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Saying And Silence

Frank Farmer

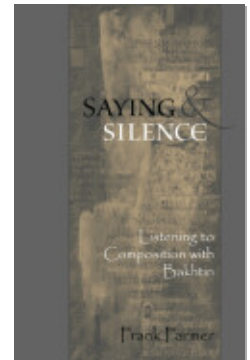
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5 PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

*Bakhtin, Composition, and the Problem
of the Outside*

Public speech is a performance in time, located at specific historical junctures, temporary and unstable, even though it is imagined as a location in space, always available, with secure and discernable borders.

Susan Wells

For us, the social force of time is not a source of hope but a specter promising the degeneration of all that we can still value. The challenge then is to show why we need a temporal dimension to our interpretive thinking.

Charles Altieri

Of the many Bakhtinian ideas that have found currency among scholars and teachers in composition—voice, heteroglossia, carnival, dialogue, to name the most obvious—one idea that has not commanded much attention is Bakhtin’s notion of “outsidedness.” This is a bit surprising, since Bakhtin alludes to it in many of his major works, from his very early fragment, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, to his very late essay, “Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*.” Bakhtin continually emphasizes the importance of having, maintaining, and exercising an outside perspective—whether that perspective occurs in relationships between self and other, author and character, or culture and culture.

Of these, in fact, the relationship that perhaps best illuminates outsidedness is the one that occurs between self and other. For a thinker who understood selfhood largely as a gift bestowed from the other, we can easily glimpse why Bakhtin places so much importance on outsidedness. In his own terms, an outside perspective provides one with an “excess of seeing” or “surplus of vision” that the other cannot provide for herself. My vision of the other, in a sense, completes the other—or

at least attempts to—because I can see what he or she cannot. Elaborating on this point, Bakhtin says,

I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes. (AA 23)

Bakhtin chooses a visual metaphor here to suggest the crucial importance of the other to the self I understand myself to be. Indeed, Bakhtin will say it is because of the other's "seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity" that I am able to construct an identity at all. Or, as Bakhtin puts it, an "outward personality could not exist, if the other did not create it" (AA 36).

Given the rather profound responsibilities, then, that the self has toward the other, the self must resist any temptation to merge, to become one, to completely empathize with the other. In a famous passage that speaks to this particular feature of outsideness, Bakhtin asks,

In what way would it enrich the event if I merged with the other. . . . And what would I myself gain by the other's merging with me? . . . Let him rather remain outside of me, for in that position he can see and know what I myself do not see and do not know from my own place, and he can essentially enrich the event of my own life. (AA 88)

Therefore, we should not seek identity with the other, for to achieve such a condition would be to negate the possibility of a *relationship* with the other. Take away our mutual outsideness, and we will not mean anything to each other at all.

Now, I would like to register two criticisms of Bakhtin's outsideness, the first of which I am merely reiterating because it is so commonly heard. Bakhtin seems to imagine the outsider's perspective as always kindly, benevolent, affirming, generous, and gift-bestowing. He seems, in other words, not to acknowledge the outsider's gaze as potentially hostile or threatening, the outsider's gaze as something

perceived to be less than providential. My second criticism, one that I will return to in my closing, has to do with the implications of thinking about outsidedness in exclusively spatial terms. Certainly, the term itself suggests that we must do so. But it seems to me that without a temporal dimension to the notion of outsidedness, we would have no way of disputing whatever outside perspective we encounter. Or, to put the same point in Bakhtin's more familiar dialogic terms, without time we would have no way of *answering* what others see. Thus, the notion of pure outsidedness could imply an autonomy of perspective, sufficient beyond any need for dialogic response. Yet such a conclusion would gainsay nearly everything Bakhtin wrote about the utterance in particular and dialogue in general.

THREE REPRESENTATIONS, THREE RESPONSES

As mentioned, I'll return to this latter point toward the end of this chapter, but for now, I would like to attempt to "answer" three highly unflattering outside perspectives on composition. As with many such representations of contemporary writing instruction, the ones I will discuss here are unabashedly hostile to what we do. In that sense, they not only offer representations of composition, but, taken together, they themselves represent widespread attitudes among the public at large about how writing is taught and who teaches it—attitudes that are overwhelmingly negative.

In order, then, I will first examine a snippet that appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in 1994 entitled "Reading, Writing, Rambling On," an excerpt from an interview with Victor Vitanza that originally appeared in *Composition Studies*. I will follow Vitanza's excerpt with an article by the former chair of a high school English department, written for and published in the *San Francisco Chronicle*. I will conclude with what is by far the most elaborate—and scathing—indictment of all, a chapter entitled "Croaking about Comp" from Terry Caesar's *Conspiring with Forms: Life in Academic Texts*. First, then, the Vitanza excerpt.

What strikes one most upon reading this excerpt is how thoroughly in keeping it is with the tenor established by the now-famous *Harper's Index*, which opens every issue. There, as many know, the

reader is presented with a list of seemingly random facts, statistics, items, all of which are meant not merely to provide information but also to inspire a laugh, a moment of amazement or wonder, perhaps even a fleeting instant of outrage. Typically, the intended effect is elicited by juxtaposing one item with a (loosely) related other item, thereby inviting the reader to make a comparison and eventual conclusion. For this to work, the reader must “fill in the blanks,” so to speak, by tacitly agreeing to the assumptions of those who compile the list, a requirement that makes the whole process of reading the *Index* a highly enthymematic one.

The same is true of the Vitanza snippet. As with the *Index*, no comment is deemed necessary or, for that matter, desirable. What *Harper's* attempts to do is simply offer a brief, verbatim excerpt from an interview with Vitanza that intends (I would assume) to characterize him as incoherent, pretentious, and something of a bore. To illustrate what I mean, I quote here a portion of the excerpt that appeared in *Harper's*:

Cynthia Haynes-Burton: Who do you think your audience is?

Victor Vitanza: My attitudes are that I am very much a “comp teacher,” that I am a writing instructor, and that I am contemplative about what I do. I always am giving writing lessons. I don't know, however, if I am Levi-Strauss or if I am that South American Indian chief in *Tristes Tropiques* that Levi-Strauss indirectly gives writing lessons to. Perhaps I am both. Which can be confusing. . . . One of the fundamental questions that I am ever-reflexively confronted with is that I do not know who I am for this profession. . . .

Cynthia Haynes-Burton: Please start over.

Victor Vitanza: Okay, so what I have said so far: I very consciously do not follow the field's research protocols. And yet, of course, I do; most other times, I do not. And yet again! Do you feel the vertigo of this? (Haynes-Burton 51)

Now, to have to explain the Vitanza excerpt is like having to explain the punch line to a joke—once you've reached that point, real laughter becomes, well, nearly impossible. But, then, the question remains: what exactly is it that *Harper's* needs its readers to think in order for us to enjoy this excerpt in the way intended? In trying to answer that question, I've developed a list of assumptions that, I believe, *Harper's* would like its readers to endorse:

- That Victor Vitanza is the representative *par excellence* of all scholars who work in the field of composition studies and, quite probably, the entire contemporary Academy;
- That, yes, the contemporary Academy is going to hell in a handbasket, Vitanza being a prime example of its imminent decline;
- That more evidence of this decline can be inferred from the fact that an entire specialty devoted to freshman composition exists at all and that Vitanza is one of its luminaries;
- That, because of his obvious, insistent, seemingly nonsensical ramblings, Vitanza ought not to be teaching anyone how to write;
- That logic, clarity, coherence, in contrast to Vitanza's ramblings, are the hallmarks of good writing; these are the *Ur* values of the written word and therefore ought never to be compromised;
- That publishing a 250-word excerpt from a 17-page interview in no way compromises the logic, clarity, and coherence of the original author's discourse;
- That there can be no alternative to understanding what language does except through these values.

Regardless of how each of us might position our own work in relation to Vitanza's, few of us would abide the view that the presentation of his scholarship is either (1) all that representative of the scholarly approaches of his colleagues or (2) utterly devoid of sense (though, to be sure, Vitanza will press us to question our ordinary ideas of what is sensible). If we wanted to determine for ourselves whether or not *Harper's* gave a fair picture of Vitanza in this interview, most of us would probably read the original interview in *Composition Studies*—admittedly a task somewhat easier for us than for the general reader of *Harper's*.

And yet, what we would find upon reading the interview in *Composition Studies*, however, is a full frontal attack on the discursive values that *Harper's* holds dear. Among other things, Vitanza launches into a critique of Enlightenment *logos*, sensing that within

our irrational faith in the superrational, there lurks a menacing foundationalism that is implicitly associated with imperialist and colonialist impulses. Arguments that proceed on Enlightenment logos, that is, arguments that embrace facile notions of logic, clarity, and coherence, are, in Vitanza's view of things, dangerous, heavy-handed, and enormously self-deluding. As he himself points out in the interview, "people who speak or write in impeccably clear language are the greatest of liars, whether they know it or not" (57). Vitanza mocks those delusions.

Along the way, he also mocks the genre of the interview. He does so (1) by beginning the interview with a question that *he* puts to the interviewer; (2) by dodging nearly all subsequent questions put to him; (3) by calling into question the very act of questioning; and (4) by including in his answers that distinctive manner of stylistic irreverence that we have come to expect of Vitanza: abundant word play, intentional misspellings, typographic heresies, unconventional hyphenations—all of which, taken together, spoof the commonly accepted idea that published interviews are (or in any way could be) faithful transcriptions of what someone else said. In short, but in practically all respects, Vitanza parodies the very criteria by which *Harper's* wants us to judge him—logic, clarity, and coherence. But how could the usual reader of *Harper's* possibly know this?

In an E-mail to Robert Connors (and later distributed to subscribers of the H-Net History of Rhetoric discussion group), Vitanza gives his own response to the *Harper's* excerpt, a remarkably non-defensive rejoinder to, as he puts it, being "enframed." He notes that "what the interview is all about [is] how Victor . . . avoids questions and yet responds to them," a reflexivity that would no doubt escape readers who knew nothing of Vitanza, his work, or the interview from which the excerpt was taken. He also recognizes a certain anxiety that could likely be felt in the profession, an anxiety that might be paraphrased thus: "Oh, my God, what will people think of the rest of us . . . in rhetoric and composition . . . if they think we are like V? No wonder why Dick and Jane can't write no mo!" Vitanza sympathizes with colleagues who might feel this way, but since he, too, is against (that is, both contrary to and alongside of) mainline colleagues in composition,

he cannot worry too much about how readers of *Harper's* choose to see him or the field. In light of these remarks, it seems reasonable to conclude that *Harper's* is far more threatened and defensive about what Vitanza represents to *Harper's* than what *Harper's* represents to Vitanza.

But what about the rest of us—those “mainline colleagues” of Vitanza’s whose everyday practices are not likely to command the attention of *Harper's*, whose stated words may not be provocative enough for mass scrutiny and thus mass ridicule. We, too, are subject to public criticism, though such criticism is usually directed toward us as a group (the collective of “English teachers”) and not as individuals. A recent example of this particular brand of criticism can be found in David Ruenzel’s, “The Write Way to Success: ‘Feel Good’ Writing Deprives Students of Needed Skills.” Ruenzel’s opinion piece appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Ruenzel begins by recounting the story of a time when he chaired a high school English department and was summoned by his principal for a conference. During their talk, the principal told Ruenzel that he needed to give more attention to how students might achieve a sense of “emotional commitment” to their writing, a needed sense of “ownership.” The principal suggested that Ruenzel’s “insistence that they develop a thesis and use proper English made them feel that their work no longer ‘belonged to them.’” Ruenzel’s essay is a response to what he regards as the process orthodoxies embraced by his principal and demanded by the profession at large.

Identifying “ownership” as “a central tenet” of the process movement, Ruenzel proceeds to link an array of other—in his opinion, misguided—practices to process orthodoxy: the “quasi-therapeutic” aims of exploratory discourse, naturalistic learning models, collaboration, student-centered pedagogies, and the widespread acceptance of “feel-good” writing instruction. In their place, Ruenzel advocates a return to “rigorous academic standards in the language arts.” Ruenzel even hints that students know—and resent—how precious little is being demanded of them. According to Ruenzel, students whom he once taught at a local commuter college implored him not “to put us in any more writing groups. Teach us to write a thesis statement.”

Now it must be asked, what does such a request tell us about those students' previous experience with formal writing pedagogy? To request instruction on how to write a thesis statement, after all, assumes that the person making such a request already knows *something* about what a thesis statement is or what it's supposed to do. Such a request implies, moreover, that the person asking must have some notion, however vague, that the ability to write a thesis statement has something to do with the ability to write well. Yet, how or where could such views be acquired, if not through prior writing instruction?

It is possible, I suppose, to imagine a parent or other close family member advising a younger relative to demand to be taught how to write a thesis statement. It is even possible to imagine some process-oriented teacher extolling the virtues of thesis statements but refusing to teach them, thereby leaving his or her students feeling cheated, bereft of valuable knowledge that would help them to improve their writing. The latter seems quite a stretch, though, unless we want to suggest that some process teachers are not only misinformed but intentionally cruel. No, what's most likely, I think, is that Ruenzel's students have already had instruction in writing thesis statements and have decided, for whatever reasons, that they need more. But since Ruenzel finds it remarkably easy to blame process methods for the sorry state of writing that he routinely encounters, then, by his own logic, traditional instruction in skills must be, in some measure, implicated in this failure as well. Otherwise, why didn't those students—the ones who almost certainly received *some* instruction in writing thesis statements—turn out to be the kind of students Ruenzel claims they would? And why, then, wouldn't Ruenzel see fit to assign some degree of blame to traditional pedagogies for their apparent failure?

The answer, it seems to me, is that Ruenzel has too much invested in the either-or logic of his position. In order to make this kind of argument, Ruenzel has to consolidate all extant teaching practices into two opposing camps—process and traditional—conveniently ignoring the profound differences of opinion that exist *within* those separate camps, the commonalities they might share with each other, and, for that matter, any alternate explanations for what Ruenzel sees as the dire state of current writing instruction.

Thus, to offer an obvious example, Ruenzel makes no mention of the rather fierce disagreements that emerged among process advocates during the 1980s and well into the 1990s. Nor does he mention that the process movement, from its inception, had its critics and detractors from within the ranks of English teachers. Nor does he mention the eloquent and forceful critiques of process theory offered by, among others, Lisa Delpit—to wit, that process approaches reflect white, middle-class assumptions about learning and language. Nor does he acknowledge that at the time his piece appeared, a good deal of discussion centered upon whether or not composition studies had moved into what Thomas Kent and Sidney Dobrin call a *post*-process era. Of course, within the profession, there is indeed wide agreement that process approaches marked a significant advance over the current-traditional approaches that they sought to replace. But to represent the “process” movement as a seamless whole, dogmatically imposed or endorsed, is a gross simplification.

Perhaps an even greater simplification is Ruenzel’s assumption that a facile, unmediated, simple cause and effect relationship exists between writing pedagogy and writing ability. Scholars as diverse as Mina Shaughnessey, Patricia Bizzell, James Berlin, Mike Rose, and Walter Ong have all, in often very different ways, relieved us of this notion by showing how teaching practices always occur within larger historical and cultural contexts. Whether mapping the characteristics of secondary orality; or noting the enormous changes resulting from open admissions in colleges and universities; or exposing the varied interests served by recurrent literacy crises, or chronicling the shifting demographics of the American populace and the increased linguistic diversity that such shifts entailed—regardless, some of the best work to emerge out of the process movement was conducted by scholars who (somewhat ironically in my view) undermined the naive belief that “teaching process” could wholly determine, or otherwise account for, writing ability. Ruenzel’s wish to blame process teaching for the utter demise of written literacy is a wish that simply cannot afford to acknowledge the complexities brought to light by the kinds of scholarly inquiries mentioned here. For Ruenzel to recognize these complexities would

be to evaluate the process movement more judiciously, to see it as something other than a pedagogical scapegoat.

Finally, I would like to mention an essay by Terry Caesar entitled “Croaking about Comp.” Caesar is an English professor at Clarion College in Pennsylvania who has written extensively on professional concerns and issues. His essay appears as a chapter in his collection, *Conspiring with Forms*.

Now, it would hardly be an overstatement to observe that Caesar loathes composition, not to mention the freshmen who are required to take it. On the opening page of his chapter, he tells us that he’s taught two sections of comp for nearly twenty years and that only recently—the last year, in fact—has he gotten a reprieve from the stultifying drudgery that composition is. He tells us that he hopes never to have to teach comp again, for, quite candidly, he “hate[s] comp” and wonders “why the sheer detestation for teaching this subject on the freshman level never gets expressed at all” (69). Doesn’t anyone else hate comp too, we can almost hear him plead, incredulous that the seeming answer to this question must be no, since no one appears to be very forthcoming. He suspects, of course, widespread dishonesty about that apparent “no.”

To provide just a taste of Caesar’s revulsion toward composition, I offer this sampler of random comments from his essay:

Composition themes comprise the most massively *mindless* writing I’ve ever read—and read, and read. (70)

Can it actually be true that no one who teaches comp tries to write about how empty it is as a subject or even how it gets more theoretically empowered as it gets more empty? My supposition is that no one can revile comp without immediately being accused of reviling students, who are in turn, a “god term” so professionally ceremonialized that they can only be comprehended from within the temple; furthermore anyone who doesn’t approach in the right spirit must be sent packing as a person who didn’t belong anyway and never believed. Comp teachers include some of the most pious, not to say evangelistic, people I’ve ever met. (72)

I hate comp because at the center of teaching it there is always a moment when I don’t want to be benevolent, and I hate the pretense that I have to

try to be. Sometimes this moment suggests to me that the whole enterprise is all pretense—professionalized patience, insincere concern, bored judgment, and sheer disgust. (76)

Nearly twenty years, and I still don't know how anyone can learn anything teaching comp, except more ways to teach comp. (81)

What can be said in response to these words? Well, to be fair, Caesar is not altogether unfamiliar with the literature of composition studies. He cites, among other sources, Donald Murray, Howard Tinberg, Dana Heller, Michael Carter, and *Rhetoric Review's* "Burkean Parlor" and refers to these sources often approvingly. He seems to embrace a "two realms" conception of composition's professional geography—one, the proletariat, the great wash of instructors beaten down, hopelessly despairing, lost in reams of insipid freshman prose, and, two, a much smaller group of instructors invigorated by the opportunity to theorize that same prose and intrigued by how it might be theorized even more completely. In fact, Caesar hints that the latter group might provide the only true motivation for teaching comp at all. As he says, "I'm now more certain than I've ever been that all of its [composition's] many, mundane occasions can be of immense theoretical provocation, and this can provide enough motivation—it can even provide a career—to enable just about anyone to plow through another week's set of themes" (81).

Perhaps we ought not to react too hastily to the Great Divide that Caesar perceives, though we may want to avoid his more extreme characterizations. After all, some in our field—Sharon Crowley and David Jolliffe come to mind—have actively promoted the abolishment of the first-year requirement altogether. Their reasons are far different from the ones we assume Caesar might offer, but I think he would suspect that the motivations of the "new abolitionists" camouflage a certain wish to be rid of comp entirely in order to better pursue what he refers to as comp's "escape into theory," a situation where *all* may participate in rarefied, intellectual pursuits *about* composition and no one has to tend the fields, so to speak—no one has to *teach* composition. Certainly, this trend has been commented upon recently by David Bartholomae and others, who warn of the disastrous consequences of a

two realms or “two nations” model for composition (“Composition”). But whereas Caesar might find this state of affairs, by his own logic, inevitable, Bartholomae does not.

While we might applaud Caesar for perceiving a trend that those “inside” composition perceive as well, we also need to recall that Caesar suspects a hefty measure of dishonesty among compositionists who never have a bad, disparaging, unhappy, or just plain tired word to say about teaching comp. But even allowing for the calculated reticence that Caesar ascribes to us, do we—those of us trained in teaching composition—have an exclusive purchase on disingenuous silence? Caesar, for example, would have readers believe that his views about composition originate solely from his experience of teaching composition. This strikes me as surprising, to say the least. Caesar, after all, is quite insightful when exploring the determining forces at play in the institutional, theoretical, and professional questions that he addresses throughout the remainder of this collection and in subsequent works. Yet, he wants the reader to believe that his own attitudes toward composition have nothing to do with his graduate training, have nothing to do with his twenty or so years of professional experience in an English department, have nothing to do with public opinions about writing instruction, and so on. He wants us to believe, in other words, that his attitudes are immune to the very forces—especially those forces underwritten by institutional and professional hierarchies—that have a determining effect on the rest of us, that give rise to, among other things, the somewhat defensive zealotry among compositionists that he cannot understand. He wants us to believe, moreover, that in certain institutional contexts, “croaking about comp” isn’t without its rewards—isn’t, in fact, a happily indulged pastime, as it sometimes is in many departments.

These same essentializing moves are manifest in his attitudes toward the hapless freshman writer. Since he makes no mention of insipid prose among students taking advanced composition or upper-division literature classes, we are left to conclude that, well, somehow freshmen must get better—better at learning, better at thinking, better at writing. If that’s the case, then Caesar has thankfully avoided the temptation to indulge yet another tiresome

condemnation of an entire generation. But if freshmen improve, if their writing gets better, might their comp courses have something to do with that improvement? And if freshmen improve, ought not we conclude that blaming them for their wretched prose is tantamount to blaming them for being young, inexperienced—for being, in a word, freshmen?

In a telling passage, and one relevant to my larger purposes here, Caesar quotes a representation of the composition classroom that appeared in a recent novel. As might be expected, the novel provides yet another damning portrayal of the freshman student. But in an odd self-contradiction, Caesar comments that such portrayals “would only appear in a work of fiction because writers are outsiders to teaching. They utter the truth of outsiders—that which should not be uttered—and they utter it shamelessly” (73).

Here we have reached the opposite point on our compass. Where Bakhtin, perhaps naively, sees the outsider as one who showers beneficent gifts upon others, completing what they cannot see of themselves, Caesar sees the outsider as one whose truths are so severe as to render those truths unspeakable, or if spoken, not without some requisite shame from the speaker, except perhaps those speakers who are writers of fiction. In any event, Caesar’s notion of outsiderness is seemingly just as limited as Bakhtin’s when we attempt to think of the outside dialogically, that is, when we think of how we may answer what others see of us.

PROBLEMS OF DIALOGIC OUTSIDENESS

At the outset, I mentioned two apparent weaknesses with Bakhtin’s concept of “outsiderness.” The first, a commonly heard criticism, is that Bakhtin seems to posit the outsider’s gaze as one that is always benevolent, forever insightful, edifying, and redemptive. In light of the outside perspectives I discuss here, such would seem to be a hard case to make. Each of the views above is very critical of composition studies and, in the case of Caesar, enthusiastically hostile. How then may we say that composition benefits from, or is otherwise illuminated by, what any of these three perspectives offer? What gifts do the perspectives outlined here bestow?

Perhaps the only way to imagine how the outside perspectives elaborated above could benefit composition is to regard each perspective as the occasion for self-scrutiny, as prompts for questions we might not otherwise put to ourselves. In fact, there is evidence in his late writings that Bakhtin did, indeed, try to think of outsiderness this way. In a passage that tries to outline the meeting of distinct cultures, for example, Bakhtin writes:

It is only in the eyes of *another* culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly. . . . A meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning; they engage in a kind of a dialogue . . . which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign culture, ones that it did not raise itself; we seek answers to our own questions in it; and the foreign culture responds to us by revealing to us its new aspects and new semantic depths. (SG 7)

Again, we notice Bakhtin's guiding assumption, namely, that encounters with outside perspectives are always neighborly, urging us to question ourselves in ways that will eventually prove mutually illuminating. And yet, none of the critics I discuss here seem especially interested in putting questions *to* composition, though each seems very concerned with shaping views *about* composition. In fact, if any questions arise at all, they will be questions that we put to ourselves based on how we choose to interpret what our critics say. Thus, to achieve Bakhtin's version of benign outsiderness, we must translate some rather blistering portrayals of who we are and what we do into the occasion for serious, disciplinary self-examination. That can be done, of course, and there is no doubt considerable value in this very sort of self-questioning, even when prompted by less than friendly others. But the responses we develop to our own questions—are they truly answers *for us*? Or are they meant for our outside auditors, who, it must be remembered, never asked these questions of us to begin with? Bakhtin seems to suggest that in answering such questions, we can reveal “new aspects and new semantic depths” to our outsiders. But if our outsiders did not address these questions to us in the first place, and if the gaze of our outsiders is an unrelievedly critical one,

might not those “new aspects and new semantic depths” risk becoming little more than apologies on our part, mere justifications for why we do what we do?

I raise these problems to emphasize the second weakness of Bakhtin’s idea of outsidedness, namely, the extent to which it is, or can be, regarded as a truly dialogic concept. Even Bakhtin seems to have some reservations on this point, describing the encounter between two cultures above as “*a kind of dialogue*” (my emphasis). Bakhtin holds something back here, I think, not simply because of the formidable difficulties involved in imagining the meeting between two cultures as analogous to the meeting between two interlocutors. He holds back also because he realizes that the twin foundations of his theory of the utterance—addressivity and answerability—are both potentially compromised when regarded in light of his theory of outsidedness. As noted above, for example, an outside perspective need not be addressed to insiders at all—and indeed often is not. Yet even when not addressed to us, Bakhtin suggests that an outside perspective is capable of revealing a culture to itself through the process of internalization whereby an outside perspective becomes the motive for disciplinary self-scrutiny—that is, for questions we’re more likely to address to ourselves than to our outsiders. As before, it must be asked whether any utterance (remark, question, comment, criticism) not addressed to us and answers not sought from us amount to anything even faintly resembling a dialogic exchange.

Yes, there is enormous value in self-examination—the kind of questioning, that is, that occurs *within* individuals, communities, and cultures. And surely interior dialogue is crucial to a full understanding of Bakhtinian dialogics. But it must be recalled that for Bakhtin (as for Vygotsky) interior dialogue *follows from* social dialogue; it is a product of the dialogues we *first* conduct with our others. And yet, where no authentic social dialogue is manifest—where no questions are addressed to us and no answers are sought from us—would we not be wise to consider what manner of interior dialogue could possibly derive from the sorts of outside perspectives that composition studies routinely encounters from its critics? How,

then, can it be that Bakhtin's implied mutuality of perspectives is necessarily dialogic? True, in strictly dyadic terms, you are my outsider as much as I am yours. Yet, beyond the brute fact of our respective positions, there seems to be no way to explain how we might engage in dialogue with one another. In other words, and as things stand conceptually, there seems to be no particular requirement that one outside perspective need *address* another and no provision for the likelihood that one outside perspective might wish to *answer*, or be answered by, another.

When addressivity and answerability are depleted in this way, so too are the conditions for genuine dialogue. What's missing in Bakhtin's formulation of the outside—what makes outsidedness such a hard concept to square with dialogue—is precisely that certain kind of mutuality that allows for address and response, the kind of mutuality that requires *time*. Bakhtin is obviously aware that those to whom an outside perspective is directed simultaneously provide an outside perspective for those who look upon them. And he also acknowledges the mutual benefits that should result from the mere fact of our relational positioning to one another.

But then, what? What are the possibilities for dialogue once an outside perspective is announced or otherwise made known? Doesn't the very concept of outsidedness imply that an outside view need merely remain fixed in place to be legitimate, sufficient for no other reason than the fact that it exists somewhere on the outside? And, if exempt from any and all temporal considerations, how can an outside perspective ever change—or, speaking more pragmatically, how could we effect a change in how outsiders view us?

As I mentioned in my opening, we need to think about outsidedness not merely in spatial terms, but in temporal ones as well—or more precisely, in the conjunction of both terms together. Another way to put this is that we need to consider outsidedness *chronotopically*, Bakhtin's term for the unity of space and time. Without the inclusion of some temporal dimension to Bakhtin's concept of outsidedness, it will seemingly remain one of the least dialogic in his entire corpus, if for no other reason than this: strictly spatial thinking cannot account for a dialogic understanding of meaning.

TOWARD A PRAGMATIC UNDERSTANDING OF OUTSIDEDNESS

At what distance does one qualify as having an outside perspective? Are all outside perspectives equidistant from the insiders they comment upon? If not, how do those variations in distance bear upon what they see? If one outside position is exchanged for another, how does this substitution alter or determine what is seen? Moreover, what is the process by which such exchanges might occur? To put the same question a bit differently, what is the process by which an outsider might be encouraged to adopt a new perspective? Or, even more dramatically perhaps, how is it that outsiders might become insiders, or vice versa?

Because questions such as these presuppose movement and change, they seem to require a dialogic understanding of positionality Bakhtin does not provide. To answer such questions, as well as to address the problems of dialogue I have raised above, Bakhtin's outsiderness must be extended in ways that restore the temporal to the spatial, a yoking that dialogue requires. Otherwise, it must be shown that positionality—or to be more exact, *interpretive positionality*—is in fact already in time, is in fact already dialogic, and cannot escape being so. I believe that the latter is true and that the dialogic nature of Bakhtin's outsiderness can be revealed through an application of C. S. Peirce's triadic theory of meaning.

At the outset, though, it must be admitted that a fully elaborated version of Peirce's theory would not be possible here. Most of Peirce's concepts fit, or attempt to fit, within a complex system of ideas that is nothing short of daunting in its range. Peirce will variously address problems of logic and mathematics, semiotics and pragmatism, science and phenomenology, metaphysics and God—and will do so with an eye cast toward the systematic, philosophical connections that may obtain among such global areas of inquiry. Moreover, Peirce, like Bakhtin, frequently tends to revise earlier formulations of certain ideas, sometimes introducing such revisions in contexts where they might not be expected. For these reasons, I will try to limit my discussion to how a certain understanding of his triadic theory of meaning might help illuminate the problem I have set forth above.¹

The basis of Peirce's theory is that all meaning is representation in signs and that all signs are composed of three essential terms: first, a *representamen*, or what is typically meant by "sign" in its most ordinary usage, a word, gesture, symbol, etc., that stands for, or otherwise points to, something else; second, an *object*, a term roughly equivalent to "referent," or that which is stood for or pointed to; and most importantly, Peirce's third term, an *interpretant*, or mediating idea, a constituent term of any sign and a term without which no meaning relationship is possible between representamen and its object. Peirce observes that "a *Sign*, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relationship to a Second, called its *Object*, as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant*, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object" (*Collected* 2:274).

Now, it is tempting to regard the interpretant as a person, as someone who endows the otherwise meaningless relationship between representamen and object with significance. But this is not exactly what Peirce means. It would be more accurate to say that the interpretant is that idea evoked in the mind of another by which the other may similarly represent the original object. Whether or not, or how faithfully, the other chooses to outwardly represent the same object is rather beside the point. What matters is that he or she must first be able to *re-represent* the same object, in like manner, as a precondition for an appropriate response to the original sign. In Peirce's theory of meaning, this assumes that "an appropriate response," however defined by circumstances, is itself "always already" interpretive, is itself triadic in nature. As Peirce puts it, any sign "creates in the mind of [some] person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign" (*Collected* 2:228). In other words, that which interprets a sign must be a sign itself.

Again, notice that while Peirce is reluctant to equate the interpretant with a person, he is far from implying that "signs interpret one another without involving persons at all" (Mounce 25). Though it will seem otherwise at times, Peirce is not offering us a theory of disembodied meaning.² To say, along with Peirce, that signs cannot mean apart from their relations with other signs is not to say that persons are

inessential to a triadic theory of meaning. This point is best explained by W. B. Gallie in his elaboration of Peirce's definition:

(i) A sign stands for (ii) an object by (iii) stimulating some organism or person to (iv) some appropriate response which is (v) itself capable of signifying the object of the original sign. (120)

Peirce simply dispenses with steps (iii) and (iv) because he considers both already to be implied by his more abbreviated definition.

What, then, are the broader implications of Peirce's definition, especially as those implications might relate to dialogue? First, since every sign depends upon another sign for its interpretation, it follows that there can be no first sign, just as for Bakhtin, there can be no first word. Likewise, it also follows that we never originate meaning with our utterances. Yes, obviously we extend, revise, answer, interpret, and often act upon meanings communicated to us, but, for Peirce, we would not be able to do so unless we were, in some way, already *in* meaning. Having established that "we have no power of thinking without signs" (*Collected* 5:265), Peirce will make this point in a striking analogy: "Just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought, and not that thoughts are in us" (*Collected* 5:289n). Bakhtin, of course, would say much the same about dialogue.

A second implication of Peirce's semiotics is that every sign characteristically possesses the quality of *addressivity*. For Peirce, a sign "addresses somebody"—a not especially surprising fact given the requirement that one sign needs another for its interpretation (*Collected* 2:228). Indeed, it is through Peirce—and his insistence that speech always entails the *re*-representation of a prior sign—that we come to see the relationship between the word and the sign. Though neither Peirce nor Bakhtin develop this concept at length, it is apparent that addressivity is a feature of Peirce's triadic theory of meaning, as it is for Bakhtin's theory of the utterance. When, for example, Peirce (presaging George Herbert Mead) claims that thought is internal dialogue, he is thereby (and simultaneously) making the claim that "a person is not absolutely an individual," since internal dialogue requires a plurality of selves:

His thoughts are what he is “saying to himself,” that is, saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man’s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. (*Collected* 5:421)

Here, Peirce offers a sort of surprising inversion that illustrates his preference for continuities over polarities. That is, what we conventionally think of as uniform and singular—namely, interior experience—turns out instead to be a locus of pluralities, while what we typically regard as diverse or plural—namely, outward, social experience—may, at least for purposes of addressed thought, be regarded as singular, that is, as “a loosely compacted person.”

Thought, then, as internal dialogue, is addressed to “that other” self, that emerging “critical” self one is trying to persuade. Elsewhere, Peirce will say that a “good introspector” must admit “that his deliberations took a dialogic form, the arguer of any moment appealing to the reasonableness of the *ego* of the succeeding moment for his critical assent” (*Essential* 402). And since Peirce regards it as obvious that “conversation is composed of signs,” we are left to conclude that thought, whether conceived as internal or external dialogue, is thus always addressed to the mind of a “somebody,” to another interpreter (*Essential* 402). Even in those seeming cases where “a sign has no interpreter,” where no addressed interpreter is apparently present, “its interpretant is a ‘would-be,’ i.e., is what it *would* determine in the interpreter if there were one” (*Essential* 409).

This mention of a subjunctive conditional, of a posited “would-be” leads us to the third and most compelling reason why dialogue is implied by a Peircean semiotics. In brief, Peirce’s conditional illustrates an important way in which his theory of meaning relates to his more encompassing theory of pragmatism and, further, how both theories require dialogue.³

Though he will amend, and occasionally attempt to refine, his definition of pragmatism—or *pragmaticism*, as he later preferred—

Peirce never wavered from the central pragmatist insight of the relationship between human purposes and human knowledge, between our “knowing the meaning of a hypothesis and knowing what experiential consequences to expect if the hypothesis is true” (Misak 3). Early in his writings, when Peirce initially formulated this insight, he did so in terms of what he eventually came to refer to as the Pragmatic Maxim: “Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects, is the whole of our conception of the object” (*Collected* 5: 402). But since we cannot always know in advance, or with absolute certainty, what “effects” or consequences our present conceptions might have in the future, we are met with the unavoidable problem of belief and doubt—a problem that, perhaps more than any other, defined the course of early pragmatist thought, and a problem, which, not surprisingly, Peirce devotes considerable attention to in a number of his essays.

In light of this problem, one of the interesting revisions that Peirce makes in his original definition of pragmatism is the very inclusion of such a “would-be” conditional. Peirce moves from a position of implied certainty, which holds that a specific effect *will* occur, to a more modest view that “a certain kind of sensible effect *would* ensue, according to our experiences hitherto” (*Collected* 5:457; see also 5:453). The difference seems to be a fairly minor one, except that Peirce’s latter formulation is, it seems, far more consonant with a pragmatist version of truth—inasmuch as Peirce offers us one for consideration. Which, somewhat reluctantly, he does.

Peirce rejects both “correspondence” and “transcendental” accounts of truth, noting that each assumes an unmediated truth, a truth able to exist somehow apart from human inquiries, purposes, and consequences. Truth, for Peirce, cannot be divorced from the very human condition of belief and doubt; and, when in mock dialogue, Peirce answers questions put to him by the more metaphysically-inclined character of “Mr. Make-Believe,” Peirce tells his questioner that “your problems would be greatly simplified, if, instead of saying that you want to know the ‘Truth,’ you were simply to say that you want to attain a state of belief unassailable by doubt.” In the same passage,

Peirce offers his interlocutor still another possible definition: “[I]f you were to define the ‘truth’ as that to a belief in which belief would tend if it were to tend indefinitely toward absolute fixity, well and good” (*Collected* 5:416).

For Peirce, just as signs without interpretants would not be possible, neither would truths without beliefs. For a pragmatist, these terms are inseparable. Even if we were to attain that sublime condition of belief “unassailable by doubt,” we still “cannot in any way reach perfect certitude or exactitude” or infallibility (*Collected* 1:147). But here we run into the sort of perplexities that typically beset readers of Peirce. Why, for example, should we not consider a belief that is “unassailable by doubt” to be a “perfect certitude”? And why would any belief need to “tend *indefinitely* toward absolute fixity” (my emphasis) if attaining such a state would, by definition, settle the question at hand once and for all? To understand why Peirce seems confusing on this point, we must first understand what he is trying to accomplish in his formulation of pragmatic truth.

Peirce wants to keep some version of realist truth that is more certain than subjective opinion but less certain than absolute infallibility. To negotiate such a position, Peirce must discover a pragmatist brand of objectivity, one that embraces belief and doubt as constants that inevitably attend all human inquiry:

[T]he objectivity of truth really consists in the fact that, in the end, every sincere inquirer will be led to embrace it—and if he be not sincere, the irresistible effect of inquiry in the light of experience will be to make him so. This doctrine seems to me . . . to be a corollary of pragmatism. . . . I call my form of it “conditional idealism.” That is to say, I hold that truth’s independence of individual opinions is due (so far as there is any “truth”) to its being the predestined result to which sufficient inquiry *would* ultimately lead. (*Collected* 5:494)

Peirce adds that, as a practical matter, “questions do generally get settled in time” and that that is enough (*Collected* 5:494). What’s important for Peirce is that truth must have pragmatic value. This value resides not solely in the effects that would follow from a particular truth if embraced; it refers, as well, to our common efforts to

attain those truths. Therefore, one important pragmatic value that truth has is that it serves as a *regulative ideal* to which all our inquiries are directed. Truth leads, shapes, guides, prompts, and, in large part, determines our inquiries. And while, in a very limited sense, truth may transcend “experience and inquiry here and now,” as Cheryl Misak points out, “it does not transcend experience and inquiry altogether” (41). In her comments on Peirce’s conception of pragmatic truth, Misak reminds us again of the conditional quality of his formulation: “A true hypothesis, or a permanently settled belief,” for Peirce, “is simply one that *would be*, at the hypothetical end of inquiry, settled” (42).

It follows, then, that because truth cannot be separated from inquiry, neither can it be separated from dialogue. We have seen in chapter one how Bakhtin makes this very point. In composition studies, though, the one scholar who has understood this most clearly and consistently is Peirce’s foremost explicator, Ann E. Berthoff. In many of her essays, Berthoff has repeatedly argued that a triadic theory of meaning, a theory that proceeds on the basic assumption that we must interpret our interpretations, is one thoroughly saturated in the processes of social dialogue, in what she refers to, borrowing from I. A. Richards, as “the continuing audit of meaning” (“Rhetoric” 284). Realizing that dialogue is *required* by Peirce’s theory of meaning, Berthoff will come at dialogue from various angles, sometimes claiming dialogue to be cognate with dialectic as entailed by the continuing audit of meaning (Meaning 45). On other occasions, though, she will reveal a more pointed concern with dialogue *per se*. For example, drawing upon the often vexing relationship between interpreter and interpretant, Berthoff alludes to Peirce’s (somewhat uneasy) suggestion that “man is a sign.” If this is so, she observes, and if it is true, as Peirce claims, that “each sign requires another for its interpretation, it follows that each person requires others in order to understand and be understood: dialogic action requires dialogic partners.” The audit of meaning, Berthoff reminds us, “is *necessarily* carried out in societal contexts. . . . Nobody makes meaning by himself or herself” (“Rhetoric” 285).

Not surprisingly, then, Peirce always thinks of meaning—and the pragmatic truths to which meanings tend—as a *movement forward*

within social or communal contexts. Perhaps this idea is nowhere better expressed than when Peirce discusses the nature of that special category of signs called thought:

Finally, as what anything really is, is what it may finally come to be known to be in the ideal state of complete information, so that reality depends on the ultimate decision of the community; so thought is what it is, only by virtue of its addressing a future thought which is in its value as thought identical with it, though more developed. In this way, the existence of thought now depends on what is to be hereafter so that it has only a potential existence, dependent on the future thought of the community. (*Collected* 5:316)

Thought (and we may include here the family of terms to which it belongs—meaning, interpretation, belief) is always addressed to future thought. The process by which “one sign gives birth to another, and especially one thought brings forth another,” Peirce calls *pure rhetoric*, a definition that ties rhetoric to the unceasing enterprise of meaning-making, and one that therefore lends considerable force to Berthoff’s efforts to recover rhetoric as fundamentally a hermeneutic art (*Collected* 2:229). In any event, what remains obvious is that, for Peirce, interpretation requires dialogue and dialogue requires a future. Or, in the succinct words of one of Peirce’s commentators: “It takes time to mean something” (Mounce 26).

A TEMPORARY CONCLUSION

It is interesting to note that drawing upon Peirce’s semiotics, Berthoff objects to structuralist-inspired theories because they emphasize a *dyadic* rather than a *triadic* approach to the problem of meaning. In one familiar version of structuralist method, the reader seeks to identify those binary oppositions within a “text” that reveal the system of meaning, or “code,” which in turn authorizes all significations to be found within that text. A method like this one, Berthoff claims, fosters “killer dichotomies,” the most illuminating of which is *fact* and *opinion*, a dichotomy that implies that real “facts” somehow exist apart from someone to interpret them. For Berthoff and for Peirce, a semiotics of unmediated meaning, a

dyadic semiotics, is one that has effectively shut down “the dialectic of meaning and knowing” and, in so doing, any necessity for dialogue whatsoever.

Bakhtin likewise, and understandably perhaps, is critical of methods that derive from structuralist approaches, though he himself will not make any such distinction between dyadic and triadic semiotics. In fact, for one whose thought is sometimes characterized in opposition to semiotics of any kind, it is intriguing to consider how Bakhtin might favorably regard the semiotics of Peirce. As I have tried to show above, there are some notable similarities. Both Bakhtin and Peirce reject the possibility of first and last words. True, Peirce will embrace the usefulness of hypothetical last (or “settled”) words, but, along with Bakhtin, he too will insist that “meanings are inexhaustible” (*Collected* 1:343). Both thinkers, moreover, regard meaning as ineluctably *addressed*, and therefore each understands meaning as a generative process occurring within historical time. Finally, Bakhtin and Peirce, while hardly foundational thinkers, nonetheless aspire to rescue the concept of truth from the relativism of what they regard as subjective opinion and the absolutism of objective certainty. Peirce’s self-described “conditional idealism” is an attempt to navigate a passage through these hazardous extremes, and, as I suggested in the first chapter, Bakhtin’s superaddressee seems likewise to posit the need for a regulative ideal by which the seeming futilities of the relativism/absolutism binary might be surmounted.

What, then, of Bakhtin’s outsidedness? Or more exactly, what can Peirce tell us about how outsidedness might be construed as a dialogic concept?

Peirce, I think, would not deny that there exists a non-interpretive sense of the outside, one premised upon the brute placement of objects in relation to one another. In Peirce’s lexicon, this is the quality of “secondness.” But once we add a third, that is, once we take into account the interpretive possibilities of an outside position, as Bakhtin insists we do, then we must necessarily find ourselves already *in dialogue*. If, in other words, meaning is always defined by addressivity, as Peirce maintains it is; and if, furthermore, meaning is always characterized by movement forward in social contexts; and lastly, if meaning is therefore always a threshold phenomenon, requiring others and a

future, then dialogue, along with the time it requires, is a constituent feature of all interpretation. Thus, where interpretation is present, there can be no outside of pure location.

Not to be too ironic, we are nonetheless obliged to ask: What does this mean? Or, in pragmatist terms, what follows from a Peircean elaboration of the Bakhtinian notion of outsidedness? I think two considerations are suggested by this discussion—one relevant to our classroom practices, the other to our occasional skirmishes with the public at large.

During the last decade, in the wake of Barthes, Althusser, Foucault, and, more recently, Michel de Certeau, a great deal of interest has been extended to spatial metaphors, particularly in the ways that such metaphors help us think of how relations of power effect subjectivities. Thus, in the parlance of our moment, we speak almost casually of “sites” and “intersections,” of “politics of location,” of “subject positions,” of “contact zones,” “borders,” “margins,” and so on. Composition, too, has embraced this metaphor, especially as a way to reveal to our students how their values, their opinions, their identities are shaped by the geographies of class and community, race and family, gender and tradition.⁴ The purpose of drawing our students’ attention to the several *loci* they inhabit, of course, is to challenge what we often find in our classrooms: the naive belief among many (if not most) of our students that they live their lives as wholly autonomous, undetermined individuals, “free, beyond the contingencies of history and language” (Clifford 39). Of late, one of the ways this problem has been addressed in the writing classroom is that teachers have developed writing assignments that, in some manner or another, ask students to identify the subject positions from which they write. Writing teachers who employ such a practice obviously mean to foster a particular kind of awareness among students, a critical consciousness of the ways that we and our students are determined by larger social and historical forces.

But, again, there are hazards to be found in a too complete embrace of this metaphor. To understand our students’ perspectives wholly in terms of spatial placement, of locations and positionings, is to risk looking upon them precisely as we would points on a map—with

supreme confidence that, like those points on a map, our students are reliably, inalterably fixed in place.⁵ If our students sometimes suffer from a naive belief that their lives are *undetermined*, our spatial metaphors, it seems to me, tempt us to look upon those same lives as *overdetermined*, as lives denied agency, change, possibility.⁶ When literally deployed, metaphors of location simply cannot account for time and change, for the *movement forward* required by Peirce's theory of meaning, as well as Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue.

Peirce, in particular, reminds us that an exclusive preoccupation with spatial positioning, that is to say, an understanding of space abstracted from all temporal considerations, guarantees an end to inquiry and the production of meaning. Indeed, for Peirce, the spatial metaphor, "in itself," must remain quite literally *meaningless*—at least to the degree that constructing an absolute dichotomy between space and time is as quixotic as constructing a similar dichotomy between insides and outsides. Such a view, however, might not find favor by a profession that has found the metaphor enormously valuable. Still, our use of the metaphor would be understood by Peirce as abstracted and partial, just as he would likewise regard Bakhtin's use of it in the concept of outsideness. In both cases, I believe, Peirce would ask us to look not only for continuities rather than dichotomies, but also for the ways a future is presupposed in even the most fastidious uses of this metaphor. Not to do so is to cultivate an illusion that we, our students, and the world we inhabit together exist merely in fixed relation to one another. For, once we proceed to evaluate and interpret our respective positions, once we begin to imagine other positions that we might ourselves occupy, once we discuss our positions with each other, we are, from Peirce's vantage, already situated in both time and dialogue. A purely spatial world (a world, by the way, that can only be posited) is one that is finished, one with no alterable future—and, I trust, hardly one we would want to promote in our classrooms.

Returning to my earlier discussion of composition's often less-than-friendly outsiders, I believe a second observation to be made of Peirce's extension of Bakhtin has to do with the problem of addressivity. Earlier I observed that outside views of composition are ones not typically addressed to those within composition. I noted, in fact, that

outside perspectives on composition are largely intended for the “public sphere,” a domain composed (for our critics, at least) of even more outsiders to the discipline or the profession at large. The central problem, as I saw it, was how could “outsidedness” possibly be considered dialogic when the many outside perspectives routinely encountered are seldom addressed to us and are therefore ones that expect no answer from us?

Peirce helps us with this problem, I think, by his basic insistence that there is no meaning that is neither addressed nor uninterpreted. Peirce will allow that there are signs that *seem* to be uttered by (or addressed to) no one. On the first of these, Peirce argues that in cases where an apparent utterer cannot be distinguished, what he calls a *quasesitum*, “a sort of substitute for the utterer . . . fulfills nearly the same function” (*Essential* 404). Thus, Peirce argues that, “If a sign has no interpreter, its interpretant is a ‘would-be,’ i.e., is what it would determine in the interpreter if he were present” (*Essential* 409). In both cases, a “stand-in” is called upon to fulfill a function that Peirce regards as indispensable to his triadic theory of meaning; and in the latter, Peirce returns to his subjunctive conditional for the proxy that he regards as necessary.⁷

A correlate of Peirce’s view, I believe, is the intriguing notion that we may *choose* to be an interpretant, or addressee, even for those utterances not obviously directed to us. In our usual understanding, we regard the addressee as something of a passive recipient, someone determined or invoked by the speaker alone. Peirce, it seems to me, asks us to consider whether or not we might *appropriate* for ourselves, and thus for *our* purposes, the addressee function, particularly, but not exclusively, when no seeming addressee is present or even when a certain utterance might be intended for a different addressee. In other words, Peirce invites us to see the addressee as a figure who claims a prerogative to respond to any utterance of his or her choosing. Claiming this prerogative, of course, does not exempt the addressee from the typical problems that attend any dialogic exchange (i.e., how much authority or influence our responses carry with other addressees; the rhetorical appropriateness of our answers; our command of the speech genre in which the provoking utterance was spoken; and so on). But Peirce’s addressee, it seems, does exercise a great deal more range

than that addressee who, in a very real sense, does not exist until directly spoken to.

And why is that important? In the context of my earlier discussion, Peirce allows us to see why we need not remain silent spectators when others speak *of* us but not necessarily *to* us. In other words, because public representations of composition have both real and potential effects for composition, they are, in a Peircean sense, *meaningful* to us and are therefore worthy of our response. In the spirit of Peirce, then, I would like to recommend that we proceed from the following maxim whenever we encounter outside perspectives on composition: *any public representation of composition is an utterance addressed to composition*. Of course, as with all utterances, we may choose to respond to how we are publicly represented—or, like Victor Vitanza or Sor Juana, we may choose, instead, to exercise a strategic, rhetorical silence. In any case, the point is that we reserve for ourselves the privilege of interrupting dialogues that concern us but are not meant to include us. Just as the presumed value of an outside perspective for us resides in its ability to interrupt our disciplinary conversations in fruitful ways, we must likewise be able to intrude upon the varied public conversations about us. Another way to put this is that any fully realized theory of dialogue must be able to account for voiced interruptions—*critical interruptions*—without which we have only a diminished say in public representations of composition studies. To guarantee our ability to interrupt critically, then, we must be able to choose for whom we will fulfill the role of addressee.

True, there is “much to learn . . . much to appreciate” from composition’s outsiders—and “more to be wary of,” as Peter Mortensen has recently observed (83).

Mortensen’s choice of public critics, much like my own, attests to the fact that there is indeed a good deal of public discourse about composition that we need to be wary of. But do we have the wherewithal to assume the burden of public engagements? In light of our prior struggles to establish legitimacy in the academy, “going public” would seem to require a measure of will and resources that we may not readily have at our disposal. As Mortensen notes, having fought hard to “build credibility within the academy[,]. . . at the end of the day, little intellectual energy remains for the serious task of going public with what we do, with what we know” (182).

But, of course, we must. We must listen and learn from even our most vehement detractors. We must answer those who may speak of us but not to us. We must make ourselves known to a public who otherwise may never encounter an alternate or contested representation of “what we do” and “what we know.” In short, we must provoke authentic exchange with our critics and the publics they address. Or, in Bakhtinian terms, we must become proximate outsiders to those who might prefer instead that we remain so far outside the public forum that we will not be heard at all.

But is this enough? Or, to use the parlance of the logicians, is our entry into the public forum *both* a necessary and sufficient condition for altering that sphere? Michael Bérubé, a noted scholar who publishes frequently in public venues, does not think so. Drawing a distinction between “publicness” and “mere publicity,” Bérubé maintains that our experiments in “going public” cannot be limited to our wish to be published in the *Village Voice* or *Harper’s*. Elaborating this distinction, Bérubé argues that

Publicness involves a commitment to the idea of the public. Publicity involves putting a few more talking heads on television and cranking up the academic celebrity apparatus. Publicity means nothing if it isn’t tied to the idea of publicness, of public ownership and public welfare. The figure of the so-called public intellectual is worthy of attention, then, only insofar as it can be a force in whatever way, and in whatever media, for fostering and popularizing a revived notion of public good. (*Res* 170)

Of course, we do not need either Bakhtin or Peirce (or, for that matter, Bérubé) to sanction our forays into what is for most of us unfamiliar territory. But we may find them valuable when we reflect upon the larger meanings of our choice to enter the public fray and upon what we might reasonably expect for doing so. If, as I noted earlier, it “takes time to mean something,” it also takes time to *change* something, to imagine a different world from the one we inhabit now.

In my final chapter, I will try to show why this is a concern voiced not only by certain academics and intellectuals, but also by the students we teach, however unwittingly they might do so.