

**DISCLAIMER: This piece of writing is experimental: it is unfinished; it is a continuing WIP; it is slightly mortifying and maybe slightly horrifying; it may not even make sense. Read at your own risk.**

Like most children in the American education system, I began learning to write in kindergarten when I was about five years old. I vividly remember copying down words such as cat, deer, and room while coloring in their pictures with a box of vibrant Crayola crayons. I remember giving my deer a purple head and green feet, the crayons leaving the nostalgic waxy residue behind. A classmate looked over at my deer and simply said, “Deer aren’t purple, they’re brown. See, look at my picture.”

Like most children, when I was in the third grade I learned to write in cursive. The elegant loops and swirls cohesively connected to create meaning. In the margins of my math assignment I would practice the elegant L’s and the capital K’s that my teacher drew so fluidly on the board. A classmate looked over at my desk and questioned, “Where is your math work? Do you need some help?”

Like some lucky children, I was blessed with a special teacher. I remember her asking me if I liked to write and I simply answered, “Like write a book report? Kinda.” She asked me if I had ever written a story that was just for myself, a story that I didn’t show anyone and I shook my head. That day during recess, I sat under the slide and wrote a story just for myself. My friend came over and asked, “Did you forget to do your homework? Don’t you want to play with us?”

Like some unlucky children, I was told there was no future for my words. I remember replacing my notebook with a calculator and trading my novel for a textbook. Equations and short, scientifically staccato sentences were written in my fluid cursive. My professor wrote in the margins of my lab report, “Write in print, cursive is too difficult to read.”

My theory of writing is fluid; it is constantly changing to reflect my current thinking and is influenced by nearly everything in my life. I began to construct my theory of writing in the fall of 2016 and was prompted by a Theories of Writing class to go beyond the reading that was required for the class and to develop my own ideas about writing. While I was taking this class, I was also being introduced to the writing center as a new consultant. The training for this position involved taking a class where discussions on writing center pedagogy and articles about how writing centers function took place every week. These two classes acted as a sort of obsessive frame of mind for me. I found myself attempting (with varied success) to talk to my friends and peers about writing, and often just contemplating it on my own.

Prior to the fall of 2016, I saw writing as a means to an end. I always enjoyed and appreciated the inherent value of writing, but that appreciation very rarely dipped below the surface, and I had yet to truly understand the extent of that inherent value. I was able to recognize ‘good’<sup>1</sup> writing, and I had always excelled in my own academic writing; yet I was coasting. I rarely bothered to think about the writing process other than proofreading and editing, and, I am embarrassed to say, I never truly revised a paper until last month<sup>2</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> Good writing is a term that has always bothered me. To me, good writing is not about grammar or structure or any of the prescribed uses of syntax and diction. Good writing is a good idea. While it can be incredibly pleasant to read pretty sentences and complex sentences and experimental sentences, the ideas are what stays with me.

<sup>2</sup> A part of me still believes I have not fully revised a paper. There is a notion, perhaps that is not fully realized yet, that thinks a revised paper should look very little like the rough draft. There was a reading I did recently for a class and the author described her experience of having a professor go through her Master’s Thesis and completely change it. She simply watched as he took it apart. Yet she wasn’t upset or offended, she was grateful that someone finally showed her how to write and revise. Simply seeing comments and attempting to make acceptable changes and hope that your writing has improved to meet some abstruse standard is incredibly frustrating. I am extremely envious of that experience.

intricacies of the writing process and of teaching writing were never of importance to me and I was fine correcting papers for grammatical errors, basic coherence and structure, citations, and formatting. Yet I was missing the whole point of writing.

In September of 2016, I wrote that writing “in its most basic form, is a technology that has allowed for an unprecedented level of continuous advancement for the human race. Yet I would argue that it is more than just words on a page. It is a form of communication that takes place in song, in art, in body language. Writing has become an integral cog in the mechanism of human existence.” Nearly two months later, I found that I was far removed from that original<sup>3</sup> theory of writing. I had begun to question the methods by which writing is taught and how those methods can shape a student’s academic career. And so, perhaps the most complete thought I had at the end of 2016 is that writing is a conversation and a social act. Writing begins as a thought. Yet to go back, to reflect, let’s look at what a thought is. For us as human beings, a thought takes place in words. So what we are experiencing as reflective thought is a form of internalized conversation. The next step is to externalize this conversation. To do this is an intense effort: to verbalize to another human being; to put the words on the page; or to converse, discuss, and turn this thought into a more cohesive idea that another person can understand can be intimidating as it places you in a place of vulnerability.

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<sup>3</sup> When I say original, I am referring to this ‘theory of writing’ as my first coherent lets-put-this-on-the-page-and-publish-it-on-my-blog idea, but this idea is hardly original. I believe I was pulling quite a bit from Plato’s *Phaedrus* and his own idea that writing was a technology that would destroy true knowledge, an issue I now think is exacerbated by the advent of the Internet and of modern technology. Yet this is a topic that is deserving of its own paper and I won’t bore you with it here.

Writing is perhaps one of the most vulnerable creations a person can make. Writing is often our thoughts spelled out on a page (or screen) for someone else to see, judge, and analyze. I have so much respect for creative writers and poets and scholars who put their hearts and minds into their work for anyone to see because for me, that is the scariest thing in the world.

Personally, the act of externalizing this internal conversation is the most important part of my writing process. I can think all day long and have short notes on my thoughts and think I am onto something big, but when I try to articulate it can fall apart. This is where writing becomes a social artifact. It is something that is developed within a conversation, though the context of this conversation can be fluid<sup>4</sup>. I believe, if you are lucky enough, the best ideas are those developed in a personal conversation<sup>5</sup>. I have gained the most through my conversation with a close friend where we can debate issues, ranging from politics to grammar to our Westworld theories, for hours and talk through abstract ideas until they finally become concrete<sup>6</sup>.

In my contemplation of writing – what it is, the process behind it, and the different forms it may take – I have delved into the ideas offered and explored within the postmodern genre. The four authors I have taken the most from this quarter are all masters of this genre,

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<sup>4</sup> A conversation may not be with another person in the form of speech. It can be through social media, you can post an idea and have anyone or everyone respond. You can email a friend or post on a random or relevant blog or article or picture or Wikipedia. It can also be reading whatever on what you are thinking about to gain perspective and other ideas. Writing is a long history of thought and response and thought and response. Writing simply *is* conversation.

<sup>5</sup> Yet I have this abstract idea that talking about writing is so wonderfully redundant. So if it is redundant, then is talking about writing the definition of reflection?

<sup>6</sup> Or not, sometimes they become so abstract they just disintegrate, and that's OK too.

Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*), Chuck Palahniuk (*Survivor, Fight Club*), Thomas Pynchon (*The Crying of Lot 49*), and David Foster Wallace (*Infinite Jest*)<sup>7</sup>. Postmodernism, as I understand it, works to undermine the master narratives that are inherent in contemporary society. Postmodernist authors struggle to understand the effect of mass media and technology on our culture, and in this struggle these authors pull from other texts and rely heavily on social satire to critique and question the world around us. Jenkins, Ford, and Green explore the impact that technology is having on our society as a whole and many of the concepts in the novel are satirized in these postmodern texts. DFW, besides creating some of the most phenomenal works of fiction in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, follows in Didion's footsteps with his creative non-fiction essays. *Consider the Lobster* and *Authority and American Usage* are two of his essays that are now commonly found in college classrooms around the country. These authors are not just incredible writers, they are philosophers in the continuous and ongoing conversation that is attempting to make sense of humanity.

Writing is more than just words on a page, and it is more than just printing out an assignment for class. Since the invention of writing, and the evolutionary process that has propelled us from oral cultures and practices, these conversations span generations and allow for a more thorough and globalized perspective into these issues. What these postmodern texts are really getting at and attempting to make sense of is what it means to be a human today. We are surrounded by technology and we are surrounded by people, but we have never been more

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<sup>7</sup> This should not come as a surprise at this point, but all of these authors are in a conversation with each other! Chuck Palahniuk and DFW cite Kurt Vonnegut as a major influence, DFW cites Thomas Pynchon, and Thomas Pynchon and everyone else on this list cites James Joyce. These authors, without exception, are looking at the media and our culture and pointing out its flaws in the form of fiction.

isolated. A chime on our phone is now a social connection that releases dopamine in our brain, creating a biological dependency on the technology that links us to the rest of humanity. Our world is changing at an astonishing rate that we cannot hope to keep up with. There are new trends – in fashion, in technology, in text lingo - every day and if you fall behind then you are separated from mainstream culture<sup>8</sup>.

I now believe that writing is not simply black and white, words on a page with an attempt at communication. It is a conversation, an act of reflection that encourages introspective meditation, and a social artifact and process. David Foster Wallace said that ‘fiction’s about what it is to be a fucking human being,’ but I would add<sup>9</sup> that writing is what *makes* us human. It is a constant act of reflection, of going back. It is a primarily recursive process that can define us if we let it. The more I read ‘good’ writing (such as DFW, Joan Didion, Chuck Palahniuk) the more I realize that the ‘good’ writing is about being human. It is confronting the struggles we face on a daily basis and attempting place ourselves into conversation with the rest of the world. It is about making those connections that are constantly defining and redefining humanity. This can take the form of fiction, of creative fiction, of an essay, of a scientific research paper, a personal blog, an email, a text, any type of writing is the attempt at connection and the continuation of the conversation that shields us from isolation. Joan Didion wrote in the *White Album* that “we tell ourselves stories in order to live,” and I think that sums up my current theory of writing.

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<sup>8</sup> I realize that this statement may seem melodramatic, but hopefully the terrifying truth behind this statement comes through.

<sup>9</sup> And this is an act of heresy on my part since DFW is my writing hero, I mean check out these footnotes!

Unlike some children, I gave my calculator back and found my old notebook. I wrote a story for myself and I shared it with someone. The textbooks were thrown in the fire and I invested in a sturdy bookshelf for my novels. I looked at my life and I said, "I think I' m going to like it here."