Sonogram: A Rhetoric of Echo-Location

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This dissertation titled
Sonogram: A Rhetoric of Echo-Location

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This dissertation traces conceptual genealogies of the terms “form” and “voice” in relation to rhetoric/writing and to sexed bodies. An ultrasound machine searches the interior contours of a body, bouncing sound off tissue, creating a fuzzy electronic image of space and sound: a sonogram. This work is a sonogram of voice bouncing off form, creating a counter-picture of a history of exclusions in Rhetoric and Composition. I assert throughout the dissertation that “form” and “voice” are always already gendered terms, and that writing also relies on sex and gender for meaning. I find evidence for this in classical rhetorical theorists such as Plato, Aristotle, and Quintilian, as well as in biological or gynecological treatises of the time period. According to such theorists, one of the central problems of women’s bodies and subsequently of their writing is their formlessness, their inability to be pinned down, their proclivity to leak across barriers. I argue, like many feminist rhetoricians and theorists before me such as Anne Carson, Miriam Brody and Adrianna Cavarero, that the female voice has been characterized as dangerous and irrational, based largely on the classical conception of their leaky bodies. Female voices have therefore been quite literally ephemeral in the long history of writing, though key interventions by scholars like Cheryl Glenn, Andrea Lunsford, and Susan Jarratt have sought to rediscover these voices. Because of this history of exclusion, I advocate for voice as a viable metaphor in writing, if it can be disassociated from
essentialism. I draw on the mythological figure of Echo as a potentially transformative trope for writing and rhetoric, precisely because she creates her own form, separate from her body, through voice alone. After examining some of the rhetorical strategies of women writing about gynecological concerns—including an eighteenth century midwife, a nineteenth century doctor, Mary Shelley, and the twentieth century Boston Women’s Health Book Collective—I suggest that Echo absorbs and resounds masculine and feminine voices, providing a potential transgender (as in above, beyond, transitioning) figure for writing that is more inclusive than adopting the dominant discourse or accepting a non-dominant position in rhetoric. Echo offers us a figure that can reclaim voice as an important metaphor in writing without claiming essentialism.

Approved: 

Sherrie L. Gradin
Professor of English
This dissertation is dedicated to my loving family of boys: my husband, Michael Ensor, and my three children, Fionn, Sawyer and Thatcher. They have sustained me through all of my studies and writing with their love and support.
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I must also give my heartfelt thanks to my writing group, Melanie Lee and David Fritts, led by Dr. Candace Stewart, for all of their efforts in helping me mold especially my early chapters. Lana Oweidat has also been a constant support and sounding board for all of my writing, and I hope I will be able to return the favor.

I’d like to thank all the faculty of the Rhetoric and Composition Program at Ohio University for all of the tools they have given me for becoming a strong writer and a solid scholar in the field. I have appreciated every class I have taken, and have been continually stretched and challenged. I also appreciate all of my professional development opportunities in the program, especially the opportunity to work under Dr. Jennie Nelson as Assistant to the Director of Composition.
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PREFACE

Though I will be explaining my argument in detail in the first chapter, I need to insert a preface by way of explanation concerning the form or style of my writing in this dissertation. As I explain in the first chapter, I will be interrogating two important terms in rhetoric and writing’s genealogy: form and voice. A necessary component of my interrogation of these terms is an enactment of counter-forms and counter-voices in my writing. So I interrogate both in content and in form (though I will be problematizing these terms and their weighted meanings throughout).

Because I am interested in disrupting "form," my writing could be called experimental.¹ Each chapter will play with form and voice in different ways, so they will not follow a recognizable template, each looking similar, nor will any single chapter represent one clear voice or one dominant form. I am attempting to enact rhetoric with "sonogram" as a driving metaphor: picturing sound and space through sound-play and varieties of design and image. My fonts change often as my voices change. Visuals are sometimes placed encased in text or behind text or to the side of text as a kind of parataxis, therefore there is no separate section of “figures” since this would diminish this effect. Because of this playful interrogation, I am also filing this dissertation in a format

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¹ I do not wish to define experimental because I feel this would limit its form. In order to be experimental, the writing must experiment, so it cannot be limited by a prescribed definition. I will locate possible incarnations of writing that utilizes a sonogram as model and a voice metaphor, but they will not all look alike. They will all resist and resound, as I hope my writing also will do.
that is not usual to this institution. My front matter\(^2\) is filed in the usual manner, and then the bulk of this project is a PDF slide show, that can be accessed here.

I have included my list of Works Cited in the front matter as well as at the end of the dissertation to assist readers and researchers who may not decide to follow the link to the full text.

\(^2\) Another interesting term to interrogate, since it is largely a function of “form” rather than “matter.”
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