

Rejection, Deconstruction, and the Artifice of Language

With Postmodernism comes an increased awareness and concern of construction, specifically the conventional construction of the meta-narrative and the construction of language. An emphasis on the construction of language becomes important because of the recognition that language no longer has a complete, singular, isolated, universal meaning. If the way narratives are constructed and the conventional use of language is rejected then what are writers to do? Language poet/writer Charles Bernstein in his essay *Thoughts Measure*, asserts, "It is through language that we experience the world" (63). Since language is our main medium of communication, and as Bernstein argues, it is our experience, it is important to start with the artifice of language itself. Because language is the established symbol system used it is crucial that we deconstruct conventional language and techniques in order to manipulate language in new ways. In order to create a new experience for the reader writers must deconstruct or reject previous techniques, patterns and convention, and explore deeper the artifice of language.

Techniques used to transfer experience from the writers head into the readers, such as transparency, are no longer functional. Bernstein, in his text *Absorption and Impermeability*, makes this point when addressing that "impermeable textual elements may actually contribute toward absorptive affects & that such textures may be particularly vital at a time when readers are skeptical of the transparency effect" (21). Despite the technique of transparency's desire to make the text clear to the reader, because conventional language does not connote or have a singular definition universally, but communicates different meaning to different readers, the idea of a transparent text is impossible.

Critically examining the faults of transparency, and its relationship to how we perceive language raises another concern regarding how narratives and writing are being constructed. The conventional ways dramatic narratives are constructed bring nothing new to the reader. In John Barth's *Lost in the Funhouse*, Barth gives readers the pattern for how all dramatic narratives are constructed (95). The problem with the pattern of dramatic narratives is readers can predict the future of the story, so there is no purpose in writing them. There is no purpose in writing them, because readers stop thinking and the language becomes mundane; readers are able to finish sentences on their own. Because the constructions of stories become so predictable, writers must find another method for communicating with the reader.

After critiquing techniques used in writing and deconstructing conventional language, a different approach to writing needs to be made. Because language is the pre-established symbol system with which we communicate, we cannot abandon it altogether. Therefore, writers must critically think about the language they are using in their writing. In Henry Sussman's essay *Prolegomena to any Present and Future Language Poetry*, Sussman argues that writers must not only pay attention to the meaning of the words, but like the language poets, writers must, "hone into such data as the shape and sound of words, syllables, or letter clusters either in place of, at the expense of, or in supplemental relation to the 'idea' that they might 'convey' (3). Here, it seems as though a total and complete shift has happened with writing when the sound and syllables of the language become more important than the actual idea the language is attempting to convey. Knowing the influence that language has on our thinking, if we want to move past structuralism we have to start with deconstructing language. After deconstructing language, writers must critically examine how the language used will produce multiple experiences simultaneously.