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FACULTY OF EDUCATION

**COMING TO VOICE : IDENTITY AND CHANGE IN THE
TEACHING OF WRITING TO WOMEN**

**A dissertation presented
in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of**

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE EDUCATION

by

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ABSTRACT

As a teacher of creative writing, the researcher is interested in the most effective and appropriate approach to the teaching of writing to women.

This study considers two approaches to the teaching of writing - **writing as self expression**, and **writing as social practice**. It outlines the theoretical framework of these two approaches, in terms of three key concepts - **self, language and change**. It looks at the implications of these approaches in terms of their approach to autobiography and in terms of 'the writing scene' - the context for women writers - and in particular, it looks at how women are affected by the approaches.

The study then explores the implications of a **feminist poststructuralist approach** to the teaching of writing. The theoretical framework of this approach is discussed, again in terms of the three key concepts of self, language and change; and the approach is then 'translated' into the practical research of the study. Positioning itself as **feminist advocacy research**, it takes the form of an **action research study** where a series of writing workshops is designed and then facilitated in a selected group of women participants.

The study analyses the process, the writing produced in the workshops, and the interviews with the participants after the workshops, in terms of how they reflect the central concepts, self, language and change of the **feminist poststructuralist approach**.

The study concludes with a summary of the essential ingredients of a **poststructuralist approach**, it comments on the generalisability of the research to other groups, and comments on the research process in terms of the researcher's intentions as a piece of **feminist advocacy research**.

In line with **feminist research**, the researcher is concerned that this dissertation is written in such a way as to be of practical use to a teacher of writing who might like to adopt a **feminist poststructuralist approach**. With this in mind, a complete set of workshop outlines is given in Appendix A, a complete set of handouts in Appendix B, and some resource material for teachers in Appendix C.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This research study looks at the theoretical bases of two main approaches to the teaching of writing - writing as self expression and writing as social practice, and explores what might be a third approach based on feminist poststructuralist theory. It argues that this third approach is particularly relevant and appropriate in the teaching of writing to women. In an action research study, the implications of the third approach is explored in the design, running, and consequent analysis of a series of writing workshops for women.

In this introduction I describe, through personal narrative, the context in which I find myself as a teacher of writing, and attempt to explain why I believe this study is important to undertake - for me, for teachers of writing, and as a contribution to the discourse of the teaching of writing. I then give a broad outline of the structure of this dissertation.

Personal narrative

I have been running writing workshops for 23 years. I began by coming across a copy of the just-published book by Peter Elbow - *Writing without Teachers* - in 1973. A friend and I read the book and formed a small writing group in Johannesburg based on Peter Elbow's ideas and guidelines.

We were excited by what we saw as a completely revolutionary way of looking at writing. In terms of the theory I didn't have at the time, our excitement was the discovery of the 'process' approach - as opposed to the 'product' approach. Some of us had previously been part of a group that met and read and

critiqued each other's work. We now used workshops as places to write rather than as places where we brought finished products of writing for helpful comment.

The new group carried on meeting, with changes and flux in membership, for the next 10 years.

In the workshops we explored the aspects and techniques of process writing - such as free writing, separation between writing and editing, feedback as personal response rather than critique. We welcomed the philosophy on which it was based - that everyone was a potential writer, everyone was creative and needed only to be freed and assisted to express themselves. Although there was often a tension in the group between the need to produce finished work, to ask whether it was 'good' or 'good enough' or 'publishable', and the very successful strategy of non-critique and non-judgment.

In the early 1980s I became interested in right-brain learning theory, especially in relation to language learning. There was a surge of interest in the connection between right-brain thinking and creativity (Russell, 1979; Buzan, 1974; Blakeslee, 1980). I went on numerous courses and did extensive reading around this, particularly books on writing offering right-brain techniques in the teaching of art and writing (Rico, 1983; Klauser, 1987; Zdenek, 1983; Edwards, 1986). The right-brain learning theory confirmed for me why the process approach was so effective in enabling people to write. I now added principles and techniques based on this theory into the workshops that I ran.

In an article in a Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) publication I wrote:

Much of the writing workshop activities are a way into the right brain to practise being involved in the process of writing, to put the censor aside, to silence the internal critic while drawing on the rich imagery, the authenticity of our emotions, the richness of our senses and then - at the end of the process - to let the internal critic pounce on the writing and edit and polish. (COSAW Local Vol 1 no.1, May 1990).

In December 1983 I added drama to the workshop mixture. I attended a course on Active Learning through Drama in Jerusalem run by Professor Mark Rittenberg of the University of San Francisco. Although it was primarily a teachers' training course for second language teachers, I chose as my practical project the application of the learning-through-drama techniques to the design of a creative writing course.

I co-ran this course twice in Cape Town from 1984 onwards, once with a newly formed small writing group, and once as part of Community Arts Project (CAP) creative writing workshops. I then carried on running workshops - for CAP, with my writing group and later for COSAW.

These workshops were an interesting mixture of basic Peter Elbow process writing techniques (free-writing, non-critique), with drama, movement, art, and music being thrown into the pot as part of right-brain stimuli.

Further experiences and influences added to the mixture, and there now seemed to be a basic recipe which could be passed on. I co-designed and ran the 'recipe' as a training course for COSAW writing workshop facilitators in 1989.

My feminist and political awareness increased through the second half of the 1980s, and our writing group became a women's writing group. My involvement with

the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) and the Women's Cultural Festivals led to my running workshops for women's organisations like the United Women's Congress (UWCO) and groups within COSAW.

In retrospect, I realise that all these workshops were essentially process writing workshops, and were based on what I would now call a writing-as-self-expression (liberal humanist) approach. The feminism of the women's workshops was more in line with an essentialist feminist view of women, and as such did not contradict the humanist paradigm. It was a feminism that valued and argued for workshops to provide the space and encouragement for women to write, and enabled women (some for the first time) to express themselves and tell of their experiences.

The space to be creative and have fun and to listen to other women's writing was generally very empowering and affirming for the women in these workshops. Much of the writing produced in the workshops at this time was read (by the authors) at political rallies, women's cultural festivals and meetings of women's organisations. The women and their writing were also very much in demand at the numerous cultural events that took the place of political rallies at that time, when organisations and events were banned.

Our women's writing group continued to meet fortnightly, with members taking turns to facilitate workshops. Different facilitators' interests and ideas added other ingredients to the basic recipe, which was - free-writing around a stimulus using right-brain techniques like colour, drawing, collage, movement, drama, music - all within a safe and non-critical, teacherless environment.

Exciting writing was produced, and the group continues (with changes in membership) to meet. We have

compiled for ourselves several collections of our writing, including a booklet with a series of writing workshop outlines plus the writing from the group that came out of them.

My reading and intellectual exploration became focused at this time around feminist theory (Flax, 1990; Grimshaw, 1986; Tong, 1992; Code, 1991). I explored feminist literary criticism (Gilbert & Gubar, 1989; Moers, 1978; Showalter, 1986; Moi, 1985; Spender, 1989), feminist cultural theory (Probyn, 1993; Trihn, 1989; hooks, 1991), and in particular, feminist poststructuralist theory (Butler, 1990; Nicholson, 1990; Elam, 1994; Fraser, 1989; McNay, 1992). I began to consider a more clearly defined feminist poststructuralist approach to writing and to teaching writing.

In January 1995 I offered to run a feminist writing workshop at a conference at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, entitled 'Women and Art in SA'. I designed and co-ran a workshop there called 'Is being a woman just a cultural performance?'. This was my first attempt to design a writing workshop based on definite feminist theory, in this case the concept of gender. Although there was no overt discussion of theory, all the exercises and the workshop material were based on exploring the concept of gender and what that means for women and women writers.

The workshop was well received, and acclaimed as being 'feminist'. But I was not sure. Was I just adding feminist theory as another ingredient into the recipe that I had been using over the years, or was this a new approach?

Later that year I designed a series of five workshops which were run for the 'public' at the Natalia Labia Museum. I called them 'Feminist Women's Writing

Workshops' and grounded each one in a basic concept in feminist theory that would be related to writing.

The participants enjoyed and responded to the feminist theme and content, yet the same question still nagged at me. I was certainly using feminist theory, but in what way was it poststructuralist? What would a feminist poststructuralist writing workshop look like, and what would this mean to the participants?

I did not just want to make the workshops 'more feminist', I wanted to move away from the process writing (or writing as self expression) approach. My feminist poststructuralist readings (Stanley, 1990a; Smith, 1993; Bishop, 1989; Belenky, Clinchy & Blythe, 1986) argued that the humanist view of self was inappropriate for women. As the humanist view appeared to be the basis of the writing as self expression approach to teaching writing, my concern was that this process approach (that I and most other teachers of writing were using) was not only inappropriate for women, but might actually contribute to the marginalising and silencing of women writers.

I wanted to make a fundamental shift from writing as self-expression to the poststructuralist view of writing as social practice. I wanted to try to create a feminist poststructuralist workshop, and to see how women responded to it.

It was with this in mind that I registered for the MPhil in Language and Literature Education. I wanted to come to grips with educational theory, feminist pedagogy, feminist and feminist poststructuralist theory, language theories and critiques of different approaches to teaching writing. From this knowledge, I would attempt to design and run a creative writing 'course' that could be said to be a feminist poststructuralist approach to writing, and to see what

this produced, in experience and writing, for the women participating.

Structure of the dissertation

This dissertation records the research process.

In *Chapter 2*, I outline the theoretical framework and discuss and critique in some depth the two approaches I have identified - the writing-as-self-expression approach, and the writing-as-social-practice. I then attempt to suggest what a feminist poststructuralist approach might be.

I have chosen three key concepts as fundamental to my theoretical framework - the concepts of **self**, **language** and **change**. In the theoretical framework I look at the different approaches I have identified in terms of these concepts. I also look at the implications of these approaches in terms of what I call 'the writing scene'. I use the term 'writing scene' to cover both the writing workshop or 'classroom' scene and the broader scene for women writers - the literary, cultural and social context in which they find themselves. In both scenes I look specifically at how women are affected by the approaches.

In *Chapter 3*, I describe the research design and methodology - how I went about planning, designing and then running a series of 10 workshops, consciously attempting a feminist poststructuralist approach. The research positions itself as feminist advocacy research, and the process follows an action research model of first the **planning** of the workshops, then the **running** of the actual workshops, and finally **reflection and analysis** of the process. During the workshops I recorded the process and collected writing samples from the participants. At the end of the series, I interviewed the participants.

A central and unifying focus in all the workshops was the contested genre of 'autobiography'. I chose this for three main reasons. Firstly, Peim (1993: 27) describes autobiography as "exemplifying a number of characteristic beliefs about the nature of writing" which draw together "notions about the self, about identity, about narrative and about writing". Through this medium many of the key concepts of a poststructuralist and feminist approach could be unpacked.

Secondly, feminist theories of autobiography challenge the traditional canon of autobiography. Stanley (1992:4) claims that "most auto-biography is concerned with 'great lives', and these are almost invariably those of white middle and upper class men who have achieved success according to conventional - and thus highly political - standards".

Thirdly, many theorists and writers see women's autobiography as vital to their 'coming to voice'. Virginia Woolf claimed autobiography as a 'genre of the oppressed' and Friedman (1988:41) claims that "writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech."

Chapter 4 is the reflection and analysis chapter. I look at how the key concepts (self, language and change) were evident in:

- the design of the course as a whole and in the individual workshops;
- the 'action' of the workshops;
- the writing produced and in the comments made by the participants in their interviews.

(The extracts from participants' writing and their interviews are presented in italics in the dissertation.)

I analyse how feminist poststructuralist theory was used in the workshops and how it is reflected in the writing produced and the interviews with the women. In particular, I am interested in women's conceptions of identity, their metaphors of self as revealed in their writing, how they experience themselves as writers, and how they experienced the workshops in terms of their relationship to their writing and their 'writing selves'.

Chapter 5 attempts to pull together a conclusion and assess how far I succeeded in designing and running a feminist poststructuralist course for women. I also try to assess how the 'writing scene' which I created in the workshops affected the women and their writing, in other words, the participants' responses to the approach.

In the feminist research tradition of accessible, practical research, I attempt throughout this dissertation to offer a clear outline of the research process in order to share it with other writing teachers and writers. I also attempt to offer some guidelines or recommendations for the teacher of writing based on implications of adopting a feminist poststructuralist approach, and on the insights and conclusions gained from the research.

CHAPTER TWO

RATIONALE FOR A FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH TO
TEACHING WRITING

"The self is in fact erased rather than expressed in writing" (Nick Peim, 1993:137).

Writing 'erases' the self. I use this more provocatively than seriously to jerk the reader (and myself) out of the common-sense notion of writing as self-expression.

Peim calls the notion of writing as self-expression, a "common sense" notion. It is the one we take for granted, the one we never question. It requires a mental shift to dislodge the notion and be able to ask the question Peim asks: "what is writing?". Once jerked out of complacency and once having dislodged the notion, I can begin to question the notion of writing as self-expression.

Writing is something we are so familiar with that it is difficult to find a PERSPECTIVE from which to view it effectively, to deconstruct our common sense notions about it (Peim, 1993:133).

In order to find that new perspective, this section attempts to deconstruct and 'reconstruct' the common-sense notion of writing as self-expression.

If writing is not self-expression, as our common-sense says, how do we view it? Peim (1993) argues for a poststructuralist approach which sees writing as **social practice**. Writing as self-expression is based on what he calls the liberal humanist notion of the self. He claims that

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The individual's responses don't come from some inner, private, strictly personal core, but are programmed in advance by a whole range of cultural practices... (Peim, 1993:24).

In this chapter I outline the three approaches (writing as self-expression, writing as social practice, and a feminist poststructuralist approach) in terms of their understanding of concepts which I have identified as central to an approach to teaching writing. These are the concepts of language, self and change. I attempt to show the implication of each in their approach to autobiography, and in terms of what 'writing scene' they create for women writers.

A. WRITING AS SELF-EXPRESSION

1. Writing 'expresses' the self

I group the 'process' theorists such as Elbow, Emig, Macrorie, Raimes, Nightingale, with Whole Language theorists like Goodman, in what I am calling the writing as self-expression approach. These theorists and educationalists reacted against the 'product' or 'skills-oriented' theorists or what I rather derogatively call the 'write-by-numbers school'. Much of school teaching, particularly when I was at school in Johannesburg in the 1950s and early 1960s, was focused on the product - the essay or composition. There were rules as to the correct structure of an essay; correct style; and grammar and spelling were of major importance.

The product approach is still prevalent in schools today, as it is in many instruction books on 'How to improve your style' or 'How to Write a Novel'. Writing schools, particularly correspondence colleges like the Howick School of Writing (with its emphasis on success

in selling your writing, and mastering the formulas of particular genres like short story writing, magazine articles etc.) exemplify this approach.

Even where the process approach replaced the product approach in the 1970s and 1980s, there has often been a reaction against it and a return to the 'traditional curriculum' in schools. Cope and Kalantzis (1992:4) point out that:

In the United States the debate about 'political correctness' has led to a classical revivalism of sorts, in an attempt to meet the alleged onslaught of feminism, multiculturalism and the like - movements which supposedly threaten the educational place of the Western canon.

The product approach to the teaching of writing, reflects what Cope and Kalantzis (1992:3) describe as the "logicoscientific culture and epistemology". They state how this was "based on the idea that the world can be described in terms of 'facts', rules and regularities epitomised in tables to conjugate verbs or decline nouns".

In its reaction against the product approach, the process approach can be likened to the world-view based on Einstein's quantum theory, which destroyed Newton's mechanistic, atomistic view, and replaced it with a holistic view of reality. Fritjof Capra (1982) describes this theory as one in which the parts of the world are interrelated and can only be understood as patterns of a process. In philosophy the phenomenologists and humanists argued for the individual's private subjective experience.

A central focus of humanistic psychology, as seen in writers such as Maslow (1962) Carl Rogers (1961), is on

personal growth and the fulfillment of human potential. Maslow speaks of 'self-actualisation', that is, becoming the self you truly are; and Rogers speaks of the 'self-actualising tendency' as the process of becoming a more competent person. The emphasis for the humanist is on the autonomy, self-fulfillment and self-assertion of the individual who is distinct from society and free to express her- or himself in unique ways.

The humanist philosophy of the human potential movement of the 1960s and 1970s is reflected in the process (self-expression) approach to writing, with its emphasis on individual freedom and personal growth.

Who or what is the self in self-expression?

The self-expression 'school' of writing would say that it is the stable, coherent, inner, individual self that is expressed in writing. There is a strong connection here between individual self-expression and creativity. This approach to teaching writing aims to unlock or free the creative self, by focusing on the process of writing rather than the rules (which are believed to stifle self-expression). There is also a strong connection with the personal growth of the individual, which is seen to be developed by and in the practice of writing.

This humanist approach has become the common sense view of contemporary thought. Grimshaw (1986) claims that this doctrine of 'abstract individualism' is the basis of the political philosophy of liberalism. The liberal believes that no matter how social our development may be, we exist essentially as separate individuals and any social order must respect the rights of the individual members and provide ways of judging the claims that one member might have against another.

This approach is implicit in the majority of writing workshops popular as extra-mural courses and with private writing groups. The 'workshop' is an event in which the participants are able to practise the **process** of writing. For example, Colleen Higgs (1997), facilitator of a recent course offered at the University of Cape Town Summer School in January 1997, describes her series of six workshops as follows:

You will be guided through exercises to free your imagination... so that your inner voice can speak and be heard.

2. Language 'reflects' reality

The common-sense notion of language - which relies on the liberal humanist concept of self - is that **language reflects reality**.

When this is applied to writing, it implies that there is a reality out there that we can and do experience directly, and that we can express that experience in language. There is an assumption that there is a one-to-one correspondence between the experience and the language used to describe it. In other words, we have a coherent self we can express and we can describe that self's experiences in language which accurately reflects that experience.

Much of the technique of process writing is intended to enable the writer to 'get in touch' with her/his self, and her experience. This ability to be in touch is seen to enable her to express herself in writing more freely.

Peter Elbow (1981) talks of 'true' or 'real' voice as being that to which prospective writers aspire. His search for the 'power' in writing, by which he clearly means 'good' writing, and that to which he as a teacher

and his students as writers are aspiring, has to do with 'getting in touch with the experience'. Openness to experience is valued, and there is the assumption that, with the assistance of process writing techniques, people can get directly 'in touch' with experience.

The key features of this common-sense view of language are described by Weedon (1987: 78) as "the assumption of the transparency of language and its appeal to experience".

She describes how from early childhood we "learn to see ourselves as unified, rational beings, able to perceive the truth of reality". We also learn that "as rational individuals we should be non-contradictory and in control of the meaning of our lives". And she claims that "this understanding of subjectivity is guaranteed by common sense and the liberal-humanist theory of meaning which underpins it" (Weedon, 1987:80).

For the process writing advocates (Elbow; Rico; Goldberg), the language used by anyone is an expression of their essential self, a self, as explained by Peim (1993: 47),

"that may grow and develop as it is nourished by engaging in developing activities with language or as it comes into contact with texts that open horizons and that allow the individual self to extend to encounter other worlds, to experience other lives, other ways of seeing and so on.

Autobiography

The humanist, transparent view of language as reflecting experience is exemplified in the traditional view of autobiography. In this genre, where notions of truth and memory play a major role, the writer of an

autobiography recalls accurately and honestly the details or facts of 'his' life, and expresses these in a form that confirms the uniqueness of 'his' life.

Friedman (1988:34) states that the "cultural precondition for autobiography...is a pervasive concept of individualism".

I find clear parallels between the eight major themes of enlightenment or modernist (humanist) culture which Flax (1990) describes, and the assumptions of traditional autobiography. Flax identifies these themes as:

- i) "a coherent, stable self (the author)";
- ii) "a distinctive and privileged mode of story telling - philosophy";
- iii) "a particular notion of 'truth' (the hero)";
- iv) "a distinctive political philosophy (the moral) that posits complex and necessary interconnections between reason, autonomy and freedom" and which grounds claims to authority in reason;
- v) "a transparent medium of expression (language)";
- vi) "a rationalist and teleological philosophy of history (the plot)";
- vii) an optimistic and rationalist philosophy of human nature (character development)"; and
- viii) "a philosophy of knowledge (an ideal form)" based on scientific progress.

Looking at traditional autobiography in relation to these eight themes, the match is clear:

The author, a coherent, stable unique individual (i), expresses in an acknowledged and accepted manner of story-telling (ii), the truth about himself and his life (iii). What he writes accurately reflects his life (v), and is expected to be a rational story of his

progress and achievements as he moves through his life in a logical and linear manner (vi, vii & viii).

Autobiography is the literary consequence of "the rise of individualism as an ideology", according to Georges Gusdorf (1956:33) and as a genre represents the expression of individual authority in the realm of language. It is "the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image".

This is a commonly held view of autobiography among creative writing teachers. Associate Professor Dorian Haarhof, who regularly runs writing workshops for UCT's extra-mural programme, describes his January 1997 Summer School course, entitled "Writing yourself: creating a life story", as follows:

This experiential course is about preserving memories for future generations...The course is for those who want to use personal memory as a way of processing and recording their life and times, or to leave gifts for children or grandchildren.

3. Change & the writing scene

Change

The notion of change for the self-expression school of writing is very much the humanistic view of the unique individual aspiring to realise 'his' full potential. Change is becoming more yourself as a separate individual. Writing is generally seen to be a tool for growth towards self-actualisation.

Much of 'journal writing' aims at this development of self (Progoff, 1975; Adams, 1990; Rainer, 1978).

Kathleen Adams's *Journal to the Self: Twenty-two paths to personal growth*, is described as a way to "open the

door to self-understanding by writing, reading and creating a journal of your life".

Self development and writing development are difficult to separate for the process writing teachers. Marjorie and Jon Ford (1990) describe their philosophy of writing in their book: *Dreams and Inward Journeys: A Reader for Writers*, as "a process of self-discovery".

In this view, the process of writing is both a process of self-discovery and personal growth, as well as a process which, in improving the students' ability to express themselves, in fact, improves the quality of their writing.

This is well expressed by James Catano (1990:428), who notes how the New Romantic or Expressionist theories share in the:

tradition of individual growth and development common to the popular vision of education. They also share a vision of self as defined through the artistic use of language. Whichever aspect is stressed - art or language - it is clear that the goal is to free the writer to know and experience a self that has been dormant, unknown, unformed or simply unavailable.

The writing scene

What is the writing scene in which this unique individual - the author as a liberal humanist, coherent, separate self - appears?

Feminist theory (Butler, 1990; Flax, 1990; Harding, 1990) points out that human experience is 'gendered'. The humanist or modernist world-view is essentially a 'gender-blind' view, in which there is no acknowledgement of the difference between men's and women's experience. The 'writing scene' for the

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process writers is seen as and assumed to be gender-neutral.

James Catano (1990) points out the lack of gender neutrality in the work of process writing teacher Peter Elbow. He says that Elbow, and other process writing teachers, perpetuate the "myth of the self-made man". He argues that Elbow "expresses a clearly masculinist vision of writing behaviour" (p429), and illustrates this with Elbow's use of metaphors and aggressive descriptions. He shows how even the title of Elbow's book *Writing with Power: Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process* (his emphasis), uses aggressive masculine terminology, as do other metaphors from Elbow's book which describe the process of writing: "the experience of battle conditions with live ammunition" (p33); "wielding the knife and seeing the blood on the floor" (p123); and "the power of words to hit readers in the gut" (p361).

Catano shows how Elbow unconsciously constructs a male heterosexual adolescent as the typical student when he describes the ideal teacher as being the one "who gives us permission to care about honor or Dostoyevsky or relativity or irony - not just gags or girls or cars" (p217).

Feminist theorists (Grimshaw, 1986; Flax, 1990; Fraser, 1989; Davis, Leijenaar & Oldersma, 1991) point out that the liberal humanist self is essentially a masculinist one; and feminist critics of autobiography (Lurie, 1991; Stanley, 1990; Stanton, 1984; Frye, 1986; Smith, 1993; Friedman, 1988; Benstock, 1988) have challenged the "white, male, heterosexual ethic underlying the Modernist aesthetic" (Benstock 1988:18) of traditional autobiography.

Given the fact that the 'self' in self-expression is essentially a masculinist self, it is not surprising that theorists like Peter Elbow (unconsciously) perpetuate the myth of the self-made man and set the writing scene so that the identity of a writer is stereotypically masculine.

As Catano (1990:433-4) states:

It is often difficult to capture the subtler anti-feminine components of the myth [of the self-made man] such as the escape from the mundane and its related world of the domestic...The difficulty with all social myths is that they serve to validate pre-set behaviour in such a highly deterministic way that the behaviour comes to be seen as natural rather than conventional.

The writing scene (inside or outside the classroom), according to the common-sense process approach, would be one in which the student or writer is seen as a unique (male) individual. Katharine Haake (1989) calls for a reconceptualisation of this dominant scene of writing. She describes it as that of the Great Authors - "all those (white) men who populate the canon". She claims that the modernist tradition works to silence those who are seen to be the wrong gender, colour or class.

The picture of the 'writer' in many people's common-sense view is that of the creative genius. Battersby (1994) describes how in the nineteenth century there was a move away from 'man the rational animal', to 'man the creative genius'.

She asks whether 'man' included 'woman', and concludes that it didn't; "genius was a male - full of 'virile' energy," and "creativity was male sexuality made sublime" (p3).

According to Battersby we still operate within the broad framework of Romantic assumptions about creativity which are "modelled on notions of a male God creating the universe" (p11).

According to this Romantic view, women could not be considered writers or artists. Battersby (1994:55) quotes the artist, Renoir, as having said:

Women are monsters who are authors, lawyers and politicians, like George Sand, Madam Adam, and other bores who are nothing more than five-legged beasts. The woman who is an artist is merely ridiculous, but I feel that it is acceptable for a woman to be a singer or a dancer. In Antiquity and among simple people, women sing and dance and they do not therefore become less feminine. Gracefulness is a woman's domain and even her duty.

How do women, as potential writers, fit into this writing scene? Feminist teachers of writing (Annas, 1985; Bishop, 1989; Brannon, 1984; Brodkey, 1987; Flynn, 1988; Haake, 1989; Hollis, 1992) argue that the self, self-creation, and self-consciousness are profoundly different for women, minorities, and many non-western peoples. Friedman (1988:41) asserts that "the concept of isolate selfhood is inapplicable to women".

We could see the genre theorists' (Hyland, 1992; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Kress, 1993) analysis of how the process/ self-expression approach has failed, as a comment on the 'writing scene'. They point out that the process approach is culture bound while pretending to be culture neutral, and "'naturally' favours students whose voice is closest to the literate culture of power in industrial society" (Cope & Kalantzis,

1993:21). Cope and Kalantzis (1993: 22) argue that this approach reproduces educational inequalities and "leads to a pedagogy which encourages students to produce texts in a limited range of written genres, mostly personalised recounts".

My research study questions whether the student or prospective writer who is 'the wrong gender, class, or race', has a place in the self-expression 'classroom'.

B: WRITING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

The view of writing as social practice rather than self-expression is based on a poststructuralist theory of subjectivity and language. In outlining this theory, I draw mainly on the work of Peim (1993) and Chris Weedon (1987).

The particular theory of poststructuralism that I am adopting in this dissertation, and on which I am basing an approach to writing, is described by Peim (1993: 4) as one which:

makes the connections between language practices, educational practices and social forms inescapable by addressing the politics of the subject - power and ideology at work in specific ideas and institutional practices.

Poststructuralism, as Peim (1993:3) explains, "is subject to different interpretations and different uses" but is generally accepted as "the culmination of a counter-trend running through the history of western thought".

Poststructuralism questions our common-sense notions and critiques, in some form or other, all the eight

themes of modernism that Flax (1990) identified. In particular, it questions notions of universal truth or value and knowledge. As Peim (1993:2) points out:

Post structuralism would tend to insist that knowledge and understanding are always positioned - that the identity and meaning of things shifts radically given different perspectives and cultural contexts.

He goes on to note that poststructuralism applied to writing will hinge on the awareness of the social, cultural 'conditions of meaning' or "the cultural practices and habits that determine the nature and directions of the process of meaning".

Genre theorists (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Kress, 1993) claim that **genres are social processes**. According to Cope and Kalantzis (1993:7)

Texts are patterned in reasonably predictable ways according to patterns of social interaction in a particular culture. Social patterning and textual patterning meet as genres.

Teaching writing as social practice would attempt to make the 'student' aware of the relationship between language, social institutions, subjectivity and power.

I will now consider the key concepts which I identified earlier - those of **self, language and change** - from a poststructuralist viewpoint, and once again try to describe the writing scene, this time from a poststructuralist perspective.

1 Writing constructs the self

Questioning the liberal humanist notion of a coherent, stable individual self, or "an essence at the heart of the individual which is unique, fixed and coherent and which makes her what she is" (Weedon, 1987:32), is a key aspect of the poststructuralist critique.

In order to be able to explain or articulate the poststructuralist critique of the 'self', I need to shift the terminology away from 'self' (humanistic terminology), to 'subjectivity', which is better able to describe a poststructuralist concept of identity or the subject. As Weedon (1987:32) explains:

The terms subject and subjectivity are central to poststructuralist theory and they mark a crucial break with humanist conceptions of the individual which are still central to Western philosophy and political and social organization.

Weedon uses the term 'subjectivity' to refer to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p32).

Once again, autobiography is a very useful place to pinpoint concepts of self in writing.

Autobiography as a literary genre has been a contested site for many feminist theorists (Stanley, 1991; Stanton, 1984; Frye, 1986; Smith, 1993; Friedman, 1988; Benstock, 1988; Gilmore, 1994). Many question whether there can be such a thing as a feminist autobiography, or if it is not a contradiction in terms.

Feminist theory in general and feminist poststructuralist theory in particular, question the

gendered nature of the liberal humanist or modernist 'self'. Traditional autobiography theorist Georges Gusdorf (1956:27) claims that "autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not properly exist". Friedman (1988) argues that women's consciousness of self is different from this individualistic notion of self. In her essay "On feminism, cultural politics and post/modern selves", Stanley (1992:5) rejects what she calls "the psychological-reductionist accounts of 'the individual'", and insists that individual people are "social and cultural products through and through".

A poststructuralist approach to autobiography, has to take into account notions of identity and self-representation. However, the poststructuralist view questions the stable and fixed 'autobiographical I' offered by the traditional view of autobiography.

Gilmore (1994) discusses the 'multiple levels of self-representation' in autobiography, and differentiates between what she calls the three identities of autobiography: the 'historical self', the 'fictive or textual self', and the 'writing self'.

Poststructuralism allows us to identify what Gilmore calls 'the writing self'.

This writing self is an important factor in any approach to teaching writing. My research will explore the participants' awareness of their 'writing selves'.

As Gilmore (1994:85) explains,

The subject of autobiography is not a single entity but a network of differences within which the subject is inscribed. The subject is already multiple, heterogeneous, even conflicted, and

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these contradictions expose the technologies of autobiography.

2 Language constructs reality

In taking a poststructuralist position it is not as easy to separate the concepts of subjectivity and language as it is with the humanistic position. Here, the two concepts are interlinked because of the importance of language in the construction of 'the individual subject'. As Weedon (1987:52) explains:

The subject is not the author of meaning, but is ordered, constructed and positioned within and by language ... the subject is, according to this theory, actually constructed and positioned by language.

The interlinked nature of the concepts of self and language are reflected in Mikhail Bakhtin's challenging of much of Western philosophical and psychological discourse about the self. Smith (1987:48) quotes him as saying:

Human consciousness does not come into contact with existence directly, but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world ... In fact, the individual consciousness can only become a consciousness by being realized in the forms of the ideological environment proper to it: in language, in conventionalized gesture, in artistic image, in myth, and so on.

Poststructuralist language theory insists that we take into account the social contexts of 'language meanings and textual practices'.

A recent approach to teaching writing, which criticises both the process and product approaches, and in fact

criticises the debate itself, comes from the Genre Theorists (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Kress, 1993). Their approach is very similar to Peim's poststructuralist position.

Cope and Kalantzis (1993:1) describe the genre approach as involving "being explicit about the way language works to make meaning". Peim (1993:37) argues for the importance of theorising language and textuality and of making "connections between language, textuality and social practices".

The poststructuralist theory of language questions the common-sense notion that language is transparent, and that it can describe the world. Weedon (1987:43) argues that, like all theories, poststructuralism makes certain assumptions about language, subjectivity, knowledge and truth. "Language, far from reflecting an already given social reality, constitutes social reality for us."

For poststructuralists, according to Weedon (1987:21)

Language ... is the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. The assumption that subjectivity is constructed implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced.

In other words, language is not the expression of unique individuality. Rather, it "constructs the individual's subjectivity in ways which are socially specific" (Weedon, 1987:24).

All forms of poststructuralism assume that meaning is constituted within language. And this meaning is located in discourse.

Discourse, or discourses, is a term derived from Foucault and is used by theorists (Lee, 1992; Fairclough, 1992; Kress, 1993; Graddol & Swann, 1989) to apply "to the many ways of speaking that are associated with different social contexts, and different speaking positions" (Lee, 1992:51).

Peim (1993:61) outlines his theory of language and textuality in terms of discourse. He explains how the theory of discourses gives us an alternative way of looking at language. "It puts language into specific social and institutional contexts, examining how beliefs and attitudes are embedded in those contexts."

For Peim, as for Weedon, "language does not refer to 'reality' so much as constructs it" (p44). And this construction always takes place within specific social contexts and within specific cultural practices.

Weedon (1987:35) also locates her theory of language in the concept of discourse. "Discursive fields consist of competing ways of giving meaning to the world and of organizing social institutions and processes."

In the area of **autobiography**, the poststructuralists not only challenge the liberal humanist notion of the self, but also the common-sense notion of language as reflecting reality.

Gilmore (1994:25) suggests that autobiography is the "discourse of self representation". In other words, "the autobiographical subject is produced not by experience but by autobiography".

3. **Change and the writing scene**

To look at the writing scene through poststructuralist eyes is to see the social discourses at play - to understand the 'textual politics'.

Change, to a poststructuralist, would be in the form of awareness or consciousness. An essential aim of the poststructuralist teacher of writing would be to make the participants aware of writing as social practice, to encourage them to question common-sense notions of writing and language.

In order to do this, the writing scene in a poststructuralist or Peimian 'classroom' would be one in which the theory of writing was an overt part of the teaching, and part of the practice of writing. Students would be made aware of issues of gender, race and class amongst themselves within the 'classroom' or workshop. The notion of genre as social process would be explored.

The way for participants to become aware in this sense would be through the activity of 'deconstructing', according to Peim. "Deconstruction is ... an attitude, an activity - addressing texts, writing and signs systems" (p54) and "provides a way of examining ideology in its relation with, for example, reading and writing practices" (p55).

Out of this will emerge a recognition of a writing identity, a 'writing self', with the awareness that this writing self is "inscribed according to the forms, categories and processes" which are "loaded in favour of dominant power groups" (Peim, 1993:8).

In other words, the writing scene will require teaching with and for an awareness of the social and cultural contexts in making clear "how meanings are produced in specific contexts, relating language uses and texts directly to the attitudes, beliefs, behaviours of general social life" (Peim, 1993:63).

The poststructuralist writing scene would be one which would redefine the idea of what writing is, and make ideas about writing explicit. In arguing against writing as self-expression, Peim says "the idea of language as a form of self-expression denies the importance of the institutional context of writing". A Peimian writing scene would always make the context clear.

The implications for teaching methodology may include "teaching explicitly and sociologically against the institutional operations of inequality" (Peim, 1993:8).

The Genre Theorists have a similar view. For Cope and Kalantzis (1993:7), genres are textual interventions in society.

It follows that genres are not simply created by individuals in the moment of their utterance; to have meaning, they must be social. Individual speakers and writers act within a cultural context and with a knowledge of the different social effects of different types of oral and written texts.

Poststructuralist theory claims that identity is positioned. Therefore 'the writing self' is positioned by social and cultural attitudes, beliefs and practices. The requirement for a poststructuralist teacher of writing would be to make her 'students' aware of how their writing selves are positioned.

Cope and Kalantzis (1993:8) also point out that "students from historically marginalised groups ... need explicit teaching more than students who seem destined for a comfortable ride into the genres and cultures of power."

Since my focus is on women as a 'marginalised group', the social positioning of the woman writer is of particular interest. In a poststructuralist 'classroom', students would be made aware of the theory that the meaning of gender is socially produced, since meaning is produced within language rather than reflected by language.

The creating of awareness of "the rules of discourse" would be a major part of the poststructuralist writing scene. As Peim (1993:38) says, these rules of discourse "are often unstated ... and the power of discourse exerts control over ... what gets written and how it gets written".

However, as he warns, "the discourse is dependent for its proper maintenance on the often concealed presence or exertion of power".

Part of a poststructuralist writing scene would be to contest the established power of a particular discourse - in the case of this research, that of autobiography as well as writing - and to offer alternate ideas and practices.

The poststructuralist writing scene I attempted to create in my research was one where

"women writers, born again in the act of writing, may experiment with reconstructing the various discourses - of representation, of ideology - in which their subjectivity has been formed (Gilmore, 1994:85).

C: A FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH TO WRITING

What is the difference between a poststructuralist approach and a feminist poststructuralist approach to writing? What difference will a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework make to the writing scene?

To view the teaching of writing from a feminist poststructuralist perspective would not mean removing the poststructuralist lens and replacing it with another. Rather it would be a matter of slipping a feminist lens in front of the poststructuralist one. I believe that this would do two things: one, it would refine the view still further by bringing certain aspects clearly into focus; two, it would broaden the view by correcting the often gender-blind nature of the poststructuralist perspective.

An assumption often made when people think of a feminist perspective being applied to a practice or theory is that it simply limits the scope by focusing only on women and cutting out anything else. However, feminist theory actually broadens the perspective by including women and making visible the gendered nature of most theory and practices.

The poststructuralist lens enables us to see the social construction of identity and gives us an insight into the effects of social and cultural power imbalances in the writing scene. Feminist poststructuralism adds the gender focus (while recognising the related aspects of race, class etc.) It enables us to see how the 'common-sense' view plays a role in "maintaining the centrality of gender difference as a focus of power in society" (Keating, 1996:45).

I have adopted Chris Weedon's understanding of feminist poststructuralism as my framework. She describes this position as "a form of poststructuralism which can meet feminist needs". For her, "poststructuralism proposes a particular theory of language and subjectivity which is extremely productive for feminist practice" (Weedon, 1987:34).

Feminist poststructuralism, then, is a mode of knowledge production which uses poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity, social processes and institutions to understand existing power relations and to identify areas and strategies for change (Weedon, 1987:40).

The feminist lens also brings with it a 'political' or advocacy element. I see the feminist lens as in some way changing the gaze of the viewer from that of an interested observer to that of the involved activist. Lather (1991:31) argues that "feminism has pushed poststructuralism in directions it might otherwise not have gone in terms of political engagement".

The feminist poststructuralist concept of subjectivity sees subjectivity and consciousness not only as socially produced in language, but also as "a site of struggle and potential change" (Weedon, 1987:40).

I will now examine how the feminist aspect of a poststructuralist view alters the basic poststructuralist notions of **subjectivity**, and **language** and what it means for the writing scene, especially the notion of **change** in the writing scene and in the writer.

1. **Writing transforms/reconstructs the self**

As the above heading suggests, the notion of **change** is an integral part of the feminist poststructuralist view of subjectivity.

Feminist poststructuralism goes beyond the poststructuralist concept that "self" or subjectivity is constructed in language to see subjectivity as a site of struggle and potential change (Weedon, 1987; Keating, 1996; Butler, 1990; Probyn, 1993) .

Central to this potential for change is the view of subjectivity as a **process**. As Weedon (1987:87) puts it,

Conscious subjectivity, acquired in language, is seen as inherently unstable and subjectivity itself as constantly in process.

If subjectivity is a process and unstable, and if identity is constructed rather than fixed, it can be re-constructed. This is particularly important for women as a 'social category'. The feminist poststructuralist approach to subjectivity particularly challenges the common-sense notion of a **gendered self**, which is seen in humanistic theory to be fixed and 'natural'.

The common-sense view sees individuals as having fixed identities which separate us with distinct boundaries. The markings of these identities by gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc. is assumed to be permanent and unchanging.

Poststructuralism challenges this notion of fixed, stable identities by arguing that identity is socially constructed in discourse. Feminist poststructuralist

AnaLouise Keating (1996) takes this position further in her theory of Transformational Identity Politics.

Keating (1996:5) explains that in conventional identity politics, "social actors base their political theories and strategies on their personal sense of ethnic, gender, and sexual identity". Transformation identity politics, on the other hand, "deconstructs all such notions of unified, stable identities", and in so doing, "opens up psychic spaces where alterations in consciousness can occur".

In looking at the construction of **gender identity**, Keating (1996:137) argues that

when the 'female subject' is seen as the site of shifting and multiple identities, she can challenge her own self-conceptions and, by extension, western humanism's model of unitary selfhood.

Thus feminist poststructuralism enables the subject to 'reconstitute' a gendered sense of herself, since an individual's subjectivity 'is constituted in language' for her every time she speaks.

'Gendered subjectivity' is not fixed for feminist poststructuralists, and 'femininity' and 'masculinity' are constantly in process.

Autobiography

The notion of fixed gendered identity is assumed and perpetuated by traditional **autobiography**.

"Autobiography is positioned within discourses that construct truth, identity, and power, and these discourses produce a gendered subject" (Gilmore, 1994:pxiv).

In *Women Reading Women Writing*, Keating (1996:4) analyses the work of three writers who challenge fixed identity categories. She describes these writers (Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldua and Audre Lorde) as individuals who occupy 'threshold locations', seeing themselves as "sites of plural and shifting identities", and who are constantly "in the process of reinventing themselves".

As they inscribe their threshold identities into their creative and critical writings, they challenge their readers to rethink the dominant culture's sociopolitical inscriptions - the labels that define each person according to gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class and other systems of difference (Keating, 1996:5).

Keating (1996:42) goes on to describe how the writer Anzaldua

situates herself on a series of overlapping thresholds. As she shifts between ethnic, sexual, gender, and political identities, she simultaneously critiques existing social systems and creates new forms of identity incorporating differently positioned groups.

2 Language reshapes reality

According to poststructuralist theory, language does not reflect reality but 'reshapes' it. The feminist lens offers an additional perspective, enabling a view of the gendered nature of language.

Graddol and Swann (1989) point out how meaning is not fixed by language but is dependent on context. Language is socially and historically located in discourses. The political interests of these discourses are noted by Weedon (1987:41), who describes them as "constantly vying for status and power".

According to poststructuralist theory, such discourses construct a person's unconscious and conscious self or subjectivity. Such discourses also embody "particular world views and belief systems which may be oppressive to women" (Graddol and Swann, 1989:165).

A feminist poststructuralist view of language (and writing) would be incomplete without mention of the contributions of French feminist philosophers/theorists Irigaray, Cixous and Kristeva, particularly their theories of 'feminine writing'.

For all three of these theorists, the acquisition of gendered identity is inseparable from the acquisition of language.

Irigaray (1985) insists on the integral relationship between language and sexuality, arguing that the 'otherness' of female sexuality has been repressed by patriarchy, and that "patriarchal definition of female sexuality caused women to lose touch with their essential femininity" (in Marks & de Courtivron, 1981:102).

Cixous moves away from the essentialism of Irigaray. Weedon (1987:66) explains Cixous' argument that

"masculine sexuality and masculine language are phallogentric and logocentric, seeking to fix meaning through a set of binary oppositions, for example, father/mother, head/heart, intellible/sensitive, logos/ pathos, which rely for their meaning on a primary binary opposition of male/female (or penis/ lack of penis) which guarantees and reproduces the patriarchal order.

Cixous sees feminine writing as challenging the patriarchal order. However, her work avoids "tying feminine and masculine language to the biological sex of the speaking subject" (Weedon, 1987:68).

For Kristeva (1989) too, 'feminine writing' is open to both male and female writers.

What is feminine writing? Cixous asserts that "the very otherness of feminine writing means that it is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing".

This is because

the practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded - which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination (in Marks & de Courtivron, 1981:253).

However, Cixous (in Shiach, 1991:22) does indicate what she sees as characteristics of 'an alternative, feminine, practice of writing':

Such writing would not be afraid to go outside narrative structures, or to create subjectivities that are plural and shifting. It would not need to return to the security of fixed categories, of stable identity.

Cixous' belief in the disruptive potential of writing indicates the close connection between language and change, which I will discuss in greater detail in the next section.

3. Change and the writing scene

Peim (1993:98) believes that the idea of English Literature "as valuable and worthy in itself must collapse", arguing as follows:

If we compare these texts from the point of view of how they represent women, how they address women and how they seem to position male and female readers, it's difficult to see how the texts of English Literature - according to conventional reading practices, anyway - can escape the charge of an intransigent sexism.

A major aspect of a feminist poststructuralist writing scene would be enabling an awareness of how the traditional writing scene regards women. As Keating (1996:32) puts it, the aim would be to make women aware of how, "in its gender blindness, liberal humanism masks structures of male privilege and domination".

In this writing scene, as in feminist poststructuralist theory, the concepts of subjectivity and language are interlinked with the notion of change. However, change is located not only in terms of subjectivity and consciousness, but also in the wider social and political context.

While subjectivity enables us to redefine ourselves each time we speak or write 'I', language enables us "to reinterpret existing social systems and forms of identity" (Keating, 1996:113).

In Keating's (1996:186) view, "these shifts in self/worldview can transform us", and this is the basis of her theory of transformational identity politics.

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The feminist poststructuralist writing scene that my research attempts to construct aims to encourage women to explore these shifts of 'self/worldview' and to recognise how their gendered subject positions are constructed. As Keating (1996:164) put it:

Gendered subject positions are constituted in various ways by images of how one is expected to look and behave, by rules of behaviour to which one should conform, reinforced by approval or punishment ...

In describing her theory of Transformational Identity Politics, Keating (1996:175) comments that

Western culture's belief in a heterosexually dual gendered system, where the masculine is elevated over the feminine, is not a natural fact but rather a constantly repeated act - naturalised by these constant repetitions.

Explaining how Cixous sees producing 'feminine writing' as a political act, a political strategy aimed at producing both individual and social change, Shiach (1991:26) notes that

When women begin to write, they must remain in a critical relation to the languages and the narratives they inherit: they must invent new beginnings, remove themselves from the fixed categories and identities they have inhabited, explore the 'third body': which is neither the inside nor the outside, but the space between.

In Cixous' view, it is only through such exploration that women challenge the culturally produced category of 'woman' and "explore other identifications, other

images ... rediscover some of what has been unexpressed, actively repressed" (Shaich, 1991:28).

This is a similar approach to the feminist theory of autobiography, or 'autobiographics' as described by Gilmore (1994:2). She explains the need for this change in terminology on the basis that "women's autobiography cannot be recognized as 'autobiography' when it is written against the dominant representations of identity and authority as masculine".

In agreement with Cixous' encouragement to women to 'write themselves', Gilmore (1994:40) states that "even in the narrowest and most ambivalent sense, writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for".

So, what exactly would the writing scene look like for a feminist poststructuralist? Answering this question is a major aim of my research, which attempts to create/suggest a feminist poststructuralist writing scene by constructing a series of workshops to explore the implications of a feminist poststructuralist theoretical framework for the teaching of writing.

The next chapter describes the research principles and methodology which I adopted in the design, running, and evaluation of these workshops.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

If the main purpose of my research is to look at a feminist poststructuralist approach to teaching writing, then it is appropriate, if not congruently essential, that the research methodology I adopt should be feminist poststructuralist.

Just as a poststructuralist approach sees writing as social practice, so it also sees research as social practice, asserting that no inquiry is value-free. In this view, the (scientific) objectivity valued by the positivists is 'value-blind'. Lather (1988:23) describes postpositivism as "marked by inquiry approaches" which recognise that knowledge is "socially constituted, historically embedded, and valuationally based".

The poststructuralist approach to research asserts that language constructs rather than reflects meaning. Similarly, the researcher, is not a neutral or objective observer, but an agent whose presence affects both the data and the data collection.

Patti Lather (1991) outlines four categories of research methodology which she bases on Harbermas's three kinds of knowledge claims: prediction, understanding and emancipating. As a poststructuralist, Lather adds 'deconstruction' to the list, represented diagrammatically in Table 1 (reproduced from Lather, 1991:7).

Table 1: Postpositivist Inquiry

Predict	Understand	Emancipate	Deconstruct
positivism	interpretive naturalistic constructivist phenomenological hermeneutic	critical neo-Marxist feminist praxis-oriented educative Freirian participatory action research	poststructural postmodern post- paradigmatic diaspora

Noting Lather's (1991:8) comment that "to position my own discourse is to mark a place from which to speak", I position my discourse in a feminist postpositivist paradigm.

Of the three postpositivist categories, my research project falls mainly into the **Emancipate** (feminist, praxis-oriented, action research) group, and the **Deconstruct** (poststructural) group. Much of the analysis of participants' writing falls in the **Understand** (interpretive) category, however.

Emancipatory or 'empowering' research

Cameron et al (1992:22) describe 'empowering research' as "research on, for and with". They explain that if research 'on, for and with' is the goal, "we must also acknowledge that standards and constraints of positivist 'research on' - objectivity, disinterestedness, non-interaction - will not be appropriate in those contexts". Asking what alternate standards would be appropriate, they suggest three main issues:

- a) the use of interactive methods;
- b) the importance of subjects' own agendas; and
- c) the question of 'feedback' and sharing knowledge.

Throughout the research process, I attempted to meet these standards by:

- * presenting my aims and approach for discussion to the participants at an introductory workshop,
- * asking for comment from participants during the workshops, and discussing the ideas and issues arising from the workshops,
- * making the practical arrangements (dates, times etc) a group negotiation process at the first meeting,
- * playing the dual role of facilitator/researcher and participant in the workshops, actively participating in all exercises and readings
- * encouraging feedback from the participants through exercises in interviews, and giving feedback to participants in the interviews.

In Cameron et al's terms, I tried to make my research methods "open, interactive and dialogic".

Action research

Action research, as a form of self-reflective inquiry, is an increasingly popular form of educational research. Kurt Lewin describes action research as a spiral of steps, with each step having four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. McNiff (1988:5) claims that "action research is an instrument used willfully by good teachers to improve their practice". She also asserts that action research is political in that it is to do with change.

Praxis-oriented advocacy research

Lather (1991:56) argues for an approach that goes beyond the action research concept proposed by Lewin which she claims "operates from an ahistorical, apolitical value system". Lather (1991:27) describes feminism as "the paradigmatic political discourse of postmodernism". She acknowledges a tension between the political engagement of feminism and the "irredeemable political ambivalence" of postmodernism, but argues, with Spivak, that we need to "take the risk of essence in order to increase the substantive efficacy of feminist resistance".

By adding the feminist lens to my poststructuralist approach to research and research methodology, I add what Lather would call a 'political' dimension. Thus I position my research as 'advocacy research'.

Lather (1991:50) asks "what it means to do empirical research in an unjust world" and argues for a "research approach openly committed to a more just social order". She calls this approach 'advocacy' or praxis research - "research that is explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society". I see my research project - concerned with exploring a more appropriate approach to teaching writing to women - as Lather's 'research as praxis'.

In Lather's (1991:84) terms, I would like my research to be not only an interesting exploration of a feminist poststructural approach to teaching writing, but also "an intervention in the area of research and pedagogy" that is "committed to using the present to construct that which works against the relations of dominance".

I would hope that my 'intervention' might work against the marginal position of women in the writing scene.

Throughout the research project I was aware of and used the tension between poststructuralist concepts and the advocacy aspect of my research, which would enable the "formerly silenced to come to voice", (Lather, 1991:33), enable the women in the workshops to explore their 'writing selves'.

Feminist advocacy research

What positions my research project as feminist advocacy research? Lather (1991:71) defines feminist research as follows:

Very simply, to do feminist research is to put the social construction of gender at the center of one's inquiry.

I have tried to do this throughout the project at many levels: in the structuring of the writing workshops which 'deconstruct' the concept of gender; in the specific focus of the writing scene on how it affects women; and in the attempt to create an approach to writing that will "correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position" (Lather, 1991:71).

Validity

In a poststructuralist and feminist research methodology, there is always the issue of validity to be explained.

Lather (1991:72) proposes a new, more emancipatory way of validating critical research, what she calls "catalytic validity". Instead of trying for

'researcher neutrality', she argues for "a more collaborative, praxis oriented and advocacy model that acts on the desire for people to gain self-understanding and self-determination both in research and in their daily lives".

Lather explains that the "best tactic ... is to construct research designs that demand a vigorous self-reflexivity", and to use triangulation to establish data trustworthiness. As explained below, I consciously include self-reflexivity in the writing exercises, and self-reflexivity is part of the interview process. I attempt to triangulate my data sources, collection and analysis by using participants' writing, interviews, my own research journal, written reflection and evaluation. In analysing data, I adopt Lather's view that "research illustrates (vivifies) rather than provides a truth test" (Lather, 1991:55).

The creation of a poststructuralist writing scene in the workshops aims to fulfil Lather's (1991:57) proposal that "we consciously use our research to help participants understand and change their situations". Throughout the workshops and in the interviews, I attempted to "construct meaning through negotiation with research participants", rather than impose meaning on them. The interview process "invited reciprocal reflexivity and critique" and the "involvement of research participants in data interpretation" (Lather, 1991:59).

The interview as discourse

Mishler (1986) views the interview as discourse jointly constructed by interviewers and respondents. I approached the interviews with the participants, with an awareness of the 'shared meanings' as well as the

power relations involved. I was also aware of the 'interactional control' described by Fairclough (1992), who acknowledged that it is the interviewer who drives the interview and asks the questions. With this in mind I chose an in-depth, semi-structured interview in which at least half the interview time was spent reviewing the participant's writing samples, and jointly evaluating and analysing what they revealed of the participant's response to the exercises and of each person's relationship to her writing. (Most of the interviews lasted from one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours).

Feminist pedagogy

In the overall approach and in each workshop I planned a teaching or facilitation method which I considered had the main elements of **feminist pedagogy** (Lather, 1992; Luke, 1992; Walkerdine, 1989; Jeanne Giroux, 1989). Lusted (1986:3) defines pedagogy as addressing "the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies - the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce".

I attempted to explore the use of feminist research methodology at all levels. By feminist research methodology I understand, as described by Richardson and Robinson (1994:113),

process and content to be inextricably linked and that we develop and share feminist pedagogical approaches that are democratic, cooperative, experiential, integrative of cognitive and affective learning, and empowering of students to create personal and social change.

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Countering my role as facilitator and researcher was my role as 'equal' participant in the workshops. Each participant had a turn to start the workshop with a warm-up, and participants were consulted and informed as far as possible in the planning process.

The research process

My research process generally followed the action research model of planning, action (running workshops), reflection and replanning.

1. Planning

Two types of planning were involved (other than the actual planning of the research project itself): the overall planning of the series of 10 workshops, and the planning of each individual workshop.

Although each workshop had its own particular focus or concept, each also included the three key concepts that I identified as essential to a feminist poststructuralist approach - the concepts of self, language and change.

I used the medium of autobiography as a focus and as a thread to link the concepts and the workshops. Throughout the workshops, exercises attempted to question or deconstruct the traditional notion of autobiography and the autobiographical 'I'.

Choosing the group

Part of the planning was choosing and inviting the participants to make up the group of 10 women. Various factors determined the selection of the group, and these are discussed below.

a) **Size:** I decided that 10 to 12 participants was optimal (this included myself). This was influenced by the space required for a workshop - larger groups put a limit on possible venues - and the time required for reading. In a workshop of two-and-a-half to three hours, I usually allow for two to five minutes per person for reading what they have written to the group. The balance between reading and writing time is adversely affected in a larger group. However, if the group has less than eight members, it can lose the variety and range of styles and experiences of writing which enrich a group. A smaller group is also more affected if one or two people are unable to attend a particular workshop.

b) **Gender:** It was a conscious decision to work with women only, firstly because my research was to explore how women respond to a feminist poststructural approach, and, secondly, because the 'writing scene' of a women-only group would be very different from one in which men were present. Since part of my rationale for exploring a feminist poststructuralist approach was the assumption that women are marginalised and silenced in the traditional writing scene, I needed to create a space where this factor was reduced as far as possible.

c) **Writing experience:** This was a major factor in my selection. I wanted to find as broad a range of 'writing confidence' as possible, especially in terms of what is called 'creative writing'. The group contained three participants whose writing had been published in collections;

one who had done a fair amount of creative writing and also journalistic writing; one 'academic' writer who considered that she had never done any creative writing; two who wanted to write and had been part of writing groups but were not confident about their writing; one person who said she had had a block about writing for years; and one who regarded herself as completely 'uncreative'. The range was limited in the sense that all were completely literate in English, and more than half had tertiary education. All had done a fair amount of writing, of whatever kind.

d) **Fixed identity categories:** I also attempted to balance the group along the fixed identity categories of race, age, class, and sexual orientation. Despite the apparent contradiction involved in acknowledging fixed identity categories in a feminist poststructuralist writing workshop which critiques the notion of fixed identity categories, I saw the 'fixed identity' mix as useful, because the feminist poststructuralist approach of the workshops would involve the exploration of the multiple, overlapping and contradictory aspects of identity. More important, participants would bring a wide range of life experiences to the workshops. Differences in race, language, and class made an enormous difference to their life experiences under apartheid. The focus on autobiography made it important to have a group with as rich and varied a life experience as possible. Unfortunately, the group which emerged was more limited/closed than I had hoped. For instance, there were no black African women (the two I invited were unable to attend), and all members

could be classified to a lesser or greater degree as 'middle class'. Although such acknowledging of fixed social identity categories constituted an awareness rather than any kind of 'scientific' selection, I did decide not to invite a likely participant because she was 'white, middle-class and heterosexual'. I already had people in that 'category' and didn't want it to be the predominant life experience of most of the group. The final group consisted of four 'lesbians'/ six 'heterosexuals'; three 'coloureds' /seven 'whites'; eight with tertiary education/ two without; five with English as first and major language/ five with English as second or dual language; three over 55 years old/ three under 40.

2. **Action: the running of the workshops**

At an initial introductory workshop, I outlined my research ideas, as well as some of the key principles and concepts. For example, the notion of feminist autobiography. Each woman was asked if she was interested in being part of the group which would mean commitment to nine three-hour workshops. A series of dates for these workshops were negotiated to suit all our life-styles, our other commitments, our individual preferences, as well as the needs of the research project.

At this introductory workshop, I also asked participants to be willing to let me have and use as much of the writing produced in the workshops as they felt comfortable with handing over.

We decided on:

Workshop # 1	:	Sunday	28 April	10am - 1pm
Workshop # 2	:	Sunday	28 April	2pm - 5pm
Workshop # 3	:	Tuesday	30 April	6.30pm - 9.30pm
Workshop # 4	:	Sunday	5 May	2.30pm - 5.30pm
Workshop # 5	:	Saturday	1 June	10am - 1pm
Workshop # 6	:	Saturday	1 June	2pm - 5pm
Workshop # 7	:	Sunday	2 June	10am - 1pm
Workshop # 8	:	Sunday	2 June	2pm - 5pm
Workshop # 9	:	Sunday	9 June	2.30pm - 5.30pm

} weekend
away

I then designed the particular workshops structured around these dates.

The workshops took place as planned. Although I had a broad outline of all nine workshops, I did the detailed planning for each workshop after each previous one, taking the actual outcome and feedback into account.

The detailed workshop plans are presented as Appendix A, at the end of this dissertation.

At the last workshop (on 9 June 1996) the feeling of the group was that we should meet again for another (tenth) workshop a few months later. The aim was seen as enabling me to update other members on how the project was going, and to run a workshop on any aspect I might feel had been left out or neglected, apart from the need expressed to "get together again". This tenth workshop took place on 6 October 1996, and this was when I asked participants if they would be willing to be interviewed by me as part of gathering further data.

3. Reflection

The reflection phase was made up of the following components:

- a) interviews with participants;
- b) analysis of participants' writing - done by me and given as feedback in the interviews;
- c) my own research journal - which reflected on the process as it went along;
- d) feedback and evaluation from participants - given in structured form at various points in the workshop process;
- e) an extract from a personal journal kept by one of the participants.

Interviews with participants

In November and December, three months after the main body of the workshops, I interviewed seven out of the nine participants. One of the two I wasn't able to interview had already left for London where she is studying, and the other wasn't available for the interview period and had also missed the last two workshops due to family priorities.

The semi-structured interviews had three main components: a set of open-ended questions to the participants (set questions for all participants, and specific questions for each participant); detailed feedback and comment from me on the participant's writing samples produced in the workshops; and general discussion on themes, aspects that emerged from the answers to the questions and from the analysis and feedback on the writing.

The interview questions were carefully constructed with the help of my research supervisor. (See Appendix D for the interview schedule.)

Each interview included questions on the participant's relationship to writing, experience of various exercises, interpretation of 'autobiography', and experience of change in her writing or her relationship to her writing during the workshops.

I also posed questions specific to each person which arose mainly from the writing samples and the written evaluations produced in the workshops.

The interviews served various purposes. Firstly, they provided further data on various aspects to feed into my analysis under the three main theoretical concepts - self, language and change.

Secondly, the interviews provided feedback on how participants saw the 'writing scene', both the one I created in the workshops and the broader scene out there for them as women/ women writers/ women who write.

Thirdly, it was part of the research design to incorporate what Lather calls 'reciprocity' and 'dialectical theory-building' into the research - to involve the participants in the process of analysis and evaluation. This was stimulated by the feedback I gave them in the interview from an initial discourse (and literary) analysis of their writing samples, and the discussion that resulted from it in which we jointly interpreted the data. Laslett and Rapoport (1975:47) call this approach to interviews "collaborative interviewing and interactive research" whereby the

researcher 'gives back' "to respondents a picture of how the data are viewed".

Transcription of the interviews, and analysis

I then transcribed the interviews, with the help of a research assistant, and analysed the information in terms of the three main concepts (self, language and change) described in Chapter 4. Some of the evaluative comments are included in the evaluation and conclusion of this dissertation (Chapter 5).

This reflection phase of the research forms the analysis chapter of the dissertation (Chapter 4).

Collection of data

The data used in the analysis consist of:

- a) detailed workshop plans and exercises used in the workshops
- b) my research journal reflection on 'what happened' in the workshops as they went along, that is what worked and what didn't;
- c) the writing produced by participants in the workshops and given to me;
- d) an extract from one of the participant's journal, reflecting her response to the workshops;
- e) interviews with seven participants at the end of the 10 workshops.

The data used in analysing the 'planning' stage of the research were mainly the workshop outlines and my research journal. The data used in the analysis of the 'action' stage were the participants' writing and the interviews. The data used mainly in the 'reflection' stage were the interviews, the written evaluations and my research journal.

4. **Replanning/conclusion**

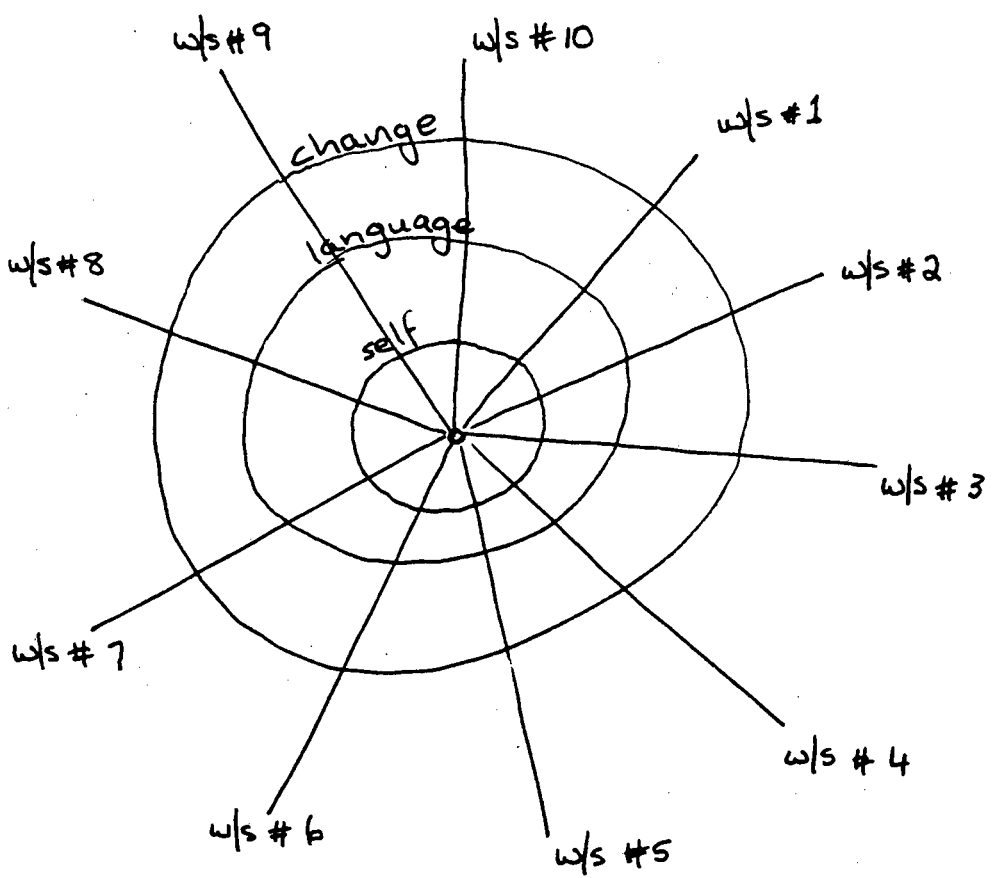
In my conclusion, I attempt to summarise the essential ingredients of a feminist poststructuralist approach to teaching writing; I comment on the generalisability of the research study to other groups and contexts; I reflect on the nature of the writing scene for women; and I bring the story of the personal narrative of this introduction up to date.

CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS

In this chapter, I will attempt to:

- analyse how I used feminist poststructuralist notions of self, language and change in the planning of the 10 workshops;
- illustrate the way the writing produced in the actual workshops reflects these three concepts;
- reflect on the process using the interviews with the participants as well as my own research journal.

As an analysis framework, I see the plan of the workshops in the form of a web, with each of the 10 workshops linked to the centre and the key concepts as threads linking the workshops in the overall design, as follows:



The method of my analysis will follow the concept threads (self, language and change) through the workshops. I follow the concept thread of self through each of the 10 workshops, reflecting the action research stages of planning, action, observation and reflection. In following the threads in this way, I am able to show how the concepts were built up through the workshops and how they linked the workshops together. I analyse the concept thread of language in terms of two main aspects of feminist poststructural theory - intertextuality and 'feminine writing' - illustrating these with selected exercises from the workshops. Following the third concept thread of change, I analyse the workshops on three levels of change - change in consciousness, change in participants' relationship to writing and change in the writing itself.

It must be noted that this kind of analysis structure - dividing the stages and concepts into separate categories - is to a large extent a contradiction of a feminist poststructuralist approach. As pointed out in Chapter 2, a feminist post structuralist lens would show these concepts as interlinked and interdependent.

However, for the purposes of analysis, it seemed important to attempt to give myself and the reader some grips in the inevitably fluid area of feminist poststructuralist theory. Nevertheless, there will often be overlapping and blurring of these sections/divisions as I work through the analysis, since as Lather (1992:1) notes "my own categories and frameworks [are] contingent, positioned, partial".

1. SELF

The thread that represented the concept of self throughout the workshops had three intertwining strands - autobiography, metaphors of self and construction of identity. There was also a progression over the course of the workshops through Gilmore's three 'selves' of autobiography - the 'historical self' (or self that lived), the 'fictive self' (or self in the text) and the 'writing self' (or the self who writes 'I'). In the earlier workshops the emphasis was on exploring the historical self, then it moved more to the fictive self, and the later workshops focused mostly on the writing self.

An underlying purpose of the writing exercises around self was to challenge the liberal humanist (masculinist) notion of a coherent self, and to deconstruct the common-sense 'fixed' categories of identity.

a) The introductory session

In the introductory session, I invited Rochelle Kapp (from my MPhil class) as a guest to introduce the idea of autobiography as a contested genre. She asked the question "who is it who says I?" in autobiography, and introduced the group to the difference between 'author', 'protagonist' and 'character' in autobiography. She gave participants the opening and closing paragraphs of three autobiographies by women, which we discussed in pairs in terms of the question 'who is it who says I?'.
I followed this with an exercise in which I gave participants examples of graffiti and two shopping lists. I asked the group to free-write (see

Appendix C) the opening paragraph of the autobiography of the person who had written that graffiti or that shopping list. We read our writing to the group and once again considered Rochelle's question 'who is it who said I?'

In this way I introduced the idea of there being different 'I's, and therefore questions around the notion of a unified self, and introduced the idea that the genre of autobiography was not as straightforward as we traditionally/ generally believe.

One of the participants wrote the following as the opening paragraph of the autobiography of a graffiti writer:

My teeth marks were visible on the painted bars of my playpen. I shook the sides so much and when no one helped me to get out, I would start to chew. Even then my hopes were high. That some part of me would help to get me out of this unspeakable enclosure.

As it worked out - the teeth didn't do it, the shakes neither. The screams, the yells, the curling-up, head under blanket - even less.

They were out there, I knew, but they didn't hear, see or respond. But, like most confinements, there was an end to it - from the playpen at least. And I began my development as innovator supreme.

Although the writing doesn't use the traditional linear form of autobiography in its strictest sense, that is 'I was born in to a family of ', it does start with the childhood of the protagonist. I wasn't surprised that this was the case in most of the participants' opening paragraphs.

In my interview with this participant, I commented on the highly imaginative piece, its metaphoric use of

'teeth marks' for graffiti and its insight into the character of the graffiti writer. She remembered that: "I tried to imagine just what I would have been like as a graffiti writer, why I had this impulse to go and do it ... ". This remark also reflects the common-sense view of autobiography which Haug (1987:12) states is one which "assumes that actions follow one another logically, and that adult human beings are more or less contained within children".

b) Workshop # 1

In the first workshop, I continued along the thread from the introduction, building on to the notions of autobiography and identity.

The first exercise was a game I called Writers' Bingo. Here each person was given a sheet showing statements around a person's relationship with/to writing. The game entailed trying to get a signature on each block of your sheet and getting the sheet completed before anyone else - so shouting 'Bingo!'. The following is an example of a completed Bingo sheet:

would rather write than go to the movies	writes well	doesn't really know what she wants to write about	thinks that men write better than women	has written something satisfactory in the last year
writes worse than anyone in this workshop	writes best after midnight	writes at least 2 hours per week	never has time to write	writes better than she sings
finds writing difficult	thinks she's not very creative	finds writing easy	is a writer	loves reading her work in public
has had her writing published	is not a writer	whose favorite writer is a woman	reads only women authors	writes worse than anyone she knows or has read

The idea of a writing self or being able to identify yourself as 'a writer', was introduced on the Bingo sheet in statements like "Is a writer", "Is not a writer", "Writes better than she sings", and "Has had her writing published". My assumption was that most women do not see themselves as writers, that is, are not able to claim the identity of 'writer'. The intention of doing this as a game was to enable the women to see how difficult it was to get the block 'is a writer' signed by others in the group, even by those who had had their writing published.

In the actual workshop all sorts of interactions happened, many that I hadn't anticipated. People were 'persuaded' to sign the 'is a writer' block. Some found that they were prepared to 'lie' on some points, for example 'reads only women authors', but not on others, for example 'men write better than women'. There was competition over signing the block 'writes worse than anyone at this workshop'.

One of my questions in the interviews was "Do you see yourself as a writer", which I linked to the first question, "Why do you think I invited you, in particular, to be part of the group?". All of the participants I interviewed answered "No" to this question.

One said, "No, I think it was specifically because I wasn't a writer, because in the context of all the women, I am a kind of resistant writer, a kind of non-writer"; another, "Uh um, no, I have written and there was a time that I did want to see myself as a writer, but now I don't." When I asked why, she said, "I don't think I have got the commitment and the discipline in my life."

Another said, "No, not at all, I thought I was going to be quite embarrassing, but I knew you were not going to be judgmental at that level in terms of the standards to be a writer, but you were trying to encourage me." Another: "No, no, in the future maybe. It's one of the things that I think I might like to do when I retire."

It was interesting that even those women who have had their work published in collections, could not take on the identity 'writer'. Most expressed initial anxiety because, as one person put it, the others "were all experienced writers and talented". This emphasised for me the importance of 'identity' as a factor in the teaching of writing to women, and the difficulty women have in claiming the label 'writer' when the models of writers are those of the Great Authors who are almost always (white) men.

c) Workshop # 2

This workshop's main focus was around deconstructing the notion of fixed identities. As described in Chapter 3 (methodology), I had attempted to choose participants from as broad a spread of fixed identity categories as possible - in terms of age, race, sexual orientation, education, etc.

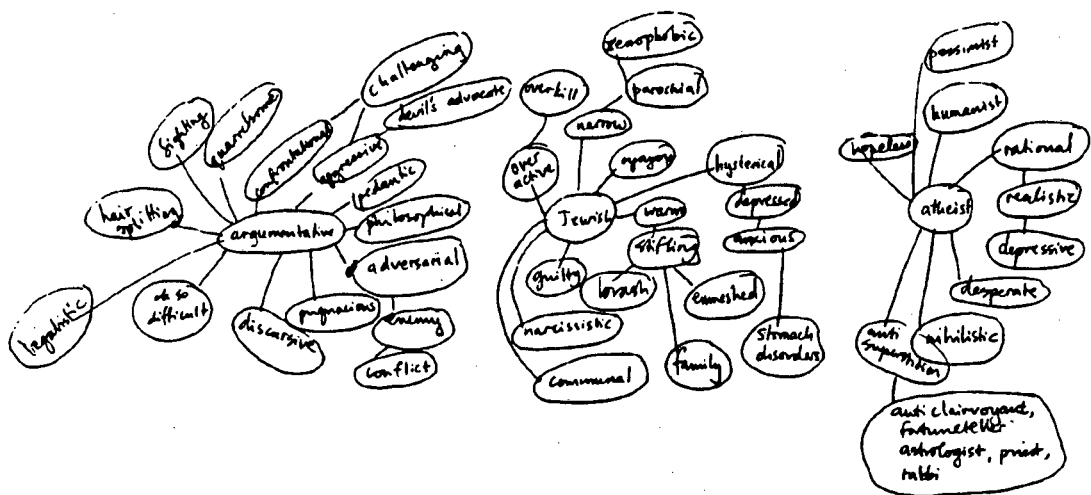
The main exercise in this workshop involved my sticking name tags and five or six labels in a totally arbitrary way on each person's chest. These labels covered the fixed social identities (such as young, middle-aged, elderly, woman, lesbian, heterosexual, white, black, rich, poor etc.), as well as what are often considered fixed personality traits (like argumentative, sexy etc.), and belief affiliations (Christian, Jewish,

atheist). I included roles and relationships (wife, mother, aunt) and identity labels which were both professional identities (teacher, pilot, dancer) as well as abilities which had a connection to writing (for example creative).

The exercise required participants to negotiate with others in the group to get rid of labels they did not want and to persuade others to give them labels they did want. My intention in this was to create the experience that identity can be put on and taken off like a label, that one can try out new identities, the possibility of multiple identities, and the often contradictory and overlapping combinations of labels. For example, the significance and effect of wearing the labels 'argumentative Jewish communist', or 'rich middle-aged bisexual').

Participants were asked to cluster (see Appendix C) around three of these labels.

The following is an example of one participant's clusters illustrating the generative nature of this technique.



difficult, conflictual, communal, depressive, nihilistic, rationalist.

66.

In this exercise I again observed some unexpected interactions. For instance, I had not expected people to be so adventurous or to find the exercise so liberating. In their interviews, many of the participants mentioned this exercise as one of the most enjoyable and memorable experiences of the workshops. One participant said, *"I enjoyed the contact, the claiming of persona from the labels. I always feel much more me when I'm living out someone else."*

Participants seemed to delight in claiming and owning labels remote from their daily lives, for example 'trapeze artist' and 'bisexual'. On reflection I think that this exhilaration arose from the fact that fixed identity categories are generally restrictive, particularly for women, and often symbolise subordinate positions or disempowerment. In the exercise, for example, no one would accept the label 'wife' (not even the heterosexual married women in the group). It was meaningful to be able to claim the label 'creative' or 'writer' and discard those that trapped participants in their everyday lives. One participant, reflecting in her journal after that day, said: *"The day was warming, calming, reassuring and at times allowed me to feel genuinely a person."*

It was at this workshop that I introduced Gilmore's notion of the three selves of autobiography - the historical, the fictive or textual, and the writing self. I wanted participants to begin to become conscious of, and separate, a 'writing self' from their notion of self. I backed this theory up with a hand-out (see Appendix B) which gave various views on autobiography, mostly feminist poststructuralist.

In the labels exercise, I allowed participants who were unable to get rid of unacceptable and undesirable labels to stick them up on a sheet of paper on the wall.

The next exercise required each person to take one of those discarded labels, make a list of 'props' to go with such a label, add a 'place' (for example 'park bench' or 'attic') and free-write **autobiographically** as the 'person' of this label. The aim was for participants to note the shift between the **historical self** or the **self that had lived** in the labels they identified with in the first exercise, and the **fictive self** or **self in the text** that they now had to write about. I also wanted them to recognise that BOTH were selves in the text and as such 'fictive'. I hoped they would be aware of themselves doing the exercises and start to acknowledge the **writing self**.

One of the participant's free-writing was around the label 'attractive', the place 'road' and the prop or object 'bowl'. She wrote:

Red dust drifting round my feet. The hot metal parallel tracks of the railway stretching to the horizon on my left. I stand at the edge of the rutted furrows that mark the passage of the wagons between Khanjaberree and Nampul. The ragged flags of the tattered cotton palms sag limply over my head.

I gaze at the bowl in my hands. Will I be lucky today? Few enough families passing on the road, I expect. Perhaps the train will yield some pickings.

I'll not manage to make a sale unless I appear attractive enough to those foreign round-eyed cunts that expect you to smile and smile and smile as they pick over your wares. Cover my head with the end of the sari. Submissive but suggestible look - sideways and up. Remember to keep the head tilted. My broken tooth doesn't help. Curse that son of a rabid hyena

that knocked my face to the other side of next week.
Ah, hand coyly over the mouth. That'll do it.

'Sahib, Sir! Sir, look, sir. Here, sir, very cheap'
(smile, hand, head, tilt, bob).

In this writing I see the awareness of the oppressive,
and restrictive trap of 'attractive' when it is
attached to women. The acknowledgement of the
situation of a poor woman begging, the realisation that
"I'll not manage to make a sale unless I appear
attractive enough", and what it costs the woman to
smile and bob.

Awareness of the difference between the historical and
fictive self is reflected in some of the interviews.

"The question of whether it is fictive experience or
whether it is real experience becomes irrelevant. For
example, this whole sense of self - I find it so
complicated. I am not sure at this stage. I must just
allow everything to be me, everything that I register
to be me, everything I do or say or hear to be me."

In workshop # 2 I also introduced Virginia Woolf's view
of autobiography as a collection of "moments of being",
as opposed to the traditional notion of a linear
narrative of historical facts.

Participants were asked to list significant 'moments of
being' (about five or six), which they considered
turning points in their lives. They then chose one of
these moments of being, listed associated props, and
free-wrote.

I hoped that by writing about and then listening to
descriptions of these moments of being, participants

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would experience the difference between the aliveness and 'voice' in the moments of being, and the duller recording and interpretation of historical facts that often mean autobiography.

This aliveness and 'voice' is well illustrated in the following piece by one of the participants:

Moment of Being:

The letter arrives. A visit. Such excitement of seeing a familiar, well-liked face from my recent past. Even if the past in that damply drizzled land was only twelve months old. Here I knew nobody. Only Jutta. She was embroiled in her own tangled, passionate affair. So a visit was an event. Welcoming this arrival is shrouded in mist. Everything also is too except the walk that night to the restaurant. The night air was cold in Amsterdam but I was warm in the company of this odd-looking man, with so un-English looks. Dark black hair, long nose, puckered reddish lips.

Following on from this was an exercise in which we again considered the turning-points or crossroads in our lives, and instead of writing about the road taken, we free-wrote about the road not taken, as if it had been taken. We had to write autobiographically, as 'I', as the self that might have lived.

By this I hoped to introduce the notion that identity is constructed not only by what did happen, but also by what might have happened, in other words, the notion of multiple selves includes possible selves. This exercise also questioned the notions of 'truth' and 'memory'. An example from one participant follows:

The road not taken

And now I'm really trapped. I made a big mistake. And here I sit, with the whole bloody team of them, more of them appearing everyday. Different names, different ages, different colours. Every day a new self appears asserting her or sometimes his authority, independence, sanity. And everyday it's a different story and it's always my problem now. I alone have to carry it, to make it better, to make it right. And what do I know, of the psyche, and little splintered selves that grew into monsters, fully formed and roaring and screaming. I who do not know or understand anger, how can I deal with this rampaging. And I have to do it alone, with no-one to consult. I gave up my friend for this and I will die of the missing her. She had a narrow escape though, although she will never know it. I followed my body and my need and my desire for another's utter worship and now I am imprisoned in this castle, where child-rapists lurk and big red children rage and there are trials and executions, civil wars over cereal bowls. Nothing is trivial, nothing is light.

In this powerful piece there is an acute awareness of self, and of the possibilities of different selves.

d) Workshop # 3

In this workshop I focused on the notion of gender identity. Participants looked at two pages of photocopied photographs, which I chose for their gender-ambiguous characteristics (see Appendix B).

Participants, in groups of three, had to discuss the pictures and answer the question "Is it a woman, and how do you know?"

My intention here was to start deconstructing the common-sense notion of gender identity, to undo our usual automatic connection between sex and gender, and to introduce the notion of gender as a social construction; or as Judith Butler (1990) says, that being a woman (or a man) is just a 'cultural performance'.

I wanted people to recognise the pointers or signs they use in order to make this decision (for example, expression, clothes, physical size, strength, way of sitting). I anticipated that most people would be wrong about the sex of the person in the picture. When I gave the 'answers', I was very careful to phrase them as picture no. 1 is a male, pic no 2 is a female, and so on, thus enabling us to entertain the possibility of a male being also a woman, for example Pieter Dirk Uys being male while also being a woman as Evita Bezuidenhout.

The following picture, for instance, was identified by all groups as a 'man'. Reasons given were "position of hips", "smile", "angle of head", "thick wrists", "balls" and "bulge in pants", "mannish expression", "clothes fitting body". In fact, the picture is of a female! The exercise also had the element of a guessing game, and the fun element of surprise.



I also wanted the participants to struggle with the question "Is it a woman?" and with their possible resistance to having to answer the question. I wanted them to explore the complexity of gender identity as articulated by Helene Cixous (1989: 83) in *Sorties*:

But we must make no mistake: men and women are caught up in a web of age-old cultural determinations that are almost unanalysable in their complexity. One can no more speak of 'woman' than of 'man' without being trapped within an ideological theater where the proliferation of representations, images, reflections, myths, identifications, transform, deform, constantly change everyone's Imaginary and invalidate in advance any conceptualization.

One participant commented in her journal on the exercise as follows:

Our group fell straight into complexities, and didn't get stuck into the nitty gritty of detailed signs of man/woman like the other groups. I resist 'this or that' I suppose. I muddied the waters a great deal. I saw 'performing' where some saw 'being'. We moved into disputing the task itself.

The next exercise introduced the term/notion of 'metaphors of self'. I asked participants to remember the identity labels from the previous workshops and to write down one that they remembered as being important but difficult to claim (for example, wife, trapeze artist, creative). We listed five moments of being in which that metaphor of self was present, chose one, free-associated around it, listed props (using the senses) and free-wrote.

One participant's 'difficult' label was 'argumentative'. Some of her associated words and phrases were: *challenging, uncompromising, pugnacious, pedantic, anti-authoritarian, talkative, bold, brave, debating, don't tell me what to do, don't tell me what*

to say, don't speak for me. Her props were: "table, something to drink, maybe cigarettes".

She wrote:

Somehow there is always a table between us, and it is always his table. It's always me who goes in and meets him across his table and it is always a vast expanse of wood, separating us from each other, no, separating me from him. There was never an us. And there is no food on this table, either. This table is the battlefield, maybe the playing field. For me this is no game. This is the most serious business in the world.

A reflection from another participant's journal on this exercise gives a vivid picture of her experience of this exercise:

I panicked at having to choose one of the labels - I was interested in elderly. Also last time I developed great affection for all my labels. When Anne said pick one that was 'difficult' to get, to acknowledge wanting, I edged around 'creative'. Writing the word 'creative' and sticking it on my paper embarrassed me. I didn't want anyone to see. The list of 'props' that came next poured out, easy, tumbling. I could have found another page full Then the free-writing - the vividness of the place, the props from the list - I could smell, see, hear very clearly. I was off. Couldn't write fast enough. Knowing I could edit, I didn't care I'd have to read. I was extravagant - the 'me' gave detail (the castanet, the large pockets, chewing gum) but it was 'she'/'not-me', fantastic, fictional not 'real', 'true'. My voice spoke out of this me/not-me/ she. I roller-coasted on it.

e) **Workshop # 4**

In workshop 4 I came back to the construction of gender identity by using a free-writing exercise in answer to the question "Am I a woman, how do I know?"

Here is a selection from the pieces people wrote:

(i)

Am I a woman and how do I know? Ha, that's a good one. Never thought about that before my daily obsession my nightly waking sweat nightmare, and often I wonder how anybody else knows either. I think the answer is that I'm not. And how do I know? Well I don't seem to have succeeded at it very well have I? Not quite a good enough boy, but for sure not a good enough girl. Does a not good enough girl qualify me to be a woman? ... I wonder what the options are if I decide I am not a woman. How about just being a person? Or maybe being a man - or being a woman just because I refuse to be a man. The truth is I refuse to be a woman either if it means I have to do things I don't want to do, or be things I don't want to be or say things I don't believe in or behave in a way I don't want to.

(ii)

I've been told I am a girl since I was born so even though I don't know what it really feels like being a woman to other women, I just know what it feels like to me by being me. Of course that is I am sure, due to what other people have been telling me women should be - and that is helpless in the face of everyday small events, like having a puncture, or having to get men's approval about the way I look. But because I don't feel like that anymore, and feel like telling most men to fuck off, and I don't care what they think about me my looks my personality my abilities, have I stopped being a woman? And is it a problem that I still feel a woman without feeling in any ways that women are supposed to feel?

(iii)

How do I know? Everyone always said so, always treated me like a perrrl. Yeah and didn't you just hate it? 'Little girl..' That tone of voice, patronising, goes with wrinkles and gold powder compact and tight bobby pin curls, fringes, marcelled waves and age. All those girls - old girls, young girls, in girls. Go and wash your hands/set the table/ do up your shoelaces. Your knickers are showing. Stringent training for girlhood turns you into a woman. No training for that. A woman is all the things real people (boys, men, people with Important Work) are not. Women are all the bits and pieces left over when the real people are finished, completed, up and running.

How do I know? Because I stopped being a girl. I grew up - out - and decided that 16 years of sullenness qualified me to be a woman. Just one. Not all women, not even a bit of Woman. A woman. Me.

The common-sense response to the question 'Am I a woman?' would have been "of course!" and surprise at the possibility of asking such a question. Participants' responses illustrate that they deconstructed the notion of 'woman', and the question led them to consider whether, as Kristeva (1989) claimed "strictly speaking, 'women' cannot be said to exist", and Judith Butler's (1990) statement that "Yes, I am a woman, but that's not all that I am."

The next exercise took us back to exploring metaphors of self, but working this time with another person's metaphors. I asked participants to pick a name of a person in the group out of a hat and then to write down images, phrases, words, metaphors evoked in them by that person, concentrating on sensory imagery. One person wrote:

like yellow light in the garden, like round big warm waves, cello mellow like rich malt, like apricots, like a fresh soft clean towel.

These descriptions were given to the person concerned, and we free-wrote around the images or metaphors of self offered by each other, so allowing other ways of seeing ourselves to interact with our own.

One participant gave the following images to another:
Sleek thoroughbred horse whickering, pacing restlessly but soft as a night sound - shaking the thick mane around the lean wiry sleekly muscled body lost in the world of the fenced place.

The person so described subsequently wrote:

I am most surprised by being seen as a sleek skinned thoroughbred horse. I mostly think that I would like to be a dolphin, but feel vulnerable like a butterfly. I quite like being seen as a horse because they are usually quite strong and can run as fast as the wind and jump, and go slow when they don't feel like obeying their masters. If I start seeing myself as a horse it will probably do wonder things for me and my spirit of adventure. "Lost in the world of the fenced place" Yes, I like that - give in to the spirit of non-surrender, discovery, self discovery, adventure, break away fences and boundaries, invite others to join me, ride with me. I didn't know that that part of me is so easily picked up by others.

In this piece of writing, the participant tries out different metaphors of self - dolphin, butterfly - sparked off by the one given to her.

f) **Workshops # 5 - 8 (weekend away)**

The four sessions (workshops) on the weekend away had a strong focus on autobiography and, in the first part, on the historical self. I had asked everyone to bring "photographs of yourself from different periods in your life, including photos that might surprise us!"

I pre-prepared brown paper sheets labeled in decades which would cover all the periods of the women's lives: 1930s, 1940s, 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. In order to give a sense of the richness of women's history and to create a women's writing scene, I plotted the lives of many well-known women (particularly writers and feminists) in those decades.

This strategy risked us eliciting the traditional linear (androcentric) response to autobiography. However, I hoped that we had sufficiently questioned/

deconstructed this approach to autobiography and that there had been enough dislodging of fixed categories of identity to question the notion of a 'true', inner, coherent self. I hoped we had played sufficiently with the notions of 'truth' and 'memory' to keep our liberal humanist selves at bay, at least for some of the exercises.

I also gave participants a hand-out on alternative approaches to autobiography (Appendix B), and had as a griphold for myself (and for those who had resisted their historical selves), Gertrude Stein's (1937: 56) comment on autobiography/ identity:

And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right. You are of course never yourself.

The first exercise involved sticking up our photographs and comments in the appropriate historical places, that is, plotting our historical selves on the visual time line.

Participants then had time to look, wonder, exclaim, talk about and generally absorb the sheets/display of all their lives, or rather, the chosen moments of being of their historical selves that they had chosen to reveal to the rest (see photograph below).



A free-writing response followed.
 People's responses to their historical selves as
 created on the walls were very different.

From one participant:

It's such a definite claiming of myself. Ok Gertrude Stein and whoever you are out there with opinions about autobiography. Perhaps it's not 'myself', but it's more of that than what I do and live for most of the working hours of myself. Ok of course that's myself ... but it is my contextualised world my existence in-relation-to. In all these pictures then, it was my existence in relation to as well of course, but from here when I look back at them it seems as though I have a more intimate claim to that self - she is no longer

in that context. She is a living breathing pulsing cell of me. Not in the context of today either. She is almost free of context living as she does in the past and the present, yet in neither.

And another:

Deep sense of despair isolation. Why? All the pictures add up to such a lot of living and so many are so similar - celebrating public events - the meaning is in the detail of course, in the connection between me and each photo - some of them could be me quite easily. Yet it's important for me to know and recognise *my* pictures, to say to myself mine, me. Although I hate the exercise - I hate being held to be 'this is me', this is how I am. My story. It's the tip of the iceberg. It's what's not there that's interesting.

I then asked for a second piece of free-writing, with participants writing in a style chosen from a list of suggested ways, such as 'all in the present tense', using lots and lots of adjectives and adverbs' (see Appendix B).

In the interviews I specifically asked participants for their response to this exercise of putting their pictures on the wall. Their answers reassured me that it had been worth taking the risk of using a linear way to represent lives. Samples of their responses follow.

(i)

"I loved it because ... I was there, my pictures were there. I chose quite strange pictures I remember, but I loved to see myself there on the wall with all these other wonderful women, and to know that all those people somewhere were also teenagers, or babies, or getting married or not getting married, more or less at the same time as I was. There was an enormous connectedness, wonderful women in this workshop, that made me feel as though way back I also knew them. Whereas I didn't know them way back, I just knew them now. And I think everybody's photographs, they could have been photographs of me, I would have looked a little bit different, and there would have been different sets of Uncles and Aunts, or a different

husband or whatever, but there was so much similarity between us. And it made me feel more bonded with myself, with my being, by being there. I felt more bonded with these women and more bonded with the world. It was amazing and I loved being part of that."

(ii)

"I liked it very much. I think we've grown very close, the group, and I think that the photographs brought us even closer, because ... we were thrown together through writing, we were thrown together, but that actually added a extra kind of intimacy, seeing each other as young people. I absolutely loved seeing everybody's lives just over the years, and how this group was now mixed up and all ... like their lives were somehow interwoven, and even if they weren't as black and white South Africans, there were similarities..."

(iii)

"It was a wonderful exercise. When you put up the decades, I saw how, slowly, people in the group who came from such disparate backgrounds and even with 20 or 30 years difference, slowly our lives became intertwined, and sometimes we didn't know it was happening, until that time that they actually converged, concretely. And it was unfolding before our eyes, and we were all sharing these things, and they converged. And when other people put their things up, it also made me think about my own life. Seeing other peoples' images woke up things that I hadn't even thought of."

(iv)

"Watching other people putting up, I delighted in the narratives. But I also had a faintly guilty sense of being some sort of voyeur looking at other people's lives. I was terribly interested to see each person's pictures, and what was most interesting was that at the beginning I didn't know whose pictures they were, and there was a kind of collective, a kind of chronological identity, communal identity for the 50s and the 60s and in a sense, in looking at all of the photographs under each kind of decade, I kept thinking but all those could be me. I was deeply intrigued by the communal sense, I finished up with the sense that all that belonged to me. I suppose the communalities, you know, the wedding photos and the graduation photos and the awful children in awful dresses ..."

(v)

Ja ... I loved it, just absolutely loved it, but I'm a voyeur ... I am desperately curious to know everything about everybody's life, it fascinates me, I want to know all the stories about everybody.

(vi)

I found it so powerful. One, because of the visual aspect of it. I find one can read photographs, they speak to you so powerfully, and some of them were so moving, the images of people just speak to me. I loved seeing all our lives up. It was so moving and so dramatic. It was just an extraordinary experience.

The pleasure, the sense of being affirmed and of being bonded with the others, with the world and with ourselves reflects, for me, Virginia Woolf's claim that autobiography is the 'genre of the oppressed', and Gilmore's (1994:32) statement that:

One has to claim with authority, the very grounds of identity that patriarchal ideology has denied women - a self worth its history, a life worth remembering, a story worth writing and publishing.

The visual impact of the women's lives displayed on the wall, with the reminder of other women's lives, gave the experience to these women of selves and lives worth their history, worth remembering and worth writing.

To move away from the chronological view of a life, the next exercise involved a brainstorm around the different ways a life, or a biography, or autobiography could be seen. That is, different or alternative ways to the linear way so graphically displayed on the wall. As Haug (1987:51) puts it:

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"Women's narratives are, very often, interlinked stories. The thread is spun out endlessly; almost from the outset we are led off at all kinds of tangents ... what we uncover in our story-writing are patterns from the fabric of life, rather than any pre-planned coherence.

We put these alternative metaphors for telling of a life up on the wall on yellow slips of paper. The point I was trying to illustrate was that there are many ways to present a life other than linear narrative, which in itself could (now) be seen as just another metaphor.

Some of the alternative metaphors which emerged from the exercise were:

Roller coaster, whistle stops in between, change of seasons, a collection of bits and pieces from the shoreline, station after station meeting the unexpected, corridor of mirrors, washing machine cycles, a journey of discovery, treadmill, waves, marble collection, smorgasbord, music symphony, a chess game, weaving a carpet.

Anticipating that participants would be expecting to write autobiography - their historical selves as displayed on the walls - I deliberately turned this around and explained that we were going to write, instead, the **biography** of another person in the group.

We then free-wrote around the kinds of questions we would ask in an interview with the person whose 'biography' we were going to write, in order to know/decide how we would want to represent them.

The aim was to encourage participants to see that there were many different ways of representing another 'self'. This would imply that there were many different ways of representing their own 'selves'.

Then I put us in 'biography' pairs. Another free-writing exercise followed in which we thought of life metaphors for our partner and specific questions we wanted to ask her.

Each person had 45 minutes to interview her partner. We then all came back together and I randomly handed each person a slip of paper with a word on it which they could use (for example 'sound', 'darkness'). I asked participants to free-write their partner's biography for about twenty minutes. Then I gave us all about an hour to edit, and/or rewrite something that we would read to the group that evening after supper.

I wanted us to explore and perhaps even struggle with aspects like 'fact' or 'fiction' and something in between called 'faction'. I suggested we choose a genre in which to write this biography that would most suit the person, and choose a metaphor of self for them and a metaphor of a life, but also to realise that these were fluid and flexible.

After dinner we read our 'biographies' to the group. As I had hoped, there was a great variety of ways of presenting - from linear narrative to extended metaphor in poetry.

A fine example of a decision to use a traditional approach was the 'biography' of me by one of the participants. Here are the first two paragraphs:

After ten days, the midwife took official leave of the mother and her child. "You have a contented non-choliky baby, Mrs Schuster, so I won't bother to check up on her unless of course you feel a need to do so.

Mrs Schuster did not find the need. Her baby girl went through her burping, teeth cutting, crawling, other developing stages, without upsetting the household too much, or disturbing the domestic pattern too drastically.

Another participant wrote her 'biography' in the form of a poem. Here are the first two verses:

Still Life

*A still figure stands in a leafy haven
Caught between the long narrow-bladed grasses
in the foreground
and the arching branches behind*

*Insistently, hopelessly still she stands, as
the grasses bend and tickle
the branches twinkle with flickering leaves
the child wades and drums in the sea of shimmering
green
the dog shuffles and grunts
in the twiggy nether regions of doggy
undergrowth*

In the reading, we were able to see (hear) ourselves represented in someone else's words, to hear their metaphor of our selves, of our lives, and in this way to further loosen fixed pictures of ourselves and our identities.

On Sunday morning we returned to focusing on our autobiography. The main exercise was to make a self-portrait in the form of a collage from a suitcase of bits of pieces - clay, string, paints, objects, things from the garden and so on. Then, using the collage and a biographical image chosen from the life metaphor wall, we free-wrote.

The collage was intended to put us into a more abstract mode and to provide us different images, more metaphors of self.

Here is a photograph of a collage made by one of the participants, entitled 'Everest'.



One participant, whose biographical image was "a collection of bits and pieces from the shoreline", wrote:

Tangled skeins veins nerves stretched across the bits and pieces. Orange, vivid, leading somewhere, no where, trailing off into blankness, attached to a pipedream heart on a pole. Telegraphing 'with love from me to you' - oh treacherous wires that tangle between the living.

Another participant reacted to the exercise in a way that questioned the 'self' she was supposed to be representing, as well as the task she thought she was asked to do:

It's about making your mark, or expressing your voice, or being who you are, whatever that means. it's like saying that thing is not me, or worse, that thing is me. ... I don't want to make anything or show anything or stick with anything - I just like to do it. but tie it to self-expression, or self-representation or a task that requires it to mean anything other than what it is, I hate it. If there are patterns, they are irrelevant to me. Let someone else find them. I am here to play in the sandpit and cut things up and throw paint around and sing and all that stuff. I'm not here to represent myself, today or ever.

For a few of the participants, the focus on the 'historical self' was not completely comfortable. I did not fully anticipate the resistance to what Cixous called the "minefield of cultural stereotype, literary figure, and lived history" (quoted in Shiach, 1991:26). Reactions to this aspect of autobiography from some of the participants in their interviews supports the idea of it as a 'minefield':

"If I am going to go back in there to write my autobiography, I am going to step right into that situation that I am now liberated from."

"I have an instinctive recoil when I think of writing my autobiography. The instinctive recoil is that I have got no completely truthful picture of my life to myself. My present is such a puzzle for me, so the whole of the past and the present ... the question is just overwhelming!"

"I don't want to confront my own history. It's too thick. My own biography makes the world go grey. I can't own my biography. It's not me."

g) **Workshop # 9**

The weekend had been spent mainly exploring the historical self and the fictive self and the relationship between them. A week later, at the ninth workshop, I moved us into our writing selves. I designed a card game which required the group to construct the pack by making cards of such things as first lines, characters (imaginary and autobiographical), places, time of day, mood, metaphor, situation and genre. We then played a kind of rummy in which we tried to get the best hand we could. At the end of playing we had to write from the hand we ended up with.

The game is meant to work on different levels. On the level of the concept of self, I saw it as indicating how the writing self gets dealt a hand and that's what it has to work with. I wanted to move us from the 'factual' sense of autobiographical writing into pure imagination, fiction and plot. In addition, I wanted to give those who were uncomfortable with the historical selves of the weekend the pleasure of playing with words and plot.

We then read our stories to each other.

The following extracts from participants' writing give an indication of the inventiveness of the writing produced in this exercise:

(i)

There was a very strange feeling in the empty house. I entered cautiously, stepping lightly over the patterned tiles of the elegant Edwardian porch. Dread seized me momentarily; my heart failed. What if Melissa were not there? She had promised - promised with all her heart when we parted in abject misery from each other at the orphanage gates - that we should find our way through all the tribulations of the world to meet again in the house where we had shared so much fun. Such jolly tricks as we had then, such pink happiness of girlish sharing of secrets, of bonnets and boys.

(Two of the cards that this participant had were 'write it as melodrama' and 'pink happiness')

(ii)

Once upon a time, the thin girl with the big feet came padding down the passage to her bedroom. She opened the door and lying in her bed she saw a roundfaced androgynous clown with woolly grey hair and gold spectacles. He lay with his head on the headboard and his arms folded across his chest.

(iii)

The kitchen door slammed shut but she didn't bother to look up. Leslie always slammed the bloody door. One would think that when someone had gone to so much trouble to carpet a house wall to ceiling to improve the acoustics for that damned hi-fi, the sound of doors would be muted. But the bloody kitchen was tiled wall to ceiling and the door could and did slam. All her fucked up marriage he'd slammed that door. The orange energy of her anger had long since turned to ashes. And she kept arranging the cauliflower that the bastard liked too much, without even tensing her neck.

(One of the cards this participant had was to 'put a swear word into every sentence'.)

(iii)

It was one of those crisp, cold autumn mornings and I was totally overcome by a bright cheeriness finding myself in the cable-car, stuck, half-way to the top of the mountain, with the person who told me the biggest lie I ever heard.

In the interviews, I asked specifically for feedback on the card game exercise. The responses confirmed for me that participants experienced many of the aspects that I had hoped they would. Samples follow.

(i)

"It was an interesting exercise. It's like these are the cards you are dealt, these are the words you get, now you have got to do it. And I think the more limited the exercise, the more structured the exercise, the better the discipline, the better the writing, the better the practice."

(ii)

"When you are making the pack you can be outrageous, so that is nice, you can dare somebody to start something with that first line, or various other things. You also know that you are playing with fire, because you know that everybody else probably thinks the same way, and that you are going to end up with a hand that is going to be quite difficult to deal with. I enjoyed the freedom that those kind of exercises gives one - this is what I have got to play with. There is an element of choice in it, while the rounds are going around, and an element of horror in it, in which you think oh my god, I'm going to throw that away, I can't possibly do anything with it, and then you get something that is even worse, and you think 'why did I throw that away?' And then there is the challenge of

actually sitting down and doing it, the creative challenge. The game both forces one to do something, but it also gives you license, because it is only a game, and that is liberating."

(iii)

"I enjoyed it enormously, and it made me feel nice. It's in a way what life is like, you know, you get dealt a series of circumstances, you get dealt the first line of your birth, you can chuck some of the stuff away, you have got some choices, but some things are going to come around again, and that could actually be worse. And at the end of the day you have got to play this hand, you have got to live your life, like you have got to write your story, you have got to live your life with these things that come your way."

The card theme featured again in the last exercise, where each person gave a partner a set of cards with suggestions, exercises, tips on how to write what it was they wanted to, outside of the workshops.

I asked one of the participants if she thought she could sustain her new relationship to writing, and she said of this exercise:

"When we did our last exercise, I got a little postcard suggesting that I took little bits of paper and wrote words on them, and kept them to write on. I did this and they are there in a little jar, and that is a VERY secure feeling. Because sometimes I don't know where to begin. To begin with a word is just fantastic."

h) Workshop # 10

At the tenth and last workshop, I chose to work with the writing and ideas of the French feminist Helene

Cixous. Here again I was focusing on the writing self. But I wanted to contrast the lightness of the card game with Cixous' depth and intensity in writing. I wanted the participants to explore themes like 'dreams' and 'death' in a similar way to how they had approached the card game.

I prepared enlarged quotes from Cixous' *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* on sheets of brown paper on the wall. I asked participants to read them all and then choose one that reverberated for them. They then free-wrote around their quote.

The Cixous (1993:66) quote chosen by one participant was:

Like plants, dreams have enemies, plant lice that devour them. The dream's enemy is interpretation. Interpretation wants to make the dream cough up. We must let ourselves be carried on the dream's mane and must not wake up - something all dreamers know - while the dream is dictating the world to us.

The participant's free-writing response was:

On a Dream's Mane

*Plant lice cluster
around the pip-like buds of orange blossom -
their perfume still frozen in early time
Maybe here we will have a little misshapen show
But other buds are swollen with immunity
they will bloom, sending out waves of aroma on
warm layers of air
Altogether though,
we don't see the potentials blocked
the process of reversing life.*

Another participant took the following quote from Cixous (1993:82):

The writers I feel close to are those who play with fire, those who play seriously with their own mortality, go further, go too far, sometimes go as far as catching fire, as far as being seized by fire.

The participant's free-writing response dealt with her self as a writer and other writers in her piece about death. The following is an extract:

*Don't tell me about the dead:
grey gloomy concrete
pastel half colours
seagulls panicking overhead....*

*Why did I stop eating fire?
Why did I stop leaping through flames?*

*The dead only help us in the manner of their death:
They die without fire in the blood.
They die because they don't have a choice:
jumping off buildings because the only way out
is down.*

*Slowly burning for 30 years
The only way he could imagine of
smashing his brain,
That coveted precision instrument.
Up in the lift
To the 23rd floor
left his footprints and fingerprints
Pilled so he couldn't feel the burning
Or remember the dreaming ...*

*Did he know or care
that we wept and drank?
Not for the lost precision instrument
but for the burning beneath that kept it going?*

*Don't tell me about the dead:
Romantic mystical hazy rubbish.
They go too soon:
They go too soon to teach us.*

2. LANGUAGE : Breaking the laws of genre and gender

The next concept thread I analyse is the feminist poststructuralist approach to language. The exercises that made up this thread were designed to turn the common-sense humanist notion of language on its head, by looking at how we use language, by blurring genre categories, and by playing with words and syntax. I also wanted to push participants into using what the French feminist language theorists like Cixous and Kristeva called 'feminine language'.

In this section I will analyse this concept thread using examples which illustrate two central features of a feminist poststructural approach to language: a) 'feminine' language; and b) intertextuality. I will use one or two examples of exercises to comment on these two aspects in the design of the workshops and the writing produced.

a) Feminine language

One of my intentions in the 'language' thread of the workshops was to encourage participants to "break the laws" of genre and gender, and to explore what Cixous and Kristeva call 'feminine' writing. Aspects of 'feminine writing', according to Cixous, are fluidity, decentredness, playfulness, fragmentedness, and open-endedness, as opposed to 'masculine writing' which is linear, finite, structured, rational and unified.

I used the process writing techniques of 'free-writing' and 'clustering' throughout the workshops.

Free-writing (see Appendix C.1) is a technique used by the 'process writing' teachers such as Peter Elbow. It frees participants from worrying about the rules of writing - grammar, punctuation, spelling, and so on. I introduced this technique in the first workshop by asking participants to write with a knitting needle on two sheets of paper with carbon paper in between. Thus they couldn't see what they were writing while they were writing it, and could only read it afterwards by looking at what came through the carbon paper. This 'blind' writing was intended to introduce them to the feeling of writing without thinking, what Natalie Goldberg (1986:7) calls 'keeping your hand moving'.

What is the purpose of this? Most of the time when we write, we mix up the editor and creator. If you keep your creator hand moving, the editor can't catch up with it and lock it.

Clustering (see Appendix C.2), described by Gabriele Rico (1983:28) as

"a nonlinear brainstorming process akin to free association ... that allows patterns to emerge. It is the writing tool that accepts wondering, non-knowing, seeming chaos, gradually mapping an interior landscape as ideas begin to emerge.

The free-writing and clustering techniques encourage aspects of 'feminine' writing. There are many similarities in the fluidity, playfulness, and fragmented, non-linear character of the 'feminine' writing described by the French feminists, and the non-knowing, 'seeming chaos', non-rational writing of the process writing school. I used both free-writing and

clustering as the main writing techniques in all the workshops.

In another exercise in the first workshop, I asked participants to think about what they would call 'voice' in writing, using it loosely as a metaphor for what we were striving for in our writing. We wrote a list of what writing without voice would be like, and then with our non-dominant hand we wrote a list of what we thought writing with voice was like. We stuck these up on little yellow slips of paper on the wall and looked at them.

What I had hoped for from this exercise happened: the descriptions of writing with voice were very similar to the descriptions of 'feminine' writing. Examples from the exercise follow.

Voice: energy, depth, opening up, has the power to move, robust, takes risks, alive, so people can see you and smell the dust, intimacy, textured, juicy, resonant, pregnant, cello sonata, crackling, loaded.

Without voice: empty, toneless, bloodless, showing your knowledge, studied, mechanical, cold, dispassionate, unrooted, phonology text book, answering machine synthesizer, market reports, traffic lights, not-me, dishonest.

Another technique I used to explore non-linear, non-rational writing was '**scrambled syntax**'. This is a technique which I adapted from Natalie Goldberg (see Appendix C.3). The exercise requires participants to take a random sentence from their writing, repeat the words in it in a scrambled way for about a quarter of a page with no attention to the meaning, and then, very

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arbitrarily, to punctuate. Participants then read their pieces "with confidence". The intention was to enable people to let go of the 'rule' of having to write in full sentences and to discover how much meaning can emerge from the resultant, supposedly meaningless, piece. Many of us commented on how much 'voice', power and meaning the scrambled writing had.

In Workshop # 4 I used an exercise which required participants to separate words from 'meaning'. I gave each participant a copy of the following Welsh poem:

A chlodant,
rhwng pob pawen felfed,
noddant,
rhwng pob saethdrem wyllt,
fod :
dim ond dob ;
ysgafn, heini, dwl,
ansylweddol fel can adar,
bwrlwm pistyll,
neu'r ddawns gyntefig ar y ddol.

I gave them 15 minutes to 'translate' it into English. I assumed (correctly) that none of them could understand Welsh, and therefore would be unable to find any 'meaning' in the words. The only way they could do it was to let go of the idea that they had to discover the 'real' meaning of the words in the poem, and risk creating their own meaning according to - the sounds of the words, the look of them, or whatever they came up with.

I gave them the hint that the poem might be about 'silence'. This wasn't in fact true, but I wanted to introduce silence as a metaphor as a contrast to the metaphor of voice.

The 'translations' produced were amazingly varied, and although participants said how hard they had found the exercise, they also commented on how exciting the products were. Samples follow.

(i)

A slow chant,
throbs then fades thoughtful,
Silence,
throbs then frees my mind,
full:
air and warmth;
seep, smile, dawdle
one syllable left to smell
dark green
roots down brown moist and still.

(ii)

A closed eye
filled with other moments
blinking
filled with wild handpoems
faded:
dim and dark
bloated, heavy, dull
until we both can close our eyes
beyond silence
never can dawns greyness make eye poems.

(iii)

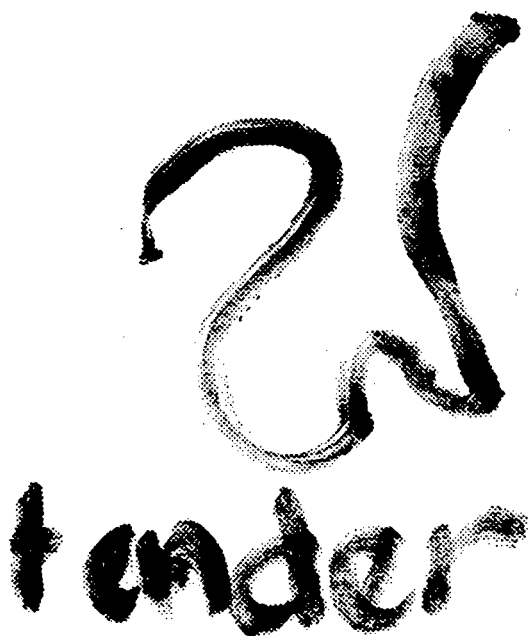
Ah, penitent
Lie down while you can on the road.
Peace cannot last.
Ease in the silence, life out of stillness
is death
Grim and fell.
Restless, dis-eased and disturbed,
You must take up your burden of words;
Rip open the heart of the world
And eat of the turbulent noise.

Still exploring the relationship of words to 'meaning', I used an exercise adapted from poetry therapy called the 'Zen telegram'. This is a light, quick, unthinking

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(non-rational) 'feeling' mark on a sheet of paper made with brush and black ink. We then wrote the first words that came into our heads next to the mark. I used this exercise to separate writing marks from words or rational meaning. From this mark, participants free-wrote.

The following is an example of one of the participant's Zen telegrams:



Participants enjoyed this exercise and surprised themselves with their subsequent writing.

One participant said of it: *"There was something so pleasing about the Zen telegram. I think it was the escape from words and their clutter. Something to do with the movement, the visible sign of the brushstrokes on the paper. And the enigmatic possibilities of the sign. Very satisfying."*

Her enjoyment is evident in the free-writing she wrote from it:

The trickiest thing about being dead without being completely passed away, is keeping your eyelids from flickering....

If my heart had not stopped, it would have broken into a thousand pieces, just watching my family and friends weeping and fainting in the aisles. Shame, look at my writing group. I did not think that they would be such emotional wrecks, because I am no longer of this world. They'll probably do a workshop on the agonies of losing a friend

I can't wait till I get my licence to haunt. when my writing group have their workshop on Death, I hope they will not be too startled when their papers rustle gently despite the closed doors and windows. I don't want to scare them. I just want to say Hi!

b) **Intertextuality**

'Intertextuality' is a term created by Kristeva and used by theorists like Bakhtin and Fairclough to describe the "property texts have of being full of snatches of other texts.." (Fairclough, 1992:85).

I used this poststructural concept in a very deliberate way in the exercises to deconstruct and challenge common-sense notions of genre, the 'author', and the production of texts. "The concept of intertextuality points to the productivity of texts, to how texts can transform prior texts and restructure existing conventions (genres, discourses) to generate new ones" (Fairclough, 1992:102).

Many of the exercises in the workshops were aimed at exploring the 'ownership' of words. These exercises required participants to use other people's words, or random words picked from a hat, or their own words and phrases pulled out from other parts of their writing.

For example, in the first workshop, the participants were asked to choose ten words or phrases from the free-writing they had done, put each on a slip of paper and put the ten slips of paper in an envelope. I shuffled the envelopes and gave one to each participant. Thus each of us got an envelope of another person's words, with which we had to make a 'poem'. We then read these pieces and looked for 'voice' in the writing. This exercise was intended firstly, to take the anxiety out of writing a poem by making it simply a matter of rearranging given words; and secondly, to wonder and consider 'whose poem?' it was.

When judging the 'voice' in the other participant's writing, whose voice were we recognising - the voice of the writer of the words, or the voice of the writer/compiler of the poem?

One participant, hardly adding or changing any of her given batch of words, wrote:

*To be compulsive smothers
silence dances in prune-darkness
absently, like stroking velvet.
Silence seeps in rippling eddies
roughening resistant fibre.*

This participant said about hearing her 'words' made into a poem and read by someone else:

"It was an extraordinarily momentous moment for me. I felt as if she had made a poem that was more me - that she hadn't made the words into something else, hers, but more mine. It was a very confirming experience for me. I felt more there - my words spoke me ... What was empowering for me was the safety and the sense that the

poem was neither 'mine' nor 'not mine'. Ownership has such a weight of responsibility attached to it ... It was *her* voice speaking, somehow speaking my 'voice'. And I didn't do it, but I could glow privately."

Another participant's poem was:

*Unsung dreams
like dance steps gone wrong
are hidden in grainy-grey sand.
Unsung dreams
they are knocking
and with the piano open
she smiles
while trying to listen.*

After the workshop we had a discussion about 'whose voice/ whose poem' it was. Some felt that the words they were given dictated the poem they wrote. As one participant said: "Funnily enough, when I was sorting out the words there was a kind of inevitability about how they would arrange themselves. It was the words that I got in the envelope that made the poem, they had a particular quality, I just put them down." Others thought that, as another participant put it: "It is the person who puts the poem together who does the job. I have a clear sense that if someone deals you words, then it's always your poem. It's what you do with it that makes a good poem or doesn't."

Another technique I used was one of asking participants to pull out lines, phrases or words from a few pieces of their writing, and make these into a 'product' for presentation. To lessen the anxiety of producing a 'good' finished piece and the blocks this anxiety often creates, I usually gave very little time for them to do this (5 or 10 minutes),

The following 'product' was produced from pulling out lines/phrases drawn from three previous free-writing exercises - the Welsh/silence poem, the "Are you a woman?" and one around a metaphor of self:

*Where do you come from
depths to be unearthed
tangled feelings webbed
disturbing the slow sun's pattern*

*Where do you come from
soft eyes
womb warm
caring like a woman*

*Ah, your hands
agile monkey hands
unashamed aware
fixing up your history.*

Another way I attempted to 'de-center' the author via intertextuality was in the creation of a group writing product. In the last exercise of the weekend away, I also explored the idea of a 'group writing self' by asking participants to take two words/phrases from any of the writing they had done that day, and put them on slips of paper in a hat. We then formed into three groups, each group taking 6 or 7 words/phrases from the hat and creating a group poem using these words/phrases. The groups then performed these poems for each other. In neither the writing nor the reading, could we say whose words or whose poem they were.

One of the group poems produced was:

A minute passes.
Air floats
heavy with the
sounds of beauty.
What am I supposed to be listening to?
Abandoned sea shells -
salted ripples -
squiggle and dash -
It is time to put a
heart beat in the
wood.

The final example of the deliberate use of intertextuality, is the **card game** designed for workshop # 9. In the warm-up to the card game we each wrote down two nouns, two verbs and two adjectives. These were put in piles and each person chose (at random) one noun, one verb and one adjective, and was required to free-write a piece which used all three.

I used this to 'limber up' for the card game and to let them experience the freedom and inspiration that arbitrary restriction can give writing.

The card game itself extended both the arbitrariness and the restriction, by making participants work with the hand they were dealt. Many aspects and techniques from previous workshops were used in the design of the game - there were cards with metaphors on, cards with first lines, cards which gave writing instructions (for example using a swear word in every sentence), cards with genre instructions (for example write it as melodrama, as erotica, as a poem with rhyming chorus).

Participants' enjoyment of this exercise is reflected in the following extracts from interviews:

"The game is so rich, it just starts something, there was such an element of fun to it, you build a spirit in

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which you are kind of interacting. And then it is easier to go off on your own."

"I thought I can't do this, but the minute I got cards I was fine, I had something I could hang onto."

"It was great fun, a wonderful exercise, and it was also something that actually led you, dragged you along with it, once you got your pieces, there you've got your places and your characters and other odd things, and your dingetjies in between, and you put it in sequence, you know now this is what is going to happen. You know you're all set, and this thing actually drags you along with it, it writes itself.

The card game also explored notions of genre or 'discourse types' as illustrated in this extract from an interview with a participant who got (and kept) the card 'write it as erotica'. She said:

"I just absolutely loved it because it allowed me to be somebody completely different, whereas the other ones I was always present, but there is a different me that was in here... it was very freeing."

An extract from the piece she wrote 'as erotica' follows:

Suddenly it was clear that she had to kill him. The very thought made her hands clammy and pushed her heartbeat to danger level. Here she was outside Fishhoek station on a Sunday afternoon between trains. The sunset was stroking a russet rocking sea. All she could think of was of taking a bite out of a ripe peach followed by a sip of flaming late harvest wine, and reliving moment by moment how her clothes had slipped from her gently perspiring body in a mountain hut. His form was missing from her memory. She knew that every fragment of memory regained would give her courage to kill him. She lay down on the fresh damp earth in an effort to recall....

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My intention in making participants explore genres, and 'break genre rules' was so that they would also be aware of "the way in which social practice is constrained by conventions, and the potentiality for change and creativity" (Fairclough, 1992:126).

3. CHANGE & THE WRITING SCENE

The Writing Scene that I attempted to create in the workshops was a feminist poststructuralist one - one in which women could start to identify themselves as writers with a place for their experiences and voices.

To create a feminist poststructuralist writing scene I had to create an awareness of writing as social practice, rather than writing as self expression. I attempted to do this by:

- including quotes that expressed this approach in the hand-outs (see Appendix B);
- in the evaluation exercises and in the interviews, asking the participants questions about their relationship to writing which were intended to make them consider the questions 'what is writing?', 'what is autobiography?' and 'what does it mean to be a writer'.

Much of this awareness came through in the participants' free-writing and in the writing they gave me in response to evaluative questions. It was also evident in interview comments, such as the following:

"I think it has to do with that sense of knowing who you are as a writer, I don't think you get to be a writer until you know who you are as a writer. It's definitely got to do with a sense of identity."

"The workshops were very feminist - in giving me the space to find out what I write, and in a sense celebrating everybody."

"In many ways those workshops were quite unique for me, not as a crutch, but as a way of entering dangerous territory."

I hoped that the writing scene created in the research workshops would 'empower' the participants. I adopt Lather's (1991:4) view of the concept empowerment which she expresses as follows:

Drawing on Gramsci's (1971) ideas of counter-hegemony, I use empowerment to mean analysing ideas about the causes of powerlessness, recognising systemic oppressive forces, and acting both individually and collectively to change the conditions of our lives.

In creating an empowering writing scene, I was hoping to effect **change** on the following three levels: **Firstly**, change, for a feminist poststructuralist, would be in the form of **awareness or consciousness**. On this level I wanted the women to become conscious of the social construction of identity, including gender identity. I wanted to shift their awareness of self from that of a humanist common-sense view to a feminist poststructuralist view - to an awareness of multiple selves, multiple identities. I also wanted them to become aware of **a writing self** or selves, rather than thinking that in order to write they had to discover, or uncover, their inner 'true' selves.

The design of the workshops and the use of the exercises in each workshop have been explained in some detail in the above sections. In examples from participants writing and excerpts from their interviews there is evidence of this awareness of "the politics of multiple identities" (Keating, 1996:13).

For example, one participant said in her interview:
"What I liked was the sense that the writing self could be all sorts of things. There is a sense that you can be inconsistent. I remember in translating that Welsh poem, I moved into a kind of medieval self, and that could be my writing self for now, and then I could leap away into something utterly different. It's like putting on dresses, trying on dresses, that one I can think ooh yes ooh yes, now we can take that one off and now we put this one on.

The following section from this particular participant's 'death' poem also powerfully reflected an awareness of selves:

*This, then, is undeath - the glassy treacherous slope
 featureless impermeable
 The droplets of me sliding, separating,
 resisting inevitable extinction.
 Each tautly surfaced, intent, absolute,
 a million me's, snail tracks of the self
 oozing down the flat unfeatured dimensionless plane
 of a mirror's surface.*

Secondly, I expected a change in the women's relationships to their writing to happen through a combination of an awareness of their writing selves, through the actual activity of writing and the affirmation that sharing their writing would give.

In the first and the last workshops, I asked participants to do a five minute free-writing entitled 'Dear Anne, how I feel about my writing is ...' Some of the differences between how they felt about their writing at the beginning and then at the end, are significant. The following examples illustrate some of the changes.

(i)

First day 'Dear Anne':

How I feel about my writing is a very mixed up affair. The few times I have tried to write down something, usually late at night, nothing turns out as I planned.

Last day 'Dear Anne':

I still feel insecure about my writing ability. But I think that the series of workshops have helped to show me that I can actually write about anything I choose to. I might struggle, but clustering helps to get me started, and the final product can always be edited.

(ii)

First day 'Dear Anne':

My feeling about my writing is that I am really what the stereotype says - academic and so uncreative. Anxiety overcomes the will to write. I mistrust my words - and everyone else's. I hate my writing. I hate it when I'm pretending to be 'creative', I hate the apparent smoothness of the sentences when I am being academic.

Last day 'Dear Anne':

I'm a lot more erratic, less cautious, more bold. I don't always predict disaster - and find it. I know I don't want to be a writer, but I want to write. I need a writing group to work with.

Responses to interview questions related to their feeling about their writing also revealed awareness of writing selves, as illustrated in the following extracts:

(i)

"I think that the question of whether it is fictive experience or whether it is real experience becomes irrelevant. For me the only emotional self I have is the sense of the source and it's me, it's my hand that writes, and anything that writes is me. I don't think that everything that I do is me, and I don't think that it is my business as a writer to figure out what is me and not me."

(ii)

"I don't see myself as a writer, but I've begun to see myself as somebody who can write. The experience in this workshop has made me think that writing is something very important to me that I should actually do more of.

The writing that I want to do has to do with seeing what comes out when I sit down to write... your own voice is a surprise."

Thirdly, I hoped to effect a change in their writing. I hoped that their writing would become more 'feminine', that is, more free, more fluid, more playful, more confident, more metaphoric, more like the examples of what they had said writing with 'voice' was.

This is a difficult area because there is no way to 'measure' this change. It is only by looking for thread elements in their writing, by looking at their

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writing from the later workshops in relation to the earlier ones, and by hearing their own reflection on whether their writing changed, that I, and the reader, will be able to assess whether there was change on this level.

In the interviews, I asked the question of each person, "Do you think your writing changed during the workshops, and if so in what way?" Here are some of the responses:

(i)

I think I've become bolder... You see, I can't think about the writing, I think it's not the writing that changes, it's the way I think that changes, because I am not aware of writing when I write, I just put down on paper what comes into my head. So if the words change, if they do become more lyrical or whatever, it's because my thinking probably is more detailed. And I do think probably bolder. In the first workshop I was not sure where I was going to be allowed to go, by the third, and especially over the weekend, we were given a free rein, and I started to think more boldly and more authoritatively. And that means that I write differently.

(ii)

Yes, I'm trying to think in what way. I don't know whether the writing changed or whether my sense of the writing changed. But in a sense it did create a writing persona. Ja, it certainly changed but I think it was an ongoing thing where I learned that I really did have permission to write and that I was allowed to play. I think it is too easy to say now I have more confidence, but in a sense I have a clearer outline, a kind of shape in space.

(iii)

I've become more confident, most definitely. I felt like I was a bit stuck, but with more workshops I felt less inhibited, more adventurous...

These three aspects of change informed the design of the series as a whole, as well as the individual exercises in individual workshops.

I wanted overall to create a writing scene which would go some way towards enabling the participants to write what Cixous (1993:69) calls 'the *imund* book':

If we are in joy and in love with writing, we should try to write the *imund* book. The *imund* book deals with things, birds, and words that are forbidden by Those He. It is the book written with us aboard, though not with us at the steering wheel. It is the book that makes us experience a kind of dying, that drops the self, the speculating self, the speculating clever "I". The book that takes life and language by the roots.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

"There is no 'conclusion' to be found in writing ..." (Helene Cixous)

In my introduction I stated that my plan was to explore what a feminist poststructuralist approach would mean to the teaching of writing, and to argue why this approach is particularly relevant and appropriate for women participants.

In this conclusion, I attempt to:

- * pull together what I see as the essential ingredients of a feminist poststructuralist approach to writing in terms of the theoretical framework and after reflection on the design and outcome of the practical research;
- * comment on the generalisability of this research study to, for example, other groups, other writing scenes;
- * reflect on the nature of the writing scene for women as created in the research by this feminist poststructuralist approach, and what this might imply about the nature of writing;
- * complete the personal narrative started in the introduction, and thus bring 'the story' up to date.

1. The essential ingredients of a feminist poststructuralist approach to writing.

I offer this summary as a pulling-together of the theory and praxis of the research, and as a checklist for teachers of writing (perhaps against which to critique their teaching).

A feminist poststructuralist approach to teaching writing is:

- a) one in which the participants are made aware of the social practice of writing - that is, one which explores issues of language, textuality and cultural production; challenges common sense assumptions of writing as self expression; and looks at the practice and ideas of writing;
- b) one in which core concepts of feminist poststructuralist theory (for example, notions of 'self', 'language' and 'change') form the basis in the design and running of the workshops;
- c) one which acknowledges and makes explicit the gendered nature of human experience;
- d) one in which the teaching methodology is participatory and empowering;
- e) one in which a 'writing scene' is created which validates women's experience and writing.

2. Generalisability

As described in chapter 3 (methodology), the research group in this project had certain limitations (although attempts were made to select as broad a group as possible). However, I think it is important to consider how these workshops would need to be adapted for other groups - in particular, groups in which there were male participants; groups where the educational and English competence levels were much lower; and groups that had different time/venue constraints.

I offer the following suggestions:

a) Groups which include male participants:

I believe that the workshops are applicable to male participants. Peim (1993:8), as a poststructuralist theorist, claims that teaching writing as social practice "means addressing more fully and more centrally issues of race, class and gender, issues in relation to culture and democracy, concerning, among other things, language differences and power". These issues can and need to be addressed for 'students' of all races, classes, genders. The feminist lens would ensure that gender differences are not left out of this approach.

Furthermore, if we see 'feminine writing' as having the characteristics aspired to by many of the process writing teachers, their 'feminine writing' would be an aim of both women and men.

It must be acknowledged, however, that there would certainly be a difference in the writing scene if men were part of the group. Because of the power

imbalances in society, the presence of men in a group would in all probability affect the comfort/freedom level of the women in the group. Here are some interview comments from participants, which indicate that including male participants would have a significant impact on the process:

"It [the all women group] did allow us to think about ourselves as women, rather than the unmarked male writer, without ourselves having to be consciously female, I think we were allowed to be female, which I liked."

"The workshops recognised that as a group of women, regardless of who we were or where we came from, we were not as free to say what we wanted to say in the world, and they set about trying to do something about that silence."

b) Groups where the education and English competence levels were not as high

As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the research group I selected was predominantly one in which there was a high level of education and competence in English. The few participants who did not have the high formal educational qualifications, were competent in English.

In groups where English is very much a second language and formal education is limited, much of the overt theory would be likely to be obscure and possibly intimidating.

In such a group I would recommend that the handouts be omitted. In the design of the workshops, I

deliberately attempted to place the formal/explicit theory in the hand-outs, so that the workshops could work on an experiential level where any theory was implicit. I therefore anticipate that the workshops would accommodate a lower level of formal education or competency in English, but this is a claim which cannot be substantiated without further research by another researcher interested in the generalisability and extent of the approach.

c) Groups with different time/venue constraints

As explained in the methodology, the time structure of the workshops was arrived at by a process of group discussion and consensus. Where at all possible, it is important for the process to accommodate participants' different commitments and preferences. For example, many extra-mural courses are held at times which might be inappropriate and inaccessible for women, and this in itself might be a factor in the marginalisation of women.

I attempted to allow for adaptability in time structure, by structuring the workshops as 10 x three hour sessions (total 30 hours). As such they can be adjusted to suit different group requirements - for example, the course could be integrated within a formal education curriculum; and in an informal setting, it could be run as one (three hour) workshop per month over 10 months, or as a one week workshop (5 consecutive days).

3. The nature of the writing scene for women

The writing as self expression approach works on the assumption of the writer as a separate, unique, individual. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation, the emphasis for the humanist is on the autonomy of the individual, distinct from society and free to express her- or himself in unique ways. This picture of the 'writer' is well described by Battersby (1994) as the Romantic 'Real Artist' who lives an authentic, self-centred and bohemian life.

Feminist poststructuralists such as Lurie (1991), challenge this picture and writing scene. Lurie (1991:101) argues for "the possibility of a different relation between reader, writer and text altogether." According to her, we need to review the writing scene which focuses on an individual writer creating an individual text, and which ignores the practical and political context in which such writing is actually produced and consumed. She claims that this scene does not acknowledge the wider contexts in which women read and talk about writing.

Lurie (1991:101) describes these wider contexts as scenes in which "women have worked together collectively, either outside, or in a deliberate problematized relation to, the traditional individualist ethos of artistic work". She claims that women's writing is read by women in networks rather than as individual, isolated consumers. She offers an analysis of women's writing groups as an example of the change in the conditions of production and reception. This analysis, Lurie

(1991:102) claims, employs a method of literary analysis "where the unit of analysis is neither the text nor the writer, nor even the reader, but the social relations of representation to which the actions of individuals are articulated and which gives them form, determination and meaning".

Of particular interest to me in my research is Lurie's claim that this view of women's writing workshops implies and helps to construct a particular view of both writing and authorship, and what it means to be a writer. She points to writing as a 'collaborative activity'.

4. Personal narrative

Finally, I would like to return to the personal (autobiographical) narrative with which this dissertation started. It paused where I registered for this degree and chose this particular research topic. In between then and now, I have completed the one year course work and this last year of practical research and the writing up of this dissertation.

The questions I now want to ask myself are - to what point in my story as a teacher of writing has this brought me? Do I now call myself a feminist poststructuralist teacher of writing? Am I convinced that this approach is the 'best' and perhaps the 'only' approach to teaching writing - to women? And, having reached this point, what new 'theory windows' has the exploration opened?

I did succeed in clarifying for myself the theoretical bases of the approaches (writing as

self-expression, writing as social practice), and exploring an approach that was based on feminist poststructuralist concepts. From this, I believe the most effective way to teach creative writing to women must incorporate a basic process writing approach (which I can now theorize into being a way to teach 'feminine writing') and should also include the essential ingredients of a feminist poststructuralist approach, as summarised in my checklist. Without those essential ingredients, I believe, women participants are likely to be marginalised.

I end by asking myself a final question - do I see my research as feminist advocacy research? In Lather's words, did I "consciously use my research to help participants understand and change their situations"? I would answer that the research workshops did so by creating a writing scene in which women were able to claim an identity as 'writer', even if only tentatively. As one participant said:

"I can say that I now see myself as a writer, but ... I'd say it softly."

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APPENDIX A

WORKSHOP OUTLINES

Workshop # 1

1. Warm-up: [** Warm-ups done by different member of group each time*]
eg. Push-pull : Participants move around room to music, find a partner and join hands. When facilitator says 'pull', they lean away and pull on hands, and then 'push'. They then find another pair, in group of four 'pull' and 'push', and so on until whole group standing in a circle holding hands and 'pull' and 'push'. Can then do a fun name/introduction game. [15mins]
 2. Writers' Bingo Each participant gets 'Bingo' sheet. Aim is to get all blocks signed by other people in the fastest time, shout bingo and sit down. [15mins]
 3. Free-writing Introduction to free-writing (Appendix C, no.1). Prepare two sheets of paper with carbon in between. Participants free-write with knitting needles on top sheet, starting with "How I feel about my writing is..." They take out one word/image/phrase and write on a slip of paper for use later. [15mins]
 4. 'Bad'writing Drama In groups of 3, participants tell each other what is the worst judgement of their writing that they fear from readers/listeners. Then as small group, they improvise a (silent) 'scene' to show the rest of the group. [20mins]
 5. 'Voice' in writing Participants divide page in half, on left hand side they list characteristics of 'writing without voice'. On right hand side, they list characteristics of 'writing with voice'. They write 5 of these on separate slips of paper, and stick these on wall. [15mins]
- B R E A K [20mins]

6. **Clustering** Introduction of technique (Appendix C, no.2). Participants cluster around three word - 'voice', 'girl' and the word selected from exercise 3. They write down dominant impression, cluster that, and then write down 2 statements. Then they free-write for 5-10 minutes. [30mins]
7. **Make 'poem'** Participants take 10 words/phrases they like from all the writing done, and write each on separate slip of paper. They put all slips in an envelope. The envelopes are put in a hat, shuffled, and each participant chooses an envelope from the hat. They then make 'a poem' with the words in the envelope, trying to use all and trying not to add any extra. [20mins]
8. **Reading to group** Each participant reads the constructed 'poem' out loud. Others in group listen and rate from 1-10 for 'voice'. [30mins]
- [Total 3 hours]
-

Workshop # 2

1. **Warm-up** In circle, each participant offers a stretch movement for group to copy. [10mins]
 2. **Identity game** Facilitator sticks wrong name tags on each person. Then she sticks 5-6 pre-prepared labels on each person (using fixed identity categories such as young/black/lesbian, occupations, personality characteristics, religions, roles - such as wife/aunt etc. Participants fetch their names, and then negotiates with others in the group for labels they want, and try to give away labels they don't. At the end, facilitator allows participants to stick unwanted labels they were left with on wall. [30mins]
 3. **Clustering** Participants cluster around 2 of the labels chosen. Then they write down dominant impression, and cluster again. Then they write 2 statements, and free-write. [20mins]
 4. **Free-writing** From the discards on the wall, participants choose a label. They pick a slip of paper from a hat with pre-prepared 'place' and 'object' on it (eg. soft toy, waiting room). They then free-write around the label, place and object. (eg. wife, soft toy, waiting room). [15mins]
- B R E A K [20mins]
5. **Turning-points** Participants write lists of 5-10 significant moments which were turning points or crossroads in their lives. They then choose 1 - give it a dominant image. [15mins]
 6. **Free-writing** Participants free-write on chosen turning point. [15mins]
 7. **Road-not-taken** Participants then consider where they might be now if they had taken another road at that turning point. They free-write using 'I' - as if it had happened. [15mins]

8. Scrambled syntax Participants take 2-3 lines from any of the writing done, and scramble for 1/3 page (see Appendix C, no.3).
[10mins]
9. Reading to group Participants read scrambled syntax writing 'with confidence'.
[30mins]
[3 hour]
-

Workshop # 3

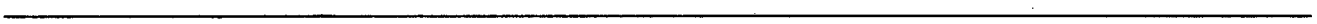
1. **Warm-up** Facilitator has again asked a participant (different one each time) to do the warm-up, from a general brief that it should match the theme of the workshop, be energising, fun and non-threatening. [10mins]
 2. **Group discussion** From hand-out (Appendix B, no 2), in groups of 3, participants discuss and decide the answers to the questions - 'Is it a woman? How do you know?' for each picture on the sheet. Each group reports back. Facilitator gives the 'answer'. Discussion on what is 'femininity'. [45mins]
 3. **Moments of being** Introduction to Virginia Woolf's term 'moments of being'. Participants choose a label from Workshop #2 which was important to them but difficult to claim. They write it down, and write a list (a page) of 'props' associated with that label. Then they list 5 'moments of being' when the metaphor of self of the chosen label applied. [30mins]
 4. **Free-writing x2** Participants free-write on the 'moment of being', using props and sensory imagery. (5mins)
Free-write again - participants carry on or start again. (10 mins) [15mins]
 5. **Edit** Participants edit free-writing for reading to the group [15mins]
- B R E A K [20mins]
6. **Reading to group** Each participant reads her edited piece in a group of 3 standing with their backs together.
 7. **Feedback from group** While each person reads, and for a few minutes after, the rest of the group writes a feeling response as feedback for her on a piece of paper, noting striking phrases/sections. When the person is finished reading, she received a feedback sheet from each person. [45mins]
- [Total 3 hours]
-

Workshop # 4

- 1. Warm-up [10mins]
 - 2. Cluster Participants cluster around word 'silence' [10mins]
 - 3. Welsh poem Facilitator gives each participant a copy of a poem in Welsh (Appendix B, hand-out 3). Each person must 'translate' the poem into English. Facilitator hints that the poem may be about 'silence'. [20mins]
 - 4. Reading to group Each participant reads her 'translation' to the group. [30mins]
 - 5. Free-writing Participants free-write on 'Am I a woman? How do I know?' Trying not to use full sentences. [15mins]
- B R E A K [20mins]

- 6. Images of another Each participant puts her name in a hat. Facilitator shuffles, and each participant picks another person's name from the hat. Then they write images/words/ phrases they associate with the person whose name they picked. They give this on piece of paper to the person concerned. [15mins]
- 7. Metaphors of self Participants free-write from the images received. [15mins]
- 8. Put together Participants put together a piece of writing from all writing done, or edit one of their free-writing pieces. [15mins]
- 9. Reading to group Each participant reads the piece of writing. [30mins]

[Total 3 hours]



Workshop # 5 (Note: Workshop # 5 & 6 best done on one day)

1. Warm-up [10mins]
 2. Autobiography Wall Facilitator pre-prepares sheets of paper on wall, marked in decades and with dates of famous women plotted on them. Each participant puts up her photographs, writes comments, notes significant dates in the appropriate place on the sheets. [30mins]
Facilitator gives time for everyone to look at the sheets, comment, exclaim. [15mins]
 3. Free-writing Participants free-write around the experience/ impressions. [10mins]
 4. Free-writing Participants free-write as above, but this time choosing a writing instruction. (See hand-out Appendix B.4, pg2). [10mins]
 5. Non-linear metaphors Facilitator comments on the linear 'metaphor of life' of the autobiography wall. Participants list alternative metaphors of life eg. spiral, tapestry. Each participant writes 3 or 4 on squares of paper and sticks them on another part of the wall. All participants get a chance to read these. [15mins]
- B R E A K [20mins]
6. Free-writing Participants free-write their thoughts about writing someone's biography/faction/ life story - what would they ask, how would they approach it etc. [10mins]
 7. Free-writing Facilitator names 'Biography' pairs. Participants list for themselves the questions, metaphor of life, thoughts about writing that person's biography. [10mins]
 8. Interview A Person A from pair interviews person B in preparation for writing her biography. [60mins]

[Total 3 hours]

Workshop # 6

1. **Interview B** Person B from pair interviews person A in preparation for writing her biography.
[30mins]
 2. **Cluster** Participants choose an image for their partner, then choose a metaphor of life, and pick from a hat a pre-prepared sensory word/image. They cluster the 3 words, write dominant impression, cluster again. They then write 2 focussing statements, and free-write.
[20mins]
 3. **Free-write** Participants write (draft, with a free-writing feeling) their partner's biography.
[60 mins]
- B R E A K
4. **Edit** Participants edit their writing for reading to group.
[20mins]
 5. **Reading to group** Each participant reads biography of her partner, while partner does feedback on slip of paper.
[30mins]
[Total 3 hours]
-

Workshop # 7

- 1. Warm-up [10mins]
- 2. Zen telegram
Meditation music playing. Using paint brush and black ink, and without looking at sheet of paper, participants make a quick feeling mark on paper. They then look at the mark and write down one word. Participants free-write from the mark and word. [20mins]
- 3. Collage
From collage material brought by everyone and put on a table, each participant makes a self-portrait/ self-representation. [45mins]
- B R E A K - participants look at other collages, but without comment. [20mins]
- 4. Free-writing
Participants free-write or cluster on the collage. [20mins]
- 5. Free-writing
Participants free-write trying to use 'feminine' writing (Appendix B, Handout 4, pg 2). [20mins]
- 6. Edit
Participants edit free-writing for reading. [15mins]
- 7. Reading to group
Each participant reads edited piece. [30mins]

[Total 3 hours]

Workshop # 8

1. Warm-up [10mins]
 2. Free-writing Participants free-write around a life metaphor/ a moment of being/ a genre for themselves. [15mins]
 3. Cluster/list From the free-writing participants choose a title/ phrase as the centre of cluster or the heading of a list and cluster/ list detail, especially sensory detail- touch, taste, smell, sound, images. [15mins]
 4. Write Participants write, with a free-writing feeling, from this list cluster. [30mins]
- B R E A K [20mins]
5. Edit for reading Participants write it out so that it is legible [30mins]
 6. Reading to group Each participant hands their legibly-written piece to the person on her left, who reads to the group. 'Author' writes her own feedback while listening. [60mins]
-

Workshop # 9

1. Warm-up

[10mins]

2. Word limber-up

Each participant writes the following: a noun on red slip, an adjective on green slip, and a verb on yellow slip (facilitator explains simply what nouns, adjectives and verbs are). Facilitator puts coloured slips in piles of red, green and yellow, shuffles the piles. Each participant takes one of each, and free-writes for ten minutes using the three words in some way.

[15mins]

3. Read to group

Each participant reads her free-writing to the group.

[30mins]

4. Card Game
Making the pack:

Facilitator hands out piles of white visiting cards. Each participant writes the following on a card:
- a first line,
- 2 character descriptions
- 2 place descriptions
- time of day/year
- a situation, starting with "In which..."
- mood or colour eg. pink happiness

Facilitator puts in pre-prepared cards:
- 2 wild cards/jokers
- 5 writing instructions (eg 'write it as erotica')
- 5 reading-to-group instructions (eg. 'read in a stage whisper').

Facilitator collects all cards, puts them in a pack, and shuffles.

[15mins]

Playing the game:

Facilitator deals 4 cards to each person, places the rest of the deck face down, with the top card facing up. Facilitator sets a buzzer for 20 mins. Game starts - each participant in turn picks up the face-up card or one from the pack and discards one from their hand to the face-up pile. (They don't have to discard, but they can't discard without first picking up).

When the buzzer goes off, each participant has to write, using ALL the cards in her hand. The aim being for participants to try to get a hand they like, while getting rid of the cards they don't. A wild card enables the participant who gets it, to do any of the following: extend the game by 10mins, stop the game immediately, make up a card of any type, or ask another player to give her a card she want from their hand.

[45mins]

5. Write from hand

When the buzzer goes, each participant must write following the instructions on each card.

[25mins]

6. Edit for reading

[10mins]

6. Read to group

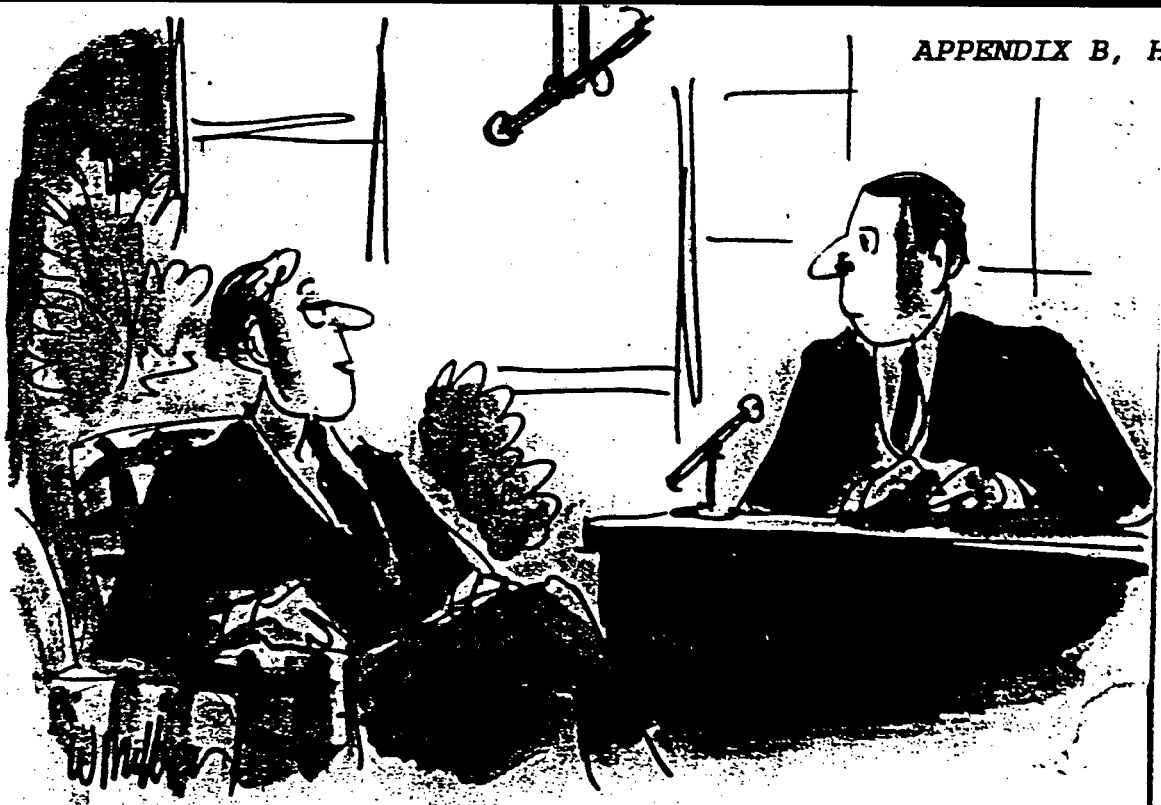
Each participant reads, following the reading instruction card if they have one.

[30mins]

[Total 3 hours]

Workshop # 10

1. **Warm-up** Facilitator puts Cixous quotes (enlarged) on wall. (See appendix B, hand-out 5). Participants read quotes, and choose one that resonates for them. [15mins]
 2. **Free-writing** Participants free-write on the chosen quote. [15mins]
 3. **Images** Facilitator plays meditation-type music. Participants listen and jot down images/ words/ phrases that come into their heads. [10mins]
 4. **Free-write/cluster** Participants free-write or cluster around the theme of 'death', while facilitator plays the music again. [15mins]
 5. **Make 'poem'** Participants put together a piece/'poem' from all the writing done in this workshop. [30mins]
 6. **Reading to group** Participants read to the group. Each participant chooses a name from hat to give feedback on paper. [30mins]
 7. **Group poems** Participants write words/phrases on three slips of paper. Facilitator collects these and puts in a hat. In groups of 3, participants take out 7 slips and make a 'group poem'. [25mins]
 8. **Preparation** Each small group prepares a presentation for the rest. [10mins]
 9. **Presentations** Each small group performs its 'group poem'. [30mins]
- [Total 3 hours]
-



"Actually, Lou, I think it was more than just my being in the right place at the right time. I think it was my being the right race, the right religion, the right sex, the right socioeconomic group, having the right accent, the right clothes, going to the right schools..."

The traditional genre of autobiography authorizes some 'identities' and not others.

"Autobiography as a genre.. the master narratives of conflict resolution and development whose hero- the overrepresented Western white male - identifies his perspective with a Gods'eye view and from that divine height sums up his life."

[Leigh Gilmore]

"Most autobiography is concerned with 'great lives', and these are almost invariably those of white middle and upper class men who have achieved success according to conventional - and thus highly political - standards."

[Liz Stanley]

"Many women write under the influence of the The Griselda Syndrome, named after Chaucer's Patient Griselda who was 'bright, competent and diligent'. Such 'good girls' employ a style that aims to please all and offend none, one which 'smiles' all the time, shows very little of a thought process but strives instead to produce a neat package tied with a ribbon."

[Joan Bolker]

"One has to claim with authority, the very grounds of identity that patriarchal ideology has denied women -

a self	a life	a story
worth	worth	worth
its history	remembering	writing and publishing"

[Leigh Gilmore]

"Writing is a transgression of boundaries, an exploration of new territory. It involves making public the events of our lives, wriggling free of the constraints of purely private and individual experiences. From a state of modest insignificance we enter a space in which we can take ourselves seriously."

[Frigga Haug]

"Writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts the right to speak rather than be spoken for."

[Leigh Gilmore]

"Autobiography is the genre of the oppressed."

[Virginia Woolf]

"Writing the self shatters the cultural hall of mirrors and breaks the silence imposed by male speech."

[Susan Friedman]

'The three identities of autobiography: the I who lived, the I in the text, and the I who writes I.'

[Leigh Gilmore]

"My power as a person, as a poet, comes from who I am. I am a particular person. The relationships I have had, where people kept me alive, helped sustain me, people whom I've sustained, give me my particular identity which is the source of my energy. Not to deal with my life in my art is to cut out the fount of my strength."

Audre Lorde]

"Identity always worries me and memory and eternity."

[Gertrude Stein]

"I'm telling you stories. Trust me."

[Jeanette Winterson]

"You are of course never yourself."

[Gertrude Stein - Everybody's Autobiography]



(6)



(7)



(8)



(9)



APPENDIX B, Handout 3

A chlodant,
rhwng pob pawen felfed,
noddant,
rhwng pob saethdrem wyllt,
fod :
dim ond dob ;
ysgafn, heini, dwl,
ansylweddol fel can adar,
bwrlwm pistyll,
neu'r ddawns gyntefig ar y ddol.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY/IDENTITY/MEMORY

Everything we remember is relevant to our identity.

What we uncover in our story-writing are patterns from the fabric of life, rather than any pre-planned coherence.

A linear model implies the absence of cycles.

What characterises all forms of feminism is the challenge of authentic self-definition.

Here authenticity would mean recognising the validity of women's experience and women's interpretation.

The autobiographical subject is produced not by experience, but by autobiography.

.. interested in the ways in which individuals construct their identity, the things that become subjectively significant to them.

Although it appears as a structuring intervention into the chaos of remembered experiences, the autobiographical method is in fact based on a theoretically untenable proposition. To view childhood and adolescence simply as causal phases of today's person is to assume that actions follow one another logically, that adult human beings are more or less contained within children, that external events produce little more than minor modifications.

... free ourselves from notions of our present superiority over our past selves.

FRIGGA HAUG

And identity is funny being yourself is funny as you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography you do not of course you do not really believe yourself why should you, you know so well so very well that it is not yourself, it could not be yourself because you cannot remember right and if you do remember right it does not sound right and of course it does not sound right because it is not right.

You are of course never yourself.

- from *Everybody's Autobiography* by Gertrude Stein

...seizing upon self-representation as a strategy to change the story of one's life.

...the act of writing autobiography constructs an identity.

What is a 'self' that it can be represented? What is autobiography that it can represent a self?

Leigh Gilmore

For the French Feminists..the acquisition of gendered identity corresponds with, and is inseparable from, the acquisition of language. The symbolic order is a gendered one

masculine language	feminine language
linear, finite	fluid, decentred
structured,	playful
rational	fragmented
unified	open-ended

Try...

- * using very short simple sentences
- * using lots and lots of adjectives and adverbs
- * repeating a phrase or line at frequent intervals
- * starting each sentence with - a swear word/but/and/no/yes/..
- * playing with word sounds - using rhyming words, using words starting with 'b' or 'd' or 's'
- * using long long sentences
- * using minute detail whenever possible
- * using scrambled syntax
- * using no full or complete sentences
- * all in the present tense
- * in the style of your favourite writer

From Helene Cixous: Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing
(1993)

To begin (writing, living) we must have death. I like the dead, they are the doorkeepers who while closing one side give way to the other. Writing, in its noblest function, is the attempt to unerase, to unearth, to find the primitive picture again, ours, the one that frightens us.

The writers I feel close to are those who play with fire, those who play seriously with their own mortality, go further, go too far, sometimes go as far as catching fire, as far as being seized by fire.

Our lives are buildings made up of lies. We have to lie to live. But to write we must try to unlie.

Thinking is trying to think the unthinkable: Thinking the thinkable is not worth the effort. Painting is trying to paint what you cannot paint and writing is writing what you cannot know before you have written: it is preknowing and not knowing, blindly, with words.

Writing is the delicate, difficult, and dangerous means of succeeding in avowing the unavowable.

Not everyone is given access to this other world where the dead and the dying live. We are not all guests of the dead, this wisest of companies. If we can't get there by dying, then let's go there by dreaming.

One has to get going. This is what writing is, starting off. It has to do with activity and passivity. This does not mean one will get there. Writing is not arriving; most of the time it's not arriving. One must go on foot, with the body. One has to go away, leave the self. How far must one not arrive in order to write, how far must one wander and wear out and have pleasure: One must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self toward the dark.

What do dreams teach us about written creation?

Sometimes it is just a small piece of paper you put on the bed that is suddenly lost. You do not know whether it is the child who faded or whether it is you who forgot the child. Sometimes it comes into the world six months old, bigger than you are, and of course it speaks better than Shakespeare. Sometimes it's a sticky little girl stuck to your leg, sometimes it's a terrible cocklike little boy running mad in a room on four cock legs. The worst is the scene when the child emerges and then disappears. These are all metaphors for the state of potential creation.

What dreams teach us: not to be afraid of not being the driver, since it is frightening, when we write, to find ourselves riding a crazy book. The book writes itself, and if by chance the person opposite should ask you what you are writing, you have nothing to say since you don't know. Yet the book is written only if it has an engine. A book that writes itself and carries you on board must have an engine even if you don't know how it works, otherwise it will break down.

These dreams: what we are when we are no longer ourselves: our survivings. Prophets of our traces, of our ultimate metamorphoses. Self-portraits of our future phantoms. Someone in us has a presentiment of future recognition. that will be me! we feel. Which is why we see them racing through the poets' nights.

Like plants, dreams have enemies, plant lice that devour them. The dream's enemy is interpretation. Interpretation wants to make the dream cough up. We must let ourselves be carried on the dream's mane and must not wake up - something all dreamers know - while the dream is dictating the world to us.

We are shaped by years and years of all kinds of experiences and education, we must travel through all sorts of places that are not necessarily pleasant to get there: our own marshes, our own mud. And yet it pays to do so. The trouble is that we are not taught that it pays, that it is beneficial. We are not taught the pain nor that in pain is hidden joy. We don't know that we can fight against ourselves, against the accumulation of mental, emotional, and biographical cliches. The general trend in writing is a huge concatenation of cliches. It is a fight one must lead against subtle enemies.

The person who doesn't tremble while crossing a border doesn't know there is a border and doesn't cast doubt on their own definition. The person who trembles while crossing a border casts doubt on their own definition, not only on their passport, not only on their driver's license but also on every aspect and form of their definition.

The immersed author necessarily comes to the point of questioning his/her limits, his/her frontiers, his/her passages, his/her alterations: wondering not only which sex but also towards which sex, in which relation to the other, which other? What is the other's sex? This is not obvious.

We must work. the earth of writing. to the point of becoming the earth. Humble work. Without reward. Except joy.

THE TECHNIQUE OF FREEWRITING

From: *Wild Mind, living the writer's life* by Natalie Goldberg

1. Keep your hand moving

When you sit down to write, whether it's for ten minutes or an hour, once you begin, don't stop. What is the purpose of this? Most of the time when we write, we mix up the editor and creator. Imagine your writing hand as the creator and the other hand as the editor. If you keep your creator hand moving, the editor can't catch up with it and lock it.

2. Lose control

Say what you want to say. Don't worry if it's correct, polite, appropriate.

3. Be specific

Not car, but Cadillac. Not fruit, but apple. Not bird, but wren.

4. Don't think

We usually live in the realm of second or third thoughts, thoughts on thoughts, rather than in the realm of first thoughts, the real way we flash on something. Stay with the first flash. Writing practice will help you contact first thoughts. Just practice and forget everything else.

5. Don't worry about punctuation, spelling, grammar

6. You are free to write the worst junk in...the world, South Africa, your neighbourhood, the universe ...

7. Go for the jugular

If something scary comes up, go for it. That's where the energy is.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF CLUSTERING

from *Writing the Natural Way* by Gabriele Lusser Rico

"To create a cluster, you begin with a nucleus word, circled, on a fresh page. Now you simply let go and begin to flow with any current of connections that come into your head. Write these down rapidly, each in its own circle, radiating outward from the center in any direction they want to go. Connect each new word or phrase with a line to the preceding circle. When something new and different strikes you, begin again at the central nucleus and radiate outward until those associations are exhausted.

As you cluster, you may experience a sense of randomness or, if you are somewhat skeptical, an uneasy sense that it isn't leading anywhere. That is your logical Sign mind wanting to get into the act to let you know how foolish you are being by not setting thoughts down in logical sequences. Trust this natural process, though. We all cluster mentally throughout our lives without knowing it; we have simply never made these clusterings visible on paper.

Since you are not responsible for any particular order of ideas or any special information, your initial anxiety will soon disappear, and in its place will be a certain playfulness. Continue to cluster, drawing lines and even arrows to associations that seem to go together, but don't dwell on what goes where. Let each association find its own place. If you momentarily run out of associations, doodle a bit by filing in arrows or making lines darker. This relaxed receptivity to ideas usually generates another spurt of associations until at some point you experience a sudden sense of what you are going to write about. At that point, simply stop clustering and begin writing. It's as easy as that.

There is no right or wrong way to cluster. It is your Design mind's shortand and it knows where it is headed, even if you don't. Trust it. It has a wisdom of its own, shaping ends you can't really evaluate yet. This wisdom has nothing to do with logic; should you try to apply logic to what you have just clustered, this sense of knowing where you're headed will be destroyed. Then you simply begin to write. The words will come; the writing takes over and writes itself."

SCRAMBLED SYNTAX

From *Writing Down the Bones* by Natalie Goldberg

Try this. Take one of your most boring pieces of writing and choose from it three or four consecutive lines or sentences and write them at the top of a blank piece of paper.

See each one of those words simply as wooden blocks, all the same size and color. No noun or verb has any more value than *the*, *a*, and. Everything is equal. Now for about a third of a page scramble them up as though you were just moving wooden blocks around. Don't try to make any sense of what you write down. Your mind will keep trying to construct something. Hold back that urge, relax, and mindlessly write down the words. You will have to repeat words to fill a third of a page.

Now, if you would like, arbitrarily put in a few periods, a question mark, maybe an exclamation mark, colons, or semicolons. Do all of this without thinking, without trying to make any sense. Just for fun.

Now read it aloud as though it were saying something. Your voice should have inflection and expression. You might try reading it in an angry voice, an exuberant, sad, whining, petulant, or demanding voice, to help you get into it.

What have we done? Our language is usually locked into a sentence syntax of subject/verb/ direct-object. We think in sentences, and the way we think is the way we see. By cracking open that syntax, we release energy and are able to see the world afresh and from a new angle.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think I invited you, in particular, to be part of the group?
2. Do you see yourself as a writer? Why (not)?
3. Do you think your writing changed in the process of the workshops? If yes, in what way?
4. If a positive change, in what way do you think you can sustain it?
5. Whose writing from the group do you most enjoy/admire? Why?
6. What meaning did/does the autobiography theme have for you?
7. Did you enjoy the Autobiography wall exercise where we put up our photographs comments etc? Why (not)?
8. Did you enjoy the card game? Why (not)?
9. If you were to do it again what would you change or like changed?
10. (Individually structured questions for each person coming out of their writing).

