THE FALLING SCHOLAR: ESSAYS IN THE OUTSIDE

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Abstract

“The Falling Scholar – Essays in the Outside” is a collection of six essays that explore the effects and affects of crisis in the contexts of academic writing.

Crisis, from the Greek root word, Krinein, means “to turn;” and is applied in a variety of historical settings that allow for the writing itself to turn towards writing. As the writer, I am always in a position of turning towards, or away from the crisis as a site of learning, or of turning the crisis into something else. These essays constitute a performance-writing that attempts to expose new possibilities in meanings and interpretations through “turning,” and for revealing the subject-in-process. The subject-in-process is an identity that flows in and out of each effort to address the crisis: whether personal, social, or political, each crisis is an event for turning towards what might not yet be written about how we understand ourselves as authors of our bodies.

These essays are invested with a writer’s vigilance, attending ceaselessly to the ways writing can refuse, deny, displace, disguise, conceal, and protect what might be revealed in writing. By locating this work in the university, I have tried to explicate the conflicts and contradictions that arise for women who are writing within the institutionalized discourses that originate in a historically misogynist vernacular. The “poetic conscience” is foregrounded as what might assist in writing outside of the traditional academic language practices, and each essay contains stories that work to disclose what is so often closed or forbidden by university writing systems. It is a writing that subjects the reader to the process of the writer’s learning to write as an intellectual and as an artist – an initial effort to perform intellectual artistry as a passionate practice, and as a performance of the passionate intellectual.
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Preface

This is not a traditional dissertation, but then I am not a traditional graduate student. What follows here is a work that exceeds the traditions of graduate work without, I hope, dismissing the importance of graduate research.

We are not all good researchers, and we need not all be good researchers in order to produce something new and intelligent from our university experiences. Since the completion of my Master’s degree I have been exploring different venues of expression, in search of the ways I might write something that could be of value to me, to the community within the university, and to the community outside the university. For these reasons I have written The Falling Scholar.

What follows are essays I have written in a chronology of experience, an historical text that makes visible the process of learning. Each essay moves towards a sense of meaning within itself, and informs the next in the same way that one step follows another. There was no way for me to predict how this would end, and there was no desire in me to know the ending before I started anyway. I was trapped, and I knew I had to write my way out. So I did. The essays here are the steps I took, one at a time, to find my way.

It is a writing about writing, and written for the pleasure of writing, with the hope that this might produce some pleasure in the reading. If I have achieved some of this in the work, then I can honestly say it has all been worth the effort.
Acknowledgements

No one writes alone, in the end. We begin alone, it always seems as though we write alone, but there are others who inspire and support us as we work. I can truthfully admit that this writing is the product of blood, sweat, and tears; however, it is also an experience with producing an alternative writing project that has been difficult to promote in the university.

For believing in my abilities as an artist, and as an intellectual, and for believing that there was something for us all to learn from this experience, I am always and most especially grateful to Dr. Anthony Clarke. He has stuck by me from the beginning, when I was writing the first raging scripts that would eventually cool down and become this book. He has read everything I’ve written with a genuine interest and has encouraged me to continue, whether I was able to articulate what I was doing, or not. His faith in me as a writer is what made this writing possible. I hope that Tony is cloned many times, and that others like him find more prominent places in the universities of the world.

Drs. Carl Leggo and Rita Irwin came into this project towards the end, and demonstrated to me a great excitement with alternative works such as this book: not only has this rescued some of my failing faith in the university, it has enabled me to proceed towards a degree I nearly quit on many times during the past few years. For their insights, artistic visions, and poetic sensibilities I am most grateful, and I have appreciated their ability to see beyond the traditions of graduate work, to see the value of alternative writing, and I am thankful they made time to participate in this process with me.

The Laboratory of Learning and Activity seminar group in the School of Education, University of Colorado, Denver was an experience of great generosity. The people there extended tremendous interest and attention to my struggles, read all my pages, however mangled with emotional confusion they might have been, and they taught me the pleasures that can accompany being read by other people. This has been a significant experience with sociality, one that I will not forget. It was there, in Denver, that I began writing this project and it is to these fine people that I owe my initial inspirations. Thank you all for being there, and for including me in your fold.

To my sister, and my mother, I owe my life, several times over. There are no words I can think of that might express what this means. But they know. You don’t have to.

I am grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for granting me the scholarship that enabled me to eat and buy cigarettes and coffee during the past four years, and I thank Dr. Mary Bryson and Dr. Suzanne de Castell for writing and supporting the original proposal, for their friendship and generosity, for providing me safe haven when I needed it, and for all the years of support and guidance.

Finally, and perhaps most of all, I wish to extend the most gracious and heartfelt thanks to Kathryn Alexander and Eva Ekeblad, for understanding the importance of what I have tried to do, and for cheering me on when I felt there was no point in continuing. They are women of spirit and sisterly affection. They are brilliant women of vision, genius, and extraordinary talents. They have inspired me a thousand different times and in a thousand different ways, and I write this for them as much as anyone.
This project is fondly dedicated to Professor Donna Varga,

my friend,

my first mentor,

and the first professor who ever took me seriously as an intellectual.
The Falling Scholar Essays in the outside

Diane Celia Hodges
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Introduction

Initially, I had decided that the essays written here would speak for themselves, and that an introduction would not only be redundant, but might inadvertently have the effect of spoiling the reading process. I know. How presumptuous. How arrogant.

It is the difference between scholarship and art, perhaps, that pushed me to think of the ways that writing can "speak for itself." I do think of these essays as works of art, as productions of intellectual art; however, it seems prudent to write something here about "intellectual art," scholarship, and the essays that follow.

Intellectual Art

I have been an artist for as long as I can recall, I have written, painted, sculpted, and would say my preferred two mediums are writing – as the most essential and organic artistic impulse - and working with wood, as the more externalized, tactile and dimensionally inventive process of artistic expression. I have never identified myself as an artist, although I have always identified myself as a writer. From an early age, I was also very much an intellectual, or a poet-philosopher, perhaps, but insatiably engaged with the difficult ideas that come from philosophy texts and theory.

Combining these passions for the work of analytical intellectualism, with writing as an art, seemed to me the most obvious combination of resources for developing an alternative process of producing new, intelligent, and provocative material for the university community. As well, my ambition has been to write for an audience that is not exclusively within the university, and includes the intellectual readers who live
and read and write outside of university practice. Again, Intellectual Art seems to me to be the most obvious vehicle for achieving this, or at least for beginning the work of developing this into an exploration of writing.

The essays here are blends of imagery, metaphor and the blur of literal and figurative languages, organizing kinds of perspectives that - as with cubist painting - analyze an object or experience from a multitude of positions, and findings ways to contain them on a two-dimensional plane.

Writing, of course, is two-dimensional in the limits of the physical parameters of the text; however, it is multi-dimensional in the contexts of the readers, their interpretations, their imaginations, with my imagery and metaphor, my explorations, the readers' responses to these, and so on. The artistic elements of this kind of writing are not limited to the inclusion of certain poems, although there are indeed poems infused with the composition and the narrative. The artistic practice involves an experimental approach to writing about and with material, ideas, and theories that are considered to be intellectual. Intellectualism, here, refers specifically to the academic traditions of theory and philosophy; however, I have not precisely analyzed the theories so much as I have relied upon these for informing the experimental process of making visible the complex process of learning.

As art, these essays attempt to represent what is involved in the process of learning as a spatial experience, not a temporal history, but an enacting of the literal process of learning in the places where learning might be taking place. As spatial, these experiences are provided as movements in mindful space, from here, to there, and back, or sideways, asides, stopping, disrupting, interrupting, always moving with the words instead of moving the words in a linear progression. There are moments of linearity in the essays, but I have also tried to write towards the differences between spatial and temporal constructs of writing, of thinking. I have tried to portray these as ways of being in the process of writing where writing is an experience with what words will do. It is not only about what I will do with words, but what words do with me, to me, for me, through me, towards the page, towards the reader, through the reading, from the writing, as the writing. It is a practice of living in the writing.
Differentiating spatial and temporal modes of thinking, or being in the world as a writer, a producer of a textual artifact, is an important part of these essays. It is impossible to dispense completely with the temporal qualities of narrative. Narrative, as a linear script, is more than a mode of literacy but is the essential structure of Western consciousness. We think of ourselves in a world that exists with three frames of reference - the past (history), the present (now) and the future (later, soon, further on). These are linear references, conducted with the reliance upon time, calendars, clocks, hours and minutes, memories, and especially in the ways language provides a past tense for speaking about what is not happening in the "now" - ...I was sick; ... at the time I did not know what this meant; and so on.

The reliance on a temporal frame provides a social web within which all Westerners can exist, we can all share in the same kinds of understandings and communication with the existence of the temporal as a Real construct. It is necessary to social coherence. Furthermore, the temporal, as a linear reference, provides us with an understanding of History that is shared as a Past, as events and experiences that have already happened, that happened "then" and can be remembered.

History and memory are intimately connected and are also part of what provide a social coherence that is essential to cultivating a shared and communicable reality. And most certainly, much of the writing here relies upon my own memories, my constructs of my history, my life, my body. It is my ceaselessly moving self who re-calls "me" as a child, as a young adult, as a person who "was" somewhere else. There is no way of removing these from who I am, and really, there is no need. These are who I am in the immediacy of the recognition. These are relations that change within and without, through, and for my self and the social world, as both social realities and social illusions. Writing writes me as much as I write writing: "being" here makes me as much as I make myself present, as I place myself "here" in this writing.

Spatial modes of thinking require a different kind of composition from traditional narrative, and while I make no claims to have succeeded in producing this in these essays, I would say that as a whole, the essays attempts to represent a spatial experience. Each essay is composed in a particular movement of learning/being/changing, and each essay follows the previous as a movement that has been slowed down long enough for me to attempt the work of composing the turn. In other words, I wrote the first essay first,
and then found myself writing the second essay, the third, the fourth and so on, allowing each previous writing to push me into a different movement in-relation to what the writing produced in my own living.

There is evidence, therefore, of change, of disruption, as much as there is a faltering and stumbling around in the words at times. These are all representations of the movements within which I have been writing, always in-relation to what the writing itself composed in my relations to the problems I have been addressing.

I cannot deny the existence of the temporal modes, I cannot claim that Time does not exist: it is a cultural tool that is co-constructed in infinite streams of a social reality that are necessarily shared. My point in differentiating time and space in the contexts of writing is to differentiate narrative and composition. It was Gertrude Stein who insisted upon this claim, and it is one that has inspired me to consider how to work with the differences as a play with words in time, and space.

Narrative is linear, and so adheres to constructs and concepts of time. There is always a beginning, a middle, and an end. Composition, on the other hand, is written in the living, living in the writing, and adheres to a ceaselessly fleeting "now" that prompts the words and the writer to move as one experience within the other.

This difference is also important, to me, for thinking about the ways we are in-relation with the world, and how we consider ourselves as relative to the world. In the uncontrollable processes of denial, refusal, and resistance, in deflecting the immediate, and rejecting the fears contained in the moments that come as a surprise (and they do, when moving within words, each moment comes as a complete surprise), there is a relation to an Other that is more easily displaced with temporal concepts.

There is always a way to make what discomforts us disappear, to render it as "gone," to make it something that never happened. But in spatial expanses, the discomforts can be moved away, out of view, perhaps, but these are not "gone" so much as re-located in the immediate space of writing... meaning, they will re-turn, the writing will re-turn to these, because there they are, with me, here, now, in this expanse of writing.
With spatial concepts, the relation to the Other is more than a "past" or a history, it is a relation that is understood as a location, a proximal experience, one that can be pushed away to a different location, or written into a different relation. This does not remove the temporal element so much as substitute the temporal conceptions that enable the past to be "gone" with spatially located relations of our lives.

The past is ceaselessly moving into our movements, of course, and it is the temporal modes of writing that permit us to deflect these as "gone;" they are no longer happening and so can be distributed into capsules of memory. Spatial relations are not so easily displaced, they are always with us, always haunting the "now" of each written experience. These can be re-located to an other relation, a location, placed far away from ourselves, but this is not to forget them so much as to make room for something more, something that might connect what has been moved in the turning; a life-line, perhaps, to cling to as we reach back towards that haunting.

The belief that memory is a recollection of past events is a powerful cultural system for maintaining the "past" as an experience that is "gone." But of course we are constantly re-scripting our memories in the present, with others, family, friends, photographs, sudden whiffs of a scent that pull the memory into the presence of consciousness. Memories do not exist in the past, but appear into the present as we re-call them into our present. They represent experiences that we perceive as no longer happening; however, one of the desires of cultivating memory is, of course, to hold onto the experiences of our lives and keep them in our present. Memories change ceaselessly as we bring them into our present and so render the "past" as a question, and it is this aspect of time that I am interested in exploring, or displacing.

Spatial thinking allows us to consider our lives as movements, always in-relation with all moving bodies. Time does not move: we move, bodies move, orbit, shift, re-locate, dis-locate, re-connect, but always in motion. Time measures these movements, but it is not time that moves us so much as it is we who enable time to accompany our essential mobilities.

Temporal thinking, as a linear construct, may be what prevents us from accessing the expanse of what is present, and reduces each moment to a "moment in time." It is not required to believe this, or accept these ideas; however, these thoughts and practices of space and time do occur in the essay on *Differance and*
Desire, and I am anticipating the difficulties that might occur in the reading. I have relied upon both narrative, as a linear story that speaks of the past, and composition, placing history upon a landscape of relations and locations that connect me within a present, or "now" that is inescapable and is moved within, as wording through space, not writing in time. The difference is a thin veil, perhaps, but one worth considering, nevertheless.

It is the intellectual in me who tackles such abstract ideas, and the artist in me who attempts to enact these as possibilities in writing something new, representing the familiar in unfamiliar scenes and through the unfamiliar terrain of experience. It constitutes an initial effort at intellectual artistry and I make no claims to have succeeded, so much as having set out a ground from which I might build further.

Scholar

The scholar, is, in the ancient definition of Latin, schola, a person who is dedicated to the pursuits of learning, and learning through curiosity, perseverance, dedication to the process of learning. It is not a description the learned person, but is a reference to the learning person. As a scholar, I have committed myself to setting out a process of learning in all its excitement and disarray, in all the worst moments and the better moments.

It is a work of identity as a processual flux, transforming, changing, turning from one place of self to another, learning how the “I” of who “I” am is a movement, not a claim-statement. Learning engages this motion of self, this movement of identity and I have tried to lay this out in a kind of landscape where the changes of my perspectives are revealed as a subject-in-process. In doing this, I have subjected the reader to the writing as much as I have subjected myself to the writing, and the reader. There have been concerns about the confessional qualities of some of the essays, not so much pertaining to the question of personal narrative, but more of a discomfort with the content of the writing.

Because I make explicit reference to addictions, depression, suicidal fantasies, for example, there is due consideration to how this might reflect unfavourably upon me as the author. It is crucial that I make two
statements pertaining to the potential perils of the confessional. First, the presence of addiction, depression, and suicidal fantasies are intimately and widely connective with the academic professionalism. While it is a preferred secret darkness reserved for each academic who suffers, I feel that for myself, I have a responsibility to be accountable for the ways these afflictions, or dis/positions, are inextricable from my experiences with the university.

Second, to exclude these aspects of my being in-relation to others would be to suggest there is an element of shame that I cannot address; and I am not ashamed of what I have written, what I have admitted to, and what I have described in the essays that follow. The most important issue that concerns this writing is the unwriting of institutional discourses; trying to untangle the institutionalized consciousness from my writing. If I begin to refuse, resist, and deny and conceal certain realities of my life, then I am responding to the institutional preference for negation and self-preservation, the privileged construction of the self-aggrandizing victory narrative in place of the squeamishness of self-reflective subjectivity. So long as shame underwrites what the academics produce in this milieu of intellectual production, change will continue to falter and fall and potential scholars will continue to falter and fall. Even now, as I write, there are scholars who are falling and denying their predicament. This is a situation that is, for me, intolerable and I have refused to endorse it in this writing.

What Follows Now

Each essay represents a place I have been in during my life and in the midst of the writing. Some of these are geographical sites - Vancouver, Denver, New Mexico, Montreal, Africa - and others are metaphorical sites, such as the Tower, the dungeons, the swamp of information, and so on. These are all locations that I move through in the writing, and each represents the locations of my writing in-relation to what writes. This is not to deflect myself as the author, but is to emphasize the difference between writing and being writing. Being writing is a process of subjecting the self to what writes, translating the complex and incomprehensible self into codes of communicative writing. I have avoided the traditional discourse,
the traditional practice of excess citation as affirmation; however, I do make reference to the writers who inspire me. These are not so plentiful as they are significant.

I am not claiming to be the only writer who has written what follows, or who has noted what follows, and am certain that much of what I have written has been written before, by others. Nevertheless, these essays occur in the places of my own learning, and have been written to display the process of learning as a question and confusion of subjectification. It is an uneven process of questioning, demanding, searching, rejecting, refusing, resisting, moving, ceaselessly moving, and I have tried to portray this as vividly as possible.

It is a work of passion, of love, and of commitment to learning, and I can only ask that the reader engage with the text as a representation of learning, not as a documentation of proof regarding what I have learned. It is a struggle to openly represent learning as a movement, as a motion that is always in-relation to other people, other words, other worlds, other places, histories, and the webs of all the intersecting spaces of partial understandings.

Et, Tu

Some of these essays succeed, others fail, and by fail I mean they transgress the acceptable boundaries of scholarship. The writing slips into midst of spaces that cannot see the location but can only attempt to write through it, as if slogging through a swamp at night.

There is an Ideal of scholarship, where the writer protects the readers from these slips, where we re-write and re-edit and re-punctuate ourselves until the product re-presents a “better” person than the one who wrote the first faltering scripts of self-indulgent despair, the crawling pages of self-pity, the writer almost whining, “why me? why me?”...

Readers don’t want to know, typically, of what transpired in those horribly strangled episodes because the writing lacks the “writerly” dignity of someone who has already learned what might have been there; where the writing soothes the experience with an authority of authorship, the humility of reflection, the gentle work
of deflection, the comfort of no longer being there, in that mess. No one wants to really know how clumsy writing can be, how disgusting depression can seem: the tradition of the Western narrative, the one that scripts our conscience, is the heroine's tale, the victorious survival, the wisdom of looking back with hindsight and painstaking revisions. This is not a fault with reading or writing, but is the dominant genre. When a writer slips out of this, she is awful, the writer is pathetic, the scripts are amateurish, because a professional would know to erase the struggles of being in the place that prompted the dreadful writing, the scholar knows to cover her tracks.

There are times in this writing, here, where I've slipped and persisted in making the dreadful appearance of this as visible as possible. I have no desire to protect you, I suppose, the reader; neither have I have desire to protect the words from what they might do in the work of immersing in places I have been and have written my way through. So, at times, you are going to hate me, or hate my writing. At times, you are going to be bored, irritated, embarrassed on my behalf, discomforted by the fumbling grammar and ruined possibility of what a careful revision might have provided.

I can only repeat that this document represents a subject-in-process, a learning-performance, and an unrefined attempt to compose a life in its best and worst moments. I have done this to reveal something not yet written in the academy. And it is like a scrawl of graffiti, really, where few might see it, fewer still might understand it, many might not even approve of it; but it speaks in public as a raw statement. It enacts itself as illegal and so illegitimate, transgressive, digressive, at times regressive. It is a movement of words stilled only by the reader's pause and the writer's committed literacy.

There is much to be learned in these pages, much to be regretted, I am sure. I have authored this writing deliberately in protest against the anticipated genre of scholarship, and in sympathies with the poetics of scholarship, even if my own poetics falter and stumble at times. It is through the visibility of our own imperfections that we reveal ourselves to be bodies who write, people who write, not already written but writing, here, in this moment of existence, however cruel or profound.
The tower

I have never thought of myself as a jumper. There always seems to be too much time between the leap and the landing, time to see a lifetime lived and ending, time to have second thoughts, too late, to find yourself falling in that decisive tumble and regretting the jump or fearing the crash... as the velocity of the body's fall increases, the mind surely slows down so that each millisecond lasts a lifetime.

When I was a child I used to think about it, jumping, but my fear then was that the fall wouldn't kill me. I would be alive and maimed, paralysed or disfigured. I used to send my Barbie dolls out the bedroom window instead, watch them slide down the roof and then twirl head over tip-toes to the ground in the backyard below. I would descend, gently, I would pretend to be that falling Barbie doll, just that easily, twirling to the earth. As I grew older, however, my imagination was increasingly more vivid and detailed. I began to imagine the fall as a heart-splitting terror, and
my body would be plummeting instead of tumbling, so I did eventually discard the viability of jumping, but I admit I have always held on to the fantasy.

I have been in many high places, atop the Eiffel Tower in Paris, hanging perilously from slippery rock edges in the Swiss Alps, swinging recklessly from chair lifts in the Quebec Laurentien mountains, perched on Rocky Mountain summits in Alberta, letting myself be buffeted by the winds on the bluffs overlooking Lake Ontario. I am drawn to these heights with a passion for the view, the exhaustion of the ascent, and the fantasy of leaping to catch a wind that might take me elsewhere; and still, jumping always passes through my thoughts when I am up there, jumping to fall, swan-diving, arms spread wide as though riding the invisible gravity that pulls me down.

I recall several months of a bleak depression in Edmonton. I walked daily to the bridge that crosses the North Saskatchewan River, and I'd stand there at the hand rail, looking over, visualising my climbing up, teetering for a moment and then leaping off to the shallow stone bed below. Up until now I have known in my heart that I never really meant to jump to my death, but up until now there has always been a way out, a better route down, up until now I have always known a way out, or through, a better trail to back-track; up until now, jumping has been more a wish to fly away than a sense of how to fall.

But now, perched here on this stone ledge, jumping doesn't seem like such a desperate idea. I have decided that if I pitch myself out backwards, I can watch the sky as I fall and I know I'm high enough here, I wouldn't survive, no concerns with living paralysed or maimed. What I haven't decided is whether I want to fall with the daylight in my eyes, or the night stars.

From here I can smell the snow in the mountains. The clouds have settled in like pillows over the peaks, I can't see it snowing but I smell it in the breeze and it tastes like air that I have breathed before, not here, but in the years within me. It rarely snows here at the tower: it only rains,
dark, low skies hover relentlessly, raining, drizzling, misting, always gray and bleary, this weather keeps the tower stones damp and cold. I thought it would be so romantic up here, but it is miserable, dank, it doesn't smell of death but it feels like a tomb.

When asked what she thought of Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein once said, "He smells of a museum." The tower smells of a dungeon. Stein was making a joke about Modernism, that Hemingway was dull, clinging to the ancients, appealing to a time passed, writing as a relic. This dungeon is a little older than 19th century Modernism, it is medieval here, archaic and ignorant. I used to think "ignorant" meant stupid, but lately I have realized it means more about willfulness, ignoring information, refusing knowledge; ignorance is purposeful, not stupid but mean.

I didn't always like Gertrude Stein, but I read her book, *An Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, and was dazzled, really, by the humour. I loved that she didn't take anything seriously, not herself, nor Alice, nor the genre of autobiographies, or even narrative. She was at play in the fields of words and I fell in love with that. And her. I've been in love with several writers - Virginia Woolf, Mary Shelley, Alice Walker, Adrienne Rich, Dionne Brand, Monique Wittig, Jamaica Kincaid, and for a while I was in love with academic writers, like Donna Haraway, Judith Butler, Elspeth Probyn, Julia Kristeva, Dorothy Smith, Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, I was even in love with Deborah Britzman, but that was more from taking a graduate seminar with her, in one of the rooms in the tower.

I was so lonely then, and Britzman was walking us through a reading of Freud's essays on *Metapsychology*¹, lovely, heady stuff, just the sort of deep-thinking I love, the kind of obtuse theory

that I adore soaking in. I suppose I fell in love with the learning, but more, I think, with Britzman's
way with spoken words. Really, for me, women with words are just the most intoxicating
experience.

Being in love with words is possibly the loneliest affection because the words can never
love me, but when I am in love with a writer it doesn't matter that the words are not returning the
affection. From the words pour ideas, and the ideas can touch me in ways that literally thrill - how
ridiculous that must seem to some, but it's true. And it isn't only women who can thrill me with
their words. I remember reading a book by the German existentialist, Martin Heidegger, in my first
year as a philosophy student, and when I grasped what he was doing with words, the play he was
engaged in, at play in the fields of words, like Stein, I experienced heart palpitations. My hands
broke out in a sweat, I trembled, (and we had not yet read Kierkegaard's aching tome, Fear and
Trembling, then, by when we did, I knew what he was describing, because I felt it when I read
Heidegger. Kierkegaard’s philosophy agonizes through the perils of faith, when we believe in
things that we don’t especially understand; when we have faith in what cannot be empirically
substantiated, but is still powerful enough to keep us held together in suspended belief. This was
my experience of reading Heidegger, where the writing was hypnotic and compelling enough to
capture both my intellect and imagination, as well as my emotions. But when asked to explain it, I
was struck with how inexpressible my understanding was, how much of it was based on a faith in
what I grasped in the language.)

The book, What is Called Thinking², is something I still cherish, like a first love in
philosophy, just as Stein is my first love in experimental writing, in the avant-garde, the outside.
When I felt myself understand Heidegger, (and it was a feeling more than a thought, a feeling of
my thoughts, perhaps,) but when I felt that moment of "getting it," my entire life changed. I was
overwhelmed with a certainty that this philosophy had to be part of children's education. Crazy, isn't it? Is it?

But that was what I believed, it was all there in Heidegger’s writing, it was in his understanding of poetry, of translation, of words, wellsprings, the depths of what could so easily be mistaken for a shallow surface. I applied immediately to a teacher education program, Early Childhood Education, and my reasons were so intellectual I was surprised they accepted me. But I believed, then, that I was holding a key to changing the primary school curriculum.

What happened during this program was I realized that to change the primary school curriculum, I would first have to change teacher education. And as I went along, through my MA Degree, I realized that to change the teacher education curriculum, I would have to change the university's traditional approach to teachers and education, and teacher education. Then I began to recognize that the problem was with the traditional concepts of Knowledge and Learning. ...Ha. Oh really. It amazes me that I never stopped, I just kept climbing the stairs, higher and higher, looking for the root of all this ignorance.

The stupidity of me, really, is there, or here, in that I was ascending to the skies, climbing up the tower, looking for the roots of this ignorance. I should have started digging, of course. But I was blinded by the tower, everyone seemed to either be climbing, or leaving, and I wanted to climb because I didn't want to leave. I was in love with the ideas and the idea of ideas, mad for theory, passionate for philosophy, and discovering a whole world of political theory, history, critical history, cultural studies, queer theory, feminism, words, genres, and more words, and oh, it was all too rich to walk away from. The saddest part of all this is that when I did finally start digging, I recognized that I had climbed too high and what I found, digging, was so tangled and gnarled I knew it would be impossible to bring these to light in the tower. The tower itself is so practiced in

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training people to bury what they dig up, you see, that really I was only unearthing my own demons.

I think you have to climb up here to realize what you're doing, and what you're doing when you're climbing is disappearing into the dungeons. It is like when I looked at some lithographs by the surrealist artist, E.M. Escher, and I saw the tower there. Just as you think you are climbing up, you find yourself actually descending, and even though you can look over the stairwell and see that you are going upwards, when you reach the top, you are really at the bottom.

Sure enough, if you climb long enough you end up lost. Me, I stopped climbing. I reached this point where I am now, here in this tower room by myself, looking out this cold window, alone, and I know I can't climb down because of the way this place is built. If I try to climb down, I'll just end up lost on those staircases and passageways and I'll be in some other strange stone room. That was when I started realizing that the way out is to jump. Or maybe I realized that the only way out, for me, is to jump. I sit on the window sill and hold onto the ledge with my hands, my back to the outside, facing the walls, thinking that all I have to do is let go, tip back over, and fall. Then I'll be outside the tower, and this insanity will finally be over.

I used to love the idea of the university, of course, that was why I went through it all, through all the courses, attended the lectures, the seminars. I performed with fascinated passion through presentations, wended my way through group projects with open enthusiasm. I wrote essays, research papers, narratives, personal stories, fictional stories; I wrote theory, I described my history with teaching, I theorized and philosophized and wrote about what I was reading, read about what I wanted to write. I climbed, stumbled, and climbed again.

I was mentored by the best, the best, really. I could have really turned this all into something great. I could have produced some sort of major research epiphany for my doctoral
dissertation, and then ingratiated my way into some university somewhere else, slipped patiently into the tenure-track and been on my way to a life in the university, be a professor.

But it all fell away. One minute I was thinking of giving lectures and grading assignments, slouched against some rich oak desk, piles of books and papers crowding me, students leaving messages for me, sorting through invitations to speak, or write, ...and the next minute I'm staring at these dungeon walls in the top of this tower, realizing it has all been a lie. It's an illusion, it's like Escher's lithographs, a trick of the eye. Donna Haraway calls it a "God-trick," where you can see everything the way it is, as though you can know everything about something by looking at it, as though you can know what you cannot see, simply because you are able to look with a history of certainties about the way things are - and really, all we can see are pieces, fragments, moments. There are no certainties, no stable truths, and we are all so easily deluded by what we want that we don't even really look half the time. We just imagine what we want, and forget to pay attention to what we're doing as we try to get to where we want to be, trying to reach for what we want. We look to see what we need, but we cannot see what we're looking at, because we're blinded by ignorance.

That is really what Freud was saying, that everything we do and say with others, or alone, is the same expression, over and over. We are driven by wants, needs, desires, most of which are almost impossible to admit to anyone, or to ourselves, and all of which are always translated into the social language of our culture. These languages are pre-scripted in ways that ensure the speakers will inhibit their desires and articulate their needs into the norms of the desired society. These languages we speak are coded for ignoring the strangled strains of actual people trying to
speak, and everyone ends up trapped in a language designed to punish us for wanting what we cannot have, and rewarding us for having what we never wanted.

This is the unspoken statement that underwrites everything human beings do, the inexpressible desire. Britzman, who guided that graduate seminar on Freudian theory, told me that the question which needs to be asked more is this: What do you want?

I wonder about that here, in my final preparations for the leap, that there is more going on than my desire to leave, but what is it? What do I want? What did I want? Why did I come all this way, only to find myself alone, cold, and perched on this ledge? I can't help but think there is something significant to the position I have taken here, with my back to the outside, facing the interior of this tower room, as if it holds something I haven't yet seen.

There are no mirrors here, not actual mirrors, but then I can see myself reflected in everything I do here, everything I have done in the past ten years, reflecting off the walls. I think if I were to look at myself in these reflections, now, I'd see a man's face staring back. Part of the transformation from student to scholar, of course, is the metamorphosis into a man - it is how we must learn to write, and think, and how we must argue, and how we must respect the authority of the rational tone. The reflection is so monstrous, it isn't me, but it is, because it is me looking. If I could scratch the tain from the back of the mirror, it would only be a piece of glass and then I could simply look through. Then all I would see is what really lies behind the reflection: these damp stone walls.

But the walls aren't simple stone, they are like the wallpaper in Charlotte Perkins-Gilman's room, in *The Yellow Wallpaper*\(^3\). Just as in her story, where she is kept in a room, forbidden to

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write by her husband, the Doctor; just as she is locked away to “rest” because she is acting as if she were mad; just as when she starts to see the women crawling in the wallpaper of her room...Just like that. Here, in this tower room, it is just like that. There are women slinking furtively around behind the stones, and I can see them scrambling like spiders within the walls here, the stones murmur with their roamings; their movements have no desperation, and the sight of these is not unsettling.

It is comforting, really, to know I am not alone, and that soon, if I don't figure some way out of here, I, too, will be one of those women skulking in behind the walls, silently scuttling from room to room, probably not really searching for an exit but more travelling in the space where the men never go - I mean, the men can't crawl behind these walls the way the women do. It isn't that they don't know how, they just don't see through walls the way we do.

I can't hear them, the women, they aren't saying anything; but every now and then out of the corner of my eye I see the stones undulate as though a wave rolled through and I know it is those women, and I think of Charlotte, another woman writer who, failing to find her exit, killed herself.

I have lots of paper, certainly, I am supposed to be writing here. At least I can write. But I have written thousands of pages that I must refuse, because I am not yet writing like a man, not yet mastering the scholar's voice, still clinging to my poetic conscience and she tells me, write your truths, it's all you can do. And I am sure that is the key, that I must write my way out, word by word, line by line, the way a spider might spin a web that will link her from one tree to the next one. I have to spin the yarn that will lead me from this window to the sky and then keep writing, suspended above the swamp of information that surrounds this place. I have to remain balanced with my words, writing, word by word, line by line, keep scripting this thread that I can travel across, like a tight-rope walker, and get myself far enough away. Perhaps I need to make it to those...
mountains. It isn't the heights, after all, that bother me: it is the tower that is killing me. If I do turn into a man, I will surely be dead, and if I stay and do what I am expected to do, if I crumble now, I will be as dead as male.

It isn't that I hate men, it must seem that way, but there is a legacy of men who control this place, and I never expected it to be so powerful - legacies, traditions - I never expected these to be so overbearing and so punishing. I have seen many men fall dead to the male, too, it is not only women who are destroyed here. But, really, many men survive it, gay or straight, and most women accept the metamorphosis, or they leave once they feel themselves changing, or they die, dead as male. How I have managed to survive this long, resisting the way I have, is a miracle, and I am still not out, I still haven't made my way out of here. I have to write it. That's what I have to do. I am already falling, after all, or I wouldn't be in this predicament. So, I have to write knowing I am falling, but not yet dead. And maybe I can script the thread that will lead me from this window to those mountains.

les tours d'ivoires

There was never a true tower sculpted from ivory, of course, but it is an expression that moves in common word-currency. The "ivory tower" is familiar as a phrase, not a place or location so much as a dismissal, a figure of speech, a trope, a reference to remote intellectualism, it is irretrievably disparaging, pejorative. The ivory tower denotes social isolation and elitism. It refers, today, almost exclusively to the university.
The phrase emerged during the 1830s, in Paris, where poets and artists represented a competing political class of opinions and protest, expressing a responsibility to comment upon, and argue against active political states, class conflict, and inequalities.

In 1837, poet, novelist and playwright Alfred de Vigny had decided to withdraw from the political and literary scene of Paris in order to spend more time editing his poems. de Vigny had pursued poetry (a genre he had identified for the "staging" of philosophical thought) in his earlier years as a writer. Perhaps too many experiences with disillusionment and disappointments had accumulated, for de Vigny lost in love, when Marie Dorval left him for an affair with George Sand. Perhaps it was the scandal of lesbianism, a mockery of his affections, or perhaps he was shamed, or embarrassed. Or perhaps he couldn't let go of his love for Marie. And he lost in friendship as well as in love, when his colleague Victor Hugo took off to enjoy the bawdy life, adopting liberal critiques of the royals and spending his time with the likes of C.A. Sainte-Beuve. It was frustration with change, perhaps, but de Vigny chose to abscond into a social and political silence, a self-imposed exile, claiming he wanted to listen more closely to his own poetic voice.

C.A. Sainte-Beuve, a famous French literary critic of the time, wrote then that de Vigny had retired to "la tour d'ivoire." The "ivory" was a reference to elitism, ivory as a rare and exotic material, and the tower as a remote and forbidding structure, an ivory tower as an ostentatious display, an excess of self-indulgence.

It is worth noting that de Vigny was relatively loyal to the literary traditions and political conservatism of the elites. Sainte-Beuve, on the other hand, was supporting the liberal and avant-garde movements in the Parisian literary community, keeping company with artists such as Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, George Sand, Honoree de Balzac, Berlioz, and others.
Sainte-Beuve consigned de Vigny to "la tour d'ivoire" as a political sneer, not an academic critique. During this time and in this place, the 1830s in Paris, political activism through the arts was part of the artist's responsibility, and the elite conservatism of the French upper class was being condemned, indeed blamed for the increase in poverty and food shortages. The riots and political mayhem of the French Revolution had erupted for the same reason - poverty, famine, and the excess of the elites - and no one was soon to forget, or quick to ignore the symptoms of a social structure that spurred the French peasants to storm the Bastille some thirty years prior. It was the artists, musicians, poets, and intellectuals of Paris - not the academics - who were willing to publicly assault the legacies of conservatism that had worked to protect the noble classes at the expense of the poor.

The ivory tower, penned in Sainte-Beuve's critique of de Vigny's silence, represented a site of political seclusion when faced with the waves of change. The tower as a solitary structure, detached from society, the city. A tower carved from the rare and priceless tusks of an exotic beast, the pretentiousness of excess that characterized elitism and royalism.

Today, the ivory tower almost exclusively describes the university, but in the 1830s, there were only a few universities scattered through Germany, France, Scotland and Britain. Scarce, and few, these universities certainly did not participate in the social climates of change or invention, but instead functioned to preserve the traditions of literacy. Degrees and certification meant little outside the institution who issued them (except in medicine) and there were no specific or separate disciplines of compartmentalized knowledge, no distinct faculties within which specializations could be cultivated. The universities of the early 1800s were monuments to their own legacy, exclusively invested in preserving the languages, Latin, Greek, German, and the books of men, of theology, philosophy, Greek poetry.
Outside the university, however, there was an increasing public fascination with physics, chemistry, science, engineering, literature, art, industrial design, politics, history, theory, practice - and all represented a continuum of knowledge, much of which was pursued by poets, the working class, and middle class women. Indeed Charles Babbage, inventor of the first calculating machines, (The Analytical Machine and the Difference Engine) remarked publicly that women were best suited for the pursuit of mathematics, and so when Lord Byron's daughter, Ada Lovelace, provided Babbage with the initial mathematical formulas for coding his calculating machines, he was perfectly pleased. Ada herself was tutored by Margaret Sommerville, another mathematical genius of this era. There were gender lines which prohibited women from many activities, but mathematics was not yet one of them.

Really, what is quite remarkable about this time is the public pursuit of all things scientific. More remarkable is how the universities wanted nothing to do with this hands-on science. It was utterly scandalous that Janet Mercer should write *Conversations in Chemistry More Especially for the Female Sex*, or that the poets Shelley and Coleridge should be conducting experiments with electricity, and writing sonnets about quantum physics. Coleridge, inspired by the writings of Kant, musing on the thoughts of energy, theorized the emergent principle on the Conservation of Energy.

John Dalton, a shepherd and school teacher, theorized the fluidity and unity of matter, where the fundamental principles of quantum mechanics were evidenced in his observations of mountain weather systems. Michael Faraday, who would eventually develop the science of thermodynamics, was then a working class book binder. He read Mercer's book and found it to be such a revelation that he abandoned his job to apprentice with British scientist, Humphrey Davy. Davy, meanwhile, had appealed to the British government for the funds to set up an institute where
scientific and mechanical explorations could be cultivated. Davy began to encourage the work of writing, publishing, and speaking publicly about these new interests and discoveries in science.

Meanwhile, for the tradition of academic knowledge, science and technology were kinds of practical anarchy in relation to revered activities of higher education. The irony is that today the traditional university cannot get enough science, there is no such thing as "too much science," and the arts are petty, self-indulgent, at times disgraceful, and poetry is infantile literacy. The great realities and important discoveries, the well-paved road to progress now lies in the ways research and inquiry appeal to scientific rigour. Everything empirical is everything measurable. The world is an infinite field of data. Technology is the precious sister of science, and everywhere universities are perfectly and madly in love with science and technology. Strange turns of traditions. Strange turns indeed.

The birth of the Tower

I have started reading Paul Johnson's *The Birth of the Modern* (and that title makes me just a little queasy. The birth of THE modern, as though this little creature is a historical product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment literally fucking, and getting Europe pregnant with the baby-Modern. But I digress.)

The tower was never birthed in the way that Dr. Frankenstein created his monster, or in the way a book is written, or a baby is born. The tower never began as an originary event; actually, it is perhaps impossible to identify any event as an originary moment. Every relation is connected to another relation, and another, and another, and there is no real beginning to anything (which is why,

\[ See full citation in "References" \]
perhaps, many of us feel that we are always beginning, over and over again, beginning and beginning, without any origin within which to say where we started). Still, for Johnson’s purposes, “the birth of the modern” is a metaphor for starting somewhere, for asking ourselves, where did this all start?

_The Birth of the Modern_ is a very long story, and to Johnson's credit, he doesn't claim to know where the "modern" started, but looks at the world's recorded events within a fifteen-year period (1815-1830), and draws the lines where global relations connected in ways that indicate the shifts in thinking, language, and activity, shifts where something more modern began to emerge. In all of this, I found the smaller story about how universities could come to be associated with ivory towers and science. This is a small story, really, compared to Johnson's epic, just a story about some people in England and France.

I picked up Johnson's massive tome because I had been bothered for some time about the brief rise and fall of "postmodernism." The word (verbiage, the currency of those who are impatient with words) had been massaged into everything avant-garde in the university, but my familiarity with "modernism," as a history that had been exceeded, has been lacking. So, I started trying to understand modernism, that I might better understand why postmodernism spurted in and out of the academic regime like so much (or, really, so little) premature ejaculation. Can there be postmature ejaculation? Perhaps that is what follows the postmodern. But again, tsk. I digress.

What I found in Johnson's stories was a social history of universities, the history of scientific publishing, and a curious relation of poets and the working class to physics, thermodynamics and chemistry.

For example, the idea of publishing research findings developed out of a Humphrey Davy's desire for a collective of information, and his own sense of competitiveness. Owning ideas emerges
here, in the push to publish. Securing the funding needed to keep the institutes in operation required
that the sciences being practiced produce artifacts of value – lamps, machines, technologies –
anything that promised to be commercially valuable had to be protected by patents. At the same
time, anything that was invented or discovered or produced needed to be written about so that an
institute could make claims to the “first” of anything new, and so that others could build on the
initial work. Ownership of ideas, and artifacts, became one in the same thing.

Many of these inventors and experimenters were working class, and self-educated readers.
The structure of a research article was developed in response to a need to make scientific
discoveries public, and to accommodate those inventors who were marginally literate. As a
template for writing, the structure breaks down as follows.

“Introduction:” (writing a brief outline that informs the reader about what they are about to
read; that is, tell the beginning, middle and end in the introduction.)

This is followed by the relations that inform the current object of interest, who’s
experiments, whose hypothesis is being tested, or re-tested, or negated, or built upon, who’s claims
are being questioned, or substantiated, what are the sources that prompted the writer to conduct the
present experiment, and so on. Today this is commonly referred to as a “Literature Review,” and
amounts to the same practice of referring to all the claims that have been made as relations to the
work being presented.

At this point, the writer announces what the experimental question amounts to, and
describes the methodology used to explore the truth or falseness of the hypothesis being advanced.
The method, (“Methodology”) traditionally, was required in order for other scientists to repeat the
experiment. Repeatable experiments are considered True tests; that is, if the same results can be
reproduced by anyone, using the same methods as described in the writing, then the texts are True. The results are more easily understood as True results.

Following the method, a description of the experiment is written, and refers exclusively to the actual instrumentation and calculation, an analysis of the results of the method; hence, the section called “Results” is purely technical.

Then, there is the “Discussion.” In this section, the author refers back to the original question, the original hypothesis, and whether or not the results confirm or negate the hypothesis.

In the “Conclusion,” the Introduction is repeated.

My first exposure to this style of writing was described to me as a simple formula: “Tell ‘em what you’re going to say; say it; tell ‘em what you just said.” This is still the traditional scientific structure for writing, and emerged at the time that these novice scientists were trying to write about their findings. There are several reasons for this, but most prominent was the need for a firm structure of writing that would assist the less literate in organizing their thoughts into written language. As well, a standardized formula for writing meant that reading was simplified. As every science publication would conform to the same formula, it became easier to read the manuscript as a blueprint for scientific information.

At this time, when Davy was working hard to standardize a science community, there were many practices that had been informed with the philosophy of Kant, and poetry. Odd mixtures of philosophical musings on matter and the immaterial, or spiritual, were fused into rather queer methods of poetic reasoning. Writing about these, nevertheless, needed to be functional. It was a practice designed for claim-making. Ownership and control of ideas were needed for government funding, and the funding was needed for building more institutes for science and engineering, since the universities were content to shun the dirty work of all things mechanical. Indeed, today in
Europe there are still large differences between science institutes and universities, where the two institutions are maintained as different kinds of activity.

What is worth thinking about, again, is the quality of writing. If most of these 19th century apprenticing would-be, or wanna-be scientists were clumsy with literacy, who were they imitating in order to write about their experiments? Mostly, each other. The standards of scientific discourse begin here, with marginal literates writing about discoveries made while mixing potions and wiring contraptions in the wood sheds. Here is where the discourse, or institutional literacy emerged as a standard for academic and scientific writing. Here is where jargon and jingoism blended into the factual document, the Truth-text upon which all subsequent writings would of necessity refer. Here is where the standards of research protocols became standardized in both the text and the institutional practice.

There is such a colossal difference between research in chemistry, thermodynamics, or the biological sciences, and what are called the social sciences. There is, really, nothing similar between mathematical sciences and social sciences, nothing that compares in the formalities of replicating laboratory experiments with social experiments. Nevertheless, the standards of science proved formidable in establishing irrefutable Truths about the real world, and in order for anyone to gain legitimate status in the institution, science standards and protocols were an essential feature of the practice.

This is what happened to psychology, how it became the study of human behaviours as a way to make assumptions, or guesses, really, about the human mind. To study the human mind scientifically, empirical experimentation was required. So, theories about the mind drifted from philosophers into the hands of empiricists, behavioural scientists who found ways to conduct experiments with people as subjects (as well as mice) and with all the protocols of science engaged.
The writing-up of these, as legitimate science, followed all the standards of science writing, and the beginning of social science discourse arrived for the first time in the tower. The social sciences developed in this environment of proofs and measurement, tools and rigour, and reproducible experiments.

This is, of course, a whole other history, one that also lacks a definitive source or originary event. In attempting to understand how it is that science has come to organize so many disciplines of study in the universities, however, certainly sociology and psychology mark the first efforts to apply a particular scientific practice in the studies of social phenomena.

Initial scientific methodologies had been designed for studying what were considered to be non-human phenomena, in areas such as chemistry, physics, astronomy, engineering, mechanics, mathematics and so on. The social, and decidedly human realms of institutional-based inquiry developed out of the initially naïve attempts at psychology (through phrenology, for example, and the study of cranial exteriors) and into Marxist and Freudian constructs, where class identified a social group and psychic structures identified psychology processes. In order for these studies of humans as phenomena to be conducted in scientific contexts, however, there was a necessity for empirical data, or, observable behaviours. As such, the empirical, or observable processes of social and psychological activity were quickly foregrounded as most important precisely because these were measurable, more easily subject to classification systems and instrumentation-based inquiry, as well as statistical analysis.

Psychoanalysis quickly fell out of favour because it could not be a science by the definitions of scientific practice. Psychology developed rapidly into the practice of studying observable human behaviour in contexts of testing human responses and reactions to controlled events and phenomena, and sociology was an analysis of groups of humans who could be classified in some
similar way, by class, or race, or activity. From these practices of sociology and psychology emerged Social Psychology, a science that proposed to observe group behaviour as opposed to individual behaviours, to reveal the psychological processes at work in social contexts.

At around this same time, in the early 20th century, Education had developed from a philosophy to a practice, and from a practice to a science. Education was both a social process (groups of people) and a site of individual activity (human behaviours in contexts of testing.) As well, Education conformed to the terms of social psychology, since it involved groups of people who shared a similar practice, or class, or age-group, or location (schools). Thus, Education found itself borrowing from sociology, psychology, social psychology, philosophy, and all in the institutionalized discourses of science as the method for explanation. Voila. Education became one of what were and are still identified as The Social Sciences.

Social science has always needed the "science" to be considered legitimate, so the development of better surveys and better questionnaires became its own field of study. Anthropology needed better methods, more rigour, to make claims about other cultures, and the problem of how people are immeasurable was never regarded as a barrier, but as a problem to be solved. It still is, today, where people - including the researchers themselves - are not regarded as human beings in a chaotic world, but are reduced to micro-communities, and learning about these people are problems to be solved, not obstacles to the research.

The social sciences - education, geography, history, sociology, psychology, anthropology - have tended to rely upon the same discourse and writing structures that were devised to assist those 19th century self-taught inventors and scientists how to communicate their knowledge. These scripts, these genres of written communication are still applied to the structure of journal articles for the contemporary academic. Most important to my writing here is the question of where the
“social” is in social science, and how the social is communicated to the social realms about which it is so fascinated. It is a rhetorical question, really, since there is no identifiable “social” in the social sciences, just as there is no interest in communicating with the social realms that exist outside the university walls.

Of course, while it seems that there is no such thing as a "social" in the social sciences, there is certainly a science. Science, above all else, is not about writing, or human communication, or literacy: it is about research. Furthermore, the ideal research project concludes with directions for more research...more research. The university produces more research than it produces journals that can publish it all, thus more journals are developed to accommodate the excess research. And so on it goes, with greater confusion and wider spaces and gaps between a purpose and a project.

These are the sorts of stories that have pushed me to this window. These histories and legacies are what press upon me. These are weights I have never expected to carry in my university work and in my writing here, in the university. Just knowing these stories is a pressure that forces me to think in desperate disillusionment: what did I want? I came here to make a difference, or maybe I came here because I really was in love with the romance of the ivory tower. But as I learned about it, moved through it, I realized it was all an elaborate euphemism for a psychiatric institution, a place for disturbed psyches to thrive, a site where sociopaths can hide and gain status and tenure.

I started falling. I’ve seen how many women die here (dead as male) just to get through this, and the whole romance falls away and all that is left are these cold wet stones, the isolation, the solitude, the futility. It is the futility that pushes me down, out, how I recognize myself as a falling scholar, I mean. And I am falling, certainly.
How can I pursue something that would never matter to anyone but the ghosts and sad dreamers who wander these halls? How can I ever just cast aside what I know, and pretend that I am important here?

The teaching matters in the tower, that is what I am told by those who still love to teach. Still, the teaching has been something I dodged because I have been so afraid of the metamorphosis, and I know the minute I adopt just one piece of activity as my own, I will begin to transform and I am not ready for that, not yet. I have to be able to get out; and if I can get out of the tower, maybe I can still salvage something from these past ten years. But teaching, oh. That's a whole other complex set of problems. It belongs in Education, and Education, in the tower, is a whole other set of weights and illusions, pressures and lies, histories and legacies that make no sense to me, and I know - my god - I know it might just be me: maybe everything here is completely normal and I am the one that is crazy, and how I got this far is anyone's guess. Maybe now the truths are seeping through my pores, and maybe I was never meant to be in Education.

But I'm not a stupid woman. I do think Education in the tower is something else. It is what they say, on the surface, it is what they do, they teach, they teach Education, they teach students how to be teachers, and they teach teachers how to master a graduate degree; they teach teachers how to muscle through the doctoral programs. I have also seen many women leave the graduate program before completing the degree because they cannot succumb to the burdens of these histories and legacies. I have seen many others simply fold into the structure, dead as male, absorbing it all into their bodies until the histories and legacies are inside of them. There are the women who crawl behind the stones, and there are women who find themselves swimming desperately in the swamp, trying to get out, or through, trying not to get sucked back in. There are
women who give up and finish their degree the same way someone might have to eat worms, just do it and get it over with, as though the learning is punishment, as though the knowledge is what is killing them. There are the women who get sick, depressed, physically ill, the women who quit, who leave, women who fall all the way down and don’t get up again.

The bodies who fall or get lost or disappear don’t matter to those who do Education in the tower. I don’t understand why it’s done the way it’s done, why it is never questioned in a way that asks about the killings and deaths, the abandoned attempts, the illnesses, the drowning women. It’s never a question of how it is killing us, but always a question about itself. Education asking itself about Education, but not about the institution where Education is done. It is never a question about the human beings who are here in the tower. It asks about itself as though it is not even in the tower, but somewhere else, out there, in the world outside this tower. It’s a disturbing paradox, for me, it’s like a sociopath producing her own analysis of the social and then giving it to the institution as a method for improving health care.

What is Education For?

I have studied in Education for the past ten years, and it was only in this past year, the final year of my doctoral degree, that I realized how literally Education is considered to be a social science. Education considers itself to be a social science.

At the doctoral level, in Education, a graduate student is expected to conduct a social science research project and use this research for developing a dissertation. The dissertation, upon acceptance, is ideally condensed into a journal article. There are, approximately, 170 million journal articles published in Education. Every one of them refers to a particular and highly
specialized area of interest: early childhood education, teacher education, teacher-as-researcher, education and technology, educational philosophy, and educational psychology; special education, sociology of education, educational theory, feminist teaching, radical teaching, college teaching.

There are journals focused exclusively on methodologies: quantitative research, measurement systems, statistical tricks and variable manipulations (manipulate those variables!). Qualitative research produces different articles on efforts such as action research, participatory research, ethnographic research, narrative research, analytical research, and so on. Then there are the journals that focus on school subjects - Math Teacher, English Teacher, Teacher of Second Languages, Science Teacher, Computer Teacher, and Social Studies Teacher, Physical Education Teacher, The Annals of School Principals.

There are journals on curriculum, instruction, curriculum-and-instruction, curriculum theory, instructional practice, curriculum practice, theory and practice, theory of practice, and so on. And on. And on.

Most of these publish research articles. Some are reflective pieces, some are based on experience, some are reflecting on research, or experience with research, or reflections on experience with research. Some offer new designs for research, modify measurement tools (surveys, questionnaires, scales). Some are reviews of all the research that has been published, some are strictly educational research as science, some are strictly education as reflection, some are phenomenological, some are philosophical, some are pragmatic, some are esoteric, some are historical, archival, etc.

Research methods are organized around two dominating paradigms: quantitative (statistical) and qualitative. Qualitative research can be anything, from a tape-recorded interview, to a video taped segment of a classroom in action, or perhaps personal reflection, ethnographic anecdotes,
drawings, poetry, or structured observations, or semi-structured participation, or participant-observation; or research might consist of a conceptual analysis. A conceptual analysis is usually reserved for a philosophical inquiry: what does this “word” mean? A concept is a word, of course, but in the research paradigm the “word” exists as a thing. This thing must be studied historically (where did this thing come from? Who uses this thing? What does this thing mean?) An example of a conceptual analysis might be organizing a research project around a question like “What does the word "curriculum" mean to grade four teachers in a particular community?" Interviews, written journals, structured activities, spontaneous insights, all of it, all of it is "data." The data is coded into particular structures, themes, categories, and then analyzed in relation to the literature. The literature refers to the 170 million or so journal articles that are published in education.

Education research often takes place in the world outside the tower. Education is studied by being "out there" in the field (this is what academics say when they are referring to the world outside the university: it is a "field:" "I need to do fieldwork, I need to go out in the field to get more data.") The field is where the action is. Action research is where the field is.

The field, predominantly, means schools, and school children. Some (few) academics go to colleges or universities to "study" what is being "learned" or to learn how professors teach. Feminist scholars will interview other women professors to document how horrible it is to be a woman in the university (yes, still); or some will interview women who identify as lesbians, or women of colour, to find out how horrible it is to be different from white straight people in the university. But mostly, Education concerns itself with schools, teachers, and children. Mostly, children are white, asexual boys and girls - gendered in excess, sexually denied, refused, ignored; again, not from stupidity but purposeful (fearful) ignorance. Mostly teachers are white, heterosexual, but again these people are invaded through gender norms, repressed from sexual
ignorance and fear. The conflicts of the classroom lie buried in ancient rituals of contradictory relationships between normalized (enforced) assumptions of gender and fearful, repressed regimes of sex, and traditional conceptions of Knowledge and Learning. While schools are modeled on institutions, and so trapped in an historical vortex of repetition, the micro-communities (the fields) are protected from the observation of their contradictory relation (i.e., institutional ignorance studying institutionalized sites as “fields of research”) with the help of research tools and specializations.

Mostly women teach children. Mostly men write philosophy. Mostly white people dominate the academic turfs of Education. Mostly this is all the same as it was one hundred years ago, when observation laboratories were designed to study children in artificial settings of scientific sterility. These scientific sites were designed to watch children because it was unlawful to make them work, and so something needed to be done with them. Children, at the turn of the industrial revolution, shimmered into research as creatures of mystery.

Schools were modeled after factories, and the failure of schools, then, was attributed to a lack of understanding about children. The failure of schools today is much more complicated because in the 170 million or so education journals, each specialized research article communicates to its own specialized community. Who knows what researchers are doing? Who can keep up with them? The rush to publish has overtaken the purpose of research, and publications have overtaken the value of inquiry.

Mostly, the failure of the university, as the omni-school of schools, is due to a lack of understanding about institutions, ideologies, and the dominance of gender-privilege. Men invented the university: men continue to preserve their traditions in speech, genre, practice; men built the tower, because men would rather be lost in the fortress, cultivating their own isolation here than
help in the world outside. The fear of dirty hands and messy work continues today as it did in the early 1800s. The isolation of the tower prevails.

Education, in the university curriculum of teacher education and graduate work, can indeed remain both isolated from the social and political realms that are schools, and remain actively engaged in the school-based realms of education. This is accomplished through research. It is isolated, because no one but other academics ever read the research that is published; actively pursued “out there” in the schools since the preferred site of research is the field, and the field is typically a school outside the university. The social and political realms of the institutional community are not a part of the study of schools outside the university, even as these are inextricably connected through their histories. So, while it seems that researchers go “out there” to study the “world” outside the university, they are in fact bringing the schools “out there” into the institutional gaze. Research works in a way that can deny the institution as a social and political realm within which each (the schools and the universities) are contained. In this way, research can seem innocent, at times even emancipatory, liberating, without ever having to account for the complexity of its institutional relation.

There is an excess of research, of academic literature, and specializations. I sometimes feel as if too many of us have lost track of what the hell it is we’re doing, when all that matters is how much we write for other academics who are also overwhelmed by the deluge of research publications. The result is a kind of absurdity, where a scholar can now, and quite easily, make any claim he or she wants and substantiate it with some sort of research. And while I understand this in the secular space of academic reproduction, I cannot understand it in the contexts of a larger purpose. What's it for? Who is it for? Who benefits?
Everything I learned that seemed to matter to me the most was from theory and philosophy, not research. The difference between research, and theory and philosophy has to do with the methods of writing. In research, there is data. In theory, there are ideas and critiques of ideas, history, and critiques of the history of ideas. In philosophy, there are concepts and histories, critiques of concepts, and re-imagining histories of concepts. In research, there is data, proof, validity, structure, a final analysis, a hypothesis that is tested to be true or false, an inquiry that is designed to produce responses to a research-based question. In theory, there are just questions. In philosophy, there are ideas about questions.

The forcefulness with which science has moved through university work is so pervasive, actually, that philosophy is very concerned with a scientific methodology for philosophical inquiries; and theory, soon, will also be subjected to scientific scrutiny, proofs, evidence. I am not sure whether this is qualitatively "good" or "bad" so much as I am concerned with what is happening to the quality of writing in the university, and the communicability of this writing to those who are not specialized in one specific micro-site of Educational interest. I am extremely worried about how remote the readability becomes when the demands for scientific validity conform/contort the writing.

I have written screeds of papers that were researched-based, reviewing the research of others and summarizing their findings, and I wrote these for coursework, seminar papers, final papers, and major papers. But it all started to fray when I realized that I could not see the sense in producing more research, and found out that I was expected to produce research if I wanted to finish my Ph.D. And I said, isn't a Ph.D. a doctorate in philosophy? And I was told yes, but in Education, you have to conduct some kind of research. Any research. But it has to be research.
It doesn't, really, of course. I mean, according to the traditions of doctoral work in Education it has to be research. The problem is that I had been reading too much, and not researching. I not only have no skills in interviewing people, but I have no ability to assume the role of the researcher in an interview context. I have grown to loathe writing as an academic. It is not that I am so self-centred that I cannot listen to others, but rather I cannot assume the role of witness, I cannot watch, I cannot be detached, I cannot use people for the mulching work of academic publishing. This is my failing. My falling. As a writer I cannot bring myself to be completely incomprehensible in order to substantiate how smart I must be. But mostly it is the people I avoid, the work of using people for research.

Qualitative research has amassed a fabulous vocabulary for addressing the squeamish work of using people for research, but these are all just words that skid through the tower like cold drafts, nothing sticks. There is no room for active compassion here, there is no space to think about what matters. Really, beneath the surface of the words, there is depth in analysis but there is no purpose to it if it cannot make you feel - there is no feeling here, just words without affection, and if there is no feeling here, how can there be compassion? How can we care enough to stop using people the way we use words?

It is a way that language is debased, the meaning squeezed out of a word through excess usage, until finally everyone tires of the word, and it must be thrown away for another. This way, even the word "compassion" can become a part of research, without actually engaging the researcher on the level of a human being who is using people for a specific research question that will make no difference in the social realms outside of where the research is being conducted. In the "field" everything is protected by Research, including the language used to describe what is being done.
Whatever the word might be describing doesn't matter, because the sentiments implied in the word just ride the history of words, the excess verbiage, like surfers on a fading wave, ready to move on for the next ride, always looking out for the bigger wave, a better word. I remember saying something about "the patriarchy" to a professor and he said, "Well, maybe we could use a different word..."

Me, I keep staring down at the moat, the swamp, with all its refuse, ponderous, thick, weighted with the meanings that cannot seem to break through with any impact in the social world outside the isolated language of academic concerns.

**Outside Institutions**

There is no true outside. I might be outside mainstream heterosexuality, as a queer woman, but I am not outside the institution of heterosexuality. I am confronted everyday with heterosexuality as the normal way of life, I read about new legislations that allow gay people to have "spousal rights," just like heterosexuals, but we may not "get married" just like heterosexuals. And we are not "just like heterosexuals" anyway. Why can't being gay mean being different from heterosexuals without being penalized for not being heterosexual? There is no outside to this, there are just different ways of skidding around the edges.

I might be outside of the academics' community, but I am not outside the tower. I might not fit in with other graduate students, but I am not outside graduate ideology. I am writing this dissertation. I could have quit, a thousand times I could have quit, but I stayed because I am - mostly? Stubborn. I will not let them kill me, and I will not leave. I will stay, and I will write my way out. I will write the words that mean what I need to write.
I will write what I need to mean when I write, and I will persist in this impossible struggle to ask the questions that matter to me - what matters? who benefits? how is this university making a difference in the world? how can so many intelligent people be so disinterested in the world outside the tower? how can so many people work so hard to maintain a structure that is murderous and poisoned by the fumes from that ancient swamp? how can we pretend to know so much and yet do so little to make change in the ways we interact with this thing, Education? what do you want, besides security and tenure and power and status? what do you want from this place? why are you here?

My position of being an outsider is deliberate, and I have to ask myself what it provides, more than them, more than asking the others around me who do what they do, I have to ask myself: what do I want?

**Institutions, Too**

The institutions of the world - these are inescapable because they are greater than the architecture, they are discursive. This is a word that is used to mean everywhere and nowhere, and institutions are certainly everywhere and nowhere, because they are part of language, life, time, space, and human consciousness. For example, medical institutions move through the world in the way white middle class people speak about their bodies. No one enjoys their body, but instead must speak of the body as an object in need - in need of exercise, diet, nutrition, herbal remedies, surgical procedures, prescriptions, hormone replacement therapy, physiotherapy, rest, sleep, a body in need of what is made available through medical regimes. The "institution" is not a place, but a way of speaking. This is the main point of the French philosopher, Michel Foucault: institutions are
interested in bodies because these are entities that can be controlled, and if the body can be controlled, so can the mind be trained into kinds of kinetic socialization.

An example is the school classroom, where children's bodies occupy little seats at little desks. Some classrooms have replaced the little desks with little round tables so that four or five children can sit together, but the furniture is customized for smaller frames. The walls are painted bright colours, children's artwork is tacked to the walls, and in some classrooms children might move freely around the room, or they might have to stay in their seats. Permission is usually required to use the bathroom, and there the toilets and urinals are smaller, so that little bodies can use them. To ask a question, a hand must be raised in the air. In some rooms, children may speak freely, or they may take turns speaking. To read aloud, it is preferable to stand, but in some rooms you can read aloud while sitting down.

The teacher stands and talks, walks around the room and watches the children work. If they are supposed to be working silently, the teacher will tap them on the shoulder as a reminder to be quiet. No talking. No communication with other students during tests - information is to be shared at specific times only, during designated co-operative activities. A bell rings to schedule each subject - now it is math, now math is over and it is time for physical education - now physical education is over and it is time for French, or geography, or English, or composition, or reading - now it is time for recess. Bodies are dressed and sent outside to play for fifteen minutes. A bell rings. Bodies run back into the school and make their way back to their little classrooms. Now it is time for history. It is compulsory to attend school. However beautiful the architecture, the language of schools is written in the code of compulsory attendance, and this is an institutional practice, coded in institutional discourse. Bodies move in schools according to school rules. School rules are institutional rules.
It is the same in hospitals, psychiatric institutions, prisons, these are the places where the body is the site of control. The flesh of the body is what matters, how it is moved, observed, cut open, stitched up, medicated, confined, how and where it sits to play cards or walk around outside behind the fenced yard. It is what Foucault described as the regulation of bodies, and it is administered through schools, medicine, legal and judicial systems, governments, prisons, psychiatric care, churches, even heterosexuality enforces kinds of regulations that dictate the ways a body will move in relation to sexuality or gender. Marriage ceremonies traditionally require a variety of postures, entrances, exits, walks, and pronouncements, ("I do").

In courtrooms there are very specific rules for how and where the bodies may be, who gets to sit up so high and tower over everyone else, who may speak for whom, and how, and what may be said; just as in churches, there are rules for who may sit where, and for how long, and when to stand, or kneel, or repeat a chant, or sing, or say "Amen."

So it is with sexuality, too, who may kiss in public, or hold hands in the subway, who will go to queer parks at night and cruise for other secret fags in the dark, or who may dress how, when, and what other people will think about what she is wearing. These are all institutionalized. They are the consciousness of Western society, not just buildings or traditions: these are institutional practices that script the normalcies of our minds.

Capitalism is another institution. It is a corporation, a practice, a language, a way of being-in-the-world that is normal, desirable, even as it ensures there will be poor people and working class people, capitalism functions as a kind of consciousness. It is not a choice, it is an ideology that dominates North American culture. Consumerism is an institution that is essential to capitalism, and so the consumer (the person, the human being) is constructed in a way that functions through, and is incorporated into corporate interests.
Ideas about public and private domains are yet another institution. It is a way of positioning the body in-relation to others, in public space, or private space, it is a language of privacy and an access to public information, it is a space that is transgressed and violated, preserved, protected, celebrated. It is a structure of social life and personal needs, it is a privilege to have privacy, a right to have entrance to the public spaces.

Once a social function is institutionalized, it becomes a part of consciousness. By this, I mean that we are aware of the institutions, and we are aware of the ways they function, but we are not aware of how we function in-relation to the institutions. We are ignorant to the ways we reciprocate institutional practice by appealing to these regimes at the same time we might condemn them. For example, gay activists who fight for the right to get married are both fighting against the institutions that condemn sexual difference, and appealing for acceptance from the institutions that condemn us for not being heterosexual. The Church, Heterosexuality, and legal rights are all blurred, and what we really want, well, this is the deeper question that cannot be asked: what do we want? The institutionalized consciousness cannot respond outside of the institution, so we say, “We want to get married.”

There is no outside to any of this, and still so many of us feel left out. A person can be outside, like me, I am isolated, solitary, but it is a punishing life and in a way, I am allowing myself to practice a kind of self-punishment rather than allow the institutions to punish me. It is conscious, in that I have stranded myself in the tower with full awareness of what the implications are – the falling, from this height, is a fall that I won’t survive. But the urge to remain in the tower, it is scripted deep into my mind, no matter what I might want to believe, I am written into and through these regimes of control. And when I reject the regimes, it doesn’t matter: I have internalized these, and so I can produce the same punishments and controls on my own body, with or without the
structural institution’s help. In other words, where the institution’s purpose is to control the flesh of
the social realms it governs, so it becomes a part of social consciousness to control the personal
flesh as a realm that must be governed. And because so much of this governance manifests in kinds
of punishments, self-control, too, manifests in kinds of self-punishment.

Of course the easiest way to survive this is to not-be aware, seal off the part of mind that
identifies these punishments and perhaps it all becomes unconscious, perhaps the colonized mind is
the unconscious self reproducing institutional practice as normal and perfectly social, not
institutional at all. All the repressed gay women I know, the queer women who live as if they were
heterosexuals, all of them are convinced of their heterosexuality, that it is normal for them, even as
they are miserable in their lives, it is normal for women to live this way. This is how the colonized
mind functions: it enables a person to punish themselves on behalf of the institutions. Maybe I am
unconsciously reproducing the university here, in this writing, but I am trying like hell to write
above ground, writing as I am falling – and if I were truly and totally colonized, I wouldn’t be
falling at all. Or if I were, I wouldn’t know it until I hit the ground. Maybe that’s the difference.

It was when I began to understand how institutions organize social relations that I began to
look at the university differently. I know I am not really outside, I am in the tower. I might jump, I
may be falling, but outside the tower are all these other institutions that keep me inside, fold
thoughts through my speech and attach to my consciousness. I mean, out there are the other folds of
punishing worlds, in the workforce, in the restaurants, bars, on the streets, in middle class
neighbourhoods and in the homes of the working poor, in the shelters for the homeless, in the
hospitals, punishments are everywhere. But here, in the tower, I can speak about institutions and
Michel Foucault and know that some folks know what I am talking about. Out there, I can’t. Out
there, I say something about heterosexuality and nobody knows what I am talking about. Out there, heterosexuality doesn’t exist, it just IS. And to speak of it is crazy talk. To speak of heterosexuality as compulsory sexuality is stupid, and to identify myself as a queer is dangerous.

I’m too much of an intellectual to be out there and not be an intellectual; and I am too much of an intellectual to be in here and just be an intellectual.

So, I cling to my poetic conscience here, I cling to my poetic self because it is fleshed with the feelings I need to know that I am still alive. For some reason, my poetic conscience is not so easily organized by the regimes of controls and the regulations of bodies. My poetic self has freedoms of language that write outside discourse. My poetic conscience may be a part of the colonized consciousness, but it speaks a different language: it invents language, re-works the words, it guides a different vision, permits a different way of looking at the world, creates alternate versions of what might yet be written. It’s a kind of schizophrenia, but is that so bad? It is only through the poetic conscience that I can search for scraps of who I might be outside. And if I could ever be outside, it would be in my mind, my thoughts, it is through my words that I would be outside. That is why I know, that is my hope, that I can write my way out. Because they may take my body, but there is part of me who still clings to poetic thinking and that is something that the institutions cannot control. I am not certain of this, I mean, I know enough to know I am certain, really, of nothing, but I have to believe in something and I do believe that what saves me is the poetic sense of what has been happening, and it is through those words that I can write outside.

I do, I’m sure, and on some sad level, identify with the self-exiled de Vigny, dead as male. He was the lonely conservative writer who lost the woman he loved, because she was in love with another woman; he was the lonely man abandoned by his lover because she chose, instead, George Sand, because she left him for the queer life; Marie Dorval found a way outside.
I understand in a strange way how he could just pick himself up and leave, disappearing from the popular scene of intelligentsia to find poetry. I mean, I haven't lost the woman I love to another woman, or to another man, indeed the best part of that story is Marie and George. But, it is the poetic retreat I empathize with. I was a poet before I came into the university, and I find myself turning back to the poetry now, thinking about what a poetic conscience means, wondering what is the poet's consciousness when there are both literal forms, and ceaseless strands of metaphor?

**The Swamp of Information**

Below my tower window is the swamp, a thick soup of information that chokes the thoughts right out of the mind. Once submerged there, it is impossible to hold onto a clear thought. Information seeps in and overpowers the body, inhibits the will to swim, so the body sinks slowly, under the surface, and once the body is fully submerged, it drifts through the stew into a sewer down there, and is sucked back into the base of the tower. To jump, I have to find a way to clear the swamp. I know I cannot get free, but I must get out, even if it kills me. Even if I am writing my lines across the swamp, one slip, and it's all over. Back I'd go.

What happens to "what matters" is there in the swamp. Once you are in it, "what matters" turns murky, all you can see is the outline of your hand in front of your face, and so what matters is your hand. There may be other hands reaching out to you, but for some reason, your own hand is more important. There is tremendous power in the hand in front of your face. There is no compassion here, nothing but fear and fascination with the power of your own hand.

This is essential to specialization, of course: a narrow vision that can focus on the intricacies of one thing – whatever that thing becomes, it will become "something" through research. In other
words, research is what creates the thing, the tiny thing that is a part of the bigger problem, and in
the swamp you learn to look a certain way at your hand, with fascination, as a training for your
research. Once the only thing you can see is your hand, and once you can see how powerful that is,
you are ready to focus on a specialization in Education. You are ready to go Out There and
research.

**The Ethics of Swamp Crossing**

To cross over this swamp, to reach the fields where research lies, there are secret rites of
passage. First, the academic designs a rational purpose for needing to go to the field. This purpose
must be written in scholarly language, this requires sparse punctuation and great words that might
replace what we really mean. This is substantiated with references and citations, this is supported
with nods to other research that relate to this field and to this inquiry. And because all research
concludes with a need for more research, it is not difficult to script these particular schemes of
necessity.

These are referred to as "rationalizations" borne of what is commonly coded into a "research
problem." These problems are then transcribed onto an official form, succinctly summarized, cited
and tidily titled, completed by scratching an "X" in the appropriate marked boxes ("Will you be
using human subjects in this research? If yes, please complete the Ethics Form Q44 for Research
with Human Subjects"), and there are check-lists to ensure you have done everything properly.
These forms are then submitted to a formidable, invisible panel of persons known only as The
Ethics Committee. They will review the request in order to determine what kinds of harm might
result from this venture out to the field. If it is written properly, that is, if the codes are properly in
place, the Ethics Committee will Approve the request for permission to go to the field.
This is the traditional route from the tower to the field, and one not need wade through the swamp if one is equipped with approval from the Ethics Committee. I don’t know how they get from the tower to the fields, I’ve never conducted a research project that required me to go to the fields. But I do know that if there is ample funding, the researcher may invade whatever field she desires. I just don’t know how she gets from here, to there. Researchers disappear for a few months, or a year, and then return with cartons and boxes and computer disks that are filled to bursting with data from the field.

Fields of education are vast and complex, these fields might be anywhere - the schools, health education, hospitals, psychiatric institutions, private homes, communities of working class, women in prison, a field is anywhere the researcher wants to go. The field is infinite, so long as it can be contained within the discourse of the institution. And as I wrote earlier, this is managed through the practices of research, where the field is subsumed into the institutional paradox that maintains itself through the bodies of its participants.

The Power of Swamp Crossings

It was Francis Bacon who wrote "knowledge is power." Michel Foucault took this idea through the institutional regimes: power is knowledge, as in, one in the same thing: power/knowledge. This is an idea traced through the history of the prison, and the history of mental illness, universities - strange threads to pull together, but not so far-fetched, in a perverse translation of what these structures and histories desire for the people who are in them. Control is certainly a primary function of institutions, especially prisons, psychiatric hospitals, and
universities. It is the power of science that provides the necessary illusions of control. Control of minds, bodies, and activity. If you can cross that swamp as a researcher, you have all the power you need to reach the fields and gather the data safely. You cannot control the field, it is not like a laboratory, but you can, nevertheless, (indeed you must) control the way the field will be represented in the data. This is done by controlling the way the data is gathered. This is done because you are not a social worker, you are a social science researcher. Social Science Researchers are scientists who research the social. We don’t know, yet, what the social is, but we know the science very well.

Science is specifically organized for control, manipulating data. Ensuring that the study can be replicated requires strict domination of all variables. It indeed makes sense that the social sciences would be more interested in science than the question of what or where is "the social," because the perception that society is out-of-control dominates public information systems. As the mass media thrive in this kind of information chaos, social science operates to quell the din of chaos by transforming information into controlled research projects. The chaos, thus, is "out there," and in here, in the tower, well we all know just what we are doing, thank you very much.

The university thrives in information control. There is no chaos in research, no confusion in research articles: there is just science, and the controlled, passive voice of the victorious intellectual. It is an endless wrestling with control, power/knowledge. It is a struggle for control with knowledge, a desire for control of what little power can be dispersed amongst the academic elites, where knowledge turns in whorls of increasingly specialized designations. It is much ado, really, an endless system of reproduction, more details, more specifics, more specialized segments of distinct compartments of knowledge, where more and more, 170 million research articles of more and more, all begins to amount, strangely, to less and less.
Maybe this is the key to the sociopathology of scholarship: producing more and more, while knowing that it all amounts to less and less.

Power is not a function or value, it is like gravity, an earthly force that humans are subjected to, and subject each other to. Power is a politic, a governing of self and other. We subject ourselves to these powers, we speak in the discourses of the regimes and feel the surge of power rush through the bones of these knowing bodies. And as much as others may exert power over me, try to restrain me, I also have the power to resist, to exile, as I have, to this tower. Power, like gravity, is invisible, moving in and out of language and bodies and spaces, shifting from here to there through the stories we tell and the stories we bury. Power is not strength, it is power. Unlike gravity, however, power disperses in all directions, a force that persists, discursively.

Here in isolation, I know I have chosen a powerful position, solitude; but it is also an illusion. I know that so long as I stay here I will never understand what I want, and I know I cannot leave until I know what it is that keeps me here with the same force that pushes me to leave. But I won't leap, not yet. I used to be a rock climber, and I know that I could crawl out this window to the roof of this tower. From there, I could take a running leap, over the swamp, and land in a crush of flesh and bone. I know I could. But I won't. Not yet. I haven't even started writing my lines.

**Knowledge and Learning**

Knowledge and Learning are, as I wrote earlier, the cornerstone concepts of Education in the tower. Here I want to ask, in a different way, about the relation between knowledge and learning. I
know there are typical understandings of these, knowledge typically means "facts," but usually means anything about which a person is certain. "Learning" is still an uncertain process; that is, in Education, there is no consensus on what Learning might, or might not (yet) be. Really, to know what the words mean depends upon your specialization. But I am going to write a bit about knowledge, here, and belief.

Much of the writing here is influenced by Shoshana Felman’s *Jacques Lacan and The Adventures of Insight*\(^5\), and in particular, her chapter on Education. The ideas about knowledge and learning as being in-relation to identity echo strongly from the theories of the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Still, I would hesitate to suggest that I am specifically referencing Lacan’s theory, so much as I am drawing from Felman’s interpretations of Lacan’s interpretations of Freud’s interpretations of the psyche. Again, there is no specific line to draw, no original theory, but strands that are related by the ways people write about what they believe in, or connected within what they want to say.

To know something is also to believe it is true. I know the earth is round, I believe this to be true. This is not to say that everything I believe to be true is an absolute Truth, but instead suggests there is a subjective quality between knowledge, beliefs, and truths. In other words, there is a relation between what I know and what I believe to be true. For example, I certainly believe in things that are not specifically true, or factual: I believe in the unknown, (e.g., intelligent life in the universe, inexplicable manifestations of spiritual activity, and so on). I believe in things that I don’t necessarily understand, so my belief system is both based on what I know to be true, and what I understand, or believe to be possible.

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Knowledge, and belief, whether empirically true or not, act as kinds of certainties. Again, this does not necessarily mean that anything about which we are certain is absolutely true, but instead indicates a relation between knowledge, belief, and truths.

Belief is perhaps more powerful than knowledge, because if I believe in something that is later shown to me to be potentially false, I might say, "I don't believe you," because my beliefs are more powerful than knowledge, more powerful than my knowledge.

What is interesting in this relation are the connections that are formed between knowledge, beliefs, and identity. "Who I am" seems inextricable from what I know, and what I believe. And while knowledge and beliefs may be contradictory, I am still "known" to myself through an accumulation of knowledge and beliefs.

Knowledge and beliefs, of course, do not belong to any one person. You and I may know the same things, we may believe the same things, and in other ways what I know may contradict what you believe. Knowledge and beliefs are dispersed through the social worlds, through interactions with others, with books, advertising, media, music, art, literature, with institutions such as schools, with the discourses that constitute a particular institutional practice, with poetry, and so on. These interactions are inextricable from how we “know” ourselves, but to identify the knowledge or belief as belonging to others, or an other, is part of the complexity of originary events. There is no origin for knowledge, or beliefs: these are discursive, everywhere and nowhere, accumulated and discarded, invented, created, denied, deployed, defended, and all of it, really, emerges in language.

In French there are two words for "knowledge:" savoir, and connaissance. Savoir describes facts, what we hold, or believe to be true. Connaissance refers to ideas or activities or people with which we are familiar, but might not know as absolute truths. "Je sais ca," translates as "I know this is true;" "Je connais ca," means "I am familiar with this."
There is no such differentiation available in the English language, which is why I am suggesting a relation between knowledge, belief, and truths: I know this person, but I don't know her as a fact, I know her as a social relation. The difference between knowing the principles of quantum physics, and knowing a person, are different manifestations of belief, different kinds of truths. So, there are infinite variations to the ways we use these words, what we mean when we say "I know," or "I believe," or "It's true."

There are different kinds of knowledge, and these depend upon the language that is used to describe them. Mathematics describes a kind of knowledge, the King's English performs an other kind of language; Education has its own language. The working poor have a language, a knowledge, a system of beliefs, truths, and these are particular to the relations they conduct with each other, with the workforce, the economy, and/or the prejudice and ignorance of middle class. A painter has kinds of knowledge that are different from a midwife's knowledge, but both might believe in abortion. Each identifies and believes in herself according to these differing knowledge and similar beliefs, and each holds onto different truths about themselves based upon their beliefs.

It is a chaos of knowledge, in one sense. But in another sense, it is what relates us all as being-in-the-world, these are how we identify ourselves to others, to ourselves, and to the institutions who require that we have a particular identity.

How these connect into what is understood as identity can be understood through the social character of knowledge, belief, and truths: it is through our social interactions as infants, children, and adults, that we accumulate a sense of who we are, through participation in kinds of social activity. Most of our youth is spent in school, engaged with what Education typically categorizes as Knowledge; therefore, much of how we come to think of ourselves takes place in schools, with
other children, teachers, texts, films, and the activity of "learning" or perhaps we might say "participating with the practices of Knowledge."

There is, in Education, little consensus on what "learning" means, and I will not be making any claims to know what learning is; rather, I am interested in the relations between knowledge, belief, truths, and learning; because identity, or who we think we are, is something we learn.

So, this is not a question of how we learn, but is a question about what happens to what we know, about ourselves, when we are learning. If identity is something we learn, then what we know when we are learning is also what we know about ourselves. So, what happens when we learn only facts and how to colour in maps of world geography? We accept these as knowledge, I know where France is on the map, but what have I learned about myself by knowing this?

If our sense of self is inextricable from these knowledges, beliefs, and truths, then our identities are shifting, always, in-relation to what we are learning. Most significant in these relations is the need for certainties about selves. No one can bear to live in the social world, and be uncertain of who they are; thus, we need to know ourselves, whether this is a belief about ourselves, facts about ourselves, or what we hold onto as truths about ourselves. Much of what we learn about ourselves in schools is a complex identity that merges in-relation to the different social contexts. When I am learning where France is, on the map, I am learning that I am a "good" student, in-relation to the teacher who asks me to know this. On the playground, however, I am learning a whole other set of beliefs about myself, in-relation to the other children there. When a student beside me copies my answers onto her sheet of questions, I am learning something else about myself – will I let her copy? Will I tell the teacher "she is cheating"? Will I elbow her and cover my answers with my arm? What kind of a person am I becoming in these sites where knowledge forms the context of my social relations?
Identity requires a certain amount of certainty, however subjectively constructed. These certainties can be understood as beliefs about who we are. And these are learned, not given, but acquired throughout our social lives, through our interactions with others, with activities, with literacy, and so on. Identities such as “student” or “girl” or “boy” are easily dispensed in the social world, but how these are constructed within the person are the subjective work of re-construction, or, in some cases, de-construction. In most cases, complex social skills are cultivated to accommodate the different identities provided from the social world.

For example, at birth I was given the identity of a girl based on my genitals. I learned, as I grew older, that “being a girl” meant certain things that I did not agree with, like wearing dresses. I never wanted to wear a dress, but because I was a girl, my mother insisted I wear dresses. I never believed in myself as a girl, because I knew I was nothing like a “girl” and soon my parents recognized this, and referred to me as a “tomboy.” As I grew older, I knew I was very different from “girls” because of the way the other girls in school behaved, and because of how I felt.

I did not want to play with girl’s dolls, but I did like to play with “Ken” dolls, and my “Major Matt Mason” astronaut action figure. I wanted to play football. I did not like boys, I liked girls. But not the girls who were like “girls.” I liked the girls who were not like “girls” but were like me, who played outside and climbed trees and pretended to be explorers and fur-trappers with me in the woods of our backyards.

In high school, I started to know the word for me: I was a “lesbian,” and this filled me with dread, shame, and I became depressed with the impossibility of being a “lesbian.” This realization marked my first conscious conflict with identity, where I knew myself to be someone who was unlike the others, and I believed, as they did, that I was not only wrong to know this, it was wrong to be this kind of a “girl.” It was years before I could feel certain that I was a lesbian and that this
was not wrong. It was years before I could "be" queer, and I learned this through my relations and friendships with other queer women. Nevertheless, throughout my life, I was always certain about what I was not (a "girl") and much of the struggle to "be" someone emerged from this conflict. It comes from the need to be certain of who we are, and sometimes this is not so simple.

This is a basic need for certainties, a need to believe in truths, a need for kinds of knowledge to be eternal, irrefutable. This need for some sort of stable belief system is maintained because it identifies who we are. If we are asked to learn something that will unsettle what we are certain about, it is likely that we will be resistant to learning. This doesn't mean that a person can or cannot learn something, but rather, we will or will not learn something, depending upon how it influences our sense of self, how it develops or contradicts, or interacts with what we need to know about ourselves. We call this our identity, but it is not an actual fixed state of Being, or being. It is a fluid process of interacting constantly with knowledge, beliefs, certainties, and learning.

**Knowledge and learning: Identity crisis**

In the university, there is a need for certainty as a function of power, where certainty takes the form of knowledge. The crisis, here, is that knowledge is no more stable than beliefs, or truths, and so maintaining this power involves a ceaseless engagement with learning and resistance to learning. It is an endless process of shifting relations with what is believed to be true and what must be let go as not-true, in order to accept, or reject, what has changed.

This, for example, alludes to the difficulty of Feminism in the universities, where the traditional academy is masculine, the dominant books are written by men, and women have only been allowed to attend university during this past century. There is a legacy of male-dominated activity and identity that is challenged and critiqued by Feminism. In order for male professors to
learn about feminism, they must let go of certain beliefs, certain identifications with knowledge that relates to a social organization dominated by men's certainty about their individualized innocence.

As a crisis, Foucault describes it as follows:

...what is called the crisis of the universities should not be interpreted as a loss of power, but on the contrary as a multiplication and re-enforcement of their power-effects as centers in a polymorphous ensemble of intellectuals who virtually all pass through and relate themselves to the academic system.\textsuperscript{6}

In other words, the academy reinforces itself in resistance to different knowledges, and intellectuals participate in this by relating, or identifying, with the academic system. What emerges is, as Foucault indicates, a polymorphous ensemble of intellectuals. Contrary to the traditional ensemble of intellectual unity in relation to foundational, universal Truths, there is now conflict and contradiction in its place, as relations with power shift in relation to knowledge and certainties. Identities are thus ceaselessly challenged and reaffirmed, questioned, attacked, or tolerated under the veil of "liberalism."

Remarkably, as confusing as all this seems, I have witnessed this moment of transition between certainty, identity, and power, during a graduate seminar on Early Childhood Education curriculum. During this particular discussion, we (the students) were discussing the implications of anti-foundationalism. This is a critical approach to knowledge, where previously held assumptions about the foundations of knowledge, society and history are challenged as specious, as belief structures designed to privilege certain persons at the expense of other persons.

The critique assumes that there is no factual foundation upon which any society has developed, but rather there are fictions which have been mobilized through certain institutions that

have an investment in the maintenance of these fictions. The superiority of white people, for example, has been, historically, a foundational structure upon which any Western society would build. The inferiority of women represented a foundational belief which maintained laws about who could vote, work, attend higher education, and so on. Science as an unbiased and pure source of Truth is another foundational construct which has since been exposed as highly cultural, gender-designed, and biased towards imperialism, racism, sexism, and so on. The Church as an omnipotent source of morality is also foundational, and also subject to an historical critique of who represented the Church, where, and how their practices contributed to oppression of women, the colonization of developing countries, and sexually aberrant behaviours, such as child molestation.

As we discussed the various foundational constructs that have since been critiqued by anti-foundational arguments, one member of the class suddenly asked, in an uneven voice, "What about God?" and, still caught up in the theoretical position of these discussions, several students suggested that a belief in God was personal, but did not represent a foundational truth for all the world. I was sitting beside this fellow, and saw, in his eyes, a shift inwards as his struggle to understand this seemed to incite some form of inward-battle with his belief systems, and so, his identity. I am not suggesting I saw his identity change, but rather I witnessed the crisis that occurs when a certainty is challenged to such an extent, that identity is challenged as well.

He looked down at his desk, bewildered, as he tried to formulate a counter-argument; however, the loss has already taken place. The loss of a certainty in the Church and in God as absolute Truths of the world had already been shaken loose and now he was grappling inwardly. There were efforts made by other students to stabilize the situation, condolences, perhaps, that the belief in God was not being challenged, but the fact of the Church as a foundational structure was
being critiqued, and so on. But, in the end, all he could do was try to reassemble his own thoughts in silence, and we moved the discussion towards somewhere else.

Seeing this happen changed the way I think about learning and knowledge, moved me to realize that in learning there is a loss of certainties, and with that loss is a loss of the way self-identification is organized. When one piece of certainty is removed, when one subjective truth is shaken loose, the entire structure collapses. Somehow, the self must be rebuilt: we will either try to accommodate this new piece of knowledge into our identity, or reject the knowledge as false. We will always choose what we can be certain about, and this will be what we believe to be true. It does not mean that what we believe about ourselves IS true, but that identity is contingent upon the certainty of our beliefs. We need these beliefs in order to be certain of who we are. If the new knowledge contradicts the old knowledge, identity fractures, fragments, disassembles, and the wholeness with which we rely upon for “being” in the world is suddenly damaged.

Of course, most people don’t think of themselves this way, most people don’t associate a relation with knowledge and identity, with beliefs and certainties, most people never think about who they are in these kinds of contexts. It is a question that arises when we are asked to identify ourselves.
Knowledge and learning: Who are you?

London is particularly fertile in this sort of phrases, which spring up suddenly, no one knows exactly in what spot, and pervade the whole population in a few hours, no one knows how...

...When this phrase had numbered its appointed days, it died away like his predecessors, and ‘Who are you?’ reigned in its stead. This new favourite, like a mushroom, seems to have sprung up in a night, or, like a frog in Cheapside, to have come down in a sudden shower. One day it was unheard, unknown, uninvented; the next it pervaded London. Every alley resounded with it; every highway was musical with it,

"And street to street, and lane to lane flung back
The one unvarying cry."

The phrase was uttered quickly, and with a sharp sound upon the first and last words, leaving the middle one little more than an aspiration. Like all its compeers which had been extensively popular, it was applicable to almost every variety of circumstance. The lovers of a plain answer to a plain question did not like it at all. Insolence made use of it to give offence; ignorance to avoid exposing itself; and waggery to create laughter. Every new comer into an alehouse tap-room was asked unceremoniously, ‘Who are you?’ and if he looked foolish, scratched his head, and did not know what to reply, shouts of boisterous merriment resounded on every side. An authoritative disputant was not unfrequently put down, and presumption of every kind checked by the same query. When its popularity was at its height, a gentleman feeling the hand of a thief in his pocket, turned suddenly round and caught him in the act, exclaiming “Who are you?” The mob which gathered round applauded to the very echo, and thought it the most capital joke they had ever heard, the very acmé of wit, the very essence of humour.7

Knowledge acts as certainty, and there is a particular certainty with which we find ourselves, invariably, identifying in-relation to institutions (universities, governments, hospitals, churches/temples, capitalism, law, civil service, welfare, prison, etc.) It is with these knowledges,

7 Charles MacKay, *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions* 1841, 57. I am especially indebted to Eva Ekeblad, who, will roaming through her collections of books, came across this passage and offered it to me while I was in the midst of writing about this question, “who are you?” Her find is a most fortuitous coincidence, and her sharing it with me, a most generous gesture.
with certainties, that we find ourselves in the position of having to respond to the uncertainty posed by the intolerability of the unanswerable question, *Who Are You?*

The assumption is that we all must have an answer to this: we must know who we are, but the desire is to know the answer in excess of the self who wants to know. In other words, the certainty of self ("I am [someone]") is an imposition on/of identity, it is placed upon our selves, it comes from outside, and asks that we pull an answer from within ourselves. It is the basis of human existence in the Western conscience. Who am I? Who are you?

It is a question that originates in Greek philosophy, the question of existence, it is Descartes' dilemma, and it is a history of ontology that has produced this question. It is a foundation of androcentric practice that has placed the question of identity into a force that moves from the outside of our selves towards the inner life we cultivate. Identity becomes absorbed by the force of power/knowledge: know yourself is not a suggestion, but a directive.

The complexity wends deeper: the certainty with which we answer this question (Who are you?) cannot represent a singular reality of ourselves, but is, instead, the desire to respond to the authority that asks. We are being asked to know the answer, not the self. It is a knowledge question, a rational question, a power strategy. And the demands for answers belong to the institutionalized consciousness. This is the part of our lives that requires a structure of rationality. Needing to know, Who am I?, is, then, a rational question demanding a rational answer. By the same token, it is irrational to assume anyone can answer the question rationally, because it is asked in excess of the self who wants to know: it is in excess of the possibility of an answer: it exceeds the rational response.

It is a question formed from institutional histories, and is demanded of the surface human. It is asked of the appearance of a person, not the fleshed and intricate being who stands before you,
trying to think of what response will bring about the least amount of shame, or humiliation that comes with uncertainty. We are all many kinds of people, historical, complex constructs that change fluidly throughout different social contexts, different moments of solitude, different social activities, and at different places in our lives. Nevertheless, Who are you? is a Knowledge question, one that we must learn to respond to, as we defer to the authority who asks.

This self who must "know" the answer to who she or he is, that is, the person who must have a response to the question that demands an answer, is thus, irrepresibly transformed into an organic manifestation of institutional ideology. It is the body, fleshed, gendered and sexed, someone who comes to know herself as a particular, conscious subject (that is, a body subjected to the ideologies that construct the demand an answer.) It is a metamorphosis from the fluid self, to the fictive stabilized self who presents an answer to this impossible question. It is the moment when a layer of institutional identity appears, like a film, or veil, that cloaks the self with an answerable self, a self who can answer the question.

At the same time, as this filmy substance of stability covers the complex self, the body turns away, denies the question, because the body knows no stability. The body is chaotic, placed and displaced, historical, kinetically-responsive, breathing slowly, or rapidly, perspiring, or freezing in place, the body has been concealed, suffocated, denied. Who are you? I am Diane Hodges. I am a doctoral student. I am sister. I am a writer. I am a loner. I am queer. I am, I am, I am,... I don't know.

Intolerable, unacceptable, inappropriate, the crisis is in the question as it reproduces the obedience of our answers, and crushes the body's secrets (I don't know). The body has no words for itself, the body cannot answer, the identity that is being asked for is not the body’s certainty, but a social presence that is recognizable. The difference is the crisis.
This is an unfathomable condition of Self. It is a moment of being incomprehensible, without certainties, shaken from our beliefs, conflicted within the space between the question and response that lies waiting. It is intolerable for the body being asked because there are no words for itself, only words for the question. The question is not about the body, however, it is about something, someone else, someone who knows who she is, and not as a body in the world, but as a social relation that holds in her speech a response that will be the “right” answer.

When I was given the identity of “girl,” I grew to realize how it was me, and it was not me. I was expected to respond to my identity as a girl, even when I knew I was not a girl in the way the question wanted me to be a girl. "Is this your daughter? What a pretty girl."

“Who are you? Are you Bill’s little girl? What’s your name, sweetie?”

As I struggled into the more comfortable site of a tomboy, however, the question shifted me into shameful mis-recognition: “Is this your son?” or “Can I help you young man?” (This is not me, this is not me.)

I was feeling wrong, (I am not a girl/I am not a boy) and still knowing that I had to respond with the right answer. And this meant admitting to being a girl. The only way to do this, since I had no words for who I was, was to comply by not denying I was a girl. This is the condition where a conflicted/punished body is trapped as she is trying to co-ordinate herself with the colonized consciousness that demands stability from chaos.

So she moves herself to answer with activity: I am what I do. I am not a self, I am an activity. Who are you? I am a teacher/student/worker/writer. This is not to say the Self is or is not its activity, indeed our identities are inextricable from the complex social webs where we conduct our daily lives. But the answer of activity-as-self is also the most tolerable source for an answer. It is acceptable. No shame, no humiliation: safe, for the moment, from the probe of inquiry. It is, as
Foucault's power/knowledge homology inadvertently hints, pouvoir/savoir = I am what I do. I know who I am by what I do. This is where power acts as Knowledge, "I Know Who I Am," marks a position of power, because it refuses the chaos and fragments of emergent selves, and asserts, instead, a certainty of self as someone who is doing something identifiable.

Deeper yet are the identities of marginalization, the outsiders who are marked with difference – those who are not-white, not-heterosexual, not-middle class, not "girls" or "boys". We are identified as raced/classed/sexed/gendered, but we do not easily identify ourselves as such: we might choose ourselves as activity before answering with the distinctive marks of our difference. This is because ideology (institutional consciousness) oppresses the identity markings as distinct from the identified activity. ("I am a teacher" is a tolerable response. "I am a black teacher" is an affront; "I am a queer teacher" is a crime; "I am a feminist teacher" is a threat, and so on.) In learning to respond to the question, (Who are you?), we learn to act-as-if we are that person, and in doing so, learn to conceal our difference.

The university invented identity theories and a politics of difference because so many academics were experiencing the silence of exclusion. As women of colour, queers, and others began to speak about oppressions, began to critique the institution from within its towered walls, however, institutional ideology consumed them, evacuated the power of the words, and spit it out as discourse. Institutional discourse is an effect of institutional ideologies, whether we can identify these or not. Institutional ideologies persistently construct the question that demands we answer for ourselves, and then provides the discourses within which we might reply. It sets up an intolerable system for learning.

It is similar to the relations of universities and science, where science was once a social activity of poets, philosophers, working class, women, semi-literate but ingenious and curious, and
the institution was a monolith to foundational Truths, protective of its legacy of Knowledge through traditional practice of upper-class white literacies.

It was not long, however, before the universities began to recognize the power of science, and, as with other social activities, consumed science and foundationalized it, disrupted the extended social relations, spit out the working class and the women, shoved aside the poets and philosophers, and institutionalized science as a discourse of practices. Science changed from being outside the institution to being inside, and with that one huge gulp of activity, science became an ideological activity, and scientists became specialists in their fields. Who are you? I am a scientist.

Knowledge and Learning: Letting-go

Learning involves the work of letting go what is known as a certainty. In order to learn about anti-foundationalism, for example, that student who sat beside me was suddenly confronted with the thought of having to let go of his absolute belief in the Church as a Truth of God.

To learn is always to risk the certainties of self. And with that risk, comes the peril of confronting the incomprehensible recognition of an unknowable self. To learn is to persistently risk the self, a self that is structured with fragments of lived and remembered history, with social relations, and social activity. We are always in process, always in flux, and we have learned that we must know ourselves, we have learned that we need certainties in order to believe that we are someone. We want to know because we must - who can bear to be in the world and not know? We must know something, and to learn anything we must be willing to give that knowledge up: learning becomes unendurable, humiliating, learning becomes a constant encounter with the unknowable self. Learning becomes a constant challenge with what we believe about who we might be. This is why it is so easy to stop learning. It is so easy to find the patterns and routines of
speech and activity and relations that are agreeable with the world where we live, and then cling to those, make them our certainties, our truths, make them the knowledge that we rely upon for being who we are in the world.

Resistance to learning, or refusing to learn, are examples of the same conflict: it is not the knowledge that is being rejected, but what the knowledge represents to what we already believe. Learning is being refused because we will not let go of what we already believe. No one ever actually “stops” learning, of course. What happens is that the person must persistently construct new ways for maintaining the existing identity, the established belief system. We are challenged on a daily basis with conflicts about who we are, but many of us learn to ignore them, or refute them, or deflect them. Many of us learn strategies for projecting our own resistance onto others – it is not “me” who refuses to learn, it is “you” who refuses to learn.

Teachers do this often, when confronted with the students who will not learn what the teacher wants them to know: it is not the teacher who is refusing to learn something about the students, rather, it is the students who are refusing the teacher. In fact, they are refusing each other. This is because the teacher is certain she is a teacher, and the students are certain they are learners. Learners can refuse to learn. Teachers can refuse to accept that students are refusing to learn, and project an other rationale: students are stupid. “These students are so stupid!” means the teacher can maintain her certainty of herself as a teacher. “This teacher is so stupid!” means the students can maintain their certainty of being students. What is not being asked about is something else all together: what is it about this knowledge that you must refuse? What is it about this subject matter that challenges who you are? What is happening to you when you think that this might be true? What will it cost you to believe in this? What will you have to let go of, in order to know this? How
can we find a way to make this knowledge tolerable? Of what are we so certain that we can refuse to learn?

So here I am sitting in a schoolroom again, which sounds funnier than it is. In fact I find it terribly hard; I can no longer behave like a grammar school boy, and, funny as it sounds, the humiliation is so great for me that I often think I can hardly bear it.8

No matter how I turn this around through my words, knowledge and learning are, beneath the surface that so easily deceives, questions imposed upon us, demands about identity.

Teachers and students: Identity questions

As children, we are students. As adults we come to universities, to Education faculties, to become teachers; therefore, we must let go of ourselves as students. These Education programs are called “Teacher Education” so the assumption of identity is built into the process: you are learning to be a teacher. Having always only been students, however, the transition is contradictory, and complex.

You are sitting in the classrooms of the university, as a student, learning about teaching. You are learning from a teacher. The teacher is not a student, she is a teacher: she is who you want to be, but perhaps only as an ideal. She is not exactly who you want to be, but she is doing what you want to do. But there is something that must be let go of, in order to move into the position of knowing oneself as a teacher – letting go of the self as a student precedes the knowledge, or certainty of oneself as a teacher. What identities are privileged in this context? What does it mean to be certain that she (I) is (am) a teacher?

8 Wittgenstein, 1925, in Brian McGuinness 1988, 282
What are we doing when, as adults who have been students for most of our lives, we are trapped between an inability to let go of what is known about being a student, and the wanting to be a teacher? Who is the student-teacher, who wants to be teaching students?

Learning to be a teacher is only possible through learning, as a student, about teaching. The identity of a student-teacher does not provide much in the way of a certainty, and this is why so many student-teachers fail to become teachers; or fail to become the kinds of teachers we need in schools. Inevitably, what happens, is that student-teachers teach in the ways that they were taught as students. There is no actual learning of how to be a teacher; rather, there is a regression to a previous identification with teaching, as a student, and in fact, most teachers teach in the ways that they were taught when they were students in elementary, or high school.

Knowledge is identity. Even when we are learning to conform, we are constructing ourselves in a relation with that activity of conformity; even as knowledge is normalizing, we are learning to identify with normalization.

Learning is, obviously, not knowledge, but is the let-go of knowledge. Identity is in flux with what is being learned, what is being let-go of as known, what is believed; and identity is thus in conflict with what is remembered, felt, desired, wanted, suppressed, ignored, rejected, concealed, and forgotten, and desired to be understood as known.

Educational ideology asserts a particular maxim of value and justification: Knowledge for Knowledge's sake. This is the same as saying Identity for Identity's sake: it is meaningless without the experience and acceptance of learning to let go of certainty. Nothing is for the sake of itself, not even the Self. We are all for the sake of each other, because “knowing” is always relational.
A little story

In my (1996) thesis, I wrote about teacher training, and focused on writing a multi-staged performance of writing. I was writing about writing, about diaries and journals that are prescribed as curriculum in the undergraduate preservice (teacher-education) programs, and it was also about writing a thesis in a graduate program. I was writing about writing, as a performance of writing in complicity, compliance, and resistance. I emphasized the gender politics that historically organize these activities, and I perceived significant parallels between the anti-intellectualism of Early Childhood Education teacher training, and the ways such a university-based program systematically enforces gender conformity through curriculum practice. I became increasingly engaged with the ways women disappear through words, how they turn words, hide, reveal, conceal and disrupt themselves in their work with words.

By evaluating women's history of writing of diaries and journals, in the context of a thesis, I encountered an explicit endorsement of women's relations to intellectual work; i.e., intellectual women are not wanted, nor are they encouraged in Early Childhood Education teacher education. Increasingly, there is a greater emphasis on practice as distinct from theory. Theory is less and less valued as more and more women participate in Education as a discipline in the university. Women have no place in theory and although many women write with theory and theorize, they are writing from a standard of language that belongs in the early years of the 19th century. They are writing with the traditions of language in the academy, the scholar's learned jargon, the intellectual's work of imitating other intellectuals, creating a special rhetoric that speaks only to other intellectuals.
The tower

It gets so cold here, sometimes I just want to sleep. I wish I knew what drives me to write, erase, edit, rewrite, I wish I could just throw these pages into the swamp, and stop this madness. I climbed all this way, and all that I have for comfort is the breath-taking view of the distant mountains, now capped with yesterday's snow.

Earlier, I piled the shards of a broken mirror into a pile and cut my hands in several places. The blood was reassuring, somehow, I am still human, I have not been completely transformed. I think of Kafka's sorry Gregor\textsuperscript{10}, who woke up as a cockroach. I worry I will wake up one day and find myself transformed, contorted and helpless to even get myself out of bed, deformed and yet, accepted, because in some maddened way the metamorphosis has proven that I can just give in, do what they want, be who they want... at least then I might belong to somewhere.

This ceaseless struggle erodes my strength, slowly, but it cannot erase my will.

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\textsuperscript{9} Training Women to be Teachers in Early Childhood Education and the Politics of Participation.
\textsuperscript{10} Franz Kafka, 1915, The Metamorphosis.
Erosion

like a rock in the pools, a stone in the streams,
I've been caressed by surfaces of stillness,
eroded in silence, I've felt the pieces of me drift with the motions and the currents that persuade me.

I've rolled in crystalline gestures, grains of me colliding with the mysteries of resistance.

and this flesh is not enduring,

the thick of this earth's crust is more profound than any grieving.

I was, though, once,
in the chorus of a Colorado stream, I was
a piece of what I wanted in the pouring of a wellspring,
moveable,

I was that stone I tossed while standing by the rush of mountain waters, I was
crouched there by the graveled shores, hovering in the broken shadows of autumn, yellow aspens
grifting leaf and cool, the sun was hot, the air dry, the sounds of waterways too ancient for the mere
body of me -

I was picked up too easily and thrown into it all,

and the splash was an echo, the crash from an eternal flight,
dry hand to wet lands,
I heard a thousand years of everything that arcs between these worlds.

each pebble or rock that hits the waters sings a strange relation with
thumbs and fists and properties of water - we are all kinds of chaos,
destroyers in one way or another,

it is the way of picking up a stick to poke the crevice of a brook
that tells the difference between me and the stone I think I am, when I feel myself crushed by the
currents of the hand that stirs the waters.
A Question of Questions

This is a question of (my) learning and a question of how to write in a way that communicates learning rather than knowledge. It is the process of a question I have found myself pressed to deal with: what do I want? In many ways, this is an identity question, but it is not an identity question in the traditional discourses of the university's ideological constructions of identity. It is a simple question that demands a complex inquiry.

This writing is about gender, but writing in the university is always about gender, and the ways the gendered body writes. What the gendered body produces in academic contexts is always neutralized through the discourses of science – which is not to say there is no sex, but rather there is only the traditional writing from the position of a man. To write as someone other than a man is to write with other kinds of language, languages not yet written perhaps.

This writing is also about philosophy and theory, but mostly it is about human communication as social communication, it is a question about the human condition, and it is about writing about the social, indeed it is an effort to insist that there is a "social" in the social sciences.

My perplexity remains with social science, a science with no bodies, no "social" to describe, or be concerned with explicating. There seems to be no shared compassion for the human condition, nor even consensus on what the human condition might mean. Research will never help clarify these issues of meaning. We cannot measure the human condition. So I refuse research.
Writing as Responsibility

I am using this word, responsibility, in a way that is described by the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida, and in a way that is practiced persistently in the writing of post-colonial feminist, Gayatri Spivak: response-ability is the ability to listen and respond. It is an ethical practice, inextricable from literacy and experiences with writing, reading, and Western cultural engagements with language: whether speaking, or writing, to what am I responding? and what is this as an ability?

Accountability is being used here in the same way: the ability to write an account is a skill that academics cultivate. It is a writing ability that, I would argue, depends upon the ability to respond, and the ability to write in ways that can admit to the body that writes, types, scribbles with a pen, or holds the text in her hands. Account-ability depends upon response-ability, and each of these abilities is a writing ability.

I am concerned with institutional complicity because of the ways it is built into academic writing. In order to speak outside the ideology of the institution, I need a way to write my way out of this denial of complicity and into a space where reading the production of academic work becomes more expansive. I need to reach out through more than one discipline, because one discipline is not enough, it will never be enough.

Writing here, from the damp chill of this place, I see my words the way I did when I was a child, first learning script, copying what the teacher had printed on the blackboard, letter for letter, trying to stay within the widely-spaced lines of my composition notebook. I would read it back into my mind's ears and feel estranged, these are not my words, these are not what I would write, these are not yet the way that I would say what I would like to say.
And now, amidst the hollowed drips of accumulated moisture, ancient leaks from corroded pipes that once fed information from the world to these walls, in the midst of this there are the voices, not psychotic whispers from the interior of my thoughts, but echoes that hush through the corridors outside this room: scholars and students speaking of ethics reviews and grant applications, scholarship awards and publications, stubborn students who will not ask the right questions, students who will obediently learn what the curriculum requires, arrogant faculty who bicker in staff meetings, inexperienced faculty who will listen and learn who to be, there are, just outside the doors of these meetings, angry young male students who resent feminism with indignation, and in empty classrooms are the silent women students who sit and copy notes, waiting for knowledge to happen to them. There are women like me, stumbling their way up the stairs, losing more and more of themselves, skinning their knees as they trip, and some of them stay, and some of them leave, never writing what might yet be written.

I hear all of these in the passing of soft-soled foot-falls, as the members of the tower pass by my room. I want to cry, I am so lonely, but I am muted by the realization that I am not lonely for their company, and I do not want their approval. I sit, and write poems.

I resist the feelings of helplessness, but they overwhelm me just the same.
Witness

The Execution

In Lagos, Nigeria, January 1972, this white suburban family of five camps on a beach. I am twelve years old, my brother nine, and my sister fourteen. My parents have driven already from Accra, Ghana, along the African coast and by the time we arrive in Lagos we are hoping, mostly, to find a place to take a bath.

We pitch our tent on a beach in the city because there is nowhere else to stay. The Commonwealth Games are being held in Lagos this year, so there are no hotels or motels or guest houses with vacancies. What isn't filled with athletes and visitors has been bombed from the ravages of the recent civil war. Buildings are blown out and strewn across sidewalks, into parking lots, streets, piled as rubble, blackened, gaping, specters of a city that used to be here.

We are driving to Kenya, camping our way across the African continent, driving the way Eastern Canadians might drive to Miami or Myrtle Beach. But crossing the African continent is no recreational drive, and our trip is no safari. It is naïveté, we are filled with colonial fantasies that
never included something so subtle as the military rule that dominate these central African countries.

We set up our canvas tent alongside a temporary tourist encampment, settling in with other stranded travelers on the beach, and we are still thinking dim thoughts about adventure. The beach, as a sandy metaphor, as a literal oceanfront, is supposed to represent a holiday. The trip from Accra has been harrowing, bringing us to a slow and exhausted recognition of what we are expected to endure: the heat, the relentless red dust from the unpaved TransAfrican Highway, the constant dehydration and hunger, and the restless scrutiny of border patrols and local military police. Lagos is supposed to be a time for us to recuperate, gather ourselves, prepare for what lies ahead; it is time to swim in the ocean and eat something other than tinned corned beef and rice.

On this day, on that beach, we are awakened at dawn by the clanging of metal barricades being set up outside our tent. It is a temporary fence that passes less than a meter from our camp, stretching unevenly from the beach road behind us to the seashore in front. The barricades are aligned in a horseshoe design, lined up to open at the water's edge. No one seems to know what is going on at first, but armed soldiers are everywhere, installing a tented shelter near the road. Then one of the stranded tourists tells us there's going to be an execution.

An armored truck drives up and parks about five meters from the back of our tent, it is a windowless, gray steel box on wheels. There is a feeling that we are the ones being fenced in, surrounded by military trucks and soldiers with guns slung casually on their shoulders, steel barricades blocking us on one side, and the truck that pulls up is accompanied by several army jeeps.
The occupant of the truck is the man who will be shot; he stole a camera. He is called Black Joe but I don't know if that's his name, or if that is just what he is being called. I'm confused. Stealing a camera? The gossip lanes are widening. Since the civil war ended, too many civilians are still armed, too many people have refused to turn in their rifles and guns. There is a problem with what is perceived to be an increase in violent crime because the people who lost everything during the war are now turning their weapons on the wealthier citizens, burglary is turning into chaos.

Someone else tells us he stole the camera from a white woman, and this execution is intended to impress British visitors here for the Commonwealth games. I try to imagine a white woman, and her camera. In my mind she is middle-aged, bleached blond, and she lives in a trailer. I don't know what has been said to prompt this image, I don't know why I imagined she lived in a trailer, but that is who I think she must be.

I cannot imagine "Black Joe," although I try, I try to picture a Nigerian man sitting in that sealed truck with his hands folded on his lap, waiting to be shot, but I cannot really believe that is why he is here. They are transporting him somewhere, perhaps. But I keep hearing it, from other excited voices in our camp of stray white people, he is going to be executed. I have heard of executions, but I have only seen them in movies and I thought they only happened during World War II.

Rusted oil drums are stacked at the waterfront, and a tall wood pole is secured in the sand. Joe will be tied there, standing atop the drums, with his back to the ocean. The shooters will stand near the hastily constructed tented shelter, where officers, dignitaries, a doctor and a priest will be waiting to signal the order to shoot, and to pronounce the time of death. Right now none of these people are present. It is just soldiers, and tourists, local Nigerians who are arriving in small and scattered groups, and Joe.
We stand around, white tourists on the beach, we are on one side of the barricades and across the sand, on the other side, native Nigerians are arriving with portable lawn chairs and blankets and coolers. Their clothes are brightly coloured, there is laughter and some singing, the crowds keep growing, and by noon the barricade is surrounded on all sides by spectators, here to witness the public execution. Sometimes, we are told, these are televised, but almost always these are public events. This one was probably announced on local radio stations and advertised in the newspapers.

I cannot put this scene together, I am looking at the steel fences, the wood platforms that are shaded beneath a canvas shelter near the northern beach road, the oil drums and a lone pole standing against the southern view, the ocean beyond glittering in the sun, stretching out to the horizon beneath a cloudless blue sky.

Noon comes and goes. Joe sits baking in the steel truck. It is close to 40 degrees Celsius, and we wonder how hot it is in the sealed truck. My mother starts to complain to us, it isn't fair to leave him in there, how can he survive this heat? Perhaps they are punishing him. Perhaps they are waiting for a larger audience. Maybe they are waiting for the important officials to arrive and witness this killing from their shaded shelter. The spectators keep coming, there are cameras everywhere. My father has pulled out his super-8 movie camera out and is filming the scene. It is like a stage set up in the sand, with the seascape serving as the picturesque backdrop.

The army's shelter slowly starts filling with chairs, bureaucrats and military officials are being escorted to the shelter, more jeeps are parked along the beach road, and the platform is crowded now with soldiers and officers, some are sitting, some are standing around outside the shelter, holding their rifles in front of them. The day plods on, it is now well over 40 degrees, it is intolerably hot, stifling, and I wonder if they will kill Joe by leaving him in the truck. Maybe there
will be no execution. Maybe he has already suffocated. The spectators on the outside of the barricade are talking and laughing, comparing their cameras, explaining the tradition of these executions, there is nothing more known about Joe, if that is his name, but there is no question, it seems, that he stole a camera and is being killed for it.

I hear it all as a murmur, in the background, and try to read a book. My sister and I play cards, but it is too hot to do anything, really, but wait. My father is trying to keep his vantage point, holding the camera up and panning the setting, keeping close to the barricades so he doesn't lose his place. People are starting to push in for a better view.

It is late afternoon when the soldiers open the armored truck and escort Joe out. I don't know what I expected to see, but he is just a black man, like the soldiers, the officers, the doctors and priest, most of the spectators. I've only really seen black people being shot at by white Americans, watching the civil rights demonstrations on television; I only know about black people in the United States, and I don't understand how black people can kill each other. I can't understand how they can watch.

And as I am standing there, watching, I am feeling myself start to go crazy, my mind feels frantic, my thoughts are hysterical, my body is numb, I feel like screaming or flailing myself around. Instead, I start the work of forgetting myself, withdraw from my body because I can't watch, and I want to watch; I can't bear to be standing there, but I can't bring myself to leave. All I can do is pull myself into nowhere inside me, a body with eyes, no heart, no soul, trying to detach this twelve year old self from this moment, and trying to stay because on some level I cannot fathom what is going to happen and I am trying to understand what, about all of this, is real.

Joe is escorted to the barrels and a wood scaffold has been built beside the barrels so the soldiers can step up, with Joe, and position him on top of the oil drums with his back to the ocean.
They tie his hands behind him and step down. Joe stands there against the blue sky and the sun casts light that sparkles on the waves of the water.

Three soldiers line up across from where we are standing by our tent. They must be 15 or 20 meters away from him. I realize I have never heard a gun being fired and I wonder if it will sound like an explosion.

*It is remarkable to me, how some scenes from our life slow down in our mind so that what might have taken ten seconds seems to last a lifetime in our memories. It is as if our retina and brain disconnect, images are pouring into vision in real time, but the brain is slowing everything down, stretching each moment out into slow motion frames that will forever run through our thoughts as if every second lasted a minute, every minute an hour.*

The soldiers bring their rifles up to their shoulders and shuffle their feet a little into a stance, lining their guns up towards Joe. Before they start shooting, I imagine an officer will yell something, the guns will fire in a cacophony, and Joe will be dead.

An officer does announce something, and then the first soldier fires a single bullet. The second soldier fires a bullet, and the third does the same. Three shots. One, two, three. They sound like pops, flat, tinny. They do this again, one, two, three. And then again, one, two, three. A pain has curled into a lump in my chest because I cannot stand the time that is passing as they take turns firing a bullet. I watch Joe and see a piece of his shirt sleeve rip open and know he has been hit in the arm, and it's as if the bullets are exploding when they hit him, but soundlessly. All I can hear is the tin pop of the rifle, and the hush of the waves on the beach.

After the nine shots are fired, a doctor and an army officer walk down the beach to where Joe is tied to the pole. They climb up and are checking to see if he is dead. He isn't. Too many shots have missed. He is only injured.
The soldiers are ordered to move closer, and they do. They repeat the procedure of firing single bullets, one after the other, and I feel it, for the first time, a creeping horror, like red rage, filling my body with something that feels jagged and incomprehensible. I have looked already to my parents for help, but my father is filming, he is seeing it through a camera, a movie is being made. I can't see my mother or my sister, or brother. I can't think, I keep seeing the sleeve of Joe's shirt burst open and it is too late to look away because I have seen this, now, and I'm trapped.

I don't know when he finally died. I had started staring very hard at the sky behind him, and at the waves pushing up to the beach. And I have turned, for the first time, completely within. I have seen myself and I am unrecognizable, I don't know who I'm looking at, and she is staring back at me with the gaze of perplexity, confusion; and I have moved just slightly out of phase with the everything inside and outside of me. I watched Joe and tried to will his spirit up to the sky, scatter the death over the ocean, I had wished with all my might for his soul to be freed into the blue beyond, as if I was trying to save him.

**turning**

Crisis. Greek > *krinein*, to turn.

i have been thinking about how 'turning' occurs and what happens in that moment when we turn - when something rips the seams of what we have grown accustomed to and what is suddenly unrecognizable.

it is a glimpse of a self we have never seen, certainly, it is self-perception
and the forbidding moment of nonrecognition, seeing oneself and not recognizing the moment as
self perception but (culturally) reckoned as madness or delusion or illness or incomprehensible
reality.

what is intolerable, i think,

(and i use words like horror-intolerable-incomprehensible because in those
moments that is the sensation, and to deny that sensation or to assume that you or
i can bear to look in those moments is
to look with eyes closed and conjure something known in place of what is,
actually, completely strange and dangerously familiar - the glimpse of an
unknown self staring back at the entire history that you or i might have relied on for years)
is how a lifetime evaporates because the self staring back does not see what you or i have been
assuming is the predictable world,
the known reality,
the assumption of routines and the comfort of schedules and the familiar moments of mindlessness;
driving without thinking about where you are going;
interacting with the people of your everyday and not thinking or looking at them
but acting with them in the habits that patterns permit.

when a partial perspective is turned from the known self to the
stranger who is staring back, it is not only what we might see in
ourselves as unrecognizable,
but also a glimpse of what that unrecognizable self has been
seeing for the lifetime that we might assume we've lived ...
all the timeless
worlds that
exist just on the edges of the assumed worlds;
these are what give insight
and what prompt the writer to write
what no one else might have dared say.
some call it genius or original –

in academic traditions these are designed (some of them) as
canonical and reverential, historical, disembodied, -

the text becomes so tangible
that the terror of the crisis that pushed the writer's eyes to see
what spins just at the edges of the world's assumptions are ignored -
because to know that,
to know that terror of seeing a world
that no one else sees and that no one else can bear to look at,
is a moment of the most profound isolation,
beyond loneliness,
it is an unforgiving despair because now there is no turning back.

it is recognition of both what cannot be seen and of the futility of
expressing the incomprehensible - it is a glimpse of how horror
exists amongst humans alone.

as a genre, a type of story, horror is invented as a response to the
incomprehensible glimpses of ourselves,

the intolerable moments when we see what cannot be recognized and yet is

known in the way we might know the skin on our backs,

what we cannot easily see without contorting in a mirror

and looking at in skewed and partial perspectives.

we feel that skin and we know it as our own but we cannot see it

the way others do,

others who can look at the skin on our backs are the only others who can touch it,

caress it,

only Others can see the parts of our body that we cannot reach with our eyes alone.

the realities that storm through when known reality is ripped

and the glimpse of what the unknown self can see,

they are a multiple gaze of memories and perspectives and lived

selves and sudden selves who simmer beneath the surface of

perspectives.

it is hard to look,

harder to believe that what has been seen in that horrible moment

might possibly be as vivid and known as the feel of the skin on our

backs.

the grief is complex - it is dreadful to realize that a strange self within

has been looking at a different world from the one the known self has relied upon,
and assumed will remain as the true world;

to realize that there are many worlds existing in the same place,

and without consensus, in contradiction, is to be overwhelmed with

knowledge and questions that cannot be shared or asked.

cultural isolation is a moment when culture rips and other worlds of history

and

consciousness all shift.

it is incoherent, but familiar nevertheless, the way a scar we might never have seen is suddenly
touched by Other hands, tracing its history on the skin.

(Freud effectively said the Other is ourselves,

and we cannot bear to think

that we can never know ourselves,

so we emphasize the colonizing work

of Knowing Others instead.)

these are not brilliant moments of glory or accomplishment, but a complete loss of

recognition,

the grief is for knowledge,

for the loss of the comfort of certainties and assumptions,

and in the place of those comforts there is a terror of what undulates

beneath culture, there is the horror of irrational worlds -

war, Fascism, anti-Semitism, revolutions, abjection and poverty, hate crimes and
genocides -
these are the 'everyday' irrationalities that characterize the history of the gaze and
the perils of the partial perspective.

"We have destroyed something by our presence," said Bernard, "a world perhaps."

The disconnection I felt was simultaneous with a connection to something else, as I moved
out of phase with the moment, I turned towards somewhere else. I was standing there, trying to will
this man's soul free, to send his spirit to the sky behind him. It was a moment of mortality where I
didn't fear for my own life but suffered someone else's death. I could only stand helplessly
watching. The helplessness was intolerable, that I could only witness this slow public murder, and
what I lost was my ability to recognize what was human about all of us there, and what I saw in that
instant of nonrecognition was the sky.

I didn't believe in God, or heaven or hell, and I was lost in this crowd of spectators with no
where to go with the suffering. Nothing I knew could explain what was happening, no one could
express a reality of it for me. The social connection was ruptured, then, and I leaped for the sky
because there was no one there, nothing but soothing cool blue, out of the stifle of Africa heat and
seas of watching bodies, and up towards somewhere else. I connected with Joe in his moment of
death because I was hating myself as a witness, vainly trying to save his spirit, desperately wishing
it was me who could fly to the skies, feeling a death in me, as slow and as cruel as the murder I
witnessed.
crisis writing

What gets written out of crisis, what the mind's eye sees when the pen draws the lines across the page is often a description of what has been seen, but cannot be written. So we write something else. It is a desperate work of translation, of turning experience into a place that is elsewhere, setting out words that act in our place, responding to what we cannot endure with a leap outside of what habits and traditions dictate in our inner thoughts, inner speech languaging into a dialect of estrangement. And when it is done, it must be sent away, because it has been written in codes that others must learn. It is written because what has happened cannot be endorsed, but it cannot be expressed, there are no words for what we've seen, there is no language for these moments of turning and so, like spies, we try to send a message out.

I slipped into this notion of crisis writing by accident, I never looked for it, but I found it in footnotes, these stories of philosophers who had carved their shattered selves into desperate languages. Three philosophers who turned, and who wrote not what they had seen, but something else, coding the grief into something that tried to articulate the loss, and tried to destroy something else. Ludwig Wittgenstein tried to destroy the tradition of philosophical ethics; Max Horkheimer tried to destroy the tradition of positivism and elitism in the universities; and Louis Althusser, after strangling his wife, tried to destroy his guilt by creating a theory that might punish identity through

an effort at exposing State institutions and institutional ideologies. In the end, he blamed the State for creating the circumstances that drove him to murder his wife.

There are stories within the university, stories about the people who write the canons that academics read and refer to - it is traditional, perhaps, to defer to the canons as authors of our knowledge. While rooting around in the basements of 20th century knowledges, I came across several stories about white European men who have been canonized, referred to, deferred; and some, of late, more critically regarded as deceivers, liars, men who fooled us with knowledge that had been written in unforgivable circumstances, say, for example, Louis Althusser, or Martin Heidegger.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was a German philosopher of the human condition, and while I might refer (though not defer) to Heidegger’s thoughts about the human condition, what matters more, in the academy, is his participation with the National Socialist Party during the rise of Nazism in Germany. I write that this matters more, in the academy, because by participating Heidegger endorsed Nazism, and so is complicitous with the Holocaust. That he never wrote about his relations with the Party, or openly regretted or explained his relation with the Party, points to kinds of guilt by association, rendering Heidegger an accomplice to genocide.

In the spring of 1933, Heidegger was appointed as a rector of the Freiburg University, just after the Nazis came to power. From 1933-1935, he was an enthusiastic supporter of the Fascist regime; however, in 1935 he resigned as rector, and while he continued to lecture, he withdrew, more and more, into a life of seclusion, choosing, or succumbing to alienation, on a mountain top in the Black Forest.

This is one version of the story. There are, of course, many other versions of this story, and much has been written to suggest that Heidegger's philosophies were subliminal efforts to advocate
the extremism of the Fascism he once supported. There are many books written about Heidegger and Fascism, and his philosophy. In the end, there is no truth to be told about this story, because Heidegger himself refused to explain his relations to the Nazi party, and so everything academics try to tease out by way of finding the truth about his philosophy is interpretive analysis, speculation, all texts driven by a desire to prove one thing or another.

And recall, I mentioned earlier, that today an academic can make any claim whatsoever and back it up with supportive references, proofs, evidence, and so on. So, what are we to believe? What am I to believe? Is it necessary for me to believe in one version or another? I suppose it is my own relation with Heidegger's writing that pushes me here to this search for an answer: if I had never loved his writing, I probably might not care.

For myself, I believe Heidegger was swept up in the National Socialist party in the same way that most bourgeois and working class Germans were, and while we are supposed to expect more from intellectuals, in my experience with the university I have come, really, to expect much less from intellectuals. I personally believe his philosophy is genuinely concerned with articulating the condition of being human, what it means in the contexts of being-in-the-world, that is, what it means to be being a human in the world within which we all live.

I also wonder if his resignation from the university wasn't an act of recognition, that as the dream of the Party faded into the realities of genocide, he left; perhaps this was his moment of turning and seeing himself as someone he could not recognize. But I wonder if he didn't simply turn, and keep turning, into somewhere smaller and smaller, more and more alienated, until finally seclusion was all he could tolerate, to be left alone with the monster he saw when he turned that first time.
I also believe his philosophy changed as a result of his participation with the Nazi regime, that this crisis, his turning, reflected more an effort to seek some way out of his culpability, that his lectures during the 1950s were the work of writing over, erasing that the intolerable grief of participation. His own ability to respond was inexpressible, and so he wrote something else, something that might speak in codes for others to understand.

His is a philosophy of culture, tools, surfaces, idle talk, understanding, caring, and the articulation of understanding with other humans who are trying to be Being (Being-in-the-world), as opposed to acting-as-if we were human. It is a philosophy of the human condition, much in the same way that Freud's theory, however flawed by the standards of today's scrutiny, was driven by compassion for the human condition.

This, unfortunately, does not let Heidegger off the hook, so to speak. He still represents a tradition of appealing to traditions of Greek philosophy, he still writes to connect a history of xenophobia into a theory of transcendence, and while his articulations later in life speak to the grounded life of human beings, he is still speaking as an isolated individual, he is still trapped by alienation and so theorizing about alienation. His call to respond to the call of Being does not account for his own response to the call from the National Socialist regime.

In Derrida's book, *Writing and Difference*, he indicates that what the philosopher does not disclose is of importance, but I am not writing Heidegger's story here, I am more interested in Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), Max Horkheimer (1895-1973), and Louis Althusser (1918-1990). These are authors of canons, traditional texts of knowledge/theory that are curiously contradicted by the undisclosed stories that set the contexts for their writing.

Each has their crisis, their turning-point, and what is produced is a document, a piece of writing that refers to their academic identities, without deferring, or yielding to the state of their
lives while writing. Each refuses to disclose, stubbornly conceals, turns away from the unrecognizable self and translates this into a theory. Each refuses to offer an account of the contexts of their writing, each refuses a response to their position as author.

Ludwig Wittgenstein and the Tractatus

Wittgenstein's famous text is a small book of logical propositions which effectively claim that there can be no ethics without language, that only what we can speak about can be considered. There is nothing outside of the language we rely upon to speak about things in the world, and so ethics, really is a work of language. Ethics cannot exist outside of the language used to describe it, and so there is a limit to what can be expressed of our thoughts, because language is bound by the limitations of what can be expressed in or about ethics. This book, written in a detailed series of numbered logical propositions, argues that logical propositions are false truths, since they are really sentences contingent upon the words chosen to make any sort of claim.

What is more interesting about this book is that it was written while Wittgenstein was serving in the First World War, with the German Army, fighting the Russians. During the day he would work as a soldier, and during the evenings he would write what would eventually be published as Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus in 1922.

What is striking about this context of writing is that there is no reference to WWI in the actual book, and in his notebooks, he refers often to how he does not get along with the other soldiers. He finds them to be stupid, dull, and so he is alienated in the war, driven by a patriotic duty from 1914-1920, during which time he wrote the Tractatus.

Was it patriotism that held Wittgenstein in the war? Guilt? Again, there is no way to know a truth about this, although certainly many books have been written that have attempted to explain
the Tractatus, and the war years, including the years when he was captured and held as a prisoner, 1918-1920.

Brian McGuinness' *Wittgenstein: A Life*, attempts to suggest something of relevance, that Wittgenstein's "insistence on the limits to the expressions of thought come at a time when more than at any other, life decisions were called for." (277).\(^{12}\)

It was during captivity that the Tractatus was completed, but it was during his return to his family, after being released from prison camp, that the crisis he had endured began to manifest itself. Wittgenstein came from a family of great wealth and privilege, and serving in the army was, perhaps, a desire to suffer with the people with whom he was so removed in academic life during his years at Cambridge. But that he disliked these people with whom he served is curious, telling one of them, once, during his war years, "You are like pigs rolling in the filth."\(^{13}\)

Upon return to his family, after the war, Wittgenstein gave the family's wealth away to sisters and brothers, and began the work of trying to live with some sort of purpose. Here is where the crucial question, "What do I want?" emerges in his life, and here is where he tries teaching, fails, and eventually takes a position in the university, where he begins the work of retracting Tractatus, denouncing the work and rewriting his theories of language and philosophy.

So, Tractatus is, more or less, a product of the war, an effect of the crisis of attempting to be more-like his fellow humans and finding himself even more alienated than before. It is worth mentioning that Wittgenstein suffered from depression, and was suicidal for a large part of his early academic and war years, and there is a possibility that he volunteered to serve in the hopes that he might be killed in battle, a noble death indeed.

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\(^{12}\) McGuinness 1988, 277.  
\(^{13}\) Ibid., 250
But how does a man who wants to "suffer with his people," and discovers that he dislikes them all so intensely, find salvation in the patriotism of serving with them? In his notebooks, there is no mention of deaths, of the horrors of war, mutilated bodies, murdered soldiers, no mention of the ethics of war itself. Instead, ethics becomes an issue of language, that how a person who writes of an ethical issue will determine that ethical position; that the ethics of any part of human activity cannot exist outside of the language within which it is written - meaning, what? Only the most articulate can be ethical? Only the most literate can understand what is the right thing to do? Or the more articulate a person is, the more ethical she is? For Wittgenstein, there was nothing beyond language: language was the limit of everything that could be expressed about the world. Ethics, really, was reduced by Wittgenstein to a work of words that could never exceed the limits imposed by words, and logical statements were, fundamentally, words. In effect he used logical propositions to prove that logical propositions were a false method for determining anything that might be true about ethics.

More compelling, Wittgenstein was suggesting there is no such thing as "ethics" but only language. It is the absent sub-text in his book that indicates the value of deferral, what Jacques Derrida calls "la differance;" the omissions, the undisclosed, the concealed contradictions of writing. Tractatus was written in the midst of one of the bloodiest and most gruesome wars of European history. In conflict between technological advancements and traditional ground troop strategies, most soldiers were marching into fields of death, walking into clouds of poisonous mustard gas, stranded often because of the lack of communications between field soldiers and their commanders, all of which contributed to an especially brutal and barbaric war.

It is, perhaps, the intolerance of witnessing these atrocities that design a scene for turning away from the unrecognizable. This is Wittgenstein's turning-point, as a witness to the killings of
men he disliked and yet felt ethically responsible to serve with, a contradiction that could not logically be resolved, and so is logically turned into a series of complicated propositions which denounce ethics.

It was during my own reading of this confluence of events of Wittgenstein's writing during the war that reminded me of my witnessing the execution in Nigeria, that moment of turning away just enough from the spectators so that I could maintain enough distance that I might hold on to something of my humanity.

In a way, the Tractatus is similar, a method of turning just enough from the insanity of the war, just enough to avoid recognizing the mutilations of the men with whom Wittgenstein had wanted to serve, witnessing their deaths in the same context of his own, in the name of patriotism, or in the name of traditions where men are compelled to go to war.

As he turns, he turns to all that he can cling to in his thoughts: words, language, because there are no ethics in the war, and there is a sudden recognition of his own queer ethics, doing the right thing for reasons that suddenly fail to make sense in the maelstrom of the murderous chaos.

The last lines of the Tractatus speak volumes:

6.54 My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them - as steps - to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.)

He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

7. What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence.\(^\text{14}\)

\(^{14}\) Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* 1922, 74.
There are no apologies: only silence. The nonsensical stands before us all, and if we can surpass this insanity through language, we might see the world in a way that makes sense. Everything else is silence: what we cannot speak about, here, is perhaps the crisis' euphemism for "will;" that what we will not speak about can remain in silence. It doesn't absolve anyone, for these repressed or unexpressed articulations lie deeply in the psyche, turning, over and over, unrecognizable, unarticulated, indeed.

Why silence? What is silence for Wittgenstein? It is what passes over what cannot be said, it is a veil for the inexpressible, a shadow, a shroud that works to conceal what could be known, if only it could be written. We must ignore the unknown because we cannot speak of it: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence." This does not point to any options about what silence might do in language, but instead signals a boundary that exists as silence. It is a statement, an assertion, a sign of resignation. It is not language that has failed, but logical positivism; however, Wittgenstein, in his closing remark, almost sighs with the futility of writing.

The idea behind my version of this story is to suggest that the Tractatus reveals more about Wittgenstein's own crisis. While the book makes claims that astonished ethical philosophers, it is curious to note that Bertrand Russell, Wittgenstein's advisor, friend, and the man who titled the book for Wittgenstein as Tractatus Logico Philosophicus, the same man who worked tirelessly to ensure that it be published, is also the same man who makes no reference whatsoever to Wittgenstein in his A History of Western Philosophy. Where Wittgenstein denounces logical positivism and ethics, Russell points to logical positivism as the future of ethics.

While the Tractatus remains today as a canonical text that philosophy students will read again and again, there is a crisis in the writing that remains hidden from view, a story of one man's evocation of what was inexpressible, an effort to articulate the unrecognizable in the codes of a
method, logical positivism. It was the method that permitted him his desired alienation from the actual human condition he was immersed in at the time of writing. And as he used logical positivism to prove that it was a false method; he was turning the method against itself.

Max Horkheimer and Critical Theory

Max Horkheimer (1895-1973) was a devout Marxist, and in the late 1920s wrote a lengthy dissertation about the bourgeois classes, an analysis of his own class, really. What he wrote revealed a kind of apathy concerning the effects of National Socialism. After years of analysis, Horkheimer was seeing the ways that bourgeois classes tolerated the increasing persecution of Jews, and the ways the middle class participated in capitalism as an economic structure that ensured a poverty for the working classes. His dissertation marked his own recognition of how bourgeois consciousness was clearly seduced by the effects of comfort and the righteousness of the so-called "self-made" man.

It is this indignation with his own class that indicates the first clue to the failure of Marxism - one that Horkheimer cannot quite accept, but which is hinted at in those initial pages of analysis. Marx's theory predicted that the bourgeois class would rise in revolution to rescue the working class from their poverty; however, what Horkheimer learned was that self-satisfaction was greater than any compassion for those who had less than the wealthier citizens.

As a Jew, Horkheimer was also struggling with the bourgeois class' participation with National Socialism. It is this betrayal that leads up to his (1934) canonized essay on Traditional Theory and Critical Theory, a paper that not only gave name to the school of thought now known

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15 Bertrand Russell, 1946.
as critical theory, but one which blatantly condemned positivism as meaningless to social change. This paper, initially delivered at the Frankfurt Institute as his opening address upon being appointed as Director, in 1933, emphatically denounces positivism as incapable of making a difference in the Marxist agenda of change. His essay argues for more self-critical practice, that the elites must be willing to challenge their own comforts and positions of privilege, and ignore the methods of positivism as part of science that provided the elites only with the opportunity to manipulate the world to suit their purpose. The Frankfurt Institute's purpose, Horkheimer emphasized, had to change, intellectuals had to become more self-reflective, self-critical, and work together in service of the public, the social classes, and especially the working class.

What Horkheimer proposed was an interdisciplinary approach to social studies, drawing from all branches of knowledge - economics, sociology, psychoanalysis, history, literature, sociology, and so on - and combine these to better understand the condition of the people in the world who suffered. He was proposing an immense undertaking, where the entire institute would dedicate itself to understanding the working class. The information would be gathered through surveys and interviews, and analyzed by all different interpretations of knowledge and social life. Then, these analyses would be combined, read together, and combined into a meta-analysis that might better explain the role of Marxism in society, with the hopes for a critical approach for intellectuals to participate in effecting social change.

In other words, since the bourgeois classes had failed to take up the Marxist agenda of revolution, it was up to the intellectuals, the elites of academia who needed to put their resources to work as a collective, and find a way to instigate the changes needed.

The result of this project, which was grudgingly pursued by scholars such as Erich Fromm, Hebert Marcuse, and others, was a disappointing text. Horkheimer discovered the overpowering
influences of capitalism, where the working class unexpectedly expressed a contentment with their positions in life. He also recognized the concomitant dominance of patriarchal family structures. It was the fathers, the men of each household who dominated the family's decisions and their politics. This, combined with working class complacency, seemed to be blending into a consciousness that could not comprehend a move towards revolution, let alone understand the purpose or possibility of such a move.

The research efforts that produced this analysis constituted an innovative and prodigious project, one that was also disparaged by most members of the institute, most of whom preferred the individual work of their own specialization, and who resented participating in this critical theory project.

During this time, the entire institute's population had been forced to relocate to Columbia University in New York, because of the threat posed by Nazism. As exiles, they continued the analysis of the information they had accumulated, and waited for Horkheimer's fall. This emerged in the largely ignored (1936) publication of *Authority and the Family.*

My own sympathies with Horkheimer are here, in his fall from the tower. As his dream for a critical theory of academic practice that might influence a progressive social change crumbled, he, too, began to fall apart as a critical theorist. This marks, in effect, the turning, the crisis, the moment when the self is unrecognizable and what is appearing is a reflection of someone unknown, and this unknown self staring back is rewriting everything that has ever been believed or held onto as truths about the self.

There is no identity to cling to in these moments of turning, but instead an unimaginable landscape of strange and unfamiliar shapes. The people you knew are suddenly not so familiar,
everything shifts, and the turning places the self just slightly out of phase with what was once believed to be the familiar world. There is nowhere, no one, nothing, that makes sense, and still there is, in this estrangement, a peculiar sense of understanding something quite intolerable.

Unbearable, it is deferred, sent elsewhere, changed into something else. Just as I fantasized about sending Joe's soul to the sky, as a way to save myself from the incomprehensible events of the execution, Horkheimer had to create an alternate reality for the events that were unfolding. And this is what produced the more commonly referenced text, *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, a book of essays written in California with his partner at the time, Theodore Adorno.

Ah, this mystery remains undisclosed - were they lovers? No one will say, and it will, eventually, be revealed, but to date, no one is speaking. There has been a re-discovery of Horkheimer and Adorno and the legacy of the Frankfurt Institute, currently under the direction of Jurgen Habermas, is passionately protected. What is perhaps likely, is that Horkheimer was queer, and in love with Adorno. Adorno was, perhaps, more sexually ambivalent, than committed to any kind of intimate relation.

One indication of this is found in an essay penned by Horkheimer, where the Nazi Party is strongly denounced, and where, without any reasonable connection, homosexuality is denounced as an evil propagated by the Nazi party itself. The denouncement is so vehement that it suggests more of Horkheimer's own homophobia, or shame, or rejection by a man he loved, than a rational argument to explain what is wrong with National Socialism.

In California, during their four year stay in Marina del Ray, the relationship ended in the composition of this book. This was published (in German) as a collaborative project, but was actually a collection of essays written by each man individually, as each man was moving away

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16 This text, along with all of Max Horkheimer's writings, including his work in *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, were only translated into English after Horkheimer's death in 1973. The original German manuscripts were published by the
from the shared ideals. Horkheimer was regressing to idealism and the philosophy of Hegel, transcendentalism and spiritual theory, and Adorno was moving into cultural studies and materialist analyses. The publication of this book as co-authored was strategic, to rescue the reputation of the Institute, to suggest that the Institute remained committed to the same kinds of ideas and practices. But it was, in effect, the fall of Horkheimer and the rise of Adorno.

When Horkheimer returned to Germany, after the war, he went to the Institute and in the basement there, buried everything he had ever written in a crate and locked it up. For this reason, none of the works composed during these years were translated into English until the late 1970s, as Horkheimer persisted in refusing to have his writings translated, and persisted in refusing to have the *Dialectics of Enlightenment* translated into English. The crate in the basement remained locked until a year before his death, when finally he relented to translations, and the publication of the *Dialectics*, and Horkheimer’s original thesis on *Critical Theory*.17

Adorno, meanwhile, had been teaching in Paris. During a lecture, he was pelted with thrown texts, as the students there at his lecture demanded he speak to the current political crisis in Paris. This was during the 1967 student riots, and Adorno was being punished for insisting on speaking on his cultural studies, and for not commenting on the state of Paris during the strikes and public crisis. Adorno walked out, and quit teaching.

A sad closure to both careers, really.

The crisis, for Horkheimer, is re-enacted in the burial of his works, and maintained in the refusal to have these works translated. There are several turns in his career, *Critical Theory* being written in response to his disappointed recognition of the apathy of the bourgeois class. *Authority and the Family* was written as the culmination of his disillusion, the failure of Marxism only too

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apparent, the absence of the revolution, the falsity of the theory to which he believed and identified. If what we know, what we believe is what holds together the pieces of who we are, then losing what we know, when what we believe is taken away from us, leaves us to face an abandoned self, someone who we used to be, suddenly unknown to ourselves.

Some regress, as Horkheimer did, to earlier times, to Hegelian transcendentalism and dialectics and philosophical idealism, and then burying everything in the deepest part of the institute, hiding what was produced as an performance of the desire to hide this unknown self elsewhere. Like Wittgenstein's retraction of the Tractatus, Horkheimer is left digging a hole in the basement and hiding his papers for over thirty years, and denouncing his own writing as if betrayed by his own beliefs.

**Louis Althusser and "Interpellation"**

Louis Althusser (1918-1990) provides an important perspective to these stories, and for two reasons. First, Althusser strangled his wife one evening while "helping" her on with her necklace. He claimed to have no recollection of the murder, and, drawing on his own years of depression and institutionalization, was declared not-guilty of murder, and was instead re-committed to a sanitarium to treat his "illness."

Second, in his entire career, Althusser wrote only one essay of importance to the academic community, an essay wherein he offered a theory of identity in relations with State institutions and State ideologies\(^\text{18}\). This was his theory of "interpellation." Interpellation is the individual's response to institutionalization. State institutions, in Althusser's description, include schools,

churches, governments, the military, universities, hospitals, and all bureaucracies. Althusser referenced the Marxist theory of "ideological consciousness," where institutions control social life to such an extent that citizens cannot recognize the difference between their own liberation, and the State's interests in controlling social activity. Althusser suggested that the State's Institutions have a vested practice embedded in these ideological modes of activity and discourse, and that is one of identification.

In other words, not only does institutional ideology mold an individual's relations to institutionalism and the State, it effectively works as an authority that identifies the individual in-relation to the institution. This identification takes place through interpellation, the calling of an individual into a social being, where being is in-relation to the institution. Interpellation works to foreclose the possibility of resistance, because the person is recognized to herself only through the names and callings that are emitted through institutional authority. In other words, interpellation forms the subjective identity of each individual, who then responds to the institution as a child to a parent, with obedience, resolution, without resistance, but already named, identified, and subjectified through this calling into being.

There are deeper meanings to this theory, undisclosed in the essay but revealed in Althusser's actions, in the murdering of his wife. This theory of identity being subjected to "ideological identification" refers to all three academic authors written about here - Wittgenstein, Horkheimer - but especially to Althusser himself. Indeed, in a radio interview during the 1970s, when asked pointedly about the murder of his wife, Althusser responded, "I was interpellated."

Who was this man Althusser? Middle class, white, male, and desperate to be recognized by the French realms of intellectuals who functioned in the uppermost echelons of Parisian society - the highest tower possible, in other words. Having been refused entry into the most elite
universities several times, Althusser persisted in trying to gain the reputation of an important intellectual. His wife, Sophie, an intellectual in her own right, helped considerably, typing and editing his manuscripts, offering suggestions and reformulations of his ideas. That Althusser strangled her is perhaps indicative of his need to effect her silence more than an effect of his depressions, for if Althusser did gain the fame he desired so feverishly, his wife would be inextricable from the positions that Althusser sought. Silencing her was essential to the more pathological need for State recognition and intellectual identification.

It is important that this theory of interpellation emerges from Althusser's authorship, as it works to explain how he could murder his wife, and how it could happen that he could do this without his own knowing. The amnesia, that is, functions conveniently as evidence of the effects of interpellation, where a person cannot identify his or her identity with the institution, but can only respond to the ways she or he is called. To be called professor, or teacher, student, or doctor, nurse, judge, lawyer, senator, to be called within the bureaucracies as administrative assistant ...

... to be called on the street by a policeman is Althusser's famous example, positioning himself as subject to criminal authority, as the man who turns to a policeman on the street, who turns to the policeman's simple call, an anonymous, "Hey you!"

Who turns indeed? The subject, the individual who responds to the call without thinking - these are the ways interpellation infuses society with institutional identities, to the extent that we cannot identify ourselves outside of these. To be called husband or wife, to be called a "self-made" man, to be called a patriot, are all examples of how institutions issue forth the call to being subjected to the State's ideology.

What lurks deeper yet, here, is Heidegger's theory of being called into Being, that to be called is to respond to the call. Where Althusser understood this as a political regime taking control
of the citizen's subjectivity, Heidegger understood this as being called into a condition of Being a human being.

But if Althusser is right, then these academic figures are all subjects of interpellation, all called into being by the universities they served, all subjected to the regimes of ideological norms which dictated how they might respond to the call, even in their radical acts of dissension. Wittgenstein, denouncing Ethics as a field of philosophy, wrote his Tractatus during war, and insisted in having it published, insisted on its being recognized. In the end, while he could no longer believe in the field of philosophy to which he was committed, he returned to teach and write in the university after finding the academic world itself was much more forgiving than he was of himself.

Horkheimer, calling his fellow-intellectuals into a radical crusade against the atrophy of elitism, could not leave the university, even as he recognized that his thinking could not be appreciated, that the intellectuals of his time, and indeed of this time, cannot turn to themselves and wonder how it is that they contribute nothing of value to the society they claim to be interested in. Althusser himself never left the institutions, whether in state hospitals or in universities, he could not reject the subjectivity that imprisoned him.

Of course, many are called, but it is Avitar Ronell who asks of Heidegger, why did he respond to the National Socialist's call? Why answer that call? Althusser's theory suggests there is no choice in the act, that to be called is part of the function of ideology; but Ronell asks the question differently, that to be called is to hear, first, the call, and there is a lag between responding, between accepting the call or, as she puts it, "letting the phone just ring."

In the contexts of crisis, there is perhaps a way to understand how these men - canonized authors all, responded to trauma without being able to relinquish an identification with the institution that instigated the trauma in the first place. There is the question of seduction, of course.

This is what led me to the university, what pushed me through the ten years of resistance and waffling between responding to the call and ignoring the call, refusing to identify as a teacher, and yet studying in Education for so many years, between seeking the doctoral degree, but in refusing to conform to the standards of the degree itself.

In the contexts of crisis, there is this moment of turning where a person might turn one way, or another, or keep turning, but there is no way to predict what will be seen when the turn actually manifests in an unrecognizable perspective. Because it is intolerable, it is understandable that a person might cling to the institutional identity for answers, for comfort, for a site of familiarity, for a place to re-ground the suddenly incomprehensible self.

The other option is to endure the loss, grieve the identity that must be abandoned and exist in a space of alienation both from self and from others. Another option is to seek, immediately, an alternative identity, to cling to the first person who comes into view and identify immediately with that person, for good and for bad, to mimic their language and activities, to imitate their practices, and to be in complete subjectification with the other as the source of power lost to the one who has abandoned one kind of knowledge in order to learn an other kind of knowledge.

This is a particularly complex site of identity, and social relations.

Landscapes
Finding a space where I feel I fit in with these abbreviated tales is not so complicated, but
not so simple. The position of the witness is precarious, how often we see what we cannot bear to
believe, or recognize, and how often that thing-seen is ourselves standing apart from the rest of the
world - it is the condition of alienation, the position of isolation, the feeling of not-belonging. For a
time I believed that belonging depended upon the others, that to belong I must be invited in and
accepted, and that I would belong if only provided with access to the group where I wanted to be;
however, writing these stories has reminded me too much of my willfulness in not-belonging, that I
choose not to belong, for reasons I still have not unraveled.

The condition of alienation provides the isolated person with a privilege not ordinarily
acknowledged in discourses of privilege - it permits digressions that are only possible from the site
of solitoue, and not physical solitude, but alone in the crowd, so to speak. To not-belong in a crowd
of people with whom I want to belong, as with the university community, presents me with an
impossible responsibility of accounting for this distance.

There are a hundred or more reasons for how I might explain why it is that I came to feel
like an outsider in the university, how I came to find myself secluded in this tower, writing about
falling, about alienation, writing about others who fell, or who were alienated, or who wanted the
accolades of institutional favour so desperately that nothing else seemed real enough or valuable
enough to hold onto.

There is the difficulty, here, of recognizing how I can identify on some level with men's
thinking, with men's texts, with the masculine theory that my feminism begs me to banish and
despise. By the same token, I have yet to meet a woman who has not, on some level, absorbed
fragments of the masculine identity, living immersed in a world dominated by men, by men's
decisions, it is impossible to say that the only difference that matters is gender. Or is it impossible
for me to admit that the difference here is completely marked by gender? Does my being queer make it different? Does my difference mean the gender lines are not so clear? Or do the gender lines render my difference differently?

The Human Condition

This brings me back to Heidegger, and Dasein, the Being of being human, the condition of being human; what it means to respond to the call of Dasein, and how contorted this response can be when trying to respond from within an institution that has already called me, a call to which I have already answered, "yes."

Now, I suddenly feel as though I picked up the wrong line, I answered the wrong call, I didn't listen to the call that was calling me, but instead sought out the call of status (elitism) and privilege, all the while resisting, seeking a language for the human condition and instead being fed the discourse of contamination, breathing the fumes of the swamp, climbing a tower without thinking about where it might lead, ignoring the signs along the way, accumulating anger and disappointments, but never resisting the desire to climb.

And so now here I am, alienated, not-belonging, trying to write my way out in some way that will not completely cut off my relations to this institution because it did, after all, call me, and I did, after all, respond. I did say "yes" and I don't regret the position I am in, but I am fearful of where this leads.
And I am trapped, just as I was in Nigeria when I was twelve years old, not-looking, but looking, present, but not-present, assuming the position of God, trying to save the soul of a man I didn't know, adopting the powers of omnipotence I did not even believe in, but with a desperate certainty that if I will this man's soul to the safety of the blue skies, everything will be all right.

These are the same delusions/desires that have brought me here, trapped in this tower and falling at the same time.

Initially, I sought a response from Heidegger's theories of Being, there were words I wanted to read, such as "understanding" and "care", but more feminists have written these languages than men, and so I have to ask myself why I will not turn to feminism here, now, surrounded by all these ghosts of white male philosophers?

To think about the human condition is terribly dangerous terrain because of the potentially essentialist assumptions that underlie the assumptions that there is a human condition which is undifferentiated. By the same token, I want to think that there is something human about being human, that there is something about the condition of being human that is local and global, differentiated in infinite variations through histories, cultures, nationalisms, religion, genders, sexes, class status, races, geographies, technologies, social norms, ideologies, and institutional forces, power/knowledge, and so on. These do produce the complicated person, and still, beneath all of these interactions, there is... No, rather, I am suggesting I need there to be something about being a human being that functions as a landscape for these interactions. I am not seeking the soul, but searching for a language that might allude to a condition of being human.

That I position this search in the company of men is, as I mentioned, troubling for me, a queer woman, but identification in Western civilization, and participation in the university
promotes these identifications. Am I doing what Althusser did, here, blaming "interpellation?"
Saying I have no will against the patriarchal forces of society?

I do find sites of affinity with the alienation of Wittgenstein, the depression and suicidal desires. I do experience sympathies with Horkheimer’s self-exile, his idealism, his loss of credibility and his subsequent withdrawal (I, too, have my buried manuscripts, texts I have written and packed away in boxes, not quite ashamed of what I wrote, but not quite certain that anyone ought to read them; I too have resisted any pretenses to knowing enough to publish for a public reader). Like Althusser, I too wanted the respect of the institution. I wanted the prestige of university status, and while I can safely say I am no murderer, I do live with depression and anxiety attacks, memory lapses and failed suicidal attempts, suicidal fantasies.

I have allowed arrogance and academic privilege to protect me, accepted scholarships for projects I never intended to pursue, accepted graduate salaries for work never done, I have allowed myself to believe I deserve all the gratuities, and now am dealing with the consequences here.

I do, most of all, believe in what Horkheimer wanted, in his self-critical interdisciplinary studies, in his certainty that the university has an obligation to serve society and not itself. I also think I can understand that Wittgenstein was faced with a condition where there are no ethics, in war, and so wrote his way out of that paradox in his Tractatus, just as I am trying to write my way out of the tower.

There are differences in the gender and histories, the cultures and geographies, the conditions of war, of being a Jew, of being queer, and of being so thoroughly seduced by the lure of university prestige. By the same token, there are parallels in being queer, the seduction of privilege,
of being white, middle class, of being idealistic and of turning away from the intolerable conditions of being human in contexts where humanity is unrecognizable.

The Fall

Again, just as I stumbled into the stories of the Eurocentric philosophers discussed here, I recently tripped over a phrase in an essay by Heidegger, *The Way Back into the Ground of Metaphysics*:\textsuperscript{20} “…Dasein’s everyday interpretation of itself is familiar to us as the “the voice of conscience”.”\textsuperscript{21}

It’s funny how sometimes a simple sentence leaps into the mind like a shout, something that might have previously always been dismissed as mundane, outmoded, insipid, even, and then one day it shouts at you in a different voice, one that hears you listen. Well, I have neatly displaced my pronouns here, so let me re-situate this as a moment when a simple sentence leaped out at *me*, and shouted at *me*. It was a gathering of words that could hear me listen when it yelled about “the voice of conscience.”

\textsuperscript{20} Heidegger, “The way back into the ground of metaphysics.” 1957.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 208
I mean, this is why I am falling, after all, isn’t? It’s my conscience, my sense of what is the right thing to do here. My personal ethics, however questionable they might seem to others, have driven me so far out of the inner circles in the higher towers that I am falling. I am falling because I care too much about what gets written, what writes, who writes, how, why and for who. Anything else would be a betrayal to myself. Anything else would be an act without integrity, and my integrity, my responsibility, my accountability, my conscience demands nothing less.

What I like even more about the way that simple phrase leapt and shouted at me, is that it came from an essay that paradoxically places traditional metaphysics into the ground, as if grounding the human being’s Being (Dasein) on earth. It is not transcending out there, but here, right here. And as I fall, there is a ground rushing up to greet me, and I am thinking, maybe, this is the way to fall without betrayal.

(But Christ, this reads as if I have been saved, as if I have been rescued, as if this is an authentic fall, and such a noble, righteous thing to do. Well, even I know that is crap.)

So, what does our man Heidegger describe as “inauthenticity?”

'Inauthenticity' does not mean anything like Being-no-longer-in-the-world, but amounts rather to a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world - the kind which is completely fascinated by the 'world' and by the Dasein-with of Others in the 'they'...

He writes, further, that by understanding everything else in the world, by understanding every Other being, Dasein is provided a kind of "tranquility." This is a tranquility that does not seduce or drive one into a kind of stagnation; rather, it "...drives one into uninhibited 'hustle..'"

In other words, he describes a general belief that everything can and ought to be understood as clearly as possible, and that the interest in Others as a “genuine” curiosity is, actually, the work

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22 Heidegger, Being and Time, 1962, 220.
of understanding everything and everyone else. Such interests can be designed to make the world a better place; but it is also where Being begins to fall away from the ground upon which each being stands. By fixating with everything and everyone else, we are not attending to our own being, but are deflecting this towards the world: this is not Being-in-the-world, as a way of being human, but is being in the world as a way of refusing Dasein.

This metaphorically refers to university work, of course, and the social sciences, in that the project of the social sciences is Out There, not within our own neuroses, but Out in the Fields. This also indicates what the role of the witness creates for the human being, a detachment, a separateness; in the academic context this is often described as objectivity, and the 'hustle' is for more research, the more researchers learn about the Out There world, the more research that must be produced.

Of the three stories sketched here, of Wittgenstein, Horkheimer, and Althusser, Heidegger's comments are nonetheless quite pointed:

But at the bottom it remains indefinite what is really to be understood, and the question has not yet even been asked. Nor has it been understood that understanding itself is a potentiality-for-Being which must be made free in one's ownmost Dasein alone. When Dasein, tranquilized, and "understanding" everything, thus compares itself with everything, it drifts along towards alienation in which its ownmost potentiality-for-Being is hidden from it. Falling Being-in-the-world is not only tempting and tranquilizing: it is at the same time alienating.24 (my emphasis)

Heidegger is making reference to totalitarianism, universalism, and the intellectual assumption that one answer can respond to the world's questions, or resolve the world's problems; but, this also explains the intellectual's plight, the overwhelming afflictions of depression, anxiety, addictions, isolation, alienation. That Wittgenstein, Horkheimer, and Althusser all "acted out" their

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23 Ibid., 221
24 Ibid., 221.
depressions and anxieties in the manners that they did are provocative stories which work as metaphors for falling from the tower, into the swamp, and finally being sucked back, staring almost mutely at the power of the hand in front of the face.

Having lost sight of what it was that drove the hustle for a philosophical answer, having turned so completely away from ourselves, we turn back onto ourselves and are subjected to the unknown self staring back, knowing that there is nothing yet that can be done.

Wittgenstein did return to philosophy, and did continue his work, after denouncing Tractatus as "wrong," but that doesn't take away from the story of his own "falling" -

Nor does it deflect from my falling.

I am not a fool, of course, and this is German idealism at its finest. I can confess German idealism appeals to me precisely because it is idealistic, and because it is grounded in materialist concerns - Being, for example, Dasein, is grounded, not "up-there" but on the ground within the human condition. But of course, the history of ontology is, as with the history of epistemology, collapsed. No longer unique traditions of philosophy, they have merged into one and the same condition of being identified, being subjected through what a culture knows about gender, sex, race; through what a social class knows about being located specifically in-relation to the Others who have more, and who cherish their possessions. To Know is to attach to a belief which merges into a fragment of the self-identified, the subject and the subjectified. Philosophy, in the traditional sense, is, as Derrida notes, dead, and the closure of metaphysics has been written so many times that it is almost redundant.
I am forced to return to the experience of the witness, the condition of alienation as a condition of being human, for some, for me, and I cannot universalize this condition because I have met too many others who have no idea of what it means to be isolated.

**Re-Turning the Witness**

It is interesting, here, to turn back to the original narrative that opened this chapter, and think about what I wrote, that I pretended I could reach to Joe's spirit, that I turned away from the spectators, because I wanted to salvage something of my humanity.

What happened, perhaps, was that rather than salvaging something of my own humanity, I disconnected from humanity and connected instead to Joe, the executed man, and when his spirit fled to the skies, it was my soul fleeing the traumatized body. And I never wrote about it - this crisis never turned into some other manuscript; in fact, I never wrote about Africa, until now. I have remained silent in text about Africa because I do not know how to speak of it to people. I knew this when I returned to high school, some six months later, emaciated, I had seen too much, survived too much, and my friends were all the same as when I left them, and they asked me, "Did you see lions and tigers?" as though they were all children. They were, of course, 12 years old, children, and I was struck silent, for a moment, "Yes, we saw lions. No, there are no tigers in Africa..." And in my mind I am thinking, "I saw Biafra, i saw the starving children there and they were bloated from starvation, mutilated, crippled, and they shouted to us 'cadeaux! cadeaux!' because we are white... and we drove over blackened two-by-fours where bridges had been blown out; ...and I saw a man executed, i saw the bullets rip away his body, piece by piece... and we were almost shot, several times, by border patrol guards, ...and we were robbed at night when men would slit..."
open our tent and steal artifacts we'd been collecting, ...and there was never enough food, or water, ...and the jungle is still filled with terrorists who will not give in their guns, ...and we were stranded, several times, in the Congo in Zaire, with flat tires and no way out ..."

I suppose the grief of isolation began in my earliest childhood, when I was vicariously throwing myself out of the window, sending my Barbie dolls to suicide because I could not live with what I knew about my devastated life then, in the family of unspeakable punishments, and regulated through incomprehensible secrets. The actuality of my alienation came to me fully when I returned to Montreal from Kenya, when I realized I could not articulate my experiences. So I became a reader, a writer, and a great pretender.

For the past ten years I have been agonizing my way through the university, resisting so much of the traditions of practice, and for reasons I have never been able to fully articulate. But I do think it connects with this role of the witness, with the academic desire to know everything else, to know Others, to learn about one's self as a researcher by researching Others. I don't know if I resist these practices of research because I am too immersed in this self. While I never actively participated in traditional research, I certainly connected to the role of the researcher-as-witness, and re-called the alienation.

Now I have barricaded myself here in the tower, trying to write my way out; that is, writing to somehow deflect all of this elsewhere, writing without deferring to the higher authorities' expectations, but still setting us all out on some sort of landscape where we are connected in some way. That is a desire, something I want but can never have. I have, in fact, been largely a witness to university practice, never so silent, certainly not passive, but never engaged as though I wanted to
go on somewhere with all this: I have been standing, disconnected from the people, and deeply identified in theory, writing, and more theory, and experience.

I struggle to connect with feminist texts, but so much of these appeal to traditional canons of thinking, I feel a strange betrayal, so many are written in the language of men's traditions, so many are written by heterosexual women, that I feel excluded. So many assume Women are connected to families of children and husbands and larger social circles, that I feel estranged. I witness the feminist text, learn the theory, advance the argument, but in my heart I am nowhere, but here in this stone room, glancing out my window. I try to relate to queer theories, but in my isolation, I cannot connect to the excess of sexuality, when I read these queer texts, it seems as though everyone is fucking but me.

The witness watches, sees, but it is perhaps more relevant to ask myself questions about what it means to be a witness: have I staged this event specifically so that I might be a witness to the worlds of others? What do I learn from being a witness of others, as opposed to the turning that might bring myself to a position of being with others in the process?

What crisis do any of us endure, and transform into theory so as to spare ourselves the more painful work of asking, "What do I want?" from this work of witnessing? Is it another article, a paper, a book? Is it the desire to be recognized by other intellectuals?

What do any of us want to understand? Why? How will this make a difference in the world? Where is the world for you, or me, is it somewhere between home and the university, and the "field;" or is it larger, and if it is larger, where is our concern for the ways you or I act with the world, all of us on some level masterful at being Great Pretenders?

These are not questions I have answers for. These are the questions that have prevented me from seeking out a research project, prevented me from conforming to traditional methodologies,
these are the questions that I saw being acted out in the stories of Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Horkheimer, and Althusser, in different ways, different contexts, and with different outcomes, all devastating, all producing kinds of writing that emerged as theory, detached from the world where their crisis manifested.

And for what? Tractatus was retracted by its author. Horkheimer buried his writing in his basement. Althusser's guilt provided one essay of interest in his entire academic career, living in his world as a commuter between home, the sanitarium, and the institution he wanted to belong to, the place that he later claimed "called him" to murder his wife; one essay that is now being called into question, in relation to his criminal behaviour, and the sheer inhumanity of strangling his wife. Heidegger simply ran away.

These are canonized authors, men who are granted a place in the traditions of their specialization; academics who initiated kinds of intellectual transformations, at great cost to themselves, and to others. Sadly, there are many stories such as these, more than I can bear to tell, but certainly there is something to be said for university relations with the world, its relations with intellectuals, and the intellectual's relation with the university. And we are all still acting in the role of the innocent intellectuals, writing for each other, inserting our victory narratives as experiences to learn from, while the world we belong to goes to hell.

The feminist practice of blurring subjective and objective practice into kinds of participatory research continues to elude me, the subtle writing of self-as-researcher into the narratives, where the coded analyses of Others is perhaps more compassionate than traditional objectivity. There, nonetheless, is a self-serving aspect of apologizing for the intrusion in the subjective narratives, it is a version of the victory narrative, as if to say, "I did no harm, and I learned about myself in the process."
I still wonder why, why seek out people in "the field," turn them into data, and then use this to narrate the struggle to act as researcher, to act as a person, to be in-relation when the relation is constructed through the university's traditions. The methods of research have expanded, certainly. Now, virtually "anything goes" in the final analysis, but this does not clarify for me a social purpose in social science. I am not condemning the contributions feminists and queers have made to social science, indeed, these have been a breath of humane compassion in the stench that seeps from traditions of practice; however, whether we are writing about ourselves, based on what happened when we went out There to "learn" about Others, or whether we are learning about Others based upon what we discovered - in discomfort, or confession - about ourselves, I still cannot understand the social relevance.

I have been a writer for too long to know how easy it is to lie to ourselves in the textualizing of experience, and what was devastating can easily be turned into enlightenment; what was invasive can easily be interpreted as emancipatory. There are no truths here, just texts, and we are all so eager to believe that what we do is of value, it is easier to "learn" from these research experiences, than to ask ourselves, what are we really trying to understand? What, really, is the question that means something beyond the cell of our specialization? Is it genuine curiosity? The inquisitive intellectual, the interested academic, wanting to understand, or needing to know, something else? And if knowledge is identity, if epistemology and ontology have collapsed into something yet unnamed, who benefits from this knowledge?

There is, within the socialized self, an isolation from others that can never truly be breached. There is, within the psyche, an intolerable isolation that may be soothed, satiated with the comforts and affections of social relations, but deep in our hearts, I do suspect all of us think, late at
night, that we are unknowable. Alienation is not necessarily as extreme as the kind that I live with, but neither is it unique to my condition.

Alienation is what mutes us, in the end. It is what pushes us to write about social connections and the need for Others. It is what drives us to seek partners, lovers, friends, to have children, to join groups, to find a place to belong, because somewhere within us all, there is an unknowable self who craves the attention, seeks an identity, desires to have a piece of an Other to fill what remains empty within.

Perhaps that is the human condition, the unresolvable isolation from the world. Research, producing a separation between what we do here in the academy from what we do outside the academy is also producing a rift between what we can and cannot, or rather what we will, or will not speak about; what we have seen between our places of home and academia... what we can and cannot know.

It seems to me, sometimes, when I wander through the halls where the academic journals are stacked, millions and millions of articles speaking to wee pockets of specialists in some area or another, that we are not doing anything, but are merely adrift.

from here she looks adrift

from here, she looks adrift, - but I know she's held fast where her hull's been crushed against the hidden tumble of the reef; I watch her list.
every day she slumps a little more, the undertow gently rocking the gash,
I can hear the planks whine; she'll no doubt be wrenched free one night with a final
shove or tug from the tide, no doubt; and then she'll go under -
I imagine her mast will snap as the ropes that snagged the jetty strain, and I lie awake at night, as
though I'm tied there, waiting for the wreck to yank me loose, tensed as though I
might resist the drag, or hold her up against the weight of sinking.

amidst the calm here, rich azure bouncing seamlessly from sky to sea, surrounded here by the soft
lush of fine sands and gentle winds, she looms dark and damaged in the view, no longer lurching
the way she was, when the final pitch, or yaw, tossed her like a skipping-stone;

she harbors, still, the storm that sent her crashing there, and even now the ropes are losing slack,
stiffening from the tangle in the jut of coast that choked her, they'd been flapping wildly in the
winds

and in the thrashing of her frame, snagged into those crags and held her fast against the foaming
waves that shoved her up against the reef.
she looks, from here, adrift, as if she might have slipped away and is now surrendered to the
currents, an illusion, a wish, perhaps, that she might safely nudge herself free

and float off easily, unharmed, as though she's only resting, but the timbers groan and grind like
thunder coming, as though she's trapped still in the rage of winds and sea, and the ropes there taunt
like mooring lines,

not what finally jammed her but what holds her steady, though when she goes those lines will be
what tighten in resistance, and her mast won't yield, it will shudder for a moment but there's too
much to undo, it'll crack and splinter, not enough to hold her from

submerging, it will break before she goes, and float there without her, dismembered from her bulk
but still fastened to the ropes that dragged her in, the piece of shattered mast still clinging to the
tangled lines.
I wrote my Master's thesis in New Mexico. I lived in Vancouver, and met a woman through an internet discussion list. She was funny, she liked me, it was sexy in the nouveau-cyber scenario of disembodied attractions, and she invited me down to Alamagordo, New Mexico, for the summer. It seemed like a good idea, and I figured it was a place to write. I don't know why, I mean, I always seem to travel somewhere else when I am writing. So I went to New Mexico, to the White Sands Desert, a place where United States military tested Stealth aircraft flights regularly, at a time when such aircraft did not exist, of course. We would watch them fly overhead and Sue would say, "There's a Stealth Bomber..." and then add, "...not that they exist, mind you." We would shrug,
smile cynically when the aircraft emitted a sonic boom, also not officially taking place there in the military test site.

There was something curiously comforting about living in an area where the primary income-based activity of the local military air force did not officially exist. I ought to have been more politically offended, but it struck me as too absurd to be worth the work of engaging any indignation.

I wrote my thesis in her house, she would go to teach at the State University of New Mexico, and I would write. The first draft took about ten days. And then I spent months revising, re-shaping, rewriting, but the basic idea, the ground I wanted to build from, emerged in ten days, as if it had been already scripted in my head and all I was doing was transcribing my thoughts as text.

Now, here, writing in transit, in Vancouver, then to Denver, now here to Montreal, this writing is working differently, there is no ground to build from. It is as if I am underground, trying to make my way up, out, trying to find a ground, even as I know there isn't any surface out there that I would trust for a minute. My writing has always been about presenting a deceptive surface, one that looks firm but is really too soft, one that is easily imagined as solid until you start moving through the words and find yourself slipping into the depths of something else. I was grounded in New Mexico, and so was able to stay there, and build up.

I am underground now, trying to make my way out. It's all backwards, I am trapped in the depths, trying to scratch at the surface, as though under a thin layer of some sponge, or ice and I am pushing and thumping my fist against it, trying to make it crack, or give, so I can push myself through. I am writing from the depths of something else, trying to tunnel up from underground to make my way to that surface, the one that looks firm, the deceptive grounds I ordinarily script myself. They loom above me, and I am in the loamy space beneath. Writing back, words.
In the dungeons of the tower, I am high enough to see the mountains, but crazy enough to recognize the tomb for what it is; trying to write myself out word by word, line by line, sentence by sentence, fearful of every syllable now, because each word is so precariously placed to the next one, each one must hold this writing taut enough that I can walk the tightrope I am writing to get out of here.

My Master's thesis was a pretty good piece of writing, and my supervisor wanted me to turn it into an article for this journal in Southern California, "Mind, Culture, Activity," - an international journal, eclectic to a degree, emphasizing Cultural-Historical theories and Activity theory. These are articles written with a set of complex codes of interaction and mutuality, everything educational, material, personal, cognitive, every human and social being connected in some way to everything else - tools, texts, contexts, history.

This is a journal that presents theories and research, where everything is about how people of different historical and cultural places, and ages are participating in an activity, with tools, languages, in a classroom, or in any activity where people are doing something together, and how are they learning, what are they learning, what is happening in this set of embedded activities and relations, and what does it mean, and so on. These theories revisit the materialism of psychologist Lev Vygotsky, and explore other Russian and Eastern European theoreticians with an eye towards Activity theory, and how to reframe its place in contemporary intellectual practice.

My thesis was mostly about how women are gender-oppressed, gender-constructed, and infantalised in Early Childhood Education, how women are treated as unintellectual, how writing is such a key structure in the work of turning women into creatures of such gendered practice. I wrote about how Early Childhood Education is about heterosexuality, or heteronormativity, and how hard it is to be a queer and an intellectual in this milieu of Education, learning to be a teacher.
It was about how I never learned to be a teacher, basically, how the process slowly eroded any confidence I might have had in myself as a teacher, and how, in the end, I was ashamed and embarrassed about myself, my history, my memories of being a child all yanked forth into this teacher education program and ignored, denied, or punished for being revealed as a contradiction to the theories we were learning about children.

A large part of the thesis was committed to elaborating upon a theory of learning presented by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, Communities of Practice

...and I was trying to use my experiences and memories to reveal an historicized body, referring to these narratives as ways to explicate how difference is invariably excluded from communities, and how communities of practice thrive in contexts of normativity, conformity, obedience to tradition, and uncomplicated generativity. The movements through the community, as described by Lave and Wenger, were, to me, assumptions based on concepts of "belonging." And I was certain I did not belong in Early Childhood Education, even as I completed the program and was certified to teach, I was certain that as a queer intellectual woman, I did not belong to this community of teachers and children.

So, I tried to summarize all of this thesis into an article, submitted it as a rough draft, and my thesis supervisor insisted that the editor of this journal read it, and consider it as important. The article was returned to me with extensive and detailed suggestions for revision, grammar changes, re-arrangements of the paragraphs, explanations of more about this, or that, clarifications of this, or that, changes to the punctuation on this page or that page: very thorough advice. So I rewrote accordingly. One of the reviewers e-mailed me personally with more advice for clarifications, what mattered, what was superfluous, what needed more detail, and she helped tremendously in the rewriting.

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25 Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger, Situated Learning in Communities of Practice 1990,
Then my supervisor and her partner took a crack at it, read through the rewrites and gave me full sentences to use instead of the ones I had written; scratched out words here and there, re-framed sentences into clauses and inserted different ways of wording, different vocabulary. So, after about a year, I resubmitted, and it was accepted, and then the editor himself e-mailed me and told me where to use "which" instead of "that" and when to use "that" instead of "which" and when to punctuate, and when to subordinate a clause, or re-arrange a sentence.

By the time it was ready for publication, about seven people had put a hand into the writing and at the time I was very grateful, flattered for the attention, thinking they were training me how to write as a social scientist. And when the article was published, I was excited at first, the surface of it all was glossy, and the typeface was professional, and of course, there it was, my first academic article.

But it wasn't mine, really, and I knew that, as I read it in the journal I knew that most of the wording wasn't mine, most of the changes had transformed the original thesis idea into something else, something social science. It was difficult to understand, the way it was written, just the way a proper intellectual article is supposed to be - I mean, it is supposed to be difficult to understand so that the reader knows this writer is very intellectual, and sure enough that was how it read to me, intellectual, difficult, more and more estranged from my hands and belonging more, really, to the hands of those who helped.

I remember when I finally finished changing the last "which" to "that" and switched the last clause around, making ready for publication, I remember reading what had been written by all these kind and helpful scholars, and thinking, "Never again," meaning I will never write this way again. It wasn't that I was ungrateful, I was really quite astonished by the help I received, but it seemed stupid to put my name as the author because I hadn't written most of it, I had rewritten
most of it through the reviewers and editors and rewriters. It was more theirs than mine, and I have
always felt ashamed of including this article in my list of publications, because I never felt as
though I wrote it, I felt as though I was assisting the rewriters in making it something else,
something that they needed to read, or something that they needed me to produce, and because I
could not produce that text, they did it for me, and then signed my name to it, as if it were mine.
And I was never able to refer to it as mine, I always mentioned it as that article we wrote, and the
people who helped would ask "which article?" and I would refer them to the MCA article, and "oh
yes, heh heh," as if this was our little secret.

No writer can live with that, of course. No writer can call herself a writer and then publish
something that so many others rewrote. I suppose scholars are accustomed to the process, or
academics are habituated to the work of rewriting through the hands of so many others, but I am
not. I have always been my own writer, as much as possible, I can take suggestions, advice, I can
respect questions for clarity, but this was different. This was never my article, and that was why,
when I finally finished, I thought so clearly, "Never again."

I think that is why, now, everyone is so angry with me, because I rejected all that training in
how to write as an intellectual, and now I have rejected all the social science protocols for writing
a dissertation, and those people who helped so much must surely feel rejected, after all that
training and grooming, after all that support, how could I turn around and say I won't do it again?
I won't produce more intellectual scholarship in the traditions of this thing they do in social
science, I won't do it again. I refused to "conduct" a research project, and that is crazy, really, how
can anyone write a dissertation that isn't a research project? How dare I? Who the hell do I think I
am, anyway? What the hell is the matter with me? Am I so selfish? So self-centered? So egotistical?
So ungrateful? So... stupid? Or ignorant?
What do I want?

Writing, Too

No matter what I write, now, it will be some form of illness, some sort of sickening, it will be too easy to dismiss this as anti-intellectual, as anti-scholarship, as insulting to the traditions and legacies of doctoral work, my gawd, everyone else has done it this way or that way, who am I, to say I won't?

It will be "preliminary," or "a good start;" but as an essay about writing, it will fail, or fall, because it isn't trying to imitate scholarship, it isn't trying to imitate anything, it is me, writing about writing, because this is what I do, and this is what we never speak about in Education, in the university, the speaking about writing is as silent as the "social" in social sciences.

Writing 3

I've been a writer all my life. It's all I do. I write to live, not to impress people with how smart I am, I don't care about how smart I am, or aren't; I am a writer and I write to live. And I have learned so much of the wrong thing here in the university, it is impossible for me to just turn around and pretend as though none of this has happened, as if I am going to go, now, into the field, and gather data. ...as if now, I will reproduce the scholar's text, and not my own.

I am already in the field, here, the fields of words. This is where I am, it is where I am writing, it is what, how, why I am writing, and it is like screaming at the glass in a sound-proof booth, a two-
way mirror. They are watching me completely destroy ten years of university work because of my
damned idiotic notion about poetic conscience, intellectual artistry.

I am compelled to insist upon accountability in response to the article that was published;
that is, account for my ability to write. I am trying to be more responsible about my writing in this
university; that is, be responsive to the actual activity of scholarship and training students in the
codes of how to write as a social scientist.

I am insisting on writing as the primary method of academic communication; I am saying that
for all the talk of science and research, what we really do is write.

I am trying to position myself somehow as a writer and an intellectual, because that is who I
am, and I am trying to create some sort of writing with words and imagery to make this idea of
intellectual artistry a different approach to academic work, a work of intellectual difference,
academic difference. It is intellectual, in that my thinking draws from a vast landscape of theory,
philosophy, and fiction; and it is artistry, in that the production is drawn towards alternative
representations of what might be taken-for-granted in the production of social science.

I am trying to write in a way that anyone might read and think about, to reach outside the
tower, word by word, line by line, sentence by sentence, trying to write my way out to the people
who are out there in the world that is not a field, but is a site of existence, of struggle, of suffering, of
loss, and gain, of love, and pain, of loneliness and despair. I am trying to write outside of social
science, not because I think there is no value to the traditional scholar's work, but because I am
convinced that it is simply not enough.

I very well may be crazy, and the weirdest part is that I won't quit - I've been asked, so many
times, "Haven't you quit...?" and they don't say "...yet?" but that is what they mean.

Haven't you quit yet?

You aren't doing anything according to the traditions and you surely won't make it through
the dissertation process this way, so why do you keep writing?

Who are you pretending to be?

Who do you think you are?
What makes you so damn special? After everything everyone has done for you?

Can you hear that?

It is the voice of Tradition speaking. The History of those who have complied
and compiled.

The university is a monument, a castle, an ancient edifice of Legacy that is struggling with the way the architecture has changed. The discipline of Education is coded into the stance of the patriarch, arms crossed across the chest, furrowed brow, trying to un-code the dissenting act. After all that investment in making me into someone like a scholar, after all the work, and support, for me to turn around and say I don't want this, to say that conformity to this tradition is really unhealthy for me...,

well, how dare I?
I mean, I have no right to do this.
I owe something to the institution. I have to prove something here, I have to produce something institutional here, I can't just write.
I can't just write.

Writing, Still

I remember trying to read before I knew how; I remember the books I would sit with, turning pages and studying the pictures, images, the black codes of text, trying to peer into these for the meanings I could not yet understand. I remember sitting in my closet in the dark, running my
fingers over typeface, feeling the lettering on the book covers, trying to feel the meanings through my fingertips.

I remember grade one, when the code was finally given and I had been waiting so long, it seemed, I instantly understood and words materialized from the previously garble of texts. By the age of seven I was writing my own stories, poems, reading the newspapers, and any books I could find. I wrote a trilogy of poems about absence: silence as the absence of sounds, as a kind of music; loneliness as the absence of others, the eternal solitude of being inside the skin of the self; and blindness as the absence of light, the vision of darkness as the other side of seeing.

It was many years before I would find in philosophy the cryptic phrase, 'the presence of the absence,' and realize I had known, for a long time, what that revealed.

By the age of nine I was reading an English translation of Adolph Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. I had expected the rantings of a lunatic and I was interested in madness, then, because I thought I might be insane, with curious clarity, I thought insanity might explain what was happening to me. Hitler was frighteningly lucid in his writing and I had been hoping for more hauntings of prescient knowledge, indications of the griefs and sorrows that accompany knowledge that has no language.

I read *Flowers for Algernon* and wept in sympathies I could not understand; I read *One Day in the life of Ivan Desinovitch* and was mesmerized by the details of survival. I was comforted by the isolation and the suffering, relentlessly seeking to understand, insatiable in my desire for meaning. I could not say what meanings, or the meanings of what, but I was passionate about finding out everything I could about everything around me, because everything around me was also, somehow, reflecting a piece of the self inside of me. Everything I learned was speaking to

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26 Adolf Hitler, 1923.
27 Daniel Keyes, 1966.
me about there, and here, others, and myself, everything I was trying to understand was a work of connecting somehow with the strangeness of the world around me. Like so many other children, I found the most soothing route through books because they gave me words, images, metaphors, emotions, insight.

I was no Polly-Anna: I was prone to morbidity, depression, seclusion, and confusion. By the age of ten I had learned to disappear without effort, withdrawing into my skin and insulating myself from the world, pursing my darker life in the protective spaces of my imagination, wording it all persistently to myself.

This is one representation of myself as a child, one that I am familiar with most clearly when I try to write now, as an adult, and I trace my wordings back to those darker and perplexing years. I understand them as re-membered, as embodied poetic moments, as life in a stillness that is just outside the shared worlds where I was always partially in bordered realms of inside, outside, committed to neither, but instead always slightly out of phase.

I understand these experiences as sculpting the linings of a poetic conscience.

I think of this poetic conscience as a way of understanding in/as/through/with language, as the art of words, or the word as a work of art. Of course, language is more than words, and is meaningless outside of the ways it is issued forth, whether language is projected in voice or text. Still, words are what pull and push the mind, the heart, and the soul, from inside to outside, they traverse a history and carry something through space in a single glance at a photo. We fill with imagery, metaphors, and a thought overspills in words filled with memories; it is the body calling itself forward, and back, sidling up to something else, re-collected, re-named in the re-membering.

28 Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, 1963 (English Translation).
Language in thought, in writing, in speech, is echo, repeated, whispered to ourselves or others; language is more than the human words but the sounds and ciphers relied upon to cross the distance from one body to another, one thought, meaning, gesture, there is a space that is traversed between bodies, one to the other, to an other, to the next.

An infant babbles to herself at night, talking herself to sleep. A child narrates a game to herself in the corner of a room, or tells her friends what she is doing, offering rules for a game that transforms in the company of others. Someone carves their initials in a park bench, draws messages in the sand with a stick, doodles while cradling a telephone to her ear; she listens to a lecture with one part of her mind, and sketches a shopping list with an other.

At a party four friends are reminiscing, jogging each other's memories with brief fragments of verbal cues that bring them to a shared place in their pasts, laughing, commiserating. A lone youth is scribbling a dark poem while drinking coffee alone at the Laundromat... the poem speaks sorrow to himself, a passerby glances at the writing and thinks the young man is writing lyrics to a song, perhaps.

And she is someone else, pushing a shopping cart on the sidewalk, a steel cage on wheels that is stuffed with her worldly belongings, and she speaking to herself, muttering, it is not a conversation but a monologue, a soliloquy she might repeat to herself everyday.

Certainly, the spoken word is infinitely distinct from the written word. The written word comes from a tumultuous silence of the speed of thought. Writing is the impossible translation of thoughts that move at the speed of light, the shift from listening to the inner-ear to the inner-mind's thought, the pauses that still the hands while we listen to what might yet be written from the stutter of thinking slowly enough to give words a chance to catch up...
This is so different from the spoken words that tumble from the spontaneous mouth. The written words can be as impulsive as speech, but are sometimes less rehearsed, less practiced. Speaking is so much repetition, the skill of social banter is learned in patterns of the people who speak with you. There is less listening than speaking in social language, perhaps because so much of it is prewritten scripts of chatter and anticipated dialogues, "hello, how are you," and "I'm fine" so automated now that neither means anything outside of a generic greeting for White North Americans. When I was in Denver, a standard call amongst strangers was "How's it going?" and for weeks I attempted to answer, "...I don't know how, but it goes and I try to stay with it;" or "...oh it's all right, you know, it goes..." until someone explained that it is a greeting, not a question. It is what Heidegger referred to as "idle talk," a speaking that does not come from the ground where our bodies are steadied by gravity, but instead travels through the air, passing from one breath to another:

The groundlessness of idle talk is no obstacle to its becoming public; instead it encourages this. Idle talk is the possibility of understanding everything without previously making the thing one's own...Idle talk...releases one from the task of genuinely understanding. 29

And then there are those emergent conversations, the spontaneous self speaking with an other, not anticipating familiar speech but hearing something else, what the philosopher, Emmanuel Levinas describes as the relation of Self/Other, where there is no "I" or "You" but an "Us" who are engaging in some form of social merging, emerging, disengaging, pulling back, leaning in, listening, asking, responding, inventing a "who" who might never exist again, but who will be reconstructed in memory, after the encounter, on the way home, re-calling what was spoken, felt, said, heard, assembling a small and new piece of a self/other within. These are the ideal speaking

29 Heidegger, Being and Time, 1962 (English Translation) 19
moments. When is an ideal writing moment? In the university, in the genres of scholars, when does an ideal writing relation emerge?

When the graduate student writes in the company of the other scholars she has read, when she is writing with them, as if she were one of them, as if she were being them, inhabiting the discourse. Learning to repeat the cadence, she is implicitly forced to imitate their speech, explicitly expected to reproduce this script. It is required that she write with a specific genre that is recognized as "intellectual."

Just as the article in MCA was transformed from my writing into a difficult text that I was expected to claim as my own, and which instead turned into an object of estrangement, the traditional dissertation becomes an object, a thing, not a written work, not a work of writing, but a research project spliced with the company of intellectual quotations, citations, references to the Others who write as intellectuals. It is a way of stealing from what might yet be written, and abandoning what might yet be understood.

I am not rejecting the value of the dissertation, nor am I dismissing the value of the dissertations that have been written - having read many of them, I have been amazed by the insights, and impressed with the scholarship. I have also lamented the repetition, the imitation, the redundancy of format, the absence of creative input, I have regretted that moment when I cannot read anymore because it is so convoluted with method and pre-scripted genres of writing that the language disappears, the words are wooden, and I find myself suddenly bored by the absence of something unexpected, but, perhaps that is my own impatience, my own limitations with the scholar's genre.
When it became easier and easier for me to write with a spew of jargon, I stopped writing all together. In fact, after the publication of the article, I found myself muted. It was time for me to write my comprehensive essays in order to meet a requirement of my doctoral degree, and I was emptied of words that would speak as the scholar. I knew I had to just sit down and do it, but I was depleted of scholarly discourse and its pretenses, weary of the endless sentence. I was stuffed to a point of illness with the specifics of jargon and splatters of wordiness that turned this way and that, from this author to that article to this research article to this critique, the endless reference to what every other scholar says, ... everyone saying something, meaning everything, a literal encounter with the sound and the fury of academic scholarship, signifying nothing but rushing, always, to say more.

I know this is the tradition. I know that this is what it is all about. But I also know that there are approximately 170 million research articles that I might refer to, and that I can make any claim with references and it won't be any more true or real than any other claim. In other words, the work of writing for the university has peaked in absolute absurdity.

Writing For

You will write if you write without thinking of the result in terms of a result, but think of the writing in terms of discovery, which is to say that creation must take place between the pen and the paper, not before in a thought or afterwards in a recasting. It will come if it is there and if you will let it come, and if you have anything you will get a sudden creative recognition...

(Gertrude Stein³⁰)
What I have learned through writing, not reading about writing but writing poetry, prose, narrative, and immersing in the creative process of writing, is that with the written words there are meanings at play in a different space of silent construction.

To write is to choose each word in fits and starts, in phrases and in syllables, erasing, rewriting, looking up definitions, playing with synonyms, trusting I need not know where it goes before I get there, trusting that in the spaces between text and the surface of the page there are always layers within and below. Writing is to lose oneself in a sudden stream that pours from the fingers in flows and floods of words that exceed the hand's ability to keep up. It is stopping, suddenly, as if incarnating from a dream, rereading what just poured forth and wondering at it, where might it lead, or wondering where it might have come from. It is savouring the perfect sentence, and erasing the clumsy fumble of words. It is recalling a page as brilliant, and then shredding it in disgust the next day, starting over, knowing that it doesn't matter because there are always more words, and each writing is the possibility of getting closer to the depths inside that push the hand to write.

Writing is the play of taking everything as literal, everything as figurative, and everything as metaphorical, all at the same time. It is the work of finding out how the word is potentially meaning, always representing something else, indicating something new, or representing something old, or known, or believed, in different flavours, colours, shapes, textures, dimensions, bodies, lives.

This aspect of words is not doubled-sided but, perhaps, triple-sided: (i) what it is on the page, (ii) what it is beneath the surface, and (iii) what it is reflecting. These are prescient meanings, where I write what I cannot anticipate, choosing words that foretell what I might yet want to mean.

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30 Stein, G. 1926. *Composition as Explanation: An Address Given in Cambridge and Oxford, June 1926*
always trying to catch up to what my words might be hinting at, what images and metaphors are lurking beneath, and what these reflect in my desire to mean something.

This writing is with meanings that are indistinct in the moment of apprehension, it is listening, reading, and writing, threefold: (i) the idea of someone, somewhere, something, (ii) the history or trace of these, and (iii) the connectedness of these in reflective relations, what it reminds us of, what it might yet remind us of, what it leads to, what it is like, how it might remember us, how it might inspire us to remember something differently, create a different shade for the shapes that hover behind speech.

It is like being handed a clump of clay. There is the texture of the clay itself, there are the hands that start to pull and push, twist and fold one piece over into another piece, pull the lump apart and then you wet your hands, soften the clay, mold and shape.

Then there is the object that lies inside the lumps, the representation that is buried in the artist's psyche, the "thing" that she wants to pull out from the shapes she has been pushing around, there is a depth within that must be found, not a work of creation but discovery, there is something inside that must be teased out piece by piece, and the work becomes more thoughtful because something is inside there, and when the sculptress can see it, she is working now with the imagery of memory and desire, it is not longer a piece of clay but a substance within which something of her lies, waiting to be uncovered by her hands, the tools of her body.

And in all this work, there is her history with clay, with these textures, with messy hands and muddy splashes, with past attempts at sculpting, the failures, the successes, there is a history of working with her hands this way that moves through her fingers as she tries to help the buried image emerge from all the clay that surrounds it, as she tries to find the shape within.
It is the thing, clay, it is the history of this, sculpting. The traces of past experience, and the scent of the workshop, the textures of clay, of wet and dry, the sensation of discovery with each movement of her hands. These are reflecting a memory, revealing a desire. It is this compulsion, the desire revealed, that pushes forward in her mind's eye and her body's movements, as she is pulling away the superfluous surface to release the object's life within, shaping to coax the depths free. It is all of these in one and the same moment of the word, sculpting, in the act itself, sculpting, more than an act or a word, it is a relation of prescient meanings that pull her along in the artistry.

This is what writing is, for me, this is what I do when I am writing - at play in the fields of words, I am prying, flowing, basking, floating, drowning, gasping, paddling, flailing, stuttering, stammering, breathing, existing in the language, writing with the history of my relations with words, tropes and syllables swimming in my thoughts and coursing through my fingers.

In all this are the memories of the life that has been revealed, remembered to me, and the writing that has exposed to me, uncovered me as something inside the text, inside my body, something that I am compelled to find by stripping off the excess, word by word, line by line, adding another. It is the same thing, writing, and it is all of these, the geology of the work, the art, the history, and the creative urge that pulls me into the abyss of language, my own selves merging into textual landscapes, a spongy surface that thrives only because of the depths that are beneath.

It is what Gertrude Stein meant, when she hinted "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose," where a rose is a flower, it is a word describing a flower, it is word that reflects itself in scent and petal, like a rose, a rose is a rose. It is always more than it seems, easily reduced to what it is in the word, alone on the page, repeated.

In art, repetition is the urge to proceed beyond what is reflecting.

In art, repetition is the urge to proceed beyond what is reflecting.
In art, repetition is not the work of perfecting what has been done a million times before, reproduction, crafting out what is the same, but is the urge to proceed beyond this, to reach into a different space where there is more room to move, to write, release the desire to express what it is that pulled you in. It is not a work of carving replications, it is the urge to move ahead.

Casting lines
like web, weaving sticky threads
into a geometric bridge from one anchored ledge to the needles of that cluttered pine,
knitting strands that reach from leaf to limb, from rose vines to the porch railing, from cellar steps to water heaters, stretching lines to trap what feeds me, netting string to capture strays that I can then entomb, cocoon, setting meshes in strategic places to sustain me - being read is being fed.

Writing Gender

Writing is irrepresibly gendered, queered, and it is about human communication, social communication. Writing is about what is social, and here this writing is an effort to insist that there
is a "social" in the social sciences; we just have to find it, buried in the institution, something I
thought I might have dug up once, but threw back because it was unrecognizable, at the time.

Of course, writing is always about gender, and the ways the gendered body writes, what this
body in space produces in texts. When the texts are institutionally muted through the discourse of
science, the gender is transcribed through the woman's hands, from her words, to his genre.
Whatever might yet be "social" about social science, it remains gendered in the male body,
scripting the texts that release research into the swamp of information.

There needs to be some work of unwriting, detexting, unraveling of discourses that script
through our heads and spill off our tongues; there needs to be more listening for the unspoken
sentence, the what-might-yet be said, might what yet be written, more wondering about what was
written and then written over, scribbled off, deleted, what has been shredded out and replaced with
the scholar's drone. The social is here, in the writing, the reading, the remembering, wanting - there
is an institution here, in the echoes of unspoken reference, "this has all been said before" by an
other social scientist, somewhere in the stacks.

Of course it has. Of course it has.

Certainly, my crisis is personal, certainly all trauma is personal, but it is inextricable from
the institutional memories and histories that have effected what and how I write; affected my way
of thinking about Education, and persists in infecting social science. And these are written through
the gender norms of social science. We may write about gender, but we must write like men. We
might write about "women's voice," but we must cite it like a proper science article. We write about
voice as if we didn't actually have one with which to speak. As a crisis, gender is muted through
institutional tradition.
Often, women who are traumatized by the way they are changed and contorted through their participation in the university choose to write a dissertation about "women" in the university. Often, women who are traumatized by the way they are changed and contorted through their participation in the university choose to write a dissertation about "women" in the university. Often, women who are traumatized by the way they are changed and contorted through their participation in the university choose to write a dissertation about "women" in the university.

... given the investment of women as wives and daughters in the tangled relations of dysfunctional families, it is also possible to see in graduate student writing and voice problems the playing out of emotional or family dysfunction as defensive strategies. Viewed in this context, it makes sense that women graduate students, when required to produce sophisticated argumentation, should express their concerns with voice, silence, walls, and underground tunnels through their writing. Thus, these women often "bury" their thesis in the middle or end of their essays; they give too much authority to the voices of scholars and theorists quoted to support their own quieted voice; they produce maze-like sentences in order to avoid being attacked for their ideas. They set up walls at every turn at the same time that they resist accepting professor's ideas. This contradiction -- of insisting on proceeding along while refusing to let any one listen -- characterises in detail the dysfunctional family member. By playing out the drama of the family on the body of her writing, the graduate student shows what an excellent symptom the student has been all along: she accepts the family's symptoms as hers, and she expresses it semiotically on a text/body that will be seen but not understood, diagnosed and judged to be failing but not "heard". More than the family's victim / caretaker, she reveals herself to be the symptom of the culture at large, the hysteric whose "disease" not only makes her unfit to take on a responsible position in that society unless she is "cured", but whose "body" of writing reveals the fault line of that society. 31

There is something in this cited work that is sheer truth, veiled actuality, a generalization that has been gently concealed with a filmy shroud of impossibilities. Because this citation, this

31 Elizabeth A Fay, Eminent Rhetoric: Language, Gender and Cultural Tropes, 40 - 41
quote, is a text that is inevitably coded into the discourses of the (dead as) male genre, it is muted, too, as muted as the women the author tries to describe. The grains of life in there, of how dysfunctional families are reproduced in the graduate student's text, and how these reflect the larger social sphere of violence against women, this is something I could hold onto, if only it weren't written with the dis-ease of the scholar's own voice. It is almost desperately meaningful, but it doesn't express the agonizing grief of the trauma. It writes over it, scripts it into a scientific discourse, and the body of which Fay writes must eventually be nestled in quotation marks, marked off from the rest of her writing.

Even here, when the feminist tries to speak of the bodies of women, she must ultimately encase it as special, as separate, not a fleshy body of secretions and wounds, but a "body" that reveals the fault lines of "that society." Not "this university," or "this department," or "this faculty," or "this particular perplexity of what might be social science," but distantly held away from her writing, like the "body," the fault lies with "that society."

Fay, the scholar, deflects the woman graduate student as a successful social science writer, turn her towards her dysfunctional family, because it is always, somehow, her fault that she is a woman. Whether she resists or refuses, whether she complies in perfect imitation and reproduction of the institutional text, she is still the abjected body, subjected to critique for what and how she writes, absent in the history of writing, she is everywhere the same and nowhere the same.

How many rewrites did it take for Fay to perfect that analysis? How many erasures before she could bring herself to write? The traces of women reverberate in these mutations of communication, and Fay, the scholar, is writing towards something different, but she cannot speak about difference, only over it, across it, to the other side where academic discourse sits in smug mumblings. Yes, yes. Women are dysfunctional. Mm-hm.
Academics, always straddling the can(n)on, enact the social science text as a violence of reproduction, one that writes over women and puts the institution in motion. Somewhere between the thoughts of mind and that hands that write, the literary vocals are pinched and tightening the voice to a thinner trail of writing, discourse, echoes of institutional altos, ideological tenors, a chorus of scholars in the harmonies of their genre, singing to each other, in such perfect pitch that the words of these are slipping under the monotony of reproduction.

Part Deux

Queer Theater: A Play for Reading

I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person because looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there and so the play being written the relation between you at any time is so exactly that that it is of no importance unless you look at it. ...A Landscape does not move nothing really moves in a landscape but things are there, and I put into the play the things that were there.

(Gertrude Stein, *Plays*[^32])

At Play in Random Acts of Writing

[^32]: 1932, Lectures in America, 245.
A play in Several Acts
by Diane Celia Hodges

Cast of characters:

Gertrude Stein
Virginia Woolf
Mary Shelley
Diane Hodges

ACT I

(Scene: At lower stage left Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein are sitting at their favourite writing desks, Stein at a large oak table, and Woolf at a smaller writing desk. At upper stage right, Mary Shelley sits alone. At lower stage right, Hodges, the author, sits in a wooden chair and watches the scene begin.

Lighting is dim at stage right, so that Mary Shelley is visible, but shadowed. Woolf and Stein are fully lit, sitting at their tables, not facing each other, but side by side, angled towards the audience.)

Stein: We listen as we know. We hear what we can hear we can hear everything and never hear everything because we are listening and when we listen we cannot hear everything we can only listen as we know. We can't listen to what we don't know but first we must hear it, you see that don't you. You must hear before you can listen.

Woolf: You seem to have started from the middle. Is this leading somewhere?

Stein: Precisely.

Woolf: (Turns to Stein as if amused) You're odd...
Stein: (Silence)...

Woolf. (Leans back in her chair) Very well. So, beginnings, I take it, are not beginning. ...that's interesting.
Well, this a question about art and writing, isn't it, because in art there's much more than knowledge at stake ...yes its much deeper than that. Writing, my writing is more strange than any relation to knowledge, or what I hear, but there is this other relation ...of prescience with the reader. I write what I want others to know, or why else would I publish? But if it's meaningless to them, ...what if they don't understand, ...and the only way to know if they can hear you long enough to listen, the only way to know is to let them read it. And that is a strange relation, because it is like a haunting. ...a furious haunting. Have you ever felt that?

Stein: (Silence)

Woolf. (Smiling to self) Precisely.

ACT II

Stein: Now, with writing something new, and this is where we might appreciate the art, that something new, that something from outside what readers know, it is very hard to listen to or learn from, or think about or speak about.
This is something I have noticed and in narrative that there is something interesting or exciting to know, to know the difference between repetition and description, that there is so much repetition in description, and in narrative, there is much description, and so it is the repetition that appeals to many readers because they listen to narratives differently. The repetition is description and familiar and so it is soothing. It lulls the imagination without satiating the senses, each word echoing or not echoing.

Art that interrupts that relation speaks in composition, difference, and what is interesting is that living is the thing that they are doing, and composition written in the living of the doing is interesting. That is what is different, what there might yet be to know.

Now it is very likely that nearly everyone has been very nearly certain that something is interesting them. It is very interesting that nothing inside of them, that is when you consider the very long history of every one who has ever acted or has felt, it is very interesting that nothing inside them in all of them makes the history connectedly different.
By this I mean this. The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everyone is doing everything.
Nothing changes from generation to generation except the thing seen and that makes a composition.
It is a question of time, actually.
If you are writing in your time you are entering a different relation with composition, writing in the moment is different to what is being read and that is why you are only of importance
when you are dead because by that time
the present having become the past is classified
and the description of it is classical.
This is too bad, because it is always better to begin again and to begin again
because the moment of the words is moving differently to the reading of the words and so not every
one can see the movement,
so what is there to hear?
It is hard to listen, impossible to enjoy.

*Woolf:* *(Amused)* My word, are you lecturing?!

*Stein:* No, I am remembering about the difference of repetition.

*Woolf:* What might be confused with repetition is the movement of a meaning through the space of
imagination, or not in the imagination, perhaps, but in an other way of moving. Repetition can be
confused with what is redundant, or worse, superfluous, gratuitous.
But there is always a reader, after all. It is the reader who must notice whether or not you have
written something different, don't you think? If you are merely repeating a phrase, or a word, or a
sentence, over and over, it might not be recognized as insistence. It might be written with
insistence, but it might read like gratuitous or superfluous repetition.
This is where I think it is so necessary to be writing, to describe something familiar in ways that are
unfamiliar as a way to produce motion, ... although I must admit I have been accused of being
repetitious, yes. This is the general misunderstanding of what might yet be different about writing,
about women who are writing, really.

*Stein:* It is about sex, and living in a different relation to time, or history. History is, after all, about
sex and by that I mean it is nothing about sex and so is everything about sex.

*Woolf:* Maybe we should begin somewhere else.

**Act III**

*Woolf:* Readers are not contained by the artist, rather, the artist is inevitable contained by the
readers who are reading in their time. And much of time is organized around anticipation.
Familiarity, yes.
I am also quite certain I have forgotten too much of the reader when I am writing, and if the readers
are left out of writing, they have to work to read, reach beyond their expectation, step out of the
anticipation, and read without knowing...
Stein: You think too much of the Other, and she is unknown. You can only write what you know.

Woolf: Yes, well, perhaps you're not thinking enough of the others, the readers, you are assuming too much about what they are doing when they pick up your text or novel or poetry.

Stein: Well, neither of us, in our lifetimes, has made much of a mark on the world through writing. That in itself tells us what we want to know.

Woolf: We write outside, outside of anticipated rhythms of writing, or creating unusual rhythms for reading, changing the tempo of the reader, that is, well, is changing time. Perception, after all, is tuned to what might be called Time. And still there is this present moment that we believe in, even as it is fleeting ceaselessly.

But we - well not you and I, perhaps, but the cultures we have lived within - these are, everywhere, calendars and clocks and church bells, the habits of time... what if you are never waiting? Well, that can't make sense, don't you think? Perfect sense is most palpable to human perception. No one likes confusion.

Stein: No one is ahead of her time, it is only that the particular variety of creating her time is the one that her contemporaries who also are creating for their own time refuse to accept. That is why when there are outlaws in the arts and they are later on classics. It takes the passing generations to look back in order to see what was happening then, but for those who did not do the writing, this takes longer, because they are surrounded by what is being created by the contemporaries, and theirs is what everyone sees, and "then" as in what was written then is a creation of something inside of that present moment of creation, it is produced and it cannot be seen because others cannot listen to something they don't know, and if they don't know the difference, or if they do know the difference, they will be confused by the difference. It takes a long time to listen, because first you must hear.

Woolf: Yes, every generation sees what it sees and there is always something the same about that... I wrote Orlando as a way to make time my own creation, to make the character my own, to create my own version of history. Orlando is flaunting time and so mocking its authors, which is something too awful for some to consider, that time has its authors... And it is about sex, because we are constantly recreating a history that does not exist, but does exist in the living.

... I prefer this conception of movement in space, and rhythms of space, memory, bodies in space, moving back and forth, pretending there is time but really always living in the same shared instant of a kind of distant-present - only once have I reached that sense of completion, with The Waves,
that this is how it is, everything weaving and woven from minds and memories and movements through space, and the timelessness of this version of reality... (Suddenly sad) ... you're right, of course, every generation sees what it sees, and hears what it hears, and reads what it reads the ways that they want, and any change to that process, that flow, any kind of interruption is ... incomprehensible.

(Sits silently)

ACT IV

(Lights dim over Stein and Woolf. Shelley is lit and is watching them, then turns and sees the writer, Hodges, sitting, watching.)

Shelley: Excuse me.

Hodges: (Turns slightly towards Shelley) Yes?

Shelley: I don't understand... I mean, what am I doing here? Who are they? Why am I here? ...

Hodges: ...I... Well, to talk about writing. ...I thought there was something, I mean, I think there are interesting relations amongst the three of you as women writers, as women writers, there is something that holds the three of you together, in my mind.

Shelley: In your mind. Oh! Well pray, tell me my part so I'll know when to speak!

Hodges: Well, I don't know exactly. I mean, you are speaking.

Shelley: (Sits silently for a moment) Quite honestly, I didn't understand this. And those two, I wasn't at all able to make sense of what they were saying. It was an awful bore of pontificating, really. They were talking about writing, and time. And sex.

I don't understand any of that, not at all. .... And really, as for me being a writer, I am not much of one, surely you know that.

Hodges: 'not much of one?'

Shelley: None of my novels were successful, no one read what I wrote, I mean, no one especially enjoyed what I wrote.

Hodges: But you did write Frankenstein.

Shelley: (Laughs) I was eighteen years old!! What could I know about writing a novel? It was a complete failure, even with Percy editing every page, and offering so much assistance, the book, ...it was a disaster. It just went from nowhere, to nowhere, really. ...(Glances at Woolf and Stein) Now why have they stopped talking?
Hodges: I...well. You and I are talking...

Shelley: And when you and I speak, they must stop? Why?

Hodges: Well, because that's how...um... I'm writing it. (Uncomfortably) That's how I'm writing it.

Shelley: I don't understand.

Hodges: This is a script, you see, and I'm the writer. You're one of the characters. I mean, well, ... I am writing this, every word. Well, I've been paraphrasing some quotes from Stein, but mostly, I've...

Shelley: (Interrupting)... What are you saying? Or should I say, what are you writing?!! I don't like this. I have no idea of what I'm going to say next, do I.

Hodges: Frankly, neither do I.

Shelley: So, you're just making it all up, all of this, all the words coming from my mouth, right now, you are just making it all up in your head and writing it down on paper as it comes to you, just... willy-nilly as you please?!

Hodges: No, no, no. I mean yes, but I have read an awful lot about you, all of you, and I've read what you wrote, and there is some weird connection to me. I feel as though I might know what I want you to say, something about suffering, despair, in your writing there is something beneath the words that is so different... I feel, or think, that I understand what is means to be an outsider, to be outside of where everyone else seems to be, and I think it has to do with art, and time, and gender, ... and... well, so, I am writing it...

Shelley: Well that's preposterous isn't it? What can this possibly achieve, if you're admitting it's a farce, characters talking to you while you write to them, no one is going to be deceived by this, it's ... it's ruined. Whatever you set out with, I mean, is ruined from all that lecturing, and now this - you writing to me as if I were someone other than you... It's too odd. Not interesting at all. Who cares?

Hodges: It's important... Each of you represents something in me, each of you have come to mean something particular to me, and why I write, what I think is interesting enough to write about, why write... Each of you represents a connection with the line inside of me, the one that pulls on me every day.

Shelley: (Pauses, looking at Hodges closely) That such a girl could invent such a monster...

(Lights dim on Hodges and Shelley. Stein and Woolf are lit with blue hues)
ACT V

Woolf: Who are they, over there? (Looks over at Shelley and Hodges) Well, they were all lit up a moment ago, did you see them? They were speaking...

Stein: I wasn't aware, or that is to say I was listening to them but not to hear what they were saying. It struck me as an interruption, a strategy of some sort. Not one of my own creating, so clearly I am part of something of which I have no control, or that is how it seems now.

Woolf: Well, what should we do? I'm of a mind to go over there, actually.

Stein: It is always that way when speaking about writing, the desire is to move.

Woolf: (Pauses) You are a most austere intellectual.

Stein: (Laughs) Life is food and sex, you know that, don't you. Everything else is intellectual.

Woolf: (Looks at Stein directly) Now what makes you say that?

Stein: Well as I said before I am not sure about who or what is making me say anything, but I am certainly more aware now of this than when we started out. What I see is you and you are very thin, and this makes me think, or say, or be written with "life is food and sex." And everything else is intellectual, and everything else is what we are doing.

Woolf: How very odd that you should say that. Did you just say that now? Or are you remembering something from what you have written?

Stein: If you mean have I said it before, yes, and if you mean am I repeating myself, no. We seem to be engaged in some sort of work of beginning, but not our beginning, it is someone else's beginning, and she is beginning again and again.

Woolf: I want to speak to those women over there.

(Woolf stands and crosses the stage to where Mary Shelley sits. She stands there for a moment and looks at Shelley, and then at Hodges, and then back at Stein. Stein remains lit in blue hues of lighting, and Shelley, Woolf, and Hodges are partially in shadows and dim lighting. They remain for several seconds in silence.)

ACT VI

Shelley: (To Hodges) Is this supposed to happen? I feel as though worlds are colliding here.
Woolf: I am quite intrigued about all this... (Looks around the stage) I mean, this is a staged event. The lighting, this (Waves her hand distractedly at Stein) furniture, these are props, and we're on stage somehow, isn't that it? (To Shelley) Who are you?

Shelley: Mary Shelley.

Hodges: I'm... (awkwardly) I'm the writer. I'm writing this.

Woolf: Are you indeed. How interesting. (There is another silence as the three women look around the stage and at each other, and at Stein, who has remained at her table.) I take it you want her to remain there.

Hodges: Truthfully? I wouldn't know how to talk to her.

Woolf: Now that is also very interesting.

Hodges: Well this is biography and fiction, and history. It's hard to confront each moment at the same time.

Woolf: All history is fiction, all fiction history, of course. Well, here we are, and you, my dear, seem to have written yourself into a corner.

(Stein emits a loud burst of laughter, "HAH!" and opens a drawer in her table, pulls out sheets of paper and a pencil and begins writing.)

Woolf: (To Hodges) Find me a chair, why don't you, and we can try writing ourselves out of this. (A chair is lit in centre stage. Woolf crosses to where the chair is, picks it up and carries it to sit beside Shelley.) Now.

Hodges: Of course. Begin again. Well, I'm writing about what women might yet say - that is something I am very interested with, what women might yet say...

Shelley: (To Woolf) I'm afraid I don't know your work.

Woolf: I am slightly ahead of your time. But I do recall reading your work. That Frankenstein novel, yes. Very dramatic... Yes. But it isn't really the sort of thing I read.

Shelley: (Laughs) It wasn't the sort of thing anyone reads.

Hodges: Well, you see that's important, because both of you, well, Frankenstein is now considered a classic of Gothic literature, and the character of the monster, and the scientist, these are cultural symbols for so much in the social world. You were transgressing your history, in so many ways; and (to Woolf), you, also, are a classic now. Transgressing your history, or not your history, but the history that you lived in the middle of...
Woof: Ms. Stein, is her work considered a classic now?

Hodges: Avant-garde, perhaps. She is being more read now, I think, because of recent interests in non-narrative writing, and, well, because she's a lesbian.

Woof: Is that so. And me? Am I also classified sexually?

Hodges: A lot has been written about your life, yes, in terms of sexuality, gender, and some understand you as a lesbian who was never able to act on her desires. An androgynous woman.

Shelley: And me? Am I a lesbian too? A lesbian?!

Hodges: (Laughs) Well, queer, I think, is a more appropriate word.


Woof: Queer, as in what boys do together, queer as in homosexual, or buggery, if you prefer the cruder terms... (with a smile) which I sometimes rather do... But I believe is what you are referring to? Or bisexual, or sexually divergent, perhaps, and this has to do with...?

Hodges: Well, this is just my interpretation. Queer writing, writing from a queer space, in a queer space, a queer life... There is a difference in being a woman and being a queer woman. What she writes, from being outside, while being inside this history.

Shelley: This history - this history... Which history? Yours?

Hodges: Yes. It's the difference of my history. And the persistence of writing, that what matters is what writes, not what gets written, but what writes. The three of you are like reflective fragments of me... women inside and outside history. All women are both inside and outside history, but some of you have written a different history, and that's what is important.

Woof: That's stating the obvious.

Hodges: ...you mean that this is about me. Yes. What I have learned and lived about writing, what is interesting to me about writing, and other writers who have lived and learned about writing, in writing, ... but also, there's something else. Remember what Stein was saying about each generation, time, each generation sees what it sees... Well, when I read you, I am reading a part of myself that is different. The living part of me writes, or I am writing what I am living. And I can understand my living when I read what you have written, each of you, in some way, echoes. I have written you in this space here as conductors, or connections, to...something... in me.

Shelley: Writing. Art.

Hodges: Intellectual art. Frankenstein is intellectual art, influenced by Milton's Paradise Lost, that acknowledgment is explicit in the Preface -...but you also take it further, you give it flesh, and find monsters and insane science... It's brilliant, really. It's a work of prescience, anticipating...
knowledge... and translating the echoes into something else... Mary, you created a monster. To me, that's brilliant. It is what I have been trying to write about, writing in spaces and being in the world as it is happening, living in the writing. It is art, taking the familiar - like *Paradise Lost*, - and transforming it into something else, something yet to be seen, something that you are living as you are writing, and what's different, is you are writing without a history, but in a history. Living in both, that's the transgression, the translation...

*Woolf*: Are you living in this writing, ...?

*Hodges*: I'm always living in the writing.

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**ACT VII**

(*Stein, still lit in dim blue, is writing. Hodges crosses the stage and sits at Woolf's desk, then moves the chair so she is sitting at Stein's table.*)

*Stein*: Have you found your beginning?

*Hodges*: There is no beginning, really, is there. That's the point. I started in the middle because that's where we are, that's where I am, outside, inside, in the midst of all this, and outside of everything at the same time. Its what I write that makes the difference.

*Stein*: You are always beginning, and beginning again. It's all you can do, of course. Find your beginning and write it through, until you find your middle, and your end.

*Hodges*: What are you writing? Well, what do I want you to be writing, I suppose, is the question.

*Stein*: A beginning.

**The End**

Being in the beginning
Women writing today in the universities, in the social sciences, are both inside and outside, and in the midst of things. They are inside the institutions, inside of the discourses that produce our ways for speaking about ourselves, and others, and what we do with our selves in the process of living in this history.

They, women, we, are also simultaneously outside these histories as the absence of sex, the refusals of gender that write in the institutionalized texts women are expected to master. We are outside history, but contained in its ideologies. The beliefs that women bring to the universities can be combinations of both inside/outside, scripted into our bodies, and translated through our hands, as we write, through our mouths as we speak, through our thoughts as we listen and think about what it means to be in the university.

Thus, many women who are traumatized by the way they are changed and contorted through their participation in the university choose to write a dissertation about "women" in the university. In the midst of this, there is no beginning place for women, but only the beginnings that have been written through the histories that exclude women by writing through us, over us, without us, and into us. Even feminist discourses, and theories of difference speak from these places of being without the history we are living, muted into fragments that are incoherent, and erased in the texts we might write. Edited, we must write ourselves into the midst of where we are, without any beginnings that speak about where we are, have been, without being able to articulate where we have not been, all these centuries, in the arts, in science, in the production of civilization.

To begin, then, writing from these woven spaces of inside/outside and moving into the midst of these, there must be new beginnings that are written, over and over, not as repetitions of discourse but as transgressions in time, in the presence of this absence of sex in history, in the midst of this absence of women's history, in the work of producing what might yet be written. This calls
for a different emphasis, an insistence of difference. Difference is not particular, but is produced in
the living. And so what are we living, where we are living in the doing of social science, trying to
write about what might yet be understood as a "social," as a complex relation of texts and histories
and fictions and biographies can be understood as truths still unwritten.

Where are these truths, if not in the textual worlds of the institutions that dominate
university communication? If every utterance in the academy conforms to the histories that exclude
sex, what can women say that might be different? We are not there, and we are here, imitating the
tradition of men, resisting the vernacular of masculinity, copying codes of objectivity, apologizing
for subjectivity as if it were a weakness particular to women. We are invariably encasing ourselves
in cautious quotations, trying to be somewhere in relation to these traditions, and trying to compose
a beginning that must keep being written...

Women have not had the time to cultivate a language of difference, in the history of
civilizations, women have been outside, speaking in different relations.

So, now we are beginning to write, after years of reading, we are beginning to write, and
beginning again, and again. So, to be outside reproduction, there must be multiple beginnings,
textual vigilance, writing outside the laws of tradition and history.

Part Deux, Encore, Differance

Act I: (Stein, Woolf, Shelley and Hodges are seated at Stein's table, lower stage-left, light in pale
blue hues)
Stein: Life is food and sex. Everything else is intellectual.

Hodges: You know, I think you're missing something - what about the passions? What about love, and hate, and loss, grief, desire, ...?

Stein: Manifestations of the intellectual, these are neurological translations of the body into what are intellectual repetitions of food, sex, the will to live emerges in the intellectual pronouncements of these. Existence is translation.

Hodges: What about passions? The passion to write?

Stein: There is a passion, yes, intellectual passion is what produces art.

Hodges: I think there is something important about what Virginia said, about the 'furious hauntings' that ride the writer's work... There is an ineffable, an inexpressible that is particular, perhaps, to women, to sexuality, because there are no ways for women to make language mean what they live. I think that is where we start, that is where the beginning is, for me, in this absence of a way to speak, as a way to speak, as an intellectual, about the passion to write, the desire to mean something beyond the scientific. There is nothing scientific about art, or women, for that matter, sexuality, these have no language and all language is somehow ordered by laws of logic - sense - what makes sense is always somehow contorted into logical syntax.

Stein: Precisely. Writing, then, is always beginning again, and again, to find that other way into the writing.

Hodges: But I ask again, what about passions?

Stein: Passion in writing is historical, it is romantic. We are trying to write now, in this time, without that history speaking through us -

Hodges: But it never spoke through us - it has always been speaking about us - we are subjected to the passions, but we have never made them our own, the language to speak of the passions - love, hate, hurt, loss, joy, ecstasy, ... we need a language of women's lives that speaks ourselves into these, so that these are not only the subject of women, but the subject of writing. An ability to be immersed, and to stand back and ask about what she is doing, not doing, reading for the traces of the hauntings... do you know what I mean?

Stein: Interesting.

Woolf: Women are subjected to the passions, or the subjects of passions, always identified in the passions, so are you speaking about something else?

Hodges: The passionate intellectual.
Shelley: Ah. (Smiles) So, the creation confronts the creator as passion, made, invented, designed by the intellectual... a confrontation with the monster, if every creation is some form of monster, that is, and I suppose it is because what is created, the creation, is potentially that which might destroy the creator, always...

Woolf: It is what women create that must seem monstrous, when she creates anything other than heirs to the master’s throne, that is. Anything else that women create, in the arts, as acts of creation, these are, perhaps, too monstrous for the world to bear...

Shelley: ... and so it is a woman who invents a new language for these... it does not have to be a monster, does it? Indeed, perhaps it is the monster who confronts history, not women, but the science that has made the monstrous possible. But how might anyone take these seriously?

Hodges: That will be, I suppose, ...the art of creating something that can be heard.

Woolf:...by those who have no interest in listening.

Hodges: Precisely.

The End
Truths are somewhere between differance and desire.

In the university, in the social sciences and humanities, words are a kind of currency, sometimes spent recklessly until the word has been used up and then the meanings, with the word, are abandoned. Another word will come along, and they do, like coins from a slot machine, in excess, and reinvested before anyone really has a chance to think about what has spilled out in the constant search for meaningful writing. For example, social science writers used to write about "equality" but now are more likely to write "equity." (A policy for equality in schools is now an equity policy.) The shift in meanings here has to do with difference, ability, safety, and access to opportunity, freedom from harassment, a political move away from liberal conservatism, and
towards more liberal progressive language, and so on. But it is much easier to simply write "equity," and assume that what is contained with the word, "equity," is understood.

For a while there was talk about "liberatory practice" and "empowering" others, but with more recent understandings of personal will, motivation, choice, and agency, these words have been replaced with "negotiation" and "inclusive practice."

It is word-work, writing, and it is important to keep this in mind: no matter what academics do in the company of others, it is what they write, and the way they write that matters, because that is all we have. The only way we can know what other academics are thinking about or doing is to read what they have written. What is written, in the end, is sculpted into kinds of scholarly languages, and the currency of words often matters more than the activities being represented. What I mean is that in the activity of any research being referred to, it is the words which effectively work the representation of what the activity might have been, what might have happened during the research process.

We tell each other stories about what we do, what we did, what we think, what we read, we call it theory, or practice, but really it is all a practice of writing what we think. And the words we choose are trends, fads, French philosopher Jacques Derrida calls them "fashions."

Some words are quickly exhausted, - "political correctness" was once a way to describe political sensitivity to difference and the assumptions of normalcy; now it is a slur, derogatory, a way of diminishing meaning and attacking feminism all at the same time. It is often described in the media as an "ideology;" however, all this provides us with is another word that has been exhausted of its meaning – ideology. Ideology is a Marxist term that describes a system of practices (languages, activities, relations) that organize a particular social structure. Fundamentalist Hindu ideologies, for example, function to maintain a caste system that organizes the social structure in a
hierarchy. In Western cultures, capitalism organizes the social structures in ways that maintain a
class system. What is significant about ideologies is the ways they are incorporated into the social
system as normal ideas about the way people should live. Because these are accepted as the normal
ways people should live, people within the social structures work to maintain the structure, without
actively working to change the ideology that perpetuates structural inequalities.

Ideology expresses and maintains an oppressive system in ways that make the oppression
seem normal, acceptable, tolerable.

"Political correctness" emerged as a tool for identifying ideological practice, especially those
that worked to oppress women. Today, however, it has been turned onto itself so that political
correctness is considered the ideology, and the normal way of the social system is being
"threatened" by feminism. Indeed, if nothing else, this indicates how very powerful ideology can be.

Other words linger, especially those that do not threaten the status quo. The word
"pedagogy" remains as a descriptor for "teaching," but in Education discourses, it implies there is
something more to teaching than teaching. "Teaching," as it is taught in the university Teacher
Education programs, can be identified as a discourse, a language-game that is inherently
institutionalized. To speak in discourse is to reiterate institutional languages, it is the repetition of
academic languages, the affirmation of Education as a social science. And while there are
professors who will actively try to interrogate the discourses of teaching, there are more who will not.

Pedagogy, on the other hand, implies kinds of values in the practice of teaching, pedagogy is
not "done;" you do not "do pedagogy;" you "practice pedagogy." Pedagogical practice refers to the
adult literacy work advocated by activist Paulo Freire during the 1970s, during his political
teaching in South American countries. His efforts focused on empowering the local citizens by giving them the tools of language, to enable the natives there to participate politically in the regimes that governed their lives. Literacy was the crucial tool for this, and pedagogy was the type of practice that Freire advocated, not teaching, but leading, encouraging, empowering, inspiring. For Freire, pedagogy was a politic, not a teaching.

Today, in the Western Education discourse, "pedagogy" is interchangeable with "teaching." Pedagogy is now a word that suggests the teacher is reflective, intelligent, teacherly, self-conscious and sensitive to the students' interests and needs, and so, as a word, pedagogy is now part of the same institutional discourse that speaks about "teaching." This is an example of how the words may change, like surfaces and textures, without ever really reaching into deeper stones that hold them in the swamp.

The talk of teaching in university contexts (Teacher Education, for example) is explicitly meta-educative: it is education about education. It is a work of discourse that is delivered from professor to student/educator. "Teaching" here, as a word, is understood as self-evident, and the discourse of teaching is its own language, purposefully eclipsing the art of listening, or hearing what might not, yet, be said. This is not the same as saying the activities of teaching are self-evident, but that the words themselves are dispensed as a premise that there are pre-existent and shared-assumptions about what the words mean. Again, this is not to say that these assumptions are shared, but that the assumption in Education is that there is a shared grasp of what teaching means. When it is called pedagogy, it is still teaching. The words change, but the meanings do not especially move.

I am more concerned with what we write, because in lieu of what might be spoken, all university participation requires that students read academic literature. The words are there, in their
excess, the words that become part of the students' language, the words that will make their way from the absent scholar's writing to the student through her reading and writing about "education." These are the words of interest, these are the scripts of discourse that translate education and teaching into the preferred languages of the academic.

Discourse, as it is written, is a craft of excessively cited verbiage. Students read these scripts, and then are asked to write with them, that is, use these words in an assignment. This is where the transfer of literacy as social communication becomes most formidable. What tools do the student have to intercept the discourse in her re-writing? How can she interrogate a language in the same moment that she is trying to learn it? She will write "pedagogy" without having to explain it in her own words: does she have her own words? Do they matter?

There is difference amongst all academics, absolutely, but if you were to pick up, at random, four journals in Education, and read at random any few articles, you would undoubtedly recognize the tones of repetition, the imitative grammar, the familiar structure, the excess of words over the complexity of what might be found in worlds within the words. And there are worlds in words. Worlds in words. These are historical worlds being reproduced through the history of its authors: and here there can be no ambiguity about the gender of the writer, as we know, it is men who have laid the foundations of women's literacy.

The academic life is thus an incessant chatter of theory and words that seem to lack a connection to the lives of the speakers and writers. Here is where discourse is as good as babble, and the pedantic stylistics of scholarship are, in this case, shaming themselves. I find myself less and less inclined to engage in academic discussion, because at the heart of the talk there is, often, no heart, just words prattling out of the intellectual's brain.
I have always tried to live by what I write, struggled to follow the trails of what I mean when I write, abide by what I can admit to, and be accountable for my words. This does not make me better or worse than the verbose intellectual: hell, I am a verbose intellectual, but I feel a different commitment to the words. I need too much honesty from others, I recognize this as my failing, I cannot trust the words of those who spend words like coin, who cannot commit to what they say, and who take no responsibility for what they might mean. It is an impossible expectation of others, I know, and again it describes my solitude more than it describes others. For me to sit high atop the world in my lonely tower room, and speak of honesty, is quite hypocritical. Still, as a writer, I am here with a world of words, not quite alone, but perhaps being more selective about the company I keep as I try to write my way out.

Worlds of Difference

The word, "differance," is French, and was passed around by the philosopher of language, Jacques Derrida. This word, "differance," has its own particular history, in very specific scholarly contexts of linguistics, cultural studies, later to be encrypted into the writings of queer theory: it is not a casual word, like "pedagogy;" and like "political correctness," it has not endured with its intended impact, but instead has been absorbed, contorted, diffused.

This doesn't suggest it isn't a useful or interesting word; it just implies an impatience with difficult meanings. "Difference" emerges with the English "difference," and the distinction between the two is certainly opaque and convoluted.

"Differance" is a word that Derrida relies upon to form an interplay between difference, and deference: to differ, to mean something else; and to defer, and to avoid meaning something else.

Differance is a method of reading Derrida relies upon for "shaking" the foundations of
structuralism, the traditions of theory that have supposed there is a totalitarian response that can emerge in writing, that one answer will appeal to all of the worlds.

Totalitarianism, based on a belief in structuralism in writing, is a tradition of believing that a universal, or a single reality, can be created with words. Linguistics, as a science, has relied upon a structuralist approach, believing that languages can be studied scientifically as a universal assumption, in absence of the social context, in ignorance of the political context, and disregarding the ways sexuality struggles to speak. Structural linguistics is far above and beyond such corporeal realities.

During the 1970s, Derrida challenged this practice with a grammatical trick of the word, differance, pointing to where something slips one way, slides another way, and leaves a trail, a trace, a shadow that might be cast as uncovering what structuralism has worked so hard to conceal.

"Differance" depends upon an understanding of difference, and deference, and so first I will try to point to where these words have meaning in writing, because writing and identity (difference) are, in these pages, inseparable facets of academic existence.

Differ

Difference refers to what is outside the anticipated, or the commonly held (socially constructed) expectation.

In writing, to differ is to startle the reader from an anticipation of normalcy. To differ, in writing, is to place a word that is unexpected, interrupting the flow of a sentence with a sentence or thought that is outside the main streams of traditional discourse.
Difference-as-identity startles identity by being outside what is expected as universal. In feminist writings about the social worlds, difference describes people who live in the world, but who are not included in the reigning conceptions of "who" counts. Being white, for example, is dominant in North America as normal, and means a person can participate easily in the assumption that whiteness is irrelevant. Difference, here, describes the people who aren't white. It is this condition of not-being white that is different, what marks the unexpected, and challenges what is assumed to be, for Westernized literates, as universal.

Similarly, being heterosexual is easily recognized as "normal," and "normal" is easily understood as upholding the values of heterosexuality lifestyles. It is much easier to anticipate heterosexuality than to consider how these are values that belong to a specific history about particular kinds of people who were conditioned into heterosexual relationships by religious laws in the Middle Ages. When a local regime renders and enforces a law about sexuality, it is an act of totalitarianism, and it is this suppression of difference that creates the conditions for heterosexuality to function as an ideology, as an oppression. As an ideology, it operates both from within the psyche, as consciousness, and outside, as a social organization. There is no escaping the dominance of heterosexuality as normalcy, even as there are populations who can not be included in this conditioning social consciousness.

Difference, here, describes those who are not heterosexual (queers, gays, homosexuals, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgendered, and so on).

The same normalizing, or totalitarian standards that control sexuality also apply for middle-class values: it is much easier to assume these are the "best" values for everyone, than to consider how these are being valued over differences in economic situations. It is easier to rely upon middle-class assumptions about welfare class, working class, working poor, than to consider that the
majority of this population of economic difference are women, single mothers, and people with disabilities, mental illnesses, and addiction illnesses.

Difference holds worlds in its meaning, but it is not easy to account for this when writing for Education. It demands quite a lot of thinking about privilege and the assumptions about who is included in what is believed to be normal. Difference, in academic and in social words, must, invariably, be classified, catalogued, named, identified. Once identified, it is no longer different, but is, rather, a condition of not-being normal.

Certainly, it is always difficult to think about how privileges are afforded to kinds of dominance. This word "dominance" is not a literal description for anyone who wants to specifically overpower an other. Dominance works to describe how distinctive values of a particular history have been functioning as global assumptions. In other words, it is easier to think there is nothing wrong with the ways white middle class beliefs dominate other people's lives, indeed these may be for their ("others' ") benefit. It is often believed that white people civilized the world when they colonized the world, and enslaved so many other worlds; it is easier to believe that capitalism freed the world instead of creating an underclass of poor and disenfranchised upon which the middle class depend.

It is easier to think that there is nothing wrong with the ways heterosexuality is represented in television, films, multimedia, advertisement, magazines, newspapers, fiction and non-fiction, and everyday speech, than it is to think about how these are experienced by those people who are not heterosexual, those "others" who are typically represented in contexts of sickness, deviance, and danger, or contexts of cruelty, hatred, or as victims of violence.

Difference is often positioned as a negation, not what it is, but what it isn't. It is not easy to be queer, to be considered insignificant, unimportant, or to be asked to accept heterosexual ideas as
normal and universal. Sexuality is universal, certainly; but the ways sexuality manifests is variable - homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, for example, represent some ways that sexuality is expressed. Being different typically means being different from the normal assumptions. It is "normal" to assume that everyone is heterosexual, that everyone ought to accept white values and social habits, that everyone ought to be like everyone "else." The "else," here, means the dominant beliefs about who "everyone" is - in North America, everyone is usually white, straight, and middle class. This is not to say everyone IS white, or straight, or middle class, but that everyone - including those who are not - ought to feel that just because they are not white, or straight, or middle class, they are not excluded from those dominating values. That they are excluded, of course, is regarded as irrelevant.

No one ought to have to account for everyone in any literal sense of the word, instead, everyone ought to feel included, whether they are or not. Specious reasoning, but then dominant beliefs have never been about accounting for difference; rather, dominant beliefs are about power and the maintenance of power. So long as white people believe they can represent everyone's interests, there is a sense of normalcy in the sections of society that govern "everyone," whether in the legal or judicial system, or medical, education, welfare and health, social service, bureaucratic structures, corporate organization, and so on. Whiteness, more than pigmentation, is a discourse, a set of practices, a belief system, an institution of particular values.

Difference means different from. By being different from others, the singular exception is set up (the difference) against the authority of normalcy. Heterosexuality is not different from queer, after all: it is queers who are different. White people are not different from black people. It is the black people who are different. It is the poor who are different from the middle class. It is the
purveying assumptions of who is not-different, who is normal, who is included when "We" is invoked, and more importantly, who is excluded.

Difference is not qualitatively better or worse, it is not a position of value: it is a location. So, when I write about what something might mean "in-relation" to something else, I am thinking of this as a spatial concept, a connection that refers to somewhere else. Privilege, for example, is spatial, where what is regarded as the dominant norm is located as a central belief system. It is centrally located in that it is a closed system, and difference, or marginal beliefs and practices orbit on the outer edges of the dominant system.

The spatial metaphor is useful, I think, for thinking about the ways a social system is organized, and I want to stay away from notions of "value" because these are especially relative, and locations are relational. The difference between what is relative, and what is relational, will also matter when trying to make sense of the idea that truths are somewhere between differance and desire. If nothing else, I think most people share a passion for understanding truths about the world in general, as a global space, as well as in the localized world where we find ourselves every day.

**Defer**

Deference is linked to difference, but in a slightly skewed manifestation. To defer is to both delay or postpone, and to yield to a higher authority. Deference in writing suggests the words chosen by the writer can be avoiding, or waiving away something inexpressible, and can also indicate an obeisance to the higher authorities of discourse. To defer to the dissertation, for example, assumes a variety of discourse styles, citations, chapter structures, particular methodologies and data - whether archival, conceptual, or human - will be relied upon for writing up the final document. Deference to the dissertation means both to delay writing, to postpone the
writing that might yet be exposed, and to yield to the higher authority of the authors of higher education. This high in the tower, it is madness to slip out of deference, and shy away from how this is different. This is where truths are wanting, perhaps, between differance and desire, in between the struggle to defer (appeal) to the seduction of normalcy and the necessity of deferring (postponing) the normal for something that is different.

Being different often traces to the ways writing defers itself, deferring, or delaying the effect of difference as an act of yielding to the authority of normalcy. It is a writing that appeals to the unexpected, and so silences what is different. In the desire to not be noticed as different, to be accepted by the Normal, where the dominant view's appreciation is a kind of extended-belonging, a way of saying, "Hey, you're just like one of us," writers of difference might defer their difference - delay the position of a different perspective as being about something like gender or sex, or race, or class, or ability - and substitute authoritarian sites of writing, being in the proper place to make "these" claims. Difference invokes deference in the writing: thus, the word differance is designed to bring attention to the implications of this relation between difference, and deference, and the ways they work together on so many levels of expression and suppression.

**Deferring to Worlds of Difference**

"Truths are somewhere between differance and desire" is a sentence that brings together a relation of difficult ideas. By a relation of ideas, I am writing about ways to think in complex practices, ways to consider complexity as a series of connective tissues, ways of moving through the depths of conflict and contradiction without feeling that an answer must be uncovered. As a relation, this sentence attempts to describe the layers that can constitute a sentence, and how it can
provide a meaningful resource for understanding, for seeking meaning, for cultivating meaningfulness out of seemingly disparate ideas. I want to try here to approach this sentence obliquely, while considering each word individually. So, I'll begin with truths.

**Truths** are plural, of course, because truths are biographies: truths, as constructs of realities, are inextricable from the personal history of each believer. Whatever I might believe to be true, or real, is inseparable from the history I have lived, the memories I rely upon, the experiences I draw from for reference, and this is personal. This is not to say I can't share in the realities or truths of others, but when pressed to commit to my own systems of belief, I have to admit they are written through spaces of my body, the affective self, as complex as she is, she clings to beliefs, seeks and defends truths, and chooses realities.

It is easy for philosophy to drift into arguments about subjective and objective reality, and I want to clarify that what I am suggesting here is different from the subjective, or objective. I am thinking from the social perspective, so there are personal truths that can exist within a larger social reality, just as there are socially organized relations that have written my personal truths - family, friends, colleagues, acquaintances, lovers, mentors, and so on, have all participated in the personal truths I rely upon. By the same token, many of my personal ideas about truths and realities differ considerably from these relations, we do not all have the same perception, nor do we all share the same perspective. There are differences between what I believe, for myself, and what I understand to be the shared beliefs of the larger social world.

The civil wars in Bosnia, Algeria, the splitting of Czechoslovakia into two separate states, the Chinese relations with Taiwan, the Indonesian political and civil corruption, the more recent mass murders that took place in Uganda, the genocides of Rwanda, the historically complex...
relations between Northern Ireland and England, these events present North Americans with a set of complex contexts that require more than our confusion about "other ethnicities;" rather, these require an effort to cultivate compassion for the ways other cultures struggle in the midst of oppressive regimes and changing relations of history.

These civil wars are social and political realities that we cannot all literally share in our understandings, even as we can all "know" about these; and still, we can know about these in ways that invariably refer to personal beliefs about what is normal, and safe. To think of these conflicts as complexities, the understandings of difference need to be explicitly invoked in the work of making meaning of what lies behind and within these cultural clashes. These are not events that the media can give to us, but are realities that we must reach towards with different kinds of expectations. We can mostly read about these, watch these events on television and rely upon the reporting perspectives, and so it is important to be listening to what is not being said as much as we must listen critically to what is being said, or written.

The multiple shootings at Columbine High School, the endless stories of children with guns, these present an issue of social reality, again, where everyone shares in the knowledge of the event, but is helpless in understanding what these acts mean. The questions that need to be asked must be greater than "What is wrong with kids today?" and consider more complex relations of cultural norms of violence, cultural norms of middle-class parenting, and the denial of difference that affects so many youth in today's cultures.

These issues, these truths, are contradictory, and conflicting. To reach towards truths, however, is essential for cultivating compassion. There is, undoubtedly, considerable conflict between what I might believe and what others believe; others might believe that truths are Absolute and Moral, and everything else is propaganda. Ultimately, we choose what we want to believe, and
here is where the personal truths are different from the social, but not specifically separate from the social realms that support personal truths. Still, I hold onto this word, "compassion," as something that is needed in the question of the human condition, what truths might we understand about the human condition. More locally, I hold onto this word for the sake of Education, and for the belief that compassion is part of what reveals truths about the social in Social Science.

Truths are...

"Are" is the operative verb, meaning truths exist. We can be certain that truths exist because falsehoods exist. We all lie, we are all lied to, we deny, refuse, disguise, invent, elaborate reasons or stories to conceal our thoughts, activities, and beliefs. It is because we invest energy in concealment that we can know truths exist; that is, truths are a selective process of revealing.

Whatever I might believe to be true or real is often guarded. There is always a context of trust that shapes the presence of truths, and it is not bad or good to admit that we all lie, but it is a recognition of the ways social relations shape the kinds of realities and truths within which we all participate. There is no way for everyone to tell the truth all the time, it is impossible. It is by that recognition that I know there are reasons to lie: to protect the truths, the beliefs that shape my personal world, my self and others. I can tell a person one thing and someone else another thing, telling myself something completely different from what I am telling others. I might tell a friend the truth and lie to an other, I might choose not to admit to something with a lover, and I might say that I agree with someone else even when I don't, because I know an argument will not change our differing views. I might lie out of shame, embarrassment, I might lie to protect someone else, but by doing this I know the truths I am concealing. We might not always know the truths, but we might have an idea if we can work to recognize the lies.
Truths are somewhere...

This is a spatial context. Truths do not exist in time, but space. We look for truths, find truths, seek, desire, hold on to truths, keep truths in place, let them go, but they are not temporal. These are spatial, located in relation to who and where I am in my life, always in relation to others.

For example, it is true, for me, to admit I love women and to consider myself a woman who loves women. This is a truth, an aspect of my reality, and one that I cannot share with everyone. It is not a temporal part of my life, but spatial, in relation to where I am in a city, country, neighborhood, town, house, room, who I am with - a family member or friend, acquaintance, it is something I must choose to disclose or reveal, but it is always a truth that rests between myself and the place where I am.

I express this love differently in all these contexts, even as I simultaneously choose loneliness to be the space my life fills. It is no less a truth, to identify as a woman-who-loves-women, it is a personal truth, and a social reality. I am not gay now, and not-gay later, there is no now or then, no temporal context for truths.

The civil wars in East European countries, in African countries, and the violence of North American youth all represent truths that are located in people's lives. The European crisis is remote to the North American, and so represent a truth of a different kind than the truth of the Columbine shootings, and other recent acts of youth violence, where the location of this truth brings violence into a different space of relation, people relate differently to this violence because of its location,
and because of their location to those who have been murdered, those who have acted violently, and those who suffer the violence in their relations to the events.

It is often the case that historical truths are rewritten as new documents become available, as new technologies for examining artifacts are used, as new information emerges, as different analyses are generated, as confessions are made. This does not mean that truths change with time, but that truths are in-relation to the ways people go about proving what is true. And this is socially constructed, whether an archaeologist uses a new method for carbon testing ancient artifacts, or a long-held secret is revealed, it is in the contexts of others that truths change. It is in the contexts of social and political contexts that truths are concealed, or revealed, or disguised.

We tell people something that is true, or not, and then years later admit that we lied, or didn't; we read new interpretations of history or watch television documentaries or films that revisit historical narratives with different perspectives, changing what was believed to be true, but not changing what was true. In other words, what is true today does not change what was true a hundred or five hundred years ago - truth is a relation. So, we listen to new versions of an old story, but truths do not change alone. It is the very existence of the social world that produces truths, just as it produces lies, and it this social/political context that shapes and changes the ways we all think about what is true, or real.

People in repressed societies will lie as self-protective measures, they will lie in unconscious ways, denying what is too intolerable to admit, but the truths are available in the work of denials and deceits. The idea that truths are spatially located reveals the ways multiple truths can exist at the same time; and what was believed to be true then is no less true than what is believed to be true now: it is the context, the relation, the interaction that finds truths in-relation, and as I wrote
earlier, relations are spatial, not relative to time, but in-relation to the social/political or personal context.

**Truths are somewhere between...**

Like the sheets, or the lines, or the poles, truths are somewhere between; not self-evident, these must be uncovered, deciphered, revealed, unveiled. This is a key notion for understanding differance, which is a way of thinking about what is beneath the surface of things.

In reading, what is beneath the surface of the text is the author, the author's history, the context of the writing in politics, geography/nationalism, sexuality, race, and gender - when reading, it is useful to think of the text as something that was written by a particular person. This might seem superfluous to the narrative but it is, in actuality, the critical dimension of reading just as it is the critical dimension of writing.

There have been complaints by some critics recently about the work of re-reading historical books for traces of the author's sexuality - Marcel Proust was gay: does this change the books he wrote? The key question here is not about the books, or the quality of the narrative, but is about the author's relation to writing, in a particular history, in a context of personal secrecy. That a queer writer must hide his or her queerness is not only important for thinking in terms of how heterosexual dominance functions in the lives of others, but for thinking about what is being written in the contexts of secrecy. What is being revealed in the writing, how are the traces of a life writing through the lines. French philosopher Michel Foucault wrote three volumes on the History of Sexuality, all the while concealing his own queer sexuality, and his affliction with the AIDS virus. How are we to read this history, knowing the author himself believed his sexuality is not relevant to
the writing of the history of sexuality? It is no less important to read these volumes, but it is important to consider what self-silencing produces in the text.

Queers do see the world from a perspective of being outside, their writing can be insightful because they are outside, and see the world from a different perspective, outside looking in. And in this way, it is important when people who are different write, because they are seeing the normal world from a position of exclusion.

This is not a novel concept: the Italian Marxist philosopher, Antonio Gramsci, admitted as much while he wrote from his prison cell during the early part of the twentieth century. He was incarcerated for participating in Marxist activities and for writing to incite a revolution. He wrote, from inside the prison, that it is only from being outside of the regimes that normalize oppression that one can see how these systems function. By refusing to defer to the authoritarianism of Italian politics, and by writing in ways that differed from what were officially authorized texts, Gramsci enacts *differance*.

But I am getting ahead of myself - the idea that truths are somewhere between *differance* means that truths are somewhere between the text and the history of the author. The writer's efforts to control the words are certainly part of what writing entails; however, that we cannot actually control what our words will mean is in the space between writing and reading. This is a space where erasure leaves a mark, or trace, a shadow of what lies beneath the effort of writing. Literally, words are erased and changed: why? What prompts the change? What can't be written? Why write, after all?

There is something audacious about writing, something that pushes a writer to wrestle with an irrepressible self, a part of the identity that stands apart and tries to speak to the quintessential stranger, the idealized other, the reader.
*Differance* is what lies between the words on a page, and what lingers between the reader and the writer.

**Truths are somewhere between differance and desire.**

Desire is both what I want, and what I must deny myself. It is an object outside of me, something I want but can never have, because once I have it, it is no longer a desire, but an object of my self. It is the process of identity, desire is the need to be with an other, to be as an other. Desire is concerned with what objects represent, not specifically what these are, but what they represent to the psyche.

Desire can often be indicated in the denial, actually, meaning that whatever I refuse is precisely what I want, but because I cannot tolerate the implications of what I want, I refuse it - this is a condition of abjection, to refuse desire is to refuse to identify with, and instead describes an identity that is composed through refusals, through not-wanting, not being in any place, not connecting with any one object, but instead identifying with what is not. Abjection is the obverse of desire. The abject condition of identity is something I will return to, but for now I am interested in the complexities of desire, because it is used so often in academic literature, and because it is so often equated with lust, or sex.

I am referring to a classic tradition of psychoanalysis, where what is most desired is produced by the libido, a passionate need, translated into sexual fantasies that are traced to the originary relations of the body - the mother, the father. These are not isolated relations, but social and political relations. Living in a world where sexuality is repressed, suppressed, regulated, legislated, controlled, and promoted, advertised, explicit, forbidden, everywhere and nowhere,
dangerous, and violent; desire is inevitably conflict. This was Freud's main point: society is
invested in sexual repression, therefore sexual desires are repressed. But because these are impulses
that cannot be controlled, that is, desire cannot be controlled, it manifests in other ways.
Furthermore, because desire is repressed, it manifests in varying pathological expressions.

Eating disorders amongst young girls, for example, are traced to relations with fathers,
where the father's desire is projected onto the girl, and she, in return, must enact a resistance and a
compliance simultaneously. So she starves both to retain the child's body that is desired, and to die
from the anguish such compliance incurs.

Pornography, fantasy, incest, molestation, promiscuity and celibacy are all productions of
desire that reflect kinds of conflicts that cannot be simply resolved, and so they are performed in
contexts that are reflective of the conflict, not the desire. It is characteristically human to
experience sexual desire: it is characteristically social to regulate the ways sexuality may be
expressed.

Desire is not literally about fucking, or lust, but is a motive for love. It is a desire for
identity, an irrepressible need for an other to complete my identity. My love for others is not a
desire to "have" them, but to be them. In others, I see the ways I desire to be - to love an other is to
identify with the other. And this is the conflict of consciousness, where the other is effectively the
unknowable part of ourselves - the unconscious.

Since I can never know myself completely, I seek the completion in others. I love others in
ways I want to love myself, in ways I want to feel loved. I seek my self in others, because there is a
person who stares in the mirror, and I am unsure of who she is, I know this reflection as familiar,
but what do others see? This is part of desire, the desire to know what Others see, to know the self
through others, to know others as reflections that might signify the unknowable self. We love who
reflect back to us a self we desire - we love who we want to be, as it is seen in the ways others see us. It is irrepressibly shared between the self and Others, desire, and love; as social processes of identity, of belonging, of understanding, of knowing.

**Meaning**

Truths are somewhere between *differance* and desire.

So where does that leave us, besides terribly confused?

What this phrase describes is a way to think about meanings. I wonder often if my obsession with meaning isn't personal, reflective of my own losses, my own confusions with people and the way the worlds move in, through, along with people's lives. Of course, everything is personal on some level. By the same token, everything personal is also, always, social.

Still, I have to recognize my passion for understanding as part neurosis, part art, part memory, and part experience. It is not a right, or correct thing to do, this ceaseless fascination with meaning. This is not a quest for the meaning of life, nothing so impossible; but it is also not solely an invention of my own imagination. I do think a lot of people struggle to understand what is happening to them, to the people around them, to people in other countries, other cultures, other economies, other histories, other places, territories, other systems of social organization.

In the past twenty years or so, the volumes of information that people have access to has changed, and the importance of making meaning has, I think, increased with the complexity of the messages. People, inevitably, are changing in relation to the amount of information we have about what other people are doing, what is happening to other people. We are confronted, more and more, with information about people we do not know, but we know what is happening to them, where
they live, we know what they look like, we know what they have done, or refused to do, and all of
this, I am certain, changes the way we think about ourselves.

At the same time, I recognize that only a minority of the world's people have access to
these volumes of information, and most of the global population live as a consequence of those
who control and receive these streams of information.

Knowledge and power, here, emerge again as reflecting a relation of force:
knowledge/power cannot be controlled, but rather is manifested in different relations to knowledge,
how we act with what we know, how we don't act with what we know, how we refuse to know
what we do not want to believe, how we control what we know, how we sterilize what we know
into something less human, something more indifferent, more fearful than concerned.

What Do You Want?

Admitting that my passion for meaning, for understanding, is personally driven and
inextricable from my childhood traumas with secrecy and denials, recognizing how much of my
adult life is organized around learned responses to losses and emotional change, does not diminish
the importance of the issues that concern me. Of the many truths that there are to recognize and
accept, and of the many deceptions that filter through our lives, the desire for meaning is always,
for everyone, personal, social, historical, and all at the same time, an experience with fragmented
strands of motivation, willfulness. The desire for meaning is a need to be connected with what is
meaningful, an identity that makes sense; not a normal self, but a recognizable complexity of
selves.

I also think that everything that people do is rooted in the weave of trauma, loss, memory,
and emotional history. In the university, every research project produced can be traced to an
individual academic, and can be further drawn through personal experiences that manifest in kinds of neurosis. Neurosis is probably the one universal feature of the human condition that we can all count on - again, this is neither good nor bad, it is not a value, it is a part of cultivating greater compassion for the complexity of the human condition.

In the university, where scientific discourse eclipses compassion, there is a history of self-denial that writes through the neutralized text. What I see in this struggle for compassion is the fear of others, the persistent threats that are perceived by others, the acting against others with dismissal, indifference, apathy, anger, hate, rage. Everyone wants something, but few are able to articulate what that is, let alone reach a point of making peace with the possibility that all of us want what we cannot have.

To understand the more complex weaves, outside of simple morality (good or bad) or simple ethics (right or wrong) and consider what isn't obvious, is to think about how nothing is self-evident, how everything is always partly personal/social, and how we are all always engaged in kinds of self-deception. We will always struggle with the confusion of who we are, who we are in relation to others, and who others are; we will always mix the two in some way, so that even my own need for compassion is as much a wish for others to be more compassionate with me, as it is a wish to myself to be more compassionate with others. Love is as much a wish to be loved as it is a wish to love someone else. It is a desire to love the self as much as a desire to be loved, and to love an other.

_Differance_ and desire are allusions to practiced self-deception. These are the distracting surface of things, where we settle for always betraying ourselves just enough to make our way through the complexity of these lives. Earlier I suggested that we can know truths exist because of
the ways we lie - this is something I thought about with psychoanalysis, Freud's theory of negation, and the ways it appears in speech. If I think of everything I refuse, deny, negate, if I think towards every time I say "I am not...;" "I don't want...;" "I won't...;" "I can't...;" beneath these are inexpressible wishes, the desire to affirm the very thing I deny. Every time I think I don't know something, I also have to recognize that I do know, but I can't admit it to myself.

I don't want to believe in anything, because I actually do want to believe in something but I can't bear how precarious belief can be. Everything I don't want reveals to me a desire that I cannot bear to accept. I don't want possessions: but I do, I just haven't been able to afford anything, and I haven't lived anywhere long enough to accumulate possessions; and every time I move I am forced to get rid of what I have, so my desire for minimalism increases. It is a way to refuse what will become a loss: if I have nothing, I will lose nothing. Lack of desire is the defense against loss; lack of interest is a defense against complication, a refusal to recognize complicity. Lack of motivation is the refusal of the risks that go with participation - everything we refuse is precisely what we want, but cannot bear to lose.

My current desire to have nothing is the same as the desire to trust no one: I would rather be lonely than betrayed. But this is, again, my practiced self-deception, because I would rather be loved than alone. I would rather believe in everyone, than believe I am too estranged from the normal social world to understand anyone. Whatever I cannot admit to, is invariably what I must refuse - this is the way desire emerges - in the negation.

Truths are not obvious or self-evident, and they do not remain for long - these are transient, fleeting moments of recognition, always partial, always contingent, always connected to somewhere immediate and somewhere remote - a context and a memory, a familiar expression,
activity, image, phrase, gesture. But I'll try to situate these somewhere more specific: social
science and writing.

To sum up what I've been working through:

1. Truths are always plural, whether personal or socially shared, there is no single truth, but many, often conflicting, contradictory truths.

2. Truths exist, and we can know this because of the ways we work to conceal them.

3. Truths are spatial, so I am asking where is a truth located; not when is this true, or not; but where is this true, as in, what is the context for this truth?

4. Truths are not self-evident, but between what we might know, and what we might believe, what we might wish to be true, what we take-for-granted as true, all of these are contingent upon a social context.

5. Truths are layered between what is deferred, delayed, postponed, in writing; in what is deferred to a higher authority, and where the text differs from what we expect or anticipate.

6. Truths are layered, and portrayed in desire, the denials and suppression of desire, and the manifestations of what we might want, but cannot admit to.

Science, Art, and Social Communication

This is a play within the pages, as much as there is a play in the fields of words, there is a theatric of madness here. It is a madness borne of anger, disillusionment and disappointments, but it also a kind of lunacy that keeps that anger in a perspective of location; that is, the anger is shifting in relation to what I write, what I admit to. The complexity, the depths below this surface is where I can hope to make better meanings from my own confusions. How can I try to read these lines as I
write them, to understand this kind of concealed craziness, how can I find my truths between differance and desire?

Seeking out the depths beneath the surface of things (here such a thing is this page, these lines, these words) is not a method of provoking or tearing away the surface; it is not designed to rip away the surface because the surface, like the skin of our bodies, protects our more tender and vulnerable selves. The idea here is to cultivate meaningfulness from the depths in ways that might reveal a site of compassion. And any thought of justice needs to have access to a site of compassion when dealing with what seems to be insane.

As an intellectual, and as an artist, I have always tried to communicate in my writing as much to evoke an intimate relation, as to relate an intimate emotion. There is, in social science writing, a particular vernacular that is detached, and communicating as an intellectual is very different from writing.

Literacy has evolved through its artistry, not its intellectual form. The intellectual forms of writing have, if anything, stultified a development of creative communication. It has seemed to me, for some time now, that the social sciences have a responsibility for communicating socially, not only amidst its circle of specialized intellectuals, but outside the tower; and it has occurred to me, more recently, that perhaps there is no "social" in the social sciences because of this limited communication.

At this point, my work of accountability needs to shift, because a multitude of ideas have been put forth, but as yet no opportunity for activity; that is, so now what? What to do with what we know? For myself, this involves a story, an activity, a chunk of my life, where I engaged in an art-activist project for three years outside of the university. It was not a research project, but an activist project; it was not scientifically-designed, but artistically focused. It involved my
incorporating a non-profit organization, ArtTech Explorations Society, Inc., and writing proposals to non-university sources for funding. The idea behind the experience was to somehow put intellectual work into a social activity outside the university, and at that time, I believed I had the ability to write the proposals, organize the activities, coordinate the ambitions of the project, and so on. I located the project in my own community, a lower-income neighbourhood in East Vancouver, and addressed the status of mental health in the area, primarily because so many of the area's residents are survivors of psychiatric institutions, mental health consumers.

But my silence about this, to the university, requires an exploration, and this is where I apply the activity of account-ability, the ability to write about what I did, and response-ability, the ability to respond to what I write. This second activity borrows from this notion of truths being somewhere between differance and desire; because no matter what I write, I repress other events, no matter how I paint these years of activism, I want to emerge as a winner, I want this to be my victory narrative, even as it is still ambiguously narrated to myself, and to others. I want to defer to activism even as I recognize that I am no activist. I want to differ from the institutional narrative, even as I am an intellectual who has been participating in the university for ten years.

This requires an art of writing, certainly, but more importantly, it demands a cautious work of re-reading for the places where I slip, the sites of my fictions, desires, the traces and shadows of my denials, the resistance to apologetic or self-pitying discourse, a work, of writing with an artistic sensibility, with a passion for the work words can do, and an intellectual sensibility, a passion for the ways I am inspired by theory.

Once Re-Turned
Before I leave, I want to take the ideas proposed here, and offer a re-turn the ending of the previous chapter, where I engaged in a scenario with three other authors - Gertrude Stein, Virginia Woolf, and Mary Shelley. It was only last night that I recalled I had wanted to situate these authors in a multilogue of women's bodies, to explicate and perform the ways flesh speaks from mind and body, through hands.

Re-calling this script in my thoughts, however, revealed something very different, not bodies speaking, but talking heads. I inserted the thinking heads of these women writers into a confrontation with my own thinking head. There were no costumes or gestures, no talk of bodies, in fact there was no movement at all except for when Woolf crosses the stage to speak with Shelley and myself. Instead of addressing the body, we all addressed our thoughts and I coordinated a highly intellectual discussion of time, gender, and writing.

Of all the writers I might have chosen to sit down with and talk about women's bodies and writing, it is incredible to me that I spontaneously chose these three women. Not one of them has ever succeeded in bringing together the body with writing, but rather all three are women who refused the women's body in their texts, who wrote as if there were no body, but only the intellect speaking from thought, through their hands. In my desire to confront the body, I refused the body, and choreographed in its place a scenario for exploring why I was writing at all, staging the influences in my own writing and sustaining my desire to conceal this body. In effect, I performed what was possible and refused to do the impossible. This is to say, I could never speak for the bodies of these women, nor could I ever imagine what they might say about their bodies. I cannot even imagine what I might say about my body.

There is no confusion now as to why I selected these women - intellectuals all - for all of them treated the human body in very particular ways in their writing, and in their lives. For
example, Mary Shelley, having survived several miscarriages and the deaths of her newborns, writes a story of a man who creates a life he cannot bear to confront. A scientist, detached from the deeper meanings of what he is actually doing, assembles body parts from corpses, stitches them together and brings the corpse to life. Upon recognition of what he has created, when the monster walks into his room and grunts, gestures in uncanny need, Victor Frankenstein flees. The monster, abandoned, wanders out and over a period of a year learns to speak and read.

It is through this internalization of language and his secret glimpses of how others live that the monster can think about himself, seek his identity, find who created him as a desire to attach to an other; he can finally confront his creator and ask, "Why?"

In the end, the confrontation culminates in the death of both. It is through language that each realizes what has become of the experiment: Frankenstein is horrified, and enraged at the monster's demands for companionship; and the monster vows to destroy Frankenstein's life by murdering everyone he loved. Both are left despondent, despairing, existentially adrift as bodies without identities. Frankenstein dies while the monster watches his creator perish; and the monster loses the one object he might have claimed as a source of love, attachment, the only relation he could cling to has been destroyed, and so his life returns as meaningless, a body with no identity.

Shelley's story differed so dramatically from the traditional texts of her time that it was publicly dismissed. Refusing to defer to the canons of her contemporaries, her desire is to depict abjection, a life without meaning, a body without an identity, where monsters are those who have no compassion for life. Frankenstein and his monster are each abjected, exiled: the creator of a living corpse and the cadaver who stalks him.

These are deeply conflicted symbols of Shelley's own biography, a woman without a home as she traveled with Percy, a woman shrouded in scandal, living without family support as she was
publicly shamed by her father. She was living without social relations or social affiliations, never attaining any status in the social circles she visited with Percy. Surviving the deaths of all but one of her children, and the death of Percy, Mary was left alone at the age of twenty-six, an exile, writing for a living without the art that once captured her hands.

Gertrude Stein wrote with the hands of a cubist, identifying with the men who initiated this movement of art. Her minimalism is literal, specific to grammar and the structures of writing. Devoid of emotion, passions, descriptions, Ms. Stein writes from her brain, translating visual perceptions through her hands, but with the artist's passion to create something different out of what is so commonly familiar. Her body, in-relation to her life-companion Alice Toklas, is reserved for a scattered few references, one of which is Lifting Belly, an erotic composition. In another piece of writing, Patriarchal Poetry, Stein makes use of repetition to emphasize the location, or gender, or dominance in her writing.

Primarily, however, her writing is concerned with words, however, not gender, and what words can do, what words can perform in the work of reduction. There is never a body attached to these words, rather, the words are, like a landscape, objects she can move around.

There is no desire with these objects, no object to attach to or identify with, but instead she detaches herself from these and moves them across a page, the hands foreclosing desire through the restless movement of her impressions.

Virginia Woolf was less a body writing than a body suffering through her art. Married to a man who wanted no children, and who sought little sexual intimacy, Woolf fell in love with a woman with whom she could not permit herself to desire (Victoria Sackville-West). Woolf was eventually forced to displace her desire into a construction of androgyny (Orlando) rather than identify herself in-relation to the woman she loved.
A chronic sufferer of anorexia-nervosa, ceaselessly subjected to her husband's over-
protective and dominating concerns for her mental health, Ms. Woolf suffered her body until her
death. Still, she wrote the transcendent text, transforming the commonplace into something
unfamiliar, depending upon words to enact the art that moved within her.

What did I expect to write with these women? Why these writers, all of whom could not
write with the woman's body present, writing from histories where women's bodies were
profanities. To what was I deferring, desiring, avoiding, not-writing, in a context I had identified as
specifically concerned with women's bodies and writing?

Here I can ask about the truths I try to conceal, while revealing the truths that slip through
the lines. I can look to which authority I did defer, to which desires I did postpone, neglect, and
recognize that even as I tried to consciously confront myself, I was unable to unveil the
complexities of what writes when I am writing.

There is a symbolic work of decapitation in these kinds of writing, where the heads are
removed from the bodies that are claimed to be there, but cannot be seen - it is what intellectuals do
in the university, decapitate, in order to universalize. There can be no obvious signs of gender when
attempting to speak about everyone, and so there can be no body, fleshed with genitalia, blood,
semen, perspiration, AIDS, sickness; in Education each body is a "person" placed outside the mess
of flesh.

To be accepted by other intellectuals, it is imperative to decapitate the resources, remove the
references from their bodies; thus, we are not expected to quote Michel Foucault and identify him
as a victim of AIDS. Talking heads thrill the intellectual, and the most successful intellectuals are
the ones who can decapitate themselves, remove their thinking from their bodies completely and
speak, as Stein, from the transcending brain.
What truths are there, in my scene? If truths are buried where we conceal the most of ourselves, then I have to concede my own body is a truth that I struggle with in these writings. My passion for intellectualism is also evidence of my desire to decapitate, to remove this head from this body because this body holds a history that I still sneak away from, a body that I still wish to deny.

Even as I identify the absence of the body in academic writing, I cannot recognize its absence in my own writing. Perhaps I postponed the body because I can only speak of this body, I am not authorized to speak of Stein's body, or Shelley's body, or Woolf's; but only of my own. What, then, is the desire? What am I seeking here, in choosing these women? To identify with women who intellectualized their bodies, perhaps, I find company with these women as artists who also wrote in the absence of identifying how their bodies needed to be concealed.

There are multiple readings possible here, but it is helpful to ask these questions in this place of my uncertainties of truths and meanings. Most significantly, throughout this writing, I have deferred, postponed any acknowledgment of abjection, the refusal of desire, the rejection of identity and the displacement of the self into locations and meanings.

The abjected self never asks, "Who am I?" but instead seeks answers to "Where am I?" and does so in ceaseless work with meanings, meanings, attempting to undo the meaninglessness that accompanies the absence of identity, the absence of an identification with an other. For the abject, there is no other, but only the desperation of meanings. The abject sees horror, filth, decay, and agonizes for a location in relation to these gruesome reminders of life, and death.

In a way, the scenes I have scripted with women whose writing I have loved has connected me to writing, to my own writing, with a kind of love for how the words will move if I let go of insisting that I can predict what this might mean. It has helped me recognize this self as passionate for meaning, abjected from the living relations that might write me free from falling.
This recognition of the abjected self who writes marks a necessary deviation, pivoting now, turning towards what amounted to my own crisis, and what finally pushed me up here to the tower, in solitude, trying to write my way out of the crisis from an other site of practice.

There is, of course, the activist project I organized, where I attempted to pose as an intellectual activist and instead identified as a mental health survivor. There are the movements I have taken, literally from place to place, in Vancouver, and then from Vancouver to Denver to Montreal. There is this question of the body, decapitation, intellectual connections, my own sympathies for Frankenstein's un-named monster, my own monstrous feelings of the histories that collide within me.

There is this persistent refusal to identify, and seek the answers to "where?" instead of "who?" ... there is this chosen place of exile that I live with, damning the world, ripping at the walls of this tower as though they confine me, when I know that I could always simply walk away.

This is not my madness alone, but a common madness of intellectualism, a familiar conflict of academic work, concealed, repressed, denied, but here, there, nevertheless. How I choose to explore these will shift the weight of these writings, as I move towards fictions, and seek refuge in some other way with words.
The trace of a curve

"To substitute an equation for a figure consists, therefore, in seeing the actual position of the moving points in the tracing of the curve at any moment whatever, instead of regarding this tracing all at once, gathered up in the unique moment when the curve has reached its finished state."

Henri Bergson, Creative Evolution (1911)

this body of water arches, dips, a spine dissolving to a curve,

rippled with her touch, a hand upon the surface
like a dewdrop hangs from leaf, or shimmers from the silver web drawn between a lush of cedars, intertwined beneath the spongy soil.
her hand a current murmuring this endless caress,
wending along the curves that this body coaxed in the enduring, flesh not from age but through living.

pouring into this mouth, lips like soft willow leaves weeping into mine,
this body of water welcomed her roaming, drank her touch like rain,
memorized the streams of her hands on this skin, her body in this body
of water,
merging into seas.

in the stillness of the rhythmic pattern of my beating heart
I still hear the sounds of her caress, the echoes of our ebb, and flow,
the whispers of how loving lives in the touch of a hand that traces the curve.
Artless Communities

Art, madness, and belonging

I had started a version of this writing in Vancouver, during a moody wet spring in the West Coast rain forest. It was a labour of agony, drawing words from my tongue, unable to think anymore in the scripts of the scholar, I was fiercely uncommunicative. I had strayed too far, and was searching, quite desperately, through volumes of poetry, or, when exhausted there, left staring dumbly at television, tight-lipped and grievous, wordlessly trapped by a thunder of thought that moved too quickly for my hands.
From this place of sorrow in silence I knitted an anger at history, angry at the acuteness of understanding I had reached, and remained impassioned with for too long. I'd sit and smolder in a rage of helplessness, there is no way for articulating this symbol, this "thing" that I know.

It is a representation of so many layers of my own, personal madness, I can see it reflecting and it is so utterly insidious. It's about me, but not me, not just me.

It is not everything, and it is everything; not everyone, but not any one; everywhere and nowhere, but for poetry. There are no institutions in poetry, but I couldn't find the poetry in myself, and I could find no way to reveal the pervasive social dulled by common ignorance. (What gave me this right?) I was helpless against the meaningless words, 'institutions', 'ideologies,' more than overworked and emptied, I felt I had simply swallowed them whole.

It was a time when all I could see were the bodies bending according to Laws that were written from ancient privilege. Nothing had changed, in a thousand years, but the clothes and the speed of violence; nothing had mattered from scholarly calls for a notice of difference, the indifference to difference warped into something more normal.

And I was sinking from the weight of an irreparable question: did participation in the university make women sick, or were women who were sick drawn to the university? Irreparable, because sickness, women, and the university were inextricable from the asking and so, in many ways, left the question as an accusation of myself. I couldn't respond to it, but only suffer the consequences of thinking it needed to be asked... and not anyone or anywhere, but of myself.

In August, I moved to Denver, Colorado - the Alpine Desert, with dry thin air and cloudless skies, I was one mile closer to the sun.
Denver, as a place and an experience, offered me the comforts of estrangement, I didn't want to belong anywhere, I think. At the time I needed to maintain this vision, that I was unable to see where I fit or belonged in-relation with the university. The University of Colorado was, to me, the same as any other university, the city was the same as any other city. I started writing with artless rage, slipping into something almost wicked and shameful, my thinking impaired because of some inner decay.

I set out the work of my own self-destruction, as if in a trance, moving in space as though it were too thick to pass through, eventually holing up in an apartment, engulfed with despair and emotional devastation.

In December, I left Denver to return to Montreal, and I am still here, in Montreal, and now, as I write these words, in January, it is only cold: -20 Celsius, cold enough. It snowed yesterday, then the winds began to blow in, everything froze, and memories of ice storms crept to the surface of the city.

I grew up in these winters of Eastern Canada - the cold is eerily familiar, the bitter humidity and frosting windows comforting, I remember this. I go out and the interior of me freezes, and I think, yes, I remember this.

My body panics, almost hyperventilates, and I think, yes, I remember this, too.

The terror of this cold, the pain of freezing, the bitter clutch of damp to bones, the stinging pinch of cheeks that have been exposed too long to the winds that blow from Arctic gusts; and while Vancouver drowns from rain and dies from lack of sun, while Denver sits in blankets of thick mountain snows, Quebec settles into a seasonal ice age. Frostbite warnings on the radio, ski news, cautions and admonitions about wind and cold, bundle up, be careful, carry survival gear in your car, reminders that this eastern winters can, and do, kill with cold.
My family lives here, this is where I grew up, and "here" has been only a source of my rage for so many years, I have never returned to Montreal well. My infrequent visits during the past ten years have been framed with my anger and through hurtful conflicts.

Now, I am here and for some reason, I have exhausted my maddening turns and am standing, seeing them as who they are. Goddesses. How people change, how we have all changed, I can feel the difference for the first time. I have been really baffled by how much they care. And the different way this feels, I am feeling safe for the first time I can remember, with them, and with each other.

They comfort, understand, sympathize, reassure, and my sister, "single mom," eighteen months older than me, my other half of life, she begins to remind me of who I might have been, once. She knows me in ways no one else can, and I've been realizing how I need that. Her two children love me and I can't understand why. But I can feel the difference, here is some sort of energy that comes from this uncomplicated affection. I am losing what has been so cruel, so piercing; still, as always, haunted by writing, but it is not so turbid, not so tortuous, not so furious.

Irrational Chills

...human relationships are not founded on reason any more than my roses are fertilized with debate...seeking asylum behind the wall of intellect and rationality is a selfish retreating into self-protectiveness at the expense of another's well-being. 

ArtTech Explorations - Vancouver

It began during a ten-minute walk from the bus stop to my apartment in East Vancouver.

There is a stretch of sidewalk that is lined with pale blue ceramic tiles, each square has been
autographed by people who participated in a public art project during the summer of 1996, and all their names are etched deeply in the surface of the tiles. I see these everyday on my walk between home and the bus, and on this day, I remember quite vividly, the sight of these names in the sidewalk irked me. Who were these people, and why are they written in the street this way?

This was the beginning of a difficult fracturing of identification for me, to recognize that I felt estranged from so much. I was feeling exclusion on behalf of homeless kids and street youth, the addicts, the mentally ill, the depressed, manic, schizophrenic, paranoid, over-medicated and impoverished others who lived in my neighbourhood. I could not, at the time, recognize that I felt homeless, struggling with my own addiction, depression, taking psychotropic medications and feeling increasingly "sick" in-connection with my relations at the university.

What was happening, I thought, was that my increased distancing from the science of research and the self-seriousness of the faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia was seeping into my world view. I felt estranged from everywhere and everything, and still, I could only see it in the alienation of others, in muted likenesses of myself.

(Me, of course, always me, isolated, from childhood, I am one of the boundary-less people.
I have no understanding or experience with setting personal boundaries in my relations with others.

Too trusting and yet never really trusting myself,
it is easy for others to transgress my spaces, and
I don't expect anyone has ever deliberately invaded my space but instead,
it may be that I am prone to enabling this, and perhaps I am transgressing as much into the lives of others.)

During this ten minute walk, I imagined there was an "us" in the neighbourhood where I lived, I imagined we shared a relation as people who live within these kinds of ruptures. I wanted to make it possible for "us" to work together as a way to create a public expression of our presence, as a collective, a community built in the process of confronting isolation, imagining that this was something I wanted for myself, and for others who were like me.

The initial idea was to coordinate a public art project that would take place as art activism over two years, where the names of those not embedded in the sidewalk could make a claim to public space in the wake of urban gentrification. I imagined paintings, sculpture, video, photography, visual arts that might make it possible for those who are most often represented by others to re-present themselves to the community where they, and I, struggled to live, in East Vancouver.

The boundary-less people of the world, trying to be in-relation with others, sets up a complicated process, one that I was not prepared for. I didn't want to study anything anymore, I just wanted to do something that might make a difference - I was trying to help others, and trying to help myself, conflating my needs in an activist context. Of course, to re-imagine community, there must be an idea of community to begin with. This, too, was my assumption, that everyone could identify with ideas about community.

So, I incorporated a nonprofit arts organization named ArtTech Explorations Society, and applied to fund this project I imagined. I called it "Re-Imagining Communities." It was a community-building partnership with local women artists, local businesses and cafes, and a local centre for people who identify themselves as mental-health-consumers, mental health survivors (and on some days, just crazy.)
The centre was the primary site of participation, the daily members there were the primary group of participants. These are people in transitions from psychiatric care to the everyday world of welfare, poverty, hunger, and addictions, living in realities that are largely constructed through frames of mental illness and mental health, and in relations with institutional care, outreach programs, medications, health-care teams, and other such authorities.

I felt we shared a space of estrangement through our daily communities of institutional relations, as well as in our daily struggles with mental health and addiction, with loneliness and depression.

I was falling out of social science, then, unsure of who I was in relation to the faculty of Education, and I was slipping out of familiar desires to "be" an academic, wanting it, still, and yet rejecting it at the same time. I struggled, daily, to lift myself out of a despondent self and performing for others the kind of person I needed to be, in order to secure funding, to convince people to participate, to inspire interest from others.

I wrote proposals for funding which resulted in successful grants and secured ArtTech a project fund for paying artists, buying supplies, and coordinating public art production.

What I succeeded in doing, really, was to describe hope. It was me who needed hope, then, and I was using all my resources for locating, or finding my desires into a public context. I needed to do something, and I invented an activist project that would enable others to strive for what I needed...

It is not only my need, of course; to have hope, I mean, is essential to survival. I was trying to move from surviving to living, and I was also trying to create a social context where I could give it away, so I could see it in others like me, and maybe the reflection would make it, hope, more tangible.
Without hope, fear leaps: hope is a buffer, a distant point from where fear can be cushioned - without hope, fear reaches out in infinite relations, infinite space, and survival is all that we can manage. Everything is tinted with shades of dread and sudden panic, and every day turns into a cascade of obstacles that begin with waking and do not end until consciousness surrenders to the dreamless sleep.

Without hope, even dreams are a betrayal, dreams as uncontrollable and incomprehensible as the bluntness of the wakeful world. Sleep must be dreamless to ward off despair. Without hope, dreams stir the self into painful contradictions, dreams are not part of survival, but instead are reflections of what is lost - and hopelessness emerges in the confusion. Where there is no hope, we use - we drink, get high, overmedicate, anything to induce the necessary dreamless sleep.

I was able to rally considerable support for "Re-Imagining Communities" at first. I received more funding than I applied for, and initially there were ten of us who actively engaged in the planning, coordinating art-based workshops and activities with people, scheduling hours, discussing what to focus on, meeting at the centre to discuss what folks there wanted to do, what they hoped we might achieve, what they wanted from us, what materials to provide, donate, and so on.

I had my own conflicted commitments. I'd been studying and experimenting with multimedia technologies at the time - digital video, computer animation, sound recordings, video - and I felt a troubling obligation to make the computer work relevant to the activist work; to foreground video as a liberatory tool: my interpretation of video.
At the time I was still associated with a larger technology project, one that my academic supervisor had organized, a school-based program designed to provide greater access for girls and women into uses of computer and video. Her project, Gender and Technology, or GenTech, was dutifully incorporated into my project, ArtTech, where access to art and technology for the disenfranchised was idealized as what would liberate them (us) from the invisible fringes of their (our) community.

It took me over a year to recognize why video was so inappropriate for the people we were working with at the centre. These people have spent considerable time in psychiatric care, medicated, restrained, confined, and then released to "society" to fend for themselves. These are people who live to survive on welfare. Their lives are monitored by health-care teams who make sure that medications are coded in regimes of routine and access - that is, so long as a person takes their prescribed schedules of medication (e.g., Lithium, Halydol, psychotropics and anti-anxiety drugs) - access to assistance in crisis is made available.

They survive in the contexts of surveillance, and video technology is not a tool of liberation but a reminder of how their lives are being monitored by powerful authorities. The use of video in the beginning, when ArtTech (me, I) emphasized video cameras and video workshops, effectively alienated people from the project, and we (I) never really managed to undo the damage that was done in those first six months.

Of course the very idea of public art is presumptuous, it assumes that all people have access to public and private lives. In this case, however, there was no line between the private and the public, and without privacy, the public is not differentiated. Everywhere is potentially without boundaries, and everywhere is uncontrollable.
This is the foundation of addiction, really. When everywhere is perceived, or recognized as uncontrollable, all we can do is try to control ourselves. We anesthetize as a way to subdue the body and mind. It is the intolerable activity of being present in the midst of so much fear, so little knowledge about others' lives, how does anyone live in the recognition of chaos and the crowds of unpredictable others? Sedated, anesthetized, the madness recedes, the senses are dulled, and the clarity of chaos is softened.

This is one place for thinking about how personal boundaries work. Here, in the contradictions of control and chaos, the skill is not about controlling the self, or the world, but about recognizing when boundaries will protect the self from what is irrepressible about social life. It is a skill learned from experience with trust that informs an understanding of self-protection.

Where I am experienced with harrowing memories of being defenseless as a child, all I have learned is how to disappear, be absent. I have little tolerance for what is so exhausting about being present, always vulnerable, without skills of self-protection, or experience with trust.

For myself, and for the many others like me (certainly I am not unique) most overwhelming is the desire to feel safe, to feel safe in a way that is reliable, to feel the reciprocity of an other, a relation that will not betray. This relation is easily constructed with drinking, toking, shooting, sniffing, swallowing, the need to connect in the blood streams, an organic relation with something to induce the boundaries between our selves and the intolerable alienation that comes from survival. It is in the ingestion, the most intimate relation, the most desperate love that comes with such inexpressible needs for absence: the terror is not really of the world, but of a self who has no strategies or experience with self-protection.

We are all violated in one way or another at some point in our lives, some more brutally, but these violations are incomprehensible, to be invaded internally - a broken heart, grief, loss,
betrayal, despair - where suddenly the body is not distinct from the world but is subsumed into its chaos, as if dissipating. The only way some of us have to stop it is to seek the solace of being numb, medicate, to leave the perilous experience of being present and to conduct the self in a relationship that promises to satisfy the desire to feel protected. The bottle, the stash of pills, the needle, these become the primary relation, a desperate love of what will protect us from ourselves. When we cannot protect ourselves, we desire, and love that which can.

This is not a romantic love, it is not a sexual love, it is a very basic connection with trust - I trust that drinking will anesthetize the pain, will give me a dreamless sleep, will stop my body from awareness and deaden my jangled nerves, dull my overwhelmed senses.

We all attach to what we can trust, even if it is simply knowing the night will end and another day will replace it, we attach ourselves in a symbiotic relation; this, the turning days and nights, is me, it makes me, and without it a piece of me ceases to exist. This drinking, I used to say "This drinking is what I do," and drank alone, all the time, as if being drunk was the only company I wanted to keep.

That's why addiction is so impossible to control, and why stopping is so impossible to do alone. Even as using makes us sick, to stop is to feel a part of the self cease to exist. The user is gone when she isn't using - it is a grievous distance that gapes too openly, and all there is, then, is the loss and the peril of the unprotected self.

For a long time people with ArtTech and at the centre assumed I was a social worker, or that I was a social worker who was at the centre for practical experience. I repeatedly identified myself as a student, a writer, a mental health consumer, an addict, but no one interpreted me as any of those.

I was there for myself as far as most were concerned
and in a way, certainly, they probably recognized more of me than I was willing to admit, that I was helping them because I didn't know how to help myself.

The workshops in visual arts were scheduled, and canceled, or scheduled and abandoned through no-shows. Artists took money for work they never did, disappeared, and participants were discouraged quickly. Fewer and fewer showed up for anything, and then, when the patterns of scheduling and canceling resumed, equipment was stolen, people disappeared - some died, or were murdered, or were re-hospitalized, or overmedicated, or too hungry, cold, or too lonely or sick to come out.

I was struggling through what seemed to be chronic depression, using drugs to battle my desire to drink, trying to negotiate a desperate need for isolating with the social demands of activism.

I had made so many mistakes, of course. I hired people who were ill-suited for the work, paid artists who were not committed to collaborative work (whatever that might be). I asked people who were not reliable to help out, trying to give the folks that are never asked to contribute something to do with us, only to find myself, repeatedly, left holding the project. I still couldn't see though, I couldn't see what was happening.

I made all kinds of promises, committed myself and ArtTech to all kinds of needs; and then I'd fall into depression and hide, not answer the phone, make excuses for my absences, inconsistently, wishing more of them would understand what it was like for me and realizing that when I told others about my depression and addiction struggles, no one truly believed me. They saw me as different from themselves, living in a different situation, with the means to pay for heat, and a telephone, to have an apartment that wasn't a room on Hastings Street. I was a doctoral
student with a scholarship, articulate, competent, and in charge of the money, the one who signed
the cheques and who went to meetings, the one with the authority to say yes, and no. I gave them
what they wanted to see myself as, but I couldn't see it reflecting.

Disintegration

During this time, I managed to write an article for an academic journal, with extensive
revision assistance from faculty and other more accomplished scholars. The end result was
surprisingly anticlimactic: I succeeded in writing an article that relatively few would read and
would have, perhaps, a minimal influence upon a minority of academics, perhaps even less of an
effect than that.

This was, for the first time, a profound sense of loss in the writing. To be read within the
academic community, I must be published, and in order to be published, I must write in a way that
is Social Science. I didn't want to write for them anymore. Writing for academic publication forced
me to write in increasingly disconnected ways, and being published produced more distance, now
not only from the Education community (those who can think both a great deal, and very little
about academic publication), but also from my own history with writing.

By the end of the year, I had begun splitting into disconnected fragments, shards of self that
differentiated and fractured, I was now fully immersed in disconnecting myself from everyone and
everything. Rejecting all academic traditions of practice, I had made myself strange to the work of
graduate students and faculty, as their work had become increasingly strange to me. I kept meeting
women who had been in doctoral programs at university and had quit, women who were sick,
women who had been discouraged from completing their programs, women who felt disillusioned with the traditions and practices they were asked to reproduce as graduate students.

My understanding of activism had also changed dramatically. I had really believed that all an activist needed was the money to do something - this is not accurate at all. The money makes a difference, makes kinds of activity possible, but there is much more to it than funding and opportunity. I had studied art activism, had been inspired by art activism, but the activity is never acted out the way it has been written.

Simplicity matters to many, maybe most respond more easily to simplicity: a simple goal, one coherent ambition that manifests into a variety of expressions, perhaps. I see and hear complexities, layers and layers of meanings and relations intertwined in thick strands of knots and loops and ties that weave and tangle through the fabrics of realities - infinite contingencies, infinite interpretations, mosaics and kaleidoscopes of meaning that are needed to understand all that is happening. As a result of my tangle with complexity, the project, "Re-Imagining Communities," was too dispersed, it involved too many collaborations between people who needed contexts of isolation and who oscillate between habits of autonomy and the frustrations of living in chaotic relations. A simple project would have communicated more diversity of interpretation, might have invited more difference; a complex project imposed too much diversity, created too much difference, disparity, disconnection.

Of course, the personal commitment of activism can only work for those who have experience with personal boundaries, those who have the skill to act in ways that are self-protective but not alienating. It is a balance maintained in constant struggle, something that I doubt can be managed alone, but instead requires interpersonal trusts amongst others who can help reflect the
strategies for managing the conflicts of safety and care. I thought I could do it myself; I thought I could incite others to do it for me; I thought it would happen spontaneously.

The difficulties of the project involved the scope. More than setting up the arts organization, there was the work of connecting in the community with the local credit union, businesses, cafes, arts supply stores, the community centre, the drop-in centre, and the artists.

This created too much diversity in participation, intimidating to those who were involved, and baffling for those who wanted to understand what we were doing. I had envisioned many artists providing very different perspectives in the visual arts, but I had overlooked the importance of familiarity and the reassurance that predictability provides. A small number of artists working over a longer period of time would have made a greater impact, might have enabled more stability.

Everyone wanted structures imposed, and I wanted structure to evolve on the basis of the relations that formed so that the organization of activity was negotiated. Work that was produced was held on to as personal possessions, no one wanted their representations to be seen but wanted to keep them or be the one who threw them away. There was no value in production, but only in the break from monotony.

Of course, everything isn't my fault, or the artists, or the participants at the centre, but there was more of a collusion of contradictory expectations and experience. What I began to see was a debilitating effect of long-term institutionalization, the ways powerlessness is written in the ways we respond to institutional traditions and practices. For the artists, the traditions of isolation and ownership prevail, the work of appealing to art institutions for funding dominates. For the centre, psychiatric traditions dominant everyone's lives, and the staff were overtly invested in recreating an institutional atmosphere, such that permission was required for everything, and any breach in
protocol resulted in immediate disbarring from the centre. As ArtTech was trying to incite
digression, the centre was trying to enforce conformity and obeisance.

In the end there was no collective interest in the community we might have created amongst
ourselves, but rather there were isolated communities spinning within larger communities with few
sites of overlap, there were too many histories of contradictory lives colliding in awkward and
resentful spaces of privilege.

There was an overwhelming presence of heterosexual white men who perceived themselves
as victimized, and who dominated ArtTech's activities. When the women there set up their own
quilting workshop, the men demanded their own workshops, too. When it was pointed out that
nearly all workshops were dominated by the men's presence, individuals would begin to complain
of how they felt left out. The women placed greater distance between themselves and ArtTech, the
staff ignored us completely, and the men continued to demand more be done for them. When it was
suggested that they might be able to find ways to do much for themselves, with ArtTech's
assistance, interest disintegrated.

We stopped in the early fall. Still ruled by guilt, I funded an alternative project and handed
the money over to three people who had stayed with ArtTech from the beginning: one artist, one
videographer, and one participant who had produced video, poetry, and music during his work with
ArtTech. They are now working on a multimedia project with selected individuals who have
expressed an interest in producing something of their own in a media venue, predominantly, I
believe, video.

In the end, exhausted and traumatized by the overwhelming demands and expectations of
this project, a feeling of utter failure and betrayal to those I had hoped so much to help, I ran. I ran
away to Denver, for no reason other than a desperate need to be elsewhere. I had met a woman who
lived in Denver, and I was interested in understanding the graduate School of Education at the University of Colorado, trying to salvage something from my ten years of scholarship. I knew I was no activist, and I needed to know if I could find a place to reclaim myself as a scholar. So I ran, stupidly, without plans or financial security, to Denver.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had deprived myself... I had desired it with an ardour that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my heart. ³⁴

Running Away

Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, their colours have been washed away, every red, every purple, yellow, blue, every green is dusted to a muted hue, duller than pastel, dimmer than bright, these are colours that have no moisture but have the texture of brambles and tumbleweeds: faded rose, pale mauve, dry ochre, brittle sienna, a fade of green, even the sky is rendered less than blue but is - like everything here - evaporating, remote, and wan.

I've always only been a visitor, and always been quite repelled by what seems crude, muted, alcoholic about the west. I have just moved to Denver and am struggling for a less frenzied flow of

³⁴ Mary Shelley, Frankenstein, 53
mind. I still can't explain to myself or anyone else how it is that I have come here, much less how it is that I have decided to stay.

All that can be celebrated as culture in Colorado, it seems, is the old west, the olde west, cowboys, rodeos, whiskey; it is like Alberta without the chuckwagon races and the West Edmonton Mall. Of course, everything I see is through the eyes of an addict.

I've lived in Western Canada for about nine years now. No one speaks of the alcoholism of the two wests (the Canadian West and the United States' West), but the culture of drinking here reminds me often of the histories of the ways these lands were settled. Oh not the ways, really, (though the Story of Crude certainly could be traced to these histories) but the Who of those histories, who came out here, how, with which ambitions, what kinds of people came out here in the name of England and in the spirit of colonization. Of course, Americans don't speak of the English, or the Irish, or the Germans or Scottish or French who made their ways west - in American history, somehow, everyone was already a Marlboro cowboy before the west was colonized.

Drinking, and not water but whiskey, rum, hooch, moonshine, fermented fruits and kerosene, the excess of booze is such a huge part of this colonization and cultural legacy. Just as the trade of rum opened the commerce routes for the men of western Canada, the glamour of whiskey lured the illiterate boys across the western plains of the United States. Armed, stupid, drunk: the history of the west is all that lives here, it's all that persists, they are still armed, stupid, drunk, only now they drive at eighty miles an hour in Ford and Chevy pickup trucks.

Of course here there are dislocated collectives of Others, Hispanics, homeless, the lost and wandering, the abject souls who hover near every urban center. Everywhere has its outsiders, its shame, and here in Denver we all ride the same bus every morning, me to the university, many to the rehab centre along the route, others to who knows where.
What I mean is that being in this American west is as familiar as the Canadian West - the stagnant culture of the historically bereft, Alberta, Saskatchewan, British Columbia - there is not much that survives but the rugged heroics of history's alcoholic illiterates, colonizing and claiming in the name of European imperialism. We have to have better stories than that, of course, and there is no denying that there are better stories to tell than tales of drunken oafs slashing, burning and raping the native women: and why not? How can we celebrate the past, after all, if the celebration is too morbid? Every colonization preserves its white people, and displays, without humiliation, glass cases of the relics that identify the colonized.

Denver, like Vancouver, is a nice city for the elites, but it doesn't seem that the city is any more disrupted by the gulf that spans life and survival. I think it's me who is trying to feel a little less jumbled, a little less out of time and place with everyone else. Of course I could hardly say that I belong with the citizens of Denver, anymore than I belonged in Vancouver and the people there; but I am seeking to live more in my skin, trying to settle in my body more and feel less detached.

Feeling less desperate.

It is only when I stop feeling desperate that I realize how much a frantic instability has driven me through my life. This is my fortieth year of surviving the uneasy grip of estrangement, although it feels like I've lived for a thousand years in experience. I have trouble admitting that - it is pretentious for women to wince at their wisdoms, unless these are pithy thoughts about children and husbands. But I have no children nor husband, and the women I have known have always started to hate me at around the time I was feeling what might have been love. (I am a monster.)

...but when those muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing such as even Dante could not have conceived.\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 53
Doing community activism in Vancouver was an act of monstrous despair for me. I was really crazy: depressed, manic, suicidal, overwhelmed with kinds of lunacy that I couldn't seem to channel anywhere in the world I lived in, or even in the smaller world of my immediate community.

It had seemed that there was a "we" there, we were students, artists, educators, health care workers, activists, drop-outs, mental health workers, survivors, mental health consumers; we were barely surviving on limited incomes, or not surviving on welfare, we were all disabled, physically, emotionally, mentally, in some way, and seeking a safer place to live within. We were transients, homeless, poor, we were politically motivated to fight for welfare rights, to speak on behalf of the lost and dislocated, we were making havens for persecuted peoples, we were all on the street everyday, struggling within our lives in some way that was hard to conceal, it was hard to hide the ways we all were living against the changes.

We all felt betrayed by the signs of gentrification, the new condominiums going up, the little shops that were closing because their rent was raised, brokers and owners anticipating the money, more or less, expecting the changes to rationalize the real estate. The shops turned into themes and kitsch, bohemia was marketed, and the people became expendable, started moving further east, into the Hastings area, Hell.

Then a community police force started scooping the homeless kids off the streets and driving them to the city limits, to 70th and Granville, just to get them out of the area so that pedestrians wouldn't have to look. Of course they didn't mean "us;" us being the folks who live there, and who look at what and who are there all the time. The community police vans were loaded with homeless kids so that visitors to our community wouldn't have to see them.
The visitors are tourists from out of town, and city people from upper-class neighbourhoods, the folks who visit poverty because they are lonely for colour and personality. They are bored with themselves, they are comfortable and disinterested, they are going to the poor parts of town the way others might go to the beach, to look without seeing, the way we look at those relics in glass cases. They are there to comment, to point and make guesses about, but not to know, or listen, or understand.

It isn't just a middle class gaze, it's that colonizing mind, the residue of those harsh white folks who think they settled the western lands. Poverty is never settled, never fully colonized - it is always disrupting, every day is a lifetime. The monotony is always about food, shelter, water - when or how to get clean, when or how to get clothes and shelter; how to get high, how to disappear, how to stop being alone, how to feed that need to leave the grief of the lifetime that uses up every day.

Visitors to poverty can't understand. They look at homeless kids with dogs and complain, if the kids can't afford to feed themselves, then what are they doing with a dog? It is criticism - you ought not have a pet if you are poor. No one says you ought not have children if you are poor, but pets? That is a luxury reserved for those who can afford it. I used to speak up, and say that these kids have dogs for company and safety - it isn't safe to live on the streets, after all. But I was a stranger speaking and that frightens the people who visit poverty. And speaking of the street culture in the midst of the middle class isn't something that translates. Once you start thinking about what it means to live on the street, I mean, all sorts of discomforts can flood in to the imagination. Better to be angry at the poor, they remind too many people of what they have, and what they have had to do in order to get what they have: the anger is not at the kids who live on the street, but with the sight
of people who aren't living the invisible life of the housed and the employed. It's the exposure, the visibility that can't be tolerated.

Of course I'm no innocent here, Born and raised in the illusion of middle class, I was brought up in a house in the suburbs of Montreal - we weren't wealthy or rich or even comfortable, really, but we managed to live the illusion for about ten years. I didn't know much then. Or, I knew too much and so kept my mouth shut. I started drifting when I was about eighteen years old.

I am still drifting, over twenty years later, still drifting in and around the shadow worlds. I think I am trapped, actually, and maybe I am here in Denver to search for a way out of the shadow worlds, while struggling with what I must give up in order to leave.

Oh, but being here in Denver forces such a different reflection to everything. In Vancouver I was so closely identified with despair and suffering, I was getting lost in it all. Knowing where I come from is a bit of a burden. It could be guilt. Maybe all philanthropy and activism comes out of guilt. I was a devout Marxist for a while, ranting about the redistribution of resources, preaching the role of the elites in making change, and maybe I felt obligated to act out, the performance of middle class guilt.

I remember fleeing from Montreal to get away from all the queer guilt - I had been a radical lesbian activist there, organizing and marching and yelling in the streets, fighting for visibility and safety. That was where I learned how the need out there in the world is like a vacuum that pulls on the people who can bear to stand in the path of the suction and scream into the wind, it can pull anyone of us in and then all you are is lost in it all.

Maybe it was being poor, being sick with alcoholism and depression, being suicidal and lost, the culmination of that, and the recognition of the poverty in Vancouver. In the haze of creeping gentrification, I could see who were being pushed out of their place, further and further
away from the street that was their home, I could see their struggling, and maybe that pushed me to begin the activist work.

Maybe it was the maddening. I've been angry for so long, angry at my university work, I was angry at the education and the privileges I knew I had but could not seem to appreciate, and I wanted to disappear into something that wouldn't be about me. I am still grappling with that, pushing it away from me, and fumbling instead with culture shock.

Writing this now from here, in Denver, I think in broad sites of abstraction and generalization. This west of hard lives and hard drinkers and comfortable American dreams, it is strange to look at Canada from here. It is strange to see British Columbia, the lush rainforest, from here in the Alpine forests of a mountain desert. It is strange to breath this dry air, and think of the wet damp of Vancouver. It is peculiar to be in this economy, in this American mind, with my socialized Canadian heart thinking thoughts of vast geographies and tiny populations of people scattered across it.

My impressions here, of what is dry, washed, crude, harsh... it's me, projecting again, isn't it. Maybe it's me who is dry, washed, crude, harsh, maybe I can't see anything but what is empty and blunted, as though I can't get past myself, as though I am so firmly standing in my own way.

I'm spending my last few dollars on the rent for an apartment I cannot afford. I have no furniture, just a sleeping bag I borrowed, a pillow, and a tiny black and white television that I bought for five dollars. So far the people I have been introduced to are all white, middle class, straight, and comfortable with their lives, discomforted by mine, portraying a self who is content with their choices, though I know that many are not, they remain so staunchly oblivious to their privilege.
I keep wondering what I'm doing, why do I keep giving everything I might have up, why do I keep living like I am punished, why don't I just join them and live like my tribe does? Dykes my age - the white grrls, they all find wives, a dog, buy a house, and play golf. ...But I can't seem to relate to them, I can't seem to settle down, I can't seem to settle for anything. How can they? What happens? When do people usually give in, and why won't I? Why does it seem like 'giving in?'

This is the bleary world, the out-of-phase space that I carry around with me, so that I don't even have to look for it anywhere - it's what I bring with me. While I am here to get a grip on my life, it still feels too loose and slippery and so it keeps slipping out from under my feet. I am here to stop and settle in my skin, think, to stop being angry, to stop being alone, I am here to get better, but I cannot understand any of the people I meet and I refuse to think that they can understand me.

...I am leaving the seminar group at the University of Colorado, it is night, not late, really, and a homeless man stops me and asks if he can buy a cigarette. I tell him he doesn't have to buy one, I can give him one. I know him better than I know myself, I can talk to this man, and we do - his feelings have been hurt because he helped someone out earlier, and then they told him to fuck off when he asked them for a cigarette, and he was hurt by that, what's coming to the world, man? Why are people so cruel? What goes around comes around, man, it's the karma that matters - he tells me all this in the space of a few seconds, but the world seems to stop moving as he speaks, I can hear him, I know that feeling of hurt and disappointment, and I know the feeling of wanting a cigarette and having no money: addiction is a killer for those who can't keep it satisfied. A killer...

I know so many people who cannot see them, who don't believe in them, never give them money because they can't control what they will do with it - so many are like that. They won't give money because who knows that they'll do with it? They will just buy a bottle and get drunk: so
everyone keeps their money, which is not to say that who won't also go out and buy their own bottles to get drunk, but somehow it's different.

I still wrestle with drinking, strain against sobriety, but I remember why I drank: painkillers. It starts with pain, and turns to love - I am in pain and the drinking stops it, and so I fall in love with the numb. My love-relation, my primary attachment seems to have been to the bottle. I've given up everything for that; and actually, even though I am not drinking, I am still in-love with giving everything up. I'm what is known as a dry-alcoholic: not drinking, but still living like an alcoholic.

And I still give what I've got away, because if I have 50 cents and someone else has nothing, then I can give them a quarter. I know that's why I am still broke, because I cannot hoard my money - but I can't help myself. I can't seem to stop thinking I am as lost as they are.

There is a turn, I think, that people take, when they stop believing in helplessness, and start controlling it instead, as if they cannot remember what it felt like to be small, to recognize that no one believes you except others in despair.

Maybe that's why adults turn away from children, and invest themselves in controlling them instead. Me, I still believe everyone - of course, most folks can't tell when they are being honest, there are so many layers of that - and of course, inevitably, I realize I was believing the wrong thing, hearing the wrong words, listening to the wrong conversation, believing in lies and practiced deceptions. Maybe if I could turn away from children, too, I wouldn't be so gullible.

Disappearance
It hasn't taken long for me to start drinking again, sitting on the floor of the apartment, watching television all day, getting drunk, passing out, then waking up sick, and waiting until I am well enough to go and buy another bottle. I started with vodka, but it made my face bloat and purple; so I switched to scotch, but that made violently sick, then I drank rum for a while, and finally settled with gin. I get drunk and then write rambling angry e-mail notes to the seminar group's conference list. No one knows I'm drinking, and in my toxic states I am utterly monstrous and unforgiving.

I know this place, I am so very near to killing myself. I imagine slashing my wrists in a tub of warm water, feeling the soothing flow of life leave, and it feels like peace, finally, some peace as I drain myself into a pool of somewhere warm.

My mother has sent a plane ticket for me, for a return to Montreal. So, I leave Denver, ruined, walking wreckage in body, mind, and spirit. Already dead, in many ways, the drinking destroys so much, but I leave, harrowed, still haunted by that fury, the loss and emptiness, still burdened with meaninglessness, so thoroughly demoralized that I can't even summon a feeling for whether I wanted to go home or not. I just leave, abandon the apartment, abandon everything.

I don't recall exactly when I realized I banished myself to the upper towers of the university. My writing has been bouncing off those stone walls, but somewhere between Denver and death, I locked myself in the tower with pages, and a mirror, something to reflect what I am turning into, turning through each crisis and looking to see who's there. A man, a monster, a drunk, a forty-year old woman, an exile, a face not disfigured but empty of a self to see.

There be monsters here
A woman in the shape of a monster
   a monster in the shape of a woman
the skies are full of them

She looks at her self in the bathroom mirror. She sees the face that looks back at her in reversed proportions, watches herself looking, tries to see what others might, relaxes her face to see if her mouth turns down in a natural grimace, or if her lips naturally curl up, to a smile. There are spider-web veins that pattern her cheeks, thin red lines etched from her years of drinking. Not so long ago.

She turns away and feels the monster inside squirm. Briefly, images of smashing her head through a glass pane, a hammer suddenly clutched in her fist as she bashes her face into her skull, these gruesome sights are fleeting, visions that visit at the speed of light. It is not the monster who wants to destroy this face, but the woman who lives as its shell. It grips her from inside as if she is suddenly breathless, gasping, somewhere, for air; it snags a malformed hand around her ribcage and holds on, pulling against her chest.

This familiar pain is one she has grown up with, this intimate pain has molded, shaped, designed her, this everyday affliction is what lives inside of her flesh, beneath the skin and muscle tissue, it lingers deep with the organs, too close to the frail muscle of her heart, shaking her bones from inside.

She looks once more in the mirror and peers into her eyes, one at a time, and sees nothing recognizable. It is the face she has always seen, it is a pretty face by the standards of what might be pretty. Perhaps the uglier her monster becomes, the prettier she looks on the outside.

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36 Adrienne Rich, *Planetarium,*
She moves so slowly through space sometimes, it's as if her body would rather be stilled, like stone, immobile, frozen, solid, as if the fluids that rush through her flesh are churning waters that erode her from the inside.

The first time she spotted blood in her underwear, she was eight years old. She told her mother, in terrified whispers, "there was blood in my underwear this morning..." and her mother, dismissive, not unkind, but putting aside all fears, said that maybe she was starting her period. Some girls started earlier than others. Maybe, her mother offered, you were scratching yourself in your sleep.

She started her period when she was eleven years old. It was much later on in her life when she learned about the hymen inside her, or the one that used to be there, still not finding any relations between the spotted underpants and the hymen, still living as a ghost, still filled with loathsome feelings of monsters and things that were too grotesque too imagine.

Now, that she has locked herself in the tower, she is hovering between pages and leaping, moving back and forth between the window and the place where she is writing. She rereads what she has written, so certain she is stupid, so stupid, then walks to the window where the outside air breezes past the stone and mortar square that opens to the world.

She paces this way often, from the inner refuge of the pages and words and books scattered around her feet, to the stone frame of the outside. There, where there is life, grass growing thick and lush with green, trees branches bursting from bud to leaf overnight, everything rushing to be here in this early spring. The tulips and daffodils are opening in ruby reds and spirited yellows, the spectrum of the outside always set against the determined gloom of the distant clouded mountains.

It's the madness that keeps her trapped between the writing and the leaping, the falling, the pages and the window. It's the certainty of the insanity of whatever sane might be.
It is a weariness of trying to belong with those others, those who champion rational thought and normal human development, those scientists who set their sights against invisible margins of something made normal for them, something so normal they cannot even identify it. They can only recognize the deviations, marking them off from the beloved curve, pretty arcs of who fit in the place that they desire, measuring and rating their value. The deviations, those who slip under the lowered slopes of this curve, these are standardized deviants, unimportant, if their value is low enough. This is science, after all. How much is all that counts.

The tower is under the curve, under the sums of all that has been measured, perceived, discovered, or inferred. The tower is attached to so many buildings where Knowledge is measured as pure and True, everything measurable is certain, so precious and good.

When did she begin clamoring and racketing against these Lords of Knowledge? When did the betrayal begin, when did she finally stumble dumbly up these stairs to the highest tower, abandoned and empty, cold and dank, when did she lock herself in and begin this work that pleads for something else?

She has earned her way through university through a scholarship, one that was written for her by her former supervisor, one that she cannot claim as her own, but she takes the money anyway. A few years ago she started earning money by writing term papers and essays for anonymous undergraduate students, working through a modestly advertised research service, taking the texts of other students, reading their assignments, and writing their work for them.

She has plagiarized herself in order to make a living, and in the process learned more than she wanted. Had she stayed within the stricter disciplines of Education, she might be perfectly sane. But no, she studied and learned and wrote essays and terms papers about everything, archaeology, anthropology, art history, English, Canadian, American literature, African American literature,
Asian histories, Asian studies, business education, sociology, philosophy - so much philosophy - political theory, political science, labour policies, feminism, women's studies, urban studies, communication studies, cultural studies, ... anything and everything, any assignment offered to her, she said yes, sure. And learned, too much. Too much.

More than she can account for, it is a blur of studies in subjects and sciences, and writing, writing, writing the essays and learning, learning too much about too many subjects. She ought to have stayed within Education - but she strayed, and lost sight of Education as a discipline. Instead she lived in education as perverse learning.

Ten years of studying Education, erased within those years of dubious employment of self-plagiarizing. Overwhelmed with what remains meaningless, she wanders from page to window, thoughts scrambled with knowledge she can no longer account for, emptied of purpose, writing for the sake of writing, because in the end that is all that there is. In the end, that is all that there is.

There is nothing concrete here, but for the walls that surround her, and the pages she fumbles through daily. The world she worked in, when she wanted to be an activist, it has fallen away from what she wanted, she wanted to do something real and specific and connected to the lives of the outsiders, outside the tower...

And now when she writes it seems as though only air passes from thought to fingers, nothing preceding her words, she writes from an internal abyss of silence, the words come from nowhere, only having meaning when she reads back what she has written and she sees it as air, vapour, nothing but scents and shadows, allusions, dim hints of whispers and glances of what keeps shifting from the corner of her eyes, the unimagined merging into words of blood and monsters.
I do not believe that being sane or intelligent is superior to being insane or retarded. Many times the insane person has often turned his or her back on the often alienating normality that most people become conditioned to believe is a real and desirable goal.\(^{37}\)

**Abjection**

This word just came to me, last week, from the pages of Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* - it is terrible to me because she describes so much of what I struggle with; how I have never been especially overwhelmed with the question of my identity.

I have never wondered, with any real depth, "who am I?" and have, indeed, questioned the origin of the question itself, that it has been handed down to us from Greek xenophobes. I have convinced myself that it is not even a question at all, but a chunk of male-oriented self-obsession or narcissism - ...well, that was my thinking, and then I started reading Kristeva.

Now I am thoroughly confused, as if I need to start all over, from a beginning that I have no language for, with a word that crawls inside me like an itch I've never scratched, a scar I've never noticed, or known what to call, a self I've never known because she never had a name.

Here is a horror of turning, I am sure, of turning to see someone I'm not sure I want to see, not because I won't recognize her but worse, much worse, because I'm afraid I will know her too well; a "she" I have been turning away from, never towards. It's as if I suddenly see this turning, this crisis, as a repeated and deliberate misrecognition.

In psychoanalytic theory, there is always an object of desire; that is, a desire to identify with an object/other, whether a someone or a something (indeed, many identify with the university, as object, but not

necessarily with the people in the university, as subjects). We seek objects in order to create ourselves as subjective selves - we might desire a person, or a thing, such as a car, or a piece of clothing, or a tattoo, all desires are experienced in ways which provoke an attachment, an internalization of that thing as ourselves. Desire is about identity - an "I" with whom to call myself.

Initially, theoretically, (typically) the first object an infant encounters is the mother, and that forms a primary attachment. This is the first internalization of self with other, self-as-other; and as a child grows, these initial attachments form the basis with which to identify with others, other children, teachers, relatives - all are contingent upon the first experience with attachment as identification.

It's not a naming of self as other, the child does not think she is her mother, although she will speak with her mother's inflections, pretend to be a mother, act out the feelings of self to place the attachment outside, externalizing the self in language and activity. She needs her mother in order to feel assured that she is someone, as a self who identifies, self both with and within, the mother.

This is the effect of the primary caregiver, the one who provides the infant, the child, with that essential primary object with which to attach, and through which an identification is possible. This is the basic ground of identity, and desire. This is the desire to possess an identity, internalized and externalized, it is an identity that must first be internalized through a relation with an other - object, person, place, and so on. This is the origin of "I," of self both as one and the other, "I" begins here, in the first object of desire, the first identification. The first attachment is the first desire.

In Julia Kristeva's account, she extends this attachment towards the necessary loss, noting that the first attachment is also the first experience, ultimately, with loss. As this child moves further into the social world, she loses her primary identity, or perhaps she transfers it from the mother to others in her world. It is a necessary loss in that it incites desire - as the relations between this child and her mother change, differentiations emerge.
This child knows she is not her mother, and so she seeks the desired sense of completion that she once had, elsewhere. It is this loss that comes with change, this is what prompts desire for an other, a transition in social relations. As the social becomes increasingly more sophisticated, so too the desire to "be" someone "else" becomes more complicated.

But the Abject, she is the opposite of this; the abjected self has no relations that engage her in a desire to be someone else. The abject refuses identity and searches instead for knowledge, meaning, and the meaningfulness she seeks is entangled with refusing to desire. She does not desire meaning as an object of love, but as a substitute for desire, something to fill the cavernous self who rejects identity and in so doing, finds herself overwhelmed with meaninglessness.

The abject has only one quality of the object - that of being opposed to "I."
If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of fact, makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is abject, on the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses.38

In other words, for a person who is abjected any internalization is refused as identification: desire for identity is replaced with a desire for meaning. The abject transforms any potential identity into meaning and in doing so, throws away the object of desire. The object of desire is dismissed and in this willful rejection, she produces an emptiness that is a paradoxical experience of meaninglessness and an obsession with meanings that might fill the place where identity would be, a self-connected to something other than her losses. The abject chooses exile from identity, a kind of self-imposed banishment from sociality.

...from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master.

Without a sign (an "I") it beseeches a discharge, a convulsion, a crying out...
[This is]...an opaque and forgotten life [that] now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing either. A "something" that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, which crushes me...\textsuperscript{39}

It is not desire for completion that moves this self through the world, but loss, and the recurring anticipation of loss, betrayal, the betrayal of desire that can never be named. For her, the primary experience with desire and loss has stalled - all that is retained is the loss and all that is preserved is the intolerable grief of that initial loss of an other who would be herself.

The abjection of self would be that very culminating form of that experience of the subject to which it is revealed that all its objects are based merely on the inaugural loss that laid the foundations of its own being. There is nothing like abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the desire of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded.\textsuperscript{40}

In other words, she rejects her desire to desire because she is trapped in anticipating the loss of desire, the loss of attachment, the loss of an other, a loss that is, in every way, a certain loss of self. Rather than risk the inevitable grieving that is inextricable from the process of desire, she chooses to refuse everything as potentially identifiable, translating what is refused into meanings...meanings in the absence of identity.

Put another way, it means that there are lives not sustained by desire, as desire is always for objects. Such lives [abjected] are based on exclusion. They are clearly ...articulated by negation and ...transgression, denial, and repudiation...\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{39}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, 230
\textsuperscript{40}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, 232
\textsuperscript{41}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}, 234
I can't begin to describe the effect this understanding of abjection is having on me. My words are coming back at me with a name, the exile as abject, I don't want to see myself here but I can't resist the recognition.

The one by whom the abject exists is thus a deject who places herself, separates herself, situates herself, and therefore strays instead of getting her bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing. ... and not without laughter - since laughing is a way of placing or displacing abjection. ... instead of sounding herself as to her "being" she does so concerning her place, "Where am I?" instead of "Who am I?"... A tireless builder, the deject is in short a stray. She is on a journey, during the night, the end of which keeps receding. She has a sense of the danger, of the loss that the pseudo-object attracting her represents for her, but she cannot help taking the risk at the very moment she sets herself apart. And the more she strays, the more she is saved. ... 42

What begins to sustain “her” is in the very life I lead, the stray, the loner, the tireless philosopher, the insatiable student who can never learn enough, can never settle with what she understands but is driven constantly to know more...

If all learning produces a loss of what was previously known, the eternal learner is perpetuating the foundation of loss, not through desire, but through knowledge, and not even through knowledge. She is learning it and then refusing it as she learns more, the contradictions of history, truth, knowledge, the conflicts overwhelm and fulfill her at the same time. Each meaning discarded as new learning changes old knowledge. The loss is maintained though learning without an identity to hold her in place, without a self who can attach to anything with certainty.

She is a self-proclaimed exile, a wanderer, a subject without an object, a self with no identification, no ability to recognize her desire for identification, always refusing to identify. Instead of seeking the self, she seeks a place, strives for the perverse, see corruption and negativity,

42 Ibid., 235
the filth and decay that others might ignore... All of it transforms into meaning, what does anything mean, what does anything mean?

The childhood experiences of terror and confusion, anxiety, madness, the insecurity of relations and the inability to attach, with any safety, to anyone; all of this self culminates in an obsession with meanings. What does anything mean, what does everything mean?

I have been a writer all my life, as if keeping a record of meaning, what I have learned, what I think, what I want to know, what I want to understand, all of it a desire for knowledge that is not knowledge, but that which I cannot seem to accept: a self who is identifiable. A someone who belongs somewhere, or to someone, or with something.

Of course the ultimate betrayal of knowledge is in the recognition of injustice and oppressions, how these are etched into the body of practice. I sought a purpose in the university and found, instead, a total loss of the very rational discourse that I must have hoped would save me. Learning, like opening Pandora's box, has invited the demons and hauntings of cruelty into me, and I have incorporated a rage that is empty, really, just raging at what I have perceived to be the absence of meaningfulness.

This is the restlessness that pushes me through volumes of knowledge and finding, too often, Laws of Normalcy, assumptions of selves, ignorance of desire, names and histories, stories of people whose greatest leaps of thinking took place as they wallowed in their own abyss. The crisis of insight, the insight of crisis, either way, it is lawless and so, deviant. So I recognize the deviant but she does not give me love, only anger. I have embraced each crisis of learning as a crisis of meaning, fulfilling loss and forestalling love.

So much of this echoes as my furious haunting, and reminds me of how it is I came to incorporate a monster as my self, so many years ago - a nameless monster, like Frankenstein's
creature, a self poorly stitched and scarred, frightening, hiding, increasingly aware of how ignorance motivates Lawful knowledge, and why it is that I never belong. Indeed, this helps me understand why I refuse to belong, why I refuse to stay anywhere, why I feel so betrayed all the time.

This is how I've come to feel safest when walking the life-line. The meaninglessness of a life without human love or desire, of course, holds little bearing on the meaning of death - neither holds anything, or promises anything, other than the latter as a release from the pain - and it's the pain that makes me crazy ... more than anything, it is the pain of this life that I keep to myself.

This is my madness, and not my madness, but a madness that for the first time leaves me stammered. A woman, a monster, writing her way in a circle of geographies and territories, moving through worlds that have, of late, become what is my self-exiled confinement in the tower, pacing from pages to window, from window to mirror, to pages. There is no place that matters. Everywhere, it seems, is the same cold stone. I keep falling, I keep falling down and getting up again, juggling the contradictions and conflicts and trying to keep my balance all at the same time. It’s in my head, it’s in my body, it’s in the mirror, it’s in the tower, the others, the world, all of it is everywhere the same, and nowhere the same as this. Nowhere is like this. This is like nowhere.

Artless communities...

So she strides into a site of mental illness and poverty, a stranger with no identity, and presumes to rescue them, presents a project that will give them community, belonging, a
collaboration that will inspire them, and give them a sense of place where they live. The nameless. The homeless. The unidentified. Unidentifiable. The people who have surrendered their selves to the mental health industry as a way to alleviate pain.

There was never a community to re-imagine, there was never a desire to belong in the community she desired - she never even really desired a community as a place to belong, as place to identify. She wanted something meaningful, and they wanted something else. Friendship, perhaps. An interest in their lives. A common ground of experience within which to name their lives. What they wanted she could not give, and what she wanted, could never be. There can be no meaning without identity. Each invention and creation, vision, insight, all of it means she is ceaselessly writing. Writing to live, because without it, she really is no-one.

She is what I have produced through the years I have sustained this life, through the perils of learning without being anyone other than a writer. And she has lived through loving ideas, loving authors, loving the losses that come with learning, and still, she is hating myself for what it has cost me socially.

All the friends and lovers, gone, live like ghosts in my body, all subsumed into a monster, a monster who feeds on me, from the inside. She thrives in my pains, exists in my cycles of loss, grief, despair, and rages at me when I am not filling myself with what will, of necessity, become meaningless. The true peril is in the comforts familiarity provide. This is all I've ever allowed myself to be.

testify to this life, testify

testify to this life is turning, not spinning or whirling but wrenching, my joints are being torn from the sockets in a slow and pitiless mangle from here to there, rotating without elegance but with gross, freakish contortions.
my bones are not supposed to bend this way and still the muscles stiffen into stone as the force of this turn gnarls.

this life becomes increasingly reluctant as it plummets and soars, crashes and sinks, this life flies and dives headfirst against the walls, flies and falls and dies a little with each grain of my survival.

this heart shatters like useless glass, sand and fire joined in some horrific malformation where I ought to be enduring, this life turns inside out, and rages in its raw grotesque, ineffectual excess, this neck spasms and agonizes, holding up this heavy head that is a shell around this stupid stupid brain.

this life is whirling in such queer geobiologic patterns, veering in perplexity, splitting me and breaching me again until I fracture, winding into tensions that can only spray me like a fractal back into the chaos, a depth of unpredictable mutations, leaving me alone, wreckage unrecognized, disguised by a body that's familiar in its surface and so easily ignored.

'loss is letting go,'
the words like butter slipping into something warm and gentle;

'grief is loss,'
and loss, and loss is letting go, like ocean breezes in the palms;

and

'turning is the movement from the loss to some desire,'
like tulips brushing up on silk;

and this twisting of my life is a gruesome amputation of a self I never loved much but the only one I knew, grinding bones against their bloody nature, pressing down to hammer me into the granite floors, these losses are pores that have been vacuumed from my flesh and to escape the unendurable I arch, and warp and coil, as if I might just turn away instead of turning back into another impossible position where I stare, transfixed by my own deformation, nonexistent and still peeling off familiar skins, while faces stare past my pains and sympathize with sorrows, speak Change in soft drifts of the ethereal, muses of religions or poetic reminiscences.

ah it's madness that floats in front because I cannot see the way it feels, it's a warm white hand up to the face so that what's hideous is hidden by strategic splays of fingers, listening with music so that this cannot be heard... monstrous noises creep from my soul at night, wake me swollen-eyed and bleary with no sense of when I sobbed but with the terror of past nightmares vivid in this foolish dream, it only loves the worst of me, and hates to let me go.

there is no fever of creation, no manic gust of passion, no blur of some inspired glint of panic and momentum, there is no scurry, no solace in the stance of a stoic or a martyr.

...nothing but the grind of bones that cannot stand the buckling of my spine,
and cannot flee this flesh as if I might release the body, as if I might just look away and wait for this to be perfected, as if I might be a ripple instead of savage tides.

there is no poetry here, there is no rhythmic cadence, or visible romance with literary metaphors, or images to pluck and preen, there is no poetry here - there is just a vicious suction of me into this ragged collision of selves. I feel so stupid with this work of spending words... this wending in and out just makes me think I am mundane (it loves the worst of me and so how can I let me go?)

(poetry is easy for despair, graceful for its liberal protection. "...and I stand here like a stripper who won't dance," her body sagged and living in the glut of this resistance.)

Has this seemed too easy? Self-indulgent. Excessive. Of course, desire is excess, it is in the excess of our actions that we might better understand what we want, not as something specific and identifiable, though. No, it is something more like this, what spills out of the edges when a body is pressed too close between spaces, where there is no more room to repress what we want, and it squeezes out in the glimpses of uncanny actions, these excessive moments we'd like to forget, hope to learn to forgive, and apologize for – desire is here, somehow.

Even as I testify to this life, I am forced by this body to lie about it, deny something else, there is no way to be here, and no matter how hard I try, no matter how deeply I sink this flesh into this work of writing, I am still not in it, not in the text, but writing myself through it. Writing towards somewhere else, somewhere not so excessive and self-obsessed, perhaps, from the near-narcissistic accounting of me towards something more social, opening up spaces to breathe, and see, and be with others.
Somewhere beyond this excess. I mean, I am not time-travelling, after all, but moving across landscapes of questions. Nothing is simply what it seems.

If I compare the pen to a syringe, and I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe, a suction point rather than that very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose, calculate, take ink before filtering the inscribable, playing the keyboard on the screen, whereas here, once the right vein has been found, no more toil, no responsibility, no risk of bad taste nor of violence, the blood delivers itself all alone, the inside gives itself up... 43

seven books of dreams

Book One "I", Intellectual

If I compare the pen to a syringe, and I always dream of a pen that would be a syringe, a suction point rather than that very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose, calculate, take ink before filtering the inscribable, playing the keyboard on the screen, whereas here, once the right vein has been found, no more toil, no responsibility, no risk of bad taste nor of violence, the blood delivers itself all alone, the inside gives itself up... 43

If the body could write, from flesh to page, what would it say? This is a question that pushes the philosopher Jacques Derrida to write, even as he believes that the body will always refuse itself in writing, that what "I" might want to say will be deferred in language; that language itself cannot translate the body. For Derrida, language can only point to what is absent, or as Kelly Oliver writes, "Words can do no more than point to, or conjure, the absence of that about which they speak." 44

Writing, for Derrida, is always an act of violence - this is described most potently in the above passage, where he imagines the pen could be a syringe, where the blood would move, sucked from the vein, as ink, and speak itself into words. What would it say?

Of course, the body does write, with language, but never through it. We are never disconnected from our bodies when we write; but we might be disconnected from a desire to speak in ways that language cannot provide. The words themselves cannot articulate that distance between flesh and thought. Nothing is there in words that speak directly from the body to the page, because the psyche, the mind, the conscious self, the ego, the subject, the "I" who writes is ceaselessly erasing, translating, deflecting herself, deferring to language. And for Derrida, Language is "other" to the body, it is outside of the body, and so is changing the meaning as it emerges: whatever the body might want to say, it is dependent upon its history with language to speak - and language is, first, and always, outside of us.

More concretely, we learn language from others. We are not born speaking, but learn to speak from our families, our most intimate and immediate social worlds give us the words to speak, and so we are written, in a way, before we can even begin to write. We are spoken to before we speak, named before we know ourselves, and so as we grow from infancy through childhood, we

44 The Portable Kristeva: Introduction 1997, xx
are incorporating - bringing into our bodies - the social connotations of this "otherness" that is language.

What we do when we write is translate a history, and a language into the words we need: we speak, write these words to each other, to ourselves, we read and participate with literacy, words, speech, and we do so in ways that always elude us as literal meanings. The work of translation suggests we are never precisely in control of what we want to mean, or might mean, because we are never in control of language, or, for that matter, history. It is the history of language that governs our speaking and writing.

(This is not to say that at some time in our history we might learn a different understanding of history, and language. Instead, I am suggesting there are limitations that exist, today, as we write, read, speak, translate, and try to make meaning, try to find out what something means.)

So, what does it mean to ask of a person, "Say what you mean," if the truths and histories of language forbid it? We can't know, in absolute terms, what we mean, because all we can rely upon for even thinking about meaning is language. The violence takes place when we try, because it is the struggle to do the impossible.

So, why do we write? For some theorists, writing is a site of desire, we write because we are trying to "be" with language, trying to identify ourselves as different from our named self, trying to surpass the limitations of ourselves.

This is why some kinds of writing are preferable to other kinds of writing, because the ache of trying to speak the impossible is too excruciating, the moments of stubborn silence on the empty page are too much to cope with. Like some irretrievable loss of self, the "I" cannot speak, the writer cannot write, the empty page looms as a love that can never be had, a desire that will never be satisfied, a need that will never be met but will always haunt. This is the furious haunting of
writing, and some live with it, exist through it, and others deflect it elsewhere: banish the torment and substitute something else.

This is why, and how, writing has produced so many differing genres of literature, of poetry, of scripts, of discourses, of fictions and non-fictions. Perhaps academic language in the social sciences has emerged as a strategy for writing about what is "social" (people) in ways that resolve the conflict of a body that cannot speak itself. This is achieved most efficiently by removing the body from the text. In other words, if you pick up an academic journal, or a textbook, the author is most typically speaking of others, rarely speaking of his or herself. This is the trick of surviving writing as an intellectual: erase the body, remove the "I" and substitute the "others" for study.

In Education, these "others" are children, students, teachers, the subjects of research, and the researcher is the author of them, not his or herself. There is no "I" in research writing, no "I" in the research project. The author may identify herself as an “I” in the contexts of her writing, but it is a self-conscious “I,” uncommunicative, removed from the implications of who “I” am. The researchers who do write with an “I” are so cautious and tender-footed in their writing, it is as though they are still quite fearful of the consequences of being there, in the writing.

Academic writing is always, really, a work of someone else. Them. Out there, in the "fields;" we must learn about them, but we must never identify who we are. "We" is ubiquitous and assumed at the same time.

It is a foreign language, learned, imitated, re-iterated, and it works to control the body so that it will not speak of these things, such as monstrous selves and desires to know, or love, or be loved, desires to be meaningful in a meaningless world - these are the taboos of the academic consciousness, and "we" must not speak of these. We must speak of them, those particles dispersed
in the world outside the tower, in school classrooms, hallways, in their homes, (never our homes), and the further we reach away from ourselves, the more likely we are to write without pain.

This is the dominant genre of the university. It is, like a faltering script that depends upon the decapitation of the speaker, a gathering of talking heads who speak in an orchestrated chorus that is organized by the writer-researcher. She might insert herself, self-consciously, admit to her presence historically, as the one who was there when the others were interviewed, or videotaped or gathered into an action-research project, or an ethnographic research project. But as author of the product, she must defer to others - other academics, other researchers, other writers, others who can legitimize the authoring as a necessary struggle for the social science researcher. It is a conflict that can be overcome within the right traditions of discourse, the right kind of language, and the necessary inculcation into the dominant belief systems of the social science, those which pivot on the non-negotiable essentialism of researching Others for knowledge.

This constitutes the dominant text of the university intellectual in the social sciences, in the faculties of Education, this is the world of academic intellectualism, always transmutated through research, affirmed through its history of research, and its millions of research articles. These are where she finds the authorities to whom she defers, as if to say, "I'm not inventing this, I'm doing what other researchers have done, and I believe in them, I believe in their work, and they have pointed a way for me..."

This is not bad or wrong, obviously. There are, in some rare cases, examples of what might be called a useful research project, in that the product - the text that gets written - succeeds in revealing the kinds of commitments that are involved when working with others. These are descriptions and admissions to the kinds of sacrifices, the kinds of losses, risks, investments, and
the kinds of compassion that are required to work with others and then write about them after the research is "finished."

Still, I am not specifically speaking about a quality of research, rather I am concerned with a genre of writing that functions to address, or displace, the relations and distance between body and text. Indeed, the writing of displacement has developed into its own kind of art, as an alternate representation that can refer to an absent self in ways that signal a semblance of presence.

This emerges most often in feminist practice because women know that they are not written in the institution's traditions. We know the struggle to write for the institution in a discourse that can't betray the difference of being an author of traditions, while being subjected to traditions that are based on the exclusion of women. It is primarily feminists who wrestle with this, and find ways to conform to the discourse and practice of researching others, while remaining committed to beliefs about the necessity of feminist practice in the university. And while changes have been made within the kinds of research that are conducted, the subjects of research remain essential to research, they are "out there," and she must find them, gather them for data, and write about them. She must, that is, she can not really do anything else and still be a researcher. The question that no one seems to want to respond to, however, persists for me: why must we all be researchers? Who do we serve in this capacity? Who do you serve, in the end; who is it for?

So, who am "I," if I refuse research, and yet claim to be an intellectual? This is the most interesting site of my own exploration, because it is my own, and it is not only mine - it belongs to the thousands of silenced bodies who cannot yet speak of themselves. There is an other "we" within the university community, struggling to write in different kinds of languages, inheriting the static rational voice, trying to speak in rational tones about a world that is completely irrational.
The academic text, as a relation of history, language, practice, and writing, is a ruling relation, governing the bodies who write within the regime. Feminist sociologist Dorothy Smith has written, for years, of this "ruling relation" that affects/effects women, language, social science, and how it enacts a silencing of what might yet be spoken if the (ruling) relations of textuality were changed.

Academic discourse is, really, a kind of neurotic babbling, an anxiety that rejects itself and produces madness. If I can embrace the madness and speak it, if I can live with a monster within me, if I understand how I elude and dodge identifications, how I displace language in the work of meanings, if I can accept these as aspects of an art that has not yet been named, there might be somewhere to turn in poetics.

Art need not be defined precisely in order to recognize a difference between science and art, between discourse and writing, between academic intellectualism, and intellectual artistry. All of these are works of representation; however, science purports to represent the "real;" and art accepts the truths that guide imagination, memory, metaphor, and poetics. Thus, with the stone tower as my metaphor, and a recognition of the crisis of abjection, I have not injured myself, nor cut myself off from the theory that interests me, and prompts me to write. Instead, I have allowed myself to move through these theories, and turn through this writing.

This is a peculiar relation for me, thinking with theory in the contexts of alternate representations. There is no desire in me to represent the "real" here; rather, I am invested in prodding the imagination, the affect, linking thought and emotion in responsive writing. This is not a mutilation, as Derrida describes it, but is instead a surrendering to the ways I move in language. Turning in writing pushes me to give up on meaning, and engage more playfully with the words. I cannot control meaning anymore than I can control identity - all of these are the symbols, the
cultural and historical abstractions that we inherit, and infuse with our own necessary
meaningfulness.

This writing, my writing is trying to produce something concrete, a text for reading, for
thinking about, evoking, provoking, disturbing, consoling, comforting, upsetting - and is persistent
in confronting the inhabited body. It is only through this turning towards the body that writes that
compassion can be articulated, that in these sites of language, a social space is cultivated as a
relation between the author and the reader.

It seems, possibly, ridiculous to claim that it is my passion for theory that moves me to write
in ways that are a movement towards some form of social writing that implies a kind of
compassion. But if I truly have compassion for others, how can I then turn away and subject them
to a discourse that can never speak of it, in a language that can never admit to love? This is where I
struggle to find the intellectual work of understanding complicity, turn it towards an art of writing
as one in the same, and always as a composition of difference.

There is a movement in time: I writing now, and you reading then; I writing then, and you
reading now. The text lies between us, organizing our relation.

This is the sense of the text I want to hang on to. I want somehow to move away
from the notion of texts as existing as meaning, and to see them instead as occurrences in
time (partly captured in Derrida's notion of differance) and as organizing, through time,
relations between people as sequences of action in which more than one is involved.45

As a feminist, as a woman who loves woman, I feel a responsibility to understand this
difference as both a political act, as well as a desire that is shaped by a sexualized, gendered
identity. Indeed, both the political and the sexual are socially entwined within and outside the
university, in that typically a writer's "social-science" writing is politically designed to represent a

45 Dorothy Smith, Writing the Social 1999, 53.
neutral or heterosexual perspective. As much as I write with the need to insist these assumptions are part of the struggle to write and inextricable from my need to push beyond the struggle, it also works against me, forcing me to address the issues of sexuality and politics in ways that are precarious.

These assumptions of heterosexuality are not only normalizing structures of writing and reading; these structures function to re-present me as a writer in ways that I cannot control. Even as I am powerless to control the reader's assumptions about sexuality and politics, I am, nevertheless, refusing to ignore the ways my love for women place me in risky writing spaces, in places when I turn towards an inexpressible body - sexual, political, historical - and turn away from the comforts of traditions that would erase this body.

My refusal to research or write as a social science researcher is a crisis - it is the turning point, where my pen admits to monstrosities, addictions, pains and sorrows, griefs and losses, all of which are social phenomenon that cannot be admitted to in a social science. Within this stubborn conflict, there is a desire to turn towards love - not romance, or traditional love - but love as an attachment, a being-with, a relation with an other, where the other here is locked inside me, not in the fields of education. This other is this body that bends over the page, hunches over the keyboard, writes, erases, rewrites, and seeks to speak with some form of poetic sensibility that might reveal the author as something more than the orchestrator of language. This other is someone trying to write outside of the institution that has written me first as a girl, and now, strains against me as I refuse to seek out this desire in the bodies of others.

It must first be within me, and to unwrite the traditions of discourse, and rewrite a body of memory, metaphor, history, is to seek out a body of poetics that longs to be "she," recognizable,
readable, she who writes as a particular self who is, at the same time, a relation to "her," not myself, but "she," anywhere, who reads.

Book Two
"We" who are She

A thinking woman sleeps with monsters.
The beak that grips her, she becomes. And Nature,
That sprung-lidded, still commodious
Steamer-trunk of tempora and mores
Gets stuffed with it all: The mildewed orange-flowers,
The female pills, the terrible breasts
Of Boadicea beneath flat foxes' heads and orchids...  

...a most recent epiphany, as I write about writing and the human bodies who write, and all that is engaged there, in this muddle of identities and mind and social memory and language and regimes, ruling relations, materialism and symbolism, semiotics and psyche transmutations of meanings therein -

reading Julia Kristeva has made the difference, i think, because she talks about love, all the time, the meaning of life has to do with love, for her, and i have really worked to understand where that fits in my writing -

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so last night i dreamed it: i had merged consciousness with another woman, and found myself in a kind of dream-quest. there was a man and a woman, and the man was challenging me with illusions - at some point i realized that every five or six tricks he set out were really just sleights of hand, not illusions, or altered realities, but mere and simple tricks - it was the seventh illusion that was real - and i was faced with what seemed to be a frozen stream of water, arcing off into a darkness... this frozen stream was very thick and sturdy in one place, but was balanced, or held in place, by one single thin branch of crystalline, acting as the brace upon which the larger flow rested - and as i looked at it, two things occurred to me: one, i could break it, so easily, it was so fragile, and as i thought that, i also saw some small glimmer of red, there was blood in it, and i remembered that someone told me i would know what to do, when i needed to, i would know what to do -

and in that instant, i realized i was to do nothing, but walk away. the man and the woman called me back, but i realized that they wanted me to break that bridge and i had "won" by refusing -

and, still dreaming, as i walked away, i knew that bridge was the love I have for myself - there it was, i knew it was the love i have for myself, and i hadn't broken that bond, it was still there, in all its fragility, still there, and that man and woman had no power to break it - only i did. and I refused to...

i woke myself up by speaking aloud the words that i dreamed, "you'll know what to do..." and really, had to sit up and "be" with that, because it was terrifically profound... that's the final chapter - the seven books of dreams - emerging out of an intellectual artistry - translating the
intellectual stuff into a language of my own body, ... so anyhow. that's the final chapter of the
dissertation: the seven books of dreams, and they are seven separate pieces of what that means,
what do the seven books of dreams mean? i am astonished by the process. utterly astonished.
i told my sister this morning and she was astonished too. and i was so grateful to have her there to
tell, that there was someone to tell my dream to, who loved talking about dreams as much as me -
and well, how often do any of us receive such epic messages from our unconscious? indeed.

The period of the wildest weeping, the fiercest delusion, is over.
The women will rest their tired half-healed hearts; they are
almost well.
Some of them will stay almost well always: the blunt-faced
woman whose thinking dissolved
Under academic discipline; the manic-depressive girl
Now leveling off; one paranoiac afflicted with jealousy.
Another with persecution. Some alleviation has been possible.\(^47\)

To be a woman who loves women is be someone who constantly rewrites herself through
the women she loves. She is not always a dyke, a butch, a femme, a queer, a gay woman, a lesbian,
a straight women, a bisexual, she is not always one or the other. She is who she chooses, through
women who can love other women, with passion or kindness, as sisterly or motherly, as lovers,
partners, friends, she is always someone who I might yet seek to be, to be with, to belong with, to
be for.

\(^{47}\) (Louise Bogan, *Evening in the Sanitarium* 1937.)
Lesbianism ...[is]... a sense of desiring oneself, choosing oneself; it [is] also a primary intensity between women, an intensity which in the world at large [is] trivialized, caricatured, or invested with evil.

Even before I wholly knew I was a lesbian, it was the lesbian in me who pursued that elusive configuration. And I believe it is the lesbian in every women who is compelled by female energy, who gravitates towards strong women, who seeks a literature that will express that energy and strength. It is the lesbian in us who drives us to feel imaginatively, render in language, grasp, the full connection between women and women.⁴⁸

"We" who are "she" refers to the plurality of social existence, in that "we" are not alone; "we" is the self subjected to the social norms of identification. "We" are identifiable as "women" along an infinite spectrum of postures, performances, experiences, existences, and so are in one sense different from each other, as women, in the ways we determine our own ways of "being" women. Even if this includes women who seek transsexual identifications, including hormonal and surgical assistance in altering their sex from female to male, there is something within that desire to change that speaks of femininity, refers to the female, of rejecting it, embracing it, altering it, re-inventing it, refusing it or resisting it while remaining connected in-relation to what it means to "be" a woman in this world that "we" who are "she" live within.

"We" are all daughters, mothers, sisters, lovers, and no matter how we might structure our intimate relations we are always in-relation to a larger social structure that is indifferent to women. We are, at birth, named as girls and "called" girls, brought into a social relation of being a girl in a world where girls are less-than male, less-than men, written and spoken, relentlessly called into a relation with the world as girls, women. Whatever sexuality, whatever nationality, ethnicity, race, whatever geographical place we might occupy, we are born into a subject who precedes us as potentially other-than women.

⁴⁸ Adrienne Rich, *It Is the Lesbian In Us* 1976
This is not to say we ought to be "other-than" women, but that we are subjected to different social relations because we are women, and these relations are structured in a context of being less-than men. I could cite, here, the statistics that substantiate the truths about violence against women, sexual abuse, rape, incest, abductions, murders, mutilations, and other such hate crimes that persist on a global basis against women - but how do the numbers work to cultivate a relation between "we" and "she?" They do not, of course. The numbers appeal to the pragmatist's need for proof - how can you speak of "women" without proof of women? Indeed. The paradox of being a woman is there, in that women must prove much more about the social world than men, since women are subjected to such different realities from men.

The sheer force of the masculine perspective can be understood in the ways women resist women, in the ways women work to substantiate the validity of the masculine by striving to be equal to men, by refusing to support feminism, by adopting an antagonism against women's politics, by insisting there is no difference between men and women, by seeking the same positions of power and authority traditionally belonging to men, and acting within those positions as-if they were men, in order to "prove" that women can do anything men can do, ...

Indeed, "we" can: but more pointedly, why would we want to? What can women achieve by reinventing the same regime that functions to exclude women as different from men? The very notion of learning to act "like men" points towards this one-sided difference, that men are not different, men are not expected to be more like women. Women are the class of people who have been working to be more "like men." So the regime does exclude women as different from men, and is evidenced in the ways women must respond in their participation with these regimes.

Women are different; however, this is a sign of both our strength, and our subjection. This is not a quality statement, women are not "better-than" men, but we are different in-relation to men,
we are different in our relations with men, we are different in-relation to the social structures that name us, call us girls, and then punish us for being less-than men. Not you, you are thinking, not me, maybe other women, but not me - I am not like them, I am not like those women. Do you need to be like all women in order to recognize how "we" are potentially "she?"

"She" holds a powerful significance in society, as a pronoun, as a subject, as an other person in the world, in the neighbourhood, in the home, in the family, in the places where she works, lives, loves, thrives, suffers, and dies. She is subjected to kinds of violence that make us turn away, because it is too incomprehensible. She must have deserved it ... she must have done something to earn that suffering - it is her pain, not mine. This is not me, she is thinking, I am not like that woman, she tells herself; I never think about my sexuality, I don't believe in gender, I am just a human being, she says, as are we all.

The work of demeaning what it means to be human lies in the belief that "we" are all the same as humans, but different in the ways we suffer. Actually, it is more likely that we are the same in the ways that we suffer, but we are very different in the ways we are asked to be human.

This is a global phenomenon, as well as national, regional, local, and it does not mean we must recite any maxim of symbolic rationalism. "Think global, act local," functions to paralyze women in political realms because the "local" for so many women is overwhelming, filled with responsibilities given to us because we are "she" and we have agreed to be "she" without questioning what that will take from us, as humans.

There is no way to conceptualize or understand what it means to be human, without first understanding what it means to be named a "girl" or a "boy" in this world, and what it means to accept this in-relation to the ways we act in the world, in-relation to the social realms of girls and boys, men and women. There is no way to think of what it means to be human without some
understanding of what it means to be sexually divergent and other to heterosexuality, what it means to be other-than white, other-than middle class, other-than Western.

The liberal agenda buried in the desire to think of ourselves as "humans" is wicked, in one way, because it asks us to forget we are women. That we have been named as such, no matter how we may reconstruct ourselves throughout our lives, we were first, before anything else, named "girl." Rather than diminish the power of that naming, there is much to be gained in examining what that carries into the social world, with an effort to recognize how we are all in-relation to others in the world, as girls, as women.

It is almost banal to speak of this "we" in-relation to "she;" it is almost trite; but I am not referring so much to the complexity of this "we" as a fictive "community" of women as I am suggesting a more responsible understanding of "she."

This is not a question of identity, "Who is she?" but asks instead, "Where is she," in-relation to women, where being a women is something yet to be originated, something still insisted upon at birth, where is she in-relation to what women might yet write about being-in-the-world?

Gujar Khan, Pakistan - Zahida Perveen's head is shrouded in a white cotton veil, which she self-consciously tightens every few moments. But when she reaches down to her baby daughter, the veil falls away to reveal the face of one of Pakistan's most horrific social ills, broadly known as "honour" crimes. Perveen's eyes are empty sockets of unseeing flesh, her earlobes have been sliced off, and nose is a gaping, reddened stump of bone. Sixteen months ago, her husband, in a fit of rage over her alleged affair with a brother-in-law, bound her hands and feet and slashed her with a razor and knife. She was three months pregnant at the time.... Perveen's disfigurement is extreme, but her case is standard in its basic elements. Thousands of Pakistani women and girls are stabbed, burned or maimed every year by husbands, fathers or brothers who believe they have brought them dishonour by being unfaithful, seeking a divorce, eloping with a boyfriend or refusing to marry a man chosen by the family. ...

(Pamela Constable, May 22, 2000, "The price of honour.")
There are women who may or may not have read this article in this month's *Washington Post*, and may have read it as a cultural piece, as a story of how awful it is "over there," and how awful Islamic tradition can be to the women it claims to protect. We may also read it as indicative of relations, women in-relation to institutions.

*Ottawa, Ontario* - Despite widespread worry over crumbling relationships and family breakdowns, the institution of marriage is decidedly not dead, according to a landmark study of Canadian society by the Ottawa-based Vanier Institute of the Family...

"The institution of marriage is not dying," report author Robert Glossop says. "We do know that the vast majority of Canadians still do marry,"...

Of the 7.8 million families in Canada today, 6.8 million are comprised of a couple - the vast majority married in the traditional way...

(Jennifer Campbell, May 22, 2000, "Marriage not going out of style")

The "vast majority" is mentioned at least twice in this article. The institution of marriage is regarded as something that might have been dying. As a queer woman, I am all too aware of the recent efforts of the federal government to include same-sex relations in the contexts of legal privileges afforded heterosexual couples. This fear of the death of traditional marriage refers more to a fear of different kinds of relationships than a fear that the institution of marriage is crumbling.

Furthermore, the same institution that thrives with the "vast majority" of Canadians is the same institution that enables the thousands of "honour" crimes that men commit against women in Pakistan, India, indeed across the world's different social and cultural "civilizations." These are the crimes that will continue to predominate the institution of marriage, and will simultaneously be enabled by the same institution. These are crimes that will, for the "vast majority" of women worldwide, go unpunished.
Where is "she" in-relation to "me?" or "you?" This is not a simple question that asks for a specific location; rather, it points to the discursive, the everywhere and nowhere manifestations of institutional effects on society, and in particular, on women. And because the discursive is everywhere and nowhere, it cannot be pointed to with certainties and proofs, but only alluded to in moments where something signals a relation.

Today, for me, this occurred reading the morning newspaper, where both articles appeared, affirming and contradicting competing desires that belong to the "vast majority" (a fictive entity, to be sure) and the ineffable assumptions of heterosexual relations. These are the relations between the men and women who choose to participate with the seduction of the institution, while denying the implications of this institution on a larger scale of relations, and refusing to recognize how violence is written into these practices.

We, who are yet to be she, perhaps, need something to enable a different relation between "women" and the ways we think and feel about this "we" or that "she" - a different language, a yet-to-be-written language that decodes the norms of constructing ourselves in-relations to men. We need to attempt something new, or other-than what exists as language, even if only to begin the work of thinking differently about women. And it is women, most of all, who need to think differently about where "she" is in-relation to whoever women might be...

...and if this seems to you to be trite, and banal, then certainly my words have failed my convictions, and my language has undermined my passion for emphasizing how these relations are complexities that require a different relation with language.

To think about "we who are she" is not to subsume the other into our/their locations of traditions, but is to think, instead, about how we share these relations with institutions that were never designed with women's interests or health or benefit in mind.
While it is impossible to be a woman outside of any institution, it is, I must believe this, it is possible to start the necessary work of un-writing the scripts that have named us as girls, as women, and start using a certain power of relations differently. I am not advocating a specific plan of action, and I know too well how futile resistance can be; it is not enough to argue against what already exists. Instead, it is possible to begin the slow and painful work of writing different ways for being in-relation with language, with traditions, with institutions, with dominant ideas about "who" we might be, ...

...and this is not the work of alienating others, of shutting out some in order to include others, but it is a work of undoing the ways we are each written into kinds of conforming practice, and always at our own risk, to our peril. It begins with the end of rationalization, and the loss of a less-coherent self who struggles to survive these relations. It begins with the end of apologies, and starts with radical inventions that might produce more assertions. It marks the end of trying to change the system from within, and the beginning of an acceptance of the losses that come with separation; the end of traditional and familiar attachments, and the beginning of a different anxiety of speaking in ways that might not be understood, that might not be welcomed, or appreciated, but that must be spoken to undo the ways we are all tied into relations with her, the "she" who has yet to be plural, discursive, everywhere and yet, still, nowhere. The work is not about naming her, but finding her, and thinking about where is she, in-relation to, ...me. You. Her. She.

From there, the human being emerges, from the places where women begin writing about themselves differently, for we are all human beings, but there is still no way to comprehend this in a world where women continue to be punished for being women. The language that will find humans being human will be a language written in words that have not yet been written, and these words are, perhaps, waiting for us in poetics.
It is probably necessary to be a woman (ultimate guarantee of sociality beyond the wreckage of the paternal symbolic function, as well as the inexhaustible generator of its renewal, of its expansion) not to renounce theoretical reason but to compel it to increase its power by giving it an object beyond its limits...⁴⁹

In "Desire and Language," Julia Kristeva is concerned with what she perceives to be a crisis in meaning, identity, and social institutions. This is something that Michel Foucault refers to, in the crisis of the universities, and the failure of knowledge to produce a change in its own reproductive structures of repression and subjection. Knowledge, in the university discourse and academic structure, instead works to reinforce the crisis through a cacophony of competing discourses and the subsequent fragmentations of knowledge into smaller pockets of paranoid specializations - power disperses, but loses none of its effect on repressing change and inciting resistance.

Kristeva is specifically interested in language, and writing, and what a change in language might produce for thinking about these crises differently. Her interests are with meaning, not identities, because identities are effectively produced through meaning, or, what language provides in its function as a symbolic tool for constructing, or producing meaning. Whatever we choose as identification, in other words, is ultimately contingent upon what we think identity means, what our relations mean, and what it means to "be" anyone, however multiply expressed and socially dispersed.
She understands this as a crisis resulting from certain turns in language that took place in 19th century philosophy and linguistics, the consequences of which are, "...situated at the forefront of 20th century politics [as] phenomena....[which]... could not remain outside the so-called human sciences without casting suspicion on their ethic."\(^{50}\)

In other words, in the work of following in the footsteps of a ground already walked, ideas and methods already posed, meanings already posited and subsequently addressed as intact beliefs, language loses its movement, and stutters on itself. The repetition is not productive, but redundant. There is nothing in the language that can ask itself about what it means; rather, it assumes that what it meant remains knowable, referred to persistently as the authoritative source; words out of the mouths and minds of certain individuals such as Kant, and Hegel, for example.

What is needed, she argues, is an analytic language, or theory, that can interrogate itself, not as its object of analysis, but as itself in its process. This is similar to what Derrida has attempted, except Derrida stammers at the impossibility of bleeding himself onto the page as a way to express the subject-in-process, the writing as a body in space, pouring forth itself as a knowledge into language. What Kristeva suggests, instead, is a "thetic of poetics," or a turn towards poetics as the disruption of logical syntax, symbolic structures, and semiotics.

Thetic can be understood as a doubled-reference, where \(\text{theta}\) refers to a sleep-state that is characterized by a proximity of consciousness to subconscious thoughts. These are those swift and startled dreams that jolt us awake, heart thudding, not quite panicking but flooded with incomprehensible imagery that has left, in its wake, a feeling of what we cannot yet bear to know.

Thetic also expresses, for me, an ethic in its sound, a poetic sound of ethics, thetic, a thetic of poetics being an ethic of poetic relations. Kristeva herself expresses it as "...an analytical theory

\(^{49}\) Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language*, 113
\(^{50}\) Ibid., 94
of signifying systems and practices that would search within the signifying phenomenon for the crisis or unsettling process of meaning and subject rather than for the coherence of identity of either one or a multiplicity of structures."\(^{51}\) Certainly, theta-sleep opens us to unsettling processes that ordinarily are unknown, and to be conscious of these is disturbing, so much so that we cannot remain and bolt ourselves to wakefulness as if fleeing the scenes of sleep. There are meanings there, but there are yet-strange, bizarre, complex, confusing, inarticulate.

It is, thus, a "precarious tightrope"\(^{52}\) and one which I have also indicated in this writing, the process of subjecting my own writing to repeated subjection, turning constantly towards the writing itself as re-marks of my own desires, my locations of difference, and my struggles with difference. When Kristeva states that it is probably women who would do this, she is calling upon the same history of male-writing that I have written of, the history of a search for transcendence, for ontological essentialism (Being) and for unification of these particular (paternal) desires. This is not the same as rejecting the importance of some kind of unity, however, and Kristeva argues there can be no coherence, or meaningfulness in either identity, or in the multiplicities of the structures that produce identities without some form of speakable truth about these, as a process.

Instead of asserting a truth-claim, she proposes that the "...subjects of theory must themselves be subjects in infinite analysis... what a woman, among others, can finally admit, aware as she is of the inanity of Being."

In other words, women - having been subjected to theory - can unwrite these structures by writing herself into a language that presupposes a subject-in-process - that is, we are always changing, in-relations, and in these changes, or turns, we speak of a crisis (or deny the crisis) in languages already structured to refuse the turn. It is in poetic language that a writer can interrupt the

\(^{51}\) Ibid., 94
\(^{52}\) Ibid., 94
structures that subject her writing, and allow her to subject language to an interrogation of itself: 
poetics reject assumptions of coherence, and seeks the risks that accompany any transgression 
beyond meanings that are already-spoken.

It is a kind of beginning with the basics of language, of rhythms and sounds, phonemes and 
morphemes, and an exploration for "new objects" - new objects of desire - as non-universal. 
Writing a poem is not quite the same as writing with poetics, or being aware of what poetics can do 
to language; and still, women who write poetically find alternate ways for speaking of themselves 
in-relation to language. I must confess that most of my own writing here has been a struggle to 
speak about abstractions in material contexts, trying to thread the material with the symbolic, trying 
to situate language in a different relation with those who write.

What can this mean? It can mean creating new desires, and with these creations a different 
understanding of what it means to be a subject who is subjected to pre-given meanings, (such as 
girl, woman). These are solitary practices that engage the entrenched sociality of self in poetics, 
bringing these to the surface and crucially, leaving a visible trail back to the point where the body, 
as a subject, has turned away from disparity. We are all, already, socially-disparate in our infinite 
relations with the world, however large or small, and we are all already struggling with the ways 
these relations structure our multiplicities with existing language.

How does anyone rewrite themselves out of language? This is a remarkable turn, indeed. 
What Kristeva is suggesting is that language itself is the universal structure that organizes 
institutions, identities, subjectivities, practice, and that the social and political crisis that mark the 
20th century's degeneration can be understood in the functions of the language that give them 
meaning. The crisis, here, marks a departure into alternate forms of representation, ones that refuse 
assumptions of coherence, and risk the perilous work of turning away from knowability - what if
you wrote something that no one could understand? Is that what this means? Be meaningless in
order to explore a different terrain for what might yet be meaningful?

Not quite. The risks of knowability are self-generated, we desire to know ourselves, even if
these are expressed as multiply expressed relations, fragmented identities; the desire is
nevertheless to know and understand each one of these fragments, and to find within this a sense of
meaningful existence. Kristeva is arguing that these cannot yet be revolutionary, since these
meanings depend upon known languages, known texts, agreeable theories, belief systems that
soothe the subject's desire to "be" someone who is somehow complete, knowable, identifiable,
meaningful.

What might this look like? Each is particular, each writer constructs her own incoherence
when she rejects identity and attempts instead to position herself in a different relation with what
might be meaningful. For myself, I have tried to align with difference as a social response, writing
difference as a transgression through its own absence in social science discourses and practice. In
doing so, I have subjected myself to a variety of undoings, and still, I am unharmed by the process.
The pain, as I wrote earlier, is ascribed to the proximity of the writer to her work, and the desire for
distance is a desire for painless exploration. Social science discourses produce an infinite set of
methods and practices that enable this distancing, and so promise a painless process. Oh would that
this were so!

On the contrary, most women in the doctoral process, and in the traditions of academic
writing, work in contexts of extreme pain, paranoia, and a persistent nameless loss that washes
through the body as a grief that recurs with each new effort to participate within an institution that
cannot admit to women. Women must submit to the institution, say yes, I will do as others before
me have done, say yes, I will comply with these traditions, say yes, I wish to be here - but the
institution, the university, has no such reciprocal responsibility. And in this relation there is a pain that is not eased by the distances afforded by science and intellectual languages, because we are erasing ourselves, over and over, with each new effort to perform, and say yes, at the same time.

(Excerpt of email communication from Kathryn Alexander, Thursday May 13, 2000)

diane...this is what happens in writing - we commit and the dominoes of textual production determine a particular trajectory.

as for the betrayal and abandonment, your responding here is activating my own understanding, just what occurred in my experience, how it appears again and again.

the contradiction of identity formation at the site of the "doctorate" - here is a snip from the middle.

**Genre and Author(ity)**

Writing draft by Kathryn Alexander

My interest in how this research site has come to negotiate and generate meaning is also reflected in the contours of the prevailing discourses that have influenced my own educational journey. As I trace backwards and forwards through my initial research grant proposal..., subsequent conference papers, comprehensive exams, personal research journals and aborted chapters, I note the changing conditions and contexts for understanding my research site. I observe that with each added disciplinary discourse and research tool, my research site has winked in and out of scrutiny as an institutional ethnography, a workplace genre, as a site for feminist identity formation or as a complex genre which mediates all of the above. Thus there have been many research sites for this dissertation, and many ways of seeing them. ... I have also begun to recognize how my participation with particular discourses produces concrete material effects, manifested as ways of thinking and methodological tools which construct disciplinary knowledge commitments, among other things. While this is not a particularly profound observation, it is precisely the apparent isomorphic relationship between how my research site has appeared, disappeared and evolved as a complex of
multiple discourses and my own subject formation - as a peculiarly genred text (feminist, critical, qualitative) continues to lead me to consider the constitutive capacities of genres and selves, the situated action of particular literacies and curriculum in educational institutional contexts.

...The genre shapeshifts and refuses to settle, the genre moves and theory travels with it, the genre accomplishes work in the world, exceeding and adapting to the intentions of its participants, and also failing their explicit instructions and desires. Again, perhaps the half life of genre is another important metaphor for curriculum theorists and genre theorists. The effects of genre are always concrete, in texts, in self-formation, in geographical sites of social action. Genre may be traced through story, narratives, actions and explanation - discourses and curriculum. Its is a kind of carbon tracing - providing evidence of how a genre moves through and resonates in a community, in a text, in memory and in explanation.

Trying to think through the convergence of genre as it is enacted in communities is problematic. As a participant observer, researcher and possibly mendacious constructor of knowledge it is difficult to recognize the evidence that genre is always being enacted, even in the reading of a so called fixed, historically generated text. The effects of the genre never really stop - there is a kind of "all at once-ness" manifested in the social actions of a genre. ...Genres are not merely scripts or symptoms of communicative action they also offer pathways for re-visioning, understanding, re-scripting social practices in concrete ways. Genres are material/cognitive/social matrices - they do the work of the social - thus although we may encounter them as cultural concepts and abstractions they do comprise our social bodies - genres are the things we do with language.

Kathryn and I have been friends for several years, working our way - as writers - through the university process. We have each recognized the conflicts and complicitous sites of conforming, struggling against these, and writing often to each other about crisis, and articulating the relations that participate in these. When everyone admitted they did not quite understand what I was doing, or why, Kathryn grasped the passion of my efforts, and praised the courage it takes to hold onto commitments, even when there is no certainty of what it might mean.

I like what Kathryn has written, because she is able to articulate the blur of "real" with the less tangible structures of language, the material and the symbolic, where metaphor, memory, and experience merge in kinds of writing. Her writing reminds me to ask of myself, what new genres
might still be written? What if we persist in resisting prescripted discourse, and while stumbling somewhat precariously, risk the self in attempts to write somewhere outside, while inside these systems? What new practices can be attempted as she tries to write?

I have been working to build a text here that strays from the structure of the academic text in its process of composition, and instead of subjecting myself to the traditions of university writing, I have tried to recognize where these function as a crisis. This has not evolved into the radical poetics I might have imagined, but then the process itself has been what I've maintained, and this work offers a direction for continuing, a place from which to see differently, to think about identity and desire differently.

To desire a meaningful relation is not the same as rejecting identity, as found in the site of the abject: it is the recognition that identity is formless, and that without meaning, identity cannot exist. To desire meaning is to seek identity in alternate forms. It is also a work of refusing the existing objects of desire, and seeking to invent new objects.

Painful? Certainly. But there is no existence without pain, no love without loss, and no desire without meanings that can speak of alternate possibilities.

We want to "have"/"possess"/"internalize" what (who) we want to be; we desire what we want to be, and these desires are always organized to supplement the self that is incomplete. I have asked of myself, repeatedly, "What do I want?" because this is the site of possibilities. In other words, to desire what already exists is to desire what has been produced in relations of gender and sexuality that pre-exist who we might yet be, as "she." When I ask "what do I want?" I am asking questions about who I might yet want to be, and seek to cultivate these in what asking this question means. The implications of the question, in other words, are a crisis of meanings and knowledge.
The crisis of the world, (and it is a crisis of the world, the only universal concept I can recognize is the crisis that turns the world with each new atrocity against the people who live here) is not something that can be resolved with the existing structures of authority because it is these existing structures that produce the crisis, over and over.

A poetics of crisis is not a rhyme about catastrophes, but is a writing that moves through difference, takes on the twisted working with difference. Poetics admit to desire, admit to a desire for something that might not yet exist. Julia Kristeva listens for the poetics of the not-yet-spoken in babies babbling, and in the repetitions of traumatic, psychotic babbling, because each represents a kind of proto-linguistics, an effort of speaking that has not yet become a structured language. It is patterns of rhythms and sounds that indicate beginnings of language.

This re-calls what Gertrude Stein wrote, about writing, that it is about beginning again and again, about listening and hearing what seems to be different, heard in its discordant sounds, not harmonies, but atonalities that jar the self out of a daze, and into the struggle to repeat what was heard.

In this writing I began with my own terrain of uncertainty, and moved through, refusing to check with authored authorities on how I was doing (is this right? Can I say this? Hasn't this already been said?) and simply continued moving, turning, and there are points in this writing where I have faltered, embarrassed by the ways I slip into already-knowing, re-iterating the decapitated entourage of talking heads, and then in the work of turning away, faced the abyss of abjection.

This is a process of learning, a process of self-in-process, a subject-in-the-making, an endless project of language that turns each time it faces the very object it ought to desire -
ought to desire. what ought i desire? rationalism, resolution, coherence, victory narratives, success, a winning argument, a persuasive text, acceptance from my peers, completion.

A poetics of crisis, I think, admits there is no such thing as completion, this is the untenable object of desire, after all.

"If I could just have what I want, I would be complete."

what i want, however, is something that does not yet exist, and that is something meaningful outside of the institutions that have already written me, written the reader, written the language i stumble through. to write outside of these discursive structures is a process of seeing what i see and admitting this is what i see - this is the language of madness, of course, to see what others refuse to see, or what others regard as fictive, inconsequential, stupid.

to see what others suggest is the wrong thing, to hear that you are looking the wrong way and still persist in looking, perhaps, is done because what you see is what everyone else ignores. The ignorance of others, however powerful, does not negate the things seen or unseen, or the words not yet written to describe what is seen: it merely makes the work of writing that much more important.

i see the tower, the window that looks out over the swamp of information, i see the well-worn trails that lead to the fields of research,

and once i was in northern Edmonton, driving north to Athabaska, and seeing the canola fields there, from here to the horizon, seas of yellow waves that made the sky explode with blue. no
trails, no rows, no swamps, no towers. Just endless yellow oceans beaming blameless at the sky - there is so much more to be seen in those fields of canola than the fields of research. Whatever I might have loved about that yellow ocean is reflective of much more than colour, but the ways it affected me, created a space of desire that I was unable to speak about but could nonetheless hold onto as something different about myself. It is a symbol of something that I might transform through a different kind of semiotics, a way to speak about what I want in languages other than those that I still rely upon. It is the beginning of a new desire, something that might yet still be written.

**Book Four**

**Love in the ruins**

The ruins and the wreckage here are insurmountable, but certainly not unfathomable, meaning I can move through some of this, as someone might dive into the murkier waters of the inexplicable.

Why reject all the writers of social science? Why refuse citations and reference? Why pick a select few, as I have done, and indeed some of these choice deferrals are quite dated. Julia Kristeva's essay on "Desire in Language" was written over 25 years ago. *The Powers of Horror* was written in 1980, and certainly hundreds of scholars have taken her to task, analyzed her analysis and argued for or against, or modified and re-invented something about her writing, or critiqued her as an authority, discredited her writing in some way so that we might never make the mistake of referring to her again ...
it is certainly possible, in fact it is likely that these interpretations precede my own reading. I haven't really searched out every source on Kristeva's writing, because I found what I could not have known I was looking for, until I read it in her writing. Why is that enough? It's hardly scrupulous. From an academic standpoint, it's damned irresponsible, really.

I have also been reading what Dorothy Smith has written for about seven or eight years now, but I have mentioned her randomly, and have relied exclusively on her most recent text, *Writing the social: Critique, theory, and investigations* and *Conceptual practices of power: A feminist sociology of knowledge*.

It is from Dorothy Smith's analysis that I have been able to understand the relations between the material and the symbolic, and from a feminist perspective, one that admits how "the social" is written to exclude women. I have found in Kristeva the relations between semiotics – as the material of language - and symbolism, and these from a perspective of love, desire, and compassion for suffering in global contexts.

I have read these writers quite closely, over and over, as I have been writing, underlying passages and marking pages, studying the text and carrying it with me everywhere, opening it at random and reading, stopping, thinking, then reading, or closing the book and thinking some more. These have guided my thinking, offered me phrases for thinking about compassion. As well, Judith Butler's (1997) "The psychic life of power" has enabled me to articulate the subjective dimensions in the crisis of turning, and in ways that have provided contexts for thinking about gender, sex, and power.

How does explicit citation achieve the effect of substantiating these influences on my own thinking? Well, it is literal. It is there, on the page, for every thought I write, if Smith, or Kristeva,
or Butler, or Gayatri Spivak (another profound and influential feminist writer) said it also, (or first?) then I am obligated to make note of this, page by page, book by book, and so on.

This ruins reading. It is disruptive, not strategic. It's annoying, because the author is sliding too much in and out of everyone else's words and phrases, and eventually there is a sense of no one actually speaking, or writing, but of someone who is inserting prepositions between quotations and citations. It is excessive in a way that defers to the institution, and deflects from the writer herself. Where is she who writes? This is what I want to know.

In Julia Kristeva's writing, on the other hand, there is no dancing from quote to quote, but her own pen responding to what she has read, listened to, thought about, and practiced. She writes. Dorothy Smith, as well, writes. And while each may discuss a particular historical thesis-as-canon - e.g., Hegel, Kant, or Marx - it is to target the faltering tradition, as a way to bridge a different interpretation, an alternate progression, a turning from dogma to something more inventive than reiterative.

For similar reasons, I have been reading Butler's *The psychic life of power*, for two years, reading and re-reading, underlining and highlighting and folding page corners and shifting book marks around in the text, studying the ideas the way others might study a poem. Again, Butler writes, discussing the male-as-canon, and then turning it all some other way, pointing through language towards the subject who writes, and the subject who subjects herself to the process of language. It is from Butler's writing that I have been able to understand the "subject" as a complex relation, and the ways power and gender are interdependent with desire, and language. It is from Butler's writing that I have been able to gain a more critical understanding of psychoanalysis, of love, hate, and the intricate processes of repression, suppression, and oppressions that permeate the social, as well as the subject who with lives in-relation with the social. It is Butler who reminds me
of the difference of being queer, the necessity of this difference in thinking about "subjects" and the social, and the importance of being able to account for this difference.

These scholars I rely upon - Smith, Kristeva, Butler - write in what is often referred to as "the inaccessible text." The writing is dense, what some call "high theory" and by this, meaning abstract. Each author composes texts that can be considered difficult to read; these texts are constructed in such a way that to remove one paragraph or sentence is to defile the work of composition. There is no way to quote Butler, for me, because it is a project of connective tissues that weave into a body of thought. To wrench a section loose is, really, to ruin the effect of the book.

Similarly, with the influences of Gayatri Spivak (and there are many), there is a work in her writing that refuses dissection, there is no single paragraph or line that substantiates anything; rather, these are thick, historically complex writings that require reading, not paraphrasing. These are kinds of compositions that ask something different of the reader, the scholar, the academic, the intellectual.

I have been quite unabashedly inspired by the writing of Gayatri Spivak, but am too cowardly to dare paraphrase her essays. I am making a point of providing a bibliography, for those who wish to pursue some of these works, but I am reluctant to assume responsibility for their meaning. What I read is not always enough to write about, because the effect is an affective stirring of emotion and thought, emotion as thought, a feeling of thinking that eludes me in language. These are, I expect, hints of what might yet be written, but there is much to wade through before then.

I have taken liberties with Kristeva, admittedly, because of the way she writes of love - a writing that has inspired me to turn towards love as a process of turning in crisis. A crisis is not
necessarily a tragedy, but is the possibility for change, loss, letting go of the familiar attachments and standing apart, working to create an object of desire that can be loved without an expectation of completion. The novelty of this entices me, and so I wanted to quote Kristeva because of her words, her language.

So, I can love these writers, as women, feminists, brilliant thinkers, radical thinkers, and I can love their ideas with a passion that exceeds my language. To reduce these experiences to chains of referrals and paraphrasing is to ruin the work they have done. The influences are irrefutable, but the proof of this is inexpressible.

The practice of citation and referral has a long history in the academy, of course; however, today it is most often insisted upon as a work of "giving credit where credit is due." If you read something, and it makes you think, then you need to say what you read and what it made you think about. This is also described as a courtesy to other academics who may want to read what you read, to see if it makes them think what you thought, too. It is a project of intellectual ownership, academic property, a defense against plagiarism, a demand that the ownership of ideas be controlled, rigorously monitored, and dutifully respected. It is a tradition in the university, an essential structure of writing.

What can I do, but refuse? I have named the authors, listed the books (they are few, and that is potentially, as I noted earlier, an irresponsible act towards other writers who have written about the writings I have read and been inspired by here.)

Typically, accountability means being accountable to other academics. I have stated, however, from the onset, that my accountability depends upon my ability to render an account, my ability to write; and my responsibility is not towards the traditions that constrain me, but is a
responsiveness to the account I am writing. (This, I learned from Gayatri Spivak, in her essay on *Responsibility*).

And it is out of a love for the ideas that have been inspired by these writers, that I choose to leave their texts intact, not taken apart into pieces and fragments that meet institutional needs, and refusing to ruin the very work that moves me to write.

The ruins are, in many ways, the potential wreckage of history, instituted by institutions and disseminated amongst its participants, members, subjects, all of us, none of us are innocent, or spared from these effects as a kind of crisis in meaning. If conforming is not an effective method for beginning the hazardous work of finding some way outside of these meaningless positions, what is?

Book Five

*(G)love-moi [an ethic of poetics]*

During the 1980s, in Montreal, the gay communities went to great lengths to encourage the use of condoms, promote safe-sex, and provide education on AIDS and the HIV-virus.

At the same time, a play had opened in the city. Its advertising strategy was to rely upon graffiti; thus, "Love-moi" was spray-painted at various intersections and on billboards, construction sites, building walls, and so on, promoting the play (which was also advertised through posterling, displaying the same scrawl of graffiti-style writing for its title, as a logo.)

Within in a few weeks, someone, or a group of someones, had inserted the parenthetical (g) to the phrase, changing it to "(g)love-moi." This, in Quebecois, was (is) a reference to condoms, a pun within the pun, "(g)love-moi" as the safe approach to "love-moi." If you love me, protect me. It
was quite clever, because it didn't alter the effect of the promotion for the play, but instead elevated its sensibility to include a particular ethic of intimacy, safe-sex being an ethical sex practice. Love and ethics, sex and AIDS, queers and relations all set together in a simple gesture, a single cipher, one mark transforming the play into a pronouncement of social significance.

I remember this so well, because it was poetic. Smart. Simple. Significant. Semiotics at the play in the fields of symbolism. Semiotics doing the work of altering a symbol - "love-moi" as a symbol, a representation designed to promote a theatrical performance, transformed by a semiotic twist into something to think about, to laugh at, a play between comment, politics, and jouissance.

This simple mark also changed the subject of the phrase, from moi (me), to the penis, (g)love-moi transforming the speaker to the penis in need of a sheath. It's extraordinary, at times; what a single mark can do, how poetics can do more than reproduce, but literally re-invent a meaning. It is a poetic gesture that assumes an ethical relation to difference, transgressing "love" towards something more socially dispersed, the inclusion of queer love and all that is embedded there, all brought forward with one cipher, one semiotic move.

The appeal, for me, is personal, my history with poetry going back to my first trilogy, written when I was seven years old. My fascination with words, dictionaries, thesauruses, language translation books, from English to German to Swedish; I remember, vividly, reading dictionaries, collecting them from different eras, different places in time, witnessing the movement of meanings through the history of books. I am still enthralled with dictionaries, historical texts, the etymological traces of words, the original Greek, or Latin, or Anglo-Saxon, the geographical and cultural leaps that take place in the history of language. From the incomprehensible drama of Chaucer's Beowulf, to the shallow jabber of the so-called postmodern novel, I am in love with
words, and what can be done with them, what has been done, what still yet might be done, the infinite tightrope that writing outside requires.

It is a passion for meanings, because everything also might mean something else. A turn, or a trope, a figure of speech, a play with words, a play in words, on words, grammatical tricks, phonetical ploys, all of it fascinates me because it speaks of so much more than the surface of what we depend upon in language.

This writing is, for me, an invention that emerged from my own conflicted conscience. I wanted to do the "right thing" but all I knew was what I would not do - I would not go out and take transcripts from other people as the data for my project, I would not re-search Educational practice. What I wanted was to account for the ArtTech project in some way that did not subject the people I worked with to institutional discourse. And in the process of trying to protect them from anymore intellectualism (I had, by then, done quite enough damage) I started falling. I started understanding myself as less than a scholar, and more as a recalcitrant scholar who had lost all faith in the university. High drama.

But then, heights are a part of this, because I have turned towards high theory, and placed myself high in the tower, and am tippy-toed in a tightrope that stretches out from here to who knows where. Why so high? Perhaps it is for the view. This has driven me to climb, all my life, to seek these heights literally, metaphorically, to seek the view from up there, because "down here" the view is obscured by so much traffic, so much confusion, chaos, insanity that moves towards psychosis, beyond madness, into sociopathological neurosis, hatred at every turn, down here.

Up high, in these other realms of remote connection, I feel protected from the overwhelming everything that spins out of control in every day worlds; I am hyper-sensitive to the every-day, it is only when I can climb away that I can hear myself think.
And this is what I wanted to do: hear myself think. And I do. After ten years of raging at the walls of the institution, and reading everything I could find about anything, after ten years of writing political critiques of the system that functions to condemn the process of change, I have finally found a movement in words that is not maniacal and fused with anger, and is not a betrayal to myself, as author. I have learned and am learning, in this writing, about much more than writing, yet always in writing, an ethic of language, just as “(g)love-moi” represents an ethic of poetics.

The ethical response here is towards my writing, towards who I represent here, as my self, in multiple relations, how I represent the “social” in broad strokes of generalizations. How can I do this and not betray difference?

If I betray myself, I have opened the door to all kinds of rationalizations, if I betray myself first, then I have lost too much. I am learning to live with the losses that come with the refusal to betray myself - and believe me, they are real, lived, social relations, as well as future prospects, and material security, the appearance of normalcy and acceptance, and so on - but I am learning, here, that if I ever turn enough to legitimize a betrayal of myself, then I could really betray anyone and anything.

Betrayal, as self-deception, once turned away from, moves out towards other relations. Once I concede that my own self-deception is acceptable, there is no end to the mindful tricks that can function to maintain the acts of betrayal that follow. This is not to say I have succeeded in avoiding self-deception - it is impossible, at this point, to speak from the body into the page - but I have made this struggle to learn as apparent as possible, because that is all I can do. It's all I can do, and it feels as though it is, for now, quite enough, if not quite a lot more.
Book Six

What does she know?

**Compassion** \n -s [ME compassion, fr. MF or LL; MF compassion, fr. LL compassion-compassio, fr. Compassus (past. Part. of compati to have compassion, fr. L com- + pati to bear, suffer) + -ion, -io, -ion - more at PATIENT] : deep feeling for and understanding of misery or suffering and the concomitant desire to promote its alleviation: spiritual consciousness of the personal tragedy of another or others with selfless tenderness directed toward it <to have [compassion] on a person> <with [compassion] (so different from pity) she shows the sordid impact of this convict settlement on the lives of the natives - Sarah Campion> ...

**Patient** \n adj, sometimes -ER/- EST [ME pacient, fr. Pati to suffer; akin to L paene almost, penuria want, need, Gk pema, suffering, calamity, Skt papman, want, need ]...

Foolish, in a way, to turn towards dictionary definitions in order to grasp a meaning of compassion; but also revealing, in the ways the word connects to desire in the want, or need. It is ambiguous as to whether the person who feels compassion does so out of an empathy with the wants or needs of those who suffer, or if those who suffer are the ones who want, or need, the compassion of others.

Patient, of course, draws out into several definitions, from the activity of being patient ("...bearing pains or trials calmly or uncomplainingly: exhibiting power to endure hardship or physical or mental distress";) to the manifestations, or behaviours that demonstrate "...lenience to the shortcomings or offenses of others...;" and being "...able or willing to bear: enduring...;" then returning back to the archaic meaning, "...acted upon rather than acting: passive - opposed to agent.")

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The second set of meanings, following the passive state of being acted upon, trace towards the subjective position of being a patient, that is being sick, or under the care of treatment for sickness\textsuperscript{55}.

The possibility from playing with formalized definition is in the history of the language. It is a place to begin thinking about how meanings come-to-mean something through historical uses of the word. That is, although both compassion and patient can be traced to the root \textit{pati}, to suffer, they manifest in alternate directions of sociality. The primary definition of patient leaves little room for the expression of compassion, since the former is largely a static state of distance, the opposite of agent, the obverse of acting, patient indicates a passive state of enduring with forbearance. Compassion is actively moving to alleviate the suffering.

Compassion is a desire, a want or need. Whether it is because we want or need to feel compassion, or desire compassion from others, there is an obvious indication of activity, of being-with, of seeking a relation. Where being-patient is a state of being removed from any relation, compassion is an activity that requires a relation, in that we are only compassionate towards others. This is a compassion we can cultivate for the other within, the unknown self who is other to me, in me.

Of course, I can't help but love the etymology, the trace to Sanskrit, \textit{papman}, as to want, or need, and the Greek \textit{pema}, as suffering, or calamity. No one wants to suffer, so the relation is indicated somewhere in the midst of these. Somewhere in their midst is how they were brought together through uses of language to cultivate a word for what we do when we reach out to those who suffer, or are in pain, and do so with desire.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 1655.
Here, compassion describes more than a desire to see, or know the one who suffers, but is also a desire to alleviate the suffering. This, I would argue, emerges from the position of having suffered, and knowing what pain feels like, what it can do to a person, or persons. In keeping with the understandings I have been working with about desire, it is important to remember how desire is in the recognition of the self, in the other. So compassion is not precisely self-less, but is more self-aware, an active remembering that does not prompt withdrawal from the suffering, but instead provokes a different need, to alleviate the suffering.

This is a particular, specific relation, a relation of compassion, of being willing to both remember one's own suffering and to recognize it an other. In that moment of recognition of the self, and an other, a compassionate response is motivated by similar desires to unburden the burdened, comfort those who suffer in ways that we might have been comforted once, or wished we had been comforted, once, when we too suffered in ways that are suddenly familiar.

Compassion is an intimate relation, and "more than pity," as Sarah Campion writes. It's a movement from self to other, an engagement, an emotional process that is socially-inspired.

This is a difference between claiming to know how someone else feels, and remembering how we have felt, and remembering what we wanted, when we felt that way. It is not the same as knowing how an other feels, but is seeing the other through a subjective reflection. This reflection requires more than the identifying of emotional or physical or psychic suffering: it is only compassionate in that it is active, where the experience of feeling is both remembered, and given towards the other. Compassion communicates suffering in a relation outside of the self, and so is a social act, a material act of extending the self towards the other in ways that are self-aware. I cannot take away the suffering of an other, I cannot subsume the other into my suffering, and I cannot know what that person is feeling as she suffers; however, this does not prevent me from
remembering what it feels like to suffer, and so I know enough to not turn away from the other, but turn towards her, and in that turn communicate my own understanding of what suffering produces in the self.

In dominant Western cultural ideology, there is an undeniably masculinized relation to suffering, one that praises those who suffer in silence. We admire the stoic, identify the martyr, and turn away from the open expression of pain, loss, grief, and depression. Thus, it is easy to turn away from people who are homeless, because they are exposed, they are suffering in public, reaching out for something that has been denied. There is no evidence of an overwhelming desire to be compassionate with homeless people, because they seem or act as if they are helpless, and in Western society, we have turned away from the existence, and presence of victims, and instead learned to despise and deny them. People who are "victimized" are antithetical to the self-help agenda of conservative indifference. The role of the individual is now an icon of survival and success. To need others is to be weak. Victims are deluded, needy, unconvincing, unstable, insubstantial.

I have met, in my life, so many men and women who have learned to seal themselves from memories of their own suffering, or rewrite the ways they suffered that the extent of this denial quite easily translates to the belief that it is better to suffer in silence, to suffer alone, to conceal pain from others. The individual who heals her own suffering in silence is far more potent, much more appealing, and so socially recognizable and desirable, and in ways that work to diminish the value of acting with compassion towards those who remind us of our pains and losses. In the power of the masculine individual, compassion is erased and rewritten with contempt. That this contempt for the suffering of others might reflect a self-hatred for having suffered is plausible, but as yet, incommunicable.
This hostile indifference is more than a social malaise, it is an increasing social apathy that thoroughly permeates cultural and historical processes, it writes itself into our bodies and works to cultivate a cruelty that is defended as righteousness. It is a self-sealing adhesive, functioning to blame individuals for their losses by directing social affect inwards: everyone has their own troubles, yours are no better or worse than mine; I can't deal with your pain, you have to learn to deal with it yourself.

For example, White people can now watch the history of the civil rights movement on televised documentaries with a remote dispassion that refuses recognition of how racism still organizes the dominant culture. We can watch what happened then without feeling, without more appropriate responses of horror, or grief for the White-centered and murderous hatred of Black people, as if it is in the past and over, done, finished, gone. Perhaps we might think about how awful White people were then, and not even White people as a dominating class, but those White people, those individuals being shown in black and white television footage; and oh, how brave those civil rights activists were, how noble was Martin Luther King. These are acts of patience, willful witnessing, a refusal of agency, a rejection of self, and a self-less positioning outside the events.

It is harder and harder to understand who the victims of a dominant social structure are, because we are all slowly turning into witnesses of the atrocities that these structures cultivate, enable, legitimize and fictionalize all at the same time. Standing aside from the relations that connect us all to these crimes against humanity, this living hatred, active genocide, and pervasive, systemic oppressions, we dispense with affective understanding, and with it, suppress compassion, ignore what we might yet need to know, and refuse the social.
The question that marks this book, the sixth book of love, ("What does she know?") asks questions that reveal what is concealed about women in-relation to other women, about her understandings of herself, in-relation to "the social" as an inquiry, ("What does she know?). A quick turn of emphasis also allows this question to dismiss her as not-knowing: "What does she know?" accuses her history and understanding of self in-relation. The meaning is suddenly subjected to this subtle effect of "emphasis," as Gertrude Stein recognized in writing. What does she know? (factual) What does she know? (assessment) What does she know? (dismissal) What does she know? (desire?).

When I ask, What does she know, I am asking about who she is. To ask this of each other, compassionately is a desire to both know her and "be" recognizable to her. It is to ask about how we risk ourselves in familiar and unfamiliar terrain - woman as nurturer, healer, women as caring, kind, motherly, sisterly, loving, as well as punished, punishing, cruel, selfish, misogynist, angry, ill, ignorant, hateful. These risks engage small moves through the language that identifies our ways of being-women in the world.

Being compassionate requires translations of what is already written, and the rewriting of relations in alternative ways. It is writing that matters. Writing in the presence of being-a-woman, however that translates in your language, is what provides new interpretations. It means taking into your work such impossible processes as culture, history, power, literacy, art, gender, and so on. It is always unfinished because it is processual, never complete but instead always recognizing what the feeling of completion might mean. Writing is a way to learn about the subject-in-process, as writing - listening to hear what cannot yet be known.

(Oh! That reads back to me, uch! Bland, blah blah blah. Yes, duh, who hasn't heard it all before, ...)
... I'm so trained to be skeptical of language - my own especially. Listen to what you cannot yet hear. Be with the you within. To thine ownself be true. How many different ways has this been written before? How can I say this in a way that is not echoic but different from how it's been already-written? Perhaps I can't. Yet.

Certainly, culturally, it is expected that women will be compassionate, and men will be patient. This is part of the heterosexual structure, women-as-nurturer/mother, and man as emotionally passive, deferring to the woman for emotional needs, and at the same time denouncing affect as lacking in social value. The structure is effective, certainly, as masculinity and femininity have regained currency in this late 20th century; but more worrisome is the ways this denotes the value of "women" to the extent that women are increasingly assuming the role of active misogynists, embracing the masculine patterns of behaviour as desirable ways for being-in-the-world.

As misogynist ideologies increase amongst the social spheres of activity, they become cultural property. Self-help is the dominant commodity - individualism is the dominating ideology that forbids sociality, and negates compassionate responses to those who fall outside the privileged pockets of class, gender, and race. When I ask, What does she know? I am asking if she knows the ways paternalism is reproduced, if she knows that the ways she has suffered have everything to do with living in a society that is historically and systemically structured to hate and punish women, and does she know that the more she embraces the masculine practices, that the more she chooses to "act like a man," the more she represents her own demise?

This misogyny thrives in the university, and amongst the feminist academics who are actively producing feminist research, there is little tolerance for victims, for women's suffering, for the ways pain writes the psyche; there is little room for love in the activity of research. Love, and
compassion, are not ethics or responsibility: these are capacities that are either cultivated, or mutilated, denied, or subjected to rationalization. I am not suggesting that women ought to have greater capacities for compassion, but instead am indicating how knowledge, as power, effects our affective relations in the social realms where we work as intellectuals, as researchers, as academics, teachers, and so on.

This is not a theory of "caring," as feminist Nel Noddings\(^{56}\) has advocated, (an ethics of caring;) rather, it is about the relations between psychic and intellectual interactions, and the ways language translates the other into what has become a contest of relations. The intellect, in other words, can deny the psyche, but the psyche doesn't deny intellect: it needs the other to exist in the social world of language and relations, the social world of others. Literacy, as a function dependent upon some intellectual capacities, also responds with its relations to knowledge.

Our more complicated emotional and vulnerable selves ceaselessly respond with relations to knowledge, and language forms the terrain upon with these conflicts find space to interact. If knowledge is the premise upon which we identify, what we know certainly merges with who we presume ourselves to be. This knowledge is created through meanings, where what is meaningful is linguistically provided: knowledge is linguistic meaning, and so identities hinge on the relations of meanings-as-knowledge, which are, in turning, and at the same time, a power we rely upon for acting in the world. What you know is very complex. What is true is dispersed and contradictory. Most importantly, what anything means can be changed.

What the social lacks, perhaps, is a language that can admit to love and compassion, desire and grief, loss, horror, pain, suffering, sorrow; a language that can relate to these experiences in ways that cultivate different relations with knowing, meaning, and "who" we are in the contexts of

\(^{56}\) Nel Noddings, \textit{An Ethics of Caring}
what we know, what we refuse to know, what we deny, conceal, refuse to admit to, erase, and suffer in silences never written.

When I ask, What does she know?, I am expressing more than a question, but am indicating a complex set of relations between gender and power, between memory and identity, between relations and histories, intellect and ideology, desire and denial. These are all active processes, mediated by psychic relations within the self. What does she know, asks also, what does she remember? How does she understand her-self in relation to these memories? How has she written the identities she relies upon? How do these manifest in powerful acts within the social, and within herself? What does she mean? What does she need?

What does she want?

Book Seven

Dreams

In some ways, the site of the dark and gloomy tower that I found myself in is an important dream-image, it comes from childhood books of dungeons and castles, from dark movies of damp, ruined, moss-covered stone and an evil king who has banished the hero, a man in a mask, to the tower.

As well, dreams are the site of our own transgressions, our own subconscious wildness; the unknowable self unraveled and spinning a cascade of images that are ineffable and intolerable at the same time. This thetic space of poetics might be where men turn into cockroaches, and women crawl beneath the wallpaper, where a life we live unconsciously suddenly pours through into conscious thought, monstrous, horrifying and strange.
It was in a dream like this that Mary Shelley saw the monster who became Victor Frankenstein’s creation, and while it terrified her to a startled waking, bathed in sweat and trembling, she also recognized it as the character and the story, both in one and the same.

It was the dream of that bizarre crystalline archway that brought me to a speaking wakefulness, repeating to myself what I dreamed I needed to know, stirring me so thoroughly that I had to write it here. And I never thought for a moment that I ought to keep that to myself, but instead realized how necessary these experiences are for prodding the writer to push herself through the poetic work of translating the most strange images of sleep. This where we are, too, when we sleep, after all. We both asleep and awake in an other part of consciousness, an other part of consciousness that witnesses our world every day without revealing a single thing until we sleep, the ego stills, and the subconscious roams in its own chaotic roamings without interruption or dismissal. In other words, we never think, of a dream, that we didn’t dream that. We might forget what we dream, we might recall a dream and be unable to make sense of it, but we cannot deny what we dream, and this is a site of possibilities for poetics, this place where there is no denial. This is not to say there is truth in our dreams, but that there are translations of what we dream that might yet speak about what remains silent, about difference, about the social world of selves and others, about ourselves, as others, about us, about me, you. It is where we might find what is yet to be written about, however frightening or monstrous, in the translations from inarticulate imagery to poetics, where the impossible becomes possible, and new desires emerge.

These "books" are seven alternate perspectives on the themes that have run through these essays, of witnessing, of suffering, writing, and poetics. These are all perspectives and experiences of turning in crisis as a way to make something new out of loss, as a way to face changes

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57 Muriel Sparks, 1951. *A child of light: A reassessment of Mary Shelley.*
differently. These are also places to make use of theory for writing about the most frail connections we cultivate within ourselves, and how these manifest socially in acts of oppression, resistance, strength, cruelty, selfishness, self-awareness, always, essentially, self-in-relation to self, as other, the interminable stranger.

Writing this has not changed my position in-relation to the university. I still consider myself a falling scholar, but I am grateful for the fall, and relieved to have been able to turn with the realization that there is no way to change the system from within. So, I have no regrets, because I have learned more in falling than I ever did while I was clinging to the walls and stumbling around the stairwells.

I have great respect for the women who stay, and for the ways they find to work within the institution. It requires courage and sacrifice to stay. There are, undeniably, and most importantly, many women academics who do make a difference, and I wish sometimes that I might have become one of them, but thus far I have been committed to writing this way out. In these same scenes of writing, my relation as rebelling in this falling out from the university still includes my realizations of the love I do have for intellectual work.

It is a conundrum, certainly, for there is nowhere an intellectual might work, really, other than in the university. And so I am faced now with significant decisions about where this leads me, as much as where this all leaves me.

At the moment, for now, it provides me with a freedom I never realized I craved until I started writing these seven books of dreams. I never fully understood how cramped and enraged I was while participating in the university, how much of the privilege I resented, how much of the pettiness I absorbed, how much of the ignorance I was willing to tolerate, and how little kindness, how little compassion, how much masculinity, how much male-dominance in text and relations was
organizing my faltering feminism. I was starting to hate women, I was starting to understand
women as stupid, and it was at that moment that I recognized what effect institutional participation
has on me. I had to fall, if not leap, if only to save myself.

The looming question, of course, is why write this and follow through with the assumptions
that I might graduate with a doctorate? Why take the prize, if I have rejected the context and
dropped out of the race? After ten years of struggling and accumulating a debt that will consume
the rest of my life, really, I have decided I at least owe myself the semblance of completion. This is
not to say that going through these final steps completes me, but instead confirms for me the value
of alternative work, and the strength it takes to see it through.

Research is a very necessary practice in many ways, but there are other ways to produce
writing in the university, there are other ways for intellectual ideas to make their way into writing,
and there are other ways for speaking about the issues that are of concern to the academic
community. Knowledge, learning, identity, literacy, gender, social issues, and theory, represented
in alternate scripts and fictions, rants, arguments, explications and explanations, all of these relate
to the primary site of crisis as the potential for change.

There is no denying that Western universities are in crisis today: how this manifests in
change, and alternate practice, remains to be seen. But I have done what I could do, and it's all I can
do; rather, it is what I wanted to do, it is what I want. I want to write, "This is not a victory
narrative," but then I'd be denying what I wanted. I wanted to portray learning in alternate ways,
and I can only stop, at some point, when I am aware of that feeling of completion. The feeling of
completion is a feeling that I have learned, which means I have let-go of what I was holding onto
(anger, pain, self-hatred, shame). In the process, I find myself now writing about dreams and
compassion, and realize how little those words convey by themselves. To continue I will, at some
place, find a way to let-go of those words, and write different meanings. I doubt this ever gets
easier, but it can become more recognizable, more familiar, as the process of writing towards
somewhere, ...yet.

composting a life

surely life is wet, sticky, messy, runny,
sinking, bobbing, swimming, sailing, floating,
viscous, leaking, dripping, moist, secreting;

just as water
  falls, rivers, streams, flow, pour
like rivulets of being -
  surely there are these:

unused seeds and peels,
shells and grounds and cores of the persistence of me.

some of failure, disappointment,
some of unexpected loss, of strange success,
some of those deliberations, achievements and catastrophes,
the desired and the unanticipated loves;
casual and committed,

incidental, purposeful, filled with working, loving, living, being in the
echoes and demands of
some-said,
some of silence...

moments wasted, spent, exhausted, and those
times of absorption, escape, exultation,

joys and griefs, gains, losses, and in-between: uncertainties...

the wandering, waiting, wanting, rushing and pushing,
pressing, resisting,  
wishing, ignoring,  
hiding, greeting, leaving,  

the struggle of patience and frustrations of urgency,  
the quiet stillness of indecision...  

the passion, desire,  
infatuation, skin to skin,  
the fold  
of her;  

our bodies when we wrapped ourselves in  
the scent of that completion;  
the hollow of her absence,  
and the panic of a breaking heart,  
the linger of that pain...  

it is not what I keep but what I leave;  
not what I account for,  
not what I admit and list,  
but more what I deny and cautiously refuse to say -  
and what can I conceal, what can I refuse, what can I discard  
without my knowing?  

it's not what I give, but what overflows,  
what spills off and sits in the world  
of others,  
the lives I've touched but never known,  
the thoughts I've shared, the words I give away,  
the places I might occupy  
in hearts and minds of others - strangers - lovers - friends,  
any who might cultivate a life  
of me from pieces that were gleaned,  
shreds and incidental crumbs.  

it is the way a memory endures beyond the flesh that first inspired,  

and all of these  
like seeds and peels  
discard in the living,  

but nothing disappears.  

where all these unknown pieces might accumulate
float within me,
I can feel the heat of these,
composting into something rich,
like black soil, rainforests, ocean reefs,
marsh lands and pond surfaces,
the moisture of us -
sorrows, passions, perspiration,
gasps of musky pleasures, those bursts of
tears, sweat, secretions and indiscretions feed to unknown
earths and worlds I have sown -
just as I'm
sown by the seeds and peels of others,
just as every life too arid,
and too dry and measured
fails to thrive,
surely we've not saturated this living,
just as surely as we thirst for more.

References


The difference between the references listed above, and the selected bibliography listed below, ought to obvious, but, oh... what ever is? The citations above refer to the texts I mentioned and write about within the book itself. The readings listed below are the books that have had the most profound impact on my thinking, and are the texts that I would recommend for reading. I have included short notations for these, so that the reader might have a sense of what it is about these books that is worth considering. There is, unfortunately, no way for me to list all the books that have informed my thinking – although perhaps one day I will write a book about all the books that have influenced my life and writing. For now, I have written a short sampling of significant texts that are, in my opinion, absolutely relevant to the *Falling Scholar* in terms of influence.

This has been an excruciating work of selectivity and choice – there are hundreds, if not thousands of articles that have influenced my thinking, and are not itemized here. Journal articles in social science publications are simply not easily accessible to the everyday reader, and it is my decision to focus on materials that are available to everyone, and not only academics.

**Selected Bibliography**


This essay still matters, no matter how many ways we might want to deconstruct the author in his life. The theory of interpellation carries crucial implications for the institutional relations that organize social and cultural life, and for thinking about what “identity” means in these political and ideological contexts. The essay itself is quite interesting, more interesting still if read with Judith Butler’s *The psychic life of power*, as she dissects the implications of Althusser’s theory in the contexts of his life. This does not mean there is no such thing as “interpellation;” but instead requires a critical reading of both Althusser, and Butler, in ways that reveal the complexity of the subject, of subjectivity, and subjection.


This is Althusser’s confession, his own version of his life, including the murder of his wife and the subsequent events of his time spent in sanitariums and universities. It is by far the most difficult book I have ever read, because Althusser cannot bring himself to compose an admission that speaks to his responsibility. It is a disturbing insight into the psychotic academic mind, and the ways the academic institutions participate with these kinds of defects in the human condition. It is
not a pleasant read, nor an easy read; however, it reveals institutionalized consciousness at its most profane level of denial and culpability. This book inadvertently substantiates the sociopathological qualities of academia, and as such is a valuable description of French intellectualism as a culture unto itself.


...power that at first appears as external, pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity. ...[this] form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning on oneself. (3)

Butler’s *Theories in subjection* is a complex collection of interpretive readings and analyses on subjectivity. She moves from the 19th century German idealism of Hegel, towards Freud and Foucault, and then takes on Althusser, writing his accountability for the death of his wife through his academic work. Finally, she turns towards herself, and her own crisis in teaching. Each of these analytical explorations forces a look at the subject in a context of power, gender, and the ways that punishment is incorporated into psychic life. I continue to read this book because the depths of its implications deserve a patient reading and re-reading. It is not a book for everyone, because it is indeed quite difficult to make sense of; but by the same token, it is a book for everyone to read, and to think about in terms of how we are with ourselves, to ourselves, and others. She addresses many of the global issues that affect human suffering in the contexts of psychic processes, emotions – grief, loss, melancholia, narcissism, hate, love, as well as the critical subject who survives the turn and manages to turn the crisis into something about herself, something new. There is always something about the self-as-subject that is differently written, because what we want is for others to understand what we do, in the end, always, is try to speak about what we are doing, what we are feeling, how we are suffering, and what we want.

Butler’s weaving of Freudian psychoanalysis with Foucault’s theories of power provide a fascinating glimpse of socially structured conflicts that are internalized, externalized, and re-internalized, over and over, as endless turnings of conflict and crisis that produce the social subject, and that the subject, as a social being, reproduces. It is a most important book for cultivating an understanding of the vulnerable self who moves in these worlds.


Freud admits in several of his writings that psychoanalysis is mostly about the analyst’s own neuroses. This is perhaps the most significant purpose of psychoanalysis as a tool for thinking about the ways we are with ourselves, and with others. It is a mistake, I think, to read Freud too literally, for he is, as are all writers and theorists, a product of a culture that co-constructs much of his thinking. By writing his autobiography, Freud was attempting to identify the ways his own life
unavoidably informs his theories of the psyche. It is not a confession, but an attempt to identify psychoanalysis as an interaction with the self and the Other within, self and others in our lives, and of course, between the analyst and the analysand. It is a short book, but helpful for understanding the ways desire, love, loss, and repression function as social and personal aspects of the essential interactions within ourselves, and with others.


There is nothing especially difficult about Kafka’s classic story of a man who turns into a giant cockroach, except it is a story about a man who turns into a giant cockroach. The absurdity and insanity of this predicament for the character, Gregor, is mesmerizing in Kafka’s hands. It is written as if it were simply a child’s fable, but it is an incisive indictment of socialization and the excess of institutional effects on the private lives of people and their families.

It is, in my life, one of the most disturbing, and enriching books that I have ever read. Kafka succeeds in portraying the internalized feelings of estrangement and alienation, and it does so in a context that is perfectly macabre. Bizarre, brilliant, and really, at the same time, utterly lovely.

Kristeva, Julia.

I want to select one of her articles, essays, or books and say this is the one you should read, but I simply cannot be so specific. All I can write is that Kristeva is worth the effort, no matter what you choose from her published works, she is worth the effort.


This is possibly one of the best short fictions ever written in the 20th century, if not in the history of English language literature. It is rich with political metaphor and insights into women and writing, women and intellectualism, as well as the ignorance and misogyny of medicine. Perkins-Gilman portrays an extraordinary power of writing – both in the ways women have been prevented from writing for so long, and in what happens when women do write in ways that are outside the dominant feminine ideologies of women’s fiction. It is about madness and brilliance, and how these are so intimately scripted into what men fear the most about women. As with Mary Shelley, Perkins-Gilman foresaw much more about the politics of gender than anyone in her social realms. This story represents a chilling indictment of gender oppression, and the ending, alone, is reward enough.
Rich, Adrienne

I want to select one of her poems, articles, essays, or books and say this is the one you should read, but I simply cannot be so specific. All I can write is that Adrienne Rich is worth the effort, no matter what you choose from her published works, she is worth the effort.


Joan Scott’s article on the uses of personal experience in political and theoretical writing is a critical analysis of what constitutes the “personal” of experience. In other words, and as I have written about here, it is easy to rewrite experience into something else, something less personal in acts of negation, denial, and as ways for scripting kinds of victory narratives from personal experience. But what is personal about experience in the contexts of the narrative? How are we to read these, and what kinds of assumptions do we make about the honesty of the writer when referring to someone else’s experience as evidence of a phenomenon?

Scott refers to several theory-based (academic) articles that have relied upon personal narratives as sources of “evidence;” and turns the authors towards each other – what does the theoretician need, and how does this narrative meet that need? What is left un-read, or what is assumed in the narratives can be misleading, simply because there is no way to write honestly about experience. The events are being re-called into memory, and re-crafted into text, re-written into something that is about an audience as much as it is about an experience. There is much to be gained from these kinds of skepticism, and Scott’s article is, I think, necessary for any writer who relies upon narrative and personal experience, whether it is in reading the narratives of others, or writing their own...(myself, included, obviously.)

Indeed, the entire edited text, Feminists Theorize the Political, contains some of the most important political essays written in the past two decades by feminists, including Gayatri Spivak, Iris Murdoch, Denise Riley and others. It is a must-have for any political writer, an essential part of any feminist’s library.

Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. 1818/1982. Frankenstein, or the modern Prometheus, the 1818 Text. James Rieger, (Ed.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press

While I don’t especially recommend this edition of Frankenstein, (the introduction by James Rieger is, in a word, stupid.) I do recommend it to those who have not read the story. I was prepared for the movie version, personally, and was startled by Shelley’s intellectual and philosophical interests as she guides the story through a variety of genres, from narrative, to diary entries, letters, and first-person accounts from the monster himself, in a meeting with his creator. It is unquestionably an existentialist theme about identity, written prior to the development of existentialism in its philosophical form. It is an allegory about class consciousness, science, and
power. It is also about language, identity, and self/other relations composed before psychoanalysis had come to be developed. Shelley was a visionary in many ways, making the tragedy of her life all the more grievous, as the suppression of women-as-intellectuals prevented her from living the life for which she was most gifted.


I have never been the same since reading this book, particularly because of the readings Smith provides on the biography of Virginia Woolf. Smith’s deep reading, based on her theories of conceptual practices that act in material sites as power, left me quite weakened for days. The sheer brutality of her reading points an unambiguous finger at Leonard Woolf and Woolf’s brother-in-law, Quentin Bell, as those who drove Woolf to her death. Smith is probably one of the most important feminists writing today, and should be required reading for every woman who wants to consider her relation to the university, and other institutions.


During the late 1960s, Sherry Turkle was in Paris, during the “uprisings” of 1968, when massive strikes and student activism were turning rapidly in an anarchic culture. In a culture that prizes its intellectuals as icons, France had more than a psychoanalytic movement: it had a widespread and deeply rooted psychoanalytic culture. At the heart of this development was a "reinvention" of psychoanalysis - as politicized, and poeticized Freudianism. This is revealed through the work of Jacques Lacan. The story of Lacan is a remarkable story of politics and analysis, revealing not only the man, Lacan, as a borderline personality, but also setting the effects of his work into the social and intellectual contexts of Paris. Turkle’s story reads like a novel, and not only explains the relations of psychoanalysis in political and cultural realms, but explains the more difficult theories of Jacques Lacan, in-relation to the ways Lacan was reading Freud. Given the reliance I have placed on psychoanalytic theory here in these essays, I highly recommend Turkle’s account of psychoanalysis as a text that de-mystifies theory and analysis, and explains the meanings of psychoanalysis in clear, interesting, and accessible writing.


The first time I read *Mrs. Dalloway*, I was unfamiliar with Woolf’s works, and was really mostly bored, in search of something to read. As I moved through the text, I was quite stunned by the brilliance of the story’s structure, the writing itself, and the dream-like qualities that Woolf could paint in scenes that were so challenging to comprehend. The entire story takes place in a single day, as Mrs. Dalloway prepares for a party she is having that evening. Through the story, her own life is curled and unfurled through memory, and through the simultaneity of the movements
taking place in other places in London at the same time. Time, here, marked by church bells and the ringing of the mail delivery, and so on, is played out on a landscape of events that slowly wend their way into a most inventive and profound relation to Mrs. Dalloway herself. It is, for myself, an achievement of the kinds of spatial writings I have referred to here in these essays. In Woolf’s text, the concept of time is reduced to what marks our lives as we move through space. Time does not move, but we do, and in this story the spatiality of being in-relation to the others of our lives is scripted so gently that it is almost painfully frail. It is a gorgeous allusion to the relations of the condition of being human in a world where such conditions are taboo.


When Woolf wrote *The Waves*, she tried to pull her theories of time and space into a single weave of memory and dream. Here, reality is a space we drift through within the lives of six friends who meet as children, and then again as adults. There are no lines in this writing, no linearity, just streams of dreams and speaking voices who are at times children and others times adults re-calling their voices as children. In many ways, I read this as an example of the singularity of time, as a story that refused to be a story. Instead of narrating, Woolf worked with the depths of the space our bodies fill as we move through the space of the world, as our own bodies move with the organics of aging, and the effects and affects of relations on the directions of these movements.