

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Like other social institutions, universities have been created and administered by and for a white-male dominant culture that continues to marginalize women and anyone else designated as "Other" according to race, class, ethnicity, ability, age, size, and sexuality. This discussion questions the dominant model of standard written discourse in the college English classroom where linear, abstract argument centered on autonomous thinking and reasoning prevails. It explores how such a discourse privileges a patriarchal system of education that subordinates other ways of learning and writing, particularly those that may be closely associated with contemporary women's learning, and it looks at some experimental writing strategies for teachers and students who want to challenge the dominant model of discourse within the institution and perhaps better enable students to write with a sense of their own goals and purposes.

Writing a Feminist Position in the Classroom

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For my Family

&

For Ruth and Joe Long

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WRITING A FEMINIST POSITION IN THE CLASSROOM

A sheltered life can be a daring life as well.
For all serious daring starts from within.
--Eudora Welty (One Writer's Beginnings 114)

For women, "shelters" such as the home, church or temple, and school have been conflicted places, promising to protect and sustain us while housing ideologies that have been less than favorable to women. It should surprise no one to hear that universities like other social institutions, other "shelters," have been created and administered by and for a white-male dominant culture that continues to marginalize women and anyone else designated as "Other" according to race, class, ethnicity, ability, size, age, and sexuality. Feminist theorists have been interrogating social relations and institutions for some time, in a sense asking who is sheltering whom, under what conditions, for what purposes, and to what ends?

For the purpose of this discussion, I'd like to consider the "shelter" of the college classroom where the dominant model of written discourse continues to be linear, abstract argument centered on autonomous thinking and reasoning. I'll explore how such a discourse privileges a patriarchal system of education and subordinates other ways of learning and writing, particularly those that may be closely associated with women's learning. Then I'd like to discuss some reasons why teachers and students need to open

spaces within the classroom for daring or risk-taking-- student writing that resists the standard master discourse and perhaps empowers student writers interested in examining their positions as social subjects and knowledge-makers.

My questions about academic writing began as personal questions, growing out of my experiences as a student, as a writer, and as a new teacher in the English classroom. Over the past two years, I've been thinking about the essays I learned to write as an undergraduate--essays with a syllogism worked out in advance, a concise, focused introduction with thesis statement clearly explicated, quotations to demonstrate a point, and a narrative as close to selfless as possible. I call these "safe" essays because they were straightforward and dependable; I could always earn an "A" or a "B." But they took few risks and hesitated to explore beyond major premises. Now I wonder about the assumptions operating behind this model of writing: What role does it assume for student writers? What is its purpose? Who benefits and who does not?

Beginning with my first college writing course more than ten years ago, I learned argument and abstraction as the prototype for all serious writing. My English composition instructor, a journalist and Vietnam veteran, required critical analyses of the novels we read and discussed in class: The Red Badge Of Courage, All Quiet on the Western Front, A Farewell to Arms, and Going After

Cacciato. Writing was war and acts of heroism; it was rigorous, without revision, and for the most part without "self" except for the few times we were allowed to have a go at fiction or something creative. Later, in an advanced composition class, I learned more sophisticated arrangements of argument, arrangements that included extended analogies or metaphors as framing devices.

When I became a graduate student, I was looking forward to becoming a more professional-sounding writer, someone with a "voice" and the authority to experiment with forms. I was ready to leave behind the safe essays I'd written as an undergraduate, the ones shy of first-person pronouns and shielded by overt logic and objectivity. These essays weren't unsuccessful or unpleasant to write; in fact, I liked working with controlling metaphors to frame an argument, and I learned to enjoy the silent competition, handing in my work to be read alongside twenty or thirty other essays. But after awhile my writing seemed artificial, as though I were blending analysis and summary without ever really saying what I believed or experienced as a reader. As a graduate student, I was ready to risk an opinion and hoped I'd be shown publishable ways to write--ways that weren't merely acceptable for "student work" and that joined analysis and narrative, logic and poetry without dividing them into categories of "critical" and "creative" writing.

Perhaps I was being idealistic, for what I found were mixed responses to my work. In writing and women studies courses, I was generally encouraged to experiment and try balancing critical discourse with more subjective discussions. During my first term of graduate work, I took classes from three feminist professors who invited personal narrative as a strong and integral part of analysis. Having been away from the university for three years and then returning with feminist values of my own, I was thrilled to find opportunities in the classroom for writing actively, personally--and critically. I believed this was the kind of work expected of graduate students: essays in which a student openly identified herself and explored ideas from a standpoint. My writing was beginning to change, and I felt like I was pushing beyond the essays I'd written as an undergraduate.

Before the year was out, however, I had to reconsider my assumptions about what was expected of graduate student writing. In more traditionally structured literature classes where abstract argument prevailed as the dominant discourse, for instance, the interactive voice with which I was struggling to speak was judged inappropriate--subjectivity and "I" got into some trouble. Now, what I call trouble may seem pretty mild to some readers. I didn't fail any courses, and my lowest essay grades stayed in the

"B" range. But grades weren't so much the issue here. I was--and continue to be--sensitive to written comments.

One professor whom I especially respected and admired suggested that I was sacrificing too much "rigorous analysis" of the text for personal reflection, and he resisted too much use of "I." Comments like these left me flattened. I felt like I had broken some sort of protocol in my writing and was reminded of my studentness. When this professor announced in class one afternoon that the best essay is a "transparent essay," one that reveals insight to a text without a reader having to "bump" into the writer, I understood that I'd been writing with a different set of assumptions--and goals--in mind. I had assumed that, as a graduate student, I could have a say in determining my purpose in writing an essay, even let some of my feminist values shine through by emphasizing my experiences as a gendered subject. Anymore, I no longer want to deny my background and experience in reading, thinking, and writing about literature--or anything else. I enjoy writing with a sense of positionality; I feel interested, capable, connected.

This thesis is an enactment of these desires; it's a paper in which the reader is going to bump into me. To provide some examples of the writing I've been experimenting with over the last two years, I've included a number of intertexts within the body of my research. These passages

are selected from essays I wrote for graduate courses in composition, literature, and women studies. Most of the intertexts are parts of introductions, but a few illustrate middle or closing thoughts. While some of the essays they represent received high praise; others, as I've mentioned, weren't so successful. But my purpose for including the intertexts is not to prove that my writing is flawless or that these approaches would be appropriate for every writing situation. Rather, I hope the intertexts will initiate some productive questions and discussion for readers about student writing, its purpose and potentially subversive power as a discourse within the institution. I want, as well, to demonstrate some of my own attempts to write beyond critical, lineal, abstract arguments that perhaps represent interactive ways of knowing and responding to texts, ways that allow a student writer to explore her positions as a knowing subject, ways that reveal contexts and surroundings, showing an awareness of time, location, and relationships.

Exploring such juxtapositions enables new connections with texts and characterizes how Adrienne Rich defines writing with accountability in her essay "Notes toward a Politics of Location." Rich rejects abstraction and sees writing that connects with material existence as a type of social activism. Taking such a stance with writing seems to me distinctly feminist because it's grounded in experience, recognizes gender inequalities and the interrelatedness of

oppressions, and involves questioning authorities and examining assumptions behind social practices. In the final section of this paper, I'll discuss how Rich's approach might be used effectively within the institution for raising consciousness.

I'm certainly not the first person to question traditional writing practices in English. My opinions have been shaped by feminist writers such as Adrienne Rich and Audre Lorde and by teachers of English like Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes, who've been deconstructing the hierarchy and opposition between literature and student writing, the "real world" and the institution for some time. Two books, Ways of Reading by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky and Reading Texts by Kathleen McCormick, Gary Waller, and Linda Flower, have also had a strong impact on my thinking about writing in the English classroom. There seem to be more ways to acknowledge that readers create meaning when responding to a text than the dominant discourse allows, and I want to push for opening spaces that allow a wider range of student writing in the classroom, particularly those that show an awareness of ideologies at work in our language and culture.

I began this paper by suggesting that there's something amiss with the standard writing practices in college classrooms. My experiences with the dominant model of discourse over the last two years, the times I had to pick

up again with linear, abstract argument for a professor's approval, left me feeling irritated, isolated--like I was compromising, losing something, being forced to deny responses that really mattered to me. I believe there may be something patriarchal and oppressive about teachers limiting students to writing "objective" arguments that repress personal grounding. Some students, particularly women, may want to resist this discourse, explore ways of writing that are openly subjective, relational, and I might now add, positioned within a dialogue that recognizes social diversity and power differentials. Issues of gender, race, class, ethnicity, ability, age, size, and sexuality need to be examined as political issues working within our institutions and classrooms. It seems crucial that we recognize the classroom is not a neutral space where differences don't matter, don't play a part in how students read and respond to texts, the instructor, and one another. Text-centered, abstract writing forces students to minimize or ignore the social positions from which they write and suppress their experiences under the pretense of "objectivity." For women, who often struggle to see themselves as subjects, as competent thinkers and creators of knowledge, repeating the standard master discourse can eventually leave some of us feeling empty or insincere.

* * *

One summer my father and I built a 16-foot drift boat. From June to September we worked, sanding its plywood sides and oak railing, bending and fitting and gluing it together,

staining it a dark walnut color, trimming the seams with copper screws, and massaging it all over with a thick, yellow oil, from bow to stern, from the inside out, until it absorbed a satiny luster. After we dipped the boat into the currents of the Yakima River, Dad handed me the oars. His instructions on oar etiquette were plain, his directions for our course precise. But my first tries at pointing the bow downstream at a 45 degree angle and 20 feet out from the bank (this being the perfect pitch for fly fishing) were awkward, embarrassing. I'd dip an oar too deep, push too light, or not light enough, and send us doodling down river. Dad would grab the railing and lunge for his lucky green hat when we'd slam into a not-so-small rock. He'd curse, do some kind of a clumsy duck and pirouette under his fly pole, and then suggest I straighten our spin. Within a few hours, though, I was dipping and rowing, pointing and drifting with finesse, and after a couple more trips down the Yakima, and one full summer later, I was cutting my own course, heading in one direction. Small successes are everything, and I think finding your direction on the page is like finding your direction on the river--both call for a certain amount of preparation, risk, encouragement, and return.

* * *

In this passage from an essay where I explore an analogy between rowing and writing, between a father/daughter and teacher/student relationship, the idea of risk-taking seems critical to both contexts; there needs to be room for negotiation and relinquishing of control by the teacher in order to help a student stretch, reach her own goals. Linear, abstract argument seems to me counterproductive to risk-taking if it's promoted too rigidly: it may be more controlling than enabling for some student writers.

My main assumption, of course, is that the dominant discourse authorizes a Western white-male tradition while discouraging ways "Others" such as women may think, write, and learn that perhaps allows for greater intersubjectivity,

connection, and collaboration. I'm also assuming that students and educators might want to challenge this discourse by putting difference at the political forefront of their discussions. Other readers may disagree, insisting that logical, abstract, autonomous reasoning privileges no one, is merely a democratic form of communication that enables a teacher to see how well a student can analyze a text, and labeling these characteristics as patriarchal or male-centered is erroneous or, at the very least, comes close to essentializing "male" and "female" writing. Maxine Hairston, for instance, argues in a recent article of College Composition and Communication that the composition classroom, particularly "freshman [sic] English" where some writing teachers and graduate students are attempting to teach awareness of social and cultural differences through writing and course readings, is no place for political agendas (180).

I can understand the reluctance of critics like Hairston to create sites of tension in the classroom. Discussing differences, especially about gender, makes plenty of people uncomfortable. I would also agree that making claims for what is "naturally" male and female limits rather than frees us as individuals; gender does seem more socially defined than biologically determined. What troubles me, however, is that Hairston and other educators fail to see the political agendas and ideologies already

present in their classrooms. Differences among people are not equal differences, after all. There's a certain power and privilege to being male or white or middle class or heterosexual. Depending on who is writing or speaking to whom and for what purpose, then, discourses may maintain or challenge those privileges and power relations. The following intertext, for example, reveals some of my feelings as a student amidst the complex forces shaping classroom conversations.

* * *

I'm sometimes surprised how, even though I may feel passionately about a reading, remark, or text or know there's much I want to say, I end up feeling sort of dead or anesthetized when it comes time to formally "discuss" things in our class. Maybe it's the fluorescent lights or the pinched little desks that wrap around us like paper clips. Maybe it's the other loud, energetic voices that I'm swept up listening to or the way the guy sitting across the room is slouched down, pointing his crotch at me that sometimes keeps me silent. I'm not sure, but I leave feeling as if there's something lacking in me--I haven't spoken because I didn't have anything to say. But not all classes or class discussions strike me this way; at times, I've been known to be open, almost chatty. I've tried to consider what makes the difference, and I think it has something to do with feeling safe to risk an opinion. Such discussions for me, recently, have been those focused on feminist perspectives or, not so recently, a women studies course last term and some fiction writing classes that I took as an undergraduate. Gender differences may not influence my classroom discussion habits the most, but I'm aware of them. Even sitting in a circle men still seem more vocal than women, still quick to tell about their experiences. Sometimes, though, I think it's all a matter of atmosphere, arrangement, the particular group of folks who've come together.

* * *

In order to demonstrate how linear, abstract argument privileges a patriarchal system of education, let me first

refer to some current research that shows abstract, argumentative reasoning remains a dominant mode of learning in college classrooms, then to a few recent empirical studies that demonstrate gender differences in the ways women and men identify and express themselves, and finally to research that confirms women in higher education often feel shut out of traditional academic discourse or have their work devalued or judged inferior.

ARGUMENT AND ABSTRACTION

Perhaps the two most obvious characteristics of academic writing are argument and abstraction. Much of our education inside the English classroom centers around adopting a stance in opposition to others and in reasoning outside personal experience. Some feminists suggest this type of "academic environment is modeled on the worst of the norms for white, Western male, father/son relations-- competitive, unsupportive, sometimes hostile battling to confront and outperform one another" (O'Barr and Weyer 74). The discourse within this environment, then, gets standardized, normalized, and rationalized, in misleading and problematic ways.

In "Beyond Literary Darwinism: Women's Voices and Critical Discourse," for example, Olivia Frey refers to the traditional practice of literary criticism as the "adversary method" in which a writer expresses his or her ideas while pointing out the flawed arguments of others. This kind of competitive stance Frey sees as tiresome, perhaps even harmful, especially for women who may wish to value cooperation, and she suggests that it may actually be a kind of "structural discrimination" used by those in power to exclude others under the pretense of quality criticism (510). Another writer who sees argument as the traditional response to literature is Sheree Meyer. In her recent

article in College English, Meyer confirms that "Although challenged from a number of directions, formal argumentation is and will probably continue to be, at least for some time, the dominant mode of academic discourse" (52). Meyer adds to Frey's discussion by explaining that traditional models require students to assert "mastery" over a text, to hide behind an objective, authoritative voice that may leave some students feeling like "frauds" or "impostors" in their writing (47). Another reflective composition teacher, Don Kraemer, further corroborates the tradition of academic literacy by looking at it as an engendered game. He describes the exit exam his university requires of students in order to determine their competence in summarizing and critiquing a text. One of his students, "Flo," failed the analysis portion of the test because she wrote in agreement with the text rather than "situating herself against and within competing voices" (307).

As researchers identify conventional academic discourse, so do they recognize differences in the way some women may write within the institution. We might ask, then, under what conditions might gender be a significant factor in the way students respond to a writing assignment? This seems an important question to consider if we're concerned about how gender may be expressed in language--or produced by it. A number of recent studies reveal interesting patterns.

THE "NATURE" OF WOMEN'S WRITING

In "Composing As A Woman," Elizabeth Flynn examines narrative essays of four English composition writers to see if they reveal a gender-related difference in "identification processes." Flynn observes that the essays of two women writers, who wrote "stories of interaction," demonstrated a sense of self in connection with others while the two men's narratives, "stories of achievement, of separation, or of frustrated achievement" (428), emphasized identities apart from others. Flynn acknowledges other complexities within these essays which might bear on her conclusions and asserts that she is not evidencing a female/male pattern of writing. Rather, she suggests that questions concerning feminist theorists like Nancy Chodorow and Carol Gilligan about women's identity formation may also be relevant to composition studies (431). Similarly, Linda Peterson in "Gender and the Autobiographical Essay" compares two groups of English composition writers who were asked to write autobiographical essays and finds that the women tended to write about themselves in relation to others while men typically wrote about themselves as autonomous beings (173).

Shirley Rose offers another study that reveals gender as a determinant in how student writers responded to an

assignment. In her recent article in Rhetoric Review, Rose identifies gender differences in the student literacy narratives she's collected and studied for over four years but explains them as indicative of cultural myths surrounding literacy rather than inherent qualities of masculine and feminine writing. Rose defines myths as "those images that give philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life" (245) and concludes that the differences between her students' essays about learning to read and write reveal the cultural assumptions they've internalized about the social behavior of men and women:

The activity of becoming literate is fundamentally the same for males and females, but the myths they use to represent their roles . . . are different. Thus a boy's experiences may reinforce his myth of literacy for autonomy while a girl's experiences may reinforce her myth of literacy for participation. (250)

In this passage, Rose is making a solid social constructionist claim that Flynn and Peterson haven't made quite as clear--namely, that we're born into a language, a social set of symbols and myths, that shapes us.

These studies provide some useful insight to gender-correlations in writing, but I want to be careful about how we interpret and use them. For instance, I don't believe it would be productive for a teacher to encourage or expect all women students to write essays that describe a sense of connection and all men to write with a feeling of independence. There's nothing fruitful in reinforcing

gender stereotypes. We may, however, learn from these studies in the way they reveal how students define themselves as cultural subjects. Paying attention to response patterns to an assignment that seems objective and democratic can help teachers recognize if they prefer and encourage one type of response over another. Implicit assumptions and ideologies have a tremendous impact in the classroom, and we need to uncover them. The business of education is not equal, after all. As Adrienne Rich writes in "Taking women students seriously,"

If there is any misleading concept, it is that of 'co-education': that because women and men are sitting in the same classrooms, hearing the same lectures, reading the same books . . . they are receiving an equal education. They are not, first because the content of education itself validates men even as it invalidates women. Its very message is that men have been the shapers and thinkers of the world, and that this is only natural. (24-5)

Linear, abstract argument, the dominant mode of discourse, does seem to validate a masculine response as do most parts of university life. Perhaps we need to give more serious attention to the gender politics of academic writing as well as to all the mixed and difficult and intricate experiences of women in a patriarchal institution. In the excerpt below, I try to get at the friction in one of my own recurring experiences.

* * *

A couple of weeks ago I was walking up 21st street on my way to campus. I was angry. I thought I'd lost the Conflicts in Feminism text I'd been sharing with a classmate in our women studies class. It was an expensive book, I had

no money to replace it, the bookstore was sold out of them, and I had journal pages to write. Somebody must have stolen it out of the English department. But who would snatch a book about feminist theory? Another angry feminist? As I walked toward Monroe, I heard a low, cooing voice from across the street. "Smile. Smmmile. SMILE! WHY DON'T YOU SMILE?" I stopped and looked over at a guy who was grinning like a goblin at me. "Come on and SMILE," he said again. My face felt warm. I grew angrier, clenched my fists, didn't smile. I looked at him until he waved me off as a lost cause.

This wasn't the first time a strange man had stopped me in public to insist that I smile. The same thing happened on another campus in Washington. Once I was even confronted this way at a golf course. So what did it mean? Why was I asked to call up a facial expression that I didn't feel at the time? Why was I being asked to let someone define my emotions for me--construct me--submit to what seemed like a manipulation of my spirit, or as he had put it, "smile"? It seems to me smiling has something to do with identity, authority, an individual's sense of esteem and joy (what Audre Lorde would call the "erotic"). These experiences are symptomatic, I believe, of a larger issue--the power of patriarchy, of men over women, that is so silently forceful, so internalized and encoded in our language, our social structures, and ourselves that it may even affect how we smile--or not.

* * *

THE QUESTION OF ESSENTIALISM

Studies like those of Flynn, Peterson, and Rose have initiated some powerful discussions among feminists and composition specialists about the "nature" of gender differences. Perhaps it would be helpful at this time to discuss a critique of current gender and writing research. Helen Brodie Graves suggests, for instance, that instead of focusing on the qualities of women's writing that are different from men's, we might more productively consider the reasons behind any apparent distinctions: "The real crux of the matter is not so much what [women] prefer as why . . ." (142). Graves is concerned that researchers like Flynn, Peterson, and others might be essentializing characteristics of women's writing without fully exploring social influences. Essentialism is the notion that there is some inherent essence to being female or male, that gender differences are biologically determined and fixed. This is problematic for feminists who want to deconstruct any argument that invokes sexist and misogynist assumptions about the inferior "nature" of women. Graves reminds us that "The essentialist argument has been used for centuries to ensure that women remained in the domestic sphere, nurtured the young, the old, and the infirm, and had little access to higher education and lucrative employment" (141). Some of these empirical studies might be confusing gender

with sex, social difference with biological difference, when they describe women's writing, according to Graves, and she wants to make clear "Generally, 'male' and 'female' have to do with sexual difference, whereas 'masculine' and 'feminine' have to do with gender" (142).

To show why she believes labeling "male" and "female" writing, in other words characterizing writing on the basis of the writer's sex, is erroneous and how complex gender issues really are, Graves compares the writing styles of French feminist Julia Kristeva and rhetorician Kenneth Burke. Graves argues that Burke's style might be classified as "feminine" because it seems to match Hélène Cixous's description of *l'écriture féminine*: "The argument and the prose style are recursive, circular, nonlinear, open-ended . . ." (146). By contrast, she suggests Kristeva's writing fits a more masculine style: "linear, hierarchical, agonistic, individualistic, closed-ended" (146). Graves effectively demonstrates, then, that the sex of the writer is not to be conflated with the "gender" of the writing style.

Like Graves, I'm hesitant to accept claims of "fundamental" sameness or difference. While Flynn and Peterson seemed careful to set limits around their empirical studies, Graves shows the need for "problematizing" the results of their gender and writing research. I'm uncertain, however, about Graves's analysis of Kristeva's

writing as a true masculine style. In About Chinese Women, Kristeva claims that although "the symbolic order" of language is masculine, women can manipulate that order, experiment with it in radical, productive ways. Kristeva's essay "Stabat Mater" seems to me a significant exception to Graves's argument about the masculine style of her work and a convincing example, with its two columns of text--the right side a linear, critical argument and the left a free-flowing, personal narrative--of how a woman might disrupt the "symbolic order." I see Kristeva's work as exploiting rather than emulating masculine discourse and wonder if questions of style might more accurately be considered within the context of who is writing and for what purpose.

Whether we're looking at the writing styles of well-known writers like Burke and Kristeva or those of students, the question of essentialism is relevant, nonetheless, to writing in the classroom because we need to distinguish between arguments that could be appropriated to further marginalize the writing of women and those that could open up possibilities for writing from a gendered or social position. I'll discuss this in greater detail when I move on to explore writing as a politics. In the meantime, the following intertext illustrates one instance where gender did seem relevant to the personal narrative I used to unfold an analysis of a relationship formed between reader, text, and writer. What seems important to notice here is

the way my "voice" is partially situated by gender in the telling of the story.

* * *

Two years ago in December I was standing along the shoulder of 16th avenue near the bridge that crosses Bachelor's Creek. I was trying to read Raymond Carver. He'd written a short story, "Nobody Said Anything," and I'd recognized the details of the airport, the Chinese restaurant on the southeast corner of 16th and Washington, and this shallow creek which Carver renamed "Birch Creek" in his story. Carver had lived in Yakima during his high school years, and apparently parts of the town and surrounding area made an impression on him, enough to write about. Anyway, I'd decided to follow the path of the main character, a teenaged boy who cuts school to go fishing, to this spot overlooking the mud hole and large scrub tree that was the location for the boy's excursion. I'd been to Bachelor's Creek before on a fishing trip with my dad and brothers when I was about six. (Usually my sister and I would stay home with Mom and make fudge.) One Sunday evening we parked the Chevy near this bridge then walked down into the tall grass. I remember I found a snake skin and tucked it into the pocket of my jeans. Once we were home, though, I pretended I was afraid to remove it, not wanting my mother and sister to think I enjoyed myself too much. But that's another story.

Carver's story was about a boy who came to this bridge, met a strange kid on a bicycle, kicked a sickly trout out of the fishing hole, divvied it up with the kid (after arguing over who should get the head end), and took his half home to show his parents. Like most Carver stories, this isn't the whole story, however. I'd thought about "Nobody Said Anything" for some time before coming to the creek to reread the scene. The story seemed to have very little to do with fishing and everything to do with communicating: the boy had troubles at home, and his parents didn't listen long enough to understand him. Watching the water pooling and swirling under the bridge, I wondered if this place wasn't really about the boy or Carver or me; rather it suggested a connection--a relationship that formed between us because of our different "readings" (and consequently writings) of fishing at Bachelor's Creek.

* * *

I agree with Helen Brodie Graves that we need to be careful about how we interpret observations of difference in writing (we mustn't forget the diversity among women, also),

but I'm concerned essentialist finger-pointing may be counterproductive to discussions of gender and writing, forcing a binary opposition between essentialist and anti-essentialist perspectives--with essentialists at the "low" end of a feminist scale and anti-essentialists taking the moral high ground (de Lauretis 256). There's plenty to be gained from looking at affinities among women writers since we all are oppressed by patriarchal ideologies. The difficulty, as Adrienne Rich points out, is that "Patriarchy exists nowhere in a pure state." Oppressions are "tangled," interrelated, and "most women in the world must fight for their lives on many fronts at once" ("Notes toward a Politics of Location" 218). Totalizing the wrongness of essentialism or dismissing empirical studies of gender and writing as biased observation, however, seems stifling and repressive to me. We may discover more by examining the complexities of essentialist and anti-essentialist positions as Linda Alcoff does and by deconstructing their binary opposition like Diana Fuss.

In "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," Linda Alcoff explores some of the tensions between the essentialist thinking of cultural feminists and the anti-essentialist position of poststructural feminists. Cultural feminists, according to Alcoff, argue for a female essence in order "to revalidate undervalued female attributes" (408). Poststructural

feminists want to resist this idea because it traps women within "biological determinism," innate female characteristics, and does little to end sexism. Poststructuralists consider "woman" to be a socially rather than biologically defined subject. Alcoff explains:

The idea here is that we individuals really have little choice in the matter of who we are [O]ur experience of our very subjectivity is a construct mediated by and/or grounded on a social discourse beyond . . . individual control. (416)

In short, "women" are born into a culture and a language that has already largely defined who we are.

Alcoff points out that poststructural feminist philosophy may seem more productive than cultural feminism because it focuses on differences among women and opens up a wide range of possible definitions for "woman" in the future. But it also has its limitations:

If gender is simply a social construct, the need and even the possibility of a feminist politics becomes immediately problematic. What can we demand in the name of women if "women" do not exist and demands in their name simply reinforce the myth that they do? How can we speak out against sexism as detrimental to the interests of women if the category is fiction? How can we demand legal abortions, adequate child care, or wages based on comparable worth without invoking a concept of "woman"? (420)

By limiting her discussion to cultural and poststructural feminisms, Alcoff may be creating an unnecessary dichotomy as Teresa de Lauretis suggests (263), especially given the variety of feminist theories (Rosemarie Tong identifies seven in her book Feminist Thought).

De Lauretis reminds us that, as feminists, we need not get stuck between these two positions; we can (and should) step back and see this as another tension that is part of "the paradoxes and contradictions that constitute the effective history, the essential difference, of feminist thought" (264).

Exploring the debate from another perspective, Diana Fuss proposes that cultural feminism and poststructural feminism are not worlds apart, after all. They in fact share some significant similarities since "nature" or "essence" includes variety and change, and the idea of standpoint or positionality works as a kind of essence in social constructionism. Fuss argues that neither category is fixed and self-contained. Their complexities and "internal contradictions" make them, instead, interrelated or closely aligned:

I have argued from the start that essentialism underwrites theories of constructionism and that constructionism operates as a more sophisticated form of essentialism. This is simply another way of saying that constructionism may be more normative, and essentialism more variable, than those of us who call ourselves poststructuralists hitherto have been willing to acknowledge. (119)

WHAT'S AT STAKE

I won't try in this paper to resolve these complicated feminist perspectives by insisting that one is more right than the other; any attempt to do so would invoke a combative stance that I'd certainly prefer to avoid. But when I consider the realities of women's lives and experiences--what's at stake for all feminists--it seems we need to recognize that however we explain the observations in gender and writing research, whether we decide women write differently from men or the ways we express ourselves are indicative of social or biological forces, women often do feel shut out of the dominant academic discourse. According to Susan Miller, "Standard interpretation . . . has been a game in which we call foul on moves that do not find internal unity, coherence, and consistency in data from any entity we take to be a text" (177). And as another teacher and cultural critic, Elizabeth Ellsworth, explains, "Rational argument has operated in ways that set up as its opposite an irrational Other, which has been understood historically as the province of women and other exotic Others" (94).

Perhaps what's needed are more gynocentric approaches to research, studies that take women exclusively as their subjects and that focus on understanding the variety and complexity of what women experience in the classroom. Then,

as Diana Fuss writes, "we might learn more by interrogating the relations between female and woman, woman and women, women and feminist" (51-2). The authors of Women's Ways of Knowing, who reason that historically women have been left out of academic research and their experiences conflated with men's, offer a first in this type of woman-centered study:

In our study we chose to listen only to women. The male experience has been so powerfully articulated that we believed we would hear the patterns in women's voices more clearly if we held at bay the powerful templates men have etched in the literature and in our minds. (9)

Mary Belenky, Blythe Clinchy, Nancy Goldberger, and Jill Tarule argue that instead of minimizing gender differences, pointing to qualities of women's thinking that are the same as men's, we all might gain something by trying to understand, value, and practice what may be distinctly favorable to contemporary women's thinking, knowing, and learning. The authors write about their collaborative, five-year project recording and transcribing interviews with 135 women in hopes of better understanding women's impressions and experiences of "truth, knowledge, and authority" in the family and in school. The five viewpoints of "knowing" the authors identify as "silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge"--and the stories defining each perspective--make it clear that not only do women experience

meaning-making in unique ways, but also traditional academic learning and writing may not benefit them the same way it does men. The standard patriarchal discourse may, in fact, leave women feeling excluded and silenced.

In the following passage, I try to show again how personal narrative might be a valuable response to a text in lieu of an abstract, critical line of argument. When issues hit close to the bone, in this case a mother/daughter relationship, a personal response may open up an analysis of a text, providing a deeper level of insight.

* * *

Alice Walker wrote that somehow "our mothers and grandmothers have, more often than not anonymously, handed on the creative spark . . ." ("In Search of Our Mother's Gardens" 590). While I know Walker is specifically addressing women of color, her words seem relevant to all women. I wonder if our mothers and grandmothers sometimes unknowingly, probably unwantingly, pass on a self-berating inner voice in addition to creative energies since their voices speak as well with internalized, "contrary instincts."

When I think of creativity, I think of my mother's hands. They seem to symbolize at once an artistic energy and an inner struggle for self-esteem. Never at rest, they're always rolling pie dough, folding sheets, knitting wool afghans, nimbly sorting through bills and letters. Even when I've discovered my mother napping, her hands, the fingers, are still in motion: thumb strokes little circles over each finger tip; finger tips play back the pattern over thumb. First one hand, then the next. These finger dances are those of an artist, though my mother would never call herself that, but they also seem to be nervous gestures to soothe that part of herself which says she can never rest, never completely relax or wholly trust. These small, lovely movements sign not only her talents but also a worried self. Part of both, it seems, she has passed on to me.

* * *

It's not that women can't handle abstract reasoning or lack a sense of structure. Quite the opposite. The authors

of Women's Ways of Knowing listened to women describe uneasiness with learning when "abstractions preceded the experiences or pushed them out entirely" or when structure became control (201-5). Similarly, women felt silenced by academic debates when they had to argue against an authority--teacher or text. Referring to Peter Elbow's believing and doubting game, the authors explain that "while women frequently do experience doubting as a game, believing feels real to them, perhaps because it . . . promises to reveal the kind of truth they value--truth that is personal, particular, and grounded in firsthand experience" (113). In some instances, a woman's refusal to critique or doubt the authority of a person or text meant that she was devalued by fellow classmates, labeled a non-thinker or someone who is less intelligent than someone openly critical; other times, like with "Flo," Don Kraemer's student, the results are even more damaging. Remember, "Flo" failed the exit exam; her work was judged unacceptable because she believed rather than doubted the authority of the text.

Anymore, I prefer to adopt a stance that simultaneously believes and doubts a text, what Bartholomae and Petrosky call "reading with and against the grain." Examining a range of responses to a text, responses that drift and change with each reading, seems less artificial to me, truer to the experience of reading. The following intertext is taken from an essay in which I tried to show my process

reading Edgar Allan Poe, making explicit how my responses have changed over time.

* * *

As a girl, I sometimes would sit upstairs under the dormer window in the attic, wrapped in the shadows of the sycamore tree, and read through my parents' books. I was drawn to Freud's The Interpretation of Dreams, a text I'm not sure I've ever fully understood, and a small red book of Poe's works. Both Freud and Poe seemed to divulge wonderful secrets about the human psyche, and while my reverence for Freud and psychoanalysis has been tempered since I realized the disservice his philosophy imposes on women, my liking for Poe endures. Rereading his poems and stories has left me with a renewed sense of wonder at his talent, but I'm also feeling a little doubtful of his works this time around. Poe's poem "The Raven" and his story "The Fall of the House of Usher" have once again given me a tingle and a slight start--in a familiar way. But perhaps I'm too prepared for all the haunts and frights to just accept the experience of reading these works. I know what to expect from Poe, the twists and turns of plot, the mixing of the real with the surreal, the psychological with the supernatural, and I find myself resisting the "effect." Does Poe use these elements of experience in opposition or harmony with one another? I would argue that the mix is complementary, that Poe's intended "effect" on the reader depends upon the vigorous blending of mind and senses, the psychological with the material world. What I feel as resistance, however, may be a kind of tension, an unwillingness to welcome the two simultaneously.

* * *

SUBVERTING PATRIARCHAL DISCOURSE WITHIN THE INSTITUTION

Some experimentation, some supported risk-taking within the university seems in order, then, to allow for a greater variety of written response--especially for women. As writing teacher Lillian Bridwell-Bowles argues in her article "Discourse and Diversity: Experimental Writing within the Academy," "students may need new options for writing if they, too, are struggling with expressing concepts, attitudes, and beliefs that do not fit into traditional academic forms" (350).

While we wait to see whether new writing styles can effectively challenge patriarchal ideology and open up new spaces, we also need to consider new teaching strategies for writing. What might be some alternatives within academic discourse that actively acknowledge and value other ways of reading and writing? Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule suggest that we begin with what women know; that is, we might find ways to build classroom discourse from student knowledge, experience, and observation (198). Educators might show "the imperfect processes of their thinking" (215) and adopt a midwife approach to teaching. According to the authors, midwife teachers "assist the students in giving birth to their own ideas, in making their own tacit knowledge explicit and elaborating it" (217). To state it succinctly, they promote "connection over separation,

understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate" (229). The authors likewise offer a nice model for collaboration with their book, a writing project Mary Belenky describes in an interview in the Journal of Advanced Composition as "a month-long pajama party at a cottage by the shore" (279).

In addition, Don Kraemer suggests challenging exit exams that fail to recognize responses other than critical ones and, instead, valuing classroom discourse that attempts genuine understanding (316-7). Sheree Meyer advises fostering essays in response to literature that allow for multiple perspectives and uncertainties within an analysis; she offers an exercise called "Double Trouble" that enables students to respond to literature with both objectivity and subjectivity by having them write on one side of a page what they rationally know from a passage and on the other, what seems inconsistent or what memories the passage invokes (60). Meyer also examines experimental ways of writing that yield to subjective response through parenthetical comment like Jane Gallop uses or columns of texts like that found in Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater"--splitting formalistic prose on the right side of the page and subjective narrative on the left. And in "Beyond Argument in Feminist Composition," Catherine Lamb stresses that argument is still a viable means of communicating for women as long as differences are respected. Lamb encourages collaboration in her classroom

to resolve conflict and incorporates mediation and negotiation into writing assignments so that students individually must analyze one side of an argument and then in groups write a mediation agreement or, in pairs, record their negotiation of a resolution (20-1).

Perhaps Lillian Bridwell-Bowles offers us the widest range of suggestions by explaining the ways students in her writing classes experiment with "diverse discourse," that is, writing with attention to difference. Some of her students' projects for writing outside patriarchal discourse have included trying out multiple "voices" or perspectives, playing with language, writing ethnographies, and experimenting with form by manipulating a series of questions or quotations or by integrating computer graphics in the prose.

The intertext below provides an example of another possibility--a letter to an author. The epistolary style is nothing new, but letter form situates a student writer in a different rhetorical position to both author and text than that usually found in traditional argument. In the spring of last year, one generous professor gave me permission to write freely--even badly--in his literature class. A letter to E. B. White was how I responded. Here's part of what I wrote about the assignment in an appendix: "If form is the shape of content, then I feel satisfied that my writing has taken the shape of a letter this time around because I

wanted to say a few things to E. B. White. And if by chance this letter reads as an essay as well, that's fine, too."

* * *

Dear Mr. E. B. White,

This evening is warm, heavy, but a breeze puffs the curtains, and I've read Scott Elledge's narration of your life. I feel anxious about writing to you since you don't know me and I want, in some way, to thank you without embarrassing us both. I might as well tell you that I hope to be a writer, even in the smallest way. I hesitate, though, hold my breath in mid-thought, mid-sentence, mid-syllable, have to remind myself just to keep breathing, keep writing.

I've imagined writers like yourself, especially journalists, to be either drunk or slightly mad most of the time, self-centered all of the time, living in the East or the South and writing "up" that part of the world, bifocaled, hair slightly mussed, and looking both pondersome and weary under layers of cotton or wool. But you, your life as a writer, seems a mix of someone at once sober and dizzy, a struggler despite notoriety, money, and print. You even came west, to Yakima, of all places--and liked it. I appreciate that. Yakima is my home and when you described those "bare brown sand-hills . . . streaked with great black shadows," the ones I've known for over twenty years, have hated for the way they circumscribed me, loved the way they rolled and rounded my life, I was touched to know that someone else, a writer, could see the beauty in a region so plain and dry.

* * *

EXPLORING WRITING AS A POLITICS

I've tried to show how phallogocentric writing practices privileging linear, rational argument may operate as a marginalizing force in the college classroom and how current research in composition and feminist theory challenge the assumptions behind such a discourse. While I'm encouraged knowing that new spaces are opening up for a variety of writing strategies, it's a little disconcerting to see that most of these experiments are safely maintained within writing courses. For students to risk an experimental discourse outside of a writing class, say in a traditionally taught American literature or history class, for instance, they may face plenty of aversion. Grades and good standing are at stake for all students. I found, for instance, that I wanted (and needed) to risk some experiments in my essays at the beginning of two traditionally structured literature courses but reverted back to the dominant model of abstract argument when I received discouraging comments.

I don't claim that experimental writing is an easy or even necessary risk for all students to take all of the time. That's a personal choice. Still, it seems worth considering how writing might be explored as a politics for disrupting ideologies and power relations in the classroom and for enabling students to examine multiple subject

positions. Two works seem especially relevant here: Susan Miller's book Textual Carnivals and Adrienne Rich's essay "Notes toward a Politics of Location."

In Textual Carnivals, Miller describes the history of English departments and how composition as a field has evolved separately from literary studies since Harvard established the first "freshman" writing course in 1873:

composition . . . began in a political moment that was embedded in ambivalence about how to assimilate unentitled, newly admitted students in the late nineteenth century 'new university,' which was in turn formed to address its era's social, economic, and political changes. (79)

According to Miller, composition was partially founded on the classist assumption that the undisciplined, underprivileged students entering a growing university needed to have their writing skills checked over, cleaned up, and regulated.

Miller suggests, in addition, composition's early focus on mechanics and later preoccupation with theme papers divorced from any real rhetorical situation has served as a type of "marginalizing power" keeping students from joining purposeful social discourses, discourses that might challenge authorities, question institutions, or push for change. "Composition," Miller writes, "was established to be a low-status site. It enacted clear social agendas to keep the masses in new universities and their writing in a socially low place" (154).

Literary studies, on the other hand, particularly American New Criticism which privileges the authority of the text has held a "high" status within English departments. Consequently, there's an implicit but unclouded distinction between "literature" and "composition," "authors" and "student writers." As Nancy Comley and Robert Scholes suggest in their article "Literature, Composition, and the Structure of English," students interpret literature and compose "pseudononliterature"--writing that is characteristically "voiceless" and artificially functional within the academy (98, 102). In other words, literature is that lovely published writing all good English majors dream of writing but are diverted into writing about in an abstract, self-subjugating way.

I mention all of this because Susan Miller names composition as a potential place to disrupt the university's agenda for "containing the masses" by helping students to write as subjects with real purposes and goals in mind. She argues that, given composition's history, writing classes are the appropriate location for questioning the assumptions and beliefs behind our social institutions: "Composition Studies has always had the process available to transform its marginalized culture into a site where cultural superstructures and their privileging results are visibly put into question" (186). In describing a vision for

composition studies, Miller explains,

we would . . . give priority . . . to the ways that we can together make it easier for any group of people to write successfully to reach particular goals. This model would not establish internal relations to praise pluralism, but to articulate the ways that various practices and research projects empower discourses As in radical feminist studies, relations between "ideas" or theories and actual cultural dispositions of writing would not be suppressed, but would become substantial discussions of the student's (and the professional's) immediate position in relation to any act of writing. (195)

The strategies and writing experiments described earlier seem indicative of the transformative potential of writing classes where there's already some serious daring and risk-taking going on. I wonder, though, if literature courses and other more traditionally structured classes that require writing from students may be less tolerant of subjective or exploratory writing because they continue to privilege texts over readers and insist on keeping student writing a "low" status discourse. In that case, and if we believe "writing is an action toward its surroundings" (Miller 195), a student who declares herself as a subject and explores a position--particularly a feminist one--in connection with reading a text rather than adopting a critical stance and picking at the details of that text, is engaged, I would argue, in a highly subversive and political act. The following excerpt, for example, is taken from an essay in which I chose to show my understanding of Emerson's definitions of nature by working through a personal example

and revealing how reading in alignment with Emerson changed my perception.

* * *

Last night I was watching the moon, trying to see it as Emerson might. I was struck by its plainness, its soft, misshapen form, the way its pale light bled into the clouds passing below, white into white. Something about that moon put me at ease; it wasn't showy or especially bright, just simple, holding its place in the sky with a certain sincerity. After several minutes, I left the window feeling reassured by the scene. In Nature, Emerson describes four designs or aims of nature, each signifying a higher awareness in an individual's potential perception of the world: Commodity, Beauty, Language, and Discipline. As I looked up at last night's moon, imposing these definitions on it, what at first appeared to me a very real, very solid shape grew increasingly unreal and obscure. But it was the possibilities of this seemingly simple moon that was comforting because the more unfamiliar it became, the more it suggested a creative freedom for us both.

* * *

Let me refer again to the subject of "woman" and to Linda Alcoff who finds some fruitful ground when she defines "woman" as a social and political position from which to speak, act, and I would add--write:

If we combine the concept of identity politics with a conception of the subject as positionality, we can conceive of the subject as nonessentialized and emergent from a historical experience and yet retain our political ability to take gender as an important point of departure. Thus we can say at one and the same time that gender is not natural, biological, universal, ahistorical, or essential and yet still claim that gender is relevant because we are taking gender as a position from which to act politically. (433)

If we can agree, then, that gender may be taken as a position from which to write, we might want to consider some strategies for doing so. In "Notes toward a Politics of Location," Adrienne Rich offers an approach that those of us

interested in writing a feminist position in the classroom might model as a politics for raising consciousness. While Rich is not teaching composition within the university or directly speaking about classroom writing strategies, and while she attempts in her essay to define knowledge and writing in ways connected to a social activism that's more global, I wonder if experimental essays that explore identity and difference might effectively challenge our accepted notions of writing within the institution.

Recognizing the interrelatedness of oppressions and the variety of subject positions every person holds, Rich suggests that we should know the context within which we write and the surroundings within which we exist and express ourselves as a matter of realizing not only personal identity but collective identity. Personal identity is a complex "I" and the social context that shapes a person's being; it's a fragmented, multiple, organic, and changing identity. Collective identity is the connection of "I" with bodies of similar and different times, places, languages, cultures, and experiences. "We," then, is also multiple and differentiated; it's the collective identity formed with the past and continuing and changing in the present. How might students use this kind of poststructural perspective in the institution?

Like Rich, we might experiment in the classroom with writing that rejects the dominant model of discourse. We

might explore the implications of identity and written words as emerging and connecting through a sense of difference, affinity, and examining relationships with others--including texts. In an essay I wrote analyzing Rich's work last spring, for example, I tried to reveal some of my own situatedness and locate my identity as a writer.

* * *

I've opened the window near my writing table and listen to the rain splashing the leaves outside. Below, pink heads of bleedingheart nod and drip, and the mint I planted last summer has turned thick-green and native, spilling over its brick border and sending runners through the gaps. I've moved away from writing in my journal about Adrienne Rich's poem "North American Time." Section three of the poem where the speaker invites a reader to try writing without a sense of time or social responsibility has left me sensitive to this moment of writing near a window on a rainy afternoon in May, one block from a large university whose brick walls and erupting roof lines I can see by stepping outside my front door, writing with fingers that smell faintly of the strawberries they sliced, packed with sugar, and stored in the ice box for another day, similarly collecting and saving my words. I'd forgotten who I was--my whiteness, even my femaleness. I'd forgotten where I was, what I was doing. And I had the luxury of forgetting until reading the line "and this is verbal privilege."

* * *

Linear, abstract argument centered on autonomous thinking and reasoning can be an oppressive ideology for some students. According to Rich, it's dangerous for writers to lose sight of their contexts and connections; identities can become abstract, fixed, taken for granted or for sameness. She encourages feminist writers "To reconnect our thinking and speaking with the body of this particular living human individual, a woman. . . . Begin with the

material. Pick up again the long struggle against lofty and privileged abstraction" (213).

Some readers may argue that, ultimately, there's nothing subversive or political about a little experimental writing within the classroom. Some may even suggest that this whole discussion smacks of "bourgeois individualism." I would agree any argument situated within the institution is a privileged argument to begin with. As Audre Lorde writes, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house." But I believe there's room for all kinds of social and feminist activism. Any of us speaking from a location of privilege (and being a college student is a privilege) might use that position for consciousness raising and assisting change. The walls of this shelter, this university, probably won't come tumbling down from my experimental, personal writing in traditionally taught literature classes. But they might budge if more teachers and students take the risk together.

* * *

I open the window a little wider. It's raining hard now, rushing down the glass and spattering the table. I like the smell of rain, the promise of change. "Who is 'we'?" This is my question, too, and after reading Rich, I take heart in the way countless green runners are wandering, dividing, spreading out below my window, and pushing against brick.

* * *

At this time in my life, writing is my principle means of expressing a public feminist perspective. It seems to me not only a social act but a political and potentially

reformist strategy when writers and teachers of writing can choose to either accept and identify with dominant, patriarchal ideologies and systems of power currently in place or reject them, write against them. Can language alone or the ways we use it produce change? I'm not certain, but what's at stake for me as a student, a writer, and a teacher is to find out. Perhaps we might begin by negotiating writing strategies in the classroom that better reflect a student's own purpose and goals for writing.

It's Thursday, August 19th, 10:45 p.m. I'm eating frozen blueberries (don't ask me why) and trying to pull together some closing thoughts. Writing a thesis is no simple project for anyone. But I have to say that writing this paper has been especially difficult for me. The university has been my home intermittently over the past ten years. I've matured, discovered new ideas, and cultivated a good many dreams about the future here. So it's with some mixed feeling, sadness even, I present as my last writing project something that takes a stand against the institution and its patriarchal ideologies.

Drafting this paper, I was caught in a self-reflective struggle over whether or not I should be saying any of this. I spent hours staring at the computer screen, pacing around, maybe eating a spoonful of peanut butter, having a brief cry, or retreating to the back stoop where coaxing wild

kittens out of the bushes seemed more productive and enjoyable. Sometimes while writing I'd get worried or frustrated or both, switch to a second screen in WordPerfect, and write down my anxieties before returning to a more orderly and audience-aware discussion. There's some irony in the fact that I never saved any of these freewrites, ultimately negating an important part of my writing process. But it was knowing that no one would ever read those thoughts that allowed me to momentarily write the flip side.

Still, I consider this paper the last of several worthwhile risks I've taken since returning to school, and in many ways it's been the most difficult. The first risk was teaching writing--something I'd never done before--and then trying to teach with feminist values and an open appreciation of diversity as a privileged, young, white, middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, thin woman; the second was reading Erica Jong's poem "Castration of the Pen" from the third story fire escape of Strand Agricultural Hall during a women studies presentation; and third is the assortment of essays, represented here by the intertexts, in which I did my best to refuse abstract argument.

It bothers me that, in the end, my thesis will join the ranks of more traditional arguments within the shelter of the university, indexed, catalogued, and vertically positioned on a shelf in Kerr library--completely

apolitical. Does anyone ever really read these things? I'd rather envision this essay lying on a table in a student lounge somewhere, the pages all softened, corners curled, and maybe a coffee ring on the cover the way things well-read and well-used end up. Oh, well, only so much I can control for now. In the meantime, I'll continue thinking, writing, daring in whatever ways I can, in whatever ways feel right. Within.

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