TEACHING OURSELVES TO READ:
THEORY AND PRACTICE OF
WOMEN'S INTERPRETATION OF TEXTS

A Thesis

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Abstract

In this thesis, I discuss the difficulty of representing women as women in the university context, given the organization of knowledge and structure found there. The type of public knowledge found at the university is largely a male construct; equally male determined is the methodology by which that knowledge is created as well as its medium of representation. Women's participation as students, staff, and professors in the everyday life of the university is mainly predicated on male terms. When the male experience is taken to be the human experience, the resulting theories, methodologies, knowledge claims and practices exclude the views of women. In light of this domination, the thesis interprets and represents a view of knowledge from a feminist perspective.

In a departure from the organization of traditional theses, I do not undertake an analysis of domination, but an interpretation of its effects. Conducting feminist scholarship and pedagogical practice is made difficult given the institutional, disciplinary and practical constraints of the university. These constraints are also what make feminist scholarship and practice a necessity.

Using a process that is congruent with feminist practices, I illustrate that knowledge and its representation are not definitive categories, but social constructions, open to interpretation.
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to my teachers
Preface

This thesis is supported by historical and current feminist scholarship that challenges the tradition of the university as a context in which the representation of women is marginalized. In that this thesis takes seriously the feminist philosophy that theory and practice are inextricably linked, the style in which the thesis is written is part of the break with the traditional notion of objectivity. More than information about women, feminist scholarship is also a way of thinking which resists the separation of knowledge from experience.

The thesis makes problematic categories of thinking that objectify knowledge and that place limits on what counts as evidence; in this regard the thesis clearly runs counter to the positivistic research tradition. What I have done instead, by the format I have chosen, is to adopt a hermeneutical approach that both interprets and demonstrates that knowledge is partial, not fixed, and always in process. In reading the thesis you will see that insofar as I am able, I have avoided an empirical structuring of knowledge in favour of one that is deconstructive, interpretive and personal.

My commitment to this project comes from my experience of anomalies in the public and private representation of women. I have observed that even when women have the same knowledge and perform the same jobs as men, women are
discounted as women. Clearly the power differential of men over women depends on more than women’s ability to perform men’s public roles. The thesis discusses not only the categorization of knowledge, but the use of gender as a category to interpret knowledge.

I have also noted that in public, women’s private knowledge holds little currency as a medium of exchange. For example, diaries and journals, as representative of women’s private lives, have until recently been disregarded as sources of information about women; and even that knowledge is often seen to be of questionable worth. As a way of offering up the relevance of this personal form, I begin each chapter with a journal entry.

The research has been guided by my understanding of poststructuralism as it intersects with feminist philosophy. The works of Chris Weedon, Linda Nicholson, Jonathan Culler, and Michel Foucault have been particularly instructive, as has the writing of feminist literary critics, Elaine Showalter, Joanne Frye and Mary Jacobus.

An extended metaphor that I use throughout the thesis is the act of reading and the interpretation of texts. The everyday events of the university tradition are compared to a text which can be read and interpreted for its meaning. As one would read in the literal sense, I "read" the university (con)text to see what meaning I can take from it, especially regarding the position of women.
The thesis represents my interpretation of the university context in a way that resists closure and definition, not from contrariness on my part, but from an understanding that knowledge is not a localized commodity, but an event. The hermeneutic approach I have chosen draws on both public and private knowledge and experience. In keeping with the social construction of knowledge, this thesis is not a definition for you to read, but an interpretive event in which you are invited to participate.
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Introduction

Journal Entry

Our class is taking a break. And what a class it has been--the women patient, silent, denying what they know, even to themselves. But now listen to them. Listen to the women, talking, talking, talking. There is something wrong here. During the class they think they are what is wrong.

I have heard the women before. They are very bright. The questions they would ask are around, beside and on top of the discussion. Their questions are critical, honest, engaged. The women are puzzled that they have so many questions. They think this means they are slow to catch on, that they don’t understand, that they don’t really belong here. These women think there is something wrong with the words they have used because the professor doesn’t understand them.
**Thesis Statement**

The Western, middle class, male hegemony over the creation of knowledge at universities is more frequently than ever being called into question by those who are neither Western, middle-class, nor male. Beyond wanting minimal participation in the university, those who are not part of its original elite are challenging several traditional notions including what counts as knowledge, how it may be recognized, and whose version is credible. Masculinist patterns of university life that define issues, disciplines, practices, life expectations and social interactions situate women and many men on the periphery of the institution. The need for a feminist interpretation of the university context is created in light of the masculinist patterns which place limits on knowledge and perpetuate injustice against outsiders.

Ironically, the need for a feminist interpretation is initiated by the same structures and ways of thinking that makes feminist interpretation difficult to accomplish. In short, the masculinist interpretation of knowledge and practice at the university is the same hegemony that makes feminist interpretation both difficult and necessary. In particular feminist pedagogy, as a practical interpretation of feminist theory, raises problems requiring solutions beyond the scope of traditional understanding of pedagogy. This study, then, undertakes a feminist interpretation of
the university in spite of the exclusion and marginalization of women’s experience and knowledge.

**Rationale**

The significance of the thesis lies with the elucidation of feminist pedagogical practices in the context of the masculinist university tradition. The thesis contributes to feminist theory and practice of education in three ways. First, it performs a feminist interpretation of the university context in light of the marginalization of women as women. Second, the thesis applies a feminist interpretation to an understanding of feminist pedagogy as a hermeneutical process. Third, the thesis shares a commonality of female experiences in the representation of women at the university. I will explain.

There is more than one irony in choosing a topic for a master’s thesis which criticizes the university for excluding women’s interests. The most obvious irony is that a student may fulfill university requirements by levelling critical words at the institution that grants the degree. While the search for knowledge at the university can surely withstand such a critique, does the acceptance of the thesis in fact contradict its theme that women’s interests are suppressed? This is not to suggest that the statements found herein are particularly novel or incendiary, and at any rate we are cautioned that theses are probably not often read past the day of their defense. On the other hand, is
the acceptance of a critical thesis simply part of the tradition, a tradition in which the knowledge created is secondary to the fact that the thesis follows the rules, and verifies its argument according to the university tradition? That this thesis exists is an acknowledgement of the spirit of openness and debate originally intended as part of the university purpose. I suggest, however, that tradition and the structure of knowledge have grown like ivy around the university, secluding it from knowledge that contradicts the existing paradigm, especially knowledge about women.

In criticizing the university, the thesis, as part of the tradition, is no threat at all, even though it is with the traditional values, methods, and structures that women’s issues take exception. Women’s participation as women in the university is one way among many to resist the continuation of patriarchal hegemony. Feminist theory making and practice contribute to social change and, indeed, to the very notion that change is possible. Women’s knowledge is not simply auxiliary, but exists as a challenge to an elitist way of viewing the world. Without a feminist perspective, the university reproduces a systemically distorted notion of knowledge that is inadequate for both female and male students and for meeting the challenges of justice and equality being contested daily in society.

That the university is an elitist institution is not news to anyone. The traditional university education was designed for and by upper and middle class men and the fact
that half the undergraduate population nowadays are women has had little impact on changing the traditional orientation. Because the university is a male dominated institution, the generation and teaching of facts, as well as the research, is accomplished according to a male intellectual tradition. In spite of the university tradition which, in theory, holds knowledge open to debate, testing, and proof, those who are educated in the broad sense of the university curriculum are most likely to judge it as good and most unlikely to take seriously critical remarks from outside the walls (Grant, 1969, p. 131). Criticisms, in fact, are a welcome sign, and taken as further proof that the university is an open institution where debate is alive and well.

Critique of the university from a feminist analysis encompasses more than an examination of gender equity or studies of how female students and faculty can interact more successfully within the university. A critique of the university that examines its structure is more difficult; one that looks at the bureaucracies, hierarchies and traditions that entrench practice by the sheer weight of its persistence. But, the criteria for judging the university structure as inadequate can best be found in conditions that are marginal to or outside the university tradition. Of course, criticism from outside the university often means that the critique need not be taken seriously from within
the system. I suggest that a feminist critique and the proposal of a pedagogy come from such a marginal position.

As the method of teaching enters into the information about what is taught, a feminist pedagogy is an integral part of women's studies. In many ways, the classroom interaction, the structure, and the implicit philosophy will be at least as important as the class content for the adult learner.

It is important to examine ways that pedagogy is carried on at the university because of the profound implications that are revealed about who and what the university serves. Questions about who benefits from the present system may suggest that it is the institution, wider society, the discipline itself or the students. As with the study of the literary work, the university acts as a text whose message is open to interpretation. I suggest that whatever else it serves now, the teaching in most disciplines at the university rarely serves the students, particularly those who are women.

The interpretation of any text is never a neutral act in that we can never remove ourselves from our own effective history that prejudices our interpretations. In classes that explicitly teach the interpretation of literature, questions arise about the practice and theory of what is going to be interpreted, and who gets to decide. Further, what tradition will be used for the interpretation, and whose purposes are served to do things in this way?
Feminist criticism is one medium for raising questions about the literary and political assumptions on which the reading of texts is based.

Although some may argue that women are not outside but inside the university system, it is important to see that as women, their work is valued differently. The paucity of the number of women in tenured positions, the absence of their names on publications and course reading lists, the silence of their voices in decision-making, and the invisibility of work done in general by women all confirm that they are, at best, silent insiders.

The male domination of interpretive thought found at Canadian universities is indeed pervasive. Such factors as class content, the method of instruction, the sex of the instructor, the organization of the department and the structure of the university, all militate to reproduce the paradigm of Anglo, Western, male, middle-class thought. More than an alternative approach, a feminist pedagogy stands as a critique against the hierarchical structure of academia that reflects on the experience and purposes of one group thereby giving that group the power to define knowledge. Not only does this approach exclude all other definitions, but it limits learning for all people. The issue is not simply one of male-bad/female-good or one that posits a feminist interpretation as somehow morally superior. Radical feminism asserts that academia is not only sexist, but also racist, class-biased and an
institution serving an exploitive economic system. In the reproduction of the status quo, academia is, in fact, incompatible with radical feminism (Gearhart, 1983).

The study is important because it is primarily about the interpretation of texts as found throughout our lives. Literary texts that exemplify interpretation in a formal sense are but one facet of the on-going task of reading and understanding. This study questions the efficacy of one interpretation over others and suggests that as women’s interpretation has been historically undervalued, all readers are the poorer. The limitations imposed by masculinist practices at the university pose a practical problem that "affects the health and strength of our universities as a centre of scholarly research and teaching" (G. A. Smith, 1991, p. 1). The teaching of feminist theory and practice at the university is important not only because it adds to the stock of knowledge; it is a matter of justice that all people have the right to define the world from their own experience.

**Theoretical Perspectives**

In many ways, what I am describing is much like the theoretical position of adult education programs which speak of person-centered education, notions of community, and the importance of praxis. As described by Angela Miles (1989), the process of educating for social change in adult education and feminist pedagogy have many points of overlap.
Adult education theory which is rooted in social commitment and action is congruent with social movements in which knowledge is both a means and an end to groups such as women, who wish to take more control of their own lives and influence the shape of their future (Miles, 1989).

It is not surprising that even though university populations consist of adult learners and even though the educating function is a university activity, the theory and practice of adult education do not appear to have made an impact on the pedagogical practices at most universities. The ideas of liberatory education, critical reflection and collaborative learning may be topics of discussion, but in reality these are activities more closely associated with the perceived needs of working class and third world populations. Since oppression is mainly thought of in economic terms, liberatory notions would seem to have little relevance at the most elite of educational institutions. The radical nature of adult education is largely ignored at the university, and practice is reduced to job training, skill development and interest classes. Adult education programs are most often conducted at arms-length from the core campus curriculum in extension programs, distance education, off-campus events and community development activities. As a student-centered, dialogical, problem-posing event, the practice of adult education contradicts the university's elitist view and structure. At its most radical, the use of adult education for social change may be
too egalitarian for the university by threatening to transform it into an institution that breaks down longstanding traditions of knowledge, power and control. The university appears to be resistant to change from even the most modified form of adult education. In its marginalization and peripheral status at the university, "adult education parallels the position of women in society" (Hughes & Kennedy, 1983, p. 261).

But, while much of the adult education theory overlaps with feminist notions of education, in practice, the gaps are wide. The problem is that any humanistic education that does not specifically address gender issues cannot adequately serve women’s needs to make explicit the structures that oppress.

In spite of many fine programs and person-centered teaching strategies, the humanistic model of adult education fails to present a challenge to the present social system and remains individualistic, ultimately reinforcing the myth that the problem lies in the person. When women look for models of critical education practice, they find that the realities of their lives are not reflected in the androcentric ideologies of post-secondary education. According to Miles (1989) the ungendered assumptions of many adult education courses renders them impervious to women’s needs as women. In a critique of Miles, Susan Collard suggests that women’s challenge to adult education has not been met, particularly with respect to its understanding of
"women, with feminism and with the insight from the women’s movement" (Collard, 1990, p. 51). In spite of its rhetoric of education for social change, adult education offerings continue to reinforce women’s secondary role in society (Hughes & Kennedy, 1983).

Adrienne Rich (1979) asks some important questions about the nature of learning at the university. She wonders whether the means of changing society can be learned in a setting that is already over-determined in its structure and thoroughly sedimented in its practices. She suggests that there is a great deal at stake for leaving things as they are, especially for women.

"Toward a Women-Centered University" (Rich, 1979, p. 125), acknowledges that while the title of that particular essay may sound far-fetched, it helps us realize that the opposite—a man-centered university—is, in fact, what now exists. As a male dominated institution, the university tradition and the male tradition are one. The generation and teaching of facts, as well as methods of research, are accomplished according to a male intellectual tradition.

Women’s integrity in a university setting is compromised in at least two ways: in the content and in the structure. The content in most disciplines obscures women’s experience by assuming that the male experience speaks for all. In many cases research about women has just not been done, or has been added as a footnote to the existing body of knowledge. Margrit Eichler (1988) has noted several ways
in which so-called "objective" research methodologies have subsumed facts about women. It is hardly surprising that women students find so little to reflect the world as they see it and indeed, have not come to expect that the facts could be otherwise. Anne Walsh says that for women students, "The absence of women writers in university literary curricula together with the minority of women teachers contributes to a material, intellectual and psychic deprivation" (Walsh, 1986, p. 8).

The silencing of women's voices at the university parallels women's historical exclusion from the literary canon (Showalter, 1987). The erasure of women's writing from the academy happens as a matter of course when, in spite of the availability of women's literature, it does not make its way into the curriculum. Women's writing has had so little effect on defining the criteria of esthetics and value in a literary work that, in proportion to their numbers, the establishment of women's writing in the literary canon has not happened. It is left to each generation of women to discover and reinvent their own tradition and then watch the influence of women's literature drop like a stone into the sea. If the discovery of women's writing is all that is required for it to be accepted into courses of curricular study, women's writing has clearly been rejected on other grounds.

What readers of English literature have been trained by educational institutions to value is men's writing and the
ensuing male literary tradition whereby all other writing may be judged. Attacks on this literary canon made by the increased visibility of women's writing and feminist criticism calls into question both the esthetics and the ethics of a literary tradition which can no longer substantiate its claim that its voice is universal.

The structure that serves to keep people, ideas and disciplines apart is epitomized at the university by the hierarchical image, the style of discourse, the depersonalization, the use of power and technology as ends rather than means and confusion between human beings and objects. The effect is of distancing, of keeping in one's place, and of challenging only within the guidelines (paradigm) permitted. These structural impediments, and others, affect both women and men who attend the university but insofar as a masculine culture prevails, women succeed only to the extent they can become "amateur males" (Rich, 1979, p. 134). The dehumanizing effect of the university system of education is addressed by both feminist and adult education theory. Paulo Freire's (1974) banking concept of education is typified at the university level, and liberatory learning is given up in exchange for the highest level of academic certification. Feminist theory is not satisfied by "well-meaning" programs that do superficial work to address women's issues but do not address the flawed structure.
As the study is a critique of university structures and activities, it is open to remarks by Jonathan Culler (1989) that such criticism is a "breeding ground for facile polemic." He suggests that radical criticism leveled against institutions generally assumes that the inherent force of themes such as racism, sexism and imperialism would be released to their political ends if they could by-pass the institutional structures that order and contain them. The way in which institutional structures domesticate radical discourse becomes a favourite theme of criticism resulting in a diatribe that exposes the fault of one system, while advocating yet other reforms.

It is the desire of finding another method to bring about these efficacious, political acts that produces "an interest in the institutional and ideological dimensions of criticism itself" (Culler, 1989, p. xiii). As a large social institution, the university is not infrequently the target of public criticism and it takes no special ability to offer a critique of its organization and structure. In spite of Culler's scepticism of yet another critique that closes other lines of thought, his words about the nature of structures are worth noting. The university is not simply a monolithic enterprise set in place by malevolent designs against women. Beyond the physical structures, course outlines, rules and regulations, the university context is also a process of changing patterns.
The context of the university is more than a place where things happen; the context also includes what happens. The interpretation of a context requires the elucidation and interpretation of the events that produce the context. When I speak of the university context, I mean its determined structures and processes that set the university in motion, as well as the fluctuating assumptions about how the processes should be carried out. As the processes have socially constituted meanings, I use this study to look at some of the values, institutional arrangements and practices that become known collectively as the university context.

I have described my activity in this study by saying that I am going to "critique" the university structure, and alternatively to "look at" the context in which this action takes place. The purpose of the thesis is not only to critique, but also to elucidate some of the assumptions about procedures and events which discriminate against women and are called normal. The issue is important because it provides a backdrop against which women’s positionality, representation and voice are carried out. More than a critique, however, this thesis asserts the right of women to assume central positions in their own understanding and interpretation of this context. That women have the right to interpret contexts from their point of view as women comes from the same justice claim that women use to negotiate concrete issues of equitable wages and representation on course reading lists. The struggle is not
just with the conditions or effects of patriarchal structures, but with the importance of these contexts for women’s reading of their own lives.

A metaphor that I find convenient for the purposes of this thesis is that of reading a text. Just as we read and interpret texts, we are constantly interpreting and taking meaning from our surroundings. Like the words, sentences and paragraphs of a text, human action is an event that is open to a range of interpretations and references which decide their meaning. As we take meaning from texts, so we take meanings from the events that occur around us. Paul Ricoeur says that "All significant events and deeds are...opened to this kind of practical interpretation through present praxis. Human action, too, is opened to anybody who can read" (Ricoeur in Thompson, 1981, p. 208).

Just as a text is open to the interpretation of those who read it, the context for human activity which is the university is open to interpretation. This idea of reading the university as text is not only a metaphor; reading is what goes on any time someone interacts or encounters the university context. Insofar as we are more or less involved with the university, we cannot stop interpreting it. This is a requirement of functioning within any context, a constant reading, interpreting and understanding in order to decide what to do next.

This study looks at reading in both a literal sense and in a metaphorical sense. As the topic addresses a feminist
pedagogy in the teaching of English literature, reading is a literal event. But the ongoing metaphor of context as text slips easily between figurative and literal applications. For example, in choosing a topic, I have decided simply to read; by narrowing the topic, I choose what part of the context it is that I will read; and in the act of reading I begin what I think is the most problematic aspect of all, and that is, how I will read. By this I mean that what point of view I may use, and what experiences and prejudices I bring to the reading event cannot be separated from my interpretation in this study. The fact that my reading is coloured by these variables is not, in itself, unusual. The location of the reader within a context is not only commonplace; it could not be otherwise. The reader is always situated in some context that presupposes what and how she will perceive and understand. The problem of reading the university is deciding who may read, what may be read, and whose reading will be aloud.

The interpretation of how we read will depend not only on our previous life experiences, but also on how we have been taught to read. A great deal of feminist criticism both theoretical and practical is founded on the understanding that "reading as women is not necessarily what occurs when a woman reads: women can read, and have read, as men" (Culler, 1982, p. 49). Implicit in the notion that we read differently according to our gender is the understanding that the experience the reader brings to the
text is at least as significant to the interpretation as the reading event itself. Moreover there are as many experiences as there are readers and no single prerequisite mindset. Assumptions about gender provide only one set of criteria for viewing the world, albeit the criteria are significant when we consider how profoundly we are inculcated into our role as male or female. On the other hand, other categories of social stratification such as race and class are equally vulnerable to a dominant reading by a single identifying group. Elizabeth Spelman notes that since "gender is neither experienced nor describable independently of race and class, then race and class become crucial to feminism" (Spelman, 1988, p. 176).

Reading in the literal sense as required in doing literary criticism has a parallel in feminist scholarship: both enable women to share common perceptions and "to remove individual women from a sense of isolated personal position" (Joanne Frye, 1986, p. 192). As well, both literary criticism and feminist philosophy engage in issues of women's representation as part of a larger commitment to cultural change. The alteration of human experience emerges as women learn new ways to interpret the lives of other women and themselves.

This chapter sets out the grounds for a thesis that provides both a theoretical discussion and practical illustration of feminist philosophy. Chapters Two and Three on reading the institutional context and disciplinary
knowledge are exemplars of a simultaneous reading and illustration of a feminist interpretation. These chapters on the institution and the disciplines of English literature are a framework for the discussion of the classroom practices which follow. In the fourth chapter on feminist pedagogy, I discuss the political nature of reading and interpreting a classroom and the understanding and meaning which are thereby created.

**Methodology as Matrix**

The question of methodology is a major issue in feminist research as the methodological structuring of a problem already presupposes what kind of knowledge may be included in the answer. The issue of methodology, therefore, is most germane to this thesis; and in the writing process, the issue of methodology has been, for me, the most difficult.

Although there is no single model of feminist methodology, all feminist research takes seriously the notion that the method must fit the problem and not the reverse. For women, the method becomes part of the problem when the saying and the doing are seen to be simultaneous. As a result, we are constantly checking our language and perceptions to see which voice and whose words are being used. We are always checking to see what has been omitted and what difference it makes in a way that Dorothy Smith describes as "making the everyday problematic." As women,
we are in the midst of establishing and articulating our values at the same time that they are being formulated, so that to say is also to do and knowledge is constructed and reconstructed as a process. This discussion of methodology is not a formality or a preliminary exercise that takes place before we get to the interpretive data. In the methodology, the interpretation has already begun.

The discussion which follows begins with a description of some of the disciplinary sources I have used. Then I discuss the assumptions I have made in the interpretive process. After that, I discuss the process of methodology and the way in which I have tried to make it congruent with the topic of the thesis: the representation of women at the university.

The methodology used for the study is centered on the compilation and interpretation of feminist writing in the areas of literature, education and philosophy. Extensive writing has been done on the topic of women’s experience as both teachers and students in academic institutions. Occasionally, these are directly personal accounts. Authors have combined their reflection on experience together with their knowledge of subject matter—such as literature, education, philosophy—to report and theorize about women’s issues.

A second major body of literature directly relevant to the study is that of literary criticism and theories of interpretation. Because a feminist standpoint is assumed as
a legitimate form of literary criticism, there is no attempt
to debate its efficacy or to deal with literary criticism
that ignores gender issues and thereby reinforces the male
hegemony over the interpretation of texts. Works are chosen
for the aptness of their contribution to the production and
reproduction of women's interpreting voices.

Upon reviewing the sources I have cited, I note that
there is no single author whose work I have used more
consistently than any others. The contributions of many
people regarding their teaching experiences, philosophical
discussions and theorizing have indicated a wide range of
questions and points of view. What emerges from these
various sources is not quite a pattern but a chimera of
patterns, most noticeable at the point of their dissolution.
The diverging and converging patterns imply that knowledge
is not so much a thing to be grasped as it is a way of
momentarily understanding the connectedness and revelation
of ideas. It is also consistent with a discussion of
feminist pedagogy which is not prescriptive and immutable
but is personal, reflective and emergent.

What follows is a discussion of some of the assumptions
I have made in writing this study regarding terms and ideas
that have become almost invisible to me by custom and use.
It is always difficult to know where to begin in this regard
of rendering visible what seems obvious to us, since we can,
only with difficulty, think as an outsider about our own
assumptions, except for those that are most obvious even to
others. Consequently, the issues I clarify are not necessarily the most important ones, but rather the ones that are easiest to notice. The assumptions that I do not mention may in some ways be more germane to what I am writing, but it is their very embeddedness that makes them less accessible, and consequently, unrevealed.

The first assumption is that the male experience is not universal. Second, since gender is one category that affects interpretation, and since men and women are differently situated in the social structure, their readings will be different. Third, in that reading as a woman is possible, it will be the privileged reading in this thesis. Last, my interpretation is an expression of my experience, my research, my effective history, and the way in which I am socially constructed.

Because I am talking about reading the university, my source of information is all around me. For the most part, I have chosen to base much of my research on the reading of books, journals, and articles found in the library and in private collections. Other contextual options were open to me, however, and I would have had an equally fruitful and perhaps quite different reading if I had set out to gather information, for example, from sitting in on classes, systematically interviewing students and teachers, observing the interactions of various departments, and many other instances of women's encounters with the university. In some ways, all of these activities have been an informal
part of my reading as I have at some time, or other, engaged in all of them. The encouragement and criticism of friends and acquaintances have contributed to my reading process as have numerous conversations, intense debates, news about others' research, and articles pressed on me by others that I "simply must read."

Now as I interpret the meaning of what I have read, I see even more clearly that I am simultaneously the researcher and part of the researched. The possibilities for reading are wide open; my criterion for interpretation to read as a woman, however, is not. What is open, and that which resists closure is the definition of what a woman might be, in this text or in any other. Mary Jacobus (1986) and many feminist literary critics struggle about the representation of women in texts, especially those texts whose form is already overdetermined by masculinist codes. That academic writing is thoroughly male encoded makes this question pertinent to the methodology of this thesis.

Is there a women's way of presenting the research of others and of presenting herself as a woman when the tradition of thesis writing assumes that gender is not an issue because the male model is universal? Similar questions of how the feminine emerges are the topic of Mary Jacobus's chapter (1986): "Is There a Woman in This Text?" Jacobus's answer for the particular text she is describing is equivocal. My answer is likewise qualified: yes, in that I have recorded my own experience and observations which are
those of a woman; yet no, in that woman as a speaking subject is subordinated by the masculine tradition; yet perhaps yes again, in that even though I have been encoded in masculinist tradition, I have foregrounded my feminist point of view. This question of the representation of women in text and context is important and one which I invite you to consider as you continue reading. The issue of women’s representation in thesis writing and in other academic activities is whether, and how they can be present as women, or whether they will always be offering a female version of men’s work. The topic of this thesis is how we may overcome the latter in discovery of the former.

Disembodied, academic writing undermines the influence of the personal and gives the impression that the objective voice is capable of greater knowledge and authority. Beginning from my own experience, I am better able to illustrate with integrity the notion that knowledge is socially constructed and that the personal and the intellectual are not opposing qualities.

That is not to say, however, that feminist writing is merely confessional, simplistic or even easy. One of the most difficult things about writing is to include the personal; to this end I have struggled against my own inclination to objectify my experience and to remove myself to the outside. Permission alone has not released me from longstanding habits of formal writing which is more interested in theory than experiences, in the abstraction
rather than the concrete, and in the speculation of the "other" over the subjective "I". To remain personal, to own what I am saying, to stay in the centre of discourse takes all my courage and honesty when what I really want to do is to flee to the sidelines to postulate about what I have learned, a process that would leave me safe and the learning opaque. But, while the act of reflection enables me to answer the question "What does this mean?" I also want to be able to answer "What does this mean to me?" What I am learning is to stay in the middle, to read, to engage and to be a person, one who can see that you are a person too.

Writing as a woman from the centre of my knowing is not easy to do, partly because other kinds of writing are so ingrained and partly because of the risk of personal revelation. I suggest that as we continue to reveal our own experience as evidence, we will expand the parameters for academic writing as a form of praxis.

**Format of the Thesis**

Two axioms of feminist education are that it is interdisciplinary and that it legitimates life experience as an appropriate subject of analysis or evidence. Both of these principles constitute the matrix of my thesis.

The topics I discuss cover a wide range of feminist concerns as they are found in the university context. A partial list of the topics includes research methodologies, women's knowledge, the devaluation of pedagogy, the question
of women's authority, methods of literary interpretation, women's representation in texts, the process of pedagogy, specific pedagogical practices, feminist hermeneutics, feminist poststructuralist analysis, and other topics. The reason for this listing is to illustrate that like the interdisciplinary nature of a feminist analysis of the university, patriarchy is not confined to one discipline or one method of operation.

Because this partial list names several topics, the reader will find that the treatment of these themes is by no means exhaustive, the knowledge at best being partial. These topics do not act as proofs as in a deductive analysis, but as evidence of the reality I am describing. Neither are they linearly connected; instead the topics sometimes overlap and sometimes act as separate themes. The thesis does not rest on any one of the themes individually but on their functioning in the context of a feminist reading and interpretation. The suggestions for further study, usually found at the end of the thesis, would do well to recommend any one of these themes for further investigation.

The second axiom of feminist education, to legitimate life experience as appropriate evidence, is accomplished by including a personal narrative of my own. I have included part of a journal entry that I recorded in response to a particular series of events that took place during my course of studies. I have placed part of the journal at the
beginning of each chapter as part of the on-going process of my engagement with and interpretation of the university experience. As a literary device, the journal acts as a trope in that it stands apart from the body of each chapter for comparison with and an elaboration of the theme. It acts as a frame in which personal experience is an exemplar of the critique of the thesis. The journal entry, however, also stands on its own, as a narrative and witness of my experience.

Organization of the Thesis

A discussion of feminist pedagogy is not complete without a description of the context in which it will take place. Locating this pedagogy situationally, philosophically and practically provides a better understanding of why it is difficult to carry out and why it meets with such resistance. The onslaught of tradition often defeats revolutionary activity, not necessarily because the ideas themselves don’t work, but because the status quo is the main opponent. The new idea, whatever it is, can be labelled as somehow flawed, the proof being its impending demise. In this way, the system justifies and maintains its on-going practices. For feminist pedagogy, the issue is not the rightness and truth of a superior method, but the difficulty and assumptions that set it in opposition to traditional pedagogy.
Overlooking the context in which feminist pedagogy is based leaves these teaching practices open to rejection as just one more fad or well intentioned idea that just didn’t get off the ground. The problem is not unlike that experienced by any marginalized person whose marginality is socially constructed and yet who is held individually responsible for failure to meet the demands of the system.

I claim that it is the context of the hostile environment of traditional teaching methodology that is problematic. The purpose of Chapters Two and Three is to provide the context for a discussion of feminist pedagogy.

A discussion of feminist interpretation in Chapter Two begins with an overview of the university context, its assumptions about research, and its disciplinary approach to knowledge. I demonstrate the difficulty of women’s incorporation of their experience and knowledge as women into the university given the overdetermined structures that reflect men’s experience.

The third chapter features a feminist interpretation in English literature as a specific subject discipline. An historical examination of the literary canon reveals its domination by men’s interests and esthetics. Historical evidence also traces the erasure of women, their interests and their work as producers of and characters in literature. A feminist interpretation of texts challenges those interpretive theories that ignore women except as objects while at the same time, claiming to be a-political. The
feminist literary theory which abandons a definition of essential woman must then come to terms with women's representation as subject.

The final chapter in some way begins the real work of the thesis: to discuss the process of feminist pedagogy. This process is contrary to organizational, methodological, disciplinary and philosophical approaches to traditional university activities that have erased women's participation, contributions, and voices. In the application of feminist pedagogical practices, the administration, students and even professors committed to the issues entailed, do not find it easy to envisage practices that have no precedent and may, indeed, contradict notions of what was formerly thought to be important. I demonstrate that feminist pedagogical practices, based on life experiences and feminist theory, take place in a milieu that is essentially anathema to it.
Chapter 2
The University as Text

Journal Entry March 8, 1989

Today I had a terrible experience at the seminar class. It started yesterday and in a way, it started years ago when I began talking and asking questions. The issue has been with me my whole life as a student and then as a teacher of language—as a person who can’t hear words without seeing them appear before her eyes and sometimes in colour. In some ways I feel like going right to the end and giving the summary, but that isn’t being fair to me or to the words and besides, there are too many ends. So I will try to say what happened, happens, is happening.

As a child I wondered about the mysteries of words—meaningless, arbitrary sounds really. But they made sense, not because of themselves alone, but because of what we understood by them. I also knew that words, in fact, point to all the things they are not saying, that to say a word was really a joke because behind it stood everything but what was uttered. The only thing words did was to represent only those things that were easiest to throw away or could be most easily identified. They came from the excess of what a thing was. It was always understood
that they said only those things of least importance--
and that the most important parts were yet to come and
were always coming. I understood these things as
children do and marvelled at the miracle of it--and
laughed at my imaginings because no one else was saying
it. I laughed because it was either so obvious that no
one spoke of it, or else it was so preposterous that no
one would listen. But still the words came into my
head and told me these things by saying what was not.

In this class on theories of interpretation and
the creation of meaning, we have been doing some hard
slogging through Heidegger, the Structuralists,
Habermas, and now Gadamer. I have had to work hard in
this class because my background in analytic philosophy
is so very thin. At the same time, I have enjoyed the
chance to read about language. Some of the passages in
Heidegger are particularly seductive--about how
language is a part of us that can't be separated from
who we are--about how we call ourselves into being--
about how we mediate and are mediated by language. So
as a human being who has thought a lot about this
intimate relationship we have with language, I wanted
to talk about it in class and have a few things
clarified, to trust in the openness of the text that
Gadamer elucidates. We were talking about the nature
of experience and how we stand in our own effective
history. I had many things ready to say.
Yesterday in class I dared to raise the issue of non-rational ways of creating meaning. As usual, I did it right at the end of class, probably so that it wouldn't get much air time, so that I wouldn't have to defend it very long. However, since we were having another class today, the professor said we could bring it up again and encouraged me to do so. He doesn't know that it took every bit of courage to say as much as I did; and that I didn't know if I had any left over for today. But of course I would try.

This morning I got up early to make a few notes. I had done all the readings; I was prepared. But going back was harder because of what I wanted to talk about. I had already said the potentially slanderous words among analytic philosophers: "non-rational" and twice "intuition." Preparing my notes to raise the issue again, I was not unaware of how difficult these topics were to discuss adequately among this particular group of men, as difficult as if I had wanted to discuss, for example, a heartfelt belief in UFO's.

I had made copious notes and was very pleased about what I had read. I liked the philosophy that allowed Western tradition to be open to itself--and that science could look at its understanding of how meaning is created--and how there is no way to objectify these sedimented experiences of culture,
history, and tradition because they are already part of our present.

**Prevailing Norms**

The purpose of this chapter is to do a reading of the university text to see what can be learned about some of the very significant activities and ideas promoted there. I suggest that the generation of knowledge through research and scholarship as conducted at the university provides us with a very limited view of what knowledge is and how it is created. We see excluded from this narrow view, the work about and by women and other marginalized groups, work that is grounded in both theory and personal experiences. A reading of the university from a feminist point of view results in a critique of masterful meaning which the university upholds.

In reading the university as text, we see that as an educative source of information about personal identity and humanness, the university is a thin read. Instead of learning about critical self-awareness, collaborative and nurturing education or about the social construction of knowledge, we learn the structures of the university to which we must conform in order to receive the acknowledgement that we are educated persons. The banking concept of education described by Paulo Freire (1974) is well entrenched at universities, in part, because of the size of the institutions and the need for efficient production of a learned population. The banking concept,
however, suits other agendas at the university as well, such as the existing research paradigm, reproduction of the status quo, and a desire for accountability modelled after the interests of business and industry.

Notions of student-centered liberatory education espoused by Freire and other critical educators are not views generally found at the university except as topics of a theoretical discussion. Both feminist philosophy and liberatory education begin with the learners' points of view and explore how these views are shaped in the extended relations of larger social and political relations. In the hierarchical model of the university, this learner-centered characteristic of adult education practice is replaced by a compliance to structural requirements for both teacher and learner. The dominating force of the university to dictate practice and norms is a power which it does not even pretend to share with those involved. "[I]f institutional education primarily reproduces and nurtures existing power structures, then it cannot possibly be in a position to give power" (Zacharakis-Jutz, 1988, p. 46). University education does not generally promote liberatory or critical notions of power because these are in direct contrast to its own elitist structure. The further up the hierarchical ladder of education one moves, the closer one is aligned with the dominant culture. The more rarified the educational atmosphere, the less inertia there appears to be for making changes to or criticizing in any way the structure of the
institution. The systematizing is so very thorough that years of learned silence cannot be overcome among students simply by a professor's invitation for dialogue and questions. Rather, systemic distortions require systemic changes.

In Chapter One I discuss the issue of how we read and how our personal experiences influence the interpretations of our reading activity. As gender is one of our most important self-definitions, our experience as women will be reflected in our reading of the university text. I do not wish to imply, however, that this is a single read, or that all women will have the same perspective simply because we are women. A single women's standpoint is too small a space for the myriad of perspectives drawn from women's lives. In that the perspectives of class, race, age, sexual orientation and other distinguishing features are inseparable from the experience of gender relations, I cannot describe a singular women's reading.

A feminist reading of the male university text speaks of the difference between men and women and of the way women have been fallaciously represented and systemically assimilated into the generic masculine (Schweickart, 1986). According to Dorothy Smith (1987a) the key to enlivening the feminist movement is, first, to make central the critique of ideology at work in everyday lives; and secondly, to unveil the ideological nature of values, norms, and beliefs. It is in this unveiling of values and beliefs that the feminist
reading is inherently critical of the university support for the status quo in which being gendered female is a socially created liability rather than an asset (Spelman, 1988).

According to Schweickart, the feminist reading and writing is a site of political struggle. It includes women's claiming of their own experience as starting points in the project of interpreting the world in order to change it. The reading assumes that the university text is neither cast in stone nor closed to all but the "right" interpretation. Women's articulation of meaning cannot be conflated or reduced to a single voice but can be described, instead as multivocal. In spite of multivocality, however, the problem remains that women's voices are often not heard at all, noted significantly by their silence and their unarticulated questions. Adrienne Rich (1977) describes perfectly the experiences of many women attending university:

Listen to the voices of the women and the voices of the men; observe the space men allow themselves, physically and verbally, the male assumption that people will listen, even when the majority of the group is female. Look at the faces of the silent, and of those who speak. Listen to a woman groping for language in which to express what is on her mind, sensing that the terms of academic discourse are not her language, trying to cut down her thought to the dimensions of a discourse not intended for her. (Rich, 1979, p. 243)

If we look at some of the ways women participate in the university, we note that attending university is strategically at least as important for women as it is for men. Women have learned that while qualifications alone
won't guarantee a career, their chances of employment in anything but a low paying job are slim without a degree. Secondly, an uncritical look combined with current folklore suggests that at the university, in the pursuit of knowledge and degrees, women will receive fair treatment. Gisele Thibault notes, however, the contradiction of women's education. On the one hand, education is a necessary part of the transformation of society and, conversely, education systems reinforce the status quo and the structured hierarchy (Thibault, 1987). The class structure mediated by the educational institution is maintained by the integration of middle-class women who remain part of the structure reproduced in wider society (Gaskell & McLaren, 1987). University historically upholds "the myth that 'education is power' or at least the notion that exposure to knowledge is the panacea of oppression" (Thibault, p. 179). Further, what the university has not told women is that "the knowledge they have struggled to 'know' is in itself oppressive."

Although women are present in numbers, their issues as women are not represented in the text that is the university, where they appear only in the margins and footnotes as part of the research.

The resistance of the academy to women's knowledge can be seen in the difficult acceptance of women's studies classes. The threat to the status quo by these classes is that women's participation is not limited to the roles of homemaker, care-giver and educator. Neither are women's
efforts confined to a liberal arts education where they are subsumed under the universal rubric "man". Even women's entry into the training colleges dominated by men, where their acceptance is conditional on their imitation of the male model, is more acceptable and less threatening than women's study of themselves as a sex-class. Even now, the terms "women's studies" and "gender studies" are commonplace, implying a reduction in political potency of the classes that were originally conceived as "feminist studies" (Barry, 1991, p. 83). With a change in name, came a change in the acceptable topics for discussion now reduced to sexual discrimination and legal inequalities. What became unacceptable were sexual categories, behaviour, and perception, sexual acts and desire; definitely unacceptable were discussions of sexual politics and power.

Thibault follows the historic passage of women at the university and divides into three periods the barriers to feminist scholarship. In the first and second periods, feminists were concerned with issues of equal access, recognition and pay for women at the university. But as far as hiring practices are concerned, "equal access" has been cloaked in two myths (Thibault, 1987), the first that colleges and universities are eager to hire and promote women if only qualified women can be found. The second myth, implied by innuendo, is that the women candidates are relatively inferior to males and that the standards will be lowered for a time while women "catch up." That these
notions are, in fact, myths (Thibault, 1987, p. 60) throws into question the hiring practices that are called objective. In spite of the 1960s and 1970s being a period of great changes in the university "women...gained scarcely 20 percent of the available places during the greatest expansion of higher education in this country" (Hawkins cited in Thibault, 1987, p. 58).

In Thibault's third period which describes the recent past, feminist dissent goes beyond a concern for parity and asks about the structures and attitudes that make these inequalities so difficult to route. The third stage examines "the ideology which creates and maintains the notion that women are inferior, the institutions which structure male domination and female subordination, and the social sciences which are in many respects, the study of men, by men, for men" (Thibault, 1987, p. 7).

**Silent Reading**

Let us look, then, at more underlying ways in which women's needs remain marginalized. This is not at first an easy thing to do because men and women alike are accustomed to reading the university text from a male point of view. That the university text is not written to include women's experience should surprise no one when we consider how and by whom the tradition was established. The preponderance of male faculty and the names on course reading lists and research publications verify that public academic knowledge
is created largely by men. Universities simply reflect the traditions and thought processes of those who established them, namely, middle and upper class men of the white ruling elite. According to Bunch and Pollack (1983, p. 5), "The higher the step on the administrative ladder, the paler and maler is the atmosphere" (1983, p. 5).

The silent voices of women and minorities in academia are consistent with the university tradition. The practice of the dominant discourse "effected through the humanist tradition has produced the ideological difference as social inequality" (Leach & Davies, 1990, p. 325). Generation of women's enrollment at the university in numbers equal to and greater than men without an appreciable change in women's influence, attests to the fundamental entrenchment of male domination. The only surprising thing is that we still live under the assumption that the thought processes of this limited group reflect the thinking of the rest of humanity. The racist, classist and sexist bias is most noticeable when the assumption is made that this elitist view has an inherent right ultimately to be the dominant mode of thought.

Problems in reading the university text as women brings the readers, first of all, up against the dominant paradigm of research and scholarship at the university. I have chosen to look at research and scholarship because of the central role they play in the definition of the university to the public, to government and business interests, and to the
university itself. Women's point of view underlines the questions that have for some time been raised about objectivity and value-free research. A feminist critique of science disputes the notion that objectivity is ostensibly a non-involved stance claiming that instead, "objectivity is the male epistemological stance, which does not comprehend its own perspectivity" (Thibault, 1987, p. 122). Further claims insist that subjectivity is inherent in all research regardless of one's epistemological position (Warren, 1987; Tomm, 1989). The myth of "pure" science and a methodology which is value free are not new topics of discussion, nor are they restricted to women's issues (Kuhn, 1970; Freyeraband, 1975). The feminist critique notes, however, that the gender bias in research activities largely excludes women's interests, and that the knowledge that is produced perpetuates this omission.

Specific examples of sexism and sex blindness in science are identified by Eichler (1988) as follows: overgeneralization, in which results of research on men have been generalized for all people; gender insensitivity whereby women's response in research was not considered to be different from men's; double standards in which identical behaviours of men and women are treated differently by the researcher. Other examples of sexism in science include giving normative status to social behaviour that has been labelled "proper" according to gender; or, treating the
sexes as two discrete groups and ignoring their overlap or sameness.

Research methods that quantify information are not in themselves contrary to women's interests, but over-reliance on quantitative research methodology has distorted the idea of what kind of information is worth collecting. The problem is that the lives of women have been largely overlooked in the interests of information that is measurable and easy to collect. The idea of truth and the objectivity central to natural science are the embodiment of male norms of objective reasoning and in this limitation exclude women's experience a priori (Thibault, 1987, p. 120). It is now clear, however, that in order to find out more about women's interpretations, it is necessary to observe their responses and listen to their descriptions even to the extent of having the women themselves ask the research questions. Erroneous assumptions about women have been made by lack of attention paid to what women themselves report (Tomm, 1989).

By not acknowledging the ways in which one's presuppositions and methods of interacting shape the findings of the research, the researcher is easily lead to false assumptions regarding the other's reality. In the past, in the search for objectivity, this failure to examine one's influence on and by the researched subject was simply "bad" science. It is now clear that the declaration of one's interests does not remove the interest, and that such
presuppositions are not necessarily negative influences if they enable the researcher not only to hear what others say but also to understand what they mean. This involvement of the researcher with the researched is in keeping with a feminist methodology which rejects the two main assumptions of objective research that "knowledge of the material world is gained through measurement of natural phenomena" and that the object of study can be isolated from its surroundings (Thibault, 1987, p. 122).

The reliance on notions of truth and objectivity has placed a rigidity on how we may think about thinking. The limitations of this closedness are that science is not self-cleansing or self-regulating and within its ordering, is cut off from the thinking that would reveal these limitations. Dawn Currie proposes that to address this process, "we treat as problematic the categories of human thought" (Currie, 1989, p. 189).

In feminist writing about the revisioning of the research paradigm, methodologies are often complex and not necessarily in agreement with each other. Lines of methodology are crossed by using multicausal analysis which draws on both quantitative analysis and qualitative interviews; the underlying assumptions are that a rational explanation includes non-rational factors, and that the notion of an objective measure is largely a reflection of male subjectivity (Tomm, 1989).
A major interest to feminist research is the inclusion of first-person accounts, especially of women. As men have often been the spokesmen for human consciousness (McCormack, 1983), feminist approaches are overturning the assumptions about whose knowledge or ways of knowing are acceptable. Perhaps the most important contribution of the new knowledge about women is the female consciousness that we can now bring to our reading of texts, including the discovery of those texts we didn’t know existed.

Feminist methodology examines women’s lives in a way that makes women the subject of their own experience. Methodology which takes seriously the basic feminist concept that the personal is political cannot permit a separation of the theory about women’s lives from the practice of revealing it. The methodology of consciousness raising is an example of women’s collective analysis of their experience and an illustration of women’s coming to know more and more about themselves. If we look at consciousness raising as one type of women’s research, we can see that knowledge, both personal and collective, when created in this way, is for women an empowering event. The discourse and research among women, which is the context of feminist work, is always political and open, never established, finalized, or concluded (Smith, 1984, p. 10). In these collective endeavors, women lay claim to the importance of their partial and particular knowledge.
Tomm (1989) uses an analogy to illustrate loosely the way our knowledge in the past has been like the shadows found on the ceiling of Plato's cave (Bk. VII, The Republic). Like the man who escaped to see real objects outside the cave rather than the reflections on the wall that he thought were real objects, feminists have, in part, escaped the gender-biased groves of academe and have begun to see a new kind of knowledge.

The problem that contemporary feminists face is similar to that encountered by the man who escaped from the cave. Both have been accused of making claims that are "off the wall." Their new reality is so radically different from that of others that it is difficult to communicate. Their way of knowing has changed to the extent that it is impossible to know as they knew before. (Tomm, 1989, p. 6)

This assessment of being "off the wall" works against those who have devised new research directions or theoretical orientations. Under this label, it is difficult to publish unpopular points of view or methodology in an established field, a difficulty women have noted in their attempts to publish research (CAUT, 1988).

Feminist scholarship is inherently critical of the conserving nature of the university and its reproduction of women's oppression in society. The political nature of feminist scholarship differs from other scholarship in that its politics is overt. The openness of its political intent and the fact that it calls into question the tacit politics of the university system often makes feminist scholarship unwelcome. Further tensions between the feminist agenda and
the academy are created by the paucity of female academics amid a growing interest in feminist scholarship generally, and by women's notable absense from disciplinary content.

**Women's Work**

As silent insiders, what then can we read from the university text? We see that even though women are visible at the university, their roles are found in the pyramid of support that places male academic work at the top. In association with the university, women's roles are generally performed as wives, research assistants, secretaries, teaching assistants, foodservices personnel, librarians, lower-echelon administrators or women students. Women's roles at the bottom of the pyramid are defined by their relationship to men in power instead of to other women up and down the scale (Rich, 1979, p. 137). Rich suggests that "this fragmentation among women is merely a replication of the fragmentation from each other that we undergo in the society outside," and "in its very structure, then, the university encourages women to continue perceiving themselves as means and not as end--as indeed their whole socialization has done" (Rich, 1979, p. 138). This definition of women according to their alignment with men's work and interests pits women against each other and blinds them to their common struggles.

Academic women speak of being hollowed out by their complicity with the patriarchy of the academy. They have gone along with and appropriated the rules, perhaps
critically, but complying nevertheless with at least the official demands of institutional setting. On this point they are held to account by their sisters who operate outside the walls, who rail against the elitism perpetuated by the academy. They question women's desire and purpose in being there, suggesting that academic women have already sold out. Anne Cameron (1989) says that upper class academic women should stop presenting papers and giving interpretations on topics in which they are outsiders. Their interpretation is no better than a male one, Cameron claims, on topics such as "Welfare Mother Reality" or "Poverty."

At least two points can be raised in discussion of this issue. One is the uncertainty of whether it is possible for committed feminists to work for change inside an elitist system such as the university. In that system they have been irreversibly altered or temporarily deterred from the feminist cause, thus supporting the notion that change of any organization from within is difficult if not unlikely.

Secondly, women in the academy are cautioned that their efforts to increase the sound of women's voices for gender equity or for the advocacy of feminist thought must not be simply an effort to achieve more privilege for women who are themselves already privileged.

Against these charges, Adrienne Rich responds by saying that, among other places, the university is where the students are. Moreover, to begin changes long overdue in academia, women entering the professions must bring with
them the education of their female experience (Rich, 1979). Rich cautions against acceptance into academic life at any cost and urges women to "choose what we will accept and what we will reject of institutions already structured and defined by patriarchal values" (Rich, 1979, p. 133).

The cautions against perpetuating the elitism of the academy are important to heed because, among other things, the structural impediments of the academy are designed to pit people against one another. The criteria for hiring and tenure can easily play women off, for example, against the demands of the system, non-white males, or other women. Additional structural difficulties confront women academics in their careers. In that their involvement does not always follow the traditional model of their male colleagues, women find differential assessment of their commitment and productivity, and the evaluation of their feminist research (CAUT, 1988).

Women's public activities in male dominated fields have long been denigrated. In A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf reports that women's authority in the areas of music and preaching elicited this male response that "[It] is like a dog's walking on his hind legs. It is not done well, but you are surprised to find it done at all" (Woolf, 1982, p. 53). It is quite possible that at the time of Virginia Wolf's writing in 1928, the same would have been said of women as professors.
The dehumanizing forces of competition are at odds with women's needs to support themselves and each other in a system that currently supports elitism and exclusivity. Disciplinary barriers, for example, are an effective measure for both limiting knowledge and isolating women. Within disciplines, knowledge is framed as a product with prescriptive theoretical and methodological means by which reality may be known. The feminist understanding of knowledge as a social construction is incompatible with disciplinary approaches which compartmentalize knowledge. Such barriers discourage the reconnection of both knowledge and people, a lack that is particularly hazardous to women as minorities. Isolated by disciplinary barriers and by their low numbers, women do not always discover that their problems are not limited to their disciplines but are common to women within the institution. Women need to hear each other, then argue, debate and affirm what they have in common and celebrate where they differ.

Problems that academic women encounter at the university are similar to the ones many women experience in their daily routine: the problem of double duty. As a minority to begin with, women who are professors and who identify themselves as feminist often find their work load especially onerous. Besides a regular teaching assignment, committee work, correspondence, and publishing demands, women are often asked to sit on committees, panels, boards, make speeches and be visible because they are women; their
woman’s presence giving the impression of equality to publicly organized activities. Especially in fields where women’s presence is still an anomaly, women are asked to give the female perspective of the particular field, as if women were all the same and their experiences undifferentiated.

If the female academics are feminists, and if they appear at all sympathetic, women students seek them out for personal counselling in areas well beyond academic concerns (Briskin, 1990). They hear of women students’ experiences in sexual harassment, discriminatory treatment and the unfairness of rules designed for automatons, but not human beings. Unfortunately, the shortage of a larger sympathetic audience guarantees that many issues never come to light, and that many other women in the face of systemic difficulties, remain silent and confused.

Those who are committed to the inclusion of women’s experience in their teaching find that in most disciplines they could work full time on feminist research alone. Beyond the expectations of traditional research, however, the task requires a rethinking of the role of gender within the discipline as well as an interrogation of the very structures on which the discipline was erected (Aiken, 1988, p. 108). If women take on this role, their study and critique no longer constitute double duty, but triple.

Another problem for female academics centres on the issue of power and authority in the classroom. Here they
meet conflicting assumptions based on unexamined traditions and lived reality, both theirs and the students'. These are some of the issues: first, when expert knowledge is assumed to reside inherently in the male, how convinced will students be that although equally qualified, the non-male instructor is equally expert? In feminist classes, women reported that some of the greatest opposition and anger comes from young male students (Briskin, 1990). Second, should a professor committed to interactive education respect students who wish to remain uninvolved in the learning process and who adopt the role of passive learners? Third, how may professors share their authority with students who do not assume any authority of their own? Four, how may a professor share her power with students who are not convinced that, because of her gender, the professor has any power to share?

Because of their gender, female academics often struggle to be credible in ways that may not be a concern for men. For example, in individual conversations with three feminists about their classroom practices, I noticed some differences that were at first puzzling to me. One professor was concerned about the high academic standards she set, requiring that students cover as much as possible on a particular feminist topic. She emphasized that students needed a firm grasp of the material in order to participate meaningfully in the discussions. A second woman believed dialogue was very important in feminist classes and
spent a lot of energy engaging students in this activity. The third feminist, a man, did not articulate his theories on teaching, but merely told me what he did. Of the three, his feminist approach was both intuitive and practical and more concerned simply with how best to help the students learn.

I mention these conversations because I was surprised by the calm with which the man described his teaching. He surely covered less material and frequently worked through problems with students in which they disagreed with him. But by sharing his power with students, they all became co-learners. I suggest that such a relaxed approach has at least as much to do with his individual personality as it does with being male, and that his power to divest and bestow authority is a luxury that women can not so easily afford.

Briskin (1990) reported on the difficult balance for feminist professors who attempt to equalize the power relationship in their classes by giving up their institutionalized authority. In her studies, where this movement towards a more democratic classroom was rarely an easy transition for anyone, it was perceived quite differently depending on the professor’s gender. Students perceived that this action by female professors indicated the women were unsure of themselves and lacked credibility; conversely male feminists suffered from an embarrassment of riches. Students adopted overtly subordinate roles and
constantly looked to the male professors for verification and approval of what the students had learned.

In the symbolic order which defines male authority, the question of women's authority is not changed simply by discursive practices or the recognition that women are also knowledgeable in their fields. Without any change to the symbolic order of male domination, individual and exceptional contributions on the part of women do not change power relations. Even children can see that the one woman who is the exception, "is someone who got her gender relations wrong" (Leach & Davies, 1990, p. 331).

**Devaluation of Pedagogy**

Women's concerns about education and their insistence on congruence between theory and practice challenge traditional operating methods at the university. Feminist perspectives call for a change in the framework of scholarship generally, not merely the addition of women or a body of research about women (Dubois, Kelly, Kennedy, Korsmeyer, & Robinson, 1985) because the "add women and stir" approach (Bunch & Pollack, 1983) leaves unproblematic the existing information. An important feminist challenge to the research activity is over the importance attached to "having knowledge" as opposed to "ways of knowing" which is characteristic of feminist approaches. Furthermore, I suggest that the dominant position occupied by research
overshadows equally important endeavors carried out at the university, particularly teaching.

When advancement depends on publications and the securing of grants, teaching is relegated to an occasional or incidental activity (Wilshire, 1990). Whereas professors are rarely relieved of their research load so they can devote their time to teaching, the reverse is more likely to be true: for a full professor, the lighter the teaching load, the greater the prestige (Wilshire, 1990, p. 78). In the hierarchy of the university, those who supply teaching duties only, are hired to marginalized positions as sessional lecturers. Not surprisingly, women are present as sessional lecturers more than in any other faculty position.

At times women’s interests and ways of knowing are at odds with the definition of what it means to be a professional educator. Nel Noddings’ (1989) discussion of the professionalism of educational institutions concludes that the educational activities that can be described as female are seen as opposites to those which are professional. Similarly Barbara Johnson notes "that not only has female personal experience tended to be excluded from the discourse of knowledge, but the realm of the personal itself has been coded as female and devalued for that reason" (Johnson, 1989, p. 44).

The professionalization of education consisting of the mastery of subject matter proceeds from elementary to secondary schools and reaches its epitome at university
levels. In this movement from elementary to graduate level teaching, two corresponding shifts occur. First, the number of women teachers decreases, and two, the process of knowledge gives way to the possession of knowledge. Disregard for education as a process is clearly shown when the most highly professionalized teachers may achieve those ranks by the knowledge they possess rather than their ability to teach. So undervalued is the ability of how to teach that the ranks of the professoriate may be achieved without any pedagogical instruction whatsoever. This is not to set up a false dichotomy between professional education training and the intuitive sense of what is the right thing to do in the classroom. The notion that these are opposites devalues both the skill and art of teaching possessed by both women and men. However, with the possibility that the best teaching is being done in elementary schools, one cannot help but notice that, as far as institutional qualifications are concerned, professionalization and regard for quality teaching are inversely related.

Professionalization of education in which knowledge is truly a bankable commodity is at odds with what Noddings calls a feminine view. "It is feminine in the deep classical sense--rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness" (Noddings, 1984, p.2). That is not to say that logic is to be discarded or that this feminine view is an essential quality of women and one that is alien to men, although it is an approach that may be more commonly found
among women than among men. Johnson also notes that in the discussion of feminist issues, there is a move "to reverse the impersonalization...and to reintroduce the personal, or at least the positional, as a way of disseminating authority and decomposing the false universality of patriarchally institutionalized meanings" (Johnson, 1987, p. 44).

The notion of receptivity and the ethic of caring is rooted in the particular in a concept of justice which sees the person for whom the principles of justice were formed, and not just the principle itself (Gilligan, 1982). As opposed to rule based, generalizable justice, the feminine notions of justice are person-centered and particular (Friedman, 1987). The latter approach singles out justice as more than an abstract virtue rationalized to mean equal treatment for all people. Insofar as people are not equally interchangeable, the concept of equal justice depends on the individual and the particular. Feminism is committed to a social view of justice that finds expression in the attention paid to the specific and the personal. It is in caring for the other that feminism stands against injustice.

The feminist commitment to the notion that the personal is political does not accept the mind/body split inherent in traditional pedagogy. For feminists, curriculum and teaching strategies are both politically significant for deconstructing the hierarchical structures of academe. A person-centered education and especially the articulation of
women's experience are not what we now see when we read the university. Historical and present day resistance encountered by women to an expanded view of knowledge and practice that more fully reflect women's experiences cannot be explained simply by the inertia of an unwieldy system. Resistance is more deeply rooted in the risk that "objectivity will be revealed as itself value-laden, serving the interests of male (and class) superiority; as do the concepts of rationality, justice, equality, freedom, knowledge, [and] progress" (Miles & Finn, 1989).

In this chapter, I have discussed the representation of women in the context of the university. In a setting in which only objective, public knowledge is permitted, the good scholar has been encompassed by the definition of a good scientist (Raymond, 1985, p. 58). The feminist interpretation confirms the worth of each person's experience and thereby reflects the pluralistic, historical and contextual nature of the conceptualization of human society. Knowledge cannot be defined by a single group, but must be interpreted and created by multiple groups for the understanding and representation of their own lives (Maher, 1985, p. 35).
Journal Entry

Finally this morning's session took place. In my notes I starred the things that seemed important. There were lots of stars. The discussion went the same way as always: I was mute. I have tried to discover why I was silent and have concluded a few things. First, I wanted to say things that weren't very popular like "non-rational" and "intuition" (at least UFO's are not a gender biased topic). Second, I wanted to talk about my own experiences because that is how I understood the text. Third, I wanted others to do a synthesis rather than abstract analysis. Fourth, the others were all men who had extensive backgrounds in philosophical arguments--statement of proposition followed by counter proposition or an analysis backed by statements of authority.

I didn't want to ask or suggest that there was another way (or several) for the class to happen--partly because the topic was too important for me to expose my feelings about it--partly because I didn't want them to "go along" with my suggestion for a while and then go back to abstractions because "that is how you really talk about it". The other reason I didn't
ask was because I didn’t think I could say the words with my heart in my mouth.

I left at the break and said I had to go to work. I know it isn’t entirely my problem that I didn’t say anything, but still I operate from the premise that I have to adjust my thinking about the topic to suit the dominant discourse, and that it can’t be the other way around because after all they’re not running a therapy session. And it’s my problem if I’m so emotional that I can’t say anything. The real issue is made clearer, however, by the fact that the rest of the class (the men), are all fairly nice people who wouldn’t have interrupted me and may even have welcomed what I wanted to say. Although they may not be personally to blame, they are part of the problem. The discourse of the university favours them by reflecting their understanding and knowledge in a way that corroborates their right to be there. I know that is how the tradition is supposed to operate, but I wanted somehow to find a way to learn things that are more authentically who I am. Instead, I was silenced about a topic which is of great importance to me. Ironically, this is International Women’s Day.

What was most distressing was that in the text itself was a discussion about this very point: that consciousness of standing in our traditions is what makes it possible to know and talk about those
traditions. In the face of this invitation, the seminar examined neither its own traditions of the university, nor the nature of discourse, nor the hegemony of Western thought, but used only a very small part of its privilege to talk, theoretically, about something completely different.

**Introduction**

This chapter follows a discussion of the university context as a problematic site for the carrying out of a feminist pedagogy. One of the main points of contention has been the extent to which scientism and the notion of objectivity dominate the research paradigm and by extension the criteria of what counts as knowledge. The purpose of this third chapter is to locate more specifically the difficulty that this hegemony creates for feminist literary criticism and the generation of women's writing.

By locating feminist pedagogy in the teaching of English literature, I discuss in more specific ways the difficulties inherent for feminist pedagogy and modes of thought when situated in a particular academic discipline. As before, I am not discussing the specifics of how this pedagogy is to be carried out, but rather I illustrate that like the university structure, the activity of specific disciplines is similarly gendered. Whereas the study of many disciplines besides English literature would quickly illustrate the difficulty of introducing feminist thinking,
I have chosen the one that I think is among those most receptive to the admission of feminist pedagogy. The question for any discipline is whether women can claim to have a different voice without succumbing to the pitfalls of essentialism, whether biologically, socially or metaphysically determined.

I will discuss ways in which English literature as a discipline at the university is a prime example of scholarship dominated by analytical thought and reasoning to the distrust and exclusion of human experience and response. As discussed in the previous chapter, the domination by this notion of objectivity is self-referential and excludes other modes of thinking simply by definition. In this chapter, I first discuss how the closedness of English literary studies typically excludes other thinking from its paradigm in ways that limit what we may describe as knowledge. Secondly, I describe the difficulty for women in establishing a place to begin speaking, given their relegation to a position of "other" in literature. With some understanding of the need for a description of the poststructural, nonessential subject, this chapter concludes with a discussion of women's aesthetic and women's voice.

Three reasons follow for choosing English literature as opposed to some other discipline. First, as an art form, English literature is experience based and theoretically more in touch with the subjective, non-rational, creative world than, say, law or geology. Literature offers a range
of understanding of human development and thinking in ways not readily accessible through conventional science. A literary artist beginning from personal experience and making the experience public, portrays "themes of human experiences in ways that allow us to understand and to see our own lives with greater clarity and order" (Merriam, 1983, p. 6). One of the qualities of a literary work is that it narrates something of what it is to be human and reveals that experience for a particular culture according to codes of behaviour, representation, and interpretation. Feminist pedagogy also recognizes the importance of personal experience as a way of understanding and creating theory, and like English literature, it is similarly grounded in a fragmented set of practices and possibilities which we first experience and then describe.

A second reason for choosing English literature as a site for feminist pedagogy is the large number of women who choose English as a course of studies compared to, for example, engineering or mathematics. This is not to discuss whether as a university subject, English literature has been affected by the large numbers of female students. Rather the study suggests that numbers of women, alone, do not outweigh the preponderance of traditional thought in the disciplines. By choosing the discipline of English literary studies as a specific field of research, I demonstrate how pervasive and inappropriately located is the tendency to treat knowledge as something to be schematized and
structured. Even in a discipline that typically attracts large numbers of women and that uses as its subject matter accounts of the human condition, objectivity and abstract thought replace that which is personal and specifically located. We must look elsewhere for why it is that women make up a large portion of students and a small portion of faculty, or why women form the majority of readers and men the majority of writers.

The third and perhaps most important reason for choosing to study English literature, particularly literary criticism, is its hermeneutical function. English literature represents the study of theories of interpretation which inform and are informed by certain philosophies. In Western philosophical tradition, primacy of meaning resides in interpretations of the word and in the construction of reality from discourse. The interpretation of texts and contexts is at the centre of the most powerful cultural influences of the Western world: religion, law and learning. The judicial system, the church and the university, through their study of the word, claim and are awarded the authority and power to define interpretation and meaning in the context of society. In choosing English literature and its area of textual interpretation, I do not undertake an analysis of this domination, but rather the capacities of various interpretations to represent women's experiences. I have chosen feminist poststructuralism as a philosophical basis for interpretation of texts and for
discussing women's position in the construction of meanings in literature.

**Where Is the Woman in This Text?**

It comes as no surprise that English literature as part of the university tradition is thoroughly embedded in a male dominated construct. As an art form, English literature has perhaps even more need to assert its masculinist qualities in order to claim its place as a discipline alongside the sciences and the professional training colleges of the university. The late, pre-eminent Canadian literary scholar, Northrop Frye remarks that compared to the physical sciences which were so symbolically male and out in the world doing things, literature is "narcissistic, intuitive, fanciful, staying at home and making the home more beautiful, but not doing anything serious and therefore symbolically female" (N. Frye, 1975, p. 201). To shore up literature against such dubious associations, his *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) attempts to make the study of literature more serious and manly by structuring its principles scientifically like the laws of physics, biology, or mathematics (Showalter, 1987).

The exclusion of women's influence from English literature may be surprising when we consider that literature is an art form reflecting the human condition. The effect of women's exclusion therefore, easily leads us to believe that, by default, the human condition is male.
Clearly, the merger of masculinity and authority as a description of the world is seen as a culturally acceptable condition (J. Frye, 1986; Dubois et al., 1985).

Alarm bells and exhortations caution English literary studies to return to the literary works themselves as the focus of investigation as opposed to the preponderance of studies about the works. Literary criticism and analysis is the research counterpart of the natural sciences. Investigation of theories, assumptions, and hypotheses and the accompanying publication of the findings is not unlike the explanation and theory-making of many other disciplines, including the sciences.

Literary scholarship has a way of escaping the experience of the literary work when instead of suggesting that we read the work, it asks how we will deal with it (Barzun, 1984). To the extent that literature becomes the property of scholarship and professionals, knowing what one thinks about the subject becomes infinitely more important than direct experience with it. When the unquestioned aim becomes the analysis of the work, the discussion of method flowers as the focus of debate. Perhaps some of the most extreme examples of English literature under analysis are found in the work of N. Frye who suggests that "literary criticism is a pseudo-scientific approach that operates beyond taste, value judgements, and the uniqueness of an artist and his work" (Powe, 1985, p. 37). By setting up his own organizational framework for literature, N. Frye is able
to ignore the historical forces that privilege certain canons of writing.

The wish to ape science and to rely on its tools of analysis, proof and method has created a literary criticism whose responses must be measured by and limited to the use of these tools (Grant, 1969). The point at issue as stated earlier, however, does not question the efficacy of research itself, but the closedness of many types of research, the question of whom or what is served by the investigation, the assumptions made about knowledge and the incremental domination of research over the real life event. Feminists such as Nina Baym (1987) are critical of feminist literary theory because it is grounded in theories such as deconstruction or Marxism that are indifferent to women’s writing and are "irretrievably misogynist." She charges that theory becomes just another way to divide women and serves only as a means of legitimation for women in the audience of prestigious male academics.

On the other hand, there is an important place for feminist literary theories which critique patriarchal structures and speculate from a women’s point of view how, why, and under what assumptions women have come to occupy the role of the oppressed. Women need to develop theory to reflect and describe women’s writing and pedagogical practices. Women’s presence at the university is also attributable to the pleasure some take in studying, teaching, or writing; pleasure which may be either a natural
response to curiosity or a learned response now become intrinsically satisfying. This is not a gendered kind of pleasure, but one that is open to women as it is to men. While feminists at the academy are aware of the gender bias of the curriculum and of the ideological positioning of the institution, they are also aware that their presence is a statement of their right to claim their own pleasure.

Paraphrasing Virginia Woolf in *Three Guineas*, Rich says that the more crucial task for women at the university is the process of deciding on what terms we will participate in "the procession of the sons of educated men" (pp. 62-63). For a description of those terms, I first discuss the tradition into which a feminist literary analysis enters as part of the subject matter of feminist pedagogy.

Feminist literary criticism as a theory of interpretation is located within the discipline among other theories of interpretation such as formalist, New Criticism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, reception theory, structuralism, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and political theory, to name only a few.

Terry Eagleton (1983) shows that the shape of a theory is determined by a wider arena than literature alone, that theories are informed and sustained by certain readings of social reality. By this process, literature resembles a large, amorphous body that is described according to the part that seems most salient to those who favour a particular interpretation. Each methodology subsumes what
it thinks is important in literature. Whatever gets left out is, by definition, unimportant.

Claims by literary critics that their favourite interpretation theory is an objective stance support two untenable propositions. First, every theory supports some political agenda and simply declaring it to be neutral does not make it so. Secondly, the value of objectivity is itself a questionable stand. The claim of objectivity serves only to provide an argument for the exclusion of theories such as feminist literary criticism whose political statement of social change is explicit.

From a feminist perspective, a discussion of the merits of various literary theories must make problematic what is to be considered as literature. On what terms will writing about and by women be included? In particular what roles will women play as writers beyond the marginalized positions now offered, and how may the characters be interpreted; what will reading be like when it is acknowledged to be a gendered event? Eagleton states that new definitions of literature do not simply provide ever differing accounts, for example, of the plays of Samuel Beckett. He suggests that a redefinition or "breaking with the literary institution...means breaking with the very ways literature, literary criticism and its supporting social values are defined" (Eagleton, 1983, p.90). A brief discussion of the codes and structures by which some literary theories operate
will illustrate the seemingly arbitrary rules by which they are supported.

According to formalist criticism, explains Eagleton (1983, p. 4), literature is a special kind of language and a function of the differential relations between one sort of discourse and another. What is named as literature is to be identified by its special use of language, most noticeably, for example, as it is used in poetry. In formalist criticism, features of the work are examined and described in isolation from biographical, historical, psychological or intertextual considerations. This exclusive focus on language as a definition of what is called literature means that only by inclusion in a literary genre can language be judged as literary. The problem with this, of course, is that expressions used in a novel and defined as literary may be indistinguishable when used in ordinary conversation.

Two more illustrations are the contrasting theories of the New Historicism and the doctrine of death of the author. New Historicism requires that readers are aware of the historical conditions under which a work was first produced, published, and read in order for one to have a full appreciation of the significance of the work. On the other hand, Roland Barthes (1972) argues that the meaning of the work is dependent on the structure of the language and is completely independent of the author's intentions and meaning. In death of the author the task of the criticism
is to unlock the multitude of possible "meanings" that the text alone can generate.

In one sense, what we understand as literature is a kind of self-referential language which talks about itself. (Eagleton, 1983, p. 8). To qualify as a topic of literary discourse and criticism, a work must first be judged as literary; and entrance into this ring is determined by the literary institutions (Eagleton, 1983, p. 89). The problem that this closed-circuitry presents for women's writing, literary criticism and feminist pedagogy is that the norms and definitions of what is aesthetic have already been decided, with a most noticeable absence in the lack of input by women. The concern is that women's voices in English literature are acceptable in so far as they meet existing standards. This is one of the reasons the feminist project makes problematic the areas of reading and writing as crucial components for "interpreting the world in order to change it" (Schweickart, 1986, p. 39).

Reader-response is one theory that self-consciously permits the entry of personal values into its analysis. In this process the reader acknowledges and emphasizes his or her participation in both the reading of the work and in the analysis of the literary process. In refusing to be absorbed by theory, reader-response admits other facets of human reality such as science, history, politics, a variety of psychologies, the facts of literary creation, the sociology and economics of the professor, et cetera. But
even though reader-response theories offer a way to return both literature and life to literary studies, it offers students no measure of critique for examining their own assumptions about literature. As Eagleton says of reader-response, "[W]hat you get out of the work will depend in large measure on what you put into it in the first place, and there is little room here for any deep-seated 'challenge' to the reader" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 80). Similarly, "The closedness of the circuit between reader and work reflects the closedness of the academic institution of Literature, to which only certain kinds of texts and readers need apply" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 80).

A question that reader-response is unable to ask is what difference it would make to the experience and meaning of literature if the reader were non-white, poor and/or female. In its inability to critique, reader-response can only assume an objective text and gender neutral criticism. From its liberal-humanist tradition, what appears to be a neutral stand results in supporting the status quo.

The point is made by feminists that the prevailing canon and literary theories exclude, marginalize and stereotype women's participation as characters, readers, writers, and interpreters. In the literary tradition, women's values, experiences, aesthetics as reported by women are all but silenced. The one thing on which the plethora of feminist literary criticism agrees is that what is problematic are assumptions about both literature and women
that have resulted in their distorted and silent representation in the canon. Without this challenge to cultural norms, modern critical theories, including post-structuralism, are incapable of discussing issues of literary value and evaluation (Showalter, 1987).

Modern literary and critical theories are far from being value free or neutral. On the contrary, their silence on the question of women's issues already demonstrates the value that to be human is to be male. In their treatment of value judgements as non-issues, they remain as self-referential as any positivistic science. The objectivist suppression of the non-rational and the elevation of the rational imagines that words can be used to construct external reality. In the suppression of non-rational qualities such as value, sentiment, empathy and emotion, and the elevation of the rational, literary theories use words alone to construct a reality, "fashioned by particular people for particular reasons at a certain time" (Eagleton, 1983, p. 11). The theories are historically variable and have a close relation to social ideologies.

Benstock says that objective aesthetic distance is not only undesirable; it is also impossible. The dissection of literature as if it were an aesthetic machine denies the social, political and historical culture of which it is a part (Benstock, 1987). She continues that
Literature must not be seen in the dichotomous view of the male scientist as an "it" opposed to the "I" of the analyst. Nor must literature be seen as a transcendent string of disembodied masterpieces that are disconnected from their specific historical sociocultural locale. Literature, communities, critics, and authors must be seen as bound up in a relational network. Just as modern physics recognizes that reality is contingent upon the positional relativity of the observer, so must modern criticism reject the Newtonian notion of critical objectivity. A women's epistemology, as identified by modern theorists, is appropriately contextual and relational. (Benstock, 1987, pp. 106-07)

The assumption of critical objectivity is not simply a matter of the definitions of texts; it is "the assumption by which certain groups exercise and maintain power over others" (Eagleton, 1983, p.16). "Literary interpretation is a political act and like the politics of anything else, the main issue is power" (Fetterley, 1978, p. 4).

The extent to which masculinity and authorship merge in a culturally acceptable authority has been at the expense of a female definition of authorship in anything other than masculine terms (J. Frye, 1986; Fetterley, 1978). The peculiar form of powerlessness is not simply the erasure of efforts or the silencing of voice, nor is it the lack of recognition or legitimation of one's art. The powerlessness comes more significantly from the endless division of "self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male--to be universal...is to be not female" (Fetterley, 1978, p. xiii). "Forced in every way to identify with men, yet incessantly reminded of being woman, she undergoes a transformation into
an "it," the dominion of personhood lost indeed" (Fetterley, 1978, p. ix).

With success and authority defined in male terms, women readers, teachers and scholars are seduced into becoming willing accomplices of their own oppression. By accepting as normal and legitimate a male system of values, the immasculation of academic women is accomplished (Fetterley, 1978). Their bifurcated response and self-surveillance follows directly from the fact that the reality of patriarchy is constructed both inside and outside the reader. The representation of women in literature is not different from what happens in other art forms such as in visual representation when it is the male viewer’s gaze that defines women. Again women are split in the way they simultaneously watch themselves and watch men watching them as objects. As John Berger says of visual representation "Men act and women appear" (Berger, 1987, p. 47). Male control of textuality, even when women write, means that men never have to endure the gaze as "other." By firmly controlling self-enhancing readings, men can avoid the alienating readings they have allotted to women (Fetterley, 1978). "The female body is neither neutral or natural; it is clearly inscribed in a system of differences in which the male and his gaze hold power" (Hutcheon, 1989, p. 155).

A feminist literary theory has, as one part, the critique of theories which continue exclusionary practices by determining in advance what will be included. Feminist
literary criticism makes problematic women's point of view in literature, as an interest that has in interpretation theories, been underestimated, derided or ignored. The critique also extends to methodology that does not acknowledge the political nature of its organizing practices. Feminist literary theory, however, is more than a critique of men's studies.

Feminist literary studies begins with experiences of reading the text from a women's point of view. The point of view locates experiences in social constructs which are also part of the reading. The readings make the experiences problematic by revealing how they relate to material social practices in women's lives and the power relations which structure the experiences both inside and outside the text.

As a representation of their experiences, male and female fantasies about reality are valued differently. In using the written word, it is the literary medium that remains available to women, and women's reality is mainly revealed not only in but also as fiction. Other genres that women often use such as journals, diaries and letters, are often discounted as literature because they cannot be written off as fiction. Men's fiction, however, can be read in the law, the universities, the churches, the civil and moral codes by which our society is ordered. It is male subjectivity that has created this reality. This is the story of men's reading of their own world and of the world of others. Because they are recorded as fiction, women's
accounts of their own reality need not be believed (Brossard cited in Daurio, 1991, p. 20). The accounts of women remain for those who know how to read them.

In the experiences of others expressed in literature, women can read themselves. Indeed, the reason why some women become feminists is not that they have necessarily read something new or learned new facts "but they have come to view those facts from a different position, from their own position as subject" (Alcoff, 1988, p. 286). Reading the text as a woman is a profoundly important step toward a feminist interpretation of texts.

**Women's Knowledge: Apart or A Part**

The sameness/difference debate in feminist philosophy has long ago been described as dated, boring, and a concept women struggled with before they discovered poststructuralism. While the debate may be all of these things in a philosophical sense, it continues to have practical relevance for predicting some of the pitfalls and institutional traps for feminist literary criticism. Conceptualized more broadly, on the sameness side of the debate, are women’s issues and feminist philosophy to be seen merely as yet another good idea; the alternate question being whether women are to claim status only in their difference from men.

In response to these persisting questions, I discuss some of the understandings about women’s distinct positions
revealed through debate described as sameness versus difference, and the further contributions of poststructuralist theorizing. My concluding remarks refocus the questions away from an analysis of the problem to look instead at the answers that are always already present.

J. Frye (1986) identifies some of the significant issues in feminist literary criticism in her discussion of the tension between sameness and difference as represented by criticism found in Anglo-American and French feminist thinking, respectively. She succinctly describes the debate as the dominant concern in American feminist criticism, with its experiential basis, and the dominant concern in much of French feminist criticism, as evident in the commitment and 'l’écriture féminine' to language, theory, textual femininity, and the female unconscious. (p. 15)

Although the experientially based American feminist criticism is in danger of representing just one more sociological grouping, the French feminist insistence on speaking through the body renders women’s difference to be essentialist, and nearly inaudible and inaccessible.

J. Frye (1986, p. 15) names the sameness versus difference debate as the Scylla and Charybdis of feminist analysis. The problem with such naming of sameness or difference, however, is that it takes as the norm that to be different is to be apart from the standard, which in literature and the academic tradition, is to be male. Schweickart (1986) suggests that we remain captivated by the notion of maleness as the standard model of humanity.
More than a philosophical argument about speaking and writing, the debate highlights practical concerns about whether women's participation in such events as writing novels, writing literary criticism, teaching at a university, or being a student can be done without being absorbed into the sameness of masculinist constructions. Theories of difference and sameness are much more complicated than the polarity of meaning implied by the words. To say that women ascribe to one polarity or the other in their theory making is a denial of the consciousness that sees an issue not in black and white, but in colour. The lack of resolution to this debate may be an indication that the question does not fit the evidence at hand; there is no generalization or single definition that will describe the multivocality of women's voices.

It should come as no surprise that voices which alternately claim positions of sameness and difference often sound contradictory, tentative, evasive, or impatient. The difficulty is in using the tools of, and taking positions within, a male dominated construct such as the university without losing one's voice. The danger is that the feminist critique and knowledge, like women's knowledge in the past, may be reduced or simply conflated as another topic of discussion, reduced to sameness.

According to Culler "feminist criticism...has had a greater effect on the literary canon than any other critical movement and...has arguably been one of the most powerful
forces of renovation in contemporary criticism" (1982, p. 30). For some, feminist literary criticism is appealing because of the soundness and freshness of its argument, the reconnections between theory and life, and the re-examination of personal practice. In spite of its appeal, it is possible to read and accept the analysis of feminist literary criticism and to ignore its political intent. Unless there is a connection between the theory and the political context of the cultural, such as in classroom practice, for example, feminist analysis will become another lifeless museum piece. The analogy by Greta Nemiroff is apt in which she describes one-way communication in Women's Studies classes as "talking head pedagogy" (1989, p. 3).

Feminist analysis that remains theoretical and propositional is a contradiction in terms. Divorce feminist literary analysis from its intent of social change and it becomes, with variations, much the same as any other literary theory. When the acceptance of feminist literary analysis amounts to no more than making room for a few more books on the library shelf, the distinct political intent has been dissolved in sameness.

To continue to promote such obvious inequalities as male dominated reading lists and inequitable classroom practices which ignore the distribution of power between men and women is to have coopted feminist analysis against itself. Just as adoption of gender equity programs does not necessarily promote feminist thought, it is possible to
subvert the radical intent of feminist literary criticism by naming it as merely an alternative agenda item.

The reception of feminist theory into traditional philosophy is an example of how the prevailing structures have tended to blunt the radical nature of the feminist project. Kingdom suggests that philosophy may be a way for the academy to make feminism more acceptable and to cure what is said to be wrong with it. At the same time "Feminism becomes coopted by philosophy...making it less extreme and more popular to all but feminists" (Kingdom, 1987, p. 9). In sharing some characteristics with postmodernism, feminist philosophy is sometimes seen as yet another insight into the "grand narrative." By permitting selected ethical issues or even gender equity to rise to the level of debate, traditional philosophy is rescued, begrudgingly, from remoteness and impersonal objectivity. Feminist philosophy may enter the discourse by performing its womanly role of humanizing the conversation.

A monologic version of feminist literary theory obscures differences between women and removes differences based on race, class, and age. The assumption of sameness obscures individual variation, whereas the reification of difference forecloses on the recognition of common ground shared by humanity.

Feminist literary criticism questions whether available language can elucidate women's lives or whether women's use of language as a male construct merely reinforces the status
quo. Can women interpret their experience in any way other than how it is already interpreted through language? The experience itself is already an interpretation and the reflection and articulation which follow are at least second and third hand attempts to create meaning. A feminist commitment to participate in cultural change takes place in part through the re-shaping of the conventions of language and form. The question raised by French feminist literary critics is that if our language as an agent of change is suspect, how can language and its conventions be used to make transparent women’s experience? What can be said for language-based media such as novels and classroom discourse if language and its use betray women?

In conversations with women about their classes, I often hear them express frustrations about their inability to participate and be heard as they would like. Unfortunately, some of the best of intentions and the presumption of equal opportunity for male and female students only heightens their frustrations. This presumption of equality acts as an invisible barrier because while it represents equal treatment of individuals, the male dominated terms for approaching the material are clear and unequivocal. For women, the disjunction is most noticeable when they participate in all female sessions and alternately in mixed gender sessions. In her experience of the latter, a friend of mine remarked, "I’m speaking a different language that they can’t even hear." While I do not for a
minute claim that women-exclusive sessions are unproblematic, the problems are compounded when women's voices are not allowed to speak for themselves; women as a subdominant group, have learned to speak the language of domination and are relegated to speak their thoughts forever in translation. For women who struggle daily to claim their education, frustration has already led to despair when they conclude, "Our mother tongue cannot be heard in this context."

Feminist literary critics are concerned that the novelistic capacity, preempted by male-dominant language, does not permit both the representation of women's experience and the redefinition of the premises for the representation. The alternate methods for reading women's texts helps to identify the subversive representation of women's lives.

Feminist scholarship has added to notions of what is literary by considering the wide range in which women's writing appears. Robinson suggests that "women's letters, diaries, journals, autobiographies, oral histories, and private poetry have come under critical scrutiny as evidence of women's consciousness and expression" (Robinson in Showalter, 1985, p. 117). Women's writing challenges the canonical definitions of the literary aesthetic and the limitation of forms in which literature may be found by "measuring literature against an understanding of authentic female life" (Donovan, 1989, p. 46). The development of a
feminist poetics emerges not simply as a definition of women’s experience in literature but as a "shared inquiry into the understanding of female experience and its relationship to literature" (Donovan, 1989, p.17).

An example of women’s reading of each other’s lives is found in the short story "A Jury of her Peers" by Susan Glaspell (1916). In this story, some women accompany their husbands who have come to investigate the motive for the murder of a local farmer at the hand of his wife. The woman’s guilt is established, but the motive remains unclear. While the men on their official business search elsewhere, the visiting women occupy themselves with the guilty woman’s world of the kitchen. There the women read telltale signs of an unhappy life revealed in the otherwise meaningless disorder of the woman’s kitchen. The subtle disarray has meaning which speaks to those who know how to read. The men return from their unfruitful search for a motive and chide their wives for their womanly preoccupations of quilting and housekeeping. The story, when told in its completeness, exemplifies women’s exclusion from the search for truth and reveals how women’s culture is "invisible, silenced, trivialized, and wholly ignored in men’s construction of reality" (Andersen, 1988, p. 37). The story also exemplifies how women can read the effects of their experiences in the representation of other women’s lives.
In the next section I discuss the location of women in both subjective and theoretical positions: "how is one located in competing subjective realities and the social interests on behalf of which they work?" (Weedon, 1987, p. 8). The discussion is important because it finds women located neither in the ghetto of difference promoted by essentialism, nor as an addendum to the traditional canon, but as active agents in the creation of meaning. More than passive recipients of culture, women actively participate in the historical, specific, and contingent movement in which their position is located. In this positioning women are both active and passive in the construction of society.

The "I" Witness Account

Showalter asks "What is the difference of women's writing?" (1987, p. 248). We see that feminist literary criticism is more than what once was its principal mode: that of woman as reader. The emphasis is more strongly focussed on gynocritics: women's writing, that is, "the study of woman as writer, of history, styles, themes, genres, and structures of writing by women; the psychodynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evolution and laws of a female literary tradition" (Schweickart, 1986, p. 38). How is women's voice revealed?

This section has practical relevance to the question of how women will claim the right to speak about the texts and
contexts which they read. Before they risk exposure of private voices made public, women will want to have considered these questions, which I first ask myself. As a student of literary theory, on what authority can I speak of what I know as a woman in a way that will not discount my words? In acknowledgement of my gender, how will my words be received? In light of various theories of interpretation about the nature of womanness, where do I begin?

Some of these answers are found in the assumptions that in the feminist project to decentre the category "man", one cannot claim an essentialism for "woman." Humanist discourses offer a variety of essentialist explanations to describe the category 'woman' as she is, a fixed, coherent subject (Weedon, 1987). I suggest it is not easy for us as Western thinkers to lay aside our quest for certainty or an explanation about how we come to be as we are. Our continual search for causes reflects our belief that one of the most important questions we can be asking is "Why?" We also understand that the answer itself is not as important as our faith that indeed there is an answer. The poststructuralist decentred subjectivity is disturbing to those who would like to say, "Yes, yes, I understand all that, but how are we gendered? How do we come to be essentially female or essentially male?" The poststructuralist response is that subjectivity and consciousness are socially produced in language and as such
are a site of struggle and potential change (Weedon, 1987, p. 41).

The attempt of various philosophies to describe the essential nature of human beings is outlined by Weedon. For example, liberal political philosophy ascribes to a unified rational consciousness; the belief that there is an essence of womanhood is at the heart of much radical-feminist discourse; and for the humanist Marxist, the true human nature is our champion against alienation by capitalism. Against these subjectivities described as an irreducible humanist essence, "post-structuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987, p. 33).

Even though gender identity in psychoanalytic theory is not fixed to the same degree that it is in biological determinism, psychoanalysis assumes the existence of basic structures prior to their discursive realization (Weedon, 1987, p. 50). A continual search for the origins of a gendered identity reflects our notion that meaning is given rather than constituted. It reflects our assumption, which we can hardly escape, that our humanness is fundamentally and essentially grounded. Perhaps it is the very lack of certainty and determinism in the appropriation of our sexuality that necessitates virulent social control over how our sexuality is constituted.
The significance of abandoning this essential subjectivity of the human being is that it opens for discussion the forms that subjectivity may take. According to poststructuralists, the meaning of what it is to be a woman or man, for example, is produced historically and, as such, is open to change. These categories of man or woman are not immutable but change with the range of discursive practices in which they are constituted. Weedon continues that "if we assume that subjectivity is discursively produced in social institutions and processes, there is no given reason why we should privilege sexual relations above other forms of social relation as constitutive of identity" (Weedon, 1987, p. 50).

The qualities ascribed to one gender or another and the values we have attached to our practices are derived from social, changeable causes which do not rest on any inherently superior way of being. For example, a teacher who attempts to share power with students in a classroom can expect her efforts to be opposed and undervalued because, in general, the norm for interaction at universities has been inscribed as one-way from teacher to student and not cooperative or inclusive. Even though the dissimilar styles of sharing power, as opposed to wielding it, could be judged as democratic versus authoritarian, respectively, the former will meet with less success because it is not what the institution, consisting of systems and people, has come to
expect. We find it difficult to view actions as neutral if we already have an image of what we expect to see.

Weedon says that "social meanings are produced within social institutions and practices in which individuals, who are shaped by these institutions, are agents of change, rather than its authors, change which may either serve hegemonic interests or challenge existing power relations" (Weedon, p. 25). Feminist use of poststructuralist theory concludes that if the power that supports an hegemonic system is neither fixed nor inherent in that system, then it is also available for use by those who formerly acted as if they were powerless.

The criticism of poststructuralism by feminist scholars such as Donovan (1989) is that in the pluralism and ambiguity of the decentred subject, the radical intent of the feminist project is neutralized. In other words, what is gone is not just a plurality of places for women to stand, but the very position of "woman" at all. Deconstructionist theory blocks political identity and any kind of agency (Donovan, 1989, p. x-xi), thereby removing the grounding for a feminist politics. In that deconstructionism is described as "inherently anti-political and conservative" (Donovan, 1989, p. xi), it parts company with feminist philosophy to whose agenda it sometimes runs parallel. Jane Flax suggests that "The relation of feminist theorizing to the postmodern project of deconstructionism is necessarily ambivalent" (Flax, 1990, p. 82). In the
ambiguity that comes with the deferral of fixed meaning, feminist poststructuralism finds in the production of conflicting and competing meanings a discourse that is historically and socially specific (Weedon, 1987, p. 86).

The problem remains then of how to proceed: where are women to begin speaking and writing about their lives as women? Without grounding in any field of inquiry or study but language, is women’s writing abandoned to the invisible world of the non-living, waiting for attachment to and identity with one institution or another? It is not by relativism or by the openness of liberalism that women presume to speak in their own voices. Access to agency in language occurs "by looking at a discourse in operation, in a specific historical context, it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment" (Weedon, 1987, p. 111). Women’s expression of themselves in text has the effect of constituting their experience as both object and subject of what they write and read. Insofar as women read and find written an argument for their own self-expression, women, both reader and writer, become the subject of the writing. This concomitant engagement of the other calls neutrality into question, and reading women writing becomes a political act. In the feminist project, to come to terms with the historically mutable and changing forms of "woman," women claim power for self-definition, to speak themselves into the world.
J. Frye's explanation of "The Subversive 'I'" reveals how the novelistic form of first person singular--the "I am...is itself one of the most powerful expressions of women's capacity to resist cultural definition" (Frye, 1986, p. 64). The one who calls herself "I" both defines herself and subverts entrapment as "other," as someone who is "different from," a standard model of humanity. The character who sets in motion, interacts and acts is always, already in motion, is not a static reality acted upon by some authority or confined by some gender-specific definition. The narrating "I" claims selfhood, not in a static sense of a resemblance to other forms, but in a dynamic voice speaking in complexity and experience. "As the visible agent, the female 'I' refuses objectification and assumes the capacity to act" (J. Frye, 1986, p. 65). Margaret Atwood concludes "The writer is both an eye-witness and an I-witness, the one to whom personal experience happens and the one who makes experience personal for others" (Atwood, 1982, p. 348).

Women are not adequately described by biologically based theories of sexual difference or by scientific discourse as in Freudian theory. Neither are women to be identified by their specific social practices (Jacobus, 1986) or rendered neutral by the abstract discourses of philosophy. The irony of the elusive representation of women in writing is that we assume the representation is there at all, that the struggle for self-definition remains
even though it is repressed and identified as other. Whether reflected in women’s literary tradition, language or culture, the search for this description is, according to Jacobus, a political response. She writes

[T]he emphasis on women’s writing politicizes in a flagrant and polemical fashion the "difference" which has traditionally been elided by criticism and by the canon formations of literary history. To label a text as that of a woman, and to write about it for that reason, makes vividly legible what the critical institution has either ignored or acknowledged only under the sign of inferiority. We need the term "women’s writing" if only to remind us of the social conditions under which women wrote and still write—to remind us that the conditions of their (re)production are the economic and educational disadvantages, the sexual and material organizations of society, which, rather than biology, form the crucial determinants of women’s writing. (Jacobus, 1986, pp. 63-64)

Waiting for the arrival of the "most correct" reason for being able to speak at all will, of course, continue women’s silence. The search for such an answer has two assumptions which tie in to the rationalist, essentialist thinking which we find so hard to avoid. First, the assumption that there is a "correct" feminism, or even women’s standpoint has, already been soundly laid aside by other writers as the appeal for one essentialism over another. Secondly, it is harder to begin without answers to essentialist questions if we still believe in the efficacy of such questions to validate our acts. In the meantime, whether they are feminists or have ever read a word of any philosophy (which excludes more than it includes), the power relations in women’s lives are carried out in material
conditions of contest and struggle. It is not necessary to have a particular ideological orientation to know you are oppressed, discounted, marginalized. Perhaps the refusal to accept these conditions is a pre-condition for self-definition and speech. It is in the local, historical and contingently constructed discourse, that women act as agents on their own behalf in the production of meaning.

The project of gynocritics as defined by Elaine Showalter encompasses the notion that criticism alone does not establish women's voices. For her the focus on reading as women has long passed and the issue at hand is the sound of women's writing. Freedom from essentialism and the determination of the subject encourage and challenge women to uncover their own complicity with domination and to discover what it means not only to reproduce their history, but to produce it in ways that affirm their present.
Chapter 4

The University as (Con)text

Journal Entry

This is not the first time I have experienced this unsettling mixture of self-doubt, anger and confusion. For the class today, I had done the readings diligently. Sometimes I didn’t understand it, but pushed on because I want to learn what people have to think and say about topics like language and learning, hermeneutics and the dialectic. I had done my homework, made notes, had several questions to ask and offer opinions for some of them. I was prepared. But I left anyway, and the feeling I had today as I walked downtown across the bridge was not unlike what I remember when I was a child, and my brother and his friends ran away when they saw me coming, and my mother told me that girls don’t play boys’ games.

I learned a lot from today. I am quite astounded at the gripping quality—perhaps pre-hensile—of my fear of being wrong. It was partly a set-up too—here where I want so desperately to be right. I am not berating myself for not speaking up because if I had been able to speak I would have done so. As well, it is futile for me to make this a private crusade to revamp every class I take so that it offers students, particularly women, more than just an objective discourse. But how does anyone circumvent this
academic hegemony and learn to speak, for example, using the personal narrative? Whatever has to happen, I have quite a ways to go in affirming my own voice before speaking in front of potential critics.

Some of the conclusions my mind would like to draw, right or not, are these: (1) I need to learn more about the topic under discussion so I will have the confidence to speak up. (2) I should just stop trying to participate in these classes because there are other things I can do anyway. (3) I will go back and make myself speak in a way that is useful to me. (4) I need to practise making conscious what I know so that I can articulate it to the class. (5) I am interested in the wrong topic. (6) The male right to define knowledge is men's power over women.

I won't forget how I was silenced today because by losing my voice, I somehow have developed clearer vision. I know I'm going to find something worthwhile to do with my insight and anger.

What is Feminist Pedagogy?

Why is feminist pedagogy so difficult for me to describe? First, because there is no specific set of practices or a recipe of how to conduct a class whose end product will be, for example, a group of politically correct, feminist thinkers. No one should be surprised by the lack of a feminist formula because the practice of feminist pedagogy, by definition, resists a singular set of
principles, objectives and aims. The pedagogical process is difficult to name even if those doing the naming can specify precisely what they want to see as an outcome or goal. The difficulty of naming a feminist pedagogy increases when we acknowledge the plurality of women’s voices, feminist theories, points of view and political agendas.

Feminist pedagogy is difficult to describe because there is no single best picture of what it looks like; I am not discussing only representation, but what there is to represent. What I mean by this is that feminist pedagogy not only resists categorization, but it is a practice that is difficult to perform in the context of certainties and knowledge as truth found at the university. Is this to be a discussion of methods of feminist pedagogy? Not likely. A description of classroom practice? Not yet. A selection of the best theoretical positions? Impossible to achieve. Reasons why all of these things are difficult? An endless job. The location of the educator? A personal decision. The need for strategic planning? Necessary always.

I am being most faithful to feminist pedagogy when I share the ambiguous thoughts that have occurred to me before and during my investigations. Every text I interview offers yet another question in the series of questions already asked. What does feminist pedagogy look like? How does it happen? Why doesn’t it happen more often?

There are those who would look for facile solutions to these questions and who ask feminist teachers for
categorical descriptions of their pedagogy compared to "regular" teaching practices. Many who ask have not taken seriously or have never understood the dilemma of women in positions of authority who struggle not to reproduce oppressive conditions for others.

I have avoided answering these questions for three chapters by first addressing the context in which these questions may be applied. I have outlined some of the reasons why feminist practices in many ways are not welcomed, if indeed they will be tolerated. For as well as challenging the university discourse about knowledge, how it is constructed, and whether it reflects women's experiences, feminist critical pedagogy also addresses the social context of education and the relations of particular interests and power.

The examples of teaching strategies from people who have taught from a feminist perspective are marked as much by their diversity as by their agreement, carried out in endless variety, on the need for social change in women's lives. The need for diverse strategies is surely required when we look at the oppression under which women suffer and acknowledge that the stratifications such as race, age, and sexual orientation are as inseparable from each of us as is our gender.

There is no prescription or recipe for how this activity that I, for the sake of convenience, call feminist pedagogy, is carried out. As a distinct body of knowledge
about educational practices, feminist pedagogy does not exist. While it is not difficult to describe some of the forms that have become familiar in many feminist classes, a description of these forms should not be mistaken for a description of feminist pedagogy. Classes which are learner-centered, discussion-based, consensus-forming, interactive, self-disclosing, and creative are also characteristics of many adult education classes based on humanistic learning principles. While use of one or more of these forms may create the possibility of a feminist pedagogy, they do not define how this interpretive and creative process takes place.

The lack of specificity does not come simply from the relative newness of interest in feminist practices or in their inordinate scope. The teaching event, as an interpretive process, cannot be discussed separately from the context of the classroom including the power relations, the politics of the topic or the people involved.

The discussion that follows is neither an attempt to acknowledge a correct theory or correct form of practice, but to acknowledge that feminist practice is "not an empirically knowable entity but lies in ways of thinking" (Probyn, 1990, p. 178). What I am discussing is not so much a set of practices as an attitude, an understanding or personal belief about the commitment to feminist agendas for social change. Feminist pedagogy is more than anything
else, a political act for social change in the conditions of women's lives.

**Is the Subject Fixed Yet?**

The feminist poststructuralist view that I discussed in the previous chapter is most helpful now in elucidating an understanding of a feminist pedagogy. In the departure from the poststructuralism of Lacan, Barthes and others, feminist poststructuralism assumes a subjectivity in order "to make sense of society and ourselves" (Weedon, 1987, p. 173). The significance of this assumption about women's subjectivity is that it is played out in the absence of universal notions about truth, essential humanism and the prescriptions of gender. Women's subjectivity is located in the particular material conditions, the discursive practices and the everydayness of women's experiences. Similarly, the university system is founded in "conditions of existence which are at one and the same time both material and discursive" (Weedon, 1987, p. 8). As educators we can ask ourselves what modes of subjectivity are open for us to read and what are the implications in political terms. In this reading, classroom practices of power and discourse are a necessary part of what is examined in feminist pedagogy. The particular ways of fixing identity and meaning are important to recognize for their political implications as feminist pedagogy is involved in the practice of
transforming the material conditions of women’s access to and production of knowledge.

The lack of fixity of feminist pedagogy is also part of the meaning to be derived from feminist classroom practice. Feminist political practice is "a patchwork of overlapping alliances" spoken of "in the plural as the practice of feminisms" (Nicholson, 1990, p. 35). This plurality recognizes that even though we cannot ever come to know each other as fully as we describe ourselves, we can decide to act together in ways that protect the differences that will never be shared. Similarly, on a personal level, we are never fully aware of the extent to which conscious practices such as patriarchy are also constructed in the unconscious. We continually construct knowledge of ourselves in the everydayness of our experiences. Feminist postructuralism recognizes that these things are not given, but constructed, and that knowledge, the other and we ourselves are locally and contingently constituted.

A feminist pedagogy is a practice that is attentive to more than the theoretical prerequisites of dealing with diversity; it is a pedagogy that takes seriously the reality of the other within the feminist political agenda in practical terms as well. The paragraphs that follow illustrate some of the assumptions for practising diversity in an atmosphere in which change for all parties can take place.
Elizabeth Ellsworth (1989) describes her experiences as a White middle-aged woman and professor engaged with students in developing an anti-racist course. Two important questions raised by Ellsworth's article and shared by feminist pedagogy are these: first, what diversity do we silence in the name of "liberatory" education? Or, how can feminist pedagogy avoid strategies which repress differences such as race, class, age (to name but a few). Second, what is required of the teacher and students?

Students noted that in the discourse of some other anti-racist classes, certain groups ended up oppressing women and adopting an analysis that excluded students of some ethnicities. In Ellsworth's course the students learned that their struggle against racism came not only from their common commitment but also from what they did not share--their gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity and other differences. Each one had a particular view of racism based on personal experience and on the social history of the distinct group to which each person belonged. As part of larger groups elsewhere, their strategies for fighting racism had to be interrogated for the implications that the strategies had for recreating an oppression in another sphere. In other words, how could their anti-racist strategies make things better without making them worse? The students' proposal used to judge any action they would take was subjected to this question: "To what extent do our political strategies and alternative narratives about social
difference succeed in alleviating campus racism while at the same time managing *not to undercut* the efforts of other social groups to win self-definition?" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 318)

In a paper on feminist research practices, Kate Sandilands (1990) draws many conclusions that are equally applicable to the question of pedagogical practices. In a way that is useful for education, she defines method as part of the social construction of reality and as the practice of knowledge. Her following remarks about research apply equally well to the discussion of how pedagogy may be carried out.

The point is not...to use feminist research to validate any and all frames of reference. Rather, if our goal is to use knowledge (of the self and the world) to effect change, then we are capable of using the tension between statuses, between "insider" and "outsider," to build a set of partial affinities, a coalition of related and critically self-reflective interests rather than a totalizing strategy of unidimensionally defined identifications. These processes can and do begin in the particular situations of feminist research, and constitute our chosen method of understanding. (Sandilands, 1990, p. 18)

In like manner, there is no single feminist pedagogy because there is no single representation of identity or reality as "our knowledge of the particular is derived from both theoretical and contextual insight" (Sandilands, 1990, p. 18). The living out of feminist theory within the context of patriarchal institutions is, perhaps, the greatest challenge to feminist pedagogy.
In a discussion of research methods, Sandilands states that the problem of the researcher dominating the researched cannot be overcome simply by allowing the participant to define her own agenda and to speak her own life without interruption. The same dilemma exists for a teacher who does not wish to dominate a women's studies class simply by having a student reach some sense of empowerment through consciousness raising understood in the teacher's framework. More specifically, what does the teacher do with her own knowledge and agenda in light of students' experience? Nor can the difference in power be erased by the use of empathy which, in fact, may exacerbate the domination. The oppression of empathy has the potential to detract or subsume the interests of lines crossed by race, class, or sexuality (or nationality, region, time, age, etc.). The empathic expression "I understand" sets up the structure wherein all differences between the two are measured against the definition of "how am I the same?" (Sandilands, 1990, p. 17). How identity is maintained in the classroom is a question raised by the liberal humanist and the critical pedagogue alike. In light of the subjugation of women's knowledge, feminist pedagogy is especially sensitive to the voice of the non-dominant discourse, the voice of the other. Feminist theory and classroom practice work against a situation in which the discourse remains grounded in the teacher's version of identity, "which will, in that context,
define the truth of the situation" (Sandilands, 1990, p. 17).

Feminist theory is informed by first person accounts which provide information and expand available knowledge. Perhaps even more important, the strength of first person accounts as the beginning of understanding, underscores women’s interpretations of themselves and the world. This insistence on the personal or at least the positional is at odds with institutionalized meanings that privilege patriarchy as a universal interpretation. The tension arises between feminist theoretical knowledge and institutional methods for reaching understanding of the knowledge. This gap between theory and practice is the difficulty or pitfall inherent in critical pedagogy.

**Misreading Feminist Pedagogy**

The reason I am discussing critical pedagogy is because, while the ideas themselves are useful to feminist pedagogy, some of the terms such as "empowerment," "student voice," "dialogue" and "critical reflection" need further examination to see that, as noted by Ellsworth (1989), they are not actually repressive myths. For example, for whose empowerment is this model at work? Who will do the empowering, and to what end? A system that assumes fully rationalized, individual subjects capable of agreeing on universalizable principles is, by virtue of its assumptions, incapable of uncovering the patriarchal structures of power
and knowledge and other organizing bases in the classroom; equally opaque remain the conscious and unconscious processes of both students and teachers.

Unless the assumptions, goals and issues of who produces knowledge remain untheorized and unaddressed, "critical pedagogues will continue to perpetuate relations of domination in their classrooms" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 297). She observes that the discourse of critical pedagogy by reproducing relations of domination in the classroom has itself become a vehicle of oppression. The idea of who the class "should" be and what "should" be happening in the classroom ignores the context specificity of the classroom and the social identities of the individuals who comprise it.

Critical pedagogy has a way of satisfying itself by its own theory, a way of relying on the power of discourse to come to an understanding of the "other." But merely setting up the ground rules for dialogue does not address various forms of resistance to participation including the acknowledgement of how one is implicated in the information. The writing of Henry Giroux (1988) is an example of critical pedagogy that misses the point about resistance. In formulaic fashion he envisages that in the goals of dialogue, all voices will be unified in their identification of suffering and their desire to alleviate it. (Giroux, 1988, p. 72). Unfortunately, the assumption that dialogue will undo the asymmetrical positions of difference and
privilege does not make it so. Such assumptions about the fairness of the democratic process can make it even more difficult for the non-dominant to speak. The assumptions about the unity of efforts and values conflates differences in a way that is repressive, aligning participants into "us" and "them" status. In a classroom, attempts to achieve harmony of interests may be both impossible and undesirable if the rules of dialogue are used as yet another way to manipulate the range of interpretations. Gayatri Spivak quoted in Ellsworth (1989, p. 322) calls the search for a coherent narrative "counterproductive." In Ellsworth's anti-racist class, the collective struggle was not made on the basis of sameness, but on the acknowledgement that unity was fragmentary, unstable, not given, but chosen.

I think it is a simple matter for the radical intent of feminist pedagogy to become elided with critical pedagogy. When this elision occurs feminist pedagogy loses its radicality and begins to look like nothing more than many other classroom situations characterized by student discussion, sometimes heated, around a particular social issue. In Ellsworth's classroom, it was not enough to make oppression relative by claiming it as the one thing all students had in common; rather, it became necessary to clarify the oppression and insist that it be understood and struggled against contextually. The task was seen "not as one of building democratic dialogue between free and equal individuals, but building a coalition among the multiple,
shifting, intersecting and sometimes contradictory groups carrying equal weights of legitimacy within the culture and the classroom" (Ellsworth, 1989, p. 317).

Feminist pedagogy is ripe for cooptation into other pedagogical forms because, for one thing, it is difficult to do and sustain given the uncertainly of what can be known and what should be done. As well, the position of the teacher is neither prescribed nor predicted in any theoretical framework of methodological practice. In the reformulation of pedagogy and knowledge, feminist practice is profoundly contextual and interdependent.

The richness of feminist pedagogy stems from an explicit recognition of a "plurality of understandings, [a] rejection of a single 'truth for all women'" (Sandilands, 1990, p. 19). At the same time, this richness also makes it difficult to resist cooptation or lapsing of such a generous philosophy into a liberal notion of individuality. The feminist political agenda of social change, however, serves as the main criterion by which feminist pedagogues can decide whether they are making their practice better without making it worse. A quotation from Sandilands (1990) summarizes.

We speak, then, from both specificity and context relevant generality; what we speak are not immutable truths upon which we reflect and act. They are not, I suggest, mere "opinion," but are self-critical and contextual statements of purposively-constructed generality which, to paraphrase Engels, are "valid" insofar as they are applicable in practice. (Sandilands, 1990, p. 12)
But how are we to assess what is valid and applicable in practice? While some assessments can only be made while the action is taking place, we can also use theoretical knowledge to predict what some outcomes will be.

What will the theory come to mean when it is put into practice? The search for meaning in people's lives is being conducted at a scavenger hunt pitch if we can judge by the plethora of self-help books offering theories and/or practices of how to make sense of the world. We see popular evidence of the desire to understand the changes in female/male relations brought about since the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Books with theories about how gender relations work (or don't work) followed by solutions are found on nearly every bookstand. Let us consider as an example, the outcomes of the solutions proposed by popular writer Anne Wilson Schaef (Schaef & Fassel, 1988). In order to assess its usefulness in women's lives, I will follow one of Schaef's most popular theories to conclusions about its practical applications. In Women's Reality (1982), Schaef describes what she calls the White Male System as a worldview in which power and influence are held by males and perpetuated by them (p. 7). This system is one in which we all participate. Schaef uses addictions theory research to describe the similarities between the White Male System and substance or process addictions. She says that it is most important to look at how we react to the White Male System because just as co-dependent behaviour
on the part of others actively perpetuates the process of the addict, certain reactive behaviour, particularly on the part of women, also perpetuates the actions of those who operate according the White Male System. Schaef’s most remarkable claim is that if people stopped living in what she calls the Reactive Female System, then the White Male System would collapse. She suggests that there are alternate processes that are supportive and life giving that do not work to perpetuate the White Male System. Rather than being extricably tied to a malignant process in the way co-dependency and addictions are linked, Schaef’s theory offers alternative choices for feminist action beyond this unhealthy dualism.

As a popular theorist whose books sell widely, Schaef was very well received in her address to the Status of Women Conference of the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (1990). I will assess her theories as ones which enjoy current popularity among women in relation to the potential for the promotion of social change for women.

First, in addictions theory, the co-dependent is restored to wholeness by refocussing attention from the problems of the addict to the needs of the co-dependent. As mentioned in the previous chapter, feminist literary criticism is not concerned so much with a critique of the androcentrism of the canon, but with gynocritics, the development of women’s aesthetic and forms of writing. Women’s agenda and literary production exists without
comparison to the white male canon as the standard for knowing. Feminist pedagogical practices and the inclusion of information about women are their own referent for knowledge claims. Schaef would agree that a feminist agenda is not centred on the showing up or the correction of the partial knowledge of men’s studies.

In contrast, the addiction theory and the role assigned to women as co-dependents once again leaves women in the position of victim. Schaef’s claim that co-dependence is what keeps the addictive system in place leaves the responsibility for change with the victim herself. Further, the victim has no alternative but to blame herself when this conversion has not yet been accomplished. The problem is that this analysis ends up blaming the victim and making her responsible for the solutions. In the face of such analysis we need to ask if this works toward social change and whether women’s interests are served by continually holding women responsible for injustice done to them.

The question of the correct theories and concomitant practices is always a dilemma in the midst of complex social relations. I suggest that while there is never a single right answer, there are several ways in which the best of intentions will be compromised in practice. For example, in commenting on the use of deconstructionism in much of American literary criticism, Weedon notes that much deconstructive textual analysis reaffirms the status quo. "[T]he implicit assumption that there is a free play of
meaning not already located in hierarchical network of discursive relations is to deny social power by rendering it invisible" (Weedon, 1987, p. 165).

Feminist practices agree that it is discourse which helps to name the social and material conditions of our existence and permits discussion of how they oppress us. As stated earlier, however, discourse does not necessarily bring to light the conditions of our oppression that are unconscious. Discourse and the ideas of a critical pedagogy are useful up to a point, but in the end, they do not go far enough to provide a motive for action. Critical pedagogy clouds the fact that nothing is happening insofar as it fails to alleviate problems of social context, particular interests, and power.

The issue remains that while there are many ways in which feminist theory and practice can be coopted by institutions without changing the status quo, the inverse corollary is equally dangerous: the paralyzing fear of cooptation. In an effort to have the right theory and action, we can become immobilized. In examining the result of any actions, we can be made to feel that what we do is never enough, never completely correct or worse, it might be coopted and used against the original purpose (Price, 1988). For example, one might wonder how academic feminists who work to transform practice can be providing anything more than an educational institutionalized fix by teaching at an institution that is in many ways antithetical to their
commitment as feminists. Or, how may a discussion of feminist pedagogy be more preoccupied by words and less concerned with practice?

The fear of cooptation and the desire for solidarity against outside criticism can lead women’s groups to a narrow range of acceptable theory and practice. Feminist groups often generate borders and dichotomies in the desire for unity or wholeness against the alienation and individualism of society. Young suggests "that the desire for mutual understanding and reciprocity underlying the ideal of community is similar to the desire for identification that underlies racial and ethnic chauvinism" (Young, 1990, p. 311). When women can speak only about those issues on which there is agreement, the desire for community helps to reproduce homogeneity. Factionalism and the inability to understand the other while professing similar ideologies comes as a disappointment for those hoping for solidarity and congruent action. The ideal of community, however, fails to address the political question of face-to-face relations (Young, 1990, p. 302). In other words, how can we be transparent to or claim understanding of another when our understanding of ourselves is partial and contingent at best? I think that the expectation of community and the desire for affirmation and support from likeminded people is a luxury we cannot look for when deciding to take action with others.
The cultural expectation of community as the opposite of individualism is similar to the way that femininity and masculinity are depicted as opposites. The disappointment at not finding congruence immediately demarcates what is outside the agreement and leaves the impression that if the likemindedness promised in community has failed, then the project has failed. Some understandings of community do include the politics of difference of which Young speaks; she suggests that a redefinition of the term "community" would be more useful than coining a new word. She concludes that the concept of social relations that embody openness to unassimilated otherness with justice and appreciation needs to be developed. Radical politics, moreover, must develop discourse and institutions for bringing differently identified groups together without suppressing or subsuming the differences. (Young, 1990, p. 320)

In the feminist project, it is the naming of oppression in the historical, the local, and the particular which grounds deliberate action and provides motivation for choosing to work with others.

This holding of differences is a great challenge to feminist practice partly because of the desire to protect feminist interests from outsiders and from criticism. But it is the lure of right theory and essentialist, monologic thinking that would seduce feminist practice into an ever closer fit with traditional institutions. As part of its acceptance into the academy, feminist practice is encouraged to provide grand metanarratives, to explain the loose ends,
to make things clear so that everyone will finally be able to understand what feminism is all about. Feminist pedagogy is made more difficult by assumptions such as these and by the routine expectations placed on consensus, group affiliation and community.

**What Do We Do On Monday?**

Even though one of the strengths of feminism is the ability to engage in many struggles simultaneously and to permit contradictory understandings, the contested terrain is classroom practice. Practical constraints always intrude in any efforts to speak openly about differences of opinion and experiences (Sandilands, 1990, p. 18). In the reality of the classroom, how much contextual insight will be permitted by the students, the teacher, or the institution?

The need for feminist pedagogy in institutions like the university is so great, that it would be a luxury to wait for the correct theoretical stance before taking action. The promotion of women's issues has so many agenda items worthy of immediate action that, if this were possible, the need is there to begin everything, everywhere, at once. While the discussions of pedagogical theory may be illuminating and perhaps find some agreement with the reader's thinking, it is in the classroom that theories and contextual insights are put to the test.

Feminist understanding of partial and subjugated knowledges is at odds with a teaching institution in which students have come to expect nothing more than overarching
theories and "proven facts." Demands of some students for "right answers" lead many teachers to deplore the concept of knowledge as nothing more than a marketable commodity.

A problem with describing teaching practices so that they are compatible with the feminist intent of social change through political action is that while the theory is acceptable as theory at the university, the teaching practices which are implicit in the theory cannot so readily find a place. Indeterminacy, contingency and the local construction of knowledge are not so easily accommodated by institutional concerns for systems and accountability and quantitative evaluation.

Many feminists have written about their teaching experiences in a way that helps us locate some practices that worked in the classroom. The discussion that follows is about particular practices that worked for feminists in their classrooms. The practices are reported as they are described in the literature without any attempt to group them into categories or to generalize about them.

1) Michele Russell begins the educative process in the present material conditions of the classroom itself. (1985, p. 163). Instead of dealing in abstractions, she exhorts us to "use everything." She describes the way in which the small and unyielding classroom furniture made the ample-bodied, mostly black students feel awkward, restless and furtive. Russell starts with the physical conditions of the classroom to discuss the unnecessary ways in which the
educational process makes people feel slighted and uncomfortable. Russell's "use of everything" makes problematic "what is" in an examination of the education activity.

2) Janice Raymond (1985) calls on feminists to teach passionately, not by preaching or proselytizing, but by being unguarded in showing that we care about learning. Passion is involved in showing students the proud traditions of women and in teaching students that we think they are capable of doing the same. Feminist teaching is not a disembodied enterprise. "We look at our subject with passion because we are our subject" (Raymond, 1985, p. 58).

3) Barbara Hillyer Davis (1985) describes the difference that has occurred in women's literature classes compared to when they were first offered. The class constituency has gone from being mostly feminists to some feminists and mostly traditional female and some male students. The difficulty in educating each group in the presence of the others is largely a problem of language. The need of the traditional students is to learn how to analyze their lives as women, while the "advanced" students need to learn to appreciate the life stories of traditional women and men. Segregating the groups into "beginning" and "advanced" may be an easy solution, but it is not a good one. By interacting with each other, the beginning groups learn the words, ideas and language of feminist discourse.
and the advanced groups act as translators, observing in others, the power of language to change consciousness.

3) Margo Culley (1985) believes that the details and injustices in women's lives are cause for anger, a force which she investigates with her classes on women's issues. Her goal is "to permit the acknowledgement and claiming of anger as one's own, and to direct its legitimate energy toward personal and social change" (Culley, 1985, p. 212). She begins her large lecture classes of 250 students with readily available, public statistics on the facts of women's lives concerning education, employment, and income levels. Students are often startled and angered by the data and soon begin challenging the sources, validity, and method of compiling the data, as well as questioning the professor's relationship to men. She examines the issues with the students and looks at the anger in a lesson on the displacement of negative feelings. In acknowledging their anger, she asks the students to consider the anger in society directed towards women. She asks them why "the culture allows overt and often violent hatred of women, but does not permit, indeed has no word for, anger at men?" (Culley, 1985, p. 213). She concludes that feminist teachers cannot expect students to experience anger if we will not acknowledge that we ourselves are so moved.

4) Charlotte Bunch (1983) advises us that feminist teaching should include the development of feminist theory. By means of theory, women can come to understand the forces
that work against them, as well as using theory to develop visions for sustaining those who are engaged in day-to-day political activity. Theory grows out of activism and reflection; it acts as a guide for sorting out options and keeps us from becoming overwhelmed and immobilized.

Bunch teaches students how to develop theory by dividing the process into four interrelated parts: first, the description of what exists—a process of interpreting and naming reality about the conditions of women's lives. Second is the analysis of why that reality exists, being careful to avoid explaining everything all at once with a single concept. The third part is the vision of what should exist, a process which enables students to assess actions in light of long and short term goals. Last is the formulating of strategies for how to promote change which includes drawing out the consequences of theory.

Women see that doing theory is not "too hard" or beyond them when the theory formation begins with the conditions of their lives and an examination of assumptions they make daily about their being in the world. The women practice their theory making skills in exercises that help them to think creatively. From their own experiences, they see that there is not a "correct line" as in the political sense or a "correct answer" as in academia.

5) Some of the most innovative teaching comes from classes and schools organized outside traditional institutions which often find feminists too radical for
existing modes of pedagogy (Hammer, 1983, p. 219). As an extra-institutional event, Barbara Hammer taught film-making by presenting classes in her own studio. Women learned how to create images of themselves that were a reflection of their own politics. Teaching in a non-traditional setting reduced anxiety and permitted women to explore and receive acknowledgement for more than just their smallest effort. Women envisioned the scope for their possibilities well beyond the limitations of the institutional evaluative process.

6) The Women’s School of Planning and Architecture (Weisman & Birkby, 1983) grew from the convictions of architects, planners, teachers and practitioners who found their common interests and goals not being met within existing architecture and planning institutions. The establishment of their school reflected the organizers’ feminist beliefs that in all aspects, the design process could be organized as if women mattered. Beginning with a basic declaration of intentions and goals, the women planned curriculum, organized the site, advertised, raised funds and dealt with the many practical and ideological issues of women educating themselves. The women found that their feminist politics, their creative talents and their lifeworks were not separate entities but parts of themselves and integral to their lives as whole persons. The key was the feminist education process that they struggled to evolve. They identified the two most important factors in
feminist education as theory, feminist analysis, and ideology as well as a context and practical demonstration of those values. The article concludes with these definitive remarks.

A feminist analysis, and even the generation of new ideas, can take place in many environments, including establishment academic institutions. A feminist education cannot...

[T]he impact of feminist values is significant only when they are reflected through changes in behaviour and action. (Weisman & Birkby, 1983, p. 245)

This discussion of feminist pedagogy does not end in a definitive statement of what this pedagogy is which promotes a feminist interpretation of texts. Such a pedagogy is at best an elucidation of foundational thought, broadly stated, with clear understanding that what is at stake is the uncovering of meaning in women’s lived experiences. The philosophy may reach some conclusions and name some practices, but a description of feminist pedagogy like the guiding principles for an adequate feminist politics, "cannot be specified in advance since the precise configuration of power relations in any situation will determine how best we can act" (Weedon, 1987, p. 11).

The reductionism of natural science that feminist research methodology resists is not more unhelpful than grand totalizing theories of education that try to address all issues for all people, for all time. One absolute is as misleading as another. Therefore feminist pedagogy cannot be a prescription. The advancement of feminist interpretation of theory and practice is obtained by
contingency and balance which offers far less security and requires far more courage than a single source solution. A description of feminist practices is offered that, at best, outlines some things that worked for some people in their classes. What is written here is intended to be information that will help us read with more understanding, the text that is the university, the subject discipline, each other and ourselves.

**Some Concluding Remarks**

In this thesis I have discussed the representation of women as writers and as interpreters of their experience in the university context. In general, one of the predominant concerns in literary criticism is the capacity of literature to represent women's experiences, given the consequences of male encoding. The concern about women's representation in literature is a concrete issue in the definition toward a feminist hermeneutics; the interpretive process of feminist pedagogy is a similar concern. The revelation of women in feminist pedagogy is not so different from feminist literary tradition. A paraphrase of J. Frye (1986) illustrates the similarity between the interpretation of experience through the text and through context in the events of the classroom:

In recognizing women's experience as both participants in and outside of the dominant culture, a feminist poetics [read pedagogy] must not only identify the novel's [read classroom's] formal and linguistic conventions as they nearly silence women's expression, it must also assess
the novel’s [read classroom’s] susceptibility to 
women’s subversive expressions and the development 
of new conventions responsive to the experiences 
of women’s lives and the needs of cultural change. 
(J. Frye, 1986, p. 16)

The poetics of the novel and the pedagogy of the 
classroom are the intangible media by which writing and 
teaching are performed. A feminist hermeneutics that is 
central to both teaching and writing comprises these parts: 
understanding, interpretation, and application of texts and 
contexts. The interpretation of texts in feminist literary 
criticism is one part of a feminist hermeneutic, and the 
application of feminist pedagogical practice in the 
classroom is another. We are constantly immersed in the 
hermeneutical process with texts, context, each other, and 
ourselves.

In discussing how women are represented at the 
university and what this implies in political terms, I refer 
to Weedon (1987).

Modes of subjectivity, like theories of society or 
versions of history, are temporary fixings in the 
on-going process in which any absolute meaning or 
truth is constantly deferred. The important point 
is to recognize the political implications of 
particular ways of fixing identity and meaning. 
From this perspective it is clear that we are far 
from achieving a society in which gender, race or 
class are non-issues. (p. 173)

In this on-going process, feminist pedagogy struggles 
against the reality that patriarchy as a social construction 
is located both inside and outside of each person; 
similarly, the feminist teacher is located in many places at 
onece. She finds herself within a set of patriarchal
practices and also outside of the practices as critic. Even if there were a clear understanding of what that influence would mean at all times and places, we cannot act completely outside a system which is constructed not only in our external reality, but inside us as well.

Feminist teachers resist the way in which the texts and contexts of the university construct meanings and positions for us as readers. According to Minnich (1983) "The differences between male and female as politically and socially defined have been so important to the maintenance of the prevailing order that they have been proclaimed nonpolitical (meaning not open to negotiation), or nonacademic (not open to discussion), and 'natural' (not open to change)" (p. 326). Feminist reading is inherently critical when it asks what and whose purposes are served by this construction of meaning.

The contradiction is not so much that conditions of knowledge production at the university are often contrary to how women see the world; the contradiction is that in spite of this condition, "women still continue to become woman" and insist that there is a difference (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 186). In this thesis I have shown some of the shifting, duplicitous terms of that contradiction; I have not attempted to reconcile them. I have tried to illustrate that the female subject at the university is not found in a privileged nearness to nature and the body, or in essential female consciousness; nor is femaleness based on its
contradiction to masculinist tradition. The female subject is constituted by her historical experiences, self-reflection, and by her political practice in relation with the social reality (de Lauretis, 1984, p. 186).

As a representation of feminist pedagogy, teaching and learning is not merely a pattern of testing a fit between the classroom event and one's own experience, or reshaping one's experience to merge with the available patterns; rather, it is a way of reassessing experience toward the possible formation of new patterns of knowledge (J. Frye, 1986). Knowledge becomes a process or event in which learning happens along the way. The influence of institutional practices beyond the control of the well-intentioned educator, however, make the process of education for social change more difficult than we often realize. Knowledge as a process is pitted against knowledge as an over-wrapped package. Methodology modelled in scientific tendencies for systematic analysis has infused the approach to disciplinary studies such as English; and scholarship has become a misguided idea that excludes discovery of the discourse, in exchange for the studying of a topic as if it were a "cipher to be decoded" (Barzun, 1984, p. 101).

Just as women's mistreatment in some research studies is often the result of "bad science," many problems in education could be similarly labelled "bad teaching". As in most fields, both scientific research and the process of education have some practices that are more exemplary than
others. Much fine teaching is already being done by women and men who recognize that teaching depends to a large extent on the inter-relationship between gender, power and knowledge in the classroom. The feminist project of social change in the academy occurs slowly as it parallels the change of human consciousness and action. "Feminism is a 'gestalt' or world view, not a laundry list of 'women's issues'" (Bunch, 1983, p. 250). Neither does it confuse an excellent way with excellence itself (Bunch, 1983).

In spite of the task, changes have already begun, sometimes in ad hoc classes among interested men and women, given by teachers who are uncredited and unpaid for their teaching, to students who similarly receive no credit. Feminist teaching takes place across disciplines, formally and informally in the development of feminist institutional practices and theories. The feminist intent of social change is a slow process that takes place daily in classrooms as people support each other in the subversive activity known as feminist pedagogy. Women articulate the political, self-reflective and historical practices of their lives; their experiences are recognized and re-created in the writing and interpersonal activities they share with other women. Women affirm the right to use both heart and head in learning, to speak, argue, and debate in classes without translation; in classes of feminist theory and workshops, women share their views, read each other's literature, and hear that we are not isolated.
What hope is there for the continued success of this feminist process?

In thinking about women's process at the university, I am reminded of the computer screen on which I have typed this thesis. As I look at the screen, it appears to be on. But I know that, in fact, only half the pixels that form the image are turned on at one time. In the next instant, faster than my eyes can register, the pixels that were on, alternate with the ones that were off. In reality, at any time, the screen is half blank. But why does all of it appear to be always on? Because human beings are constructed with persistence of vision. Even when it is not there, we cannot so easily forget the image or vision we have seen. Similarly, women's lives and narratives are always "on," always supporting our persistence of vision.

Feminist efforts at counter forms of scholarship and pedagogy within the institution are not so much a program of reform but of revolution (Thibault, 1987, p. 171). In that women's acceptance into academe has thus far been predicated on men's terms, a reform-oriented strategy based on masculinist notions of progress, equality and amelioration is to repeat the history of women's oppression. Within institutions, feminist change is not usually a smooth transition; whatever it is, it won't necessarily be pleasing or polite, but disruptive, chaotic, noisy, discordant. We should recall that a silencing technique effectively used on women in the past, is to call their discord, hysteria.
Herbert Marcuse suggests that revolutionary activity happens when marginalized people refuse to play the game and that this refusal may be what marks the beginning of the end of a period (Marcuse, 1964, p. 257). His own philosophy of critical theory ends in negativity and possesses no hope for a better future. But while the first line of defence in the midst of emotional turmoil is always denial, many people engaged in feminist project for social change have already moved beyond that first defence. Marcuse, though personally despairing, concludes that the chance for success is for those who, "without hope, have given and give their life to the Great Refusal" (Marcuse, 1964, p. 257). The hope is in the naming and in the acting.

A thesis is studied for the information or knowledge generated by its messages. In a traditional thesis, the knowledge adds to the stock of information in a way that supports how the tradition has determined what things may be known. In this thesis, I have looked at the work performed by the coded information at the university concerning tacit support for its tradition. In feminist education, we can examine the messages performed through the masculinist codes and know that this examination, in itself, helps to transform the codes, even as it transforms those who do the examining.

This thesis represents some of the information I have gathered about masculinist messages. It also represents one small way in which the tradition has changed prior to the
writing of the thesis. Your reading and my writing transform the codes at the same time that we are constituted by their representation. As we interact with the university tradition, we are the subjects of our own reading.

This thesis captures a short moment in the reading I have done, reading which began long before I started writing and which continues after the end of these pages. There is no closure in the traditional sense because the reading isn’t over yet, and now you have joined it too.

The thesis in its representation of feminist pedagogy is not so much a crusade with a fixed goal, as it is a pilgrimage towards learning. Like the characters in Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, the knowledge is not in the arrival at a specific destination, but rather, knowledge happens in the process of arriving. In the interpretation of women’s lives, like the characters in the stories, we read of the importance of being on the way.
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