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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses questions of validity, textual authority, and the rhetorical handling of the researcher-as-self by examining current thinking on poststructural approaches in the work of Patti Lather and Laurel Richardson. The first section introduces the idea of inquiry validity as an "incitement to discourse," a view which changes the character of the social science report from a closed narrative with a tight argument structure into a more open narrative with holes and questions and the admission of partiality. The next section focuses on ethos, which is associated with the character of the speaker and how authors achieve textual authority. Lather's and Richardson's approaches to qualitative inquiry suggests a reinvention of the "scientific ethos" which is then applied to a reading of a poststructural educational text by Erica McWilliams. The following section describes the notion of a "transgressive self," one who fluidly positions itself in multiple places in the discourse and thereby constructs a text more radical than an openly revolutionary text could be. In a concluding section, it is noted that McWilliam's dissertation is presented in traditional form with appeals to authority and validity but also with experimental use of a transgressive self. Contains 39 references. (JB)

Reinventing Ethos:

Validity, Authority, and Tne Transgressive Self

Paper presented at the 75th Annual Meeting for the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA, April 6, 1994.

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Reinventing Ethos: Validity, Authority, and Transgressive Self[1]

Let the data speak for themselves, these scientists say.
The trouble with that argument is, of course, that data never do speak for themselves.
Evelyn Fox Keller (1985)

Under the influence of postmodernism, many qualitative researchers agree that representations of knowledge in research reports are constructed from partial, multiple, local, and historical situations. Many also agree that this awareness creates the desire to produce research-reporting texts that communicate this awareness without reinscribing just another breed of domination[2]. During my search for researchers who discuss this task, a piece by Alison Jones (1992) was recommended to me. She relates issues that confronted her as she transformed her doctoral dissertation from an "exercise in scholarly discourse" into a poststructural text that she felt more honestly portrayed her emotional, political, and intellectual engagement with the situations and people in her study. The "authoritative and distanced stance" she was compelled to adopt in the dissertation is a rhetorical artifact of mainstream academic writing in education, which remains largely impervious to the critique of objectivity, method, and the transparency of language in current theories of social inquiry[3].

"Confessional tales", such as the one Alison Jones has written, have become more common as researchers find the need to "demystify fieldwork or participant-observation by showing how the technique is practiced in the field" (John Van Manaan 1988, p.73). These tales are usually written up separately from the principal

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[1] This work was made possible by the propitious convergence of readings in several courses over the past year with some wonderful professors: (in alphabetical order) Kay Halasek, George Hartley, Nan Johnson, Patti Lather, Mary Leach, and Laurel Richardson. My writing group also contributed to this piece substantially; I thank Linda Condron, Guitele Nicoleau, Wanda Pillow, and Bettie St.Pierre for their support, critique, and companionship. Thanks to Kevin Lenzo for listening to these ideas as I rant and rave and for challenging them relentlessly. In the words of Mikhail Bahktin: "The ideological becoming of a human being. . .is the process of selectively assimilating the words of others" (1986, p.341).

[2] I'm referring here mainly to charges of obfuscating denseness and inaccessability of many poststructurally influenced texts. Erica McWilliam addresses this issue in a cathartic post-dissertation piece entitled "'Post' Haste: Plodding Research and Galloping Theory" (1993). Patti Lather refers to this "problem" as the "politics of accessibility" (personal communication).

[3] See Sandra Harding (1986, 1991), Yvonna Lincoln & Egon Guba (1985), Egon Guba & Yvonna Linclon (1989), Patti Lather (1986a,b; 1991; 1993), Elliot Mishler (1990), Steinar Kvale (1989).

research document. In some views of what is or is not rhetorically permissible, the messiness and subjectivities of the confessional tale have no place in the "official" research report. Scientific ethos is compromised by admitting to the uncertainties and false starts that characterize fieldwork.

Recent feminist poststructuralist theorizing about presentation of research, however, has emphasized the importance of "theorizing our practice" (Patti Lather, 1993, p.674). This reconceptualization has at its core a committment to self-reflexivity in terms of "what is and is not done at a practical level", as messy as that may be and recognizing that there are limits to our ability to self-critique[4] (Ibid.). Presentations of feminist poststructural work, then, attempt to make apparent in the research-reporting text the recognition of the discourses[5] that inform decisions about what we do in the conduct of research and

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[4] I am using the term self-reflexivity with the tentative agreement that self knowledge is likely a representation of what we tell ourselves, not a direct line from wherever it is that we know; nor is it a direct line from some correspondence to reality. We cannot absolve ourselves through a self-reflexivity that recourses back through our constructions of ourselves and our attachments to some singular, pure state of good intention or existence. A pure state unassailable by critique? As Alcoff (1991) puts it:

> The desire to find an absolute means to avoid making errors comes perhaps not from a desire to advance collective goals but a desire for personal mastery, to establish a privileged discursive position wherein one cannot be undermined or challenged and thus is master of the situation. From such a position one's own location and positionality would not require constant interrogation and critical reflection; one would not have to constantly engage in this emotionally troublesome endeavor and would be immune from the interrogation of others. Such a desire for mastery and immunity must be resisted (p.22).

I can't resist asking: What sort of mastery is desired in the denial of mastery?

Patti Lather (1993, p.20) notes: "To attempt to deconstruct one's own work is to risk buying into the faith in the powers of critical reflection that places emancipatory efforts in such a contradictory position with the poststructuralist foregrounding of the limits of consciousness".

[5] When I use the word discourse, unless noted otherwise, I draw on one of Foucault's definitions in his 1966 [1970 translation] work, *Les mots et les choses* [translated as *The Order of Things*]: "a fundamental arrangement of knowledge, which orders the knowledge of beings so as to make it possible to represent them in a system of names" (p.157). (I do have a question, though, about the pronoun 'them' in the translation. I'm unsure of the referent. Is it 'beings'?). I would add to the quote: "for the purpose of communication, thought, or any other 'operation' that requires intra- or interpersonal exchange."

how what we do is represented. We try also to question how we constitute and are constituted by the discursive contexts in which we think we operate. The myth of the absent author seeing everywhere from nowhere gives way to a conception of the knower as a "situated", "split[,] and contradictory self" [or selves] who can "interrogate positionings and be accountable" (Donna Haraway 1991, p.193). This situated, split, and contradictory knowing self is "always constructed and stitched together imperfectly" (Ibid.).

Such committments to feminist poststructural practice raise interesting questions about validity, textual authority, and the rhetorical handling of the researcher-as-self. How is validity to be rewritten after poststructuralism? What kind of textual authority can admit to uncertainty, deal in contradiction, and question attachments? How is the multiple and shifting positionings of the poststructural researcher-as-selves to be handled? In this paper, I address these questions by examining some current thinking on poststructural approaches to validity and writing in the work of Patti Lather and Laurel Richardson. I show how such approaches to qualitative inquiry suggest to me a reinvention of "scientific ethos"; then, I give a reading of a poststructural education(al) text by Erica McWilliam that challenges the handling of researcher-as-self in mainstream ideas of academic writing[6] in what Judith Butler (1990) might call a "subversive repetition" of the genre of the doctoral dissertation.

Validity and Writing After Poststructuralism: Evocation & Incitement

A recent paper by Patti Lather asks questions about what validity might be--taking into account the crisis of representation[7], assuming an "open-ended and context sensitive" *modus operandi*, and questioning the inclination to accept criteria that hinge on such uncertain (anti)foundations (or the propensity for asking questions about these kinds of things). She calls for:

> a kind of validity. . .in which legitimation depends on a researcher's ability to explore the resources of different

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6 Although McWilliam incorporates innovative rhetorics of the researcher-as-selves into her "formal" research report, she seems to have still felt the need to write a post-dissertation piece to address issues she was not able to discuss in her dissertation. (See note 3.) From my perspective, it seems that instead of needing to debrief herself and the rest of us regarding her subjectivities, she needed to vent about her relationship to the very bodies of theory she draws on--the centrifugal tension in the "circulate and break" mode of tangling with theory (Lather 1993, p.2).

7 If you asked me what I meant by crisis of representation, I would refer you to Marcus & Fisher (1988), though I question whether taking into account the crisis of representation yields an "accurate view and confident knowledge of the world" (p.14-15). Moreover, I can't guarantee that Lather would refer you to the same text.

> contemporary inquiry problematics and, perhaps, even contribute to "an 'unjamming' effect in relation to the closed truths of the past, thereby freeing up the present for new forms of thought and practice" (Lather 1993, p.676 quoting Bennett 1990, p.277).

In other words, she positions "validity as an incitement to discourse" (Gordon 1988, p.23,drawing on Foucault, quoted in Lather 1993, p.674). In my view, this positioning suggests that validity practices may function as what Immanuel Kant[8] would term representations of "aesthetic" ideas. Consider this quote from Kant's *Critique of Judgment*:

> By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e., *concept*, being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible (p.47).

Here are some other ways that Kant characterizes aesthetic ideas:

- They "give the imagination an incentive to spread its flight over a whole host of kindred representations that provoke more thought than admits of expression in a concept determined by words" (Ibid., p.48).
- They open "out for [the mind] a prospect into a field of kindred representations stretching beyond its ken" (Ibid.)
- They "go hand in hand with the logical, and give the imagination an impetus to bring more thought into play in the matter, though in an undeveloped manner, than allows of being brought within the embrace of a concept, or, therefore, of being definitely formulated in language (Ibid.).

Thinking of validity as an "incitement to discourse" changes the character of the social science report from a closed narrative with a tight argument structure into a more open narrative with holes and questions and an admission of situatedness and partiality. Validity moves away from boundary-policing criteria toward "counter-practices of authority" that "interrogate representation" (Lather 1993, p.677). These practices may open up spaces for the exploration of what eludes capture and being closed off into concept.

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[8] I recognize that it may be problematic to bring Kant into this discussion, as his delineation of the aesthetic involves high art and "genius" and the "foundation of Romanticism" (Gilles Deleuze 1983, p.xii) but, in the spirit of *bricolage* (see Jacques Derrida 1976) and "blurred genres" (see Clifford Geertz 1980), I defiantly bring Kant's work into the mix. I see the kernels of poststructural possibility in Kant's work in what Deleuze explains as "a terrible struggle between imagination and reason" and "a tempest in the depths of a chasm opened up in the subject" in which "the faculties confront one another, each stretched to its own limit, and find their accord in a fundamental discord: a discordant accord" (1983, p.xii).

The struggle to freeze our experiences and interactions with other people into words, sentences, paragraphs, and rhetorically appropriate essays is an issue germane to many discussions of the conduct of qualitative inquiry (See Marcus & Fisher 1988.). Not only is there the wrestling with language inherent to any communication project; there is also the hurdle of genre appropriateness as set forth in guidelines for rhetorical presentation. For the "scientific report", the prescription is usually a "rational"[9] discourse that may be satisfactorily represented objectively, symbolically, and, often, mathematically. If we eschew the objectivity/subjectivity split and write from our own positions, how do we (or, do we dare?[10]) risk the further untidiness of admitting to a shifting role and perception of a self become selves?

Engaging ideas of the aesthetic, authorship, authority, and validity, Laurel Richardson (1993a) encourages us to practice "Writing from our Selves" in order that we be "more fully present in our work; more honest; more engaged" (p.3[11]). The poststructural context, she argues, "incites us to reflect upon our method and explore new ways of knowing" (p.8). Writing becomes a form of inquiry in which we seek to "understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular situations at specific times" and in which we are freed "from trying to write a single text in which everything is said to everyone" (Ibid.). Through such writing practice, we can release "the censorious hold of 'science writing' on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche" (Ibid.).

Practicing "Writing from our Selves" can be accomplished through experimental genres; "evocative representations" are one class of experimental genres that Richardson explores. She

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9 I'm thinking of rational here in the sense of Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, as the breaking down of a task into the smallest possible increments so as to be easily learned and mimicked by interchangeable workers in a production line. I believe that this definition is reconcilable with Kant's discussion of the rational idea as formed of concepts and words derived from the realm of sensory experience (the empirical), rather than the realm of imagination and interpretation, in which case, they would be aesthetic ideas "transgressing the limits of experience" (p.47).

10 Some feminists have based their theories on assumptions that presuppose the creation of what Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson (1990) call "quasi-metanarratives" (p.29). See their discussion of the problem of the stable self and political effectiveness of social critique. See also the many other fine essays in that edited volume that explore the meetings of feminism and postmoderism (Nicholson 1990). Chris Weedon also addresses the issue of poststructuralist subjectivities at some length in her 1987 work.

11 My page numbers are not accurate. Richardson contributed chapter 32 to the Denzin & Lincoln edited volume, *Handbook of Qualitative Research* (1993a), which I have not yet seen. I am quoting from an earlier draft.

suggests that using "evocative forms reveals the underlying labor of sociological production and its rhetoric, as well as its potential as a human endeavor because evocative writing touches us where we live" and where we "struggle to find a textual place for ourselves and our doubts and uncertainties" (p.17).

The re-thinking that Patti Lather and Laurel Richardson have done concerning validity and writing after poststructuralism suggests many things to me, but, in this paper, I focus on just one of them, another re-thinking--or re-inventing--the reinvention of rhetorical ethos with a focus on the rhetorical handling of researcher-as-selves.

Ethos and Rethinking Writing

It's useful, I think, to bring the conception of ethos to bear here because it has been associated with the "character of the speaker" (Aristotle, in Johnson 1984, p.101) and how authors achieve textual authority. Throughout the history of rhetoric, ethos has been characterized as "moral obligation" and "ethical responsiblity", on the one hand, and "as a skill of stylistic adaptablity to mode and audience", on the other (Ibid., p,113)--the mode depending on the prevailing philosophical climate of the time. It seems to me that, when we address validity and writing in terms of self-reflexive practice, what we are concerned with is the moral obligation and ethical responsibility of the speaker/writer, as well as concerns about who we are speaking to and why. We are talking about textual practices of self-interrogation with an ethos of non-prescription, situatedness, and political attachment--an ethos intended to interrupt the dominant practices of positivist inquiry as described by Merton (Prelli 1989), interpretivist inquiry as described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), and critical inquiry as described by Lather (1986a,b; 1991). Whereas the ethical appeal in these approaches is persuasive to the degree that it establishes the credibility of the researcher as doing work that conforms to epistemological mandates, the ethos of poststructural approaches is evocative[12] to the extent that it disrupts epistemological mandates and interrogates the power relations between knower and known. With an ethos based on concerns broader than epistemology, the agency of social science changes from that of political neutrality or political superiority to political responsibility and involvement. Moreover, the rhetorical treatment of self-reflexivity brings validity practices out of the realm of Method, exclusively, and into the larger frame of the crisis of representation. In other words, an ethos of self-reflexivity pervades the entire text, and presumably the entire practice of fieldwork, and thus is not relegated to a brief section under the heading of Method or to a

12 I'm more and more convinced that persuasion is not the goal here. Trinh T. Minh-ha (1990), for example, characterizes persuasive text as coercive and violent. Although I agree with her to some extent, I have begun thinking of the possibility of poststructural texts as being more evocative, in Kant's aesthetic sense, than persuasive, in Kant's rational sense.

fleeting concern in the writing up of a study; writing up becomes more than just a tedious task to be performed when the data is in and analyzed.

For example, Laurel Richardson (1990) emphasizes the moral character of writing the lives of others. Although she does not situate her discussion in terms of rhetorical ethos, she is concerned with it through her discussions of authority and authorship, tone, and audience--concerns for the construction of an entire text. In fact, Nan Johnson (1984) points out that:

> the concept of ethos rarely appears in current texts by name. Rather it is discussed under such varied stylistic headings as "tone," "writer's voice," "personal appeal," "attitude," "persona," and "credibility." Often, these are presented as preparatory considerations in the process of composing under such titles as "considering an audience," "convincing a reader," and "planning for aim and audience" (p.112).

Where Johnson contends that the contemporary focus on ethos generally ignores moral obligation and ethical responsibility, Richardson sets this pragmatic focus to work in the service of moral obligation and ethical responsibility. The stylistic choices made hinge on answers to questions such as: "How does our writing reproduce a system of domination, and how does it challenge that system? What right do we have to speak for others? to write their lives?" (p.27). Stylistic choices are not based merely on the question: How do I persuade my audience that I am right?

To explore this idea of a poststructural ethos more concretely, I offer a rhetorical analysis of the construction of researcher-as-selves in a doctoral dissertation by Erica McWilliam (1992) entitled "In Broken Images: A postpositivist analysis of student needs talk in pre-service teacher education". The dissertation is being published as a monograph by Teacher's College Press.

An Example

Ethos in the Doctoral Dissertation and the Price of Challenge

The work I analyze here is a doctoral dissertation, the gatekeeping document of an academic's career. In terms of ethos, the dissertation is a potentially very interesting piece of writing. A candidate must demonstrate "a high level of knowledge and the capability to function as an independent scholar" in a "scholarly contribution to knowledge in the student's area of specialization" (Ohio State University[13], 1992, p.38). Strict format and content guidelines are usually followed. The candidate must be able to situate herself within the field--within a specific research area in terms of methodology, theory[14], and

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[13] McWilliam's dissertation was written at University of Queensland, Australia. I'm assuming that the requirments for the dissertation document are similar in Australia to what they are at a typical U.S. research university.

[14] In notes 3 and 8, I cite a piece by McWilliam (1993) in which she characterizes the principal difficulty with writing

perhaps philosophy. Whether first person, third person, or passive construction is required depends on the degree to which the field, the committee, the methodology/theory/philosophy prescribe the rhetorical construction of objectivity. Deviations from the generally accepted norms usually must be explained. If they are ignored, credibility and authority may be fatally compromised.

Rhetorical mechanisms of credibility are but one way to create ethical appeal. The presentation of good intent, a sense of moral obligation, and/or ethical responsiblity, usually in the form of adherence to human subjects' committee guidelines, assures readers that participants in a study have been treated fairly and ethically. In studies that maintain a firm line between reseacher and researched, such a presentation is often sufficient to establish ethical responsibility, but in feminist poststructural approaches this division is interrogated and in some cases done away with. The ethical consideration goes beyond addressing the concerns of human subjects' committees into the realm of exposing the unequal power relations and the potential for oppressive practices inherent to the research situation. Such a consideration exposes the impossibility[15] of the rhetorical construction of objectivity in a research text.

In a recent essay in *College Composition and Communication*, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles (1992) discusses some of the risks that students take if they choose to write experimentally in the academy. She notes that her students fear that their writing will not be "readerly", will be too confessional--too private. The consequences of these reader responses vary depending upon the audiences for whom experimental writing is intended and the purposes it hopes to serve. In the case of a doctoral dissertation, departing from established norms risks the denial of a degree--high stakes. How, then, are such norms to be challenged?[16] In this analysis, I propose that McWilliam addresses and transgresses issues of authority in the dissertation by fashioning what Susan Marren (1993) has called the transgressive self.

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poststructural texts as the impossibility of providing a coherent treatment of often incoherent "galloping theory".

15 Here I draw on the idea of the *point de capiton* in Slavoj Zizek's (1992) reading of Jacques Lacan. The *point de capiton*, or "quilting point", is a point of integral connection holding the imminent threat of unraveling. It can be characterized as a "blot" or a "stain" that holds the potential to disrupt an otherwise seemingly coherent whole. When we shift our gaze from a straightforward, head-on encountering to a "looking awry", the inconsistency of what had previously been considered unproblematic reveals itself.

16 I suppose I assume here that the "why" of writing challenging texts is well-known and articulated (See Trinh 1989, for example).

The Transgressive Self and The Possibility of Agency

In "Between Slavery and Freedom: The Transgressive Self in Olaudah Equiano's Autobiography", Susan Marren (1993) offers a rhetorical analysis of the autobiography of a freed slave who writes out of paradoxical objectives: "an internal compulsion to establish himself as a speaking subject" and "an external compulsion to serve the antislavery movement" (p.94). These objectives are paradoxical because the very Enlightenment philosophy that gave rise to the antislavery movement "interpreted blackness as absence--an absence of reason and, therefore, of agency" (Ibid.). In order for a black author to speak as a black, race--the inescapable--had to be escaped. "Equiano had to manipulate the terms of racial representation themselves both to demonstrate a black man's capacity for reason and to elude any definitive, silencing racial categorization" (Ibid.).

Marren argues that Equiano does this by constructing a transgressive self, which can fluidly position itself/its selves as a "secure cultural insider", as a slave who has suffered at the expense of such insiders, as an exceptional black man capable of reason, as a reformer rather than a revolutionary, as a master rather than a slave, as a Christian, as an innocent child, as an Englishman of the Enlightenment, as a "white" man, as all of these at once. Using Judith Butler's (1990) terms, Equiano enacts a "subversive repetition" of eighteenth century autobiography. He takes a familiar form and engages it, to some extent, in the traditional way, yet in his fluid self-positioning he constructs a text more radical than an openly revolutionary text could have been. He draws on the social climate of his time and refracts it back onto his readers creating a space for agency that may otherwise have been closed off. Although, according to the context in which Equiano operates, he is constructed as one, who by virtue of his race, has no agency--no capacity to act on his own or on anyone else's behalf, Equiano finds a vehicle in that very context to contest his allocated position. Judith Butler's (1990) words are helpful here (even though she speaks of feminism and the issue in Equaino's case is racial equality):

> Construction is not opposed to agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible. The critical task for feminism is not to establish a point of view outside of constructed identities; that conceit is the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject, a position that deploys precisely the imperialist strategies that feminism ought to criticize. The critical task is, rather, to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them (p.147).

So how does this relate to a late-twentieth-century doctoral dissertation in education? McWilliam, like Equiano[17], operates out of paradoxical positions: she seeks a degree (validation) from an institution, whose rules and mandates she seeks to disrupt and challenge (invalidate); she seeks to make a contribution to her field, yet does so in such a way that works against much of the accepted knowledge and ways of constructing knowledge in that field. It would seem that any construction of ethos that promotes degree-seeking and contribution-making would be inconsistent with challenging the mandates of a degree-granting institution and contesting the knowledge and knowledge making in a particular field. Rather than abandoning either set of goals, however, McWilliam finds a way to achieve both simultaneously by refusing a singular subject position within her dissertation text. In no way do I mean to suggest that McWilliam consciously constituted what *I am calling* a transgressive self, though she does admit to "attempt[ing] to ensure against a monovocal, self-centered text as the research product" and to making a "deliberate transgression against traditional territorial boundaries in teacher education" (pp.258-259). Although I interpret her intention in safegarding against a "monovocal" text as being careful to include and make heard the voices of those she studies,[18] McWilliam represents herself variously as "the researcher", "we", and "I" throughout the text. Through these variable self-references, I argue, McWilliam transmits her own multiply sited positions in a construction of ethos that is partial, situated, and political. Part of my task is to give a reading of the contexts of these nominal and pronominal transgressive positionings; inseparable from this, however, are the ways in which McWilliam, through her self-reflexivity, positions herself within and against her field of study, her theoretical and philosophical attachments, and traditional ideas of researcher/researched relationships.

Authorial Voices: Referring to the Researcher-as -Selves

What initially led me to want to do this sort of analysis with McWilliam's text is her variable self referencing. I was intrigued that she refers to herself first, in the acknowledgements, as "I" and then in the abstract as "the researcher". Later, I noticed the pronoun usage in the Robert Graves poem, "In Broken Images", used as a frontispiece and as as source for the title and organizing poststructural metaphor of McWilliam's dissertation. The poem is constructed in 7 couplets, each setting up a "He"/"I" dichotomy in which "He" is constructed as the rational, efficient humanist and "I" is the questioning,

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17 I am nervous about this comparison. I, in no way, wish to trivialize the subject position of black slave by comparing it to white, doctoral candidate privilege. The mode of analysis--employing the concept of a transgressive self--used by Marren is helpful for me, however, because of the similarities between the relations of power in Equino's case and in McWilliam's.

18 She accomplishes this as well as can be expected in a dissertation document.

sharp, slow thinker. First of all, what are the power implications of such prominent positioning of the work of a white male poet? Is the "I" in this poem by itself the same "I" that it is in the organizing metaphor of McWilliam's dissertation? Was I to read this as a feminist "othering" of *him* and *his* clear, quick, dull, trusting ways? I'm tempted to go on a Trinh T. Minh-ha rampage with it.[19] But I'll save that for a later date.

"I, me, my"--first person singular. Throughout the text, "I", is Erica McWilliam--a person engaged in the research process:

- thanking her friends and colleagues (iv);
- having a cautiously optimistic attitude toward experimental research methodology (111);
- exposing herself as a constructed subject (113-114); admitting that her background as a sociologist makes the critique of "positivist behaviourist paradigms of inquiry" easier than looking to her own roots as problematic (116);
- drawing on her experience as a teacher (118, 215); choosing a text in her field, one that she has attachments to, to deconstruct (122);
- wrestling with her "own constructions of self" (226); negotiating her role in "playing out critique in the real" (227-237);
- feeling out-of-control as participants assumed more responsibility in the inquiry (231-233);
- concluding her roles as framer of study, negotiator of indeterminate research spaces, interpreter of data, maker of knowledge that contributes to and challenges her field (256-277).

McWilliam's "I" is a self-reflexive, acting "I"--an agent finding agency within and against her constructedness. "I" works against self-absorption, confession, and domination by remaining focussed on the tasks at hand. As a reader, I saw enough of McWilliam's "I" to know that "I" was there and acting, but not so much that "I" became the body of the research. "I" circles around and criss-crosses as an engaged participant, involved in relationships at every juncture and does not dive into an abyss of apologetic self-disclosure.

"we, our, us"--first person plural. These pronouns serve two main purposes in McWilliam's text--to identify her as part of a group of teacher educators who she refers to as *avante garde* and to identify herself as part of a group of researchers/participants in her study in its final, reciprocal phase.

I have provided a paragraph that seems to concisely characterize her identification with and tension within a group of teacher educators:

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19 Go to Trinh T. Minh-ha 1989, p.47-49. Read aloud, with feeling. Feel it.

> In this way, as *avant garde* educators, we remain part of a discursive system, to which "conservative" discourses also contribute, whose effects are to "blame the victim" of our own discursive practices for their failure to accept "our" version of the "truth" about relevant professional preparation. The effects of our own discursive practices would mean that we "misrecognise" ourselves as empowering agents. In understanding our adversaries as simply external to our discourse, namely the discursive practices legitimated by a technocratic tradition of teacher education, we have failed to allow ourselves space for *within/against* critique[20] (pp.116-117).

Although McWilliam is actively engaged in critiquing *avant garde* educators, she does not refer to herself as outside that group. She admits her own complicity in the potentially oppressive practices of a group committed to emancipation, yet breaks with it in her efforts to pre-empt such practices. Throughout literature review sections of her text, McWilliam is present in this "we" of *avant garde* educators, yet is absent in reviews of more mainstream literature, which are transmitted in more traditional, objective text largely in the passive voice.

The other use of "we" comes out strongly in the third phase of McWilliam's study in which she attempts to engage her participants as researchers and/or co-theorists on a level roughly equal with her own. This final phase of the project took place in a special section of a compulsory final-year seminar that all pre-service teachers take after completing a six month teaching practical. As the lecturer for the course, McWilliam had to face many barriers to her ideal of achieving some kind of equality between herself and her students. She and a rotating subset of the group set the agenda for each weeks' course coverage based on the pre-service teachers' needs. Each member of the group kept notes of each meeting, which were compiled into a computer file after each session. In this way, McWilliam and the 14 participants in her study shared the responsibility of carrying out inquiry on identifying, meeting, and critiquing the needs of pre-service teachers. McWilliam's use of "we/our/us" in this section seems to reveal her feelings of belonging in the group--intermittant, of course, with her use of "I/me" when reflecting on her own position in the group, especially as she lost control of it as participants gained responsibility. Consider the following example:

> What became clear to **me** soon after this phase of "reflection-in-action" began, [sic] was the fact that "planning, acting, observing and reflecting" did not happen as discrete and tidy phases of research, nor did they focus on only one issue. While **we** were planning in terms of a suitable way forward in addressing one area of concern, others were at various stages

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20 She includes an APA-style citation to Lather 1991 for the "within/against" terminology. I did not include it above to avoid confusion as to where the quote comes from.

> of being reflected on, acted on, observed and so on. I was beginning to experience a sense of "loss of control" that I had not felt previously in the overall study (p.231).

"the researcher, this researcher, the researcher/facilitator, the discourse analyst, the group facilitator, the beginning teacher advocate"--third person singular. The use of third person singular self references were the most surprising to me. In much feminist and other openly ideological inquiry, the distancing of third person references to self are rejected as artificial, alienating, and a relic of positivist models of "disinterested" research. Although I can't pretend to know McWilliam's intent in referring to herself in third person, I can say that as a reader I find it helpful to think of as a way of positioning her work as "postpositivist" rather than "anti-positivist". She argues:

> The sort of "anything goes" eductational research that can result from "anti-positivist" work has been viewed with alarm by those who now speak of the need to establish standards for validation of "non-empirical" work, in order that this tag alone is not held to be sufficient validation in itself (Bartlett, 1989; Diamond, 1988). Further, "anti-positivist" studies remain caught within a positivist epistemological framework, imitative of "hard" science while rejecting, in theory, its limitations.
>
> It is not that positivistic research ought have no place; rather, that its place ought not to subsume all others as a reseult of claims to neutrality. It is the *ideology of scientism* that has ill-served teachers, rather than positivist inquiry per se. The problem that is still to be resolved is that "anti-positivist" work, the *Other* of research methodology, cannot hope to challenge the hegemony of scientism when it informs itself out of the same modernist cultural logic (pp.59-60).

Perhaps, in seeking to do "*valid* and *rigorous* inquiry while at the same time seeking to reconceptualise what this might mean for emancipatory research" in a postmodern climate (p.85), McWilliam finds the rhetorical distance of third-person self-referencing helpful. She uses it most when describing her role as a researcher, both generally speaking and in terms of her particular project. Consider these statements:

- "The role of the researcher as reflective teacher educator is important in facilitating this response" (p.31).
- "What emerges out of this phase is a narrative constructed by the researcher which contests and critiques the versions of reality present in the needs discourse generated over time by the research group, both collectively and individually" (p.36).
- "Again, epistemological and political issues are raised for the researcher by construing the task in this way" (p.102).
- "*Research as praxis* (Lather, 1986b) requires of the researcher not only that she bring her own biases forward for scrutiny, but that she spend a great deal of quality

time working to change the social relations which always privilege her own talk over that of her students" (p.271).

A Concluding Note

Even though, in many ways, McWilliam's dissertation is presented in a traditional form with the obligatory appeals to authority and validity, her experimental representation of researcher-as-selves, a transgressive self, is bold and thought-provoking. By offering this analysis, I do not wish to suggest that the only or the most desireable way to present qualitative research under the influence of poststructuralism is to create an authorial position as a transgressive self[21]. The possibilities are only limited by our imaginations. Well, that is not true. The possibilities are also limited by what is permissible, acceptable, and communicative in terms of the purposes we have in doing our work. I am encouraged by McWilliam's efforts to address poststructural concerns with multiple self-positionings, competing discourses, and softening the divisions between researcher and researched while still making an effort to speak to segments of the academic community who may find other ways of addressing such concerns inaccessible and, therefore, more easily dismissable.

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[21] Other interesting examples are described by Richardson (1993a,b).

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