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# Towards an *e-Critique Feminine*: Woolf, DuPlessis, Cixous, and the Emerging Discursive Tradition in Women's Online Diaries

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Towards an *e-Critique Feminine*:  
Woolf, DuPlessis, Cixous, and the Emerging Discursive Tradition in  
Women's Online Diaries

by

Deborah Silverman Bowen

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
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This dissertation is dedicated to all women who write themselves.

I listened to your voices, and found mine.

-DSB, 2004

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Thank you to my friend Chuck McSorley. If laughter is the best medicine, you should be a physician. I'm so glad you are a part of my family.

Thank you to my son Benjamin Gil. In many ways, the credit for this belongs to you.

Thank you to my husband Phil. Your insight and guidance helped turn a harmless pastime into a legitimate avocation. How honored I am that you never stopped believing in me. You are now and forever will be "sweet like candy to my soul." I love you so, so much.

What matters is that lives do not serve as models, only stories do that. And it is a hard thing to make up stories to live by. We can only retell and live by the stories we have read or heard. We live our lives through texts. They may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories have formed us all; they are what we must use to make new fictions, new narratives.

-- Carolyn Heilbrun

In postmodern America we are culturally obsessed with getting a life -- and not just getting it, but sharing it with and advertising it to others. We are, as well, obsessed with consuming the lives that other people have gotten. The lives we consume are translated through our own lives into story.

-- Sidonie Smith and Julie Watson

oh i can't tell you how incredibly happy i am to have this back. it is my safe-haven. i am in love with diaryland. ... i feel so safe here- like no one could find me. it's like i am bundled up in a nice warm comforter of public seclusion. that's an oxy moron, i know... but it fits well. i'll write something more meaningful later, but for now i am just revelling in the wonders of my long-missed friend, "carallyne".

-- "Carallynne," Diaryland.com

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Towards an *e-Criture Feminine*: Woolf, DuPlessis, Cixous, and the Emerging Discursive Tradition in Women's Online Diaries

Deborah Silverman Bowen

**ABSTRACT**

Women are drawing together the concepts of space, style, and medium and using these concepts collectively as a foundation for a new discursive tradition in the online autobiography. This dissertation, positioned in postmodern feminism, draws on a variety of disciplines to argue the development or evolution of a new women's discourse.

While a broad base of material exists which acknowledges the presence of women's discourse (formed by combining women's writing and women's genres), very little information explores its evolution, particularly in/on the new medium of the World Wide Web (WWW).

A combination of extant social and literary theories supports the idea that women are developing a new *e-criture feminine* via the online diary. Both the virtual medium and the historically women's genre echo the very tenets of this new writing style: privacy, individuality, and a lack of (restraining) conventions.

This dissertation will contextualize the phenomenon of women publishing online diaries in the poststructuralist ideologies of Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous. Following an

explication of women's space, women's style, and women's medium, this dissertation will demonstrate that women successfully concatenate these concepts in their online journals, resulting in the creation of a new feminine discourse.

The goal of this project is to provide readers with a theoretical explication of this new discursive tradition. Certainly, a number of critical and academic works exist which address the "gendering" of the written medium, the phenomenon of women publishing online, the importance of women developing their own voices.

What is missing from academic dialogue, however, is the assertion that these individual elements unite to create a new discursive tradition that is at once literary and rhetorical. Using the work of Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous, this dissertation presents, explicates, and ties together these elements in an effort to introduce and theorize the significance of this new discursive tradition within the context of postmodern feminism/s. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that women are experiencing the organic concatenation of the concepts of space (Woolf), style (DuPlessis), and medium (Cixous) as they relate to the Web in order to develop an important new women's discursive tradition.

## Chapter One: Women Write the Web

### *The Purpose and Theoretical Standpoint of the Project*

"Soul Reaver," 21st-century American teenager, chronicles her life at approximately 14 kilobits per second, tops. "Time drips away, so intensely slow . . . as if the world was locked in a freeze-frame and I am the only living thing," she writes in her second entry, captured during a slow moment at her summer job on August 15, 2000, and uploaded that very day to the Open Diary, a Web site that hosts online journals.

"Exhaustion, my eternal exhaustion, can't peace fill me for an instant?"

These diaries are less private memoirs than performance art, descriptions of random chunks of time and space in a person's life, dressed and decorated and served up for mass consumption. As recently as two years ago, the number of online journalers was estimated to be in the low hundreds, but new commercial sites like the Open Diary, diarist.net, and DiaryLand now host or index millions of online diaries, "the biggest chunk of them young women and girls confiding in the world their fears, hopes, crushes, and three-pound weight gains" (Dibbell <http://www.villagevoice.com/>).

In this project, I will examine the phenomenon of women doing autobiography on the Internet, specifically writing and publishing diaries on the World Wide Web (WWW), and contextualize that phenomenon in the poststructuralist ideologies of three postmodern feminist literary critics: Virginia Woolf, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Hélène Cixous.

In order to provide a platform for argument, I will adopt the theoretical standpoint of **postmodern(ist) feminisms**. Postmodernism itself attempts to subvert and challenge the hierarchy that exists within cultures, thus by definition (or by understanding of the term), postmodernism deconstructs, as well as constructs, negotiates, and challenges the notion of feminism(s). According to Butler, postmodernism, as she understands it, questions the manner in which it uses examples in order to substitute that which it wishes to explain.

The body of feminism referred to as either “postmodern” or “poststructuralist” incorporates many different viewpoints and objectives, and so ought not to be understood as homogenous. Poststructuralist feminists generally have become self-conscious about the metaphysical assumptions of feminism as a body of thought. This generalization permits a grouping of these disparate feminists under the one heading of “postmodern.”

Postmodern feminisms typically reject the very notion that an epistemological claim could be empirically adequate or true; the idea of an independently existing world waiting to be explored and the idea that a statement could accurately describe or fail to accurately describe such a world are both anathema. Instead, postmodern feminists would argue that the statements and theories of epistemology are just like the statements found in any other "text" and are, therefore, no more or less meaningful and no more or less informative or authoritative than the statements made in any other "discourse." There is no Grand Narrative; there is only personal experience and personal truth or relevance. Paradoxically, autobiography fits into this paradigm as the *only kind* of reliable record of “truth” available to narrators.

What interests postmodern feminisms are the effects of the various discourses / theoretical frameworks /stories people tell, or use. Postmodern feminism/s would ask: “What are the multiple effects of stories about patriarchy and women's oppression? Do they unintentionally re-produce those very ideologies they seek to dispel?”

Postmodern feminisms accept the “reality” of the male/female binary as a main categorizing force in society, acknowledging its existence even as they reject the fundamental premise of the binary. The movement/s criticize the structure of society and the dominant order, especially in their patriarchal aspects, and identify *female* as having being cast into the role of the Other.

A deconstruction of the title of Butler’s work “Contingent Foundations: Feminism, and the Question of Postmodernism” gives the reader insight as to Butler’s own take on the subject. According to accepted postmodern theory, feminism/s are questionable, dubious, uncertain, conditional, provisional, and reliant. For Butler, the very foundations of feminism/s are “contingent,” dependent on or conditioned by something else. By accepting the mere fact that postmodernism attempts to “deconstruct” the term “feminism,” one is not only implying its existence, but s/he is also implying that it is a reaction to what others have recognized, understood, and learned in prior times. Consequently, it is not to say that postmodern theory is proposing or offering something “new,” rather “the pursuit of the “new” is the preoccupation of high modernism (...) the postmodern casts doubt upon the possibility of a “new” that is not in some way already implicated in the “old” (“Contingent” 37).

Moreover, domination and power play a role in deconstruction, since it is through power struggles that people construct, modify and produce meanings in society. “We

might adopt the very models of domination by which we were oppressed, not realizing that one way that domination works is through the regulation and production of subjects” (“Contingent” 39). This production of subjects indeed creates, corresponds and is compatible with postmodern theory in that through the exclusion of feminist subjects we are producing and constructing the term “feminism,” and while this subject or notion is intended to suppress the connotations of feminism, it functions quite conversely. The reason for this is evident: why would one need to subvert or suppress a non-existent subject or concept? Postmodern feminism/s, however, is concerned with its construction, foundation and the “how.” Thus, these feminisms are attempts to unlock and employ feminisms as never before, perhaps even assigning them new meaning/s. According to Butler, “to deconstruct the subject of feminism is to release the term into a future of multiple significations, to emancipate it from the material or racialist ontologies to which it has been restricted, and to give it play as a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear” (“Contingent” 43).

The establishment of foundations that would deconstruct, reconstruct and restructure feminism would include the subject and description of women and their oppression, as well as concepts, symbols and perceptions that are socially constructed and produced over time. Writes Butler, “(t)he subject is constituted... that subject is never fully constituted, but is subjected and produced time and again” (“Contingent” 48). Hence, feminist perspectives in postmodernism presuppose the reification and deconstruction of the subject, allowing it to be redefined, negotiated and challenged, in turn generating and granting these new assignment of meaning.

In keeping with the postmodern rejection of the Grand Narrative, postmodern feminism/s revel in diversity, embracing multiple truths, multiple roles, and multiple realities. Essentialism is rejected: there is no single way to “be” a woman. Despite the rejection of the Grand Narrative, postmodern feminism/s thoroughly embrace the idea of self-inquiry, a constantly shifting examination of one’s many selves.

According to Hartsock, feminism itself is an epistemology, a mode of analysis, and not a set of given conclusions. To that end, questions of process and change become significant. This dissertation, the focus of which is the development and evolution of a new literary tradition, certainly adheres to Hartsock’s premise that feminism is a mode of analysis, rather than a set of given conclusions, and that as such, questions of process and change (as in this case of evolving discourse) become significant. Feminist analysis is thus concerned with recognizing process and interaction, examining structures of relations in process (rather than as given categories), and understanding the world as a set of interlocking and dynamic elements (38-39).

In her own examination of feminist standpoint theory and its relationship to feminist postmodernism, for example, Hundleby uncovers hidden dimensions of Hartsock’s articulation of difference and diversity among women. Hundleby is thus able to argue that rather than focus on the traditional (mis)interpretation of Hartsock’s standpoint theory (i.e. ignoring differences), one can actually tease out Hartsock’s acknowledgement, discussion, and accommodation of differences among women in her previous writings. Thus, it is not impossible to reconcile Hartsock’s standpoint theory with the concept of diversity among women.

O'Leary attempts to further close the gap between postmodernism and Hartsock's standpoint theory by locating standpoint theory within postmodernism. This provides a new style of standpoint theories that transcend Hartsock's allegedly unitary image of women. This retooled conceptualization of standpoint theory acknowledges difference in experiences of women, and encourages them to establish their own standpoints. Thus, a standpoint theory becomes an epistemological position instead of a methodological movement.

Finally, Hirschmann's work succeeds in closing the gap between standpoint theory and postmodernism by accommodating the latter in the former. She distinguishes "feminist postmodernism" from "postmodern feminism". The postmodern feminist theory is relatively tolerant to the possibility of unity among women, while feminist postmodernism longs to accept complete diversity among women. In order to reconcile the disconnect/s between standpoint theory and postmodernism, feminists often conclude that the former is more desirable than the latter.

Thus, the concept of postmodern feminism/s dovetails with Hartsock's careful distinction between a "standpoint" from actual beliefs of individual women. In her definition, a standpoint is a tool and active stance, not a statement of actual consciousness. "Thus," argues Hartsock, "I make no claim about the actual consciousness of existing women, but rather I am arguing about the theoretical conditions of possibility for creating alternatives" (236).

A standpoint is not generated *de facto* through experience but born from struggle; "not generated unproblematically by simple existence in a particular social location. It is a product of systematic theoretical and practical work, and its achievement can never be

predicted with any certainty" (237). Using Hartsock's own definitions, then, this dissertation can successfully be presented from the standpoint of postmodernism feminism.

Feminism, as conceptualized in this dissertation, can certainly cope with the collapsed notions of foundationalist premises, such as that of the stable and unified self-concept. Many feminists can live without the idea of the "I" in its formerly institutionalized form. Butler asserts that there is no general 'I' which/who stands behind discourse. Rather, the 'I' only comes into being by individuation, by being "called, named, interpolated" (143). Thus, postmodern feminism allows for a new creation of "I"s. As Butler summarizes it: "If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an 'I' that preexists signification" (ibid).

Although this work is not specifically fixed in the paradigms of cyberfeminism, I would be remiss if I did not include some information about this intriguing postmodern epistemology, since directly or indirectly, any project on women-writing must acknowledge the contributions that this movement has made.

*Cyberfeminism* is a compound word made up of "*cyber*" (a prefix referring to computer related technology, in particular the Internet) and "*feminism*" (which has multiple meanings, but generally could be described as the theory and practice that seeks to understand and subvert systems of gender inequality). The theoretical roots of the movement tend to grow out of an interesting mixture of Donna Haraway and French third-wave feminism and poststructuralism (Galloway, <http://switch.sjsu.edu>).

The term “appeared on the scene in the 1990s as feminists responded in various ways to the rapid global proliferation of information and communication technologies (e.g., the Internet, WWW, and email)” (Leithauser <http://home.gwu.edu>). In early-nineties Adelaide, Australia, a group of artists and activists formed and called themselves VNS Matrix. This group developed and published the first Cyberfeminist Manifesto. The movement took root, and began to flourish in Europe. On September 20, 1997 in Kassel, Germany, the First Cyberfeminist International conference met at Documenta X, an international exhibition of contemporary art.

Like feminism, cyberfeminism is open to definition, and focuses on gender as its overarching element. With feminism as its starting point, cyberfeminism then turns its gaze upon contemporary technologies, exploring the intersections between gender identity, the body, culture and technology. Cyberfeminism is also engaged in both theory and practice, unwilling to remain critical of new information technologies without exploring the potential for challenge and change.

Despite international recognition, however, cyberfeminism remains a highly problematic theoretical framework. Like many avant-garde political movements, cyberfeminism offers no formalized or codified party line, but rather an amorphous “trade union” consciousness. Perhaps the movement is best delineated through the following set of questions: “How does technology gender us? Does the Internet escape discrimination through gender anonymity? Can technology help us overcome patriarchy? Why are computer geeks disproportionately male? Who wrote the history of computers? Are digital machines fundamentally male or female?” (Galloway <http://switch.sjsu.edu>). One might also inquire if these machines are neither – or both.

According to Haraway, best known for her work on cyborgs, technology, and feminism, cyborg imagery and politics have particular relevance for those seeking to break down those binary oppositions that inevitably result in hierarchical configurations. These binary oppositions are constructed and promoted by patriarchy (particularly linguistic patriarchy), colonialism, and capitalism: man/woman, culture/nature, machine/organism. Haraway emphasizes the transformative and “liberatory” potential of the cyborg in breaking down systems of power. “Cyborg imagery,” she argues, “can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves” (181). This manifesto suggests that women and feminists embrace technology as an aspect of our embodiment in order to continue reclaiming our (cyborg) bodies and our (cyborg) selves.

Cyberfeminist theory has been dominated by the themes of bodies and identities. Much of the focus on bodies stems from the process of forgetting the body or trying to forget about forgetting the body. The advent of cyberspace is the story of bodies migrating and morphing into new contexts. (Galloway <http://switch.sjsu.edu>). In fact, Leeson goes so far as to claim that “new [Web] users are forming the largest immigration in history” (328) Women are literally and figuratively *making themselves* literally and figuratively *at home* online.

In order to successfully argue my points, I must first present myself to the reader. I am writing this work from the perspective of a white, heterosexual woman in her early thirties. I have “been online” in some form or another since September of 1992, when I was first introduced to the concept of the World Wide Web via available UNIX chat and e-mail utilities. Since then, I have come to rely quite heavily on the Web as a tool for

communication and information. I have used e-mail and Web browsers extensively, and have drawn on Web applications for meeting other like-minded individuals via Multi-User Domain chat programs (Internet Relay Chat), site-specific chat programs, and instant messaging programs (e.g., ICQ and AOL's proprietary format). I have written and published a variety of Web "home" pages, entirely autobiographical in nature. Finally, I have been reading online diaries since May of 2000, when an online friend published her first diary entry (now available in archives at <http://boogie.diaryland.com/older2.html>).

### *Thesis*

The premise of this project is that women are drawing together the concepts of space, style, and medium and using these concepts collectively as a foundation for a new online discursive tradition in the online autobiography (diary or journal). Three critics in particular speak to these concepts: Woolf to space, DuPlessis to style, and Cixous to medium. The work of these critics will serve as the primary theoretical foundation of this dissertation.

This project, positioned in postmodern feminism, is critical to current academic conversations because it draws on a variety of disciplines (literary criticism, cultural studies, feminist gender studies, new media studies) in order to allow me to argue a single, critical point: the development or evolution of a new women's discourse. As demonstrated in the review of the literature, this dissertation aims to make a contribution to the study of women's writing: while a broad base of material exists which acknowledges the presence of women's discourse (formed by combining women's

writing and women's genres), very little information argues for an active evolution of the discourse, particularly in the new medium of the World Wide Web (WWW).

Throughout the project, I will use available critical commentary on the gendering of the diary as a "women's genre" to shore up my argument that women are consciously working within rhetorical mores traditionally ascribed to women. Additionally, I will propose and support the idea that the World Wide Web is itself a women's writing space, the ideal medium for women to develop an *e-criture feminine*, an online women's-writing. I will also use established qualitative research methodology and collect empirical examples to support my claims.

This interdisciplinary work is critical to the ongoing conversations in several academic fields, chief among them English literary and rhetorical theories, gender studies, feminist studies, and cultural studies. The project posits that an entirely new discursive practice is developing online, an assertion that can be well supported by drawing on established literary and rhetorical conventions. Additionally, the work engages and challenges contemporary social theories of gender identity development and draws in elements of new media theory as a function of popular culture studies.

The goal of this project is to provide readers with, as the title indicates, a theoretical explication of this new online discursive tradition. Certainly, a number of critical and academic works exist which address the following topics: the "gendering" of the written medium, the phenomenon of women publishing online, the importance of women developing their own voices.

What is missing from academic dialogue, however, is the assertion that these individual elements are uniting to create a new discursive tradition that is at once literary

and rhetorical. Using the work of Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous, this work will present, explicate, and tie together these academic elements in an effort to introduce and theorize the significance of this new discursive tradition within the context of postmodern feminism/s. Ultimately, this dissertation seeks to demonstrate that women are experiencing the organic concatenation of the concepts of women's space (Woolf), women's style (DuPlessis), and women's medium (Cixous) as they relate to the Web in order to develop a new women's discursive tradition online.

## **Chapter Two: Research Specifics**

### ***Methodology***

For this project, I will appropriate and adopt certain standard methodologies of literary analysis as guiding principles of my scholarship: bibliographic research; critical analysis of primary and secondary source materials; synthesis of scholarship; formulation of an argument; and, ultimately, the development of ideas germane to the research area that further scholarship through this original contribution. My work will be comprised of two discrete parts: examination and explication of primary sources (critical theory), and applications of the critical theory to available online diaries.

I created a set of critical parameters using the texts of critics Woolf, Cixous, and DuPlessis and contextualized these parameters in an established theoretical paradigm – postmodern feminism- and provided support and justification for these parameters through an extensive literature review and series of theoretical summaries and supports.

In order to substantiate my claims, I have examined 30 online diaries, chosen arbitrarily, for use as referents. Diaryland.com, one of the largest diary sites on the Web, offers not only an extensive, browsable collection of diaries, but provides virtual space for its members to archive past entries for several years.

Diaryland.com allows surfers to browse users by screen name. I began with letter A, and selected the 25<sup>th</sup> diary that appeared in the listing, adding that diary to my list of ‘Favorites’ in my Internet browser for subsequent visits.

In order to be approved for use, each diary must have met two criteria: the author must be self-identified as a woman (although admittedly, there is no way to conclusively prove the gender of a relatively anonymous online author) and the author must have been using the diary for at least two (2) years. I selected January 1, 2003 as my starting point for reading, an arbitrary date which offered two important criteria: 1. each diarist would have been writing for at least several months prior to that selected date; and 2. each diarist would have a number of entries available for perusal.

One must note, however, that the number of entries was not consistent between any two diarists. Some updated once a week; in most cases, however, the diarist offered multiple weekly or daily updates. There was no obvious pattern to when or why each diarist chose to update; occasionally, the diarist would make mention of a particular event in her life that spurred her to write, or indicate that she had been “too busy” to sit down and update her work for a while. Rarely did I find a diarist who did not update at least weekly without an explanation or an apology to her readers, a phenomenon that suggests an implicit understanding of the two-way relationship even in this supposed one-way form of communication. Without conscious awareness, these diarists were participating in dialogic communication, acknowledging Fish’s “active reader,” concretizing reader-response theory through these highly personal documents. These diarists are aware of the power of their texts, both to themselves and to others.

On the occasions I selected a diary written by a male, by an author with no gender specified, or with too recent a start date, I eliminated that diary, counted down five screen names, and verified that this new diary met my criteria before admitting that diary as a replacement.

I cycled through the alphabet, selecting diaries letter by letter, and began again with letter A, continuing until I had my 30 secondary sources.

This dissertation, then, will use literary analysis to argue the idea that a women's discursive tradition is evolving on the Internet, as exemplified by online diaries (and journals and autobiographies).

### ***Operationalization of Definitions and of Assumptions***

This dissertation is grounded in the idea that the concepts of "identity," "language," and "means of discourse" are fluid, polymorphous. To that end, I am obligated to ascribe definitions to those and other slippery terms, definitions that will, ideally, provide clarity and cohesion to the overall series of arguments found herein. I will start from the premise that it is possible to theorize gender attributes as forming a spectrum of constructed possibilities, from which the individual either chooses, or unconsciously internalizes, and then expresses these attributes in a way that is far broader and more fluid than "standard" gender stereotyping would suggest.

In the postmodern paradigm, "feminism" is no longer analogous to the experience of women and the necessity to *prove* to the world that women were indeed oppressed. Instead, the oppression and erasure of women is taken as a given, and the focus of postmodern feminism becomes the analysis of *how* and *why* such oppression and erasures occurred. For the purposes of this dissertation, the model of **postmodern feminism/s** signifies the body of thought that seeks to want to understand *how* and *why* the persons embodying the feminine (women, usually) are negatively impacted by this

gender/hierarchy structure. It is a focus more on "why things happen" instead of just "what things happened" relating to women's lives (Grant 130-131).

While feminism, within the context of postmodernist theory, refers to a women's commitment to liberation, justice, and equality amongst all peoples, regardless of gender, race, religion, or economic background, "(p)ostmodern feminism focuses on cultural forms as against structural analysis, especially in the role of Culture and Language...Its use...indicates that feminism has succeeded in shifting the terrain of cultural politics; not necessarily implying that the battle has been won...but making it necessary to read texts differently..." (Andemahr, et al.). This anti-essentialist movement understands that masculinity and femininity are cultural categories (or social constructions) that are subject to interrogation and change. Finally, postmodern feminism focuses on, among others, otherness, authorship, identity and selfhood (Tong 194).

Because postmodernism denounces the idea of the Grand Narrative, it is reasonable to assert that no unified theory serves as the guiding force or mythos for any contemporary Western society. Therefore, one can make the argument that no unified theory guides concepts found in contemporary society, specifically the ideas of "sex" and "gender." "Sex" is usually understood as relating to inherent genetic, physical "facts": reproductive organs, genitalia, the role of the person in the reproductive process. "Gender" is usually understood as relating to those arbitrary social and behavioral characteristics of men and women, the result of years and years of rigorous social constructivism. This work, on the other hand, will adopt Butler's definition of "gender," and, to a lesser degree, "sex."

In the past, feminists regularly made a distinction between bodily sex (*corpo/reality* of biological organs and functions that “define” and “distinguish” men from women) and gender (*social* conventions that determine the differences between masculinity and femininity). Certain visible anatomical structures do mark the differences between those which we call “men” and “women,” but the argument can strongly be made that most of the conventions that determine the behaviors of men and women are, in fact, *social* gender constructions that have little or nothing to do with genitalia or reproductive roles (Felluga <http://www.purdue.edu>).

According to American second wave liberal feminism, sex is a biological category; gender is a historical category. Butler questions that distinction by arguing that "gender acts" have such an affect on material reality and anatomical reality that even the *perception* of corporeal sexual differences is affected by social conventions. For Butler, sex is not "a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed, but... a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies" (*Bodies* 2-3). Sex, for Butler, "is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (*Bodies* 2).

Here, Butler is influenced by the postmodern tendency to see the conception of reality as determined by language, so that it is ultimately impossible even to think or articulate sex without imposing linguistic norms: "there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body" (*Bodies* 10). Thus, according to Butler, the very act of “saying” (or writing) something about sex ends up imposing cultural or ideological norms: "'sex' becomes something like a fiction, perhaps a

fantasy, retroactively installed at a prelinguistic site to which there is no direct access" (*Bodies* 5). Nonetheless, that fiction is central to the establishment of subjectivity and human society, which is to say that, even so, it has material effects: "the 'I' neither precedes nor follows the process of this gendering, but emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves" (*Bodies* 7). "Sex" is thus unveiled not only as an artificial norm but also a norm that is subject to change.

According to Butler, individuals can be made to understand gender as a symbolic social construction, in which power and dominance are constituted and materialized in bodies. Gender is produced by discursive and performative practices, which produce subjects in connection with a normative two-gender-system and enforced heterosexuality

Indeed, Butler argues that gender, as an objective natural thing, does not exist: "Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed" ("Performative" 278). Gender, according to Butler, is by no means tied to material bodily "facts," but is solely and completely a social construction, a fiction, one that is therefore open to change and contestation: "Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis" ("Performative" 273). The body becomes its gender only "through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" ("Performative" 274).

If "gender" is constructed through arbitrary signifiers, the connection between signifier and signified can be weakened, changed, or broken. The signifiers of gender

help maintain the system of binary oppositions that shape Western thought; by dividing the world into "male" and "female," "masculine" and "feminine," gender can be deconstructed, and the elements that constitute stable notions of gender can be put into play.

According to Nicholson, the term "gender" is used in two different and contradictory ways within feminist discourse: 1) it refers to a social construction rather than the biologically constructed sex; and 2) it increasingly refers to any social construction that separates "female" bodies from "male" bodies. "If the body is itself always seen through social interpretation," she writes, "then sex is not something that is separate from gender but is, rather, that which is subsumable under it" (39). Even in feminist discourse that does not endorse the idea, Nicholson demonstrates that gender is still seen as dependent on biological sex via her "coat-rack" view of self-identity: "Here the body is viewed as a type of rack upon which differing cultural artifacts, specifically those of personality and behavior, are thrown or superimposed" (41).

This "coat-rack" approach allows some feminists to explain both commonalities and differences among women and to avoid the pitfalls of biological determinism. The shape of the rack can make certain demands as to what it can accommodate, but its shape does not solely or completely determine the items it winds up holding. This view allows feminism to maintain the idea that there are basic natural constancies regarding gender while not closing women off to social change.

Nicholson calls this "coat-rack" approach *biological foundationalism* (b.f), distinguishable from biological determinism because of b.f.'s reliance on one or more elements of social construction. Nicholson feels that b.f. and the "coat-rack" view of

identity ultimately stand in the way of really understanding differences among men, among women, and regarding who is identified as either. It is not acceptable to just use and accept male/female differences; one must investigate how these differences come about, how they are socially constructed, and how they play out in different times and places.

"What I am calling 'biological foundationalism'," she writes, "is best understood as representing a continuum of positions bounded on one side by a strict biological determinism and on the other side by the position I would like feminists to endorse: that biology cannot be used to ground claims about 'women' or 'men' transculturally" (49). On this continuum of b.f., positions are relative, not simply either/or. Approaches that delve into biological differences make invisible the many ways in which men and women *do not fit* the generalizations. A feminism of difference is both true and false, offering no conclusive reading of difference, and adhering to the paradigmatic status quo of the binary.

Bearing in mind Nicholson's critique of biological foundationalism, I will focus my definitions on ideas of "gender" and exclude the notion of "sex." For clarity's sake, this dissertation will use the term "gender" to refer to those established societal constructions which create and underscore the binary opposition of "male"/"female." This term is so defined in keeping with its generally accepted uses *outside* of academic feminisms, where one typically encounters a lack of comprehension of gender as a construct and an emphasis on gender loosely defined as "traits that exemplify biological 'givens.'"

A blanket definition of *woman* is impossible, because of the diversity of the gender (e.g., race, social class, sexual orientation). “The women’s voices most likely to come forth and the women’s voices mostly likely to be heard are, in the United States anyway, those of white, middle-class, heterosexual Christian women” (Lugones and Spelman 21). This marginalization of an already marginalized group threatens the development of (a) women’s voice, insofar as this voice is key to fighting repression, establishing opportunity, and creation of recognition (26-27).

According to various forms of feminism, the underlying theme of the struggle of women is to overcome communication and cultural barriers, and to destroy the patriarchal perspectives and definitions of women that inform language and philosophy. Cixous uses this idea to define *woman* as the “inevitable struggle against conventional man” (279), and argues that “woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement. The future must no longer be determined by the past” (279). According to Cixous, writing *woman* will help overcome negative history by creating a new history, written by women, toward women. Cixous, does not, however, wish to fit all women into one mold of *woman*; rather she wishes to focus the entire gender on the struggle for *woman*.

Using Butler’s definitions as a guide, but not as a series of absolutes, I will use the generic term “woman” or “women” to refer to those individuals who have adopted, consciously or not, the culturally and socially constructed “norms” which mark that group of individuals as thusly gendered.

In these linguistic parameters, then, the term “feminine” takes on its own meaning, a greater meaning than just “of or relating to the female.” One might

immediately define the term as simplistically, or, worse yet, fall back into binary oppositions, and define “feminine” in its relation to the privileged quality of “masculine.” One may make the following logical assumption simply on the basis of its adjectival modal form: that which is *feminine*, associated with the female, has been categorized as such using the same types of cultural and societal suppositions that result in arbitrary designations of and characteristics of *gender*.

Poststructuralist cultural theorists of gender claim that *gender* is a set of signifiers attached to culturally defined sexually dimorphic bodies, and that these signifiers work to divide social practices and relations into those binary oppositions (male/female, masculine/feminine). A beaded handbag, for example, may serve as a signifier: a beaded handbag generally signifies femininity. It is the case, however, that *anyone* is capable of carrying a beaded handbag. Therefore, by extension, anyone is able to be / capable of being *feminine*. The concept, then, becomes more than merely a set of qualities arbitrarily associated with femaleness; the concept becomes an individual and collective act, the deliberate appropriation of and designating of behaviors as intrinsically (but not inherently) female.

Humans are biological (“natural”) beings; we are also social (“artificial”) entities. As such, I must address the concepts of transgender and intersexuality and their relationship to the terms “women” and “women” in the context of postmodernism. Transgender, in true postmodern fashion, does thwart the convenient binary opposition of “male/female,” crossing and blurring the lines of gender ‘typing,’ both physically and culturally. Theorists like Butler rely heavily on the concepts of the body and gender as constructed rather than fixed and essential, the notion of the body as a commodity, the

destabilization of empiricism, the disruption of sex in relation to gender and the problematization of sex and gender binaries. Here, too, one may certainly argue that certain attributes of both gender and sex are conscious and dynamic choices, not fixed and static physical or social givens. Gender, as a social construct, can be wholly performative; sexuality, a subset of gender, can also be, to some degree, a series of conscious deliberate acts (how one engages with his/her organs, how one uses his/her organs, etc.).

In brief, this dissertation will ask that the reader use the following terms and definitions:

*Female* will refer to those with a specific set of physical, observable characteristics or signifiers; female thus becomes a quality that is not necessarily judged by ability to procreate. The bulk of this dissertation will use the terms “woman” and “women” as contextually appropriate, but in some cases, the term “female” must be used. This is particularly true when referring to traditional or canonical Western philosophical or linguistic thought, both of which rely quite heavily on the concepts of “female” and “male” in relation to one another, and to the binary relationship of “male”/“female” that informs so much of Western ontology.

*Feminine* will refer to one having the qualities arbitrarily associated with “female.” The term has been categorized with the same types of cultural and societal suppositions that result in arbitrary designations of and characteristics of *gender*.

*Gender* will refer to a changeable adoption of codified societal constructions which create and underscore the binary opposition of “male”/”female.”

*Woman* or *Women* will refer to those who have consciously or unconsciously adopted those societal mores ascribed to “women.”

### ***Background***

The following background material seeks to position this dissertation as an active part of the current conversation in both literary criticism and social sciences. The primary focus of this project is online discourse analysis located in the feminist ideologies of Butler and the social ideologies of Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous; although there exists a wealth of articles on communication and gender, online activity and gender, and online pedagogy and gender, there has been very little written about gender-specific types/genres of online writing. Still less has been written using postmodern feminist critique to justify gendered writing.

Two areas of investigation are relevant to the premise of online feminine discourse presented in this dissertation: the idea of traditionally ‘feminine’ literary forms (specifically the diary) as exemplifying a developing women’s discursive tradition, and the use of the new electronic medium as the right vehicle for development of the new discourse. Although a considerable body of material has been written on gendering in computer-mediated communication (CMC), what is missing from much of the work is the acknowledgement of the singularity of the phenomenon of women publishing on the Web.

The burgeoning number of women authors online is indicative of a collective desire to populate this new medium, and, as a result of this populating, to establish a new and different presence in this new medium: hence, the new women's discursive tradition. This dissertation seeks to address not only the manifestation of the new tradition, but to justify it in the context of postmodern feminism and three specific critical ideologies (Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous). I intend to bring a single facet of CMC – the online diary/journal or autobiography – to the fore, and argue that its presence signals this new online discursive tradition.

The first of the investigations of modern linguistic studies were focused on general language development in children: imitation and habit versus the learning and adoption of linguistic rules (Skinner 1957; Chomsky 1957). Chomsky asserted that children have an innate knowledge of grammar rules, that linguistic systems are somehow part of an individual's genetic hard-wiring. As a result of the rise of African-American consciousness in the 1960's, linguists embarked on further evaluations of Chomsky's claim of the level of "genetic grammarology" among the races (Silverman 1964, Davis 1969).

The late 1960's brought about a similar time of awareness for women as the second wave of the American women's movement began to take shape and gain public prominence. Because of this attention, linguistic studies turned to the differences in language not *among* the sexes, but *between* the sexes. This observation was not "new," per se: Key notes that since as early as 1582, it had been assumed that women speak substantially differently than men do ("Behavior" 281).

These initial studies were concerned mainly with vocabulary and conversation topics (Lakoff 1975; Bodine 1975; Brend 1975; Lakoff 1978). In traditional “offline” linguistic and discursive theories, this approach seems to have been neglected in favor of using influential, shaping texts to reinforce the male/female polarity in communications, focusing on, among others, audible vocal cues of patterns of interrupting (Zimmerman and West 1975) and vocal pitch control (Brend 1975).

Early articles and books on gender and cyberculture primarily dealt with the computer mediated communication aspect of the Internet, as there was no mass World Wide Web. In the early days of CMC, those who studied “gendered linguistics” focused on three main areas: differences in communication (Tannen 1991); the intersection between these differences and the ways in which knowledge is constructed; and the most effective method of learning for members of each gender (Freire 1971; Carr and Kemmis 1986; Elliott 1991; Kramarae and Spender 1993). Herring (1993) was one of the first to debunk the idea that because CMC is a faceless medium, many hoped that it would neutralize impressions of gender identity and provide women with an equal playing field.

Scholars have acknowledged that differences do exist between the kinds of identities presented by men and women online. Gender has been a significant topic for those writing about electronic communication, but the focus of the scholarship has mainly been about the negotiation of gender or gendered styles of communication in interactive communication (De Lauretis 1987; Stone 1991; Herring 1994; Turkle 1995; Hall 1996; Donath 1999).

In the relatively new discipline of pedagogically-centered CMC, much critical attention has fallen on the best ways in which to use CMC as a tool for observing

differences between the genders in the classroom, and the best ways in which to use CMC as an effective teaching tool for either gender (Matheson 1991; Hardy, Hodgson, and McConnell 1994; Herring 1996; McConnell 1997; Gregory 1997).

Even more recent is the work of feminist theorists charting the development of women's e-space (Balka 1993). The most dominant frame for this type of analysis is the postmodern paradigm, and the ways in which one can use postmodernity as a lens through which to examine these differences (Halberstam 1991; Plant 1996).

The online environment is a new social and political location, offering women access into male-dominated computer culture. Plant (1996) indicates that initially, the WWW (a subset of the Internet) was intended to be a military weapon, a "male tool" from the start, while Fallon (1998) claims that because the Internet was developed within an already established technological culture it ignored women's role and participation.

The cultural background of the Internet is rooted in a gendered construction of a patriarchal, hierarchical institution. Cyberspace became an unfriendly environment to women. Some theorists suggest that women are being excluded from positions of influence within the context of electronic networks just as they have been historically excluded from other technologies; as Cook and Stambaugh (1997) glibly suggest, "the problem for women is that men got there first," meaning that cyberspace reflects male socialization and interests (Hawisham and Sullivan 1998). Alternately, other theorists argue that this "exclusion" is not the case, that in fact in this significant space, *men* become Other as young women establish their own spaces on the Web (Boese 1999; Takayoshi, E. Huot, and M. Huot 1999).

The medium itself allows a woman author to create, to develop and to test out her own voices, even as she joins in the collective chorus of the new online discursive tradition. In contemporary feminist studies, for example, the concept of DIY (do it yourself) has become instrumental for scholars of girls' studies (Comstock 2001) to describe the specific ways in which young women produce culture through the appropriation of technologies and/or dominant discourse to create alternative identities and media that resist mainstream representations.

The concept of creating “gendered online content” is critical to the thesis of this work. It is important to consider the language itself as its own episteme. Unfortunately much linguistic theory rides on the assumption that such differences not only exist, but are documentable in the context of the other gender, implying, of course, that one is “normal,” the other is “deviant” (Herring 1994; Shade 1993; Shade 2002). The idea of differences also presumes fundamental (essential and biological) differences between the genders, differences that are the result of genetic hard-coding, and not the result of societal convention. Herring (1994), for example, argues that communication disparities are present between the genders, and for that reason, women who defend their own spaces are engaging in subversive acts.

According to Spender (1995), dominant male culture designed the Internet and its accompanying Internet ‘discourse’, a language designed to protect and perpetuate men's interests. Both Spender and Fallon also assert that terminology such as ‘abort’, ‘chaining’, ‘thrashing’, ‘execute’, ‘head crash’, and ‘kill’ portray negative images of sex and violence to women, creating an uncomfortable and unfamiliar terrain (Spender 1995; Fallon 1998). In response, women are developing this new discursive tradition, destroying misogynistic

paradigms, inverting the traditional forms of oppression and using these forms not for self-empowerment, but rather for a reshaping of the patriarchal linguistic status quo (Gerrard 2002).

Spender debunks the assumption that women will share in the gains from the newest information age, an argument that retains relevance even ten years after its publication (161). She claims that exclusion of women from previous knowledge-making processes, such as the invention of the printing press, should be a warning for the technology of today. There is, writes Spender, "plenty of evidence today to suggest that women are again being kept out of the production of information as we move to the electronic networks" (161). Just as the assumption was made years ago about math being a "male" subject, technology, too, is often "gendered" the same way.

Although women are present in many aspects of technology, their singular and collective presence is often overlooked, since when credit is given for technological projects, women's contributions are rarely cited as key. *Zeroes and Ones*, Plant's account of women's roles in the development of technology, also offers information about the tremendous impact that women have had on the disciplines of mathematics, science, and technology, even as she recognizes the lack of recognition of women's work within those fields. According to Spender, online technology can no longer be an "option" but a necessity for women: "The electronic medium is the way we now make sense of the world, and this is why women have to be full members of the computer culture" (168).

In one particular "corner" of cyberspace, women are free to explore *e-critique* with little fear of reprisal. Online autobiography (diaries, journals) offers women a new medium for reading and writing *écriture féminine*.

The computer is a natural vehicle for communication. Women, writes Spender, are "thrilled with the potential of the computer for human communication" (175); in fact, Spender cites Plant's assertion that women should feel comfortable in cyberspace because the medium is more attuned to a woman's way of working (non-linear, anti-chronological) than to a man's (229). Perhaps the most critical aspect of the Internet for regular women users of technology is the opportunity to share their own thoughts and ideas.

Why does the online diary, the cyberautobiography present itself as the ideal medium? It can be argued that few historical texts are as compelling to read as personal letters and diaries. To the reader, these pieces appear to be written without pretense; they come across as spirited, often reflective of the writer's own personality, and, more often than not, full of details. Both letters and diaries seem to emerge *directly* from the writer, fresh and deeply intimate.

Traditional autobiography is thought of as the bringing of the self into focus, and the subsequent presentation of that self to the public through a written (verbal) medium. Feminist theorists began in the 1970's to note that men write most *traditional* autobiographies, since the structures of traditional autobiographies did not seem to fit the existing structures of women's lives. This immediately demanded an examination of the concept of autobiography, and a redefinition of other literary genres that could fit the type.

Until recently, most critics and theorists of autobiography have accepted as the narrative persona of the generic prototype that of the unitary, autonomous, liberal male subject. This subject position remains exclusive and exclusionary, not at all desirable to

those who have wanted to write autobiography. Not only does this model marginalize and isolate a whole range of autobiographical possibilities, but it also fails to acknowledge gender (not to mention race and class); it resists inclusion, and exerts “inherent” patriarchal influence upon self-representation in its assumption and presumption of the masculine/male subject position. Not surprisingly, women’s autobiographies (which frequently inscribe experiences of the world and the self that do not conform to canonical definitions of autobiography) have often been misread or ignored completely.

It is through (or against) the fictive "representative subject" that the woman-Other has had to represent herself. Sadly, the Other is always portrayed as dismissively local and specific to that subject's lens as being merely universally representative (read: stereotypical). Whether "minority," "regional," "ethnic," or generically "women's," these representations of Other subjectivity are, by necessity, revisionist, as writers in these Other subject positions must create in a dichotomous discursive space: fracturing the dominant paradigms in order to reconstruct and represent the Other self.

The exclusionary nature of the subject position has allowed the consistent default to the masculine. A subject that does not “fit” (into) the masculine paradigm is made minor, relegated to the margins, positioned in an Elsewhere, somewhere outside the (masculine) norm by an exclusive Symbolic status quo that falsely claims universality and equal inclusion. This ideological construct is rooted in the foundational gender polarity: "masculinity" and "femininity." The Symbolic concept of “binaries” would have one believe that the concepts are balanced, equally weighted on two poles of a fulcrum, while in narrative reality, masculinity and femininity are, in fact, entirely hierarchical. While masculinity reigns on the positive pole, and femininity looming over the negative

pole, the opposition creates a subject-object relationship that situates women as *not-men*, the ultimate negation of subject position, the complete evisceration of the “I” self. When a woman writer attempts to shift her representation from object to subject she is obligated to blow apart a deeply internalized and normalized linguistic, historical, and cultural paradigm.

Contemporary women's autobiographical *fiction* – as opposed to pure autobiography – communicates to the reader the painful position of having no "place," no “room” to call one's own. Furthermore, women's self-representation articulates the struggle of making a "place" for oneself, and the attendant difficulty in being forced to construct this space within alienating narrative and cultural forms, even as the woman writer attempts to splinter these forms so that they might accommodate "the subject" of the marginalized Self.

Feminist critical scholars have begun unearthing a vast number of (O)her autobiographical writings that had heretofore been excluded from the traditional definition of autobiography: letters, diaries, and scrapbooks, quilts, samplers, family Bibles, and familial oral traditions. These materials were considered peripheral, and therefore not eligible for inclusion in the canon of autobiographical work (or, indeed, the very category itself). Some feminists assert that the exclusion was deliberate, since “mere” women were the writers of these autobiographies (Jelinek 1980).

As feminist critics began to study these long-neglected pieces of writing, these scholars immediately rejected shoehorning them into the traditional form of autobiography, instead choosing to establish an intrinsically “women’s” autobiographical tradition and playing havoc with canonical boundaries of autobiography (Culley 1985;

Huff 1989; Bunkers and Huff 1996). The criteria of what constitutes an autobiography have been overturned and expanded with the inclusion of the diary and journal as a form of autobiography. The diary is a "profoundly female, feminist genre," a "feminist practice," precisely because of its multiplicity of modes, its joining to community and collectivity, and the way in which the form makes primary the personal (Huff 1989).

Smith's feminist inquiry into the genre has revealed that autobiographical criticism seems to have been informed by androcentric assumptions that both marginalized and trivialized subjectivity of women. Smith holds that the dominant theoretical paradigm, again, until recently, continues to claim that experientially, the sexes/genders were indistinguishable. The dominant paradigm, argues Smith, asserts that the ways in which men and women experience the world and the self, and their relationship to language and to the institution of literature are identical (5). These "beliefs" also include the idea that women's autobiographies, because they emanate from lives of these "culturally insignificant people," are themselves culturally insignificant; or that women's autobiographies, because they may not inscribe an androcentric paradigm of selfhood, are something other than real autobiography; or that autobiography is fundamentally a male generic contract (ibid)

The subject position of the woman autobiographer proves problematic in the traditional canon of autobiography, which relies heavily on the notion of a singular, univocal self (Brodzki and Schenck 1988); scholars of the genre hold that the exercise of writing one's autobiography fulfills a desire of "coming to knowledge of the self" (Benstock 1988). Emulating Virginia Woolf's own description of her autobiographical essays, feminist critics have proposed the canonical adoption of the term *life-writing*, a

new genre that challenges the traditional limits of by encompassing memoirs, diaries, letters, and journals, *bildungsroman*, and other personally inflected fictional texts (Benstock 1988). Smith and Watson (1998) recommend the building of archives and documentary collections that incorporate works traditionally considered "'merely personal' and extraliterary" (38-39). Examples of such works include "diaries, letters, journals, memoirs, travel narratives, meditations, cookbooks, family histories, spiritual records, collages, art books, and others." Expanding the category to include these genres would itself be an act of breaking the sequence, embracing disjunction, nonlinearity (Benstock 1988).

As a non-sexist theoretical paradigm, postmodernism accepts women's autobiography. These self-conscious, self-representational narratives tend to describe a particular space-time in flux and denote a period of transformation of social and symbolic structures and a restructuring of values. Postmodernism shunts aside traditional symbolic systems and voices of authority in favor of multiple perspectives and the authority of individual authorship. Within this constantly shifting cultural schema, the very nature of the speaking subject is continually rethought, reworked, deconstructed and reconstructed, but never codified. As Braidotti notes, "the historical contradiction a feminist postmodernist is caught in is that the very conditions that are perceived by dominant subjects as factors of a 'crisis' of values are for [her] the opening up of new possibilities" (2). Rather than demanding a Barthesian death of the author and therefore, by extension, the subject, feminist postmodernists cite an epistemological shift that has splintered authoritative centrality, particularly phallogentrism.

*Écriture féminine* embraces and embodies that premise with polyvocality, relationality, and in the new cyber-world, hypertextuality. Traditional autobiography does not –cannot – comprehend the concept of many voices; the form is locked into itself and cannot account for any deviation from its norm (Friedman, 1988). "The self constructed in women's autobiographical writing," writes Friedman, "is often based in, but not limited to, a group consciousness -- an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny" (41).

Time and time again, women have been unsuccessful in their attempts to create a new discourse within the constraints of male-dominated language and genres; because of this linguistic lockout, women have had difficulty even finding a story (Heilbrun, 1988; Heilbrun 1999). The lack of women's writing, then, becomes painfully obvious (Fletcher 1999). In order for women to successfully create this new discursive tradition, a decision on "how?" must be reached by all of the participants. In this case, the unspoken consensus takes the form of the online diary, or the online autobiography (Sorapure 2003): distinct chunks of information per page, arranged in reverse chronological order. (Hourihan, Bausch, and Haughey 2002).

By assessing the use or absence of linearity and chronology, one can attempt to distinguish a women's writing from that of a man in order to evaluate the success of the spontaneous linguistic subversion. DeVoss and Selfe (2001), for example, bring together the elements of feminism, autobiography, and online writing in a work which asserts that a relationship does exist between the sex/gender of an online writer, and the type of content s/he offers to the reading public on her/his Web site. The combination of genre

and medium – the diary and the Web, in this case – permit the genesis of this new tradition.

When a woman's signature is ascribed to an autobiography, traditional Western literary history has dubbed such a work as outside of the mainstream of the genre, and positioned it as writing from the margins, almost a work of subversion. Jeffries notes, "Traditional opinions on autobiography usually have been grounded within the idea of the "I" of self-identity as reflective self-presence and discussed within the terms set by the Cartesian subject: a universal, singular self - linked with the thinking, rational subject of eternal human nature" (<http://web.ukonline.co.uk>). Historically – albeit not critically -, this type of writing has been linked to men, to maleness. Until the development of the Web and the new discursive tradition, women have found their autobiographical spaces have been wracked with tension, mostly relating to the fractured relationship between speaking subject and narrative subject.

Because many women have challenged (and continue to challenge) the universality of self-identity, women have been identified as "Other" to the rational, reasonable, male norm. These classifications both established and reinforce a hierarchy of both power and binary oppositions. This positioning results in the potential of a woman speaking subject as "other" being legitimized within the constraints of cultural practice while at the same time, "(fixing) a conception of autobiography as the feminine, natural self-portrait *par excellence*" (ibid).

The creation of a diary – of any autobiographical form, by definition – relies heavily on the use of the "I," the subject position with which many women, according to Lacan feel most uncomfortable. Throughout history, women have danced around that

subject position, creating “off-camera” narrators who subtly guide the action and control the story, but are not main characters, not “visually” central to the plot (Conway, 1998). However, when a woman author aggressively pursues the foregrounded “I” subject position, she may find a greater emphasis on authority within her Self as the external authority (in this case, Logos) loses power (Belenky 1986; Bunkers 1990). This is perhaps because women have been denied the empowered speaking position of “I,” as Self, for so long. However, it may also be argued that the longstanding exclusion of women from the Symbolic Order has resulted in women understanding the fluid and fractures experiences of many speaking Selves, many “I”s.

Autobiography in the postmodern paradigm offers an "an emphasis on the subject as an agent in discourse, where the subject itself is understood as necessarily discursive" (Gilmore 1994) (3). Gilmore suggests that within this framework autobiographical texts facilitate the production of cultural identities. She argues, further, that postmodern debates have destabilized the foundations of autobiography studies by calling into question concepts that have been central to the tradition of autobiography, such as history and subjectivity. Attention to the relations among "ethnicity, gender, race, sexuality, and differing forms of representation" – some of the many subject positions, these many “I”s – also alters the paradigm (3).

The online autobiography gives a woman the freedom to try out some or all of her voices, to publish ideas and opinions solely for the pleasure of recording and sharing experiences. The Internet offers women the space, the tools, and the medium for exploration into individual and collective *écriture féminine*. Online autobiography can provide important insight for the writer and her writers; the format also serves to

exemplify the potential for feminine ecriture. These women are comfortable sharing the "truth" of their lives with less fear of negativity from the audience and with more anonymity than any other historical or traditional medium for women-writing.

The Web has the potential to be a safe environment for women. In this virtual reality, there is no construction of identity but rather a location or 'open space', as Plant (1996) calls it, to share experiences. On the Web, women have the opportunity to articulate bodies of knowledge based upon their own experiences and perceptions and, therefore, to subvert and redefine extant discourses into entirely new bodies of discourse. The creation of autobiography leads to the creation of "women-space," a merging of public and private spheres resulting in the creation of this entirely new spatial reality (Zalis 2003).

This overview clearly substantiates the claim that this dissertation is a viable contribution to the academic conversation precisely because it ties together several of the main areas of interest in a variety of disciplines. This work successfully draws on the established critical traditions of gendered writing and autobiography, and borrows from the relatively new body of work being created in cybercultural studies. The findings are couched in recognized ideological standpoints of postmodern feminism, and contextualized in the works of three canonical authors.

## Chapter Three: En/gendering the Internet

### *The Masculinization of the New Technology*

The Internet has completely revolutionized communication (and communicating). One can trace the evolution of the technology, beginning with the invention of the telegraph, and followed by the development of the telephone, the radio, and finally, the computer. At once, the Internet offers world-wide broadcasting capability, tools for disseminating information, and a medium for collaboration and interaction between individuals without regard for geographic location. The Internet Society (ISOC) (<http://www.isoc.org/Internet/history/brief.shtml#Transition>) and Hobbes' Internet Timeline v.7.0 (<http://www.zakon.org>) offer "industry standard" histories of the Internet; a brief gloss of the timeline is necessary to understand the importance of this medium, its global impact, and the speed at which it continues to grow.

The technological evolution began with early research on packet switching (i.e. the digitization and transmittal of digital information) and the ARPANET (Advanced Research Projects Agency Network of the U.S. Department of Defense). In 1957, the USSR launched Sputnik. In response, the US formed ARPA, the Advanced Research Projects Agency, in 1958. From 1961 until 1968, a group of (male) American scientists, engineers and scholars including Licklider, Kleinrock, Baran and Roberts (thought to be the "fathers" of the Internet), developed a series of technological protocols which would later form the backbone of the modern-day World Wide Web.

In 1969, the Department of Defense commissioned ARPANET to study networking; the “ownership” of the Internet was formally transferred in 1975 to the Defense Information Systems Agency, a branch of the United States military. The 1970s saw vast leaps in technology and the development of tools and resources that are still used today. One such example is the Gutenberg Project, founded in 1971 by Mark Hart; this venture sought to archive and make electronically available copyright-free works, including books. The first text Hart used for the Project was the US Declaration of Independence. E-mail was developed in 1972, and on March 26, 1976 the Queen of England sent her first E-mail from the Royal Signals and Radar Establishment in Malvern. “Emoticons” were not developed until April 12, 1979, when Kevin MacKenzie suggested adding some emotion back into the dry text medium of email, such as “-)” for indicating a sentence was tongue-in-cheek. Though MacKenzie and his idea were “flamed” by many users at the time, emoticons became widely used after Scott Fahlman suggested the use of “:-)” and “:- (“ in a CMU BBS on September 19, 1982.

The 1980’s reflect the initial public accessibility and globalization of the formerly private, American academic/industrial medium. In 1981, BITNET (Because It’s Time NETwork) was developed as a cooperative network at the City University of New York, its initial connection linking it to Yale University. The purpose of BITNET was to provide electronic mail and listserv servers to distribute information and handle file transfers.

Europe made its first “public appearance” online in 1983 with the development of EARN (European Academic and Research Network), its version of BITNET. The WELL

(Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link) signed on in 1985, and Cleveland, Ohio opened up the first freenet service in 1986.

ARPANET was dissolved in 1990, but technological advances on/for the Internet continued throughout the decade. That same year saw the appearance of The World, the first commercial provider of Internet dial-up access. Jean Armour Polly coined the term "surfing the Internet" in 1992. Shortly thereafter, in 1993, both the White House and the United Nations had presences on the Web. The first online shopping appeared in 1994; the first cyber radio station was broadcast from Las Vegas, Nevada. CompuServe, Prodigy, and America Online began providing Internet access to consumers in 1995. Just three years later, the number of Web pages was estimated to be between 275 and 320 million.

Of course, nothing so powerful and necessary would remain free forever. In 2003, larger US Internet retailers begin collecting taxes on all purchases. Some US states began taxing Internet bandwidth. The European Union began requiring all Internet companies to collect value added tax (VAT) on digital downloads as of July 1, 2003.

Despite its seeming "across-the-board" policies (e.g. taxation, children's online safety), the Internet is highly decentralized. Indeed, the basic design philosophy underlying the Internet (particularly since the dissolution of ARPANET) has been to push management decisions to as decentralized a level as possible. Therefore, one can imagine the Internet as a number of communicating users with infrastructure in the middle facilitating that communication. If this is the case, then management authority rests mostly (but not exclusively) with the users rather than the infrastructure, which may be analogized to a collection of pipes that carry information to and from users. The global

nature of the medium essentially removes the potential for a single governing authority to gain the consensus necessary to impose policy, although a variety of transnational organizations are seeking to address issues of Internet governance globally (Thornbaugh and Lin 32).

Even during online and “real life” debates over privacy, security, and copyright laws, current research continues to expand the horizons of the infrastructure along several dimensions, such as scale, performance, and higher-level functionality. As the current rapid expansion of the Internet is fueled by the realization of its capability to promote information sharing, users must understand that, in a postmodern reflexivity, the first role of the network in information sharing was providing information about its own design and operation through Requests For Comment (RFC), which were brief memos, a fast, informal way to distribute and share ideas with other network researchers). This unique method for evolving new capabilities in/via the network remains critical to future Internet development.

Such uncontained growth has presented its own set of particular challenges. On this medium, both visual and auditory, one E-commerce industry has emerged as the undisputed leader: pornography. According to Thornburgh and Lin, the online pornography industry generates an estimated \$1 billion in annual revenue; the authors predict that this will rise to between \$5 and \$7 billion by 2007 (72). Researchers at the Online Computer Library Center “suggested that globally there are around 74,000 commercial sites; US industry group UAS/IFA offers an ‘educated guess’ that there are around 200,000 sites” (<http://www.caslon.com.au>). The motivator is, of course, money:

MacMillan notes that pornography was the first “business sector” to show a profit from developing an online presence (<http://www.washingtonpost.com>).

### ***How Women Engage the Internet***

The irony is inescapable: the Internet, home to millions of pornographic images, the currency of woman-as-object, has become a virtual home to millions of women, a vast boundary-less cosmos in which real-life women are them/selves in this cyberplane with the products of words, thoughts, and ideas. According to Nielsen NetRatings (via NUA, the largest Web site dedicated to Internet trend analysis demographic statistics), American women over 21 spend “spend longer online each week than teenagers ... mothers spend an average of 16 hours and 52 minutes online per week, approximately four hours and 35 minutes more than American teenagers” (<http://www.nua.ie>). In fact, “the number of at-home female Internet users in the US increased more rapidly than the number of male users in 2001 ... Women now account for 52 percent of home Internet users, or 55 million people, up from 50.4 million last year. There are 49.8 million male home users, up from 48.2 million in December 2000.” (<http://www.nua.ie>). Currently, women make up the *majority* of Web surfers: “Women now account for 52 percent of home Internet users, or 55 million people, up from 50.4 million last year. There are 49.8 million male home users, up from 48.2 million in December 2000” (ibid).

What, then, are these women *doing* online? It would seem as if the Internet is dominated by three radically disparate pastimes: pornography, genealogy, and shopping/e-commerce (as a side note, Weisbard notes that “Cyber Dialogue's January 2000 in-depth interview with 1,000 Internet users and 1,000 nonusers found that nearly

70 % of women who seek product information online still end up going offline to make purchases.”). Surely this majority group is not confined to one of these three ventures.

Apparently, women are not content to sit idly in front of the keyboard, passively clicking through series of screens, reading or buying what appears in front of them. Alternately, women are not content to be represented on the screen, captured as-object by a camera, uploaded to the Web, fodder for voyeurs. Women are engaging in acts of creation: they are helping to construct individual identities as well as a common discursive tradition via the World Wide Web.

One of the first to recognize the potential of the computer as a means of expression was Turkle, for whom the Internet "has become a significant social laboratory for experimenting with the constructions and reconstructions of self that characterize postmodern life" (180). "Identity is socially mediated," write Miller and Mather, "and much of that mediation is through language. It follows that as new social processes and new ways of using language emerge, it may be possible to develop new aspects of identity. It has been suggested . . . that the developing communication technologies of the last twenty years have had profound implication for our sense of self."

How are these women constructing or developing identity within this new medium? Love writes,

(M)any are unaware of the substantial body of creative work that women have been producing for the web. The work belies the notion of a 'gender divide' in the digital world: it aggressively employs cutting-edge media technologies and insistently explores concepts and themes that range widely over women's concerns and experiences. Insiders in the world of electronic literature have long

recognized that women were among the earliest adopters of online technologies for expressive, artistic, and literary purposes (<http://alpha.furman.edu>).

Women are carving out deep niches on personal Web sites, or “homepages”. Once primarily the domain of the adolescent male, this vehicle is rapidly becoming the pen-and-paper of women Internet users.

### *The Nascence of the Online Diary*

It is possible to point to the single catalyst that actually spurred this proliferation of women’s diaries. In 1995, Robert Toups published “Babes on the Web,” a catalog of then-current homepages of women. This catalog featured photographs of each woman author. Toups rated each photograph on a scale of one to four solely on the basis of the aesthetic appeal that each image held for him. As Toups explains: “Along with being a capitalist pig, I am a proud male chauvinist pig. As such, I have gathered all the World Wide Web sites of women I could find. Instead of rating them on quality of design, I am grading them on a four Toupie scale according to their personal pictures. My rating system is totally subjective to my personal tastes and whims” (Kibby 40).

Clearly, Toups was prepared for controversy. His page included the following caveat: “If this page is offensive to you, then go to the National Organisation for Women (NOW) home page and cry to them. Maybe they will organise a cyber protest against my page or maybe you will find something else to bitch about. Either way, I won’t care.” Following that suggestion, Toups provided a link to the NOW homepage (ibid).

Toups’ project immediately generated “vocal” online debate and counter-attack. A number of anti-‘Babes on the Web’ pages appeared; several women posted pictures of

Toups, and invited visitors to rate his attractiveness and potential for meeting a ‘babe’ for himself.

In an ironic twist, women publishing today may actually owe Toups a debt of gratitude. Without Toups, it is arguable that many of these voices would still be relegated to paper and pen, and these groundbreaking Web authors would not have been able to make themselves known so vocally, allowing women’s Web publishing to have become so diverse and divergent. Thanks to the feelings Toups engendered in his women readers, these reaction-ist pioneers forged the way for an insurgent wave of women’s Web publishing. Current homepages are reaching well beyond what casual observers would think of “traditional” subjects for women. The breadth of subject matter, however, is much greater than what the casual Web surfer might expect to encounter.

Every day, women build identities in postmodern technological contexts. DeVoss notes that “feminist theorists and historians of the philosophy of technology have often painted a bleak picture of marginalization and restricted access” (34). Happily, as women create, produce, and mark, this landscape bursts with potential and possibility. Perhaps the genre in which women have again, entirely differentiated themselves from their male counterparts is in autobiography: *diarying*, or creating *online chronicles of the self*.

Online diaries and journals have been around almost as long as the World Wide Web, as evidenced in the postings of Justin Hall and Carolyn Burke, who offered a mixture of personal information and commentary online by late 1994 (Ozawa <http://www.diarist.net/guide/blogjournal.shtml>). In fact, Burke is credited with launching the first “official” online diary on January 3, 1995 (Sorapure 2). Weblogs did not emerge

with any impact until 1998 (although some say NCSA [National Center for Supercomputing Applications] link pages dating back to 1993 “count” as the first) (ibid).

“Deb,” another diarist on the World Wide Web, and a contemporary of Burke’s, introduces herself on <http://www.diaryhistoryproject.com>:

I first got online some time in early 1995 ... I was more than a little amazed at what the actual Internet offered. ... A few months later, the novelty had worn off and I started looking for other chicks online. When I found them, it was such a mind blowing experience to see that there were women out there putting their lives online, women who had been doing this longer than I had actually known there was such a thing as the World Wide Web.

Although the World Wide Web is by no means without its restrictions, it is a powerful resource to those with the means to access it. Thousands of Western women chronicle their lives on the Web and correspond with one another via diary lists or "burbs" (organized around common interests), "prompts" (offered as inspiration for diary entries), Webring (a group of websites linked together by topic or interest), and other electronic forums that promote communication among diarists globally.

The Internet offers three basic approaches to journaling: diaries, blogs, and “combination interfaces.” The online diary reflects its real-world counterpart: it is arranged in reverse chronological order, most current post first, with one visible screen comprising a single entry. The term "weblog" or "blog" describes a form of diary or journal writing that features Web pages on which short, frequent, chronologically ordered entries are posted. This project will focus primarily on pure online diaries, although the dividing line between diaries and blogs is becoming increasingly unclear.

An introduction to the two genres from Diarist.net describes the differences between the two: “In short ... a traditional weblog is focused *outside* the author and his or her site. A web journal, conversely, looks *inward*, focused on the author's thoughts, experiences, and opinions. Some sites, of course, do both.” (Ozawa <http://www.diarist.net>).

Two main differences exist between diaries and blogs, one structural, one in content. Each entry in an online diary typically occupies its own page, the most current entry displayed to the public. The author archives past entries, and makes them available to readers through hyperlinks. A blog displays several entries on a single scrollable screen, archived at the author's discretion (e.g. weekly, monthly, topic, etc.). While a diary is largely personal, reflecting on the thoughts and feelings of the writer, a blog, “... (sometimes called a blog or a newspaper or a filter) is a webpage where a weblogger 'logs' all the other webpages [sic] she finds interesting ... ‘Originally, weblogs were basically richer (and often automated) lists of links. ‘Click here to see an article on human cloning, here's what I think about cloning, click here to post what you think about cloning’” (ibid).

For purposes of this project, I am going to rely on the strong historical and literary traditions associating diary-writing with women and a “women's genre.” There is nothing inherently woman-specific about the genre, nor is there an essentialist's guarantee that every woman will feel comfortable writing in that arena. Over time, however, the diary format has proven to be one of the most comfortable and accessible for women, both in the private space and the public sphere.

Just as there has long been a relationship of women with/to diaries, blogs, too, are slowly becoming gendered. Guernsey notes that although people who track blogs try to avoid making sweeping generalizations, some patterns have emerged that are simply too significant to ignore. Women bloggers tend to follow in the stylistic footsteps of their diarist sisters, focusing inward, and generating entries of a personal nature that resemble those in diaries. “If that is the case,” Guernsey continues, “the Mars-Venus divide has made its way into Blogville. Women want to talk about their personal lives. Men want to talk about anything but. So far the people who have received the most publicity (often courtesy of male journalists) appear to be the latter” (1).

The “sites that do both” combine features of diaries and blogs. LiveJournal.com is an excellent example of a site that offers both the potential for personal content and the structural arrangement of a blog. More and more, the genres of “diary” and “blog” are demonstrating convergent compatibility; like so many other aspects of postmodernism, the line between the categories has become blurred.

All of these online journalers experiment independently with formats that they design themselves and publish on sites that several companies host free of charge. These diaries, where “people spout their thoughts for all to read, are fairly evenly divided between men and women, but subject matter is vastly different; men's ... generally comment on news and politics and women's tend to be more inwardly focused” (Guernsey 1).

Women writers are finally able to engage in newly women-specific literary endeavors in, on, and through cyberspace without the “canonical, careerist or corporate imperatives which frame academic and publishing institutions” (Carrolli,

<http://home.pacific.net.au>). Historically, women who participate in public places and spaces have been accused of “disrupting” these spaces with their Showalterian “wildness” of women participating. The “mindless corporeality” of women is long said to have devalued cultural endeavors, including intellectual and artistic practices. This criticism has been founded on the rationalist binaries of mind/body or public/private, binaries in which women are traditionally 'othered' (ibid).

The Internet, then, becomes the means by which another form of feminism can take shape, a brand of feminism that cannot be challenged by binaries in this binary-less space. This brand of feminism – cyberfeminism – like any burgeoning movement, requires its own linguistic foundation. Herein lies the significance of *e-criture feminine*, the discursive tradition being developed by the participants in this new women’s discursive tradition. Further examination will demonstrate what these maverick women are appropriating for themselves and for the development of this language: the autobiography, via the online diary.

## Chapter Four: Autobiography

### *Women Chronicle (Throughout) History*

Writes Heilbrun,

Autobiography is not the story of a life; it is the recreation or the discovery of one. In writing of experience, we discover what it was, and in the writing create the pattern we seem to have lived. Often, of course, autobiography is merely a collection of well-rehearsed anecdotes; but, intelligently written, it is the revelation, to the reader and the writer, of the writer's conception of the life he or she has lived. Simply put, autobiography is a reckoning. (Education, xvii).

Traditional autobiography has been conceptualized as the bringing of the self into focus and the presenting of that self publicly through writing (Charnes <http://home.comcast.net>). In his essay "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" Gusdorf describes autobiography as that which "requires a man (sic) to take a distance with regard to himself (sic) in order to reconstitute himself (sic) in the focus of his (sic) special unity and identity across time" (35). Autobiography also relies on a conception of "'reconstituting' the ego against the bulwark against disintegration" (Benstock 15). The "self" is typically seen as a firmly singular entity, which pulls together the story of a life through an objective, focused, will.

The woman-as-chronicler is not a new phenomenon. Women have written autobiographies since the Roman period; diaries, autobiographies, letters, protests,

stories, and poems by British women, for example, are traceable as far back as the Middle Ages (Jelinek 1). Medieval women wrote about childbirth, about housework, about relationships with men, about friendships with other women. They wrote reflectively about themselves as girls, and they wrote about themselves in the present and future. They wrote about themselves as wives, mothers, abandoned souls, lovers, workers, and outcasts. They also wrote about themselves as writers and about the discrimination they faced, as well as the pain and courage with which they faced it (ibid). In both America and England, the form flourished among women (both white and non-white) beginning as early as the 1600s.

Most early American diaries were kept by men. Many Colonial diaries took the form of almanacs and logs covering men's experience in public life. In many cases, historians say, these diaries were written specifically to be read.

The majority of women in these colonial times had neither the leisure nor the literacy to contribute to the body of work. American women's autobiographies in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries exist were written by white teenage girls and well-to-do white women who kept diaries and journals, women's accounts of the mostly religious and spiritual Puritan tradition. For the most part, the documents from that period are straightforward religious and secular accounts of domestic life and travel.

Anne Dudley Bradstreet (1612-72), the first recognized U.S. woman writer, included autobiography in her domestic poetry, and was honored for her 1650 poetic work *Tenth Muse Lately Sprung up in America*. In the 1700's, Abigail Bailey of New Hampshire wrote of her "wicked" husband's "vile intentions" toward their daughter; Mary Holyoke of Massachusetts recorded giving birth to twelve children, and burying nine of

them; Elizabeth Fuller wrote of household work. "I spun three skeins," was all she wrote one day. Some of the entries may seem trivial at first glance, but as a corpus of literature, the pieces are brimming with important information, and provide a view of the time that is missing from the accounts penned by men of the era (McKay <http://college.hmco.com>).

The first unique autobiographical form in America was developed by white women who were captured and later released by Native Americans. These distinctive self-stories of the period were almost exclusively religious narratives. Mary Rolandson's 1682 work, A True History of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rolandson, a Minister's Wife in New England is regarded as the "most celebrated" of these narratives (McKay <http://college.hmco.com>).

Puritan autobiography continued throughout the nineteenth century, while increases in literacy permitted women to expand the boundaries of the domestic autobiography with stories of unhappy childhoods and marriages; of experiences in prisons, mental institutions, or convents; and of women who assumed disguises in search of adventure, escape, or to enter military service. A large number of popular women novelists flourished during this American renaissance (1820-circa 1850) ((McKay <http://college.hmco.com>).

In the 1830's, as the centers of production moved from farm to factory, the spheres of men and women became even more divided. Men were deemed responsible for the public realm (i.e. anything outside the home), and women became mistress of the intimate, private, family domain. Culley suggests that the diaries of women at this time became more introspective, a record of an inner life. As more women were educated, they increasingly chronicled their thoughts (17).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, American pioneer women “went west” as missionaries, or accompanied their families in search of better economic conditions. These women wrote journals, letters, and other forms of narrative that addressed women's isolation, fears of childbearing, and other privations. Toward the end of the century, improvements in women's social, political, and economic conditions led to the emergence of (again, mostly white and middle-class) reform-minded and feminist women. This population boasted the suffragists, who focused their written work on serious descriptions of women's lives and careers. Notable women from this group included Frances Elizabeth Willard, temperance movement activist; Elizabeth Blackwell, first woman to graduate from a U.S. medical school; and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a major intellectual figure of the women's movement in that era (Culley 18).

For almost two hundred years, slaves and nonslaves alike struggled to liberate themselves from their literal and figurative chains. Writing about the self became a weapon in that collective resistance. By the end of the eighteenth century, two new forms of writing had emerged: the black spiritual narrative and the slave narrative. Spiritual narrators claimed selfhood through access to the love and forgiveness of a black-appropriated Christian God. Slave narrators, aiming their words toward Northern white sympathizers, used personal experiences in direct, immediate voices to develop the most persuasive antislavery literature of the century. The slave narrative became the predominant genre in early black writing as well as the second of the two unique forms of U.S. autobiography (ibid).

The written quests of women slave narrators articulated the twin wrongs of racial and gender oppression. The most renowned of these is Harriet Jacobs's 1861 story,

*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, published under the pseudonym Linda Brent. Jacobs, the first black slave woman to write against the sexual tyranny of slavery, wrote of early-childhood circumstances that shielded her from the horrors of slavery, of her coming-to-awareness of her condition, and her determination to be free. After hiding for seven years in a crawlspace under the roof of her grandmother's house, she escaped a lascivious master and concluded her story with a superb feminist analysis of the meaning of freedom for black women (Culley 18).

As in America, women writers in England faced the same stonewalling from the patriarchal literary world. Here, too, the male experience was considered normative, and women's voices were marginalized, made peripheral to the dominant male framework. Women's autobiographies commonly were considered insignificant, idiosyncratic, or tedious. Because of this judgment, women's autobiographies were relegated to the "simple" form of the unpublished diary. Patriarchal society vocalized a very strong resistance to valuing (and the value of) women's experience. Male autobiographies found a place of privilege and, in fact, became a respected art form and literary genre, while autobiographies by women were rejected, a marginalization resulting from this fundamental distrust and resistance to women's public voice.

Suddenly, literate, educated women of the Reformation and Renaissance found themselves within a new, albeit limited, world of discourse. Women writers with privileged social status were more likely to write autobiographies in literal language. Others without privileged status often wrote in figurative language. This new territory of freedom and opportunity for individual expression was, in its own way, highly structured, and revolved around certain prescribed scripts: the unmarried virgin, the wife, the nun, or

the queen. Most women autobiographers wrote letters, diaries, and journals and remained true to domestic narratives, staying out of public discourse. Those women autobiographers who were bold enough to enter the world of public discourse moved into it from disadvantaged social positions. Their autobiographies often became *heretic narratives*. (Smith 43)

The seventeenth century is an important period for the history of women's autobiography in England, as it marks both the emergence of private diary-writing as a widespread phenomenon, and the beginning of a shift from straightforward *res gestae* (a list of accomplishments or triumphs) biography towards more intimate and "personal" conceptions of the self. Diaries of this period occupied a transitional place in literary history: they bridged the impersonal, technical records of the sixteenth century and the more expressive confessional forms of the eighteenth. These seventeenth century diaries open themselves for examination; one can observe the *gradual emergence* of personality and interiority in a once straightforwardly functional form, a process often overlooked by those who forget that the term "diary" once referred to *any* form of daily record, not merely the self-revelatory model of the present day (Glaser 193).

Most women writing before 1800 did not see this writing as an aspect or an expression of this uniquely woman's experience, as writing was simply not an acceptable activity for women. As Showalter notes, women were certainly interested in the writings of other women, and women writers often knew and praised each other's works. But all these women were dependent upon men: men were the critics, the publishers, the professors, and the sources of financial support. Men had the power to praise women's works, to bring them to public attention, or to ridicule them, to doom them, too often, to

obscurity (Jelinek 36). From about 1750 English women began to make inroads into the literary marketplace, but writing did not become a recognizable profession for women until the 1840's (ibid).

Victorian women's autobiography emerged at a historical moment when the field of "life writing" was particularly rich. Spiritual autobiography was developing interesting variations in the heroic memoirs of pioneering missionary women, and was producing probing intellectual analyses of Nonconformists, Anglicans, agnostics, and other religious thinkers (Peterson 16). The *chroniques scandaleuses* of the eighteenth century were giving way to the respectable artist's life of the Victorian woman. The domestic memoir, a Victorian variation on the family histories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, flourished in a culture that celebrated the joys of home, family, and private life. Perhaps most important, Victorian women writers were experimenting with all these forms in various combinations and permutations. The desire to know the details of other women's lives – and to use them for one's own purposes – underlies much Victorian women's autobiography, even as it helps to explain the continuing interest in their accounts (Peterson 19).

In 1869, Mill argued that women would have a hard struggle to overcome the influence of the male literary tradition. "If women's literature is destined to have a different collective character from that of men, much longer time is necessary than has yet elapsed before it can emancipate itself from the influence of accepted models, and guide itself by its own impulses" (196). Mill has proven prescient in that women have in fact been able to define and to develop a literary tradition, not on the basis of traditional forms and themes, but on the basis of what gave shape to their lives, working as diarists.

### *Contemporary Autobiographics*

Heilbrun notes that the diary format was historically appropriate to women in a man's literary marketplace, as that genre gave women the power "to take their place in whatever discourse is essential to action and the right to have one's part matter" (18).

Women generally wrote about experiences rarely explored by men, and these topics were presented in voices that were different from the voices present in the literature of men.

This difference exists even now.

Today, the study of women's autobiography, diary, and self-representational narrative has emerged as an important field of critical inquiry. These self-representational narratives, scholars suggest, are now and have always been reactions to a time-honored history of exclusionary politics, a social whirlpool that has created cultural, literary, and historical vacuums all demanding (and resulting in) the current proliferation of both autobiography and autobiographics. Gilmore explains these as "those changing elements of the contradictory discourses and practices of truth and identity which represent the subject of autobiography" (13).

These autobiographies, or self-representational narratives, of contemporary women clearly articulate the painful position of having no "place," no room of one's own. Women's autobiographical writing also illustrates that having to actively create these "rooms" means also having to construct a space within the isolating paradigmatic narrative and cultural forms, while at the same time exploding these paradigms in order to make room for new speaking subjects from marginalized groups.

The autobiographies under examination in this project – those written by Western women with financial and technical access to computers and Internet – generally follow a

much different outline than do those written by their male counterparts. While men's autobiographies in general are usually progressive, linear narratives, women often describe their lives in a non-chronological pattern consisting of episodic and anecdotal accounts (Jelinek 13). Women's autobiographies, therefore, tend not to follow the traditional (read: male) style of writing history. Women recorded their lives as *they* saw fit, not as language or grammar dictated.

“Women's story lines are multiple, intermingled, ambivalent as to valence, and recursive,” write Gergen and Gergen. “Women's stories usually weave together themes of achievement ... themes of family obligations, personal development, love lives, children's welfare, and friendship. (T)he tone or movement of women's stories are never unidirectional, focused, or contained. The men's stories... exhibit the cardinal characteristics of ... autobiography” (196). In short, women's forms are different from those of men. (196).

Heilbrun asserts that four different ways of writing are available for a woman to write about her life: a woman writing about her own life (autobiography); a woman writing her own life as a story (fiction); an author writing about a woman's life (biography); to tell, in women's history, the destiny of a woman's life before she has lived it. The diary format is arguably the most personal, the most revelatory, and the most passionate of these four genres.

On her own site, Holmes suggests that:

(d)iary writing ... is a little like weaving: the warp is the daily happening of our lives, the weft the words chosen to tell the story, the shuttle the pen or voice which brings the pattern, the web, into being. Just as feminist critics have

recognised the importance of weaving and tapestry as a form of women's speech and storytelling, an activity suitably feminine but one through which they might reveal what otherwise remains silent, so diary writing has begun to be recognised as an important form of writing for women. The diary can be a place of resistance or defiance, of accommodation or rapprochement. A place where women can tell stories which would otherwise not be heard, or where they can lay claim to writing (<http://www.nla.gov.au>).

Showalter contends that the “female” literary tradition comes from the still-evolving relationships between women writers and their society. The development of this tradition is similar to the triphasic development of any literary subculture: 1) imitation of the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition, and internalization of its standards of art and its views on social roles; 2) protest against these standards and values, and advocacy of minority rights and values; 3) self-discovery, a turning inward freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity. Showalter’s terminology for these phases in women’s literary subculture is: 1) Feminine phase—the period from the appearance of the male pseudonym in the 1840’s to the death of George Eliot in 1880; 2) Feminist phase—1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote by American women; 3) Female phase—1920 to the present, but entering a new stage of self-awareness about 1960 (12-13). I argue that this three-pronged approach is analogous to three necessary components of the new tradition: space, style, and medium.

## Chapter Five: Theoretical Foundations

The depth and breadth of material focusing on the concept of women-writing echoes and reflects the ideal of multiple voices; no two critics or theorists have identical views on what, exactly, defines *écriture féminine*. What everyone does seem to agree on is the importance of *écriture féminine* as it relates to the role of women's voices. Senft explains, "Feminists are in a bind, finding that it is nearly impossible to write of the truth of a feminine body, when we are all in violent disagreement about what a 'body' truly is" (<http://www.echonyc.com>). Women-writing is the second "reaction," the second "experience," the first being immediate, "real life." These reactions and experiences must be translated from the primary into texts.

This project does not assume that any two women are alike, nor does this project intend to suggest that there is an entity that can be described as a "real" or "genuine" woman. However, one of the aims of this work is to concretize the idea that there is, in fact, a visible and accessible new form of discourse which is proving to be almost exclusively the purview of women writers. This kind of women-writing is not a divisive movement or discordant act, seeking to separate women from men, or women's writings from those of men; rather, women-writing is simply an acknowledgement of the differences and a development of a new discourse, neither derivative nor appropriated. Cixous sees "in women's writing the potential to circumvent and reformulate existing

structures through the inclusion of other experience" (Sellers 29). Women's writing can potentially reformulate structures by basing those structures on all experiences.

### *Virginia Woolf*

Woolf articulates what it meant – means! – to be a woman writer: “So long as you write what you wish to write, that is all that matters; and whether it matters for ages or only hours, nobody can say. But to sacrifice a hair of the head of your vision, a shade of its colour, in deference to some Headmaster with a silver pot in his hand or to some professor with a measuring rod up his sleeve, is the most abject treachery” (110).

Women hide from the Headmaster and successfully establish this literary tradition, despite being hindered by the formal constraints of language. Logos – language – is an integral part of Web communication. Kibby notes that poststructuralist theory has long argued that language is a determining factor in the construction of self and identity.

Woolf argues that women should enjoy the same basic necessity as their male counterparts: a space, a room of her own, a sanctuary to which the woman writer can escape. This space can be literal – a room in a home – or figurative – time in which she can focus on her creative efforts. Harding suggests that “Woolf operates out of a negative space. She seeks a room for women that is both a public and a social space in a world where women have no place. This negative space, this non-place, becomes her site of social critique” and the site of the reappropriation and redefinition of her own “I”. I argue that today, the WWW is indeed that vast and shapeless space, an immeasurable series of creations, a scientific and mathematical implausibility.

At its core, the Internet is a system of communication; the World Wide Web merely a backbone, a conduit for disseminating information via an infinite combination of puzzling computer language, images encoded in binary, and media translated into realtime interactivity. Women, then, are actively creating spaces, rooms of their own, through the 'construction' ("building," in the parlance of Web development) of individual homepages. Some use templates (a la Diaryland.com or LiveJournal.com), some forge ahead with independent designs of their own choosing. Regardless of the vehicle, women who publish on the Web engage in the claiming and development of unique writing space.

Feminists illustrate how Western languages, in all their features, are male-engendered, male-constituted, and male-dominated. Discourse is "phallogocentric" because it is centered and organized throughout by implicit recourse to the phallus both as its supposed ground (or *logos*) and as its prime signifier and power source; and not only in its vocabulary and syntax. This is true also for its rigorous rules of logic, its proclivity for fixed classifications and oppositions, and its criteria for what is supposed to be valid evidence and objective knowledge.

On a homepage, language is the primary tool for the construction of a public identity. The Web, then, becomes the right space for appropriating and manipulating language into an entirely women's discourse: it is a freeform universe that is carved out only by each pioneer who stakes a claim by creating a homepage. As Heilbrun notes: "(a) woman herself may tell (her life), in what she chooses to call an autobiography; . . . or the woman may write her own life in advance of living it, unconsciously, and without recognizing or naming the process" (12). This dissertation argues that, in fact, this new

online tradition is allowing individual women to become organic autobiographers, creating living memoirs in/on an organic, fluid space. In fact, the premise of this work can be tied to each of Heilbrun's ideas of autobiography. Certainly, the women who journal and diary online are creating the strictest, most literal definition of autobiography; additionally, women who publish online can engage in the formulation of thoughts and idea, a free reflexive exchange between Self and Self, creating (writing!) herself as she keys in her words.

### ***Rachel Blau DuPlessis***

DuPlessis's "Working Notes" contains some of her basic premises: "Drawing distinctions. Things on the side, things in the center, blurring distinctions. Allusions to cross genre, or messing up (Ashley, quilts). Genres that create themselves as imperfect. To write into silence. Poetry too pretty; creating 'beauty'? [sic] Creating chora. Beginning-middle-end, ha."

"To break the sentence," writes DuPlessis, "rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender—in short, any way in which dominant structures shape muted ones" (*Writing* 32).

Her feeling that women need to both "break the sequence" and "break the sentence" is pivotal to the concept of communicating in a voice that is uniquely of-women. She demands a refutation of chronology, itself a notion derived by and, ostensibly for, the patriarchy. The WWW, then, becomes both a canvas for and a

reflection of these writing ideals. Not only does “grammatology” simply not exist in this realm, the WWW itself is unformed, a broken sentence, lacking in sequence. Where are the boundaries of the Internet? Where are the rules, the regulations that govern not only the way in which this entity forms itself, but also the content that may be included? Like the universe itself, the Internet is shapeless, shifting, and uncontrolled, moving at the speed of realtime, eliminating pause and contemplation. According to Lapanis, “this new domain of non linearity is ... breaking down all kinds of boundary spaces of subject disciplines, mediums of representation, time and space” (<http://www.acal.edu.au>).

DuPlessis cries for women to understand “that the closures and precisions of any tale are purchased at the expense of the muted, even unspoken narrative, which writing beyond the ending will release” (*Writing* 46). The idea of writing beyond the ending, then, also substantiates the claim that the WWW is the ideal medium for the development of this new feminine discourse; rather than women being forced to restrict themselves to finite subjects – and, by extension, finite hard media – DuPlessis argues that women need to thwart borders and boundaries, to exist in a space without defined parameters. This dissertation argues that women can adopt the Internet’s lack of style conventions in order to create completely individual, wholly unique forms of written and visual autobiographical communication. As DuPlessis asserts, women need to be able to step outside the rigorous boundaries of traditional patriarchal discourse. The Internet (and again, its diaries and journals) becomes the ideal nonspace for just this sort of liberation.

And it is from the beginning of language that women are kept on the fringes of the most boundaried space of all: the Symbolic Order. Upon entering this linguistic system, the woman initiate immediately has a paradoxical subject position imposed upon her. She

is symbolically castrated; *she lacks*. She can "be" the phallus, can experience the phallus, but she cannot "have" the phallus. She is not completely integrated into the Symbolic Order. However, this lack is also an opening that can be filled up with joy, with what Cixous calls *jouissance*.

Thus, the woman initiate must create for herself her own subject position; DuPlessis would have her deliberately push out of the Symbolic Order and consciously reject the parameters established by the patriarchal linguistic paradigm. Boundaries and borders are a consequence of assigning meaning to symbols, creating a fixed symbology; the thwarting of borders and rejection of boundaries parallels the idea of women as themselves open, receptive, a positive spin on the concept of *lack*.

### ***Hélenè Cixous***

Cixous, like Woolf, argues that above all, women need to write. She enhances this assertion by suggesting that women's writing (and, by extension, women-writing) is connected to their minds, and their minds are connected to their bodies. The consequence of this syllogism is that women must write to reclaim their bodies from which they have been so violently detached as a result of language and the Symbolic Order. Sessum is a blogger (as opposed to a diarist) who actually refers to Cixous on her site. She speculates what Cixous herself might write about blogs, and, by extension, about diaries: "I think that the relationships between people are either completely pointless and meaningless, or creative, passionate and thus demand effort, real work through which they create things. In this way, they complete thought processes and become the light."

The French feminist tradition – of which Cixous is a leading force – has always charged its followers to overhaul and revolutionize language and ways of thinking in an effort to actively resist phallogocentrism, the privileging of the masculine (the phallus) in understanding meaning or social relations. As Cixous notes, "...writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" (*Rootprints* 249). For the French feminists, women are voiceless, and women are silent, having long been completely repressed and stifled by male language. The goal of women, according to these feminists, is to challenge male language, male constructs, male representations: "If woman has always functioned 'within' the discourse of man, a signifier that has always referred back to the opposite signifier which annihilates its specific energy and diminishes or stifles its very different sounds, it is time for her to dislocate this 'within', to explode it, turn it around, and seize it; to make it hers, containing it, taking it in her own mouth, biting that tongue with her very own teeth to invent for herself a language to get inside of" (*Rootprints* 257).

Some criticize Cixous for being essentialist, of relating mental attributes to biology. Critics claim that she "reduces women to an essence ... and thus negates the possibility of the very change which she seeks to promote" (Shiach 17). One of her fundamental arguments, in fact, is that women's knowledge is different from men's because of their position in culture and their capacity for motherhood.

Of her contemporaries (including Irigaray and Kristeva), Cixous is perhaps the most positive about the possibilities for the Pre-Oedipal or Imaginary phase, which is where she ultimately situates *écriture féminine*. She strongly rejects the notion of a

feminine Imaginary which is non-signifying or outside of language. Rather, Cixous asserts that the feminine is a *way of signifying* that calls into question or disrupts the Law of the Father. Because the pre-Oedipal is a phase that occurs prior to the creation of oppositional binaries, the categories of “male” and “female” have yet to be imposed. This is also the period associated most strongly with the body of the mother. In this way, Dunn argues, “Cixous' notion of feminine writing can be both feminine and non-essentialist (although this latter assertion is a matter of considerable debate amongst Cixous' critics)” (<http://prelectur.stanford.edu>).

Despite the critical emphasis on Cixous' essentialism, her ideas are nonetheless germane to this project. Certainly, points in her analogies may be contested. As such, I have chosen to use the core points of many of her ideas in the exposition and explication of *e-criture feminine*. Additionally, because of Cixous' reliance on women's biology to her arguments, the term “female” must be used extensively in any discussion of her work. In this examination of Cixous' ideologies, “female” will again refer to those with a specific set of physical, observable characteristics; female becomes a quality that is not necessarily judged by ability to procreate.

Women, claims Cixous, are slippery, fluid, much more so than men. As such, she believes that in order to escape the discourse of mastery, i.e., to escape the shackles of limiting, restrictive language, women must *write the body*, since language gives meaning to and organizes the material practices of the corporally sexed body. Freeing language from its constraints, its form and formulae, means liberation for the body, the physical form. To write from one's body is to flee the socially constructed boundaries of linguistic reality, "to escape hierarchical bonds and thereby come closer to what Cixous calls

*jouissance*, a “virtually metaphysical fulfillment of desire that goes far beyond [mere] satisfaction... [It is a] fusion of the erotic, the mystical, and the political" (“Mistress” xvii).

Cixous follows Lacan's psychoanalytic paradigm, which argues that a child must separate from its mother's body (the Real) in order to enter into the Symbolic. Lacan argues that during the pre-Oedipal stage, a child moves from Imaginary to Symbolic Order. In the Mirror Stage, writes Lacan, a child learns to differentiate between *me* and *not me* (1-7). The child experiences "an oral disgust, a refusal of the mother who is experienced as abject so that the child might expel itself from the mother-child dyad and become a subject" (Ross 149). The father, giver of law and language, inducts the child into a circuit of power; the child becomes phallus for the mother, even as the child views the mother as Other. The "normal" (read: boy) child begins an Oedipal rejection of the mother: castration fears, the perception of the mother as having lack (of phallus). The "lacking" child (read: girl) is also supposed to perceive the mother, and, consequently, herself, as missing something. For those who “lack,” the phallus is elusive, always a looming presence that can never be “gotten.”

Cixous continues the line of reasoning, grounding her assertions in Lacan's naming the center of the Symbolic as the Phallus, highlighting the patriarchal, phallogocentric nature of the language system. She notes that children of each sex are initiated into the Symbolic Order, into language as structure, in different ways, and later occupy very different types of subject positions within the Symbolic Order. As a result of this unfulfilled phallus-quest, coupled with the rejection of the father-Logos, Cixous

argues that the woman's body in general becomes unrepresentable in language; it is what cannot be spoken or written in the phallogocentric Symbolic order.

Here, Cixous leaps from the maternal body to the woman's body in general, from the female body to female sexuality, saying that female sexuality, female sexual pleasure, is unrepresentable within the phallogocentric Symbolic order. It is therefore up to women, then, to represent themselves by *writing the body*. This is why, in *The Laugh of the Medusa*, Cixous uses the metaphor of "white ink," of writing in breast milk; she wants to convey that idea of a reunion with the maternal body, an unalienated relation to female bodies in general ("Medusa" 312).

Cixous offers descriptions of this writing in concrete terms, but does not offer guidance as to what it should "look like," since using a metaphorical or simile-istic mirror is the (mis)perception of the self in Lacan's Mirror Stage, the very moment at which children are launched into the Symbolic order. Cixous is careful to talk about writing in new ways, in ways that distinguish female writing from existing forms of verbal (spoken and written) discourse, so as to completely dissociate female writing from any kind of extant linguistic mode/s. Her *écriture féminine* "is milk, it's a song, something with rhythm and pulse, but no words, something connected with bodies and with bodies' beats and movements, but not with representational language" (Klages <http://www.colorado.edu>). This dissertation argues that this new medium – the online diary – does provide women with that very freedom, the "white ink" (and red ink and teal ink and so on!) to write themselves in entirely new ways.

When a woman writes herself on/to the WWW, she is, to a great degree, free to develop a homepage in any style she likes. There are no guidelines, parameters, or

restrictions. She can include art or animation, music or pictures. She can use a black background, a teal background, a red background. Most exciting, she can write herself in any color ink she chooses. There is no structure to her art; there is no instruction to her design. Although she is limited by the Symbolic Order, even present online, she is free to subvert it without fear of penalty or reprisal.

The idea of a women's online e-critique is able to be well-substantiated by drawing on resources in feminisms, women's autobiography and diary writing, and of course, the ideologies of critics Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous. Here is where this dissertation, again, demonstrates its relevance to current academic conversations in literary criticism, social theory, and gender studies: this work draws together epistemological work from a variety of disciplines, each one able to link to the next, each one providing support and credence to the other. Grounded in postmodern feminism, this argument relies heavily upon accepted critical premises, documented literary traditions, and primary sources. The primary critical material – by Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous – does fit within the parameters of postmodern feminism, and serves as the strongest justification/s for the new online e-critique.

## **Chapter Six: A Virtual Room of One's Own**

Although she is thought of as a “feminist” or a “feminist writer,” Woolf did not explicitly write for women in all races, economic classes, sexual orientations, and nationalities. Rather, her focus was on white, British, middle-class women of presumably heterosexual orientation (or at least in “traditional” male/female domestic situations [read: marriages]). Additionally, her focus was on equal rights in general, but only for these specific types of women to have the right to produce written work. However, it can be argued that her general premises of fiduciary independence, privacy, and “professional equity” in the writers’ marketplace lay the groundwork for the feminisms of today, particularly the second wave of feminism, embodying the social and financial tenets of separatism (radical feminism), socialism (Marxism), and liberalism. Although her chronological periodization marks her as Modern, she does prefigure several of the tenets of postmodernism, and can be called an early postmodernist: her focus on process rather than product; her interest in the public and private faces of (gender) power; her rejection of the myth that artists are isolated geniuses who transcend the earthly realm through their creativity.

Woolf’s metaphorical “room” draws attention to itself as a modernist spatial trope that later enabled the revision efforts of Anglo-American feminists (particularly literary theorists and social anthropologists) to articulate what Showalter has called “[t]he problematic of women’s space” – a notion which calls attention to both the ideology of

representation, including aesthetic practices, and also to the secondary status of women in society. Castricano notes that the concept of "women's space," especially in feminist literary theory, "led feminists to posit both a gendered subject inhabiting that terrain, as well as a mode of inner space, a subject position, as it were."

In her essay "Professions for Women," Woolf recounts her experience with Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House." The "Angel," society's ideal woman, is concerned primarily with others, identifies herself only as a wife/mother, and remains conventional in her actions, conscious of the standards for women. Woolf suggests that this "Angel" guides women writers – unless these women consciously and intentionally liberate themselves.

So that a woman writer might exercise creative thought and vocalize in that "voice that speaks fresh and strong," Woolf holds that the woman writer must have two things: financial independence (or, at least, freedom from financial obligation) and a place to which she can escape, close the door, and have her own time – this mythical *room of her own*. Since this dissertation is concerned with woman's space, it will not be necessary to focus on Woolf's call for women to have financial freedom. Rather, the focus will be on this woman-space, the idea of privacy, and the concept of self-imposed restriction from sex-based social mores. Physical privacy, of course, comes in the form of the "room of her own," a space in which she is free to transform and transcribe herself from body to book.

On the World Wide Web, women publishers have this very freedom. With the room of one's own, the logic says, the woman author would not be forced to work so covertly, nor would she be forced to hide herself behind a thin veneer of fictionalization.

The privacy would afford her the time and space to tell one or all of her many “truths,” just as a homepage on the World Wide Web affords today’s women publishers the luxury of that critical space.

Woolf was fascinated with workings of memory alone, as well as its relationship to the construction of a personal sense of selfhood. Selfhood, for Woolf, develops from an amalgam of “fact” and “fiction,” “actuality” and a personal – albeit Cartesian! – sense of “truth.” Her “self-representational” or “autobiographical” texts then become the therapeutic means of Self-discovery, a way to purge oneself of past demons (and demons in/of the past), to “repair” the past, and to create a significant personal present and a sense of personal “truth.”

Because the Web is a boundless space, each woman has the opportunity to carve out for herself the amount of “room” (or bandwidth) she needs, regulated only by her imagination. She can sprawl herself over and around, an amorphous, fluidity, sectioning off the space with words and images, linking pages together as she deems appropriate. The entire enterprise is subject to her whim; she can choose to add or remove content at will, she can choose to rearrange documents, she can choose to pull the whole thing down and start afresh. Most importantly, she dictates all of the content the site contains. She is completely on her own, the very manifestation of that solipsistic epistemology so favored by Woolf herself. This kind of unfettered cyber-construction makes the woman publisher especially powerful; now that she has her space, she truly is free to create, to make her words, her space, and her Self or Selves.

Early in *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf seizes on a critical point: ““Why are women . . . so much more interesting to men than men are to women?” she asks.

Arguably, this same observation may be made today. Women seem to write to one another, for one another, revealing the minutiae of daily existence with as much passion as men describe motorcycles, sports teams, and attractive women.

“I was thinking the other night,” Woolf wrote to her friend, Ethel Smyth, ‘that there’s never been a woman’s autobiography... nothing to compare with Rousseau.’”

These words were written in December 1940, a month after Virginia Woolf made her last entry in her own autobiographical retelling of her childhood in *A Sketch of the Past*. One must be skeptical about her choice of Rousseau's autobiography as the benchmark for all diaries against which Woolf herself sets a history of women’s self-representation, particularly when one considers that women’s historical experiences make their autobiographical works different from those produced by men (Dimitroulia, <http://www.art.man.ac.uk/english/manuscript/backiss/content/woolf.html>). Since men and women have been differently situated in relation to the conventions and traditional forms of autobiography, male and female self-representations are unlikely to conform to a single model.

Having fought in her life and work against patronizing male paradigms and status quos, Woolf clearly both recognizes and explicitly acknowledges the marginalization that women had experienced in society and in its development of a literary canon. It is from this position that in *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf directs her anger at the systematic effacement of women, the organizing principle behind the exclusion of women from the sources of knowledge and consequently from the position of “speaking subject.” Woolf’s critique of the patriarchal machine and its discriminatory gender arrangements operates at two levels: in terms of content, in her themes and ideas, but most importantly in her

rhetorical practice of deconstructive reversals that challenge a whole history of privileged modes of discourse (Dimitroulia <http://www.art.man.ac.uk>).

*A Room of One's Own*, based on a series of academic lectures delivered at Newnham and Girton Colleges (Cambridge University) in 1928, begins with the question of its own title: "But, you may say, we asked you to speak about women and fiction - what has that got to do with a room of one's own?"(3). This question and its significant physical positioning at the beginning of the work succeeds in undermining the authority of the lecturer and alludes to Woolf's own refusal to speak from a position of power. Furthermore, the statement "deconstructs the lecture as a form... and invents human intercourse on a model of female discourse as a conversation among equals" (Marcus, 145-6). Immediately, the reader notes that *Woolf herself is present* – she has adopted that critical "speaking subject" position. At the very onset of this academic lecture – the very height of Woolfian patriarchal authority! – Woolf breaks its form/ality by referring directly to herself as "I."

The diary is an excellent genre selection for the woman online publisher. As Woolf notes of the corpus of women's literature in the nineteenth century, "But why, I could not help asking, as I ran my eyes over them, were they, with very few exceptions, all novels?"(822). The novel becomes, for Woolf, a façade: "If one shuts one's eyes and thinks of the novel as a whole, it would seem to be a creation owning a certain looking-glass likeness to life, though of course with simplifications and distortions innumerable" (823). The reason for this, she contends, is that these nineteenth century novelists were not permitted to write in private; they were forced to write quickly, furtively at desks in

living rooms or parlors, stealing time when they could, and always hiding the manuscript away from the prying eyes of the man of the house, the children, or even the domestics.

The diary format also fulfills another demand of Woolf's: the resistant, subversive charge for an "elaborate study of the psychology of women by a woman" (825). Every woman who takes the time to develop a homepage and bring her thoughts to life is writing yet another chapter, no matter how small, in the largest, most comprehensive journal of "female psychology," a "discipline" which, by its very nature, can only be alluded to, never codified.

"The book has somehow to be adapted to the body," she writes, "and at a venture one would say that women's books should be shorter, more concentrated than those of men, and framed so that they do not need long hours of steady and uninterrupted work. For interruptions there will always be" (825). The diary entry certainly satisfies the criteria of "shorter and concentrated": it can be an exercise in brevity or an extended tumble of thoughts. The diary entry becomes the ideal format for a woman conveying her selves through her Self – and vice versa.

Strong women characters that function as diarists of a sort offer social and literary critique as they articulate Woolf's arguments. The narrator and her multiple "I" speaking-subjects – Mary Beton, Mary Carmichael, Anonymous, Shakespeare's imagined Sister – write about their daily lives in the context of being women in their own historical moments. Woolf's use of "Mary" is itself a signifier for the common woman, a multiple, universalizing persona which suggests that a self is not an entity on its own right but exists only in relationship/s with others as a plural phenomenon which uses multiple voices to constitute meaning.

Woolf's autobiographical projects confront essentially male traditions of reading and writing, and stress language as 'a principle of separation and division' through which a woman's self or identity can begin to be constructed and decentered (Benstock, 29). Her practice of personal criticism is a pushing away of the objective, androcentric, and unified scholarly discourse for a more embodied form of feminist theorization. *A Room of One's Own* resists male assumptions and prescriptions and leads Woolf into a fuller understanding of her sexual difference: "a woman writing thinks back through her mother" (*Room* 69).

Woolf's argument is weakened only in two places: she reflects woman in relation to man, and she acknowledges the binary opposition between men and women. "And I began thinking of all those great men who ... shown what can only be described as some need of and dependence upon certain persons of the opposite sex...What they got, it is obvious, was something that their own sex was unable to supply...to define it further...some renewal of creative power which is in the gift of only the opposite sex to bestow" (*Room* 72).

This passage implies that women have always been the source of strength and inspiration for the writing man. In her attempt to contextualize women in the active creative process, Woolf inadvertently succeeds in defining women *in terms of* men: the creative worth of a woman lies in her ability to help a man produce text. In doing so, Woolf has unfortunately restricted women as literary waitresses, serving literate men inspiration in perpetuity.

"He would open the door...and find her...with a piece of embroidery on her knee," writes Woolf, "...and the sight of her creating in a different medium from his own would

so quicken his creative power that insensibly his sterile mind would begin to plot again, and he would find the phrase or the scene which was lacking when he put on his hat to visit" (*Room* 72). This passage also appears to demonstrate woman's enormously important role in the creation of fiction, her creative worth, but closer examination reveals that the "role" is completely passive. Woman exists merely to prod man to create; she has but to sit and embroider in order to whet the creative juices of the male author. She offers no advice, no suggestions, no critiques. She merely *is*.

Woolf also pays homage to Coleridge's demand for an "androgynous mind," a section in which she acknowledges the binary opposition of men/women, and encourages her listeners to attempt to negate the dialectic by equally using the "male" and "female" halves of the brain. This insistence comes shortly after she argues in favor of a style specific to women: "It would be a thousand pities if women wrote like men, or lived like men, or looked like men, for if two sexes are quite inadequate, considering the vastness and variety of the world, how should we manage with one only? Ought not education to bring out and fortify the differences rather than the similarities?" (73). Women must maintain the artistic integrity to "write as women write, not as men write" (74-75). Woolf does call for *a women's sentence* (76-77), a necessary element of successful women's writing, and something that DuPlessis fleshes out considerably in her critical work.

## Chapter Seven: Dimensionality and Texture

"Postmodern criticism," writes Humm, "is marked most of all by *self-reflexivity* by the interweaving of autobiography and theory. Rachel Blau DuPlessis is a spectacular exponent of this postmodern technique. In her essays DuPlessis makes daring combinations of her poetry and extracts from her daily diary together with literary criticism, history and psychoanalysis" (162). Immediately, DuPlessis emerges as a postmodern feminist. Aside from her visible involvement and explicit alignment with feminisms (e.g., her works entitled, among others *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices of Women's Liberation* and *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*), her writerly ideologies mark her as a postmodern feminist. Her assertion of a new linguistic for women; her insistence that women actively subvert dominant paradigms – i.e., reject Grand Narratives –; her emphasis of process-over-product: all of these are central tenets of postmodernism.

DuPlessis' writings create space for other women writers by mapping the margins of the ideologically patriarchal literary "tradition," and exploring how a "she" might find and write into/around/above (*palimpsest*) those spaces. In postmodern fashion, she complicates notions of enclosed identity and the language that is used to describe it by exploring the problems with using a language formed by — and continually re-forming — hierarchical binaries. She argues, quite convincingly in "Otherhow" for another kind of textual space *through* which and one *to* which a plethora of 'polygynous' practices

teem as a plausible practice of women's writing (*Guitar* 31). In fact, *The Pink Guitar* illustrates the very ways in which gender roles and inter/relations are embedded within socially and linguistically codified signifiers, and how feminists writing practice/s must disrupt these "standards" on multiple levels, in multiple ways.

In order to negotiate these cultural, social, and linguistic paradigms that attempt to define and confine women within limiting identities and roles, then, women must create autobiographies. These self-representational narratives symbolize a fluidity of subjectivity and the complex nature of the self's de- and reconstruction within/against/despite social and symbolic (O)rders. DuPlessis asserts that "any social convention is like a 'script,' which suggests sequences of action and response, the meaning we give these, and ways of organizing experience by choices, emphases, priorities. The term offers to social analysis what 'ideology' offers to cultural analysis: 'a generic term for the processes by which meaning is produced, challenged, reproduced, transformed'" (*Writing 2*).

Both women and feminists who participate in the entrepreneurship of autobiography are also participating in a simultaneous, parallel act of cultural deconstruction so that reconstruction of the self may take place. In any textual context, there is an inherent reliance on verbal construct. Thus, as women de- and reconstruct themselves and their Selves through self-representational narrative, reforming and reforming linguistic, social, and cultural signifiers of women's identities, these acts become subversions of significance. Through the very acts of re-presenting and representing women as *subjects* and *speaking subjects*, women's autobiographies resist external

authoritative versions of themselves even as they allow their authors access to self-representation, to authorship, to authority and to agency.

The two phrases perhaps best associated with DuPlessis are “breaking the sentence” and “breaking the sequence.” Breaking the sentence, she explains, “is a way of rupturing language and tradition sufficiently to invite a female slant, emphasis, or approach” (*Writing* 32).

Just as breaking the sentence involves an active process on the writer’s part, so does breaking the sequence entail rigorous effort: “Breaking the sequence,” writes DuPlessis, “is a rupture of habits in narrative order, that expected story told when ‘love was the only interpreter’ of women’s textual lives” (*Writing* 34).

While men’s diaries generally center on a chronicle of events, of day-to-day happenings, all of which focus on a single goal, most women’s journals appear to be layered, each entry a complex network of thoughts, feelings, ideas and events which all move in, out, and around one another thematically, contextually, and, above all, “Self-ishly.” These two narrative techniques, notes DuPlessis, “take basic elements of female identity ... and realign their components” (*Writing* 35).

Diary-writing, a truly “traditional” women’s genre, becomes a flag of pride on the gender battlefield when a woman takes DuPlessis’ literary style suggestions and writes strictly in her own style, demonstrating characteristics associated strongly with women’s writing.

Arguably, just as each diary entry becomes part of that corpus of “women’s psychology,” written online by and for women, so does each diary entry help to create a single entity called “woman,” as “multiple individual,” or “group protagonist,” to borrow terms from DuPlessis. If this assertion holds true, then the logical extension is as follows, taken

directly from DuPlessis: “the choral [or communal] protagonist makes the group, not the individual, the central character” (*Writing* 163). Each woman’s writing, then, becomes a voice in the polyphony, a different color of woman-ink in the formulation of the *e-criture feminine*. The multiple voice becomes a narrative center itself, strongly decrying the notion that ‘Love, Combat, or Danger’ (all ... requiring men) might well remain necessary for interesting literature” (*Writing* 181).

“It was not only the gender group, women, but several ideas redefining that 'group' that gave particular joy and interest to my writing career, writes DuPlessis:

What I found galvanic, beyond immediate female bonding felt intensely, and still very palpable to me, (was) the idea of gender as a critical and compelling element of culture. ... I have felt that feminist re-vision would necessitate the multiple, forceful, and polyvocal invention of a completely new culture, and the critical destabilizing of the old. Such a critique of cultural representations and institutions would open all assumptions about image, myth, narrative, character, form, language, syntax, topoi and would destabilize the use that culture has made of female figures, and other parallel figures. . . . (Literature Resource Center).

The “collective woman” works diligently to be heard, individual by individual.

DuPlessis notes that “the use of a collective protagonist may imply that problems or issues that we see as individually based are in fact social in cause and in cure” (*Writing* 179). So, then, do thousands, hundreds of thousands of women writing online begin to create their own “mistress narrative,” exposing not problems, but possibilities, intents, and, above all, hope. DuPlessis argues that there is an appeal to the voice of each individual woman, which speaks of itself as subject as non-hierarchical, breaking hierarchical

structures, making an even display of elements over the surface with no climatic movement.

Each woman, a single cell in this online organism, uses the diary medium in exactly the way DuPlessis suggests: defiantly, strongly rejecting narrative conventions of linearity and chronology. She successfully breaks both the sentence and the sequence. This dissertation seeks to parse and demonstrate visible ways in which women achieve this shattering of convention.

It is true that diaries are posted with a time-stamp, visible or not; what is not a given is that the diary chronicles specific events in time. In this act alone, the sequence is broken. And certainly in larger context, the diary allows the woman author to “critique . . . narrative, restructuring its orders and priorities precisely by attention to specific issues of female identity and its characteristic oscillations” (*Writing* x).

Breaking the sentence means, in a literal sense, throwing off the shackles of standard sentence structure, of prosaic restraint: “To break the sentence,” writes DuPlessis, “rejects not grammar especially, but rhythm, pace, flow, expression: the structuring of the female voice by the male voice, female tone and manner by male expectations, female writing by male emphasis, female writing by existing conventions of gender—in short, any way in which dominant structures shape muted ones.” (*Writing* 32).

In order to truly break the sentence, the woman writer must extricate herself from stylistic and structural convention, and foster her own entirely new voice. She must do so fearlessly, deliberately, and she must do so with the knowledge that making such a linguistic stand will have one of two effects: either she will be lauded as a champion of

women, exemplifying bold and courageous expressionism, or she will be shunned, ridiculed, made more of a pariah because of her decision to be herSelf. DuPlessis believes there is a contradiction "between the desire to please, making woman an object, and the desire to reveal, making her a subject." Her point is substantiated; this contradiction is resolved by the use of the diary "as (both) form and process" (*Writing* 280).

In order to break the sentence, the woman author needs to accept and internalize her status as Other, and allow that knowledge to inform her prose: the woman's sentence is not a biological imperative, then, but a "cultural fearlessness ... a dissent from, a self-conscious marking of, dominant statement ... (it is a) writing unafraid of gender as an issue, undeferential of male judgment ... " (*Writing* 33). Without the acceptance of her marginalization, DuPlessis asserts, a woman's sentence will be unable to be formed.

Breaking the sequence, too, demands an overt rejection of the traditional narrative form. DuPlessis writes that it not enough for a woman to rearrange standard linear storytelling; the woman writer is compelled to take her work "from the present into the future, (so) social or character development can no longer be felt as complete or our space as readers perceive (to be) untrammled" (*Writing* 178). Diary writing, then, accomplishes this; by focusing on the abstract "world" of emotions and themes rather than the calendar-strict timelines of events, the woman diary-writer allows her characters (herself, her friends, her partner/s) to exist on the pages (or the screen!) in a constant state of flux, a steady forward movement without end, and certainly, with abrupt and random starting points, *a priori* existence.

Within the diary, too, the sequence is broken. At its very basic level, the diary format does not require the use of Freytag's pyramid for dramatic structure, standard

grammar, or any of the elements of any traditional narrative format. When the author demands control over her own literary destiny, subverting dominant narrative paradigms for ones of her own choosing, certainly she has “sever(ed) dominant authority and ideology.”

The online autobiography, in addition to not forcing restrictions on content, also imposes no restrictions on form, structure, or navigation. The reader might start on one entry – not necessarily the first, if s/he navigates from a bar of archived entries! - and could conceivably “jump” to an entirely different page via hyperlinks. The online autobiography with its promise of open-endedness offers fluidity, a lack of linearity, a lack of structured “go here now.”

The diary begins *in medias res*, and ends (or does not end!), with question marks, in fact hearkening back to Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, which itself begins with a question, the first word of which is “But.” As DuPlessis notes, the use of the non-beginning and non-ending “rais(es) the issue of the future (in) another tactic for writing beyond the ending” (178). The future here is implied; it is a ‘barbaric yawp,’ a timid whisper, a desperate scream. Whatever the style of the voice, the woman publisher on the Internet has joined with her sister publishers in a very choir of Selves, straining individually and collectively to pull the “subtexts and repressed discourses” into the light of the LED, these boundaryless women in boundaryless space, smashing standards and conventions, the composers of achingly beautiful music set to the clicking keys of a hundred thousand keyboards, creating and uncreating – itself a paradoxical creative act, the act of creating deconstruction – as each author chooses for herself.

## Chapter Eight: An Infinite Number of Inks

Jakob Nielsen is a pioneer of Web usability and a leader in the discipline of human factors, “that field involving research into human psychological, social, physical, and biological characteristics, maintaining the information obtained from that research, and working to apply that information with respect to the design, operation or use of products or systems for optimizing human performance, health, safety, and or habitability” (<http://www.cdc.gov>). Nielsen argues in favor of and against certain design principles which can “make or break” a Web site. However, these philosophies defy what is the basic idea of homepage design: “anything goes.”

Despite the preponderance of Web design guides available in/on a variety of media, there simply is no set ‘way’ to make a homepage. A user can implement any number of color combinations, font styles and sizes, number and type of graphics, animations, audio, wallpaper, backgrounds, links, and the list goes on. If one reads outside of the essentialist/biological implications of the following, and accepts the idea as an allegory for opportunity, it is therefore possible, metaphorically and literally, to *write in white ink*, as Cixous suggests: “There is always within [every woman] a little of that good mother’s milk. She writes in white ink.” The concept of custom design, of individual, independent creation is itself an act of writing, of inscribing oneself in this new medium.

Cixous has long been a proponent of life-writing. She demands writing that resists categorization; such is the only writing that can adequately (if not accurately) reflect the ever-unfolding, ever-evolving nature of living. In fact, Cixous herself delves specifically into her life and that of her family in her work *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing*. In “Albums and legends,” the final section of the text, Cixous attempts to unearth the roots of her own writerly desires within the scope of her family genealogy.

The image of the “room” is present in Cixous’ work, perhaps as a conscious homage to Woolf. In “Medusa,” Cixous writes of Cixous speaks of the feminine repression resulting from phallo(go)centric structures inherent in the discourse of Western culture. The repression, for Cixous, takes the metaphorical form of a dark, unexplored room, representative of women’s language and sexuality, two areas women fear to explore as a result of both male warnings and dominance. Cixous explains that if women will question their fears, if they will turn on a light, women will discover that there is nothing to be frightened or intimidated by. Finally, women will realize that all of these fears and alleged “shortcomings” are not essential or inherent, but have been developed and based on images, standards, and binaries created by men and reinforced by language. Women, says Cixous, must understand that the obstacles they perceive as obstructions to their advancement can, in fact, be conquered. However, to overcome these obstacles, women must allow themselves to speak with and through their bodies (“Medusa” 315).

Although her work is inspired by the psychoanalytic precepts of Lacan, Cixous herself demonstrates many of the attributes of postmodernism; in fact, her 1975 essay “The Laugh of the Medusa” arguably marks a turning point for Cixous at which she

began to identify herself with the postmodern movement. This rejection of the Symbolic Order, particularly marks Cixous as a postmodern feminist (Tong 193). Cixous' feminist leanings are evident in her rejection of phallo(go)centrism, her rejection of male sexual superiority over women, her rejection of the male-as-authority. Cixous argues that the structure of language itself is phallogocentric, with stable meaning anchored and guaranteed by the phallus. Therefore, anyone who uses language must take up a position as 'male' within this structure, a paradigm that excludes women's bodies. Cixous calls for a deconstruction of the phallogocentric system and argues for new approaches to the relationship between women's bodies and language. Specifically, in order to escape the discourse of mastery, Cixous believes women must begin to 'write the body.' To write with/one's body is a way to overcome the hierarchical bonds that repress and imprison women, and to allow these women to discover their own voice/s.

In "Medusa," Cixous uses a combination of psychoanalysis and deconstruction to criticize the very nature of writing. According to Cixous, writing by men is filled with binary oppositions, but a woman's writing should be scribbling, jottings-down, interrupted by life's demands. She asserts that the conscious, deliberate development of this kind of writing will change the rules that currently govern language and ultimately the thinking processes and the structure of society ("Medusa" 316).

Cixous' *écriture féminine*, itself a discursive theory, is impossible to theorize. This practice of "writing from and of the body" is "*feminine*" in two senses. Not only is this type of writing is potentially available to both sexes, but also the new relations between the subject and "other" can be negotiated once the "*feminine*" subject position refuses fear and assimilation of the other's difference. This way of writing cannot claim

unmediated access to the body; the physical body is figured metaphorically and anti-naturalistically to create fictions of the self.

Cixous, fascinated with Lacan's suggestion that a relationship exists between gender and language or gender and writing, offers a twofold purpose for "Medusa": "to break up and destroy, and to foresee and project." She wants to destroy (or perhaps just deconstruct) the phallogocentric system Lacan describes, and to offer her own strategies for "a new kind of relation between female bodies and language" ("Medusa" 309). Deeply rooted in the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Lacan, Cixous strives to explain her new formulations in the language of these forethinkers, appropriating and shattering their own terminology (e.g. coining the portmanteau "phallogocentric").

In addition to psychoanalysis, Cixous owes a great debt to semiotic theory, since she relies heavily on the concepts of the sign, the signifier, and the signified. A sign, according to de Saussure, is merely a collection of letters, a jumble of pictorial representations of sounds. He argues that since "the linguistic sign is arbitrary," things and concepts themselves are inherently meaningless. Thus, the manifestation of the thing or the concept – apple, banjo, happiness, purple – becomes a sign only after the thing has been invested with meaning. De Saussure defined the *sign* as the by-product of the *signifier* and the *signified*. The 'signifier' (*signifiant*) is the *form* which the sign takes; the 'signified' (*signifié*) is the *concept* it represents.

I must also address the notion of woman as "excess," as the *binary opposite* of man. Language of the Symbolic Order attempts to contain and restrict women because women's *lack* is so terrifying. Women are "excess" because women are simply unable to be contained within the Symbolic Order. This inability to contain, then, brings with it the

power for potential subversion and resistance, for inscribing in women's "own words" – the experiences of writing-as-women, the *écriture féminine*.

When Cixous asserts that "woman must write herself," and that "woman must write woman," she means both that women must write themselves, tell their own stories **and** that "'woman' as signifier must have a (new) way to be connected to the signifier 'I,' to write the signifier of selfhood/subjecthood offered within the Symbolic order" (Klages <http://www.colorado.edu>).

The directive to "write the body" points toward one of the major themes of Cixous' writing: that the essence, strength, intelligence, and beauty of woman is inseparable from her body, allowing the concept of women-as-lack/ing to be so successfully destructive and repressive. For Cixous, the body and the text are companion vehicles for reflection and reflexivity. It is from this perspective that Cixous discusses the ability of women and multiplicities.

Cixous' complex notion of the multiple identity of woman is grounded in the suggestion that woman, because of her womb, in every aspect of her physical and mental selves, has the potential to be herself **as well as** another. This status is illustrated in the ways in which a woman can choose to give: A woman can choose to give life to give love, to get love which gives life to her. However, a woman's giving is not an *ablation* - a loss - of any kind. A woman's giving is always a re-creating of herself – and another who is not her: the "other."

A woman also has the ability to "know" the "other," because she can and, for some, does hold the "other" inside of her. First, woman holds the potential for creating life in the ovum contained within her. Second, she can hold the developing fetus within

her - she is herself and "other" at the same time. As Cixous puts it, "There is hidden and always ready in woman the source; the locus for the other. ... (the child that she was, that she is, that she makes, remakes, undoes, there at the point where, the same, she others herself)" ("Medusa" 313 ).

Because woman can know herself and the "other" simultaneously, she is also capable of multiplicities of meaning. Therefore, Cixous does not believe that there is, or will be, a single women's discourse. Rather, she says, "there will be thousands of different kinds of feminine words" ("Medusa" 317). This multiplicity of language will not separate women from the general discourse, but will add multiple occasions and situations for women to participate while retaining an ability to utilize what Cixous calls "the code for general communication" (ibid).

Perhaps Cixous' most compelling argument is her assertion that a woman must move away from established forms of language in order to truly write herself; how can one truly express herself in a language not her own? "[W]riting," she cries, "is precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures" ("Medusa" 311).

Equally striking is Cixous' assertion that "(women's writing) will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallogocentric system; it does, and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophico-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate." Again Cixous' prefiguring of the new technological medium is startling. Where better than the Internet, itself a medium with only periphery,

with no authority figures, for a woman to reveal herself? Where better than in a medium which has no rules, no governance? Where better than in a medium that allows a woman to both define herself from her body even as she distances herself from her sexualized, commodified being?

Instead of forgetting or deferring the body in an engagement with technology, Tenhaff calls for a radical reconstruction of technology saying that it is well within the scope of women “to develop images and tropes that are body-based in a way that open up an affirmative space for the feminine in electronic media practices” (219). Here, again, one is reminded of Haraway’s cyborg. The thought of women’s “excess” successfully merged with controlled technology is terrifying to those who occupy the Symbolic Order. While “a man” must separate and rise above nature and artifice to become lord and master of all he surveys, women can use language to reframe this separation (i.e. Lacan’s split from the mother and entrance into the Symbolic Order) and be *with/in*, rather than alone as Self. Women have so much potential for movement, thanks to this fluidity, this slipperiness; women can move between, within, and through, while men can only struggle to ascend. Women can, and perhaps should, remember the body, speak through the body, in defining and redefining their social identity. It is, of course, possible for women to re-define themselves outside of traditional categories, particularly using the space of computer mediated communication.

Kristeva, a postmodernist in the school of French feminism and a contemporary of Cixous’, identifies a language that pushes the boundaries of syntax and logic and argues that they are actually “poetic language.” She identifies this “poetic language” as being inherently female because of its connection with the semiotic, with signs and

symbols. This concept of the semiotic relies heavily on the idea of the pool of polyvocal chaos, the multivoiced alinguistic system of communication that existed before humans learned to speak. This iteration of “the” semiotic is a collection of utterances and tonalities that have no referents, scores and scores of unbridled images.

Only Lacan’s preverbal child can be fully embedded in the semiotic. From preverbality, however, each infant enters the Symbolic, in which verbalizations use syntax, logic, categories. Poetic language refers to the semiotic; it attempts to (re)capture those rhythms, that preverbal state. Kristeva states that the semiotic is “[i]ndifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax.” (“Poetic” 29)

According to Kristeva, this semiotic is inherently feminine: “many women . . . complain that they experience language as something secondary, cold, foreign to their lives. To their passion. To their suffering. To their desire. As if language were a foreign body. And when they say this we are often given the impression that what they question is language as a logical exercise” (“Question” 131). Women need to express themselves in a nonlinear way that will explode the structures of symbolic.

However, the means of re-writing self that are currently available are simply tools (signs), tools being used by those already named 'women', always already belonging to the category 'women'. A woman thinking through/with her body, speaking, performing her self through her body, confronts a set of social meanings already assigned to the feminine and to the body. As Tenhaff notes, the thrill of leaving behind the body may not

be a challenge for women, for whom the sexed body has not uniformly offered security or protection.

In "Medusa," Cixous states that ". . . there has not yet been any writing that inscribes femininity; . . . nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason" (311). Cixous' *écriture féminine* is neither linear nor objectified. It is historicized and multiple, holding within it the matrix of the many selves of the women-writer, her body. It "will be conceived of only . . . peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate" (312). Cixous postulates a writing from the body that pushes past boundaries of syntax and patriarchal content. But this writing, she says, has been rarely committed to paper.

This is why the home page becomes such a critical medium for women's self-expression. Cixous demands a paradoxical writing **from** the body, even as the body is left behind, de-commodified. On the Internet, this paradox is achievable, even necessary for the creation of autobiography.

It is within these very personal virtual spaces that such changes are being made daily. Women are claiming cyberspace, and are expropriating their own individual stories. They are writing themselves. The triad of beliefs expressed by Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous, each derivative from her predecessor, come together in an incredible coalescence of ideology, one which manages to both predict and inform the blossoming movement of women writing themselves on the Internet.

## Chapter Nine: The Theory in Progress

The bulk of this dissertation has focused on finding support for the emerging online discursive tradition, and putting forth the critical and ideological premises that support such a formation. Without critical analysis of actual texts, however, the idea of *e-criture feminine* exists only in a scholarly vacuum. Only with proof of practical application of these ideologies, deliberate or not, can the idea of *e-criture feminine* be presented as viable, a living phenomenon.

I offer several illustrations of diary entries that fulfill the tenets of style, space, and medium. However, these entries by no means constitute the only available proof or confirmation of my suppositions; rather, the entries I selected are to serve as excellent representations of the concepts outlined in this work. I would encourage readers to pursue further diary reading, and allow these independent readings to further reinforce the soundness of the assertions I have made.

In order to demonstrate the validity of my claims and show a nexus of the ideologies advocated in this dissertation, I needed to select at random and read through a representative collection of current, ongoing diaries of self-identified woman writers. To that end, I relied quite heavily on Diaryland.com, arguably the most popular (and populated!) purely diary site on the Internet (LiveJournal.com boasts the most users, but it is not a pure diary site, since it combines blogging into its format).

According to e-mailed communication between “Sammy” (Bowen), the owner/administrator of Diaryland.com, and myself, statistics show that the site has had a user base of up to 1.36 million users. As of March 2003, Diaryland.com has 850,000 registered users, with 400,000 of them considered “active posters” (<http://dijest.com>).

Since selecting a gender is a requirement for establishing an account with Diaryland.com, “Sammy” was also able to provide me with a demographic breakdown by gender: 70% of Diaryland.com users are female, 30% are male (Bowen). These statistics far exceed the results provided in a recent white paper by Perseus Development Corporation, a survey that substantiates the gender breakdown with its own demographic research. The Perseus survey analyzed the estimated 4.12 million sites that have been created on blog-hosting services, such as Blog-City, BlogSpot, Diaryland, LiveJournal, Pitas, TypePad, Weblogger and Xanga (<http://cyberatlas.Internet.com>). According to the Perseus study, located at <http://www.perseus.com/blogsurvey/thebloggingiceberg.html>, the breakdown of blog-builders by gender is as follows:

Gender	Blogs Created by Gender	Percent
Male	1,810,000	44.0%
Female	2,310,000	56.0%
Total	4,120,000	100.0%

Note that because there is no way of validating someone’s selected gender, these numbers must be viewed with some degree of skepticism, but can be, for the most part, taken to represent simply a *majority population self-identified as women*. Fluidity of gender construction does allow for alternate performances of gender; therefore, it is reasonable to accept the statistical “truth” of a majority population of women.

In my selection of diarists, my primary criterion was, of course, that the author be self-identified as a woman. I opted against using age as a determining factor. Rather, I allowed the arbitrary selection of diaries to include complementary arbitrary ages. As such, I found myself reading diaries by young girls, teenagers, adult women, and, in one case, a grandmother. The gender of the diary authors was determined by usernames, graphical representations (if present), and the content of the entries (e.g., reference to “my husband” resulted in a “woman” gender classification). I determined the age of each author by specific information provided by the authors (e.g., in profiles) or inferred from the content of the diary entries (e.g., reference to attending high school resulted in a “teen” age classification).

The diaries I read were written by women from all over the world, ranging in age from 13 or 14 to 27 and well beyond, as ascertained many times by context (as in that of the case of the woman who does not reveal her age but offers anecdotes about her children and grandchildren). Several of the diarists did not identify an age, but it might be possible to assess individual ages based on context clues provided in the content.

Carallyne, for example, whose age is not specified in her profile, writes in an entry dated January 25, 2004 (all non-standard English the author’s): “i want a man.. you know. [can you call a 20 year old a man anyway? i don't know, but i rather not say i want a "boy".]

In a later entry, this one dated February 04, 2004 (all non-standard English the author’s): “soooo if anyone wants to know what i do at college... i watch bad reality tv shows, eat junk food, hang out with friends, and sleep crazy hours. but i would like to believe that i do some work also. last night i slept one single solitary hour because i wrote

a 9 page paper for a senior level psych class.” These cues, among others, can provide an age context for the writer, despite her not having offered the information directly.

As indicated in the Methodology section, I selected thirty (30) diaries by self-identified women authors at random from Diaryland.com’s alphabetical search feature (steps for selection outlined in chapter two; user names and URLs attached in Appendix One). I read these diaries, entry by entry, and tried to tease out the certain similarities I had theorized existed among them.

For each category – space, style, and medium – I selected five (5) diaries which I felt best exemplified the ideals espoused by the attendant theorist (Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous). Certainly, I could have made a case for every diary as reflecting the ideology of each critic, but I decided that a showcase of the most striking diaries would be the best approach. From each diary, then, I chose those entries that, again, best reflected the critical ideals. I would encourage the reader to peruse other diaries at her leisure; in addition to reading these diaries for pleasure, reading them in the context of this developing discursive tradition lends the collection an air of academic dignity and a sense of importance that otherwise might have sadly gone unnoticed.

Because of the intensely personal nature of each of these diaries, I felt it was important to include quotations from these diarists in this dissertation. Not only do these quotations help to substantiate the thesis I am proposing in this work, but they also offer insight as to the depth and breadth of material that these diarists share with their readers. Compelling as these diaries are, I am sure that the inclusion of these quotations will only underscore the legitimacy of this new online discursive tradition.

I examined the general user interface (GUI) of each page; I also read at least twenty-five entries archived in each diary. The goal of this process was to critically assess both the design and the content of these diaries as reflecting the ideals of women's online writing posited by this dissertation, examined through the lenses of space, style, and medium.

### *Space*

“How private is my diary?” reads one of the inquiries on the Diaryland.com Frequently Asked Questions page (<http://diaryland.com>). “If you don't list your diary in the member's (sic) area,” reads the answer, “then only people who know your username can get to it. To be extra safe though, you can add password protection to it, and then only give passwords to get in to your friends, so only they'll be able to read it!”

Woolf's “room” is nowhere better metaphorically evidenced than in the online diary. Not only is this format a (theoretically) private space in which a woman can create her autobiography and engage her different selves, but the diary also affords its author autonomy of access. An author can open the design space or template of her diary at any time. She is not constrained by anything other than those circumstances that prevent her from writing as a function of her daily life. As Woolf herself argues throughout the treatise, the writer of “incandescent genius” rises beyond his or her petty gripes and attains a heightened, objective relationship with reality; the subject is the world, not the writer's self. Here, in these diaries, women writers manage to engage both world and self, creating the paradox of the Coleridgean “androgynous mind,” all the while doing so in a women-format and, ultimately, in a women-voice.

Woolf herself likened the diary has to a “deep old desk or capacious hold-all.” This comparison points to the expansiveness of this autobiographical form, one that readily embraces other autobiographical forms: the photo album, letters, the travelogue. The repurposing of the diary to/on the Web has irreversibly collapsed the notion of the personal diary as private and closed (Woolf’s deep old desk), even as the expansiveness of the diary retains its offline integrity. Most online diarists compartmentalize their sites into various sections (About Me, Friends, Links, Pictures), thereby allowing the autobiographical self to spread out discontinuously across a broad narratological landscape (“The Online Diary . . .,” <http://www.genus.lu.se>).

Because material circumstances limited women's lives and achievements, posits Woolf, there had been few great women in history. Thanks to the lack of education made available to women, and the fact that women were then not permitted to be responsible for fiscal matters, these women necessarily led lives that were less publicly significant than those of men. Woolf argues that until these material limitations can be overcome, women will continue to demonstrate less public achievement than will men. This materialist thesis implicitly contests the then-common essentialist notions that women's inferior social status was but a natural outcome of biological inferiority. While most people now accept the materialist position, in Woolf's time, such arguments still had to be put forward with conviction and force.

According to Woolf, essentialism is by no means a factor in the successful development of the creative mind. Rather, she argues, creativity depends on certain concrete factors, the absence of which has hindered women writers over the centuries. The room guarantees freedom of space, both literal and metaphorical, in which the

woman can work. A lock on the door allows the woman to control her solitude and her company.

Alwayslolita, a twentysomething diarist, had, at some point, taken advantage of the privacy aspect of Diaryland.com to close off her diary. She writes on January 12, 2004:

okay i'm back now. i don't even remember the last thing i wrote. there's one entry that is still up that is causing me to keep my diary locked. i might find it before i finish typing this up. in which case you'll be looking at my newly opened diary. i'm just going to start at the beginning and work my way down. i'm pretty sure that it's sometime in may of 2001. i'm almost positive of it. then i think i've captured them all. if not. oh well. i'm tired of caring what he thinks of me. tho i do care. fuck fuck fuck fuck.

The authors on Diaryland.com have complete control over when they write – and complete control over the time at which the entry “goes live.” The writer is responsible for posting the entry to the server, making the work instantly readable to the public. She is free to create the entry at any time she likes, and has the freedom to close the room for any given amount of time before determining what to do with the entry. British diary writer Groovy-jo, for example, is able to let her readers know exciting news when it happens (all non-standard English the author’s): “good god .. its just a very quick on [sic] .. i got a phone call just as i was leaving for manchester saying i could move that day if i wanted ... ARGH!! CLEARLY I COULDNT so im having to move fRIDAY afternoon .. panic on!” she writes in an entry dated February 26, 2004. She then informs her readers

that she will be offline for a while, citing “obvious reasons,” and asks her readers to email her for further contact information.

Twenty-three year old Fairybytch displays a banner on each screen of her diary that reads, “member of the bi-sexual diaryring.” She is also a proud member of the “Tattooed Bettys” Web ring, the Adam Sandler Fans Web ring, and the Faeries Web ring. Without even reading her diary, the casual surfer who happens upon her site is already privy to several telling bits of information about this young woman. Her diary, of course, is her space to share, and it is within her entries that one is offered even more telling glimpses into her life and character. She writes about men on February 11, 2004, and her young insights reveal a pride in the strength of her own gender:

okay so has anyone else noticed that men are usually so big and tough and macho...they make you feel safe and warm and they love this job. until they get sick....men become babies when they get sick. it's so funny to see what they become when they get sick....then it's the women who have to care for them and make them fee safe and warm and cater to all there needs which we do anyways but it's a bigger job when they are not feeling good. my goodness guys!!!

This is by far not the most personal entry she writes. On January 22, 2004, she opens up to her readers thusly: “so i have been dating the same guy for like 7 months. i love him sooo much. such a cutie. i suppose i will be letting people read this so let me ask.... he wants a three some and i have no objections i don't think...what do you all think?” This titillating entry has no preface and only one follow-up, written on January 26, 2004: “plus i just joined a bi and lesbian group so hopefully i will meet someone nice in my area and matt and i can fuffill some our fantasies and make a great new friend and companion.”

Following that entry, the concept of the threesome hangs in the ether, unaddressed; it is as if Fairybytch uses this entry as “bait” to attract readers. She is clearly not merely mulling over the idea of a threesome, but is actively soliciting the opinions of others. This deliberate and provocative teaser certainly illustrates the power of the online diary as the metaphorical “room” of the author’s own: this is quite literally an invitation to her readers to step inside the room, to engage with the author on her most personal terms. One part of that statement must be underscored: *on the author’s terms*. The author controls the two-way communication here. She opens the dialogue, and she decides to whom she responds, to whom she does not respond, and, of course, if she ever addresses the matter again with her readers. In *A Room of One’s Own*, Woolf urges her readers to live and write on their own terms, to achieve the creative and personal independence so critical to writerly individuation. This entry by Fairybytch brings these tenets to light and concretizes them in an easily graspable (and entertaining!) fashion.

“Ok,” writes diarist Eggsaucted, “so ... I am pretty much addicted to diaryland ...” Occasionally what these diarists reveal is worthy of soap-opera scripts, so convoluted in scope and tangled in plot that the reader is not only invited in, but compelled to stay. After a few entries, Eggsaucted reveals that the man with whom she is involved is married: “Ok it is totally pathetic that we have to go to these extremes to see each other. But we're in love and for now we have to sneak around to see each other. Someday (hopefully sooner rather than later) that won't be the case. I guess that's what I get for falling for a married man. I never meant for or expected it to happen. It just did. And for the last 7 weeks I haven't been happier,” she writes on January 04, 2002.

Although Eggsauacted mentions the wife (“evil Karen”) several times, it is not until several weeks later that Eggsauacted finally stops focusing on the wonderful love she and Kevin have, and lets her readers know how much the situation bothers her: “Maybe, I had a terrific night with Kevin last night, but I find it totally depressing that every night we have together ends with him going home to his wife,” she writes on January 22, 2002. The tone of the whole entry is melancholy and wistful; it is obvious to the reader that she is very much attached to “Kevin,” and wants nothing more than to be with him on a full-time, public basis.

What makes the situation that much more complicated for Eggsauacted is that she becomes pregnant with Kevin’s child. Although she never makes a specific announcement about the baby, she introduces her readers to the “impending arrival” on February 17, 2003, when she writes about hearing the fetal heartbeat for the first time. As a result of the pregnancy, Kevin eventually does leave his wife, but does not immediately move in with the (other) mother of his child. Although Eggsauacted gushes about how happy she is with Kevin’s decision to leave his first family, she is incredibly calm – almost cavalier! – about the relationship developing between she and the ex-wife. Kevin’s ex-wife Karen makes contact on more than one occasion, and Eggsauacted’s reaction comes across to her readers as rather *laissez-faire*:

Karen now knows about me and the baby. She's moved on from calling me a whore and such to trying to make me feel guilty. Which won't work. She's now sent me a total of 3 emails. The last two told me nothing I didn't already know but I think they were meant to scare me, and make me feel guilty. One was mostly propaganda trying to show me what a great wife she is and how hard it is to take

care of Kevin's needs. The other message was all about her kids and all the problems they have and I think it was meant to scare me. . . . But I keep day dreaming about my responses, both nice and evil.

The need to ascribe to Woolf's insistence on privacy is clearly evidenced in these exceedingly personal diaries. Although accessible by any reader with Internet access at any time, Eggsauacted and her sister-diarists rely on the veil of anonymity as the bunker of seclusion. The complicated paradox of these private disclosures in such a public space do not at all refute Woolf's ideals; rather, the woman is imbued with even more control than she might have with a traditional pen-and-paper diary. The online diarist has the ability to hide herself behind aliases and nicknames in addition to having the power to turn on and off the "lock" as she wishes. She creates her own room with every entry, determining the level of privacy and content intimacy as her mood dictates, while the pen-and-paper diarist is locked into the conventions of the physical form, and must rely on hiding places, locks, and the honesty of others to keep her secrets.

But these diarists do not only discuss relationships, sex lives, and observations about men. Often, they choose to allow their readers into the most uniquely women-aspects of their lives, specifically fertility and women's health issues. Drewbears, mother of Noah, Andrew, and Micah, is very open about her physical health. Starting at 270 pounds, she welcomed her audience into her weight loss journey; at her heaviest, Drewbears revealed that she suffered from a variety of physical and emotional difficulties, and, out of fear and frustration, decided to change her eating habits. Subsequent entries include brief descriptions of her daily menus, exercise, and measurements. This kind of day-to-day life-tracking holds to what is traditionally thought

of as a more masculine format the journaling of facts and figures. Clearly, it became habit for Drewbears to jot down these chronologies and charts; they are by no means the primary focus of her work.

A reader could easily bypass such dry facts and figures in favor of the more emotional aspects of Drewbears' writing. Like many diarists, Drewbears used the online forum as a space in which she exposed deeply personal facets of her private life. In one particularly touching entry on February 05, 2003, she shares with her readers a recent diagnosis of polycystic ovarian syndrome (PCOS). She invites her readers to learn more about the condition, and offers medical information even as she works through the deeply painful emotional ramifications:

Well after I went back to see [the obstetrician] 4 weeks later I was down 14lbs she didn't even notice or comment. She informed me that I have PCOS. Basically she said that she wouldn't help us get pregnant for at least a year and a half. At first I was really upset. But now that the weight is coming off. I wanna get down anyway. If I can get down to my goal we will see what we wanna do from there. We had thought about trying to get preggo again in like aug or sept. We will see.

On March 22, 2003, Drewbears announces her pregnancy to her readers by posting a picture of a positive home pregnancy test. Her excitement is evident in the title of the entry: "BIG NEWS.....", which is followed simply by the photographic image of the positive home pregnancy test. She does not need words to convey her emotions. Her readers, she assumes, know how she feels.

It is moments like these – revelatory, open, honest, and deeply private – that emphasize the **space** aspect of the online autobiography. In these diaries, the authors

must feel some measure of security in offering themselves up with such vulnerability.

The authors must realize that they are not writing in a vacuum; these are not the diaries of childhood, small hardbound books with fragile locks, covered with stickers and hidden beneath a mattress or under papers in a drawer. These are open spaces, inherently public by their very medium. The paradox of this public private space is as follows: the author has the power within that space to reveal – or not reveal! – that which is most pressing on her mind. The “room of her own,” then, is ultimately a combination of her Web space and her own mind.

### *Style*

“Alter Your Diary” is the first option available to users in the Members Area. The first two subcategories are “Add An Entry” and “Edit/Delete an Entry.” Clearly, the ability to tweak – to *alter* –takes precedence over all of the other available options. The freedom to make these changes is an integral part of the design process on this particular site, and arguably, one of the three most critical pieces to the development of *e-criture feminine*.

“Altering” has as much to do with writing style as with visual or graphical elements. Just as one can “alter” art, one can “alter” language. In *e-criture feminine*, woman are charged with exploring new landscapes of expression, developing new modes of language, or altering the ones that already exist (i.e., the Symbolic Order). The question of “female aesthetic” is crucial to the examination of women's autobiography. In her article “For the Etruscans,” DuPlessis describes women's language as an undeciphered code, a secret language, or a constellation of secret languages, with “. . .

emotional texture, a structural expression of mutuality . . . text as a form of intimacy, of personal contact, whether conversations with the reader or with the self. Letters, journals, voices are sources for this element . . . The female aesthetic will produce artworks that incorporate contradiction and nonlinear movement into the heart of the text" (275, 278).

In that same article, DuPlessis pays homage to Woolf as she concretizes the idea of the diary: "loose knit and yet not slovenly, so elastic that it will embrace anything, solemn, slight or beautiful that comes into my mind. I should like it to resemble some deep old desk, or capacious hold-all, in which one flings a mass of odds and ends without looking them through" (qtd. in "Etruscans," 279).

Hyperlinking or hypertextuality is a hallmark of postmodernism and of *e-criture feminine*, easily analogized to this digital "mass of odds and ends" described by Woolf. Since the first example of Web publication, the concept of hypertext has challenged the once two-dimensional structure of "writing." The World Wide Web is itself a series of interlinked and interlocking media: Web pages, message boards, chat rooms, e-mails, pop-up ads, and so on, paralleling what Lippard calls "a certain antilogical, antilinear approach also common to many women's work. . . . fragments, networks, everything about everything" (81). This new medium can be linked with feminist writings of the 1970's and 1980's, in order to make the argument that "claims of writing are inextricably twined with received notions of gender, and coded as active, passive, penetrating and receptive (Kendrick <http://www.rhizomes.net>). Theorists of hypertext rarely acknowledge the connections among bodies, gender and writing, preferring instead to disembody the writing process, reifying instead the "mind," and a philosophical history that glorifies masculine cognition. Hypertext inherently defies these masculine,

phallogocentric tenets, rejects the binaries and the dualities, opening itself and the author up for free-flowing, organic creation. Each of the following Web-spaces offers its own distinct take on “writing,” on *e-criture feminine*, which can broadly be defined as “the creation of the written word.”

Aznchickie’s diary features a very simple layout. She has no images on her main entry pages, but she offers several links at the bottom of each entry: “Comments” (curiously, she alternates the spelling of the word by including various numbers in place of the letter “O”); a countdown until her 20<sup>th</sup> birthday (which itself links to a Wishlist, a series of gift items, each again with its own link); “FOTKi GALLERY,” an organized gallery of images on the Fotki.com Web site; and “MAKE A DONATION,” a link out to PayPal.com where ostensibly readers can contribute money to the writer (this is not an unusual phenomenon; many diary writers solicit donations and remind their readers that even online diaries come with operating budgets. Readers may feel compelled to thank the author for the hours of entertainment with a monetary gift).

These links offer the reader a different kind of entree to the life of the diarist. Not only is the reader treated to a first-person account of the diarist’s life, but s/he is also now able to learn more about the diarist through these alternate sources. In the three-dimensional world of hypertextuality, these extratextual materials succeed in “fleshing out” the different sides of the diarist, and offering the reader an equally well-rounded look at the writer herself.

Smith argues that women have dual impulses of being appropriately silent in a patriarchal society and speaking or writing with their own voices. While traditionally the challenge of observing silence while still embracing the public arena results in public

censure, the woman who remains silent "denies her desire for a voice of her own" (7-8). According to Joyce, hypertext resolves this crisis of voice: hypertext is a medium more conducive to feminist discourse than printed text, because it allows multiple versions of a story to develop and be told simultaneously. Just as feminism has divergent meanings for women who grew up in different generations and in different areas of the world, these collaborative hypertext projects allow a variety of feminist thoughts and perspectives to coexist in one piece (Barron <http://www.poprocks.com>).

The use of hypertextuality as Aznchickie has interpreted it allows the author to have both a private voice (her own first-person accounts of her life) **and** a public voice (linking out to objective, third-party sites). Aznchickie's list of links does not include lists to friends' pages or personal diaries; even the "comments" section is arguably not an objective, third-party link since it appears within the confines of her own diary site. This appropriation of the coding technique defeats the paradox Smith outlines between the desire for voice and the consequence of public censure.

Additionally, hypertextuality also satisfies the idea of the three-dimensional "crazy quilt" that is so much a part of both women's life-writing and contemporary criticism about the discipline. Again, the concepts of public and private spaces are at the fore: the "layering" of thoughts and ideas in this way certainly allows the author the option to expose or hide as much of herself as she wishes, but the approach also affords the reader the opportunity to keep her/his readings as superficial or in-depth as s/he likes. The reader can take away with her the strictly subjective first-person account, comprised of immediate interface (graphics and layout) and text, or s/he can choose to look deeper

into the crazy quilt, examining not only the item as a whole, but also each square that comprises it.

Because the Internet can be thought of a three-dimensional space (particularly in terms of hypertext), it is not unreasonable to analogize characteristics of its construction and assets to equivalent aspects in the material world; in this case, the diary is, of course, likened to the scrapbook. According to Charnes, personal memento scrapbooks are imbued with the immediate presence of the individual who created them, a presence that simply cannot be recreated by/with mass production (Charnes <http://home.comcast.net>). The reader (of the diary or the scrapbook) is treated to emotional snapshots of relationships, to an individuated perspective on any number of issues. Are these representations (individually or collectively) “the” “truth”? Because postmodernism so vehemently rejects the idea of the Grand Narrative, and instead argues for the idea/s of many truths of existence, one may safely say that yes, these diaries are representative many “truths.” Although idealized or superficial, the entries still reveal information about the author

The three-dimensionality of the Internet allows the combination of inter- and extratextual material to transgress spatial boundaries (Huff 130), both in terms of the architecture of the Internet, and in terms of the spaces in which women and men write. Women’s writing comes from a place Outside of the Symbolic, a “wild zone” that lies outside the dominant culture’s boundaries in a “spatial, experimental, and metaphysical ‘no-man’s land’” (Smith 9). Perhaps the language of this “wild zone” is different from its tamer neighbor. It is in this wild zone that boundaries are crossed, lines are blurred, connections are forged and dismantled at will. Hypertextuality provides women with a

way to navigate two simultaneous wild zones: the uncharted, infinite space of the Internet and the amorphous linguistic cosmos that women are concomitantly exploring and creating.

The process of using hypertext in Web pages – including diaries – offers women more chances to explore *e-criture feminine*, this time in a spatial sense. The computer is a natural vehicle for communication, which has always been an essential piece of feminine experience. Having made it through the word-processing stage and learning computing skills, women are "thrilled with the potential of the computer for human communication" (Spender 175). Plant argues that women should feel comfortable in cyberspace *precisely because* the medium is more available to “woman's way” of working, thinking, and communicating than to “man's” (Spender 229).

The diary of Blackskirted is peppered with hyperlinks to other sites and sources, as well as to older archived entries. Almost every entry includes these physical allusions to intra- or extratextual material. In these examples of the female aesthetic, Blackskirted seems to offer her readers more than the traditional autobiography, even as she actually enhances her autobiography with information that provides her readers with further information about her character, her likes and dislikes. Rather than adhere to the flat, two-dimensional traditional diary form, Blackskirted, like many of her online colleagues, prefers to thwart the concept of the linear diary in favor of the more chaotic spatially-oriented hypertext diary.

On May 15, 2004, Blackskirted reveals, “All I ever do on this forum is bitch and complain. What a fucking waste.” This, the reader quickly learns, is entirely untrue. Because of the extratextual material, Blackskirted’s diary is full of interesting and

informative resources, whether the reader chooses to examine them contextually, as part of the diary and as revelatory of the author, or simply as standalone links to external sites. In a particularly interesting twist, Blackskirted spends a great deal of time in her diary reflecting on the writing process – not as a diarist, but as a graduate student completing a thesis. “Is writing supposed to hurt?” she asks on April 19, 2004. “Is it supposed to be a physically painful process getting a paper put together? I’m in a bit of a crisis mode. Panic. Nausea. All sorts of crappy emotions/feelings. My thesis goes out to the committee on Wednesday. I need to make it through tonight and tomorrow.” What graduate student has not, at one point in her/his career, had these very same feelings? And by extension, what **woman writer** has not experienced the frustration of trying to create written work in a Symbolic Order from which she is continually and deliberately excluded?

It is fitting that Blackskirted, a diarist who relies so heavily on hypertextuality, is so very frustrated with her academic work. In that forum, she is constrained not only by the phallogocentrism of pure language, but she is also conscripted into the masculine world of the Academy, marginalized both socially and linguistically. In her diary, Blackskirted is free to express herself in whatever means are available to her in the medium.

On the Web, women writers are able, at least for the moment, “to convene their literary practices in and through cyberspace without the canonical, careerist or corporate imperatives which frame academic and publishing institutions,” writes Carolli. By no means does hypertext nullify or invalidate the purity of the diary form; rather, the inclusion of extratextual material underscores the author’s autobiographical intent even as it permits the reader to be more actively engaged in the text itself. Hypertext allows the

writer to completely reject linearity and switch quickly between times and places, something experimental authors have been trying to do for quite a while.

In a hypertext document (fictional or otherwise), many simultaneous stories can be written with a variety of characters (again, fictional or otherwise) so that the end product can imitate the complexity of real life (Barron <http://www.poprocks.com>). In fact, Barron notes, women have created more than half of all hypertext fiction books currently available. Women, traditionally viewed as techno-phobes, are embracing what may appear to be an obscure, technologically complex method of writing (ibid).

Hypertext is a fluid way to write (and read!), offering neither beginning nor end. The reader might start on a diary entry, and venture onto any number of paths determined by hyperlinks on that first page – and subsequent pages thereafter. When a diarist includes hypertext in an entry, she can deliberately design links to circle her reader around and around, returning to that same entry, or she can bring the reader completely away from her diary to a site or sites of her own choosing.

Women no longer have to feel compelled to write "as it always has been," but can now write in whatever way/s way they choose. In addition to physical design elements on the page, the spatial addition of hypertext offers these writers a number of creative outlets because of its lack of 'margins.' According to Weight, hypertext is a space where "feminine writing can go further in its exploration of the meanings of gaps and spaces...it allows for refiguring the conventions of format and style that are so embedded within print media" (<http://www.english.udel.edu>).

Hypertext is not the only way in which women can make use of DuPlessis' imperative for women to alter the language. Perhaps the most obvious and globally used

technique is simply the destruction of grammatical and spelling mores. Much feminist linguistic theory is founded in and opposed to Lacan's Symbolic. According to his three-pronged theories of the Real, the Symbolic and the Imaginary, the Real is the place of the mother and death, the Symbolic becomes the domain of law founded on the Name-of-the-Father, and the Imaginary exists as the effect of the Symbolic in consciousness and imagination.

The Symbolic Order – in this case, the condition of language – is fundamentally masculine and patriarchal; it speaks the Imaginary language of men and is organized according to the law of the Symbolic Order. Anything outside the domain of the Symbolic Order – including women, who inhabit the realm of the Real – effectively must be translated into the terms *of* the Symbolic; in other words, its Other-as-symbolized is really the same as itself (i.e., the signifier is the same as its signified and vice versa). If this translation does not happen, then the Other (like death, or the feminine, again both in the Real) is made so radically different that no symbolic means exist for it to be communicated.

Perhaps the grandest way of altering is the complete subversion of the idea of the “master narrative forms.” DuPlessis observes, “All forms of dominant narrative . . . are tropes for the sex-gender system as a whole” (*Writing* 43). This can be accomplished not only by finding new and creative ways of structuring writing (e.g., hypertext) or by reinventing linguistic structure, but also by thwarting the established conventions of a “standard” genre: in this case, autobiography/diary.

As noted earlier in this project, the diary begins *in medias res*. Rarely do diarists begin to write on a day of cultural significance, a memorable holiday or a public special

occasion. More often than not, these diaries are either begun on a day of personal importance (e.g., birthday, anniversary), or on a day that *becomes* significant precisely because it is the day on which the diarist has begun her writing. Sometimes these diaries are precipitated by an important event in the diarist's life; sometimes a friend convinces the diarist to write. And sometimes the diarist just *begins*. In every case, however, and on every date, the underlying motivation is the same: this woman wants to *write*.

June 04, 2003 is the date of the first post from Grubbygirl. She titles her first entry "The beginnings of a boring journal," but still, compelled by the need to create, she answers the call to write. "Okay, here we go," she begins. "I get such a kick out of reading Katie's diary (and I live with her, mind you), that I decided to do one. It'll probably last a week, but I figured since I just took this hellish five day train ride, I actually have something mildly interesting to talk about." Inspired by another woman writer, Grubbygirl decides that she, too, has something to say. Despite her initial negativity or shyness about the project – "it'll probably last a week" – she has been posting regularly for over a year.

The idea of *starting to start*, of some kind of chronological enjambment, certainly fits with DuPlessis' idea of "breaking the sequence." In her own poetry volume Drafts, DuPlessis reconsiders her earlier drafts through a procedure she aptly refers to as "the fold." She employs a series of repetitions of lines and phrases throughout individual drafts, creating rhizomes of discourse, ideas, and of course, text.

While the drafts of *Drafts* are arranged in chronological order, they diffuse outward from a vanished center, reflexively spiraling forward and back between and among their own various parts. DuPlessis' own admitted inability to recover her own

history according to traditional (i.e., Symbolic forms of chronology – past, present, future) guides her readers into a fruitful space that functions “not as a single event or epiphany but as a fugue-state with many possible locations of meaning in which appears, DuPlessis suggests:

‘nothing and everything  
plaster-faced dolls,  
plastic tops from margarine tubs,  
tin tea trunk’” (ibid).

The “center” of these diaries, the starting point, is completely arbitrary: lost or misplaced in the chronology of the Symbolic Order. It is from these arbitrary starting points that these diarists begin to create their multidimensional autobiographical scrapbooks, layered with artifacts, each with its own meaning or significance. The sequence begins having been broken.

On January 05, 2001, Alicesbaby began posting at Diaryland.com. Although this was her first online diary, she quickly reveals that she has journaled before: “And how long do I make my diary entries? If they're anything like my written diaries have been in the past, it could take a looong time to type!” Despite her familiarity with the idea of autobiography, Alicesbaby starts off slowly before she finds her writing stride.

In this incarnation, she was sheepdip; she changed her identity when she became pregnant in February 2004, and then changed – *altered* – the subject and look of her diary to reflect her pregnancy. In this first entry, Alicesbaby/sheepdip, like many of her writerly colleagues, comes across to her readers as stilted, almost uncomfortable with the idea of journaling: “Wow!” she writes. “So here I am! I can't believe I've got an online

diary since a few months ago I was so technologically stunted! This is great!! I half don't know what to say now....” She spends a great deal of the entry figuring out what to write, planning the path of her autobiography:

I guess I write about what I've done and how I feel. Or whatever ... I'm kind of bored but into a routine of nothingness now. I appreciate the small things and good days, even though I still feel awful. I'm generally less depressed at the moment. Should I write stuff like this here? How do I choose what to write and what not? Hmmm.

As she does note in that first entry, she understands the value of writing: “I guess I'll probably use this a lot at first, but I hope I keep writing. Writing feelings and stuff is always helpful.” Her initial discomfort quickly wears off as she continues making entries, and she begins to find her comfort level – and her unique voice. The tone of the posts shifts from very self-conscious and awkward to informal and relaxed. Significantly, her style, too, begins to evolve: Alicesbaby loses the inhibitions imposed upon her by the linguistic parameters of the Symbolic Order. As DuPlessis asserts, Alicesbaby/sheepdip rejects the grammatical and mechanical standards of traditional written language, and begins to write for/from herself. Many of her entries focus on relationships (with her husband, with her deity), and to that end, she allows herself to be swept up in the emotionality of her entries, and not to be concerned about/with proper English.

Cutipeie1983 combines the elements of scrapbooking and linguistic play in her diary. The interface of her diary features a picture that she periodically changes to suit her mood. She offers her reader a variety of extratextual links, and does include intratextual links throughout her diary. A great number of her entries actually focus on her

frustrations as a writer; for example, on June 15, she writes: “Siree inspired me to actually get back into writing the other day over the phone, and that is what I have been doing for the last couple of days. Usually the first paragraphs and/or the plot of the story is the hardest, but once you've got that, the rest is fairly easy. So people...give me a story idea!!” The idea of *wanting* to write, of *desiring* the expression of Self is a constant force in many of these diaries; the underlying motivation for the creation of the written word, as will be discussed in the following section on Cixous, is the desire for voice and fulfillment, the urge to create that which is *of* the Self and *independent* of the Self. The scrapbooking format that so many of these diaries take – including Cutiepie1983’s – allows these authors to experience the genesis of an entirely personal creation.

Even when writing seems difficult or “unnecessary,” these diarists are compelled to write, to create. Cutiepie1983 entitles her May 06, 2004 entry “Sorry Excuse for an Update.” The body of the entry focuses on her feeling bored in one of her classes, not, according to the author, a typical subject matter for her diary. In an essay about the essay, DuPlessis writes of the restlessness in writing not in, or for, a genre, but at “a moment of writing before the genre,” at an “impacted point prior to the flying off of matter into planets, fragments into texts, and over all [with] a sense of volatile incipience”(1996, 23).

Cutiepie1983’s frustration with herself as writer, with her “inadequate” subject matter, certainly echoes the restlessness of which DuPlessis speaks. There may be nothing to say, nothing to write, but it is the job of the woman writer to defy convention – to break the genre, as it were – and write what she *needs* to write. As a diarist, these conventions are much restrained, since the subjectivity of the diary lends itself to an infinite number of interpretations. The creative anxiety, the impulse to **do**, however, is

echoed in DuPlessis' idea of "writing before the genre," of writing before the mind has the chance to consciously enter the Symbolic and deliberate the propriety of the language and the voice.

Only recently have scrapbooks been acknowledged as a legitimate literary form, particularly in the context of "women's genres." Although women have long kept scrapbooks, it is with the contemporary explosion of the literary canon that these scrapbooks have begun to take their places among more traditional literary forms.

The very word "scrapbooks" diminishes the significance of the treasures that are these multi-layered records of life experiences. Scrapbooks come in many forms: collections of obituaries, articles, autographs, dried leaves and flowers, bits of cloth, genealogical data, stickers, stencils, yellowing photographs. These testaments to the lives of so many forgotten women lie in houses all over the world: in attics, in basements, in cartons pushed to the backs of cabinets, and are part of a tradition of life-writing that Melvin dubbed "Self Works" (1). Every scrapbook is revelatory, not only for its record of a person's preoccupations, but on a deeper level, each of these scrapbooks offers an intimate glimpse about the person who would patiently create these books.

Because of the inherent personal nature of the form, every scrapbook is, by definition, autobiographical. However, the kind of scrapbook that seems most significant to the examination of history is the personal memento scrapbook. This is the scrapbook that contains ephemeral mementos of a woman's life: letters, photographs, clippings, invitations, locks of hair, dance cards. These fragments are "saved because of their relationship to an experience"(Garvey 56). They are pasted in and each page arranged to

hold its record of an event or a day or a year. As Buckler notes, "the personal memento scrapbook is a locus where text and artifact meet" (149).

These visual texts use their own kind of linguistic system: artifacts as nouns, sentiment as verbs (Motz 75; Buckler and Leeper 1). This language is personal and decentered, a language entirely unrestrained by diction and syntax that women use to creatively express their lives. For so long, so many of these historical documents have been ignored, neither decoded nor translated, leaving the lives of their creators buried and mute.

Scrapbooks are sources of both linguistic and artifactual information, and the decoding of these artifacts results in a rich mine of information about the scrapbooker's life. In the Symbolic Order (and by extension, in any culture that is driven by and built on a foundation of language) where women are the Other, the Object becomes of primary significance. Feminist historians have begun to use material culture for that reason, learning to "read" domestic objects to uncover the details of women's lives (Johnson 2). Kavanagh suggests that in emphasizing documentary sources, historians have "constructed a middle-class view of the past, since not only the creation and retention of the documents, but also the development of their interpretation, has rested largely with the literate and intellectually privileged" (126). Women have often historically not been among those 'privileged.'

Just as accepted diary forms do, these scrapbooks also defy the boundaries of the limits of traditional autobiography. When taken as a form of autobiography, writes Gilliam, "scrapbooks also transgress boundaries of language and artifact, low and high art, and concepts of the spatial and the textual. The scrapbook as autobiography provides

us with a fuller understanding of women's lives.” As DuPlessis notes, extratextual material, far from being something to ignore, is a source of rich "emotional texture" of a woman's life ( "Etruscans" 275).

The creator of each scrapbook is “writing blank. And writing wily. For annotators do not take the process of textual making for granted; they intervene in the processes of signification, canonization, attention-making. They point. They undermine. They bear shards of almost irrelevant information. Clues," writes DuPlessis (ibid).

What is an online diary if not a unique digital scrapbook? Hypertext links pages to pages, just as a “real world” album contains leaves that can be turned, skipped, added, and removed. Pictures abound in online diaries, both in layouts and in “about Me” or “friends” sections; “real world” scrapbooks are full of images of the people, places, and things most important to the collector. Finally, extratextual material is present in online diaries; just as “real world” scrapbooks rely on non-verbal cues as means of communication, so do online diaries offer the same kind of visual introductions to their authors. From animated images and customized icons included in entries and layouts to music files that play on page-loading, these extratextual materials are no less valid to the autobiography than are the birth and death certificates or dried corsages that fill the spaces between the pages of traditional scrapbooks.

### ***Medium***

The first question on the Diaryland.com Frequently Asked Questions page (<http://diaryland.com/faq.html>) reads, “What's up with this DiaryLand thing? Me no get it!” The answer immediately showcases the freedom the user has to create her own space:

“DiaryLand is a place where you can get a free, fun online diary that you can update through your web browser. You don't need to know anything more than how to type and use the web (which you must be able to do since you're here!) to use it. If you do happen to know HTML and whatnot you can completely customize your diary and make it look however you want.” The “completely customizable” aspect of Diaryland.com allows the diarist to operate under Cixous’ premises of organically driven, gender-based creative chaos.

A series of frames on the user pages of Diaryland.com focuses strictly on what is called, “**Your diary’s appearance.**” This section is second only to “**Update your diary,**” which offers an indication of the hierarchy of important site features to the diarist. Obviously, the foremost criterion is the ability to make quick and easy updates; secondly, however, the placement of the “**appearance**” links seems to suggest that each diarist craves the ability to individualize her diary even outside of the variety of templates offered by the administrators at Diaryland.com.

Cixous discusses the “appearance” of *écriture féminine*. This “appearance” is less a physical set of attributes than an aural manifestation since “looking like” “is at the heart of the misperception of self in the Mirror Stage which launches people into the Symbolic order” (Klages <http://www.colorado.edu>). Cixous is very careful to talk about writing in new ways, in ways that distinguish *écriture féminine* from existing forms of speech/writing. In so doing, Cixous creates an association between feminine writing and extant non-linguistic (sensory) modes. For example, *écriture féminine* **is** milk, **is** a song, something with rhythm and pulse, but no words, something connected with bodies and with bodies' beats and movements, but not with representational language (ibid).

The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* notes that this concept of “feminist aesthetics” does not label a variety of aesthetics in the way that, for example, the terms “virtue theory” and “naturalized epistemology” qualify types of ethics and theories of knowledge. Rather, to refer to feminist aesthetics is to identify a set of perspectives that pursue certain questions about philosophical theories and their assumptions regarding art and aesthetic categories. Feminists who work in aesthetics inquire into the ways that gender influences the formation of ideas about art, artists, and aesthetic value. Feminist perspectives in aesthetics are also attuned to the cultural influences that exert power over subjectivity: the way that art both reflects and perpetuates the social formation of gender, sexuality, and identity (<http://plato.stanford.edu>).

Cixous has long argued that women must “write the body.” In order to successfully separate themselves from phallogocentrism, women must write themselves independently of the Symbolic Order, thus rejecting and unseating the powerful Phallus. This is a difficult concept for many Westerners to grasp, since throughout the history of Western culture, women's bodies have almost exclusively viewed as objects on display. Women have rarely been permitted agency in art, but instead have been restricted to enacting — upon and through their bodies — the theatrical, musical, cinematic, and dance scenarios constructed by male artists (McClary 137-8). These online autobiographies do permit women to engage in women-specific performance. Cixous’ claims support the idea that the performance of writing as well as the performance of creation can both be and should necessarily be gendered in order to give women the voice and/or presence they have so desperately craved for so long.

The two most striking findings are as follows: no two diaries “looked alike,” and in at least one entry, the diarist would reach out to her readers in an attempt to connect with her readers. These conclusions support Cixous’ two primary premises: first, that women must have writerly freedom, complete independence of the Symbolic Order (or any paradigmatic extension thereof, as in restrictive templates), and secondly, that women must reach out to one another, drawing together in order to create a common discourse made up of any number of different voices.

Some of the diarists did implement the templates designed and made available by Diaryland.com, but most diarists opted to either use individually created templates, or to modify the extant templates to reflect personal style. Barbiebundy’s diary pages both address the design aspect and provide means for dialogue: feature a permanent link called “Design.” This link leads to the diary of another user, Somberdesign, who makes a variety of templates available to Diaryland.com users. This openness, this sense of community helps to underscore the highly woman-centered aspect of the online autobiography; as solipsistic as the act of writing may be, the power of togetherness underlies even this most isolated act.

While not directly related to design, this phenomenon can still be connected to Cixous, who believes that women must work individually **and** collectively to thwart the "discourse of mastery" that was created by men and is the discourse of the academy that, like the scientific discourse, excludes non-linear forms of expression (“Woman,” 1245). Though her theory of discourse coincides with Foucault's, Cixous concentrates on the oppression of women, calling for a new and powerful way of using language (“Woman”

1227). When women develop and join (and vice versa) their own community of discourses, the discourse of mastery can be torn down.

In an interesting approach to self-revelation, Cherry-punk uses many entries in her diary to display transcripts of online conversations, ostensibly between herself and a friend. One might argue that a fundamental tenet of Cixous' argument is that women need to write and rewrite in "white ink," a kind of **linguistic design** that would showcase this new means of communication between/among themselves, a non-exclusionary system of discourse that allows for limitless exchanges.

What Cherry-punk does, then, is to adopt this ideal, consciously or not, and bring these conversations to the fore. She does so with a layered approach, again, taking liberties with traditional linguistic systems. Not only does Cherry-punk herself engage in these conversations (the literal level), but she also then transcribes these conversations as part of the interaction and conversations that she has with her readers (the meta level). In fact, this approach certainly ties in with the relationship draws between fiction and reality. Cixous questions whether any sharp distinction can be drawn between these two states of being; after all, she claims, the subjectivity of reading and interpretation is not limited to fiction, since such subjectivity infects any attempt at interpretation. When Cherry-punk uses the conversation as representative of her reality, she succeeds in blurring that line between what is reality (lists of events, feelings, reactions), and what is fictional or interpretive (conversations *about* events, feelings, reactions).

Even though a discussion of hypertext is available in the discussion of DuPlessis and style, I would be remiss if I did not also mention the connection the concept has with Cixous' own ideals. Using the definition of "hypertext" as "linking pages," one can see

that the new additional spatiality and overall formlessness of the approach can easily be justified as part of a Cixousian ideal. The fluidity of hypertext not only “works” as a freeing form for a writer, but it also invites a variety of styles of writing, both on a single page, in a single diary, and/or on an entirely exterior series of links. Cixous says women “take pleasure in jumbling the order of space, in disorienting it, in changing around the furniture, dislocating things and values” a perfect description of the process performed by hypertext.

Hypertext connects women-to-machines-to-humans, says Weight. He describes this connection as creating a hypertext that essentially redefines the “rules” of writing, and that the women taking part in the redefining process of hypertext are exploring new possibilities for *écriture féminine*.

Why hypertext? This approach to coding perfectly suits *écriture féminine* (and *écriture féminine*) because it opens the door for women to use a new writing space to write their bodies. Some proponents of hypertext have gone as far as to suggest that hypertext’s “form and structure reveal affinities with feminine writing...are men writing like women, on the Web?” (Weight <http://www.english.udel.edu/>).

Because the majority of coders are male, the raw data may suggest that men may currently be producing more hypertext than women. However, hypertext lends itself extraordinarily well to the style of writing women tend to create. Weight claims that “if hypertext writes of the body, then what each hypertext document expresses is a particular and complex body, one which is interconnected with all of the bodies it is connected to.” Weight, as well as others, has suggested that this style of connected writing exemplifies

at least one of the qualities that defines *écriture féminine* on a linguistic level (<http://www.english.udel.edu/>).

Dearedwin's diary is minimalist in its design, but the author does offer her readers a variety of hyperlinks throughout her entries. If she mentions a product, for example, she will provide a link to the product Web site. On June 02, 2004, she writes, "we have this long hall that connects the bedrooms to the kitchen and front room. in addition to asking for one of those [craftm@tic adjustable beds](#)—the ones you can make recline on either side for you and your partner's respective comfort—i also asked for one of those [st@ir chairs](#) (but one that will carry me from my room down the long hall) for my birthday."

In addition to hyperlinks to product sites, some of Dearedwin's entries refer readers to other location: "today is action packed, so we're gearing up. there's a kentucky d\*rby soiree (have you ever attended one? me neither) at [these](#) people's house. we're not sure if we're supposed to dress up. i imagine fancy hats. i should call someone. after that, [shadowdress](#) and her husband are having an open mic-type performance party," she writes on January 05, 2004. Not surprisingly, the latter link takes the reader to the journal of someone with the user name "shadowdress." What is intriguing, however, is the fact that the link found attached to the word "these" in the phrase "these people" takes the reader to an earlier entry in Dearedwin's diary, this one dated September 11, 2003. This entry details a 1960's theme party the author attended, the house in which the party was held, and of course, the people themselves. The use of the "internal linking" is extremely effective; not only does the technique keep the reader contained in the author's diary, but it also allows the reader to learn about the subjects of the discussion (again, "these people") from the perspective of the **author**. Cixous' dictum that "woman must write

woman” – tell her **own** story – is evidenced in this internal linking. Rather than moving out of her own voice, Dearedwin combines the freedom of hypertextuality with the imperative of keeping the material in her own voice.

The diaries are not limited to the theoretical ideal of design, but also to literal creative freedom, both linguistically and physically. This particular diary also opened itself to an examination of the author’s use of language. Although she uses Standard Written English (insofar as a grammarian might demand), she uses a number of original, playful spellings of words. She certainly takes the established language and makes it her own, creating her own written ‘voice.’ In the entries I have already cited, there are visible examples of some of Dearedwin’s subtle spelling tweaks: replacing the letter “a” with the “@” sign, for example, and substituting the asterisk for the letters “o” and “e.” In these simple substitutions, Dearedwin challenges the Symbolic, deconstructing the signifier and causing doubt as to its signified. It is only through context that the reader is able to interpret meaning, and it is only through *knowing Dearedwin’s writer-voice* that the reader is able to deduce meaning. This semiotic play is indicative of the feminine: achieved by play, demonstrated in the deliberate subversion of the phallogocentric language system and an introduction to *parole*.

At age 13 or 14, Dolphinz is perhaps the youngest diarist in my selection. Her layouts, however, are surprisingly sophisticated. At the top of her diary is an anime-styled picture of a blonde teenaged girl, seated next to the large lower-case marquee, “this is where I can be *myself*” (this last written in sprawling script). Not only does the right side of her diary contain a series of links to the standard pages (archives, host, friends’ diaries), but she also includes a scrolling mini message board and a place for realtime

postings from her readers. However, in a sharp deviation from that design sophistication, her prose is almost entirely non-standard English; in addition to numerous misspellings and grammatical errata, she also tends to write in the style of “Net-speak,” using abbreviations (“c-ya” for “see you,” “tfn” for “ta ta for now”), number-for-word substitutions (“2” for “to”), and alternate spellings (“wuz” for “was,” “n” for “and”). The paradox of her slick layout and inelegant language is an interesting phenomenon, one that allows again allows room for Cixous’ ideas.

Because the design is so surprisingly developed for a young teenager, one can make the assumption that this diarist spent a great deal of time on the look and feel of the project. This is, however, not to say that she does not spend equal time on her entries. Rather, one might argue that the sharp design complements the prose by introducing the writer in a visual, graphical sense before introducing the writer in a prose, linguistic sense. The reader is treated to two separate but dialogic “sketches” of what Dolphinz might be like, successfully seizing, as Cixous says, the opportunity to speak. The linguistic subversion, the defiance of the phallogocentric language, the bright picture of the wholesome young woman on the top of the page: these all suggest Dolphinz’ attempt to assert herself as a young woman, as someone who wants, as her diary’s tag line say, to “be herself” *as* a woman.

On February 06, 2003, Albinoqueen shares with her readers a “design dilemma” in which she finds herself:

for my next diary layout I have two very definate ideas, and I cannot chose between them. Idea the First: a layout based on "Dragonheart", one of my favorite movies, that I have loved long and it has great lines and items for a layout. Idea

the Second: A fan layout of my newest actor-fancy: Kenneth Branagh(Prof. Lockheart from Harry Potter: CoS). And yes, I have an obsession for actors with English accents. They're so...attractive. They just draw me in ... So....guestbook, notes....people tell me which you think would make a better layout?

At the same time as she ponders her options, she opens herself to two-way communication, offering herself to her reader, using the language/tools and potential of the Web to create dialogue. It is more than merely layout that allows one to see the relationship between online autobiography and Cixous' ideologies. It is the combination of freedoms the Web affords these women writers. Not only are women writers given the different "inks" (both metaphorical and literal) with which to physically write down text, but they are also encouraged to interact and engage with one another on their own terms.

This assertion successfully combines the three concepts of women's style, women's space, and women's medium in one single idea, best articulated by Cixous. Women, she postulates, will create thousands of different "feminine words." The resulting multiplicity of language will not separate women from the general discourse, but will add multiple occasions and situations for women to participate while retaining an ability to use what she calls "the code for general communication" ("Woman" 1246).

## Chapter 10: The End?

What *is* this new discursive tradition, this *e-criture feminine*? How can it be expressed in succinct language? Is there a way of formalizing the tenets of the theory in such a way that it becomes accessible to readers everywhere, an “instruction manual,” of sorts, to the woman autobiographer? The very act of “defining” the theory would deconstruct its essence, an ideology predicated on the rejection of the established (O)order. It is possible, however, to **describe** the theory, if not to **define** it, a subtle distinction that will allow for the concretization of its three very basic tenets.

“The community of women can only come after the recognition of difference between women, and after the raising of some key questions of who is talking to whom, and why?” (McRobbie 205) Postmodernism as an (anti)theory sheds some positive light on feminism; it opens up the dialogue, and portrays the real problems with a single, feminist standpoint or place of critique. Because there is no single definition of feminism, the exploration of this new online discourse “allows for open debate and dispute about boundaries” (McRobbie 204).

According to Morse, virtual environments are “liminal spaces, sacred places of social and personal transformation... neither imaginary nor real, ...[they are] a subjunctive realm of externalized imagination where events happen in effect but not [in actuality]” (180). As an abstract form or a “structure of what does not yet exist,” the online diary and its use of hypertext, images, comment boxes, and so on, could also be said to be both

virtual and liminal (235). Hypertext, a primarily textual medium, and virtual reality, a primarily visual medium represented, in this case, by the Internet itself, are beginning to "blur together" (Bukatman <http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu>). This blurring poses an implicit invitation to actively meld the two in order to create a potentially revolutionary form for feminist criticism. "The hybrid or meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which a new form is born," writes McLuhan, "...the meeting of two media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses" (63). The combination of the Internet and the online autobiography offers women a new language, a new way to express themselves and break free of the "ordinary trance," the numbing paralysis of the Symbolic Order.

This dissertation demonstrates the ways the Internet offers women a chance to participate in the paradox of writing the self and leaving the body. A combination of specific social and literary theories fully supports the idea that women can develop individual and collective writing styles on/in a medium which is exquisitely suited to accommodating this exact development, a medium which in fact echoes the very tenets of this new writing style: privacy, individuality, and a lack of restraining conventions.

Clearly, it is possible to draw together the elements of genre, space, style, and medium as contextualized within established literary and social theories, and thus create a series of specific, concrete conclusions about the efficacy and necessity of the Internet as the ideal medium for women writers. Each member of the triad of cultural critics I have named – Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous – offers women a particular set of guidelines or suggestions for becoming a successful writer, and it only on the single vehicle of the Internet and the online diary that these can be combined and manifested. Certainly the

structural and stylistic ideas offered by Cixous and DuPlessis are easily converged in “hard” media; the Internet, however, allows for Woolf’s spatial component to be actively embraced to even those women who do not have physical rooms of their own.

Fewer than forty years have passed since Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* was adopted as a manifesto by early feminist critics who sought to establish a legitimate “place” for women writers in the current dominant literary tradition. This literary tradition had heretofore historically excluded women writers on the basis that women were considered incapable of sustained, intellectual achievement (Castricano). In order to even dream of acceptance into this “boys’ club,” Woolf argues that a woman must have two critical assets: first and foremost, she must have privacy, and secondly, she must have income and/or financial independence. The World Wide Web certainly provides places and spaces for women writers to write: the online diary. A cursory search on [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) for the phrase “online diary site,” for example, yields approximately 3,240,000 “hits,” or matches. Clearly, the online diary site offers the kind of privacy, anonymity, and protection, and allows the woman writer the virtual space, or room, that she needs to break into a literary tradition.

What Woolf did not anticipate, however, was the fact that technology would lead to the availability of space – and the subsequent development of a brand new literary tradition, independent of the dominant literary paradigm that even now privileges the discourse of the patriarchy. This is part of the beauty of *e-criture feminine*: it relies not on disrupting the literary status quo, but instead focuses entirely on unfolding and unfurling itself, producing and reproducing itself in a reflexive mimesis of the very process of women-writing, the development of layers and of re-appropriated language.

The trope of organic creation that one sees in the joining of Woolf's "room" with the online diary is not at all restricted to the spatial or structural requirements of *e-criture feminine*; rather, the very nature of women-writing as described by DuPlessis dovetails right in with this overall discursive idea. DuPlessis' linguistic play welcomes women writers into an unshaped, form-less collective of writers, one that is permitted to diffuse rhizomically. This mirrors the *parole* itself, which is without traditional formal structure ("breaking the sequence," "breaking the sentence") and without traditional linear form (hypertextuality). Asks DuPlessis, "How might that Woman function by virtue of her iconic Otherness? How can I (a woman) read my our their his her semiotic: What is a woman writer's negotiation with the semiotic to produce poetic language?"

DuPlessis works this negotiation by adapting Kristeva's assertion of poetic language and form(lessness) as inherently semiotic – and thus inherently specific to women. The semiotic, the subconscious grasp of meaning and the syntactical polyvocality that exist before the introduction into the Symbolic, is by definition amorphous, astructural, although not resistant. It is, in fact, entirely pliable – like the use of hypertext, like the deliberate use of *parole*. This formless semiotic is reflected in the boundaryless medium of poetry, and, by extension, the lack of adherence to the phallogocentric language and structure of the patriarchy (the broken sentence, the broken sequence).

The semiotic, like the Internet, like the language of the online diary, is a realm of intonations/sounds that have no referent, a maternal space of unbridled images. It is only in the preverbal state that one is truly immersed in this semiotic state before introduction into the Symbolic, the system of syntax, logic, binaries, categories. Kristeva states that

the semiotic is "[i]ndifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax" (*Poetic* 29). The online diary – the representation of *e-criture feminine* – allows women writers to engage in an immersion into the semiotic, the most women-centered of linguistic non-systems.

Space and style join together to create a safe haven for private writerly creation and development, while Cixous' instruction to "write the body" provides women writers with the validation they need to realize that in order to truly write as/from themselves, they must reach inside and create. This guidance encourages women writers to develop a uniquely feminine discourse that works around (but not necessarily against) the Freudian and Lacanian representations of woman as the gender-which-lacks, a subject position which arose out of a focus on the phallus as the privileged symbol of biological, and therefore cultural, social, and intellectual superiority. "Woman must write herself," asserts Cixous, "must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies" ("Medusa" 309). The essence, strength, intelligence, and beauty of woman are inseparable from her body. This is why, argues Cixous, that the focus on the physical, the corporeal as "lacking" has been so successfully destructive and repressive for women in society. For the women writer, the body and the text are companion vehicles, reflexive and open to multiplicities.

These multiplicities evince themselves in the idea of individual diary creation. Cixous' "white ink" becomes a literal manifestation of originality; the white ink can be purple or green, it can rest on a blue background, a yellow background, or a graphic of a

flower. For Cixous, the point is to create as a women writer, to participate as an individual in the great community of women writers. And it is as part of this community of online diarists that again, the women writer is participating in the development of *e-criture feminine*. Cixous herself does not believe that there is now, or will ever be, a single discourse created by and shared among women, but that the multiplicity of voices will come together. This polyvocality – again, harkening back to the Semiotic – will not isolate women from the discursive status quo, but will add multiple occasions and situations for women to participate while retaining an ability to utilize what Cixous calls "the code for general communication" ("Medusa" 310).

Here, *e-criture feminine* proves itself a worthy member of this community of discourses. As I have argued, *e-criture feminine is by no means a single discourse, but an entire tradition*, developing online via the online diary/autobiography. The concepts of style, space, and medium are brought together as tools or functionalities for use, but are not at all rules or sets of instructions as to how each writer "ought to" create her work.

The paradox of *e-criture feminine*, however, is that by nature, although it exists and can be *divined*, it cannot be *defined*. By true women's discursive necessity, there will be no certain point at which anyone can conclusively (a) describe an *écriture or e-criture feminine*; or (b) suggest that such a phenomenon exists at all. It is precisely the fluid, slippery nature of this writing that makes it so subversive. It is precisely because it cannot be defined, identified, and categorized that it is truly the voice of the Other. It is precisely because of its organic, individual polyphonous nature that it will never be able to be put down in outline form and taught in the classroom.

Writing (and women-writing) is powerful; it is, as Cixous writes, "the very possibility of change." *Écriture féminine* is not writing that can be captured by dry theorizing; this writing resists categorization; it the "excess" that disrupts, circles around, climbs the sides of rational, linear traditional texts.

As with Cixous' *écriture féminine*, the electronic form of women-writing defies formal definition, since so much of defining comes from negation: describing something by what it is **not**. Like its predecessor, *e-criture féminine* refuses to be defined as part of a binary opposition. Cixous argues that one can't define the practice of "*l'écriture féminine*." Klages writes that to define something is to pin it down, to anchor it, to limit it, to put it in its place within a stable system or structure, and Cixous holds that says that *l'écriture féminine* is too fluid to exist within the rigid boundaries of a hierarchized system; it will always exceed or escape any definition (<http://www.colorado.edu>). Like *écriture féminine*, online feminine writing cannot be theorized, enclosed, coded, or understood.

This does not mean that the phenomenon of *écriture féminine* does not exist. Rather, notes Klages, it will always be greater than the existing systems for classification and ordering of knowledge in phallogocentric western culture (<http://www.colorado.edu>). *Écriture féminine* cannot be defined, but it can be "conceived of," (a quasi-biological phrase which works on literal and metaphoric levels) by subjects not subjugated to a central authority. Only those on the margins can these maverick writers, these subverters of phallogocentrism, "conceive of" feminine language; those outlaws will be women, and anyone else who can resist or be distanced from the structuring central Phallus of the phallogocentric Symbolic order.

Throughout this work, the same three concepts have continually emerged as primary to *e-criture feminine*: space, style, and medium. A combination of these three ideas allows women writers to successfully open themselves (and be open to) writing from/of themselves in a format that is already specific to women. Without any of the three components, *e-criture* in its entirety is not possible; it is only by simultaneously working in and through these ideas that women are able to participate in this development. Granted, a woman can write from herself in any way she wishes; this is part of Cixous' feminine writing, or *écriture feminine*. The difference between *écriture* and *e-criture* is the difference between solipsism and collectivism. While any woman is free to engage in life-writing from/of herself, the discourse that *e-criture* helps to encourage allows women to write individually **and** as part of a burgeoning group.

Space, style, and medium come together to form the foundation of *e-criture feminine*, but what allows me to allege the development of a new discursive tradition is precisely that community aspect. While the ideological premises of Woolf, DuPlessis, and Cixous are certainly applicable to a single woman, it is only when they are all adopted by a united body that one can legitimately argue for the presence of a larger, broad-based reinterpretation of linguistic and writerly mores.

Autobiography, as personal as it is, provides not only a glance at the life of a single individual, but when a series of like autobiographies are examined in tandem, they offer a widened perspective of what might be called a community or collective experience. This is by no means to suggest that two people in a like community are experientially identical; rather, an examination of a broad spectrum of individuals might give rise to certain exegetical assumptions (but not "givens"). If a cross-section of diaries

from Colonial America were examined, for example, one would be given a sweeping insight as to the lifestyle and concerns of a group of people writing in a particular historical context. More information can be extrapolated from these diaries, however: a more specific examination of the diaries of women in Colonial America would certainly reveal the character and lives of individuals, but would also offer a view of the collective women's experience during that time.

Because contemporary women's autobiography comes up against the boundaries surrounding what has long been defined as "traditional subjectivity" and the disappearance of the subject, as dictated by postmodernism, these narratives are insinuated into the middle of a duality created by traditional representation on one side, the refusal of postmodernism to represent any subject on the other. Within this dialectic, a woman's autobiography attempts to represent a Self that lives in a state of flux, a Self that is fluid even as it retains integration, a Self that exists as an individual but is always relational. Women's self-representational writings thus successfully represent individual subjects who are in a constant state of be-ing and becoming, of fragmentation and re-integration, a subject who seeks individual integrity in relation.

Those women who can access the World Wide Web have entrée into one of the world's most powerful media. The World Wide Web is a haven for women writers who heretofore have had to settle for notebook paper, pens, and typewriters. The World Wide Web gives voice to those who could not speak; it gives an audience to those who were forced to write alone, for no reader. It makes viable the possibilities for innumerable women's writings, an unlimited number of women writing, and an infinite number of women's writings. As women continue to develop individual styles, each one joining in

the chorus, women together will be engaging collectively in one of the most important acts of creation possible: the creation of women as Selves – and Selves who are fully, completely able to express themselves *as* women.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix 1: Diaries Used

Alkerz87 (16)	<a href="http://alkerz87.diaryland.com">http://alkerz87.diaryland.com</a>
Aznchickie (18)	<a href="http://aznchickie.diaryland.com">http://aznchickie.diaryland.com</a>
Alarouge (26)	<a href="http://alarouge.diaryland.com">http://alarouge.diaryland.com</a>
Alicesbaby (27)	<a href="http://alicesbaby.diaryland.com">http://alicesbaby.diaryland.com</a>
Alwayslolita (“twentysomething”)	<a href="http://alwayslolita.diaryland.com">http://alwayslolita.diaryland.com</a>
Albinoqueen (“teenage girl”)	<a href="http://albinoqueen.diaryland.com">http://albinoqueen.diaryland.com</a>
Adilee (no age given)	<a href="http://adilee.diaryland.com">http://adilee.diaryland.com</a>
Blueyedmom (no age given – refers to “grandson” in diary)	<a href="http://blueyedmom.diaryland.com">http://blueyedmom.diaryland.com</a>
Blackskirted (no age given)	<a href="http://blackskirted.diaryland.com">http://blackskirted.diaryland.com</a>
Blueyedmoo (23)	<a href="http://blueyedmoo.diaryland.com">http://blueyedmoo.diaryland.com</a>
Barbiebundy (no age given)	<a href="http://barbiebundy.diaryland.com">http://barbiebundy.diaryland.com</a>
Cheerldnbaby (no age given)	<a href="http://cheerldnbaby.diaryland.com">http://cheerldnbaby.diaryland.com</a>
Cutiepie1983 (20)	<a href="http://cutiepie.diaryland.com">http://cutiepie.diaryland.com</a>
Carallyne (no age given)	<a href="http://carallyne.diaryland.com">http://carallyne.diaryland.com</a>
Cindylou03 (“college student”)	<a href="http://cindylou03.diaryland.com">http://cindylou03.diaryland.com</a>
Cherry-punk (no age given)	<a href="http://cherrypunk.diaryland.com">http://cherrypunk.diaryland.com</a>
Dolphinz (13 or 14)	<a href="http://dolphinz.diaryland.com">http://dolphinz.diaryland.com</a>
Drewbears (25)	<a href="http://drewbears.diaryland.com">http://drewbears.diaryland.com</a>
Dumbbunny (17)	<a href="http://dumbbunny.diaryland.com">http://dumbbunny.diaryland.com</a>
Dannii (25)	<a href="http://dannii.diaryland.com">http://dannii.diaryland.com</a>
Dearedwin (no age given)	<a href="http://dearedwin.diaryland.com">http://dearedwin.diaryland.com</a>
Eggsaucted (no age given)	<a href="http://eggsaucted.diaryland.com">http://eggsaucted.diaryland.com</a>
Emmiexx (20)	<a href="http://emmiexx.diaryland.com">http://emmiexx.diaryland.com</a>
Eve-louise (22)	<a href="http://eve-louise.diaryland.com">http://eve-louise.diaryland.com</a>
Faerieduckie (no age given)	<a href="http://faerieduckie.diaryland.com">http://faerieduckie.diaryland.com</a>
Fairybych (23)	<a href="http://fairybych.diaryland.com">http://fairybych.diaryland.com</a>
Groovy-jo (no age given)	<a href="http://groovyjo.diaryland.com">http://groovyjo.diaryland.com</a>
Girle (“post-college”)	<a href="http://girle.diaryland.com">http://girle.diaryland.com</a>
Grubbygirl (no age given)	<a href="http://grubbygirl.diaryland.com">http://grubbygirl.diaryland.com</a>
Greentealeaf (21)	<a href="http://greentealeaf.diaryland.com">http://greentealeaf.diaryland.com</a>

### **About the Author**

Deborah Silverman Bowen is a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at the University of South Florida with an expected graduation date of December 2004. She holds a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of South Florida, and a Master's degree, also in English, from New York University.

Following a hiatus from school during which she wrote and produced video games and children's toys, this former Romantic/Victorian specialist has turned her attention to cultural studies. Ms. Bowen has been involved in, among others, the Popular Culture Association, the American Association of Behavioral and Social Sciences, and the Keats-Shelley Society. Her current interests include cyberculture, cyberfeminism, and the juncture between the two.