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## Memory-work as a Method of Social Science Research:

### A Detailed Rendering of Memory-Work Method

Even though different terms and different points of view are used, most of us deal with power, dominance, hegemony, inequality and the discursive practices of staging, secrecy, legitimization and reproduction. And many of us are interested in the subtle tools, used by the text on the one hand to lead the mind and obtain agreement, on the other hand to incite resistance and impeachment. (van Dijk, 1995)

When I began putting memory-work to use in my work, I had to prepare for questions about the exact steps, starting points and process, methodological comparison and justification, clarity and potential for generalization, and theoretical connections. I have learned a great deal in discussions of these questions, achieved greater clarity, and brought the preliminary nature of the individual methodological steps into the foreground. I have, however, refrained from actually documenting research steps in written form. The current research methodology seems in need of further improvement, arbitrary in individual steps, and one-sidedly limited to the linguistic problem. It has not matured enough to be publicized as a general guide.

However, I continually encounter great interest in this process wherever I present this work and I desire to have something in hand which people can use in their own groups. Thus, I will attempt here to document considerations for the research methodology. It has occurred to me after my original reflections, that the interesting part of memory work consists of two dimensions: the collaborative nature of the process and the theoretical foundation. The theoretical background is time and again rendered explicit and expanded on in the discussion of individual steps, a discussion that is nothing more than a methodological relationship with

critical discourse analysis. I include theoretical argumentation in this process because of the freedom it provides, that is, freedom for individuals attempting to do memory work to change the method for themselves, remaining within - or critically expanding - the theoretical framework of the process.

The method is designed and written as it applies to women's groups. The reason for my perspective of exclusivity is historical; memory-work was developed with and for the feminist movement. I am not certain if memory work is possible within the perimeters of traditional science, often seen as maleness. Apart from that concern about maleness, this method is recognized as feminist.

### *The Research Question*

Memory-work is text work beyond conventional narrative analysis (Crawford et al. 1992). It is not only experience, but work with the experience, which is useful as a research method. The first step is developing a research question that opens up and delineates the field. The question should be of interest to everyone in the group. In fact, it should be a burning issue, so that the motivation to discuss creates a sense of commonality, a prerequisite for team work. This question can be established by the group or a topic may be announced for which interested female participants simply present themselves. Groups should be limited to no more than 12 women, so that all involved have the opportunity to be actively involved. If interest exceeds the group limit, additional groups may be formed according to size, so that everyone can actively participate. Using this strategy, I began doing memory work about fear with more than 50 women.

Although differences among women have been emphasized in recent years to the point where females with mutual experiences have been disregarded, there is hardly any topic in everyday life that does not mutually touch every woman, independent of age, profession, or social class. For instance, consider the topic of fear. Granted, experiences of fear are individually different depending on cultural

background, but all women can report memories of experiences of fear; most are painful and therefore important.

In the first session, the topic should be formed in lay terms. It is important not to pose the question in scientific or analytical terms since memories will not emerge when the appeal to them takes the form of language that is not in the vernacular. "A time when I was afraid" is common language to which everyone can relate. Setting the question in scientific terminology, "About the problematic gender-specific emotional inability to act" would elicit few memories. It becomes clear that although the meaning of the research question is assumed, that meaning must be acquired first through everyday language and personal experience.

#### *The Remembered Scene or Memory*

It is best to provide some time between asking the question and writing the remembered scene. This allows time to select an experience that is important for the author. In situations where this project is done in a weekend seminar or in which this is only the beginning of a longer-term project, it is best to let at least a night pass for this transition to occur. Time allows the author to process these thoughts while following her own habits and idiosyncrasies. Some people choose to write immediately, others late at night, and others prefer to get up early and write.

For writing about fear, a few suggestions, which preferably will be theoretically justified, are in order. The whole process should be kept simple and open to examination so that it can be supported by everybody. The process should enable individuals to be active and avoid creating situations where omniscient experts give orders to an uninformed audience.

The suggestions might be as follows:

1. It is best to have participants use third-person narration. This forces the participants to explain themselves as not self-evident and, therefore, unknown persons. It allows the women to describe themselves in detail and to account for

themselves; whereas, oftentimes with first-person narration too much is taken for granted, left out, or considered unimportant and embarrassing. We might call this choice of third-person narration historicizing or distancing the narrator. No rule is absolute, so should a person insist on writing in first person, this may be done. I can add at this point from my experience that people who are used to giving an account of themselves write more easily in the first person. However, I had a dispute with a woman that illustrates the contrary. She insisted on using the first person because she had just learned in the women's movement that women have to say "I" more often. This would make their stories stronger. After a very short time she came with four lines about an experience without any personal statement – except the defiant I.

2. Only the memory of an experience, an event, or a scene may be written. Sequences or biographical stories should be avoided. Extended descriptions allow the author to reconstruct herself, for example, as either fearful or non-fearful. The construction of oneself, which determines the format of any biographical note, shall be broken through because it is the development of the construct that we look for, not its final outcome.

3. A theoretical prerequisite for the work with memory is the assumption that we know much more about ourselves than we normally assume. Many things have been censored out of our self-image because we deem them not essential, too painful, or too chaotic. For instance, we may present ourselves as intrepid and daring and pass that off as an essential characteristic, or perhaps we remember ourselves as fearful and incapable of taking action in certain or all important situations. Inasmuch as our self-image is a part of our daily ability to act, it can also hinder expansion and continued learning. It tends to balance us to some degree. Removed from these assumptions is the challenge to write in as much detail as possible. That means the writer must not censor or leave out anything but, rather, note everything that exists in the remembered scene. Once the detailed writing

begins, participants will notice that they remember more and that we do possess a past richer than we assumed. Self-reflection and remembering can be learned; it's a matter of practice.

4. For practical, research-related reasons, limiting the length of the written text of a memory is useful. The purpose is neither to find the whole truth nor to create a complete construction. Rather, it is to gain insights into the ways of constructing, into focal points, into common sense and its workings, and into the knowledge that we semi-consciously have about ourselves. We accept a certain sketchiness of our work. To avoid pushing a single session beyond two hours, it is advisable to limit description of the remembered scene to about one typewritten page, with one and a half spaces between lines. If time is not a consideration, this limitation may be unnecessary. In that case go ahead and gather a group working with a limit of around three to four typewritten pages and work until the written scenes or memories are finalized. Because the ways of constructing and the idiosyncrasies of individuals repeat themselves, it will soon be obvious that mutual tension will decrease, that some will leave the room, and that requests for breaks, hunger, and fatigue will take the place of passionate interest.

*Brainstorming: The Collective as Process*

The seminar or research, while there are not yet any written remembered scenes, may begin with a brainstorming session about the topic. Write the results for all to see on the chalkboard. To name "What I am afraid of" not as an experience but in quotes results in a wide array of responses, which surprise many and immerse all in the topic. This exercise will break the ice in that there will emerge a number of shared conditions of fear, but also strange circumstances that one may never have associated with fear. Both similarity and dissimilarity pull the group together, arouse curiosity and create agreement. The exercise creates a shared empathy into all kinds of situations even though individuals may not recognize them from their own experience. When dealing with the issue of fear, allowing for

anything possible seems to demonstrate fear as overpowering and the individual as powerless.

Depending on the time frame and the purpose of the project, the group may continue with the theoretical work involved in this process. The group may attempt to learn something about the complexity of doing theoretical work from the common sense experience of creating categories from the list of fears. The group may order or categorize the different fears, for example, relational fears, fear of authorities, and fear of powerlessness. Other themes may emerge, within which fears of similar nature could be gathered. In doing so, it will become noticeable that each woman uses a system of categorization - similar to theories – which, without question or reflection, help her bring order to her everyday emotional chaos. At any rate, making this a topic of discussion promotes critical reflection.

Otherwise, brainstorming as a method is limited. But in the case of memory-work it serves the additional purpose of showing retrospectively that which was considered noteworthy before further reflection removes it from the category of something learned from our experiences. The superfluous nature of spontaneous namings conceals women as already finished products in the long-standing practice of connecting what is said to the anticipated cultural model, the non-pathological, cultural norm. Brainstorming is not free of ideological justification.

### *Organic Intellectuals*

It is easily recognized that memory-work, as a method, struggles with delegating the work as collectively as possible. At the same time, interventions by an experienced researcher are necessary. Each step must be thoroughly explained to every member of the group so that individuals may proceed to another group and share this information. Following the rules of collective debate, it should be possible to find mutual agreement (Miller, 1986).

Memory work is applicable in a variety of situations. It is suitable for adult education outside the perimeters of the university, as it is for people beginning

something new, or in social movements. Not all the necessary qualifications have to be generalized. It is a good idea to be familiar with theories that surround the given research topic. Theories may help further knowledge, but may also serve as obstacles along the way insofar as they may constrain discussion. For example, when dealing with the topic of fear, psychoanalytic and behavioral theories often are used in their vulgarized form. Such theories could be studied and critiqued during a research seminar using individual experiences. In a non-academic setting, or in a group with other necessities and interests, a selection of theory will have to be presented insofar as it is recognized as important in light of the gathered pool of experience. This necessitates research leaders for memory-work who are familiar with the theories that are associated with the topic and who at the same time will try to pass on as much knowledge as possible in order to be able to count on the critical imagination of each individual. Remember, the study of theory is not an inadvertent privilege of a university but rather is open to anybody.

I call the person leading memory work an organic intellectual. Coined originally by Gramsci, it denotes the figure within the group who assumes the intellectual tasks for the group. When doing memory work, there is no division of labor when it comes to writing the remembered experiences. Because the leader has had the same experiences, she should be free from the expert feeling and be able to participate in mutual discussion. This arrangement stirs up imagination while avoiding elitist judgment. No matter how much insight we think we possess, it is only when we have learned to see ourselves as children of these circumstances that we are equipped to work with others as we work about ourselves.

### *The Selection*

Depending on the group, a number of decisions have to be made. Suppose you are working with a group of 12 individuals. It is important that all the members of the group have completed the written scene (experience). All who have completed writing their experiences will be motivated to pay close attention to the

details within the stories of others because they too have written about their experiences. This also enhances the tolerance for some stories, which may seem trite compared to worldly events. For instance, in a seminar with both male and female participants, I had difficulty getting the male participants to write about their experiences. We worked with the question, "How we acquire moral judgments?" The men expressed the arrogant opinion that the texts they would create would be far superior in depth and quality and that they would not want to present them to such an unqualified audience. With this attitude the atmosphere was strained, and the analysis never became a reality.

The task that each person write down an experience conflicts with the necessity that initially in working with the whole group, only one or two of these scenes are chosen for discussion. The others are put aside. After the first, collective step, smaller groups of three or four members are formed, in which all works are processed. Nobody has written in vain. For the selection of the first scene, finding a volunteer is rarely a problem. Usually all women want their work to be chosen. Anonymity may be granted but is seldom an issue. The group makes this decision.

How do you choose a scene, though, that will serve as a pilot case to establish how the smaller group discussions should proceed? The criteria for selection should include richness in detail, inclusion of social/cultural background, and, of course, the interests of the group. Here again pragmatic decisions must be made. It is best that all group members take part in the selection process. Allot about an hour break for members to read the 12 scenes. After the scenes have been read, make a balanced majority decision. Admittedly, groups who have not done memory-work before will choose works based on things like tension, literary quality, presumed writer, or the mysteriousness rather than the general comprehensibility of a scene. You may also decide to have the team leader make the selection. This, however, takes away from the group feeling and is also stressful for the leader.

This is especially true when one considers that the team leader will have to live through the actual work process afterwards, which requires explaining, analyzing, and additional sociological imagining and feeling for tensions in the group. Making the selections may take at least two hours.

A final consideration is the importance of legible text. Whenever possible, it is best to use typewritten text.

### *Introduction to Some Theoretical Assumptions*

Some of the theoretical assumptions of memory-work should be explained before working with the remembered scenes so that the members of the group are not necessarily at the mercy of the individual work steps. In particular, four theorems seem to be indispensable as known assumptions: the construction of one's own personality, the tendency to eliminate contradictions, the construction of meaning, and the politics of language.

#### Construction of one's own personality

Our personalities are not simply things we received, were born with, or were predetermined but, rather, are constructed by the self. This self-construction within pre-existing structures implies that a personality has a story, a past. We attach meaning to our personas and use this meaning, or understanding of our personality, to determine the steps we take in the near present and distant future. If we reconstruct and remember ourselves as failures, we will approach new activities timidly. On the other hand we may perceive ourselves as having been born under a lucky star; our memories are full of success stories. Accordingly, we act energetic and straightforward in the future and seize the present. A comprehensive list of our experiences would provide enough information for either construction. It is important we understand that we construct ourselves. That is to say, a personality has a history, and it is essential for both our present and our future to work with the past so that we may always be available for a change in perception. This

construction is dictated by our desire to obtain the ability to act and remain able to act.

### Tendency to eliminate contradictions

An important strategy in memory-work is the elimination of contradictions. We tend to disregard anything that does not fit in with the unified image that we present to ourselves and others. This mostly semi-conscious act of eliminating contradictions may become transparent in the written experiences as we document the details that do not fit. Deconstruction work is aimed primarily at drawing out these contradictions and breaking points in our experiences. It presents them in a new light and connects them to other developments, choices, or ways of life. The graveyardlike silence of sameness is thus disturbed in order to enable change. A sense of mental unrest is created. If we achieve this sense of mental unrest, we recognize that certain emotions are disquieting and destabilizing; the memory-work is in motion.

### Construction of meaning

We attempt in our everyday life to give coherent meaning to ourselves. We create the kind of image of ourselves in which we believe. We try to convey this image in each and every communicative situation. The construction of meaning happens continuously. We speak of ourselves and expect that others receive the message as we wanted to send it out. The construction of meanings thus requires agreement by others. Meaning occurs in the first place through language, but also through gestures, appearance, and expression.

### *Politics of language*

Working with language usage is of central importance in the discussion of an experience documented in written form. How does the writer use language to convey the meaning she is aiming at without raising much doubt? A prerequisite for this critical work is understanding that language is not simply a tool that we may

use according to our liking. Rather, in the existing language, politics will speak through us and regulate our construction of meaning. Thus culturally a number of ready meanings lie around, so to speak; they push themselves on us when we write and dictate what we might not even have wanted to express. This happens when we less reflectively and more naively use language. Of course, the more we try not to stand out as personalities and wish to attribute normality to our experiences, the more we use these ready meanings.

The theoretical assumptions could be presented and made a subject for discussion in the first seminar session, and/or they could be read by the participants individually in preparation for the work. For that purpose, the following article, among others, seems useful: Haug (2000) Chapter 1, or in shorter version, Haug (1997), or Kippax (1997). There is secondary literature in all three.

### *Steps in the Editing Process*

It is best to use a chalkboard or another device so that all participants can see the individual steps. Copies of the first remembered scene should be distributed to everyone and then read out loud. We first want the meaning the author wishes to convey. Most of us learned in school how to interpret text. What does the poet want to tell us? The method used in school is opposite to the method used in memory work; it takes things literally, tries to think and feel like the poet. We do not follow this method when doing memory-work, but it is critical in this first step.

We read the memories aloud to avoid a permanent temptation to put ourselves in the author's shoes rather than examine the meaning laid out by her. At this point it is important, however, to work toward a consensus about the author's meaning. This will open up a lively discussion. A number of different suggestions should arise, as each member of the group analyzes the text. There are never any wrong answers. Each suggestion should build upon the others creating a thesis-like formulation of different statements, ultimately reaching a consensus. On one occasion, while doing a scene about fear in dark places, it was suggested that the

author was afraid of animals in the dark. Another participant suggested that the author was afraid of trees and wind. All group members were immediately in agreement that the author was afraid of non-human nature. This was especially baffling in this case because most listeners first thought she was afraid of men.

### *Consensus about Common Sense*

It is best to limit the initial discussion about the meaning or message to about 15 minutes. Everyone is still fresh and motivated to discuss endlessly, which will waste valuable time that will be needed later. In the first discussion many will still have on their academic masks. The group leader must be able to recognize a good breaking point and then summarize what has been said. It is not necessary to recite the whole dialogue, but rather sum up what was said. The message found within her writing not only conveys the author's intention, but also fosters the idea that we are working forward as a group towards our culturally shared self-understanding.

Adages or sayings are particularly suitable for expressing what somebody wants to say. They also give us the opportunity to reflect about those congealed common sense wisdom sayings and their functions. We may see that most often they are constructed in a way that their opposite is equally true. For instance: "Birds of a feather flock together," or "opposites attract," illustrate that we think-feel in such traditional patterns. The thesis statement is placed in the first row, which spans the chalkboard (see Table 1). Try making the thesis statement as brief as possible so that it may be quickly written and so that it does not use up too much space.

Table 1. Format for Record of Collective Editing Process

Initial Thesis Statement of Author's Meaning:						
Common Sense Theory:						
Analysis of Elements of Language:						
List of Verbs As Activity	Linguistic Peculiarities	Emotion	Motivation	Others Presented in Narrative	Vacuums	Contradictions
Construction of "I":						
Construction of Others:						
Thesis Statement Based on Deconstruction and Reconstruction:						

The second row contains another dimension of common sense and was gathered in the discussion about the message. This row contains the everyday theory about the topic and its context in relation to the writer. Using the example

from above, that would be: "Fear develops where civilization ends." This idea, which each participant has about the topic, is most often not a conscious and elaborate theory, but a supposition silently kept to herself. I call this common sense theory. It is a part of our everyday lives, and necessary for daily orientation. Whenever we do not explicitly formulate it and put it in front of us, it unexpectedly, without questions, weaves its way into all discussions. It's almost always a surprise to the women since most of them never knew they harbored such theories or feelings. These theories are often replicas of simplified psychoanalytic theories that have woven their way into the fabric of everyday consciousness. They, too, will be exposed and confronted in the later part of our work.

### *Analyzing the Elements of the Language*

The next step is simple and at the same time rigorous. We want to find out how the meaning that the author wanted to convey about her experience was expressed with language. The first task is to break from the realm of conveyed meaning, and distance ourselves for the work of deconstruction. This is not easily done because most individual experiences reported rely on empathy and comprehension and are successful in eliciting these in everyday communication. The consequence is the attempt to cultivate therapeutic discourses of sympathy and to relate connecting stories by way of "psychologizing." This stance and practice is not only theoretically unproductive, but it also stands in the way of insight. It invites group members to ally with opponents of understanding and active thinking and simply increases painful perceptions. It is absolutely necessary that distance be established in order to work with the text.

A method of distancing is posing questions to the text. Behind each question asked is a kind of theory about the subject. Try to keep the questions as simple as possible, and keep the implicit theory controllable at any time. The questions about the text are limited to language use - basic grammatical rules. Sentences contain a subject, a verb, an object, perhaps adjectives. They give

information about the engaged person, her emotions, her activities, and other persons. With this notion, we split the text in its elements and place them in vertical columns. We are searching for the way and manner in which the writer constructs herself, that is, her personality, and how she thus creates meaning and coherence, as well as in what way other people were constructed in relation to her.

The verb as activity. First write all verbs referring to the subject of the narrative. This simple act of collecting, which does not require more than about three years of formal education, reveals a number of surprises. Oftentimes the verbs are not found or are hardly detectable. All verbs are listed randomly, and a discussion begins about which verbs do, in fact, refer to the subject of the narrative. "It was cold for me." Is this a verb, an activity, which belongs to a person? Obviously, yes, and at the same time, no, because the subject of this sentence is an "It," an impersonal subject which determines the action. Furthermore, the verb is also an auxiliary verb.

Linguistic peculiarities. We create another column which we call linguistic peculiarities. Here we list to what degree the narrative is written with impersonal subjects. This often reveals that the persona of the writer disappears almost completely, at least as an active agent, and instead is in the hands of other powers. It becomes noticeable that in such situations there is nothing she can do. One observes that there are experiences that are presented exclusively in such a way as if impersonal subjects will determine the plot. Consider, for example, hunger grabbed me, fog enveloped me, the dark surprised me, the sky exploded. These are phrases in which movement and activity appear compacted. None of the subjects, however, are people, and so the narrative subject herself does not act as an active agent. Another particularity is the use of negated verbs, for example, did not run, and the frequent weakening of activities through auxiliary verbs, such as, can, like, want. Both make the narrator less important for the narration. There are cases in which one to two active verbs are sufficient for the narrative subject and also those

cases in which the same verb, such as, said, is always used. These peculiarities will be discussed at a later point to see if it is merely the language deficit, using the same verb repeatedly, or also demonstrates the hopelessness of the situation. Given the way the situation unfolded, there was nothing else to say.

In my experience the power of memory coupled with the desire to convey a certain message, for instance, that there was nothing one could do, is far stronger than the new knowledge that one makes politics with language, and vice versa. By the way, this step, which at first appears somewhat tedious, is usually deemed interesting by the whole group. During these discussions, many women realize for the first time how they actually use language when they narrate.

Emotions. The next column is reserved for emotions. We would expect that in a narrative about fear or about a touching movie the scene would express a number of feelings through language. Additionally, with a group of women, the so-called sensitive gender, one would expect a number of strong emotions. It is always surprising though, that most narratives were written void of named emotions - as if emotions were not important. Most scenarios seem as if the absence of feelings is necessary to make the observation appear reasonable. One might compare this to the reproduction of experiences of women when watching campy love stories in Haug and Hipfl (1995).

After two to three words are listed, this process is usually finished. A heated discussion (usually) often follows about whether or not certain hints, constellations, or even probabilities point toward feelings and emotions. The desire to read into, feel into, and interpret the text has been awakened anew. Because we study the language work of the author, that is, how she constructs herself through language, it is only the literal account, not an interpretation that counts. I have grown restless from my long experience with memory-work. I want to get to know more about this curious insensibility in self-perception and self-projection, not having found yet any relevant literature or the time to initiate my own research project. The great

pressure at the seminars to speak about fear and the number of love stories read weekly by women make pursuing such a project more and more important.

Motivation. The next column lists interests and desires. Only after some experience with memory-work did we begin to include this column. We discovered almost all narratives are constructed so that actions of both the narrator and other persons were basically incomprehensible. Creating confusion, such irrationality in language has the effect that the narrative subject again has no opportunity for active agency and appeals at best to the sympathy of her audience. Such a picture fits with the dominant ideology, therefore we should inquire about motive. Without having particularly radical theoretical premises, we assume that people act on the basis of motivation and that most will mention their motives in an event. The search for those motives, which is mostly in vain, sheds an interesting light on the self-perception and self-presentation of the narrator. The extensive absence of interests and desires is even noticeable when we do not insist on literally naming them in this column, but rather attempt to reconstruct the motivations from the narrations, which means analyzing and trying to understand instead of following the language used, which is a different method and also dangerous because it allows the members of the group to leave the surface of the words and open up a discussion on opinion and interpretation which is hard to draw back to the actual narrative. Instead a first conceptual analysis has to be started.

The Others. The next columns, as needed, are reserved for the presentation of the other persons in the narrative. Most often other characters in the stories do not possess actions and feelings, nor do their desires and interests represent a plot that is cohesive to the structure of the story. These columns fill fast. This gives more time to discuss this characteristic in and of itself. A sharpened attention develops in the following questions. How do we refer to others in everyday life? What is it about others that we ignore? How much of their own lives do we grant

them? And, most importantly, what is the meaning of this non-perception of others for the cohesion of a narrative in which others nevertheless appear?

Vacuums and Contradictions. There are still two more columns, which may be filled during the discussion about individual linguistic elements or during the following discussion about the constructions of "I" and "Others." These elements do not refer to the literal text, but require inquiry into that which is not mentioned. One column asks for vacuums, that is, elements not mentioned in the written memory but necessary to the plausibility and agreement of the story. The other asks for contradictions in the story. That these columns have become a part of the project implies that individuals, in order to remain agents, have to give their stories and their self-perception a sense of cohesiveness. They must eliminate contradictions that might possibly appear in this process, or simply ignore certain individual elements. For example, we came to know a story about the topic "waiting," which is important for women. Three women (grandmother, mother and daughter) regularly remained for hours in the garden, apparently without reason. The group pointed out that something was missing and the scene made no sense. Suddenly in a second version, a mentally handicapped father appeared. The three women were in the garden all the time because they walked around with him. You can imagine how different the story was now with this detail.

Elimination of contradictions is a well-known psychological process. We see this process in action in the narratives. To search for the silence or vacancies was a discovery in feminist research (first, feminist theology (see letter)), which only now makes a connection to why scientific systems and theories seem to be right, even though women are not included. The search for silence or vacancies has by now become a recognized scientific method. In the narratives, we recognize that we use this technique in everyday life. Detecting these peculiarities, we are able to question the narrative without questioning the credibility of the writer. It becomes clear how artistically constructed a narrative of one's experience may be; how many

additional possibilities for action and perception there are; and how differently one could have developed.

### *Construction of "I"*

The following steps are difficult, and demand both analytical abilities and imagination. The former can be learned individually, while the latter require the abilities of the group. We first examine the construction of the "I," the first-person narrator.

A line is drawn under the vertical columns. For the construction of the "I" we will need the whole width of the chalkboard and a different work process. As a guideline, it should be said that the basis for work is now exclusively the just finished chart, and we will not return to the text to make sure one knows the true opinion of the narrator. Transfer the chart to an overhead transparency, or use another alternative surface. It is important that we have a new space in which to write, but we still must be able to see the old chart. Literal reports of authors are now completely rejected because the authors of the reports are tempted to note self-perception as a statement about personal construction, which means we are taken in by the writer. Thus, there will not be any writing about a scene, for instance, where the narrator says about herself, "I was a scared, fearful being." The writer constructs herself as scared and fearful. It is our task, however, to find out how she leaves that impression for us. In the present case, for example, it could be possible that we see the author mainly as active and able to act, not as scared and fearful. That means that the sentence "I was a scared and fearful being" perhaps intends to make us sympathetic toward the person. She probably earns sympathy because of her great though unsuccessful activity.

All statements about the construction are analytical, and require a parallel vocabulary of terms. By writing down these short sentences, my memory of the workprocess reacted with trepidation? It means it is easy to write down that the workprocess at this stage should be analytical and use analytical concepts, but if

you try to do this in a group there are always some who become advocates of some “authentic” author who should be defended against the analysis – they start formulating sentences like, but she really loved her husband, mother etc. She was afraid of them – e. g. in the context of anxiety, (see above) when everybody was convinced that anxiety in the dark comes from men behind trees etc and the stories were all written without any male member of the species, it was hard to write down clear sentences, like men were absent in the scenes. It is unavoidable at this point not to be impatient because you always try to go back to the text and rescue the “true” author, in opposition to the analytic method. This disposition, rather to feel and interpret, belongs to our daily orientation and probably is part of the usual literary analysis in a German or English class. This approach to thinking and its acquisition also should be a separate project.

At first, the jump from a critical collection of textual elements to the invitation to formulate observations is a very big one. It is therefore beneficial to begin with a relatively easy observation. After noticing a column full of verbs, the first statement might be, “On first sight, the author constructs herself as a very active person.” Now one approaches the multitude of activity words and checks their quality, for instance, “On second sight, however, the named activities all take place in the imagination;” or “the activities are mostly expressed in negative form as non-activities;” or they are “diminished through use of an auxiliary verb;” or they are “made vague through other additions.” In my experience, it is easy to find the various qualities associated with the written activities, and oftentimes, there will be a lively discussion in the group. I have yet to experience a group that was not able to judge sharply and accurately, and able to note in brief sentences what was observed. Most of the time, there is additional amazement about how different the observations are from what was read spontaneously. The desire to make harsh judgments develops, maybe due to a kind of relief that one does not have to stick to the literal text anymore, maybe because one has the impression of moving forward, maybe also just to teach the writer a lesson.

It is necessary to avoid making a group member feel hurt or judged. Therefore, initially and again and again, it should be pointed out that it is not the writer who is the subject of investigation but the text. Also, indicate that the text itself does not contain the "truth" about the writer. Through our work with these texts, we come to understand the ways of construction, which reveal a mutual knowledge about self-representation and construction in our culture. Some individuals are very sensitive and not at all used to questioning themselves. In some groups, something like a climate for unmasking emerges. Generally, however, this step is enjoyable and encourages the participants to work more and gainfully on themselves. At this point, during the discussion of the noted activities, it is beneficial to consult the Linguistic Peculiarities column. It often allows for a better explanation of strange phenomena. This is the case, for instance, when on first sight, the writer constructs and presents herself as incredibly active, but in the bigger picture she gives the impression that she is unable to do anything. This effect is reached among others through the usage of many impersonal subjects, which take over the direction in the text.

The Emotion column will often elicit, "The writer constructs herself as being without emotions." Dealing with this finding is mostly unambiguous on the level of observation. No emotions or very few emotions are named although the threshold to feelings is approached, as in "she had a feeling." The writing style does not allow any other conclusion than that emotions do not play a role for the narrator in her experiencing, or that they are not worth mentioning. Most of the time, however, this observation meets with forceful protest from both the writer and the rest of the group. Evidently, it is important for self-presentation and self-perception to have emotions. Since the mutual observation cannot simply be interpreted away but a feeling of uneasiness remains, it is beneficial to pose further questions about the fate of emotions and to stimulate further discussion and research about this topic.

The group leader should make provocative and contradictory statements to arouse further research on the subject. For example, "Evidently, women, this supposedly so emotional gender, are unable to express feelings," or, "Something happens to the emotions and feelings of women in our society; they wilt, become not allowed or unnamed," could be said. What does it mean when activities that we know are accompanied, steered, blocked, or perpetuated by feelings are reported without mention of the feelings, but we still deem what we have written out as a carefully laid out, valid experience? Maybe, this is the beginning of a new research project. From my experience, the following statement always holds true. In documented experiences by women, feelings occur highly peripherally, even when the documents concern the experience of antagonistic feelings. In addition the feelings have to be regarded by the group as mostly superficial, measured on the scale of humanly possible passions. You can respond to the arguments within the group with a short break. Everybody has to write down which feelings are evident and, accordingly, what language cues they use to determine the feeling in the scene.

Surprise about the language construction along the way makes looking at the column Motivation seem like a mere confirmation. Usually this column is empty, as if women lived and acted without motivation. Similar to the question of feelings, this observation also stimulates further research. Concerning the construction of the narrator, the sentence emerges, "She constructs herself as devoid of interests." Perhaps in looking at the impersonal subjects or in looking ahead toward the construction of others, it may become evident if the woman constructs herself as powerless, faint, or left in the hands of strange powers, for example.

#### *Construction of the "Others"*

After the difficult task of tracing the construction of "I," construction of the others is quickly detected most of the time. First of all, are there any others? It is clear that the way others are perceived and documented is also a part of the I-construction and it also needs to be handled this way. For example, in a long

remembered scene that took place in a big demonstration in a major city, other persons were not ever mentioned, or at best, mentioned as part of the scenery. The writer thus constructs herself as lonely, as a single protester, alone. Sometimes, however, there are other persons, such as, the mother, the father, boyfriend, girlfriend. In attempting to find out something about their constructions, one almost always realizes that the authors did not make an effort to bring reasonably alive fellow human beings into the experience. Perhaps one or another activity is described, but rarely feelings, wishes, or interests. The other persons often function as a service to the credible presentation of the narrator, but they do not have their own lives. They are not people with whom some mutual activity would be done, solved, or lived.

On an abstract level each participant knows that she neither lives by herself nor that she can do much by herself. Since especially in such a memory-work group a collective attempt is made to live a part of feminist culture, the self-perception of an individual woman as living on an island like Robinson Crusoe and having to tackle everything by herself is articulated by all as a scandal, which necessitates individual efforts toward resolution.

At the same time, the group should discuss the issue of tracing back any events to the inner part of a person, the fading out of others, and the social circumstances as contributing to a self-perception that is culturally supported in our individualistic society. The development of our own culture becomes an urgent task, which relates to individual development and freedom.

### *Shifting the Problem*

In this last and most difficult editing step, especially when this work is being done for the first time, we search for the message or meaning created by the deconstruction of the narrative and latent praxis connections. This is different from, and even in contrast to, the initially agreed upon message that was discussed, and which the author was trying to convey through her story. It is recommended,

therefore, not to look quickly to the first lines of the Initial Thesis Statement and also not to go back into the narrative. Rather, formulate a new message in the form of a thesis statement from the constructions of "I" and Others, and from the columns about Vacuums and Contradictions. The thesis (the reconstruction) does not correspond to the author's intended meaning. She has nevertheless written it down, and it shows the semi-conscious awareness of the connection she is living. Oftentimes, it is discovered that alone one cannot do anything, or, where one does not listen to advice one is lost, or, similar sentences, which sound like pebbles smoothed on truth. They are that which is not said but wanted to be said.

Finally, one can compare this last thesis statement, a reconstruction based on deconstruction with the initial thesis statement deduced in consensus. One often will be surprised how poor and also how ideological the earlier intended message was, compared to the new meaning elicited after the deconstruction process. This does not mean that one is true and the other invalid. Both messages are from the author. The circumstances that produced the one at the cost of the other show how strange our dealings are with ourselves, and how we struggle with ambiguity and knowledge in everyday life.

### *Insecurity and Therapy*

Time and again questions are posed, is memory-work a careless endeavor because it makes participants highly uncertain? And is its process so similar to that of psychoanalysis that memory-work could be used for therapeutic purposes? To avoid extensive discourse on such a broad, complex fundamental as differing personalities in our society, I will limit myself to a few sentences, which shall be elaborated at another time.

The fear that one may become uncertain about one's self by reflecting and working on the self is justified. However, without any uncertainty, there is no development. The desire to be able to live without uncertainty is naive.

Memory-work is not intended to provide therapy for suffering persons. This is not cynically meant, but the formulation is derived from the opinion that therapy uses expert knowledge to help people who cannot help themselves. Increases in self-recognition, knowledge about socialization processes, competence about language and meaning, and critique of theory are fundamental and prerequisites for the growing ability to act, memory-work aims at such an outcome.

### The Second Version

To assist with the writing of a second version, it is best if the author is present when her written scene is being analyzed, and if possible, assists with the deconstruction. There should be an explicit ban, however, on the author heading into more explanation and teaching of others every time she feels that the others get off track. Similarly, she should not expand her explanation when she does not like something said, when she wanted to say something completely different, when she expressed herself in the wrong way, etc. After all that has been said before, when she persists, it is clear that she will only attempt to present her message in a more articulate way and thus block the analysis. One can smuggle in a lot of meaning in oral communication because nobody afterwards can put a finger on individual words.

Even though women who stand on their rights as authors often hinder the process so that you want to cut off their comments, you should still take the growing concerns of the author into account. If you have enough time, it is a great advantage to obtain a second written version of the edited scene. The writer can rewrite all of the parts where she felt she was misunderstood, did not express herself clearly enough, or where she remembers now that things were different. She should be instructed to fill in the vacant spots that were found and make statements about the obvious contradictions. For the continuing editing process it is useful to note the parts that were left standing in another typeface in order to clearly mark the changes. The writer soon realizes from her undertaken corrections

that the whole scene does not fit anymore, and she will rewrite more and more. The group will be surprised to see that the opposite of what was initially written has sometimes appeared. In summary, the leveling of contradictions, the artful vacancies, all of these attempts to make the narrative cohesive now all of a sudden appear fragile. The new story is a lesson to everyone - the writer herself and the editors - and it adds new proof of the value of strategies for the harmonization of memory. Most of the time it is the persona of the "victim" who suddenly appears in an unfavorable light in the rewritten memory.

For example, once, after a first memory of a family in which mother and daughter were subjects to a jerky father, we received a second version in which father and daughter saw themselves confronted with a noisy, good-for-nothing, indifferent mother. She chased the father out of the house, destroyed a wonderful father-daughter relationship, and put all the responsibility on the daughter. These discrepancies between the first and the second versions lead to suspicion that the scene was not becoming "truer" but that we were getting closer to the author's manner of construction. In this instance the case consisted of an absolute enemy-friend perception in which the author herself was always a victim merely of different personas.

In another case, a story about a bad, lusty, physical education teacher was rewritten into one which depicted how the fanciful wishes of a whole class brought individuals in harsh competition with each other, an arrangement that motivated best performances in order to secure the favor of the teacher. In each case, the writing and editing of a second version of the experience strengthens the insight about the constructive nature of our memory. At the same time it creates insecurity about whether something like a true or real memory exists at all, and it shows that it is worthwhile to continue with more care.

*About the Politics of Language*

To make an insecurity productive, if it is worthwhile at all to use such a burdensome procedure as memory-work for everyday life and its knowledge, a repeat discussion about language and its usage is helpful. We so far have given the impression that strategically we use certain linguistic means in order to achieve the desired meaning and effect. We will now turn to the linguistic expression in whose captivity we find ourselves.

Michel Foucault made the statement that language is a field of conflict, where the dominant culture wins its hegemony. While speaking and expressing our feelings and our will, dominant normality is speaking. There is no way out. We follow this thought a short way and assume that in patriarchal cultures such "foreign" speaking or the absence of women's "own" language most likely applies. But following such a view would consequently sentence us to eternal deconstruction, and there would be no basis for winning our own home. For memory-work this leads to the question, where do sense and meaning, which are constituted in the story, come from? Also you have to ask yourself the importance of the other parts of the story.

We can agree that every author of an everyday situation first has to try to write in the dominant language. She must write with appropriate feelings, sensibly and logically ordered and, at first glance, without contradiction, a story completed with beginning, climax and end so that we can understand her. By using the dominant language we get to know the dominant cultural pattern. Using such language conveys experience. The proclaimed experience is therefore a political process, which is made automatically. In telling the story you confirm that you went through this process. But nobody other than the describing subjects is able to see this process as development and not as an experience of a class goal. We assume that we can find in the experience evidence of semiconscious things, departures and contradictions. Often this is revealed in the stories as inappropriate words,

senseless pieces, reasonless silence, or contradictory statements. These are also experiences, but stand in conflict with the dominant meaning of the experience gained. We compare the single experience against the potential of a single person in the world. It seems possible to assume that every single person has the need to escape from the conditions in which she is acting and to reach competence, autonomy, and codetermination in every important question. This condition has a political and critical-of-domination dimension as well as a methodical dimension. Each woman in the research group can examine her own texts, how she makes compromises, how she falls in line or submits so that she does not lose her ability to act in contradictory structures. The way of life, attitude and pattern of processing conflict become readable as a solution that was functional, but seems today as if you have never been older than four years old. At the same time, you wish for the complete ability to act, comprehensive solutions, and the ability to create a living culture of contradiction instead of a culture of inequality. This is a position where you can work for the possibility of a freer life and which therefore may become a vision, a possibility to make happen something you wanted or divined. This search is collective. The language is found in the process and the material is lying around in the described experiences as undiscovered knowledge. The process is always unfinished.

### *The End*

Memory-work is an emancipating learning project. So there is no summary of the results from this guide. It started with the naive desire to obtain quite quickly and comprehensively a collection of socialization experiences of women, which, maybe worldwide, would bring back the forgotten women to the social sciences. The difficulty was not the lack of passion or the lack of people who wanted to participate. The difficulty and also the results were the topic itself. It became more and more obvious that things went the same way with us as they did with Gulliver and his trip to the Lilliputians. We were tied up at every single hair

and woven into the social power connection. The first easy task became the enormous task to break away from so many ties. It became clear that our task was not to develop knowledge to spread. We found out that memory-work is a process, which is itself a way and a goal. At the same time, it is a departure and impulse for change, which has to include the condition of our actions and beings.

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