MEMORY-WORK

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Memory work is a method for feminist social research. It combines the advantages of consciousness raising groups with the strength of theoretical analysis. It is in fact work with one's own memory guided by theory. Thus it is a challenge for the personalities involved. It allowes to overcome the gap between researchers and their objects of research and in the same time gives a history and a language, a scientific concern to all those lives and experiences of numerous women, for their everyday lives. The article of memory work, which by now is used by a number of female research groups in Germany, deals with the problem of language, of single case studies and the right of generalization; the problem of subjectivity, identity and ideology etc. It is a call for working in collectives and gives some hints how everybody could start working with her own memory. Memory work is a method which has to be improved while in practice. Thus it is a challenge for all of us: for researchers, women in the movement, psychologists or those who are interested in therapeutical advice.

The Object – A Process

Our object is women's capacity – or incapacity – for action, and for happiness. It involves us in a study of the structures, the relations within which women live and the ways in which they appropriate them. We are interested in the individual process whereby women become part of society – a process usually defined as female socialisation. The concept is most commonly used in ways which fail to grasp the active participation of individuals in their formation as social beings. Since we are opposed to tolerating conditions which produce only suffering – we argue instead for change, for active intervention – our attention is focused here in the main on the process whereby individuals construct themselves into existing (social) relations. The question we want to raise is thus an empirical one; it is the 'how' question of feminine practice. 'The organisation of society and of the State evolves continuously out of the life processes of particular individuals.' (M E Collected Works 3,25) Yet in our attempt to study the process of development of 'feminine sexuality', we have been confronted with a further problem: the problem of having simultaneously to discuss the constitution of a separate sphere of 'sexuality' *per se*. It becomes difficult to develop our thoughts in discussions of this kind, simply because there is little of any solidity to hold on to. We are asking ourselves to consider and investigate both the production of a specifically feminine sexuality and, parallel to this, the constitutions of the sexual as the very process which produces the insertion of women into and their subordination within certain

determinate social practices. Complicated as this may at first appear, it has in
fact made our work on and with our memories — the empirical element, then,
of our research — more than a little less difficult. The questions most com-
monly asked of so called 'sexual socialisation' limit our work to two possible
approaches: studying sex education, in terms of either a dearth or a surplus of
information, or studying the drilling of our bodies in sexual practices in terms
of a lack or a surplus of *technique.* In each case, we are left with the uneasy
feeling of having arrived too late; of assuming a certain knowledge of which
we have no knowledge; of being called upon to chose between alternatives
which we cannot satisfactorily relate to questions such as those of happiness
versus unhappiness, or of oppression versus liberation. It is not simply some
lack of information or technical facility which bars our route towards the
experience of fulfilment, but in som barely perceptible way, it is we ourselves,
our bodies, our relationship to our bodies and, again, ourselves as whole per-
sons in relation to the world, which must of necessity be brought into associa-
tion with questions of human happiness, up to and including happiness in the
realm of the sexual.

We are then formulating here, as an empirical question which we ask of our
lives, the question of the development of a separate sphere of sexuality. This
becomes in turn of question of the sexualisation of our bodies. We aim to use
our own memories to observe the ways in which individual parts of the body
become linked with sexuality, the way gender becomes to be expressed through
the body, the drills which have taughts us to practise a particular relationship
to our bodies, and the ways in which all of this becomes bound up with social
structures and social relations between the sexes. Our aim is to struggle to-
wards self-determination and towards a capacity for happiness: to overcome,
then, determination by others, and unhappiness.

Memory-Work As Social-Scientific Method

"Scientific knowledge and everyday experience underwent an irrevocable
separation with the development of rationally structured academic disciplines
in the transition to the modern age." (Peukert 1982, 24) What profound un-
certainties must have arisen within academic canons and what enormous
quantities of personal disrespect are required if we are to demand the right, in
the face of these kinds of barriers, to use experience nonetheless as a basis of
knowledge. The very notion that our own past experience may offer some in-
sight into the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing
relations, thereby themselves reproducing the same social 'organization', itself
contains an implicit argument for a particular methodology. If we refuse to
understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful struc-
tures, or to the social relations through which we are formed; if we search in-
stead for possible indications of our active participation in our past experience,
then the normal mode of social scientific research, in which individual objects
are *only* objects of the process of research, has to be abandoned. For too
long, empirical research has approached its object from the point of view of

the control ability of human beings, the predictability of their actions. Character traits and modes of behaviour have thus come to be quantified as fixed elements within human subjectivity. Since however we are concerned with the possible means whereby social subjects may assume control for themselves, (Holzkamp, 1982) and thus with the future perspective of liberation, our research itself becomes an intervention in existing practices. Character traits and modes of behaviour do not remain as they are. Memory-work itself is only possible if the subject and object of research are one and the same person. Even notions of 'subject' and 'object' must be seen as problematic, amongst other reasons because they assume that both of these are fixed and known quantities, that they are not themselves subject to change. In scanning the horizon for signs of our future liberation, we think human beings in collective and co-operative terms. However tempting it may seem to fabricate images of Princes and other fairytale heroes whose great deeds − often no more than a kiss at the right moment − release the bewitched from the chains of unfreedom, we refuse nonetheless to be led astray, even by these sweet dreams. We prefer to rehearse the painful lesson that liberation is dependent upon liberation of the self. The very fact of our intervention is itself an act of liberation.

If we propose to piece together the process of development of the separate sphere of sexuality, of the sexualisation of the body, out of our own experience, then the human object of research must herself become the researcher. The history of humanity is nor merely a process of socialisation, but at the same time one of individualisation, atomisation. Individualisation takes place most particularly on the level of State institutions. It is not a group, nor a family, but each individual who becomes a citizen, responsible for his or her own actions (though women are positioned defferently from men in this context). The process whereby individuals are subordinated to dominant laws and juridical conventions works essentially in and through a particular drilling of the body (see chapter on sexuality and power: also W. F. Haug 1982 and PIT 1979, 1982, 1983).

Our basic assumption is that the sexual drilling of women is intimately bound up with female subordination, and thus that we will encounter significant instances of practices of subjugation in our studies of the sexualisation of female bodies. A particulare difficulty which arises in this kind of study is the taken-for-grantedness of many of our observations; specific modes of behaviour are simply accepted without question, or seen as typically feminine. Our field of study is a walled garden of inner secrets, of intimacies of idiosyncracies; at the same time the language at our disposal to decipher our object is one which (like the object itself) both secures and prolongs our containment within these walls. Or, to put it another way, in calling upon ourselves to record past desires, we find ourselves speaking, thinking and experiencing ourselves with the perception of men, without ever having discovered what might be our aims as *human beings.* To be and to become a woman is in and of itself to be the polar opposite and object of masculinity and the masculine subject. Thus our research is concerned with individuals who have already submitted to their own subordination, and for whom there is − even within their own

memories — no alternative language, no conceivable possibility of alternative action. And yet they have one common strength; those who suffer from their subordination — however unarticulated that suffering might be — are many; potentialy, they include all women. Thus we do not only begin from the premise that the subject and object of our research must be one; our second premise is that research itself should be a collective process. It is as a collective that we write and analyse the stories of our memories.

Writing and the Problem of Literature

Writing is a transgression of boundaries, an exploration of new territory. Wriggling free of the limitations of private and personal experience alone, we begin to make public the events of our lives. From a position of modest insignificance, we step into a realm within which we take ourselves seriously. Instead of unconsciously accepting everyday events, we pull them back into consciousness in an attempt to identify those points at which we have been able to defend ourselves. At the same time, our writing is 'destructive of culture'; the dominante culture deprives us of power in two simultaneous ways. Signification — the process of generation of meaning — as well as our own way of life are doubly alien to us; they are both derived from the culture of the dominant group, and at the same time from the culture of men. Language and modes of thought, emotions and attitudes place women in a relation of subordination. When we begin to write, we must then of necessity be participating in the 'destruction of culture' (Wartmann, 1982).

Writing at the same time transports us across another boundary; it begins to break down the division of labour between literature as creative writing, and everyday language as a means of communication. Down the centuries, the separation of one from the other through specialisation has on the one hand maintained the art of writing, making it into the (exclusive) domain of men; on the other, it has perpetuated the colonization of feminity in the realm of of language and symbol. 'A true art for all cannot be developed by extending the audience of art to include all humanity, but conversely, by a process whereby the capacity for constructing and organising the raw material of art (a capacity which has been particularly characteristic of specialists in art) is appropriated by all'. (Tretjakov, 1923 cit. Thomszyk, 133). Even if we do not aspire to eliminate the practice of literature as a profession, it seems to us nonetheless important to eradicate the harmful effects of this division of labour, since it is those effects which allow or disallow the possibility of conscious intervention in thought or action, as well as of developing any capacity for sensuous pleasure on all levels. (See the section on Language). Over and above this, the elevation or degradation of feminity in art, and thus in effect its exclusion from artistic practice, makes it imperative for us to give female practice a place in language, to weave it into the lived relations of society at large.

Women have learnt to share the reservations of 'true' artists on the value of everyday writing. Writing is an impossibility, since there is nothing to write

about. The things we experience are unimportant and uninteresting; they are banal. The division of labour between authors and writers is reproduced in the question of 'theme'. We only come into the running as possible subjects for a readable text if we achieve world-wide fame, if we involve ourselves at the very least in conscious struggle or even in tragic exploitation. It seems that we do indeed require more than a modicum of disrespect for all kinds of norms and values, if we are in any way to enter into this world as conscious particpants; a disrespect amongst other things, for traditionel uses of language, for divisions of labour and theme, for modes of thought and behaviour. If we wish to stop seeing ourselves through the eyes of others, then we must also run the risk of making mistakes. On this battlefield, we will arm ourselves with writing.

The Subjectivity of Memory and the Problem of Identity

It was in consciousness raising groups that women first gained practical experience of possible ways of retrieving from everyday life itself the means of transcending the everyday. The knowledge that individual women were not alone in any of their different modes of experience certainly increased our self-confidence; and yet there came a point at which we could go no further. Telling stories became a circular process; no-one wanted to listen anymore. We do not have to learn to fly to discover the secret of gravity; hauling ourselves up out of the water is enough. As long as our experiences remained fixed in obstinately repetitive gestures, it was impossible − since we had not yet begun to remeber *collectively* − to say anything of any consequense about the practices of femininity − practices which could not be deduced from any known body of theory. In proposing to work with and to theorise memory and the everyday, we are attempting to mobilise our pleasure in past experience, to harness it then for the arduous task of laborious theoretical analysis. We began to reevaluate, to question things we had always taken for granted. Yet it soon became clear that our asumptions about the pleasure of the everyday and the arduousness of theory were themselves founded on prejudice. Particularly in relation to questions of sexuality and the body − and moreover not simply in relation to anything we might describe as immediately sexual, but even in thinking about hair, clothes, the presentation of self in general − the work of analysis became fraught with difficulties and obstacles; from which theoretical discussion seemed to offer an obvious means of escape. It seemed then that we did not in actual fact wish to rethink either ourselves or our position in relation to the world. Just as Reynard The Fox disclaimed any interest in the grapes still left hanging on the tree, we too quickly came to want to agree with those of our predecessors who had claimed that experience could never be used as a source of knowledge; that experience was too subjective; that individuals did not give objective accounts of themselves. Even in our willingness to take individuality into account − in opposition to the denial of individuality in general categories of academic science − we nonetheless felt some necessity to insists on objectivi-

ty. It is commonly argued that the lack of objective validity in subjective ex-
perience is due to the propensity of individuals to twist and turn, reinterpret
and falsify, forget and repress the events in their lives, pursuing what is in fact
no more than a construction of their person, giving themselves an identity for
the present to which the contents of the past are subordinated.

And yet it is precisely the ways in which individuals construct their identi-
ty, the things which become subjectively significant to them, which we have
taken as the problematic of our research. We are interested in the 'how' and
the 'why' of the individuals relationship to the 'givens' of her everyday life; in
the way, then, in which she grows into the structures of society. We start
from the premise that human beings, in the process of their socialisation,
work at restructing the given elements of their life, until such time as they are
able to perceive their surroundings as relatively uncontradictory; in other
words, until social action becomes a possibility. Given that there is no such
thing as an existence without contradictions – certainly not under present
conditions, and above all not for women – we have to assume that the ab·
sence of contradictions in our interpretations of ourselves will to a a large ex-
tent be constructed by us – through forgetting, omission, failure to perceive
etc. It is precisely these constructions (although it is they which have allowed
us to 'come this far', so to speak) which in fact prevent any true adaption to,
or any transformation of reality. Every time we allow ourselves to indulge in
self-delusion, refuse to confront issues face to face, avoid conflicts, deny con-
nections and so on, we are at the same time by-passing, or at least failing to
perceive the hidden possibilities of life. It is these *processes,* through which
we ourselves are formed as personalities, which we want to investigate, rather
than 'the way it really – objectively – was'.

Furthermore, we do not by any means assume that subjective appropriat-
ions are solely the result of individual inclination, as the term 'subjective'
might suggest. It is not only social structures, the pre-existing forms into
which individuals work themselves, but also the way in which individuals
perceive any given state of affairs, the way they aprove it and validate it, their
assessment of it as a proper and worthy goal, or as repugnant or reprehensible;
all these things are points of conflict in the day-to-day class and gender struggle
which takes place around the minds and hearts of human subjects. Individual
products and processings of experience, which we decode as particular appropr-
riations of the world, are positioned in the arena of dominant cultural values
and oppositional attempts to wrest cultural meaning and pleasure from life
(see for example Willis, 1979): they are *compromises.*

Similarly, we cannot assume that there is any such thing as a unitary hu-
man being. We know from experience how we ourselves subscribe to a whole
range of notions which we both wish to retain, and to which we are at the
same time antagonistic. We are loaded down with the lead weight of emotions
which we do not raionally accept; they seem to have been handed down to us
from some distant point in the past. We do not want here simply to set up
reason in opposition to emotions, but to interrogate both, as a means perhaps
in the end of changing both. It is not our aim here to solve the problem of
our own lack of unity within ourselves, simply by calling upon ourselves to

accept what we are; instead, we hope to find ways of penetrating the diffuseness of suffering, of embarking upon a structuring intervention. Our collective empirical work sets itself, then, the high-flown task of working out the ways in which individuals construct themselves into existing structures, and are thereby themselves formed; the way in which they reconstruct social structures; the points at which possibilities for change become visible, the points where the chains chafe hardest, the points where accomodations have been made, and so on. The fact that it is indeed possible slowly and laboriously to transform the self-constructed prisons of everyday life is shown most clearly in the diverse cultural processes of the Women's Movement. Here cultural forms which were once new and shocking are taken granted; illegitimacy is no longer any grounds for suicide; in many areas, restrictive conventions in dress no longer hold away. The attitude which we propose to adopt towards ourselves and to the world is one of disagreement, of discontent – an attitude which we will maintain until such time as we are able to develop the whole range of our human and sensual possibilities.

Our attempt to identify the points at which we ourselves participate in our socialisation will not only offer new possibilities for a general intervention in pursuit of change; at the same time, it is directed against a widespread assumption in socialisation theory that human beings are nothing but the bearers of roles, the fulfillers of norms and expectations. We start then from the assumtion that human beings do not simply fulfil norms, nor simply conform in some way; that identities are not formed through imitation, nor through any simple reproduction of predetermined patterns, but that the human cappacity for action also forces individuals to attempt to live their own meanings and means of self-fulfilment, albeit within a predetermined and circumscribed social space. Thus experience is constituted as lived practice in the memory of a self-constructed identity. It is structured by expectations, norms, values – in short, by the dominant culture; and yet it nonetheless contains an element of resistance, a germ of oppositional cultural practice. It is this intertwining of cultural expectations with individual hopes for self-fulfilment which is responsible for example for the fixity with which notions of morality are established in our minds. A weaking of the dominant morality within us thus always involves a simultaneous weakening of our oppositional potential, which has devloped in and through our appropriation of morality. Take for example the dominant moral precept according to which women are still required to remain monogamous, faithful until their life's end etc. – independently of whether they are passionately in love with their husbands or perhaps bored to tears by them. In the process of making this normative moral precept our own, we cling obstinately to the feelings which make it bearable; in other words to the certainty that we – i.e. every *individual* one of us – will be exceptional in feeling this lifelong love. Our desires and dreams are channelled accordingly, as are our suffering and joy; and it is precisely this same moral precept, and the way in which we have appropriated it, which prevents us from even contemplating possible alternatives. Simply deciding to embrace promiscuity, or demanding of ourselves that we live our lives diffently, is similarly debilitating if indeed we carry out those demands in reality – for

along with our chains, we also relinquish the hopes that we have hitherto invested in the possibility of lifelong love and faithfullness. It is this which makes collective efforts to strengthen already resistant identities so necessary. The demand for love to continue within lifelong monogamy — which is based on the recognition that only love can make the latter liveable — contains a germ of resistance. Giving up both, the hopes along with the constraints, takes the ground out from under the feet of resistance. What we require, then, is a means of rupturing the unity of hope and constraint; only then can we develop new oppositional modes of living. Thus the writing of stories, for example, offers a first opportunity for the perception of self. Stuttering shame over the inadequacy of our lives can thus give way to a representation to the things we have actually done; no longer do we have to judge ourselves according to criteria which stem from an alien culture.

The Individual and the General

The question we have posed relates to the way in which individuals live in social relations. We do not assume individuals to be the blind effects of economic relations. To that extent, the *form* which their life process will take can neither be predicted, nor can it be deduced from any economic laws; it is itself a question for empirical investigation. The experince of any given individual, the decisions s/he makes for her or himself, the means whereby s/he deals with conflicts, desire and emotions; all of these constitute particular modes of appropriation of pre-existing structures; they differ according to different epochs and cultures, according to class, stratum, gender — they are *personal* ways of negotiation given structures. By challenging each other and ourselves to work with our memories, we confront ourselves with the problem of the uniqueness or singularity, the individuality of any given experience. The fact that individual interpret their lives, suffer them, invest them with meaning. seems to make their experiences unique and thus of little value for scholarly analysis. The mass character of processes is obliterated within the concept of individuality. Yet we believe that the notion of experince, as well as the various modes of its conscious assessment, are themselves fictions. There is no *limitless* number of possibilities for action; their number is radically limited. We live according to a whole series of imperatives — social pressures, the boundaries of nature, the imperative of survival, in economic terms as well as in relation to prevailing socio-cultural circumstances. Human beings produce their lives collectively. It is within the arena of collective production that individual experience becomes possible. If therefore a given experience is possible, then it is by its very nature also subject to universalisation. Personal modes of appropriation of the social are at the same time modes of generally possible appropriation. Thus studying each individual mode in detail is a way of taking advantage of experience as empircal material — in a positive as well as a negative sense. If we aspire to expand our capacity for action, if our vision embraces the development of new possibilities for humanity, the enjoy-

ment of diverse sensual pleasures, then we must have the courage to investigate the terms and conditions of production of these pleasures, and then to press for their universalisation. On the other hand, it is equally of universal importance to recognise recurrent productions of suffering in their specificity, if indeed we are to avoid reproducing them in future.

It seems to us therefore undesireable to understimate the significance of the experience of any given individual. Actual existens within social relations can and should be approached through questions as to its generalisability. On the other hand, if research limits itself to the general and ignores the individual, then it will be impossible ever to discover the conditions of universally human phenomena. We build our own traps (and fall into them); we sweep aside our own obstacles — and it is precisely actions of this kind which must be studied, if we are to advance along the pathway towards liberation. To be sure, the (common) notion of the uniqueness of each individual mode of appropriating the world underestimates the sociality of human beings. Thus if our recognition of that uniqueness is to be anything more than a rhetorical construct, then we should perhaps tailor the concept of uniqueness more precisely to our aims here. On the one hand, anything which individuals may come to see as appropriate to and adapted to their personal needs pre-exists those individuals, in the form of dominant cultural values. In their attempts to make their lives meaningful, individuals offer tentative resistance to the encumbrances they find inscribed into the dominant culture (Se Haug , W. F., 1980). In this process, it is virtually impossible for them completely to abandon traditional norms and expectations. They can however — and indeed do — make compromises in the grey areas along the boundaries of their capacity for action. Thus we witness individuals searching for a meaning to life within preexisting structures, by engaging with those structures, yet at the same time negating them etc. Individuals are always active. Thus the range of activities accessible to a given individual can be viewed in research as *general* possibilities. We are not concerned here with unique personalities, but with general modes of appropiation of the social.

Once we have ceased to subscribe to notions of the fixity, the unchangeability, the taken-for-grantedness of our selves, we can moreover begin to work at developing collective modes of existence, at reorganising the effects of older formations (as we saw above in the case of monogamy and love). The fact that our own earlier modes of appropriation must become the object of theoretical discussion, if research into the appropriation of structures is to become in any way possible, has a dual effect. The first — familiar from consciousness raising — is the comforting effect of our recognition that we are in fact not alone in having developed modes of behaviour which we have hitherto considered unique; that the apparently personal and intimate experiences buried within us are in fact more or less generalisable. The second effect is the renewed insecurity which comes from any questioning of ourselves; it has its origins in our desire to expose breaks, discontinuities, repressed guilt and painstakingly concealed memories. This aspect of our research leads quickly to tensions in group dynamics, to personality problems which carry a danger of renewed isolation — this being our normal method of dealing with con-

flicts. The disruptive and destabilising effect of memory-work demands conscious collective counter-strategies which we have not yet adequately developed. It is crucial that more work be done in this area. One particular difficulty became clear in our own work; as we discovered, developing a relationship to one's own body, subordinating it to prevailing standards, is a painful process within any social group. Thus the immediate problem encounted in any attempt to develop oppositional strategies within a different group is the perception of the group as a perpetual setter of norms — norms which are to hold even while reappraising past experience. In this context, struggle on an individual level is once again seen as the most appropriate mode of resistance. If this problem can be successfully dealt with, then this in itself is one step towards the construction of a wider collectivity — a project which is generally obstructed by the antagonistic relations which pertain within traditional social groups. In this area too, much has already been achived by the Women's Liberation Movement (see the chapter on Women and the Body).

In an attempt to transpose this problem into a form which renders it capable of resolution, we have studied our own practices as events in the life of a third person. However important it may be for women to register their protest agains pressures to desregard their own interests, to speak and write themselves as 'I', rather than falling in with abstract and apersonal modes of thought, we believe it nontheles to be necessary, indeed essential to use the third person in memory-work. It is in part the very distance this creates which makes it possible to write about past events. Moreover, the very fact that we have learned to leave ourselves and our own interests out of count has the effect, in memory-work, of reducing the time and trouble we take over writing about ourselves; we neglect large portions of experience, or attribute to our past selves motives and desires which we would find inadequate as explanations for the actions of others. By transporting our own experiences into the third person, we are able to treat ourselves with greater care. And in any case, the gaze which we cast today on ourselves of yesterday, is of necessity the gaze cast by one stranger an another.

Memory as History — The Problem of Ideology

There should be no need here to stress the necessity for an analysis of the constructed nature of feminine sexuality to proceed historically. In our particular field of study, the most obvious mode of historical research to choose seems to be autobiography; remembered history as a pathway to the present. In actual fact, we believe an approach of this kind to be programmed for failure. What appears to be a structural intervention into the chaos of remembered experiences seems to us in fact to involve a theoretically untenable presupposition. If childhood and adolescence are simply as causal routes to the person of today, we are implicitly assuming that actions follow one another logically, that adult human beings are more or less contained within children, that external events produce little more than minor modifications. A further basic assumption being made here is that the factors which determine the life

of the individual always remain the same. I sound out my life in retrospect from the point of view of an understanding of how I am determined today. Many biographical reviews of this kind thus work to pronote our present picture of ourselves as in some way handicapped, incapable of learning more; to impose a retrospective order on the event of childhood. Any diversity is suppresed in favour of unified evidence that one has 'always' been prevented from developing by this or that person, this or that circumstance. The result of this kind of autobiographical investigation is an individual and personal history which must, it seems to us, be subjected to further analysis. (see the section on A Captive Subjection – The Project) It represents the sum total of all the social judgements and prejudices, semi-scientific theories, everyday opinions and so on which we carry around in our minds and which serve – usually unconsciously – as models for our interpretation of the world today. In relation to historical experience they serve most often as barriers which, solid as they are, obscure the breaks in our own construction. Just as on the one hand dominant norms and values sediment in our minds, alongside half-conscious movements of opposition, to form and inform our perception of our own actions, and more particularly, of the actions of others – a state of affairs which demands to be approached from the standpoint of a theory of ideology – so also the process whereby we become the person we are in the present can be investigated as a sedimentation of different levels of appropriation of the social. If for example we write down any given memory from childhood and appraise it from this point of view, we find ourselves confronted with a whole multiplicity of apparently fixed phenomena – opinions, actions, attitudes, motives and desires – which in themselves demand explication. Once we have begun to disentangle the knots, the process becomes nedless. The path of analysis leads ever further into the past, as we attempt to trace some order in the confusion. Yet if we aim to make the ideological process of appropriation itself into the object of our discussions, then we need to train our eyes to see these modes of appropriation in new and more or less unprejudiced ways. It is of course not difficult to argue that it is impossible to divest ourselves of prejudice. Yet since we believe an unprejudiced way of seeing to be essential, we have sought to identify strategies to prepare the ground for this kind of non-evalutative appraisal. One possible approach seems to us to be concentrating on one particular situation, rather than on life in its entirety. Once we have begun to rediscover a given situation – its smells, sounds, emotions, thoughts, attitudes – the situation itself draws us back into the past, freeings us for a time from notions of our present superiority over our past selves; it allows us to become once again the child – a stranger – whom we once were. With some astonishment, we examine connections which have never occurred before, forgotten traces, abandoned intentions, lost desires and so on. In illuminating this one situation, we can begin to learn to recall and to reassess history. We may not always be successful – but success has become possible. It is not so much a question of 'having a good memory', as one of practising it. The longer we work with and on ourselves, the more adept we become at bringing to light forgotten history. Stepping back into the past, we embark upon a form of archaeology. We discover fragments of an achitecture

which we then begin to reconstruct. (see the section on Tools of Remembering.) Since we are accustomed to maintaining our own equilibrium through rapid repression, obliteration and forgetting, this attempt to step back into the past, to make that which is unconscious conscious, must of necessity call into question our normal modes of dealing with the world – and must by extention threaten the stability of each individual. We would argue that the power of past images within us does indeed exert such a strong influence on our life today that this endangering of the person is to be seen as an ever-present possibility in memory-work. In unearthing the foundations of our own history, in making conscious the material out of which we have made ourselves, we are however not only threatening our stability; at the same time, we are creating the conditions under which it becomes possible to weave that material into a new and more resilient fabric.

We do not then hold that human beings live according to any single plan, or in continuities, nor that they are always determined by the same consistent factors. Quite the contrary; sections of the lives of women in particular are lived in a more or less unplanned way; equally, there are changes in the practices which determine their lives. Continuities are constructed retrospectively in the mind. If this is not done as a conscious strategy for liberation, then we remain dependent on the constructs of everyday commonsense, these in themselves being the result of struggles over class relations in which our liberation as women may very well never have been at issue. In the end, social norms demand that forms of resistance be seen in terms of sustained social incompetence; by a contrast it is deemed perfectly acceptable for the life story of an individual to be told and worked through in terms of continuous progress, even if it has in fact been characterised by increasing isolation and depening poverty. Precisely because women occupy a position of objectification in cultural representations of the reproduction of life – in literature or folktales for example – they have of necessity to piece together their memories from fragments. If we were to base our work on dominant models of interpretation, we would end up with such pronouncements on the determining factors of life as the following: I actually always wanted to be a housewife (or even the reverse). In accepting such a proposition, we eradicate any possibility of ascertaining how thoughts and desires of this kind arise in the first place. Not being inscribed into history as active participants brings women finally to accept themselves as 'pieces of nature'; a supposition which leaves them at the mercy of the dominant culture. It is only through their own historicization that they retrieve from the dominant culture elements of a new image of themselves, on the basis of which they may possibly be able to construct alternatives for the future.

The Chaos of the Everyday – The Problem of Perception

Once we have determined to make our memories the objects as well as the instruments of our research, the very constructed-ness of the social, and thus of ourselves within it, throws us into a dilemma. What we may celebrate as a

unity of subject and object in the research process may in the end be revealed to contain a number of pitfalls. We are not used to paying careful attention to the ways in which familiar phenomena may be seen as social; at the same time, the new emphases we choose are in themselves a product of ideology. Since it is our own judgement which we hope to question, to revalidate and reevaluate, we are forced to resort to the Münchhausen method of extricating ourselves from a dilemma of our own making – pulling ourselves up by the roots of our hair. In contrast to Münchhausen, we however are many; with mutual support, our project may succeed.

Our refusal to take our memories for granted, our disregard for existing values, takes concrete form in our story-telling in an insistence on the pains-taking description of every last detail, independently of whether or not we consider it to be essential. It is in collective discussions that it is to become possible to uncover new relations and important traces of the origins of key pieces of evidence in our area of study. Once we have made it a condition of our work that we note down exactly even the most inconsequential of details, we come to recognise that the criterian of 'relevance' has until now imposed enormous constraints on us, that it has both censored and restricted our imagination and our memory. By making conscious the criteria we have hitherto used, and by questioning their origins and background, we may in the end succeed in producing a ciritique of dominant academic orthodoxies (in relation for example to socialisation processes, to mother-child relations and so on). Any new models of theoretical understanding which we have developed in the group have always been tested agains our stories; here theory become subject to transformation, while at the same time it sheds a critical light (just as do any other tools of knowledge at our disposal) on the practice which our stories reconstruct. It is this striving towards theorisation which differentiates our project most sharply from consciousness raising groups. We believe that it is precisely the act of making ourselves the object of our own research which demands the most highly developed means of analysis at our disposal. Why should theory be of no use to us? A preoccupation with theory does not prevent us from simultaneously channeling our energies in any number of other directions.

The first prerequisite, then, for a training in social perception, is the development of a loving attention to detail. Concentrating on one situation alone and describing it in minute detail does however have signifiance in a different area. Accustomed as we are to positioning our thoughts and emotions in relation to any number of unquestioned rules and conventions; accustomed also to being lead by the nose on the leading-reign of the dominant culture, we tend to use any questioning of our ideological socialisation as an excuse to draw up dogmatic programmes for the process of remembering. We look everywhere for traces of situations in which we either voluntarily subordinated ourselves or, by contrast, in which we first developed forms of lived resistance; our memories are thus produced as evidence of pre-formulated theories. This can teach us nothing new in relation to any method of appropriation we may have used in the past. In our work, then, we have attempted to approcah the events of our childhood with an attitude of more or less undogmatic dis-

respect. Our basic premise here is that anything and everything which is re-
membered constitutes a trace which has relevance – precisely because it is re-
membered – for the formation of identity. The details of our stories can thus
be decoded as the written sign referring to loved relations in the formation of
identity.

Living Historically – Writing It Down

What actually does it mean to live historically? Without wishing to take up
the cudgels for rationality as the only way forward, and without claiming that
we need only to recognise a problem in order fo find its solution, we would
nonetheless contend that any attempt to free ourselves from dependence and
subordination necessarily demands that we ourselves live our lives more con-
sciously. In this context, 'living historically' should be understood as a refusal
to accept ourselves as 'pieces of nature', given and questioned, but to see our-
selves as subjects who have *become* what they are, and who therefore are sub-
ject to change. (see the later discussion Ute Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1982). In
particular, we use the term 'living historically' to signal our intention to find
ways of changing the conditions which constrict us, to make the world a
place capable of being lived in. Put like this, it might appear that we are more
or less forced to rewrite our history in retrospect as a path which leads ever
forward. We are all familiar with those stories of ourselves in which we appear
to have 'resisted' from our earliest childhood on. There is little evidence that
such continuities exist. Conversely, it appears to us to be important to un-
cover points of disjuncture between our stories of childhood and the way of
life we make out for ourselves today. Present inhibitions over active inter-
vention, fear of conflict, cowardice, evasiveness, debilitating melancholy; all
of these may be connected with these kinds of unconsciously lived and re-
membered breaks in our biographies. Yet we may perhaps be able to effect
some change, if we allow ourselves to subject our past to dispassionate scru-
tiny. The very fact that situations from childhood are not identical with the
image we have hitherto constructed of them, may allow them to be linked,
not only with our as-yet-unremembered past, but also with a future which we
have not yet consciously thought. Whether or not this is the case, we can cer-
tainly see dissonances of this kind as leavers in the process of changing our
lives. In our experience of story-writing, this often takes concrete form in the
desire of an individual to write about a particular conflict or person. Often
she returns to the group with a completely different story in hand. Not only
does it take much laborious resistance to our own mental orthodoxies; it also
requires a good deal of imagination for the group not to react simply with the
familiar note of censure – 'irrelevant'. What seems important here is that dis-
placements of this kind be perceived as challenging us to rethink in ways
which are potentially enriching.

The censorship we practise on others is no more or less extreme than that
which we practise on ourselves. One of the main obstacles to be overcome in
writing is our habit of submitting all phenomena to an immediate value-judge-

ment. Since these spontaneous judgements contain in themselves the results of our accommodations to dominant morality, as well as traces of our half-hearted attempts at oppositional models — most often motivated by some all embracing commitment to liberal enlightenment — they act as obstacles, in alliance with a few fragments of popular theory, to any attempt to use our study of our own past practices to uncover the ways in which these judgements themselves have become fixed in our minds. To this extent, the process of writing itself can begin to effect some change, as long as we remain true to our viewing past situations dispassionately. It should become clear on that this kind of retention of images and emphases, this representation of connections, as well as the process of putting all this into language, is in itself enormously taxing.

One further obstacle which we have sought to dismantle in our writing is our own notion that there is no more to be said, that we know it allready. An attitude of this kind makes new discoveries an impossibility, pratically since we tend to conceptualise what we already know in terms of causal relations, so that we are unable to do justice to the complexly interwoven fabric of our memories. The dominant narrative in women's stories is the story of how narrative connections themselves are made. Threads are spun out endlessly; in no time at all, we realise that we are being led off at all kinds of tangents; it is no longer even remotely possible to perceive the ending of the story with which we began. In writing together mosaics of our childhood, we have found a narrative mode of this kind to correspond closely to actual life as it is lived by women. What we uncover in our story-writing is a number of elements within the fabric, rather than any coherent life plan. For indeed, women's lives are not determind according to plans of this kind. Thus writing itself becomes a practice of active change, the initial step towards changing an attitude of suffering and resignation, the first attempt to acquire knowledge by bringing to light particular significant phenomena. Writing forces us to adopt a more consistent approach to our perception of ourselves.

The Problematic

In setting out to study the way in which human beings construct themselves into the world, we find the threads of that development and their points of interconnection amongst our memories; at the same time, we discover ourselves, and gain insights into our part in making those connections, Whatever we remember is of relevance for our identity. Yet if we intend to work as a collective, then we cannot talk or write of everything we find; storytellers, if unrestrained, are prone to excess. For the purpose of our project, it thus became necessary to agree on a theme which could provide a common focus. In our particular case, the theme we chose was the formation of women as 'sexual beings'. A number of preliminary questions were outlined in relation to that project, each of which contained an implicit supposition on the given relation — and thus an initial assumption of an answer. To a large extent then, the trick consisted in drawing up the right questions. We had heard of a number

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of groups working on the same theme of sexuality, who had simply taken that theme and constructed a series of classificatory sub-questions, such as: when did you have your first sexual experience, and what was it like? It did not seem at all suprising to us that these groups had written few stories – or none at all – and that their own questions left them feeling descouraged and resigned. For these questions themselves presupposed some background knowledge (on the part of the questioner) in any number of theroetical areas; a knowledge of what sexuality can or does mean; a restriction of its meaning to the sexual act alone; a hope that the first sexual act may constitute a definitive origin which it will not be difficult to trace; a first source of emotion etc. Groups of this kind have furthermore found themselves competing, albeit against their will, against the massive number of pornographic texts in which there is anything but a shortage of words to describe the scene in question – including the attendant feelings and thoughts which each participant is alleged to share. Small wonder then that they are rarely able to avoid the pitfalls within the field of research they have outlined. Indeed, the very adoption of this particular problematic by such groups suggests that they may in fact have originally intended to pursue quite a different avenue of research, but that they failed to outline such an avenue with any clarity. Their interests centred, not on 'sexuality', but on 'loss of virginity' – a focus which involves the unspoken assumption that defloration constitutes a decisive event in any sexual life-history. This assumption itself is associated with a whole range of suppositions, theories, prejudices. Analysing these would have been an important first step in the construction of the group problematic; only then could new thoughts and insights have begun to emerge.

We may thus assume that any set of questions which seems to come readily to hand is likely to be firmly rooted in popular prejudice; questions of this kind will thus be more likely to diminish than to increase our understanding. Our proposal, then, is that theoretical questions should only be raised and discussed in the stories themselves if and when they formulate a previously unfamiliar and new relation. This may sound arbitrary and puzzling; yet it does in fact prove fruitful once work has actually begun. Our theme is one which weights heavy on all of us. In expressing a collective interest in that theme, we are perceiving ourselves and each other as experts on everyday life, rather than for example as rivals competing to steal the show. The theme identifies one of the points at which we have bound ourselves into society. That binding is not in itself restrictive, since our life process is always a process of socialisation. It is however necessary to make that socialisation conscious; and in the process of doing so, it becomes clear that we have absorbed a number of existing social scientific theories, ideologies and everyday opinions on the subject in hand. Thus the terrain which we enter is not uninhabited; other settlers have been here before us. There may be some advantages in this – existing theoretical knowledge may be seen in terms of a productive force which we can put to our own use. Thus our own project involved us in the study of a large number of texts on sexuality in general, texts by women in particular, as well as books on sex education and so on. Yet these advantages are more or less outweighed by the disadvantages; the traces marked out in

the process of colonization channel our perception into particular directions. Our gaze is, as it were, no longer innocent – if indeed it ever was. Thus, in an attempt to develop a less partisan way of seeing, we tried in our own work to formulate an initial problematic by combining together the key elements both of our own prior knowledge, and of the theoretical knowledge we had acquired; it was only after this initial preparatory stage that we could begin to write the stories of our own memories. Insofar as stories of this kind focus on and relate in detail to the representation of past events; and insofar as their mode of description is that of a multi-dimensional film made from the point of view of a visitor to a foreign country, to whom every small detail seems essential, since s/he has yet no criteria to determine what should be declared essential; insofar then as it is possible to 'remember' in the true sense of that word, we can expect to find ourselves tracing a number of unexpected connections – connections which appear new and exciting, even strange, yet which are immediately recognised by the group as credible, since they form part of the memories of all concerned. It is these interconnections which we believ it is necessary to pursue and use as a basis both for the formulation of a research problematic, and for decisions on the kinds of stories to be written in the future, the theories to be mobilised to elucidate them, the kinds of historical research they should entail, and so on. (This point will be developed at a later stage in relation to specific examples.) This, it seems to us, is one of the possible ways of learning from experience, from the empirical. It results, first and foremost, in a displacement of the problems of 'the sexual'.

By taking individual dissatisfaction, or individual concern with particular events in the past, as the starting-point of our research, we ourselves have forged a connection between the research process and the practical engagement of the research 'object'. And in studying the way our field of research is colonised by existing theories, explanations, value-judgements and so on, we are simultaneously exposing to scrutiny the structure of our own judgement, as well as the present state of debates and ideological struggles surroundings the field of reseach. Existing theories and interests can thus be tested against practical interests. In starting from a set of questions which derive both from existing theory and from our own interests, then setting about writing stories on this basis, while nonetheless as the same time setting out (equipped as we now are with a grasp of prevailing dominants norms) to examine our own past as the past of a stranger, we are placing ourselves in a position from which particular social relations can be perceived – relations and connections which are not represented in current theory and/or opinions. Independently of whether the discoveries may be seen as socially significant, revolutionary, or whatever, the connections theory make form a part of our lives which we have hitherto hardly heeded. Whatever else it may (or may not) involve, studying these connections certainly constitues an enrichment of our practical and theoretical lives; it may possibly also bring to light relations which were initially obliterated for structural reasons – either because they supplied a necessarily unconscious foundation for the constructions of social structures, or because they represented lost bastions of resistance in history. Certainly it is of interest to pursue such relations and interconnections further.

In the course of our work, we have elaborated a theoretical problematic which raises questions around the formation of the sexualised female body of activities around the body; the ways then in which the body itself and the feelings in and around it have arisen historically; and the ways in which this may relate to our insertion into society as a whole. This then is the first stage in our reformulation of questions of the relationship between sexuality and domination in general.

Analyses — The Collective — The Comparison

Up to this point, we have made a number of implicit assumptions as to why our memory-work should be collective; we should now make those reasons explicit. Some of them are purely pragmatic; an individual on her own is not well placed to work through the large number of existing theories, opinions, value judgements and so on, around the theme of sexuality. In collective work, on the other hand, individuals are able to complement each other, in terms of their own knowledge of our chosen theme, as well as in terms of workload.

Our choice of theme itself simularly demands collective work as a guarantee of its generalisability, as evidence of the significance of our questions for the socialisation of wider social groups. Thus the collective acts in a sense as a safety mechanism to ensure against sectarian individualism.

Analysis, then, is inconceivable in the absence of a collective. Any spontaneous discussion of a story begins with an implicit *comparison*. Here, experience is pitted against experience. This acts as a corrective for all concerned. Discussion focuses on the credibility of a situation as well as its capacity for generalisation. Raising questions over points at which the events desribed seem unamenable to any comparison is in itself an initial step towards research into the conditions under which such events first become possible. Comparison demands exactitude in recalling memories, as well as plausibility. The very attempt to produce compatibility implies a demand for explanation, a search for an understanding of our own actions.

The first draft of a story is usually full of inconsistencies, gaps, interpretations whose logic is unclear, breaks and idiosyncracies. As the story is discussed in a group context, it becomes once again the object of a spontaneous adoption og attitudes, of undigested theory and so called 'scientific' insights into the relations described — though discussions become more vehement at this point in the research, process since they are directly bound up with our own lived reality. The aim of group discussion is to uncover new relations, and to give encouragement to the writer to remember more precisely, to write the story anew. A number of resistancies are encountered here. Queries, expressions of surprice or of incomprehension all too easily carry notes of criticism; they are perceived as demands to atone for past mistakes. It is all too easy, too, for group discussions to threaten the very person of the writer, when such questions are asked as — how could you have done such a thing? Vulgar psycho-analytical models of interpretation in particular are so much a

part of our everyday jargon that sophisticated strategies have to be developed to combat the kind of patronising reasoning which claims, for example, that, 'it's obvious that you have to identify with your mother here' — and so on. Here too the writer will instinctively go on the defensive.

Yet it is above all from within memory itself that resistances arise. After all, what is written down is what is significant to the individual alone. In every case, any infringement of the boundaries of the forgotten and the repressed causes psychic difficulties. Since the aim of our collective research is to retrace the patterns of individuel appropriation of the social by a process of remembering — since then our object is the process whereby women enter the social world, this kind of slippage into amateur psychotherapy is without doubt a threat to the success of the project. One possible way of avoiding it may be not to press for resistances to be overcome in all instances; to curtail analysis, to allow others whose personal stability does not seem to be endangered by specific memories to take up the threads. A further suggestion, from the authoress Ruth Rehmann, is to ask the collective to complete the incomplete sketches which our memories have proved to be. In this way, we can learn a good deal about collective modes of social appropriation; what is more, the original writer, shocked at what appears to her to be the incomprehensible logic of these continuations, will come to recognise the points at which she has not herself understood, and the reasons why; thus by writing *against* the interpretation of herself by others, she can combine a process of self-analysis with the first faltering attempts to make herself comprehensible to others. The group thus becomes a means of transforming what has been up to now a form of communicative incompetence.

Sympathy, by and large, is bad method; it stands in the way of knowledge. This is particularly the case when interests conflict. Many of the strategies by which those in power secure dominance depend on making exploitation accessible to the understanding through sympathy. Is the factory owner not forced to take up the position of a father and head of the family, if he wants to keep a grip on his affairs? Does the entrepeneur not have to save money — just like the housewife? And so on (see *Sympathy as Method*, F. Haug, 1977). If we are attempting to discuss and raise questions around our own feelings and values, then sympathetic attitudes will only lead us up the same blind allies of vulgar psychoanalytical models of interpretation which we have outlined above. We must instead step — if only temporarily — into the shoes of the authoress; this is the first prerequisite of any comparison with our own paterns of social appropriation. If even this fails to produce an understanding of modes of behaviour in others, then our surprise at least may lead to further questioning; thus any group consensus on the meaning of particular experiences should in every case be challenged with accounts of contrary experiences deriving from similar contexts. For we are not in search of normative guidelines in the memories we recall; their content is on the contrary up for debate (thus for example we find a good deal of agreement over stories of the inadequacy of our own vital statistics, and the significance of perceived body size for our actions, irrespective of how thin or fat, tall or small we may actually be — a finding which highligts the necessity of research into the origins

of these internalised norms).

As we step into the shoes of others, we experience ourselves and each other as historical contemporaries engaged in collecting the stories which form the mosaic of experiences by which we mould ourselves into society. Admittedly, we will learn nothing if we do not pause to reflect on the attitude of each individual to her placing within the social whole. In so doing, we allow ourselves to reinterpret those taken-for-granted aspects of our lives which we cannot perceive merely by 'stepping into the shoes of others'. To this extent, story-writing serves as a a means of 'denaturalising' ourselves and our actions, thoughts and feelings. In collected analyses of the same object within different memories, there evolves a collective subject capable of resisting some of the harmful consequences of traditional division of labour. Individual practice is contained within a multiplicity of different patterns of thought, different means of interpreting the self into the world. As long as those different models remain separate and divided against each other, society will be infinitely capable of reproducing itself in its present 'individualistic' form.

By relating these different patterns of thought and interpretation to each other through a process of comparision, it is possible to begin to combat the fragmentation of human subjects in relation to each other. This is a first step towards the construction of a collective subject. Thus the more diverse are the backgrounds and occupations of members of the collective, the more far-reaching will be the insights which can be gained into the process of socialisation in general. (One extreme case of these different practices and patterns of interpretation is the separation of mental from manual labour, whose contribution to class division and its maintainence has already been the object of thorough research). We begin, then, from the premise that the differences in our various areas of experience will have produced and will carry with them specific and distinct boundaries and separations; at the same time, we assume that our collective work will have made it possible to soften the edges of those rigid boundaries. In other words, we assume that there is an element of socialisation in the drawing of boundaries and the delineation of areas, for example in the delineation of the sexual (see our chapter on sexuality and power).

The Constraints of Subjectification — The Project

The concept of subjectification is to be understood here as the process by which individuals work themselves into social structures which they themselves do not consciously determine, but to which they subordinate themselves. It is a concept which attempts to encompass the active participation of individuals in their determination by others. The fact of our active participation gives social structures their solidity — the solidity of prison walls. In relation to the external world, we find ourselves bound to a particular position within society. We have at our desposal a whole range of interpretations for this, each of which gives evidence of an awareness of the shackles which bind us. In the stories we write about ourselves, that awareness appears initially as

a general sense of disorientation. It seems initially that everything is relevant, possible, willed by ourselves, incapable of analysis. As indicated above, initial discussions yield little more than a repetition of interpretations of the story determined by our different positions within the social hierarchy. Our strategy then is to 'make necessity the mother of invention', in other words to view the initial discussion process as a 'peeling away' of the layers of material sedimented in our minds — and to make that process a systematic one. The first step in analysis thus involves all members of the group expressing the opinions and judgements they hold; in addition, they study the theories, popular sayings, images and so on which already cluster around the object; the way, in other words, in which the object has already been colonized. In our experience to date, we have encountered evidence of huge discrepancies between those modes of thought which we normally take to be theoretical, enlightened and radical, and our spontaneous judgements and feelings on the events of our childhood. This seems to indicate — to put the case somewhat extremely — that our emotions, in contrast to our thoughts, are spontaneously reactionary. A particularly productive stage of our work is thus the phase in which this ideologisation of our consciousness is made accessible to analysis, through the noting down of all the interpretative models, feelings, thoughts, snippets of popular wisdom, judgements etc. which we and others might make on each individual story.

As far as the analysis of the origins of the questions thus raised is concerned, the most fruitful form of research is without doubt project work. It allows not only for our own experience to become a source of knowledge, but also for the examination of anything from historical documents, to old and new doctrines and dogma, images and fairytales, proverbes ands newspaper articles. In other words, it slashes the horizontal sean which traditionally welds individual areas of knowledge in a relation of parallelism, allowing us then collectively to forge new connections between separate elements of our stories — connections which are then more relevant to the specific questions we want to raise. The task is admittedly a long one: but the pleasure it affords is equally great — the pleasure for example of making direct connections between the great cultural artifacts of history, and our own lives (as for example when we look at the representation of the female body in the Fine Arts down the centuries, or when we rediscover the elements within fairytales which we had passed over, unconcerned, as children — the fact for example that girls very often had to marry the most repugnant of men, for whom in turn marriages was little more than a means of ridding themselves of their hedgehog skin, their disguise as dragon, as horse etc.).

If we are to outline strategies for liberation on the basis of a study of models of social 'dressage', of our training by society for others, then it seems to us to be essential to record the mental traces of these prevailing models, to make conscious the ways in which we have hitherto to unconsciously interpreted the world; to develop resistances against 'normal' states of affairs. Only then will it become possible to identify the points at which our morality stands in the way of sophisticated thought, the points at which images from the past rise up to overtake us in the present; to recognise our feelings as in

part of our own making.

The power of traditional images within us derives in part from our isolation. By making the research process collective, we are at the same time making it possible to draw general conclusion. Again, we may assume that the experience of women is colonised in a particular way by dominant patterns of thought, and by interpretations which organise our subordination. Writing against the grain requires of women in every case that they unburden themselves of dominant patterns of thought within what we have called 'everyday theory'. In the normal run of things, everyday theory – commonsense – bundles the experience of individuals together like so many disparate sheets of paper. Anything which fits the theory is used as evidence; incongruities are disguised or discarded. Our task then is to construct a different order of things.

One further result of writing down our spontaneous interpretations of the events in any given story offers an insight into the way we customarily both assess and live a particular event simultaneously – into the fact, then, that our morality is no more unitary than we are ourselves. In the same way as society appears alien and contradictory to us, we transport its alien and contradictory qualities into our very selves.

Discussion in the group further enables us to recognise the fixity of certain value judgements as stemming from their embedding within a context, or rather to see that value judgements hold only because they are not visible within xxx different contexts in which they are nonetheless operative. Thus a particular stance, for example, – an attitude of total sacrifice or universal goodwill, a willingness to suppress one's own interests – maybe entirely justified in the context of the family (or at least, it may not be entirely indefensible); the same attitude in the world of social production, or class struggle, solidifies however in the form of unmitigated opportunism. There is great pleasure to be gained from collective experiments with any of the many different attitudes which surface in our work; by transposing them into different areas, seeing how they look in different contexts; by trying out their opposite, organising inversions, in short, by transporting the stories told out of the sphere of the purportedly 'natural' and into the arena of production.

Language

Language is a slippery instrument. The language of academia in particular floats far above our heads; abstracted from the concrete everyday, it fosters illusions of neutral objectivity. It is then particularly important to establish precisely what is being abstracted from, whose interests are being represented, whose side is being taken, under the blanket justification 'scientific' generalisation. If I talk in social scientific terms of 'strata', I remain silent on the question of class; if I talk of class, I ignore gender, and so on. The language of science is, then, in no sense neutral. On the other hand, everyday or colloquial language is by no means our absolute ally. The fact that we have a language for particular events and feelings is not in and of itself an advantage. On the contrary, everyday language is particularly well known to be packed with pre-

conceived opinions and value judgements which act as obstacles to understanding. We only have to look at a few well known proverbs — which, after all are an integral part of day-to-day speech — to see for example how the impression that individual advancement is merely a matter of personal effort maybe created or reinforced. ('If at first you don't succeed try, try and try again'; or, 'Rome wasn't built in a day').

Language gains power over us when it is spoken by others, or when we lose our control over the language at our disposal. In an earlier section on literature and writing we referred to the relationship between skill in language, and the incompetence which derives both from the social division of labour, and by extension from the unconscious nature of our practical action. Elsewhere, we have also suggested that theory as yet simply provides no concepts for, and thus no means of understanding the many diverse practices of women (see F. Haug, 1982). In relation to the language of the everyday, we have alone indicated the ideological character of objects formed in language. Thus an initial analysis of our stories in terms of an engagement with the language they employ can offer us new knowledge and insights.

The first point to arise in the work of the group is our awareness of a lack of language. This lack becomes evident in the stories as a paucity of expression, an apparent incapacity to communicate anything at all. Queries from the group as to the precise nature of the events narrated — how we felt, what disturbed us, what we initially aimed to achieve, invariably encounter the same barriers which deny us access to any capacity to express and thus to channel either our desires or our disabilities. This lack of language is not simply an expression of the fact that not everyone can be a great writer; it is an obstacle to liberation. Any movement which allows us to emerge from the shadows of ahistoricity — the movement of women into politics, for example, — demands a conscious appraisal of our lives; it demands that experience be transported into conceptual theory; it demands, then, a language. One important task for the collective is to act as a kind of language school in which the attempt is made, in contrast to traditional schools, to find everyday words from our own experience which may equip us theoretically for active intervention in the social world.

The most common form in which memories surface into words is that of the cliché — a form which might also be defined as the linguistic means by which we adopt the position of a social other. It is not lack which is the problem here; for the language of cliché is characterised precisely by volubility. To the extent that the use of cliché assumes concensus, it acts as an obstacle to critical analysis. 'He looked deep into her eyes': 'she felt her heart flutter': 'a sob rose in her throat': 'the blood drained from her face': the world of female emotion seems to be densely colonised by cliché. The corset of cliché defines to contours of appropriate female feelings and desires. A. E. Rauter's definition of a cliché seems particularly opposite here; speaking in cliché is, for Rauter, like 'biting on a plumstone which someone else has spat out; the flesh of the plum cannot be enjoyed'. (Rauter 1980). To an extent, the cliché is a sentence which we impose on ourselves; it condems us to remain on the well-trodden path of that which should be. The cliché, then, de-

bilitates; it acts as an obstacle to understanding.

Thus for example one woman from our group wrote the following on her participation in her own slavish degradation: 'I realised that my long curly hair was fashionable and that it attracted attention.' Doris Lessing, by contrast, writes of the same complex, 'hair' — always so significant for women, the hairdresser 'left her with deep red hair and a style which gave her the feeling of heavy silk brushing against her cheeks every time she moved'. (Lessing, 1978). The difference between these two formulations is not simply one of literary competence; it implies two different possible scenarios for practical political action. While Lessing illuminates the sensuous and erotic element by describing the tactile sensation of hair brushing against her cheek — a description which we are only able to understand because it describes feelings of which we too are capable — the version written by the lay authoress seems to suggest that her relationship to her hair is determined by fashion and the attention of others alone. In her use of ready-made assemblages of words, which appear credible to her to the extent that they fit with the everyday theories with which she is in any case familiar, the writer condems herself once again to subordination. The words which present themselves so readily to us as adequate expressions of our experience in fact direct us (in this case at least) away from sensual pleasure and bodily feeling. If they seem to mark out a pathway towards more 'liberating' modes of action, then this route in fact leads only to defiant attempts to make ourselves independent of fashion or of the opinions of others — attempts which are limited to practices of refusal, whereas Lessing's use of language enables us to plump for the pleasure of the senses.

Language can serve either as a prison house, or as the raw material of liberation. It is not always easy to bear this in mind. Thus our linguistic sensibility is formed through a whole range of signifiers of model virtues which we, in our own use of language, place firmly and determinedly as markers of commendation or uniqueness. Thus for example we consider an attitude of disrespect to be reprehensible, whereas in fact it is a necessary precondition for the expansion of our knowledge. We use the concept of power as a insult, as something to which we never aspire (mild and gentle as we are); and so we continue to live in a state of powerlessness. We talk of the hard-edged quality of competitiveness, of the immense rigidity it produces in human beings; and yet we ourselves are barely capable of standing firm in the face of even the smallest of conflicts. It can therefore only be beneficial to us if we investigate both the models which are given for us in language (see Solle, 1981), and the ways these inform the development of our own language. Contrary to its reputation, our everyday language is more than a little *abstract* — in other words, it bypasses the concreteness of feelings, thoughts and experiences, speaking of them only from the distanced vantage-point of commonsense interpretations. Hence the enormous effort involved in transporting female experience into language. At first, much of this experience surfaces only in passing phrases; thus one union woman in the group wrote, for example; 'he was able to make numerous contacts in the course of his work for the union, all of which came in useful when he applied for a very much higher position.' No

words for, nor any understanding of the way in which contacts are made. What is the price he pays for this forging of contacts? Whose pockets does 'he' now live in? To whom is his outspokenness no longer a source of aggravation? Who or what has become the target of his flattery? Would he himself be able to nurture such contacts without placing himself in a position of extreme ambiguity? And finally; what is a 'very much higher position', and why does he have need of it? It is questions such as these which become 'askable' in the context of the group. Indeed, after a while it becomes something of a game to vye with each other to pick up the traces of teal events encased or, as one woman put it 'ensnared' within the words we use.

We are perhaps unusual in perceiving language as a malleable material in and through which we live our lives, a material which we mould, and through which we ourselves are moulded. From our very first day at school, we have learned to write *'on'* the world, rather than to find a language for the forms *within* which we live. We have no language for the feelings we experience – and, by extension, no means of reassessing or questioning them. We simply reproduce the observations of others; observations which themselves are far removed from the actual perception of those who utter them. One particularly forceful memory of my own involves an early experience of my daughter at school. One day, quite nonchalently, she presented me with her new creations for Mothers Day. The text, a German essay, was saturated with such heart-rendering expressions as, 'day and night you scrub the floor on your knees': 'at night time your tired hands dam our worn out socks by the dim light of an old lamp': 'your hands are soft from the eternal round of washing up . . .', and so on, My response, the outrage of a modern mother: how can you bring yourself to write such things? I've never darned socks in my life – and what about the washing up machine? Our floors have wall-to-wall carpeting – and besides, whats happened to the typewriter which takes up so many hours of my day? Her matter-of-fact answer: 'you know I can't write that – what sort of marks do you think I'd get for *German behaviour?*' This was the one phrase she had coined from her own experience: 'German behaviour'. To me it seems to sum up perfectly the relationship between language and ideology, or rather between the way language is used and the modes of behaviour which instil in us dominat notions of value. Our relationship to language becomes strangely artificial. Even as we write, we have little faith in the words we use; how can we take ourselves seriously when our mouths form words which are and yet are not our own. These are the teeth of our argument; what then if they turn out to be false.

Absences – Silences – Breaks

Writing stories is amongst other things a way of gaining self-confidence. For reasons of emotional survival, we have become accustomed to seeing ourselves in the terms laid down for us, and from a standpoint marked out for us by society. This does not not leave us much room to manoeuvre. Memories of childhood reveal the extent to which our modes of experience, our desires

and dreams, have become improverished. By excavating traces of the motives for our past actions, and comparing these with the experience of our present lives, we become able to expand the range of our demands and competences. Admittedly, this is not as easy as it sounds. Our stories are written in the language we use today. Buried or abandoned memories do not speak loudly; on the contrary we can expect them to meet us with obdurate silence. In re-cognition og this, we must adopt some method which is suited to the resolu-tion of what has been identified as the key question of feminity *per se;* a method which looks for the un-named, for silence and for absence (Irigaray, 1980). Here too, our experience of the education system maps out a ready-made path of analysis; we have been taught to content ourselves with decod-ing texts, with searching for truth in textual analysis, complemented at best by the author's own analysis ('what did the poet mean by this?'). 'Re-learning' in this context means seeing what is *not* said as interesting, and the fact that it was not said as important; it involves a huge methodological leap, and de-mands more than a little imagination. And it is in the group that these lessons can be learned. The search for omissions, for the unnamed, becomes a collec-tive one. Once it has become clear that women are neither linguistically pre-sent in our vocabulary, nor personally present in numerous everyday-situa-tions − at work and in society at large − nor theoretically, in the language of science, our research takes on the excitement of a detective novel; gradually, we develop skills in following clues and uncovering scandals as a preliminary to future transformation. (It is illuminating to look at a few of the metamor-pheses which have taken place in this area. I myself, for example, reading Freud's discussions of female sexuality twenty years ago, had no doubts what-soever as to their validity at the time; indeed, I pursued them with an attitude of reverent thirsting for knowledge. After reading Irigaray's critique of Freud − which actually does little more than expose his analysis of feminity as a mere series of restatements of the fact that women are not men, that they 'lack' something in relation to men and so on − I now find it impossible to read the old texts without laughing our loud: a true release. My new aware-ness dawned late: but it was a great step forward). Despite omissions, abscen-ces and the unnamed, it is still possible to reconstruct past events in the cracks between the echoes of our silence.

Contradiction and the Desire for Harmony

In telling stories, we are always abandoning threads in the narrative, breaking off to take up other strands with different origins and trajectories. The mar-gins of narrative mark out the border between the remembered and the for-gotten. Questions from the group generally simply provoke a reaction which is familiar to us from the strategies whereby we ourselves deal with the social world; we call it fudging. We have two alternatives; either to tell stories which run peacefully and harmoniously through a series of logically related events, or to produce a set of inconsistent fragments which cannot be forged into a

whole. There is no sure route out of this dilemma. It seems likely that many stories will simply have to be abandoned as 'unproductive'. One method of story analysis has however proved in our experience to be fruitful, namely the tracing of contradictions. These appear most often as no more than hairline cracks; at first glance, we seem to be dealing with a harmonious whole. Yet under the surface, confusion reigns; beyond the harmony of the perfect story, antagonistic relations are possible. (F. Haug, 1982, and Projekt Frauengrund-studium, 1982).

We always wanted to learn, we had always been forced to learn, we de-spised others because they learned and so on – any and all of these different motives and attitudes may be implied at different points in the same story. Transposing them into linguistic form is the first prerequisite for resolving the contradictions between them. Since however contradictions of this kind are not simply contradictions in language, it is impossible to resolve them on the level of language; we take them instead as a point of departure, a challenge to work on what we now recognise to be real contradictions in our lives – while at the same time sharpening our perception of them in language, and search-ing for further connections and relations still obscured by ('linguistic') am-biguities.

Our desire for harmony is particularly detrimental to any efforts to gain a broader knowledge of ourselves and society. Like wishful thinking, the desire for harmony ornaments ugly inconsistencies, plasters over the cracks. We do of course pay a particular price for fudgeing over our own contradictions; we risk falling into a cosy acceptance of partial viewpoints, even if they fail to coincide with the level of knowledge we have attained. Our parents, for ex-ample may appear to us as no more or less than villians; conflicts present themselves as unavailable; we present them to others in such a way as to focus agreement precisely on evidence of their unresolvability. How then can we make visible the unconscious structure which underlies this fantasy of har-mony? Everyone of us knows and can give examples of women's descriptions of the daily labour of looking after the husband; 'he's never there. I have to get the children their food. Then they never come home. I only live for the children. They'll leave home for good in the end. My husband likes me to be at home in the evenings. He always goes out on his own.' There is a fear under-lying all this; a fear of thinking all these things at the same time. In social ac-tion, contradictions are avoided by proceeding in a series of unconnected events. When stories of this kind are told in the group, the group acts as a cor-rective to any harmonising of contradictions. There may be at least one mem-ber of the group who can give an account of her own contrasting experiences. In group work, it is also possible (even in the face of resistances which threaten to distort context and structure) to produce a new set of questions, and final-ly to conclude that apparently insoluble conflicts – which are the root of the desire of harmony – may in fact appear less incapable of resolution once their dynamics have been exposed. Thus a key element of memory-work from the outset in the raising of practical doubts, the casting of aspersions; memo-ries cannot be seen in any simple way as a key to new theoretical knowledge.

Interests and Character Traits

Many autobiographical narratives derive their credibility from the (apparent)
incomprehensibility of the actions of others. Just as in fairytales the plot is
carried forward by the actions of the good fairies and the bad fairies, we too
view the charachters of others as decisive in directing our lives − even if we
have long since ceased to 'believe in' fairytales. People act in particular ways,
we say, because they are 'evil', characterologically 'bad'; mothers are pretty,
schoolfriends envious and hateful, etc. In depicting others in this way, we are
however more likely to be disguising our own contradictions − or at least at-
tempting to construct them into an image of unity. It is, moreover, judge-
ments of this kind which paralyze us for action in many areas of our daily
lives. If then the analysis of stories is to be accepted, we must ensure that we
provide detailed descriptions of other protagonists, that we represent their ac-
tions from the point of view of their own interests and motives. Just as we
were able to produce a complete description of ourselves through a simple
process of distancing (writing in the third person), it is similarly unproblema-
tic to fulfil a demand to present credible motives for the actions of others. As
far as the rewriting of stories is concerned, the transformation this effects is
no more or less than revolutionary, and certainly profoundly enlightening
(see Brecht on the characterisation of relations, 1975).

Method as Culture

Various individual groups of women have been working now for almost two
years on stories of the everyday. The individual stages of analysis presented
above have developed most centrally out of these groups' increasing familiari-
ty with the stories; they were formulated neither prior to nor in abstraction
from the questions which the stories themselves raised. In our experience,
new modes of analysis suggest themselves continously − for example it seems
to us that it might be worthwhile to look more closely at contiguous elements
in the stories whose relation to each other is not immediately clear (such as
for example conflicts and new clothes; money − as an unnamed presence −
and Christmas, etc.). The diversity of our methods of approach, the numerous
objections raised in the course of our work with the stories, and the varied
nature of our attempts at resolution, seemed to suggest that there may well
be no single, clear and 'true' method which alone is appropriate to the kind of
work. What we need is imagination. We can perhaps say quite decisively that
the very heterogeneity of everyday life demands similarly heterogeneous
methods of analysis if it is to be properly understood.

Despite our own experience of bottlenecks, dead ends and running on the
spot, we would nonetheless plead, in conclusion, for story-writing as method.
Writing stories is fun. More than this, it expands our knowledge enormously,
sharpens our capacity for social perception, improves our use of language,
changes our attitude to others and to ourselves. It is a form of cultural labour
which is at the same time politically necessary. It makes us live our lives more
consciously.

Postscript – Tools of Remembering

I have agreed to write a story on something which happened in the distant past of my early childhood. My stated aim is to gain insights into modes of appropriation of the social from the feelings I had and the connections I made at the time. One of the difficulties here is that past feelings and thoughts may become distorted under the influence of present-day value-judgements; I have to try to remember as precisely as possible. I attempt then to develop a method which can be generally applied to attempts to remember this way. In relation to the scene which I want to reproduce, I look for a key image, in other words for a tableau, often no more than a fleeting glimpse of a moment from the past, which I have since kept stored away in my memory. An example: the furious expression on my father's face as he sweeps aside the personal bric-à-brac I keep on the window-sill, in his angry attempts to open the window. This image presents itself to me with absolute clarity. I then recall every detail of my surroundings at that moment: in this case, my bedroom, a room which I still remember as if I were a diminutive 1 m 30 tall. I myself am standing by my bed, my face turned towards this furious figure of a man. Up to this point, I have used a number of universally understood facts and details (the arrangement of my room, my height) as props to the process of remembering. But now I feel my fists clench involuntarily, I sense feelings of defiance and anger rising within me. Aha . . . my feelings are remembering. Or at least, they are reacting by duplicating past emotions. My anger is strong enough, uncontrolled enough to allow me to feel once again as I did the first time I cast my customary cowardice to the winds and protested, I can see the china cat shattering once again, my little cactus being bent in the middle, it hurts, I cry and and scream and storm towards him to hurt him in return, to avenge myself, I want to hit him, bite him, pinch him, kick him.

In searching for graphically descriptive vocabulary, I begin to feel a definite distance. Although I can now remember the precise details of my struggle with myself – a struggle which was a crucial first step towards undermining my respect for authority, as well as towards overcoming my cowardice in the face of threatened punishment, if only for a few brief seconds – I can now order both feelings and thoughts simultaneously. I begin to do so, and the scene unfolds as I write, searching for the appropriate words; detail after detail surfaces out of the memories which still strive to find expression in language.

It seems, regrettably, that this tentatively exploratory method does not work in every case. Some members of the group had extreme difficulties with it. I cannot moreover be applied at random to any given topic. If we want to extend its range of application, we may perhaps take as an essential point of departure, not an image, but a smell perhaps, a colour, sounds or music; smells in particular are especially evocative for me – the way that every house has its own special smell, instantly recognizable: or the particularly intense smell of spring in the air after heavy March rains . . . .

NOTE

1. Artiklen har været publiceret i DAS ARGUMENT – Sonderband 90 "Sexualisierung der Körper" 1983 (1983). Oversættelse til engelsk af Erica Carter. Sidste afsnit: Postscript – Tool of remembering er skrevet af Marion Verena Laudan.

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