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An Explanatory Foreword [or two]

Back in the day, before digital technology, snapshots were taken using cameras with slow moving shutters functioning in a similar way to our eye, closing over the lens before returning to its original position. In those days, the view as seen through the viewfinder could be significantly different to what was 'captured' on the film. Researching, to me, is like this, offering a snapshot of a moment in time framed through the eye of [and behind] the camera with the final production an ambiguous reflection of 'reality.' I take up this imagery to explore my experience of coming to write this presentation, drawing on emerging genres of qualitative inquiry - personal narrative performance - as an entry point for researching the constituting of subjectivities and productions of knowledge in post/modern/colonial worlds, and to imagine my way into alternate frames of researching and writing.

ACT 1



Scene 1

Bread Ahead
Pietermaritzburg
Thursday 13-05-2010
Email Communication
Written 9.30am
Sent 3.00pm

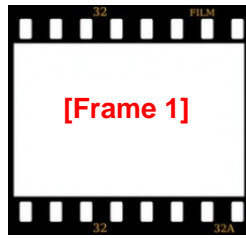
Hi Darl,

I really appreciate your help! The expectations of us in Oslo are a bit sketchy at the moment – we're not sure if we are submitting a paper for peer feedback or presenting; in an academic context presenting means you have 20 minutes to 'speak your piece' – and then there is time for questions. Words and graphics need to do double duty. Because I'm not sure what's required I need the final product to do double duty as well – that is, serve as a paper and presentation. I'm thinking of an A4 landscape rather than portrait layout – with the frames 2 up on each page. The impetus for this writing came from my watching of a film documenting a ritual for protection against HIV/AIDS. Got me thinking about frames and framing and how films are produced - stories are produced - framed. I'm trying to portray the dynamic, ambivalent production of knowledge, disrupt notions of a coherent, rational and linear accounting of selves and lives, and to raise questions about constitutive power of discourse in the research process. Feeling a bit nervous about all of this – as usual, a bit out of the box – and I've probably bitten off more than I can chew (maybe I should say present). Oh well! What's new?

Love you,

Trudy

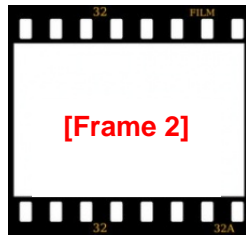
Re-Framing Africa,
Re-Framing the World:
(Re)searching Practices
in an Age of (Un)certainty



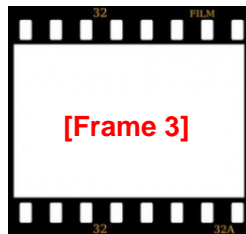
Frame, framing, framed
from pro-Germanic framjanan [to further] and old English
word fram [going forward]
to be helpful, to be of service, to be profitable, to make
progress, to move forward

[Reframe]

To let a scene appear in another point of view



Africa; African
The second largest continent and second most populous
continent after Asia at about 30.2 million km²; located to the
south of Europe and bordered to the west by the South
Atlantic and to the east by the Indian Ocean; a native of
Africa



World
The earth, the universe and its inhabitants
A geographic location
A particular way of life



Scene 2:
My student digs
Pietermaritzburg
Friday night
07-05-2010

I pour myself my thimbleful of red wine [I'm trying to lose weight], sit down at my table sitting in front of the window. Television set sitting beside my computer. I open my emails and read the subject line 'Meeting before we go to Oslo,' double-click and the words appear in the frame before me.

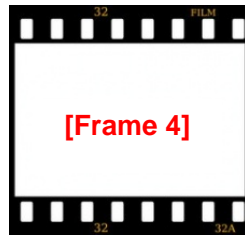
Dear students

A number of you have sent us drafts of your presentations which you will give in Oslo. We thought that it would be helpful to go through them together as a group like the way we did for the gender seminar. Please indicate if you are available on Friday, 14 May at 10:30am in Room 107. Please send the titles of your presentation to us (so we can formulate a programme) and a copy of your full presentation...

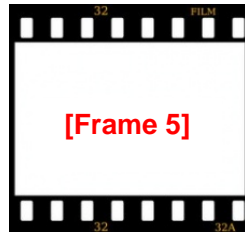
Regards

Sarjini and Isabel

I've been putting off (resisting) writing this paper; no one reason, a mixture of thoughts and feelings each competing for my attention and allegiance.



Ambivalence
uncertainty or fluctuation, especially when caused by inability to make a choice or by a simultaneous desire to say or do two opposite or conflicting things
the coexistence within an individual of positive and negative feelings toward the same person, object, or action, simultaneously drawing him or her in opposite directions.



Laurel Richardson, speaking to herself says, 'postmodernism says show your process; interrupt your textual staging. If I interrupt myself enough again and often enough again and yes she said and yes again, I'll not have to 'really' begin will I? What is really? What is begin? Is this 'displaying' my process or a postmodern fritter? Enough already REALLY BEGIN!'

I begin writing. Really, truly begin.

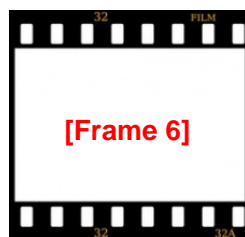
ACT 2



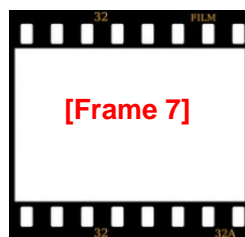
Scene 1

Fading in [from Act 1/Scene 2]
Friday afternoon
14-05-2010
Room 107 New Arts Building
Pietermaritzburg

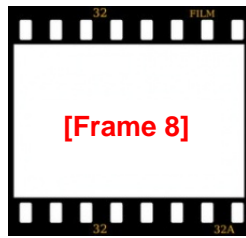
Faculty of Theology
University of Oslo
Day and Time TBA



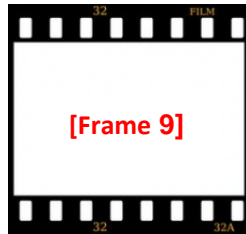
My presentation, this body of speaking/writing, is intended as an exploration of practices of knowledge production within post/colonial/modern worlds, taking up a feminist post-structuralist approach to meaning making and subjectivity to [re]search the [re]searching eye [!] and our multiple framings of 'reality.'



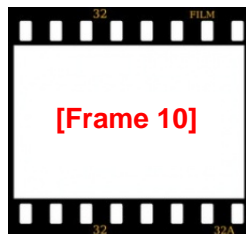
I experience this writing as a field of inquiry where accessibility and intelligibility [a signpost for hegemonic meaning systems] can give way to the possibilities for other ways of showing/telling to emerge. I don't put forward a coherent argument, a rational, logical, linear account or offer a conclusion [no straight lines make up my life, all my roads have bends, no clear cut beginning and so far no dead ends]. My thinking is fragmented and fluid; melded; hopefully, with enough 'glue' of a kind that can hold it [and you and me] together.



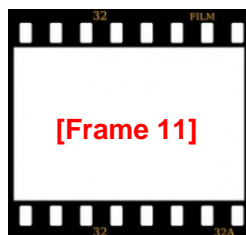
And yet I want to forge an entry point for you, dear listening reader; and so I come back to my writing that has gone before and make additions. It is in the movement back and forth between writing and reading that I come to see the blurring of the structures that divide beginning from end, research from researched, thought from thought, storyline from storyline; the slippages, the contradictions beginning to come into focus.



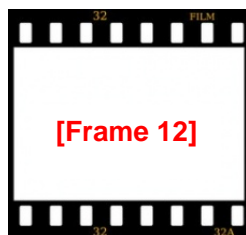
This writing is an experiment; I've always been one to experiment at the most unlikely times: to not only try out a new recipe when I have company for dinner but also to alter the ingredients and method. And now, I write an experimental piece for presentation at an academic conference. In some places and from some positions my choice may be called innovative and in others foolhardy. The choice is yours, as it is mine to determine what we can make of this opportunity; whether to play it safe or to try on something new, to open ourselves to the novel, to relinquish control. Elizabeth St. Pierre echoes and reinforces my conviction that 'no art ever came out of not risking your neck. And risk - experiment - is a considerable part of the joy of doing.'



Joy
Deep pleasure



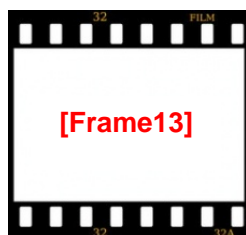
Jouissance
Deep pleasure
reaching an almost intolerable level of excitement
Pleasure beyond what is permissible
Play



Frame
To put together structural elements
To position visually within a fixed boundary
To establish a context with words;
To interpret
Somebody's body

[Reframe]

to make progress, making the scene [seen] visible from other points of view;
to suggest possibilities of 'qualitative' change; to re-search *otherwise*



This is a scary place for me; an experiment born of a powerful and precarious moment. [When I began this writing I seemed extremely competent in logical rational modes of expression. I had a passion to write, though I found myself unable to work beyond the discourses in which I had been educated.] I have to learn to write again – from within new spaces [to come to know against the grain through which my own life and the lives of those around me have taken meaning.]

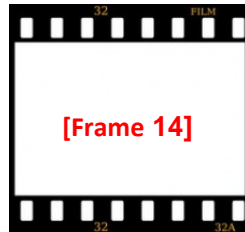
ACT 3



Scene 1

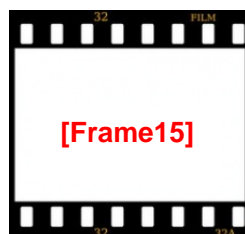
University of Stellenbosch
June 2009

I'm sitting
in a dimmed lecture theatre;
waiting
for the film presentation to start.



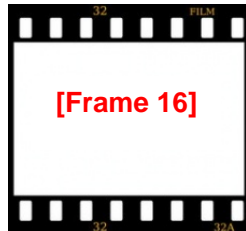
Something familiar about this me,
a pink-skinned church(ed) woman,
student,
sitting
waiting
for the roll of the reel to reel projector
the gentle whirl of the motor of data projector
the disk in the lap top computer;
professing before us,
anthropologist, religious studies scholar, sociologist,
theologian, Biblicist, caring practitioners;
introducing
the document(ary)
living, human;
providing
comment(ary)
from within a complex human web of relations;
presenting
their research
their mission.

This set up feels as strange as it is familiar;
I look ahead of me and to the side
I'm encircled by black and brown and pink skinned bodies;
waiting
for the camera to role.

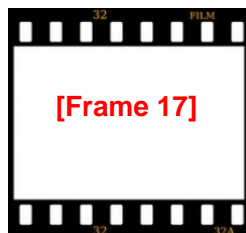


'This article begins', say John Warren and Deanna Fassett,
'with a study of others but, like most, tells us more about
ourselves. It's funny that way. We began with the need for
dissertation topics. What to do, what to write, what will get
us done and off to some new place, some new beginning,
somewhere else. We both began in the site and sight of
others, the qualitative quest—go into the field, go to the
people, go to those "others" and study them, figure them
out, and then report back [and, by the way, make some
original contribution to the discipline along the way]. Yet as
we reflect back on the projects we undertook, the people we
studied, the questions we asked, we find that we learned
the most about who we are, what we do, and what we need
to do and write as ethical, cultural studies–informed
scholars.'

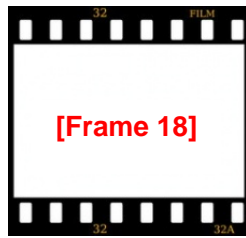
*I feel a rush of excitement surge through my chest.
Yes!
I scream
silently to myself,
in their uncovering
the covering of the qualitative quest.
Go forth young man
[and woman]
multiply
[and subdue
our knowledge]
reeling in the conquest*



For myself, fieldwork is not to an encounter with any primitive or any foreigner. The other in my 'field' is heavily constituted out of a tension between my own memory of an earlier time, and the recognizable changes of my return: out of the memory of how I used to be, and the inadequacy of my responding now.



At first, it wasn't the film that disturbed me, what the film was about, as much as what would become of it; you know, here I am (we are) in Africa watching a documentary about an African protection rite produced by a white researcher from the North. I couldn't help but imagine that it (the film) would find its way to other lecture theatres like the one I was sitting in (at a historically white university) and be viewed by a plethora of white faces. I've watched similar films through my undergraduate education. My heart sinks. Isn't this what 'field' researchers have always done – produced films, written articles and books about others? I feel increasingly self-conscious - a participant/observer in what feels like a 'repeat performance' of the research practices criticized by scholars from the South.

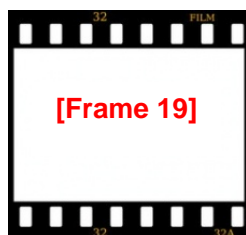


I find it increasingly difficult to voice my discomfort – to find the words to say it without falling into theoretical explanations. I struggle with my feelings and the discomfort that companions me. In the early hours of the morning when the night sky is giving way to the day I come to a place of insight. I am horrified and resist the knowing that bubbles up from within that interrupts self assurance.

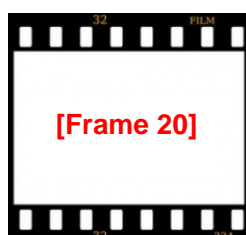
I am more constituted by postcolonial discourses than I am aware. I have taken these up as my own – my consciousness raised by black educators within the Northern and Southern academy. I have become suspicious of knowledge produced by white researchers in the same way that I have come to second guess my own knowing and its legitimacy. I am positioned in the colonized academic landscapes of Australia, Canada and South Africa as perpetrator of the violence of (mis)representation.

The emotion I'm feeling is guilt. Positioned within the colonial discourse [and other discourses of inadequacy and moral failing] I, in turn, constitute the producer of the documentary within this same discourse – that is, in terms of inadequacy and failure to represent knowledge truth-fully; I pronounce the producer guilty. By taking up the positioning offered by these discourses I vindicate myself; that is, reclaim a sense of my morality – position myself as a moral subject; this is achieved however through privileging the knowledge of the (woman, native) Other. In a complex movement I not only contradict my desire to respond to situations in more complex ways but also re-iterate binaries that divide colonized/colonizer, innocent/guilty, good/bad and Other/other.

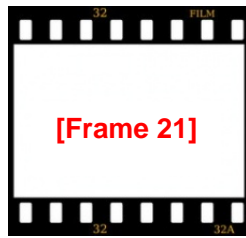
At another time I might make sense of my experience in another way, opening up to the possibilities of knowing differently. As the day moves on I come to interpret my experience in other ways and to experience my-self differently; to make different meanings.



But now I have taken us into a place that is complex; am I grappling with issues of representation [or recognition and misrecognition], postcolonial guilt, power, agency, the negotiation of co-existing knowledge systems and meanings or...



The most pressing problem I have is that I need to do my 'field work' but for quite some time now I have been stalled, stopped, stuck, dead in the water, not quite sure where to go. And since I am becoming convinced that alternate form of writing can take me places I haven't been able to articulate, I have decided to attempt to travel to the places that these kinds of writing might produce – wide, open 'fields of play.'



I believe that I have begun the journey of deconstructing my own story(ies) to find diversity, multiple identities, shifting subjectivities, and having begun this journey , written these fragments, I can name my self-(re)presentation as a social/personal framing of embodied, historically situated research practice celebrating multiplicity of method and multiple sites of contestation in the service of qualitative change.

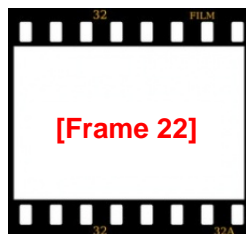


It's a rap

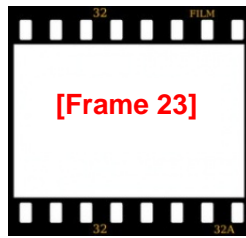
ACT 4



Scene 1
The After Show



The title for several talk shows aired by the Canadian version of MTV connected to the reality series it airs. The typical *After Show* features two of the former *MTV Live* hosts discussing the program immediately preceding with input from studio audience members, callers, e-mailers, and webcam participants. The current format of the show includes a discussion of entertainment news, fashion, and pop culture.



The performance is finished and it's time for you, the audience, to talk back. This is my second 'showing' – I use this phrase intentionally as a metaphor to expressing the deep vulnerability, the exposure of presenting an "up close and personal" rather than a more detached accounting of 'experience.' I've accommodated the responses to my first performance to enhance the 'intellectual shape' of this reading/writing body. I co-opted my friends Molly and

Kennedy as readers in my (our) first performance; today, other friends have joined me – a group performance - changing the shape, reconstituting the performance, in what ways I do not know.

I open to you - make visible - some of my interior processing, the reconstituting of my researching I/eyes, my bodied subjectivities and identifications as researcher - posturings and positionings constituted-in-relation. I write my thinking about my thinking about my experiencing of researching in several locations. I suggest that the researching (racializing, classing, gendering, sexing) ethno-graphic I/eye is a product of discourse; that changes in social environment and self/other identities are interwoven; and when taken up as such open spaces for imagining researching as simultaneously product and process , noun and verb; complex, embodied, historically located, socio-cultural and psychological engagements; socially (pre)scribed practices in constant flux and negotiation; sites of both struggle and transformation where thought and action are constantly refracted back upon one another.

'The reflexivity of modern social life,' says Anthony Giddens, 'consists in the fact that social practices are constantly examined and reformed in the light of incoming information about those very practices, thus constitutively altering their character. We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but where at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of the knowledge will not be revised.'

I ponder the implications of imagining researching as product and process, as intra/interpersonal engagement and as reflexive social practice in contexts where the rituals and rules of culture which once shaped the contours of subjectivity have lost/are losing their salience, perhaps irretrievably [while recognizing my suggested conceptualization is a discursive construction with-in this context].

What can be known, and how is it known with-in a post/modern context? What meanings are constructed in the taking up [the re-constituting across landscapes and bodies] of 'traditional' knowledge systems [the languaging of rituals, myths, proverbs] in post/colonial contexts. [How] are these post/modern/colonial /traditional take-ups, converging, conflating, correcting, conforming self-other conceptions and social relations? How can ethno-graphic researching engage with and express the complexity of these creative re-appropriations?

Or asked another way, what researching practices can safeguard against representation of 'realist' or natural accounts of 'experience' without denying either that researching involves interactions and exchanges with real people, in real relationships dealing with real circumstances or that meaning is not just achieved through the availability of certain discourses and practices rather than others but also through the mediations of psychological processes, themselves captured by language. How can we explore the interruptions [the fluidity] of self-other constructions and relations? Are there means to creatively enter and express the process of change itself?

What I desire is a researching posture that can span the divides between self and other - a '3D' orientation to researching: dialogical, dynamic and discerning; a posture where knower and known interact, shape, and interpret the other, I/eyes wide open and responsive to inheritances that encircle – speaking/writing that allows us to articulate the multiplicity of our experiencing selves, our subjectivities.

Last words

I am ending where I began - with me sitting in my student digs sitting in front of the computer which is sitting on the table that sits in front of the window; me sitting (but no longer feeling ambivalent) reading/writing my paper for presentation at this conference in Oslo. And now the paper presentation, this body of writing, that found its beginnings in a precarious and powerful moment of risk, is about to take flight – to the other [side of the world]. The ending is a beginning; I hope your pleasure is in reading/authoring, journeying with me.

Credits and Conversations

Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press, (1990), 38-39.

Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson, *Doing Qualitative Research Differently: Free Association, Narrative and the Interview Method*. London: Sage 2000.

Bronwyn Davies, *A Body of Writing 1990-1999*. Walnut Creek: Altamira Press, (2000).

Bronwyn Davies and Sue Gannon, *Doing Collective Biography: Investigating the Production of Subjectivity*. New York: Open University Press, (2006).

Laurel Richardson, *Fields of Play: Constructing an Academic Life*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, (1997), 64.

Paula M. Smith, *Mapping the Whirled: Syncopations in the Life of a Woman Religious*. Melbourne: Spectrum Publishers, (2003).

Elizabeth St. Pierre, 'Nomadic Inquiry into the Smooth Spaces of the Field,' *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 10, no.3 (2002): 365-383.

John Warren and Deanna Fassett, '(Re)Constituting Ethnographic Identities,' *Qualitative Inquiry* 8, no.5 (2002): 575-590.