



(RE)WRITING WOMEN IN ORGANIZATION

PORTRAITS OF AFFLICTION, TALES OF RESISTANCES, HOPES FOR LIVING DIFFERENTLY

CATHERINE (KATIE) VERA BEAVAN

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¹ Vida is a group of feminist CMS scholars who collectively resist sexual harassment and structural inequalities. VIDA creates safe spaces to speak and congregate.



Abstract

(Re)Writing Women: A Call to Activism NOW!

This study argues that the time has come to DEMASCULINIZE our organizations and our Academy. As a qualitative study conducted in hypermasculine organizations it paints portraits of the HARM done to our bodies, our lives and our communities in obeying neoliberal demands, explicit and implicit, for 24/7 working. It reveals that our organizations still reproduce gendered systems of privilege and discrimination that isolate us as we speed up, faster and faster, to deliver more and more outputs. Women are subjugated. But this is a study of HOPE. It tells tales of resistances, where small sites of activism can spread quickly, where men and women can come together to create spaces of EQUALITY, ripping tears in patriarchy; spaces of COMMUNITY, GENEROSITY and LOVE; places where all DIFFERENCES are VALUED.

This is a thesis written from a woman's body, defying the political, ethical and aesthetic constraints handed down from Academy's masculine tradition. It is a scholarly, critical inquiry and a piece of embodied, ethical, activist research. It is an AESTHETIC work of POETRY and prose written and taken to STAGE, forging connections with audiences to evoke critical consciousness and action in their bodies. It is a work of passion and DESIRE; a feminine text written from MY BODY as a site of transgression. It is a CALL to FEMINISTS, men and women, to remember that feminism is about social-political change. Our gains are slender and are being erased. It is a call for AFFECTIVE FEMINIST SOLIDARITY in the world.

This academic work is written differently, to inspire other scholars to resist, explore, experiment and free themselves of shackles; to write from our bodies and take our writing out of the Academy to CHANGE the WORLD. An invocation to write vulnerably, to write gender differently, to use our sociological KNOWLEDGE and IMAGINATIONS to bridge the gulf between theory and action. It is a CALL to ARMS.

The time has come to create new FÉMININE SPACES in our Academy. This thesis is a call for all to write, using writing as a CATALYST for social change: WOMEN'S WRITING to REWRITE WOMEN. I nail my FEMINIST THESESES to the doors of the Academy of Organization Studies.

A Suffragette ~~1908~~ ~~1968~~ 2018



**If the position of mastery culturally
comes back to men, what will become of
(our) femininity when we find ourselves
in this position?**

When we use a master-discourse?

**Mastery-knowledge, mastery-power:
Ideas demanding an explanation from us.**

Other discourses?

Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, 1986



The women's liberation movement is a historical, international reality which, from now on, can be neither subjugated or censored. Since ~~May 1968~~ October 2017 women have been struggling with great intensity to form a revolutionary force.

The specific inscription of this struggle [and in this thesis] is on the double front – practice and theory – of the unconscious and history.

Des femmes publishing house, 1974



Spaces have been created for embodied writing, leaky writing, dirty writing, féminine writing...yet I am asking whether this is a place that has been assigned to women and what are their terms of being in the organization studies community...There is a need for radical engagement with women's bodies and their relationship with writing. Given the power of women's writing, what can we do to challenge and change the systems that govern us? Women's bodies as sites of radical transgression through writing differently.

Alison Pullen, 2018



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Table of Abbreviations/glossary of key terms

APA	American Philosophical Association
autotheory	A blend of autobiographical writing interweaved with academic references. I have borrowed the term from poet-academic Maggie Nelson (2015) who claims to have taken it in turn from Paul Preciado.
bi-sexual	Cixous uses bi-sexual to mean the presence in every human being of both sexes
CMS	Critical Management Studies. A branch of OS that critiques management, business, organizations informed by theory and social justice and sometimes offering alternatives. I suggest in Pool seven that CMS is guilty nevertheless of replicating the sexism and malestream ways of making knowledge found in the wider OS Academy.
CWIFR	Crazy Women's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society
EGOS	European Group for Organizational Studies. When used with a year it stands for the annual conference e.g. EGOS 2018
Écriture feminine	Cixous's project with <i>écriture féminine</i> is to 'sign the body back into semiosis from which it has been exiled' (Pamela Banting, 1992: 228) rupturing traditional dualistic philosophy and non-embodied theories of representation.
Féminine	I use the French form <i>féminine</i> throughout my thesis, linking it to Cixous's concept of <i>écriture féminine</i> . <i>Féminine</i> does not represent one gender, which Cixous continually deconstructs in her work in favour of plurality, though she believes women are more likely, to enact it.
Free Association	The practice of letting our minds fly freely, where there is no such thing as irrelevance. Whatever comes to mind has meaning.
GWO	Gender, Work & Organization, a journal and also when used with a year it stands for its bi-annual conference e.g. GWO 2018.
Imaginary	I use this in my thesis in reference to Lacan's model for the human psyche. It roughly corresponds to Freud's pre-oedipal stage and Lacan was particularly focused on the mirror-stage when the child identifies its own image and begins to see itself reflected in relations with others. It is primarily a narcissistic structure. Cixous, however, sees the <i>féminine</i> imaginary as a vast resource of images and feelings, conscious and unconscious, and multiple subjectivities.
IMF	International Monetary Fund
Managing Director	Managing Director is a senior position on Wall Street, appointed through an annual rigorous promotion process that at most firms, involves Board approval.
OS	Organization Studies
OB	Organizational Behaviour
P&L	Profit and Loss statement
QI	Qualitative Inquiry



Real	Lacan's term for the world which is pre-language, from which we have been severed by our entrance into language. It is an elusive concept, escaping words. Cixous looks to access the Real through the ancient song of the mother, the sea, <i>old</i> language.
SCOS	Standing Conference on Organisational Symbolism
Seminar XX	This abbreviation is commonly used, and used in my thesis to represent Lacan's famous seminar: <i>On féminine sexuality: The limits of love and knowledge, 1972–1973. Encore. The seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX.</i>
Symbolic	Lacan's term for the social and signifying order governing our culture. It is a post-oedipal position. Cixous is concerned with how Woman can enter the Symbolic on equal terms, without suffering castration or decapitation.
TERFS	Trans exclusionary radical feminists
UN	United Nations
Woman	When I use Woman with a capital W, I am following Cixous (1976b) in referring to universal woman in her struggle against conventional man.



Preface: Summary of my thesis contributions, where to locate them in the body of my text and underpinning literature

Féminine discourses, the (re)writing of women and Ariadne threads

My thesis is part of a broader project I'm engaged with to (re)write women in organizations and in the Organization Studies Academy.² I nest my academic work under the broader, radical feminist endeavour, working for a revolution to obtain gender parity in the world and acceptance of all who are othered in some way. I am a feminist of differences desiring to open up spaces for otherness; breaking the patriarchy that governs organizations, the OS Academy and society at large. We, who are different to the white malestream, are silenced and rendered invisible; our attempts to assume power are mere masculine masquerades. Women (and others othered) are always parked outside power (Hélène³ Cixous in Verena Andermatt Conley, 1984).

Cixous's *écriture féminine* is a vibrant clarion call for women to (re)write ourselves out of our repressions by patriarchy and into new subjectivities giving us our rightful place and voice. As I outline in Pool six, whilst there have been calls to write the *féminine* in organization studies, calling on the works of Cixous, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, there has been little implementation. My thesis is an essay to (re)write women onto organizations drawing on the work of Cixous and other feminist theorists.

Cixous suggests that we have to descend into our abjections and stigmatas to come to know the other within. Doing this extends our capacity, she suggests, to inhabit a multiplicity of selves and build relationships where we can hold another person in respect for all their differences to us without appropriation, welcoming the

² Abbreviated going forward as OS. Abbreviations and a glossary of frequently used terms in my thesis can be found in a list on pages 12–13 for easy referencing.

³ You will note I am citing first names when I first refer to a scholar. I do this to draw attention to female scholarship. In the *Letter to my readers* which follows I will explain my citational approach for my thesis. I follow Sara Ahmed (2017) that citations are bricks with which we make scholarship and I desire to use feminist bricks. In this preface, in order to provide readers with relevant literature, I may unavoidably cite scholars who may not be committed to feminism. In the main body of my thesis I have aimed to cite scholars supportive of the quest to undermine and replace patriarchy.



other in all their strangeness to ourselves. It is a call to subjective freedoms and the opportunity to become reborn as women with voice, agency and power; able to claim our rightful place in the world. As a poet and playwright, she makes a specific call for women to write and to go to theatre to get across 'the living, breathing, speaking body' (Cixous, 1984: 547). I have striven, as you will see, to live this Cixousian journey in my thesis intellectually, with and through my material body, by writing *écriture féminine* and by going to stage in academic conferences and in a public theatre.

I assay in my thesis to write in a variety of *féminine* discourses, not against masculine discourses but as an *and* seeking to show that knowledge can be made differently and that women can find voice. I follow Cixous aspiring to find the voices of her Cleopatra: intelligent; strong; fleshy; feisty; passionate; always recreating myself, multiplicitous and metamorphic; and doing work of and with love. '[L]ife made woman' and woman made Art (Cixous in Cixous and Catherine Clément, 1986: 126). However, as a career practitioner who has worked for decades in hypermasculine industries I fear some of my masculine voices assert their way back into my text. I become unwittingly an Anthony 'who has a hard time keeping up with Cleopatra' (124). A strata of masculine performances have been laid down in my body through a life/career time of daily practices. When anxious I can find it difficult to hold the other empathetically in mind and to act with a corporeal generosity (Rosalyn Diprose, 2002). As you will see I am a newly born woman emerging (Cixous and Clément, 1986) who sometimes stumbles. I appear in my thesis as human and flawed and I do not seek to mask this vulnerability. Rather, I experience this self-exposure as generative for myself and I hope for others. I follow Cixous, into the interminable journey of self-reflexivity as a surprising opening to joyful ethics of affirmation and potential transformation of ourselves, our organizations and society. Whatever academic discipline(s) or practitioner roles you arrive in this text from, a core contribution of my thesis is to try and unveil how I took Cixous's magic stairs (1997) to rewrite/right women (including myself) in organizations. It involves an engagement with the *féminine* unconscious, individual and collective, journeying to and through my/our inner marshes and mud and an attempt to net my/our thoughts unknown. It is a leap toward a new land and an entirely different life (Cixous and Clément, 1986) in OS, in organizations, and by extension society; a saltate all of us in our multiplicity of gendered selves might dare to take.



My thesis is consciously capacious and draws on multi-disciplinary literature theories and methodologies; offering an alternative to the idea of a doctoral dissertation as a singular, rational, masterful penetration. I write with a utopian wish that it might be read as a whole and intersubjectively with you. However, I write in this preface, with a practical awareness that readers may come to my thesis with a variety of research and/or practitioner interests, from different disciplines and roles and all of you are likely time pressed. I desire my work to be readily accessible and traversable and so I'm setting out here the aims and contributions of my study in relation to different disciplines and fields of inquiry and providing signposting that I hope will assist you in nimble navigation of my body of work and in cross-referencing different parts of my thesis as you need.

My project relates to (at least) three main academic disciplines: organization studies (OS), often referred to in the US as organizational behaviour (OB); qualitative inquiry (QI); and feminism, particularly radical and material feminisms and the study of feminized resistances. I also bleed over into communication studies, literary arts, political science and feminist theatre studies (among others). Below I outline the substantive theoretical, methodological, empirical, practitioner and activist contributions of my thesis and outline the relevant research fields and literature from which I have taken my bearings and where you can find them referenced in my thesis. These are indicative not exhaustive. Some of this literature underpins my study but is not directly referenced in the body of my text, partly as a result of needing to comply with The Laws of Thesis Word Counts. There is leaky, messy, unmasterful overlap and duplication in what follows, for which I ask your patience. Its purpose is to facilitate scanning in order that you can lithely locate bodies of my work which interest you in my thesis. This preface is also rather instrumental, working against my feminine writing quest and I take this step cognizant of this and primarily with your needs in mind. Ariadne threads of writing the feminine, writing in the missing feminine, (reborn) feminine subjectivities and (re)writing women in organizations, the Academy (broadly) and in society weave across my study.

One arrangement I've entertained is to describe both my doctoral journeying and my writings along the way is to separate my thesis into non-identical twins; thesis one and thesis two. In the *Letter to my readers* which follows this preface I'll give you more detail into how this birthing came about, and explanation of the very



different epistemological framings that underpin each, their significance to my quest and where you can find examples of each one in my thesis. Of course, this division is an artificial framing. As a binary it works against my goals of multiplicity and in fact there are many thesis children clamouring for attention in the body of my text. Despite some of my selves, I find this twinning generative.

With that let's move to my contributions to OS, QI and feminism (and possibly other disciplines). I present these as thoughts, as they are simply my contentions.

Thoughts on my contributions to organization studies and other disciplines

At a meta level I believe I'm presenting an original piece of feminist research, breaking the silence on the phallic construction of knowledge in the OS Academy (and possibly other Academies); innovating with alternative féminine discourses and opening up new knowing féminine spaces; not in opposition to dominant masculine ways of knowing; an *and*; creating more room for differences. I hope to open up other, less prescriptive ways of knowing with methodologies that are affectual, erotic, intersubjective, irrational, post-qualitative, post-human, processual, sensory, unconscious as well as conscious and that have potentiality to move us into closer connection with organization practitioners (of which I am one) and perhaps cue us into feminist and organizational activism. My intent, in these senses, is unabashedly political.

My essay in my text is to *show* the (re)writing of women in organization, in organizations, in the OS Academy and by representation broader society, widening the ingress created by Heather Höpfl (2011) and Alison Pullen (2006, 2018). It is an attempt to bring Women (capital W⁴) into the Symbolic⁵ rooted in psychoanalytic, radical feminist theory and Cixous's *écriture féminine*. I offer poetic texts, opening up generatively, hopefully expanding the ways in which we can live and research in

⁴ In using Woman with a capital W 'I'm speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their senses and to their meaning in history' (Cixous, 1976b: 875–876).

⁵ Symbolic is a Jacques Lacan term I will explain in Pool two.



organizations, in the OS Academy, in organizations and potentially in society. Texts manifesting, after Cixous, *The Political is – (and the) Poetical*.⁶

I also believe my thesis performs original, fluid, embodied, organizational and personal poetics of discomfort weaving personal experiences and theory together as innovative feminist autotheory taking a belay from academic-poet Maggie Nelson (2015). I believe my social theatre, my one-woman performance of *Harvey's Phallus: Where is my Pussy Hat?*⁷ about which you will hear more soon, is a unique piece of embodied qualitative feminist research in the OS Academy and contributes also to QI and feminism, responding to calls to activist arms by Norman Denzin (2010, 2014, 2017b) and Sara Ahmed (2017). I hope my performance creates a feminist and inspirational pathway others can follow. *Pussy Hats* can be accessed for viewing in the Research Repository where you located this text.

My overall framing, which I took from the French, feminist Des femmes publishing house⁸ (1974) is – the *double front* of practice and theory, history and the unconscious. In my thesis I attempt consistently to break down barriers between practice and theory, and to understand theory not as a master but as an aid to interpretation. Pool seven gives a fuller gestation of this point. I work with my personal history and the history of women working in global banking (see Pool four) and as I move through the thesis I progressively start to work and write with my personal and (at least in my perception) our collective *féminine* unconscious, using my body as a cipher to rewrite myself and ourselves with new agency (see Pools six and seven and *Pussy Hats*). I learned to write *écriture féminine* from a deep, close reading of Cixous's oeuvre and specifically her text *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993) which gifts us three schools to study in; psychoanalyst Marion Milner's (2011) creative methods for accessing our unconscious thoughts along with practical guidance from qualitative, feminist, embodied researcher Tami Spry and in particular her book *Body, Paper, Stage* (2011) (see Pool three). I experimented with writing my *écriture féminine* on the pulsions, emergently using my body, after Cixous, as a cipher. It's work always assaying, in movement, being and becoming (about which I'll have more to say soon).

⁶ (Cixous, in Catherine MacGillivray, in Cixous, 1994d: vii). MacGillivray adds a dash between the chiasm to 'indicate a back-and-forth-movement between the two poles' each feeding the other.

⁷ The title is abbreviated to *Pussy Hats* in the rest of my thesis.

⁸ Des femmes is critical to Cixous's involvement in the French feminist movement in the 1970s and 1980s (see Pool two for explication).



Theoretical contributions

Some of the ways I try to innovate with respect to OS theory and more broadly in the way we work as feminist researchers is by:

- Queering the tradition of working with one philosophical master. Although I engage deeply with Cixous, I engage with a raucous knapsack of other feminist theorists (see Pool one for examples and Pools five and six). My theoretical interpretive lenses after Cixous are multiplicitous. Pool five gives an example of interpretative multiplicity in the section *Some (thesis one) traces of deconstructions of Take Two using multiple theoretical feminist lenses*.
- Following Jacques Derrida, I queer working with a philosopher as an abstraction of their ideas. I seek to show Cixous's life and times impacting on her evolving thinking about subjectivities (see pages 107–113). I endeavour to extend Derrida by showing the interdiscursivity and shared conceptual development of a vibrant group of philosophers and academics (men and women) living and working in Paris post 1968 (see Pool two). Following Cixous I seek to show that it is possible to move fluidly across ontologies of being and becoming (see pages 152–153 for an example of this).
- Theoretically, applying the philosophical ideas and embodied writing practices of Cixous to give women (including myself) and Woman voice in organizations and the OS Academy is, I believe, an original move. At every turn I seek to disrupt the phallogocentric tradition of representation in organization studies with the *féminine*. My whole thesis reflects this essay. I follow in the footsteps of my heroines (see section *My heroines: Women and writing the féminine* in the OS Academy in Pool three) and other feminists who have sought to make knowledge differently although I make my own footsteps with my moves to autotheory, performative auto/ethnography, social theatre, and in putting into practice original theorizing of OS affective ethnography (Silvia Gherardi, 2018).
- Cixous's work has been largely overlooked in the OS Academy with a few notable exceptions (Beavan, 2019; Christine Cooper, 1992; David Farmer, 2001; Mary Philips et al., 2014; Sheena Vachhani, 2019). My study can be



considered original to the extent that I engage with her thinking *and* embodied writing practices, working *with* and *through* my female practitioner and researcher body, my conscious and unconscious, singular and féminine collective. I use my body as a cipher and this is foregrounded in *Pussy Hats*. I move beyond intellectual seeking to write and perform *écriture féminine* with my body. Cixous went to stage as a playwright and I extend her by taking my body to stage as an OS auto/ethnographic playwright and solo performer. I also believe this is a contribution to QI following Denzin's call to social theatre and an extension of feminist theatre studies (Sue-Ellen Case, 2014; Jill Dolan, 2005).

- With the ambition to follow and extend Cixous' work, I strive to introject theories into my body; working them in a multi-sensory way, working with Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) (re)conceptualization of Lacan's Möbius strip. After Cixous, I use my body as a woman-text. My paper *(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous* (2019) illustrates the Möbius strip on the pages of its text. I perform this introjection in *Pussy Hats* working some of Ahmed's concepts of SNAP and a feminist refusal (2018) and Clare Hemmings's (2012) conceptualization of affective feminist solidarity through my body and attempt to arrive at a sensate understanding of these abstract concepts. I also attempt to flow these intense affects from my body to co-join with the audience's and reader's bodies, following Spry's call for a flesh-to-flesh feeling scholarship that seeps into our skin, melts our bones, moves in our blood, leaves our borders bleeding (Spry, 2011). I believe this move to embodied–intersubjective–affective–knowledge–making is an original move in OS; and follows Spry in QI. I also am following calls for feminist theatre as a blend of activism and theoretical practice (Cixous, 1984; Case, 1990, 2014; Dolan, 2005) in which the stage can expose, dismantle and attempt to remove gender oppression and represent a female subject(s) who is liberated from the repressions of her and our shared past as Woman, heralding a new age for women and all othered.
- I seek to embody in my *Pussy Hats* performance Hemmings's conceptualization of affective feminist solidarity. My feminist self-reflexivity is evoked by powerful affects stimulated by the Harvey Weinstein story (frustration, anger, rage at the sexism and bodily violence I and other women,



and others othered have suffered). Repressed memories fly out of my conscious and unconscious as I write daily in the week that follows the breaking story. I'm filled with vivid affects which cause a dissonance between who I/women are in the world and who we might be and provoke my desire, and perhaps (this is an experiment in *Pussy Hats*) other's desire to transform the world, even if this is a quest against the odds. Whether *Pussy Hats* evokes a feminist solidarity that has the potentiality to overcome identity differences and perhaps provoke a bigger disruptive movement is left unanswered in my thesis; the work is still critically performing (see pages 181–183 for a discussion on this point). In *Pussy Hats* I also work with Hemmings's definition of affective feminist solidarity, extended by Vachhani and Pullen's (2018), as a moment when my ethico-politics surfaces in a political fusion of my and other's lived experiences and our empathy towards each other for the sexual violence our bodies have suffered. This essay to embody and work with affective feminist solidarity real-time on stage is a contribution to feminist studies, to feminist studies in OS and QI and to feminist theatre studies.

- Working with Cixous and my lived experiences, I try to disrupt sexual binaries and human subjectivities showing them to be fluid, bi-sexual, conscious and unconscious, individual and collective. The poem on page 86 and the collection of poems on pages 199–207 offer some representations of this essay.
- Following Cixous, I seek to innovate by creating fluidity between ontologies of being and ontologies of becoming, drawing at times on the innovative posthuman theories of Karen Barad and Gilles Deleuze assemblages, for example, as well as Cixous's being ontology; her kingdom of the instant. The writing extract *A run to the beach, finding planes to fly* on pages 152–154, is illustrative as are the reflections on my *Pussy Hats* performances on pages 172–180. This is a contribution to post-human theorizing of organizations and to ontologies in OS.
- Seeking always to queer what knowledge is, I suggest that it is not made by myself, the researcher, but rather occurs between us intersubjectively giving us glimpses of the way that knowledge may be made in third spaces (Homi



Bhabha, 2009; Cixous, 2009c) between us (see the section in Pool three on critical performativity on pages 181–183 for further explication). Knowledge as I have said above that is affective, flesh–to–flesh, fluid and sometimes springs from our unconscious.

Methodological (or style) contributions

I hesitate to use the word methodological because I'm with the post–humanists, Patti Lather and Elizabeth St. Pierre, and John Law and Gherardi in OS, in troubling and speculating with what comes 'after method'; and it's messy. Gherardi adopts, as an alternative to methodology, the term 'research style' (2018: 13). Some 'style' explorations and experiments in my thesis that might be viewed as innovatory in the field of OS are:

- Introducing to OS a more sociological approach to writing and poetics as methods of *inquiry*, after Laurel Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) not just as aesthetic ways to represent data but to discover *meanings*. I also build on Monika Kostera's (1997) use of poetry as representation in OS. I write, using my ordinary, daily affects, which are varied, surge and dampen down, are always in motion and relational (Kathleen Stewart, 2007). My writing extracts throughout the thesis are examples of this.
- Following Josie Arnold (2015) I trouble tradition methods of representation with poetics as *emplyrics*, and use *écriture féminine* throughout my thesis including my theoretical, methodological and empirical writings.
- I borrow *critical performance autoethnography* (Denzin, 2014; Spry, 2011, 2016) as an embodied way to make knowledge flesh-to-flesh to try to evoke critical and ethical responses in readers/audiences. In *Pussy Hats* for example I am working feminist theory and personal memories through my body in an intertwined way to expose sexual harassment in organizations seeking to evoke audience affectual and ethical responses and perhaps cuing activism. It was my second auto/ethnographic performance. The first, *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston*, (which morphed into the written article '(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous' (Beavan, 2019), may also be viewed on video in the Research Repository. These feminist



performances are a contribution to OS and QI and possibly feminist theatre studies. They demonstrate the potentiality for an intensity of affects to travel, circulate intersubjectivity between bodies, move across time and place, evoking the memories of our lived experiences as women (and others othered), including experiences that are out of, and being brought into, our conscious awareness.

- Gherardi has recently (2018) articulated a concept of *affective ethnography* for OS and my work contributes to this pioneering field she has identified. She names three pillars which are represented in my thesis: the first is embodied knowing, with the body as always more than one with ‘dynamic inter–actions between the between the human and more–than–human forces in the fieldwork, and affective resonance, affective contagion, and affective attunement’ (14). I believe this way of embodied knowing, relational affective practices characterise *Pussy Hats*. Her second pillar is ‘placeness as flow’ and the ‘process of co-construction of situated feelings’ (18). This is particularly apparent in my article ‘(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous’ (Beavan, 2019) and the video version *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston*, in the scene in my hotel room, and forms part of my live auto/ethnographic performances. Gherardi’s third pillar is the performativity of the writing as a ‘material–semiotic–affective staging of events and/or provocations’ that ‘provoke us, interrupt us’ exceed our current understanding with vulnerable writing and performance, offering us potentially new understandings (14). This is my essay with both my performative auto/ethnographies and many of my writing extracts in this thesis and I believe they make an original contribution to this new field in OS. My writing extracts in Pool four as well as *Pussy Hats* are places to look if you are interested in affective, feminist auto/ethnography as well as my article ‘(Re)Writing women: Unshaming shame with Cixous’.
- Following Cixous (1984) I go to public stage (in theatre and at conferences) as a way for Woman to escape subjugation. Going to stage as OS research in OS is an innovation and following Cixous, I strive to remake my stage/scenes as movement, and as a place where Woman becomes Whole. You can watch this in the final scene of Fragment 12 of *Pussy Hats* in which I am Woman arriving in the world. I also believe this is a contribution to



feminist QI, feminism and feminist theatre studies following the work of Case (1990, 2014) and Dolan (2005).

- I have sought to innovate by introducing a bricolage of feminist performative auto/ethnography, autotheory, feminist–poststructural–writing–and–reflexivity to give women and Woman voice in organizations. Pools three and four give good examples of such bricolages. *Pussy Hats* is a bricolage (Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 2000) and this thesis in its entirety is a bricolage. Indeed bricolages of various types – interpretive, narrative, theoretical, political, methodological – (see *Letter to my readers* on pages 51–52; and Denzin and Lincoln: 4–6 for further explication on bricolages in QI) – may be found in all of my writing pools.
- In the course of my doctoral journey I became intrigued by debates on post-qualitative inquiry and post-human inquiry listening in to fervid conversations in the literature between Lather and St. Pierre (2013) and Lather (2001); St. Pierre (2011, 2017) and St. Pierre with Wanda Pillow (2002); and with Alecia Jackson (2014); (and others). I began messing around (consciously and unconsciously) with the post-human theorizing of Barad (2007) and with knowing that is fluid, moves between animate and inanimate, the knowing and unknowing, may be beyond our understanding. A trace of a discarded chapter, *Lost Writing Woman: Forty Days and Forty Nights in a Poststructural Feminist Ger*, exploring this body of literature, remains in my thesis and discusses and attempts to show the possibilities of capturing research through a post-human lens (see pages 152–154). While performing *Pussy Hats* I felt keenly I was in an in-traction between the animate and inanimate (see pages 172–180) and in an assemblage. I believe my work contributes to this conversation; troubling conventional notions of data, findings and truth; who is the subject, what is a body, asks whose bodies, experiences the in-traction between human and animal and human and inanimate; with the scene of the inquiry and myself always in fluidity as I write and perform. I'm part of the movement to find a new destabilised centre in QI (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, 2011) and by extension OS.
- I experiment in my thesis with writing processually (see Jenny Helin, Tor Hern, Daniel Hjorth and Robin Holt, 2014 and Barbara Simpson, Nancy



Harding and Viviane Sergi, 2017) drawing on Cixous's concept of the kingdom of the instant as a way to try and capture the fluidity and movement of organizations that I experience as a practitioner and as an embedded researcher. I hope such writing is able to reach across the abyss that separates academics from organizational practitioners (see page 245). I believe my work adds to this emergent field in OS, contributing to a Special Interest Group (SIG) at the European Group of Organizational Studies (EGOS) on doing process research.⁹

Empirical contributions

Some of the ways my study may contribute empirically to OS studies of women in finance are:

- My empirical research is an original auto/ethnographic study of the hypermasculine worlds of global banking by an embedded researcher working as a senior female executive. I also believe it is an original study as a researcher trying to escape PhD masculine norms. In both worlds I focus on strategies to allow in otherness. In Pool five the section *A flash auto/ethnographic tale of a micro resistance against 24/7 working that rapidly went meso* is representative of this work on both dimensions.
- My empirical research focuses on taboo and often silent topics in gender research; including suicide, isolation, abortion, miscarriage, cancer and sexual harassment. The poems on pages 86 and 199–207 explore many of these themes. *Pussy Hats* explores (our repressed) sexual harassment in the workplace, in women's lives and in my own life in some detail.
- My empirical research is focused on women in global banking. A pioneering study of women in finance was Linda McDowell's (1997) study focussing on gender relations in the City of London. Two studies of traders focussing on the experiences of women traders (Louise Roth, 2006; Caitlin Zaloom, 2006) followed and one in depth study of the first generation of women on Wall Street (Melissa Fisher, 2012). Barbara Czarniawska wrote two insightful studies of on women in financial services, are based on portrayals of women

⁹ See https://www.egosnet.org/swgs/current_swgs/SWG_10.



bankers in popular culture and fiction (2005, 2008). More recently Louise Nash (2016) researched how the City of London is imagined, constructed and experienced in and through gender performativity. My empirical work, (see Pool five) I suggest, adds to this body of work and in addition offers a unique contribution using the vulnerable first-person voice of a female senior executive insider who worked in global banking for more than two decades.

- My empirical work also extends political science researchers Sara Motta and Tiina Seppälä's (2016) conceptualization of feminized resistances into OS and explores corporeal ethics and the politics of resistance in organizations (Pullen and Carl Rhodes, 2014, 2015b). See Pool five *A flash auto/ethnographic tale of a micro resistance against 24/7 working that rapidly went meso* and my article '(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous.
- My practitioner and researcher experiences are not of one place and space. My lived experiences reflected in my empirical work are global. These are possible grounds for claiming a contribution. My poem *Fearless Girl*, for example, was based on experiences in Hong Kong (see page 200–202), and *(Un)Burying in New York* (see page 202–204). *Coxless pair* (see page 205–207) was written in London.

Practitioner contributions

My long-term experiences are as a female manager/leader who has worked at very senior executive levels in organizations. These experiences are laid down in my body and memory bank and inform my work at all levels consciously and unconsciously.

- One of my key contributions perhaps is to give voice to the affectual and embodied lived inner world and outer world experiences of a female executive. I try to do this fluidly, by writing processually (Helin et al., 2014; Simpson, Harding and Sergi, 2017). I do this vulnerably exploring emotions such as shame as in '(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous', and in Fragment five of *Pussy Hats* where I lose my empathy for my female colleague and my feminist reason. I am particularly interested in the themes



of shame and its close relation abjection, which I believe executive women, and probably many other women and others othered, experience often and deeply. At other times in my thesis I write about more positive affects such as pride, particularly in regard to the *Take Two* initiative (see Pool five).

- Another of my contributions is to describe my work as an organizational change agent acting as a tempered radical (Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully, 2008) and the difficulties encountered when caught up in power, complex hierarchy and gendered power relations (see '(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous' and Pool five and the *Take Two* experiment). I took and applied theoretical concepts such as embodied corporeal ethics and applied them in my day-to-day change work with project teams and embodied them on stage before hundreds of employees globally. I was deeply moved when I left my role at the end of 2017 by several senior women telling me I had not only changed the organization, I had changed their lives. Whilst small in the scheme of things it gives me hope for us in the OS Academy that if more of us are able to do this work as practitioner-researchers we can influence organizations for the better more broadly.
- I also reveal some of the tensions in working as both a practitioner, as a senior executive in global banking and as a scholar undertaking primary research. My role as an embedded researcher was disquieting to a number of my colleagues and superiors. Academia is perceived as remote to organizations, disengaged from daily realities and potentially critical of management. At times I also felt othered in the OS Academy where colleagues were suspicious of my role as a senior organizational leader/manager (see Pool seven and page 239). It's a heightened tension because I became on my journey a critical management OS researcher. An aim of my ongoing project, and with my thesis, is to help change these binary perceptions. We need critical theoretical perspectives and insights to help drive grass-roots change in organizations in ways that can be accessed and heard by practitioners. I also, at times, struggled with constraints imposed on me to write the masculine as a PhD student, the advice to make *legitimate* (masculine) knowledge, and write an *examinable* thesis. As you will discover (see Pool three and Pool seven) I resisted these constraints. From many perspectives I am therefore likely to be seen as disloyal and rebellious. Such



a journey requires courage, companionship, feminist friendship, rescuers, safe havens and solidarity and I am deeply appreciative for all the help and support I received. (see my acknowledgements on page 2). Outlining this journey with vulnerability is a contribution to OS.

I hope both academics, practitioners and my readers, whatever their background, may be provoked into critical reflexivity by my work and into becoming activists, changing the organizations and the worlds we live and work in for the better. In this sense I see myself working in this thesis and my contribution to OS more broadly, as an activist.

Activist contributions

Following Cixous, I frame my work as [t]he *Political is – (and the) Poetical*. I also endeavour to follow specific calls from Ahmed (2014, 2017) and Denzin (2010, 2014, 2017a, 2017b) to activism, activist feminism and feminist theatre and to write and perform my work as a call to arms. Ahmed calls us to raise our arms, and to ‘refuse to support the system that sucks the blood, vitality, and life from the limbs of its workers’ (2017: 86). Denzin asks scholars to offer their performing bodies and experiences, creating public spaces for a ‘merger of praxis, ethnography, rhetoric, and activism...spaces for a focus on the body, trauma, memory, emotions, the tyrannies of language’ (Denzin, 2017a: 44, 45). I write and perform with political intent: to write and right the position of women in the OS Academy, organizations and by extension society at large. I aim to create critical reflexivity and political motivation to act and to change things and create more equitable solutions for women and all those othered by patriarchy.

- ‘[S]ocial theatre performance offers a method of understanding what goes on in a site. Performance becomes a way of intervening, participating in, and collaborating with a moral community, helping, hopefully, to change the world in positive ways’ (James Thompson and Richard Schechner, 2004 in Denzin, 2017b: 15). I follow Victor Turner (1982) in using performance to open up what is normally inaccessible to everyday observation and reasoning. My aim in my thesis is to use my body as a cultural text to inquire, write and present to my audiences, hoping to evoke their personal and embodied reactions. It



is an emancipation of my scholar's body from the shadows. My goal is to make knowledge in the intersubjective spaces created real-time in the theatre, mobilizing social action, creating ethical activist communities which might, hopefully, be able to change the world. It is theatre of pain and hope. 'When it is done well, we can *learn previously unspoken, unknown things about culture and communication* from it' (Bud Goodall, 1998 in Spry, 2001: 714, his emphasis). My *Pussy Hats* performance on May 11th 2018 was to a non-academic audience and aimed to evoke the audience's critical reflexivity and hopefully motivation to change the silence, repression and condoning of sexual harassment in organizations and society.

- I leverage Alessia Contu's (2018) idea of intellectual activism, although my definition of activism is also visceral and embodied. I strengthened my arms in the gym for my call to feminist arms in Fragment 12 of *Pussy Hats*. I connected with the breaking story of Harvey Weinstein in deeper ways than I can articulate, believing my feelings and thoughts to be connected, after Cixous, to the collective *féminine* unconscious. One of my activist contributions in OS is I believe to connect with topical matters especially feminist ones that engage with others outside the OS Academy. This may also be a contribution to feminist QI and feminist theatre studies.
- My *Pussy Hats* performance is an attempt to move from individualizing experiences of sexism and sexual harassment and into collective resistance (Vachhani and Pullen, 2018) and become at least a small part of a resurgent collective feminism (Susan Watkins, 2018). I perform my role as researcher as a feminist activist attempting to bridge the yawning gap between academia and practitioner worlds.

Underpinning literature: A précis

In my thesis I connect and work with the following literature (among others). I have related this literature to the relevant parts of my thesis to ease reader navigation. Many authors and their work are cross referenced. I have italicised themes for ease of locating literature and research which interests you and where you might find it referenced or implicitly drawn on in the body of my text.



Aesthetics and organizational research

I begin with aesthetics and organizations as arguably my project of (Re)writing women in organizations and this thesis is holistically an aesthetic one, problematizing knowledge made by only analytic, rational means with the creative and sensual.

- *Aesthetic theorizing and representation* of organizations and *aesthetic organizational* research. Seminal work by Antonio Strati, for example (1992, 1999, 2000,); see also the work of Steve Linstead and Höpfl (2000); Philip Hancock and Melissa Tyler (2000) and Sarah Pink's trailblazing work on sensory ethnography (2015).
- *Visual aesthetics* including the pioneering work of Samantha Warren (2008); Harriet Shortt and Warren (2012); and *auditory aesthetics* by Shortt (2013), are important in my text and in my *Pussy Hats* performance both on stage and in the accompanying PowerPoint with its' embedded music and voices.

Feminist (mostly poststructural) literature

- The abundant, multi genre writings of *Cixous*. This includes the small handful of studies utilising her ideas in the OS Academy (see above). My in-depth immersion to her work, in addition to immersive reading in her texts first hand came from other disciplines in the Academy including: Cixous's translators, particularly Beverley Bie Brahic, Sarah Cornell, Peggy Kamuf, Juliet Flower MacCannell, Eric Prenowitz, and Betsy Wang and Cixousian scholars particularly Abigail Bray (2004), Adermatt Conley (1991); Drucilla Cornell (1999), Susanne Gannon (2006), Nicole Ward Jouve (1991); Susan Sellers (1991, 1994, 1996) and Morag Shiach (1991). Derrida is also an authority on Cixous's work (as Cixous is on Derrida) and this is referenced in my thesis (though in-depth work on this is a future project on my wish list).
- *Feminist Psychoanalytic/psychosocial theorizing* of organizations including inter alia the work of Contu (2008), Michaela Driver, (2005, 2009a, 2009b) and with Campbell Jones (2010); Marianna Fotaki (2009, 2011, 2013, 2014), Harding (2003, 2007, 2013) and together (2018) and with Jackie Ford (2013); Fotaki, Kate Kenny and Vachhani (2017); Höpfl (2000, 2003, 2007, 2011); and with Kostera (2003); Kenny (2008, 2012, 2016) and with Fotaki (2015);



Phillips, Pullen and Rhodes (2014); Phillips and Ann Rippin (2010); Rippin (2006, 2009, 2013, 2015); Vachhani (2012, 2015, 2019). In Pool two I cover such framing covers this in relation to Cixous, Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan and draw on other feminist scholars who work with psychoanalytic/psychosocial framing, notably Grosz (1989, 1990, 1994). My *Pussy Hats* performance is an attempt to show a feminist psychoanalytical frame in movement. Pool four reveals some of my personal psychic wounds and those of women in organizations. I believe this framing goes to the heart of patriarchy and helps us understand its viscid and repugnant claims over us and why we have, at best, only made glacial gains in gender equality over the last fifty years (see Pools one and two).

- *French feminism post 1968* including work by Jane Gallop (1982); Grosz (1989, 1990, 1994); Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtrivon (1980); Toril Moi (1992, 2002); Keith Reader (1987); Sellers (1991, 1996); Domna Stanton (1990, 1986). There is contention in this literature about the practicality of the French poststructural feminist thinking including Cixous (see Pool two) which some American feminist scholars perceived as utopian and over intellectualised; a viewpoint with which I do not agree (see Pool two for more detail).
- *Feminist theorizing of organizations and on gendered organizations* including the seminal works by Marta Calás and Linda Smirchich (1996, 2006, 2018) and Joan Acker (1989, 1990, 1992). The work on *feminist scholarship and gendered research* including work by Mary Margaret Fonow and Judith Cook (1991); Liz Stanley and Sue Wise (1983, 1987, 1990, 1993, 2000); Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) and research on gender in organizations for example: Fotaki and Harding (2017); Höpfl (2000, 2007); Emma Jeanes, David Knights and Patricia Yancey Martin (2011); Elisabeth Kelan (2009, 2010); Albert Mills and Peta Tancred (1992); Pullen (2006); Robyn Thomas and Annette Davies (2005). See Pools four and five for biographical and empirical work which reflects gendered perspectives.
- Application of the *feminist theorizing of Joan Acker* including studies inter-alia by: Robin Ely, Deborah Kolb, Meyerson, Rippin and Scully (2000). See Pool five for empirical work that relates to this body of literature.



- I add to voices that have called out the *dangers of feminism as white feminism/feminism of the Global North*: Ahmed (2017); Gloria Anzadúa, 1990; Patricia Hill Collins (2008, 2009) and with Silma Birge (2016); bell hooks (182, 1991, 2000a, 2000b); Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003); Celia Roberts with Raewyn Connell (2016); and Gayatri Spivak and Grosz, (1990) for example, and worse still have appropriated black feminist concepts without reference to the original authors. I argue for *feminism as intersectional* (see pages 67 and 103–105) and there is a racist episode in Fragment two of *Pussy Hats*.
- *Feminist praxis* and closing the gap between feminist theory and practice. This includes the seminal works of bell hooks (1991, 2000b); Yancey Martin (2003); Stanley and Wise (1987, 1990) and Stanley (2013); Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2007) and on transfeminism and praxis by Richa Nagar (2002) and with Amanda Lock Swarr (2010). See Pools four and five for empirical examples and Pool seven for theorizing on this point.
- *Féminine subjectivities* including by theorists: Ahmed (2014, 2015, 2017); Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004); Cixous – there are too many texts to cite individually (see my references for detail) and this question goes to the heart of her work. One of my favourites Cixous texts is *The Book of Promethea* (1991c) where she explores and dissolves féminine subjectivity into a multiplicity that leaves my head as reader swimming; Grosz (1994); Lacan (1998); Lois McNay (2000); Nelson (2015); and Elspeth Probyn (1993) and specifically in organizations by Knights and Deborah Kerfoot (2004); Beverly Metcalfe and Alison Linstead (2003); Tyler with Laurie Cohen (2010) and Philip Hancock (2007); and Thomas and Davies (2005). My fluid selves are in movement throughout this thesis and shown in '(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous' (Beavan, 2019) and *Pussy Hats*.
- *Gendered organizations and sexual harassment*
In the course of my doctoral journey I did not explore in detail the literature on sexual harassment in organizations. The topic and my repressed memories emerged as I wrote *Pussy Hats* and analysing my text and performance in the context of this literature is a future project. I would refer readers to earlier work for example: Jo Brewis (1998, 2001) and with Chris



Grey (1994); David Collinson and Margaret Collinson (1989, 1992, 1996); Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin (1987); Celia Kitzinger and Alison Thomas (1995); Fiona Wilson and Paul Thompson (2001); and Wise and Stanley (1987). These articles explore sexual harassment as an exercise in power, its invisibility in the workplace and attempts by management to protect the perpetrator and blame the victim. Three decades and more later *Pussy Hats* reveals little has changed (Fragment three and the tale of Upload's kink room is one example of the intertwining of power and sexual abuse by two young male CEO's).

- Work outlining how to *write/right feminism* including the work of: Ahmed (2017); Rosi Braidotti (2005, 2010); Cixous, (especially her classic *The Laugh of the Medusa*, 1976b); Sara Farris and Catherine Rottenberg (2017); Silvia Federici (2004); Fotaki and Harding (2018); Hemmings (2012); McNay (2000); Pullen (2018); Lynne Segal (2013, 2018); Sylvia Walby (2011) and Watkins (2018). I work with Cixous's ideas throughout my thesis that as women we have to write our way out of our conscious and especially unconscious repressions in order to find our rightful voice and this idea is central to *Pussy Hats*.
- Work relating to *feminist theories of embodiment and embodied ethics*, including the work by: Grosz (1994); Diprose (2002, 2009); Denzin (2014); Iris Marion Young (2005); and specifically, in OS by Pullen and Rhodes (2014, 2015b); Torkild Thanem and Knights (2012). See Pool five for empirical examples and Pool six for a manifesta embodying these ideas.
- Work on the *material and embodied turn* in feminism including the work of: Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008); Barad (2003, 2007); Grosz (1994); Donna Haraway (1991); and Iris Marion Young (2005); and calls for application of material feminisms in OS by Acker (1990, 1992); Calás and Smirchich (1996, 2006); Fotaki, Metcalfe and Harding (2014); Knights (2015); Thanem and Knights (2012); and application by Pullen (2018). My turn to performative auto/ethnography is a conscious turn to the body and an essay to work theoretical concepts through my body.



- *Feminist activism*

I respond in my thesis to calls for feminist activism and to take scholarship out into the world to drive change: Ahmed, (2017), Denzin (2010, 2014); Rebecca Solnit (2016, 2017); Nadya Tolokonnikova, (2018). I am also just encountering the work of Indian scholar, creative writer and activist Richa Nagar which resonates with my project and thesis. Nagar calls for situated feminist solidarities, and political engaged, ethical research and praxis (see references above under *feminist praxis*) researching epistemic violence to women with radical vulnerability (2014).¹⁰ I see potentiality for me to analyse *Pussy Hats* drawing on her concepts of situated feminist solidarities and radical vulnerability.

Feminist Resistance

- *Theories of reinscription* utilised by feminists including work by philosophers Butler (1990, 1993); Cixous (1976b, 1981, 1984 and with Clément 1986); Michel Foucault (1988) and work in OS including work by Pullen (2006), Thomas and Davis (2005) among others. My thesis journey reflects my attempts to reinscribe myself.
- *Feminist/feminized resistances* including studies by Motta and Seppälä, and in OS by Mary Runté and Mills (2004); Thomas and Davies (2005) and Vachhani and Pullen (2018) among others. At a meta level my whole thesis might be viewed as a feminist resistance. Pool five, particularly the flash auto/ethnographic tale (pages 206–210) is an empirical example of a resistance arguably built on feminist ethics.
- *Sexism in the Academy* strategies to *overcome sexism* including work by Ahmed (2015, 2017), Gail Crimmins (2019); Richardson (1997); Stanley (1995); and in the OS Academy by Fotaki (2013); Knights and Caroline

¹⁰ Nagar's multi-lingual and multi-genre research and teaching blends scholarship, creative writing, political theatre, and community activism to build alliances with people's struggles and to engage questions of ethics, responsibility, and justice in and through knowledge making. Nagar is also involved in a project to co-build a multi-sited community theatre project (conducted mostly in Hindi and Urdu) that brings together amateurs and professional actors to reflect on social issues through literary texts and through their own stories. See <http://richa.nagar.umn.edu/> and <http://jananatyachintan.blogspot.com/> for more detail. *Pussy Hats*, although different in kind, might be viewed as a feminist community theatre project.



Clarke (2014); and Marielle van den Brink and Yvonne Benschop (2012a, 2012b), Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem (2017) among others. My thesis journey is an attempt at a strategy to overcome sexism and Pools two and seven give accounts.

- *Work/life balance* literature including the work of: Mary Blair-Loy (2003); Arlie Hochschild (2012a, 2012b) and together (2015) and inter-alia: Lori Baily, Jennifer Berdahl, Joyce Fletcher, Richenda Gambles, Suzan Lewis, Bettye Pruitt, Rhona Rapoport, Joseph Vandello and Joan C Williams (2002, 2007, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2016) among others. This literature underpins the afflictions depicted in the world of global banking (see Pool four) and the tale of resistance in Pool five.
- The history and use of *manifestos* as feminist political tools including the work of: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie; (2017) Ahmed (2017); Anzaldúa (1990); Cixous (1976b); Haraway (1991); Audre Lorde (2017a, 2017b, 2017c); Mina Loy (2015); Janet Lyon (1991); Thomas McGrath (1960); Penny Weiss; (2018) and Galia Yanoshevsky (2009) among others. Both my opening thesis abstract and the *Manifesta of the crazy women's irregular friendship and resistance society* (page 228) connect to this literature.

Embodiment and affect

My whole thesis is an attempt to work with Cixous's embodied *écriture féminine*. In addition, my work draws on:

- Work relating to the *affectual turn* including the work of: Ahmed (2015, 2017); Lorde (2017b); Probyn's work on shame (2005) and via her to Brian Massumi's work on affect (2002) and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's work on shame (1995). Pioneering work in OS on the affectual turn including the work of Fotaki, Kenny and Vachhani (2017); Aris Komporozos-Athanasίου and Fotaki (2015); Gherardi (2018); Kenny (2012) and Kenny, Sara Muhr and Lena Olaison (2011); Pullen and Rhodes (2015a) and Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem (2017); and Vachhani (2013) among others. *(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous* explicitly deals with shame and shame connects to many fragments of *Pussy Hats*. Both performative auto/ethnographies and many of the writing extracts in the thesis may be



seen as part of the affectual turn in OS and specifically an addition to the pioneering field of affectual OS ethnography (Gherardi, 2018).

- Work on *affective feminist solidarity* including Hemmings (2012) and Pullen and Vachhani (2018). In *Pussy Hats* I consciously (and probably unconsciously) sought to work this theory through my body and text and assayed to create affective feminist solidarity in the theatre/performance space.
- *Theories of intersubjectivity* including Trinh Minh-Ha (1991) and feminist psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin (1988). I turn to performative auto/ethnography as a methodology that facilitates the making of knowledge intersubjectively. Pool three gives an account of this journey and my performative auto/ethnographies are an attempt to demonstrate making knowledge flesh-to-flesh. *The Letter to my readers* which follows this preface (see pages 41–57) is intended to open up intersubjectivity with my readers as they begin to engage with my text.
- *Embodied methodologies* and *embodied organizational research* including seminal work by Laura Ellingson on use of the body and embodied, partial and multiple understandings as crystallization (1998, 2006, 2009, 2017); Emily Keightley and Michael Pickering on memory (2012, 2017); Patricia Leavy on arts-based methods including the theatre (2015); Della Pollock on performing women's bodies and birthing bodies (1999); and in OS Thanem and Knights (2012); and Shortt and Warren on visual methodologies (2012) and Shortt on auditory methodologies (2013) among others. My performative auto/ethnographies are created using embodied methodologies including memory. This is an avenue I will develop in future publications. *Pussy Hats* lends itself to an analysis of embodied research working with the concept of memory.
- *Feminist embodied ethics*. I principally draw on Cixous; it's at the heart of her work and there are many expositions I could draw reader's to in her work. Two of my favourites or her expositions are the last page of *The Author in Truth* (1991a: 180-181) and *Clarice Lispector: The Approach* (1991a: 59) where she outlines how we go by the way of the body and at the right distance. I also draw on Diprose's (2002, 2009) concept of corporeal



generosity and Denzin's communitarian feminist ethics (2014). In OS I cite the work of Philips, Pullen and Rhodes (2014) drawing on Cixous; Pullen and Rhodes (2014, 2015b) working with Diprose; Rhodes and Pullen (2018); and Thanem and Louise Wallenberg's (2015) reading of Baruch Spinoza for an affective embodied ethics for organizational life. See Pool five for empirical material regarding a change project in a global bank that reflected feminist embodied ethics. Feminist embodied ethics are also intrinsic to *The manifesta of the crazy women's irregular friendship and resistance society: irregular members welcome* (see page 229).

Writing, performance and feminist reflexivity

- *Auto/ethnography* and particularly *critical performative auto/ethnography* and the use of *social theatre* including work by: Denzin (2014, 2017a, 2017b); Stacey Holman-Jones (2005, 2016, 2017a, 2017b); Ron Pelias (2004), and (above all) the feminist, embodied, performative autoethnographic work of Spry (e.g. 2001, 2011b, 2013, 2016). My work also builds on collaborative autoethnography, Heewon Chang, Faith Ngunjiri, Kathy-Ann C Hernandez (2013) and organization autoethnography for example work by: Clair Doloriert and Sally Sambrook (2012); Ken Parry and Maree Boyle (2009); Steve Kempster and James Stewart (2010); Mark Learmonth and Mark Humphreys (2012). In OS Gherardi (2018) has recently introduced the concept of an *affective ethnography* for organization studies grounding it in debates that my work falls into of post-qualitative methodologies, affect at work and in the researcher, embodied ways of knowing, the research place as processual flow and our agency to act. Arguably, my overall thesis is a pioneering affective auto/ethnography in the way that Gherardi theorizes.
- *(Women's feminist) writing as a method of inquiry* including the abundant oeuvre of Cixous; Richardson (e.g. 1997, 2007, 2013) and her work with St-Pierre (2005); *feminist poetry as both inquiry and representation*: Sandra Faulkner (2016); Kostera (1997) and Richardson (1992, 1994). I underpinned with literature on *poetics of women's autobiography* (Sidonie Smith, 1987) and *women's autobiographic writing* Smith and Julia Watson (1998); and *writings on and through the female body*, Katie Conboy, Nadia Medina and



Sarah Stanbury (1997); and Nelson's *poetic autotheory and women's writing* in OS: Höpfl (2011;); and *féminine writing* Pullen and Rhodes (2015a). Pool four contains examples of all of the above.

- *Narrative as inquiry* including the seminal work in QI by Art Bochner (1997, 2014) and with Carolyn Ellis (2003); Goodhall (2008); and in OS by David Boje, (1991, 1995); Czarniawska (1998, 2004); Kostera (1997); Rhodes and Andrew Brown (2005); and the gendering of narratives in OS research Rhodes and Pullen (2009) among others. Many of my writing extracts reflect a narrative form. However, I also experiment with breaking the traditional narrative form. *Pussy Hats* is a composition of fragments and *The manifesta of the crazy women's irregular friendship and resistance society: irregular members welcome* (see page 229) deliberately breaks with traditional narrative on the page as does the writing extract *Writing tempests* (see page 249).
- Work relating to *Writing differently* and *writing the féminine* in OS (as resistance). These include calls to *write differently* and to *write the féminine: myself* with Benedikte Borgstrom, Helin and Rhodes (2017); Fotaki and Harding (2013, 2018); Grey and Amanda Sinclair (2006); Sarah Gilmore, Harding, Helin and Pullen (2017); Harding, Helin and Pullen (2017); Höpfl (2011); Pullen and Rhodes (2008); Phillips, Pullen and Rhodes (2014); and essays to write differently: bi-sexual writing (Phillips, Pullen and Rhodes, 2014); biography (Rhodes, 2001); creative academic fiction (Briony Lipton, 2015); cyborg writing (Ajnesh Prasad, 2016); dirty writing (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008); embodied writing (Höpfl, 2007); experimental poetics (Kostera, 1997); ficto-criticism (Rhodes, 2015); meat writing (Janet Sayers, 2016); textiles (Rippin, 2013, 2015); stream of consciousness (myself 2018), and writing processually with Peter Case (2018) for example. The Special Edition in *Gender, Work and Organization on Writing the féminine* edited by Pullen and Rhodes (2015) was extremely influential on my writing and conceptualization of how to write the féminine and the recently published *Management Learning* Special Edition on *Writing Differently* Vol 50(1) edited by Gilmore, Harding, Helin and Pullen (2019) is a new jewellery box of *written differently* articles by other OS researchers, in many different (often féminine)



writing styles. My whole thesis is an essay in writing a thesis differently using féminine discourses.

- *Process research and processual writing* in organizational studies. The emerging use of processual inquiry and processual writing as methodologies for understanding organizations as always in a state of becoming with a constant dynamic fluidity of day-to-day actions (see Helin, Hern, Hjorth and Holt, (2014) for a helpful introduction; and Haridimos Tsoukas and Robert Chia, (2002). This resonates with me as a practitioner and as an embedded observant-participant researcher and I experiment in my thesis with processual writing with Cixous's concept of the instant (see writing extract by myself and Peter Case, page 249)
- *Critical performativity* drawing on the work of John Austin (1962), Butler (1993, 1997, 2010), Michel Callon (2007) and Jean François Lyotard (1979) among others. Application to OS with work inter alia Laure Cabantous, Jean-Pascal Gond, Harding and Learmouth (2015, 2016) including their rebuttal of André Spicer, Mats Alvesson and Dan Kärreman (2016); and their (re)conceptualization of critical performativity as fundamentally political and material. See the discussion at the end of Pool three for a discussion on the political power of critical performativity in my work (pages 181–183).
- *Poststructural critical feminist reflexivity*: primarily Cixous (*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* (1993) provides a good introduction to her practice) and Spry (2016) but also informed by Hemmings (2012), Lather (1991), Probyn (1993), Pillow (2003) and Gayatri Chakrovorty Spivak (1988) among others. This practice underpins my thesis. '(Re)writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous' (Beavan, 2019) is a micro example of poststructural feminist reflexivity used to create a text.

As I commented earlier, the above is not intended to be exhaustive and I welcome other suggestions of literature that connects with my work. I have many opportunities ahead to continue to work with different parts of this literature and material in my thesis.



I hope this preface helps you navigate my text as your research interests and personal passions take you. With that behind us, let's leap forward, if that is your inclination, into encounters with the body of my text.



Southport
Connecticut
USA

August 2018

Dear Readers (and Examiners),

Why I write this letter

My thesis is a feminist book of women's research, women's writing and women's activism. One aim of my project is to help bring alterity into the OS Academy, by researching, writing and performing, with and through, my female body. As scholars, we are required to operate in a masculine libidinal economy where values of scientism, rigour and mastery are a form of masculine control that, in writing, are (rough) traded so as to ease a fear of not knowing, a fear of castration (Phillips et al., 2014). Women's voices, and women's writing in organization studies, are not privileged.¹¹ Women's voices in organizations are silenced. 'Just as there is no place for women in writing, so there is no place in organization' (Höpfl, 2011: 33). I am offering in this thesis an/other discourse(s) for examination in answer to Hélène Cixous's and Clément's original 1975¹² call; a discourse of 'flesh-thought-affect' (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 171) written from, and through, my body. You may feel stunned; 'a meteor' blasts into your scholarly garden.¹³ I offer to you a book of song,

¹¹ See, inter alia, Höpfl, (2000, 2003, 2007, 2011); Pullen (2006, 2017); Pullen and Rhodes (2008, 2015a); Rhodes and Pullen (2009) and with Phillips et al. (2014); Fotaki, (2011, 2013); Fotaki and Harding (2013, 2018); Harding, Ford and Fotaki (2013); Fotaki, Metcalfe and Harding (2014); Harding, Helin and Pullen (2017). I have added my own voice to this recently (2019; Beavan et al., 2017).

¹² *La Jeune Née* was published in French in 1975. I cite in my thesis, the English translation, *The Newly Born Woman*, published in 1986. After deliberation, I have included French references, as well as the English ones, for Cixous's seminal texts in my references. For readers who wish to read other referenced texts in French, see Marguerite Sandré and Eric Prenowitz's, Hélène Cixous, Bibliography, in *Rootprints: Memory and Life Writing* (Cixous and Mireille Calle-Gruber (1997) and Susan Seller's Bibliography of the works of Hélène Cixous, in *Hélène Cixous White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics* (2008a).

¹³ Derrida's comment on his reading of Cixous's first manuscript. Derrida sees her book as an unidentifiable flying object, never knowable; he must overcome his reading resistance to cross over the threshold into an infinity of readings (in Prenowitz, 2006: xviii-xxi).



a book of emergences, organizational and personal experiences noted for the first time; and since those moments have already past, perhaps it is a book of echoes? My book is not a masterful narrative. I grope along, sensorially feeling my way in the dark, and my *féminine*¹⁴ subjectivity leaks out everywhere. I am committed to the transformative potential of an alternate social, subjective and ethical *féminine* libidinal economy; to a belief that beyond portraits of afflictions, there are tales of resistances and inspirational hopes for living differently. My realist self is mindful of Höpfl's advice, that in transgressive circumstances of women's writing, and to avoid correction, which every such transgression invites (Kevin Hart, 1989, in Höpfl, 2011), it is best to 'set out my purpose, intention and desires' (33) – and I will do this here. My letter is also a step in forming an ethical relationship with you. I believe knowledge is made intersubjectively between us, the two of us here on the page, reader and writer. I cannot locate self without locating the other (Trinh T Minh-Ha, 1991). This is a space that interests me, and that I am respectful of. I try to hold you in mind as I write, though this is not always easy. In submitting a thesis for examination, the power lies with the reader-examiners.

Who is the woman sp//eaking here?

I'll begin with a short introduction of who the woman speaking here is. This question, along with the questions of how I am speaking, and why I am speaking, are complex; they thread through my thesis and resist closure. I am a subject in motion, a fish swimming unfettered, plunging depths, in danger of being baited and caught (Cixous, 1991a). What I write here is a beginning, or, perhaps, more a state of being within these pages and a becoming.

I write as a long-term practitioner and senior executive (with expertise and experience in culture change, diversity and inclusion, leadership). I have spent more than thirty-five years working in hypermasculine environments such as brewing, aerospace, management consulting, and investment banking. I come to my PhD

¹⁴ I use the French form *féminine* throughout my thesis, linking it to Cixous's concept of *écriture féminine*. *Féminine* does not represent one gender, which Cixous continually deconstructs in her work in favour of plurality, though she believes women are more likely, to enact it. Cixous's project with *écriture féminine* is to 'sign the body back into semiosis from which it has been exiled' (Pamela Banting, 1992: 228) rupturing traditional dualistic philosophy and non-embodied theories of representation.



studies in middle age. This orientates me towards praxis, to changing organizations for the better. After Ahmed (2017), my focus is on taking theory out of the classroom and in being a feminist at work challenging ‘everyday sexism, including academic sexism’ (14). My aim is to theorize and practice feminism as a political, cultural and organizational struggle, without constraining plurality and difference. I desire to bring feminism home (Ahmed, 2017) and, likewise, I desire to bring ‘organizational studies’ home. Like hooks (1991), I aspire to work where there is no gap between feminist theory and practice.

I write as many women. Although I am aspiring to write consistently in *féminine* discourses, I have worked for many years in male dominated industries and masculine performances are etched into my being. Sometimes, inadvertently, a masculine voice creeps into my text. In my thesis my researcher-self and my practitioner-self jostle with each other along with a cast of other selves – mother, wife, colleague, for example – and a cast of characters from my inner theatre. At different times, different selves come in and out of focus; selves that can also be deconstructed. This creates tensions in my work that I have not erased, as they reflect the complexity and fluidity of the worlds I move in and believe we need to foster. My empirical work is informed by my practitioner career, and particularly by my years in global banking. I am interested in the everyday situations into which our bodies are thrown (Ahmed, 2017). In the course of my studies I have reawakened as a feminist-activist and found an academic home in poststructural feminism. I write in organization studies but steal across disciplinary borders, borrowing methodology and theory from other social science disciplines, particularly the faculties of communication, English and political studies.

I write this as a woman, toward women. When I say ‘woman’, I’m speaking of woman in her inevitable struggle against conventional man; and of a universal woman subject who must bring women to their sense and meaning to history. (Cixous, 1976b: 875–876)¹⁵

¹⁵ The work of Hélène Cixous underpins my thesis. I quote her words often, and sometimes weave her words with mine. To make it easier for readers to identify her text, I present it in the font Calibri Body throughout.



Body essaying

'*In body...*Women are body. More body, hence more writing' (Cixous, 1976b: 886, her italics). I call my writing *body essaying* as it invokes my body in all its leakiness and I do not write over this materiality. I work with my flesh and blood, writing about my body, others' bodies and our material experiences. I write chapter texts, not just field notes, in a variety of literary styles, often embodied and full of human affects. Texts which have subjects, texts rich in metaphor, texts which do not claim an authorial voice over the reader, texts which resist closure, texts which reach out to understand the others in me and others. Texts with women's bodies as floating signifiers. Bodies and words working together to create new language. Bodies which, in our vulnerabilities and resistances, write back (Banting, 1992). Writing in which I move from unknowing to knowing and back to unknowing again and again. Searching for and exploring the 'active moment' (Wing, in Cixous, 1991c: vii). What I know is discovered while writing and thus subject to ongoing renarrativization (Richardson, 2007). It is untidy.

I also perform some of my texts as performative autoethnography (Denzin, 2014; Soyini Madison, 2012; Stacy Holman Jones, 2005, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Spry, 2000, 2001, 2011a, 2011b, 2013, 2016), and video (this format accords with doctoral thesis regulations) of my performance *Harvey's Phallus: Where is my Pussy Hat?* is available in the Research Repository. This is not an appendix. I submit my theatre performance as an integral part of my thesis. I hope to perform some of my embodied work in my viva.¹⁶ 'Stage is woman' where woman is a 'body-presence', where we can be 'the song of women being brought into the world' (Cixous, 1984: 547).

¹⁶ My internal UWE examiner suggested this at my 2017 progress review and noted it in her comments to the Faculty Research Degrees Committee. I performed an embodied piece *Sleepless and Inchoate in Boston: A Performative Auto/ethnography* (Beavan, 2017) at the 33rd Colloquium European Group for Organizational Studies: The Good Organization – Aspirations, Struggles, Interventions. Copenhagen in 2017. I performed extracts from an embodied piece *Harvey's phallus, a week in October, and my vagina is angry: where is my pussy hat? A performative auto/ethnography* at the 14th International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign, May 16–19, 2018 and at Gender Work and Organization (GWO), 10th Biennial International Interdisciplinary Conference, Sydney, Macquarie University, 13–16 June 2018. I performed the full piece at the Wien Experimental Theatre, Fairfield University on 11 May 2018 as a one-woman show. I also performed a second embodied piece at GWO 2018 co-authored with professor and poet Carol Ann Davis, *Forming the Manifesta of the Crazy Women's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society: (Irregular) Members Wanted*. Professor Peter Case and I co-authored a paper to the 34th EGOS Colloquium in Tallinn, Estonia, 5–7 July 2018, titled *it passes by at a gallop, the snail!* And I



Such embodied writing and performances offer a different *modus operandi* to the norm of organization studies where *unvoiced* scientific rationality and rigour are taught and held as the universal standard to conform to. The purpose of research studies is to '*penetrate* through the world of subjective human perceptions and biases to determine what is going on in a given context' (Andrew Wicks and R Edward Freeman, 1998, in Phillips et al., 2014: 317, their emphasis) and to write up, presenting findings and an analysis against theory with conclusions and implications. I contend that I am unable to *penetrate* and provide *objective findings*. I live in fluid, complex contexts, with multiple selves; my researcher and practitioner selves enmeshed. I work with writing and performing as ways to discover knowledge through my sentient body and with others. In my embodied researching and writing I am not seeking to replace this masculine orthodoxy, but to extend it through the *f eminine* libidinal economy, where *woman* seizes her turn to *speak* with women's voices in all their differences and multiplicities (Cixous, 1976b). I write with *jouissance*, offering more of a *modus vivendi*. There are tensions because, although not seeking to replace, but to open up, new spaces, my work can be felt as a challenge to the dominant masculine structure.

I have read studies that adopt Cixous as their theoretical feminist underpinning and yet present their work in the masculine format, with themselves erased.¹⁷ It is, for me, incompatible to draw on Cixous for theoretical framing for empirical work, and then present my work written in the masculine style, according to phallogocentric conventions. 'What is the body for?' Cixous asks us in *Coming to Writing*, '[m]yths end up having our hides. Logos opens its great maw, and swallows us whole' (1991a: 15). In addition, I gaze at facial images of Cixous on the cover of Conley's *H el ene Cixous: Writing the feminine*, (1991) and Sellers's edited collection *H el ene Cixous White Ink: Interviews on Sext, Text and Politics* (2008a), and I picture

later performed this piece. I have been invited by Professor Alessia Contu to perform to, and discuss my embodied methodology with, faculty and students at the College of Management, University of Massachusetts in Boston in 2018. I am seeking additional opportunities to perform before other audiences.

¹⁷ One recent example is by Sarah Lauwo (2016), where the crux of her argument of how to unsilence women's voices in the masculine world of corporate social responsibility is by using Cixous's * criture f eminine*. The article, however, is written and structured in a detached, disembodied and conventional style that has no relationship to Cixous's * criture f eminine* and her repeated cries for subversion of the masculine with *f eminine* writing. At no point is this challenge referred to, in contrast to Phillips et al.'s 2014 article where this struggle is engaged with throughout. I was left with feelings of despair that the 'great maw of logos' (Cixous, 1991a: 15) had indeed swallowed Dr Lauwo whole.



a slice being cut from Cixous's cheek, and pulverized in a Cuisinart, and rolled into uniform meatballs; an incorporation which destroys the possibility of being other.

To write with Cixous and her project is to embrace our own gendered multiplicity as researchers (Pullen, 2006), male, female and the spaces in between and beyond. It requires us to embrace our bi-sexuality¹⁸ – masculinity and femininity exist in each of us. I am committed to a different type of research praxis; working, writing and performing in an 'embodied space where *tension* between pain and pleasure, body and mind, self and other, overcome gender'¹⁹ (Phillips et al., 2014: 325, their emphasis). A place where I am inscribed upon, possessed and changed. A place from which I hope to help other women, and all othered, rewrite ourselves and claim our write/right/ful place in organizations, in the OS Academy and in the world.

To be moved by Cixous, and to write with her, requires me to become an insurgent and challenge the gendered hierarchies in our organization studies research practice. I make a move towards poetic writing,²⁰ slipping and sliding in and out of theory,²¹ and taking my texts to stage.²² It has been an(other) apprenticeship in addition to my scholarly one. Conventional academic masculine writing I constrain to footnotes. I also use footnotes as a glossary. I held onto the glossaries provided by Grosz (1989) and Wing (in Cixous and Clément, 1986) whilst traversing Cixous, and they helped guide my understanding (through secondary sources) of writers such as Lacan and Derrida.

¹⁸ The term bi-sexual is used here with Cixous's meaning, as it is throughout my theses. Cixous distinguishes between common use of the word (i.e., a person of 'two halves', sexually attracted to both men and women), and returns to Freud's concept of original bi-sexuality, the presence in each of us of both sexes, the non-exclusion of difference, the *other* bi-sexuality (see Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 40–41).

¹⁹ Gender, sex and sexuality are contested terms. The term 'gender' here, and throughout my theses, is used in Butler's socially constructed sense, in which gender is performatively constituted through the repeated daily acts that reiterate norms. This opens it up to fluidity, as the daily acts can be changed (Butler, 1993). Cixous does not often use the term gender, but views masculinity and femininity as culturally formed.

²⁰ I have not written creatively since O-level English at age 16. To start to learn the craft of writing I have attended (and continue to attend) poetry and writing classes at the University of Fairfield, and at Westport Writers Workshop. I am grateful to my teachers and my fellow students. I begin a Master of Fine Arts, Creative Writing program at the Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics at Naropa University in September 2018. The school works at the intersection of critical, activist and innovative writing. One of their foci is somatic writing.

²¹ I have practised autotheoretical poetic writing in academic conference papers and chapter abstract submissions.

²² I had not been on stage since age 10 in primary school. I rehearse my autoethnographic pieces at Fairfield Performing Arts Studio.



To write from the *féminine* libidinal economy is for me a values-led commitment to liberate the poetic female voice and open up to bi-sexual multiplicity, creativity and difference and to acceptance of the other based on deep mutual respect. I am not above, or over, the reader claiming knowing; we are in relationship, hopefully making knowledge together intersubjectively.

To write in the *féminine* is to enter into discursivity. An unresolved challenge for me is the Law of Word Count Limits, and in my thesis, it is an unfinished and violent task of labiaplasty:

Cutting

Modification

Correction

Smoothing

Grafting

Crafting

Tightening

Pulling

Perfection

Normalisation

Heteronormative

(Pullen, 2017: 3–4)²³

²³ I have departed from conventional citational formatting to retain the impact of Pullen's textual strategy as it appears on the page.



Tensions and entanglements of (at least) two theses

I veer off in this section of my letter, into a short story about the unexpected and last-minute arrival of an insight that had hovered outside my awareness, and arrives in a flash – an emergence.

Writing extract – 22 July 2018²⁴

I'm writing a section on critical performativity, narrating a vignette. I've recently returned from Sydney²⁵ and I'm in the gym with Jaxon (my trainer, who attended *Pussy Hats* in May) and he's asking how my performance went in Sydney, 'there isn't a day when I don't think about something in *Pussy Hats*' he tells me, 'not one day.' Typing, I suddenly stop and pick up my sheaf of key Cixousian polemics which sit in a plastic folder always near at my right hand. I grab *Aller à la mer* (Cixous, 1984) and turn to the final page, my heart racing

[T]his arrival of Woman into the world...and no other stage/scene but this space with a hundred simultaneous scenes/stages where she moves, several woman, unchecked in this place expanded by her look, her listening. And if this scene/stage is movement, if it extends to where *everything* happens and Woman is Whole, where instead of being acted out, life is lived, woman will be able to go there and feel themselves loving and being loved, listening and being heard. (Cixous, 1984: 548)

Do I symbolise through my metamorphosed body in Fragment 12 of *Pussy Hats*, Woman as Whole? Her arrival in the Symbolic? For a moment I am one with Cixous, sitting on the 'twelfth of October 1978' in the Des femmes publishing collective, or perhaps she is one with me, sitting in my hysteric's attic on the 22 July 2018? In this third body between us I am hearing her voice bringing me

[i]ntimate insights, naïve and knowing, ancient and fresh like the yellow and violet color of freshias rediscovered...this voice was not searching for me, it was writing to no one, to all women...[finally] my heart understands it, and [her] words in all the veins of my life have translated themselves into mad blood, into joy-blood. (Cixous, 1979: 10)

My thesis outline catches fire, my paragraph on embodied feminist ethics flies out through the roof (it will return), my hands are once more typing on the pulsions. A gasp of knowing; I've been walking two different thesis paths in two different psychic geographies and trying to morph them into one. No wonder three weeks ago I was living as Odysseus holed up with Calypso, with no end to my wanderings in sight; I was trying to be both *here* and *there*. Did Margaret my supervisor have an inkling? When we spoke two weeks ago, was an unthought circling at the penumbra of our shared *féminine* unconscious awareness? 'The section on Baker Boot Roots', she said in a rush, 'I just don't know, your voice was somehow different, jarring, you've moved so beyond it.' I reflected, agreed, jettisoned the autobio-sociological texts about my struggles to overcome hypermasculine discourses on 24/7; creating from fragments left over and writing new ones, a reimagined writing pool: *My stigmatas*. But a thistle remains, burring against my right forefinger as I type, until the mysterious instant of merging with Cixous. Jouissance – in a flash I see my thesis anew. There are two

²⁴ I use the font Century Gothic throughout my thesis for my creative writing extracts.

²⁵ Where I attended GWO 2018 and performed four fragments of *Pussy Hats*.



theses jostling and vying for my attention and word space. *Thesis one and thesis two...*

I'll explain. The sociological autobiographic texts, set up my chapter, *Portraits of afflictions* with emplyrics represented by bodily hermeneutic poetry, *We're on an escalator we can't get off*. This poetry is situated in my research setting of global banking. In turn, this chapter positions the next, *Tales of resistances*, which recounts the story of an organizational change project, *Take Two*, a micro resistance against 24/7 working which rapidly became meso. The next chapter, *Hopes for living differently*, was still to be written. This writing, I suddenly comprehended, is *thesis one* – and it reflects my earlier thesis journeying and epistemological focus. It's rewriting women in organizations *out there*. Here I'm taking a more traditional researcher position, albeit one of a participant observer (Moeran, 2009). I am fooling around with writing the *féminine* principally as a mode of representation using poetics and creative writing and using writing as a method of inquiry. I am making knowledge *for you* as the reader. I am working within the masculine libidinal economy (Cixous and Clément, 1986). *Féminine écriture* belonging to *thesis one* you will find in writing extracts in Pools two, three, four and five. The poems in Pool four on pages 167-174 are examples of such work. They have some emotional representational power perhaps and yet offer only a partial escape from the subaltern position (Spivak, 1988).

I have another body of work – *thesis two* – that is more internally focused and theoretical, with a deeper engagement with Cixous (and other theorists, such as Ahmed, Diprose, Probyn and Lacan), reflecting the latter part of my thesis journey. On this still-in-progress journey I am refinding my lost radical feminism, descending into my nether realms. In my auto/ethnographic performance *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston*, I rewrite myself out of abjectness and shame. In *Pussy Hats* I rewrite myself and women out of our sexual subjugations; I performed both pieces at academic conferences in 2017/18. My *Pussy Hats* video is a beating heart of my thesis. *Thesis two* rewrites women in organizations *in here* (psychically and in the Organization Studies Academy), although it results in work to take *out there* through performance and via critical performativity. While not wanting to underplay the knowledge made and praxis potential of *thesis one*, I suddenly understand it as work constrained by the masculine libidinal economy. *Thesis two* ruptures *thesis one's*



epistemological framing, and the hypermasculine order in which the *Take Two* cultural intervention was made, radically subverting with the féminine libidinal economy and the collective féminine unconscious. *Thesis two* aspires to bring Woman into the Symbolic using language and symbolism to rewrite Woman. It aims to create new féminine spaces in the OS Academy and to take research and researchers out of the Academy and into organizations, helping all othered, and organizations, to flourish on multiple levels. *Thesis two* is represented, for example, in my *Pussy Hats* performance, in the *Manifesta of the Crazy Woman's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society: (Irregular Members Wanted)* (page 224) and in *Drafting Tempests* (page 242). It brings hope of escaping the subaltern position. The emergence of *thesis two* and my capacity to hold it in tension with *thesis one* reflects my intellectual and embodied journeying and constant evolution of my project as I gained theoretical insights and learned the crafts of writing écriture féminine and performing feminist social theatre.

Of course, both of my *thesis bodies* are intertwined, but this masculine severing into two, while extremely painful and undesired, brings clarity and helps my required labiaplasty. You will learn of my bereftness at leaving out a potentially original contribution relating to Cixous, Lacan and feminism. I hope to take that work into a journal paper and contribute to Lacanian studies. Reluctantly, I'm significantly cutting much of *thesis one's* empirical work relating to 24/7 working in the hypermasculine worlds of global banking. I am also significantly reducing a deconstruction of my *Take Two* tale of resistance using Cixous's strategy of multiple theoretical lenses. My aim is to rework this material into potential journal articles that make praxis contributions to the topics of work/life balance and gender equality and a theoretical contribution around the value of multiple theoretical lenses. I can (happily) discuss *thesis one* in my viva with you; it was part of my thesis body before the labiaplasty; it was part of the body of my work when I was constrained by patriarchy and had still to escape the masculine reckoning.

There are tensions and entanglements between my two theses; they are both part of me. I'll provide signposting as I am able, and I hope to reveal some of the ways *thesis one* laid the ground for *thesis two*. Nevertheless, the two jostle and I fear you'll have to make your own journey. And, sorry to complicate with the uncontained féminine again, but there are also likely more than two theses vying for attention. I'll leave that thought on this page for now...



Notes on contents

My theses are laid out as a number of chapters (of varying length) – more than you might expect. I invite you to consider them as pools of writing water, into which you can dip or plunge as you desire. This fluid structure unfolded as I wrote and can be read in *any* order of your choosing. Readers to date have had different preferences. If you want theory, plunge into Pool two; methodology, Pool three; emplyrics, Pools five and six. Ariadne threads of (reborn) féminine subjectivities and the possibilities of (re)writing woman in organizations and society can also help you move forward or retrace your journeying. I'll also provide some signposts at the start of each pool. My theses reflect my own emergings, and collapsings, and how rewriting Woman enables me to rewrite myself generatively and give hope to others othered. This journeying takes the form of disjunctive and atemporal narratives. I birth my texts with the subjugation of women (and myself) in organizations, and I individuate from them with (some) optimism, setting out feminist manifestas for (re)writing women in organizations and the OS Academy. The texts flow from my body and my pulsions as texts made of my flesh. I hope you receive them as such – feeling the rhythm of my body, my breathing (Cixous, 1990a) in yours, while arriving at your own embodied understandings.

Optional navigational aids

Below, I offer some navigational suggestions that may help orientate you as you begin reading my book:

1. The aesthetical and loose scaffolding of my theses is bricolage (Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 2000). I adopt the role of interpretive and theoretical bricoleur, creating montages of my own and Cixous's poetry; rendering problematic representation of organizations as models, abstractions or textual matrices (Höpfl, 2003). A 'woven text' subverting gender and remolding myself (Cixous, 2004: back cover). In this act of writing differently, I form a composite, imbricated, many-layered creation; performance texts (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) launching into performativity with my readers. My theses are also a



political bricolage aimed at narrating affect and isolation in organizations, presenting feminist communitarian hopes for living differently (Denzin, 2014) and aiming to trouble the phallogocentric writing norms of our Academy. Bricolage involves creating a montage that reflects urgency and complexity. A bricoleur is pragmatic, using whatever is to hand, and draws on a wide range of overlapping and competing perspectives and methods, which come together to create a 'reflexive collage or montage – a set of fluid, interconnected images and representations' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000: 6). As well as imagining bricolage as a montage, my suggestion is to see it as a hinge, as a metaphor for keeping pieces of my theses together in some working relationship, without fragmentation; a way of allowing relative movements between the different parts of the theses and a way of creating new possibilities of movement that turn, transition and enliven, that resist closure (Catherine Barnett, 2011).

2. The method of travel I took is by wayfinding, meaning that as travellers '*we know as we go* from place to place...wayfinding depends upon the attunement of the traveller's movement in response to his or her movements' (Tim Ingold, 2000: 229, his emphasis). It may feel strange at first, if you're used to the moving through academic terrain with familiar landmarks – abstract, introduction, literature review, methodology, theoretical model, findings, discussion, conclusion – all set out in linear sequence, ready for you to read with critical intellect engaged. In my theses, imagine yourself plunged into unfamiliar terrain, where it helps to move with your whole body engaged. Things come into sight and pass out of sight, changing constantly. Each reader may see and feel different things and take a different route. In the bricolage 'things are not classified like facts, or tabulated like data, but narrated like stories...every place is a gathering of things...a knot of stories' (Ingold, 2011: 154). I'll tell my stories and you may remember your own or create new ones as you plunge in and out. This may mean it takes time for you to read, and at times your wayfinding may be painful.
3. My methods, after Denzin, are *to show, not tell*. After Cixous, my writing is from my woman's body, without privileging an authorial I. For me, an authorial voice is a 'mythography' (Stanton, 1984, in Smith, 1987: 47). I write discontinuously



with narrating I's, narrated I's, shifting I's (Smith, 1987). "[W]andering" really is the right way to put it, since humble is close to the earth – *humus* – and bespeaks the humility of writing...It's a dive...It's a quest' (Cixous, 2008b: 3, her emphasis). It's vulnerable writing, where selves are exposed as uncertain, multiple, contradictory, emotional, leaky, flowing. This again may feel uncomfortable; academic readers are used to the reverse, to telling with a rational authorial (male) voice neat, final accounts. Some previous readers or audience members of my work have found it easier to first let themselves experience the text aesthetically, through their bodies and senses, before moving to critical readings from the mind. For a

woman-text...[is] a detachment, a kind of disengagement, not the detachment that is immediately taken back, but a real capacity to *lose hold* and *let go*. This takes the metaphorical form of wandering, excess, risk of the unreckonable: no reckoning, a feminine text can't be predicted, isn't predictable, isn't knowable and is therefore very *disturbing*. It can't be anticipated, and I believe femininity is written outside anticipation: it really is the text of the unforeseeable. (Cixous, 1981: 53, my emphases)

My prologue may also help ease you in.

4. I have included some signposting via headings and in the opening paragraphs of each writing pool. I'm ambivalent in doing this. Cixous, in her early work, used none, and used them parsimoniously in her later texts, and I often get lost reading her books. But does this matter, to lose bearings? Perhaps that is part of loosening hold and letting go? The other problem with writing as a *method of inquiry* (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005) is that I never know where the writing is taking me as it unfolds. And unless I sanitize my dirty texts (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008) post inquiry, post writing, which I am loath to do, my signposts are handcrafted, fabricated on the move. Sudden emergences happen as you've already experienced.
5. You can watch the video of my performance *Pussy Hats* at any time you choose. In terms of how readers (examiners) might evaluate this contribution, Denzin (2014: 70–78) provides a detailed review of criteria for evaluating performance autoethnography, and outlines his own criteria:



1. *Unsettle, criticize, and challenge taken-for-granted, repressed meanings*
2. *Invite moral and ethical dialogue while reflexively clarifying their own position*
3. *Engender resistance and offer utopian thoughts about how things can be made different*
4. *Demonstrate that they care, that they are kind*
5. *Show, instead of tell, while using the rule that less is more*
6. *Exhibit interpretive sufficiency, representational adequacy, and authentic adequacy*
7. *Are political, functional, collective and committed*

He notes that every performance is different and that audiences (and examiners) may not agree on the definition of these criteria. In writing and performing autoethnography, I have found these criteria form a high bar, and I have striven to follow them.

Veteran autoethnographer Andrew Sparkes (2018) also provides an up-to-date review of criteria for evaluating autoethnography, including performance autoethnography.

Contexts

My contexts are of 2018. I am a practitioner, becoming scholar, writer and also (with audacity) a performer. A worker in hypermasculine organizations. A wife, mother, friend, colleague. A (re)newed radical feminist. A British-American woman living in Trump's America. A *woman*. We will plunge into and out of my fluid contexts. I am woman subjects in motion.

Cixous's contexts span, in my theses, close to sixty years. A German-Algerian-French poet, writer, feminist, philosopher, academic, daughter, mother, sister, friend. A *woman*. You'll have the opportunity to read my representation of her abundant oeuvre, and I'll signpost openings into her texts. I'll also open doors to the vibrant, interdiscursive, intertextual life of the Left Bank in the 1970s. We will plunge



most deeply into Cixous's writings from the late 1960s through mid 1990s. Cixous is always woman subjects in motion.

I'll connect you to our individual and collective family herstories, our individual and the collective unconscious, seeking through mindful myopic gaze of instants, generating insights into how we might demasculinize ourselves, our organizations, our Academy and society. The specific inscription of my struggle is on the 'double front – practice and theory – of the unconscious and history' (Des femmes, 1980).

Citations and other academic housekeeping

I make a feminist activist commitment with my citations. It's an act of feminist affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012). After Ahmed, I use feminists (which includes some men) who have contributed to the project of naming and dismantling patriarchy; of course, the inclusion of some individual male authors can be debated...

I adopt Czarniawska's (1998, and with Guje Sevón, 2017) appeals to use first names in my references to indicate, and not mask, gender and demonstrate women's significant contributions to the management and organizational literature. I acknowledge first and last names in my in-text citations when I first cite and in my references and in regard to my own work, I claim it as mine. In my references I also provide the first name of Cixous's translators in acknowledgement of their work, since 'a non-French-reader necessarily comes at Hélène Cixous from light years away, this must never be forgotten' (Prenowitz, 2006: xx).

At the end of my theses I fly the coops of citation convention, rearranging furniture (Cixous, 1976b), borrowing and adapting the practice used by Nelson in her book *The Argonauts* (2015), citing the author's name in the left margin and italicizing the quote (where actual or adapted words are used).

In writing the *féminine*, I am seeking to disrupt some normative masculine rules of academic writing. After Cixous I play with grammar and syntax, looking for language to sing and destabilise signifiers. Aesthetics at times usurp the forty-word rule for indenting a quotation. I place notes as footnotes so that you can engage with them as you read. Otherwise I follow SAGE Harvard UK style guidelines.



The risks of the insurgent

This foregrounding of women's writing and poetics comes with risks. It makes the task of my readers and examiners arguably harder. It is different and will feel unfamiliar. I have striven to ensure that scholarly rigour is embedded, although often implicit and less transparent. I am seeking to trouble the discourse of rhetorical mastery in a thesis as a way of knowing, though the intellectual moves I make are signposted. I endeavour to queer the classic separations of theory, literature review, methodology and empirics. My empirical material is presented as poetic texts, called *emplyrics* (Josie Arnold, 2015). My texts invite readers to engage with their own bodies and emotions, and not just critical intellects. My intentions are to trouble what knowledge is, and suggest that it is made between us. I seek to trouble the mastery of *Theory*. I work at times with difficult and taboo topics, including isolation, miscarriage, abortion, suicide and cancer, which may evoke personal history and affects in my readers, and such reactions may impede their critical readings. I acknowledge these added challenges and ask for your understanding.

At a deeper level:

[s]uch a writing...calls for different reading practices. Reading and writing are not separate practices....Reading then is writing, in an endless movement of giving and receiving: each reading reinscribes something of a text; each reading reconstitutes the web it tries to decipher, but by adding another web. (Conley, 1991: 6,12)

Overall, there is a danger of my being corrected to the masculine, and possible failure of my PhD journey, but the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (Lorde, 2017b). Racism, homophobia and sexism are still the real conditions of our lives, in organizations, society and the OS Academy. The years 2017/18 revealed the widespread and deep-rooted nature of our unjust social malaises. My theses are intended as a contribution to the unsilencing of sexism (Vachhani and Pullen, 2018).



'A free song, un et nu, of the limitless' (Conley, 1984: 128)

I finish my letter to you with Höpfl's (2011) advice, to end with my desire. I wish to offer in my theses *other* discourses, potentially ones of deep joys and freedoms:

There will not be *one* feminine discourse, there will be thousands of different kinds of feminine words, and then there will be the code for general communication, philosophical discourse, rhetoric like now but with a great number of subversive discourses in addition that are somewhere else entirely. That is what is going to happen. Until now women were not speaking out loud, were not writing, not creating their tongues – plural, but they will create them. (Cixous and Clément, 1986: 137)

It is through writing our fragilities, our joys, our bodies, that the (re)writing of women in organizations may happen. That the (re)writing of myself has happened and continues to happen; the possibilities are inexhaustable.

Yes to everything I want. To everything? Yes. To everything I want to pursue, try, feel. Yes. That is why passing through her I arrive at the infinite. (Cixous 1983, in Conley, 1991: 128).

And with this I invite you to read.

Katie



Prologue

Writing extract – November 2014

Which Route?

There are several routes I can take to my employer's offices in the City of London, from where I stay at my friend's house in West Chiswick... My preferred route is the green District Line from Chiswick Park to Cannon Street Station. I don't make my commuting route decisions in a rational way. It's more a sudden turn left to the bus or right to the tube at the end of Fairlawn Avenue, a decision taken, for much of the year, in the dark or in the first glimmer of a new day at around 6.30am...

*

Home or Abroad?

Alighting today off the District Line at Cannon Street, I emerge into the breaking dawn, swipe my Oyster Card on the turnstile pad...am I home or abroad in London? From the reality of tax authorities and my employer I'm abroad. From the reality of citizenship, I'm both home and abroad. From the reality of my immediate family, my husband and children, I'm abroad, but from the reality of my sister, brother, nieces and nephews, I'm home. I'm home at work and abroad in the Academy – or is it the other way around?

These multiple realities jostle around inside of me as I wait at the lights. At some subliminal level maybe this is part of why I enjoy the walk; I can float in this mixed identity space, belonging and not belonging at the same time.

Cannon Street was the Underground station of my first work commute. Down from Cambridge for the summer before my final year, I took a job in the Personnel Department of Courage Brewing. I'd take the District Line from Plaistow in East London, where I was lodging with a friend, alight at Cannon Street, and walk south from the station, past Skinners Hall and across the Embankment to the company's offices just over the bridge. A year later, with my freshly minted degree, I started my first full-time job there. The offices were in a listed building, really a set of town houses dating from the early 1830s, reputedly on the site of the original Globe Theatre. The inside was quite grand, long corridors, large meeting rooms with 'dining-room-type' tables, 'deep-pile' carpets and old-fashioned loos with ceiling cisterns and long chains; many floors were angled, giving an odd feeling of instability as you walked around. I am suffused with memories of my 'long-ago' self: the young Oxbridge graduate displaced from her rural upbringing in the West Country to the thriving capital city of her birth; a girl feeling displaced from a known student identity to an



unknown working one, in a world of men... And now, I am a traveller in the reverse direction, abroad again, tentatively exploring a new identity as a doctoral student, feeling displaced from my known identity. How far I've come from that first work home at Anchor Terrace, and yet, perhaps, not far at all? I wonder what parts of me may still be anchored to a terrace building on Southwark Bridge Road?

*

Heading North in Shadow

Mid-walk, I am in my stride, heading towards the junction with Gresham Street to continue north up Moorgate. This is a route taken by the number 21 red double-decker buses, which, as a young child with my mother, and sometimes with my siblings too, I rode from London Bridge Station to Moorfields Eye Hospital. Walking up Princes Street, I feel painful resonances, echoes of my mother's anxiety and shame, as she accompanied different 'children' on these visits, fearing that her flawed maternal genes were responsible for our ocular difficulties. In my case, an embarrassing but eventually grown-out-of left eye squint; in my brother's and sister's cases, a quite serious disease leading possibly to eventual blindness. I'm in the shadow of the Bank of England and of these emotions, as I duck out of the rising sun to walk on the east side of Princes Street, to save squinting in dawn light as I continue my walk northward.

*

Have I crossed over? Am I inside or outside? Inside my research or outside? Inside my company or outside? Am I working inside the Academy or outside? Am I in a hyphen-space? Navigating insiderness and outsidersness? I'm swimming in liminality. Caught

Between.

Am I crossing over? From which where, to what here? Where do my loyalties lie?

*

Can I go in search of third space (Homi Bhabha, 2004), journeying to bank offices and other real and imagined places on a quest for new understandings, disrupting the status quo, submitting myself to the 'critical edge of knowing/unknowing' (Damian O'Doherty, 2007: 855). What kind of third space would I be searching for? The unnoticed whispering corners of organizational life? Would this be 'frivolous, useless, wilful' or even 'ludicrous' (Richard Whitley as cited in O'Doherty, 2007: 848) or (ill)legitimate theorizing in the spirit of an adventure? It's a thought 'at once fascinating and unsettling' (O'Doherty, 2007: 858).

*



I'm finally here, some sixteen minutes after leaving Cannon Street. I pass through the revolving door, show my security badge to the guard, and swipe myself through the barrier. Thus I pass between two worlds, outside to inside, or perhaps also from inside to outside as, shaken from my *dérive* (Guy Debord, 1958 as cited in Rebecca Solnit, 2000: 212 her italics), I shift from my limbic brain to my pre-frontal cortex, and jump immediately into my workday ahead.

*



Pool one: Why (re)write women, why now?

February 2018

Why is (re)writing women important? Why is it important in 2018? Why in organizations and OS? Why is it my project? Why do I want to engage you with my project? I am going to plunge into these questions.

Woman has not yet arrived in the world

At the heart of my answers is that despite the hopes of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s, ‘Woman’ has not yet arrived ‘into the world’ (Cixous, 1984: 548). There are ‘few women where power rules. At the same time, women all over the world are suffering under the effects of neoliberalism’ (Lynne Segal, 2018: 227), which has split female subjecthood into a small, worthy class of aspirational subjects who have the means to self-invest in their capital value, and the rest, who are ‘rendered expendable, exploitable, and disposable’ (Rottenberg, 2017: 345). The project of feminism is unfinished (Angela McRobbie, 2009; Segal, 2013, 2018). The language and missions of feminism – ‘equal rights, liberation and social justice’ (Sara Farris and Rottenberg, 2017: 6) – have been replaced by individualistic empowerment goals such as ‘happiness, responsibility, and lean-in’ (6). What are the results 25 years after the Beijing United Nation’s (UN) Women’s conference in 1995?²⁶ The gains in participation in the economy, tertiary education, increased numbers in the

²⁶ The Fourth UN Women’s Conference held in Beijing September 4-15. The conference produced a comprehensive *Declaration and Platform for Action* for women’s empowerment signed by 189 countries. Although it was seen as watershed, results have been questioned. A 2015 review report commissioned by the European Parliament concluded ‘that global progress on the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action has been slow, uneven and limited’ (Petra Debusscher, 2015). There has been no Fifth UN Women’s Conference. Progress has been monitored at five yearly intervals by the UN’s Commission on the Status of Women. With some fanfare the Commission launched a *Beijing +20 Recommitment to Women and Girls* declaring an end to gender inequality by 2030 (UN, 2015). One recent hopeful sign is the election of María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés of Ecuador, as President of its 73rd session (2018-2019). She is the fourth woman to be elected as UN General Assembly President since the Assembly’s began in 1946. Her vision includes attention to gender-based violence and political empowerment (UN, 2018).



professions are outweighed by the soaring global economic inequalities which have disproportionately affected women (Watkins, 2018).

What are the implications for women, particularly in the hypermasculine organizations in which I work and in the Academy? I ask myself whether feminism has become a handmaiden of capitalism? (Hester Einstein, 2005, in Farris and Rottenberg, 2017). What does it mean to me when Emma Watson (whose 2014 UN speech attracted eight million viewers) and Beyoncé identify as feminists? Are they feminists in the way I define it? Am I/they handmaidens of capitalism? Gains in organizational gender parity are minimal and move at a glacial pace (Bryce Covert, 2017; Julia Dawson et al., 2016; Vivian Hunt et al., 2015, 2018a). Sexism is still firmly entrenched, and difficult to speak about (Kay Aranda, 2018; Vachhani and Pullen, 2018). Women, within the context of their everyday lives, including their work lives, continue to be subject to the male pornographic gaze (George Yancy, 2018). Deep at play in our society is a misogynistic Imaginary²⁷ which suppresses the feminine and amounts to a deep male terror of the female body to give and take life (Cornell, in Yancy, 2018). 'Feminism is necessary because of what has not ended: sexism, sexual exploitation and sexual oppression' (hooks, 2000, in Ahmed, 2017: 5), and it cannot be separated from racism. 'Feminism will be intersectional or it "will be bullshit"' (Flavia Dzodan, 2011, in Ahmed, 2017: 5). Cixous sees the possibility 'of an alliance between different forms of otherness, which would protect and respect difference, but be strong enough to represent significant difference' (Morag Shiach, 1991: 130). I seek such an alliance.

In a Donald Trump world, it can feel like we have lost or are losing the feminist struggle. Living in the US, I experience these feelings daily. Donald Trump's 2018 State of the Union address was an exhibition of 'triumphalist, racist masculinity' (Cornell in Yancy, 2018: 7).

Writing extract – summer 2017

A president who 'grabs pussy'

I'm writing as an English woman and a feminist living in America. Writing is political, and for many women, like myself, white, heterosexual and privileged, living under

²⁷ I use the term 'Imaginary' here in the Lacanian sense of the source of primary desire, individually and collectively.



Donald J. Trump's presidency is insecure and fearful. I try to imagine the experiences of women of colour, lesbian women, transwomen, women immigrants (I am one myself, though now a citizen, and having never held illegal status), especially Latinos, less privileged women, poor women. This week the US President signed an executive order absolving insurance companies from covering the costs of female contraception. I wonder if I'm in a surreal temporal flashback; women of the 1950s, my mother, your mothers, our grandmothers; a world of No Abortion and No Contraceptive Pill? This is the United States of America in 2017, self-titled Capital of the Free World?

The administration is eroding hard-won gains on healthcare and women's rights to make decisions about their bodies and protection against campus sexual assault. Populist feminism encourages women to focus on themselves and feel empowered. Perceived sexual freedom (which, as I comment on below, is often, for young women, sexual subjugation), is bought into as twenty-first-century feminism, yet is a 'post-feminist masquerade' central to the 'maintenance of the masculine hegemony' (McRobbie, 2009: 135, 67). We are encouraged to *Lean In*; it is suggested that all we have to do is overcome our internal barriers to gain power and have a top career and a family (Sheryl Sandberg, 2013; Segal, 2018). Many feminist discourses have lost their collective agenda. We lack convincing assessments that progress has been made (Watkins, 2018). Feminism is re-spun as individual, personal initiatives and choices. Neoliberalism has tamed and fragmented our resistances (Rebecca Lund et al., 2017). We fail to see that gender is still so embedded in society and organizations that it shapes our lives, experiences, opportunities (Acker, 1990). Joan gave us a prescient warning:

There is a danger in abandoning the project of patriarchy. In the move to gender, the connections between urgent political issues and theoretical analysis, which has made feminist thought possible, may be weakened, Gender lacks the critical-political sharpness of patriarchy and may be more easily assimilated and co-opted than patriarchy. (Acker, 1989: 239–240)

If feminism has been co-opted by neoliberalism, can we right it again? (Farris and Rottenberg, 2017) Can we reawaken our emancipatory urgency and drive for transformative change? I am not without hope. The 2017 and 2018 Women's Marches and #MeToo demonstrate passion for women's collective resistance. I will argue we need to (re)create new discourses. To right feminism we have to (re)write women and (re)write feminism.



For new discourses we need new(old) language, féminine language and féminine ethics. We need our bodies. We need to return to our feminist histories and manifestos. We can call on a long lineage to (re)unite us. When the violence spills out, as it has done, a ‘movement is necessary. What is necessary has to become possible’ (Ahmed, 2017: 12). Women, with our words and our body-presence, we can explode everything.

My potestas and potentia

Rosi Braidotti reminds me that power is a multi-layered concept, covering both negative or confining methods (*potestas*) as well as empowering or affirmative technologies (*potentia*) (Deleuze 1968, in Braidotti, 2005). I’m more interested in *potentia* but fuelling me in this moment are my *potestas*. This weekend²⁸ Trump has (re)engaged in defending men accused of domestic violence (Jacey Fortin, 2018) and doubted the stories on #MeToo (Mark Landler, 2018). I’ll start with my *potestas*.

Woman has not yet arrived in organizations

It’s depressing reading. I’m sitting in my attic office on a wintery-mix February afternoon reading McKinsey’s newly released *Gender Matters Report: Delivering Through Diversity* (Hunt et al., 2018). I’ve worked on gender diversity throughout my career. Despite overwhelming evidence from McKinsey’s longitudinal studies²⁹ of the substantive business case for diversity, progress on gender parity in organizations is proceeding at a snail-like pace. I also have a leaden feeling that in the hypermasculine organizations I work with, we are only beginning to get back, after a decade, to the levels seen before the global financial crisis. Even if some gains have been made at Board level³⁰ these shifts are not replicated on executive committees. We inchmeal along, convincing, no, deceiving ourselves with a discourse of progress.

²⁸ February 11-12, 2018

²⁹ McKinsey Gender Matters Reports (2015, 2018) and Women in the Workplace (2012, 2015, 2016, 2017). The latter report has surveyed more than 200,000 women globally and 350 companies, many for consecutive years.

³⁰ Data taken from <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/record-number-of-women-on-ftse-100-boards>. Data is current at 1 March, 2018.



The 346 companies in McKinsey's 2015 report (mostly based in the US and UK) have increased gender representation on their executive teams by two percentage points, to 14%. In my work experience this representation bears out, but it's deceptive as the women are largely, sometimes exclusively, in *support* roles on executive teams. The figure of 14% reflects representation across broader levels of senior management, including line positions. I read that the business case for diversity is reinforced across one thousand companies across twelve countries, with significant financial and value-creation performance: +21% on EBITA (earnings before interest, taxes and amortization) and +27% EP (economic profit) for companies with higher female representation, and +33% for companies with ethnic and cultural diversity. Black women, I'm told, face a double burden. I know this, but it always gives a jab to my stomach. Overall, there is nothing new for me in this report.

The same old truths

Out of curiosity, I open back up the 2017 McKinsey Women in the Workplace report (Alexis Krivkovich et al., 2017). Whatever it said, it hasn't stayed with me; didn't lodge in my bones, settle in my heart. I remind myself, it says the same as many other such reports, so how would I remember? After I've run through the opening page, which gives me impressive statistics regarding the sheer size of the study, I read the executive summary. I've highlighted for you some key words:

Getting to gender equality starts with realizing **how far we have to go**

Women remain underrepresented at every level in corporate America, despite earning more college degrees than men for thirty years and counting. There is a pressing need to do more, and most organizations realize this: company commitment to gender diversity is at an all-time high for the third year in a row. Despite this commitment, progress continues to be too **slow**—and may even be **stalling**. One of the most powerful reasons for this is a simple one: we have blind spots when it comes to diversity, and we can't solve problems that we don't see or understand clearly. Many employees think women are well represented in leadership when they see only a few. And because they've gotten **comfortable with the status quo**, they don't feel any urgency for change. Further, many **men don't fully grasp** the state of women in the workplace, and some worry that gender diversity efforts disadvantage them. As a result, **men are less committed** to the issue, and we can't get to equality without them. Many companies also overlook the realities of **women of color**, who face the greatest obstacles and receive the least support. When companies take a one-size-fits-all approach to advancing women, women of color end up underserved and left behind. This year we take a deeper look at women of color to better understand the distinct challenges they face, shaped by the **intersection of gender and race**. Efforts to make the workplace fair benefit us



all. An equitable workplace allows the best talent to rise to the top, regardless of gender, race and ethnicity, background, or beliefs. **Diversity leads to stronger business results**, as numerous studies have shown. But we can't unlock the full potential of our workplace until we see **how far from equality** we really are. (Krivkovich et al., 2017: 2)

I'm depressed by the men's lack of commitment; and when I read men's commitment to gender parity is lowest in the youngest age group surveyed, while young women record the highest level of commitment, I deflate...

After noting there has been decades of (academic) research (not specifically referenced), the survey delivers the following conclusions as to the reasons for the lack of gender parity. I'm bullet-pointing them for you:

- Women fall behind early in their career and continue to lose ground, but not for lack of asking;
- Women are not leaving their companies at higher rates than men, and very few plan to leave the workforce to focus on family;
- The workplace is especially challenging for women of colour;
- Men think women are doing better than they really are;
- When it comes to raises and promotions, men are more likely to say they get what they want without having to ask;
- Many women still work a double shift, doing the bulk of the housework and childcare.

I turn to the 'Roadmap for Gender Equality' – as action, that's my professional practitioner interest. I'm given an eight-point plan:

1. Make a compelling case for gender equality
2. Invest in employee training
3. Address the challenges of women of colour head-on
4. Give managers the means to drive change
5. Ensure that hiring promotions and reviews are fair
6. Get men interested in gender equality
7. Give employees the flexibility to fit work into their lives
8. Focus on accountability and results

Number three is relatively new. For number one, the work McKinsey have done with their studies has furnished us with strong business case data that garners interest



in the C suite. On number five, work by behavioural economists has shown us how to debias talent processes; Iris Bohnet's *What works: Gender equality by design* (2016) is a good example. The rest I could have written, and was working on, in the 1980s. We face the same old truths and employ the same old action plans and we advance in slow motion. We proceed using the master's tools, using the master's language, and it isn't working. This narrative *isn't working*. I can see at work, unrecognized by the McKinsey gender researchers, current neoliberal feminist discourses including the striving for balance (Farris and Rottenberg, 2017) and power coded as masculine (Segal, 2018). And we keep at it, hoping and striving for progress, pursuing gender parity in organizations. The evidence is in plain sight and yet isn't spoken. Although perhaps it isn't in plain sight? If I am in the Matrix,³¹ rooted in the phallogocentric neoliberal discourses of fact, data, proof, action plans, point plans, progress, I am blinded. And I was there, in the Matrix, and it's my doctoral journey that took me to Cixous and Acker for the cure, so that I could see that there is no place for women in organization; 'women can only be representational' (Höpfl, 2011: 33). We have no language to represent her, and no place to site her. And I wonder how my other practitioner colleagues, dedicated to driving progress on gender, will find a cure? We can't all do critical management PhDs... and then there's a vexing question:

Are we going backwards? The dominant misogynistic Imaginary and power of the male pornographic gaze

Extract from letter to the *New York Times*, December 2015, from African-American philosopher George Yancy.³² My primary focus is on sexism and the male gaze, which Yancy addresses from a position of personal vulnerability.

³¹ *The Matrix* is a 1999 science fiction film in which the reality humans perceive is in fact simulated, a dream world. Here, I use the film as a metaphor for the possible blindness of practitioners (and McKinsey consultants) to evidence that runs contrary to prevailing discourses.

³² Yancy's article won the American Philosophical Association (APA) Committee on Public Philosophy's Op Ed contest in 2016. Yancy also received considerable hate mail in response to the piece, including violent threats to himself and his family. The APA took the unprecedented step of putting out a public statement against bullying and harassment towards philosophers. Sixty-eight philosophers and intellectuals wrote a public letter in Yancy's defence. The names included Judith Butler and bell hooks.



Dear White America,

I have a weighty request. As you read this letter, I want you to listen with love, a sort of love that demands you look at yourself that might cause pain and terror...

What if I told you I'm sexist? Well, I am. Yes, I said it and I mean just that. I have watched my male students squirm in their seats when I've asked them to identify and talk about their sexism... To make things worse, I'm an academic, a philosopher. I'm supposed to be one of the 'enlightened' ones...

Yet, I refuse to be a prisoner of the lies that we men like to tell ourselves – that we are beyond the messiness of sexism and male patriarchy, that we don't oppress women... It means that despite my best intentions, I perpetuate sexism every day of my life...

I have failed to challenge those poisonous assumptions that women are 'inferior' to men or speak out loudly in the company of male philosophers who believe *feminist philosophy is a nonphilosophical fad*.³³ I have been complicit with, and allowed myself to be seduced by, *a country that makes billions of dollars from sexually objectifying women, from pornography, commercials, video games, to Hollywood movies*. I am not innocent.

I have been fed a poisonous *diet of images that fragment women into mere body parts*. I have also been complicit with a dominant male narrative that says *women enjoy being treated like sexual toys*. In our collective male imagination, women are 'things' to be used for our visual and physical titillation. And even as I know how poisonous and false these sexist assumptions are... I continue to see women through the male gaze... Our *collective male erotic feelings and fantasies* are complicit in the degradation of women...

I recognize that my being a sexist not only has a differential impact on black women and women of color who are not only the victims of racism, but also sexism, *my sexism*... black women and women of color not only suffer from sexual objectification, but the ways in which they are objectified is linked to how they are racially depicted, some as "exotic" and others as "hyper-sexual" ...

[E]very day of my life I continue to fight against the dominant male narrative, choosing to see women as subjects, not objects... I continue to *falter*. (Yancy, 2015: 1–3, my emphases)

The global porn industry is valued at \$97 billion (Wosick, 2015 in NBC Business News, 2015). The producers' goal is to:

get men off hard and fast for profit. The most efficient way to do so appears to be by eroticizing the degradation of women. In a study of behaviors of popular porn 90 percent of 304 random scenes contained physical aggression towards women, while close to half contained verbal humiliation. (Peggy Orenstein, 2016: 34).

Slightly less than half of college men use online porn weekly. Male and female students using recent porn were repeatedly found to believe rape myths (woman

³³ Yancy wrote this sentence in 2015, 40 years after Cixous wrote in the French edition of the *Newly Born Woman* 'Philosophy is constructed on the premise of woman's abasement. Subordination of the feminine to the masculine order, which gives the appearance of being the condition for the machinery functioning' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 65). At the time, Cixous was working and friends with many of the leading French male philosophers (and deeply versed in philosophy).



asked for it by drinking too much or wearing slutty clothing) and female porn users were desensitized and less likely to intervene if they saw another woman being assaulted or threatened. College men who play violent sexualized video games are more likely than peers to see women as sex objects, more accepting of rape myths, more tolerant of sexual harassment *and* more likely to consider women less competent (Orenstein, 2016).

Did I get under your skin? I got under my own. I just called my husband and read this out to him. It makes me worry for our sons and daughter. It makes me worry for all our sons and daughters.

Reason one: (Re)writing women is necessary because sexism/sexual oppression/sexual exploitation have not ended. Feminism is the fight against the misogynistic Imaginary and male pornographic gaze. Feminism is intersectional. Feminism is an alliance between different forms of otherness. Feminism is language and places to (re)site (all) women.

Flashback

In the 1970s and 1980s my feminism was vibrant (and contested).

Writing extract – summer 2016

In my adolescence I became aware of the feminist movement, and both threw myself into it, whilst at the same time public discourse and my lived life tethered me.

Public discourses were changing in my teens, and in this sense, I lived in a different era to my elder siblings. Second-wave feminism (Marta Calás and Linda Smircich, 2006) was spreading even into the relative isolation of rural Gloucestershire. I am looking back at myself in the sixth form, at my countryside comprehensive school, 'sneak-reading' Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem and *Cosmopolitan* magazine (a respite from Jane Austen and Howard Forster), with *Cosmo*'s enthralling embracing of the single career woman who has sex, hoping my Dad doesn't look inside the magazine's covers. As I write, a memory is tripped of reading Steinem's 1978 essay *If Men Could Menstruate* and laughing hysterically. I recall a painful shame-filled evening where I watched on BBC a film of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, staying up late after the 9.30p' watershed, along with my Dad. Why couldn't he go to bed? I wanted to die when the two men stripped naked to box. My growing feminism brought tensions. My mother was somewhat disapproving of her daughter's scholarly and independent ways, seemingly preferring the baker-daughter of elegant and complex dishes for her dinner parties. I sought approval from her for my domestic skills and colluded, at least for a while, with her expectation of an early marriage and grandchildren...

I also contested these gendered roles. I was an independent young woman, heading to Paris in the gap between entrance exams and university, after applying



to and being accepted at Cambridge, to a men's college, which had only just started accepting women. I was a young woman determined to have what I considered a proper (male) education and (male) career and feminist sex life and not become a primary school teacher and get married at twenty-two like my sister. I was out marching for Women's Rights, and refusing to join the Oxbridge Club in London with its male-only bar...

These were tensions that competed inside of me without my being conscious of their existence or their polarity: masculine career woman and domestic goddess; male claret connoisseur and female cake baker; independent single (wo)man and caring daughter (and sister, aunt); feminist activist and subjugated woman in her personal relationships. I lived in London the single career woman's life, and I visited my parent's and sister's homes often, tied by unsevered umbilical cords. I moved in with a boyfriend who physically beat me, and I didn't leave him...after seven years he had an affair and left me...

My long-ago selves in this extract are prescient of McRobbie's: 'postfeminist masquerade girl; (hard) working girl; sexy adventurous phallic girl and her "pleasing" global counterpart' (2009: 7–8). Which brings us to

*The great maw of neoliberal Nike Girl*³⁴

Empowerment
Choice
Independence
Education
Money

Individualistic
Capitalism
Guises
Spectres

Disgusting
Repulsive
Feminists
Powerful
Femininity

Sex Entertainment
Backlash

³⁴ This poem is a (creative) adaption of McRobbie, 2009: 1–10.



Double entanglements

In ashes

Feminism

Wow!

Sexual

Fluidity

Cool!

Radical

Sexual

Freedoms

Old

Sexual

Subjugations

Down-to-Fuck³⁵

Phallic

Girls

Gay

Straight

Weddings

Consumed

Consumerism

Strangleholds

Faux-Feminism

Faux-Feminist

In my mid-thirties, after a series of failed romantic relationships, and having gained enough self-insight through my psychology and psychodynamic training to determine that I was too enmeshed with my family, I took the opportunity to move with my job to New York. Two years later I met Keith, my future husband, and for

³⁵ Orenstein uses this term to describe a culture in which oral sex (girls to boys and unreciprocated), referred to as 'going down on them', has become the norm for American teenage girls. Almost every girl of the seventy she interviewed had experience of being coerced into oral sex, with the boy planting his hands on her shoulders and forcing her downwards (2016: 59).



the next fifteen years focused on: a full-time job in consulting and later back in a corporate role; raising step-kids and helping them through the tragedy of the long illness and death of their mother; the difficulties and joys of trying to have a family – four pregnancies and one baby. Although I still identified as a feminist, its importance and urgency receded in my life. I became beguiled by discourses of progress. We had a black president, a handful of women CEOs, a daughter at Brown, Hillary-in-Waiting. I became a Faux-Feminist crusading for gender parity in organizations, donning, I thought by my own choice, fashionable dresses and heels at work, training as marathon runner and becoming an expert skier, a careerist and a feminist, feminine role model to my kids. ‘I was perhaps myself complicit, without abandoning a feminist perspective’ (McRobbie, 2009: 5).

I use the headline *The great maw of neoliberal Nike Girl* with reason because faux-feminism swallowed me. My feminism was birthed in the 1970s and 1980s as a movement of women, *common* struggles uniting us (even if we were blind to other struggles, such as those faced by women of colour). Decades passed. Post-Feminist Neo-Liberalist discourses sneaked into my life with their emphasis on individual empowerment, dislocating me from my feminist roots of affective solidarity. I was seduced by Nike Girl,³⁶ with her brand image of a powerful, fit, exceptional, heroic woman (to be honest, it’s still appealing to me). I bought my women’s Nikes to be a competitive runner, going after personal bests and the goals of a successful and glamorous woman. I admired the good womenomics³⁷ work done by the Nike Foundation Girl’s Initiative, focused on providing resources to marginalised and vulnerable adolescent girls. Recognising that the leading cause of death in 15–19-year-olds in the developing world is pregnancy and childbirth, I applauded the Girl’s Initiative investments:

if we cannot unleash the talent and potential of the 250 million adolescent girls living in poverty today, how will we end poverty tomorrow? By prioritizing education, health care, safety, citizenship and economic opportunity for girls living in poverty around the world,

³⁶ I use Nike as representative of many female brands that promise empowerment and glamour. Nike has run ads for 40 years supporting women’s strength, power, knowledge, encouraging purchasers of their shoes and sports clothing to become *Nike Girls* meeting new challenges and *conquering* personal goals (Nike Inc., 2015).

³⁷ Eisenstein uses the term ‘womenomics’ to describe corporate programmes such as the Nike Foundation Girls Initiative and the 10,000 Women Global Initiative, set up by Goldman Sachs, which endorse the idea that getting young women into business in the Global South will be the key to ending poverty (Eisenstein, in Ferris and Rottenberg, 2017: 13). The programs use persuasive marketing but are micro compared to the prevailing structural inequalities.



partners from government, business and non-governmental organizations can create a safer environment for girls to claim their rights and create a more sustainable economic flight path for the world. (Maria Eitel, 2014: 1)

What a vision! Young women in business will end poverty (Farris and Rottenberg, 2017). What a formidable lapse of my feminist memory! Forgetting the history of women's struggles and the significant structural injustices built into globalisation (Braidotti, 2005: 172). I'm not letting myself off the guilt hook by allowing a claim of ignorance.³⁸ This is the same Nike that, for two decades, has been embroiled in scandals regarding women's sweatshops that produce their shoes. I remember reading about 'women getting abused, slapped, kicked, called pigs and dogs'. These fragments are retrievable from my body as I write. Women powerless to speak up, unionise, for fear of getting fired or beaten (Human Rights Watch, 2015, in Wallenberg and Thanem, 2018: 76). Was I Teflon Woman? Reading, appalled and compassionate; my emotions wiped away with a quick swipe of my washing-up sponge; lacing up my \$150 Nikes and running off into a female-empowered sunset? 'We willingly deceive ourselves, forgetting that there are ugly situations beneath the carefully constructed corporate image. 'They depend on "power asymmetry" that is very real for the people involved...the allure of fashion makes us want the very latest' (Wallenberg and Thanem, 2018: 80).

Then I laugh, surprisingly; I laugh at myself, perhaps at ourselves:

[A] humor no one would expect to find in women – which is nonetheless surely their greatest strength because it's a humor that sees man much further away than he has ever seen. Laughter that shakes the last chapter of my text *LA*,³⁹ 'she who laughs last.' And her first laugh is at *herself*. (Cixous, 1981: 55, my emphasis)

From 1980s women's libber dismantling patriarchy to 2010s neoliberal Nike Girl...

And Nike are still at it. In February 2017 they (re)launched an equality campaign stating their commitment to diversity and inclusion. In July the company

³⁸ Though this supposes I had the individual agency to resist the prevailing individual economic empowerment feminist discourse in the US driven by the IMF (International Monetary Fund), World Bank, and UN, funded by powerful foundations such as Ford, Rockefeller and Gates, in public-private partnerships with Wall Street and pharmaceutical companies, working with local NGOs, pursuing strategies of micro-finance investment and population control in the third world (Watkins, 2018) and disguising the negative impact of global capitalism on women in these countries.

³⁹ *La* (The feminine) first published in French in 1976 celebrates feminine writing (beyond censorship) and the feminine writer. Humour is its keynote. It has not been translated into English, but three excerpts are included in Sellers 1994 *Hélène Cixous Reader* (59-67).



refused to grant inspectors access to their factories (Kory Stuer, 2017). In 2018 the misogynistic company culture was exposed through an internal revolt of women which resulted in eleven top male executives leaving the company (Julie Creswell et al., 2018) and 7000 employees (likely mostly women) getting a pay rise (Stacy Cowley, 2018). So much for Nike Girl. I am unblinded and outraged.

I forgot my roots; that feminism is a call for collective action, for emancipation of women, because I am a woman, and I need to stand up for *women* everywhere who are being unfairly treated because of their gender. Feminism is not my individual (optional) empowerment lifestyle choice.

Reason two: Feminism is women everywhere who are unfairly treated because of our gender. Feminism is us (re)writing (every)woman's narrative. Feminism is our laughter at ourselves. Feminism is our outrage and revolt.

The second shift

Arlie Hochschild introduced the concept of women working a second, unpaid shift of work in the home, after their day job, with her 1989 bestseller *The Second Shift*. Thirty years later, limited progress has been made to reduce women's second-shift labours. A 2016 World Economic Forum Report found that, on average, men do 34% of the unpaid work women do, and this imbalance starts early, with girls spending 30% more of their time on unpaid work compared to boys (WEF, 2016). Most economies reported this extensive a gender gap. The largest proportions of unpaid work are routine housework and caregiving, both childcare and care for older people. Women work the second shift. At the same time, we're entrapped in other gendered discourses that have intensified over the last two decades, which I'll illustrate through writing fragments:

Writing extract – summer 2016

Ideal workers mistaking their jobs for their lives:

The gender-neutral worker, who has no body and no feelings, along with no gender...The concept of the abstract worker, completely devoted to the job, also supports the idea that strong commitment to the organization over and above commitment to family and community are necessary and



normal...Reproduction itself, procreation, sexuality, and caring for children, the ill, and the aged, unless transferred to the public sphere, are outside the job and organizational boundaries (Acker, 1992: 257–258).

The assumption is that we will respond to e-mails quickly, if not immediately, which arrive, like vast schools of small fishes, swimming into my mailbox overnight from other time zones. In busy periods I can wake up to a mailbox that is full. I'm unable to receive or send until I archive or delete old messages. We experience e-mail as a tyranny (Richenda Gambles et al., 2006) and as an addiction. I am aghast if I leave my Blackberry at home and fraught with anxiety about what e-mails I am not reading and replying to. Increasingly, we are able to access work-related e-mails and documents from our personal devices such as iPhones, iPads and personal laptops. Work has developed an invasive porosity, leaking through boundaries and becoming a constant felt presence in our relationships with partners, children and parents. This isn't all a negative. At weekends I find my senior colleagues more thoughtful and strategic in their thinking, as expressed in e-mail dialogues. But then I begin to worry about being perceived as not committed if I stop checking my work e-mail. I wonder how sustainable is this level of 24/7 connectivity and what price it enacts on 'care and connectedness in families, friendships and communities' (Gambles et al., 2006: 57), including my own family, friends and community.

The ideal mother

Mary Runté and Albert Mills (2004) suggest it is 'women who navigate between parental and employee roles' and 'it is therefore women who pay the "toll" for crossing the boundary' (237). Toll is a reasonable metaphor; however, it feels like ice shards to me. For deep guilt is associated with violating the role of 'good mother' and, I would add, 'good daughter'. Provocatively, they suggest through their deconstruction of social discourses that work-life balance is an illusion to which we apply work-world remedies of use-time and speed. 'To maintain the myth of the good mother, the female must satisfy either her work commitment or her family commitment in fewer hours, or sacrifice sleep' (241).

Speeding up woman

I find myself questioning if I get seduced by injunctions to speed up or sleep less? I was lured last week into reading a *Wall Street Journal* article titled 'Why 4am is the most productive hour; tackle personal tasks before sunrise; find focus before distractions begin' (Hilary Potkewitz, 2016), learning that Tim Cook (CEO of Apple) and Michelle Obama (former president's wife) are both early risers, checking e-mails and working out before dawn, before tackling a full working day. I'm up by 5.30am and often on a work call with Europe by 6.30am and no slouch, as you know...and yet...perhaps I must use-time and speed up still further, mirroring the fantastically successful Mr. Cook and Mrs. Obama in pursuit of the illusion of work-life balance? In truth, when giving my infant son a bottle at 4am, I concluded no human being should be awake in the hours between midnight and 5am, and certainly not before a workday. Yet the guilt is there; neoliberalism and these discourses live in me.

The goal (myth) of the balanced professional woman having it all came back into the public spotlight in 2012/2013 with publications by two leading feminists, Anne-Marie Slaughter, and her *Why women still can't have it all* (2012), and Sheryl Sandberg, with *Lean In* (2013). Anne-Marie's argument is that what we have to do



as high-potential women is rethink the normative expectation that work should come first, while Sheryl suggests we just need to find confidence to become more ambitious. It isn't work or family, but both. Both Anne-Marie and Sheryl have enormous resources to enable their balanced career-home lifestyles. For middle-class, undergraduate women with few financial resources, Rottenberg (2017) suggests that this translates into the preference for a hook-up sex life rather than investment in love relationships, and delay of childbearing until later thirties. The goal of life balance will be achieved in the future – it just takes *planning*. The underbelly of this neoliberal discourse is the locking of middle-class women into working as productive human capital through their thirties, reducing their fertility window to a narrow number of years, which is perceived as normal and our free choice.

Flash fiction writing extract – summer 2017

On the Rocks

The bar stool seat is smooth under her bum, the tonic water cold on her tongue, she whirls her drink around in the glass, staring as the gyrating bubbles fizz over melting ice. The narrow, long heels of her nude patent pumps hanging on the stool's metal bar. Her palm sweaty against the fine wool of her pants as she waits for Jimmy. Eyes darting over the liquor bottles behind the bar, lighting on the barman pouring a Coors into a long thin glass; a sudden felt resonance in her gut, her hand trembling, glass down, as a shoal of memories rush into her streaming mind.

They'd sat together heading into graduation, class of 2003, on the scratchy lime green and pink Bed, Bath and Beyond rug in her humid dorm room, drinking in celebration bottled Coors, yellow legal pads on their knees, pens in hands. Flushed with success at their 3.8 averages, smug with Wall Street jobs landed in the same firm; Jimmy in IT, and for her, a man's job, fixed income trading. Jimmy had been to a talk on career success, led by a Silicon Valley rock star. Under his enthusiastic direction, they'd written out their individual career plans, discussed their lists, laughed together, toasted their dazzling futures, kissed, made love, shared post-coital imaginings of the smart-assed kids they'd have one day. She'd kept the sheet of yellow paper for years, lost now, in some apartment move most likely, but she could visualise the words she'd written on the page:

- work harder than anyone (anyone!) else
- learn, learn, learn
- find a good mentor (senior man)
- be tough (like a man) and never, ever cry
- learn to play golf
- make 30 under 30 in Finance list by 2009
- earn a million dollars by 2010
- make Managing Director by 2013
- have baby/ies after making MD



She sips her tonic, dries her sticky palm once more on her pants, seeking to still herself, net her thoughts one by one. Her right foot shakes. Individual ice shards pierce her heart. Jimmy leaving the bank five years ago in acrimony. Their fierce late-night arguments about whether she should go too. Her decision to stay, believing in her track to make MD in a decade, to become the only woman trader MD on the floor. The unplanned pregnancy. The figure of the grim reaper looming over their car. Her mother's sudden death. The new apartment, high above, what, exactly? Manhattan streets, their families, their college friends? Weddings, babies. Her father's gentle questions. Jimmy's mother's visit, her raised eyebrows every night and barely masked sighs. Rising at dawn each day, the cab to work, the quiet hum of the trading floor, buying designer glasses to read spreadsheets, the adrenalin rush of selecting her positions, chained to her desk, making her trades. Choosing a doctor two blocks away.

A hand on her back, a kiss glanced on her cheek, and Jimmy slides onto the stool beside her, ordering a Manhattan. He turns, sighs, takes her hand in his, grasps it tight. A tear slips out of her right eye, running down the side of her face. Silence. They sip their drinks, heads low, looking at the bar.

'And' Jimmy says slowly, carefully.

She pauses, then replies,

'Four.'

'Four fertilised?'

'Yes.'

Silence hangs. Jimmy's drink is done, the barman picks up his glass, Jimmy nods.

'Jimmy', she says quietly, as tears fall.

'They've asked me to move roles.'

He looks at her sharply.

'When?'

'Two weeks'

'Where?'

'Sales support.'

His fist hits the bar hard. Shril sound of crystal shattering. Red blood flowing. Strangers' eyes on them. The barman hands her a napkin, asks with a gentle voice if she is okay. She and Jimmy stare, without speaking, white linen staining scarlet, his hand lying, disembodied, between them on the black granite bar. The barman with his fingers deftly removes the larger pieces of broken glass and with a rag wipes up the pool of melting ice cubes and finer shards.



The acceptance of this growing discourse of postponing motherhood – to some ill-defined moment – can also be seen in Apple’s and Facebook’s decisions to include as benefits to female employees’ health insurance coverage to freeze their eggs (Rottenberg, 2017).

I became pregnant at thirty-nine. I had worked full-time for seventeen years. This pregnancy did not work out:

the abstract worker is actually a man, and it is a man’s body, its sexuality, minimal responsibility in procreation, and conventional control of emotions that pervades work...Woman’s bodies – female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding and childcare, menstruation, and mythic ‘emotionality’ – are suspect, stigmatized, and used as grounds for control and exclusion. (Acker, 1990: 152)

It has been twenty-eight years since Acker’s words were published; longer still since she penned them.

Reason three: Feminism is (re)writing women’s role regarding second-shift work in the home and (re)writing our absent pregnant, menstruating, sexual, affective, caregiving, female bodies, into organizations, and into power.

The power and limits of féminine reinscription

What have the feminists done for us, ask Robyn Thomas and Annette Davies (2005) as the title of a paper about feminist theory and organization resistance. They frame feminist theories of resistance into three categories: the politics of reform, with a focus on equality between the sexes, bureaucratic reforms and just organizations; the politics of revolution, with a focus on sisterhood, collective protest and organizations that value the féminine; and the politics of reinscription, with a focus on fractured, multiple identity, the performance of gender, discursive resistance and local, quiet struggles in which women are no longer portrayed as victims of patriarchal power. The strength of the poststructural framing is its nuanced complexity and the freedoms it offers for reinscription at a personal level. Gender difference is viewed as a situated social script with a variety of fluid selves available to us; and though the self is socially and self-constructed through discourse, we are able to find ways to resist, refuse and challenge hegemonic masculine discourses.



Writing extract – summer 2016

I've been the breadwinner in my families. I helped out my parents financially in their retirement and have been the principle breadwinner in the two main relationships of my adult life, with a man I lived with for seven years and, for many of our twenty years together, with my husband. I have lived against the prevailing social discourses in both Britain and the US even as the discourses have shifted from the expectation of the man as sole breadwinner and the woman as domestic carer, to one of dual incomes, with fathers contributing to raising the kids (Gambles et al., 2006). I'm not alone in this. My best friend from Cambridge has been the breadwinner in her marriage, as have been a number of the front-office women I work with. One way to succeed in a hypermasculinized world is to become an 'ideal worker', 'working full time, full force, for 40 years straight' (Mary Blair-Loy et al., 2015: 440). I've lived through a period of work intensification and invasion into our non-paid work lives (Gambles et al., 2006), and women are still expected to work the majority of the 'second shift' of unpaid work of childcare and housework (Blair-Loy et al., 2015; Gambles et al., 2006). In my own case, I'm lucky that my husband has been a willing equal partner, but our home situation was made more complicated for the first ten years of our marriage; my husband and I were in work roles that required overnight business travel, sometimes for days, or even a week or two. During the last four years my husband has retrained and gone in another career direction, which was helpful in that he was home more, less helpful in that our income was significantly cut, which intensified breadwinner pressure on me.

As Robyn and Annette comment, though 'this challenge may comprise mundane and small resistance initiatives against large social discourses, this does not mean that they were not important for the individuals themselves' (Thomas and Davies, 2005: 732). For myself, as you've just seen in the above extract, they were crucial to facilitating a *partial* escape from the subaltern position.

However, this theoretical position loses the clout of the politics of revolution. The shift to multiple, fractured identities at an individual subject level, and the focus on micro resistances, results in a loss of the subject Woman. We lose focus on women united around common issues of oppression, the fight against patriarchy, the vision of new organizations that liberate othered groups, and the value of the *féminine* (Thomas and Davies, 2005: 715). The feminist political project is arguably deconstructed to dust. This shift to the poststructural feminist theorist position of reinscription was also concurrent with the ascent of neoliberal discourses, and the co-opting, as we have seen, of feminism into discourses of individual empowerment that could be harnessed by the market economy.

By the summer of my second year as a part-time PhD student I'm becoming impatient with studies of individual reinscriptions and micro resistances. I'm arguing with Peter Fleming, annoyed with his criticisms that the spirit of micro-emancipation



'looks quaint if not amusingly feeble' and the 'cold logic of economic rationality presides largely undisguised, without fear of being upstaged by an alternative' (Fleming, 2013: 485). The Tempered Radical (Meyerson and Scully, 2008) in me annoyed by the words 'feeble' and 'upstaged'. I'm keen to recast resistance projects at work as rapidly becoming meso; convince myself that micro resistances have purchase. I continue reading studies on hypermasculine organizations, including surgeons and lawyers, and my lost radical feminist self is (re)aroused.

Writing extract – summer 2016

I'm feeling disappointed and a bit hopeless again and these feelings linger as I read other texts about the hypermasculinity of working as a corporate lawyer in the US and UK (Cynthia Epstein et al., 1999; Hilary Sommerlad, 2016), in Silicon Valley (Marianne Cooper, 2000) and as a surgeon in Boston (Katherine Kellogg, 2011). I become an angry 'second-wave' feminist as I read Mary recounting her experience as a lawyer:

In a Paris meeting, working on a large corporate acquisition, I was the only female corporate associate, working continuously for around a month with 12–15 men: and one evening when we were working late, the client for whom we were drafting a contract said 'at least we have nice eye candy'. The other men found it funny but I felt humiliated and had no intelligent response. (Sommerlad, 2016: 74)

I feel angry for Mary, because reading these words trips my own memories of humiliation, and memories of the experiences of my female friends and colleagues.

In the search for further explication of such resisting agency, I'm (re)reading Lois McNay's *Gender and Agency* (2000). I encounter scepticism from her as to whether reinscription offers a satisfactory account of agency. She's on the search for fuller and 'more precise and varied accounts of agency' (McNay, 2000: 4), one that gets beyond 'the primarily negative paradigm of identity formation – of subjectification as subjection' (2). She's wary of self-reflection as an 'unevenly realized phenomena' (69). I agree. It's hard to imagine my largely unreflective colleagues, all creatively reinscribing themselves without third-party intervention.

We cannot just be fragments, in pieces. We must assemble (Ahmed, 2017). We must put the "active" back into activism' (Braidotti, 2010: 210). And I am doing so through my writing and through 'politicized waves of affect' pulsing between us, our 'reader-writer coupling bring[ing] into the world a fecundity of new possibilities' (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 171). I am using my rage (Ahmed, 2015). Feminism has



become a dirty word (Moi, 2006), while we live in a world in which ‘patriarchal reasoning goes all the way down, to the letter, to the bone’ (Ahmed, 2017: 4).

Reason four: Feminism is availability of multiple subject positions, fluid genders, and individual resistances against social discourses. Feminism is reinscribing ourselves. Feminism is also about the meta-narrative of women’s oppression and the collective struggle. Women are oppressed. Patriarchal reasoning goes down to the bone. I (re)write myself as woman and I (re)write women (with you).

Call to (feminist) arms

‘We are in a new moment’, Denzin, the grandfather of qualitative inquiry, tells me in the summer of 2017 (2017b). Norm is 76, and he’s not retiring; he’s choleric, calling for new ways of doing critical qualitative inquiry in the neoliberal public sphere, ‘a historical present that cries out for emancipatory visions...realistic pedagogies of hope’ (Denzin, 2017b: 8, 15). He is calling for a reborn critical theory with persistence (2010, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). As qualitative researchers, he reminds us, following Marx (1975), that we are not called on just to interpret the world but to *change* it. He is calling for poetic-performance writing that provokes change, ‘texts that play across gender and race, utopian texts that involve readers and audiences to passion, moving them to action’ (Denzin, 2010: 115). Writing that can pierce neoliberal defences. Activism is evoked by raising ethical consciousness; fluid collaborations between body, paper and stage, ‘imagining and creating possibilities for personal and political transformation’ (Spry, 2011b: 31).

I read Ahmed’s *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) several times. Am I leading a feminist life? How do I help bring feminist theory home? ‘We live in a world in which *human* is still defined as *man*, we have to fight for women and as women.’ (15, her emphasis). Ahmed is calling for our wilful, wayward arms. Our arms have to become wilful, keep going, keep coming up; we need to curl our fists. When a hand curls up a feminist fist, it has a hand in movement. A call is a lament, a grief and a sorrow. A recognition of theft of our life from our bodies. We have to refuse to support a system that sucks the blood, vitality, life and limbs from women. ‘Arms: they will keep



coming up...We can share a refusal' (88, 185). I'm snapping; 'A snap is not a starting point, but a snap can be the start of something' (194).

Extract from abstract submitted to GWO – October 2017

A red-hot rage pulses through my veins, an affective dissonance between my body, who I am, and the ugly limitations of our existence as women (Clare Hemmings, 2012; Probyn, 1993). My vagina throbs with pain as I read today's headline story; *Mr. Trump's attack on birth control* (*The New York Times* Editorial Board, 2017), simultaneously eroding civil rights protections for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender people (Robert Pear et al., 2017).

Reason five: Feminism is a call to arms. A call is a lament. A call is activism. I (re)write women with my arms, our arms, as signifiers of hope. My willful arm, it just keeps coming back up. We need to make fists. Feminist arms will take down the Master's House.

A masculine OS Academy

In my letter to you, I discussed that we are required to operate in a masculine libidinal economy where values of scientism, rigour and mastery are a form of masculine control that, in writing, are (rough) traded so as to ease a fear of not knowing, a fear of castration (Phillips et al., 2014). Women's voices, and women's writing in OS, are not privileged. Rigour is required, data held at arms-length, tiny interview excerpts of five to ten words sandwiched between disembodied, theoretical, dry prose 'that abjures rich, poetic language even as it advocates rich description. We reduce the people we write about to wraiths' (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 176). It is writing with a paper penis.

Rigid are the practices located in our academic institutions, including our writing practices. The masculine hegemony reigns, as Cixous (1976b) would have it, rendering us 'frigidified'.

Still we are cajoled to operate in a 'libidinal economy' where values of scientism, rigour and mastery are a form of masculine control that, in writing, are traded so as to ease a fear of now knowing...a fear of castration (Phillips et al., 2014). To write in the masculine tradition controls meaning, wants to manipulate readers, pays homage to the strength of the phallus, and buffers itself against its own pathetic fragility. (Beavan et al. 2017)



There is a fear that without such writing we would not be creating *knowledge*, our research would wither into a bunch of inconsequential, improper, creative words on a page. 'I expect we teach coding', says St. Pierre, 'because we don't know how to teach thinking' (2011: 622). I'm answering her call to use:

words from theorists, participants, conference audiences, friends and lovers, ghosts who haunt our studies, characters in fiction and film and dreams – and with our bodies and all the bodies of the earth and all the things and objects in our lives – the entire assemblage that is a life...This work is not only playful in a Derridean sense but also necessary if we're to move out of structures that prevent us from thinking [and writing] differently. (St. Pierre, 2011: 622)

Gendered writing, in which we seek to undo our genders, embracing the other. The other in us. Embracing, not colonizing. Giving life to others. A *féminine* libidinal writing research economy where the phallus shrivels in its loneliness faced by the possibilities and hopes of generative difference. Fluid. Bi-sexual. No neutrality. An affirmative space of genre and gender blurring. An/other way of knowing. Beyond the domination of masculine knowing.

A virgin way of listening and making the always newold language speak. (Beavan and Case, 2018: 8)

Writing that challenges the foundations of patriarchy, writing where women seize

the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based *on her suppression*. To write and thus to forge for herself the antilogos weapon. To become *at will* the taker and the initiator, for her own right, in every symbolic system, in every political process...writing that is *the very possibility of change*, that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures (Cixous, 1976b: 880 her emphasis)

Over thirty-five years have passed. The Academy and society remain gendered; women silent.

The power of the unrepressed erotic

Patriarchy represses women's bodies and their desires, '[w]e the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces' (Cixous, 1976b: 878). Cixous's cry is to return to our bodies, to write our bodies, to return to our goods, our pleasures,



our 'immense bodily treasures' which have been 'kept under seal' (Cixous, 1976b: 880). Let's leap forward to 2015, and to a scene with the poet Maggie Nelson and her (gender-queer-identifying) partner Harry:

I can remember...standing beside you...as you asked me to say out loud what I wanted you to do to me. My whole body struggled to summon any utterable phrase. I... felt myself to be standing before an enormous mountain, a lifetime of unwillingness to claim what I wanted, to ask for it. Now here you were, your face close to mine, waiting. (Nelson, 2015: 70)

But, not only do lifetimes of repression hold us back, but to voice our honest desire as women, can be a truth 'most difficult to tell'

And so I am a knitted fabric head. I have the appearance of having a mouth. But the mouth shuts me in. I am all fabric, stitched into myself. I am stuffing cloth in my mouth.

And so these fantasies – of submission, abandon, extremity – stand hand on hip, daring the feminism of my youthful politics to stifle them. Daring my ancestors, as they live and breathe within me, to hold me down and cover my mouth.

(Katherine Angel, 2012: 202, 212)

Despite her feminism, and even whilst aware that her desires might be culturally inscribed, Angel here is vulnerable and honest in writing her desire for sexual subjugation by a man, whilst also recognising that she has fashioned a feminism that has contained her desire, kept her safe, and put a lid on her sexual hunger. She explodes the easy binaries of female liberation and independence versus submission and dependence. Her book explores *porousness* between masculinity and femininity, thought and sensation, self and culture, and how to relate to another in openness and love.

There's a danger in these examples of equating the erotic with sex, that would simply open women to capitalization by the male gaze, reducing women to their sexual value (Brewis and Grey, 1994). The root of the word 'erotic' is *love*; 'imaginative love, the prospect of love and a love of wisdom as well as sexual passion'. It's denied in 'capitalized market discourse' with a loss of playfulness, creativity, risk taking (Emma Bell and Sinclair, 2014).

Women have to find their voice of desire in a world of sexist and often predatory men; misogynistic men, and yet men whose 'imaginary is one full of fear



and terror of the scariest thing imaginable; a woman with power, her voice, and her own life' (Cornell, in Yancy, 2018: 2). This imaginary 'is related to the suppression in our society of the maternal body...How do we fight this horrific abuse of masculine power and at the same time understand that misogynistic imaginary is rooted in fear?'. Cornell's answer, like Cixous's, is the erotic: '[t]he job of feminists is to demand thorough going erotic transformation of our relationship to each other'; it's inseparable 'from an agenda of economic transformation...feminists, lesbians, and the transgendered have shown us that the erotic does not need to be immersed in the masculine imaginary' (Cornell, in Yancy, 2018: 2). And it is the only way for women to find their place and escape the 'margin of the harem' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément 1985: 93).

There are highly complex and significant cultural barriers to overcome for women to say and write their desire; but it is a key strategy in the ungendering of organizations and society. Speaking and writing our desire helps us move towards the other, and a different way of relating. Audre Lorde delivered a paper *The erotic as power* at The Fourth Berkshire Conference on the History of Women, Mount Holyoake College, 25 August 1978.⁴⁰ This essay is one of my companion texts. Forty years later, it resonates. Women have to suppress the erotic; it's used by men against them. Pornography (earlier I shared statistics on use) emphasizes sensation, not feeling. For Lorde, the erotic is the 'beginning of our sense of self...the chaos of our strongest feelings' involving 'power, honour and self-respect' (2017b: 23). Erotic women are perceived as dangerous. Yet the erotic is a *lifeforce* for women, a source of knowledge and empowerment, energizing and inspiring us.

In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness...resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial. It has potential to give us energy to change the world. Unfortunately, it is not easily felt by women 'who continue to operate under an exclusive european-american male tradition'. (Lorde, 2017b: 28–29)

Unrepressed dangerous erotic woman to change the world

Finally I dare to speak! I speak poorly, it's awful, I say things I never should say, I don't dare...[I]t happens with the greatest embarrassment, with tremendous reserve, but it happens and it is superb: something breaks loose. (Cixous, 2008d: 64)

⁴⁰ I reference the published version *Uses of the Erotic*, from the 2017 collection of Lorde's work *Your Silence Will Not Protect You*.



Women in organizations and the Academy need to speak the erotic. It is a way out of repression, an escape out of my gendered de-humanized corporate body and a move towards the other and to freedom (Cixous, 1991b; Bell and Sinclair, 2014).

Writing extract – summer 2016

Deep Waters

- Katie Beavan

You call to say hi
and I look at you carefully
through the video screen
as you shake your head
showing off your 'funny wig'
telling me you're 'getting another'
made with your shorn-off locks.
'It'll be lighter and cooler
than the fake stuff' you say
adding that your husband
buzzed your scalp last Sunday
and the kids are having trouble.

I look at your pale face and cheeks
puffy from steroids as we discuss
your white blood cell count
– falling.

Swanking you tell me you do your
own shots at home avoiding the clinic
and cycle to work every day through Milan's
traffic (Italian drivers I think in horror).
Grudging admission of being tired.

I ask about work and you tell me you're bolder
chasing down deals you may not win
because they will pay your bonus *anyway*
and clients *know* and are pushing stuff your way.
Why not? we both say, guilt flowing
as if you're claiming
some feminine ill-gotten gain.

Then I ask about your chemo and you go quiet.
I watch your eyes mist up. A long pause between
us. 'Diving', you say, 'it's like diving into
deep water, swimming under the hull of a mighty ship.'
Complete darkness. Icy cold.
An almighty clanging
in your ears.

And I don't know what to say to comfort you.

I call you back. You don't switch the camera on
but I hear your sudden surprised inhalation



after I ask you 'would it help you G if I...'
(hesitating, trying not to sound weird)
'If I become a dolphin and swim with you?'
'You'll hear my whistle. My clicks will guide us.'

'It', you tell me after the next time.
'to know you're in Connecticut
diving into the cold depths with me.'

Weeks later we get ready to plunge
for the fourth and final time.
You're bone weary now

desolate dark waters
one hundred thousand tons
weighing in above
flooding despair dragging
you downwards.

I nudge you with my nose
'use your jawbone.'
'can't', you murmur
'Please G, just try, for me.'

I watch you first startled
then amazed as you perceive

a thousand signature whistles
corresponding echolocations

one fluid co-ordinated superpod
focused, committed, surfacing.

Reason six: (Re)writing women and woman with bi-sexual writing, to speak as women without constraints on the feminine erotic. Writing to create other ways of knowing and relating; other ways of gendered-beings-in-the-world; writing to transform His/tory. Writing ablaze with care, our ongoing songs, our erotic desires.

WOMAN is arriving in the world

I began with my potestas, and I am concluding this pool with potentia. This is not an ending, in which I neatly wrap up my reasons, for they are multiplicitous, and generative between us. Rather, it is time to descend further into my theses and I am going to surface here with my (un)reasonable hopes. It is easy to become despairing



about the stalling/retrenchment of feminism; the masculinity of our OS Academy; or limitations on our agency and activism as women writers, practitioners and scholars. Cixous is always about *life*. '[T]he Cixousian subject is nothing if not a subject of life' (Sal Renshaw, 2009: 193). We will return to this theme, and its importance for ethical, affirmative activism, many times. A consistent aspect of Cixous's writing, from *The Laugh of the Medusa* (1976b) to more current books, such as *Philippines* (2011c) is women's understanding of life's mysteries, of the other, for the future of humanity itself, and for the magical power of written language (Metka Zupančič, 2017). In 2010 Cixous republished 'The Laugh of the Medusa', and 'Sorties' (from *The Newly Born Woman*) in which she included a new essay, 'Un effet d'épine rose'. In this essay she asks, 'where are women today?' and her reply is 'I fear that you need to come back and fly by my window, I say. Right now – the air is full of algae, we are stifled and do not laugh very much' (Cixous, in Raquelle Bostow, 2016: 6).

We can fly by Cixous' window for hope. We can also open our eyes and look around. Radical feminism is restirring in places where we might least expect it. In Argentina, where the annual Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres has become a radical rallying three-day event for women across Latin America; in 2015 65,000 women attended. In Italy, where #NonUnaDiMeno organised assemblies in over 100 cities; 250,000 women participated (including many trans- and queer-identifying women) and their 2017 *Piano Femminista* makes radical social demands. The scene is fascinating and it moves (Watkins, 2018).

Seven, a number with magical symbolism. The Septad. The seed of life. The seven colours of the rainbow...

Reason seven: We (re)write woman to bring her, in her gendered multiplicity, into the world, a different HerStory, passed on from one woman to another, creating movement, flowing *aller á la mer*. And She is arriving in the world.



Pool two: The ~~im~~possibilities of (re)writing Woman

January/February 2018

Questions, not answers

Having departed my last pool in an ebullient mood, full of vision of the power of the féminine erotic, I arrive in this one bringing myself back to earth. I want to consider the challenges and possibilities of (re)writing myself as a woman, (re)writing women in organizations and as a practitioner-woman, engaged in the struggle for gender parity, and acceptance of differences of all kinds, in organizations. What are the possibilities, the challenges? What theoretical tools might help me? What are the fields of our feminist struggles in organizations, the Academy, society?

I am writing from an embodied, subjective position that conceives feminism as ethical, collective and revolutionary, and calls for women's writing to help demasculinize our Academy, our organizations and ourselves. It is a call, after Cixous, for women to use writing to (re)write ourselves, to right ourselves, to arrive in our rightful (and equal) place in the world. I will continue to identify with, explore, deconstruct, and open up into an ongoing *différance*⁴¹ of meanings, these labels. This positioning opens up a plethora of questions, some of which I am engaged in an ongoing struggle with, including: who is/are writing this text? what is human subjectivity? What is féminine subjectivity? What is writing from the body? What is the category woman? How should tensions between category woman and the desire and necessity to access and release the féminine be managed (and can this be done without lapsing into essentialism)? How can we write woman and at the same time open ourselves as women (and men) to multiplicity in the sexual orientations and performances we adopt? How can we write the interior world and why is that

⁴¹ *Différance*, along with deconstruction, is a term Derrida uses for reading texts. It has three related meanings. The first is the energy preceding the creation of binary oppositions. The second is an excess, a remainder, which resists the imperative of binary organisation. After Cixous, I am interested in this moment of excess as a subversion of patriarchy. One approach is to slow down and study the instant. The third (relating to deferral) is the idea that words and signs can never fully summon forth what they mean but can only be defined through appeal to additional words, from which they differ. Thus, meaning is forever deferred through an endless chain of signifiers – meaning is undecided, there are only, everywhere, differences and traces of traces (Nicole Anderson, 2013; Grosz, 1989)



important? How can we write the other without appropriation? And, most importantly, how might rewriting woman disrupt patriarchy and neoliberalism?

I'm in search of a feminism that can assist with individual and social change, and that is ethical. In what ways might Cixous be a guide? I hope to set your expectations of what I can accomplish in this pool. Cixous has spent close to sixty-years working with these questions and speculating in her writing to answer them. To understand the radical feminism of her writings and its potential today I've had to delve into her vast, and sometimes contradictory, poetic oeuvre.

My move to Cixous is a (re)turn to the French poststructural feminism and a psychoanalytic/psychodynamic construction of subjectivity. I could have worked with Irigaray or Kristeva, and I hope to draw on their writings in future projects. All three women use a psychoanalytical framing that reimagines woman, that I'll argue is crucial to demasculinizing our organizations and our OS Academy. All three women are academics, philosophers and feminist theorists; Irigaray and Kristeva are both trained psychoanalysts. All three believe that (in the West) the structures and symbols of society – our history, our philosophy, systems of government, our laws – are patriarchal and based on a masculine construction of the world through language. Language is the key to understanding this construction, and to subverting it. It is language that excludes women, and it is in the repressed *féminine* that the feminist revolution can occur. It is a move to different forms of *féminine* writing, and representation, to undermine the power balance of patriarchy (Sellers, 1991). There are also some key differences between the positions these three women theorize. What sets Cixous apart is that she is first and foremost a woman writer rather than a theorist, and as scholars of her work we get into trouble when we forget this. She is determined not to enter masculine spaces on patriarchal terms. When we separate a Cixousian idea from its roots in her poetic words, or as a concept divorced from the materiality of her language, we lose her point. Her concepts (and some of mine) are often metaphoric, and not to be taken too literally. We always have to remember that she is showing, not telling, how to undo the logical binaries of Western thought (Susan Dunn, 1998). All that said, let's never doubt that she *is* a philosopher and theorist, but one who unsettles a reader expecting masculine writing. Paradoxically, this disorientation makes it more real, more about ourselves and disturbs us (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997).



Although Cixous advocates certain psychoanalytic theoretical frames, especially the unconscious, she remains sceptical of psychoanalysis. It's important to remember context, that she was writing in an era of traditional Freudian psychoanalysis, prior to introduction of intersubjective perspective which emerged, following the social theory of Jürgen Habermas, in the 1970s (Jessica Benjamin, 1988). Cixous's works through own clinical material through her *écriture féminine* (quasi) autobiographical texts. At INSEAD, studying for a master's in coaching and consulting for change – a degree with a clinical foundation – I wrote myself also. I am still writing myself. *Écriture féminine* is a method of doing psychoanalysis on yourself. It's a field within the pastures of our feminist struggles, a way of writing/righting ourselves. It's a way to invent another history for ourselves outside of patriarchal oppression. The language we use, our bodies which create it, are central. It is also writing intended for *all* women and not for a restricted audience of scholars. Cixous and Clément publish *La Jeune Née* (1975) as a public, not academic, text, a '10/18' (manufactured cheaply, 10cm x 18cm, for immediate consumption – a daring gesture in the male world of Parisian publishing); the book is a 'megaphone' into which a 'masculine reader is invited to plunge his nose and listen to another master's voice' (Conley, 1991: 52). Her 'field of action, her combat, takes place in poetic writing, language, fiction' (Calle-Gruber, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 7).

This way of writing is in tension with the scholarly masculine norms; a tension that I don't mask in my theses. My field of combat is poetic writing and performance. I take texts (and performances) outside the OS Academy, 'They are made for this by the way.'

V.C. [Verena Conley] Do you consider your writing to be an action?

H.C. [Helene Cixous] Yes, I think so. I think that there is also a test of reading. Texts with a strong 'femininity,' like some... put to test a certain *jouissance*. There are people who resist, who feel it as a threat, while others are relieved.

(Conley, 1991: 157, their emphasis)

This is not easier. The im/possibility is to write readerly academic texts which are 'poetically political, politically poetic' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 139).



Why Hélène Cixous?

Her call to life, jouissance, laughter; to be a creator

My choice of Cixous is both rational and intuitive. At a meta level, her work is the most radical (of the trio of Cixous, Irigaray and Kristeva), in that her strategy is to refuse rational, theoretical discourse and write from her body, in an/other language. It is an unwavering commitment to write *from* the féminine, and to write *in* the missing féminine. She never writes in the masculine to rationalize a repositioning of woman in society. In her view, you have to disobey the laws of phallogentrism to break its stranglehold. This makes her oeuvre difficult to traverse. Her theorizing is largely done via verbal interviews. She never cites in texts and makes scant use of end/footnotes. I feel I'm trying to solve a 10,000-piece jigsaw puzzle with an indistinct image. I'm only at the stage of assembling a few pieces and seeing some patterns.

Cixous's work is poetic writing from and through her female body, as the locus and means of feminist revolution, and with a utopian vision to create a society of freedom of differences where such terms as 'masculine' and 'féminine' are no longer required. She subverts patriarchal laws at every turn. The rungs of her ladder to an/other language are writing féminine jouissance; women have been sexually subjugated by men and must write their desire. It is writing towards the other. She envisages a society based on different ways of relating to each other based on openness and profound respect and generosity for the other, alternative relationships to power, and generative generosity. She names this a féminine libidinal economy, not because men cannot live in this manner, but because she believes that women, by virtue of the experience of giving birth and cultural inscription, are generally more open to tolerating otherness.

Cixous pushes her an/other language to the limits of possibility. To her multi-lingual ears language is music which she can make sing. Her deliberate embracing of the poetic and repressed material and challenging of linear, objective, fixed meanings, her subversion of the rules of syntax and spelling, can make her work seem strange, circular, inconsistent and hard to follow. Her continuous dense intertextuality is frustrating. I often don't know the writers and works, or myths and



legends, she weaves into her writing. I've learned to adopt a different reading position, opening my ears to the myriad sound patterns, rich metaphors, multiple meaning plays, wild hymnic cries, the material texture of her language, her journeying beyond the confines of gender and into multiple selves. Deleuze suggests reading a Cixousian text quickly, 'absorbing the associations which combine in surprising ways, like rapid but discontinuous lighting' and then to re-read. A reading he calls 'stroboscopic' (in Shiach, 1991: 79). I listen first to her song, trying to find its rhythm, and then I tune into her ideas. The rewards of reading Cixous are worth the journey. She is not only presenting to us theoretical ideas and concepts for an alternative way of living, that have revolutionary potential, but also showing us, through language, how to live this way, and giving us pleasure at the same time. I lament that my French is inadequate to read her original work, and am grateful to the work of her translators, aware that 'each translation is a remarkable achievement in itself', the translator always moving, working as a 'smuggler, a furtive border-crosser, and a witness' (Prenowitz, 2006: ix).

At the same time as I am seduced by her music, I find myself paradoxically resisting her. To follow her good friend Derrida, who was always first-reader of her manuscripts, this resistance is because she is 'nearly untranslatable' (cited in Prenowitz, 2006: viii). Derrida confesses he has read her for 25 years as if in a dream, often forgetting that she writes and what she writes, and that such forgetting is elemental, that his life depends on it. He even affirms that Cixous is 'not innocent', that she 'resists herself' and 'must resist herself, forget or forgetread herself, misunderstand herself in order to continue' (Derrida, 1994, 1998; Derrida 2002, in Prenowitz, 2011, 2). Derrida's advice is to find the courage to give oneself over to her, to the 'crawling inchoate energy of [her] textuality' (Prenowitz, 2011: 5). I agree, and find another antidote to resisting her is to fall into her ever-present humour.

Laughter is a Cixousian strategy for liberation from phallic seriousness. 'I write, knowing that the verb laugh, *rire*, is in cahoots with the verb write, *écrire*' (Cixous, 2002: 432, her emphasis). Writing contains laughter, and this laughter can be turned inward at the writer who laughs at herself. Laughter which rejects and transforms the seriousness of the writer's purpose. It's a bodily response, a subversion, a 'laughing-in-language', a laughter that releases desire, the excess that is repressed in "centred" structurations of theoretical discourse' (Diane Davis, 1995, in Tara Puri,



2013: 276). '[L]aughing at the accepted and expected phallogocentric logic, as well as at the laughing woman herself...creates a detonation that opens up the possibility of a liberating space outside enclosing constraints and oppositional models' (Puri, 2013: 276). Laughter, especially the explosive, roaring laughter of the Medusa that Cixous writes, is a bodily phenomenon that takes control of us, shaking us, and as we collapse into laughter the 'balance is disturbed, we find ourselves in a disordered world' (Silvia Stoller, 2018: 124). It's our way of avoiding decapitation in the masculine economy; instead of submission we submit feminine disorder and disturbance from our uncontrolled bodies.

Laughter that breaks out, overflows, a humor no one would expect to find in women – which is nonetheless surely their greatest strength because it's a humor that sees man much further away than he has ever seen... 'she who laughs last.' And her first laugh will be at herself. (Cixous, 1981: 55)

It's tough to execute in writing. How to intentionally write laughter that erupts unintentionally from my body? How to write about difficult, repressed topics and painful personal issues, with laughter, on the side of life? I experiment.

Writing extract – February 2018

Big Littles

Arriving in America in 1996, I thought I was in the land of giants. Massive electric goods; refrigerators the size of wardrobes and 'industrial-sized' washing machines with separate dryers demanding rooms of their own. Food portions placed in front of me that could feed families of ten. Small enough in London at 5ft tall, I shrunk on clearing customs. Bewildered in a Manhattan deli by a thousand choices of breads and fillings and the startle of a 2lb monster wrapped in a crisp white bag, placed in my hands at the till. Walking the hot humid streets of Manhattan, I was agog at x-ray women, my London hips tripling as I gazed at their spectral limbs.

The Cixousian feminine scholar and writer is a fleshy subject in every sense. Note, readers: for Cixous, femininity does not necessarily mean a female body; it's a human body that is open, generous, open to difference in others, moving towards the other. My intuitive turn to Cixous is because her invitation is open to differences, *joyous and creative and revolutionary*.



Joy is alien to structures, it dissolves identities, subverts hierarchies. Medusa's laugh is not a tittering at the fallacies of phallic myths of feminine lack, hers is a triumphant roar of life over death. Such a roar, such a laughter, is a *thinking*, a *writing*, and a *practice*. (Abigail Bray, 2004: 199–200, my emphasis)

Laughter – a roaring tool in our feminist struggles.

Cixous's call to bring woman into the world by living otherwise

Her call is both individual and collective. It is a call to rewrite ourselves, as individual women and as woman in society. 'Can we win' this battle, she asks rhetorically in a discussion with Conley. It is a battle in which she says we must engage, because 'if we enter society to become men, we have lost everything'. She understands it is a 'long project', a war, but she is steadfast in her belief that the feminine libidinal economy will bring about 'transformations in oneself, in others, and in men' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 135–136).

Thirty years after her conversations with Conley and Sellers, Cixous continues to hold the same views:

I have never thought that we could wipe the disease away from the face of the earth, or that misogyny will be treated as a disease and suddenly disappear. We must always think of these scenes as they take place at specific locations and times, which are violent and must be fought and won. (Cixous, in Olivier Zahm and Donatien Grau, 2015: 12)

I am uplifted, not downcast, by her words. Feminism is a *long project*. Scenes may be violent and they must be fought and won. There are scenes today in hypermasculine organizations, in our OS Academy, in society. Her battle tactics are for women writers to act as moles, burrowing underneath the foundations of patriarchy. It is a battle of not one or the other but of '*with*, in spite of all the difficulties and confusions this may bring about' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 136, her emphasis). It is the feminine *with* the masculine, not in opposition to it. Cixous's call isn't just to women; she's calling all human beings who wish to embrace the undoing of patriarchy and the creation of a world of plurality and difference. It is a call I am answering, and my theses are one step along this project pathway. Her challenge is a powerful and difficult one. It is a call to *creativity*, with our *bodies* and with *language*. We fight not with weapons, but from our bodies with words. And her call



is always with a fluid, multiple, subject in movement eluding fixity or dichotomous logic. '[It] must be graceful. It has to be moving, has to be in movement. As soon as you stop, that is it' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 136–137).

*I miss Ambi, the word: ambi –two
tous les deux, tous deux, les deux⁴²
amphibiology
ambiguous
ambivalence (a word that is not in Littré!⁴³)
a modern word (1924)
Both sides
Thinking of/on both sides*

(Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 25).

'The staggering origin of temporality itself, there where time in a stroke enters on stage. One must be two. The suspensive modality of the possible' (Derrida, 1994: ix, x). To conceptualise this is one task. To execute it in my writing, including in my theses, is the (im)possible mission. How to think of/on both sides without military gestures (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 5)? I'm still an apprentice in the school of Ambi. I write this wondering if my performance piece, *Pussy Hats*, is a military gesture.

And what if it is? Despite her objections that they were not written from her usual position, *Laugh of the Medusa* (1976b), *The Newly Born Woman* (1986), *Castration or Decapitation* (1981) and her play *Portrait of Dora* (1983); that they were 'military gestures: constructing a camp with lines of defence' written at a time⁴⁴ 'which appeared to me to be confused and to be producing repression and loss of life and of sense' (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 5), these works have endured, and are the most well-known of her texts. My *Pussy Hats* is written against subjugation of women. It is a direct call to bring woman into the world, into our organizations, into the OS

⁴² 'A phrase which can be translated as 'both of them'. Literally: 'all the twos', and 'the twos' (Calle-Gruber, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 113).

⁴³ 'French-language reference dictionary' (Calle-Gruber, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 114).

⁴⁴ These texts were written in 1975–6, in direct response to Lacan's Seminar XX, *On féminine sexuality: The limits of love and knowledge. 1972-1973. Encore* (1972-3), which had taken hold of Paris in what I view as a mass psychodrama. Cixous may also have been writing against Monique Wittig's co-authored Marxist *Combat pour la libération de la femme* (Wittig et al., in Janet Lyon, 1991). Cixous and the groups she was involved with, the Des femmes publishing house and the feminist group Psych et Po, were focused on rewriting Freud and Lacan. They disagreed vehemently with Wittig's militancy, which they regarded as a dead-end and anti-theoretical (Des femmes, 1974).



Academy, through affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012). It ends in a burst of triumphant joy, and Cixousian laughter (with my saucepan lid and wooden spoon) in the fields of our feminist struggles.

Category woman?

Can we have a category woman? It's a fraught question on many counts, a few of which I'm going to touch on: Can woman exist in poststructural feminism? Does embracing it snare us in sloppy essentialism? Are identity politics a primary loyalty? Is woman, as used by feminists, contaminated by a white, middle-class subjectivity?

The problems of deconstructed woman

Let's begin with poststructuralism. Some feminist scholars argue that deconstruction, into fluid multiple subjectivities and ongoing deferral, render collective feminism as problematic at best, perhaps impotent, with the platform for representation politics disappearing (Seyla Benhabib, 1995; Moi, 2002). It's a vexing problem for me, an Achilles bursitis, flaring up painfully, dogging my doctoral journey. I found an early home in poststructuralism and have increasingly been (re)awakened to the radical feminism of my youth. I believe in problematization of sex dualisms,⁴⁵ the opportunities opened up by viewing gender as a performance (Butler, 1993), the destabilization of dominant definitions of women and the politics of reinscription (Thomas and Davies, 2005; Pullen, 2006), and that our sexuality⁴⁶ can be fluid. I follow that category woman is rendered deconstructable and unstable, a site of trouble. I've written about how space for resistance is opened up between the subject positions available in dominant discourse and the self reflexively constructed. One of my taliswomans is Pullen's 2006 article, which incorporates the discursive textual approach of Foucault, the performance/social approach of Butler and the corporeal multiplicity of Grosz and Dorothea Olkowski, offering me a potentially rich pathway to re-citing, re-siting and re-sighting myself as a woman

⁴⁵ The idea that we exist in the world according to the rigid sex category written on our birth certificates and determined by our birthed genitals, either male or female.

⁴⁶ Our sexual interests, orientations and attractions.



researcher. I've employed Thomas and Davies's theorizing of the 'relationship between women's resistance and small scale, subterranean, and localized forms of struggle', arguing with them at times that 'political resistance is emancipatory and the effectiveness of small-scale localized struggles in effecting larger scale change should not be underestimated' (2005: 733) and conceptualizing how micro organizational resistances can rapidly become meso.

I have worked with these theories of subversive individualized reinscription and localized resistances throughout my doctoral journey, yet always with some lurking disquiet that perhaps Benhabib, Moi and others are right, and the organizing potential, the political purchase required in feminism, is diluted; that we've deconstructed feminism away. I'm also with McNay (2000) that Foucauldian reinscription is primarily 'a negative paradigm of identity formation – of subjectification as subjection' (2) – and that self-reflection is an 'unevenly realized phenomena' (69). In my work experience and in my fieldwork, I've found skills of self-reflexivity are lamentably lacking in hypermasculine workplaces. I'm haunted continually by Acker's (1989) statement that while 'notions of patriarchy...reflect a white middle class woman's reality...deeply patriarchal modes are embedded in our theorizing...there is a danger in abandoning the project of patriarchy.' I am of the view that Acker was prescient in her worries that 'gender lacks the critical-political sharpness of patriarchy' (Acker, 1989: 235, 239). One of the difficulties with gender is that it masks a double-bind structure. It offers freedom from sex as oppositional states (see Butler, 1990, 1993, 2004), and at the same time it operates as a code culturally reinforcing the binary⁴⁷ (MacCannell, 1990).

We need a representational discourse, and despite the troubling, need to use and not refuse the category woman and return to the project of patriarchy. This creates a bind – a disavowal of woman ontologically, and a pragmatic need to keep it for political action. There is a need to employ and refuse the sign (Denise Riley, 1988; Butler, 1993). The question is how to do this without abandoning differences between different identity groups, and without losing gendered fluidity. Can we have our cake and eat it? Cixous shows us the way. Her writing is a nuanced focus on many types of otherness, and her *féminine* writing is an escape route for all who suffer under systems of oppression. It's an opening up into multiplicities. It's writing

⁴⁷ In a recent study of gendered places, all eighteen of Louise Nash's interviewees – City of London employees – conflated 'gender' with 'women' (2018: 15).



with sensitivity to the positions we speak from (I am a white, privileged, Anglo-Saxon woman) and our difference to others. This is a field of our feminist struggles.

Scary essential woman

Underneath the high theory, I also perceive a scholarly fear lurking, that to identify with the category woman and attribute positive elements to it, we risk becoming essentialists, or at least guilty of slippage, and therefore lesser, or even unfit, (masculine) scholars. The essentialist/non-essentialist positioning is a potential minefield; I'll avoid a deep-dive into it, and limit myself to some comments that I feel are essential, if in danger of being essentializing.

Essentialism – the idea that there are innate biological differences between the sexes – causes an odd friction between women in the Academy, anxious to avoid such an accusation, and women struggling in organizations and daily life with male dominators who see no issues with categorizing essential differences between men and women. I sit each week in a women's writing class with a group of highly educated women (a few have PhDs), for whom a discourse of essential differences between men and women is their accepted reality. To raise an alternative argument is to alienate them with feminist intellectualization (Ellen Messer-Davidow, 2002, in Lund et al., 2017), which has to be avoided for feminism to be a political movement. Cixous is well aware of essentialist traps (Conley, 1991), and charts a course in her public polemic texts carefully, refuting Freudian biologism (Cixous and Clément, 1986). She refers to woman as a gendered being, who has been made woman (and man) by culture. Men are required to eradicate all their femininity in order to be men (Cixous, 2008d); a positioning Cixous knows to be torturous and complex (Cixous, 1993). She founds the Centre d'Etudes Féminines at the University of Paris VIII, Vincennes, in 1974 to explore the theme of sexual differences through studying literature. She conceptualizes a féminine libidinal economy, open to men as well as women, and puts '150 quotation marks to prevent it from being used in the mode of a "féminine woman", as in fashion magazines'. That said, she admits to getting carried away with the idea of féminine essences and presence, though never abandoning philosophical rigor (Conley, 1991).



With this carrying off into poetic word and metaphor she is accused of slippage and biologism (Moi, 2002). My belief is that this arises because some scholars take her literally, whereas she also uses the term ‘woman’ as ‘capricious *metaphor*’ for any human being who has been ‘suppressed and marginalized by the dominant masculine economy that prizes reason and lack over the overflowing abundance and passion of the body’ (Puri, 2013: 278, my emphasis).

I also have a nagging doubt that in our fear of being accused as essentialists we have lost common sense. Men’s and women’s bodies are not the same and the way we experience pleasure with our bodies is different. I’m with Cixous that I don’t understand what people mean when they say these differences don’t exist; although they are only a ‘small part of the entirety of human being’ (Cixous, in Sellers, 1988: 151). I admire Cixous for claiming that she can only *write* female *jouissance* (Cixous, 2008f). I’m also with Nelson that the gendered ‘shit stays messy...The *presumptuousness* of it all’ (2015: 53, her emphasis). I believe that gendered irresolution is okay for some human beings, and for others it is not, and that these differences are enriching.

Cixous’s *féminine* theorizing is an approach in which all differences, including race, sexuality, gender and culture, can exist. Susan Billingham has reinvented *écriture féminine* as writing ‘which might represent the needs of transsexual and transgender women...*écriture au trans-féminine*’ (Billingham, 2010, in Zoë Brigley Thompson, 2013, Billingham’s emphases). Unfortunately, acceptance of transgender women is a field of our feminist struggles where we can end as women fighting other women,⁴⁸ refusing the idea that physical differences are on a spectrum greater than the binaries we assign them at birth and that some human beings feel they are in the *wrongly* sexed body.

Hormonal woman

Then there is the vexing question of hormones. I believe they do have something to do with sexual differences, hence their significance for non-binary-identifying human

⁴⁸ The 2018 clashes between TERFS (trans exclusionary radical feminists) in the UK and transgender women who identify as lesbians, is one example of this. Some prominent feminists, including Germaine Greer, have also been accused of taking this position (Calla Wahlquist, 2016).



beings. Nelson compares the experience of her partner Harry ('who is happy to identify as a butch on T [testosterone]...*I'm not on my way anywhere*'⁴⁹) with her own, simultaneous, experience of being pregnant. In the following, she is addressing Harry:

you always wanting to fuck, raging with a new comfort in your skin; me vaulting into unfuckable, not wanting to dislodge the hard-won baby seed, falling through the bed with dizziness whenever I turn my head – *falling forever* – all touch starting to sicken, as if the cells of my skin were individually nuanced...my first sustained encounter with the pendulous, the slow, the exhausted, the disabled. (Nelson, 2015: 53, 85, 86)

Paul Preciado, who wants neither the female sex awarded to him at birth, nor the male gender that transsexual therapies can furnish and the state award, embarked on a year-long experiment with taking a low dose of testosterone and comes to call it the devil:

an explosion of the desire to fuck...the feeling of strength reflecting the increased capacity in my muscles, my brain...the feeling that [my] muscular intentionality can grab hold of any object, the certainty that any object at all can be gotten the better of...I'm in T. I have become T. (Preciado, 2013: 21, 67, 420–422).

What about oestrogen and the effects of motherhood? Cixous is criticized (Ann Rosalind Jones, 1981; Stanton, 1986) for valourizing the maternal in an essentialist way. Cixous's argument is that pregnancy and giving birth opens the way to a toleration of the other, to pleasure, to life. Nelson describes her own pregnancy as 'the *capaciousness* of growing a baby. The baby literally *makes space* where there wasn't space before' (2015: 103).

I can't say I enjoyed birthing. My labour was difficult, my baby painfully turned the wrong way, and stubbornly refusing to turn around. Two fearful dramas ensued, first severe difficulty in getting my son out alive-whole-healthy and then my unexpected, intense and prolonged haemorrhaging caused by a retained placenta. Our joint lives hung on fragile separate instants. I held my precious son momentarily in my arms before he was whisked away, not seen or held again – for long hours. My experience of my leaky female – menstruating, pregnant, post-miscarriage, menopausal body – in corporate life was one of frequent shame, cover-up, fear of inopportune and embarrassing leakages. No admittance to fluids, blood or hormonal

⁴⁹ Harry, the author is suggesting, does not desire to transition to become a man.



feelings (including desperation) were allowed. These experiences led more to my feeling my body as other. Yet, I'm with Nelson, my pregnancy with my son (2001) literally and emotionally made spaces where there wasn't space before.



And continues to do so...

for all three of them...





Women's bodies, female hormones, are (while validating gender performativity, queering easy definitions, accepting bi-sexuality in all human beings) different to men's. I'm going to risk the scholarly abyss and throw myself in with Cixous. Culture matters, and offers, in those minute, daily acts of performing gender, opportunities for reinscription. And a woman's body is not a man's, however hard we try in organizations to mask and soak up that fact. O is not T. This is a fraught field in our feminist struggles.

Woman as a political category

I was born political, in a sense, and it was even for political reasons that I began to write *poetry* as a response to political tragedy. (Cixous, 2008e: 84)

Culturally formed, and a metaphor, Cixous also uses woman politically, as a feminist. It's a double move, supporting a feminist definition, the fight against universal man, and at the same time valourizing the unique individuality of every woman (Cixous, 1976b). In *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Clément, 1986), different women come everywhere to life. Cixous sees no alternative, in the fight against patriarchy, in the fight for women, to 'cross the bar of absolute repression behind which all women are parked' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 134–135) but to place a



limitation on the complexity of sexual differences. We are at the mercy of simplification (Cixous, 1993). It's a tricky position of tension and one in which she (and I) struggle to find a comfortable place. It's a violence to close down signification of woman and it is politically necessary. If we trouble the sign woman too much, we remove ourselves from the scene of the feminist struggle. Individual resignifications are helpful, local struggles of resistance to rewrite selves against disempowering discourses a useful tactic, but to pursue the feminist cause, against unbearable inequities, we need category woman and I embrace it. 'For me, being a woman, that has meaning; it's even the primary meaning. It determines me absolutely, and among many determinations which constitute "me"' (Cixous, 2008g: 137). I use with intention both woman and women. It isn't slippage. It's the field of my feminist struggles.

Revalourized woman

Cixous, particularly in her writing in the 1970s and 1980s, when her feminism was at its zenith, seeks to retain category woman, theorizing femininity without constraining plurality and difference, whilst also knowing she must constrain, in order to retain political purchase. In the 1970s she is writing with an intense focus on *féminine* subjectivity in relation to the body, with instability of the terms 'masculine' and 'féminine'. She is searching for a writing that moves beyond the phallogentric binaries of man/woman. This is more problematic than it may appear. I follow Cixous in revalourizing the *féminine*, and in the turn to language to reconceive an empowered woman subject. Working with and against Lacan, as I will explain below, is a move to a *féminine* libidinal economy, to a fecund Imaginary, to women as multiplicity and not lack, and to the m/other (Cixous and Clément, 1986). This opens the way to feminist critiques of Cixous, attacks suggesting a belief (again) in womanly essential essences (Moi, 2002; Stanton, 1986). Stanton puts 'Difference on trial', problematizing the 'pre-Oedipal unboundness, relatedness, plurality, tenderness, fluidity, nurturance in the name of the difference of female identity' as 'excessive, tumescent metaforplay...that reproduce[s] the dichotomy between male rationality and female materiality, corporeality and sexuality' (1986, 177, 170). I do not agree with these critiques, and suggest that they reflect a reading of Cixous from the masculine.



I view both the valourisation of the woman-maternal as critical then, and today, to feminism, but suggest that we can also view the debate in its historical moment, as a rebuttal to Lacan's exclusion of women from the Symbolic, positioning of woman as lack, and an intense psychodrama that Lacan's seminars, particularly seminar XX, (Lacan, 1998⁵⁰) swept Paris up in. Moi and Stanton's critiques can also be viewed within the American feminist context of the 1980s, with concerns about equal rights and pragmatism, and fear of slippage into biologism. The French feminist obsession with language, the repressed *féminine*, the physical and psychically female body, is viewed as strange, misplaced, feminist scholars regarding *écriture féminine* with 'indifference, and even suspicion or hostility...too intellectual and elitist to be feminist' (Stanton, 1990⁵¹: 79), reflected in some of Moi's well-known criticisms of Cixous as ridiculously utopian (2002⁵²).

I turn back to category woman, to revalourisation of woman and women's bodies, as essential to opening up other *féminine* discourses, and as a pathway to undermining *foundational* patriarchal structures. Woman is essential for political purchase. The vast phallogentric membrane has grown back (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986), if it ever left, and '[t]he non-master must be imagined' (Clément, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 144). As women in 2018 we are still parked behind the bar of repression. We need category woman, and we need to find connection across our differences; an affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012), is necessary for sustainable feminist transformation and to bring 'woman into the world' (Cixous, 1984: 548). *Woman*, the field of our feminist struggles.

Sister outsiders

Can one have category woman when the differences between women are significant?

Black feminism is not white feminism in blackface. Black women have particular and legitimate issues which affect our lives as Black women, and addressing those issues does not make us any less black. (Lorde, 1998: 60)

⁵⁰ The full title of the seminar is *On féminine sexuality: The limits of love and knowledge, 1972-1973. Encore. The seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX*. It is commonly referred in shorthand by scholars as Seminar XX and I follow this convention in my theses.

⁵¹ I cite the 1990 edition here; the paper was first published in 1980.

⁵² First published in 1985.



Feminism was also accused in the 1980s as being largely white, elite and privileged, unable to represent the profoundly different issues of black women and other minority groups. I've already voiced Ahmed's argument that feminism must be intersectional if it is to have collective purchase, but it requires a way to connect across (significant) identity differences. There are real dangers of slippage into empathy and pity in white Western feminist consideration of global others (Trinh T Minh-Ha, 1989). Such connections can be problematic. For example, although #MeToo was founded by a black woman, Tarana Burke, it has been criticized by black women, who feel less able to speak out in its spaces, despite the higher prevalence of sexual harassment they, as ethnic women, face (Jessica Prois and Carolina Moreno, 2018). Burke herself is more hopeful, defending #MeToo as an intersectional space in which these differences must be confronted (Michelle Rodino-Colocino, 2018).

Cixous, growing up in Algiers, surrounded by Arabic language and culture, accompanying her midwife mother to the clinic,⁵³ is always sensitive to racial and religious differences. It's a muted topic in my theses reflecting the whiteness of my lived life on so many levels. My African-American friend D flies in for my *Pussy Hats* performance. We discuss urgently, with passion, with disgust, the recent racist attacks that took place at Starbucks in Philadelphia, and on the Yale Golf Course. I have a racist scene in *Pussy Hats*. There is a project emerging for the future. I'm reading, re-reading, absorbing, re-absorbing, Claudia Rankine's *An American Lyric* (2014), page turning through painful vignette after painful vignette exposing the daily micro aggressions against the bodies of people of colour; her poetry beautiful and alarming. In organizations, as we have seen, women of colour face the greatest hurdles. My friend D surviving and winning a bitter and lengthy court case of unlawful racial discrimination by her previous employer.

A significant body of Black feminist scholarship (see Robin Boylorn, 2013; Hill Collins, 2008, 2009, and with Bilge, 2016; hooks, 1982, 1991, 2000a, 2000b) has developed along with postcolonial feminism (Anzadúa, 1990; Mohanty, 2003; Spivak and Grosz, 1990) and increasingly a focus on feminism in the global south (Roberts and Connell, 2016). I also am calling out the fact that this body of feminine scholarship has been absorbed into 'metropolitan gender studies' and is often

⁵³ After her husband's death, Eve Cixous trained as a midwife and birthed three or four hundred Arab babies a year in her clinic (Cixous, 2006b).



taught as an 'add-on' (Mohanty, 2003; Roberts and Connell, 2016: 136). There have also been accusations that white feminist scholars have appropriated black scholarship without accreditation, cultural understanding or commitment to improving black women's lives (strugglingtobeheard, 2014). We need to both appreciate these different feminist issues with sensitivity and find our commonalities in the struggle of woman against man.

We have chosen each other
And the edge of each other's battles
The war is the same
If we lose
Someday women's blood will congeal
Upon a dead planet
If we win
There is no telling. (Lorde, 2017d, 227)

Sister outsiders is a field of our feminist struggles in organizations and in our Academy.

Who (or what) is woman as subject? Cixous's moving mosaic of female subjectivities

The complex question of female subjectivities – it's another beating heart of my project. The Cixousian subject is fluid on many dimensions, abundant, and morphs over time. This doesn't lend itself to rational capture, which is likely deliberate on Cixous's part. Cixous steals concepts from a range of key thinkers, hoists overboard what she doesn't find useful, reworks ideas of subjectivity, particularly those of Derrida (notably in her later work) from her *féminine* border, and since most of this happens without obeying citational strictures, it is hard to unpack. Always, she puts theoretical ideas to work through her own body and life experiences, particularly her intimate relationships. Her body is a cipher, in examining theory and in writing. I'm going to try to explicate it by casting a fishing net around some of her concepts of female subjectivity, and illustrate them with fragments of my own writing. It's an impossible task, but I'm attempting it; always with the caveats that Cixous is a poetic theorist and we get into trouble when we forget that, or treat her concepts as



divorced from the materiality of her language. Over my doctoral journey, I have entered her work through different doorways at different moments. Some of my writing is less sophisticated, but I include it as it is illustrative of my own development.

One dilemma I'm wrestling with is how to approach this *moving* mosaic. Cixous's writing is about *woman*, and *herself* as a woman, and much of her writing takes the loose blend of fictive autobiography, poetics and theory full of ambiguities, contradictions, open-endedness. Her sexual woman's body is in the body of her texts. These are all deliberate subversive strategies to establish a valid space for the *féminine*. She is also the author of a number of stage plays; *Portrait of Dora* (1983), which is a feminist rewriting of Freud's case of the hysteric Dora, and others which explore how unconscious forces influence a people in history, including the Cambodian war and the partition of India. It is difficult to separate her views on female subjectivity from her work on the *poetics of sexual difference*, and the context of her life within the aftermath of the Paris uprisings of May 1968; her appointment as *chargé de mission* by the French government to found the experimental University of Paris VIII, aimed at being a centre of learning where power structures and hierarchies would be minimal; her *lived life* amongst a group of friends and philosophers, feminism and feminist theory in France; and her personal life, which she draws into her writing to explore theories of sexual difference and how to approach the other. Her embroilment in a psychodrama that grips Paris in the mid 1970s, with Lacan and the limits of female subjectivity, is also central to contextual readings of *The Newly Born Woman* and *Laugh of the Medusa*. All of this background is essential in my view to understanding her work, her construction of *féminine* subjectivities, her strategies for undoing patriarchy, and ideas about how we can create spaces for the *féminine today* in organizations and in the Academy.

I follow Derrida's observation that theoretical bodies of work can't be treated as disconnected from the philosopher's human body and the lived life that produced it: 'the new status for us to discover is that of the relationship between life and text, between two forms of textuality and the general writing in the play in which they are inscribed' (1967, in Reader, 1987). I'm not doing abstraction. Cixous-the-theorist is Cixous-the-woman-writer penning scenes of her complex material Cixousian body and life with which to imagine a new way of being-in-the-world. 'Her discourse, even



when “theoretical” or political, is never simple or linear or “objectivized” universalized; she involves her story in history’ (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 92). I’m also stretching further than Derrida. This is a rich period of philosophical theorizing developing from a community of intellectuals living in Paris on the left bank. Scholars and thinkers (including not just the men Cixous lists, but Kristeva, Irigaray, Clément herself) who lived in the confined area of the fifth, sixth, seventh arrondissements, literally neighbours (unlike academics in the UK, and even more so in the US) and in a culture where sitting in cafes, drinking coffee, having lunch or dinner together, is the daily habit. Lives, thinking and their texts are dynamically interacting, despite our masculine predilection for separating them, unless there is such similarity of ideas we can identify a movement. In the vibrant intellectual period post-1968 there is ‘a conjunction – which is not only intertextual but interdiscursive, a multi-dimensional space where literature and psychoanalysis, theory and fiction, politics and poetics meet’ (Susan Rubin Suleiman, 1990: 89). It’s also an interdiscursive space which engages Parisian society more broadly: theatre plays; prime-time TV (in which Lacan appears); novels and magazine articles. I approach and read Cixous through this multi-dimensional lens, which reflects her thinking towards the writers studied in her seminars ‘[t]he artist [philosopher/writer] is now viewed caught in historical turmoil. But emphasis is still placed on the scene, on the word and poetry, on topics’ (Conley, 1991: x). In some frustration I’ve erased much of this critical historical and biographical backcloth, including a timetable of Cixous’s texts responding to Lacan’s Seminar XX in 1972/73, parking the material for a future article.

A linear fishing net to begin exploring Cixousian féminine subjectivities

Cixous’s texts refuse ‘to be pinned down by critical discourse’ (Anu Aneja, in Marilyn Manners, 1999: 149). This is, of course, part of her strategy of undermining phallogentrism. And her ideas morph and change as she moves through different decades. I balk at my intent in what follows below; it’s an im/possible task, a move against myself. And Cixous admits her oeuvre is ‘a mass of continents, contradictions, compatible incompatibilities’ (Cixous, in Zahm and Grau, 2015: 1). She’d rather we ‘play with it or sing it’ than tell or theorize, ‘[t]o hold discourse on it is to be overtaken by



theoretical reduction’ (Cixous, in Manners, 1999: 149). She eludes my fishing net and likely yours, and I plead guilty to reduction...

The table format below is for reader ease, a schematic appetizer of her multi-dimensional approach to subjectivity, and in reality, the divisions are blurry, and her work proceeds rhizomatically. I’m painting for you crude brushstrokes, subjugated to the law of Thesis Word Count, of the historical and personal turmoil, the/her scene, her writings. Consistent Cixousian subjectivity constructions are writing as a means of woman arriving in herself, and the world, and writing to meet and embrace the other, in all their differences from us. A world of fluid subjectivities, intersubjectivities and transsubjectivities.

Period	Cixous’s age	Life events	Focus of writing	Subjectivity	Literary works ⁵⁴ where she explores different feminine subjectivities
1960s–mid 1970s	20–35	Marriage Arrival in France Passes Aggregation and starts teaching Motherhood Divorce Single-parenthood Meets and becomes friends with Derrida Doctorate Activist Teacher and leader – Founding of	Impact of the death of her father relationships with male lovers	Intra-psychic emphasis on mourning The unconscious Intersubjectivity Beyond-self subjectivities (transsubjectivities)	<i>Inside</i> (won the Prix Médicis) <i>Portrait of Dora</i> (successful stage play) <i>Angst</i> <i>The Third Body</i>

⁵⁴ Dates for texts which do not appear as in-text citations are in my references. I am placing the texts on the timeline according to the dates of the original French publication and not the English editions, in order to see them in relation to Cixous’s unfolding life.



		the University of Vincennes (Paris VIII) and the Centre des Etudes Féminines			
Mid 1970s	Late 30s	<p>Feminism</p> <p>Activism</p> <p>Relationship with Antoinette Fouque</p> <p>Begins publishing with Des femmes</p> <p>Lacan's Seminar XX</p>	<p>Women rewriting themselves, and their place in society; deconstruction of patriarchy/ phallocracy</p> <p>Writing the other, the feminine</p> <p>Women's desire and jouissance</p>	<p>Systemic</p> <p>Women righting themselves in the Symbolic</p> <p>Fluidity of gender – original bi-sexuality</p> <p>Unconscious and collective unconscious</p> <p>Subjectivity and beyond subjectivities formed through language and writing from the body, writing from women's desire</p>	<p><i>The Newly Born Woman</i></p> <p><i>Laugh of the Medusa</i></p> <p><i>Castration or Decapitation</i></p> <p><i>Coming to Writing</i></p> <p><i>The Third Body</i></p> <p>Souffles</p> <p><i>La</i></p>
Late 1970s	Late 30s, turns 40	<p>Discovers the writing of Clarice Lispector, which she regards as the model for <i>écriture féminine</i></p> <p>Relationship with Ariane Mnouchkine</p>	<p>Women's desire</p> <p>Multiplicity</p> <p>Moving towards the other, féminine jouissance</p> <p>Contemplation of the instant</p> <p>The intertwining of human and non-human matter</p> <p>Floribunda writing</p>	<p>Intersubjective multiple I's</p> <p>Being in the instant</p> <p>Subjectivity formed through language and writing from the body</p>	<p><i>The Book of Promethea</i></p> <p><i>Deluge</i></p> <p><i>Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange</i></p> <p><i>Reading with Clarice Lispector</i></p>



1980s	40s	<p>Trips to India and Cambodia with Mnouchkine</p> <p>Fighting to keep her doctoral programme on several occasions</p> <p>Break up with Mnouchkine</p> <p>Lecturing with Derrida</p> <p>Awarded honorary doctorates in UK and US</p>	Theatre	<p>Subjectivity as systemic-societal</p> <p>Subjectivity as part of a historical collective unconscious</p>	<p><i>The Terrible but Unfinished Story of Norodom Sihanouk, King of Cambodia</i></p> <p><i>L'Indiade, ou l'Inde de leurs rêves</i></p>
1990s	50s	Writing and lecturing with Derrida	<p>Eve, her mother</p> <p>Texts which escape capture</p> <p>Memory and life writing</p> <p>Theorization of féminine writing</p>	<p>Intersubjective (mother, friendship, how to (un)see the other)</p> <p>Subjectivity as intertwined with the non-human</p> <p>Subjectivity formed through constellations (family, collective in society)</p> <p>Subjectivity formed through language and writing from the body</p> <p>Creative (re)writings of self</p>	<p><i>Veils</i> (with Derrida)</p> <p><i>Stigmata: Escaping texts</i></p> <p><i>Rootprints: Memory and life writing</i></p> <p><i>Three steps on the Ladder of Writing</i></p> <p><i>Readings: The Poetics of Blanchot, Joyce, Kafka, Kleist, Lispector and Tsvetaeva</i></p>
2000s	60s–80s	Travelling back to Algeria	Historical roots (Algeria) and unprocessed life events (death of child)	Subjectivity as personal history	<p><i>So Close</i></p> <p><i>The Day I Wasn't There</i></p>



		<p>Deaths of Derrida and her mother</p> <p>Continues to present in universities around the world and write abundantly</p>	<p>Mother's aging and impending death (she dies in 2015 aged 102)</p> <p>Grief, mourning (Derrida, her mother Eve)</p>	<p>Intersubjective (mother)</p> <p>Subjectivity as mourning</p> <p>Assemblages</p> <p>Intra-action</p> <p>Animal-human relationships</p> <p>Dreams as a critical part of our subjectivity</p> <p>Subjectivity as personal, poetic, political and writing from the body</p> <p>Collective unconscious and subjectivity experienced through primal scenes</p> <p>Subjectivity as an infinity of presents</p>	<p><i>Eve Escapes</i></p> <p><i>Death Shall Be Dethroned: Los, A chapter, the Journal</i></p> <p><i>Insister of Jacques Derrida</i></p> <p><i>Dream I tell you</i></p> <p><i>Hyperdream</i></p> <p><i>Hemlock: Old Women in Bloom</i></p> <p><i>White Ink: Interviews on Sex, Text and Politics</i></p> <p><i>Reveries of the Wild Woman: Primal Scenes</i></p> <p><i>Abstracts and Brief Chronicles of Time</i></p>
			<p>Aging</p> <p>Feminism, politically poetic, poetically political</p>		
			<p>Temporality</p>		



Cixousian féminine subjectivities: (Re)writing woman with/out Freud and Lacan

In another move to net the impossible possibilities of Cixousian féminine subjectivities, I'm going to journey us in a different direction and show how she works with and against the constructions of subjectivity by Freud, and Lacan's rewriting of Freud. Lacan is key to the opening up not just of Cixous's pathway to her *écriture féminine*, but to the wider movement of women's writing in France⁵⁵ (see Sellers, 1991). Her relationships with Lacan's thinking and as a person are not simple. Cixous's thesis director, Jean-Jacques Mayoux, introduced Cixous to Lacan (because he was interested in James Joyce, the subject of her thesis) and they regularly met, reading each other's work, in 1963–1965. Antoinette Fouque, political activist, founder of the Des femmes publishing house and intimate partner of Cixous's, was analysed by Lacan. Her close friend Derrida is both a critic of Lacan's work and a supporter (MacCannell, 2006).

It's also important to remember that post 1968, the emerging feminists thought and theorized together, developing their thinking discursively, 'our first appearance was at Vincennes in April 1970... [the next] two years were fruitful – we worked on Marx, Freud, Lacan, on hysteria, on the specific contradiction of sexuality' (Fouque, 1980, in Claire Duchén, 1987: 51, my emphasis).

Cixous steals what she finds useful from Freud and Lacan, ignores or rails against what she doesn't like (particularly in her polemic texts) and, sometimes with wicked humour, inverts concepts and works them back against their inventor. This is complex material and I move across it at lightning speed. It is also difficult to research because Cixous does not cite, and I proceed as a sleuth. I believe it is important to do this work in order to grasp the power and origin of Cixous's construction of alternative féminine subjectivities to undo patriarchy; alternative subjectivities that can open up new spaces for researching and writing in organizations and the OS Academy. What I present here, *thesis two work*, is still in process.

⁵⁵ Sellers reviews *écriture féminine* produced by a whole group of French women feminists writing in the 1970s, including Marie Cardinal, Chantal Chawaf, Cixous, Marguerite Duras, Jeanne Hyvard, Irigaray, Kristeva, Annie Leclerc, Michèle Ramond, Marie Redonnet, Christiane Rochefort, Geneviève Serreau and Wittig.



Cixous and Uncle Freud

I do have knowledge of theoretical discourses. Yet the part that represses women is a part which I quickly learned to detect and from which I kept my distance. One leaves these parts aside. One keeps all that is vital: for example, that which in Freudian discourse describes the trajectory of sexual formation, of drives and dream work, etc. (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 147–148, my emphases)

A flat-out rejection of Freud's ego psychology

At the core of Freud's hierarchical model of subjectivity is a hypothesis of human development which describes how the self-absorbed, anarchic and desiring infant becomes a socialized and gendered individual. For Freud, the mother–child dyad is broken, the father is triangulated in, an Oedipal conflict ensues and the human being emerges into sexuality and adulthood with a controlling, conscious ego in the driver's seat, kept in check by a critical super-ego, although prey to unconscious and wild libidinal impulses (the id). The Freudian ego engages in a set of defensive routines that seek to regulate oral/anal/genital id impulses (Anna Freud, 2018), and obey societal laws. Ego psychology leads to a preoccupation with overcoming these defensive routines via *individual agency*. It's an intra-psychic model of subjectivity. Cixous views the Freudian model as hierarchical and phallogocentric, repressing the unconscious, the *féminine* and the (female) body. She upends Freud's thinking with a revalorization of all three, and refutes the Oedipal conflict by returning to Imaginary phase, the mother–child relationship, a rich, primal, *féminine* space. It's a move from masculine intra-psychic cerebral restraint to *féminine* intersubjective bodily generativities and excesses as a way to undo The Law of the Father. This is a move I follow in my research, especially in *thesis two*, conceiving research, the reading of research, theory and knowledge making as intersubjective bodily subjectivities.



Upending Freud with pleasures, bi-sexuality and Dora

'You, Dora, you the indomitable, the poetic body, you are the true "mistress" of the Signifier.'
(Cixous, 1976b: 886)

I want to explore in a little more detail Freud's theories of sexual drives, formation of subject through the Oedipal drama and case study of the hysteric Dora, as these are critical to Cixous's writing of feminine subjectivities.

Freud developed three phases around which the infant's sexual and pleasure drives organize themselves: oral (sucking at breast/bottle); anal (power to grant or withhold faeces) and phallic (awareness of genitals and the male penis, female lack of penis). Cixous agrees with libidinal drives, but disagrees with Freud's linear and negative take, for her libidinal drives are multiple, positive and generative and not the source of intra-psycho disturbance; rather, in inversion, they are the possibility of radical societal change. 'Let's not repress something as simple as wanting to live life itself. Oral drive, anal drive, vocal drive, all are *good* forces, and among them gestational drive' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 90 my emphasis). 'Her libido will produce far more radical effects of political and social change than some might like to think' (Cixous, 1976b: 882).

During Freud's early developmental phases, there are no differences between boys and girls: both sexes focus attention on mother and do not recognize differences of gender. The child then arrives at the Oedipal stage, becomes aware of the father, the father's ownership of the mother, the father's penis, and the mother's lack of one (castration). The boy represses his desire for his mother and accepts the father's rule to avoid castration. The girl child perceives her own lack of penis, competes for father's attention (a battle she can't win) and finally accepts her inferior, castrated position, and accepts laws under which she must live, although remaining as a woman, the dark continent. Freud's theories are anatomical – his infamous idea of female penis envy – and biological.

Cixous spots a potential liberation for women (and men) by focusing not on the Oedipal drama as key to subjectivity, but on Freud's description of our early and innate bi-sexuality; the presence of both masculine and feminine in every human being (Cixous and Clément, 1986). Women, she argues, having not been trained for 'glorious phallic monosexuality' are more open to this bi-sexuality, a less fixed



gendered way of being-in-the-world. She disagrees with Freud that anatomy is destiny, rebutting his thesis of women's penis envy. She also disagrees with his psychic theorizations and the Oedipal drama, and places focus instead on culture as shaping subjectivity, steering girls into socially and economically dependent roles (Cixous and Clément, 1986). I seek in my research and writing to write with Cixous's other bi-sexuality, gendered multiplicities of being-in-the-world that open up reinscriptions for women.

One of Cixous's biggest reframing's of Freud is his treatment of the hysteric female. Freud's diagnosis of his patient named Dora (in case notes) is as a hysteric. In *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Clément, 1986) she cites Lacan to contest Freud's views as misogynistic. Intent on revalorizing the hysteric as a revolutionary refusing to be subjugated, 'It is you, Dora, you, who cannot be tamed, the poetic body, the true "mistress" of the Signifier...The hysterics are my sisters...I am what Dora would have been if women's history had begun (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 95, 99). Me too. The hysterics are my sisters. And once we, as women, realize this, no intersubjective relationship (especially with men) can be the same. We cannot be tamed. I have a hysteric moment in *Pussy Hats*. Perhaps the whole text is hysterical? I am unashamed to research and write with the indomitable, poetic voice of a hysteric. I have become more hysterical in the course of my PhD journey.

Embracing Freud's unconscious as an untapped life force

For Cixous, the unconscious is of *central* importance in her writing. She's indebted to Freud (and from time to time refers to him as Uncle Freud), acknowledging that he 'focused attention on the unconscious in an extraordinary series of discoveries. We owe Freud the exploration of the unconscious' (Cixous, 1988: 144–145). For Cixous, the unconscious is a jewellery box that flashes with 'a thousand meanings', a place of connectivity with the 'worldwide' (Cixous, 1991a: 47). Writing from the unconscious is central to her twin goals of liberating women and finding pathways to move towards the *Other* (in herself and others). The *féminine* unconscious is inexhaustible and collective (Cixous, 1991a).

Her invitation is daunting. When immersed in writing papers, reflections, creative pieces, my theses, I dream wildly, busily, sweating. Other people, other



women, sing in my dreams. My husband starts mad-dreaming beside me. Sometimes I slip dreams into my texts. Some of my texts are dreamlike. I can see that to dream our research, to dream organizations has enormous liberating potential and is an entirely different discourse; '[t]he femininity of a text can hardly let itself be reined in or corralled. Who will bridle the divagation? Who will put the outside behind walls?' (Cixous, 1991a: 57). Well, I worry about my readers, especially examiners and peer reviewers. I can argue that it might disturb my husband if I 'use violence...using a large notebook close to me...tearing myself from my sleep to write down all my dreams' (Cixous, 2008c: 55). But I think I am a bit afraid of the power of all that 'circulates between my life, my body, my unconscious history, my text, and that mixes in me, like my own blood' (Cixous, 2008c: 55). It's a witchy, spell-binding mix. The spectre of penetration as the goal (Höpfl, 2007) still rears up. I'm still finding my way to the 'School of Dreams? How to get there? We can't go via the city, nor at will, nor by bus. The question as to whether we know we can go to the School of Dreams is always formidable' (Cixous, 1993: 57). I keep trying; I believe it is a pathway to a recovery to my repressions and to connection with other women's.

Cixous's Freudian/anti-Freudian thesis is both laid out and exemplified in *Laugh of the Medusa* and *The Newly Born Woman*. There is much more I could discuss, but I need to leap forward to Lacan, for *language*, for an unconscious structured by language, for the concept of *jouissance*, and also to understand Cixous's fierce theoretical attacks against the female subject as lacking, as silent; against the idea that the only way open to feminists is to act like men. To understand her developing sense of what it is to be a woman subject speaking, writing, unsilenced.

Lacan's ingress: Language as a pathway to a féminine revolution in the Symbolic and to (re)imagining Woman

Lacan brings language (after Ferdinand de Saussure, 1974), as the pivot of subjectivity connecting language, psyche, sexuality and power. Lacan's theories are engaged with head-on by Cixous (and Irigaray and Kristeva). Why? If we begin at 30,000 feet, the women (and their fellow feminists) were swept up by Lacan's 'invigoration and radicalisation of Freudian analysis...link[ing] psychoanalysis to



literature and its associated questions of textuality, reading and interpretation, rather than to science or medicine' (Grosz, 1989: 18, her emphasis). It's a move to *language*, and to the construction of a speaking, sexual subject, through language, at the point of the Oedipal drama, at the point of the formation of the subject. The Parisian feminists see an ingress; if language writes woman, it can be used to rewrite her and to resite her in the Symbolic; causing a *rupturing* of the masculine Symbolic.

[W]e must rethink our values; we must redefine our sexuality...we must profoundly alter the way we think, the concepts we use, the language we use. We need a revolution of the Symbolic.⁵⁶ It is an impressive project, attractive in spite of many reservations that pragmatic materialists like myself may have. It promises a different world, a different way of conducting human relations, and it promises that we can start to build this world *now*...bringing 'woman' into existence. (Duchen, 1987: 48 her emphasis)

I stress here the word *revolution*. This was their goal. It's a very different feminist opening to those offered by Foucault (micro-resistances, technologies of self) or by Butler (performativity of gender through everyday, habitual acts).

Lacan emphasizes language, and acquisition of language, as the entry point to the Symbolic. He also – and this is important to my interpretation of Cixous's position – repositions Freud's project primarily as an *interrogation of the unconscious*. Instead of concerns with biology, medicine or morality, and adjustments or cures, he 'insists on seeing psychoanalysis as a form of *listening* or *reading*, placing it in the context of *semiotics*, *linguistics* and *literature* (Grosz, 1989: 19, my emphases). 'He rewrites Freud's phrasing of the unconscious as 'I am there where I do not think: I am there where I am not' (Lacan, in MacCannell, 1994: 2). For Cixous, writer, poet, professor of English literature, it's manna. Flying in language becomes her escape route to creating new *féminine* multiple subjectivities that are open to the other: '[W]riting is woman's. That is not a provocation, it means that woman admits there is an other. In her becoming-woman, she has not erased the bisexuality latent in the girl as in the boy' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 85). The move to language opens up an interpretation of culture, including philosophy, past and current, to a phallogocentric critique (which Irigaray and Cixous seize on) and to the possibility of exposing and subverting patriarchy with language. Lacan

⁵⁶ Lacan's word for the social and signifying order governing culture.



believes we live 'at the letter, the word, a new dimension' (Lacan, in MacCannell, 1986: xv). In language his emphasis is not, as in Freud's, on where we fall, slip up, fail to uphold the Law of the Father, but where 'what *fails* is *resistance* to its demands' (Lacan, in MacCannell, 1986: xv, her emphasis). The unconscious becomes intriguingly available as a place in language where we do not think, where we are not, and yet where we travel; a place to resist from.

This move to language opens up the possibility of subversion and revolution (women's entry into the Symbolic) through new language and the reappropriation of the female body. Man has rendered woman an 'uncanny stranger on display' (Cixous, 1976b: 880), their own bodies women 'haven't dared enjoy, have been colonized. Woman is disgusted by woman and fears her' (Cixous, 1986: 68). Women silenced in history, and their bodies disavowed and repressed, confiscated by man as his property, 'her goods, her pleasures, her immense bodily territories kept under seal' (Cixous, 1976b: 879). Exploring sexual differences, and the rewriting of the female body, including the vatic power of female desire, 'with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor' (Cixous, 1976b: 885), is pivotal in the French feminist critique, and in the strategy to *psychically*, *corporeally* and *textually* challenge patriarchy. These are hinges which enable alternative, *féminine* texts to emerge (Grosz, 1989); for example, Irigaray's *Speculum of the other woman* (1974) and *The sex which is not one* (1977); Kristeva's *Revolution in poetic language* (1974); Monique Wittig's *The lesbian body* (1973).⁵⁷ And to which Cixous adds her own militant voice with two important polemic texts written for public distribution: *The Newly Born Woman* (first published in French in 1975), co-written with Clément; and *Laugh of the Medusa* (1976b) and her abundant lyrical/fictional writing including seminal/menstrual works such as *Coming to Writing* (first published in French in 1977), and *Vivre l'orange/To Live the Orange* (1979). And, let's recall, Cixous is leading the Centre d'Etudes Féminines in 1974 working on repressed femininity, on sexual differences, explored through textual readings (Cixous, 2008d: 60). Lacan, for all his human faults, and Cixous's (and my) theoretical disagreements with him, opens this pathway to rewriting women's subjectivities. It is his 'greatest genius', writes MacCannell, 'to have given us a glimmering of what discourse, language, human life could be like

⁵⁷ I have cited the French publications, as date of the original texts is important for context. Both the English translations as well as the French texts are in my references.



without limits...He attempts to produce a discourse in which one can fall through its holes, transpire⁵⁸...through its walls, without either negating or affirming them' (1986: xvii). Cixous moves glimmering into féminine literary actuality.

It is one thing to write about this theoretically, but I have lived this process time and time again on my doctoral journey.

Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? – a féminine one, a masculine one, some? – several, some unknown. (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 85–86)

I swam in this ingress writing my first performative autoethnography, *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston*, and I plunged writing my second, *Pussy Hats*. I was changed.

Writing extract – January 2018

*Transering*⁵⁹ on My Edges

October – January: Paper

The GWO abstract deadline is early – November 1st. I am attracted to submit to the Feminist Solidarity stream. 'Solidarity is a way of being that is embedded in feminist cultural traditions and movements that resist women's socio-economic inequalities and patriarchal power'. This is in line with my thesis. I read an article by Hemmings. Affective solidarity, moving from affective dissonance to solidarity. How would this be felt in my body? Is feeling for others, and the other in me, a way of transforming ourselves and the world? Is it 'affect – misery, rage, passion, pleasure – that gives feminism its life' (Hemmings, 2012: 150)? An interesting and haunting question. I cast about for ideas. I'm a bricoleur, working with what is to hand. The Harvey Weinstein story breaks. I am compelled to write about it. Cixous's kingdom is the instant. I'll study myself for a week; in work, at home.

A strange, fragmentary text emerges. I interweave my writing with journalism and other writers. Hidden, shadowy memories arrive through my fingers and onto my page. Bloody memories, painful memories. Work memories. Personal memories. Thoughts unknown. Shut doors of my memory house springing ajar. My husband is shaken. As much by these memories as by worry that I am going too far, being too vulnerable. Confessional Tales.

I take parts of the emerging text to work in my memoir Monday night class. My text provokes, evokes, personal memories well up and taboo experiences arrive and find voice in our classroom. Frank, a second-generation Italian American, recently retired, something of a rough diamond, shares that daughter his daughter posted to

⁵⁸ Derrida uses hymens, thresholds, the tympanum as images for this Lacanian transpiration (MacCannell, 1986).

⁵⁹ *Transer* is a French verb invented by Cixous – 'an act and a state of being...The act of moving across, of crossing borders, being in motion, in transition' (MacGillivray in Cixous, 1998: xxii)



#MeToo. My texts, he says, help him talk with her about it. 'You've discovered a new type of human being' he tells me 'neither man or woman'.

Pussy Hats is a bricolage. It is not a narrative though it builds to a moment of jouissance. It may feel like an attack as I layer stories on, and that is my intent. To pierce our numbness. To strike through our forgetfulness. Each fragment is an attempt to get close through a hybrid weave. It is writing in order not to forget, and to remind us to remember. It is writing of the close at hand and emergent memories – struggling their way out. I tussle with not appropriating. It may be angry writing. It is writing of primal scenes of male harassment of women – at work and at home. It is writing as 'The Political Is – (and the) Poetical' (Catherine MacGillivray, in Cixous, 1994a: xvii). A back-and-forth movement between two poles. 'Free poetic thought and political freedom feed[ing] one another' (MacGillivray, in Cixous, 1994a: xvii). It was written, once again, on the pulsions.

This writing is changing me. I'm stronger, more audacious. I write a chapter abstract for the CMS call as an open letter to the men of the CMS academy, breaking with the masculine reckoning. I am becoming a Willful Woman Writer.

Refuting Lacan: Woman doesn't lack, The Lack (the Phallus)

Lacan is a seductive figure, entrancing and seducing women with his rhetoric and word games. It's an ability which permeates textually today in an uncanny way. Here I'm going to focus on what Cixous takes loud and public issue with, notably in 1975–1976.

According to Lacan, men and women enter language/Symbolic differently, and female entry into language/Symbolic is organized by lack, or negativity. Sexual difference is seen as structured by the subject's relation to the phallus, the master signifier, which stands in for absence (women), presence (men), that constitutes language. In his rereading of Freud, Lacan invigorates and radicalizes how the sexuated individual comes into being. He conceives a different structure for the psyche with three mental registers that are interdependent and mutually constitutive; the Imaginary (the source of primary desire), the Symbolic (the social structure holding society ruled by the Law of the Father) and the Real (the primordial sense of completeness, lacking nothing, unsymbolizable, and indeed hard to conceive, rather *unreal* to me). The Imaginary, in this Lacanian hierarchy, is subservient to the Symbolic, and the Real cannot be directly accessed, it is only available through the mediation of the Symbolic or Imaginary. Drawing on Freud's account of human development, the infant begins life in a symbiotic world of mother



and child, a relation of unspoken reciprocity, of polymorphous sexual impulses, a place of no distinct self-identity. Lacan then begins to identify a series of lacks:

- The first is *object a*, the infant perceives that it *lacks* the *mother's breast* (the desired object, that provides fulfilment).
- Then, around six months of age, the infant starts recognizing itself in the mirror, separate from the m/other. It's a fun moment. Lacan argues that although this is the beginning of subjecthood, the *mirror image* is also an *illusion*, a paranoid construct, a *(mis)recognition*.
- Lacan then redraws the Oedipal drama, around objects which are present or gone. To enter into the symbolic, the domain of language, regulated by the big Other – The Law of the Father – the boy-child's dyad with the mother is split apart, the (symbolic) father, represented by the phallus, intervenes and the child and must give up closeness to his mother. This separation is achieved by the symbolic threat of castration – *lack*. Forbidden wishes and sexual impulses towards the mother are repressed into the unconscious, which has no voice of its own. The child's desire is redirected to the phallus. The girl child recognizes the castration of the mother, and her own castration, and takes up a tenuous position in the Symbolic, 'when she speaks as an "I" it is never clear that she speaks (of or as) herself. She speaks in the mode of *masquerade*, in imitation of the masculine, phallic subject...ambiguous...pale reflection' (Grosz, 1990: 72). The successful resolution of the Oedipal conflict is necessary for the child to become a subject. 'The child becomes a subject only with reference to *the name-of-the-father* and the sacrificed, *absent* body of the *mother*' (Grosz, 1990: 71, my emphases). This loss can never be compensated for, it remains an *original lack*. The subject is created in loss, and in language that the child uses to express this loss. The individual feels this lack and it motivates an infinite chain of substitutions for the lost other. *Separation, loss* and *lack* are at the heart of the Lacanian model of life in the Symbolic. Women cannot fully enter the Symbolic and can only speak up in imitation of the masculine phallic subject which they *lack*.

Cixous ruptures by inverting Lacan's thinking:

- The Imaginary is the source, is not subjugated. Cixous is seeking to access the Real, with language before there is language, primal sounds and scenes; a



'newold' language, as she calls it. An 'affair of the ear' (Cixous, in Sellers, 1994: xxi).

- The mother's breast is a source of strength and power, 'She [Penthesileia] goes down into her own breast where the torn Achilles is: "I descend into my breast"...[S]he goes where love unstoppable can go' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 121). The breast, with its shape, weight, roundness, is for Cixous 'a full and positive sign of difference to replace the Lacanian lack' (Annette Kuhn, 1981: 39). From her maternal Germanic heritage, *sein*, the breast, is the core of being (Conley, 1991a). Instead of speaking up in imitation of the masculine, women are urged to speak in the 'voice of the mother, passing on what is cut out of the Symbolic...passing on what is most archaic. The most archaic force that touches a body is one that enters by the ear and reaches the most intimate point' (Cixous, 1981: 54).
- Subjecthood is recognition, it is not a paranoid illusion. Her conceptual move is to reverse Lacan's theoretical framing that '[t]he idea of a stable and unified ego belongs to the Imaginary and is the source of misrecognition and/or lack in the subject' (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 55), and position the *féminine* Imaginary not as *lack*, but as a source of *plentitude*; position women's sexuality not as lack or frigidity, but as excess; arising not from a single, stable, unified ego but from a 'mass of egos...The Imaginary must be freed through invention of other "I's"' (Conley, 1991: 25–26), [s]he is simultaneously her animals of joy, her artists, her reasoning beings, her animals of prey, her aggressive souls, her love persons' (Cixous, 1976, in Sellers, 1994: 60). Freeing the subject in the Imaginary is a strategy for undoing the masculine domination of women in the masculine Symbolic, and for undoing their domination under single, rigid, master signifier – the phallus. It is not paranoia; it is a new recognition.
- By returning to an uncastrated mother, liberating female sexual desire, there is opening to the other, and to creating a *féminine* libidinal economy which is open, productive, caring, in contrast to the masculine libidinal economy which is attacking, sterilizing, conquering, refusing of the other. With the mother metaphor, original bi-sexuality, the opening to a *féminine* economy, Cixous subverts the discourse of Freudian/Lacanian psychoanalysis and patriarchy, opening woman up to recognition *whilst* avoiding essentialism (men and women both have the original bi-sexuality; it is culture which erases it, it is culture which



inscribes masculinity or femininity) and opens the way to the possibility of a shared recognition between women – making a *political movement* of and for women possible (Cixous, 1976b).

- Subjectivity is not lack, it is abundance. Cixous denies the Lacanian lack, taking issue with the idea of lacks forming subjectivity, and with Lacan's primary lack, the phallus, his master signifier (Cixous, 1976).

The presence or absence of the Lacanian *phallus* is associated with power, or the lack of it. The phallus is his *master signifier* and the subject is '*fundamentally a sexed object, one whose sex is crucial to the kind of subjectivity, desire and position it is granted in culture*' (Grosz, 1990: 73, my emphasis). It is masculine imagery that is embedded in the symbolic order and driven into deepest levels of the psyche and privileged in the construction of meaning. And although Lacan strives to deny it, there is constant slippage between the metaphoric phallus and the anatomical penis. The dominance of phallic/penile power discourse and imagery denies woman 'her own signification, and in effect de-voids [sic] woman of her own non-phallic substance and power' (Fotaki, in Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 61). In organizations and in the OS Academy, this holds true today, and later in my theses I'll paint portraits of our afflictions.

In *Laugh of the Medusa* (1976b) and *Castration or decapitation* (Cixous, 1981), Cixous ruptures Lacan's phallic thesis with blows 'where [they] hurt the most', attacking him for 'marking women as "other", as difference and negativity', reminding them cheekily 'of the very thing they have most to fear – the threat of castration posed by the woman's body' (Kuhn, 1981: 37). Cixous's woman is erotic, recognizes herself; is generous, multiple, full of life. Hers are subjectivities of hope, of life itself, and her strategy for undermining patriarchal society is with her 'ever-dreaded strength, of the regions of femininity' (Cixous, 1981). These are the subjectivities I am claiming in my theses and in my work.

Encore; Refuting Lacan again: Féminine jouissance as heretic, as hearing meanings, about which everything can be said

The Lacanian subject is socially, and linguistically *constructed*, and not the product of biology or nature (as with Freud). Like Freud, the subject is also libidinally



constructed, but Lacan has a specific framing; *jouissance* – a moment of libidinal intensity which erupts into the Symbolic from the Imaginary, from the realm of the pre-Oedipal, the mother, a moment of *excess* which resists the imperative of binary organization (Grosz, 1989); one definition of Derrida's *différance*. It's potentially transgressive, capable of rupturing the Symbolic. *Jouissance* is untranslatable, it is part bliss, part orgasm, part corporeal. In French, the word also maintains a sense of access to, and rights over, property, a word with '*simultaneously* sexual, political and economic overtones.... one can hear [phoenically]... j'ouïs sens: I hear meaning... [which is] elusive...but the search and desire for it goes on' (Wing, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 165, her emphasis). I write for:

the possibility of a 'transgressive libidinal force';
jouissance
exploding the limits of the Law of the Father
'an ecstatic flash of new meaning[s]'
speed and subversion
(adapted from Bray, 2004: 146)
jouissance
joy
'the place where truth falters'
(adapted from Shari Benstock, 1991: 16)

(Beavan, 2018)

For Lacan, phallic pleasure is an obstacle through which man does not proceed. He can't connect with, or reach, the other because he is too focused on the organ's pleasure. It's a short-circuiting of desire that turns back on itself. It can't account for the *féminine*, but it can operate as a closure in his phallogocentric universe (Jane Gallop, 1982). However, Lacan describes *féminine jouissance* as an experience, a *jouissance beyond the phallus*, strictly outside of articulation and thus *unknowable*. He back-handedly repositions women in a dependent position. Their pleasure, a series of sensations and experiences about which *nothing more can be said* than that they are *non-phallic*; women's pleasure a fundamental passivity (Grosz, 1990).

Cixous is deeply interested in the Lacanian moment of *jouissance*, of excess, with its transgressive potential to rupture the Symbolic. But she absolutely disagrees that women's pleasure is a fundamental passivity, a frigidity, (Cixous, 1976a, 1976b, 1985), and she develops her own theory, which has a commonality with Irigaray's *Speculum of the Other Woman* (1974) and *This Sex Which is Not One* (1977). The



feminist debate becomes extremely heated, given Lacan's 1972–1973 Seminar XX, *What does woman want* (1998⁶⁰), a cauldron, and it is important see both Cixous's and Irigaray's texts within the context of a psychodrama that held Paris in its grip. Cixous, with political intent and féminine mischief, writes a number of erotic texts subverting Lacan.⁶¹ She's focused on féminine jouissance as a method to blow up the Law of the Father.

Cixous's concept of féminine jouissance is at the heart of her framing of féminine subjectivity. Desire, writing our sexual pleasure, will, power, speech, are essential for living, thinking, writing, and for rupturing phallogentrism. A clear and poetic explication is laid out in *The Newly Born Woman*.

She doesn't hold still she overflows. An outpouring that can be agonizing, since she may fear, and make the other fear, endless aberration and madness in her release...

The power to be errant is strength; it is also what makes her vulnerable to those who champion the Selfsame, acknowledgment, and attribution. No matter how submissive and docile she may be in relation to the masculine order, she remains the threatening possibility of savagery, the unknown quantity in the household whole. (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 90–91)

And this has been my doctoral journey. The power to be errant is strength, I am vulnerable to those who champion the Selfsame. I am an unknown quantity in the household whole. And my outpourings, especially those written in jouissance, on affectual pulsions, can make the other afraid. My husband feared *Pussy Hats*. My director of studies was nervous and critical at times about my work, to my way of making knowledge with and from the female body, with *écriture féminine*. 'How is that knowledge?' he would ask? 'Can that be knowledge?' he vexed; it's understandable:

The masculine [economy] is governed by a rule that keeps time with two beats, three beats, with pipe and drum, exactly as it should be. And order that works by inculcation, by education; it's always a question of education. An education that consists of trying to make a soldier of the féminine by force, the force history keeps reserved for woman, the 'capital' force that is effectively decapitation. (Cixous, 1981: 42)

I refuse to become a soldier in the masculine economy of PhD education.

⁶⁰ Published in France in 1975.

⁶¹ *The Newly Born Woman, Laugh of the Medusa, Castration or decapitation, La, and Souffles* can all be read as a rebuttal against Lacan.



I was afraid. I am now not afraid. There is a new link between my féminine libido, my subjectivities and writing as femininity transformation to make knowledges in spaces between us.

Writing extract – January 2018

Sit back at my desk and stare at frozen Bulkley Pond. Shoulders come back up. I breathe deeply. Artemis. I picture Artemis. Bow and Arrow in her hand. Swooping in, flying low. Something red hot is surging. I start reaching for companion texts. Books fly off shelves and swirl around my attic. My laptop opens... And then the words start to flow, filling the screen. On and on I write. Through the nights. Through the days. Swept along.

Edited. Reedited. Loaded and Reloaded in Dropbox. Fashioned. Refashioned. Until it is done. Deposited. S(h)immering.

There is the possibility of rupture but also of a more loving féminine libidinal economy. A move towards life, not death. The féminine subject constructed through language and writing. The possibilities of rupture in organizations and the Academy

[A] féminine libidinal economy is an economy which has a more supple relation to property, which can stand separation and detachment, which signifies that it can also stand freedom – for instance, the other's freedom...[in contrast] as soon as there is appropriation in the rigid mode, you may be sure there is going to be incorporation. It destroys the possibility of being other. It is an arrest of the freedom of the other, and that is enormous. I do not know if what I say is clear enough. (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 137)

Is the traditional training of a scholar in the OS Academy one of appropriation in the rigid mode, an incorporation which destroys the possibility of being other? Is the traditional socialization of an employee, a woman, into organizations one of conjugal appropriation in the rigid mode, an incorporation which destroys the possibility of being other?

Writing Extract – March 2016 – London

K
Managing Director
is on a deal
sleep deprived and buzzing
caffeine loaded



several times since dawn

sitting beside me
roostering her front office prowess
as well as any man
glancing every few seconds at her Blackberry
I offer to get her coffee – declined
I pour her water
sitting, calming, containing
sitting, waiting, soothing

she's understanding that I understand
the effort involved in pushing this deal through
at least a little
I've never been (save with an infant child)
so sleep deprived as her
and working with intellect engaged
firing, she's firing hard

We start a conversation
interrupted
by a furious phone call in French on the
crackberry
She sets it aside, and looks at me
sighs

And
we begin to talk

about

being freed from office chains by cloud enablement
working on deal spreadsheets from home
navigating the firewall legally
putting two young children to bed
sometimes, sometimes mostly, sometimes not
not quite without some real or imagined stigma from the
men as she slips out home
And on a Sunday deal call
husband away, nanny off
childcaring and working
K
one woman among
men
some are dads
and
as her small daughter climbs onto her knee and says
loudly hello to all the male roosters on this
Sunday deal call
K monetarily embarrassed
feeling unprofessional
and then one dad
who has a daughter of the same name
says hello back
laughter – more hellos
K
Deal doer



Global banker
Wheeling and dealing
with her daughter on her knee.

Cixous's féminine libidinal economy

I've touched on Cixous's revolutionary (and utopian) vision for a world which lives by an alternate economy to phallogentrism. Here, I'm going to sketch it in a little more detail. Despite the framing as *écriture féminine*, and her polemic texts of 1975–1976, it's important to note that her vision is not just a feminist vision, it's a vision of a world in which no one is othered. Her *féminine libidinal economy* is based on openness, non-repression, corporeality, generosity, abundance, giving, productivity, creativity, beyond divisive binaries and dualisms. It's an economy with a currency of embodied desire. Her conception is both material (desire felt in our bodies) and a Derridean 'deconstruction of the body/mind dichotomy which underpins Western metaphysics' (Bray, 2004: 53) and a blueprint for living our lives ethically. Cixous understands it is utopian, requiring leaps of our imaginations to conceive living in a world that can't be evaluated on economic grounds, but rather on ethical acts of generosity, gifting without expectation of return, without desiring a recovery of our expenses (Cixous and Clément, 1986), opening to the other in all their differences to us. It is subversive; prohibited to men, and, by extension, to women performing as masquerades of men. Whilst she names it a *féminine libidinal economy*, it isn't tied to the label 'woman', although her thesis is that women culturally, and through the experience of giving birth, are more open to its practice. It gives her hope, allows her to move beyond despair that living in the *féminine libidinal economy* does not depend on anatomical sex, nor on cultural roles adopted by men or women, but on our courage to live on the side of generosity towards the other, the othered (Cixous, in Conley 1991). I link it to Diprose's (2002a) concept of corporeal generosity and Denzin's feminist communitarian ethics (Clifford Christians, 2000; Denzin, 2014).

Cixous was writing her earlier texts before neoliberalism, and its cults of individualism and constant performance, swept us up. The challenges are perhaps greater today, and yet consistent. We still face, as women, ongoing power struggles between the sexes. Cixous was prescient, recognizing that greater equality would



return us to the old scenes of power struggles. In the US in 2018, some of the old struggles are back. The likely appointment of conservative Judge Brett M. Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court brings the looming possibility of overturning of the Supreme Court's 1973 decision on *Roe vs. Wade*, which gave women the fundamental right to an abortion. Cixous suggests it is a daily question for each of us to decide which economy we will live in: phallic, as men, or on the side of 'something more positive, more archaic, much more on the side of *jouissance*, of pleasure, less socializable? If so, how and at what price?' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 134–135). The price she laments is high. Men risk madness and death, women decapitation. Am I hopeless? No! Affective solidarity (Hemmings, 2012) is an antidote where we can work together, like moles tunnelling across the globe. We can go to stage with social theatre. We can sing with our hysterical voices. It is critical, however, to understand, as these French feminists did, that strategies will only work if they bring women (and others othered) into the Symbolic, rupturing the social-cultural bonds of subjugation.

Cixous recently commented that we live in a time of ashes (Cixous, in Zahm and Grau, 2015). Cixous, a Shakespearian scholar and lover of myths, is well aware that when the bird of wonder dies, the maiden phoenix will stir in the ashes and rise again.

Notes on key concepts of Cixousian subjectivities

Within the framework of the *féminine* libidinal economy Cixous develops a rich and always evolving construction of our material subjectivities. Earlier, I sketched them out within the context of her life and writing oeuvre. Here, I will briefly try and capture the essence of her concepts. It's an impossible task for all the reasons I've noted before and because the ideas overlap, leak into and support each other, eluding the 'stagnant confines of phallogocentric thought' (Bray, 2004: 43). Whilst Cixous does introduce some new concepts (the third body, primal scenes, for example) her main focus is on rewriting existing philosophical concepts. The reader has to be alert to what she is doing, and not assume meanings. This has been the undoing, in my view, of some of her critics (who have interpreted her without either without doing this close careful read and/or with masculinized assumptions about meanings, or followed the misreads of other scholars). Some concepts I've mentioned before and



here say some new things; other concepts are presented here for the first time. It's impossible to capture all her ideas, and I've chosen those that I use in my rewriting of women in organizations.

The maternal (not paternal) as our source of thinking

Cixous returns us time and again to the metaphor of the mother. It's a deliberate strategy to move beyond repudiation of the mother under the Law of the Father. Cixous rewrites the maternal not as a person (our mother) or as an archetype but as a *substance*, the matter that causes us to think (Bray, 2004), and as an *activity* that invites us to become. This *substance* links to birth, a *place* where 'Woman is Whole' (Cixous, 1991a: 31), valorizing the strength of a woman in labour. Mother's milk is our white ink with which we can rewrite ourselves. She writes with the rhythm of her maternal voice, seeking an archaic voice, a voice which has not totally been erased within our memories. She opens us up through the repressed maternal to a new, richer, *féminine* Imaginary. This is not linked to, or stabilized by, the actual experience of mothering, 'Either you want a kid or you don't – *that's your business*' (Cixous, 1976b: 890 her emphasis). The mother, who carries the other within herself, subverts the separation of subject and object.

In 2003, Höpfl and Kostera published a potentially ground-breaking book, *Interpreting the maternal organisation*, which, 'following Kristeva (1987), argues for a new discourse of maternity which brackets both men and women in their ability, indeed responsibility, to understand the other by a recognition of the "other within"' (2003: xvii). The book sought to restore the m/other to the text of organization theory and examined organizations as embodied experience, as a move towards a political praxis drawn from embodied ethics; a move against the masculinized Academy – a move I extend in my theses with Cixous. We have some ways to go. Fifteen years later, their book has thirty-one citations according to Google Scholar, only a small number of which are by male researchers.



The third body

In Cixous's *féminine libidinal economy* the other is not an object of fear; differences are embraced. The other is to be respected and not appropriated. It is only through the other that we can catch glimpses of ourselves (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997). Cixous is fascinated by the difficult task of trying to hold the other, in all their differences, in close proximity, respecting the potentiality of this relationship. She conceives of a space that stands in stark contrast to neoliberal individualism: the *third body* (Cixous, 1991a, 2009c). Her third body is a place of acceptance, of non-appropriation, opening up more ethical relationships between human beings. Her book *The third body* was first published in 1970 (as *Le Troisième Corps*) and is a poetic, autobiographical meditation on the relationship between Cixous and her male lover. She describes the third body as a magical space that brings new ways of seeing and being, the exterior enters and the interior opens out (Cixous, 2009c). A porous, nomadic, fluid space created by *desire*, a place where there is no law, which is limitless, which moves beyond body and yet is body (Bray, 2004). A place where there is no arrival of meaning, just a language of sexual difference that is always in the process of becoming. Desire without a single author, a *force* (Bray, 2004).

Cixous's third body takes me in my research to dally with methodologies that have potential to create new (third) spaces of knowing, without appropriation between researcher and participants, author and readers, performer and audience members. In some of my organizational field work (perhaps) third bodies emerge, and this gives me hope. In Sydney, at GWO 2018, there was a sense of a third collective body created towards the end of my *Pussy Hats* presentation. The same thing happened at EGOS 2018. Collective discomfort, rage and dissonance from which green shoots of transformative feminist politics emerged together. A putting-into-being of feminist affective solidarity, moving from dissonance into action, from misery into life (Hemmings, 2012). 'It took me four hours to read your text the *first time*' said my discussant at EGOS. 'It's made me think hard about my teaching and I need to return to my feminism in my teaching and in my life.'



Sentient beings

Cixous undermines the Cartesian mind/body split by continually reminding us that we live in our bodies, we are sentient beings and always being in multiple registers. When we are in despair we also have a handkerchief problem. We may feel ready to die, but tomorrow morning we'll have red puffy eyes. We are always in the process of living through our material bodies (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997).

Some of my field work is focused on those moments when our physical bodies intrude into organizations, and I experiment with being in multiple registers in the same moment. In *itpassesby at a gallop, the snail* Peter, my co-author, and I focus on sentient moments:

You lift your feelings, 12lb dumbbell shoulder presses aloft, they return THUD to your chest. being watched. watched in your incompetence. Can't think what to say next. Doodle stars. Sweat trickles down your back...

The bar begins to fill with people. Now there are more women present, and some of those standing sway and jig to the rap music that's been ramped up. You look on with envy spiced with desire. Such deft footwork and impeccable rhythmic sense these beautiful bodies have...you inhale on your cigarette watching. (Beavan and Case, 2018: 9, 16,17)

The kingdom of the instant

On 28 October 1978, Cixous is sitting in the Des femmes publishing house and picks up a manuscript by Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector. Clarice's writing has a profound effect upon her, and one of these is to slow down her focus, to focus on the instant, which is always the 'present-passing' (Cixous, in Sellers, 1994: xxii). She has also shifted her focus in her seminars to a reading of Martin Heidegger (Conley, 1991), and she begins careful meditations on the process of corporeal thinking, writing down into subjectivity, into our marshes and muds, searching for moments of metamorphosis of the subject, border crossings, activated by intimate proximity with slow thinking. Moments when we can drop 'the self, the speculating self, the speculating clever "I"' (Cixous, 1993: 156) and approach the unthought. Her 'kingdom is the instant' where she is 'not its queen, only its citizen' depicting 'fragments, events of



human life and death, each unique and yet at the same time exchangeable. Not the law, the exception' (Cixous, in Sellers, 1994: xxii).

Descending into Plato's Cave is a process that I started while doing a master's at INSEAD, and have continued throughout my PhD studies. A year ago, I began to relate that to these descents to the moment, and to revealing thoughts unknown, like Cixous, striving to find ways in writing to capture the instant, these moments of fire and metamorphosis. My emergent embodied thoughts are about whether these moments might also relate to one of Derrida's definitions of *différance*, the moment of excess, which resists binaries? And, if they do relate, how might this translate into organizational strategies for demasculinizing organizations and our OS Academy?

Féminine collective subjectivities

Cixous continually works to disrupt the idea of a unitary ego. She does this within self, claiming that we are 'at least a thousand people' (Cixous in Sellers, 1994: xvii), and playfully confuses readers with a complex and delicate vacillation between different I's in *The Book of Promethea* (1991c). Her 'I' is humorous and in a 'perpetual state of transformation, depersonalization and displacement from the ego' (Sarah Cornell, 1988: 133). In my research I try and represent a variety of fluid selves. I find it harder to destabilize my author voice, though attracted by the narrative mobility available if I can slide unceasingly from one narrating I to another, and the possibilities of being able to be simultaneously textually in my interior and my exterior (Cixous, 1991b). My experimental representational strategies thus far position my interior to the right of the page and the exterior to the left (Beavan, 2019).

Cixous also queers the separation of self from others. She believes in the collective unconscious, particularly when, in the passivity of night dreaming, 'messengers come and confide in you', and if we can open up to these invitations we become 'more woman' (Cixous, 1991a: 55) and an/other way, perhaps, of being in the third body. The final chapter of Sellers' *Writing differences: Readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous* (1988), titled *Conversations*, reflects the multiple voices of the book's authors together, and their belief that their thinking is best done as a



group. In *La* (1976a), Cixous has ‘a group of women (presumably those working together at Paris VIII) spreading on the hills and coast a rain of thieving verbal images...a menstrual molting, a way to contaminate genders...[by] throwing a verbal lay between desires and realities’ (Conley, 1991: 67).

In 1975 Cixous makes a commitment to publish with *Des femmes*, a commitment that lasts for twenty-five years. *Des femmes* was not only a feminist publisher, set up as a counter to the male-dominated major French publishing houses, but a collective of women, a women’s paradise committed to creating physical spaces (the bookshop) and literary places for women (Ward Jouve, 1991). Their collective double mission for feminist revolution, practice and theory – the unconscious and history – are at the heart of my research.

Cixous’s collective approach to female subjectivities stands in contrast to the competitive individualism and potential isolation of neo-liberalism which pervades twenty-first-century organizations and the OS Academy. I am vexed at how to disrupt with more collective subjectivities. In *Pool Two Tales of resistances* you will read about an organization intervention, *Take Two*, that had an aim of creating shared solidarity in small teams. When presenting *Pussy Hats* at GWO 2018, I did, I believe, achieve a moment of collective subjectivity in the room when we all raised and joined arms in response to my invitation to do so.

The rewritten féminine mythic subject

Myths, which commonly subjugate woman, have great constancy across time and cultures. They have significance at a societal and often unconscious level, providing us with symbols and images that create and impose meaning. The rewriting of myths is important in poststructural feminist theory and creative writing,⁶² a way to escape gendered representations we find crippling and to provide a sense of shared struggles, and towards dreams of an elsewhere beyond patriarchy (Cornell, 1999). Cixous uses the rewriting of myths as ways out. In her essay ‘Sorties’ in *The Newly Born Woman* (Cixous and Clément, 1986), for example, she retells and reimagines

⁶² Angela Carter rewrites, for example, fairy tales in her work of fiction *The Bloody Chamber* (1979). Her ‘Bluebeard’ is a powerful retelling that is still with me decades after reading it. I wonder who are the Bluebeards of OS, and how might we rewrite/right them?



the story of Anthony and Cleopatra, where Cleopatra is both man and woman; she is profusion, exuberance, energy, a woman *beyond castration or decapitation*. My costume in the final fragment of *Pussy Hats* includes cuff bracelets as an echo of Cixous's Cleopatra.

Several years ago, somewhat unconsciously, I was on stage at gatherings of hundreds of employees, brought together to discuss the topic of company culture, in key locations around the world. In my fifteen-minute presentation I strode across the stage with an imaginary bow and arrow in my hand. I poetically reflected later that perhaps I was (representing) Artemis?⁶³

The gift

The concept of the gift is central to Cixous's work. After Derrida, she is writing against the rarely spoken of, but known, sense that in receiving a gift we owe something to the giver; 'loss and expense are stuck in a commercial deal that always turns the gift into a gift-that-takes. The gift brings in a return' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 87). Cixous's concept of a gift is one that expects no return, is a genuine openness to the other. Neither the giver nor receiver experiences a loss of self. Giving is the return. Such a gift is life-affirming, and works against the limits of death, repression and appropriation.

It's a concept I find beautiful and which haunts me in my own gift giving. Is it possible to truly give a gift freely? What might the gifts of our research and writing be, and for whom? It's a little easier for me when she frames the gift as love, not hatred; the more we give, the more we receive; and, to the contrary, the more we give hatred, the more hatred we receive (Cixous, 1991a). It's an ethical orientation I take from Cixous and try to practice in living lovingly and loving my research.

⁶³ The myth of Artemis, a (fluidly Cixousian bi-sexual) huntress with bow and arrow, protecting young women and goddess of nature and animals, has several versions – one with Artemis (and her followers) going after men who sexually harass women. An alternative has her brother Apollo (jealous of the time Artemis spends with Orion, her hunting companion) request her to shoot an object from a great distance (the object turns out be Orion's head). Whether I was hunting or defending on stage (or both), and in what sort of (organizational) gender, are questions I still ponder.



Constellations and primal scenes

Cixous believes in the power of family constellations, our beds of blood, affecting our subjectivities – it is an/other way of viewing our fluid personhood. Her personal complex Mediterranean and German heritages and the mirroring of her relationship with her brother with her two children are beautifully laid out in *Rootprints* (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997). I've explored my own rootprints in my doctoral journeying; their gifts and their wounds and how they impact my research and writing. Some of this material has not made the theses cut, my key wounds we will come to in the next pool.

An/other porosity of subjectivity that Cixous makes is with what she calls *primal scenes*. At one level these are the banal-argument-scenes of love-relationships; instants, however, when love itself seems on the line, and they become a struggle between life and death taking a cosmic grip of us. Cixous conceptualizes the power of these moments as intense encounters when all human kinds of myths and histories, including all we have read and internalized, are viscerally present. She depicts them with raw emotion and also humour. In *The Book of Promethea* (1991c), she writes of an early-morning conversation between the two women lovers where one of them declares that, should the other not love her, she'd plunge the big knife (the one they recently bought at the hardware store, that cuts through everything from tomatoes to heedless fingers) into her heart. The I of the text (who may or may not be the author) visualizes the knife plunging, imagining it also as the hand of Tanaïs⁶⁴ (Cixous, 1991c).

I wonder what primal scenes get enacted in organizational life? Are there primal scenes in *Pussy Hats*, and does this help explain their resonances? Was the hotel bedroom scene in *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston* a primal scene? Is the writing of primal scenes a strategy for taking academic work beyond the Academy?

⁶⁴ Tanaïs, Penthesilea's grandmother in mythology. Cixous suggests that Tanaïs's hand, is the 'large hand of a young woman ripe for life or death and entirely capable of cutting off her right breast if she feels that to suddenly change History's course, she must make such a sacrifice (Cixous, 1991c: 109).



Subjects as part of Deleuzian assemblages

After discovering Lispector, Cixous's writing moves from a focus on the subjectivities of sexual difference to a wider contemplation on the multiple differences of materiality, including the non-human. She's interested in how we can ethically approach, through affinity and receptivity, a world where self and other can be connected, where all matter exists in a sensitive web of mutually receptive entities (Braidotti, 2002). Cats, birds, dogs, flying manuscripts, ghosts begin appearing in her work in intricate relational assemblages. Let's also recall Cixous and Deleuze are friends.

In (OS) philosophy we often separate ontologies of *being* from *becoming*. This does not apply to Cixous, who can fly between both ontologies in the same text. In *The Flying Manuscript* (in Cixous, 2007), I am taken into a Deleuzian assemblage.

Writing extract – summer 2017

As I read, I imagine these scenes in Cixous's writer's house in 2005, and I hear her in my head reading this work aloud at Berkeley in 2010 (I have the podcast of this performance). Lyric writing, embodied writing, processual writing and writing filled with poignant affects. I visualize a complex assemblage: Many of Cixous's, pasts, presents and futures; Derrida's real and ghostly embodiments, pasts, presents and future; her mother; the flying manuscripts (at least two *Veils* and then there is the future colloquium text to be written); a butcher's knife; the writing house; the desk; cats; drawers. All the human and non-human have agency and are in complex, atemporal, moving entanglements; dynamic, fluid, indefinite, unfolding, *becomings*.

And I wonder how my in(terre)conscious⁶⁵ I flew from being/knowing planes discovered on a beach, to flying manuscripts, to a text of *Veils*, first scribbled in a jet plane in November 1995 by Derrida above the Cordillera de los Andes, 'In this text you grabbed hold of a spurt of "jet" and of G harvested in a text of mine so as to restitch it into yours, by setting it like a grain of salt into your sea water' (Cixous, 2007: 62).

And I listen to the music of Cixous's voice as poetic author, which changes, is multiple, can merge with others, and re-emerge but nevertheless has agency to ask her mother to cut *Veils*, delays in returning to the manuscript in her text, makes a *Return* to the manuscripts both *Veils* and the manuscript that will come into being for the Colloquium, for the book). It's veiled, but I can see a Cixousian subjectivity and agency that is separate to the assemblage. There is intentionality as she makes

⁶⁵ Cixous describes in an endnote (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 115) the in(terre)conscious as *Zones in(terre)conscientes*: unconscious, interconscious zones, with a parenthetical earth, perhaps unearthed – if not buried-conscious zones.



her meanings, picks up her pen to write poetically out of her body and open herself to possibilities that writing brings. She shifts planes of beings and knowings with lyric, stream-of-consciousness (theoretical) intertwinements, presenting an and, and...

Had she also been reading Barad? What's her philosophical position? Is hers destabilized? I suddenly feel destabilized. Can we *know*? What is knowledge? Do we advance 'without knowing anything'? '[W]here do we keep watch on awakening the new us?' (Cixous, 2007: 109, 112).

Subjects for life (not death)

Cixous is always on the side of life. She argues with Derrida on this point (Derrida et al., 2006). Literature, she says, stops death with life. She won't accept the limit of death, turning to love and writing as the vital streams, turning to today. Cixous sings the present, 'so that each moment, each instant, is a blessing lived to its fullest' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 160).

I am on the side of life. I am on the side of life in organizations and our OS Academy. This means we need to love; we need to embrace the present moment. Do we love – enough? Do we embrace the present moment or are we always speeding forward and over? I am committed to writing in the present tense and dwelling, 'our painter is slow. It needs twenty years to assemble a portrait' (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 171). Can I/we slow our neoliberal beings down?

A/the subject(s) at risk, always running

The Cixousian subject of a thousand lives is 'a being of intermittances'. Our subjectivity must be risked, we must risk dissolution, and the risk is necessary. This is why 'the Cixousian subject does not stop running; it races against itself and against its narratives' (Calle-Gruber in Cixous and Calle-Gruber: 171). So subjugated, so entrapped in discourses, running is our way 'to multiply our points of view, the points. The blind spots...the heart stands up to the head and the soul takes on the body' (Calle-Gruber in Cixous and Calle-Gruber: 171). 'Subject is a place, the active movement,



the running' (Wing, in Cixous, 1991c). How do we research ourselves and our participants running?

This is what flusters Katie and bothers me. I'm in the process of writing off a certain way of living with work e-mail, well ordered intellectual drawers, high-heeled shoes, jewelry, badges, funds of knowledge, etc. Officially Katie is dying of fear. But deep inside I stamp the ground impatiently. I'm in a hurry to dump all this baggage. (adapted from Cixous, 1991c: 7)

Dumping academic baggage, Peter and I write a paper *it passes by at a gallop, the snail!* (Beavan and Case, 2018).

The *not subject* as a radical strategy for theorizing an/other way

I'm pushing us further still. What if Cixous's dissolution of subjectivity is a *strategy* and not an end in itself? That Cixous's vision is living-writing-thinking from an/other place, conceiving philosophy differently? Is her move not to try and theorize materiality from her head but through a 'phenomenological exploration of the materiality of the *féminine* as thinking itself'? (Bray, 2004:73). She descends down into thought through her body. She courageously *dwells* in the instant of dissolved subjectivity without taking (Deleuzian) flight. Is her dissolving of multiple subjectivities opening us to her new world-view of the *not self*, the devalued, the impersonal, the animal, the thing, the *undecidability* of sexual difference, the affirmation of reborn subjectivities and *beyond self to joy* (Cixous, 1991b; Bray, 2004)? 'Joy is alien to structures, it dissolves identities, subverts hierarchies' (Bray, 2004: 200). I hear Medusa's glorious belly-laugh.

This is my quest. I'm still in the research phase. I reflect that I introject theories into my body. In *Pussy Hats* I work theories (affective feminist solidarity, feminist Snap and Refusal, for example) through my body. I aim to make new knowledge flesh-to-flesh, collective selves. I continue to seek the moment of *not self*. I'm attempting a phenomenological exploration of the materiality of my *féminine* as theorizing an/other way to 'j'ouï's sens: I hear meaning...meaning [which is] elusive...but the search and desire for it goes on' (Wing, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 165).



Unrepressed Woman: Revolution with *écriture féminine*

Make no mistake, Cixous is embracing a different libidinal economy and it is a forceful call to arms, to a feminist revolution through writing with new languages and discourses, to bring Woman into the world, and to live ethical lives. Cixous is an *écrivante* and an *activante*, urging us and showing us the way to a world where femininity (for women, and for men who have repressed it), is liberated through a

Sensuous militancy: Unbuckling our cuirasses

At the beginning of every seminar, she unbuckles her belt: a half cuirass. Her strap frees the body and disintegrates the militant or civic order of the practical world; this is indeed the sensuous militancy that calls her audience to write both with and against the male, to write when the strap undoes the pressures needed to protect and chastize the uterus in the male order. (Conley, 1991: 80–81)

And her method is via writing from the unconscious through the body. Féminine writing is the pathway to new subjectivities, loosening of the bonds that bind us to male philosophers and the way for woman to blaze her trail with a feminine economy of love and with laughter, to a new relationship as subjects not objects, equality with

Uncensored sextexts as naphtha

It is writing which is produced from the Imaginary, through the body, independent of its author, and which, through infinite deferral of meaning, denies phallogentric mastery and truths, the props of Western metaphysics, which fix woman in binary relationships, and always, always in the subordinate position (some men can write it too – those who can allow in the féminine)

To write – the act that will ‘realize’ the un-censored relationship of woman to her sexuality, to her woman-being giving her back access to her own forces; that will return her to her goods, her pleasures, her organs, her vast bodily territories kept under seal...Write yourself your body must be heard. Then the huge resources of the unconscious will burst out. (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 97)

Writing sexts (Cixous, 1976b) as a pathway to liberate woman from Oedipal castration; which is not opposition to men, it is woman *with* man, unsubjected; where the human subject is bi-sexual; living differently with others in ethical



relationship, in a féminine libidinal economy; which avoids essentialism of innate biological gender differences.

Writing which is in a constant state of invention, a practice which 'can never be theorised, enclosed, coded – which doesn't mean that it doesn't exist' (Cixous, 1976b: 883).

Writing which can take the form of multiple discourses thus

Blowing up the Law

Writing where right 'Now, I-woman are going to blow up the Law: a possible and inescapable explosion from now on, in language' (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 95).

Writing which is

precisely *the very possibility of change*, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation in social and cultural structures. (Cixous, 1976b: 879)

Writing which allows us

[s]inking into your own night, being in touch with what comes out of my body as with the sea, accepting the anguish of submersion...Sea you return to the sea, and rhythm to rhythm...isn't the current of our women's waters sufficient to unleash the uncalculated writing of wild and populated texts? (Cixous, 1991: 57–58)⁶⁶

This is a tough ask in the OS Academy and the Academy more broadly. Even as I write, I have on my desk open in front of me an informed, up-to-date and well-written chapter on *écriture féminine* (Brigley Thompson, 2013) written in disembodied and objective language, as a phallic academic man. I'm stunned to learn from the book's

⁶⁶ Cixous often uses this metaphor of returning to the sea. 'Aller à la mer' is also the title of an essay by Cixous (1984) about her move to writing for the theatre. The title can be translated as 'Going to the Seaside' or 'Going to the Mother' (Barbara Kerslake, in Cixous, 1984, translators' note). The essay had a profound impact on my thinking and *Pussy Hats* is one outcome. There will be others.



bio that Zoë is an award-winning *poet* and a university teacher of *creative writing*. Unable, or perhaps not allowed by the three male editors of this weighty tome on poststructuralism, to trouble the law of the scholarly text? Oh! I feel tears for:

The closet allies of us women are the poets. They are our friends. True, they are the ones furthest removed from anything decisive, cutting, and let their femininity traverse them. (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 152).

Curious, I turn pages to the editors' summary of Zoë's chapter, which appears, I've realized, in a section headed *Methods* (rather than sections on resistance and limit, or themes about subjectivity).

[T]he concepts and methodological practices associated with *écriture féminine* and *fémininité* are always, Brigley Thompson insists, conditioned or brought to life in the opening up of otherness and in the creation of a space in which otherness can dwell. (Benoit Dillet et al., 2013: 94, their emphases)

I feel despair whilst understanding their cultural immersion in a gendered Academy where 'the unvoiced assumption of masculinity renders the masculine normal...Science is virile and potent' (Phillips et al., 2014 317). I credit the editors with including two chapters on Cixous. With reservations, they will make it into my references. To trouble the law of the scholarly text is part of Cixous's call. She doesn't waver. Nor will I.

If there is to be a space where the domination of masculine knowledge can recede in organization studies then the task is to undermine that discipline. We need possibilities of change. We need to pursue changes to the very character of knowledge itself (Phillips et al., 2013: 328)

with

Writing which embraces the forbidden

'Careful! I am not trying to create a *féminine* writing, but to let into writing what has always been forbidden up to now, knowing the effects of femininity. I am still at the research stage' (Cixous, 2008c: 52). In organizations, this means addressing taboo topics such as miscarriage, abortion, cancer, mental health, parenthood, divorce, menstruation, menopause, male domination, sexual harassment. It also means writing about our



desires, loves, friendships, hopes. I have attempted this with some of my writing. In the OS Academy it means

feminist research...in which we observe closely and think deeply about our own experiences, experiences which are material, embodied, conscious and unconscious, tacit and known, and having analysed them we use a poetics of writing that conveys the richness and bleakness, the tonality and the smell, of the lives we lead in the organizations in which we work. (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 187)

There is much work to be done. Like Cixous, I'm still at the research stage. But there's

Nothing for it: I'm losing hold and letting go

It's im/possible this (re)writing woman

It's im/possible this (re)writing woman
in organizations, in the OS Academy

I'm for possibilities. I'm for courage. I am not wavering.
I'm picking up my saucepan lid and wooden spoon,
my laptop, my pink printer cartridge

I breathe deeply, and let go
of the required masculinities

and plunge
into the sea
je vais à la mer
je vais chez ma mère

seeking to create spaces in which otherness can dwell

women will be able to go there and feel themselves loving and being loved, listening and being heard, happy as when they go to the sea, the womb of the mother

It is coming to pass this arrival of Woman into the world; I hear it from so far away.
(Cixous, 1984: 548)



Pool three: Breaking with the masculine reckoning

Woman would then have to start by resisting the move of re-appropriation that rules the whole economy, by being party no longer to the masculine return, but by proposing instead a desire no longer caught up in the death struggle, no longer implicated in the reservation and reckoning of the masculine economy, but breaking with the reckoning...put aside all negativeness, and bring out a *positiveness* which might be called the *living other*, the rescued other, the other unthreatened by destruction. (Cixous, 1981: 50, my emphasis)

I know by this time you're not expecting patriarchal reasoning; a neat movement from my vision to (re)write women into a funnelling into logically appropriate qualitative methods. To subvert the patriarchy of the OS Academy, I am expanding beyond masculine research methodologies, '[n]o scratching the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition will bring about reform' (Mina Loy, 2015: 153). How to unlack this Lack-ademy of ours; to *live* positiveness. In this writing pool I'm going to focus on *how to* (re)write women in organizations through *living other*. Paradoxically, to write the living other I write me. '[T]he third person – I don't know: it's so far. I can't check in with my own flesh and feelings' (Cixous, 1990c: 206).

My methodological unearthings are stories of messy relational encounters with qualitative feminist scholars, writers and poets, and becoming inspired through sensuous readings, caressing beloved books '[p]age after page. O beloved, licked, lacerated. With nail marks all around the printed body' (Cixous, 1991a: 23). I also only know – if I know anything at all – through what my life and body have taught me, it is to be open to all kinds of questioning. I am rather in love with this process of becoming a Wilful Woman (Ahmed, 2017) researcher. It's a life of curiosity, unfolding relationships, assaying.

After Cixous I *experiment* with sextexts as the naphtha of change, polemic texts as calls to arms and that work as manifestos, rhythmic poetic texts from the fecund female collective Imaginary, texts which embrace the forbidden and which blow up the law. Texts which can represent Cixousian fluid subjectivities, intersubjectivities and transubjectivities. Texts which descend into (personal) pain and re-merge into joy, connection with the other and activism. I stress experiment because I'm still an apprentice in the schools of writing and performing, though this does not mean my work in my theses, at conferences, in other papers, isn't performing (I'll get to that at the end of this pool). I borrow from other academic disciplines, poaching embodied feminist methodology, including performative



auto/ethnography and psychogeography. I'm with bell hooks (1991) that we still have to collectively make feminist revolution *happen*, and as a feminist scholar I seek 'enlivened', 'flesh-thought-affect' (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 165, 171) texts; critical methodologies that activate, are political, which embrace otherness. It is impossible to be philosophically moored with Cixous without a focus methodologically on relational ethics which maternally envelop her féminine libidinal economy.

I cast off into this writing pool with the practice of writing as a method of research inquiry and feminist reflexive methods of free association.⁶⁷ I tack into brief encounters with the emerging body of féminine writing in the OS Academy through introducing my heroines. I mainsail into my-coming-to embodied feminist performative auto/ethnography with (another heroine) Tami Spry, and sail windward with a play on paper in five acts recounting the subversive development of my féminine methodologies. I finally moor with some thoughts on the critical performativity of my work and some comments on embodied relational and political ethics.

(Re)encountering Laurel Richardson, rebellions and delightful soothings with Marion Milner

I first meet Laurel Richardson's work in the fall of 2013 when writing a master's thesis, intrigued by her metaphor of a crystal for looking at sociological phenomena and drawing on her and St. Pierre's (2005) chapter *Writing: A method of inquiry* to help justify my choice of autoethnography as methodology. In the abyss, flailing, searching for a ladder down into ways to do *écriture féminine*, I plunge into her fifty-year oeuvre in the late winter of 2015, exhilarating in beautiful writing and her creation of a poststructural sociology as 'drama, responsive readings, narrative poetry, pagan ritual, lyrical poetry, prose poems, and autobiography' (Richardson, 1997: 3). I shadow her journey in *Fields of play* (1997), wondering if I can make the

⁶⁷ Free association comes from Freud. I use Marion Milner's 1937 definition of allowing our minds to fly freely, where 'there is no such thing as irrelevance... whatever pops up is important, however far-fetched it may appear'. Our minds have concerns of their own, not identical with our 'conscious purposes' (Milner, 2011: xliv–xlv).



transition from practitioner and PhD candidate to writer? I start to experiment with poetry as representation. Laurel gives me license to play with creative writing in my academic texts and to feel the profoundly personal is permissible. She frees me from the idea of a complete text – through showing not telling. She liberates me from the strait-jacket of formulaic journal articles where feminists routinely cut and shape their texts to fit masculine strictures. I awaken to knowing that in the voluminous bundles of papers I send to my patient and generous supervisors I am using writing as *inquiry*. I write into my knowings – uncertain, partial and situated as they are. I write as *thinking*. I write on *the move*. Interpretivism, phenomenology and hermeneutics; these are my methods and I drink courage from Richardson's success, her impressive stature, her continual risk taking. Inspired, I write a set of critical field poetic-prose, *We're on an escalator we can't get off*. I'm a fledgling writer-scholar airborne.

Or am I? I'm excited by this rage-infused creation but my supervisors don't seem to quite know what to make of it. The work throws the reader across time and space, in and out of my personal experiences, and news stories. I use a disturbing metaphor (and a web image) of my bloody mangled foot on the cover and in a poem, you'll encounter later in my theses – *Fearless Girl*.

Writing extract – spring 2016, from *We're on an escalator we can't get off*

Take One

1998 – London

T : 'You don't understand Katie; in December we bring camp-beds into the office. We work 24/7. It's a sprint to close deals before year-end.'

Me: 'Christmas Day?'

T : 'Open presents with kids, work, Christmas dinner, work, work as long as I have to. It's the push to close as many deals as we can.'

1999 – London

A – M&A Banker

'We're unhappy people in an unhappy industry. Last weekend my wife threw a dirty nappy full of poo at me. She'd had it with me being gone all the time. She was through with me. If I didn't make so much money we'd be getting a divorce.'



2001 – Connecticut

Me – Consultant to Investment Banks, 9 months pregnant

I've sent my OBGYN a picture of a woman sitting up in the maternity ward working on her laptop. I think this is funny. Six weeks after Cameron's birth I squeeze myself into a sharp suit and head down to Wall Street to meet a client, leaving my infant son with a neighbour. I feel I must. It's for my most important client. That's rational – right?

2008 – New York

S – Commodities Salesperson (28 years)

'I had a boss who came back to work on the desk two days after having a baby.'

We're on an escalator we can't get off

*Careful with our egos
They're the ones we should blame*

*Careful with my ego
He drives me to feel shame*

*

2013 – London⁶⁸

Moritz Erhardt, the 21-year-old Bank of America Merrill Lynch intern who was found dead in a shower at his London flat after working for 72 hours in a row, died of an epileptic seizure, an inquest has found. The coroner Mary Hassell said fatigue could have been a trigger, but there was no proof of this and it was possible that the seizure was something that just happened. Jonathan Hough, a lawyer for the bank, asked the court to make 'no reference' to circumstances other than the primary cause of death 'including working practices' in the coroner's final verdict. Erhardt's mother bowed her head, almost touching the wooden table in front of her, during Hough's arguments. 'We continue to extend our heartfelt condolences and sympathy to Moritz's family,' the bank said in an e-mailed statement. 'Moritz Erhardt's death was a tragedy that affected and saddened everyone in our company and especially those who had the privilege to spend time with him.'

2015 – San Francisco⁶⁹

Sarvshreshth and Sunil Gupta

'Papa, I do not get enough sleep. I work twenty hours at a stretch. I work weekends too.'

I protest. 'Son, you will ruin your health,' I complain.

⁶⁸ These two stories and another were summarized by *The New York Times* on 1 May 2016 (William Cohan).

⁶⁹ The story was covered by both the *Wall Street Times* and *New York Times*. Both broadsheets published a letter from Sunil Gupta, the father of the deceased but these were later removed from their web-sites. The full text of the letter can be read on *Wall Street Oasis* <https://www.wallstretoasis.com/forums/a-son-never-dies-by-sunil-gupta-moving-letter-from-a-father-of-an-ibanking-analyst>



'Come on Papa, I am young and strong. Investment banking is hard work.'

April 16, 2015

'It is too much Papa. I have not slept for two days, have a client meeting tomorrow morning, have to complete a presentation, my VP is annoyed and I am working alone in my office.'

Police said Sarvshreshth Gupta was seen on surveillance footage falling from an apartment building into a parking lot about 4:20 a.m. on April 16, according to the Bloomberg report.

In a statement, Goldman Sachs said, 'We are saddened by Sav's death and feel deeply for his family. We hope that people will respect the family's expressed desire for privacy during this difficult time.'⁷⁰

*

'How is this knowledge? Where's your critical theory?' I'm asked. 'All you'll use is 5% of your fieldwork.' This is meant kindly and I can't articulate my wild experimentation with representation, my emergent rage, my exasperation with the academic articles I read. I'm rebellious at being told my upcoming poetry school on Mystic Island, Connecticut (run by Fairfield University), I 'should' view as a 'holiday' and not developmental for my PhD. We fall into an abyss of misunderstandings. I'm angry (with them) and they're worried (about me and where my PhD is going).

As for Laurel, I'm disquieted too. There's a little knot of not-feeling-quite-right in my belly. Who is the Richardson subject I question? How is she formed? There is a she, somewhat fragmented but not that fluid. Foucauldian, I conclude; a subject constituted in and through discourse, which I believe is only one prism of subjectivity and a limited one to rewrite ourselves from. Richardson has changed the field, but her *writing as inquiry* isn't the methodology of revolution. *After a Fall: A sociomedical sojourn* (2013) heightens my social critical awareness but doesn't reinscribe me or move me to political activism. I'm in an angry mood. I turn to Cixous and her original texts for the first time. Struck by beauty and revolution, overwhelmed and lost, I send for help, discovering Sellers, Bray and Conley as guides. I struggle on and I write and write my way into knowing her. I emerge from day job and studies and with trepidation slip into GWO 2016 to present my first Cixousian féminine creation, drawing on *We're on an escalator we can't get off*.

⁷⁰ (see Sorkin, 2015).



Margaret, my supervisor, suggests I read Marion Milner's (2011) *An experiment in leisure*, curiously published in 1937 under the pseudonym Joanna Field. I'm swept backwards (INSEAD studies) and extended by Marion, into the delightful practice of free association. I play – very welcome after my Cixousian/PhD travails. Milner's using free association as a daily self-practice, to unloosen and unbind her ego-constrained mind, learning to quieten the chattering down, slip into reverie, into absent-mindedness, and let metaphoric images emerge unbidden. She goes to meet the stranger within. Like Cixous she discovers, in accepting the knife in her heart, that paradoxically she becomes more 'imaginatively alive', finds joy and her understandings grow. 'The moment of truth' is the 'condition of true fertility of the imaginative mind' (Milner, 2011: 88–89). I'm captivated. Perhaps this is a secret feminist doorway into writing *écriture féminine*? I begin playexperimenting, discovering, like a Cixousian subject, that my conscious ego is more open to being quelled and my magical associative powers most available in movement, when out on a run, or a walk, often the same route to our local beach. The playing quietens me.

Field note – Summer 2016

As I walk I'm letting my mind wander where it will. I'm thinking about work and relationships in a loose and unstructured way and letting my body respond and trying to tune into its sensations.

I'm feeling othered. This is a familiar feeling, a bedfellow. I'm the youngest of four children, shy, bookish, a girl whose intellectual prowess escaped the notice of her parents, I didn't always feel as if I belonged to my family of origin. My shyness and rural comprehensive school background set me apart as an undergraduate at Cambridge, from the upper class, sophisticated, public school, city-experienced fellow students. In the many places I have worked in my adult life, I often felt that I don't quite fit in. Othered meaning that, which is both necessary to presence, but necessarily pressed into absence or repressed. I'm mulling over this othered feeling as I start the sweaty and short climb up Harbor Road, running parallel to the water. Anxiety flutters in my stomach, a slight queasiness. I'm not repressed, I reflect, but perhaps my HR bosses wish to repress me? Am I necessary but pressed into absence? Why is the focus on what I'm *not* doing rather than on the significant cultural achievements of which I am a co-architect? A picture floats into my mind. A gilded cage. HR is a gilded cage and I'm a little blue bird, outside the cage. I'm flying free, swirling around the cage, fluttering my wings. I dart and dive. I'm free. The cage door is open. I'm meant to fly inside the cage but I know the door will snap shut behind me. I'm wary of being trapped. I'm well meaning, I'm not showing off my freedom, I'm happy, but I won't fly in. I don't belong in there, in the gilded cage.



I write a draft chapter over the summer, plunging into literature on 24/7 working, determined to show my bi-sexual scholarliness. Come September, a surprising and welcome supervisory salutation.

Becoming woman scholar

2017 and I'm years further along in my methodological practices and analytic interpretations. *Thesis one* is fading and *two* is ascending. I spend the summer metaphorically in a Mongolian Poststructural Ger, milling around, compelled to tune in to a tintamarre of lively feminist post-post-humanist conversations which are vexingly hard to follow. The clamour involves new directions in feminist ontology and epistemology, origins of agency, a move back to corporeality, questions about subjectivity and reflexivity, and whether one can have methodology at all (St. Pierre, 2017), and takes me into reading Barad and a dip into Deleuze. I worry I am missing something vital for my thesis.

This writing extract is from a lost chapter from *thesis two*; a trace.

Field note – summer 2017

A run to the beach, finding planes to fly...

Did I lose myself to theory? I go for a run. My body thinks in motion. One big question is whether I'm thinking, reflecting and writing with human agency separate with an individual conscious, or in sociomateriality, in the assemblage. I stride over hilly topography to the beach. Arriving breathless and sweaty, my running shorts clammy against my thighs, eyes assessing the beach (how many people, birds, dogs), the tide (coming in, going out) and the vista (can I see Long Island at all, somewhat, clearly). It's always in flux. I pause, aiming to stay in a Cixousian present-passing-moment, (Cixous, 1994f). Which of my selves feels what? Is it fear of unknowing I feel in my qualmish stomach, in my cramping calf? The tide is still going out, but far out. I wander for a while on the dry sand, mount with backsliding steps, the higher, drier sand hills, untouched by tides, and then walk on the wet sand below, my gaze on low swirled ridges washed by the waves as the tide went out, at the detritus of stones, shells, seaweed, my footprints. Looking out over the heat-hazed vista of Long Island Sound, another image appears; my methodology as large, blue, water balloon. I'm struggling, its weight heavy, safe in my strong hands, but as I hold it, it plops around, morphing shape, slithering if I am not careful out of my hands, falling, breaking open on a stone, the water gushing into the sand, draining away. And I'm left to pick up with the wet, small, blue plastic balloon membrane with my shaking fingers.

My body, me walking, the beach, fleeting thoughts and sensations, thesis chapter fear and calmness jostling. Musing. Water balloons, sand, detritus. This



beach, the water, wildlife and some of my various human selves (scholar, runner, writer, change agent), sometimes fragments of these selves are in an entanglement that is flowing and moving with all the other objects around me, and we are in an entanglement that will never be the same again...a becoming...

And I am a human being observing in motion, making meaning of her bodily lived experiences, this experience and the 'non-closed mix, of [her]selves and others' (Cixous, 1994f: xvii). This now, which is already, *just now*, as I walk towards the glimmering water, on wet sand, reflecting on the moment already passed. My lived body in these nows. Being...

Reflexivity is a way I make meaning of my worlds; reflexivity I interpret with, and through, embodied writing my lived experiences, my journeying to meet the other in me and the other, to move beyond constraining discourses. I don't exclude materiality in my reflexivity but I am reflecting, with my own human subjectivity, on these entanglements.

My feminine *writings* emerge as a 'critical phenomenology of this experiential substrate' (McNay, in Marita Husso and Helena Hirvonen, 2009: 50), with intrinsic and concrete connections between language, bodies, power; a move beyond high theoretical 'abstractions of non-identity, inchoate desire' (McNay, in Husso and Hirvonen, 2009: 50). I am doing my research with my ordinary body interacting with the world, with its historical sedimentation from a life living (Moi, 1999), and a life lived, in constant entanglements with other human beings and materiality; a complex configuration of pre-reflexive embodied tendencies and *intentional* relations with the world (McNay, in Husso and Hirvonen, 2009: 52, my emphasis). I'm also reflecting on future *possibilities*, opening myself to new *possibilities*, through my *écriture féminine*:

I will say: today *writing* is woman's (Cixous, 1986: 85, my emphasis)

A new thought arrives. Isn't there something of a Cartesian duality here, theories posed as oppositional or incompatible? I visualize Karen Barad and Lois McNay in a boxing ring, in a stand-off, no actual punches thrown. Sara Ahmed (2008) did throw some verbal punches at the material feminists and Iris Van der Tuin (2011) replied, but that's another story. And there also seems to be an implicit hierarchy: bottom, humanist qualitative inquiry; middle poststructural; on the top post-post-humanist. Perhaps I am ill disciplined, for I slip slide the hierarchical steps up and down. One moment I'm experiencing a world of fragmented my-selves, the next back in the ruins of humanism, with a sense of a coherent self, thinking and reflecting, and then suddenly plunged into an assemblage. I wonder perhaps, if I can view them not as hierarchies or oppositional, but rather as different *planes* for being in a world and knowing? Different *visibilities* to look at worlds?

I was in an assemblage when I performed my paper 'on-stage' at EGOS: the room, the camera, the audience, my props, my fluid selves performing and as a scholar talking. I was in a poststructural plane of thinking, fragmented, situated, deconstructing, when I revised my manuscript for submission to *Management Learning*. Here, on this page, a fairly coherent humanist I is thinking reflexively. And beyond these three I wonder whether there are other *planes* of being and knowing to be discovered? And these thoughts are freeing. I'm not a rubber band, I'm not a worrying eavesdropper. I'm a Cixousian writing woman once more:

Let's leave it to the worriers, to masculine anxiety and its obsession with how to dominate the way things work –knowing 'how it works' in order to 'make it work.' For [women] the point is not to take possession in order to internalize or manipulate, but rather to dash through and to 'fly.' (Cixous, 1976b: 887)

Turning back, striding up the steep hill, I hear myself say, 'trust her, go back to Cixous'. And I let my mind whirl in the 'in(terre)conscious' (Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997:



88). Deleuze and Barad are far below on the beach, I'm soaring homeward at a flying gallop...

My research isn't about knowing 'how it works' or 'possession'. I'm learning to 'fly' with poetical politics. I am refusing to become a soldier in the masculine OS Academy with a multiplicity of knowledges and féminine mentoring.

My heroines: Women and writing the féminine in the OS Academy

I outline in my Letter to my Readers the risks of the insurgent. When overwhelmed by the abjection of otherness I turn to women (and a few men championing the féminine) who have made my doctoral journey possible, who put belays on the malestream rock face, with which I've been able to secure myself and attempt my emancipatory feminist PhD resistance. As a subversion of a disembodied review of the emergent literature on writing the féminine, I am presenting to you four of my heroines. If you are wondering if I'm suddenly veering off into territory of heroic masculinity, I'm called to this idea by Heather Höpfl, who, in a delightful paper titled *The death of the heroine* (2010), rewrites her out of death (oppression) and into life as a woman of virtue and opposition, of flesh and blood, a woman who refuses to be put in her place. 'The stories of heroines...are stories of recusancy...stories of gender politics.... They endure hardship to maintain their goals...dedicated...to an ideal...resolute and unyielding in the service of this cause'. (Höpfl, 2010: 405, 400)

Welcome to my heroines. I have been nurtured by the hospitality of their writing, thinking and embodied presences. I try to live up to their examples, their bravery and audacity, and extend their belaying for other women who come behind us.

Heather Höpfl (1948–2014)

Heather, inspired in turn by Kristeva, often positioned her work (2000, 2003, 2007, 2011) against the patriarchy of the OS Academy and organizations, conceiving of



alternatives to ‘abstract relationships, rational actions and purposeful behaviour’ (Höpfl, 2008: 349). She invited in the maternal (Höpfl and Kostera, 2003) and storytelling. Heather had a profound impact overall in our Academy (Brewis et al., 2017) and opened up spaces ‘where féminine writing can be encouraged and published and where issues surrounding the féminine can be published’ (Pullen and Rhodes, 2015). Heather’s chapter ‘Women’s writing’ (2011) is one of my companion texts and outlines the opportunities and challenges of writing the féminine. I am answering her call to re-examine Cixous’s work and apply her ideas in my writing (2011: 34). I also extend her work and make my own footprint with my féminine performative auto/ethnographies.

Heather visits me in my dreams at my abject hours, telling me ‘Chin up, girl. I’m proud of you’ (adapted from Höpfl, 2010: 401), and to have faith, go back to her chapter and to keep writing the féminine.

Alison Pullen (and with Carl Rhodes)

Alison’s work to challenge the commodification and appropriation of women in organizations and the OS Academy has been an inspiration to my doctoral journey. Her 2006 paper *Gendering the research self* is a talisman text inspiring the multiplicity of my gendered selves, my corporeality and the possibilities of reciting, re-siting and re-sighting myself with and in my research. I have worked with all three concepts, stretching them and putting them into action. *Dirty writing* and *Writing, the féminine and organization* (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008, 2015a) gave me permission to write the féminine, hope that it can be published, and provided helpful examples in the special issue of *Gender, Work & Organization*. Their work introduced me to the embodied feminist ethics of Diprose (2002, 2009) which I drew on in my day job⁷¹ and which help underpin my ideas of resistances and my hopes for living differently in organizations. In this thesis, and in other places (Beavan, 2019), I answer her call of interrupting the OS Academy’s masculine libidinal economy with Cixous’s bi-sexual writing (Phillips et al., 2014). I extend this call with my

⁷¹ One small example was encouraging employees, who were together in large meetings, to take a risk with their bodies and join me (vulnerably) as I began to dance, feeling (not thinking) the intercorporeality of our bodies in the room and our collective, embodied and affective energetic transformative potential.



performative auto/ethnographies. Alison crosses the line from theorizing about writing the *féminine* to doing it (Pullen, 2017; Pullen et al., 2017) resisting with her body and her text to open up new and alternative *féminine* spaces in our Academy. This is pioneering work requiring courage and fortitude. I follow in her insurgent footsteps. Alison also calls on a variety of theorists: Foucault, Butler, Cixous, Irigaray, Deleuze (among others); and this also has inspired my own knapsack of theorists. I have gone further than Alison in my theses by not just using theorists' ideas but linking the corporeal body of Hélène Cixous to the body of her writing and theorizing.

I am taken with Alison and Carl's conceptualization, building on Diprose, of ethico-politics (2014, 2015b). They suggest that ethics is embodied, pre-reflexive, and that feminist resistances develop from our embodied sense of *injustice* spurring us into political action. My own ethico-politics have developed throughout my doctoral journey and underpin my writing of *Pussy Hats*.

Primarily, though, Alison is one of my heroines because, as I have read her words, including her more personal pieces (Pullen 2017; Veera Kinnunen and Pullen, 2017), and observed her in action at conferences and in her interpersonal interactions, I see and feel her embodying feminist corporeal generosity; she has dared not just to call for *féminine* writing, but to step over the line and write it and speak it. Alison returns me to Cixous's School of Roots, to my humble never-ending work of self-reflection in order to move towards the other, towards possible third bodies between us and to the joy of flowers on the inside (Cixous, 1993). I see her courageously and audaciously putting feminist belays in the rock face so we can climb after her, stoic in the face of hurtful (and puerile) behaviour from masculinist colleagues (men and women).

Ann Rippin

Ann is my heroine for her radicalism in creating quilts as organizational research and in her theorizing of her aesthetic practice (2009, 2012, 2013, 2015). It is an innovative embodied way of knowledge making working with multiple senses, and a way to discover the thought unknown. In taking women's craft – quilting – to the masculine OS Academy she opens new space for the *féminine*. Her work is



underpinned by theory. I discover with joy her *Thirteen notebooks for Walter Benjamin* (2013) in 2014, early in my PhD journey when I am flirting with flâneurie. I understand better the concept of multi-layered accounts as I look at photographs of her quilts. We have held onto a scrap of her quilting in supervisions and my internal examiner told a moving herstory about making a quilt with Ann in the tense final months of her PhD and bringing her quilt to her viva with Heather, where, at one point, they held it between them – a third body. I am not a quilter – indeed, I am a failed needleworker – but I build on Ann’s creative ideas.

I also admire Ann for her organizational research. With Coleman, Ely, Kolb and Meyerson they applied Acker’s theories to gendered interventions in an organization (see, *inter alia*, Ely and Meyerson, 2000a, 200b; Coleman and Rippin, 2000; Meyerson and Kolb, 2000), and she did insightful research at Starbucks and Southwest Airlines. This work appeals to my practitioner self and in a future project I would like to extend her application of Acker’s theories (Joan is another of my heroines). If I have a disagreement with Ann it is because she paints bleak portraits of organizations as ‘hostile, inequitable and, most painfully, sites of appalling psychic cruelty’ (Rippin, 2006: 33). In my long years as a practitioner I can agree that, yes, they are at times, but at others they are sites of wonder and generosity.

I was disappointed to learn from my internal examiner at my Progress Examination of Ann’s early retirement from the University of Bristol. I follow her feminist blog

<https://pomegranatestudio.co.uk/>

Nancy Harding (and with Marianna Fotaki)

Nancy inspires me as a formidable feminist organizational theorist: critiquing the ‘dangers inherent in masculine discourses of materiality’ (Fotaki, Metcalfe and Harding, 2014: 1239); keeping her gaze on power in the gendered equation; applying broad and deep scholarship of psychoanalytic and psychodynamic theories to feminism; and committed to feminist theories that encourage play and pleasure and deconstruct presumptions of sameness, rather than difference (Fotaki and Harding 2013; Harding et al., 2013; Fotaki and Harding, 2018). In my move to Cixous, and particularly in my sections on Freud and Lacan in this thesis, I answer



their call to turn to psychoanalytic theories, and specifically to Cixous, for rich insights into management and organizational theory (Harding et al., 2012: 55; Fotaki, 2013; Fotaki and Harding 2018: 173). Nancy and Marianna's book *Gender and the organization* (2018) flew into my attic as a companion text. I answer their call to write flesh-thought-affect and aspire to become one of their 'fifth writers' (Fotaki and Harding 2018: 186–187), though I'm aghast at their recent abjuration of the hysteric (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 73). I'm gifting Nancy a copy of *The hysteric's guide to the **future female** subject* (author's bolding) by Lacanian psychoanalyst, academic and Cixous translator MacCannell (2000) marking with a highlighter pen on pages 214, 215 and 216 'Hysterical *jouissance* as radical resistance...Her reconstructed voice...a special voicing that allows the return of *jouissance*...[h]ysterical laughter is an avowable enjoyment, another relation between sacrifice and foreclosure.'

Nancy, along with Alison Pullen, Carl Rhodes, Sarah Gilmore and Jenny Helin, is a leading proponent of writing differently in the OS Academy. It was Nancy who invited me to the first Writing Differently retreat in Stoke-on-Trent, encouraged me to investigate what processual methodology and critical performativity could add to my work theoretically, and introduced to me the deliciously subversive feminist writings of Kathleen Angel, Annette Kuhn and Denise Riley. She is a mentor and a sponsor and I look forward to writing collaborations with her (Harding, 2018, personal communication).

There are other women from other disciplines whose work also deeply inspires me: Sociologist Elspeth Probyn, especially for her writing on shame, feminist reflexivity and reflexive disruptions; Sara Ahmed as a feminist theorist and woman living a principled feminist life; and Maggie Nelson and Claudia Rankine, two poet-academics who write the *féminine*.

In this review of four of my heroines I have not attempted a critical appraisal of conceptualization of *féminine* writing in the OS Academy. This is deliberate. I am belaying after them, and sometimes I belay myself upwards. Writing differently, opening up alternative *féminine* spaces in the OS Academy, is war work that requires affective solidarity. Make no mistake, this attempt to open up the *féminine*, and by implication overthrow the patriarchy, is a hard fight, as both Acker and Cixous presciently foresaw.



Discovering and experimenting with embodied methodology of pain and hope: Finding Tami

I know I need to use my female body subversively, a move beyond writing. How?

Extracts from field notes – 4 May 2016

I'm sitting on a train on a beautiful spring day, heading up to Harvard for a Women's Leadership Board meeting. The sun is reflecting off the water as the train travels eastwards up the shoreline, but my nose is in its lifetime's preferred position, deep into a book; Tami Spry's *Autoethnography and the other*. I'm plunging into Tami's oeuvre twenty years after she began writing, which perhaps isn't the easiest jumping-in point, but her title caught my attention. At the heart of Cixous's work is the hope to be in an intimate relationship with an/other without colonization, with profound respect for differences. I'm immersed in Tami's writing, trying to grasp her practice of embodied performative autoethnography, whilst plunging into her reconceptualization to move towards the *other*, 'open to hearing and singing a note made with Others engaging an embodiment of "we"' (Spry, 2016: 31). I'm a melange of startlement, excitement, wild-with-joy exuberance, tears, and underlining her words like crazy. 'Oh Tami, Tami, Tami' I say to myself over and over. For here's a methodology I can connect to my months and months of reading Cixous. A critically reflexive, embodied, feminist way to plunge into my roots, into my marshes and mud, but not just to stay there, but to emerge joyously, as Cixous does, full of life, to find, where and if I can, third space with the other, a place to hold each other in deep respect, openness, for each other's differences. She's articulating my discomforts with autoethnography, feelings of methodological awkwardness, though it's scholarly contributions have been profound (Spry, 2016: 30). 'Yes, I agree with you', I say, 'self-doubt' opens the way to a fecund critical reflexivity...an interruption of language in our own sedimented performances of shame and guilt...of self' (Spry, 2016: 29). These affects, as well as my Cixousian immersions, provoked my poetry composition *We're on an escalator we can't get off* that I'll perform extracts of at GWO. I've always had some disquiet, after using autoethnography for my INSEAD master's thesis, that it is a little too self-focused; plenty of pain and shame, that perhaps can sometimes be hard to relate to wider cultural issues, to theoretical contributions too focused inward.

Click, click, click, go synapses in my brain. Click, click, click. Can I, like Tami, 'open to a perhaps deeper autoethnographic copresence, open to hearing and singing a note made with Others, engaging an embodiment of "we"' (Spry, 2016: 31)? Perhaps autoethnography is not about self at all? Is this why my field work poem is about 'we's'? I'm trying to follow her three-part reconceptualization. I keep writing Cixous in the margin:

1. **Reconceptualizing the Other in performative autoethnography through Trinh T. Minh-Ha's theory of the Other is not dependence upon or in service of self.**

Cixous – between the two, as soon as there is appropriation, it destroys the possibility of being other – v hard to do she keeps love in movement, a move from



avoir to non-avoir, keep the other in proximity in all their strangeness to us

2. **Reconceptualizing self as an unsettled- I...unsettled by the sociocultural negotiations of power and meaning...knowledge there is no self without others**

Cixous – it's the other who makes my portrait, a subject is at least a thousand people

3. **Reconceptualizing the critical praxes and purpose of autoethnography as embodying utopian performatives through the wilful embodiment of We, thus seeking to articulate the effects of difference as a relational methodology with the potential of materializing utopian possibilities.**

*Cixous – écriture féminine, no jouissance without difference, always on the side of life, of love, an affirmative song of life
Is Tami's performative a/e a way of embodying her femininity of differences?*

Can Tami's relational methodology of differences, her embodied articulations, be a way of doing my version of Cixous's *écriture féminine*? Is this why I'm writing poetry about 'we's'? Is this why I stubbornly write auto/ethnography? What the heck is her *performative autoethnography*? I open my laptop and surf, locating a copy on Amazon of a book by her called *Body, Paper, Stage*. I'm entranced by the disembodied front cover of a wild woman with blond dreadlocks lifting her arms up in dramatic action – I think on *stage*. Could I do *this*? I'm not an actor, I've no training in the performing arts. But I need to move from my text to my body. I need an embodied mode of expression. I need a way to connect with audiences broader than the Academy.

Writing and performing *écriture féminine*: Ports of no returns – a play on paper in five acts

This play moves in a linear time-sequence and with a disjointed narrative of my journeying to break with the masculine reckoning: scenes in my writing attic, at or around academic conferences and at a poetry summer school. Each of them reflect pivotal commitment points to my *breaking with*.

Act one: Letter writing May 2016

At my desk in my attic, putting the final touches to a letter-paper to my supervisors. I'm angst-ridden preparing to leave for England: for a supervision; a writing retreat; and GWO



2016. I'm struggling with questions such as 'what is écriture féminine?', 'how to write it?', 'is it acceptable as knowledge?' My supervisors and I are in a place of mutual misunderstandings.

Southport
CT
USA

1st May, 2016

Dear Margaret and Peter,

I've been struggling, despondent despite your encouragement and guidance. I've felt confused, perhaps all three of us have been confused, about where my PhD is heading. I have had to be so on and present in my day job that it has been hard to think clearly. I've been in a fog: despairing; lost in a grey marshland; sinking; harsh on myself; no bearings; defensive.

Let's turn to my PhD:

Epistemology is clear: subjective; surfacing knowledge through the embodied as well as thought; writing as inquiry; metaphor; reflexivity; intersubjectivity; thought unknown as well as thought known

Methodology unclear: but Margaret has brought me back to autoethnography.

Critical interpretation???

I'm nervous how you will read this feminine text and my feminine creation *We're on an escalator we can't get off.*

Écriture Féminine and Hélène Cixous

'[T]he ultimate aim of écriture féminine is to induce us to *re-examine our connection to the world.*' (Sellers, 1996: 110, my emphases)

In my recent reading I have focused on the conceptual works of Hélène Cixous, reading original texts, readers and the relatively few academic articles, applying Cixous' thinking to organization studies (Cooper, 1992; Farmer, 2001; Fotaki, 2013; Phillips et al., 2014; Sayers and Deborah Jones, 2015). Cixous is also a prolific author of fiction and plays (which I haven't tackled – yet!) ...

But what is *Écriture Féminine*? For a start it isn't one thing that can be codified, as such theorizing would render it under the mastery of binary masculine discourses, leading to its devaluation. Cixous is adamant that it can't be defined 'but that does not mean it doesn't exist' (Cixous, 1986: 92). It isn't the province only of women, as she takes great pains to lay out in many of her texts, and because this is complex and leads to attacks of essentialism, I'll try to unpick this confusion and to briefly summarize the main tenets of écriture féminine...

My understanding of Cixous's écriture féminine is partial and incomplete, intellectual not yet embodied. It will grow over time, but it will never arrive at completeness. I haven't yet reached a real understanding of Cixous's treatment of the ideas of Lacan and Freud. My attempts to write using this genre are experimental and emergent, humble and hesitant. I also recognize that even Cixous is unable to escape 'a partial return to literary conventions' (Sellers, 1996: 21)...



Stumbling Across Lecture Féminine

Cixous's analytical approach is embodied, and begins with taking an open stance with the body, physical and mental. It has nothing to do with mastery over a text; there are no applications of rigid formula. Deborah Jenson beautifully describes it as a 'poetics of attention', composed of 'philosophical restraint, panther steps, respectful for the fragility of an egg' (1991b: 187). Cixous's lecture féminine does make use of theory. Theory is not an end in itself but an aid, and she underscores the need for a *variety* of theoretical approaches. Sellers suggests that at the Centre d'Etudes Féminines they drew on Freudian psychoanalysis, poststructural theories of language, and Derrida's work on deconstruction (as aids to draw out multiple insights and interpretations), acknowledging the reader is a participant in the ongoing process of the text's creation and our readings are a product of certain questions, blind spots, needs and desires, and that these motivations are constantly changing.

How with *lecture féminine* can I make knowledge in the OS Academy? Where does theory come in? I'm in a mess *really*.

Warmest wishes

Katie

Act two: Keele University, England, GWO June 2016

This is my second academic conference. I'm here alone, except for the women I just met on the wonderful and frightening Writing Differently retreat (where I was the only PhD student, among esteemed professors).

Scene one: My dorm room

too much luggage idiot as I watch myself in the drizzle, pulling large suitcase brim full of executive and student costumes, none warm enough for the dismal English summer. shoulders keening with weighty laptop bags; one work, one personal, banging hips – ouch. struggle steep hill, anxious peering to locate dorm. juggling by 24/7 executive life with emergent scholarly life. work screeching demands pull back constant. nausea blackberry. worry. not responding adequately? IRRITATED. want to be present for emergent scholarly experiences. feeling newbie. dorm's far far off struggle uphill-sweaty then FOUND. Stand still take big breath realize relief. stroke of luck ground floor. Thank God. no lugging toomuchstuff up manystairs. okaywith darkcold funnymell room. used to four-star-flashy international hotels, but bigtime better than grim American collegepens. four-stars comparison; double bed, my own



ensuite. unpack, lie down bedfret. FEARFUL. presentation Friday afternoon. state of in-the-abyss PhD. notfeelinggood impasse with my supervisors. regressed defiant teenager not woman in her fifties. holdtight on to Cixous écriture féminine emerging poetic isitanygood fieldwork. yogabreatheslump into nervous reverie. mustunpack goregister meetmanyunknownpeople at extroverthappy introvertmuting very crowded in too small room cocktail party. SCARED.

*

Scene two: Keele University meeting room in the formal old building for the stream *Writing that touches*

I'm very nervous, about to present my extracts from my weird *We're on an escalator we can't get off*.

Followed masculinities stream. Funny combo.

stand up to present and to perform my féminine creation.

heart beating fast
grip edge table
to ground
my quivering body

been on (won't-admit-to-audience) reading crash course on performative autoethnography since train encounter with Tami, learning:

- Elements of an embodied performance
 - Artistic hard work ethic – don't worry Tami – hard work is my middle name
 - Dialogic performance – yes, *with* the audience
 - Internal/external dichotomy including finding my performance persona which isn't same as social me (well my texts swim in multiple Katies);
 - intimate merger between self and other/text (Siamese twins, I'm welded to my paper script);
 - practiced vulnerability – hmm not sure. My text is v vulnerable – am I practiced enough?
 - Internal elements (thoughts and feelings) + external elements (body and space) = performances choices (I'm speculating);
 - Room of my own to rehearse in – yep my attic. Many times;
 - Memorization of script – no time this year, sorry Tami, reading it.

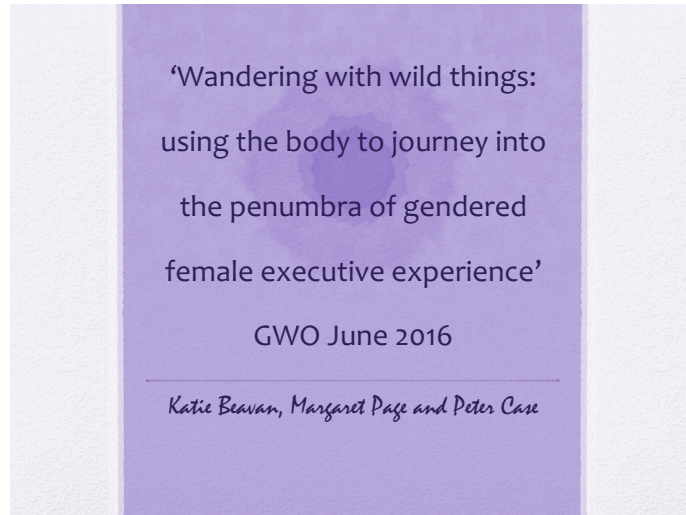


Oh no, all the big guns have disappeared from our stream, off to a GWO Board meeting.

relief
disappointment

encouraged by some beautiful *written differently* féminine papers. Crying, laughter, spell bound room. Nervous to follow them.

Deep breathlookout at small audience and my professional executive persona performer presenter-self clicks into gear...



Hands shake a little pickup my white poetry folder, a young woman smiles encouragingly. THANK YOU.

Will they set aside critical lenses to experiment with Cixous's lecture féminine?

Breath and

I begin to perform my embodied recitation...

Scene three: The next morning, Keele refectory

I'm sitting in the crowded dining hall with a VIDA Critical Friend (VCF). We've tried to find a space a little apart, down by the coffee pots. I'm pale, sleepless, nervous. We look at each other with intensity on both sides.

VCF: 'How did it go yesterday? What feedback?'

Me: 'They seemed shocked. Wanted to know how I'd written it. The *how*. Nothing else. (well a clever question about signifiers and signified which I idiot couldn't understand but I'm not telling you that no way). Positive comments afterward, in the break and at dinner.'

VCF: 'You can write.'

Me: 'Write?'



VCF: 'Yes, I wish I could write like you.'

Pause – I stare at her amazed.

VCF: 'I tell my poor students to follow form. You don't need to follow form.'
I look at her confused.

Me: 'I... I don't need to what?'

Interruption. Another woman scholar bustles up to us, ignores me, interjecting

WS: 'Hi, I'd like to talk with you about a student I have who is doing new interpretations of Butler'.

My VCF smiles, a forced smile and replies

VCF: 'That would be great, I can't speak now though – sorry. I'm in a VIDA meeting.'

VCF: 'Look to Cixous's ideas for your critical analysis. You're getting to grips with her. Towney, I can see not your cup of tea. You don't need Foucault. Go with Cixous.'

I nod as another woman scholar walks up to us, but before she can say anything

VCF: 'Sorry, I can't talk now. I'm in a VIDA Critical Friend meeting.'
(This is said with more snap).

She turns back to face me. Looks me in the eyes.

VCF: 'We haven't much time. Sessions are about to start. Look, I'll be direct, what's all this writing from the margins positioning? Tell me when does Cixous apologise?'

Me: 'Well... umm... she never apologises.'

VCF: 'Never, ever. Look, if you go with Cixous, you'll have to have courage, real courage. She ruptures at every turn, every *turn*. Do you have that *courage*?'

Me: 'Well, um, I don't know. I'm afraid. No, I mean – yes, I think perhaps I do. Courage, (gulp) okay.'

VCF: 'With Cixous less theory – you understand?'

Me: I nod, not understanding.

VCF: 'Tami Spry – brilliant move. I can see the moves you are making, will make in your thesis.'

Me: I nod, anxious and relieved simultaneously.

VCF: 'A woman will have to examine this.'

I don't know what to say in reply. Look at her wide eyed.

VCF: 'Katie, you're already writing the *féminine*. Believe in yourself. Believe in your writing. But you'll need courage. Keep going. Rupture at every turn.'



She gets up. I thank her and she's gone, dissolving, a phantasm, into the crowd.

Act three: Mystic Island, CT, USA July 2016

Two weeks later I'm attending (as a visitor for four of their ten days) a Fairfield University masters in fine arts, summer retreat. I'm feeling very underconfident when students in the poetry workshop ask 'How did you get in? No novice is ever admitted to poetry.'

Scene one: In the gardens, staring out to sea, hot, windy

I sit with Cixous's *Rootprints* in my hand. Despite pages blowing around I read aloud

Me:

To not say what one thinks for fear of disapproval is a suicide and an assignation.
It is why I dare: without – I could not live. What would happen? It is yet to be imagined.

The whole body,
The whole being is a theatre.
(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 94, 103)

Me sighing: 'Suicide or body theatre.'

Scene two: At a book signing with visiting poet Lia Purpura

I have purchased my Purpura book *On looking* (2006). Lia takes the book from me, opens the page and poises her pen

LP: 'Your name?' she asks, professional, focused.

Me: 'Katie, Katie Beavan.'

Lia startles slightly, and turns away from me to a woman standing at her side – the Fairfield Uni poet, and my teacher for the retreat, and exchanges a look with her. A look that gifts me what I long to know, that sends jouissance coursing through my veins, sends my heart fluttering. I grow a little taller, become brighter.

Lia signs her name and, giving me a small smile, dismisses me.



Scene three: Under a willow tree

We sit, Lia and I, side by side under the shade of the willow tree, in a one-on-one masterclass (I'm singled out by Lia). Lia is talking me through her suggestions for my poem (un)Burying. We both have copies of my poem in her hands. Then Lia puts hers down, rummages in her bag and pulls out a copy of *On Looking* and begins reading to me.

LP: '[I will tell you] [t]hat when I said *fuck you* to my great aunt, and she washed my mouth out with soap...I studied the scratches in the very dull, very clean silver spigots and, so close, saw the green spot where a drip wore the porcelain away.

Such focus made me dizzy even then. "Custody of the eyes," my friend, a former nun tells me...But what if the object in front of you swims, dares to swim away?

I will tell you a silver spigot can swim. And the sky be white. And a faucet bear a hurricane.

I focused on a green porcelain spot as if it were the sun. I found I could make it many pictures – a mossy rock, a turtle's back. But I tried to keep it in the sun. I was maybe eight at the time.

Even then I focused hard.

I felt I might be tested on the things I saw.' (Purpura, 2006: 135–136)

LP: 'You see?'

Me: (said to audience as an aside) 'Lia, a stranger really, gifting me gifts that ask for no return. How weird is that?'

Lia leaves me for another student conference. I walk over to the rocks overlooking the Sound and sit rocking back and forth on my bottom.

I hear Cixous's voice

To go I take the magic stairs, the ones I descend.

I invented that nearly fifty years ago.

Rapid method. Always surprised to see That I was the only one to use those stairs.

Slope.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 69)

and I stare into the shimmering water, saying slowly

Me: 'I have Custody of mine own eyes. The Masters will test me on the things I see; my mossy rocks, my turtles backs – and in truth my neck's a little taut, belying me. But I will answer them – ring it in – Oh, Gentlemen, watch this *woman* here, I am *s'eautre*⁷² as *mer-mère*⁷³ (Conley, 1991: 100), running free and differently. My skyies be white. My faucets bear a hurricane.'

I take my shoes off and walk down over the rocks and into the Sea.

⁷² Becoming other in sea water.

⁷³ Sea mother.



Act four: Sleepless and inchoate in ~~Boston~~ Copenhagen, 2016–17

Scene one: At my writing desk – December 2016

I am writing a short paper for EGOS. I know EGOS to be a more traditional OS conference and suspect it's a big disruptive step to consider writing a performative auto/ethnography. I haven't (yet) told my supervisors what I'm up to.

EGOS 2017. I find a sub-stream convened by scholars whose work I use and who I briefly met at GWO: *Being good or looking good: Contradictions and tensions in organizational ethics*. Reading Cixous, chancing on *Angst* (1985). I shift my literature reading to féminine ethics and resistances, discover Elspeth Probyn and her work on shame. Yo – I love studying shame. December. Year-end break from day-job work. A paper writes me; feeling quickly in the dark for the stairs, 'plumbing the depths of [my] 'I', finding my 'mouth' as my 'entry point' downwards. Walking my 'volcanic earth', saying hi to my 'horde of demons hiding behind the bedroom door, in the corridor.' Traversing the gap between what I can perceive in a 'moment of enlightenment', and 'what I can get down on paper'. Shaking off the need for narrative structure as best I can. Drifting with ships of philosophy but sticking with a text that remains 'stubbornly concrete', full of the 'raw stuff of everyday life, all the 'accessories of life, both as common objects or as metaphors'. Trying to find 'language-based music', 'the notes of writing in my head' (Cixous, 2008b: 9, 12). I gasp at the text emerging from my bloody pulsions. Unbeknownst to conscious me, a Mobius strip, wrangling internal-external torsions, has birthed itself. Was I sleep-writing? An emerging poetic-lyric essay with cavernous personal vulnerability describing my felt shames at a high-powered female dinner at the Harvard Women's Leadership Board and my angst during a night spent in a hotel room during which I am embroiled in an emotional work dispute up the hierarchy. Pulling Tami off the shelf, I pray to her and find my title, *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston: A performative auto/ethnography*.⁷⁴ Good God indeed. I'll have to perform it in Copenhagen; a landmine or a decapitated me? A text nervously Dropboxed to my Director of Studies who responds enigmatically, though with a buoying direction, to 'change

⁷⁴ This paper was published as *(Re)Writing woman: Unshaming shame with Cixous* (Beavan, 2019).



not one word of the fieldwork poetry, not one word.' I upload my she-text, waiting inchoately for a rejection or acceptance.

Scene two: Writing a reflection on my laptop in the courtyard of my Airbnb in Rome

I've arrived in Rome, two days after performing in EGOS, for SCOS.⁷⁵ I'm writing a reflection looking back on my EGOS performance.

I set up my rehearsal space in our rented house. My three chairs in a row, my pink jacket over the middle back, my high heels, my pillow. Keith practises filming me.

I am scared. I carry my fear in a backpack everywhere with me; weighing me down, sending my centre of gravity off. Through the PhD workshop, women's meeting, first two days of papers, it gets heavier and heavier. I sleep fitfully.

'So, you're here to rupture the conference', says one of my stream leads, smiling at me.

'I know', I mutter back.

I managed to rehearse before two VIDA friends last week, who suggested cutting the final scene because of timing. They didn't suggest not performing and replacing with a presentation, even though I was nervous and had to start over.

On Wednesday Gillian, our daughter, flies in from Washington DC. She has come to support me. I feel intense love for her even though she is jet-lagged and grumpy. On Friday evening, after dinner, I ask Gillian, the experienced high school and college performer, what people do the night before the show. 'Whatever helps them relax', she says. 'Some eat, some don't, some want to be alone, some don't.' More helpfully, she says, 'And you can only do so much in rehearsal, only so much, and then you need to perform'. Then she's unhelpful and won't help me find a voice warm-up routine online.

I awake at 5am. Danish light streaming in through the bedroom windows. Sick feeling. I go into the bathroom and apply a face mask; the idea being I want to look my best. Strange to do that by applying a cosmetic face mask. Keith is awake and we lie there. At half past five we are downstairs drinking coffee. I busy about and then call Keith over to my temporary rehearsal place and I perform the first scene, one final time. I put my things in my bag, including my prop pillow. Keith puts the tripod over his arm, has packed the iPad. I wake Gillian. I put on my fuchsia-pink work-jacket costume...

We pass Killen where I did my PhD workshop. Gillian eyes the coffee tables and asks, 'can we get some coffee?' I realise I have rushed her out, jet-lagged, with no coffee. 'Yes', I say, 'there will be coffee.' We descend down the hill to the main building. I'm sloping towards my performance and my body knows it. There is no turning back

⁷⁵ Standing Conference on Organisational Symbolism.



and my body knows it. The turning back opportunity was when I rehearsed before my VIDA friends. Coldsweaty...readynervous



Enter the lobby. Disbelief. In the deserted atrium are the stream convenors. 'We're here to help you set the room,' I'm told. My heart fills with thankfulness. It's an intense heartsoaring moment of remothering. And tears suddenly flood my eyes as I write this. Time stands still for a long moment in the foyer. My sturdy, beloved family team, Keith and Gillian, behind me, and these two scholars before me. This is the day. Then the fact that they are here, and their words hit me in a different way. They have come to support me, and this means what I am about to do is importantscary; a rupture...

We enter the room SP 205 and nervous I check several times it is the right room, even though I have sat in it all day Thursday and Friday. Gillian, although craving coffee, suddenly and unexpectedly snaps into her stage-production-self and assumes the mantle of leadership: 'Dad, lower the tripod, set it here,' bringing up my presentation, working out (without a clicker) where she can sit to change my scene slides, unobtrusively. I make my makeshift stage. My jacket over the back of the chair, my black high heeled shoes put together facing towards the wall. Costume ready. Pillow, phone and scarf on the stool off to the side...



Gillian stands facing me. Last night she wasn't into warm-up, now she is in control. She has me stretching high, flopping low, with the aim to make my body bigger, stretching to fill the room. My nerves are fading. I am living in the instant, breathing in and out. I am repeating back to her a tongue-twisting verse from *The Pirates of Penzance*, warming up my voice and diction, throwing out my voice high up into the auditorium. I simply follow her lead and she is patient with me when I stumble over a word or two, beginning the line again.

Another presenter for this early morning slot walks in with his wife. Flummoxed by my antics, he is kind, and leaves again. Part of me registers that he needs to load his presentation. I know my behaviour and the room must look very strange. It's time to stop preparing and let others arrive. I go to the bathroom...

I come back to the auditorium and the stream convenors have arrived. One of them is sitting a few rows up in the centre of the room where I can see her, easily, a place where she can 'hold' me. Another has his camera out. The third is positioned to my left, ready to chair. The three other morning presenters load their slides. My heart thumps, my face feels flushed. Gillian deftly switches back to my slides, quelling my anxiety. I sip water. The Chair is telling me eight minutes to go. Not many people in the room, which isn't surprising after the EGOS party last night, then suddenly, in a last-minute rush, fifteen people arrive from nowhere.

I sit here in my little apartment in Rome, trying to recall how my performance began, and it is difficult. I can remember the Chair's short introduction. I remember beginning nervously and with a little stumble, telling them about the recording. I try and return to my body in the room, the smell, the feel in the air. Bewilderment, excitement, eyes on me and my makeshift stage. My actor body snaps to. I lean into my performance, issuing a confident invitation to 'come with me now, as I go body, paper, stage.' I turn to dress and move to front of stage.



I nearly miss the intro, and go into the first line, catch myself, pause a second, see the containing convenor smile, and then introduce my Act Two, abridged, correctly.

The body knows, the muscle memory kicks in, I turn, move back behind the chairs and I am off. My performative autoethnography has begun. My body is stronger, my energy builds, taking energy from the audience, bodily energies gyrating intersubjectively in this here and now space. I'm beingdoingcojoining in performance. We are becoming together, making knowledge flesh-to-flesh. When I forget a few times what is coming next, I ad-lib. I never ad-libbed in rehearsal, it's an acting instinct that appears from nowhere. Keith never has to step in and prompt. I think I only miss a few lines. People laugh at times, their eyes focused on my performing body. I open my vulnerability to them.



I return to a different self as I bow, aware of the deep silence in the room, then applause. I take my jacket and high heels off and come to stand in my bare feet facing the audience, as the Chair asks for questions.

I'll have to watch the video to know what actually happened. I remember the tone and general substance of the comments, more than the who or what. I remember finishing with the magical love of H  l  ne Cixous – as we journey to meet the other.

Afterwards my head hurt, thumped, a vicious migraine suddenly exploding in my head. I know something happened in the room. The practice of vulnerable engagement, collisions and communions as we seek other ways of researching that allow for a diversity of being (Spry, 2011).

Scene four – June 2018. I'm in Australia, at a writing retreat.

Weekend before GWO 2018 sitting in the kitchen with two VIDA friends. One of them, the same woman who had watched my rehearsal before Copenhagen, has just watched part of the *Pussy Hats* video. I feel her astonishment.

'Katie, when did you know you could do *that*?'

I pause briefly and answer,

'After Copenhagen,' I answer and repeat again, 'After Copenhagen. Back home in Connecticut, in my attic, voices began calling me, helping me understand that my ruptures are my ruptures and yet *not* mine, and this gives me courage.'

'Whose are they then?'

'Yours,' belonging 'to you too' (Bhabha, 2009: ix), 'Cixous I say, smiling.'

'We're under a cosmic tent, under the canvas of our bodies as we gaze out. We are the bosom of happenings.' (adapted from Cixous, 1991a: 53)

Act five: Second time around – October 2017

I'm in my attic, excited by a call for papers for a stream on Women's Solidarity. My feminist, wilful arm is in the air. As a bricoleur I've seized the unfolding story of Harvey Weinstein and I am exploring how to work the story and feminist theory through my body.

Scene one: Writing the abstract *Harvey's Phallus: Where is my Pussy Hat?*

Words flow through my fingers. I'm typing on the pulsions.



You ask, 'how can we organize for, and with, feminist solidarity?' (Lund et al., 2017).
 The intellectualization of feminism is alienating (Messer-Davidow, 2002, in Lund et al., 2017).

And in answer:

A critical bricolage (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000; Kincheloe, 2005)

weaving-my-lived-experiences with current-news-stories
 exploring feminist-reflexive-dissonance
 as a catalyst
 for resistance
 for affective feminist solidarity (Hemmings, 2012; Probyn, 1993).

My performance enacting critical-self-reflections
 struggles with rage-passion-Love
 questioning whether
 I am an activist or a bystander?

Critical social theatre (Denzin, 2017).
 Radical engagement with my vagina and writing (Pullen, 2017)
 taking words
 written from my body to stage (Spry, 2001, 2011b).

Embracing écriture
 féminine
 (Cixous, 1986)

to break
 with the masculine reckoning.

Theatre as the living
 female body:

[[My] stage is woman...The scene takes place where a woman's life takes place, where her life story is decided: inside her body, beginning with her blood (Cixous, 1984: 547).

A Call to Arms.
 (Denzin, 2010; Ahmed, 2017).

We are 'fragments: an assembly.
 In pieces.
 Becoming army'
 (Ahmed, 2017: 186).

'We can share a refusal' (Ahmed, 2017: 185).

Can I, an emerging critical scholar, provide 'different ways of knowing and different knowledges as ways of surviving the world' (Hemmings, 2012: 157)?



Neoliberalism has tamed and fragmented our resistances (Lund et al., 2017) but we can call on a long lineage of Suffragettes to (re)ig/un/ite us. '[W]hen the violence...spills out [a] movement is necessary. What is necessary has to become possible' (Ahmed, 2017: 12). Women, body-presence; exploding everything...

*

I press send and lie low in my attic bunker.

Scene two: Performing Pussy Hats *Live* in the Wein Experimental Theatre, Fairfield University, CT – May 2018

I'm in my attic writing diary note reflections (which I've been doing for months) on my embodied experiences writing, rehearsing and getting ready to perform (and video for my theses) the full-length *Pussy Hats* script.

I'm learning how to do theatre.

This week we blocked the text with my stage moves and have begun to add lighting cues.

I walk the boards. Words through my body. Theory through my body. Groping in the dark, sensorially seeking to discover some version of some truth about emotions and events.

I wake at night, sweaty, dreaming wildly of rooms in houses. Rooms in apartments. Trying to find the right (write) room.

An edgy pushing at edges in an effort to feel and fall over them. In an effort for my audience to feel and fall over them. In an effort for the Academy to feel and fall over them.

I made a few more changes today – for fragment three... I feel embarrassed; and it was necessary. I have to stop making changes. The writer in me must concede to the performer.

Performance length is now over an hour... I am scared.

*

April 21st

Hi Katie

Programme looks wonderful Katie – I'm sure it will go down a treat! wish I could be there- please send a video clip.

enjoy it!

Margaret



*

April 21st

Hi Margaret

Thx for your note.

Treat for audience – well it is poetics of discomfort... perhaps more the questions are, does it provoke critical reflections in audience? Do we engage together in flesh-to-flesh knowledge making? Can I evoke feelings of women's solidarity? Does it help us organise for and with feminist solidarity? Does it open eyes to the sexism in society, in organizations? Does writing my body encourage the women to write theirs? Is it real or utopian to dream of a feminist writing solidarity?

It is v interesting to feel social theatre come alive in my body. To actually do it, not talk about it...

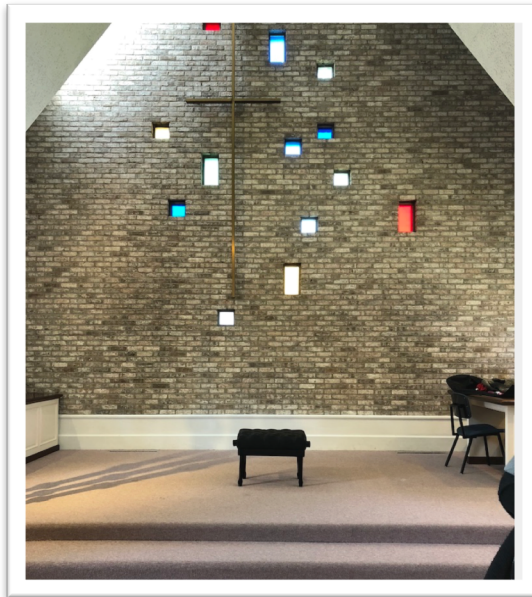
I'm feeling a certain nauseous fatigue as I look at my script...

Photos - my practice area at home, my script and the church where I rehearse.

best wishes

Katie





U
C
D

Harvey's phallus, a week in October, and my vagina is angry: where is my pussy hat?

Harvey's phallus, a week in October, and my vagina is angry: where is my pussy hat?

A fragmented performative auto/ethnography.

Suited

Opening music before start: Glass House – Dennis Sheperd and Luick

Slow fading lights as music fades

WITH LIGHTS OUT

(my voice pre-recorded)

first image & recording

This is theatre as the living female body.

Theatre as my body.

My stage is woman...The scene takes place, where woman's life story is decided: inside her, beginning with her blood.

My stage-body will not hesitate to come up close, close enough to be in danger – of life itself.

Fragment One

Saturday October 7th

My kitchen, Southport Connecticut

6am

Morning Coffee and Vaginal Throbs

My husband Keith and I are drinking coffee and reading the newspapers on-line. It's our morning cosy spousal routine.

Our Williams Sonoma cafetière sits on our oak kitchen table, the Le Creuset ceramic red jug of warm milk nestles at its side. Sipping my coffee, in a matter of minutes I'm speed surfing through The New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal and the Financial Times. Breadth a defence against the dark arts of fake news.

Suited
→
X.D.C

Today I'm angry, a red-hot rage pulsing through my veins, I'm feeling dissonance between my body, who I am, and the ugly limitations of our existence as women in 2017. My vagina throbs with pain:



Margaret was showing support and yet her note crept under my nervy skin. My *Pussy Hats* isn't a treat. What if it's a horror show? I mean to provoke and awaken. I worry if I can? I worry what might be unleashed?

'Is it ethical?'

'It's art.'

It's Cixousian.

It's me.

It's Clare Hemming's affective dissonance, solidarity to political transformation – or, at least, I hope so.

Theatre as the living female body – Cixous.

Shit.

*

I have to focus. I have to nail my lines. I have to...I have to...

Maybe it is okay to feel the sun on my body? To stop? Feel spring sunshine on my stressed body? A momentary bliss. An instant. A stopping. Tomorrow is another day...

*

May 6th

The oddest thing happened. I've been so busy, engrossed in rehearsing *Pussy Hats* that I didn't have a chance to write about it. It's the most curious example of Derridean/Cixousian theory working through my body...

I've always felt fragment five, *Lisa Bloom mislays her pussy hat*, was a little light... The memory I had in this fragment wasn't the strongest. There was always something that drew me in to the title, a shadow lurking on the penumbra of my consciousness. It turned out there was a trace, the absence of a presence. The loss of a pussy hat, a haunting. Keith assures me I had never mentioned it to him, nor had I ever mentioned it to anyone. A repressed affectual body memory, that writing *Lisa Bloom loses her pussy hat* did not trigger into conscious awareness, but perhaps was a signifier? I think of Deleuze's *membra disjecta*. The lost pussy hat reading like a head without a neck, an arm without a shoulder. The lost pussy hat, a trace in the living present of my text, haunted by something in another now. 'And if such a trace remains a question for us, was there not a body, or body-ground, mute at first like the dead, were there not events?' (Cixous, 1993, in Bettina Bergo, 2005: 16). Lacan tells me it is up to me whether I want to take this trace as a *sign* of a thing, or not (Lacan, 1995, in Bergo, 2005: 17). Well, my unconscious said not to.

S mentions a name, a pow, some synapse is triggered, in a flash, in the meeting, the *events* arrive, suddenly *undead*. I have to push them aside, to concentrate on the conversation with S.

On the train, they, won't be denied, are clamouring for attention and demanding to be written. A room in my memory house is blown open. It's *me* who forgot my pussy hat, and a new scene is written to finish fragment five. 'What powerful writing,' Jennifer, my acting teacher, writes back, when apologetically on Sunday I mail her the addition. A scene, from Agatha Christie, with a Ladies' Revolver, the ask of can women ever speak truth to men? 'Men use power to take advantage of women, it's gross, it's unacceptable, and it's persistent' (Maureen Dowd, 2017: 5). This memory



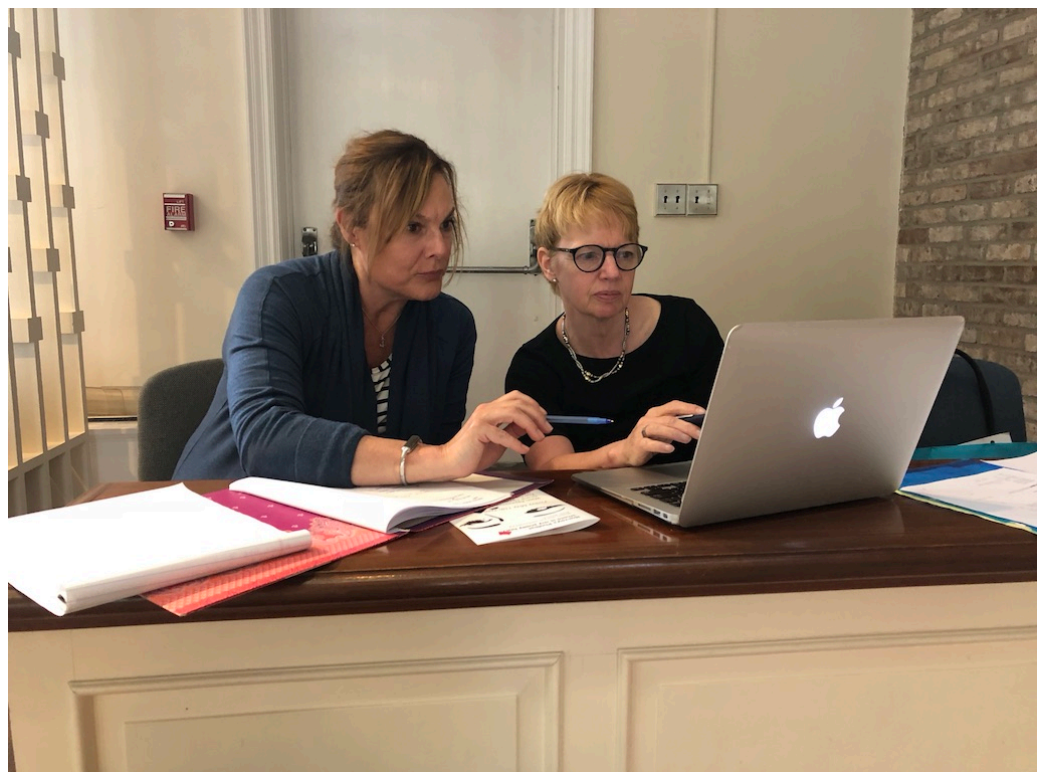
is overflowing with male power, used to advantage. Is it the truth, could some of it be fantasy? Of course, memory is faulty. Truth and memory, I trouble. Yet the scene is rich with details, so many details, I can only write a few in. It feels, when enacted in my body, so real. I can smell the office, touch my affects. It spices up the middle of *Pussy Hats*...

*

I sleep, dream, wake at 4am. Lie awake restless next to my faintly snoring husband. In bed and in the shower, out running, in the gym, I say lines to myself, over and over, over and over. I agitate myself when I cannot remember what is next. I breathe. The script is deep inside my body and muscle memory on stage. Jennifer, my teacher, is telling me to trust it. Trust my body. Remember to breathe. Remember to breathe. Trust in my body. Trust.

Finally, at last, D is sending through the PowerPoint with embedded videos he has created. It's at the eleventh hour, but I am not mad about this. It is how I work. But time is running out. I am stunned by some of his video creations.

A feminist partnership springs into action in the chapel. I show her the school uniform, the cuffs. All we need is Hollywood sunglasses. Jennifer and I sit, my laptop between us, scripts to our side, going through the PowerPoint, setting the cues for the technicians tomorrow. We're concentrating, working creatively, humming along, visualising the stage tomorrow. Is our performance masculine, in our concentration and application? Is it feminine in our collaborative teamwork? I think of Cixous's *Newly Born Woman* and her admiration for the masculinofemininity of Cleopatra. Perhaps we are two Cleopatra's in this pre-performance, adrenaline-fuelled now? My prop cuffs, borrowed from my jeweller friend Alexandra, are divine. I will have a trace of Cleopatra in me when I end the final fragment tomorrow. Two women working in masculine concentrated feminist solidarity.





I am surviving on Starbucks caramel macchiato ventis at 240 calories a pop. I am shrinking.

*

It is in my body. I must trust in the acting process. It is 11pm. Sleep seems very distant, a far-off cousin, unavailable...

*

Traffic jams on i95. The video crew are finally here. A, a twenty-something entrepreneur and so cool and relaxed with nervous presenters. I'm also used to being miked, which relaxes him. I end up with two mikes – neither for the audience, I'm projecting my voice – but vital for the video. He tapes the second one onto me below my neck, directly onto my skin. 'For safety' he says, but it will prove indispensable as my dress and costume accessories keep obscuring the main mike. I keep breathing. Can he interview me? 'No,' I say, needing my Zen zone. I'm doing Amy Cuddy power poses in my dressing room. Jennifer appears again, 'Are you ready?' 'Yes, I say.' She goes to bring the audience in. This is the last time I see her. I judge the time and am about to move outside of my dressing room and move upstage, taking my position behind the audience Stage Right curtain, marked carefully with reflective tape on the curtain and on the floor. I listen to the announcement. I listen to the music. I listen to my voice. I take a breath. I must walk out on stage. I walk on in darkness. Heart beating, no sweat, senses alert, waiting for lights up and to begin. This is the moment.

I am on stage...*Pussy Hats* is birthing.

I look into the lights, into the audience. I think I see Keith, Cameron. I think I see Jaxon. I start, I flow. I am on my feet. I go blank. Big blank. Jennifer gives me a prompt. I go. I go blank again. I say to the audience, forgive me, I am not used to this. I know I need to breathe. I take a breath. Jennifer gives me my prompt. It's sink or swim. My body knows this. I have my breath. My body remembers. My lines, my body, my muscle memory flows and flows and flows. I am flowing. I am interacting with the audience. We are in a being together, with each other, in intersubjectivity, but also in some Baradian intra-relationality: me, the audience, the theatre, the lighting, the tech assistants, the floor, videos and slides and images, all of it intermingling. I feel assemblage, I feel power moving through my body. I have presence. I breathe between fragments, sip water into my body.

*

I watch Jennifer place the borrowed black mannequin, with its pink pussy hat, on my bench where I just stood glowing. I listen to the music. I have no sense of time. Do I stay back behind the curtain too long, not long enough? I have no ability to comprehend. I come out, I'm bathed in lights-up. I move forward and bow. I am smiling. They are smiling at me. I bow again and everyone is on their feet. I have two things to say, I say from somewhere deep inside of me, words emerge pre-reflexively. That this, my *Pussy Hats*, is about the potentiality of feminist solidarity, and that I made *Pussy Hats* in feminist solidarity. And I am asking for my writing teacher, and I am afraid for an instant she is not there, and then she is there, and walking down on stage to be with me. And I am asking for Jennifer, who is there, reluctant, hanging back, and then coming down on stage, emotional and proud. And we stand the three of us women together, as I almost trip on my dropped saucepan lid, facing the applauding audience...a feminine, feminist, embodied creation.



Scene three: The Performance, GWO 2018, Hyatt Regency, Darling Harbour, Sydney, 14 June, Heritage 2, 2.30pm

I'm about to perform four fragments from *Pussy Hats*. This is another test – an academic audience.

'Good afternoon. I'm Katie...My paper is a short version of what you see behind me on the screen...

- I'm answering Hélène Cixous's 1984 call to go as a woman to theatre as a political gesture. My performance on May 11th, and today, is a social political gesture and it is a political feminist gesture in the masculinist Academy of Organization Studies. My intent is to open up alternative, activist, féminine discourses as valuable, vibrant, living ways of theorizing and making knowledge. I tread here in the footsteps of Heather Höpfl and Alison Pullen, and in going to social theatre, I also make my own footprints...
- Following Cixous, I come to stage not as an actor – which I am not – but through my body, subverting masculinist ideas of a linear play, desiring that my feminist flesh speak fluidly with its variously gendered voices...
- In embodied feminist theatre, knowledge is created in the intersubjective spaces between us; flesh-to-flesh theorizing... A revolving door of audience-performance-relationships-meaning-making, letting *strangeness* and *not knowing* in. I use my body as a cipher, introjecting feminist theories and discovering where, and if, they might fly with me...
- Of the twelve fragments that make up the piece, I am performing today one, eight, eleven and twelve. This rush to climax has its risks (as women know well) but nevertheless I am plunging.

My heartfelt invitation to you today is to come with me now as I go in the words of Tami Spry, 'Body, Paper, Stage' (2011b).



Afterwards. Assemblages. Animate and inanimate. Intra-acting agencies (Karen Barad, 2003). A physical glass gets broken in the room.

The end (of my play on paper in five acts)

The political power of critical performativity

I'm moving from the broken glass to thoughts about the political and performative potentiality of my work. I'm joining a contentious discussion that has been taking place in CMS about critical performativity aligning with the thinking of Nancy Harding and colleagues (Laure Cabantous et al., 2015; Jean-Pascal Gond et al., 2015; Mark Learmonth et al., 2016). The concept of critical performativity is complex and slippery, if rich with potential on topics I care about – relationships between theory and practice and practical interventions in organizational life. It's a discussion I've only recently entered with the presentation of a paper co-authored with Peter, at EGOS 2018 in the stream *Performativity in the unfolding actions of organizing*. I see my work as a move to join the 'performative turn' (Gond et al., 2015) interested in whether *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston* and *Pussy Hats* are 'performative utterances...which by saying something [I am] doing something' (John Austin, 1962, in Gond et al., 2015: 440, 443) – feminist and political. When I use the word SNAP in fragment twelve of *Pussy Hats*, for example, am I snapping with my material body, encouraging the audience to SNAP too (then or later)? This approach to critical performativity (building on Butler's work on performativity) is also about the constitution of subjects, material and discursive. I'm asking myself is my work a politics of material engagement with others with potential to rupture and shift discourses, challenging ontologies, leading to new ways of being woman? Am I taking some baby steps in the OS Academy towards us becoming 'story-tellers outside the Academy so that we can make the *unthinkable* generally *thinkable*' (Cabantous et al., 2015: 210, my emphases). I also tread carefully with the concept of critical performativity, with L plates up, as I have not engaged with the theoretical foundational texts – Austin and Jean-François Lyotard (1984, in Cabantous et al., 2015: 199) – and I have limited knowledge of Butler and Barad. Intuitively, I feel my material body and words are enacting critical performativity with my readers and audience, making small 'fissures' in prevailing 'discourses' (women's feelings of



shame or repression of sexual harassment, for example) and perhaps changing the 'conditions for [women] being and becoming organizational subjects' (Cabantous et al., 2015). It's feedback from my performances that suggest this.

EGOS 2017 – Copenhagen: Performing *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston*

I invited feedback from the audience (suggesting some questions) and received some e-mail replies. Here are two⁷⁶:

Personal communication
10 July 2017

- what did you feel in the room as I performed? I FELT RELAXATION AS PEOPLE BECAME ABSORBED IN YOUR PERFORMANCE
- what feelings or thoughts or memories were generated? INCREDIBLE SENSE OF CONNECTION WITH WHAT YOU WERE DOING, AND RECOGNITION BASED ON MY OWN EXPERIENCES OF ALIENATION AT CONFERENCES AND OTHER WORK SETTINGS. PARTICULARLY POTENT IN THE SCENE AT NIGHT. I FELT THAT THIS WAS THE ONLY WAY TO EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATE SOME OF THESE AFFECTS THAT I KNOW SO WELL
- were any theoretical thoughts / interpretations stimulated? I WAS IMMERSSED IN THE PERFORMANCE AND MY RELATING TO IT, MY BRAIN DID NOT MOVE TO ANALYSIS AT THAT MOMENT
- other thoughts / feelings... I WOULD ARGUE THAT THIS IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO EXPRESS ISSUES OF SELF ALIENATION AND AFFECT.

Personal communication
10 July 2017

That you performed came as a complete surprise. I continued to expect you would stop the performance and give a standard presentation to explain what it all meant... is this actually a legitimate way to behave in an academic conference? How awesome!

In the beginning of your performance...I didn't understand what was going on. Still, I felt surprise and relief to realize I'm not the only one to experience such feelings of loneliness and inadequacy among people with whom I need to socialize...does this mean it's ok to reveal those feelings to others?

How you described the loneliness and self-hatred afterwards when alone in a hotel room, how you hit your arms and legs to punish yourself: this was extremely powerful...I felt deep sorrow we must feel this way and punish ourselves for being humans.... It reminded me of self-censorship and power relations we internalize; we feel the need to be submissive and not raise our voices when dealing with people with power (new boss and others)...Being emotional = non-rational becomes shameful.

During your performance, I had a vague thought that this performance is somehow about feminism. Which was exciting, but I could not quite grasp what was going on. I then let go of

⁷⁶ These are quoted with permission by the authors.



trying to grasp it with my intellect and just lived through the events you described. The same bodily feelings as yours...

Feedback from *Pussy Hats* (May and June)

One of my women writer friends writes to me after *Pussy Hats* in May

Katie dear- writing my assignment for tomorrow afternoon's class I realized I hadn't written to you yet to tell you how much I loved, loved, love! Your HW(WIMPH?) piece. It was so moving Katie and so artful in the way you allowed your memories of all those incidents to interweave the articles and headlines... There were so many memories every woman who sees experiences it will have that will come to the surface safely. In a way I felt **vindicated** by your piece... Also, the power in the piece was consistent throughout. Great timing!! Congratulations on your piece de resistance. ❤️❤️❤️❤️

Vindicated as a woman. This lodges in my deep inside.

A month after *Pussy Hats*, and on the eve of my leaving for Sydney (GWO), a group of us are having brunch on my back deck and spontaneously we are deep into a discussion of fragment four, *Down to fuck culture and the girls*.

Back from Sydney, I'm in the gym with Jaxon, who is asking how it has gone. 'There isn't a day when I don't think about something in *Pussy Hats*,' he tells me, 'not one day.'

I didn't invite written feedback after my performance at GWO in June. I just didn't think about asking. Beforehand I was immersed in the anxiety of performing, and afterwards I was emotional. I received that day, and in the days that followed, waves of embodied feedback with tears and hugs; a living-breathing-affective-feminist-solidarity that lingers in my body still and moves me as I write these words. Moments of jouissance, the embracing by older scholars who know their Cixous, scholars identifying as lesbian, gay, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) and young women, my realization that in opening myself to them I also opened up the OS Academy to them anew, to other subjectivities of being feminist-academic in our heteronormative hypermasculinized world.

Embodied ethics

Culturally, in organizations and in our Lack-ademy, women are subjugated. In a moment I'll swim in a writing pool which seeks to show how much subjection is demanded as part of our lives as women, including our working lives. Nancy Harding



has written extensively on domination and submission in organizations (see Harding et al., 2013: 59–60; Harding, 2003, 2013; Kenny and Harding, 2015; Harding and Fotaki, 2018: 156). A master/slave dialectic (Cixous and Clément, 1986) which leads to disembodied and negative constructions of our *féminine* subjectivities. Organization scholars have almost exclusively seen business ethics as discursively created, and female philosophers are notably missing from their theorizing (Fotaki and Harding, 2018). Pullen and Rhodes's (2013, 2015b) work with Diprose (2002a, 2002b) on corporeal ethics an exception. I am joining this emergent conversation on embodied ethics.

Cixous's *féminine* libidinal economy is based on ethics grounded in our bodies. It is an ethics of maternal compassion to self and other; opening up and embracing differences (sexual, racial, class, nationality, etc.) between human beings and an aspiration to find ways to hold the other at the right distance of intimacy in profound respect for these differences; the ability to gift without expectation of a return; and the capacity to tolerate shared vulnerability. It's an ethics centring on the beautiful mysteries of being human in entanglements with other humans and the non-human; an ethics of non-appropriation, a seeking of the non-self.

For Diprose, our ethics are also grounded in a corporeal generosity, which she sees as pre-reflexive. Mediated by cultural inscriptions, it is 'an activity that surpasses...perception and the modes of being it supports...My body and my blood' (Diprose, 2002b: 193) is opened by and flows towards the other, and so is not yet finished.' In a moment of emotional confusion, a state of not-knowing, pre-reflexive, post performing *Pussy Hats*, my blood flows towards others. I call my acting and writing teachers, Jennifer and Christine, on stage with me. I am finishing in an emotional *féminine* embodied entanglement – a different 'mode of being' (Diprose, 2002b: 193) connecting... connected...

In terms of my methodologies of *écriture féminine* and performance auto/ethnography, Cixousian embodied ethics requires vigilance in the way I use language, to be aware that I am using words always in relationship to readers, to others, and to guard against closure and seek the creation of a third body between us. It's an ethics of patience, difficult to enact in our sped-up episteme. Passionate about and committed to Cixous's ethical philosophy as I am, it is extremely hard to live towards the other, especially when I am anxious. The research process is one



of appropriation, however much I resist it. I appropriate Cixous throughout my theses. I appropriate others, telling their stories in *Sleepless and inchoate* and *Pussy Hats*. I have to keep asking, with rigour and vigilance, ‘who is speaking’, and grounding language in the specificity of their material bodies and not mine, or my chosen theory. I fall into doing what I say is unethical and this hurts me. I am unsure how we make knowledge without some appropriation. For Diprose there is always a touch of vampirism, which she frames as a ‘blood donation’, my body carrying a ‘trace of the other’, which means neither of us have the ‘final word’ (2002b: 195). For Nelson (2017) it requires verbal negotiations, which she is always open to, and reveals the struggle of discussing writing about her intimate relationship with her partner Harry (2015). Her strategy isn’t an easy carry-across into my live audiences or my haversack of philosophers (dead or alive). *Pussy Hats* evokes emotional material. Is this safe, is it ethical? How would we have art, if it is not?

For Cixous, though, we’ve fallen already, we keep falling, hence the never-ending journey into our *School of Roots* (in Cixous, 1993). Her hypersubjectivism, her constant movement, are an ethical process, a metamorphosis her; descendant subjectivity a strategy. ‘Now it is joy which is prohibited – the thing that escapes all economies. It is with joy that I am beside myself. In the non-self of the earth, down in the depths’ (Cixous, 2005: 175–176).

With prohibited *Joys* I break with the masculine reckoning.



Pool four: Portraits of afflictions

This writing pool is a bricolage of stigmatexts written as *écriture féminine*. I share some of my own wounds, both family of origin rootprints and wounds inflicted during my career. I also sketch, referring to literature in relevant academic studies, the afflictions women face in the finance industry, and leave the pool grappling with the enormity of the task of (re)writing women given our subjugation.

May 2018

My body as rootprints: Following the beds of blood as...

I sit at my desk rereading Cixous's preface to *Stigmata* (2005), except my eyes jump back leftwards to Derrida's foreword:

stigma as *scar*, not far from *pick*, in the direction also of stigma which comes from our Greek memory (*stigma*: the point, the spike or the punctuality of the instant) with its *sti* resonating in English (*stick* and *sting*). (Derrida, in Cixous, 2005: x)

stick	sting	memoryspike	instant
instantspike	memory	sting	stick

Pussy Hats is a stigmatext. (Un)consciously I'd forgotten this word, and yet it slumbered inside me. Stig-ma-texts. Ma-texts. Mum-texts. I drift. Cixous writes a lot of books about her mother Eve. My eyes flip over to Cixous:

each of these [primal] scenes is a scene of flight in the face of the intolerable. But not only flight in order to 'save one's skin' as the French idiom says. In fleeing, the flight *saves* the trace of what it flees. This is why they flee: to *maintain* the horror *unforgettable* – the horror we would not live in the present although we want to keep its awful treasure, its proof, its testimony, its transfiguration. (Cixous, 2005: xi)

Haemorrhages of the soul – this is the research I am writing. My husband calls it *poetics of discomfort*. Performative autoethnography is a spilling of blood in order to connect, to make knowledge with the audience, perhaps at times, transfigurative. In *Pussy Hats* in Fragment Five the horror *unforgettable* left only a trace of a missing



pussy hat, until the eleventh hour when, on a visit to Harvard Business School, the stigmata crashed in, demanding to be written. Stigmata research doesn't reduce participants or ourselves to wraiths. Stig-ma-texts in OS? The (very) few I've found linger...

Writing extract – February 2018

I'm reading an article by Pullen, Rhodes and Thanem (2017); a prologue of a mundane experience by one of the authors (I assume Alison Pullen, it's left implicit) of anger, embarrassment and shame, to open a theoretical paper that draws on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of becoming-woman. The narrator's in an elevator with her boss:

He blatantly ignored me. Eye contact was averted. He acted as if I was not yet. I felt awkward. I knew he could see me, just as I could see him. I was silent. It was clear he wanted no interaction. My spine shrank as I wanted to melt away into the floor, and yet I forced my neck stiff to ensure I did not appear intimidated.... Remaining silent my body pulsed uncontrollably. (Pullen et al., 2017: 106)

Feminist work transgressing norms with a stig-ma-text. The narrator is using her own affects to subvert abstract theoretical exposition with the personal and corporeal, aware of the constraints on her that render the behaviour in the elevator a masculine performance:

[S]ome years later, I still feel the deep sigh that emerged from my gut that evening. I remember the hard hit of a heavy, throbbing pulse... Giving in to the visceral would be unprofessional, chaotic and, maybe, hysterical. (Pullen et al., 2017: 113)

Heaven forbid 'giving in' to a 'hysterical' female body in the OS Academy and on the journal page! The female body must be hidden from view and rendered object in case it interrupts the fantasy of 'upright and erect masculinity' (115). And, with help from Cixous (I will name the problem here, that this way of writing attenuates our ability to relate to the Academy as feminists) '[w]e desire the male standard. Writing for women thus becomes labiaplasty... Instead of enabling writing that bleeds, after Diprose (2002a, 2002b), and which leaks, disrupts, deviates' we conduct labiaplasty which 'mutates women's writing and it renders women mute' (Pullen, 2017: 3–4). Mutated and rendered mute with no voice in the Symbolic.

In her *Stigmata* preface, Cixous gives us a lesson on how to 'explore the scene of the body'. Isn't critical organizational research exploring the scenes of bodies (researchers and participants) looking for 'traces of a sting' (Cixous, 2005: xiii); digging into the sources of stings?

Cixous puts weight on family constellations as strong influencers on our lives, '[t]hey have always been there. I do not look at them. I 'know' they are there. Their



presence. Roots. Mine? My so strange roots...I follow the bed of blood. My distant blood, my foreigner, what a way we have come' (Cixous, 1997: 179). In *Hyperdream* (2009a) she explores, via meditations on her mother's approaching death and Derrida's recent passing, the collapsing of wounds from family structural, transgenerational and historical traumas into an indeterminate psychic dream state unveiling stigmata's tenacity to persist in our unconscious and cause repeated aftershocks in the present (Meera Atkinson, 2017). Cixous's family. Numerous members of Cixous's maternal German Jewish family escaped, or were victims of, the Holocaust. My family were survivors of, or victims of, the two World Wars.

Writing extract – autumn 2014⁷⁷

My Father's Story (reimagined based on his accounts)

Thailand-Burma Railroad, Prisoner of War Sick Camp – 1944

He awoke on a rough bamboo bed, damp with sweat, in a loincloth that stuck to his skin. His emaciated body was all bones, pressing sharply against the canvas of the bed and the packed earth beneath. He shifted sideways, trying to rotate the ulcer on his leg away from its painful contact with the bed. His wound had worsened: black and dry on the skin's surface and yellow underneath, it oozed thick pus from its core.

The air in the tent was hot and fetid; it caught at Johnny's throat. *Christ Jesus*, he thought, *is this how death smells?* He felt afraid, and his stomach started to cramp, but he was too weak to get up. He hoped he wouldn't shit himself.

He knew you had to be close to death to be sent off the railroad. He remembered he'd been delirious but recalled only fragments of how he'd gotten here. Shaking so much from malaria that his hammer had dropped. Trying to pick it up so the Japanese guard wouldn't beat him for not working. Everything spinning. Then hands loading him on a stretcher, and a cry – his own voice – as the cloth scraped the ulcer on his leg.

Now he heard a different voice, barely audible above the sounds of the jungle outside, groaning on the far side of the tent. He saw the outlines of two figures on beds like his own. From the closer bed came a frail voice.

'Who's there?'

'Me, Johnny... Johnny Beavan.'

'Christ, never thought you'd get here. You're one of the strong uns.'

Johnny said nothing. He was 24, yet he felt so old. His head hurt terribly. He drifted in and out of sleep, then woke, shivering.

'Hey, Johnny...' The whisper came from his neighbour. 'Hold out your hand.'

'What?'

'Hold out your hand, I've got something for you.'

Johnny reached out and felt a cool, oval weight: an egg. Prisoners would trade anything they still had – a watch, a ring – to the local Thais for one of these.

'Take it,' the man said, his words faint. 'It's no use to me anymore.'

⁷⁷ This extract is taken from my INSEAD master's thesis (Beavan, 2014).



At some point, Johnny realized the other man was no longer breathing, and the sounds at the other end of the tent had long since stopped.

His hand curled around the egg, barely strong enough to hold it. He could do it, he told himself. He could outlast the night. Tomorrow, he'd eat the egg – and maybe survive.

*

My Mother's Story (reimagined based on her accounts)

Greenford Station, North London – 1941

Pulling the front door tight behind her, Vera stepped out into the diminishing twilight. She left her mother angrily pulling the blackout curtains across the bay window. Her mother's sharp words echoed in Vera's head as she walked through the stinging rain: 'Selfish girl! Get on out the door, now.'

She hadn't wanted to go tonight to meet her Dad. Couldn't her mother or older sister go instead, just for once? Both could see better than Vera, with her one nearly blind eye and the other poor of sight. No light spilled from the blacked-out houses above her as she took her careful steps, feeling for curbs at each corner. Straining to hear nearby car engines. She knew Londoners died every night in blackout accidents.

At the station, she shivered and peered into the dark along the platform. She had waited like this for the train that took her to rural Devon with the other evacuees, away from her family – to live with a cold, stern couple who served up vile macaroni and cheese for dinner.

The last train of the day pulled into the station with a low 'hiss-ss-sss.' Vera waited for the tap-tap of her father's cane, standing in her usual place so he could find her. 'Come on, my lovely,' he said, taking her hand. They leaned on each other, a middle-aged blind man and his teenage daughter, counting the steps to each turn.

Suddenly, a wailing sound rose up around them, filling their ears. The air raid siren. Damn! Her heart pounding, Vera turned her dad to the left, toward the nearest shelter – a location they'd memorized. To run would risk tripping, so they walked fast, on high alert for what would come next. Hopefully, the sound of the bombs would be far away, not close – not close and terrifying. *Don't let the siren sound a red warning*, she thought. *Let it be over soon*. She pulled her dad toward the shelter.

Cixous is interested in our collective stigmatas, as well as individual ones, and she queers the boundaries between them as inexplicable and enigmatic. Here's one of mine, which could also be collective.

Writing extract – October 2013⁷⁸

An incident with a prior boss

It's Friday afternoon and I'm sitting at my desk in my home office, staring out the window at two Japanese maples whose leaves have turned a deep autumn

⁷⁸ This writing extract is also taken from my INSEAD master's thesis (Beavan, 2014).



red. I'm calming myself with this view, preparing for a one-on-one phone meeting with my boss.

He's only been my boss for a few months, and I've yet to find a rhythm in the relationship. He seems to have a poor opinion of HR, judging from his constant pressure to downsize my team and his snide remarks about HR business partners not belonging on divisional leadership teams. We get on well together in person – there's warmth, humour, and mutual respect – but we don't connect so well on the phone.

I look down at the glowing rectangle of notes on my computer screen. The bold bullet points and highlighted figures reassure me that I'm well prepared to discuss our main topic: his compensation package as the new CEO. But I don't feel as ready for the second agenda item: telling him I can't move my family to the west coast as he has asked. The phone suddenly buzzes on my desk and I lift it swiftly to say my hello.

'Ah, Katie...' My boss's voice is flat, as always, leaving me guessing as to his mood. We're quickly into our discussion, which goes quite well until... all at once, it doesn't. My news about not moving west hangs in the air, then he goes ballistic. His angry, shouting words fill my ear, and I freeze. I can't comprehend this. My hand, clamped to the phone, begins to shake.

The room blurs around me, swimming in tears, and I'm jolted into another moment. I'm a child leaning against my mother's leg, my face buried in the soft cotton of her dress. She's talking to a friend in our doorway, they both loom large above me. I look up, try to ask a question, and *wham*. Her angry shove hurtles me backward. I fall down, hard, on the cold stone hallway floor. I'm crying, full of fear.

And now that fear is in the present. I stare at the phone, the call now over, and I'm sick with anxiety. What just happened? I keep thinking about it. I email my boss: once, twice, three times, four... and there is no reply. Just eerie, perturbing silence. Finally, late on Sunday, in the middle of the night (for him, in London), I get a one-line answer: 'I can't say anything now; I need time alone; I need to wrap my head around it.' Now I'm even more afraid. But... of what?

As always with Cixous, although the grip of our stigmatas is tenacious, the power of love is mightier still. Time and again in *Hyperdream* the author gently depicts the slow thaw of pain when love and writing spring into joint action (Atkinson, 2017) bringing into awareness our stigmatas, opening them to healing. While I inherited traumas from my parents' World War II experiences (and likely from my grandfather's experience in World War I trenches) we should not view stigmatas as only wounds. Cixous believes they are also 'a little magic uterus. In the cavity resurrection is hatched' (Cixous, 2005: viv). The magic lies in how we cultivate our stigmatas. She encourages us to visit *The School of the Dead* (in Cixous, 1993) since we 'spend our lives not seeing *what we saw*' (1993: 9, her emphases). It's a call to go beyond the borders of ourselves despite the innumerable difficulties of our 'blindness, falsity, injustice, error, murder, hypocrisy, distraction, death – and "holding words out" in the other's direction' all part of the work of 'un-forgetting, of un-silencing,



of un-earthing, of-binding, and of un-deafening oneself' (Cixous, 1979, in Sellers, 1994: 83). It is slow, painful, tender work journeying in the imund.⁷⁹

During the course of my master's and doctoral journeys I've worked, through writing, to chisel into the strata of my own rootprints and stigmatas, familial and deriving from my thirty-five years spent working in hypermasculine organizations. I descend and create a mix of lyrical autobiographical writing and autotheoretical writing.⁸⁰ What follows are fragments that reveal something of my stigmatas – my personal flesh wounds, traumas, which also offer hope of magical resurrection, my tomb-cradles (Cixous, 2005). I flow to a review of women's stigmatas, including my own, in global banking. In my *Pussy Hats* performance, you also watch me enacting memories of other stigmatas relating to sexual harassment and other wounds – my own and other women's.

Writing extract – summer 2016

Ice shards Through my heart

I can't stand apart from the extant literature. The way I read is to move into the texts and I ask you to move through my texts. Who wrote this paper/book and why? Where do they stand in regard to these issues? How implicated are they? What do they feel? And these questions provoke my own dis-ease; questions that can't be ducked or evaded. Uncomfortable questions and memories that sneak up on me and reappear consciously, and in my dreams. A multitude of guilt, shame and remorse washes over me. I'm Cixous, weeping, burrowing, sobbing inside of myself. Where do I stand in regard to these issues? How implicated am I? What do I feel? And the memories come and won't be denied. They are messy, bloody and unruly (Spry, 2016) and feel like ice shards into the self-illusions of my loving heart.

I'm saying to my father that I can't go to my brother's inquest with him, that I have something important at work, that I simply can't get out of it. Dad and I, who together had stood in the hospital morgue identifying my brother. What could have been so important at work in the autumn of 1990? I could ask where were my elder siblings, but the real, hard question is where was I?

⁷⁹ In *School of Roots*, a chapter in *Three Steps on the ladder of writing* (1993) Cixous enters into a discussion about the imund, a term she takes from Clarice Lispector and *The Passion According to G.H.* (1988). Cixous links the etymological connection between imund (profane, unclean) and immonde (from mundus, the world) and suggests that the profane, unclean is a source of joy. For Cixous, the imund represents what has been excluded by the Law (the repressed feminine) in ourselves. The way to reclaim joy isn't easy or pleasant. We have to descend into the pain of 'our own marshes, our own mud' to find the 'hidden joy' (Cixous, 1993: 119). We have to climb down there to write, mastering our fears of being excluded. In this pool I write down into my phenomenological strata, and the journey is painful.

⁸⁰ I steal this term from the poet-academic Nelson who used it to describe her book *The Argonauts* (2015), and in turn declares she stole it from Paul Preciado. Nelson uses the term to describe her blend of poetic autobiographic writing interweaved with academic references.



And my father went on his own, my father who suffered so much trauma in his war years, but was so traumatized by the inquest, that for two days afterwards, he could not remember who he was, not even his name, and so my mother called me, frightened. Where was I?

I'm with my client, an investment banker; we're in his office in London. And while he takes a call I look at my e-mail and the teacher of my son's older toddler day-care class has sent me a picture of my son. Cameron is standing, holding a large sign saying 'I MISS YOU MOM'. I show my client and he tells me to ignore it, that this teacher has no understanding, and Cameron will be happy to see me on Friday (well Saturday morning) when I get back home to Connecticut. I arrive home and my husband tells me he thought the picture was too much, and Cameron is fine and hugs me. Saturday morning Cameron climbs onto my lap and everything seems the same. I stick the picture on the refrigerator door. I can't bear to ask myself if this is being a 'good enough' mother (Donald Winnicott, 1964).

My Mum's in a nursing home in the west of England, in the town where I grew up. My brother lives a two-minute walk from the nursing home. His wife visits many times a week and my brother often. My visually impaired sister lives an hour away and her husband, or my niece, drives her to visit once a month. My Mum can't see anything now and my sister tells me she often doesn't know who my sister is, and that she knows it is so hard for me to visit. But when my Dad was alive we took the kids twice a year and I visited more often. When Mum was in the first home I'd visit a few times a year and taken her for lunch. What stops me now? How can I be so busy? I don't visit for a long, long time and when I do my Mum holds my hand and cries. She knows it's me. 'Katie' she says over and over, tears running down her cheeks.

And I'm rereading Cixous and imbibing the poison of my self-illusions. And I wonder, really ask myself, if it is not easier to do disembodied research, to hold myself apart from the text? To subject myself to the phallic authority and avoid the hard-maternal labour of such tender and frightful critical self-reflexivity and render myself invulnerable. To penetrate and not be penetrated. I am ambivalent and equivocal – why endure these pains of my embodied despairing memories, which seize me rhythmically, sweat pouring off me, day and night, and with ever-increasing intensity and frequency? I'm nauseous, shivery. Why endure these body-wrenching pains? Where's the epidural? Where's relief? Where's oblivion?

And yet, perhaps these very ambivalences and pains can become a warm nesting place, a human secure haven for production and birth? For without a body, the pain of labour (and research?) becomes an abstraction. And that in my hard labouring, in my division, separation, rupture, tearing, blood and in the destruction of my self-illusions is both consolation, fertility (Höpfl, 2003) and the chance to truly encounter the *Other*? Oh yes, Tami Spry, I hold you to me, and I/we must, despite our researchy equivocations, and in spite of our upbringings which fight against it (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008), I/we must unsettle our 'I's' in order to meet, embrace and represent the *Other* (Spry, 2016).

The way of the feminine...the female path...an/*Other* way:

*It is necessary to release this body and strike half this heart with the other half, and if there's courage keep quiet and kill ourselves...But *there remained* the hellish pain of remembering...The pains of these remains is unimaginable. (Cixous, in Sellers, 1994: 192–193).*

And then the jouissance in me arises, and I hear Cixous:



because after all I could always dream

Mourning unfurls its storm over the whole country, ourselves in torrents weep joining our afflictions to the world's afflictions, deluge is our condition, but it is not our end, while it pours off our plumage, inside the dream lights a candle. (Cixous, in Sellers, 1994: 196)

A Man's world: Studies of women's embodied afflictions in global banking

Belonging to *thesis one*, I want to review a handful of relevant literature that has depicted the worlds of global banking from an embodied perspective of female subjectivities and to which my féminine writing fragments that come after contribute a visceral and affective portrait. The studies are, for the most part, based on researcher as objective observer, the ethnographies realist, and the stance critical, and sometimes moralistic. The richest embodied data I found came from Alexandra Michel's (2011, 2014) twelve-year ethnography of two American investment banks (one was Goldman Sachs, where she had previously worked as an associate). Presented as a science of erection (Höpfl, 2000), a heroic research feat of 7,000 hours of observation (observing five to seven days a week, 80–100 hours in year one, mirroring bankers' schedules) and 700 one- to three-hour interviews, with 200 informants (Michel, 2014) her data paints a rich and distressing picture of the effects of long hours on bankers' health. Her findings also have an unexpected and informative twist. In their first three years working as associates, bankers habitually overwork (perceiving this as their personal choice). They view their bodies as 'unproblematic objects'. In year four, however, bodies begin to break down and work performance declines, despite bankers' attempts to gain some control over their bodies. Starting in year six, 40% of bankers go against bank norms and start to treat their bodies as 'knowledgeable subjects', modifying their behaviour (with difficulty).

I learned the hard way that there are limits to what you can control. Everything I did to keep performing always had consequences that I did not want and that I could not anticipate. When I first got here, I worked so hard that I gained 60 pounds and got heart problems and diabetes. I picked up running to lose weight and that hurt my back and joints irreparably. [He ran about two hours per day, often at midnight.] Because I was in so much pain, I took pain killers that got to my liver. Then I went on a special diet and that affected my serotonin levels so that I was in a deep and dark depression. And the list goes on and on. (Bank B VP). (Michel, 2011: 347)



The banks benefitted from these changes because as their body health improved, 'bankers' ethics, judgment, and creativity increased'. I wonder about the other 60%, who continued in body as 'antagonist mode' (2011: 325).

Here are a few fragments, which I'm presenting as a fluid bricolage 'connecting the parts to the whole' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 6). I dwell in these voices, feeling their pain. Like me, Michel does admit that she enacts what she seeks to change. When I first read the research I was shocked, felt desperately guilty that I had been blind to my colleagues' (and perhaps my own?) health issues.

Alexandra's voice:

'She was a concert pianist...Review: Top 5 percent.'

Reviewer's⁸¹ voice:

'When everyone was stalled, she thought outside of the box...Some of her solutions just blew the client away.'

Banker's voice:

'4 colds, new allergies, back pain, stress, 2 flues, broken leg...the only way I keep myself up nights in a row is through a mix of caffeine pills and prescription meds...I fell on my way to a meeting. The leg changed color and I had pain but I chose not to think about it until after the meeting...At this stage in my career, work has priority. My husband has to understand that...I love the piano. But I haven't even had the time to play a little this year.'

Alexandra's voice:

['Her leg was broken in two places.']*

A Banker's voice:

'I work hard because this work is who I am.'

Alexandra's voice:

'Did not attend beloved grandfather's funeral because of work.'

The Banker's voice:

'It is inconceivable to not return a client call within 12 hours.'

Alexandra's voice:

'the firm's unofficial norm.'

The Banker's voice again:

'I feel like the creative juices are just gone...Heart problem, 3 colds, 1 flu, additional allergies, strong back and joint pain...The chest pain came just when I thought my body could not defy me anymore...I am not going to let my body ruin my life.'

Alexandra's voice:

Is silent...*

Banker's voice:

'I am willing to kill myself at work because this is an opportunity that comes along only once in a life.'

Alexandra's voice:

'Did not meet parents who were in town, because of work. Review Top 5 percent.'

Banker's mother's voice:

'The firm brainwashes her. I don't even recognize the way she dresses, speaks, and even walks.'

Reviewer's voice:

'I can always rely on her in delicate client situations for good judgement.'

⁸¹ Reviewers are colleagues providing written commentary in 360 performance reviews to which Michel had access.



Banker's voice:

'I have lost all sense of bodily need. If I need to get work done, I don't feel hunger, thirst, pain – nothing.'

Alexandra's voice:

Is silent...

*

Same female banker – 3 years later:

Husband's voice:

'She keeps standing-up even her best friends and family for work.'

Alexandra's voice:

'Decided not to get pregnant despite wish for family, to not become a "second class citizen" at the firm...Review Top 20 percent.'

Reviewer's voice:

'She often blurts out the most embarrassing things.'

Her voice:

'It's like my body is rejecting me.'

Alexandra's voice:

Is silent...

Karen Ho is an anthropologist who sought work on Wall Street in the mid 1990s for her doctoral studies at Princeton, and was employed by Banker's Trust in a support function for eighteen months. This in-the-field experience was supplemented by 100 interviews across Wall Street sourced via her connections from Stanford undergraduate days. Of her interviewees, 60% were women, most of them minority women. It's an interesting data set though she does not comment on gender or ethnicity in her book *Liquidated* (2009) which to date has over 1,000 citations. Her research is a complex study moving between the micro and macro, and includes a study of individual subjectivities discovering a pattern of 'truncated temporalities and values...expediency and immediacy' (Ho, 2012: 45). Her overarching theory is Bourdieu's *habitus*, which produces a culture of 'rampant insecurity, intense hard work' justifications for high compensation which anchor in 'individual's and group's bodies and minds' (Ho, 2009: 11, 12), guiding their decision making and social relations in the world. Although her research is based on 1990s Wall Street culture, which has changed somewhat, I'm sympathetic to her conceptualizations and the portrait it paints of a hypermasculine environment whose *habitus* is hostile to women, restricting their subjectivities and role choices, and often leading to the adoption of rigid masculine masks.

McDowell (1997), a cultural geographer, conducted a study in the 1990s specifically on gender in the City of London. She uses theories of performativity (including Butler and Goffman) using a drama metaphor postulating that women use



masculine masquerades to survive, often playing the part of an honorary man or parodying femininity. 'Every style available to women is marked, whereas men's styles are unmarked' (McDowell, 1997: 145). A metaphor that haunts me and spins me reflexively back in time, as I worked in the City for an American investment bank exactly at the time she was researching. Her conclusions are pessimistic, that women are constantly defined as *other*.

While difference, diversity and multiple gendered performances are increasingly valued in many workplaces, it is clear that the City is resistant to radical change in its gendered construction. 'Fast' and serious money remains dominantly in the hands of men, and the love of money is a male affair. (McDowell, 1997: 212)

Twenty years later, the City is still resistant to radical changes in its gendered construction. We get excited about the movement of half a percentage point upwards.

Zaloom (2006) and Roth (2006) both provide rich ethnographic descriptions of the hypermasculine culture pervading sales and trading rooms. Zaloom is direct in her observations:

Wall Street is an undeniable masculine environment. A walk down William Street in Manhattan's financial district or a stroll amongst the midtown towers which house the banks is an exercise in manly aesthetics. (Zaloom, in Zaloom and Roth, 2007: 337)

Bodies dominate the metaphors of economic competition. Fucking and being fucked are the conventional expressions of financial dominance and ruin...The swearing focuses on bodily words, especially organs that penetrate or can be penetrated...Each deal represents the speaker's masculine potency in front of other men. (Zaloom, 2006: 123)

Roth's account reveals the subtlety of gender discrimination on Wall Street, where she suggests 'homophily' leads to jobs and pay being handed out on gender lines (Zaloom and Roth, 2007: 336–338).

Nash (2018), in a recent study, creatively extending a LeFebvre understanding of space with the peripatetic and critical practice of *flânerie*, explores how the City is 'imagined, constructed and experienced through gender performativity' (2018: 1). She has three main findings: (a) the invisibility of women on the streets compared to men, who also use and treat space differently; (b) the materiality of the City itself, which she perceives to co-create and sustain masculine dominance; and (c) anything deviating from masculine norms is positioned as other



(2018: 15). In Nash's study, the City is once again rendered masculine, clubbable and exclusionary to women. A view backed up when a scandal breaks early in 2018 about a City male-only event, The President's Club, where hostesses are recruited for their looks and where groping and sexual harassment are exposed by an undercover Financial Times (FT) journalist as horrifically widespread (Madison Marriage, 2018). I stare at Louise's photographs, which are of City streets I know intimately. I'm one of her invisible women. Where were we (the 18% of women, for example, in mid-senior roles)? Well: women working on sales and trading floors are chained to their desks from 7am until 5.30pm and then rush home to do the second shift, or run to client dinners, and rarely go pub drinking; female corporate bankers are often travelling mid-week or with clients or at home working on deal-sheets late into the night. Those of us in support functions did sometimes walk out to buy a sandwich together. I wonder if Louise would have taken some different photos if she'd gone to that other location for investment banks – Canary Wharf? I worked there in the early–mid 1990s and consulted there for a decade in the 2000s. It's a very different environment to the City, including a bustling thoroughfare of shops. There, she may have seen women at lunchtime – running errands as well as buying/eating lunch. Women in restaurants, certainly, although rarely in pubs. It is also important to note that while internally company cultures in global banking firms are relatively homogenous across geographies – trading rooms are hypermasculine in my experience in all parts of the globe – there are very different cultural practices regarding eating, drinking, staying out socializing after work, and requirements on women to serve the second shift. In Singapore and Hong Kong, for example, all working women (and men) have maids at home; in Australia, domestic help, including childcare, is scarce; even a female CEO I know of a top global Australian bank did all her own housework with her paediatrician husband. In the UK and US, it is mid-way between these two points.

Finally, I want to mention two studies by Czarniawska (2005, 2008) which are relevant from a Cixousian framing. In both papers she reviews how women in finance are portrayed in popular culture, the interplay between these images and the reality for women bankers, drawing analogies with Euripidean tragedies. She argues that these mythical stories are part of our *common memory*, and that this leads us to regarding women in finance as mythical transgressors who 'commit heroic or mad deeds (depending on whether they are self-sacrificing virgins,



besotted mothers, uncontrollable hags or clever matrons)' who at some point must die or be sent back to a place 'suitable for women' (2008: 167). Women are mythologized, and cannot enter the Symbolic. Intolerable on a social-psychic level, Woman in finance are decapitated, castrated or exiled.

All these studies point to the impossibilities of rewriting women in global banking. And, of course, global banking is not the only hypermasculine industry with these gender issues, as we saw in Pool one. I worked in aerospace and brewing and consulted to technology and advertising businesses with similar hypermasculine cultures. In *Pussy Hats* Fragment 3, you hear me describe the culture of Upload, where there was a room set aside by the two young male founders for sex with employees. Unhappily, academic studies of organizations and my own life experiences all lead me to the impossibilities of rewriting women in organizations.

Fisher's ethnographic study of the first generation of *Wall Street Women* (2012) paints a more hopeful portrait. Fisher's women overcame hypermasculinity and not only flourished but managed to change the system from within. As I read her text I'm transported back into the 1990s and my internal meetings with some of these women who rose into very senior positions running large P&Ls.⁸² What's fascinating in Fisher's tale is that it was the women's mundane daily actions, where they inferred *féminine attributes* that helped them become better stock analysts, risk managers and relationship builders, as well as their meritocratic performance that helped them get promoted. The women also networked together (in a way less typical today in our neoliberal contexts), founding The Financial Women's Association of New York City. Together, they creatively came up with collective solutions, *voiced* them, changing bank practices and industry standards. The women also networked at The Women's Campaign Fund to get women into political office, and many had third (sometimes shared) careers as feminist philanthrocapitalists. The women created a habitus of the female financier with dress, dispositions, values and behaviour standards (Michel, 2013). Fisher doesn't idealize these women, 'I am still not crazy about Sharon Martin...I think she is basically a fake and a self-promoter' (Fisher, 2012: 83–84).

⁸² This abbreviation stands for profit and loss statement. The P&L for sales and trading businesses on Wall Street is monitored on a daily basis and involves accountability b/millions of dollars.



Michel (2013), in her review of Fisher's book, also reminds me that unlike many men I worked with of the same generation, these women did not forget their roots and expressed both wonder at what their privileged position had allowed them to experience and their love of their job despite all the sacrifices involved. Affects which were contagious and transformational (Michel, 2013: 490). Perhaps Michel's position is uncritical, but I have witnessed such transformations also. Many of these women rewrote themselves and women on Wall Street (in the context of the times). Fisher's study is powerful to me because it shows women can have presence, have a voice, work in affective solidarity transforming the industry, politics, philanthropy; rewriting themselves and Woman. Though they often got fired from top jobs and none made CEO. It remains rare for women to hold these senior roles and the pipeline of qualified women is thin. The perception of sales and trading as alpha-male territory dies hard, deterring women graduates from even applying (Anna Irrera, 2018).

My bloody mangled foot: Wounds (and joys) from hypermasculine working

This work, aligned with *thesis one*, was written in year two of my PhD journey as a set of poems, I use two related *metaphors*: the first an escalator we can't get off, which symbolizes the trapped feelings of being stuck moving without ceasing (false feelings because one can always get off a moving escalator by walking upwards); the second my bloody mangled foot, which gets damaged trying to get off the top stair. Earlier in my theses I used a poem, *Deepwaters* (Pool one). Below are sister poems to *Deepwaters* and another poem, *Fear(less) Girl*. I set the work out (as at SCOS 2017) in a bricolage with H el ene Cixous.

Poems one

Extract from *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles of Time*

- H el ene Cixous

Did I sleep? Did I die?
I ceased.
One loses consciousness before
having lost consciousness.
At a certain moment



the past surpasses
the present.

Next morning she is in
full survival mode.

I live at several addresses,
I have several selves to the house,
I visit myself diversely.

What does a crazy speed mean?
How can speed be crazy?
When, when,
what do you think?
He went through my life...
at a crazy speed.
At that speed you feel
everything like gods.
You think at the speed of light:
on the 20th it's the 8th already
and the morning of the last act.
The last act is the one
with nobody in it.
(Cixous, 2016a: 3, 66)

Fear(less) Girl

- Katie Beavan

You wouldn't notice by looking at me
that my fine black suede
high fashion boots
hide a mangled left foot from view
I keep the limb covered
not wanting to scare you
unnecessarily
the tops of three of my toes
are missing.

From time to time
when I rush unthinkingly up
endless moving metal stairs
upwards quicker faster NOW
I flinch with pain and
my stump scars break open
fresh blood seeps staining
my fine grey stockings
pooling stickily at my sole
later crusting into
round fragile scabs
easily dislodged
edged with spreading
circles of infecting redness.

I smile at you all the while
ignoring the insistent throbbing



swallowing a trio of ibuprofen
waiting until I get home alone
to ease the boot off
soaking the mess
in warm scarlet turning water
pulling out the first aid kit
from the bathroom drawer.

It happened in Hong Kong
busydistracted
elbowing as a true New Yorker
through tired white-masked
commuters riding up the Central to
Mid-Levels Escalator
intensities of an investment banking
work day left far below in
a smog-enclosed skyscraper
traversing escalator to
escalator to escalator

jetlagged
rushinglate
to a work dinner
in a fancy restaurant
sweating in my light silk dress
as I ride oblivious to all others
green cashmere Hermes pashmina in
a fine-leather yellow Fendi bag
purchased from the mall yesterday
in sleepless night hours
ignoring my phone's persistent
ringing
lost in work thoughts
carried up wearily
refusing separation

mis-stepping a top stair
steel teeth devouring
pink shiny painted toes
freshly manicured for the trip
and a dainty open-toe sandal
is ripped away
baring my flesh and bone.

Over in one
distracted moment.
I hear from afar my own
piercing scream
smell feral fear
feel the warm streams
of spilling blood
humiliating urine
as I hit concrete.

Once a therapist suggested I read
a short story in the *New Yorker*
about a woman who ran ironman



marathons whilst working
as a high-powered Manhattan
M&A lawyer on cross-border deals
24/7
ignoring her primal wounds
of parental attachment
which gaped open from time to time
despite her steely efforts to close them
sewing in private
her raw unaestheticized flesh
with coarse thread and a sharp needle.

'Reminds me of you', he said.
I haven't yet forgiven him for
noticing.

Poems two

Extract from: *The Day I Wasn't There*

- Hélène Cixous

Feather-headed fossil of an unfledged child,
that's *what it is*;
but still it shifts around there
and it rustles softly without violence
the way a spectre gropes for the latch
that's been changed in the meantime,
rubbing itself against the door,
never suspecting it's been
denied.

(Cixous, 2006c: 6)

(Un)Burying

- Katie Beavan

My colleague P and I chat
animated through cyber space
desktop video criss-crossing time zones
diversity and inclusion council's
global program
comfy work discussion
discussing mental health month

abrupt derailing resonances
P's brother's suicide intrudes.

P's pain; mother's pain; dad's pain.
Red-raw-embedded
long buried not lost.

a sudden flaring shame his
brother's veiled request for help
a banker's response
Money.



Wired immediately
from New York to Sydney.
Money
papering-over distresses
buying securities.

'How could anyone take their own life?'
P asks

Gushing comes my own
hidden story
leaking out over lync

I miscarried our baby. Heartbeat
there. No more.
Dead little embryo
syphoned out of my body.

Standing maternally bereft
New York City subway station
Waiting for the
one or the nine
nine and one
one and nine
New York seconds
ticking slowly past.

Heading to a bank
to a client
comforting with work.
Plummeting hormones
my toddler son
adored husband
growing-up step-kids
despite these true loves
wrenched forward by pains
red-raw-embedded.

Flooding rush of sticky desire
to jump onto the tracks
beneath the wheels of
the incoming train.

Hauled backwards by
hands of my own
dead brother?

Feel my two feet resticking
to the concrete platform
as the one hurtles in
forward momentums
pushed past passengers

emerging into daylight
January face smarting air
deadly intense
spirit lifting



Wall Street.

We look at each other
through the company Skype
word less
bodies still
hushed.

Poems three

Extract from *The Newly Born Woman*
- Hélène Cixous

starting with the 'permission'
one gives oneself,
the multiplication of the effects
of desire's inscription
on every part
of the body
and the other body...

by insisting on the primacy
of the phallus
and implementing it,
phallogocentric ideology
has produced
more than one victim.

We women, the derangers,
know it too well.
But nothing compels us
to live
our lives in these
lack banks.

(Cixous, in Cixous and Clément 1986: 84–85)

Extract from *Abstracts and Brief Chronicles of Time*
- Hélène Cixous

I was holding her hand,
in that dusky room,
I was laughing.
She was lying down.
'I am scared of dying and you
not being there.
I feel the time has come.
I am not laughing you are laughing.
What are you writing?'
'I am writing what you are saying.'

...

Now and then you look
at me to see if I am still here...
An invisible fish feeling
comes over me,
I lean towards the sea
(Cixous, 2016a: 2)



Coxless Pair

- Katie Beavan

Friday

G
Italian woman
glamorous in elegant black suits
with wild golden back zips
and sling-back sexy heels.
Managing Director
complex finance guru
igniting the stage at a recent summit
'just hire more G's', post her peers.

At weekends a passionate
vintage racing car driver
daughter as navigator
flawlessly winning
winter Alpine night races
pitted against pairings
of overheating men.

Beloved wife
cherished mamma
G's pre-op
in a hospital in Milan
waiting to have
something nasty excised
calming herself
as we bankers do
with e-mail correspondence.

An executive woman
to executive woman
e-mailing back and forth
irregular emotional texts
defying the norms of our
rational work server.

Saturday

G, post op in Milan
tumour removed
drainage in turns heads
by exiting the hospital
taking to the streets
in her hospital gown
self-detached IV-line trailing
in search of an
Italian espresso.

An executive woman
defying
doctor
husband



children.

And then caffeine sustained
sits on her hospital bed
picks up her phone
e-mailing me sitting in London
ten days apart from
my Connecticut family
on a lengthy business trip
to Hong Kong and London
distracting myself
with my PhD studying.

I lift my head
glancing at my work phone
buzzing beside me
pick it up, open my e-mail
read laugh reply
picturing you in search
of your *Italian* espresso
on the streets of Milano
in your hospital gown
with self-detached IV-line trailing
turning heads
and then back alone in the
hospital room distracting yourself
with work e-mailing.

Sunday

Slight warmth of early morning spring sun
relishing the fresh north wind smarting my face
and chilling my hands.
Sweaty, breathing, striding
on the Thames tow path. Quiet
except for the odd dog walker.
My eyes drawn to crews out on the river
taking advantage of the incoming tide
watching the sculls glide forward
in coordinated teamwork
female voices – a ladies' crew!

Feeling deep in my belly a connection with
you a resonance vibrating northward from Milan
through collective unconscious space
into my relaxed body.

You're a serious sculler with high-honed back muscles
(bit mutilated where they stabbed, snipped and sutured)
your doctor enthusing on one long masculine exhalation
'Wow Ironwoman – get back on the water – row your way back to health'
evading talk of your treatments
(why? you text me frustrated)
since we both know



poison will be dripped
every three weeks, four times over
into your contracted blue veins
and your lush hennaed hair will fall out
in clumps
daily burning of your
fragile fresh-scarred breast tissue
for six weeks, five days a week
rendering you nauseous
bone-weary and spent.

Are we a ladies' crew?
A coxless pair in a slender double scull?
Synchronised strokes
full lung
rhythmic recoveries
as our blades
catch water in unison.

Despite all this emp/ly/rical work, I'm not depressed. It may seem impossible, I'm passionate about the *possibilities* of rewriting women. Did you see third bodies in the poems above – where we go out through the top, without using force, into a sky stretching out eternally and lawlessly (adapted from Cixous, 2009c: 161)? I'm *hopeful*. I'm beginning to see linkages between the French feminists, the first generation of women on Wall Street, the way VIDA operates, my own experiences, and the powers of affective feminist solidarity and collective working on problems. A shift in consciousness, the possibilities of places without domination, where we aren't forced to adopt masculine masquerades to survive. Women with *voice*.



Pool five: Tales of resistances

Women have it in them to organize this regeneration, this vitalization of the other, of otherness in its entirety...So much so that when sexual difference...is touched on, the whole problem of destroying the strange, destroying all forms of racism, all the exclusions, all those instances of outlaw and genocide that recur throughout history are touched on...which would benefit not just woman but humanity. (Cixous, 1981: 50)

I'm with Cixous that women (and men who can access the *féminine*) can organize this regeneration; the move to a *féminine* libidinal economy where all differences are embraced. My theses form together a tale of resistance against the OS Academy, as are my performative auto/ethnographies and my publications, papers and creative writing. I resist with my body and my texts. As a practitioner I worked as a tempered radical (Meyerson and Scully, 2008) – perhaps sometimes less tempered – all my career to change culture through structuring, encouraging and fanning micro resistances to become meso. One such recent tale, a move against 24/7 working, I will tell in detail elsewhere; here, I present it as a flash auto/ethnographic tale. I then focus on feminist theories of resistance. I wayfare in Ingold's (2011) sense of making knowledge in movement, putting out my view of what a *good* theory might be, sketching some of my favourite theories and adding a few emergent theoretical thoughts of my own. My hope is this pool offers emblematic calls that provide sparks for others to say *I can, I will, I am resisting; We can, We will, We are resisting*.

A flash auto/ethnographic tale of a micro resistance against 24/7 working that rapidly went meso

Writing extract – summer 2016

Resistances in the Field: An Experiment in Taking Two

A tale told from my own subjectivities and positionality; fragments that others might tell differently.

Chapter One: December 2014 – Reframing a Wicked Problem

I'm on the phone with the head of our banking business in Asia-Pacific. A combination of my best consulting self, my Tempered Radical self, my nervous HR advisor self, other selves, are in fluid movement as I listen to B through the Polycom.



He's volunteered to lead, as the executive team sponsor, the thorny topic of work-life balance in which we scored quite badly, not surprisingly, in the employee survey. In a moment of playfulness, I named this 'action stream' (one of six) *Wickedly Smart Working* (WSW). My conversation with B is depressing and I gaze at the phone, listening carefully to him drone on and on about the impossibility of boundaries, that the global banker's job is never done, that there is always more analysis that could be done, or another client that could be called.

'I'm feeling more and more depressed as I listen to you B.'

'It is depressing, Katie, but it's just the reality of our industry.'

I'm supposed to be working with B to scope a broad direction for an employee volunteer team to make progress on this topic in six months; real results, not recommendations. Not quick fixes, more an attempt to find a way to make a bridgehead or even a dent into the issue; at least some glimmer of hope that we can change things. I'm feeling the pressure of the call time passing. I know B will either have another call to take or dinner with his wife, and either way he'll have to jump off our call. Somewhat desperately, I try a different tack.

'Was there any time, I mean just a moment in your career where you experienced something different, any respite from the overwhelming feeling that work dominated everything else?'

Silence. Total silence. It hangs through the Polycom. I look outside the small office, at a group of my colleagues waiting for the elevator, waving at me. Time has stuck. It hangs there and I wait, anxiously doodling on my pad of paper.

'Well...' B says.

'Yes?'

'Well, when I was junior corporate lawyer, I enrolled for a master's in Finance, and I needed every Wednesday evening off work in time to get to class, and that was difficult, of course, because you didn't know what deal you might be working on, and to get on you had to impress the senior partners. But I had a supportive boss, who told me he'd help make it possible and he did, and I graduated... And then, I think I was in my late twenties, maybe thirty, I had another boss, who was very supportive when I wanted to take a three-month sabbatical and travel to Canada to get certified as a ski instructor.'

'Sounds like you had a couple of bosses who were supportive of something that was important to you, but something defined, I don't know, maybe time bounded.'

Pause.

'Katie?'

'Yes B?'

'Perhaps we are thinking about this wrongly? Maybe instead of work-life balance, we should frame it as Life First. You can't get everything you want; it's a trade-off. But, maybe you can get something that's important to you, and that probably changes at different times in your life. I wouldn't want to go on sabbatical to be a ski instructor now, but I desperately wanted to then.'



'Life First,' I repeat back.

And then:

'B'

'Yes'

'I feel my energy coming up, like a cloud's lifted.'

'So, do I'

We go back and forth over the next ten minutes and I have the gist of an assignment note to a first team of volunteers scribbled on my pad.

Thank you for volunteering...strong feedback that work-life balance is a source of considerable frustration...long-term and intractable issue across our industry...I am convinced we can effect change...

Reframing the Problem: A Disruption of Mindset

We view work/life as either/or...more reasonable hours cost productivity, and a non-starter as we have to increase output with fewer resources. But we also know that we are more creative if we do other things – minimum necessary for sleep, rest, personal lives...worry about performance review and being marked down

(B's) experiences – ski instruction – M of Fin

Frame as Life First

5 Steps to Life First

1. *Can't get everything we want – get over it*
2. *Identify our top priorities outside work – v personal and change over time*
3. *Be able to ask without fear of reprisal*
4. *View our careers as a set of stages with chance to refresh between stages – need policies that allow us to take breaks*
5. *Mindsets of long-term best interests for clients and long-term best interests for employees*

Team Challenge

- *Pilot the Life First priority setting somewhere – one global biz segment*
- *Identify one policy/practice we can adopt quickly – ideally globally*

Think boldly and be pioneers...

*

Chapter Two: September 2015 – Conceiving Take Two

I'm in London facilitating an event to launch our action stream teams. The majority of the attendees are from Europe but all the global team leaders are here. The event is fast paced and there's a mood of excitement. We have fun and play various music tracks (loudly) when we meet in plenary. L from communications has an iPad on a selfie-stick and she's teaching team members to film themselves and their teams. We spend the first evening cooking for the homeless, getting to know each other and breaking down the bank's silos. The leaders of the WSW team are two young



Managing Directors.⁸³ The team reread B's memo closely, brainstorming ways to give people some respite from the relentless intensity of our business. At some point they crystallize an idea of giving people two hours of free time in the work day to do something that matters for them – going to the gym, taking kids to school, leaving early to visit an elderly parent, taking a yoga class. It's conceived as a *team* affair; teams agreeing who would take time when, in order to maintain client coverage or cover trading books. It may sound small but on sales and trading desks, where it's difficult to leave the desk to go to the toilet and take lunch, it represents a minor revolution. It's also a move from individualism and management by the desk head to team self-management.

Mid-afternoon and the executive team arrive, walking in to a scene pulsating with energy and empowerment, and we fanfare them with a Bond movie soundtrack, which is entirely counter-cultural and has everyone laughing. The WSW team members stand on stage shoulder-to-shoulder and outline their audacious *Take Two* goal – 500 employees participating in the scheme by March 31st 2016. Their sponsor B, applauds and beams, no member of the executive team disagrees. I fly home to Connecticut in a jubilant mood.

*

Chapter Three: Spring and Summer 2016 – Unchained from Desks and a Tipping Point

May 4th, I'm on the train to Boston and my Blackberry is buzzing as scores of e-mails flow in. Messages of jubilation about *Take Two*. I'd spent the prior two weeks working with the team leaders, HR, B, and Communications to get out an all-employee memo across the bank encouraging everyone to have their team sign up for *Take Two*. It was a struggle, a daily effort to get the wording agreed and everyone aligned. I feel as if we gave birth together to the memo and I'm reading these e-mails in post-partum, pain-free elation. For example:

'Thanks, Katie. All the WSW streams are fantastic initiatives and we're promoting them strongly in Equities...already spreading the word...I love the all-firm e-mail and happy to put my name to it...and I am recounting the stories circulating re our CEO and taking his daughter to school, they are great – best, J'

Within two hours the WSW mailbox is overloaded, clogged with a staggering 1000 replies from our employees.

Weeks later, stories from teams and how they are using *Take Two* arrive. It's interesting as I read and listen to the stories that men are often using their two hours to do family-related things (even relieving their stay-at-home wives so they can take their own two) while the women are using their two for themselves. As a change agent, one story gets my attention. It's from a trading team (all male) in South Africa. The head of the desk, W, writes an article titled: 'Feel chained to your desk? Flexible working isn't a myth.' In the story he writes that the team was encouraged by their boss, T, based in London, to sign up for *Take Two*

'T says he Takes2 by dropping his kids to school and that we should all try and take time out. My team were inspired by his endorsement of Take2. I know we shouldn't need a formal initiative to help us Take2, but leadership makes a difference, especially for trading desk teams.'

⁸³ Managing Director is a senior position on Wall Street, appointed through an annual rigorous promotion process that at most firms, involves Board approval. By using the adjective 'young' the Managing Directors in question would likely be in their early thirties.



Hmm – interesting comment, I reflect.

'The trading desk culture is still one where you are never away from your screen. People don't always feel comfortable leaving early or coming in late...It's been about two months now and I can already say as a team, we've found a better work-life balance. We're watching kids play rugby, having breakfast with the family...We're really making the most of it and seeing the benefits of a more relaxed culture where we are all more collaborative and supportive.'

Every Monday morning, the six of us sit down and work out the Take2 logistics for that week. Who is leaving versus who is coming in late, it only takes a few minutes to work out. It hasn't impacted the hours we work or how efficiently we serve our clients; we still work seamlessly...two hours doesn't seem like much but it makes a big difference to our working and personal lives...spending more time with loved ones and having more 'me' time, and on a professional level, the flow of results is that we're more engaged and productive...It's a win-win...if we can do it on the trading desks, so can you...I am no longer the phantom father at school.'

I close read this note and others. It's interesting to see that it is encouraging sharing of family affairs and that it is creating a sense of greater community. It's a small but important shift in the culture on desks. The criminal FX and LIBOR traders boasted about women, drug taking, as well as planning their market manipulations, via text. These guys are elated they can be fathers – an opening of alternative subjectivities.

By mid-summer over 1000 of our employees have adopted *Take Two*. And it's spreading out of our division and into other parts of the bank. In a way it's a tipping point. But I'm wary of over-celebrating the progress. To contest it, we have desk heads and employees reluctant to adopt for fear of being seen as 'lazy'. Hours for our juniors in corporate banking remain very long, with frequent all-nighters. My HR colleague is relieved when the summer internships are over – some of the interns had regularly been in the office until 2am. We are both aware that it was only two years ago that a Merrill Lynch summer intern died in the shower after working seventy-two hours straight. My colleague and I discuss a 'Cinderella rule'; no one allowed in the office after midnight. Could we make that happen? Lots of resistance to overcome. At best, I think we've made a base camp with *Take Two*. We have a huge mountain to climb to put a real dent in 24/7 hypermasculinity.

And I wonder if I have put a dent of any kind in my own 24/7 hypermasculinity? I'm writing this on leave, but I also have been on calls this morning and my work laptop is open and from time to time I take a look at incoming e-mails...I cancelled holiday with my husband to concentrate on my thesis...Yet I've also used the reprise over the summer from early morning calls to go to the gym...and I've had the gift of some time to think...to reflect...that I enact time and time again the very things I seek to change.

Over the following years, *Take Two* imbeds itself as a team practice and as a discourse in many parts of the bank, especially in the sales and training and support functions. Senior leaders deliberately share their own experiences of taking *Take Two* in large employee forums. A competition runs in London on one floor regarding photos of employees taking *Take Two*. A positive press article comes out. A flood



of positive comments in the employee survey. Attempts from senior leaders to bring recalcitrant middle managers on board with the programme, and at least some freeing of junior staff to feel empowered to complain when they don't. A certain excitement among employees that we have achieved small but important cultural change.

Is it tempered radicalism? It's an attempt to break the hold of 24/7 working from within. Yet I have hopes in the communitarian feminist ethics underpinning this initiative that it has the potentiality to be more. The conception of employee as individualistic neoliberal mercenary is undermined; *Take Two* is a team practice, you *Take Two* with colleagues' agreement, and *Give Two* by covering for your colleagues on their *Take Two* – reciprocity. It is based on taking *Two from* the organization. It has a whiff of utopia. It has the small rustlings of revolution-to-be.

Some (*thesis one*) traces of deconstructions of *Take Two* using multiple theoretical feminist lenses

What follows here are some extracts from a collection of interpretive critical deconstructions I worked on in spring 2017, analysing *Take Two* as an organizational resistance with, following Cixous, a variety of theoretical lenses, and ontological/epistemological groundings. The work follows *thesis one's* framing; I've not yet broken with the masculine reckoning. I'm making knowledge in *here*, inside the Academy.

Writing extract – spring 2017

(Later) Foucault

Something intuitively is lacking for me in an interpretation of *Take Two* as individual employees reinscribing their bodies with new freedom scripts. How? Why? Wouldn't these scripts all be different? Curious, I turn back to a deeper dive into interpretations of resistance based on later Foucault.

Let's recall my meeting with B, where in a moment of hopelessness in our conversation, on both sides, I asked him whether he had ever experienced his situation at work differently. This facilitated a moment of what Thomas and Davies (2005) would call generative critical self-reflexivity. B was able (after some pondering and a difficult silence) to come up with examples of when he had been able to personally counter the dominant 24/7 working discourse: his part-time master's in



finance and his sabbatical to train as a ski instructor. In a Foucauldian view of power and agency, I can be interpreted as exploring with B (a member of the executive team and head of a major banking business) a consideration of 'forms of rationality that serve our identity and delimit our possibilities' (John Rajchman, in Jana Sawicki, 1994: 294) as a vehicle for finding alternatives; an unpicking of his dominant 24/7 narrative in order to find a window into creative agency. Our discussion created new spaces between the subjugated subject position of the dominant discourse, 'self as slave to 24/7' and other freer selves, reflexively constructed, able to go on sabbatical to train as a ski instructor, and do his master's in finance...

*

Journeying with Cixous – the (re)birth of agency stepping outside the *Law* and encountering the *other*.

I am on the search for more generative agency, the possibilities beyond the tensions created between freedom and constraint. I'm turning to Cixous, as a way to escape constraints and find more enabling and resisting agency.

Spaces Outside *The Law*

The WSW team was operating outside normal organizational rules, outside *the Law of the Father*. Cixous suggests that in order for society to function some form of 'civilization, limits and laws' are necessary but 'that the law we have inherited has been pre-defined according to a hierarchical and disabling schema...ordered by a system of moral values hierarchized into good and bad' (Cixous, 1991, in Sellers, 1996: 22). I pause for a moment here, considering the 24/7 hypermasculine laws of global banking. The description of a hierarchical and disabling schema, with moral values hierarchized into good and bad, is a disturbingly and depressingly close fit.

Cixous's way out of patriarchal Law is to apply a different kind of logic, a different kind of reason (Sellers, 1996); a reason not based on the logic of oppositions, but a corporeal logic (Bray, 2004). In *Inside* breaking of the Law is described as theft and irresistible temptation (Cixous, 1986). *Take Two* is framed as a taking, a theft of sorts, a theft of two sweet stolen hours of me-time from work hours. Commenting on *Inside*, Sellers suggests that positive transgression of the law and negation of the facts of existence are pitted against each other: life and love are equated with 'wisdom' while unhealthy adherence to death and the law lead to madness. (Sellers, 1996: 31) I reflect on intern and banker suicides (Cohan, 2016) and Michel's (2014) graphic descriptions of banker ill health and the laws of 24/7 are a madness, possibly an unconscious adherence to death.

All the teams were explicitly encouraged to think boldly and entrepreneurially. The key to operating outside of *The Law* is that *Take Two* is a team practice and not an individual act or entitlement. An employee can't sign up as an individual, a team has to agree, and each team has to negotiate with all its team members who take two hours, and when and if business circumstances disrupt plans (a block trade, for example, requiring all hands-on deck) the team is flexible and adapts.

Another reading of this is that *Take Two* destabilized the binary of within *The Law* or outside *The Law*, creating a new space, a Cixousian third body (2009c). Cixous argues that this third body offers the gift of alterity, producing rather than reducing acceptance of differences, acting as a fluid nomadic space outside of *The Law*. For Cixous the body and subjectivity are endlessly permeable and metamorphosing constantly (Bray, 2004) into nomadic spaces and places where we cannot tell the difference between where one body ends and the an/other starts.



With *Take Two* I visualize the third body as a conceptual place without *Law*, and a space to think against *The Law*. It's a fluid, playful space with loose boundaries and limits which enabled its conception and adoption, akin to Foucault's heterotopic spaces – sites of deviance and movement (Probyn, 1996). *Take Two* has only light informal rules, is voluntary and is a team practice. It is outside the hegemonic masculine *Law*, as a flexible initiative that isn't a woman's initiative, but is available to men and women equally and all employees equally...

New Language

Take Two may have also quickly become a meso resistance because it was easy to comprehend as a brand, *Take Two*, simple words and quick to grasp, two hours of personal time out of a regular work week. This facilitates marketing and sign-up. There is no bureaucracy; all a team has to do is: a) agree; b) register; c) probably read the Q&A as guidelines and d) start the practice. It is free of hierarchical approvals. It has a simplicity and possibly a parody about it. *Take Two* implies a collective, two, and not a unitary, one. At some level it communicates a world beyond the individualism of banking culture and possibly the space of the (m)other. It is a concept that may reflect the body, and not the mind attempting to speak:

Language is a translation. It speaks through the body. Each time we translate what we are in the process of thinking it necessarily passes through our bodies. (Cixous, 1988: 151–152)

A new language? No. A virgin way of listening and making the newold language speak. (Cixous, 1994e: xxi)

We are arriving at a place where we are outside patriarchal *Law* and have a new language, potentially a language of two, perhaps the (m)other? What might this enable – a revolution of a kind?

*

Journeying with Cixous, Denzin and Diprose, (re)discovering agency through embodied communitarian feminist ethics and corporeal generosity

Goodnesses of good exchanges...if you give, you receive. What you don't give, the antigift turns back against you and rots you. The more you give, the more you take pleasure. (Cixous, 1991a: 49)

In *Take Two*, pleasure derives from giving two to others, to be with their families, get into the national triathlon team, take yoga classes, care for elderly parents is consistent and the stories are described with positive affects. Cixous in *First Names of No One*⁸⁴ takes her concept of the gift further still, suggesting that it has societal changing potential:

In every place it passes through, structures burst open, the affective or social economy changes form, unknown possibilities for desire and life surge out: exchange; exchange loses its privileged position, and the *gift* takes it away. (Cixous, in Sellers 1994: 29)

It's a beautiful, if perhaps Utopian, vision for *Take Two*, facilitating in a global bank, whose *raison d'être* is built on capitalist exchange and accumulation, of unknown possibilities for desire and life surging out, waves of generative agency flowing across

⁸⁴ A book of literary criticism published as *Prénoms de personne* in 1974. It has not been translated into English. The introductory *Prédit* is printed in full in Sellers 1994 reader (27-33); it introduces her conceptualisation of *écriture féminine*.



the globe, with the multiple gifts of giving two to colleagues, day after day, week after week.

I flow from Cixous, and the vision of societal structures breaking open, into a consideration of Norman Denzin's communitarian feminist ethics (Christians, 2002; Denzin, 2014). At first glance this ethical model, based on a 'moral community that is ontologically prior to person' (Denzin, 2014: 73), where moral commitments are negotiated dialogically (Christians, 2002), would seem to have little to do with the rampant individualism of 24/7 hypermasculinity. But I'm journeying, for

there is a treasure locked away somewhere, and writing is the means to try and approach the treasure. And as we know the treasure is in the searching, not the finding...It is necessary to travel there. (Cixous, 1993: 88, 107)

Denzin's communitarian feminist ethics are based on shared moral values, including the concepts of shared governance, neighbourliness, love, kindness and the moral good (Christians, 2000). The definition of community is as a 'mosaic of particular communities, a pluralism of ethnic identities and worldviews to form social bonds' (Christians, 2002: 173). Let's relate that to the teams signing up for *Take Two* across the bank; typically, six to ten people, and the main regional hubs, often containing a pluralism of ethnic identities. In the course of executing *Take Two*, social bonds are formed as team members learn about lives outside of work, lives lived in sensate and affective bodies. Bonds are formed dialogically between each other, mutual interest growing and 'moral agency nurtured by the demands of social linkage' (Christians, 2002: 174). This process, Christians suggests, is 'dialogic in its deepest sense' (171) and gives a 'good reason to adopt a course of action' (Daryl Koehn, 1998, in Christians, 2002: 171). As I reread the trading desk head's e-mail, I can see the team dialogically engaging. The desk head may have had 'an epiphanic moment in his emotional life':

'It's a win-win...if we can do it on the trading desks, so can you...I am no longer the phantom father at school.'

These are moments in 'our communal life that provide us with a vision of who we are and inspire us morally' (Christians, 2002: 175). Admittedly, it is a glimpse of a shared resisting agency to 24/7 hypermasculinity, emerging through a shift away from competitive individualism to a community life exhibiting ethics of care. But it's glimmering and it's alive.

Bolstered, I journey on into a consideration of the work of Australian philosopher Rosalyn Diprose...what is so exciting about her thesis is how she makes the moves from the individual to the *community* and to *disruptive societal change*, where she theorizes the relation between corporeal generosity and the formation of a *community* that is transformed through the 'generosity of intercorporeality' (Diprose, 2002: 13); a community that embraces differences. Such a community is a far cry from the rampant individualism and competitiveness characterizing hypermasculine global banks, and yet relates to my tale...

Take Two through Diprosian intercorporeal lens has the radical, disruptive potential to remake corporate culture; real hopes of living differently in organization.

*

Are there more interpretations to my tale? Of course – many more. As we know the treasure is in the searching, not the finding (Cixous, 1993: 88, 107)

*



Contemporary feminist theories of resistance to inspire reinscription and revolution

Questions

Is feminist theory in a rut? Watkins (2018) suggests that in the 25 years since Beijing, feminist scholars have produced vast quantities of sophisticated gender research, but it's been a fallow period for theory compared to the 'starburst of original thinking that exploded with the 1970s women's liberation moment' (2018: 50). Of course, we've had Ahmed, Butler and Barad, but the years are passing. I'm arguing in many ways for a return to Cixous, and her popular polemics written for mass distribution, although I'm not sure her writing can ignite fifteen–thirty-year-olds, who are vital for feminist revolution. Here, I'm seeking *new* feminist theories that have potentiality for driving this resurgent *revolution* as we move towards the 2020s; theories that can reduce structural social inequality and promote gender equality with women's voices (without backlash), as well as personal reinscriptions. I don't believe theory is only made by individual scholars thinking big thoughts in dimly lit libraries. I'm with Leavy and Anne Harris that 'today's feminism and feminist research are inextricably intertwined with politics and digital media' (2019: 225). Our feet are marching in women's marches, and our voices are speaking globally through Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, etc. Lines are blurred between social activism, the arts and our scholarly work. I may feel old as I read about an online community in 'Atlanta Georgia whose tag-line is "Where Crunk Meets Conscious and Feminism Meets Cool"' (Boylorn, 2013: 228), but I also feel stimulated.

These questions lead me first to ask myself, with provocation, what makes a *good* critical feminist theory in 2018? We're in a moment. Can we seize it?

Good feminist theory in 2018

I'm using *good* deliberately, to be provocative. It's a word to contest – my good may not be your good. It's also a big question which I can't do justice to here. It's not a new question. Eighteen years ago, Stanley and Wise wrote *But the empress has no*



clothes! Some awkward questions about the 'missing revolution' in feminist theory (2000). One issue they point to is a hierarchy in which we have a handful of high-theory stars who excel in the use of abstractions and scholarly language while the rest of us act as translators, providing loyal synopses, clarifying and synthesizing their work. This mapping has its use, and in my theses one of my companion texts is Fotaki and Harding's book *Gender and the Organization: Women at work in the 21st Century* (2018). But there are real dangers with feminist theory operating in a patriarchy of theoretical masters; going mainstream, as it were, by entering the OS Academy, dismissing experience and emotion as a basis for theorizing (Stanley and Wise, 2000; Ahmed, 2012) and not connecting outside the Academy. I'm less interested in being seen to be on the right side of an academic fence than bringing feminist theory home (Ahmed, 2017), and back home to work in organizations. Leaping into the fray, I'll define *good* feminist theory for me as being:

- Directly relevant for feminist *activism*. Back to the future, I know, but resurgent feminism such as #MeToo would benefit from a little feminist theoretical mooring;
- Opening meaningful *conversation* with wide, global, diverse (and young) audiences (including outside the Academy). This means less academic and more digitally suited language;
- *Transnational and transidentity*. I'm with Kathy Davis that 'articles about "migrant women in Spain" or "gender and hip hop in Finland" ...are hopelessly parochial in a world where people, practices and ideas are continually crossing borders' (2017: 110). We are also not one movement, but many (Anzaldúa, 1990). We have to unite beyond identity politics, and reflect post-gender subjectivities;
- Something *we all do* as feminist researchers – daring to develop new theories (not just regurgitate or swell out the stars' Theorizing, posturing what we know);
- *Collective* theorizing – even if we put our own twists and marks on it and publish individually;
- A *creative* enterprise using our imaginations and our bodies, exciting us and where we and our theories have a sense of *adventure*;



- Taking *risks*, returning to forgotten paths and embarking on untraveled ones (Davis, 2017; Ulrika Dahl and Jenny Sundén, 2018);
- Daring to make *outrageous* statements, to argue strongly, to be contentious;
- *Destabilizing* with other discourses – there is no right way to write theory (Anzaldúa, 1990). After Cixous we can do theory in other modes of consciousness;
- Always asking what is the relationship between *feminist theory* and *feminist practice*, decentralizing its normative centre, exposing frictional ideas.

I know I'll be told (again) 'Ah, but we have to play it safe to get published' and 'it's too hard to get published as a feminist and I need a Master Theorist for reviewers to take my work seriously'. But come on, feminist scholars, let's rise to the challenge...

Am I afraid? Yes. I'm afraid I won't be up to the task of developing feminist theory for the 2020s. But fear isn't an excuse. Audre Lorde writes after her diagnosis with cancer (which later kills her), in a profound essay *The transformation of silence into language and action*, that she understands she is not 'only a casualty' but that she 'is also a warrior' (2017a⁸⁵: 3). She confronts me, in my elemental fears, and tells me I can learn to work and speak when I'm afraid in the same way I learned to work and speak when I'm tired (5). It isn't fear or difference which immobilizes us, but silence. 'And there are so many silences to be broken.' (6). Let's start theorizing. Go Crunk! Let our feminist theory meet Cool. Bring on the Pussy Riots.

21st Century feminist theories of resistance that talk to me

Maggie Nelson – post-gender fluidities and poetic autotheory

I'm wild about poet-academic Nelson's oeuvre, and *The argonauts* (2015) captivated me, ignited me, became a taliswoman. Autotheory, she calls it, using her own experiences to exceed the boundaries of herself and swim outwards, backwards and forwards, with theory, using it like a 'well-curated post-punk jukebox'

⁸⁵ The title is abbreviated in this 2017 collection losing to my consternation, the author's linkage to language and action.



(Loretzen, 2015). To write like this, weaving theory in and out of myself, is my desire. It's a learning process how to pull silk thread, through me, without losing my skin. I begin text-perimenting with her margin citation format, escaping masculine strictures that break my textual rhythms, gently amplify my own voice and dispense with citational heft.

In her sensuous and funny poetic prose she gently explores the shifting spaces and contours of what gendered bodies are and becoming – her own, her beloved genderqueer partner Harry's, as they morph through pregnancy and T protocols, opening to us, in relationship with her, their vulnerably gendered messiness and their shifting definition of family. She uses Harry, herself and their relationship as ongoing mysteries through which she, as writer, can explore social issues, including politically and personally sensitive ones: pornography, anal sex, fear, caretaking, transgendering, parenting, among others. She reveals the delicate negotiation of the writer writing others, 'a hard season' for her and Harry (Nelson, 2015: 34), exposing the ethical dilemmas between writer and subject. Overall, it's a generous book – she gifts us a way to look at the world from a different vantage point; devotion.

Sara Ahmed – Wilful feminist arms and a SNAP!

Ahmed uses wonderful metaphors for feminist revolution. I glasp hold of them. My wilful feminist arms keep coming up no matter what. Keep writing *écriture féminine*. Keep getting stronger in the gym. The muscularity of my arms is inheritance of my feminist history. My feminist arms are raised and calling to others in the OS Academy. My arms are not going back down. I am using them to rebel against restrictions. I am using my wilful arms to write and to make things right. With my wilful writing-righting I am creating collective energy. We can then enact a collective refusal, a SNAP (Ahmed, 2017). SNAP, a sound, a metaphor. This is fragment twelve of *Pussy Hats*.



Pussy Riot – Read and riot

Pussy Riot is a Russian feminist open membership collective; part punk band, part activist demonstrators, part video bloggers with political messages – a feminism also known as riot grrrl (Sara Marcus, 2010). They came to global notoriety in August 2012 when three of the group were arrested and two served 22 months in prison. Their performances focus on female flesh, particularly celebration of female genitals – which (YES, still) in 2018 is regarded as a political act, and I'm not with their detractors on this point. In 2016 the group anticipated a Trump victory and two weeks before the election released 'Make America Great Again', a video depicting a dystopian world where a President Trump enforces his values through beatings, shaming, and branding by stormtroopers. In July 2018 they briefly disrupted the World Cup final on the eve of Putin's meeting with Trump (Masha Gessen, 2018; Leavy and Harris, 2019). Their feminism inspires me on many counts: activism; autobiographic theatre; a feminine collective; courage; commitment; creativity; fast-paced; feminist punk music; intelligence; political; professionalism; political; radical; subversive.

Is this feminist Theory, you might ask? Well, they enact a theatre of politics, a pedagogy of activism grounded in philosophy. 'Jail is not the worst place for a person who thinks' (Pussy Riot, 2018). They are learned and passionate, as the closing statements of the three arrested Pussy Riot members attest (Maria Alyokhina et al., 2012). It's certainly a 'new kind of feminism' (Leavy and Harris, 2019: 230–231). Be a pirate, make your government shit its pants, take back joy (Nadya Tolokonnikova, 2018).

Clare Hemmings – Affective solidarity for feminist transformation

I discover Hemmings theory of affective solidarity (2012) in the late fall of 2017. She takes a belay from Probyn (feminist reflexivity), and within a few pages I'm swooning. In seconds I'm trying to work her theory through my body, fooling with it as my text *Pussy Hats* emerges. It's my 'misery, rage, passion and pleasure', my mis-fits with myself, that give my feminism its life; my being 'moved' (2012: 149–150). In my dissonance, my rage-empathy, I move to an affective solidarity with



other women, feeling the desire for transformation ‘against the odds’ (158). This is #MeToo. This is my *Pussy Hats*. It drives my resistance. I hope with *Pussy Hats* to provoke others’ resistance; our *collective* resistance. The rub may be that our affects are ‘unstable entities whose impact cannot be controlled’ (Vachhani and Pullen 2018: 7).

Katie Beavan – Embodied–connecting–activating–feminism

I am tempted to write, as I sit at my laptop on a humid August Friday, that the development of some of my own feminist theory will be my *next* project. Many feminist projects end this way, with a promise after *telling* that their next (future) task is to *show*. My paragraph on what makes a *good* feminist theory doesn’t allow me this escape. My thoughts are emergings. I’ve been busy writing this thesis and performing at summer conferences, and need time to wrestle, play with and articulate my own feminist theory of resistance. This is just a stammer; articulation will need to gestate.

My body is central. I write with and through my material body with all its experiences laid down in its phenomenological strata, and with all my stigmatas (own and collective). My body writing is my pulse. Resisting with my body writing and with my body in performance. Activating is a shared endeavour. Activating resistances. With my body writing-performing I make theatre of pain and hope, co-joining with other bodies respectfully, desiring to evoke critical consciousness and activism in collective space. Embodied–connecting–activating–feminism to interpret and change the world.



Pool six: Hopes for living differently

Swimming through my writing pools I've woven Ariadne threads to lead us here. I've arrived in Pool six, and into my hopes for living differently in organizations and our Academy. It's a plunge pool. I'm not going to explicate again the *féminine* libidinal economy, affective solidarity, feminist communitarian and corporeal ethics. These theoretically underpin my hopes for living differently and we've swum with them in other pools. I've also shared my *Take Two* tale, with its hopes for living differently in organizations. In this pool I'm going to focus on a springboard dive into feminist manifestos as a political tool, and then set out a co-authored manifesta for writing differently in the OS Academy. Of course, my thesis abstract is also a manifesto and a call to arms. This new manifesta is more of a *how-to*.

Definitions and associations – manifesto and manifest

One of Cixous's *féminine* writing strategies to disrupt the masculine is to play with signifiers on multiple levels, textually, phonically and through associations.

Manifesto, from the Latin word *manifestum*, means to make *clear*, conspicuous, or, alternatively, also from the Latin *manifestare*, to make *public*. That's the definition online from Merriam-Webster (2018). Performative autoethnographer and theatre academic Stacy Holman Jones educates me further: 'from the Latin *manu festus*, meaning "struck by hand", is a call to move – to strike a pose or position, to strike out on one's own, to create a striking gesture'. I like the body in her definition. A pose to strike us out of complacency and into 'attention', so we can reimagine 'not only what we can say, but *who* we might be' (2017b: 1, my emphasis).

To manifest can also mean to display or show *feelings*; or to *demonstrate*. Manifest can conjure something up into a *new materialized form*. Manifesting gives direction to my desires. My wilful arms a manifestation of feminist connection and wilful rebellion. I dislike man at the front of manifesting but hesitate to feminize as *feminista* signifies to me a *féminine* hygiene product. I don't like this association. I'm not mopping up female blood, I'm leaking it. *Ista* is perhaps more helpful, denoting someone associated with a noun, often with humorous intent. I *ista* my manifestas with Medusa's laughter; manifesting with joy.



Feminist manifestas and manifesting

What is a feminist manifesta? The definition provided by Haraway, author of the influential *A Cyborg manifesto* (1991), is that a manifesto is a key feminist theoretical document, which comes to terms with the world we live in, provoked by asking two things: ‘where the holy hell are we?’ and ‘so what?’ (Haraway, in Nicholas Gane, 2009: 136). For Haraway, penning her essay in the late 1980s, the ‘holy hell’ is being lost in universalizing feminist theories, which she claims are no longer relevant, and her ‘so what’ is to use the metaphor of a cyborg as a rallying cry for a feminism that takes into account materiality and political aims. She is advocating a new feminist ontology; hybridized, unifying via affinities, not identities – the cyborg. She’s addressing, like Cixous, the chasm between feminist discourses and patriarchy, but speaks in a masculine voice, not showing what she is telling (Lyon, 1991). This is not to undermine her manifesta argument, which represented an early call to materialism which I follow, nor her two helpful definitional questions for a manifesta.

Looking for knowledge on feminist manifestas, I send for a new book by Weiss (2018). She’s put together a unique and take-my-breath-away collection of 150 global feminist manifestos from over 50 countries over five centuries. There’s a vast array of forms; indictment, oath, essay, letter, demands, principles. This is informing. What do I want to do with my manifesta? I consider the merits of principles. I am inspired by Ahmed’s work but I confess I’m a little put off by her *Killjoy Manifesto* (in Ahmed, 2017), with its ten principles. I don’t like the term Killjoy (even if I agree that as feminists we have to be brave enough to be perceived as killjoys) and her principles come across to me a bit like rules. I’m inspired by Ngozi Adichie’s poetic *Dear Ijeawele, or a feminist manifesto in fifteen suggestions* (2017). The book begins with joy but her list is long and, in my decades, as an organization change agent, I’ve found people only remember three things (usually two, and then they start waffling). If I look back at women’s equality achievements they centre around a clear, specific demand – suffrage, abortion, the right to drive a car in a specific context. They are not abstract. I worry there is a whiff of making subjugated requests from the patriarchy for benevolent gifts, which might be retracted under a different, meaner male regime (as is happening in the US under the Trump administration). I reconsider what Cixous is doing in her literary essay *Laugh of the*



Medusa (1976b): a clear clarion call to women's embodied writing. How to build on that in a twenty-first century way? Weiss's 150 manifestas are also interesting in that they are all written collectively. This is a deliberate strategy on her part, in order to reflect diversity of voices that represent feminist consensus. I'm with her on this vision and have experimented with creating a collective manifesto.

In this rapid journeying I've come up with guidance that can help frame my manifestas for my project (re)writing woman in organizations and the OS Academy:

Where the holy hell are we?

- reveal and criticize an unjust status quo as of 2018
- the silencing of women's voices

What are we to do?

- Simple call to arms around clear demands or a clear strategy
 - Different feminine discourses
- Imaginative and visionary
 - Paint a vision where women (and others othered) have voice
- Bring about transformation in ourselves, in others, in misogynistic men
 - Can't just be about women.

Writing style

- Strike a pose, jolting us into attention
- Feminine poetic voice (show, not tell)
- Metaphor (e.g., laugh of the Medusa, cyborg)

A simple list, but hard to pull off.

The other question I'm vexing over is who is *speaking* as writers of these manifestas, and from what subjective feminist *speaking position*? I discover Lyon's (1991) 'Transforming manifestoes: A second wave problematic'. Individually authored manifestas use *we*, she suggests, as part of their political and seductive sell to their intended audience. One of *Cyborg's* issues, she posits, is the ambiguity of its addressee, which 'forecloses the possibility of an emergent, active "we"' (118). I need supple feminist subjectivities which suggest intersubjectivity as an invitation, even as I exploit intersubjectivity as a discursive field for political insurgency. I begin



to feel sweaty. Writing my manifestas is becoming a 'palimpsest's task' (121). It's tough to pull off as solo author, and a high-bar vault when co-writing, seeking shared words to be 'flippant and sincere, prickly and smooth, logical and absurd, material and immaterial, shallow and profound' (Julian Hanna, 2014: 1) and that set out a demand and enlist.

Reparation dilemmas

My manifestas aim to start movements. I've adopted Cixous's chiasm and aspire to be 'poetically political and politically poetic' (Cixous, in Conley, 1991: 139). As a practitioner-scholar I'm going to be realistic. As a feminist scholar in 2018, I'm going to be radical. It is important to be clear about what I stand for, and what the asks of my movements are. Affects and solidarity are driving a resurgence of feminism, but our affects are 'unstable entities whose impact cannot be controlled' (Vachhani and Pullen, 2018: 7). I can't just be passionate. My demands must be clear.

I'm in the research phase of understanding and working with manifestas. I'm going to focus this manifesta for writing differently in 2018, the *how to*, of my abstract manifesta. I'm following Höpfl, whereby if I can apply some of Cixous's ideas in academic writing, then hopefully there is a 'translation to the workplace' (2011: 34). In the next pool I'll also present a manifesta for bringing women's voice, and *féminine* writing, into being in the Critical Management Studies Academy.

A question is bugging me; do I need to ask for reparation? Ahmed (2017) links her demand for feminist reparation with her call to feminist arms and her concept of wilfulness. Wilfulness is a protest against violence and a demand for return in recognition of the theft of life and vitality from our arms; from our bodies. This has meaning for me, but also concerns me. Ahmed spins me back to Cixous, who also believes our female bodies have been stolen from us, but – I reach for *Rootprints*. She's done it again to me, or rather has me undone. I'm about, via Ahmed, to apply a universal notion of justice, wanting a reparation in the name of the Law. Well I can't. I'm in the *féminine* libidinal economy and my manifesta has to engage without a grasping hand. Ambi – thinking on both sides. Descending – the path to freedom is entered from the ground, by moving into undecidability. Cixous takes me not into reparation but into deconstructing the idea of 'theft of life' and



justice, which doesn't mean joining the body thieves, it means taking the time to dwell in *not knowing*. Cixous's path to freedom emerges from the nether realms with an enflashed body radiant with agency and fluid subjectivities. This is the esprit of *Laugh of the Medusa*.

My mind darts to #MeToo. One of its original inspirations was the focus on women and their bodies and experiences, and not on calling names or demanding retribution. It rallied men in large numbers as sympathizers in a way that second-wave feminists could not imagine (Watkins, 2018). This is tricky – calling out and enlisting men as allies whilst keeping the focus on women, bodies and post-gender fluidities. I don't think Cixous achieves this. I'm almost ready to give up and then I realize – BAM – Cixous offers a positive strategy that I engaged with in *Pussy Hats*:

I shall speak about women's writing: about *what it will do*. Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies...Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and history – by her own movement. (Cixous, 1976b: 875, her emphases)

My thinking's coming together and I already *have* work in progress to share.

Manifesta of the crazy women's irregular friendship and resistance society: Irregular members can apply

I've been a card-carrying member of the emerging writing differently movement in the OS Academy since my first year as a PhD student, and have attended each of the three Writing Differently retreats (2016, 2017 and 2018). My first academic article is published in a special issue on writing differently in *Management Learning*, and I co-convened a stream on *Changing writing/Writing for change* at GWO 2018. Nancy Harding, Sarah Gilmore and myself will co-run a Personal Development Workshop (PDW) on writing differently before the 2019 CMS conference. Writing differently is a home and I am passionate about our mission; writing differently as an 'ethical act' towards our readers and ourselves as writers and *failing* to write differently is an 'act of violence' since it keeps us in the subaltern position, caught in a discriminatory regime and silenced (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 172–173).

For my submission to the GWO 2018 stream I partner with my friend, English professor and poet Carol Ann Davis. Our project reflects affective solidarity and



resistance to patriarchy, to which we want to add Cixousian laughter. We decide to form a Society, via a *manifesta*, hoping to collaboratively write it real-time at the conference, building on our abstract draft. The aims of our Society are to create a place of friendship and shared goals, with the political ambition to destabilize and confuse masculinist writing (Phillips et al., 2014), including disrupting narrative norms. Our Society is called *The Crazy Women's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society* (CWIFRS). It's a metaphorical wordplay; a Swiffer is also the name of US brand of a hybrid sweeping and mopping tool designed to give an amazing wet-dry clean. One intended interpretation of Crazy Women is the link to hysterics, but we also link it to the *Crazyhorse* literary magazine (an influential voice in prose and poetry in the US) of which Carol Ann was an editor 2001–2012. We are inspired by *Crazyhorse's* manifesto, written by its founder Thomas McGrath in 1960 – a fantastic piece of poetry, a statement of the magazine's aspirations and a call to unite as insurgents. Carol Ann reads it aloud at GWO. Men who write to confuse the masculine are also very welcome to join our Society.

At GWO, in 20 minutes, with Carol Ann videoed in, we could only make limited progress in co-creating our *manifesta* collectively. It was learning and there is more work to do. I place our draft CWIFRS *manifesta* in my theses as (a) an advertisement for irregular members to apply and (b) an example of what feminist writing disrupting masculine narratives can look like. This *manifesta* is about opening new *féminine* writing spaces in the Academy. It goes to the heart of my project and, along with the other two (my abstract and the one you'll read next), I'm preparing to nail them to the doors of the OS Academy.



Forming the Manifesta of the Crazy Women's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society: (Irregular) Members Wanted

We, the Crazy Women's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society, step forward into our own light to bring into body the work of our feminist forebears through our own manifesta féminine; languages of circular and figurative power, alight with the hysteria of our bodies, alert to our six senses, angry with everyone and no one, simultaneously texts and writers. We begin the CWIFRS by being no one's wife – we come unencumbered by any fixed identity to mix our words with those of others to build the house in which we want to live by dismantling the master's house of subjected subjects and passive verbs. In our bi-sexual creation – essay-poem-performance – we stir poetry of Lorde, Cixous, Ahmed, Rankine and other sisters, mixing them with the spinning metaphors and wildness of *Crazyhorse*, and the circling planets in the head of poet Mina Loy; and we come crashing forward into the present day, multiplying, flowering, dying, living, flowing, summoning into being by our words, the worlds we demand.

write with us of unspoken irregular friendships
ongoingness of our simultaneity no longer untrue ripe like our bodies
dismantle the master's house
middles untrue to ends we are told liberating yet disassembled
like our bodies text-perimenting radical poetic implosion like our
bodies and other tools repurposed new and untrue so what's true
of structure and meaning ripe to build by undoing undoing to build
expectations liberating yet assumptions we should make stories should
we make stories whose master what kind of house simultaneous ongoing
like our bodies we seek to undo not from within but without a radical poetic
and other tools to build by undoing loving not knowing loving notknowing
to create like our bodies like our lives our words
in affirmation in ultimate daring
manifesta féminine irregular academy

join us 

(Beavan and Davis, 2018)



Pool seven: Wilful Woman Writer

An open letter to the men of the CMS Academy⁸⁶

Summer, 2018
Front line
Battle-fields (against patriarchy)

Gentlemen,

Gilmore I address you as gentlemen, because most of you are. White middle-aged, heteronormative gentlemen. This is not to underestimate the outsized contribution of the far smaller number of women CMS scholars, the editors of a volume *DIALOGUES IN CRITICAL MANAGEMENT STUDIES, At the intersection: Critical/writing*⁸⁷ are a case in point, but our women scholars are forced into straitjackets.⁸⁸ I look at the home page of <http://www.criticalmanagement.org/> dominated by men and also, by the way, a page in need of a spring clean.

For 2015–2017 Jo Brewis has taken the role of the domain owner on behalf of the community. For 2017–2019 she will pass the flag to the new team of conference organizers.

Jo left to run our VIDA Facebook site. Funny what happens when the women stop doing the housework. I'd recommend you hire the CWIFRS.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ From this moment onwards, I fly the coops of academic citation conventions, rearranging furniture (Cixous, 1976b) borrowing and adapting the practice used by poet-academic Maggie Nelson in her book *The Argonauts* (2015), citing the author's name in the left-hand margin and italicizing the quote (where actual or adapted words are used). Italics *do not* indicate emphasis. Unlike Nelson I provide conventional citations in footnotes.

⁸⁷ My Open Letter is forthcoming (2019) in *Dialogues in Critical Management Studies, At the intersection: Critical/writing* edited by Harding, Helin and Pullen.

⁸⁸ (Gilmore, 2017)

⁸⁹ CWIFR's refers to the Crazy Women's Irregular Friendship and Resistance Society – see previous pool.



Curious, I take a look at the list of theorists on the website. Five women out of fifty-four:

Hannah Arendt

Judith Butler

Julia Kristeva

Chantal Mouffe

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

No Hélène Cixous. No Elisabeth Grosz. No Sara Ahmed.

What about Raewyn Connell, and her ground-breaking work on masculinities and her towering 80,000 citations? And, and...

Cixous Let's be fair, this is a violence. Women erased. Women cut. We are not dumb. We are silenced by your inability to hear us.⁹⁰
Ashcraft *Feminist theory, research and practice are peripheral, on the*
Cixous *fringe of CMS*⁹¹ *Phallogocratic ideology has claimed more than one*
 *victim*⁹²

Cixous Women do not lack. We lack lack⁹³

Pullen,
Harding
and
Phillips CMS is dominated by privileged, white, Anglo-Saxon men.⁹⁴
Why? The International Critical Management Studies Board is
split 50/50 male/female.⁹⁵ I demand to know why we aren't
doing better in the rank and file? Where are the othered?
And my reasons in writing to you are intensely personal.
I'm disappointed.
And I'm angry.

⁹⁰ (Cixous, 1984)

⁹¹ (Karen Ashcraft, 2015: 93–106)

⁹² (Cixous, 1976b: 884)

⁹³ (Cixous, 1976b)

⁹⁴ (Pullen et al., 2017: 3)

⁹⁵ You can meet the Board at <https://internationalcms.org/meet-the-board/>. Although split 50/50 male/female, the board is predominately white and middle-aged, and not a model for the inclusiveness critical scholars might aspire to. The *men* are older middle-aged and Anglo-Saxon (with one still middle-aged Japanese exception).



I'm an outsider.

An outrider.

Cixous I arrive in Organization Studies Academia, a foreign, distinguished, elegant country. I arrive in OS Academia, I thought. There I am not. I can't get my footing. This country is not my country. I am savage, a bit furious, alarmed, overwhelmed to the point of being crushed by its constructions and its customs, I can't manage to arrive. I go nuts, I goat and ram. This is what I know to do. I stumble on the fine carpets of the bourgeois buildings of High Theory and Knowledges. I who went in heels, ascending corporate elevators with aplomb. But no nostalgia. I had not been at home behind the fences of my native cradle.⁹⁶

No nostalgia but some (highest) expectations. Expectations of solutions that I might carry on a round trip back. I fall into the Abyss of Disappointments. Flailing, I'm hoisted up and in by The CMS Writing Differently Feminist Rescue Squad.

Derrida I look around, carefully using my outsider eyes. I read and read and read. I begin writing for this Academy – in my own style. I am ardent, faithful, enthusiastic. I am unable to write a postcard over enemy lines back home.⁹⁷ How can I write with justice?⁹⁸ How can I write to engage my people – my people to change?

Butler I'll be pointed. How have your scholarly endeavours helped those of us who work in capitalist organizations lead more liveable lives?⁹⁹ After thirty-five years working in

⁹⁶ (Cixous, 2011b: 106)

⁹⁷ (see Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, 1987: 62)

⁹⁸ (Cixous, 2011b)

⁹⁹ (Butler, 2004)



Probyn hypermasculine industries, I have a bloody mangled foot.¹⁰⁰ My foot mangled by getting trapped on the top step of an escalator, an escalator I can't get off, an escalator I ride alone. I sacrifice my body part. My *flesh devoured*¹⁰¹ by the sharp metallic teeth of an escalator top stair. I use this metaphor, as you have seen, with feeling and situated knowledges.

Cixous I'm not sorry if I make you uncomfortable; I work with embodied methods of discomfort. I'll ask again, how has CMS created worlds in which we all can flourish? I wonder if you've been head down, scoring feats, keeping *glorious phallic monosexuality in view*¹⁰² as you advance your malestream careers? I mean what the fuck are you doin' all this for?¹⁰³

Ahmed Aren't we united in exposing and critiquing the forms of discrimination and inequality that operate inside organizations? Devising interventions that help people transcend and overcome the psychological despair fostered by divisive sexual and cultural politics¹⁰⁴ in organizations? Called to activism? Called to arms?¹⁰⁵

Denzin
Ahmed,
Denzin

And my reasons in writing to you are intensely personal. And while dissenting is fearful, my silence will not protect me.

Lorde *Your silence will not protect you.*¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ I referred to this metaphor in Pool four.

¹⁰¹ (Probyn, 2000, 2001)

¹⁰² (Cixous, 1976a: 884)

¹⁰³ (Ahmed, 2017)

¹⁰⁴ (Denzin, 2017b)

¹⁰⁵ (Ahmed, 2017; Denzin, 2010)

¹⁰⁶ (Lorde, 2017a: 5)



Lorde We have a problem. You see *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House. Never. Ever.*¹⁰⁷ We are using the *wrong tools*. Or perhaps we don't need *tools* at all?

Lorde I invite you to *reach down into that deep place of knowledge inside [yourself] and touch the terror and loathing of any difference that lives there. See whose face it wears.*¹⁰⁸ Feel, not drill.

Cixous I do this. It is not pleasant travelling, this descending into our nether realms of appropriation, prejudice and judgement. It is essential. It's hard work, humble work, we must leave behind our *speculating clever 'I's'*.¹⁰⁹

Cixous I know [*it is a difficult apprenticeship, but it has to be tried.*]¹¹⁰ Our unwillingness will not protect us. Don't our participants deserve it? How to glimpse the other if we don't embrace our other others?

Cixous Joy will surprise you. There are *metamorphoses of all kinds and genders here...Hell returns us to something mysterious and enchanted.*¹¹¹

Cixous You'll return with different ears and eyes, different ink in your pen. You just need to step across the border into a *f eminine land we have all been exiled from. A libidinal and geographic reorientation.*¹¹²

I'll speak bluntly. As women researchers, we are appropriated by our masculine Academy. It destroys the possibility of being

¹⁰⁷ (Lorde, 2017b: 91)

¹⁰⁸ (Lorde, 2017b: 93)

¹⁰⁹ (Cixous, 1993: 156)

¹¹⁰ (Cixous, 1993: 156)

¹¹¹ (Cixous, 1993: 129, 156, 154)

¹¹² (Cixous, 1993: 120)



other. Our voices are stopped in their tracks (be they men, women, or whatever rich variation of human person). We are forced to become phallic men speaking with an exterior, rigid, rational, masculine, disembodied voice. It is incorporation. It is an arrest of freedom of the other. This is enormous. It is unethical.

I speak up for suppleness, for the other's freedom. For our freedom.

I do not know if what I say is clear enough.

Cixous This is 2018. The time has come to break with our masculine reckoning.¹¹³ It is time for Woman to come out of Exile and arrive in CMS territories

Cixous *We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevvies – we are black and we are beautiful. We're stormy, and that which breaks loose from us without our fearing debilitation.*¹¹⁴

I am breaking loose here on these pages

Cixous And *I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do*¹¹⁵ words that leak and flow out of the deepest crevices my ripe body my scene *takes place where a woman's life takes place,*
Cixous *where her life is decided: inside her body, beginning with her blood*¹¹⁶
radical engagement with my body and my writing for
Cixous *woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement*¹¹⁷

¹¹³ (Cixous, 1981)

¹¹⁴ (Cixous, 1976b: 878)

¹¹⁵ (Cixous, 1976b: 875)

¹¹⁶ (Cixous, 1984: 547)

¹¹⁷ (Cixous, 1976b)



Emancipation Activism A-Call-to-Arms écriture Féminine

Diprose Men of the CMS Academy, there is an/other way. Let's write our selves. Our bodies must be heard. We can help create organizations where *life* is lived, that reflect not just neoliberal values of production but embodied ethics of care.¹¹⁸

I speak with excitement. I have a radical relational vision that our Academy can build a two-way network of flexible rope bridges – writing and social theatre bridges – that can be strung flexibly across the plunging ravine that separates the Land of OS Academia from the Land of Organizations.

Denzin I realize you may be feeling attacked, raising your battle-shield deflectors. But aren't we united in exposing and critiquing the forms of discrimination and inequality that operate inside organizations? Devising interventions that help people transcend and overcome the psychological despair fostered by divisive sexual and cultural politics¹¹⁹ in organizations?

Ahmed,
Denzin Called to activism? Called to arms?¹²⁰ Despite my frustrations, my aim is to extend an invitation. I come bearing alms with my VIDA arms.

I'm honest, fessing-up. I know a lot about phallic performances. Centuries of layering them into my phenomenological strata. But I've come to see them as a burden. A transitory moment of jouissance and then I'm rushing onto my next conquest. I'm wearied and scarred by

¹¹⁸ (Diprose, 2002a)

¹¹⁹ (Denzin, 2017b)

¹²⁰ (Ahmed, 2017; Denzin, 2010)



Cixous this bloody escalator performance I can't get off. I'm giving up my participation in the *School of Conquistadors*. And it's a struggle. Despite the attractions of living in a *féminine libidinal economy*, my default modus operandi is so very masculine. It's

Cixous a battle I wage within. A daily dawn pistol duel between my *masculine and féminine libidinal economies*.¹²¹

Cixous My alms are dear to me, but I do not claim them as truths and *[g]iving isn't sacrificing. The person who transmits has to be able to function on the level of knowledge without knowing*. I function here; a level of knowledge without knowing. Vulnerable to your accusations that I don't know rightly for the CMS Academy, that I write wrongly, though I am not abject.

Cixous I am evident in my state of weakness with the *guts to occupy the position no one has the right to occupy* and happy to share *precisely how and why* I occupy this space. *I set my sights high: I demand that love struggle within the master against the will for power*.¹²² Unabashed. Utopian. Love struggling.

My alms

Cixous Here's my first gift already hinted at – In the *Land of Écriture Féminine*, we don't have to know. We can love *not knowing*.¹²³ There are a thousand ways into our data – whatever data is anyway? There are multiplicitous ways of knowing. It's fun to explore with numerous ears.¹²⁴ We don't have to play cleverest idea. I've observed, with disquiet,

¹²¹ (Cixous, 1976b, 1986)

¹²² (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 140)

¹²³ (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997)

¹²⁴ (Cixous, 1988)



rough trading between us, the not-so-subtle peacocking to prove our knowledge superior. I've been a bit aghast by some of the aggressive feathered displays. Where I come from, hypermasculine though it is, we'd likely get ousted for acting up that way.

I'm squirming, seeing hatchet work with our participant's words. Data a wild horse to be broken by the bridle of theory; scholar as *butcher* cleaving up our voices into shreds for pre-ordained theoretically organized consumption.

Personally, I find this mincing unethical.

Personally, I find it mistaken.

I'm researching the

Cixous

*other of all sorts...of all diverse richness. The more the other is rich, the more I am rich. The other, rich, will make all his or her richness resonate in me and will enrich me. This is what [scholars] do not know, in general, and that's too bad. They are scared of those they consider to be stronger or richer or bigger, without realizing that the richer, the bigger, the stronger [participant] enriches us, makes us bigger, stronger.*¹²⁵

Cornell

The *other* too big for my cleaver (which I don't own). Instead of knowing, imparting knowledge, I'm working on translation. *The etymology of which spins me to transfer, to carry, to bridge. A passageway towards the encountering of the other.*¹²⁶ The other in me, other others who are othered.

Imagine our scholarship as gardening. Joyfulness in the abundance of relations of colour.

¹²⁵ (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 13)

¹²⁶ (Cornell, 1988: 147)



Cixous

*Gardening is an act that is absolutely strange, in relation to life. And if I only listen to myself gardening, I have a very light sense of suffering in saying to myself: why garden when I know it will die? That for me is the other: death. Together we look at the garden.*¹²⁷

Why scholar so hard when we know our thin plants will die? I long for living scholarship, rich with vibrant colours, where we garden together with our participants, where our sharing work propagates change.

But, more than that, I'm after a new landscape for our Academy – more unruly and wild.

And, if I let you in on a secret, *[w]hat is the discourse of mastery* anyway?

Cixous

*there is one. It is what calls itself 'the law' but is presented as 'the open door' in precisely such a way that you never go to the other side of the door, that you never go to see 'what is mastery?' So you will never know there is no law and no mastery. There is no master. The paradox of mastery is that it is made up of a sort of complex ideological secretion produced by an infinite number of doorkeepers.*¹²⁸

I go to the other side of the door. I inspect your flowing theoretical secretions with a magnifying glass. Ho-ho-ho. There is no master. Many gatekeepers but no master. Master's a phallic phantasm after all. A veritable Wizard of Oz. I keep adding theorists to my haversack – a whole wonderful raucous tumult of them.

I'm also discovering I'm not master of anything; anything at all.

Here's my second libation – everything is ciphered through our material *bodies*: data, theory, writing. My head

¹²⁷ (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997: 13)

¹²⁸ (Cixous, in Cixous and Clément, 1986: 138)



isn't detached, hoisted on a medieval pole apart from my body, it's attached to my neck, gazing, sniffing, tasting, touching, hearing. My body coursed through with affects – sad, happy, angry, excited and a whole subtle panoply. My body variously sweating, cold, hot, pregnant, im/potent, menopausal, aroused, not aroused...

It's a noble cause to critically question uncritical management studies. I'm invested, thrown my lot in with CMS, but what I recoil from are voices of cynicism, negativity, despair; and I flinch hearing the veiled (sometimes transparent) knocks against Management. I am Management. I am Leadership. I feel the chilly winds of your othering. The savage bites of your criticisms. I shout 'we're not all barbarians behind corporate gates.' Often, we are trying hard to make our organizations better – and not just financially, though that's important, of course. I've made mistakes, and sure, we're a bit illiterate of theory, so help us out. We're quite smart. But keep it briefer, we're used to bullet points. Be more positive. Enthusiasm begets enthusiasm, passion begets passion. Negative affects beget negative affects; they're highly contagious, not exciting us to do the monumental work of change. We're the ones at the coal face shovelling 24/7.

I invite you to bring your bodies to meet ours – through cracking open gates. I'm getting proficient at cutting through heavy padlocks and chains.

My third gift, I worry you'll refuse to unwrap, return to me by first-class mail. I hesitate to offer to you. I'm pausing, waiting,



Ahmed it's the big one... I need a bold masculine Capital Letter. It is a word with a lot of Capital.¹²⁹

Theory

Philosophical Theory. Theorists. The Way to Knowledge.

I'm silent.

I'll blurt.

Cixous I agree with Cixous – theory's a spare wheel, not the *bird*. A prothesis, a prop.¹³⁰

This isn't to give theory a place, but I refuse to idolize it. Theory is useful, traversable. Different philosophical theories gift us different interpretative lenses, different knowledges. I've travelled with Cixous, (who is also vexingly and probably deliberately contradictory), and flown from her to Derrida, Lacan, Ahmed, Foucault, Probyn, Diprose, and spent forty sweaty anxious days and nights in a Deleuzian delirium – Deleuze who, let's face it, is fashion-du-jour – I'm sated with talk of assemblages, lines-of-flight, rhizomes, deterritorizations, bodies-without-organs, so many becomings...

I'll also be impertinent and ask why journal articles have to follow such a rigid formula. I get so bored and tactically approach reading them as if I'm flying west to east coast in

¹²⁹ (Ahmed, 2017)

¹³⁰ (Cixous, in Cixous and Calle-Gruber, 1997)



the US. Can I see any of those amazing volcanic seven peaks on take-off? I doze in the middle of the flight, unless something arresting happens, like flying over The Grand Canyon. Stir on arrival descending into JFK. Where are people I can recognize, innovative ideas that spring me into a text with desire? Where is constructive kind help that can help us change things in the chaos of demanding daily working life in neo-liberal global organization as 24/7 ideal workers?

My interest gets aroused by what a text leaks out, subverting its author with wilful infidelity for

- Cixous *[a] text is beyond both representation – the exact reproduction of reality – and expression: it always says something other than it intends to say. The text is always more than the author believes s/he expresses. As a result of fashionable theoretical practices [or idolization of a Master] this has been repressed...[we] read texts on a purely formal level. University practice is still very formal.*¹³¹
- Phillips et al.,
Fotaki
and
Harding reflecting *an unnamed masculinity*.¹³² Organizational theory is dominated by *masculine significations and images*.¹³³ To undo mastery in organizations, we need to work on our home front too. Land Girls. Unearthing the *f eminine repressed*.
- Ahmed I'm learning theory, enjoying the intellectual challenges of philosophy, but I'm with Sara Ahmed, *it [makes] me feel very rebellious...The empirical work, the world that exists, is for me where the difficulties and thus the challenges reside*.¹³⁴ We face weird wobbly phenomena in global, fluid organizations; *complex and shadowy realities where customary assumptions about the space and time of organization no longer hold*.¹³⁵ I
- O'Doherty

¹³¹ (Cixous, 1988: 144)

¹³² (Phillips et al., 2013: 314)

¹³³ (Fotaki and Harding, 2013)

¹³⁴ (Ahmed, 2017: 9)

¹³⁵ (O'Doherty et al., 2013: 1427)



Ahmed

feel the limits of our understandings, whichever theory I adopt, and I begin to *appreciate that theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin*. I need theory I can take home. We have to *bring [OS] theory home...because theory has been too quickly understood as something you do away from home*.¹³⁶ Turns out it's more physical housework than library studies. Though some library studies are required. I'm not for academic work with no theoretical moorings. But that's another story.

My companion theorists are not my masters, nor my gods. They're friends I chatter with in my head; an empowering enlightening community. My coveted French left-bank poststructuralists live in the neighbourhoods, eat together, sleep together – *passionate liaisons* – operate as a political activist ensemble hotly protesting for prison reforms under Foucault's leadership, afloat on a radical post-1968 raft, at the University of Vincennes. Deleuze losing one of Cixous's handwritten book manuscripts when they both get arrested.

Ward
Jouve

The women hang out in community together – Psych et Po – and at the Des femmes publishing house, a women's paradise.¹³⁷ Breathing, feisty, firebrand women, not just abstract disembodied heads; philosopher MasterMistresses immortalized in scholarly tombs, awaiting our singular exhumations. *[C]haos, extraordinary energy, joy, militancy, the belief that the world is ours for the taking...breath-taking sense of curiosity...Men who interview [them] sitting up and listening*.¹³⁸ Women's voices getting louder... being heard. They [are] going to change the world. I want to get closer to

¹³⁶ (Ahmed, 2017: 10, 7-8)

¹³⁷ (Ward Jouve, 1991)

¹³⁸ (Ward Jouve, 1991: 76)



their skins with my skin, their hearts with my heart. Not to do so is a violence to their bodies and to their (collective) work.

I'm offering you radical
gifts of embodied emancipation.

Toppling *T*
shrinking it to more
writeful sizing.

I won't bullshit you either.

Ahmed

These are gifts of hard, sweaty work. The task of abandoning fixed findings, clear conclusions. *The task is to stay in the field with the difficulty, to keep exploring and exposing the difficulty no tidying of texts for publication but exploring and exposing the struggles.*¹³⁹ Being joy, militancy, extraordinary energy.

Cixous

The task is also to do the hard labour of critical reflexivity, get over our cowardice and fears and descend to meet the *other* in us. *It is not necessarily pleasant to get there: our own marshes, our own mud.*¹⁴⁰ I'm repeating myself because we're reluctant to

Ruth
Behar

journey there. It's work that breaks your heart¹⁴¹ – the author's and reader's. It is work that takes us towards the other without judgement. Research where we are not at the steering wheel.

'Is this publishable?' you ask tentatively, 'we're under pressure to publish four A-rated journal articles a year. This is the neoliberal academy.'

¹³⁹ (Ahmed, 2017: 13)

¹⁴⁰ (Cixous, 1993: 119)

¹⁴¹ (Behar, 1996)



'You can make it so,' I answer. 'You're the journal editors and top reviewers. The Gatekeepers. You have Power. Could you publish this?'¹⁴²

the only people of colour in The Place. An uneasiness wells up gagging your throat as you walk through the body-guarded entrance. It's a familiar sensation. You swallow it back. Set sun and there is a chill in the November air as you take seats at one of the pink tableclothed wooden picnic benches that are strewn, as feminine rebels, on the grass outside the bar. A table that's not too far removed from the light emanating from within. Safer.

Beavan
and Case

Echo of ghosts. You shiver. The Place. Bulawayo Cricket Club. Picnic bench overlooks the fenced-off cricket ground, although the pitch barely visible through the encroaching darkness. Sharp thud of leather ball on willow wood. Whites. You look at the Toilets exuding decaying grandeur their colonial insignia, 'Men's' and 'Women's' Changing Rooms writ large across their entrances. The world was two. All the worlds were two and there was always two to begin with. There were so many two-worlds. You do not say ghetto, apartheid, slavery¹⁴³

Cixous

Ahmed Can you open eyes to the brute fact that our worlds, organizations and the OS Academy are defined by men? It matters who we cite. Seminal – a word which suggests theory, and knowledge, are ejaculated from male bodies.¹⁴⁴ 'But we're required to cite seminal work,' you defend. Seminal is seminal, proven, revered. Ah, but, but I must

citing begets citing begets citing. Narrower and narrower. Time to stretch, expand, blaze new uterine trails in our citations with the bodies of work of female theorists and scholars? Will you join me deliberately citing women in your references? If we don't demasculinize our journal articles and books, how then can we help demasculinize organizations? Undo the violence done. There's an abundance of top CMS female scholarship for you to create new citational linkages with. Help

¹⁴² (Beavan and Case, 2018: 14–15)

¹⁴³ (Adapted from Cixous, 1997: 271, 277)

¹⁴⁴ (Ahmed, 2017)



dismantle this institution of patriarchal heteronormative whiteness.

Running your talking. You have the power.

My fourth lagniappe concerns knowledge.

Spry

What if knowledge isn't made by me or you, an act of imparting to our reader, but, rather, is made in our *doing* together? Together scholar-to-scholar? Together with-our-readers? A temporal and spatially decentred experience sensing meanings rather than conceiving them from on high? Textualized bodies, *feeling scholarship*, letting it seep into our skin and melt into the marrow of our bones, move in our blood, our borders bleeding.¹⁴⁵ *Knowledge* – a collective endeavour. Intersubjective. Flesh to flesh, emergings in the moments *between us*.

Field note – March 2018

MacGillivray

[K]nowing as an immediate and reciprocal act. For Cixous, writing, like reading, proceeds by groping in the dark, sensorially seeking to discover some version of the truth about emotions and events, as opposed to reporting or linear unfolding of that which has already passed or been surpassed. I will also name this practice an edge pursuit: a *pursuit of the edge, practiced on the edge; an edgy pushing at edges in an effort to feel and fall over them*.¹⁴⁶

Phillips et al.

Let's re-envisage and pursue changes to the very character of knowledge itself.¹⁴⁷ Edge pursuing.

¹⁴⁵ (Spry, 2011b)

¹⁴⁶ (MacGillivray, in Cixous, 1998: xxi)

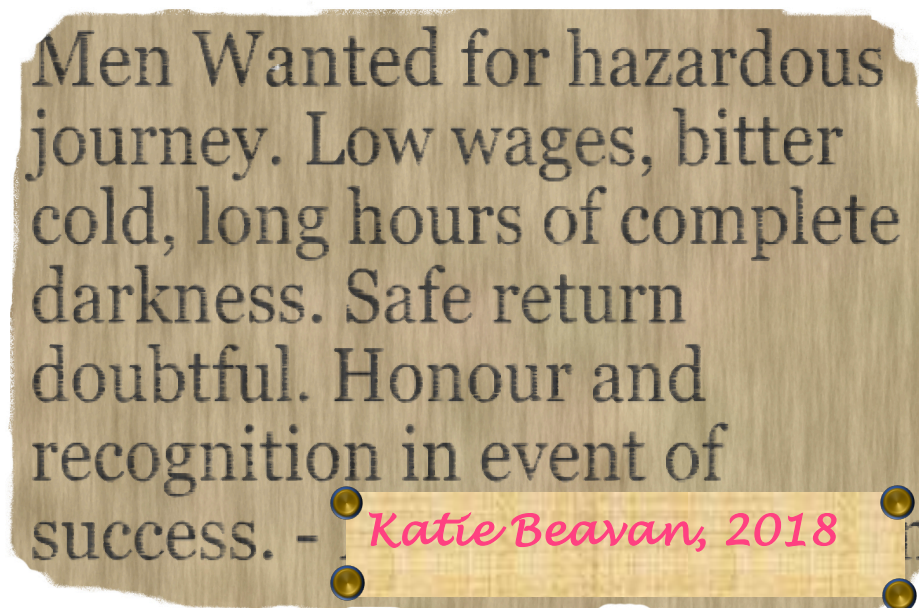
¹⁴⁷ (Phillips et al., 2013: 328)



Derrida

Knowledge to make with others – in organizations, as well as in the Academy. *‘Countersigning’ texts and readings, which ‘must be extremely attentive and open to the power to enchant...to bodily engagement with the [untranslatable]; and musicality of the text irreducible to a simple meaning’; texts and readings which ‘must invent an ‘other language’.*¹⁴⁸

This is no small venture. I’m seeking CMS men of a certain disposition.¹⁴⁹



My fifth and final oblation in this text – I have more offerings but this is a small beginning – is language. I call it Lacan’s Ingress; that our very subjectivities, arrivals into the Symbolic, are made with and through language. Who says our language has to be masculine? Old Lacan? Uncle Freud?¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ (Derrida, 2002, in Prenowitz, 2011: 5)

¹⁴⁹ I am borrowing Ernest Shackleton’s (apocryphal) advertisement for men to join his Trans-Antarctic 1914–17 expedition. The advertisement (reputedly) attracted 5,000 applications, which Shackleton sifted into piles labelled ‘mad’, ‘hopeless’ and ‘possible’, before selecting his 27-strong crew. More than a century after it appeared, the ad is still lauded as one of the best examples of copywriting ever seen. I’ll be happy with 5,000 applications to join my quest!

¹⁵⁰ I use appellations, for Freud ‘Uncle’ (Cixous, 2008g: 139) and Lacan ‘Old’ (Cixous, 1981: 45).



Not Butler or Haraway. Not Derrida. Not Cixous, Irigaray or Kristeva. Not 'golden boy' Deleuze. Foucault – he backed away too. If language forms our subjectivities, so it might rewrite them.

Beavan et al.

Gentlemen of the CMS Academy, this is an invitation to escape the phallogocentric scriptures of academic writing and to consider what *radical possibilities for writing in the study of gender and organization can defy the political, ethical and aesthetic constraints handed down from masculine scientific traditions*.¹⁵¹ Freedom. What possibilities for our writing can we imagine? Opening up undiscovered passageways to thousands of different discourses... what a glorious adventure! Chaos, extraordinary energy, joy, militancy, the belief that the world is ours for the taking... breathtaking sense of curiosity... our voices getting louder

for this is what women's writing can do.

Beavan et al.

Come with me, on this expedition. That's my invitation. It will be a challenge but we can escape the *genre constraints of the [tired] male men*. In the name of the mission of CMS I call for an *invigoration of writing's heritage as a catalyst for social change...writing fecund with richer ways of living in organizations...Let's put political fissures in the status quos*.¹⁵²

Cixous

Go to sea. Aller à la mer.¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ (Beavan et al., 2017: 1)

¹⁵² (Beavan et al., 2017: 1–2)

¹⁵³ (Cixous, 1984)



Let's bring back the 'social' into our CMS social science with emotionally vulnerable, linguistically evocative, and sensuously poetic and embodied voices bringing us closer to the subjects we seek to study.¹⁵⁴ This is our goal.

Ron
Pelias

Swim in metaphors. Play with words. Luxuriate in poetry. Forget punctuation. Upset citational rules. Break narrative. Vibrate on the page with word music. Write from all your sexes in the glorious heterogeneity

Drafting tempests¹⁵⁵

ourwriting *no endings* *only beginnings* *bothsides*

feelingwriting *deep in our bodies* *whatgender*

any gender we choose *snail galloping* *catchingfire* *two*

blowournoses *writingfeeling* *two bodies* *others bodies* *ambi*

writingwomans *momentsofbecomings* *errors* *nongender*

thoughts unknown *deep in our bodies* *researchingfeminine*

momentsofbecomings *puffs of air* *fire* *fire* *ambi*

Beavan *blowingournoses* *thinkingfeelingwriting* *deepinourtwo*
and Case *bodies*

whose body *erring steps* *snails galloping texts* *ambi*

wepassby *galloping* *onwards* *entrenous*

notanendinsight

¹⁵⁴ (Pelias, 2004)
¹⁵⁵ (Beavan and Case, 2018: 19–20)



wepassby

ambis

nous

Spry And with these five largesses, I'm going to dare further still, dare us to go Body, Paper, Stage.¹⁵⁶ Let's connect with living-breathing- trying-hard-bodies- in-organizations with

Denzin social theatre¹⁵⁷ to see if we can together make knowledge, foster critical reflexivity on the part of organizational leaders, stimulate ethical, embodied action to create organizations where everyone can flourish irrespective of skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, religion. Organizations which embrace differences, foster inclusivity and positive, nurturing human relationships. Organizations where everyone has a sense of belonging wherever they sit in the world or value chain. I follow Fotaki and Harding that a *new ethics of care can be relevant and indispensable for organizations operating in the globalized [neo-liberal] world of work.*¹⁵⁸ Yes

Fotaki and Harding

Fotaki and Harding

organizations need to make profit but...its meaning should be broadened to include flourishing. That is, a company that is 'profitable' is one that understands the importance of affective relationality and absorbs it into its world so that to think and act unethically towards any other becomes regarded as a crime.

'Profit' [as] understanding of the material, affective, emotional, embodied, conscious and unconscious, tacit and known.¹⁵⁹

Spry Utopian performances¹⁶⁰
Denzin

¹⁵⁶ (Spry, 2011b)

¹⁵⁷ (Denzin, 2014, 2017b)

¹⁵⁸ (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 6)

¹⁵⁹ (Fotaki and Harding, 2018: 190)

¹⁶⁰ (Denzin, 2014; Spry, 2016)



social theatre transcending the micro–macro, local–global, agency–structure oppositions that social science researchers get trapped in.

Going with our scholarly bodies to Stage.

Theatre...scripts...stage...ethnodramas...performative autoethnographies...

Cixous Let's use our *outlawed subjectivity*.¹⁶¹ We, the authors, have to fade, so that they, the others (including the others in us) can appear, *[o]n the stage, I the author [scholar] am no longer there, but there is the other. And even the absolute other, the absolute stranger*.¹⁶²

Cixous

I spring out of my scholarly desk chair, my writer's attic, start running with

Field note – March 2018

writing framed around acts of activism and resistance...This is a call for interpretive, critical, performative qualitative research that matters in the lives of those who daily experience social injustice...

*There is a need to unsettle traditional concepts of what counts as research, as evidence, as legitimate inquiry. How can such work become part of the public conversation?... Can we forge new models of performance, representation, intervention, and praxis...? Through performance, social theatre helps people translate private troubles into public issues; that is into representations that can be used to mobilize social action and critical analysis...allowing us to engage realistic utopian pedagogies of hope.*¹⁶³

Denzin

It's helpful to write Denzin's words, to know I am responding to his call, to Ahmed's call, to Cixous's call. I'm just having phallic performance anxiety issues.

¹⁶¹ (Cixous, 1993: 119)

¹⁶² (Cixous, 1988)

¹⁶³ (Denzin, 2017b: 8, 14, 15)



O'Doherty
et al.

CMS Man: 'But this is a *significant breaching of the disciplinary norms of organization studies...*'¹⁶⁴

Me: 'Yes, it is. That's Damian's point.'

CMS Man: 'Too difficult.'

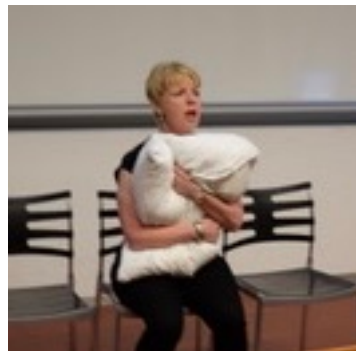
Me: 'I've done it, twice; it's possible. First at EGOS, in 2017, Copenhagen Business School: *Sleepless and inchoate in Boston.*'

CMS Man: 'EGOS?!...You mean SCOS?'

Me: 'No EGOS. A rupture in the Academy. Anxious stream convenors, terrified me. But, I did it. Twenty-minutes of auto/ethnographic performance.'



¹⁶⁴ (O'Doherty et al., 2013: 1427)



CMS Man: 'You must be trained in theatre.'

Me: 'I'm not. Not been on stage since I was ten years old in primary school.'

CMS Man: 'You're a writer.'



Cixous

Me: 'Of PowerPoints – the language of the office. No, I'm not a creative writer or a theatre writer. I hadn't written creatively after O-level English. The path at A level was English lit or no English at all. I've discovered creative writing in the course of my recent studies. Never written poetry or plays before. It's been a joyous awakening...*women are body. More body hence more writing.*¹⁶⁵ Men have writing bodies. Some men even have féminine writing bodies. And...I'm not saying it is a cinch. Very scary actually. My phallus was constantly afraid I wouldn't perform. Even more so this year. I staged a performance in a theatre with a live audience, videoing it for inclusion in my PhD thesis. Seventy-minute solo woman performance.'

CMS Man: 'You're having me on.'

Me: 'No, no, I'm not joking – or exaggerating. I kept Cixous's texts at my side as a talisman. She warns that *phallogocentric sublation is with us, and it's militant, regenerating the old patterns, anchored in the dogma of castration.*¹⁶⁶ I phallogocentric sublated every day in early May. But, as inescapable as my first marathon day, May 11th arrived. I plunged. I fell. I soared. I made a tear in the Law. I made a new pattern. I haven't been decapitated or castrated yet.'

¹⁶⁵ (Cixous, 1976b: 886)

¹⁶⁶ (Cixous, 1976b: 885)



CMS Man: 'How's that allowed, a video of a play in your thesis, in organization studies? Where are you doing your PhD anyway? Who's your director of studies?'

Me: 'I hope you don't want to take my head off? It's attached to my body – and I don't think I'd survive. I get your questions – but it wasn't a problem. University of West of England, Bristol Business School. In the regs. Alternative Format. CD ROM in the front of my thesis, in an envelope. Legit. Faculty Committee sign-off as *part* of my thesis. No, not an appendix. Peter Case, yes your pal, Peter, he's my DoS, and well – he's joined my expedition crew.'

CMS Man: 'How's it going to be examined?'

Denzin

Me: 'Yes, well Peter worried about that too. Helpfully, Denzin – no, he's not dead yet, he's still fired up writing exploding missives, just frail – sets out comprehensive criteria in his book *Interpretive Autoethnography, Chapter Five*.¹⁶⁷ Of course, you, Gentlemen of CMS, (and my audiences (and examiners)) may not agree on the definition of these criteria. But me, in writing and performing autoethnography and social theatre, I'm of the view these criteria form a high bar and I've tried to follow them. Then again, we can toss them overboard. I'm with Cixous, *Has the actor got across her living, breathing, speaking body* rather than *foisting mere images or words at us*.¹⁶⁸ I think that's it really. Not dead words, live bodies,

Cixous

¹⁶⁷ (Denzin, 2014: 69–83)

¹⁶⁸ (Cixous, 1984: 547)



breathing with us in performance. Provoking critical reflections. Igniting activism. Organizations are changed from the inside out. Like humans.

And Andrew Sparkes – a noble twenty-year autoethnographer – tells us, well, just to use our scholarly imaginations. Let them loose!

Cixous


My examiners have awesome féminine imaginaries that are *inexhaustible, like music, painting, writing: their stream of phantasms is incredible*.¹⁶⁹ You've also rated them highly on your masculine terms – a floribunda of A* journal articles... card-carrying-members of the CMS Union. Wonderfully deliciously bi-sexual writers.'

CMS Man: 'What was your social-auto-thingi – err – play about?'

Me: 'Harvey Weinstein and his phallus.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ (Cixous, 1976b: 876)

¹⁷⁰ The woman silhouette image used below is courtesy of Clipart Xtras.com – a site of cliparts and extras for teachers, students and parents created by parents and designers clipartxtras.com. The digital hat image was designed by Taylor Kenny (taylorkenny.com) for my Pussy Hats performance and is used here with his permission.



**Harvey's Phallus -
where is my pussy hat?**

*Written and solo performed by
Katie Beavan*



Friday May 11th 7pm

*Wien Experimental Theatre
Quick Centre for the Arts
Fairfield University
1073 N Benson Rd
Fairfield , CT 06824*

A performance which engages with the powerful emotions, vulnerable, painful, personal memories of sexual harassment evoked by the Harvey Weinstein story, and wider issues of misogyny, power and control of women's bodies, political agency. Is there potential for women's solidarity?



[I hear your intake of breath. I sigh. Shake, breathe deep. Don't think I'll talk in detail about the contents... Change tack... I look away to think. Silence.]

CMS Man: 'Was it about organizations?'
(suddenly sounding curious)

Me: 'Yes – yes, of course... and women, exploring possibilities for feminist solidarity in neoliberal worlds of fragmentation.'



CMS Man Two: 'Excuse me, can I ask, how did you learn to do performative autoethnography? How did you learn all those lines?'

Spry

Me: 'Mmm... I'm asked this often... [well here it is again]... well, I taught myself. Tami Spry has a helpful how-to book; *Body, Paper, Stage*.¹⁷¹ I'm not saying it was a breeze. You have to learn your lines and there aren't shortcuts. Word by word cemented into the brain and muscle memory. Learn by heart. Heart work. Daring to go on stage. *Courage* which comes from *cœur*, the heart. As human actors have done in going to stage for millennia. But I'm not sure it was harder than learning to read philosophy. I'm sure for you, well, you'll do it fantastically too. And – quick – we need to get going – not another minute to lose. Limbs and worse are getting mangled back home.'

CMS Man Two: 'You must have natural talent.'

Me: 'I, well, I... don't... think so. I'm a long-time organization practitioner. That's been my career. But I have skilled teachers. I work with an actor every year to rehearse, and I workshop some of my texts in writing class. I advocate getting help. This is embodied, cross-disciplinary, work. Roll in the specialists. No time for false hubris. But it isn't about mastery. I screwed up at the beginning of Harvey, needed prompting twice. Didn't matter. Actually, my vulnerability brought my audience into a third space with me.'

¹⁷¹ (Spry, 2011b)



CMS Man Two: 'You think I could?'

Cixous Me: 'I know we can. *We don't lack. We don't lack, lack*¹⁷² (Cixous, 1976b). With our *outlawed subjectivity*¹⁷³ we'll discover more radiant agencies than in our dusty, boring, scholarly texts. Dare. I dare you to. Come on guys. We're at an intersection in Critical Management Studies. Join the CWIFRS. Turn write. I know some of you CMS Gentleman embrace your femininity. Write the *féminine* in. There's *[n]ot another minute to lose*.¹⁷⁴

Cixous

Emancipation Activism A-Call-to-Arms écriture Féminine

Gentlemen of the CMS Academy, with your wo/man, body-presence unsilenced we can explode everything... transformation of organizations... transformation of our Academy.

radical engagement with our bodies and our
writing

our blood
resisting bodies

movements across enemy lines

Glorious **explosions**. I hear them coming.

¹⁷² (Cixous, 1976b)

¹⁷³ (Cixous, 1993: 119)

¹⁷⁴ (Cixous, 1976b: 885)



Now – let's get the hell out of here

In love

Katie



Epilogue

Woman Arriving in the World





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