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Untitle-ing the Master:

Harvesting language, haunting bodies and
transforming Self

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Psychology

at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand

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2011
ABSTRACT

This work has no beginning so to speak of it in this way is to instill an arbitrary boundary that I do not wish to inscribe, I would say instead that I have been moving towards enlivening it all my life, and though I am part of the story, I am not the author, for the text once enlivened has moved on, I do not purport to own it or to be able to contain it. I am compiler and the compilation is within a community of others to whom I am absolutely indebted and continually inspired. This thesis does not begin and end with me. Its story begins, as does my own, before my birth, located in a social, cultural and linguistic history, that preceded me and it does not end, for it proliferates out from these arbitrary boundaries, these pages and covers which do not bind it, they are an artifice of a bind, like the binaries of language they seek to name us, and then hold us in that place with nothing more to secure us than the name itself.

I arrived here as I have journeyed from those early stirrings of resistance to an articulation and embodiment of the self. When I speak of self I am simultaneously speaking body, and vice versa for they cannot be untangled, they are interwoven and I am embodied, always, by this dialogue, as I read, write, think and speak. I have most desired that this text will be in every way a writerly one, in the way Barthes conceived of it. That it is testament to writing that does not instill artificial boundaries, but opens up spaces in the text, that in the reading there is a sense that location there is unbounded, that the narratives that are woven through it do not insist upon a name in order to be, that they are content to be partial, unfinished and located stories.

Rather than method, there is a practice of reading that is woven through the text that is from my embodiment, my location, in the work. It is the immersion of my self as communal compiler in the text to read from that multiple and intertextual
space, so that the reading necessarily draws forth other threads, other weaves, and thus the readings are fluid and multiple. I bring this practice of reading to the images of photographic artist, Cindy Sherman, I locate in my self and body, in that dialogic space and read in that communal compilation these works which span more than thirty years and are woven through with many narratives, with fragments of Sherman, us, ‘woman’, bodies, and language but with no absolutes, no truths, no author, no titles, no depths or essential ‘woman’. The transformation that the reading evokes is both personal and political; actually it is the immersion of these and the embodiment of me in other ways. It is my own transformation, my own journey of self, I am not the same person, I do not have the same relationship to my body, the same sense of who I am and how I can be, as I did at the un-beginning of my journey. And the politics, that cannot, of course, be delineated from the personal for they are me, as well, I live in theory, the theory is embodied in me, as it must be, are the transformation of hegemonic discourse, from its place as truth, as expert knower, as teller of our stories. We take back our stories, we position and tell from our own corporeal and subjective spaces, transforming those in the telling and we take up those spaces on the margin, on the excess of the name, we give rise to our abject self, the other within.

I have struggled to write without naming, but still to show the traces, the threads of my story, and the multiple other stories interwoven through it, and bleeding out from it, immersing with other stories, other selves. The narrative is, thus nonlinear, and if it appears at times chaotically so, this is because I desire for the text to reflect the life that it speaks, not my own in particular, but life generally, that is not lived in linear ways, we do not live as an autobiography would suggest, from one aspect or stage to the next. We live actually in what is more akin to chaotic disorder, and is, as Freeman has said, more circular than linear, where we are continually reflecting and reconfiguring our selves, repeating and returning, but of course the return is altered for each cycle is a transformation. So I do not
apologise if this text seems disordered for i would not want to instigate an absolute order where none does, nor can, exist, except within the artificial binds of the hegemonic name. Rather it is a disjuncture, an interruption of that hegemonic voice as other voices come forth, the corporeal voice, the voice of our abject selves, the excess on the edge of 'woman', all are interwoven through the text and this gives enlivens it in ways that i envision will allow it to reflect life. To read is to bask in the language, to be embodied by it, to have it move you to spaces that may barely be imaginable but are felt, are desired in our bodies. The writerly text can disrupt to the point of boredom for it is a discomfort, it does away with our certainties, our presumptions, our hegemonic and ordered selves, but it also is a jouissance, it has an orgasmic quality, that enlivens, that fulfills in a way that is absolutely and corporeally enriching. i envision for this work that it will inspire others in a way that the 'sublime word work' of hooks, Morrison, Barthes, Butler, and Freeman, to name but a few, has inspired me. Let us all be overwhelmed in jouissance.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

i would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Dr Leigh Coombes, for her support and encouragement at each stage of this journey, and for always encouraging me to believe in myself and the writing.

i would like to thank my children, Gina and Flynn, for putting up with their grumpy mother, especially in the final stages of this undertaking, and for being proud enough of me to tell the story of ‘Mum writing a book’ to their classmates.

i would like to thank my husband, Paul, who became my ex-husband along the way, but more importantly remains my most unwavering friend, who never failed to believe in me, or support me in this journey, financially and otherwise.

Dedication

For my Dad who passed away on this journey, but whom i know would have been proud.

For my Mum who is proud.

For the child who was always a square peg in a round hole, who became the woman who realised that square pegs will never, and should not ever, try to fit into round holes.
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