

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

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

Joanne Stevenson

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 object 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.

List of figures

Figure 1 Rothko, 1960, No. 14	2
Figure 2 Basquiat	110
Figure 3 Michels, 1974	126
Figure 4 Untitled #92, Sherman, 1981	267
Figure 5 Untitled #25, Sherman	275
Figure 6 Untitled #66, Sherman	283
Figure 7 Untitled #168, Sherman, 1987	286
Figure 8 Untitled #31, Sherman.....	292
Figure 9 Untitled #413, Sherman	296
Figure 10 Untitled #53, Sherman, 1980, p. 86.....	299
Figure 11 Untitled #52, Sherman, 1979.....	304
Figure 12 Untitled #65, Sherman, 1980.....	309
Figure 13 Sherman, 1982	315
Figure 14 Untitled #133, Sherman, 1984	317
Figure 15 Sherman, 1983, Untitled #122	320
Figure 16 Sherman, 1985, Untitled #154	321
Figure 17 Untitled #153, Sherman, 1985	322
Figure 18 Sherman.....	323
Figure 19 Untitled #112, Sherman, 1982	324

Figure 20 Sherman, Untitled #.....	332
Figure 21 Untitled #92, Sherman, 1981.....	333
Figure 22 Sherman, 1979, Untitled # 39	336
Figure 23 Sherman, 1977, Untitled #2.....	337
Figure 24 Untitled #96, Sherman, 1981.....	338
Figure 25 Untitled #424, Sherman, 2004	340
Figure 26 Untitled #412, Sherman, 2004.....	341
Figure 27 Untitled #175, Sherman, 1987.....	370
Figure 28 Untitled #264, Sherman, 1992.....	390
Figure 29 Sherman, 2003.....	410

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
Dedication.....	v
List of figures.....	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
IMMERSING PERSONAL AND POLITICAL - LIVING IN THEORY AND EMBODYING LIFE.....	1
Retrospective Writing, the Immersion of 'Beginnings' and 'Endings'.....	1
Seeing from 'I' to 'i'.....	4
Metaphor and Poetry - Embodying Flow.....	4
Sherman, Basquiat, Rothko and More ...Art and Resistance.....	6
Orgasmic Texts, Inserting the Discomforting Body.....	7
We Are Not 'Woman' Alone, Attending to Multiple Names.....	8
Back to the Beginning, Thinking Retrospectively.....	9
Tracing the Sparks of Resistance - Articulating Irritation.....	9
The Land Before Our Time, Thinking that World that We Are Born Into	10
Denying 'Woman' and Sex Re-Education.....	12
Telling Stories, Imagining, and Denouncing the Untrue Self.....	14

Containing the Uncontainable Body	15
Harvesting the Experiential for the Seeds of Resistance	16
Resisting in Bodies and Through Language	18
Ethereal Moments, Harvesting and Bringing Them to Voice	20
Exposing 'Woman' and Finding Calm in Chaos.....	21
A Corporeal Haunting.....	23
Mining the Margin in Metaphor	26
Uncovering Our Subjective Pasts and Moving Forward Remembering.....	28
Healing Wounds, Ashes, Dust and Resurrection	30
Unstable Names, Unfettered Language	31
Alternative Stories, Thinking on the Edge, Thinking Other	33
Awakening in our Bodies	34
Taking Journeys, Finding Selves	35
Thinking Historically - Locating Bodies and Selves	36
The Recalcitrant Body - The Importance of the Corporeal in Negating 'Woman' and Transforming Self	38
Communities that Nurture and Let Us Breathe	40
Metaphors that Breathe Life into Text and Engage Bodies	42
Understanding and Speaking Multiplicity and Complexity	43
Uncontainable Bodies	46

Retrospective Remembering - A Transformed 'Beginning'	47
Moving to the Margin, Denying the Name as Truth.....	49
Psychologies Disappearing Self	50
Glimpsing the Other.....	50
Leaving Home: Taking Up Space on the Periphery.....	52
Envisionings and Finding Voice	53
Giving Flesh to Linguistic Bones and Fleshing Out Words	55
Revolution Pure and Simple.....	57
Writhing Bodies, Taking Courage from Fear.....	59
Opening Up Spaces for Transformation, Writing in Perforations	61
Telling Our Own Stories	62
CHAPTER TWO	65
THEORETICAL IMMERSION.....	65
Learning My Place, Exploring Other Space.....	65
Living in Theory	70
Speaking in Whispers, Many Voices, Holey Texts and Ethical Selves	71
A Spiritual Harvest - Life, Death and Breathing.....	74
Coming Together - Celebrating the Unknowing 'i'.....	76
Transforming Eye's ("i's") and Learning to See.....	77

Punching Holes, Hearing Voices, Changing Coats, Writing and Writhing the Tide of Communal Embodiment.....	79
Telling Stories Differently - Taking Up Radical Narratives and Embracing Chaos and Linguistic Suturing.....	82
Out of the Spotlight and into the Shadows - Relinquishing the Facade of Authority	85
Weaving New Worlds, Compiling New Lives	88
The Author is Dead, Long Live the Reader.....	90
Compiling in Moments, Gathering Momentum.....	90
Thinking in Dialogue.....	92
Viva Revolution.....	92
Personalising Language in Politics.....	93
A Political and Personal Transformation - Saving Lives.....	96
Going With the Flow, Embodying the Motion	96
Becoming a Born-Again Reader.....	106
Embracing Chaos and Finding Calm	108
Changing Lives - Taking No Shit.....	110
Basking in Unoriginality, Relinquishing the Individual	111
Becoming our own Storyteller, Remembering, Creating and Transforming	114
Imagining Bodies Other - Using Metaphor	116
Making Up Stories	118

Becoming a Revolutionary, Living Theory and Reconfiguring Selves.....	120
Blurring the Boundaries, Fictitious and Transgressive Imaginings.....	122
Thinking Positioned, A Politics of the Self and Body.....	128
Learning to See Differently - Unlatching 'I' and Releasing 'i'	129
Reconfiguring Bodies, Healing the Cartesian Split and Letting us Live.....	131
Envisioning, Thinking and Living Politics, Other Bodies and Selves	132
Learning to Speak Again, Bringing in our Corporeal Voice	134
Surface and Depth.....	135
Celebrating Abnormality, Embracing our Abject Self.....	139
Hearing Voices.....	141
Warning Sign: Please STOP at the Surface.....	142
The Case of the Disappearing Sherman and the Disintegrating 'Woman'	144
Space is Political, Learning to Appropriate Space, The Importance of Metaphor and Poetic Speak.....	146
Politics and Space in Art.....	148
Leaving Home	153
Relinquishing the Name, Desiring Uncertainty and Re-Visioning.....	154
Refusing to be Named, Taking up Spaces of Bodily Resistance	155
'Only the Lonely Know Why, i Cry'.....	157
Reconnecting.....	158

Self and Other	160
Believing in the Self, Telling our Own Stories.....	162
Kicking Nostalgia in the Butt, Clearing Away the Dust, and Dreaming Our Way Out of Oppression	163
Opening up Stories to Embody Lives.....	167
Telling Stories that Heal, Taking Care with Words	168
Wasted Opportunities and Human Folly.....	170
The Palimpsest - No Blank Slate	172
CHAPTER THREE	175
RETHINKING BODIES: HARVESTING WORDLESS SOUNDS AND MAKING CORPOREAL NOISE	175
Unwieldy Bodies.....	177
Poststructuralist Feminism, Language and Bodies	178
Languaging Bodies, Saving Lives, and Relinquishing Headaches	179
Back to Theory	183
Picking Up the Pieces of Our Bodies - Disrupting Language and Basking in Life	198
Thinking Bodies and Speaking Other	207
Harvesting the Body in Metaphor.....	215
The Site of a Struggle to Name	219

The Voice of Our Bodies in Art.....	220
Embodying Theory	221
Thinking Outside Binary, Healing Splits, and Retrieving Bodies	222
Embodying Transformation	223
CHAPTER FOUR	227
TROUBLING METHOD	227
Reading in Transformed Spaces.....	228
Practicing Reading from Altered Vantage Points.....	229
Art.....	234
Space	236
Critical Thinking, the Importance of Theory.....	238
Normalising Bodies Through Sex Talk.....	240
Speaking the Body and Embodying Language - A Dialogic Flow	241
Reading and Harvesting Moments.....	244
Disrupting Foundations/Disputing Normality.....	248
Surface/Depth.....	248
Leaving Home	249
Remembering.....	251
Self and Other	251

Particular and Objective.....	253
Experimental Journeys.....	258
The Body and Language	260
Thinking Form.....	261
Finding Sherman and Selecting Images.....	263
Retrospective Reading.....	267
Reading in the Writerly and Transforming Self	268
CHAPTER FIVE.....	271
READING FROM THAT SPACE OF CORPOREAL AND LOCATED ENGAGEMENT	271
Selecting the Images.....	273
Dissolution-ing Bodies.....	274
FILM STILLs	275
Thinking Titles.....	277
Out of the Light and into the Shadows - Finding Comfort in the Dark	278
Fleshing Out The Stranger in the Shadows	280
Celebrating Black, Othering White	287
I Shine a Light But i Can't See You (or me).....	291
Liberating in a Wash of Colour	302
Shedding the Facade, Exposing Bodies and Embracing the Surface	312

DEMI-ISE AND DECLINE SERIES.....	315
A CORPOREAL TURNING, NEGATING THE SAMO AND READING RECONFIGURATION.....	323
The Beginnings of Corporeal Aggression.....	323
Bringing Sherman In: An Other Disruption.....	325
Thinking Multiplicity in Multiple Ways - Metaphor Again!.....	327
Lamenting Gaps and Celebrating Holey Texts	330
DISTURBING THE CENTRE AND SURFACING THE FOLDS: THE CENTREFOLD SERIES.....	331
In Sherman We Refuse Surface Its Depth	334
THE CLOWN SERIES - A PIVOTAL ORIENTATION.....	339
Surface/Depth.....	341
Clowns Speak 'Woman'.....	343
Denying Names - Uncontainable 'Clowns'	346
Troubling in Parody.....	349
Surfacing an Other 'Truth'.....	350
Making Up Our Own Stories, Celebrating the Weave.....	354
'Please Stop!' You Are at the Surface, Learning to Love and Live in Chaos...356	
Engaging Reading.....	358
De-Oscillation and Interruption.....	360

Serious Clowning Around.....	363
Basking in Artificiality, Pre-Emptying 'Aging Woman'	365
Welcome to the Flipside	366
The Disappearing 'Woman'	368
DETERITUS WASTE/ANNIHILATION SERIES	369
The Disintegrating 'Woman'.....	370
Emerging from the Decay and Debris, Stopping the Thoughtless Waste	382
White Trash - Making the Privileged Speak their Legacy	384
PLASTICS AND PROSTHETICS: THE DISAPPEARING BODY OF 'WOMAN' IN THE SEX PICTURE SERIES	389
Plastic and Prosthetics, Still 'Woman'	390
Wrestling Back the Story of Our Bodies, and Melting Plastic	396
Laugh, Look Away, ... but Keep on Thinking: Perplexing Ambiguity	398
Lost Opportunities, Laying to Waste	400
Disposable People and Wasted Lives in Literature and Art, Resurrecting from the Debris	401
Fogging Up our Rose Coloured Lenses: Transgressing through Art	403
Laughing in Spite of Our Selves.....	404
THE AGING 'WOMAN' SERIES	408
The End of the Fairy Story and the Beginning of the Light - Women Coming Out of the Shadows.....	408

Surfacing 'Woman', Making Her Speak in Other Tongues.....	413
Re-Surfacing 'Woman' and Transforming into Woman.....	416
Surfacing and Resignification.....	419
I Am Not Just a 'Woman' ... Now Hear Me Roar	421
Harvesting Our Corporeal Voice.....	424
Wrestling Back and Transforming our Bodies	427
Letting our Corporeal Self Speak, Learning to Hear and Harvest that Voice, Matters of Flesh and Blood.....	429
Blood Letting - Women and Flow.....	434
Learning in our Bodies, Embodying our Writing and Transforming the Self ..	436
Burning and Branding, leaving marks, traces, scalds and reigniting embers...	440
Speaking the Politics of our most Personal Spaces	443
Speaking in Silence.....	449
Unleashing our Corporeal Armour, the Struggle to Resist	453
Wielding our Corporeal Armour to Make us Whole Again.....	457
Meeting the Threat Head On	459
Reading on the Margin and Transforming that Edge.....	462
Destiny Calling ... No One Home	471
Getting Angry and Taking No Shit	476
Seeing the Light.....	481

Imagining and Transforming Reading Sherman	483
CHAPTER SIX.....	489
THINKING IT THROUGH: REFLECTION, RECONFIGURATION, RENEWAL, AND TRANSFORMATION	489
Transformation: Beginning Again and Again, Storying our Lives in Other Ways	489
Smudging Lines and Firing Up Bodies.....	490
Weaving, Othering and Immersing in Text and Bodies	491
Here is My Body, Take It	493
Unwieldy Bodies, Unwieldy Words.....	494
Seeing Beauty in the Shadows, Daring to Speak the Unnamed Self.....	495
Keeping it Open and Letting Us Breathe.....	495
Living in Language, Writing in Life, Breathing Revolution.....	496
Moments to Share, Deepening our Sense of Interconnectedness	499
Telling Other Stories of Our Bodies	502
Embodying the Other, Facing Up to the Stranger Within	504
Finding Our Way Back and Forward in a Ceaseless Dialogue.....	507
Refusing Names and Living Literally.....	507
Harvesting the Wordless Sounds	509
Sounding Off in the Writerly Text.....	512

Bodily Boom and Reverberation.....	514
Unstuffing our Throats.....	518
Bodily Resistances.....	519
Harvesting that Bodily Resistance in the Writerly Text.....	520
Writerly Texts and Writhing Bodies.....	523
Thinking at the Surface of Selves and Bodies and Reconfiguring Subjectivity	524
Subject to the Object.....	525
Horrifying 'Woman' - Sherman's Writerly Text.....	527
Forming the Self in Other Stories.....	528
Teetering in the Writerly.....	529
Getting Caught in the Web.....	535
Unendings and Transformed Beginnings.....	536
Sherman: Working through the Debris, Picking Up the Ruins.....	536
Embodied Resistance, Unanticipated Surging and Writhing in the Writing...	537
Speaking from the Body, A Corporeal Engagement.....	538
Pleasuring Bodies, Enjoying and Joissance in Theory.....	540
Speaking Bodies in Located Spaces, Telling our Own Stories.....	542
Enlivening Bodies, Writhing in Texts.....	544
Gathering Strength.....	548

Spectacular Women	549
Living and Loving the 'things with no names'	550
Scalding and Surturing in Language.....	552
Death of the Author and Birth of the Reader	554
Measuring Lives in Language	554
Saving the Sacrificial Child.....	555
Living in Theory and Embodying Metaphor: Enlivening the Flow of Bodies in the Text	556
REFERENCES	557