

OUT-LAW GENRES AND LITERATURES
OF RESISTANCE: THE QUEER AND FICTOCRITICAL
BODY IN CREATIVE PRACTICE

Either I am writing my body, or my body is writing me. It's not always clear which way around it goes. Every day I sit down at my desk, and my fingers move over the keys, and they produce text. They produce a piece of writing that is both memoir and theory, speaking and spoken, signifier and signified. Flesh made of paper—not the neat stacks you buy in blocks, so white it is blue, edges like blades. Flesh made of paper the way it used to be made: it is clear that this page was once wood. There are remnants, splinters that make my pen jump. The colour is a softened yellow, plied through with light brown. There is a pulpy smell; organic and full of mountain air, like I am breathing mist, like the words written here are cooling my lungs, then warming to match the temperature of blood, of me. Its edges invite my touch. Its edges are soft, torn things that flake away as I write. Flesh made of paper, paper made of wood; I am interleaved and dreaming of dirt and green things and blood.

When I interleave genres, and write this body mixed with memoir mixed with theory my work is called fictocritical, but I like a term coined by Caren Kaplan: 'out-law genre'. Out-law because Derrida and Ronell write that when we invoke the word 'genre' we invoke the Law. There can be no speaking about what's in, without defining what's out (56). Kaplan writes that "the struggle in writing remains to be read" and that "staying alive... fuels the narrative engines of out-law genres" (213). This fictocritical body is already an out-law (genre be damned): it insists on being written, on writing, on leaving more than traces on a page. To write fictocritically is to sing, to speak to theory and hear its echoes, is to push myself in to a narrowing place and require an opening out. To write fictocritically is to resist the Law that says write this here, now, like this, and speak this way here, now, like that. To write fictocritically is to produce a literature of resistance—a text that speaks to theory, a text that shudders when theory speaks back.

"Let a body finally venture out of its shelter, expose itself in meaning beneath a veil of words. WORD FLESH. From one to the other, eternally, fragmented visions, metaphors of the invisible" (Kristeva & Goldhammer 133). From one to the other, this body shimmers in and out of invisibility. Veil of words? Words unhide me. Each time I sit, and feel this chair beneath my thighs, and move my fingers across this keyboard, I am made visible. Text illuminates. It remembers and scrivens. It sees. I am making word flesh (this is not a metaphor). I am taking this queer body that has birthed two babies, drunk ink like it's milk, fucked outrageously in the dawn, drawn scalpels and needles to its arms and wrists, and standing it, unapologetically, on

this page. It is impossible to be not visible here, and I relish the light. There is no passing. You can't pretend you haven't seen.

If I tell you about my body, do you think I am telling you about me? Because to tell you the story of my skin and bones, gristling joints, grey matter, milk and saliva and tears, is to tell you a story about me. If I lay this map out before you, you will learn more than you want to (I will learn more than I want to). This body is a place as much constructed by what it is not as by what it is.

I have always said too much, been charged with the crime of over-disclosure, as if this was the worst thing I could do: speak. "Every woman has known the torture of beginning to speak aloud, heart beating as if to break, occasionally falling into loss of language, ground and language slipping out from under her, because for woman speaking—even just opening her mouth—in public is something rash, a transgression" (Cixous and Clement 92). It feels as if I have always transgressed. Yes my heart beats rabbit-like against the cage of my chest and my pulse surges when I open my mouth to speak. The cavern of my mouth instantly dries as it opens to tell you the story of a body torn and remade, of a body that is every day new. And after I have spoken anxiety runs ravaging through all of me, to tingle and throb in extremities, the fear even worse once text and speech have left me. Do I dare? I do. I was born with the urge to speak. It is the thing that leaves me feeling like a puppy dog, a fool, red hot-faced and a deep wish to draw the words back in, apologies stumbling around for hours after I have transgressed. Still, I continue to speak.

When Hélène Cixous, Keith Cohen, and Paula Cohen told me to "write your self. Your body must be heard" (880), the only thing I could do was answer. The only thing I could do was to take this queer body and inscribe it with text; to make new lines, to create a different space. This body that is not me and is always me is producing these words. My fingers and hands type this, now. This morning they placed a row of sticky tape along the edge of the yellow kitchen table so my son could turn a paper cup into a trailer. This morning they held my breast in place so my other child could drink. They took soap and washed my knees, bruised from trying to get a shopping trolley up a gutter. They warmed a gob of white wax and pushed it through my spiking hair. They got me ready to sit, to write. This body, writing body, will move through discomfort, hold down a tremor, take up its pen, and begin.

Of course there are structures suggested by a story like this. We'd all feel more comfortable if I started small, described amniotic fluid and translucent skin, a tracery of veins, eyelids that stutter with dreaming. A birth-to-now timeline makes sense, but I am tired at the thought of linearity. I am tempted too, to start with Lacan and Freud, with Foucault. Would you feel safe if I started with polymorphous perversity, then described the mirror stage, then moved to subjectivity and the Other? All of the ways in which what I am not, speak to that which I am? Bracketed space, the I and the not-I, the body as vessel, as cup. Be brave. Let's follow the lines on my palms (I'll tell no fortunes this day). Let's unravel this net of veins and lay them over these pages. Where blood runs and seeps, let's see where it pools. And if those pools dry,

and leave suggestions of images, I will take out my pen and run black ink around their edges. What I will look for, what you may find, is that the picture is what I've left out, the part that is uncontained by my lines.

The place I want to start at is always-already the place where I begin. In the beginning my body did not matter; that things could be inserted into it did. That there were spaces, places to fit other things; that was key. I was not my body, but my body was everything. Was my body uninhabitable? Yes. Abject in the extreme? Yes. And when it was not abject enough, others made it so. "In the beginning, there is an end. Don't be afraid: it's your death that is dying. Then: all the beginnings" (Cixous 41). If you are guessing at a doubled reading, you are right. I am speaking about a time before language, a rounded baby body that knew about breast milk and screaming in the night, its mother's hands, the feel of a crocheted blanket, the smell of patchouli leading it, spiralling, to the woman who would sustain it. There is another place though, that this body reminds me of, almost daily. Haunted, it remembers everything I attempt to forget. The only thing it can do is ask me, repetitively, to tell you this: or.

All the beginnings. I am remembering the man who wanted to stick needles through my flesh. He came to see me in the dungeon where I worked and asked to see my thighs, the medical room, and the still meaty tops of my arms. He talked about gauges, and drawing blood from the crooks of my arms, then injecting it back in to a place of his choosing. Of course he was going to pay, and so I agreed. I agreed. There was a large amount of money involved, enough to numb me for days. I imagined it would hurt, but I knew I could shoot dreaming stillness and chemical sting into submarining veins and then the things he did would be gone.

He never returned, but of all the work I did in that three-storey Glebe house with its rooms never punctured by sun, I am haunted by this the most. Needles I was familiar with. It was the blood. Him wanting to take it from me, and then put it back into places where it did not belong. I'm guessing it would have produced something like a bruise. A marker of where he had been. "Writers end up writing about their obsessions. Things that hurt them; things that they can't forget; stories they carry in their bodies waiting to be released" (Goldberg 49). Each time I bruise, there's a flicker of remembrance. Body tells mind what could have been. A telegraphing, a seeing backwards. Do you see what could have happened? What might have been done to me? This is a story I can't forget, a story that I tell, and tell again. And the core of it is this: not that he wanted to take my blood, but that I would have allowed him. That I said yes.

When I write, there is always-already a tracery of this moment. When I write, what I create will say this: I died and then lived. I would have sold my own blood. I walked through dungeons and was schooled in shadow selves and dark halves, the ways in which pain draws us to the light. I swooned in a chemical dream and nearly did not return. The text I produce is a rich, dark thing, but in it you will find points of light. My intention is not to depress, but to unhide, to stand in the bright day, and speak. I will be brave now and say this: I am not over-disclosing. I am never over-disclosing. I move my dry tongue, my adrenalin laced hands, and I write. I write in spite of my wavering fear and the Law that says *Silence, hide*. This is the only thing I can do.

I write to leave myself here on this yellowing page. “[T]here are ways in which the sexuality and corporeality of the subject leave their traces or marks on the texts produced, just as we in turn must recognise that the processes of textual production also leave their trace or residue on the body of the writer (and readers)” (Grosz 18). Subject and writer both, and reader too, I am almost all residue. You may not believe this, but I am almost all you. Sexuality and corporeality both (because can there be one without the other?) are the shadows beneath my words, left there by the ways I have moved through dungeons and other people’s sheets. And when I write this, when I speak, this text here, now, imprints upon me.

You will find a tracery on the inside of my upper arms, and between my legs where the tops of my thighs meet: narrative seeks out the places on my body that are unnamed. Without titles, those places can do more than speak. They are not just imprinted. WORD FLESH, this body shouts.

I have a tendency to celebrate the abject—I have always been drawn to its bruised and stinking heart—but there is thinking and speaking and producing narratives steeped in abjection, and then there is living it. I woke up most mornings with yellow flesh and a craving for mandarins and heroin. I did not wash. I forgot about toothbrushes, flannels, warm water, and soap: there is something to be said for being clean.

The project I undertake is this: to unhide the language that will allow us to not just describe the abject, but to tell it, as it takes hold of each of our bodies, as it pushes from an opening cervix, a crease, all stain and fluid and smell like rotting breath and blood and bone, like earth. Oh I know I should be far more careful. I am associating Woman with the Natural, which means base nature, and no brain, and “gut-being, a primitive body” (Cixous and Clement 109). First over-disclosure, and now essentialism, except it’s not. Argue with me and I will say this: I do not write about every body. This is my body, written, not every woman’s or every queer’s, or every mother’s: one body, attempting to answer Cixous, to speak.

Why do I insist on writing bodies, on writing this body? Because “I don’t write. Life becomes text starting out from my body. I am already text. I am already text” (Cixous 52). Because “woman must write her body, must make up the unimpeded tongue that bursts partitions, classes and rhetorics, orders and codes, must inundate, run through, go beyond the discourse with its last reserves, including the one of laughing off the word ‘silence’ that has to be said, the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops dead before the word ‘impossible’ and writes it as ‘end’” (Cixous and Clement 95). When I stop dead before the word impossible, I speak. I refuse the impossibility of laying myself out before you, of echoing onto this page. This is not essentialism. I am already text. This is one body before you, chimeric, moving out of invisibility and into a smarting white light. This is one body disordered before narrative and language organises, bringing subjectivity and truth. Not the truth of this-really-happened, but the truth of a story, of all of the ways we read and write and say yes, this, this is true. Resonate. Stand between mirrors, vibrate as if all you are is the skin of a drum, smell salt and air and wood, feel how you are more than what I see. Echo. Vibration. Flesh, organs, bone. Story. This.

Woman must write her body, but so must queer, and not-white, and differently-abled, and all of us who find ourselves waking one indistinct morning into madness that has crept upon us in the night; that has laid itself down underneath layers of viscera so surely that it is indistinguishable from the sanity of the cool evening before. These are the partitions we shall wreck, the codes we will break. Because always the Law of *Do Not Speak*. I was born with the urge to speak. Text bursting, baby limbs pushing at pages, three generations of writers settled under my skin. I am afraid of words like destiny, kismet, meant to be, but when I stand before you, and the text on this page reflects the sound of my voice, I am all-of-a-sudden in a hall of mirrors and the image is infinite, and this moment is exactly where I have always been.

This is where I have always been: the carnival on Manly pier. Having caught the ferry, and not been sick on that choppy water that throws the boat as we pass The Heads. Going into the mirror maze with my sister but losing her. Finding myself here: between mirrors, reflecting, the sound of my sister calling my name. Flaking blue paint on mirror frames. Silver backed glass. The sound of salt water beneath my feet—I can see waves through the cracks in the boards—and the smell of popcorn and talcum powder, residue from my grandmother's kiss, on my cheek. Between mirrors, reflecting, I see myself, and speak.

I see you. You are here. You see me. I am there.

Eventually I will turn, find my sister, take her hand, and find our way through the maze. At the end a large hand with a smattering of hair will pin a cheap medal to our chests. A reward for having been lost and then having been found; for pushing our way through the last hidden door. We will go home. Later the silver backed glass will reflect some other girl with too much flesh, who will not be struck mute by echoes or the sound of salt water beneath her sandaled feet, who will be reflected infinitely, and find her voice too, and whisper *I See. You.*

If I tell you the story of my body, these are some of the things you will learn. If I tell you the story of my body, I am telling you everything. I am not just skin (I am more than the container, the keeper-in). I am telling you everything. I am reminded that I will need to be brave—it is always harder to open than to close. That writing this story is like standing on an edge, feet apart, facing a strong and hot wind. Stop here; stop now, if there are things you would rather not know. The whole of this work is indelicate, is abject and steeped with wonder, is real but not true, true but not real. This is what it is not: a survival story, a car crash at which you can't not stare, a narrative of redemption, a neat end. "There is plenty of space. Thousands and thousands of words are available here. We can bend them to fit the shapes of our bodies and our stories, to encourage new kinds of questions and different kinds of answers" (Bartlett 96). Thousands of words in waiting, that dance a strange kind of joy as they hit the page, as they are allowed to describe the abject, to feel the horror they held caressed, to be seen, reflected, allowed out of their hall of mirrors. Thousands of words that make new tracks (that should be old tracks). Why has it taken me this long to speak? Because I could never have always-already been here without this body, lived.

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