Teaching and Learning Like a Feminist
Storying Our Experiences in Higher Education
Elizabeth Mackinlay
The University of Queensland, Australia

Teaching and Learning Like a Feminist is a conversation between academics in Women’s Studies and Gender Studies about the politics of pedagogy in higher education. What does it mean to embody feminism in universities today? Written in a creative narrative style, Mackinlay explores the discursive, material and affective dimensions of what it might mean to live the personal-as-political-as-performative in our work as teachers and learners in the contemporary climate of neo-liberal universities. This book is both theory and story and aims to bring feminist theorists such as Virginia Woolf, Hélène Cixous, Sara Ahmed and bell hooks together in conversation with Mackinlay’s own experiences, and those of women she interviewed, in their diverse roles as ‘feminist-academic-subjects’. The fluid writing style presented is a deliberate attempt to enact a ‘post-academic’ form of literature and is playfully punctuated by black and white drawings. Teaching and Learning Like a Feminist captures the precarious position of Women and Gender Studies in universities today, as well as the ‘danger’ inherent in grounding teaching and learning work in feminist politics. Mackinlay wraps herself in both and invites us to do the same. This book is designed to stimulate reflection and lively class discussion and is appropriate for courses in curriculum studies and pedagogy, education, feminism and feminist theory, gender and women’s studies, and narrative inquiry. It can also be read by individual teachers and researchers interested in feminism.

“Mackinlay re-envisages how feminist knowledge can be articulated through her audacious and engaging mix of reflection, analysis, narrative, poetry, and line drawings. This is a refreshingly personal and powerfully collective analysis of doing feminism in hostile institutions. It will give heart to many.” – Alison Bartlett, The University of Western Australia, Perth

“This highly readable book is a love story about feminism at the same time as a rigorous investigation … a must read for undergraduate students and for scholars-who-don’t-identify-as-feminist, core reading for gender courses at all levels, and mandatory reading for feminist and gender academics.” – Julie White, Victoria University

Elizabeth Mackinlay is an Associate Professor in the School of Education at the University of Queensland.
Teaching Gender

Volume 7

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Teaching and Learning Like a Feminist

*Storying Our Experiences in Higher Education*

Elizabeth Mackinlay

*The University of Queensland, Australia*
ADVANCE PRAISE FOR
TEACHING AND LEARNING LIKE A FEMINIST

“As feminist issues fill social media and yet disappear from university curricula, this is a timely volume and an inspiring companion for any feminist scholar or teacher. Drawing on a wealth of feminist thinkers, Mackinlay documents the intimate realities of contemporary university life for feminists while creatively resisting the coercive forces to serve the Masters of the Academy. Always attentive to positionality and the embodied occupation of space, Mackinlay re-envisages how feminist knowledge can be articulated through her audacious and engaging mix of reflection, analysis, narrative, poetry, and line drawings. Her politics are playful and polemical, sobering and scintillating as she traces heartlines of writing, teaching and learning as a feminist in today’s academy. This is a refreshingly personal and powerfully collective analysis of doing feminism in hostile institutions. It will give heart to many.”

– Alison Bartlett, Associate Professor, Gender Studies, The University of Western Australia, Perth

“Searching for a way out of the ivory tower isolation, Elizabeth Mackinlay weaves a compelling narrative about the women academics from the global south, who teach and learn within the threatened field of Women’s and Gender Studies. The use of theory and key historical texts is exemplary and breathes new life into feminism by showing, rather than just telling, how they remain relevant today. In addition to the essay form, this text employs creative analytic practices with drawings, dramatic play scenes, email conversations and poetry. Elizabeth Mackinlay succeeds in being whimsical and highly engaging, yet she shocks the reader into realising the significance of the ‘f’ word, in these times, in our universities. The story told here is neither fiction nor fact, but draws from both. As such it makes a vital connection between the academy, theory and the lived experience of the women who teach and learn within it.

This highly readable book is a love story about feminism at the same time as a rigorous investigation. The author reveals the personal—how the author’s Indigenous family keeps her honest—while simultaneously scrutinising issues of pedagogy, power and politics of the modernised and managed university. She draws on contemporary methodology including
ethnography, Indigenous ways of knowing, narrative, autoethnography and creative analytical practices. Elizabeth Mackinlay is quite a storyteller and what a delight it is to find such a strong text focused in the global south! This book is a must read for undergraduate students and for scholars-who-don’t-identify-as-feminist. As a theorised and comprehensive text, it is core reading for gender courses at all levels. For feminist and gender academics this reflexive, contemporary and seriously scholarly book is mandatory reading.”
– Julie White, Senior Research Fellow, The Victoria Institute, Victoria University

“This is a magical, playful and yet deeply serious book which resists summarisation. It is a work of careful scholarship but each chapter displays a resolutely disobedient desire to journey into ‘the borderlands of danger’ by following the example of writers such as Helene Cixous, bell hooks and Virginia Woolf. The book dispenses with the conventions of academic discourse and linear argument to reveal the way language, relationships, bodies, buildings, stories, encounters and emotions come together to produce the contradictory and messy experience of being a feminist teacher in the contemporary neo-liberal university. Mackinlay elegantly combines personal narrative, research findings, poetry, retold fairy tales, drawings, theoretical exploration and excerpts from ‘real and imagined’ conversations with colleagues, friends, mentors and students in a passionate, provocative and yet consistently reflective defence of feminist pedagogy and praxis. While she celebrates classrooms as ‘locations of possibility’ where feminism can be brought into being, she is acutely aware of the uncertainty and risks of claiming the label feminist within spaces marked by what Aileen Moreton-Robinson calls the logic of white patriarchal sovereignty. Mackinlay places race, coloniality and the Australian experience at the centre of her narrative in a way that complicates any vision of feminist purity. As a teacher who is deeply involved in Indigenous performance and who has close personal and familial ties with an Indigenous community, she examines the power and privilege attached to her whiteness. In her focus on embodied experiences and sensations, both inside and outside the classroom, Mackinlay brings together an awareness of the entanglements of the present with hope for the future.”
– Helen Keane, Associate Professor, School of Sociology, College of Arts and Social Sciences, Australian National University
For

Daphne, Doris, Hilda and Dolly
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword xiii  
*Pam Burnard* xvii

Chapter 1: Writing, Teaching and Learning Like a Feminist 1  
- The Breath: Giving This Book Life 2  
- The Movement: Permissions for Writing Wom*n in Stuck Places  
  after Woolf, *V. Professions for Wom*n* 7  
- The Skin: A Note on Writing 12  
- The Body: A Note on Drawing 20  
- The Bones: Framing This Work 22

Chapter 2: Not Afraid of the ‘F’ Word: Positioning Ourselves as Women’s and Gender Studies Academics 27  
- Opening 27  
- Scene 1 Do Universities Still Need Women’s and Gender Studies? 31  
- Scene 2 A ‘Feminesto’ about Higher Education 35  
- Scene 3 Ourselves as Feminist Academics 38  
- Closing 46

- Opening 51  
- The Historical Body of Feminist Pedagogy: Following a Woman in Danger 54  
- In the Fullness and Process of Feminist Pedagogy: A Collective and Dangerous Body of Central Tenets 61  
- Closing 66

Chapter 4: Rooms of Our Own: Feminist Pedagogy inside the Classroom 73  
- Opening 73  
- Room One 85  
- Room Two 87
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5: Living Feminist Pedagogy Outside the Classroom: Untimely Fragments</th>
<th>103</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6: Are You a Feminist? Stories Undergraduate Students Tell about Teaching and Learning Writing with Sia Carlyon and Nicole Maree</th>
<th>127</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Story Begins</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prelude</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 1</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interlude</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 2</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene 3</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 7: Living Our Pedagogic Response-Abilities in Women’s and Gender Studies</th>
<th>153</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talking and Living the Orange</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Materiality of Response-Ability in Feminist Pedagogy: Why It Matters to Me</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 8: A Diffractive Narrative: Feminist Pedagogy and a Refusal of Reflexivity towards Decoloniality</th>
<th>171</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diffraction and Decoloniality: Disobediently Living and Being beyond the Same</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Little Difference: A Teaching and Learning Story That Relies on Paint</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 9: Daring to Lead with Feminism in Higher Education: Let It Blaze, Let It Blaze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing with Briony Lipton</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daring to Walk through with Virginia Woolf</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invading and Creating Feminist Spaces: Power, Politics and Perspectives</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodying the Past, Future and Present Moment as Feminist Academics</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist Leaders as and through Feminist Pedagogy</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences of the Compromise within the Compromise for Feminist Academics</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 10: (Not) Concluding Teaching and Learning Like a Feminist</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opening</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Closing</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Author</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As an academic, I have always found writing for the academy to be a brutal challenge. The challenge, as artist, teacher, researcher and academic, is reconciling slippery concepts of identity and culture which are multiple. It is also a challenge to voice one’s selves within diverse writing traditions, of addressing the restlessness we experience when we try to identify with, imitate or be-just-like another. The problem in academia is that building confidence to find or develop your voice is very subtle and in turn can be brutal. You can very quickly feel like you are an alien from another planet. It is not easy to feel as if one belongs in academia or to understand how one got there. The subtle, low key (they think) aggressions one feels as a women working in academia, has not (yet anyway) given me an impenetrable thick skin to the back handed, off the cuff comments that I get as an ‘antipodeon’ working in the northern hemisphere. So, what do I say to the beautifully crafted writing-teaching-learning continuum that Liz performs so uniquely in this timely and meaningful contribution to higher education feminist practice is AMEN! This book is a life changer! Liz inspires a new feminism in higher education, a new feminist pedagogy inside and outside the classroom and a new generation of women academics informed by new discourses for healing wounds, an affirming sanity and a renewed determination to do more than just effectively and joyfully persevere. In the company of a collective of feminist writers, Liz challenges the dominant model that higher education espouses as a justification for continuing public funding.

Describing herself as a “white-settler-colonial-cis-gendered woman” (Chapter 1), Liz reveals herself, her investment, her uniquely incisive creative self to perform writing through poignantly poetic and visual forms of expression. She offers us a wealth of insights into ways of changing how we see ourselves; changing how we address each other’s writing; changing how we understand Women’s and Gender Studies; changing us to take courage and challenge ‘the professor-ing and production of academia’ (Chapter 1); to keep questioning how we understand ourselves and others; and to remain critical about the assumptions we hold about both. It is not simply in the process of writing that a proactive new ethic for academics is argued: it is in the performance of writing where Liz uniquely builds on the shoulders of the greats—such as Hélène Cixous, bell hooks, Virginia Woolf, Maxine Greene and Sara Ahmed—in new transformative ways at the interface of Feminist
and decolonial positions, and Women’s and Gender Studies. The process of writing starts and ends through the writing-teaching-and-learning-as-feminist stance. It is where writing turns into teaching with a ‘lived-throughness’ to learning; and then we experience thinking-as-writing, teaching-as-learning, where Liz performs in her writing and offers an epistemology of feminist practice which creates and performs knowledge-as-text. Uniquely, Liz shows us how to subvert, rethink and reject normative, narrow, dull, limiting academic ways of writing by insisting that she and the profession interrogate concepts such as ‘the “f” word’ (Chapter 1) positioning ourselves as Women’s and Gender Studies academics’ body; thus revealing ‘the classroom, with all its limitations, remains a location of possibility for teaching and learning like a feminist and making space for others in higher education to continue to do the same’ (Chapter 2).

Liz offers a ground-breaking reflexive ethnographic lived-through account of her experience of being and surviving academia ‘as a Gender Studies academic’ (Chapter 3). She helps us to reflect on our own and her ‘vulnerability, excitement and empowerment in education as pathways that enable transgression and new visions for education as the practice of freedom’ (Chapter 3). In this way, she precious shares with us how we need to mutually recognise each other, to think in new ways about what constitutes knowledge and, therefore, about the aims of education for and by both women and men; and position ourselves in our writing, teaching and learning, thinking and doing, without feeling silenced by others.

Her writing is simply stunning. Stunning to read. Stunning to view as a picture gallery in ways which see her performing herself. The chapters in this volume repeatedly show that ‘for many of us teaching and learning in this space is our pedagogical practice remains on the one hand unarticulated, and on the other, completely entangled with our philosophical, political and personal convictions and commitments’ (Chapter 3). Her ‘versioning’ of feminist pedagogy, is performed as a set of knowledges and experiences which is enacted and enabled by sitting on ‘borderlands of danger’ (Chapter 3). It involves us in interpreting how being professional bridges both practice and research and aligns with classroom enactments of emancipation agendas in practice. The messages inspire us to take risks, to embrace change and engage the imagination at the heart of our work. Following this comes the possibility of acting on common values and understandings, uncertain as they are. The development and representation of gender inspires us with optimism in our belief that it is worth struggling for justice, uncertain knowledge and how to get it.
From chapter to chapter Liz is able to put together and share the living enquiry which is her life. We see and read her processes of knowing and making sense an inclusive and creative teacher who offers and shares opportunities; she invites imaginative and responsive forms and practices of performativity. She tells her own story, intermingled with conversations with others which link empowerment to voices of the past and present. She offers a collective interpretation and a personal one. She brings together the personal and the collective, through her journals, where ‘life is lived in multiple registers’ (Chapter 5). Key questions of possibility, performativity, power and privilege are raised and we are invited, gently but persistently, to take up a position, to ‘live our pedagogic response-abilities’ (Chapter 7) in ways that she has learned and developed from Women’s and Gender Studies. She keenly explores Hélène Cixous’ invitation to investigate positionality ethically, critically and reflexively. She draws on the perceptions of teachers themselves about their current relationships to power, in order to investigate the possibility of their moving into new relationships.

Following ‘closely to stories’ (Chapter 8) of undergraduate students tellings about teaching and learning, we are invited into a personal and collective narrative framing that gives voice to her own realities that ‘inhabit us and we inhabit’ (Chapter 8). Here Liz draws closely on her own experiences, work and relationships with Indigenous Australian peoples. She asks, ‘what is decoloniality in my feminist classroom, why do I want to do it, and am I really doing it?’ (Chapter 8). It is clear that much of this constant questioning, of the viability of theories, is seeking dialogue with other transformative positions, and asking whether or not, that community has a voice. In this book the performance of writing is underpinned by performativity, embodiment and reflexivity in terms which inspire ‘my/our/your feminist pedagogy’ (Chapter 8). Her analysis of, and vision of the possibility for, the enactment of feminism in the academy and the shifts in institutional values required in the commitment to feminist pedagogy breaks new ground. Is it possible to find equitable practices within universities? Can we identify these practices? We will need to take an explicit stance to embody the past, future and present moment as feminist academics; to take risks; to embrace change; and to encourage creative pedagogies that inspire and engage the imagination. She invites us to promote writing, teaching and learning that respond to difference and have inclusion at their very core.

This is a groundbreaking book. It is a passionate book. It offers a new and powerful contemporary framework for linking personal and collective experiences. It is infused by a poetic and narrative flow of ideas whose
fluidity in identity is experienced on every page, with every turn voicing the performance of writing. This book provides a source of inspiration and ideas for all those who work in higher education, but also for researchers and senior managers, policy makers, teachers and learners in the academy and beyond. This gracefully written and deeply personal volume will change the way you see yourself and others; it will offer you new ways of seeing and thinking, knowing and practicing collegiality, and a renewed commitment to feminist pedagogy.

Pam Burnard
Professor of Arts, Creativities and Education
University of Cambridge
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‘Because thanks to love we can do anything’, writes Cixous (1990, p. 109), and love for and from so many sits behind, around and through each and every letter, word, paragraph, section and chapter that has become this text. This book was written while sitting on the lands of the Jagera and Turrbal first nations peoples of Brisbane with the love of my Yanyuwa family sitting close by and I pay my respects to both. To Jemima a-Wuwarlu Miller, Dinah a-Marrngawi Norman, Mudinji Isaac, Eileen a-Manankurrmara McDinny and Mudinji Noble, this book has only been possible because of your patience, generosity, love and wisdom—because you have shared with me a sisterhood beyond.

I simply do not know how to thank the circles of beautiful women inside and outside the university who have stood beside me in sisterly solidarity. It is such a privilege to call Briony Lipton, Sia Carlyon, Nicole Maree, Sue Monk, Pam Burnard, Morwenna Griffiths, Karen Upton-Davis, Alison Bartleet, Carole Ferrier, Helen Keane, Julie White and Patricia Leavy, my feminist friends. The personal-political-pedagogical conversations we have shared have inspired me to be brave, critical, messy, entangled and creative all at once for ‘in one another we will never be lacking’ (Cixous, 1976, p. 893). A forever thank you to Merle Thornton for bravely speaking feminist from the very beginning and inspiring me to never ever surrender, to never ever give up.

To those of you in higher education who so generously shared your feminist teaching and learning stories as Women’s and Gender Studies academics, and whose words and worlds appears here, this book is for you. To my sisters in union Barbara Williams, Carolyn Cope, Jeannie Rea and Terri MacDonald, thank you for reminding me how important it is to speak, listen and act feminist as women for women.

Thank you to Claire Backhouse, Janine Roberts, Jane Fisher and Erica King from the bottom of my heart for running this writing journey into danger with me.

To David, Ailie, and Cate in the Experimental Creative Academic Writing Group and Sandra, Ailie, Dewi, Mufli and Fabi in ‘The Laughing Medusa’s’, thank you for the collective community and critical engagement you have provided in equal measure, and for always being happy to hear and say the ‘f’ words. Thank you Martin and Bob, the pro-feminist men in my life at work
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who have steadfastly shouted their encouragement and the ‘f’ word from the
sidelines. Versions of three chapters included in this book have appeared in
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book Arts-based learning with First Nation’s peoples. I am grateful to the
editors of these publications for giving my work its first outing, and allowing
me to expand and adapt my earlier thinking-writing-feeling here.

To Shalen Lowell, Jolanda Karada and all of the behind the scenes team at
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had a story to tell and making it possible for me to tell it is in this particular
way.

Thank you to Lyn, Keith, Sally and the Crossy 5, and Natalie for
wrapping the worded world which is this book tightly in the kind of
uncompromising love that is our family. To the three beautiful men in
my life—Hamish, Macsen and Gordon—thanks for being the best cheer
squad I could hope for, you are so much more than you know. This book is
our equivalent of Friday night footy, the only difference is that this time
the ‘girl’ is back and she’s writing into danger.
A feminist feeling
is riding on the bus
this morning
A woman on fire
because she sits
beside, alongside, inside
her fierce intellect
accompanies my mind
and holds my hand tight
for together we take on
the academy
her fiery wit
and love of life
turn flames into
words, wisdom and
what, where and why
A finer companion
I could not want
In one hour I will meet them, the new students who have enrolled in our introductory Women’s and Gender Studies course at my university. I have been awake half the night hunched over my laptop trying to get my lecture just right, knowing how important it is to make a good initial impression with first year undergraduate students. I flip through my lecture notes and can’t explain why but I am terrified. How will students respond to this course? Have I framed Women’s and Gender Studies as a most necessary way of knowing, being and doing in the world? Am I being too theoretical or not intellectual enough, and how sound is my disciplinary knowledge in relation to theory, history and philosophy anyway? Is striving for gender justice important to them and have I the right kind of pedagogical tools within my reach to convince them it is? Are my definitions of sex and gender too simple? Are they accessible while at the same time giving an understanding of why these two words still matter? Will I stammer over words and phrases as I stumble for clarity and conviction in my place as a feminist educator? I stare down at my coral pink dress and wonder; do I look feminist enough to be teaching this course? And what does teaching and learning like a feminist mean anyway?

And there it is, the ‘f’ word. A word which takes centre stage in the discipline of Women’s and Gender Studies and is totally guaranteed to get tongues talking, tempers flaring and tears falling amongst teachers and learners alike. But no matter how hard I try, it’s impossible to separate myself from it—feminism and I are in this teaching and learning about Women’s and Gender Studies busy-ness together, through thick and thin, riding the waves backwards and forwards, come what may. Feminist teaching and learning, I decide in that moment of waiting, should be exhilarating, unpredictable, and passion-full. The ‘f’ word cannot help itself—it is a particular combination of eight small letters full to overflowing with multiple personal-is-political-is-pedagogical positions and performativities, histories and contemporary realities, entanglements and enigmas. It cannot stand still and over and over I find myself flying high in the freedom of this forever movement.

My flight of fancy soon turns to free-fall as gusts of wind remind me that feminism in and of itself holds no claims to innocence. It has a particular kind of historical reputation and contemporary habit of excluding those who are not white, middle-class, educated, cis-gendered, able-bodied and/or heterosexual from its dialogic doors. Feminism might like to think itself a disobedient daughter but its perceived inability to move with the times
and embrace the grrl power of the 1990s works against it. The backlash of neo-liberalism cruelly tightens the belt around the waist of dress, pinching and squeezing so that it soon becomes impossible to breathe. It threatens to yank and drag this particular combination of heart, mind and body down into a place where being feminist no longer seems like a rational thing in the academy and higher education. My flesh and bones crush together, warning me to be careful, go quietly, and remember to fly low under the intellectual radar just in case—you never know who might be sitting in the back row of the lecture theatre, watching and waiting for the right moment to pounce.

The epistemological, ontological and material danger of being a feminist in higher education hangs ominously in the air, a constant hum, low and foreboding. Staying alert and awake, all the while muffling and muzzling our voices as feminists, is a lonely and exhausting place to be. The kind of self-surveillance necessary is a day-in-day-out non-stop process of assessing the safety of the spaces, situations and scenarios we find ourselves in.

The title of this book, *Teaching and learning like a feminist* draws inspiration from Sara Ahmed’s forthcoming publication *Living a feminist life*. In this work, Ahmed (2015) explores what it might mean to ‘live your life claiming that word as your own: being a feminist, becoming a feminist, speaking as a feminist’ (2015). *Teaching and learning like a feminist* extends Ahmed’s thinking to the context of Women’s and Gender Studies and higher education. For those of us in Women’s and Gender Studies, the feminist identity stakes seem particularly high—and the accusations of being ‘unfeminist’, ‘not feminist enough’ or a ‘bad feminist’ come just as fast, thick and painfully from within as they do from outside. There is an unsaid expectation that being a Women’s and Gender Studies academic means that you will necessarily speak, teach and learn *like a feminist*. Feminist theory, feminist philosophy, feminist politics, and feminist waves will flow from your lips in a language that is familiar, expected and called for by other feminist academics in Women’s and Gender Studies. But I sense that most of us in the disciplinary ‘demandness’ of Women’s and Gender Studies would insist that living, teaching and learning like a feminist is not a one-size-fits-all performance where an agreed upon set of ideals, practices and ways of thinking must be enacted at all times and at all costs. Borrowing Ahmed’s line of thinking, living, teaching and learning a feminist life in Women’s and Gender Studies is instead a series of questions about ‘what it is we are against, what it is we are for’ and ‘what, how and why are we working toward’ in the performance of knowledge in tertiary classrooms. I cannot promise that I will cite all of the salient words and worlds of feminist thinkers and
scholars that have and continue to speak and write about feminist pedagogy in higher education, merely those whose words and worlds speak to, write and touch me. Such words and worlds, as Ellsworth (2005, p. 27) suggests, might be described as ‘sensational’ because they encourage me to ask what feminist ‘pedagogy does rather than what it means or how it means’ through the materiality of my/our bodies.

When I began the work for this book, I was searching for women who identified themselves as feminist academics in some way, who saw themselves as centrally involved with teaching and learning Women’s and Gender Studies, and could speak into the pedagogical silence that exists in our work as feminist academics in Women’s and Gender Studies. While Women’s and Gender Studies academics write often about the historical, political and philosophical underpinnings of our discipline, the teaching and learning positions we enact are not as regularly shared. I was searching for a way out of the isolation that the ivory tower can bring to women like me and went looking for women who saw, felt, heard, and experienced the same kinds of confusions, dangers, and rewards that voicing the ‘f’ word in higher education had brought me. I was searching for women who saw themselves teaching and learning ‘like feminists’ and hoped that together we might come close to understanding the performative, political and pedagogical dimensions of our shared and lived world. I hoped to make space for us to remember that Women’s and Gender Studies, like feminism itself, comes out of women’s experiences (Rogers & Garrett, 2002, p. ix).

The fifteen women whose voices, stories and experiences as feminist academics in Women’s and Gender Studies appear here, are all working in Australian universities and this book undeniably has a ‘southern’ sentiment. Here I am referring broadly to Connell’s (2007) term ‘southern theory’ which draws attention to the way the global dynamics and geo-politics of knowledge in social science work and the particular kinds of ‘periphery-centre’ relations of knowledge and power which re-produce similarly certain kinds of social thought. By and large, the centre, metropole, Global North and ‘majority world does produce theory’ writes Connell (2007, p. ix), and according to this geo-political division, Australia sits in the Global South—on the periphery, at the ‘ends of the earth’ (Connell, 2007, p. ix) and far away in a colony. Our location in a colonising society offers an alternative perspective on the ways that Women’s and Gender Studies histories, discourses, subjectivities and epistemologies take on a messy and edgy relationship within/against the kinds of white-settler-colonial identities that many of us occupy. Connell
(2007, p. 228) further suggests ‘it is helpful to think of social science not as a settled system of concepts, methods and findings, but as an interconnected set of intellectual projects that proceed from varied social starting points into an unpredictable future’. If what I am doing in this book is considered social science, then bringing a Global South perspective into Global North discourses about teaching and learning Women’s and Gender Studies in higher education, might also be considered an open moment for alternative ethico-onto-epistemological teaching and learning positions and performativities as feminist educators to begin to take shape.

The speaking, feeling and writing position presented here has another more global ‘southern’ take. Here I am referring not only to a geo-political location but rather the ontological-geo-political situatedness of gender and race categories, and more specifically, the subjectivities of women in relation to the philosophical, theoretical and sociological knowledge making economy of the Global North. If such a knowledge economy is, as Connell contends, a foundation story ‘invented by a group of white male “founding fathers” pre-occupied with European modernity’ (2011, p. 104; see also, Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 74), I am not at all surprised by the refusal and erasure of gendered and racialised fluid voices in that epistemological space that may proclaim and push production of a counter-story.

The counter-story is not one but many and it belongs to those who stand outside Western hegemony or the ‘malestream’ as Tanesini (1998, p. 38) cleverly puts it, of the Global North knowledge economy: women, Indigenous peoples and marginalised ethnic groups, those who do not easily, cannot and do not desire to perform the social construct ‘white’, the lesbian-gay-transqueer and intersex community, those who are not able-bodied or who do not pray to a Western god, refugee populations and other displaced peoples, and Others who are similarly othered by their absence from this list. As the locus for and the material embodiment of ‘imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarch[al]’ (hooks, 2004, p. 17) epistemology aligned with the Global North, the academy itself perpetuates negation of these others—and indeed, its very survival rests upon such narratives of removal and invisibility. Turning around the Descartes ego cogito ‘I think therefore I am’ to ego conquiro ‘I conquer therefore I aim’, Grosfoguel (2013, p. 77) refers to these processes of knowledge eradication by the modern colonial world as ‘genocide/epistemicide’. The former relies upon and is predicated by the latter, and according to Grosfoguel, the systematic eradication of knowledge held by women is one of the four great genocide/epistemicides
begun in the ‘long 16th cebtury’ (2013, p. 77). During this period, women who transmitted, held and were empowered by ancestral and Indigenous knowledges became the subjects of ‘modern, colonial, capitalist, patriarchal conquest’, persecution and murder (Grosfoguel, 2013, p. 85). The women’s bodies that were burned alive, writes Grosfoguel (2013, p. 86), were the books of knowledge, and as I read these words my response is visceral. Given the stronghold of coloniality in the Westernised university today, I would argue that the bodies of women and all of the Others subject to the same acts of genocide/epistemicide (Muslims and Jews; Indigenous peoples, Marranos, Moriscos and Africans), continue to occupy a dangerous position. It is against this epistemic racism and sexism—indeed, erasure—that my voice as white-settler-colonial-cis-gendered-woman–feminist teaching and learning in higher education speaks and writes.

I have wanted to write this book for a long time and I thought that because I wanted to share my thoughts and experiences of teaching and learning like a feminist, it would be a simple thing to do. Being feminist in the academy is what I do; it’s who I am. But I was wrong. Time and time again I found myself ‘stuck’, struggling to find the right words to say the rights things in the right way about what it means to experience, embody and enact feminist pedagogies in Women’s and Gender Studies. Each time I sat down to put pen to paper I felt the shadow of Virginia Woolf’s ‘Angel in the house’ (1942/1992, p. 141) darken the moment of writing and remind me about purity, truth-telling and the need to appease the desires of master narratives. I saw myself censoring every word, every breath, every thought and indeed becoming Cixous’ ‘ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions’ (1976, p. 880) as my writing-teaching-learning-feeling body was torn away from itself. The remedy they propose is replete with epistemological, ontological and discursive mischief, mayhem and murder—Cixous suggests that ‘we must kill the false woman who is preventing the live one from breathing’ (1976, p. 880) and similarly Woolf realises that the only way to avoid having ‘the heart plucked out of her writing’ is to kill the Angel in the House (Woolf, 1942/1992). Poised to strike a deathly blow, I see that perhaps after all, writing about feminist teaching and learning needs ‘a dead (wo)man to begin’ (Cixous, 1991, p. 7) and being in a stuck place is exactly where I need to be.
THE MOVEMENT: PERMISSIONS FOR WRITING WOM*N IN STUCK PLACES
AFTER WOOLF, V. PROFESSIONS FOR WOM*N

But to tell you my story—it is a modest and naïve one. You have only got to imagine yourselves a wom*n in the ivory tower with mind, body and heartlines bursting with the fullness of theory, experience and emotion that is writing. I see her standing there and wonder whether she is locked in that lofty turret or locked out of a post beyond her, but for now we have to only concern ourselves with what it is that she must do. She had only to craft those heartlines into an academic paper; a publication in a high-ranking journal would suffice—from beginning to end, introduction to conclusion, and life to death. Then it occurred to her to do what is simple and economical enough after all—to write from those heartlines, to write her body, herself as wom*n and slip a few of those pages into her article, quickly tap out a letter to the editor, and email it away into the deep dark ether with hope as its companion.

It was thus that once my heartlines began to flow that I came to call myself a feminist academic; and my effort was rewarded on the first day of the following academic year—a very glorious day it was for me—as I watched my publication citation index grow and bibliographic data collection expand exponentially. But to show you how little I knew about what it meant to be called a feminist academic, how little I knew of the struggles and difficulties of such lives, I have to admit that instead of taking heed of those around me who insisted I was too bold in daring to bite the hand that fed me, I continued to write my body, write myself, write the heartlines in my hand. Words became whimsical images became rhyme became public performances, which very soon involved me in bitter disputes with those whom I would not wish to call friends.

What could be easier than to write your body, write yourself, and write the heartlines? But wait a moment. Books and journal articles have to be something—something quite particular if you write as an academic, and even more so if you are a wom*n. My writing, had become insistent, refusing to be anything other than the heartlines but I soon discovered that if I were going to write as a feminist academic, I should need to do battle with a certain spectre. And the spectre was a wom*n masquerading as not-wom*n, not writing her body, not writing herself or her heartlines. I observed her day in and day out, falling into step with the procession of academic men in front of her, not daring to walk
to a beat of her own making because they were behind her too. The monotonous pacing saw her shift shape in mind, body and spirit and I watched in horror as she became that which she had always professed she would not. The heartlines stopped flowing, her skin began to pale and flake, the light in her eyes was replaced by a dull ache, and her voice had become but a fleeting shadow. When I came to know her better I likened her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House, except this wom*n was a Cherub in praise of the Masters in the Academy.

It was this Cherub, Angel, spectre—call her what you will but know that she is always a refusal—who used to come between me and my writing. I can hardly believe that I once felt sorry for her but it was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. I will describe her as briefly as I can. She was immensely smart but was always proudly careful not to conceal it. She was intensely supportive, particularly of those men she saw herself in servitude to. She put herself across as utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of office politics and baking cakes for staff birthdays. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was a committee she put her hand up to be on it and she always made sure she tidied up the action items with her trusty tea towel; if there was a course that needed teaching or work to do on weekends, she made sure to be made she did both and 100% more without complaint—in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to acquiesce always with the minds and wishes of the Masters in the Academy. Above all—I need not say it—she was uncontaminated by the heartlines in her hand, her mind, her body, her writing was clean and the Masters applauded her. Her concentration, clarity and commitment to the Masters were her chief beauty—her blushes, her great grace, and the measure of her worth.

Then and now every department, every School, every Faculty has its Angels. And when I came to write myself as a feminist academic, I encountered her with the very first words. I felt her vice-like presence squeezing and closing my throat; the shadow of her crumbling wings fell on my page; I heard the creak and groan of shoulder pads, starched skirts and stilettos as she silently stalked me. I jumped as she slipped behind my chair and placed her clammy hand on my shoulder. I felt her sour and rotting breath on my neck as she began to whisper: ‘My dear
you are a young wom*n. You are writing a book for the academy. You would do well to remember that patriarchy—dominator culture of the white, imperial, capitalist kind—is your Master in this tower. He pays your wage, opens the door for your publications and allows you to be promoted. Be sympathetic; be tender; flatter; deceive; use all the arts and wiles of our sex. Never let anybody guess that you have a mind of your own. Above all, be clean’. And without warning, she made as if to wash my mouth out with soap, her fingers scraping, scratching, feverishly trying to cleanse the f-word from my tongue. I bit down hard and felt the crush of bones; blood, sweat and tears burning like acid and buying enough time for something more.

I admit now it was with relish that I turned around and smashed her hard on the side of her head with an open hand. How much easier it would have been if I had had a hammer in my possession. I did my best to kill her. My excuse, if I were to be charged with a crime, would be that I acted in self-defence. Had I not killed her she would have killed me. She would have plucked the heart out of my writing. I call her ‘she’ but in that moment I saw her for who and what she was, an ideology, a discourse and a praxis which detested the likes of me. Don’t be fooled, she did not die easily, and I cannot be sure even now that she is gone for good.

Whenever I sense her presence, the stale stench of patriarchy she exudes, the sinister sounds of domination she ushers in or the whisper of her wings that would wash me and my sisters away, I once more pick up whatever heavy implement I have at my disposal and fling it at her. She has a nasty habit of always creeping back; the blood and bruises she bears from the last assault a beacon of hope for those like me. It is far harder to kill a spectre than a reality, and the Academy is full of hallowed halls with goal posts that keep shifting. The struggle is severe and it is bound to befall all feminist academics at some time. I raise my fist in the air and see the heartlines in my hand pounding; we are at war and killing this Cherub has become my obsession. What will remain after the Angel is dead? I cannot know, indeed you cannot know either, but such a crime is worth the freedom to begin searching for the room we may call our own in writing.
Being ‘stuck’, I realise now, can be turned around and over in a number of ways. As an adjective, ‘becoming stuck’ could mean to be perplexed or baffled by a problem; it might mean becoming joined, glued or fixed somewhere as in ‘stuck between’; becoming ‘stuck in’, trapped or ensnared is another interpretation; as is ‘stuck with’, becoming burdened or encumbered with something. It could also refer to becoming infatuated, enthusiastic and ‘stuck on’ something; or perhaps even, ‘getting stuck into something’, suggesting performativity and persistence within/against difficulty. All of these interpretations of being stuck seem to match this moment of writing and here I am reminded of Patti Lather’s (1998) work on the ‘praxis of stuck places’. With specific reference to discourses of critical pedagogy, Lather uses the phrase in an attempt to disrupt the ‘right story’, which this particular ‘big tent’ and ‘boy thing’ of teaching and learning theorises (1998, p. 487). She builds upon Derrida’s ‘ordeal of the undecidable’ to suggest that a praxis of constant movement, of never finishing closing, or defining, and of not being so sure, ‘situates the experience of impossibility as an enabling site’ (1998, p. 488) for working through doubt and uncertainty.

writing. a practice of writing.
a daily practice of writing.
but whose writing?
not my own.
reading other words.
writing other words.
that are not mine.
taking a shallow shape.
hollow inside.
a shell of someone else.
texture tastes sour.
colour sounds thin.
the words get lost in the writing.
the writing loses itself in the words.
not my own.
written by others.
many times over under around.
ever reaching through.
to the heart of it all.
According to Lather (1998, p. 488), being in a stuck place then, is a way to ‘keep moving within “the impossibility of teaching” in order to produce and learn from ruptures, failures, breaks, and refusals’. From stuck places, the search for ‘something other than the return of the same old’ is inevitable (Ellsworth, 1997, p. 125) and indeed, the kind of estrangement from usual ways of thinking about pedagogy in higher education that I have been yearning for becomes a performative possibility. I can hear echoes of Hélène Cixous in Ellsworth’s writing, who contends that while ‘the future must no longer be determined by the past, I do not deny that the effects of the past are still with us. But I refuse to strengthen them by repeating them’ (Cixous, 1976, p. 875). Indeed, Maxine Greene suggests that in moments of ‘decentering…of eroding authorities, of disappearing absolutes’ (1994, p. 217), educators are most necessarily always ‘in quest’ (Greene, 2001, p. 159) and ‘always on the way’ (1994, p. 217). ‘Questions, questions, freedom and unease’, suggests Greene (2001, p. 166), are at once strangers and friends in our search for meaning-making in creative and imaginative places and I have written this book holding hands with both. I have learned to leave my words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs in the stuck places in-
between, hoping that in their marvellous incompleteness, they do the kind of work intended.

THE SKIN: A NOTE ON WRITING

The room I call my own at the university is a 3.64m × 2.86m square space. The walls are white painted brick, the carpet on the floor is a navy blue with pale thin pin stripes, and there are two windows to the outside world, which share with me the warmth of the afternoon sun. A class set of djembes are poised on top of the book cases around me. They are wrapped in bright coloured cloth and stand tall like sentinels, watching protectively over the books that sit beneath them. Photos of my two boys in school uniform sit alongside a Virginia Woolf doll above my desk on a shelf. A Judy Horacek tea towel with her inspirational ‘Woman with altitude’ cartoon (Horacek, 2002, p. 76) is pinned on the wall in front of me and stares back, daring and urging me each and every day to live the feminist life I am searching for.

I look up from my laptop screen in frustration as a shadow appears outside my room and begins to knock incessantly. This is the fifth interruption I have had on what is supposed to be my ‘research’ day for thinking and writing. I swallow a loud sigh and will myself to be silent and invisible inside my room, hoping the unexpected visitor will give up and go away. ‘Liz?’ a voice calls, then pauses. ‘I have a present for you!’ A wave of relief washes over me as I realise it is Claire, a woman after my own heart. Together we have run kilometre after kilometre at work and at play, across town and country, winding our middle-aged way together through the many pathways of emotion and experience that life throws in front of us. Only yesterday I was sharing my angst with her about being pushed and pulled in competing administrative and curricular directions and as a result, the slow progress I was making on my book. I was in desperate need of some kind of intervention to ensure that the room I call my own might truly become a place where a woman could write. I open the door and she has a smile as long and wide as the marathons we have run on her face. ‘What do you think?’ she asks, a twinkle in her eye and holds up a laminated black and white sign. It reads, ‘CAUTION, WOMAN WRITING. Enter at your own risk, or better yet, come back another time!’ There is a picture below of a young ‘Victorian era’ girl, pen in hand in a thinking pose as she looks at the page on the desk in front of her. Underneath the following words are written, ‘Thank you for understanding’.
‘A woman must have… a room of her own if she is to write fiction’
(Woolf, 1929/2001, p. 4)

The sign is the perfect balance between the necessary kind of playful assertiveness needed to ensure people would not disturb the writer inside, while ensuring that they might walk away without taking offence. ‘I love it!’ I squeal with delight and hang it up immediately. The sign declares that there is now a woman inside this room writing, and that she is both a dangerous woman writing, and a woman writing in the fullness of danger. The words of the body inside writing and the body of words being written inside turn the knock on the door around and become doubly the interruption.

The textual work of writing this book has embraced and attempts to embody the kinds of ‘contradictions, messiness and doubts’ to be found in emergent writing methodologies in Feminist Studies, and by extension, Women’s and Gender Studies (Livholts, 2012, p. 1). Such writing, Livholts (2012, p. 12) suggests, attempts to ‘relocate dislocation’ in writing and reading. She makes a strong push for feminist theoretical and textual praxis-ing to engage in ‘post/academic writing’ to ‘illustrate a contemporary condition of critical, creative, and multiple and shifting movements’ of interdisciplinarity (Livholts, 2012, p. 7). Within post/academic writing lies the possibility for ‘disturbing and interrupting the un-named hegemonic style’ (Livholts, 2012, p. 7) and
thereby promoting an ethics of change. Finding and writing autoethnographically was an open moment for me to begin dis/MS/placing an insurgent writing style. It was the one genre where my work in ethnography and anthropology, found a home to sit with story by the fire at night. With fiction tied ever so loosely to facts, tugging at the corners and reaching beyond to life (Woolf, 1929/2001, p. 34), authoethnography presented itself as an experiment in academic fiction with potential ‘critical consciousness, disrupt[ing] stereotypes, cultivat[ing] empathetic understanding across differences, promot[ing] reflection through resonance, open[ing] up a multiplicity of meanings, and extend[ing] the reach of our scholarship’ (Leavy, 2012, p. 258). Reading Ruth Behar’s (1996) The vulnerable observer; Laurel Richardson’s (1997) Fields of academic play; Carolyn Ellis’ (2004) The ethnographic I, and most recently Patricia Leavy’s (2015) Low-fat love, changed my writing world. Collectively their work illustrates that a critical, material and affective approach to writing practices is not only possible and desirable, it is permissible. To have hearts-as-letters-as-bodies-as-prose-as-paragraphs-as-minds-as-manuscripts intermingling, entangled, and everywhere emerged for me as a methodological tool for textual praxis-ing as transformation. Like Leavy, my hope for this kind of writing is that it performs my ‘yearning’ (hooks, 1994, p. 92) to ‘theorise in a more passionate way’ (Livholts, 2012, p. 6). Such writing sits because of and beside ‘post/academic’ writing in the borderlands of uncertainty in which I find myself, in full recognition that, as Maxine Greene so aptly expressed, ‘I am what I am not yet’.

The work of Hélène Cixous has been a most necessary companion in this adventure of post/academic writing. ‘Write! What? Take to the wind, take to writing, form one body with letters. Live! Risk: those who risk nothing gain nothing, risk and you no longer risk anything’, urges Cixous (1991, p. 41) and it is her call for texts and bodies to take new flight that the writing in and of this book responds to. I cannot call myself philosopher or make any claims to a deep knowledge of psychoanalysis, but I am drawn to the subversive entanglement of poetics, politics, playfulness and performativity in Hélène Cixous’ work. I first began to read Cixous’ work in an attempt to write and thereby puzzle out my experience of being a white-settler-colonial-woman, teaching and learning in Indigenous Australian Studies and Women’s and Gender Studies, while at the same time embraced as mother and wife in an Aboriginal family. I had written many journal articles and chapters about my work with them but my writing was monotone, hegemonic and boring. The stories I told were not for anyone or good enough, least of all the family and community I claimed to be writing social justice for. I felt as though I
was not fulfilling my response-abilities to my Aboriginal family to ‘fracture
the locus’ (Lugones, 2010, p. 749) of coloniality in my writing, nor to my
colleagues in the sisterhood, for my teaching, learning and writing to use
something other than the master’s tools. I saw myself conveniently side-
stepping around the discomforts of being in-between using black words on
white pages to sustain an academic authority and presence in the intellectual
circles I thought mattered, and I sank to the bottom in shame. The buzz of
falsity my writing portrayed had finally become too thunderous to ignore.

Once I had begun my journey with Cixous, the possibility of return to
the selfsame disappeared beyond the horizon along with the dead heart of
academic writing I had left behind. Immersed in her piece ‘The laugh of the
Medusa’ (Cixous, 1976), I found myself crying alongside the woman who
knows ‘the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely
lost for words, ground and language slipping away’ (Cixous, 1976, p. 880).
Seething, I found myself sitting next to Cixous’ infinite woman, ‘kept in
the dark about herself, led into self-disdain’ (1976, p. 876) by misogynistic
phallocentrism, ashamed of her own strength and accused of being a monster.
I found myself smiling in wicked delight as I picked up and ran with Cixous’
call to insurgent writing—it will be an ‘explosive, utterly destructive,
staggering return, with a force never yet unleashed’ (1976, p. 886) and ‘let it
be done, right now, in language’ (1976, p. 887).

Described by Bray (2004, p. 20) as a ‘post-structuralist feminist of
difference’, Cixous’ writing takes many forms of expression including poetic
fiction, chamber theatre, philosophical and feminist essays, literary theory
and literary criticism (Sellers, in Cixous, 1994, p. xxvi). In her work, Cixous
seeks to write as a woman in order to empower women and her writing is most
often associated with the concept of écriture féminine or ‘feminine writing’
explains, writing in the feminine is ‘a place…which is not economically or
politically indebted to all the vileness and compromise. That is not obliged
to reproduce the system. That is writing’. Cixous (1976, p. 892) encourages
a refusal to be ‘impressed by the commotion of the phallic stance’ in our
writing—‘that’s the woman of yesterday!’ she proclaims. Her voice reaches
fever pitch as she desires us to go further still, ‘Shrug off the old lies, dare
what you don’t dare…rejoice, rejoice in the terror, follow it where you’re
afraid to go…take the plunge, you’re on the right trail!’ (Cixous, 1991,
p. 40). This sentiment is echoed in Braidotti’s (2011, p. 24) recent invitation
to ‘disidentify ourselves from the sedentary phallogocentric monologism
of philosophical thinking’ and Greene’s (1994, p. 109) refusal to be ‘swept
along by what the great ones have said and remain partially submerged by them’. Together, Cixous, Braidotti and Greene urge us to find new ways of writing academic words; ways which deliver an antidote to the paralysing and prohibiting structures of high theory (Braidotti, 2011, p. 24).

Reading Hélène Cixous, I saw clearly that my writing needed to and could become

a way of leaving no space for death, of pushing back forgetfulness, of never letting oneself be surprised by the abyss. Of never becoming resigned, consoled; never turning over in bed to face the wall and drift asleep again as if nothing had happened; as if nothing could happen. (1991, p. 3)

The performance of teaching, learning and writing needed to become a different kind of ‘rite/right’; one that did not seek to ‘master’, but rather, as Cixous contends, writing that transmits, affects, ‘wakes the dead’, ‘reminds people that they once wept for love, and trembled with desires, and that they were then very close to the life that they claim they’ve been seeking while constantly moving further away’ (1991, p. 57). For me, Cixous’ capacity for writing to come at once ‘quite far from the peel of the world, in truth, but close to the center, just next to a nest of poems’ (1994, p. 88) holds much hope for reuniting creativity with philosophy, theory and analysis while at the same time foregrounding an ethical and response-able yet resistant approach to writing of the kind that Braidotti (2014, p. 165) advocates. To write in this way about feminist teaching and learning in the academy, seems like the kind of intervention that I can make, to sidestep what is expected and search for something other than the same.

Before continuing, there is a secret I have been keeping hush-hush that demands to be sounded. It is a secret, which as Ahmed asserts, ‘establishes the limits of knowledge, reminding us that as knowers that if we don’t know what we don’t know, then we might not even know what we know’ (2010, p. xvii). I have not read the original Cixous in French, I cannot read French and I cannot speak French. This secret is one that sits edgily on the boundaries of my discussion of Cixous’s work here. Some years ago, I wrote a paper with a postgraduate student, which relied in part, on the use of Foucault’s notion of power and the disciplining of bodies to re-think the place of women in traditional university music degrees. We received two reviews, one glowing and the other lacklustre. Our writing had lost its shine, the reviewer said, because it was obvious that we had not read Foucault’s work in its original language. Regardless of whether I read her work in French or English or
Yanyuwa, there is always the problem of translation, of reading, of the representations words make in my mind, in yours, and the meanings they held when Cixous wrote them. A necessary companion for me in my journey of not-translation in relation to Cixous, is the work of Abigail Bray (2004). Bray’s clear and accessible introduction, critique and analysis of Cixous’s life and work has opened up further possibilities for me to bring Cixous nearby. Cixous herself is always playing around with untranslatable phrases, seeking other forms of expression beyond formal language, insisting that each and every text is but one quarter of herself (Cixous, 1994, p. xvi). Each reading of her work is a new moment for a new beginning, a new possibility that neither she nor I have imagined yet. I will not then, apologise for not reading Cixous in French, but instead relish in the sensation of her words wrapping around my thinking-as-writing.

I have adopted a number of different writing techniques, refusing to be bound by any particular style. Does it matter whether we call it serious play (Weber, 2010, p. 136), a series of performative acts of the Butlerian kind (Butler, 1997, 1999; Weiss, 1999), fiction-as-fact, autoethnography, narrative writing, and/or experimental academic critique? Real and imagined conversations with women I think of as feminist friends, fragments of talk and text, the beginnings and ends of stories that share a messy in-betweenness, become the ‘flesh on the bones of experience’ (after Holman Jones) as a Women’s and Gender Studies academic that I am searching to share. I have been care-full to include the talk from female academic voices as they were spoken. In some places in this book, their words may appear twice but never with the same way of approaching them.

I have taken delight in finding space in this text for writing which I had finished and closed shut; especially the kind of secret wondering-as-writing which fills up the pages of the journal I carry with me. Livholts (2012, p. 7) calls this ‘untimely’ writing, writing that doesn’t seem to quite fit, ‘texts that, for different reasons, the authors did not think were possible to write and publish at the time’. For this reason they are ‘out of time’—delayed, dislocated and late (Livholts, 2012, p. 7). Elsewhere I have described this kind of post/academic writing as ‘storylines’; that is, writing which considers an ‘ethical, wise, relational and loving politic as key…for drawing us into a space of ‘heart thinking’ where emotion becomes entangled with experience and epistemology so that all everything we have left is our response-ability’ (Mackinlay, 2015, p. 1438). Writing storylines-heartlines brings the creative and analytical together (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), and works as a provocation to become and remain fully ‘wide awake’ (Greene, 1994, p. 112).
to the particular kinds of ethico-onto-epistem-ological disciplinary response-abilities we hold as feminist teachers and learners in higher education to do something more. Indeed, allowing our theoretical texts to be ‘carried off’ by a poetic rhythm’, is, as Cixous (Cixous, in O’Grady, 1996) contends, an acceptance of our ‘pedagogic response-ability’ to the embodied, ethical, material, affective and discursive dimensions of our teaching, learning and writing lives.
Throughout this book then, I bring myself/ourselves into this text by my/our own movement to embody and project a dissonance with the status quo, and express my allegiance to feminist research, writing, teaching and learning. I am joined by scholars along the way whom I consider my personal-is-political-is-pedagogical friends—women whose way I have willingly followed across the waves of feminist writing, thinking and feeling: bell hooks, Hélène Cixous, Virginia Woolf, Maxine Greene, Sarah Ahmed, Maria Lugones, Sylvia De Winter, Karen Barad, and Elizabeth Ellsworth. There are three other most necessary companions sitting beside me in this text: Briony Lipton, Nicole Maree and Sia Carlyon. Briony, Nicole and Sia were all students of mine in Women’s and Gender Studies, and have travelled with me as teachers and learners from first year through third year and beyond. The co-authored chapters included in this book, were written as conference papers and co-presented at national education conferences in Australia. Teaching and learning like a feminist is about being-in-relation—in classrooms, in academic forums and in writing. It is my privilege to be able to share some of my/our/their being-in-relation with me in this text.

Some time ago a wise and loving feminist friend asked me what might happen to my scholarship if I refused to cite and work with the words of white men. I had just shared with her a paper where I referenced and used some of the theoretical big boys of the kind that Lather refers to—Bakhtin, Freire and Merleau-Ponty. A music educator with a fine voice, my friend teased and sang, ‘Rub a dub dub, three men in a tub and who/what/why did you think they were?’ At first I thought she really was asking me about the occupation of these three men but her questioning song went straight to the pre-dominance of patriarchy in the professor-ing and production of academia. A serendipitous moment it was, as it coincided with my first encounter of *A room of one’s own* and Virginia Woolf’s writing began to play an accompaniment to my friend’s song: ‘Have you any notion how many books are written about women in the course of one year? Have you any notion how many are written by men?…Men who have no apparent qualification save that they are not women’ (1929/2001, p. 32). I have never forgotten the provocation of both women. My friend’s question has stayed with me long after her song was sung and continues to play around in my head, returning at the most unexpected moments. I am often asked if my approach to only cite women and/or non-Western men is similarly wise and loving because of its potential to feed into the selfsame exclusion that we are fighting, writing and citing against as feminist scholars. But I would argue, that enough airplay is given to the words of Western men. It is my
white-settler-colonial-cis-gendered-woman privilege to adopt—in all of its messiness and contradictions—as Ahmed (2014) urges, the following ‘strict and explicit citation policy’, that is, ‘I will not and do not cite white men… We can rebuild our houses with feminist tools; with de-colonial precision we can bring the house of whiteness down. Their body is not the world. A world can be opened up when it is not organised around their bodies’.

THE BODY: A NOTE ON DRAWING

‘I am woman hear me draw’, wrote Australian feminist cartoonist Judy Horacek in 2002, and her work forms much of the inspiration behind the black and white line drawings included in this text. I began drawing the character you see here in 1995 whilst in the grips of an eating disorder. In the image over the page, the woman is pictured skeletal thin. Her eyes are closed; the thought of opening them unbearable because it would mean seeing an image of herself in the full expanse of her flesh—a body she abhors. In the sky a heart hovers above her. The heart is open, full and clear; a cruel and constant reminder that only in this emaciated state is she destined for happiness. She sits quietly, not moving, not feeling; not being.
Drawing became a way for me to speak that which I did not have the words to say; shame and embarrassment, self-hatred and loathing, sadness and loneliness, and a desperate plea for love and understanding to take me away from the prison I found and willingly placed myself in.

Aside from the central role drawing reflections played in my recovery, with each image I found myself falling in love all over again with the act and art of drawing, relishing the free flow of black ink, circling, curving, and becoming whole on the page. This was something I was not expecting but once I had begun, my drawings soon became an essential part of my textual practice. The pages of my journals are now frequently marked and punctuated with dreamings as doodlings, the beginnings of images that hold the possibility of something more. I feel an apology for the crudeness of the lines, composition and creativity buzzing in my mouth as I have never taken art classes beyond my high school education, nor been given any formal training on how to draw black and white cartoon style pictures. The character you see in the drawings does not have a name but she is at once and perhaps impossibly an image of me. Slowly but surely over time, her body has become re-embodied, a more full and complete version of myself, with eyes becoming more wide awake to the material, affective and discursive dimensions of this life in the fullness of lived experience.

When I think about the performativities associated with drawing, I am reminded of Virginia Woolf in A room of one’s own describing herself drawing cartwheels on slips of paper (1929/2001, p. 27), sketching faces and figures in the midst of attempting to come to a conclusion (1929/2001, p. 31), and moreover, using words and imagery to ‘draw attention’ (1929/2001, p. 78) to women and fiction. According to Woolf (1929/2001, p. 105), drawing pictures, dining, looking out the window and reading books on the shelf are all part of the process of laying bare those thoughts and impressions that lead to thinking and writing. Indeed for Woolf (1929/2001), ‘the whole of the mind must lie wide open…there must be freedom and there must be peace’. Here she is referring explicitly to dismantling the split between the mind and the body, the masculine and the feminine, the creative and the analytic. Reflecting more on the writing processes that enable her to become as ‘one’ she shares that, ‘Every morning I write a little sketch to amuse myself. I am not saying, I might say, that these sketches have any relevance. I am not trying to tell a story. Yet perhaps it might done in that way. A mind thinking’ (Woolf, 1980, p. 229). I follow in her footsteps and hope that these drawings too might be ‘done in that way’, a heart and mind thinking.
CHAPTER 1

Sharing my drawings publicly has always felt risky—we all have a keen sense of what makes art *good*, what makes it *bad*, and a strong idea of whether, in fact, we can call something ‘art’ at all. But that precarious feeling only lasts a second and is replaced quickly with the excitement of knowing how ‘imagination breathes life into experience’ (Greene, 1994, p. 22). Drawing enables me to turn over, around and upside down all that I take for granted—to ‘lurch,’ as Greene would say, ‘if only for a moment, out of the familiar’ (1994, p. 123) and question it all anew. If the writing of qualitative research is, as Leavy (2009, p. 11) suggests ‘ultimately about (re)presenting a set of meanings to an audience’ and ‘persuasion’, then drawing too is potentially an invaluable methodological tool I have for ‘being emotionally and politically evocative, captivating, aesthetically powerful and moving’ (Leavy, 2009, p. 12). In this way my drawings are another version of the kind of storyline-heartlines-autoethnography I spoke of earlier in that they aim to evoke a resonance with the reader of this text, as Leavy (2009, p. 34) would describe it, a ‘me too!’ moment. Writing and drawing together seem to fit in my post-academic adventures; creating a special kind of ‘belonging’ place for bodies, emotions and ideas in black ink on a white page.

THE BONES: FRAMING THIS WORK

In putting this book together in a semblance of structure, the bones that give life to the flesh of experience (Holman-Jones) enfolded in each and every page, I find that my ‘mind is like a dog going round & round to make itself a bed’ (Woolf, 1980, p. 156). I have chopped and changed the order, titles, subtitles and headings many, many times. After all of this mattress trampling, I have somehow made a base to rest. At this point in a text such as this, the expectation might be that a logical and structured outline of how you and I as reader and author will proceed. If I were to do that, I would tell you that I begin by introducing the academic women I interviewed who scream and shout the ‘f’ word, and their/our/my work in the Women’s and Gender Studies teaching and learning space; and, in doing so, provide further musings on why this book and why now. You and I are helped along in this passage of our thinking-writing-reading in Chapter Three through theoretical interaction with a character called Ms Feminist Pedagogy. I have no intention here of defining feminist pedagogy, particularly as it is enacted in the academy and Women’s and Gender Studies, but rather meander through some of the big picture issues which inform the way in which feminist academics think about and through feminist pedagogy.
I would then tell you that our passage of thinking-writing-reading enters into rooms we occupy as feminist academics in Women’s and Gender Studies, and I use the word ‘occupy’ deliberately. We have reclaimed the rooms where teaching and learning happens as material, affective and discursive spaces where the fact of embodiment brings life to our personal-political-pedagogical performances and performativities. The possibilities of being outside in, in and out, and inside out is explored further as the passage swerves to include untimely fragments of experience as a feminist academic in Women’s and Gender Studies. These are intended to ‘get in the way’ of the neat and tidy thinking-writing-reading you may have been wanting. The voices of students who proudly say the ‘f’ word join us next and provide an-other perspective on how feminism is embodied and experienced in the Westernised university. You and I might then step back and go closer in to our feminist pedagogical work by considering the ethical responsibility we have for teaching and learning within and towards the materiality of difference and otherness. The whiteness of our work in Women’s and Gender Studies sits underneath the passage we follow together and is a constant reminder of the something more that we are yearning for. Perhaps a diffractive approach in feminist pedagogy is what Women’s and Gender Studies needs and the thinking-writing-reading passage you and I might follow dives quickly into the possibilities of a disturbing teaching and learning approach to enact a decoloniality of being in Women’s and Gender Studies. This is an audacious move indeed and the ways in which Women’s and Gender Studies academics are daring to lead with feminism within and against the neo-liberal tide occupies our thinking-writing-reading next. I would then tell you that the passage you and I are following is going to close by swerving once more for the tide is turning. In thinking-writing-reading about the future of feminist pedagogy and Women’s and Gender Studies, our attentiveness to the materiality of otherness, and the affective and discursive dimensions of our teaching and learning selves, suggests that a decoloniality of being is ready to take its turn. But I am not going to provide that carefully packaged up structure for you; on this I shall remain silent—as Cixous insists, we ‘can’t make a recipe of it, for as soon we begin to inscribe signs, to attract attention, we destroy’ (1993, p. 59). I would like you to experience the surprise of ‘sudden good luck’ as you stumble upon the unexpected and the unwanted, ‘without which we would indeed be limited’ (Cixous, 1993, p. 63). Following Cixous (1993, p. 46) there is an invisible element not printed in this book too, that which asks, ‘And what have you enclosed and kept secret? What is your story as you read this one?’


CHAPTER 1


