

Colors of Water: Light on Healing

John Farrell Kelly

They tell me their stories in their language, in the twilight, all alike or almost, half gentle half cruel, before any day, any hour. . . . Consider the weight of each dream; or of a thought; or of a kiss; or of a squeeze of a left hand.

—Hélène Cixous, “Forewarnings,” in *Dream I Tell You*¹



In *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, Mona Livholts assembles a diverse collection of chapters that explore a wide range of discussions about writing, knowledge, and research methodologies:

This volume invites readers to engage in how writing the shape of knowledge in feminist studies constitutes a methodological challenge that has been relatively sparsely elaborated in a field that emphasizes epistemological and methodological critique and renewal.

It brings into focus how forms of writing knowledge are becoming increasingly transdisciplinary, transgressing and shifting.²

In the first section of her introduction, “Relocating Dislocation in Writing,” Livholts notes the exclusion of some writing methodologies in academia and invites a creation of new spaces:

Dislocation referred to the way in which creative, reflective, and experimental writing methodologies have tended to be marginalized or even excluded from academic space. . . . Relocation referred to the creation of a

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¹ Hélène Cixous, “Forewarnings,” in *Dream I Tell You*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic, *The Frontiers of Theory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 1–11. First and last sentences of this chapter.

² Mona Livholts, ed., preface to *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, *Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality 7* (New York: Routledge, 2012), xii.

meeting place that placed these methodological issues at the focal point of dialogue, reflective practice and collaboration.³

Livholts further notes a concurrent epistemological marginalization: “A central issue here is that mainstream textual forms are often related to a system that privileges certain kinds of knowledge over other, subjugated knowledge.”⁴

In one of the chapters of this volume – “Medusa’s Laughter and the Hows and Whys of Writing According to Hélène Cixous” – Sissel Lie addresses “the relationship between fictional writing and academic writing through a rendering of Hélène Cixous’ ideas on writing.”⁵ Lie further addresses “the astonishing continuity of her views on the importance of writing in contact with the body and the richness of the unconscious.”⁶

As discussed by Lie, some of Cixous’ views on writing are expressed in conversations with Frédéric-Yves Jeannet in *Rencontre terrestre*⁷ – recently translated by Beverley Bie Brahic as *Encounters: Conversations on Life and Writing*.⁸ For Cixous, the boundaries between fictional writing and academic writing are fluid – the term *fiction* is “a simple, fairly vague indication. . . . certain readers would shelve my texts with ‘theory.’”⁹

For Cixous, the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction are also fluid: “each of ‘us’ has his or her own story . . . it’s all a fiction, all a story. . . . we are all stories.”¹⁰ Distance from experience becomes a defining characteristic of writing: “everything takes as its starting point the experience of the subject. . . . distance between the source and the paper is more or less broad, and the period of writing, as of painting, changes, that’s all.”¹¹

In the chapter “The body writes,” Cixous affirms the essential role of the body in writing: “That I write bodily, with from through thanks to my body

³ Mona Livholts, “Introduction: Contemporary Untimely Post/Academic Writings—Transforming the Shape of Knowledge in Feminist Studies,” in *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, ed. Mona Livholts, Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality 7 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 3.

⁴ Livholts, “Introduction,” in *Emergent Writing Methodologies*, 3.

⁵ Sissel Lie, “Medusa’s Laughter and the Hows and Whys of Writing According to Hélène Cixous,” in *Emergent Writing Methodologies in Feminist Studies*, ed., Mona Livholts, Routledge Advances in Feminist Studies and Intersectionality 7 (New York: Routledge, 2012), 41.

⁶ Lie, “Medusa’s Laughter,” 41.

⁷ Hélène Cixous and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *Rencontre terrestre*, (Paris: Galilée, 2005).

⁸ Hélène Cixous and Frédéric-Yves Jeannet, *Encounters: Conversations on Life and Writing*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic (Malden, MA: Polity, 2013).

⁹ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 15.

¹⁰ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 25.

¹¹ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 26.

with the help of my entire body and all my bodies, is essential.”¹² Body becomes partner, genesis, and medium. Gratitude leads the emotive relationship with the body – and bodily writing is both holistic and polyphonic. Cixous notes two particular experiences “in or of” her body – the “incandescent body, eroticized” and the “body attacked, by this or that illness or alteration.”¹³

Cixous further describes two parts of the “writing activity” that engage the unconscious – a nocturnal part and a diurnal part. The nocturnal part consists largely of dreaming:

The “sleep” part of the writing activity, the biggest, the nocturnal part, does half the work for me. I go to bed *in order to* dream. Carefully. And with hope and curiosity. While I sleep, the shooting (the film, the scenarios) takes place. In the morning I harvest.¹⁴

The “small but efficacious” diurnal part consists of an “alert passivity”:

I sometimes go to bed to “think” imagine with another rhythm than the desk’s high-pressure one, a floating rhythm, aswim, unhurried, when I let images, phrases come or come back, a state of alert passivity . . . I “float,” and, indeed, the current bears me along and nourishes me.¹⁵

In *Dream I Tell You*, Cixous stretches and challenges conventional boundaries of fictional writing and academic writing and explores the unconscious with a text that consists of a brief theoretical discussion followed entirely by written descriptions of her dreams.¹⁶ In a further exploration of these boundaries, Edinburgh University Press situates Cixous’ text in its “The Frontiers of Theory” series.

In “Colors of Water,” I use an emergent writing methodology similar to Cixous’ to suggest new relationships between fictional and academic writing. I explore frontiers of embodied writing and the unconscious by expressing three personal dreams, and I follow each dream with a brief creative or academic section. I invite readers to consider dreams as a liminal space and an embodied performative emerging from the unconscious.

¹² Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 122.

¹³ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 123.

¹⁴ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 123.

¹⁵ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 123–124.

¹⁶ Hélène Cixous, *Dream I Tell You*, trans. Beverley Bie Brahic, *The Frontiers of Theory*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

Forewarnings

*I am aware
of evildoing*

*other
minds
blessed ones*

—Sappho¹⁷

In my dream, I witness a woman being raped.

I am standing outside in the afternoon light, and I see a group of seven or eight armed policemen protecting a single man. The man sees a woman walking by. This is no ordinary time – this is his time, and he takes what he wants. He proceeds to overpower the woman and begins to rape her. The policemen stand by to protect him.

I am in shock.

I slowly approach the policemen with my hands raised, and I carefully say to them, “This cannot happen.”

The policemen look at me with a peaceful understanding, and one replies, “He is a monster. But he is the brother of a Man-in-Power, and this is our reality.” They have wives and children, and they clearly abhor their own reality.

However, if I engage, they will respond with no hesitation and use deadly force. I will defeat them, but I will have to use deadly force myself.

I choose to back away, and I weep as I witness the afternoon events unfold.

Despite all of my training in feminism, I do not intervene.

This is her story.

Later in the dream, I am teaching swimming to young teens in a local pool. The water is constantly dirty, and the filter system is unable to clean it.

A policeman from earlier approaches me and hands me a manila folder and an envelope. The manila folder has a detailed case report that they have filed on the incident, complete with photographs of the woman’s bruised face – but omitting the name of the attacker. The envelope has a large sum of money for me. They did not need to pay me off – I made my choice when I backed away. But this is how the Men (and Women)-in-Power do business. I take the money, because I feel that I need it, but when the time is right, I will speak.

One of my swimming students, a young girl, glimpses a page that is slipping out of the folder and innocently asks, “What’s that?”

¹⁷ Anne Carson, trans., *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 9. In her translation, Carson develops an innovative use of brackets to reflect the fragments in her source texts. In the context of this article, however, these brackets are omitted.

“Nothing,” I reply, and I tilt the folder to slip the page back in place. I reflexively scan the area to see if anyone has witnessed my actions. I notice a security camera in a ceiling corner. There is a record of my behavior.

My therapist at the VA has a PhD in psychology, board certification in clinical psychology, and over thirty years of experience. She appears to be shocked when I tell her this dream.

She appears to be more shocked when I tell her, “I dreamed this for you.”

Fortunately, I believe that she understands exactly what I mean.

This is my story.

Shock and Horror

like amnesiacs

in a ward on fire, we must

find words

or burn

—Olga Broumas, “Artemis”¹⁸

Both the limits of insanity and the possibilities of emancipation are born out of the same horrors of subjugation.

—Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*¹⁹

Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies.

—Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa”²⁰

Or something is untimely not only to the extent that exerts forms of the past in the present, but perhaps more interestingly and in less secure and predictable mode than an exploration and revivification of the past is the . . . leap into the future without adequate preparation in the present, through becoming, a movement of becoming-more and becoming-other, which involves the orientation to the creation of the new, to an unknown future, what is no longer recognizable in terms of the present.

—Elizabeth Grosz, “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory”²¹

¹⁸ Olga Broumas, “Artemis,” in *Beginning with O* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1977), 24.

¹⁹ Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, Theory out of Bounds 18 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 84.5.

²⁰ Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs* 1, no. 4 (1976): 875.

²¹ Elizabeth Grosz, “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” *NORA—Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 18, no. 1 (2010): 48–49.

A tornado forms in the distance.

I feel shock and horror as it approaches. With uncanny precision, it touches down to a small sphere in my upper abdomen. Every emotion I have ever felt is torn into pieces, and I am thrown through a portal in an explosion of pain. When I return, I have the eyes of a stranger.

Waves of destruction flow like a tsunami from my abdomen to my mind, and every idea of who I thought I was shatters into fragments. In a reflexive act of futile resistance, my mind forms again for a moment and then shatters again in another wave. And again.

I walk slowly along a beach.

Thick black oil covers the shore.

Life has departed.

Then something unexpected happens.

I find a single grain of golden sand.

It is enough.

If you give me a body, I will give you a style.

In *Invisible Wounds of War*, editors Terri Tanielian and Lisa H. Jaycox address a significant problem – US veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, and traumatic brain injury.²² The scope of the volume is impressive – seven teams of approximately fifty total contributors led by Tanielian and Jaycox combine their efforts to discuss current policy context and historical perspective, the nature and scope of the problem, immediate and long-term consequences, economic consequences, care for invisible wounds, and conclusions and recommendations. As a veteran enduring each of the above conditions, I feel grateful for this volume, and I feel that it serves an essential role in developing understanding and guiding the creation of long-term solutions.

However.

In *The Invisible War*, writer and director Kirby Dick addresses another significant problem – the way the US military has willfully denied and concealed an embedded rape culture.²³ The scope of the problem is significant – Amy Herdy estimates that “it’s probably somewhere near about a half a million women have now been sexually assaulted in the US military.”²⁴ According to Anu Bhagwati, approximately 16,150 service members were sexually assaulted

²² Terri Tanielian and Lisa H. Jaycox, eds., *Invisible Wounds of War: Psychological and Cognitive Injuries, Their Consequences, and Services to Assist Recovery* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2008).

²³ *The Invisible War*, written and directed by Kirby Dick, DVD (New Video Group, 2012).

²⁴ *The Invisible War*, 13:52.

in fiscal year 2009.²⁵ Loree Sutton notes that “military sexual trauma is not limited to women” and the numbers of men are even greater.²⁶ Bhagwati clarifies that “this is not an issue of sexual orientation – this is simply an issue of power and violence.”²⁷

The effects of this rape culture are devastating – “women who have been raped in the military have a PTSD rate higher than men who’ve been in combat.”²⁸ Herdy states that “rape is a very, very traumatizing thing to have happen, but I’ve never seen trauma like I’ve seen from women who are veterans who have suffered military sexual trauma.”²⁹

Then it gets worse. Susan Burke notes that “what we hear again and again from soldiers who have been raped is that as bad as it was being raped, what was as bad, if not worse, was to receive professional retaliation in their chosen career merely because they were raped.”³⁰ In congressional hearings regarding the 2003 US Air Force Academy sexual assault scandal, Senator Susan Collins asserts: “we have a clear pattern of reports of sexual assault where the reaction of the Air Force Academy seems to be to blame the victim.”³¹

Options for these individuals have been limited. Myla Haider states that “the only way out of it is . . . suicide or awol.”³² Haider further summarizes a common perspective: “All the things that they’ve put in place are all pretty much intended to help women deal with being raped better. That’s what they’re about.”³³

Furthermore.

In *Transforming a Rape Culture*, editors Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth emphasize the necessity of looking beyond the individuals who have been sexually assaulted and exploring, transforming, and revisioning the broader culture in which these sexual assaults occur.³⁴ Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth develop an innovative three-part thematic organization for the nearly thirty chapters in this volume: *Living in a Rape Culture*; *Strategies and Activism*; and *Visions and Possibilities*. From one perspective, the chapters in this volume are very timely, as there is a tragic need for this work. From another perspective,

²⁵ *The Invisible War*, 14:16. Current statistics are available in the *Department of Defense Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military*. <http://www.sapr.mil/index.php/annual-reports>

²⁶ *The Invisible War*, 37:51.

²⁷ *The Invisible War*, 39:19.

²⁸ *The Invisible War*, 34:23.

²⁹ *The Invisible War*, 1:03:06.

³⁰ *The Invisible War*, 23:51.

³¹ *The Invisible War*, 42:48.

³² *The Invisible War*, 1:11:24.

³³ *The Invisible War*, 1:09:33.

³⁴ Emilie Buchwald, Pamela R. Fletcher, and Martha Roth, eds., *Transforming a Rape Culture*, rev. ed. (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2005).

however, these chapters open spaces for valuable conversations on theories of the *untimely*.³⁵

For Cixous, the untimely is linked with solitude as “the most incontestable example of the tragic,”³⁶ misunderstanding, and the pain that occurs from delayed understanding: “the lateness, the too late, the lag, the untimely arrival of the message. . . . The tragic is the insurmountable anachrony: the missed appointment.”³⁷ However, for Cixous, there is also the unexpected: “hazard, chance, a grain of sand in the works: the possibility that the tragic programming will break down, the grace of a totally unforeseen development.”³⁸

For Elizabeth Grosz, the untimely forms an essential site for contemporary feminist theory: “one of the central questions of contemporary feminist theory as it faces a changing future, as it directs itself to the question of change, should be about what is *untimely*, what is out of its time.”³⁹ Furthermore, for Grosz, the untimely also forms an essential part of the creation of the new: “it is partly by being irrelevant, untimely, and dislocated, by being abstract, that the new is brought into existence, that creation and invention insert their surprise into the everyday and the concrete.”⁴⁰

Aligning with Grosz, one essential characteristic of *Transforming a Rape Culture* is, perhaps, an untimely “leap into the future”⁴¹ involving the creation of the new:

Transforming a rape culture involves imaginative leaps from our present state of institutionalized violence to a future that is safer and more just. We must summon our imaginations for this task, because history and society have so few precedents for us.⁴²

Furthermore, aligning with Cixous, another essential characteristic is, perhaps, a response to the tragic with “the grace of a totally unforeseen development.”⁴³

³⁵ The following paragraphs briefly revisit theory discussed in John Farrell Kelly and Mona Livholts, “Light on Water: Conversations on Emergent Writing Methodologies,” *Writers in Conversation* 1, no. 2 (2014): 22.

³⁶ Hélène Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” trans. Brian J. Mallet, in *Selected Plays of Hélène Cixous*, ed. Eric Prenowitz, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 26.

³⁷ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 26.

³⁸ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 27.

³⁹ Grosz, “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” 48.

⁴⁰ Grosz, “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” 51.

⁴¹ Grosz, “The Untimeliness of Feminist Theory,” 49.

⁴² Buchwald, Fletcher, and Roth, eds., preamble to *Transforming a Rape Culture*, xi.

⁴³ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 27.

Dark Warriors

*Some men say an army of horse and some men say an army on foot
and some men say an army of ships is the most beautiful thing
on the black earth. But I say it is
what you love.*

—Sappho⁴⁴

In my dream, I am dressed in white.

I am wearing the popular culture notion of a ninja uniform – with the exception of the color. My face is covered, and I carry a sword that I know how to use.

I am standing in the back of a large group of about a hundred people who are dressed in a similar fashion. We enter a small village in a rural setting that resembles a scene from the film *The Last Samurai*.⁴⁵

As we enter the village, the leaders of our group begin to attack the local villagers. Our weapons are advanced, and the villagers are no match for us.

Something's wrong, I think. I stop for a moment, and I realize that we are attacking innocent people. In the confusion, I notice two dark forms in the distance. They are wearing uniforms like ours, with the exception of the color – they are dressed in black.

The two dark warriors begin to engage the leaders of our group. Their style is deeply organic – they move like wind and water.

I follow my intuition, and I move quickly to a nearby structure. I enter into what appears to be a small prayer room. I set down my sword and sit in *virasana* on a *tatami* mat.

I close my eyes and allow my mind to quieten. Then I leave my body and observe the battle outside. Our group is no match for the two dark warriors. Everyone quickly falls or retreats.

When the chaos is over, I observe one of the dark warriors enter the room and approach me from behind. My mind becomes clear, and I realize that transformation is essential. I accept that my death is required for transformation, and I remain absolutely calm.

Then something unexpected happens.

As the dark warrior's sword descends, it suddenly stops – a hair's breadth away from my neck. Then the second dark warrior enters the room. They remove their masks, and I witness the faces of a man and a woman.

As they look at me, I slowly open my eyes.

Then the man carefully says, "You are invited to study at our temple."

⁴⁴ Carson, *Fragments of Sappho*, 27.

⁴⁵ *The Last Samurai*, directed by Edward Zwick, DVD (Warner Home Video, 2009).

Now, more than a decade after this dream, I am beginning to understand the depths of the teachings of this temple.

Enemies and Others

A spiritual martial art views things on a higher level. Its base is love, and it looks at things in their totality. It is formless, and never seeks to make enemies.

—Morihei Ueshiba, *The Art of Peace*⁴⁶

In “Inventing the Enemy,” Umberto Eco discusses the practice of creating an enemy:

Having an enemy is important not only to define our identity but also to provide us with an obstacle against which to measure our system of values and, in seeking to overcome it, to demonstrate our own worth. So when there is no enemy, we have to invent one.⁴⁷

In this discussion, Eco draws attention to two key concepts – threat and difference:

The people who become our enemies often are not those who directly threaten us, . . . but are those whom someone has an interest in portraying as a true threat even when they aren’t. Rather than a real threat highlighting the ways in which these enemies are different from us, the difference itself becomes a symbol of what we find threatening.⁴⁸

Ultimately, Eco suggests that this path of the reduction of an Other to an enemy creates our own destruction:

We can recognize ourselves only in the presence of an Other. . . . But it is more likely that we find this Other intolerable because to some degree he is not us. In this way, by reducing him to an enemy, we create our hell on earth.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Morihei Ueshiba, *The Art of Peace*, trans. and ed. John Stevens, (Boston: Shambhala Classics, 2002), 31. Morihei Ueshiba is the founder of aikido. (In 1988, I studied aikido in Iwama, Japan, with Morihiro Saito.)

⁴⁷ Umberto Eco, “Inventing the Enemy,” in *Inventing the Enemy: And Other Occasional Writings*, trans. Richard Dixon, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 2. I would describe Eco’s tone here as tragic satire.

⁴⁸ Eco, “Inventing the Enemy,” 3.

⁴⁹ Eco, “Inventing the Enemy,” 21.

In “Enter the Theatre,” Cixous describes a similar destruction. She begins with a description of her childhood as a play – a theatre she moves through and witnesses. For Cixous as a child, this play begins as a horrific tragedy:

I wondered how in this entanglement of violent evil good forces . . . anything other than a tragic ending could be expected. . . . I was three and a half, four years old and searching with all my strength for a beyond. My German family was in the concentration camps, my grandmother had just managed to escape. . . . From everywhere there loomed the forms of exclusion, exile or massacre.⁵⁰

Cixous’ search for a beyond leads her to poetry: “If there is a somewhere else . . . which can escape the infernal practice of repetition, then it is there that new worlds are written, dreamed, invented. . . . This is the mission of poets.”⁵¹ Context suggests that the repetition Cixous refers to is an endless cycle of violence – “vengeance, or resentment or reprisal.”⁵² Cixous’ search also leads her to solitude as “the most incontestable example of the tragic,”⁵³ misunderstanding, and the pain that occurs from delayed understanding: “we do not understand one another *at the same time*.”⁵⁴

Ultimately, Cixous discovers a salvation in the poetry of the theatre:

For me the Theatre is itself the Proof of the real transgressive force of the Dream, it is a meteor from the other world. The magical place of a story and a history which we will never know, which awaits us and promises always to exceed – all that we have ever feared desired. It is the temple of our fortune.⁵⁵

Eco’s discussion also leads him to poetry – as an almost impossible pathway to understanding and as a possible alternative to a tragic destruction:

I would argue that morality intervenes not when we pretend we have no enemies but when we try to understand them, to put ourselves in their situation. . . . Trying to understand other people means destroying the stereotype without denying or ignoring the otherness. . . . These ways of understanding the enemy are the prerogative of poets . . .⁵⁶

These emerging ways of understanding may also be, perhaps, the prerogative of untimely writers, theorists, and philosophers.

⁵⁰ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 25.

⁵¹ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 25.

⁵² Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 27.

⁵³ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 26.

⁵⁴ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 26.

⁵⁵ Cixous, “Enter the Theatre,” 34.

⁵⁶ Eco, “Inventing the Enemy,” 21.

In *Humanism of the Other*, Emmanuel Levinas expresses a personal style of humanism.⁵⁷ In the introduction to this volume, Richard A. Cohen provides an insightful and sophisticated intellectual and spiritual context, including a brief summary:

The three chapters of *Humanism of the Other* each defend humanism—the worldview founded on the belief in the irreducible dignity of humans, a belief in the efficacy and worth of human freedom and hence also of human responsibility—from different angles. . . . In “Signification and Sense,” . . . Levinas subtly discusses the origin of meaning and its relation to cultural symbols. . . . [In] “Humanism and An-archy,” . . . Levinas reveals and challenges the dehumanization perpetrated by all the “social sciences” that seek to explain away human subjectivity in the name of abstract *principles*, the “intelligible structures” wherein subjectivity “would have no internal finality.” . . . “Without Identity” continues to oppose structuralism, with its then intellectually fashionable slogan of the “death of the subject,” in the name of the irrepressible “youth” of ethical responsibility, the “sincerity,” frankness,” and “authenticity” of genuine concern for the other.⁵⁸

In his forward, Levinas moves quickly to situate his own writing as untimely:

The three essays in this small volume . . . mark the stages of an “out of date consideration” that is not yet or no longer frightened by the word *humanism*. Of course, out of date can mean expired, and nothing is preserved from expiration. . . . But the out of date where these studies are placed, or toward which they tend, should not be confused with inattention to the dominant opinions of our time, which are so brilliantly and skillfully defended. Here the out of date signifies the *other* of the up to date rather than ignorance and negation of it . . . the *inopportune* that interrupts the synthesis of presents that constitutes memorable time.⁵⁹

In his introduction, Cohen also describes elements of Levinas’s tragic personal history and Levinas’s graceful response to this tragedy, which may form the heart of *Humanism of the Other*:

Are we to forget that Levinas spent the war years in a prisoner-of-war work camp for Jewish French soldiers or that his parents, siblings, and millions of his coreligionists were murdered . . . ? Surely Levinas did not. . . . But

⁵⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanism of the Other*, trans. Nidra Poller, intro. Richard A. Cohen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003). From Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l’autre homme* (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972).

⁵⁸ Richard A. Cohen, introduction to *Humanism of the Other*, by Emmanuel Levinas, trans. Nidra Poller (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), ix.

⁵⁹ Levinas, forward to *Humanism of the Other*, 3.

Levinas returns love for hate, the “wisdom of love,” the “humanism of the other” . . .⁶⁰

A Beach of One’s Own

and the motion of light on her face

.....

to pray for a share

.....

out of the unexpected

—Sappho⁶¹

In my dream, I am standing on a beach.

Numerous people are relaxing on the sand.

Then a woman approaches me.

Her eyes shine like sunlight in water, and she moves with a fluid grace. She motions for me to follow her, and we begin to walk down a path in the sand that is outlined by *naupaka kabakai*.

A few minutes later, we arrive at a secluded beach. Large rock cliffs form a protective sanctuary.

As we walk on the sand, we pass a woman on our left. She is kneeling in the sand, sitting astride a surfboard. In a series of fluid, graceful movements that form an organic dance, she is touching herself. Her eyes glaze, and she gathers the energies of the sky, the sunlight, the water, and the land and moves them through her body.

My gaze is light, attentive, and brief. I allow my own energy to remain at rest.

As we continue to walk, we pass two women on our right. They are lying in the sand, holding each other. In a similar series of fluid, graceful movements, they are touching each other. Like the earlier woman, they gather the energies of this area and move them through their bodies and each other.

We walk a short distance further and then come to a stop. As I stand beside my guide, the name “Tara” forms in my mind.

I gaze at the water. My eyes glaze for a long moment – and then soften.

“Would you like to swim with me?” Tara asks.

Out of respect for the water, I reflexively ask, “How far?”

Tara casually replies, “Twenty miles.”

I reflexively convert distance to time – ten to twelve hours.

⁶⁰ Cohen, introduction to *Humanism of the Other*, viii.

⁶¹ Carson, *Fragments of Sappho*, 29.

The longest that I have ever swam before is nine miles, but I feel confident that I can swim twenty miles in this water.

“Yes,” I reply.

I feel a deep sadness and joy. I know that even my deepest wounds will eventually heal on this beach. I look at the water and smile.

Then something unexpected happens.

Tara kneels by my right side and gently holds my right hand. Then she softly kisses the back of my hand.

Light on Water

Once she allowed herself to feel the rhythms of the water in her bodily senses, movement occurred from within.

—Mona Livholts, “Writing Water: An Untimely Academic Novella”⁶²

In “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” Alison M. Jaggar suggests that “emotions may be helpful and even necessary . . . to the construction of knowledge.”⁶³

Additionally, in *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing*, Jaggar joins with Susan R. Bordo to edit and introduce a volume that explores similar themes. In their introduction, Jaggar and Bordo note a thematic unity in the diverse chapters: “this unity . . . consists of an emerging feminist challenge to conceptions of knowledge and reality that have dominated the western intellectual tradition.”⁶⁴ Discussions of epistemology and methodology are grounded in multiple bodies:

There emerge not *one* body but *many* bodies . . . the body as locus of social praxis, as cultural text, as social construction, as the tablet on which new visions of an “écriture féminine” are inscribed, as the marker of union rather than disjunction between the human and “natural” world.⁶⁵

⁶² Mona Livholts, “Writing Water: An Untimely Academic Novella,” in *Documents of Life Revisited: Narrative and Biographical Methodology for a 21st Century Critical Humanism*, ed. Liz Stanley (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2013), 179.

⁶³ Alison M. Jaggar, “Love and Knowledge: Emotion in Feminist Epistemology,” *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy* 32, no. 2 (1989): 151–176.

⁶⁴ Alison M. Jaggar and Susan R. Bordo, eds., introduction to *Gender/Body/Knowledge: Feminist Reconstructions of Being and Knowing* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 2.

⁶⁵ Jaggar and Bordo, introduction to *Gender/Body/Knowledge*, 4.

In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick edit and introduce a volume that revisits similar themes.⁶⁶ In their introduction, “Openings on the Body,” Price and Shildrick note that the purpose of their Reader is to “uncover the very richness of feminist responses to the body.”⁶⁷ They further note the diversity of these responses:

Other feminist writers have developed theory that is explicitly embodied and insistent on the centrality of the material body; while yet others, influenced by poststructuralism and postmodernism in particular, have put into question the givenness and security of the so-called natural body, positing instead a textual corporeality that is fluid in its investments and meanings.⁶⁸

In discussing theory that explores the relationships between bodies and texts, Price and Shildrick specifically note the work of Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler:

The concern with the irreducible interplay of text and physicality which posits a body in process, never fixed or solid, but always multiple and fluid is one that resonates, implicitly and explicitly, in the work of theorists such as Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler.⁶⁹

One site for this resonance may be Grosz’s *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. In this volume, Grosz notes the fluidity of bodies and their performances:

It is this ability of bodies to always extend the frameworks which attempt to contain them, to seep beyond their domains of control, which fascinates me. . . . This signals the permeability of the question of sexual difference, its uncontainability within any particular sphere or domain; its refusal to respect the boundaries separating private and public, inside and outside, knowledge and pleasure, power and desire.⁷⁰

Other sites for this resonance may include Butler’s *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* and *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex.”* One interesting way to approach *Gender Trouble* may be to begin with the tenth

⁶⁶ Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, eds., *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁶⁷ Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, “Openings on the Body: A Critical Introduction,” in *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*, ed. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999), 1–2.

⁶⁸ Price and Shildrick, “Openings on the Body,” 1.

⁶⁹ Price and Shildrick, “Openings on the Body,” 6.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), xi.

anniversary edition and to explore Butler's own reflections on her text over time. In her 1999 preface relating to the 1990 edition, Butler offers a typically sophisticated and visionary context for revisiting her original work:

The aim of the text was to open up the field of possibility for gender without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be realized. . . . *Gender Trouble* sought to uncover the ways in which the very thinking of what is possible in gendered life is foreclosed by certain habitual and violent presumptions.⁷¹

This context includes revisiting notions of performativity:

Much of my work in recent years has been devoted to clarifying and revising the theory of performativity that is outlined in *Gender Trouble*. . . . The view that gender is performative sought to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body. . . . [And] there may well be a psychic theory of performativity at work that calls for greater exploration.⁷²

Butler further notes that "the iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility."⁷³

Additionally, Butler addresses an emerging concern of materiality: "On the status of the materiality of the body, I have offered a reconsideration and revision of my views in *Bodies that Matter*."⁷⁴ In this volume, Butler quickly notes an essential need to extend her exploration:

I began writing this book by trying to consider the materiality of the body only to find that the thought of materiality invariably moved me into other domains. . . . Not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies "are." . . . Inevitably, I began to consider that perhaps this resistance to fixing the subject was essential to the matter at hand.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Judith Butler, preface 1999 to *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, tenth anniversary edition (New York: Routledge, 1999), vii.

⁷² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xiv–xv.

⁷³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv.

⁷⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv.

⁷⁵ Judith Butler, preface to *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), ix.

In negotiating the complex theoretical terrain of embodiment, one valuable approach may be to explore Cixous' thematic interests in both "the body attacked" and "the incandescent body, eroticized."⁷⁶

One location where Cixous explores "the body attacked" is in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*. As in the above approach to *Gender Trouble*, it may be interesting to explore Cixous' own reflections on her text over time. In her 2005 preface relating to the 1998 edition, Cixous begins with discussions of texts and wounds:

The texts collected and stitched together sewn and resewn in this volume share the trace of a wound. They were caused by a blow, they are the transfiguration of a spilling of blood, be it real or translated into a haemorrhage of the soul.⁷⁷

In unexpected movements, Cixous embraces both her own stigma and her own stigmata:

I choose to *cultivate the stigma*. . . . Stigma stings, pierces, makes holes . . . and in the same movement distinguishes – re-marks – inscribes, writes. . . . I want stigmata. I do not want the stigmata to disappear. I am attached to my engravings, to the stings in my flesh and my mental parchment. . . . Traumatism as an opening to the future of the wound is the promise of a text.⁷⁸

For my part, in relation to discussions of "the body attacked," I am interested in emerging approaches to emotional healing and how these approaches may take into account relationships of subjectivity, trauma, and textuality. In *Feminist Therapy*, Laura S. Brown describes one emerging approach:

Feminist therapy is a theory that derives its inspiration and wisdom from an in-depth interrogation of standpoints that are unavailable to the dominant culture simply because they have been relegated to the margins. . . . what is inherent in feminist therapy is the radical notion that silenced voices of marginalized people are considered to be the sources of the greatest wisdom.⁷⁹

Additionally, in *Narrative Therapy*, Stephen Madigan describes another emerging approach:

Narrative therapy explores . . . the relationship between power and knowledge, structural inequalities, the textual identity of the dialogic person,

⁷⁶ Cixous and Jeannet, *Encounters*, 123.

⁷⁷ Hélène Cixous, "Preface: On Stigmatexts," trans. Eric Prenowitz, in *Stigmata: Escaping Texts* (London: Routledge Classics, 2005), xi.

⁷⁸ Cixous, "Preface: On Stigmatexts," xiii–xiv.

⁷⁹ Laura S. Brown, *Feminist Therapy*, Theories of Psychotherapy Series (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2010), 1–2.

the social location of the multi-sited person, the influence prevailing cultural discourse has on the shaping of how we view persons and problems, and questions on the origin and locations of problems. . . . [And it raises] a rather simple question: Who has the storytelling rights to the story being told?⁸⁰

One location where Cixous explores “the incandescent body, eroticized,” is in *The Third Body*. In this text, there is an obvious shift in language and tone from Cixous’ more “academic” works – the writing is fluid, imagistic, and intuitive, which raises the question of how diverse writing forms may express different ways of knowing. Also, the text explores the “third body” that emerges in relationships and the depths of merging that may be possible in these relationships:

For a long time I closed my eyes when he would leave, and I kept my eyes closed when we made love. . . . But he is in my flesh, and he is in my eyes, and he is the marrow of my bones.⁸¹

Additionally, there is a complexity to this eroticized third body that, perhaps, contains an ever present stigmata:

One of us felt we were dying with each departure. One of us knew that it wasn’t death but a pain as vivid and complete as the body of the one departing, that of the one staying behind, identical to that body, a body pained by violent absence. The body and the pain knew each other, and by being mixed together resembled one another, were named by the same words.⁸²

In this incandescence, this eroticism, an immanence seems to emerge:

Oh, I see everything, I see everything, light trickles from my pupils, I bathe all the bodies, those that have lived, those that are living. . . . I see everything, light is at the bottom of the waters, things at the bottom are dazzling.⁸³

For my part, in relation to discussions of “the incandescent body, eroticized,” I am interested in emerging expressions of lesbian spaces; how these expressions may take into account relationships of bodies, performativity, and texts; and how these expressions may invite the transformation of a broader

⁸⁰ Stephen Madigan, *Narrative Therapy*, Theories of Psychotherapy Series (Washington DC: American Psychological Association, 2011), 9.

⁸¹ Hélène Cixous, *The Third Body*, trans. Keith Cohen (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 1.

⁸² Cixous, *The Third Body*, 1–2.

⁸³ Cixous, *The Third Body*, 63.

culture and the creation of new possibilities for embodied relational performances.

In *Lesbian Utopics*, Annamarie Jagose emphasizes the importance of exploring both utopic and, perhaps, dystopic lesbian representations:

While it is important to identify and analyze the convergence of various discursive representations of “lesbian” at the utopic, it is equally important to understand that the utopically figured “lesbian” maintains a disavowed dependency on those very economies from which it attempts to distinguish itself.⁸⁴

Jagose also emphasizes the embodied and textual production of meaning:

The lesbian body, like the lesbian text, is never simply the surface on which meaning is either circumscribed and fixed or overthrown and disrupted but the surface on which the meanings of “lesbian” are being continually produced.⁸⁵

Over time, Jagose’s articulation of a “middle path” may prove to be particularly valuable:

Locating the lesbian body as a site of discursive contestation allows a middle path between the oppositional and ultimately equally unsatisfactory models of idealist voluntarism . . . and structural determinism. . . . It provides a passageway between the two positions with regard to emancipation: the one that posits liberation as proceeding fairly unproblematically from liberatory desire . . . and the other that rules out the possibility of emancipation, subject positions being regarded as entirely circumscribed within a language system that is wholly hostile to liberation.⁸⁶

In the conclusion to *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire*, Amy Villarejo notes that she has “barely glanced off the surface of how sexuality makes an affective difference, or produces affective value differently.”⁸⁷ Villarejo also asks a compelling question and offers an insightful personal finding:

Does “sexuality” somehow cease to be sexuality when processed through the transparency and revelation figured through “coming-out”? Yes: if But

⁸⁴ Annamarie Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 160.

⁸⁵ Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, 161.

⁸⁶ Jagose, *Lesbian Utopics*, 161.

⁸⁷ Amy Villarejo, *Lesbian Rule: Cultural Criticism and the Value of Desire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 196.

if the signified is permanently deferred, it is also endlessly elaborated, and those elaborations . . . hold the key precisely to the *value* of that deferral.⁸⁸

Along with this finding, Villarejo elegantly opens spaces for multiple emerging “gestures of coming-out”:

There are other, of course, questions that remain, the generation of which will have to await other publics, other gestures of coming-out, other readings. There are other films to watch, ways of blurring the lines between creative and critical work.⁸⁹

In *Framed: Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture*, Judith Mayne engages in a similar exploration. Mayne begins by “reflecting on some of the questions that feminist work on film and related areas . . . has raised about the very nature of theory.”⁹⁰ Mayne continues by expressing a personal interest:

My interest . . . is not in theory as an autonomous area of inquiry but, rather, in how the acts of looking and seeing are transformed when one looks differently. . . . Thus, what seems to me most important . . . is not the theory but the practice, and specifically, the practice of textual analysis.⁹¹

In the final chapter of this volume, “Su Friedrich’s Swimming Lessons,” Mayne looks at “how, in Friedrich’s haunting and complex meditations on desire, the family, and growing up, lesbianism is seen as possibility and potential.”⁹² In this analysis, Mayne makes a compelling argument about film language:

One could argue that given Friedrich’s relationship to the development of a film language adequate to the complexities of lesbian desire and representation, she is indeed exploring another language.⁹³

One example of this emerging film language (in *Gently down the Stream*) may include the following:

When the white screen appears, coupled with the poem about seeing, the possibilities of the cinema as a source of both directed seeing and unbounded dreaming are juxtaposed.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Villarejo, *Lesbian Rule*, 206–207.

⁸⁹ Villarejo, *Lesbian Rule*, 207.

⁹⁰ Judith Mayne, *Framed: Lesbians, Feminists, and Media Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), xii.

⁹¹ Mayne, *Framed*, xiii.

⁹² Mayne, *Framed*, xxii.

⁹³ Mayne, *Framed*, 194.

⁹⁴ Mayne, *Framed*, 198.

Another example may include images of water and swimming:

While water appears in a variety of forms in Friedrich's films, a particular insistent image is the woman swimmer. . . . The woman swimmer, then, is a narrative motif in Friedrich's work that embodies many of the same principles as the screen-within-the-film, and the two figures become central in Friedrich's visual and narrative explorations of cinema and lesbian representation.⁹⁵

A third related example may include images of marine mammals, as described in Mayne's analysis of *Damned If You Don't*:

We find the nun . . . at an aquarium where she stands entranced before the lush, sensual movements of whales. . . . There are two whales, and the implications of their sensual dance are unmistakable, their sheer joy in their movements and bodies a visual reminder to the nun of her own desires.⁹⁶

Mayne concludes this chapter (and this volume) with a several page comparison of Friedrich's films to Carol Anshaw's novel *Aquamarine* and their "similar ambiguities of what it means to speak of lesbian representation."⁹⁷ I am very fond of Mayne's concluding sentences:

In both Anshaw's novel and Friedrich's films, lesbian narratives do not triumphantly affirm lesbian identity but affirm, rather, lesbian possibilities. They are possibilities as rich with complexities as the color aquamarine . . . as a swimmer moving downstream.⁹⁸

In the age of untimeliness, I was always writing water.

—Mona Livholts, "Writing Water: An Untimely Academic Novella"⁹⁹

⁹⁵ Mayne, *Framed*, 198–199.

⁹⁶ Mayne, *Framed*, 200.

⁹⁷ Mayne, *Framed*, 208.

⁹⁸ Mayne, *Framed*, 210.

⁹⁹ Livholts, "Writing Water," 186.

Reflections

*Someone will remember us
I say
even in another time
— Sappho¹⁰⁰*

*Oh, yes, we remember you,
Sappho—
even in these troubled times.*

I am haunted by a vision.

A young woman in pajamas sits on a bed with her knees drawn to her chest and her arms wrapped around her shins.

Staff in white uniforms have told her what to think and how to behave. Eventually, they will discard her.

I feel an urgent need to offer her something – an invitation, a prayer, a blessing.

In a long, slow process, I am finding my words. Today, however, I echo Sappho's words in another time and another way.

*stand to face me beloved
and open out the grace of your eyes
— Sappho¹⁰¹*

¹⁰⁰ Carson, *Fragments of Sappho*, 297.

¹⁰¹ Carson, *Fragments of Sappho*, 281.

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