

Editorial

What comes out, next

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When I first encountered theories of gender, under the curiosity driven auspice of an elective in Sociology, it was thanks to the tutelage of the inimitable Lorraine Mortimer. She lit fires in bellies like nothing I had known, and her radicalism shimmered around her sharp edges. She was a person who refused to fold herself into neat expectations; I was in awe of her fearlessness. I watched her fight the bureaucracy for two years, until she finally tore free from the manacles of her department, amidst hot sparks of controversy, and disappeared from the university – and my life. I still miss her – she was one of the best “guerrilla” academics that I have ever known – but it heartens me that champions such as her continue to proliferate. At *Writing from Below* we are deeply interested in things that don’t “fit”; things that bend, diversify, challenge, test and break. This special supplement issue, “What Comes Out, Next,” brings together a strong collective of such voices. Amongst them we have a witnessing, a decoding, an interrogation, a disclosure, a score to settle, a talking to and a shout; and they all corroborate the rigorous, exciting and multimodal iterations of gender, sexuality and diversity that *Writing from Below* is proud to facilitate.

Leading the troupe is Judy Lattas with her remarkable “Ramah Robot, Brain Mother.” Her work is an intense intersection of postcolonialism, religion, gender, identity and psychopathology. Lattas charts five years of correspondence (predominantly via thousands of emails) with a woman whose mental illness is channelled through the distorting lens of Christian missionary indoctrination in postcolonial India. Ramah’s voice, often a shout, twists and turns through the abject, the exalted and the paranoid; and collides with the biblical, the mythological and the pervasive intervention of western culture and “whiteness.” This “diary of the body in deep alienation” – both physical and mental – is a rare glimpse into a specific psycho/socio/cultural site of the hidden; Lattas discloses with theoretical mindfulness and ethical care. “Ramah Robot” is an unprecedented offering that provides a glimpse into the experience of mental illness as a “symptom,” a “performance,” and a “[re]presentation,” of modernity.

The second article in this edition is an unconventional mingle of conversation, research, theory and reflection. “Re-reading Sexuality as a Life Practice,” is a joint effort by Peter Banki and Nikó Antalfy, who engage with notions and experiences of non-normative heterosexuality. It is an interesting personal debate about “queerness,” with its political, personal and ethical ramifications. Banki discusses his participation in a gay men’s workshop around power, sexuality and BDSM; for him it triggered desires which appeared at odds with his heterosexual identification and encouraged him to explore more fluid boundaries. Antalfy discusses her involvement in polyamory and believes that such “ethical non-monogamy” may provide an avenue for “radically re-negotiating the power relations between genders.” As part autobiographical conversation, and part ideological rumination, this work journeys through tested boundaries and subversive playgrounds and aims to explore, challenge and redress mainstream restrictions and categorisation; all with a tantalising whiff of the confessional.

Moving on, we present you with “Preliminary Materials Toward a Theory of the Female Intellectual.” Zoya Brumberg’s wonderful “Mynifesto” is a discursive three-way proposition of traditional scholarly research, informed philosophical

consideration and corpulent personal narrative. Brumberg’s work incorporates sections of memoir and weaves them into a potential hypothesis for countering the gendered bias that has been prevalent in mainstream philosophical and intellectual discourse. This intelligent and unique offering is developed cooperatively with the likes of Derrida, Duras, Irigaray and Joyce.

Eden Elizabeth Wales Freedman’s work, “The Queer Faces of Eve: Witnessing Theories in Sedgwick’s *Dialogue On Love*,” is a spirited collage of “queeries.” In it, she examines themes of sexuality, witnessing and trauma in Sedgwick’s compelling autobiographical work but also explores her tendency towards multiplicity when exploring manifestations of her own (and more broadly, her theorisations of) queerness; “For Sedgwick, to witness queerness is not to speak an essential identity (to say ‘I am gay’) but...to fashion the self in conversation with others, to work mutually to (de)construct individuality.” In a mirroring of Sedgwick’s own style, Freedman goes on to open conversations with alternate theories of queerness which, in turn, caution against the reductive and stifling dangers of despecifying queer identities. There is a lovely layering here of one self onto self onto another self, that speaks of Freedman’s intimacy with Sedgwick’s work and consequent affinity. It may be hard to encounter this work and not subsequently seek out the originating Eve.

“The Visitor” is a multimedia score, in which Michael Coombes has demonstrated both the potential and value of feeding work through different mediums. His scripted piece is a textual representation of a musical composition, predominantly utilising Messiaen’s manipulation of material. Encouraged by our editorial team, Michael has extended this work to include a wonderful soundscape that evokes a modernist sensibility and is reminiscent of the works of Joyce and Beckett. We are very pleased to be incorporating such vibrant and experimental work in this issue.

Anna Wing Bo Tso’s “Masculine Hegemony and Resistance in Chinese language,” engages thematically and aesthetically with notions of alterity. On the one hand, she investigates the patriarchal domination of Chinese character structure,

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vocabulary, word order, pronouns, proverbs and idioms. On the other hand, the non-Chinese reader is submerged in the visual dissimilitude and beauty of traditional Han script. Her paper charts both a theoretical and visual course through a language with strong cultural overtones and examines the rubric through a shifting contemporary lens. As a lecturer in Applied Linguistics, Tso aims to explore “whether there is room for Chinese language to go against its sexist morphological and lexical structure and strive for gender neutrality.”

The edition closes with a piece of short fiction by Julia Prendergast, entitled “Bygones.” A hen’s party sex quiz triggers memories for the main protagonist Annie, whose difficult and promiscuous sexual history still reverberates and causes internal havoc for her in the present. The first-person narrative jumps skittishly between present and past, between stale friendships and days bygone. It creates an idiosyncratic and speech-like narrative that grounds us in the now and also takes us back to the originating site of Annie’s trauma.

We hope this strong cohort of papers will inspire you to sit, read, contemplate and question. And that it might stir, build and fan your own internal fires.