Breasted Bodies as Pedagogies of Excess
Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming M/other

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Breasted Bodies: An Introduction

Women’s breasts are invested with social, cultural, and political meanings that shape the ways we make sense of, experience, and materialize our embodied selves. Breasts can be highly prized objects of sexual desire and/or markers of the monstrous, harassment, and shame, thus compelling women to experience their breasted bodies in confusing and contradictory ways. Large breasts further complicate this ambivalence given the social and cultural meanings understood in relation to breast size. Discourses of beauty in Western society have required breasts to be a particular size and shape, and while the popular message is that “big is better,” feminist scholar Iris Young (1990/2005) notes that the ideal breast is “round, sitting high on the chest, large but not bulbous, with the look of firmness” (p. 191). Breasts that do not measure up (or cover up) threaten to exceed the rational framework, disrupting the binary categories through which the clean and proper self is held apart from abjection (Kristeva, 1982). Maternal breasts—swollen, expansive, and sometimes leaking—emphasize the unpredictable and excessiveness of a woman’s breasted body.

Confronted by a multiplicity of visual representations of breasts in our everyday lives, there still remains a conspiracy of silence and invisibility around the experience of breasts. Accordingly, this chapter examines how stories of breasts can be figured into an enabling narrative for (academic) women and the ways they live in their breasted bodies. It considers the possibilities of breasts as thoughtful, emotional, and knowledgeable asking the questions: If breasts can be thought of as a site of embodied knowledge, how could this re-conceptualize understandings of and engagements with curriculum and pedagogy? How might breasted bodies become pedagogies of excess? How does a woman academic incorporate her breasted-self into her professional work? And, how does her work affect her breasts?

To examine and value women’s embodied breasted experience, we draw on Rosi Braidotti’s (2002/2006) materialist theory of becoming, which opens up morphologies of embodiment to mutations, changes, and transformations destabilizing aesthetic ideals of the maternal body. A materialist theory of becoming provides a way to think of m/othering as a relational process, a site of inter-embodiment that shifts the figurations of maternal subjects and their ways of being in the world (Springgay & Freedman, 2007, 2009; Springgay, 2008a, 2008b). Figurations
de-center images offering multi-layered visions of the subject that are dynamic, accentuating that we live in a world that is always in transition, hybrid, and nomadic, “and that these stages defy the established modes of theoretical representation” (Braidotti, 2002/2006, p. 2). Differing from metaphor, figurations are living maps, particular and specific accounts of the self. Drawing on our own narratives as breasted bodies, our aim is not to make claims about the experiences of all large breasted women, or the maternal body, but to use our stories to interrogate understandings of embodiment, m/othering, and public pedagogy.

Created as a kind of hypertext, which makes possible a dynamic organization of information through links and connections, the chapter engenders a public pedagogy and a bodied curriculum. It is hyper—going over and beyond—in both the performance of collaborative writing and in the form, which includes narratives, images, and video (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7X3QT5b-n8s for Part 1 and http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCau1BCeTWw for Part 2).

Hypertext produces what Umberto Eco (1962/2006) refers to as an open text. Openness strips a text of necessary and foreseeable conclusions and places the reader/viewer as part of the discontinuity of meaning making. Openness suggests a kind of movement where numerous possibilities of personal intervention take shape, placing the reader/viewer at “the focal point of a network of limitless interrelations” (Eco, 1962/2006, p. 23). Deleuze also saw possibilities in deterritorializing representation, calling for a partnership between authors/artists and readers/audience in favor of mutual displacements and a rejection of the tradition of ownership, authentic interpretation, and critique. Reading and writing become moments of affects: a cartography of forces, movements, and interventions with the purpose of rupturing spaces of transformation and becoming. This is similar to Hélène Cixous’ (1975) “écriture feminine” a form of writing the body that places experience before language and privileges non-linear, cyclical writing.

Our chapter as hyper points to the gaps between unquestioned assumptions about breasts and the actuality of mothers’ lives, lives which in their multiplicity often strain against these very assumptions. We envision our writing/performing as the creative invention of concepts and the intensive mapping of affects and events. In doing so, we propose a different possibility for thinking of breasts, m/othering, curriculum, and pedagogy away from representation to one that is relational, connective, and affective. Posing alternative and counter cartographies of
m/othering beyond representation we unhinge breastwork re-conceptualizing breasts as haptic, intense, and dynamic.

Young (1990/2005) observes that all women are affected by their experience of having/lacking breasts, whether they are mothers or not. We concur, suggesting that the academic maternal breast, plump and pumped, engorged, swollen, aching, and cut open is a lived bodily experience that marks the mother’s body as excessive. This excessiveness we envision, not as lack or something to be contained, but as a cultural corporeal schema, which Rosalind Diprose (2002) considers to be “a set of habits, gestures and conducts formed over time in relation to other bodies” (p. 105). Thus, our bodily schema is formed in relation to other bodies and attenuated through the breast. Addressing bodily excess in order to rupture and re-configure (and perhaps parody) the experience of breastwork and m/othering in the academy, we created a performance-reading as a way to bring-into-being our breasted stories. Narratives and images from the performance-reading are folded into the chapter, evocative of Derrida’s (1990) “iterability”—repeated, remade, and remade continuously—the breasted maternal body becomes unbound, liminal, and indiscreet.

Autobiography and Breastwork: Queering M/othering as an Intransitive and Relational Practice

Maurya arrived on a sunny, mild afternoon at the end of December, 2004. I had just completed my first semester as an assistant professor—my first appointment out of graduate school. Only a few weeks after giving birth through an emergency c-section, and still juggling the demands of first time mothering, I was required by my department to attend a meeting on campus to review job applications for an assistant professor position. I was exclusively nursing which meant Maurya would need to come with me. However, as a three week-old mother, I had not figured out the art of public breastfeeding, diaper changing, and stroller navigation over ice. By the time we arrived at the meeting, I was already a nervous wreck, and Maurya, who had nursed before I left the house, was screaming to be fed once again. I settled myself into a chair, behind a stack of files containing job applications, and proceeded to nurse Maurya. At home I whipped it out, flopped on the couch, and cradled her with one arm while the other held my breast to her face, settling into a lactation stupor. In the conference room, I tried draping a receiving blanket over my shoulder and her head, but her little legs kept kicking it aside (hey, mom, I can’t see you) and I wasn’t doing such a skilled job of nursing with one hand, while the other flipped through files on the table. My breast kept falling out of her mouth. Milk sprayed and Maurya screamed. Then she pooped. Without a changing table near by, I hovered in a corner of the conference room, cleaning yellow baby shit, while simultaneously being asked by colleagues my opinions about various candidates (I had yet to read a single file). Muttering an answer, while juggling the sticky paste of butt cream, I thought I noticed milk droplets on the edges of the files. Somewhere in the midst of this meeting, after nursing a few more times and more poopy diapers, I excused myself and went home. Years later, one of my colleagues, a full professor, feminist, and mother of two said to me (remembering that fateful day): “I didn’t know who was going to cry first—you or your daughter.”

According to Donald Winnicott (1989), breastfeeding teaches us about the aliveness of the mother and the relationality between bodies. It is, in Merleau-Pontian (1968) terms, a chiasmic encounter, a constitutive relationship between beings. Jennifer Biddle (2006) suggests that the “taking in of the breast to feed and to be fed begins a lifelong and ambiguous intercorporeal relation to others” (p. 26). This breasted ontology recognizes the pleasures of breastfeeding, the
euphoric rush of the “let down,” and the gentle rhythmic intertwining of one body to another. Yet, it is simultaneously coupled with horror and potential harm brought on by the inability to produce milk, painful engorgement, mastitis, the aggressive and bleeding “latch on,” the infant who feeds and feeds and will not settle, and the potential of an all-consuming relation (Biddle, 2006). Breastfeeding suggests a way of being together in difference, a coming together, where skin touches and mingles, then separates and parts. Elspeth Probyn (2001) asks: “Could skin be the site where difference becomes intense, where it sucks both ways and rearranges the present?” (p. 90). Thinking through skin as a site of embodied knowledge, Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey (2001) suggest that skin is not simply a covering for the body or a garment that contains and holds it in place but an event where bodies become exposed to other bodies in the past, present, and unimaginable future.

Writing skin is an attempt to autobiographically express difference, not as pathological, but as hybrid, monstrous, and anomalous, which unfolds virtual possibilities and points to positive developments and alternatives (Braidotti, 2002/2006). The video we created of our breasted skin, marked with moles, hair, wrinkles, scars, and discolorations makes visible Deleuze’s central figuration of becoming-minority/nomad/molecular/bodies-without-organs/woman in which subjectivity is “non-unitary yet politically engaged and ethically accountable” (Braidotti, 2002/2006, p. 84). Deleuzian becomings deterritorialize subjectivity stressing the need for a de-centering of the dominant subject. According to Braidotti (2002/2006), “The process of being nomadic in the rhizomatic mode favoured by Deleuze is not merely anti-essentialistic, but a-subjective, beyond received notions of individuality. It is a trans-personal mode, ultimately collective” (p. 85). What becomes central is the process of “undoing” (Springgay, 2005) shifting the grounds for sexed and gendered subjectivities. Becoming opens up the possibility for queer-ing m/othering, curriculum, and pedagogy.

By queering, we mean the process of looking at breastfeeding and m/othering practices outside the normative constraints that apply in contemporary Western culture, and which therefore has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities (Giles, 2004; Sullivan, 2003). As Eve Sedgwick (1995) notes, queer as a transitive performance is both “relational” and “strange.” A queer mode of inquiry invites an opening out of attitudes towards m/othering as a practice marked by difference, relationality, and fluidity. The framework of “queer” works to name an alternative rendering of m/othering and to dislodge it from its adherence to heteronormative reproductive logic. Suturing queer to m/othering thus recuperates those desires, practices, and subjectivities that are rendered impossible and unimaginable within conventional mothering ideologies by juxtaposing various texts against each other. Moreover, a queer framework radically resitutes questions of home, dwelling, and domestic space in relation to m/othering, curriculum, and public pedagogy. Contesting the notion of “home” as a space of purity, tradition, and authenticity, with the figure of mother enshrined at its centre, queer theory evokes “home” spaces that are permanently and already ruptured as “public.”

Drawing from the work of Maxine Greene, Janet Miller (2005) imagines how autobiography, conceptualized as a queer curriculum practice, might challenge our understandings of the familiar, of the everyday, and of the normal by asking us to dis-identify with others and ourselves. Miller (2005) asks,

[W]hat might happen in educational theory and practice if we were to use autobiography to ‘trouble’ the links between acts, categories, representations, desires and identities? What possibilities might open if we were to make evident identity’s construction in order to create more space for and recognition of the various actions and ‘selves’ performed daily in a social landscape often blinded and hostile to variety? (p. 220)
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Reading/writing/imaging our breasted autobiographies through a queer framework “can cast in new terms the ways in which we might investigate our multiple, intersecting, unpredictable and unassimilated identities” (p. 220) and thus elaborate a creative, active, and empowered sense of subjectivity. Molecularization—queering—alters the notion of autobiography from a narrative authored by the self about the self, to a process of becoming intransitive where binaries, linearity, and other sedimented habits are deterritorialized. Writing/imaging is about “transiting in in-between spaces, cultivating transversality and mutations” (Braidotti, 2002/2006, p. 94).

I discovered that I was pregnant exactly one month after I turned in my materials for tenure and promotion. As my tenure materials worked their way through the process—outside reviewers, department committees, college committees, and university committees—my body began to swell. And as I wondered about how my colleagues were evaluating my scholarship, I also wondered about how my colleagues were evaluating my bulging belly and especially my ever-expanding bust-line.

Large breasts have various meanings for the socially constituted body. According to Rachel Milsted and Hannah Frith (2003), women with large breasts are judged to be incompetent, unintelligent, immoral, and immodest, and will be more inclined to have numerous sexual partners. While large breasts signify the overly sexual feminine, the ever expanding maternal breast is viewed as asexual and/or monstrous.

Although there are multiple histories that examine subjectivity, there are often two most commonly used forms. The Cartesian model of mind/body reduces the body so that it becomes a supplement of the mind. A more phenomenological approach places subjectivity as inseparable from experience and being-in-the-world. Yet, both theories assume a normal model of corporeality. Shildrick (2001) argues, “The so-called normal and natural body, and particularly its smooth and closed up surface, is then an achievement, a model of the proper in which everything is in its place the chaotic aspects of the natural are banished” (p. 163). In contrast, the monstrous resists the values associated with normalcy, reminding us of what must be cast-out from the proper and clean subject. The abject cannot be completely expelled from the body, but is always already present, disturbing and endangering the limits of the body (Kristeva, 1982). Theories of abjection suggest that the fundamentally unstable corpus is always already present, threatening to reveal the corporeal vulnerability of the self. As opposed to the normative body, which posits the separation and proper constitution of bodily form, the pregnant and nursing body conjoined with another becomes a figure of excess. Thus, the ambiguous, fluid, and unbounded body marks the monstrous as a site of disruption. Excess becomes, not lack, but lack of containment (Grosz, 1994). It is a body constructed within complexity, a formless flow, a viscosity.
On campus, while I’m surrounded by academic women, many of whom have had children during the course of their careers, it feels as if I’m the first woman to give birth and lactate. My office is not private, I share it with two grad students, and the door has a large window. I’m offered an empty office space for pumping purposes cluttered with dusty books and empty boxes, where the only outlet for my Medela pump n’ style is behind a bookshelf. For the remainder of term, I chose to invite students to my home or the local coffee shop; my daughter always joins us. What’s more natural than coffee and milk? I’m asked by a colleague if I ever plan on holding office hours?

Andrea O’Reilly (2004) argues that there are differences between motherhood and mothering. She contends that “the term “motherhood” refers to the patriarchal institution of motherhood which is male-defined and controlled, and is deeply oppressive to women, while the word “mothering” refers to women’s experiences of mothering which are female-defined and centred, and potentially empowering to women” (p. 2). However, this bifurcated approach suggests that there is another ideal form of mothering, one that lies “outside” of patriarchy and one that assumes a fixed, static, and essential notion of the maternal self. In re-conceptualizing m/othering from the perspective of performativity we recognize the relationality between mother and other. As Emily Jeremiah (2006) writes, “To understand mothering as performative is to conceive of it as an active practice—a notion that is already progressive, given the traditional Western understanding of the mother as passive” (p. 21). In doing so, we shift our attention from motherhood as biological, selfless, and existing prior to culture, to a practice that is always incomplete, indeterminable, and vulnerable. A relational understanding of m/othering opens up the possibility of an ethical form of exchange between self and other and “allows us to understand the maternal subject as engaged in a relational process which is never complete and which demands reiteration” (p. 28). M/othering as performance “contain[s] the potential for a disruption of dominant discourses on maternity” (p. 25) and thereby makes room for maternal agency. This re-conceptualization of m/othering refuses to be split, while also remaining ambivalent.

About 20 weeks into my pregnancy, I was diagnosed with Gigantomastia. For those of you unfamiliar with the term, Gigantomastia, or as I affectionately called it at the time, Big Boob Syndrome, is the rapid growth of the breasts usually associated with pregnancy. Such a condition is VERY rare—with an incidence of 1/28,000–100,000 (Argarwal, Kriplani, Gupta, & Bhatla, 2002). I wonder if the statistics on Gigantomastia mirror the statistics for m/others getting tenure and promotion at a tier one university while maintaining one’s sanity.

As I prepare to wean my son, I agonize over my conflicted emotions. I am unable to continue nursing given the demands of tenure and two children under the age of three. I simply cannot produce what we both need. In preparing to let go, I nurse him often, savoring his milky breath.
And then the slow drying up, the shriveling of skin, the hanging limpness of heavy sacks. Six months later, the weaning process complete, my breasts refuse to give up their milk production. At moments both surprising and comforting a small trickle of milk will ooze from the end of my nipple. This wetness is a reminder of my breasted connection to my children’s lives, their mouths and tongues forever imprinted on my skin.

The camera is shaking slightly as it moves over scar tissue then nipple, exposing the jagged lines of stitches, and the yellowish discharge of milk. This movement invites the viewer to enter the video and to move like the marks on the skin, producing an effect more ontological than ocular. The encounter between viewer, image, and breast operates as a rupture in our habitual modes of being, producing a cut and/or a crack (O’Sullivan, 2006). The encounter with and of skin is further troubled by the performance of putting on maternity bras, their sizes increasing exponentially. Nursing pads flutter to the floor, refusing to remain still, while fleshy melons are heaved into the bra cups.

The video and performance(s) oblige us to think otherwise; to think in intensities, experimentations, and forces that operate beyond representation and meaning. Brian Massumi (1993) contends that when we abandon the fixity of signification, meaning is figured as the envelopment of a potential. Thus, meaning becomes unfixed from identity and is conceived of as “a relation of a non-relation between two (or more) forces acting on one another in a reciprocal and transformative relationship” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 21). Rather than meaning as representation, meaning becomes the processes of encounter between forces or lines of flight which are complex, dynamic, and in a constant state of becoming something else altogether.

Similarly, Elizabeth Ellsworth (2005) understands pedagogy “not in relation to knowledge as a thing made but to knowledge in the making” (p. 1). She goes on to explain, “By focusing on the means and conditions, the environments and events of knowledge in the making, it opens an exploration into the experience of the learning self” (pp. 1–2). These experiences are relational and acknowledge that “to be alive and to inhabit a body is to be continuously and radically in relation with the world, with others, and with what we make of them” (p. 4). A pedagogy in the making—a relational learning experience—is a meaning encounter that opens bodies to other bodies in the process. As Massumi (1993) notes:
The thinking-perceiving body moves out to its outermost edge, where it meets another body and draws it into an interaction in the course of which it locks onto that body’s affects (capacities for acting and being acted upon) and translates them into a form that is functional for it (qualities it can recall). A set of affects, a portion of the object’s essential dynamism, is drawn in, transferred into the substance of the thinking-perceiving body. From there it enters new circuits of causality. (p. 36)

Another way of thinking about pedagogy/art that unhinges it from representation is to think about multiplicity and assemblages. A multiplicity, write Deleuze and Guattari (1987) “has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions” (p. 8). When we conceive of knowing and being, processes of meaning making, as multiplicities, the world is no longer thought of as being comprised of distinct entities but rather “difference becomes the condition of possibility for phenomena. But this difference is not that between already demarcated signifiers (it is not a semiotic) rather it is a difference in intensity” (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 31). Such a reconceptualization allows us to move towards an asignifying framework, in which m/othering becomes insubstantiated, hyper, and excessive—differences of intensity.

The literature notes that for those who experience Gigantomastia, it is common for each breast to gain 10 or more pounds, often in less than a month. Usually, a woman goes up 1–2 bra sizes during the course of her pregnancy; I went up 5–6 bra sizes during the course of my pregnancy. My department head took a definite interest in my breasts. She was not shy with her staring, nor was she afraid to point out the hugeness of my boobs. On many occasions she even offered tips on where to buy bras. I laughed with her, hyper-aware of the strange harassment I was experiencing, hyper-aware of my tenure documents working their way through the system. I always accepted her shopping tips with a “thank you.”

Writing about art, Deleuze calls for a new partnership between artists and viewers based on mutual displacements and a rejection of authorial truth. Art theorist Claire Bishop (2006) approaches Deleuzian thinking in her writing on the politics of participation. In calling for a mode of spectatorship that is active, she argues that participation does not lie “in anti-spectacular stagings of community or in the claim that mere physical activity would correspond to emancipation, but in putting to work the idea that we are all equally
capable of inventing our own translations” (p. 16). This would imply that audiences or learners
not be divided into “active and passive, capable and incapable, but instead would invite all of us
to appropriate works for ourselves and make use of these in ways that their authors might never
have dreamed possible” (p. 16).

The process of “inventing our own translations” is not a neat and tidy process; it is a place
of pedagogical multiplicity, full of excessive understandings and individualized provocations.
Ellsworth (2005) states that “a scene of pedagogical address must necessarily remain open and
vulnerable to learning selves who might misuse it, reject it, hate it, ironize it, find and exploit its
limits, and even ridicule it” (p. 165). There is never the same reading of an event, historical hap-
pening, or experience. Ellsworth further reminds that we might have common knowledge, but
each of us experiences that knowledge “in an absolutely singular way that we can never share”
(p. 167). Thus, m/othering as public pedagogy calls for participation as civic engagement that
provokes and stimulates invention. As a form of civic engagement—an aesthetic one at that—m/
othering “tries to remain within the activity flows already occurring in a population or com-
munity. In this way, such engagement can be considered even more faithful to the first principle
of popular education—to let the learners do the leading (O’Donnell, 2006, p. 34).

I’m hovered over a filthy toilet in a public restroom. My breast pump is sucking away and the
sound of hundreds of leeches echoes throughout the bathroom stall. Fifteen minutes each side
seems like an eternity. I can hear the restlessness of feet on the other side of the stall door and
sense the consternation of impatient bladders. In order to be present at this academic confer-
ence, my first trip away from my eight month old daughter, I had to pump excessively for months
in order to leave behind the 400 ounces of milk she would require. My conference sessions,
ironically on the body and visual culture, are punctured by the “every-three-hours-bathroom
stall ritual.” I save the liquid gold in the hotel refrigerator, transporting it a week later on my
transatlantic flight. On day seven, the sound of leeches is interrupted by my aching sobs. Was
this conference worth it?

While breasts play a significant role in the construction of the self, they are rarely seen as
belonging to women themselves (Milsted & Frith, 2003). Although they are housed on her per-
son, from the moment they begin to show, a female discovers that her breasts are claimed by oth-
ers. Parents and relatives mark their appearance as a landmark event, schoolmates take notice,
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girlfriends compare, boys zero in; later a lover, a baby take their propriety share. No other part of the human anatomy has such semi-public, intensely private status and no other part of the body has such vaguely defined custodial rights (Brownmiller, 1984, p. 24).

Five months into my pregnancy, I attend a conference. I feel the strange stares from colleagues—my breasts now twice the size of my belly. People notice my body—they wonder is she pregnant or has she gained weight as a result of the strain of the tenure process. Trying not to judge, trying hard to keep eyes focused on my face, many ask me about tenure; a few confide that they were outside reviewers. I explain, “I will not find out about tenure until the end of the semester—about a month before I deliver.” “Oh, you’re pregnant?” they ask, outwardly relieved that the excesses of my body were not permanent.

Janet Miller (2005) in conversation with Mimi Orner and Elizabeth Ellsworth uses the concept of “excess” to call attention to discourses that contain and repress. They explain that “what becomes contained by an educational discourse and what becomes excess or excessive to it is no accident. Excess is a symptom of histories of repression and of the interests associated with those histories” (p. 111). Yet, excesses need to be noticed; excesses beg to be realized, performed and rewritten, as new understanding, as new and more complicated texts (Ellsworth, 1997; Lather, 1991).

It’s 2 a.m. and I’m trying to console my hungry infant. As I rock and nurse, I calculate the hours of sleep I will get that night. In two hour fragments, I hope to accumulate at least five hours before my two-year-old is up and running through the house demanding Cheerios and stories to be read. The nursing continues. My mind drifts to calculating the juggling of my breastwork. If I nurse him again before I leave the house, I can make it half-way through my undergraduate seminar class. I’ll offer the students a break and find a space to pump in the bathroom. If I pump again at lunch in-between advising meetings, I won’t have to escape to the restroom during my graduate class. I should be able to make it home to nurse him again just before dinner. Just the timing of everything hurts. We’ve been awake now in the middle of the night for more than an
hour, and hot angry tears stream down my face. I want to throw his swaddled body across the room and then heave my own lumpy shape out the window. I wear the exhaustion of breastfeeding on my body.

One month before the delivery of my son, I received tenure and promotion. Six months after the birth of my son, at the tail end of my maternity leave, I had breast-reduction surgery. Four months later, I received my year-end evaluation from my department head. She described my teaching and advising as very strong; she described my research and scholarship as good (mind you that particular year, I had co-authored an edited book, published four book chapters, one book review, and one article in a refereed journal); and she described my service to the university, college, and program as considerable. One week after receiving this review, I made an appointment to speak with my department head, curious to know what she meant by the words strong, good, and considerable in light of the fact that I had been on maternity leave for half of the year. I also was curious to know why my leave had not been mentioned in my review letter. Instead of explaining to me, she laughed a bit, mentioned something about my smaller breasts, and then asked if I was going to be one of those Associate Professors who continued to have babies instead of rising to the rank of Full Professor.

**Pedagogies of Excess: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming M/other**

Madeleine Grumet (2008) reminds us of the importance of following the apparently “random images that come to mind” during the writing process (p. x). She notes that these random images, these “things” help us to make associations in an effort to construct understanding. She writes, “the things we surround ourselves with, the things we see and touch, the things we pay attention to—all stand as icons of what matters” (p. xxi). In becoming m/others we begin to notice these random images in rhizomatic ways. We write/image/teach/research our lines between our children’s, or as Renee Norman (2001) suggests, we “write on top of small scrawls and drawings, not to erase them, but so our writing is fused” (p. 1). This living in-between the lines reminds us that personal experiences are narratives that run alongside the dominant discourse in such a way as not to mirror it, but to disrupt it, and to render it malleable and in motion (Ellsworth, 2005).
The writing of this chapter, the way in which we live our lives as academic m/others becomes pedagogies of excess, which actively create the terrain they map, setting out coordination points for worlds-in-progress, and for subjectivities-to-come. Writing, imaging, performing, teaching, m/othering—are all processes that are creative, constructive and always moving towards something else unnamable, or the yet unknown. Likewise, m/othering as pedagogies of excess is inherently aesthetic, a mapping that pays attention to regions of intensity and affects. Simon O’Sullivan (2006) writing about art practices from a Deleuzian perspective comments that excess need not be theorized as transcendent, but that we can think the aesthetic power of art in very much an immanent sense, as offering an excess not somehow beyond the world but an excess of the world, the world here understood as the sum total of potentialities of which our typical experience is merely an extraction. (p. 40)

M/othering as pedagogies of excess is possible when control and regulation disappear and we grapple with what lies outside the acceptable (Bataille, 1985).

Understanding excess as pedagogical seeks to offer new narratives about what it means to be in excess. Excess is meaning as something else altogether or as John Dewey (1938/1997) suggests, it is an experience “of a deeper and more expansive quality” (p. 47). Pedagogies of excess “take place at the turbulent point of matter crossing into mind, experience into knowledge, stability into potential, knowledge as promise and provocation into bodies in action, doing and making” (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 165). By queering m/othering, making it strange and relational, we are able to imagine other ways of being-in the world not represented by the feminine, heterosexual, passive, and private realm. Furthermore, by attending to the hyper, we are given over to excess, constituting our subjectivities as enfleshed and immersed within multiple sites of knowing.

Notes

1. The performance-reading was enacted at the 2008 Curriculum and Pedagogy Conference, Decatur, Georgia.

References

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