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(Re)Writing Woman with
“The Laugh of the Medusa” and *AntiOedipus*

By

Samantha Rodgers

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Date 10 Apr. 2017

(Re)Writing Woman:
A Revolution of Desire through Tattooed Bodies in Late Capitalism

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of
Eastern Kentucky University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my cat, Luci, because he is pretty rad.

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I would like to thank my thesis committee chair, Dr. Erin Presley, and my thesis committee member, Dr. Butler, for their guidance and patience. I would like to express my thanks to my partner, Alan, for challenging me to be a better scholar. Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Earl and Regina, for answering my panicked phone calls at 3a.m. and soothing my worry.

ABSTRACT

The importance of tattooing as an area of feminist composition study lies in its challenge to male discourse concerning the subjectivity of sexed, particularly female sexed, bodies that feminism has long ignored due to fear of essentialization. Cixous argues: "...Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (8). Tattooing has transitioned from writing masculine group identity (gangs, prisoners, sailors, etc.) into writing feminine embodied experience. It is a way for women to rewrite institutionalized norms of womanhood and humanity. Consequently, this paper argues that tattoos are a form of *l'écriture féminine* (écriture féminine). This is problematized, however, because unlike poetry, the original écriture féminine, described by Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa", tattoos are not usually inscribed by the women in whose skin they reside. Instead, tattoos are bought. The commodification of body and experience in this transaction supports a capitalist structure that upholds oppressive phallogocentric relations of power. Tattoos are far from another act of choice feminism that has been sublated into capitalist superstructures, though. The position of tattooing as an (anti)commodity raises important questions concerning feminist practices in late capitalism. This paper explicates how tattooing differs from other popular feminist fashions. In the end, it resolves the role capital conflict for women getting tattooed. Utilizing the concept of Body without Organs outlined in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, this paper asserts that tattoos still act as écriture féminine and as a result, carry revolutionary potential. Becoming a Body without Organs through écriture féminine is a resistance writing that complicates institutionalized codification.

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Chapter I Introduction

The importance of tattooing as an area of feminist composition study lies in its challenge to male discourse concerning the subjectivity of female sexed bodies. These are bodies that feminism has long ignored due to fear of essentialization. Hélène Cixous argues "...Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard" (880). Tattooing has transitioned from writing masculine group identity such as gangs, prisoners, sailors, etc. into writing feminine embodied experience. I use Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* and "The Laugh of Medusa" by Cixous as primary texts for this metacriticism of the conception of the body in western societies. The tattoo acts as something between a metaphor and metonymy that helps one understand this brand of feminist politics. It is a way for women to rewrite the institutionalized norm of womanhood as one who lacks and whose desire comes from lack. Consequently, this paper argues that tattoos are a form of *l'écriture féminine*. This is problematized, however, because unlike poetry, the original *écriture féminine*, described by Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa," tattoos are not usually inscribed by the women in whose skin they reside. Instead, tattoos are bought.

The commodification of body and experience in could be argued to support a capitalist structure that upholds oppressive phallogocentric relations of power like makeup or hair dye. Tattoos are different from more mainstream body modifications though. The position of tattooing as an (anti)commodity raises important questions concerning feminist practices in late capitalism. This paper explores how tattooing differs from other popular feminist fashions like t-shirts and pink cat-eared hats. Cixous' *écriture*

féminine through tattooing provides an embodied politic. In the end, it resolves the conflict of capital for women getting tattooed. Utilizing the concept of Body without Organs outlined in Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, this paper asserts that tattoos still act as écriture féminine despite commodity status and as a result, carry revolutionary potential. Becoming a Body without Organs through écriture féminine and using écriture feminine to remain deorganized is a way to implement political resistance to antifeminist ideals of the capito-patriarchy through a (re)writing of woman that complicates existing codifications of bodies by changing the way capitalism and sex interact.

For Deleuze and Guattari, sex is part of the infrastructure upon which society is built: "sexuality is everywhere: the way a bureaucrat fondles his records, a judge administers justice, a businessman causes money to circulate; the way the bourgeoisie fucks the proletariat; and so on. [...] Flags, nations, armies, banks get a lot of people aroused" (Deleuze and Guattari 322). This suggests that social structures of the economic and political spheres are based on the libidinal investment. Deleuze and Guattari assert, "Beneath the conscious investments of economic, political, religious, etc., formations, there are unconscious sexual investments, microinvestments that attest to the way in which desire is present in a social field, and joins this field to itself as the statistically determined domain that is bound to it" (200). According to Grosz, Lingis' characterization of primitive vs modern societies' conceptions of tattoos is indicative of Western society's discomfort with distorted boundaries (Grosz 145). The erasure of bisexuality, the of "fixing" intersex children, and refusal to use nonbinary pronouns are

symptomatic of this discomfort¹. The savagery of the tattoo is important because it challenges the group fantasy of civilization in the West. This savage “distribution of cruelty” turns the body into a text (141). Tattooing does not “simply displace or extend the already constituted, biologically pre-given libidinal zones” but eroticizes the entire body by emphasizing self-made orifices made by the tattoo needles (139). This blurring of the lines that separate dichotomies is a key facet of Cixous’ concept *l’écriture féminine* (880).

This paper is a metacriticism that will explore the relationships among tattooing, feminist corporality, and capitalism in order to explore theory to inform contemporary body politics through Deleuze and Guatarri’s *Body Without Organs* and Cixous’ *écriture féminine*. To avoid an arborescent model of writing that would ultimately undermine the ethos of this paper and support a phallogocentric discourse this paper avoids a unified thesis statement in favor of a series of interrelated assertions². They are: (1) Capitalism represses desire and therefore undermines the liberation ideology of feminism (2) The tattoo is the result of an alternative capitalist transaction that makes it an anticommodity (3) From a feminist standpoint, the tattoo raises important concerns about the relationship between choice feminism and capitalism (4) The body provides a plane upon which feminist ideals can be inscribed and made material because the tattoo combats the alienation of the body that occurs in a capitalist system (5) The body is the primary site

¹ For more information concerning bisexual erasure see Yoshino’s “The Epistemic Contract of Bisexual Erasure.” For more information concerning intersex children see Fausto-Sterling’s “The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female are not Enough.” For more information concerning discomfort with gender neutral pronouns see Petrows “In the War Over Pronouns, Gender-neutral Pronouns are here to Stay.”

² There is precedence for this format in several academic publications including my primary texts “The Laugh of the Medusa” and *Anti-Oedipus*.

upon which oppression is inflicted and any revolution must be a revolution of the body
(6) Oppression is generated from and perpetuated by modern structures of language (7)
tattooing rewrites the body so that the individual may unrepress the desires repressed in
late capitalism.

Chapter II Literature Review

This paper works in a materialist theoretical framework consistent with the assertions made in Hélène Cixous' "The Laugh of the Medusa" and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* which act as the primary texts for the metacriticism of the body politics of contemporary feminism³ through tattooing. Avoiding essentialism, this paper orients Cixous within a corporeal, intersectional feminism. This rebuts detractions such as those found in the editorial collective *Questions Féministes* that argue that it is a repressive and regressive fancy to assert that women are so different from men that they must find a new language to describe the feminine body and overcome oppression (Bray 29). Such an argument actively ignores the violence and oppression of the body that is perpetuated by enlightenment logic and print capitalism (Adorno and Horkheimer 3). A corporeal feminism like that pioneered by Elizabeth Grosz⁴ and Donna Haraway⁵ emphasizes the importance of not erasing bodily difference, which actually supports rather than dismisses the needs of trans people. Combined with an intersectional position, this feminism looks at class, race, and ability, how those are coded on the body and territorialized in the social order to create an inclusive, materially oriented philosophy. In

³ I use contemporary feminism rather than 3rd wave feminism because using "waves" as a system to define feminism imposes arbitrary historical boundaries composed by patriarchy onto a continuous movement. The wave system denies the work of many women of color outside major waves, it characterizes resistance as action-only and it denies the pluralistic extrapolating, collaborative nature of feminist ideals. Throughout this paper, I will also refer to 3rd wave feminism as choice feminism because of the emphasis on individual choice without regard to the material consequences of those choices. Information concerning the wave metaphor in feminism can be found in Nicholson's "Feminism in "Waves": Useful Metaphor or Not?" and further reading about choice feminism can be found in Goldman, Heath and Smith's "Commodity Feminism" and McCarver's "The Rhetoric of Choice and 21st-Century Feminism."

⁴ *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*

⁵ *Staying with the Trouble and Cyborgs, Simians, and Women*

order to understand the role of the body in a patriarchal, capitalist society, one must understand how capitalism, sex, gender and bodies interact and relate. Cixous, Grosz, and Deleuze and Guattari explain the intersections of oppression that occur in these relationships.

In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari provide insight into the way capitalism influence a body's role in society. Deleuze and Guattari start the book by attacking the notion that humans, machines, and nature are separate: "There is no such thing as either man or nature now, only a process of that produces the one within the other and couples the machines together. Producing- machines, desiring-machines everywhere, schizophrenic machines, all of species life: the self and the non-self, outside and inside, no longer have any meaning whatsoever" (2). This may seem counterintuitive at first; however, for Deleuze and Guattari, machines are directed by humans as is nature yet, both direct humans as well (4). All machines are produced by other machines; there is no origin (6). The cycle of interproduction described above makes humans and nature nonsubjective productions, or machines, and will prove to be an integral concept in the relationship of the body and capitalism (6).

Elizabeth Grosz also explores the produced nature of bodies in her book, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. She centers her analysis of sex and gender on the body rather than the consciousness or psyche which she claims Western feminism is prone to do (vii). Grosz identifies psychoanalysis as a driving force that produces current western understanding of the body. She argues, "the body is literally written on, inscribed, by desire and signification, at the anatomical, physiological, and neurological

levels” (60). Grosz takes to task the implication in psychoanalytic theory that female bodies are constructed from a standard male body (58). This leads Grosz to draw upon Foucault and Nietzsche to assert that “All of us, men as much as women, are caught up in modes of self-production and self-observation” (144) and “the body is not outside of history, for it is produced through and in history. Relations of force, of power, produce the body through the use of distinct techniques...and harness the energies and potential for subversion that power itself has constructed” (148). Grosz echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s conception of the body as produced. Furthermore, by arguing that the body is produced in and through history, she is arguing that understandings of the human body are produced by other human bodies because history is a human idea.

Deleuze and Guattari further explicate the relations of force and power that Grosz mentions. Psychoanalysis codes women and female sexuality as lacking (Deleuze and Guattari 299). This codification has its origins in the desires repressed in Oedipalization but Deleuze and Guattari write against Freud. They argue that Freud disregards the social in his concept of Oedipalization and thus fails to see it as capitalist coding (300). Capitalism needs to control and repress desire in order to prevent revolution (130). The repression that occurs from familialism, the sorting of society into nuclear family units, is necessary to make compliant subjects within the social order (120). This process sets internal limits to desire using the family thus, setting precedent for the latter repression of desire (303). This familial repression and later oppression in a capitalist system disfigures desire into a desire of lack, according to Deleuze and Guattari; in reality it is a productive force (120).

Deleuze and Guattari come full circle in this critique because desiring-production (instead of a desire of lack) like all production is the labor of machines. Desire as conceived by Deleuze and Guattari has no subject, because it comes from nonsubjective machines, and no object, because it is productive (28). Lack is a result of desire because desiring-machines are always linked to repressive social machines which gives people a false sense of harmony (314). Bodies are desire-producing machines linked to repressive social machines in this framework.

Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on this conception of the body. They state that the linking of desire-producing machines and social machines creates organization (organs) internally and externally (341). And the linking of machines creates a flow (5). What is flowing or what the flow carries varies based on the machines interacting. Deleuze and Guattari use bodily functions to demonstrate flow between and with machines (4-5). Organs control flows including flows of desiring-production. Grosz avows the importance of the body that Deleuze and Guattari describe to feminist thought, “their notion of the body as a discontinuous, nontotalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations, may be of great value to feminists attempting to reconceive bodies outside the binary oppositions imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object and interior/exterior oppositions” (164). The question that remains is how can feminists combat oppressive structures that define bodies in a fixed, structural manner that is harmful to all. Cixous and Deleuze and Guattari have an answer.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest an alternative to the socius defined by the linking of desiring-production and social machines, the Body Without Organs (Deleuze and Guattari 8). The BWO defies a singular definition; Deleuze and Guattari use it in several different ways throughout *Anti-Oedipus*. A Body Without Organs is a set of practices that dismantle the body's organization (150). The BWO resists the tranquility of the linked desire-producing and social machines and stops production (10). The BWO is described as so full that it becomes a consistent plane that the desiring machines act on (21). In Marxist terms, the BWO is capital and labor is a desire-producing machine (11). The BWO is the unproductive, inconsumable plane upon which codes are recorded (11). The organs the BWO has rid itself of are the organizations of Oedipalization.

Without the organs of Oedipalization, woman would be unwritten. Once uncoded, Cixous offers that fluidity replace the fixed binaries that characterize sexuality (880). For Cixous, the word *woman* works on two levels throughout "The Laugh of the Medusa." Materially, woman is corporeal. Woman is anyone who lives her life as woman. Cixous does not equate a vulva or uterus with womanhood, rather she equates a woman's body with womanhood. Even *male sexed* bodies can live as woman. After all, sex, gender and the body are constructed so the individual can reconstruct them. Metaphysically, woman is anything or anyone located on the fringes of the Symbolic Order which is social world of linguistic communication and the acceptance of the law which parallels Oedipalization. Those on the margins of the Symbolic Order are able to move meaning more freely because their signs are not connected to a single signified.

Furthermore, Cixous recognizes the different degrees of marginalization based on race. She asserts that the man/woman and white/black dichotomies come from the same oppressive system of binary opposition. She writes: “As soon as [women] begin to speak, at the same time as they’re taught their name, they can be taught that their territory is black: because you are Africa, you are black. Your continent is dark. Dark is dangerous” (878). While obviously, White women enjoy privilege not afforded to women of color, Cixous is correct in declaring that the oppressions come from the same place: the phallogentric culture built on the Symbolic Order.

Embodiment is imperative to *l’écriture féminine* because it disrupts dichotomies. Cixous claims that a woman must “write her self” (875). The act of a woman writing woman is to remap the phallogentric narrative written by history. Cixous wants woman to write woman. For a woman to write woman, she must write in a feminine style, free from one-to-one signification and arborescent logic. When a woman writes woman, she is writing over what culture inscribed. Society cannot rewrite what she has permanently inscribed into her body. The nature of the inscription is not of nearly as much importance as the act of getting tattooed. It is the event of getting tattooed and living tattooed that changes the flows of desire. To borrow from McLuhan and Fiore, the medium is the message (26). Once tattooed the body interacts with society differently. The amount of difference depends on the amount and visibility of the tattoos but even a small, mostly invisible blurs the lines of self and other, mind and body. In congruence with Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological theory of embodiment, the tattoo conflates the subject and object. Since we are our bodies, the tattoo is no longer an object but part of the canvas which is the subject. The more visible and the higher percentage of the body that is

tattooed, the more conflation of foundational binaries occur. As a woman tattoos herself more and more visibly, her potential for movement within the symbolic order increases.

By writing her body, the woman creates a new signifying order that does not serve capitalist interest when she (re)inscribes presence and absence onto her body through tattooing-- or in terms of labor, by when she changes the nature of (re)production by redirecting (her) desire from capital to herself. Eason and Hodges state that body modification as a dress act “provides a bridge between the idea of tattooing and body piercing as a commercial act taking place within the marketplace and an artistic practice used to meaningfully adorn the body” (340). Tattooing decompartmentalizes the canvas by making public the private desires, by making human into art, by bringing savagery to civilization. The more tattooed a woman, the more disorganized her body becomes. This deterritorialized flow of production threatens capitalism which requires the individual be cut off from the means of production (Goodchild 102). Thus, the tattooed body becomes disorganized when it is not overcoded by capitalists *socii* that define one based on their role in production. No role can be assigned to a woman who remains without organs; the body then remains open to be filled by intensities⁶ of free-flowing desire. In a sense, women who seek liberation from the capito-patriarchy are already BWO because the very process of wanting to become a BWO is deorganizational (21). Tattoos offer both a metaphor and concrete practice of micropolitics⁷ through which one can better

⁶ An intensity is an asignifying particle. In Derridaian terms, an intensity is difference.

⁷ Micropolitics act on a small scale enacted by individuals. They are related to De Certeau's concept of tactics.

understand and a process to become a BWO and how one can (re)write woman through l'écriture feminine.

Chapter III

Tattooing in and Through History

The savage inscription is a working over the skin, all surface effects. This cutting in orifices and raising tumescence does not contrive new receptor organs for the depth body, nor multiply ever more subtle signs for the psychic depth where personal intentions would be being formed; it extends the erotogenic surface.

Lingis in *Excesses*.

Tattoos occupy a complicated position in western culture as neither acceptable nor acceptable. C.P. Jones gives a variety of examples of words constructed from the *stigma* root in both ancient Greek and Roman literature to construct a compelling argument for understanding tattoos as stigma in that time period. He presents strong evidence of *stigma* meaning tattoo rather than other modifications such as branding and piercing. Jones chronicles Xenophon's account of "[*estigmenous*]" Thracians "decorated on back and front...with flowers" and "[*stigmata*]" on servants of Atargatis who were by Herodotus (6). Jones' attestations of *stigma* cognates in ancient Greek and Roman culture are often the result of putative measures or uncivilized practices. The meaning of *stigma* remains colored by negative connotation in modern English.

Jones concludes that tattoos in the civilizations of which much of Western society is modeled served a variety of functions but disgrace was one of the most prominent and important. By starting her collection with this essay, Caplan is hearkening to a conception of the tattooed people as pariahs. It is telling that stigmatized people are othered as well. Slaves who were exploited for their labor and people of color were the first bearers of stigma in antiquity. It is still low socioeconomic status people (who are disproportionately people of color) who are stigmatized today. Below Jones' careful linguistic narrative lies the assertion that stigma is an embodied condition.

Tattoos entered Western culture as punitive but many other cultures like the Egyptians used them for erotic expression. Today, in Western society the tattoo lies somewhere in between decorative self-expression and stigmatization. On one hand, they do not hurt a person's chances of employment and they have become most popular among young women who make up 59% of the tattooed population (Sinha-Roy). Yet, despite the tattoos seeming move to acceptability, women with tattoos are still seen as less attractive (Horne et. al.). To force tattoos into a purely acceptable or unacceptable dichotomy does not work because they change the way bodies interact with those established categories. The last essay in Caplan's collection brings issues of the body to the forefront. "Inscriptions of the Self: Reflections on Tattooing and Piercing in Contemporary Euro America" by Susan Benson examines the relationship between the incorporeal self and the physical body in England and the United States. She begins by juxtaposing modern societies' conception of the body with traditional societies conceptions; she is careful to note that "modern" and "traditional" are borrowed sociological terms (234). The United States, as a "modern" society, views adornment on the body as superficial; it does not have to reflect the incorporeal self. On the other hand, traditional cultures tend to see the outside appearance as a reflection of the internal self (235). Women who are heavily made up, dress in overly feminine or overly masculine styles, trans people who dress according to the norms of their gender are all thought to be hiding who they really are. Capitalism has turned identity into a metaphysical ideal to be bought rather than a set of material relations. In capitalist societies identity is constructed by what one produces and consumes but to prevent the populous from identifying those relations as oppressive to some those material relations have been coded with

metaphysical values. A working-class job is inferior to a professional job (less physical labor). Staying in the home is inferior to participating in the workforce (more money). Being a straight man is superior to being a gay man (more rights). Because tattoos become a permanent part of the physical body, the perception of tattoos is conflated between the capitalist metaphysics of identity and the material reality. The way tattoos are perceived varies with among contexts and people. Unlike hair dye, clothing or even plastic surgery, tattoos distort the lines between depth and superficiality.

Fashion, makeup plastic surgery, body building, etc. are all viewed as predominantly surface modifications to obscure the true self. Tattooing, according to Benson, is different. The practice is seen as “anti-repressive” to the inner savage (Benson 242), an explicit statement of self (244), and reclamation of the body for the self (249). Benson utilizes Gell’s “technical schema” of tattooing as “the puncturing of skin... the flow of blood, the infliction of pain, the healing and closure of the wound; and the indelible trace of the process” to emphasize its corporeal nature which results in “an inside that comes from the outside...the exteriorization of the interior which is simultaneously the exteriorization of the exterior” (237). Such a complex process complicates the notion of bodies as subject to the mind/ incorporeal self. The tattoo changes the way the world interacts with the body in material and unpredictable ways. For example, a story in the *Cape Cod Times* chronicles a breast cancer survivor’s relationship with tattoos. She lost control of her life as the cancer progressed. She lost her hair, her breasts and had to get a defibrillator implanted in order to overcome her disease (Bragg). Her tattoos provided her with a way to work through her bodily experience like a therapy. She wrote her experience with her mind (in conception of the

tattoo) and body (through the process of tattooing). From overcoming internalized objectification to providing sexual freedom, tattoos alter the way the mind lives with the body. For an example, one needs to look no further than online news periodicals like the *Star Tribune*. Over one hundred women lined up to have Senator Mitch McConnell's description of Senator Elizabeth Warren, "nevertheless, she persisted," tattooed on them outside Brass Knuckle Tattoos in Minneapolis (Blanchette). The female artists working were happy to work free of charge: One stated "I am overwhelmed and I am so grateful... We're working for free and we're really glad to be supporting these awesome women" (Blanchette). The women involved shared found a way to write their experience of being talked over and ignored in male discourse through the story of McConnell and Warren's interaction. The bodily inscription acts as a reminder to persist through the oppression experienced every day.

Additionally, Benson addresses tattooing as a commodity. She notes that the language used to describe the process, act, and result is often framed in consumeristic terms (245). One "chooses" a tattoo. One "customizes" their body. One "gets" a tattoo. However, this agency is false. Because of the profound influence of the enlightenment on the West, history is the only site of agency (Grosz 148). Historically, tattoos did not provide power because those who got them were considered nonthinking like barbaric civilizations and slaves. Tattoos were inflicted upon the powerless. More recently, people with ink either were perceived to be out of control (because of drugs or alcohol) or claimed to be out of control (as those claimed they were tattooed by Native Americans) (Benson 235). In this context, tattoos cannot be reduced to consumer choice like make up or clothing.

A tattoo is the product of exchange of money for services. When looked at uncritically, tattooing appears to take place in an uncomplicated capitalist relationship. However, the origins of the tattoo problematize positing tattoos as commodities. Instead, tattooing acts as an anti-commodity. According to Sandip Hazareesingh and Harro Maat, an anti-commodity is a production that resists commodities or their functions (8). Anti-commodities are enduring—they are events not moments. Sinha-Kerkhoff adds that anti-commodities are characterized by their origins in anti-globalization (Hazareesingh and Maat 25). Furthermore, Curry-Machado asserts that the status of anti-commodity can come from the use of profits of a product. He studies how the Remedios region of Cuba fights the hegemony of the sugar industry by investing profits in local schools and healthcare (Hazareesingh and Maat 71). Finally, Hyde sketches a compelling definition of anti-commodity as the humanization of labor power (Hazareesingh and Maat 147). In the wake of the 2016 election results, women across the United States are in uproar. Because of the dehumanizing speech of the newly elected President’s campaign, many women are opting to embody their opposition to these behaviors through tattooing (Joseph). Tattoos, from these to butterfly “tramp stamps,” humanize labor power through the blood and pain of obtaining one and the locality in which revenue from tattoos operate. For example, in the wake of a series of funding cuts to Planned Parenthood, a tattoo shop in Brooklyn, NY hosted an event, Tattoo to Protect Your Parts: A Planned Parenthood Benefit, where several artists donated their time, materials, and one hundred percent of proceeds to Planned Parenthood (Irish). The spontaneous nature of the event as a direct response to President Trump’s misogyny undermines the argument that this benefit could be a marketing ploy because it would be fairly ineffective due to the short

notice and premade designs offered (Irish). Instead, event like these solidify the tattoos status as an anticommodity.

Taken *en masse* the definitions of an anti-commodity encompass the functions of the tattoo. It is no wonder that tattoos were first popularized in the West by soldiers (Dunlop). As the military began to exert more and more control over the bodies of soldiers, they used the “technical schema of tattooing”—the puncturing of skin, the bleeding, the resulting mark—as a way to connect with the body again (Benson 237). In this act, soldiers decommodified their bodies. They took control over the vessel of labor-power contracted to the government. Furthermore, tattoo studios are predominantly non-corporate institutions. The tattooed individuals who own these shops do not send their profits to a global conglomerate or send money to buy labor power elsewhere. Money from tattoo parlors stays closer to home than a globalized corporation. Finally, aesthetically, a tattoo as a body enhancement does not have to be repeated for efficacy like hair dye, shaving, and other feminine beauty tropes. The tattoo actively challenges the definition of what a commodity should do in a late capitalist setting

Chapter IV

Material Feminism

Feminism after the post has become in theory and practice largely indifferent to material practices under capitalism - such as labor, which shapes the social structures of daily life and has fetishized difference. It has, in other words, erased the question of "exploitation," diffusing knowledge of the root conditions of women's realities into a plurality of particularities of "oppressions." Feminism has embraced the cultural turn - the reification of culture as an autonomous zone of signifying practices and put aside a transformative politics.

Teresa Ebert in "Rematerializing Feminism"

Zeisler explains in her book, *We Were Feminists Once*, that just under 100 years ago white women were granted suffrage in the United States. In the 1960s, many women of color were finally extended full voting rights after the restrictions of Jim Crow were lifted. However, obstacles for women still remained. Lack of economic independence left women subjugated to the institution of marriage and dependent to her husband's capital. Women could not open a line of credit on without their husbands' permission and women without a husband (single widowed or divorced) were denied outright without a cosigner until the introduction of the Equal Credit Opportunity act of 1974 (Zeisler).

The woman who had the audacity to defy traditional feminine ideals provided a fresh prey for marketers. According to Maria Mies, with the rise of choice feminism came the separation of capitalism from patriarchy because of a lack of intersectionality of women's issues (25). By ignoring class as a site of female oppression, choice feminists became a new, lucrative consumer base. The New Woman was crafted as a devoted mother or wife--a well of untapped potential who longed to participate in the public sphere. She played sports; she served on juries (Zeisler). She was a far cry from the prickly suffragettes who starved themselves for voting rights (Zeisler). So, feminist

interests were sublated into the capitalist-patriarchy that had denied them personhood (until they represented purchasing power). Twenty-first century feminism is the fully realized version of this choice feminism. According to Zeisler, the popular nature of feminism that was perhaps once a feminist's dream has coded every action as a feminist *choice* (Zeisler). This model of feminism theorizes the ethical value of actions on the basis of an individual's freedom without regard to the effects of those actions on others. As a result, feminism claims to no longer limit feminists' freedom in regards to wearing make-up or taking a husband's last name. Now women can uphold institutions that have oppressed women for decades and shamelessly buy products made in sweatshops with ingredients that result from the reproductive exploitation of other animals without being judged as anti-woman.

The near homogeneity of choice feminism is notable in the rhetoric surrounding feminist contemporary conversations concerning female appearance (McCarver 23). Popular feminist discourse dictates that a woman's *choice* to wear make-up is not antifeminist but attempts to limit her bodily autonomy are. This is a compelling argument in an abstract sense. Feminists of the 1970s decried patriarchal beauty standards and the policing of women's bodies so they pioneered a less made up aesthetic. Twenty-first century feminism strives to correct the demonization of femininity cultivated by its progenitors. In practice, it values the freedom of the individual over the freedom of the whole and in doing so fails to recognize those at whose expense capital privilege is maintained. The citizens of countries imperialized by US corporations who manufacture beauty products are often underpaid and are subject to terrible working conditions ("Ugly Truth Behind Global Beauty Industry"). Moreover, submitting to

patriarchal beauty standards perpetuates them in ways that hurt women who do not or cannot conform to white, European standards of beauty. While feminist in capitalist societies must participate in capitalism to a degree, the uncritical nature of choice feminism sustains the exploitation of labor and alienation of the body that directly conflicts with core feminist values of equality and equity.

The material realities of choice feminism prevent it from functioning as a liberation philosophy. In “Rematerializing Feminism,” Ebert asserts that the role of cultural studies is to examine and explain social relations and how they impair society’s ability to meet human needs (36). Choice feminism has fixated on difference as a means of examination and explanation; unfortunately, this fetishization of the “particularities of oppressions” pushed aside transformative politics (33). The emphasis on constructing one’s identity through minute categorizations leads to the prominence of the individual over the relationships of individuals within social structures. Feminism focused on the individual will always fall short of equity because it does not contextualize connections that cause and perpetuate oppression.

The push for income equality, even when intersectionality is taken into account, is an example of this failure of equity. Ebert uses the example of the feminist push against income inequality as a nontransformative examination of social relations. She emphasizes that this sort of feminism allows practitioners to feel empowered without ever challenging the status quo (38). If transformation of the oppressive system were the goal of these feminists, they would challenge the wage-labor system of enslavement. In America, transformative politics would focus less on how much latinx workers make to

the white man's dollar and would focus more on ending bourgeoisie labor-power exploitation both domestically and abroad.

In order to avoid dead-end traps of difference, class must be understood as a feminist issue, a move that undermines the foundation of choice feminism. Ebert argues that racism, homophobia, sexism etc. cannot be effectively understood by theories of power imbalance alone (Ebert 40). Contrary to her assertion that power imbalance come from the ownership of the means of production, power imbalance finds its origin in the control of desire (40). Gender, race, and class are sites of social struggle only within a class system because those oppressions stem from labor relations. Ebert demonstrates that race is a site of struggle because people of color were made slaves to increase capitalists' profits (38). Additionally, the oppression of women and people of color through unpaid labor built contemporary Western society. Particularities of oppression are important but overemphasis obscures the relationships that create the oppression. Tattooing physically obscures sites of bodily oppression in a way that forces attention to the body itself. Metaphorically, tattooing allows one to see the forest and not just the trees. Tattooing makes the body opaque by concealing the other inscriptions on the body. Tattoos on the hands can disguise the marks of hard labor or the softness that comes from a life in academia. Russia decriminalized domestic violence; as a response tattoo artist, Zhenya Zhakar, offered to tattoo over the scars of victims for free. The response to her offer was massive (Sparks). The article goes on to tell the stories of some women whom Zhakar has tattooed. One Client, Vika, survived stab wound to the chest from her husband and his friend (Sparks). The tattoo transforms the way her body is codified by society. Vika claims she could not show her chest in public because of the shame from her scar but the

tattoo stigmatizes her body in a new way that is not so easily defined (Sparks). Tattoos on the legs can cover cellulite from ageing or self harm marks. Tattooing, in other words, can overwrite particularities of oppression in favor of drawing attention to the commodification of the body.

To reemphasize transformative politics, feminists must start back at the beginning by looking at the roots of bodily oppression—dichotomies of presence and absence, mind and body, self and other. These dichotomies create hierarchal systems of oppression in the United States (and other Western countries) that give one term privilege at the expense of the other. Through the separation of mind and body, humans are alienated from their desire. Through the separation of self and other, humans have created systems in which bodies are arbitrarily split into groups with some deemed superior. No matter what group the body belongs to, it is shaped by society or by the individual at the will of the society. Presence and absence then are used to define bodies based on the factors society has inscribed as well. Those inscribed with presence maintain superior but no less coerced positionality. The philosophy of Feminism relies upon sexual difference while trying to erase it. According to Foucault, sexuality and sex may be the result of social power exerted on bodies, that does not erase material difference in bodies and their corporeal capabilities (Foucault 116). Feminine bodies do not benefit from erasure; they exist in a material state and thus are affected by laws governing the socius, the social relations of a person.

Chapter V

Body and Feminism

The body is the primary object that attracts oppression and upon which oppression is inflicted. Hence, it is of paramount importance to any liberation philosophy. The body is coerced, controlled, inscribed, and commodified. Feminism must work with and against these material realities for equality and equity. In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler explores the relationship between performativity and the material body. She claims that access to the body is not unmediated; the body defies attempts to capture it fully in discourse (Butler 1). For Butler, the materiality of the body is uncontested (ix). Conversely, she fails to take into account for embodied experiences as a building block of the self. Similarly, Linda Alcoff theorizes embodied experience in *Visible Identities* through a phenomenological approach. Working within the traditions of Merleau-Ponty and De Beauvoir, Alcoff discusses how different bodies, arbitrated by social taxonomies, constitute the self. Merleau-Ponty asserts that people do not experience the world as mere objects of society. He argues:

It is as false to place ourselves in society as an object among other objects, as it is to place society within ourselves as an object of thought, and in both cases the mistake lies in treating the social as an object. We must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about inseparably with us before any objectification (362).

Alcoff builds on Merleau-Ponty when she argues that accounts of embodied experience “require a cross-indexing by cultural and ethnic specificity” (107). For Alcoff, the visible

body mediates perceptual experiences. She focuses primarily on race and gender when she argues that visible identities or identities that are “marked on and through the body” are “lived as a material experience, visible as surface phenomena and determinant of economic and political status” (102). In these ways bodies, can become a site of resistance. The practice of tattooing, then, reaffirms Merleau-Ponty’s claim. The body is not an object among objects but a subject that defines itself. As a visible marker of identity, the tattoo changes the way the body interacts with the society and the way society interacts with the body. The subject of the tattoo is of minimal consequence to *écriture féminine*. The decentered nature of *écriture féminine* is what is important in politics of desire surrounding understandings of the body. There would be no flipping of regimes nor dystopian anarcho-capitalist mayhem. Revolution of the body is the embodiment of revolutionary ideas through material struggles rather than a solid theological foundation or hypothetical situation.

Chapter VI

L'Écriture Féminine and the Sexed Body

The sexed body must be considered when theorizing tattooing because the construction of sex fundamentally defines Western bodies because of the institutionalization of the oedipal complex (Deleuze and Guattari 200). Caplan elucidates the contradictions that exist in the history and modern conceptions of tattooing. Benson's essay is close to crafting a corporeal theory of tattooing but stops short of theorizing an explicitly constructed body in a feminist framework. A corporeal theory of tattooing would allow one to understand the political implications of the tattooed body as a BWO and tattooing as *écriture féminine*. To that end, Grosz in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* takes to task many of the male theorists on whom Benson's work is implicitly based. Grosz builds upon the work of Deleuze and Guattari to theorize a body "...as a discontinuous, non-totalizable series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, speeds and durations" (164). Grosz demonstrates bodily fluid such as lactation and menstruation have been historical sites of oppression because they are seen to stem from a lack of control; this notion is echoed in psychiatric diseases long associated with women like hysteria that are characterized by a lack of control over the mind or body (Grosz 39).

Grosz, instead, theorizes that womanhood is not characterized by *lack* of control propensity but by *surplus* that cannot be contained. The anti-Platonism of Deleuze and Guattari creates a platform upon which womanhood can be theorized without the opposition to man. Grosz uses Kristeva, Mary Douglas, and Deleuze and Guattari to counter the configuration of *woman as lacking from castration* into *woman as*

uncontainable. A discourse that has been dominated by men in part due to the phallogentric nature of language and in part from the fear of essentialization of the body. Because women were historically oppressed for bodily difference from men, feminists began to reject the body as essential to a person's personhood (Edwards). That is, women were not hysterical, emotional, more nurturing, more sexual, less sexual, etc. because of the presence of a uterus⁸.

Tattooing redirects flows of desire from and around bodies that challenges these and other institutionalized organizations of bodies. The deorganization that creates a Body Without Organs as theorized by Deleuze and Guattari is most effective for feminine bodies, however, because the shift in the effects on desire from lack to surplus is most dramatic. For example, a study out of Texas Technical University by Koch et al. found that women who had more than four tattoo had significantly higher levels of self-esteem than those with fewer or none (540). 2,395 female students responded to the survey by Koch et al. (537). He found that women with more than four tattoos also reported more previous suicide attempts. Koch et al. interprets the data to mean that women on college campuses are more hyper aware of their bodies because of hypersexualized imagery aimed at ensuring capitalist transactions and that they turn that awareness into empowerment through tattooing (540). Koch et al. recognize that the women in their study feel the oppression exerted on their bodies and that is what caused the suicide attempts. However, they have decided instead to fight societal coding by deorganizing

⁸ Not all women have uteruses. It does not reflect the potential of non-uterused persons to be women. However, male dominated discourse concerning sexed bodies dictates that women have uteruses and that causes all sorts of issues that prevent women from being equal.

their bodies. The tattoos fight bodily oppression by allowing the women to write the codes themselves. This is why they are *écriture féminine*.

Cixous voices a similar conception of a woman's body. She states: "Though masculine sexuality gravitates around the penis, engendering that centralized body (in political anatomy) under the dictatorship of its parts, woman does not bring about the same regionalization...which is inscribed only within boundaries. Her libido is cosmic, just as her unconscious is worldwide" (Cixous 889). Women are not lacking in sexuality or desire because of a lack of phallus, but Western societies inscribe such meaning into women's bodies. Psychoanalytic theory makes clear that desire and signification are culturally and socially inscribed into bodies (Grosz 60). In other words, bodies are inscribed with significance parallel to societal norms and the experiences that a body lives changes it on anatomical and neurological levels. Imagine the hands of a domestic laborer; they bear the marks of her working-class status. Imagine the skin tone of a well off white lady in the antebellum South. Her paleness, curved spine, and fainting fits are the result of the role her body plays in society (Steele 67). In Western societies, the hegemony of capitalism has undeniable influence on desire and thus bodies.

Deleuze and Guattari argue that "desire is revolutionary in its essence ... and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised" (Deleuze and Guattari 116). Capitalism provides the exploitation, servitude and hierarchy for desire. Therefore, the uncontained body presents the opportunity for a disorganization of sex and commodification that

feminists ought to seize. Furthermore, the position of tattooing as an (anti)commodity⁹ raises important questions concerning feminist practices in late capitalism and presents a modification to the body that is unique from other signifying adornments. This paper will explore the relationships among tattooing, feminist corporality, and capitalism in order to explore theory to inform contemporary body politics. The body has the potential to become a site of feminist political resistance to oppressive structure of patriarchy and capitalism through tattooing if the claim of “The Laugh of the Medusa” and *Anti-Oedipus* are appropriated by contemporary feminist.

Cixous’ écriture féminine pushes back against the binaries upon which Western society is founded. Dualism, as suggested by Rene Descartes, continues to shape western thought. He claimed “there is great difference between mind and body, inasmuch as body is by nature always divisible and the mind is entirely indivisible...the mind or soul of a man is entirely different from the body” (97). According to Cixous, by virtue of existing in a society that espouses this dichotomy, people, particularly women, are unable to connect to their bodies because of the alienation of the body under a capitalist system. Women are more vulnerable to this alienation because it comes from dual sources: capitalism and a patriarchal system that seeks to control those bodies for the sake of perpetuating itself. The connection with one’s body, or sexuality, is the source for her conception of l’écriture féminine.

The appropriation of binary language by those empowered by capitalism allows them to write themselves as the standard. This is why androgyny is coded masculine

⁹ A term appropriated from Hazareesingh and Harro Maat’s *Local Subversions of Colonial Cultures: Commodities and Anti-Commodities in Global History*.

(Michaelson and Aaland 269), this is why whiteness is a-racial (Richardson and Wodak). This false standardization and dichotomization invades speech and writing to obfuscate the influence of capitalism. Standard English comes from the dialects of the wealthy. It is not inherently superior. Only the wealthy could read or afford books, thus their language spread. All deviation from it was othered. And so, language began to privilege wealthy white men as the standard against which the value of others was measured--one by one—creating a system of binaries: man/woman, white/black, white/latinx, straight/gay, cis/trans (Fox-Genovese 73). This opposition, according to Cixous, “has always worked for man's profit to the point of reducing writing to his laws” (883). If one is to counteract oppression, one must find a way to communicate information without upholding the current oppressive structure of language. One such path is to destroy foundational dichotomies through l’écriture feminine.

Tattooing as feminine writing destroys this notion of absence and hence breaks down the presence/absence and self/other dichotomies. It creates bodies that are defined by presence and that define others by presence. This is what Cixous refers to as the *other Bisexuality* (884). From this nonsubjugation comes a “‘self-permission’ [that leads to the] multiplication of the effects of the inscription of desire, over all parts of my body and the other body” (884). The mind/body, presence/absent splits are dissolved. The framework of the institutions becomes shattered; property rights decline into turmoil (Cixous 888). Conceptually, the collaboration that happens between a tattoo artist and the tattoo collector leads to a collaborative composition that challenges ideas concerning singular authorship. The tattoo cannot be copyrighted by the artist because the canvas is a body according to the speculations of UCLA Copyright Law Professor Nimmer, although there

is no case law to provide precedent to be sure (Kravets). Tattooing is a “man’s industry” only in the sense that like all writing fields, more men work there (Beeler 42). Unlike other forms of writing though, the work does not belong to the artist, even though many artists are known for their work, because it is part of a person and therefore ownership would infringe on basic human rights (Nimmer qtd. in Kravets)¹⁰. As tattooing helps individuals reclaim their bodies, more women have the potential to become writers outside of phallogocentric systems of oppression through the challenge to singularity in ownership and authorship. This collaboration and deconstruction of the boundaries between subject/object and author/text are indicative of the way many rhetoricians have conceived of l’écriture féminine¹¹.

¹⁰ In the interest of transparency, I admit that there is very little in the way of case law regarding tattoos and copyright; since law is not my area of study, I interpreted case law and popular sources to the best of my ability to make these assertions.

¹¹ The following works advocate collaboration as part of l’écriture féminine: M. Kendrick’s “The Laugh of the Modern: Interactive Technologies and l’écriture féminine,” A. Bell’s *The Possible Worlds of Hypertext Fiction*, G. Landow’s *Hypertext 3.0: Critical Theory and New Media in an Era of Globalization*, and C. Guyer’s Quibbling.

Chapter VII

Tattoos and Politics of Desire

Nearly the entire history of writing is confounded with the history of reason, of which it is at once the effect, the support, and one of the privileged alibis. It has been one with the phallogocentric tradition

Hélène Cixous in “The Laugh of the Medusa”

Previous critiques and characterizations of tattooing fall into the traps of fragmentary truth and overemphasis on agentic capacities of actors. Braunberger, for example, argues that tattooed women create ruptures that lead to a revolutionary aesthetic by creating a monster beauty of physical difference that threatens masculine conceptions of beauty (23). In a similar vein, Riley et al. argue that authentic body art or body art that is gotten to exercise subjectivity over one’s body combined with the belief that outer image reflects the inner self always produces a meaningful sense of identity (263). Overemphasis on agency reterritorializes the desire and action (Deleuze and Guattari 120). It gives it a purpose. Passive vitalism highlights that relations are social. Nothing has a proper actualization or singular goal. Each singularity can always enter in to other relations that change its nature (O’Sullivan and Zepeke 130). Tattooing, therefore, becomes a deterritorialized flow. Deterritorialization, according to Deleuze and Guattari, is a move from one’s assigned position within society (1). Deterritorialization is the result of capitalism (2). In late capitalism, everything can be commodified- a departure from its given purpose. While such deterritorialization is the result of capitalism it is also its inner difference and death (Deleuze and Guattari 245). Such deterritorialization is a threat to capitalism because to be deterritorialized is to be outside of class (255). When a body deorganizes it also becomes deterritorialized because without organs it cannot be

positioned in the social order. A Body Without Organs interferes with the (re)production of oppressive binaries by freeing desire from public production.

When tattooing dissolves the presence/absence, mind/body and self/other dichotomies, the oppression that comes from the privileged ceases. The phallogentric Western way of thought demonizes the body through infamy. Stereotypes of the other center on physical appearance though they are built on a foundation of presence/absence the presence of a phallus, the absence of European features, the absence of melanin, the presence of callouses from work. Cixous asserts “censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. Write yourself. Your body must be heard” (880). Woman theorized as uncontained desire is productive not lacking. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari assert that desire does not result from lack. It is a productive force (125). This goes further than obscuring woman by emphasizing corporality. She is no longer abstract. Matter is a part of the physical world and cannot be contained by metaphysical concepts because of the ever-shifting relationships with other social and desire-producing machines. In this way, woman is uncoded as a decentered concept because she *matters*. Matter is no longer censored or unheard because of its undeniable presence. This is why l’écriture féminine to become a Body Without Organs and as a way to code a Body Without Organs is important to feminist politics.

The function and control of desire are key to the history of capitalism. Civilization morphs from savage to despotic to capitalist (Deleuze and Guattari 200). The tattoo is deemed savage because of its origins in a precapitalist time. Each era transforms the Oedipal complex; in the savage era, Oedipalization had not moved to the center of the socius and did not code for incest (Stivale et. al. 74). Familialism and the consequential

Oedipalization is the represses and distorts the desires of children in order to make docile individuals who are content to be oppressed by capitalism (Deleuze and Guattari 396). Instead, the social order then was made through bodily inscriptions and gave rise to alliances that prevented “anti-social appropriations of life” (Holland 74). Savage writing does not represent speech but social place and function. In this model, desire for incest is not repressed because the concept of incest does not exist (73). Instead the desire of the individual’s life is repressed because the social group is valued more than the individual (73).

Savage writing takes place on the body. Laws, then, are painfully inscribed into the bodies and memories of people who live during that that precapitalist time period to the end of ensuring no deviation from societal rule. Tattoos draw upon this power to produce desire (Deleuze and Guattari 189). Because they no longer dictate an understood social order and still do not represent speech, tattoos have become a deterritorialized writing in late capitalism. As discussed earlier, desire is a revolutionary, uncontainable force. The tattoo reaches into the body and is able to deorganize the desire. The desire is a productive force—not a force of lack—that has been directed by capito-patriarchal structures of power. The tattoo disrupts those coded to make uncoded, unrepressed desire. This sort of desiring-production is a threat to current structures of power because it subverts their repression in favor of objectifying interaction with other assemblages.

Chapter VIII

The Tattoo on The Body Without Organs

Alternative to this false consciousness, stands the notion of totality.

Postmodernism criticizes totality as dismissive of difference. Conversely, totality can be understood as “the concrete recognition of the diverse relations that produce the social” (Ebert 54). A materialist understanding of truth is birthed not just to end capitalism but to end its territorialization of bodies as desire-producing machines. Truth then comes to be understood in the process of implementation of theory and praxis. A union of the subject and object is made when desire producing machines are left unrepressed by capitalism. One becomes indistinguishable from the other and oppressive structures fall around it (Luckas 521).

L'écriture féminine through tattooing is a reification of a new understanding of how bodies are composed on the structural level. *L'écriture féminine* will expose the Symbolic Order, Capitalism, the bourgeoisie as something constructed. It will reveal that body is not subservient to mind, that Self is not inferior to Other and that female is not left wanting for what is male. The wage laborer is not left wanting more income, but they are left wanting to be free from oppressive profiteers. Cixous writes “Men have committed the greatest crime against women. Insidiously, violently, they have led them to hate women, to be their own enemies...” (878). That is, metaphorically, phallogocentrism has led women to value reason over empiricism; or put another way, capito-patriarchal structures have taught women to trust dominant discourse of reason rather than the multiplicity of their bodies’ desires. The hegemony of postmodern thought has similarly done great violence to the proletariat through its abandonment of transformative politics

in favor of the fetishization of difference (Ebert 1). Phallogocentric structures have been taught as truth so long that women have internalized them: “We’ve been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty” (Cixous 887). Women have become complicit in their own dehumanization in the name of logic. Woman writing woman is the conduit to free desire and the expression of it.

The permanence of tattooing brings into question the relationship of permanence and meaning to the tattoo. The body is transformative (to other bodies and itself-in the assemblage) therefore the meaning of the tattoos in the body must be volatile as well. The body ages, skin shrivels and sheds. Abrasions and underlying musculature are forever changing phenotype. The body is hardly a fixed canvas. Furthermore, the body flows out of itself (blood, urine, saliva, breast milk) combining and dissolving into other matter. To study the tattoo, then, must move from an object to an event. From the inscription into the body to the body’s interaction with the environment, the meaning of the tattoo changes. The feminine tattooed body possesses a passive vitalism in its interactions with other matter. The multivalent nature of the feminine tattooed body changes the question from “who is this female?” to “what is this body doing?.” (MacCormack 24). The body becomes disorganized and voided of its previous significances—colonized and repressed—when tattooed (24). The tattooed body becomes a Body Without Organs.

The Body Without Organs is free to fragment, subvert, and rebound flows. Thus, desire is freed from capitalism that suppresses and directs it (341). This leads to a deterritorialization of desire that allows desire to flow rather than be repressed into

Oedipalization. Psychoanalysis coded women as lacking of a phallus. Deterritorialized desire produces without being structured because it is rhizomatic. Rhizomatic structure is non-hierarchical. And so deterritorialized desire does not code feminine bodies as lacking but as producing. The Body Without Organs, then, is able to exploit the internal difference of capitalism because without organs the body taps into its potential to be “unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable” (Deleuze and Guattari 9). According to Deleuze and Guattari “This body is as biological as it is collective and political; the structures emerge and vanish on it, it carries the peaks of deterritorialization of the structures, or the lines of flight.... It opposes all levels of organization, the one of the organism and also the organizations of power” (2). The BWO can turn modes of production against themselves to incite change such as a new order built on equality and equity rather than oppression and repression. The tattoo may be conceived as fixed but its meaning is anything but. Like Grosz and Cixous’s feminine fluids, mother’s milk or menstruation, the tattoo’s meaning cannot be contained. It is deterritorialized in the West under late capitalism and it draws upon the potentialities of infinite orifices to ensure constant difference to work as an anticommodity.

Chapter IV Conclusion

This paper explores the interactions of capitalism, feminism, tattooing and the body in order to assert their interconnectedness and call for the relationships to be studied more. Tattooing remains a largely unexplored form of writing in the West. Tattooing breaks free from hierarchal relations of language that abandon “privileged reference” because of their complex entrance into Western Society (Deleuze and Guattari 261). A thorough understanding of this relationship is necessary if the contemporary feminist agenda is to move forward because as it currently works it perpetuates oppression.

Hélène Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari provide useful concepts for feminist thought that challenge the values of contemporary feminism in a way that can help it return and reach goals of liberation. (Re)writing woman to complicate existing codifications of the Oedipalized body by changing the way capitalism and sex interact is the ultimate goal of *l'écriture féminine* but one must first deorganize that body. The concept of tattooing, in this paper, acts as a way one can implement *l'écriture féminine* to become a Body Without Organs and a way one can write upon a Body Without Organs values of equity and equality that keep it deorganized. The tattoo acts as both a metaphor for *l'écriture féminine* because and a concrete example of it. In this paper, it is not a primary text but an extended metaphor—a shifting sign that moves to draw attention to the organization alphabetic writing relies on and undermines that organization. At the same time, there are many examples of tattoos that have explicit political aims discussed in this paper that demonstrate the value of *l'écriture féminine* in the material world. This multiplicity is

necessary to understand undefinable concepts like the Body Without Organs and l'écriture féminine.

The change that could occur from an embodied writing would be much like that described in by Cixous, Deleuze and Guattari, and in this paper. A broad application of écriture féminine and Body Without Organs theories to specific tattooed bodies would be an effective next step.

Revolution will remain impossible if the world remains unaware of its chains. It is naïve to assume that the mass communication of ideas via the internet has not been sublated into capitalist structures. The need for an alternative writing is clear. According to Bizzell “Composition specialists generally agree about some fundamental elements in the development of language and thought, namely, that human individuals possess innate mental capacities to learn a language and to assemble complex conceptual structures” (214). The conceptual structures that inform discourse are the result of societal convention (Bizzell 215). If current modes of discourse are influenced by complex and oppressive societal structures, then it makes sense to change that discourse. Writing and thinking need remediation. Thinking as a biological function can be changed through the body. Clearly, in these last stages of capitalism, the left has amassed enough knowledge to stage a revolution but the way this information is communicated remains contaminated by phallogocentric discourse. Tattooing offers a way to skirt the issue by rewriting the relationship of desire and the body that capitalism exploits.

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