Chapter 3
Sustaining the Change Agent: Bringing the Body into Language in Professional Practice

Margaret Somerville and Karen Vella

Introduction: Body as Method

In the Introduction to *Volatile Bodies*, feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz announced that the book was a 'kind of experiment in inversion', based on a wager that 'bodies have all the explanatory power of minds' (Grosz 1994, p. vii). The purpose of this wager was to displace the centrality of 'mind, psyche, interior, and consciousness' in conceptions of subjectivity through a reconfiguration of the body. In this chapter we take up this stance of body as method in order to explore the body in professional practice. The structure of the chapter is based on pivotal conversations between the two authors in the process of doctoral supervision. It is written through key conversations when the body made its presence felt. The conversations we re-enact in this chapter are hesitant and discontinuous, each representing a performance of the pivotal moments of coming to understand the power of the body in professional practice.

The context of Karen and Margaret's conversations was the *Space Place Body* doctoral research group at Monash University. The purpose of the group was to generate new conceptual, theoretical and methodological resources within the core concepts of space, place and body through 'conversations' across our differences. These conversations focussed on inter-linked subjectivity (ontological) and knowledge (epistemological) work, at the intersection of our postcolonial and

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poststructural approaches to educational research. A specific interest in alternative and creative methodologies emerged from these onto-epistemological conversations which built on earlier work about the simultaneous emergence of new subjectivities and new knowledge in doctoral research (Somerville 2007, 2008). For all of us, it was the ability to speak new ideas hesitantly and uncertainly into a supportive and collective space.

Margaret came to these conversations with a history of working with the body as method – through bringing her own body into articulation as a postcolonial stance in relation to her collaborations with Australian Indigenous people (Somerville 1999, 2013); and also in relation to workers in aged-care and coal mining workplaces (Somerville 2006; Somerville and Lloyd 2006). In both of these industries, problems of body safety are critical, expensive, and challenging for workers and management alike. In aged care it is the body of the other, the aged-care resident, that insistently inserts itself into practice, while the body of the aged-care nurse is invisible until it is injured. To learn to have safe bodies, aged-care nurses have to learn to bring their body into presence (Somerville 2006). On the other hand, the bodies of coal miners are constantly present in their attunement to minute sensory changes in the mine because it is a matter of life and death. One worker talked about feeling the changes in air pressure through the tiny hairs on the back of his ears, because changes in air pressure signal immanent danger. Bodies assert themselves in these industries because of the pressures of workplace safety, but even in ill health bodies are curiously and conspicuously absent in professional practice.

Karen brought her experience as an organisational change agent for over 15 years, including undertaking the role of change agent in the academy for 6 years. Since completing those 6 years in the academy, she continues to undertake change roles in organisations as a self-employed practitioner, a portfolio worker (Fenwick 2006). Organisational change agents are both outsiders and insiders to the organisations in which they are employed. The process of organisational change is defined as involving the critical analysis of the context, antecedents and history of change that helps to clarify how change will best be facilitated. The implementation of change, on the other hand, focuses attention on the management of individuals through the application of preconceived models/interventions that are intended to achieve predetermined outcomes (Wilson 1992).

Karen said that it is common banter amongst organisational change managers that any change manager only has three big change projects in them. The first change project is done with a combination of naivety and raw talent, and the excitement of the challenge. The second is undertaken with more experience and belief in your ability to strongly and sensibly steer things in the direction they should go, accepting the compromises that have to be made as sensible responses to the reality of the business world. By the third project, you are burdened with knowing and feeling too much – about the compromises that will come, about the pain and anger that people will experience, about the inevitable 'shoot the messenger' reaction, and the disappointing outcomes of the project. Forget a fourth project, they say, for you will no longer have the stomach for change work. It is this 'stomach for change work' that is the focus of our chapter about the body in professional practice.

Karen came to Margaret because her supervision at another university had failed. After several years of working on her thesis about sustaining the organisational change agent and developing creative approaches to research using fabrics, Karen had taken her efforts to her supervisor who said 'this is not a thesis'. These words about the challenge of bringing the body into language have continued to destabilise the supervisory relationship between Margaret and Karen too, as Karen struggles with the (im)possibility of writing the body. As Green and Hopwood have asserted (Chap. 2, this volume): 'Work on the body ... has clearly come up against the limits of language and representation'. Karen and Margaret's first pivotal conversations approached the body indirectly by discussing fabric and clothes.

Conversation 1: Clothes as Second Skin

Karen I have worked with fabric since I was around eight years old. I have collected fabric and vintage clothing and made clothes for myself, either making them from scratch or reshaping and renovating vintage items. I enjoyed the creative intensity of all aspects of the making process – creating designs, adjusting pre-set patterns to my unique design, cutting the cloth, and working the stitching. In my travels I have scoured Middle Eastern markets, Asian silk factories, prestigious European fabric houses, and flea markets to bring back these material souvenirs, treasures from other lands and lives. I have an eye for what is possible when looking at fabric. A broad outline of an idea is inspiration enough to acquire the fabric.

Designing and creating garments has always seemed a practical and sensible pastime for channelling my fabric fascination. My size and shape has not conformed to off-the-rack, predetermined ideas of Australian women's bodies. My creative and practical self combine to make and wear clothes that fit my body. Often it is only I who know the story. I know the her-story of that vintage trim (from a nightdress of my mother's trousseau), or the provenance of the Asian graphic print on that shirt's inset (from my grandmother's collection), or the exotic aromas evoked by the Egyptian cotton (bought in Cairo's Grand Bazaar). A living complexity of memory, imagination, and story is embedded in my clothes.

With their Middle Eastern/European cultural roots, designing something original was important for my grandmother and my mother, as it was for their peers. They seemed to be seeking a look, perhaps more attuned to their overseas tastes. In their home countries, they more often than not could hire people to do the making. In their Australian home, and in changed economic circumstances, they would be both designer and maker.

In the making process, I seek the advice of these 'experts' (my mother, female relatives and friends – all migrants). We spend time together problem solving, fitting the garment to my body, watching the draping as it falls over my body, and ultimately creating one-off and unique garments. The garment is finished with a shared sense of satisfaction. The aim is high quality, even though there is always

further perfection to be sought – releasing the slightly puckered seam, raising the line of the shoulder, a final straightening of the hemline. The co-creators want to see the finished garment. My mother wants to hear about any reaction to the garment once it is worn.

This interest, this passion of mine, is separate from my work as a serious change manager, but I would still spend many a lunch break wandering in the fabric stores in Melbourne's central business district. Feeling the textures, looking at the play of colour, observing the fall and drape, looking for inspiration. With my energy levels high and so many possibilities in my head, I would return to the complex but often relatively mundane tasks required to be done for the 'real work' in my high-rise tower workplace. These lunch-hour expeditions feel secretive and subversive, empowering and sustaining. Rosika Parker describes some of what I experience in *The Subversive Stitch* (2010).

I had also understood from an early age that in contemporary Australian urban culture such interests and aptitudes are distinctly uncool. A recent article by Ginger Briggs in the *Sunday Age* (28 September 2008, p. 15) describes the stitching journey from the 'uncool' activity of the latter part of the twentieth century to the 'inefficient' activity of the 21st:

> [Craft] ... has been sidelined for several generations. First, feminism freed women from having to spend their nights darning (thank you). And sometime after that it gathered a distinct aura of uncoolness for a generation of young women. Later, as the double-income family became the norm, women simply didn't have the time even if they'd wanted to.

I always wanted to. I made time for it. It was irresistible. It was essential.

Until recent years, I did not discuss my makings outside my family and close friends. It seemed too homespun, too girly, too looks-conscious, too light-weight. In the early twenty-first century Australian context, this fabric practice can be regarded as an over-concern with clothes and appearance. It may not seem compatible with my feminism. I couldn't describe, at that time, what it was. It is not just about clothes-making. It is about my body, bringing my past into the present, making my stories, combining the past and present. It was the beginning of my conversation with Margaret about bodies in professional practice.

Margaret I remember reading an article about the significance of clothes in organisational life. It was by a researcher who was studying how disabled people might be able to fit into the corporate world. The article stood out at the time and I wonder now if the permission to write about clothes was because it was about disabled bodies. The researcher turned the gaze to herself, reflecting on the unexpected insertion of her body, initially so lost in corporate spaces, into the exploration of this research (Church et al. 2006, p. 83). Through reflecting on the way she dressed her body for its appearance in the corporate world, she became aware of 'the anxious dance between visibility and invisibility' for her co-researching clients:

> I recall clearly what I wore for that performance. It was a fitted jacket in a smooth, almost heavy black fabric with burgundy corduroy inserts, most notably on the lower half of the

> cap sleeve. ... over the years through her actual sewing practices my mother taught me the texture, colour, cut, fit and finish of clothing. ... The jacket intrigued me with its 'haute' combination of two rough and tumble fabrics. It strikes me that I may have worn the piece as a subliminal in-your-face gesture to Everybank, a way of carrying my disadvantaged colleagues beyond the teller's window where they try to cash their welfare cheques (Church et al. 2006, p. 84).

For Catherine Church clothes provided a transition, a way to carry her disabled colleagues into the corporate workplace. The act of reflecting on clothes in the context of academic writing legitimates the possibility of focussing on how we wear clothes at work as an object of scholarly analysis. We start thinking about clothes as a stand-in for bodies. 'I wear clothes to protect my body in a corporate patriarchal workplace', I say. 'I play with different combinations of clothes on different days. Under the corporate outer garments, the dark grey pin stripe suit, I like to wear a silk shirt to feel the soft pliability against my body. Clothes are like a second skin, a transitional object between inside and outside. Like the infant's first object, they mediate out relationship between self and other, self and world'.

Conversation 2: The Abyss

Karen I came to a time in my practice as a corporate change manager when my body began to react, to make my ongoing participation in organisational life difficult. Change work was particularly risky and perilous. I was working in a university. At that time in my life I came to deeply understand the adage amongst change managers – that any change manager only has three big change projects in them.

My body speaks, shouts, screams. I am sitting in a meeting, waves of nausea take over. I am reeling with dizziness, a cold clammy sweat breaks out on the skin of my forehead. I try to stay seated and appear attentive to the discussions but soon I have to leave and vomit on the grass outside the door. This happens over and over again. Waves of dizziness and nausea take over my corporate body and I have to leave, overwhelmed by the need to vomit. Weakened and ill, the outcome is produced. An exit of that body from organizational life is inevitable.

Margaret The body in professional practice is invisible, especially a body out of control in its responses to organisational life. We talk about our bodies behind closed doors, share our stories of bodies that have become weakened and ill in the 'Unhealthy Places of Learning' in which we work (National Tertiary Education Union 2000). Bodily products threaten the stability of the established social order, abjected in their manifestation as neither inside nor outside the body (Kristeva, in Grosz 1987). And yet, for Kristeva, the abject is a site of possibility for the body to emerge into the symbolic order of language. Maggie MacLure (2013) writes about the body of a child asserting itself through vomiting at school. For MacLure,

this is data that 'glows', data that defies translation into codes and signification, challenging her to think through the unrepresentability of the body:

> Again, the school staff, and we ourselves, attempted to bring the vomiting, and the child, into the scheme of representation, assuming that it, or she, must 'mean' something. Everyone wanted the vomiting to be codable – a sign of something else: 'attention seeking'; 'immaturity'; 'lax parenting'; 'timidity' … But like Hannah's silence the vomiting remained a point of indetermination between the materiality of the body and the abstraction of meaning, quivering with the emotional intensities of sense, refusing to offer itself up as either signification or as 'mere' bodily process (MacLure 2013, p. 663).

Using Deleuze's *Logic of Sense* (2004), MacLure says that data such as these push us to consider how the material world 'intra-acts' with all of us, in ways that do not necessarily pass through language in its ordinary appearances, but instead manifest in and as 'sense'. Sense is 'this non-representing, unrepresentable, "wild element" in language. Sense is important for a materialist methodology because it is a kind of "mobius strip" between language and the world' (MacLure 2013, p. 658).

'This is the work of your fabric making, to bridge the body and representation, in a form other than language'.

Conversation 3: Making Fabric Assemblages in the In-Between

Karen My faith in myself was eroded. I was lost, marooned as a change worker in the academy. Images of myself as a confident, competent, successful change manager were in tatters. The fabric of the inner me was thread-bare and shredding. I resembled one of my vintage clothing pieces that could no longer hold together in the face of the handling required to renew and transform the piece. I could no longer envisage gathering the energy once again for change work. However, I was in the academy, in an institution with strong support for practice-led research. The idea of reflecting on the experiences of change managers, using the structure and form of doctoral research, seemed like a good use of the experiences I had at my disposal. In discussing the research possibilities with my academic friends – all women – my passion for fabric work surfaced. I was encouraged by them to bring these aspects of my creative and working life together. What a freeing idea, that maybe fabric was part of how I experienced the world and that it wasn't just a welcome distraction! I could find inspiration from this other space, it was woven amongst the threads.

I seemingly disappeared into, and was sustained by, a making with fabrics. Even when serious problems were facing me on the work front, what woke me up in the middle of the night in a 'Eureka!' moment was knowing that I had worked out how to place that contrasting fabric feature into a garment design. So amongst all the work chaos, my joy came from solving the problem of how to utilize the beautiful silk I had bought in Bond Street, London many years before. I wanted to be strong again.

I rationalised that, through this research, I could cut out the thread-bare pieces of my change worker life, and examine them. I would then understand my experiences. I would stop the shredding. I would strengthen the weave of my organisational life by placing a reinforcing, academic 'backing piece' on the experience, and in the process restore the fabric of my strong change manager self.

I exited from ongoing positions in organizations. I silenced my organisational voice for a time. I became a stranger to myself. I was generating something new, strange, unpredictable and, for me, totally compelling. The research was difficult to discuss. However, I was determined, compelled and allowed myself to stay with the practice of fabric assemblage, often alongside weeks of silence, and no writing. Sometimes I would do creative writing/journaling alongside the making but often there were no words. Neither did the fabric pieces make sense. They weren't made to exhibit or display in any way, they were silent bodywork. I got a friend to take black-and-white photographs of them.

Vertigo and nausea abated. The fabric practice was like a salve to the body turmoil. It made it possible to live the shift that I was experiencing. Not all together comfortable, but going with it regardless. There were no words, no academic writing to translate this body knowing into the conventional language of research, only a proliferation of fabric assemblages (Fig. 3.1).

Margaret The liminal space of the fabric making has no words, no narrative. The liminal space is about becoming, becoming-other-to-oneself through research engagement (Somerville 2007). Victor Turner (1982) coined the term 'liminal' from

Fig. 3.1 Fabric assemblage: White

Van Gennep's limen or threshold, referring to the space of becoming for the initiand in initiation rituals: 'The liminal period is that time and space betwixt and between one context of meaning and action and another. It is when the initiand is neither what he has been nor what he will be' (Turner 1982, p. 113). While Turner focuses on the space of the liminal in performance, the liminal is a non-stage, a time and space without narrative. Although a time without narrative is a radical idea in relation to the production of research through writing, I understand the liminal as a critical time and space for the emergence of new knowledge through research (Somerville 2007). In the liminal, new subjectivities emerge simultaneously with new forms.

For many other qualitative researchers, the liminal space of 'undoing, redoing and modifying of this very limit' is fundamental to the practice of writing-as-research.

Trinh Minh Ha, for example, writes that 'rather than talking about death, I would prefer to talk about threshold, frontier, limit, exhaustion, and suspension: about void as the very space for an infinite number of possibilities' (Trinh 1989, p. 59). Betty St Pierre (2000) describes the mixture of pain and joy in research when her body 'pauses, settles and readies itself for another motionless voyage that always seems to involve painful desubjectification, joyful disarticulation'. She refers to 'those certain places that provide especially fertile conditions, exquisitely dynamic intensities that make us available to a transformation of who we are' (St Pierre 2000, p. 260). But, I puzzle now in relation to Karen's fabric making, how does one cross over from that time and space of no words, no narrative, into the language of representation?

#Conversation 4: Listening with the Eyes

Margaret My supervisory role with Karen followed these conversations in a sensing way because the ideas had not yet come into words. I began to sense that the time had come to challenge Karen to make the passage into language. I remembered the time when I became ill, not long after I started working in a university. It was a certain exhaustion of the self, of logics, of academia, a dis-ease. I began a process of bodywork in which images lodged in my body emerged through massage, the touch of skin on skin. In that space between self and other, the movement of finger on skin, the massage practitioner articulates a knowing through touch. The touched body responds with images that exist in the body before words, and draws them into articulation. Not sense-making, but image-making, non-logic word attachment from multiple sites of the sensing body, from the space between self and other, between body and world. Through a slow process of attaching words to these felt images I started first to talk them, then to write them down after the massage. I found that with practice I was able to be in my body in place and to make words from that bodily experience. Walking across the lounge room feeling silky smooth floor boards under my feet, one foot after the other, walking-falling into movement of body in space, a feeling of presence. It was as if I knew my body for the first time.

I said to Karen: 'I think you should stop making new fabric pieces and re-visit the old ones. If you keep making fabric pieces your body will never find the words to articulate its story. This will be a hard thing to do because the fabric making has replaced the somatic symptoms of overwhelming nausea, dizziness and vomiting. It is a perilous and risky business to bring the body into visibility in professional practice. To begin, I would like you to re-visit the fabric assemblages materially, not in your mind, don't try to give them meaning, but respond to their materiality with your body. I want you to listen with your eyes and write down what you hear them saying to you. Give them voice'.

Karen

This fabric assemblage is in my workroom
lying on the floor
it has been kept away

from day to day domestic things
shoes removed, and with bare feet
I walk over it.

A small square of green khaki fabric
with fringed edges
secured by neat dark green stitching lines
that meet at right angles.

Felt exposed at the academy
now I feel broken and battered
I'm no longer there.

Another patch of white fabric
mother's hand-stitched nightgown
made for her trousseau
rectangular shapes stitched in place
resemble playing cards.

A third patch of iridescent yellow fabric
fine stitches secure a golden yellow
rounded
billowing
joyful form.

In this space not thinking
not knowing
freedom
no neat resolution.

Something is taking hold
settling in
establishing
underneath consciousness
giving form to research-making
not clear
not sharp
no coherence yet.

I tried to express ideas about the gap, the silence, in a meeting with strategy planners on a government assignment. They looked at me. A brief halt in the interminable talk. Then things just continued on as if I had never spoken. The hour filled with words. Unable to hold onto the meaning of all these words. I was in a room in which all those around me – some women, mostly men – seemed fluent in a language that was alien to me. Although I was accustomed to being around foreign languages, in the face of this language I am heavy with incomprehension and disinterest. So I undertook the making in private. I undertook the making in silence. Long stretches of silence, occasionally interrupted with sparse strings of words. Sometimes I audio-taped myself, in a period of making.

Disparate components joined
sometimes separated
differing weights, textures, sizes
large/small does not point
to importance
makings evoke
experiences, emotions, memories
colours and shades
differing surfaces textures
each felt, seen, heard, smelt
components re-stitched
configuration, representation, type
what's normal, different, ugly, beautiful
varying touch-temperature
always movement in fall, weight
twisted strips
internal and external the same
encased but exposed
outside inside transformation
the inside outside
porous to/of environment
can be taken apart
regeneration
transformation
disparate components are joined.

Conversation 5: Women Coming into Language

Karen My making of fabric assemblages and sitting with the organisational change work in that way allowed the articulation of unknowing and undoing to emerge. It has been an uncomfortable and volatile bodily experience for me, this undoing. I became detached from organisational leadership roles. It seemed like a necessary stage in coming to a new knowing. Fabric assemblage work played a major role in this detachment and reattachment. I seemed to let go of all I had built up in my professional life. I cried, I grieved. I tried to stop the letting go. The feeling of deep loss was at times almost unbearable.

The fabric assemblages were always all around me. I could go through that portal into a liminal space, knowing I had these objects, something to hang on to in this perilous, chaotic space, the space of the in-between. I read Grosz (1990) on Lacan and began to think about the fabric pieces as transitional forms that sit between body and language. Lacan refers to the speaking/writing subject as the unproblematic pre-constituted subject, who is simply presumed as a knowing subject to the patriarchal order.

What Grosz's writings on Lacan did for me was to establish his platform very clearly. Grosz identifies what Lacan does and what he has left hanging in the air. Lacan has developed a theory of the symbolic order of language specifically relating to male bodies. Women are other than, or less than, in this theorising. There are threads of certain types of thinking that continue into feminist work and I needed to understand this genealogy of thinking before I could explore her later work on the French feminists Kristeva and Irigaray.

Lacan's account of the mirror stage is about the insertion of the body into language in the life of the infant. It theorises the beginning of speech and the loss of unbounded identification with the space of the mother in the infant's development. The specular image (the mirror) symbolises both a literal image of the self and an idealized representation. The mirror-image provides the ground for imaginary identifications of the ego in which the self becomes an object separated from the body-of-the-world. The mirror stage provides the conditions for detachment from lived experience (Grosz 1990, pp. 48–49).

In feminist terms, Lacanian psychoanalysis is useful in providing different understandings of taken-for-granted ways of looking at men's and women's relationships to patriarchal systems and knowledge and language. Freud outlined the characteristics of femininity as a consequence of woman's acceptance of their lack (Grosz 1990, pp. 131–137). He theorised that women develop strategies that ensure that they take up the position of 'the phallus' through being the object of desire. The art of illusion and semblance become a woman's greatest assets in striving for this position. Lacan (Grosz 1990, p. 144) shifts the ground of our understanding of power relations and their social reproduction, and provides some crucial elements for a description and explanation of the psychic components of women's oppression as caused by socio-economic and linguistic structures, the socio-linguistic Law of the Father.

As an experienced executive woman, I was naïve to expect different power relations in an academic institution with deep patriarchal traditions. A woman's trajectory is to be reduced to a desired object. In this context, I became undesirable through my unwelcome efforts at reflecting the institution back to itself, providing a different mirror, as it were. I commented on the institution's enacting of traditional power relations, and courageously pursued my role in leading a program of change.

After a short time, however, I became distanced from the core of power, and readily interchangeable with any other woman (considered more trustworthy, more predictable, more compliant). I was unable to fundamentally challenge the Law of the Father as the Other (Grosz 1990), the law that was fundamental to academic institutions. I was experiencing this through my body – the nausea, the vertigo, the

vomiting – before my rational self could accept it, could know the circumstances of my making. At the same time, some other form of expression, a 'circling around', an emergence (Somerville 2007), were at play.

Margaret For me, the mirror stage seemed to be a pivotal point for feminist theorising about the relationship of bodies and language. The symbolic order (of language) is the field within which our lives and social experiences are located. It can be conceived as a system where there are many possible signifiers of social power and linguistic norms. Grosz brought the body into the centre of analysis, 'the very stuff of subjectivity' (Grosz 1994, p. ix), and positions it as the ally of sexual difference, questioning phallocentric assumptions. She seeks to rescue the body from dominant, uncontested (patriarchal) models that link women's subjectivities and social positions to the specificities of male bodies. Through analysing the philosophical writings of Kristeva, Irigaray, and Le Doeff (Grosz 1987), she addresses the possibilities of language to enunciate women differently. These theorists, departing from Lacan's mirror stage, provide accounts of embodiment which question many presumptions in male-authored philosophical texts.

For Kristeva, particularly, in her theorising of the semiotic space of the mother, the insertion of the body into language is the site of possibility for speaking and thinking differently. She writes of the creative potential of the abject, and of 'madness, holiness and poetry' as the way in which the body bursts forth into language, disrupting the smooth surfaces of the linguistic field. She describes the disruptive potential of the corporeal language of hysteria. She says if women write as hysterical subjects, they are bound to the body and its rhythms, estranged from language, they are visionaries, 'dancers who suffer as they speak' (Grosz 1987, pp. 165–166). Karen's fabric assemblages, like the child's transitional object, links her to both the semiotic space of the mother and the symbolic order of the father, the unrepresentability of the body in object form.

Women, for Irigaray, do not conform to a singular identity, nor are they definable in men's terms (Grosz 1987, pp. 145–146). The human subject is fragmented, emerging as a subject-in-process, constituted in language each time they speak. For Irigaray, the female body is the site of patriarchal power relations and at the same time the site for symbolic and representational resistance. Woman does not conform to the logic of singular identity, sexuality and desire. Women's bodies are not definable in men's terms. She seeks the positive re-inscription of women's bodies, the creation of perspectives, positions, desires that are inhabitable by women as women, creating positive alternatives, viable methods of knowing, and means of representation for women's autonomy.

Karen Through the making of fabric assemblages I sat with the not-knowing, and felt connected to something strong and unique. Eventually I re-attached to the organisational change manager part of my self in a different way. I began to work as a 'portfolio worker', working from the outside or from the margins of organisational life, as many women have chosen to do (Fenwick 2006). The fabric assemblages were key to being able to detach from my old organisational change-worker persona.

I became deeply attached to the making of fabric assemblage, and in that making, came to know/not know and to find ways to write from the experiencing body.

I am a woman. I was employed to work on changing a profoundly patriarchal institution. I was trying to do this as a woman rather than as an instrument of patriarchy. It was perilous work. It took a profound toll on my body. Fabric assemblage provided a transitional object to hang on to, in the liminal space. I began to understand ideas of multiple subjectivities. Other parts of my self gained expression and all of these could be part of our conversations in the Space, Place and Body group.

Collective Conversations: Space, Place and Body

Margaret and Karen In the context of doctoral supervision, the collective body/minds of a group of doctoral students engaged in discussions about the body and language. In a safe space, new ideas about female bodies, language and writing were able to be articulated. The onto-epistemological work of the Space, Place and Body group was significantly informed by Elizabeth's Grosz's early writings on the relation between bodies and language. It was important to understand the genealogy of these ideas from their emergence in the particular space/time conjunction of scholarly work. Feminist poststructural theory reconceptualised the work of key male theorists such as Freud, Lacan, Derrida and Foucault, with the fundamental aim of deconstructing the biological determinism of the male/female binary. Never a closed category, however, feminist poststructural theory arose as a living dynamic system of thought that has evolved along many different pathways. The category of the body was the most radical and productive of these new forms of thinking, and continues to inform new relational materialist methodologies today (e.g. Barad 2003).

Grosz's first published work in feminist body theory began with the French feminist philosophers Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Michelle Le Doeff (Grosz 1987). This first book ('Three French Feminists') began, like many of her published works, in her intellectual conversations with similar groups to the Space, Place and Body group as a collaborative but distinctly pedagogical process. These particular feminist philosophers were chosen for study because each of them fundamentally challenged the works of influential psychoanalytic theorists of the time. The episteme began with Freud, whose theoretical contributions fundamentally depended on the women who engaged in psychoanalysis with him and, in the process, translated somatic symptoms produced by repressed trauma into language. Lacan followed Freud to develop a highly sophisticated albeit masculinist understanding of the relationship of bodies and language, in particular the insertion of the child into the symbolic order at 'the mirror stage'. Grosz was interested in understanding the distinctive scholarship of each of the French feminist philosophers chosen for study but, more

significantly for our genealogical tracing, summarised the collective thrust of their ideas as:

> . . . a fundamental antihumanism and materialism, a recognition of the powers of prevailing (patriarchal) modes of representation and knowledge, a recognition of the cultural debt owed to women and maternity, [and] a concern with the social, institutional and discursive construction of sexual identity (Grosz 1987, p. viii).

Each of these four elements has been taken up in her later work to interrogate philosophy from a female embodied perspective. The focus on 'antihumanism and materialism' is the means through which the primacy of the Enlightenment male subject as a singular, rational, autonomous human being in the world is fundamentally deconstructed. It is the challenge to the related modes of representation through which this subject is constituted, that is of most enduring relevance to the genealogy of our current thinking. Antihumanism challenges the dominance of human beings in both discursive formations and practical actions-in-the-world, and materialism focuses on the possibility of alternative relations with 'the flesh of the world' through different ways of being and knowing. Grosz's original work is to select and filter their ideas through the lens of the body to develop a loosely held theory of corporeality that was to extend in other lines of flight in her own work and the influence of other feminist scholars in a multitude of directions.

The body is already a challenge for understanding practice, and this is doubly so for the body in professional practice. For Karen and Margaret, the conversations initiated by readings of Grosz, Lacan, Irigaray and Kristeva offered ways of thinking about the female body and how the female subject is constituted as 'other' in patriarchal organisations. Based on these understandings, possibilities opened up for articulating the silent and silenced embodied self of Karen's professional practice. Grosz suggests that women's experiences have not been acknowledged or represented in terms chosen by women themselves. There are other ways of undertaking cultural activity and intellectual endeavour, using feminist theorising of (multiple) subjectivities, that understand women as both subjects and objects of knowledge. This provides a set of perspectives based on women's specificities, experiences, and positions that can provide a productive and generative way forward. For Karen, it opened up the possibility of working differently in her professional practice as a change agent and opening new ways to integrate a sustainable life for a sustainable planet.

Conclusion: Sustaining the Change Agent

Karen and Margaret In returning to the question of what this study teaches us about sustaining the professional practitioner more generally, we re-trace our steps through fabric assemblages to the new professional practitioner selves that have emerged through this process. The making of the fabric assemblages produced transitional objects (Winnicott 1953) that allowed Karen to be in the liminal space

of 'not knowing', a place without language where new understandings could be experienced. The process gave rise, eventually, to an understanding of the resistance, the struggles, the coercion invested in both accepting and refusing the image of self in a patriarchal institution. Feminist body theory taught Karen that time away from patriarchal workplaces, in which a woman can listen to her body in a non-medicalised way, was a rich source of data and experience. To focus on the sensations and the reactions through the transitional objects enabled Karen to hold any discomfort, to remain aware, and to stay with the experience without either spoken or written words. Alternative forms of representation were key to this process. In returning to the makings after a period of time, Karen was able to give them voice, to 'listen with the eyes', and written words were generated in sparse scanned lines, interestingly right-hand justified on the white page. Both Margaret and Karen travelled by different and circuitous routes to the recognition that sustaining the change agent in professional practice is ultimately about sustaining multiple selves, human and non-human, and the well-being of the planet. In addressing the binary constructions of thought through which formulations such as body/mind and nature/culture can only be thought as oppositions, in which one side is devalued in relation to the other, the space in-between is a critical site for transformations of knowledge and practice.

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