

Developing a Poetics of Flippancy to Document Fourth Wave Feminism

Prudence Chamberlain

Royal Holloway University of London

English

Declaration of Authorship

I, Prudence Chamberlain, hereby declare that the thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

Abstract

This practice-based PhD uses a combination of critical and creative work to develop a poetics of flippancy in relation to feminism. Drawing on concepts of the 'contemporary' and the 'constellation', I theorise a model of poetic and political engagement, which is synthesized through a body of poetry.

The critical work discusses current feminist activism in relation to public feeling, addressing the surges of activity and solidarity that are created through affective ties. Affect is central to this discussion, particularly in my reconceptualization of the feminist wave narrative. Looking to contemporary feminist activism, particularly technological development and recent mainstream publications, I make the case for the wave narrative as an 'affective temporality.' Furthermore, I contend that this current fourth-wave affectivity has been catalyzed and shaped by new technologies and activist methodologies coming to the fore.

Having addressed temporality in relation to activism, situating my practice alongside current forms of feminism, I then draw specifically on Mina Loy, Frank O'Hara and Eileen Myles. In doing so, I consider tensions between the political and poetic in their respective socio-historical contexts and bodies of writing, with an eye to developing a flippant poetics relevant to my own. This allows for an investigation of the place that a flippant lyric 'I' can occupy within the current moment of feminist activism, making a case for subjective unseriousness as a form of political engagement. Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' entails a consideration of her specific locatedness, addressing the ways in which fluctuations between Futurism and feminism create a problematic political engagement that appears both fickle and contradictory. In O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto' I employ the constellation as a method of reading the poet's work, raising questions of the co-existence of the amicable and intimate, with the historical and public. How does Personism, despite its ostensible glibness, offer a form of political and poetic engagement relevant to contemporary feminism? Finally, Myles allows me to address embodied performance, in which the poet continuously places herself at the centre of creative work, complicating the distinctions between Myles as constructed figure and Myles as woman. Combined, these three areas of analysis create a space in which conflicted and changeable, community-orientated, and seemingly embodied experiences of a wider public, can constitute a 'flippant poetics' that is politically engaged.

The poetry documents contemporary feminist activism, mobilizing my critical exploration through a body of creative work. Rather than commenting upon my academic writing on wave narratives, the contemporary and the constellation, the creative work is mimetic of current activism itself. This way of writing addresses my central critical concepts, but ensures that the poetry is tethered to the real occurrences of feminism both on and off-line. Each poem has a title and date to indicate the incident, event, march or campaign to which it relates. In doing so, the poems draw on the poetics I have developed in the critical writing; specifically, the locatedness of Loy's work, the community emphasis of O'Hara's and the embodied poetics suggested by Myles. The poetic document as a whole gives a reader insight into the development of fourth wave feminism.

Index

Chapter	Pages
Introduction	5 - 56
'There is no half-measure': Mina Loy's Irreconcilable Feminism and Futurism	57 - 89
'There's nothing metaphysical about it': Frank O'Hara's Flippant Manifesto and the Poetics of Tight Trousers	90 - 118
'Who are these idiots writing these poems?': Eileen Myles' Pornographic Tone and Mutable Categories	119 - 147
Conclusion	148 - 167
Bibliography	168 - 176
Practice	177 - 336

Introduction

This thesis draws upon creative practice and academic investigation to develop a poetics of flippancy that subjectively documents current feminism. The intersections of poetry, academia and activism create a series of confluences and conflicts that are both embodied and explored in my writing. Through immersing myself in current feminist culture, including attending marches, listening to discussions, going to conferences and following online communities, and then writing about this experience in my poetry, I am creating a set of documentation that records and reflects feminist politics. The poems are written in the lyric mode, with an 'I' as the consistent mediator between multiple forms of activism and the technology that facilitates the dissemination of feminist material and information. Not simply limited to detailing street marches, the poems can arise in response to legislative change, news articles, domestic settings or off-hand comments that seem to resonate with the objectives of, or indeed, objections to, feminism. My poetry synthesises a number of different strands of feminist and urban engagement, disregarding hierarchies of appropriateness or seriousness to consider a range of issues, from the frivolous to the harrowing. As such, my poetics have been influenced by the practice of feminist politics, raising questions such as: How can one define a wave so that it is no longer deemed a divisive narrative? How does feeling consolidate communities and why might that be useful in terms of non-essentialist female identities? What place does flippancy have in a politics that hopes to stop the epidemic of violence against women?

A multiplicity of source material, differences within feminism itself and a range of poetic influences have created a 'constellation' within which I situate myself.¹ In this way, my practice rejects a chronology of political inheritance and resists a linear understanding of avant-garde feminist poetic precedents. Instead, I aim to position my poetics in dialogue with three poets from different temporal and geographical contexts who I see as key to the development of a poetics of flippancy: Mina Loy, Frank O'Hara and Eileen Myles. My use of these poets is based entirely on their poetics, as opposed to any similarity in socio-political position. Loy was writing in pre World War One Italy, reconciling her

¹ I discuss this term and its theoretical as well as practical implications below.

feminist interest with an artistic affiliation with the Futurists. O'Hara was producing poems in New York during the 1950s and early 60s as he balanced working at the MOMA with a hectic social life. Myles, in contrast, grew up in working class Boston and later moved to New York, becoming a fully integrated member of the St. Mark's community in the 1970s. While the poets differ from one another in both geographical context and time period, I draw on their poetic practice and specific locatedness to create a platform from which to develop my own flippant poetics.

In addition to the contexts in which the poets moved, their political engagements have been central to the development of my work. Loy espouses a different form of feminism to my own, with a focus on reproduction, eugenics and self-determination; however, her location at the site of a conflict between Futurism and feminism speaks to my engagement with a current contradictory and disparate political situation. O'Hara did not address feminism explicitly, but established a chattering and urban poetic that, while appearing apolitical, cultivated an aesthetic that allows for social engagement and countercultural identification. Myles uses a similar conversational style to explore her feminist and lesbian identity, while considering the 'self' as a construction. While their politics differ from one another, the commonality between Loy, O'Hara and Myles and myself is that we are each located within specific communities, while expressing an anxiety about strong affiliations and collective participation.² Although these poets were part of Futurism, first-wave feminism, the New York School and St Mark's Church respectively, they still remained critical of easy identification. Similarly, I am part of specific communities, both feminist and poetic, in which I explore how a lyric speaker can articulate discomfort within collectivity.

Defining Affect and Waves

The 'wave' narrative has been attributed with causing generational division, accused of dismissing the achievements of past movements and, finally, charged with highlighting only a few figureheads as representative of a whole. In spite of

² The community and coterie work of the three poets will be explored individually in each of their chapters.

this, the narrative persists, and is widely used by feminists.³ It is my contention that feminists must reconceptualise the wave in a way that recognizes both its difficulty and the purchase that it nevertheless retains on feminist politics. I will not be considering the wave as a strategy of division specifically applicable to certain types of women or generations. Instead, I will suggest that it can be viewed as an ‘affective temporality’. This affective temporality is a ‘feeling moment,’ in which a specific period of time engages with and produces feeling that, in turn, engages with and fuels activism. While I avoid offering a definitive definition for affect throughout this introduction, I understand the term as relating to public feeling: transferrable and transmittable, it can stick political subjects together creating movements in which a collective capacity for feeling is central. Furthermore, I acknowledge that affects, both positive and negative, can move subjects together in order to form collectives. In my conclusion, I shall explore negative affects in further detail to consider the way in which they relate to contemporary feminism.

To clarify, my intention is not to offer a comprehensive history of specific waves in terms of affect. If, as Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth assert in their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), ‘affective moments ... do not arise in order to be deciphered and decoded or delineated,’⁴ then a post-rationalisation of previous feminist feeling would prove a difficult endeavour. As such, I will make a case for re-thinking the wave narrative generally: a theoretical reconceptualization that rejects chronological narratives and intergenerational divides. Instead of emphasising each wave’s distinctiveness in a narrative of progression, I will argue that they are in fact moments in which certain affects combine with specific activisms to sustain a surge of political engagement and participation. Initially, I will define affect and waves, elaborating on the possible intersections of the two, and then address the idea of the ‘contemporary,’ to consider the way in which the ‘moment’ necessitates an awareness of both the past and future. This will develop into an exploration of ‘affective temporality’: what constitutes a feeling moment and how that could ultimately be described as a ‘wave’. I will also consider the ways in which this

³ See the work of Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, Clare Hemmings, Angela McRobbie, Astrid Henry and Rosalind Gill.

⁴ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth, (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2010) p.21.

approach to a wave narrative creates space in which affective political participation can exist and where a lyric feminist poetry can serve as appropriate documentation.

Deleuze and Guattari

In order to explore the way in which affect is central to my conception of fourth wave feminism, initially I will look to Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*. From this text, I will move into contemporary scholarship on affect, which serves in many senses to complicate this initial understanding. The more recent texts on affect emphasise the difficulty of pinning down the term, acknowledging it as an elusive transmission of public feeling amongst a variety of subjects or within specific spaces. This is complicated further by the fact that I will be looking to primarily feminist and queer understandings of affect, which engage strongly with 'the personal' as a necessary starting point for forceful political feeling to come to the fore. In his introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi comments on translating 'affect/affection', of which he writes 'neither word denotes a personal feeling ... *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act.'⁵ This established, Guattari and Deleuze's take on affect seems to occupy multiple positions throughout the book. Without being contradictory or changeable, affect is reframed and recontextualised in relation to animals, becoming, perception and warfare.

In writing about animals, Deleuze and Guattari establish that 'affect is not a personal feeling ... it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel.'⁶ This implies that while affects might not reside within the realm of the personal, they move an individual, later referred to as subject, into a group dynamic in which the force and strength of extimacy creates collective coherence. The authors go on to elucidate that 'schools, bands, herds, populations are not inferior social forms; they are affects and powers,

⁵ Brian Massumi, 'Introduction' in Gilles Deleuze and Feli Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. xvi.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Feli Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p.240.

involutions that grip every animal in a becoming.’⁷ Rather than focusing here on the way in which animal affectivity can map back onto the human, which is suggested in *A Thousand Plateaus*, I am interested in this idea of ‘becoming’ in relation to collectives. Social forms and formations can be a locus for affectivity to become powerful. Not only is an animal or subject moved to collectivity, or stuck within it, through the adhesive nature of affect, it is also propelled into its own ‘becoming’. Later within the text, Deleuze and Guattari make this very claim, writing ‘affects are becomings.’⁸ This sense of ‘becoming’ is vital to my understanding of the way in which flippancy engages with the affective temporality, undergoing a process of ‘unbecoming’ as a method of politicisation. Affects seem to suggest a liminality, in which a subject enters into a state of upheaval that nonetheless places them in motion amongst a larger collective.

Deleuze and Guattari proceed to consider this idea of ‘affect’ in relation to the human and the social, using the ‘body’ as a vehicle for discussion on both the individual and collective. Reflecting on Spinoza, the authors write that:

We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body.⁹

What is perhaps most useful about this understanding of the body is the idea that affects are a form of ‘doing.’ The body becomes functioning and functional on account of the way in which its affects operate. However, Deleuze and Guattari do not specify what ‘affect’ is, focusing instead on the way in which it works, as an exchange of action or passion that moves a body to become part of a more powerful and larger body. This is, undoubtedly, a form of becoming, in which a subject moved into a collective then participates in the group movement created through affective intensity. What is difficult, however, for affect scholars and social movements attempting to narrate their own emergence, is that ‘movements, becomings, in other words, pure relations of speed and slowness,

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.241.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.256.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.257.

pure affects, are below and above the threshold of perception.’¹⁰ If affects cannot be perceived, then their recognition becomes problematic, located purely in an ability to feel and feel collectively.

A Thousand Plateaus also addresses the way in which affect can engage with the state apparatus, as well as the war machine. Deleuze and Guattari write that ‘feelings become uprooted from the interiority of a “subject,” to be projected violently outward in a milieu of pure exteriority that lends them an incredible velocity, a catapulting force: love or hate, they are no longer feelings but affects.’¹¹ In spite of Massumi’s willingness to differentiate between feeling and affect, which is continued throughout the text as a whole, there is an undeniable relationship between the personal and then the extimate affective. Through this uprooting, a subject can engage in the social act of becoming, which has the capacity to be both personal and political. Both writers suggest that ‘affect is the active discharge of emotion, the counterattack, whereas feeling is an always displaced, retarded and resisting emotion. Affects are projectiles, just like weapons.’¹² While my work is resistant to viewing affects as weapons, this does demonstrate the way in which a discharge of emotions, in relation to a collective, in public spaces and social contexts can be useful for create a forceful engagement with politics.

Affect and Force

Affect has a number of qualities that recommend it to contemporary feminism. Seigworth and Gregg state that:

Affect arises in the midst of *in-betweenness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon. Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained state of relation *as well as* the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities.¹³

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.281.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.356.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.400.

¹³ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworthy, (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader*, p.1.

This sense of the in-betweenness, related to the 'acting' and 'being acted upon', the passage and duration of passage of forces, speaks to the relationship between temporality and political activism. Political action is necessitated by a desire to move from one set of relations or one state of being to another. The activism, as a result, is positioned as a middle ground in the fight for achievable objectives, where past conditions dictate aspirations for a different future. The in-between is also useful for thinking through the difficulty of engaging in social movement or forms of feeling that cannot be defined. The sense of process and transience implied by being between one state and another allows for affect to emerge and grow without becoming stifled through definition. As a result, a passage can emerge in which acting and acting upon simultaneously contribute to the affectivity of the moment.

Affect, when applied to a political context, becomes a force that unites people through reciprocity. This force carries intensity such that a passage of action is made evident to those who act and are acted upon by the affect proliferating within their group. The passage may be types of activism, the aspirations for social change or just the links created between subjects and political groupings. Notably, Seigworth and Greggs' claim that 'affect is in many ways synonymous with *force*'.¹⁴ This concept of 'force' is vital when affect is considered in conjunction with politics, offering an explanation for the ways in which feeling can drive activism and action. Despite the vagueness and lack of definition that surrounds affect, both in academic criticism and socially, it does reflect a sudden surge of energy towards certain objects, events or politics. This force sustains the affect and turns the public feeling into productive action.

Both force and in-betweenness are central to the understanding of affect's operations and integral for thinking through the formation of collectivities. In-betweenness acknowledges that a subject moved to political action can, in turn, be acted upon by the contexts that have facilitated their politicisation. Through this, affect suggests relations in addition to trajectories: it is formulated through links and communications. These links necessitate movement for a subject, whether that is toward achieving a tangible political aim or establishing communities. Affect is also central to the formation of the communities toward which a political subject may be drawn. As Seigworth and Greggs note, it '*accumulates*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.2.

across both relatedness and interruptions in relatedness ... traversing the ebbs and swells of intensities that pass between “bodies.”¹⁵ In this sense, bodies are not only recognised as breathing human entities contained by skin, but understood ‘by their potential to reciprocate or co-participate in passages of affect’.¹⁶ This understanding of force and affect becomes particularly important for my aim of reconsidering the wave narrative.

Waves and Temporality

Jennifer Baumgardner, who co-wrote *Manifesta* (2001), published *F'em!: Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls* in 2011, collecting several pieces of her feminist journalism together. Here she comments on the possibility of an emergent fourth wave: ‘if you think too hard about the criteria for each label, the integrity of the waves disintegrates rapidly and they eddy into one another, the way ocean waves do’.¹⁷ Similar to critical writing on the archiving and analysis of affect, Baumgardner proposes a vagueness in approach that eschews rigid definition of the waves. She references Ednie Kaeh Garrison’s essay ‘U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style! Youth (Sub)Cultures and The Technologies of The Third Wave’ (2000), in which the author questions general assumptions that the wave relates to generational difference. Having located her third wave identity within a specific temporality, Garrison writes that ‘feminism has changed substantially in the late-capitalist and postmodern world but still references a longer movement history,’ and continues: ‘there are important differences between historical specificity and generational specificity’.¹⁸ I suggest that it is useful to think of the wave as demarcating a temporality, as opposed to a definite identity within feminist subjects. A feminist who thinks of herself as ‘second wave’ can be active and engaged within a ‘fourth wave moment’, even if her feminist identity was initially consolidated and galvanised at the height of 1970s consciousness raising. The wave, as a result, becomes a less prescriptive possibility in which changing temporalities, in relation to their wider history, necessitate a change in attitudes and activism. It is this alteration in activity

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

¹⁷ Jennifer Baumgardner, *F'EM! Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2011), p.243.

¹⁸ Ednie Kaeh Garrison, ‘U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave’ in *Feminist Studies* (26)1, pp.144-145.

that speaks to my understanding of affect, which develops based on new contexts, time periods and forms of engagement.

I see the updating of the wave narrative as demonstrative of the intersection of a forceful surge of political engagement with societal change that reflects the affect of the moment. Both Baumgardner and Garrison champion the use of the wave narrative because it recognises a change in historical context that, in turn, necessitates a linguistic recognition within feminism. The wave comes to represent a particularly forceful moment in which the altered activisms and concerted feminist efforts are joined in a mass attempt at change. By locating new waves within the desire for recognition by younger activists, Baumgardner's flippant 'I believe the Fourth Wave matters, because I remember how sure I was that my generation mattered'¹⁹ undercuts what I see as the possibility inherent in conceptualizing surges of force. Actually, what the wave can come to represent is an affective force crossing a temporality, creating active collectivities that are moved by a shared feeling.

An Emergent Wave

The present of feminism, I would argue, is currently obscured by its immediacy: action is proliferating and at such a rate that it is difficult to grasp fully its development. In *Feeling Backward* (2007) the gender theorist Heather Love writes that 'it is possible to detect impulses that are not yet organized as movements; we can understand and respond to a historical moment that is not yet fully articulated in institutions as the dominant mode of existence.'²⁰ Simply put, reactionary activism cannot be fully visible or understood as it gains momentum and germinates. Inevitably, then, archives of documentation emerge retrospectively, looking to the reports and paraphernalia that emerged within the immediacy of the political moment. Such responsive activism is motivated by affect, or forms of affect, which serve as the catalyst for action.

The connectivity inherent within my understanding of the contemporary is vital for reconceiving the relationship between wave and affect, and I shall tease out the theoretical implications of this term in the section "The

¹⁹ Jennifer Baumgardner, *F'EM! Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls*, p.250.

²⁰ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007) p.12.

Contemporary,” below. Here, I highlight that a concept of the contemporary ensures that the past and the future are similarly experienced, and propose that this can be considered an alternative to operating specifically within the present. This temporality allows for emergent new waves to reflect the issues and obscurities of their own moment, as opposed to creating opposition between feminist precursors. Rather than dismissing past achievements or denigrating previous efforts, it demonstrates an awareness of, and respect for, precedents. In *Archive of Feeling* (2003), which is primarily concerned with recording and understanding the past, Ann Cvetkovich writes:

Histories can “touch” one another. There are resonant juxtapositions between past and present whose explanatory power is not causal or teleological; instead, the affective charge of investment, of being “touched”, brings the past forward into the present.²¹

Cvetkovich’s idea that investment in politics necessitates a haptic temporality - one that, in turn, touches the political subject - is true for a contemporary and affective feminism. With feminists who were galvanized during the second, third and fourth waves, all working together within a ‘fourth wave moment’, histories are perpetually touching the present. In this touching of various histories, the contemporary is imbued with a specific kind of affect in which, being moved to movement, is enabled by a consideration of temporality and politics.

Why Fourth Wave Now?

Having established the concept of the wave as an affective moment, I want to make a case for fourth wave feminism emerging in contemporary western society. In doing so, and having acknowledged the difficulty of engaging with the wave narrative, I emphasise that my introduction of the fourth wave is not intended to create further division, but to contribute to the pre-established narratives that have been articulated within feminist discourse. It is also to pay necessary tribute to the ways in which the cultural constellation has changed significantly within the last few years, primarily on account of the technologies

²¹ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures* (London: Duke University Press, 2003) p.49.

that have developed. Indeed, much like Garrison's writing on the third wave, my consideration of the fourth wave relates to the way in which dissemination and connectivity have been fundamentally changed.

Recent technologies have allowed everyday and personal situations to become increasingly public. For feminism, this means that incidents of everyday sexism and misogyny are made visible and public, thereby escalating response. The Slut Walk was organised in response to the comments an individual police officer made to a group of students.²² Similarly, Everyday Sexism allows for the documentation and wide dissemination of everyday incidents of inequality.²³ In 2013 a number of prominent female journalists abstained from Twitter, prompted by misogynistic responses to Caroline Criado-Perez's successful campaign to install a woman on the £5 note.²⁴ This escalation of individual incidents demonstrates the ways in which women are becoming less forgiving and more public about the treatment they receive. It also resonates with the belief that 'the personal is political' and, as such, individual experience should be made public. Pairing this with Twitter ensures rapid response and easy links to be made between incidents, despite geographical distance.

The speed facilitated by online activism is also vital for considering this affective moment that I am identifying as fourth wave. While not attempting to pinpoint the specific affectivity of this time, the possibilities afforded by speed of communication have changed the way in which feminism operates. Protests can

²² The Slut Walk began in Canada in response to a police officer telling university students not to dress like sluts if they wanted to avoid rape. A march was organised, which encouraged women and men to wear whatever they wished – revealing or not – and take to the streets. The march became international within a number of months, Ed Pilkington, 'SlutWalking gets rolling after cop's loose talk about provocative clothing' in *The Guardian* (6 May 2011) <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/06/slutwalking-policeman-talk-clothing>> [accessed: 21 November 2013].

²³ The Everyday Sexism project began as a Twitter account and blog, which invited women to submit their stories of sexism. Its initial aim was to offer a space that documented the harassment women encountered on a daily basis. Laura Bates, 'The Everyday Sexism Project: a year of shouting back' in *The Guardian* (16 April 2013) <<http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2013/apr/16/everyday-sexism-project-shouting-back>> [Accessed: 21 November 2013].

²⁴ When it was announced that a new face was going to be put on the £5 note, a number of women campaigned to ensure that it was a woman. These women all received death and rape threats when it was announced that Jane Austen would go on the note. Caroline Criado-Perez 'After the Jane Austen announcement I suffered rape threats for 48 hours, but I'm still confident the trolls won't win' in *The New Statesman* (27 July 2013) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/media/2013/07/after-jane-austen-announcement-i-suffered-rape-threats-48-hours-im-still-confident-tro>> [Accessed: 21 November 2013].

be organised through a series of clicks and supported with information on a supplementary Facebook page. Online petitions ensure that access to protest has become easier; for example, disabled feminists who may previously have found participation difficult can contribute voices and names to central issues. The speed of the Internet has also changed the scope of feminism, which has come to acknowledge a problematic but vital relationship with global feminist issues. Stories such as the gang rape of a young woman in India or the rape of a girl by two football players in Steubenville become widely known with great rapidity.²⁵ In fact, it was an online group, Anonymous, that was able to offer compelling evidence in the latter's case, by retrieving deleted photos that had originally been posted online.²⁶

Historically, waves have also come to be identified with an attendant 'backlash', which occurs directly after a surge of activism. Recent technology propagates a different relationship to the backlash in what I am identifying as a fourth feminist wave. Alternative to a model suggested by Susan Faludi in which a wave of feminism is quickly followed by restrictive legislative change and counter-activism, the Internet allows for simultaneity of activism and backlash.²⁷ In fact, this relationship has become almost dialogic as feminists engage with misogynists. In her book *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender and Power on the Internet* (2013), Laurie Penny draws on the optimism of Donna Haraway's 'Cyborg Manifesto' (1991), in which the Internet was believed to allow for a genderless safe space. However, as Penny has experienced, having an opinion or blog is considered as 'the short skirt of the internet', in which the simple fact of expression in a public forum means a woman is asking for threats of sexual

²⁵ Steubenville was a particularly famous rape case, in which two young athletes carried an unconscious girl between parties, sexually assaulting her as their peers and friends filmed and photographed it. Their high school and local community defended the boys, due to their athletic records and places on the football team. Laurie Penny, 'Steubenville: this is rape culture's Abu Ghraib moment' in *The New Statesman* (19 March 2013) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/laurie-penny/2013/03/steubenville-rape-cultures-abu-ghraib-moment>> [Accessed: 30 November 2013].

²⁶ Tara Culp-Ressler, 'Hacker who Exposed Steubenville Rape Case Could Spend More Time Behind Bars than Rapists' in *Think Progress* (7 June 2013) <<http://thinkprogress.org/health/2013/06/07/2119171/anonymous-hacker-steubenville-jail/>> [Accessed: 30 November 2013].

²⁷ Susan Faludi, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 1991).

violence and bodily harm.²⁸ As a result of this new way of communicating between feminists and non- or anti-feminists, and the dialogue facilitated by the Internet (for better or worse), women are able to engage directly with the 'backlash', possibly for the first time. In fact, the speed at which groups can be mobilised ensures that surges of feminist activism are not followed by a backlash, but are accompanied by it.

All of the events and activism included above are linked to forms of feeling, engaged with public emotion, creating a certain affect that is unique to this contemporary cultural moment. The presence and all-pervasiveness of the Internet, especially in relation to documentation, organization and a dialogue with the backlash, has changed feminist public engagement. Furthermore, the Internet has allowed charities to find new fundraising forums, petitions to be circulated with greater speed and dialogue between feminists and anti-feminists to exist in a space that does not entail bodily presence. While all of the criticism I have considered encourages a move away from attempting to define types of 'affect' specifically, I want to suggest, without pinning down the feeling driving it, that the mobility and speed that acts on feminist subjects, and that is enacted by them, is creating a forceful fourth wave with its own form of social feeling.

Feeling Feminism: Individual and Collective

Both affect theory and feminist politics are concerned with the ways in which the personal engages with the public, moving experience from the private realm to social contexts. Love outlines some of the seemingly irreconcilable relationships between public politics and private feeling, writing that:

Politics and feelings are very different kinds of things; the public sphere is big, feelings are small; social life happens out there, psychic life, somewhere inside; public time is collective time, measured by the clock, whereas in psychic life the trains hardly ever run on time. Such problems of scale, location, and temporality simply serve to remind us that the public sphere and affect are different kinds of objects; as such, they have different histories, critical frameworks, they call for different kinds of responses.²⁹

²⁸ Laurie Penny, *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender and Power on The Internet* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

²⁹ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, p.11.

Inevitably, it is challenging to map what is ostensibly a more personal and feeling sphere onto a wider public or, indeed, vice versa. However, despite the difference between the public and personal spheres, affect creates an undeniable relationship between the two. As suggested by Deleuze and Guattari, affect is a transmittable form of becoming, while 'feelings' are far more located within the individual subject. However, it is my contention that the passage of affect allows for individual feeling to be moved into a shared social experience, with a subject becoming both affected and affecting.

Feminism has been, and to an extent remains, heavily reliant on the mantra 'the personal is political'. Realised as a political tactic, this becomes an imperative to make visible the minutiae of women's lives, including the details that could be considered too 'personal' for public recognition. Alternative to encouraging introversion or separation amongst feminist subjects, the result is a shared public intimacy. This idea of public intimacy is also central to the transference and perpetuation of affect. Airing feeling, and allowing feeling to be aired, creates a context in which responses and emotions become integral to a public or political collective. While feminism has moved away from the consciousness-raising groups so central to second wave temporality, an awareness of domestic violence, female genital mutilation, rape and other bodily issues are both intimate and central to moving feminists into collective action. Current technologies aid in the cultivation of public intimacy and its affective results. In his essay 'Understanding The Material Practices of Glamour' (2010), cultural geographer Nigel Thrift writes about 'extimacy' as symptomatic of this current historical moment, stating that 'the public sphere is increasingly used to communicate what were once regarded as private passions'.³⁰ In relation to current feminism, this suggests that the privacy traditionally associated with the body and concerns of relationships have been necessarily transferred into the public sphere, such that the affect they produce can galvanise feminist collectives.

In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004) Sara Ahmed writes that 'the response to the dismissal of feminists as emotional should not then be to claim that feminism is rational ... Instead, we need to contest this understanding of

³⁰ Nigel Thrift, 'Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour' in Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J. (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), p.294.

emotion as ‘unthought’.³¹ In this case, I understand ‘emotion’ as occupying a similar position to feeling, distinguished from affect, as outlined by Deleuze and Guattari. Prioritising feeling as a form of political engagement and action salvages it from being dismissed as an irrational response to social contexts. Political stimulus inevitably catalyses an emotional reaction: a subject will arguably *feel* when confronted with inequality or sexism. In fact, feeling and responding might be vital to galvanising individual subjects in their attachment to politics. Additionally, feeling will also work to secure a sense of solidarity, in which a number of feminists are united through their responses to an inequality. Although ‘feeling’ has been denigrated in order to silence women, attributing feminists with both irrational anger and over-sensitivity, Ahmed is right in stating that the emotion-thought binary needs to be destabilized. Emotion and the thinking it produces, even emotion as a form of thinking itself, is intrinsic to creating an affect that sustains feminist communities and activisms.

Political communities’ investment in certain forms of affect serves as a means of achieving a cohesive solidarity. Building on the inclusivity foregrounded in the third wave, feminism is continually creating spaces of possibility for participation. Involvement in the politics is no longer limited to women born women, or women identifying as women, which allows for trans women and men to become active members of the feminist category. If this is the case, and essentialist identity is no longer the basis for solidarity, then collectivities need to be forged by qualities other than shared sexes and genders. Cvetkovich writes that she views ‘affect as a motivational system and as the ground for forging new collectivities’.³² Resonating with the formulation of waves, affects may serve to catalyse a new surge of related activity. Love makes a similar assertion to that of Cvetkovich, when she writes that she understands ‘community not as constituted by a shared set of identity traits, but rather as emerging from shared experience of social violence’.³³ If feminism is no longer predicated on identity traits, then it is logical that common ground is found through a determination to resist social violence. Given that in 2013, the World Health Organisation declared violence against women an epidemic, feminism

³¹ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p.170.

³² Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*, p.12.

³³ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*, p.51.

evidently has a wealth of international social and political violence against which to work.³⁴ The movement away from collectives determined by shared characteristics, to those formed through shared feeling, creates a feminism that is able to adapt and evolve with affect at its centre.

Affect may, in fact, work as an adhesive for political subjects participating in a movement or feminist community, sticking them together through shared feeling. In her essay 'Happy Objects' (2010), Ahmed states that affect is 'sticky', and, as a result, 'sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects'.³⁵ As such, affect is able to form communities that are driven to political action through feeling, sticking a group together to form a cohesive series of relations and connections. Similarly, Teresa Brennan's work *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) focuses exclusively on the way in which affect can proliferate amongst and be generated by groups and communities. She describes her work on the transmission of affect as 'a theory of the group based on what is produced by the "group", as well as the individuals within it'.³⁶ Looking at the spread of affect between subjects in waiting rooms to football supporters, Brennan explores the ways in which the social constructs the biological. She places emphasis upon the social as key to consolidating group affect, while not negating the role of the individual, writing: 'the specific waves of affects generated by different cultural constellations could lead to a different and altogether more interesting characterization of stable, as well as temporary, group phenomena'.³⁷ What is most striking here, for me, is Brennan's choice to apply a wave analogy to her analysis of affect, implying that this public feeling can be measured or understood through a consideration of surges or moments of particular force – this resonates with my own thinking of the feminist wave narrative in terms of affect. Furthermore, Brennan's term 'cultural constellation' invokes not only the necessity of context in creating forms of feelings, but also the existence of a number of points that converge to form a central image. I propose that this central image formed out of a constellation, which I explore further in the section

³⁴ Unknown, 'Violence against women worldwide is 'epidemic'' in *BBC News* (20 June 2013) in <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22975103>> [15 July 2014].

³⁵ Sara Ahmed, 'Happy Objects' in in Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J. (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2010) p.29.

³⁶ Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004) p.51.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.51.

entitled 'Moving Stars: Through a Constellated Practice' below, creates and sustains affect, entirely contingent on the cultural context in which it operates.

The Contemporary: Subject within a Context

When considering the contemporary in relation to feminism, it is necessary to address feminist time-keeping in order to consider the politics' interconnectedness. Feminism has arisen as the result of social and political inequality, and is a necessary politics for righting the imbalance between men and women. Having created a society in which the two sexes are actually equal, feminism will no longer be necessary. It is thus, a form of politics aspiring to its own out-datedness. So, within feminist time-keeping, the future is emphasized as a constant consideration in a way that, paradoxically, the politics awaits a time in which it will be rendered defunct. In her chapter 'Feminist Attachments' in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed writes:

What feminists share is a concern with the future, that is, a desire that the future should not simply repeat the past, given that feminism comes into being as a critique of, and resistance to, the ways in which the world has already taken shape... thinking the very question of what it would mean to have a world where feminism, as a politics of transformation, is no longer necessary.³⁸

Political change is instigated in order to secure a future that in no way replicates the problems of the past. Feminism pairs this awareness with an eye to the future, which complicates the idea of a simple existing within the 'present'. In doing so, it maintains the past and imagines a future, creating an activism that responds to the necessities of a particular moment.

I shall employ a concept of the 'contemporary' as a way of thinking through 'the moment' and the crossing of temporalities with force, in addition to my own position as a feminist poetic practitioner. I understand the moment in terms of the social and political contexts that determine the day-to-day movements and engagements of a subject. In my own work, the moment suggests the concerted influence and continuous presence of feminism and the conditions that have determined its fourth wave incarnation. The contemporary, for me, draws on the moment, but combines its temporality with a historical

³⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.183.

understanding of feminism, ensuring that the past is not undermined by engagement with present conditions and activism. The force of the fourth wave movement, while demonstrating a resurgence in feminist activity, is still determined by the conditions of the moment despite drawing upon its historicity. It is in this collision of temporalities that I consider how my position as a contemporary lyric poet can synthesize affect and time.

While feminists operate within their own time, participating in the activism of their moment, narratives of progress are always developed by looking at past experience and considering future possibility. The past of feminism, as a result, occurs simultaneous to its present and future; that is, future and past awareness must exist together, in conjunction with the present in order to fuel the movement of the politics. The temporalities of feminism, as a result, come to belong to the contemporary, which manifests through individual actions and political activism. Considering Gregg and Seigworth's belief that 'affect is born in *in-between-ness* and resides as accumulative *beside-ness*,'³⁹ the 'beside-ness' of affect seems to echo the construction of the contemporary that, as the Oxford dictionary makes evident, engages with a simultaneity, existing in a state of togetherness: '[b]elonging to the same time; existing or occurring together'.⁴⁰ The 'occurring together' of the contemporary resonates with the concept of an 'in-between-ness' in affect theory, in which a subject can be situated between multiple occurrences, spatialities and temporalities. While I am, as a feminist, with my own time, participating in the activism of this moment, I am also maintaining the narratives of progress, looking to the past and maintaining hope for the future.

The Contemporary

In addition to considering feminist political activism in terms of the contemporary, I posit that the contemporary, as a result of its synchronicity, represents possibility for a feminist poetic practice. In his 'Manifestos for the Future' (2010), art theorist Hans Ulrich Obrist writes:

³⁹ Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader*, p.2.

⁴⁰ Lesley Brown (ed.) *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.492.

The word “contemporary” implies a relation; one is a contemporary of another. The word “contemporary” is traceable to the Medieval Latin word, “contemporarius,” whose constituent parts “con” (“with”) and “temporaries” (“of time”) similarly point towards a relational meaning: “with/in time”. What is suggested here then ... is a plurality of temporalities across space, a plurality of experiences and pathways through modernity that continues to this day, and on a truly global scale.⁴¹

The contemporary, as Obrist implies, is preoccupied with connectivity and a programme of making links throughout history, between temporalities and across geographical contexts. It allows a greater flexibility in the production and reception of work, which is not locked within the present and a specific physical place, but can draw upon different spaces, dialogues and temporalities. While Obrist is addressing art practice, his thinking can be equally applied to a poetic practice that engages with a ‘constellation’ of influences. This concept will be explored further in the section ‘Moving Stars: Towards a Constellated Practice’.

Obrist draws on philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s ‘What Is the Contemporary?’ (2009) in order to unpack his ideas further. Agamben claims that contemporary artists, while belonging to their time, are not necessarily of it or within it:

Those who are truly contemporary, who truly belong to their time, are those who neither perfectly coincide with it nor adjust themselves to its demands. They are thus in this sense irrelevant [*inattuale*]. But precisely because of this condition, precisely through this disconnection and this anachronism, they are more capable than others of perceiving and grasping their own time.⁴²

Agamben’s supposition implies that a sense of the peripheral, or disconnection, is necessary for a subject (in my case, a poetic practitioner) to operate effectively within his or her own contemporary. I contend that this feeling is vital not only to feminist action, but also to a feminist poetic practice.

In order to contextualize Agamben’s thinking and how it relates to my theorization of a poetics of flippancy, it is necessary to engage with his writing on ‘biopolitics’ and the ‘state of exception’, both of which can be traced through

⁴¹ Hans Ulrich Obrist, ‘Manifestos for the Future’ in *e-flux* [2010] < <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/manifestos-for-the-future/>>.

⁴² Giorgio Agamben, ‘What is The Contemporary?’ in *What is Apparatus? And other essays*, (Stanford: Stanford, 2009), p.40.

Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life (1995) and *State of Exception* (2003). As Agamben identifies, biopolitics is a term coined by Foucault, describing 'the population as political problem, as a problem that is at once scientific and political, as a biological problem and as a power's problem.'⁴³ Agamben takes Foucault's writing on the biopolitical and places it in dialogue with the concept of 'bare life' and a state of exception, both necessary for understanding the way in which government or politics have come to legislate bodies. Agamben understands bare life not as a state of humanity that is so basic and instinctive that it remains untouched by politics; rather, he sees it as a state of embodied being that is inextricably bound up with both law and governance. By this I mean that the human body cannot exist in a state untouched by power structures; it is entirely configured and defined through politics such that it can no longer be understood as separate from power. In *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* Agamben writes that 'the interlacing of politics and life has become so tight that it cannot easily be analysed. Until we become aware of the political nature of bare life and its modern avatars ... we will not succeed in clarifying the opacity at their centre.'⁴⁴ For Agamben, the relationship between bare life and state control are so closely bound that we are, in a sense, living in a state of opacity. The intertwined nature of bare life and state control prevent us from perceiving the extent to which governmental powers are working on us, and by extension, are shaping our subjectivity. This opacity maps back very strongly onto the obscurity that Agamben notes is an inevitable part of the contemporary.

Agamben approaches the state of exception similarly, suggesting that this mode of existence denies political subjects a transparent engagement with their government and legislators. The state of exception initially stood for the point at which a government, perceiving a threat to its citizens, was able to declare emergency and thus adopt unchallenged authority until the danger had passed. Agamben, however, claims that the state of exception has now become the status quo, particularly in post-911 Western countries. He writes that:

⁴³ Michel Foucault, '17 March 1976' in *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France 1975 - 76* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), p.245.

⁴⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998), p.120.

only if the veil covering this ambiguous zone is lifted will we be able to approach an understanding of the stakes involved in the difference – or supposed difference – between the law and the living being. And perhaps only then will it be possible to answer the question that never ceases to reverberate in the history of Western politics: what does it mean to act politically?⁴⁵

Similar to the opacity of biopolitics, Agamben's state of exception works as a space of ambiguity in which it is difficult to determine and define the political act. Such ambiguity, both in the operations of state and body, in addition to the prevailing forms of power in place, prevent the subject from being able to find meaning in the political act. It is in this sense that the 'contemporary' of Agamben's 'What is the Contemporary?' can be understood in relation to - or in terms of - the contemporary subject as one who is not quite adjusting to the demands of her time, but rather engaging with past and futurity in order to move alongside the operations of their present moment. The figure in my own poetic work acknowledges the opacity and ambiguity of the present time, in addition to the way in which the female body is inseparable from politics. As such, the lyric 'I' is contemporary in the way that Agamben suggests, experiencing a disconnection from her own time while accepting the ambiguity and opacity of her own biopolitical moment.

Agamben's understanding of the state of exception, biopolitics and the contemporary are all productive framing devices for the scope of my creative project. Firstly, let us consider that the 'state of exception' be stretched such that it becomes applicable to women as a whole, who have always been constituted, defined and legislated through patriarchal systems and governments. This concept of the patriarchy as an ongoing 'state of exception' then maps back onto Agamben's biopolitics, which resonates especially with the female body and feminism as a whole. Crucially, the body is addressed throughout my poetry collection, whether in relation to rape, abortion rights protests or street harassment; the female body is inherently concerned with, and defined by, the law, even while it is neither protected by it, nor cast out. Insofar as the poems address the state of being embodied, thereby governed, they pose the question of what it means to act politically, in Agamben's sense.

⁴⁵ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), p.2.

The Subject and The Individual

This close relationship between the state and the body, particularly in relation to feminism, also raises questions for the way in which the 'individual' and the 'subject' operate. As suggested in my previous section, which focused on the 'individual' within collectives, specific moments 'call' for specific responses. However, this symbol of the call is not purely representative of the way in which one must answer a pressing social issue, but the way in which one is constituted as a political subject. Louis Althusser formulates subjecthood around the act of the call, in which an individual immediately becomes a political and social subject when they recognize the hailing of a police officer. Through responding to the call, the subject consolidates herself as inextricably bound to social order and political institutions. Althusser writes '*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, by the functioning of the category of the subject.'⁴⁶ Althusser argues that, while there is ideology, interpellation will always occur and, by extension, the individual will always be a subject. He writes 'individuals are always-already interpellated by ideology as subjects, which necessarily leads us to one last proposition: *individuals are always-already subjects*.'⁴⁷ As such, not only does the stickiness of affect draw the lyric speaker into collectives, but the inevitability of ideology results in the 'I' being a political subject from her conception. The lyric 'I' of the poetry is the speaking feminist subject, exploring categories of both politics and gender. In locating herself intentionally within these ideologies and categories, in addition to being placed within a much wider ideological state as suggested by Althusser, the lyric speaker is always an interpellated subject.

Significantly, Althusser writes that what 'seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it.'⁴⁸ Arguably, contemporary feminism is entirely aware of this predicament, and has a strong history of acknowledging the ways in which ideology shapes and conditions engagement with public spaces. The need to reclaim the night through marches, to initiate Hollaback Campaigns to fight street harassment and

⁴⁶ Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 1971) p.173.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.176.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.175.

the popularity of *Everyday Sexism*, is testament to the fact that feminists are highly aware of the way in which the street is not outside ideology. Therefore, I would argue that all feminist activists are highly aware of their positions as subjects within the patriarchy. Instead, it is perhaps more useful to address Althusser's writing on the duality of the position of the 'subject.'

Althusser writes that the term 'subject' can denote '(1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission.'⁴⁹ Here, Althusser indicates that there is no autonomy other than in the recognition of one's own lack of autonomy. I develop this concept further in relation to Judith Butler, Sara Ahmed and Denise Riley below in my section 'Becoming Trouble.' Here I will simply note that Butler suggests there is no position purified of power, and that in working in relation to the problematic subjecthood that is inevitably a part of identity politics, one can at least trouble hegemony. Although impossible to work outside of the ideological state apparatus, as Althusser suggests, interpellation as a form of calling can give rise to a proliferation of different types of 'call'. The subject is able to respond to the call of affects, to call to one another in the form of solidarity, and call themselves out, both as a process of naming and self-critique. While all of these occur within the framework of being interpellated by the state, they allow for the interplay between responsibility for action and the acceptance of submission.

The concept of interpellation in relation to 'making trouble', as discussed by Butler, speaks to the way in which Agamben addresses belonging in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. This is important for me given that one of the recurring themes of this project, and one of the central concerns of the theorists from which I draw, is the way in which one can belong and participate in a group political activity without necessarily adhering to a group identity. More specifically, how does the lyric speaker recognise feminism without wholly subscribing to it?

Examples and Exceptions

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.182.

In addressing the idea of class, Agamben states that the 'example' and 'exception' are actually inextricably tied to one another, despite ostensible differences in their position in relation to a category identity. He writes that 'while the example is excluded from the set insofar as it belongs to it, the exception is included in the normal case precisely because it does not belong to it.'⁵⁰ Whether positioned as inside or outside, both the example and the exception serve to shore up the boundaries of the category. Furthermore, the example, the exception and the category itself are formed and defined through their relationship with one another. Agamben goes on to suggest that:

exception and example are correlative concepts that are ultimately indistinguishable and that come into play every time the very sense of the belonging and commonality of individuals is to be defined. In every logical system, the relation between outside and inside, strangeness and intimacy, is this complicated.⁵¹

If the exception and example coexist whenever an attempt is made to unpack the idea of belonging, then such a state can be extended to the flippant figure. What does it mean to be at points totally ensconced within a community and defined in relation to it, while occupying certain points on the periphery in spite of this belonging? Agamben understands the figure of exception as one who has been excluded from society or social groupings. As such, the figure is not included in the category of which it is a member, which goes some way to represent the problematic of belonging. He states that 'what emerges in this limit figure is the radical crisis of every possibility of clearly distinguishing between membership and inclusion, between what is outside and what is inside, between exception and rule.'⁵² While this research project does not attempt to resolve the problems of the exception and the example, the flippant figure is at times both, blurring distinctions that can be made between the inside and outside. At times, she is an example of a feminist subject, totally identifying and participating within the category, whereas in others (particularly the early poems) she is the exception, standing outside of the feminist community. This blurring is vital for the way in which the poems themselves address a sense of solidarity, avoiding taking a

⁵⁰ Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* p.20.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p.21.

position on fourth wave feminism's sense of coherence. As opposed to formulating or defining a contemporary understanding of solidarity, the lyric figure in my poems attempts to engage with the obscurity of this nascent political moment, considering the ways in which she is both outside and inside, strange and yet intimate.

Anachronisms and Disconnection

I would like now turn my discussion of the 'contemporary' toward my critical work, the seemingly anachronistic nature of which emerges through the particular choice of poets through which I develop my poetics. Loy and O'Hara were both making work in the first half of the 20th century, while Myles lives in America and is classified as a second-generation New York poet, occupying a distinctly different moment to the London-feminist one with which I am engaging. Thus, while I belong to this 'moment', my points of connectivity and the constellation implied by my practice ensure that I am establishing what I understand as the 'contemporary'. Using these three poets, who I posit are all my contemporaries, ensures that a specific temporal locatedness is transposed into my own creative work. In considering each poet critically, I explore their community and the connections that they make thereby setting forth a constellation of poetic influences not necessarily co-present with me, but nevertheless relevant to my contemporary situatedness. My poetics are thus contingent upon a plurality of temporalities of poetic influence as well as by the plurality of experiences of feminist politics.

The sense of disconnection that arises through maintaining multiple temporalities is also vital for feminist activism. In her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Ahmed writes about the ways in which feminists are isolated from their present moment through the expression of unpopular political opinion. A refusal to participate in post-feminist discourse and an insistence on speaking up in the face of gender inequality destroys the happiness of others, simply through the act of refusing to align with them. Rejecting appreciation of, or laughter at, post-feminist irony positions the feminist as both anachronistic and excluded from her own time. Ahmed writes that 'the feminist killjoy "spoils" the happiness of others; she is a spoilsport because she refuses to convene, to

assemble, to meet up over happiness.’⁵³ Ahmed also proposes that this level of disconnect and separateness extends to the category of feminism itself: ‘we need to stay uncomfortable within feminism, even when we feel it provides us with a home. This discomfort ... means ‘not sinking’ into the spaces in which we live and work, and it means always questioning our own investments.’⁵⁴ As such, a feminist subject must maintain a dual disconnection, from society as a whole, and then feminism itself.

What is flippancy?

Throughout the duration of three years of documenting contemporary feminism, my poetics of flippancy have evolved with the recognition of difficulties posed by participating in London and online activism. In the early poems, flippancy initially formed the means by which the lyric speaker was able to critique some of the pettier aspects of feminist organization. For example, in 2011 a number of the feminist conferences were focusing on questions of body image, with diet plans and vajazzling taking significant precedence over other, potentially more difficult subjects. However, as feminism has begun to gain momentum, to the point of the fourth wave being consolidated within the cultural imagination, the scope and focus of activists and academics has changed, as I explore in greater detail within my conclusion. Rather than addressing what could be considered aesthetic or cosmetic responsibilities, feminists are discussing FGM, gang rape, the problematic of Western feminism offering solutions to less economically developed countries, as well as the shamefully low rape conviction rate here in the UK. Along with these changes, the position that my lyric ‘I’ occupies has inevitably changed. Having used flippancy, initially, as a means by which to extricate my ‘I’ from the potentially sticky and difficult affects of feminism -- my poems construed as flippant for their lack of commitment, lightness of foot and irreverence in the face of feminism -- it has since become apparent that certain feelings are nevertheless adhesive. As such, while flippancy continues to allow my lyric ‘I’ mobility and distance, it also now acknowledges the difficult

⁵³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (London: Duke University Press, 2010) loc.930.

⁵⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.178.

stickiness and transference of affect, that ultimately come to constitute a form of solidarity.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines flippancy as a 'disposition to trifle,' while the adjectival form refers to a nimble tongue, playful subject or 'a person who displays unbecoming levity in the consideration of serious subjects.'⁵⁵ The definition of flippancy links it to the state of a subject; it does not relate to an atmosphere, or a general public feeling: flippancy is an embodied performance. The use of 'disposition,' 'subject' and 'person' suggest that flippancy is drawn upon by an individual within a wider context. While the 'nimble tongue' makes speech central, highlighting a fast-paced conversational style that demonstrates deftness with the subject matter, thereby suggesting a poetics, the suggestion that one who is 'flippant' is a playful subject is also vital for considering its political implications. This sense of playfulness seems to undercut the seriousness of commitment, offering a lightness and fun that might not appear as an appropriate level of engagement for a feminist political subject.

This idea of 'appropriate engagement' is an important one to critique in relation to feminism. As explored in the section 'Becoming Trouble' included below, Butler suggests that there are no political positions that are entirely purified of power. Rather than elucidating this further, I will turn to Roxane Gay's *Bad Feminist* (2014) as a contemporary -- and popular -- cultural means of exploring the idea of what constitutes 'failing feminism' in this fourth wave moment.

Bad Feminists

Gay frames her book with an introduction and conclusion that explores the idea of an 'essentialist feminism', which she understands to be a prescriptive way of adhering to the politics in order to appear both 'good' and dedicated. She writes:

there is essential feminism or, as I perceive this essentialism, the notion that there are right and wrong ways to be a feminist and that there are consequences for doing feminism wrong ... The most significant problem with essential feminism is how it doesn't allow for the complexities of human experience or

⁵⁵ "Flippancy" Def.1. *Complete Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 1991. 25 Jan 2014.

individuality. There seems to be little room for multiple or discordant points of view.⁵⁶

It is my contention that flippancy engages with this problematic essentialism in two senses. Not only is essential feminism detrimental to creating an open and multiple politics, but essentialist gender politics are also becoming damaging to any kind of feminist unity. Flippancy allows for movement between the essentialist and constructivist, drawing on the views of both in order to mediate between the two, drawing on elements of both. The lightness of foot and nimbleness of tongue implied by the poetics of flippancy ensures that there is multiplicity, and at times discordant points of view, that allow for the critique of any kind of monolithic feminism. As such, this works to undermine the sense that feminism can be done 'right' in a way that is sanctioned by certain feminist authorities. Gay proceeds to state that 'maybe I am a bad feminist, but I am deeply committed to the issues important to the feminist movement ... I am as committed to fighting fiercely for equality as I am committed to disrupting the notion that there is an essential feminism.'⁵⁷ Flippancy, in turn, is asking a similar question of the ways in which politics can be practiced. In relation to Althusser, it questions the way in which one can be interpellated through ideology, but still problematize the easy call. Furthermore, it relates to both Foucault and Agamben's interrogation of the ways in which one might be able to act in a meaningful political way; why stand counter to feminism when one can be contrary within it?

I go on to explore subjecthood and its relation to the lyric 'I' below; however, it is first important to establish the ways in which flippancy positions itself as difficult, aggravating the distinctions that might be made between a variety of poetic and political modes. Moreover, as my conclusion focuses on the relationship between performativity and performance, as well as affect and affectation in relation to the flippant subject, here I want primarily to suggest that flippancy productively resists secure definition. Could flippancy be considered as a style, or a tone, conveyed through the movement of page-based poetics and a very specific type of voicing? Alternatively, might it be considered

⁵⁶ Roxane Gay, *Bad Feminist* (London: Harper Perennial, 2014), pp.303-304.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.316.

a form of posturing that foregrounds the artificiality of poetic constructions based on the interaction of the subject with a larger political sphere?

Given these various possibilities, it is unsurprising that flippancy itself is inherently tied to the subject and her context. Tonality, style and posture are all dictated to by the situations within which a subject is positioned. It is my contention, then, that flippancy is a totally relational performance. That a speaking subject might opt for levity in the face of seriousness, is in accordance with my engagement with the 'put-on' or 'performative.' By extension, the capacity of a lyric 'I' to reflect this specific voicing and form of interaction is facilitated by the context of the poem. When placed in dialogue with consideration of the construction of 'gender', the lyric 'I' begins to enact shifts between performativity and a more self-determined performance, in addition to the affectation of unbecoming levity in the face of the sticky and uncomfortable affects of contemporary feminism. These movements echo the duality proposed by Althusser, in the subject's only freedom coming from acknowledging her own subjugation. In Althusser's understanding of interpellation, no individual is able to evade becoming a subject. So, although flippancy cannot be read as a resistance to interpellation, the lyric speaker's open acknowledgement of 'the call' allows for greater space of play. As I will explore later in relation to Denise Riley, 'the call' can become multiple and allow for the some autonomy, in spite of the subject's interpellation.

There are serious forms of play and, politically, engagement itself – in whatever manifestation – is a serious gesture. That being flippant is a display of unbecoming levity when addressing serious subjects forces the flippant figure, and those around her, into an uncomfortable position. By virtue of her flippancy, a flippant subject is rendered unbecoming; the lightness is viewed as a grossly inappropriate response to the contexts within which she moves. As a result, she could be positioned as one who problematizes the practice of politics through unserious commitment; in other words, someone who causes trouble. In my work, a flippant attitude does not negate the other affects associated with feminism. Ahmed writes extensively on the necessity of a killjoy, in addition to the importance of anger within feminist discourses. While accusations of hysteria and rage are often leveled at activists in order to silence them, strong emotional reactions are necessary for moving people toward or away from

objects that ultimately come to politicize them. However, Ahmed also necessarily recognizes that ‘a feminist killjoy knows from experience: when people keep making light of things, something heavy is going on.’⁵⁸ My work does not assert that flippancy is the correct response to sexism, nor the right form of emotional engagement for effective activism. It establishes a poetics of flippancy as fitting with contemporary feminism, creating a central lyric figure who is a troublemaker, both to her political communities and a wider society.

Moving Unbecomingly

Flippancy is achieved through tone and mobility, both of which must demonstrate levity and nimbleness. While I explore tone fully in my chapters on O’Hara and Myles, it is nonetheless important to map its relation to movement and the constellation. As established previously, the constellated model of practice not only relates to the converging of temporalities that comprise what I have called the ‘contemporary,’ but also allows for a lyric speaker to move between multiple referents and points of interest within a poetic text. The necessity of a nimble tongue relates to the way in which a poem itself may enact a form of easy movement, with a range of subjects being covered through the chattering of a central ‘I’. The nimble tongue moves quickly, but also without fidelity, jumping to another subject before the former has been thoroughly discussed. Furthermore, the ‘nimble tongue’ implies responsiveness and relationality. The speed with which subjects can be traversed and treated relates to the contexts through which they emerge, and the other people addressed or referred to. The tone, while conveying lightness and speed of movement, is contingent on contexts and other subjects.

So, why is it that this flippancy is so central to the fourth wave affective moment? Contemporary technologies such as Twitter and Facebook have not only made transience and immediacy an element of current activism, but also facilitate quick and easy dialogue. It is now possible to contact or respond to people, albeit in 140 characters, and as a result participate in wider debate through the ease of the Internet. The speed with which events, marches and protests are now organized also speaks to the mobility I have stated is central to the responsive flippancy that my work cultivates. Finally, and as I will explore

⁵⁸ Sara Ahmed, ‘Under The Skin’ in *Feminist Killjoys* [4 March 2015] in <<http://feministkilljoys.com>> [17 February 2015].

later within this introduction, flippancy allows for the lyric speaker to become a troublemaker. While I shall theorise the figure of the troublemaker using Riley, Butler and Ahmed, it is vital here to acknowledge that to be flippant is to be 'unbecoming.' Furthermore, that this state of 'unbecoming' is necessary for a contemporary feminist subject. While feminism itself is set as a category of politics in opposition to a sexist society, feminist subjects must maintain some discomfort within the communities themselves. Without this sense of misfitting, or inappropriateness, feminism would never experience internal critique, and as a result, would never progress.

I place this idea of being 'unbecoming' in conversation with 'becoming' as vital to a subject's politicisation. As stated previously, Butler, Riley and Ahmed each believe that a state of uncertainty is productive to developing a political identity. 'Becoming' is not so much a failure, but allows for mutability and divergences that are not afforded by solid identification: a subject knowing exactly what they 'are'. Understanding this, my work involves my lyric speaker finding ways in which to become unbecoming. The 'unbecoming' of flippancy does not negate this drive to 'become' in terms of necessary politicisation, but it does create a useful tension in the process. Arguably, through becoming unbecoming and, in doing so, rejecting the more stable identities associated with feminism, my lyric speaker is able to undergo the process of politics.

This concept of becoming resonates with the way in which both the contemporary and affect are formulated throughout this project. Deleuze describes becoming as 'an objective zone of indistinction or indiscernibility that always exists between two multiplicities, a zone that immediately precedes their natural differentiation.'⁵⁹ He elucidates further that in the process of becoming 'one term does not become another; rather, each term encounters the other, and the becoming is something between the two, outside the two.'⁶⁰ In this sense, becoming has a similar liminality to that of affect, while gesturing towards the uncertainty that lies at the heart of the contemporary. To become is to exist in a state of in-betweenness or, I would argue, a position of along-sideness, in which two multiplicities are entertained in a moment of simultaneity. The 'encounter' of two terms, or two ideas, create a sense of outsideness that is both necessary

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London: Verso, 1998), p.xxx.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.xxx.

for the contemporary figure, but also for the troublemaker suggested by my own poetics of flippancy.

Deleuze also addresses 'writing' in relation to the concept of 'becoming'. To write is 'a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience. It is a process, that is, a passage of life that traverses both the livable and the lived.'⁶¹ This suggests that the becoming of writing is concerned with the moment, while anticipating a futurity that renders the process forever incomplete.

Furthermore, the movement between the livable and the lived speaks to the way in which my poetic practice engages with the operations of contemporary feminism. Not only is feminism engaged with a project of futurity, attempting to secure a society that is 'livable' for all woman, my primary mode of engagement has been embodied presence at marches and in activism. Thus, writing poetry has become a point of mediation between the contemporary of the politics, its futurity, processes of politicization and the lived experience of my actual body in relation to my developing lyric 'I'.

It is necessary to address the way in which this sense of Deleuzian becoming can be mapped back on to the 'unbecomingness' suggested by my main theorists, Butler, Riley and Ahmed. As will be corroborated below, all three theorists focus on the necessity of causing trouble, being difficult and resisting the ease of assimilation, both within feminism and then a wider social context. Becoming unbecoming not only recognizes the process of politicization, but recognizes that this process might be most productively realized through resistance, difficulty and provocation. The contradiction implied by the term suggests that there may be non-normative ways of becoming that thrive within obscurities and the places in between, where multiplicities do not intersect neatly or overlap perfectly. It encourages a turn away from linear narratives and rather embraces deviation, stumbling and imperfection, particularly within a feminist poetic praxis.

Moving Stars: Towards a Constellated Practice

In conjunction with the contemporary, my work develops a model of the 'constellation' in order to consider how literary and feminist influence, in

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.3.

addition to activism, creates a central figure within my poems. Similar to Obrist's consideration of the contemporary as a possibility for connectivity, I posit that a constellated poetic practice allows a poet to create a number of fixed points through which to locate herself. Amidst a convergence of temporalities and the obscurity of the present moment, the links made through the creation of a constellation make a lyric 'I' figure legible. The reference points create a central shape, which takes on the form of the lyric speaker within the poetry. Addressing a tension between fixity and mobility, the constellation allows for the simultaneous existence of location and movement in my own work and that of the three poets with whom I engage. The work of the model, consequently, is twofold: on the one hand, the various fixed points are considered in relation to one another, forming a unique spatiality for the poet to occupy. On the other, the constellation facilitates movement off on tangents, in which the poet avoids rigid definition or fixity through having the freedom to explore a series of references. Each chapter will address the way in which the individual poets draw on influences and references in order to locate their own practice, while creating a space in which their speaker is able to move. Here I shall unpack my understanding of the constellation through Agamben's discussion of the night sky in relation to the contemporary, Michel de Certeau's theories of space and place and, finally, Ahmed's writing on queer phenomenology and orientations.⁶²

In addressing darkness in 'What is the contemporary?' Agamben uses the night sky as an analogy for contemporariness. He writes:

In an expanding universe, the most remote galaxies move away from us at a speed so great that their light is never able to reach us. What we perceive as the darkness of the heavens is this light that, though traveling toward us, cannot reach us, since the galaxies from which the light originates move away from us at a velocity greater than the speed of light.⁶³

⁶² The term 'constellation' can also be traced back to Walter Benjamin's 'Theses on the Philosophy of History' (1968) and again in his 'Arcades Project' (1999). Although his work is concerned with light, darkness and temporalities, my work does not engage with the Marxism so essential to his writing. As such, while I recognize his contribution to writing on the contemporary and development of the constellation in relation to critical practice, I have chosen to create a definition through other theorists more relevant to my writing.

⁶³ Agamben, 'What is the Contemporary?' p.46.

This night sky resonates with the darkness that Agamben states is a necessary condition of the contemporary. He goes on to state that 'it means being able not only to firmly fix your gaze on the darkness of the epoch, but also to perceive in this darkness a light that, while directed toward us, infinitely distances itself from us.'⁶⁴ I understand my own work as using a number of references in order to create a lived and embodied version of a night-sky constellation. While I will extrapolate a more precise methodology in my chapter on O'Hara, I want to consider the relationship of my own work to darkness and light. In creating a central lyric speaker, I am making use of a number of different referents, or stars, to create a constellation from which a figure emerges. However, as I have stated previously, as a contemporary poetic figure, my 'I' is engaged with the darkness and obscurity of her own time. As such, Agamben outlines an ideal reading process for recognising the contemporary figure I have created through my own work. While the referents might serve as stars that illuminate, offering some light, the difficulty lies in reading the figure at the centre who comprises of darkness and obscurity. The central space, configured through the relationship offered by my own constellation, is the lyric speaker of the poetry, who sits in relation to the light shed by recognisable referents, and the obscurity heralded by her own time.

My deployment of the concept of the contemporary is mobilised through de Certeau's definition of space in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). As de Certeau writes: 'space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the orientations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it'.⁶⁵ This understanding of spatiality not only gives an impression of the speaking subject, but also allows the subject room in which to move. In fact, De Certeau himself goes on to link space as a practiced place with the speech act. Through moving between and amongst stars, or place-holders, my 'I' creates a space in which a conversational poetic can emerge.

It is my contention that the points of the constellation orientate, situate and temporalize the speaking figure within my work. The 'stars' that constitute

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p.46.

⁶⁵ Michel De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (London: University of California Press, 1984) p.117.

my own figure of the lyric 'I' comprise my three poets, seminal feminist texts, my engagement with queer theory, present-day London, Twitter activism, popular culture and the recurrence of a few important marches. While these points, in dialogue with one another, serve to situate and temporalize my work, it is the lyric speaker's insistence on moving within the constellation that creates an ensemble of movements. The central figure is not fixed in the configuration, but is able to move around and through the space created, orientating herself more toward certain points of interest.

While Ahmed does not explicitly refer to a central figure created through a constellation, she does explore the possibilities of alignment, collective affiliation and following lines. By placing her work within the context of de Certeau's spatiality and Agamben's night sky, I aim to explain the ways in which my practice and the poetics of Loy, O'Hara and Myles engage with community and individuality. Specifically, I look to Ahmed's writing on 'straightness' and the prescriptive behaviours entailed by following a single trajectory; from here, the possibility for deviation, bending or going off course, that arises. Ultimately, Ahmed allows me to consider the lines traversed by the poets under consideration, including myself, the connectivity created and how, through this, the particular figure of a troublemaking 'I' begins to emerge. All of which becomes useful for considering my three poets and my own work in terms of political and personal investments.

Ahmed emphasizes the commitment necessary to follow lines and align ourselves with specific groups or ideologies. To follow a trajectory, especially as part of a collective, is to devote time and energy:

We can think of following as a form of commitment as well as a social investment. Following a line is not disinterested: to follow a line takes time, energy, and resources, which means that the "line" ... might mean a specific "take" on the world, a set of views and viewing points, as well as a route through the contours of the world, which gives our world its own contours. So we follow the lines, and in following them we become committed to "what" they lead us to as well as "where" they take us. A commitment is also a commitment made as an effect of an action.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) p.17.

Significantly, Ahmed sees commitment not as stasis, but as a necessary mobility. In following the lines offered us, we come to add contours to the landscape of contemporary politics. However, with the definition of the contemporary as the meeting and convergence of multiple temporalities, specifically in feminism, the landscape is an intersection of historicity and identity. It is possible for a political subject to follow more than a single line, investigating the end point of multiple trajectories. In following several lines, we create routes, which in turn serve to consolidate the relationality as well as the contingency of what I have described as a constellation. Irrespective of the central figure formulated, all of the points and positions can be considered in relation to one another. As a result, lines proliferate, creating multiple and occasionally even conflicted commitments that can become side-tracked or distracted.

How can a political and poetic subject draw on a constellated practice to avoid being co-opted by a group or ideology, specific point or trajectory? Ahmed discusses the line in relation to direction, considering the way in which the elimination of detour and mediation can result in inflexible alignment:

Directions are instructions about “where,” but they are also about “how” and “what” ... a direction is what we are asked to follow. The etymology of “direct” relates to “being straight” or getting “straight to the point”. To go directly is to follow a line without a detour, without mediation.⁶⁷

As Ahmed makes evident, a central problem in following lines is that a moving subject will be required to ‘take direction’ and, in doing so, follow a trajectory that does not allow for deviation or tangents. In resisting this concept of ‘following’ and, as a result, circumventing the necessity of ‘being straight’ or reaching a singular ‘point,’ I propose that a constellated poetic practice allows for a space in which lines and their detours can co-exist. The result is a poetics of misalignment, disorientation, resistance and troublemaking, in which ‘where,’ ‘how’ and ‘what’ are all in a state of becoming. The constellation becomes critically and creatively useful for exploring the ways in which a lyric ‘I’ can occupy positions and follow lines without committing to the ‘straight and narrow’.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.16.

Through looking to popular culture, feminist concerns, activism, academia and poets in my body of poetry, I aim to form a constellation that presents a legible lyric 'I' figure while exploring the possibilities for connections between my influences. As will become evident in both the creative and critical component of this thesis, a flippant poetics manifests through the particular constellations that characterize my own and the other three poets' practice. My work demonstrates how an individual subject can attach herself to certain ways of thinking or modes or praxis depending on its appropriateness (or lack of appropriateness) at the time. While the central figure is representative of the lyric 'I,' the figure is not fixed in place, instead able to follow lines created between the different positions, demonstrating flexibility in making identifications. The constellation allows for connections to be made that might not otherwise be placed in dialogue. As a result, the lines created and followed are not necessarily points of alignment but tangents and divergent trajectories that, while conflicting with one another, nonetheless constitute the figure of a lyric subject. The work also acknowledges that no practice is 'pure', solely concerned with one issue or single worthy cause. Flippancy speaks to the problematic of simultaneous commitment and co-option, which certainly exists in feminism as well as the work of the three poets being explored.

Becoming Trouble: Reading and Writing Contemporary Poetry through Feminist Theory

In order to consider the ways in which Loy, Myles and O'Hara can be read in conjunction with feminist theory, I look to the theoretical work of Judith Butler, Sarah Ahmed and Denise Riley. This process locates the poetic practice of the three poets, as well as my own work, within established gender theory. Butler is most famous for her work on performativity, specifically *Gender Trouble* (1990), which addresses the ways in which repeated action can consolidate a gender. She discusses how heterosexuality, assumed or actual, works to police the ways in which gender manifests socially. Rather than offering a number of strategies through which to undo the gender binary, the primary aim of Butler's work, is to open spaces of possibility in which there can be alternatives to male-female heterosexual relationality.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes that 'performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and a ritual, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration.'⁶⁸ Gender, then, is realised through the ways in which a subject engages in repetitious and ritualistic acts that fix a socially-determined gender to their body. Inevitably, as socio-cultural conditions change or evolve, the ways in which gender manifests reflect the difference. Butler writes that her exploration of performativity was intended 'to show that what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body'.⁶⁹ Eschewing the essentialist belief that sex inevitably leads to the emergence of a related gender identity, Butler chooses to consider the way in which identity is constructed, and then perpetuated, through complicity in gendering acts.

Reading Loy, O'Hara and Myles through Butler offers a number of possibilities for thinking through a subject's relation to the social and the ways in which gender is conditioned to become apparent through bodies. An awareness and consideration of 'performativity' allows for a focus on the 'performative' or the possibility for 'performance' within a poetic work. In what way can a lyric subject subvert her own time's gender performativity through foregrounding artifice and performance? Through demonstrating an awareness of the ways in which gender is conditioned, and the ways in which a society and culture can demand that certain behaviours are concretized through repetitive action, can a subject escape or at least exhibit a knowingness in regards to gender identity? Understanding how female and male identities are constructed in relation to sex allows for some flexibility in the ways in which gender can manifest through a subject.

Riley is a poet as well as a philosopher, and her works *Am I That Name: Feminism and the Category of 'Women'* (2003) and *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (2000) consider solidarity, naming and category identification. In the former, Riley considers the way in which 'woman' has been historically formulated, with the identity highly contingent on the social context. 'Woman' is always conceived of as a relative identity; it is the identity occupied before

⁶⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 2006) p.xv.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.xv.

women are able to progress to an unsexed humanity, in which gender and sex no longer become relevant to social standing. *Words of Selves* considers the way in which women title themselves, and the relation that naming has to 'calling out' both sexism and feminist politics. The book also proposes a model for irony, drawing on the Echo and Narcissus myth to reflect on the way in which appropriated languages can create solidarity amongst feminists.

Focusing on the problematic of essentialist and constructivist approaches to 'woman,' Riley champions a feminism not predicated on sameness or uniform identification. Instead, she advocates a more fractious form of the politics, which speaks to my understanding of a troublesome flippancy. A multiple feminism can still constitute solidarity, even if there is a proliferation of different political praxes. More so than Butler, Riley considers the tensions that exist between adopting a feminism that subscribes to both essentialist and constructivist ways of thinking. She writes on the unavoidability of the female body, if one has one, and how such embodied politics are necessarily a part of developing feminist identity. While her writing is not exclusive, demanding that only women-born-women occupy the category of 'woman,' she does acknowledge that embodied experience can lead a woman to political awareness. She writes that 'gendered self-consciousness has, mercifully, a flickering nature,' but that women are, nonetheless, 'hit by the intrusions of bodily being – to be caught out by the start of menstruation, for instance – is just not the same as being caught up unexpectedly in 'being a woman'.⁷⁰ While Riley makes a distinction between 'being a woman' as a result of social construction, she also acknowledges how biology, too, can heighten awareness of occupying a gendered body.

Riley's work also considers the interchange between surface and depth, both in terms of individual identity and collectivities. She states that a superficial engagement allows for stronger solidarity, moving emphasis away from fundamental difference to positive identification. She writes that 'political parties and their adherents develop 'the social'; feminism follows the same course. The social is in this sense constructed, rather than being the universal

⁷⁰ Denise Riley, *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* (London: Macmillan, 1988), p.96.

agent which bathes everything else.⁷¹ While Riley sees solidarity as a constructed form of the social, she also states that feminism itself is a category. As a result, her work problematizes the simple feminist objective of destabilizing identity categories in order to further gender equality.

As I have discussed, Ahmed's work focuses primarily on the affects that are associated with queer feminism, considering the unhappiness of the queer subject in addition to feminist 'killjoys'. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* Ahmed writes on the way in which emotion can result in feminist attachments being formed. While a subject may be moved to feminism through anger, their attachments to the politics may result in more positive affects, such as wonder or optimism. Ahmed considers the role of responsiveness and feeling in politicizing subjects, in addition to the ways in which such feeling can sustain interest and involvement. Beyond simply contemplating the individual, Ahmed also discusses the affect of collectivities that can result in forms of solidarity. She writes that it is possible to be moved by attachment itself, investing in the concept of the collective, becoming mobilized through being part of a 'we'.

Most usefully for my critical and creative work, Ahmed states that unhappiness is a productive feeling for feminists, resulting in a continual critique of society and politics. To feel happiness, in spite of gender inequality and systemic sexism, is to ignore social problems that need to be addressed. However, Ahmed does not state that affect is useful purely to create solidarity amongst feminists, differentiating them from a wider society. She writes that it is important to retain discomfort even in the places that seem to offer us spaces of safety and community. As an example, she teases out the implication of the angry black feminist, who is positioned as negative by her white counterparts. The black feminist is conceived as a problem and often silenced as a result, accused of undermining the solidarity of communities that are intended to support her. However, the expression of anger within the categories we have chosen for ourselves is necessary to ensure that they continue to change and evolve. While anger would appear to be distinct from my cultivation of flippancy, Ahmed's combination of identity politics with feeling has formed a strong basis for the way in which my 'I' engages with contemporary feminism. Flippancy can emerge in response to anger, in addition to provoking anger

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.51.

amongst feminists – so, it is not necessarily as distant from the emotion as might be expected.

Although all three theorists demonstrate serious political commitment to feminism, they each write against easy category identification. Even if feminist politics do not require ‘essentialist’ identification, to rest easily within any form of category or collectivity can lead to stasis. Feminism must evolve continually in order to reflect change and, as a result, it is essential for adherents to create trouble internally. Butler writes that ‘feminist critique ought also to understand how the category of “women,” the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought’.⁷² For her part, Riley writes that feminism has been ‘vexed with the urgency of disengaging from the category of ‘women’ as it has been laying claim to it.’⁷³ It is necessary, therefore, to have a form of feminism that is aware of the instability of ‘woman’ as a category through which a politics is formed. Inequality on the basis of gender actually derives from the way in which gender is read by society at large. It is not the sex organ that necessitates a need for feminism, but the way in which gender constructs are understood within a socio-political context. The discursive construction and understanding of ‘woman’, irrespective of whether one chooses to assume that identity or not, is what results in category-based politics and inequality.

Inevitably, this identification anxiety extends beyond the category of ‘woman’ to the category of ‘feminism’. Arguably, the latter allows for far greater self-determination, in that one is not born or socially-inscribed as a feminist, but opts to identify as one. However, as Butler writes in *Gender Trouble*, the relationship between feminism and ‘woman’ is problematic: ‘the premature insistence on a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women, inevitably generates multiple refusals to accept that category.’⁷⁴ Feminism must continue to move away from the idea of the stable ‘woman,’ and as a result, reformulate the ways in which it constitutes its own category. Alternate to relying on a shared identity, or uniformity of subjects, feminism needs to create a category space in which difference can proliferate and multiply.

⁷² Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.4.

⁷³ Denise Riley, “Am I That Name?": *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*, p.4.

⁷⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.6.

According to Ahmed, the best way in which to ensure that feminism does not become a prescriptive, and resultantly limited politics, is to practice continual discomfort.

All three theorists, then, seem determined to interrogate the relationship between the political category of feminism and the category of 'woman' in order to understand the shifting relationship between the two. Claiming that the latter should not be a prerequisite to participate in the former, the theorists also claim that feminism should not come to determine the ways in which 'woman' manifests itself. There should be unity surrounding the politics and mutual investment in social change, as opposed to groupings determined by sameness or homogeneity. As Riley writes 'identity is not the same as solidarity,'⁷⁵ and Ahmed addresses a similar issue, redefining the way in which solidarity should be understood:

Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground.⁷⁶

Solidarity and discomfort are central to a continually evolving feminist politics. The claim that 'we do live on common ground' suggests a need to recognize that feminists occupy a shared spatiality and temporality, which ultimately is the most important aspect of a shared feminism. Maintaining discomfort ensures that feminism will continue to problematize the idea of 'women', resulting in a more inclusive politics that never rests or becomes static. While, as Ahmed suggests, the category of feminism may provide a home, it is important that the home does not become too comfortable, lest it ceases to develop and change. A reluctance to fit a category identification can actually have productive political possibilities.

⁷⁵ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2000) p.133.

⁷⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.189.

This reluctance links strongly to the emphasis on 'becoming' and on processes evident in the work of Deleuze, but explicated in a feminist sense in both Riley and Ahmed. It also relates to affect, conceived as a state of 'in-between-ness'. In this respect, the idea of becoming has two implications for feminism, the first of which is inherently linked to movement. In accepting that this process is an inevitable part of political development, feminism resists fixity and opens the possibility for a multiple type of politics: one that is able to evolve in relation to changing affectivity.

Looking at the ways in which feminists orientate themselves in relation to objects of desire, Ahmed considers how movement becomes a possibility when multiple aims drive the politics:

It is the failure of the object of feminism to be secured that allows feminism to become a movement ... it is by turning towards the objects of feminism, that we keep hope in feminism alive. Such a 'turning towards' does not hold the object of feminist critique in place; rather, it is the condition of possibility for their movement.⁷⁷

In acknowledging that the objects of feminism cannot be fixed in place, Ahmed introduces the centrality of movement in to the politics. Her description of feminism's lack of a central object resonates with my development of a poetics of flippancy and my employment of the constellation as a critical and creative tool. Important for flippancy and the constellation is an appreciation that the points of reference facilitate the movement of a lyric subject. As Ahmed suggests of feminist objects, it is the turning towards them and the orientations that they necessitate that allow for feminism to maintain a sense of vitality and progress. It is this sense of renewal and mobility, resulting in non-fixity, that enables a continual hope in feminism. Turning towards and turning again ensures that feminism never comes to represent a definitive viewpoint, or, in fact, a definitive type of woman; it is a politics in a perpetual state of becoming.

I place Ahmed's discussion in dialogue with Riley, who considers developing identity from a more individual perspective. She writes 'my awkward navigations to *become*, coupled with my constitutional failure to fully

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.187.

be, are what actually enable political thinking and language.⁷⁸ Instead of constituting a failure of commitment, the space for 'becoming' creates political thinking. To be turning and in motion not only destroys an exclusive feminism, but also acknowledges that 'woman' is an unstable and problematic category. Feminism, as a result, becomes 'the site of systemic fighting-out of instability,'⁷⁹ in which debate is continually generated and formative.

This idea of becoming and the mobility it entails also relates to the way in which political subjects learn how to identify as 'feminist,' and use such identifications to participate within collectivities. All three feminist theorists that I am looking at here – Butler, Riley and Ahmed – acknowledge the ways in which certain names must be adopted for a more effective politics, even if these do not precisely fit. Riley writes that 'self-descriptions, including those of 'identity politics', are indeed costumes, whether avant-garde or hopelessly outmoded. To wear one means first trying it on – and sometimes in both senses.'⁸⁰ A political subject must try on the identity they have chosen; almost as if wearing an outfit can facilitate political efficacy and allow for participation within a collective. The 'costume' becomes vital for involvement in public dialogue. The 'trying it on' is not the literal donning of the appropriate manner and behaviours, but also a challenge, a subject pushing identity to an uncomfortable limit. In choosing to prescribe to a certain identity, the political subject must see how far they can go with it, test barriers of acceptability and explore limitations of comfort. The 'trying it on' undercuts any earnestness associated with the assumption of a specific identity. The suggestion here is that there will always be a tongue-in-cheek, artificial and forced aspect to any attempt at collective participation based on identification.

Butler is also aware of the ways in which specific identities can be co-opted by the powers they aim to resist, or the ways in which groups can come to reproduce mainstream and oppressive systems within their own category. She writes that:

the mobilization of identity categories for the purposes of politicization always remain threatened by the prospect of

⁷⁸ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, p.5.

⁷⁹ Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?": *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*, p.5.

⁸⁰ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, p.151.

identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes. That is no reason not to use, and be used, by identity. There is no political position purified of power, and perhaps that impurity is what produces agency.⁸¹

What is particularly useful, in the work of Butler and Riley, is that neither resists the difficulties and contradictions of considering identity. It is the lack of purity, the difficult navigations, the trying on, and the symbiotic relation with central power structures that actually creates the possibility of agency. Amongst the problems of categories and self-determination, railing against identity while understanding its political necessity, the two acknowledge conflict.

Strikingly, Butler and Ahmed emphasise being 'trouble' for this very reason. Both write about the ways in which one should be willing to occupy the position of 'irritant' to dominant orders and the communities in which one participates. In her introduction to *Gender Trouble*, Butler writes:

To make trouble was, within the reigning discourse of my childhood, something one should never do precisely because that would get one *in* trouble. The rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms, a phenomenon that gave rise to my first critical insight into the subtle ruse of power: the prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble. Hence, I concluded that trouble is inevitable, and the task, how best to make it, what best way to be in it.⁸²

Not only is Butler's treatment of 'trouble' playful, it makes for a strong defence of work problematizing an understanding of sex and gender. If prevailing law uses the threat of trouble to keep one out of trouble, then the political response is to cause as much as possible. Ahmed echoes this when she outlines what is to be expected of troublesome feminist killjoys: 'the troublemaker is the one who violates the fragile conditions of peace.'⁸³ Refusing to be silent when it might be easier to refrain from speech, the killjoy enacts verbal rebellion against the polite acceptance of systemic and everyday sexism.

The three poets that I have chosen to look at each, in their own way, cause trouble. Loy's troubling is evident from the way in which she combines Futurist

⁸¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.xxviii.

⁸² *Ibid.*, xxix.

⁸³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, loc.867.

poetics with feminist politics throughout her manifesto. However, her employment of eugenicist rhetoric and shocking recommendations of enforced bodily modification, so at odds with the manifesto's cry for self-determination, demonstrates how she picks different political positions depending on what is best suited to her purpose at that time. The tongue-in-cheek artificiality suggested by Riley's work also resonates with O'Hara, who draws attention to the poem as put-on. Through foregrounding the constructed nature of poetry, and his own investment in creating a thing of beauty, O'Hara makes evident that his poems are a 'trying-on' of style, in which conversation and walks are reproduced to create the type of work his manifesto outlines. In Myles' promotional video, the shifting of identity and 'trying it on' become particularly evident. Positioning herself as a lesbian poet, Myles refers to herself as a loser and in third-person, undercutting her lyric speaker and the very purpose of making a promotional video. These shifts are compounded in 'The Lesbian Poet,' where she considers the mutability of gender, sexuality and identity as a writer, claiming they are all essential characteristics as well as just an aesthetic.

The focus on language and its structures seems to lend the ideas of Butler, Riley and Ahmed well to poetry, in which collectivities and the self can be explored in a space of grammatical play. I extend this idea into the ways in which I have approached my three poets, drawing on an almost flippant method of reading and analysis. Each poet's work is analysed through a manifesto or statement of poetics that was not necessarily intended to become the definitive word on their writing processes. As such, I look to Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto,' O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto' and Myles promotional video for *Inferno* (a poet's novel). Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' was never published in her lifetime, while O'Hara's Personism was dismissed as too inappropriate for Donald Allen's *New American Poetry*, and Myles promotional video is disseminated to sell books, not enact lesbian poetics. How can drawing on these works create a space of play in which community, self and poetic production can be explored?

In addition to helping me think through the role of the troublemaker, these three theorists draw on lightness and humour in their critical writing, which is integral to my understanding of flippancy. Butler states that 'without a

doubt, feminism continues to require its own serious form of play.⁸⁴ – here, playing is not in conflict with on-going committed politics. Riley, considering her own style in *Words of Selves*, writes

how can I defend my flippant doggerel with its tongue-in-cheek exegesis here as having anything much to do with the serious question of how political subjects are consolidated? Only thus: Calling out, calling myself, and being called are all intimately related to incarnations of the flesh of words.⁸⁵

While Butler focuses on the need for play within the political category, Riley considers the ways in which a lack of seriousness in the treatment of subjects can result in interrogation of the self. As a political subject, one can become consolidated through practising perpetual awareness, whilst being vocal, self-aware and named. Identification and the troubling of identification, in addition to a consideration of voice, all work as flippant exploration in *Words of Selves*, in which Riley demonstrates how such an attitude can constitute a serious political way of speaking. In this case, both theorists defend a position of unserious seriousness.

Ahmed considers troublesome linguistic construction when she writes ‘it is in the alignment of the ‘we’ with the ‘I’, the feminist subject with feminist collective, an alignment which is imperfect and hence generative, that a new grammar of social existence may yet be possible’.⁸⁶ Attributing social existence with a grammar, Ahmed creates a relationship between the way in which a politics is practiced, and the way in which a political poetics could be constructed in poetic writing. Resonating with this, Butler, in her defence of the accusation that *Gender Trouble* is a difficult read, states that ‘neither grammar nor style are politically neutral ... it would be a mistake to think that received grammar is the best vehicle for expressing radical views, given the constraints that grammar imposes upon thought, indeed, upon the thinkable itself.’⁸⁷ Riley also seems to speak to this idea, adopting a slightly different stance when she writes:

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.xxx.

⁸⁵ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, p.111.

⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.188.

⁸⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.xix.

I don't mean to imply that to be ungrammatical is to be merrily liberated from constraint – rather, that the very articulations and bonds of language themselves enact productive constraints, which include what we may call ideological effects. If the affect of language extends to its formal structures, then the intricacies of self-description, which is laced through with strange temporalities, can offer a critical testing ground for this intuition.⁸⁸

In the critical works of all three writers, there is serious consideration given to formal possibilities, particularly in regards to the ways in which grammar may work as a generative constraint.

The emphasis placed on language and grammar by all three theorists has informed my poetics. Their concerns around category identification, affect and constructivism can find their expression within poetry. Butler uses her inscrutability as a catalyst for causing textual trouble, demanding attentiveness from her reader. Similarly, Ahmed and Riley believe in the possibilities of grammatical structures reiterating social control. Of course, the removal of grammar and structure does not suddenly result in the liberation of both language and subjugated political subjects. However, it does create space in which a reader encounters meaning and vocabularies in a new way. So, what kind of poetics might this feminist investment in language establish? While my poetry is transparent, without the opacity sometimes associated with more experimental schools, such as the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets, the subject matter itself is difficult.⁸⁹ Furthermore, the subject matter is made more difficult by the tone with which it is deployed. What does it mean that flippancy can thrive in the discussion of violence against women? Thus, while I cannot claim the same inscrutability as Butler – and, indeed, some experimental feminist poetic texts – the tonal properties of my work ensure that the texts trouble a reader. Ahmed's work draws heavily on wordplay and reiteration, which lends itself to a feminist poetry that is concerned with play, lightness and the vocabularies of my

⁸⁸ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, p.4.

⁸⁹ The use of transparency here is a gesture to the essay 'Paint it Clear, Paint it Black', which Eileen Myles wrote in response to Marjorie Perloff's criticism of 'transparent' poetry. While Perloff railed against easy understanding, Myles mounts a defense for poetry that can be got at easily, even if the poem as a whole is troubling. See Eileen Myles, 'Paint it Clear, Paint it Black' in *The Volta* (May 2013) <<http://www.thevolta.org/ewc29-emyles-p1.html>> for further details. I acknowledge that opacity and transparency are not mutually exclusive, but that experimental poetry itself may require, as Charles Bernstein suggests, elements of absorption and anti-absorption.

contemporary political movement. Riley's emphasis on structure, in contrast, informs the way in which stanzas, lines and the white space of the page can be used in conjunction with one another. Both Riley and I are skeptical of the problematic ways in which page-use can reflect or initiate social change, and so, instead, focus on the way in which poetry allows for the questioning of prevailing orders and draws attention to language use.

So my development of a poetics of flippancy is informed by Riley, Butler and Ahmed's thinking as much as by the means whereby these theorists materialize their thought. 'Flippancy' is troublesome in two senses; it suggests a stance that is deliberate and affective, in addition to too light-hearted for an engaged and serious politics. There is an element of falseness or contrivance to a lyric speaker adopting flippancy as it is without the same immediacy or involuntary nature as emotion: it appears intentionally cultivated. However, if Ahmed claims that 'to be recognized as a feminist is to be assigned to a difficult category and a category of difficulty,'⁹⁰ then to cultivate a difficult poetics is not necessarily at odds with the feminist politics that informs it. The poems themselves are not difficult in terms of reading: they do not challenge through innovative form or experimental language. However, they offer a tonal difficulty that is an irritant to solidarity. Flippancy simultaneously acknowledges the 'trouble' associated with identifying as feminist, while being happy to occupy a position of trouble within that category, continually problematizing the operations of the politics. The fact that flippancy emerges in a space between the deliberate/rational, and the instantaneous/ emotional, allows my work to explore further the problems of prioritizing the former over the latter.

Lyric Poetry as Subjective Documentation: The Emergence of the Troublemaking 'I'

My work is affective documentation that draws on influences from different time periods in order to enact a constellation of contemporary feminism. The poems document the emergence of fourth wave feminism in London and, in doing so, account for different forms of affect that manifest through online participation and forms of co-present group activism. The affect evident in political communities becomes an integral part of the poetics, which uses a

⁹⁰ Sarah Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, loc.918.

flippant tone to move amongst the feelings of collectives. As a result, the poems work as a form of feeling documentation, engaging with the feminist contemporary through a poetics of flippancy.

Throughout my poetry, the central lyric 'I' speaker is figured as a troublemaker, and this is informed by my critical work. Similarly engaged with their respective contemporaries, all three poets that I explore in my critical writing draw on a range of influences. Their work is foundational to my development of feminist documentation through the constellation of a central lyric 'I' figure who troubles community affiliation and contemporary affect. The speakers evident in Loy, O'Hara and Myles' work are all troublemakers. While they reflect a strong situatedness, the locatedness of the three poets' practices does not prevent them from troubling their own attachments and influences. Interaction with community, coupled with a feeling of uncertainty or reluctance to commit fully, is central to the way in which I am developing a flippant poetics. As Ahmed writes, it is necessary not to become too comfortable or complacent in a category or politics, even if it does seem to offer us a home. Feminism must be constantly agitated and critiqued, with no feminist-identifying subjects accepting stasis. Much of the light-heartedness of the poetics emerges from questioning the community in which I participate, playing a lack of commitment against the commitment necessary to go on marches or attend conferences. This problematic community relationship also relates to the idea of 'discomfort'. All three poets engage with their subjects and environments while expressing a sense of displacement. Possibly as a result of this discomfort all three poets occupy the role of 'troublemaker', or at least use their work to create 'trouble'.

In addition to figuring troublemakers, the poets all enact a bounded mobility. The poets' movements are within specific circles, and this limitation ensures that their mobility happens within strongly defined strictures. By working within two groups, Loy was limited to moving between and around feminists and Futurists. Similarly, O'Hara's poems are defined by his walking through the city, using footfall to propel his poetics. Myles demonstrates mobility too, identifying herself as a poet while writing criticism, reviews and novels. Despite being attached to the mantle of 'poet', she is still able to move through other genres. Thus, all of the poets are simultaneously moving and located, as my use of the critical term constellation to read their work postulates.

This mobility relates to the way in which my own lyric speaker traverses the city in addition to a range of different sources and influences. Despite this mobility, which is necessary to cultivate levity and flippancy, my work is bound by my locatedness and political context: my location is fixed in London, and the poems themselves are concerned with a very specific form of politics. So, in a similar way to Loy, O'Hara and Myles, the work is preoccupied with lightness of foot, speed of movement and the necessity of mobility, while remaining positioned within a specific constellation and contemporary. It is therefore the specific locatedness of these three poets alongside their treatment of subject matter and use of tone, that formulates a strong basis for the development of a flippant poetics.

Conclusion

In this introduction, I have established the links between feeling and feminism in order to make a case for the interrelatedness of affect and activism. In doing so, I have addressed the ways in which the contentious wave narrative remains relevant, particularly when viewed as a feeling moment as opposed to a divisive generational delineation. Having considered my own fourth wave moment, I have defined the 'contemporary' in relation to politics and poetics, proposing that to be contemporary, is not simply to exist within the present, but to draw on the obscurity of the moment in order to place this specific temporality in dialogue with both the past and future. This understanding of the contemporary has particular relevance for feminism that, as a politics of progression, is contingent on the gender inequality of the past and aspirations for the future.

Looking, then, to the three poets that I will be using, and drawing specifically on De Certeau, Agamben and Ahmed, I have established a 'constellated practice.' This form of practice creates a central lyric figure in poetry that, within a bounded mobility, is able to move from referent to referent. The model of the constellation creates a legible 'I' configured through a range of widely divergent influences and points. It is through this constellation, that I have discussed my lyric 'I' as a troublemaker: a flippant feminist speaker who engages with contemporary feminism in order to document its progression.

In the following three chapters, I look at Loy, O'Hara and Myles in relation to different aspects of their critical and creative work. The emphasis for each

poet will be on their unique mobility and community participation. I shall use Loy to consider the ways in which the manifesto can become a site for conflicted loyalty, considering the problematic of Futurist and feminist affiliation. O'Hara allows me to theorise the constellation further through 'Personism: A Manifesto,' which is dense with referents and friends' names. I then use the lyric speaker implied by Personism to examine some of O'Hara's poetry, considering the ways in which issues of love, intimacy and mobility manifest themselves within his poems. Finally, I look to Myles' promotional video for *Inferno: A Poet's Novel*, mapping its embodied and performative poetics back onto Myles' essay 'A Lesbian Poet' and, ultimately, her poetry. These considerations allow me to think about the difficulty of existing amongst conflicted communities, which is inevitable within feminism, in addition to the way in which embodied practice facilitates mobility through a range of events, debates and online sources. With each poet, the relationship between poetics and politics is unpacked through a focus on their contemporary locatedness and the work produced as a result.

Finally, in my conclusion, I will make a case for the idea of feeling temporalities and fourth wave feminism lending themselves to the emergence of a lyric 'I'. I will also explore further the ways in which the troublemaker within my own creative work is a necessary means of engaging with the contemporary. Thinking about the positions that Loy, O'Hara and Myles take in relation to communities and collectivities, I will suggest that it is necessary to make trouble in order to avoid political complacency. Ultimately, I will postulate that poetry itself is a strong medium for drawing together feeling and feminism, and as such, is an inherently political form for documenting my own contemporary.

'There is no half-measure': Mina Loy's Irreconcilable Feminism and Futurism

When Roger L. Conover was first collecting *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1997), working extensively with the archives of Mina Loy, it was certainly true that her voice had been lost amidst the intrigue that surrounded her life. Her dalliances with Modernist celebrity as much as her physical beauty and practised elusiveness had ensured that she remained on the periphery of all groups, even if she had participated in their activities. However, Carolyn Burke's *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (1996) demystified Loy's biography, while *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (2010) and the recently published *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy* (2011) as well as *Insel* (2014), have given greater insight into Loy's creative work and literary locatedness.⁹¹ This chapter will build on the critical body surrounding Loy's work, considering her positioning between two influential groups, Feminists and Futurists, to unpick the workings of her 'Feminist Manifesto'.

In 1914, Loy wrote the 'Feminist Manifesto' in a letter to her confidante Mabel Dodge. The two had met in Italy, but as the latter had recently departed for America, their friendship was continued through correspondence. At the time of writing her manifesto, Loy was specifically located within both a political and an artistic group, and these communities and ideologies helped to shape her work. Drawing on the feminist politics of her time, Loy positions her own work as distinct from the usual demands of the contemporary women's rights movement, while still assuming the title of 'feminism'. Not only does this evocation of a specific politics align her with a group, her choice of genre, a manifesto, gestures to the Italian Futurists. Despite these apparent allegiances, the 'Feminist Manifesto' exploits the disjunctures between these contending ideologies in order to resist fixity. Its engagement with feminism ensures that it

⁹¹ For further information see: Roger L. Conover 'Introduction' in *The Lost lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), Carolyn Burke, *Becoming modern: the life of Mina Loy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (eds.), 'Introduction', in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, (London: Salt Publishing, 2010) and Mina Loy *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, ed. Sara Crangle, (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).

could not be defined as Futurist, while the affiliation with the latter complicates a relationship with gender politics.

The 'Feminist Manifesto' itself is a difficult document, shifting and re-positioning, resulting in a range of possible readings. The document contradicts feminism, Futurism and itself throughout so that, while heavily dependent on lineage and inheritance, it is problematically independent. When approaching the manifesto from an analytical perspective, it is easier to trace the progression of a single concept or ideology that it represents: feminism, Futurism, eugenics, sexology, gender representation etc. However, a focus on one particular aspect of the work allows one to draw conclusion that, I believe, the document otherwise resists. In her essay 'Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy,' (2010) Rowan Harris suggests that the manifesto is gynophobic. She writes: 'repudiation of femininity and a *derision of women* become crucial in the effort to forge a feminist position.'⁹² In contrast, John Wilkinson's essay 'Stumbling, Balking, Tacking: Robert Creeley's *For Love* and Mina Loy's 'Love Songs to Joannes'' (2010) claims that the manifesto loses its vigour and political commitment as it progresses. He writes that the work moves from bombastic Futurism to a wish-list, and that 'Loy's inability to stay singleminded leads her to temper her assault on men by acknowledging the mutual deformation of men and women in the master-slave dialectic.'⁹³

I intend to argue that the manifesto's strength lies precisely in its problematic shifts and difficult positions. In fact, the refusal to follow a single trajectory of thought makes the 'Feminist Manifesto' a troubling document. While I will be focusing on Loy's specific temporality within this chapter, my aim is not to conflate my reading of the manifesto with her life. As implied by the quotations above, it is easy to consider Loy as the voice within the manifesto that, alternatively, could be read as a standalone statement of politics. In exploring the specific groups and context that influenced the production of the 'Feminist Manifesto,' I will analyse Loy's work as a document that offers no insight into the

⁹² Rowan Harris, 'Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy' in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (eds.) Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2010), p.20.

⁹³ John Wilkinson 'Stumbling, Balking, Tacking: Robert Creeley's *For Love* and Mina Loy's 'Love Songs to Joannes'' in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (eds.) Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2010), p.153.

woman, but is an example of the way in which political and artistic affiliation can be troubled. Using her personal encounters with Futurists, and the news of feminism she received from Dodge, Loy produced a document that simultaneously embraces and refuses her greatest social influences, engaging with the feeling of her moment, altering the affectiveness of political writing and creating a new way of expressing feminist politics.

Reading the manifesto in this light, I will argue that Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' is a space in which politics, poetics and group affiliations are troubled, gesturing toward solidarity while championing self-determination. It is the seeming irreconcilability of the multiplicity of feminism and Futurism that enables the manifesto to adopt a critical position in relation to Loy's own contemporary. Not a didactic document, I will argue that the 'Feminist Manifesto' evades definitive affiliation such that contradiction and mobility are central to an interrogation of gender as well as political and artistic categories. Focusing on the text itself, this chapter will consider Loy's work in relation to the critical feminist lens developed through Riley, Butler and Ahmed in the introduction. Drawing on concepts of performativity, positions and alignment, I will address the troublesome nature of the piece. The 'Feminist Manifesto' refuses to sit comfortably within feminism, avoiding the 'sinking in' or 'finding a home' that Ahmed sees as detrimental to progressive politics. Refusing category affiliation and questioning a politics predicated on identity, the manifesto demonstrates a consciousness of gender performativity and the role it can play in destabilizing rigid gender binaries and category dichotomies.

'Extorting betrayal of woman wholesale': Loy's Feminist Contexts

At the time Loy was writing the 'Feminist Manifesto,' women's rights movements in England and America were developing into complex, multiple and divergent communities. Understood as the 'first-wave,' the most famous group at the time were the Suffragettes, whose aim was to achieve votes for women. Despite this objective being shared by a number of women involved, a split nevertheless occurred between the Suffragettes and Suffragists. Headed by Millicent Fawcett, the Suffragettes were committed to achieving economic and social parity through peaceful campaign, whereas Emmeline Pankhurst's Suffragists, formed

in 1903, were radical militants who employed the slogan 'deeds not words'.⁹⁴ America was reflecting similar divisions, with varying strands of women's rights groups emerging: the Equality League of Self-Supporting Women had split, leading to the formation of the new National Woman's Party.⁹⁵ More generally, protests and marching demonstrated an organisational ability and strength that changed public opinion of women. Stereotypes of docility and weakness were thus exploded throughout the campaign for equal rights. Ultimately, while Loy was not engaged with any specific feminist groups, per se, this context indicates that she would have produced work in the midst of this activism.

Feminism, which Loy draws upon for her manifesto title, was distinct from the other women's rights movements of her time. Emphasis was placed on the cultivation of intellect and sexual independence, not economic and political parity. In *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States* (1999) Sheila Rowbotham states that 'independence for some feminists meant sexual equality with men,' while 'a rebellious minority set out to defy convention by opposing marriage in their own lives.'⁹⁶ For the most radical, 'freedom meant rejecting not only marriage but also men.'⁹⁷ The threat of pregnancy outside of marriage and the value placed upon virginity had turned women into commodities, entirely dependent upon husbands for fulfilling sexual experience. Damage, corruption or any evident impurity in a woman would prevent her from achieving the secure position of 'wife' and, as a result, damage her ability to function within society. According to Lucy Delap, a historian, feminism's emphasis on the need to right this male and female disparity 'came to occupy a similar space to the idea of the 'new woman' of the 1890s'.⁹⁸ In her book *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century* (2007), Delap writes that the primary aims of feminists were:

The self-liberation for elites, through the cultivation of will and personality. This was motivated by the desire to subvert the

⁹⁴ Sheila Rowbotham, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*, (London: Penguin Books, 1999), p.13-14.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.41-42.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.7

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7-8.

⁹⁸ Lucy Delap, *The Feminist Avant-Garde: Transatlantic Encounters of the Early Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.2.

overarching category of 'woman', about whose sexual instincts of political interests so many generalisations were made.⁹⁹

Instead of calling for direct political and social action with legislative change in mind, feminism was focused on self-determination and the emancipation of the intellect, in addition to sexual autonomy for women. Furthermore, feminism seemed to encourage individualistic impulses instead of a need for collective action. Given the content of Loy's manifesto, and the lack of investments it makes in wider campaigns, it is no surprise that the work is positioned as 'feminist,' even if Loy rejects its contemporary incarnation as inadequate.

Despite the evident resonances with feminism, it is possible that Loy's most influential engagement with women's rights was through her friendship with Dodge. When Dodge had lived in Italy, Loy had been a regular visitor to her Villa Curonia, which was always open to artists and writers. While cultivating many friendships, Dodge 'had a special affinity for a close woman friend with whom to laugh at the foibles of men,' a role that Loy readily filled.¹⁰⁰ The letters between the two women between 1913 and 1914 offer insight into Loy's relationship with Futurism, as well as a growing interest in Western feminism. Most significantly, Loy sent her only copy of the 'Feminist Manifesto' to Dodge, with the qualifier 'give me your opinion – of course it is easily to be proved fallacious – there is no truth – anywhere'.¹⁰¹

Through their correspondence, Loy was able to keep abreast of feminist developments as well as those in sexology and politics, which were formative in the writing of the manifesto itself. Moreover, choosing to send her 'Feminist Manifesto' to a single friend demonstrates the way in which Loy rejected the feminist and Futurist communities, opting to seek the advice or criticism of a particular woman with whom she had an influential personal relationship. The emphasis on female discussion and conversation is useful when considering the way in which the manifesto as a document engages with groups formative to its synthesis and, in doing so, complicates the relationship between the piece and any given political or artistic group. The focus placed upon interaction between

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.6.

¹⁰⁰ Winifred L. Frazer, *Mabel Dodge Luhan* (Boston: Twayne, 1984) p.35.

¹⁰¹ New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 62, Folder 1658, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, November 15 [1914?]. [Accessed online].

two women undercuts the strength of the two communities Loy invokes, placing importance instead on intimate engagement.

Strikingly, Loy dismissed her manifesto in a follow-up letter to Dodge, writing 'by the way that fragment of Feminist tirade I sent you – flat? I found the destruction of virginity – so daring don't you think – has been suggested by some other woman years ago'.¹⁰² Not only does Loy's work reject political or ideological fixity, her quick dismissal of the 'Feminist Manifesto' ensures that it never enters into wider dialogue and, as a result, speaks to the transience of the specific political moment in which she produced the work. As I explored in the introduction, it is necessary for affect to be realized in a social context, such that it can contribute to the feeling of larger collectives, resulting in more nuanced and understanding forms of political activism. However, it is inevitable that some contexts will register transient affect, in which individual engagements with feeling are unable to contribute in a wider sense. As such, Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' troubles connections and participations, echoing the fleetingness of political feeling through participating in a more private relationship with Dodge.

Still, the gesture of offering the manifesto to a single female friend is not an anti-community act. In fact, it suggests a model of sisterhood in which one woman looks to another for a political education, and then shares her related creative outputs. Feminism, even in Loy's time, has been concerned with the affective ties of sisterhood: ties that are echoed in the relationship between Dodge and Loy. Whilst I explore the role of friendship in flippant poetics more thoroughly in my chapter on O'Hara, I want to highlight here the centrality of a personal relationship in the production and dissemination of Loy's manifesto. The piece ultimately becomes part of an intimate conversation, in which the polemical work sits squarely between two people. Dependent on specific communities, but also choosing to reject them, Loy occupies an uncomfortable position at the intersection of the periphery of both feminism and Futurism.

'Manifesto of the Flabbergast Movement': Loy's Futurist Locatedness

F.T. Marinetti published 'The Futurist Manifesto' in 1909, cementing himself as one of the group's most influential leaders. The piece outlined the tenets of

¹⁰² New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 24, Folder 665, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, 1914. [Accessed online].

Futurism, moving from an almost anecdotal retelling of an evening out, causing trouble, to a bombastic listing of the group's central aims. Most notably, Marinetti's manifesto rejected the past in favour of the future, emphasising technological progress and the importance of machinery. Tirelessly exalting in the youth and novelty of his movement, Marinetti called for both aggression and violence in its synthesis, with the aims of disrupting order and transforming art. He claimed Futurists 'want to sing the love of danger' and that all 'poetry must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown.'¹⁰³ The movement also aimed to extend beyond the art world and into every day living, destroying the containment of creativity in 'the stultifying interior of museums, libraries and other cultural institutions'.¹⁰⁴

The 'Futurist Manifesto' became so influential to the movement that the use of the genre proliferated and was adopted by a number of Marinetti's followers. In fact, the manifesto as a form was soon so widespread that, as Natalya Lusty states in her essay 'Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism' (2008), it was considered without any irony as 'the master genre of the movement.'¹⁰⁵ In addition to adopting the manifesto form, Loy showed an affiliation with and appreciation of Futurism in her letters to Dodge. In 1914, she declared that

I am in the throes of conversion to Futurism – But I shall never convince myself – there is no hope in any systym [sic] that “combat le mal avec le mal” – that is really Marinetti's philosophy.¹⁰⁶

Despite these reservations, Loy still appreciated her friendship with Marinetti, praising his vitality and personality, claiming: 'I am indebted to M. for twenty years added to my life from mere contact with his exuberant vitality.'¹⁰⁷ In fact,

¹⁰³ Marinetti, F.T., 'Futurist Manifesto' in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, ed. Alex Danchev, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), p.5.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.5

¹⁰⁵ Natalya Lusty, 'Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism' in *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (November 2008), p.247.

¹⁰⁶ New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 24, Folder 664, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, February 1914. [Accessed online].

¹⁰⁷ New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 24, Folder 665, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, 1914. [Accessed online].

Loy's first appearance in print was her 'Aphorisms on Futurism' (1914), published in Alfred Stieglitz's *Camera Work* 45.¹⁰⁸ However, Loy's enthusiasm did not diminish an awareness of her gender difference and burgeoning feminist identity. In fact, in another letter to Dodge she wrote that the Futurists were delightful to be quarrelled with, and that the conversation had led to 'my utter defeat in the sex war – you will put it down to feminine pride of which I haven't got – I have a fundamental masculine conceit'.¹⁰⁹ This demonstrates that while Loy was participating within Futurism, she was continually considering how gender manifested itself within these interactions.

Loy can also be considered in conjunction with Valentine de Saint-Point, a contemporary of the poet who considered herself to be a Futurist woman. Unlike Loy, Saint-Point's work completely dismissed feminism claiming that it was antithetical to the aims of the Futurists. In her work 'The Manifesto of Futurist Woman' (1912), Saint-Point articulates the ways in which the female sex may best embody and aid the development of Futurism. In fact, she writes that: 'feminism is a political error: feminism is a cerebral error of woman, an error that her instinct will recognize'.¹¹⁰ It would appear that, for Saint-Point, feminism itself is preoccupied with both the intellect and politics, as opposed to engaging with the more essential elements of women. The socially-constructed political conscience is portrayed as a negative attribute, with Saint-Point stating that a more primal and base response is necessary to reveal a greater truth about the insufficiency of feminism. 'Manifesto of the Futurist Woman' proceeds to claim: '*[w]e must not give women any of the rights claimed by feminists. To grant them to her would bring not any of the disorders the Futurists desire but on the contrary the excess of order.*'¹¹¹ Saint-Point's document makes evident the ways in which Futurism and feminism could be considered irreconcilable: with full revolt and upheaval incompatible with organised political and social reform.

¹⁰⁸ Roger L. Conover 'Notes on the Text' in *The Lost lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, p.215.

¹⁰⁹ Although this claimed 'masculinity' for Loy will not be mapped back onto her own manifesto, it is worth noting that the 'masculine' and 'feminine' are presented in this letter as more mutable than within the 'Feminist Manifesto'. YCAL MSS 196, Box 24, Folder 665, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, 1914.

¹¹⁰ Valentine Saint-Point, 'Manifesto of The Futurist Woman' in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, ed. Alex Danchev, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), p.32.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.32.

Eventually, Loy began to distance from the Futurists, choosing to satirise Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, another influential central figure. Disaffection is evident in Loy's poetry, particularly 'The Effectual Marriage' and 'Lions Jaws,' in which she describes her central female, who adopts anagram permutations of Loy's own name, as 'secret service buffoon to the Woman's cause' (l.13).¹¹² The character's position as working undercover for feminism demonstrates that Loy had been made aware of the difficulty of reconciling her Futurist participation with feminist commitments. Indeed, this conflict is no surprise when placed in the context of Marinetti's own approach to women and their rights. Despite his claim to support the Suffragette movement, Marinetti believed women would remain enslaved even after legislative reform. Burke writes in *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* that he believed 'the average woman would continue to exist within the "closed circle" of femininity, "as a mother, as a wife, and as a lover"'.¹¹³ Furthermore, Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto' champions scorn for women and also describes feminism as a 'self-serving cowardice.' While Loy was drawn to the vitality of the movement and its leader, her gender politics would make elements of Futurism irreconcilable with her feminism, forcing a dis-identification with the artistic movement.

In addition to singling its female character out as a secret feminist, 'Lion's Jaws' makes obvious reference to Marinetti and Papini, who are renamed 'Raminetti' and 'Bapini'. The poet also subjects herself to this play, naming her central female character 'Nima Lyo, alias, Anim Yol, alias/ Imna Oly' (ll.111-112). Throughout the poem, two male characters, Raminetti and Gabrunzio are made ridiculous through their egotism and competition with one another. Both men continually attempt to seduce women, with Raminetti deserting 'several countesses/ in a bath full of tuberoses' (ll.10-11) and creating 'psycho-pathic wards/ of his abandoned harem' (ll.15-16). In turn, Gabrunzio is notable for his attempts at courtship, and a desire to 'burst in a manifesto/ notifying women's wombs/ of Man's immediate agagomogenesis' (ll.44-46). In fact, 'manifesto' is referenced once more a few lines later, as an output of the 'flabbergast movement/ hurled by the leader Raminetti' (ll.51-52) as well as being conflated

¹¹² Mina Loy, 'The Lion's Jaws' in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 46 – 50. All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹¹³ Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, p. 178 – 179.

with Gabrunzio's lechery. Loy's poem thus places her own 'Feminist Manifesto' in continual dialogue with a male sex act, or at least, attempts by a male to secure their place within a woman's body; whether in her womb or her heart.

Raminetti and Bapini are further satirised as the poem progresses. Raminetti, 'cracked the whip of the circus-master/ astrid a prismatic locomotive/ ramping the tottering platform/ of the Arts' (ll.), while Bapini:

experimenting
in auto-hypnotic God-head
rolls off as Raminetti's plastic velocity
explodes his crust
of library dust
(ll.74-79)

The two men continue on their way, allegedly committed to artistic reform and politics, while in fact they seek out 'every feminine opportunity' (l.94) with an aim to possess 'the women of two generations' (l.97). While the poem itself is imbued with energy, facilitated by line breaks and hyperbolic language, as well as the complex and polysyllabic vocabulary used to relay the story, the two men appear as frauds. Full of self-importance, mobility and grandiose aims, they are simply multiple seducers in constant competition with one another.

As my exploration of both Futurist and feminist contexts have established, Loy's locatedness within her specific contemporary is reflected in her practice. Instead of working independent of influence, the 'Feminist Manifesto' draws from artistic and political groups, in addition to close friends, in order to create work that avoids affiliation. Troubling both Futurism and feminism, Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' is committed to an exploration of the limitations of her own time, in regards to both art and politics. Adopting a position of critique, the manifesto refuses to 'sink' into comfortable spaces and this, I think, demonstrates a sense of Riley's 'becoming', where to identify fully is to stop productive mobility. It is process and development, and the occasional deviation, that allows for a work to express discomfort and in doing so, troubles affiliations and associations.

'Astride a prismatic locomotive': Moving Through the Manifesto

Having established the contexts within which Loy was located, my critical strategy is to move through her 'Feminist Manifesto' in a linear fashion, placing its content in dialogue with political and artistic influences. The mobility that my critical strategy demonstrates is reflective of the way in which Loy moves, rapidly, through a range of different subjects and concerns of feminism as a whole. Furthermore, mobility, which is explored in greater depth in my chapter on O'Hara, is central to my own feminist practice. Making its way through activist events, literary texts, online arguments and popular culture, my lyric 'I' enacts a consistent mobility. The movement creates a through line that binds disparate elements together and, in Loy's case, lends coherence to the manifesto as a whole.

My reading strategy also allows for this chapter to highlight the ways in which Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' presents a series of contradictions to the reader. Her document moves back and forth with regard to the roles that women should be fulfilling, in addition to what constitutes feminist strategy as a whole. Loy fluctuates between self-determination, on the one hand, and encouraging mass action that denies both autonomy and freedom of choice, on the other. Drawing out particular themes, or focusing on sections of similar subject matter, would negate the way in which the manifesto's movement enables the conflicts between Futurism and feminism to emerge.

Ultimately, a linear approach to reading the manifesto allows me to mobilise the feminist critical lens created through Riley, Butler and Ahmed in my introduction. Throughout the 'Feminist Manifesto,' the representations of gender and sex change consistently. While Loy's work invests in inflexible sex identity, she does create a space in which gender performativity can be explored thoroughly. Moving from 'men' and 'women,' to 'masculine' and 'feminine,' and 'male' and 'female,' Loy's stance on gender is subject to constant revision. As such, a thematic or category approach to the 'Feminist Manifesto' would not allow for a thorough exploration of the way in which Loy's work renders gender both mutable and performative. In order to allow troublemaking to come to the fore, it is necessary to take a linear approach to Loy's work on feminism.

'Secret service buffoon to the woman's cause': Inadequate Feminism and Ill-Fitting Futurism

Loy's manifesto opens with contradiction. Her choice of title demonstrates that she is unwilling to reject feminism, even if she does align herself with the Futurist need to destroy all social and historical structures. She writes: '[t]he feminist movement as at present instituted is Inadequate.'¹¹⁴ While accusing feminism of failure, Loy is still indebted to it as a category in which to locate her own work. Instead of creating a document outlining a series of behaviours for the Futurist woman, as Saint-Point did, Loy draws upon the provocative methodologies of Futurism to champion feminist politics. As a result, Loy stands against the Futurists and their attitude to women; feminists and their attitude to social reform; and her female contemporaries working within similar contexts and traditions. In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler writes that 'if identity is constructed through opposition, it is also constructed through rejection'.¹¹⁵ If Loy's manifesto is constructing an identity, it does so in opposition to the Futurists, and through a rejection of the work of contemporary feminism. Furthermore, it refuses to align itself with women working in disciplines similar to her own. Operating in and through opposition and rejection ensures that the 'Feminist Manifesto' offers a series of different and sometimes irreconcilable positions, complicating the possibility of a definite single identity for the piece.

Unlike Marinetti's 'Futurist Manifesto,' which is half-anecdote and based around the exhilarating experience of the group of which he was part, Loy draws upon second person plural, somewhat distancing herself from the writing while further implicating her reader in it. Loy opts for the declamatory 'you,' which creates an authoritative and distant voice, slightly other to the operations of her contemporary feminism. We can compare this use of second person to Marinetti's manifesto wherein, once he has established a community, he alternates between the 'we' of the Futurists and the 'you' for those who are not yet adherents. Marinetti demands of the wider public: 'do you really want to waste all of your best energies in the unending, futile veneration for the past,' calling for a separation from the museums and libraries, which are nothing more than graveyards to an irrelevant history.¹¹⁶ Loy's manifesto similarly calls for the destruction of lies established by centuries worth of female oppression,

¹¹⁴ Mina Loy, 'Feminist Manifesto' in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p.153.

¹¹⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, (New York: Routledge, 1993), p.115.

¹¹⁶ F.T. Marinetti, 'Futurist Manifesto', p.6.

stating ‘the lies of centuries have got to go – are you prepared for the wrench - ?’.¹¹⁷ By offering no elaboration or proper critique to justify her dismissal of feminism, while predicting a wrench from the past, Loy’s work is reminiscent of Marinetti’s manifesto. Both are invested in the belief that destruction of tradition will result in the emergence of a new society.

In order to achieve such a transformation, the ‘Feminist Manifesto’ claims: ‘[t]here is no half measure – NO scratching at the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about Reform, the only method is Absolute Demolition.’¹¹⁸ This seemingly straightforward dictate raises an immediate contradiction. As explored previously, Loy’s work is located within specific ideologies, both artistic and political. In order to bring about reform, to achieve absolute demolition, her manifesto would need to enact a destruction of her influences. Despite her troubling Futurism through placing it in dialogue with feminism, and rejecting feminism in its current incarnations, the ‘Feminist Manifesto’ is still heavily reliant on the existence of both. In fact, the manifesto has to be read against both strands of thinking in order for meaning to be thoroughly extrapolated. Contrarily, then, the absolute demolition advocated by Loy is not practiced within her manifesto, but made impossible through drawing on both organised feminist and Futurist influences.

Continuing the battle cry for the collective ‘you’ to follow, Loy’s manifesto states: ‘[c]ease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-crusades & uniform education – you are glossing over Reality.’¹¹⁹ Loy does not specify what this elusive ‘reality’ is, but does make evident that an emphasis on economic and political change deviates from what should be the aims of feminism. Choosing not to aspire to equal education, representation and employment opportunities, women need to look elsewhere to locate the root of inequality. In criticising the focus of both Suffragists and Suffragettes, Loy’s ‘Feminist Manifesto’ distances itself from the legislative changes other women’s groups were determined to bring into effect. Once more seeming to align her work with the Futurists, Loy’s document refuses a feminism that looks to support pre-established structures, such as government and economy.

¹¹⁷ Mina Loy, ‘Feminist Manifesto,’ p.153.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.153.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

While Loy acknowledges that legislative change is occurring, the 'Feminist Manifesto' places the onus on women to interrogate whether that should be the pinnacle of feminist achievement. She writes: '[p]rofessional and commercial careers are opening up for you – is that all you want?'¹²⁰ Although the 'Feminist Manifesto' does not outwardly reject the heavy emphasis on economic and political change, the inflammatory 'is that all you want' seems to expect women to demand more. The implication is that women have the power to determine the changes they wish to see, all of which should be independent of any pre-established patriarchal social structures. Why should women seek out legislative change that supports a government that has been complicit in its subordination? The 'reality' to which Loy's work alludes still remains undefined, but appears to refer to a much wider problem of sex discrimination, not dictated to or determined by legislation and politics.

'Man's immediate agamogenesis': The Masculine and The Feminine

Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' is exceptional for its claim that women and men are not actually equal. While Loy calls for women to be brave and find their place in the world, she also incites feminists to deny:

the pathetic clap-trap war cry Woman is the equal of man –
for
she is Not!¹²¹

While the manifesto proceeds to address gender difference through the 'masculine' and 'feminine', the work does not elaborate on the inequality between the sexes. The statement above has multiple possibilities, the most positive of which is that feminism needs more than 'equality' as the basis for its aims. However, a face-value reading of the claim makes it appear that men are positioned as superior to women and, in acknowledging this, suggests that women should forge a new form of feminist politics. Does the statement reject equality because systemic sexism would prevent true economic and political parity? Alternatively, is the 'Feminist Manifesto' saying that men and women are

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.153.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p.153.

so fundamentally different that they can never be seen as equals? This uncertainty forms the basis for the rest of the manifesto, which restlessly probes the position of women without offering any fixity.

At this point in the 'Feminist Manifesto,' Loy's syntax and spatiality becomes most experimental, making use of the white space of the page for emphasis. Despite having drawn on underlining and larger font previously, the lineation of this refutation separates the statement, giving it greater significance. From this point onwards, the manifesto becomes formalised into more regulated paragraphs, and so the definitive stand-alone nature of 'she is Not!' represents a transition from the more fragmented statement to coherent argument. The proclamation makes particularly evident Loy's indebtedness to the experimental typography of Futurism and the political ideologies of feminism. It is apparent that the 'Feminist Manifesto' will be addressing sex difference, the constructions of gender, troubling both category and identity politics, while refusing to espouse a typically 'feminist' view. The work, as a result, is simultaneously undermining and maintaining gender normativity, offering performative alternatives while still investing in male and female difference.

It is no surprise, then, that the 'Feminist Manifesto' proceeds to make distinctions between the 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Loy writes that the man who 'lives a life in which his activities conform to a social code which is protectorate of the feminine element – is no longer masculine'.¹²² The 'Feminist Manifesto' does not see 'man' as the ideal category, but understands that it is necessary for masculine qualities to be cultivated. A similar model is used to approach woman and the 'feminine'. Loy writes: '[t]he women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a relative impersonality, are not yet Feminine'.¹²³ The idea of 'relative impersonality' foregrounds gender as constructed around a binary, totally contingent on the relationality between men and women. The 'Feminist Manifesto' seems to declare that in order to be 'feminine' a woman must refuse to allow her identity to develop through opposite sex relationality. This is reinforced with: 'leave off looking to men to find out what you are not – seek within yourselves to find out

¹²² *Ibid.*, p.153.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.154.

what you are'.¹²⁴ In championing a self-determination outside of gender binaries, Loy's work offers new ways for men and women to develop their masculine and feminine qualities.

Although significantly pre-dating Butler, and not considering repetitive social acts constituting performative gendered identities, the distinction between 'man' and 'masculine' has resonances with *Gender Trouble*. Loy's manifesto, instead of outlining a series of prescriptive behaviours for feminists, experiments with the binary understanding and gender construction of both sexes. Butler writes that '*man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one.'¹²⁵ While Loy does not address the possibilities that masculine and feminine could become untethered from the sex with which they are associated, she does recognise the performativity of gender within a social context. The 'Feminist Manifesto,' interestingly, does not call for men to make more concessions to women, but instead to terminate any chivalric impulses, such that both sexes can achieve their full potential.

The effectiveness of the satire in 'The Effectual Marriage or The Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni' hinges almost entirely on this use of binaries.¹²⁶ Gina and Miovanni are separated and defined as such: 'He was magnificently man/she is insignificantly a woman' (ll.56 - 57). Loy establishes greater opposition than sex difference, putting magnificent masculinity in conflict with a femininity that is insignificant; additionally, establishing Miovanni as 'man', an embodied subject, his gender personified, while Gina is simply 'a woman', a singular entity within a fixed category. Miovanni's identity is totalising, all-encompassing and empowering, while Gina's is insignificant and commonplace. A reader then attaches these attributes to the previously simplistic 'male/female' binary. Loy not only rests on biological sex for her binary opposites, but also associates differing roles with each one: Gina is in the kitchen while Miovanni occupies the library. Once more, rather than relying solely on male/female to

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p.154.

¹²⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p.9.

¹²⁶ Mina Loy, 'The Effectual Marriage or The Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni' *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997). All further references are to this edition.

convey difference, Loy ensures the reader is aware that male stands for cerebral engagement while femininity is synonymous with 'easy', physical work. Therefore, the binaries of the poem stand at male/female, magnificent/insignificant and cerebral/bodily.

Masculinity as a symbol for wakefulness and creative power is also evident in 'Three Moments in Paris', in which Loy writes 'your indisputable male voice roared' (l. 6).¹²⁷ The first-person female character listens to the monologue on dynamic decomposition, but comments: 'I was understanding nothing' (l.9). However, when the 'I' becomes less sleepy and is awoken, she seizes upon the argument, understands 'and ceased to be a woman' (l.21). Although this is not a case of the character assuming male characteristics, the female has ceased to identify with her gender because she no longer exists in a state of ignorance and intellectual inferiority. Once more, Loy reinforces the male/female, intelligent/unintelligent binaries inherent within the two genders.

The 'Feminist Manifesto' focuses further on the nuances of the category of woman. As a result of a binary understanding of gender, women have been forced into three positions: total invisibility, 'Parasitism, & Prostitution.'¹²⁸ These undesirable roles have resulted from men and women's dependence on one another, which the manifesto claims has created a society in which 'men and women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited'.¹²⁹ As such, the enmity only dissolves when the two sexes merge in a sexual embrace, succumbing to a mutual need. The 'Feminist Manifesto' recognises the centrality of sex to gendered relationships, considering the way in which inequality ensures that women remain parasites. The work's implication is that the 'masculine' and 'feminine' will destroy the relationship between the parasite and exploited, replacing it with a more equal and less mutually dependent one. If self-determination becomes possible for both sexes, then the concept of 'equality' is shifted such that both men and women are not caught within a set of social, economic or political expectations.

'The Myriad-fleshed Mistress': Free Love and Mothers, Virginity and Virtue

¹²⁷ Mina Loy, 'Three Moments in Paris' in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997). All further references are to this edition.

¹²⁸ Mina Loy, 'Feminist Manifesto,' p.134.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

Having considered problematic relations between men and women, Loy's manifesto turns to the division of the category of 'woman' into further dichotomies. She writes: 'it is in your interest to demolish the division of women into two classes – the mistress, & the mother – every well-balanced & developed woman knows that it is not true.'¹³⁰ The separation of women into those who are suitable for reproduction and those who are best in a sexual capacity is damaging to the category as a whole. The 'Feminist Manifesto' argues that it is detrimental to view 'woman' as comprised of mutually exclusive identities. Loy writes that 'the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother – an inferior mentality - & will enjoy an inadequate apprehension of Life.'¹³¹ Collapsing the roles of 'mistress' and 'mother' together complicates a separate understanding of both roles. While 'mistress' implies sex, the role of 'mother' is a functional propagation of the species, responsible and respectable. These socially-constructed identities can co-exist within one woman, destabilizing the negative and positive associations of both and allowing for more freedom.

In 'Giovanni Franci', Loy experiments with both the individual and gender as stable and uniform.¹³² She introduces 'threewomen', 'who all walked/in the same dress' (ll.1-2). This image is twofold: the 'all' implies that threewomen might be three distinct and separate females, each wearing the same dress. The image can also be read in a more surreal light, with the three women collapsed into the singular noun 'threewomen,' because they are one coherent subject, sharing a solitary dress. This conflict of identity, and possible plurality of 'threewomen', is resolved later in the poem when Loy's verb conjugation is singular third person: 'the threewoman was composed of three instincts' (l.27). The character is expressed as one homogenous mass of femininity, sharing instincts, clothes and a singular identity. However, as is typical of Loy's work, the character understood as representative of all women is further dismantled: a homogenous category too reductive and simplistic to be left untouched. Having determined that the first instinct of the female character is to be faithful to a man, the second is 'to be loyal to herself'. As she is still writing in the singular, a reader might assume that Loy is maintaining both her stable female subject and

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.134.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p.134.

¹³² Mina Loy, 'Giovanni Franci' in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker Baedeker* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1997) pp.27-32.

her stable category of 'woman', until she writes that 'she would have to find which self first' (1.34). Within the 'threewomen', then, there is a need for the identification of individuality, which opens up the definite possibility of a multiplicity of identities. Loy is suggesting here that a single entity, one woman, can encompass multiple types of self, in addition to affirming that womanhood cannot be reduced due to the abundance of identities within it.

These shifts within categories of identification are inherently political, as Butler states when she writes: 'the deconstruction of identity is not the deconstruction of politics; rather, it establishes as political the very terms through which identity is articulated.'¹³³ However, this approach to destabilizing female dichotomies is extremely problematic in relation to a wider gender binary. Whether a woman is fulfilling motherly duties, satiating sexual appetites, or occupying a point on the spectrum between such roles, her position is defined through a heterosexual matrix. While collapsing the mother and mistress together could be liberating, removing some women from 'ruin' on account of more sexually permissive behaviour, the category of 'woman' is still contingent on interaction with the opposite sex. Loy would have been exposed to lesbian relationships during her early friendship with Dodge, who facilitated a meeting with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas.¹³⁴ Still, while acknowledging fluidity within the category of 'woman,' the 'Feminist Manifesto' does not entertain the possibility that roles can be determined external to engagement with the opposite sex. Certainly, a woman can choose to be a mistress or a mother, but the co-existence of both is enabled and facilitated by the heterosexual sex act. Consequently, while destabilizing expectation and insisting on self-determination for women, Loy's manifesto still understands empowerment through a man-woman binary.

This problem is reinforced when the 'Feminist Manifesto' explores virginity as a highly valued commodity. Drawing once more on the polemical war speak of the Futurists, Loy calls for a sacrifice to be made amongst young women. She writes: 'the first & greatest sacrifice you must make is of your "virtue". The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity.'¹³⁵

¹³³ Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, p.203.

¹³⁴ Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p.130.

¹³⁵ Mina Loy, 'Feminist Manifesto', p.155.

The underlining of virtue, in addition to its place within inverted commas, enacts the social emphasis placed upon the quality, but also serves to ironize it, gesturing toward a reverence on the page that is undercut by the content. The value placed on women's virginity ensures that they are discouraged from the 'acquisition of merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value'.¹³⁶ All of this suggests that women must find a way to protect themselves from the 'man-made' virtue and the way in which its preservation comes to dictate their lives' trajectories. Upon which the 'Feminist Manifesto' proposes a shocking solution: 'the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity throughout the female population at puberty -'.¹³⁷ The paragraph containing this instruction moves from the rhetoric expected of a political movement, calling for personal sacrifice, to the shock-value of campaigns for destroying virginity in pubescent women. However, this shock need not be read earnestly: it is possible that Loy's manifesto is adopting flippancy, making a declaration that will be dismissed as ridiculous. Particularly given Loy's context, the inappropriateness of the bodily invasion of women is an example of unbecoming levity; an unfitting response to feminism and society. Rather than focusing on 'virtue,' which is linked to a certain biological intactness, the 'Feminist Manifesto' locates it specifically within the body. What could remain an abstract consideration becomes embodied and specific. Instead of propounding a means by which 'virtue' can be changed such that it is no longer considered essential for a woman, Loy's manifesto encourages a physical act that is concerned with the most intimate part of the female body.

Undoubtedly, the removal of virginity during puberty would necessitate an invasive procedure from which no woman would be exempt. The implication is that in enforcing a prescriptive, uniform and unconditional procedure, women's choices and opportunities would multiply. However, in order to achieve this possibility, first, female choice must be removed entirely. In attempting to deflect from the emphasis placed on virtue and virginity, Loy's manifesto thus brings both concepts to the fore, locating them specifically within a woman's physicality. Instead of achieving the demystification of female virtue and the hymen, the 'Feminist Manifesto' makes evident its existence with an

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.155.

engagement with the vagina that is troubling and radical. This discomfort is compounded by the fact that consent is never considered in this uniform destruction of virginity. In creating a process that destroys 'virtue' as a commodity, the 'Feminist Manifesto' negates the woman's right to choose, and in doing so, contradicts one of the central tenets of feminism.

Once more, Loy's manifesto draws on the theme of destruction initially championed by Marinetti. However, similar to the early stages of the manifesto, destruction is tempered by the work's total dependence on that which it seeks to destroy. Consistently, the 'Feminist Manifesto' calls upon institutions to be destroyed, yet in no way implements such an action in the piece itself. Instead of offering a view of sex that entirely decimates virtue, Loy's work discusses the means by which women's bodies can facilitate a change in public opinion and feeling. However, this does not offer a way in which women can be liberated from the bodily constraints policed by societal expectation. In fact, it replaces one idealised notion with another set of prescriptive procedures. Furthermore, Loy's piece does not question the traditional gendered roles associated with virginity and, instead, finds new ways for women to become better-informed and more independent 'wives,' 'mothers' and 'mistresses.'

The 'Feminist Manifesto' elucidates problematic virginity further, stating that its intactness can be traded for a good marriage. As such, a woman's future is entirely determined by her ability to ensnare a man in a life long union:

the value of woman, depends entirely on chance, her success or insuccess in manoeuvring a man into taking the life-long responsibility of her – The advantages of marriage are too ridiculously ample – compared to all other trades – for under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man (with-out return of any sort – even offspring) – as a thank offering for her virginity.¹³⁸

The trading in of virginity seems like an easy choice, ensuring that a woman would not become resigned to a lifetime of struggle. However, as Loy states, such dependence on marriage ensures that women will invest their energies in

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.155.

the maintenance of virtue as opposed to the cultivation of intellect and talent. Men, in comparison, sit in the position of being valued on the basis of their contribution to society. In considering this injustice, the 'Feminist Manifesto' makes evident the difficulty for women in terms of the roles they are forced to adopt in relation to sex and reproduction. The mutually exclusive nature of the mistress and mother has to disappear, as it leads to one-dimensional female subjects, in the same way that emphasis on virtue and subsequent marriage must be disbanded to allow women self-exploration and development.

In 'Virgin Plus Curtains Minus Dots,' Loy explores the lives of women who are of a marriageable age, but do not have the marriage portions in order to afford a union.¹³⁹ She writes that 'virgins without dots/ Stare beyond probability' (ll.5-6). While the women are trapped at home, looking out hopelessly on the urban scene, young men are free and mobile: 'They are going somewhere/And they may look everywhere. Men's eyes look into things/Our eyes look out' (ll. 10-14). Here, instead of exploring anatomical difference between men and women, Loy explores the ways in which social expectation can determine completely opposite behaviour in both sexes. The women lament 'Virgins for sale/ Yet where are our coins/ For buying a purchaser' (ll.33-35), raising questions about the problematic position of virgins: a commodity to be acquired by a husband on account of their purity, but a commodity that comes with a quantity of money. Loy proceeds to write 'somebody that was never/ a virgin/ Has bolted the door/ Put curtains at our windows' (ll.43-46). This echoes the manifesto's claim that to be a virgin is to experience limited access to life: no sexual experience, total dependence on marriage and the danger of being reduced solely to the quality of intact virtue.

Similarly, in 'Café de Néant', the youth holding his mistress's finger looks upon a flame in front of him, which is the 'Synthetic symbol of LIFE, In this factitious chamber of DEATH' (ll.21-22).¹⁴⁰ While the candle might be a synthetic reproduction of life, it nevertheless serves to remind the young man of a vitality beyond the room in which he is confined with the female. Life is offered to him by the promise of 'cabs outside the door' (l. 37), while the woman is

¹³⁹ Mina Loy, 'Virgin Plus Curtains Minus Dots' in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker Baedeker* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1997), pp.21-24. Marriage portions relate to the money needed in order to secure a favourable match for the bride.

¹⁴⁰ Mina Loy, 'Café de Neant' in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Inc., 1997) pp.16-17.

forced to remain, static, in a place characterised by putrefaction and decomposition. The binary of trapped/free is therefore collapsed with female/male, in a similar way to the physical/intellectual opposition of the 'Effectual Marriage'. Here Loy toys with ideas of performativity and constraint. To use Butler's words, 'constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is, rather, that which impels and sustains performativity,'¹⁴¹ in that the social inscription and enactment of the women's gender and sex is maintained by their entrapment within expected interaction and action. In 'Café de Néant', the female character is performing a female geniality, she 'is smiling as bravely/ As it is given to her to be brave'(ll.25-26). In both poems, the restrictions placed on the female on account of their virginity finds expression in the enactment of typical female traits: a performativity made almost compulsory by the limited environments.

'Petitions to be the lurid mother': The Race Responsibility of the Intelligent

The 'Feminist Manifesto's discussion of virginity leads to an exploration of motherhood. Once more, the document adopts a troubling position emphasising the necessity of reproduction for all feminist women. Having gestured toward self-determination, the manifesto prescribes uniform female experience in becoming mothers. The 'Feminist Manifesto' states that the current model of marriage and virtue denies some women the possibility of becoming mothers, with Loy writing: 'every woman has a right to maternity –.'¹⁴² Whilst this statement appears to be in accordance with a woman's right to choose, the manifesto then asserts that 'every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility.'¹⁴³ With great rapidity, the manifesto moves from vilifying marriage as the only position in which a woman is able to have a child, to stating that maternity is the right of all, to concluding reproduction is, for some, a social responsibility. Progressing from emancipatory speech to utilitarian declaration, the 'Feminist Manifesto' at this point echoes the forcefulness of virginity removal by demanding that intelligent women recognise they have a 'race-responsibility' to reproduce. This 'responsibility' is

¹⁴¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p.99.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.155.

problematic, implying that feminism itself has a number of intellectual prejudices.

Following from this, the 'Feminist Manifesto' continues to shift positions, slipping between promises of self-determination to prescribing specific functions for women. It then further elucidates that intelligent women serve their function best by 'producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex.'¹⁴⁴ Much like the definition of 'feminism' outlined in the introduction of this chapter, Loy's work champions a politics that relates to a very specific elite. Women of a certain calibre need to reproduce in order to counter the effect of less-worthy or less-intelligent members of the same sex. The feminism espoused by the manifesto appears to represent the possibilities for a specific class of educated women, rather than an engagement with the wider category and its sex specific problems. The intersection of class, education and race are entirely negated in favour of creating a generation of children that reflect the superiority and intelligence of their mothers.

Despite previous reliance on marriage in order to produce children, the 'Feminist Manifesto' says that a woman need not continue relations with a man after producing offspring. Instead, the child is positioned as a possibility for a woman to develop the self: 'each child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life - & not necessarily of a possibly irksome continuation of an alliance'.¹⁴⁵ This implies that a child is an expression of autonomy and can actually be an extension of psychic development, not exclusively the product of a satisfying union with a man. This is corroborated by the manifesto's statement that an alliance is 'adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it - following their individual lines of personal evolution'.¹⁴⁶ Having previously stated that every woman has a right to maternity in relation to marriage, it becomes evident that childbearing is possible out of wedlock. In fact, the 'Feminist Manifesto' advocates that the sexual union exists independent of any further relations, acknowledging that a man and woman should not cleave together but pursue individual trajectories. In doing so, the manifesto deconstructs a traditional familial model.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p.155.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.155.

'Her cautious pride': Male, Female and Fragile Appearances

Having established that men and women need not be dependent on one another in childrearing, the 'Feminist Manifesto' turns its attention to the ideal human. Loy writes that 'each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpenetration of the male & female temperaments.'¹⁴⁷ Considering that, earlier in the text, the desirable state for a man was 'masculine' and for a woman 'feminine,' this hybridity undercuts a gender-specific constructed identity. There is no point at which the 'Feminist Manifesto' explores the possibility for the combined ideal 'masculine' and 'feminine' subject: each relates specifically to their respective sex. However,, the concept that an individual should be a perfect balance between male and female characteristics undermines the separateness so central to 'masculine' and 'feminine' and, as a result, resonates with Butler's belief that these gendered terms could be applicable to subjects of either sex.

It is worth considering, then, the ways in which male and female differ from the contrast made between the 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Clearly, in Loy's manifesto, the former can work in conjunction with one another and do not have the mutual exclusivity suggested by the latter. The 'masculine' and 'feminine' are both characteristic of respective genders achieving freedom from definition through relationality. Instead of calling for men and women to define themselves based on a series of gender contingencies, the masculine affords men freedom from chivalric expectation while the feminine will resist dependence on male counterparts. The male and female, in contrast, speak to qualities typically associated with either/or gender, but that can actually exist simultaneously within one subject. According to Loy's manifesto, the best kind of individual conceivable embodies both sets of characteristics. Irrespective of this call for combination, the manifesto returns to its preoccupation with women as natural mothers, stating that 'woman must become more responsible for the child than man.'¹⁴⁸ Despite combining male and female traits, the manifesto asserts that women should still adopt a more maternal role while a father is not required to demonstrate the same levels of paternal investment.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.155.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p.155.

The final stage of the manifesto encourages women to destroy any need for love from men as such a fragility and dependence renders them vulnerable to hurt. Women are thus encouraged to eliminate 'the feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers his attention from her to another woman.'¹⁴⁹ At no point does the 'Feminist Manifesto' propose that a woman may transfer her affections between men: rather, that immunity must be developed against the inevitable fickleness of the opposite sex. Allowing this immunity to develop distances a woman from her desire for complacent comfort, replacing it with 'an intelligent curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressures of life.'¹⁵⁰ When in love, women are portrayed as liable to fall into a series of negative affects that serve to dull intellectual capabilities.

Despite this call for women to divorce themselves from emotion, the 'Feminist Manifesto' makes a final claim that 'woman for her happiness must retain her deceptive fragility of appearance.'¹⁵¹ It is uncertain whether this appearance relates to physical attributes or is intended to denote a projected vulnerability, in which a woman appears to be kind, quiet and tender. Irrespective, having offered a number of strategies through which women improve their social position and find greater freedom, the 'Feminist Manifesto' returns to this necessity of seeming weak. In order for true happiness to exist, self-determination, will power and strength need to be masked by the performance of fragility. In addition to this cultivation of weakness, the text advocates that women must realize that 'there is nothing impure in sex – except in the mental attitude to it.'¹⁵² In recognizing the moralization of the sex act, women will increase their self-respect and make unprecedented changes to the rights of following generations.

'She is not quite a lady': Loy as the Original Troublemaker

Loy uses 'feminism' as a group with which to associate her manifesto, but still distances herself from its incarnation in her contemporary. As a result, the piece, despite being 'feminist', expresses disaffection and discomfort with the political category with which it is associated. The feminism of the piece is also in conflict

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p.156.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p.156.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.156

¹⁵² *Ibid*, p.156.

with Futurism, which denigrated women's rights and associated the manifesto form with dominant masculinity. The 'Feminist Manifesto' calls to women as a whole, never lapsing into 'we' in order to create solidarity between the writer and her female audience. These distinctions become further divisive when it is evident that the manifesto is appealing exclusively to intelligent woman, and excluding those considered to be weak and degenerate.

The 'Feminist Manifesto' also avoids adopting a definitive position on the relationships between men and women, and the way in which gender identities should manifest themselves socially. In asserting that men and women are not equal, Loy's manifesto positions itself as troublesome and contrary. Consequently, a reader is required to find the politics of emancipation within the manifesto, having been assured that the writer is not attempting to make a case for the equal value of men and women. Loy's introduction of the masculine and feminine implies that the manifesto is concerned with the ways in which men and women can cultivate specific qualities in order to become a superior example of their gender. This foregrounds the constructivist and performative nature of gender as opposed to the fixity of sex-predicated identity. Loy's manifesto accepts that sex is inescapable; men and women are determined by biology, but may be able to control the social manifestations of their chromosomes.

The manifesto further suggests that it is not enough simply to exist as man or woman: in order to be truly feminist or revolutionary, one must cultivate an attitude outside of the limitations of the gender binary. Denying relative impersonality, men and women must determine their own identity in order to fully embody a 'masculine' and 'feminine' possibility, respectively. However, despite this emphasis on constructivism and performativity, Loy's manifesto is still tethered to binaries and biological difference. Although she calls for the category of 'woman' to be less divisive in its allocation of 'mistress' and 'mother' roles, she demands that all females have their hymens removed and go on to bear children. The 'Feminist Manifesto's' understanding of empowered womanhood is intrinsically linked to the physical bodies of women and, by extension, their interactions with men in sex and reproduction.

Toward the end of the manifesto, the content strays into borderline eugenics with the recommendation that only a certain type of woman reproduce.

Not only is it a 'race responsibility' to populate the earth with worthy offspring, necessary to counteract the presence of 'degenerate' members of the same sex, the role of mother would only be on offer to a select few considered intelligent enough to raise children. As a result, while the 'Feminist Manifesto' emphasizes individuality and independence, it advocates a number of enforced campaigns. All women without exception would be required to undergo a surgical procedure to remove their virginity, in the same way that all intelligent women are expected to procreate. In offering ways in which women can liberate themselves from problems of the mother/whore dichotomy and dependence on men, Loy's piece contradicts itself through its advocating enforced bodily invasion and motherhood.

The 'Feminist Manifesto's' fluctuations in opinion, in addition to different positions, makes it difficult to ascertain what the piece is fully advocating. In *Queer Phenomenology* Ahmed writes that 'orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitation, as well as "who" or "what" we direct our energy and attention toward.'¹⁵³ In the 'Feminist Manifesto,' however, direction is determined through what Loy's feminism is for *and* against. The piece clearly rejects the Futurist stance on women, while also choosing to stand distinct from established feminism of the same time period. In spite of this, the work moves towards feminism through its concern with female emancipation, and towards Futurism in the experimental syntax and polemical tone. As such, the 'Feminist Manifesto' is orientated and directed through its enactment of the turns towards and away from both influential groups. Ahmed also states that lines work as forms of alignment with groups, as outlined in the introduction. Due to the number of adopted stances taken and contradictory viewpoints championed, the manifesto resists alignment even with a specific form of feminist thinking. Through occupying different positions, the work does not always pursue a trajectory or line, or even align itself. In doing so, it refuses affiliation.

The positions of the manifesto are created not through changing identity, but through shifting identifications. In this, I understand 'shifting identifications' as the will to identify *with* a politics; it speaks to the movement towards and away from influential groups and people. In contrast, 'changing identity' would

¹⁵³ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.3.

relate to the 'Feminist Manifesto' shifting from different and total affiliations: at one point entirely feminist, another completely Futurist, with the different identifies forcing the repudiation of the last. In applying this to the 'Feminist Manifesto,' the work identifies with sexology, eugenics, feminism and Futurism at different points, and sometimes simultaneously. However, as I see it, the work does not maintain multiple voices or identities. Instead, to include 'shifting identifications', as opposed to identity, allows the 'Feminist Manifesto' to move around the categories of 'woman' and 'feminism'.

In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler writes: 'that identifications shift does not necessarily mean that one identification is repudiated for another; that shifting may well be a sign of hope for the possibility of avowing an expansive set.'¹⁵⁴ Loy's manifesto certainly presents an impressively expansive set of differing positions, but it is their possible co-existence that becomes central to her poetics. As Butler writes, to adopt a different or new identification does not render others defunct. One position does not necessarily better another, but becomes considered in relation to it, foregrounding the act of 'shifting'. As a result, the 'Feminist Manifesto' forces the reader into a consideration of uneasy and uncomfortable alignments, in which self-determination is not repudiated in favour of enforced programmes of virginity removal, just as a woman who can be both a mistress and a mother is not replaced by the idea of a woman who must destroy her desire to be loved.

The denial of a fixed position throughout the 'Feminist Manifesto' emphasizes the mobility of the politics, which shift and turn continuously. As I see it, this movement resonates with Riley's writing on 'becoming' as opposed to 'being,' explored in my introduction. In constantly shifting orientations and following different lines of social investments, Loy's document constructs a feminism and feminist subject in a state of becoming. The contradictory positions circumvent an urge to define the manifesto as espousing a certain form of politics. Riley writes that 'my awkward navigations ... are actually what enable political thinking and language.'¹⁵⁵ Changeability does not imply a form of failing politics, but engages with the difficulties of political processes, in which self-naming and community identification necessitate a constant following of

¹⁵⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p.118.

¹⁵⁵ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identity, Solidarity, Irony* p.5.

lines without necessarily reaching an end point. It is through engaging with this state of 'becoming' and ensuring that the manifesto is never static that my reading of Loy raises questions of political vocabularies and affiliations. Riley, for her part, writes:

The cruel aspects of identities is their frustrated promise of an identification for everyone; but while slots of possible description may feverishly multiply, they still remain mass-produced slots into which thousands, in their rare specificities, can never neatly fit.¹⁵⁶

Loy's use of 'feminism,' which she rails against, demonstrates this difficulty of finding an identity that fits. The fact of occupying a category such as 'woman' or 'feminist' does not necessarily result in solidarity, nor an identity to which everyone is able to attach. Even if a surface identification is possible, each of these categories contains multitudes that ensure there are multiple positions that can be taken within, despite an ostensible sameness.

The 'Feminist Manifesto' does not just avoid alignment, but rejects formulated communities and refuses to be directed through subscribing to the politics or poetics of others. Ahmed considers the role of alignment and direction in relation to political groupings, writing:

Communities might be "going in a certain direction," or facing the same way, such that only some things "get our attention." Becoming a member of such a community, then, might also mean following this direction, which could be described as the political requirements that we turn some ways and not others.¹⁵⁷

While the manifesto is contingent on the existence of the two groups with which Loy engages, it refuses membership of each, allowing the piece to determine what is worthy of attention. The manifesto, both in content and dissemination, problematizes the concept of poetic and political communities.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p.132.

¹⁵⁷ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.15.

The 'Feminist Manifesto' demonstrates that there is no position that is not in some way complicated, as Butler proposes in her writing on impurity and agency. Although feminism is concerned with achieving parity between men and women, the complexity encompassed by sex, gender and their social manifestations ensure that the activism and academia associated with such a struggle vary significantly. Elsewhere, Riley suggests in *Am I that Name* that 'feminism must negotiate the quicksands of 'women' which will not allow it to settle on either identities or counter-identities, but which condemn it to an incessant striving for a brief foothold.'¹⁵⁸ If each identification manifest in Loy's manifesto is considered to be a fleeting foothold in relation to 'woman' and politics, then no position is enduring enough to be pure or uncomplicated.

To acknowledge the impossibility of purity in one's own position is also to recognize the ways in which political categories, such as feminism, can be rife with problems. In Loy's manifesto particularly, the impure identity is compounded by consistently changing positions, which complicate the feminist stance. As Ahmed states, it is a necessary political act not to sink into spaces that seem to offer us comfort. In *Queer Phenomenology* Ahmed writes: 'to live out a politics of disorientation might be to sustain wonder about the very forms of social gathering.'¹⁵⁹ In this sense, I understand disorientation not as confusion or the quality of being 'lost,' but to relate to a proliferation of orientations that stands in opposition to a single, easily followed line. The disorientation exercised in the 'Feminist Manifesto' draws into question affiliation and community loyalty, considering particularly the way in which an individual, operating at the intersection of poetics and politics, can critique social gathering. Loy, despite positioning her work as feminist, does not become aligned with a specific group, opting instead for her own forms of lineation.

Conclusion

The 'Feminist Manifesto' is a model for the ways in which two contending ideologies can be situated together in order to explore a unique formation of politics. Through drawing heavily on feminism and Futurism, Loy makes evident the ways in which an artistic group, championing a specific form of poetics, can

¹⁵⁸ Denise Riley, *Am I That Name*, p.5.

¹⁵⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p.24.

be considered in dialogue with political affiliations. As such, her work is very useful for my own project, in which I draw on lyric poetry to document contemporary feminism. Loy's manifesto does not claim that artistic engagement is a failure of political commitment, but enacts the overlaps and commonalities between movements toward feminism, with a reliance on the poetics of Futurism. Most importantly, placing these two conflicting ideologies together allows for an unfixed feminism that puts emphasis on 'becoming'. Similarly, in my work, I use seemingly inappropriate flippancy as a means by which to explore contemporary feminist commitment.

The proliferating positions offered by the 'Feminist Manifesto' also speak to my engagement with what I have described as the fourth wave. While I am using a specific designation for this feminist moment, 'fourth wave' does not denote a uniformity of approach. Instead, the fourth wave encompasses the types of activism and affects contributing to the forceful surge of public feminist engagement. Inevitably, then, the fourth wave comprises multiple different positions and stances. While I recognise that my work cannot encompass all aspects of the fourth wave, the poetry is concerned with multiple elements. The lyric 'I' writes about activist events in London, Western feminist in-fighting, news reports, everyday sexism, internationally reported issues, sex and systemic sexism. Through engaging with such a range of material, my work refuses alignment and single trajectories, instead reflecting multiple positions in relation to different stimulus.

This movement in my work as a whole speaks to the concept of becoming and, in my case, becoming troublesome. Both the 'Feminist Manifesto' and my own work recognize the necessity of moving toward and away from different forms of political practice. Furthermore, the lack of commitment to one methodology, demonstrated by Loy's work and my employment of flippancy, allows for both sets of work to be placed in a continual process of 'becoming'. As I have established, Loy's shifting and movement ensures a sense of discomfort, both within the manifesto itself and for the reader engaging with the work. This discomfort allows for an implicit critique of feminism to emerge, which draws on restlessness and mobility to question community ties and easy alignment. It is through this, that the 'Feminist Manifesto' demonstrates the way in which a

politically-affiliated document can nevertheless be engaged in a process of 'becoming trouble'.

Throughout my development of a flippant feminism located in the fourth-wave feminist moment, Loy's work has been central to thinking through the tensions of my poetics and politics. Drawing on unbecoming levity to document my specific locatedness enables a process of becoming that draws on affects and problematic group affiliation. The shifts and movements evident in the 'Feminist Manifesto' have demonstrated the ways in which potentially conflicting ways of thinking about and engaging with politics can be navigated. Furthermore, my analysis of the work suggests that a seeming lack of commitment does not necessarily betray indifference to politics, but evidences a strong engagement with its possibilities.

'There's nothing metaphysical about it': Frank O'Hara's Flippant Manifesto and the Poetics of Tight Trousers

Frank O'Hara was a New York poet, socialite and curator at the MOMA. Posthumously positioned by influential literary critic Marjorie Perloff as the poet amongst painters, O'Hara was firmly located amongst the New York School artists, with whom he collaborated and socialised. In addition to poetry, O'Hara produced a range of creative work including art criticism and plays, although he was most renowned for his ability to sit down in the midst of any conversation or party to write a new poem. Much famed for his extensive friendship group and overwhelming popularity, O'Hara is also known for his provocative interactions with some of the most masculine figures of his time, including Lowell and Kerouac. Unsurprisingly, O'Hara's work is often considered in direct relation to his vibrant social life, in which the poems themselves appear to be maps for intimate relationships and friendships.

The constellation of references evident in O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto' gesture towards the specific locatedness of the poet himself. Considered as a 'New York School' poet, the urban environment was central to O'Hara's poetics and regular walks around the city helped to inform his work in both form and content.¹⁶⁰ He was also strongly affiliated with the abstract expressionist painters, including Jackson Pollock, Larry Rivers, Elaine de Kooning and Jane Freilicher, amongst others.¹⁶¹ Outside of the immediacy of his New York environs, O'Hara was producing poetry in the context of pre-Stonewall and Cold War America. Consequently, homosexuality and any interest in Russian poetry would have been considered with some suspicion, even if the poet in question seemed to embrace America as a whole.¹⁶² O'Hara's unique locatedness within a city and specific social milieu is complicated by his manifesto's references to French writers and his poems' dependence on Russian precedents

¹⁶⁰ For further information on the footstep in O'Hara's work see David Herd, 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara' in *Frank O'Hara Now* eds. Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) pp.70-85.

¹⁶¹ See Marjorie Perloff *Poet Amongst Painters*, Russell Ferguson, *In Memory of my Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art* (London: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁶² In *Digressions on Some poems by Frank O'Hara* Joe LeSueur writes on O'Hara's open homosexuality in poetry, and the fact that 'At The Old Place' was published, not in the poet's lifetime, but a few months after the Stonewall riot. 'At The Old Place' is about gay-identified men making their way to a gay bar in New York, where they encounter less openly homosexual friends.

such as Pasternak and Mayakovsky. As such, I choose to read O'Hara's work through a constellation in which his specific locatedness in conjunction with the literary influences he invokes create a consolidated central figure, evident in both the manifesto and poems.

In addressing the emergence of this figure, I recognise that the speaker created through the manifesto is not evident within O'Hara's body of work as a whole. Consequently, I am selecting poems in which facets of the figure of the manifesto are exemplified or mobilised to great effect. As stated in my introduction, the constellation is a means by which to consider the way in which a consolidated lyric 'I' – a figure – can emerge from multiple temporalities, spatialities and divergent reference points. O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto' not only forms a figure, it also establishes ways in which the figure can be read and understood in relation to poetry. The tone of the piece allows for the figure to be attributed a light-hearted mobility that draws on literary traditions and contemporary locatedness, while avoiding poetic affiliations.

O'Hara tells his reader to expect everything of Personism, although 'we won't get it. It's too new, too vital a movement to promise anything.'¹⁶³ Although used here to designate a specific poetic movement, the implications of motion are characteristic of O'Hara's work and have political possibility when considered in conjunction with community and participation. While less concerned with gender categories and performativity than Loy, and without any writing that relates directly to feminism, I nevertheless read O'Hara's inconsistent engagement with communities and categories in relation to the feminist theories of Ahmed, Butler and Riley. 'Personism: A Manifesto' is able to invoke community engagement while refusing alignment, which results in the avoidance of unity that might call for exclusionary norms. Furthermore, locating O'Hara allows for a consideration of the way in which his practice is political. Ahmed writes that 'in the forming and deforming of attachments: in the writing, conversations, the doing, the work, feminism moves, and is moved. It connects and is connected.'¹⁶⁴ Thus, while O'Hara might not address politics directly, his poetics speak to the methodologies and praxis of an uncomfortable and troublesome feminism. This chapter will continue to build on the mobility

¹⁶³ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* (London: University of California Press, 1995).

¹⁶⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, p.17.

evident within Loy's writing to understand how movement can become integral to a practice that is strongly located within the contemporary. O'Hara's avoidance of rigidity and conformity, combined with conversational and shifting reference points, indicate a practised form of politics in which discomfort and troubling are central.

However, there is a tension regarding what constitutes the serious O'Hara – or, certainly, what should be taken seriously in regards to his work. In addressing my methodology for this chapter, I will consider the critical work surrounding O'Hara, problematizing my approach to his manifesto and poetry. It is widely recognised that O'Hara's personal life, seemingly dazzling engagement with New York celebrity and early death have resulted in a romanticization of him as a figure. In line with this, his most popular poems are the ones that indicate an open, egalitarian and friendly lyric speaker, who traverses social classes and racial divisions on the streets of New York. It is necessary, of course, to acknowledge that O'Hara's collected works present a more nuanced and multiple poet, who experimented with a variety of genres and often departed from the camp style and realism that so strongly characterise his *Lunch Poems*.

'Categorically the most difficult relationship': Figuring a Reading Methodology

Despite the two poets having written manifestos, the work of Loy and O'Hara vary significantly. Consequently, I have developed a different methodology to approach O'Hara's work that, structurally, defies the linear reading I used to engage with the 'Feminist Manifesto.' As opposed to employing a 'moving through,' I will be approaching O'Hara's work thematically in order to consider the constellation, mobility, subversion, tone and the place of the individual within artistic or political communities. In 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara,' David Herd writes of the manifesto that: 'O'Hara has stolen the show and quite likely what you're experiencing already is yearning ... To follow it, in the name of commentary, is to sound cumbersome. And yet nonchalance is part of the allure, and anyway the thinking of 'Personism' is too quick to let it go.'¹⁶⁵ Unlike Loy's manifesto, 'Personism: A Manifesto' does not progress through a number of contradictions, wavering between two central influences while discussing

¹⁶⁵ David Herd, 'Stepping Out with Frank O'Hara' p.70.

emancipatory politics. Instead, 'Personism' is less formal in structure, reading more as an immediate and spontaneous commentary on poetics. As such, O'Hara's writing does not advance sensibly through the consideration of different aspects of poetics; rather, it moves between references to cultural consumption, friends, sex, and then back round again. Following Herd's assertion, then, I will not attempt to keep up with O'Hara and, instead, approach his work through a constellated and then thematic approach.

Despite O'Hara's claim that his work may have achieved, finally, the death of literature, 'Personism: A Manifesto' itself is laden with references to canonical and non-canonical writers. As a result, O'Hara locates his work and himself as a poet amongst a range of names, whether he is affiliated with their writing or standing distinct from their writing methods. These references, in conjunction with comments on personal relationships, such as lunch with LeRoi Jones, serve to create a unique and specific figure at the centre of the manifesto. Moving from high cultural commentary to intimate and amicable anecdote, O'Hara establishes a lyric speaker who appears to move from microcosm to macrocosm with great ease, placing seemingly disparate elements in a comfortable dialogue with one another. Furthermore, the seeming irrelevance of the references that comprise O'Hara's constellation demonstrate a flippant mobility. Refusing to fix on one category, one genre, one art form or a single group of friends, the speaker in 'Personism: A Manifesto' practices a freeing mobility through and amongst a range of influences, flippantly moving from one to the other. In my critical engagement with this inherently mobile document, I shall consider the manifesto through the constellation in order that I can then concentrate on the themes raised by the manifesto that are relevant to my contemporary feminist practice. These aspects, including tone, the expression of love and mobility, will then be read back into O'Hara's poetry in order to consider the ways in which the figure presented in 'Personism: A Manifesto' manifests itself.

At this point, I want to acknowledge the way in which my reading of O'Hara differs from other scholarship on the poet. While I am considering O'Hara's specific locatedness in relation to the manifesto, I will not be analysing the social formations that informed his work as a whole. Lytle Shaw does a full survey of both O'Hara's immediate and European influences in *The Poetics of Coterie* (2006), which addresses this inherently social and communal model as a

means by which to approach the work. Andrew Epstein's book *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (2006) is equally comprehensive in its consideration of the friendship and the New York school social dynamic in relation to poetry.¹⁶⁶ However, as Will Montgomery and Robert Hampson rightly warn, on occasion it is difficult for criticism to 'free itself from anecdote and reminiscence, as if the chatty, witty voice that speaks in many of O'Hara's best-known poems defined the writings' intellectual horizons.'¹⁶⁷ As such, my work will be avoiding the biographical writings on O'Hara, including Joe LeSueur's *Digressions on some poems by Frank O'Hara* (2003) and Brad Gooch's *City Poet: The Life and Times of Frank O'Hara* (1993). Rather than corroborating the stories or friendships gestured towards in the manifesto and poems, I will be reading the sociable and conversational tone of O'Hara's Personism in relation to the 'I' as social figure within a more expansive constellation.

Montgomery and Hampson state that their collection of essays on O'Hara speaks to a more troubling side of the poet, in which the palatable I-do-this I-do-that poems are ignored in favour of exploring artistic collaborations, surrealist work, pop cultural references and long poems. They write that the book suggests that O'Hara is not 'as easily assimilable – or indeed as friendly – as he might appear ... O'Hara's cheerfulness is the cheerfulness of one who has encountered and embraced suffering. The ready wit often conceals doubt and uncertainty'.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, the two editors pose the question: '[w]hat, however, if O'Hara is only sometimes so insouciant, only sometimes so sociable? What if the writing is, in other words, rather more strenuous in its ambition than O'Hara's cultivated flippancy sometimes suggests?'¹⁶⁹ Both quotations demonstrate the problematic aspects of positioning and framing O'Hara as an urbane socialite, both light of foot and politics. However, this invocation of the flippant is vital to my work and reading of O'Hara, in reclaiming the light-hearted as a deliberate and strenuous political strategy. That cheerfulness can be cultivated in dialogue with suffering, and that flippancy might serve as a veil to seriousness, speaks to

¹⁶⁶ See Lytle Shaw *Frank O'Hara: The Poetics of Coterie* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2006) and Andrew Epstein *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

¹⁶⁷ Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery 'Introduction' in *Frank O'Hara Now* eds. Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p.2.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.4.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.3

the way in which I draw on affective feminism to cultivate a seemingly irreverent poetics confronting and confronted by weighty subject matter. As such, I will analyse the chattering central figure presented in 'Personism: A Manifesto' as flippant, cheerful, insouciant and sociable, but with the recognition that O'Hara as a poet can be viewed from a far darker critical perspective.

'Utter disparagement turns into praise': flippant manifesto and genre subversion

The first few words of 'Personism: A Manifesto' state that 'everything is in the poems' and, as such, O'Hara immediately establishes the lack of seriousness with which he is approaching the manifesto.¹⁷⁰ While this flippant approach to the production of a didactic document could be performative, consolidating O'Hara as a light-hearted and uncommitted speaker, the opening lines still set up a frame through which the reader approaches Personism. The manifesto is rendered immediately defunct by the fact that everything a reader needs to glean of poetics can be found in the poems themselves. However, on account of an accusation of O'Hara being confused about his own poetry, he alleges that he is writing to the audience in order to offer clarification. Yet, throughout 'Personism: A Manifesto', elucidation is continually denied by the mobile and anecdotal nature of the work.

O'Hara does not limit his genre subversion just to the manifesto, he extends scepticism into the realm of ideas and then to poetry itself. Having addressed the writing and reception of poetry, O'Hara asks 'I'm not saying that I don't have practically the most lofty ideas of anyone writing today, but what difference does that make?'¹⁷¹ In positioning himself as a lofty thinker, O'Hara is able to deflate the claims he makes for his own work. Quite rightly, he asks the reader what difference being lofty makes anyway? What efficacy can great ideas have, other than serving to prop up and inflate the writer himself? In undermining 'lofty ideas,' O'Hara is writing a critique of the manifesto form into 'Personism: A Manifesto' itself, undercutting any seriousness that may be attached to his role as poet and polemicist.

¹⁷⁰ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', p. 498.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, p.498.

Having weakened the manifesto genre, O'Hara goes on to question the purpose of poetry, first by equating it with the movies, and then replacing it entirely with telephone conversation. He writes of the American public that 'if they don't need poetry bully for them. I like the movies too.'¹⁷² The implication of this statement is that, while O'Hara is both a writer and consumer of poetry, he could substitute the genre for the occasional trip to the movies. In fact, the poet even appears to empathise with those who eschew his genre in favour of the cinema because only three poets (Hart, Crane and Williams) surpass the movies in terms of brilliance. Later in the manifesto, when O'Hara claims he is writing a poem, he realizes that 'if I wanted to I could use the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born ... the poem is at last between two persons instead of two pages.'¹⁷³ The poem is thus transported from the page and written word to the conversational, the implications of which I will consider in my section on tone. Significantly, the very act of writing poems is undermined consistently throughout the manifesto, bettered by a trip to the movies and easily replaced with a telephone conversation.

The question posed implicitly by 'Personism: A Manifesto' is, then, what is the role of the poet? If the manifesto and poem are redundant as outputs, what responsibility is the poet fulfilling in the production of work? O'Hara writes:

But how can you care if anybody gets it, or gets what it means, or if it improves them. Improves them for what? For death? Why hurry them along? Too many poets act like middle-aged mothers trying to get kids to eat too much cooked meat, and potatoes with drippings (tears). I don't give a damn whether they eat or not. Forced feeding leads to excessive thinness (effete).¹⁷⁴

This section establishes that 'Personism: A Manifesto' is not going to make a case for poetry, nor the reading of it. Instead, O'Hara deliberately avoids the didactic and polemic, once more undermining the purpose of a manifesto, and locates the appreciation of poetry, instead, within a very specific constellation.

¹⁷² *Ibid*, p.498.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.499.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.498.

'Like Whitman my great predecessor': towards a constellated practice

In the first sentence of 'Personism: A Manifesto,' in which O'Hara is defending the need for a statement of poetics, he writes that issuing such a statement puts him at risk of 'sounding like the poor wealthy man's Allen Ginsberg.'¹⁷⁵ However, a consideration of poetics is still necessary because, as O'Hara claims, 'I just heard that one of my fellow poets thinks that a poem of mine that can't be got at in one reading is because I was confused too.'¹⁷⁶ Immediately, these two references gesture toward a number of tensions that are useful for considering O'Hara's self-presentation, his poetry and the figure he constructs through the use of a constellation. The possibility of sounding like Ginsberg aligns O'Hara with the other poet, creating an affiliation with the politically-engaged, homosexual and spiritual themes incorporated into the former's work. However, the 'poor wealthy man' confuses an easy association, implying that O'Hara might sit in a more fraught relation with Ginsberg amongst a wider poetry audience. By 1959, Ginsberg had become nationally famous on account of the obscenity trials provoked by *Howl*, and so occupied a position of celebrity that O'Hara did not. Furthermore, in invoking criticism of his poetry, that it is 'confusing,' O'Hara also locates himself alongside a contemporary who goes unnamed. Not only does the lack of identification foreground the deliberate choices that have been made in creating a constellation of names, but also makes the reader aware that difficulty and trouble should be part of a reading process.

Despite having aligned himself with Ginsberg, O'Hara goes on to state that 'I hate Vachel Lindsay, always have; I don't even like rhythm, assonance, all that stuff.'¹⁷⁷ Lindsay was a great influence on Ginsberg, who wrote the poem 'To Lindsay' after the former's suicide. Both poets placed emphasis on the incantatory elements of a poem, drawing on rhythm and sounds to strengthen the relationship between spirituality and writing.¹⁷⁸ Through rejecting Lindsay, O'Hara establishes a certain expectation of his own poems, and further distances himself from Ginsberg. It becomes apparent to a reader that rhythm and other literary tropes will not proliferate through the New York poet's works. This

¹⁷⁵ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', p. 498.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p.498.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.498.

¹⁷⁸ Gregory Stephenson, "'Howl": A Reading' in *On The Poetry of Allen Ginsberg* (eds.) Allen Ginsberg and Lewis Hyde (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1984) p.390.

dislike of Lindsay signals a departure from the spiritual poems produced by Ginsberg, into a more conversational and casual way of writing.

Provocatively, O'Hara's next set of reference points are placed in dialogue with American movies and the claim that only three poets surpass the brilliance of cinema. He writes that '[a]nd after all, only Whitman and Crane and Williams, of the American poets, are better than the movies.'¹⁷⁹ Placing poetry in dialogue with a mainstream and widely consumed art form allows O'Hara to collapse distinctions between high and low cultural forms, while implicitly aligning himself with these influential poets. While stylistically different to Whitman, who opted for the long line and expansive page use, O'Hara is similar in his commitment to a multiplicity of experience represented through the poem. In the introduction to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman writes '[t]he American bard shall delineate no class of persons not one or two out of strata of interests nor love,' which resonates with the inclusivity practised in O'Hara's New York walking poems.¹⁸⁰ Crane was most famous for his work *The Bridge*, which was a long poem that drew on New York as a setting. In his introduction to *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara*, Ashbery claims that O'Hara's work was akin to 'Hart Crane in his more vatic moments.'¹⁸¹ In contrast to Whitman and Crane, Williams was an early proponent of Imagism, which was concerned with the representation of 'things' without superfluous words or imagery. Williams was also committed to poetry that reflected the American vernacular, asking 'where else can what we are seeing arise from but speech?'¹⁸²

As O'Hara places these three men together, it is necessary to consider how their relationality may offer an insight into his poetry. In *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman describes himself as 'an American, one of the roughs, a kosmos ... no sentimentalist ... No stander above men and women or apart.'¹⁸³ Similarly, O'Hara's work positions himself as one who participates, not standing apart from the contemporaries that surround him, but amongst them as an American poet. This speaks to Williams' assertion in an interview with the *Paris Review* that

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p.498.

¹⁸⁰ Malcolm Cowley, 'Introduction' in *Leaves of Grass* (London: Penguin Group, 1986) p.14.

¹⁸¹ John Ashbery 'Introduction,' p.viii.

¹⁸² William Carlos Williams, 'The Poem as A Field of Action' in *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1954), p.289.

¹⁸³ Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, (London: Penguin Group, 1986) p.48.

poems should be 'modified by our environment; the American environment.'¹⁸⁴ Moreover, Williams' insistence that the written genre should reflect American speech patterns, the cadences and vocabularies, resonates with the manifesto's emphasis on the telephone as a possible replacement for the poem. In relation to Crane, Brian Reed writes in *Hart Crane: After His Lights* (2006) that 'O'Hara alone intuited that Crane's greatest ambition has been to transfigure time and the world through an unquestioning reliance on poetic artifice.'¹⁸⁵ This combination of poets, then, would imply that O'Hara's work is committed to the representation of American experience, demonstrating openness and inclusivity, although Reed's writing claims that O'Hara's relationship to Crane might be more complex than his relationship to either Williams or Whitman.

As these references to specific poets attest, 'Personism: A Manifesto' draws on a highly cultivated tone to demonstrate a performative self-consciousness that allows a number of different temporalities and locales to be placed in poetic dialogue with one another. All of which speaks to my use of the constellation in order to understand O'Hara's work. Complicating this even further, 'Personism: A Manifesto' then deviates from names and draws upon abstraction in order to locate itself. O'Hara's constellation thus creates a figure not just at the centre of a social grouping, but also of artistic movements and genres to position his work. He writes that '[a]bstraction in poetry, which Allen recently commented on in *It Is*, is intriguing.'¹⁸⁶ In the text to which O'Hara refers, Ginsberg states that through the use of abstraction in earlier works, the New York poets had 'learned the extent of their own imagination, learned how far they could go, learned freedom of composition, and turned up some beautiful lines.'¹⁸⁷ This extract implies that the New York School used abstraction as a method of exploration, to develop a more unique form of writing. Despite the invocation of abstraction, O'Hara never elucidates exactly what he understands by it. Instead, the term becomes a central shifting point through which he can make multiple references and avoid offering a definitive definition, especially in

¹⁸⁴ William Carlos Williams, 'The Art of Poetry (1964)' in *The Paris Review Interviews: Vol. III* (New York: Picador, 2008) p.85.

¹⁸⁵ Brian M. Reed, *Hart Crane: after his lights* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006) p.222.

¹⁸⁶ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', p. 498.

¹⁸⁷ Allen Ginsberg, 'Abstraction in Poetry' in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952 - 1995* () selected essays p. 245.

relation to his own work. Due to his work at the MOMA and close relationships with Abstract Expressionists, O'Hara would have had a strong understanding of the term's significance in visual art. Tellingly, the manifesto distinguishes between forms of abstraction when O'Hara writes that he is considering it '(in poetry, not in painting).'¹⁸⁸ O'Hara's poetry is distinctly different from artistic abstraction, which Paul Wood in 'The Idea of an Abstract Art' (2004) describes as 'elements with no roots in the depiction of things in the world.'¹⁸⁹ In contrast, O'Hara's poetry is continually grounded in the world through the use of names of people, streets and specific dates, which distances a reader from the seeming immediacy of the poetry as lived experience.

While still avoiding elucidation in the discussion of abstraction, 'Personism: A Manifesto' proceeds to make a distinction between 'nostalgia *for* the infinite' and 'nostalgia *of* the infinite.' The latter not only invokes Giorgio De Chirico's work on perspective and Italian squares, but also conflates the idea of abstraction with Keats' 'negative capability.' Keats' defined the state of 'negative capability' as: 'being in uncertainties, Mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reading after fact & reason.'¹⁹⁰ This negative capability is a state in which a subject is required to suspend locatedness in favour of openness, allowing uncertainty to exist without an immediate need to find reason within it. O'Hara describes this state as 'personal removal by the poet,' implying that this form of abstraction requires that the feelings of an individual are set aside to allow for mystery and doubt to prevail. Having established this, O'Hara claims that the poetics of Personism are 'totally opposed to this kind of abstract removal.'¹⁹¹

While O'Hara is clear about what abstraction *is not*, he evades any kind of certainty of what *it is* through creating a series of dismissals that give no further insight into his specific position. As such, Personism becomes contradictory: a point of departure from the extensive name-dropping and theorising that surrounds it. Explaining further, through comparison, O'Hara writes that 'Personism is to Wallace Stevens what *la poésie pure* was to Beranger.'¹⁹²

¹⁸⁸ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', p. 498.

¹⁸⁹ Paul Wood, 'The Idea of an Abstract Art' in *Art of the Avant-Gardes* eds. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (Milton Keynes: Yale University Press, 2004) p.238.

¹⁹⁰ Nathan Comfort Starr, 'Negative Capability in Keat's Diction' in *Keats-Shelley Journal* Vol.15 (Winter, 1966), pp. 59 - 68.

¹⁹¹ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', p. 499.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p.499.

Beranger was an extremely popular French lyricist, who died in 1857, long before the 'pure poetry' of French Surrealists came to the fore. O'Hara implies that the relationship between these two entirely different approaches to art, is reflected in the relationship between Personism and Wallace Stevens. In his introduction to *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* (2010), Edward Ragg writes 'Stevens could never have been a 'Personist poet', if that 'poet' resembles the performance of the intensely personal, yet elusive 'Frank'.¹⁹³ It is not entirely misplaced, therefore, to ask what Personism is intended to do and why O'Hara has used abstraction as a technical term to explain it. Established as antithetical to abstraction in poetry, set apart from abstraction in art, and claiming the first true abstraction in the history of the genre, O'Hara places his work in the midst of a series of obscurities.

O'Hara's last references to locate Personism are linked to claims that his manifesto has achieved the death of literature, in a way that both Antonin Artaud and Alain Robbe-Grillet failed to do. Robbe-Grillet published a long essay in *Nouvelle Revue Francais*, which he claims 'characterised as a "Manifesto" – enshrined me as the theoretician of a new "school" of the novel, from which, of course nothing good was expected.'¹⁹⁴ Similar to Robbe-Grillet, O'Hara demonstrates scepticism for schools, stating that nothing can be expected of Personism itself. In his piece 'A Future for the Novel', Robbe-Grillet writes 'a new form will always seem more or less an absence of any form at all, since it is unconsciously judged by reference to the consecrated forms'.¹⁹⁵ While Robbe-Grillet seems to share a similarity with O'Hara in his commitment to the new, the latter's work is made humorous by his bombastic claims. Considering the literary references throughout the 'Personism: A Manifesto', O'Hara has no intention of causing the death of literature, nor severing himself from the past.

Artaud, a French playwright, developed 'The Theatre of Cruelty', which used fear in order to shock an audience out of their complacency.¹⁹⁶ The

¹⁹³ Edward Ragg, *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) p.2.

¹⁹⁴ Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'The Use of Theory' in *For a new novel: essays on fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p.8.

¹⁹⁵ Alain Robbe-Grillet, 'A future For the Novel' in *For a new novel: essays on fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p.17.

¹⁹⁶ For further detail on Artaud's theory on theatre see Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958) and for writings and poetry Antonin Artaud, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (France: Gaillinar, 2003).

dramaturge used theatre and poetry to address the limitations he perceived in language. However, Artaud decided the deficiency was not 'in his inability to express his feelings and turn them into 'thoughts', words, language; perhaps it was language itself which was incapable of expressing them adequately.'¹⁹⁷ As his theories on theatre developed, Artaud was attempting to 'communicate the fullness of human experience and emotion through by-passing the discursive use of language.'¹⁹⁸ Through rejecting language, Artaud aimed to establish a new means of communication seems far removed from O'Hara's telephone use.

O'Hara goes on to state that Artaud's relationship with literature is analogous to the relationship of Dubuffet with art. Championed as a surrealist, Dubuffet aimed to reject all previous knowledge of art in his attempt to create methods for new production. His work was considered to be inspired by Alfred Jarry, a playwright who championed the bizarre and the brutal in ways that are reflected in the raw expression of Dubuffet's art brut style. However, Robert Hughes writes in *Shock of the New* that Dubuffet's work was indebted to both Picasso and Bonheur, the former for his work on bulls, and the latter for having painted cows.¹⁹⁹ Dubuffet is entirely locked into art communities, in addition to an art market, in the same way Artaud's rebellion against language, communicated through the written word, was locked in literature. Similarly, O'Hara claims he has achieved the death of literature, while his whole manifesto is a statement of indebtedness to his precursors and contemporaries.

By invoking numerous names and traditions, O'Hara creates a work open to and aware of influences, with multiple genres and movements in dialogue with one another. The references demonstrate how his own practice is strongly located within contemporary New York, while a more artistic constellation forms around him, creating mutable and unfixed communities. The constellated practice that I have theorised in the introduction also serves to illuminate some of the conflicts inherent in O'Hara's work: community affiliation, history and the present, and the necessity for mobility in conjunction with belonging. However, what is most evident from 'Personism: A Manifesto' is the way in which O'Hara

¹⁹⁷ Martin Esslin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, (London: Calder Publications, 1999) p.67.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.70

¹⁹⁹ Robert Hughes, *The Shock of the New: art and the century of change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) p.267.

draws upon multiple references in order to create a consistent central figure. His tone does not deviate from that of a casual conversationalist, while his content collapses temporalities and genres together. Adopting a nonchalant attitude, the manifesto demonstrates how a lyric 'I' can emerge from a constellation that offers many objects of interest and engagement. While O'Hara's references orientate him, the different points also create a central figure through their connections to one another. It is this specific figure that I trace within the poems, performing the role of a conversational lyric 'I' who is intent upon causing trouble.

'Make fecund my existence': The Figure, Mobility and Movement

In addressing the technical apparatus of poetry, O'Hara writes: 'you just go on your nerve. If someone's chasing you down the street with a knife you just run, you don't turn around and shout, "Give it up! I was a track star for Mineola Prep."' ²⁰⁰ This analogy for writing is suggestive of two forms of mobility. The first is that movement is central to the writing of poetry, as is the refusal to look back and meditate on the scene of departure. The second implication is that stasis can have violent consequences, making mobility a necessity – an idea I will return to later in a discussion of identity politics. The initial image of running without stopping for explanation, establishes the fast-paced conversational tone with which the topics of the manifesto change and collapse into one another. It is also significant that, in concluding the manifesto, O'Hara refers to Personism as a 'movement,' which, irrespective of whether it is ironic or not, gestures towards a futurity in politics and poetics, while emphasising mobility. O'Hara's claim that Personism has not yet arrived, but 'like Africa, is on its way' places the focus on the ability to move with energy and freedom. ²⁰¹

The constellation created through O'Hara's manifesto also creates a space in which the poet is able to move. The references to a range of writers, as explored in the previous section, ensure that while the figure of the manifesto takes shape at the centre, there is the possibility for movement toward specific points. By this I mean that, while O'Hara's troublesome central figure is created through reading the relations between each of the names, places and art

²⁰⁰ Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto', p. 498.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.499.

practices he invokes, it does not limit him to a central space. O'Hara is able to turn his focus to one point, before moving swiftly off to the next idea or place, creating a set of relations through his trajectory. The use of literary names in addition to friends within his present allows O'Hara to formulate his own unique moment. Through exploring his peer group and an international artistic chronology, O'Hara's voice truly embodies the contemporary: existing in the present and looking to the past with an eye towards future developments. The changing locations of the manifesto also imply that the first-person position is navigating multiple spaces and places. Initially, focus is placed on poetry as an abstract concept, but then switches to the concrete reality of having lunch with LeRoi Jones. The manifesto takes greater shape when O'Hara has returned to work, moving elsewhere again when he feels the need to pick up a telephone to communicate. The poet places himself within a series of different contexts, with none more important than the other, but all relevant to the unique poetics and 'I'.

The importance of movement and its realisation in the poems is exemplified in 'Poem (Now it is the 27th),' where the speaker makes the claim that 'my force is in my mobility.'²⁰² The spatiality and syntax of the poem indicate a constant sense of motion, reflecting 'instability, suggestibility, sensibility' (l.15) with a lack of full stops, and line and stanza breaks:

but how could I love other
than the worldly Virgin
my force is in my mobility it's said
I move
towards you
born in the sign which I should only like
with love
(ll.21-27)

Multiple spatialities overlap and engage in dialogue with one another; in this case, the spatialities are constituted by people, places and theories that become activated through the poet's incorporation of them within a piece of work. A

²⁰² Frank O'Hara, 'Poem (Now it is the 27th)' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995), p.345. All subsequent references are to this edition.

similar effect is evident in poems such as 'Avenue A,' 'Poem (Lana Turner has Collapsed),' 'A Step Away From Them' and 'To You'. O'Hara's occasional use of speech marks and inclusion of speech give the poems a sense of immediacy, as if the poet is directly transcribing life to the page, making the poem a formative part of his day-to-day experience. The poems reflect a constant chattering social walk, in which O'Hara's lightness, movement and faithlessness can all be seen to constitute a flippant poetics that, while carefully and consciously constructed, presents a lack of earnestness.

These qualities are all reflected in 'Meditations in an Emergency,' in which O'Hara writes:

My eyes are vague blue, like the sky, and change all the time; they are indiscriminate but fleeting, entirely specific and disloyal, so that no one trusts me. I am always looking away. Or again at something after it has given me up. It makes me restless and that makes me unhappy, but I cannot keep them still.²⁰³

This expression of a fickle practice resonates with the way in which the poetics operate. While it might not lead to happiness, restlessness is crucial to O'Hara's modes of writing, as it facilitates movement that allows for specificity and disloyalty: characteristics evident in 'Personism: A Manifesto'. When writing on queer politics, Ahmed notes that unhappiness is a productive state of social criticality. She writes 'happiness scripts could be thought of as straightening devices, ways of aligning bodies with what is already lined up.'²⁰⁴ The emphasis on happiness, and compulsion to be happy, actually achieves a homogenising effect, where the emotion 'can be narrated as the hope or promise of becoming acceptable, where in *being* acceptable you must *become* acceptable to a world that has already decided what *is* acceptable.'²⁰⁵ O'Hara's looking back and unhappiness could be read as a rejection of normalization. The refusal of a stable lover is a political position in which the speaker refuses staid normativity.

²⁰³ Frank O'Hara, 'Meditations in an Emergency' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995), p.197. All subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁰⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, loc. 1309.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, loc. 1553.

The blue eyes, looking at whatever has given them up, convey a ranging temporality for the poem. The past is acknowledged and invoked, even if the previous stanza has stated that the lyric 'I' never bothered with 'nostalgia for an innocent past' (l.11). The poem then moves through blonds, religion, urbanity and impending heterosexuality, and the voice has tried love but rejected it: 'I am always springing forth from it like the lotus – the ecstasy of always bursting forth' (l.31). The poem resolves, finally, in the lyric speaker expressing a need for movement: 'I've got to get out of here' (l.44), further elaborating on mobility with 'I'll be back, I'll re-emerge, defeated from the valley; you don't want me to go where you go, so I won't go where you don't want me to' (ll.45-46). The message throughout the poem is that, irrespective of the failure of love and the possibilities of defeat, stasis is the worst state for a subject who must always be emerging with newness and vitality.

Mobility is also a useful strategy for the expression of homosexuality within O'Hara's poems, allowing for a combination of both revelation and elusiveness. However, movement, much like the earlier image of a poet escaping an armed assailant, can be construed as a necessity. The ability to run, and run fast, and maintain continual motion gestures towards the material conditions of identity politics. In pre-Stonewall America, O'Hara would have had a different relationship to public spaces than any of his heterosexual counterparts.²⁰⁶ It is for this reason that the constellation becomes important, allowing for the mobilisation of a figure beyond the immediate physical setting, to create a more nuanced and textured form of movement. As De Certeau writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the city landscape is converted into a space when activated through movement. O'Hara's spatiality expands to include bars, conversations with people and the production of art, in addition to the physical landscape. It is this mobility that becomes central to O'Hara's work and, in a sense, allows the non-normative homosexual body to acknowledge the problem of moving through the city without shame.

In 'Homosexuality' O'Hara writes '[s]o we are taking off our masks, are we, and keeping/ our mouths shut' (ll.1-2) implying identity must not be

²⁰⁶ Stonewall refers to riots in 1968, in which the gay community resisted police crack downs on gay areas of New York city.

articulated even if it can be seen.²⁰⁷ The poem then moves to ‘and then we are off!/ without reproach and without hope that our delicate feet/ will touch the earth again’ (ll.7-9). Here, the image of mobility is ambiguous, implying an exhilarating freedom for those moving, but one that is disassociated or removed from reality, the ground beneath their feet. In ‘At The Old Place’ homosexuality is similarly married to mobility, but in this case, the movement seems like a celebration of freedom.²⁰⁸ Joe and the lyric speaker ‘skip like swallows’ (l.5) through the streets, while ‘Howard malingers. (Come on, Howard.) Ashes/ malingers. (Come on, J.A) Dick/ malingers./ (Come on, Dick.) Alvin darts ahead. (Wait up,/ Alvin.)’ (ll.6-9). Even the description of the men’s dances, once they arrive at the bar, demonstrates frenetic movement that constitutes shared experience. The poem ends, however, with three men who had defected earlier that evening entering The Old Place guiltily. O’Hara concludes the poem with “‘I knew they were gay/ the minute I laid eyes on them!’ screams John./ How ashamed they are of us! we hope.’ (ll.18-20). While the openly homosexual men find the whole scenario a scream, the others feel guilt over their gay participation. The fact that O’Hara ends on a note of shame, juxtaposed with hope, indicates the duality of openness and locatedness.

‘The poem whose words become your mouth’: Political Possibility for Tone

As a critical term, ‘tone’ occupies a conflicting position in which either its origins or reception, or both, are fundamental to the way in which it is understood. In her book *Ugly Feelings* (2007), Sianne Ngai, a literary theorist, articulates this problem when she defines tone in order to frame her analysis of Herman Melville’s *The Confidence Man*. She writes that tone can be understood as:

[r]educible neither to the emotional response a text solicits from its reader nor to representations of feelings within the world of its story,

²⁰⁷ Frank O’Hara, ‘Homosexuality’ in *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995), p.181. All subsequent references are to this edition.

²⁰⁸ Frank O’Hara, ‘At The Old Place’ in *The Collected Poems of Frank O’Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995), p.223. All subsequent references are to this edition.

and the slippery zone between fake and real feelings, or free-floating and subjectively anchored feelings.²⁰⁹

Ngai does not attempt to navigate the problematic slippages between the fake and the real, the free and subjective, but chooses to understand tone instead as: 'the formal aspect that enables these affective values to become significant with regard to how each critic understands the work as a totality within an equally holistic matrix of social relations.'²¹⁰ The social relations and literary constellation made evident in 'Personism: A Manifesto' create a context in which O'Hara's tone can be read as conversational, light, and flippant: which I am mapping onto a contemporary feminist poetics.

'Personism: A Manifesto' makes explicit the centrality of tone in the production of poetry. In claiming that the telephone could replace the act of writing on paper, O'Hara emphasises the way in which a poem could be 'heard'. The phone is unique as a form of communication because all understanding is derived from the voice itself. Thus, tone becomes crucial in order for communication to be successful. While the content of a telephone conversation is central, tone dictates the way in which it is understood. Furthermore, the identification of the way in which shifts in tone work in conjunction with the words being said, allows for intimacy to build. Tonal recognition creates a connection between the speaker and listener, or the writer and the reader. Through invoking the telephone as the new medium for the poem, O'Hara makes evident the importance of understanding tone throughout his writing. The poem becomes a disembodied voice, placed between two people, requiring the reader to develop their ability to identify tone, in addition to understanding content.

In order to explore this further, it is necessary to consider the relationship between affect and affectation. Flippancy could be considered a style, or mode of deployment, for which on the written page, tone is absolutely vital. However, before addressing the question of style, I will differentiate between affect and affectation in order to consider how a flippant tone may sit between the two. In contrast with 'affect,' 'affectation' is defined as the 'striving after, aiming at; a

²⁰⁹ Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007) p.41.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.43.

desire to obtain' whilst also indicating 'artificial or non-natural assumption of behaviour.'²¹¹ Affectation resonates more strongly with contrivance than affect. Rather than relying on reciprocity and organic development, affectation is the deliberate cultivation of an outward attitude or appearance. As such, it operates as high artifice as opposed to public feeling, which can act and be acted upon. I contend that flippancy sits somewhere between affect and affectation. If 'flippancy' is being read as a particular political strategy, in my case, in relation to feminism, it is highly performative while being intrinsically tied to affective relationships.

The flippant tone that can be read in O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto,' which demonstrates a light and irreverent mobility, resonates with Susan Sontag's writing on 'camp.' In her 'Notes on Camp,' Sontag defines it as 'a vision of the world in terms of style – but a particular kind of style. It is the love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things being-what-they-are-not.'²¹² The tone of O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto,' undercuts the seriousness of the manifesto as a genre and poetic lineage as a whole. As a result, his work is a critique of earnest statements about poetry, shifting the expected polemical writing of the manifesto back on to poems themselves, which he alleges contain 'everything.' The manifesto, despite its title, is not polemic, nor does it offer a mode of prescriptive poetics that could be followed. It is what-it-is-not, demonstrating a particular kind of style in which the serious becomes unserious and poetry itself is perpetually undercut. It is useful, then, to think of a flippant tonality as a facet of camp style.²¹³

How does this affectation speak back to the feeling temporalities I discuss in the introduction, and how might it be a form of tonal posturing? Posturing, itself, foregrounds artifice, which seems to be at odds with the sticky affects that Ahmed suggests in her writing. Instead of becoming infectious or contributing to the affect of a group, affectation is a mode of engagement with forms of feeling that accumulate and develop around communities. O'Hara's affectation is a form

²¹¹ "Affectation" Def.1. *Complete Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 1991. 25 Jan 2014.

²¹² Susan Sontag, 'Notes on Camp' in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1966) p.279.

²¹³ For a more thorough exploration of the relationship between camp and O'Hara's movie poems, see Mark Silverberg, *The New York School Poets and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Between Radical Art and Radical Chic* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010). The text itself has been excluded from the body of my discussion on account of Silverberg investigating 'humour' and New York school 'indifference,' both of which differ significantly to 'flippancy'.

of trying it on, affecting a flippancy that works not only as a performance, but as a means of trying out his reader and subject matter. This is not to say that O'Hara's work is devoid of feeling. Instead, the 'off-ness' of his manifesto and its tone becomes a means of speaking to poetic communities, wider America and homosexual identifications. Working as an avant-garde poet, and more specifically, within a New York milieu, the affectation enables a certain distance that still takes into account groupings and their affects. Allowing responsiveness in conjunction with distance, the camp style of his flippant tone affords O'Hara a mobility that ensures that he is not stuck in place by affect, even if he appreciates the adhesive nature of public feeling.

'Where to love at all's to be a politician': The Poem as Love and Sex
'Personism: A Manifesto' seems to be full of personal feeling, with O'Hara expressing love and friendship in relation to the much more public writing and dissemination of poetry. Sex and love not only work as anecdotes within the manifesto, allowing a reader to orientate O'Hara within his constellation, but also offer a lens through which to view his work. Having invoked a friend, and discussed an absent loved one, O'Hara also draws on a number of sexual or romantic analogies to express his position on the production of poetry. Ranging from the slipping on of tight trousers to uncaring lovers, the poem is ultimately compared to 'Lucky Pierre' if it has successfully occupied its rightful position between two people. As such, love and friendship are not simply ways in which O'Hara expresses personal ties within his immediate surroundings, but a way of engaging with and reading poetry itself. Initially, I will address the way in which love is invoked in the manifesto specifically in relation to the poet, before considering the feeling as analogous to writing.

While a number of poems allude to or directly address love, particularly in what LeSueur has categorised as O'Hara's 'Vincent Warren period', the emotion has a problematic position in the manifesto.²¹⁴ It seems inappropriate for the genre, especially considering its political and poetic associations, to place a lover and the emotions they generate at the centre of the piece. Personism, as a concept, is entirely dependent upon the conveyance of feeling, and the elation or despair associated with it. The fact that O'Hara rails against an abstraction that

²¹⁴ See Joe LeSueur *Digressions on Some poems by Frank O'Hara* for further details.

calls for a 'total removal of self,' but claims that his own work has nothing to do with personality or intimacy, deliberately contradicts the way in which feeling works throughout 'Personism: A Manifesto'.

Significantly, Personism as a movement is conceived of in the company of a friend, while experiencing longing for an absent love object. O'Hara writes that: 'it [Personism] was founded by me after lunch with LeRoi Jones on August 27, 1959, a day in which I was in love with someone (not Roi, by the way, a blond).'²¹⁵ Strikingly, and before the telephone is even mentioned, O'Hara here makes evident that Personism has arisen through a dialogic situation. Having been in a social environment with Jones, whose abbreviation to 'Roi' is demonstrative of a friendly intimacy, O'Hara was compelled to write his manifesto. However, the piece also gestures to the absent lover, who was clearly central in the formation of 'Personism' itself, despite the lack of presence. As all of this indicates, the emergence of 'Personism: A Manifesto' is intrinsically linked to socialising and friendship, in addition to feelings for a lover.

When considering poetic technique and apparatus, O'Hara turns to images of sexual desire and lust. He writes: 'as for measure and technical apparatus, that's just common sense: if you're going to buy a pair of pants you want them to be tight enough so everyone will want to go to bed with you.'²¹⁶ Technique is purely a means to ensure that a reader will want to get at the content. The use of sexual analogy here undercuts poetry as high-art divorced from human experience and locates it instead, not in seduction, but as a light-hearted expression of desire. Once O'Hara has addressed the centrality of the telephone, he states that Personism 'puts the poem squarely between the poet and the person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is correspondingly gratified.'²¹⁷ The poem is not just a site for conversation or vocal engagement with another subject, it becomes a space in which sexual desire can be thoroughly realised. While the poet brings their aims to fruition and the reader is suitably sated, it is the work at the centre that experiences the greatest form of pleasure. Although it requires a poet and a reader both to participate in the production of pleasure, it is vital to place the poetic work at the centre for the most gratified sexual

²¹⁵ *Frank O'Hara, 'Personism: A Manifesto' p.499.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid., p.498.*

²¹⁷ *Ibid., p.499.* 'Lucky Pierre' relates to a sexual practice, commonly between three men, in which the middle figure is penetrated by one man while simultaneously penetrating another.

encounter. The poem, and the process of producing a poem, is inherently erotic as well as concerned with love and feeling.

The other references to love in the manifesto are used to aid the reader in extrapolating a poetics from O'Hara's writing. Not purely located in a physical encounter or reality, the manifesto draws on a number of analogies to consider the types of relationships that develop around poetry. When discussing the reception of poetry, O'Hara appeals to the reader:

suppose you're in love and someone's mistreating (mal aimé) you, you don't say, "Hey, you can't hurt me this way, I care!" you just let all the different bodies fall where they may ... But that's not why you fell in love in the first place, just to hang onto life, so you have to take your chances and try to avoid being logical.²¹⁸

The process of writing is based on beauty and feeling, not the legislation of reception and distribution. The poem itself is the gesture of loving someone without hope of reciprocation or being treated well and, in accordance, the poet must just 'go on your nerve' rather than hoping for logical responses to life stimulus. Later in the manifesto, O'Hara states that the poem itself must evoke 'the overtones of love without destroying love's life-giving vulgarity, and sustaining the poet's feelings towards the poem while preventing love from distracting him into feeling about the person'.²¹⁹ The poem occupies a difficult position in which it must be reflective of real life and evoke a sense of love, but without diminishing the affirmative vulgarity that comes with the lived experience. Furthermore, the poet needs to maintain his feelings towards the poem without being derailed into distraction through imagining a loved object. It would appear from 'Personism: A Manifesto,' then, that a poem must draw on experiences of love, without that love detracting from the feeling imbued into the poem.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.498.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.499.

Love as a trope can be identified in a number of O'Hara's poems, particularly in his 'Ode: Salut to The French Negro Poets.'²²⁰ In the fourth couplet, O'Hara's poem questions the political resonance of the act of loving: 'here where to love at all's to be a politician, as to love a poem/ is pretentious, this may sound tendentious but it's lyrical' (ll.7-8) O'Hara uses 'love' in order to express the ways in which inequality has made human relation so fraught that the act of choosing a partner has itself become a political act. He also writes that to love a poem is pretentious and, in doing so, parallels the two. To be a politician is also to be a poet, welcome pretention, and be lyrical. Despite the politicisation of love, it is also the solution to inequality: 'for if there is fortuity it's in the love we bear each other's differences/ in race which is poetic ground on which we rear our smiles' (ll.15-16).

The poem ends with the statement 'the only truth is face to face, the poem whose words become your mouth/ and dying in black and white we fight for what we love, not are' (ll.27-28). Black and white evidently relates to race, given the title of the poem, but could also be applied to the use of the page: white paper and black ink. The words that become your mouth convey both the message and the making of the message; the words become both content and form. While 'Ode' is, I would argue, one of O'Hara's few poems that engages explicitly with the political, the work is preoccupied with lyricism, love, the poem and poet as instrumental to an expression of thought and instigator of change. Throughout, affect and feeling are central to the way in which politics can be practiced. The poem takes an international problem, gesturing away from America to France, and places it within a more personal realm. In this sense, the lone poet advocating a certain form of bravery in love seems less dictatorial and more personally relevant to a reader. Narrowing the scope of a political problem to the forum of a lyric, love-orientated poem makes effective change seem possible. Through communicating feeling throughout the poem, moving from the glorious calling-upon Whitman in the opening lines to a denial of essentialism ('we are'), O'Hara makes evident that the political fight will ultimately centre around what we 'love.'

²²⁰ Frank O'Hara, 'Ode: Salut to The French Negro Poets' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995), p.305. All subsequent references are to this edition.

'The darkness I inhabit in the midst of sterile millions': The Person and Collective

Considering the emphasis placed on relationships between people, whether in love, on the telephone, lusting after someone or being chased down the street, 'Personism: A Manifesto' raises many questions about social experience being integral to the creation of poetry. Furthermore, the manifesto as a genre gestures towards the possibility of a collective or group action, which is never fully addressed within the piece itself. Other than O'Hara asserting that the movement will surely have many adherents, but does not yet, Personism appears completely unconcerned with convincing readers to become followers. As such, the document embodies a tension between the need for a single speaking 'I', in this case O'Hara, with the existence of personal relationships, sharing a literary context with a range of other personalities and being positioned within a political category. The manifesto works through the problematic of how a lyric 'I' can retain a sense of independence when participating in collectives, whether political or poetic.

'Personism' itself is singular; it places a sole person at the centre of the poetics that follow. O'Hara never uses a collective pronoun, refusing to conflate himself with an audience through a uniting 'we'. He consistently makes distinctions between 'I' and 'you'. The fact that the title of the manifesto places emphasis on the singular, describing the manifestations of a *person's* poetics, highlights the need for autonomy from collectives and communities. In her book *Women, The New York School and Other True Abstractions* (2007), Maggie Nelson, a poet and academic, writes:

O'Hara's insouciant, "not caring attitude" can also be read as a defensive stance – a kind of pre-emptive I-wouldn't-want-to-be-part-of-your-club-anyhow line, when you already know you aren't going to get in.²²¹

If, as Maggie Nelson asserts, O'Hara's lightness relates to his difficult participation with groups, then there is a politics in his flippancy. Instead of just

²²¹ Maggie Nelson, *Women, The New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007) p.68.

demonstrating a self-defence strategy, the interplay between community and the 'I' acknowledges that affiliation is not without complication. Nelson's analysis of O'Hara's tone also explain why he places emphasis on the 'Person' rather than a collective. In 'Personism: A Manifesto,' O'Hara is able to move amongst a range of influences and references, referring to intimate relationships as well as distant, long-dead poets. As a result, the poet is not caught in specific and fixed groupings, but mobilised as a 'person' who is able to choose his own constellation.

In fact, Epstein raises the issue of the avant-garde in *Beautiful Enemies*. He writes that 'these groups [avant-garde artists] are often marked by fractious, lively disagreement and conflict rather than contented harmony, and by sexism, homophobia and power politics that are not so different from the dynamics of the mainstream they oppose.'²²² It is understandable, then, that while he invokes a number of friendships and specific artists, O'Hara might be reluctant to affiliate strongly with any avant-garde group. This also explains, to a certain extent, why a group of disparate homosexuals or ivy-league graduates would be disinclined to accept their collectivisation as the New York School. As Ashbery writes, 'the term "New York School" applied to poetry isn't helpful, in characterizing a number of widely dissimilar poets.'²²³ O'Hara's care/care not attitude, his flippancy, mitigate the potential damages of exclusion while ensuring that he never remains loyal to a certain ideology or group long enough to lose his critical faculty. As suggested by Ahmed, discomfort is necessary when occupying categories or being part of groups. Even when a subject identifies with a counterculture, he or she should still practice some restraint in regards to their affiliation. Instead of becoming the 'sacrificial bride' to the identity politics against which Riley warns, Ahmed's restlessness is politically and poetically productive. She writes 'queer feelings may embrace a sense of discomfort, a lack of ease with available scripts for living and loving, along with an excitement in the face of uncertainty of where discomfort may take us.'²²⁴ Extrapolating this in relation to O'Hara, I suggest that, through demonstrating a lack of faithfulness, O'Hara is able to remain on the periphery of both society and subcultures, so that his poetics are not limited to espousing a solitary opinion.

²²² Andrew Epstein, *Beautiful Enemies*, p.33.

²²³ John Ashbery, 'Introduction,' p.x.

²²⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, p.155.

This sense of independence plays out problematically, however, throughout 'Personism: A Manifesto,' which is highly dependent on relationality. Allegedly, even throughout the process of its creation, O'Hara was physically in the company of one man while thinking about another. Furthermore, O'Hara would not be able to express technical elements of poetry, nor its distribution and reception, were he not able to refer to an 'other'. Were he not being chased, O'Hara could not establish poetry as an instinctive practice, while if he were incapable of feeling love for another, he would not be able to articulate response to criticism. Similarly, if he felt no desire or sexual attraction, the poet would not know that the poem needs to be tight as an alluring pair of trousers. Desire, love and poetry itself are considered interchangeably, and all entirely linked to engagement with other human beings. This creates a tension between O'Hara's emphasis on the single 'person' and his need to maintain relationships.

Broadly speaking, poems are heavily dependent on social relations and contingent on the way in which a poet, and lyric speaker, engages with communities and others. Connection is unavoidable, and so the poetic or political subject needs to find ways to draw on relationships in order to propose a poetics that expresses discomfort with co-option and participation. 'Personism: A Manifesto' explains that collectivity is a necessity, even if individual subjects are reluctant participants in the formation of groups. As opposed to being predicated on identity politics, the sameness emerges through the investments of the different members of groups and collectives. The areas, subjects and issues to which they are orientated serve to create a shared direction that works as an adhesive for group action. However, it is still necessary, as O'Hara demonstrates, to retain a level of distant criticality in order to resist being fully assimilated into groups that, as Epstein claims, may reproduce wider power structures. The foregrounding of aloneness and separate thinking places some ethical onus on the individual to trouble categories and communities.

Maintaining independence in the face of conformity is also evident within O'Hara's poems. In 'To the Poem,' O'Hara addresses his poem to the form itself, as if the poem constitutes a genre of resistance than can act as an un-American

gesture.²²⁵ The poem reads as guidance for resistance, or as a call for a non-conformist act, which is achieved itself in the poem. 'Let us do something grand/ just for once' (ll.1-2) collapses the poem with poet, making the form and writer complicit in their new attempts at political statement. However, throughout the poem, the repeated use of 'thing' serves to undercut this sense of politicisation, with 'something,' 'some fine thing,' 'merely a thing,' 'a real right thing,' giving the piece a vagueness and elusiveness. The poem indicates that the poet and his form will collude to do something 'small and important and/unAmerican' (ll.3-4). This dissent is not only an indication of O'Hara's distrust of the inherently 'American,' but also indicates a will to resist homogenisation through small acts that cannot be co-opted. The fact that 'the fine thing,' the 'something' that will be done, is likened to a 'human hand' (l.5), locates the action within a living individual. That O'Hara's poem does not specify the action reads as a refusal to speak of the political, because the poem itself suggests a form of politics.

Conclusion

O'Hara makes evident the ways in which tone can be used to undermine genre and political commitment, while still expressing connection to and investment in poetry and community. 'Personism: A Manifesto' draws on movement in order to think through the position of the individual within communities, in addition to the centrality of love and feeling to the production of poetry and the forming of affective ties. As such, what appears as highly personal or subjective verse can be considered both avant-garde and a form of political engagement. Despite appearing to prioritise the experience of a 'person,' O'Hara formulates his speaker through relationality, relying on second person and wider communities to legitimise the first person.

My understanding of the constellation is evident throughout the manifesto, in which O'Hara draws on multiple influences and friends, a literary lineage, a love object and a range of temporalities. His work demonstrates the way in which a constellation, through shaping the central figure of a lyric speaker, does not fix this speaker in place. In fact, the different points of reference create a series of relations that facilitate the movement of the lyric

²²⁵ Frank O'Hara, 'To The Poem' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* ed. Donald Allen (California: University of California Press, 1995) p. 175. All subsequent references are to this edition.

speaker. The mobility of the 'I' ensures that O'Hara is able to express community affiliation and personal relationships, while troubling the ease with which one might sink into such categories or associations. Foregrounding the individual through the use of a lyric 'I', the work assumes nothing for the collective, refusing any attempts to become a representative voice for a homosexual or New York School movement. The lightness of foot and unserious attitude toward commitment creates a conversational and highly mobile flippancy with which to approach politics and poetics.

As my analysis of 'Homosexuality' and 'At the Old Place' demonstrates, the movement within O'Hara is twofold. As he traverses the urban spaces, there is an awareness of the way in which such movement operates when twinned with complex identity politics. The two poems indicate the walk of a man who moves differently to his heterosexual counterparts. This problematic mobility speaks back to the way in which contemporary feminism continues to engage with the march format and positions it within a city landscape. The movement of women differs fundamentally to the freer movement of men. The 'Slut Walk,' outlined in my introduction, mobilises a pejorative term used against women, while 'Reclaim the Night' is moving through the streets in a protest against the lack of safety past dark. O'Hara's necessary, but nonetheless difficult mobility relates to this form of feminism, in which movement is tied to identity politics and the way in which they play out in an urban space.

In a more specific sense, O'Hara's work is of use to my own flippant feminist poetics on account of his irreverence towards lineage, poetic precedents and identity categories. O'Hara's lyric speaker is positioned as a troublemaker who, while not stating explicitly that he aims to agitate and aggravate, enacts minor irritations through a lack of gravitas. Similarly in my work I maintain the individual through the use of a lyric 'I' who participates and draws on similar connectivities to O'Hara, while still retaining some autonomy. Both O'Hara's work and my own are aware of the ways in which poems are constructed through reference points and how, in spite of any seeming fixity, the individual is still able to move. It is through this movement, passing through and between the constellated poets and politics, that flippancy is able to emerge, troubling blind commitment and rescuing a lyric 'I' from becoming a sacrificial bride.

'Who are these idiots writing these poems?': Eileen Myles'

Pornographic Tone and Mutable Categories

Eileen Myles is a second generation New York School poet, a self-identified lesbian and feminist, and the writer of a number of memoirs, anthologies, art reviews and literary criticism. Unlike Loy and O'Hara, Myles has never produced a 'manifesto,' although she has written a number of statements of poetics. 'The Lesbian Poet,' included within *School of Fish* (1997) addresses the production of poetry in conjunction with emergent identity politics, while *The Importance of Being Iceland* (2009) contains 'How to write an avant-garde poem' and 'Recipe for a Lesbian Brain.' Most recently, Myles wrote 'Painted Clear, Painted Black' (2013) printed in *Volta* as a rejoinder to Marjorie Perloff's criticism of transparency in avant-garde poetry.²²⁶ Myles continual writing on poetry as a genre, in conjunction with the release of three memoirs to date, demonstrates the way in which she, as a poet, is in a constant state of becoming.

In this chapter, I will be using Myles' promotional video for *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)* as a lens through which to extrapolate a lesbian, feminist poetics. I will then map these poetics back onto her poetic statement 'The Lesbian Poet,' before exploring their manifestation within Myles' poems themselves. Working with the promotional video, I employ a critical method similar to the one that I employed when engaging with both Loy and O'Hara; specifically, using documents that the poets, themselves, may not consider to be 'serious' as a lens for reading their work. There are a number of reasons why the promotional video is helpful as a critical lens. Firstly, the promotional video makes evident the ways in which Myles is a poet of this era, drawing on contemporary technologies to promote her writing and, through this, presenting an embodied self to a wider poetic audience. The nature of Myles' embodiment, and the willingness with which she foregrounds physicality, speaks to the way in which I have been physically attending feminist activist events in order to use lived experience as the basis for my collection of poems. Secondly, the promotional

²²⁶ 'How I Wrote Certain of My Poems' is included in *Not Me* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) and explains how the series of poems were written. 'How to Write An Avant-Garde Poem' published in 1999 is featured in *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009) while 'The Lesbian Poet' is in *School of Fish* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1997) and *Revolution: A Reader* eds. Lisa Robertson and Matthew Stadler (Paaguay Press & Publication Studio, 2012). More recently, 'Painted Clear, Painted Black' was published in *Evening Will Come* (Issue 29, May 2013) <<http://www.thevolta.org/ewc29-emyles-p1.html>>.

video raises questions surrounding Myles' use of tone as well as the sexually explicit nature of her work. Equating the variations in her voice with pornography, Myles conflates her modes of presentation and creative work with the poetics of porn. Having examined tone in my chapter on O'Hara, here I will look at how tone and sexually explicit language work to create a feminist lyric figure in Myles' work. This relationship to pornography is further complicated by its problematic position within feminism, with sex positives claiming the genre as empowering while radicals attempt to ban it entirely, and so is interesting to consider in light of a troubling feminism. Thirdly, the promotional video engages with identity politics in relation to categories and communities. Similar to Loy, Myles experiments with the way in which woman can be a mutable category, using her lesbianism to add nuance to gender relations and inequality. Her participation within communities, in addition to her invocation of category identities, speak to the ways in which both O'Hara and Loy attempt to remain faithless and unfixed, and I shall explore this further through Myles work. Finally, Eileen Myles dubs herself a failure in the promotional video, linking her queer feminism to a rejection of American success narratives. In her book *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011), Judith Halberstam states that 'it [failure] turns on the impossible, the improbable, the unlikely, and the unremarkable. It quietly loses, and in losing it imagines other goals for life, for love, for art, and for being.'²²⁷ Similarly, Ahmed writes that failure allows for 'going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer ... The queer subject within straight culture hence deviates and is made socially present as deviant.'²²⁸ This deviance, both in relation to pornography and failure, will be considered in dialogue with the embodied 'I' Myles presents through the promotional video. Ultimately, the poetics of the video create a critical lens that I will apply to Myles' piece 'The Lesbian Poet' to strengthen the analysis of identity politics and mobility within her poems.

'The page for me has terrific dimensions': Developing a Critical Lens

In order to promote *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)*, Or Books produced a promotional video including the poet, Myles, herself. The video can be found on the Or Books website, but is also available on Youtube so that anyone searching Myles can

²²⁷ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (California: Duke University Press, 2011) p.88.

²²⁸ Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (London: Duke University Press, 2006) p.21.

access the piece. While the video has not been produced by Myles herself - the director and producer is Olenka Denysenko - I am aware that the piece is nonetheless structured to reveal the poet as a literary character consistent with that presented in her novel. As stated in my introduction, I have chosen to use poetic statements or manifestos to analyse the poetry of Loy, O'Hara and Myles. As I have further stressed, the status of Loy's manifesto was diminished through its entirely private distribution, while O'Hara's piece was undermined as a definitive document by its exclusion from *New American Poetry*. Fittingly, my critical method in this chapter entails using a similarly illegitimate statement of poetics and politics to consider Myles' poetry. In doing so, I drawing together my different approaches to reading both Loy and O'Hara's work: initially, I move through the promotional video, drawing on a linear analysis to demonstrate the way in which the piece itself is mobile; then, I consider themes most pertinent to my own work, and extrapolate a few central ideas for further discussion in relation to Myles' poetry.

The video itself offers many possible readings for Myles' work, with the content and editing reflecting a number of the tropes both within her poetry and 'The Lesbian Poet.' The piece, which is less than five minutes long, is a combination of reviews and praise; the poet reading extracts from her new books; an on-going conversation with an unseen and unheard figure off camera; and the reading of a poem on Robert Lowell. The promotional video is highly mobile, allowing the poet herself to jump between a number of influences and topics, while moving amongst different genres, including novel and poems. Furthermore, Myles physical presence in the video ties her body to the understanding of the poetic work and novel. Her embodied reading and self-naming within the video make evident the ways in which 'Eileen Myles' is both a literary construction and a physical presence. Not only does this have implications for the way in which the gendered, lesbian body is configured within her poetry, but for my own embodied poetic practice.

In order to further my analysis of Myles' approach to feminism and poetry, I draw on 'The Lesbian Poet.' While this work is prose-based, it demonstrates the poetics of the promotional video. Concerned with the way in which identity can manifest itself within poetry writing and yet still be mutable, Myles considers how her feminist lesbianism has intersected with creative work. The

piece foregrounds the body and the body's interaction with wider landscapes and communities, while allowing for some flexibility in terms of gender manifestations. Consequently, 'The Lesbian Poet' undercuts the certainty with which Myles presents her body in the promotional video and demonstrates the way in which her work as a whole toys with category identification and community affiliation. Additionally, and much like O'Hara, it focuses on the poem as both communication and object of desire. All of which becomes important in my understanding of Myles as both feminist and poet.

'This is a way I could get what I want': The Poetics of the Promotional Video

The promotional video opens with a close-up of Myles' *Inferno (a poet's novel)*, with the title as the obvious focal point amongst the pattern of flames across the cover. The video cuts to Myles, in black and white, standing to the right of the shot against the backdrop of an industrial grey wall with large glasses on. She claims 'a lot of people are going to like this book' over the sound of guitar chords being played with distortion.²²⁹ The screen goes black and 'Eileen Myles' comes up in white: the font reminiscent of graffiti or stencil work that has not been allowed proper time to dry. The 'E', 'L' and 'S' are all still dripping, while the 'Y' has a line above it that seems to gesture toward paint having been clumsily applied outside the lines of the original design. There are flecks of white around her second name, which make the work seem casual, immediate and quickly executed. The camera returns to Myles, who is now face on, claiming 'the tone is all over the map,' as the video cuts back to *Inferno (a poet's novel)* in the same font as before, and then quickly back to the poet who states 'it's almost porn.'²³⁰ After the same font has been used to detail where the book can be purchased and to convey a favourable review, Myles asks 'how can it get any better than that?' and the music begins in earnest, with a drum beat added to the guitar, as the screen lights up white with a copy of *Inferno (a poet's novel)* gyrating and shaking.²³¹ Within 24 seconds of a 3:57 minute video, the poetics of the promotional video and Myles' performance of her self are evident.

²²⁹ Eileen Myles, 'Inferno (a poet's novel)' on *OR Books*
<<http://www.orbooks.com/catalog/inferno-a-poets-novel/>> [2011].

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*

The aesthetic of the video is almost as 'all over the map' as Myles' claims for her tone, an assertion I shall also examine in her poetry. Moving through black and white to colour footage, from interview to reading, captions against a black screen and *Inferno* itself against a white screen, the video feels like it is unable to remain still. The longest shots are of Myles reading and talking and, as if to compensate for the lack of movement in cutting, the poet herself is so animated that the space is imbued with a sense of mobility. The movement between white text on black background reverses the aesthetic of the page and converts the writing into bold and targeted pronouncements. The statement of white on black, coupled with the clumsy graffiti aesthetic of the font, seems to declare that, while the work and poet herself may not be polished, there's an instantaneous urban harshness to them that must be heeded. The video is also interrupted by black screen with white lines running through it, as if the footage has been recorded on old tape that occasionally becomes too faulty to run. There is a retro feel to the digital, making use of a scratchy aesthetic to interrupt the otherwise smooth and clean series of cuttings between multiple shots and titles. Once more, in line with the graffiti and stencilled text, the roughness conveys a readiness and immediacy; the tape has been thrown together with material flaws and technological throwbacks.

Throughout, the rock music, scratched tape aesthetic and black screens work to punctuate the video. They create spaces in which the last sentence can ring emphatically, while offering a break to the audience before the video moves into a new element of Myles' character. Alternating between her appearing to answer interview questions (interestingly without any evident interviewer) and her reading from the novel, the video covers a range of the poet's modes of performativity. In the interview, Myles is performing herself in what seems like an earnest fashion, while during the readings she is the poet performing 'Eileen Myles' performing her new novel. The multiple angles and different colour lenses used on the poet serve to foreground this performativity and artifice. The constant shifting ensures that an audience never believes themselves to participate in what could constitute an intimate dialogue or reading. Instead, a deliberate and considered conveyance of self is occurring: one that has been directed specifically to expose an audience to a woman who claims she does not

know who she is: 'like everybody else I really don't know who I am.'²³² The black screens, music and pauses become a large part of the performance, in the same way that, as I shall argue, the space of the page, syntax and use of the line are integral to an understanding of her poetry.

The video's final shot is of the notes from which Myles has been reading. The audience are exposed to a more intimate version of her book extract, with annotated pages of A4 printed typing. The microphone peers over the stand: an important symbol of the necessity of tone and voice throughout the video. Myles' glasses sit on the lectern, facing the camera, giving the absent poet a position of scrutiny in which she is able to look out to her audience rather than being beheld. It is an uncanny moment of connectivity, in which Myles looks directly into her audience through a series of props that seem to reflect her performance best. We are offered her eyes, or at least a symbol of her vision, the technology that allows for her voice to be recorded and heard and, finally, the page of her own book with handwriting all over it. These three props illustrate the way in which we have access to a deliberately mediated Myles. Instead of attempting to diminish the distance between poet and audience, the film suggests strategies of voice and writing that actually complicate the ways in which Myles as a physical presence can be collapsed with the lyric 'I' of her poetry, even her own character 'Eileen Myles'. After this final shot, the video returns to where the book can be bought, providing a website for OR Books. The video and Myles, herself, are framed by the information necessary for purchasing the book, lest the audience forget why they are watching the footage.

'I was the mouth': The Poetics of Pornography

In the promotional video, Myles states that people are going to love her book because 'the tone is all over the map ... it's almost porn.'²³³ While I will address pornography and its place within Myles' work, I will initially focus on her presentation of 'tone.' The sentence links voice to manifestations of desire – an audience can become aroused through the possibilities of a mobile poetic tone. How can this be enacted, and in what ways can a single tone be all over the map? Myles' embodied presence in the promotional video ensures that the voice

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

remains the same throughout: a voice that I would argue, is always consistent within her memoirs and autobiographies. Even if the register or tone shifts, the reader is aware that the poetry emerges from a consolidated lyric speaker. Similar to my reading of O'Hara, Myles locates the possibilities for difference and nuance within her own voice and tone.

In the video, the problematic nature of 'tone,' as outlined in my O'Hara chapter, is enacted. Does it come from the woman herself speaking, the manifestations of her voice on the page, the page itself, or the reader's interpretation of Myles' performance of the writing? Without offering a definition for how she understands and makes use of tone, Myles describes the way it fluctuates all over the map. Maps outline specific places and allow for clear orientations of a landscape, while space is animated by the walking of this specific area (see the discussion of Michel De Certeau in 'Introduction' p.23). By claiming that her tone is all over the map, I contend that Myles is invoking locatedness and the fixity of a designated place to demonstrate how her poetic voice moves through a number of separate spatialities. In this poetics, the speaker does not stick to the topic and, instead, flirts with a number of ideas, themes and subject matter.

Despite the explicit nature of her poems, Myles' work could not be considered to constitute porn and, so, her comment implies that a *poetics* of pornography can be traced through her writing. In *Inferno (a poet's novel)* she describes the work of Frank O'Hara as follows:

the poems were queenie – slippery and fast like the city outside the store. You could hear it right on the page. I thought about Frank Harris who wrote *My Secret Life*, which was pornography. This was a little bit too. You had to close the book if you wanted it to stop.²³⁴

Porn, in this context, proposes a sense of location and dislocation in regards to voice and embodiment. Myles discusses her relationship with two texts, both of which she considers to be pornographic, but the authors bodies are excluded. Similarly, her reading process is located in a bookstore, while the pornographic

²³⁴ Eileen Myles, *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)* (New York: OR Books, 2010), p.40.

elements of the texts feel like the slippery city outside. As such, while Myles stands still, engrossed in the reading process, the pornographic is a slippery and mobile gesturing to an alternative set of happenings that are dislocated from her own located body.

This resonates once more with the assertion that the 'tone is all over the map.' The reader is offered a place, Myles' writing, but is offered no way in which to traverse it. The allusion to porn also associates the work with an idea of artifice and intimacy. In pornography, an audience is able to watch acts of a sexual nature being performed. However, spectators of porn are not exposed to the inner workings of the couples, or the actors' preparations, but become involved in a contrived and highly artificial means of presenting human interactions that does away with intimacy connoted by a sex act. Does this reveal the way in which Myles expects a reader to respond to her own body, and her body in encounters with others? Or does it speak, more simply, to the way in which a reader engages with texts: we are given a map but no directions on orientation, and so, are encouraged to enjoy the artifice of a poetic work?

Pornography is problematic for a feminist poet to invoke in relation to her own writing. In contemporary feminism, the pornography debate has been reinvigorated, with the publishing house Routledge committed to producing a publication that supports and interrogates the industry from a pro-porn stance.²³⁵ Meanwhile, Julia Long, a pivotal member of the London Feminist Network, recently published a book considering the re-emergence of the anti-pornography movement.²³⁶ Simultaneously, there has been a serious investment in the development and production of pro-feminist porn. Particularly in the United States and Canada, practitioners and academics are working toward creating pornography that is fundamentally feminist. *The Feminist Porn Book* was released in 2013, published by the Feminist Press and included 26 contributors ranging from porn actors to academics. *The Feminist Porn Book* introduction states that feminist porn:

²³⁵ Mark Robinson, 'Routledge to Publish First Porn Studies Journal' on *TandF* (2013) <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/press/porn-studies.pdf> [January 2014].

²³⁶ Julia Long, *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti Pornography Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

uses sexually explicit imagery to contest and complicate dominant representations of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, ability, age, body type, and other identity markers. As a result, there is no definitive stance on what 'porn' is, what it constitutes, who it subjugates and what its politics are. It explores concepts of desire, agency, power, and pleasure at their most confounding and difficult, including pleasure within and across inequality, in the face of injustice, and against the limits of gender hierarchy and both heteronormativity and homonormativity.²³⁷

Long understands pornography differently, arguing that '*porne*' originally referred to the lowest class of whore in ancient Greek society: a woman who was available to every sort of man, irrespective of wealth or status. She claims that 'the etymology of the word 'pornography' is a useful reminder that pornography as a concept does not originate in notions of individual expression or erotic fantasy, but in relation to representations produced within specific, material conditions of inequality between women and men.'²³⁸ Pornography, then, is contradictory, inspiring a number of different opinions around individuality, sexuality and feminist politics. The editors of *The Feminist Porn Book* assert that the porn they are championing 'creates alternative images and develops its own aesthetics and iconography to expand established sex norms and discourses,' while others believe the genre is so entrenched in inequality that it will always reproduce unequal relations between men and women.²³⁹ However, there are a number of tropes that remain uniform across the spectrum of pro and anti-porn sentiment, which will be useful to consider in conjunction with Myles' assertion. As Long claims 'most people in a culture where pornography is available are able to recognise it without a consensus on a definition.'²⁴⁰ It is porn's elusiveness, but also the ease with which it is identified, that is particularly applicable to Myles' work.

²³⁷ Constance Penley, Celine Parrenas et al. 'Introduction' in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas et al. (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013) p.9-10.

²³⁸ Julia Long, *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism*, p.57.

²³⁹ Constance Penley, Celine Parrenas et al. 'Introduction' in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure*, p.10.

²⁴⁰ Julia Long, *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti-Pornography Feminism*, p.58.

The fact that pornography is conflated with 'being all over the map' implies that narrative is not central to the conveyance of meaning. Certainly, the promotional video does not have a linear narrative that moves a viewer from a start point to the end, allowing for character development and plot revelation. We are exposed to images, moments and incomplete sections of interview, to ensure that, as an audience, we do not invest in a linear or chronological development. Similarly, a tone of voice being all over the map denies the simple journey from point A to point B. The reader is presented with a series of tangents that all exist in relation to one another, as opposed to one coherent narrative that can be followed with ease. This implies an erratic mobility: one that does not focus on the reason why one moves, but places emphasis entirely on the movement itself. The implication is that Myles' work, preoccupied with mobility, moves through multiple scenes and images, using herself, or an 'I,' as the coherent central point. In both the promotional video and her poetry, emphasis is placed upon the sensational, the vivid and experienced, as opposed to communicating a lucid progression to a reader.

In her essay 'A Feminist Teaching Pornography! That's like Scopes Teaching Evolution,' Constance Penley outlines some of the central concerns and ideas in pornography, assuring the reader that the genre is not gratuitous without purpose: '[p]orn isn't lewd for nothing.'²⁴¹ She goes on to elucidate: 'can we still recognize porn's historical continuity with avant-garde revolutionary art, populist struggles, or any kind of counterculture impulses?'²⁴² Myles' tone, therefore, does not relate exclusively to the ways in which we consume the sexual image. Rather, her feminist status, in conjunction with the advocacy of porn, suggest new and subversive possibilities for poetry. As Penley asserts, pornography has not always been aligned with subordination and capitalism, but at one point was associated with the avant-garde and revolution. For Myles, equating her tone to pornography reads as a resistance to the appropriate, choosing instead to reframe lust and consumption such that it can represent a feminist, lesbian poet.

²⁴¹ Constance Penley, "A Feminist Teaching Pornography? That's Like Scopes Teaching Evolution!" in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas et al. (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013) p.187.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p.187.

Myles' work is not restricted to the expression of desire, but is often preoccupied with love. Throughout her poetry, her lyric speaker is directed and moved by a number of people with whom she falls in love.²⁴³ The combination of the poetics of the pornographic in addition to wildly overblown declarations of love, serve to create a juxtaposition between the grand and the genuine, and then quick consumption. Similar to O'Hara, Myles is moved and directed by her enthusiasm for and love of specific people, events and causes. Relationships and friendships are given equal measure to the urban and political in her work, creating a poetics that move from the intimate to the social, refusing to prioritise one above the other. On account of her identity, not only as a poet, but as a woman and lesbian, Myles is concerned with the way in which gender politics dictate social etiquette. Her use of both desire and love mean her tone is never entrapped within the earnestness of politics, but dwells on the miniscule and intimate to ensure there is a lightness of movement.

In 'The Lesbian Poet,' the speaker briefly recalls a conversation with a male friend about the size of female genitalia. Her male acquaintance laughs about the size of female orifices, claiming that men leave women after they have had babies because they get no sexual pleasure from a vagina that is no longer tight. The explicitness with which Myles relays this conversation speaks to the titillation of porn, but also distances the reader from the more mainstream ideas surrounding arousal. We are not presented with the well-kept and tight woman, whom we are invited to penetrate in the way a man might. Instead, the speaker states how such considerations differ in lesbian sex, when two women encounter one another. She writes 'it's different for us. We love it. Huge with desire. An incredible dripping cave'.²⁴⁴ Here, the sex act is pleasurable on account of the hugeness. The vagina becoming a dripping cave makes wetness and the cavernous space welcoming, almost desirous of being filled. Thus, Myles sets lesbian desire against heterosexual and normative expectations, making evident that the woman's body has an autonomy that invites sexual encounter.

²⁴³ The poems and statements of poetics in *Not Me*, assert that the collection was written in response to an old lover and a new lover both being in Myles' life at the same time. In *Sorry Tree* there are a series of love poems entitled 'Dear Andrea,' while *Different Streets* is dedicated to an ex-girlfriend Leopaldine Core.

²⁴⁴ Eileen Myles, 'The Lesbian Poet' in *Revolution: A Reader* eds. Lisa Robertson and Matthew Stadler (Paeaguay Press & Publication Studio, 2012) p.434.

In her poem 'Untitled (I always put my pussy),' Myles addresses the female anatomy, and the genitals of her female lover.²⁴⁵ Using the words 'pussy' and 'cunt,' as opposed to more medical vocabularies, positions the work as colloquial and every day, demystifying the female genitalia. She writes:

I always put my lover's cunt
on the crest
of a wave
like a flag
that I can
pledge my
allegiance
to
(ll.6 - 13)

The lover's cunt is not simply an orifice to be penetrated, but receives diverse and divergent treatment that is more nuanced and relational. The lover's pussy is later personified, given human qualities and interests: 'has a sense of humour/ has a career/ has a cup of coffee' (ll.37 - 39). The speaker also states that the cunt of her lover 'knows my face/ my tongue/ my hands' (ll.43 - 45) but has 'lousy manners' (l.47). Here, sex is being invoked but not in a simplistic and one-directional sense, in which two lovers come together with the final aim of orgasming. The poem develops such that the pussy of both the speaker and the lover gain a depth of character, becoming autonomous parts of human anatomy. When stimulation is finally introduced, through the naming of hands, face and tongue, the lover and her pussy are established as full and rounded. While the whole poem has been located around two cunts, the cunts are used to orientate the reader and the speaker such that, ultimately, 'my lover & I/ can be safe' (ll.58-59).

The placement of the pussy, whether in the middle of trees or at work, also speaks to the idea of map and tonality: sex is placed firmly all over a series of locations, and the tone is one of simultaneous lust and carefulness. Invoking

²⁴⁵ Eileen Myles, 'Untitled (I always put my pussy)' in *Maxfield Parrish* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1995), p.48.

multiple positions without necessarily developing a narrative is a tactic that Myles addresses in a 2001 HOW2 interview. When asked about her sex writing she states 'I often think of sex writing – whatever that is – in relation to something like dance movies, where there is little plot going on, and then people break into a dance. Later, when I saw porn, I thought oh, that's the same structure.'²⁴⁶ The focus on the pussy within the poem works as the close-up of a camera lens, allowing a reader to see a multiplicity of colours and experiences that are then mapped onto public and social engagement. Myles also states in the same interview: 'sometimes it [writing about sex] seems like an interesting thing to do, and sometimes it doesn't even seem to be on the map'.²⁴⁷ Using the same image as in her promotional video, Myles implies that a combination of tone, focus and movement are what constitutes the pornographic and sexual within her work, but that sexual explicitness has to be located on a map, even if its co-ordinates are hard to trace or follow.

Myles' five-line poem 'Porn Poems' also addresses this question of structure and feminist potentiality for the genre.²⁴⁸ Opting once more to convey a moment through brevity and movement, the poem seems to echo what Myles considers to be a 'porn structure': a series of shapes thrown together without plot or through line. The work reads:

Her tongue & her
heart were
throbbing
in the holster
of her pussy.

The title 'Porn Poems' implies a multiplicity that is negated by the existence of one stanza. The poem does not offer multiple scenarios, nor does it draw on a plurality of stanzas and positions: it presents the image of one woman. The line breaks work to fragment the poem such that, structurally, it is reminiscent of the

²⁴⁶ Kimberly Lamm, 'Interview with Eileen Myles' on *HOW2* (21 March 2001) http://www.asu.edu/pipercwcenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_8_2002/current/workbook/lamm-interview.htm [14 March 2014].

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Eileen Myles, 'Porn Poems' in *School of Fish* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1997), p.48. All further references are to this edition.

operations of pornography. The reader is encouraged to focus first on a tongue, then a heart, then the action of throbbing, then a holster and, finally, the image of a pussy. The fact that the pussy is equated with a 'holster,' is indicative of what the vagina is able to carry: it might, in fact, be a place for a gun; a locus of power from which the woman can draw at any point. This sense of implicit violence, in addition to the power bestowed upon the genitalia, glamourises the throbbing that is sexualised by the potential for action. Furthermore, the poem seems to be suggesting that both voice – through this, words – and feeling can be located in the pussy itself. Speech and feeling become synonymous with the gun traditionally held by a holster, while the pussy is the site for communication and love. Despite the structure echoing the jumping from image to image of pornography, Myles complicates the presentation of divided and disembodied female anatomy through drawing them together as a space for communication and power.

'I made myself into a poem': Myles' Constructed Selfhood

Myles participation within a promotional video seems to imply that the poet is happy for her bodily self to be confused or conflated with the representation of herself within the poet's novel and, by extension, the lyric 'I' she uses in poetry. In this sense, she takes a greater risk than both O'Hara and Loy in terms of including the ostensibly personal and lived. She actually uses her bodily presence to recontextualise the way in which the self participates in the work, claiming that 'Eileen Myles' is simultaneously a construct and a reality. Claiming there is 'nothing falsier than Eileen Myles', but still placing herself at the centre of her work, Myles interrogates the way in which she as an embodied woman and then a written 'I' can be constructed and lived. This shifting relationship articulates the difficulties and disjunctions inherent in using the 'self' as fuel for a body of poetic work. What does Myles stand to gain from conflating her embodied self with the poetic 'I'? The promotional video offers no insight into the identity of the woman, herself, nor the identity that manifests itself within poetic work. Instead, it offers insight into the ways in which an embodied performance of the discursive construct of 'Eileen Myles' is central to Myles' work.

In 'The Lesbian Poet,' Myles writes that 'we all write our poems with our metabolism, our sexuality, for me getting a poem has always been an imagined body of a sort, getting it down in time, it moves this way and that, it is full of its own sense of possibility.'²⁴⁹ Myles work suggests that a figure, a body, can emerge from writing poems, existing at the intersections and overlaps of a multiplicity of different referents. This statement echoes the body duality evident in the promotional video. Initially, the possibilities for poetics are located in the living body, where sexuality and metabolism manifest themselves. However, the poem, itself, comes to constitute a body that moves in the same way a human could. In this sense, the poem becomes linked to Myles' body while it is an entirely independent body, separate from the poet herself.

Myles' poem, 'The Poet', enacts the same kind of genre play and emphasis on sexuality, using a lyric 'I' to explore becoming a poet, while rejecting a traditional poetic structure. A number of her works are long poems with frequent line breaks, occupying a thin space on the page. In contrast, 'The Poet' resembles prose, with the words ranging from both margins, making full use of the page and investing in the sentence as a unit of meaning. In the first line, she writes 'I made myself into a poet because it was the first thing I really loved. It was an act of will' (ll. 1-2).²⁵⁰ Throughout the poem, the role of both the genre and the poet change and fluctuate. Having assumed the title of 'poet' for the speaker, Myles' work still allows for some flexibility in the formulations of her 'I' and the poem itself. The lyric speaker states 'you see the page for me has terrific dimension. I can go into the white & I do. The lines are designs for something real' (ll. 20-22). This implies that, even if the page is covered, and the piece appears to echo prose structures, it is the fundamental considerations of space and line that maintain the genre of 'poem'. The dimension and the possibility for the expansive blankness of the page are realised within poetry.

Myles goes on to write: 'My poems were flat. A woman made me ache, I was love on the page not yet I had always felt like a brick shit house. I was the poem' (ll. 35-37). The poem is conflated with the love of a woman, while the poet becomes the poem embodied, demonstrating the way in which both writer and document have a similar capacity for constructing the 'self' around relations

²⁴⁹ Eileen Myles, 'The Lesbian Poet' p.432.

²⁵⁰ Eileen Myles, 'The Poet' in *Maxfield Parrish*: (Boston: Black Sparrow Press, 1995) p.109. All subsequent references are to this edition.

and connectivity. The poem progresses to the lyric speaker, claiming 'I have truly become my poems, but do note the sculpture of others, their obliviousness, like architects leaving crumbs' (ll.44-46). These sentences have a doubleness to them, suggesting possibilities for the way in which the poet self-constructs and the part another could play in permeating the poem. The sculptural and architectural analogies imply that, rather than a natural outpouring of feeling, the genre is a careful construction with an awareness of structure, both in regards to the presentation of self and page. Myles embraces the role of poet throughout the poem, considering the formal elements of poetry even while the lyric 'I' ranges through a number of different scenes and ideas. The work becomes a meta-poem, masquerading as prose, while asserting its genre status and the collapse of the poet into the piece itself.

When discussing her autobiographical writing and self-referential work in the promotional video, Myles makes the claim that 'the first fiction is your name ... Eileen Myles. Am I Eileen Myles?' She goes on to clarify that 'there's nothing falsier than Eileen Myles.'²⁵¹ The use of her own name undercuts the stability of selfhood, in which the poet is fixed as 'Eileen Myles,' but is still unable to explain what such a title signifies. Myles acknowledges her status as 'Eileen Myles' and, in finding such identification impossible to evade, she accepts it as a means of denoting who she is while revealing nothing of her self, similar to the way in which O'Hara invites an intimacy that he ultimately denies. Myles is tied to 'Eileen Myles,' even if it is not an identity that she has self-determined, such as her other titles of 'poet' and 'lesbian.'

In *Impersonal Passion*, Riley writes that 'the real impersonality of the personal name is ... where the promise of intimacy has faltered, and where that shard of language which is given a name functions much like a travel ticket or a luggage label.'²⁵² Rather than investing in the intimacy of divulging herself, Myles uses her own name as a ticket by which she can explore multiple areas of interest, including politics and poetics. By denying intimacy to a reader and audience through claiming even she does not know who 'Eileen Myles' is, the poet's name becomes a passport to experience the world, which is shifting,

²⁵¹ Eileen Myles, 'Inferno (a poet's novel)' on *OR Books* <<http://www.orbooks.com/catalog/inferno-a-poets-novel/>> [2011].

²⁵² Denise Riley, *Impersonal Passion: Language as Affect* (London: Duke University Press, 2005) p.115.

changing and uncertain. This self-alienation seems to suggest that, as Riley asserts, 'my name is sheer "extimacy." And it's something I pull inside me to make it mine, drawing it in from the outside.'²⁵³ Eileen Myles' is the proper noun Myles has adopted that, while it has a bearing on her interiority, is actually an expression of her existence and movement within a larger social sphere. While her own name is used throughout the poems and her autobiographies, it reveals nothing of the poet herself. Certainly, the name fixes her as a fully constituted subject – an embodied figure at the centre of a constellation of referents – but also demonstrates an inability to move away from self. The lyric 'I,' as a result, is still tied to 'Eileen Myles,' if only because the latter is positioned as the creator of the former.

Myles and Riley are interesting counterparts through which to consider the role of the lyric speaker within poetry. While both are heavily resistant to easy category identifications, they differ wildly on which categories can be evaded and which are inflicted upon the subject. Riley's book *"Am I That Name?" Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History* and her essay 'Your Name Which Isn't Yours' both consider the ways in which a subject can abandon a name in order to become entirely independent. In contrast, Myles does not attempt to shed 'Eileen Myles.' In fact, she revels in the imposed identity restriction, which allows for a certain amount of impersonality. The falsity of her name facilitates constant self-exploration, which seems counter to Riley's belief that 'self-assertion is thwarted, and its frustration is just one aspect of the unfreedom which attends naming and being named.'²⁵⁴

In 'The Lesbian Poet' Myles addresses the constructions and problematic of drawing on the self, both as proper noun and lyric 'I,' in relation to identity politics. In the talk, Myles states 'if I were to start unwriting myself, Eileen Myles, I would begin with my name. That's the title of the poem, I own her.'²⁵⁵ Eileen Myles, the proper, is still seen as representative of the whole, but the 'I' invoked allows for greater autonomy; the 'I' determines that the first way to undo the self is to deconstruct the name. Myles also conflates her name with a title, confusing the distinction that is made between a poet and their poem; in fact, the poem

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.115.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p.116.

²⁵⁵ Eileen Myles, 'The Lesbian Poet' p.436.

even acquires the same gender as Myles herself. In these parallels, Myles demonstrates the way in which the self is written, much like a poem.

‘We are the liars & thieves, we are the women’: Identity Categories and Politics

Similar to Loy, Myles also engages with categories; specifically gender, sexuality and poetry. Riley defends an unwillingness towards category affiliations when she writes ‘hesitations in inhabiting a category are neither psychological weaknesses nor failures of authenticity or solidarity.’²⁵⁶ However, Myles demonstrates very little hesitation in category habitation, happily occupying both ‘lesbian’ and ‘poet’. Different to Riley’s ‘mutating identifications, sharpened by the syntactical peculiarities of self-description’s passage to collectivity,’ Myles makes use of collective identities in order to allow for a poetic speaker that is simultaneously fixed and mobile.²⁵⁷ Categories become a space within which she is able to move, expressing the ways in which the social construction of the subject may allow for more mutability than expected. Categories refer to groupings of people based upon gender, sexuality or race, but also extend to political affiliations. While ‘woman’ and ‘lesbian’ are categories, it is also possible for feminism to be considered as such. However, categories themselves are mutable, and while Loy does not attempt to disrupt an understanding of ‘woman’ and ‘man,’ Myles queers the way in which she sits within the category of ‘woman’ and ‘lesbian.’ In Myles’ own writing, identity categories themselves are far more mutable, not fixing the subject in place in the way that Riley warns against.

The promotional video itself works interestingly with categories. Myles establishes herself as a ‘poet,’ while promoting her novel. Throughout the video, Myles relays elements of her life, focusing on the day she realised she could put herself at the centre of her own creative work. Despite her opting to choose the title of ‘poet,’ she makes evident that the category of poet can extend to the production of novels. As such, the promotional video itself is framing a piece of writing that exploits the instability of categories, such that the poet can produce prose, and prose itself can become poetry. Furthermore, Myles’ embodied

²⁵⁶ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* p.1.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.1.

presence identifies her as a 'woman' to the audience, but one who questions the category's stability through her butchness.²⁵⁸ Thus, while Myles is presented as a woman, her butch signifiers undercut the traditional expectations of women, once more demonstrating the way in which the category itself might be subject to change, or more fluid than imagined. Finally, in the promotional video, when imagining the response of publishers to her book, Myles refers to herself as 'this lesbian no-one' and, in doing so, clearly states her sexuality.

Despite the clear category affiliations suggested by the title, 'The Lesbian Poet' complicates the way in which Myles' identity intersects with the categories she outlines for herself. The document addresses the way in which a poet is able to navigate a multiplicity of identifications, drawing on intersections of categories to find a place in which Myles' herself feels comfortable. She writes:

it was something about the area of feminism, gay or lesbian issues, something like that, that tradition. I drew a figure in my notebook, three circles joined at one point, and launched at it – that's it, my spot, but then I realized it was poetry or the poetics of it that I was needing to address.²⁵⁹

Myles' poetry and poetics are directly concerned with the way in which she is located in the overlaps of a number of categories. Her writing is informed by the intersection of 'poet,' 'feminist' and 'lesbian'. However, 'The Lesbian Poet' goes on to experiment with the way in which the poetic subject fixes these categories in place. Having suggested that lesbianism is central to her identity, Myles goes on to state that 'a lesbian is just an idea. An aesthetic one perhaps'.²⁶⁰ In suggesting that lesbianism is a concept, one that can be realised aesthetically, Myles undermines the identity category. Furthermore, in 'The Lesbian Poet' she proceeds to describe a moment in which she is standing on top of a hill, looking out at the landscape, where 'there was no thing of woman at all. I was standing

²⁵⁸ Throughout her career, Myles has self-identified as butch, stating in a conversation with JD Samson 'In terms of gender and sexuality, it is such a changing, changing thing over time ... I am female but I feel butch. But I feel like my version of butch.' Eileen Myles and JD Samson in Conversation in *RecapsMagazine* ≤<http://recapsmagazine.com/review/eileen-myles-and-jd-samson-in-conversation/>> .

²⁵⁹ Eileen Myles, 'The Lesbian Poet' p.431.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.433.

in nature alone, this guy. It was a terrifically human feeling.'²⁶¹ Here, Myles transcends her gender to become a 'guy,' which she positions as the universal. The poet had to feel like a guy, which is more colloquial and casual than a 'man', in order to feel human. This statement makes evident that Myles not only approaches gender categories as fixed, but also that she wants to interrogate the idea of 'woman' as the non-universal.

'The Lesbian Poet' complicates category identification through moving back and forth between a constructivist stance and an essentialist relation to gender and sex. Here I recall Loy, who acknowledges gender performativity but sees the category of 'woman' as, itself, very stable, possibly divided up into a number of female roles. Myles, in contrast, first establishes her category identities and then proceeds to undermine their fixity by positioning her lesbianism as an aesthetic, and her womanhood as transmutable into 'guyhood'. The document, as a result, fluctuates between viewing Myles' identification as biologically determined (she is a lesbian and a woman, she was born as such and the identity is incontestable) to considering it in terms of the constructed (she is a woman who can become a guy and views sexuality as an aesthetic). This form of feminism, while highly problematic for a reader attempting to cleave one method of approaching identity politics, is particularly relevant to my contemporary writing. While, within the poems, my 'I' is positioned as a woman, I recognise the diversity of the category of feminism and woman, which ensures that a purely essentialist approach can no longer thrive.

Myles poem 'Promotional Material' engages with difficult categories, looking at the tensions created through adopting certain identities and social positions.²⁶² She writes 'I am/ an American./ I am a/ true American/ poet' (ll.19-23). The lyric speaker is making a patriotic identification, repeating the assertion that she is a subject of the USA. The line breaks separating the statement, however, disrupt the claim, rupturing the patriotism of the act. The statement of existence stands alone as an assertion of being, 'I am,' then brokenly relates to America. Myles proceeds to qualify this statement with 'I use/ multi-strike cartridges in/ my Smith Corona/ word processor' (ll.23 - 25). The lyric speaker is constituted as American through the branded machine she is using to

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 'p.432.

²⁶² Eileen Myles, 'Promotional Material' in *Not Me* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) pp.96-103. All subsequent references are to this edition.

write. Americanism is embodied through her word processor use, as opposed to what is produced from it. The speaker, and the objects that surround her, position her firmly within a category of 'American,' which is presented as a broken and faltering identification.

Myles' poem also addresses the problem of the category of 'woman' and 'lesbian.' She writes that women 'get/ pushed/around. We/ don't know how/ to fight' (ll.159 - 163). Using the collective pronoun, Myles' line breaks give this statement solidity, rather than fragmenting the identification. Women become collective through the ways in which they are treated, pushed and denied the knowledge of how to fight. Myles then moves into a second person address, when discussing the way in which her identity politics are approached by others. She writes 'people/ say oh are/ you a feminist' (ll.174-177) and 'are you a/ loser?' (ll.181-182). The poem then states that if women resist this collapsing together of feminism and being a loser, that 'they/think you're/ a lesbian' (ll.27-29), and later, '& you are/ a lesbian./ Which ruins/ everything' (ll.243-245). Here, Myles has used woman, lesbian and feminist as categories in order to explore the ways in which such a constituted identity can play out, dangerously, within a public space.

'I must get on & save myself': Community Formations

In her book *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (1999), Carolyn Dinshaw looks at the formation of queer communities, drawing on Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault to consider history and temporality in relation to identity. Dinshaw defines community as denoting 'some sort of social grouping that is not a conventional kinship group; the term as I use it does not in itself imply unity or homogeneity.'²⁶³ Myles' use of communities speaks to Dinshaw's definition of the term. Instead of looking directly to the categories she occupies to create a community, Myles gestures towards unconventional kinship groups that do not rely on shared identities.

Communities are central to Myles work in that she needs a space in which her lesbian feminism can thrive in conjunction with her poems. Myles talks about tracing a lineage within her poetry, and in doing so, creates a community

²⁶³ Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (London: Duke Press, 1999) p.22.

of both men and women. Having spent time justifying to herself why she felt she had more poetic fathers than mothers, she decided to reclaim men, 'to not be ashamed of their influence on me, who was undoubtedly female, lesbian.'²⁶⁴ Nevertheless, Myles concludes the statement of poetics by gesturing towards the necessity of creating a community for women. Throughout 'The Lesbian Poet,' she makes evident the ways in which men support one another, best exemplified by her assertion that gay men dying of AIDS did not want to be remembered by a lesbian community, but by other men. Finally, she calls upon women to begin looking to one another for support and trust. She writes:

There is a word in Italian, *affidamento*, which describes a relationship of trust between two women, in which the younger asks the elder to help her obtain something she desires.

Women I know are turning around to see if that woman is here. The woman turning, that's the revolution.²⁶⁵

It is relationships of trust that Myles sees as necessary to forwarding and promoting a feminist poetics, even if such a community does not negate or exclude creative male influence.

In *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)* Myles writes that 'I understood community. Going to the place and standing around. Aiming for a connection to bodies, language and the future.'²⁶⁶ This concept of community is preceded by the claim that 'an artist's responsibility for a very long time is to get collected, socially.'²⁶⁷ Through venturing into the world, and hoping to be collected, Myles is seeking a space for her female lesbian body to feel comfortable, in addition to a space for her politics and poetry. In *Inferno* and 'The Lesbian Poet', Myles seems to be suggesting that this space exists within community formations that, not being based on kinship or category identification, allow for communication and connection. Myles' statement that she sought connection to the 'future' through community has resonance with both politics and poetry.

²⁶⁴ Eileen Myles, 'The Lesbian Poet' p.435.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p.438.

²⁶⁶ Eileen Myles, *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)* p.41.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.33.

In her poem 'Keats & I,' Myles makes reference to Keats in a way that is similar to the references invoked in O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto.' However, she also gestures to wider community affiliations, having created a poem that moves through multiple locations, different forms of technology, such as the answering machine, and a number of temporalities, ranging from the weekend to specific times of day. Myles writes:

I believe in
a community of
believers. It's
the most believing
I do which
creates faith²⁶⁸

She then goes on to state 'Let's drink buckets/ of coffee. Let's/ imagine ourselves/ all fired up/ for once' (ll.292-296). The belief in the community is located, outside of the grandiose claims of faith, in the banal day to day of coffee drinking. The believing and community that emerges is deflated by the act of drinking coffee. While Myles places emphasis on community, and gestures towards the idealism necessary to maintain communal links, she also creates a space in which the lived and affective is quotidian and ordinary.

Myles makes similar statements, but specifically in relation to women, in her poem 'Basic August.' She writes:

I believe
all the women
could be strong
& stand up &
lock hands
& bond. We
could save
ourselves

²⁶⁸ Eileen Myles, 'Keats & I' in *Not Me* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991) ll.278-283. All further references are to this edition.

we could save everyone
we could be
here tonight
& I am
(ll.218-229)

While statements of community are always embedded within longer lyric poems, their presence counters the individual and mobile focus that dominates the rest of the works. Interestingly, in both poems, Myles places emphasis on communities over categories. When she asks women to come together and lock hands and bond, the category of 'woman' moves into the 'community of believers' outlined in 'Keats & I.' Myles work propounds that community has the capacity to move people together, create sticky affects, and mobilise solidarity in order to effect change.

'I am full of holes because you are': The Queer Art of Failure

Through positioning herself as a 'loser' in her promotional video, Myles pairs her bombastic performance and the possibility of book sales with being a social failure. Her comportment, and the fact that she is the star of a promotional video, juxtapose with her 'loser' status and, as such, heighten the performativity of the video itself. Having described herself as a 'lesbian no-one,' Myles goes on to say that her novel as a whole is 'about what losers we are – Americans.'²⁶⁹

Considering the American narrative of striving and success, being a 'loser' is counter to American self-perception and ideology. However, it fits well into Myles' wider preoccupation with the idea of failure, which she considers fundamental to poetry. She writes in *Inferno* that 'in a way, poetry really does require failure, because failure produces space that nobody else wants. Poets as a group hate success.'²⁷⁰

This idea of failure is productive when considered in relation to space as opposed to a state of being. Halberstam writes in *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011) that 'we can also recognize failure as a way of refusing to acquiesce to dominant logics of power and discipline as a form of critique. As a practice, failure

²⁶⁹ Eileen Myles, 'Inferno (a poet's novel)' [2011].

²⁷⁰ Eileen Myles, *Inferno (A Poet's Novel)* p.56.

recognises that alternatives are embedded already in the dominant.'²⁷¹ By positioning the poem as a space of failure, Myles is denying normativity and, in fact, suggesting political alternatives to the American success discourses. This denial of normativity resonates with the negative affect that Ahmed suggests is so central to maintaining autonomy. Failing, failing to fit and inability to align gives a subject the distance and requisite discomfort to critique their social groups and categories.

Throughout the promotional film, Myles' presence and her speaking have a sense of bravado. Framed by loud rock music, with praise of the work included in text on the screen, she is surrounded by loud affirmations of her self. However, she still chooses to foreground that she believes herself to be a member of a nation of idiots, and that the work itself is about what losers the people are. To move between bravado to bathetic declarations is central to Myles' poetic work, and allows her to style the self as a lesbian underdog despite evident success. Her writing career has been preoccupied with the way in which she can perform the role of the woman, lesbian, poet while acknowledging that as a woman she is disadvantaged, as a lesbian she is sexually alternative and as a poet, she will not garner any mainstream literary success. Despite having written a novel, her insistence on maintaining the category identification of poet is an on-going insistence to practice her failure to be a novelist, or a man, or heterosexual. Instead, she uses her position of slight deviation from normative success to question American social hegemonies, and to trouble her position within the communities she does identify with. Myles seems to embrace the role of one who is willingly co-opted; she is the ultimate capitalist loser. Similar to Loy's complicity with the Futurists and her borrowing of their aesthetic for her 'Feminist Manifesto', Myles is a willing participant in structures of power.

'The Lesbian Poet,' however, demonstrates that, despite levels of complicity and participation, Myles is still a figure who is negated on account of being a woman. As I have stated previously, when Myles addresses the AIDS epidemic, she claims 'men want to be remembered by men. When a man dies, it's the need to be valued by men, not women that counts. History, and we still know who keeps that'.²⁷² While this quotation demonstrates the necessity of a feminist

²⁷¹ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (London: Duke University Press, 2011) p.88.

²⁷² Eileen Myles, 'The Lesbian Poet', p.434 – 435.

and women-orientated documentation for historical accounts, it also makes evident that a gay woman had no part in the AIDS tragedy nor in the construction of history. It is this realisation that causes the speaker to claim 'as a literary lesbian *vis a vis* gay men I'm more alone than ever before'.²⁷³ Despite drawing on primarily gay men as poetic influences, Myles is still not welcome to participate in the AIDS crisis furore, nor is she important enough outside of the gay plague to remember the men. Twice marginalized as a lesbian and a woman, and a literary one at that, Myles makes evident the ways in which society constructs certain people as 'failures', denying them power and participation. As a result, her insistence on calling herself out as a failure and a loser introduces a sense of autonomy.

In 'An American Poem'²⁷⁴, Myles explores the successes and failures inherent within the American dream by positioning her lyric speaker as a member of the Kennedy family, who has given up fame and fortune in order to become an obscure and marginalised lesbian poet. As is typical of her work, the numerous shifts, re-framings and re-positionings ensure that the poem is a problematic representation of power and success, with the lesbian poet ultimately becoming a 'Kennedy' for the people. The title 'An American Poem' seems to suggest two possibilities for the work: either the piece has qualities that would result in it being defined as American in an adjectival sense, or it indicates the poem is the belonging of, or a tribute to, the country itself. When the speaker in the poem decides she will reject her Kennedy family and embrace obscurity, she writes 'Well I'll be a poet./ What could be more/ foolish and obscure' (ll. 41 - 43). The lyric 'I' moves from the all-American to the ultimate American loser, rejecting her status as a symbol of patriotism and nationalism in order to adopt a role or job that renders her entirely unknown. The poem appears, then, to operate based on the assumed binaries of success and failure, with an established political family encapsulating the American dream, while the poet represents complete life failure.

The lyric speaker goes on to state that she further distanced herself from the Kennedy success by becoming a lesbian: 'Every woman in my/ family looks like/ a dyke but it's really/stepping off the flag/ when you become one' (ll. 45 -

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.434.

²⁷⁴ Eileen Myles, 'An American Poem' in *Not Me* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991). All subsequent references are to this edition.

49). Despite adopting the position of failure, the embodied lesbian poet, the 'I' states that 'I am beginning to think/ there is no escaping/ history' (ll. 52 - 55). These lines suggest that, irrespective of the ways in which an American may attempt to embody failure, their bodies and failings still contribute to a wider national discourse. Failure makes up an important part of the national identity and needs to be considered as central to Americanism as success stories. Due to an inability to avoid fame, the 'I' makes a final admission: 'I am a Kennedy. And I await/ your orders' (ll. 85 - 87). This section works as a complete reversal in which the poet has come to a position of such importance that she can no longer deny her visibility and political significance. Interestingly, the poem proceeds to consider conditions for production and the ways in which the political can dictate the movement of art:

If art is the highest
and most honest form
of communication of
our times and the young
artist is no longer able
to move here to speak
of her time ...
(ll. 105 - 111)

Myles seems to pose the question that if the artist is denied a voice and is not able to offer a representation of her time, then society needs to find a new way to encourage means of expression. She writes: 'Shouldn't we all be Kennedys?' (l.115) and describes those who cannot afford healthcare, have bleeding gums, produce art, do not work in politics and are gay; all of these people are Kennedys. The lyric speaker becomes, ultimately, the leader of the losers and also the president of America; 'I am not/ alone tonight because/ we are all Kennedys./ And I am your President' (ll.155 - 158).

'Flippancy' seems to occupy a similarly problematic position in regards to success and appropriateness. To adopt such a position could be seen as a willing embrace of a failing feminism, perversely practicing a light-heartedness that seems antithetical to the contemporary movement's concerns. However, this

failure creates a space of possibility in which various elements of feminism can be explored from a different position. As Ahmed writes, happiness is used as a means by which to align bodies with collectives that are socially acceptable and enshrined. In this case, I want to understand happiness not as the emotion, but as a collective cohesiveness that results in the participants of a movement feeling as if they are aligned with one another. To reject the uniformity required by a political identification is to refuse to stand in line with the others and, in doing so, offers a more constellated way of practicing politics.

Conclusion

Myles' promotional video, 'The Lesbian Poet' and her poems all demonstrate the way in which an embodied encounter and bodily awareness can become present in the production of written texts. Playing with her use of the proper 'Eileen Myles' in order to designate and construct herself, Myles also writes using a more flexible lyric 'I' that, while encumbered with the same identity politics, is able to mobilise them, playing with the mutable categories that the promotional video presents to a viewer. The necessary focus on the female body, in conjunction with the highly mobile lyric speaker, is vital for demonstrating the possible co-existence of essentialist and constructivist feminism. Furthermore, referring to herself as 'Eileen Myles', but denying any knowledge of what that might be, allows both the noun proper and the lyric speakers in the poem to be in a perpetual stage of becoming.

The Venn diagram presented by 'The Lesbian Poet' has resonances with both Loy and O'Hara. While Loy was caught on the periphery of feminism and Futurism, Myles makes evident that her work is produced from 'within': she is situated at the intersection and overlaps of three identities. Although her intersection and overlaps are not as nuanced nor as precise as the constellation O'Hara creates through his range of references, her work does gesture to multiplicity creating a central writing figure. Myles is able to put lesbianism, feminism, poetics and the St. Marks community all in dialogue with one another. All of this has a bearing on the way in which I have created a flippant figure within my own poetry. Throughout the process of writing, I have physically attended contemporary London activist events, engaged in less-embodied online feminism and made continual references to feminists and artists of multiple eras.

As such, Myles' embodied practice plays a part in the way in which my poems have come into synthesis. Similar to Myles's locatedness, my own locatedness is at the centre of London activism, contemporary poetics and queer feminism. And even if, like Loy, I invest less wholeheartedly in the promise of community, Myles' Venn diagram of categories speaks to my own practice. Similarly, I make use of the constellation to consolidate my lyric figure, drawing a number of disparate references together from multiple locations and temporalities that serve as a lens through which to understand the poems' 'I.'

Myles' engagement with desire and the pornographic creates an area in which tension can arise. Drawing on a genre that is perceived as antithetical to feminism, Myles makes use of sexually explicit representations of the female body to move away from normative and male-determined expectations. Her tone, which is light and ranging, facilitates this dismissal of the previously established and, while gesturing to hetero-dominance, chooses to celebrate the unlikely and unusual. This all speaks to the way in which sex becomes central in a number of my poems, relocating the macrocosm of wider politics in sexual intimacies. Rather than aspiring to a mainstream and disassociated pornographic reaction, this movement serves to demonstrate the way in which mainstream culture dictates sexual norms, in addition to the place that politics has within the bedroom. The public becomes inescapable even in private, and foregrounds the way in which bodily perception or experience is central to feminist aims and understanding.

Juxtaposing admissions of failure with bravado and posturing, Myles creates a flippant approach to both the role of the poet and America as a country. The flippancy with which Myles addresses the Kennedys and capitalism could be read as a failure of commitment. However, I see the flippancy in Myles' work and my own as addressing the possible failures of political engagement, using an affectation to contribute to contemporary affect. As Halberstam makes evident, to fail is a political gesture, particularly amongst narratives and discourses that emphasise the importance of success. To be flippant, then, is a similarly political gesture, with a poet choosing to use tone and mobility to engage with their contexts and feminist surroundings as a form of critique.

Conclusion

This conclusion will reflect on the critical elements of my thesis in order to explore the ways in which they are manifest within the creative work. Having used the introduction to establish key concepts such as the contemporary, constellation and affective moments, the conclusion will focus exclusively on the poetry produced in conjunction with the critical work. In doing so, I aim to demonstrate the way in which the body of creative work draws on Loy, O'Hara and Myles, while engaging with a contemporary feminist London scene. However, I also aim to reflect on the way in which feminism has changed throughout the duration of my PhD. When the work began in 2011, 'fourth wave' was not being discussed in wider feminist or academic circles. However, in 2014, it has become the popular term to describe the current incarnation of feminist theory and activism and, as a result, has entered the understanding of a wider public. The general acceptance of fourth wave feminism has a direct bearing on my understanding of the contemporary: can Agamben's darkness and obscurity still thrive if my central terminology has been consolidated in journalistic and mainstream discourses? Furthermore, what place does flippancy have within this tension? How might its suggestion of 'becoming unbecoming' work to effect within this consolidated fourth wave moment?

'I've always brought in both women and men': Loy, O'Hara and Myles

Loy, O'Hara and Myles offer complex and nuanced work that engages with the political even if the poems, themselves, appear to be superficial and light. Both Myles and Loy engage explicitly with political subjects, with the former writing continuously on her status as a lesbian poet, while the latter addresses her contemporary feminism and uses poetic work to satirise the gender politics of the Futurists. O'Hara is less obviously political, with a manifesto that focuses almost exclusively on community and literary heritage. However, this is not to suggest his work is without politics. Instead, it presents the challenge of finding ways in which to reclaim the light and flippant as a means of engaging with social issues.

All three poets represent an area of conflict that has been vital to the development of my own work. Loy was heavily reliant on precedents, both

feminist and Futurist, even though she claimed to believe in 'total destruction'. Furthermore, her work occupies a difficult position between two groups who would not usually be put in dialogue with one another. My poems also express a certain discomfort with feminist practices, questioning the validity of entirely white and Western marches, or consciousness raising that focuses exclusively on body image. O'Hara, in contrast to Loy, demonstrates the way in which a constellation can offer insight into a lyric speaker, as well as questioning the political efficacy of levity. Throughout my poems, I make use of a constellation to create a contemporary feminism that is able to draw multiple referents into dialogue with one another. O'Hara's 'Personism: A Manifesto' offers a model by which it is possible to engage with the communities of one's own moment, while still creating work that gestures outside of that specific temporality. Although there is a danger of work becoming too multiple, and possibly attempting too much by way of dialogue, O'Hara draws on a consolidated and central lyric 'I' to offer coherence. Myles states that poetry can be a means by which a poet comes to politics. Her work as a whole allows me to conceptualise flippancy as a form of failure, address the poet's embodied presence and consider sex in relation to feminism.

All three of the poets share the commonality of toying with their own identity in creating work. Loy makes use of permutations of her own name, as well as anagrams of her contemporaries to ensure her satire has clear links with real life. While she still remains elusive as a woman, her lived experience of being on the periphery of both feminism and Futurism becomes apparent through poems that play on her own name. Similarly, O'Hara locates himself through his manifesto, with references to contemporary poets. The lyric 'I,' employed throughout the manifesto can be understood as the figure presented through the poems, suggesting a single and consolidated speaker for a significant amount of O'Hara's work. Myles is the most explicit of the three poets in using herself as poetic material, and the most difficult to decipher: while she refers to herself in third and first person, she makes claims that her name is a fiction. While I draw exclusively on a lyric 'I', eschewing the name play that Myles and Loy favour, the poems all arise from embodied encounters. I make use of a lyric 'I' to document the marches where I have been an embodied presence, just as poems regarding Twitter feeds or online spaces are all ones I physically traverse.

Thus, there exists a complicated relationship between my embodied self and the lyric 'I' within the poems, which has resonances with my lived reality as a feminist in London.

Myles, Loy and O'Hara are all highly mobile poets, rejecting stasis in favour of moving through their subject matter. Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' moves through a number of topics, while her more satirical poems find multiple angles from which to critique Futurists. O'Hara's work, in a physical sense, demonstrates an urban mobility in which the poet is often found walking around New York City. However, his constellation ensures that the poet is also able to move amongst different poetic references, pieces of art and conversations with close friends. As such, O'Hara's work creates the 'space' that de Certeau speaks of, rather than just moving from place to place. Myles combines both Loy's movement from and through political subjects, with O'Hara's movement through an urban and literary space. The lesbian poet's work is highly literary, extremely feminist, concerned with poetic communities and often located in an urban setting. As a result, Myles' mobility speaks to the rapidity with which Loy addresses aspects of feminism, in addition to the space O'Hara creates through the constellation presented by his work.

Through my use of titles and the continual references to feminist events, my work is immediately political. Unlike the three poets I have looked to, where a politics has to be extrapolated from the poetics, my work foregrounds the relationship between the two. The ostensibly political nature of the work, however, makes the deviations into the personal more noticeable. The poems, as such, interrogate how the political can be maintained through lapses into the anecdotal or private, or how the lightness of a personal encounter can be reconciled with the seriousness of public protest. In order to achieve the movement between the two, I have made use of a flippant figure. Much like the conflicts evident within the work of all three poets I have considered, feminism and flippancy have a difficult relationship to one another. Any form of documentation, whether poetic or not, inevitably causes trouble when it combines elements of flippancy with news stories that address gang rape, female exploitation and murder.

This problematic of flippancy is reflected within feminism itself, which sits in a troubling position within its own category and in a wider world. As

stated throughout this thesis, feminists should remain alert to their own category formations and any complacency within the community in which they participate. Consequently, some form of troubling affiliation is necessary both to maintain critical distance and to avoid full assimilation. External to feminism, the category needs to trouble wider society, continually pointing out sexism. Unsurprisingly, then, feminism itself is positioned as a form of making trouble, creating conflict through its adherence to equal rights. With this in mind, some of the feminist methodologies with which I have engaged are inherently conflicted. While I have identified the rapidity of the Internet as integral to fourth wave development, and also central to my own work on motion and rapidity, it has a dual purpose. Most recently, the news has reported the hacking and release of a number of celebrity naked photos, all of which are female, as well as a famous female gaming blogger being chased offline with continual threats to her personal safety by a whole 4chan community.²⁷⁵ While these two incidents appear to occur in a virtual space, and one that has been relatively liberating for feminism, they have direct embodied results for women, certainly in the case of the latter, where threats of violence and paralysis have been accompanied with the release of a home address.

The feminist poetics I have developed require a total engagement with points of conflict, refusing to take a position of superiority or, in fact, to offer a solution to any potential problems. Rather than presenting a didactic feminism that attempts to rectify any of the 'troubles' evident from my engagement, the poems themselves exploit and appreciate the areas of difficulty and disjuncture. Much like Loy, O'Hara and Myles, my work is intended to reflect the difficulty of multiple positions, of certain tones in difficult contexts, and the question of how effectively any form of poetry can instigate social change. This is mirrored through the poems' mobility, in which urban and online movement are considered in conjunction with a range of topics, working between the personal and political, private and public realms.

²⁷⁵ See Roxane Gay 'The Great 2014 Celebrity Nude Photos Leak is only the beginning' in *The Guardian* (4 September 2014) <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/01/celebrity-naked-photo-leak-2014-nude-women>> [Accessed: 5 September 2014] and Soraya Nadia McDonald 'Gaming vlogger Anita Sarkeesian is forced from home after receiving harrowing death threats' in *The Washington Post* (29 August 2014) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/08/29/gaming-vlogger-anita-sarkeesian-is-forced-from-home-after-receiving-harrowing-death-threats/>> [Accessed: 5 September 2014].

'Are you prepared for the Wrench-?' Consolidating Fourth Wave

In my introduction, I make a case for 'Why Fourth Wave Now' and argue the ways in which the affects of this particular moment have resulted in a resurgence of feminist activism. I also acknowledge that different technological advancements have facilitated new modes of organisation and activism, which are both immediate and responsive. In my initial writing on the fourth wave, my engagement with affect was necessary for maintaining openness. While I drew on a few specific marches, my aim was not to focus too strongly on tangible details. Rather, a focus on the affective charge of the wave allowed for my understanding of it to develop without a reliance on figureheads or the concept of a fourth wave identity. As I have stated previously, conflating a wave with specific women or a certain type of identity has promoted generational division. Now, instead of asking the question of 'why fourth wave now,' which was so vital to the progression of my poetics, here I am more interested in how the fourth wave has been cemented in the public imagination. This, inevitably, has a bearing on the obscurity of the contemporary and the in-between-ness of affect that were so central to my initial thinking.

The acceptance of 'fourth wave' as a term has consolidated this movement of feminism, giving it a name and so changing the way in which we can engage with the affectivity of a moment. In her book *All The Rebel Women: The Rise of The Fourth Wave of Feminism* (2013) Kira Cochrane claims that 'everywhere you looked in the summer of 2013, a fourth wave of feminism was rising in the UK, women were opening their eyes to misogyny and sexism, and shouting back against it.'²⁷⁶ Unlike Baumgardner's *F'em: Goo Goo, GaGa, and Some Thoughts on Balls*, which I quote in my introduction, Cochrane is very attached to the concept of a fourth wave. She does not view the title as uncomplicated, however, writing:

another potential problem with describing feminism in waves is that it can obscure those campaigners who endure, who commit themselves to advancing women's rights when popular support

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Loc. 49.

has ebbed and media coverage has phut-phutted to a sour trail of articles on the death of feminism.²⁷⁷

Despite this, such anxieties have not prevented the fourth wave from having a purchase on public discourse, with it being regularly reported by *Radio 4*, *The New Statesman*, *Guardian*, *Telegraph*, *Huffington Post* and through more academic forums such as *The Political Studies Association*. I want to consider the impact this has had on my own poetry writing, and the way in which it relates to my understanding of the 'contemporary'.

Agamben, quoted in my introduction, writes that a true contemporary never perfectly coincides with, nor adjusts herself to, the demands of her own time. Love suggests in *Feeling Backwards* that the excitement of being caught in the initial stages of activism is that each participant is expected to respond to the uncertainty of the historical moment. An emergent movement cannot be fully articulated: it is amorphous, open and mobile, as opposed to being tied to a widely accepted definition. Consequently, the poems I produced were engaging with my own time in the way that Agamben claims is necessary to be contemporary. The uncertainty of what fourth wave was, how it would progress and, ultimately, how it would come to be understood in the popular imagination meant that there were no demands to which I was expected to cater my work. As opposed to coinciding with my time, I was able to embrace the obscurity that emerged through the uncertainty of a nascent moment and the elusiveness of the affects associated with it.

In *All The Rebel Women: The Rise of the Fourth Wave Feminist*, Cochrane is able to outline a number of characteristics she sees as defining of fourth wave feminism. Similarly, in an article for *The Political Studies Association*, Ealasaid Munro offers reasons why fourth wave is differentiated from those which preceded it.²⁷⁸ Whereas my introduction includes a section on 'Why Fourth Wave Now?' and is concerned with emergent marches, new forms of activism coming to the fore and the changing affectivity of the feminist moment, Cochrane and Munro both write from a retrospective position where wave as a whole can

²⁷⁷ Kira Cochrane, *All The Rebel Women: The Rise of the Fourth Wave Feminist* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014), loc.246.

²⁷⁸ Ealasaid Munro, 'Feminism: A fourth wave?' in *The Political Studies Association* <<http://www.psa.ac.uk/insight-plus/feminism-fourth-wave>> [Accessed: 3 September 2014].

be surveyed in order to delineate exactly what it constitutes. My poems, however, document actions as they have arisen, resisting foregone conclusions in favour of engaging directly with the moment. Interestingly, while flippancy was developed in conjunction with the feminism I was documenting, Cochrane argues 'many of the feminists I've spoken to have said humour is a defining mark of fourth wave ... Feminists should never have to be funny or flippant about endemic sexism. They shouldn't be nice and unthreatening because that's what expected of women.'²⁷⁹ I will return to this discussion in my section on flippancy. However, it is worth comparing here briefly in relation to my own work. In my own, there is a clear distinction between 'flippancy' and 'humour,' while Cochrane conflates the two. Flippancy is engaged with movement, rapidity, changing topics and unbecoming levity. Unlike humour, its focus is not on creating a sense of solidarity or relationship with an audience through eliciting laughter. Arguably, having positioned flippancy as the causing of trouble, it is neither 'nice' nor 'unthreatening' in the way Cochrane suggests. Rather, it is derived from this specific historical moment, with the intention of causing trouble both within and without feminism. The question arises, how does this flippant approach contribute more broadly to the consolidation of fourth wave feminism?

I think that it is important for this fourth wave to sustain its affective moment in the hope that widespread change can be achieved. Rather than waiting to see the way in which activism, engagement and affect changes, feminists need to work with this sustainable description of the current wave. Without conflating queer activism with feminist work, it is useful to consider the way in which Cvetkovich writes about ACT UP sustaining affects. This is summarised succinctly by one of her interview subjects, who states: 'we came together at a certain moment and our lives have changed significantly, and we're no longer in each other's spheres.'²⁸⁰ The undefined, but collectively experienced affects allow for groups to converge over shared feelings that come to inform their own activism. In this sense, the affects that initially catalysed ACT UP, ranging from anger and melancholy to the excitement of community bonds, came to lose their impact. As the cultural constellation changed, the concerted

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, loc.797.

²⁸⁰ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures*, p.171.

activism of a larger group was no longer necessary. Similar to feeling moments of feminism, in which subjects can converge over shared affects, thus creating a unified group affect, ACT UP ultimately came to divide. This is not to suggest that AIDS activism has stopped entirely, but to claim that the efficacy of a central and active group – one motivated and joined by affect – is no longer necessitated by the cultural constellation. In feminism, the surge and then disappearance of waves does not indicate the wider failure of the politics, but demonstrates that a large amount of subjects have been galvanised in collectivity by the affect of a particular moment.

My work contributes to the consolidation of the fourth wave by offering subjective documentation of the moment, in which the poetry and the poetics reflect the movements and forms of contemporary activism. Deriving tone, mobility and subject matter from my immediate surroundings and Twitter engagements, the poems themselves reflect the ways in which activism and discourse have developed within the last three years. In that sense, the poems are enacting, both in form and content, the fourth wave of feminism. In *An Archive of Feeling*, Cvetkovich addresses the creation of archives by countercultures. She notes that 'both gay and lesbian as well as activist history have ephemeral, unorthodox, and frequently suppressed archives.'²⁸¹ Consequently, 'cultural artefacts become the archive of something more ephemeral,' which validates more unorthodox modes of documentation as a legitimate reflection of a particular moment.²⁸² While I make no great claims for poetry in relation to activism, my work creates a space in which the in-between-ness of this feminist affective contemporary can be documented.

Both in *Happiness: Some Notes after Rimbaud* and on his blog, the poet and activist Sean Bonney writes about the difficult position a poet occupies within political movements. He describes doing a reading for the Occupy movement, where 'it felt stupid to stand up, after someone had been doing a talk on what to do if you get nicked, or whatever, to stand up and read poetry.'²⁸³ However, in his 2009 *Documents: Poems, Diagrams, Manifestos July 7th 2005 – June 27th 2007*, Bonney addresses the importance of the poem as document, writing:

²⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.166.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p.10.

²⁸³ Sean Bonney, 'Letter on Poetics (after Rimbaud)' in *Abandoned Buildings: This Machine Kills Fascists* [25 June 2011] <<http://abandonedbuildings.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/letter-on-poetics.html>>.

(1) identify the precise moment in the present conjecture, (2) name the task specific to that moment, ie a poem that would enable us to name that decisive moment and (3) exert force insasmuch as we would have condensed and embodied the concrete analysis of the concrete situation. I'm not talking about the poem as magical thinking, not at all, but as analysis and clarity.²⁸⁴

When read against my understanding of the contemporary, there are fundamental differences between Bonney's assertions and my own. I argue that there can be no precision within the 'moment'; rather, a combination of historicity, futurity and obscurity allow for nascent activism to develop without hindrance. Furthermore, my work on affect suggests that it is impossible to name a task specific to the moment; instead, my focus is on allowing for the feeling driving collectives to determine subsequent actions and campaigns. However, I agree with Bonney's assertion that the poem should not be magical thinking, but engaged with the operations of the contemporary. The poem, if it is to be successful as a document of its time, does require an aspect of the embodied in addition to an engagement with concrete situations – even if no concrete solutions suggest themselves.

In 'Archive Fever,' Derrida writes that 'there is no political power without control of the archive, if not memory.'²⁸⁵ At this point, I want to make a distinction between documentation, the document and the archive. While my collection of poems could be said to contain a number of documents, thus constituting a unique and highly subjective archive, I see the body of work itself as a 'document.' The poems individually work as documentation of specific incidents, while the collection itself forms the basis of a document that engages with feminist activism from a Western perspective from 2011 – 2014. The outward looking nature of the poems, including their bearing on the reality of London-based and online activism, is intended to suggest that they could form part of an archive of fourth wave feminism. Flippancy deliberately negates the authority necessary to form an archive and, as such, the poetry and poetic strategy offers itself as documentation of a specific temporality, presented as a

²⁸⁴ Sean Bonney, *Document: Poems, Diagrams, Manifestos July 7th 2005 – June 27th 2007*, (London: Barque Press, 2009) p.58.

²⁸⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression' in *Diacritics* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995) p.11.

whole and cohesive document. The poems do not claim a political power for themselves, but are highly concerned with politics and power and, as such, are consciously positioned as a collected document that grapples with contemporary feminism.

‘Pain always produces logic, which is very bad for you’: Exploring Negative Affect

I acknowledge in my introduction that not all of the effects of affect are positive. Certainly in regards to feminism, it is not just a shared utopian vision and belief in social justice that ties women to one another. Primarily, women are moved to feminism through negative affect, whether that is anger at everyday sexism, disaffection with the cover-up of systemic abuse or an inevitable sadness in the face of rampant inequality. Ahmed addresses this in *The Promise of Happiness*, where she writes:

Does bad feeling enter the room when somebody expresses anger about things, or could anger be the moment when the bad feelings that circulate through objects get brought to the surface in a certain way? Feminist subjects might bring others down not only by talking about unhappy topics such as sexism but by exposing how happiness is sustained by erasing the very signs of not getting along.²⁸⁶

It is not necessary for there to be positive feeling for a group to feel an affective bind. In fact, it is the combination of a range of affects that creates a sticky affective environment to which feminist subjects can adhere. This multiplicity also ensures that there is greater inclusivity within feminism itself, acknowledging that different feminists will feel differently given their unique experiences and backgrounds.

However, affects can also be divisive within feminism. Thus, the negative aspect of affects can be understood in two ways: the most obvious is that they refer to ugly or bad feeling, while the latter is that they result in the division of groups and political movements. Ahmed states that certain bodies are perceived as inherently negative. For example, within feminism, itself often accused of

²⁸⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*, loc.940.

killing joy, the 'angry black woman' is approached with mixed feelings. Not only capable of killing feminist joy through highlighting racism within feminism itself, the black woman is also encoded as irrational with anger. Ahmed writes that:

Reasonable thoughtful arguments are dismissed as anger (which of course empties anger of its own reason), which makes you angry, such that your response becomes read as the confirmation of evidence that you are not only angry but also unreasonable!²⁸⁷

Feminism itself is not immune to the this. Most recently, this issue has played out in relation to the inclusion of trans women in radical feminist politics.²⁸⁸ When trans women express anger at their exclusion, they are attributed with a 'male' aggressiveness: this affect is considered, by some, as illegitimate feminist rage on account of the politics associated with trans identities.

While my critical work does not address unique examples of this, the poems themselves highlight the ways in which negative affects can proliferate within feminism, causing division and internal fighting. In some cases, the poems deal with the material aspects of accessibility and participation, as well as decisive or contentious opinions being expressed. For example, 'Go Feminist! Conference' addresses the way in which, despite an attempt to make the material inclusive of deaf feminists, the woman subtitling the event continually made mistakes. Much of the language was rendered entirely incomprehensible, making it clear of the ways in which, despite good intentions, certain groups of women are still excluded from feminist proceedings. 'The danger of women only spaces' engages with a similar issue, in which the London Feminist Network stated that trans-women should bring passports and proof of their reassignment surgery if they wanted to participate within feminist events. Similarly, the 'Slut Walk' was objected to by a number of black feminist organisations, which stated that white feminist appropriation did not recognise the historical and racial implications of the term. The organisers of the walk did not make time to

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, loc.973.

²⁸⁸ Cathy Brennan, a lawyer and well-known radical feminist, has been outing trans women's OKCupid accounts, contacting their employers and estranged families, and naming and shaming them on public websites <<http://www.bustle.com/articles/7277-cathy-brennan-speaks-to-bustle-about-her-stance-on-transgender-people>>. More recently, a group of radical feminist academics picketed the 2014 London Dyke March for its inclusion of trans women. See: <http://www.sarahlizzy.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/IMG_3611-Edit.jpg>.

engage with this critique of their march, and it caused multiple problems between feminist groups as a result.²⁸⁹ Even when there is ostensible unity, as demonstrated by my poem on the 'Dyke March,' there are still voices that deviate from the solidarity. Rather than focusing on the aims of the march, which were mostly around positive visibility, a number of women repeatedly called out 'fuck the police' (who were accompanying the marchers), using the queer feminist platform for their own ends.

I also want to turn my attention to the backlash I referred to in my introduction, once more drawing on Penny and Faludi to consider its unique formation in this feminist moment. As I have suggested, the fourth wave is exceptional in that its rapidity and technological innovations are also being employed in the backlash against feminism. Consequently, and possibly for the first time in the history of waves, a 'backlash' is occurring simultaneous to the fight for progress. This backlash needs to be understood outside of regular protest – inevitably, all waves of feminism were subject to resistance. As Faludi writes in *Backlash* (1990) 'if fear and loathing of feminism is a sort of perpetual viral condition of our culture, it is not always in an acute stage; its symptoms subside and resurface periodically.'²⁹⁰ A backlash, then, is not the background murmur of misogyny or underlying dislike of feminism, both of which are continual, but a surge in action that happens in response to perceived progress. However, Penny documents a different kind of backlash, discussing the way in which the Internet as a genderless space quickly morphed into one that reproduced patriarchal structures and sex inequality. Her work certainly differs from Faludi in scope, most usefully because it gestures to the way in which feminist activism is now accompanied by a backlash. She writes specifically on the topic of the Internet, which I have argued is central to the rapidity and immediacy associated with fourth-wave feminism. Penny states that:

The Internet is a public space, real space; it's increasingly where we interact socially, do our work, organise our lives and engage with

²⁸⁹ On September 23 2011 'An open Letter from Black Women to the SlutWalk' was published, expressing concern with the term 'slut' finding that it was not an appropriate reflection of the socio and historical factors suggested by the sexual assault of black women (<http://newblackman.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/open-letter-from-black-women-to.html>).

²⁹⁰ Susan Faludi, *Backlash*, p.13.

politics, and violence online is real violence. The hatred of women in public spaces online is reaching epidemic levels and its time to end the pretence that it's either acceptable or inevitable.²⁹¹

Cochrane writes, very much in accord with Penny, that while the Internet has offered a space in which feminist activism can thrive, it has also 'brought to light deep strains of misogyny, a vicious opposition to female advancement that plays out in countless threads, which hum with threats of rape, death and mutilation.'²⁹² What is notable, and more positive, in both women's work as well as Laura Bates' *Everyday Sexism* (2014), is that feminists are beginning to shout back. Rather than the relationship between feminists and anti-feminists being progress-backlash, the simultaneity allows for a dialogue to emerge in which there is a perpetual back and forth. The conversation about legislation changes in order to penalise online abusers is happening at the same time as feminist activism and misogynist trolls are fighting it out.²⁹³ It is my belief that, as a result, this current backlash has consolidated the wave. For the first time, feminists are able to be immediately critical of the way in which their campaigns are derided, their freedom threatened and their subjecthood undermined in public places. Furthermore, they are able to call out the 'backlash' ensuring that the conversation is not purely about women's rights, but also the way in which the fight is consistently undermined by men's rights proponents and activists.

'It does not have to do with personality': Lyric Speaker and Embodied Feminist Subject:

The lyric speaker within the poems engages with different elements of feminist scholarship, in addition to the poetics I have extrapolated from the three poets. The lyric 'I' occupies the position of a troublemaker, takes on an element of performance and is continually trying it on, both in regards to different forms of feminism and through levity. Ahmed's work raises the necessity of a feminist defining herself as one who causes trouble. In her most recent book *Willful Subjects* (2014), Ahmed puts a case forward for willful disobedience: intentional

²⁹¹ Laurie Penny, *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender and Power on the Internet*, loc.278.

²⁹² Kira Cochrane, *All The Rebel Women: The Rise of The Fourth Wave of Feminism*, loc.711.

²⁹³ Julia Bell, 'Is Twitter seen as misogynists' 'golden ticket'?' on *CNN* (5 August 2013) <<http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/05/opinion/twitter-trolling-julia-bell/>> [Accessed: 4 September 2014].

deviation from the prescribed paths and accepted authorities.²⁹⁴ Throughout the body of poems, the lyric speaker demonstrates continued ‘willfulness,’ willing herself to participate within feminism while remaining in a willfull position of critique. Exercised primarily through flippancy, the position of the lyric speaker allows the ‘I’ to become a troublemaking subject.

As I go on to explore within the next section, flippancy occupies a troubling position between affect and affectation. However, when considering the embodied feminist subject it is necessary to map this back on to Butler and her theories of performativity. While my exploration of the terms will not necessarily draw any conclusions, the work must acknowledge the relationship between affectation, performance and performativity. Flippancy itself could constitute a performance in two senses: as an embodied woman I was attending marches in order to participate in the feminist community, such that the experience could be documented in poetry. I performed a willingness of participation, while also performing the role of concerted activist. The experiences and atmosphere, which went on to inform the lyric poetry, were then performed by an ‘I’ distinct from my embodied self. The poetics remained flippant throughout, with the affectation permeating each poem, irrespective of the occurrences it was documenting. I see this affectation as a partial performance, and one that is distinct from Butler’s understanding of performativity. While in *Gender Trouble* performativity signifies reiterative acts that make publically legible the sex and gender of a subject, performance operates differently. Performance is a conscious set of actions, exercised by an autonomous subject; performativity certainly denotes a subconscious complicity within societal norms. The work I have produced, which is informed by embodied participation as well as close reading of feminist theory, has attempted to reconcile this tension through flippancy. As my lyric speaker is aware of performativity and gender constraints, she can continue to perform, allowing the more self-determined actions to work in dialogue with socially subscribed values. While there is no resolution to how gender performativity and a more deliberate feminist performance might engage with one another politically, the two can co-exist in a difficult relationship of knowingness and theoretical awareness.

²⁹⁴ Ahmed chooses the American spelling of ‘willful,’ so that the ‘will’ is visible throughout the book.

This question of affectation and performance also relates to Riley's work, specifically her claims that feminism and political engagement should be a case of 'trying it on.' The trying it on seems to suggest the donning of a costume that can be quickly discarded if it has no effect. The term suggests pushing the limit of the acceptable, but also mutability in terms of self-presentation: experimenting in order to find a workable outward appearance. Although my lyric speaker remains consistent throughout, not donning attitudes, politics or outfits that change the way in which she engages with contemporary feminism, the trying it on does relate to the engagement with different forms of activism and flippancy itself. The lyric speaker's mobility makes it appear as if each poem is a trying on of a different aspect of feminism, engaging with the online spaces, actual marches or radical feminist politics. While the subject is not subject to change, the contexts are, each one tried and tested through a poetics of flippancy.

The problem raised by this idea of performance and trying it on is that the lyric 'I' represents the combination of actual embodied experience with falsification and fiction. The poems themselves are always in dialogue with actual events or incidents, but the more personal actions of the lyric 'I' are fabricated to reflect the feminist concerns of that specific day. As such, the poems occupy a troubling position when documenting a specific temporality. The understanding of a historical document is that it pertains to a truth, irrespective of whether it is written in the first person, in the form of diaries or letters, or an official document or transcript. However, as my readings of Loy, O'Hara and Myles would suggest, emphasis placed on the biography of the poet does not offer further insight. Rather, it is how they mobilise personal details to create a more nuanced and constellated poem that offers a critical model for reading and producing poetry, which as a document, interrogates the relationship between the public and the private, the personal and political.

'It's a very exciting movement': The Poetics of Flippancy

As I suggest in my chapter on O'Hara, the links between affect, affectation and flippancy are complex. While affect encourages a subject to act and, in turn, be acted upon, affectation seems to imply performative acting and acting out. While highly contingent and context-driven in the same ways as affect, flippancy is an artificial style or an act that demonstrates a resistance to authority. As a result, it

occupies a difficult position between the feeling and the contrived, the performative and the rebellious. Given that flippancy is defined by the dictionary as an ‘unbecoming levity,’ how can it sit in dialogue with Riley’s ‘becoming’? How might the unbecoming subject, or irreverent politics, enter into a process of feminist becoming? Is it through embracing the problematic of ‘becoming unbecoming’ that a feminist flippancy has political efficacy.

Before I consider the implications of this further, I want to draw on Halberstam’s work *Queer Art of Failure* again, to investigate what ‘unbecoming’ may mean in relation to politically engaged failing. The author states that within the text:

I explore a feminist politics that issues not from a doing but from an unbecoming, not from a being or becoming woman but from a refusal to be or become a woman as she has been defined and imagined with Western philosophy.²⁹⁵

It is not unreasonable to suggest that ‘flippancy’, on account of the difficulties of placing it and its relation to serious subjects, enacts a form of failure in relation to concerted political effort. However, this failure is not necessarily negative in relation to much larger political collectives. In fact, Halberstam believes that ‘under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world’.²⁹⁶

If we return to this idea of becoming, then, how can it be theorised in relation to the queer art of failure and the unbecoming subject? Becoming suggests a process or movement that is mutable, including deviations and changes. I believe that Riley’s work, especially read in relation to Halberstam, allows for a queerer form of becoming that does not necessarily follow straight lines. This resonates with Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* where she suggests that the existence of straight lines allows for deviation and going off-track. Flippancy, with its relation to the unbecoming, demonstrates the way in which a

²⁹⁵ Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.2.

subject can engage in a process of politicisation without adhering to lines of normativity or straightness.

It is my contention that becoming and unbecoming do not operate as opposites of one another. In fact, it is rare that the latter would be used as a verb to describe the process of shedding political and personal identifications. Instead, 'unbecoming' works primarily as an adjective, to describe something as unsuitable or improper. When Halberstam uses 'unbecoming' as a verb, it is possible the word is not intended to work as the opposite of 'becoming', but rather as signifying a process of becoming unsuitable: the doing of being improper. If this is the case, then becoming a troublemaker – inappropriate and improper – is a necessary political strategy that rejects more staid and acceptable methods. However, this becoming unbecoming does not necessarily have a single trajectory or mode of operation and, as such, creates a space in which the flippant subject can participate in politics while 'displaying unbecoming levity in the consideration of serious subjects'.

With this established, I want to return specifically to flippancy in order to consider its relationship with failure and feminism more fully. Flippancy rejects appropriateness and the responsibilities entailed by feminist affiliation, prioritising mobility and irreverence instead. As suggested by Halberstam and Ahmed, I make use of flippancy to allow for deviations from what might be a prescribed path of politicisation, rejecting polite exchange in favour of irritating and provocative interaction. Flippancy also works within feminism itself, troubling solidarity and links within the political category. Undoubtedly, Feminism is a politics concerned with hugely serious issues, ranging from systemic sexism to acts of violence perpetrated against women every single day. To practise flippancy in relation to the politics does not necessarily mean standing in opposition to the central concerns of feminism. Instead, it raises questions about the ways in which political methodologies have developed, and the ways in which certain affects take greater precedence over others. To be flippant, even in spaces that offer an area of identification and security, creates trouble, which is necessary to political progress and development.

Flippancy is troubling, troublesome and creates troublemakers. The troubling emerges through what seems an inappropriate levity in the face of systemic sexism. It irritates and agitates and, in turn, provokes discussion about

methodologies for engaging with feminist concerns and affects. Flippancy, as an unbecoming, partially performative, partially affective stance, ensures that a level of discomfort is maintained that can evolve into critique of the operations of political collectives. It could be assumed that flippancy works in the same way as a more palatable feminist 'humour'. However, despite its levity, flippancy is not constructed so as to elicit laughter, or even accrue followers. It prioritises mobility, lightness, conversation and unbecoming as a response to feminism and the wider society that continues to necessitate the politics' existence.

As a way of engaging with feminism, flippancy might appear non-committal; however, it still causes trouble and continues to engage with the negativity that emerges from the irritations. To return to Halberstam, the *Queer Art of Failure* suggests that in order to achieve a new form of radical politics:

We must be willing to turn away from the comfort zone of polite exchange in order to embrace a truly political negativity, one that promises, this time, to fail, to make a mess, to fuck shit up, to be loud, unruly, impolite, to breed resentment, to bash back, to speak up and out, to disrupt, assassinate, shock, and annihilate.²⁹⁷

Perhaps flippancy cannot claim assassination capacities, but it does shock, breed resentment, occupy a position of impoliteness and make a mess of traditional forms of solidarity.

Conclusion

Halberstam writes that 'if taken seriously, unbecoming may have its political equivalent in the anarchic refusal of coherence and proscriptive form of agencies.'²⁹⁸ However, flippancy is characterised by its total lack of seriousness: a levity that renders it unbecoming, which raises the question of whether it ever can occupy the anarchic refusal of coherence outlined by Halberstam. The light-heartedness associated with flippancy, while seemingly at odds with radical negativity, simultaneously provokes and is provoked. In acting as an irritant and in trying on the inappropriate in unsuitable contexts, flippancy becomes a negative reflection of its contemporary and surroundings. Furthermore, it can inspire negativity through the reception of its seeming unseriousness.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*,

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.136.

In line with the theory I have drawn on, I want to deviate from the straight line of critical writing into the personal and anecdotal. Flippancy as a feminist strategy has emerged in a fourth wave moment. In a culture of one hashtag usurping another as the most visible form of political activism, what does it mean to occupy the role of a flippant subject? More importantly, is it ethical to cultivate an unbecoming style, an uncomfortable levity, when mediating the move from Bring Back Our Girls, in response to the girls abducted by Boko Haram in Nigeria, and Yes All Women, which emerged after Elliot Rodger had killed six people at the University of California Santa Barbara.²⁹⁹ I mention these not just anecdotally, but because they form the backdrop to my current thinking through flippancy as feminist poetics and politics. In this conclusion, furthermore, they make evident the problematic of immediate and rapid activist response: BringBackOurGirls was trumped by NotAllMen, which was responded to with YesAllWomen, which in turn provoked YesAllWhiteWomen.³⁰⁰ What does it mean to practice a hashtag feminism, which creates online spaces of solidarity, but is so fleeting it does not necessarily result in any kind of political cohesion?

Flippancy, as I have suggested previously, is entirely contingent: its operations and engagements are informed and determined by the contexts in which it is deployed. It is not separate from anger or righteousness or killing joy. In fact, using flippancy in relation to feminism is often provocative: it encourages negative affects to emerge, affects that are useful for solidarity and mobilisation. Ultimately, I want to return to a previous quote from Riley to consider flippancy's possibilities in relation to feminist political practice. In *Words of Selves*, she writes:

²⁹⁹ Bring Back Our Girls arose in response to over 260 young girls being kidnapped by Boko Haram, for further details see 'Bringing Back the Girls Now and Alive' in *Wall Street Journal Online* (15 July 2014) <<http://online.wsj.com/articles/political-diary-bringing-back-the-girls-now-and-alive-1405453910>> [16 July 2014]. Elliot Rodgers went on a shooting spree in California after claiming he had been repeatedly rejected by women. See Jessica Valenti 'Elliot Rodger's California shooting spree: further proof that misogyny kills' in *Guardian Online* (25 May 2014) <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/24/elliott-rodgers-california-shooting-mental-health-misogyny>> (16 July 2014) for further details.

³⁰⁰ For further information on these specific hashtag activisms see Jumoke Balogun 'Dear world, your hashtags won't #BringBackOurGirls' in *Guardian* (9 May 2014) <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/09/nigeria-hashtags-wont-bring-back-our-girls-bringbackourgirls>> [16 July 2014] and Phil Plait '#YesAllWomen' in *Slate* (27 May 2014) <http://www.slate.com/blogs/bad_astronomy/2014/05/27/not_all_men_how_discussing_women_s_issues_gets_derailed.html> [16 July 2014].

how can I defend my flippant doggerel with its tongue-in-cheek exegesis here as having anything much to do with the serious question of how political subjects are consolidated? Only thus: Calling out, calling myself, and being called are all intimately related to incarnations of the flesh of words.³⁰¹

In relation to flippancy, I like to think of acting out as a form of 'calling out': the deliberate performance – putting on an act, if you will – as a form of 'calling myself', both of which are in response to being 'called to' by a feminist politics with which I am determined to engage.

³⁰¹ Denise Riley, *Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, p.111.

Bibliography

Agamben, Giorgio, 'What is The Contemporary?' in *What is Apparatus? And other essays*, (Stanford: Stanford, 2009).

Agamben, Giorgio, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (California: Stanford University Press, 1998).

Agamben, Giorgio, *State of Exception* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Ahmed, Sara, *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

Ahmed, Sara, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

Ahmed, Sara, *The Promise of Happiness* (London: Duke University Press, 2010).

Ahmed, Sara, 'Happy Objects' in Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J. (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2010) pp.29 – 51.

Ahmed, Sara, *Willfull Subjects* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2014).

Ahmed, Sara, 'Under The Skin' in *Feminist Killjoys* [4 March 2015] in <<http://feministkilljoys.com>> [17 February 2015].

Althusser, Louis, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus (Notes Towards an Investigation)' in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review, 1971).

Ashbery, Ashbery, 'Introduction' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995).

Artaud, Antonin, *The Theatre and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

Artaud, Antonin, *Pour en finir avec le jugement de dieu* (France: Gaillinard, 2003).

Artaud, Antonin, 'The Theatre of Cruelty: First Manifesto' in *The Theatre and its double* (London: Calder, 1970).

Bailey, Cathryn, 'Making Waves and Drawing Lines: The Politics of Defining the Vicissitudes of Feminism' in *Hypatia*, Vol.12, No.3 (Summer, 1997) pp. 17-28.

Balogun, Jumoke, 'Dear world, your hashtags won't #BringBackOurGirls' in *Guardian* (9 May 2014)
<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/09/nigeria-hashtags-wont-bring-back-our-girls-bringbackourgirls>> [Accessed: 16 July 2014].

Banyard, Kate, *The Equality Illusion*, (London: Faber and Faber, 2010).

Bates, Laura, 'The Everyday Sexism Project: a year of shouting back' in *The Guardian* (16 April 2013) < <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2013/apr/16/everyday-sexism-project-shouting-back>> [Accessed: 21 November 2013].

Baumgardner, Jennifer and Amy Richards, *ManifestA: Young Women, Feminism and the Future* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000).

Baumgardner, Jennifer, *F'EM! Goo Goo, Gaga, and Some Thoughts on Balls* (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2011).

Bonney, Sean, 'Letter on Poetics (after Rimbaud)' in *Abandoned Buildings: This Machine Kills Fascists* [25 June 2011] <<http://abandonedbuildings.blogspot.co.uk/2011/06/letter-on-poetics.html>>.

Bonney, Sean, *Document: Poems, Diagrams, Manifestos July 7th 2005 – June 27th 2007*, (London: Barque Press, 2009).

Boone, Bruce, 'Gay Language as Political Praxis: The Poetry of Frank O'Hara' in *Social Text*, No.1 (Winter, 1979), pp. 59 – 92.

Brennan, Teresa, *The Transmission of Affect* (London: Cornell University Press, 2004).

Burke, Carolyn, *Becoming modern: the life of Mina Loy*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

Butler, Judith, *Bodies that Matter*, (New York: Routledge, 1993).

Butler, Judith, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2008).

Campbell, Sue, 'Being Dismissed: The Politics of Emotional Expression' in *Hypatia*, Vol. 9, No.3 (Summer, 1994), pp. 46 – 65.

Certeau, Michel De, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, (London: University of California Press, 1988), p.117.

Chisholm, Dianne, *Queer constellations: subcultural space in wake of the city* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

Cixous, Hélène, 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *Signs*, Vol.1, No.4 (Summer 1967), pp. 875 – 893.

Conover, Roger L. 'Introduction' in *The Lost lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

Conover, Roger L. 'Introduction' in *The Lost lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

Comfort Starr, Nathan 'Negative Capaibility in Keat's Diction' in *Keats-Shelley Journal* Vol.15 (Winter, 1966).

- Cowley, Malcolm, 'Introduction' in *Leaves of Grass* (London: Penguin Group, 1986).
- Cochrane, Kira, *All The Rebel Women: The Rise of the Fourth Wave Feminist* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2014).
- Criado-Perez, Caroline, 'After the Jane Austen announcement I suffered rape threats for 48 hours, but I'm still confident the trolls won't win' in *The New Statesman* (27 July 2013) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/media/2013/07/after-jane-austen-announcement-i-suffered-rape-threats-48-hours-im-still-confident-tro>> [Accessed: 21 November 2013].
- Culp-Ressler, Tara 'Hacker who Exposed Stuebenville Rape Case Could Spend More Time Behind Bars than Rapists' in *Think Progress* (7 June 2013) <<http://thinkprogress.org/health/2013/06/07/2119171/anonymous-hacker-steubenville-jail/>> [Accessed: 30 November 2013].
- Cvetkovich, Ann, *An Archive of Feelings: trauma, sexuality, and lesbian public cultures* (London: Duke University Press, 2003).
- Delap, Lucy, *The feminist avant-garde: transatlantic encounters of the early twentieth century*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
- Deleuze, Gilles, *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London: Verso, 1998).
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Feli, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
- Dinshaw, Carolyn, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (London: Duke Press, 1999).
- Derrida, Jacques, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression' in *Diacritics* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Summer, 1995).
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau, 'Seismic Orgasm: Sexual Intercourse and Narrative Meaning in Mina Loy' in *Ambiguous Discourse: feminist narratology and British women writers* ed. Kathy Mezei (Carolina: University of Carolina Press, 1996).
- Elliot, Cath, 'Women speak out about online abuse' *Too Much To Say For Myself* (7 November 2011) <<http://toomuchtosayformyself.com/2011/11/07/women-speak-out-about-online-abuse/>> [Accessed 8 November 2011].
- Elliot, Cath, 'An Occupational Hazard' *Too Much To Say For Myself* (20 April 2011) <<http://toomuchtosayformyself.com/2011/04/20/an-occupational-hazard/>> [29 October 2011].
- Epstein, Andrew, *Beautiful Enemies: Friendship and Postwar American Poetry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006),

- Esslin, Martin, *Antonin Artaud: The Man and His Work*, (London: Calder Publications, 1999).
- Fallon, Freddy et al., 'Gender and Digital Politics' in *Digital Papers* Issue 5, (July 2011).
- Faludi, Susan, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (London: Vintage, 1992).
- Frazer, Winifred L., *Mabel Dodge Luhan* (Boston: Twayne, 1984).
- Gay, Roxane, *Bad Feminist* (London: Harper Perennial, 2014).
- Geary, Joanna, 'SXSW Notes: Why is Professional Blogging Bloodsport For Women' *joannageary.com* (15 March 2009)
<<http://www.joannageary.com/2009/03/15/sxsw-notes-why-is-professional-blogging-bloodsport-for-women/>> [26 October 2011].
- Gilloch, Graeme, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Malden: Polity, 2002).
- Ginsberg, Allen, 'Abstraction in Poetry' in *Deliberate Prose: Selected Essays 1952 – 1995* (London: HarperCollins, 2001).
- Gooch, Brad, *City Poet: the life and times of Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Knopf Press, 1993).
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworthy, (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2010).
- Halberstam, J. Jack, *Gaga Feminism: Sex, Gender, and The End of Normal* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012).
- Herd, David, 'Stepping out with Frank O'Hara' in *Frank O'Hara Now* eds. Robert Hampson and Will Montgomery, p.70 – 85.
- Harris, Rowan, 'Futurism, Fashion and the Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy', in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (London: Salt Publishing, 2010).
- Hampson, Robert and Will Montgomery eds. *Frank O'Hara Now* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010).
- Harrison, Charles, 'Jackson Pollock' in *Varieties of Modernism* ed. Paul Wood (Milton Keynes: Yale University Press, 2004).
- Hughes, Robert, *The Shock of the New: Art and The Century of Change* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991).
- Halberstam, Judith, *The Queer Art of Failure* (California: Duke University Press, 2011).
- Kaeh Garrison, Ednie, 'U.S. Feminism-Grrrl Style Youth (Sub)Cultures and the Technologies of the Third Wave' in *Feminist Studies* (26)1, pp.141-170.

Keohane, Nannerl O. (1986) 'A Fourth Wave?' in *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol.10, No. 5 (Winter, 1986), pp. 154 – 158.

Kinnahan, Linda A., *Poetics of the feminine: authority and literary tradition in William Carlos Williams, Mina Loy, Denise Levertov, and Kathleen Fraser*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Kinser, Amber E., 'Negotiating Spaces for/through Third-Wave Feminism' in *NWSA*, Vol.16, No.3 (Autumn, 2004) pp. 124-153.

Kouidis, Virginia M., *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet*, (London: Louisiana State, 1980).

Lamm, Kimberly, 'Interview with Eileen Myles' on *HOW2* (21 March 2001) http://www.asu.edu/pipercenter/how2journal/archive/online_archive/v1_8_2002/current/workbook/lamm-interview.htm [14 March 2014].

LeSueur, Frank, *Digressions on some poems by Frank O'Hara*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004).

Long, Julia, *Anti-Porn: The Resurgence of Anti Pornography Feminism* (London: Zed Books, 2012).

Love, Heather, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Loy, Mina, 'Feminist Manifesto' in *The Lost lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

Loy, Mina, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover, (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997).

Loy, Mina, *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, ed. Sara Crangle, (London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011).

Lusty, Natalya, 'Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism' in *Women: A Cultural Review*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (November 2008).

Lehman, David, *The Last Avant-Garde: the making of the New York School of Poetics* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

Mann, Susan A & Douglas J. Huffman 'The Decentering of Second Wave Feminism and the rise of the Third wave' in *Science & Society*, Vol.69, No.4 (January, 2005), pp. 56-91.

Marinetti, F.T., 'Futurist Manifesto' in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, ed. Alex Danchev, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), pp. 1 – 8. Meyer, Moe, ed. *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (London: Routledge, 1994).

McRobbie, Angela, *The Aftermath of feminism: gender, culture and social change*, (London: Sage Publications, 2009).

- Myles, Eileen, 'Inferno (a poet's novel)' on *OR Books*
<<http://www.orbooks.com/catalog/inferno-a-poets-novel/>> [2011].
- Myles, Eileen, 'The Lesbian Poet' in *School of Fish* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1997).
- Myles, Eileen, *Inferno (a Poet's Novel)*, (USA: OR Books, 2010).
- Myles, Eileen, *Cool for you*, (New York: Soft Skull Press Inc., 2000).
- Myles, Eileen, *Not Me*, (USA: Semiotext(e), 1991).
- Myles, Eileen, *Maxfield Parrish* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow Press, 1995).
- Myles, Eileen, *The Importance of Being Iceland: Travel Essays in Art* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2009).
- Myles, Eileen, 'Paint it Clear, Paint it Black' in *The Volta* (May 2013)
<<http://www.thevolta.org/ewc29-emyles-p1.html>> [Accessed: 30 December 2013].
- Nelson, Maggie, *Women, The New York School, and Other True Abstractions* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007).
- New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 62, Folder 1658, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, November 15 [1914?]. [Accessed online].
- New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 24, Folder 665, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, 1914. [Accessed online].
- New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Mabel Dodge Papers, YCAL MSS 196, Box 24, Folder 664, Mina Loy to Mabel Dodge, February 1914. [Accessed online].
- Ngai, Sianne, *Ugly Feelings* (London: Harvard University Press, 2007).
- O'Hara, Frank, *Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet, 2005).
- O'Hara, Frank, 'Personism: A Manifesto' in *The Collected Poems of Frank O'Hara* ed. Donald Allen, (California: University of California Press, 1995).
- Obrist, Hans, 'Manifestos for the Future' in *e-flux* [2010] <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/manifestos-for-the-future/>>.
- Olson, Charles, 'Projective verse' in *Postmodern American Poetry: A Norton Anthology* ed. Paul Hoover (London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994).
- Orr, Catherine M., 'Charting the Currents of the third Wave' in *Hypatia*, Vol.12, No.3, (Summer, 1997) pp.29-45.

Penley, Constance, et al. 'Introduction' in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas et al. (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013), pp.9-21.

Penley, Constance, "A Feminist Teaching Pornography? That's Like Scopes Teaching Evolution!" in *The Feminist Porn Book: The Politics of Producing Pleasure* eds. Tristan Taormino, Celine Parrenas et al. (New York: The Feminist Press, 2013), pp.179 – 199.

Penny, Laurie, 'A woman's opinion is the mini-skirt of the internet' in *The Independent* (4 November 2011)
<<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/commentators/laurie-penny-a-womans-opinion-is-the-miniskirt-of-the-internet-6256946.html>> [5 November 2011].

Penny, Laurie, 'Steubenville: this is rape culture's Abu Ghraib moment' in *The New Statesman* (19 March 2013) <<http://www.newstatesman.com/laurie-penny/2013/03/steubenville-rape-cultures-abu-ghraib-moment>> [Accessed: 30 November 2013].

Penny, Laurie, *Meat Market: Female Flesh Under Capitalism* (Winchester: Zero Books, 2011).

Penny, Laurie, *Cybersexism: Sex, Gender and Power on The Internet* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013).

Pilkington, Ed, 'SlutWalking gets rolling after cop's loose talk about provocative clothing' in *The Guardian* (6 May 2011)
<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/06/slutwalking-policeman-talk-clothing>> [accessed: 21 November 2013].

Plait, Phil, '#YesAllWomen' in *Slate* (27 May 2014)
<http://www.slate.com/blogs/bad_astronomy/2014/05/27/not_all_men_how_discussing_women_s_issues_gets_derailed.html> [Accessed: 16 July 2014].

Potter, Rachel and Suzanne Hobson, 'Introduction', in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (London: Salt Publishing, 2010).
Perloff, Marjorie, *Poet Amongst Painters*, Russell Ferguson, *In Memory of my Feelings: Frank O'Hara and American Art* (London: University of California Press, 1999).

Purvis, Jennifer, 'Grrrls and Women Together in the Third Wave: Embracing the Challenges of Generational Feminism(s)' in *NWSA* Vol.16, No.3 (Autumn, 2004), pp. 93-123.

Ragg, Edward, *Wallace Stevens and the Aesthetics of Abstraction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

- Redfern, Christine and Kristin Aune, *Reclaiming the F-Word* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2010).
- Reed, Brian M., *Hart Crane: after his lights* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006).
- Rich, Adrienne, *Diving Into the Wreck* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1984).
- Rich, Adrienne, *The Dream of A Common Language* (London: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1993).
- Riley, Denise, *"Am I That Name?": Feminism and the Category of Women in History*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).
- Riley, Denise, *Impersonal Passion: language as affect*, (London: Duke University Press, 2005).
- Riley, Denise, *The Words of Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2000).
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain, 'The Use of Theory' in *For a new novel: essays on fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989).
- Robbe-Grillet, Alain, 'A future For the Novel' in *For a new novel: essays on fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989).
- Robinson, Mark, 'Routledge to Publish First Porn Studies Journal' on *TandF* (2013) <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/press/porn-studies.pdf> [January 2014].
- Rodgerson, Gillian and Wilson, Elizabeth eds. *Pornography and Feminism: The Case Against Censorship* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1991).
- Rowbotham, Sheila, *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*, (London: Penguin Books, 1999).
- Saint-Point, Valentine, 'Manifesto of The Futurist Woman' in *100 Artists' Manifestos: From the Futurists to the Stuckists*, ed. Alex Danchev, (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 2011), pp.29-34.
- Shaw, Lytle, *Frank O'Hara: the poetics of coterie*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2006).
- Shreiber, Maera and Keith Tuma, *Mina Loy: woman and poet*, (Orono: National Poetry Foundation, 1998).
- Silverberg, Mark, *The New York School Poets and the Neo-Avant-Garde: Between Radical Art and Radical Chic* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2010).
- Smith, Hazel, *'Hyperscapes in the poetry of Frank O'Hara': difference, homosexuality, topography* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000).

- Sontag, Susan, 'Notes on Camp' in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1966), pp.275 – 292.
- Stephenson, Gregory, "'Howl": A Reading' in *On The Poetry of Allen Ginsberg* (eds.) Allen Ginsberg and Lewis Hyde (Michigan: University of Michigan, 1984).
- Thrift, Nigel 'Understanding the Material Practices of Glamour' in Gregg, Melissa and Seigworth, Gregory J. (eds.) *The Affect Theory Reader* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp.289-308.
- Unknown, 'Violence against women worldwide is 'epidemic'' in *BBC News* (20 June 2013) in <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-22975103>> [15 July 2014].
- Unknown, 'An open Letter from Black Women to the SlutWalk' on *NewBlackMan.Blogspot* (23 September 2011) <<http://newblackman.blogspot.co.uk/2011/09/open-letter-from-black-women-to.html>> [Accessed: 4 August 2014].
- Unknown, 'Bringing Back the Girls Now and Alive' in *Wall Street Journal Online* (15 July 2014) <<http://online.wsj.com/articles/political-diary-bringing-back-the-girls-now-and-alive-1405453910>> [Accessed: 16 July 2014]
- Valenti, Jessica, 'Elliot Rodger's California shooting spree: further proof that misogyny kills' in *Guardian Online* (25 May 2014) <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/may/24/elliott-rodgers-california-shooting-mental-health-misogyny>> [Accessed: 16 July 2014].
- Whitman, Walt, *Leaves of Grass*, (London: Penguin Group, 1986).
- Wilkinson, John, 'Stumbling, Balking, Tacking: Robert Creeley's *For Love* and Mina Loy's 'Love Songs to Joannes'' in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy* (eds.) Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2010), p.146 - 165.
- Williams, William Carlos, 'The Poem as A Field of Action' in *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams* (New York: Random House, 1954).
- Williams, William Carlos, 'The Art of Poetry (1964)' in *The Paris Review Interviews: Vol. III* (New York: Picador, 2008).
- Wood, Paul, 'The Idea of an Abstract Art' in *Art of the Avant-Gardes* eds. Steve Edwards and Paul Wood (Milton Keynes: Yale University Press, 2004), pp.229 – 272.

Practice

Feminine Lécriture: Sluts, Sexism and Sisterhood

20.11.11

So I am reclaiming
the night as it has been reclaimed
before, & then Slut; ever
presently the words that mean
nothing but mean woman all the same.

The awareness of you
at the front of a lecture theatre
comes to me in waves;
a look like the absence
of water on someone dying
for a drink, though I would like
to take her out for one
& talk about social theory
over glass rims
with eyes lazy
dispirited and coloured rum
I'll make myself
a haze of territory,
a small part of something
that can be taken back.
Like the night - which is
hitting hard with heavy descent
trying to surprise day out
of November's cold complacency.

As you talk about problematic
narratives, the crest of your laugh
lofty and frothed,
I problematise your zip
with the trough of my fingers
clumsy & downward as
I am though
I try.

Each inch of you is an insight &
can I still call you sister
now that we've fucked?
"You never did call me Sister" -
the Utopia ended before its beginnings
which were humbled & bedded
by you.

I add you to a list of FILF
(& in some cases have);
but monogamy has a new light, not this
cloying fear of - just one - like

lungs too small for breathing.

Did you notice in your talk – I ask –
that mostly men asked the questions.
Knowing nothing about you.
“But neither do you” & for all
the shares of anatomy
this common ground
of your tongue on my skin
my words at your feet
this facile of similarity is
nothing like knowledge – is it?

As you turn away in bed
performing this newest rejection
you pick up Judith Butler

& I – ever in the present tense -
go back to modernist lesbians, who if
nothing else teach me where
language is lost, meaning
is too.

Woman's Rights? Bah Humbug! Protest

29.11.11

I look for devils everywhere
& if there are none
I advocate the best I can.
When I see a priest on the district line
I almost get off
the whole carriage starting to smell
the antiseptic of faith.

Four men laughing say
he looks like a 70s Pornstar
& I believe truly, against belief
no woman would have done the same.
I should have said something
but if they're riffing demeaning-costumed sex
I'd only be screaming 'target'.

Now, months on, years on, a whole age
I wake up next to
my own improbability,
& listen to trains go past,
Prokofiev's dancing Capulets less
delicately moved than I
by the simple turning of wheels
& I think a hand on someone's thigh is perfect possessive
now I've had time to miss yours.

At the protest where Westminster has started to look more blackened than
ever before, seven are there rather than
the promised seventy of
easy-
click-
online-
lives
& this moving of the masses has become so easy
since we've been able to press 'attending'
like someone else's buttons
when we're just looking for a
little intimacy.

At the Wine & Raised Voices social
that evening my morals now loose
as tongues, I make the femmenist-fatale
mistake of choosing Akon's new number
as my karaoke song: it is unforgivable
misplaced & painful
even now the memory
feels like continuous present.

What am I if not an

unfortunate product
of my popular culture?

I buy the paper & sit down to write
using the margins of Guardian
readership to structure the stanzas.

Woman held in phone
hacking probe
& either it's a new
nightmarish form of prison;
or
a headline because
a lady somewhere
has done something bad
(whereas the men are not
just men arrested because
they have names,
which is
expected of them).

A station warden waves
off my overground
like an unwelcome aunt
& my ticket is checked like art
in unlikely places & I am
a furtive Banksy of commuter travel
when I prove
that I do have a student card & thus deserve reduced prices
I hand over my money
to the cinema cashier
& sit the whole way through
My Week with Marilyn :
about a man who loved an image
of a woman who never became real
& I drink in a pub where
men around the bar have
such unwelcome permanence.

I used to be a seasoned drinker until
a glass of strong brandy left me reeling for days
& someone said that ought to put hair on your chest
but no petite woman is after the pectorals of a man
when she looks to the mirror.

In a hospital somewhere more rural than here, there's a crying out for help that
goes unanswered.

Do you remember how I used to come round
and eat candied mango and that
you never grew up to be the artist you
promised; not that you never

got taller, and wider, more of a man
but just forgot your
feel for a figure & we've since lost
our luxury?

Ostensibly the world should have stopped, but I almost don't notice
when it's only the women who are missing.

After a glass too many – which for me, on
days like today when London has a hurricane
warning & I have tempted you into my company
with tickets to an author you once liked, is quite
commonplace -

I walk into the men's by accident;
but it doesn't matter because it
looks like I'm just queering the
toilet

A man in a dress is lit
between the walls of a stall
like a readymade in a frame;
the lipstick just found its way
to his face like accidents of
art in one-size-fits-all worlds.
The urinal is all dismay behind
me & this evening's bright stripes
of camp are becoming
a different kind of Duchamp.

I sit here like rougher trade
than I really am in case
you swap me in for something
white collar and comfortable;
something a little less boy-girl
and certain, with a bow on top
but;

I am you short of an I
a second away from self.

And when she begins to speak this is better than page-based, better than
concrete, better than firecrackers Scottish & below 5ft, better than trainspotting
impersonations, all of my Glaswegian pastiche, or even pastis which I would
never drink outside of summer anyway or outside of Paris, especially now I am
in a conference room for an evening surrounded by an architecture of brutality
that knew before I did this was a night for gay publishers, & now beside you I am
flagrant revelation, I am flagrant homo-social wish you were home with me
because socialising is tired. And she reads. And there is nothing but me to stop
me reaching out for you and she is fluid and changing and I cry quite by mistake
because this is too much beauty for the eye to behold, and while I am stripped to
nothing by boy meeting girl it all becomes so fast it resembles some kind of unity.

But she is a prose writer & rumour has it
the poets always leave them behind in
search of new bodies to fall, which
always do fall.

After

I drag my sleeping feet
back to feminine
& walk the Southbank
of our Thames to my
nearest station which
is decorated with the names of
men who fell for freedom
& I trip up the steps: my fall
from Grace: but always hope
to land in the alteration of
your arms, which makes me
less than human, only
relativity.

If the bookshop had seams
they would split
but people like unwanted weight
spill out onto the curb
undisguised & unappealing
in their clamouring & chatter.
When free mulled wine & minced pies
are headlining with Caitlin Moran
as a supporting act we crowd
together, belt-hooked & tucked in
to feel our best
familiar bodies pressed tightly
like fingers pulsing & ready
easing a shirt down undone jeans.

Buckle up.

This is not what a feminist looks like – she
seems happy, for one – &
is well dressed.
A levity of white streaks through
the undressed black of her hair.

This is not what feminists look like
their only statements are
hair-pieces
& placards are the falling, throwing
shapes of their jackets
even the rain dropping is looking
fuller with mascara.

I drink the wine on offer, but I draw the line at accepting
baked goods from strangers; this Waterstones' chain
no alms house & their food supplies bound
to involve a pact with the devil or
Nestle.

People used to ask me how we lasted so long & I've
long since stopped explaining that I like the pastry of minced pies
while you only ate the centre & meeting someone
who fits like that is probably one in a couple of thousand
so Christmas was always our happiest time :
almost unexplainable in the Summer

I can't be fucked to
wait in line though
she looks beautiful – but
it bothers me that
the world & me loves her.

She calls me baby twice & I'm not sure
whether this is a come-on or solidarity
but she says my hair is nice, which makes
me think maternal thoughts with
her hand on my back engendering trouble.
Her performed smile only a camera-click away &
disarming as its flash

London has never been so wet as this evening
I hold the book like it's the dream
of size 0 & feel all adolescent now that I've been
with a lady who writes her life so prettily.

Outside, a woman whose hood has slipped
over her eyes
is collecting for Womankind Worldwide.
- I stop & put a pound in the tin.

Feminista Muff March

10.12.11

I am marching away my first-world problems
the feel of a cardiac workout the most healing
salve for inequality I can think of – and here – I
am one of the privileged, being thrice marginalized:
as woman
as bisexual
by my inhaler,
 which they didn't make in red to match my Politics

Clare Jones, who I am with & who is dressed for ice-skating
with her heteronormative self later that day complains all the
way because this is
not her fight
not worth fighting
like the third world
& the beauties
in mutilations dressed by
NGOs & facial
reconstructions we can be doing when
acid has made us less women
than our legal rights imply

& her feet are cold.

I partly listen, caught instead by the allure of a word play on a sign.
I wish I were here with a brunette I am very recently in love with (not Clare) but
they are a whole set of alternative moralities away which feels like a distance
when you want someone this badly.

Regent's Park is a Winter of
itself; a discontent of people
faces iced stoic like lakes
amongst trees having agitated
themselves to nakedness
& even the sunlight has that
familiar quality of cold like the
feeling of looking at someone
you know will leave you one day.

Looking at placards, I wonder, if
DON'T SLIT MY CLIT is some kind
of foreplay, so I walk next to
her in the hope she might take me
home, teach me a thing or two about
Loves Labias Lost.

Just being in the same city as these women is enough to hurt me into poetry.

I leave early missing a Harley street culmination feeling my city sting with politics from the circle line as I put Ethel Smyth on repeat & think of her love for Virginia Woolf & my love for the Waves & London seems whole for once.

At Vauxhall underground
an Italian man says *Mama Mia* at me
which is a shame because I don't believe in
national stereotypes.

I have come to Bethnal Green to see Joan Jonas & perhaps
Tilda Swinton a little more because her expressions are
an art alone face framing the not-quite abstract of her straight lines.

I run into Jenni who is working
with children in theatre & has a Dutch
boyfriend & incidentally
is my cousin
but got all of the 5'10 genes to fill her
tall jeans whereas mine are always
the smallest you've got please.

She points me to a café which is kitsch, filled with
children's toys, half buried, clothes which are
vintage worn out&in, I hate the smell
of age which is really a scent of passing time.
If I never get to the gallery
this is the place to sit, she tells me
where they write your name on your food
receipt to make edible intimacy.

But I do get to the gallery & behind its steel black doors
there is no art but documentation, there is no continuous,
the only present, us, while everything else on show is all
part of the past.

But you are a future of
love iconoclasm red & I
will not put you down
even if I feel my fingertips
burning their print away.

& though I'll go back to him as I am used
you'll bleed me like an old cure until I have
to ruin all the beauty he's created for us.

When I get home, I'm the same shade of blush as destruction
& sit in my blue bedroom to cool down.

In bed later, when I mention the pay gap
the conviction rate for rapists, talk about
my bodily anxiety which he is holding to
him; a mine of problematic possessions, &
He says Hush Hush, you're so emotional.
and falls back to sleep --- every man's Marinetti of modern age.

Bed should be a suitcase unpacking of our days,
but it's just become a symbol of all
the detritus of a life before *you* were here

& you is never permanent anyway.

But now I have woken up and I can't help
but think of Joan Jonas' woman with four
marriages, based on ancient lore, & I might
need something a little more mythical than
this;

How can I justify this turn away
which is more than just our bodies
I look to the Gods I might come to love:

man shall not lie with man;
woman can do whatever
she fancies.

Nadine Dorries' Abstinence Bill Protest

20.1.12

The woman opposite us on the overground
is eating an egg, but has opened the window
of the girl next to her, like a conciliatory
yellow sunshine centre gesture in all
the white of unwelcome train smells.

She is holding in her hand hardboiled motherhood & biting whole mouthfuls of
living, yolk & all.

I am off to debate Just say No because No
means yes and yes means
anal.

I am outside the Houses of Parliament again – St Paul's is taken – without
a banner, or convictions which I could probably pick up from the
nearby police van & standing next to Penny Red
who is shorter than you'd imagine but does have
protester hair, bright of pink down to the indignation of her jacket.

Note to self: stop going to these protests with anti-sex feminists
if you want to take them to bed.

The last thing you need to hear is that she
just finds 'sex-positive' problematic
which turns your seductive optimism
grey & leaves nothing but body
with which to disarm;

I am not anti-sex; I am watching the L Word,
reading Henry Miller for its casual degradation, &
dipping into Judith – still –
who never invited such a casual approach
she feels like a long-term girl to me
which is what makes me nervous

especially when she can see through every act.

But I've got her on the kindle, which is mechanical, reductive, instructive,
as text shouldn't be, & only serves to remind me that really it's
bodies that matter.

Dorries is not my sister
but arguably, neither is my sister
who is conservative & golfs on the weekends
& in a day's time
the right papers in order
I will become a a disorder of sexuality.

SLUT means speak up
PRUDE means step down & so I let myself
get pushed aside by the cameraman who
is both a man & keeps elbowing feminists

to get us from his better angle
& is focusing on the 18 year old with the sign that reads 'I wish someone had
taught Nadine Dorries' mum how to say no'.

There is such crude humour always
when it gets anatomical
& I have little
place in all of this rage.

○, the symbol, formally known as Clare Jones, does not want to be known any longer.

She said putting her in poems is too intimate,
too revealing, then returned to
'The Left & The Erotic', eating from a pot of chocolate ice-cream.

Last night, there was a man in the house
& this morning, ○& I have talked periods as if
to wash him away
to sanitise the masculinity
a creeping camp of beta
threatening rather than alpha male.

As I sit down to write it
my confessional is a political 'I'
I put on Jupiter which reminds me
of the way you move;
a kind of glorious frenetic
fight - you are - though you
might think I don't see it.
Though I'm three cups of coffee
desperate for the toilet, I have to
sit & listen until the end.

cunt has entered my every day
vernacular
& I am likening poems to lover's pussies which
drink coffee, sing ballads, commute like the rest of us.
& what is meant to be an early sexualisation of
our youths has come late for me.

When I see him again – different man – I want
only to say:
Shave it off, you look like a girl with a
hormone problem –
but it's not my place anymore now
we have no shared address or postcode
to position our critiques kindly.
G02 HE11

Outside, London is tragedy cold
& the dishwater steamed clean wet of
my glass lenses start to splinter
themselves warm over my Riley paperback.
which is better than my eyes
pricking with tears which is
noticeable, which is an odd
verb, denoting pin, small sensation or
male, or sometimes all three if he's

unlucky.

●tells me not to be so crude.

So, I sit, an outcast, which is better than downcast,
in the Southbank centre - surrounded by their
cheerful coffin display - listening to ABBA
& my heart is not broken & my heart is
not a fist, which you told me yours was once, and
I didn't have the words to tell you it was just
indigestion after all that Thai food.

Because you are more a romantic than
you realise and
because today I found out labias have their
own lipstick, even though they need help applying
it
& my lips stick with rouge & your pen is dull with unhappiness
but then, some people think Leonard Cohen is a poet
so if we come to expect so little of words,
we might make it after all.

I am on the balcony of Conway Hall on Red Lion Square with the men & a few other latecomers, but my notebook is the largest

On the subtitle screen for those hard of hearing all the English accents are broken like Britain into misspelt syllables & phonetics these units of language are becoming harmful, miss un de stüd and so our signs will have to be full body gestures if we're to get anything at all.

Though everything today reminds me of the pyrotechnics of our first touch it does not mean I am waiting for your phone call.

I have seen more Frida Kahlos here than I did at her exhibition & more Diego Riveras then the fairer sex would like to admit & though I am more mocking than hummingbird, we can't be shot at, which is better for me, after all.

We are invited to tell our own stories --- narratives, prose character development, beginning middle ends --- but we are none of those things the only coherent arc here framing the proscenium stage of a disparate theatrics & true to the drama of another time written across the ceiling is: 'To thine own self be true'

But which one?

The queue outside the gender-neutral toilets is 20 people deep with the principle of it & I stand in line, not wanting to be the girl who makes a break for the women's.

And actually, amongst all this line-up deviance, this active looking I have found more beauty than I have ever seen

In connecting movements I'm drawn again to the words on the screen which are not like art though they're sketchier than verbal difference, by far

On the subject of disability, instead of 'autistic, and particularly looking for'
Autistic and particular look in
is typed across the screen &
what a way to undermine linguistic anger
what a way to make uniting separate causes
sound like a KFC bucket with a new oriental sauce.

I say nothing though maybe I should be shouting
WHAT ABOUT OUR LANGUAGE, when the deaf woman begins
to sign & the silence of the room is as expressive as
any scream, any despair, and we all hear her like it is
the first time a cause has been spoken
& through some essentialism that creeps up on me
every now & then like unexpected adolescent-throw back
I feel I understand the women filling seats around me better
than I do enunciation, though I've been taught in one &
not the other

Though how exciting to learn & learn one way
that is not just male/female.

Languid Americano – black - & Panini
of difference (pesto & olive, neither one nor the other)
and here there is no mutually exclusive
just what I am able to buy & Gaskell on the kindle.

The open forum of a coffee shop with steamed-milk
conversation.

"A woman must be fit enough to be a fuck toy, but not fit enough to be strong"
which is the ugliest rhetoric I have seen even
if there's laughter around it, because it's materiality
stuck on the repeat of a hahaha
that is futile & fickle as
I am.

I learn that sexism in the media
is 'apt slooly a blunkt'
& I am too because sometimes I wonder
what they look like if you strip away
convention though I'm equally interested in what women
might be trying on
when they wear & tear what they do.
But I don't like myself naked, so maybe it's transference
or perhaps there is something in this new way of
dressing, this looseness of clothing
that makes taking it off seem – every day – more unlikely.

We buy 'cut cakes' & cup
cakes in our recently holding hands &
they are limited in art by the colours
of icing Tesco had on offer so that ours
is a tepid orange split open anatomy smile.
You take the first bite but when I toothily
disseminate the waving layered of its
decoration I realise hazelnuts are posing as
extraneous hair & as a recent allergen of mine
I have to stop to have an anti-histamine.

You know what word is not poetic – ?
which is why it belongs in the surgery of
Doctors or in verbatim monologues to prove
a political point because having spent five minutes
of spoken-word, watching a woman trying to make
it rhyme with 'beauty', I know
it has no place in a stanza.

& this performed female empowerment comes in the form of metaphor:
my is a landscape
mine is dressed in a trouser-suit
my is a person unto itself
mine is baked bread (which can only mean yeast infection).

My is a coffee drinker, more comfortable in androgynous dress,
aspiring to poetry, not easily swayed by fact but cries at the movies.
Mine is cynical, does not play well with others, doesn't like confessional writing
& feels uncomfortable in social situations.
My is self-referential yet elusive, likes urban walks & tube carriages,
the sounds of other people's distress, & the games we play when we're tired of
our language.
Mine is a Picasso, considering the labour party & has been staged to look this
way.

There's a fetid half-red, half-lit paint distressed heart behind the stage
each break in it a bulb to light the actresses
a tired sponge-cake activism
& a selling of vague donated goods
yet here I am, the
centre of all beauty
writing these poems
imagine

You might think me young, a little too univocal for you
who collects statements & wears them out as opinion the next day:
--- Oh, do you like it? It's exploited girl, Mozambique.
While I converse textually with performance poets I have seen who

have mistaken slurring words & up-speak for a rhyme substitution.
Do they not know ABAB is dead in the age of sex shopping where
“Men are allowed in with a woman
or on Tuesday”.

Maybe I will go to Vauxhall after all.
I can't wait for you to see my eyes are dotted & my
I's always observant in passing.

When I get home, I look you up for memory's sake
(and because I am excluding nouns today, it will work for proper ones too)
***** likes 'drinking' on facebook.
Remember I caught you fragile once?
It was love for you that set me afire & being in your part of town, south of your
border between my London & yours.

I have arrived early for another protest
& while I am meant to be in purple, the only
solidarity of colour is my nose
in dialogue with the cold

I stand with the
London Met wardens, which is the safest place to be, in the neon
yellow of power, until I hear the female police
officer – attractive and authoritarian - say
“I don’t like birds” as she protects me from a car
then looks at a pigeon then back to me then back
to the pigeon

We haven’t moved for half an hour
& my legs are like hollow ideologies waiting for the walking off -
the two women behind us feed each other’s cats
when they are away
 the women – not the cats – cats don’t holiday
& Lambeth Women’s Shelter is closing next week
because refuges have something of the high-waisted 80s
about them we hate sartorial hang-ups
in an age of progress

A dislocated grey sky gestures blue above us
& the distance between M&S Food and Selfridge’s Food Hall
is a stony road glare of bright-eyed traffic lights, open wide car tyres
the young bride foot-to-foot of when will this all begin for us?

I look at the diminishing line behind me and meditate on
the quantitative optimistic of Million
(the qualitative optimism of ‘women’)
& these quantities of disappointment are difficult to count

All these euphemistic names of ours; how will we ever wear them again?

* * *

When the slow rolling of the crowd begins the balls of
our feet turning like whole worlds, the singing begins
its megaphone distortion a cracking-lyricism of voice.

“Sister, can you hear me” we call
& with some voices I wish I
couldn’t, but that’s solidarity
for you.

We shout
Hey (Ho), Patriarchy has to go but
a misplaced comma & it’s a

Snoop Dog song.

We are the cheerleaders of the revolution
Stop the violence – that is the solution
but the greying cloud of my mind just expects damage to be
done & I'd rather not dress that up in blazing red skirts
& try to rhyme myself away from what is real
what hurts
what still burns with unpreparedness after all this time.

Resist! Resist! Raise up your fist!
Resist! Resist! Fight misogynists!

What are we if not our language?
Occupying it might be all we have left & it's taken
me long enough to realise I love no-one in this city;
just its offered verse.

* * *

You have a politics that will stop traffic
& I have dreamed you here since the first
day we saw one another & you told me
reclaiming spaces was easier than words,
& took a peace of my mind though I've never
told you that.

You are beautiful & I am resistance,
your walk all the temptation of a mobility
scooter during a march.

I am so easily converted & I'd like to learn under
the weight of your principles
because you could be just my type.

Never cross a picket line, you tell me
& though I shake my head,
I probably would
because I am faithless.

* * *

In Trafalgar Square when we finally arrive there
we are the tired torn leaf of paper information collected
in bags & hands.
It is announced this is to be
The Year of the Girl Child
(The Year of Tautological Statements)

And next to the lions a group of fourteen year old girls dance for the inadequacy
of boys around them their hips a young fragrance & all that self-esteem a
repulsion of hormones sounding off the stone;
And though I won't be the first one to cast,
I don't think anyone should be allowed
to move to music until they've learnt what
rhythm really means & that such attention gets you
nowhere if you know where you're headed

All my steps until now can't have been that vacuous, can they?

* * *

I drink coffee in a crypt where I take
it flat white like my personality
like my chest
like my page before a poem.

* * *

Tonight I am wearing two-tone denim, glasses &
myself,
listening to Sexual Healing with a bottle of Merlot
considering a letter to Walkers, telling them not to
personify my food - I am about to eat that smiling potato
sliced fine & covered in salt and vinegar.
Lana Turner has not collapsed,
another beautiful woman is unavailable,
& there is nothing at all to be written.

In an act of undeniable symbolism
I have burnt my upper thigh with
the iron while doing a shirt.
Not a small affliction, no, but the welt of a W
flaming & blushing livid.
Clare Jones says that will teach me to iron in my pants but
it is my right to undressed this early in the morning.
So while women are on the bridge
I am in the shower
where I sooth away the balm I have been salved
in to stop infection; but I
want to go out unprotected &
come home with dust in what's raw

Last night when you were anecdotal I thought
a story like that can only be told by a man who
has never had cystitis & if needs be, I'll do
what I can to destroy you

But today, it is international woman's day and I can find nothing
to be cruel about
All the twactivists being twitty on witter
sounds like Disney birdsong & I am
Snow White (but not gracious, nor
beautiful, dark nor fair) with my
hands out waiting for the feel of beak & talon.
Then I think of Hitchcock & change my mind
– I remember how well it ended for that
blonde.

The floor starts to fill with sun-warm women as if they've
been poured in by the day while
my thigh throbs more than a
Mills & Boon

I have covered my table in coffee cups & 'Interrogating Post-Feminism'
as a pointing arrow
to my circular femininity.
The front cover reads:
Post-
Femi-
Nism-
& I can't help but thinking they didn't
draw from the language poets for
that alignment because what
political units are Femi- and Nism-
when they're at home?
Which 100 years ago, is where I'd be.

To celebrate, Jeanette Winterson writes about Gertrude Stein for Granta & only that woman could make another woman about her & I think more people should read Janet Malcolm's version of events because a woman remembered for the heft of her cruelty & moustache of her partner is not the best symbol for a progressive movement.

More women come in, like a spill, an accidental of solidarity that you can try to mop up but we're rivers, lakes taps & for drinking & I'd like to see you do without that

I can't find it in me to be flippant about girls in S. Sudan being more likely to die in childbirth than get through primary school, but I have joined the shameless taking photos of Cherie Blair with her perfect of hair.

This is what a feminist looks like
weighted with fact & slim of expectation
from everywhere
a pride content to sit on the wooden London floors
offered us
perplexed by Gertrude Stein calling
orgasms 'making a cow come out' & what it
might mean logistically for bed with Alice
believing in a new Goddess because what other
way is there to describe her
our names all down for the war that is here & is coming
laughing & laughing & laughing

all this
& still light of foot.

The morning after I read
O'Hara in bed put some
Stravinsky on like hang
over for one: no nostalgia
record scratch like the
company that might just
get me coffee in the
morning if I asked

But so many lovers have had so many problems with the linear looks of these
angular poets being the only morning beauty I'll rise to
so I'll get it myself

The flare of my arm between the anthology
& sheets is like a mattress surface burn
that is just coming round to a mild swell
of pain & it moves me to look so bodily
afflicted so early
& I dreamt of Merleau-Ponty & Judith Butler
but my ontological processes stay unchanged;
when I come to know, it's time for me to leave.

So much for not being the monster in my own
bed anymore but soon it will be April & I will
be a year older and Firebird Suite seems to tell
me not to rush with these times, nor the poems
nor the easy symmetries we lose in aging.

Last night it was two days since I had heard & post-
vigil, I sat with Alice Notley & a sobering glass of
red, diving into the wreck of myself, the tannin all
that is left of poems;
that bitter tea-leaf taste of someone somewhere trying
to read a future in all of this.

At the protest I am in a space
where Gods are women
but I am stasis no moving
poetics here but the
claustrophobia of idealism
clipped down to three word
vocabularies because
simplicity makes the chant
simplicity is the charm

I am just the sum of my parts
& if they can extract body
baby organ from me then
I am not wasted entirely

after all, just a cage a
carriage a womb & on
the other side of the
barricades they have
just tried to convincingly
rhyme
'in clean suburban neighbourhoods
the terror and the salt and blood'
all suddenly Nosferatus of easily
forgotten bad-accented 50s films,
all black & white, wild eyed Draculas.

And am I expected to genuflect to something I wouldn't even watch on the tv
even if nothing else was on? An ecclesiastic blonde shuts her eyes to the abuse of
our language and sings – abortive semantics are not her fault after all.

A band of cyclists emerge wheeling through falling night
the half-moon finger nail the promise of a guiding star &
no one can tell whether they're on our side or just shouting
Shame On You because we have blocked the road with
the meshing of banners, inscribing the streets with bodies

When the others kneel for the eighth time &
light their candles I think of the woman
who accidentally self-immolated exchanging panic
goods from one jar to another, diesel at her kitchen
sink, oil a viscous enough reason for everything
& now she has become a
flammable percentage of victim
her own body a statistic & can't
we find a linguistic way to bring
them round to the images of new
skin they will learn to live with?

I think of you & how
we met at a bookshop
where I was reading
the back of a book on
necrophilia & that now
we are a city apart
where you will be
drinking the blood of
no one from a glass
full of the evening &
eating the body of
someone as ungodly
as you can find.

So now I'll make my choices
my own because time will
change it all & any

resistance is foetal.

I sat in a workshop with Joan Retallack yesterday
who I kept calling Rae Armantrout
though never to her face & I was asked
what is the current emergency and what is poetry doing about it?
Nisha has told me that in an upcoming biopic
Gloria Steinham will be played by Sara Jessica Parker
now that Demi Moore is back in rehab;
& I guess that seems as
contemporary and urgent
as anything.

An essay writer I have dinner with remembers
someone somewhere who was a poet
saying Frank O'Hara would not be read on a Baghdad boulevard
but I don't believe any English speaking poet would be read in Baghdad
if the parked cars might be about to explode because
words haven't quite the material properties
to protect against shrapnel
or unpick it from skin when it sticks -in

all they can do is play through the aftermath of why
& if that's what they need in Bagdad
or that is what they need in England
for trite poetical relativity
then why not Frank?

I owe you something new this time
but the Southbank is closed for the Baftas
so we go to the BFI where early Jean Gabin
plays to an audience of none & I get
rum for you; a plastic cup of catastrophe for me
& if I go to the city which wave of the New York school will I be?

I just want you to love my infinite possibility
imagine me walking through Soho with lifting belly
in a back pocket a denim shirt
me - the camp walking girl cowboy the East Side never dreamt they'd birth

but last night I dreamt I was reading one of your
papers to you in a Swiss Chalet &
all the gendered pronouns had been
removed & I couldn't make any sense of
it until disappointed - you asked me to stop.
Couldn't bear to hear me trip on
'it' one more time.

When I stop to take note of something you've said
'you take everything and make it a symbol,' you shout at me.

--- I'm not sure what else to do with all that surrounds me ---
all the while writing you
verbatim under the table keeping eye contact
not that you're fooled by anything
blue anymore.

I talk about you often if not always
and feel the compacted bulk of your absence
as I lift belly on the jubilee line, lift it too on the
overground, lift it laughingly through my small frame,
lifting belly with London and
not you, which is who I'd rather do.

Sean Bonney is not
to be read
on a glass-walled
terrace in
Earlsfield
where a
rose bush
has been
left to die
with a glass
of good – for once – Chardonnay
but that is what I am doing tonight & the risotto later will be
made with fresh oregano.

The LFN Organisation has decided
we need to prove our femininity before we are
able to join the club; so I, like the other women,
am lined up without clothes waiting for inspection
& a number to be written up my arm hoping
they haven't noticed my furtive looks left & right
& labelled me a 'pink triangle'.

When I re-dress I see you for the first time;
because I am sightless naked,
& I start to shift in front of you
- the mover that I am - and tell you
Hey, I'm wounded too & I haven't fallen in to any arms yet
but
take me home with you
these buttons are actually poppers.

Does that make me a traitor to the cause?
If I'm a heretic, I'll burn as Joan of Arc up against
the impassive Catholicism of your certainty.
Sense is exposed by my senseless speech, you say, but I'm left unfeeling by your
Hegelian dialect
& Freudian readings of my last night's dreaming
because I only like philosophers
I can wear to the gym -
Lyotard fitting with my vanity
& love of heavy lifting

I have been to women only spaces
& lost my mind, which is worse than losing any kind of trite poetic imagery about
the heart; & I have been all margins
next to women already on the periphery so I send out these
poems, not as validation but because they're easier
than a phone call

The only truths are face to face; but if the draw of your lips
& tall dark handsome of your eyebrows
are not genetically determined female then you
& I have nothing to say to one another

I say to my sisters:
do not treat me bodily if you can help it
and resist inviting them to manhandle me
for its gendered implications even if I like it rough when the lights are out.

& with your face the perfect heart, nodding at the exclusion of anything
ambiguous,
I realise with an apathetic's horror
I am by far the most political one in the room

& I want you to kiss me
bitterly because I am all XY chromosomes.

Was it in the bible they
said
'You know not what you do'
or a Harold Pinter play?
Either way, I say it under my breath,
turning existential angst my bottle blonde.

I want my face to be shaven, and my heart –
you can't plan on the heart, not when it's meagre and hip boned,
but the better part of it, my poetry, is
here, it's queer and without syntactical experimentation.

Those of us who grew up in a time and context where there was a political analysis of sexuality were able to make a positive choice to be a lesbian. I believed then, and I believe now, that if bisexual women had an ounce of sexual politics, they would stop sleeping with men. Julie Bindel, 'Where's the Politics in Sex', *Huffington Post Online*, (6th June 2012).

Nisha & I argue
over the politics of
both ways/
multi-directionality/
fluidity/
flexibility/
but it ends in
debating
euphemisms
people use when
what they mean to
say is
greedy

but my appetites are just right for the commercial age & isn't our attraction an individualism that would make even Thatcher weak at the economy

& an ounce is such a quantitative approach to polis:
a meagre kind of sex
I dole myself out in weights
& quantities
like erotic cake mix
that can be whipped
up by anyone at all

& what Julie doesn't realise
is that it's much harder,
(hands & arms exhausted)
to hold a placard up
the day after sex with
a woman

my marching is always more effective with a good man waiting
with my dinner at home

& I am my city
learning the scratch of the Shard
its new irritation something like yearning
for the days it blinds me with sunlight
the open mouth of my station where the steps
are wet with pipes always ready & dripping
& the round soft untamed of Battersea Park if you know just where to stand
when spring comes in
all these, the architectures of fence-sitting.

and then there's the political analysis of want ---
this might be the only chance we have to express
a desire that is not buy/sell or stop
this body-commodity because what
we want is to touch what is real
which is equality and often, men.

I find my most political sex is
open
in the face of lesbian feminism & hetero dominance;
both uncomfortable positions
if you hold them for long enough

So tonight I will go to
the young vic with a
man named after
Virginia Woolf's most
ambiguously gendered work
because if there's a remedy for bisexuals of modernist-tastes
that might just be it.

The procedure of fusing two spinal plates together &
knotting blade of a shoulder, knitting a finger-light spine
performing an enema & the appropriate bedside manner
the tightening of the muscles between the high smile of your cheekbone hips
re-setting the bones of an arm with metal splint &
the aluminium splice of a kiss on the back of the neck

But we never say the word
not that I'm not flattered if someone is interested in mine

I'd never usually write about enemas but
I have been challenged on my bodily feminism
& the shock is not only that I have a trap of skin but
that it's manifesting itself in words.
Things change I suppose

In London's best attempt at suburbia
where I write this
the children at the school fete across the road
gyrate to the Tequila song
& then Sex Bomb
and while the girls can learn how to move from TV
when the first tentative hands move
down

there will be no
name for what
they find there.

The poems you send
are too experimental
for my phone to format
&
you are a Baudrillard fuck
simulacrum upper thigh
two freckles the mirror
image of each other's untruth
& I'd like to see you sunlit
and golden

Take your make up off, you're like the Borges' story about the map
with your face a falsity of the face underneath

I read the Du Mauriers used 'menacing' as code for sexually attractive
so when you threaten me is it just part of some literary enactment
or do you really mean it when you say you'd like to scare
the fuck out of me?

I buy unromantic toilet paper
tulips for upstairs
use dystopian literature to describe
the problem of women's football
& watch theatre on Belarus

At my local Waitrose cancer is beating
downs syndrome in the charity vote-off
the LFN are still talking about trans issues
Feminista are not talking very much
and the F-Word doesn't want to get involved
though it will comment on vagina as the new profanity;
I suspect they are making a distinction
who isn't

I buy unromantic tulips
dystopian literature for upstairs
use women's football to describe
the problem of theatre from Belarus
& watch toilet paper

I refuse for this to be the age of metaphor
& give my last £5 to the underground
East European theatre company who spent
the last hour & a half pointing to each other's
police-broken ribs in a black box in central London

I buy unromantic dystopian literature
toilet paper for upstairs
use theatre from Belarus to describe
the problem of tulips

& watch women's football

The World Cup is on
the Olympics will push up prostitution
Assange & Strauss-Kahn (who I keep confusing with Levi-Strauss) are
not rapists because they're liberals
& I've ended another poem
before with 'Nothing can be written'.

A love poem to Eileen Myles

I'd temper
you nicely
brightly &
neatly like
an envelope
like breath &
sounding not
like me.
You -- are my

I'd temper
you angry
& tempted
you away
from apples
& oranges
and contrived
poet voices
& the
proliferation
of women
holding hands
outside the
BFI cinema
because
there is a
festival on
for people
like us

You're one hell of a carnival, Eileen
& I mean it though you're no Bakhtin
mix of masks & danger, suspended
norms & me your miscast Harlequin.
We talk about being bad feminists
but you just kiss
me your downcast
Harlequin

I think of earlier in the week when I was sitting with
a socialist friend and finally did my Marxist coming out;
& her visible
bra strap was a reminder of my
laced-up self-restraint
a blinding of black delicacy
& I was flat on back, flat-pack wanting
to be taken somewhere and unfolded
just put in my place.

I hooked up
with an ex
in New York
& made her
in the bath
room on the
2nd floor of
the MOMA
& her face all
light appreciation
is more delicate
than the
Cézannes.

But now in London I look out of the window and see the lazy shine of silver of
your parking ticket and again you offer me empty but with both hands
as if I did not have enough of that.
But isn't that what it means to live just outside Clapham Junction
where you know you're middle class with death denial
when you read posthumous as the
course that follows dips and pitta

and isn't there a march on somewhere today?

When a friend asks me why I stopped jogging
I tell him that I just found
coffee, poems and unavailable women
a more effective way
of getting things done
& because I can't write a love poem to you
I write a love poem to the impossibility
of my feelings

The way you
twist your
verse like a
body in pain
the way you
pain my
verse into
bodies of words

And Eileen
Myles gets
kind of
forgotten in
the poems
you talk
when we
drink beer
together in

empty bars

Dear blue eyes, I don't love you anymore
because there is something realer in a
darker kind of colouring.

I don't want the mirror image of my stare
anymore, no Lacan lover & bed rest for me,
but some naked looks in public with
someone just a shade or two other than I.

“Welcome to the revolution”
she says with her
pop-culture voice; a
you-might-have-seen-me-on-TV
voice

so she’s calling it revolting;
opening for Marina Abramovic
but based on audience demographic
we all would have done the latter
then struggled with making
the former political
not just anti-aesthetic & bodily

Imagine this most glorious of worlds! where HBO series stars
give introductions for intense modern artists! on the grey
felt seats of Queen Elizabeth Hall for an all women audience!
(though they’re not checking passports on the door for sex/gender assignment
so who can be sure)

& here is Kim Catrell
from Sex and The City
talking contemporary
performance while not
performing anything &
is also fully-dressed what modern miracles we behold on the Southbank

so in sister hood: we clap

but when she starts to talk
& tells us all she’s no feminist
because the MOMA doesn’t
discriminate I choke on my
£5.99 metallic Chardonnay
tasting the feeling of cheated

art’s as gender neutral
as it is colour blind

She goes on to play her favourite YouTube videos of art pieces
--- Abramovic watches youtube - these banalities of our heroines –
& I wonder if she’s seen the one of the dog smiling on command ---
“here is woman dressed as bunny running through snow”
“here is woman naked with camera strapped to chest crawling through forest”
& I’ve started to scan the audience for her dressers
who I hear designed the Emperor’s New Clothes too
except – today - she’s dressed by Vivienne Westwood & I’m completely naked

Later, when she finally reads her manifesto without anything on

I am reminded sometimes all we share is the sadness of biology

Poem (against writing on your chest with lipstick)

17.8.12

I'm live-streaming some of the trial :
there's a hallowed to her cheeks
because political art is never full
of face & if Artaud taught us any
thing it's that subversion looks thin

& I rifle through modernity to complement her
& can only think 'if you were on tv I'd watch you' -
she has the eloquent beauty of someone who spends
most of her time wearing balaclavas & masks
which is a shame
because she has
features I could follow
on twitter

but feminism will insist
on its Guerrilla head

She's all defiance
on the stand
& the only trace
of it in London
I've seen yet
was a girl
walking past
the Hayward Gallery
with two older men
'Free Pussy'
lipsticked on her chest
& while I am
sure it is all
new-age new-adjective slut-walk of her
three women have not accepted jail sentences
for us all to be liberated enough to write provocation
on our tits & walk it around town flanked by men

in your studio where we make
protest art like a difference
I thought it was desire making me weak
but it was just the paint fumes
there's no need to make it metaphysical
if I prefer things meta and physical;
self-referential sex is the highest form of art
& the best poems - like
sun tans - are dirty &
that one girl keeps
coming to mind; her irony
reads a lot like complicity

The cabinet has been reshuffled
but if you look inside the porcelain
has just been rearranged; so stop
taking an interest in other people's
tea sets if you were expecting
something sharper & modern

The thing about men & bathrooms
is that there's a precedent
I wish I were franker & knew:
14th street is drunken & credulous
53rd tries to tremble but is too at rest
but we are two women & this is
the Sainsbury's Local public toilet

it's been hours since I've heard
the halcyon days of Jeremy Hunt rhyming slang have ended
& rather than loins we're girding-our-wombs for another year
of ownership rights

& if I were fucking someone
I'd probably be
less concerned by
a long-dead poet

but as it is, he's keeping me awake with classics
& Russians

what would he have made of the romance
of a vibrating phone well past 00:00am in Earlsfield
though such sensuality of contact
means more for women - I think -
if what you want
is pleasure
not high
aesthetic

& it is the same familiar dislocation:
I am walking again
my phone alive with names of emailing LFN members
ASDA still delivering door to door shopping
I don't know my religious festivals &
I am the unexpected item in the bagging area

You say it's good luck for things
to land in my hair but as the breeze-
heavy Tesco bag hits me square in
the face somewhere around Victoria
I know not to believe a single word of yours

what can ever be done by someone so distracted by beauty?

How I relate to the certain
beauty of your light white shirt
is by my neural passages
so I touch you through cotton
with stammering-caffeine fingers
& say, why don't you
ménage-a-trois with just me
& what is my hand's weight
doing for your oxytocin levels?

Then we stay up all night arguing
orgasms the goddess shaped hole & is this love
now that the first love has finally died
where there were no impossibilities?

But today I am in Soho which smells
of piss & the last time you were

here. I can't sit
still enough to write
which I think is not my
fault or yours but my
vagina

 which is edgy
 and feeling
 responsible
 since Wolf's
 new book

& there is nothing worse than vaginal guilt
so I whisper sweetly & tell it we can go
to the Pre-Raphaelites at the Tate Britain
later if that will help at all

we'll wear our best Calvin Klein's & try to recapture what has been lost
between us

NW: Has a really profound sexual experience ever affected your confidence levels?

Yes

NW: Given you more energy?

Yes

NW: Made you like yourself more?

Well --- it's certainly made me like them more
and some female artists
even orgasm as they work
for pure fucking brilliance
but give me my delirium
chiller-cold & let's forget
I have this un-touching body
at all

because climaxes do not make the poem

Wolf suggests we play
at good-arousal, bad-arousal
so you call me a bitch & grab my tits
and I lie back like the
well-behaved I am
 (with such lowered dopamine levels my inner-goddess doesn't know her
 pleasure from a riding crop)
& what is so erotic to me about
your shortened fingernails
and Birkenstock?

 Just because someone in a lab
could brush a rat into all kinds
of mammalian-frantic does not
mean it'll work for me
 & though I've never dated a scientist
you paint me action anyhow
& turn me scarlet in
every kind of way up
against the burnished
clean of your wrists; the

brand names of your clothes
sitting in this disjunctive body
on the carpet as my
inelegant becomes all
communication

any excuse to talk me
down
down down (if this were a Jackie Kay poem)
but it's not so we'll stay squared-face-to-face
& you can try your prettiest shaped words out on me

I've been crying
on the phone a lot
about my disparate
self this week & it
does me absolutely
no good

to think you'd
colour me intimate
were this ever to
get between four-poster

& it's so unconventional -- your moving into mine -- I wonder did
Cage get Cunningham dancing this way too by an accident of hands &
yes-yes-just-there-don't-stop

all the while the LFN is suggesting we fight
against 50 shades with male-subordination
fiction on every bookcase everywhere but

I am not sure a sharpened heel through
a man's retina will remedy their
non-essentialist feminine melancholia

so I remember my mother taught me two
things: never trust a man who likes The Smiths
and don't you dare leave anyone out

& as my world constricts
to the size of your teasing
I hold it in my mind like
there's nothing else to hold.

I am this disastrous Pollock of wanting
you and all the chaos of primary red
blue yellow that comes too

so I drink too much & text
anyone about sex :
whatever your plans
say something has come
up & get here soon

After I've told
you everything
about labels & identity
quoted Denise Riley
across the duvet
called my dressing
avant-garde & outmoded
skated the surfaces of
your lightly boned face
and made a poetic symbol
of standing on the front
line of identity politics
my categories fastened to
my top like decorations

(sometimes I am wonderful with allegory)

you ask me how long it
would take to get me out
of such a well-pinned shirt

as you unbutton me, careful
with my words for myself, you
tell me reaching a gender
equality platform is crucial
so you'll be good with all the
names I use when I need fixing

I'd let you tease me
political every day

I don't want to write you love poems
I want to write about your conflicted sense of self

the morning after
I've lost my gender
symbol earring to
your side of the bed
only the butterfly
of last night's
movement left on
the black sheet &
this light-winged
moving at night has
made a lot of poems
suddenly clearer

you have had me
girlish & taken
my signifiers all
off; which can
only be write

though it's left leaning

London 'Slut Walk'

22.9.12

'Tactically taking on verbal hostility includes the dark humour of those who elected to name themselves 'faggots'; and 'queer' as a denigration belligerently adopted by those who it tried to humiliate is another instance of verbally flaunting it. But there's less evidence of, say, any proud female society of 'fat slags' or 'cunts'
Denise Riley, *The Words of Selves*, p.168

When I look at *Study for Clouds*
I think of your neck; the abstract
marks I left there before you went
that you call gentle reminders & I call
concrete art

here I am in paris
away from sluts
walking love-poems
writing word-marches

in the *Rouge-Bleu*
it is the boldness of the moving
not the beauty of the paint
that reminds me of your doorstep kiss

I ruin a man's photo ---
gestural spite --- as the
well-dressed lady
a painting over
regards my visible
socks

'A lot of people
 find other mediums
 more attractive –
 put a screen in a
 museum and nobody
 wants to look
 at the painting
 anymore'

A man asks me to move to take a picture
of the painting I was standing in front of
but he took one of another with a lady in his way
who'd just bent over and turned the painting
a whole new shade of unexpected red

Gris Sous Verre
is so bleakly
reflective I can
actually see myself
which is the best art

I think of you
I write an abstract poem in the style of a realist
I find it all so
metaphysical
but what I'm feeling might just be yearning

 'I like Richter's squeegee period'
I say in the bar afterwards
if only to say the word squeegee
over a glass of pernod on Rue Moufflard

life is not
a Judy Garland song
my love
remember how
we used to play
like wolves

we used to say the children would have
my lazy eye & your stupid teeth; I've never
dated anyone like that since –
it's all cunts after you really –
but I shouldn't call them that

given today's message

maybe it's a good thing
they're all cunts

given today's message

I just wish they'd claim it for
themselves without any
prompting from me

 : maybe they could march about it too

or maybe I'm the cunt

& a bit of a slut to boot
if only for the sake of
the poems

A Sonnet in 5 stanzas

your intertextuality makes me
come over though I know it's dark
& not safe for man nor woman nor
genderless in London: two
people send me pictures on phones
with their hands - accidents in corners
& I look at his and remember mine
leaving their all over his
back when we were alike & wolves -

I can't tell you about the sexual anxiety
precipitated by Stein & O'Hara portraits
opposite my bed; all stony knit-wear
& this sudden inert pressure to sleep
only with geniuses compacted & moving

by accident I find out about Kathy Change
who wasn't a flaming radical; just a fire
starter with immolation vocabularies &
intent & would I arm myself with kerosene
or is it enough that widows are burnt with
husbands faces corroded by acid witches
tied to stakes --- for me to choose not
to be a lady burning with anything other
than want for you & poetic turnings

I only dance to avant-garde so I dare
you; put your arm around me find out
how I'm textured when I'm fixed in place
& we always said with the right hands
& cuffs, I'd be all tied up & fucked

still - finally not bursting forth from
the lines of another & you've left me
restless another lyric evening

How to have a sexy Halloween

29.10.12

'Halloween is sex night. We deal with our fear of death and witches by storming out into the dark, nipples aloft, sweating fright and libido from every pore.

- Eva Wiseman, 'How to have a sexy Halloween', Guardian, 21 October 2012

I put on my
shortest skirt
a bra & go to
the party dressed
as ineffective irony

everyone else is dressed as
missing-the-point

we're in a part of London where
I can't tell whether its fireworks
or guns; is that a Hoxton bonnet
or skull cap:

her eyes are green
unexpected
so I sign the petition
for the silent Kurds
& tell her about this
brilliant piece by Caroline Bergvall
Say Parsley Say Parsley Say Parsley;
massacres have happened on less

I meet a man there I knew by the vague
blonde of his legs under streetlight
in Battersea where skin was electric
with power station highlights & shadow
where I fell on the pavement once when
he wasn't there but washed me away
afterwards in the bath with his soap
which was masculine & cold and stopped
the bleeding

alone walking
I find myself
lifting my hips
to you: absent
lifting my verse
for someone
but it's not a voice
anyhow

I've put a jumper on
my misplaced humour

Later, sitting in a pub a little way off Victoria -

she tells me she's not sure about
perpetuating unhelpful narratives
but that it is most certainly
a moment --- and with the candlelight
between us it most certainly is

I drink a beer;
this is my fourth
wave identity

I pull out the building
Houses comic book
open the top & the
sheets inside smell
like paper & earth
like realer than anything
you've ever touched & night
is filled with new love
pronounless feeling of
veined winter hands on
a new cooling skin

My face in it eyes closed thinking of the wrong you
I want to say come home & soon tall dark & handsome
which you always called yourself when we joked &
we were young & we were children

it's the week of misaligned believing women
& I can't be faith

full in my various ways
it's the time of the month
when I am my own blood
sacrifice & so you'll be
having none of me tonight

bashing the bishop
has different significance
now & I see
why it's a masturbatory
institution so I pick up my biggest club
a primitively snapped chair leg
& empty bottle of Shiraz
primed for smashing/insertion:
ready for this crusade to get personal

& if we voted them in
we'd have to find
all new kinds of verbs
to describe administering
love which dark at night in my room is just between me &
the voyeur in the sky who's made life difficult since
a distant relative ate an apple & pulled on a leaf-skirt

Would I rather bash bishops
or two-finger tango with anti-establishment
but you make my mind up for me
the first time we get into bed together
& you check me for depth & find me lacking
as a freudian feminist

I text Eley: what is the lady version of phallic?
vulvic is the closest we come but it's too much
like the French spring water bottled at source

so I find yonic through google which is
a few websites away
from all these turns-of-phrase I read
down the telephone to you even better
than a poem
& sexting
all at once

your name on my suggestive moving Samsung
erotic technologies shifting their way around
this new woman question & the backlight to

you & I feeling confession
all surface & light touch
screen of communicating
this emptiest way; finding
another position that doesn't
work essentially

because we are the misprint accident-thumbed
XY at the end of a message meant to read
XX

Nisha says lesbians
are the best feminists
& that I am a symbol
of modern political
instability

Eileen Myles says you can't write beyond sexual orientation
like you can't subvert consumerism while you're eating

I e-mail Elizabeth: I won't be there
but I'll write another poem
all about your stepping out
distinct in female homogenous
& remember pub drinks
happened & unhappened
because why not?
 I'm not there

I reclaim my own night
late with this poem
writing it a month too late
& all this aspiring to art writing
is getting to me
 so I read Kenneth Koch
like you suggested & wish for
grammatically structurally correct romance
& Howl at the moon but not like
Ginsberg 'Who Are My Contemporaries?'
though I'm just not very good
with people
& a man is just as likely
to kill me in the dark of morning
as night

but reclaim the everything does not make for a useful polemic

this evening all it took
was a message
from the wrong kind of boy
to make me a Freilicher
so I watch O'Hara on youtube
drink red from a glass for white
want to be a blonde panther

I'm not at Joan's
really –
she is a state of
mindful politics;
I am lonely for myself

I who was once collected
can't find a real poem
so I'm not moving at all;
if it won't happen to me
what shall I do?

& he used to be a way
I might love
now he's my best exit strategy
I love to leave to verse

He still stops
me walking;
my heart too

I dreamt about you
last night in front
of the mirror
with the black frame
sitting your back to
the glass to help
me put my gender
earrings back in
except you'd found
the ♂ I hadn't
been missing

we put them both on the left: my
statement ear & looked
at all our difference
contained on one
pinking lobe

with your legs open & your wide-rimmed hat
boots hard around my body your face too
close for clarity we could have been a
Larry Rivers
but you were clothed
& who was painting?

I fell asleep in Lost Lost Lost
for Alex to wake me to Frank
& just thirty seconds of him on a sofa or bed
with friends --- smiling
but there was no sound
other than the strain
of some shrill organ

the counter productivity of bleeding
once a month always makes me
more political but less inclined
to go out walking anywhere

this morning to think about Lithuanian exile
retrospectively
to do google searches of 'Frank O'Hara naked'
for the poetic image
to think about his pose & yours
his nose your streamlined beauty my bleeding
& the significance of napping through
the avant-garde at its black & whitest

& missing every march I meant to move through
& that blues surround me from the sky
across the terrace steeled glass to the
Langston Hughes caught on youtube
your eyes and my eyes

then writing a poem
-- all that can be done --
but not being at the centre
of it anymore; nor finding
it beautiful just a thing
that must be attempted

Have you forgotten what we were like then
when we were still a shocking mobile public
and the lawlessness of August came fat
with an apple in its mouth?

remember when we
were here before
seeing Francesca Woodman
at Victoria Miro &
that we both went
out after & bought
cameras thinking
we could be elusive
& foregrounded too

but there are two photographs we both took:
London & NY:
What parliament does/ the streets can undo
Are you/powerful? yes.

On the tube here
we had argued
marked Rothko
& Yellowist
manifestoes
& the legal
artist subject
with someone
else's name on
their object

don't hold
banners or
leaflets
if you can;
paper heavy
ring-leaders
are legal
strategies for
collective
arrest

imagine what they do to the writers

& don't be afraid
to take up space
as a woman
you can be
as fat as
you want

but not in
occupation or
public; all our
material critiques
are bodily

here we sat in Fortnum & Masons
this is my white female privilege
my secret lust
for truffle oil
& holding ground
by chilli infused
maple syrup

we're writing anthologies & holding banners in department stores
I don't want my revolution bloody but maybe a few 'I's poked
& in Egypt the women are being raped in the squares
tested for virginity in the jails by the subjectivity of jailer's hands
& Pussy Riot have not got off
but I stayed – where I ought – by the afternoon tea
stands just off Mayfair because we all move in solidarity
don't we sisters this is our same fight

there's such a thing
as anti-institutional
hair I've seen it
& Nina Power laughs
a compelling girlish
light-yellow social notes
laugh

but I wonder: where's Medusa?

I wouldn't want to be singular
or more individual than now if you were with me O you
were the law reinforcing its identity

On the train --- everyone's
mid-point on the lines
we follow left/right back/forth
I read Emily Critchley & listen
to Lady Gaga
in Costa & early
Veronica Forrest-Thompson
& Adele 'Set Fire to The Rain'
where I fall for form
having not noticed her
figure for the words

I run through Richmond
for a train
from the pizza place
that won in 2007 09 & 10
for one dish each time
& I am reading more
writing like a girl
missing you a different kind
of Luftwaffe to Plath's
but there's no designation to rest on
old fling's back
in London

dateless December
of no times & places
contemporary nostalgia
no space for me; no watch
face

 but I am sexed
gendered appropriate
through choice & by you & you
only my mismatched right-fit past tense
golden boy
retrospect makes you prettier
than Movember has

I wrote most & best & drank
most asleep in a single bed
- also mine - possessives
are dangerous ways to
people & no identity
signifiers me
 - for reasons of politics
 & poetics -
but 'yours' still fits
my shadings of blonde

I'm writing a poem
forgive me
I've been teaching William Carlos Williams
& reading Bill Berkson's
disregard for canonical modernist structures

these women with
syntax I cannot hold close
& their painful love for men

forgive me
I thought we had to be Rich
with love of one another
& these persistent parodies – well

I am no collective
no polysyllabic feminist discourse
just on a train from Richmond
to Egham £7.20 without railcard
doing my most
radical feeling
reading around the spatiality of

I write my feminist ster
off the j

VERONICA

**COLLECTED
POEMS**

**FORREST-
THOMPSON**

which reads like a quotation marked nickname for the back of a leaving 6th form
hoodie.

today is a day
for tragic hetero
poetry & it
might be braver to say Look
I'm mainstream and still unhappy
no subculture excuse mine

everyone I know has quit
smoking & I just wish
they'd put it out in my
 I never started or tried
 so I wouldn't give up
 I read Zizek's *Violence*
 too young for efficacy
 maybe

let's go all the way tonight
no regrets; just love
we can dance until we die
you & I will be young forever
denise, this one's for you &
when we drove to Cali & got drunk on the beach

it's the problem of Cambridge
poets: the lyric obsession
& I know I know when I
compliment her she don't
believe me
but girl
you're amazing just the way you are

& best I don't
get onto your lips
in as public a place
as the poem
or South West trains

this is my straight
margin lament
I am not so
much in love
as experimenting

**2012: the year when it became okay to blame victims of sexual assault &
Woman Whose Gang Rape Galvanized India Dies** 28.12.12

I watch videos of
Sophie Robinson
reading poems
about not scratching
yourself in public
(she recommends you don't)
& then Vanessa Place
doing *Gone With the Wind*
which is the silence
of breath & a final line

& I can't help but feel
in all her rapist truth
she's identifying with
the wrong O'Hara

we articulate these slipping tangled desirings
learn to distrust the prose writers & the prose
poets & their emotive ugly seriousness

& while we all want to be inside
one another in our most physical
lesbian poetics where we eat
each other; all Sapphic cannibals;
the woman who galvanized India
has her intestines taken out from
metal rod damage be careful on insertion
& I'd like to draw a Kahlo
parallel but it feels a little
artful tasteless; am I implying
a monobrow which is colonial & not like grieving at all
so this tasteful artless:
the woman who galvanized India is dead

& I can't help but think of Ghandi
that it didn't take his gang rape
to make him vocal enough for change
but maybe her aesthetic was all wrong
he wore that distinctive sheet which on a lady
is just an invitation an evocation of bed a claim for
responsibility

the night seems to scream for itself
but I realise
it's the sounding of a DVD player next door
full of the revulsion of mainstream
cinema

Assange is just guilty of bad sexual etiquette -
it's politer for the woman to be awake
one of the 15 year old Rochdale girls
had just made a lifestyle choice
Ched Evans just fucked the wrong Money
Grabbing Slut (haven't we all)
while in America real rape doesn't get
women pregnant unless they like it
& Jimmy Saville has done well to die
before the innocents hit the fan
"she let herself down badly. She consumed
far too much alcohol and took drugs" said
the judge to the rapist punch line

Sophie is still
my backdrop to
contemporary horror
her black outfitted
ethics worn like her
hair which is loose
& to her shoulders

Untitled

I like your square brackets
non-euphemistically
& I knew you were trouble
when you walked in like
a pop-song just waiting
for the right sized blonde
& microphone to talk you
up walk you down bed
level & undone & dancing

i've had this strangest
nostalgia for the infinite
looks you used to give &
remember on a deep mouthed
sofa in the BFI you asked ---
are we a frank o'hara poem?

I imagine you pushing me
up against the cooker my
lower back turning us
180 degrees for slow roast
these clumsy-cut hip bones
edging their sharp up north
all the way to your part of
London & above my waist
band;
undress me
quick
just South
of waterloo

now
I listen to mumford & sons
weep into my denimed
inadequacies; a sissy
truck driver caught
just off the M4 in a
suburban shit storm

am I in or out of sisterhood:
out of everywhere: but she's
been co-opted by the men
& if I call her a self-interested
exception to the rule, what
kind of enmity am I?

I am modern right up
to: my language choices:
to my sexual preferences:

to my ironic east-London-top-button-done-up-collared-shirt

would you --- me out of your
phone book if you could
maybe – maybe – perhaps
I flustered say too little
too much too often rarely
but I'd fuck-you hyphenated

& the worst thought comes creeping in
you never loved me; or her; or anyone;
anything; or worse still this feeling
this feeling is just the next Taylor Swift

A first meeting with someone who goes on to become poetically influential

What did I make
you think of first
that time we met
after a Prokofiev
fall-out with whoever
I was seeing;
my stare all
Russian & light
an opacity blue

I like to think maybe the Dr. Zhivago movie posters
with Omar Sharif & Julie Christie
but you tell me an intimacy later
I just looked sleepless

In her most recent e-mail
she said if you love me
sister, you won't go
to Roman Polanski
at the BFI this January
so I find myself velvet-
seated-ticket-for-one
the lime licking of gin
& tonic tasting like bad
behaviour & I am a regular James Dean;
girl-faced but wearing boy's leather

later when rosemary's baby & pacts with the devil
begin to worry me after it gets dark
I can't talk about it for fear of being found out -
Mia Farrow & I betray myself; so I walk Soho
Covent Garden Tottenham Court Road Leicester Square
promise never to get pregnant
nor adopt
in case my
neurotic jewish
partner leaves
me for our child

I verb in conditional:
this is/was hard
but could it be easier;
it would if you let me

When you&I are
married we'll live
off soup caffeine &
typewriter ribbons
& I will kiss your

expletives every
morning with coffee

& isn't it the purest
to love your crudest
words & I'd let you
use me like a found
text - I'm that depraved -
& remember, I only
fake it in the poem

Defeated Sunday

It's Sunday & I am tired
of twitter tired of feminism
tired of the trans debate
in the Guardian again
tired of our only intersections
being wireless crossovers when
I confuse your sky for my virgin
experience all of you in signals
generated by pylons not your body
language against mine on the page

though that was when we lived
on the district line & I wasn't
like the victoria hitting northern
all the way through King's Cross
which is ruthless & new & modern

But oh my days I'm wearing
pointed shoes at the BFI
my wide-framed
sensibilities edging
my eyes with hipster
& none of this counter-
culture; let's not flatter
ourselves with empowerment
vocabularies when I'm
just here to meet women

When I'm finally back
in the clichéd frames
of love; in your bed,
your arms held & held
fast head over heels &
I'm crazy about you
I want to see your door
light up when I come
through your face;
eternity is when eye
look into your 'I's

Just off Trafalgar Square
which is our only walking distance
from here after so much tequila
I stand alone in front of *One
Summer in London* &
between the hardback
of her calves I see
inside & everything
this perfect darkness

of a naked woman;
where she's not got
symbolic breasts on show;
these universal spheres
of flesh & silence
but a contained self-
kissing lips scarcely
breathing but there
in the turns of bone
& muscle & I feel
party to something essential

so I'll pick up my feet pick up
men women why not either
or neither because everything
is new after the right kind of
cunt at the National Portrait Gallery

I watch winter happen
with George in the Hayward
light infects light with
seasonal vague brightness
& it is summer again; refracting/multiplied
background yellow red green with the
crystalline stop start of wire wrapping
itself under & around
braided black & crude

with the urban

it's like Kusama
& the edge of her infinity with Alex
but George & I are doing
something for our time
standing in a well-lit
installation phone-booth
from which we cannot
see out the artist might be Chilean I think &

he tells me all these smoke & mirrors
will never create infinity & there's
a temporality to our two bodies framed
under these concrete stairs with his
brutalist beard & my architected step

in the dark a woman walks into a wall
thinking it might be the start or art
and we laugh

I do not remember
last week's hurt
even though I have
a subscription to the
Guardian daily on my
ipad archives
aren't really my style

virtual backlog virtually
stroking through news
the way you touch a woman
not a man; I wonder they
haven't done a model for each sex

I think about my activism & past
failings I think about my
speech & feelings I think about
the tone volume spatial properties
of my voice & whether I could be
a screamer with the right stimulus

And soon we are out into the real night
& I think of you; how I'll wear you pearled
as my wedding ring on every finger
& changing as your body seems to ask
me too; I'll be variation & tight-lipped
sarah water's oyster imitation like you want

we ride to the protest on Rimbaud's
collected works our own omni(sexual)bus
for the present and I
open my glow sticks
with my black silk shirt
& synthetic ethereality
I'm ready for the pro-choice carnival

which is empty: 30 people
Christians & feminists - I think of the last
time which was lyric chaotic & full
so I go
not home
but to drink
& a woman sits
at our table who
can barely speak a
single word though
she makes all the sounds
of a communicator; gestures
her wine glass all around the
table like lost hands held & talking
we all should have done more of while
we can & I am suddenly

The next day I pass
through Bedford
Square; the Christians
still there, the religious
version of last night
debris faces like lipstick
red rimmed glasses all
suggestive sex-acts in
their chaste community
standing & I don't
pull out a poster, but wear
my 'This is what a feminist
looks like' t-shirt for show :
I play a great game sometimes

I have nothing more
to offer than to wear

myself out in London
this poem my slogan
though its not catching
and street-based

It is Valentines day on Bedford Square
& 40-days-for-life are back
standing on
street corners
like a very
different sort
of practice; but
no one who knows
better is going to
tell them to stop
hailing cars

& I could not be more
out of any kind of love
& I am not your fucking
baby

so I am chatting
interdisciplinary
online dissemination
when over by London's
wide-innocent eye
a group of women are
dancing in solidarity
with abused women
everywhere (1/3)

one billion women violated is an atrocity
one billion women dancing is a revolution
-- they're right -- for all the women grooving
around London's very own panopticon
less will be raped when they get home this
evening

I'd tango with every last lady in
this city; dressed as a matador or naked
as a bull; kissing the rose between her
teeth & legs - thorns or no - if I thought
it would make a difference
but I can't pick up my politics from Pineapple Studios

& today I am performative; I want to feel the oppression
of the gays; which is what Foucault
meant, writing inside his closet but it's all so social
I'd have to do it publicly & being arrested
for indecent exposure is the only
thing that can make this day worse

so I let capitalism have love
today I'm still wearing

tight trousers in the poem which
will be in bed with me tonight
when no one else is

It starts with *Lesbiana*: the movie
 which is either about cults &
 indoctrination or a girl with parents
 made cruel with the fun of bad naming
 over a birth certificate & Eley has
 already been picked up by someone
 we don't know
 & this early propaganda raises
 so many questions for me Why
 do lesbians over 40 all live in the forest What
 did people do before Butler killed essentialism

the French seem to do lesbianism
 better than the rest of us
 & in the death of the lesbian panel
 I find out they are either evil or dead
 on TV

unfortunately in life
 most of my exes are
 the former rather
 than latter but the
 talk makes me optimistic
 & apparently there are counterculture
 accessories; the accoutrements don't
 just strap on but are big glasses & high
 collars & in the movies a man for a
 threesome to resolve the visual in
 some kind of heterosexual

* * *

I want to interrogate
 progress narratives
 from your neck down
 but I get stuck in the
 anti-normative folds
 of your bowtie

* * *

In 'Women Who Kill'
 the morbidity of same-
 sex resolution is driven into me
 by a woman from Manchester
 who tells me it's more feminine
 to smother & poison than shoot
 we are mad bad & victim
 made monster by post-
 death analysis but she was a fucking poet, ~~man~~

I tell her: let's start a scandal

over the collar of your cardigan
we can be experiential if you
want & I'll say words to you like
extrapolate 'lens' problematize
which are all tongue
just the right pressure
of consonants

* * *

It occurs to me that every man here could be a patriarchal terrorist

* * *

A girl I have just met
tells me she thinks
I am the dirtiest
poem-writer she has
ever read then later that night
away from the coast we talk political fucking
& the people she messes around with being
just sex
so I say
interesting over a Corona which is a choice
& so political;
and she's getting personal
which is our legs are a tapestry
of skinny jean & booted brogue
but my knees are inside the spread
of her & this is Brighton but I resist
cliché so we're not going to make this
political or the new Tegan & Sara song
though I do think of her getting underneath me;
that this argument could be happening
somewhere more engaged than a bar
before I leave she writes Sufi & Buddhist poetry
in the back of my book & my modern
sensibility bites at its tongue

* * *

I am in bed now
with high aesthetic
& pedagogy

* * *

We've made our pasts unhappy
to be happy now nostalgia
is political - so I remember you &
how you would hate that everyone
here uses the word caress to talk
about sex you liked me
harsh mono-syllabic no assonant
sibilant sounds sensual sentences

but for now I have to think about
how best to avoid objectifying
anyone who might actually read
this poem and our
history isn't my past,
 so I'll leave it where
I can in books and forget you
easy as you were in & out of bed

In a plenary I sit
between Canadian lesbian sisters
as a Jewish New Yorker reads
woman on woman erotica & it's not
quite the experience mainstream
led me to believe it might be
so I try not to listen to the description
of crotchless pants left on apartment
doorsteps or the lace thrill of exhaustive
finger fucking & think of Sedgwick

Later when I ask them questions
about same-sex vocabularies & should
we really be fucking our 'sisters'
I realise I'm suggesting incest &
that way learn the true problematic
of familial narratives in feminism

That night
when she starts to tell me
about pro-feminist porn
with darkest blue eyes; I
take on my pro-feminist
form, turn to face her full-on
& think which texture we
could be she would be
an 'xx' of offered information
historical material substantive
while I am 'x'; a polarity between
substance & surface with none
of the depth suggested by my
willed erasure of anything other
than contemporary
 but as her thigh touches
mine, Sedgwick didn't write for the
texxture of what sex positivity
could do to the way she moves me
& I am no longer latent & light
the only shallow thing about
me my breathing if you offer to take me home with you

* * *

Today

I am sitting in a jazz bar in Soho
with my sister & the woman's
depthless singing makes me think
not of A New Spring Afternoon
but the way you might take
everything off me deliberate
make each button slower than
tender; speeding tactility to an
unbearable wait & I probably would for you

what kind of nostalgia
is this that I long for
a futurity in my infinities?

think how intertextual you could make
my pages with your lips
in my tired bed
I send you handcuffs
in the mail; there's nothing else to do

it is light outside the Tate where I have read
Poem Read at Joan Mitchell's in front of
Joan Mitchell's no. 12 when what I was feeling
was more like At Joan's in the Lichtenstein
but the queues were long & the index was difficult
so I settled on what was free & quick

& it is light outside the National
Portrait Gallery when I go in
& there's always the anxiety of
how dark it will be when I come out

The day is long now
I am bleeding through everything I have on
but let's not have a crisis
or an !

I spread myself
thinner than
I already am
to make sure
there is always
time for us &
falling in love
with you has
! disembodied
enthusiasms
though I'd rather
there were bodies

I send you duct tape
in an e-card; international
postage rates are too
much to be suggestive by post every time
I want to hint at something dirty

to think you have made me
feel new & contemporary & stanzaic
in February with a temperature so low

**A seminar on Goddess feminism & reading something really dirty on South
West Trains**

27.2.13

How do you feel about your Goddess
feminism when your laptop tries to
link to the projector but can't find
the source?

From a ways away you look
almost like someone I could love
long-time
& from where you are you tell me
that you can get female gurus
but they're all bearded.

an old Eileen Myles anthology
is being delivered in Tucson
to a girl I tattooed with a muse
poem before we knew what it meant
& our love objects just keep shifting

I hate it when you are not
here where I am when
I want you so much
& so presently
blue eyes are back as my tropes
recycle

 I am fickle & indiscriminate
I suppose as well as everything
else; casually low waist-band hip-
slung & pen-ready for your dirty
laugh & visible socks under roll-ups

 The perfect clean-slid 'M'
of your hairline across
your neck that sounded alphabet
of fur and noise whenever &
wherever I have the fortune
of stepping out just behind you

 I've changed my structural
approach; I'm subjecting myself
to resistance; I'm trying my way
out of systemic longings & reading
new theory on horses & orality
& now I know why the caged clit sings

My mouth is tired
around the bones
like I've been arguing
politics or going down
on you for hours so I
wait for the poem
to come or

just a wordless affirmation
that I'm alive

it's not just all physical
I'm the type who will get oh so critical
so let's make things physical
I won't treat you like you're ephemeral impulses
& if I get you somewhere unafraid
take my artifice off
we'll be raw as two
steaks; us, vegetarian
feminists together

do I believe there's anything other
than artifice – well – if you've ever
been fucking someone who doesn't
insist on a mirror but keeps looking
in the one next to the bed anyway
you'll know what I'm talking about
ethic; ethics; ethical play
safe – wear protection – artificial
looks good on just about everyone
& my love for you is a variable
kind of roll on latex

when you talked to me late this
evening from the other side of bed
the word flushed out the intimacy so
let me love you pre-linguistic
keep my sharp mouth shut &
my pen is capped so that when I leave
you in the morning traces of motion
remain

Catherine Hakim is on the radio
again she's very in vogue
at the moment because of *Honey*
Money like this sudden fashion
for bee activism now we know
they're all dying softly in bundled
stripes of blaze & black

I buy the book for kindle & make a strong
coffee because it is morning & these days
there are words between us whole
verbs do more than we do so I am tired;
this is just another £7
in the wrong pocket;
no wonder there's a
crisis of every sort of faith

On the overground there is a
tag just over the open & close buttons;
& is it 'Bossy has a blood clot pussy hole'
or am I looking too hard for sex?
The black signifier
on a cold plastic
fulfils none of the
image's potential
& I imagine a red
openness healing
itself against public
transport

having a vagina
is not all
its cracked
up to be
& poets are cunts -
quote me on that

To be as erotic as Hakim would like us
wear beauty everywhere like a charm
be fit & moving & develop competence
in bed your business doesn't
need the same kind of working knowledge
& my erotic imagination
is making its way down
like an HD poem & though
masturbation is apparently
only a male hobby; like golf
cars boxing & rape; I'm
animate with the need

to do something that costs
nothing

I'm pretty anti-capitalist
in that sense &
maybe that's my problem
I'm so egalitarian I don't
have a problem thinking of
fucking anyone

The Metro at Waterloo reports
Women are more likely to die
from men than cigarettes;
sponsored by Marlborough Lights
& it amazes me in the new
glass panes & steel infrastructures
of the station & how far we've
come that there are still
human fatalities; I put you
in that category & fall for
you anyway

International Women's Day

8.3.13

The train back into London
is empty of commuters
because it's past six & I'm
sure everyone but me has plans
for international woman's day

I get in & pour a glass
of something large &
opened yesterday
then sit down in front
of the television to
watch some art house
about a prostitute &
a wife
 it's very French

& Oh but sweet
Mother of God
I want to be
Emanuelle Beart's
coffee cup
but
I've lost my heart
to something unreal
again:
I love you like a sip on
ceramic feels; Ahmed's
affect theory; the feel
of plastic covered library
books;

I'm in on a Friday; I've been
working too hard
& I enjoy nothing
unproblematized

I cry over a poem rejected
from AngryDykeFeminists.com;
 it was my most serious work
but small one – you'd tell me –
rejection will come always
don't read it as gendered

you text to ask what I'm doing
can you come over & it's nothing
so why not you'd be fun
to do this evening when the film ends

A Million Women Rise

9.3.13

This year's solidarity
is red; last year it was
the colour purple
but now I am wearing
my American apparel
unisex rouge fisherman's
jumper as a symbol of
international female blood
shed & loss
 the knitting pattern
lets the cold in

I'm late this year; not a queue away
from mobile & an hour early now but walking fast to be
there on time
listening for drums
up Oxford Street

When I arrive
anywhere at all
I am a reluctant
placard holder & I feel
that my feminism is like
turning up to a party
unsure of my own invite
& I keep being hit
in the head with ribbons
dancing around the banner
of the women from
North-East London
where craft & knitting are
so post-ironic they're genuine

I've changed;
I don't need you anymore;
I am my own trope
but I throw you in like
it's a love poem
when I am always
thinking of someone else

I buy lunch for everyone
I've ever walked away from
but I'm so poor now
I'm probably going to have to
settle down

When we get to Trafalgar Square
& I have not sung at all yet;

defunct lyric that I am
amongst the lions & the column
we listen to abstraction through the
microphones & our bodies
get written & run through
with the international implications
of the inescapability of
chromosomal womanhood

& my feet; the futility of my
stone & fluorescent yellow brogues
I've made a scene; I've walked
in colours & I am whole steps
away from any kind of understanding
& what --- what is it that can be done?

Luckily
I have the 'myths about rape'
bookmarked on youtube
to look forward to later
& Elizabeth is live texting
from a sexualities seminar;
I feel alive & solid with my
palm held technologies

to all the iphone anarchists;
air-mile environmentalists;
essentialist feminists
to your water tight principles
I am just another white girl
reading bell hooks but
I know it

This is about laughing - which I am - often
having missed all the talks on unhappy
queers pornography and vaginas
to walk in the cold & try to unlearn
feeling unease while picking up sisters

getting drunk with
you this Sunday
was fun but not
as fun as seeing
the Man Ray
exhibition together
where I covered
that girl as she
took an iphone
picture of le
Violin D'Ingres 1924
& you had assumed
I knew her
because she
was just my type
& how we stood
in front of the 1920
female nude unsure
of its sex - really - us
in matching skin &
hair; blue & blond, me
in a jumper you bought
two years before
but in a different
shade of red - my foot
edged between the
interchangeable of yours

& I saw Mina Loy for the first time
in a characteristic hat & look
with a dark room thermometer in her ear

I sing the March of The Women
as the evening ends knowing
you love me in all my fucking
denim which you find ridiculous
but I've seen you in jeans &
know it's infectious; with the
scene for our genes
because we know it's genetic
we are falling in love twofold
& double a Myles New York
of butch & sissy & tough

when I get home I read
about the new trend for
pig-fucking;
pick the ugliest girl & take
her home & she'll be thank
ful for the attention & next
time I hear the word banter
I will make it all concrete art
just to be able to shove it
up someone's arse;
& imagine they'll be thank
full of it all the time it's exhausting

it is hailing & snowing
the London sky is alive
with itself & dashed
5pm colour as a blond
walks past my window
untouched by the cold
& the distant light is
an orange to aspire to

On a public shaming website
the steubenville case is being
tweeted facebooked reddited
disseminated deconstructed
& what shocks me most is that
one commenter can write on
social issues but has not learnt
the difference between 'could
of' & 'could have' so for all his
conditional tenses & futurity
haters gonna hate; rapers gonna
rape, but the rules of grammar
should always apply

luckily a twitter lesbian couple
I follow like a car-crash on the
M5 have met other lesbians &
are live-streaming their dialogue
& tube rides & cake eatings &
smiles homogenous smiling homo-
normativity

so I'm distracted by
that & all the blond machinations
of what I could be with a lady
that matches better than my bag
& shoes

here is a picture of my
self; let me attach it to
the e-mail then whatsapp
you about it I'm
wearing pants in it which
is novel for this age but I'm trying to make
new new again;
you tell me I'm all delicacy
of form & lies of lyric eyes
which are blue & batting
their heavy eyelashes like
a victim would

you write such alphabetical
torture; I couldn't come up
with a better way to hurt
than reading you all day So I do;
sit down with coffee & start at your blogspot

let me be your memory loss
or let me be your yesterday
at the local Indian takeaway

I take you out
in the poetry library
sit us at a table
for two read you
in the evening
under the water
of the bathtub
& the light of a
Kandinsky
reproduction

the poem
considered
a lost lover
; & its heavy
canvas primary
colour a thick
grieving friend

a topless tunisian is on the huffington post
& is being stoned; is suicidal; in a mental
hospital; raped on the streets; incommunicado
which in a technological age like this is
impressive I wish I were out of touch
like that sometimes but my BT connection
is too good for my own good

I'm not even attracted to blondes
but I use them like self-obsessed
confessional stylings though
my body belongs to me, and is not the source of anyone's honour
which is a relief since I've
been fucking morals
in every position
going since I read
giving an account of oneself

elsewhere in the world
but still ablaze on my
Infinity+ internet is her &
she might get lashed: pay a small fine: at worst die
it's not much different to a night out in London
if you're part of the dirtiest scenes & collectives
so I am mobilising my white male friends with
writings on their chests because if they're put
away the
world will
have to listen

I feel betrayed by all my friends
who never even told me Oppenheim's
fur cup & saucer existed let alone
had a matching spoon for small acts
of coupled bodies intimacy if
you're into those normative displays
so I order an imitation on ebay & wait
for its hair ringed surfaces to arrive
in a brown paper envelope slick
& disarrayed with second-hand travel

When we sit up
in bed the second
night that is ours
you are surprised
by your own adult
beauty that day
someone caught
it on polaroid
because we're
retro-complicit
no oil-painting
now that I hold
your face in my
mind where I
am the least
temporary of any
other body part

we are our own
implicit critiques
lost one; & I wish
you here safely
though I know I
can't have it

I hate the cleanliness of pop art
& am being fed instead with the
wild insinuations of my vibrating
phone: pictures of women all over
the world taking tops off for each
other

I write like
I punch
like a girl
& one day I'll get you
right between the 'I's

& yesterday I could not
stop thinking about
 'you' but today
I can't remember who
 it was I was thinking
 of – not really
all I know is my spaces
 are becoming like an
early Myles because I am
 reading Hart
Crane; and thoroughly disgracing
 myself

over girls dressed as sailors writing poems like New York sounds

Tidy me up
with a dustpan
& paintbrush
I feel you painfully
& like a Lichtenstein
though you're so clear
cut I can see
your pencil outline
the tentative workings
of self all over you

it has been snowing
in April & though there
is tweeting its no bird
outside the window

the radio sings
I have died
every day
waiting for you
wave-based

second person
romance

I still smell
the salt
of your
deodorant
floral all
over my
t-shirt &
next day is
far away

my clothes have been on too long
& East of here the braless are going
missing

I think that I will fight for you
but then I remember those are song
lyrics too & that night
away from the manufactured cartoons
dotted around the Tate Modern I take
this shirt off; which is sheer & grey
stand in front of my mirror my body
this line-breaking curve of Danse Russe
I am alone
Beautifully alone
In protest
& wishing you here
to animate me with the sharp
of your mind
and bodily unguarded

The Day Lady Died

8.4.13

Us four play
it out on London
terraces 3am past
the first night bus

I think about the glass ceiling
hers & mine and how
I used to watch you make
the kitchen alive with mov
-ing splicing & reconfiguring
in the worlds of a pasta bowl

I have
found you new now
for many days
& I have
this great pen that is
making me write the
fullest words I've used
in an age

 She dies & I get a year older
all in the same week & these things so rarely
happen together but here we are in a Spring
so cold it's a discontented winter of raincoats
our waterproof surfaces making us solid
with samenesses

I actually fancy
the pants
off you painfully
& she's not for turning
but you might be

& a flurry of tweeting with her name on it
the witch
we have such limited vocabularies
of hate I find the collective
weaken under the strain of easy
call-outs
my side has become
a party manifest in
Brixton & defending
their right to sexism
on this one occasion
every national holiday needs a bitch

But
instead
I have a muse

who is not
funny at all
&
I've been throwing
my weight around
the poem since
way back when & other
vague timeframes

and I'm sweating now but not an unladylike amount
and thinking of sitting in a kitchen in Brighton
next to a large bichon frise with great eye contact
where everyone & me stopped believing

My Vincent Warren Period

I feel joyfully
uncommitted
in the mornings
& I make coffee
am not hung over
open my laptop
to begin again
with poems
almost a lady lazarus
of 9am but less
internal rhyme
& a little less feeling

It's like that time I joined
the Labour Party & ignored
all of their e-mails until
a local representative turned
up on the door step

I had a paintbrush in my hand; ripped trousers;
sometimes I'm so butch & so great & had been
painting a wall

but I see myself reflected
in the eyes of others & I know I'm O'Hara
fairy not Myles urban gunslinger

since I've met you
I can't stop for writing
& this better not be
my Vincent Warren period

where you go off to Canada
leave me with an ugly STI
& my death is imminent
& if we're honest you're
not the beauty of the Bolshoi ballet in a body
but there's something in the fragile
between that obvious collar bone &
the line of your shirt that subtlety of
masculine I love all the way through
your jaw line

we're all such straight lines aren't we?
The way we fall & fuck & think

So I dance to show tunes all the way across
my bed which is paisley & made
& think about my ineffectual political subjectivities

What I do at My Desk

I listen to Eileen Myles talking
to Charles Bernstein
& reading her early poems
when she loved trees & natural
things never differentiated between
her dog & her girlfriends

I listen to her read
& I nod as I chop
garlic & drink Rioja
& I want to be
in touch somehow
with you but
I can't

I'm suddenly worried
about my ethics & my
faith which are absent
& heavier than I am

How young am I? well
these poems I'm listening
to were recorded in 2009
before I even knew
your name but I
had more certainty in my
hands then; to hold

I can't remember
the last time
I fell in love
with someone
my own age; or
when & how I
got to be so small

So for providence's
sake I listen to
Bright Eyes 'First
Day of My Life' &
remember feeling

What I do at my desk
is never different
to what I do at my bed

I wish I had friends who lived in lofts
I wish I had friends who were here &
drinking wine with me but they're not

& I'm thinking of you & coffee & the paper
how maybe you'd sound on the phone
if I surprised you with my call
& a smile, perhaps

When I get off the train
& commuter-tight breathless
walk into afternoon bright:
I put my ipod in my jeans
zip up the leather of my jacket
feel the concrete through converse
 I hum
it's my consumerism
& I'll buy if I want to
 buy if I want to

& Ocado is advertising with a woman
pushed down some stairs
& Vistaprint is advertising on
domestic violence: don't make me tell you twice
& iTunes is advertising with a
bruised bitch who didn't know when to STFU

So today I am taking chances
in familiar places deviating
through the crowd with Ahmed
in my bag & phenomenology
all over my tongue like what
I did last night

I want to
remove
everything
from you
with my
 teeth
but the things I want
to do are so soft
outside of online
spaces & different
but ours
nonetheless
 when we take this
to my room we won't be advertised
& the removal of your jeans
 dirty & quick
will not be sponsored by Zipcar

& BBC Radio 1 is advertising on
don't wrap it & tap it: tape her & rape her
& Dove is advertising with
'next time don't get pregnant'
& Sky is advertising women deserve
equal rights & left hooks

While
I am theorising all our erotic
encounters
 fantastical respectful
I pack up my ethics in the poem
& send it your way trigger
warning you off me maybe

But when we sit in the
tepid dark of a bar
there will be no harm
done here & the surprise of your fingers
on my wrist where it has hurt
before turning & holding
like consideration fine-boned & fleeting
we are a snapchat photograph
with a three second lifetime
but its yours on mine & there's
something in that

I am face down
in your conversation
I want to be at the
ballet seeing legs
moving in time
I want to go on cinema
trips: be consensual
with you

all these questions of want
& temporality & will you say
yes as I wonder why anyone
would go near Dalston Superstore
& why dungarees are making a
comeback
that I might objectify you
just enough to make you
a subject again

& I'm boycotting & voting - watching bbqt - refreshing
twitter for the most recent news & I'll be up all night
for good fun; 'til the sun; or to get lucky

This morning we heard
that Nationwide had pulled
their advertising from Facebook
& instantaneously – but unrelatedly – increased
their female customer base 17.4%

I ask you to meet
me somewhere central
to think about holding
your hand & not being
at the Frick or anywhere
more romantic than here

We sit on bar stools:
I conflate beer mats
with art: poetry with
wet rings textured
by bottles moving
across their surface
– you've noticed
it in me
this urban animal
instinct
for words not breath

You have a deadline
for tomorrow
afternoon & I have
mornings for writing
now you are out
of my bed & weekends
for leaning heavy on the
handrails of the over ground
hanging off Friday
nights
& maybe missing
your body like a line that
can't be written yet

feeling is
a state
of mind-
ful politics
& if poetry
is a swoon
then you're
a concussion

it is raining still:

I am wearing tweed
& grey denim
I have never been so wet
but
close analysis of your
syntax makes me hot
what do my ampersands
tell you about my thinking
round the body & through?

Someone I love once said:
don't piss where you eat
kiss on the street
rhyme didacticism in verse
 it'll only hurt
& now
I can never tell
whether I am dating
disaster or just
a dating disaster
but it makes for an
avant-garde poem anyway

Evening will come
& this is how
I wrote certain of my poems
in dark & light the same length
as my walking wetly
& almost to this day 100 years ago
a woman died by the horse
but yesterday an EDL member
was wearing a Pussy Riot shirt
to protest Islam
 he must just think
it is an internet bought
kind of vaginal violence & this is dissent
when anatomical cuts
are symbols of our protests

In a recent programme
Clare Balding asks what
drove a middle-class governess
to such drastic action I
imagine it was something to do
with her being
a middle-class governess
so on the train out of London
I read Foucault because I can
& my primary concern
as a young woman
is that in a public space
I might have visible
toothpaste on my face

My infinite shallowness
is allowed for I
am free: a self-involved
kind of liberty but one
that is mine

On campus the full-bricked
knowledge looks livid in
the light of our late Summer
but the library is empty & full
all the same
these voices like paper moving
turning & undoing over spines

My fantasies have become
pouring coffee over cultural theorists
opening the archives to feel history like
someone else's skin
the clandestine militancy of your purple
shirt buttoned all the way to your neck
tracing the ways in which our enemies
are changing
:
our moments of intangible injustice
are systemic & quieter; unavoidable
cuts both social & bodily

I think of Emily Davison & the photographs
in the paper; coloured time-worn black & white
nostalgia & I wonder how today's press
would have reported her death:

Racy dressing: woman hit by horse shows ankles
Woman steps out in green, white & purple

Getting it in the neck: the dangers of Suffrage Scarves
New Hunger Strike Diet Fad
Emily Davison, B Cup, Dies by the Horse

Because that is what contemporary
liberty looks like even if
I can vote to create a Government
where men outnumber women 4-1
so
now is not the time to stop being
radical break windows
if you have to; but let them be
the right ones

& if Amina's arrest & Pussy Riot
have shown us anything
it is that Give Me Liberty or
Give Me Death
isn't the earnest embarrassing
datedness I had always thought

But, until the
revolution begins
I must make my way
home &
as the train
leaves Egham
I am reminded
of all the things
I will not have
to throw myself
in front of.

Tegan & Sara concert

I am on the DLR which as far
as transport goes is confusing
this liminal above & underground
space

of tickets & oysters
tapping in & out but no toilets
for the possibility of tapping that

so I go to a bar
order a gin martini
am told it's a strong
drink for a small girl
- I hope so -
I'm all for ladies drinking
larger than they are
as long as it won't
be held against them in
the morning if the night turns
ugly in a non-consensual way

& as our group gets larger
we talk poems marriage public policy
category identifications queers
t-shirts & corrupting our media
all for the politics
not the practice
order more drinks then head
to the venue where no one
malingers
until we are subsumed in a wave
of plaid
stereotypes
leather jackets & large glasses

it is dark & bright purple stage
lights like rising temperatures
across a crowd that is seething & moving
all hips elbows wide-eyed fandom
of collars done all the way to the top
& sweating closely like bodies in bed
as I am part of a crowd: uninhibited & stunned

& the music is not a
heartbeat but a life-
line of text & rhythmic
making this physical
through the floors & walls
humming too; not oh so
typical with dancing

& acoustic guitar
& all I want to get is a little
bit closer

in this safest of spaces
it looks like everyone here reads
poetry & cries over knit-patterns
owns braces & believes in unicorns

for once
I am not
meant to be any-
where else

the train ride back from East London
is more alive with women than I have
ever seen; this mobile safe space
of casual conversation like song
the bluish flirtings of subculture

I have decided to move to Canada
where I can learn how to chop wood
& chain my tyres when it snows listen
to music outside of headphones
disappearing in crowds with the
ease of the happy

entirely non-monogamous

in the queue a man
wearing ethical clogs
can't be part of the patriarchy
& every other woman here
is pierced dressed in
ironic military fatigues
dyed hair & socially
constructed top-knots
leopard print retro scrunchies
 this must be what
 East London looks like
there are berets & round glasses
people wearing their Lenins &
Trotskys out with talking & a
number of wrist-banded attendees
have transplanted John Lennon
straight to their faces & style

* * *

Last night we got drunk
& sexted each other
but you're better at it
because you're somewhere
dirtier than I am
then later you send me a poem
by Leopaldine Core
about spitting on genitals
-- who uses 'genitals' in a sex poem? --
I feel unaroused
as a reader

but today I am locked in a room
with the Guerrilla Girls talking
about standing for the conscience of art
& that they are like Batman or Zorro
& I am being lectured by two women
all in black and wearing monkey masks
one of them calling herself Frida Kahlo
& my mind wonders like Plato's
conception of the uterus
as we discuss politically correct language
chair person instead of man/woman
& are such vocabulary changes superficial
which really – is my whole life – which at best
is lived shallowly

They encourage us to buy their book
or at least steal it &

my modes of acquisition are evolving
I buy I take I eat I have

when I leave I realise
I fancy a Gorrilla
which is a shame:
bestiality is the only
sex act I object to

* * *

I am told this is a cultural space
a safe space for swearing &
we live in extraordinary times
where art objects are vulnerable
to being forgotten about:
our legacy will be silence
so identify your point of friction
that is not between us
still jeaned & ready
but what you do & what
you are
because if you're as
socio-economic as you say
tell me what you fight for
that you love
not are

be – if you can't be ethical – transparent
I won't be commercial confidentiality
closed down to you I will be
open & revealing if you ask me to
though it's not avant-garde to be so
forthcoming
'we should not take lazy intellectualism
if all money is dirty'

so the power is shifting all over
the map the city us: I want you
when I don't have you
these fucking blue eyes
have got me with their
regretful tones of seeing
but you do whatever you want
baby this is free speech

let's transform ourselves
be more & less than I am
look here this
is what's wrong it'd
make me sick if I weren't

so flippant

* * *

I have been in a workshop with
the Guerrilla Girls watched two
members of Pussy Riot give a talk
with a new art school lesbian friend
but – oh my - the adrenaline of sitting outside
in the just-beginning rain with you
talking Nancy Fraser & both having
dated people from the Middle-East
Marie La Pen homophobic marches
Marion Cotillard's pretty face &
Isabelle Huppert's acting ability
that you are an activist &
interviewing Femen & La Barbe
that I write these subjective lyrics
& am waiting to fall in love without
ideological involvement because

I am not a poet I am
a pick-up artist of the loneliest degree
it's reached a point where I can't tell
whether I'm in trouble or am trouble
& I am sitting opposite an installation
of a shed & a fridge with a beautiful
French girl I have just met in a workshop
O! How Modern
O! So Pastoral

you add me on facebook: I poke you: you like all
my recent photos: we are very much in love & all
the better for you not living in the same country

I don't like marches
the police kill
my libido so do anarchists
are we here to fuck hegemony
or each other?
We are doing nothing
other than casual
discomfort down
Old Compton St

I'm with a growing group
rebellng against myself
& lesbophobia sounds
like a disco better than here
 I am feckless
& blonde you e-mail me
about meeting: tall & beautiful
with such a way with facebook messenger

the powers of contemporary
dykedom are invented
vocabularies & neon pink
skin tight
 dreaming
as a hatted troll at the back
shouts 'Fuck The Police' &
the officer & I eye one another:
I see her handcuffs
smile disarmingly probably
& say - maybe - they mean it
in a flattering gay way
 she stares
we both feel oppressed
but she's in uniform &
I'm just into kink

I am told I am
a 1 on a recently created
gender scale I move
like Bambi; use my wrists
as a form of expression it's
feminine to move like that

I pretend like I'm pretty
like I'm happy
like I'm essentialist
high-vis wearing labels
in London
 & I am not a dyke

I just sleep with them.

Someone starts singing
she'll be coming
with the woman
when she comes
but I will not be a collected
sex act promotional
materials slogan t-shirts
snatch the day posters:
I won't shout here
because if the word
can't be intimate & between
two my tongue can

I've moved today
from I candy to
butch & tramps
to the page
but only the homeless man
asked me the shade of my nipples
trying to enlist a group of women
in the game
but no one has ever played
me properly & they tell him to cut
it out

Later at a silent disco
which is pretty similar to
Dyke March politics
I flick between the two DJs
resting nowhere just
angles of bodies & sound
but
when you take the headphones
off we're all just 1,000 strong
dancing to the beat of nothing

Mainstream me with your
eyelashes: long & curled
a deviant upturn that makes
you beauty unique & awake
while I am unreliable
failing
containing multitudes
but no depth

This is the age
of documentation first: action later
we're contemporary archivists
learning the art of
collecting & conservation
on the job

so when the photographer saw
Nigella's husband's hands
around her throat he
did what anyone would clickclickclick

& now
the fear that this could happen to anyone
 but we've all read the papers
it happens to slags who have it
coming & domestic goddesses -
I am in no danger
my proclivities all secrets & my cooking burnt
not eaten in
 fridge-lit negligee for a camera
well past the bed time of decent celebrity chefs

we appropriate our
most curvaceous figure
her pouting & crustacean deep-throating
Photographed
disappearing home after the incident
with the man
 who does playful tiffs like knuckled
sandwiches

I'm the post-er girl
for disaffection
write #lolitics
if you're not
taking this serious
 & in my sisterhood
group we all disagree about
what should be done
so we send a 'hope you feel
better' fruit hamper
to the food channel studios

Should we be worried
our homosocial female
bonding has no ugly feelings to it:
even the Marxists thought
Fortnum & Masons was the only

company with enough
gravitas to do the situation justice

The sky is full of ground-level flat
light though it is past 8pm &
the way I yearn for you
is old-fashioned & indecent

 I'd eat you with a whisky sour
whipped up to stiff
my discolouring self disquieted by these
new purples of feeling
with a hint of sea air & fresh parsley
& last night I slept completely
nakedly thinking about the way
you drink from a glass

there's no returning
she's the exception-
al woman cum every woman:
every charity & paper
wants her the way
producers intended us to
 people are tweeting their
 inappropriate sympathies
 in 140 characters of invasion

We all have our hands
round Nigella's
neck now

There was a time
I would not leave his
tracksuit until lunch

Remember when people
used to get high
go on road trips &
write prose
& poetry is dead
like feminism is dead
my love has been
a massacre recently
 I'm taking on
 no more causes
 until I know they
 can survive

& I can't find community
unless I'm plugged in

 now I'm always
dressed & who is
this sullen thing
I want
what kind of muse you that e-mails past 11pm
not blue eyed & darling & political too

I make cross-stitch
of your hapless affections
burn myself cooking
turn inside out over a thought
about interiority
& the way you kiss me
is sheer extimacy
like your nipples through that top

Are you a Caitlin Moran
or bell hooks kind of grrl?
It's such a riot when we get together
disagree into coffee cups
which I have without cream or milk

I have my own modern problems:
can't work out
which profile picture
makes us look most
gloriously in love

This morning I woke up
hurting turned over
& dreamt you on the bed
not even in around or
over Freudian, you
undressed by me
in this subtle way
like a latex glove

I peel nothing off/give everything away
you ‘, in the centre
of your lines when you walk
while we talk like postmodern
novels with feelings
ctrl alt delete
your heart out

& I woke up before
we’d fucked but
how amazing on a Saturday
morning to have this half
naked giant on my
mind & the act of
becoming is not failure
but political when you’re
undressed you’re just undressed
& there’s no where else to go

let’s role play police brutality
in public places during
mental health week
 we flip a coin over
which of us gets to wear
the butch boots
& which of us has the power
 you believe in the
Proletariat & laugh
whenever I’m the officer
like you’ve not read Discipline
& Punish

You tell me to stop carrying Frank O’Hara
everywhere with me he’s dead
people will think I am a sentimentalist

I can’t get over
toilets with women
that same-sex
intimacy that always

disappoints or ugly
realises itself one leg over
the seat against
the flush
 half-sounds of water
starting to run
down the yellow
stained porcelain

The sun has stopped for
the day
& the urbane cries
itself to a grey sleep
like this is Swindon
not London

Your Is are
bruised egos
& I am only
as clean as
the dirtiest
men I know: I feel like
I've been talking this poem
a filibuster length of time

All I want
is a good man
to hold me
 trite

As a young Dutch female journalist
is raped in Tahir Square
60s-and-still-looking-good
is embarrassed in the Guardian
over a word

remember how we used
to think actions speak
louder than celebrities
but I blush
myself talkative with all
my out-dated identifications

I surf alone & at home
with a martini; not cold
or iced
just gin in a glass;
look up women I used to know

I'm sick over
the internet celebrity
of mortals
& eat my olive
sourly

this life & death of words
all the isms I carry in my pockets
to impress a new you
thinking about
our first year
as animals
together; having
to wear scarves
everywhere --
borrowing your black wool
for my first funeral
that I went to
wearing your
last-night's mouth

Susan Sarandon thinks me retro-
grade; oppositional; worse, in-
famous & one day I want to be bad
enough to be unforgotten
my face
a snarl
biting
& you: just the mess
of a memory
at the end of

a telephone call

Slane Girl (love poem)

19.8.13

Reading Amiri Baraka
on the tube nowhere:
“Love is an evil word.
Turn it backwards/see, see what I mean?
An evol word”

you would not go
to the cinema
with Kant but
you would sleep
with the mummy
from *The Mummy Returns*
rather than spend
five years in a loveless
marriage
I like to know the scales
of your unrealistic morality

I do not get a bag
for my tampons
because I am
shameless ;
I wrap them
in the light
paper of ink
print transaction
which becomes a skin
around the box
when the rain stars

I listen to Eminem
“cause I’ve been treated like dirt before you
and love is ‘evol’
spell it backwards I’ll show you”
& I came to the lyrics
of the white rapper first – no revolutionary
poetic
disavowing feeling

I love you like the love of camera phones; biblical judgment;
familial shame; fluorescent green hats; every spectator we solicited
then wished we could lose; Kenneth Koch’s more nonsense poems; that
you let me pronounce it ‘cock’ for a year before you corrected me; our
youtube presence which is not yet established; the possibility of future San
Sebastian

In Ireland there is noise
around a public sex act;
my only objection is she

got photographed on her
knees in front of a man
but the internet
has ruined her like every
network is intended to

why else would we stay
in touch the damage
we can do one another
is tantamount to living:
these new connectivities
are made in the shape
of disgraced women who always have curves.

I'm lying
face-down
topless
knowing I'll be free
if you call
though I'm just
an inoffensive
place to stay
in London

it's not so much
that I want to talk
about feelings
but that I want you
to realise I reveal
more than my content

you head my way from Camden
picking apologies as you come
for our social double standards
which have made me a spectator
to my own gender constructions
& we are elusion
together a time bomb
of what price we will have to pay
for openness & enjoyment & community

no sex is priceless
babe

As a girl
who can
easily get
a fist in
her mouth
I am not
predisposed
to this film

nor have I
wrapped my lips
around the cultural
precursor; I am without referent
in the velvet cinema seats

my politics have meant
intimate conversations
with unknown women
& men where private
humiliations become our public
& I know who has
pubic hair but not
because we're fucking :
whose one-night-stand
tried to come in their eye
because he'd seen it somewhere
once – and women like that

as a big mouthed female
I feel uncomfortable
until her husband starts
beating her & the men
in the cinema stop laughing

I am restored in the promise
of misogyny --- the type we all
condemn --- not the slippery
laugh of get your lips round this
or just breathe
through it
baby

& is this a date?
is this like a date – where you
& I watch domestic violence & porn
because we could have
done that at my house

I try to check my wide-gob

privilege
my mouthing off
ability I can eat more
jaffa cakes in one go than all the
other girls that is something
you wish you were rich
problematically
& are so fucking good
at poems
they make me swoon
like the girl
I look like

I read the next morning
the original movie is suing the new movie
because this is the age of warring capital
& if I weren't turned on by economic conditions
there'd be no reason to see this film:
it's a lot to swallow

when I get up
and can't
find two shoes
that match you
are a dreamboat
stretched out in sleep

Rape Poem

10.9.13

I wake up with blood
on my chin and wonder what
we did last night, in the back
of the white car
I close my eyes to sunlight
sit in the expanse of my
orange vision delicate lined
& pulsing black with tree outlines

around our world rape
poem is going viral
but you have me against
a stall; leg between mine
bold & acrylic thick like coming
on just strong enough

Gaga's *BOYS BOYS BOYS*
plays in the room next
door as you fuck me
in the frame against a lock
& we carry on because we do
like boys
 they make the best rape
jokes

I guess I'm obsessed with
your breadth & body hair
& won't say no to anything
because you are shot through
with emergency exits anyway

I work up my best sweat
against plasterboard
bathrooms & theorists
 don't break anything
useful or ceramic

what is the acceptable violence
for our feelings?
 I fuck you over
the sinks. Fair's fair.

We talk about
the possibilities for
viral poems
over a drink
& this is cute what we do
when we're frustrated
& that it's becoming

a regular thing
meeting where poetics
happen in two cities

I learn nothing
I did not know
about you &
this is fine
statistically: the more intimate
this gets
the more likely
you are to assault
me sometime – you're safer
as a stranger in bathrooms at night

Maybe I love you
maybe I love the nothing we are
and plural pronouns and rough sex
are just a way to work through trauma
& our collective is shaken
as you lift me off the page
& are surprised by how lite I am

Day of The Girl

11.10.13

Sometimes
I am so busy
in the morning
it gets to lunch
before I have
even read the
Daily Mail online
& those are my
most powerful
days

on this: day of the girl: avoid
inflicting the same punishments
so we don't & we learn nothing
 am I to be educated
out of want
of plural pronouns with you
all over it

I want to subscribe to the fate of my own personality
while you are in the shower
I write a sad poem
to the resident mouse
who is possibly getting
in through the bathroom
& while you were sleeping
I spent some time sitting
at the top of my stairs
feeling all symbolic
with you warm & flesh
there that night

how can you be a true revolutionary
with that weapon of power
hanging historical between your legs
 in the meantime
a lady in her Disney Chanel incarnation
swings across my vision deep-throating
power tools without clothes on
I wear a vest
 like Marlon Brando

You so neatly
get into bed
I hurt at
your precision
send you pictures
of high-street retail
t-shirts that say

you're boring me babe
I'm going to eat you
as I work through the banality
of a road crash bureaucracy
think about death in our 20s
what I mean to be a girl

take my photo
while I'm clotheless
we should be
thin enough now
for pre-pubescence
it's the day of the girl
day of the selfie; in
appropriate states of dress;
youtube "am I ugly" movies
- comment below:
ill-advised drink & out
darker than 8pm with
older boys & older cars before we know
who tracy chapman is even & that velocity
isn't enough speed
if we're talking about a revolution;

take my picture xoxox & for Halloween
we'll go dressed as Jimmy Saville in
costumes bought on amazon & 11yr olds
are taking after their moms with their long legs
& model good looks

they've gendered kinder eggs now
& all I got was a readymade
my little pony fetish babe

I want to curl up
like a dog & feel
truly for once
out of innocence:
I am never taken
advantage of in the right ways

Come In Like a Wrecking Ball

14.10.13

It's not yet 8:10
& I have read
about a 13 yr old
raped & filmed
all charges dropped
at the feet of football
playas

the only fumbled pass
is the one I make at you

Somewhere in the elsewhere
of the internet our child star
swings naked on a wrecking ball
we are all upset & talking about
her victimhood

no one has noticed she's
wearing Dr Marten's
which is queer & feminist
you go girl in that vest top

Don't you ever say
I just walked away
I will always want you;
wear my man boots lick power tools
fuck you industrial hard hatted

I eat breakfast bars
for dinner meals
are an abandonment
of self
& I smash coffee in the supermarket
where they can afford my loss
while you throw philosophers
like shapes & dated moves
to impress no one but the checkout
girl who stays a girl her whole life

People say Britney's new music
video 'work bitch' is too sexy
but she's wearing flares in it
flares aren't sexy

given the historicity of the
widening trouser leg I take
a moment for narrative in which
local boy rapes local girl; local girl
loses place on cheerleader squad local girl's
mother loses her local job & the charges

were dropped at the local police office
just before the local family's local house
was burnt down;
Stein's heft of fatty language repeats
offence after offence
Basket I & II po-faced poodle judgment

I feel sad
for all
that is not
in my hands

You wrecked me
but at least it's
the height of fashion
& laydeez will continue
their music video nudity

Sexual Assault Photographed Two Blocks from Police Station 16.10.13

I don't do sex
in public
because I too
have a camera
phone
& know where
its flash is
& the snapchat
people have handed
over pictures of
snatches to Washington
for security reasons

the war on terror
with the vag shot
is top priority

In Ohio as if
it could be anywhere else
a lady in a pea
green coat is eaten
out in the street
hashtag eatingbox
roadside slut

the state of things now
are that the police
are never far; in this case
which is yet to be dropped
they were over the road

& to drink is to wreak
havoc upon ourselves
so I pour myself a drink
three fingers deep
in a wide-rimmed black glass
my shirt smells of the last
woman who wore it who
was you not yet a night ago

do all that is cunning with
your tongue & technology
I; connoisseur of distaste
will teach you sour grapes
if this shit goes viral

at the cinema
when the lights
finally go down

after the advertising
you put a hand
on my upper thigh
& just keep going
until we leave
untouched by
French New Wave

getting back I cook
spaghetti while you
play Goddard film
soundtracks on the
speakers of what we
missed
because we are
comfortable & daring
safe in the touch
of each other outside
of crowds

I am not a community poet
& you are not a clamour
of others & crowds & noise
but fur unshaven light
on the tip of my lips

Reclaim the Night

26.10.13

On Tottenham Court Road half
an hour late the march has moved on
as marches will

& I have missed it again
this is the third year of unclaimed
evenings which could be made safer
by my walking in the right collectives

I have Patti Smith
because the night
as fade-out soundtrack
to my depoliticised day

& what is the
more necessary act to
reclaim the night or
belong to lovers?

I go to a bar nearby waiting
for the sounds of women
screaming; roundabout sirens
for utopian impossibilities
where you breathe in tequila
& taste the salt
of my saccharine childhood self
mother other mother trucker
your father was a mind the gap
sign at a tube station one night
I am in a shit café rouge
drinking too fruity red & googling
Edward Said

I confess my childhood
indiscretions to a Freudian
Scholar once removed from
his couch by facebook messenger
&

I want to be the sweet
you mean to suck
that gets lost on your I

I walk home late at night alone
don't I – I worry for friends who
do too don't I

at what point have I done
enough? Except not today

where I have missed the night
& the bus
in a unit of time no longer

than a poem

getting home where I have no
blinds I lie in hesitating
light of the school opposite &
thinking positive sex-education
masturbate rabidly for the public
exposure & I am avoiding
the sisterhood as all other women
are tonight

we just want each other
in new and non-familial ways

& I can chant & I can sing
use all my taste buds at
the same time on your
elusive specificity of taste;
fetishize the 1970s origins
of solidarity
who defends public nudity
these days when the telephone
box is the public protectorate
of getting off not the libraries
anymore

but if you wanted to go
down the back of senate house
I wouldn't say no

I want my stimulus
on jstor mass-produced & easy
access state sanctioned

& when someone is attacked tonight
let's scare quote the incident
"she claims she was"
mishap of punctuation & you are a liar
my friend, my lover, my late-night-body

International Day for Elimination of Violence Against Women 25.11.13

When the train pulls in to Vauxhall
I am already leaning heavily
into Jack Spicer's Lorca letters
just beyond the maroon promise
of Top Shop
 as you wait outside the Zara
our encounters caffeinated with the
just-missing of one another at local landmarks

The gallery was full
of bodies & the rooms stretched
whiteness like passive art
 but I looked & I felt & I like
the textures
the scripted thickness
of face & vagueness shaping
itself into human skin-tones

rereading O'Hara
is a romantic proposition again
& I am on lyrical repeat escaping
embodiment in the eyes of paper

so we will drink
Lemonade & be
glorious even in
Winter
because easy affections
of summer are seasonal
meaninglessness
& the candid of your
laugh is a spoken
hopefulness beyond speech

I think of you lying
in knit-wear & low fashioned
intimacy in the frames of the
page & our bed
it is not so hard for me to be
tender
 when we hate narrative
& choose to suspend our time
in the touching of middle-beginning-end
so that when we are
together
now
what is radical is gentle
 so statisticians say

Sometimes I am so excited
by life's fulsome possibilities
I could vomit
 but it's often too much
coffee
& there is no worse statement
in this world than lady garden

the agencies have picked up
on the momentariness of this
feeling
my politics take a rebrand: I am new &
baby-oiled to shining perfect
see how I catch the city-bright lights
of our evening chatter across the Thames
to Mother's headquarters
where we can see all sorts of
genitals captured by celebrity
photographer Alisa Connan

 if I wore skirts
 I would be lifting them
for this momentous day : success
is when you make it to a billboard & we are
an innovative centerfold of hair & skin

You find biological terms
ugly in sentences that
aspire to poetry
& I thought you made my
heart skip a beat
but it was latent tachycardia
& what was dormant in my
chest is alive with beating irregularity
again

while 93 women
are in frames on white walls: we stand
I to eye to Cyclops
of the hideousness between legs
& there is undeniable beauty
in bodies that can be marketed

I love you probably & likely
wish I did not because it cannot be bought
I'll read you 'To Marina' in bed because
it is long & will keep you undressed for longer

Love poem to Debbie Tucker Green

I act you out in black & white
Lily Allen's baggy pussy no concern
where objects are concerned
& I find myself directionless & line-
less

we kiss just
off Lavender Hill & I am blue
like the middle of a riot

I excel at such short lived intimacies
you are too dull even to write about
though you wear all the leather
a girl could wish for

the lightness of our time
is all from ipod minis
& I sing along I do like
all the others I take you
like a punch
of salt.

In this world of keeping
tabs behind bars
I do lines
of poems & sit-ins that should
be illegal they feel so good :
we are led off one by one
hashtagging Team Nigella

Drug Education is changing
so that the worst side-effect of coke
is Charles Saatchi's hands around
your neck

So I laugh as you slip across
the tiles of Embankment tube
after the rain being non-pedestrian
down the escalator & on
the district line

How you
take up space
how you take
a breath
I am astounded
by this wonder-

What is that dialect

that makes you such
a beautiful moment of talk
an exposed thigh on an old
LP sleeve broken pair of heels
painted nails & blood on the pavement

At this time
of high artifice
& 6:34pm
I am on the wrong
side of the bar
possibly in the centre
of a gay speed dating event
like some effete perfect boy
I worry for us & our
future on the street
so let no one follow me home
but you

The Evolution of Feeling

7.12.13

Women are more likely than men to report regretting sexual encounters. But according to a new study, it's not cultural views of female sexuality that saddle women with regret; it's evolution.

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/dec/04/shame-sex-women-regret-evolution>

With that first
kiss next to the
cycle path
hours behind us
we are
here unavoidably
washing clothes
wet through with
Winter or some
kind of feminine
longing

&
in the haze
of a spin-
cycle: you are
safe & detergent
in the lamp-
light

where I make magic
of your touches
well past mid-
night like the icing
on a cake that
was never made
just left undone &
undoing
as a gesture
between us of what
could be baked &
offered in love
if we chose which we didn't
: I don't like baking
it's kitsch & unhappy

& there's no time
for making beyond
the page when
the decorative can be
worded & light
so we wear red & emote:
it is new to feel together
now that the backlashes
are beginning in truth

be good to the environment
if you have the inclination :
otherwise don't
I'll want you no less
 & so, put on your
trousers to wear into
sleep tomorrow
I will be ungainly matted
mascaraed mishaps
under both eyes

it's just the way
I've been made
Darwin's survival
of the female facial
smudge the morning-
after
when I wake
up regretful & still
full of your arm span
& where you can walk
it off

 I'll play shameful
Flaneur all the way home
the airy step of tradition
my Baudelaire downfall
as I read *Flowers of Evil*
& wonder
if we are
headed the
same way
as floral
disaster

The End of Love

For Him

Now that I am alone
on Saturdays reading
Don Giovanni's room
I can't reminisce about
Italy we never went to or
Madrid & its orange possibility

Just think of instead
the unanswerable tone
of your weight on a mattress
or the nothingness of exits
so as not to draw attention
to your own sad departures
 these are the things
I cannot love but are history
to us all the same & the kindnesses
of your hairline or footfall are not
prepared for any sort of war

I don't want to dress
it up in analogy or a role play
but to kiss you blindly on both
ankles because if running
is an option then let you
grow wings there
where the skin is uncreased & fine
not deep enough to be without the
purplish of blood; a vein of a way
away from here

Who would choose this
& choose this for their children
& it's like an REM song on repeat
in the refrain of an aisle of Matalan
where you use words & definitions
like a spineless dictionary
to define what we are
when
I would rather hold your hand
in-between all these plastics & prices

You don't know what it's like
to work on/off as a light bulb or be
shallow as a shower I have
forgotten how to turn off
every kitchen appliance in your
absence but armed
with potato peeler

I start
failing
with coffee from
Costa©
me my own
large brand label
drink

The only one
who went externally : the solidarity of packet
coffee kept in urns &
conference dilution is not mine

but is it not the human condition
to take accidental corporate caffeine
into an anarchist plenary?

I am seeing Jack Halberstam
again but not
with Clare Jones who is back & I am glad
& I am sitting opposite
the room from a whole South London Feminism group
I signed up to but never attended
& I wonder will they recognize me
from a thumbnail photograph

The talks have all been
compressed for anarchy
outside
where to be a bit
provocative is arrestable
this week
& I am the ideal
partner for an anarchist
who hates themselves &
wants to resent a made-up
commitment phobic politico

* * *

When they start saying
'anarchistic' I think of the phonic
implications of a word
with kiss at its centre like xx marks
the spot there yes

marriage makes us governable
so in the easy resistant
of undressing you so happily
this can go nowhere but

the concrete
& ohmi the erotic rebellion
of the visible sock, striped above
blue brogues
post-structuralist for all kinds
of difference

in bed later you tell me 'your confusion
is around the word freedom' when I offer
theory up as a lens for our monogamy
& we are not each others'
nor do we belong
because you will not make
capital of our enjoyment of fucking
& I'll own that
--- you've got me, I guess
& I take you on
like a Foucauldian dialectic, I only
feel free as a sense of relativity
 so I write you love poems
verge on abstraction & try to create
a little trouble once in a while

* * *

I like us face to face
but you like low theory
& who can blame you
if it gets you off
without pretention
& I have still not finished
my Costa Coffee
so gather reality around
myself & feel the loss of the room
 unless you've been here
you can't understand
how many checked shirts
& dyke hair cuts
make a community

Man I bet everyone here chops their own wood
makes homely open fires of effigies each night

* * *

I heart Jack Halberstam & anti-moralism
& so I am quiet listening
but not like the dead silence
of the night outside the city
nor the suicidal queers of turning
20th century

& in the break, anarchists
queue for the women's toilet
because it is in demand
& there is no solution for that

I am bound to be dutiful
under the one dimension
of a stick-figure dress wearer
on a lavatory door

why do all lesbians wear
hats inside, is that a gender
identity thing?

* * *

This lyric is – probably
not – comically constructed
it's difficult to enact
meaningful alternatives
when the riot is outside &
I am inside with the poem
occupying the same square
of London

and while gentle pressure
is a political term for coercion
from your tongue
it's a beautiful thing

Lady Gaga is never far away
from the forefront of my
gyrations countering power
with a poker p-p-p poker face

There are no pure positions
which we've already found out
through our mattress practice
& when I am asked a question
about neoliberalism I say
"I'm a poet"
like one might say
"I'm a blonde"
when asked something difficult
about car engines for example.

* * *

I am back by 9pm
obedient with a closed

front door
where people can underestimate
the tyranny of happiness
so I get drunk
& eat discount tapenade
& say come over
I want to be yours only

I am sitting in the shed just outside
the National
all red wood & sweltering lights
perspiring illumination across a stage
& I have just left
you angry on the bed
running out on you
for something ticketed

but look love feminism has hit
the main stage & is all west end
now being written by men
how could I stay in as the world
begins to change one aesthetic
at a time?

& the all-woman cast come out
wearing clothes women actually
wear :
a character face
a gangster's girlfriend
single mum
bubbly northern girl
divorced alcoholic
downtrodden housewife
unthreatening girl next door
 here come the girls

what is beautiful about
the confines of the black
box is the interconnectedness
of everything where not my
problem is lit up & enacted
& it's not just a song & dance: not just
a bit of fun it's high-heeled
damage walking all over us

& the actors were not given
permission to use the original
song
 which is revealing as
a number one single

& this woman
that every song is sung
about the fantastical
sex product wild & innocent
& she don't need no papers
so we can assume she's trafficked

too

I hate these blurred lines
of indeterminacy whether I should
be gagging for it or just gagged
so that all the pop star mens can
do it like it hurt, like it hurt

& as Robin Thicke sings
You the hottest bitch in this place
I look at the women sweating
it out on stage & know I am not
so when it ends without resolution
because there can't be one

everybody get up
& out into the wet night

As it is the anniversary
of Hitler becoming chancellor
I book tickets to Wagner
for this evening & leave in my
military jacket which is just
back in with new romantic
like a cello's candid beauty

later when you have me
naked across the kitchen
table around which relations
are made & unfolded or forked
you tell me you think it's disgusting
I went at all
& I tell you but it's subversive
 darling
but you say not for a blonde

the conversation moves
as we do downstairs &
the house of lords have
voted against compulsory
sex education in schools
which you think will
change only when
"women can cum in
men's faces
 then they'll see"
though not if it's got them
in the eye which happens
I hear

Illicit material is just a click away
from where we are & I will never
be lazy with you in a several screen
sense
but I worry for other women & the
girls who have not learnt no
or to be anything other than a shot
snap release pocket for bodily fluid

back to back or tooth to tooth
we are & know what we like
sometimes eye to eye we just
fuck quietly before sleep & that
is enough
 for one another & us
& the plurality of happiness when
we come together

so while you think my vegetarian
diet is sanctimony & I find your
historical humourlessness
astounding
at least we are learning one another
by moments
& saying yes because loving allows it

I read Sean Bonney's
militant poetics
while Akon's Sexy Bitch
plays sounded from a
90s list that belongs to
someone else - the news
is open on nightmarish
my laptop's back turned
to the sunlit Thames

it is beyond my remit
as a writer of poems
even to empathise or to try
but the stories
on fish & chip paper
 where all words are
 hack-jobs
are more popular than ever now

mutilation goes in & out of
vogue with the intact mainstream
where it is not cut off
& thrown to the birds
where some bleed to death
hanging from beaks & wings
 so what does Adorno say
about that? I have never heard
an avant-garde political poet
say the words female
genital mutilation
but they do love a good injustice
generally; something to get all
line broken up over

Who can commission female
pain fastest : my money
is on channel 4 & all
proceeds go to no-one

I keep looking out
at Big Ben fucking
the sky with its
peaked & tipped top
& the girl opposite
thinks I have an
eye for her wide-
framed lenses &
slightly open legs
 which I do

in part & in parts

but rather than act
on anything in case
getting active turns into
its puritanical ism form

I eat a mixed
leaf salad in front of a
documentary about cutters