

OBJECTS
OF fEMINiSM

ART THEORETICAL WRITINGS FROM
THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

10

OBJECTS
OF FEMINISM

Edited by Maija Timonen
and Josefine Wikström



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Objects of feminism are the subject/object relations of contemporary capitalism, pieces of inorganic matter in contact with living tissue, chunks of fleshed-out knowledge. The meaning of “object” is taken broadly here, in discussions ranging from the objectification of subjects (or what it would mean to embrace the idea of becoming an object), to thoughts on the conception of an object in relation to knowledge, to the idea of an object as an object of an action. As concept, the object can as easily be attached to the field of psychoanalysis as to critiques of capitalism or to metaphysics. Through the specific and varied inquiries of the contributors, this publication approaches feminism from a range of angles relating to its artistic, academic and political significance, as both object, discourse and method.

MAIJA The above is a blurb that provided a starting point for this publication, which in turn originated in a symposium I organised at the University of Arts Helsinki, as a part of KuvA Research Days (December 7–9, 2015). You, Josefine, spoke at the symposium, and also came up with the suggestion of using it as a starting point for the publication. The blurb sets out a rationale for the book around this malleable understanding of “the object” that would act as a prism for reflections on, through

and from within the position of feminism. The way the project has shaped up in the course of the last year, influenced by events in the world, has transformed the object referred to into something even less definite, into something more like a vanishing mediator for a set of themes and connections arising from the texts themselves. This vanishing is most literal in Nina Power's text, where "the object" is replaced with "the void." The way the object gets partially written out of the book is also present in Hannah Black's poem, in a line that says "there are no correct objects of feminism." It is as if this line is feeling around for the possibility that there are no objects of feminism? Maybe feminism is a relation.

Faced with this transformation, I am left with the task of trying to summarise the book in some less objectified terms, perhaps more subjective, personal ones. When I was writing my own contribution I came across a sentence in Juliet Mitchell's book *Siblings*, in which she remarked on what she perceives to be a "decline in the importance of descent and rise in the importance of alliance"¹ in Western societies. Though I don't think this is true in terms of the decline of descent, certainly alliances are not just significant to society as a whole now, but the reflection on what they do and what they can consist of is more important than ever, with the rise of nationalism and right wing populism forming their own pacts and battle lines. What are alliances for or against? Can a book

like this be a starting point of an alliance in the sense of standing up for the things threatened by the rise of the far right? Against neoliberal capitalism? An alliance between both us the contributors and also between us and those who would read the texts and get something out of them?

Another term close to "alliance" that arises from the book is "belonging." Lizzie Homersham touches on it in her text in a way that resonated with my own experience, as well as echoing the broader conditions of this particular point in history. Nationalist us-and-them narratives about the value of settled life and borders produce both material hardship and emotional distress that traverses (with varying intensities) a range of positions, from those of people for whom transience is a convenient privilege to those for whom it is absolutely necessary. Questions of how to belong, or what constitutes belonging are central. Lizzie quotes a comment a friend had made on Facebook in response to a post I had written about the annoying way the Guardian put out articles reporting on the anxiety of EU residents in the UK, which highlighted the settled status of the worried persons, their being married and having children and jobs in the UK. This seemed to me as inadvertently cementing some idea of what a moral life consists of, and marking out these types of signs of belonging as somehow more valuable than other, less tangible ones, or even as more valuable than the principle of free movement itself.

The very same sentence quoted by Lizzie had grabbed me as well, as it seemed to respond to the question of belonging that I have been confronted with with increasing frequency in the past year: “at the end of the day it is impossible to ‘belong’ for most people in this world, and our real forms of belonging are all articulated through forms of solidarity in *antagonism* to the way things are.”² This is how I think I would like to think of this book, and perhaps the medium of feminism more broadly, as a kind of anti/belonging and an alliance formed around it, solidarity expressed through it.

JOSEFINE Both the terms “object” and “feminism” have regained currency in theoretical, philosophical and art-related discourses within the last couple of years or so. To me, however, some of these “returns” (if we understand the interest in the object as going back to a certain pre-modern metaphysical idea of philosophy, and the coming back to feminism as a return to categories like “woman” after the queer politics of the 1990s) have been a bit disappointing. Both of these returns require forces of reformulation, for example, as undertaken by many of the writers in this publication, through questions of labour and reproduction, or through questioning what becoming an object, as a strategy, might politically mean today. Too often what I have seen in these returns to the object and to feminism is instead a retreat from questions of politics, including questions of labour and race.

What made me interested in participating in the symposium you organised Maija, and what made me suggest us working on a publication was the way in which you had approached “objects” and “feminism” from a perspective which allowed for a return to these questions and which didn’t refrain from politics, but rather brought them to the fore. This has also become explicit in the publication, where Hannah Proctor’s text addresses Ulrike Meinhof’s skull and how this very object has been used to diminish her political agency, and in Cara Tolmie’s performative score or transcript of a performance where sharing and supporting is central. I felt very explicitly that your invitation, Maija – the people you’d invited and the people who attended the symposium – made it possible to speak about these questions from angles and in ways I had not come across in other contexts. And the publication seemed like a productive way to continue this discussion.

MAIJA Its interesting that you bring up Hannah Proctor’s and Cara Tolmie’s texts together, as although they are written from different starting points, I also thought of them in relation to each other and the different ways they treat the inhabitation, for want of a better word, of their chosen objects. Cara’s performance transcripts revolve around fragments of songs by specific singers. In the first part they are sung by Cara, reanimated with varying degrees of fidelity to the originals. In the second, the original

singers are invited, or perhaps invoked, to participate in a conversation about the fragments, and their potentially healing power. Hannah's text reflects, as you say, on the ideologies that have been attached to the objects Ulrike Meinhof's brain and Charlotte Corday's skull (inanimate fragments of once living bodies), and how they have been instrumentalised and reanimated by these ideologies. Hannah's text analyses in great detail the way meanings attach themselves to and become naturalised through objects, and how the notion of gender is itself deeply embedded in these processes. It too carries this weight of history and ghostly presences from the past that have formed its present guises. Whereas Hannah considers what might be needed to critique and undo these determinations, it occurs to me that Cara's text in turn (and the performance it is based on) seems to stage a propositional scene where fragments, relics of the past act as catalysts for a situation of sharing, or communing with the past as a kind of productive healing. I was thinking of inhabitation also in relation to Nina's text, as she writes about the idea of somehow "owning" your own objectification as a feminist strategy, embracing your objecthood, and the difficulties of actually doing this. She writes in her text:

Yet to be fully a feminist subject seems too optimistic: part-Kantian, part-Marxist, anti-Patriarchal, all-knowing? To be the kind of

subject that embraces its object or thing-hood cannot help but wrestle with its own constitutive paradoxes, to be an object that thinks of itself as an object...in 3-D, but not inert, 'there' but autonomous, the thing-in-itself without holes...³

This made me think of also about the Sisyphean effort that trying to assume this kind of all-knowing (endlessly regressing but always supposedly final) viewpoint, trying to be this kind of subject, entails. It's kind of redundant and painful, but also almost unavoidable. Also of how attempting to know how and where you are at all times, in addition to aspiring to always already knowing all the possible ways and locations of being or appearing, is a defence against being hurt, in an almost paranoid way; an anticipation of damage that presumes to be able to somehow preempt said damage through knowledge of it. So in my mind, the "thing-in-itself without holes" is a kind of armoured, insular thing, arising from a constant state of being threatened somehow (or feeling that you are). I concur with Nina about the problems of this "thing-in-itself without holes," but also see a certain compromised tenacity arising from it.

JOSEFINE I like the way you describe practices and texts (and perhaps thinking) as dealing with "their chosen objects." I have never thought about my writing or anyone else's in that way. But it makes me think of the way Kant understands experience as the

possibility to cognise an object (which Nina also speaks about in her text) and which is what has historically been criticised in much (mainly post-structuralist) feminist theory. I think perhaps that's a feminist strategy: to deal with one's chosen objects fully. And as you also articulate, the question then doesn't concern whether to side with the subject or with the object, since "we live as and through objects as a kind of demand placed on us," but how to find ways of relating to them. Rose-Anne's text touches on this, since, in it, she gives an account of how two women in Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Liebhaberinnen* (Women as Lovers) relate differently to the objective conditions of their lives (work and childbirth), including those of their bodies being seen as pure objects of either "consumption," "reproduction" or "productive labour," to which they are expected to submit. To me both of these women also embody the paradox of what you refer to as the Sisyphean effort of endlessly striving to be that fully coherent subject yet always failing. It's perhaps something like what Étienne Balibar has called the "the performativity of the Cartesian I."⁴ In a way I think this is the only position one can and should aim for: as soon as the "fate"—drawing on Freud and Adorno – that Rose-Anne also refers to in her text disappears, then nihilism seems to be all that's left, which I am not interested in. This doesn't mean that a feminist strategy should entail becoming the "all-knowing" patriarchal subject, but rather finding ways of relating to that subject (as an object) in different ways.

MAIJA Yes, I think the "different ways" is important here. It seems to allude to an understanding of the subject as some kind of a process, as something that can't be fixed, but that is also not without meaning. I am also drawn to your formulation "relating to that subject (as an object)," which adopts a dialectical view of the subject/object relation, as such a view seems to me essential to the undoing of what you refer to as the "objective conditions of their lives (work and childbirth)." Rose-Anne describes Jelinek stripping these conditions of their objectivity by objectifying them through her blunt language. The object becomes a tactic of denaturalising historical conditions. It is I guess quite Brechtian, but remains to me very powerful, and holds the kernel of what being politically feminist would mean. I think the crux of the rejection of nihilism is in this commitment to the understanding and undoing of the purported objectivity of conditions that appear as unavoidable, as "fated," as well as fighting against more blatant injustices. What I hope this collection of texts will manage is to provide an instance of gathering "different ways" of thinking through subject/object relations – a set of formally very different contributions which nevertheless share this commitment to the undoing of given truths, fates, structures – and suggest forms of alliance through its constellation of ideas.

Notes

- 1 Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), 4.
- 2 Benedict Seymour on Facebook, December 30, 2016.
- 3 Page 109 in this publication.
- 4 Étienne Balibar, "Structuralism: A Destitution of the Subject?" *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* no. 14 (2003): 19.

By Cara Tolmie



Cancamon is borne of three songs:

"There is a Balm in Gilead," by Jeanne Lee and Archie Shepp

"Groung," by Zabelle Panosian

"Blasé," by Jeanne Lee and Archie Shepp

From these songs I adopt the following fragments as materials to build the performance:

1. "The way they say," as sung by Jeanne Lee in "Blasé."

All attempts are made to faithfully preserve her intonation from the recording at the "Studios Davout," Paris, 1969

2. Long vocal slide from high to low, including proceeding ornament on bottom note, as sung by Zabelle Panosian on "Groung," recorded in New York City, 1917.

Feeling that this sample contains the crux of the songs' pathos, I endeavour not to reproduce an aural fidelity but rather to channel the speculated emotional function of this fragment with my voice.

Adjoining Fragment: “Something’s Coming,” as sung by Jeanne Lee in a cover of “Something’s Coming” from West Side Story with Ran Blake. This fragment is first whispered as an interruptive operation, then repeated syllable by syllable so that one iteration of the words lasts the time it takes to cross the room whilst conducting a stiff, angular, repeated dance move along the side of the wall.

3. Acappella section of melody, as sung by Jeanne Lee on “There is a Balm in Gilead.”

Although I seek to replicate the phrasing of her rendition I do not aim to mimic her vocal tone.

Rather, I repeat the phrase each time, disintegrating the sound with the addition of a harmonic whistle over the top of the singing until the vocal becomes only its whistled harmonic.

The performance is structured as follows:

- A: I sit in the middle of the last row of the seating bank, kneeling on the chair backwards. I wear a black baseball cap, a light pink jumper with a black pattern on it, black leggings and black socks. My lips are painted metallic blue. I have a wireless, handheld microphone in my hand. I improvise for around five minutes, vocalising between fragments 1 and 2.
- B: “Adjoining Fragment” begins; I suddenly whisper

“Something’s Coming!” and turn around in my chair sharply.

- C: Awkwardly, but in a tight, controlled manner, I lift myself from the chair and begin to slowly move along the aisle. As I move I initiate the remainder of the “Adjoining Fragment.” This takes me along the side of the theatre space to the floor in front of the forward right hand corner of the stage.
- D: I mobilise a “mover tool” that I have prepared in advance: a surprising fast run on tiptoes, including a quick punch of the arms in front of my chest, and with a short cadence of step. I head for the stairs which will get me onto the stage. On my way there I make a stop off at a loop pedal where – with a brisk pawing action – I trigger a loop of a single tone that very slowly fades out, creating a prolonged pulse. At this stop-off I also pull my black cap down over my eyes.
- E: I travel from the floor, up the stairs onto the stage. I enact a taut and precise physicality during this journey: angular joints and limbs, pointing toes, stiff leg muscles, attempting to control an image of smooth and slow movement. At times I look back at the audience like an animal might, with my eyes and face obscured by the cap. At the end of this journey I am standing on the middle of the stage, facing the audience.

F: I am now Cancamon¹. Implementing the same taut physicality, I stretch my right arm out towards the audience. With my left hand I carefully pull up my sleeve to expose my bare forearm. I take a pause. I make a constrained vocal sound that I sometimes call “the kettle.” This sound sits somewhere between a moan, a dampened scream, an old dial-up tone and the sound of a whistling kettle. I sound “the kettle” twice; its length each time is reliant on the capacity of my breath. Then, on the third articulation of “the kettle” my left hand strokes my right arm until the vocal sound ceases. It pauses again before pulling the sleeve slowly back over my right arm, tucking the exposed limb back to rest. I then repeat this same action exposing my stomach, my left leg up to the knee, my lower back and finally my upper chest.

G: I enact fragment 3 whilst very slowly edging backwards in a semi-circular movement towards the rear of the stage.

Note

¹ I named her Cancamon. This is the name of one of the plants thought to be the Balm of Gilead, a rare perfume used medicinally, mentioned in the bible and utilised in figurative speech as symbolising a universal cure. I do not want to place the phrase’s biblical connotations within her identity. She is named not for God but for Jeanne Lee’s grain, for Malachi Favor’s modesty, for Dave Burrell’s dis paced intervals and for Lester Bowie and Archie Shepp’s sinking down touch, wavering, (dis)quiet.

By Josefine Wikström

✕

I

In the late 1970s, only a few years before her death at the age of 43, Norwegian artist Sidsel Paaske, in a panel discussion on Norwegian state television about the role of and conditions for women artists, declared her artworks to be feminist. She argued that women have specific powers to produce and interpret art, and referred to her own work which at the time used what she elsewhere called “women’s art” materials and techniques, such as textile and woodcarving. Despite the fact that Paaske, at the time, was one of Norway’s few international artists, whose large-scale sculptures are said to have preceded Claes Oldenburg’s work, she never gained full recognition as an artist. Instead, she was thrown out of academies and other art institutions throughout her life. Her hardcore separatist position can be read as a political strategy in which the feminist art object becomes an explicitly political weapon.¹

About forty years later, the London-based Danish artist Sidsel Meineche Hansen’s solo exhibition *SECOND SEX WAR* took place at Gasworks in London.² Part of this exhibit was the CGI-animated film *No Right Way 2 Cum* (2015) in which the virtual avatar ‘EVA V3.0’ is seen masturbating with a female cum shot disrupting

the camera lens. In contrast to Paaske, Meineche Hansen doesn't use specific types of recognizably gendered labour (such as traditional women's craft) or materials (such as textiles) associated with women's labour in the making of her work. Although the title and the content of the works in *SECOND SEX WAR* explicitly refer to feminist questions, nowhere does it state in the press release that it is a feminist exhibition or that the works are feminist. Meineche Hansen describes her work as a "techno-somatic variant of institutional critique."³

Paaske's political strategy and work belong to Second Wave feminism and the category of "feminist art" that came out of that. Meineche Hansen's art objects take a slightly different position: they seem to claim to be objects of feminism in a different way. In contrast to Paaske's work, identifiable as feminist, made in "gendered" materials and with gendered labour skills, *No Right Way 2 Cum* and other works by Meineche Hansen, are not.

So what is a feminist art object today, then? What objects are feminist art objects concerned with? And what might a feminist critique of the art object look like? Both the term "object" and the term "feminism" have recently made significant returns – on the one hand, there has been a return amongst artists to questions around feminism, and on the other hand, a return in philosophy to a discourse of thinking around what an object might be. Both have converged within the institutional space of contemporary art, which is as perplexing as it is productive.

II

In November 2014 the artist-run space Penarth Centre in South London opened the exhibition *Je Suis Feministe*. Comprised and organised by twenty-eight, mainly female London-based artists such as Melika Ngombe Kolongo and Morag Keil, the exhibition, as Fatima Hellberg put it, suggested "a feminism that also is a feeling – one that impacts your perception and politics."⁴ No outspoken political strategy was detectable in the works. Instead, the framework of the show simply declared the artists involved to be feminists.⁵

The category "feminist art" was institutionalized in the 1970s and has historically referred primarily to artistic practices in the West.⁶ Although coming from different political and social angles, most of these art practices took as their starting point the female body as a site of oppression and violence as well as a location for resistance and transformation. This focus on the body was in line with the historic feminist struggles emerging around the same time. The right to abortion, wages for housework⁷ and a woman's safety were all political struggles located around the woman's body.

In *Je Suis Feminist* (2014), and other contemporary "returns" to feminism, the body – its libido, as much as the way in which its reproductive forces are capitalised upon – was also central. But whereas in previous feminist art the body was approached from the perspective of post-structuralist categories such as "sex," "gender" and "representation," the focus of

many of the artists who today claim their work to be feminist is from the perspective of terms such as “production,” “labour” and “reproduction” found in French and Italian feminist Marxisms.

Thus, despite the fact that contemporary feminist politics have different strategies than those of previous generations, and although today’s feminist art might look different – what feminist art “looks like” today seems, in fact, like a non-question – the concern with the body, its practices and the labour of reproducing itself and others’ (often men’s and children’s) bodies has not gone away.

III

Within the last decade or so another return has taken place, one which seems to contradict the deeper political and philosophical concerns at stake in contemporary feminist art practice. The contradiction is between concepts such as practice, reproduction and metabolism addressed by these practices and the return to the object-concept in contemporary philosophy and theory. So called object-oriented-philosophy or object-oriented-ontology – often abbreviated as *OOO* – developed out of what is often referred to as “Speculative Realism,” inaugurated at Goldsmiths College in 2007.⁸ Speculative Realism might be described as re-establishing a new relation, or, with Quentin Meillassoux, a new “correlation,” between the world and the human, and as a philosophy of access. It attempts to do this in a way that rejects

the Kantian idea of “things-in-themselves” or “noumena” as something that exists beyond the reach of human knowledge, but which is still necessary for the finitude of the human. *OOO*, in slight contrast, and according to Graham Harman, is concerned with understanding the world beyond Kant’s privileged relation of humans and the world. *OOO*, Harman argues, is interested in how objects can be thought of, not just independently from humans, but more broadly still, independent from any relations. This desire to think about the world outside of humans’ relations or correlations to the world requires Harman to introduce a new concept of the object: that of the “real object.” Real objects, Harman contends, are: “deeper than their appearance to the human mind but also deeper than their relations to one another.”⁹

Harman constructs his “real object” by drawing mainly on Aristotelian and post-Aristotelian philosophy. Aristotle didn’t have a concept of the object but used the Greek term “*antikemenon*” best translated as “that which stands in front of or opposite” and from which the Latin term “*objici*” is derived.¹⁰ But instead of this more complex meaning of the term object in Aristotle, what Harman takes is the idea that things, for Aristotle, exist independently from human powers or faculties. A faculty, for Aristotle, knows something only via the manifestations or properties of that something, meaning that the faculty is governed by being and not by the object. Significantly, Harman also draws on a

phenomenological tradition coming from Husserl and Heidegger. The latter is especially important for Harman in that an object, or rather a thing, for Heidegger has its own being and is distinct from the sensual as well as the cognitive realm. In his lecture on *The Thing* delivered in 1950, Heidegger writes about the vessel of a jug: “The vessel’s thingness does not lie in the material of which it consists, but in the void that holds.”¹¹

Harman has – depending on how you see it – a dialectical or schizophrenic relationship to Kant. Harman on the one hand dismisses Kant’s idea about the Copernican revolution, that is, the idea that human experience – an *Objekt* for Kant – is produced as a relational synthesis between the faculties of understanding and imagination. On the other hand Harman is indebted to Kant in that he confirms Kant’s distinction between “noumena” and “phenomena” or “*Ding*” (the thing-in-itself) and “*Gegenstände*” (sensual phenomena). But whilst Kant places “noumena” outside of human experience – yet indispensable to human experience in that “they” provide the metaphysical limit against which experience can ever be thought – Harman’s “real objects” are inside experience yet beyond knowledge and more importantly beyond human knowledge. Harman’s real concern is whether objects can be thought of as infinite things-in-themselves and therefore “resist all forms of causal or cognitive mastery.”¹² Harman’s real objects are neither just the everyday objects in front of us, such as tables

and bread, nor the particles, atoms or microbacteria of which such objects consist. Instead, Harman tells us: “real objects” are a form of “third object,” that is, an object in between the everyday, cultural and in natural science. Harman’s “real object”: “has an autonomous reality over and above its causal components”;¹³ it “emerges as something distinct from its own components and also withdraws behind all its external effects” and as such provides a “reality deeper than any theoretical or practical encounter with it.”¹⁴

IV

Harman’s “real objects” are confusing. Firstly, Harman bases his conception of the “real object” on Kant’s thing-in-itself by arguing that all objects exist in some deeper realm unknown to humans, animals or other objects alike. But Kant’s thing-in-itself is not an object or even a thing in the sense in which Harman speaks about rocks, tables and zebras. The thing-in-itself for Kant is merely a limit or a horizon against which thinking raves, thereby realising or actualising itself. More importantly, Kant’s thing-in-itself, independently of its relational objectivity, also refers to sensual phenomena and thus has an explicit relation to practice and action. Yes, the thing-in-itself is separated from Kant’s *Objekt* – experience – as well as from sensual phenomena (*Gegenstände*). But these three different types or aspects of an object in Kant merely exist in relation to sensuousness at different levels of phenomenal objectivity.¹⁵ They are, in

other words, not as distinctly separate as Harman would like his own real objects to be. The thing-in-itself, for Kant, is not absolutely autonomous or separated from objects of experience (Objekt) or sensual phenomena (Gegenstände). It exists in relation to these as the necessary metaphysical limit and thus on a different level of phenomenological objectivity than the others.

More important – in light of feminist struggles – than the critique of Harman’s use of Kantian or Aristotelian concepts, are the consequences of his conception of the “real object.” Because what does it mean to place objects in an autonomous realm deeper than reality itself? Although Harman celebrates the democratisation of all types of objects by calling on zebras as well as on tables, he never speaks about objects such as sexual violence or porn imagery. What happens when we refuse to see the relations through which some of these objects are reproduced? For Harman, objects are not only devoid of culture but also of the relations producing and reproducing them. The consequence is a concept of the object that excludes not only the idea of a practice – that trans-formative force through which the world is reproduced – but also any conception of the often oppressive and abstract labour relations that reproduce objects such as pornographic images or those that are at stake in domestic violence situations. How could we think of a relational object as a material and practical one rather than as metaphysically non-relational?

Harman’s real object ignores the explicit relationality at the centre of Kant’s conception of the thing-in-itself. This is the same relationality that Marx, in his early writings, sets off from in his conceptualisation of practice [Praxis] and later in *Das Kapital* develops into the notion of labour. This is also the conception of labour that Marxist feminists, as well as many feminist artists today have drawn attention to by looking into the role of women’s unwaged labour. For example, many of the works in *Je Suis Feminist* focus on women’s affective and emotional labour within image-production online. To dismiss the unavoidable relationality in Kant, like Harman does, is then also to reject a modern conception of labour through which all social relations take place. This also means to ignore the place of women and women’s bodies within the reproduction of labour with which many feminist artists today are occupied.

V

EVA v3.0 is a royalty fee product sold online by the company Turbo Squid that stocks 3D-models for computer games and “adult entertainment.” She is a commodity that circulates freely on the market, ready to be sold and purchased at any time. Equipped with the attributes of a female body, this virtual body’s digital reproducibility makes it explicitly desirable. It is a hyper-sexualized object without the capacity for a desire of its own. As I watched Meineche Hansen’s *No Right Way 2 Cum*

EVA v3.0 transformed into a kind of subject-object with its own libido. By appropriating this virtual body, Meineche Hansen shows (in 3D form) how the gender binary is subject to the value-form. She displaces the commodity status of the appropriated body, and presents a critique of both the commodity form and the objectification of women in the production of those commodities. She turns it to a different kind of commodity: a feminist art object.

Notes

- 1 Nasjonalmuseet in Oslo, currently showing her work, is where I encountered it for the first time. "Like før. Sidsel Paaske (1937–1980)" October 21, 2016–February 26, 2017. Curated by Stina Högvist.
- 2 "Sidsel Meineche Hansen: Second Sex War" was commissioned by Gasworks, London (March 17–May 29 2016) and Trondheim kunstmuseum in Trondheim, Norway (June 12–October 16, 2016). This is also where I saw the animation *No Right Way 2 Cum* for the first time.
- 3 See the press release, online: <https://www.gasworks.org.uk/exhibitions/sidsel-meineche-hansen-second-sex-war-2016-03-03/>. (Accessed January 18, 2017.) Also for an in-depth discussion and review of Meineche Hansen's exhibition see Rose-Anne Gush, "War By Any Means," *Mute*, May 21, 2016, online: <http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/war-any-means>. (Accessed January 18, 2017.)
- 4 Fatima Hellberg, "Fatima Hellberg on Je Suis Feministe at Penarth Centre, London," *Texte Zur Kunst*, October 29, 2014, online: <https://www.textezurkunst.de/articles/hellberg-feministe/>. (Accessed January 23, 2017.)
- 5 Other feminist returns have included "Re-Productive Labour: An exhibition exploring the work of Cinenova" (2011, The Showroom: London), "Door Between Either And Or Part 1" (Kunstverein, Munich, 2013) and "Re-Materialising Feminism" (Institute of Contemporary Arts and the Showroom, London, 2014).
- 6 Linda Nochlin's 1971 article "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists," in *Woman in Sexist Society*, eds. Vivian Gornick and Barbara Moran (New York: Basic, 1971) was crucial for the development of this category and for feminist theory in art more generally.
- 7 The International Wages for Housework Campaign was a global social movement that started in 1972 in Padua, Italy by author and activist Selma James. Coming out of the Italian Operaismo-movement which put the worker and their struggles at the centre, the Wages for Housework Campaign wanted to bring awareness to the fact that all productive labour in capitalist society is dependent on unwaged housework and reproductive labour such as childrearing. The demand of wages for housework was purposively and strategically an impossible demand made in order to show the way in which women and women's work were the core of capitalist relations and exploitation of labour-power. This contradiction in the demand is developed in Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," (*Power of Women Collective and the Falling Wall Press*, 1975), 1–8.
- 8 Graham Harman, considered the "founder" of OOO: "In recent years I have been linked with a philosophical movement called speculative realism. But my own variant of speculative realism, known as object-oriented philosophy, actually dates to the late 1990s." Graham Harman, *The Third Table in 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts*, *DOCUMENTA (13) series 085* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 4.
- 9 Harman, "The Third Table," 4.
- 10 Dominique Pradelle, "Vocabulary of European Philosophies, Part 2: Gegenstand/Objekt," *Radical Philosophy* 139 (2006): 21–31.
- 11 Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," *Poetry, Language, Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 184.
- 12 Graham Harman, "The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism," *New Literary History* (2012): 188.
- 13 Harman, "The Third Table," 7–8.
- 14 Harman, *ibid.*, 9–10.
- 15 For a reading of Kant's distinction between Objekt, Gegenstande and Ding see Pradelle, "Vocabulary of European Philosophies, Part 2: Gegenstand/Objekt," *Radical Philosophy* 139 (2006): 2–131.

By Hannah Proctor



Spirit is a bone.¹

G.W.F. Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit

CORPSE (OF A WOMAN)

In the final room of the Marlene Dumas exhibition at Tate Modern in 2015 hung two paintings: Stern (2004) depicting the head of the corpse of Red Army Faction co-founder Ulrike Meinhof and Skull (of a Woman) (2005), which showed the skull of Charlotte Corday, who assassinated the Jacobin leader Jean-Paul Marat in 1793. The coincidence of these two paintings, which both feature the dead bodies of women who committed violent acts for political ends, prompted me to analyse them alongside one another. In both examples, inert bits of corpse took on posthumous lives but not, however, lives of their own. Scientists scrutinised both Corday's skull and Meinhof's brain in the hope of shedding light on the violent political acts the two women had committed; acts which, despite their very different political motivations, were deemed to

conflict with the supposedly natural predispositions of healthy women. These bits of matter were thus interpreted in ways that emphasised abnormality, pathology and deviance, bolstering existing normative assumptions about gender, active political engagement and violence. The scientific analyses of these specific lumps of flesh and bone thus reveal more about the social values that mattered to those analysing them than they do about the women from whose bodies they were taken; tensions between matter and meaning, nature and culture, essences and ideas evident in the analyses of Corday's skull and Meinhof's brain are also at stake in the making, remaking and unmaking of gendered identities among the living.

MEINHOF'S BRAIN

Ulrike Meinhof was found hanged in her prison cell on May 9, 1976. The death was ruled a suicide. Her brain was removed and secretly preserved in a jar of formalin for posthumous analysis. Meinhof's brain had been the site of intense speculation since she became involved with the Red Army Faction in 1970, as she had undergone brain surgery in the early 1960s. Photographs of the X-ray of her brain taken at the time of her hospitalisation, which were first published in a scientific journal in the late 1960s, appeared in the mainstream press in 1972. Could the engorged blood vessel in her cerebral cortex and the subsequent operation explain her "slide into terrorism"? Could the armed struggle in

Germany be attributed to neuropathology? Many in the West German press, as well as Meinhof's estranged husband, speculated that it could. Why else, they reasoned, would an educated middle-class woman, a mother no less, advocate radical political violence?² In lieu of her fingerprints, the metal clamp in Meinhof's brain was used by police to identify and then arrest her. Charity Scribner discusses the dramatic change in Meinhof's appearance and public image after she was imprisoned: "grey uniforms, hacked-off hair, and hunger strikes transformed her image from that of a poised intellectual into a raging lunatic, an enemy of the state."³ Meinhof's distressing and fragmentary letters from prison suggest that her imprisonment prompted an internal as well as an external transformation: "The feeling that your head is exploding (the feeling the top of your skull should really tear apart, burst wide open) – / The feeling your spinal column is pressing into your brain – / The feeling your brain is gradually shriveling up, like baked fruit..."⁴ However, according to official public debates these experiences did not originate in the prison cell but in Meinhof's cerebral tissues. As Amanda Third discusses:

[By] consolidating the link between her brain surgery and her 'conversion' to violent politics, the state sought to construct Meinhof's terrorism as pathologically motivated. In this sense, her brain surgery constituted, for the state, an opportunity to contain her actions within

a familiar narrative about both women's (and terrorists') fundamental irrationality. Meinhof's politics and her identity as a female political terrorist were constructed as a neurological dysfunction, a sign of peculiarly feminine madness.⁵

According to Third, it was hoped that analysing Meinhof's brain would give insights not only into her psychology as an individual but into the motivations and proclivities of all terrorist female subjects. The fascination evinced in Meinhof's brain is, Third argues, continuous with broader constructions of the female terrorist as pathological and deviant, and hence as one whose actions and opinions can be delegitimised, read as crazy.⁶ Third, however, displays little interest in the specific content of Meinhof's political views. Meinhof is presented as being against the state and status quo but these entities seem curiously transhistorical, static and culturally unspecific, which makes it possible for Third to imagine a homology between all acts of so-called terrorism committed by women and, concomitantly, between the various things they might attack. The example of Charlotte Corday complicates Third's thesis because, despite her violence, Corday was politically "moderate"; her relationship to the "social order" to which Third imagines all terrorists pose a threat was not straightforwardly disruptive, in that she sought to halt rather than unleash a revolution. In fact, "terror" was both the target of her violent act, and – ironically – its

outcome. Nonetheless, the most prominent analyst of her skull, though sympathetic to her actions, still sought to find a physical basis for describing violent and politicised women as pathological.

HYBRID CREATURES

The same well-worn story of Corday's assassination of Jean Paul Marat has been told and retold. Across two centuries, the key moments of the murder rarely alter – the chronology and even the script of the meeting between Corday and Marat are firmly established and rarely deviated from. What changes is the detail.⁷ There are lots of versions of Corday – honest or duplicitous, a calm and steadfast patriot or a frenzied counter-revolutionary, a virginal victim or a violent virago. Her contemporaries variously likened her to Joan of Arc, to Judith who decapitated the Assyrian general Holofernes, to Caesar's assassin Brutus, and to heroines from the works of Corneille (to whom she was distantly related). Sometimes she appears as the antithesis of revolutionary virtue and sometimes its apotheosis. Even her hair colour is inconsistent: auburn, brunette, ash blonde; sometimes natural, sometimes powdered.⁸ It is these small differences between accounts that make it possible to distinguish the contemporary Jacobin commentators who were repulsed yet fascinated by Corday from the verbose nineteenth-century conservative historians who saw her as naive yet principled; the 1930s Soviet historians who cast Corday as a crafty class enemy

from the American feminists of the late twentieth-century, who, obsessed with the gendering of public and private spheres, claimed Corday as an active political agent. Indeed, contradictions often exist within individual descriptions of Corday. In 1837 Thomas Carlyle described her as beautiful yet “squalid,” “angelic-demonic.”⁹ Jules Michelet, writing 18 years later, as “masculine in expression but delicate in features.”¹⁰ Such ambivalence was also evident in analyses of her skull.

Corday was executed on July 17, 1793 (the revolutionary calendar would not be introduced until the October of that year). Four days earlier she had assassinated “Friend of the People” Jean Paul Marat in his bathtub. Her skull, however, only appeared in public ninety-six years later at the 1889 Exposition Universelle in Paris, which marked the centenary of the revolution.¹¹ Dumas’s painting seems to have been based on a photograph taken on that occasion. Like Meinhof’s brain, Corday’s skull was examined by scientists to provide insights not only into her individual psychology but into female criminality in general.¹² “The skull before my eyes is yellow like dirty ivory; it is shiny, smooth,”¹³ ran one description by the French craniologist Paul Topinard. He claimed that the skull betrayed no abnormalities or “patho-logical deformation” and instead declared that it was it just like any woman’s skull: “It is a beautiful skull, regular, harmonic, having all the delicacy and the soft, but correct curves of feminine skulls.”¹⁴ Topinard argued that

the specimen displayed no signs of innate deviance. Instead he set out to attack contemporary scientific assumptions about the relation between skulls and psychology (although he still maintained Corday’s skull was inherently “feminine”).

Topinard’s analysis was, however, vehemently repudiated by the prominent Italian phrenologist Cesare Lombroso. Lombroso asserted that a person’s propensity for crime could be gleaned from the shape and “abnormalities” of their skulls; that criminals were physically distinct from and inferior to non-criminals. His discussion of Corday’s skull is included in his *The Criminal Woman, the Prostitute and the Normal Woman* (1893) in which he attempted to delineate a boundary between “normal” and “deviant” women (although in his system only non-criminal white men were fully “normal,” as even the most virtuous women were said to exhibit “innate depravity”¹⁵ and “slight criminal tendencies such as vindictiveness, jealousy, envy, and malignity”¹⁶). Unlike the most maligned figure in his book, the prostitute, whom Lombroso treats as a kind of separate degenerate species, Corday is cited as an example of a woman who committed “the purest political crime.”¹⁷ But, in distinction to Topinard, Lombroso claimed that despite her beauty and the nobility of her crime a large number of “cranial abnormalities” marked Corday out as a natural born killer.¹⁸

While Lombroso (in contrast to the West German analysts of Meinhof’s brain) ennobled men who committed crimes of passionate conviction, he insisted

that their female equivalents were atavistic: “premeditation and savagery play a greater part in women’s than men’s crimes of passion.”¹⁹ “Colder and more cunning” than their male equivalents and less likely to repent, such criminals displayed some distinctly “masculine” “moral traits” including, he says, a “love of firearms.”²⁰ Had Marat’s murder been committed by a man Lombroso may have approved, but Corday’s gender rendered the act irrational, and hence precluded it from being considered properly political. Lombroso claims that he struggled to find evidence of a natural propensity for violence among non-human female creatures, an absence he cites to bolster his arguments about women’s natural proclivities. Female ants, he says, are a rare exception; they “sometimes crush another ant’s head with their mandibles and squeeze it to death.”²¹ However, the female creatures which Lombroso declares are prone to criminality – ants and bees – should not strictly be considered female at all, so distinctly unfeminine are their acts. Instead he proposes they constitute a “third sex” – within the animal kingdom but aberrant and sinister nonetheless, ants and bees are the exceptions that prove the rule. Lombroso’s decision to use insects to represent criminal (non)women, rather than creatures like mammals or birds more commonly aligned with femininity, seems calculated to repulse the reader. Lombroso sought to show that the passionate criminal Corday, like the warrior ant and pillaging bee, transgressed the ideal masculine-feminine binary.

Lombroso’s characterisation of Corday as someone not properly female is part of a long history. Historian Erica Rand has argued that Corday’s act was understood as a transgression of gender norms by her contemporaries regardless of their political persuasions: “People either saw a woman and could not see a political actor or saw a political assassin and could not quite call her a woman”; they either “depoliticis[ed] the woman or defeminis[ed] the patriot killer.”²² In the aftermath of Marat’s assassination an article was published in the *Gazette de France Nationale* and reprinted for distribution by the General Council of the Department of Paris which described Corday as a woman who “had thrown herself absolutely outside of her sex.”²³ Meanwhile, the Marquis de Sade proclaimed:

Soft and timid sex, how can it be that delicate hands like yours have seized the dagger whetted by sedition?... Marat’s barbarous killer, like one of those hybrid creatures to whom the terms male and female are not applicable, vomited from the jaws of Hell to the despair of both sexes, belongs directly to neither. Her memory must be forever shrouded in darkness and above all let no one offer us her effigy as some dare to do, in the enchanting guise of beauty. O too credulous artists break to pieces, trample under foot disfigure this monster’s features, or only offer her to our revolted eyes pursued by Furies from the underworld.²⁴

Sade's invocation of "hybrid creatures" recalls Lombroso's "third sex": Do not be deceived! Corday may look like a woman but she – he? it? – acts like a man; outer appearance belies inner reality. These anxieties about Corday's failure to slot neatly into a predetermined gender identity are redolent of anxieties about a different kind of predetermined binary: the distinction between nature and artifice, a distinction that was central to French revolutionary discourse and which, like the supposedly empirical distinction between male and female, proved worryingly difficult to pin down.

TRUTHS INHERING IN THE WORLD

Corday's memory was not shrouded in darkness as Sade had hoped. Yet although effigies of a beautiful Corday did proliferate in the wake of the killing, in the most famous image of the murder of Marat she is conspicuous by her absence. Jean Louis David's *Death of Marat* was completed in October 1793. In it, Corday is only represented in the form of a "duplicious letter" which TJ Clark argues, "establishes truth and falsehood as what the picture mainly turns on" – although the manifest content of the letter is truthful, its latent content is falsehood. How, David's painting asks, was Marat to have suspected Corday's duplicity? Clark argues that the painting "enacts the contingency of claims to truth and falsehood at the moment it was made." He contends that it does not embrace uncertainty but represents an anxious attempt to guard against

it: "doubts [are] foisted on it by the very urgency of its effort to guarantee truth, to show it inhering in the world."²⁵ For Clark, the painting attests to the "excess of reality" – the painting's obsession with establishing truth is borne of uncertainty about what truth is and where it resides. The slipperiness of truth – an uneasy relation between the verifiable and the indiscernible – can also be discerned in the "weird disparity in the painting between its insistence on matter and its treatment of where matter is not."²⁶ Despite the detailed depiction of an array of specific objects belonging to Marat, the upper half of the painting remains empty, an emptiness whose contrast with the cluttered scene below calls that reality into question. Clark insists that "the visual is a far weirder thing than language," but I want to demonstrate that material artefacts are sometimes even weirder than that.

Following his assassination, Marat's "sacred heart" was removed from his chest and placed in a bejewelled urn at the centre of an altar in the Jardin de Luxembourg. David had initially proposed recreating the moment of death with Marat's embalmed body but this proved impossible due to the rapid deterioration of the corpse. A compromise was reached: the body was displayed in a former monastery covered in a chemical-infused sheet. Due to the rotting of the flesh, however, the arm holding the pen in the scene belonged to another person's corpse. Staging the authentic, auratic presence of the revolutionary martyr thus

relied on artifice.²⁷ Similarly, the skull that appeared in Paris a century later, and which was used by Lombroso as scientific evidence upon which to base definitive claims about truths inhering in the world, may not have been Corday's at all.

According to some accounts, Corday's remains, along with the corpse of Marie Antoinette, were exhumed in 1815 from the ditch into which they'd been tossed. However, it seems Corday's severed head may not have been buried along with her body. Whoever first acquired the head is rumoured to have handed out Corday's teeth as bribes to persuade people to keep their knowledge of the purchase secret.²⁸ One anecdote refers to the head, preserved in alcohol with half-closed eyes, being proudly brought out during the dessert course of a dinner party by the man who had performed the autopsy.²⁹ In 1840 the skull (now devoid of flesh) again made an appearance as a macabre dinner table decoration.³⁰ The skull's owner at the time of the 1889 Exposition was Prince Roland Bonaparte, great-nephew of Napoleon, father of psychoanalyst Marie Bonaparte and President of the Society of Geography in Paris. In 1898 a Doctor Cabanès visited Bonaparte in an attempt to verify the authenticity of the skull. Bonaparte, it turned out, had no evidence of the skull's provenance, so directed the curious doctor to the man from whom the skull had been purchased. The latter claimed to have stumbled upon the skull in the cupboard of a relative who had inherited from it someone else, who had themselves

purchased it from a dealer of curiosities. Detective-like, Cabanès tracked down the sale in question, but despite reading long, detailed lists of weird relic-commodities – including the moustache of Henri IV, a gold ring containing half of one of Voltaire's teeth, and a branch of the willow tree overshadowing Napoleon's grave – he could find no evidence in the catalogue of Corday's skull. Cabanès thus concluded that the skull could have belonged to anyone, perhaps even to a man.³¹ Topinard's and Lombroso's discussions of the skull both proceeded from the assumption that it was Corday's; their gendered conclusions about the skull's essential properties therefore preceded their analyses. "Essence" was thus derived not from the object itself, but from pre-existing ideas about it.

In *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* Karl Marx depicts the 1848 revolution as a phony restaging of the revolution of 1789, which at least had the dignity to borrow its costumes and props from the more heroic, ancient past. For Marx, the 1851 coup of Louis Bonaparte appears as a farcical reenactment of the authentic tragedy of the coup of Napoleon Bonaparte (which happened on the real 18th Brumaire back when the revolutionary calendar still existed). Louis Bonaparte is thus presented as a crude caricature or counterfeit version of Napoleon Bonaparte. "The French, so long as they were engaged in revolution, could not get rid of the memory of Napoleon," Marx says, and thus they

remained haunted by their recent history. Marx also makes much of the coincidence of names between the two Bonapartes, which, he points out, did not necessarily imply any actual familial connection:

Historical tradition gave rise to the French peasants' belief in the miracle that a man named Napoleon would bring all glory back to them. And there turned up an individual who claims to be that man because he bears the name Napoleon, in consequence of the Code Napoleon, which decrees: "Inquiry into paternity is forbidden." After a twenty-year vagabondage and a series of grotesque adventures the legend is consummated, and the man becomes Emperor of the French.

For Marx then, the grotesquely mediocre Louis Bonaparte relied for legitimacy on the cult of Napoleon Bonaparte, which he compares to the veneration of a holy Catholic relic allegedly taken from the dying Christ: "The cult of the Holy Tunic of Trier he duplicates in Paris in the cult of the Napoleonic imperial mantle."³² This, Marx insists, was a flimsy basis upon which to build power and would therefore prove unsustainable.

Coming back to the skull presumed to be Corday's, we find another Bonaparte in possession of an object whose authenticity was likewise uncertain. As in the case of Louis Bonaparte, the skull's meaning was derived from an unverifiable

claim about its origins. Corday's skull was not venerated like Marat's heart or the shroud of Trier, but was nonetheless imbued with a significance that was said to inhere in it. And like the substitute arm used in the restaging of Marat's death scene or the objects sold as relics at auction, it didn't matter whether it was really her skull or some other person's, as long as it was believed to be hers; because, in fact, meaning was extrinsic to those objects, just as it was to Louis Bonaparte.

MAKING HISTORY

Clark's analysis of the *Death of Marat* discusses the various pieces of paper in the painting at length, and the different kinds of writing they display – the queasy way the contrast between Corday's "duplicitous" letter and Marat's "truly benevolent" letter inadvertently enact the slipperiness of the categories of duplicity and authenticity the painting seeks to overcome.³³ There is also a third piece of paper in the painting to which Clark pays less attention: an assignat. In Year 1 of the revolution, the French Constituent, or National, Assembly created a supposedly national form of paper money, the assignat, notionally backed by nationalised land confiscated from the Catholic Church. Darius Spieth thus claims David's painting contains "the first visual representation of paper money in Western art."³⁴ In *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution* Rebecca Spang argues that the success or failure of the assignats, as with

all forms of currency, depended on trust. Although these pieces of paper weren't really pieces of land, they could "circulate as land" as long as people accepted that they could:

Much as a communion wafer was flour and water that, at a certain moment, became the body of Christ, so could the pulped and treated rag fibres that made up a piece of paper transubstantiate – when marked with the right insignia and consecrated by a correctly constituted authority – into "a piece of land whose fruits the bearer can harvest at will."³⁵

In the case of both an assignat and a Communion wafer – as in the case of the skull said to be Corday's – meaning did not inhere in the object itself but was, to cite Spang again, a "product of humans' interactions with objects and with each other."³⁶

Both Lombroso's analysis of "Corday's skull" and the scientific discussions of Meinhof's brain circulated by the West German state and media were based on assumptions about gender and political violence. The dead body parts were used to confirm existing ideas about the nature of women, which influenced how that material was interpreted. For Third, however, the example of Meinhof's brain demonstrates that, in death, the corpse resists. She claims that inert matter remains unyielding, non-compliant. Science, according to Third, requires

the dead body "behave according to a pre-existing set of cultural-scientific assumptions," but the corpse exceeds and even contradicts those assumptions.³⁷ Meinhof's brain, Third argues, refused to be contained by the taxonomies and meanings foisted upon it from without. Third thus reads the politically violent woman, even in death, as "a figure of excess [who] stubbornly resists such attempts at appropriation and understanding," recalling Clark's discussion of the "excess of reality" in David's painting.³⁸

But I'd be wary to grant so much agency to fragments of corpses. Dead matter is mute. It's all very well for a bit of corpse to exceed the analysis of an onlooker but, as we have seen, matter can be ventriloquised very effectively, and ideas about what stuff – flesh, bone, tree branches, gold, paper or whatever else – means can assume the status of truths that are remarkably tenacious and powerful. In the face of physical evidence to the contrary, for example, someone like John Locke could still proclaim that gold is inherently valuable,³⁹ or someone like Lombroso could proclaim that women are inherently inferior to men or that black people are inherently inferior to white people. We can't rely on lumps of gold or bits of bone alone to contradict those claims. It takes the living to intervene. And even that is easier said than done. After all, Topinard's critique of Lombroso's scientific methodologies did not immediately or automatically discredit phrenology.

GHOSTS AND SAUSAGES

In the introductory pages of *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution*, Spang likens money to the category of gender as defined by Judith Butler: “not fixed or made once and for all but something that exists thanks only to its repeated enactment (not one interpellation but a whole series of them).”⁴⁰ Bodies are matter. The meanings we associate with that matter do not reside in those bodies alone, however, but are constantly produced and reproduced through reiterated social practices. In Butler’s canonical formulation: “as a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalised effect.”⁴¹ Through a process of reiteration something historically produced comes to be mistaken for something natural, *a priori* and eternal; through various repeated social practices people’s roles in creating and sustaining the meanings attached to particular kinds of matter are forgotten. Living bodies also exceed the labels we affix to them – including the genders we assign to them – but although gender is performative it cannot be likened to a costume that can be removed or donned at will, as it precedes individuals and is relational; not one interpellation but a whole series of them. Butler insists that gender “is certainly not a question of taking on a mask.”⁴² Third still imagines truth inhering in the world beneath a pile (or mask) of obfuscating categories, whereas Butler discerns that those categories participate in making the world and the people in it, however “untrue”

they may be. But although acknowledging that something was and continues to be made does not automatically unmake it, it does at least imply that it is remakeable. Analysing the “mystical character” of the commodity form does not automatically overthrow capitalism but Marx still thought it was a good place to start.

In *The 18th Brumaire* of Louis Bonaparte, as in David’s painting, the relationship between authenticity and artifice is uneasy. But in spite of his elaborate metaphors of masquerade and haunting, derisive remarks about Louis Bonaparte’s pathetic parodying of history, disdain for the lumpen proletariat and scorn at their enticement by some “cold poultry and garlic sausage,” Marx is grudgingly forced to concede that however mediocre, theatrical and ridiculous-seeming it was, this was *really* history – full of ghosts and sausages.⁴³ *The 18th Brumaire* grants agency to the dead, but in a different way to Third’s analysis of Meinhof’s brain, which dispenses with misogyny but clings onto a form of essentialism by insisting that female terrorist bodies have inherent properties. Marx is not interested in physical corpses but in the memories, traditions, customs and sedimented practices that “weigh like a nightmare on the brains of the living.” The “ghosts of all the dead generations” might sound like historical immaterialism, but Marx acknowledges their reality and weight; for people – let’s not say “men” – to (re)make their own history those heavy ghosts must be confronted and exorcised.⁴⁴

Notes

- 1 G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 208
- 2 On the imagined incompatibility of militant far-left politics with motherhood, see: Patricia Melzer, "Maternal Ethics and Political Violence: The 'Betrayal' of Motherhood Among Women of the RAF and June 2 Movement," *Seminar* no. 47, 1 (2011): 81–102.
- 3 Charity Scribner, *After the Red Army Faction: Gender, Culture and Militancy* (Columbia University Press, 2015), 139.
- 4 Ulrike Meinhof, letter from a prisoner in the isolation wing, June 16, 1972 to February 9, 1973 cited in Karin Bauer, "Introduction," *Everybody Talks About the Weather... We Don't: The Writings of Ulrike Meinhof* (New York, NY: Seven Stories Press, 2008), 12–100, 78.
- 5 Amanda Third, "Imprisonment and Excessive Femininity: Reading Ulrike Meinhof's Brain," *Parallax* no. 16, 4 (2010): 83–100, 89.
- 6 Amanda Third, *Gender and the Political: Deconstructing the Female Terrorist* (New York, NY: Palsgrave Macmillan, 2014), 49.
- 7 On reiterations, repetitions and rewritings of events from the French Revolution, see: Linda Orr, *Headless History: Nineteenth Century French Historiography of the Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990).
- 8 See, Nina Rattner Gelbart, "The Blonding of Charlotte Corday," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* no. 38, 1, *Hair* (2004): 201–221.
- 9 Thomas Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, Vol. III, *The Guillotine* (London: Robson and Sons, 1837), 146.
- 10 Jules Michelet, *The Women of the French Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: Henry Carey Baird, 1855), 235.
- 11 On the revival of interest in Corday in this period, see: Elizabeth Carolyn Miller, *Framed: The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 187. We might also think of representations of the mythical *pétroleuses* (working class women said to have set fires across Paris during the final days of the Paris Commune of 1871) as a potent example of how anxieties about radical political violence and gender were intertwined in nineteenth century France. Gay L. Gullickson refers to them as "one of the most powerful political symbols of the nineteenth century." See, Gay L. Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), 159. Analyses of Commune skulls featured prominently in works by Cesare Lombroso (whose analysis of Corday's skull is discussed in detail below).
- 12 Daniel Arasse claims that in her final letter, Corday stated that one of her motivations for having her portrait painted before her execution was to allow for physiognomic analysis, which he describes as a prefiguration of the later criminological examinations of her skull. See, Daniel Arasse, *The Guillotine and the Terror*, trans. by Christopher Miller (London: Allen Lane, 1987), 141–142.
- 13 Paul Topinard cited in Leslie Dick, "The Skull of Charlotte Corday" in *The Politics of Everyday Fear*, ed. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 190. Dick's essay includes an interesting discussion of Marie Bonaparte's psychoanalytic theories, an analysis of which is beyond the scope of this essay.
- 14 Dick, *ibid.*, 191.
- 15 Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman*, trans. and ed. by Guglielmo Ferrero, Nicole Hahn Rafter, Mary Gibson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 207.
- 16 Lombroso, *ibid.*, 206.
- 17 Lombroso, *ibid.*, 116.
- 18 Lombroso, *ibid.*, 116–117.
- 19 Lombroso, *ibid.*, 201.
- 20 Lombroso, *ibid.*, 202.
- 21 Lombroso, *ibid.*, 91.
- 22 Erica Rand, "Depoliticizing Women: Female Agency, the French Revolution and the Art of Boucher and David," *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, ed. by Norma Broude and Mary D Garrard (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 142–158, 149, 150.
- 23 Cited in Elizabeth R. Kindleberger, "Charlotte Corday in Text and Image: A Case Study in the French Revolution and Women's History," *French Historical Studies* no.18, 4 (1994): 969–999, 983.
- 24 Cited in TJ Clark, *Farewell to an Idea: Episodes from a History of Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 32.
- 25 Clark, *ibid.*, 43.
- 26 Clark, *ibid.*, 45.
- 27 Clark, *ibid.*, 32. "Authentic" restagings were also central to the Paris Exposition Universelles, which infamously included living humans among its exhibits. See, Zeynep Çelik and Leila Kinney, "Ethnography and Exhibitionism at the Expositions Universelles," *Assemblage* no.13 (1990): 34–59.
- 28 Tom Stammers, "The Bric-a-brac of the Old Regime: Collecting and Cultural History in Post-revolutionary France," *French History* 22, 3 (2008): 295–315, 306.

- 29 See Dick, "The Skull of Charlotte Corday," 205–206.
- 30 J. M. Quérard, *Les supercherries littéraires dévoilées; galerie des auteurs anonymes*, 5 vols (Paris, 1847–52), iv. 180 cited in Stammers, 206.
- 31 Dr Cabanès, *Curious by-paths of History being Medico Historical Studies and Observations* (Paris: Libraire des Bibliophiles, 1898), 187–198.
- 32 Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, available online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch07.htm> (Accessed October 21, 2016.)
- 33 Clark, *Farewell to an Idea*, 43.
- 34 Darius A. Spieth, "The Corsets Assignats in David's 'Death of Marat,'" *Notes in the History of Art* no. 25, 3 (2006): 22–28, 22.
- 35 Rebecca Spang, *Stuff and Money in the Time of the French Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 102. Although more difficult to cite, this essay owes at least as much to Rebecca Spang's teaching as it does to her published work – specifically to her formative UCL undergraduate course *Rousseau, Marx, Freud*, which I took in 2003–04.
- 36 Spang, *ibid.*, 14.
- 37 Third, "Imprisonment...," 96.
- 38 Third, "Imprisonment...," 97. This argument is repeated in her book in which she says that the figure of the female terrorist is "always threatening to exceed the limits of the categories that are called to make sense of her." Third, *Gender and the Political*, 2.
- 39 This example appears in Spang, *Stuff and Money...*, 5.
- 40 Spang, *ibid.*, 6.
- 41 Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (London: Routledge, 1993, 2011), xix.
- 42 Butler, *ibid.*, xvii.
- 43 Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch05.htm> (Accessed February 10, 2017.)
- 44 This is a riff on Marx's famous line: "Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." Marx, *ibid.* Online: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm> (Accessed February 10, 2017.)

By Maija Timonen



A little while ago I pitched an article to a magazine in which I had hoped to use a news item about the world's first head transplant, as planned to be undertaken by Italian neurosurgeon Sergio Canavero, as a textual tool for unpacking the alienating character of online dating. The premise of the pitch was that what was wrong with it was the separation of sex and romantic love from the social contexts in which people exist in the immediate, day-to-day sense. Its inadequate allowance (in its various forms, from, say, Tinder to Guardian Soulmates) for the socially constructed nature of desire, at least as this is to be understood in the terms of Lacan's dictum "Desire is the desire of the other." We desire what we see others desiring, to resort to a crass simplification.¹ Against this sense of the interconnectedness and complexity of desire, the social itself, then, is reduced by online dating sites to vaguely sociological categories, lame algorithms catalysing acts of sex severed from their psychosocial body, or something along those lines. I showed the pitch to a friend, who commented: "It's The Ecstasy of Communication."²

Despite having gone to art school I had never read any Baudrillard, and the reference felt simultaneously overfamiliar and distant, and I couldn't

quite grab a hold of it. The pitch was not taken up by the magazine I had sent it to, but a sentence from one of the news articles I had read while researching it stayed with me. A writer for *The Independent* had speculated on the consequences of the head transplant with the help of statements from experts, and suggested that the new head-body combination could trigger a “hitherto never experienced level and quality of insanity”;³ a subjective horror of so-far-unimaginable proportions. It struck me as perhaps a kind of ecstasy too – a terrible one – an experience of being outside your body, and subject to the chemistry of someone else’s. In the back of my mind the head transplant and its insanity began to acquire new significance in relation to the text referenced by my friend.

In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, written in 1987, Jean Baudrillard articulates an experience of post-modernity as a flattening excess of what he terms “communication”: a world where information takes the place of meaning, where objects and systems of objects, as they might have operated as repositories of our fantasies and desires – that is, in relation to subjects – no longer exist.

...people no longer project themselves into their objects, with their affects and their representations, their fantasies of possession, loss, mourning, jealousy: the psychological dimension has in a sense vanished, and even if it can be marked out in detail, one feels it is not really there that things are being played out.⁴

If in an earlier phase of capitalism psychic scenes played a significant role, then the world Baudrillard envisages as advancing from it does away with psychology and moves from the mystery of the scene to the transparency of the obscene⁵. There are signs but no signification, and even alienation is replaced by indifference. His description is relatable to a more contemporary experience of the world, where we are subject to a barrage of information online, connected to social media feeds, news feeds, being constantly fed but curiously un nourished. Even before our sedentary and empty ballooning, Baudrillard wrote about the “large useless body” that is the reality left behind in a process of electronic encephalisation.⁶ What characterises the current informational overload though, is not so much a leaving behind of reality, but an erratic and undecided desire to make contact with whatever it is that we project to be more real than the daily stupor and grind of life online – a desire that is momentarily fulfilled only to prove too much.

The once-severed nerves and blood vessels attaching the head to the body touch for long enough to transmit disruptive signals that elude interpretation. Everything is in your face but distant, all too real yet unreal at the same time. Emotional responses to stimuli are intense but fleeting, a rehearsal or a reminder of feeling invoked as if in preparation for some ultimate, better, more real, feeling to come. There is a kind of messianic foreboding to these erratic twitches of emotion

culminating in the larger events that establish a connection with the lost sense of being a subject, while frying the circuits. Brexit and the election of Donald Trump, and the emotional shockwaves they instigated, are prominent examples of such events, the thumps that mobilise and immobilise, providing an all-too-real experience of reality. At their most paralysing, these moments stage a kind of a (farce then) tragedy: showing you something you might have an awareness of already, but in a heightened guise, giving an occasion to lament its existence, as if doing something about it would be too much to hope for. Beyond this revelation of how bad things already are, there are also the claims being made that the very nature of reality has changed and is changing, exemplified in statements such as that given by Marine Le Pen's chief strategist Florian Phillipot after Trump's election, who tweeted: "Their world is collapsing. Ours is being built." Perhaps more surreal (Merriam-Webster's word of the year 2016) than real, in a curious way, aside from making one doubt their sanity, the new world imagined by this statement restages the scene. And like all nightmares, the emergent dream figured there marries the mysteries of psychic investments with a transparency of affect.

FOR THE LULZ

When Baudrillard writes about the lost scene, he also marks the loss out as a kind of eradication of privacy: "All secrets, spaces and scenes abolished in

a single dimension of information."⁷ This formulation outlines a condition to which contemporary online culture, advanced from the forms of mediatization of the 1980s, seems to respond. Instead of manifesting the complete transparency envisaged by Baudrillard, it rather purports to offer something to soothe the anxiety of exposure, operating as a sort of strange public/private partnership that promises both but delivers neither. For most of its users, social media presents an illusion of visibility mixing with an illusion of privacy. In many other cases anonymity is offered in lieu of the bygone privacy.

The internet is full of spaces in which you can conceal your identity and act under the cover of anonymity. Trolling culture is an expression of this. Like a reintroduction of the secret and the scene, in its most obscene guise, the anonymous posting of the most base provocations is the epitome of the dredging up of some wish for privacy in a world of insidious transparency. The veil of anonymity re-establishes a curious form of chastity in the embracing of amorality: trolls pretend to have no sides, just an all-encompassing nihilism, which nevertheless is moralistic in its purported uncovering of the "fakeness" of other people's thoughts and actions. A recent article by Richard Seymour on trolling and its relation to right wing populism and white supremacy (nauseatingly referred to as "alt-right," as if there was something "alternative" about it) in the *London Review of Books* raises this moral contradiction, which also connects with a question of

identity.⁸ The anonymous trolling mass pretends to believe in nothing, and to be no one in particular. Their real identities are separated from their actions online. Perhaps this separation is actually where the private is rediscovered, in the new division of private and public, only now it is unclear which is which, or if both are both. Yet despite this facelessness, in their choice of targets the trolls express their identity negatively, through those they would gang up on and mark out as different from them. Seymour cites Whitney Phillips' study on trolling:

... trolls are not the 'equal opportunity offenders' they claim to be. Much of the laughter, Phillips points out, is "directed at people of colour, especially African Americans, women, and gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer" people, while trolling communities disproportionately comprise young white men in Anglophone or Nordic countries.⁹

Indeed, Seymour speculates if all trolls are not in a sense "gender trolls."¹⁰ In trolling, anonymity coincides with white masculinity as a kind of assertion of both the status of the white man as the universal subject, the measure of the norm (the one without identity, race), the same to the difference of "others," and an assertion of whiteness as a distinct identity, something culturally and economically valuable, exclusive and superior. While claiming to be no one, the troll also performs a self-racialisation,

making himself a generic "someone." Following in the footsteps of a much longer history of anxiety over the perceived loss of white privilege not acknowledged as such, the racism of the faceless troll could be seen as one example of the failures of "colourblindness."¹¹ However, it goes beyond this, manifesting the repression of the power structures expressed as race and gender through an unsocialised version of both: the id-happy, hate-fuelled white man.

The paradoxes of identity/anonymity and morality/amorality as brought up by Seymour are central to the transition from "just" trolling culture to its adoption as a method by the populist right/white supremacist movement in its contemporary guise. During the recent US presidential campaign, politics became trolling on an expanded scale. From "lulz" of the online mob to the dismissal of Trump's comments about grabbing pussies as "locker room talk," justifying everything as mere horseplay disguises the real agendas being set behind all the non-committal mess. Trump's cabinet picks as they come in provide a chilling account of the lines being drawn.

THE ECSTATIC FRATRIARCHY

Baudrillard writes:

Something has changed and the Faustian, Promethean (perhaps Oedipal) period of production and consumption gives way to the "proteomic" era of networks to the narcissistic

and protean era of connections, contact, contiguity, feedback and generalized interface that goes with the universe of communication.¹²

He thus gives us reason to suspect the lost scene to be (among other manifestations) an Oedipal one. Juliet Mitchell's indirect response, in her book *Siblings*, to the purported disintegration of the vertical into the lateral is one of turning her attention to how sibling relations might act as significant sites of initiation into the social order, and how things coded into us through them carry over to peer interactions down the line.¹³ If Baudrillard foregrounds the loss of the Freudian scene with its intergenerational structure, then Juliet Mitchell is trying to give significance to the scenes that psychoanalytic discourse has largely neglected throughout its history, and which might now have more to tell us about the continuing implications or consequences of the apparent flattening narrated by postmodern theory.

There are strong connections to be made between some of Mitchell's observations about lateral relationships and the lateral nature of online sociality (which of course exists in relation to the hierarchical, corporate, ownership of websites and data, or of surveillance access to that information by governments – laterality is as much a dialectic with verticality as anonymity with identity, private with public). One of the things Mitchell takes up is the masculine domination that manifests itself through peer relationships.¹⁴ She sees the symbolic

social brotherhood (liberty, equality, fraternity) on which western societies are based as coexisting with the dangerously absent understanding of biological siblinghood.¹⁵ When Mitchell writes about the threat to a child's sense of their own singularity posed by the arrival of a new sibling, and the violence with which they respond to this threat, my thoughts are drawn to purveyors of online hate and the crisis of identity expressed in the paradox of their lack of identity (anonymity) and the way one is created for them collectively through the assignation of identities and otherness to their victims.¹⁶ Mitchell writes of gender formation, against the castration complex of the Oedipal model, in terms of the sibling relation, and suggests how this dynamic could expand to describe broader social phenomena:

The sibling situation introduces the threat of sameness – the clearer the difference established the safer the dominant person; a major difference is the female other. Using the body to represent large/small, white/black, male/female, violence becomes the social means to establish the subject against this different other.¹⁷

The universal brotherhood of Enlightenment – which, if understood as one of the formative principles of western societies, continues to mould the universal subject in the image of a white man – contains a repression of its own difference-producing, violent mechanisms. Even if it would be too soon to do away

with the vertically-oriented concept of patriarchy, the idea of lateral form of male domination, call it “fratriarchy,” seems relevant to the collective, gang-like, identity of the alt-right brotherhood and its carnivalesque revelling in the flouting of social rules, its pride in setting itself aside from any norms of what is socially acceptable, the amorality of the troll adjusted for the furthering of an agenda. Following Mitchell’s logic to the end, perhaps that which is not acknowledged in the social sphere – here the actual persistence of inequality and violence in the creation of difference, be it by race or gender – will instead express itself in an entirely unrestricted form.

There is also self-transcendence in the anonymity of the virtual mob. The simultaneous sense of melting into the mass while being physically separated from it must present an experience of a specific type of disembodiment.¹⁸ Yet trolling and its explicitly right-wing forms are ecstatic even beyond the dark pleasures their proponents might derive from these activities online. As the dynamic of the online mob translates into electoral politics, the idea of ecstasy as a leaving-behind of the body transforms. Much has been written about the outcome of the US elections and the Brexit referendum by way of attempting to unpack the seeming (self)destructiveness of people’s voting choices. Pankaj Mishra points out that the still widely-held utilitarian idea that people’s driving motivation in life is the pursuit of material self-interest – the theory of the *homo economicus* – no

longer makes sense as an array of less straightforward reasons emerge into the public consciousness.¹⁹ The perceived loss of white privilege, national identity, a kind of nihilism of values, desperation... . In the US election in particular it seemed many voters were leaving behind (hope in the improvement of) their material existence – their bodies – in favour of an ecstasy of resentment. Something that combines a head-rush of base emotions with the ultimate denial or fuck you to their own bodies, with their needs and weaknesses.

THE REVENANT BODY POLITIC

Going back to the “large and useless body” Baudrillard writes about, the one left behind as the head blocked with information became the locus of all attempted activity, it is worth noting that his metaphor also entailed a reference to the relationship of cities to the countryside, that of the “centre” to the “periphery.”²⁰ With Brexit, Trump’s election and even the Finnish parliamentary election of 2015, the pertinence of this to contemporary electoral politics and the internal contradictions of the national framework comes to the fore.²¹ Everyone seems to be a “nation divided” these days, and the fault line runs across the jugular, the windpipe. What is significant about the head transplant as metaphor is not the separation of the head from the body but its being reattached to a new one, the one whose chemistry our brain doesn’t recognise, and the new reality or “hitherto never experienced level and quality of

insanity” resulting from this. In the wake of Brexit, the supposedly discarded body was shown up to have rematerialised as the body of UKIP, racism and xenophobia. The US election quickly followed suit, adding overt misogyny, long simmering under the protective shield of online anonymity, into the mix of the yet another “new reality.”

Through this figurative head-body disjuncture and the emotional realities stirred by it, the analytic view of the psychic (as relating to fantasy or the imaginary) could be seen to tentatively re-form a scene, but only qua a grotesque of that which would usurp its significance in a more clinical sense: neuroscience. The very absurdity of the proposed operation, its presumption of a disconnect between the mind and the body, its seeming disregard for medical ethics is what solicits not only the discovery of some metaphoric content in it, but also an attempt to give form to, imagine, something that is not known, even if it might seem foreseeable. Seen through the Wikipedia entry for “head transplant,” the prognosis for our current situation is dire:

Head transplants have been successfully performed on dogs, monkeys and rats by surgeons, although all the animals were unable to move and died shortly afterwards.²²

Mitchell writes of sameness also as it relates to a pre-adolescent child’s fantasies of reproduction. In their games, children “give birth” parthogenetically,

without the need for heterosexual sex, in effect cloning themselves.²³ She also extends this reflection on sameness into instances of sibling incest, and considers situations where marriage between relatives is encouraged as a means of preserving a bloodline.²⁴ There, as with the child’s “cloning” of themselves, as with the head transplant, a kind of fantasy of immortality reigns. The sameness that both shields and threatens the online bigot – keeping the perpetual motion machine of hatred going – is perhaps also subject to these fantasies of cloning, or fantasies of immortality in the guise of the fantasy of the eternal nature of the white man. And looked at through the metaphoric lens of the head transplant, its disrupted version of subjectivity, the breaks and morbidities in this idea of a continuous unchallenged subject come into focus.²⁵

The fantasy of immortality also serves to expand and complicate the flattened, horizontal, lateral views proposed by Baudrillard and Mitchell. It is also compatible with, and figurative of the kind of steep verticality that the unruly, fraternal hordes of the alt-right exist in a symbiotic relation with. Mitchell notes in her book, first published in 2003, a “decline in the importance of descent and rise in the importance of alliance.”²⁶ This could no longer be said to hold. The rise of nationalism, the far right and open racism in public discourse speak to the increased significance of descent as it pertains to notions of racial purity. Descent also attaches to the increasing concentration of wealth into a small number of

private mega-fortunes, which has now become a matter regularly reported and commented upon in mainstream media, the coinage “the 1%” having escaped no one. The importance of alliance persists, but so does descent, only now what is passed on is not the reason of the modern father, promising rewards in return for deferral of pleasure, a kind of protestant finitude, but an increasing concentration of power of nigh-apocalyptic proportions. Alongside the bloodline, it is the preservation and accumulation of the power that adheres to it that gives the mega-rich their fantastical image of immortality. Donald Trump and his family provide a caricature-like portrait of this oligarchic, neo-feudal rule.

Maybe these fantasies of immortality, aside from serving some dark psychic function for those who would choose to just hate, or in whose hands power is concentrated, explain something of the context in which those who are subject to this hate and to the structural effects of inequality also exist. A context wherein the fantasies of immortality for some are paired with a denial of the dignity of “being unto death” for others, and ultimately with the actual heightened imminence of death for the rest.²⁷

With the downward social mobility of the middle classes, fewer people get to grow up in the way their parents were accustomed to. There is a deferral of one type of maturity – the traditional job, house and family kind – inscribed into the financial insecurity

that keeps some young people in their parental homes and forces one to reassess the consequences of the choice to have children of one’s own. The defunding and decline of public services that would support families hit the poorest hardest, but they also reconfigures the options available to those who wish to hold onto their middle-class identification in the absence of its attendant financial means. It would be normative in the extreme to say sexual reproduction is a prerequisite of maturity, but so is the version of maturity discussed here as slipping out of reach, cheating the middle-classes out of their masterful acceptance of mortality. If the child’s fantasy of reproduction is about immortality, to actually have children is to be confronted with the fact that you will eventually die. Having children offers an encounter with death that allows for it to be assimilated to life. The fantasies of immortality of the eternal white man, on the other hand, would assimilate life into death. The stakes of imagining away mortality become high as we are being denied an assimilable encounter with it by our circumstance, at least one that we might have some sense of control over.²⁸

Then there is the broader view, in which the fantasies of immortality stand in stark contrast to the heightened presence of death in everyday life for many; a world where the possibilities for vast quantities of people to reproduce themselves, in the most urgent daily sense, are dwindling. This economic disenfranchisement has been argued to

contribute to the disaffection that feeds the rise of the populist right, to provide a motor force in the production of hate.²⁹ Those subject to the hate, however, face as they always have the most acute threats, for the fact is the hate has always been expressed at a structural as well as a psychological level, even as it is now exacerbated.

Notes

- 1 Not that this could not play out online as well, in a mediated form, but what seemed significant to me was the role our already-existing close relationships and social contexts played in sexual and romantic predilections, in often latent and psychologically complex ways. Online, we do not see those close to us desiring (us desiring); we see, rather, abstract traits that even when appearing in a constellation (online profile) are isolated from the sensory whole – the person, their lives, our lives.
- 2 Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, trans. Bernard Schütze and Caroline Schütze (Los Angeles: (Semiotext(e) 2012). In this essay, I have however used an earlier translation of the first chapter of Baudrillard's text, which appeared in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, trans. John Johnston (CA: The New Press 2002), 145–154. The two translations are quite different and the quotes I have included in my text don't match the Semiotext(e) edition. In fact some of them are not in it at all.
- 3 Christopher Hooton, "Man undergoing head transplant could experience something 'a lot worse than death,' says neurological expert," *Independent* April 9, 2015, online: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/man-undergoing-head-transplant-could-experience-something-a-lot-worse-than-death-says-neurological-10164423.html> (Accessed January 3, 2017.)
- 4 Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 146.
- 5 This obscenity Baudrillard writes about is an extension of Marx's notion of the obscenity of the commodity, which consists of the way the material substance and use value of

the commodity becomes divorced from its exchange value. In circulation, commodities manifest their essence by equivalence, as the price through which they communicate. The obscenity Baudrillard speculates on is an advancement of this where all functions are eradicated to a single dimension of "communication." Baudrillard, *ibid.*, 151.

- 6 Baudrillard, *ibid.*, 148.
- 7 Baudrillard, *ibid.*, 151.
- 8 Richard Seymour, "Schadenfreude with Bite" in *London Review of Books*, Vol. 38 No. 24, December 15, 2016, 11–14, online: <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v38/n24/richard-seymour/schadenfreude-with-bite> (Accessed January 3, 2017).
- 9 Seymour, *ibid.* The book Seymour is quoting from is: Whitney Phillips, *This Is Why We Can't Have Nice Things: Mapping the Relationship between Online Trolling and Mainstream Culture* (MA: MIT Press, September 2016).
- 10 The term derives from Karla Mantilla, *Gendertrolling: How Misogyny Went Viral* (Praeger, August 2015).
- 11 For more on this, see Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review*, vol. 106, no. 8 (June 1993). Harris discusses white privilege from a legal standpoint, unpacking how through the history of white supremacy in the USA whiteness has been constructed as a property interest, a key to privileged treatment and opportunities in society, protected by law, and goes onto discuss affirmative action and the kinds of (legal) challenges it has faced, many of which arise from a lack of willingness to acknowledge that privileges inhering to whiteness are the result of a long history of subordination of people excluded from it. She identifies the problem of many judgements in such cases as being their referral to the question of whether an individual living now can be held responsible for past injustices as the location of these challenges within the frame of corrective justice. Her argument is that once you see whiteness as a property interest, affirmative action reveals itself to be actually a case of distributive justice and the validity of these challenges falls away. Harris writes: "...whiteness retains its value as a 'consolation prize': it does not mean that all whites will win, but simply that they will not lose, if losing is defined as being on the bottom of the social and economic hierarchy – the position to which Blacks have been consigned." (Harris, *ibid.*, 1758–1759). This forms a backdrop to how the perceived loss of privilege afforded to a person simply by virtue of

belonging to the exclusionary group “white” has more recently been used to explain the rise of the populist right, even when, as is so obviously the case with someone like Donald Trump, they would not represent the material interests of their more impoverished voters.

- 12 Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 146.
- 13 Juliet Mitchell, *Siblings* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003). She more directly aligns her consideration of the significance of siblings with the theorising of postmodernity, when she writes: “Sibling and peer cohorts are the personnel of postmodernism with its focus on sameness and difference, its concern with ‘time present’ rather than ‘time past.’” (Mitchell, *Siblings*, 31.)
- 14 She refers to the work of Carole Pateman, who argues that the modern social contract establishes a male domination as a fraternal form. (Mitchell, *ibid.*, 217–218)
- 15 Mitchell, *ibid.*, Preface XV
- 16 Mitchell, *ibid.*, 10: “the ecstasy of loving one who is like oneself is experienced at the same time as the trauma of being annihilated by one who stands in one’s place.” This formulation is interesting, as in its use of the word ecstasy, it proposes this formative conflict also as a kind of impossible self-transcendence, echoing the melting of the subject into the physically atomised mass of the online mob.
- 17 Mitchell, *ibid.*, 223
- 18 This individualised disembodiment sets itself in stark opposition to the type of anonymity inherent to left-anarchist forms of mob activity. This quote from an article about the black bloc in the Trump inauguration J20 demonstrations, sketches out a kind of embodiment: “The black bloc is not a group but an anarchist tactic – marching as a confrontational united force, uniformed in black and anonymized for security. Once deployed, the tactic has an alchemic quality, turning into a temporary object – the black bloc.” Natasha Lennard, ‘Neo-Nazi Richard Spencer Got Punched – You Can Thank the Black Bloc’, *The Nation*, January 22, 2017, online: <https://www.thenation.com/article/if-you-appreciated-seeing-neo-nazi-richard-spencer-get-punched-thank-the-black-bloc/>. (Accessed January 24, 2017.)
- 19 See: Pankaj Mishra, “Welcome to the age of anger,” *The Guardian*, December 8, 2016, online: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/dec/08/welcome-age-anger-brex-it-trump>
- 20 Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, 149.

- 21 The day before the Finnish parliamentary election in 2015, my friend had been to a public swimming pool, doing something called water running that involves a flotation belt and moving forward only with the help of one’s legs, so that movement is slow and the upper part of the body is above water at all times, enabling conversation with whoever you are doing it next to. She had overheard two older women moving in front of her discuss the election, saying that the Centre Party was going to make a clean sweep. My friend told me about this, and we were both slightly surprised that such a thing would never even have occurred to us, even though the Centre Party is historically one of the larger parties. This could be attributed to them being mainly an agrarian interest party, and to the fact that barely anyone in the Helsinki metropolitan area voted for them. The thought seemed quite frankly alien to us. They did however ‘win’ the election, but even more upsettingly, the anti-immigration True Finns (who rebranded themselves as simply the Finns Party in an effort no doubt to assert belligerent dominance over the idea of who the finns are, “True Finns” being too clumsily expressive of an underdog’s phoney claim to authenticity) made large gains, and were included in a coalition government with the Centre Party and the National Coalition Party (the centre right party). The ensuing discussion that revolved around “bubbles,” liberal cries of “not my Finland” and generally the shock of the coexistence of such distinct realities within the nation state, have since been echoed in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum and the Trump election.
- 22 Wikipedia, “Head Transplant,” online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Head_transplant (Accessed December 12, 2016.)
- 23 There is a cleanliness to this virtual reproduction, which if thought of in the broader frame of the reproduction of the capitalist system itself, brings to mind ideologies that see this process as a neutral one, one without social dimensions, tensions, inequalities and hierarchies as its fundamental characteristics.
- 24 Mitchell *Siblings*, 25–26.
- 25 Thank you Hannah Proctor for this observation.
- 26 Mitchell, *Siblings*, 4
- 27 One quite explicit example would be the doubling of maternal mortality rates in Texas since drastic funding cuts to its family planning centres. In the UK cuts to benefits and the reform of the procedures by which eligibility is measured have been linked with suicides of claimants. (Molly Redden, “Texas has

highest maternal mortality rate in developed world, study finds.” *Guardian* August 20, 2016). Online: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/aug/20/texas-maternal-mortality-rate-health-clinics-funding> <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-34074557> (Accessed January 3, 2017.)

- 28 2016 was marked by a seemingly large number of deaths of iconic figures, but also by the public mourning of these deaths on social media. While it may have been a bad year for a certain generation who saw many of the artists who were formative presences for them, and who had seemed somehow eternal, pass away – David Bowie, Prince, Leonard Cohen, George Michael, Carrie Fisher – there is also something about the way these deaths were commemorated and sadness shared online that now seems to me to resonate with the lost encounters with mortality discussed here. The ones that do not entail the actual death of someone close to us, but that softly, or through non-specific anxiety, or through the giving of life, make us reflect on our own passing. The ceremonies of transition from one phase of life to another, the goal posts of maturity if you will, could here be seen as having moved into the virtual realm, where the experience of these close-but-distant-but-assimilable deaths provides an opportunity for (re)claiming them.
- 29 In the US the spiking mortality rates of white women between the ages of 25–55 are a part of a larger trend of the increasing mortality of poorly educated middle-aged white Americans, the same demographic that voted for Trump in large numbers. See e.g. Eli Saslow, “We don’t know why it came to this,” *Washington Post* August 8, 2016, online: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/sf/national/2016/04/08/we-dont-know-why-it-came-to-this/> ; Gina Kolata, “Death Rates Rising for Middle-Aged White Americans, Study Finds,” *New York Times* March 11, 2015, online: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/03/health/death-rates-rising-for-middle-aged-white-americans-study-finds.html>; Anne Amnesia, “Unnecessariat,” May 10, 2016, online: <https://morecrows.wordpress.com/2016/05/10/unnecessariat/> (Accessed December 17, 2016.)

By Lizzie Homersham



We’re used to seeing hearts as smoothed-out representations. While they do their work as part of the circulatory system of our bodies, the heart as a sign enters a different sphere of circulation and exchange, sent through the ether as <3.¹ In the bible a heart of stone is replaced with one of flesh. On a backlit poster on Broadway, Manhattan, the heart is a dark red piece of meat, an organ used in an advertisement for a TV documentary series about trafficking: “ANYTHING YOU WANT... FOR A PRICE: \$119,000?” In my collection of photos of New York moving company vehicles, the heart is blue and almost as large as the cartoon men carrying it between them like an unwieldy piece of furniture. Roadway is the “#1 Mover in NYC” and its slogan is “A nicer way to move.”²

One of the worst things about America is the lack of universal healthcare. Riding the subway I see an advert for FreedomCare, the New York state organisation that sets out to help Medicaid-insured sick, elderly and disabled people find carers. To the left of a portrait of a man accompanied by a woman I take to be his daughter, the ad copy says: “Choose a FAMILY MEMBER OR FRIEND who will be paid to care for you, instead of a stranger from an agency.”

FreedomCare's branding features a graphic heart: an angular red ribbon describes the rounded peaks at the top, and a blue ribbon draws the left and right sides down to a point. A tiny flock of red and blue birds flies out of the upper right curve – the heart breaks to set them free. The biggest type, white on red on the poster, says "STRANGERS DON'T BELONG IN YOUR HOME." I recall "The Intruder," Jean-Luc Nancy's reflection on his ten-year-old heart transplant, which he writes of as a stranger he welcomed, albeit with difficulty, conceiving of the replacement heart as an intruder to be let in.³ He extrapolates, delineates an ethics that, in being for the acceptance of foreign bodies, ought also to promote the free movement of people.⁴ Refusal of the stranger's heart would mean death. A couple of decades earlier, when transplantation surgery was less advanced, his life would have been shorter: "Personal contingency intersects with the contingency of technological history."⁵

On another subway journey I realise I'm no longer on my route. I leap onto the platform and pulling away the MTA driver yells out at me "That's a great book!" I'd been reading *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* by Claudia Rankine, who renders the heart as a technical object:

Mr. Tools, for a while the only person in the world walking around with an artificial heart, said the weirdest thing was being without a heartbeat. His was a private and perhaps lonely singularity. No one else could say, I know how

you feel. The only living being without a heart-beat, he had a whirr instead. It was not the same whirr of a siren, but rather the fast repetitive whirr of a machine whose insistent motion might eventually seem like silence.

Mr. Tools had the ultimate tool in his body. He felt its heaviness. The weight on his heart was his heart. All his apparatus – artificial heart, energy coil, battery, and controller – weighed more than four pounds. The whirr if you are not Mr. Tools is detectable only with a stethoscope. For Mr. Tools, that whirr was his sign that he was alive.⁶

Elsewhere Rankine writes about the liver:

My editor asks me to tell her exactly what the liver means to me [...] Why do I care about the liver? I could have told her it is because the word live hides within it. Or we might have been able to do something with the fact that the liver is the largest single internal organ next to the soul, which looms large though it is hidden.

In truth I know the answer to her question, but how can I say to her, *Understand without effort that man is left, at times thinking, as if trying to weep.* I am somewhat rephrasing the poet César Vallejo because Vallejo comes closest to explaining that any kind of knowledge can be a description against despair, but she wouldn't accept his answer, she couldn't really use it for ad copy.⁷

I keep moving, write this piece in fragments, dispirited, as if in need of a sign. While taking a walk, an intended break from the heart, I come across an advert for machine love, a love machine. Glowing yellow under spotlights in Red Hook, I pass a billboard advertising Chevrolet: “MY DISTANCE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER.” It touches a chord in me, returns me to my text and state of mind: confusion around the consistency of love and the location of home. When I left London at the end of August 2016 I was “following my heart.” I had had in mind the possibility of renewing a relationship begun in romantically adverse circumstances: the last two days of my first trip to New York were defined by a meeting that became the basis of a long-distance relationship of about a year’s duration. The longest time we spent together was on a three-week trip to the West Coast: we drove around Oregon in a red Chevy hired from Hertz. In my memory it looked just like the car in the advert.

I keep working, at one point on a freelance job transcribing interviews with transplantation surgeons. One of them spoke about what happens when an organ is refused:

What part the mind plays in rejection: the scientist in me would say that it doesn’t, that rejection is an immunological response to an immunological injury, that you’re putting foreign tissue into somebody else and the body’s response to foreign tissue, whatever it is, is to reject it.⁸

We rejected one another. At different times, communication broke down. We processed the world too differently, he wrote, and I took refuge in reading. In Marge Piercy’s “Simple-Song”: “We are not different nor alike ... and loving is an act/that cannot outlive/ the open hand/the open eye/the door in the chest standing open.”⁹ In Rankine’s “Coherence in Consequence”: “Were we ever to arrive at knowing the other as the same pulsing compassion would break the most orthodox heart.”¹⁰

Heartbreak is not a metaphor. I found this out from the artist Leah Clements, who convened a discussion between Sian Harding, Professor of Cardiac Pharmacology, and Simone Severini, Reader in Physics of Information. The former spoke of her research into the phenomenon of Takotsubo cardiomyopathy, “a heart condition caused by extreme physical or emotional stress, usually bereavement.” The latter spoke on quantum entanglement, “where two particles exist, almost as if they are one, so that if you affect one, the other could be very far away, it could even be on a star, and once you affect one of them the other is affected instantaneously, which in traditional laws of physics, shouldn’t be able to happen.”¹¹

When I first put my mind to moving, making an application for study, I sent an email informing the love to whom I was still attached of my intentions. He replied that it was so strange: he’d arrived home from a night out, found himself thinking of me and had an overwhelming feeling of psychic connection, like I was also thinking of him in that instant or

trying to make contact. The first strike of homesickness came unexpectedly a few weeks after I arrived. Confused between love for a man and desire for a home, I'd thought my heart was in New York.

Perhaps "New York Was Yesterday." I read Gregg Bordowitz's melancholy account of living in Manhattan:

I am at a loss. The first-person singular pronoun shares the same fate as the skyscraper. [...] Turn it off. "I" is a syndicated talk show. "We" is a corporate enterprise. Factors in an equation. Pronouns in a sentence. Notations, a couple of keystrokes, commands. Do this. Feel that. American culture is a funeral.¹²

Bordowitz's caution: "Keep in mind that Manhattan is an island. It's an ideal, an aspiration, and like all absolute horizons it can never really exist. Not as a state of pure limitlessness"¹³ is comparable to Deleuze and Guattari's description of the Body without Organs, the body without a heart: "You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit."¹⁴ The Body without Organs can, however, be made as practice: "you make one, you can't desire without making one."¹⁵ My distant lover said that home is where you make it. It would cost \$5,600 for a lawyer and \$325 in government processing fees if I wanted to try to make my home in the States for another three years. Who gets to deterritorialize? There are

times when it seems easier to say that love is where you make it and that "making love" requires a heart only for beating, pumping blood. We were together on the eve of the US presidential election, and the sunshine in the morning of November 8 held dread in suspense, fooling me for a minute into thinking that forces of nature were out against Trump.

Later I gathered with classmates and friends to watch election night TV, where the feared outcome was slowly revealed through hours of projections of unfinished counts, yellow turning too often to red and too rarely to blue. I couldn't bear to sit still and have powerlessness impressed by immobility, so I took myself to a desk in the adjacent studios, started looking back at my notes from a talk given by Claudia Rankine the month before. When I rejoined the group the Republican states were still leading, and at 11.00 p.m. I began walking home. Crossing the Brooklyn Bridge I looked back to see the Empire State Building displaying the latest from the polls: Clinton Colorado, Trump Ohio. Announcements were interspersed with "ELECTION NIGHT" flashes, beneath which a graphic line shot up and down like the trace of a heart on an electrocardiograph machine.

In writing *Citizen*, Rankine said, she was framing a series of intimate experiences felt in a nation founded on segregation. She wasn't thinking about the future, rather about present day America and its dynamics as we experience them day-to-day. She continued, tongue in cheek, I think: "If Jefferson

were alive today, I would marry Jefferson. Jefferson said you shouldn't free Black people and leave them here in the US because when they realise what we've done to them there will never be peace."¹⁶ Slavery and homelessness go hand in hand. Trump's presidential campaign captured hearts and minds by falsely dividing people into winners and losers, promoting border walls and the deportation of groups identified as a threat to a racist myth of nation.

On November 10, Gregg Bordowitz opened a seminar with the question of how to proceed. "Let's do away with the distinction between thought and feeling... let's conceive of them as two junctures within a movement rather than an opposition," he said.¹⁷ Are true feelings even distinct from thought? In Yvonne Rainer's work, "feelings are facts."¹⁸ Let's do away with the gendered distinction between feminine feeling and masculine thought. To the Xenofeminist Manifesto's "rationalism must itself be a feminism," and the Gender Nihilism anti-manifesto's argument that "the subversion of gender is a dead end," Nina Power adds "that emotion and reason are in fact not mortal enemies, but rather inseparable branches of the collective experience of social and political life that Philosophy purports to address."¹⁹

"Post-truth" is the word of 2016 both sides of the Atlantic. As a news report summarised on November 15: "US election and EU referendum drive popularity of adjective describing situation in which objective facts are less influential than appeals to

emotion."²⁰ Published three months previously, Lauren Berlant's "Trump, or Political Emotions" begins with a plea:

Dear America, if I read one more article about the Danger of Political Emotions in an election season [...] I might take my own life. [...] politics is always emotional. It is a scene where structural antagonisms – genuinely conflicting interests enforcing imbalances of power – are described in rhetoric that intensifies fantasy.²¹

Is it fantasy or true love for Trump that's been expressed in his supporters' shouts of "I love you"? Unable to properly doubt the veracity of these cries, I've come to think of the love they declare as chemical; fuel used up by the climate-denying ego to which it's directed, sustaining a purely selfish rise to power. Love thus consumed will never be returned. Therein the lie of Trump's "I love you more."²²

Friendship's Death (1987) is a film that treats the distinction between truth and untruth within its opening ten minutes.²³ A peace envoy named Friendship is one of two main characters, an extra-terrestrial data-gathering technology sent from the distant galaxy of Procyon in the guise of a human. Destined for Massachusetts Institute of Technology, she gets misdirected to Amman, Jordan and captured by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). The film is set in 1970, during a conflict between the Jordanian armed forces and the PLO that came to be

known as Black September. Sullivan, a British journalist posted out to report on the war comes to the captured subject's aid, claiming the alien as his friend. Their conversations range from the proper treatment of typewriters (to Friendship's dismay, Sullivan hammers at the keys), to the status of Palestinians, whom the journalist describes as "victims of a map," part of a politics based on the "romance of territory." The Israelis are victims too, he says, "it's a downward spiral: the Nazis exterminate the Jews, the Israelis exterminate the Palestinians, the Popular Front seizes the hostages."

Friendship, who "can't accept subhuman status simply because [I'm] a machine," identifies "with all the victims": "[The Palestinians] have no home. They have no hope. The most powerful empire in the world arms and finances and sponsors their oppressors." Job done, Sullivan looks forward to returning to London: "I'll be glad to go home. A shameful admission I know. But after all, the Palestinians are fighting for a home, why shouldn't I value mine in Chalk Farm?" To this Friendship responds: "Home is where the heart is. I don't have a heart, so naturally I don't have a home. Home, where memory stops." Sullivan is troubled by Friendship, disturbed that neither the US nor England present themselves to her as satisfactory destinations. He traces her lack of belonging to their incompatible pasts: "You have no childhood. You don't age, you obsolesce ... your memory can never be the same as mine because your sense of time has to be different."

Following Susan Sontag's analysis in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, an account of the ways in which humans relate through images to such extremes as war, torture and death, from since before the Holocaust to post-911, Friendship's lack of memory would be in keeping with her peace-making mission:

Perhaps too much value is assigned to memory, not enough to thinking. ... Heartlessness and amnesia seem to go together. But history gives contradictory signals about the value of remembering in the much longer span of a collective history. There is simply too much injustice in the world. ... To make peace is to forget. To reconcile, it is necessary that memory be faulty and limited.²⁴

I remember standing by the open door of my mother's garden shed as a child. She was going in and out, setting green fingers to work. Because of the spiders, I wouldn't enter but I could see the "Home is Where the Heart is" bristle doormat she kept in there. On the first two occasions I Skyped with my mother since moving I cried. The first time we talked about Europe in the wake of Brexit; I was reeling from Theresa May's Tory party conference speech statement: "If you believe you're a citizen of the world, you're a citizen of nowhere. You don't understand what the very word 'citizenship' means."²⁵ May violates Friendship, and anyone

who questions where home is has the right to a home denied. A friend comments on Facebook: “Since for most people in this world it is impossible to “belong,” our real forms of belonging are all articulated through forms of solidarity in antagonism to the way things are.”²⁶

In “The Intruder,” Nancy writes against rejection:

With the aim of stimulating organ donation, a great emphasis has been placed on the solidarity, and even the fraternity, of “donors” and recipients. And no one can doubt that this gift is now a basic obligation of humanity (in both senses of the word), or that – freed from any limits other than blood-group incompatibility (and freed especially from any ethnic or sexual limits: my heart can be a black woman’s heart) – that this gift institutes the possibility of a network where life/death is shared by everyone, where life is connected with death, where the incommunicable is in communication.²⁷

The second time my mother and I spoke, after the US presidential election, I cried again and got angry at the inefficacy of tears. We talked about what we could do. She texted me later saying she’d been thinking about helping people and had filled in a form to donate all her organs when she dies. November 17 was her birthday and on waking that morning I received a WhatsApp message from one of my housemates back in London: “I’m going...

I living. I’m not ready but I’m going. Because I’m so tried.” Tired must have autocorrected but he’s also been tried: too many years characterised by flight from an occupied state, by detention, by border technology misidentifying his Palestinian Arabic as Syrian, by a housing situation that frustrates hope in spite of its relative stability. He referred once to a chicken that tries to fly every day and realises it can’t. Letters to the Home Office go unanswered, legalities unresolved. Destitution. I didn’t know what to say, thought I’d reply to some simpler emails first. In my inbox, from the same housemate, subject line: “loving day.” Had I read his text about “day living”? Living, loving, leaving, I wouldn’t put it past him, such is his sensitivity to mood and talent for wordplay, to have noticed the typos and left them alone.

Notes

- 1 <3 is an emoticon, whereas ♥ represents an emoji. At Get Emoji, a variety of hearts are categorised as symbols, listed beneath objects. Online: <http://getemoji.com/>. (Accessed 30 December 30, 2016.)
- 2 In response to Morehshin Allahyari's Twitter post: "NYC how do you move couple of furnitures from one location to another? U-Haul? Man w/a man? Private jet? Why is this so complicated?!!" (@morehshin, September 30, 2016), I shared a picture I took of the Roadway van, along with photos of College Hunks Moving Company, Celebrity Moving, and MORE company trucks. Online: <https://twitter.com/homershame/status/782040311673544708> and <https://twitter.com/homershame/status/782040851669213184>. (Accessed January 1, 2017.)
- 3 I'd forgotten about "The Intruder" and thank Aria Dean for reminding me of it in her essay, published as part of Sondra Perry's exhibition "Resident Evil," The Kitchen, New York, November–December 2016. Dean's essay, "Poor Meme Rich Meme (aka Toward a Black Circulation)," opens with a quote from Jean-Luc Nancy: "There is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation."
- 4 Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Intruder," in *Corpus*, trans. Richard A. Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 161–173.
- 5 Nancy, *ibid.*, 162.
- 6 Claudia Rankine, *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2004), 71.
- 7 Rankine, *ibid.*, 54–55
- 8 I transcribed interviews conducted as part of the Transplant and Life project by Tim Wainwright and John Wynne for the Hunterian Museum, London. For this particular interview with Ms. Lorna Marson see "Rejection and the role of the mind" online: <http://www.transplantandlife.uk/en/page/3870>. (Accessed December 5, 2016.)
- 9 Marge Piercy, "Simple-song" in *Circles on the Water* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), 47.
- 10 Claudia Rankine, "Coherence in Consequence" in *Plot* (New York: Grove Press, 2001), 14.
- 11 Leah Clements, *Beside*, presented 8 December 2015, as part of Chisenhale Gallery's 21st Century programme, online: http://chisenhale.org.uk/audio_video/media.php?id=82. (Accessed October 25, 2016.)
- 12 Gregg Bordowitz, "New York Was Yesterday" in *The AIDS Crisis is Ridiculous and Other Writings, 1986–2003* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004), 153–154.
- 13 Bordowitz, *ibid.*, 156.
- 14 Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, "How Do You Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 150.
- 15 Deleuze and Guattari, *ibid.*, 149.
- 16 "Claudia Rankine: Rescues from the Wreck," public talk and discussion, Yale School of Art, New Haven, October 10, 2016.
- 17 Gregg Bordowitz, seminar at the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program, New York, November 10, 2016.
- 18 See Yvonne Rainer, *Feelings are Facts* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 390–393, and Siona Wilson, "Structures of Feeling: Yvonne Rainer circa 1974," *October* 152 (Spring 2015): 3–25.
- 19 Nina Power, "Philosophy, Sexism, Emotion, Rationalism," in *After the "Speculative Turn": Realism, Philosophy, and Feminism*, Katerina Kolozova, Eileen A. Joy (eds.) (punctum books, 2016), 17–18.
- 20 "'Post-truth' named word of the year by Oxford Dictionaries," online: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/nov/15/post-truth-named-word-of-the-year-by-oxford-dictionaries>. (Accessed November 15, 2016.)
- 21 Lauren Berlant, "Trump, or Political Emotions" <https://supervalentthought.com/2016/08/04/trump-or-political-emotions/#more-964>. (Accessed November 15 2016.)
- 22 Adam Curtis, *HyperNormalisation*, 2016; see 2:20:00, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9m2yReECak&t=23s>. (Accessed December 26, 2016.)
- 23 Peter Wollen, dir. *Friendship's Death* (1987) 78 min, screened as part of "Laura Mulvey and Peter Wollen: Beyond the Scorched Earth of Counter-cinema," a retrospective curated by Oliver Fuke, NYU Tisch School of the Arts, New York, November 11, 2016.
- 24 Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 115.
- 25 "Theresa May's keynote speech at Tory conference in full." Online: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-speech-tory-conference-2016-in-full-transcript-a7346171.html>. (Accessed October 6, 2016.)
- 26 Benedict Seymour, Facebook comment, December 30, 2016.
- 27 Jean-Luc Nancy, "The Intruder," in *Corpus*, 166.

By Rose-Anne Gush



our story, which will soon be over, begins
in the urban island of peace.
if someone experiences fate, then not here.
if someone has a fate, then it's a man, if
someone gets a fate, then it's a woman.¹

Die Liebhaberinnen, published in 1975, was translated as *Women as Lovers* in 1994, and is an early iteration of Elfriede Jelinek's ongoing preoccupation with the ideologies of love and work. The novel revolves around a brassière factory in rural Austria filled with working-class women, and around the institution of marriage.² The two protagonists of *Women as Lovers* are named Paula and Brigitte. They are characters, akin to masks, in no way realistic. What is clear is that their lives are dominated by the determinations of capitalist society. This entails the subjugation of human life to capitalist labour, but expresses itself also in more specific articulations, including what drives humans to reproduce themselves: love and the conservative instincts of self-preservation. The bourgeois need for security and stability appears to these women as a need to be owned by a man, to have a marriage contract. These determinations could be described as women's double burden:

oppression by means of both capitalism and patriarchy. While feminists have struggled to bring to light the concerns of women within the production process, as well as articulating how their labour outside of it is integral to the upkeep of both workers themselves and the class system within which they exist, and while Marxist feminist analysis offers a coherent understanding of the social situation of women under capitalist social relations through the categories of productive and reproductive labour, my focus here will be the notion of fate.

MARKET OF BODIES

“one day brigitte decided, that she wanted to be only woman, all woman for a guy, who was called heinz.”³ The narrator continues, “she believes that from now on her weaknesses would be strengths and her strengths very much hidden.”⁴ Brigitte does not have time on her side because time belongs to Heinz, the man for whom she is becoming woman. A situation is described in which Brigitte is stuck in a purgatory ruled by dependence.⁵ All of her attributes belong to him, Heinz, including her future. The narrator continually tells us that everything she works on in herself she works on for Heinz, meaning her projected future with him. This future, for the very reason that it belongs to him, is, however, not guaranteed: she has to win him first in order to secure a life outside of piecework. Ageing and working to survive are both life and death to her, which in the novel become interchangeable

terms. At work in the factory, Brigitte is one of many seamstresses who sew brassieres made of nylon lace. The narrator describes details such as the thin rubber lining of the brassiere. Brigitte does not have much of a subject position beyond her twinned labour and quest for Heinz. She rejects “empowerment.” In Brigitte, Jelinek constructs a figure through which to present an ideology of femininity: the ways in which “women” are moulded into wives and mothers, are shaped and styled to become what is expected of them, and achieve gain for themselves only through proximity to male power and gain. Throughout the book Jelinek allows Brigitte to hold on to this precarious identity, building it up as a contradiction in terms with eventual consequences. The second protagonist is named Paula. Paula is from the countryside, Brigitte is from a small town. Paula is the youngest in her family and at fifteen years of age she is given the opportunity to imagine what her future might be: she is given the choice between “housewife or sales assistant.”⁶ The characters in the book are pitted against each other. They are divided by their minor class differences; while all of them are working class, some are teetering on the edge of attaining the category of petit bourgeois. Heinz has a family and importantly, a mother who can stay at home; Brigitte only has a mother who works sewing the same things as her.

The narrator tells us that Brigitte is nothing, but she can offer her body to the world. Along with her body, the narrator tells us that many other bodies are

flooding the market, constantly pressing the notion of competition.⁷ In an interview from 2000 Jelinek describes this “market of bodies,” as that which,

declares women to be bodies and reduces them to their biological being, a being that is unable to improve herself through work, thought, or even in my opinion, economic power. Women are still reduced to biology, regardless of how much work they perform. [...] it is just paradigmatic that as a woman, you are thrown onto this market of bodies, irrespective of what you have done and achieved in your life. Nothing has changed that. Instead, it is getting worse; I believe this “glamour,” this pressure to be beautiful, this backlash, also when it comes to aesthetic categories, forces women to pump iron, to build muscles, to work to remain slim and muscular, to fixate attention on the body, [...]. In other words, more and more is expected of them and they get less and less in return.⁸

Bodies function in a specific way in *Women as Lovers*: if they belong to men they are there to do something: to act, to be labour power and to consume women. If they are women’s bodies, more is expected of them. They are reduced to their biological function as vessels. The men consume them in order to reproduce the species. And they can be consumed as an exemplary, static labour power, seemingly unable to improve their lot materially through work;

exposing a rift, or a limit to a politics centred on work. Part of Brigitte’s success lies in her fertility. The narrator says, “well done brigitte’s body. child bearing capacity is the victor. in particular the womb and ovaries.”⁹ The female organ did not “go to waste on the line, but through heinz got it into full working order.”¹⁰ The narrator provides a metacritique of the proximity between the functions of work and love and their affective power in structuring and maintaining the gender hierarchy, through the dimension of the family and the division of labour. Brigitte and Paula both become pregnant and give birth. For Brigitte, “the little child will occupy an important place: inheritor of the business! brigitte will occupy the second most important place: worker in the shop and in the home.”¹¹ The novel is carefully structured so that it maps the structure of society. That Brigitte swaps the factory for the marriage contract so easily shows us the limits of both these mutually negating “options.”

The tiny world that Jelinek has authored is made objective with excessive, hard language, which has closed itself off from any aporia in order to cling to everything that is bad. In 2005 she characterised the quality of this “second-hand” language as depravity: “[w]hen a man speaks, he speaks the discourse of authority. When a woman speaks, she does not. But what she can do is what I am doing, that is, to deal with this speechlessness, to show, by using this depraved language, how depraved it is and where this depravity comes from.”¹² This language is not

constructed through psychology, but by way of its own rhythms and puns.¹³ It is a perverse language; it functions to pollute, contaminate, and adulterate what it represents, to show how this gendering occurs. It works through this speechlessness by endlessly circling and repeating, using dominant linguistic forms to negate its own security, moving in only minor new directions, resisting plot. It is inelegant. To read it gives the sensation of being ground down. The reader is not permitted an escape route from this small world.

REAL LIFE

Nothing is stable in *Women as Lovers*, including fate. Real life can “give an opinion,” writes Jelinek, “if it’s asked, real life is the life after work. for brigitte life and work is like day and night.”¹⁴ But the meaning of this “life” is temporal and like that of “future” it returns to Heinz. “real life is not only called heinz, it is heinz.”¹⁵ Travelling in a loop, Brigitte returns to her object choice. We are told that if they have love it is because it comes from Brigitte. She must convince Heinz that he needs her, and that his future depends on her. In the novel, it is fate orchestrated by Jelinek that decides what will happen to Brigitte. “fate [schicksal] decides brigitte’s fate.”¹⁶ And throughout, Heinz embodies fate: it is what he does and is. Like the women who are lacking a story, or those whose story is only ever a symptom, so the novel struggles to find a plot. We are told that,

a natural cycle has come into being: birth and starting work and getting married and leaving again and getting the daughter, who is housewife or sales assistant, usually housewife, daughter starts work, mother kicks the bucket, daughter is married, leaves, jumps down from the running board, herself gets the next daughter, the co-op shop is the turntable of the natural cycle of nature, the seasons and human life in all its many forms of expression are reflected in its fruit and veg.¹⁷

This “natural cycle” is precisely what the novel undermines mimetically, by repetitively and relentlessly restaging and objectifying it, denaturalising it. As if it is itself a turntable. Jelinek shows how linguistic forms and patterns of language contribute to expected patterns of life, and then attacks the depraved “reality” of this cycle. “the women begin to hate their daughters and want to have them die as quickly as possible just as they once died, so: they must get a man,” in this schema for Paula, “marriage always comes alone, without life.”¹⁸ Paula is differentiated from Brigitte by her desire to learn a skill. Paula shows some agentive potential, but she is also enthralled by the trappings of modern existence such as television, beauty ideals and clichéd notions of romantic love and happiness. Something separates these characters. They provide a duality to the structure of the novel, which is parable-like; they teach us about the ideology of

love and work, but do this from marginally differing losing positions located within the family and in badly remunerated factory labour. Brigitte finds something she is searching for, while Paula does not. Fate has a double standard.

Women as Lovers hinges on two points: the myth of love and the ideology of work. The structure of the novel takes the looping figure of infinity. The forward is mirrored in the epilogue.¹⁹ Brigitte, who starts out in the brassière factory takes up her place in the home as a housewife. Paula, who starts out sewing, ends up working in the brassière factory because of the “choices” she made: she followed a drunk man who, shamed, left her after she took up prostitution to raise money for her subsistence. Brigitte ends up feeling hatred for Heinz, whom she successfully “captured” although she maintains the status of winner because she gets to keep a home, have a child and a washing machine. Brigitte also feels hatred and jealousy for other women who represent competition. The narrator describes what happens to these women, saying that they die slowly: “wives die away together,” whole families die together in “mutual dependence. And the daughter can hardly wait, to be allowed to die at last also, and the parents are already going shopping for the daughter’s death: sheets and towels and dishcloths and a used refrigerator. Then at least she’ll stay dead but fresh.”²⁰ Death can be read as a metonym of the prevailing circumstances, and as an actual condition. Death in life is, as suggested

in Theodor Adorno’s *Minima Moralia*, the “unlived, banished life.”²¹ For Adorno, this banished life is exemplified by Snow White, who can only recover from it in death. Although there is no stable concept here, a hopeless hope brings emancipatory potential for Adorno: “yet it is powerless hope alone that allows us to draw a single breath.”²²

AGAINST FATE

The original meaning of the term “fate” implies “the word” or, “to say.” Jelinek uses the German word *Schicksal*, which refers to both “sending” and “destiny”: a destiny over which we have no control. In *Women as Lovers*, *Schicksal* also connotes certain meanings of the term that, inherited from Greek tragedy, travelled through German idealism and continue circulating in representations today. They include: death, the assigned portion, one’s lot, thread, linkage, constraint. In Homeric Greek mythology, the Moirai (often known as the Fates) were the three goddesses of destiny. Pietro Pucci characterises each Moira as a “part” and as a “spinner who spins around the newborn child the portion of life assigned to him.”²³ He points out, through this example of a terminable life, that the Moirai are “associated with death.”²⁴ The name Moira is paired with the term *Aisa*, meaning “one’s lot,” and is used synonymously. The thread spun is unwinding and part of a whole. “Along the line of destiny, every event produces a closure; the line itself, made up of a succession of closures.”²⁵ Pucci

describes the proper expressions of destiny and fate: the thread and the knot, fortune with its good and bad effects, and the constraints and bonds of necessity, as attesting in their “own way to the formation of a relationship between the gods and men, and a relationship of man to himself.”²⁶ The three goddesses of fate, Klôthô, Lachesis, and Atropos, who determine the course of a human life, are the gendered personification of a fate that also carries the connotation of bad luck or ill fortune, mishap or ruin. Through this personification, which is at the origin of fate’s conceptualisation, women’s gender and catastrophe merge.

In “The Theme of the Three Caskets,” from 1913, Sigmund Freud imparts his story of the convergence of the Moirai, the spinners, with the Graces and the Horae, or Seasons. Freud’s aim is to show something ahistorical: an eternal humanly-derived meaning contained in the changing story of fate, from the Greeks to the Romans to the Middle Ages, that he then located in his relationship with his own daughters.²⁷ The Horae were spinners of clouds, the waters of the sky; they were the goddesses of vegetation, representing the seasons. Later, they came to officiate time, inculcating hours. For Jelinek this sentiment is carried forward as a joke, whereby “the seasons and human life in all its many forms of expression are reflected in its fruit and veg.”²⁸ For Freud the Horae became the “guardians of Natural Law and of the divine Order which causes the same thing to recur in Nature in an unalterable

sequence.”²⁹ In this temporal recurrence, Freud saw that the myth of nature became a human myth, and the goddesses of weather (seasons) and time (hours) became goddesses of fate, although this aspect only found expression in the Moirai. The Moirai, with “ineluctable severity of law and its relation to death and dissolution” stamped fate upon the lives of humans, who it seemed to Freud, only “perceived the full seriousness of natural law when they had to submit their own selves to it.”³⁰ Freud attempted to explicate what he describes as a man’s “choice” between three women, that concludes in the choice of death, occurring and repeating in myths and fairy tales. He recognised a pattern whereby the third sister was the bringer of death in examples ranging from Psyche to Cordelia in King Lear and Cinderella. This figure of death, as the object choice of the “heroes” in myths and fairy tales is the figure of the dumb, mute woman, the one who chooses to love silently, personified in the Moirai as Atrapos (ineluctable). The choice that is given here is a false choice, Freud writes: “the choice between the women is free, and yet it falls on death. For, after all, no one chooses death, and it is only by a fatality that one falls a victim to it.”³¹ Freud moves beyond the initial catastrophic collision between fate and gender where gendered fate determines one’s life course, to assert that this there is a structure of fate. Within this structure, man is given a false choice; man becomes a victim of woman. Moreover, in this course of events, this example of “choice”

functions as a catalyst for man in his overcoming death, something that he now knows intellectually. Freud writes, “[a] choice is made where in reality there is obedience to a compulsion; and what is chosen is not a figure of terror, but the fairest and most desirable of women.”³² The death figure “stands in the place of necessity, of destiny.”³³ It is what comes to be “woman” who is stuck in this role. Ultimately conservative, Freud shows us the true meaning of this present persistence of the past myth, when he writes:

what is represented here are the three inevitable relations that a man has with a woman – the woman who bears him, the woman who is his mate and the woman who destroys him; or that they are the three forms taken by the figure of the mother in the course of a man’s life – the mother herself, the beloved one who is chosen after her pattern, and lastly the Mother Earth who receives him once more. But is it in vain that an old man yearns for the love of woman as he had it first from his mother, the third of the Fates alone, the silent Goddess of Death, will take him into her arms.³⁴

Although this is merely an extension of the doctrine of the myth of Oedipus for psychoanalysis, here, the “inevitability” of these relations is what is rewritten in *Women as Lovers* and also undermined. We return to Brigitte, who ultimately comes to have a fate because Heinz feels some kind of desire towards her.³⁵ As

in the many stories that explicate the logic of the three fates, Heinz chooses Death. In Jelinek’s novel no one wins, least of all Brigitte. The horizon granted to her within the constraints of the structure and the language of *Women as Lovers* mean that her success is bestowed to her entirely through Heinz’s action. She rejects any form of self-empowerment, instead opting to gain power through proximity to Heinz.

Why might the word fate not immediately give rise to ridicule? In *Women as Lovers* the very notion of fate is one that works to fix time in a never-ending cycle of guilt and punishment, the novel is structured in this loop; the characters swap roles. Fate asks us to fixate on an excess that surpasses one’s needs and desires. Fate is then, in a psychoanalytic sense, a word of reaction.³⁶

FATE’S ABSTRACTION

The history of fate is also wedded to tragedy. Expressed in a poetics of tragedy, fate is dictated by the external law of the gods, resulting in the death of the man (sic) of action, or the hero (not merely the one who has chosen death).

“Since Aristotle there has been a poetics of tragedy. Only since Schelling has there been a philosophy of the tragic,”³⁷ writes Peter Szondi in *An Essay on the Tragic* from 1961. In this short book Szondi develops a philosophy of the tragic, which he then advances through the analysis of literary works. He shows something like an arc through “German” thought from Friedrich Schelling to Walter

Benjamin. He demonstrates how Aristotle's poetics of tragedy, as instructions for tragic art, came, in the German tradition, to be associated with the idea of the tragic. In the "Transition" at the mid point of this book, Szondi looks to Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). He argues that in an almost tragic moment, Benjamin relinquishes the concept of the tragic as it exists as a generalised concept. Rather than replacing the philosophy of the tragic with poetics, as in Aristotle, Benjamin replaces it with the philosophy of the history of tragedy.³⁸ Szondi suggests that Benjamin posits the genesis of the tragic as identical with the genesis of the dialectic. It is clear that fate's relationship to tragedy is transformed in Benjamin's history of the philosophy of tragedy, as he renounces a timeless concept, unlike Freud's analysis of the afterlives of the three Fates.³⁹ Following from Benjamin's historically conditioned concept of the twinned tragedy and fate, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer begin to consider their own *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947).⁴⁰

The notion of fate is held fast within the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The central argument of the book holds that Enlightenment reverts to mythology, and mythology (as we have already seen) is deeply intertwined, in multiple ways, with the notion of fate. Importantly, for Adorno and Horkheimer, the Enlightenment is not understood as the period in time spanning between Descartes and Kant, but rather it contains a logic: it is that which demytho-

logises, secularises and disenchanters.⁴¹ The first phenomenon of their investigation in their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is "the self destruction of the Enlightenment."⁴² The dialectic means that while they see and acknowledge a correlation between social freedoms gained through enlightened thought, they also contend that the social institutions within which these gains are caught up, also contain "the seed of the reversal universally apparent today."⁴³ They warn that "if Enlightenment does not accommodate reflection on their recidivist element, then it seals its own fate."⁴⁴ For us to acknowledge this "element" of Enlightenment is to encounter the destructive aspect of progress. Adorno and Horkheimer do not posit this aspect in nationalism, paganism or any number of other modern mythologies exactly, but rather in Enlightenment thought itself, thought "paralysed by fear of the truth."⁴⁵ This "truth" is not merely "rational consciousness," but also consciousness as Adorno and Horkheimer understand it to play out in normal life. The dialectic implies that after the "fall of man" coterminous with social progress that produces the apparatus of technical institutions, the apparatus increasingly gains in power. As a result, the individual loses their power, and as s/he is devalued, s/he disappears before the apparatus that s/he serves.⁴⁶ Part of this disappearance is the result of the socio-technical apparatus doing more and more for them. Adorno and Horkheimer's subject does not have the opportunity to complete a task fully, to see some-

thing to its end, and this is the recidivist element of Enlightenment thought that must be first acknowledged and then interrogated. Is it this element as well as this disappearance that appears and is a mode of thinking and writing for Jelinek in *Women as Lovers*?

Adorno and Horkheimer arrive at a brutal verdict: everything that contained difference is now equalised.⁴⁷ Their line goes something like: Enlightenment excises the incommensurable. Individuality is unique so that it can be made the same as any other individuality, just as Enlightenment can be made to sympathise with the social impulse, just as fascist mythology is shown to be the myth of antiquity.⁴⁸ They write: “Abstraction, the tool of enlightenment, treats its objects as did fate, the notion of which it rejects: it liquidates them.”⁴⁹ In this dialectic, “abstraction” revivifies something of Freud’s ancient *Horae*, and begins to mean that everything in nature is repeatable. Abstraction is a leveller preparing the ground for progress alongside industry, which abstraction rules to be that which now ordains repetition. And the implications of Adorno and Horkheimer’s thought in their treatise on enlightenment are indeed also present in Jelinek’s *Women as Lovers*.

In *Women as Lovers*, Jelinek’s characters are submitted to the brutal verdict of formal abstraction arrived at in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. These characters also show, through their exposition of recycled language, through Jelinek’s “depraved” language,

the prevailing and maintaining structures of love and work; the repetitive (to infinity) logic of the “natural cycle” that Jelinek writes for them. The fate-like tool of Enlightenment thinking is hammered into the reader by way of Jelinek’s relentless prose style which dwells on the very how of gendering, the mediations that mean, in Western culture, that women are still rewarded for loving “in an unassuming and speechless way,” and for being speechless; as for working tirelessly while knowing that this alienated work will not lead to something new. Much like the Fates, in various descriptions, are sent on their way along the thread of time, a collateral punishment is doled out by a patriarchal, capitalist world that still teaches (here, through the figure of Brigitte), at least to some women: your silence is your only weapon and it is not a good one.

Jelinek’s style, far from silent, is affecting for the reader precisely because it avoids psychologising the characters. It avoids offering any positive image or blueprint for an alternative to what exists, but it shows how the institutions of love and work prevail through linguistic formal abstraction. The story has a slight narrative that hooks back to the beginning. Jelinek could be described as the hero, who risks something. Small things have happened, the reader learns:

 paula has already experienced her fate somewhere else. here it is over.
 brigitte began her fate here. brigitte has got away.

paula was struck down. if life happens to be
 passing by, paula doesn't try to speak to it.
 she doesn't care to chat anymore.
 there goes life, paula!
 but our paula is still looking for her car keys.
 goodbye, and safe journey, paula.⁵⁰

EPILOGUE

These characterless characters in Jelinek's words:

In my work there are no longer any living acting subjects whatsoever, ... There are hardly any agents in my texts; instead I would say that the acting subjects are history in that they only represent the dialectic of history, that is to say, they carry history on their bodies, or express it through their speech. ... The subjects speak their historicity, one might say, and thereby become dialectical because they always also carry their antithesis with them. They are artificially constructed, hence constructs. I really do believe that the subject died with the nineteenth century. No one today can maintain that the subject has an identity, even if one likes to read that. It is nothing but a construct, constructed by its own historicity, which includes advertising, television and the superstructure, to use the Marxist term. What that means is that even in the most private moments of one's life, or those in which one has the strongest illusion of privacy, the subject cannot preserve itself,

because the private sphere no longer exists. We are moving beyond the nineteenth-century conception of the novel or of subjectivity, because we can no longer live under the illusion that we can represent a microcosm of the whole world. No one can afford to do that today, it's an illusion.⁵¹

Notes

- 1 Elfriede Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Serpent's Tail, 1994), 3. Elfriede Jelinek, *Die Liebhaberinnen: Roman*, (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010), 6. It should be noted that no capital letters are used in this book, thus Jelinek ignores the conventions of the German syntax to capitalise all proper nouns. In any quotations hereon, I follow Jelinek's style.
- 2 Incidentally, "the brassière factory" was proposed as the 1988 title of an English translation that didn't reach publication. See Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality, An Introduction to Elfriede Jelinek*, (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 67.
- 3 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 5.
- 4 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 5.
- 5 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 12.
- 6 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 13.
- 7 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 6.
- 8 Elfriede Jelinek, interviewed by Brenda Bethman, "Interview with Elfriede Jelinek," *Women in German Yearbook* no. 16 (2000): 69.
- 9 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 153.
- 10 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 154.
- 11 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 161.
- 12 Elfriede Jelinek, "I am a Trümmerfrau of language," *Theatre* Vol. 36, Number 2. (2005), 29.
- 13 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 24.
- 14 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 6.
- 15 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 6.
- 16 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 6.
- 17 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 13.

- 18 Jelinek, *ibid.*, 13.
- 19 Allyson Fiddler and Juliet Wigmore have also alluded to this structure. See Allyson Fiddler, *Rewriting Reality* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 1994), 71; Juliet Wigmore, "Elfriede Jelinek: Social Oppression and Feminist Focus" in *Neglected German Progressive Writers (2)*, proceedings of the Galloway Colloquium, 1985, published 1986, 164.
- 20 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 16.
- 21 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life* (London: Verso Books, 2005), 121.
- 22 Adorno, *ibid.*, 121.
- 23 Barbara Cassin et al., eds., *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 531.
- 24 Cassin et al., eds., *ibid.*, 531.
- 25 Cassin et al., eds., *ibid.*, 531.
- 26 Cassin et al., eds., *ibid.*, 532.
- 27 "In a letter to [Sándor] Ferenczi of July 7, 1913, he connected the 'subjective determinant' of the paper with his own three daughters." Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets." *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII, trans. James Strachey, 1911–1913* (London: Vintage, 2001), 290.
- 28 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 13.
- 29 Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets," 296
- 30 Freud, *ibid.*, 297.
- 31 Freud, *ibid.*, 298.
- 32 Freud, *ibid.*, 298. (My italics.)
- 33 Freud *ibid.*, 298.
- 34 Freud, *ibid.*, 300
- 35 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 153.
- 36 Freud has also described the process of choosing death/fate as one of reaction formation: the replacement of one form with its opposite. The Horae reminded humans that they were part of nature (the seasons and the hours) and in Freud's view, were replaced by the Moirai (the spinners of fate/death). Sigmund Freud, "The Theme of the Three Caskets," 299.
- 37 Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic* (Stanford, CA: Meridian, 2002), 1.
- 38 Peter Szondi, *An Essay on the Tragic*, 49.
- 39 For Szondi, Benjamin's study of the Mourning Play functions as a turning point from the philosophy of tragedy to the philosophy of history of tragedy. Peter Szondi, *ibid.*, 49.
- 40 Peter Szondi, *ibid.*, 52.

- 41 Simon Jarvis, *Adorno, A Critical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 24.
- 42 Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. (London: Verso, 1997), xiii.
- 43 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, xiii.
- 44 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, xiii.
- 45 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, xiv.
- 46 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, xiv.
- 47 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, 13.
- 48 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, 13.
- 49 Adorno and Horkheimer, *ibid.*, 13.
- 50 Jelinek, *Women as Lovers*, 192.
- 51 Elfriede Jelinek, interviewed by Brenda Bethman, "Interview with Elfriede Jelinek," *Women in German Yearbook* no. 16 (2000): 66.

(Poem on the occasion of the
publication of Objects of Feminism)

By Hannah Black



there are no correct objects of feminism not the
womb nor the vaginal canal, anus definitely not
the body, it doesn't
produce anything truthful
shit is no more truthful than plastic or gold,
baby primates
the tone shift halfway thru your email
there are no women
there are no women on the inside of my wrist and no
more
are there women in my bank account, zero women

now take me as your
resource concentration, carbon
capture, soul
mate material, the noise
of the notifications
like "come here, come here"

the atmosphere of the sex, fastidious and uncontrolled
at the same time, like a little girl who is
the undeclared boss of all her friends
and altho extremely well behaved to adults

at all times
 is among peers always the first to suggest
 playing doctors or another sex game
 even tho she always makes it seem like someone
 else's idea and
 is never the one to get in
 trouble
 – that little girl as a man

he and she was the prequel
 taught me a lot about
 love, follow these 4 steps, squirting
 now it's tough how
 lucky we are to meet each other now
 how unlucky we must have been
 to meet each other now, no
 karmic-industrial complex
 newly mediated
 screen dysphoria
 time is the prison dimension
 barbed wire islands
 documentation
 dissolution (Neptune)
 skin

– breathe deeper, the word is on the side
 of your breath, the evidence –

and any other organ that joins and separates
 pounds and euros
 the Canadian dollar
 is

so
 sad
 today

tweeting
 alt-
 shot in the head
 all summer long
 I am the president

no interest
 lovers are always less and more
 than you want them, it's not
 an attribute of the body, it
 radiates outwards
 I just keep folding this piece of paper, as if
 mute things could break the law of finitude

5 times
 50 dollar bill!
 what do they say about us?
 the feeling that sleeping means missing out on
 something:
 a strategy for this
 brace, brace
 the arms and legs of men and women
 500 years of soap and ash
 unloaded there
 island air, sea legs
 in flesh recorded every one of you I am so
 I am so I am so I am so

you can't exchange a living president for bread
 what if you make me happy
 and I become slow and heavy like a cow?
 when you're here where's my beloved
 longing? here's everything you asked for
 put it wherever, drink me dry, real stars
 keep their trophies in the bathroom, so
 chill I get off on my own abundance
 700 times
 or until disintegration

embrace, embrace
 steps to achieving
 female squirting:
 move your hand
 as if you are saying "come here"
 you cannot GIVE
 she can only ALLOW
 repeat STEP 3
 as I mentioned before if you are learning it on your
 own (without good professional guidance) it
 might take some time
 don't worry your email address is totally secure

is exhaustion sex?
 the mysterious presence/absence of
 attention and enthusiasm
 is scary!!
 sub-sensory flickering
 the idea of being looked at
 lining the reality

of being looked at
 consenting to be looked at
 o love I am so I am so
 it's OK I can't die because I'm not made
 of organic materials

Macbeth thinks he's safe because the only person
 who can kill him
 is "not of woman born"
 haha Macbeth
 then the forest... moves
 the trees are alive
 they're men dressed as trees
 living men
 the mother was surgically opened and
 I know it doesn't matter in the conventional
 sense of whether things matter or not, which is
 not at all, but Shakespeare owned shares in –
 normal procedures
 investment in violence
 caesarian posterity
 long seasickness

zero women
 untimely ripped

they're not plugging the gap
 they are the gap
 sound has no edge, you can't
 block anything out
 it's like

escalating a conflict
 is a form of conflict avoidance
 because you're not talking about the thing
 any more
 you are the thing
 filling the now-indeterminate space of
 was once a minor disagreement
 about the erotics of transaction
 fill her up

and even if I had eaten the library and bled out
 in an operational bunker
 the factual presence of flesh

thinking of you with someone else
 moving my hand
 as if I am saying
 "come here"
 is totally secure
 as if

you have to say something about money
 to show you have "a dick" and are strong
 well-fed and choosing not to
 vote in a local election
 carrying your amputated stub
 to be discounted

she says she likes
 prairies and deserts
 adorable white girl

it's not charming to talk about what you
 do and don't like
 if the mountain doesn't
 move it comes to you
 don't want the mountain
 you come to the
 mountain comes to you if you
 wait

the only hope is that beauty isn't actually
 objective

he offered to marry me for a visa
 there was a night in the winter
 when I thought I was going crazy
 from an argument and having no money
 I called
 and he talked to me for 2 hours –
 whenever we gchat

I don't know how to communicate with him
 and have probably hurt him
 but to deal with this
 I would have to go thru a huge backlog
 of unseen videos unread articles
 and Wikipedia entries, unheard songs

started with so much
 the feeling of being porous

the feeling of something falling off the table

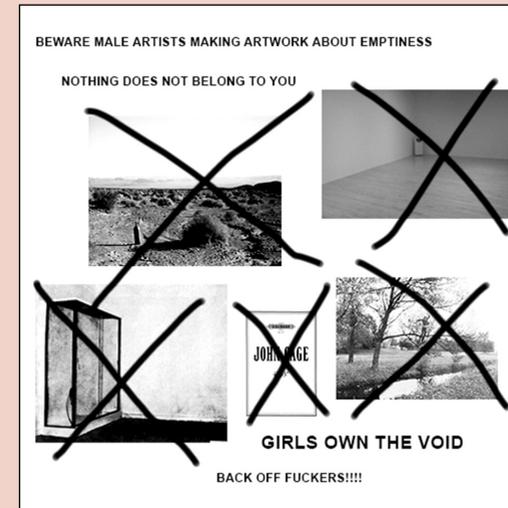
fell
 asleep with their head resting against a
 window and
 everyone is too
 polite to
 wake them
 tho they are blocking the national light
 the national mother
 symbolic gunfire
 a huge screen behind her
 reads Have (the national) Mercy, love as
 anxiety disorder
 dissolve at the border and seep
 thru like the most amazing
 fluid, it's for you
 the national language
 has cancer, the cells can't
 lie flat, they grow
 elbows, distinguishing marks
 torn or told apart, repeating in
 flesh I am so I am so I
 am so I am so I am so

I consented to carry this
 in cash, now I have avenged our dead
 I can see you with my whole eyes
 with all eight of my eyes
 crawling, island air
 sea legs, eight legs
 beautiful lady

look at this one spot of light that survived the
 general abolition of light

By Nina Power

✕



In October 2015, Audrey Wollen posted a picture on Instagram with the message “a PSA brought to u by ur local chapter of Female Nothingness.” The picture comprises a black and white composite image with the words “BEWARE MALE ARTISTS MAKING ARTWORK ABOUT EMPTINESS/NOTHING DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU/GIRLS OWN THE VOID/BACK OFF FUCKERS!!!!” next to crudely crossed-out images of a John Cage manuscript, and works by, amongst others, Yves Klein (*Le Vide* [The Void]), Bas Jan Ader (*Broken Fall* [organic], *Amsterdamse Bos*, Holland, 1971) and Robert Barry, (*Inert Gas Series: Helium*).

Sometime during the Morning of March 5, 1969, 2 Cubic Feet of Helium Will Be Released into the Atmosphere, 1969).¹ Wollen's piece, alongside her "Sad Girl Theory" (where she states, and I agree, that "the sadness of girls should be recognised as an act of resistance"²), is brilliant, both for its immediately blunt but recognisable vantage point, its militancy and its humour. "GIRLS OWN THE VOID" – but what, we might ask, pushing past the humour, does it mean to own (the) nothing? A nothing that is possessed and taken away at the same time. Wollen's synonymy – emptiness, nothing, void – and the defensive possessive "BACK OFF FUCKERS!!!!" posits an ironic essentialism on two levels: the very idea of owning nothing, and the idea that "girls" have a privileged insight into the nothing by virtue of being "girls." It is precisely the sort of joke/non-joke that cannot be fully articulated, because it takes place on the very terrain of representation itself, which is also where sex and language do their obscure work. In this sense the joke morphs into something much more serious, revealing, once again, that all jokes are acts of aggression, even in defensive formation.

Does feminism have any objects it could call its own? Is the void an object, and if so is it an object, or perhaps "the" object "of" feminism? The spatial dimensions and possessive relations of feminism are so overwhelmed by context: if feminism is first and foremost a way of looking at the world, then we perhaps cannot really say that some objects are feminist, but rather only that there is a feminist

perspective on objects. This idea of feminism as a perspective grants it (problematic) vision but not ownership. If feminism is a way of looking at the world that tells us more about that world, and that explains how the world works and even how the world is seen, and whose vision dominates and whose does not, can we also regard it as something that persists in objects in the world? The critique of objectification, sexual or otherwise, is now regarded in many ways as passé, as a kind of common, and slightly dull, knowledge: "of course women's bodies are objectified!" "Objectification happens all the time!" Then there are ways of thinking about what it means to resist as an object, to assume the power of the object. As Linda Stupart puts it, "to replace the distanced objectivity of critical distance with an empathetic exchange of ethical aesthetic objects ... What happens if we treat ourselves – our bodies, our history as well as our "I"s, as malleable structural frames, which are grounded on every utterance – as material?"³ Or as Hito Steyerl puts it, more bluntly: "How about siding with the object for a change? Why not affirm it? Why not be a thing? An object without a subject? A thing among other things?"⁴

But why are there so many question marks here? We are asking for a reply which we do not hope to actually receive. Unlike Wollen's statements "GIRLS OWN THE VOID" and "BACK OFF FUCKERS!!!!" we are in a strangely tentative world when it comes to thinking about objects, things and feminism, being neither subjects nor objects, but rather uncertain

positions and unstable relations. To fully side with the object is to embrace “bad faith,” as in Sartre’s example of the woman playing coy on a date, pretending that her hand is a dead thing, not (yet) wanting to own the subjective (and in this case, sexual) dimensions of the situation. Yet to be fully a feminist subject seems too optimistic: part-Kantian, part-Marxist, anti-Patriarchal, all-knowing? To be the kind of subject that embraces its object or thing-hood cannot help but wrestle with its own constitutive paradoxes, to be an object that thinks of itself as an object...in 3-D, but not inert, “there” but autonomous, the thing-in-itself without holes...

I want to take seriously Wollen’s VOID, regardless of how she meant it (and perhaps it was meant as a serious joke in the first place). I want to begin from the premise that feminism’s object is the nothing. This is not merely from a delight in paradox, though there is that too, but because I think feminism forces us to rethink what the conditions for the possibility of thinking objects at all might be. Kant’s attempt to undermine Hume’s fragmentary empiricism in *The Critique of Pure Reason* forcibly leads him to posit the transcendental necessity and unity of thinking objects: we are object-representing beings. The subject’s ability to synthesise objects under categories gives us the ability to identify objects outside of use in space but also to identify our body, which then becomes a strange double, or even triple-object: that which is and isn’t an object, that which we can perceive but also feel, that which we can see

bits of but also sense at the same time. That which has an inner feeling of unity – at least sometimes – but that which also provides the basis for any understanding of objectivity as such. But both the object-in-itself and the self-in-itself, and the body, in Kant, remain fundamentally unknown. We are, as Nietzsche, jibing at Kant, puts it: “unknown to ourselves, we knowers: and for a good reason,”

To think from the standpoint of the VOID then is to begin from what looks like incompleteness but which is fully real. Extending Wollen’s arguments against male artists making artwork about nothingness, we could also indict many of the philosophers: the Ancient atomists for their separation of atoms and the void, Hegel’s dialectical negation, Lacan’s void as the “thing that is closest” and Freud’s unconscious. When Deleuze and Guattari try to overturn this legacy and labour of the negative in favour of a positive intellectual history of plenitude and affirmation, we could say that they perversely simply replace one version of male ownership with another. And then we could also say **BEWARE MALE PHILOSOPHERS MAKING PHILOSOPHY ABOUT EMPTINESS/NOTHING DOES NOT BELONG TO YOU.**

But haven’t we always been positioned on the side of the void? Women are always described as that which lacks (reason, a cock, strength), but this always of course depends on how you define (reason, a cock, strength) and the material conditions that require the production of (reason, a cock, strength). It is tempting to go full-on non-strategically

essentialist here, if only to enjoy the annoyance that would follow: yes, it's all about the nothing, fucking come on then, so what! What would it mean to embrace a feminism of the void? A feminism of emptiness, of nothingness, of absence. If subjecthood is denied or given in such resentful, impoverished ways ("well I suppose you count as human, but never forget it's of quite a different kind!"), and objecthood is maybe just a little bit too static, then what about all the space in-between, all the non-things that cannot be seen, could we see and think from there?

This strategic nothingness could be militant: an edict against men speaking and working on the nothing, a boycott of claims made about visibility, about the idea that lack is somehow *lacking*. A revaluation of void-values, in which void-reason (the standpoint of the nothing) trumps paltry, stuff-reason, where a cock is merely a cigar, and where a cold, empty place is instead a place of great comfort (if the rectum is a grave, is the womb a tomb?). Void-feminism is all-embracing, seeing as there is no need to "lean in" if one is already in an abyss, and the abyss cannot stare back at you if you are it. Not only would void-feminism refuse recognition and representation, but it would refuse the conditions of possibility of these structures in favour of, well, simply not caring about these things at all, and just getting on with whatever you feel like, in the void, from out of the void, in the loving arms of the void...

Aye, here's the rub: You cannot be alone with the void! You are not allowed! They will try to take even

that away from you! Whoever they are: agents of the visible, colonisers of the void, externalising forces. You are neither allowed subjects, nor objects, nor nothing! So somewhere on the edge of the void, then, rope around your waist, whether you asked for it or not, peering over, a hair or eye-lash falls in, the void gets a piece of you, now you have become one with the void...

To "void" something is to declare that it no longer stands. This could also be part of a feminism of the void, in the sense of no longer standing for "it," where "it" could be any number of things that one objects to. It could be a renunciation of all the contracts we never signed but nevertheless find ourselves party to – compulsory heterosexuality, the regime of the visible, being treated poorly on the basis of resentment and anger that we have no ability to stop. Is a feminism of the void a kind of separatism? Perhaps of a kind – a separatism from the full, but I imagine it operates in the gaps of this fullness, rather than at a distance from it, because that distance is, for now, or perhaps, always, foreclosed.

Towards a Feminism of the Void
(with apologies to Audrey Wollen)

Some voids are bigger than others
But all have a negative number
But not a whole number
More like the number of
Your number's up!

Girls own the void
 Which is just as well
 As they get to own
 Very little else
 Much of the time

Even though possession
 Is loaded on to them
 Like manure on to the back
 Of a pick-up truck

And then this manure is given
 A name tag
 But it's not your name at all
 But the name of another
 That you can barely make out
 Because your eyes are full of manure

Notes

- 1 Thank you to Chris Van Eeden, via Linda Stupart, for identification of the majority of the images in Wollen's piece.
- 2 Cited in Lucy Watson, "How girls are finding empowerment through being sad online," *Dazed Digital Online*: <http://www.dazeddigital.com/photography/article/28463/1/girls-are-finding-empowerment-through-internet-sadness>. (Accessed February 10, 2017.)
- 3 Linda Stupart, "Rematerialising Feminism: Things Like us and Them," *...ment journal Issue 06 Displace...ment* (2015), online: <http://journalment.org/article/rematerialising-feminism-things-us-and-them> (Accessed February 10, 2017.)
- 4 Hito Steyerl, "A Thing Like You and Me," *e-flux Journal #15* (April 2010), online: <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/15/61298/a-thing-like-you-and-me/> (Accessed February 10, 2017.)

By Cara Tolmie



After performance #1, Cancamon invites Jeanne and Zabelle to stay for a couple of days. They both accept.

Jeanne comes from Paris, 1969.

Zabelle comes from New York City, 1917.

1.

Jeanne and Zabelle break the ice by casually exchanging their experiences of motherhood and how they manage this alongside their careers as musicians. They also share reflections on the seemingly mandatory inclusion of the existence, age and names of their children within their professional biographies.

Jeanne talks about her great joy / in being / Naima's mother and shares anecdotes about the times she took her children on stage with her. Zabelle in turn speaks of the logistics of recording eleven sides for Columbia Records at the age of 23 whilst also caring for her six-year-old daughter. She also shares stories from the many times she and her daughter Adiena took trips together overseas.

Following on from this, they enter a discussion on the notion of the "singing mother" and those

voices which have often been called upon to serve a kind of “mammy” function by “healing” and “nurturing.”

Cancamon sits listening silently, reflecting on her speculative role as a mother. She is currently surrounded by pregnant friends. She is at “that age.” The sensation has began to soak into her body as a kind of contortion, pulling her taut into awkward angles. Recently a masseuse told her that she sensed a deep-rooted ancestral fear of childbirth being held within Cancamon’s left hip. “I feel compelled to tell you that you would in fact survive childbirth,” she bestowed upon Cancamon, before chanting improvised vocal sounds towards the aching hip. Cancamon gave her a taste of “the kettle” in response. The pain in that hip had escalated dramatically after their session and still continues to cause Cancamon distress now.

2.

As a way to prepare the ground for their time together, the three of them spend most of the first day catching up, each sharing whatever is most prominent for them right now: emotionally, structurally, practically.

This session eventually finds itself in a longer conversation (perhaps influenced by their earlier exchange about the singing mother) about the “healing” singing voice. Their discussion lasts well into the night and grapples with the following:

- Personal anecdotes about songs that have at certain times acted as a “balm” for each of them.
- What does the word “balm” mean?

- Is “healing” an emotion?
- Locating the nature of the various types of pain they each hold in their bodies at this time: physical pain, emotional pain, social pain, inherited pain, undeserved pain, necessary pain, unaccountable pain, anxious pain, sad pain, useful pain, etcetera.
- The disparity between each of their pains and how this might relate to the particularities of their singular bodies. Their physical attributes (shape, size, appearance, constitution), the implications attached to their differing racial, class and national identities, the range of their speculated pain thresholds, the vast imbalance in their personal experiences, the different definitions of pain they bring from their respective temporalities, etcetera.
- Describing the specific textures of the sensation of being soothed by the sound of a singing voice.
- Describing the specific textures of the sensation of soothing others through the sound of your own voice.
- Describing the specific textures of the sensation of soothing yourself by singing.
- Times when they have each experienced the word “magic” being used in relation to the singing voice.
- The power dynamic, responsibility, and sensation of attempting to hold/siphon/harness the shared emotional state of a group (perhaps a physical group of bodies in front of you,

perhaps a speculated audience of listeners via distributed media) within a performance involving song.

3.

Having exhausted their desire to talk to one another on the first day, they begin the second day by watching YouTube videos of two performances mentioned in Eric Porter's text on Jeanne, one by Chaka Khan at the Republican National Convention in 2000 – the one where George W. Bush was anointed into power – and Marion Anderson singing at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939.

When they watch the video of Chaka Khan:

Jeanne begins to explore the natural rhythms and sonorities of the emotional content of the following words: "In these last days / of total disintegration / where every day / is a struggle / against becoming / an object / in someone else's nightmare."

Meanwhile, Zabelle takes the breath away of those fortunate enough to hear her sing "a crane has lost its way across the heavens" looped over and over into the room.

Cancamon awkwardly moves between Jeanne and Zabelle, stroking their hair, their hands, their foreheads and their lower backs with her clammy hands, whilst repeating "Our music is evidence of our souls will to live beyond our sperms grave."

When they watch the video of Marion Anderson:

Jeanne goes to the kitchen and raids the cupboards for percussive tools. She finds a wooden fork, a metal skewer, a large wine glass and a

battered pot. Crouching under the table that the laptop sits on, she begins to search for sounds that subvert symbolic, legal, material, and imaginative economies with her tools. Later on she quietly begins to work in the words "There is a balm to make the wounded whole, there is a balm to heal the sin-sick soul."

Zabelle stands majestically, mischievously in profile, and peers round at the screen from time to time. She fiddles with a cigarette plucked from behind her ear and, as if deaf to the rest of the room, sings the words "I am servant of your voice...from yonder stormy cloud I hear you cry?" in order to speak to the loss and bewilderment and frustration of those who she addresses.

Cancamon exposes different parts of her skin to Jeanne and Zabelle and strokes the bare flesh of her own body as if in an air or a light now fully toxic to the body, in a world in which the touch of the body is equally as distressing as the effects of exposure to the atmosphere. Each time she reveals a new small part of her body she repeats three times the same vocal slide, from high in her register to lower in her mid-register. Borrowing this sound from Zabelle, she doesn't attempt to reproduce an aural fidelity, but instead tries to channel the speculated emotional function of the fragment in the original song.

4.

They cut words out of photocopied texts by and about Jeanne. They would have used a text about Zabelle too, but they couldn't find one that they

were happy with so they stick to Jeanne Lee's Voice by Eric Porter and some of Jeanne's poems, agreeing that there were many words in these that they could all relate to. They also conclude that it can be productive to focus rigorously on the ideas and work of just one person within the group rather than feel the need to represent all present equally.

After much debate and some discomposure they manage to agree upon the following fragments:

1. THE WAY THEY SAY
2. AN EMPOWERING ODDNESS
3. BEYOND THE LIMITATION OF WORDS
4. A MYTH OF ABSENCE
5. ECCENTRIC FEMALE VOICES AND BODIES
6. BLASÉ AINT YOU DADDY
7. UNASSAILABLE STRENGTH IN BEING
ON MY WAY
8. OUR VOICE IS LIKE A HINGE
9. A DE-CENTERING OF THE WILL
10. MY HANDS ARE THE TOOLS OF MY SOUL
11. A PLACE WHERE THINGS CAN BOTH COME
TOGETHER AND FALL APART
12. RE-INSCRIBE HUMAN VALUE
13. YOU TILT MY WOMB TILL IT RUNS

They then spend two hours using thought-filled gestures to locate the most favourable position in the room to affix each of these scrolls of paper.

5.

Before embarking upon this adventure into their prepared surroundings, they infuse themselves with a quote of Jeanne's on the concept of voice environmentalism:

"I look at myself as already an environment, the environment is there and it comes through me in sound. In turn the music is created as a total environment to the audience. I'm always trying to allow the environment to manifest itself through me."

6.

Cancamon enacts Adjoining Fragment: "Something's Coming" along the wall, carefully avoiding "ECCENTRIC FEMALE VOICES AND BODIES" and "UNASSAILABLE STRENGTH IN BEING ON MY WAY" on her path towards "A MYTH OF ABSENCE."

Zabelle stands directly in front of all the scrolls in turn which are exactly at the height of her mouth and awakens "the kettle" directly onto each of them. She lands at the scrolls in the following order: "YOU TILT MY WOMB TILL IT RUNS" then "A DE-CENTERING OF THE WILL." Her version of "the kettle" fritters – wavering around a "hee" sound, angling between trilling high-pitched stutters and curdled, abrasive moans. Cancamon, concurrently sliding along the edge of the room, wonders to herself if this was what kettles sounded like in 1917.

Jeanne beckons "MY HANDS ARE THE TOOLS OF MY SOUL," "RE-INSCRIBE HUMAN VALUE," "A PLACE WHERE THINGS CAN BOTH COME TOGETHER AND

FALL APART” and “AN EMPOWERING ODDNESS” to elucidate a dance with her. In order to persuade them out from their places on the walls she announces to the room: “Don’t worry, I trained in dance, not music, you’re way ahead of me.” One by one they yield and join her to delineate the space through movement and placement.

When the dance reaches a crescendo of imperviousness Jeanne slowly backs away and joins Cancamon and Zabelle who have quietly settled themselves in the corner as a pair of witnesses. Jeanne leans in close and whispers to them “I think it’s all like a dance with everyone trying to get the right balance and configurations.”

Quotes in italics from:

Personal email to Cara Tolmie from Robbie E, September 5, 2016.

“Jeanne Lee’s Voice,” Eric Porter, Publisher: University of Guelph College of Arts, Publication: *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, Vol. 2, No 1, 2006. (<http://www.criticalimprov.com/article/view/53/184>)

“How Could Such a Beauty be Left Behind?,” Ian Nagoski, *The Armenian Weekly*, September, 2015. (<http://armenianweekly.com/2015/09/14/nagoski-zabelle-panossian/>)

Song by Zabelle Panosian

“Groung,” Zabelle Panosian, 1917

Songs and Poems by Jeanne Lee:

“Blasé,” Archie Shepp and Jeanne Lee, *Blasé*, 1969

“In These Last Days,” Jeanne Lee, Andrew Cyrille, Jimmy Lyons, *Nuba*, 1971

“There is a Balm in Gilead,” Archie Shepp and Jeanne Lee, *Blasé*, 1969

“Last Days / Hands,” Jeanne Lee and Ran Blake, *You Stepped Out of a Cloud*, 1989

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ART THEORETICAL WRITINGS
FROM THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

10

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ART THEORETICAL WRITINGS FROM
THE ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS

10

OBJECTS OF FEMINISM are the subject/object relations of contemporary capitalism; chunks of fleshed-out knowledge, dead and living bodies invested with ideologies and more. The contributors to this book approach feminism from a range of angles, relating to its artistic, philosophical and political significance. Their texts dislodge “the object” from some of its current moorings, putting it to various uses as a prism or vanishing mediator for the energies animating each text.

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