Working class women's psychogeography in experimental poetry: the work of Geraldine Monk and Maggie O'Sullivan & floss

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Introduction

For the working class woman – why poetry? It is often regarded as inaccessible, arcane, and, at worst, entirely irrelevant to the functioning of usual daily life. It is anything but a career choice, and for my own demograph, anything that is not bringing a boost to the family income is culturally frowned upon. Nonetheless, it is here in which a former journalism student found an outlet for creative writing that concerns the social, the personal and the political. The permission to write about my own surroundings, while giving due attention to a love of language that could never be expressed within the staid confines of a typical news story.

I began to re-engage with poetry when my son was a toddler, while I was a stay at home mum. I wanted to be able to read and write again, after years of a post-natal depression that was often incapacitating and hostile to any notion of self-improvement. Poetry pamphlets were a perfect entry back into considering written word as an artform, as opposed to a shopping list or something equally mundane. I could read 30 pages before finally going to sleep, or while my boy was in nursery for a few hours. Soon, it started to appeal stylistically as something that I could actually produce myself. It went from there.

It took years to develop my own poetic voice, and then years again to establish my own poetics. After exploring and attempting to create work on various subject matters, it became clear to me that there were certain themes that continued to display themselves in my work. Our little family – my husband, our son and I – relocated itself back to Liverpool after living in London for nine years. I discovered a love for my home city that I never even knew I was capable of. I started to explore old ground as the new. Not so much places that I frequented as a teenager, but those which I knew as a child, and what was left of so many sites that had now disappeared via demolition, renovation, and via the often contentious catchphrase of all town planning drafts, regeneration. I wanted to capture both the changes and the history of these places by writing about what I saw on my daily walks, albeit with a pram in tow.

I discovered that there was a word for the subject matter that captured me most: psychogeography. It was a delight to learn that my writing praxis was actually rooted in something vaguely intellectual. Unfortunately, the further I delved, the more I found that, like most literary movements, it was dominated by men. Psychogeography, as defined by Guy Debord, is “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals.”

In her book, Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography, Tina Richardson attempts to provide many definitions and various reference points for those who are new to the genre in her introduction. Yet in its historical context, the overarching common

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denominator, from Charles Baudelaire to Walter Benjamin, from Iain Sinclair to Merlin Coverley, is that the practitioners are male.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise helpful definitions of psychogeography as a starting point. Merlin Coverley proposes that it is a combination of the literary, new age ideas and avant garde practices. The latter is clearly of relevance to the praxis of psychogeography within the context of innovative poetry. Yet if social class is brought into the equation, it is also clear how previously, psychogeography has suffered from a somewhat elitist, or at the very least, detached reputation. Richardson named Baudelaire as responsible for the image of the flâneur, the nineteenth century urban walker of Paris who was bourgeois, male and dandy. It is interesting to consider how this could be taken as a blueprint for the description of an avant garde poet well into the 20th century too. So, while I recognise the importance of Guy Debord and the Situationist movement, the work of Iain Sinclair, Patrick Keiller and so on, what I have to offer in terms of perspective to this genre is significantly different if we are to cross the streams of gender and social class.

**Innovative/Experimental Poetry**

Aside from becoming a poet at all, does anybody actually choose to be an experimental poet? A successful reading involves around 40 audience members. Book sales tend to reach the same figure. Few, if any at all, encounter it throughout their school education. Even at university level, creative writing departments are essentially their own dominions, and not all of those are welcoming to innovative practice. The prevailing work in terms of popularity continues to be that which at least attempts to rhyme, or to stick to a prescribed form that the media perpetrates as poetry. The experimental is the least likely form of poetry to be profitable, and suffers from a reputation of being inaccessible. But for poets themselves, perhaps the attraction is to be found in both its definition, and in the postulations of some who attempt to define it. In their introduction to Other: British and Irish Poetry Since 1970, Richard Caddel and Peter Quartermain provide a helpful definition of its opposite, the mainstream, as follows:

Generalisation about such (often nebulous) groups is fraught with difficulties, but it nevertheless holds that in each case the typical poem is a closed, monolineal utterance, demanding little of the reader but passive consumption.

It is certainly fair to say that innovative poetry requires, or at the very least, hopes for, far more active participation from not just its readers, but also, its creators. It is also worth

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3 Ibid, pg 3.


reflecting on the subtle nuances between the terms that are employed to describe non mainstream poetry, that is, between “innovative,” “experimental” and “avant garde.” Poets who consider themselves as the latter, should, by literal definition, be acting the vanguard of that which is different in the art form. However, avant garde is a phrase that is historically charged. When defining her Archive of the Now website, an online catalogue of non mainstream poetry recording, Andrea Brady states the following:

‘avant-garde’ is obviously written into the long history of European movements which confront bourgeois norms, and which work together collectively to drive art history forward: that’s not a wholly accurate description of much of this poetry either.\(^6\)

Brady is right to accentuate this link between the avant garde and bourgeois convention. The relationship is almost symbiotic in terms of one feeding the content of the other. Yet to extrapolate further, it could also be argued that actually, the avant garde itself appears to be itself an essentially bourgeois, or at the very least, middle class, division of art. It is difficult to name a 20th century avant garde poet who could claim to be working class. With this in mind, it seems inappropriate to use this definition not only to discuss my own work, but also to talk about working class women’s psychogeography within the context of non mainstream poetry. Therefore, I will be using the terms “innovative” and “experimental” throughout this thesis.

In an interview with Scott Thurston, Caroline Bergvall argues that the fundamental issues facing innovative poets are:

the role or function of poetry in the world today….how you locate yourself intellectually and culturally….innovation as lineage.\(^7\)

This positions the poet as a kind of social commentator, an observer who, by placing themselves within the innovative framework, has a vested interest in anything that can be considered radical. To place another level of social responsibility on the shoulders of the experimental poet, the aim should be for us to look beyond the surface. To write between the prescribed lines. Women, especially working class women, with accents and a looser use of profanities to boot, are stereotyped, as writing about relationships, sex, motherhood and birth. But it needs to be asked, is this all we are? Furthermore, is this all our corporeal matter is reduced to? There is an absolute abundance of women poets writing about these topics. It is also imperative to recognise that while these are topics of importance, we are so much more than this. What we desire goes beyond the sexual, the maternal and a nature that may actually

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\(^7\) Taken from Scott Thurston’s interview with Caroline Bergvall in Talking Poetics – Dialogues in Innovative Poetry [Bristol, Shearsman Books, 2011] p.80
be considered as nothing more than Rousseauian\(^8\) fantasy of women as child rearers and other stereotypical gender roles.

**A word on the punk aesthetic**

Both stemming from the cities, punk and psychogeography complement each other well. Given that it began as a working class movement, punk also connects into my own poetics immensely. It could also be argued that the cut-up works of experimental poets in the 1970s reflect the counter culture and all its subversion. The cut-up poems of Maggie O’Sullivan, the work of Bob Cobbing and much of which the Writers Forum were publishing appears to be in tune with, or even, a precursor to, the radical shift that was taking place in music. Indeed, the British Poetry Revival seems to be concomitant to the political unrest and desire for change that was the mood of the epoch. For example, it is somewhat telling that a recording of Cobbing’s work is to be found on the collection entitled Poets Punks Beatniks and Counter Culture Heroes on Apple Music. Cobbing and O’Sullivan physically created work entirely in keeping with the production values of punk zines such as Shocking Pink and Sniffin Glue. Shocking Pink featured work with felt tips, photocopiers and collage. One of the founding members, Sally O-J, describes it as follows:

> We didn’t know how to make a magazine. In those days we did all our own layout and everything: we did everything – took the pictures, wrote it, got the copy.\(^9\)

This is strikingly similar to how Maggie O’Sullivan describes her working process with Bob Cobbing, outlined in my chapter on her work later on. Adrian Clarke also says of Cobbing’s editorial days:

> by the end there was just a narrow passage from the door round to the photocopier Piles and piles of sublications, submissions […] and loose sheets.\(^10\)

The shared visual tropes between punk zines and Cobbing’s Writers Forum work can also be observed when looking at the covers for the poetry publications they produced. Felt tip, pen, sketches, collage and bright yellow paints with red and black cuttings can all be found in abundance. Also, while experimental poetry may be in danger of springing out of academia only in these times, this was very much against the cheerfully anarchist spirit of what Cobbing’s projects were about. He was even a part of the Antiuniversity, described as a short lived attempt at self organised education outside academia, in 1968.\(^11\) It is easy to conclude that Cobbing would be somewhat dismayed by the dominance of academia within the social life of experimental poetry today.


\(^9\) [Cazz Blase: A shocking shade of pink](https://www.thefword.org.uk/2011/08/shocking_pink/) [accessed 20 March 2017]


\(^11\) Ibid, pg 144.
Psychogeography as poetic praxis

Tina Richardson has attempted to recapture the zine culture that plays such a pivotal role in psychogeography throughout the publication, Stepz, a collaboration with visual artist and fellow psychogeographer Ally Standing. The zine aims to restore the link between punk ethics and the more philosophical strands behind urban walking, or the dérive as the Letterist and Situationist International respectively would regard it. The second issue of Stepz curates the links between psychogeography in the North West and the writings of the punk poet John Cooper Clarke. My own work features in this publication, with a piece that juxtaposes two red light districts in Liverpool and Manchester. This piece is demonstrative of the lenses in which I consider psychogeography: that of belonging to the working class, and also that of the feminist. Usually, walks of this nature have informed my poetic praxis. In her book Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography, Richardson states that the collection of essays sets out to bring together the work of the contemporary psychogeographer who comes from a creative and literary background, with academics also working in this field. Within the category of creative and literary, we can certainly carve out a successful space for poetry and poetics. Richardson goes on to describe psychogeography as a subjective response, with terms like “aesthetic” and “affect” as the bread and butter terms of the discipline. Indeed, both of these cerebral consequences are extremely relevant to the response a poet aims for from their readership.

However, Richardson also makes the salient point that psychogeography tends not to be concerned with the rural environment. Within poetry, and especially the experimental, this tends to be in reverse. There is a danger, and an inherently classist one at that, of considering that which resides the city being too ugly, or simply not picturesque enough, to slide itself into the shape, or the subject matter of a poem in a way which that celebrates, rather than denigrates, the subject. A counter argument to it is, must it be pretty at all? The language can still be beautiful, even if the topic is urban decay. The dilapidated buildings in question might hold a plethora of happy memories for its former inhabitants, even if on first glance they resemble a demolition site. Considering psychogeography through a working class lens is a discipline that could be accused of nostalgia, which is something that experimental poetics seeks to avoid. Yet I believe it is possible to remain detached and impartially observe the destruction of communities as matter of fact without resorting to sentiment and excessive pathos. If the work of Laura Oldfield Ford is considered, then it could be argued that poetry, prose and working class psychogeography can work in tandem with each other extremely well. Oldfield Ford’s zine, Savage Messiah, started in 2005, documents the changes that took place in London not just preparation for the 2012 Olympics, but also, the various shifts that occurred in the landscape in the twilight years of the 1990s Tory government, and the beginnings of Tony Blair’s New Labour administration. It is produced as collage, illustrations and text. The latter being of special interest if the reader is looking for links to poetic language. The syntax could easily glide into any poem, as follows:

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12 Richardson, p4
13 Ibid, p5.
Mile End park, the Palm tree. Outside in violet shadows, his hand, a black tattoo. Red wine. Mirages on the canal. Drifting into sleep, dreams opalescent, erotically charged.\textsuperscript{14}

Such use of colour and adjective belongs within any genre of creative writing, yet the short, sharp bursts can only serve to put the reader in mind of poetry. Oldfield Ford also makes explicit reference to poets and poetry throughout the work. In Issue 6 she mentions being in Royal College Street in St Pancras, where Rimbeau and Verlaine previously lived. She also adds the following quote from Walter Benjamin in the same issue:

Poets find the refuse of society on their street and derive their heroic subject from this very refuse.\textsuperscript{15}

Yet the author has also rejected the idea that her work belongs in the canon of psychogeography, and for the purpose of this thesis, it is interesting to consider why. She believes the definition to be

[…..] just middle class men acting like colonial explorers, showing us their discoveries and guarding their plot.\textsuperscript{16}

This only serves to emphasise my point earlier that psychogeography has been a largely male dominion, and that the need for women to participate and occupy space in this sphere is inherent. I hope that this thesis shows not only how this can be done, but also, how the work has actually already begun through the medium of two working class women poets, and how I am striving towards a continuation of this ethos throughout my own praxis.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid, Issue 6.
Monk

Regarding my own endeavours to write on psychogeography through the lens of a working class woman, the importance of Geraldine Monk’s work cannot be underestimated. Through this chapter, I will be looking at how the poet applies language to demonstrate class and social status within a geographical framework.

The bulk of women’s poetry concerning concepts of space and place throughout innovative poetry to date appears to be more in tune with the work featured in Harriet Tarlo’s The Ground Aslant: An Anthology of Radical Landscape. Indeed, Tarlo herself has stated that Monk is not a landscape poet, as her work places nature within the cultural contexts of locality, culture and class.\(^\text{17}\) I would place these concerns as the very foundations of what I am attempting to define as a working class psychogeography within experimental poetics. The “radical” in the aforementioned anthology refers to “poets whose formal techniques are exploratory and experimental enough to be called radical”\(^\text{18}\) as opposed to any overtly socio-political content. Psychogeography covers a much wider field than the descriptive, and Monk’s work extends much further out than the aesthetic in terms of the scope of its content.

The poet herself labels her work as her “emotional geography of place.”\(^\text{19}\) This definition is one that is of utmost relevance to my own work, not least when writing about Liverpool in a way that combines both the history behind a location and the present day appearance, which in more often than not not a veneer in light of its former ambience. A collection which epitomises this approach is Noctivagations. The book contains numerous references that are consistent with the placing of a working class psychogeography within the genre of experimental poetry. For instance, the poem “Bluehound” begins:

But where
are we going?
And what is
it all about?\(^\text{20}\)

Here, Monk is asking questions, not making statements. The reader is encouraged to apply this to their own journeys and situations. Sticking to any concept of a straight and narrow path is gloriously irrelevant. In terms of class, Monk firstly employs dialect, which, whether we like it or not, is a social signifier. In this particular poem, she uses terms such as “Pet” which is classically Northern working class, and “pup-a-luv”\(^\text{21}\) as “puppy love.” However, the section of Noctivagations that really elucidates the concerns of a working class


\(^{19}\) [http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp](http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp) [First accessed 1 November 2016]


\(^{21}\) Ibid
psychogeography is Hidden Cities, which describes various districts of Manchester, touching upon both history and perceptions that switch from the personal to the political. The work reflects the multicoloured prism that is that particular city and its various stories, from the Madchester\(^{22}\) era, to the austere working conditions of child labourers in the Victorian mills of Ancoats, or as Monk rather beautifully puts it herself:

\[
\text{this place of critical hurt and psycho-catastrophe}
\]

\[
\text{this place where children roamed half giddy with the noise}^{23}\]

Monk also acknowledges the imperialism, horror and the colossal class divide on which such cities were built. Manchester’s cotton industry would not have been able to exist without the slave trade. The poem “Whitworth Street West”, a site of many former warehouses and trade offices, contains the devastating truth of the palatial facades:

\[
\text{A magnificence built on the blood of slavery, Red raw cotton.}
\]

\[
\text{Strange hanging fruit.}^{24}\]

The history of the proletariat in Manchester acts as a palimpsest over the slave trade that provided the backdrop to it. Monk’s project is therefore the ultimate example of working class psychogeography. It acknowledges the suffering and the strife of both the kidnapped slaves and the working poor twice over, with her own observations of the city as it stood at her time of writing (as Manchester, like several cities, is forever changing. But the history is entirely inescapable.) The slave trade is also inseparable from the creation of the city, not least as a port. To ignore this, and the other epochs of tension within its (continuous) evolution, would be revisionist as best, wilfully selective at worst. Indeed, the poet herself makes a pertinent reference to presenting such poetry as truth in her “Collaborations with the Dead” essay, stating “our minds are the embedded journalists of our bodies.”\(^{25}\) If we consider psychogeography as part documentation, then this perspective rings true. It also asks the readers to consider themselves as participants with the use of the word our. This chimes also with the work of both Tina Richardson, and Laura Oldfield Ford, who very much champion a psychogeography without exclusion, as referenced earlier. This particular article by Monk also invites the reader, albeit with humour, (“if there is an afterlife, my requisitioned collaborators will have all eternity to wreak their anger upon my celestial being”\(^{26}\)) to ponder the spirit of collaboration with those who, by their deceased status, cannot either answer back or acquiesce to any adaptations the living poet is making.

\(^{22}\) Cultural term for late 1980s – early 1990s Manchester music scene.  
\[^{23}\] Geraldine Monk, “Ancoats.” Taken from Noctivagations [Sheffield,West House Press, 2001]. p.65  
\[^{24}\] Ibid, p.64.  
\[^{25}\] Geraldine Monk “Collaborations with the Dead.” Taken from The Salt Companion To Geraldine Monk, edited by Scott Thurston. [Cambridge,Salt Publishing, 2007.] p.178  
\[^{26}\] Ibid, p.181.
Throughout Interregnum, Monk’s book on the Pendle Witch Trials of 1612, the poet addresses the oppression of working class women, and the suppression of their stories. These women were treated as subhuman, and Monk takes up their cause, and the language she has to describe it, with fervour:

They glamour. They bleed. Deceive. Imperfect animal.\(^\text{27}\)

Placing glamour and bleed so close together asks the reader to consider the apparent opposites. In turn, this implies that to do both (in the eyes of the 17\(^{th}\) century patriarchy) is simply impossible. It also suggests that to be simultaneously glamorous and bleeding must pertain to being a creature, an animal, as opposed to a woman without the scent of witchcraft hanging over her door. The next phrase in the above line, however, is imperative as a placing of women in any historical context and consideration:

Barely once removed from\(^\text{28}\)

This can be interpreted as follows: we are only ever one lesion away from those who may have been denounced in their time. In the case of Monk’s work, the women in question were executed in the 17\(^{th}\) century for being different and, most notably, being poor. They were unable to offer a decent defence in a justice system run by powerful, religious zealots who were obsequious towards a Protestant king, James I. Destitute women being sent to their deaths or being left to die in squalor within a system that favoured the rich continued well into the following centuries and, it could even be argued, up into the present day. This feature of history certainly creeps into the family trees of many working class women. So many ancestral searches result in stalemate simply because the women were not even deemed worthy of their births and deaths being recorded. When this is contemplated during a psychogeographical drift, suddenly the air seems so much heavier. What begins as a walk spirals into a time lapse.

At the start of Interregnum, Monk invites the reader to re-evaluate what might seem like a quaint Lancashire village scene. Scorn seems especially present in the opening lines of GOOD FRIDAY HIKERS:

We love to go a-wandering across this hillside track\(^\text{29}\)

Psychogeographers of any city or town that serves as a tourist trap can surely relate to Monk’s cynicism for tourists here. In her essay “Home Hills,” Harriet Tarlo mentions that the Good Friday bikers who visit Pendle “seem blissfully oblivious to the darker connotations of that day in the Christian calendar.”\(^\text{30}\) It is also an absolute failure to acknowledge the gravitas of that date to those who were executed for witchcraft in 1612, as Good Friday was the supposed date for a Witches Sabbath held at Malkin Tower, the home of the Demdike family.

\(^{28}\) Ibid.
\(^{29}\) Ibid.
most of whom stood accused and were sent to their deaths.\textsuperscript{31} There are clear parallels for this
disdain of tourists, or occupiers of sites that were formerly sites of poverty and suffering.
Victorian workhouse sites across the country have been demolished in favour of housing that
local people cannot, in all reality, afford to occupy. Former social housing sites across cities
have been taken over by private developers for either wealthy students or city workers.
These are issues that can breed resentment, and Monk is fully aware of this kind of historical
misalignment that takes place in cities like Liverpool and in districts like Pendle. These issues
provide an infrastructure for a working class psychogeography. Whereas stately homes have
been preserved, factories and housing schemes have been torn down. The maps change for
the sites of our history on a constant basis. Sites of work and leisure of proletarian past
continue to be decimated in the name of progress. The maps continue to shift, for some
towards an ideal of progress, for others, complete erasure.

There are several points during Interregnum in which the poet outlines exactly what we must
do at points in the map that have been eradicated, or at least hidden. For example in GAOL
SONG – PART 2:

\begin{quote}
 picking out what isn’t said 
 beneath the teething lines and 
 blocked out crevices\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

There is also the following line from STRIP SEARCH, which reads like it has come straight
out of a poststructuralist manual in terms of how many different meanings can be applied by
a reader to a certain text. It is, as Charles Bernstein puts it, Derrida’s “getting rid of the idea
that words refer to metaphysical absolutes, to universals.”\textsuperscript{33} While Monk’s work tends to
fluctuate between using the lyric “I” and the classic post-structuralist refutation of any of
thing, it appears that in this instance, she is making reference to semiotic praxis:

\begin{quote}
 Stripping off the signfields. Metaphors.\textsuperscript{34}
\end{quote}

It would certainly seem that Monk has established a blueprint in her work for how to proceed
with work that is inherently psychogeographical and working class. To return to the point of
using localised language, this is a powerful tool appropriated to emphasise the social class of
those who were sentenced to death in the Witch Trials. The poems from the
INTERREGNUM section, which consist of the replies of the accused, contain a deluge of
local dialect. The Katherine Hewitt poem is especially laden with scorn and bitter reproach
for her prosecutors, expressed as follows:

\begin{quote}
 E lived down’t lane in a big owse 
 wi iz porky fatted fingers drippin 
 rings and blotted copy
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{31} http://www.pendlewitches.co.uk/ [first accessed 31/10/2016]
\textsuperscript{33} Charles Bernstein: ‘The Objects Of Meaning.’ Taken From The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book, Edited by Bruce
\textsuperscript{34} Geraldine Monk, Interregnum, Creation Books, 1994.
after nervous copy – and for what?
A right royal smile?  

This is, as voiced by Monk, the right to reply that Katherine Hewitt herself would not have possessed. King James I, and the ruling classes during 1612, staunchly believed in witchcraft. The slightest deviation from a woman who kept her head down, mouth shut would have been regarded with the highest suspicion. The real Katherine Hewitt would have no doubt been far too terrified by the threat of torture to vocalise any of this backstory that Monk highlights. The work serves as almost supernatural, a phantasmal call to arms for the dead who were never allowed to truly defend themselves. Christine and David Kennedy recall Monk’s work as moving “between commentating and mediumistic voices and between simple, and almost naïve language and something akin to free improvisation which values words for the sounds that they contain and can be broken down into.” While I most definitely agree with both points of musicality and the poet as intermediary between the living reader and the dead subject, I feel that there is nothing elementary or innocent about the choices the poet makes when she breaks out of the normalised standard of written English into the realm of regional speech. I believe every single choice is meticulously made for maximum emotional effect. There is no naïveté about it. Indeed, it is certainly far more successful, to my ear, than the free improvisation that comes with jazz, which can often be sloppy and wilful.

In the final poem in the book, THE ETERNAL BEWILDERMENT OF JENNET DEVICE, Monk applies alliteration to the seemingly childlike lament of Jennet Device, whose own testimony during the 1612 Witch Trials effectively sentenced her own grandmother, mother, brother and sister to death. The following example accentuates this:

killyall thing-a bright X X X X
killyma
killykin a killy killy kin

Not only does Monk alliterate by stealth, reading X X X X as “kiss kiss kiss kiss” but also, through the intention of “killyall” and “Killykin” as words. The former being taken as a sinister compound of local speech (kill y’all) which is “kill you all” in turn. The latter serves as a reminder that Jennet sent her nearest and dearest to be executed via her performance at the trials.

The poet herself also sets aside her own definition of this particular poem. Before

35 Ibid.
36 Kennedy&Kennedy, p. 13.
introducing an extract on the West House Books website, she states:

My mother was fond of reciting Harold Munro’s ‘Overheard on a Saltmarsh’ in the slower, more melodramatic variety of Lancastrian. My father talked faster, never recited but was never lost for words. I was in-between. As children are. Both forms creep into my writing.\(^38\)

It is this medium quality that allows Monk to jump from the more poetic streams contained throughout the book, to the indigenous language of Lancashire in order to utilise the vernacular to heartbreaking effect. The same poem contains the following:

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OH MA
mi maa  mi mother
muTh er  ing
muth rin
muR ther ing ringa\(^39\)
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The Device child is invoked and conjured, not through chance, but through careful choices of capital lettering, space and placement. Harriet Tarlo also refers to this poem in particular as containing both poignancy and pathos.\(^40\) There is the centred U in the word mUthering, which asks the reader to insert themselves into this child’s shoes and watch the full horror and consequence unfold. It so much more effective than any long treatise on the relationship between mother and daughter. There is more. The word muR ther ing brings the word murder to mind, which is exactly what happened in reality. There is then “ringa,” which evokes the child’s song “ringa ringa roses.” This works on two levels. Firstly, it is referenced earlier in the book via the HALLOWE’EN BIKERS poem:

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studs
ring a
ring-a-rosey
clash a holy\(^41\)
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It seems the reader is being reminded that at the crux of this tragedy, certainly at the court case, are the words, and the whimsy, of a child. Not just literally, as in Jennet Device, but also in the sense of men behaving like children who want to please a schoolmaster, or in this case, a higher authority. Secondly, the recollection of a child’s song rouses the thought that Jennet’s performance in court was just that: as though the girl was given the audience and, as children are wont to do, acted accordingly, without realising the dire result her actions would

\(^38\) [http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp](http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp) [First accessed 31 October 2016]


have. All eyes were on her. It is certainly accurate to say, in light of the historical context provided earlier, that a young girl would not be accustomed to captivating an entire room, or indeed, be given the chance to. The opening lines of the poem correlate with this theory, as is it described by Monk’s voicing of Jennet:

I weird sang. High trilled and skirled.
I led a merry crab dance. Bright.42

This is the voice of a working class girl, on location, in her own movie set for a few precious minutes. Had she known it would lead to the obliteration of her entire family, one wonders whether she would have participated. Monk’s choice of presentation highlights the full extent of misfortune that has occurred here, on both a gender level, and a class level. By highlighting Jennet’s story, and that of the other women on trial at Pendle, the poet is not only recounting history, but also, putting her own impression and sense of place onto the map and rewriting the whole thing. Interregnum, in this sense, prefigures a working class woman’s psychogeography, presented through innovative poetry. It would be wonderful to think that it is a prelude, rather than a work in isolation, in terms of working class female participation in this field.

42 Ibid.
Maggie O’Sullivan

In recent years, psychogeography has been largely concerned with the city. Tina Richardson conducted the Leeds Psychogeography Group until 2012, Morag Rose, an anarcha–flâneuse, continues to organise the Loiterer’s Resistance Movement in Manchester city centre. Lauren Elkin’s book, Flâneuse, covers London, and on an international level, Paris, New York and Tokyo. But work that covers a potential psychogeography of rural areas remains few and far between. As discussed earlier, it is certainly true to say that the radical landscape poets turn their gaze extensively to more pastoral backdrops, but the issues that a working class psychogeography would be especially concerned with, such as disparity of presence, and how our history informs the here and now, are somewhat absent. However, Maggie O’Sullivan is one poet who has broached these themes consistently. It would be impossible to talk about experimental poetry within the framework of working class women’s psychogeography without referring to O’Sullivan’s work. She has written extensively about both the unseen and the Other as both female and working class throughout the past few decades, and in this chapter I aim to highlight how.

The poet has said of her own upbringing:

My background undoubtedly has shaped….my work. My father and mother had little schooling, and my father worked as a labourer in and out of work all his life. We were brought up on the edge, locked out, without any voice.

(O’Sullivan 2004:159)44

There can be no doubt here that O’Sullivan is asserting herself as working class, and also the tremendous influence that this has had on her poetics. Furthermore, she is also testifying to the fact that the working class are, in terms of having their voices heard in a genuine and meaningful way, excluded.45 Indeed, O’Sullivan’s views on her own praxis could well be used as a beginner’s guide to working class women’s psychogeography. In an interview with Redell Olsen, she determines that: “deconstructing/re-constituting-as-(being) heard is embodied in my poetics.”46 The crucial point here is being heard, the notion that through the

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43 Rose uses this phrase as opposed to flâneur because, in her own words: “a working class queer disabled woman does not have the affordances of (Walter) Benjamin’s privileged subject.” Morag Rose, “Confessions of an Anarcho-Flâneuse” taken from Tina Richardson: Walking Inside Out: Contemporary British Psychogeography [London, Rowman&Littlefield, 2015.] p.149.


45 Of course, there are certain media factions that claim to represent the working class, but only when it can be twisted into a right wing agenda. For example, The Sun newspaper employ these tactics on a regular basis to support the current Conservative Prime Minister, Theresa May, and to attack the Labour Party leader, Jeremy Corbyn, as a “Leftie dinosaur appealing solely to (the) middle class.” [https://www.google.co.uk/webhp?sourceid=chrome-instant&ion=1&espv=2&ie=UTF-8&q=The+Sun+newspaper+working+class [first accessed 10 April 2017]]

medium of walking and creating our own impressions, working class women poets can and will be able to articulate both their social concerns, interpretation on environment and the importance of history as a backdrop. All of these elements are captured perfectly in O’Sullivan’s choice of reconstitution as a fundamental “ingredient” of her poetics. I use the word ingredient consciously, as the idea of a cooking pot (or cauldron even, if we have Monk’s Pendle witches from Interregnum in mind) to form a recipe for working class women’s psychogeography is consistent. The items are various and multifarious: history, geography, sociology, and so much more, especially where O’Sullivan’s work is concerned.

Through the sequence, that bread should be, O’Sullivan introduces a musicality, and how song can serve as a medium for storytelling about the history of place, in this case, the story of the Great Famine in Ireland 1845-1852. It begins with a musical score, and then the Gaelic words: AN SCIOBAIRIN (Skibereen, where O’Sullivan’s ancestors were from) SCIOBADH (snatching) and UISCE BREAN (dirty water.) This indicates that in spite of the adjacent melody, the story contained within the poem will be tragic. As Mandy Bloomfield rightly points out, for the illiterate poor, oral and folk forms such as song would be a way of transcribing history to the next generation. Indeed this tradition continued to an extent as late as the 1980s. I attended a Catholic primary school in a predominantly working class area, with an Irish Catholic teacher and many pupils who were descendants of Irish Catholics who would have shared O’Sullivan’s history. The teacher would frequently sing songs such as Molly Malone, a fishmonger who died of a fever in 17th century Dublin. Or The Ballad of Seth Davy, a North Liverpool street performer at the start of the 20th century. This method of narrative is therefore highly resonant for myself and others of my generation in Liverpool. In this sequence, O’Sullivan also uses the line:

    S
    E
    V
    E
    R
    E
    D
    laid bare the narrative i SINGING

Not only does O’Sullivan draw attention to the importance of song as chronicle, but also by placing the word “SEVERED” on a downward slant, invites the reader to see the word as a descending musical scale. Of course, it also serves as steps, or hills, or a downward compass point, all of which illustrate geography as a topic in a visual way. It could even be said that the language appears to dance on the page, as opposed to being presented statically throughout the poem. The repetition of words and letters would support this point, as though

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47 Maggie O’Sullivan: “that bread should be” taken from WATERFALLS, [London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.21
48 Bloomfield, p.7
50 Maggie O’Sullivan: “that bread should be” taken from WATERFALLS, [London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.21
they had been choreographed as a pattern that is every bit as physical as it is literary. The following abstract is a fitting example of this:

**IMPEARLS TO FEATHER**

feathering & stars

stagg –e-r-r-i-n-g
at rest     CONVULSE…
the bloodless
failing

lit lit lit

There is so much materiality to this work, staggering as not just a word but an action in its enunciation. There is also the image of convulsing, bloodless and failing contrasted sharply with the glamour of feathering & stars in the lines above. This idea of the poem as a functional being as opposed to simple, pretty words on a page is completely analogous to the idea of poet as worker, and poet as working class woman in return. It is a call to movement, and how to enact ideas as a rolling theme rather than reciting immovable facts.

O’Sullivan’s work as a poet is often that of an archaeologist, digging up the remnants of a past that is untold, yet to be told, discarded, and forgotten. The reader has to contemplate the sombre truth of a catastrophe that still holds back so many stories, as O’Sullivan demonstrates here:

whole families without a trace my ______________

it occurs: ______________

the unstory

- that bread should be -

The lines not only point to an empty space, but a cavernous echo, and a blank topography. It is, as the poet phrases herself, the unstory. It forms the basis of a working class woman’s psychogeographical encounters with her own land. It is not her story that the history books have highlighted since the 19th century. The extent to which Irish events have been covered with bias and subjectivity in the media has only been elucidated relatively recently. For example, between 1988 – 1994, the voices of Irish Republicans Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness were banned from broadcast, with news programmes having to use voiceover

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52 Maggie O’Sullivan: “that bread should be” taken from *WATERFALLS* [London, Reality Street, 2012.] p.21
actors in their place. Another instance would be the news coverage of the Bloody Sunday massacre, in which 14 innocent civilians were murdered by the British Army at a civil rights march in Derry in 1972. The British media reported that the victims were armed, yet this was proved untrue by the Saville Inquiry in 2010. Yet O’Sullivan has always been concerned with the violence of misrepresentation, as Peter Manson rightfully highlights through his essay “O’Sullivan’s A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts.” Manson introduces “the interruption of text by image and image” (in this case, the words the Moon’s black Vanilla scent) as being appropriate to the themes of invasion and violation.

Psychogeography often operates in the same way as a palimpsest, with motifs, signs and symbols being written over, out of sight and juxtaposed, with a whole new host of different indicators in terms of what the given area actually means. In the case of the Irish Republic, and the subsequent formation of Northern Ireland’s six counties, we can witness how the creation of new geographies can actually bear testimony to acts of destruction and social cleansing. O’Sullivan’s experimental praxis of undercutting, overlapping and conscious erasure lends itself entirely to these matters throughout her various works.

Mandy Bloomfield states that the word excavation has special relevance when we consider how O’Sullivan’s work investigates unofficial aspects of history and culture. This word also has meaning in terms of bringing up the dead, either for forensic pathology or historical interest. This resonates deeply with my own work, as an ample amount of my creative writing involves bringing out the dead, and presenting their experiences as working class women within a local, psychogeographical framework. I believe it chimes also with Brian McHale’s definition of postmodern archaeological poetry, that is, using its own status as an artefact as opposed to a representation of an artefact. Poetry, and indeed psychogeography, are different from history in that they both contemplate and reflect the personal, the writer’s own impression, rather than just eidetic facts. O’Sullivan excels at this subjective and yet evocative delivery of image, for example here in THE WALKS:

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55 Peter Manson: ‘A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts’. Taken from The Salt Companion to Maggie O’Sullivan. [Cambridge, Salt Publishing, 2011.] p.76

56 As late as 1993, the Northern Ireland Civil Service comprised of 63.2% Protestant employees, 36.8% Roman Catholic. In his book ‘Ulster’s White Negroes,’ Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh provides a useful Appendix with quotes from Unionist leaders between 1922 – 1969 that demonstrate exactly how stacked the odds were against Roman Catholics searching for housing and employment. In terms of the book’s title, Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey states in the introduction: “the reader might well conclude that asking nationalist working class people to recognise ‘unionism’ having tradition with equal validity with their own is like asking the Afro-Caribbean, Asian, Indian or Chinese population of the ‘United Kingdom’ to accord the same dignity to racism.”

57 Bloomfield, pg 1.

58 Ibid
To record surface, single grain towards
Sepulchral. Jaff, Jonquils
Ledge. Bearing of head,
head, cleavage/
be
reavement. 59

Feuilles is a word that most readers would usually associate with cake, as in the French mille-feuille. The word hoja, Spanish for leaf, is also a word attached to patisserie, as in Latin America Milhojas is taken to refer to the same variety of puff pastry used for dessert. Yet O’Sullivan is talking about her surroundings, a walk. The word Blatt is old Germanic for leaf, and the use of Jonquils, a flowering plant, also indicates that she is outside. These types of leaves are also common in food crops, such as corn. This subject matter is clearly important to the poet in the historical context of the Irish famine, as discussed previously. But the depiction of these exquisite layers creates an altogether exceptional invocation of what would be an almost simplistic scene in less capable hands.

Returning to the presence of a working class aesthetic in O’Sullivan’s work, she has often described the process of creating publications as labour intensive. During an interview with Redell Olsen, she outlines the making of A Natural History in 3 Incomplete Parts as such:

We constructed the entire book going from xeroxing my original pages, collating, binding, glueing, trimming the A5 pages etc. and it took us a 5-day working week, Monday – Friday – to do this – working intensively from 10 to 5 every day. 60

O’Sullivan compares her artistic output to the value of a working week, and rightfully so. As a working class woman I understand exactly the justification required to convince family, friends and peers that creating poetry and the medium of distribution is very much “real” work. Implications about needing a proper job are both misguided and unfair. The only element sadly absent is any sort of salary. As a working class woman, O’Sullivan would know this aspect of our culture only too well. Not least in comparison to the definition of work that her parents would have known, as mentioned earlier. For her to highlight this point in an interview demonstrates the level at which this will have been part of her class consciousness.

The poet speaks about her work as though it were made of materials, which to an extent it really is, as O’Sullivan is very much an artist working with paints and other textures. However, she considers that which cannot be quantified by physical existence as an essential part of her creative output. She is interested in that which has not been uttered – voices that are, as she puts it herself, “other – than or invisible….or without privilege.” 61

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60 Olsen, p.211.
without privilege is of paramount concern to anyone considering class. But also, O’Sullivan’s ethic here extends to gender, as working class women will have been the unseen twice over on any mainstream map of history, and these concerns continue to the present day. Her praxis is not only inherently political, but personal. She defines her process to Redell Olsen as follows:

body intensive….bending, sticking, cutting, shaping marks, shaping sounds into the recorder, pain (t)ing and building – all inscriptions of my body’s breathing.62

Here O’Sullivan not only portrays herself a manual labourer, but also, a dancer, a decorator, and a musician even. It is heartening as a working class woman poet to read her twin writing poetry with all these elements of physical work so seamlessly. It is something we can relate both our lives and our passions to without the nagging voice of doubt, or the voice of class guilt that tells us we should be on a shop floor instead of trying to create art. This confirmation of being without apology, especially within the context of innovative poetry, is intrinsically important to O’Sullivan, as she states in an interview with Scott Thurston:

I think anybody who’s working in Britain who isn’t working within the referential, transparent language axis, is ostracised, invisible, shut out, unheard.63

This is a huge indictment of not just mainstream media, but also, the dominant poetry culture, the view that poetry should rhyme, be in couplets, verses or adhere to some other rigid formula. It not only functions on an intersectional level, but also, encompasses all those who seek to create experimental art of some variety. By using the word “axis,” O’Sullivan once more evokes the image of a map, as though there is a clear guide, a handbook to direct all budding writers that there is a certain way of doing poetry. And she is right, so many of these tomes exist, claiming to guide people on how to get published, what forms are deemed acceptable to use, and what direction in which to steer a poem, or not. For example, Happenstance Press feature a “do’s and don’ts” section for budding poets on their website, stating that budding poets should:

Avoid text language. Don’t use lower case i unless you can find a very good reason for doing so (except in the middle of words!)64

Of course, this would be acceptable if this piece was labelled as the personal preference of Happenstance Press, but it employs a tone of universality, using the “publisher/s” as the second person as opposed to first. This raises questions of accessibility for anyone who writes in a non linear way. This could act to exclude any demograph, such as working class women, who may not have been party to traditional poetry as part of their education, and who seek to express themselves in an alternative fashion. Anyone who wishes to create genuinely

62 Olsen, p.207.
innovative work can safely dismiss these instructions as restrictive nonsense. Clearly, conceptual poetry and the Flarf\(^{65}\) phase passed Happenstance by.

To end on the influence on and shared value system between O’Sullivan’s work and my own as working class women writing on psychogeography, i quote the following:

but am here
BLOOD LINES
on soil
the feet
hobbling
to the letter\(^{66}\)

The poet is outside. She is contemplating not just her surroundings, but also the feeling of her feet on soil, not just an empty space, but one imbued with her ancestor’s past and their untold stories. This is precisely one of the aims of the creative sequence that I have produced for this thesis. Not that I would ever lay claim to O’Sullivan’s immense talent in this field. Her ability to combine ley lines, working class pictorial and gender issues through her innovative work is only, to my mind, matched by Monk. To emphasise this, i offer the following extract:

weeping is
woman as
haven
(all broken line)\(^{67}\)

Three powerful points are made here. The first is the conjuration of the weeping woman. This works on two levels, not only as a flag to O’Sullivan’s background as an artist (with The Weeping Woman being a Picasso painting) but also to Catholicism (as the predominant religion of O’Sullivan’s Irish heritage) as the weeping women of Jerusalem is the Eighth Station of the Cross.\(^{68}\) The second is woman as haven, the concept of woman as a safe place on a land delineation. If we consider society as patriarchy, then this is of clear relevance to women’s psychogeography in its truly feminist approach. The last point is in the parenthesis, (all broken line) as this is exactly how women’s history would appear if it was represented via mapping. It is disjointed, jumbled and discontinuous. Only certain aspects are available through photographs, census, and most prevalent of all, word of mouth. In this short sample, O’Sullivan has covered three vital points towards her own working class women’s psychogeography, and it is exactly these sort of issues that I believe proponents of this field within innovative poetry should be aiming to debate further.

\(^{65}\) [http://artvoice.com/issues/v7n12/introducing_flarf.html](http://artvoice.com/issues/v7n12/introducing_flarf.html) [first accessed 1 March 2017]


\(^{67}\) Maggie O’Sullivan: *THE DISPUTES* taken from *DIVISIONS OF LABOUR* [ Newcastle Upon Tyne, Galloping Dog Press, 1986.] p.7

\(^{68}\) [http://catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-266.html](http://catholicism.org/ad-rem-no-266.html) [first accessed March 17 2017]
Conclusion

The flag has been raised and the standard has been set. Through the work of O’Sullivan and Monk, there is a solid case for working class women’s psychogeography having a legitimate and tangible place in innovative poetry. But how can this work be continued? Working class women continue to face many obstacles in terms of representation in this particular creative orb. University fees are at an all time high. This restricts access to a potential flow of talent from this demographic. As mentioned in my introductory chapter, the reality of experimental poetry is that it is increasingly rooted in higher education. If poetry has enough of an image problem in terms of being difficult, then innovative work even more so.

From my own personal experience as a working class woman, the most common question from older generations is “do you get paid for that?” When the answer is no, confusion reigns as to why I would want to do something that does not provide money to pay the bills or put food on the table. Poetry is not what we are meant to do with our spare time. It is 2017, and half the time when asked where I am going by an inquisitive taxi driver, or what I am doing with the rest of my day by another mother on the school yard, I know better than to answer “to a poetry reading!” or “home, to write!” and expect them to respond favourably. The standard answers are “to meet friends” (which incidentally, is often true, I just decline to mention that my friends are other poets) or “just getting the house sorted.” In my culture, working class Liverpool, nobody wants to be perceived as weird, or identified as slightly odd. Especially among the other mothers on the school playground.

Psychogeography as a discipline has been entirely harmonious with my own class status. It is free to walk the streets of my own city. The most expensive it has proved so far is the coast of a bus fare. I can fit it seamlessly around school hours, and even cement it into the school run. However, as mentioned in my introduction, psychogeography’s public face is in danger of isolating any would be participants with its homogeneity. It often ignores any possibility that women are participating in urban walking, which is simply untrue. It cannot be denied that the male only display is offputting to anyone who is Other. There are different methods of counteracting this approach. In her book, Flâneuse, Lauren Elkin offers a definition of the flâneuse as follows:

not merely a male flâneur, but a figure to be reckoned with, and inspired by, all on her own.  

It is heartening to read psychogeography from a young woman’s perspective, and Elkin’s passion for the subject and praxis itself could offer much encouragement to female would-be urban walkers. Elkin also presents the fact that Will Self refers to psychogeographers as a fraternity of middle aged men. This automatically excludes anyone who is not. Even if these men are working class, it still dismisses the participation of anyone who is non-male. If this is how psychogeography is characterised, then it is unsurprising that women may think twice before engaging with it.

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70 Elkin, p.22
However, Elkin’s work is not without its own problems in terms of having a broader scope. The book covers Paris, New York, Tokyo, Venice and London. To have lived in, and indeed travelled at leisure in, all of these cities, indicates a certain class status and disposable income. Elkin refers to her architect father at several intervals, and working class women are frankly unlikely to have shared this experience either, not to mention have been educated at the Sorbonne and Barnard College, a private and highly selective college in New York.\footnote{https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barnard_College [first accessed May 12,2017.]} Perhaps Morag Rose, referenced earlier in the Maggie O’Sullivan chapter, has a more inclusive approach to offer nascent practitioners. Rose outlines the importance of heterogeneous participants as follows:

> The potential for diverse groups of people to engage in experimental walking should be developed as it affords the opportunity to rupture the banal and disrupt the monotony of capitalism, (re) connecting with space, (re) mapping according to personal affect and (re)creating with multitudinous new stories.\footnote{Morag Rose, “Confessions of an Anarcho-Flâneuse” taken from Tina Richardson: Walking Inside Out:Contemporary British Psychogeography [London, Rowman&Littlefield, 2015.] p.161.}

I would argue that these tenets could also be applied not just to experimental walking, but also to experimental poetry. If the entire genre is composed of people who walk, talk and look the same, then the amplitude and generative capacity for the work will be inevitably reduced. There is indeed, no worse criticism for a poet than “it all sounds the same.” If psychogeography is to release its full potential as an active, flourishing discipline, then inclusion is vital. This is entirely relevant to all stretches of art, literature and creativity.

Social geographer Doreen Massey defined space as containing three elements: firstly, that it is the product of interrelations, secondly, as the sphere in which distinct trajectories co-exist, and thirdly, always under construction.\footnote{Doreen Massey, For Space [London, SAGE, 2005] p.9.} These points are an excellent guide to the conflicts and tensions that can arise in any writing that claims to be psychogeographical, poetry included. The first would suggest that for space truly to be described as such, then co-habitation must take place. Again, if we take this within the context of poetry, then it could be argued that for a true representation of a dérive, there must at be at least two visible narratives. This chimes well with Rose’s praxis as outlined above. It is useless to provide an account of an environment that does not portray this element of difference. This also leads onto the second point, that not just the presence of separate stories, but also, their inclusion in any given account. The final point, that space is always being developed, points to the notion of fluidity. This proposal is utterly congruent with innovative poetry and its penchant for that which is permanently in flux, as mentioned earlier via Charles Bernstein. Massey’s rationale of what space is could be used as a blueprint for how psychogeography in poetry should be approached. Both Monk and O’Sullivan’s work explore all three of these concepts to the full,
and I feel that the work I have produced for the accompanying creative sequence strives to do this also.

A major influence on my approach is Audre Lorde. She was a pioneer on the subject of intersectionality, that is, the concept that women and different minorities have separate intersections in relation to power structures. For example, as the critical race theorist Kimberle Crenshaw outlines, a black woman is not only susceptible to sexism, but racism also.  

To apply intersectionality to working class women, one could consider how we are vulnerable not only to sexism, but to class prejudice as well. I cannot count the amount of times I have felt like the only working class person in what has been has deemed as a safe space for every other intersection. We face thoughtlessness and microaggressions too, from the fetishisation of our accents, to mockery of our dialect, to puritanical vetting of how much we swear, to the close and careful monitoring of exactly how much we drink at the poetry reading and remembering to tell us we were so drunk! the next day. Nobody told us that it was a game and there were certain social rules. Or that when people are laughing, it is not always with you, but rather at you and how loud or scary you are, just for articulating your passions without inserting conversational footnotes.

Writings such as Lorde’s Sister Outsider appear to be more progressive than a large chunk of single issue feminists who believe themselves to be radical now. One of the major schisms in 21st century feminism is how to include the trans community within feminist dialogue. It is the view of some (who are labelled as “Rad-Fems”) that they should not be included at all, with feminist journalists such as Julie Burchill and Julie Bindel all expressing vociferous opposition to their involvement. This has caused untold amounts of pain and fracture within the women’s rights movement, on both sides. Yet Lorde was immensely critical of any such dismemberment, stating “It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences.”

Indeed, this approach is entirely adopted by the New York based Audre Lorde Project, who define themselves as a community organising centre for “Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two-Spirit, Trans and Gender Non Conforming (LGBTSTGNC) People of Colour Communities.”

Like the organisation itself, I believe recognising how each intersection has a unique point of entry into a shared dialogue is entirely in keeping with the teachings of Lorde. To my own purpose, this is the position of the female working class, and how we can contribute our own understandings, theories and critique of society, the economy and politics. Indeed, one of the criticisms of the Women’s Equality Party is that it has so far failed to reach out to both women of colour and the working class. Sandi Toksvig has even said of herself and other founding members that they are “probably the worst people to start a political party….we’re too white, too middle class. You could cut your tongue on my consonants.”

While Toksvig is clearly being humorous, there is an unfortunate resonance to her words. Whereas Lorde, on the other hand, as a writer

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7[https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality][first accessed 24 April 2017]
75 Audre Lorde, Our Dead Behind Us [London, Sheba, 1987.]
and teacher, was able to address the various aspects of her multifaceted existence, not just being a woman, but also being black, being lesbian, and being working class. Her thoughts on the latter continue to prove revelatory to those who are trying to carve an existence for themselves within an artistic medium that appears to be dominated by the middle class. In her essay, Age, Race, Class and Sex, Lorde says of poetry that of all the art forms:

poetry is the most economical. It is the one which is the most secret, which requires the least physical labour, the least material, and the one which can be done between shifts in the hospital pantry, on the subway and on scraps on surplus paper.\(^{78}\)

The implication here is that poetry can be done not only on scraps of extra paper, but also, scraps of extra time that can be snatched from a day of housework, paid labour, and childcare.

Through the medium of experimental poetry, the female writer can go beyond the rigidity of social and literary convention. We are able to produce, as Christine and David Kennedy put it, different or new types of bodies. We can utilise new voices, the heard, the unheard, the non-heard. The poet can distance themselves from “the roles of the anguished “I” and the victimised “we.”\(^{79}\) This variety of poetry appears to have enjoyed a renaissance through the gurlesque\(^{80}\) movement over the past decade. It sells. Readers are intrinsically curious about the intimate lives of others it seems. The bestsellers list of any major bookstore will contain at least one form of memoir or autobiography. People get kicks and thrills from the legitimised peering at another’s diary entry, and the more lascivious the better. Sex sells, there is nothing new in this. In her essay, On Breaking Up With The Gurlesque (not that we were ever going steady) the poet Elizabeth Treadwell talks of her displeasure about a flyer for a Gurlesque event, organised by Arielle Greenberg. The poster is described as showing a thin white woman ‘covered in whipped cream, eyes dull in commercialized seduction.\(^{81}\) Treadwell then goes further on to say:

we all must live every day in this world, survive and create anew. Let’s not put this mind fuckery onto undergrads, male or female. I bet this flyer seems corny and mom-ish to them anyway; let them DIY.\(^{82}\)

Treadwell is adamant that this genre of writing that places the burlesque, the camp and the idea of selling sex as somehow ironic has little in common with the values of a truly radical


\(^{80}\) Defined by Lara Glenum, an American gurlesque poet, as female artists who “ taking a page from the burlesque, perform their femininity in a campy or overtly mocking way.” It includes poets such as Chelsey Minnis, Arielle Greenberg and Ariana Reines. [http://jacketmagazine.com/40/glenum-gurlesque.shtml](http://jacketmagazine.com/40/glenum-gurlesque.shtml)[first accessed 22 November, 2017]

\(^{81}\) Elizabeth Treadwell: On Breaking Up With The Gurlesque (not that we were ever going steady.) [https://www.tumblr.com/search/gorgon%20poetics](https://www.tumblr.com/search/gorgon%20poetics)[First accessed November 22, 2017]

\(^{82}\) Ibid.
poetry. Therefore, in this same vein, to opt for the innovative, something that reaches out further, or to put it another way, goes off course, beyond the primal, yet simultaneously to the very root of something more, is to consciously reject any concept of capital behind writing. We are made of more than this. We live in the most politically precarious times imaginable. Women’s lives, history and heritage are being destroyed by the continuous pursuit of aggressive capitalism, protectionism and Government policy that is anti-working class and anti-immigrant, anti-refugee, anti-disabled and implicitly anti-feminist. We need more than pussy poems that cater for the heterosexual male gaze to counteract this.

It is perhaps notable that Monk and O’Sullivan rarely touch upon sexuality in their work (with the exception of considering how it is used against the women in Monk’s Interregnum.) Put simply, both poets have so much more to say than the sum of their parts, so to speak. They write as women, unapologetically, but also, as women who do not belong to the elite. Both poets draw upon the surroundings that they have grown up in, and also, grown into, wandered through, and imagined. While other female poets may choose to make sex and sexuality the very epicentre of their work, for Monk and O’Sullivan, it is clearly secondary to their socio political concerns as far as their poetry is concerned. It is with this kind of inspiration in mind that i pursue my own working class psychogeographical poetics.

The relation of stories, anecdotes, history and artefacts also invites me to question my own work, both ethically and in terms of its accuracy: how can i be sure that my ancestors are exactly as i am portraying them in my poems? My answer would be that people are (and indeed, language is) multi faceted and complex, and i have endeavoured to combine the stories of the dead with the impressions of the living in a fair and sensitive fashion, while simultaneously inviting various interpretations through the medium of what I hope is innovative and experimental writing praxis. A large figure in my sequence is my great grandmother Lilian. While accounts of her from primary sources are harsh, it is important to recognise her hardship, both socio economically and as a woman who lost a child to a disease in the wrong place, at the wrong time, in 1920s slum housing, in Liverpool. Tracing her steps through the city via several dérives and extensive research of the areas in question have provided both connection and empathy on a personal level. It has also provided pause for thought in light of how women are historically portrayed, often to the detriment of truth if they were anything other than subservient and compliant.

To return to psychogeography, my creative sequence for this study has included not so much old ground, but that which is barely recognisable as such. The former slum housing sites that my grandparents grew up in are now sites for private student apartments. I cannot enter the land on which my ancestors played as children without a pass code. Other sites, such as Vauxhall. Old Ford Cemetery in Litherland and Yew Tree Cemetery in West Derby, are on sites that i have never visited before. These poems, and also those that are located outside Liverpool, in the interval section, followed the exact template of psychogeographical adventure that Tina Richardson helpfully outlines in Walking Inside Out:
Get off when you feel you are far enough away from home that the area is unfamiliar. Begin your walk here.  

Richardson also illustrates that psychogeography does not have to be clinical, as it is fundamentally based upon the subjectivity of the walker. This chimes perfectly with poetry, which is nothing if not absolutely subjective. One person’s shipwreck is another person’s treasure chest. For some it is both. I have endeavoured to present the city of Liverpool as such.

I would like to end this thesis on Audre Lorde’s iconic quote:

For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.

There is an implicit knowledge that once working class women have stepped into academia, they have effectively stepped into the master’s house. Now more than ever, universities are not designed with the needs of those who are financially challenged as priority. Indeed, this entire thesis would have been impossible without complete scholarship funding, which I was extremely lucky to receive. But how many more working class women are denied a voice in innovative poetry, not because of their lack of talent, but rather, their lack of money to integrate themselves within academia, which is where the bulk of experimental poetry resources and knowledge reside? Psychogeography can be seized by working class women as a template to tell our stories, and to share our deepest feelings about our surroundings. But to join a community that is sometimes literally behind brick walls and sequestered on campuses is far more difficult. The world of experimental poetry needs to look within itself to find a way to become more inclusive towards a group that, while entirely prominent in everyday life, is somewhat absent from its events and publications. If not, we may miss out on the next generation of Monks and O’Sullivans, which would without doubt be a sincere loss to us all. We are not just cleaners, cooks, dinner ladies, classroom assistants. We are poets too, with so much to bring and much more to say.

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83 Richardson, p.1
84 Ibid, p.5.
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floss

sarah crewe

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preface (portmanteau)

idiomatic tongue twister:  *ken dodd’s dad’s dog’s dead*

knotty ash exists mythical

millennium roundabouts suede floorlength

to dry clean would be erasure &

contrary to purpose opposite to praxis rewind:

death is fresh but sites are dormant

covered concealed foundation brushed

ivory honey vanilla lily white

maps & faces blended contoured new shade

skintone / roads ricochet bounce back

psychogeographical shotput discus throw

hangman cover girl hospital mortuary

discuss artifice flick: a woman-thing

fling a dice microphone

*flick’s dad’s dad’s dog’s dead*

her name was floss

canine inspector

brother replacer: this is yr life

one whole page: numbered dog days

numb or non cognizant not once

did he call it squalor not once

slum living destitution cricket bones
adventure beloved sister
the model of veronica size three
size six shadow trace job search
cotton candy photo booths yr best years
bus routes signal commonality visiting angels how did we get here
we came through marriage eviction social cleansing
rent stamps a flick book in which
the stick man wears a skirt is spherical
absorbs stories horror gender based
missing girls & broken fathers
distant mothers gutted sons &
so on & sewn on grief on sleeves on paper

*flick’s dad’s dad’s dead*
manifest wilderness eyes closed
stinging poetry a ditch a soapy bowl
hands rinsed bleached scoured
mouth abrasive brass like ship’s bell
melancholy call out the scrabble
for remnants miscellany anything related
from the sea floor trinkets letters
rusticles blue auburn spikes composition
scratch silver dust scratch skin
scratch floss both flick and loss in flight
in fight mode  barking  hear me at dawn

in birdsong  through river fog  traffic horns

suspect ice cream vans  localisms

megaphone dropkicks  footstamps  the word  *shan’t*

the word shall  shall we dance

shall we write  shall we flick out a pen

shall we talk about loss  the personal

the social  shall we
lichen

it begins here

gale force – if creeping ivy had hands

waves a river with an ankle fetish

walking mermaids

the shadow of belfast

stena line

white star line

inclement in shawls

swaddled by fate &

bad weather birth line

heart line

marriage line

crossed wires rather

twisted gnarled

romanticised how many babies can a river lose

how many times can slavery =

a wide eyed shiver

a grimace

how many hearses overturned urns

half flash fiction

half forgotten

growth symbiotic

poverty/tragedy contamination from

outside disturbances
river births

second wives
the bitter cold
the tired trope pathetic fallacy
foaming at the mouth
/grief
/seizure
/trauma

it is dark

deadly affirmative
a permanent wreath
a crown
call me queen
call me ms crewe

a multipurpose veil a suffragette scarf
a headdress
a head chock full
chocker #itsliverpool

bare trees and a brazen flag
arms folded

bottom lip
all bleeding
all bitten

if a river had hands
if a river could plead

remember me
appropriately
valentine

freshly dead & nearly
smokestack the site of jude
lost causes flat caps
the desecration of gregson’s well
past the necropolis descend slowly
steeply flatfoot sharply horseshoe
a bridal gift smoking apparition
did you ever wear your hair up
release the clip shake the debris
the building as a wedding cake
poppies an annual bouquet
eleven eleven love leave
sugar spun trees six blue tits
six boys terence /lemuel/francis
billy/alec/bobby: dodge diphtheria epidemic
dead brothers not so lucky
must not trivialise sirens
neon reminders any blood clots in the family?
no clots just fleeting absence
rat in the kitchen

he wonders now
rocking his chair
should he have built
a boat

Lorine Niedecker

what i am doing here is irrelevant. what they are doing here, when the ghosts of the ancestors
are prowling/dancing/squeezing their laundry dry is really the question. hold a mirror up. spit
clean. these prefab factories will dissolve. haircare is not eternal, ask norah. graffiti spells
prophet, speaks mission. LC in yellow paint. the phantom S is deeply moved. the street has
collapsed, vanished. dissolved, like sherbet in a copper urn, like the sand on the cast iron
shore. he should have built a boat. mutiny on the Dominion Monarch. cannot steer through
turnstiles, pass through barcodes. to the car park attendant: i have no car but this is my land.
to the barmaid: this used to be slum housing……my grandfather……her eyes glaze. to the gull
at my feet: i see you.

always do
emporium

an explosion of colour chintz excess punctuation

old girls feign horror: the generosity of other

a centrepiece: blackpool

the café is a glasshouse stone resistant

millennium dissidents: it is 1989

all about textures girlhood

yr grandmother’s habitual shoplifting pick n’ mix ethics

dolls named joyce women called maisie

chequered saturday pink silver curls

diamond sofas london road: a scouse pastiche of capital

pretend play toy money plastic that sparkles

the ancestral hall of mirrors shorter: white rose march

material matriarchal under arches

arms linked the fragments of a social life

the remains of a fabric discontinued

the insistence: she looks like her father

doesn’t she
mülleimer

go throw your plan in the purple bin – Jürgen Klopp, post match interview, April 14th 2016.

the politics of trash
the poetics of waste
how to identify social housing: the doors

postbox red a safer shade of black
a temporary white bottle green

bottle soundscapes

not the sound of stars twinkling
the crash of last night’s bettering plans
utilise the double t sound

far from mancunian
far from meadows

forests the idyllic

jurgen: observe how the stadium
juts out from the landscape

look: victorian
terraces
defy the shape

how the new build
pierces the skyline

a dorsal fin collapsing
as it thrashes over parkland

over council prophecy: a better anfield is coming

did a thesis on walking

how to interpret the scaffold as trees
the escalating bricks  bucolic
so much yellow  recycled thoughts
  see the DANGER signs  potential
  see the hard hats  progress
street names
  the word bless
  as a sick joke signifier
the murdered sex worker
  has no punchline
  &it is plural
&all items of value
  removed from property
  &all drifts lead
to the scent
  of grief tourism
to the sound
of future plans
  lashed into
the purple bin
concentric

the circular within the circular

spectacular a circus of tightrope living

of somersaults september rainbows

as though we deserved them pre storm

fluctuation pink violet believe this

number six breathes lizards sand dogs

the ghost of gentrified living edwardian

discontinued no bourgeois honeytrap

all spheres clammed shut jackknife

bouquet of broken razors

the ingenuity of magpies glittering

a flutter of brackets

a red gold rioja safehouse forcefield

contains felis rattus lepidoptera

taxonomy: watership down for ward

66

all creatures come out night

all white all unwashed all feral

neon blue dusk patrol

housing (dis) association

it all becomes relative normalised

inchoate flux falling
middle fifth

awake: industrial drill

over breakfast the cobbles appeared the cats are fixated on straitlaced ghosts
four legged mediums crystal ball skulls in an 1890s parlour room

the spectre of football gentry a bearded dragon on a windowpane stationary
the irony of a real life reptile is observed
blame the americans joe anderson the 1980s

switch

soubriquet

switch

circumference

switch

riverside

matching the seaweed in the entry midnight mermaids with scales of shellac
unseen by daylight reflect on glass fortress such ugly self defence
we will not stoop to barbed wire this is home not alcatraz

pitch imperfect yet a wolf fifth would be too dramatic
side streets
fissures that could still bloom
boats under construction

the right houses the wrong dolls

fluidity will save us from cardboard box living from homogenous rot
from peach and beige wrapped up as modernity

primary colours act as protest

jagged plum curtains sing no surrender
gloria

glorious. too good for tenement living. platinum, ash, streaked, memory slip. little yellow teapot, lift up the lid, multiple voices, hear them steep, whistling, the hard hum of of a class ‘a’ substance in festive voile form. gloria did not teach young children how to read newspapers. gloria did not say precocious. gloria’s son said, that kid is a walking dictionary. gloria’s daughter said her dad was a tramp, poor georgie. a brown leather jacket, a tonsure as a hairstyle. the first going cheap the second as contrition gloria had a kitchen radio. ah gloria, we all did. pop chart countdown tuppence jumper felt tip hair, undeterred voice, gloria listened. gloria marvelled at song on a stone cold landing. gloria’s mum lived in a champagne pink flat. auburn hair, housecoat eternal. first name mrs. please tell gloria about the dislike of lemonade. please tell gloria, motorway access does not indicate social mobility. please tell gloria, the new town is not dynasty. please tell gloria, that the shoulder pads will not cushion against lack of cohesion please tell gloria no amount of nail polish will release the gate please tell gloria the block is locked indefinitely
dark like grandma

placing the lil into lilith the medea a rejection worse than death
the son who died and lived and died proper
the hearse is now a food bank adjoining streets titanic calamity
the air is pinched imagined yr features starched
head bowed thought train: arborescent resigned&vertical
these streets are lakes static foreboding without welcome
he said: she would see you were ours
he said: she would let you in ambivalence suspicion of scarlet lily beetles
toxic to cats cold shoulder shawls not corsets no belle epoch
the beautiful dresses excluded no gibson girl all mary ellen s shape in absentia
fury delayed by a century reverberation: home and bargain car park
silver hair odd stockings clasp handbag bird woman tactics for L6
easier than feeding kids cheaper than hair dye peroxide irrelevant
dark like grandma declared at family parties a passport in black ribbed concealed
invoke lilian woods pigmentation as a portal
lilian woods in defiance of age daylight deadlight eternal without flowers
there can be no grave without a grave there can be no death
white lilies as trinity lilian as memento plaster cast imprinted
in spite of being long gone forever dead imagined as apology
conjured as remorse dismissed as gratuitous it is unbecoming &farcical
to hold a grudge against the ancestors she who birthed nine
she who lost four she who rose from a sea of statistics she who disowned herself
found again the upper arms of a sailor read mam or mother
reluctance is futile lilian your descendants are persistent relentless
dark like grandma
laurence

1.

welcome little uncle

li’ul

lil lil lil lilian death flower dog-violet

phantom dog barking floss

shepherd’s purse

mother’s heart

1922 west derby western

subdistrict standard

after the storm soapsuds

l is for libra october

la la alright la’ for lad for little boy

u specifically u u r so beautiful to her

en end ended on the poor law cusp a dead end street

c-e celandine see he see ‘e ‘ad no chance bacterial

ragged rag and bone man&

man/men

is a killer

june 1929 six years eight months

less than 48 hours pear shaped l shaped

jigsaw: school time contagious love in isolation

little lau: with a W wrong spelling we don’t care

would not bring him back gone his father’s red book

his mother’s last

the space a boy fills
2.

choir of catalan angels  aqui! aqui! aqui!
tangerine coated  counting floral streets
crocus  snowdrop  pansy
off to see the uncley dead  the road of the living
not even a wave  a reminisce  or invitation
drop gaze delinquents  child murderer vibes
here  a mental cortege  tram route
litherland  interminable  steel  sidetracked
our little l is out of sight  out of mind
dare to admonish her:

too far lilian  too far
growling  a virtual séance
ford cemetery  arcadian  anonymous

_all li’ul fellas love cars_
she reasoned

pink frost  the shadow  of the cross
commemoration  for the unmarked
requiesce in pace  the big boy
in the shared grave  [public/pauper/poor pop]
a dislocated breath  in recording  in progress  crooked trees  alveoli
wellington boots  shared soil  this is the closest we get
to each other

have ever been
to each other

welcome  li’ul uncle  into the blood
reflection (berwick street)
    after Paula Gunn Allen’s Grandmother

    a gene pool is not the universe

    it is: a split surface    glass cobwebs    a substructure

    beating a path    invisible

    non tangible thread

    stitched inside: a walking tapestry

    a best sunday suit    a crossbreed

    stuck record

    the year of sergeant pepper    check out

    sudden    in spite of decline

    someone tell the residents:

    christmas is over

    street sign of rust and rupture    wire hexagons

    concave mirrors    intense focus

    incoming traffic    dental records

    women who pray vs women who smoke

    historical alignment meets baggage

    a shopping route    go local

    a gateway    gold pointed collapse

    hybrid images    weave in    weave out

    forget to breathe

    forward    backward    embroidered

    and braided    continuous

    perpetual    great grandmother

    neverending
kensington fields - other

(a short walk from lilian)

we find ourselves before the grace

of a blind eye

reddened street light the dissonance

the strictest dictum of the faithful

me mum’s no prozzy truth: ask the seven demons

ask jesus christ himself of

the myriad of ways in which

they scrub their hands of the north end &

women who walk in zig-zags

death by male entitlement

death in turquoise baby pink tribute

red umbrellas spiralling silence

voiceless aphonie recalled

recorded in press cutting frenzy

in nineteenth all encompassing historical shorthand

scoured steps police tape: crux decussata

the slanted occult the desolate familiar

mummy aunty sister

maxine anne marie hanane
**hufeisensiedlung (hoof-eisen-seed-lung)**

**hoof**

on the hoof and off the cuff

livestock

gathered

the skirts of a stockyard

a scheme

shawls to the front

high heels to the front

top hats

posterior

a background humming sound

mmmmmmmmmmmmmmmunicipal

metropolitan

a modern perimeter

fringes

the advent of curls

thirties glamour

scouse italian

the darling buds of block ‘D’

demand fresh air suntraps verandas and curvature

settlements assurances

to remain on the right side

of a dichotomy

the wage earners as opposed to

the destitute

the side of the horseshoe

closest to the horse

that is: the carthorse champions irrelevant

the only medals of value: holy name for the jesuits

st. joseph for the immigrants

skillfully executed

congratulations

the masses

the mammas are happy
eisen

a siren (i) past life regression the concept of recycled souls to say of a child: (i) she’s been here before survived the blitz (i) tunnel vision (i) remember the trees as saplings the exhibition 1948 the consecration 1967 the papal visit:1982 pray for me norah the clasped hand of a polish pope pray for him for myrtle gerard caryl gardens those who have no repose (i) evacuations wreckage the mystery car on the coliseum floor the forbidden top landing giddy heights the dare (i) the five tier sugar stack piped decorations the kid who refuses to leave the deflated bouncy castle (i) the deleted walkway the depleted community compliment: devotion to the past (i) a human spirograph party hat a centrepiece decades cascade whirling the icing on the cake the eisen in a horseshoe hufeisensiedlung so euro so retro so karl marx-hof so pleased to meet (you/it) was a pleasure
seed (flick-in-the-bullring)

who’s there?

     eight steps

     all giddy girlish flick/lift

     the outstretched hands raised

     mock/shock artificial elevation as if

as if any kid could forgo a helter skelter

     a slope of moss algae a shipwreck the same pipes funnels

     all first class passengers

     none of you are stokers

     all of you intruders

running on deck verboten but fun

imagining a skeleton crew a glut of irish surnames

not yr local legend this is the bullring

the last vestige of a pre war utopia

yr daddy could not buy this

sold out turfed

retired racehorses

yr private stables

cctv superfluous to citizens

     flick/hiss modified replicate&multiply

firethorn cotoneaster hawberries it grows it grows on loop

     punctured balloons inauspicious colour clash

red/green mistle thrush

train of thought echoed

     locomotive

     no departure
lungs

and so it was butchered – the bronchi torn apart
like a fight. too young for bronte disco
too old for false consciousness. barricaded -
but still broken up, dispersed. a city council
plays mary poppins. shelter for investors -
breadcrumbs for birds. rats with wings.
roman catholic breeding patterns. done
because we are too menny. must not
embellish. concave and depressed.
so many boys. so many older boys.
too many cigarettes. too much substance.
the last coach out went pumpkin shaped -
protest in glass slippers. inconsequential.
blind to it. lamb busy bleating. peeling
paint. merry skipping. to be small is
to be oblivious. the space is a whirligig.
cavernous – voice imitation. blackbirds
on a ballroom floor. still dancing. still
the point of contact. membrane attached.
still a sneaky shortcut. happy childhood.
still a beacon. still a bonfire, still standing.
still the bully still home.
how to revitalise: add measurements to street names

court dwelling  so cute
  so rad  so working class chic  antediluvian  alignment

caravans  prayer vans
  the ghosts of christian niche congregations
    glassite  christadelphians

lost boys  stray dogs  tin can kittens  fireworks
  today  silence: the unthere  the undone  the under-done
    the layer cake  minus three tiers

imaginary friends  imaginary wealth  an actual sibling
  a little princess  black velvet  pink sash
    bears in turquoise  a reading school

all such wonderful militants

  prodigy living  recite:

  the herald of free enterprise capsized on the night of march 6th 1987
  especially cold  the flat flooded for a second time that same year

  the child made a lego model of the big ship she named

    TOWNSEND THORESEN
      in red  like all things of permanence

negligence

controlled atrophy

submersion
25B

the bear’s leg scorched a bronze bolt on black fur
too close yr granddaughter’s heart reduced to menthol
cinders scented jumpers chanel factoids &breathe

standing in the shadow of a yellow fiesta
for anti-climb read anti cry read girly anti social
the awkward silence in which psychogeography

exposed yr very own episode literary filler
who do you think you are? compressed living
private property succession of rat traps

live wires reported open electrics
mortality realised internally
meaning: you are old not seven

you are gone & permit holders only
occupy this space & mascara only
prevents a torrent & medication only

stems niagara falls bill murray style
now compose collect yrself the ghost
of under 12 pulls so heavy
flick/trowbridge street
for the Bronte community centre, L3 5NB

avoiding voxpop on honeybees nursery for bluebirds
the site of a twice split eyebrow &

prevention of flick on fleek on point
compass maritime wheel to steer a street through
contraction dilation mission house

music box many paint/plant mishaps
watercolours two girls in a kitchen: the north is the time
top of the dial the south to/past/to

past to dredge through sediment silt
a seabed community abridged ecosystem slashed coral
hacked but thriving yellow typography

bronte not yr literary sisters a cover
a dustjacket a cunning disguise inner city safehouse
academy bail-out & still it glitters

if a building could give a nodding wink
unwritten history emotional discord empty dancefloor
taps shrouded/shut off secluded

factory romance secret handshakes
door codes daydreams collective aspiration
made in L3
lime street (generic girl poet)

chock full of humour and explicit sexuality
the descent is laden with innuendo and vice
it must mean something trains are deeply
unprovocative banal shall we try tunnels?
dear sirs i have read my lacan a little girl
dreams of big red engines swarms of bees
subterranean plague translate: the child
mourns lack of phallus steam locomotive
too young for confession on the cusp
of sainthood her grandfather said that
seven was the age and the violets meant
she had a kind heart may she always
and may she always be true to it this
interpretation: family social history sharks
urban walking socialism feminism gender
dear sirs i have read my judith butler
violence in yr restrictive poetic (bodily)
forms repeated stylization of all vagina
poets within a highly rigid regulatory
frame rail tracks ladders in tights
virgin franchise a scathing critique of
prostitution maggie may’s concourse
exploitation ha ha ha please write
on legs not stations please admit
the accent cracks you up so kind of you
to register forgive me i have no matches
to sell no shawl to wear lasciviously
but we can talk about bessie braddock
and how she drowned that welsh village
or we could sigh with relief about the
landslide not bursting the railey walls
above my nerdish heart would have
broken is she talking about her Gwa
again? yes you will yawn as i recall
he had to tempt my aunty down from
her death with a charming voice and
sweets embankment signage
the dead streets the live wires
the hen parties the lucky visitors
the poem as a comedy sketch
what to say: the station is a circus
tent a kitchen sink a bed a brothel
what not to say: the station
is a microcosm of a city
i’m in love with
third exit (anfield cemetery)
I've been learning to drive.
My whole life, I've been learning.
Oh, Norah!

Arcade Fire: In The Backseat.

dahlia
daylily
burst luminous colour balloons daydreams immortality
arm scratches signify terminus
vapour trails cut adrift from lancashire
hills that frame a high rise
the promise of minxx escorts
from a phonebox red menace women who wash
scrub symptomatic of absorbing dirt inhale digest purge scrub
patri/matrilineal funeral routes norah: the terror of horses
equivalent to death feather plumes snatched from the
burlesque patent leather harness no cheap show
no delusions of grandeur just death for death’s sake
without psychotics without dual meaning
from courts to dirt and so on
shedding measured in handspans tremor
the height of a hearse the lost infants of mary jane &
the last of the proud macs enduring nasal shapes
secret pharmacy handshakes hardfaced
princess complex cherry blossom ashes
headless seraphim flower torsos
melodrama befitting chaos demon only child
in the red shoes cross legged another one
reflector a cherubic boy in the light of the ancestors reflector
his mother a mimeograph of hers of his/hers
the dark/the dyed/the deathly the not dead
the no thanks the waxwork the parlour
the top lid gilded crucifix
the former picture house the big bad signpost
film star static porcelain
her face the faithless the not please the backseat her face
oh [the endless pause] norah
interlude (prole holiday doc)
a cautionary tale

haven seaside squad the trajectory is set: polly doll oversized eyelashes
archetypal hair

        swinging raspberry laces cheekbones exaggerated

a stepford puppet lady rictus meanwhile:
anxious the literal elephant in the room

        fluffball pink pindown locks matron blue sister act

polly asks: does everyone have a best friend?
anxious waves a petrified trunk wishes herself invisible

        we have all been there two left feet voice: perishable item

drowning lettuce limp enter: barney

yr all girl band is co-opted by a boy/bear who wants to name you himself

        found/discovered = owned&branded

ask farmers ask cattle herders ask daisy/babe the blue ox/lulabelle III

how to dodge steak house avoid meat content

        anxious glances sideways clocks exit

will not end days as one-woman vaudeville

will not feature in diversity manual

        or be grateful oh so grateful

for the exposure the portfolio shots or even the six pound cocktail

poking fun at her waistline jelly belly

        anxious drops a bombshell:

        this is not (a) fancy dress
a dog named euro (seton sands)
lilac  pincer

    a mutilation

GATHERING
shell  cluster  silver whippet  canine glitterstick

    skin&bones&

    excess nuzzling

    EURO  dog-tag  east lothian
social fund  beneficiary

    snatch luminous sphere  snatch global snatch

    FETCH this stick with which  beaten

beach head  barren

    booted  without will

    or resurgence  foot slash  absent pearl  ridges

booted  fastened to a beach

    copper=ersatz  babbling brook  [BOY]  crackle algae

    popping candy  pied wagtail

swirly whirly

    a portion of oystercatchers  the correct use of supper

    [RECLAMATION]  the boats of leith

the crystal sea  the three

    the four shout EURO  fido  fidelis  pebbledashed  whitewashed

    impossibly woodchipped

all our houses  all our poll slips

    all our internal  class ID cards
funstars

the poet has placed three hearts on a page. he has named them: immortality/subjugation/ambition. what this means: we lost at bingo. purple dabbers make for pretty faces. immortality looks tired&shocked. subjugation looks like a one eyed swine. ambition has false eyelashes. the room is a hotchpotch of death tattoos. dates in abundance. walking headstones. two swallows on each foot. she cuts me off at “my grandfather” and finishes “was a sailor.” the girl sat in front lost her dad at 42. her family drink lager through a straw. a mhairi black doppleganger cases the joint. will she be our queen? funstar has the same name as my mother. the teeth tell a different story. addiction at the minimum. irn bru. dancing the skag fantastic. we shouldn’t judge. distant cousins etc. a man with downs (19) gives approximately no shits for societal convention. he came to burn the house down. do you know where you’re from? asks the failed drama student. kill him mouths the failed journalist. each news story 300 words. choose the angle: ban this sick prole filth from our kids. listen in horror. eyeless whites breeding scheme. deviant guinea pigs. patriotic lighters: a saltire. family values: caravan living. sharing chips. tales of the old house. the three hearts are people. the boy is an emoticon: SMILE. on camera. smile: documented working class. oh so lucky. the boy cries laughing. this is yr heritage. ticket value: priceless.
seaside girls (dublin 12)
blatant i’m not i won’t brickbat out of order vs bang to rights
utterly affirmative these acts of resistance young woman romanticised
the refusal to take instruction i’m not goin’ anywhere in spite of history
goldenbridge abandonment multiple cruelty girlhoods switched
our lady queen of heaven we offer you cheap jewellery childhoods
the offshoots bluebell demand occupation free transport equality
why don’t you ask them interchange power in gender relations
banshee republic objectification of paddy and seán in body ink
in utero our lady of the wayside travellers familiar with
post war housing aesthetic acquainted with tell tale track lines
certain flutters agitation pressed up against quaysides intentions
part time off licence shifts ponytails the bottle the audacity
broad daylight a compo claim for the grandmothers
servility meaning: you owe us a favour a lifetime a living
west curvey (june 2017)

curveball off in a motorcar double decker

the passengers create a newsreel lights: a summer sky camera: cross river closed circuit television action: dissection of tragedy via local means storey count 24 23 1980s everton brow tore them down tear them down city council police cuts static azure

the border

west kirby seaside town the gentrified dee the anarchist mersey best kept in sunlight cryptic ice cream flavours eleanor’s surprise rathbone’s ghost patron saint of family allowance catalogue payments women citizens supermarket role switch car park

liberals

matching magnums property swap pigeon chests: outwards gonna take the 137 magnanimous so benevolent so fucking boring small world small world except if you live in it private beaches weekend offenders safety nets from a great height marine lakes

sunday streaming favourite band t-shirts flotillas pear drop caudal fins baby yachts horizontal stripes: earn them flagrant disregard of no swimming signs feet in the water fresh resolve endgame we need an armada white working class diminishes all of us

all of them
vauxhall and i

the dérive constant interruption of cheap funerals

contradiction exchange hooves for motorcade
everton valley kerb crawling deterrent

minus graphics plus nordic model inclination

sharp left pirate approach to darkness
dank stairs elegaic bird songs black in top hats

devoid of direction intent stacked up
everton valley kerb crawling deterrent

the river/the rail/the public housing refuge

canal corridor promises an obsolete sign

a spectacle rattan hearts speak memorial

padlocked another son lost mistaken i.d.

always and forever/local communities
tired juxtaposition merseyside improved
corporation playground sign splintered faded

a dangling rope a snap election boundary murmur
dead bluebells limp at redbrick feet

the church is an island with borders

no gods no masters just pier head housing
cilla black celebrity openings bridges

fly posters invitations remember fenians

the anarchist bookfair sisters uncut

the ghost of county mayo catherine sam

paranormal quivering the shakes the claims
the mock tudor flats the pioneers deserted
worker apparitions untouchable non contact
the wrong type of plenitude skips overflow
profound disappointment not a single zombie
or banshee no washerwoman no street clown
singing whisky on a sunday at bevington bush
no song credits from the irish bonfire remains
the opening of cheshire the kingsway tunnel
deepest water open space big science
vauxhall road come day go day
wishing in my heart it was sunday
wishing puppets had statues
wishing homes were not dispensable
anfield fleet maintenance

sunlight day of the lords three mayors treble masters forgotten voters

floss is a dog. imagined as rather like the black rabbit of inlé from watership down. another incarnation of my psychogeographical self is flick, a girl version of spring heeled jack. legendary menace. flick/slick, sleek and all aerial like. dogs in a maelstrom more visible than women. even dead dogs. both of these more palpable than dead women. most of all, dead poor women.

dead in my language as alternative to very. dead good. dead bad. dead old.

floss as flick/loss/fleeting. working class women: we learn early [dead right] that we come and go on pay rolls, registers, phone books, electoral rolls, archives. nobody is indispensable. music teacher, an all girls high school. dictionary: heads roll on a stave.

spike a male dog name colloquial: workhouse canine alternative: rover

belmont road: for vagrants. test house. safe house. and in the 21st century, halfway house. none of this is fiction. victoriana. mirror billboards. reflective in the current state. if pavements could creak and tramps were poltergeists, this street would be teeming. ambulance. spooks. nurses on fag breaks. in food banks. many complex reasons.

walking wandering to romanticise: nomadic to trivialise: bag lady carriers
disease both intersects and divides. the site contained a tramp ward. the british medical association reported in 1895 that it also provided for the permanent able bodied of no fixed address. parallel buildings. children detained. clutch a baby. a synonym offered for homeless is rootless. grotesque. everyone came from somewhere. some of us came from here. some of us swerved it. my women were lucky. and this is all it was. ambulatory. mobile.

barking discarded carpets pathways horse kicks lethal you deserve a history
lilian is not a bear (yew tree cemetery)

  after Michael Rosen’s “Going on a Bear Hunt”

going on a grave hunt   not scared

partial to white cats

  painkillers

  &swearing

the chances of rejection

  rocket

    fifty years   internment

seventeen bus stops  hair all sticky

  subdivision   one over eight

blueberry park  princess drive

  dainty names    diurnal innocence

wet grass   uh-oh

    long wet grass    wading  open toed  toad

short&stout

    hooked nose    monuments

lily flood  adjacent names    woods

    mcdonald

    mccabe

bullseye  keystone  a keynote: hello  quiet

how to articulate:

    you would not like me anyway

clattering  of jackdaws

    of restless

    potentially unforgiving

    iliac crests   hip bones
shorter sacrums   masquerade

dead as body   forgets how to bleed
raiders:   ants   wasps   hymenoptera

without waist   symphyta

fitter&   dark

cold   impassable
cannot get over
cannot go under   fingertip:

  a ladybird   a red/black ladybird

a greeting   not scared

stealing roses

  sitting on

  buttercups

rearrange   pronounced floor-al

  or   floral   does not matter   unimportant

  the point is: i saw you

i see you &

  see yiz in plural   i am

  laurence’s daughter   terry’s granddaughter

an earwig on all these flowerpots

  layers   desquamated   to begin again: open the door

back outside   new islington

  new jerusalem   new liverpool

  no bears

  many girls
Notes:

The Hufeisensiedlung (horseshoe) estate is a housing estate in Berlin, built in 1925. Structurally it is very similar to St. Andrews Gardens, a housing estate made of five storey council flats, which opened in Liverpool, 1935. It is known colloquially as The Bullring. Designed by John Hughes on the former site of an abattoir, originally the Bullring itself was referred to in the planning sketches as the D wing, with the A, B and C blocks surrounding being Gill Street, St. Andrews Street and Trowbridge Street respectively. These streets were demolished in 1994. Only the Bullring itself remains, having been purchased by the University of John Moores as student housing.

The interlude poems are set in the Haven holiday camp at Seton Sands, East Lothian, Scotland. The evening entertainment at these centres across the UK features children’s characters including Anxious the Elephant, Bradley the Bear and Polly the Lifeguard.

In Dublin 12, the area of Goldenbridge was previously the location of St. Vincents Industrial School, in which it was later discovered that child labour, under rough conditions, was employed in the making of rosary beads.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Vincent%27s_Industrial_School,_Goldenbridge#Rosary_Bead_making

The news story referred to in West Curvee is the burning of Grenfell Tower in June 2017, in which at least 80 social housing tenants are known to have lost their lives. The title itself was my son’s way of pronouncing the seaside resort of West Kirby when he was a toddler.

müllleimer has appeared in para.text magazine, the hufeisensiedlung sequence in zarf magazine and the interlude sequence in Guttural magazine. My thanks to the editors.