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** not suitable for domestic sublimation*, Jennifer Cooke. Review by Claire Hurley

The first poetry collection by Jennifer Cooke, ** not suitable for domestic sublimation*, reveals from its opening pages that it is invested in the political axes of irrelevance/irreverence. The title itself acting as an appendix, an afterthought, the introductory ‘**’ indicates a paradoxical amendment to what has just been said. This is how the poems emerge; as juxtapositional post-thoughts in an already oversaturated political conversation. Can there be assertions in such a climate, the poems probe at us, and how might we go about doing the work of political intervention in the cacophonous contemporary moment? The poems themselves are wide-ranging in content and procedure. While most deal in one way or another with issues of political agency, and gender and sexuality crop up intermittently, the key concerns of the collection allow for a multi-dimensional, and multi-formal approach. In an interview with Sophie Robinson, Cooke comments:

Overall, I’d say the poems address issues of political protest; my work context (I’m an academic, and Lecturer at Loughborough University); gender and sexuality; my hatred of discourses of self-improvement, which always appear overtly moralistic; as well as some other, more miscellaneous topics (there’s a poem or two about the financial crisis, for instance, and the final poem is about cancer).

(<http://voguefabricsdalston.com/feelings-sophie-robinson-asks-jennifer-cooke-a-few-poetry-related-questions/>).

As a first collection the poems are assured, intelligent, and display a pointed, and poignant, wit throughout. Exhibiting a confident formal flexibility, the poems serve up dark and penetrating humour, penetrating into the corners of our stale political consciousness’. Linguistic play is crucial to the collection, and Cooke has stated the influence of Lewis Carroll to her work, but the political urgency looming behind such play marks her poems as seriously invested in the revelatory qualities of language. The poems aren’t haphazardly fragmented or fractured, but purposefully sliced and bisected into shatters of semantics, consistently revealing, and at moments revelling in, the artifice of contemporary linguistic modes. How can poetry form, inform and disengage with numerous language practices which have become hysterical in their redundancy? Modernist in tradition, Cooke doggedly questions the disintegrating relationship between formal and thematic concerns, and drags these issues through the topography of the 21st century.

The opening poem of the collection, ‘The Profundity of Cod,’ is a mock self-help guide that orients us in the subversive and warped reality in which Cooke’s poems operate. ‘Step 1 (shots)’ tells us to ‘nurture pre-morbid thoughts, a limerant outlook’. This line indicates the stakes involved in contemporary (female) self-formulation; limerence

harnesses the involuntary states of adoration and attachment, often involving intrusive and obsessive thoughts on the contingency of emotional reciprocation. This desire for emotional reciprocation reveals the truth of the self-help manual; self-improvement must be undertaken in the vague hope attracting the opposite sex. The poem moves through six steps, each becoming more ridiculous and, in equal measure, accurate, in attending to the cultural conditions in which they emerge. The vapid language of self-help, 'soul and mystery: appreciate your depth', is contrasted brilliantly with wry observations of the dating scene, 'his eyes glaze over describing himself/ as intelligent on match.com. dead'.

What I particularly admire about Cooke's work is her ability to discuss issues of gender and sexuality, not as overly theorised abstractions, but, in her own, words, as 'lived experience' (Interview with Sophie Robinson). Such experiences materialise in the anecdotal language of the everyday, 'Robbie Williams sings crack in the car park', and sometimes in oblique and incongruous terms, 'future pro/ductivity without libido superannuation'. Cooke remarks frequently on the incompatibility between conflicting versions of the self, 'collapsible selves pack neatly away, stacked', against the problematic self-help styled celebration of the individual, 'to be ourselves individually similar'. Moreover, Cooke fundamentally challenges whether quotidian experiences should be deeply considered or even coherent in being presented poetically. Expressing the 'experiences of lived contradiction' (Interview with Sophie Robinson), Cooke oftentimes renders moments that are simultaneously comical and deeply disturbing. Such experiences defy normative emotional processing, leading us towards a refreshing sense of ambivalence, but never apathy, on the part of the poet.

Cooke has commented that certain poems are somewhat site-specific, reflecting the locations where they were composed, or directly related to certain geographical movements: 'one poem is the reproduction of an over-heard conversation on a train from Leicester to London; one, 'Congelatine' is specifically about Loughborough and mentions places in the town such as the canal and the social club' (Interview with Sophie Robinson). These specifications aid the reader in negotiating the purposefully disorienting terrain of the poems. Indeed Cooke plays with the immediate materiality of say, the 'South Mimms Service Station, which is on a junction between the M25 and the A1 (M) as you head north out of London' (Interview with Sophie Robinson), against the intangibility and insipid horrors of particularly meaningless language forms (the self-help guide, the online-dating profile). In such a landscape of linguistic irrelevance, it is comforting to anchor some poems to specific locations.

Growing more impassioned, angered and hurtling towards the idea of substantial resistance, the anarchic final poems of the collection, particularly 'X.

Getupoffyourmattandfuckingwalkmyson' and 'XII. *Massaging Our Digressions*' signal towards a new era of politically driven poetry. Incisive and visceral, 'there is no bottom line/ for my kind of hypocrisy or for the happiness of my life except that people die for it', the final pages burst with voracious defiance and unquenchable energy. Blogging after the Militant Politics and Poetry Conference (18 May 2013), Cooke asserts in her aptly named 'Statement of Contradictions', that in order to write in a truly revolutionary form, 'the way we usually make and read our poetry would have to alter. This desire of mine betrays a desire for poetry to be part of political event-making in some capacity'

(<http://militantpoetics.blogspot.co.uk/2013/05/statement-of-contradictions-jennifer.html>). Whether or not poetry can attend to the political event-making that

Cooke desires remains to be seen, but what is certain is that * *not suitable for domestic sublimation* is a riotous poetic event in itself, and one that should not be missed.