

MPhil in Criticism and Culture  
Lent Term 2018  
Dr Sophie Seita (sts31)

**Experimental Writing by Women**

This course is at its heart revisionist and interventionist: it attempts to place experimental writing by women at the centre of our study of literary *history* at the same time as it attempts to offer a model for how to read and shape the *present*. Asking questions about aesthetic and social forms; canonicity and archival gaps; formal experiment and lived experience—each class will be oriented around a particular female writer, placed within their social, cultural, and publishing contexts. Some of the writers, artists, and theorists covered include: **Mina Loy** (in the context of proto-Dada and modernism, as well as reprints and revivals by feminist poets in the 1970s and 80s), **Christine Brooke-Rose** (via genre theory, French theory, Nouveau Roman); **Bernadette Mayer** (alongside 1960s conceptual and feminist art, and contemporary conceptual writing by women), **Kathy Acker** (in the context of politically radical autobiography, queer Bay Area writing, as well as various NYC scenes, including Acker's influence on the Riot Grrrl movement); **Theresa Hak Kyung Cha** (alongside 'multilingual writing', experimental translation by Caroline Bergvall and Don Mee Choi, and world literature, Cha's video and performance works); **Andrea Brady** (in the context of: a special 2015 *Chicago Review* issue on sexual violence; writing on the lyric by Denise Riley and Claudia Rankine; her own criticism and activities as the founder of a feminist listserv and the curator of the Globe Road festival).

**Essays:**

Taking my inspiration from the citational practice of Sara Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life*, this syllabus does not contain any work by straight white men. I invite you to try the same in your coursework essays. The essay can focus on any of the writers and/or their milieu discussed in our sessions, or on a particular question that connects a number of different practitioners and genres. Ultimately, the aim is to read this work attentively, rigorously, and hospitably; in other words: to allow a research question to emerge from the work itself. Moreover, we don't just want to read female artists as 'women writers' at the expense of taking them seriously as 'writers' and thinkers; at other times, an explicit exploration and interrogation of feminist politics, aesthetics, sociality, and the very category of 'woman' is exactly what is required to understand how a particular poem or poet thinks and works. You may want to consider questions about form, experiment, and politics, or you may want to query the usefulness of those categories and come up with an alternative approach.

More information about the essay's format and length, and various rules and regulations can be found in the 'Green Book' for M.Phil students on the Faculty's intranet.

## WEEK 1: KILLJOYS AND SHE-DANDIES

Andrea Brady, 'The Book of the City of Ladies' (in which she appropriates lines from contemporary male poets that address an unnamed female figure). Listen to the recording [here](#).

Lisa Robertson, 'Proverbs of a She-Dandy' (2017), consider this essay-poem in the context of ageism.

Sara Ahmed, 'Killjoy Manifesto' and 'Killjoy Survival Kit' in *Living a Feminist Life* (Duke UP, 2017).

'A Forum—on recent actions in response to sexism, misogyny, and sexual assault in literary communities' *Chicago Review*, 59.1/2 (Fall 2014 / Winter 2015) [read the introduction and then choose one response to focus on]

Additional reading:

Valerie Solanas, 'The SCUM Manifesto'

Verity Spott 'Trans\* Manifesto—As A' and 'Against Trans\* Manifestos', *Datableed*, 3

<https://www.datebleedzine.com/verity-spott-trans-manifesto> (1 page)

<https://www.datebleedzine.com/verity-spott-against-trans-manifestos> (1 page)

Sandeep Parmar, 'Not a British Subject: Race and Poetry in the UK', *LA Review of Books*, 2015

<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/not-a-british-subject-race-and-poetry-in-the-uk/>

'Race and the Poetic Avant-Garde', edited by Stefania Heim and Dorothy Wang, *Boston Review* (March 2015) [read the introduction and then choose one response to focus on]

## WEEK 2: 'WOMEN ARE THE CAUSE OF MODERNISM WHATEVER THAT IS'

Mina Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', in *Others* (1917).

Loy, 'O Marcel—Otherwise I Also Have Been to Louise's', *The Blind Man*, 2 (1917).

Jayne Marek, *Women Editing Modernism: "Little" Magazines and Literary History* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995). [introduction]

*HOW(ever)* 3.1 (January 1986). [Two Reappraisals of Gertrude Stein]

*HOW* 2, 1.5 (March 2001). [Special Mina Loy symposium]

Kate Eichhorn, *The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order* [introduction]

Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young, 'Numbers Trouble', *Chicago Review* 53.2/3 (2007), 88–111.

Additional reading:

Arjun Appadurai, 'Archive and Aspiration'

Naomi Sawelson-Gorse, ed., *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

## WEEK 3: FLUTTERING AROUND A CANON: FORMAL CONSTRAINTS AND THE INVISIBLE 'WOMAN WRITER'

Christine Brooke-Rose, excerpts from *Thru, Between, and Life, End of*

Brooke-Rose, 'Self-Confrontation and the Writer', *New Literary History*, 9.1 (1977), 129-136.

Brooke-Rose, 'Illiterations', in *Breaking the Sequence: Women's Experimental Fiction*, ed.

by Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), pp. 55–71.  
M.Nourbese Philip, 'Zong 1', 'Zong 3', 'Acknowledgements', in *Zong!* Also watch  
Philip perform with cellist Amanda [Ngoho] Reavey, at [Naropa's Jack  
Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics Summer Writing Program](#) (2014); and  
'Discourse on the Logic of Language', from *She Tries Her Tongues* on [YouTube](#).

Additional reading/listening:

Brooke-Rose, *Invisible Author: Last Essays* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2002).

Foucault, 'What is an Author?'

Joanna Walsh, '[The Anti-Canon of Christine Brooke-Rose: An Algorithmic Appreciation](#)'.

[Audio interview](#) with Philip by Uljana Wolf (the intro is in German but the interview is in English), starts at 3:02.

#### **WEEK 4: KATHY ACKER & THE POLITICS OF (FAKE) AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

Kathy Acker, excerpts from *The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula* by *The Black Tarantula*  
and *My Death My Life* by Pier Paolo Pasolini

Eve Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You're so Paranoid,  
You Probably Think This Essay is About You', in *Touching Feeling* (Duke UP)

Jonathan Flatley, 'Prurience', talk for MLA 2017 panel on 'Critical Moods'

Additional reading:

Rita Felski, 'After Suspicion', *Profession* (2009), 28-35.

Robert Glück, 'Long Note on New Narrative', in *Biting the Error: Writers Explore  
Narrative*, ed. by Mary Burger, Robert Glück, Camille Roy, and Gail Scott  
(Toronto: Coach House, 2004), pp. 25–34

Acker, 'Devoured by Myths', interview with Sylvère Lotringer, in *Hannibal Lecter, My  
Father* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991), pp. 1-24

Maggie Nelson, *The Argonauts*

#### **WEEK 5: Multilingual Writing and 'the Mainly White Room'**

Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, *Clio History* (New York: Wedge, 1982) [artist book]

Cha, *Dictee* [excerpts]

Sophie Collins, introduction to *Currently and Emotion: Translations* (London: Test  
Centre, 2016).

Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young, 'The Program Era and the Mainly White Room',  
*LA Review of Books*, 2015 <[https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-program-  
era-and-the-mainly-white-room/](https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-program-<br/>era-and-the-mainly-white-room/)>

Additional material:

Watch some videos by Cha.

Also look up the work of Adrian Piper—brief intro here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKPtKrKvXyo>

Look up Vahni Capildeo's work.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, excerpt from '[The Language of African Literature](#)', 3pp.

Rebecca Walkowitz, 'Born Translated and Born Digital', in *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in the Age of World Literature* (Columbia UP, 2015), pp. 203-234.

## WEEK 6: ZANY SUBJECTS AND AFFECTIVE LABOUR

Bernadette Mayer, [excerpts] *Sonnets* (Tender Buttons, 1989/2014)

Bernadette Mayer, excerpts from her work in *0 To 9* (a magazine she co-edited with Vito Acconci)

Lee Lozano, 'General Strike Piece' (1969) and 'Dropout Piece' (1970/1972)  
[conceptual art projects]

Holly Melgard, [REIMBURSEMENT](#) up on *Troll Thread* (2013) and [Money](#) 'by' Maker, also on *Troll Thread* (2012); 'Undocumented Labor', *unAmerican Activities* (2015), listen to the recording of Melgard's reading on [Archive of the Now](#) (10 mins.)

Sianne Ngai, 'The Zany Science', ch. 3 in *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012)

### Voluntary background reading:

Laynie Browne and Caroline Bergvall (introductions) to

[I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women](#)

Audre Lorde, 'Poetry is Not a Luxury', in *Sister Outsider*

### Generally useful resources:

- You have access to Kanopy via Moodle (login with Raven), which has thousands of films, documentaries, and brief video interviews (with, for example, Meredith Monk)
- [Vida: Women in Literary Arts](#) (includes the Vida Count)
- Useful reading list on poetry/poetics compiled by poets:  
<http://www.thevolta.org/thevolta-resources.html>
- Read the *Harriet* blog & *Jacket2* for news and reviews of modernist, contemporary, and other historical forms of poetry / avant-garde writing.
- Listen to recorded readings, interviews, and more on PennSound and Archive of the Now