Making Waves:

Comedy, Humour and Laughter as Fourth Wave Feminisms

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To the women that taught me how to laugh.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to explore how humour, comedy and laughter are functioning within the fourth wave feminist movement. Specifically, it examines how comic techniques are being mobilised by feminists in order to shatter restrictive and outmoded processes of gender representation. It also considers how waves of laughter generated by feminist comedy performances are capable of eventfully opening bodies to the possibility of new ways of being, and creating ripples of affective solidarity that are characterised by humour and joy.

Historically, humour, comedy and laughter have been largely ignored within the academy. In recent years, however, these more playful aspects of social life have gained traction within new materialism(s), where they have generated thinking about group behaviour. There has also been a surge in feminist writing in this area; with some theorists pointing to how comedy, humour and laughter can subvert sexist stereotypes and move beyond normative modes of representation. This thesis builds on and addresses gaps in the existing literature, by diffracting new materialist concepts through instances of comedy, humour and laughter within fourth wave feminism(s).

A qualitative study was conducted in three event-spaces where aspects of fourth wave humour, comedy and laughter have been taking shape. The first of these spaces was the Women's Comedy Workshop: a participatory comedy project for women in Bradford, UK. The second was the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which has seen an exponential increase in performances by female and feminist comedians in recent years. The third space was the online/offline interface created by the hugely popular feminist comedy podcast entitled *The Guilty Feminist*.

Through the thesis, it is argued that humour is a defining feature of the feminist fourth wave. As well as allowing us to transgress some of the boundaries that keep patriarchal ideas in place, feminist comedy practices are bringing diverse groups of people together and allowing for the emergence of affectively charged micro-communities. Moreover, laughter can increase the body's capacity to act; making it possible for participants to explore new ways of relating to the world around them. Finally, it is suggested that some of these effects have taken on global proportions via the internet; meaning that waves of laughter are capable of energising waves of feminism all over the world.

CHAPTER ONE:

RIPPLES

Back in 2015, I was stuck in a rut. I am theatre director, and had just directed three plays that dealt in some way with rape. I was also spending too much time online, writing snarky blog posts about sexual violence and the banality of Emma Watson's 'HeForShe' campaign. To make it worse, the Tories had just won the UK election; putting David Cameron firmly in the country's driving seat. All around me, feminists seemed to be mobilising; Hilary Clinton was running for the White House, and *New York Magazine* had put thirty five of Bill Cosby's accusers on its front cover. A wave of change was coming and I wanted to be on the crest of it. However, I felt angry and isolated, and kept ruining dinner parties.

Then - one day - I read an ancient greek comedy, and everything changed. That comedy was *The Thesmophoriazusae* by Aristophanes, which was first performed in 411BC. Set at an annual fertility festival, the play opens with a group of women plotting to murder the tragic poet, Euripides (Aristophanes, 2012). Euripides has insulted them by presenting women as lascivious and dishonest in his plays, and they hope that his death will warn other writers not to do the same. The plot gets going when Euripides finds out, and asks his friend - Mnesilochus - to pretend to be a woman in order to speak up on his behalf (ibid). Much of the story centres on the escapades of these (male) characters, who must dress in female clothing and then try not to be discovered in the women's sacred space. However, it was the female chorus that sparked my imagination. At the time, feminism seemed to be preoccupied with packaging itself as sweet and non-threatening. Emma Watson's 'HeForShe' campaign - which calls on feminists to stop isolating themselves and focus on 'getting men involved' (UN Women, 2014 [online]) - is a case in point. Here, however, was a group of 2500-year-old characters instigating terrorist tactics. These women seemed to be organised, angry and - most astoundingly - *funny*.

However, when I started to create my adaptation of *The Thesmophoriazusae* in 2016, I realised that I had strayed a long way out of my comfort zone. As a feminist director, I specialised in issue-based, political theatre. I often worked with community groups,

creating performances that responded in some way to their experiences. For example, at the same time as developing *Thesmo* (the name of my adaptation of *The Thesmophoriazusae*), I was also co-directing a festival entitled *B!RTH* at Manchester's Royal Exchange Theatre. As a project, *B!RTH* aimed to highlight the fact that, each year, millions of women and children die from preventable causes during childbirth (Royal Exchange, 2016 [online]). Headlined by seven plays that had been written by female playwrights from different parts of the world; the festival also told a series of birth stories that had been collected in hospitals, birth centres, refugee charities, a women's prison, a school for teenage mums and an adoption service in Greater Manchester. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the festival was serious in tone; even though - looking back on it now - there were plenty of opportunities for humour. At this point in my career, I simply lacked the skills, experience and confidence to capitalise on those opportunities; remaining safely ensconced in a world of sad stories and harrowing statistics.

I reflected on why this might be the case, and was flooded by memories of incidents that had impacted my relationship with comedy. I remembered, for example, being told by my family - at the age of 8 or 9 - that women aren't funny; a story that I will relate to you now. We were sitting around my grandparents' table, having just played a game of cards. My dad, uncle and grandad were exchanging jokes, and me and my brother were savouring the laughter coming from their deliciously grown up banter. When I wanted my mum to join in, however, this laughter quickly evaporated. Women can't tell jokes, they all explained. They aren't funny. My brother smiled smugly and nodded his head in agreement. I can't remember what happened next, but I do know that humour - like wearing jeans to family occasions, and camping with friends in the fields near our house - became increasingly 'off limits' as I entered adolescence. And - like many teenage girls - I didn't try to challenge the status quo. Why would I want to put myself in danger? I spent those years giggling to the witticisms of my boyfriends, male teachers and friends' dads, and made it to adulthood without ever trying to make any of my own. Of course, I knew that I was able to - on occasion - make (some) people laugh. I just had no idea how to do it on purpose.

I also realised, with some horror, that the female chorus in *The Thesmophoriazusae* was not meant to be played by women. As pointed out by Garber (1992), women were not permitted to perform in ancient Greece. However, female characters did appear in early comedies, because comedy was seen as an "imitation of inferior people" (Aristotle, 1996:9 - accessed Garber, 1992:70). In the play, women provide a "symbolic corporeality" for men

to inhabit (Garber, 1992:71); their 'unruly' bodies and loose costumes allowing for the playful exploration of homoerotic male desire (ibid). Moreover, the female chorus is disciplined through mockery. Mnesilochus, for instance, presents them as over-sensitive, erratic and unable to cope with the 'reasonable' way they have been portrayed in Euripides' plays. While dressed in female clothing, he declares:

> "Oh, women! I am astonished at these outbursts of fiery rage… Just because [Euripides] has shown up two or three of our faults, when we have a thousand!" (Aristophanes, 2012:32).

According to Douglas, this is one of the ways in which we still dehumanise feminists today; presenting them as women with "the complete inability to smile - let alone laugh" (1995:165). Consider, for instance, the Daily Mail's branding of 'fourth wave' feminists as "touchy feminazi(s) with the sense of the humour of a ryvita" (Vine, 2015 [online]). It turned out that my beloved female chorus were the 'feminazis' of ancient Greece, and I couldn't help but feel aghast at the fact that, 2500 years on, we seemed to have made such little progress.

According to Frances Gray, women have long battled a perception that they, as a sex, are not funny. As far back as 1695, William Congreve declared that he had never made any observations of humour in women (accessed Gray, 1994:3), and - despite the increasing popularity of women-led comedy - this is still a commonly held belief today. As recently as 2007, Christopher Hitchens claimed that women and humour are "antithetical" (Hitchens, 2007 [online]); a position he backed up with cod (as in fake) evolutionary science:

> Why are men, taken on average and as a whole, funnier than women? Well, for one thing, they had damn well better be. The chief task in life that a man has to perform is that of impressing the opposite sex, and Mother Nature (as we laughingly call her) is not so kind to men. In fact, she equips many fellows with very little armament for the struggle. An average man has just one, outside chance: he had better be able to make the lady laugh (ibid).

As hinted at by Hitchens, the notion of humourless women is part of a 'natural' hierarchy, tied up with other aspects of heteronormative male-female relationships. Humour is something that is *done to* women, rather than a behaviour that men and women might participate in together. And, unsurprisingly, this notion of 'humourless' women becomes particularly pronounced when we bring feminism into the mix. Many scholars have noted

the general absence of feminist humour (Auslander, 1997; Finney, 1994; Tomsett, 2018); a phenomenon that Barecca puts down to the idea that feminists want "to be accepted by conservative critics who find feminist theory comic in and of itself" (1988:4). Similarly, Willet *et al.* suggest that the absence of feminist humour is due to the fact that - all too often - "feminists themselves have been treated as a joke, while humour has seemed to belong to a more exclusively male terrain" (2012:217).

In other words, I realised that women making jokes upsets the patriarchy. And all of a sudden, nothing seemed more important than trying to bring humour into my feminist theatre practice. After securing some funding from the arts council, I brought together a small group of theatre professionals, including a stand-up comedian called Kate Fox, and two female clowns[1]. We spent three weeks together at Theatre in the Mill in Bradford; watching funny YouTube videos, playing improvisation games and - ultimately - developing a series of short comic sketches inspired by Aristophanes' play[2]. I also set up a project called the Women's Comedy Workshop, which allowed me to invite local women to participate in comedy workshops. Exploring comedy with these women was a thrilling experience. Comedy seemed to create an atmosphere in which we could transgress boundaries, blend performance styles, engage in taboo behaviours, and pick apart stereotypes. The project started 'making waves' in my personal life; snapping me out of my political malaise and helping me to feel more 'plugged-in' to contemporary feminism. I was still ruining dinner parties, but I was also - occasionally - making the other guests laugh.

Later that year, I toured a short play called *Thesmo*, which loosely told a (somewhat autobiographical) story about a woman called Alice, who (re)discovers her sense of humour - and her anger - after meeting the Goddess of the Thesmophoria in her kitchen. In the show, we worked with the tropes of a 'messy' girls night out; playfully blending these with the outrageous behaviours of the female chorus in *The Thesmophoriazusae*. Male audience members were invited to masquerade as women in order to enter the performance space; and - during the show - the audience was showered with prosecco, pelted with cupcakes and invited to place bets on a plastic 'wind-up willy' race.

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[1] Kate Fox describes herself as a 'stand-up poet' (Fox, 2019 [online]). She is also a broadcaster, academic and speaker (ibid). I was introduced to Kate by a colleague at the Arts Council, and our collaboration on the *Thesmo* project has led to further collaborations across both theatre and the academy.

[2] These early sketches can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dxfY5prr3Sc

By the time the tour ended, I had become fascinated by the capacity of contemporary feminist comedy to radically alter the people that came into contact with it; to enact a *qualitative* shift in the lives of ordinary women. The show seemed to have created an arena for the cathartic exchange of stories about feminism and humour, as well as for rebellious waves of laughter, which rolled between the bodies of women in the auditorium. By this point, I had also noticed that *Thesmo* was part of what seemed like a movement. As 'fourth wave' feminism had been picking up speed, so too had more women been getting involved in comedy. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe was reporting increases in women performing on its comedy circuit (Hughes, 2016 [online]), and humorous podcasts like *The Guilty Feminist* were gaining traction in the media due to their increasingly large listener-base (Verdier, 2016 [online]). It was this fascination that motivated me to start the *Making Waves* study, and which has sustained me all the way through the project.

In this thesis, I explore how humour, comedy and laughter are functioning within the fourth wave feminist movement. As you will see in the chapters ahead, feminist comedy practices are bringing diverse groups of people together, and allowing for the emergence of affectively charged micro-communities. Laughter, which can increase the body's capacity to act, is making it possible for feminists to explore new ways of relating to the world around them; triggering an array of playful becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). As well as pointing out that performers are using comedy practices to transgress some of the boundaries that keep patriarchal ideas in place, I suggest that comedy performances and workshops are creating new modes of feminist activism. By looking at *The Guilty Feminist* podcast, I also suggest that some of these effects (and affects) are taking on global proportions via the internet; meaning that waves of laughter are energising waves of feminism all over the world.

In what is left of this chapter, I will briefly outline my argument. In doing so, I will start to show how the idea of 'waves' works through the thesis. The 'wave' analogy provides me with a way of writing about the study as a multiplicity of stories, tides and currents that sometimes pull in different directions, and sometimes lend one another greater force. In some ways, I have followed the traditional mandates of a thesis, in that I have written an introduction, a literature review and a discussion of methodology, followed by three empirical chapters and a conclusion. However, at the same time, each of the chapters can be understood as a 'wave' of vibrating intensities, which (like Deleuze and Guattari's 'plateaus') are not directed toward any sort of culmination point or external end.

OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In chapter two, I begin my exploration of feminist comedy, humour and laughter by placing it within its 'fourth wave' context. I do this - in the first instance - by making a case for working with the notion of feminist 'waves', which - for some scholars - is highly problematic (e.g. Laughlin *et al*, 2010; Springer, 2002). I then outline some of the features of 'fourth wave' feminism, including its use of the internet and its somewhat playful personality. By pointing out that feminists have used humour and laughter throughout history, I avoid the reductive notion that comedy is specific to the fourth wave. However, I also note that contemporary feminists have a particularly animated relationship with comic forms.

By taking a look at the symbolic connections between comedy and the (female) body, I then explore why - historically - comedy has been downgraded within the academy. This correlation can be seen most clearly in the 'grotesque' (Bakhtin, 1984), where it is also possible to see why comedy has been such a dangerous space for women to exist within. However, it is also possible to see, here, what comedy has to *offer* feminism. According to Davis, the grotesque "disrupt[s] the norms of femininity and the social hierarchy of male over female through excess and outrageousness" (Davis, 1975 - accessed Rowe, 1995:30). By acknowledging this, I start to hint at how comic forms might be capable of 'making waves' within contemporary feminism.

Towards the end of chapter two, I outline the four dominant humour and laughter theories. However, through the metaphor of 'waves' and 'currents', I hope to show that any attempt to contain comedy within discourse or structure eclipses its rhizomatic nature; the way it spirals out into unexpected territories, making weird and wonderful connections between disparate ideas and groups of people. By extension, I point out that the terms: 'comedy', 'humour' and 'laughter' behave like liquids in my writing; dissolving into one another like so many raindrops on the surface of a lake.

In chapter three, I describe how my methodological framework developed; detailing the ways in which I worked with Barad's notion of 'diffraction' (2007). Specifically, diffraction has to do with the way waves interfere with one another when they overlap. When applied as a methodology, then, diffraction encourages researchers to read insights from the different areas of a study *through* one another (Barad, 2007:30). Unlike reflexivity, which

"invites the illusion of [an] essential, fixed position", diffraction "trains us to more subtle vision" (Haraway, 1992 - accessed Barad, 2007:29); helping us to display the intricate patterns that reverberate through a study. Therefore, it has given me a way of capturing something of the *movement* of fourth wave feminism, and how this movement might be energised by waves of laughter and/or waves of affect.

I then describe how I went about setting up a series of 'event-encounters', which allowed me to generate insights about what comedy, humour and laughter could be doing within the fourth wave. This involved leading more comedy workshops with women in Bradford, watching performances at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, and listening to *The Guilty Feminist* podcast. As well as outlining the qualitative methods used in each event-space, I explore the various ways in which I am entangled with the study. Ultimately, I suggest that I am (in) the water that flows through the thesis, creating the ideas that ripple through each chapter and then spill out into the world around it.

In chapter four, I explore how humour, comedy and laughter could be affecting women within the fourth wave feminist movement by paying attention to events that occurred during the 'Women's Comedy Workshop' research projects that took place at Theatre in the Mill. Through the analogy of 'surfing' waves of laughter, I suggest that the workshops create a space in which participants can overcome their inhibitions around humour. This, I argue, is partly due to the 'affective' or 'atmospheric' dimensions of laughter, which is continually moving through and around us; swirling between bodies and altering what those bodies 'can do'. The act of laughing together, I suggest, allows women to explore new identities, and to forge new relationships based on humour and joy. By unpacking Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming' (1987), I also consider how comedy can help participants to experiment with new ways of being. It is in this sense, I argue, that comedy can be understood as an 'empowering' activity for contemporary feminists to be participating in.

In chapter five, I discuss two comic performances that I saw at the fringe: Julia Croft's *Power Ballad* and Emma Maye Gibson's *Love and Anger*. These performances generate huge amounts of excitement through their use of stand-up, burlesque and clown; intervening in contemporary feminist debates in ways that are highly playful and often taboo. The chapter begins with a diffractive analysis of each performance, in which I read fragments of data through Deleuze's notion of "minor theatre" (1997) and Bakhtin's ideas

on the "carnivalesque" (1984). In doing so, I explore how they playfully pull apart normative modes of gender representation; inventing new modes of feminist performance. I then examine how these practices can bring diverse groups of people together; altering the power dynamics within traditionally male-dominated comedy venues and allowing for the emergence of affectively charged micro-communities. This - I suggest - means that feminist comedy performances can be understood as a form of 'socially engaged' or 'relational' art (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2002), which may serve as a catalyst for political change.

In chapter six, I start by thinking about the importance of 'radio waves' within the various iterations of the feminist movement. Technology has always helped to 'stick' bodies together in a social movement. And - with Guattari's *Chaosmosis* (1995) - I argue that laughing 'virtually' with the *The Guilty Feminist* allows listeners to feel like they are part of a powerful subculture, or - as Deborah Frances-White puts it - a 'guilty feminist army'. Jolted out of their habitual subject position, listeners are able to detect the emergence of new incorporeal universes (Guattari, 1995), and enter into a nascent collective subjectivity (ibid). If we work with Manning's idea that "we do not populate, extend into or embody space - instead, we form it" (Manning, 2012:15), the women that are laughing to *The Guilty Feminist* podcast, I propose, are capable of changing the world.

In chapter seven, I pull together the different 'waves' that have rippled through the thesis, and diffract them through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'minor' (1987). This allows me to develop my thinking about the kinds of comedy, humour and laughter that I have been interested in, which are - above all - 'minoritarian' and 'carnivalesque' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Bakhtin, 1984). It also enables me to think about the 'micropolitics' that are being unleashed within feminist comedy spaces, and what these (often imperceptible) forms of activism might be doing within the fourth wave. At no point do I try to pull the various strands of my argument apart. Rather, I enjoy the complexities and (in)tensions that have unfolded through the study.

CHAPTER TWO:

CURRENTS

As indicated in chapter one, waves operate as a metaphor all the way through this thesis, and have provided me with a way of thinking beyond binaries, fixed categories and hierarchies. Waves are the effects of forces and friction, and the movement of wind and land. They are created when energy passes through water, causing it to move in a circular motion. In this chapter - which operates as an unconventional literature review - I consider some of the ideas, publications and movements that have helped shape the *Making Waves* study. The genealogies I trace are by no means linear or all-encompassing. Rather, they are motivated by the deep currents that swirl in the dark depths of the thesis as a whole.

I start by allowing myself to be caught by the notion of 'multiplicities'. This enables me to place my research within the context of new materialisms, which - according to Dolphijn and van der Tuin, is (also) "a wave approaching its crest" (2012:16), and can be understood as a radical rethinking of the dualisms that are central to modern and postmodern thought (Coole & Frost, 2010). Braidotti, for instance, points out that matter is not solid or stable, or self-identical across time (2002:5 - accessed Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012:17). Instead, she argues that a radically immanent conceptualisation of matter can help us understand its ongoing "metamorphosis" (ibid). This is useful for researchers, who - like me - are thinking about transformations, mutations and processes of change in relation to women participating in comedy, humour and laughter.

The next section crashes up against the feminist wave narrative, which (as indicated in chapter one) is contentious for some thinkers. After clarifying the ways in which I am using the wave metaphor, I trace some of the contours of what we might call 'fourth wave' feminist movements. As well as pointing to the fourth wave's reliance on technology, I suggest that comedy can also be understood as a form of contemporary feminist praxis. Of course, previous feminist 'waves' have also used comic techniques and emphasised the political force of women's humour. What we are seeing with the fourth wave, then, is a

wave-like re-turn to feminist comedy, humour and laughter; a powerful current carrying the playful debris of centuries past.

I am then sucked into the stormy relationship that exists between comedy and the 'unruly' female body; spiralling out of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle and into the work of Bakhtin. By taking ideas from a variety of disciplines and allowing them to overlap, I explore why comedy, humour and laughter have been subjugated within the academy, and how this is entangled with aspects of sexism and misogyny. By exploring the notion of the 'grotesque' body, I present comedy, humour and laughter as a means of empathetic connection and an arena for becomings.

Towards the end of the chapter, I am pulled in different directions by four dominant humour theories: superiority, relief, incongruity and play. As well as revealing the hazardous rip tides that lurk within each theory or trope, I explore how we might challenge cultural dualisms and dominant hierarchies by looking at them through a feminist lens. As with all of the currents that move through this chapter, my discussion of these theories continues to ebb and flow throughout the thesis. So, my thinking here is speculative, and by no means stable or complete. Rather, it moves rhizomatically outwards, proliferating connections that will re-emerge in later chapters.

MULTIPLICITIES

I want to start with the notion of 'multiplicities', because this thesis is primarily about change. As well as exploring how humour and laughter are capable of transforming the everyday lives of women, I ask why feminists are turning to comedy, and how comedy could be energising (or changing the shape of) fourth wave feminisms. However, as pointed out by Braidotti, trying to represent change - while also engaging productively with the contradictions, paradoxes and injustices that it engenders - is difficult (2002:2). In other words, it is much easier to think about static concepts than about the dynamic, fluid process(es) that are involved in the movements between them (ibid). However, with the advent of new materialism, researchers have started to pay more attention to processes of change (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012:94). In doing so, they present human beings as 'multiplicities', which is an idea I will now explore.

According to Grosz, many of our ideas around human subjectivity remain indebted to Descartes, who - in the seventeenth century - distinguished between two kinds of substances: a 'thinking' substance, and an 'extended' substance.

> Only the latter, he believed, could be considered part of nature, governed by its physical laws and ontological exigencies. The body is a self-moving machine, a mechanical device, functioning according to causal laws and the laws of nature (Grosz, 1994:6).

This exclusion of human consciousness from nature has been more influential than almost anything else in establishing the terrain for concepts such as subjectivity and knowledge, and - as pointed out by Grosz - it has come at a cost (Grosz, 1994:7). When we position bodies as mute matter, we tend to ignore specificities such as sex, gender and race, and the way that different bodies are performatively produced through "relations of discipline, regulation [and] punishment" (Butler, 1993:232). It becomes impossible to understand the complex interactions that take place between bodies in different sociocultural groupings, and between bodies and the environment (of which they are a part).

According to Coole and Frost, new materialism can be understood as a form of 'anti-Cartesianism', which seeks to undo the dualisms that hold this type of thought in place (2010:8). It does so by conceiving of a world that is never still. The world - within new materialism - is always-in-motion; bursting with multiple crests, ebbs, flows and obscurities. The embodied human, for its part, is inseparable from the 'radical immanence' of this world (Braidotti, 2002), which can be imagined as "an individual varying in an infinite number of ways" (Deleuze, 1990:122). The human subject becomes a multiplicity (Manning, 2013; Massumi, 2015), a meeting of forces (Grosz, 1994), and a process of becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

An apposite image to think of, here, can be found in *The Birth of Tragedy* (1967), where - quoting Schopenhauer - Nietzsche writes:

> [I]n a stormy sea that, unbounded in all directions, raises and drops mountainous waves… a sailor sits in a boat and trusts in his frail bark: so in the midst of a world of torments the individual human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis* (Schopenhauer, 1973:416 - accessed Nietzsche, 1967:35-36, original emphasis).

The sea, which is always the same despite the incessant sequence of ever-different waves, is an important metaphor for Nietzsche; representing both the unity and flux of the universe. For Nietzsche, the idea that the psyche is separate from the universe is an illusion; a "frail bark" (ibid). Nietzsche wanted to return the subject to a "primitive unity", paying attention to those forces that might provoke the joyful and terrifying collapse of individuation (Nietzsche, 1967:36).

This 'collapse of individuation' can be imagined in many different ways. For example, we might think about a virtual field of nonconscious affects, subsisting at the level of the infraindividual, or what Simondon (2009) names the 'preindividual'. The preindividual field can be understood as the associated milieu of a collective body-in-formation, a field of real potentials and technicities (Simondon, 2009; Manning, 2013). The field could also be understood as a realm of 'pure experience' (James, 2012) or 'bare activity' (Massumi, 2011). In each of these cases, we can imagine that the sailor within Schopenhauer's image has been placed in and amongst the waves. They are no longer able to sit quietly, trusting in the *principium individuationis* (Schopenhauer, 1973:416 - accessed Nietzsche, 1967:35-36, original emphasis). Rather, they - like the ocean - are at the mercy of multiple forces. As pointed out by Deleuze, this kind of thinking "shatters the individual, drags him into the great shipwreck and absorbs him into original being" (Deleuze, 2006:11).

As can be seen in the paragraphs above, new materialism is influenced by a group of rogue philosophers (such as Schopenhauer, Spinoza and Nietzsche), who are part of what Deleuze would call a 'minor' tradition (1997). What unites their philosophies is a 'monist' conception of the universe (Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012), which took on new resonances within the 20th Century. For example, Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) - which features heavily in this thesis - rails against the Freudian notion of the singular subject. While psychoanalysis aims always towards the unity of this subject, Deleuze and Guattari highlight its multiplicity. "There are only multiplicities of multiplicities", they write; "packs in masses and masses in packs" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:39). What they are trying to say, here, is that a multiplicity is a complex structure that does not reference a prior unity. Multiplicities are not parts of a greater whole that have been fragmented (Roffe, 2010:181). Rather, multiplicity is all that exists.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari develop a number of concepts to help us to think about the human subject as a multiplicity. The idea that features the most in the

chapters ahead is that of 'becoming', which - as I will explore - presents the world (and - by extension - the human subject) as pure process. The human subject is continually 'coming to be' in dynamic relation with the world (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:306). This concept, then, highlights the potential for change within every situation.

This brings me to the philosophical notion of affect, which - for Gregg and Seigworth - is "persistent proof of a body's never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world's obstinacies and rhythms" (2010:1). In this sense, affect can also be understood as a form of 'becoming'. In fact, according to Massumi, affect "takes change as primary, and sees the regularities of life as temporary barrier islands of stability in stormy seas" (2015:3). The most simple definition of affect was formulated by Spinoza, who positioned it as the power of a body "to affect and be affected" (1959:27). For Braidotti, the idea is best expressed in "the turning of the waves" (2011:307), because it calls attention to the ways in which bodies are continually changing according to the forces (or affects) that are acting upon them.

As noted by Jardine, Deleuze and Guattari were publicly supportive of feminism (Jardine, 1984:47). However, their relationship with the movement was extremely fractious as a result of their concept of 'becoming-woman'. Jardine positioned this as:

> A specific form of affect or becoming that has seemingly little (if anything) to do with women per se, begging the question if the term 'woman' is appropriate at all (Jardine, 1984:53).

Ultimately, however, Grosz and other feminist thinkers have found value in "a (provisional, guarded) alliance" of feminist and Deleuzian thought on the basis of "a common target - the reversal of Platonism" (Genosko, 2001:1444). This is because it is by undoing dualisms such as mind/body, subject/object, inside/outside, and man/woman - i.e. by thinking in terms of 'multiplicities' - that we are able to reject any essentialist notion of 'woman'. Rather than looking at people and objects as static and unmovable, we place them in motion amongst a wider collective in which there is infinite potential for change.

Today, the ideas of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) are often placed alongside other new materialist thinkers, such as Donna Haraway (1991) and Karen Barad (2007). This work takes in recent advances in science - such as quantum theory - which I will discuss in

chapter three. For now, I will move on to the notion of feminist 'waves', which - like the idea of the human subject - remains in motion throughout the thesis ahead.

WAVES OF FEMINISM & 'FEMINIST' HUMOUR

The feminist wave narrative, in which Western feminist history - from the Suffragists to the present day - is divided into four 'waves', is a troublesome one. This is partly because it often fails to encompass all of the voices that have contributed to feminism over the years, and partly because the chronological ordering or 'chunking' of the movement means that the importance of some time periods and groups is diminished. It is true that - if you think too hard about any of the waves - they disintegrate rapidly and eddy into one another, the way ocean waves do. However, despite continued criticism, the wave metaphor persists, and the idea of a fourth wave has gained traction within recent feminist scholarship (Chamberlain, 2017; Cochrane, 2014; Baumgardner, 2011). As pointed out by Chamberlain, "the surging and forcefulness connoted by the wave speaks to periods of affective intensity" (2017:6), and - as long as we consider feminism as a set of *practices* rather than as a fixed identity or lifestyle - I think it is possible to discuss feminist waves in a way that is useful for considering specific historical contexts. I will, therefore, introduce the fourth wave by outlining some of the practices that can be said to be shaping it, before exploring its place within the wave narrative.

According to Munro (2013 [online]), the internet has enabled the shift from third to fourth wave feminism. This assertion coincides with recent research, which suggests that women in western countries use the internet 17% more each month than their male counterparts (Gilpin, 2014 [online]). Social networking sights such as Facebook and Instagram are dominated by women, and - according to Munro, this has "created a 'call-out' culture, in which sexism and misogyny can be… challenged" online (2013 [online]). The 'Me Too' movement, for example, was initiated over a decade ago as a way of supporting young women of colour who have been affected by sexual violence (Burke, 2019 [online]). Starting life as a Brooklyn-based enterprise, it exploded on Facebook and Twitter when some celebrities shared their own experiences of abuse, using the now infamous hashtag. In less than 24 hours, 4.7 million people from 85 different countries had participated, generating more than 12 million posts, comments and reactions (Santiago & Criss, 2017 [online]).

In an interview with Baumgardner, Stoller dismisses the idea of a fourth wave, arguing that technological platforms have simply made it possible for feminists to disseminate the same information in new ways (Stoller - accessed Baumgardner 2011:72). However, this is to misunderstand the power of the wave narrative. As Chamberlain points out, a wave isn't a declaration of new ideas but "rather, it is the acknowledgement of an affectively intense period of feminist activism" (2017:9). Feminists have always spoken and written about the minutiae of women's lives; making visible the painful details that are so often brushed under the carpet or put down to 'natural' or 'biological' differences. The internet has simply intensified our ability to do this; providing a space for feminists to come together, and to grapple in new ways with issues around intersectionality.

For Hewitt (2012), 'radio waves' provide a useful model for regenerating the feminist wave metaphor along these lines. This is because - in the first instance - radio waves are used by human beings to send and receive messages. It doesn't matter whether those messages are different to those that have gone before. What is important is the *way* in which they have been communicated; and how that mode has made it possible for a large group of people to participate in a social movement. Indeed, Hewitt refers to the importance of the radio in the year that women won the vote in the US:

> Radio waves were all the rage in 1920, and November 2 of that year also marked the first commercial broadcast when Pittsburgh station KDKA announced election returns in the presidential contest over a 100-watt transmitter (2012:658).

At this point in time, radio waves were responsible for politicising hundreds of thousands of women; affectively 'sticking' their bodies together across the sprawling American continent. Arguably, a similar phenomenon is occurring today within fourth wave feminism; with social media - which also uses radio waves (Bonini *et al*, 2016) - providing feminists with a way of reaching even larger groups of people.

Moreover, radio frequencies are based on the size of the wave that carries the signal. "Higher frequency short waves work better for transmission over long distances", while "lower frequency long waves are more effective for transmission within cities, regions, or states" (Hewitt, 2012:660). As Hewitt points out - if we think of feminist movements as being composed of both short and long waves, then it is possible to expand significantly the richness and complexity of each phase of feminism (2012:661);

> [R]ecasting the wave metaphor allows scholars and activists to tune in to moments and movements that have competed for listeners in the past and the present. Such explorations will open up channels through which we can trace signals and echoes from one century to the next while recognising the static that erupts in any feminist moment (Hewitt, 2012:674).

I pick up on Hewitt's conception of 'feminist frequencies' in my discussion of *The Guilty Feminist* podcast in chapter six. However, here I would like to suggest that her notion of short and long waves overlapping with one another can be (re)applied to the oceanic metaphor. It seems that we only get into trouble with the wave-as-metaphor when we try to still the ocean and divide it into its constituent parts. To criticise waves for being 'divisive' is to be mired in transcendent thinking, where phenomena must be frozen and isolated in order to be represented. Throughout the thesis, then, the analogy of (radio *and* oceanic) waves helps me to present fourth wave feminism *as a multiplicity.*

There is a considerable amount of disagreement over when each feminist 'wave' started and ended. In an attempt to provide some clarity - at least for within the pages of this thesis - the first wave of feminism tends to be associated with the suffragist and suffragette movements of the late 19th and early 20th century. Of course, the idea of the 'first wave' only took hold retrospectively, after it was used in 1968 in an article in *The New York Times Magazine* (Henry, 2004:58). As pointed out by Henry;

> In identifying themselves as the second wave, women active in the women's liberation movement were able to position themselves within the longer trajectory of feminism's history while simultaneously putting themselves at the forefront of something new (2004:58).

The second wave is generally said to have taken place between the 1960s and 1990s. It encapsulates the work of numerous theorists and various differing feminist ideologies (e.g. Friedan, 1963; Greer, 1970; bell hooks, 1987), many of which are still relevant today. This is particularly evident in the fourth wave's focus on 'intersectionality', which is now considered a feminist 'buzzword' (Davis, 2008). This term, which was originally coined by 'second wave' feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw, is used to describe the interlocking systems of power that contribute to the oppression of marginalised groups (1989:149). Fourth wave feminists tend to speak about intersectionality in terms of 'representation', suggesting that

society would be more equitable if marginalised groups were more visible in business and the media (Munro, 2013 [online]).

The third wave - which was first acknowledged in Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1991) - is similarly difficult to define. Arguably, this 'wave' is concerned with highlighting the 'performance' of gender, which can be seen in the work of Judith Butler. For Butler, gender is always "a kind of becoming or activity… an incessant and repeated action of some sort" (Butler, 1990:112). Femininity is not the product of a choice, "but the forcible citation of a norm, one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation [and] punishment" (Butler, 1993:232). However, the third wave is also associated with the concept of 'postfeminism', which Gill presents as a highly contradictory 'sensibility', made up of a number of interrelated themes (2007:147). These themes include an emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and self-discipline, a focus on neoliberal individualism, choice and empowerment, and a resurgence of ideas around sexual difference (ibid). Postfeminism is sometimes regarded as a backlash against feminism (e.g. Faludi, 1991). However, Gill offers a slightly more nuanced analysis, calling attention to its tendency to entangle feminist and anti-feminist ideas;

> On the one hand, young women are hailed through a discourse of 'can-do girl power', yet on the other hand their bodies are powerfully reinscribed as sexual objects; women are presented as active, desiring social subjects, but they are subject to a level of scrutiny and hostile surveillance which has no historical precedent (2007:162).

According to Rivers, this ambivalence towards feminist politics has resulted in the sense that the 'fourth wave' "has sprung from nowhere" (2017:23). Fourth wavers tend not to be "veteran activists steeped in feminist texts and brandishing manifestos", but newcomers that have stumbled across gender inequality, seen that it is unfair, and decided to do something about it (Rivers, 2017:23).

Baumgardner dates the arrival of the fourth wave to 2008, which is the year that Twitter was invented (2011:23). According to Chamberlain, what motivates much contemporary feminism is a sense of "incredulity that certain attitudes can still exist" (2017:115). Its activism, therefore, tends to focus on instances of 'everyday' sexism (e.g. Bates, 2014), as well as sexual harassment, domestic violence, and gender-based inequalities in the

workplace. This has involved a reclaiming of the word, 'feminist', which has been helped along by the fact that:

> Both Beyoncé and Taylor Swift, previously perhaps better known for their expression of postfeminist attitudes and disavowal of the need for or importance of feminism, now publicly embrace the label 'feminist' (Rivers, 2017:7).

While this does mean that feminism has been brought back onto the frontlines of public discourse, it has not done much to disentangle the contradictions that were inherent to the fourth wave's 'postfeminist' predecessor. Rivers, for example, points out that neoliberal notions of 'choice' and 'personal empowerment' - reinforced by popular culture and the media - are still central to the fourth wave point of view (2017:9).

Another way in which this feminist feeling has started to manifest itself is through comedy, which - according to Cochrane - can also be understood as a "defining feature" of the fourth wave (2013:unpag). As discussed in chapter one, historically, women have been underrepresented in this arena. However, over the past decade, unprecedented numbers of women have started performing comedy at every level in the UK. The Edinburgh Festival Fringe, for example, is seeing more women flocking to the Scottish capital to make audiences laugh than ever before (Bradbury, 2017 [online]), and there has also been a huge increase in the representation of women comedians on television. Of course, the gender imbalance has not completely disappeared; a study in 2017 found that women make up only 31% of the comedians appearing on UK panel shows (Love Graphs, 2017 [online]). However, the same study also found a marked improvement since 1989, when this statistic was just 3% (ibid).

According to Cochrane, comedy is acting as a "gateway drug" to get women involved in feminism, a vehicle for political ideas and campaigning, as well as for rage (2013:unpag). Since Freud (2001), few people have questioned laughter's entanglements with aggression, and - as pointed out by Lesage - by denying women access to joke-making processes, we replicate the cultural and historical denial of women's anger as a legitimate response to the injustices they face (1988:426-427). For some activists, humour has become a political tactic, a way to communicate their anger in a way that is more accessible. Laura Bates, for instance, says that humour has provided her with a new way of building a strong, popular movement, by attracting people "who wouldn't be caught by

someone doing more academic, theoretical feminism" (Bates, 2013 - accessed Cochrane, 2014:unpag).

Of course, humour is not only applicable to the fourth wave. For example, Willett *et al.* (2012) call attention to some of the ways that comedy has been used to affect change at various stages of the women's movement of the 20th and 21st centuries. Harking back to the famous Miss America protests in 1968, for example, they point to the rich tradition of humorous street theatre that feminists have utilised to accumulate political force, and point out that this energy is being harnessed by contemporary feminists, too. By illuminating the inversions and inflaming the passions that fuel social awareness and political activism, comedy - they think - can produce social change. As well as creating a shared identity position for one group against another, they argue that comedy can form a loosely defined intersubjectivity (Willet *et al.*, 2012: 220). The "unity" of this intersubjectivity - of laughing together - occurs through temporarily suspending reified positions of identity, jolting us out of our learned habits and opening up fresh possibilities for collectivity (Willet *et al.*, 2012:221).

Cixous and Irigaray also stress the importance of laughter. In *The Laugh of the Medusa* - which is often cited in feminist literature on comedy - Cixous encourages women to reject systems of male 'reason' through laughter (Cixous, 1976:879). Laughter, here, is a form of 'écriture féminine' - or 'women's writing' - which can help women's bodies to be heard outside of masculine discourse (Cixous, 1976:880). The famous quote: "you only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she's not deadly. She's beautiful and she's laughing" (Cixous, 1976:885), for example, conjures an excessive femininity that cannot be contained by the male gaze. Similarly, Irigaray suggests that laughter is one way of moving through the mirror, or beyond the screen of representation. For example, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, she presents "women's laughter… [and those things that women] "dare" - do or say - when they are among themselves" (1985:134) as a form of 'feminine syntax' that precludes any "distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation" (ibid). Laughter - by its very nature - exceeds the limits of the cultural imaginary. It is "the first form of liberation from a secular oppression" (Irigaray, 1985:163), capable of transcending the 'seriousness' of masculine reason (ibid). It is also a way of understanding women's desire and pleasure, which tends to be overlooked in patriarchal discourse.

Starting with the feminist wave narrative, this 'current' has allowed me to point out some of the characteristics of contemporary feminisms. I have highlighted, for instance, how social media has helped to energise the present period of feminist activism. At all times, I have tried to remain multiple in my thinking, pointing to the ways in which waves of activism carry within them the debris of previous iterations of the women's movement. I have also started to explore the fourth wave's use of humour, which is - arguably - turning into a form of contemporary feminist praxis (like the internet). In what follows, I will explore why this move towards humour and laughter is of interest, by considering the incredibly fraught relationship between humour, feminism and women's bodies.

UNRULY BODIES

When writing about comedy, humour and/or laughter, it is customary to start by pointing out the dearth of literature on these subjects (e.g. Stott, 2005). And - if one of the purposes of the humanities and the social sciences is to better understand the human world - it is remarkable how little we have written about its playful and comic side(s). Indeed - as suggested by Hyers - "a survey of academic literature… would hardly lead to the speculation that this side of humanity… existed" (1996:1). In this section, I explore why these fields have been downgraded within the cultural establishment, and what this has meant for the fractious relationship between women and humour. In order to do so, I submerge myself - briefly - in the ideas of Aristotle and Plato; allowing myself to be pulled into a stream of ideas that have connected comedy with the 'unruly' female body.

Aristotle's *Poetics* (330BC) is our earliest surviving work of dramatic theory (Janko, 1987:ix), and it refers to comedy only a handful of times. Tragedy - which, for Aristotle, is "a… higher form of art" (1996) - is the focus of the piece, and comedy is brought in by way of comparison. For example, Aristotle writes that all drama seeks to represent the world mimetically; but while tragedy "is an imitation of an action that is admirable… and possesses magnitude" (Aristotle, 1996:10), comedy is "an imitation of inferior people… [and] of what is disgraceful" (Aristotle, 1996:9). This means that - since the dawn of Western philosophy - tragedy has been positioned as a higher literary form, while comedy has been characterised as an escape from reality, or a type of light-hearted amusement that is not worthy of study. For writers such as Stolnitz (1955), tragedy works with profound emotions, and confronts us with uncomfortable truths about morality and the human world. Comedy, by contrast, is believed to be concerned with matters that are trivial.

The idea that there might be a 'missing text' on comedy is the subject of much debate (Lombardini, 2013). Some classicists (e.g. Kendall, 1928) insist that Aristotle once gave a much fuller treatment to comedy, in a separate section (or sections) that have been lost. Interestingly, these lost sections are the subject of Umberto Eco's novel: *The Name of the Rose* (1983), which imagines that there has been conspiracy to keep comedy and humour out of religion. In the book, the 'lost' parts of Aristotle's *Poetics* have been purposefully suppressed out of a fear that they might radically alter the conceptual order of things. The missing book would "justify the marginal jests of the debauched imagination… [and] induce false scholars to try to redeem the lofty with a diabolical reversal: through the acceptance of the base" (Eco, 1995:475). While *The Name of the Rose* is a piece of fiction, it picks up on the way that the unambiguous value judgements in Aristotle's *Poetics* have informed thinking on the subject ever since. Comedy is that which tragedy is not. It is the 'low' to tragedy's 'high' ideals; it is its fall from grace.

I invoke the conceptual hierarchy that exists between comedy and tragedy because of the way it is entangled with the transcendental mind/body dualism at the heart of western philosophy. According to Grosz, philosophy - which first emerged as a separate and self-contained discipline in Ancient Greece - established itself on "the foundations of a profound somatophobia" (1994:5). In the *Cratylus*, for example, Plato claims that the word for 'body' (soma) comes from the same route as the word for 'dungeon' (sema), and takes this to mean that the body is like a "prison for the soul, reason or mind" (ibid). According to Plato, reason should rule over the irrational or appetitive urges of the body, and - in the *Republic -* humour falls clearly into this category:

> There's a part of you which wants to make people laugh, but your reason
> restrains it, because you're afraid of being thought a vulgar clown.
> Nevertheless, you let it have its way… [and] the almost inevitable result…
> is that you become a comedian in your own life (Plato, 1994:360).

By establishing a distinction between comedy and reason, Plato aligns comedy with that which reason is not: the body. Moreover, he positions the urge to make others laugh as a measure against which a rational identity can be formulated; an animal drive that requires transcendence. Giving in to laughter and joking is akin to giving the body the upper hand; something to be avoided at all costs. For Hyers, this is one of the reasons why "much philosophical ink has been spilt over tragedy, while comparatively little has been devoted

to comedy" (2008:33). However, as I will now discuss, it has also contributed to the difficult relationship that women have had with these cultural and artistic forms.

In her book, *Volatile Bodies* (1994), Grosz argues that women are more closely connected to the body than men are. Through this identification, she suggests, patriarchal oppression justifies its restrictions on women's social roles:

> Relying on essentialism, naturalism and biologism, misogynist thought confines women… on the assumption that because of particular biological, physiological and endocrinological transformations, women are somehow *more* biological, *more* corporeal, and *more* natural than men (1994:14).

This can also be seen in comedy, where women have been positioned as comedy's natural target. Stott and Double, for example, describe how - since its conception in the Victorian Music Hall - stand-up comedy has been used to discipline the bodies of women. In the 1800s, for instance, female impersonation - or comic drag - continued to be a popular form of performance (Stott, 2005:82). However, as Stott points out, the intention of female impersonation was to parody types of femininity through a knowing masculine prism; often presenting 'vulgar' attitudes to sex and a level of artifice and vanity that would be deemed inappropriate in 'real' women (Stott, 2005:82). Caricatures of female behaviour tend to emphasise women's sexual and physical appetites, acting as a way of disciplining and warning women to maintain socially acceptable feminine behaviours (Double, 1997:63). The images of women's bodies conjured by Music Hall and Variety performances were often ambivalent, trivial and base, suggestive of women's unruly and unreliable natures and proof that they should not be permitted into the public sphere.

This is, arguably, one of the reasons why women are underrepresented in comedy. Barecca points out that, in communities throughout the world, women who tell jokes are still "regarded as sexually promiscuous… [because] it takes a certain fallen knowledge to make a joke" (Barecca, 1991:50). Comedy, which is thought to expose the body's animal instincts, is something that women - who are thought to be closer to the animals - must push away in order to be accepted within society. Men, on the other hand, are believed to be able to 'control' their body's 'animal' urges. As a result, comedy is a safe space for them to enter into for short periods of time.

Nowhere can the alignment between comedy and the unruly (female) body be seen more clearly than in Bakhtin's notion of 'the grotesque'. To understand this term, it is necessary to take a brief detour into *Rabelais and His World* (1984), in which Bakhtin writes about a "culture of folk carnival humour" that he terms 'carnivalesque' (1984:4). The carnivalesque, according to Bakhtin, refers to a range of subversive practices that were developed during the middle ages, usually around specific festivals and feast days within the Christian calendar (1984:217-218). These liberating times of inversion, where hierarchy and rank were suspended along with many other social norms, "made a man renounce his official state as monk, cleric, scholar, and perceive the world in its laughing aspect" (Bakhtin, 1984:13). Carnival provided a stark contrast to the church's 'official' "tone of icy and petrified seriousness" (Bakhtin, 1984:73), celebrating the body, offering an alternative conception of social relations and creating space for people to experience their collectivity through laughter.

For Bakhtin, the true spirit of carnival is realised in the grotesque body, which he introduces through the comic novels of Francois Rabelais. In these stories - which are entitled *The Life of Gargantua and of Pantagruel* - the reader is regaled with the misadventures of two giants, which involve "a continual round of eating, drinking, defecating, urinating, sweating, copulating and passing wind" (Taylor, 1995:19). In telling these stories, Bakhtin suggests that Rabelais is rebelling against the 'classic' conception of the body (1984:303). That is because he is preoccupied with the body's orifices, and the physical functions that mediate the relationship between the body and the world. So, rather than presenting the body as hermetically sealed and individualistic, he presents it as open to the world and *in process.* In this way, the grotesque can be seen as a manifestation of a popular, festive, folk identity, capable of undermining the frail power of civility and elevating bodily behaviours that are not normally permissible in the public sphere (Bakhtin, 1984:309).

However, in another way, grotesque images are problematic because of the ways in which they are linked inextricably to women. As Russo points out, the word - 'grotesque' - evokes the cave: "the grotto-esque… [which is] low, hidden, earthly, dark" (Russo, 1994:1). Because of this, the grotesque tends to be identified with "the cavernous female body; the cave as womb, and woman-as-mother" (ibid). In her book - *The Female Grotesque* - Russo describes how archetypal views of grotesque images can valorise traditional

images of "the earth mother, the crone, the witch", positing a natural connection between the naturalised female body and the 'primal' elements:

> It is an easy and perilous slide from these archaic tropes to the misogyny that identifies this hidden inner space with the visceral. Blood, tears, vomit, excrement - all the detritus of the body that is separated out and placed with terror and revulsion (predominantly, though not exclusively) on the side of the feminine - are down there in that cave of abjection (Russo, 1994:1).

It is true that - for Bakhtin - 'woman' is essentially related to the material bodily lower stratum; "she is the incarnation of this stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously" (1984:240). Bakhtin attempts to cast off the obvious misogyny within this alignment, arguing that grotesque representations of women 'celebrate' their ability to create new life, in contradistinction to men (1984:240). However, as pointed out by Russo (1994), the ambivalence of the grotesque can make it a dangerous space for women to inhabit.

This is partly because grotesque images endorse the conceptual link that we have already drawn between women and the body, showing "the inversion that can be expected of the woman that gives rein to the lower in herself" (Davis, 1975:133). Katherina in Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* is a good example of this. Her comic foibles - which have been brutally disciplined by the end of the play - legitimise the close supervision of women's bodies, validating patriarchal subjugation. Another problematic aspect of the carnivalesque is that - in a very real sense - carnival practices tend only to be liberating for some people. As already indicated, carnival "made a *man* renounce his official state as monk, cleric, scholar, and perceive the world in its laughing aspect" (Bakhtin, 1984:13 - my emphasis). And - as pointed out by Russo - there is much evidence to suggest that women were raped during medieval carnival festivities (1994:60). In other words, women and their bodies are always-already transgressive, which means they are always-already "dangerous, and in danger" (ibid). While carnival imagery is preoccupied with the womb, women are not actually permitted to participate in the carnival itself. In this sense, the grotesque brings together the subjugation of comedy within the academy *with* the subjugation of women in society, showing the ways in which these two regimes of thought are highly interconnected.

However, according to some thinkers, the grotesque also opens up possibilities for women. For example, Davis promotes the notion of 'the unruly woman', a trope that "disrupt[s] the norms of femininity and the social hierarchy of male over female through excess and outrageousness" (Davis, 1975 - accessed Rowe, 1995:30). Davis points out that unruly women exist beyond 'moral' tales (such as *The Taming of the Shrew*), providing a useful counterpoint to patriarchal social relations. Rabelais invites us to imagine one of his giants - Gargamelle - "joyously and frequently coupling, eating bushels of tripe, quaffing wine, [and] joking obscenely" (Davis, 1975:134); happily giving herself over to the sway of her bodily senses. Davis believes that the image of the unruly woman - which was available at the theatre, in books and in stories and poems that were read aloud - opened up possibilities for ordinary women to rethink their behaviours and relationships (Davis, 1975:145).

The figure of the unruly woman has been popularised and updated by Rowe (1995), whose book on the subject has been highly influential at the intersection of feminist theory, comedy studies and film studies. Looking at examples from contemporary film and television, Rowe offers a cluster of qualities associated with women who disrupt the norms of femininity and the social hierarchy of male over female through excess and outrageousness. This includes (but is not limited to) being "unable or unwilling to confine herself to her proper place" (Rowe, 1995:31), "making jokes, and laughing herself" (ibid), and calling "attention to the social construction of gender" (ibid). Above all, the unruly woman "is associated with dirt, liminality (thresholds, borders, margins), and taboo, rendering her above all a figure of ambivalence" (ibid).

As I will show in the chapters ahead, the unruly woman is highly relevant to the fourth wave. This is partly because the policing of (women's) bodies is, sadly, not a thing of the past. As pointed out by Gill, postfeminism led to the fetishisation of the "young, able-bodied, 'fit' (understood as both healthy, and in its more contemporary sense as 'attractive') female body" (2007:163). As well as social media giving rise to new forms of feminist activism, it has also been responsible for an onslaught of mental health issues associated with young women, including low self-esteem, eating disorders, anxiety and depression (Campbell, 2019 [online]). As I will explore, the grotesque body - which is finding its way back onto our stages and television screens - is able to intervene in discourses around specific feminist issues, as well as provoke new thinking about the human subject and its place within a wider collective.

FOUR HUMOUR THEORIES

I now want to explore the different ways in which it is possible to understand comedy, humour and laughter. This is because - while there are no universally accepted, all-encompassing theories to work with - it is possible to pick out four dominant ways of thinking, which emerge again and again in the chapters ahead. The first of these is 'superiority' theory, which suggests that jokes reinforce the inferior social status of marginalised individuals and groups. This idea - which is the oldest of the four I will discuss here - is most famously examined by Hobbes. In *Leviathan*, he describes laughter as an expression of "sudden glory", which arises when we feel as though we are superior to others (Hobbes, 1996:43). 'Relief' theory, which gained traction in the nineteenth century (Lintott, 1998), pulls in a slightly different direction, suggesting that humour can result in the physical release of tension. This theory is developed by Freud, who suggests that jokes - like dreams - expose repressed thoughts and feelings (2001:3). 'Incongruity' theory - which emerged at a similar time - tries to describe the humour object itself, examining the attributes that make something humorous. Simply put, this theory suggests that for an object to be humorous, some kind of incongruity must exist (Morreall, 2012 [online]). Then there is a fourth theory - which emerged in the twentieth century - that investigates the 'playful' aspects of comedy and laughter, taking into account the humorous behaviours of animals (Provine, 2001).

Contemporary theorists tend to agree that each of these ideas contains a grain of truth (Double, 1997:89) but also that there is a central methodological absence in discussions of comedy, humour and laughter, which leaves us with "no common assumptions and no set of conventions" (Charney, 1978:vii-viii). Comedy, for instance, is celebrated within the academy as "plural, unfinalised, disseminative, dependent on context and the intertextuality of creator, text and contemplator" (Horton 1991:9), and this has led to the blossoming of academic writing enjoying the freedom from definition that surrounds the form. Olson, for example, presents comedy as an affront to rationality and meta-narratives, positioning it as "an immanent form that does not make us look unto the heavens or to God for answers to questions" (2001:5). As Olson points out, comedy "is strangely fluid and cannot be contained by rational thought" (2001:6), which leaves it open to the formation of new definitions and insights. By engaging with feminist and new materialist approaches, I will start to do as Olson suggests; positioning comedy, humour and laughter as a 'biosocial' field of generative and often inscrutable forces.

But first, I will explore each of the humour theories in a little more detail. To discuss superiority theory, I would like to hark back to the article that Christopher Hitchens wrote for *Vanity Fair* magazine in 2007, which I quoted from in chapter one. As you might remember, Hitchens' answer to the question of 'why women aren't funny' is to do with 'Mother Nature'. He writes:

> The chief task in life that a man has to perform is that of impressing the opposite sex, and Mother Nature (as we laughingly call her) is not so kind to men. In fact, she equips so many fellows with very little armament for the struggle. An average man has just one, outside chance: he had better be able to make the lady laugh… Women have no corresponding need to appeal to men in this way. They already appeal, if you get my drift (2007 [online]).

Hitchens is pretending to be speaking on behalf of the 'underdog', here. However, his 'humorous' remark is of a typically misogynist variety. Not only have women (in his opinion) not been gifted with enough intelligence to be funny, but they exist as bodies to-be-looked-at for the titillation of men. Later in the article, Hitchens explains that female comedians tend to be "hefty or dykey or Jewish, or some combo of the three" (ibid). Like the comic performances of the Victorian Music Hall (Double, 1997), this is the sort of humour that aims to discipline the bodies of women, while keeping the power (and the pleasure) on the side of the heteronormative man.

Since the establishment of 'free speech' as a basic right, bigoted jokes such as these have been vehemently defended. Indeed, many comics assert their right to make others laugh, and include in their list of targets those politically correct individuals that they think want to curb their freedom. As pointed out by Willet and Willet, these liberal conceptions of autonomy and self-ownership position the individual as detached from others (2019:11). "In this excessively abstract view of the self and its liberty, free speech means simply expressing one's own opinions" (Willet & Willet, 2019:12). However, ridicule and insult need to be understood and evaluated in terms of their social context. Racist slurs are extremely harmful in the context of white supremacy, just as rape jokes are hazardous under patriarchy (ibid). Yet there are some ways in which superiority theory can be understood as a 'leveller', when someone from a marginalised group directs their laughter 'up' rather than 'down' the pecking order (Willet & Willet, 2019:12). In other words, it is important to pay attention to the multilayered and intersectional power relations that are at

play when thinking about humour, and think about how comedy might work with (and/or against) our entrenched hierarchies and biases.

This brings me to relief theory, which - according to Morreall - can be traced back to the 'hydraulic' model of the body that was popular in the early 18th century (Morreall, 2012 [online]). In this way of thinking, laughter acts like a pressure-valve, allowing for the safe release of dangerous 'humours' (ibid). Incidentally, this is the first time that the word - humour - was used in relation to comedy. Well into the 18th century, the term (which is etymologically linked to the Latin word for 'humidity') referred not to laughter and joking but to the ancient theory of bodily fluids (Arikha, 2009). Of course, as the nervous system came to be better understood, the biology behind relief theory was revised. However, in *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (2001), Freud maintains that laughter releases energy and emotions that have been repressed. For Freud, the most-repressed emotions are sexual desire and hostility, and so it follows that most jokes are about sex, hostility, or both. In telling a sexual joke, for instance, we bypass our internal censor and give in to our libido. The psychic energy normally used to do the repressing becomes superfluous, and is released in laughter (Freud, 2001).

It is worth pointing out, here, that the idea of 'comic relief' positions the human subject as an isolated, dualistic creature with autonomous borders. This way of thinking is now being challenged by the growing number of studies that have explored the affective dimensions of laughter and comedy (Emmerson, 2017; Willett & Willett, 2014; Wyatt, 2019). As anyone who has ever yielded to uncontrollable waves of laughter will know, this catching form of human behaviour troubles the idea that we are in conscious control of our behaviour, and places us in and amongst a wider collective. While a sustained engagement with affect theory in other areas of performance studies is now becoming more apparent (e.g. Cull Ó Maoilearca, 2013), affect studies of laughter and comedy present a relatively new field. This work is characterised by attempts to understand the (molecular) movements that humour can generate, the capacities that this affords to different bodies, and the complex ways in which power is mobilised by it at various scales. Sharpe *et al.* (2010), for instance, discuss the comedy performances of Stewart Lee, arguing that they enable audiences to generate new "affective habits" through which prejudices might be altered and made less certain. Elsewhere, Emmerson describes laughter as an extraordinary display of human group behaviour, which offers insights for understanding the shifting nature of human identity (2017). Importantly, in each of these cases, humour is not reduced to the

triumphant expression of superiority or the simple release of pent-up energy. Rather, laughter is positioned as a powerful force, which might generate new social formations.

However, returning to the dominant humour theories, the notion of incongruity places humour well and truly in the realm of the intellect. Kant, for example, believed that laughter was caused by the sudden transformation of expectation into nothing (Morreall, 2012 [online]). This sort of transformation occurs within many joke structures, where there is a 'setup' - which creates an expectation - and a 'punchline', which punctures it. Later, Schopenhauer suggested that the 'incongruity' within humour is between our sense perception and our abstract rational knowledge. In joking, sense perception - which, for Schopenhauer, is the original kind of human knowledge - gets the upper hand; resulting in laughter (Morreall, 2012 [online]). This more cerebral understanding of humour continues to influence much writing on the subject. And - in doing so - it continues to divorce the human mind from the body. Indeed, Critchley suggests that what causes laughter is the existential incongruity of being a human mind stuck in an animal body, with all the humiliations that entails (2002:2).

Incongruity theory is certainly relevant to feminism. Billingsley, for example, argues that 'the warping potential' of comedy can be used upon the discourse of patriarchy; "disrupt[ing] the language of phallogocentrism and mov[ing] towards a language in which women (as themselves or as a class) can speak" (Billingsley, 2013:15-16). Moreover, comedian Bridget Christie talks about the absurdities of sexist society, which give her an endless supply of incongruous material (Christie - accessed Chiaro, 2007:106). However, we might - in league with Wilson's 'gut feminism' - also think about what feminist laughter offers us in terms of *reconnecting* the mind with the body. As Willet and Willet point out, the mockery that converts despair into hope or anger into indignant outrage gives a jolt not only to a mental apparatuses, but to an entire biosocial system that is inextricably bound to politics and power (2019:14).

So far, I have explored three of the dominant humour theories: superiority theory, relief, and incongruity. In each case, laughter has been positioned as a response to some sort of stimulus, whether that stimulus be a feeling of eminence, a release of pent-up energy or the perception of incongruity. However, I now want to de-centre this assumption, before moving into an exploration of play. In order to do so, I will turn briefly to the ideas of Suzanne Langer, who criticises the tendency to seek "the source of laughter in funny

things or situations, i.e. in nature, whereas it really lies in the subject who laughs" (1973:339). Indeed, for Langer, "what is laughable does not explain the nature of laughter, any more than what is rational explains the nature of reason" (1973:340).

For Langer, the feeling of laughter is one that belongs to life. Because comedy captures the motion and rhythm of living, "it enhances our vital feeling, much as the presentation of space in painting enhances our awareness of visual space" (Langer, 1973:344). Laughter - or the tendency to laugh - seems to arise from a surge of vital feeling (Langer, 1973:340). This 'surge' may be small or big; sudden or slow, but in most cases there will be "a marked climax at which point we laugh or smile with joy" (ibid). By putting in the qualifier - 'in most cases' - Langer points out that the tendency to laugh may be inhibited, in which case it might only affect the facial muscles, or be squashed entirely. Importantly, however, laughter is not a simple act. Instead, it is the spectacular end of a complex process. Just as speech can be seen as the culmination of mental activity, laughter can be understood as a culmination of feeling, or "the crest of a wave of felt vitality" (ibid).

This way of looking at laughter is corroborated by recent research in the fields of Psychology and Neuroscience. In an experiment involving 1,200 people in a shopping mall, for example, Provine found that only 10% of the instances of laughter he recorded were preceded by anything remotely humorous. In fact, the most common pre-laugh comments were everyday phrases such as greetings (Provine, 2001:40). Similarly, Scott emphasises the links between human laughter and the play behaviours of other mammals such as chimps, dogs and rats (Scott, 2015 [online]), emphasising the role of laughter as an ancient evolutionary mechanism for regulating intense feelings during play (ibid). Indeed, scientists have now tuned in to everything from the chirping of amused rats to the infectious laughter of parrots (Kennedy, 2017 [online]), problematising the notion (which was most famously put forward by Aristotle) that human beings are the only creatures that laugh (Parvulescu, 2010:4).

One particularly interesting facet of 'play' theories of humour are to do with 'tickle', which - according to Provine - has forced a rethinking of the origins of laughter, and the basis of humour as a social behaviour (2001:100). This is because *relationships* are key to understanding tickle; a stimulus that simply doesn't work when people are on their own, or when they are with someone they do not like. The response to tickle is a socially and behaviourally complex reaction that we share with other primates (Provine, 2001:99). It is

to do with intimacy, and with negotiating the ins and outs of social bonds. And, while tickle does not feature at all in this study, I mention it here because it helps to set the foundations for a different way of thinking about laughter. Humans, as we know, are group-oriented creatures. Therefore, variants of humour and laughter tend to work first and foremost as a social lubricant and an invitation to play, and only secondarily as a response to jokes.

This, of course, lends force to the perception (which I have already described) of humour and laughter as waves of affect. Indeed, in his essay entitled *The Meaning of the Comic*, Bergson conjures the image of "waves on the surface of the sea" (2014:479) to suggest that laughter - in all its multiple forms - can only be understood in the context of a group. It is a 'social gesture' that indicates "a slight revolt on the surface of social life", continually shifting and changing (2014:479). For Bergson, laughter emphasises the undulating forces that move between bodies; forces that "clash and collide with each other, as they strive to find their level" (ibid). And, as we have seen in all of the currents moving through this chapter, comedy, humour and laughter can tell us much about the dynamic relations that exist between bodies in different cultural milieus.

Interestingly, Bergson also uses his 'wave' analogy to point out how difficult it is to understand humour and laughter. The philosopher of comedy - he thinks - is like a child playing on the beach. The child attempts to gather a handful of the 'snow-white foam' that has been left on the sand, and is astonished to find that 'nothing remains in his grasp but a few drops of water, water that is "far more brackish, far more bitter than… the wave which brought it" (2014:490). Like Bergson, I will not be trying to 'make sense' of comedy, humour or laughter. Rather, I will be submerging myself in the waves of my research, hoping to encounter these ideas as multiplicities; and as potential for change.

CHAPTER THREE:
METHODOLOGY

At the start of the *Making Waves* project, I set out to explore how humour, comedy and laughter are functioning within the fourth wave feminist movement. As indicated in chapter one, this was sparked by my own experiences of fourth wave comedy as a theatre practitioner, audience member and feminist. And - after doing my initial research (some of which is outlined in chapter two) - I wanted to investigate:

- How comic techniques are being mobilised by feminists in order to shatter restrictive and outmoded processes of gender representation,

- How waves of laughter generated by feminist comedy performances could be eventfully opening bodies to the possibility of new ways of being, and

- How laughter might be capable of creating ripples of affective solidarity, energising an intersectional feminist community of global proportions.

I spent time in three event-spaces, where aspects of fourth wave humour, comedy and laughter were already taking shape. The first of these spaces was the Women's Comedy Workshop; a participatory project for women in Bradford, which had originally been set up in 2015. Here, I facilitated two comedy projects, inviting women to take part in a series of comedy workshops and to then perform at a dedicated comedy night. The second was the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which is the world's largest arts festival, and the second largest comedy festival (Scott, 2017 [online]). Here, I watched a range of performances by feminist comedians, and interviewed two performers that were using comic techniques in their work. The third 'event-space' was that of the hugely popular feminist comedy podcast entitled *The Guilty Feminist*. I listened to the podcast while walking through the city of Manchester, paying attention to my experiences as a 'virtual' audience member, and to the ways in which these experiences altered my relationship with the world around me.

Because I was entangled with each aspect of the study as a practitioner, participant and audience member, each of the spaces worked as a different 'entry-point'; allowing me to gain a multifaceted and rhizomatic understanding of the phenomenon whilst also *staying in the middle* of it. In this chapter, I will describe how I combined traditional ethnographic methods (such as interviews and participant observation) with aspects of process-oriented methodology, drawing on recent theoretical movements associated with new materialism (e.g. Barad, 2007) and speculative pragmatism (e.g. Manning, 2016; Massumi, 2011). This approach allowed me to pay attention to the eventful moments of experience that unfolded through the project as a whole; and to gain an embodied understanding of what fourth wave comedy, humour and laughter could be doing within the fourth wave. My discussion of methodology unfolds in three sections that are interspersed through the chapter, in which I discuss my process of becoming a 'diffractive' practitioner, 'intra-acting' with the fringe, and working with 'events' rather than more traditional 'data'.

A 'DIFFRACTIVE' METHODOLOGY

However, first, I want to explore Barad and Haraway's notion of 'diffraction'. Simply stated, diffraction has to do with the way waves bend and stretch when they encounter an obstruction (Barad, 2007:74). For example, when ocean waves hit a breakwater, they tend to spread out as they push through the gap, forming a 'diffraction pattern' of concentric half circles (ibid). Similarly, if someone speaks into a cardboard tube, sound waves will move in all directions as they emerge from the other end (Barad, 2007:75). As they spread out, the waves overlap and interfere with one another, producing unique patterns as they meet. According to Barad, this is a useful concept for contemporary researchers, because it works against the idea of 'reflection' or 'reflexivity' within representational thinking (Barad, 2007:71). Methodologically, representational thinking can be seen in the 'scientific method', which - in the West at least - has been the dominant means for acquiring knowledge since the 17th century (Anderson & Hepburn, 2015 [online]). This method involves careful observation, followed by the formulation of hypotheses, and then experimental and measurement-based testing of those hypotheses. Knowledge acquired in this way is thought to 'mirror' reality. Representational thinking, then, is described as 'reflective', because words, concepts and ideas are thought to reflect the things to which they refer (Barad, 2007:86). Diffractive thinking, on the other hand, attends to the interferences and irregularities that are enacted when we try to understand the "specific material configurations" of the world (Barad, 2007:91).

In particular, Barad advocates for the practice of "thinking insights from scientific and social theories *through* one another" (Barad, 2007:91 - my emphasis). Traditionally, organising a body of scholarship is a form of boundary-creation, where one might place opposing 'schools' of thought in a "static geometrical relation" to one another; "setting one up as the other's unmovable and unyielding foil" (Barad, 2007:92). However, when we place the understandings that have been generated from different practices in conversation with one another, we "engage aspects of each in a *dynamic* relationality" (Barad, 2007:93 - original emphasis); interfering with boundaries and calling attention to the possibilities for change. As can be seen in chapter two, this is a particularly productive way of engaging with the literature around comedy, humour, laughter, feminism and affect, because these areas are already highly inter-disciplinary. Chapter two - which can be understood as a 'diffractive' literature review - brings together ideas from each field in terms of four swirling 'currents', which create interference patterns as they clash, collide and coalesce. Later in this methodology chapter, I will articulate how diffraction helped me to interfere within the boundary-forming practices of other traditional methods (such as interviews and methods of participant observation). For example, I explore what it means to work in-between the roles of 'researcher', 'facilitator' and 'participant', which - within traditional ethnography - are presumed to be stable and clearly identifiable (Mills & Morton, 2015).

For Barad, diffractive thinking also shows that matter and meaning are not separate elements, but "inextricably fused together" (Barad, 2007:3). In other words, ideas and objects do not exist outside of their interaction with one another. Rather, "they emerge through particular intra-actions" (Barad, 2007:33). The notion of intra-action is an important part of diffractive thought, because it recognises that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action (Barad, 2007:33). Barad exemplifies this by discussing the work of Danish physicist Niels Bohr, who proved that light sometimes behaves as a particle - and other times as a wave - depending on the material configuration of the experiment. This discovery led Bohr to state that scientific phenomena are not 'out there' waiting for us to discover them. Rather, they emerge *through* our experiments. Our knowledge-making practices contribute to, and *are a part of*, the phenomena they describe.

As I will discuss, this idea has helped me to take responsibility for the various ways in which I am entangled with the study. As Haraway points out, it is impossible for

researchers to remain 'objective' and 'unbiased', as this would require us to "leap out of the marked body… to a conquering gaze from nowhere" (Haraway, 1991:200). Instead, researchers should be answerable for what they learn how to see. So, rather than attempting to extricate myself from the various aspects of my study (which - as explored in chapter one - I was always-already highly entangled with), I have developed a way of working that places my body and my experiences at the heart of the research.

This has entailed thinking about the study in terms of a 'research assemblage', which can be imagined as a "web of forces, intensities and encounters" (Braidotti, 2006:41) between human and non-human elements. By shifting my analysis away from the study of individual subjects, and onto the intra-actions between bodies, ideas and things, I have been able to focus on the micropolitics of my research, and take into account the ways in which knowledge is produced. As an example of this, later in this chapter, I consider how my interviews became 'intra-views' (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012), in which my role as interviewer existed in a dynamic relationality to the presence of the interviewee and the material environment of each conversation.

I will now discuss each event-space in turn. As already indicated, I will describe how - in each space - I combined traditional ethnographic methods (such as interviews and participant observation) with aspects of process-oriented methodology, drawing on recent theoretical movements associated with new materialism (e.g. Barad, 2007) and speculative pragmatism (e.g. Manning, 2016; Massumi, 2011). I will show how this allowed me to pay attention to the eventful moments of experience that unfolded through the project as a whole; and to gain an embodied understanding of what fourth wave comedy, humour and laughter could be doing within the fourth wave.

Ultimately, I hope to show how knowledge has been generated within and through the *Making Waves* research assemblage. As already discussed, there are no boundaries or borders between me and the study; or between the study and the fourth wave feminist movement. In fact, by writing this thesis, I am not describing a phenomenon that is 'out there', rather I am participating in it - energising, adding force to and 'making waves' within the idea that humour, comedy and laughter are important facets of the fourth wave.

THE WOMEN'S COMEDY WORKSHOP

The Women's Comedy Workshop takes place at Theatre in the Mill; a small studio theatre hidden away within Bradford's main university campus. It invites women to experiment with comedy, humour and laughter in a safe and supportive environment, and organises comedy nights at which participants can perform. As outlined in chapter one, the Women's Comedy Workshop has been in motion since 2015. It started small, but - by 2017 - it was already beginning to take on a life of its own. Many of the women that had participated in the first workshops were keen to do more, and Theatre in the Mill had received a number of emails from women that wanted to join in. On starting the *Making Waves* project, then, it was simply a case of harnessing this momentum.

In this section, I describe the two projects that I led with the Women's Comedy Workshop in 2017 and 2018. As well as discussing some of the ethical implications associated with 'tweaking' the structure of the workshops to suit my aims, I give an account of the mixed ethnographic methods that were used. I also discuss how I became a 'diffractive' practitioner (Hill, 2017), which helped me to move beyond 'reflective' accounts of the workshops and performances; and look instead for unexpected moments and events that worked to open up a deeper and richer understanding of what had occurred.

THE FIRST PROJECT:

The first project started in January 2017. It was comprised of four workshops, a comedy night and a reflection session. As indicated in table one, all of the workshops (and the reflection session) were scheduled for Saturday afternoons, and the performance took place on a Saturday night. This was to make the project accessible for potential participants, who - as women - were likely to be juggling a range of commitments during the week. Activities were spaced out over three months for the same reason; giving participants access to free weekends at every stage of the project.

Participants were recruited via an advert on Theatre in the Mill's website, which read:

> *Unlock your inner funny woman in a safe, women-only space! This lively and practical introduction to comedy will allow you to build your confidence and explore a range of comic styles, with an opportunity to share material in a supportive and friendly environment.*

The advert (a full version of which can be found in the Appendix) was shared on social media, and sent in an email to all the women on Theatre in the Mill's mailing list. It aimed to attract participants by hinting at what they might gain from the experience, such as increased levels of confidence and the chance to explore different comic styles. It also emphasised that the workshops were 'safe', 'women-only', and 'supportive', to encourage women that might otherwise avoid comedy to apply.

Because the Women's Comedy Workshop was already established, it was important to emphasise that this project would be slightly different, in that it would contribute to my PhD research. This was indicated clearly on the advert, and - in order to sign up - participants were asked to read an information sheet and fill in an application form, which had a consent form attached to it. Both of these documents can be viewed in the Appendix. The information sheet described the study in detail, explaining how I would be capturing each event, and what would happen to my films, field notes and transcripts once the project was over. It also emphasised that participating in the research project was voluntary, and that participants could withdraw their consent (without affecting their involvement in the workshops) at any time. The application forms also helped me to start 'getting to know' participants before the project started. Where quotes from application forms have been used (in chapter four), further consent was sought - via email - from the participants in question.

Because I knew - from previous experience - that the workshops occasionally delved into sensitive and/or difficult personal topics, the Women's Comedy Workshop project was deemed to be of 'medium' risk by my university's ethics committee. To mitigate this risk, the information sheet warned participants that the workshops could bring up a range of strong emotions, and asked them to make sure they had appropriate emotional support in place. I brought literature from local mental health services with me to each workshop. However, at no point did participants report any negative effects from taking part in the workshops. Overwhelmingly, they spoke of the positive impact(s) that the experience had had on their lives; some of which are discussed in chapter four.

In total, 14 women signed up to the first project. As can be seen in table two, the youngest participants were in their mid-twenties, and the oldest had just turned 70. All were from Bradford and the surrounding areas, and the group as a whole was diverse in terms of its ethnic and socio-economic background. Ten of the women were already known to me,

having participated in some of the earlier workshops that were connected to my production of *Thesmo*. Four were new to me and to the project as a whole. Personal information relating to participants has been stored in a password-protected document on my laptop, and will be securely destroyed in three years, in line with the Data Protection Act. To preserve the anonymity of participants, all of the names that appear in this thesis have been changed.

As indicated in table one, I facilitated the first, second and fourth workshops myself, using my extensive experience as a theatre practitioner to create a safe space in which participants could explore comic techniques and develop stand-up material. Each session was two and a half hours long, and tended to be structured around a particular comedy technique or process such as 'clowning' or 'developing material'. We always played some games at the start of the workshop, and spent time reflecting on the session at the end. Kate Fox - the professional stand-up comedian that I mention in chapter one - facilitated the third workshop, helping the group to develop 'performance skills' on the lead up to the comedy night.

Both Kate and I adopted a relaxed and friendly facilitation style that helped us to learn-with the participants; leading workshop activities in a way that would allow us all to learn from each other, rather than keeping the focus on us as the 'experts' in the room. This could be related to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996), which is a highly collaborative way of working with participants. So, rather than teaching a particular 'method' of performing stand-up comedy, for instance, we invited the participants to develop their own modes of performance, by playing games and then trying out techniques together. According to Freire, this can help participants to develop a critical consciousness in which they "come to see the world not as static reality but as a reality in process, in transformation" (1996:64). Practically, it meant factoring lots of time for discussion into each workshop, and designing activities that would encourage participants to create material together/give each other feedback. The pedagogy that Kate and I developed is discussed in more detail in chapter four and chapter seven.

To capture each event, I filmed the workshops using two Panasonic HC-V270 camcorders that were placed on tripods at opposite ends of the room. I also took field notes during and after each workshop; scribbling my experiences and observations in a hardback notebook

that was kept solely for this purpose. At the start of each workshop, I reminded participants of the nature of my PhD research, and sought verbal consent. I also reminded participants that they could - at any point - ask not to be included in the research, and/or to review and edit the films and my field notes.

On Saturday 1 April, 12 members of the group (and myself) performed a stand-up set at Theatre in the Mill. The remaining 2 women were unable to perform due to other commitments. There were around 60 people in the audience; mostly made up of the friends and family of the performers. Kate compered the event, helping to contextualise the project for the audience, and creating a supportive, good humoured atmosphere by performing some of her own stand-up material. The stand-up sets were all approximately 5 minutes long, and I made sure participants felt ready to perform by making space at the start of the evening for everyone to do a 'dress rehearsal', where they could practice with the microphone.

I filmed the performance using two Panasonic HC-V270 camcorders; one of which was placed in the middle of the auditorium (to capture the performances), and one of which was placed at the side of the stage (to capture the audience's reactions). I put up posters in the theatre's foyer to explain why I was filming the event; and to make my contact details readily available in case any audience members wanted more information about the research project, or did not wish to be included. At the end of the performance, audience members were invited to put some money in a bucket on a 'pay-what-you-decide' basis. This way of taking money has become increasingly popular in the past decade, as a way of removing some of the barriers that prevent audiences from attending performance events (Gardner, 2014 [online]). The collected funds went back to the theatre, to help cover the cost of hosting the event.

A few weeks after the performance, participants were invited to attend a reflection session, at which I structured an informal conversation about their experiences through the project as a whole. This conversation was audio-recorded on my iPhone, and then transcribed onto a password-protected document on my laptop.

TABLE ONE - THE STRUCTURE OF THE FIRST PROJECT:

DATE / TIME	ACTIVITY	DETAIL
Saturday 21 January 2017 2pm-4.30pm	Workshop 1	The first workshop served as an introduction to the project. It started with ice-breakers, which helped the group get to know one another. I also introduced the group to some simple clowning games, using costume and props to inspire funny characters and improvisations.
Saturday 18 February 2017 2pm-4.30pm	Workshop 2	In the second workshop, I invited participants to start thinking about material for stand-up comedy. This involved a number of discussion activities, and an exercise in which we created mind maps exploring potential topics. The workshop finished with everyone improvising a short stand-up set.
Saturday 4 March 2017 2pm-4.30pm	Workshop 3	Kate Fox led the third workshop, which focussed on performance skills. She led an exercise that helped us to be more 'present' with an audience, and gave us some feedback on the structure of our developing stand-up performances.
Saturday 18 March 2017 2pm-4.30pm	Workshop 4	This was the last workshop of the series. We played some games, and then spent the rest of the session working collaboratively on each stand-up set. This involved helping each participant to develop jokes, and to generally feel more confident about performing.
Saturday 1 April 2017 8pm-10pm	Comedy Night	Participants met at the theatre at 5pm to go over their material. Audience members started arriving at 7.30pm, and the performance ran from 8pm-10pm, with a short interval in the middle.
Saturday 15 April 2017 3pm-4.30pm	Reflection Session	Participants met at the theatre to reflect on their experience of the Women's Comedy Workshop project.

TABLE TWO - PARTICIPANTS THAT ATTENDED THE FIRST PROJECT:

NAME	AGE	ETHNICITY	ATTENDED BEFORE?
Adrienne	63	White Welsh	Yes
Alpana	44	British Asian	No
Annie	70	White British	Yes
Chaz	42	British Asian	No
Claire	39	White British	Yes
Harriet	38	White British	Yes
Jeannette	47	Black British	Yes
Khadija	48	British Asian	Yes
Laura	28	White British	Yes
Lori	38	White British	Yes
Maggie	26	White British	Yes
Nel	25	White British	Yes
Suzie	24	White British	Yes
Vanessa	32	White Irish	Yes

THE SECOND PROJECT:

The second Women's Comedy Workshop project started in January 2018. Its overall structure was similar to that of the first project, in that there were four workshops (all of which took place on Saturday afternoons), a comedy night and a reflection session. Once again, participants were recruited via an advert on Theatre in the Mill's website, which was shared on social media, and sent in an email to all of the women on the theatre's mailing list. The application process also remained the same, with participants being asked to read an information sheet, fill in an application form, and sign a consent form before attending the first session.

This time, 16 women signed up; 11 of whom had attended previous workshops. As can be seen on table four, the age range and diversity of the group remained constant. So, as well as getting slightly bigger, the group remained richly inter-generational, and diverse in terms of participants' ethnic and socio-economic background. To make sure that the new participants felt welcomed into the group, we played drama games (including name games) at the start of each session, and made space - within each workshop - for the women to have a tea break and talk to each other in an informal environment. To accommodate this, each session was made half an hour longer.

As can be seen in table three, I invited a range of different practitioners to lead workshops alongside me during the second project. This was because - at this point in my research - I had completed my field work at the fringe, where I had witnessed the way some performers were blending together different comic styles to create what seemed to be new genres of feminist comedy. I wanted to see what would happen if these different styles were allowed to infuse the Women's Comedy Workshop process. So, as well as inviting Kate Fox to lead another session on stand-up comedy, I asked Helen Barnett - the Artistic Director of Trestle Theatre - to take us through a basic introduction to clowning. I also invited Katherine Warman and Rhiannon Scutt (who - at the time - co-directed a queer performance company called Andro & Eve) to lead a workshop on drag, and a practitioner called Kate Hogg to facilitate a session on comic improvisation. In the end, Kate Hogg was unable to travel to Bradford due to extreme weather conditions. So, I stepped in to facilitate this workshop, using my skills as a facilitator to create a safe space in which participants could continue to explore comedy techniques and develop stand-up material.

On Saturday 24 March, there was another comedy night at Theatre in the Mill. Again, the night was compered by Kate Fox, and 14 women performed (2 having had to drop out due to other commitments). This time, we called the performance '*Not An Open Mic Night'*, and used some marketing copy to advertise the event on social media. The copy read:

> *Ever been to an open mic night and seen the same sort of performer get up... over and over again? Yeah, us too.*
>
> *Because being an 'open' mic night doesn't make it an accessible mic night. It doesn't make it a funny mic night, either. And we want to change that.*
>
> *At our 'Not An Open Mic Night' you will see a wide variety of comedy from a diverse range of comedians; developed at Theatre in the Mill's Women's Comedy Workshop. Ranging from stand-up, to improvisation, to monologues, to drag, we guarantee you a programme that is experimental, courageous and eye-wateringly, side-splittingly (maybe pack a spare pair of pants) funny.*

The copy - which I wrote in collaboration with workshop participants - aimed to capture the radical diversity within the Women's Comedy Workshop. Even though the participants all identified as women, we wanted to honour the different performance modes that had been developed, which is something I come back to in both chapter four and chapter seven.

By advertising the event, we were able to get a slightly larger audience. This time there were 90 people in the audience - made up of the friends and family of the participants, as well as some past participants and some general audience members that were interested in the project. Once again, audience members were invited to put money in a bucket at the end of the performance, which went back to Theatre in the Mill to help recover the cost of hosting the event.

Like the previous year, a few weeks after the performance, I invited participants back to the theatre for a reflection session, in which I asked them to talk about their experiences. Once again, this conversation was audio-recorded on my iPhone, and then transcribed onto a password-protected document on my laptop.

TABLE THREE - THE STRUCTURE OF THE SECOND PROJECT:

DATE / TIME	ACTIVITY	DETAIL
Saturday 13 January 2018 1.30-4.30pm	Workshop 1	This workshop was facilitated by Helen Barnett, who took the group through an introduction to clowning. She started with games to get us in touch with our 'inner child', followed by exercises that involved performing and improvising in front of each other for periods of time.
Saturday 27 January 2018 1.30-4.30pm	Workshop 2	The second workshop was led by Kate Fox, and introduced participants to stand-up comedy. This involved watching comedians on YouTube, having a go at some basic joke structures and learning to be 'present' on stage.
Saturday 10 February 2018 1.30-4.30pm	Workshop 3	The third workshop was led by Katherine Warman and Rhiannon Scutt. We played some basic drama games and then moved around the room; exploring 'masculine' and 'feminine' ways of moving. We then 'mansformed' using costume, and worked on short scenes that were performed to the rest of the group.
Saturday 10 March 2018 1.30-4.30pm	Workshop 4	The fourth workshop was meant to be led by a practitioner that specialises in improvisation. However, due to extreme weather conditions, she was unable to make the journey to Bradford, and I led the workshop myself. I helped the participants to get ready for the sharing by performing their material and receiving feedback.
Saturday 24 March 2018 8pm-10pm	Comedy Night	Participants met at the theatre at 5pm to go over their material. Audience members started arriving at 7.30pm, and the performance ran from 8pm-10pm, with a short interval in the middle.
Saturday 7 April 2018 3-4.30pm	Reflection Session	Participants met at the theatre to reflect on their experience of the Women's Comedy Workshop project.

TABLE FOUR - PARTICIPANTS THAT ATTENDED THE SECOND PROJECT:

NAME	AGE	ETHNICITY	ATTENDED BEFORE?
Adrienne	64	White Other	Yes
Aisha	26	British Asian	No
Chantelle	40	British Asian	No
Claire	40	White British	Yes
Dora	65	White British	No
Jess	22	White British	No
Jeannette	46	Mixed	Yes
Laura	29	White British	Yes
Linah	40	British Asian	No
Lori	39	White British	Yes
Maggie	27	White British	Yes
Marion	28	White British	No
Nel	26	White British	Yes
Sara	29	British Asian	Yes
Suzie	25	White British	Yes
Vanessa	33	White Irish	Yes

BECOMING A 'DIFFRACTIVE' PRACTITIONER

Before writing about the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, I want to discuss the ways in which - during the two Women's Comedy Workshop projects - I started to become what I am terming a 'diffractive' practitioner. This term is also used by Hill, who writes that:

> The goal of the diffractive practitioner is not to determine cause and effect relationships but rather to observe how particular entanglements become agential, co-constituting reality. The diffractive practitioner moves away from cognitive reflections of self and other to engage their bodymind sensibilities (2017:7).

In other words, the diffractive practitioner intra-acts *with* the forces and flows within a research assemblage. Rather than trying to disentangle themselves from the world around them, the diffractive practitioner allows themselves to participate fully, becoming enmeshed in whatever they are researching.

Within traditional ethnography, there is a deep suspicion of working in this way. According to Mills and Morton, for example, many ethnographers argue that the 'researcher' role must come above all else (2015:9). Participation, if necessary, is a means to an observational end, rather than integral to the research strategy (ibid). However, the idea that participation and observation are in contradiction is founded upon a certain understanding of immanence and transcendence, in which human existence is constitutionally split between being in the world and knowing about it:

> The alleged contradiction between participation and observation is no more than a corollary of this split. As human beings, it seems, we can aspire to truth about the world only by way of an emancipation that takes us from it and leaves us strangers to ourselves (Ingold, 2013:5).

Moreover, the ethnographic practice of 'participant observation' - in which a researcher will try to avoid qualitatively altering or interfering with what is observed - is inherently problematic. MacLure and Rousell (2019), for instance, argue that participant observation tries to preserve the 'panoptic immunity' of the researcher, who is able to render others visible, without any reciprocal obligation. This links observation to what Deleuze & Guattari term the 'horrors of faciality', in which the observer takes shape as a white face that is

capable of capturing and swallowing all it sees (1987:189 - accessed MacLure & Rousell, 2019).

For me, the need to become diffractive occurred - in the first instance - because I was occupying a number of different roles within each project. As already discussed, Kate and I adopted a facilitation style that was inspired by Freire (1996), which allowed us to learn-with the participants. Even when other practitioners were leading a session, I ensured that space was made for this type of collaboration; often dedicating the final hour to discussion and freeform improvisation. This meant that I was continually moving between multiple roles; taking part in some activities, facilitating others, while all the time endeavouring to capture events on camera and in my notebook. As I spent more time with the other women in the group, I also found myself becoming part of an intricate network of friendships, which only deepened as we shared intense experiences, like performing stand-up for the first time together. This added another layer of complexity to the Women's Comedy Workshop assemblage. It became like a soupy sea; oozing with feeling and opaque with debris.

As previously discussed, I have sought to work with an onto-epistemology that appreciates the intertwining of knowing and being. Therefore, rather than trying to separate out my various roles, I allowed them to behave like waves. My role as a researcher was one wave, and my role as a facilitator was another. These roles frequently merged into one another, and occasionally pulled in different directions. Sometimes I had to let the facilitator wave 'engulf' that of the researcher, when - for instance - it was more important for the group to have a break than to continue with a discussion. At other times, I allowed the researcher wave to burst through everything else; halting an activity mid-flow in order to ask a question, or sneaking away from a game in order to write something down. Frequently, however, the waves worked in harmony; moving with the rhythm of each workshop. My position as a participant bubbled away beneath everything else; sometimes triumphing over the other waves like a boisterous ocean spray, and sometimes coaxing them to relax into a frothy foam of enjoyment.

This ties back in with the idea of 'multiplicities', which I explore in chapter two. The different 'waves' unsettled what Deleuze - in *Difference and Repetition* (1994) - calls 'empirical difference', in which 'roles' or 'identities' are placed in an antagonistic relation with one another (Deleuze, 1994). Empirical difference produces single points of view "within which

all difference is located" (Colebrook, 2002:64), and where identities and things are poised as recognisable, even when they are crudely effaced, frustratingly perplexing or over-coded. By becoming-diffractive (i.e. by unsettling this stagnation of roles), I was able to enter into a perpetual, unpredictable and open-ended becoming (Grosz, 2004).

Specifically, this was a form of 'participation without observation' (Maclure & Rousell, 2019), in which my entanglement with the other aspects of the research assemblage became *part* of my diffractive apparatus. By combining traditional ethnographic methods with an open-ended, process-oriented approach, I was able to tune into the more-than of each project (Manning, 2013); allowing meaning to emerge intra-actively between me and the other (human and nonhuman) bodies within the study. When turning my experiences of the workshops into exegesis, remembered conversations overlapped with video footage, and were infused by my own embodied memories of each unfolding event. And, rather than trying to 'make sense' of these complex events and experiences, I allowed them to reconfigure my understanding of feminist comedy and humour in unanticipated ways.

THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

As already indicated, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe (often referred to as simply the 'fringe') is the world's largest arts festival (Scott, 2017 [online]). In recent years, the official 'fringe' programme has featured over 55,000 performances; grouped into categories such as 'theatre', 'comedy', 'dance', 'circus', 'cabaret' and 'children's shows'. Comedy is now the largest category, making up over one-third of the programme (Bannister, 2018 [online]). While substantial data relating to the gender of performers is difficult to come by, there is evidence to suggest that numbers of female comedians have grown exponentially over the past decade (Ferguson, 2017 [online]). According to Comedy Awards Director Nica Burns, women now make up almost a third of the comedians at the festival (Brocklehurst, 2017 [online]). This is remarkable, given that - at the start of the 21st century - "the number of women doing shows was so small you could count them on one hand" (Burns, 2017 - accessed Brocklehurst, 2017 [online]).

I conducted fieldwork at the fringe in August 2017. I was able to spend ten days at the festival altogether, during which time I watched ten performances. Information about these performances can be found in table five, including the title of each show, the venue it was performed in, and an extract from its marketing copy.

TABLE FIVE - THE TEN PERFORMANCES:

DATE	TITLE	VENUE	SHOW DESCRIPTION
Friday 15 August 2017	*Blood* by Alice Marshall	Just The Tonic at the Caves	*Blood* takes a long, hard look at the darker side of humanity. Featuring returning favourites and brand new faces, *Blood* is a character show with serious bite.
Saturday 16 August 2017	*LadsLadsLads* by Sara Pascoe	Pleasance Courtyard	Always honest, always regretting it later, Sara opens her heart and mouth again to share the adventures of the last year. Full of jokes, hope and white wine, *LadsLadsLads* is the thinking person's stag do.
Sunday 17 August 2017	*Good Girl* by Naomi Sheldon	The Underbelly	Bold, provocative and laugh-out-loud funny, *Good Girl* tells a darkly comic coming of age tale about learning to live un-apologetically.
Sunday 17 August 2017	*Get A Round* by Eggs Collective	Summerhall	Pinned on the arse-end of a night out, *Get A Round* is a show with lipstick on its teeth and Wotsits on its face. A wayward exploration of friendship, kindness and belonging that spills out towards its audience.
Monday 18 August 2017	*Wold Bore* by Adrienne Truscott, Zoe Coombs Marr and Ursula Martinez	The Traverse	The gloves – and all the rest – are off as Adrienne Truscott, Zoe Coombs Marr and Ursula Martinez bare their behinds to the critics in this absurdist satire.
Monday 18 August 2017	*Trigger Warning* by Zoe Coombes Marr	The Gilded Balloon	A feminist comedian dressed as a mouthy male stand-up, dressed as a silent Gaulier clown, trying not to offend anyone. Sound confusing? It is.
Tuesday 19 August 2017	*Power Ballad* by Julia Croft	Summerhall	*Power Ballad* is an investigation of language, the hidden ideologies and power dynamics hidden within it, and an attempt to find a new language of pleasure, anger and femaleness.

DATE	TITLE	VENUE	SHOW DESCRIPTION
Thursday 21 August 2017	*Her Majesty* by Rachel Fairburn	Just The Tonic at the Caves	Every family needs strong female role models, problem is there's too many in Rachel's clan.
Friday 22 August 2017	*Workshy* by Katy Baird	Summerhall	With unflinching humour and a radical performative style Katy questions how we value work as a society and paints a truthful portrait of the often-invisible service workers with whom we interact with everyday.
Monday 25 August 2017	*Love and Anger* by Emma Maye Gibson	The Monkey Barrell	Surreal Showgurl. Obscene Beauty Queen. Totem Critter. Sex Clown. With ceremonial precision and deranged wit, Betty Grumble enslaves her audience with a powerful call to arms as she raptures in the complexity of the woman body as a political and playful site.

As is evident in the table, I went to see a diverse range of performances. This was partly because I had an eye on the different 'genres' or 'styles' of comedy that were available, and tried to dip into as many of these as possible. However, it was also 'accidental', because - at this point in the study - I did not know what I was looking for. Indeed, I had decided that I was open to seeing *anything*, as long as it was in some way comic and in some way feminist. Of course, these qualifiers could be elusive; as can be seen in the table, show descriptions rarely use words like 'feminist', and some of the performances did not appear in the 'comedy' section of the programme. However, partly through design, and partly through a series of recommendations and happy accidents, I ended up watching a wonderful collection of funny, feminist pieces.

To keep track of my responses to each performance, I kept an audio diary on my iPhone. This worked well, because it was difficult to write field notes in the dark (and busy) venues that I attended. It also meant that I could quickly add to each entry if thoughts occurred to me as I was walking around the city.

I also conducted qualitative interviews with two performers that I met at the festival, recording each conversation on my iPhone and then transcribing them onto a password protected document on my laptop. To organise the interviews, I approached each performer after watching their show, and asked if I could talk to them about my research. Julia Croft (who performed *Power Ballad*) and Emma Maye Gibson (who performer *Love and Anger*) agreed, and expressed an interest in talking to me further. I then emailed them an information sheet and a consent form (copies of which can be found in the appendix) and arranged to meet them in a convenient place. I sought oral consent at the outset of each interview, and emphasised that they had the right to withdraw from the project at any time and for any reason; a key ethical consideration for qualitative interviews (Mann, 2011). I also explained that their responses could be anonymised; however, both of the performers asked for their real names to be used.

TABLE SIX - THE INTERVIEWS:

DATE & TIME	NAME OF PERFORMER	LOCATION OF INTERVIEW	DETAILS
Saturday 23 August 2017 2pm	Julia Croft	The Summerhall Cafe	Julia and I met twice, because she was interested to learn more about my research before agreeing to be interviewed. We met for a coffee and a chat on Wednesday 20 August, and then arranged for the 'official' interview to take place on 23 August. We met in the cafe at Summerhall (where Julia was performing) on both occasions.
Tuesday 26 September 2017 9am	Emma Maye Gibson	Skype	I didn't watch Emma Maye's show - *Love and Anger* - until the last night of my field work. This meant there was no time to interview Emma Maye in Edinburgh. However, we arranged to talk on Skype on 26 September.

The interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes, and - as already indicated - were recorded on my iPhone. They were semi-structured in nature, following pre-determined themes that were introduced 'river-channel style' (Hoggart *et al*., 2002). Specifically, this means that I would ask an open question, and then allow my interviewee's answers to come to a natural conclusion before asking another open question. This allowed themes that I had not previously thought of to emerge within the conversation. The interviews were then transcribed onto a document on my password protected laptop. As can be seen in below, I tried to use punctuation to capture the ebb and flow of our conversation(s), as well as moments of 'action' (such as laughter), interruptions and non-verbal communications.

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT:

Natalie: I'm wondering, like, if you feel like there's a connection between anger and laughter, that goes beyond just making anger palatable for the audience?

Julia: Yep, yeah, I think… Absolutely, laughter can be used as like a, a, in and of itself as a subversive act. I kind of, they don't necessarily know they're doing it but I love looking out at the audience and seeing people just absolutely just cackle and scream. And, when I get them to yell there's this delight in this room full of women screaming at the patriarchy *[Natalie laughs, Julia joins]*. I was reading a lot of Helene Cixous when I started making this piece she talks about the laugh of crones, the cackle of the… (***Natalie:*** *medusa*) the laugh of the medusa, yeah, as like resistance. Women outwardly cackling. That is the kind of laughter that I'm interested in in this piece, it's the kind of joyful, angry cackle of 'fuck you'.

Natalie: And how does it make you feel? When you do look out at the audience and see them cackling and weeping and whatever // how does it make you feel?

Julia: Ah so energised. And actually, then I feel really calm at the end of this performance in a way I don't normally (***Natalie:*** *mmm*). I think it's because I go through… because there's this exorcism almost for me of anger and joy and that, and it's perfect, when it really works with an audience it feels like a real collective ex, a real collective experience of resistance? Um, yeah it brings me so joy, a bunch of people screaming and laughing in a room. *[Natalie laughs].*

INTRA-ACTING WITH THE FRINGE

In this section, I want to explore how the idea of 'diffraction' - and 'intra-activity' - played a role within my field work at the fringe. However, first I want to re-problematise the idea of 'reflection', which - as already discussed - acts as a leaping off point for Barad (2007) and Haraway (1991). In *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, Barad points out that western thought has intertwined vision and knowledge as metaphors for methodology and epistemology ever since the time of the Ancient Greeks (Keller & Grontkowski, 1983 - accessed Barad, 2007:86). And representationalism - "the belief that words, concepts, ideas, and the like accurately reflect or mirror the things to which they refer - makes a finely polished surface of the whole affair" (Barad, 2007:86).

This idea is particularly relevant to my field work at the fringe, because mirrors are also traditionally associated with theatre. In 1784, for instance, Schiller described theatre as "holding up a mirror to society" (Schiller, 2005 [online]), and in Shakespeare's *Hamlet,* Hamlet tells the players to "hold a mirror up to nature" (Act 3, scene 2, 17–24). In fact, theatrical realism - which is the name given to theatre that tries to mimic the world around it - seems to overlap with scientific realism in terms of its approach to knowledge. Writing in 1881, Zola called for playwrights to "return to the source of science and modern arts, to the study of nature, to the anatomy of man, to the painting of life in an exact reproduction" (Zola, 2001:6). Dramatists should, in effect, approach play-making through the scientific method: observing the behaviours of individuals and groups, forming their hypotheses, and then presenting their findings as "taken from reality, scientifically analyzed, and described without one lie" (ibid). Slightly later, Julien positioned theatre as "a slice of life put onstage with art" (Julien, 1892:8-22 - accessed Schumacher et al, 1996:77). Because of this, theatre researchers tend to see plays as cultural phenomena, "reflecting the concerns and values of certain historical groups" (Carlson, 1995:90).

A dominant method used by theatre researchers is semiotics, which can be connected to the troublesome representationalist thinking I have already touched on. This approach - which I was taught as an undergraduate theatre and performance studies student - makes it possible to carry out what feels like a scientific and objective analysis of theatre. Bodies, movement, gestures, language, light, sound, costumes, props (etc.) - all of which contribute to the sensual and experiential ecology of the theatre - open out into a dense system of signs, which can be 'read' like the words in a book (Veltrusky, 2012:84).

However, Carlson points out that semiology tends to ignore the "contributions of the audience to the meaning of theatrical performance" (1995:xi), which is particularly problematic for comedy. Linguistic studies of humour (such as Attardo, 1994; Raskin, 1985) are full of graphs and charts that attempt to explain humour, inevitably bracketing out the complex nature of laughter, and the ways in which it might exceed the intentionality of both performers and audience members. Because I wanted to explore how comedy, humour and laughter might be *qualitatively altering* the bodies that come into contact with it, a semiotic analysis was not going to be sufficient.

Instead, I chose to work diffractively, which allowed me to focus on the material-discursive character of each performance event (Barad, 2007). When transcribing my audio diary, for example, I used "thick description" (Geertz, 1973) - that is, layered, sensory and detailed observational writing - in order to directly engage in the personal experiences I'd had while watching each show. In many ways, this was an extension of my becoming-diffractive, in that it allowed me to merge my embodied experiences of each performance with my observations of other audience members, and my memories of the material environment that each show took place within. Importantly, diffraction does not mean abandoning signification and representation altogether (Ahmed, 2008:34). So, my descriptions do include some semiotic readings of the images and dialogue within each performance. However, these 'readings' are positioned as intra-active, generative becomings, which pay attention to the multiple dimensions of each performance in their entanglement. Incidentally, the same went for my field notes from the Women's Comedy Workshop, which I turned into detailed, sensory passages. In the empirical chapters ahead, I include long extracts from these field notes, inviting you to hesitate with me among their deterritorialising fluxes and flows, and to join me in the laughter and excitement that I experienced during each event.

Intra-activity also played a part in my qualitative interviews. As pointed out by Kuntz and Presnall, the interview should be seen as a wholly engaged encounter; a means for "making accessible the multiple intersections of material contexts that collude in productive formations of meaning" (2012:732). This works against more simplistic perceptions of the interview as a tool or methodological technique. Like semiotic readings of theatre, interviews can lead to the reductive abstracting of language-as-data from its material and embodied contexts. This means that - once again - the researcher is positioned as an isolated spectator or voyeur; ensconced within "an epistemology of the eye" (Brinkmann,

2011:59). However, by moving from interviews to 'intraviews' (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012), I tried to capture the ways in which there can be no stable, definitive, clearly identifiable interviewer or interviewee. As can be seen in the sample of my interview transcript (on page 59), I tried to pay attention to the ways in which meaning was produced intra-actively between us. As we talked, laughed and remembered moments from their performances, we produced meaning intra-actively and dynamically. It was a form of thinking and becoming together.

In the chapters that follow, quotations from these interviews (and from the focus groups that I led with participants from the Women's Comedy Workshop) emerge dynamically within my writing. At no point do I position the interview extracts as 'representative' of truth or fact. Rather, I try to show how my thoughts have emerged intra-actively with each fragment, and how the intra-views have opened up new lines of nomadic thought (Braidotti, 2011).

THE GUILTY FEMINIST PODCAST

The Guilty Feminist is a podcast that uses humour to discuss topics on and related to feminism. It was created in 2015 by comedians Deborah Frances-White and Sofie Hagen. Hagen left in 2017, and Frances-White now co-hosts the show with a variety of high profile women comedians such as Shappi Khorsandi, Jessica Fostekew and Aisling Bea. Standing out as a podcast success story, it has been downloaded more than 70 million times over the past 5 years (Frances-White, 2019). It has also been nominated for a number of awards, including an 'Internet Award' at the 2017 Chortle Awards (Chortle, 2017 [online]), and 'Best Podcast' at the 2018 Audio & Radio Industry Awards (Radio Today, 2018 [online]). Episodes - which last approximately 60 minutes - focus on a range of feminist themes, from 'nudity' and 'language' to 'power' and 'democracy' (Frances-White, 2019:xii). These themes are explored through conversation, stand-up comedy and panel discussions. Often, activists, writers and academics are invited to participate, which means that jokes and banter are blended with specialist knowledge about each topic. During post-production, these materials are cut together with ambient noise from the live studio audience.

I started listening to *The Guilty Feminist*, in the first instance, because a number of friends and colleagues had recommended it. For them, it was an efficient way of engaging with

feminist ideas and keeping up to date with relevant news stories, and had the added benefit of being funny. I started to listen to the podcast while walking between meetings and engagements in my home city of Manchester, and soon noticed that it had a big impact on my mood. Even when my energy was at its lowest ebb, listening to *The Guilty Feminist* would make me feel lighter on my feet; often meaning - because I tended to listen to it while on the move - that I arrived at my destination feeling better than I had when I set off. In fact, I started carefully timing when I tuned in - saving episodes up so I could give myself an extra energy boost when I needed it most.

In 2018, I became increasingly interested in the effect that the podcast was having on me, and decided to write a paper about it for the *Affects, Interfaces, Events* conference that was taking place in Aarhus in the summer of that year. The paper - which has since been published in *Conjunctions* (Diddams, 2019) - was based on field notes collected during a series of walks, in which I tried to take note of my embodied responses to the act of listening to *The Guilty Feminist* podcast. The paper then offered me a starting point for chapter six, in which I build on my original findings and continue to think about the importance of comedy, humour and laughter in the online sphere.

Walking as a qualitative or ethnographic method is discussed in a wide range of different fields, including "geography, philosophy, architecture, acoustic ecology and the performing arts" (Butler, 2006). As a starting point, we might think of the literature on the flaneur, where walking is positioned as a somewhat subversive act (Benjamin, 1999). More recently, however, qualitative researchers have explored the relationship between listening and walking. An example of this is the work of Janet Cardiff, who invites participants to listen to pre-recorded stories while walking, which are played over headphones (Fleming, 2005:289). According to Paquette and McCartney, many researchers using this method are - like me - exploring the relationship between the walker/listener and their physical and cultural surroundings (2012:4). For example, Springgay and Truman (2018) consider how perception and meaning-making are constructed through place and the spatial practices of sociality and positionality. Walking has also been addressed by feminists examining the politics of location and the ideologies and practices that govern and limit bodies in movement (e.g. Heddon & Turner, 2012).

As can be seen in table seven, I went on five 'guilty feminist' walks. These were all journeys that I needed to go on anyway, because I wanted to remain 'diffractive' in my

approach. So, rather than trying to manufacture an environment in which I could adopt a 'neutral' or 'passive' gaze, my research methods were simply part of my everyday life. I would have been walking these routes anyway, and - most probably - have been listening to *The Guilty Feminist*, as it was my habit to do so.

TABLE SEVEN - THE 'GUILTY FEMINIST' WALKS:

DATE	ROUTE	PODCAST EPISODE
Tuesday 8 May 2018	From the Royal Exchange (where I'd been leading a workshop) to a friends' house in Salford.	'61. Orgasms with Alix Fox' (The Guilty Feminist, 2017b [online]).
Thursday 24 May 2018	From home to a meeting on Deansgate.	'43. Nice Girls Don't with Cal Wilson' (The Guilty Feminist, 2017a [online]).
Monday 4 June 2018	From home to the supermarket (and back).	'81. Strength and Weakness with Sindhu Vee' (The Guilty Feminist, 2018a [online]).
Friday 15 June 2018	From Oxford Road (where I'd been teaching) to a birthday party in the Northern Quarter.	'85. Taking Charge with Alice Sneddon' (The Guilty Feminist, 2018b [online]).
Wednesday 20 June 2018	From home to the Arndale Centre, to shop for clothes.	'102. Taking a Risk with Tracey Spicer' (The Guilty Feminist, 2018c [online]).

By creating an audio diary on my iPhone - which I spoke into immediately before and after each walk - I was able to capture how I felt while walking/listening, and any eventful moments in which my emotional and affective state(s) shifted. Later, I turned these audio diary entries into detailed field notes, which were stored on my laptop.

Important here (as ever) are the debates on reflexivity and objectivity in qualitative research. Even though the city may appear to be a mute landscape; something that can be observed from a distance, it is impossible to extract oneself from it as a researched environment. Indeed, Manning uses the term 'milieu' - which means both 'middle' and 'surroundings' in French - to challenge the idea that an individual is separate from the

world around them at all (2012; 2013; 2016). In her book - *Always More Than One* - she argues that "we do not populate, extend into or embody space - instead, we form it" (Manning, 2013:15). Manning also writes that "walking "alone" does not exist. Walking in/with the world: the only kind of walking" (2013:2). To honour this, I incorporated information about the material conditions of each walk into my field notes; trying to describe how my subjectivity was pulled in different directions by the podcast, by the landscape, and by my own thoughts and daydreams while walking.

I also attended a live recording of *The Guilty Feminist* at the Kings Place theatre in London, at the start of June 2017. Again, I took field notes, and this enabled be to compare the 'live' experience of watching the recording with the intimacy of listening to the show in its podcast form.

WORKING WITH 'EVENTS'

After spending time in each of the spaces I have described, I had a wide range of 'events' to work with. In this section, I want to discuss how I went about choosing which events to explore further. However, first I want to address the fact that - both here and throughout the thesis - I write in terms of 'events' rather than the more widely used 'data'. This is because, as already indicated, new materialism is a move away from representational research practices. The idea of data, then, is problematic, because it reinforces the subject/object division that we are trying to move away from. It suggests that empirical knowledge can be stored, and then made to 'mean something' through certain research procedures (St. Pierre, 2019). New materialist thinkers, however, tend to give their data agentic status. MacLure, for instance, writes in terms of intensities that "glimmer" and "glow" (2010). These intensities interrupt the unemotional search for meaning, creating instead an opportunity for further thought (ibid).

The impetus behind this new conception of data is an ethical realisation of the world we live in, which is in a constant state of flux. If all we can be certain of is change, then it is important to move beyond learned habits like 'linearity' and 'objectivity'; thinking instead in terms of flows of experience (Braidotti, 2002:1-2). I have found the notion of 'events' useful, here, which - according to Massumi - provide us with a way of conceiving of the "dynamic unity" of all things (2011:3). The term originally comes from Whitehead, who saw the world as "a complex of passing events" (1964:166 - accessed Massumi, 2011:2), and it

also appears in the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987). For Massumi, events enable us to get at the 'qualitative dimension' of occurrences; the "how it happens, co-felt, in the immediacy of its now unfolding" (2011:4). Importantly, this qualitative 'how-now' continues to unfold long after the event started. So, any processes of meaning-making can be understood as an essential factor in an event's occurrence (ibid). In writing about events, then, I am generatively bringing them into being. The moments I conjure in the chapters ahead are not 'representations of things', but iterative (and intra-active) moments of becoming.

I will now try to put into words the difficult process of choosing which events to work with. This was a large and complex study, and - in each 'event-space' - I encountered many constellations of interesting moments, which then undulated through my video footage, field notes and interview transcripts. Because I was not working with 'data' in a traditional sense, I did not use 'coding' (or any other such method) to make the process more manageable. Instead, I looked for unexpected moments that caught my attention; acting on me as a constitutive force. As already indicated, this way of working is advocated by MacLure, who describes how "a fieldnote fragment or video image – starts to glimmer" (2013a:661). This 'glimmer' is largely pre-personal and pre-conscious, existing in the realm of potentialities and producing "a certain eventness" (MacLure, 2013a:662). MacLure also writes about the researcher's experience of "wonder" (2013b);

> [Which] can be felt on occasions where something - perhaps a comment in an interview, a fragment of a field note, an anecdote, an object, or a strange facial expression - seems to reach out from the inert corpus (corpse) of the data, to grasp us (2013b:228).

So, the process of choosing which events to work with was largely intuitive. If I found myself laughing at a snippet of video footage from the workshops, I tended to spend some time with that 'event', my laughter acting as an opportunity for thought. Similarly, if a fragment of an interview transcript forced me into a state of confusion, I allowed myself to be grasped by this discomfort, hoping that my bafflement would lead to greater insight.

When working on The Guilty Feminist, I even found myself including an event that had not taken place during field work at all. This is because, towards the end of June 2017 (just over a week after my final 'guilty feminist' walk), I found myself 'talking-back' to a man while at a bar with some friends, and using a strategy that I had learnt from Deborah

Frances-White. This eventful moment kept coming back to me when I was writing about the podcast, until I decided to include it as an event in its own right. This is an example of how the study has refused to remain within the boundaries of traditional ethnographic methods. My writing is often intensely personal, and the events I have chosen are all moments that have made waves within my life.

In this chapter, I have discussed the ways in which knowledge has been generated within the *Making Waves* study. I have detailed the research methods used in each 'event-space', where I orchestrated and engaged with 'events' that were explored using a range of ethnographic and qualitative research methods. Once I had chosen which events to work with, I then went through a process of 'diffracting' insights through theories from Deleuze and Guattari (1987), as well as new materialist (and new material feminist) thinkers such as Ahmed (2010), Grosz (1994; 2008), Manning (2012; 2013; 2016), and Massumi (2011; 2015; 2017). As I will show in the chapters ahead - each 'lens' has helped me to open up the phenomena at the heart of this study - (fourth wave comedy, humour and laughter) - in new ways, allowing unexpected 'diffraction patterns' to come into view. Of course, there are many, many eventful moments that I have had to leave out. However, as discussed, I have tried to choose those that have taken my thinking in the most interesting directions, or which have simply refused to be ignored. As we set off into the first empirical chapter, I hope these events will seize you with at least some of the wonder that they have given me.

CHAPTER FOUR:

TIDAL WAVES

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Event 1 -
Transcript (Comedy Workshop, January 2018):

You feel like when it's working and when you're connecting… you feel like you're riding a tidal wave, and you could just keep going and you've got this energy from each other… If you imagine a surfer - they're waiting for a tidal wave and then they get on it and they're… riding it and they… don't want to get off… they know it's going to end soon but they're going to enjoy it while it's there. I feel it's like that.

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It seems right to start this chapter with a quote from one of the participants of the Women's Comedy Workshop, because their experiences - tangled with my own - form the basis of this chapter. This quote in particular is taken from a discussion that occurred towards the end of a comedy workshop in January 2018. As usual, I had asked participants to reflect on how they'd felt during the workshop, and - sitting in small groups - they had talked for around 15 minutes, writing and doodling on large pieces of paper. In the conversation that followed, I was struck by Linah's description of a surfer riding a tidal wave. As well as capturing the surging affective intensity of laughter, Linah's words conjure something of the joy, or *the thrill*, of the Women's Comedy Workshop process. Just like learning to surf, learning to do comedy requires you to take risks, to physically commit *your whole body* to your intention, and to tune into the ebb and flow of the energy in your immediate environment. Like waves in the sea, laughter can be unpredictable; it can come at you sideways, knocking you off course, or it can fail to arrive altogether, making it almost impossible to keep going. When it's working, however, the feeling of connecting to others through humour can be wonderful; a pleasure that involves opening yourself to the flow and rhythm of the present moment.

In this chapter, I consider how humour, comedy and laughter can make it possible for women to explore new ways of relating to the world around them. Starting with the first Women's Comedy Workshop project, I describe an event in which two participants - Jeannette and Vanessa - spontaneously dressed themselves up as a 'bee' and a 'bee-keeper' in order to act out an absurdly comic improvisation that had occurred to them in the moment. By diffractively reading this event through elements of DeleuzoGuattarian thought, I suggest that comedy, humour and laughter can provide an arena in which women can explore new ways of being on a line of infinite variation or 'line of flight' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This involves a discussion of the importance of play within the workshops, which - I argue - makes participants feel more connected to one another, and more aware of possibilities for change.

I then pick up on the parallel that I have already drawn between performing comedy and 'learning to surf'; arguing that humour and laughter can enhance our ability to connect with others via the waves of affect that are always-already in motion around us. In order to make this argument, I describe a simple stand-up comedy exercise, during which a participant (called Laura) started to move-with the waves of laughter that were created by the group. The experience of 'surfing', I propose, has a profound impact on participants' sense of self, not least because of what I am terming the "inhibited intentionality" that characterises many women's relationship with humour (Young, 1990). By laughing together, I suggest that participants experience a 'loss of subjectivity' that allows them to cast off normative modes of 'feminine' behaviour, and explore alternative identities.

Towards the end of the chapter, I describe how another participant - Marion - was brought into being differently by the act of performing stand-up for the first time; a process that - like standing-up on a surf board for the first time - catapulted her into a new world of positive affect. By diffracting an extract from my field notes through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming' (1987); I argue that Marion was able to 'become-majestic' through the audience's laughter, and - as a result - reconfigure her identity in relation to past experiences of sexism and misogyny. I then think about how the effects and affects I have described help participants to feel more confident beyond the protective 'breakwater' of the Women's Comedy Workshop project, offering some thoughts on the importance of comedy workshops within the contemporary feminist movement.

WAYS OF BEE-ING

I am going to start by discussing an event that occurred during a comedy workshop at Theatre in the Mill. For me, the 'event' occurred while I was reviewing footage from the first project in my flat, because - during the workshop itself - I was unaware of what was going on in that part of the studio. So, in the extract from my field notes, I describe what it was like to watch as this moment started to unfold on film. After describing the event, I discuss the importance of play within the Women's Comedy Workshop, and consider how laughter might make it possible for participants to explore new ways of being in the world.

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Event 2 -
Field Notes (May 2017):

It is a Saturday afternoon in early May and I'm sitting in the living room of my small flat, wading through hours of video footage. The sun is streaming in through the window, illuminating the smears and scratches on my laptop screen and the dust on the coffee table. The Women's Comedy Workshop is over for this year and I'm taking some time to reflect on what happened.

I watch myself leading a game of Grandmother's Footsteps. One participant stands with her back to the rest of the group, and the group then try to sneak up on her, moving only when she isn't looking. I have strewn hats and scarves on the floor, and challenged the players to get dressed on their way to Grandma. There is lots of laughter as the women costume themselves in delightfully odd combinations of clothing; transforming continually into a strange collection of characters that disappear almost as soon as they have arrived.

The game ends, and I watch myself setting up a writing exercise. The participants fragment around the room in pairs to discuss their developing stand-up material, and I decide to fast-forward through this part of the film. However - as I do so - something catches my eye in the corner of a frame.

> *Jeannette and Vanessa are sitting opposite one another; their bodies convulsing with laughter. Vanessa's hands move out to the sides of her body, and she wafts them up and down as though they are tiny wings. Jeannette copies this movement, and - as it moves back and forth between them - its wingspan grows; turning into a fast, flapping action that soon has both women ready for take-off.*

In no time at all, they are up on their feet; using the items of clothing - which are still on the floor - to turn Vanessa into a bee. First, a yellow pashmina is tucked into the collar of Vanessa's t-shirt, and secured around her wrists with hair ties. Vanessa proudly flaps her bright yellow 'wings', and - briefly - the women surrender to a powerful wave of laughter, which has them bent-double, silently shrieking at the floor.

When they have recovered, a black woollen scarf is wrapped around Vanessa's head, and used to secure two felt tip pens as (wonderfully wobbly) antennae. The pens fall out when Vanessa moves her head, and Jeannette joyfully picks them up; poking them back into the scarf and waggling her finger in Vanessa's face. "Stay still!".

Then, Jeannette places a large straw hat on her head, and instructs Vanessa to hold one end of a long string of beads. Jeannette holds the other end, and the two women start to shuffle around the room; whispering to each other and giggling quietly.

They are - I learn later - a bee-keeper and a bee, going for a walk.

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As I have tried to capture in my description of the event, watching the video clip of Jeannette and Vanessa had a big impact on me. Alone in my flat, I laughed loudly and rewound the film several times; watching the strange idea bounce between the bodies on screen. I was fascinated by the movement of the 'wings', which starts small - (a wafting of the hands) - and then grows into "a fast, flapping action that soon has both women ready for take-off". In this section, I position this as a particularly good example of a DeleuzoGuattarian 'line of flight' (1987). In doing so, I suggest that humour and laughter can allow participants to access new ways of be(e)ing; both within the Women's Comedy Workshop and in other areas of life.

I want to start - however - by thinking about the fact that the Women's Comedy Workshop is given structure through games. As discussed in chapter two, we live in a society that prizes rationality and seriousness above all else, and - as a result - play behaviours tend to disappear as we enter adulthood (Wright, 2006). Women, in particular, are expected to play with children in order to aid their (children's) development, but are given few opportunities to do so outside of this caregiving role. In the workshops, however, games are in constant circulation. We use games at the start of every session to warm up, and to

help the participants to get to know one other. Comedy thrives in a playful atmosphere (Wright, 2006), so we also use games to develop comedy material and to explore comic personas. Importantly, play creates an atmosphere in which participants feel more comfortable taking risks. This is because - through play - it is possible to enter a flow-like state, which is marked by enjoyment and concentration, as well as decreased levels of self-conscious awareness (Thomson & Jaque, 2017:127). This, as I will explore, is of particular importance for women, who often feel anxious about letting themselves go (in all senses of the word).

According to Huizinga, play is - by its very nature - frivolous, pointless and meaningless (1955:13). Grandmother's Footsteps, for example (which I mention in the description above) is wonderfully simple. If 'Grandma' isn't looking, the players creep forwards. If she turns around, they freeze. In fact, it's a bit like the infant game of 'peek a boo', which is characterised by a similar pattern of moving and reacting. Because the players *know* what is going to happen, they are free to interact instinctively with their surroundings; taking pleasure in the rhythm and spontaneity of the game. As pointed out by Manning, when we respond to one another like this, we allow ourselves to channel the "infinity of potential preaccelerations; [the] infinite sub realm of experience and expression" (Manning, 2012:21). In other words, we become open to the *creativity of the moment*; the more-than of experience in the making (Manning, 2013:8). This could be imagined as a return to a child-like state, in which we are more in-tune with the environment and the people around us. Indeed, when watching the video footage from the workshop, it is a little like watching a group of young children at play. The women, who - for the purposes of the game - have been asked to think of themselves as 'grandchildren', happily tumble into the energy and movement of this role; emerging - at intervals - in a whimsical array of bunny rabbits, princesses and suspicious-looking spies.

Play occupies a liminal atmosphere between the actual world and the imaginary, where anything can become anything else (Bergen, 2014:13). It is possible to see this in my field notes, in which I describe how costume added to the evolving ecosystem of the 'Grandmother's Footsteps' game; inviting the women to "costume themselves in delightfully odd combinations of clothing; transforming… into a strange collection of characters," who "disappear almost as soon as they have arrived". Importantly, they are not constructing characters that would 'make sense' to an outside eye. Rather, the participants simply move when they are moved to do so; their attention aroused by each

other's bodies, and by the possibilities afforded by the hats and scarves on the floor. Vanessa and Jeannette's creation of the bee, then, is in many ways a continuation of a game that is already underway. Because they are already playing, the silky pashmina transforms effortlessly into a pair of bright yellow wings, and the black woollen scarf facilitates their desire for felt tip-antennae. By flapping her arms, Vanessa 'becomes' a bee, and - with the addition of a straw hat and a string of beads - Jeannette transforms into the bee-keeper by her side.

According to O'Sullivan, laughter causes a loss of subjectivity (2006:16), and - because it is subjectivity that often results in self-consciousness - I would like to suggest that laughter also plays an important role within the women's game. Quoting Bataille, Parvulescu explains that - in laughter - there is no subject or object, but a gap between the two, in which both lose their separate existence:

> At the summit of the [inner] experience, "I" falls into a "space constelled with laughter". Laughter is an experience of space - the outside of the "I" experienced as the inside of "my" laughter. This space is an "abyss" in that it swallows the subject, which joyfully abandons itself, its subjectivity, to it. In being an experience of space, this is also… an experience of community, the spacing of this laughing singular self in relation to other singularities (Bataille, 1997 - accessed Parvulescu, 2010:90).

So, as they laugh, Jeannette and Vanessa enter into a fragile, formless unity (Parvulescu, 2010:90). Their laughter, which has them "bent-double, silently shrieking at the floor", opens up an "abyss" (Bataille, 1997 - accessed Parvulescu, 2010:90), into which they can joyfully throw themselves. As Bataille argues, this is like "an experience of space", because - once subjectivity has been abandoned - the possibilities for the self are endless. The two women start to flow together, allowing their wingspans to increase in size and then their bodies to start intra-acting with the other materials in the room. Their laughter creates a micro-climate in which they can focus on what they are doing without worrying about what anyone else might think. The game allows them to step into an alternate reality; a liminal space in which they can playfully transform themselves and the world around them.

In the reflection session (which took place a few weeks after I had watched the film), Vanessa explained that the absurd sketch had emerged as a way of poking fun at her employer:

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Event 3 -
Transcript (*Reflection Session*, May 2017):

Vanessa: Basically, that was the deputy chief executive at my work who keeps bees. And he's a bit of a bell-end. And he goes home every lunch time but he's really mysterious about where he goes, so I got it into my head that he goes home to walk the bees [laughter]. So that's what we were doing, it was like… this thing where he's walking along, and the bee's walking along and he's talking to the bee and the bee's like "you're late again, can't you get out the office any earlier?", and he's like "I've had loads of stuff to do"… [laughter]…

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So, what erupted from their play was a celebratory and rebellious masquerade, in which Vanessa's employer was presented as being 'tied' to his bees. The dialogue of the bee belongs to an archetypal wife, who is perpetually waiting for her husband to return home from work. In this sense, the game allowed for the queering of gender roles, as well as the upsetting of power relations within the workplace.

However, there is also a philosophical dimension to the becoming-bee/bee-keeper, which can be understood as a 'line of flight' through which infinite possibilities for the self can be glimpsed. For Deleuze and Guattari, a line of flight means passing along a line of becomings, which are attached as though by a fibre (1987:291-292). As explored in chapter two, Deleuze and Guattari present life as a series of assemblages or multiplicities, which are made up of unfolding forces - bodies and their powers to affect and be affected - rather than static essences. Every assemblage is territorial in that it sustains the connections that define it, but every assemblage is also composed of lines of deterritorialisation that run through it and carry it away (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:503). A 'line of flight' is a path of mutation that causes the deterritorialisation of an assemblage, allowing for a whole series of connections (or becomings) to occur.

For Deleuze and Guattari, 'becomings' problematise the way in which life - in Western philosophy - tends to be categorised (1987:273). Their notion of becoming-animal, for example, troubles the privileged position that humans are given in relation to animals; highlighting the *continuity* rather than the differences between species. It is worth pointing out, however, that becoming-animal is not a case of *believing* yourself to be an animal, or

even imitating an animal (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:273). It is about shifting the intensities of your body, so that what is highlighted is its capacity to become-otherwise. It is in this sense that the becoming-animal can be understood as an inverse personification, which highlights the energy that we put into becomings-human every day (Hiebert, 2003). So, when Vanessa flaps her wings, she does not think that she has turned into a bee. Rather, she explores a different mode of movement, asking what might it be like to be(e) like a bee. Instead of the bee representing some sort of regression, or - like Freud's wolf-man - acting as a symbol of grief or loss (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987:32), the becoming-bee ripples outward, allowing the body to find new ways of bee-ing.

When we start to dismantle binaries (like that between bees and humans), others can be dismantled as well, such as that between men and women, and employers and employees. In other words, becoming-animal opens us up to the idea that we are multiplicities. This is why Deleuze and Guattari repeatedly come back to those animals (like rats and wolves) that move in packs. And the bee, which can only exist as part of a hive, is another instance in which "a becoming-animal always involves a… band, a population, a peopling… a multiplicity" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:279). In her becoming-bee, Vanessa is no longer in the singular. Nor is she in the multiple (as in, she is not entering into a becoming-beehive). She is both the one *and* the many. She is a line of flight. Afterall, if you can be a bee, what else can you be(e)?

In this section, I have started to explore the importance of play within the Women's Comedy Workshop. As pointed out by Wright (2006), play is particularly suited to comedy, because - when we enter a flow-like state - imaginative connections proliferate, generating incongruities and moments of surprise. Laughter helps with this process, creating fluid subjectivities that dissolve the boundaries that usually hold our identities in place. Through my discussion of Jeannette and Vanessa's becoming-bee/bee-keeper, I have also shown that play is capable of triggering a whole array of becomings. According to Hiebert, becoming-animal is almost always a parodic and liberating endeavour, because "one cannot take oneself too seriously if one is becoming-animal" (2003:116). So, learning to *play* is akin to learning to *become*; an idea that - later on - I will link with other elements of the fourth wave feminist movement.

LEARNING TO SURF

At the start of this chapter, I stated that learning to perform stand-up is a process of learning to 'surf' the energy - or affects - of the people around you. In fact - according to Massumi - laughter is a good example of the 'singularity of experience', by which he means "the kinds of affective movements that are totally situation-specific, but in an open kind of way" (2015:12). For Massumi, laughter shows "the potential for change... the eventfulness and uniqueness of every situation" (ibid), and he explains that bodies can attune themselves to these affective movements; a process that is a bit like "going with the flow... [or] surfing the situation" (ibid). In what follows, I will diffract this idea through another 'event', in which a group of Women's Comedy Workshop participants generated 'waves' for another participant, called Laura, to move-with. In doing so, I will elaborate on the pedagogy that Kate Fox and I developed, which I mentioned briefly in chapter three. By working with some of the ideas articulated in Iris Marion Young's essay - *Throwing Like A Girl* (1990) - I will suggest that this pedagogical approach can help women to overcome learned behaviours around 'femininity', and gain an embodied understanding of laughter as a charged atmosphere that can be surfed.

As discussed in chapter two, waves often appear in discussions of comedy, humour and laughter. To make the obvious point, laughter is created by contractions of the diaphragm and other parts of the respiratory system, which - usually - produce sound waves. Provine, who has done extensive anthropological research in this area, relates the phenomenon to "animal calls and bird songs" (2000:7), describing laughter as "an aesthetically and sonically impoverished 'human song'" (ibid). However, waves can also be used as an analogy for the *feeling* of comedy and laughter. Langer, for instance, describes laughter as the "the crest of a wave of felt vitality" (1953:340). It is the culmination of a surge of feeling that may be small or big; sudden or slow, but - in most cases - will end with a climax, "at which point we laugh or smile with joy" (ibid). As discussed in chapter two, this way of understanding laughter is important, because it helps us to position it as a phenomenon in its own right, rather than merely as a 'representation' of humorous materials. It also tunes into the ways in which 'waves' of laughter and humour can be understood as affective atmospheres that are collectively felt; "making the limits of socio-biological life visible and felt at the affective registers of experience" (Emmerson, 2017:2082).

While being interviewed as part of a 'Hollywood Reporter Roundtable', comedian Jim Carrey also uses 'surfing' as an analogy for the feeling of comedy. Speaking to five other comedians, he describes how;

> You're in the water, and there's a wave that's coming, and it's an opportunity to be funny, and if you have that instinct, you're sitting there going "am I gonna ride this wave?". It's a bit dangerous, but am I gonna ride it? […]. There's that… moment, where… the tide has come in, you either dive or you don't, and if you don't dive it's gone forever, but, most of the time you gotta go, even if you belly flop (Carrey, 2019 [online]).

This - of course - can be related to Linah's description of a surfer, which is quoted at the start of this chapter. Like Carrey, she describes "waiting for a tidal wave", which only arrives when you're "connecting" to the people around you and getting "energy from each other". This process is akin to 'tuning in' to the kinds of "affective movements" that Massumi describes (2015:12). By learning to do this, I suggest that participants become better at "going with the flow… [and] surfing the situation" (ibid); opening themselves up to new ways of connecting to the people around them.

Importantly, the 'waves' that Linah and Carrey refer to are not (necessarily) sound waves. While the sound of laughter *might* appear before a joke is made, the process of deciding whether or not to dive onto a 'wave' of humour is much more about *feeling* and *sensing* the affective atmospheres that are circulating within a group of people. By 'riding' the wave, you may be able to create a space in which that atmosphere can "crest" or "climax" in laughter (Langer, 1953:340). In order to continue this argument, I will now offer an extract from my field notes, in which a participant - Laura - starts learning to 'surf'.

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Event 4 -
Field notes (Comedy Workshop, March 2018):

It is the start of a workshop on a cold, drizzly March day. Gradually, participants arrive. There are 5 of us, then 6, then 7, then 8. The first women choose to sit near to each other in the circle; a segment that widens slowly as more people arrive. Bodies extricate themselves from scarves and coats, bags are placed at the sides of the room. Hair is released from pony tails, or brushed back from faces and away from necks.

We chat, a bit, about an odd collection of subjects: the new Wetherspoons app, the recipe for a Bakewell tart cocktail. The conversation feels slightly clumsy and awkward.

We decide to make a start. Kate wants us to practice "talking directly to an audience without any barriers", and invites us to stand up and introduce ourselves, saying our name and something that happened during the week. Conveniently, our positioning in the circle translates quite naturally into an audience and a stage, and Kate shows us where to stand so that we can address everyone easily.

As we start the exercise, our nervous energy is present in our body language. We are very still, with legs crossed and arms folded over chests and stomachs.

The first participant gets up and says: "my name is Laura, and this week I had a renal and bladder ultrasound". She pauses, creating a space that a number of women instantly fill with a sympathetic 'oooooh'. I find myself copying this sound, before joining in with the laughter now rumbling around the circle. Laura holds her hands out a bit like the conductor of an orchestra. She moves her hands with our laughter, a wave-like action that seems to follow - and mould - the shape of the sound. When the laughter starts to die, she flicks her hands as if to bring it to a stop and says "everything's fine". This elicits a cheer from the group, followed by even more laughter. Laura sits down, beaming.

As Chantelle takes Laura's place, the atmosphere in the room is markedly different. We have found our rhythm.

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Above, I describe an exercise that was led by Kate Fox, who - as outlined in chapter three - facilitated a stand-up comedy workshop during each of the 'Women's Comedy Workshop' projects. As an experienced performer, Kate has an embodied understanding of the need to connect deeply with an audience, and many of her workshop exercises centred on the idea of 'presence'. In what follows, I explore how exercises like this helped participants to develop an embodied understanding of what it is to perform comedy. Then, by thinking about the 'inhibited intentionality' that many women have around humour (Young, 1990), I also suggest that this could have wider ramifications for what we might think of as 'empowerment' within the fourth wave.

According to States, 'presence' can be related to 'collaborative' modes of performance, in which the audience is encouraged to become part of the meaning-making process. In his essay on the subject, he writes that;

> We often say that comedy arouses laughter and tragedy tears. The fact is, it is melodrama that arouses tears: tragedy arouses silence. The point of the distinction is that tragedy is a non-collaborative form, as usually performed. Tragedy creates an empathic experience wherein we are dissolved in what could be called a magnificent loneliness, felt most deeply in the absolute stillness of the auditorium (2002:29).

Comedy, by contrast, "is the most social of all the dramatic forms" (States, 2002:30). Rather than 'dissolving' into "magnificent loneliness" (States, 2002:29), the audience is rendered visible through the 'presence' of the performer, who speaks directly to them and expects laughter in return. In other words, the comedian must be aware of their audience - of being "on stage" - and they must be able to react to this situation energetically; projecting ideas, emotions and elements of their personality in a way that encourages the audience to respond.

Unlike 'representational' performance modes, in which performers might imagine an invisible 'fourth wall' between the stage and the auditorium, stand-up comedy relies on an exchange of energy between the performer and the audience (Double, 2014:188). This 'energy exchange' (which I discuss in more detail in chapter five) is only possible if all barriers are removed, and it is *this* that Kate is asking us to practice when she invites us to talk to the rest of the group. As I have described in event 4, Laura talks about a very personal medical procedure - ("a renal and bladder ultrasound") - and then creates a space that we "instantly fill with a sympathetic 'oooooh'". Laura pauses in recognition of this "oooooh", allowing our empathy to flow into her story. As the sound builds, it raises our general feeling tone, resulting in laughter, or "the crest of a wave of felt vitality" (Langer, 1953:340). Laura then moves her hands with our laughter: "a wave-like action that seems to follow - and mould - the shape of the sound". She is a body that is 'tuning in' - or 'surfing' - the movement of affect that is flowing through the group. Importantly, there is nothing particularly funny about what she has said. However, by feeling (and moving-with) the situation, she is able to create space for even more laughter to occur, simply by flicking her hands and saying "everything's fine".

Kate's exercise, then, is deceptively complex. Even though she is not asking us to engage cerebrally in the literary mechanisms of humour (through, for example, the development of incongruous punch lines), she *is* asking us to feel for the emergence of energetic flows taking form in the world around us. This way of working can be related to Deleuze's pedagogy, which is discussed in *The Master Apprentice* (Bogue, 2013). According to Bogue, Deleuze uses the sea as an analogy for the complex, moving systems that we must enter into in order to learn (Deleuze, 1994:165 - accessed Bogue, 2013:21). The teacher, he suggests, must try to intervene in the relation between the multiplicities of the body and the multiplicities of this sea (ibid). Like a swimming instructor, they might try to do this by demonstrating strokes while standing on the shore (ibid). However, such instruction is useless, because it is impossible for the learner to make any real connection between the mock-swimming on land and the actual swimming in the water (ibid). "It is only when the swimmer's body interacts with the waves that swimming can begin" (Bogue, 2013:22). So, rather than 'teaching' us how to tell a joke, Kate asks us to jump in and let the waves do the teaching.

As I will now explore, this method is particularly useful for women that feel hesitant about performing comedy. As can be seen in the following transcript (which is made up of quotes from participants' application forms), many participants do feel uncertain of their ability to be funny, which is something that the workshops help them to move past.

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Event 5 -
Transcript (Participants' application forms, January 2018):

Aisha: I'm hoping to develop my confidence in myself and my abilities, this type of thing fills me with dread, but I'm also thinking it might be quite fun to challenge myself.

Dora: I want to build my confidence with speaking in public and talking to people in general. I want to learn how to share stories in a funny and useful way without feeling awkward and out of place.

Chaz: I have a large family and I want to model to them that it's possible to get out of your comfort zone without disasters happening.

………………………………………………………………………………………………

As can be seen in the above quotations, Dora wants to "learn how to share stories in a funny and useful way"; a process that Aisha thinks will be a "fun… challenge", and Chaz imagines will push her "out of… [her] comfort zone". There is a sense in which - for all three women - performing comedy carries a certain amount of risk. For Aisha, the thought of comedy "fills… [her] with dread", and Chaz wants to prove to her family that she can do it "without disasters happening". Similarly, Dora hints at a fear of speaking in public, explaining that she would like to stop "feeling awkward and out of place" when interacting with others. This nervousness is something that I have encountered again and again in the Women's Comedy Workshop. It is as though humour - for many women - is a skill that seems to be missing, and that - they feel - might be very difficult for them to learn.

This slight nervousness is perhaps not surprising, because - as outlined in chapters one and two - women have long battled a perception that they, as a sex, are not funny. For example, Barecca points out that:

> Women are expected to be passive and receptive, rather than active and initiating. A woman who has a good sense of humour laughs (but not too loudly!) when a man makes a witticism or tells a joke… The man provides, the woman receives (1991:7).

While some might be tempted to roll their eyes at this assertion, it can be backed up by compelling evidence from the field of laughter research. According to Provine, when men and women converse, "females are the leading laughers, but males are the best laugh getters" (Provine, 2001:28). Men, in general, are much pickier about when they laugh; "laughing more when conversing with their male friends" (ibid). Furthermore, "males engage in more laugh-evoking activity than females, a pattern that may be universal" (Provine, 2001:29). Citing a cross-cultural study of children's humour in Belgium, the United States and Hong Kong, Provine explains that - in all cases - boys were found to be the principle instigators of humour, and this tendency was already present by six years of age (ibid).

Because gender differences in humour can be observed at such a young age, they are often positioned as a biological fact. However, with the help of Iris Marion Young, I will now turn this way of thinking on its head, arguing that - while women tend to *think* they aren't

funny - when they are permitted to start making (and surfing) waves, they often realise that they have been holding themselves back.

According to Young, the experience of many women is characterised by what she terms "inhibited intentionality" (1990:150), which means that women often fail to "summon the full possibilities of [their] muscular coordination, position, poise, and bearing" when approaching a task (1990:148). While this might be put down to women having a different anatomy or physiology to men, or to some mysterious feminine 'essence', the real source of the difference is the particular situation of women as conditioned by sexist society:

> The young girl acquires many subtle habits of feminine body comportment - walking like a girl, tilting her head like a girl, standing and sitting like a girl, gesturing like a girl, and so on. The girl learns actively to hamper her movements. She is told that she must be careful not to get hurt, not to get dirty, not to tear her clothes, that the things she desires to do are dangerous for her. Thus she develops a bodily timidity which increases with age… The more a girl assumes her status as feminine, the more she takes herself to be fragile and immobile, and the more she actively enacts her own body inhibition (Young, 1990:153).

My conjecture, here, is that there is also such a thing as 'being funny 'like a girl'', which refers to the halting, nervous way in which women tell jokes (when they do so at all). This is partly because women lack practice in this area; as we have already seen, girls tend to stop making jokes at around the age of 6 (Provine, 2001:29). However, it is also because - in learning to be 'feminine' - many women have also learnt to lean away from joke-making behaviours.

In *Throwing Like A Girl*, Young situates her discussion of women's movement within the material world (1990:139). This is based on the conviction - derived primarily from Merleau-Ponty - that it is the orientation of the body towards its environment that defines the subject (Young, 1990:140). However, in my discussion of being 'funny like a girl', I am thinking about 'movement' in relation to affective flows. My argument, here, is that women are less likely to 'dive' onto the waves of affect that form as bodies enter into relation with one another. Even Jim Carrey acknowledges that this process is scary. He says: "you're sitting there going "am I gonna ride this wave? It's a bit dangerous, but am I gonna ride it?" (Carrey, 2019 [online]). So, it's little wonder that women - who are more likely to underestimate their abilities, and to worry about potential risks (Young, 1990:149) - tend to

hesitate on the brink of making a joke, and then stumble over (or 'forget') the punchline. It's a case of comic timing. It doesn't matter how good a joke is. If you don't balance your surfboard right, it's not gonna float.

And this leads me onto another important aspect of the Women's Comedy Workshop - laughter. As already indicated, women are society's "leading laughers", but not its best "laugh getters" (Provine, 2001:28). In other words, our attempts at humour are more likely to be met with silence (a phenomenon that, incidentally, I have become much more aware of since starting this study). Because comedy is intensely collaborative (States, 2002), humour becomes almost impossible without laughter. Just like surfers looking gloomily at the flat surface of a surf-less sea, many women will have decided that there's little point in going down to the water front, never mind in getting themselves wet. However, the laughter in the Women's Comedy Workshop is another story. As can be seen in event 4, it simply pours into the space that Laura leaves; even though - as already discussed - what she has just said isn't funny in any traditional sense. Laughter continually flows through the space in this way; emerging supportively whenever we are asked to take risks, and spurting in playful fountains when a game is underway. It can become overwhelming; pinning us to the spot, or softening us at the edges until we start spilling secrets. It can also be aggressive, flirtatious, rebellious, compassionate; but - perhaps most importantly - it is reliable. It's always there.

These are the waves, then, that do the teaching in Kate's exercise on 'presence'. As discussed in chapter two, it is possible to understand the atmosphere from which laughter is contracted as a virtual field of nonconscious affects, subsisting at the level of the 'infraindividual', or 'preindividual' (Simondon, 2009). It is as though the potential to laugh is always there, agitating in the atmospheric milieu of nonconscious bodily life. However, in the workshops, we lower our threshold for laughter, making it easier for these preindividual affects to come up to surface of the transindividual (Massumi, 2017). By engaging actively in the contagious circulation of social feeling, we make the waves that allow us - as a group - to learn how to surf. In chapter seven, I will continue my discussion of the Women's Comedy Workshop pedagogy, which can tell us about how we learn to perform stand-up (and become better at telling jokes in other situations), and what this might mean for the fourth wave. However, for now, I want to introduce you to Marion, and invite you to sit in on one of our comedy nights.

BECOMING-MAJESTIC

Marion is one of the twenty two women that performed at Theatre in the Mill as part of the two comedy nights I organised during the period of the study. As I'm sure you can imagine, there are many, many eventful moments from these performances that I could write about here. However, I have chosen to think with Marion because the transformation that she underwent was particularly radical. In this section, I will (once again) use Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming (1987) to consider how Marion was produced differently through the act of performing, and through the waves of laughter moving through the space.

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Event 6 -
Field Notes (Comedy Night, May 2018):

We are almost halfway through our comedy night. I am sitting on the front row of Theatre in the Mill's tiered seating bank, surrounded on both sides by participants from The Women's Comedy Workshop. Behind me is an audience of around 80 people; a friendly bunch that are (mostly) here because they know someone who's performing.

20 minutes ago, I was on stage: a rollercoaster of blinding light and laughter. It was my second time doing stand-up and it went pretty well. I didn't use notes this time and my new material - which queers the sexist phrase "grow a pair [of balls]" - was received well. Most importantly, it was fun! REALLY fun. The kind of fun that is euphoric, addictive. The kind of fun that swirls joyfully in your chest and tingles orgasmically under your skin.

Kate introduces the next performer - Marion - and we applaud as she walks on stage and takes the microphone from its stand. Marion is in her early twenties, with long hair that has been bleached and dip-dyed pale green. She is very fat, with a friendly, oval face, and she is wearing jeans with a floaty dress over the top. Now, she smooths her hair away from her forehead and says "helloo!" in a voice that is slightly too high-pitched, slightly too casual. Someone in the audience immediately imitates it; their "helloo!" ringing out like an echo of hers.
    Marion stutters her first line, and I hold my breath. Will she be alright?
    But then, she stops, and makes a funny face.
      Everyone laughs; and I relax a little,
        Marion starts her set.

"I'd like to talk to you about something a little bit uncomfortable. I'd like to talk to you about my weight. It's been something that I've struggled with all my life, and when you are my size… it does affect every aspect of your life from, like, well-meaning family members who'll just grab bits of you [Marion indicates a specific roll of fat - on her stomach] and… go: "if you could just lose a bit of weight, HERE"."

[On the word - 'HERE' - Marion makes a huge circle with her hand, indicating that, actually, they want her to lose weight ALL OVER her body. The audience laughs enthusiastically, and I join in, caught in the moment and in the movement of Marion's hand].

"And it always ends the same way, if they think they've upset you… [doing an impression of a well-meaning family member] "It comes from a place of love!" [Pause] So does Chlamydia, I don't fucking want that either!!"

[This time, the laughter bursts from behind me with surprising force, like a small explosion. I see the wave of laughter hit Marion. She looks surprised and laughs a little bit with us before continuing].

"If you go to the doctor, you can go about anything and again, it always ends the same. They'll be tippity tippity typing, and they'll look at you…
[As doctor] "Have you thought about losing some weight?" [Laughter]
[As herself] "I've thought about it, Flower, but it hasn't helped!" [Laughter]
You can go for anything…
[As herself] "Oo I've got an ear ache."
[As doctor] "Mmm have you considered some weight loss?" [Laughter]
[As herself] "I've got this rash when I eat bread."
[As doctor] "Have you considered losing some weight?" [Laughter]
[As herself] "Help! A guy in the car park just cut half my leg off!"
[As doctor] "We have noticed a slight decrease in your weight recently!"
* [Marion holds her leg and pretends to cry, then looks up hopefully].*
[As herself] "Really?!" [Laughter]

I find myself completely drawn into this surreal exchange - in which Marion plays both herself and the doctor - forgetting all about my own performance, and all about the start of Marion's set, when I wondered whether she would be alright. All I want to do is listen to her talk, and wait for the next wave of laughter to crest over my head.

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As I have tried to capture in my field notes, Marion's performance is highly successful, generating the kind of laughter that is quite rare to experience during an amateur stand-up comedy gig, particularly one in which a woman is performing. This success is especially interesting because - as well as it being her first time doing stand-up - Marion is very low on confidence. When I first met Marion in January 2018, she was struggling with a leg injury, which meant that she needed to use a crutch. At the start of the first workshop, she introduced herself by saying "because of… my social anxiety and some problems with depression… I don't put myself out there and I don't really try things that I'm interested in"; performatively producing herself as passive and vulnerable in relation to the other women in the group. She did not participate in many of the activities in that first session and - at the end of it - I wasn't sure if I would see her again. However, a fortnight later, Marion did return, and - when we fast-forward to the comedy night at the end of the project - it is possible to see a huge transformation taking place.

In perhaps one of his most famous passages, Spinoza declares that "no one has yet determined what the body can do" (1959:87), by which he means that bodies can do a great many things that cannot be put down to the mastery of the human mind. According to Gatens, the Spinozist body "is a process, and its meaning and capacities will vary according to its context" (Gatens, 1988:68). It is this idea of the *body as process* that is at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of becoming, which I have been exploring throughout this chapter. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, they argue that a body "is not defined by the form that determines it… nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfils" (1987:304). Rather, bodies emerge through specific intra-actions with other (human and non-human) bodies, in assemblages that are characterised by "relations of movement and rest… capacities to affect and be affected" (ibid). Giving the example of a workhorse, they write that:

> [The horse] is defined by a list of active and passive affects in the context of the individuated assemblage it is part of: having eyes blocked by blinders, having a bit and a bridle… pulling heavy loads, being whipped… These affects circulate and are transformed within the assemblage: what a horse "can do" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:300).

The same horse, placed within a different assemblage (such as that of a racing track, or an open field), would individuate differently. In other words, 'what the body can do'

corresponds to the forces acting upon it in a particular moment, and - importantly - there is always the potential for those forces to change.

Even without knowing Marion's back-story (so to speak), it is possible to understand her performance as a meditation on the idea of becoming. As you can see in the extract, she starts by introducing the topic of her weight, explaining that it affects "every aspect" of her life. This allows her to address the way her body 'speaks' to the audience, which - as argued by Mizejewski - is particularly relevant to the female stand-up, "who offers her body for scrutiny in a visual dynamic that is traditionally male" (Mizejewski, 2015:212). It also, however, allows her to address the way that other bodies 'speak' to hers. As pointed out by comedian Sophie Hagen, fat bodies are more marginalised than ever in our (western) neo-liberal, health-obsessed world. The message that *fat is bad* is continually reaffirmed by "adverts on television… [the] fat characters in movies who either don't exist or are portrayed negatively… and the constant news stories telling us that *the obesity epidemic is coming to get us"* (Hagen, 2019:2 - original emphasis). Therefore, Marion's body is marked by a culture that sees overweight people as illicit, unhealthy and potentially viral. When she acts out a series of absurd skits - playing a 'well-meaning' family member that "grabs" bits of her body, and a doctor that ignores a sequence of (increasingly severe) ailments - she effectively conjures a set of assemblages, showing how her body is continually coming to be through a host of negative affects. The social forces that she enacts want her to become-smaller through dieting, or to punish her for being too big, and the sinister threat of physical violence is present in the form of the "guy in the carpark" who has "cut half [her] leg off".

In the event of the performance, however, Marion is able to sidestep these negative affects and explore different ways of relating to the world around her. Indeed, that is where much of the humour in her performance lies. We laugh when she 'talks back' to each of the characters she has evoked; for example, when she compares her family member's advice (which "comes from a place of love") to a sexually transmitted disease, and when she patronisingly refers to her doctor as "Flower". These moments of resistance alter the shape of each imagined assemblage; giving Marion space to playfully reinvent herself in relation to past experiences of powerlessness. Later in her set, Marion extends this idea by describing the verbal abuse that she sometimes receives from men when she's out and about. This abuse - she explains - is often unimaginative and poorly timed, and she thinks she should 'give back' to the community by critique-ing it.

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Event 7 -
Field Notes (Comedy Night, May 2018):

What I've decided I'm going to do is I'm gonna carry score cards. "Fatty" will get you a 2. It's fine but, no. "Fat bitch"… you're getting there, we'll give you a solid 5… Good start but still uncreative. "Hey, fat bitch", that will get you a 7 because you've said hello and that's polite [laughter].

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Once again, by comedically shifting her affective position, Marion upends the power dynamic that usually exists around her body in the public sphere. In this way, she is a good example of Rowe's unruly woman, who - as well as being unable to control her physical appetites (Rowe, 1995:31) - uses humour to affect the terms on which she is seen. She could also be compared to Cixous' figure of Medusa (who I discuss in chapter two), in that she robs her perpetrators of their powerful gaze; fixing her critical eyes on them and laughing (Cixous, 1976:885).

However, Marion's affective position is also altered in the event of performing; a shift that manifests itself within her body. At the start of her performance, for instance, Marion seems to want to make herself small and feminine on stage, smoothing her hair and greeting the audience with a "helloo" that is slightly too high-pitched and casual for the situation. As I describe in my field notes, I am worried about her in this moment, especially when somebody mimics her voice and she stutters her first line. However, as soon as Marion starts her set, her body starts to change. She becomes ever-so-slightly bigger on stage, and our first laugh is triggered by the giant circle she makes with her hand. This laugh could be understood through incongruity theory; she is pointing to a specific area of her stomach, and then surprises us with a big swooping movement that asks us to take in her entire figure. It could also be understood through relief theory, in that she is giving us permission to laugh at her fatness after awkwardly introducing the subject moments before. Either way, the audience's laughter bursts forth in celebration of Marion's body, which then continues to become-bigger through this laughter. In the doctor's surgery routine, for example, Marion hops on one leg and pretends to cry, and - later - she pretends to be a man in a car, winding down his window to shout abuse at her on the

street. In each case, the audience's laughter seems to encourage her to become-bigger; seeking for more examples of what her body 'can do'.

Figure 1 - copyright Maq Ahmad Photography.

The different humour theories - which I discuss in chapter two - highlight the fact that comedy, humour and laughter can be both "inclusive and exclusive, liberating and imprisoning, depending on when and how it is used" (Liliequist & Foka, 2015:1). I am sure that - even if we don't like to admit it - we have all engaged in the sort of aggressive laughter that casts someone out of a group. This is the sort of laughter that is focussed on by early western philosophers. For example, Descartes describes laughter as a form of "derision or scorn" that manifests itself through "a sort of joy mingled with hatred" (2015:178-179). While he does accept that laughter is connected to other emotions, Descartes (like many others) pays most attention to it as a kind of ridicule. There is now, however, much more recognition of the fact that laughter can be empowering and encouraging (e.g. Willet & Willet, 2019). And, in this sense, it seems to me that laughter has many similarities with the philosophical notion of affect; which - according to Massumi - can be understood as a:

> Prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another… implying an augmentation of that body's capacity to act (Massumi, 1987:xvi)

Positive affect - like 'positive' laughter - increases the body's capacity to act. Negative affect - like 'negative' laughter - decreases the body's capacity to act. In the everyday assemblages that Marion has conjured, it is clear that it is negative affects (including - perhaps - scornful laughter) that normally force her body to become smaller. Here, however, the 'positive' laughter of the audience moves in a different direction, encouraging her to become-bigger.

As I have already discussed, the laughter that occurs during the Women's Comedy Workshop performances is largely positive. This is because we take a lot of care to set up each comedy night in such a way as to create an atmosphere of solidarity with the performers. Kate Fox, who comperes each comedy night, tells the story of the project, and emphasises that - for many of the performers - it is their first time doing stand-up. We sit the other participants on the back row of the auditorium, and their loud, supportive laughter tends to move contagiously through the space, triggering similar laugh responses in the people in front. The atmosphere is helped by the fact that most of the people in the audience know someone who is performing, which means that they tend to enter the space with a feeling of empathetic excitement. This environment, then, creates a powerful atmosphere within which participants can practice 'surfing' positive waves of affect, which - I suggest - allows women like Marion to reframe their identities in relation to past experiences of sexism and misogyny.

For example, towards the end of Marion's set, she describes going to a beach in Cornwall with her family. She explains that her family drew attention on account of their swimsuits, which made the entire beach look at them and think "they're northern!"; an idea that is recognised by the Bradfordian audience with a ripple of hearty laughter. There is a familial, trusting atmosphere in the space, now, and when Marion likens her and her two sisters to "a really shit Russian nesting doll" (one of her sisters is very thin, the other is 'normal-sized'); the undulations of laughter that move through the space are like those of a group of old friends. Marion grins cheekily at the audience as she starts to describe how - when walking towards the water - she could hear a man doing an impression of David Attenborurgh, in which he compared her body to that of a whale.

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Event 8 -
Field Notes (Comedy Night, May 2018):

I could just hear from behind me, "so here we see the majestic whale returning to its natural habitat" [laughter] and I turn around, and there is a grown man, bent double! [Laughter]. I couldn't even be mad, because, number one, he did a really good impression [laughter], it was spot on! [Laughter]. And number two, he called me majestic. Ten points! [Laughter and applause].

....

While being compared to a whale might have been a painful experience when Marion was on the beach, here it becomes a celebration of her magnificence. Marion's 'becoming-majestic' is a process of becoming-with the waves of laughter elicited by the audience. A total immersion in positive affect.

BEYOND THE BREAKWATER

So far, I have explored a series of events that took place during the two projects that I led with the Women's Comedy Workshop. Of course, there is much that I have had to leave out. However, as discussed in chapter three, I have tried to choose events that would capture the transformative character of the workshops, and allow my thinking to develop in a range of different directions. In this section, I want to allow some of this thinking to spill outside of the workshops and into the everyday sphere. This is because, as can be seen in the transcript below, the effects of the workshops do seep into participants' everyday lives, opening up a host of new possibilities.

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Event 9 -
Transcript (Focus Group, May 2017):

Harriet: I felt so empowered after performing… I was really scared beforehand, I've never done anything like that before… and because of the topic I chose I was literally baring one of my biggest insecurities to a room full of strangers. I was fully expecting to talk and nobody laugh or not be able to talk at all… [but] after the first laugh I managed to relax… and enjoy it because it felt like they

genuinely seemed to enjoy it… It was such a positive experience and I'm still riding the high of it now.

Adrienne: …you know I went to Portugal straight after the sharing, like the next day? …We all went out for a meal and er… I just noticed that I was like making jokes in a way that I don't normally… There was one bit of dinner, there was quite a lot of people, and I just started making jokes and everyone just listened and laughed and I almost had like a, 2 minute gig! [Laughter].

Nel: I've also started to call myself funny. And I've never thought that I was funny. Like, I didn't think that… I've always been like 'confident', or whatever… I said that to my mum and she was like, obviously [you are funny]. But I've never thought that before.

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As can be seen in the above transcript, Harriet, Adrienne and Nel attribute a number of changes to having taken part in the Women's Comedy Workshop. After baring one of her "biggest insecurities to a room full of strangers", Harriet is still "riding the high" of the experience weeks after the event. Adrienne surprised herself by doing an impromptu "2 minute gig" while on a work trip, and Nel has finally started to call herself funny. In what follows, I will think about why some of these changes might have taken place. I will also review the arguments that I have made through the chapter, and start to place some of my ideas within the context of the fourth wave feminist movement.

I started the chapter by describing a funny moment in which two women dressed up as a bee and a bee-keeper. This allowed me to explore the importance of 'play' within the workshops. Through play, I suggest that participants are able to let go of some of their inhibitions; a process that is helped along by the de-subjectifying force of laughter (Bataille, 1997 - accessed Parvulescu, 2010:90). Jeannette and Vanessa, for example, seemed to enter a 'flow-like' state as they played. Indeed, the laughter that emerged from their game flowed like a wave between them, unravelling and transforming their bodies as they entered into new relations with the world around them.

According to Huizinga (1955), play must feel 'private', because - when we are watched - we cannot help but see ourselves from the outside, and question the validity of what we are doing. Therefore, the workshops must generate an environment - or an atmosphere - in which participants feel safe enough to play. This atmosphere is created partly through

games, which help to break down communication barriers, and build feelings of trust and friendship within the group. However, it is also created - I would argue - by the absence of men. The workshops are open to anyone that identifies as a woman some or all of the time, and this creates a festive, or 'carnivalesque' (Bakhtin, 1984) environment in which women can try out new behaviours. This leads me back to the idea of 'becoming', which I first explored in relation to Vanessa's 'becoming-bee'. As already discussed, becomings open us up to the idea that we are multiplicities, containing infinite potential for change (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The absence of men, I would like to suggest, works to 'deterritorialise' the workshop assemblage, making it possible for a whole series of becomings to occur. This is because men can be understood as a 'molar' entity; something that freezes the world in place around it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:215). By removing this 'component of power' - (an idea that I discuss in more detail in chapter five) - participants are able to enter into an array of molecular becomings, which traverse and undermine the molar sphere (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:219).

Interestingly, the idea of 'women-only space' has been back on the feminist agenda within the fourth wave (Cochrane, 2013). Although there are still worries around accessibility for trans women and non-binary individuals (O'Connell, 2019 [online]), there is also an acknowledgement of the need for spaces in which those from marginalised groups can come together on their own terms (Cochrane, 2013). As I will discuss in more detail in chapter seven, 'women-only' spaces can be a move toward (rather than away from) intersectional politics, because they make it possible for marginalised groups to access difference. Women-only spaces - while sounding exclusive - can (if they are set up in the right way) encompass all of the ways in which it is possible to be a woman. In this sense, they can be a force for freedom; creating the conditions for an alternative ecology.

In her essay - *Throwing Like A Girl* (1990) - Young describes how girls and women are hampered by a society that wants them to avoid 'active' (aka masculine) behaviours. Young is writing about physical activities, such as throwing a ball, running a race or lifting a heavy object. However, because joke-making is tied to masculinity in a similar way to these activities, I argue that her ideas are relevant to discussions of humour as well. There is, I suggest, such a thing as being funny 'like a girl', which refers to the ways in which women and girls might hold themselves back in potentially humorous situations. Having a safe, women-only space in which to experiment with comic techniques, then, is extremely important. And, as I have shown, this is what the Women's Comedy Workshop provides.

I then continue to explore the potency of laughter through my diffractive reading of Marion's performance. By drawing a link between the different types of laughter and the different types of affect, I suggest that the Women's Comedy Workshop is able to create a relatively controlled environment, in which waves of laughter are overwhelmingly positive. Again, this can be linked to the idea of a 'breakwater', because - while we want to make sure there are waves for our surfers to ride - we also want to keep participants away from the dangerous currents that exist beyond the breakwater, and out of the dangerous paths of passing ships. Of course, we can never eradicate all hazards. As can be seen in Marion's set, there are sometimes risky moments. However, as I have shown, the largely positive laughter of these performances can lead to the reconfiguring of identities in relation to past experiences of sexism and misogyny.

As can be seen in 'event 9', the experience of performing within this environment can alter how participants understand their ability to interact with others. For example, Nel's mother has always thought that she is funny, even though Nel would have described herself as "confident" (but not funny) in the past. Adrienne's work colleagues "listened and laughed" when she told jokes at the dinner table; an experience that was - perhaps - only remarkable because Vanessa had never taken up space in this way before. Harriet was expecting to "talk and nobody laugh" when she performed her set at Theatre in the Mill, but found - instead - that the audience wanted to support her. In other words, the Women's Comedy Workshop created a space in which these women were able to discover - and then start using - their sense of humour. As soon as they started to surf, they found that it was easy, suggesting that their 'inhibited intentionality' around humour is - (like many forms of gender oppression) - largely self-imposed.

Harriet, who is "still riding the high" of the experience, explains that she is feeling "empowered". I will pick up on this (very fourth wave) idea in chapter seven. However, for now, I simply want to suggest that the Women's Comedy Workshop shows how powerful comedy can be. As I wrote at the start of this chapter; learning to do comedy requires you to take risks, to physically commit *your whole body* to your intention, and to tune into the ebb and flow of the energy in your immediate environment. Once you have started to do this (and realised how wonderful it can feel), other activities become possible. For the fourth wave, then, humour could be an extremely useful tool; bringing us together, teaching us to transgress and encouraging us to playfully become.

CHAPTER FIVE:

MICRO WAVES

Figure 2 - Betty Grumble reads the Scum Manifesto (Image Construction, 2018 [online]).

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Event 10 -
Transcript (Emma Maye Interview):

The body becomes a shrine, a site of political commentary. I use my body quite literally, shake it, reveal it, test its ability, exhaust it, pleasure it, penetrate it, open it up to show its insides… I reveal me underneath Betty, I put Betty back on. I show it's metamorphosis, its sameness and its difference to others… A corporeal feminism to me is a vital one, my body has been the site of my lived experience as a woman. I have been working on reclaiming it in space, as a vessel and collapsing, gooey contagion.

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As outlined in chapter three, Emma Maye Gibson is a performance artist. She describes her on-stage persona, Betty Grumble, as an "obscene beauty queen, surreal show girl and sex clown", and her performance piece - *Love and Anger* - as an "ecosexually charged protest party of dancing dissent, disco and deep push back-ery" (Gibson, 2017 [online]). In this chapter, I will be discussing Emma Maye's work alongside that of Julia Croft, who created *Power Ballad* in order to investigate "the hidden ideologies and power dynamics… within language" (Croft, 2017 [online]). These performances - which I saw at the fringe - blend together elements of clown, burlesque and stand-up; defying genres in their search for new forms of feminist performance.

In the first half of this chapter, I think about what the comic techniques in *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* 'do'. By diffractively reading extracts from my field notes through Bakhtin's notion of the "carnivalesque" (1984) and Deleuze's ideas on "minor theatre" (1997), I explore how Julia and Emma Maye return us to the body through two highly grotesque events. In the first, Julia 'eats' a microphone. In the second, Emma Maye (in the guise of her alter ego - Betty Grumble) 'sings' out of her vagina. As well as being

extremely funny, I propose that these moments unravel normative modes of gender representation, allowing the performers to enter into an array of 'becomings' on stage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). By refusing to tame the unruliness of their bodies, I also suggest that Julia and Emma Maye create 'minor gestures' (Manning, 2016), which feed into the emergent micropolitics of fourth wave feminism.

Figure 2 - Copyright Image Construction.

'Micropolitics' can be understood as a move away from the standardisation and homogeneity of the molar sphere (Surin, 2010:165). The 'molar', here, is to do with the State or the civic world. It tends to be well-defined and easy to represent. Micropolitics, by contrast, tend not to be affiliated with any particular political group or idea. Instead, micropolitics are to do with the 'molecular' movements of micro-entities, and the (often imperceptible) affective shifts that might be capable of altering the world order (ibid). In this sense, we can align the idea of micropolitics with Manning's 'minor gesture', which is "a force that makes the lines tremble that compose the everyday" (2016:7). Minor gestures resist the centralising tendencies of the molar (or the 'major'), moving instead towards the disruptive power of difference (ibid). In my discussion of *Power Ballad* and *Love and Anger,* I suggest that Julia and Emma Maye make space for becoming-minoritarian on stage by "amputating" components of power and initiating what we might think of as a "theatre of immanence" (Deleuze, 1997).

In the second half of the chapter, I position the performances as fourth wave 'event encounters' (O'Sullivan, 2006) - or forms of 'socially engaged art' (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2002), - which challenge and disrupt our typical ways of being in the world. This involves a consideration of the fluid nature of laughter, which ripples between bodies, growing into waves of resistance that have the potential to disrupt deep currents of patriarchal thought. Moving beyond reductive accounts of laughter as a function of stimulus-response, I suggest that comedy is not just about making people laugh, but fielding a charged atmosphere through which new forms of life-living can emerge.

POWER BALLAD

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Event 11 -
Field Notes (*Power Ballad*):

The lights come on after the black-out. Julia has covered her naked torso with a neat black blazer, and has taken her wig off to reveal the wig cap underneath. She stands centre-stage behind the microphone, which is now obediently perched on a very ordinary-looking mic stand.

I sit quietly on my curved wooden bench at the back of Summerhall's 'Anatomy Lecture Theatre', which was once part of a Victorian veterinary college. Before the show started, I imagined the gruesome dissections that would have taken place here; the queasy-curious students peering down into open bodies, their notes stained by blood and formaldehyde.

Julia has spent the last 5 minutes contorting her bare-chested body in an unnerving 'stand-off' with the microphone. Refusing to touch it with her hands - and refusing to look at the audience through the thick hair covering her face - she has slid and slithered with the electrical cable across the stage, using hip thrusts to direct the microphone over her sternum and down her back. Just before the stage went dark, the mic dangled pendulously between her legs; a limp yet triumphant totem.

Now, Julia stands politely behind it, buttoned-up and blinking, apparently just about to speak. The incongruity of this - after the rebellion we have witnessed - sends a shiver of laughter through the room. She looks cute in her wonky wig cap, and slightly nervous as she adjusts the microphone stand; seeking us out behind the bright stage lights.

Julia 'checks' the microphone - tapping it with her forefinger - then signals to the technician to put up the volume. We laugh, and she repeats the process, tapping the mic and signalling for the volume to go up again. After tapping it a third time, she hesitates, thinks, and signals for the volume to be brought back down. She smiles sweetly up at the technician, and I snigger along with a few other women in the audience; elated by her teasing of the man behind the operating desk.

Julia slowly exaggerates her tapping action, using one finger, then two, then her entire hand. It turns into a rhythmic slapping that comes from the hips, and she rests her gaze on one person in the audience, opening her mouth sexily,

breathing hard, and banging, banging, banging. A ripple of embarrassed laughter emanates out from the person she is looking at; moving empathetically through the people sitting nearby.

Julia adjusts the microphone. This time, she 'checks' if it's working by blowing into it, gently. But rather than speaking, she blows again, and again, each time allowing out more air; a child playing at explosions. She starts moving her body to the noise, her arms and fingers outstretched. Now she is a wizard casting spells. After a frantic series of small, explosive pops, Julia runs out of breath, and wipes the microphone with the back of her hand. We laugh as she looks at us apologetically, suddenly embarrassed of the spittle we had delighted in moments before.

Adjusting the microphone once more, Julia coughs to clear her throat. The cough becomes a croak, and - slowly - she opens her mouth wide, completely enveloping the microphone and closing her lips around it. This gets the biggest laugh of the performance so far; and as we laugh, Julia continues to croak, looking at us with wild eyes as though she can't breathe. The sound from her vibrating vocal cords - and from our bellies and chests - completely fills the room. Eventually, Julia opens her mouth again and slowly moves her head backwards, freeing the microphone from her cavernous jaws.

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In *One Less Manifesto*, Deleuze celebrates theatre that "gives birth to… something unexpected" (Deleuze, 1997:239) through the 'amputation' of components of power. According to Deleuze, components of power in the theatre are those that assure at once the coherence of the subject and the coherence of representation on stage (Deleuze, 1997:241). Discussing Carmelo Bene's production of *S.A.D.E*, for example, he describes how "the sadistic image of the Master is… amputated, paralyzed, reduced to a masturbatory twitch" (Deleuze, 1997:140). This means that free rein can be given to the masochistic Servant, who "seeks himself, develops himself… experiments with himself, creates himself on stage" (ibid). In other words, by amputating the character of the Master, Bene frees the Servant from the usual processes of theatrical subjectification. He no longer has to *master* his role as *servant.* On the contrary, he is free to metamorphise, experiment and create.

Unsurprisingly, Deleuze identifies 'the text' as one of the most important components of power to neutralise in the theatre. The text, for Deleuze, "is like the domination of language

over speech (Deleuze, 1997:245), which forces homogeneity and structure on speaking subjects. Elsewhere in his work - and in his work with Guattari - Deleuze associates language with ideas of transcendence; it operates along the vertical axis of an assemblage, territorialising and stabilising the actions and passions of intermingling bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988:103). When he suggests that performers should "impose the work of continuous variation on language" (Deleuze, 1997:247), he is arguing for a 'theatre of immanence', one that deterritorialises and shifts the semiotic coordinates of the theatre machine, opening it onto a horizontal plane.

The microphone is one of the most stable aspects of stand-up comedy. In this way, it can be seen as transcendent: fixing the performer in a particular relation to the audience, and operating within a system of binary significations. Continually emblazoned on posters for comedy gigs and open mic nights, the microphone is *the* phallic symbol of stand-up comedy. It evokes the idea of a solo (male) performer, and the dominance of a noisy audience through sound. Like the character of the Master in Bene's S.A.D.E, the microphone is dominant, masculine, erect. As pointed out by Marjorie Gross, "holding a microphone is like holding a penis" (Gross - accessed Collier & Beckett, 1980:99); it's *even shaped like a dick*. Through its intimate relation to language (microphones are, after-all, designed to amplify the voice), it emphasises the singular nature of the speaking subject, picking out the thoughts of *one* over a constellation of many. In other words, the microphone is ripe for a feminist castration fantasy.

Diffracting the extract from *Power Ballad* through Deleuze's idea of amputation, then, it is possible to glimpse how Julia's refusal to interact with the microphone in a conventional way neutralises its power. By not speaking into it, for example, she sidesteps the pull of subjectification, and avoids cohering into a recognisable subject with a singular voice. *Power Ballad* was inspired by the "misogynistic train wreck" that was the US presidential election in 2016, during which Julia was struck by the implicitly gendered narratives that were played out in politics and the media (Croft, 2018 - accessed QTheatre, 2018 [online]). Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that she felt the need to avoid the 'molar' entity of language. While she does eventually speak, Julia continually neutralises the power of the microphone with an electronic modulator that queers the sound of her voice. She also avoids cohesive sentence structures, inviting the audience to hesitate with her among fragmented phrases and incongruous statements. This is a 'schizo-language' (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:318) that opens the way to a becoming-molecular on stage.

More than anything, however, Julia neutralises the power of language (and, by extension, the patriarchy) through her body. For example, by refusing to pick up the microphone with her hands in the opening section (which is what we expect a performer using a microphone to do), she gets in the way of the usual processes of theatrical representation; entering into a process of 'becoming-monster', which prevents her body from ever settling into a fixed image that we might recognise. When I interviewed Julia, she explained that her choreography, here, was inspired by the idea of a 'banshee'; a female spirit in Irish mythology who heralds the death of a family member by wailing or shrieking. Like many women in mythology, the banshee is not any one thing, but many. She is part virgin, part crone, part animal, part harbinger of doom (Lysaght, 1997). Therefore, Julia's becoming-monster (or becoming-banshee) can be understood as a heteroglossic becoming that - through multiplicity - resists the static qualification of anything in particular. Once again, by 'neutralising' the microphone, Julia is able to explore many ways of being on stage, oscillating between modes on a line of continual variation.

Figure 3 - copyright Peter Jennings Photography.

This leads me onto Bakhtin's notion of the carnivalesque, which - as hinted at in chapter two - is also bound up with the 'amputation' of power. In *Rabelais and his World*, for example, Bakhtin traces the origins of carnival back to the Feast of Fools - a medieval festival at which cathedral officials would perform burlesques of the sacred ceremonies (Bakhtin, 1984:7). These liberating times of inversion, where hierarchy and rank were suspended along with many other social norms, "made a man renounce his official state as monk, cleric, scholar, and perceive the world in its laughing aspect" (Bakhtin, 1984:13).

The neutralisation of power within the carnivalesque realm transfers "the world from the vertical to the horizontal" (Bakhtin, 1984:363), supplanting the hierarchy of high and low with a typology of interactions between humans and the world around them. This transfer is realised in the grotesque body, which reaches out beyond its bounded limits, conjuring "a special concept of the body as a whole and of the limits of the whole" (Bakhtin, 1984:315). The grotesque body is not a closed system, but a body that reaches out beyond its boundaries; interacting with the world on a sensual level.

> This means that the emphasis is on the apertures or the convexities, or on various ramifications and offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, child-birth, the throes of death, eating, drinking, or defecation (Bakhtin, 1984:26).

This works against the classical conception of the body, which (as explored in chapter two) is individualised and dualistic, cut off from the world around it. For Stott, the grotesque body is "a vivid celebration of interconnectedness, growth and continuity" within an immanent universe (2005:89).

As one of "the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body... goes out to meet the world" (Bakhtin, 1984:26), the mouth is often stressed in grotesque and carnivalesque practices. And it is not the speaking mouth of an autonomous subject that is stressed. Rather, the licking, tasting, drooling, vomiting mouth; the mouth interacting with the world on a sensual level. And, as can be seen in my field notes, Julia becomes-grotesque through her mouth. Continually looking as though she is 'just about' to speak, she makes a spectacle of her lips, compelling us to watch as

they persistently fail to form the comfortingly recognisable shapes of words. Her 'explosion' noises - made by combining breath with palate, tongue and teeth - amplify the various sounds her mouth can make, and cover the microphone with saliva. Finally, she merges with the microphone by opening her mouth wide, and inserting it right to the back of her throat. This extreme act - accompanied by wild eyes and a croak that is reminiscent of a death rattle - is truly grotesque. It is an example of the limits between the body and the world being "erased, leading to the fusion of the one with the other and with surrounding objects" (Bakhtin, 1984:310).

According to Hajdukowski-Ahmed, the grotesque can be understood as a way of warning or worrying about the 'leaky' aspects of the woman's body (1993 - accessed Shepherd, 1998:198). This is important because - as pointed out by Manning (2013) - the psychoanalytical idea of 'containment', in the West at least, has been central to our understanding of what it means to be a well-balanced human being for more than a hundred years. Quoting Bick, she writes that the infant must learn "to hold himself together in his own 'skin'… without spilling out and falling to bits" (Bick, 2002:209 - accessed Manning, 2013:1), and if this vital phase of development is not successfully achieved, it is thought that the infant will later risk anxiety and annihilation through 'leakage'. "The infant fears that itself will dissolve and, ultimately, leak into a limitless space" (Lafrance, 2009:9 - accessed Manning, 2013:2). When we look at psychoanalytic history, having 'a leaky sense of self' is especially concerning for women. 'Excessive' behaviours that complicate the inside/outside binary (such as laughing, crying, talking and sex) have long been aligned with emotional and psychological disorders such as hysteria (Davis, 1975). This is why - for Russo - the grotesque can be a dangerous space for women to inhabit (1994:63).

However, by diffracting an extract from *Power Ballad* through Deleuze's notion of 'minor theatre' (1997) and Bakhtin's notion of the 'carnivalesque' (1984), I have explored some of the ways in which the grotesque body can help feminists with the reconfiguring of cultural identities. As pointed out by Mizejewski, the grotesque can be aligned with Braidotti's account of bodies as 'events' and processes; "exemplifying nomadic subjectivity, located in many changing sites, unattached to single fixed identities" (Mizejewski, 2015:217). In other words, the grotesque emphasises the *multiplicity* of the body, transgressing the terms on which it is normally seen. Indeed, through its focus on individual organs - mouth, throat, jaw etc. - the grotesque asks to be experienced on a molecular level. The body is presented as a multiplicity of organs, each one a universe in its own right.

In her essay on *Foucault, Laughter, and Gendered Normalization* (2015), Douglas writes that there is a 'transgressive laughter' within performances that shatter categories and concepts that have been used for oppression. Transgression, here, contrasts with dialectical philosophy, which conceives of resistance as a direct negative opposition to an external object or force, with both the resistance and the force having a shared background or set of assumptions (Douglas, 2015:145). Dialectics takes for granted the conceptual schema or paradigm within which the debate is happening. Laughing in the face of categories, however, is transgressive, in that it challenges the terms, concepts and discourses that structure our daily lives (ibid). When Julia and I talked, we kept returning to the 'transgressive' nature of her work, as can be seen in the transcript below.

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Event 12 -
Transcript (Julia Interview):

I think a lot of the laughter that happens in 'Power Ballad' is… oh god she's taking it way beyond what we're allowed? And I think, for me, a lot of feminist work, but particularly feminist work that uses comedy, is super transgressive in that way… I think people laugh because it's exciting and it's emboldening to see women fully break all the rules.

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So, by making fun of the binary that normally exists between the inside and the outside of the body, Julia goes "beyond what we're allowed" to do as women on stage. This is transgressive, because - as we have seen - control of the body (in particular the female body) is extremely important within patriarchy. However, rather than simply subverting this element of patriarchal thought by, for instance, behaving in an 'unladylike' way, Julia transgresses the terms on which we can understand what 'ladylike' means. By presenting her body as a multiplicity of moving, expanding parts; Julia explodes the notion of a stable human subject, creating - instead - a space for continuous variation and experimentation.

LOVE AND ANGER

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Event 13 -
Field Notes (*Love and Anger*):

It is Thursday 24 August, 7.45pm(ish). I am standing on some damp stairs, waiting to descend into The Monkey Barrel - a grotty little comedy venue on Blair Street in Edinburgh's Old Town. It's the last week of the Fringe and I am tired; a feeling made worse by the greasy, jostling queue all around me. There are too many blokes here for my liking. Taking up TOO MUCH SPACE.

One pushes past me. "Dickhead". I remain on my step, grimly determined to see who this Betty Grumble is, and not waste the £8 that I've already spent on a ticket.

Over the past few days, Betty's name has floated towards me out of conversations, posters, an interview in Broadway Baby. I don't love the name, to be honest. It sounds cutesy and pink - the kind of name you might find on a box of ironic cupcakes. But, a friend told me that she'd walked away from the show feeling like she had a super power, so I stay put and try to put my skepticism aside.

Finally, we're on the move. I let myself be pushed past the little hatch selling cheap lager in plastic cups and into one of those dark, damp, unhealthy performance spaces you get at the Fringe: exposed stone walls that look moist to the touch; the smell of old booze, dry ice and dirt; 40 wooden chairs set out in rows in front of an unfathomably small stage.

I realise I will have to clamber past/over 'Dickhead', who has unhelpfully plonked himself on the aisle-end of the only row of free seats. I passive aggressively knock him with my backpack as I squeeze past.
That'll teach him.

Betty is already onstage, wearing a large, white can-can skirt and corset. Her face is terrifying and beautiful in its bright pink, green and orange make-up, framed by an enormous blonde wig and finished with gold glitter. T-Rex's 'Hot Love' plays, and I see that she is reading a copy of the SCUM Manifesto.
Not cutesy at all, it turns out.

Already, I feel different. The energy bubbling up between Betty and the young people in the first couple of rows is unlike anything I've experienced at the

Fringe this year. It gives off sparks. I watch as each wink and gesture bounces between bodies; bodies, which - like mine - are alert, upright, leaning towards the soft pink and yellow glow of the stage lights. There's a fluttering in my chest and I find I am already suppressing laughter. In fact, I'm relieved to be sat towards the back of the room - in the darkness next to the wall - where I can watch whatever is about to unfold from a place of relative safety.

The lights change and Betty moves centre stage, standing with her back to the audience. When the room is still, she bends over, flicking the layers of her can-can skirt up and over her head; revealing her vulva and golden, glittering arsehole. A large, cartoonish eye has been stuck on each bum cheek, making her backside into a topsy-turvy face. The music to Minnie Ripperton's 'Lovin' You' begins to play and Betty sings into a mini microphone on the floor; puppeteering her vulva-'mouth' so that it mimes along to the words.

Laughter BURSTS out of me with surprising force. I am broken apart by it, turned upside down and inside out. The tired woman from the queue has shed her skin and become a monster of energy, TAKING UP SPACE with sound.

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Like many clown performers, Emma Maye Gibson describes Betty as a 'mask' which - according to Peacock - is the costume and make up worn by a clown, but also their way of relating to the world around them (2009:60). For Peacock, clown masks are a way for performers to undergo "a transformation which reveals hidden facets of his or her personality" (ibid); and what characterises the Betty-mask - above all else - is its desire for pleasure. According to Charney, comic performances often celebrate pleasure in this way, standing in opposition to "all moral principles, abstractions and joylessness" (1978:160). As well as being shown the incongruities that are inherent to the divided human subject (as discussed in chapter two); the audience is permitted to enjoy the body's instincts and animal drives; our laughter bursting forth in "allegiance to the life force" (ibid). This appears most vividly in grotesque images, in which a character's bodily hierarchy will often be turned upside down, with the 'lower stratum' replacing the 'upper stratum' (Bakhtin, 1984:309). For Bakhtin, the grotesque allows for the celebration of a popular, festive, folk identity, which is capable of undermining the frail power of civility and elevating bodily behaviours that are not normally permissible in the public sphere (ibid).

In my field notes, I describe how - at the start of the show - Emma Maye/Betty bends over, "flicking the layers of her can-can skirt up and over her head… [and] revealing her vulva

and golden, glittering arsehole". As can be seen in figure 4, the "topsy turvy face" that is created in this moment looks strangely similar to the painted face we have already seen (in figure 2). By (re)introducing the audience to the Betty-mask in this way, Emma Maye creates a carnivalesque arena in which the 'lower' parts of her body reign supreme. Even though we don't meet the 'singing-vagina' again, its

Figure 4 - copyright Emma Maye Gibson.

appearance here incites a fascination with the body's pleasures, instincts and drives, which are explored throughout the show.

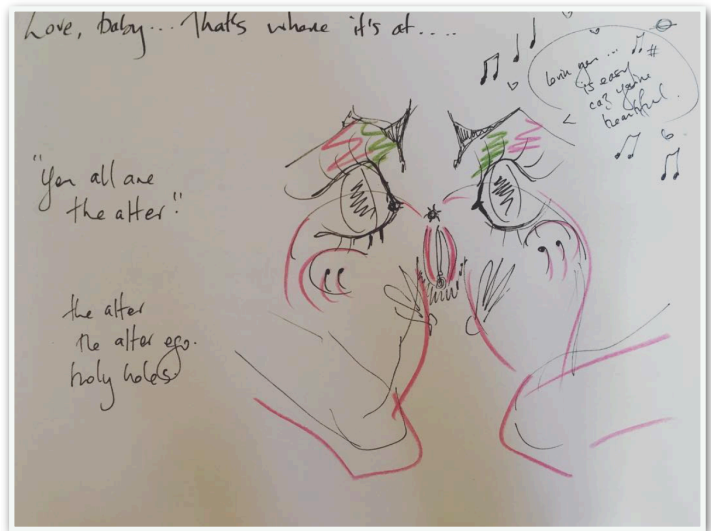In *Women and Laughter*, Gray writes that the correlation between laughter and the 'lower' parts of the female body can be traced back to the Eleusian mysteries in Ancient Greece. At these annual fertility rites, an old maid - Baubo - was believed to lift Demeter out of her wintery depression (and so bring on the spring) by lifting up her skirt, and making lewd jokes about her genitalia (Gray, 1994:2). Gray points out that images of Baubo - "little dancing vulvas with funny faces" (ibid) - are difficult to find today, while "a model of Priapus, a minor god with a gigantic phallus… [can be found] attached to a key ring, a toilet roll holder, or an ashtray" (ibid). So, despite their historical significance, grotesque images involving female genitalia are extraordinarily taboo. However, they are finding their way back onto our stages in the form of contemporary feminist comedy. Indeed, Emma Maye Gibson wasn't the only performer that I saw displaying her genitalia as part of a comedy performance in August 2017. Many feminist performers at that year's fringe seemed interested in the taboo nature of the grotesque body; with one group creating a piece of theatre - entitled *Wild Bore* - in which they (literally) 'talked out of their arses' for an hour and a half (Martin, 2017 [online]).

This is interesting, not least because - as discussed in chapter two - the 'Me Too' movement can be understood as a defining moment of the fourth wave, and it arose as a way of fighting against the constant threat of 'invasion' that women live with in patriarchal society. At the time of my conversation with Emma Maye, the Me Too movement had not

yet started. However, issues around violence and shame made their way into the spacetime of our conversation on Skype, as can be seen in the following transcript.

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Event 14 -
Transcript (Emma Maye Interview):

I really needed Betty in my early 20s. I created her as, um, sort of like a healing mechanism because I, like many woman bodies and vulnerable bodies, have experienced male violence… The show is an un-shaming ritual because I do think that the violent shame I experienced is avoidable in a social landscape that creates healthy humans.

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As explored in chapter two, comedy has long been used to discipline women, and - as a result - it can sometimes feel like a risky space for something like an "un-shaming ritual" to take place within. Indeed, when Emma Maye exposed her genitalia to the audience, I was struck by how vulnerable her body was, and wondered if there was a 'body-guard' stationed backstage (there wasn't). However, as I will now argue, the grotesque images in *Love and Anger* speak to some of the same concerns as the Me Too movement, and - in many ways - offer a more radical critique.

Grosz points out that issues around women being vulnerable to rape and touching have been central to feminist theory and philosophy for many decades (1994:9). Many feminist political struggles emphasise the need for women to be able to 'control' their bodies, and Grosz argues this can end up emphasising the sort of dualistic thinking that positions the woman's body as passive; "the object over which struggles between its 'inhabitant' and others/exploiters might be possible" (ibid). Grosz's solution is to reimagine the body as a 'mobius strip', which is an inverted three-dimensional figure of eight. This model, she argues;

> [P]rovides a way of problematising and rethinking the relations between the inside and the outside of the subject, its psychical interior and corporeal exterior, by showing not their fundamental identity or reducibility but the torsion of one into the other, the passage, vector, or uncontrollable drift of the inside into the outside and the outside into the inside (1994:xii).

The mobius strip is an apposite metaphor for the undoing of dualisms (Grosz, 1994:117). Rather than there being a stable interior that is vulnerable to 'invasion', all there is the manipulation, rotation and inscription of the body on a flat (or 'immanent') plane.

In a similar way, grotesque images - which (as already discussed) tend to emphasise the body's apertures and openings (Bakhtin, 1984:26) - problematise the notion of a stable, psychical interior. In particular, the vagina (like the mouth) is one of the parts of the body where the inside touches the outside. Just as the word - 'mouth' - refers both to the threshold (the lips and the teeth) *and* the oral cavity behind (Pocock, 2006:382), the vagina can be understood as a twisting or folding of inside into outside, just like Grosz's mobius strip. By presenting her vagina *as* a mouth, then, Emma Maye offers her audience a radically different conception of the body; one that emphasises its ability to grow and evolve. Emma Maye's solution to the threat of violence isn't to shore up the body against the world, but to open it in exuberant, rebellious displays. Rather than focussing on the need to stop men from touching women (although this is important), the Betty mask asks to be given space to exist in the world more joyfully. In this way, Baubo is given a new lease of life in the singing-vagina routine; urging feminism to look beyond its 'wintery depression' and conceive of a more hopeful spring (Gray, 1994).

The image of the 'singing-vagina' can also be understood as an 'amputation' (in the Deleuzian sense), because it troubles the Cartesian coordinates that position the mind as the locus of reason and notions of 'the self', and the body as mute matter. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari describe the "abstract machine of faciality", by which we position the "holey surface" of the head - (eyes, nose, mouth) - as the openings that lead directly to the human mind or soul (1987:198-199). This 'abstract machine' leads to the 'facialisation' of these orifices, over and above those of the "breast, stomach, penis and vagina" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:199). However, there are "profound movements of deterritorialisation" to be had - they argue - when we "shake up the coordinates of the body" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:206); in particular when we put these other parts of the body into a process of facialisation. This undoes myths around the unified human subject and its supporting fictions of order and stability. Therefore, the 'becoming-face' of Betty's backside can be understood as a neutralisation of the power that the face holds, opening up infinite possibilities for Emma Maye/Betty to experiment with her/their identity on stage.

This leads me to another way in which Emma Maye explores pleasure on stage, which is through the ecstatic reclaiming of the rituals of femininity. She does this through costume changes - which she allows us to watch; showing us the fleshiness of the body that transforms through each set of clothes - and by shifting her way of moving, her tempo, the 'tone' of her facial expressions, her way of relating to her on-stage environment. At one point, she combines a glittery bikini with a full set of fake teeth, performing a surreal bump and grind to *Don't Cha* by The Pussycat Dolls. At another, she dons an 80s-style pink leotard and leads the audience in a 'love energy' fitness workout. Her shifting identities, then, emerge performatively through a series of assemblages; each one made up of both material and discursive elements. These oscillations serve to keep her body in a continual state of becoming. Now she is a lap dancer, now an exercise coach. Now she is a naked, vulnerable woman, now a fierce drag queen. As Emma Maye folds into Betty and Betty folds into Emma Maye, we are not only presented with the unruliness of the body, but with a total rebellion against the idea of the self. Once again, the playful variations permitted within comedy are a way of accessing the variegation at the heart of immanence; presenting the human being as a process of continual change.

So far, I have focussed on what the comic techniques in *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* 'do'. I started by thinking about how Julia's games with the microphone 'neutralised' some elements of power within the theatre, freeing her body from the tyranny of patriarchal language. I then explored how - through her invocation of 'the grotesque' - Julia celebrated the fluid, wave-like nature of the human subject, transgressing the terms on which female performers are usually seen. Moving on to a diffractive reading of *Love and Anger*, I then considered the topsy turvy face that Betty Grumble creates at the start of the show. As well as initiating a carnivalesque arena in which the pleasures of the body can be celebrated, I suggest that this moment provokes new forms of feminist thought around agency, shame and control. For fourth wave feminists; for whom 'representation' is a highly contentious issue (Munro, 2013 [online]), this type of comedy offers - I argue - a productive arena for the breaking down of transcendent categories. Rather than simply advocating for the increased representation of marginalised groups - which, as discussed in chapter two, is at the heart of much fourth wave activism - both *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* shatter the notion of categories altogether. By refusing to remain within any kind of signifying regime, they open up the possibilities for becoming-molecular on stage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

MAKING MICRO-WAVES

I now want to position *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* as affectively-charged spaces of encounter, which allow for the emergence of feminist 'micro-waves' through laughter. This involves shifting my focus away from the comic techniques used by the performers, and onto the experiences of the audience. According to O'Sullivan, an 'event-encounter' - in relation to an experience of art - is one that challenges and disrupts our typical ways of being in the world (2006:1). So, I will be focussing on how these performances opened up new ways of being for the audience. In doing so, I will suggest that they can be understood as a form of 'socially engaged' art (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2002), which is - in many ways - specific to the fourth wave.

In his book - *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) - Bourriaud argues that the role of art has changed within contemporary society. Rather than 'representing' imaginary and utopian realities, the purpose of art is now "to actually *be* ways of living and models of action within the existing real" (Bourriaud, 2002:13 - my emphasis). Invoking Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome, Bourriaud celebrates work that "catches the world on the move" (2002:14), creating a 'space of encounter' in which people can explore new ways of relating to one another and to the world around them. For example, he describes a piece of art called *Turkish Jokes*, which was created in 1994 by an artist called Jens Haaning (Bourriaud, 2002:17). To create this piece, Haaning broadcast funny stories in Turkish through a loudspeaker in a Copenhagen square, producing a 'micro-community' made up of immigrants brought together by collective laughter (ibid). This laughter reconfigured the relationship between the people in the square; indeed - in that split-second - the laughter of the immigrants (and the perplexed expressions of the passers-by) *became the artwork.* It is this process that is at the heart of much socially-engaged art; which can be understood as an 'encounter' between bodies rather than as a static 'representation' of prior creativity.

For Bishop (2012), the changing nature of art can be related back to Debord's critique of a society that is rendered numb by capitalist production (1967 - accessed Bishop, 2012:11). Because the market has almost completely saturated our image repertoire, so the argument goes, artists can no longer simply create artefacts to be consumed by passive bystanders. Instead, "there must be an art of action, interfacing with reality, taking steps - however small - to repair the social bond" (Bishop, 2012:11). Debord was writing in 1967,

but his ideas have never been more relevant. With the advent of the internet and the smart phone, the passive consumption of aesthetic experiences has become an endemic part of everyday life. Many artists, then, have been moved to do something different - to create work that might shake audiences out of their political languor, and make them aware of their role within meaning-making processes.

When discussing this type of art, it is usual to focus on 'immersive' or 'participatory' techniques. So, we might consider a piece like *The Artist is Present* (MoMa Learning, 2010), in which Marina Abromavic spent three months sitting silently at a wooden table within the MoMa art gallery, locking eyes with each of the 1000 people that came to sit opposite her. Or, we might consider the portfolio of Jeremy Deller, who devises 'social interventions' that are often performed by huge groups of participants (Jeffries, 2004). Deller's *Battle of Orgreave*, for instance, invited re-enactment groups to stage the battle that occurred between striking miners and police in 1984, alongside veterans that had participated in the original campaign. We might even think about the (arguably less interesting) work of a theatre company like Punchdrunk, who create enormous installations in which audience members are encouraged to seek their own narratives, wearing masks that serve to free them from their inhibitions and distinguish them from the professional cast members (Higgin, 2017). While these examples are wildly different to one another, they are united by their mutual interest in participation, immersion and the relationships that exist between bodies in space.

It is *this* that separates socially-engaged art from more straight-forwardly 'political' artistic forms. Rather than seeking to represent political themes in order to act as propaganda, socially-engaged art is interested in the affective experience of spectators and participants. Of course, the philosophical notion of affect - which calls attention to the ways in which our bodies are continually changing according to the forces (or affects) that are acting upon them - is inherently political (Massumi, 2015). However, socially-engaged art tends not to be in control of its political messaging in the way that, say, a narrative-driven play might be. This is partly because - in generating 'active' participants - artists like Abromavic and Deller must surrender at least some creative control. Different audiences may take performances in different directions, giving those performances different meanings. What their work becomes about, then, is *difference*; the potential for change that is always present (but so often ignored) when human beings come together. By reminding audiences of this potentiality, art can act as the catalyst for political change (Bishop, 2012).

Apart from a brief reference to the Fluxus movement (2002:46) - and to the laughter in Haaning's *Turkish Jokes* - Bourriaud does not write about comedy. However, the notion of the audience as a "joint creator" of an artwork, which was most famously put forward by Duchamp in *The Creative Act* (1957 - accessed 2013 [online]), applies most viscerally to comedy; the success of which relies almost entirely on the active participation of the audience. According to Double, you can't do comedy in a vacuum, because - without the (highly audible) responses of the audience - the performance is only half there (2014:187-188). Moreover, Murray describes how comedians tend to create their material *in tandem* with their audience, rewriting and honing their material according to what generates the most laughter (2010:138). In this respect, comedy is highly relational, with many opportunities for audiences to participate in the meaning-making process.

However, in the context of the performances that are at the heart of this chapter, the audience's laughter is doing much more than 'commenting' on - or participating in - the production of humorous materials.

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Event 15 -
Transcript (Julia Interview):

There's this exorcism almost for me of anger and joy and that, and it's perfect, when it really works with an audience it feels like a real collective ex, a real collective experience of resistance?

Event 16 -
Transcript (Emma Maye Interview):

[At the end of a performance] I feel elated and high. I can get a quivering sensation. I feel orgasmic… I feel powerful and vulnerable. Flammable. I feel in control, out of control. I feel at home.

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As can be seen in the above transcripts, laughter alters the affective states of both the audience and the performers. For Julia, this feels like "exorcism… of anger and joy", and - for Emma Maye - it can feel like a "quivering sensation", which is "orgasmic", "powerful" and "flammable".

We know from chapter four that laughter is a socially contagious affect. It can alter a social climate, functioning like waves rather than like the properties of discrete individuals (Willet et al, 2008:143-147). So, as the performers channel (and 'surf') the charged atmospheres created by the audience's laughter, they start to 'feel' the audience's affects (Brennan, 2004). In his book on stand-up, Double describes this process, suggesting that:

> Funny lines, gestures and mimes flow from the comedian to the audience, and laughter, applause and heckles flow back in the other direction. The audience is energised and bonded into a group by the comedy that flows from the performer, and the performer is filled with the energy that he or she gets from the audience's responses (2014:188-189).

Double does not use the word 'affect', here. However, his description of energy 'flows' speaks to the fluidity of affects (and the porosity of borders). It is possible to imagine that - as the audience starts to feel exhilarated by the waves of energy/affect that are unleashed by each performance - Emma Maye and Julia are, in turn, 'filled' with the waves of energy/ affect that are moving through the space. It is in this sense that we can understand *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* as 'spaces of encounter' in which new modes of feminism might be born.

I now want to think about this specifically in relation to *Love and Anger*, which - due to its well advertised adult content - tends to attract a diverse crowd, with many people attending the performance in order to watch Emma Maye Gibson take her clothes off. In my field notes (in 'event 13'), I describe how I felt while standing on the damp steps of The Monkey Barrel, where it seemed like there were "too many blokes… taking up too much space". Historically, comedy has been a male-dominated artform (Double, 2014), and female burlesque performers tend to exist in comedy clubs as objects to-be-looked-at. However, because Emma Maye's performance parodies the ways in which heteronormative male desire is often celebrated in spaces like this, I soon found my affective position changing. The sight of Betty's singing vagina interrupted the scopophilic pleasure of the 'male gaze' (Mulvey, 1991), creating a space into which the laughter of traditionally marginalised groups could flow. Having felt relieved to be alone at the back of the auditorium, I now found myself sitting up in my chair, whooping and screaming like a teenager at a pop concert.

According to Bataille, "those who laugh, together become like the waves of the sea" (1988:95). Even though the unity of waves can easily decompose, the experience of communal laughter can be understood as a 'sonorous moment', with the potential of reverberating infinitely out from the event (ibid). With this image in mind, I think it is possible to imagine the 'micro-community' of laughers that I have invoked as a 'micro wave'; which - for now - I would like to imagine as a 'micro' (as in 'small') wave, rather than as a form of electromagnetic radiation. This micro wave was formed by the group that 'got the joke'; i.e. who appreciated the transgressive incongruity of 'lip-syncing' with the wrong sort of lips[3]. However, it was also a generative moment of becoming. As our laughter swept through the space it united us as a powerful wave, affectively 'sticking' our bodies together and outlining the contours of a fragile new superiority (Ahmed, 2010).

At the start of this section, I mentioned that the role of art has changed within contemporary society. Socially engaged art aims to 'interrupt' the processes by which audiences passively consume. And - even though laughter and humour tend to be ignored within the academy, some philosophers have noted its disruptive potential. At the start of *The Order of Things*, for example, Foucault writes that;

> Laughter… shattered… all the familiar landmarks of my thought - our thought, the thought that bears the stamp of our age and our geography - breaking up all the ordered surfaces and all the planes with which we are accustomed to tame the wild profusion of existing things (1970, xv).

If we define an 'encounter' as "something in the world that forces us to think" (Deleuze, 1994 - accessed O'Sullivan, 2006:1), then perhaps the importance of laughter in creating encounters has been overlooked. Indeed, this was recognised by Benjamin, who suggested that the 'engaged' artist should return to art's opportunity to "expose the present" (1973:101). "Spasms of the diaphragm", he wrote, can alienate and dissociate the audience from the conditions in which they live much more than anything else (Benjamin, 1973:102). So, as well as shattering and breaking and disturbing thought (Foucault, 1970:xv), laughter can alter our relationship with the present; revealing the power dynamics that exist between bodies and - importantly - highlighting their potential for change.

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[3] Emma Maye Gibson defines Betty Grumble as a 'drag queen' (2017 [online]). Because drag is a form of performance most associated with gay and/or transgender men (Baroni, 2006), this aspect of her performance is highly transgressive - an idea that I pick up on in chapter seven.

After the vagina 'lazzi' was over, Betty stood up and spoke directly to the audience, asking those that had come to see her "pussy" to put their hands up, and those that had come to see some "feminist, queer, avant-garde performance art" to cheer. To give a sense of this moment, I have (with the help of Emma Maye) transcribed Betty's dialogue, which can be seen below.

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Event 17 -
Transcript (*Love and Anger*):

Hello! How are you? Good? Who came here tonight to see my pussy? My yoni? My cunt monologue? Hands up! Beautiful! Great. That's beautiful. Pussies are beautiful and I love showing you my pussy so it's only going to get deeper and deeper from here on in. Yeah. Who came to see some feminist, queer, avant-garde performance art? Perfect! You're home babyyyyy! Who is a little confused? Overwhelmed? Like it's too much, too soon? That's fine! That's valid. This is a conversation we are having live in the room tonight and if you need to groove on out, that's OK!!

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As I'm sure you can imagine, the noise created by the second group (who identified as feminist, queer and avant-garde) was much louder than that of the first. And - in true 'socially-engaged art' style - this noise briefly *became the artwork.* Betty was not only giving us permission to enjoy our newfound confidence, but making it a central part of her performance.

Of course, there is something potentially problematic, here, in that I am invoking a 'euphoric' moment in which some people were potentially alienated. However, as argued by Bishop, socially engaged art does not always need to empower everybody equally (2012:38). This can be applied to Haaning's *Turkish Jokes*, which - as a 'call for solidarity' (mmoma, n.d.) - has paradoxical depth. Rather than seeking to create a brotherly/sisterly connection for everyone in the square, the laughter sparked by the funny stories broadcast in Turkish *dissociated* the immigrant population; whose laughter gave them a temporary superiority over those that didn't understand. In a similar way, the micro waves created by *Love and Anger* acted as a form of feminist resistance or affirmative violence. They provided an opportunity for marginalised groups to 'take up space' through

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sound, and to feel the budding of an emergent collectivity through the energetic transfer of joyful affects.

Moreover, as can be seen in the transcript of this part of the show, Emma Maye/Betty does not moralise at those that are willing to admit that they have come to see her pussy. "Pussies are beautiful", she croons, "I love showing you my pussy so it's only going to get deeper and deeper from here on in". She also points out that some people might be feeling a "little confused", and explains that "if you need to groove on out, that's OK!!". This carries with it something of the fourth wave 'sensibility' that I mention in chapter two. As argued by Rivers (2017), the fourth wave tends to stress the importance of 'personal choice'. By emphasising that her audience can 'choose' to be a part of the "conversation", then, Betty creates a space in which people from different backgrounds can encounter one another, and discover new ways of thinking, behaving, and being. And - by making my own choice to remain in the audience alongside them - I actually started to feel much warmer towards the men in the audience (including the gentleman I refer to as 'Dickhead' in my field notes). I think this was partly down to the fact that I had been encouraged to 'take up space' alongside them. Once my presence had been recognised, my feelings of resentment started to morph into an *esprit de corps,* made stronger by my own realisation that perhaps - I too - was fascinated by Betty's pussy.

While I have focussed on *Love and Anger*, here, I experienced a very similar effect occurring within *Power Ballad*. For example, in 'event 11' I explain that I found myself 'sniggering' at Julia's "teasing of the man behind the operating desk". This is partly because - as a woman that has spent a lot of time working in theatres - I am used to the power games that must be played when there is a male technician on duty. For me, these power games often (I am ashamed to admit) start with me making cups of tea, and end with me buying expensive biscuits from M&S. Julia's continual requests to change the volume of her microphone, then, were deliciously rebellious, and - as soon as I heard the laughter of other women in the space - I allowed my own voice to merge mutinously with theirs. Of course, I am not suggesting that all of the other laughers shared my specific experience(s) of male theatre technicians. However, I am suggesting that in that moment, our laughter joined us together in a 'micro wave'; allowing us to feel more powerful in the space.

During our conversation, Julia and I relished talking about this type of laughter, which we started to think of as a form of activism in its own right.

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Event 18 -
Transcript (Julia Interview):

Laughter can be used as like a, a, in and of itself as a subversive act… they don't necessarily know they're doing it but I love looking out at the audience and seeing people just absolutely just cackle and scream. And, when I get them to yell there's this delight in this room full of women screaming at the patriarchy.

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I love this image of "women screaming at the patriarchy", which - in many ways - sums up what I have been trying to write about here. By positioning *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* as affectively-charged spaces of encounter, I have suggested that both Emma Maye and Julia make their audiences into 'active participants' within their performances. We are not permitted to sit back and passively consume; rather - we are encouraged to express ourselves and enjoy the impact that our laughter has on the other people in the space. This produces a variety of different effects (and affects), which speak to the changing role of art within contemporary society (Bourriaud, 2002). So, rather than 'representing' power relations, these performances break and reform micro-communities; creating waves of laughter that act like moments of resistance (and even violence) as they move between bodies in space. The connection between this type of laughter and other forms of activism will be explored more thoroughly in chapter six. For now, I would simply like to suggest that we should take notice of contemporary feminist comedy in discussions around 'socially-engaged' art, because this is potentially an arena in which new forms of feminist politics are being born.

However, having said that, it now feels important (in the next section) to acknowledge that Julia and Emma Maye do not define as 'feminist comedians'. In doing so, I open out my thinking around (micro)politics, and explore how this idea might relate to the (micro)waves I have already described. As well as exploring Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the 'major' and the 'minor' (1987), I will position Julia and Emma Maye as 'minoritarian' performers.

BECOMING-MINORITARIAN

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Event 19 -
Transcript (Julia Interview):

I don't think of myself as a comedian, essentially I identify as a performer… I came from a theatre background, and trained at drama school, and… I imagined I would be a classical actress, which now is like hilarious, and really I had no interest in comedy and actually… I really would emphatically have said I'm not funny…

Event 20 -
Transcript (Emma Maye Interview):

I have always said that [Betty Grumble] was created as a survival mechanism. By this I mean… she was a way for me to… channel rage and to fuck back a world that I felt was fucking with me. So she wasn't exactly created for comedy… As time has passed I have allowed… comedy and pleasure to come into balance… It's both ways of being.

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As can be seen in the above transcripts, Julia prefers to identify herself as a 'performer', and mentions that she used to think "emphatically" that she wasn't funny. Emma Maye describes her alter ego - Betty Grumble - as a "survival mechanism" rather than a comic device, and explains that she created her to "channel rage" rather than to make people laugh. Over time, comedy has "come into balance" within Emma Maye's practice, but - like Julia - she did not set out to be a comedian, and resists the idea that her work should be categorised as such. This resistance, at least initially, was a nuisance. I had set out to learn about 'feminist comedy' at the fringe, and - by refuting the label 'comedian' - Julia and Emma Maye seemed to be upsetting the very foundations of my research. Moreover - as already discussed - both performers employ a range of comic techniques in their exploration of feminist themes; showing a high level of expertise in their use of clown and the 'grotesque'. If these hilarious (and highly political) performances *weren't* examples of feminist comedy, then - I had to wonder - what were they? I will now attempt to answer this question, while pulling together the different ideas that have emerged within the chapter.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write that minorities are not necessarily "defined by the smallness of their numbers but rather by… the gap that separates them from… [the] majority" (Deleuze & Guattari, 2017:546). In other words, the minority status of a group - such as women - is nothing to do with its numerical size. Rather, it relates to the ways in which that group differs from the western, "white… average-age-male-adult" who is deemed to be 'universal' (Deleuze, 1997:254). Despite making up over half the world's population, women can be understood as a 'minority' because they deviate from the 'majoritarian' norm (which is male). It follows, then, that feminists make up a minority *within* the minority group of women. However, as we concertina away from the 'universal' "white… average-age-male-adult" that Deleuze refers to (1997:254), it is possible to see that the 'minor' - as a concept - is really a way of capturing the disruptive potential of minority groups, rather than as a label that we might attach to them. Indeed, according to Deleuze, it is a 'disaster' when minorities "slip… into a black hole from which they no longer utter anything but the micro-fascist speech of their dependency" (Deleuze, 2007 - accessed Manning, 2016:7). In other words, the 'minor' does not always apply to the marginal. Rather, it should be understood as a 'becoming' in which one enlists (Deleuze, 1997:255), or - for Manning - as a "gestural force that opens experience to its potential variation" (2016:1).

As discussed in chapter two, comedy has always been marginalised within the academy. In this sense, it already leans away from more 'majoritarian' cultural forms, which tend to be serious (and therefore deemed worthy of study). Feminist comedy, by extension, has been almost completely ignored; hampered by the notion that feminism is itself a joke (Gray, 1994), and by the widespread belief that women do not have a sense of humour (Willet *et al*, 2012). However, even feminist comedy is not always minoritarian. This is partly because - as pointed out by Rivers - the idea of feminism 'sells' (2017:18). Since music megastars such as Beyoncé and Taylor Swift have "climbed aboard the feminist bandwagon" (ibid), other cultural icons have co-opted the label in order to become more commercially successful. As an example of this, stand-up comedians like Katherine Ryan often claim to be feminists. However, once famous, they sometimes make more problematic work, attracting the ire of their black and trans 'sisters' (e.g. Chortle, 2018b [online]). In other words, as we move towards greater representational equality, feminist comedy is increasingly vulnerable to 'becoming-majoritarian', which means that it has a 'centralising' tendency that eclipses its "power of difference" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:548).

This is why - at the start of the chapter - I pay attention to how Emma Maye and Julia use comic techniques to "amputate components of power" in their performances (Deleuze, 1997). Working with the ideas set out in Deleuze's *One Less Manifesto* (1997), I suggest that 'components of power' - such as the microphone - operate along the 'vertical' axis of an assemblage, territorialising and stabilising the actions and passions of intermingling bodies. When these components of power are 'amputated' or 'neutralised', Julia and Emma Maye are able to access what Deleuze calls a "theatre of immanence" (1997), deterritorialising and shifting the semiotic coordinates of their performances onto the 'horizontal' plane. In doing so, Julia and Emma Maye are able to move past normative modes of gender representation, and create spaces in which they can enter into becomings-minoritarian on stage.

This takes me to the next part of my argument, which is centred around the importance of laughter within the two performances I have described. Of course, laughter *can* act as an object of recognition, simply reconfirming our knowledges, beliefs and values. However, as I have tried to show, it can also rupture our habitual subjectivities in a "creative moment… that obliges us to think otherwise" (O'Sullivan, 2006:1). Being part of a 'wave' of laughter can create powerful feelings of solidarity, and disturb even the most sedimented power relations. In this sense, I suggest that waves of laughter can be understood as a form of contemporary feminist activism; awakening in us the vibratory power(s) of collective action.

Bakhtin calls this kind of humour 'carnivalesque'; a concept that - funnily enough - has many similarities with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'the minor'. In *Rabelais and his World*, for example, Bakhtin explains that - during pre-class and pre-political society - "the serious and the comic aspects of the world… were equally sacred, equally 'official'" (1984:6). However, with the development of more structured societies, the comic aspects of pre-class society were relegated to the realm of the unofficial, where they acquired a critical and celebratory potential (Bakhtin, 1984:73). What is important here is the *separation* between what Bakhtin terms the 'official' culture of the church (which was serious), and the 'unofficial' folk culture of the lower classes. Like the 'gap' that sets the major apart from the minor (Deleuze & Guattari, 2017:546), it is this separation that gives the carnivalesque its power. In fact - in Bakhtin's opinion - the more that laughter has been systematically downgraded, the more it can be said to have revolutionary potential (1984:73).

So, by 'downgrading' their work, Emma Maye and Julia are able to preserve its revolutionary power. Of course, there is a cost to this. At the fringe, for example, Julia and Emma Maye were not eligible for any awards, because their work does not fit neatly into any of the categories that there are awards for. However, it is here that we find the truly revolutionary power of their work. Yes; waves of humour and laughter emerge within their performances, but not because they are adhering to the conventions of a specific artform. Rather, their use of humour is a way of bringing people together and inciting new forms of activism.

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Event 21 -
Transcript (Julia Interview):

I think these labels on everything not just theatre - in and of themselves are a capitalist patriarchal construct that we need to lean away from… For me it's not enough for the content to be feminist, I want the process to be feminist and I want the form to be feminist, and for me that is not just inserting women's stories into existing patriarchal forms but looking for… completely new forms to hold a female experience of the world.

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As can be seen in the above transcript, labels like 'feminist comedian' can reterritorialise and recapture the transformative potential of feminists using humour. And, by refusing to be grouped with performers using this name, Julia and Emma Maye prevent these reterritorialisations from happening within their own work. In fact, arguably, their work explores a manifestation of the carnivalesque in which the structure against which it is played out is not only the patriarchal systems within wider society, but the internalised phallogocentric system of identity and signification that constitutes contemporary comedy. It is resistance to - and emancipation from - all of these patriarchal systems, which is the micro-political thrust of their performances. Rather than simply celebrating the increase in numbers of women doing comedy, then, we should look to the fringes of the form to really understand what humour can do (and is doing) within the feminist fourth wave. This is 'comedy' as the name of a space where we can access radical diversity and difference, and where we can start to build completely new forms of performance to hold a female experience of the world.

CHAPTER SIX:

RADIO WAVES

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Event 22 -
Transcript (*The Guilty Feminist*, Episode 81: 'Strength and Weakness', January 2018)

Deborah: It's the sound of the audience that bolsters listeners' ability to act… they feel like they have a tribe… [they] feel the weight of the [Guilty Feminist] army around them.

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In the thesis so far, we have lingered in spaces where feminist comedy is taking place. These spaces have been tangible and concrete; theatre buildings made of bricks and mortar, where bodies vibrate together in oceans of liquid affects. While spending time in these spaces, we have invoked tidal waves of feeling and micro waves of activism. We have marvelled at the fragmenting of power structures, and the bubbling up of emergent collectivities. In this chapter, however, we are going to be thinking about what it means to laugh with a 'virtual' feminist community, by spending some time with the hugely popular comedy podcast series entitled *The Guilty Feminist*. Using 'radio waves' as a metaphor for how affect can be transmitted to and through large groups of people via sound, I will argue that podcasts like *The Guilty Feminist* are intensifying the emergence of a global, intersectional, feminist community, which is not reliant on bodies being close together.

Radio waves are a type of electromagnetic radiation with wavelengths longer than infrared light (Altgelt, 2005 [online]). They can be generated artificially by transmitters and then picked up by radio receivers; a practice that is central to most broadcasting systems and wireless computer networks (ibid). In the last decades of the 20th Century, radio waves played a central role in many grassroots political movements. And, in this chapter I will be tackling fourth wave activism head-on; thinking about how the sound of the podcast (as suggested in the quote at the top of this page) "bolsters listeners' ability to act".

First, I will be discussing some of the comic techniques employed by the podcast. As outlined in chapter three, *The Guilty Feminist* is hosted by comedian Deborah Frances-White. It combines stand-up comedy with funny conversations, in which guests 'confess' to the insecurities and hypocrisies that - they feel - undermine their feminist principles. Working with Ahmed's notion of 'the feminist killjoy' (2010), I will explore the relationship between these jokes and productive feminist rage. Because women (and especially feminists) are much more likely to be the 'butt' of a joke about gender, I suggest that this part of the podcast allows guests to define their own joke-making practices, and relieve some of the tension that exists around 'feminist guilt'.

I then turn my focus to those listening to the podcast; working with Guattari's *Chaosmosis* (1995) to argue that *The Guilty Feminist* is capable of acting as a 'vector of subjectivation' for listeners. Building on this idea, I provide an extract from my field notes, which - as outlined in chapter three - was written after walking through Manchester while listening to the podcast. By describing an instance of contagious laughter (in which I laughed out loud in St Ann's square), I suggest that - through its use of humour - the podcast is able to 'interrupt' the everyday lives of its listeners, opening us up to new ways of relating to the world around us. As pointed out by Guattari, all forms of technology have some sort of entanglement with human thought (1995:35). However, because of the huge impact that laughter has on our bodies - and on our conception of ourselves as part of a group - I suggest that this type of feminist comedy podcast is especially capable of forging affectively charged 'waves' within the contemporary feminist milieu.

Before I start, however, it is important to note that - while comparisons between podcasts and the radio are easy to make - "the origins of the medium come from a desire to circumvent the mediated practices of the radio station, and to deliver independent content directly to listeners" (Llinares et al, 2018:5). In fact, some theorists have suggested that podcasts have more similarities with social media (Bonini et al, 2016); an idea that I will come back to at the end of the chapter. Radio waves, here, function as a metaphor and a provocation, rather than as a direct comparison between podcasts and radio practices. Podcasts, as I will show, are more suited to fourth wave feminist politics than the radio, creating spaces in which women can build highly-engaged communities that have something of the 'minoritarian' power explored in chapter five (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

GUILTY FEMINISMS

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Event 23 -
Transcript (*The Guilty Feminist*, Episode 61: 'Orgasms', August 2017)

I'm a feminist but one time, when I was on a women's rights march and I'd popped into a department store to use the loo, I got distracted trying on face creams, and when I came out the march was gone.

Event 24 -
Transcript (*The Guilty Feminist*, Episode 85: 'Taking Charge', February 2017)

I'm a feminist but when my four-year-old nephew insisted on me putting on my wedding dress and watching 'Beauty and the Beast' with him, I also put on my tiara, which he had not requested.

Event 25 -
Transcript (*The Guilty Feminist*, Episode 102: 'Taking a Risk', June 2018)

I'm a feminist but I am perfectly capable of hearing a man shout, 'hey, sexy!' and thinking "that's awful - still got it" in one clear thought.

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Each instalment of *The Guilty Feminist* opens with 5-10 minutes of witty repartee, in which Deborah Frances-White and her co-host(s) discuss whether they have had a 'guilty' week or a 'feminist' week. These conversations, which are punctuated by one-liner confessions that start with the words 'I'm a feminist but…', serve to highlight the purpose of the podcast, which is a platform for exploring "our noble goals as 21st century feminists and the hypocrisies and insecurities [that] undermine them" (Frances-White, 2017 [online]). When I first encountered the admissions of guilt within the podcast, they reminded me of Wendy Brown's description of contemporary feminism as "a tortured and guilty grieving" (Brown, 2005:3). While each confession may seem inconsequential when taken in isolation; together, they build up a picture of a feminism that is haunted by the feeling that we 'should know better' and 'do more'. As Brown suggests, we cannot claim to be naive to our own investment in the construction, reproduction and regulation of sex and gender; but yet, our ability to achieve a change in those social relations that oppress us

seems further away than ever (ibid). For Brown, contemporary feminism – like many social movements – exists beyond the hope of revolution; figuring itself as a non-utopian enterprise "with more than a minor attachment to the unhappy present" (Brown, 2005:4).

Sara Ahmed has also written extensively about the relationship between feminism and (un)happiness. However, she presents it in a much more 'positive' (or generative) way than Brown. And, by engaging with Ahmed's ideas, I have started to understand the confessions in *The Guilty Feminist* differently. Ahmed argues that - as a result of our refusal to convene around a happiness that is dictated by an inherently misogynistic society - feminists are seen to represent unhappiness and a lack of enjoyment (2010:65). This kills joy, and in turn, associates feminism with negative affects. By 'negative affects', Ahmed is not referring to negative feelings. On the contrary, for Ahmed - whose theorisation of affect is rooted in Spinoza - negative affects are those social forces that restrict the body's capacity to act (ibid). Therefore, happiness can actually be read as a negative affect, and unhappiness as a form of activism. Because, as argued by Ahmed, women are *expected* to be happy within patriarchy; indeed - in the West - the 'happy housewife' is the poster girl for the patriarchal social system (2010:52). By pointing out sexism, however, feminists expose the bad feelings that normally get hidden; "sabotaging the happiness of others" (Ahmed, 2010:66).

The feminist killjoy is highly relevant to the fourth wave, which is characterised by a certain amount of 'righteous anger'. For Cochrane, this has been triggered - at least in part - by the increasing economic inequalities that are impacting women's lives:

> In the years since the economic crash… it has been impossible to ignore the growing evidence of inequality in the UK, an ugly landscape of unemployment, under-employment… food banks, bedroom taxes and broader benefit cuts… In this politicised environment, where people are constantly having to respond to new and unexpectedly biting issues, it's no surprise that a generation of women who were brought up being told that they are equal to men; that sexism, and therefore feminism was dead, are starting to see through this… [and] one obvious outcome of being brought up to believe you're equal is that you're… very angry when you encounter misogyny (Cochrane, 2013:unpag).

This anger has manifested itself in the fourth wave 'call-out' culture that is identified by Munro (2013 [online]). During 'The Everyday Sexism Project' and the 'Me Too' movement,

for example, feminists made use of social media to challenge misogyny and sexism; challenges that have - in some cases - led to the firing of those in powerful positions (Carlsen et al, 2018 [online]), and the imprisonment of Harvey Weinstein (Landsberg, 2020 [online]). The links between this mode of activism and Ahmed's 'feminist killjoy' (2010) are clear. Rather than continuing to passively accept the micro-aggressions that are directed at women on a daily basis, feminists are 'exposing' the bad feelings 'hidden' within everyday exchanges and instances of sexual assault (Ahmed, 2010:66). As a result, contemporary feminists are often accused of being easily offended by the right wing press (e.g. Vine, 2015 [online]), and of 'ruining' the normal functioning of heterosexual relationships. In some ways, this sheds light on one of the affective shifts that the fourth wave has, arguably, been responsible for. As indicated in chapter two, the fourth wave is thought to have started in 2008 (Baumgardner 2011), which - incidentally - is the year that Twitter was invented. Social media provided a much needed outlet for feminist frustration, transferring the *feeling* of the movement away from Brown's hopeless unhappiness (2005) and towards productive rage.

As pointed out by Massumi, "affective expressions like anger" are powerful because "they interrupt a situation" (Massumi, 2015:7). They interrupt the flow of meaning that's taking place; the normalised interrelations and interactions that are happening:

> Anger… forces the situation to attention, it forces a pause filled with an intensity that is often too extreme to be expressed in words. Anger often degenerates into noise and inarticulate gestures. This forces the situation to rearrange itself around that interruption, and to deal with the intensity in one way or another. In that sense it's brought something positive out - a reconfiguration (ibid).

The actions of the feminist killjoy, then, 'interrupt' the normal functioning of everyday life. Whether someone is called-out for their sexist behaviour online or face-to-face, the power dynamic within that particular assemblage of social relations is eventfully brought to attention. Even if no action is taken against the supposed perpetrator (and even if the perpetrator is not named), the situation will - briefly - rearrange itself around the anger and sadness located within the interruption. This creates an opportunity for empathy; and for the sharing of other negative feelings by those that have had similar experiences. When contemporary feminism is accused of altering the ways in which men and women are able to interact in the workplace (e.g. Johnson *et al*, 2018 [online]), we acknowledge the power

of the feminist killjoy. In the words of Massumi, her anger has "brought something positive out - a reconfiguration" (2015:8).

In the 'events' at the top of this section, I have transcribed three of Deborah Frances-White's 'confessions', which - I argue - can also be understood as a form of activism when read through Ahmed's notion of 'the feminist killjoy'. For Massumi, humour is another way in which a situation can be 'forced to attention' (Massumi, 2015:8), because - like anger - it often degenerates into noise and and inarticulate gestures; expressing a feeling so forceful that it cannot be transmuted into words. In what follows, I will briefly explore the 'I'm a feminist but…' joke structure. While this might seem a little out of kilter with the rest of the thesis - in which I have avoided overly cerebral explanations of humour - it seems relevant, here, to explore how the guests on the podcast are encouraged to laugh at the gender norms that get in the way of their feminism. Even though the statements often sound self-deprecating, I suggest that it is the patriarchy - rather than them personally - that becomes the butt of the joke.

In each of the events, humour arises out of the perceived incongruity between 'being a feminist' and 'enjoying femininity'. In the first example, for instance, Deborah explains that she "got distracted" in a department store; directing her energies into "trying face creams" rather than the feminist march that was going on outside. In the second, she confesses to having voluntarily put on her tiara while watching *Beauty and the Beast* with her four year old nephew; going above and beyond his request for her to wear her wedding dress for the occasion. In the third, she reveals that she is capable of being both appalled and relieved by a man shouting "'hey, sexy!'" at her in the street; "thinking 'that's awful - still got it'" at one and the same time.

As outlined in chapter two, incongruity theory suggests that - for an object to be humorous - some kind of incongruity must exist (Morreall, 2012 [online]). This occurs within many joke structures, where there is a 'setup' - which creates an expectation - and a 'punchline', which punctures it. According to Schopenhauer, the incongruity in humour is between our sense perception and our abstract rational knowledge. In joking, sense perception - which, for Schopenhauer, is the original kind of human knowledge - gets the upper hand (Morreall, 2012 [online]). If we apply this to the examples described above, the 'setup' is the alignment between feminism and unhappiness. To be a feminist is to dislike femininity, and to *always* be angry when a man shouts something at you in the street. The

punchlines, however, call attention to the sensory aspects of being-a-woman, acknowledging the pleasures of bustling department stores, slippery face creams and the feeling of being desired. In other words, the jokes allow for a brief celebration of the affective experiences - or sense perceptions - of the gendered body, while highlighting the absurd contradictions that are inherent within many women's lives. Each 'I'm a feminist but…' forces an 'interruption' (Massumi, 2015), which is filled with the contradictions of living as a feminist in the twenty first century.

On the face of it, these confessions do not seem to have anything to do with the productive unhappiness of the feminist killjoy. In fact - in each case - Deborah owns up to having enjoyed a gendered activity *too much*. However, when we think about them in terms of their joke structure, it is possible to see that each funny statement reinforces and even celebrates the idea that feminists are unhappy. Indeed, feminist anger is taken as the 'status quo' to be subverted. In this way, the "I'm a feminist but…' section at the start of each episode creates a carnivalesque arena (Bakhtin, 1984), in which the feminist killjoy is placed in charge. She is the social order that we laughingly overthrow, and who returns - in full force - once our merriment has died down.

However, at the same time, the jokes allow for the release of tension around the difficult, uncomfortable and often petrifying aspects of 'guilt' that do haunt the podcast. As described by Deborah Frances-White in her book about *The Guilty Feminist*;

> I felt like a fraud for saying defiantly in an internet debate that, as a woman, my chief role was not to be decorative; and then later that day crying actual tears on finding that my favourite dress was tighter than usual because I'd put on weight (2019:x-xi).

Women, today, are often pulled in different directions like this. Now that almost every aspect of our public and private lives have been commodified by neoliberalism, it is difficult to let go of anxieties around our personal 'worth' (which, for women, often come back to how sexually desirable we are perceived to be). As explored in chapter two, one of the more problematic aspects of fourth wave feminism is the way it tends to promote the success of the individual (Rivers, 2017). This focus on personal empowerment can get in the way of our ability to stand in solidarity with others, and to stay true to our intersectional feminist ideals. So, this part of the podcast also allows for the cathartic release of guilty feelings. According to Deborah, some women have "written to tell us that they'd previously

felt unable to call themselves feminists"; and that the podcast has helped them to realise that they don't "have to be perfect or even consistent to be a force for meaningful change" (Frances-White, 2019:xi). As I will now explore, the experience of laughing with the podcast can make it possible for women to better express their feminist anger, and to feel as though they are part of a powerful feminist community.

THE GUILTY FEMINIST ARMY

Now that I have thought about the mechanisms within some of *The Guilty Feminist*'s joke-making practices, I want to move on to a discussion of its laughter. Because, for me, this is one of the most interesting aspects of the podcast. As I will argue in this section, the podcast's laughter enables people to come together in affectively-charged micro communities. This - of course - is similar to how laughter has worked in previous chapters, where I have thought about it in relation to comedy workshops and performances at the fringe. However, here, the communities I describe are laughing together across vast quantities of time and space; often while engaging in other, 'everyday' activities. This, I suggest, means that podcasts like *The Guilty Feminist* could extend our understanding of how comedy, humour and laughter are allowing new modes of feminist activism to emerge.

But first, I want to pick up on the metaphor of 'radio waves' once again. As indicated at the start of this chapter, radio waves have played an important role in many grassroots political movements. Talking about the student protests of 1968, for example, Evelyne Sullerot recalls that "the television was discredited, the newspapers were surpassed by the speed of events… all that was left was the radio" (1968:126 - accessed Bonini et al, 2017:12). She goes on to say that:

> It was because of the radio that I realised the number, the extent [of the protests]. Before that, I felt alone. We started to hear shots fire… Then a woman with a transistor came over and we heard "thirty barricades" and I realised… that at least, if we died, we would die with witnesses, connected to the world (Sullerot, 1968:136 - accessed Bonini, 2017:13).

In this moment, radio waves did much more than satisfy a thirst for information. They were also a way of transmitting waves of feeling and waves of affect; sticking people together within the sprawling student movement.

This - I argue - is similar to how *The Guilty Feminist* is functioning within the fourth wave feminist movement. The podcast is recorded in front of a live audience, and - as already indicated - laughter can be heard throughout each episode, along with applause and a cacophony of other vocalisations including cheering, booing and heckling. As the podcast has grown in popularity, the average size of this audience has increased; with Frances-White recently selling out 2 nights at the London Palladium. So, when a guest on the show says a line that is funny, it is possible to hear up to 2000 people laughing at it. Listening to this laughter - I argue - is comparable to Sullerot (1968) hearing shots fired from other student barricades over the radio. As suggested in the quote at the top of the chapter, the "sound of the audience" bolsters listeners' capacity to act (Frances-White, 2019 [online]), allowing them to feel like they have a feminist "tribe", or "army", around them (ibid).

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari redefines subjectivity as "plural and polyphonic" (Guattari, 1995:1). He points out that, in certain social contexts, subjectivity is individualised; with subjects situating themselves in a relation to the Other that is governed by things like familial habits and local customs. In other conditions, however, subjectivity can become collective, by which he means it is:

> A multiplicity that deploys itself as beyond the individual, on the side of the socius and preverbal intensities… a logic of affects rather than a logic of reified social structures (Guattari, 1995:5).

Guattari argues that this "logic of affects" can help us to understand new forms of revolutionary politics. The protests in Tiananmen Square in 1968, for example, didn't result in what you might call 'traditional' revolutionary politics; with demonstrations with specific demands, for instance (Guattari, 1995:2). Instead, they unleashed what Guattari calls a 'revolution of feeling', with people taking part in a multitude of minor rebellions in the way they organised and lived their everyday lives (ibid). Importantly, it was technological developments - namely the television screen - that allowed these affective charges to spread, setting in motion "a whole lifestyle, collective ethic and conception of social relations" (ibid). In other words, mass media produced a nascent collective subjectivity (1995:9), affectively sticking people together across hundreds of thousands of miles.

This is relevant to Sullerot's description of the transistor radio; which allowed her to feel as though she was "connected to the world" while standing on her lonely student barricade (Sullerot, 1968:136 - accessed Bonini, 2016 [online]). It is also relevant to contemporary

forms of social media, which - as already discussed - have been used by fourth wave feminists to 'call-out' sexism and misogyny online. Talking about the Me Too movement, for example, activist Tarana Burke explains that:

> When two people exchange the words 'me too', it is… an exchange of empathy between two people who say 'I hear you, I see you, and I believe you' (Burke, 2019 [online]).

The internet, here, has facilitated the emergence of a new type of feminist community. Those that make up the network may be far apart geographically and - ostensibly - have very little in common. However, by participating in Me Too, they have aligned themselves with each other through empathy; working through a logic of affects rather than a logic of reified social structures (Guattari, 1995:5). Although it is hard to quantify, some feminists have argued that instances of online activism have made them more likely to engage in other forms of micro-rebellions (Christakis & Fowler, 2009). Christakis and Fowler portray these ripple effects as "a kind of synchrony in time and space… resembl[ing] the flocking of birds or schooling of fish" (2009:116).

Guattari's ideas are also - I argue - relevant to podcasts like *The Guilty Feminist*. As pointed out by McIntosh, podcasts are sometimes ignored within the academy because - even though it has been more than fifteen years since they were first made available via the Apple iPod - they remain a relatively niche pursuit (2017 [online]). However, according to Matt Hill, co-founder of the British Podcast Awards, this ability to 'fly under the radar' can also be understood as a strength (2017 [online]). Unlike large-scale media platforms (such as BBC Radio), podcasters do not have to appeal to a broad cross-section of the public. Rather, they are free to create content for specific groups of people, building highly-engaged and well-defined communities. In many cases, these communities are small. However, *The Guilty Feminist* - which has now been downloaded more than 70 million times (Frances-White, 2019) - proves that podcast communities can also be extraordinarily large. And, because Deborah Frances-White records each episode in a different city, she attracts a diverse audience made up of people from across Europe, North America and Australia. The podcast's humorous conception of feminism *is* 'niche', but it is niche with a global reach.

According to Copeland, "there is an inherent intimacy in voice-driven sound work that seems to be soaking in affect" (2018:212). The listener puts on her headphones, presses

play and becomes immersed in an affective discourse of human experience through listening and connecting (ibid). In what follows, I argue that the 'intimacy' of this affective experience is enhanced by shared laughter, a phenomenon that can render identities fluid and primed for new forms of collective subjectivation. By diffractively reading an extract from my field notes through some of the ideas that Guattari sets out in *Chaosmosis* (1995), and through Manning's notion of body-worlding (2012), I will argue that *The Guilty Feminist* podcast is not only making it possible for fourth wave feminists to feel more connected to each other, but for them to change the way they relate to the world.

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Event 26 -
Field Notes (Guilty Feminist Walk, May 2018):

I am walking down Market Street, one of Manchester's busiest shopping areas. Over the past few months, I have juggled my PhD with teaching commitments, comedy workshops, three conferences and a house-move, and I am EXHAUSTED. The pavement feels hard under my feet, my rucksack heavy on my shoulders, and the bodies of busy shoppers unbearably close on this damp, drizzly day.

My earphones are in, and I am listening to an episode of The Guilty Feminist entitled 'Nice Girls Don't'. So far, Deborah has been chatting to comedians Cal Wilson and Celia Pacquola about how the pressure to 'be nice' means that women don't stand up for themselves.

The conversation has turned to responding to harassment, and this takes on a strange resonance as I walk down the street.

> *Celia - I don't know if other women have thought about your exit strategy or if, someone's gonna attack you what you're gonna do… I think it's ridiculous that we have to do that, but I do… Someone told me like, if you get attacked you should shit yourself, because then you'll be gross and they won't wanna rape you, and I thought, well that's fine, but I don't know that I can shit on cue [laughter]. Do you know what I mean? […] I can't do that… but I can stick my fingers down my throat and make myself be sick so that's what I'm gonna do. And I hate that I have that in my mind.*

Cal mentions a conversation with her husband, in which she told him that most women have had "some unpleasant thing" happen to them while walking down the street.

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Heat rises through my torso and to my face as I remember the words "fat slut" being hissed at me outside Barclays Bank, which is now just a few metres away.

Cal makes a joke about her conversation "ruining breakfast" with her husband, and the audience's laughter pulls me back to the podcast.

> **Cal -** *It was a revelation to him, that I was like everybody… would have some story… He couldn't get his head around it. And we were walking in town one night, he's a big guy he's six foot three… and he commented on how he doesn't feel safe in town anymore. There's so many people on ice[4] and stuff and you just don't know, he was like you just don't know what people are going to do, and I was like dude… I've spent my whole adult life… feeling like this, so I guess if there's one positive of the ice epidemic it's now, [laughter], now you dudes know what we feel like! [Laughter].*

I smile grimly, thinking about the problems that Manchester has been having with the drug, spice[5]. I wonder if this has had the same impact on the men that live here.

> **Deb -** *…I was trying to explain that we live with low level, just, alertness. I'm not in fear all the time but I'm always alert.*

> **Celia -** *It's like the background hum of a fridge isn't it? Like you're just aware at the edge of awareness, you're just aware.*

"The hum of a fridge". I turn this over in my mind. I am crossing St Ann's Square now, and take in the colours of the theatre posters, the movement of umbrellas and coats hurrying between shops, the sound of a young busker strumming her guitar, the smell of a stall selling crepes. I feel a rush of love for this city and its inhabitants, and a pang of grief for all the women that walk here every day feeling scared. I wish we could stride more confidently. I wish we could turn off the fridge.

Cal is talking about a group of men that tried to intimidate her when she was walking back from a gig late at night, and Deborah starts to offer some advice.

> **Deb -** *There are various strategies I have for those situations. One of them is [being] super nice… But the other one is, one guy grabbed my*

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[4] According to the Alcohol and Drug Foundation, 'ice' is a nickname for Crystal methamphetamine; a stimulant drug also known as 'speed' (2019 [online]).

[5] 'Spice' is a synthetic form of cannabis that came to prominence in the late 2000s and early 2010s in British prisons (Power, 2019 [online]). In Manchester, an estimated 95% of all homeless people use it (ibid).

necklace… I was walking past him and he grabbed my necklace and was like 'oh that's nice'. And I was so shocked, but I don't want to go vulnerable in those situations or angry-shouty because I can't win a punchy fight. So I just put both arms up and went "NOT COOL!" [laughter].

Laughter erupts in the audience and also - alarmingly - in my chest, bubbling out of my mouth and nose. I try to hide my face in the collar of my jacket, allowing my breath to come out in short pants.

Celia - *Because everyone wants to be cool [laughter].*

Deb - *That's right! [Laughter]. It really works. Because it's like "I'm not scared of you". I'm not going… "ooooo" [makes a high-pitched, feminine sound]. And I'm not going to punch you because then you might punch me. I'm going to do big arms and I really recommend this one. Both arms up, it's a shield, and the words 'not cool' [laughter]. Those are the specific words you should use. Because then they go "oh I'm not being cool"… And then they say sorry, he said sorry, he said sorry… so if you take anything from this night, the words 'not cool' are your friends [laughter].*

As I walk - fast - onto Deansgate, I feel giddy and a little light-headed. I stop to buy a BIG ISSUE magazine outside Waterstones and smile broadly at its seller, grateful to spend some of the pent-up energy that has inflated me like a balloon. Deborah's story has left me feeling bigger and bolder; somehow more 'present' in and amongst my fellow citizens. While working hard to maintain a composed exterior, I inwardly celebrate Deborah's achievement. I imagine - over and over again - shouting "NOT COOL!!"; mapping this onto past and future experiences of harassment. Even though the Manchester drizzle continues, it feels like the sun has come out.

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In the above extract from my field notes, I describe an experience that I had while listening to an episode of *The Guilty Feminist* while walking through Manchester. As we know from the work of enthographers such as Lauren Elkin, the urban landscape is never neutral or passive (Elkin, 2016:unpag), especially for women, who are told repeatedly from childhood by parents, school, the media and other influential sources that it is unsafe for them to be in certain places at certain times (ibid). In fact, this is partly what Deborah and her co-hosts are talking about in this episode. Celia, for instance, explains that she always feels "alert" when she is out walking alone, and compares this feeling with "the background hum of a fridge". Even though I know that I am not in any immediate danger, the landscape that I

describe in the fragment is alive with memories of 'being-looked-at' and concomitant feelings of shame. These phantasms and daydreams are interwoven with the ebb and flow of the women's discussion of harassment; affecting my experience as I walk down the street.

According to Manning (2012), there is no subject-position that precedes experience. Rather, there is a continual process of 'worlding', which refers to how subjects are continually coming-to-be *with* the world. For example, in *Relationscapes*, Manning explains that:

> Worlding creates bodies as much as moving bodies create worlds. These bodies are always qualitatively different from the bodies of a split-second before - bodies recombining, sensing towards a continual differentiation of what they know the world to be (2012:232).

In other words, I do not simply 'perceive' the street that I walk on. Rather, I 'pull' (or 'world') the street into existence. Here, the becoming-body expands past its 'self', where the expansion and world to which it extends are at once also part of the body, just as much as the body is part of the world. The fact that I remember the words "fat slut" being hissed at me as I walk past Barclays Bank, then, "is not an unfolding of the bottled past in the neutral present" (Manning, 2016:111). Rather, the act of remembering involves activating a relation; it means sensing the world in a particular way.

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari points out that we are all familiar with the "crossings of subjective thresholds… that plunge us into sadness or indeed, into an ambience of gaiety and excitement" (Guattari, 1995:17). These eventful crossings tend to alter the immediate behaviour of the subject, while at the same time opening them up to new fields of virtuality; described here as:

> Incorporeal domains of entities [that] we detect at the same time as produce… which appear to have been always there, from the moment we engender them (ibid).

The sensing of a painful memory, then, cracks open the virtual realm in such a way that I perceive the world as a dangerous place. I feel, in that moment, as though it has always been thus; a space that is unkind to bodies like mine. This subject position is reinforced by the fact that the "pavement feels hard under my feet, my rucksack heavy on my

shoulders", and by the fact that the bodies of the other shoppers are "unbearably close on this damp, drizzly day". However - as I have tried to show within my field notes - the sound of the audience's laughter starts to 'interrupt' and 'reconfigure' my relationship with the city (Massumi, 2003). This makes space for the crossing of a subjective threshold (Guattari, 1995:17), or for the detection of new ways of worlding (Manning, 2016).

Figure 5 - copyright Natasha Bird.

As explored in chapters four and five, laughter is a highly contagious behaviour. Indeed, according to Provine, this category of laughter "strips away our veneer of culture and language... challeng[ing] the shaky hypothesis that we are rational creatures in full control of our conscious behaviour" (Provine, 2001:129). And - as is demonstrated by the clumsy laugh tracks that were attached to the nation's favourite comedy television programmes in the latter half of the 20th Century - it can move across an electronic interface, producing an immediate and involuntary chain reaction that does not rely on bodies being physically close to one another. Moreover, when we are moved to laugh with a group of people, it is as though our sense of self is pleasantly de-centred (Willet & Willet, 2019). We experience the sudden emergence of a new frame of reference; a 'collective subjectivity' that offers the potential for relating to the world in new ways.

This becomes especially apparent in the above 'event' (which is also illustrated in figure 5). When Deborah shouted "NOT COOL!!!" into her microphone, laughter erupted in the audience and also - alarmingly - in my chest, "bubbling out of my mouth and nose". Of course, as soon as the split-second eruption of laughter was over, I became highly aware of my environment and walked away from the site of my embarrassing transgression as quickly as possible. However, the momentum of the event stayed with me for some time. "I inwardly celebrate[d] Deborah's achievement", mapping it "onto past and future experiences of harassment". Far from feeling isolated or fearful on the street of busy shoppers, I now felt as though I was protected by an invisible forcefield, or by an affiliation with a powerful subculture. Reinforced by the act of laughing with a large group of people from all over the world, my subjective position - and therefore my relationship with the city - had changed.

Of course, I am not positioning *The Guilty Feminist* as a 'cure' for the anxiety that many women feel when they are out walking. This is despite the fact that - as indicated in chapter three - I do sometimes treat it as such; saving episodes up so that I can listen to them at a time when I feel the need for an energy boost. Here, I am simply calling attention to the interface that is created between the online and offline spheres, and to the notion that listening to virtual laughter can have a significant impact on our experience of the everyday. This feels like an important point, because women tend to listen to podcasts while they are doing housework, walking and driving (Baer, 2019 [online]). So, rather than our engagement with comedy and/or other forms of feminist activism being a 'carnivalesque' moment that has to be shut down as we re-enter the world, we are able to

experience transformational waves of feeling *while engaging with the everyday sphere*. This can create moments of 'wonder', which - for Ahmed - allow you to see the world "as if for the first time" (Ahmed, 2004:180), and feel an expansion of possibilities (ibid).

Interestingly, framing podcasts in this way goes against dominant modes of thinking about technology. Bennett, for example, describes the myth of modernity as disenchanted; "a place of dearth and alienation… when compared to a golden age of community and… coherency" (Bennett, 2001:3). This myth would place someone walking through the city listening to a podcast as an isolated figure; their earphones getting in the way of their affective attachment to the world. However, as I have hopefully shown through this chapter, there is also another way of looking at this. Podcasts, particularly recordings that use the sound of laughter, can work against feelings of alienation, helping us to feel connected to a large community of people with a similar outlook. Because of the way laughter affects our sensory disposition, they can also offer a feeling of fullness, plenitude and liveliness, which can provoke new ideas, perspectives and identities.

I now want to discuss another event, which occurred when I was in a bar with friends some weeks after my moment of laughter in St Ann's Square. I am including this, because I now want to think about how the podcast did not only affect my body *in the moment*; changing the way I moved through the space around me; but - some weeks later - it altered how I responded to an incident of sexual harassment in a bar.

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Event 27 -
Field Notes (June, 2018):

I am at a bar in Manchester's Northern Quarter with a few friends. It is my turn to buy the drinks, and I'm waiting to be served. My elbows are resting on the bar's stainless steel surface and I lean forward, hoping to get a better view of the bottles of beer in the fridge by the wall, and to catch the bar-tender's attention. There are lots of people around, so - at first - I am not bothered by the man standing directly behind me, and I busy myself with the important decision of which beer I should try, and which brand of rum might impress my rather discerning friends.

> *However, I am pulled out of this reverie by someone whispering in my ear. I realise that it is the man that has been standing behind me, and feel a*

shiver of adrenaline move unpleasantly up my spine. At first, I can't hear what he is saying, but then I realise that it is something about my skirt. He is telling me that I shouldn't lean forward in such a short skirt. Because it might lead to men like him getting the wrong impression.

Instinctively, my body readies itself to move away. But another - newer - instinct keeps me rooted to the spot. I feel the tendrils of the guilty feminist army reaching towards me, and find myself mouthing the words "NOT COOL".

Afterwards, I hold the man's gaze, and watch as he stutters an apology and walks off to find his friends. I turn back to the bar to order my drinks; a triumphant laugh starting to gurgle in my throat.

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As can be seen in my field notes, laughing with *The Guilty Feminist* helped me to express my feminist rage. We get a sense, here, of laughter as a "sonorous moment" (Bataille, 1988:95), which has the capacity to reverberate out from the original event (ibid). Even though my body "instinctively" readied itself to move away when I realised that the man in the bar was speaking to me, I felt as though 'the guilty feminist army' was reaching towards me; a powerful force holding me in place.

Figure 6 - copyright Natasha Bird.

According to Manning, the body is "always reaching toward[s] that which it is not yet" (2016:14), and - in order to break down this process - she introduces the term 'preacceleration', which is the unstable, interactive anticipation of thought and movement that prompts, and at the same time *is*, the worlding-body (ibid). In a sense, preacceleration is potential energy; it is "a movement of the not-yet that composes the more-than-one that is my body" (Manning, 2016:13). I invoke this idea to emphasise that - in this moment - anything could have happened. It was not a forgone conclusion that - having listened to the episode entitled '*Nice Girls Don't*' earlier in June - I would magically be able to stand up for myself on this particular evening, or that my attempt to do so would go well. Once again, I am not presenting *The Guilty Feminist* as a 'solution' to sexism and misogyny. Rather, I am recounting an experience in which a 'sonorous' instance of laughter seemed to increase my body's capacity to act. Just as easily as we can imagine the 'guilty feminist army' reaching towards me, we can imagine the more-than-one of my body reaching towards them; my desire for a feminist community extending across time and space; worlding me into existence differently.

RADICAL RADIO WAVES

In *Chaosmosis*, Guattari argues that technology is capable of creating a world that is "more collective, more social, [and] more political" (1995:29). And, as we have seen, *The Guilty Feminist* is an example of this process in action. It is a form of technology being used to forge a new social movement; one that is constituted through a logic of affects and is - arguably - resulting in a more joyful engagement with feminist politics. Just as images from Tiananmen Square unleashed a 'revolution of feeling', causing people to partake in micro-rebellions in their everyday lives (Guattari, 1995:6), the sounds of the podcast elicit affective responses that go beyond specific feminist goals, potentially triggering a whole array of rebellious behaviours.

These radical claims about *The Guilty Feminist* might seem a little surprising, because - at first glance - this podcast doesn't sit all that comfortably alongside the 'minoritarian' performances that I discussed in chapter five (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Unlike Emma Maye Gibson and Julia Croft (who purposefully 'downgrade' their work in order to preserve its revolutionary potential), Deborah Frances-White *does* define as a 'feminist comedian', and co-hosts each episode with other commercially successful performers. The podcast tends to be recorded in high-end theatres, and - outside of her work on *The Guilty Feminist*

- Deborah has appeared on male-dominated panel shows such as *Have I Got News For You* (BBC, 2018 [online]). In 2018, she even had a film called *Say My Name* produced, which she describes as "an old fashioned screw-ball comedy" (Frances-White, 2019 [online]), and which has been nominated for some awards (IMDB, 2019 [online]). So, *The Guilty Feminist* is - in some ways - part of the 'molar' sphere that I have spent much time criticising, which is made up of entities that are highly organised and easy to represent (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:57).

However, I would like to suggest, here, that podcasts are - by their very nature - minoritarian, *especially* when they are employed by a 'minority' group such as feminists. This is partly because podcasts are inherently more democratic than the radio. As we know, women are still marginalised by traditional models of 'gate-kept' media and production. But - because podcasts can be independently produced and are extremely low-tech - they are providing women with a new mode of expression (Copeland, 2018:215). That is not to say that there is equal representation within the podcast industry. In 2019, for instance, less than one third of the UK's most popular podcasts were hosted by women (Podcast Insights, 2020 [online]). However, podcasts are providing a way for some women to seize control of the means of production, and to start creating and experimenting on their own terms. Back in 2015, for instance, Deborah Frances-White started making *The Guilty Feminist* after 'giving up' on other aspects of her comedy career. As can be seen below, she explains that - after a series of bad experiences with agents and promoters - she decided to start building her own comedy community from scratch.

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Event 28 -
Transcript (*The Guilty Feminist*, Episode 175: 'Lemonade', August 2019)

I didn't know [how popular the podcast would be]… Sophie Hagen and I started it in a basement theatre. There were thirty people in the audience, twenty of whom I could identify by name [laughter]… and ten were their mates that they'd brought along. It was more that I'd given up and gone look I'll create the kind of space I want to be in, and if some people want to listen to that that's great… [W]ith podcasting, you can find a small audience who wanna hear what you have to say.

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Rather than trying to fit into existing genres and power structures - which, she explains, had been like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole (Frances-White 2019 [online]) - Deborah was able to perform in a 'safe space' with friends, and then use the online sphere to reach a wider audience. This, in effect, enacted a 'carnivalesque' separation between her work and the work of more 'successful' comedians; giving her and her collaborators the freedom to experiment and play. In this sense, Deborah's work has more similarities with that of Emma Maye Gibson and Julia Croft than one might think. Interestingly, it was by becoming more minoritarian (i.e. by giving up on trying to be accepted within male dominated performance spaces) that she achieved commercial success. By transmitting her message at just the right frequency, it has been able to reach feminists all over the world.

As well as mobilising the radio waves in order to enact her own becoming-minoritarian (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); I would like to suggest that Deborah Frances-White (and her guests) create 'radical radio waves' that encourage audiences to become-minoritarian as well. This goes back to one of the ways in which podcasts are considered to be similar to social media (Bonini, 2017), which is that producers tend to be in conversation with their consumers, creating content alongside and with them. *The Guilty Feminist*, for example, has an active Facebook group where listeners can connect with each other, as well as curated Instagram and Twitter accounts. At the start and end of every episode, Deborah alerts listeners to other events; ranging from film screenings and workshops, to demonstrations and volunteering opportunities. In 2018, a group of listeners accompanied Deborah to Calais, and - in 2019 - a number of people marched under a 'guilty feminist' banner at the Women's March in London. In other words, Deborah Frances-White works across a number of different platforms in order to encourage listeners to feel as though they are part of a community, and to encourage them - in lots of small ways - to participate in feminist activism.

However, as I have emphasised throughout this chapter, the most radical use of radio waves, here, is in the podcast's deployment of laughter. Laugh tracks - which I mentioned earlier in the chapter - aim to mimic the social nature of laughter, making it possible for at-home listeners to feel as though they are part of a virtual studio audience. Now, the laughter that can be heard on *The Guilty Feminist* is not 'canned' in the strictest sense of the word. There is no sound engineer creating the laughter score, for example; and the laughter, applause and ambient noise has been recorded 'live' rather than taken from an

audio library. However, it would also be wrong to think that the sound of this laughter is somehow pure or un-designed. When I went to see the live show in London, Deborah and her co-host(s) continually reminded us that a recording was taking place, and tried to enhance our laughter through silly facial expressions and gestures. At one point, we were asked to repeat a round of applause that hadn't been enthusiastic enough. In this way, the 'live' audience is given some responsibility for creating a contagious laugh response in the listeners at home. So, in some ways, the podcast is actively harnessing the power of laughter, by purposefully manipulating the 'canned' laughter that you hear.

Indeed, as indicated in the quote at the start of this chapter, Deborah Frances-White is aware of the power of this recorded laughter. "It's the sound of the audience that bolsters listeners' ability to act", she says. Listeners "feel like they have a tribe… [they] feel the weight of the [Guilty Feminist] army around them". While the idea of an 'army' might seem like a somewhat patriarchal idea, Faludi states that the concept of 'battle' is useful for understanding the way feminist politics tends to be divided into a number of frontiers, which are issues that can be lost or won (1991:15). She also describes the combative nature of frontline activism, and the fact that feminism is not waging war against a passive enemy, but one that is more than willing to fight back (ibid). As explored in chapter two, one of the fourth wave's 'frontiers' is the 'everyday' sphere, in which women tend to experience a host of micro-aggressions. Therefore, a 'virtual' army that bolsters your capacity to act through laughter is highly relevant to the fourth wave.

In this chapter, I have used Guattari's ideas on the production of subjectivation (1995) and Manning's work on 'worlding' (2016) to argue that - through its use of laughter - *The Guilty Feminist* podcast can alter our experience of the everyday; increasing the body's capacity to affect and be affected, and opening up the emergence of new ways of thinking, feeling and being. I have considered how the podcast might be operating within the fourth wave feminist movement, arguing for a reimagining of podcasts such as *The Guilty Feminist* as a burgeoning form of online activism. On the one hand, I have shown how this is similar to other forms of fourth wave activism such as the 'Me Too' movement. By using technology, the fourth wave is finding new ways of connecting via waves of feeling, which defy borders and encourage feminists to enact micro-rebellions in the everyday sphere. However, I have also shown that what makes *The Guilty Feminist* army radical is its use of laughter. Yes, the podcast allows for the cathartic release of feelings such as anger and guilt. However, the 'guilty feminist army' is - at its core - an army of laughing women, who are

able to initiate carnivalesque moments of joy. While the fourth wave has been criticised for lacking a set of unified goals (Cochrane, 2013), perhaps - like Guattari - we should look beyond traditional conceptions of revolutionary politics and place greater value on the unpredictable energies unleashed by the joy and laughter of grassroots movements, which may - in many small ways - intensify our powers of existence.

Figure 7 - copyright Natasha Bird.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
DIFFRACTING WAVES IN A MINOR KEY

Having surfed and surged our way through the past six chapters, we are finally back on dry land. Now it's time to shake off the excess moisture, and get ready to re-enter the world. In this chapter, I will start this process by recounting some of the stories from the *Making Waves* study. This means returning, briefly, to the very beginnings of the project, and then allowing each of its phases to re-emerge like a wave lapping the shore. Occasionally, these waves overlap, lending one another greater force, and occasionally they pull in different directions. I try to enjoy the complexities created by the turning over of the waves. I try, also, to pay attention to the interesting debris and detritus that they bring; changed things that are eroded, broken apart, re-congealing and made anew.

I then bring into focus the 'diffraction patterns' that have been generated by the thesis as a whole. The first pattern that I pay attention to suggests that feminist comedy is capable of helping women to enter into an array of playful becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). These becomings, I suggest, allow us to look beyond the 'representational' aspects of feminist comedy, and position it as a form of 'embodied thinking' that has much to offer the fourth wave. After this, I consider the role that the 'minor' has played within my research (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Manning, 2016). This enables me to make some observations about the limitations of my argument, and delineate the kinds of feminist humour that I have been interested in all along. Towards the end of the chapter, I position the study as a site for 'micropolitics', and draw together my ideas on the fourth wave.

THE TURNING OVER OF THE WAVES

At the start of this thesis, I outlined how I became interested in the intersection of humour, laughter and contemporary feminist politics. After a lifetime avoiding comedy (and believing myself not to be funny), the creative process that led up to my adaptation of *The*

Thesmophoriazusae revealed just how productive this arena could be. As well as giving me new ways of telling feminist stories, I noticed that audiences were more engaged than ever with my work, and that the show seemed to be opening up spaces in which political issues could be discussed through laughter. The same was true of the Women's Comedy Workshop. As outlined in chapter one, this project - which was initially set up alongside my production of *Thesmo* - brought women together to explore comedy techniques in a supportive and creative environment. I noticed that the workshops seemed to be having a profound effect on participants' behaviour, allowing them to experiment with new ways of speaking, moving and relating to the world around them. I also felt more 'plugged-in' to contemporary feminism than ever before, and couldn't help wondering if this was in some way to do with my interactions with comedy.

As I started my PhD research, my fascination with humour, laughter and feminism only increased. As discussed in chapter two, the fourth wave is often characterised by its use of the internet (Munro, 2013 [online]), which has made it possible for large groups of feminists to communicate with one another. However, arguably, humour is also a "defining feature" of the fourth wave (Cochrane, 2014). This can be seen in the way that more women have started performing comedy at every level (ibid), and in the way that comic practices are finding their way into feminist books, slogans and instances of activism online. Even though - historically - humour, comedy and laughter have been ignored and downgraded within the academy, it turns out that these more (playful aspects) of social life are highly appropriate for an exploration of contemporary feminism.

As indicated in chapter three, I spent time in three 'event-spaces'. The first of these spaces was the Women's Comedy Workshop, which I continued to run at Theatre in the Mill. The second was the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, which is one of the places that has seen an exponential increase in performances by female and feminist comedians in recent years (Burns, 2017 [online]). The third - 'online' - space was *The Guilty Feminist* podcast, which is internationally recognised for its unique blend of stand-up comedy and humorous feminist discussion. While in each space, I orchestrated and engaged with events, which I explored using a range of ethnographic and qualitative research methods. A 'diffractive' methodology (Barad, 2007) allowed me to start forming an in-depth and holistic understanding of what had occurred within each space. As Chorney explains, the goal - when working in this way - "is to open up analysis from a variety of perspectives and to challenge findings that are based on the 'objective' reflections of a researcher" (2014:89).

As I have shown, this has enabled me to open up the phenomena (which is fourth wave humour, comedy and laughter) in a variety of different ways, allowing unexpected diffraction patterns to come into view.

Chapter four is structured around a number of events, in which participants from the Women's Comedy Workshop were able to explore new ways of being. In the first of these events, I pay attention to how 'play' helps women to access a more child-like state. This is important, because - as discussed in the chapter - many women don't get the chance to play outside of caregiving roles (Wright, 2006). However, through games and other "frivolous" behaviours (Huizinga, 1955), the workshops encourage participants to let go of some of their inhibitions, and enjoy micro transformations in which they can intra-actively alter both themselves and the world around them. Through a discussion of a light-hearted moment in which two participants - Jeannette and Vanessa - spontaneously dressed themselves up as a 'bee' and a 'bee-keeper', I highlight the role that laughter plays within the workshops. In laughing together, I suggest that participants can enter into a state of pre-individuation, which allows them to explore behaviours that are normally taboo or transgressive for women. Then, by introducing Deleuze and Guattari's notion of 'becoming' (1987), I position both 'play' and 'laughter' as potentially 'deterritorialising' forces, which can make it possible for new modes of life-living to emerge.

In the second part of the chapter, I argue that humour and laughter can enhance our ability to connect with others via a practice that I call 'surfing' waves of laughter (or affect). In order to make this argument, I conceptualise the affective force of laughter as an expression of felt vitality that strikes the body directly, exhibiting a wave-like intensity that reconfigures the atmospheric relations between bodies and social milieus. Connecting Langer's biophilosophy (1953) with process-orientated approaches in affect studies (e.g. Massumi, 2015), I suggest that the affective intensity of humorous events are capable of improvising new forms of collective life through the transindividual circulation of affects. The experience of 'surfing' - I argue - has a profound impact on participants' sense of self; particularly because many women experience what we might think of as an 'inhibited intentionality' around humour (Young, 1990). By using an example in which the group generated 'waves' for another participant - (Laura) - to move-with, I suggest that comedy workshops can help women to overcome learned behaviours around 'femininity', and gain an embodied understanding of laughter as a charged atmosphere that can be surfed.

My ideas on laughter and 'becoming' are developed further in my discussion of Marion's stand-up set. For example, by emphasising that the body is a *process* (Gatens, 1988:68), I explore how Marion was brought into being differently by the act of performing stand-up for the first time. This, I suggest, was a process of 'becoming-majestic' on stage; made possible by the 'positive' laughter of the audience. I chose to write about Marion - as opposed to all the other women that performed across the two years of the project - partly because her material centred around some 'real life' experiences of sexism and misogyny. As indicated in the chapter, Marion talks about the fact that she is overweight, and explains that she often receives verbal abuse when she goes out. However, while making jokes about these experiences, the unruliness of Marion's body was celebrated, allowing her to 'become-bigger' (or 'become-majestic') on stage. This was another instance in which laughter altered the atmosphere and made new modes of being possible, and - I suggest - it allowed Marion to reconfigure her identity in relation to past traumatic events.

In chapter five, which takes us to the fringe, I point out that both Julia Croft and Emma Maye Gibson physically transgress the conventional boundaries of the body on stage. This can be seen at the start of *Power Ballad*, when Julia plays with the microphone; caressing it, tasting it, and - ultimately - absorbing it into her body via her mouth. It can also be seen at the start of *Love and Anger*, when Emma 'sings' out of her vagina; puppeteering her vulva so that it 'lip-syncs' to the words of the song. By calling attention to the body's orifices, they present the body as a "mobius-strip" (Grosz, 1994), or - in other words - as a continual process of becoming. This, I suggest, problematises the idea of a stable, psychical interior, and can therefore be understood as an 'amputation' of power, which allows the performers to access what could be thought of as a 'theatre of immanence' (Deleuze, 1997). Feminist performers often want to present women as complex and multi-faceted beings. This is especially true of the fourth wave, which - as discussed in chapter two - is frequently concerned with the idea of 'representation', by which I mean the 'visibility' of marginalised groups and of 'complex' female characters in books, plays, films and television programmes (Munro, 2013 [online]). These performances, however, use comedy (and the grotesque body) to move beyond mere representation, opening the way to infinite variation on stage. In other words, both Emma Maye and Julia are able to become-multiple (or become-molecular), highlighting the individual subject's potential for difference, rather than its ability to statically represent different individuals. Because control of the (woman's) body is so important within

patriarchy, I also suggest that the act of refusing to contain the body within conventional tropes is a rebellion in its own right.

This leads me to position *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* as affectively-charged spaces of encounter (O'Sullivan, 2006:1). This is largely because of the way laughter flows through the space during each performance, allowing bodies to form 'micro waves' as they move. Even when our specific histories are not the same, we become aware of each other's embodied experiences. Indeed, it is the embodied experiences of the audience that - at points - become the subject of each artwork. By noting that feminist comedy can be understood as a form of 'socially engaged' art (Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2002), I suggest that we can elevate its significance within broader discussions around contemporary performance. As pointed out in chapter two, the academy has - historically - been very dismissive of comedy (Hyers, 2008), and odours of this still exist within academic discussions of art and performance today. However, if we pay attention to the ways in which laughter can forge communities (Bergson, 2014), expose the present (Benjamin, 1973), and create opportunities for thought (Foucault, (1970), then perhaps we can glimpse its potential for initiating new forms of (micro)political activism.

In chapter six, I write about *The Guilty Feminist* podcast, exploring what happens when aspects of feminist comedy, humour and laughter are transmitted via 'radio waves'. I start by explaining that each episode opens with a conversation in which Deborah and her co-hosts 'confess' to the ways in which they have betrayed their feminist principles during the week. These 'confessions' usually unmask moments in which the speakers have enjoyed their femininity 'too much', or despite the strictures that have been imposed by third wave/ postfeminism. And, even though their various revelations are harmless, I argue that the 'I'm a feminist but…' joke structure gives power to the trope of 'the feminist killjoy' (Ahmed, 2010). Many audiences will laugh heartily at a joke that subverts gender norms. However, I suggest that they might find it harder to take gender subversion - or the idea that *all* women are unhappy under patriarchy - as the starting point for a joke. In creating a brand new space via podcasting technology, Deborah has been able to turn the usual power relations that exist in comedy venues upside down, and find new ways of discussing and making jokes about gender.

I then read *The Guilty Feminist* through some of the concepts that Guattari describes in *Chaosmosis* (1995), arguing that it is capable of acting as a 'vector of subjectivation' for

listeners. This argument hinges on the contagious nature of laughter, which can move across an electronic interface, producing an immediate and involuntary chain reaction that does not rely on bodies being physically close to one another (Provine, 2000). In the chapter, I show that these instances of laughter can profoundly alter the listener's relationship to the world around them, even weeks after the event. Laughing 'virtually' with a large group of feminists, I suggest, allows listeners to feel like they are part of a powerful subculture, or - as Deborah Frances-White puts it - the 'guilty feminist army'.

DIFFRACTION PATTERNS

During my research, I have discovered that comedy, humour and laughter are highly productive arenas for becoming. Not only can a woman become a bee, but a vulnerable body can become strong. Not only can a woman learn to do stand-up, but she can find herself standing-up to sexual harassment. In this section, I will start by thinking about this 'diffraction pattern', before moving on to a discussion of minoritarianism and micropolitics.

In some ways, the connection between comedy and becoming is not surprising, because - as indicated in chapter two - comedy has a close relationship with notions of 'variety', 'multiplicity' and 'change'. Classical comedies - such as those by Aristophanes or Shakespeare - contain multiple plot lines, disguises and moments when the narrative collapses into a dance break or slapstick routine. Contemporary forms of comedy (such as stand-up) were born on Britain's Variety Theatre stages, where acts might include "singers… ventriloquists, magicians, jugglers, acrobats, paper-tearers, impressionists, quick-change artists… animals and nude acts" (Double, 2012:1). Indeed, Langer connects comedy's obsession with change to its underlying sense of life, which is "always new, infinitely complex… [and] infinitely variable in its possible expressions" (1953:327). She suggests that what we tend to see represented in comedy is;

> [T]he indomitable living creature fending for itself, tumbling and stumbling… from one situation into another, getting into scrape after scrape and getting out again… the personified *élan vital*… coping with a world that is forever taking new uncalculated turns (Langer, 1953:342).

It is this focus on growth and self-preservation that, arguably, makes comedy so pleasurable to watch (Langer, 1953:350). Unlike tragedy, which emphasises the fragile, death-bound existence of all living things, comedy celebrates their chaotic desire for life.

Comic characters will often go to fantastic lengths in their search for more life; eating, drinking, lusting and having all kinds of anarchic adventures along the way.

Certainly, there is something to be said here about the role of comedic representations of change and multiplicity within fourth wave feminisms. As indicated in chapter six, feminism is a battle that is being fought on many different fronts, where it is facing issues (such as those around equal pay and sexual harassment) that have been around for a very long time. The elastic comic heroine - who bounces through life's misfortunes without ever seeming to run out of energy - is a refreshing alternative to the tropes of "waiting, suffering, [and] self-sacrifice" that have historically been attached to female characters (Rowe, 1995:4). And, when we look at UK television, there are now more examples of comic heroines than ever before. For example, Michaela Coel's BAFTA-winning Channel 4 series, *Chewing Gum*, follows a character called Tracey Gordon as she lurches from one baffling situation to another; her love of Beyoncé and her desire for sex continually getting her into trouble (Gatward, 2018 [online]). Like Rowe's 'unruly woman', Tracey Gordon is unable, or unwilling, to confine herself to her 'proper' place (1995:31), and - arguably - this is why *Chewing Gum* is considered to be an 'inspiring' programme for a new generation of feminists to watch (Little, 2018 [online]).

As explored in chapter two and chapter five, the unruly woman can be connected to the 'grotesque'. The grotesque body is above all a female body, because, for Bakhtin;

> Woman is essentially related to the material body lower stratum; she is the incarnation of this stratum that degrades and regenerates simultaneously. She is ambivalent. She debases… and lends a bodily substance to things, and destroys; but first of all, she is the principle that gives birth (1984:240).

Of course, the tropes of this inherent unruliness are often coded with misogyny. However, as argued by Davis (1975), Rowe (1995), and Russo (1991), they are also a source of potential power, especially when they are reframed to expose what is concealed behind the 'divine composure' that is expected of women (Cixous, 1980 - accessed Rowe, 1995:31). We have seen this play out in the performances of both Emma Maye Gibson and Julia Croft, which celebrate - above all else - the body's desire for connection, expression and pleasure. As pointed out by Julia (in 'event 12'), "it's exciting and it's emboldening to see women fully break all the rules". The grotesque celebrates what is

usually deemed 'lower' (and therefore shameful) in a woman, and - in doing so - it breaks away from oppressive dogmas that restrict women's behaviour.

Both *Power Ballad* and *Love and Anger* transgress the terms on which the woman's body is usually seen. And, by 'transgress', I do not mean, simply, that they subvert categories of feminine behaviour. Rather, I am suggesting that - through their use of the grotesque - they encourage their audiences to laugh in the face of categories altogether (Douglas, 2015:145). As an example of this, Emma Maye Gibson defines Betty Grumble as a 'drag queen'. As indicated in chapter five, drag is a form of performance most associated with gay and/or transgender men, who parody tropes of femininity through an ostentatiously exaggerated transvestitism (Baroni, 2006). While this certainly is subversive, it does not *always* involve transgression. Indeed, as (male) drag has been popularised by shows such as *Ru Paul's Drag Race* in recent years, the emphasis is increasingly placed on the performance of femininity being *as convincing as possible,* therefore reinforcing binary thinking around men and women (Stokoe, 2020:88)*.* In the show - which appears on Netflix - contestants are judged in terms of who is believed to be the most 'authentic' drag performer. Unsurprisingly, women are not permitted to perform; because their 'authenticity' is assumed to be inherent. There is (often) no attempt to parody the performance style, and the most successful contestants are those for whom the assumed mask conceals (or indeed subsumes) their own identity. Emma Maye's performance, by contrast, is highly transgressive. The laughter generated by the 'singing vagina' routine, for instance, is partly produced by the fact that her female genitalia - with the simple addition of two cartoon eyes - is itself able to perform drag, "lip syncing for its life" with the sort of lips that are not normally permitted on drag-queen stages[6]. In this way, Emma Maye's drag-inspired clown practice not only subverts gender categories, but transgresses the terms on which this subversion usually occurs.

This is interesting, as the idea of gender fluidity is a central concern of the fourth wave. Quoting a 2016 survey (in which less than half the teenagers surveyed defined themselves as 'completely heterosexual'), for example, Braithwaite argues that Generation Z "is much more queer and much less defined by gender than millennials" (2016 [online]). By transgressing gender categories, Emma Maye identifies herself with this 'queer' feminist milieu; using comedy to create a space in which gender and sexuality refuse to remain in place. In chapter five, I confess that my own feelings of sexual desire started to move in

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[6] The phrase - "lip sync for your life" - is a catchphrase used on *Ru Paul's Drag Race* (Fandom, n.d. [online]).

unexpected directions during the performance. I realised that it was possible to enjoy Betty's brand of "feminist, queer, avant-garde performance art", while also taking a voyeuristic and erotic pleasure in her body *at the same time*. In other words, Emma Maye Gibson's transgressions allowed some of my own self-imposed limits to start fraying at the edges. Betty Grumble is a 'sex clown' that wants us all to come undone.

In a similar way, one of the things I enjoyed most about *Power Ballad* was the way Julia extended (and transgressed the terms by which we might understand) what it means to be a feminist. As pointed out by Russo - considerable effort has been put into reassuring society that feminists are "normal women" and that our political aspirations are "mainstream" (1994:12). However, with the best intentions;

> [T]his normalising strategy cannot conceal its class bias and attachment to an "upward mobility" which depends upon leaving others behind. Furthermore, it concedes much to the misogyny that permeates the fear of losing one's femininity, making a spectacle of oneself, alienating men or otherwise making errors (ibid).

Because the grotesque is - by its very nature - a deviation from the norm, it allows us to move away from the 'normalcy' or 'normopathy' that runs through the movement (Manning, 2016). In *Power Ballad*, Julia's portrayal of feminism is not easily communicable, or reassuringly 'bite-sized' (like, for instance, Emma Watson's *HeForShe* campaign, which I mentioned in chapter one). Rather, her grotesquely gaping jaws ask for nothing less than to be freed from the tyranny of patriarchal language. Extreme transgressions such as these move us away from the problematic neoliberalism that still runs through contemporary feminism (Rivers, 2017), opening the way to a more experimental and participatory politics.

As I have emphasised throughout this thesis, what is at stake here is not simply what these new forms of comedy 'represent'. Rather, what I have explored is what feminist humour and laughter *can do*. So, to stay with chapter five for a little longer, I want to highlight once again that the grotesque body participates uniquely in the carnivalesque drama of 'becoming' (Bakhtin, 1984; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Bakhtin is not often read through the work of Deleuze and Guattari; especially not in relation to feminist comedy. However, as I have shown, certain ideas from within these bodies of work resonate with one another. The grotesque body - which transfers "the world from the vertical to the

horizontal" (Bakhtin, 1984:363) - is an *immanent* body. It is like a mobius strip (Grosz, 1994), where there is a continual folding of inside into outside, and outside into inside. In this sense, the 'unruly' or 'grotesque' bodies within *Love and Anger* and *Power Ballad* provide a practical answer to the issue at the heart of new materialism. They undermine the Cartesian mind/body dualism by defiantly presenting the body as a multiplicity; or as a continual process of becoming.

This has huge ramifications for feminism, because - as discussed in chapter two - dualist thinking has been used to reinforce aspects of patriarchal thought. As well as justifying oppression by aligning women more closely with the 'irrationality' of the body (Grosz, 1994:14), women tend to be held back by the idea that they are more vulnerable to 'invasion' than men (Grosz, 1994:17). However, when we remove the idea of a stable psychical interior and emphasise the body's capacity to become-otherwise, we make it possible to radically extend our understanding of feminist agency. In this sense, the performances I have described can be imagined as an embodied form of feminist thinking. As mentioned in chapter two, contemporary feminism does not really have a 'set' discourse. This could be to do with the cultural space that - according to McRobbie (2004) - was created by third wave feminism (or postfeminism), which resulted in an ambivalence towards feminist politics and a repudiation of the label 'feminist'. So, spaces in which we can discover new ways of thinking, behaving, and being are needed now more than ever. I suggest that comedy spaces (like those I have described) could be providing environments in which some of this embodied thinking is taking place, allowing feminists to communicate with one another through laughter.

However, I do not want to present my study of fourth wave comedy as an uncomplicated victory narrative. Because, while humour and laughter 'can' help us to transgress the boundaries that hold patriarchal thought in place, they can also reinforce and strengthen them. As an example of this, the Edinburgh Festival Fringe is still male-dominated. According to a report by Power Play Theatre, women make up just one third of the comedians at the fringe, and tend to earn 60% less than their male counterparts (2019 [online]). Comedian Mary Bourke points out that jokes about domestic violence, sexual abuse and rape are still rife at the festival (Ailes, 2013 [online]), as are the complaints from (often male) comedians and reviewers that 'woke' feminists are "ruining the fun" for audiences (Healy, 2019 [online]). And that is not even to mention the women comedians that are making problematic work. As indicated in chapter five, 'feminist' comedians such

as Katherine Ryan have been accused of racism and transphobia since becoming famous (Chortle, 2018b [online]), contributing to the hostile climate within the comedy scene.

While there is very little academic literature on the subject, the issue of the online 'trolling' of women comedians has been well-documented online. Comedian Kate Smurthwaite, for example, has spoken out about her experiences, explaining that:

> I've been continuously abused online… for like the last ten years… it ranges from graphic violent rape and death threats… descriptions of utterly horrific ways in which people would choose to dismember me… violent sexual things they… would wish to force me to do, through to… what you might even call the fluffy end of it, you know I'm unattractive they don't fancy me… there's something wrong with my appearance, oh my work's terrible, this kind of stuff… photoshopping my head onto hairy mens' bodies has been a… recurrent theme (Smurthwaite, 2019 [online]).

Women in comedy are still seen as 'inviting' the types of abuse that Smurthwaite refers to. While online magazines such as *Vulture* (2015) and *Chortle* (2018a) have tried to raise awareness of the issue by publishing the stories of women comedians that have been chastised, attacked and assaulted both online and offline, it feels like a problem that is not going away any time soon.

The fourth wave is experiencing a continual and sustained backlash from the right wing press and groups such as 'men's rights activists'. Of course, this is a not a new phenomenon - feminist progress has always been met with resistance. For example, in her book - *Backlash* (1991) - Faludi describes how progress tends to roll back once a wave's energies have ebbed. Even when feminism is at its greatest strength, the opposition does not tend to passively accept changes. Rather, "its resistance creates countercurrents and treacherous undertows" (Faludi, 1991:15). And - as a result of the internet - the feminist movement and the counter-movement are now happening at one and the same time (Chamberlain, 2017:50). Faludi's idea of dangerous currents, then, is highly applicable to contemporary feminisms, which are having to continually push against hazardous social forces moving rapidly in other directions.

Somewhat ironically, one of the currents moving against fourth wave feminisms at the moment is humour. Cole (2015) notes that women participating in online activism are often issued with death and rape threats, and that these threats are often qualified with the use

of laughing emoticons and/or the acronym "LOL" (which means laugh out loud). As pointed out by Gill;

> [I]rony has become a way of "having it both ways", of expressing sexist, homophobic or otherwise unpalatable sentiments in an ironized form, whilst claiming this was not actually "meant" (Gill, 2007:159).

For Drakett *et al.*, this is particularly evident in internet meme humour (2018:125). According to their study, the vast majority of internet memes reassert binary thinking around men and women, with humour being used to excuse sexist and misogynist content (Drakett *et al.*, 2018:126). In this sense, comedy, humour and laughter is being used *against* fourth wave feminists by a range of different social groups, and because it can be defended by the caveat - 'only joking' - it is extremely difficult to fight against.

However, as I have emphasised throughout this thesis, comedy, humour and laughter are fluid, and therefore impossible to tame or contain. Just as laughter is bringing feminists together in moments of joy and abandon, it is - *of course* - bringing others together in moments of anti-feminist hate. In telling a highly 'positive' story about what comedy, humour and laughter are doing within fourth wave feminisms, I have not been naive to its more sinister undertones. Rather, I have been looking at the phenomenon of contemporary feminist comedy in a minor key, which means - for Manning - "leading the event elsewhere than toward the governant fixity of the major" (2016:7). Feminist studies so often focus on traumatic events and sad stories. While these have certainly had a place within my study, I have tried to come at the phenomenon of fourth wave comedy, humour and laughter playfully, asking *what can it do*, how can it help us *become*?

I now want to draw some conclusions in relation to the Women's Comedy Workshop, which - as we have seen - is also wonderfully rich in terms of becomings. As discussed in chapter four, the workshops can be understood as a 'liminal' space, in which anything can become anything else. Liminality is a concept often associated with anthropologist Victor Turner, who wrote about rites of passage in which participants undergo an upheaval in their identity (1974:61). Liminal spaces are often playful, creating atmospheres in which individuals are dissolved and new relationships can be formed. In chapter four, I show how - through play - the workshops trigger new processes of *individuation*, which carry with them the charge of a preindividual, collective milieu (Simondon, 2009:8). Through laughter, we enter into a preverbal, collective state; and from this primitive unity it is possible to

enter into an array of playful becomings. This, I suggest, is one of the reasons that the Women's Comedy Workshop is so impactful. The license to experiment with new ways of being, I argue, stretches far beyond the 'safe' confines of the drama studio and into participants' everyday lives.

As can be seen in the following transcript, the women that attended the second reflection session did not feel that just *any* comedy course would have had the same effect. Rather, they pick out specific characteristics that make the Women's Comedy Workshop a transformational space.

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Event 29 -
Transcript (Focus Group, May 2018)

Claire: I think the collaborative nature of the process allowed us to all become our funny versions of ourselves, and have confidence in the different ways that we did it… You find the thing that's making everyone laugh, and it might be really different… There was like no pressure to copy anyone else… there wasn't like a method.

Harriet: I was gonna say this… because what's funny coming out of my mouth might not be funny coming out of Vanessa's mouth. And, like, we're all so different and we all brought our own experience and our own stamp. But the way that the rest of the group nurtured each individual to bring that out… to take it from just being Harriet to being funny Harriet… Because again, we didn't perform as a group, but we were definitely a group of performers.

Nel: One of the things I liked about this, was being on the bill with lots of women. […] I'm not a very feminine person but I think if I was around more men I would feel like I'd have to be the woman on the stage. […] But I felt I could be more me, because there was space for that.

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In the above 'event', both Harriet and Claire mention that they were not introduced to a particular 'method' of creating comic material. This is important, because humour is incredibly idiosyncratic (Stott, 2005), and - as Harriet identifies - "what's funny coming out of my mouth might not be funny coming out of… [someone else's] mouth". Then, Nel explains that she liked "being on the bill with lots of women", because this created "space"

for her to "be more me". This is especially important for Nel, because she thinks of herself as a "not... very feminine person", and knows that she'd "have to be the woman on the stage" if men were there. In what follows, I will elaborate on these ideas, thinking about how the workshops allowed *difference* to emerge. In doing so, I will position the Women's Comedy Workshop as a 'carnivalesque' or 'minoritarian' space (Bakhtin, 1984; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), which is capable of creating revolutionary forms of feminist humour.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, minority groups (such as 'feminists') *contain difference*. They are 'fuzzy' multiplicities (Deleuze & Guattari, 2017:546) that are difficult to define, and they are constantly changing. This - for Deleuze and Guattari - is their power. However, it is something that minority groups often ignore, trying instead "to enter and make themselves felt within the majority system" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:548). According to Deleuze, there is a risk to this, because systems of representation can work against revolutionary politics (1997:255), neutralising the diversity within minorities and rendering them major. When we force our way into male dominated performance spaces, for instance, we not only restrict our modes of expression (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:547), but strengthen the state; holding in place - for example - the male standard within stand-up comedy that women are perpetually compared to.

As an example of this, the increase in women performing comedy at every level has meant that comedy is now seen as a viable hobby for women, and workshops and courses have been popping up all over the UK as a result. In 2015 - before my research began - I attended a series of workshops myself, which were hosted by an organisation called Funny Women. Funny Women - described as "the UK's leading female comedy community" (Parker, n.d. [online]) - was created by Lynne Parker in response to misogynistic comments made by a promoter, and aims to get more women performing comedy professionally. At the workshops I attended, much was made of the Funny Women alumni that have 'made it' (such as Sara Pascoe and Katherine Ryan), and the facilitator offered advice on how to book gigs and cope with hecklers. She talked in terms joke structures and punch lines, and I remember being almost petrified with fear when she asked me to tell a joke before even saying my name. Funny Women do incredibly important work; promoting and celebrating the successes of women comedians and pushing for greater equality within the industry. However, the workshops I attended felt static and impenetrable, adhering to the notion that there is a 'correct' way to use humour, and a correct way to 'do' comedy. So, comedy - even 'feminist' comedy - is not always

minoritarian. In fact, as discussed in chapter five, as we move towards greater representational equality, feminist comedy is increasingly vulnerable to 'becoming-majoritarian', which means that it has a 'centralising' tendency that eclipses its "power of difference" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:548).

The Women's Comedy Workshop, however, was largely non-hierarchical, and allowed participants to explore their sense of humour on their own terms. As described in chapter three, I used a pedagogical approach inspired by Freire (1994), creating a space in which participants could learn from one another. I also invited a range of different comedy specialists to work alongside the rest of the group. While these practitioners *did* influence the process, the fact that there was no consistent 'expert', or 'director', in the room meant that there were less 'stabilising' forces holding the process in place. During the workshops, we found that the best way to learn how to be funny was (as Claire indicates) to simply "find the thing that's making everyone laugh"; a process that I describe through the analogy of 'learning to surf'. As pointed out by Deleuze, we cannot learn anything through 'dry' instruction alone (Deleuze, 1994:165 - accessed Bogue, 2013:21). And, in the workshops, we plunged our bodies into the energetic flows moving through the space around us, allowing waves of immanent laughter (rather than transcendent 'experts') to become our teachers.

Chapter four can therefore tell us something about the process of learning how to do comedy. As we have seen, there are a number of ways in which we can 'explain' humour (i.e. through incongruity, relief or superiority theory), and groups such as Funny Women tend to teach participants how to make audiences laugh along these lines. However, at the Women's Comedy Workshop, we have developed a creative process that is much more intuitive and improvised; a 'tuning in' to the processes of creation that are already underway. When left to their own devices, all human beings (indeed, all mammals) are humorous (Provine, 2001; Willet & Willet, 2019). What holds us back from using humour - what causes women's 'inhibited intentionality' around humour (Young, 1990), for instance - are the stratifying forces that hold our identities in place. So, when we 'amputate' those components of power, we create an arena in which our humour can flow. Therefore, comedy workshops do not need to 'teach' women how to do comedy. The best way to learn is to create spaces in which we can start to surf.

As Lorde famously argues in her essay, *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House*, it is not necessary to appropriate men's instruments and concepts or to "begrudge them their position of mastery… knowing "how it works' in order to 'make it work" (2007:19). Even if we are occasionally permitted to feel as though we are making progress, this mode of action will never bring about genuine change; at least not the kind of change that benefits more than an elite few. With this is mind, I would like to define the Women's Comedy Workshop as a 'minoritarian' space, which has resulted in a huge diversity of performance styles. Rather than helping participants to make their way towards representational equality, we have given them space in which to play. Over the two years of the project, women performed stand-up, drag, and comic monologues. They sung songs, recited poems and one woman even had a go at a (partial) strip tease. For Lorde, "difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged" (2007:18) and - I argue - it is that difference that we access in the Women's Comedy Workshop, which allows us to become-minoritarian.

As already indicated, there are many similarities between the carnivalesque and the idea of minoritarianism. According to Bakhtin;

> The carnivalesque crowd, in the street or the marketplace… is not merely
> a crowd, it is the people as a whole, organised in their own way, the way of
> the people (1984:255).

Like the 'minor' sphere, the carnivalesque is "outside and contrary to all existing forms of the coercive socioeconomic and political organisation" (ibid). And, it is true that - in stepping into a more minoritarian space - participants of the Women's Comedy Workshop did feel as though they were part of a collective. As Harriet puts it; "we didn't perform as a group, but we were definitely a group of performers"; an idea that was felt very strongly by everyone that took part. Bakhtin positions the carnival as an experiment in utopia. Participants become aware of their position within an indissoluble collectivity, or - as I would put it - an ocean of potential. We learn to appreciate that we are part of a whole; a whole within which there are infinite possibilities for change.

However, a number of theorists have criticised this kind of idealism, which - I think - could be levelled at minoritarian spaces as well. For example, Turner (1974) positions the carnival as a kind of cultural safety-valve, after which hierarchical regimes can snap back into place with even more force. We see this in Aristophanes' *The Thesmophoriazusae*

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(2012), in which the female chorus are permitted a few days of madness, and then expected to return to their homes. It feels important to acknowledge, here, that - after each Women's Comedy Workshop project - participants have also had to re-enter the world, and many women have gone on to have bad experiences in comedy clubs. After having their confidence boosted by performing at our *Not An Open Mic Night*, they find that actual 'open mic' nights are not so welcoming to women.

Once again, this helps me to draw some conclusions in relation to the study. Taking part in 'minoritarian' or 'carnivalesque' comedy workshops can help women to become-otherwise. Part of this is, as already discussed, entering into a liminal, preindividual state, where you become aware of yourself as part of a collective. The feeling of connecting to others in this way can be wonderful; a pleasure that (as described in chapter four) involves opening yourself to the flow and rhythm of the present moment. However, I am not suggesting that women taking part in comedy workshops can be understood as a *solution* to patriarchal social relations. It is much more complicated than that. In this sense, rather than 'taking comedy seriously' (which is what many comedy theorists think we should do), I suggest that we should look at it with a softer gaze. Even if experiences of feminist humour are nothing more than moments of light relief; those moments should still be given space to breathe, live and dance.

This point of view is also relevant to chapter six, where I discuss how 'minoritarian' humour might translate into micropolitics. 'Micropolitics' can be connected to the notion of the 'minor', because it is also a move away from the standardisation and homogeneity of the molar sphere (Surin, 2010:165). While 'molar' politics tend to be highly visible and aligned with political groups or ideals, micropolitics tend to be more immediate and much harder to quantify. This makes micropolitics much harder to see, and means that they are often missed out of political discourse. This bias is written about in *Moments of Excess*, in which The Free Association argues that our understanding of activism "is based upon the misconception that it is only activists who *do* social change" (1999:unpag), discounting those people that do not consider themselves to be 'activists' or 'political', but nevertheless perform behaviours of resistance in their everyday lives. This attitude is - of course - bound up with capitalism, where the more labour and time an act takes up, the more valuable it is deemed to be. It is also bound up with arguments around quantitive and qualitative change. So, an activist group with clear goals, which goes on to achieve policy change, is

rated more highly than a collection of individuals attempting - in a haphazard fashion - to alter their experience of the everyday.

As emphasised in chapter six, fourth wave feminism is a 'call-out culture', which is very much at work within the everyday sphere. This means that it is often dismissed as a 'slacktivist' (or - because of its reliance on technology - 'clicktivist') movement, which is not capable of creating 'real' change. However, if we understand social movements as the moving of social relations, it no longer makes sense to talk of static boundaries or limits. The patriarchy is not *a thing out there* that we can fight against - even if we sometimes talk about it as though it is - and a qualitative change to our lives does not have to occur, necessarily, through behaviours that can be quantified. Instead, as I suggest in chapter six, we should look towards forms of activism that create qualitative change, harnessing and channeling the feelings that make us more able to struggle against oppression and exploitation in our everyday lives.

This is why Ahmed's feminist killjoy (2010) is so relevant to contemporary feminisms. As I point out in chapter six, the actions of the feminist killjoy 'interrupt' the normal functioning of everyday life, causing situations to rearrange themselves around the anger and sadness located within the interruption. This creates an opportunity for empathy; and for the sharing of other negative feelings by those that have had similar experiences. As pointed out by social activist Tarana Burke, "communities have to come together to make them safe… to protect the most vulnerable people" (Burke, 2019 [online]), and we can see - in the Me Too movement - a radical 'coming-together' of a community on a global scale. While some feminist activists tend to emphasise the 'real-world change' that was born out of Me Too, such as the imprisonment of Harvey Weinstein (Watts, 2020 [online]), the true impact of the movement is within its *micropolitics*; in the infinite ways in which feminists have mobilised to alter the dynamics of the everyday.

By writing about two events that occurred while (and after) listening to *The Guilty Feminist*, I show that the podcast works in a similar way to other fourth wave feminisms. This, I argue, is to do with the way that laughter works to build affectively-charged communities; a phenomenon that we have seen again and again within the pages of this thesis. The guilty feminist 'army' or 'tribe' (as Deborah Frances-White refers to her listeners) is a sprawling, global movement, and I suggest that - by laughing together virtually - we are able to intensify our powers of existence.

Braidotti points out that - in earlier iterations of the women's movement - laughter was seen as a profound political statement, but that "not much of this joyful beat survives in these days of postmodernist gloom" (1994:167). However, I've shown - through my discussion of the Women's Comedy Workshop, *Love and Anger, Power Ballad* and *The Guilty Feminist* podcast - that fourth wave feminists are, in fact, using comic practices to intervene in (and be energised by) contemporary feminisms. In this sense, they are responding to (and going beyond) Braidotti's call for feminism to "shed its saddening, dogmatic mode… [and] rediscover the merrymaking of a movement that aims to change life" (ibid). Comedy, humour and laughter are providing an answer to the neoliberal individualism that - as discussed in chapter two - still runs through contemporary feminism. Laughing together is making it possible for women to feel like they are part of a collective; or part of a 'wave', and to start 'making waves' within everyday life. Some of these waves, as we have seen, are gentle and supportive; a way of encouraging one another to take up space and 'learn how to surf'. Some are 'micro' waves, which ripple with rebellious energy, as they change the shape of power relations. Some can even be thought of as 'microwaves'; invisible, yet capable of undoing the structural integrity of the majoritarian system. And some are (like) radio waves, connecting us - and vibrating us - across time and space.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A - Women's Comedy Workshop Advertisement

Appendix B - Women's Comedy Workshop Information Sheet

Appendix C - Women's Comedy Workshop Consent Form

Appendix D - 'Not An Open Mic Night' Advertisement

Appendix E - Interviewee Information Sheet

Appendix F - Interviewee Consent Form

APPENDIX A

Women's Comedy Workshop Advertisement

This is the copy that was used to advertise the Women's Comedy Workshop on Theatre in the Mill's website and social media.

………………………………………………………………………

Unlock your inner funny woman in a safe, women-only space!

This lively and practical introduction to comedy will allow you to build your confidence and explore a range of comic styles, with an opportunity to share material in a supportive and friendly environment.

Dates/Times:
Saturday 21 January, 2pm-4.30pm
Saturday 18 February, 2pm-4.30pm
Saturday 4 March, 2pm-4.30pm
Saturday 18 March, 2pm-4.30pm
Performance - Saturday 1 April, 8pm-10pm[7]

This project is led by Natalie Diddams, who is a PhD candidate at Manchester Metropolitan University. The workshops and performance will form part of her research, which is about women's empowerment through comedy.

To apply to take part, please read the information sheet and complete the application form (by 2 March). The workshops are free. Applications are open to anyone that identifies as a woman some or all of the time, who is over the age of 18. No previous performance experience is necessary. If writing the application form is a barrier to you applying, please contact Natalie on N.Diddams@mmu.ac.uk.

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[7] These dates and times were changed for the 2018 project, but other than that the copy remained the same.

APPENDIX B

Women's Comedy Workshop

Information Sheet

Thank you for expressing an interest in the Women's Comedy Workshop at Theatre in the Mill. This information sheet will tell you everything you need to know about the upcoming project, including how to apply to be involved.

Academic Research

The workshop will form part of my academic research into how comedy is functioning within the fourth wave feminist movement.

Before you decide whether or not to apply to take part, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve for you. Please take time to read this sheet carefully. Ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

Over the past few years, I have become fascinated by how comedy can liberate women from gender role ideology and create spaces for new ways of moving, speaking and interacting to emerge. This study will help me to build up a picture of how and why this might be.

What will it involve?

- You will take part in 4 comedy workshops at Theatre in the Mill in Bradford, where you will play games and have a go at a range of comedy techniques, including stand-up and improvisation.

- You will also have the opportunity to work on your own material and share some of this at Theatre in the Mill's dedicated comedy night (see website for more details).

- I will film the workshops and performances, so that I can analyse film footage for my research.

- I will also ask you to take part in a focus group at the end of the project, where we will talk about your experiences through the project as a whole. I will audio-record this conversation using my iPhone, so I can analyse recordings for my research.

- I may quote an extract from the focus group - or describe something that happened during one of the workshops or performances - in my PhD thesis.

Confidentiality:

- Your confidentiality will be safeguarded during and after the project, in line with the Data Protection Act of 1998.

- Extracts from recordings will not be shared in the public domain via social media, and any quotations or descriptions used in my academic writing will be anonymised.

- All film footage and audio recordings gathered through the project will be stored on a password-protected computer and disposed of securely after 3 years.

Your rights:

You may pull out of the project at any time. If you decide that you'd like to pull out after the workshop has ended, just get in touch with me using the contact details below.

Your responsibilities:

You are responsible for your own emotional wellbeing throughout - and after - the project. Taking part in comedy workshops and performing, especially if it is your first time, can be an emotional experience for some people, and it is really important that you have your own support networks in place.

You are also responsible for any networks, collaborations and careers that emerge as a result of the project.

Consent & How to Apply:

If you are happy to consent to taking part in my research through participating in the Women's Comedy Workshops, please complete and return the attached consent form along with your application form. Please note, you must identify as a woman some or all of the time and be over the age of 18 to apply. No prior experience of comedy is necessary.

Yours Sincerely,

Natalie Diddams

Natalie Diddams Natalie.Diddams@stu.mmu.ac.uk / 07800884956

If you have any concerns about my research, please contact my DoS at MMU:

PROF Gabrielle Ivinson G.Ivinson@mmu.ac.uk / 0161 247 2293

APPENDIX C

Women's Comedy Workshop

Application Form and Consent Form

Please use the boxes below to tell me a little bit about yourself.

PARTICIPANT DETAILS:

Name:
Postcode:
Telephone number:
Email:

WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO GET OUT OF THE WORKSHOPS?

TELL ME A BIT ABOUT YOUR BACKGROUND?
(i.e. have you performed before?)

DO YOU HAVE ANY ACCESS REQUIREMENTS?

PLEASE INITIAL EACH BOX IN ORDER TO CONSENT TO THE FOLLOWING:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for this project, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about what the project will entail.		I also understand that reflection activities, which will include a focus group, will be audio recorded and used for analysis for this research project.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time.		I give permission for recordings to be archived as part of this research project, making it available to future researchers.	
I understand that the workshops and the sharing at Theatre in the Mill will be video recorded and used for analysis for this research project.		I understand that my identity will remain anonymous.	
I agree to take part in The Women's Comedy Workshop research project.		I understand that at my request a transcript of any audio recordings, and copies of any video recordings, can be made available to me, and that I can ask for audio and video content to be deleted at any time.	

Name of Participant: **Date:**   **Signature:**

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher: **Date:**   **Signature:**
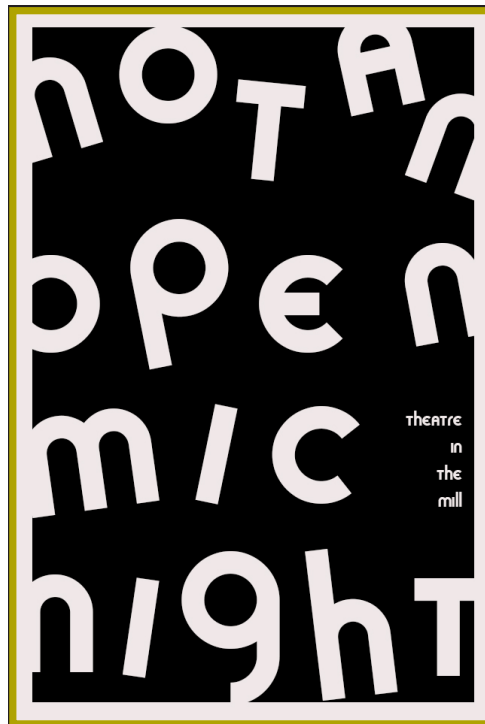
_____   _____   _____

APPENDIX D

'Not An Open Mic Night' Advertisement

This is the image and copy that was used to advertise the second comedy night, which took place in April 2018. It was placed on Theatre in the Mill's website and social media.

………………………………………………………………………

Ever been to an open mic night and seen the same sort of performer get up...
over and over again? Yeah, us too.

Because being an 'open' mic night doesn't make it an accessible mic night. It doesn't make it a funny mic night, either. And we want to change that.

At our 'Not An Open Mic Night' you will see a wide variety of comedy from a diverse range of comedians; developed at Theatre in the Mill's Women's Comedy Workshop. Ranging from stand-up, to improvisation, to monologues, to drag, we guarantee you a programme that is experimental, courageous and eye-wateringly, side-splittingly (maybe pack a spare pair of pants) funny.

APPENDIX E
Women-led Comedy Interviews
Information Sheet

01/08/2017

You have been given this information sheet because I would like to record a 30 minute interview with you about your experiences as a woman comedian. The interview - which will be audio recorded - will form a key part of my academic research into how women-led comedy is functioning within the fourth wave feminist movement.

Academic Research

I'm doing this research as part of my PhD within the Education and Social Research Institute at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Before you decide whether or not to agree to the interview, you need to understand why the research is being done and what it will mean for you. Please take time to read this sheet carefully. Ask questions if anything is not clear or you would like more information.

What is the purpose of the study?

Over the past few years, I have become fascinated by how comedy can liberate women from gender role ideology and create spaces for new ways of moving, speaking and interacting to emerge. This study will help me to build up a picture of how and why this might be.

What will it involve?

- We will talk for around 30 minutes about your experiences as a woman comedian, and about your wider thoughts on gender and feminism.

- I will audio record our conversation using my iPhone.

- I may quote an extract from our interview in my PhD thesis.

Confidentiality:

- Your confidentiality will be safeguarded during and after the project, in line with the Data Protection Act of 1998.

- Extracts from our interview will not be shared in the public domain via social media.

- On request, I will anonymise quotations from our interview in my PhD thesis. If you would like me to do this, please indicate on the consent form.

- The audio recording of our conversation will be stored on a password protected computer and disposed of securely after 3 years.

Your rights:

You may pull out of the interview at any time. If you decide that you'd like to pull out after we have said goodbye, just get in touch with me using the contact details below. Similarly, if you feel the interview is leading you onto a subject that you are uncomfortable talking about, or if you would rather I did not include part of the interview in my research, please just let me know.

Consent:

If you are happy to consent to taking part in an interview about your experiences as a woman comedian, please complete and return the attached consent form.

Yours Sincerely,
Natalie Diddams

Natalie Diddams Natalie.Diddams@stu.mmu.ac.uk / 07800884956

If you have any concerns about my research, please contact my DoS at MMU: **PROF Gabrielle Ivinson** G.Ivinson@mmu.ac.uk / 0161 247 2293

APPENDIX F

Women-led Comedy Interviews
Consent Form

PLEASE INITIAL EACH BOX IN ORDER TO CONSENT TO THE FOLLOWING:

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated 01/08/2019, and have had the opportunity to ask questions about what the interview will entail.		I understand that at my request a transcript of the interview can be made available to me, and that I can ask for audio content to be deleted at any time.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.		I give permission for audio recordings to be archived as part of this research project, making it available to future researchers.	
I understand that the interview will be audio recorded and used for analysis for this research project.		I understand that my identity will not remain anonymous, unless I request it to (if you would like to remain anonymous, please indicate here).	
I agree to take part in this research project.			

Name of Interviewee: **Date:**   **Signature:**

_____   _____   _____

Name of Researcher: **Date:**   **Signature:**

_____   _____   _____