

Nine Parts Navy
Naomi Pearce

Tuesday 5 June, 2018, 10:30am – 5.00pm

1. Index

In her book *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, Claire Hemmings argues that feminist archival practices are concerned not just with a way of looking, but with what is being looked at. Paying attention to different kinds of documents, letters, memos, health and safety manuals, things which orbit action, can be understood as an act of critical re-framing.

With this in mind this writing exercise asked participants to create an index using multiple texts of conflicting status as source material. These were a combination of administrative SSW documents such as the current business plan and fire safety manual, as well as prose and fictional texts about North East Scotland including Nan Shepherd's *Living Mountain* and *Sunset Song*, by Lewis Grassie Gibbon.

I am interested in all interpretations of the index form. The definition of an index in economic terms, is a measuring device for investments. In book form an index is intended to help the reader / researcher, rather than the author, find information. So the index is a kind of liaison between the text and its ultimate user. I like this as a generous gesture; a pre-empting of the reader. In this sense it exists as a trace of something else.

2. Critical Fabulation

This fiction writing exercise responds to a selection of failed objects/test pieces left in the studio at SSW.

This exercise is inspired by Saidiya Hartman's method of 'critical fabulation' as a means of trying to imagine what cannot be verified. Writing in the essay *Venus in Two Acts*, Hartman suggests that we 'exceed...the limits of the archive' through the process of 'critical fabulation'. This method harnesses the building blocks of narrative storytelling whilst resisting the need for plot or closure, seeking instead to refute and displace official accounts 'by throwing into crisis 'what happened when' and by exploiting the 'transparency of sources' as fictions of history'. Critical fabulation is driven by a desire for proximity with the past not its truthful telling. This exercise is intended to encourage generative responses to that which is provisional, failed or left behind.

3. Field Note

This exercise draws on methods deployed during a period of research at a teaching

mortuary in Scotland observing full cadaveric dissections and forensic anthropology practical's with skeletal specimens. During my encounters in the mortuary I followed Maria Fusco's method of 'try to act as a recording device' in order to generate a set of field notes. I resisted evaluating in favour of operating as a bundle of senses; absorbing and responding to make use of this acquired somatic vocabulary.

At the mortuary I am 'outside' and out of place. I come to forensic anthropology with curiosity but without training. In this sense, my engagement with the practices of this facility follows Elizabeth Grosz's notion of the 'outside' as a space which operates as the necessary 'third term' to allow two 'equivalent and interconnected discourses and practices' to 'interact without hierarchy'. To be positioned 'outside' is suggested as a generative method of interdisciplinary engagement, one that might be particularly useful in gaining alternative perspectives on existing forms. As a writer in a sculpture workshop I am similarly outside. However, like the sculptor, the field note process is an embodied one, I become a membrane; absorbing but also influencing the environment in which I am situated.

Participants used the above methodology to attempt to articulate their experiences of blacksmithing using the forge at SSW.