

111 affective politics, debility and hearing voices: towards a feminist politics of ordinary suffering

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abstract

This paper is an intervention within feminist and queer debates that have re-posed so-called negative states of being as offering productive possibilities for political practice and social transformation. What is sometimes called the politics of negative affect or analyses of political feeling has sought to de-pathologise shame, melancholy, failure, depression, anxieties and other forms of 'feeling bad', to open up new ways of thinking about agency, change and transformation. Ann Cvetkovich's recent memoir explores depression as a public feeling and argues that 'feeling bad might, in fact, be the ground for transformation'. As she suggests, the question, 'how do I feel' could usefully be reframed as 'how does capitalism feel'? This performative staging of political forms of psychosocial reflexivity opens up new strategies for survival, new visions of the future, and importantly de-medicalises feeling beyond an individual expression of psychopathology. The grounds for affective politics might be found within new feminist futures that are attentive to the relations between emotion, affect, feelings and politics. This paper will be situated within these debates and the challenge of thinking about the productive possibilities of negative states of being. However, rather than focus on depression, I will turn my attention to experiences such as psychosis and temporal dissociation, based on my long-standing research with the Hearing Voices Network. In the context of discussions of disability and capability I will discuss the value of concepts such as debility, and 'living in prognosis', and respond to the call to think through what such states might offer for feminist and queer practice.

keywords

affect; debility; feminism; queer studies

introduction: psychiatric debility and affective politics

Many years ago I wrote about the necessity of reframing suffering as 'ordinary', not an exceptional phenomenon, but rather part and parcel of the costs of neo-liberalism(s). I related this in part to the very difficulties of living normalised fictions and fantasies of femininity that were produced within these practices as signs of personal failure, inadequacy and the associated economies of pain, fear, anxiety and distress that keep these apparatuses alive and in place (see Blackman, 2001). I argued with Walkerdine (Blackman and Walkerdine, 2001) for the importance of developing 'psychologies of survival', which would allow an exploration and analysis of the costs of neo-liberalism in the context of those behaviours, experiences, feelings and phenomena that appear within the psychological and psychiatric sciences as signs and symptoms of psychopathology. This includes experiences such as voice hearing, dissociation, psychosis and related experiences that are often viewed as intractable and primarily amenable to transformation via psychotropic drugs and biomedical forms of intervention. This article will continue this commitment by considering what recent calls for an affective politics of negative feeling might add to specific forms of activism, research and critical practice in the United Kingdom and latterly further afield, in relation to such a politics of ordinary suffering.

Living under a psychiatric diagnosis is a particular form of debility, where the person's experiences are usually medicalised (seen as a symptom of illness and disease), individualised (often reduced to the brain or neurology) and marked out as having a particular temporal trajectory. Recovery is usually linked to the concept of insight (the process through which the person understands their experiences as an illness or disease), where such insight is premised on the possibility of the disease returning at some point during their life. Once a schizophrenic always a schizophrenic, as the old adage goes. The person is haunted by the threat and supposed intractability of disease where compliance with drug regimes is usually proffered as the best means of defence. S(he) is marked out as a specific *kind* of person, often subject to particular forms of fear, prejudice and stigma. To that extent psychiatric forms of disablement or debility are a complex entanglement of processes—somatic, psychic, social, technical and historical—and are often lived as an expression of individual psychopathology. The threat to a sense of bodily integrity is seen to come from within the person—their own delusions, voices and imaginings, which are taken to disturb borders and boundaries between the self and other, inside and outside, past and present, and real and imagined. These threats to bodily integrity are premised on the basis that normal personhood is organised and lived as unified, autonomous and clearly bounded, where the person is able to make such distinctions as the grounds and foundation of psychic health and normality.

Despite the long histories of activism and anti-psychiatric campaigns, psychiatric debility remains the subject of contemporary biopolitical strategies that primarily target the brain as the primary object of intervention. Psychiatric debilities are also dispersed and often concentrated within particular populations, overly represented within working-class, black, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans* and queer (LGBTQ), and female cis-gendered subjects. This tension and what we might *do* is at the heart of this article. I will seek to address what it would mean to approach the politics of psychiatry and psychiatric debility as primarily an affective politics, and what this opens up for approaching and analysing relations between embodiment and mental health within queer and feminist practice. What does the alignment of affect and

debility offer for critical thinking and practice? What are some of the problems and limitations with the emergent discourse of debility, particularly when framed as a way out of the often assumed problems with identity politics?

the iconicity of feminist suffering and the promise of radical negativity

What and how does psychosis communicate? In this first section I will explore some of the iconicity that surrounds psychosis, specifically in relation to distinctly feminist forms of suffering. In that respect I will start with Frances Farmer, a particular icon of feminist suffering who has a reach and traction across space and time. Frances Farmer was an American, white, upper middle-class woman—an actress and writer—who became something of an object of fascination and even phobia due to her involuntary committal to a mental asylum. The details of her life have been sensationalised across different media, with numerous films and television dramas that narrate her life as a bleak tragedy. We are told that she was an intelligent woman born in 1931 with political leanings to the left. She was a writer inspired by Nietzsche and also a possible communist. She became a reasonably successful Hollywood studio actress but spoke out about the way she was cast for her looks rather than her talent. She was unlucky in love, with her marriage to a famous director ending in divorce. She apparently drank her way through this event leading to her arrest and a subsequent prison sentence. Due to the interventions of her sister, who was a lawyer, she was moved from prison to a mental asylum. She was diagnosed with manic depressive psychosis and later as a paranoid schizophrenic. She was given insulin shock treatment, and spent the next years in and out of the asylum, sometimes even being re-committed by her mother. She was given electroconvulsive therapy, and claimed in her posthumously published autobiography that she was raped and beaten while in hospital, that she was poisoned, chained in padded cells and given ice-cold water baths (Farmer, 1983).

The iconicity of Francis Farmer's life blurs fact, fiction and fantasy. As a figure she has carried a variety of contradictory demands, sentiments, investments, desires, grievances and fantasies. Her iconicity endures and has been used as a resource to extend the subcultural capital and critical sentiment of many pop groups. This includes the anti-establishment energy of grunge rock. Nirvana famously penned a song about her, 'Frances Farmer will have her revenge on Seattle'. She appeared on the sleeve of a 1984 song by Culture Club, 'The Medal Song'. She appears as the subject of songs by T'Pau and The Men They Couldn't Hang. She also was the subject of a song by one of my favourite bands in the 1980s, Everything But the Girl, with their song 'Ugly Little Dreams', a tribute that was based on her life. She endures in an afterlife, where she has been reproduced and undergone many conversions. Scientology in the 1970s even referenced her life to call for the abolition of psychiatry.

The multiple voices of Frances Farmer, and the different agencies and actors she speaks through, have memorialised her life as an example of a woman who was unable to live the life she might have imagined and indeed that her privilege might have allowed. Unlike many others confined to asylums at the time, Frances Farmer lives on and has an enduring status as an icon of a particular form of feminist suffering, a suffering that was seen as all the more disturbing because she was considered successful, beautiful, intelligent and supposedly not the *kind* of woman who should have ended up in an asylum. But what of

those whose lives have not been canonised in this way and whose accounts have not been memorialised, whose stories have perhaps never been told? What might we learn about the productive possibilities of negative states of being and how they extend, contribute and even unsettle some of our own fantasies of hope and optimism and our investments in change for a better future?

This article is a partial contribution to a very long lineage of feminist work that has explored the significance and value of what has historically been framed as 'women's madness'. In this sense I am not alone as many feminists have documented how women's rage, anger, protest, silence and unwillingness or inability to live normalising forms of personhood have been punished by medicalising forms of treatment. This includes Millet's (1991) *The Loony Bin Trip*, and the work of feminist scholars who have de-medicalised and de-pathologised 'female madness', such as the writings of Walkerdine (1990), McRobbie (2009), Ussher (1991) and Boyle (1990). It includes work written by feminist analysts attempting to challenge the sanctity of the family as protection against the vicissitudes of the world, among them a formative book I read as a teenager by Miller (1987), *For your Own Good: The Roots of Violence in Child-rearing*, as well as numerous memoirs and autobiographies by those who have experienced depression and psychosis, such as Barnes (1991), Frame (2010), Winterson (2012) and Sarton (1993).

This is a very partial archive but one that has been particularly formative in my own thinking. It also includes the writings of black feminists who have explored how self-help must and indeed can take form as more relational and communal practices of living and loving, such as Lorde's (1996) *Cancer Journals*, and hooks' (2000) *All About Love*. They do not present self-help as the actions of an individual exercising mastery and control over their world, but rather present worlds structured by inequalities and oppressions (racial, gendered, sexed and classed) and the necessity of developing strategies of survival in order to endure. This work has sought to explore how people live, manage and importantly struggle with such oppressions. This can create economies of pain, fear, anxieties, distress and unhappiness, as well as more serious forms of dissociation and splitting, which might result in psychosis.

queering neo-liberalism?

The politics of suffering and what it might mean to live well in the context of oppression and inequalities is sadly an enduring question. In this section I will consider critical responses that are more explicitly located within the context of neo-liberalism and its discontents. I will focus specifically on queer and feminist scholarship that primarily originates within a North American context and a specific conjuncture of events. These include post-9/11 and American foreign policy in the world; the global financial crisis and austerity politics; militarism and war; and migration, racism and corresponding histories of slavery, displacement and genocide. These events and their significance have provided some of the conditions of possibility for renewed work on depression as a political feeling. This also includes, in some cases, the specificities of the neo-liberal university. This is particularly so given increased moves towards privatisation and marketisation within the United Kingdom and North American academia. Cvetkovich's (2012) memoir on depression is set within such a context where the narrative account of her own feeling depressed is primarily located within the academy. Writer's block, a failed Yale application, self-doubt about intellectual work, a reduced and competitive job market and impossible deadlines all contribute to Cvetkovich's depression, for example.

Cvetkovich's reflections are peppered with felt examples of thwarted ambition and feeling stuck, alongside a focus on 'how academia seemed to be killing me' (*ibid.*, p. 18). She asks, 'why is a position of relative privilege, the pursuit of creative thinking and teaching, lived as though it were impossible?' (*ibid.*, p. 18). She frames creativity in the memoir as a possible set of practices that might help to get hope and despair moving. This is proffered as a possible solution and forms the basis of a queer affective politics. Cvetkovich's account is a form of critical memoir that does not subscribe to medical treatment or drugs as a narrative resolution. She astutely argues that most popular memoirs on depression do. The focus on creativity as *movement* is framed within a notion of queer temporalities, a non-linear account of time that moves backwards, sideways and forwards (see Halberstam, 2005). The focus on what to *do* is an important part of the performative force of the memoir, because as the author states, 'Saying that capitalism ... is the problem does not help me get up in the morning' (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 15). The latter focus of the memoir is on those queer cultures and practices that got her moving. Cvetkovich's memoir illustrates the important need for new narratives and ways of understanding and transforming embodied experiences of distress and depression within queer and feminist practices. In the next section I will extend the genre of critical autobiography by outlining a more distributed approach to storytelling that in the context of voice hearing focuses upon traces, fragments, gaps, silences, submerged narratives, displaced actors, and more inchoate feelings and sensations that can be linked together to shape new forms of mediated perception. I will develop this in the context of my own autobiography and some of the stories I was told while undertaking an ethnography of the Hearing Voices Network in the early 1990s (see Blackman, 2001). The focus of this section will be on exploring what it means to give voice or narrativise experience and what we might learn about this process from considering the practices of the Hearing Voices Network.

the politics of feeling and the Hearing Voices Network: submerged narratives and displaced actors

I will start by reflecting on some of my own experiences that motivated my subsequent doctoral research in the 1990s. I grew up in a family with a long history of women's madness, with a mother who has been in and out of psychiatric hospitals since the age of 17. Her own mother lived on a cocktail of antidepressants and tranquilisers. Other women also 'went mad', including a cousin of my mother who spent most of her life institutionalised within a mental asylum. There was also an aunt, whom my mother was named after, who died at the age of 21 in 'tragic circumstances'. I have consequently spent my own life experiencing and thinking about what we might call negative states of being. Initially this was a desperate attempt to break the social link across generations, so that I might avoid a similar fate as some of the important women in my own family. Reading about mental illness was important to me as a young teenager, and once I had read the entire section of the local library on the subject, I came away thinking there was little hope. I had inherited the risk and this risk was primarily genetic and would manifest in a disruption to my thinking, feeling and acting that only psychoactive drugs would alleviate, if I was lucky.

I was, however, moved by the profound sense that there must be something more to say. I was not willing to accept this injunction, as it pointed to a life of debility and of being dependant on a psychiatric system that I knew was brutalising, terrifying and not fit for purpose. I would need to 'enter the system' and try to

change it from within, and this impulse led to a psychology degree, and importantly to an institution in the 1980s that offered a home for feminist and critical psychologists who were challenging the normativity of psychology and psychiatry. They offered me tools, strategies and theories that resonated and allowed me to understand the contingencies that might lead to madness. Psychosis was political and could not be reduced to biology, brain, hormones or biochemical processes. As Boyle (1990), a critical clinical psychologist, taught me, 'schizophrenia is a scientific delusion', and the genealogical, affective and material contingencies that allow that delusion to persist have formed the subject of my intellectual commitments from that time onwards.

This included a PhD exploring the genealogy of the statement that hearing voices is primarily a first rank symptom of schizophrenia. This was later written up as a book, *Hearing Voices: Embodiment and Experience* (Blackman, 2001), charting my encounter with an activist group, the Hearing Voices Network. My own research and thinking, and the practices they were developing, became mutually entangled. We shared the assumption that hearing voices should be approached as modalities of communication (not signs and symptoms of a discrete disease process). The challenge was how to develop techniques and practices that would allow voice hearers, trusted friends, families and professionals to listen to their own voices and the voices of (often unwanted) others. What might these voices communicate to those who are willing to listen? It is within this context that I want to explore the potential of radical negativity to affective politics. To do this I will start by introducing readers to two of my feminist icons whom I met while doing my PhD in the early 1990s. How these two women shaped my thinking was largely left out of the thesis and subsequent book. It is only *now* after thinking about my experiences of meeting them (and many others with similar stories that I have met and spent time with over the years) that I have started to be able to theorise the significance of their lives in the context of negative states and affective politics.

The first is Patsy Hague, a white, working-class woman from the Netherlands who challenged her psychiatrist to listen to the voices that she heard, rather than dismiss them as a meaningless epiphenomenon of a disease process. She refused to accept that her voices were not valid communications about her life. She made a link between the voices she heard and the sexual abuse she had suffered as a young woman. Her persistence paid off. This persistence was necessary for her survival, and her psychiatrist started to engage with her voices. He was directed by Patsy to ask her and her voices about their content and what they were saying, and to not simply dismiss them as a sign and symptom of a mental illness. In 1991 while I was doing my PhD, I was introduced to Patsy as the voice hearer responsible for the development of the Hearing Voices Network (HVN). The Hearing Voices Network at that time were primarily offering sanctuary and alternatives for voice hearers who had been failed by psychiatry.

After appearing on a TV talk show in the Netherlands with her psychiatrist to talk about her experience of hearing voices, people who heard voices but had never been in contact with psychiatry were invited to contact the show. Over 700 people responded and attention turned to how people coped and managed their voices beyond medicalisation and denial. The politics of the Hearing Voices Network provides an important source material and platform for thinking about debility and affective politics and is one that I have been intimately connected to throughout my research. Sadly, in many accounts now of the success and efficacy of the network Patsy's influence has been edited out. Her tenacity and persistence have been replaced by the heroic actions of her male psychiatrist who has been canonised as responsible for the development and shaping of the network. This is now extended by the mainly male cognitive scientists who

are claiming that the Hearing Voices Network is an example of a new science of hearing voices that they can explain through brain scans and theories of inner speech and cognitive deficit. In my recent book, *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (Blackman, 2012), I challenge this appropriation as vehemently as I did at the very beginnings of the network.

I filmed the first Hearing Voices Network conference in Manchester in 1991 at the request of the network. Patsy spoke her moving story for the first time and was able to publicly give an account of her experiences. This account had been a very long time in the making and its coherence was the result of a painstaking labour undertaken with many other voice hearers and trusted others. This process had allowed the traces, fragments, gaps, silences and contradictions of her voices to be linked together into an assemblage that could be animated and speak through her as an authorial voice. This I have learnt over the years is not always possible and exceeds the kinds of confessional technologies and narratives that have become so ubiquitous within neo-liberal cultures. The labour of her account questions what it might mean to give voice or allow somebody a voice. Patsy's account exceeded the capacity of a subject who could be present to herself and required a distributed form of perception—many eyes and ears—in order to take on a coherence that might be described or even recognisable as an account. Patsy had persisted with the sense that there was something more to be said about her voices and that her interlocutors should not be lessened, removed or blocked by drugs. Rather they should be engaged, encouraged, extended and amplified so that she could speak out eventually as a survivor of sexual abuse.

The second icon I want to introduce to you is Sharon DeValda. I met Sharon on a long Sunday in Manchester in 1991, where I had spent the day meeting different voice hearers in their homes who were willing and wanted to talk to me about their experiences. Sharon and her partner Mickey were the last voice hearers I was meeting, and I was already moved by the generosity of the first four voice hearers I had met. All were living on disability allowance, not able to work and mainly living in social housing. Unsolicited, they had all cooked me a Sunday roast. After four Sunday roasts (I love Sunday roasts) I did smile to myself at the thought that there might be another one round the corner. I had, however, failed to imagine that this actuality would also be followed by the appearance of a rather ceremonial black forest gâteau to round off the day! I did not write about this day in my thesis or book, but it has lived on with me. I look back now at so much of what has been edited out of my work. Sharon's story is particularly poignant. She was mixed race, working class and had grown up in children's homes. She had been subjected to racism, brutality and had been abused. She heard many voices, some of them taunting her with racial abuse, and showed me the cupboard in her kitchen that contained all the anti-psychotic medication she was on. She was very invested in psychiatry as a hope-technology (Franklin, 1998), but psychiatry had failed her. The voices simply would not go away and she was struggling with imagining a future where this might even be possible.

Sharon's is *not* a triumph over tragedy story. She did after many years and through the help of many voice hearers in the network begin to tell a story about her voices. This story situated them within particular social histories of institutional racism and abuse within schools and children's homes. These histories had contributed to her own experience of never belonging; of being made to feel shame; of being humiliated, persecuted and let down. What did kill her were not the voices, but the side effects of all the medication she had been on—a common occurrence that is being documented by the Hearing Voices Network as another symptom of what happens to many people who end up being brutalised by psychiatry. I consider

this a somatic conversion of not being listened to, ignored, and ultimately silenced and subdued by psychiatry and anti-psychotic medication. Sharon and Patsy's stories are some of my many 'companions in thought' (Ahmed, 2014). Patsy's and Sharon's stories, along with those of my mother and the many other women I have met as part of the network, are now part of my affective archive. They exist alongside those entities, agencies, actors, stories, fragments, traces and often unbearable feelings that live on through me, and many others. They have profoundly shaped my own politics of feeling.

hauntology and political depression(s)

I want to offer some provocations, questions and issues that I am struggling with about how to do justice to these women as part of a politics of radical negativity or affective politics. I want to partially respond to pronouncements, debates and theories that are shaping a terrain in the present where attending to psychopathology as a form of political feeling has become a matter of concern for many across different political spectrums. From diagnoses on the political left through to some queer theory and feminisms, attending to matters of feeling, and particularly feeling bad, depressed, worn out, or having no hope or capacity to imagine change have become dominant tropes. Fisher (2014) tells us in his recent book, *Ghosts of My Life: Writings on Depression, Hauntology and Lost Futures*, that neo-liberalism is not only exhausting, but has created an ideological form of misery where 'we'—and I think he is only referring to those mainly white men on the political left who have positioned themselves as the leading diagnosticians—are not only mired in cynicism and exhaustion, but importantly are depressed. These hauntological depressions are aligned to what is perceived as the disappearance or loss of the capacity to anticipate a world that is radically different to the one we live in.¹ I will not say anything more about this particular brand of hauntology as the lost futures that Fisher and others refer to pay little or no mind to feminism, queer theories or critical race studies. They also tend to ignore the long histories of critical approaches to psychopathology that predate the white, masculine political left appropriating depression as their leitmotif.

I do think that the lament for lost futures that underpins the hauntologies of the masculine political left raises an important genealogical question. We live in a time where futurisms of all kinds abound. A range of cultural configurations of knowledge and power have converged that make predicting and importantly shaping the future a present concern. We hear continually about lost generations (those paying the price for the financial crash and austerity politics), of lost futures (alternatives to capitalism), and the loss of the planet, or at least of the human ushered in by the anthropocene. Trend-spotting—predicting the future—is big business. But of course the trend-spotting taking place is not crystal-ball gazing, and neither is it a solely human activity. Non-human agencies are at the forefront of not simply predicting, but in a recursive relationship, also shaping what we will come to want and of course buy. These new regimes of anticipation and speculative forecast exist alongside bleak and sometimes melancholic fantasies that there is nothing to be done, that imagination is lost, that bodies are defeated, worn out, debilitated and that this is both a symptom and a source of revenue for finance capitalism. As Puar (2012) claims,

¹Interestingly, Fisher (2014, p. 59) defines depression as a '(neuro)philosophical (dis)position' and as a 'theory about the world, about life'.

‘debility pays’, and as Berlant (2011) argues, ‘slow death’ marks out precarious populations where debility of different kinds is the norm.

Puar’s (2009, 2012) call for an affective politics that can transform this economics of debility is one that I am sympathetic to. However, I do worry about the extent to which some of the conceptual framing of debility, depression and bodily vulnerabilities can allow a purchase on what is at stake. What does it allow us to see and what might it obscure? Some of the tensions might be put down to theoretical differences, different genealogies and intellectual formations, and of course as Puar notes, these differences can be generative as well as divisive. This might include different approaches to affect; to the question of what bodies can do; what counts as a body and how to understand the body’s capacity to affect and be affected. I do worry though that we might be losing specificity. The Spinozist reformulation of bodies from essence to capacity that underpins this approach is important, but it is very generic—it can include magnets and heat, for example (see Blackman and Venn, 2010).

In the next section I want to raise some questions about the normative injunction to move beyond human exceptionalism and identity politics as part of an affective politics of debility. One of the generative aspects of this conceptual move is specifically in the distribution of agencies to non-human actors and objects. However, is this at risk of losing other ways of understanding the politics of subjectification? Can we simply replace people with bodies and what do we risk in such a move? Many people have raised concerns about such moves and what we might be throwing out at the expense of replacing subjectification or subject formation with the modulation of affective capacities and non-human agencies. The question of how to theorise the matter of materialisation is important (perhaps even more so in the context of the biomedicalisation of depression and psychosis), but I wonder what problems are created when this is posed in opposition to the politics of identity and recognition. I have sympathies with all of these moves, but they also leave me perplexed and vexed. How do they do justice to people such as Patsy and Sharon, who have struggled to articulate what might be called a politics of recognition where their voices will be listened to—not their singular voices but the voices they hear that de-stabilise the boundaries between self and other, past and present, material and immaterial, voices that they want to be recognised as having a reality and validity and to be listened to and transformed as part of a collective psychic apparatus? (see Cho, 2008)

debility, psychosis and affective politics

In this section I will consider this issue in relation to the relationship between voice hearing and abuse, which has been convincingly established by research associated with the Hearing Voices Network (see Read *et al.*, 2009). It is this research that was drawn on by a judge in New Zealand who ruled that a man’s schizophrenia was caused by childhood abuse.² The voice hearer had claimed that his voices were linked to the sexual abuse he had suffered as a child. The insurance company, ACC, had refused this claim for compensation arguing that schizophrenia was a biological illness. The judge over-ruled this judgement after reading the voluminous evidence that links voice hearing to abuse. This evidence had in part been documented over many years by the Hearing Voices Network, bringing together the traces and fragments of

²LS v Accident Compensation Corporation [2013] NZACC 385 (22 November 2013). Available at <http://www.nzlii.org/nz/cases/NZACC/2013/385.html> [last accessed 27 March 2015].

different voices into a collective psychic apparatus (Cho, 2008). This evidence, which functions as a form of mediated perception, partially enables the story I am now trying to tell. The collective evidence refutes the *blame the brain for everything* discourse, which reduces voice hearing to bio-molecular processes.

The Hearing Voices Network, for example, have been opening up and exploring the links between psychopathology and negative states of being with the often unspoken or submerged social histories of abuse and trauma. The current chair of the Hearing Voices Network in the United Kingdom, Dillon (2009), for example, was subjected to abuse by paedophiles and this was sanctioned by members of her own family. It is only with the social histories of institutionalised sexual abuse that this is now gaining public recognition—in the United Kingdom the cases of Jimmy Saville, Rolf Harris and other male celebrity and political figures involved in institutionalised sexual abuse for decades—that these patterns of shame, secrecy and silence are being shattered. These links have not been documented or officially told, or are only now beginning to enter into official discourse. This has been intensified and amplified by the effective use of social media by activists, experts by experience and collaborative researchers. This includes a TEDx Talk by the voice hearer Eleanor Longden,³ and the curation and collation of a voice hearing archive of materials challenging biomedical definitions of voice hearing. These materials are posted to a Facebook account by the Hearing Voices Movement Media Watch.⁴ Alongside these practices and the burgeoning online communities forming around these new objects, entities, artefacts and stories,⁵ there are also a range of activists, experts by experience and collaborative researchers using Twitter and particular hashtags such as #MHchat@hearingvoice to extend, distribute and mediate public perceptions of voice hearing.

These practices are enabling individual stories to become linked to, animated and amplified by the sheer range of data now available for public consumption. This data has caught the attention of broadcast media, journalism and a range of blogs helping to re-shape the public communication of science in this area. As a new archive is being assembled and shaped, drawing the parameters of what the ‘proper object’ of such an archive might be, what comes to the foreground is the contested question of what it means to hear voices as it is constructed, enacted and evidenced between service users, researchers and professionals. What we find are unsettled controversies, displaced genealogies and attempts by some scientists to refigure, re-imagine, appropriate and extend the Hearing Voices Network as an evidence base for already-existing theories of voice hearing to be found within various psychological and neuroscientific theories.

Although arguably many of the researchers in the field are more open to the humanities and interdisciplinary forms of research,⁶ the relationship between abuse and trauma and institutionalised histories of racism, sexism and homophobia are often reduced to internal psychological mechanisms and the identification of cognitive deficits (in distinguishing between supposedly internally and externally generated phenomena). Although this research is committed to a psycho-social-biological approach to voice hearing, this is conceived within a narrow framework of ‘interaction effects’, which reinstates a

³Eleanor Longden, The voices in my head, TEDTalk filmed February 2013. Available at http://tedcom.talks/eleanor_longden_the_voices_in_my_head.html [last accessed 27 March 2015].

⁴Hearing Voices Movement Media Watch, Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/HVMMediaWatch?pnref=story> [last accessed 27 March 2015].

⁵See Hearing Voices Network: <http://hvn.forumatic.com/> [last accessed 27 March 2015].

⁶See Durham University, Hearing the Voice research project, <https://www.dur.ac.uk/hearingthevoice/> [last accessed 11 August 2015].

normative conception of the singularly bounded psychological subject as a focus. What is at stake are ways of theorising subjectivity and mind–matter relations that exceed such a normative and individualised conception of personhood.

debility, affectivity and the renewed grounds for political feeling

In this section I will consider what conceptions of debility and affectivity might open up in terms of these attempts to de-pathologise depression, anxiety, psychosis, disability and other forms of bodily vulnerability and to see these as the site for a transformed relational politics. The extent to which the concept of debilities can adequately address the injustices done to others is of course part of the important framing of this special issue. As we have seen, the question of the relationships between the personal realm of feeling and the contingencies of neo-liberal capitalisms is ushering in a new form of affective politics. It is perhaps important here to explore how affect is mobilised within some discussions of debility and the reach that this concept might have. Puar's (2012) work is seminal in recasting disability as debility and therefore indicative in this respect. Debility becomes linked to affect through its apparent de-stabilising of the binaries seen to underpin identity politics and the politics of recognition. These include distinctions between gay and straight, disabled and able-bodied, human and non-human, normative and non-normative, affect and emotion, ontology and epistemology, living and dying and so forth (also see Goodley, 2014). This is often described as a post-human approach to subjectivity, which is underpinned by a Deleuzian reading of affect. This de-stabilisation in part is meant to turn analytic attention to the exploration of commonalities rather than differences (e.g., contained within the category of sexuality). This includes a pre-emptive or 'anticipatory disability' (Puar, 2012, p. 152), which refuses the distinction between able-bodied and disablement to explore a future temporal logic, where 'we are (all) haunted by the disability to come' (*ibid.*). The important questions Puar poses (referring to McCruer's 'crip-theory') are 'which bodies are made to pay for "progress"? Which debilitated bodies can be reinvigorated for neoliberalism, and which cannot?' (*ibid.*, p. 153).

The concept of affect points then to processes that are taken to transcend identity categories. This move is bolstered by referring to Rai's (2009) 'ecologies of sensation', where affect refers to sensations, energies, feelings and bodily dispositions that characterise *affective capacity* and potential. Attention is directed to the corresponding 'forms of attention, distraction, practice and repetition', which distribute, capture and modulate these capacities in particular ways (*ibid.*, p. 151). Here Puar is referring particularly to social media practices that produce new forms of habituation, comportment, habit and sensation, which cut across the presumed differences between gay and straight identities. Affective capacity in this context is a generic term used to refer to those feelings, sensations, bodily dispositions and potentialities that power works on and through. Affective capacity is bodily capacity and draws attention to the liveliness and materiality of matter and to processes taken to exceed and de-stabilise the primacy of cognition and conscious attention in theories of power (such as interpellation). As Puar (2012, p. 154) argues, 'affect entails not only a dissolution of the subject but, more significantly, a dissolution of the stable contours of the organic body, as forces of energy are transmitted, shared, circulated'.

This work has a democratising impulse in that it seeks to re-distribute what it means to be incapacitated beyond the claims of particular disabled bodies, those recognised within medical, legal and insurance terms as disabled (specifically within a US context). Part of this move is an invitation to those who might inhabit normalcy to reconsider their own relationships to time, as well as marking out populations who carry greater statistical risks in relation to disease, illness, work productivity and so forth. Puar describes this as ‘risk-coding’—moving bodily capacities beyond discrete organic bodies (or individuated bodies), to distributed population bodies whose capacities are modulated and subject to surveillance within contemporary biopolitical strategies. This move, specifically in conceptual language, might involve an ontological shift from ‘the subject of disability to the subject of prognosis’—where we are all essentially living on borrowed time (Puar, 2009, p. 165). This move re-positions capacity, Puar suggests, beyond what is described as the myopia of representational politics to a consideration of the statistical probabilities, notions of risk, chance, luck, fate and accident, that interrupt and interfere with the uneven, multiple and unknown time-lines that bodily capacities of all kinds are subject to.

Debility within this context is unknowable and not located within particular discrete bodies. Debility is rather approached at the level of population patterns, correlations, risks and statistical probabilities. One consequence of this move is that attention can be directed to the hidden injuries of neo-liberalism that are covered over by particular categorisations (also see Gill, 2009). These are registered in chronic individuated responses (what Berlant, 2011, terms a temporality of the endemic), not usually aggregated at the level of population statistics. Berlant (2011) has described this in another context as ‘slow death’. Another consequence of this move is that attention is directed to those populations not usually conceived as disabled. This creates a tension as this move can also potentially draw money, resources, time and labour away from the uneven distribution of power, vulnerabilities and the differential *politics of subjectification* (rather than identity politics)—that is, how different people *live* the conditions of their existence and oppression. As attention might also include an examination of the debilities of the privileged middle classes, there is for me an unease carried by the mantra that we are all depressed or wearing out under neo-liberalism, or even being asked to reflect upon ‘to what degree is one depressed?’ (Puar, 2009, p. 156). Although I am very sympathetic to the recasting of suffering as *ordinary* rather than exceptional, I am wary of the displacement aligned to such a politics of de-stabilisation. It is in danger of producing a rather flat ontology of distributed agencies that covers over or minimises the politics of entitlement, status and appropriation that might be considered an unfortunate side effect of some of these moves. I appreciate that the tensions are important, as Puar (2012) argues, but a residual feeling of unease remains.

I do not have time in this article to engage in any depth with the conceptual framing of this affective politics, but rather I want to reflect upon the important question of what affect does to our theorising. What we mean when we refer to affect is of course an important and vexed question and one that might usefully be opened up rather than closed down by the concept of debility. One key problem with the opposition to a particular version of identity politics as a specific politics of recognition is that this does not exhaust the variety of different ways within critical psychology, psychosocial studies and cultural theory that subjectivity, affectivity and the politics of subjectification have been examined and analysed. This is particularly so in relation to those theories and approaches that have not significantly shaped North American queer theory, and the affect theories that often circulate within this genre. There are minor literatures, theories and concepts that are often overlooked and invite re-consideration.

I am particularly interested in how we can develop a mediated and distributed form of perception that works to aggregate the traces, fragments, displaced actors and submerged narratives into what Cho (2008, p. 156) has called a more 'collective psychic apparatus'.

queer science

I have tried to develop some of the grounds for such a collective psychic apparatus and affective politics in my recent book (see Blackman, 2012). The arguments are somewhat at odds with some of the assumptions made about affect in many affective traditions of writing. In short, I have tried to be led in my own work by a genealogical method that traces what became excluded from psychology and exceeds the normative conception of the singularly bounded and unified psychological subject. These potentials also exist as traces in the past of psychology, a pre-psychological archive, or *Queer Science* (see Blackman, 2014a, b), which took seriously the multiplicity of selfhood and the distributed nature of psyche, for example. It shares an ancestry with psychic forms of research and experimentation, and includes the experiments on automatic reading and writing carried out by Gertrude Stein and Leon Solomons under the tutelage of Hugo Munsterberg at William James' Harvard Psychological Laboratory (see Blackman, 2014a). I am terming this a future-psychology, or psychology-yet-to-come, which represents the lost futures of psychology and the traces of experimenting with affective processes that are more in tune with the post-humanism, vitalism and materiality of many strands of affect theory.

I have also been led by texts that many voice hearers have told me they have found useful. One of these was shared by Patsy Hague, who along with many other voice hearers told me how instructive a particular text written by the maverick psychologist Jaynes (1976), *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, was to her. This is a cult book that is more known for inspiring William Burroughs, Daniel Dennett and Richard Dawkins. I became interested in how this book resonated and spoke to some voice hearers. In short, the book presents the possibility that voice hearing might be thought of as a normal mode of communication, which only became excluded and relegated to pathology once the concept of a singular unified 'I' with distinct self-consciousness came into being. It is only on this basis that what we might call voices from the Other become seen as disruptive forms of psychopathology, rather than distributed forms of perception. Distributed forms of perception assume that we are always situated, speak and are spoken through by a range of others, human and non-human. Although we might see such distributed forms of perception most visibly in social media practices that allow traces and fragments to become linked together to assume a collective authorial voice, there are traces of these more distributed and collective forms of perception in the past, and particularly those pasts that have been marginalised, disavowed, overlooked and disqualified from most contemporary forms of psychology and neuroscience (see Harrington, 1987; Blackman, 2014b).

restoring social links

I want to begin to conclude this article by making links to Cho (2008) and her ground-breaking book, *Haunting the Korean Diaspora: Shame, Secrecy, Silence and the Forgotten War*. This critical memoir describes the process of attempting to see, hear and listen with and through another's voice as an ethics

of entanglement, one where you are implicated in the process and where listening is not a distinctly human activity. She also grew up with a mother who heard voices and 'went mad'. She felt that her mother's voices communicated something of her migration story that had never been told. This story and its hidden potentialities were submerged and surrounded by patterns of shame, secrecy and silence. She argues in the memoir that the voices speak to a social link to her mother's past that had been foreclosed. In order to stage what her mother's voices might be saying, she constructs an archive that connects different actors, agencies, entities, traces, fragments, intensities and atmospheres that might allow the voices to speak. She describes this as a form of diasporic vision or mediated perception, which connects what we might term the non-representational or the affective. This includes an exploration of artwork made by second-generation Korean Americans who had grown up in similar patterns of secrecy and silence and who had expressed this through traces, fragments, intensities, sensations and atmospheres. This might include patterns of rhythmic movement, gesture and inchoate feelings. The archive also includes media traces (documentaries, photography, film), social science research (e.g., evidence located within social work literatures), and interviews and memoirs, which all contribute to and shape specific technologies of listening. These technologies allow her in a speculative and performative orientation to see how unspoken histories might become distributed across space and time, sometimes transmuting into hallucinations that haunt subsequent generations.

These traumatic histories were deposited in particular seemingly unconnected spaces and places. Examples of this include social work articles detailing a common narrative that charts Korean women's migration to the United States as GI brides as a journey from rural poverty in Korea to psychosis in the United States, in different media, including semi-fictional film images, memoirs and witness stories and accounts, newspaper articles, interviews, secondary histories, and in the gaps, silences and omissions of official historical records—what has been told and what has been left out. This allows her to intuit a sense that something is wrong. This points towards haunting as a form of cultural mediation—that as Gordon (2008) has eloquently argued, one might be driven by a profound sense that there is something more to say, *that one should look for something more than now*. As Cho (2008, p. 156) argues, the capacity to 'see' cannot be registered in 'any single place and moment in time, and the act by which this perception occurs is not the result of a single or isolated agency but of several working in concert or parallel'.

conclusion: activist networks and the importance of staging new forms of collective psychic apparatuses

Cho has been very influenced by some of the activist work surrounding voice hearing and its reconfiguring as a meaningful modality of communication. These practices have emerged from diverse communities who have been brave enough and sometimes out of necessity have shared the traces, fragments, gaps and absences carried by their voices, taking what have been considered distinctly psychological processes out of a human and closed psychological apparatus. Voice hearing is a phenomenon that suggests that we can be moved by pasts, both known and unknown. These pasts are often experienced as non-subjective or extra-personal agencies that operate in registers that might be considered non-cognitive, and which challenge distinctions between the material and immaterial. The definition of voice hearing or what psychiatry tends to term hallucinations is interesting in this respect. Psychiatry defines voice hearing, or

what are usually described as auditory hallucinations, as being a 'sensory perception without external stimulation of the relevant sense organ' (DSM III, p. 498). The perception has what is considered the reality of a 'true perception' and can be acted upon in the way one might act upon so-called normal perceptions—that is, it can lead to action, change, transformation, to movement or inaction. Change is not, however, voluntarist, and the profound remaking of subjectivity that voice hearers describe requires the actions of many eyes and ears, raising questions about what it means to give voice and take oneself and one's experiences as the subject and object of reflection (see Blackman, 2001, 2012; Dillon and Hornstein, 2013). If we take the experiences of activist groups such as the Hearing Voices Network seriously, this requires thinking about different and multiple temporalities, of multiple pasts in the present, and particularly those pasts that have not or indeed cannot be articulated by conversantly self-present subjects. These pasts might be 'unrepresentable', unsaid or foreclosed (Davoine and Guadilliere, 2004) and require what Cho (2008, p. 156) calls a 'new form of collective psychic apparatus'. These arguments tally with other forms of distributed perception mediating the experience of sexism, for example, such as the Everyday Sexism Project,⁷ which links and articulates the traces, fragments, disqualified and disavowed experiences that speak together as a powerful collective authorial voice.

I think it is at the nexus of the challenges of staging new forms of collective psychic apparatus that queer theory, critical race studies and feminisms have much to offer. Queer theory, critical race studies and feminisms have done much to de-pathologise so-called negative emotions—shame, failure, melancholy, depression—and to critically and creatively explore some of the new forms of attachment and affiliation that have been created and forged, often in conditions not of people's choosing. I do think there is much more work to be done in collaboration with user and activist groups, those whose voices often do not find their way into the academy. Their stories are often not told and haunt the academy and the theories we develop. My question is how we can do justice to these people and their experiences and what they might make of some of the theoretical language and ontological assumptions currently being deployed, which are in danger of replacing specificity with new forms of universalism based on generic concepts of affectivity and debility. These might work in the classroom, but not for those whose lives we often have little or no impact in relation to. There is so much more to say on these matters and the creative and critical questions that this poses for the interventions we might make. My conclusion really is simple: in the new foregrounding of experience that the turn to affect is orchestrating, we must not do away with the critical lessons we have learnt from the past. I also would suggest that we pay close attention to the very specific conditions out of which different people write and which shape their concerns and questions. These do not always translate well into different contexts—nor, I think, should they.

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⁷The Everyday Sexism Project: <http://everydaysexism.com> and #EverydaySexism@EverydaySexism [both last accessed 27 March 2015].

Mass Hysteria: Critical Psychology and Media Studies (with Valerie Walkerdine, 2001). She teaches courses that span critical media psychology, affect studies, embodiment and body studies, and experimentation in the context of art/science. She is particularly interested in phenomena that have puzzled scientists, artists, literary writers and the popular imagination for centuries, including automaticity, voice hearing, suggestion and telepathy. She is currently working on a new project, *Haunted Data: Social Media, Queer Science and Archives of the Future*.

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