

ILLEGIBLE RAGE: YOUNG WOMEN'S POST-FEMINIST DISORDERS.

**BOX ONE ' A LITTLE BIT OF ANOREXIA, A LITTLE BIT OF BULIMIA.  
I'M NOT TOALLY OK NOW, BUT I DON'T THINK ANY WOMAN IS'.  
AMY WINEHOUSE INTERVIEWED IN THE *DAILY MIRROR* OCT. 2006**

**'THE STATE CULTIVATES MELANCHOLIA AMONG ITS CITIZENRY  
PRECISELY AS A WAY OF DISSIMULATING AND DISPLACING ITS OWN  
AUTHORITY' JUDITH BUTLER IN *THE PSYCHIC LIFE OF POWER* 1997 P  
191.**

### **Introduction: Normative Discontent**

This lecture is taken from two chapters in the forthcoming book *Post- Feminist Disorders: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (McRobbie 2007). These chapters are titled *Illegible Rage*, and *Subculture and the Art of Survival*. The lecture tonight falls into 6 sections. **First**, what do we mean by post-feminist discontent? **Second** what is the role of the fashion photograph in the production of heterosexual melancholia and how might this connect with post-feminist disorders? **Third**, how can Butler's *The Psychic Life of Power* help us understand young women's self-beratement and the so-called problem of low self-esteem?, **fourth**, might we re-conceptualise youth subcultures in terms of the art of survival? **fifth**, if youth culture is now, however, overtaken by consumer culture, is gender melancholia and illegible rage re-instated in these forms also? and **sixth** and finally, in Tracy Emin's post-feminist art, do we perceive the limits of rage as 'narrative of the self'? In this lecture I develop, in the addressing of pain, injury and young women's discontents, one of the key themes which run through my book, this is that the 'double entanglement' emerges in a period in which, in political culture as well as in popular culture, feminism is both taken into account, where it has become a kind of common sense, and where it is also reviled and repudiated, almost hated. (Here we might refer to Tony Blair's much

quoted comment, that he ‘cant abide the f word’.) As I have argued, this entails a process where feminism is referred to, it is taken into account in order that it can be disavowed as no longer necessary. The other element of the double entanglement comprises of a similar, wider action. There is an invoking and positive acknowledgement of liberal, even left values in regard to sexual and ethnic minorities, which then permits in a neo-liberal context, the subtle undoing of those radical agendas associated with more combative politics of anti-racism, multi-culturalism and of sexuality. Where it is commonplace to read about the end of sexual politics, the end of feminism, or the end of multi-culturalism, one of my arguments has been that this invoking of an end that has happened, which might also be expected to bring it to that end, inevitably carries a shadow of failure, that is failure to bring an absolute end to such phenomena as these, and contemporary political culture and its loyal servant popular culture, are haunted by what they repudiate, and this then re-emerges as melancholia and loss . For young women today who have, on the basis of their education and also their family life, and even through being exposed to elements within popular culture (popular feminism), become 'gender aware', this haunting takes the form of melancholia, which in turn is manifest in ‘illegible rage’ a term I borrow from Butler’s *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997).

What do we mean by post-feminist disorders? The spiralling of feminine discontents and disorders in relation to body image has reached new heights in the last decade, and the routine accusations that the media, in particular magazines, play a key role in the ‘cultural production of female psychopathology’ have achieved the status of sociological banalities (Blackman 2003). Stories of these discontents are endlessly repeated, they are the focus of cyclical patterns of public debate and moral panic. Narrative accounts, visual images and wider political discussion (including the Body Image Summit in 2000 hosted at the Cabinet Office ) of these many afflictions, from the old to the apparently new, are constitutive of a whole realm of anxiety now firmly positioned in the *popular feminine public domain*. From the pro-anorexia websites, to magazines like *Grazia*, which, in a slightly more reflective mode than the downmarket celebrity magazines, looks for ways, each week to subject the female body to new forms of assessment and judgement, to Sunday supplements like *Observer Woman* (also informed by feminism) to the wider press eagerly seeking

out new angles in the coverage of routine events like the new season's fashion collections and doing so for example, by whipping up of a debate about the designers who only employ models so thin that they fit into Size 00 clothes, we could call this the making-up of young womanhood in such a way as to institutionalise pathology. There is an increase in the range of demarcated pathologies, associated almost exclusively with young women, and in the numbers of those who suffer from a spectrum of conditions seemingly connected to body image and low self esteem ie self- starvation, bulimia, self-harming including cutting, binge drinking resulting in hospitalisation, drug abuse, suicidal behaviour, aggression, depression and feelings of worthlessness.

We need not look far to be confronted with reports, images, testimonies, narratives, fiction and non-fictional accounts of 'female complaints'. From short-lived stories in the press (two overweight working class girls meet through the internet, seem to get involved in a relationship with each other, but isolated and experiencing bullying at school plan a suicide pact, where one girl dies and the other survives) to graphic factual TV like Channel Four's *Brat Camp for Girls* showing extreme degrees of mental distress on the part of teenage girls whose excessive drinking, drug taking and violent behaviour in the home, prompts fear, anger and despondency on the part of their mothers as well as themselves. Alongside this there are of course the celebrity stories which, because of the entertainment value produce new dimensions to old double standards, in the same week that Amy Winehouse topped the charts with a song where she described not wanting to go into rehab despite the advice of her record company, press reports on the five young women sex workers murdered in Ipswich commented on their addiction to heroin and crack cocaine and the lack of rehab provision for ordinary girls like these.

Of course there is enormous variation in these illnesses, from the middle class girl or woman (eg 'self-confessed' 34 year old journalist Polly Vernon the *Observer* 14<sup>th</sup> Jan 2007) who is mildly anorexic, to the girl who has a full-blown drug habit and is also vulnerable in other ways including being poor. But for the sake of this discussion, and in a non-clinical and non-scientific way, it is I think, possible to gather these together and consider them under the heading illegible rage. The most common responses proffered to these various forms of distress by medical practitioners as well as various

other experts include the new cultural norms of female perfectibility promoted and endorsed in girls' and women's magazines and by consumer culture, and the way in which as the British Medical Association put it 'today's young woman is expected to strive for perfection in all spheres' but, the report continues, 'achieving and maintaining a feminine identity doubly compromises the mental health of females'. Here we have it, seeking to achieve a feminine identity makes women and girls ill! Being, as Butler would have it, 'culturally intelligible' as a girl makes one ill. However my argument here is that the forces of social regulation operate in this context to normalise this post-feminist scenario, so as to avert the possibility of questions being asked of the sort associated with second wave of feminism. There is pre-emptive mobilisation which again takes feminism into account by borrowing from some of its texts and manuals and even acknowledges this debt (as though to say, feminism did achieve some of its goals.). There is no shortage of advice, support, there is a vast proliferation of expertise in this field of female pathology. The magazines are asked to self-regulate in regard to the use of extremely thin models, and every so often, usually in response to a tragic event, government gestures in the direction of support or resources. And likewise a tragic event gives rise to any number of follow up stories, for example in *Grazia* a cousin of the Brazilian model Ana Carolina Reston who recently died of anorexia got the opportunity to provide her insight into the case. Shelley Budgeon shows in her empirical work, how there is solidaristic assurance to be found among women, that these complaints are normal, part and parcel of being a woman (Budgeon 2003). They become the ways in which we understand ourselves as women. This is mirrored in the world of magazines which foreclose on social criticism, in favour of endless genres which because of the repetition, because of the cycle of disorders which are reported, because of the very obviousness of the contradiction, with super-slim models on one page, and good advice about overcoming low-self esteem on the other, work in effect to confirm a notion of female confinement, not through resignation or passivity, but through what looks like the opposite, the mobilisation of post-feminist styles of agency and capacity on the part of the individual who will nevertheless struggle to overcome whichever of these ills she suffers from. The production of the category of girl along these lines and by means of these new norms of classification which include her ambition, her desire to achieve, her willingness to try hard etc, is seen not as the 'violence of regulatory norms' as Butler might put it, but as enabling, and this is reinforced through an

accompanying discourse which suggests that girls have never had it so good, and that after all their male counterparts are also now experiencing new dynamics of hardship. The common-sense running through this kind of language also serves to undercut the need for any new feminist initiative since in many regards women are after all doing better than their male peers. This also deflects attention away from any idea of a patriarchal authority, or from any socio-political rationale which is responsible for feminist disorder, in favour of pragmatic consternation or concern that achievement and freedom seems to have produced, by some mysterious process, such high levels of distress. The attributing of normative discontent to young women has become a key mechanism for the production of sexual difference, it provides a vocabulary for understanding the female bodily-ego as prone to anxiety, as lacking in certain respects, as insufficient in regard to self-esteem. At the same time because feminism has had a presence in the recent past in a range of social institutions, because it is something that young women are likely to have literally bumped into, particularly in education, the fact that they become 'gender aware', that they know and understand that these pathologies are actually connected to the kind of society we live in, and the expectations of heterosexuality and consumer culture, then, even when it is reviled or ignored, feminism has some kind of shadow presence, it must be actively abandoned or relinquished for a certain kind of life to proceed, the cost of which is melancholia, or even self-violence which is, as Butler puts it 'a refracted indictment of social forces'..

### **Fascinated Looking and Desiring: The Politics of Heterosexual Melancholia.**

The glossy magazines, and in particular the fashion images are routinely blamed for playing a role in the rise of eating disorders and other illnesses associated with body image, but debate rarely does more than skim the surface. During the 1980s and into the 1990s various feminist theorists working within psycho-analytic theory examined the processes of fascinated-looking which are associated with the consumption of fashion photographs. This work provides great insight into this form of visual culture and how it works at a psychic level. These arguments are radical in that they explore the way in which these visual images produce fantasy spaces for young women which

appear to be removed from the power of the heterosexual matrix. I would say they operate at a 'distance from heterosexuality' which of course puts them at odds with the other content in the magazines. This genre remains a constant feature in the popular culture enjoyed by young women, although styles change, the basic conventions remain surprisingly resistant to change, the models and the way they look, the settings, the narrative features, the camera angles and the organisation of space within the images, are all established within certain quite rigid frames. Diana Fuss argues that these images conjure a sphere of female homosexuality, they depict same sex eroticism which is a 'mysterious' requirement of the genre to provide pleasure to its viewers, but this also presents a danger to patriarchal authority, with the result that such images are carefully controlled (Fuss 1994). This genre becomes according to Fuss a site for specific forms of cultural intervention. In an argument close to Butler's she suggests that in order to uphold the prohibition against homosexuality, culture must invoke this desire between women, so as to properly eliminate it. However this illicit desire leaves a trace, it becomes a kind of haunting which hangs round the edges of the fashion image. Borrowing from Kristeva and her concept of the homosexual-maternal facet, Fuss also argues that the fashion image locks its viewers into a kind of re-run of the pre-mirror phase through the endless looking from a certain angle at faces which are so beautiful they are brimming with maternal jouissance and plenitude. This produces an interplay of pleasure and panic, since the viewer is reminded of a time of unbounded pleasure but also of the fear of total dependence. And finally the tendency in this genre to cut up the body into parts, showing legs, or arms, or other areas, is also evocative of the early post-mirror phase when the girl is asking 'is what I see, a me?', 'do my parts make up a whole', 'what is it that I have lost?' means that the fashion photograph is a cultural form which is literally overloaded with psychic significance, and since we know from Freud and feminist theorists including Rose and Butler that the girl's passage through the oedipal stage is always imperfectly realised, then we might concur that this genre which incites fascinated looking, is somehow central to the shakiness of the acquisition of feminine identity. Fashion photographs replay over and over again distance from heterosexuality, the models gazes are distracted, they turn away from the camera, refuse the male gaze, they are sullen, they are as Rabine argues caught up in exchanges of looks between each other which suggest an 'indifference to lack' and a kind of sexual self-sufficiency which is more than simply narcissistic and auto-erotic

(Rabine 2004). These are frequently semihallucinatory images, they often portray a seemingly drug-induced delirium, the models are always somehow wanting, they are caught up in some inaccessible reverie, or they seem depressed, even unstable, neurotic. It is my contention that there is more failure in the 'strategic deployment of the homospectatorial look' than there is success, especially in a post-feminist context where gender antagonisms, discontent and the continuing imbalance of power between men and women in the everyday world, provide a rationale for some distance or reprieve from the incessant demands of the heterosexual matrix at the level of fantasy. Alongside the nostalgia for some time past, indeed on this basis of something lost, that remains somehow out of reach or unspeakable, the fashion image is pregnant with undirected and impossible desire, always just and no more caught within the frames of the pictures and somehow held at bay, this produces tension, some undisclosed preference for sexual otherness or a sexual elsewhere. The fashion image visualises the disturbance which accrues from the interplay of desire with constraint, with models hemmed in by the frame, confined in the fashion asylum. These settings become the institutionalised site for the playing out of heterosexual melancholy, the same sex object which once was loved but must be abandoned, in order that gender intelligibility proceeds, is incorporated as unavowable loss, if not, as Butler puts it in the body, then on the body. (*The Devil Wears Prada* literally enacts all of these themes and was top of the box office for some weeks in the Autumn across Europe and also in the US). The fashion image works as a frame to contain this loss, and also to compensate for it. Containment also works metaphorically in that, with the loss also of feminism (and with it the possibilities it promised for love between women), it seems women have no alternative but to recognise themselves instead within the realm of the normal pathologies which the state and popular culture 'cultivate'. In a very direct expression of many of these themes, a recent report in *The Observer* magazine about the anorexia-related death of the young Brazilian model Ana Carolina Reston quoted from a letter to her mother shortly before she died. In it she wrote, 'If I could I'd like to go back to being four, clinging onto you as if I were still in your womb, so that nobody could harm me' (Tom Philips Skin and Bones *The Observer* Supplement 14<sup>th</sup> Jan p 28).

## **Raging to 'Avoid Death'.**

**BOX TWO 'I like pin-up girls, I'm more of a boy than a girl, Im not a lesbian tho' not before a Sambucca anyway' Amy Winehouse.**

In her account of melancholia and rage Butler is not talking explicitly about young women, nor about feminism. Instead she develops further a discussion started in *Gender Trouble* about the prohibition against same sex love and the consequences of being forced to abandon that object. She asks how does the power of these specific social norms impact on the psyche? She says this does not happen directly but rather indirectly. We cannot simply blame the prohibition for causing these feminine disorders, in some sort of unmediated way. But the object which is incorporated as unavowable loss produces a critical agency which then berates the ego, turning it against itself, and 'animating its emergence in the form of a power over the self'. And this abiding with the prohibition against same sex love produces forms of self-beratement, more acutely for women than for men, for the reason that femininity is always imperfectly realised. This turning in against the self, she argues, can be understood as a 'recasting of social plaint as psychic self judgement'. Butler draws on Bhabha's re-working of melancholia as a political analogy. If for Bhabha this state of violence against the self or self loathing is a kind of insurrectionary rage, a rebellion put down, it is also in Butler's words a 'nascent political text'. The greater the power of the state to cultivate this melancholic self-loathing the more 'shameless is the self-exposure' of those who wish to proclaim their self-worthlessness. (There is no shortage of examples, from Emin to Winehouse to name the currently most voluble) At the same time the nature of this loss must remain elusive and 'nameless', opaque and silenced. The ideal, whether it is for love, liberty, freedom from oppression, freedom from racial hatred or freedom from sexual injustice, must remain 'unavowed'. My question here is, can a case also be made for feminism to have been such an ideal, one which challenged as a political antagonism the normative ideal of femininity which now finds itself aggressively re-instated? Repudiated and vilified in dominant political culture despite having gained degrees of effectivity (in legislation

and as gender awareness) its only existence for a younger generation of women today is as unavowable loss. The State, media and popular culture converge in the production of female melancholia and illegible rage to pre-empt the re-invention of feminist politics through a wide range of hyper-individualising strategies and technologies of the self. These include expectations of individual excellence and an ethos of self-perfectibility through endless personal effort and self monitoring; various techniques of self-help for ego-bolstering and for the re-gaining of mastery over one's own life, and the making available of media spaces (also cyberspace) for the speaking out of feminine pathologies as a means of regaining self-control. The cyclical, repetitive and ritualistic features of these practices of the self become established over time as constitutive of the domain of femininity. It is through this interlocking apparatus of incitements and interdictions, pleasures and punishments that the young woman is called upon to comply with the demands of the heterosexual matrix, on the basis that she is now seemingly empowered.

Young women today are three times over subjects of melancholic self-beratement, first through the forced abandonment of the same sex love object, second through the loss incurred through oedipalisation, and third, through the loss of the ideal of feminism and sexual equality. The enforced loss of homosexual desire as a requirement of the heterosexual matrix contributes to melancholia and the namelessness or unspeakability of such a loss. This gives rise by a circuitous path to illegible rage against the self which has absorbed the loss of the same sex subject into the psyche but which then sets this lost object up as a critical agency. ('It is I who is wrong') The 'unthought known' of gender awareness resists the voice of the (older) feminist who like Butler appears to be in possession of some keys for unlocking this prison cell, not just because the melancholic does not want to be robbed of the loss which now has a place in her psyche which she is attached to, but also for fear of punishment and the threat of abjection. The afterlife of feminism as a lost ideal (again the unthought known, the social index of gender awareness) is also internalised as that which cannot be avowed. If the 'violence of social regulation' gives rise to impossible demands while also foreclosing on a form of power which might challenge these punitive norms of social approval, the young woman's illegible rage expresses the powerlessness which accrues from the forced abandonment of the feminist ideal. Such forms of self-rebuke span a very wide spectrum from everyday

disappointment in heterosexuality, and normative discontent to suicidal behaviour. But where survivability itself comes into question, where the young anorexic woman is at the brink of self annihilation, Butler sees anger as not entirely without ambivalence. The angry defiant girl now also the subject of competitive individualised aloneness rages also to 'avoid death', the girl cutting herself, or starving herself almost to death, or raging in the confines of the home or bedroom has not completely severed her attachments to the 'allocutory bond', to the social world and thus to life itself. 'Survival does not take place because an autonomous ego exercises autonomy in the face of a countervailing world (ie autonomy is not the solution), on the contrary no ego can emerge except through animating reference to such a world'. The social terms which make survival possible suggest neither coherence or mastery 'indeed by forfeiting the notion of autonomy survival becomes possible'. However conscience negates this social horizon 'as though to infer that survival depends on an act of will'. Quite the opposite argues Butler 'to claim life in such circumstances is to contest the righteous psyche by submission to a sociality that exceeds the bounds of the ego and its autonomy'. This is to argue that the insistent bolstering of the female ego, the requirement of feminine coherence and mastery, are as Butler says forms of violent constraint and female confinement. It is by these means that forms of gender re-stabilisation are secured at a psychic level. Young women now find themselves, if no longer trapped within the home, then confined to the topographies of an unsustainable selfhood, deprived of the possibilities of feminist sociality, and of social critique of masculine domination, and deeply invested in achieving an illusory identity defined according to a rigidly enforced scale of feminine attributes. The question then is what social and (sub) cultural resources are available to young people which are capable of challenging or contesting the violence of prevailing social norms?

## **Subcultures and the Art of Survival?**

Butler continues her interrogation of the limits of selfhood in her most recent books *Precarious Life* and *Giving an Account of the Self*. In each of these texts she reflects on developing an ethics of a dissolved self, whose dissolution takes the form of being for the other, a giving of the self over to the other, and whose survival likewise will actually depend on this radical statement of dependency, relationality and sociality. This is also helpful here, it permits me to revise the casting in sociology and cultural studies of youth subcultures as resistance, and to re-formulate this in terms of 'legible rage' while also proposing that the terms of the social dissolution of self in these formations, while not reflecting the spiritual intensity of the Levinasian encounter envisaged by Butler, nevertheless offer opportunities for young women in doing away with the self through intense sociality, to break the spell of the melancholic attachment to a lost object, and create a social space which appears capable of refusing the narrow confines of gender intelligibility promoted by popular culture. This would be to understand subculture within the language of survival something that in fact Butler does through reference to gay sado-masochistic styles and rituals. She asks 'what sort of styles signal the crisis of survival'? (Butler 2000). Such a comment poses subcultures not just as sites for escapist hedonist peer-group bonding, but as spaces upon which lives depend. Youth subcultures in the last three or so decades have comprised spaces which produce and permit identities less set and secured in the straitjacket of gender. Their intense sociality and investment in the field of socio-political commentary, by symbolic means, including production of music, image, text, also makes them 'nascent political texts'. In black culture, in for example the post-industrial blighted urban ghettos, youth cultures also find definition in the fine lines between life and death. Butler has written about the impoverished Latino transexuals in *Paris Is Burning*, and others including Gilroy have written about the survivalist aesthetics of music in black youth culture. This also leads us back to

Hebdige, it recasts his account of the meaning of style as refusal, as anger, rage and noise. Hebdige understood subcultures as forms which played out and magically resolved tensions which remained subject to rigidity and constraint within the dominant culture. In contrast inside UK youth cultures, a multi-cultural dialogue was being conducted in music, style and body image, and we could also suggest similar processes of gender fluidity were made possible within these subversive spaces.

If for melancholia to be overcome the lost objects of both same sex love and of the feminist ideal need to be killed off for the sake of re-establishing attachment to life and to sexual politics, and if this also requires detachment from a self-berating ego, then the cultural practices of subculture and of group rather than self, can be said to have offered this possibility to young people. It is possible to read activities like *riotgrrrl*, the website *the f word*, the queer subcultures which Halberstam analyses and organisations like *ladyfest* in exactly these terms (Halberstam 2005). Halberstam has argued that there is a tendency in cultural studies to reproduce heterosexually-defined and oedipal notions of generation in relation to understanding both so-called waves of feminism and also to youth cultures. These feminist concerns with generation remain locked into normative temporalities and spatialities which have been dictated by the reproductive dynamics associated with the norms of heterosexual family life. Queer subcultures undermine and re-territorialise the way in which the passage of time is officially encrypted onto the bodies of young people, and especially women. (The regulative dynamics of the so-called biological clock exact their cost, pushing young women into fearfulness, sexual compliancy and acute anxiety in the search for the right father at the right time).

But still, despite this insight from Judith Halberstam, generation remains a feature which shapes our everyday lives, we are, after all, historical subjects, and the spaces for feminist political mobilisation which became available within a certain historical window of opportunity, in the 70s and 80s, are now pre-emptively closed, and young women dis-identify not least for fear of the slur of being associated with old feminism, which means that a new feminist political imaginary, a young women's movement, which would engage in social critique under that heading, would necessarily find its own style, its own agenda, its own means of creating women's autonomy as a form of political agency. But in the era of cultural capitalism,

subculture is now subject to the market, and no form of symbolic activity is so highly valued by forecasters, future analysts, and corporate researchers than those which might have the word subculture attached to them. Private or undesignated or illicit spaces have been so thoroughly opened up to the gaze of those working at the innovative end of consumer culture trends, that there is now a short circuit, an instant connect between clandestine (bedroom) activities and the full glare of publicity and the promise or possibility of success, especially since youth cultures have become informal labour markers for the new creative economy. This instrumentalisation and capitalisation carries the full force of pre-emptive social authority made palatable through celebrity culture. The sociality of youth culture, and much of the socio-political noise they once made is diminished if not extinguished by the capital value such phenomena as these now have. As youth culture is surrendered then to the global cultural economy it becomes indistinguishable from the visibility of the global teenager or the global girl, and with this we see a re-appearance within the orbit of youth and their cultures, signs of numbness, illegible rage, and post-feminist heterosexual melancholia. Two recent films engage directly with this shift in youth culture from highly-legible social rage to individualised numbness and heterosexual melancholy. The film *Thirteen* (dir by C Hardwicke 2003) opens with two 13year old girls seemingly high on substances hitting themselves and each other, and the theme of self harm pervades the film from start to finish. The main character Tracy exudes undirected fury, and panic and fear resonate through her anger, and her aggression against herself, but the viewer, like her mother in the film, remains perplexed as to the reason for her anger, and this precisely is the point of the film, that her rage is indeed illegible not least because her attraction to the 'hot' bad-girl in the school, leads her to pursue this attachment through the route of becoming a best-friend and an accomplice in drugs, drink and sex with boys, but also because in a post-feminist environment where there is no longer a double standard, where girls have won some freedoms to take part in illicit activities there is nevertheless in place a prohibition against those activities including same sex- love associated with socially-unacceptable feminism. These both require a decisive stepping outside into strictly demarcated queer spaces. *Thirteen* depicts a world where the fashioning of a credible female self brings with it uncalculable injuries and unfathomable rage. Likewise the film directed by Lynn Ramsay adapted from the novel by Alan Warner titled *Morvern Callar* explores a similar set of tensions this time on the part of an older but also working class girl.

Morvern Callar displays emotional numbness throughout the film, animated only by a passionate friendship and intimacy with a girlfriend who on the death by suicide of her own boyfriend she invites on a trip to Spain. She takes drugs and has casual sex, and for the large part of the film she remains inscrutable, absorbed in some inner dialogue which is inaccessible to the viewer, this is conveyed through spare dialogue and long slow shots of the face of the actress playing her role, Samantha Morton. Morvern Callar remains socially disconnected and seemingly indifferent to life, animated only by moments of hedonism in a landscape of party and rave culture. But more than any other young women in the public eye today Tracey Emin another working class girl and also half Turkish, is haunted by the feminist art which she mimics, disavows and rails against. Her public denunciations of feminism bear the marks of a knowing betrayal, yet this is blatantly contradicted in her work, where she offers her own obsessively autobiographical account of experiences and issues (drinking, drugs, suicide attempts, mental break downs) which have been at the heart of feminist politics, so that she mimics the old feminist agenda in her outpourings about sexual abuse, rape, abortion, sexual pleasure and the sexual double standard. However her 'shameless self exposure', for which she is now very famous, means that this raging self, which must be forever plundered in order to produce more narrative fragments of personal testimony, is also a successful 'art of the self, 'this is about me, rather than this is because I am a woman'. As such Tracey Emin is a darling on the celebrity circuit. She mimics and disavows at the same time themes which have long been associated with feminist cultural studies, especially the sexual double standard. She entertains her male audience rather than makes them feel uncomfortable. In one memorable scene in the documentary about her life and work a group of male art critics sit round a table in a pub, with knowing irony and a mock assertion of patriarchal authority, they make comments like, 'I'm not sure if I'd like it if my sister was like Tracey'.

I have argued that the feminine self which is now endowed with capacity, which has won a string of entitlements and which is also expected to display some ailments and also have a story to tell, compensates for and displaces the feminist subjectivities by which it is also haunted. Heterosexual melancholia contributes to illegible rage and to new forms of feminine confinement. The young woman in contemporary political and popular culture is asked to reconcile autonomy and possibility of achievement with

compliance with a patriarchal authority which is dissolved, de-centralised and nowhere to be seen. She must do this also in a context where feminism and feminist theory have also in effect and for good reason dismantled themselves, that is where there has been a productive questioning of concepts such as patriarchy, of essentialism, of the category woman itself ('Am I that name?' as Denise Riley famously asked again). Nor do we wish to re-instate victimhood and representation, as though to say these poor young women are in need of our sound intervention and our representation. What I have sought to do here is to examine modes of regulation within the popular domain which make impossible or at least unlikely the critique of masculine domination, and which normalise pathologies as at least culturally intelligible if not always survivable.

NOTES AND REFERENCES TO FOLLOW