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Feminist Manuals and Manifestos in the Twenty-first Century

Jennifer Cooke

'There is no manual for becoming a woman', declares Caitlin Moran in *How to Be a Woman* (2011), a manual on negotiating contemporary womanhood that brims with advice and guidance in digestible lists and anecdotes.¹ Moran's is one of many in a new, extremely popular, twenty-first-century subgenre of the 'feminist blockbuster' that I am calling the feminist manual.² This chapter will be the first to outline the characteristics of the contemporary feminist manual and assess its contribution to feminism in comparison with another feminist form that has seen a recent marked rise, the manifesto, that older, energetic staple of second-wave agitation. Insofar as both manifesto and manual envision the transformative potential of a feminist future, there is commonality but, as I shall argue, while contemporary feminist manifestos envision a collectively achieved radical politics, feminist manuals are neoliberal phenomena where change is achieved individually even when the politics advocated by the writer are revolutionary. These genres illuminate the tension between two different forms of present-day feminism, one that overwhelmingly advocates personal, individual change, as the manuals do, and another that argues primarily for structural and institutional change, collectively achieved, as the manifestos declare is necessary.

Twenty-first-century Feminist Manifestos

The rhetorical mode most readily deployed by feminist manifestos is that of the demand. Manifestos are performative texts that aim to affectively move their readers and ultimately to influence the course of history. In Kathi Weeks's words, they are 'an exemplary literature of provocation' that seek 'to bridge the divide between writing and acting'.³ Laura Winkiel concurs, defining manifestos as 'activist texts that seek to generate urgent, immediate action'.⁴ The era of the feminist manifesto's flourishing is

famously the 1960s and 1970s, the time of Valerie Solanas's *The Scum Manifesto* (1967) and Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970), with their demands for the end of wage-labour, the abolition of money, and the reorganisation of childcare and reproduction.⁵ Weeks notes that after this period, 'the early 1980s witnessed a decline of feminist utopian literature, matched by a comparable retreat from the utopian in feminist theory' (p. 182), which she attributes to a newly pragmatic bent within US feminism as it responded to an 'increasingly hostile political environment' (p. 183) and desired to avoid being dismissed as unrealistic, strident, and extremist in the popular imagination. Weeks concludes that in this period, 'anticapitalist agendas were overshadowed by the urgency of rear-guard actions and more purely defensive efforts to mitigate the impact of structural adjustment policies' (p. 184). The twenty-first century has seen a reinvigoration of the manifesto form, perhaps stimulated by the turn of the millennium but certainly consolidated by growing political urgency over increasing wealth disparities and environmental degradation, both of which intersect with gender inequality and are being inadequately addressed by governments worldwide. The consensus that we are facing a series of serious global crises – from climate change to migration, from threats to democratic processes to the rise of the far-right, from the growing power of social media corporations to dwindling natural resources – produces an environment ripe once again for thinking that seeks to fundamentally restructure the way we live.

I want to focus on contemporary feminist manifestos that issue specific radical demands for institutional, structural, and social change, all of which have revolutionary potential: Sara Ahmed's 'Killjoy Manifesto' in *Living a Feminist Life* (2017); the online document, 'Xenofeminism: A Politics for Alienation' (2015), published by the collective Laboria Cuboniks and contextualised by Helen Hester's *Xenofeminism* (2018); and the 'Trans Health Manifesto' included in the 2017 issue of the *Radical Transfeminism* zine.⁶ Together, these manifestos represent a new direction in political demands and spring from a twenty-first-century feminist politics that is particularly attentive to the power institutions have to shape our lives.

Published after her resignation from Goldsmith's, University of London, in condemnation of the ongoing sexual harassment cases the institution was failing to deal with transparently and decisively, Ahmed's 'Killjoy Manifesto' builds upon the figure of the feminist killjoy that she first outlined in *The Promise of Happiness* (2010).⁷ Even if we have not heard the term before, we all know how to recognise the feminist killjoy:

she is the one who points out a sexist or misogynistic problem, who 'ruin[s] the atmosphere' in the room; she robs the joke of its humour and the group who laughs at it of their warm feeling of shared sociality.⁸ It is thus not surprising to find that Ahmed's killjoy manifesto entails being prepared to make others unhappy. The manifesto is framed as a series of ten commitments (as opposed to commandments) that she calls principles. Certain of these are particularly uncomfortable demands because what is asked of the feminist killjoy has deeply personal and potentially professional repercussions, including 'I am willing to cause unhappiness' (p. 258), 'I am willing to support others who are willing to cause unhappiness' (p. 259), and 'I am willing to snap any bonds, however precious, when those bonds are damaging to myself or to others' (p. 266). These uncompromising demands require a high degree of solidarity. Ahmed admits that breaking a friendship or family relation 'can take psychic and political work to be ready to snap that bond' (p. 267). Her uncomfortable demands are intended to root out pragmatic compromises, many of which can be witnessed in institutional settings, especially the university, where for the sake of their career, their students, or sometimes through sheer exhaustion, lecturers and professors accept situations they nevertheless know are unethical and unfeminist. Ahmed asks that feminism not simply be a cloak, a nomination, or a research specialism but a practical and performative enactment: you will know me through my deeds.

Where Ahmed's principles concern social refusals through which the here and now is actively made uncomfortable, a more traditionally utopian vision of future change is provided in the online xenofeminism document, which, while it does not call itself a manifesto, is full of demands, definitely 'an activist text', and has been received as a manifesto.⁹ Nevertheless, its opening section proclaims that 'XF is not a bid for revolution' (p. 1). It aims instead to be protean and appropriative, claiming '[o]urs is a transformation of seeping, directed subsumption rather than rapid overthrow; it is a transformation of deliberate construction, seeking to submerge the white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy in a sea of procedures that soften its shell and dismantle its defences, so as to build a new world from the scraps' (p. 10). Nature's waters are subverted to turn against its guests, complementing a xenofeminist commitment to an anti-naturalism that also entails dismantling nuclear domestic spaces. Further, they propose to repurpose technology 'for progressive gender political ends' that put 'women, queers, and the gender non-conforming' at the forefront (p. 2). An example of such repurposing is explored in *Xenofeminism* by Hester, a member of Laboria Cuboniks. Perhaps surprisingly, given the

digitally sophisticated inflection of many of the manifesto's claims, Hester turns to the Del-Em, a home-made device designed by 1970s American feminists, that 'suction[s] the endometrial lining from a human uterus' and can thus be used not only to regulate periods – by quickly removing menstrual blood – but also to prevent 'the establishment of early-term pregnancies, up to seven weeks after a person's last monthly period' (p. 71). Calling this a 'partial, imperfect, but hopeful example of what a xenofeminist technology might look like', Hester is drawn to the Del-Em because it empowers people to take control of their own reproductive cycles, and, like testosterone sold on the black market, evades the gatekeeping of medical practitioners (p. 70).

XF makes reference to the global, political problems of the contemporary: 'the ultimate task', the authors declare, 'lies in engineering technologies to combat unequal access to reproductive and pharmacological tools, environmental cataclysm, economic instability, as well as dangerous forms of unpaid/underpaid labour' (p. 2). Laboria Cuboniks laments the 'excess of modesty in feminist agendas of recent decades' (p. 3), proposing instead commitment to a new universalism that is thoroughly intersectional and 'must guard against the facile tendency of conflation with bloated unmarked particulars – namely Eurocentric universalism – whereby the male is mistaken for the sexless, the white for raceless, the cis for real, and so on' (p. 6). This is a Marxist-inflected feminism that has absorbed the warnings that Black, brown, working-class, and trans feminists have long been delivering to their white cis-sisters.¹⁰ Xenofeminism is smart, digitally alert, and unafraid to resurrect political categories that have rather fallen out of favour, such as universalism. Its commitment to DIY repurposing, upskilling, hacking, and wetware are all uncompromisingly contemporary. Yet, the manifesto remains at points tantalisingly abstract, such as in the claim that Xenofeminists will operate as 'collective agents capable of transitioning between multiple levels of political, material, and conceptual organization' (p. 3) and at other points somewhat evasive, such as in nominating XF 'a platform' not a 'programme', a distinction that sounds digitally judicious yet collapses if we return to the Del-Em as an example, since it can be thought of as both a platform for bodily autonomy and part of a programme for achieving it (p. 10).¹¹ Xenofeminism is promising but not always fully fleshed out in the manifesto, necessarily restricted by the requirements of the form, which is why Hester's book is a crucial companion.

My final example in this mode is the 'Trans Health Manifesto', published in the first issue of the zine *Radical Transfeminism* and authored by the activist group Edinburgh Action for Trans Health. A defining

feature of transfeminist theorising and thinking is its ability to interconnect different forms of oppression, from medical pathologisation to carceral cruelty, from labour precarity to sex worker and mental health discrimination.¹² Precarious work is more prevalent among trans people, who frequently suffer workplace discrimination.¹³ Mental health difficulties, linked not only to body dysmorphia but also the problems of social isolation caused by discrimination, are common too.¹⁴ Thus the faultlines that might seem to separate different but negative life experiences are rather seen by trans theorists to be networks bound by the same institutional and state-supported logic. The 'health' in the title of both the activist group and the manifesto refers, then, not simply to the wellness of the physical body or even a combination of physical wellness and good mental health, but instead has a far wider conception that is interested in the social, medical, and state structures that make some people more able to achieve bodily and mental health while others are stigmatised, interrogated, pathologised, and, at worst, locked out by the system.

The 'Trans Health Manifesto', like XF, seeks more potential for DIY self-creation, demanding the availability of 'medical training to enable us to safely carry out medical procedures & research for each other' and fully funded 'research centres and libraries of knowledge' curated by and for trans people (p. 60). The authors demand free access to safe hormones, and proper information about different drugs and dosages so that trans people can self-medicate; voice coaching that avoids pressuring people into gender normative patterns; resources for hair removal; and education about being trans for children, designed and led by trans people. Like Laboria Cuboniks, they are gender abolitionists, but they articulate specific concrete demands, such as 'an end to birth certificates and to legal gender' (p. 61). They make clear, too, that the problems these documents pose are not confined to those within the trans community, writing, 'Birth certificates are not just a violence against trans people, they are a material to the state's oppression of "undocumented" immigrants and asylum seekers' (p. 61). They call for amnesty and the right to remain for all 'trans, lesbian, gay and bisexual, immigrants and asylum seekers' because, echoing a political slogan seen in protests against detention centres for migrants in the UK, 'no one is illegal' (p. 61). They note that the development of trans medicine is part of a longer and more global history of discrimination against vulnerable sections of society, from the eugenics of the Nazi camps to 'the sterilisation & birth control trials forced on the women of Puerto Rico, to the thousands of Black and brown people who have died on NHS psychiatric wards, from the denial of the reproductive rights of disabled

people, to the denial of access to abortions' in Northern Ireland (pp. 57–8). Their very first set of demands is both concrete and uncompromisingly utopian: 'We demand nothing less than the total abolition of the clinic, of psychiatry, and of the medical-industrial complex. We demand an end to capitalist & colonial "medicine"' (p. 58). The 'Trans Health Manifesto' clearly demonstrates how demands that stem from experiences with a system that makes life difficult for one community can open out to thinking how other sections of the community can be included in demands for change.

We observe three different approaches in these manifestos. Ahmed asks us to change ourselves in order to challenge the system, to jam its operational underpinnings. XF asks us to subvert the system, using its own tools against it, dismantling the master's house from within. Finally, the 'Trans Health Manifesto' demands that the system fundamentally change so that it is in the service of its users, even created by them. What the manifestos share, though, is notable: a properly intersectional thinking through of and demand for solidarities; an emphasis on knowledge, the need to know our histories and how they continue to be sustained; and the need to upskill and inform ourselves. 'The Killjoy Manifesto', 'Xeno-Feminism: A Politics for Alienation', and 'The Trans Health Manifesto' together demonstrate that not only is the feminist manifesto alive and well, reviving the interest shown by its second-wave predecessors in sharing skills and knowledge, but it is also attentive in new twenty-first-century ways to building opportunities for solidarity, gender abolition, and lessening the power institutions currently have over our lives.

Feminist Manuals

A very different kind of writing is evident in feminist manuals, which operate on the rhetorical plane of persuasion precisely in order to avoid accusations of stridency, utopianism, and the identification of feminists as killjoys. If Moran was among the first tranche of recent feminist manual writers, many subsequently followed suit. A range from 2014 to 2015 includes Laurie Penny's *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution* (2014), Roxane Gay's *Bad Feminist* (2014), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's slim adaptation of a Ted Talk, *We Should all be Feminists* (2014), and Emer O'Toole's *Girls Will be Girls: Dressing Up, Playing Parts and Daring to Act Differently* (2015). There is diversity of nationality and ethnicity, here, and of political positions on the spectrum from liberal to radically left, but in terms of content and tone the manuals are remarkably homogenous. As

Moran's is, they are frequently grounded in personal experience, with a confessional bent that echoes the feminist memoirs of the 1980s.¹⁵ O'Toole, Penny, and Moran begin with or quickly move to recount difficult relationships with weight and food, whether through over-eating, anorexia, or bulimia.¹⁶ There is an emphasis on relationships and romance, sex, gender, clothing and the trappings of femininity, and what the feminist relationship to men should be. Even if their authors admit to exploring same sex relationships, the books are primarily heterosexual. Black feminists such as Gay and Adichie underline the intersections between misogyny and racism; the white feminists, bar Penny, are quieter on this front. All of them dedicate space to confronting the negative connotations that the word feminism has accrued and reassuring their readership that feminism is a rational matter of achieving equality with men.¹⁷ If individual books have blind spots and compositional weaknesses, they nevertheless represent a mainstream popular platform for the dissemination of feminist principles.

Tone is telling; it is a text's 'affective bearing, orientation or "set towards" its audience and world', Sianne Ngai suggests.¹⁸ In these manuals, the style of writing seeks to convert or confirm rather than issue a call to arms. To this end, humour is often evident: readers are repeatedly invited to chuckle at the authors' errors, insecurities, and poor choices as universal and recognisable experiences of girl- and womanhood. The authorial voice is that of an older sister or cool auntie: a woman who understands what her readership are encountering because she too has faced the same challenges and can offer advice from the position of experience, as one who has learned and is stronger for it, as one who can look back and interpret her previous behaviour or that of others with the benefit of feminist hindsight. Crucially, 'becoming-feminist' is represented as a journey of self-realisation rather than a result of encounters with feminist literature. 'It took me years', writes Penny, 'to understand that pretty privilege comes with its own set of problems' (p. 35); 'I was well into adulthood', admits O'Toole, 'before I became aware that I was in a carefully scripted show [called womanhood]' (p. 12). The implied reader imagined by these texts is thus not necessarily just a teen, as their titles and jacket designs may suggest. In that contemporary extension of the term which has stretched far into adulthood, she is a 'girl' who is confused or uncertain how to conform – or wants to jettison conforming – to the contradictory prescriptions of Western culture's highly commercialised conceptions of successful womanhood.¹⁹

Dedications are the blunt tool of tone, nominating figures with whom readers can easily identify. Penny's manual was created in conversation, she says, with young, cool, and excitingly edgy types: 'teenage runaways, radical feminists, anarchists, hipster kids, sex workers, mad artists, convicted criminals, transsexual activists and sad young women in small towns longing for adventure', although the last is closer to the reader the book imagines (p. 4). The opening dedication is crafted to appeal to those who like – or would like – to see themselves as dissatisfied with the status quo:

This book is for the others, as one of the others, as one of those who will never be satisfied with good enough, with free enough, with equality for some. This is for the unspeakable ones, the unnatural ones, the ones who upset people. Who do not do as they are told. Who speak when they shouldn't and refuse to smile when they are supposed on demand. Who are weird and always want too much. (pp. 4–5)

However, it is tame in comparison to a longer dedication it uncannily echoes, penned a few years earlier by Virginie Despentes in her feminist volume *King Kong Theory* (2006), which begins, 'I am writing *as* an ugly one *for* the ugly ones: the old hags, the dykes, the frigid, the unfucked, the unfuckables, the neurotics, the psychos, for all those girls who don't get a look in the universal market of the consumable chick.'²⁰ Next to this feisty list that deliberately deploys the language used to dismiss those it addresses, Penny's version pales, the placatory logic informing her flattery of her reader – who is smart enough to want equality, freedom, things to be *better*, who refuses to play by the social rules governing women's behaviour – laid bare. Unsurprisingly, Despentes's text is not in fact a feminist manual – it is not interested in offering guidance – but a series of essays based on her lived experience.²¹ The feminist manuals share with Despentes the conviction that fulfilling perfect womanhood or femininity is a fiction. Taken to its logical conclusion, this renders all women misfits to a lesser or greater extent since the model to which they are encouraged to culturally and socially aspire is unobtainable.

Overall, feminist manuals seek to reassure women and girls that if they object to, resist, or are simply wearied by the demands of contemporary womanhood, then they are not alone; that wearing lipstick and similar expressions of femininity are compatible with feminism; and that patriarchy does not only adversely affect women but also negatively limits how men relate to the women in their lives. The readership of feminist manuals can be considered to be part of what Lauren Berlant calls 'an intimate

public': 'a market [that] opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires' and helps them feel connected and understood.²² Berlant identifies 'women's culture' as the first US intimate public, and we can see feminist manuals as aimed at a specific subset of this, one less invested in sentimentality but still bound together by female complaint. To position feminist manuals within the context of trends in contemporary publishing, Leigh Gilmore's work on the rise of neoliberal life narratives is helpful.²³ Gilmore tracks the ascendancy of women's memoir in the twentieth century, the suspicion it then attracted, and finally its displacement by the neoliberal life narrative, a form which she describes as typically 'featur[ing] an "I" who overcomes hardship and recasts historical and systemic harm as something an individual alone can, and should, manage through pluck, perseverance and enterprise' (p. 89). These narratives offer pleasing redemption stories whereby the 'individual transforms disadvantage into value' but they also 'absolve readers of the requirement to do anything other than follow the writer's advice in their own lives because the writer has relieved readers of history's ethical claims on us' (p. 89).²⁴

Feminist manuals are clearly not cut from exactly the same cloth as neoliberal life narratives: while they might involve stories of personal pluck and enterprise, they locate these in a patriarchal society that must be challenged, thus recognising and naming a historical and systemic harm which neoliberal life narratives in contrast cast as possible to transcend through individual striving. Nevertheless, there is a history largely missing from feminist manuals, and that is the history of feminism itself, both as an account of activist interventions and as a developing trajectory of thought. Remarkably, feminist manuals tend not to engage much with, and sometimes not even to mention, other feminist thinkers, especially those who have made original contributions to the field. The only one in my sample who engages in any depth with feminist theory is O'Toole, whose book road-tests Judith Butler's ideas of gender performance and includes quotes from theoretical thinkers and extrapolations of their ideas, making it by far the most intellectually rich of the five. Penny namechecks various iconic feminist authors and texts but mostly only briefly and in summary, although she does provide footnotes and a fulsome bibliography. Gay reviews a handful of other popular feminist writers, including criticising Moran for producing a 'feminism [which] exists in a very narrow vacuum, to everyone's detriment' (p. 104). In *How to be a Woman*, Moran mentions Germaine Greer several times, but only in passing, while Adichie admits

that ‘each time I try to read those books called “classic feminist texts”, I get bored, and I struggle to finish them’ (p. 10).²⁵

The result of these books’ lack of sustained engagement with the history of feminist thinking is a stark repetitiveness: each one repeats insights that feminism has long been delivering. This is not lost on their readership. The website *Goodreads*, which hosts readers’ reviews, reveals that feminist manuals disappoint many of their readers who, even if they have enjoyed the humour, agreed with the content, or appreciated the honesty of the writers, nevertheless often complain that these texts offer nothing new in the way of feminism.²⁶ One rather bleak conclusion to draw from this could be that feminism itself is stuck, another that these writers lack the imagination to move feminism forward. However, the problem is more emmeshed with the authors’ public and publishing profiles than allowed for by these explanations. Penny and Moran are journalists; O’Toole also writes opinion pieces for the press; Adichie is a novelist, as is Gay, who is also a writer of memoir and had a large Twitter following before the publication of *Bad Feminist*. These authors have public personas and specific audiences, even fanbases, that are a result of the other writing and books they have produced.²⁷ Their feminist manuals are likely to be commercially successful because their names are recognisable and their other writing well-liked. In some cases, such as Gay’s *Bad Feminist* or Moran’s later *Moranifesto*, the texts collect together short think pieces initially published elsewhere, thus repeating what they have already produced.²⁸

The year 2014 was an ideal time to publish a feminist manual: it was glibly declared by the media to be ‘the year of feminism’, a premature claim precipitated by events involving prominent popular culture figures, including Beyoncé performing in front of large letters spelling out ‘Feminist’ at the Virgin Music Awards and Emma Watson’s impassioned speech about gender equality at the UN.²⁹ Individually, these feminist manuals have elements that may be appreciated: for O’Toole’s attempt to make theory a practice, for the clarity with which Adichie gives her examples, or for the importance of Gay’s insistence on intersectionality. There is value in how they are readable introductions to broad feminist principles. Appraised collectively, however, they reproduce a series of repetitive and well-worn feminist assertions. The feminist manual is a profitable venture for publishers, who are confident about publishing what sells and so have backed shelves full of such texts. But the accompanying risk for feminism is that as a genre these texts make it feel stale, repetitive, and stuck. Moreover, they showcase women in competition with each other in the publishing

marketplace – crudely typified by Gay awarding Moran only a two-star rating on *Goodreads* – rather than in deep and productive feminist dialogue with either their forebears or with each other. Feminist manuals are thus a perfect neoliberal publishing phenomenon. Repeatedly, they validate that it is the self that delivers feminist understanding, which is sometimes then confirmed by a brief invocation of a classic feminist text. Learning is presented as the result of personal experience rather than of engaging with the history of feminist thought and activism, even while, paradoxically, these books are presented as sites of learning for their readers. The model presents feminism as a personal journey, rather than a collective set of actions and insights that have unfolded over a specific time period. The self as our primary tutor, as responsible for our orientation to the world, is a thoroughly neoliberal conception and not one of much value for feminist social justice.³⁰ It is not so much that feminist manuals have nothing to offer their readers, although the complaints I mention certainly testify to a dissatisfaction among some, but that they have little to offer each other or the histories they mostly silently rely upon, and therefore nothing to offer to the debates, arguments, and ideas that move feminist thinking and action forward.

While feminist manuals confirm what we already know about the challenges of living as a woman in the twenty-first century, it is this century's feminist manifestos that are so far providing new strategies to disrupt the current systems and institutions that maintain inequality and deliver discrimination. Because the manifestos tend to circulate in forms and forums that are more commonly frequented by academics and activists, their ideas are not reaching mainstream audiences. There is clearly a thirst for new feminist thinking among some of the manuals' readership, the women motivated enough to write and post reviews of these texts online, and yet the models of neoliberal publishing and the authors it favours are unlikely to deliver to them this necessary rethinking of feminist futures. There is a lacuna at the centre of the mainstream distribution and circulation of feminist ideas effected by the manual and, given that it is the manifestos that are rethinking how to structure the world and its resources, it is to them we should be turning instead.

Notes

- 1 C. Moran, *How to Be a Woman* (London: Ebury Press, 2011), 11.
- 2 See A. Taylor, *Celebrity and the Feminist Blockbuster* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016). Taylor traces the history of the feminist blockbuster to

- begin with Helen Gurley Brown, Betty Friedan, and Germaine Greer. She admits her study is ‘not primarily focused on the formal aspects of these texts’ (p. 4) whereas my reading is particularly attentive to tone, structure, how these texts insert themselves (or not) into the feminist canon, and how they embody politics. Taylor’s definition is broad; mine far less so since it is confined to books that are dedicated to teaching their readers how to be feminists through memoir and confessional anecdote. Taylor also discusses Roxanne Gay, as I do here.
- 3 K. Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 214.
 - 4 L. Winkiel, *Modernism, Race, and Manifestos* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 12.
 - 5 V. Solanas, *Scum Manifesto* (London and New York: Verso Books, 2015), 43;
 - 6 S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1970), 185. The twentieth century’s first feminist manifesto was by Mina Loy in 1914.
 - 7 S. Ahmed, *Living a Feminist Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 251–68; Laboria Cuboniks, ‘Xeno-feminism: A Politics for Alienation’, available at laboriacuboniks.net and as a downloadable PDF, to which my page numbers refer; H. Hester, *Xenofeminism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2018); and Edinburgh Action for Trans Health, ‘Trans Health Manifesto’, in N. Raha et al. (eds.), *Radical Transfeminism* (Leith, 2017), 56–61.
 - 8 Ahmed blogged about her reasons for leaving. See ‘Resignation is a Feminist Issue’ (27 August 2016), feministkilljoys.com.
 - 9 S. Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 65.
 - 10 Hester, one of its co-authors, calls it a manifesto in *Xenofeminism*, 2; Annie Goh recalls that it was launched as a manifesto. See A. Goh, ‘Appropriating the Alien: A Critique of Xenofeminism’, *Mute* (29 July 2019), metamute.org.
 - 11 See Goh, ‘Appropriating the Alien’ for a divergent view which interprets the XF commitments to intersectionality, especially class and race, as ‘add ons’. Goh sees troubling affinities between xenofeminism and accelerationism, and even the neoreactionary figure Nick Land. She also critiques the manifesto’s contradictory uses of alienation, which she sees as linked to a problematically white ‘us’ still resident within the text’s advocacy for universalism.
 - 12 Ibid. Goh also calls the text ‘vague and elusive’.
 - 13 For attention to sex work, medical pathologisation and gatekeeping, capitalism and feminism, see Paul B. Preciado’s *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, trans. B. Benderson (New York: Feminist Press, 2013).
 - 14 D. Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics, and the Limits of the Law* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 50–93.
 - 15 N. Raha, ‘Transfeminine Brokenness and Radical Transfeminism’, *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 116:3 (July 2017), 632–46.
 - 16 For a description of 1980s feminist confessional writing, see R. Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (London: Hutchinson Radius, 1989), 86–121.

- 16 E. O'Toole, *Girls Will be Girls: Dressing Up, Playing Parts and Daring to Act Differently* (London: Orion Publishing, 2015), 1–7; L. Penny, *Unspeakable Things: Sex, Lies and Revolution* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) 25; Moran, *How to Be a Woman*, 8. Moran's promotional video for the book starts by discussing comfort eating. Available at [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com).
- 17 R. Gay, *Bad Feminist: Essays* (New York: Corsair, 2014), x–xiv; C. Ngozi Adichie, *We Should All Be Feminists* (London: Fourth Estate, 2014), 8–11; Penny, *Unspeakable Things*, 5 and 9; O'Toole, *Girls Will be Girls*, 38–41; Moran, *How to Be a Woman*, 71–88.
- 18 S. Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 43.
- 19 The use of 'girl' or 'girls' to refer to women is so prevalent that a recent multi-media advertising campaign by Sport England to encourage activity among women and girls in the UK is called 'This Girl Can'. Available at: thisgirlcan.co.uk.
- 20 V. Despentes, *King Kong Theory*, trans S. Benson (New York: Feminist Press, 2009), 7.
- 21 Chapter 1 of my monograph, *Contemporary Feminist Life-Writing: The New Audacity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), discusses *King Kong Theory* alongside other feminist autobiographies that recount rape.
- 22 L. Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.
- 23 Gilmore defines neoliberalism as follows: 'the state benefits from abandoning "the individual" to his or her own care and promotes that exposure as the freedom to choose in the absence of a safety net of appropriate support' in *Tainted Witness: Why We Doubt What Women Say About Their Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 8.
- 24 Gilmore's chosen neoliberal life narratives are Jeanette Walls's *The Glass Castle* (2005), Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search for Everything Across Italy, India and Indonesia* (2006), and Cheryl Strayed's *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* (2012).
- 25 For instance, the chapter on feminism begins, 'In *The Female Eunuch*, Germaine Greer suggests that the reader take a moment to taste their menstrual blood . . . Well I cannot help but agree' (p. 71) and then moves on.
- 26 *Goodreads* enables users to search reviews by book and view statistics on how many stars it has been awarded. For instance, Moran's *How to Be a Woman*, on 24 August 2018, had received 25,214 5-star, 29,439 4-star, 20,337 3-star, 7,709 2-star, and 4,202 1-star ratings. A typical 3-star review by poster Samadrita notes the enjoyable humour but concludes, 'Do not read this in the hopes of enriching your repertoire of feminist perspectives.' See [goodreads.com](https://www.goodreads.com).
- 27 O'Toole, whose book is also the most engaged with feminist thought, is rather an exception here: *Girls Will be Girls* draws on the theory she studied for her PhD in theatre studies. Her journalism dates mostly from after the publication of *Girls*.
- 28 Moran has capitalised on the manifesto form here, although her short, humorous 'Moranifesto' is provided only at the end. Others use the term 'manifesto' without meeting the definitions provided above, for example,

Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* provides sensible advice for child-raising; Jessa Crispin's *Why I Am Not a Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (2017) admonishes feminists for ruining the kind of feminism she advocates; Mary Beard's book, *Women & Power: A Manifesto* (2017) comprises two public lectures that historically contextualise the vitriolic misogyny aimed at women in the public eye, especially online. Using 'manifesto' in the titles of these books is canny but misleading marketing.

- 29 *The Guardian*, *Time*, *Slate*, *The Telegraph*, *Huffington Post*, and others declared 2014 'the year for feminism'. For a sample of why, see *The Guardian* editorial, 'The Guardian View on a Year in Feminism: 2014 was a Watershed' (31 December 2014).
- 30 Natalie Cecire makes a similar point in her 21 August 2018 blog post, 'New at This': 'If we want to talk about "neoliberalism," perhaps we can look at the model of learning that sees *only* that learning which is immediately applicable to oneself as valid or real, in which YouTube plumbing videos are good but reading *Gender Trouble* is unnecessary and maybe even self-indulgent.' See natalie.cecire.org.