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Satellites Programme is Collective's development programme for emergent practitioners based in Scotland. Satellites aims to support diverse practitioners to produce a new commission and a critical development programme of critical of retreats, workshops, studio visits and group discussions, public exhibitions, events and publishing. Practitioners are selected from an open submission by a new panel each year. The 2021 participants are Stephanie Black-Daniels, Mina Heydari-Waite, Katherine Ka Yi Liu 廖加怡, Joey Simons and Ray Camara.

Satellites Programme

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Poor beasts

A response to Joey Simons' exhibition *The Fearful Part Of It Was The Absence* (Satellites Programme 2021, Collective) by Helen Charman.

Watching the films in *The fearful part of it was the absence* I notice with some pleasure that, when it comes to throwing the bricks, the women outnumber the men three to one.

*When I was, a young girl I used to seek pleasure,
When I was a young girl I used to drink ale;
Right out of the alehouse and into the jailhouse,
Out of a bar room and down to my grave.*

The 2011 riots brought the dull two-bladed knife of gender to the sharpener again. Avoiding structural explanations for the civil unrest that spread, as Joey Simons' brilliant work observes, right up to the weather border, the iron-fisted handwringers in print and on the television located the blame squarely within the family, or rather, its 'failure'. The 'instant communities' of technology and trouble—the stampeding cavalry of BlackBerry Messenger—took root because of absent fathers and bad mothers, because of welfare dependence and no role models. Violent boys and corrupted women: a familiar tune. A classic!

David Cameron, David Lammy, Peter Hitchens: all were explicit in their lament that these riots were a direct consequence of 'lone parenthood', meaning single motherhood, meaning social corruption and 'casual sex'. Melanie Phillips, giddy and zealous, declared in print that 'the most important thing that socialises children and turns them from feral savages into civilised citizens' is 'a father who is a fully committed member of the family unit'. In London's Burning, the exquisitely, hilariously bad docudrama that aired on Channel Four in the December of that riotous year, a policeman recites a text that was circulated on Facebook, in chain emails and on Mumsnet, the 'looter's prayer':

Our father who art in jail
Mother knows not his name
Our Chavdom come
Give us this day our welfare bread.

Although government data based on arrests suggested 'only 10 per cent of those who took part were female', images of women wreaking havoc became titillating staples of the coverage as prosecutions wore on. We love a bad girl. Less than a year before, the British establishment had been up in arms about the prominence of young women in the student protests. The Daily Mail ran a piece filled with images of young women and 'truanting schoolgirls' disturbing the peace, headlined: 'RAGE OF THE GIRL RIOTERS: Britain's students take to the streets again - and this time women are leading the charge'. One woman, Louise Malone, was quoted as saying she had taken the wheel of a police van simply because she felt like it. When I went to university in October of the following year, the first true friend I made wooed me with her prized possession: a large fragment of glass from a Millbank window. It looked like a big juicy diamond.

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*Go send for the preacher to come and pray for me;
Go send for the doctor to heal up my wounds;*

The most beautiful thing in the world can originate in a squabble between a policeman and a fishwife. Or not. You'll have to ask her, if she yet lives. (She doesn't). When people disappear into history, when it closes over them like pond water, we have to remember it's a miracle we ever saw their brief ripples at all.

*My poor head is aching, my sad heart is breaking,
My body's salivated, and Hell is my doom.*

The law—the violence of the state—has no gender, although its effects are coloured by it. Sometimes this brutality wears the garments of conservative femininity, speaks with the assurance of canonical maternity, and describes its economic cruelty in the language of the kitchen purse.

Jacqueline Rose, writing in 1988 of Margaret Thatcher's re-election to a third term and, more broadly, of her obsession with law and order—including her longstanding support for the reintroduction of capital punishment—notes that one of the things 'being done through her' was the establishment of a psychic paradox as the basis of a new political identity. This meant that subjects could 'take pleasure in violence as force and legitimacy while always locating 'real' violence somewhere else—illegitimate violence and illicitness increasingly made subject to the law'.

Stuart Hall, writing a decade before Rose and immediately before Thatcher won her first election, observed that the cyclical moral panics—about drugs, sex, race, the Women's Liberation Movement, the civil rights movement, pornography, divorce, low birth rates—of the 1960s onwards had led directly to a 'law and order state': 'the state has won the right, and indeed inherited the duty, to move swiftly, to stamp fast and hard, to listen in, discreetly to survey, to saturate and swamp, to charge or hold without charge, to act on suspicion, and to hustle and shoulder, in order to keep society on the straight and narrow'.

I want four young ladies to bear up my coffin,

“One of my friends just said: 'Let's fuck it up,' because there was no one there, there was nothing to be seen, and all our faces were covered as well,” said one of the women, who lives in Westminster. “We kind of just went in on it. And then one of my [male] friends came at the last minute and just petrol-bombed it. So, quite satisfying.”

I want three young maidens to carry me on,

'Elizabeth McKay and Elizabeth Savage, a couple of notorious fishwives, were charged with being drunk and disorderly on Saturday night. Defendants, both being well-known characters, caused much amusement in the court during the hearing of the case, and their daring impudence raised roars of laughter. Both defendants, upon entering the dock, made a very respectful curtsy, and saluted the bench with "How are you gentlemen?". Defendants both refused to pay a fine and were accordingly ordered to be locked up. Sergeant Taylor laid hold of them to carry them out of the dock, but in doing this he had some trouble, as defendants "showed battle", and struck right and left. At the close of the scene, when being carried away, McKay turned round, and, with a wave of her hand said, "Goodbye Mr Wickes, goodbye, Mr Harrison, an' God bless you Mr Lowther. It was you that gave us t' yallow drink an' t' yallow flags! Hurrah!"

And each of them carry a bunch of wild roses,

"I saw a woman and she came out of her house with her daughter and she was like: 'Oh, where's Debenhams?' And I was like: 'Why?' and she was like: 'Oh, we're going to go looting.' I was like: 'You're with your daughter and you're going looting?'".

To lay on my body as I pass along.

Striking, picketing, and rioting is also women's work. Thatcher didn't know that: she thought the 1984-85 Miners' Strike would be crushed quickly due to pressure from their mothers and wives. I suppose, in the end, she didn't know a lot of things.

Okay, so we're all children of history, keening in the wake of absent Father Time. What's the bottom line? There isn't one. Nothing is ever finished, and I wouldn't like to hazard a guess at that anyway, given the state we're in. Let's finish with an exercise.

Q. You are:

- i) a prison custody officer
- ii) a police officer
- iii) an immigration enforcement officer
- iv) a bailiff

What is your gender?

A.

i, ii, iii, iv) the law.

*One morning, one morning, one morning in May,
I spied this young lady all clad in white linen,
All clad in white linen and cold as the clay.*

References

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