University of New South Wales

Astrid Lorange

Creativity and the lyric address [1]

Abstract:

This paper sets out to understand 'creativity' as a term with a now-ubiquitous role in describing contradictory dimensions of affective life in neoliberal capitalism. It argues that creativity can be read contra its current meaning (that is, as the capacity for flexibility, agility and self-organisation), achieving both a critique of 'creative thinking' and a reorientation of creative practice. In order to trial alternative ways of reading creativity, I look to the lyric poetry of Claudia Rankine. I propose, following others before me, that creativity as a key concept for neoliberalism informs ideas about creative practices such as poetry; this in turn informs publishing, reading and teaching practices. The lyric poem, in its twentieth-century sense (as more or less synonymous with poetry itself), is an exemplary textual form for neoliberal creativity, and yet the lyric as a form betrays a far more complex set of relationships around author, text and reader than is often assumed.

Biographical note:

Dr Astrid Lorange is a writer, editor and teacher. She is a lecturer at UNSW Art & Design, where she researches and teaches contemporary writing and its relationship to art. *How Reading is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* was published by Wesleyan University Press in 2014. Poetry books include *Ex*, *Food Turns into Blood*, *Minor Dogs* and *Eating and Speaking*. She has written for the Museum of Contemporary Art, The Commercial Gallery, *un Magazine*, *Das Superpaper*, *Cordite* and *Jacket 2*. She convened the talk series Conspiracy at Minerva Gallery in Potts Point, and is one half of the critical art collective Snack Syndicate.

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1. Creativity

The concept of creativity is everywhere. As Raunig, Ray and Wuggenig (2011) explain, creativity is imagined in two contradictory ways: on the one hand, it is imagined as a quality possessed by exceptional individuals who, through their own efforts, redefine what is possible in and for culture (think, for example, of a figure like Steve Jobs); on the other hand, it is imagined as a general imperative for life in late-capitalism, within which a great deal of affective and emotional labour is required in order to subsist; or the way 'creative solutions' are imagined as the responsibility of the worker, the unemployed, the carer, the ill, and so on. We must, in other words, be creative in everything we do—at work, at home, in love, with money—and yet we also recognise creativity as something to aspire towards. This contradiction ensures that creativity is both the ground and the ground-breaking in contemporary neoliberalism—that which is both required and aspired to, in the negotiation of everyday life, work and affective relations in the context of increasingly fragmented, privatised and financialised systems of governance and self-governance.

'Neoliberalism', writes David Harvey, 'is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade' (2007: 22). According to the logic of neoliberalism, he continues, the role of the state is 'to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices'; in other words, the state's function is to ensure that the 'military, defense, police, and juridical functions' are in place to secure property rights and support free trade (2007: 22). Harvey argues that 'the creation of this neoliberal system has entailed much destruction, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers … but also of divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life, attachments to the land, habits of the heart, ways of thought, and the like' (2007: 23). Such destruction is 'creative' in the sense that Joseph Schumpeter meant, when, in 1942, he proposed that change (in terms of continued replacement and renewal) is an 'essential fact' of capitalism:

> The opening up of new markets, foreign or domestic, and the organizational development from the craft shop and factory to such concerns as U.S. Steel illustrate the same process of industrial mutation—if I may use that biological term—that incessantly revolutionizes the economic structure *from within*, incessantly destroying the old one, incessantly creating a new one. (Schumpeter 2003: 83)

Taking up Schumpeter's notion, Harvey argues that neoliberalism's emphasis on creativity, yoked as it is to the 'freedom' of individual liberty and flows of capital and trade relations, is predicated on negation and destruction and renewal.

There are problems with neoliberalism as a description of contemporary capitalism and its manifest modes of economic and cultural management. As many before me have pointed out, neoliberalism as an economic theory is different from neoliberalism as a set of practices, laws, and policies. An example of this is the degree to which the state intervenes in the market: following, for example, major economic crises in the form of austerity measures and/or bail-outs. Also, since neoliberalism tends to be used as a shorthand for contemporary globalised capitalism and its increasingly transnational flows, it risks universalising both neoliberalism as a concept and the experience of neoliberalism by people across the world. Indeed, while

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neoliberalism relies on a notion of the individual, at the same time it produces radically different subject positions, social realities and legal statuses. When I use the term subsequently here in this paper, I do so fully aware of its complexities and generalities. My aim is to think through creativity and creative practice in the context of neoliberalism, and with a focus on the context of my research: broadly speaking, Anglo-American and Australian political economies and their cultural forms. My intention is not to suggest that the subject under neoliberalism is unified, nor to suggest that critiques of neoliberalism are unified. I am interested in the word itself and the way it comes to stand, not always gracefully or usefully, for a diverse set of sometimes-contradictory concepts and practices. The capaciousness of the term makes it feel at once impotent (because it can describe everything) and potent (because it describes everything). My aim is to trace its history alongside the equally stretchy and variously connected terms 'creativity' and 'lyric'.

An aspect of neoliberalism that is receiving considerable critical attention today is the extension of entrepreneurial and free market logic to all aspects of life—indeed *to life itself*—often felt as the irrevocable intermingling of work and life, the conflation of success with total immersion, the assumption that all problems can be solved by innovation, the financialisation of leisure time and private lives, the gamification of personal development, and so on. One of the consequences of this 'workification' of everyday life is the increased pressure to produce value in all aspects of life—not only at work, but in the home, as a social modality, within relationships. This general imperative towards the production of value is often read as, or strengthened by, the notion that failing to produce value will lead to the loss of opportunity; the burden to produce value and indeed to *be* valued is on the individual who must at every turn prove that they are responsible for their fate, capable of maximising their potential, and available to work in excess of remuneration or for the sheer passion of it. In short, when critical studies of neoliberalism talk about precarity, they do so not only to describe labour conditions in unstable, hypercompetitive and largely deregulated markets, but also the affective responses that become vital: self-management; self-care.

Creativity is a critical concept for neoliberalism, bringing together the idea of the individual subject and their liberty with the 'freedom' of market-led economy (Harvey 2007). Education, as one institution particularly vulnerable to neoliberalisation, has increasingly turned to creativity as a key graduate capability and as a way of preparing future workforces (Schram 2014). This is no doubt in part because universities are increasingly feeling the pressure to shift to corporate models in order to survive the ongoing privatisation of public institutions, and because the university—now more so than ever, perhaps—must see itself as central to the innovation economy and a training ground for future entrepreneurs. This makes the university an interesting site for the examination of the rhetoric of creativity, particularly from a humanities and creative arts perspective. So-called STEM disciplines (science, technology, engineering and mathematics), as well as business and management studies—together the economic centre of tertiary institutions—are deploying creativity, curiosity and innovation as graduate attributes: qualities understood not only to drive progress and discovery but that assist the contemporary graduate in becoming a flexible, adaptable worker in a dynamic (which is to say, largely unstable) economy. A quick survey of current programs in Anglo-American and Australian universities shows how the language of creativity is deployed in a similar, vague manner: one US university (Buffalo State 2017) has an 'International Center for Studies in Creativity' that 'credentials creativity through diverse programs that cultivate

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skills in creative thinking, innovative leadership practices and problem solving techniques'. Curiously, its promotional copy talks about the paradox of automation: creative people make work easier by outsourcing labour to technology; creativity is needed to stay employed in a time of automation: 'As technology takes over routine jobs, our professional and personal success depends on [creativity]'. This idea of the professional and personal as equally and relatedly impacted by creativity comes up elsewhere, too. A business school in the UK pledges that its students will 'Acquire practical skills in a wide range of creativity and innovation processes and techniques that [they] can use in [their] professional and personal life to deliver breakthrough solutions' (Cass 2017). Here in Australia, undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in the arts are moving towards an entrepreneurial model: one university offers a Masters program (within which students can major in creative writing, theatre studies and so on) that focuses on professional and industry conditions as central to craft. Its tagline, 'Create a product and create the future' (MCI 2017) equates creative outputs with commercial products and commercial products with cultural significance and meaning. The future here is a future in which certain products have become valuable and have contributed to a sense of what enriches and nourishes cultural life in the context of both a desire for meaningful experience *and* a competitive market dealing exclusively in experience itself.

The sudden appetite for 'creative thinking' in STEM disciplines can be observed by similar appeals to the urgency of creative responses to global challenges—where business and management models tend to refer to creativity as a leadership quality and professional/personal capacity, STEM models tend to refer to creativity as a skill able to be imported into learning environments to promote divergent thinking, productivity, teamwork and confidence. Proponents of 'STEAM'—STEM with 'art' as an addition (symbolically sexing up the hard disciplines)—look to art and design pedagogy to stimulate STEM students in the space of the classroom through one-off workshops, interdisciplinary projects, and foundation subjects centring on creative thinking. The STEAM model is less about conceiving disciplines as strengthened by relation or working differently to engage a complex world critically, and more about how to package a version of the creative disciplines for the explicit aim of training STEM students to be better at what they do.

My interest is in how creativity as a critical linkage between economy and education impacts creative practices elsewhere, for example and for me here in this paper, in the social-aesthetic space of contemporary literature. In *Literature and the Creative Economy*, Sarah Brouillette 'consider[s] how long-standing ideas about literature and literary writers have informed creative-economy policymaking and the discourses that have arisen with it and complement it' (2014: 6). Her study re-thinks this set of linkages from the other direction—that is, how literature and the figure of the writer have impacted discourses of creativity and the operationalisation of creativity in the development of cultural and economic policy. While her focus is on the UK (and the move from Thatcher-era to Blair-era neoliberal governmentality), the scope of her critique is wider:

> One of my core claims … is that creative-economy discourse dovetails importantly with neoliberalism, conceived as a set of shifting practices whose net effect is to erode public welfare, valorize private property and free markets, position government as a facilitator and 'pre-eminent narrator' of the shift to neoliberal policy, and orchestrate or justify a corresponding notion that capitalism's continued and insuperable expansion is at once inevitable and welcome. (2014: 7)

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This creative-economy discourse, she continues, is informed by management theory which draws on social scientific studies of writers, and so has 'come to incorporate concepts bearing a literary provenance', including:

> the idea that the best work expresses the interiority of talented individuals, the idea that the creative realm is a space of pure introspection unbounded by necessity and expedience, and the related notion that though creative people may work within markets, serious ones will be motivated by internal directives to which profit is irrelevant. (2014: 8)

This idea that creatives are motivated by their own ambition and desire (rather than by someone else or by the market itself) is an important aspect of the myth of creativity; it valorises a work ethic at the same time that it endorses a private-property concept of work: that is, the idea that the individual is both responsible for and benefits solely from their effort. Even more canny is the way this valorisation/endorsement is embedded in the character of the creative as one who bucks the system and suffers no fools—it's not just that creative-types work hard and own their achievement, but they do so independently (or so it is imagined) from the constraints associated with other forms of labour.

Working in a similar area, Sophie Ward considers Blair-era UK cultural policy and its engagement with creativity as an alternative to, or replacement of, mechanisms of social welfare. In particular, she looks at the 2001 'Creative Partnerships' program in which a 'freeness' associated with creative pursuits was imagined alongside the 'freedom' of market enterprise. As Ward writes, 'Blair's decision to embrace the notion of creativity as economic and cultural freedom, and to promote creativity in English schools via schemes such as Creative Partnerships, was part of an international fascination with innovation and free enterprise at the dawn of the new millennium' (2014: 111). Both Brouillette and Ward cite JF Guilford's American Psychological Association annual address in 1949, an event that 'launched the scientific study of creativity' (Ward 2014: 111). Guilford's interest was in the relationship between creativity and issues of national security and character; his early studies were of soldiers, with the aim of figuring how to optimise military tactics, and his ultimate goal was to conceptualise a specifically American kind of creativity which could be engaged to fight communism and to advance American industry in the post-war period. The emphasis on creativity was again linked to the concept of freedom—freedom and individual liberty as perceived advantages that Americans had in the Cold War (2014: 112). Because of the alliance between military, industry and economy in the push for creativity as a national characteristic, education policies and curricula became more and more geared towards teaching creativity as a natural inclination and the result of an inherent freedom. Subsequently, creativity had a renewed and intensified moment of centrality during Reagan-era and Thatcher-era neoliberalism (albeit in different ways). For his part, Reagan argued that 'Only when the human spirit is allowed to invent and create, only when individuals are given a personal stake in deciding economic policies and benefiting from their success—only then can societies remain economically alive, dynamic, prosperous, progressive and free' (cited in Ward 2014: 115). This kind of rhetoric worked to conflate creativity with 'freedom from bureaucracy and regulation' (2014: 115) while also appealing to a universal idea of what is good for the 'human spirit'.

Brouillette's study moves from Guilford to Abraham Maslow, whose famous 'hierarchy of needs' preceded Guilford's 1949 address but whose subsequent work took up creativity as an

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important aspect—perhaps the most important aspect—of self-actualisation. Brouillette writes that, for Maslow, artists become 'particularly important figures' as models for the 'wholeness of being' that he promotes; he argues, Brouillette continues, that 'creativeness is correlated with the ability to withstand the lack of structure, the lack of future, lack of predictability, of control, the tolerance for ambiguity, the planlessness' that is required in order to not only withstand but thrive in a constantly changing world (Brouillette 2014: 52). Also using artists (and in particular, writers) as exemplary figures, business scholar Teresa Ambile posits a 'social psychology' of creativity in which:

> self-discipline, an ability to delay gratification, perseverance in the face of frustration, independence of judgment, tolerance for ambiguity, a high degree of autonomy, an internal locus of control, a rejection of conventional norms, and a propensity for risk-taking and self-initiated striving for excellence' as the critical faculties required for effective leadership and innovative, entrepreneurial self-actualisation. (cited in Brouillette 2014: 53)

For these influential theories of creativity, artists/writers were handy examples, for they often work for little reward, appear to be motivated by internal passions, and perceive themselves to be anti-authoritarian and independent. This, of course, presents only one image of the artist/writer, and a conventional one at that. But this is precisely the point; the general-wisdom version of the artist/writer as an individual at once burdened and liberated by her talent and ability is what counts, for the most part, as a model for human creativity and hence as a narrative for creativisation as a social-psychological good. It produces in this way a doubly normative concept of creativity as artistically-inclined and of art/literature as exemplary creative practices.

The argument I want to make in the rest of this essay is to do with the way a general imperative towards creativity has become associated with narratives of personal success and achievement; this emphasis on creativity and the narrativisation of the personal has in turn been associated with literary and artistic practices—telling one's story, finding one's voice, expressing one's self, and so on. This association has consolidated modern (that is, post-Enlightenment) ideas about the value and purpose of art while at the same time transposing these values and purposes to discourses of management and economy. One of the grounding assumptions of this essay is that the lyric poem in its more recent sense (as outlined below) is a paradigmatic genre of contemporary neoliberal culture and its valorisation of creativity. This is because it is open, flexible, and definitionless enough to describe whatever it needs to, while also claiming to have a particular capacity to speak of and to contemporary life. But this idea of the lyric poem has little to do with the lyric as a form (classically or contemporarily), and more to do with the use of the term 'lyric' as a shorthand, catch-all for something else: namely, literary texts that are part of a reading and writing culture that centralises authorial agency in a presumed transmission of humanistic ideas about the world. What we have, therefore, is a cultural discourse of creativity that privileges certain kinds of art (for poetry, the lyric) and that draws from this privileged form a general theory of creativity for application elsewhere and as a common good. And while there is much to say about every aspect of the cultural discourse of creativity (some of which I have sketched above), I want to look more closely at this modern history of the lyric and to some recent interventions in the genre that attempt to complicate the idea of lyricism and reorient it towards critical ends. Specifically, I will look at Claudia Rankine's poetry collections *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* and *Citizen*, both of which self-identify as lyric.

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2. The lyric

In their introduction to the recent *Lyric Theory Reader* (2014), Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins write that, despite the fact that the lyric and poetry are more or less synonymous today, there is little consensus as to what the lyric actually is; this is partly because poetry itself is difficult to define. As such, we have the curious situation in which the lyric can refer to almost anything:

> Often a poem is considered lyric when it represents an utterance in the first person, an expression of personal feeling… a poem may be called a lyric when it foregrounds the musicality of language by appeal to the ear or to the eye… Sometimes poems are called lyrics simply because they are short; sometimes lyric is defined in opposition to narrative, assuming a modern binary in literary modes; increasingly, lyric is a way to describe the essence of poetry, a poem at its most poetic. (2014: 1)

At the same time, there is a tendency for lyric poetry to stand in for a no-less-general but certainly more historically specific style of poetry and its readership—the kind of poetry that dominates commercial publishing, mainstream journals and magazines, high school and university curricula, and creative writing workshops. In short, poetry that is recognisably such and that can be understood in contrast to other kinds of literature: usually versified, non-narrative but coherent, in the voice of a 'speaker', addressed to a reader who stands in for the world (or, addressed to the world whose representative is a reader).

Claudia Rankine's *Don't Let Me Be Lonely: A Lyric* (2004) might be described in a number of ways: book-length prose poem, poetic essay, experimental lyric, documentary project. Unnumbered and untitled paragraphs of text are spread throughout the book, punctuated by black and white reproductions of television screens, graphs and diagrams, advertisements, news clippings and hand-drawn illustrations. The text sections—sometimes self-contained, sometimes continued in a mini-series—coalesce around a set of themes to do with US state, legislative and judicial processes, pharmacology, and broadcast media. In short, themes that describe, if only partially, structures of mediation and regulation. The book finishes with a kind of appendix, a comprehensive list of 'notes' corresponding to each page of text and detailing the law, case, drug, event or pathology that is referenced—implicitly or explicitly—in the poems. These notes, which can be read alongside the poems page-by-page or as comprising a section in its own right, describe diverse responses to, and affective states that emerge from, mediated and regulated experience. Rankine's designation of her poetry as lyric via the book's subtitle is an important detail of this work which is otherwise, in its paragraphic and prose-poetic style, atypically lyrical. But perhaps only superficially so. In 'Notes on the Innovative Lyric', Eleni Sikelianos considers the origins of the lyric poem, a form in which a single speaker or chorus of voices, accompanied by music, performed a very specific genre of poem to do with subjectivity (or, maybe more exactly *subjectification*), that Sikelianos refers to as a 'speculative, pioneering process of turning words toward the traffic between human interiors and their exteriors' (Sikelianos 2015). The lyric tells us, Sikelianos suggests, a lot about the development (in poetry) of theories of subjectivity in civic life—what the self can be said to *be* in the context of the rhythms of daily life and via engagement with a dynamic world. In this sense, she continues, contemporary poets like Rankine are resonant with this older mode—trying to negotiate and renegotiate the rhythms of civic life in a world that may turn out to be at odds with one's self or one's sense of what is liveable *as a world*.

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As Michael Warner (2002) has written, the rhetoric of the lyric as a specific poetic form depends on a contradiction in its form of address—the speaker addresses a public (a person, an object, the world, a sensation) with what appears to be a moment of self-communion, an apostrophic disruption of subjective experience as something internal into something external, projective, generative (*O! What is this I suddenly find myself amongst?*). The lyric poem, then, as a form, is above all interested in the possibilities of imagining the subject in a manner that attends to the complexities of identification, interpellation, recognition, representation, and so on; the ways that a subject becomes, or not, for themselves and for others, and the ways that a subject can be understood as neither wholly one nor simply many, but always somewhere in-between. A normative reading of lyric poetry tends to assume that the subjective experience expressed by the speaker of the poem—often, but not always, assumed to be synonymous with the author—stands in for something universal. A non-normative approach reads the lyric as a form of address in which difference and distance function as critical interventions into the assumption of relatable or universalisable experience: the lyric is read as inhabiting a position *at odds* with the world it addresses—articulating the social, political and affective dimensions of experience that, while explicitly felt, nevertheless remain difficult to cohere or express. This is not to suggest that the lyric as a form is critical *per se*, but that it can be read as a site for 'rationally counterproductive' responses to a non-unified world, and therefore exemplary of the way that politics is embodied as a tangle of intimacies in relations that are often irreconcilable or unresolvable. I borrow the phrase 'rationally counterproductive' from Keston Sutherland's short essay on vagueness and poetry (2007), in which he argues for vagueness as a way of understanding imprecision as a style or mode of thought that is able to express what is at once impossible and true; for Sutherland, as for Rankine, a style or mode importantly at play in the lyric (again, here understood as a form not as a general description). This imprecise, rationally counterproductive style that constitutes the lyric mode, I argue, in addition aptly describes the affective dimensions of creativity and subjectivity in ways that allow for a critique of neoliberal conceptions of creativity and individuality without having to argue against the very concepts themselves. For, to be sure, this essay is not an attempt to do away with creativity or with modes of expression that engage social life or experience. Instead, I am trying to untether concepts that share the same name but that act in very different directions, or, rather, I am trying to show how a concept like creativity can contain within it irreconcilable histories and desires.

Don't Let Me Be Lonely articulates a set of discrete but related experiences that are at once predictable, normalised, ongoing or regular and felt as shocks or disorientations—instances of micro-aggressive racism, state violence, depressive episodes, chemical wobbles, social anxiety, or paratactic media language. Echoing Sutherland, her work is interested in things that are impossible (or else feel as though they ought to be) yet very much true—the fatal bungles of the justice system or the terroristic logics of anti-terrorism—registered in the poems as reports or re-stagings. It is also interested in the difficulty of perceiving the categorical differences between ordinary experience and extraordinary circumstances; between what is real and what appears as reality against all odds. Take, for example, in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, the analysis of a dream:

> I have a dream, or rather, in my dream the lights are out in New York City. They are out because they were out. Even inside the dream I know I am dreaming. The events of my dream are a form of mimesis. The darkness that accompanied the blackout existed, but

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> does not now in the world outside the dream. In my dream the lights are out because I cannot see ahead of me. Or in this dark dream I am looking for a chance, 'my chance to' or 'my chance for'—it is not clear. Then where I am going or what I want is behind a black curtain, but it is so dark the curtain becomes the night. I want to fall asleep inside my dream. This wish for further paralysis wakes me. (2004: 127).

In this section, the echo of psychoanalysis is clear; this is a dream in which symbols evoke themselves (the lights are out because they were out) in a mimetic entanglement of psychic imprint and desire. The wish, is, of course, not only impossible (to fall asleep while already sleeping) but also and importantly a failure (wanting to double-dream is what wakes). But this is not an interpretation of a dream, or at least, it is not that alone. It is also a poem: like dreams, poems are forms in which singular instances of the infinite possible responses to affective life can be understood in terms apart from rationality or coherence. The poem is of a dream that writes itself like a poem, in which the terms of a loss of orientation are felt both as a space foreclosed to experience and an experience of space without form. Following a paragraph break, the text continues,

> You think voting won't make a difference, says my husband. This might be a wise thing to think. He says all this without lifting his gaze from the morning paper.

> My dream is about a voting booth? I am not convinced. He is not interested in convincing me. He is reading about the candidates for the presidency. He is wondering if voting against someone is enough motivation to drag voters away from the televised news of the election into an actual voting booth. Sometimes you read something and a thought that was floating around in your veins organizes itself into a sentence that reflects it. This might also be a form of dreaming. (2004: 127)

The dark city and its black curtain become the literal and symbolic space of the voting booth, itself a sort of dream—in the sense of a fantasy. The voting booth appears as an interpretative offering that comes, via the newspaper, from a distracted husband who gives an account of the dream's meaning from the outside: if a dream can be interpreted by symbols, read as desires or fears, then desires or fears, read by their symbols, can be thought of as a wakeful form of dreaming. But here the dream is more of a nightmare—a dream that is not inhabitable of a city that is suddenly unnavigable, and with a real-life correlative in the form of the dismal ineffectiveness of voting in a political system that operates largely outside of representation. Dreaming and voting are scenes of virtual inaction, charged with the feeling of possibility. If in dreams we often confront impossible, vague truths that we try to read backwards into the space of the actual world, then for the lyric in this mode, so too does the act of writing attempt to find shapes that fit the passage from the unreal to the real, the impossible and vague truths that comprise the limits of experience. Elsewhere in *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*, the poem's 'I' tunes in and out of a TV, more or less constantly on like a background. Reports of police killings, or drug treatments, or reruns of films about toxic masculinity and national pride become written into recollections and propositions: short texts that consider friends' illnesses or deaths, engagements with ongoing legal cases. The 'I' considers itself self-reflexively, not so much in the gesture of autobiography (in which the 'I' is a complicated meditation on the author's witness or experience) but with consideration of what the 'I' means in social life: while discussing the cases of Abner Louima, sodomised with a broomstick and gravely injured while in police custody and the killing of Amadou Diallo by New York City Police, both seen 'through' the television's narrative loops, Rankine writes:

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> Sometimes I think it is sentimental, or excessive, certainly not intellectual, or perhaps too naïve, too self-wounded to value each life like that, to feel loss to the point of being bent over each time. There is no innovating loss. It was never invented, it happened as something physical, something physically experienced. It is not something an 'I' discusses socially. Though Myung Mi Kim did say that the poem is really a responsibility to everyone in social space. She did say it was okay to cramp, to clog, to fold over at the gut, to have to put hand on flesh, to have to hold the pain, and then to translate it here. She did say, in so many words, that what alters, alerts. (2004: 57)

Here Rankine addresses the feeling of futility in the face of loss that does not, cannot stop; the loss of life which is also the loss of black social life, which is also and always the loss of the possibility of not facing that loss again. The feeling of futility does not submit to loss but troubles the relationship between loss felt as individual pain and loss felt as social reality; the one can't act on behalf of the other, but neither does it replace or preclude it. Rankine cites Myung Mi Kim, whose collection *Commons* coalesces around the call to consider poetry an activity able to 'mobilize the notion of our responsibility to one another in social space' (2002: 111). The poem's ambivalence about poetry's possibilities is telling; the point is not to find in poetry a perfect model for the passage of individual feeling into political action or social responsibility, but to consider the poem as a space for the articulation of what 'alerts' and 'alters'. The 'I', in scare quotes here and elsewhere in the book, becomes for Rankine a figure both capable of speaking to most personal registers of embodied life and the often deeply impersonal feelings that accompany the actual experience of that embodied life.

Rankine's lyric mode, rather than aspiring towards total clarity of expression or the insistence of a humanness that is binding and effortlessly in common, is instead something like a differential lyric, an appendix of affects associated with the collective yet often alienated, alienating or inaccessible social spaces of contemporary life. Though the politics of the poetry is unambiguously critical, Rankine avoids what is often demanded from a critical politics: the demonstration of a use value or applied function. Hers is not a lyric that reveals what isn't but ought to be, nor even what cannot but should be, or what will not but could be. It explores what is and what continues, despite it all—not, I should say, in the spirit of stoicism or resignation, but in the form of an attention to the endurance of enduring conditions under which subjectivity is regulated, mediated, denied and criminalised. In this way, the lyric functions in Rankine's work as way of indexing the ordinary yet often inconceivable affects that constitute everyday life, and hence that also constitute liveable forms of dissent.

Structurally, *Citizen* is close to *Don't Let Me Be Lonely*. Mostly-prose text is punctuated by inset images (video stills, art works, photographs, documents). Sections are broken but unnamed, coalescing again around concepts of the mediation and regulation of contemporary subjectivity. *Citizen*'s focus, like the earlier book, is anti-black racism, here perhaps even more specifically so; documenting blackness and anti-blackness in a historical present ablaze with the politics of visibility, invisibility, vulnerability and violence. The address throughout the separate but connected section is second-person, naming a 'you' whose experiences negotiate and register racism in its countless forms and in the way it disrupts the ordinary—so much so that it becomes the ordinary itself. These accounts move between descriptions of moments in which a relationship (with a friend, therapist, shopkeeper, colleague, stranger, neighbour) is disrupted by racist assumptions or micro-aggressions, and longer essays that look at race alongside sport (Serena Williams, Zinedine Zidane), state violence (the murder of Mark

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Duggan by London Police), disaster (Hurricane Katrina), and hate crimes (the murders of Trayvon Martin and James Craig Anderson).

The book is concerned, among other things, with intimacy, and with the way the disruptive violence of racism precludes intimacy in manifold ways. The use of the second-person address implicates the reader relative to the writing's subject: impelling the reader to interrogate their own relation to racism (whether a reader does this or not, of course is another thing; but the address is apparent whether one heeds its call). The differentiating gesture of 'you' in this instance—a you who may be felt, or not, as a self or an other, a witness or a stranger—shows the differential structure of racism itself, the capacity for racism to shatter the relation between subjects. Also, since many of the moments captured by *Citizen* were experienced by others and not Rankine herself (she asked her friends for instances in which the shock of racism disrupted the everyday), the 'you' becomes a gesture of recognition and affinity, towards those whose experiences collect in and as the book. If the 'I' of *Don't Let Me Be Lonely* is a kind of subjectivity mediated and distributed by fragmented, fractured assemblages of text and image, the 'you' of *Citizen* is a subjectivity felt whole in moments of radical non-togetherness, difference and despair. The earlier book turns the fragment into the lyric by virtue of relation; the later book turns the lament into lyric by virtue of non-relation. In both instances, the lyric as 'master category', to cite Chris Nealon on Rankine (Nealon 2011: 152), complicates the very act of speaking, through the poem, and suggests that what is at stake in the lyric is the act of reading, back into the poem, the act of address itself.

The end of *Citizen* (2014: 143) comprises a more spacious, sparer verse form. In this section, the question of the pronoun arises:

> Don't say I if it means so little,
> Holds the little forming no one.
>
> You are not sick, you are injured—
>
> you ache for the rest of life.
>
>
> How to care for the injured body,
>
> the kind of body that can't hold
> the content it is living?
>
> And where is the safest place when that place
> must be someplace other than in the body?
>
> Even now your voice entangles this mouth
> whose words are here as pulse, strumming
> shut out, shut in, shut up—
>
> You cannot say—
>
> A body translates its you—
>
> you there, hey you

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Here, the question of an 'I' forms the beginning of a passage in which the relation of self, body and world become increasingly distant through proximity—the self becomes estranged from the body it is indivisible with, and from the world it is inextricably bound to. The intimacy of these nested estrangements leads finally to a line that, with more than a hint of Althusserian interpellation, reveals the self and other not as the signal relation of civic life but as the relation of subjectivity itself, a relation that, by reminding the one that their oneness cannot be fully known, is the primary site of difference, and therefore the primary form of politics. In this bundle of relations, Rankine's lyric 'you' is at once 'shut out, shut in, shut up', complexly embedded in and distanced from the body, language and the world, out of sync while intimate. As in the rest of the book, the question of a liveable politics is tied to the question of a liveable body, both in the sense of a body that continues to live and a body that can continue to live.

In a different context, writing with Beth Offreda on 'whiteness and racial imaginary', Rankine considers creativity directly:

> For one source of creativity lies in the fact that each individual is essentially strange. There is a deep strangeness, an alterity, in the individual human mind, a portion of ourselves that we never fully comprehend—and this is what writing taps, or is at least one of writing's sources, one of its engines … This essential strangeness, this unknowability, is a creative resource, perhaps *the* creative resource, the wellspring of art that shows us things we did not know but that are somehow inevitable and true—true to a reality or knowledge we don't yet possess, yet find in the moment of encounter possible, something we accept the fundamental being of even if its nature shocks or startles or repulses or unsettles us... But while it might be mystifying how creative impulses and decisions emerge from somewhere within, that doesn't mean we must make a fetish of that mysteriousness. (Rankine and Offreda 2015)

Rankine and Offreda's argument is two-fold: creativity is possible because one is always a stranger to one's self, and such intimacy with strangeness propels new things into being; but we must also be wary of our creative impulses, insofar as what appears to us as strange, or that part of ourselves that is strangeness in its self-encounter, is structured by history and circumstance (and so may betray our ignorance or prejudice). This version of creativity is markedly different from the social-psychological version that informs cultural discourse around innovation: in the latter, creativity is the capacity to meet the unknown with confidence and agility, to make the unknown into a coherent, profitable known; in the former, creativity is the capacity to perceive the unknown (including what is unknown and unknowable about the self) as part of what articulates experience in and of the world. Creativity's relationship to subjectivity is what makes this difference important to the bigger argument I am attempting to draw here, because if creativity is conventionally taken as subjective experience in its expressive form, a kind of critical creativity would be the expression of subjective experience as a form in its own right, and therefore prone to change, encounter and transformation.

I want to end by returning to neoliberalism. I have tried to make a number of connections here in this essay—between creativity and neoliberalism, between a neoliberalised creativity and the contemporary university, and between a neoliberalised creativity and the figure of the artist, in particular the poet, as the exemplar of individual expression and self-managed subjectivity. My aim has been to show that critiques of neoliberalism and its premium on creativity as a positive personality trait are implicit in critiques of received ideas about lyric

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poetry as the medium of personal insight and direct address. This critique in fact has little to do with the lyric as a form (and with a history), and more to do with a conventional idea, fully developed by the twentieth century, of the poem as a record of the author's mind via the performative utterance of a speaker's voice. This convention, in turn, is what social-scientific and psychological theories of creativity use in their modelling of the ideal 'creative'. So, what we end up with is a concept of creativity that engages a very specific idea of the creative subject, a relationship that serves to reinforce each term as given. Critical reclamations of the lyric by poets such as Rankine and Sean Bonney (2016) (to name only two) examine the relationship between subjectivity and the social, political and cultural contexts from which the subjective emerges and bears witness to; this kind of examination allows for a space to think about how creative practices such as writing poetry can open up, rather than resolve, questions about how subjectivity can be mobilised in the face of precarity and uncertainty and with an awareness of the manifold ways a subject is made (and un-made). The form of the lyric, here reinvigorated as a mode of address in which address is always radically ambivalent, is one that both preserves the importance of the speaking voice and yet does not presume to know for whom and to whom speech is possible, legible, or audible. If neoliberalism employs creativity as one way of producing, both as a standard and an aspiration, a subject continually impelled to adapt, make do, innovate, and so on, then reading and writing a 'critical lyric' offers a space to consider the effects of such subjectification and to understand the role that a different and differentiating creativity can play in the *re*-subjectification of the subject as it addresses the self, the world, and the possibility of something else—including the possibility of what is already are already here, living as potential, offering a slight view towards a future not ruined by fate.

Endnotes

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