NEW MODEL ARMY
Behind Tate Modern: Morphological Activism and Working-Class Single Mothers (2018–19)

Linda Aloysius

Given the fact that almost one quarter of UK mothers are single mothers,[1] I find it acutely painful that the negative effects of the historical pathologizing of working-class single mothers as artists and as subjects for art is widespread in art institutions, and especially in museums and art schools in this country. Art institutions have yet to acknowledge the complexity of the greater structures of inequality, social injustice and poverty underpinning the longevity and scope of the exclusion of working-class single mothers.

Through my Fieldworks—as trans-site and trans-disciplinary projects of sculpture, photography and writing[2]— I reflect on the representation of women's experiences of inequality. This has brought the realization that there are some things that I have to voice more publicly and more pointedly with regard to working-class single mothers and their creativity:

> One: the absence of diverse and inclusive representations, within the realms of artistic and cultural production, of the creativity and differently lived histories of (originally) working-class single mothers, who are, like myself, also artists.
> Two: the exclusion from history and history-making of a mode of looking and space-making that I call 'morphological looking and morphological space-making', which I suggest are particularly

1. 'Single Parents: Facts and Figures', Gingerbread, www.gingerbread.org.uk/what-we-do/media-centre/single-parents-facts-figures/ (accessed 31 May 2019).

2. Linda Aloysius, 'New Model Army: Invisible Labour (2017–18)', *Feminist Review* 120, no. 1 (2018), pp. 122–129.

generated by working-class single mothers, due to their political and structural positioning under patriarchal capitalism and, conversely, their strengths in resisting this.

As Joan Scott suggests when considering the evidence of the experiences of women under patriarchal capitalism, history making is not only a selective, exclusive process, in terms of content—that which is selected—but also an approach to the way(s) in which history is made and in terms of which persons—both groups and individuals—are formally acknowledged as history makers.[3]

In recent decades in the UK, and somewhat paradoxically, there has been a government-wide, strategic deflection of the public gaze away from the enormous amounts of invisible labour carried (out) by working-class women as the majority of carers, cooks, clerical and retail workers and cleaners in the workforce and in their families. Amongst the working-class, working-class single mothers are extremely burdened with different forms of invisible labour because they often lack the support of a partner, and sometimes extended family, especially if they attempt to defy their structural positioning under patriarchal capitalism and to insist on a futurity which may involve combining childcare duties, work, study and creative and artistic endeavour. As Lynn Abrams has stated, working-class women, particularly those who are mothers, have historically been actively undermined by their original families in their attempts towards self-autonomy.[4] Whilst the public gaze is turned onto and against them, the actual labour of working-class single mothers as sole carers and bread-winners for their families remains invisible and, as such, devalued. There has been a lack of progressive debate on their rights in all public institutions of education, health and culture when issues of equality and inclusion are discussed. Instead, they are widely regarded as a symptom of societal breakdown if not also its cause.

Jennifer Harding has asserted that a 'pathologized single mother' has been 'constructed in contemporary political and moral discourses' and that 'political discourse has identified single mothers as "responsible for social problems in the wider society"'.[5]

3. See for example: Joan Scott, 'The Evidence of Experience', *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (Summer 1991), pp. 773–797.

4. Lynn Abrams, 'Pursuing Autonomy: Self-Help and Self-Fashioning Amongst Women in Post-War Britain', podcast lecture, Royal Historical Society, 11 May 2018, https://royalhistsoc.org/category/rhs-video-archive/.

5. Jennifer Harding, *Sex Acts: Practices of Masculinity and Femininity* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 116.

6. Peter Lilley, 'I've Got a Little List' cited *Your Favourite Conference Clips, BBC News, 3 October 2007*, http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/the_daily_politics/6967366.stm (accessed 31 May 2019).

7. Alison Hadley, 'Young Mothers Face Stigma and Abuse Say Charities', BBC Newsbeat, 2014, www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/26326035/young-mothers-face-stigma-and-abuse-say-charities (accessed 31 May 2019).

Having experienced, first hand, the historical pathologizing[6] to which Harding refers, I suggest that the public gaze which has been forcefully turned onto and against working-class single mothers can only be challenged by works which place their experiences centre-stage and reverse the negative gaze and stigmatization of working-class single mothers. Such issues gain poignancy when we consider that, even today, scant art institutional recognition is given to the inequalities experienced by working-class single mothers who want to work as artists, and whether this inequality is considered historical, current, or both.

Alison Hadley, OBE, a key figure dealing with strategies aimed at supporting young parents, argues that many single parents 'often feel like they are being looked at in a judgmental way and that's why it's important professionals understand that and make them feel comfortable'.[7]

Hadley describes here how young parents are affected by the looks they receive from others. In so doing she touches upon what I know from my own and others' experiences to be a very extreme situation, in which the politics of looking are brought to bear on working-class single mothers. This is particularly acute for those perceived as biologically "young", as the judgemental looks they receive constitute the end points of longstanding oppressive structures designed to fix them into place, at a level of embodiment, and this gaze reproduces and engenders their social and economic marginalization and exclusion. In this situation, "equal opportunities" for young women's growth and movement—to socialize, to form supportive communities and relationships, to gain employment, to secure appropriate accommodation and to be given a fair chance in prospering—are effectively closed.

I want to suggest there is a need to place a productive doubt on the efficacy and authenticity of the current diversity and inclusion policies deployed by our art institutions. As a disadvantaged demographic, working-class single mother artists remain unrecognized by diversity and inclusion policies even when they may also be BaME and/or LGBTQI and/or disabled and, for these reasons, are not recognized in the same diversity agendas. Part of this is to do with the framing of government legislation which identifies structurally disadvantaged and discriminated

groups as automatically part of diversity and inclusion criteria, while only "pregnant" women suffer discrimination in their employment, not mothers in general. This framing is problematic for many reasons. It means that those working-class single mothers who do not fall into categories currently recognized by these agendas receive no support at all, whereas those who do fall into those categories receive only partial support. Worryingly, this begins to illuminate the more complex problem of how to properly, rather than superficially, account for class difference in relation to the same currently supported categories. For example, should a middle-class BaME subject receive the same level of support as a working-class BaME subject? And should a working-class single mother receive the same level of support as both? The possible complexities generated by this thought are vast, but this vastness also illuminates the ethical fragility of current agendas and the need for progress.

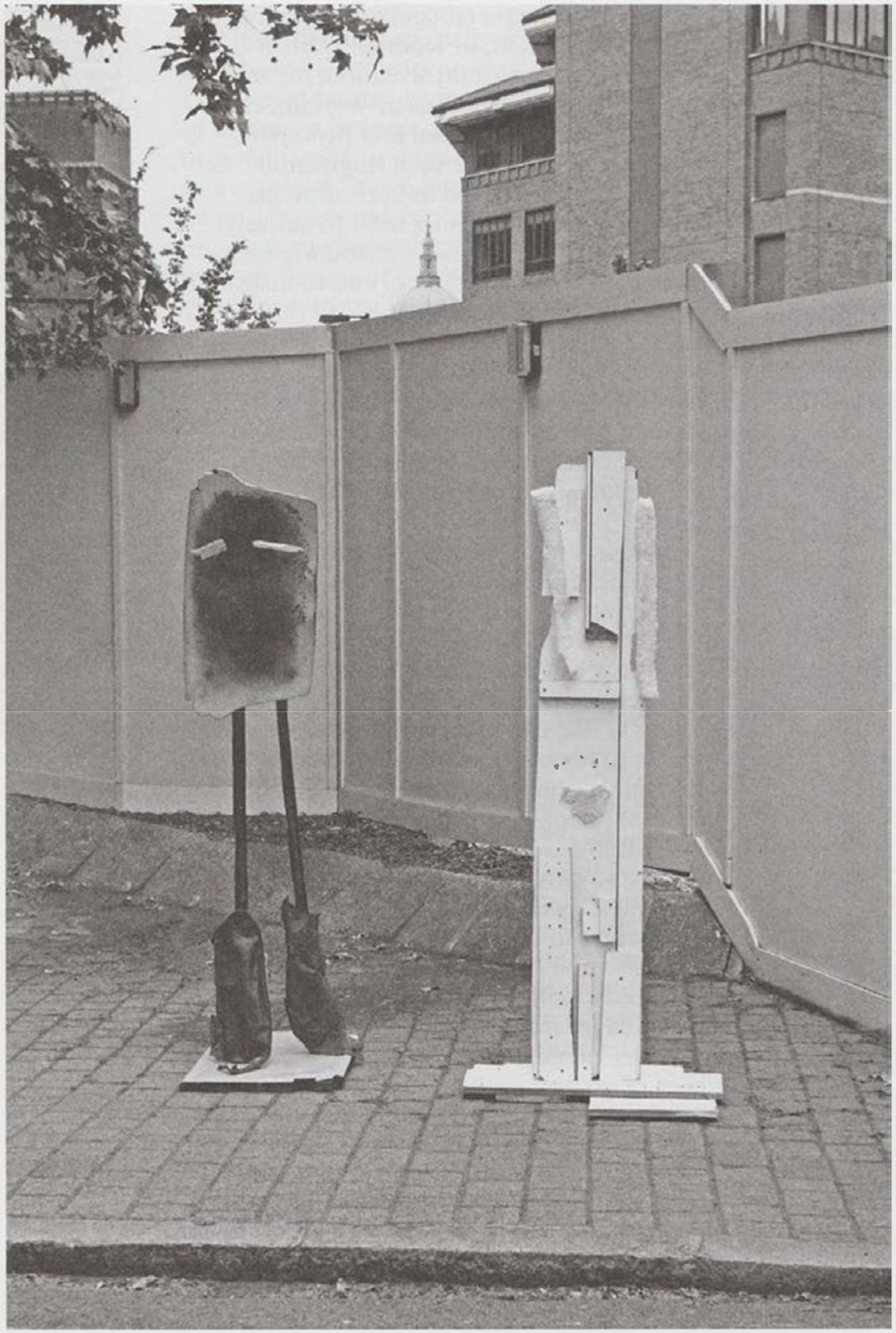
Dr Kimberly Jamie of Durham University argues there is a need to change the expectations placed on those single mothers who identify as working-class:

> We need to stop accepting the middle-class life trajectory as the "right" way for young people, especially women, to live their lives.
>
> The school to university to career to house to marriage to children isn't possible or desirable for all young women, yet those who take a different route through life are positioned as irresponsible, or as having somehow failed.[8]

Policies aimed at including "mothers with young children" in education and/or museums are typically founded on a normalized presumption that all women want to, can and should behave only as middle-class subjects educating their children. Are these policies appropriate? What is the depth of their sensitivity to, and understanding and valuation of, working-class sensibilities particularly where working-class single mothers and their creativity are concerned?

In my experience of attempting to engage with art colleges and art galleries, in my various and overlapping capacities as single mother, student, artist and employee, I have been introduced to barely any art works made by

8. Kimberly Jamie, 'We Are Middlesborough: Pregnant Teenagers Tell Their Story', Philippa Goymer for BBC News, 22 May 2019, www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-tees-48315469 (accessed 31 May 2019).



Linda Aloysius, *Strange with Straight for New Model Army: Behind Tate Modern: Morphological Looking and Space-Making and Working Class Single Mothers (2018–19)*, sculpt-photograph

working-class single mother artists recognized as such and promoted as emerging, prominent, or leading. Here, it is important to admit that, in the current situation, my own and other women's empirical knowledges of working-class single mother artists can only be "partial and perverse".[9] Nevertheless, this does not mean that such fragmental knowledges are and must remain fixed as such. Rather, I would contend that there is an ongoing need to actively refuse to work against these fragments by mistaking them for deficiencies to be corrected or added to, and to instead reflect through and across them, towards the idea that women's experience, in being drawn from as a form of knowledge, is not and cannot be presumed to be anything other than *positively* (from a feminist perspective) "instable" and, as such provides a potent, fluid basis from which to proceed with the intention to engender a "critical displacement"[10] of the central narratives of art history as framed by patriarchal capitalism.

To date, however, I have yet to come across lectures, conferences or critical debates specifically about working-class single mother artists, or about their absence from art's representations. As a lecturer, I have had the privilege of working with a few, often extremely talented working-class single mothers at undergraduate level, and who have also variously identified as white, black, mixed-race and disabled. But I have yet to meet many other university lecturers who are working-class single mothers, whether this is in a fine art department or any other department. As Jo Spence wrote, the presumption is that higher education makes you "middle-class", and lecturers can "only" be middle-class people on this count.[11] Also, in my experience, there is an unspoken presumption that to admit to being an originally working-class single mother who is now a lecturer must mean that I have never experienced employment in middle-class environments and perhaps chose lecturing because I wanted to become or be known as "middle-class". In fact, I have very extensive experience of combining art practice, motherhood and, through a combination of determination, necessity and utter naïvety, climbing the employment ladder to eventually work in profoundly upper middle-class environments.[12] In the latter I was treated with a certain kind of respect and encouraged in certain ways to prosper, receiving

9. Alison Wylie, 'Feminism in Philosophy of Science: Making Sense of Contingency and Constraint', *The Cambridge Companion to Feminism in Philosophy*, eds. Miranda Fricker and Jennifer Hornsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 157.

10. Clare Hemmings, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 36.

11. Jo Spence, *Cultural Sniping* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 156–159.

12. Early experiences of interviews had established that, if I disclosed my status as a single mother, I would not be employed. Although my single mother status was never given as a reason, it became obvious that this was why I was not offered roles and, as soon as I did not mention this at interview, I was offered a job. I therefore, through absolute necessity, did not tell my employers of my single mother status until after I had demonstrated that I was able to fulfil and, indeed, exceed my employment role which was sometimes after I had left a particular role. It hurts to remember that I effectively had no choice but to deny my child's existence for periods of time and to hide from my employers the difficulties I experienced in organizing childcare and the exhaustion I often experienced. No mother should have to do this.

13. As a child I was told—by my father, not by my mother—that my mother, Violet Plain, had been Dux (top pupil) of her school in Edinburgh and that, when my mother was fourteen years old, her female teacher had visited the family home to petition my mother's father to allow her to stay on at school, because she believed my mother had the ability to attend university. Her father—my grandfather—refused on the basis that my mother was a girl and that the family could not afford to let her continue to study. He instead found employment for her, working as a typist in a solicitor's office. As an adult, I never had any "intimate" conversations with my mother. However, she did once tell me, in a self-mocking manner that, the first day she was due to work in this office, she had cried quietly, alone, sitting on the end of her bed, because she had been given nylon tights to wear for the first time and she had only ever worn socks for school.

14. Years of experience have established that, even during conversations within the most educated, creative and 'leading' institutions, curiosity regarding working-class single motherhood rarely extend beyond the questions 'How old is your daughter?' and 'How old were you when you had her?'

15. Angela McRobbie, from live discussion at the conference 'Girling Feminism: Towards a Feminist Theory of Girlhood', Glasgow University, 24 May 2019.

promotions and increased responsibilities and authority within environments easily described as luxurious. It would have been all too easy to stay, and remain treated thus, but I only ever wanted to focus entirely on my art practice and to become a lecturer. Being the first and only member of my original family to attend university[13] and to study fine art, I was extremely naïve in regard to how I would subsequently be positioned and treated by art institutions. Other working-class single mothers' experiences may be different, but my experiences of working with fine art institutions resonate uneasily with the fact that I have rarely seen working-class single mother artists progress beyond undergraduate level education and I have not seen anyone—whether student, tutor, administrator, sociologist, artist, critic—question why.[14]

As it stands, middle class approaches ultimately entail seamlessly performing and reproducing a game of domination rife and normalized in the art world. This is a game predicated on extraction and, for it to continue, others, somewhere, somehow, anyhow, must be exploited, including by being rendered invisible. This is, to my intense boredom, and in the larger view of things, responsible for the mass dissemination of what I call *the middle class gaze*; a mode of looking normalized through an approach I would describe as that of continual project management, historically ingrained into the approaches of middle class subjects from birth and now extended, whole-scale, to art-making. This sanitizes visual languages to ensure their palatability for investors whilst serving the "star system"[15] that secures those investments.

There is a need for new, intelligent, trans-disciplinary and trans-class debate of how and why working-class girls and women become single mothers, particularly with regard to the parameters of motherhood: where these parameters lie, who sets them and how they become so fixed that they continue beyond one generation into the next.

Art institutions must overcome their fear of disrupting the subjectively and structurally embodied, middle-class frameworks and approaches they remain financially and habitually beholden to, and instead develop a sense of curiosity, a willingness to listen differently to and learn from working-class women students, some of whom

are single mothers. Art schools, in particular, can choose, now, to intervene in this situation by seeking answers to the following questions:

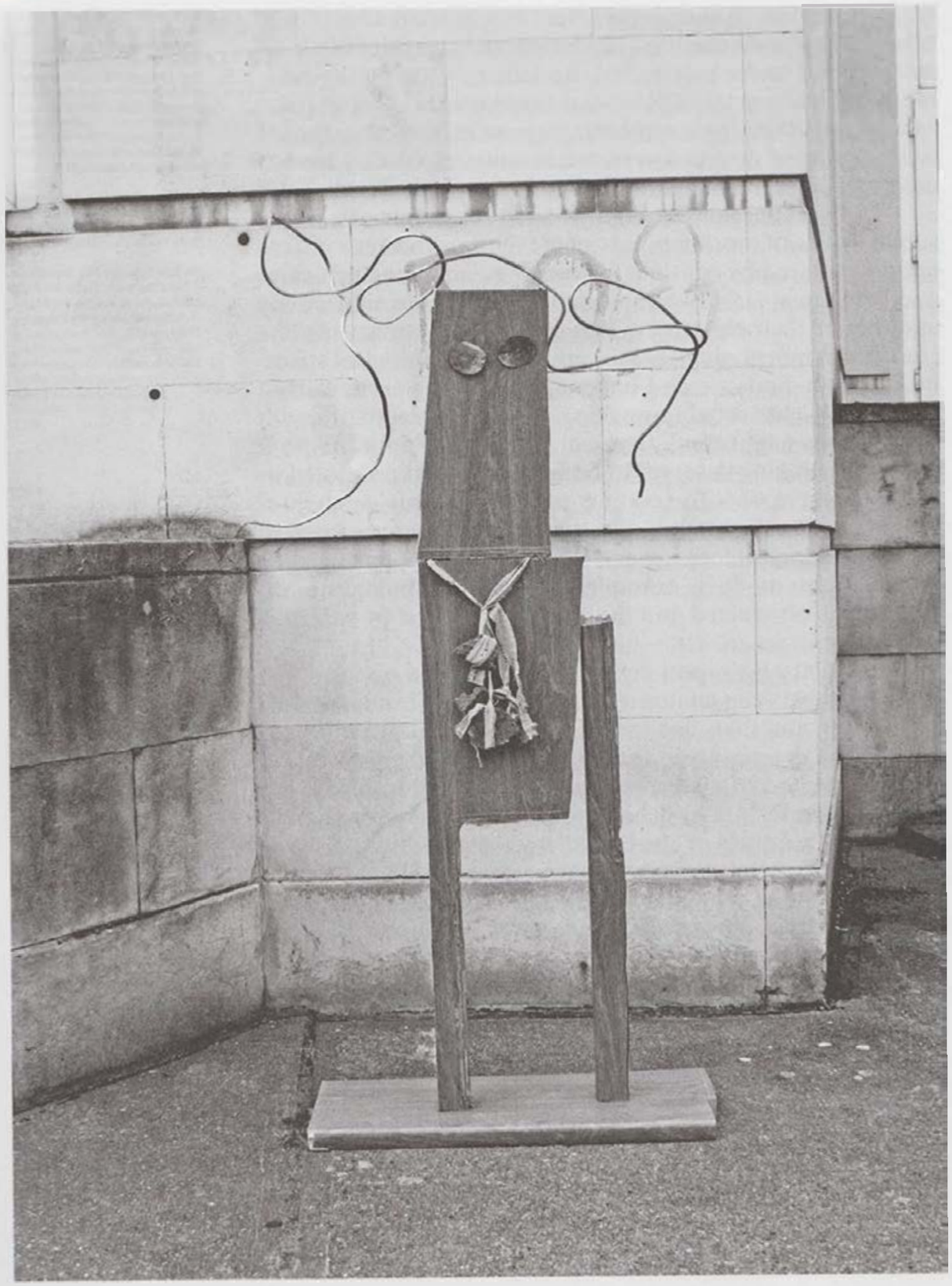
- What needs to be discussed with regard to how working-class single mothers and their creativity is addressed in the curriculum?
- How should we listen and what can we learn from identifying and understanding traits in working-class mother artists' approaches?

More attention needs to be paid to the conditioning effects of languages used within art institutions, the values underpinning their automatic conditioning towards this as "not important", how those values connect to larger political structures and how they can impact upon working-class single mothers already oppressed by them. Might some form of mediation between different classes and class attitudes be appropriate, here?

As a tutor, and speaking from my own experience, I have found that working-class single mothers may be conditioned into single motherhood, long before the biological act of giving birth. I have consistently found that my students who identify as or become working-class single mothers have experienced some form of early trauma, either their own or inherited from parents, in a family that is often toxic or struggling to function. Additionally, I have also found that, within their original family, they typically experience exposure to care duties that are either intense or prolonged and frequently involve prioritization of other people's needs combined with denial of their own. Significantly, this suggests that the parameters of single motherhood are not confined to the biological act of giving birth but instead pre-date it and, under patriarchal capitalism, can begin in childhood. In at least these ways the girls, even prior to becoming pregnant and giving birth, are pushed into a marginalized space.

Experiences such as these set them apart, psychically, from their peers, because they may not, as a consequence, have any opportunity to develop and convey the "nice personality"[16] which has been implied as being highly instrumental in gaining positive peer bonding and

16. Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose, *Deleuze and Research Methodologies* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 131.



Linda Aloysius, Teen for New Model Army: Behind Tate Modern: Morphological Looking and Space-Making and Working Class Single Mothers (2018–19), sculpt-photograph

support. Although such experiences may prepare them to take on the responsibilities, hardships and struggles of single motherhood under patriarchal capitalism, when biological motherhood then takes place and they become categorized as working-class single mothers, they are subjected to the technologies of oppression in social attitudes which I have described above.

One consequence of their situation is that the subjectivities of working-class single mothers become differently structured by continually thinking and acting across and between at least two subjectivities: their own subjectivity and that of their child(ren). This continual "between-ing"[17] constitutes morphological looking and morphological space making as a mode which I understand as being particularly structurally connected to working-class single motherhood.

One might think that such a model of subjectivity and space making deserves to be supported and promoted in societies where #MeToo culture has become problematic, to the extent that the earth is now dying. Instead, this capacity for morphological looking and being, and the potential to extend this mode by example, through morphological activism, is obstructed and thoroughly exploited by patriarchal frameworks.

Hilary Robinson says: 'Irigaray insisted on the distinction between anatomy and morphology from an early point' and that: 'the term "morphology" ... does not refer to deterministic analysis of forms in themselves, but to a method of discerning patterns of relationships between forms'.[18] Irigaray had argued that overly-simplistic, anatomical readings of the body deny the possibility of more complex relationships between, for example, the mind, the body and the symbolic world and instead engender a patriarchal 'economy of the sameness of the One'.[19] Irigaray was in favour of more complex, morphological readings between different elements, which she found to be capable of engendering women's "social signification"[20] as full, equal and different subjectivities. Notably, for Irigaray, morphology constitutes a highly serious mode of play, which draws from women's excess of patriarchal frameworks to re-structure patriarchies and allow for women's equality. So, morphological looking could become a mode of thinking and acting against the terms of the phallic and phallicising

17. In my doctoral thesis, I introduce and extensively discuss the morphological potential denoted by the phrase 'between-ing'. Linda Aloysius, *'Developing Productive Mimesis in the Age of Screened Oppression: Rhetorics of Flattening and Fragmentation in the Making of New Model Army'*, doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths University of London, 2018.

18. Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray: The Politics of Art by Women* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 97.

19. Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 132.

20. Ibid., p. 112.

21. Ibid., p. 132.

22. See my paper, 'When Girlhood is Motherhood: Towards New Looking and Being: The Desiring and Creative Gazes of Working-Class Single Mothers' at the conference 'Girling Feminism: Towards a Feminist Theory of Girlhood', organized by Girlhood Gang, Glasgow University, 14 May 2019.

23. Coleman and Ringrose, *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, p. 130.

24. Ibid.

25. I discussed this aspect of my practice at greater length in conjunction with my paper presentation '(Im)Personification in the Making of New Model Army' for the conference 'Personification Across Disciplines' (Durham University, 17–19 September 2018).

"One" in order to challenge its 'economy of the sameness of the One'[21] and instead generate a particular "morphological" space of between-ness.

Drawing from Robinson's and Irigaray's ideas, I suggest that morphological looking is not restricted to the ocular—to the eye—and does not seek to establish hierarchical, linear relations of dominance. "Morphological looking" establishes pluralized connections between the ocular, the bodily, the psychic, the emotional, the behavioural; in brief, every aspect of whole subjectivities and their symbolic worlds, generating morphological spaces within and through which feminist values are produced.[22]

Art works can be structured in ways that help to form such relations between different elements, allowing their differences to speak to one another, engendering new morphological spaces which work to unfix the territories overlaid onto the symbolic by patriarchal capitalism. In so doing, morphological looking works through artworks to generate new relationships capable of constituting what Coleman and Ringrose might refer to as 'unknown spaces for movement',[23] and which I refer to as morphological spaces.

My *New Model Army* sculptures are built and deployed to do this work. The sculptures in my Fieldworks collectively constitute my *New Model Army*—an army of sculptures of working-class single mothers who would occupy spaces differently, with the specific aim of undoing the exclusion of working-class single mothers and their creativity, via the politics of looking which Hadley touches upon, and in ways that 'resist and fight back against the fixing of the body through looking'.[24]

The impetus to make *New Model Army: Behind Tate Modern: Morphological Activism and Working-Class Single Mothers (2018–19)* emerged through the sculptures and their anthropomorphic aspect.[25]

Leaving aside the many possible psychoanalytic interpretations of my motivations for anthropomorphizing my sculptures, it often seems to me that they do not or cannot easily accept my care for them or that I want an equal, working relationship with them. Instead, like the women whose experiences they momentarily represent, they are simultaneously tough and vulnerable due to their

previous experiences of exploitation. They can be highly demanding, insisting on equality in their own terms, through their materiality and their gestures. This means they consistently assert their differences from me, refusing to allow me to fall into the trap of universalizing my experiences by veering between ignoring me entirely and/or educating me into what they need in order to activate their unique morphological potential and the solidarity this offers. This can be, for example, by exhausting and even injuring me during the making process, or by refusing to co-operate when I photograph them outside or, more recently, seeming to demand, in a variety of ways, improved working conditions. In these moments, I sense I am expected to learn from them, but I don't always know, immediately, what it is that I am expected to learn.

So, by building, transporting and photographing my sculptures behind the major art museum known as Tate Modern, and by writing about this, I sought to place the creativity of working-class single mothers in the sphere where it should be, but is not present: inside this major British art institution.

In these photographs, I choose to withhold any full view of the sculptures in the round, instead presenting them frontally as only photographic works, visual documentation of a moment in which my sculptures are situated outside of and *behind* the parameters of Tate Modern. The word *behind* is important. Positioning the sculptures in this way allows me to reflect back to Tate Modern, as a mother would to a child, its own behaviour, to highlight an awareness of that behaviour and, therefore, a choice of how it might be changed. Although Tate Modern could benefit from this new awareness of how it might choose to develop, it is not a child.

In the process of physically positioning and photographing the sculptures and writing this essay, this Fieldwork was challenging, logistically and psychically; the effects of marginalization and exclusion are embodied and cannot always easily be confronted or undone. Whilst I photograph the army to suggest a new form of feminist solidarity is possible between women, this is not a solidarity that can or should be presumed to already exist, for example, through the friendships and allegiances that working-class single

mother artists may have forged. Such a presumption of solidarity would be dangerous, alleviating governments and art institutions of a duty of care to working-class single mother artists, instead naturalizing any ability they may have to form supportive friendships, in ways that mimic the naturalization of women's ability to carry out domestic work, and which women like Silvia Federici have protested against.[26]
So, confronting the effects of embodied marginalization, as I did through the production of this Fieldwork, inevitably renders one vulnerable. Perhaps I should say, then, that I wanted to instil within Tate Modern and its ilk a feeling that even the most intelligent adults often have, that there is something at the back of the mind, on the periphery of consciousness. A nagging doubt that, when illuminated, can reveal something very difficult to face up to.

My decision to photograph the sculptures outside Tate Modern can, then, be understood generally as a material and political protest against the intricately interwoven and complex political violence of negation and non-representation of working-class single mother artists and as material testimony to their strength and vulnerability in insisting on an equal future for their creativity.

26. See 'Wages Against Housework' (pp. 15–22) and also 'Feminism and The Politics of the Common in an Era of Primitive Accumulation' (pp. 138–148), in Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010).