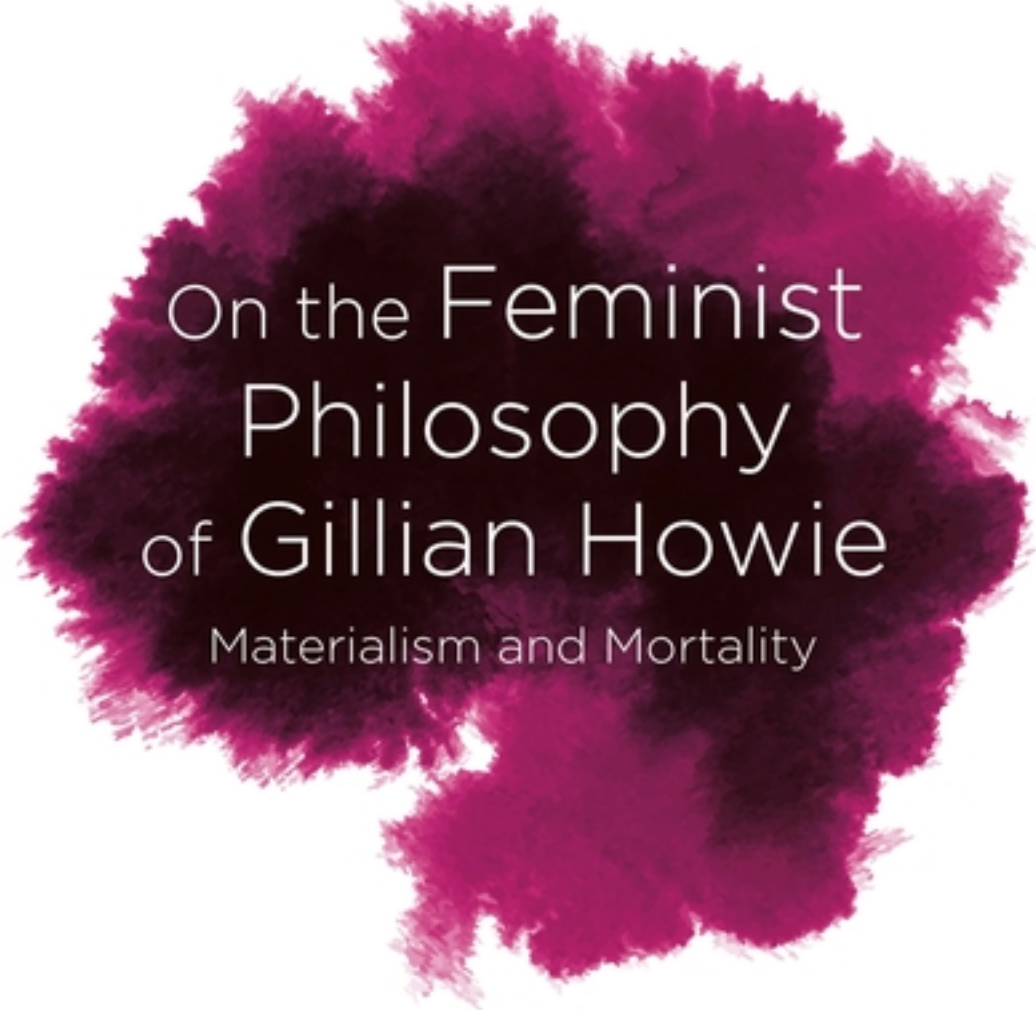

On the Feminist Philosophy of Gillian Howie

Materialism and Mortality

Edited by Victoria Browne and Daniel Whistler

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Notes on Contributors

Christine Battersby is Reader Emerita in the Department of Philosophy and an Associate Fellow of the Centre for Research in Philosophy, Literature and the Arts at the University of Warwick, Warwick, UK. She is the author of *Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics* (The Women's Press 1989, 1994), *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity* (Polity 1998) and *The Sublime, Terror and Human Difference* (Routledge 2007), as well as numerous articles on feminist aesthetics, feminist metaphysics and the history of philosophy and culture.

Victoria Browne is Lecturer in Politics at Oxford Brookes University, Oxford, UK. She has published articles on feminist philosophy, temporality and memory, and is the author of *Feminism, Time and Nonlinear History* (Palgrave Macmillan 2014). Victoria is also a member of the Editorial Collective for the journal *Radical Philosophy*. Her current research is exploring the politics, ethics and temporalities of reproduction and pregnant embodiment.

Claire Colebrook is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English at Pennsylvania State University, USA. She is the author of *New Literary Histories* (Manchester University Press 1997), *Ethics and Representation* (Edinburgh University Press 1999), *Deleuze: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Continuum 1997), *Gilles Deleuze* (Routledge 2002), *Understanding Deleuze* (Allen and Unwin 2002), *Irony in the Work of Philosophy* (Nebraska University Press 2002), *Gender* (Palgrave 2003), *Irony* (Routledge 2004), *Milton, Evil and Literary History* (Continuum 2008), *Deleuze and the Meaning of Life* (Continuum 2010), *William Blake and Digital Aesthetics* (Continuum 2011), *Sex After Life* (OHP 2015), and *Death of the Postman* (Open Humanities Press 2015). She co-authored *Theory and the Disappearing Future* with Tom Cohen and J. Hillis Miller (Routledge 2011), and a follow-up volume, *Twilight of the Anthropocene Idols* (OHP 2016), and co-authored *Agamben* with Jason Maxwell (Polity 2015). She co-edited *Deleuze and Feminist Theory* with Ian Buchanan (Edinburgh University Press 2000), *Deleuze and History* with Jeff Bell (Edinburgh University Press 2008), *Deleuze and Gender* with Jami Weinstein (Edinburgh University Press 2009) and *Deleuze and Law* (Palgrave) with Rosi Braidotti and Patrick Hanafin.

Ruth Gould was born and raised in Liverpool. In her early twenties, she trained in performing arts covering all disciplines, leading to a specialism in physical theatre and devising her own performances and producing community productions in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Since 2001, she has been working as creative director with DaDaFest, founding the festival model and growing it into one of the most consistent disability arts festivals in the UK. Within her work, Ruth seeks to bring to the fore issues that are often neglected and stigmatized, and her encounter with Gillian Howie raised questions surrounding the very real need to not feel like we are living with dying, but living until we are dead.

Amy Hardie is Head of Research at the Scottish Documentary Institute, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK. Her main research is in knowledge through practice, focusing on expanding cinematic storytelling. Publications include 'Rollercoasters and Reality: A Study of Big Screen Documentary Audiences' for *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* (2008) and 'Symbolic Cinema and the Audience' for *Participations* (2010). Previous films include *Kafi's Story* (1990), several films for BBC and Channel 4 including *Inside the Wig* (1993), *Looking for Allah in England* (1994) and collaborations with scientists and healthcare professionals: *Stem Cell Revolutions* (2011), *Tuesdays* (2012) and *Seven Songs for a Long Life* (2015). *The Edge of Dreaming* (2010) is her first personal film. Awards include BP Expo, Joris Ivens, Basil Wright; Grand Jury Prize, Kiev International Film Festival and the Tam Dalyell medal for public engagement.

Nedim Hassan is Senior Lecturer in Media and Cultural Studies at Liverpool John Moores University, Liverpool, UK. He previously worked as the New Thinking on Living with Dying research network administrator at the University of Liverpool for which he co-organized several events with Gillian Howie. His published work has focused on popular music culture, history and audiences. In particular, this work has been based upon extensive ethnographic research and has explored the significance of musical activities in everyday lived culture. He remains interested in researching the socio-cultural roles of musical and other artistic activities from an ethnographic perspective.

Joanna Hodge is Professor of Philosophy at Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester, UK. Her doctoral thesis was on the account of truth in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (Oxford 1983). Her two monographs, *Heidegger and Ethics* (1995) and *Derrida on Time* (2007), were published by Routledge/Taylor and

Francis, and a third, on the way, *The Return of the Thing: Reading Jean-Luc Nancy* (2017) will appear from Bloomsbury. She has recently published articles on 'Queering Hegel', and on '*Différance:* rewriting transcendental aesthetics'. She is currently working on a study of the transformation of transcendental aesthetics, in phenomenology, through the thematics of horizonality, touch, trace and writing at the limit of sense, which will focus on a relation between film and philosophy.

Kimberly Hutchings is Professor of Politics and International Relations at Queen Mary University of London, London, UK. Her research interests include feminist political and ethical philosophy. She is the author of several books, including *Kant, Critique and Politics* (Routledge 1996), *International Political Theory* (Sage 1999), *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy* (Polity 2003) and *Time and World Politics* (Manchester University Press 2008). Her current work is focused on theorizing political violence (in collaboration with Elizabeth Frazer) and on moral reasoning in the ethics of war.

Morny Joy is Professor of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada. Her research has been published in the areas of philosophy and religion, postcolonialism and intercultural studies in South and South-East Asia, as well as in diverse aspects of women and religion. Recent publications include: *Women and the Gift: Beyond the Given and the All-giving* (Indiana University Press 2013), *Continental Philosophy and Philosophy of Religion* (Springer 2011) and *After Appropriation: Explorations in Intercultural Philosophy and Religion* (University of Calgary 2011). Morny was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by the University of Helsinki in 2011.

Janet Price is a disabled feminist who is based in Liverpool, UK, with links to Taranaki, New Zealand. She is active in queercrip politics and has a connection of over thirty years with friends, art and social justice activism in India. She is on the board of DaDaFest (www.dadafest.co.uk), a disability and deaf arts organization in Liverpool, which has a growing global reach. Her commitment to global social justice is further reflected through her long-term academic contribution to the gender groups at Liverpool University and the School of Tropical Medicine. She writes intermittently, through blogs, discussion papers and occasional papers, and she is committed to producing work with others, on the basis that, in Deleuze and Guattari's words, 'since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd'.

Deryn Rees-Jones is Professor of Poetry at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK, widely published as a poet as well as critic specializing in women's writing and poetry. Her most recent book of poems, *Burying the Wren*, was shortlisted for the T. S. Eliot Prize; *What It's Like to Be Alive: Selected Poems* was published by Seren in 2016. She is the editor of the newly launched Pavilion Poetry series (Liverpool University Press) and recently joined the editorial board of *Women: A Cultural Review*. She collaborates frequently with artists and is currently writing a book on the work of Paula Rego.

Stella Sandford is Professor at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University, Kingston, UK. She is the author of *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (Athlone 2000), *How to Read Beauvoir* (Granta 2006) and *Plato and Sex* (Cambridge University Press 2010). She is a long-standing member of the editorial collective for Radical Philosophy, and has also co-edited collections on *Further Adventures in the Dialectic of Sex: Critical Essays on Shulamith Firestone* (Palgrave 2010) and *Philosophies of Race and Ethnicity* (Continuum 2002).

Alison Stone is Professor of Philosophy at Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK. Her books are *Petrified Intelligence: Nature in Hegel's Philosophy* (SUNY 2004), *Luce Irigaray and the Philosophy of Sexual Difference* (Cambridge University Press 2006), *An Introduction to Feminist Philosophy* (Polity 2007) and *Feminism, Psychoanalysis and Maternal Subjectivity* (Routledge 2011). She has also edited *The Edinburgh Critical History of Philosophy Volume 5: The Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh University Press 2011). She is currently co-editing the *Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy* (Routledge 2017) and finishing a book entitled *An Aesthetics of Popular Music*. She is an Associate Editor of *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*.

Daniel Whistler is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Liverpool, Liverpool, UK and Humboldt Research Fellow at the Westfälische-Wilhelms Universität, Münster, Germany. He is author of *Schelling's Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford University Press 2013) and co-editor of *After the Postsecular and the Postmodern: New Essays in Continental Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2010).

Editors' Introduction: Gillian Howie's Philosophies of Embodied Practice

Victoria Browne and Daniel Whistler

If there is one lesson to be learned from the work of Gillian Howie, it is that philosophy and theory cannot transcend their material conditions. Accordingly, the theoretical has to incessantly undergo a process of contextualization, revealing those extra-theoretical conditions that make any act of theorizing possible. Philosophy always takes place in a world of economic forces, political structures, bodily relations and existential projects; 'political beliefs are unintelligible in isolation from claims about the real states of the world'.[1] Charting the embodied practices that underwrite intellectual abstraction and 'the social conditions that give rise to theory'[2] is thus one of the central continuities in Howie's thought stretching across her wide range of interests, from the early critiques of Deleuze and polemics against managerialism in higher education, to the development of her distinctive feminist materialism and late research on the phenomenon of living with non-curative illness. What connects these different projects is the need to critically describe the situatedness (corporeal, political and existential) of a body of thought – that is, to provide an account of how subjects are variously positioned within institutions such as the academy, hospitals and public spaces and, in particular, the role of philosophy in facing very real situations, like sexual oppression and abuse, illness and death.

This overarching critical practice is thematized most explicitly by Howie through 'the context principle' with which her defining monograph, *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method*, begins:

> To grasp what a thing is … we need to place it in context that is at once social, political, and historical. Any attempt to analyze what a thing is, if abstracted from context, will lead to erroneous and often ideological judgment. Historical

[1] Gillian Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism: A Question of Method*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 3.
[2] Ibid., pp. 2–3.

> materialism is thus a theory of relations such that individual identity can be seen to be a consequence of antecedent social processes.[3]

This is a mode of critique that is not merely intended to unmask the pernicious abstractions of thought, but, moreover, to appropriate what is powerful in thought in the name of living. As Howie remarks in *Between Feminism and Materialism* on this latter point, 'Every philosophy is practical, even when it seems at its most contemplative: its method a social and political weapon.'[4] Critique, according to Howie, has both negative and positive valences: it can puncture intellectual pretension but it can also orient an art of living.

In full accordance with her 'context principle', Howie's own work was resolutely both textual and extra-textual – intertwining the two throughout her career as a politically committed academic. Pursuing her DPhil at the University of Cambridge, she served on the executive committees of the Cambridge Labour Students and Cambridge University Students' Union, and later became an executive member of the Association of University Teachers, the British Philosophical Association and the Society for Women in Philosophy.[5] At the University of Liverpool, on the way to becoming its first female Professor of Philosophy, she directed the Institute for Feminist Theory and Research and founded the Centre for Health, Arts and Sciences. These centres not only allowed Howie to engage substantially in interdisciplinary work, but also with practitioners and organizations outside the university. This fed directly into the network New Thinking on Living with Dying, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council, on which her research was focused during the last years of her life, and which – as the contributions to this volume attest – took thinking outside of the academy, confronting academic speculation with the experiences of illness, disability and death as communicated by patients, clinicians, artists and support groups.

This book follows in the spirit of Howie's critical theory and practice. The essays that follow engage with her myriad interests to ensure a continuing critical conversation involving philosophers, social scientists and researchers in the humanities, as well as practitioners outside the academy. The contributions

[3] Ibid., pp. 5–6. On the role of contextualization in Howie's philosophy, see further Daniel Whistler, 'Howie's *Between Feminism and Materialism* and the Critical History of Religions', *Sophia* 53.1 (2014).

[4] Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, p. 9.

[5] For further biographical details, see the obituaries written by J'annine Jobling (""The Personal is the Political": Gillian Howie, 1965–2013', *Radical Philosophy* 180 [2013], https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/obituary/gillian-howie-1965-2013) and Jon Harris ('Gill Howie obituary', *Guardian*, 17 April 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2013/apr/17/gill-howie-obituary).

do not simply pay homage to Howie's achievements, or try to 'fix' what she left unfinished or half-thought; in what follows, Howie's writings are taken as provocations to thought, enabling an enrichment of current and emerging debates around the intersections of feminism, critical theory and philosophies of illness and death. Hence, the wide range of questions considered in this volume include: how can feminist politics be reconceived in the wake of postmodernism? What becomes of pedagogy and intellectual practice within changing conditions of higher education? What does it mean to 'live right up to death' and how can we communicate experiences and issues relating to life-limiting illness?

Feminism, materialism, critical theory

The majority of Howie's publications can be broadly grouped into four categories, which will be explored across the various chapters in this volume.[6]

Feminist theory

Most significant in Howie's output are her several interventions into feminist theory, particularly the critical examination of the significance and limits of third-wave or 'late' feminism, the long-standing engagement with Irigaray's thought and, above all, the renewed interest in the relationship between feminism, Marxism and critical theory. Common to all this work is an abiding scepticism regarding the capabilities of 'postmodern' or 'linguistic' theory to get at what really matters within the feminist project. Thus, in her own contribution to her co-edited volume *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration*, Howie analyses the 'problem of the linguistic turn' in feminism as follows: 'Post-1980s feminist strategy became constrained within an increasingly sophisticated demonstration of the ambivalence or ambiguity of conceptual discrimination … Without wanting to collapse the third wave into the poststructuralist, and the poststructuralist into the postmodern, [the] problem of substantive goal remains a common feature.'[7] She continues in *Between Feminism and Materialism*, 'Now

[6] One aspect of Howie's work we do not consider in this volume is her collaboration with J'annine Jobling on 'women and the divine' that resulted in a volume of the same title (discussed below). However, this has begun to be explored elsewhere – see the special issue of *Sophia*, ed. Pamela Sue Anderson, on feminist philosophy of religion (53.1 [2014]), particularly the Introduction and essays by Haynes and Whistler.

[7] Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert, 'Feminist Dissonance: The Logic of Late Feminism', *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* ed. Stacy Gills et al., Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2004, p. 43.

we have feminist theories that recognize the diversity of women but are unable to figure out any community or collective goal-oriented activity. We have feminist theories sensitive to the capillaries of power but unable to answer the question "what systematic changes would be required to create a just society?" And we have an entire "feminist theory" academic industry but are unable to communicate with the women's movement, such that it is.'[8]

To try and find ways out of this perceived impasse, Howie sought to strengthen links between feminists inside and outside of the academy. For instance, in 2011, she co-organized the 'Radical Women, Radical City' event at the Bluecoat Centre in Liverpool with colleagues from Liverpool University and Liverpool John Moores University, and members of the Merseyside Women's Movement, to celebrate and reflect on the centenary of International Women's Day in 2011. The day included public discussions and exhibitions showcasing the work of local women activists past and present, and culminated in a 'Reclaim the Night' march across the city. Another key project was Palgrave Macmillan's 'Breaking Feminist Waves' series that Howie established and co-edited with Linda Martín Alcoff, which, according to the Series Foreword, aims to 'reassess the established constructions of feminism' and unearth 'neglected contributions', thereby 'unlock[ing] conversations between feminists and feminisms' and 'open[ing] up feminist theory and practice to new audiences'.

In her own writings, Howie proposes that feminist politics can be 'unlocked' via 'a refreshed and revised engagement with Marxism',[9] a position she sets out most fully in *Between Feminism and Materialism* (published as part of the 'Breaking Feminist Waves' series). Here, she argues that feminist theory needs to rediscover its 'epistemological bite' – that is, to become politically engaged once more in a way that can ensure feminist theory contributes substantially to feminist scholarship and, indeed, the feminist movement more generally. To achieve this end, she regroups feminism around the grounding methodological tenets of dialectical materialism, thereby both recovering a neglected strain of radical feminist theory from the 1970s and also providing a way for feminism to traverse the terrain of 'new materialisms' and 'speculative ontologies' in a critically and politically conscious manner. As Howie succinctly outlines at the beginning of *Between Feminism and Materialism*, 'I attempt to demonstrate the usefulness of Marxist categories and thereby revive a dialectical method.'[10]

[8] Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, p. 2.
[9] Ibid., p. 26.
[10] Ibid., p. 7.

A key part of the project in *Between Feminism and Materialism* is the defence of notions of realism, objectivity and identity from a broadly Marxist perspective, i.e. protecting such concepts against appropriation in naïve, non-political materialisms as well as against attack from subject-oriented, sceptical or idealist discourses. That is, she brackets 'Nietzsche, Bergson, Freud and Foucault'[11] in favour of 'a refreshed and revised engagement with Marxism'[12] which involves using dialectical materialism to illuminate the practical, economic and socially specific bases of concept-use, so as to distinguish a theoretically productive form of reason or universality from those forms that are politically problematic. The task is, as Howie puts it, 'to disaggregate objectivism from objectivity',[13] enabling a 'recovery of emancipatory critique' for feminism[14] by situating its critical project in terms of the legacy of the Enlightenment:

> Feminism is fundamentally an Enlightenment or modernist project; it concerns the emancipation of morally valuable individual subjects. Yet recent feminist theory rails against the principal tenets of Enlightenment thought: reason, autonomy, identity, universals, science and – in the end – freedom itself. As a consequence, unable to articulate common grounds of oppression, the rug seems whipped from under our feet – leaving feminism struggling to articulate its relevance and purpose.[15]

The opening contribution to this volume, Stella Sandford's 'When Feminist Philosophy Met Critical Theory: Gillian Howie's Historical Materialism', expounds and defends Howie's critical feminist materialism. Sandford argues that just as the tradition of critical theory is the outcome of the encounter between philosophy and historical materialism, Howie's critical feminist materialism is the outcome of the encounter between critical theory and feminist philosophy: a model of the necessarily transformed forms of philosophy, critical theory and feminist theory that emerge when these three meet. Moreover, whilst Sandford is critical of Howie's own conceptualization of 'sex' in *Between Feminism and Materialism* as a weak 'natural kind', she nevertheless suggests that the critical feminist method outlined in this book has much to recommend it as feminists seek to further develop a critical theory of sex and a critique of the 'gender industry'. Kimberly Hutchings provides further elaboration of Howie's materialist interventions in her chapter 'Feminist Knowledge and

[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid., p. 26.
[13] Ibid., p. 37.
[14] Ibid., p. 3.
[15] Ibid., p. 12.

Feminist Politics: Reflections on Gillian Howie and Late Feminism'. Hutchings is not entirely persuaded by Howie's critique of 'late feminism', nor her proposed remedy of reinventing the link between knowledge and feminist politics. Progressive feminist politics, Hutchings suggests, might not necessarily require grounding in a theoretical approach drawn from dialectical materialism. Nevertheless, in Hutchings view, Howie's coalitional, multi-dimensional model of feminist politics, which moves beyond homogenous conceptions of the feminist revolutionary subject, offers a useful way forward for feminism.

Affirmation and negation

A corollary of Howie's attempted transformation of feminist theory is her critique of Deleuze, Spinoza and feminist appropriations of affirmation and 'becoming-woman'. As Howie puts it in *Between Feminism and Materialism*, 'Before affirmation there should be criticism'.[16] She first airs her unease with philosophies of affirmation in the doctoral work that resulted in her first monograph, *Deleuze and Spinoza: Aura of Expressionism*. Once again, her fundamental target is those elements of feminism and philosophy that she believes have failed to provide the tools and conditions for politically relevant theory. As she puts it on the very first page of the work (alluding to similar complaints made elsewhere by Alex Callinicos and Christopher Norris), large sections of 'left-liberal intelligentsia' had been

> won over to consensus-based doctrines of meaning and truth that left them unable to articulate any kind of reasoned or principled opposition … Although the melancholic period of Thatcherism … has since been superseded by Tony Blair's new times, and Anthony Giddens' third way, their language of change and modernisation might be considered a sanitised version of the familiar obfuscating pragmatism. As a prolegomena towards a critique of the discourse of globalisation, social exclusion and identity politics, this present work is a commentary on such obfuscation, the process of concealment common to both 'modernisers' and postmodernists. It is in effect a commentary on ideology.[17]

Deleuze is used here and elsewhere as the paradigm for philosophy gone awry.

Another key aspect of this critique is Howie's insistence on the embodied conditions of theory and practice. She regularly takes issue with the Cartesian image of philosophy as disembodied contemplation, and her criticisms of

[16] Ibid., p. 8.
[17] Gillian Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza: Aura of Expressionism*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002, p. 1.

Deleuze's 'body without organs' and conception of 'becoming-woman' as abstractions from lived embodiment are part of this project. Her key point here is that the abstract concept of 'becoming-woman' entirely lacks reference to 'the historical and epistemological specificity of the female feminist standpoint':[18]

> The idea of 'becoming-woman' is an attempt to transform embodied experience but, because it is unable to concern itself with mechanisms, structures and processes of sexual differentiations, fails in this task … Working in the abstract, 'becoming-woman' stands with 'becoming-animal' and 'becoming-imperceptible' as a form of minoritarian becoming. But there seems little to say about the peculiarities of becoming-*woman* rather than, say, becoming-insect.[19]

In opposition to feminist philosophies of affirmation inspired by Deleuze, Howie explores the potential offered by the idea of non-identity in both critical theory and existentialism. Once again, such a move is premised on a dissatisfaction with the prevalent 'turn' to psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory as politically debilitating. She counter-poses 'materialism' to 'postmodernism', putting poststructuralism, psychoanalytic theory and all subject-oriented theories on trial in the name of a re-engagement with Marxism and critical theory, particularly in the tradition of Adorno. And 'notwithstanding the uneasy conceptual and historical relationship between existentialism and critical theory',[20] Howie brings together a rigorous reading of the early pages of *Being and Nothingness* with post-Adornoan theory to provide an account of non-identity that is intended to do justice to lived experience as well as the critique of structures. That is, Howie follows Adorno in conceiving non-identity as a central concept for articulating the experience of social contradiction, an experience 'informed by contradiction, alienation and reification',[21] but she also follows Sartre (*pace* Adorno's own rejection of Sartre) in placing non-identity at the heart of a description of consciousness. The consequences of this attempt to 'supplement or enhance Adorno's critical theory' with Sartrean phenomenology[22] are articulated by Howie as follows,

> Negative experience is not dependent on the experience of social contradiction: a world without social conflict would still be subject to the principle of nonidentity, perhaps then to the thought of multiplicity … Individual subjects

[18] Gillian Howie, 'Becoming-Woman: A Flight into Abstraction', *Deleuze Studies* 2 (2008), p. 85.
[19] Ibid., pp. 83–4.
[20] Gillian Howie, 'Nonidentity, Negative Experience and the Pre-Reflective Cogito', *European Journal of Philosophy* 23.3 (2012), p. 589.
[21] Ibid., p. 595.
[22] Ibid., p. 603.

> continually question, interrogate and destabilize the appearance of identity, permanence and presence. However this does not lead to reconciled rational identity. Because consciousness is 'elsewhere' there can be no authentic recovery of the self or the Subject.[23]

Throughout her work Howie draws upon Adorno and Horkheimer's critique of instrumental reason and in particular the varieties of abstraction and reification such thinking gives rise to. Following Jameson, she insists that 'the loss of objects in the process of abstraction poses and disguises real threats to the subject',[24] and so is particularly interested in the ways in which such abstractions impact on the lived experience of subjects: 'Subjects are compelled to behave as detached observers rather than active participants in life and … the demand to calculate oneself and others for profit leads to an attempt to regard the world from a purely rational and emotionless stance – a view-from-nowhere.'[25] What is more, this emphasis on the deficiencies of instrumental reason allows Howie to bolster, on the one hand, her insistence on the need for critique to be understood as a continual process of contextualization (counteracting the 'tendency to abstract – and try to make sense of – events, roles, human characteristics away from their social contexts')[26] and, on the other hand, a recovery of categories such as objectivity, reason and identity for feminist theory. As she argues at length in *Between Feminism and Materialism*, feminist problems with such categories are merely 'the problems of *instrumental* reason: a distinctively historical cognitive orientation to the world of experience'.[27]

It is this latter point that Joanna Hodge examines in her contribution to the volume, 'Between Negative Dialectics and Sexual Difference: Generative Conjunctures in the Thinking of Gillian Howie'. She subjects to scrutiny Howie's use of Adorno's writings as a useful tool for feminist theory, considering how Howie 'follows Adorno's lead' but 'under the guidance of [Luce] Irigaray's insight that in this modern epoch what is to be thought are the differences between human beings, both within, and between epochs'. Irigaray may seem an unlikely interlocutor for Howie, given that Irigaray is usually identified as a key figure in those poststructuralist and psychoanalytic feminisms that Howie positioned herself against. Yet, in fact, Irigaray is one of the thinkers that Howie most frequently returns to – an interest which led her to co-organize with J'annine

[23] Ibid., pp. 603–4.
[24] Howie, 'Becoming-Woman', p. 101.
[25] Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, p. 47.
[26] Ibid., p.37.
[27] Ibid., p. 64.

Jobling the major five-day 'Women and the Divine' conference in Liverpool in 2005 at which Irigaray was in attendance, and out of which the volume *Touching Transcendence* (co-edited by Howie and Jobling) emerged.[28] In her chapter, Hodge argues that the tensions and lines of conflict between Adorno and Irigaray provide Howie with a 'productive space' for conceptualizing the connection between philosophy and politics, and developing a distinct, 'hybrid' theorization in which 'Irigaray's dogmatism may be corrected by appeal to a speculative logic derived from Adorno; and Adorno's limited vision may be corrected by Irigaray's account of such blind spots, and by her attention to the silent force of an accumulating historical derogation of women'.

The state of education

Such innovations in critical theory and feminist theory are already applied to non-theoretical problems in Howie's published work – in line with her conception of the critical project. Indeed, the need to connect social science research on concrete problems to theoretical speculation is a constant in her thought; thus she laments of 'a rich stream of critical social science [which has been] forgotten rather than repressed; the result of the overwhelming dominance of cultural theory, poststructuralism, psychoanalysis and – perhaps – the municipalisation of feminist theory'.[29] From her very earliest publications, the question of the changing historical conditions of knowledge production, particularly in the UK higher education sector, was a recurring topic in her writing – as it was in her own academic practice as well. Particularly pressing, she felt, was the need to hold up to scrutiny the dizzying array of changes that higher education was undergoing in the wake of the Bologna accord in the late 1990s: the Research Excellence Framework, the widening participation agenda and modularization are just some of the topics that Howie subjects to critique,

[28] Gillian Howie and J'annine Jobling (eds), *Women and the Divine: Touching Transcendence*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009. As Jobling reflects in the obituary she wrote in *Radical Philosophy* for Howie, 'In a move typical of Gill's integrative view of academic pursuit, she suggested that the programme extend beyond the presentation of papers: ultimately it included a local, grassroots interfaith forum, yoga, Shiatsu, jazz and poetry recital' (p. 67).

[29] Gillian Howie, 'Feminist Histories: Conflict, Coalitions and the Maternal Order', *Studies in the Maternal* 2.1 (2010), p. 9. Howie elsewhere writes, 'Feminism will only move forward, reconnect theory and praxis, if we can find a way to bring together the somatic, living and experiencing body with critical social science. To reveal, to make explicit, to investigate, and to change the ways in which situations are organized, we must synthesize objectivist tendencies in social science with subjectivist tendencies within hermeneutics and phenomenology. A theoretical reorientation toward the condition and objects of experience will help to bridge feminist theory in the humanities and empirical research in social sciences' (Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, pp. 2–3).

and here as elsewhere her strategy is the same – to uncover the real conditions of production underlying these phenomena through a rigorous process of contextualization and localization. Moreover, Howie then compares this picture of higher education as it is to an ideal of critical inquiry and the cultivation of a reflective art of living: 'I suggest that students are now educated within a system that promotes a form of thought antithetical to the recognition of "otherness": a prerequisite for any substantial thought about diversity.'[30] She continues,

> The style of thinking demanded from academics and transmitted to students frustrates the explicit end of social justice but it is ideally suited to a transformed education service within an internationally agreed 'global' market. Unless the rational kernel of truth, the aim of social justice, is prised away from the widening access shell of government policy, and the management discourse of quality that acts as its conduit, then the future of higher education looks bleak.[31]

In her chapter 'Scholarly Time and Feminist Time: Gillian Howie on Education and Intellectual Inheritance', Victoria Browne brings Howie's writings on the changing conditions of higher education together with her analyses of feminism in the academy, paying particular attention to the question of how feminism is shared and transmitted between different generations of theorists and practitioners. Examining not only Howie's critical dissection of the 'audit culture' in UK academic institutions, and the generational 'wave' model of feminist theory, Browne also considers her attempts to move towards more promising ways of transmitting knowledge and intellectual inheritance via alternative modalities of scholarly time and feminist time. In a similar vein to Browne, Daniel Whistler considers in his chapter 'The Cloistered Imaginary' the spatial, temporal and corporeal conditions of the university ideal at play in Howie's writings on higher education. He identifies an ambiguity in Howie's attitude towards the ideal of liberal education in the modern university: on the one hand, it instantiated discriminatory practices under the guise of disembodied neutrality, but on the other hand it fostered an ethos of critical enquiry and autonomous thinking that, Howie laments, has recently been lost from the university through bureaucratization. The 'cloistered ideal' is both negated and partially affirmed, and Whistler excavates the 'imaginary' conditions that result in such ambivalence.

[30] Gillian Howie, 'A Reflection on Quality: Instrumental Reason, Quality Audits and the Knowledge Economy', *Critical Quarterly* 44.4 (2002): 140.
[31] Ibid., p. 146.

Living with dying

Throughout her work, Howie attests to the transformative power of philosophical thought, whether directed towards gendered power relations, labour conditions, or educational practices and institutions. In her final research project, both the potentials and the limitations of philosophy are explored, as she considers experiences (including her own) of living with non-curable or life-limiting illness. 'Terry Eagleton once described the meaning of life as a subject fit for either the crazed or the comic', Howie wrote, and when faced with one's own mortality, one may well ask 'what is the point or value of philosophy after all'?[32] It might seem unlikely that any intellectual discipline could play a positive role in 'easing suffering', perhaps especially philosophy with its reputation for being 'unworldly' and unconcerned with matters of the body. Philosophers, she acknowledges, have often been 'caricatured as lofty, bearded and anachronistic beings … as strangers to the everyday and aspiring to be free from the demands of the particular and quotidian'.[33] Yet in a blog post written in 2012 – 'Death: you can't live with it, you can't live without it' – Howie is not willing to give up on philosophy quite so easily. She proposes here that 'philosophical reflection … ought to be able to relieve anxiety, to provide the conceptual clarification that could be placed as a series of stepping-stones through any dark night … help[ing] us navigate the contours of this complicated, morally ambiguous and frail life.' Indeed, for Epicurus, 'there is no point to philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul'.[34]

In an article published posthumously in 2014, 'Alienation and Therapy in Existentialism: A Dual Model of Recognition', Howie explores the potential of philosophy to help 'settle the questions' that arise in the event of a poor prognosis in more detail. Here, she seeks to recover an alignment between philosophy and *therapeia*, between 'philosophical method, medical practice and cure'. She highlights Buddhist and non-Buddhist Indian philosophical traditions and ancient Greek philosophies, as well as Wittgensteinian and pragmatist philosophy, as schools of thought for whom 'philosophical practice can help to cure mental or spiritual disorder and restore psychological health … through the exercise of reason, which can iron out linguistic confusion, excise poorly

[32] Gillian Howie, 'Death; You can't live with it, you can't live without it', New Thinking on Living with Dying blog, 28 June 2012, https://newthinkingaboutlivingwithdying.wordpress.com/2012/06/28/death-you-cant-live-with-it-you-cant-live-without-it/

[33] Gillian Howie, 'Alienation and Therapy in Existentialism: A Dual Model of Recognition', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 17.1 (2014): 56.

[34] Howie, 'Death; You can't live with it, you can't live without it'.

formulated or inadequately justified beliefs and identify the cause of unpleasant emotional affect'.[35] But Howie's key focus in the article is the tradition of existentialist phenomenology, which she claims is able to

> engage with prejudicial structures that not only shape our thinking but also our somatic and affective being-in-the-world. Therapeutically, it is thus able to offer insight into the conditions of experience that allow for the critical dissolution of illusion and alter habitual harmful behaviours which, with practice, could prompt a radical conversion. In the process, it shows how to live a life always in question.[36]

This positive view of the contribution that philosophy can make to the project of 'living well right up to death', however, is not repeated with such confidence in the public lecture 'How to Think about Death: Living with Dying'[37] that Howie gave in 2012 (suggesting, as Christine Battersby argues in her contribution to this volume, that her position was not settled during this period). Howie presents her project here as an investigation into the 'phenomenology of living with dying', and considers different philosophical perspectives on the relationship between death and life. A common view, elaborated by Heidegger, is that 'death illuminates the meaning of life', that 'anxiety in the face of death liberates us from possibilities that count for nothing, and lets us free for those that do count for something'. Yet, Howie argues in the lecture that those who have a poor prognosis of non-curative illness often experience 'depression … anxiety … dislocation and an evacuation of meaning' which seems to contradict the Heideggerian thesis. 'When a patient receives a prognosis', she claims, 'then the future itself is disturbed and the problem of meaningfulness in time emerges. When projects are truncated, the present – the folds of the past and the future – seems exhausted and evacuated of meaning.'

Thus, whilst Heidegger was right to claim that 'humans are the only animals that confront their own situation as a question', Howie claims, dying does not 'enable authentic existence'. Rather, it 'clogs the mind with terror and evacuates meaning from the world, from my world'. Moreover, in the face of such fear, anxiety, and the 'evacuation of meaning', Howie argues that we confront the limitations of philosophy as an intellectual practice that can enable us to 'live right up to death with hope'. She affirms that philosophy can do useful 'conceptual work', pointing out, for instance, 'where our hopefulness is hope for an object

[35] Howie, 'Alienation and Therapy in Existentialism', p. 56.
[36] Ibid., p. 57.
[37] Transcribed in Chapter 6 of the present volume.

that can't be realised', but contends that what philosophy cannot do is help us cultivate 'a state of mind of hopefulness even in the face of a shortened future'. Her conclusion is that other fields, such as art, music, literature or horticulture, hold more promise than philosophy in providing answers to her fundamental research question: 'How can we live right up to death, even that period during life-limiting illness when we know we only have a few years to live?'

The full transcript of Howie's 'How to Think About Death' lecture is included as Chapter 6 of this volume, and in her subsequent chapter, 'Gillian Howie's Situated Philosophy: Theorizing Living and Dying "In Situation"', Christine Battersby provides a rich engagement with Howie's evolving philosophy of living with dying. The chapter outlines in close detail the development of Howie's thinking, locating her position alongside other phenomenological accounts of being 'situated', especially those of Sartre and Heidegger. Battersby concludes by suggesting that Howie ascribes 'an exactly similar function to free-floating hope that Heidegger attributes to anxiety … For Howie it is *hope* in the face of death that makes *Dasein* authentic, not Heideggerian *Angst*.' Moreover, she argues that despite the scepticism that Howie expresses in her lecture towards philosophy's capacity to cultivate hopefulness in the face of death, in fact this lecture itself demonstrates that 'engaging in philosophy can … be a part of the transformative journey and therapeutic practice'.

Alison Stone also engages in depth with the arguments proposed by Howie in her 'How to Think about Death' lecture; though in her chapter 'The Relationality of Death' she seeks to defend the relational model of death that Howie appears to reject. For Howie, the non-individualistic view of death as the cessation of a 'web of relations' is counter-intuitive 'because there is a radical asymmetry: I might mourn losing relationships with others, but actually I'm the one that's going to die'. As such, she states in her lecture that 'This death is my death, and the life in question is mine. It has an irrefutable first-person quality …' Stone's argument is that the relational view of death can accommodate this intuition because 'the world whose end I anticipate and fear is a shared world … and it is by virtue of its being shared that I am attached to it and do not want it to end'. Accordingly, she suggests *pace* Heidegger that 'Confronting the prospect of my death will not individuate but "relationalize" me, revealing to me the ultimate value or the fundamental impact upon me of the relationships with which I have been living.'

In Morny Joy's chapter, 'Reflections on Living up to Death', the focus shifts from Heidegger to Paul Ricoeur, as Joy explores Ricoeur's reflections on finite existence, affirmation and hope. In fact, though Howie claimed *Living up to*

Death by Ricoeur to be one of the key inspirations for her Living with Dying project, her own work on the topic includes no detailed engagement with this text, or indeed with Ricoeur's work more generally. However, Joy suggests that Ricoeur's philosophical conception of 'consent to life, with its appeal to hope', and his 'refusal to be governed by necessity', may have given Howie substantial material to draw upon if she had been able to continue developing her own philosophy of living right up to death.

The subsequent chapter by Claire Colebrook, 'Learning to Die, Finally', similarly takes Howie's lecture as a provocation to further consideration of the 'conundrums' and questions posed by living with dying. Yet, Colebrook pushes the 'living with dying' analytic beyond the subject-centred framework of phenomenology, arguing that whilst 'the prognosis appears to be exceptional, out of time, and destructive of the meaning we ought to have', 'this seemingly "non-natural death" should in fact be the way we think about *all* death, and indeed, about nature itself. Just as "the man" of European memory and "being-towards-death" has reached his limit', she claims, so too has the notion of a 'harmonious, stable, bounded, landscape-like nature that is in accord with a moral vision of time'. Accordingly, not only as individuals but moreover, *as a species*, 'we will have to learn how to die'.

The chapters outlined above attest to the considerable contribution that philosophy can make to the project of cultivating hope, meaning and critical understanding in the face of death. Yet, as discussed above, Howie herself was adamant that other fields of practice and intellectual enquiry have just as much (if not more) to contribute, and this conviction informed the interdisciplinary approach Howie took in her role as Principal Investigator of the AHRC-funded network, New Thinking on Living with Dying. A central aim of the project was to involve organizations and individuals from outside the academy, and hence the network brought together not only academics but also practitioners interested in 'the psychology and phenomenology of living with dying', including clinical practitioners, artists, community workers and 'anyone else who is interested'.[38] Three workshops were planned: *Thinking about Dying*, *Chronic Illness and Wellbeing*, and finally *The Clinical Model of Care*.[39] In addition to these research workshops, the network planned three public events. The first, *Changing Capacities, Changing Identities*, which took place on 1 September 2012, was co-organized with the Disability and Deaf Arts Festival – an organization that

[38] Quotations from the next two paragraphs are all taken from Howie's lecture, 'How to Think about Death', Chapter 6 of the present volume.

[39] This final workshop did not take place due to Howie's death in 2013.

promotes deaf and disability arts in north-west England and beyond – as Howie believed it is disability practitioners and critical disability theorists 'who have the most to teach us about how to live a changing body without living that as a loss with norms that you are continually trying to recover'. The second public event, in collaboration with the Reader Group, was to explore 'reading as therapy' and the idea that 'sometimes the unsayable can be expressed otherwise', and the third was to have been co-organized with Ness Gardens and Sefton Allotment Groups in Liverpool in order to put into practice the idea of cultivating nature, 'without, for example, having to take on the responsibility for a garden at a point when you're tired and not very fit, but just the experience of tending, being attentive to, enables the patients themselves to care for themselves'.[40]

The workshops and events planned by the network spanned a huge range of areas and involved a wide range of people and practices. It would be impossible to reproduce this range within the scope of this volume; however, the final four essays give a flavour of the rich plethora of ideas, methods and practices that were engaged and experimented with. Deryn Rees-Jones' chapter, 'What the Living Do: Poetry's Death and Dying', considers the role of writing and reading at the end of life, suggesting that the complexities of the lyric poem as 'a complex structure built around space and silences, might be a useful model for thinking about the experience of death'. Illustrating this through a close analysis of Jorie Graham's 'San Sepolcro', Rees-Jones argues that lyric poetry has the potential to reinvent and deconstruct the realities of life and death, 'in a way which might allow us also to continually encounter the "not-being" which creates meaning as well as the language which evokes or represents the being that is lost'.

Taking us from poetry to photography, Nedim Hassan's chapter '*Cancer Sucks*: Photography and the Representation of Chronic Illness' focuses upon an exhibition of digital photography entitled *Cancer Sucks* that was displayed at the *Changing Capacities, Changing Identities* event co-organized by the New Thinking on Living with Dying research network and DaDaFest. Drawing upon research into the photographic project, which was put together by the late performer/model Tutu and the photographer Ashley Savage, the chapter argues that, in spite of existing concerns about the photograph's ability to objectify the human subject, a project like *Cancer Sucks* can enable the viewer to gain insights into the embodied experiences of breast cancer in ways that challenge common representations of the illness.

[40] Again, these public events ultimately did not take place owing to Howie's death, but the thinking behind them perfectly encapsulates Howie's approach to the project.

Amy Hardie's chapter, 'Movie-Making as Palliative Care', similarly asks what artistic practice can bring to the palliative care environment, focusing on the contribution of film-making. She outlines an approach that uses the camera as 'an actual and metaphorical mirror', referring to three documentary films she made which were screened as works in progress during the activities of the New Thinking on Living with Dying network: *The Edge of Dreaming*, *Tuesdays* and *Seven Songs for a Long Life*. Through discussing the process of making the films and the subsequent impact they have had on their audiences, Hardie traces the development of an innovative use of the tools of cinema – camera, sound, projection – that engages with what gives meaning to people's lives in their last months and years.

Finally, Janet Price and Ruth Gould scrutinize Howie's aims in the New Thinking on Living with Dying network from the point of view of disability theory. Drawing on their work with Howie for the *Changing Capacities, Changing Identities* event in 2012, they argue for a convergence of research on disability and illness, since both fields reconceive the body such that the category of normality is put into question. Price and Gould further consider the role of the arts in providing a means for all bodies to be expressed in their singularity, free from and across social, political and embodied norms.

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Taken together, the chapters in this volume open up several pathways into the feminist philosophy of Gillian Howie and her engagements with materialism and mortality; however, the richness of her work and its potential for further exploration could never be fully captured in just one collection. As such, we intend this volume to serve as a springboard to further engagements with Howie's work, initiating new critical conversations across different topics and fields of thought and practice. In her writings, Howie never tried to claim absolute novelty; instead, she saw herself as part of a historical trajectory and collaborative effort, beginning her conclusion to *Between Feminism and Materialism* with the claim that 'we all stand on the shoulders of giants'.[41] That is true, but at the same time Howie was a highly original thinker and a highly original person, with a finely tuned understanding of the political stakes of philosophical enquiry. Her insistence that philosophy must be adequate to the political challenges of the times results occasionally in a polemical style,

[41] Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, p. 201.

and she consistently refused to acquiesce to academic fashions. Not only was she prepared to 'call out that this particular emperor is naked'[42]; she was also unafraid to return to theoretical frameworks such as dialectical materialism, or figures such as Shulamith Firestone,[43] that have seemingly been discarded in the clamour for the next new trend in the academic marketplace. Though she insists that philosophy should always remain reflexively aware of its own investments and contextual embeddedness, in Howie's hands this does not result in a 'touchy-feely' approach to philosophical engagement. Rather, if philosophy is to do its work, it must be bold, unflinching and provocative, as well as illuminating and precise. As Howie herself puts it so characteristically:

> My guiding principle is that the work of philosophy should be concerned with the intelligibility of the world. This is not because everything can be explained, grasped, or even communicated, but because if, as feminists, we wish to change the world, then we need to know what we are dealing with. Identity, representation, and objectivity may be implicated in an oppressive social real but are actually politically neutral concepts. Without them we are unable to investigate and change relations of oppression, and the point, after all, is to change the world.[44]

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[42] Howie, *Deleuze and Spinoza*, p. 2.
[43] Gillian Howie, 'Sexing the State of Nature: Firestone's Materialist Manifesto', *Further Adventures of The Dialectic of Sex*, ed. Mandy Merck and Stella Sandford, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
[44] Howie, *Between Feminism and Materialism*, p. 9.