


# Refusing post-truth with Butler and Honig

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## Abstract

This article argues that although post-truth is understood to pose a particular misogynistic threat to feminism, we cannot assume that feminists should simply oppose post-truth. The way the post-truth debate is constructed is problematic for feminism in three ways: it misconceives the relationship between democracy and truth; utilizes a questionable binary between reason and emotion; and propagates elitist assumptions about protecting democracy from the people. Recognizing the insufficiency of our understanding of post-truth, feminists have called for greater understanding of the roles of language, affect and truth in the post-truth debate. In response, I suggest that the theories of Judith Butler and Bonnie Honig can help. However, I seek to emphasise that if feminists are to intervene meaningfully in the inequalities and intensified affective flows that structure the post-truth paradigm they would benefit from a deintensifying, confrontational but nonaggressive, approach.

## Keywords

affect, Bonnie Honig, Jacques Rancière, Judith Butler, nonviolence, post-truth

In this article, I argue that although post-truth is understood to pose a particular misogynistic threat to feminism, we cannot assume that feminists should simply oppose post-truth. I suggest that the way the post-truth debate is constructed is problematic for feminism in three ways: it misconceives the relationship between democracy and truth; utilizes a questionable binary between reason and emotion; and propagates elitist assumptions about protecting democracy from the people. Whilst this debate rages, it distracts us from two characteristics of contemporary social relations – worsening structural inequalities and intensification of affect. Indeed, acknowledging the insufficiency

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of our understanding of post-truth, I recognize in section 1 that some feminists have called for us to seek greater understanding of the roles of language, affect and truth in the post-truth debate (Boler and Davis 2018; Budgeon 2021; Evans and Riley 2020; Ringrose 2018). In response, I suggest that the complementary theories of Judith Butler and Bonnie Honig can help. First, I revisit Judith Butler's work on parody, performativity and speech to argue that it can demonstrate how truth is constructed, the role language plays in enabling misogyny, and how we might intervene to transform affective flows of aggression. However, more is needed if performativity is to be employed by feminists to address structural inequalities and the intensification of affect. Here I suggest that Honig's recent theorization of feminist refusal via 'nonwork' and a 'return to the city' indicates how performativity can be utilized as a collective strategy. Finally, through a reflection on Honig's discussion of regicide in Euripides' play *The Bacchae*, I seek to clarify that if feminism is to overcome the hyper-aggressive misogyny of post-truth and intervene meaningfully in the inequalities and intensifying affective flows of the post-truth paradigm, it would benefit from a confrontational but nonaggressive approach.

## I. Post-truth?

Originating in media discussion (Ball 2017; Davis 2017; D'Ancona 2017; Kakutani 2018; Keyes 2004; Tesich 1992; Roberts 2010) and now attracting increasing attention from scholars (Casabo 2018; Conrad 2021; Farkas and Schou 2020; Fuller 2018; Higgins 2016; Lewandowsky et al. 2017; MacMullen 2020; McIntyre 2018; Thurston 2018; Tucker et al. 2018), post-truth refers to an apparent crisis in which truth no longer has any authority to determine people's beliefs or judgements. It is invoked to describe situations in which politicians or other powerful public figures appear to tell blatant lies with impunity (D'Ancona 2017, 7–8; Higgins 2016, 9). Of concern for this article, post-truth is understood to pose a particular threat to women (Boler and Davis 2018; Budgeon 2021; Evans and Riley 2020; Ringrose 2018) exemplified by the 'vitriolic smearing of women in public that includes on and offline rape and death threats, hostility from Men's Rights groups and online trolling of...feminists' (Evans and Riley 2020, 2). Its misogynistic standpoint is founded on a worldview feared to be growing in popularity which claims societies operate explicitly in women's favour and discriminate against men who must consequently defend themselves against women and feminism (Budgeon 2021, 254). Given the association between this form of misogyny and post-truth it is assumed that feminists must oppose post-truth. However trying to determine the most effective feminist response is complicated for three reasons.

First, the most vocal opponents of post-truth believe it is an attack on democracy. They claim that in democracy, at least until recently, facts and accuracy were accorded a certain respect. However, from Plato's 'noble lie' through Machiavelli's Prince, to contemporary democratic theory, it has been recognized that maintenance of political power is far more often than not accompanied by manipulation of the truth – if not by politicians themselves then by the media that supports them. This poses the question as to why people today are suddenly deemed to be more susceptible to lies and manipulation than previous

generations. Why is post-truth suddenly a problem now? Furthermore, the argument that post-truth threatens democracy itself invokes the ‘crisis’ narrative that has always accompanied democracy since its inception.<sup>1</sup> By positing democracy as under threat, this narrative is used to justify limiting democracy in the name of defending it. It also subtly turns the blame onto ordinary people who have apparently caused this crisis by failing to respect truth. This leads us to argue amongst ourselves – in this instance about who is undermining democracy the most. Those who defend truth thereby contribute to the further polarization of society and risk reducing democracy, in a mistaken attempt to defend it.

Second, the position of those who defend truth relies on a questionable binary between emotion and reason as seen in the much-quoted Oxford English Dictionary definition of post-truth:

Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief (Oxford Languages. 2016).

This binary has long been familiar to feminists in arguments that denigrate women as overly emotional and not capable of reason. Yet there is also an elitist association at play here which asserts that the emotive, irrational, ordinary people easily swayed by emotion need to be countered or led by the educated and expert ‘savants’. These knowledgeable ones deplore ordinary people’s either intentionally malicious or just lazy and resentful attitude and call for a return to reason, truth and facts. It would seem that the critics of post-truth risk defending a sexist and elitist form of democracy.

This elitism manifests again in the third reason. Those who defend truth are then led to engage in a further argument about what motivates others to go along with what are apparently obvious lies. Is it a left behind ‘working class, frustrated and mistrustful of what was perceived as the global moneyed, elite’ (Casabo 2018, 54) who most stridently advocate post-truth, or a privileged White middle class who simply do not want to lose their privilege (Ringrose 2018, 648)? However, the function of this argument seems to be to ascertain the extent to which the advocates of post-truth can be dismissed. Are they genuinely under-privileged and deserving of understanding; or are they just manifesting sour grapes – seeking to restore lost and unjustified privilege? Such an argument, motivated by its inquiry into whether some can be excluded from political debate is not just questionable from a democratic point of view. It also fails to acknowledge that the arguments over who deserves what occur in the context of the cultural shift to neoliberalism. This shift has caused greater absolute precarity through exploitative financial practices and the rollback of healthcare provision and state support. Furthermore, the spread of neoliberal values of competition and individualism is said to have made everyone, even many of the wealthiest, perceive their situation to be in some way precarious. Engaging in arguments over the justification of this perception could simply see us distracted by a symptom of polarization rather than its cause.

Even though the post-truth debate is problematic, feminism cannot ignore it due to its associated misogyny. Yet how might we best respond? Whilst misogynistic post-truthers are clearly not hospitable to feminism, the critics of post-truth are hardly sympathetic

allies either, due to their strident defence of the old order of rationalism and their attacks on the progressive politics of ‘post-modernism’ as a cause for the decline in the status of truth (Keyes 2004; McIntyre 2018). This does not mean that feminism cannot respond effectively to the intense hatred and anger that women are currently facing, but that it needs to find an alternative approach. Perhaps it is helpful for feminism to consider what it is that makes post-truth so distinctive today. One possible answer that is gaining increasing scholarly attention is that it is not that there are more lies in public discourse than before, but that they are defended by increasing levels of aggression. This phenomenon is referred to as the intensification of affect. It is characterized by heightened expressions of hatred, anger and disgust at what is perceived to be feminist hostility towards men who therefore perceive a need to aggressively defend themselves (Evans and Riley, 2020). One notable feature of this defence is seen in the way that men are increasingly expressing themselves through emotion, which is no longer understood as the exclusive preserve of women (Budgeon 2021, 256). Yet the way in which emotion is used here – to express victimhood – makes meaningful exchange difficult since it encourages us into unresolvable arguments concerning whose experience is more valid. As long as this intensity remains it is hard to see how we might break out of what we might refer to as the post-truth paradigm.

In a recent interview, Judith Butler expressed doubt that we are ‘in the middle of post-truth’ today (2019 np). Indeed, it is notable that although a substantial amount of feminist scholars have engaged with post-truth, the majority share Butler’s caution arguing that much is lacking in the current debate and that feminism needs more tools at its disposal if we are to tackle the misogyny that post-truth is associated with. They call for new strategies (Ringrose 2018, 654) and seek greater understanding in three areas: ‘language’ to help us better understand networked misogyny (Evans and Riley 2020); affect ‘beyond the simple opposition of rationality and emotionality’ (Boler and Davis 2018, 84); and truth itself – how it can be claimed and how such claims are mediated by the social (Budgeon 2021, 262). In the rest of this article, I argue that this work has already been begun, most notably in the theory of performativity developed by Judith Butler. I seek to build on this by first reinterpreting what I refer to as the truth rupturing capacity of performativity (section 2) and second supplementing it with Bonnie Honig’s practice of nonwork and ‘returning to the city’ in order to show how performativity can be enacted collectively by feminists (section 3). Arguing that nonwork is an interruption more than an intensification of affective flows, I suggest that it functions most effectively if enacted in a contestatory yet nonaggressive manner. The resultant strategy operates discursively by disrupting today’s flows of intensified affectivity and in this way creates openings to construct more equitable social relations.

## **2. Truth, power and performativity**

Starting with the question of how truth is claimed and mediated, what is striking about Butler’s aforementioned intervention is that she redirects us from truth to power. With reference to US President Donald Trump’s disregard for truth she observes that Trump’s lies effect a certain function: ‘above all juridical proceedings, exercising his will as he

wishes' (2017 np). Indeed some suggest that the entire post-truth phenomenon is less a crisis in truth than a transformation in power relations: either a power-struggle between the emerging discourse of the new right against the incumbent neoliberalism (Fuller 2018); or simply a crisis in the governmentality of neoliberalism itself, moving it closer to authoritarianism and further from democracy (Casabo 2018). Rather than truth versus lies, this argument recasts the post-truth paradigm as a battle that seeks to discredit the legitimacy, or truth, of the opponent's position (Fuller 2018, 5). It indicates that, just as they accuse the post-truthers to be protecting their privilege, the defenders of truth are less concerned about truth *per se* than about defending their threatened position of privilege. This indicates that if feminism is to derail both sides of this debate at once, it needs to target the way that truth is constructed or denied by power relations.

First, let us note that in *Gender Trouble* Butler argues that truth is claimed and mediated performatively. What we take to be true in our social lives is established by the precedent of iteration and hence truth is grounded not in facts but in norms – our normative order. She therefore argues that we can challenge norms, initially focusing on gender norms, by performing them wrong; parodying them in order to demonstrate their limitations and prove that alternatives are possible. Second, with regards to language, in *Excitable Speech* (Butler 1997), Butler argues that language too relies on precedent to uphold the truth. Hence the networked misogyny that feminists are currently experiencing operates via repetition – and is perhaps intensified exponentially by the multiplicity of repetitions made possible by social media. However Butler argues that by using language wrong we can subvert abusive or insulting speech. This is speech that 'talks back' to those who insult, abuse and call names, appropriating the insults, names and abuse, to reassert the agency of the insulted subject, rendering futile its intended negative connotations.

Third, regarding the roles of affect in such an instance, Butler is not denying that being insulted or abused is highly emotive (Butler 1997, 38). On the contrary, against the common understanding that when a lawyer or a newspaper quotes an instance of hate speech they are merely citing another's injurious act and therefore innocent from causing harm, Butler argues that any iteration of hate speech, regardless of the user's intention, itself enacts injury, since its force to wound comes from previous iterations which together comprise our discursive reality (Butler 1997, 39). This means that for Butler, any law to prohibit hate speech paradoxically functions to further entrench its hateful message into our discursive reality. By highlighting the groups and identities that hate speech targets it entrenches their identity as excluded and non-normative in the very attempt it makes to protect them. Rather than seek prohibitive legislation, Butler's focus on the iterability of social norms offers an opportunity to turn disempowerment and subjection into subjection in a way that might help us to subvert both the warring discourses that dispute post-truth. Since any instance of hate speech or abuse is the scene of injury and does not constitute the injury itself, we can never be certain in advance what will happen in its wake. Whilst it may be a chance for hate or abuse to be strengthened, it means that there is also the possibility that a hateful insult or gesture could fail. If it can be repeated wrong in some way it could perhaps deflect the injurious meaning, repurposing it in such a way as to transform its meaning in future.

The transformative quality of speech and behavioural norms is possible because, as Foucault has demonstrated, there is not one truth, but many truths at work in our discursive reality. In amplifying, parodying, or exaggerating a certain insult, we undermine and ridicule it, thereby introducing the possibility that its opposite could be more credible. This does not happen because the counter truth we have asserted is actually correct, rather it demonstrates that more than one truth resides in any utterance or performance. Hence performativity could be said to split the truth revealing the multiplicity of truths at work in any site.

Butler's subsequent work indicates that her theory of performativity is intended as part of an ethico-political project based on the assertion that we, as beings, are limited and ignorant, and that an awareness of these limits should create a humble attitude and an attitude of forgiveness towards others for their own limitations (Butler 2005, 42). For Butler, ethics – the way we behave towards others – starts from an acceptance of this vulnerability since this makes us more conscious of the vulnerability of others (*ibid.*, 100). Butler's attention to vulnerability aims to mobilize us to challenge the unequal distribution of precarity in the world (Butler 2015, 33) and it is to this end that performativity can be utilized, targeting the conditions under which misogyny has gained appeal and become increasingly aggressive.

Butler's theory of performativity therefore indicates how truth is mediated and how language enables networked misogyny but also scope for its transformation. Yet two questions emerge here. First, how does affect operate in these examples – how can we mobilize this strategy when we may affectively feel a need to retaliate, to hurt the abuser as they intended to hurt us? Second, how might performativity inform a collective strategy for a feminist movement targeting post-truth misogyny? To clarify, Butler's ethics appears first and foremost a personal project of self-formation with less focus on the building of a political movement centred on overcoming wider discourses and power structures. The politics that ensues from Butler's ethico-politics is far from clear (Honig 2010; Lloyd 2008). Nothing necessarily follows from the assertion that all are vulnerable. It could prompt us to exhibit more humility and fight for equality, but it could simply be met by acceptance that life is nasty, brutish and short. Nor is it clear that an ethics of vulnerability is necessary to inspire us to fight for a more equitable order. How might strategies of performative intervention in the dominant truths of our time help us build a strategy that could refuse not just individual instances of post-truth, but the post-truth paradigm itself?

### **3. From intensification to interruption**

In this section I seek to complement Butler's theory of performativity with Honig's theory of feminist refusal. The complementarity of Honig and Butler's projects is recognized early on by Honig (1993, 123–4) whose reading of performativity in Arendt also identifies the possibility of transformation that can occur from an imperfect repetition of social norms. Furthermore, Butler's strategy of contesting the scene of injury directly through performativity to transform it accords with Honig's argument that democratic politics must be agonistic if it is to guard against injustice and inequality. Honig's agonism places contestation at the centre of politics and insists that democracy can never find an ultimate

resolution of difference if it is to remain democratic (Honig, 1993, 9). Here I read these thinkers together to demonstrate how the transformative force of performativity can be utilized collectively in the form of Honig's 'nonwork' and her insistence that feminist refusal 'returns to the city'. Together these indicate how feminists can target the two key conditions under which post-truth has emerged – increased structural inequality and affective intensity; and help to illustrate the role of affect in the transformation of truth.

First, Honig recovers the concept of inoperativity from Giorgio Agamben to argue that more than just not working, inoperativity is a form of nonwork that leads to new work, of no use that leads to a new use (Honig 2021). Nonworking is to devote one's time, tools, imagination, space, resources, machines, to something else, and even if that may be rest or idleness it can never be pure suspension. I recognize that Honig's emphasis here on the English term work rather than operability (functionality) has particular salience for feminism since the role of women in patriarchy is to be always working, often unacknowledged, for example, in domestic work, reproductive work, care work and sex, alongside paid work. One particularly striking example of nonwork that Honig provides is of women in *The Bacchae* breastfeeding wild animals. She notes that the political impact of this act is that rather than simply reject the maternalism of nursing, these women nurse the 'wrong' object (Honig 2021, 23). There is something of note here not made explicit in Honig's text but which I want to draw out: different forms of nonwork could be more or less political. Indeed, not working is often a mark of privilege for the wealthy. It is only if nonwork challenges the allocation of work in any given order that it has the potential to upset that order. It subverts because it ignores the expected distribution of roles and time. By operating in the 'wrong' time and the 'wrong' place it employs the performative logic of parody as discussed above (Honig refers to this as 'ironizing' Honig 2021, 23). Furthermore, Honig uses the example of the bacchant's protest – they abandon their work and leave the city to form a community of women beyond the city walls – to indicate that nonwork can be employed collectively. The ensuing turmoil suggests that this is more than just a rejection of work. Nonwork is a refusal of the logics that put us in our place and maintain the functioning of our order.

Furthermore, Honig indicates that nonwork requires contestation. She notes that Euripides' bacchant's do not remain outside of the city walls but return to the city, challenging it to change. By claiming that nonwork must 'return to the city' Honig indicates that nonwork can be a political movement. It can, and must, target our political order, confronting political structures of inequality rather than build heterotopias outside the city walls. Although Honig asks if the end of the play, when the women are sent into exile, could indicate failure as the city is not ready for them (Honig 2021, 74) she suggests we might see our task as one of readying the city (Honig 2021, 94). Yet if, as I have argued above, nonwork effects a rupture, we do not need to only focus our efforts on preparing the city in advance. Instead our efforts can be directed also at the most effective strategy for effecting a rupture that is impossible to ignore.

Seeing that nonwork can be a public and communal strategy of contestation, let us consider the role of affect at play here. Honig seems to describe nonwork as an intensification of work since it in some way could be seen to make a struggle perceptible (Honig 2021, 18). Yet many struggles are perceived by us and still we do not respond to

them. For example the poverty of homeless people who live in the streets we pass through every day, the inequality of our work places, and even the almost constant scenes of protest on our television screens that demonstrate against wars, rights violations, violence against women, racial violence. It seems we have normalized the occurrence of these enough to be able to disregard them. Perhaps we could say that we see them but we do not feel them – in most cases we have affectively blocked any meaningful response. What is it about nonwork that prevents its normalization? Perhaps what makes nonwork, or non-use, effective is that it is not just perceptible. It actually intervenes in our order. Taking us by surprise, it causes momentary hesitation in the exchanges of our affective economy because what is made perceptible is something we cannot make sense of. This is what Jacques Rancière calls a break in the order of the sensible – which refers to how normativity ordains what we perceive, what we understand and how that is mediated by what we feel. This indicates that the performativity of nonwork could be said to provoke less an intensification than a break with the everyday flows of affect that structure our lives and everyday practices. Although Honig refers to such moments as intensification my reading of nonwork as interruption indicates that we may benefit from retaining the sense of something not functioning that is communicated by Agamben's Latinate formula 'in-operativity' when theorizing nonwork, whilst following Honig in detaching this from Agamben's notion of suspension. I suggest that nonwork makes inequality or injustice perceptible because it *prevents* our everyday order *from operating as normal*. This is not just a matter of semantics. I will argue below that by better understanding the logic that makes nonwork effective it can inform more effective strategies for feminist resistance.

Yet first let us consider if it is problematic to suggest that feminism requires us to deflect our rage. Many feminists have sought to valorize rage and hatred as motivational for political action (Ahmed 2004; Luxon 2016). Indeed, reflecting on the gruesome regicide in *The Bacchae*, where women tear the king apart with their bare hands, Honig ponders whether violent aggression towards some may at times be necessary if we are to care for others, since, in this example, it releases everyone – including the king himself 'from the false idolatry of patriarchal sovereignty' (Honig 2021, 66). She later argues that this scene operates more as a parable (Honig 2021, 58, 71) and finally asks whether it might have been more radical for the women to avoid succumbing to such 'cyclical endless vengeance and routine violence' (Honig 2021, 21). Honig concludes that the risk of getting drawn into the violence that we want to oppose is a risk of agonism, and hence the onus is now on the city as to how it receives the bacchant's protest (Honig 2021, 71). Yet I wonder if this risk of violence actually emerges more from the intensification of affect, which I suggest could be seen to exceed Honig's commitment to agonism anyway.

To respond to Honig's concerns about what she sees as the risk of violence in agonism I propose that feminists could draw on another thread in Honig's work. This is necessary because as Honig's ruminations on violence indicate, history teaches that regicide is also how new kings are made. It does not so much free us from order as change the regime of subordination. Since aggressive violence is a tool of patriarchy, meaningful resistance can arguably only be found in its refusal. It is only when we refuse to hate or destroy the master that we can enact refusal since it is our hatred that keeps the master in a position of power over us. Rather than establish a new city with new masters, to break with the



affective normativity of the patriarchal order it is evident that nonwork must effect a rupture with our everyday affective flows. A rupture which invites us to not just remove the city's rulers but utterly transform the notion of rulership. This would mean creating the possibility for masters and subjects to dwell together in reconfigured equal relationships. Feminist refusal must therefore aim less to destroy the master than dissolve the patriarchy – the ultimate order of mastery. Is this what 'the bacchant's exile' teaches? By falling into the trap of murderous violence they undermine their own politics and prevent the city from receiving them.

In previous texts Honig's agonism is focused more strongly on ambivalence. Although ambivalence may indicate an extreme oscillation between two passionate extremes, it most usually informs less extreme feelings. This need not be rational or cold. Honig's call for passionate ambivalence could indicate a need to be passionate about undecidability thereby avoiding the tug of intensification (Honig 2003). It can also include a passion for the necessity of contestation to protect against domination and the fixing of any order. Perhaps we find this ambivalence enacted in Honig's argument that feminism must, eventually, return to the city (2021, 100). Yet when there I would argue that nonwork is more likely to succeed tactically and minimize the aforementioned risk of vengeance and routine violence if it enacts this ambivalent agonism rather than a strategy of intensification.

This is not an exhortation for feminists to swallow our feelings and be rational in the face of misogynistic abuse. Instead it is to consider the most effective use of emotions. Consider for a moment how an unexpected performative response creates an opening in a site of verbal abuse. It interrupts the expected victory of the abuser, rejecting their position of mastery. It also refuses the shame and fear that creates the abused subject, hence creating a space between subjects that is unmapped. What may be formed in that encounter cannot be known in advance (Butler 1997, 148). It offers to render inoperative the affective circulation of hate, resentment and rage by deflecting the hurt that an insult is intended to inflict and repurposing the insult affirmatively. The interruption creates a little affective distance. Enough perhaps to enable us to repurpose the passion of our rage and anger into demonstrations of nonwork that contest the very conditions of inequality under which the aggression of post-truth has flourished. Hence, rupturing aggression by interrupting affective flows need not require that we ignore or repress emotions. We can still value anger and rage for mobilizing and politicizing us. It is just that we utilize it differently, passionately deflecting its energy elsewhere, interrupting the aggressivity that stems from precarity whilst actively targeting the practices that lead to precarity in the first place. I am not suggesting that this deflection is something we can or should expect ourselves to do individually, psychologically, when caught up affectively in a scene of injury. Instead this is where feminist community comes into force, supporting the channeling of passions into the communal enactment of equality by women and minorities rather than remain within the infinite loop of returning rage, hatred, or fear back at those who direct it towards us.

We are left to ask: what does a nonwork demonstration look like? How might it help us to interrupt the circulation of post-truth? I suggested that if we are to understand nonwork as an interruption rather than an intensification then we might need to employ tactics rather different from the majority of political demonstrations which often aim first and foremost for visibility. In contrast, a nonwork demonstration might employ exaggeration

and parody to undermine specific norms that generate inequality and social injustice by performing them ‘wrong’. Examples could include sleeping during the day as discussed by Honig, but also kiss-ins and poetry writing, occupations and squats, the public distribution of scarce essential household items (whilst wearing gnome hats perhaps), flamenco dancing in banks, distributing flowers to soldiers, hacking pernicious websites by redirecting them to sites dedicated to social justice, or pausing during the working day to gaze out of the window and imagine oneself the owner of your opulent surroundings (Woodford 2017, 31). Yet this leads to another question – how would these seemingly eccentric protests effect meaningful change to our social relations?

Of course, such protests will not always effect change. The logic of nonwork indicates that the measure of effectiveness concerns how well any demonstration ruptures the flow of affective meaning by enacting norms ‘wrong’. This interrupts our usual affective responses and thereby makes perceptible dominant norms at the same time as demonstrating their inadequacy, indicating that alternatives are needed. Yet even if they do succeed in interrupting affective flows. What then? Let us recall that performativity operates not through posing a new truth but by splitting the existing truth. Thus, in contrast with more conventional forms of protest these demonstrations are less focused on manifesting an alternative way to live and more focused on interrupting the truth of our dominant norms. They undermine the assumed necessity of our norms. It is not the ‘truth’ that they embody that effect this function but the ‘splitting’ of truth – demonstrating that alternatives are possible. Given the commitment to reshaping relations equally rather than simply destroying our opponents, it is crucial that we configure those alternatives together. I do not assume this task will be easy. However, it is what is required if feminism wishes to transform and overcome rather than simply intensify the ills of the post-truth paradigm.

#### **4. Conclusion: Reconfiguring the city**

Since neither ‘side’ of the post-truth paradigm is hospitable to feminism, rather than defend truth, feminism would do better to target the conditions of inequality under which the post-truth paradigm has emerged whilst confronting the insults and abuse of post-truth misogyny to dissolve their wounding force. Responding to calls by feminist scholars to attend to truth, language and affect, I have revisited Butler’s work on performativity to indicate that truth is constructed through precedent, and thus we can intervene both in language and action by performing norms wrong to ‘split the truth’ of our social order. In so doing, we create the possibility that we can create openings for the negative affects of insults and abuse to be transformed into affirmative affective relations.

I suggested that Honig’s theory of refusal complements Butler’s work on performativity by indicating that these ‘wrong’ performances can form a collective strategy and that they operate by interrupting the affective functioning of our sensible order. By emphasizing the importance of acting within our political order, Honig reminds us that the freedoms and equality of democracy rest on our willingness to keep politics contestatory meaning that feminists need to continue to contest the misogyny of the post-truth paradigm as well as the claim that democracy requires a fixed notion of truth. Yet whilst I suggest we might benefit from a form of contestation that employs nonwork as

interruptive I seek to defend Honig's passionate ambivalence and argue insist that it is only by deintensifying the affective flows of contestation that feminism can meaningfully challenge the tools of patriarchy and begin to dismantle our unequal, polarized aggressive society in the hope of bringing forth the feminist subverted city.

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### Note

1. As a means to constrain it. Indeed, as Rancière has famously observed, many of those who declare that they support democracy seem to fear really letting the people rule themselves (Rancière 2008). This is demonstrated even in the early days of emergent modern democracy by the arguments supporting the crisis governments of the French revolution.

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