

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Heather Phillipson is an artist and poet. She received an Eric Gregory Award in 2008 and a Faber New Poets award in 2009. As an artist, she exhibits nationally and internationally. Recent venues include the South London Gallery, the ICA, the Whitechapel Gallery, Flat Time House, the Serpentine Gallery, Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art (Newcastle), Kunsthalle Basel (Switzerland), and g39/Halle 14 (Leipzig). Her pamphlet was published by Faber and Faber in 2009. Her debut, full-length poetry collection, *Instant-flex 718* will be published by Bloodaxe in 2013.

NOT AN ESSAY

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Composed as a single, fractured whole, NOT AN ESSAY is a tense handshake, momentary eye-contact, a rap on the cranium.

This text stakes out a bodily territory in which bodies are inflated and denied. Preoccupied with intimacy and its opposite, its narrator detours through the nightclub, the city graveyard, changing rooms, an overheated swimming pool, free jazz, public toilets, the in-house cinema, searching for – what? Can we still cope with torsos? Are we prepared for faces? Would we like to press together in the dark?

Cavalier, acerbic, droll and disconsolate, the text is a self-incrimination, the noise of the intellect giving its mechanics away. The chronicler is contrary, fallible – a body among bodies, a nervous system, an overwrought brain, the awareness of open pores, clothed in subjectively awful trousers.

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We are more and less coagulated.

We are in malformed pieces, melted together. The overall impression is acceptable, but we don't like to talk about the pieces. Except artists, who like to talk only about pieces. Artists say: 'Here's my new piece.' Or artists say: 'In my last piece — ' Artists prefer not to say what the pieces add up to. Pieces of *what*? Are you going to pick that piece up and make it into something well-rounded, or just leave it hanging like a pig's demi-carcass?

Meanwhile, people talk about nothing except what the pieces add up to.

As if there are no pieces.

Try as we might to have a creamy consistency, we are all in pieces.
We are all people. People carefully not-looking/looking at piggy's torso, the butcher's window.

It could be said that we feel most like people when we're with other people.

In the dark, in particular. People, abutting and in columns. People dressed right for their leg-type. People in an undefined lump. It could be said that we feel least like people when we're with other people. In the dark, in particular. They are an undefined lump [chocolate misshapes], I am uniquely flammable.

The trousers?

They looked so carnal on Gina. Now I'm left standing around in them
– the idea of a person in trousers.

Any darkened place, occupied by people, is a communal changing room.

We are closer to people in an unlit room than we are in a swimming pool. [*How's life in your body today? / Oh, sorry, I mean MY body.*] A swimming pool is a plus-size bath, taken with people who are strangers. But a cinema, say, is whole body-solids – crunchy teeth + breathing.