Beached

There is an *Inside Amy Schumer* sketch that I have been watching over and over: a woman bumps into a friend on a New York sidewalk, and compliments her on her looks, but in the ensuing moments the friend subverts the quality that was praised by firing off a list of negative aspects she sees in herself.

New female acquaintances pass by and join in the routine of annulling the compliment just paid by describing all the freakish faults in their own appearance. The dynamic is broken to disastrous effect when someone accepts the praise at face value.

When I receive a compliment I also can't help but say something to my detriment. It's almost like an out of body experience, where you observe your mouth snappily issuing either a sarcastic comeback or changing topic altogether.

What is wrong? It's like saying sorry to someone that has elbowed you on public transport by mistake: you should not be the one apologising. It's like when you write job applications and are rejected, the paranoia creeps in and you start thinking something must be wrong with you. I was talking to a female friend, who is also in the arts, and we were comparing notes on how undervalued we feel, in comparison to male colleagues, even after ten years of professional experience. I see women doing things at their best, with total dedication, for less money than their male counterparts, and this is exactly what the system is not only exploiting but often counting on. It's becoming like Greece with the Troika – pretty unsustainable. Maybe we should call a referendum in the arts, too? But please let it not be run by e-flux – the EU for criticality – which ends up creating hegemony and homogeneity.

Alexis Blake, 'Conditions of an Ideal', Cross Performance Award (winner), Villa San Remigio, Verbania, Italy 2015

Outdoor arena, Garbatella, Rome, Italy 2015

Michelangelo Antonioni's photos from Sicily around the filming of L'Avventura with Monica Vitti, Italy 1960