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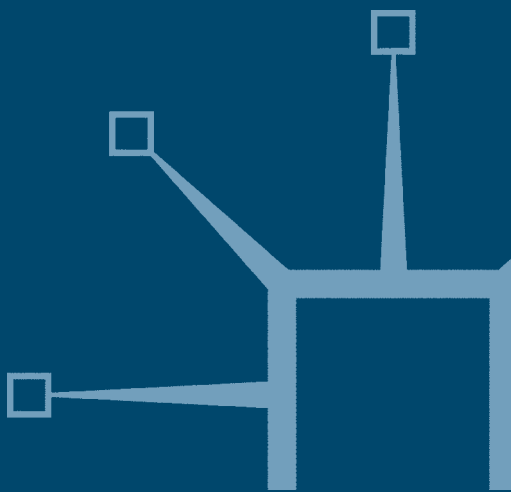
Third Wave Feminism

A Critical Exploration

Edited by
Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and
Rebecca Munford



Third Wave Feminism

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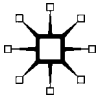

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Edward Davies completed an MA in Women's Studies at the University of Lancaster, UK. He is currently researching at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. In addition to issues relating to gender and transgender, he is also interested in art, in particular the work of Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot, Edward Hopper and Vincent Van Gogh.

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Stacy Gillis is a Lecturer in the Department of English at the University of Newcastle, UK. She has published on third wave feminism, cybersex,

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Andrew Shail completed his PhD on the relationship between silent cinema and British modernism at the University of Exeter, UK. He is working on two books: *Cinema and Modernism, 1911–1927*, and *Epistemologies of Silent Cinema*, the latter based on research into the film culture archives of the Bill Douglas Centre at the University of Exeter. His forthcoming publications include a co-edited collection, *Menstruation: History and Culture from Antiquity to Modernity* (2005), and a chapter on the genealogy of the science fiction film in *The Matrix Trilogy: Cyberpunk Reloaded* (2005).

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Introduction

Stacy Gillis, Gillian Howie and Rebecca Munford

There have always been women writing about, concerned with and acting in the interests of women. A 'feminist' history, though, is distinct from a history of both women and/or the women's movement. Traditionally, we have understood feminist history in three stages. The first is the nineteenth-century women's movement which was a response to a shared exclusion from political, social and economic life. Objectives, common to those involved, were to extend the social contract so that it included political citizenship for women. Whether all women active in this movement could be described as feminists is a moot point, but by the second stage in feminist history, a clear, self-defined, feminist movement emerged in the 1960s and the 1970s. Reflecting on the gains of the suffragists and disappointed by the fact that substantive change had not followed the modification of the formal structures, feminists concerned themselves with broader social relations. Formed within a context which already included a programme for legal and political emancipation, modern feminism concentrated on issues which specifically affected women: reproduction, mothering, sexual violence, expressions of sexuality and domestic labour. Despite the political intensity of peace camps, anti-racist activities and 'reclaim the night' marches, this concentration on 'woman,' as both the object and subject of discourse, resulted in a shift within the movement. The concept 'woman' seemed too *fragile* to bear the weight of all contents and meanings ascribed to it. The elusiveness of this category of 'woman' raised questions about the nature of identity, unity and collectivity. Appearing to undercut the women's movement, fundamental principles of the feminist project were hotly contested. What we now understand as the 'third wave' emerges from these contestations – and the responses to them.[1]

To speak about a 'third wave' of feminism, then, is to name a moment in feminist theory and practice. To incite others to speak about this wave is, in effect, to proliferate discourse in such a way as to define 'the wave' as an object, which can be considered and interrogated. Being aware that by speaking about the third wave, in this way, we risk reducing its complexity

and that by treating it as an object of academic enquiry we might impose imperatives driven by an external discourse we are, nevertheless, concerned by how this wave delimits itself from prior feminist theory and practice, thereby opening and closing debates within feminism. At all times, we are aware that we are speaking about a moment in feminism which is 'a consequence of a certain feminist history and has consequences itself as a moment of feminist history to come' (Kavka xvii). That said, the third wave has been overly eager to define itself as something 'different' from previous feminisms. The need to offer at least a provisional delineation of the parameters of the third wave – even while acknowledging the difficulties attending such a mapping of the subject – has been an underlying concern of many of those studies making claims for its existence. For Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, for instance, the third wave is 'women who were reared in the wake of the women's liberation movement of the seventies,' (15) while for Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake it is the generation 'whose birth dates fall between 1963 and 1974' (4). The most recent contribution to the field of third wave feminism – Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier's *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century* – is keen to resist such arbitrary delineations: '[t]hough we often refer to our feminism as the third wave, we want to render problematic an easy understanding of what the third wave is' (5). They assume, however, not only that there is such a phenomenon but also that it should be endorsed.

Although we, too, are concerned with 'making waves,' this collection is premised upon a critical exploration of this new category of feminism and raises the question of ownership. As demonstrated in the chapters here, many have been eager to claim the term – ownership of or affiliation to the brand – of third wave feminism. But to whom, if anyone, does third wave feminism belong? Indeed, does feminism still need to *belong* to anyone?

As is evidenced by only a cursory examination of their titles, 'third wave' texts have been eager to signal a break from 'second wave' feminism. Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up: Voices From the Next Feminist Generation*, Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Heywood and Drake's *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism* and Baumgardner and Richards' *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* all index some degree of departure from second wave feminism, positing it 'as a definable phenomenon, as embodying a more or less coherent set of values and ideas which can be recognized and then transcended' (Bailey 23). While this framing of feminist histories, through the mother–daughter metaphor, has focused on the implications – and limitations – of second wave theorising for a 'new' generation of young feminists, the implications for 'the not-so-young feminists, especially the ones in the academy,' (Orr 42) are less obvious. 'If the third wave marks a different stage in the contemporary movement, then perhaps it is time for the second wave to identify exactly what its historical legacy is or should be' (Orr 42). What does the

emergence of third wave feminism, and its generational account of feminist histories, mean for second wave feminists? In order to more fully understand feminist histories and *responsibilities*, we need to enable, and allow, a constructive dialogue between feminists that is not mired by mother–daughter conflict – and not owned by any one generation. Indeed, such a dialogue may lead to a revision of the schematic history outlined earlier.

In addition to the body of scholarly and popular work, which openly identifies as third wave feminist, there has also been a recent surge of revisionary feminist scholarship, as evidenced in collections such as Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka's *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century* and Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell's *Who's Afraid of Feminism*? *Seeing Through the Backlash*. These works are more cautious about the 'branding' of a third wave; rather, they synthesise the feminist debates concerning the body and identity that took place in the 1990s. This collection is the bridge between the cultural economies of third wave feminism, as represented by Heywood and Drake, Dicker and Piepmeier, and Baumgardner and Richards, and the epistemologies of contemporary academic feminism, as represented by Kavka and Bronfen, and Oakley and Mitchell. We have chosen to entitle this collection *Third Wave Feminism: A Critical Exploration* in order to reflect both these strands. The chapters collected here explore the possibilities, as well as the limitations, of both third wave feminism and the wave metaphor. As a result, this collection is the first to bring the critical eye of the academy to bear upon third wave feminism rather than it belonging to those who identify as 'third wavers.'[2] The historical narrative, underlying the generational account of stages within feminist theory and practice, overly simplifies the range of debates and arguments preceding the stipulated 'era,' and appears to be enmeshed in a sororal anxiety relating to inheritance.

At the same time, the 'municipalisation' of feminism – its incorporation into the academy – has coincided with conservative practice and what has become known as a media 'backlash.' The appropriation of feminism by the academy has a long tradition in the discipline's history and has resulted in an antagonism by those on the streets to the intellectualising, rather than activating, of feminist discourse (not that the two are necessarily different).[3] Third wave feminism threatens to repeat this divisive model as there are increasing tensions over its 'ownership': 'new' feminism *must* belong to new (for which read: 'young') feminists.[4] Because young women outside of the academy are 'doing' third wave feminism, does that mean that young women (and, for that matter, 'not-so-young' women) inside the academy cannot? Anger between those who regard themselves as excluded and included has – for *too* long – inf(l)ected feminist history. Feminisms can be multiple and polyphonous without withdrawing behind lines of engagement. Theresa Ann Sears distinguishes between political and intellectual feminism without necessarily regarding them as antithetical: 'Political feminism is activist and ideological and strives to position women favorably within society and its

powers. Intellectual feminism is analytical; it concerns itself with "reading" the representations of women in culture and its texts and artifacts' (269). The activist/academic schism enables only backlash politics.[5] The chapters in this collection cross this schism, interrogating what it means to be a feminist today, working in what some call the 'third wave,' regardless of age, gender, sexual orientation, race and/or ethnicity. Unfortunately, this does not mean that the collection subverts the dominance of Anglo-American feminist models but it does gesture towards the 'situated' nature of feminist theory. Heywood and Drake, amongst others, have pointed up how 'U.S. Thrid World feminism changed the second wave of the women's movement for good' (9). Third wave feminist texts have, to date, been quick to point out the whiteness of this academic feminism but have not yet fully articulated the possibilities for global feminisms.

Our intention is to revise the wave metaphor, whilst ensuring that the voices, ideas, arguments and hopes of 'third wavers' are heard. The chapters in this collection are split into the four sections which have had – and continue to have – both a substantial impact on feminist practice today and have shaped debates about third wave feminism. We begin with *Genealogies* which interrogates the generational model of the waves as a characterisation of the material conditions of feminist history and poses this in relation to possible futures. The *Sex and Gender* section moves through the permutations of the debates in identity politics – including such areas of contention for the 'second wave' as pornography and transgender – which have been at the centre of much feminist discussion during the past thirty years. The third section on *Popular Culture* – with which third wave feminism is often conflated – explores one of the most contentious areas of colonisation by feminist thought and activity. The papers move through those versions of feminist agency, from Buffy to Ally McBeal to the cybergrrl, which trouble the projections of feminist development. The chapters in the fourth section, *Challenges*, foreground the exclusions and occlusions of third wave feminist methodology and its appropriation by the still white, and still very Western, academy.

Despite these tensions we have been encouraged by the multiplicity and variability of the contemporary feminisms emerging from those working in feminist theory and history. Feminism should not go gentle into that good night. We need to fight for it, with it, through it and by it. But what is still not clear is whether the term 'third wave feminism' helps this project. Feminism – as many of the papers here argue – needs to be multiple, various and polyphonous, and we must encourage this. The generational wave paradigm limits the transgressive potential. As Misha Kavka notes, '[f]eminism is not . . . the object of a singular history but, rather, a term under which people have in different times and places invested in a more general struggle for social justice and in so doing have participated in and produced multiple histories' (xii). This collection allows for 'second wave' feminists, self-identified

'third wave' feminists as well as those, like ourselves, who are excluded by both of these categories to engage with the notion of a third wave.[6] 'What is feminism? Who is a feminist? Contention rather than accord is what we must explore in answering such questions today' (Segal 4). This collection is not asking so much what *is* the third wave; rather, through an exploration of the versions of the third wave that are circulating in Anglo-American feminist discourses, it is asking how and if another wave contributes to the future of feminism. Bearing in mind Judith Butler's reminder that laughter, in the face of serious categories, is indispensable for feminism (viii), we indicate a crossroads where the past and present meet in order to mark out trajectories for future feminist praxis.

Notes

1. See Rosalind Delmar for a clear and concise introduction to the question of 'What is Feminism?'
2. There are four publications which get referenced repeatedly in third wave feminist debates: Baumgardner and Richards' *Manifesta*, Heywood and Drake's *Third Wave Agenda*, Jacqueline N. Zita's special issue of *Hypatia* and, more recently, Dicker and Piepmeier's *Catching a Wave*. The circulation of references and cross-references around these texts cannot be avoided and the chapters in this collection are replete with the same.
3. This has been partially aggravated by the fact that over the past twenty years academic feminism has come to 'belong' to departments of philosophy, English and, increasingly, cultural studies. That many young adults, at least in the humanities, come to feminism through, for instance, Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) or Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979) needs to be analysed.
4. For more on this see Kristin Aune and Louise Livesey.
5. See Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford for more on the relationship between backlash politics and third wave feminism.
6. This uses the same model as Rebecca Walker's collection *To be Real*, with its foreword by Gloria Steinem and afterword by Angela Y. Davis. However, Walker's collection repudiates the supposed inflexibility of second wave feminist discourses: 'For many of us it seems that to be a feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that doesn't allow for individuality, complexity, or less than perfect personal histories.' (xxxiii)

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Part I
Genealogies

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Introduction: Genealogies

Jane Spencer

There is something seductive about the number three. Third time lucky. Thesis, antithesis, synthesis. And we all want progress. Even Julia Kristeva's famous 1979 essay 'Women's Time,' which divided feminism into three 'attitudes' or 'generations' while invoking the possibility of 'the *parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other' (209; emphasis in original), ended up strongly implying that third comes last and is the best. First attitude: the pursuit of equality. Second attitude: the claim of difference. Third attitude: undermining the kind of fixed identity on which the first two have been based: 'In this third attitude, which I strongly advocate – which I imagine? – the very dichotomy man/woman as an opposition between two rival entities may be understood as belonging to *metaphysics*' (209; emphasis in original). It is this third attitude which is so provocatively attainable – and yet not, as the chapters in this section discuss.

Since Kristeva's essay a new generation of women has grown up, and a new terminology of feminist waves has emerged. As she predicted, there has been a focus of struggle 'in personal and sexual identity itself,' a concentration on 'the multiplicity of every person's possible identifications' (Kristeva 210); but the result has rather been a proliferation of identities than a deconstruction of identity itself. Class difference, racial diversity, the multiplicities of sexual orientation and gender identity have been made the bases of different kinds of identity politics. Feminism has moved towards related forms of oppositional politics while being itself repeatedly declared dead by the media; and as the essays collected here demonstrate, there is no clear agreement as to what third wave feminism is even about. It is necessarily defined as what came after the second wave (itself understood in retrospect as what came before the third). '[T]here have always been, and will always be, differing versions of what feminism is about, with the "new" or latest trajectories invariably keen to mark their distance from the "old"' (Segal 205). To this extent it is a generational phenomenon, raising the question of what can or should be

passed on from one set of feminists to the next, and to what extent the rising generation must rebel against the earlier.

Female to female inheritance has, of course, always been problematic in a patriarchal society in which the legacy passed from male to male is understood as natural and of central importance. Even today men can be unself-consciously honoured as the fathers of artistic movements, scientific fields, inventions, and ideas. Advances in thought are reified into systems by being named for their male founders: so we have Marxism, Freudianism, and Darwinism. It is no accident that feminism was not named after an individual woman. If, sometimes, a mother for feminism is mooted – Mary Wollstonecraft, for example – it is always tentatively, with irony, in the spirit of daughterly insurrection. Culture – including the culture of political organisation – is still subliminally understood as a male property passed on from father to son. Sons may need to rebel against their fathers, but in the interests of eventually taking on their power and inheriting a structure that remains intact though its content may change. A daughter's place in culture – and a mother's place – have always been more difficult to interpret. Women have certainly yearned for cultural mothers. Twentieth-century feminist literary critics constructed a female literary tradition in a clear attempt to discover and honour our foremothers. At the same time mothers have been the focus of anxiety and ambivalence. Diane Elam argues that

> feminism needs to take account of the fact that it does not simply stand outside of institutional power structures at the same time that it tries to imagine new ways of standing together. The problem with actually doing this seems to revolve around a lack of specifically feminist models of power and tradition. Patriarchal power structures of the family – imagining relationships between women as always those of mothers and daughters, for instance, stay in place by default. (64)

In a patriarchal society the mother's role of subordination and self-sacrifice is what the daughter does not want to inherit; and the unwritten commandment 'Thou Shalt Not Become Thy Mother' has now exerted an effect on generations of feminist-influenced women, militating against the odds of turning feminism into a cultural inheritance to be passed on from metaphorical mothers to their daughters. This has its advantages – the revolutionary feminism of one generation does not get the chance to become the repressive orthodoxy of the next – and its disadvantages. As Lise Shapiro Sanders points out in her chapter, sometimes it seems as if the feminism of one generation gets completely lost and, consequently, feminists 'need to reinvent the wheel every fifty years or so' (Baumgardner and Richards 68).

The revalorisation of all girlie things in popular culture is the most immediately obvious feature differentiating Western feminist second and third wave generations, but whether this is seen as a liberating force or a capitulation

to consumerism, it is arguably less significant than the different conditions facing new generations. Educationally and economically, young women are now nearer to equality with their male contemporaries than their mothers were with theirs. As the economic disadvantages of femaleness are made apparent later in life, overwhelmingly with motherhood itself, feminism has a different significance to women at different stages of life. In Chapter 1, Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake show that third wave feminism is not a case of daughterly rebellion for its own sake. They chart some of the economic conditions arising from globalisation that have particularly shaped the experiences of those born after the 1970s. Younger Americans' experience of 'relative gender equality in the context of economic downward mobility' is likely to foster generational rather than gender solidarity. The greater authority enjoyed by some women, in part the legacy of second wave feminism, can also be seen, they argue, as the unintended by-product of the general collapse of traditional authorities in an economic globalisation that has as its most salient feature a huge concentration of wealth, massively widening the gap between rich and poor, and bearing disproportionately on the majority of the world's women. In this context it is not surprising that there is no agreement about how to think of, much less use, what power is now in female hands. In her interview, Elaine Showalter – firmly identified with the second wave feminist tradition – urges us to make use of those women now in positions of power in politics, corporations, or the military, envisaging a benign culture of female mentoring that will enable women to transform social institutions from within. The third wavers Heywood and Drake locate contemporary feminism as enmeshed within a broad field of environmentalism and anti-corporate movements whose activists are deeply opposed to many of the institutions within which women's previous gains have been made.

Evidently, the third wave is not going to give us our synthesis. There is some doubt as to whether it exists at all beyond a contentious label. In Chapter 2, Ednie Kaeh Garrison reminds us that as part of the necessary feminist relation to the media – which we ignore at our peril – we must 'reconstruct the ways the popular consciousness of feminism is conceived and articulated.' In reference to the machinations of feminism's own representation, Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert's chapter argues against the simplistic opposition of second and third wave feminism and sends out a call for renewal and return – a return to materialist feminist analysis, and to argument. They remind us of the significance of substantive disagreements within feminism, and that we need to have the arguments, not to avoid them by explaining different positions as the characteristics of different phases, generations and waves. Lise Shapiro Sanders calls for a different return – to utopian thinking – while, similarly, stressing that arguments have to be had: utopia is not a 'conflict-free zone.' The talk of waves, in fact, can obscure our recognition of how far we are engaged in a long-standing argument. The debate between the advocates of making feminist gains

within the current system and those who argue that radical change is needed has been going on for a long time. If we try to make it a generational one, where do the lines fall? Between young advocates of girl power and old lefties hankering after a lost socialism? Or between older women now in government or on company boards and young anti-capitalist activists? Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford have argued that we need to break the wave paradigm altogether, because the generational account of feminism implicit in the notion of third wave feminism aids the backlash. Perhaps so, but the pieces collected here show that talking and writing about third wave feminism is wholly beneficial, fostering a recovering sense of feminist urgency. Never mind which number we are on, we need to be making waves.

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1

'It's All About the Benjamins': Economic Determinants of Third Wave Feminism in the United States

Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake

Although conversation and debates about third wave feminism have been ongoing since the nineties, there has been a lack of theory that delineates and contextualises third wave feminist perspectives, especially in the US. This chapter provides a partial redress of this through illustrating how third wave perspectives are shaped by the material conditions created by economic globalisation and technoculture, and by bodies of thought such as postmodernism and postcolonialism. Since writers usually identified as the 'third wave' are most likely to be part of a generation that has come of age in these contexts, the chapter outlines some of the economic variables that have heavily impacted the current generation in the US, and demonstrates how they have resulted in a feminist movement that is not focused on narrowly defined 'women's issues,' but rather an interrelated set of topics including environmentalism, human rights, and anti-corporate activism. While discussions of third wave feminism have tended to limit themselves to the context of North American consumer culture – and have thus largely been identified with writers living in the US – these discussions can only have theoretical and practical value if they are set within the larger frames of globalisation and technoculture, and do not prioritise the US.

The economics and demographics of post-boomer generations in the US

The following are definitional criteria that delineate the economic and demographic determinants of a generational perspective, a perspective that influences critical strategies employed by women and men who identify as third wave feminists in the US. This perspective is not monolithic and it does not exclude persons of other generations, but most third wave feminists (although not all who identify as such) were born after the baby boom.[1] Transnational capital, downsizing, privatisation, and a shift to a service economy have had a drastic impact on the world these generations have inherited.

The shift away from the public works philosophy of the Roosevelt years to the free market fundamentalism of the Reagan/Thatcher years clearly contextualises the third wave tendency to focus on individual narratives and to think of feminism as a form of individual empowerment. In collections such as Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up*, Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real*, Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller's *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order*, and Ophira Edut's *Adios, Barbie*, third wave writers took the second wave feminist mantra of 'the personal is political' seriously, using their own experiences to help name and situate their own feminist views. This valuation of the personal as a theoretical mode has led to charges that the third wave is 'a youthful continuation of individualist, middle-class liberal feminism,' and that its preoccupation with popular culture and media images is 'not serious enough' (Messner 204). These charges misunderstand third wave work, which can be understood through an examination of how the lives of post-boomer women and men in the US have been impacted by economic globalisation and technoculture.

Gender-based wage and education gaps are closing, especially in younger age groups, and this relative gender equality has shaped third wave perspectives. The 1994 US census provides evidence that the wage gap has closed to within five per cent for women and men aged 20–24, and that more women now earn BA and MA degrees than do men. While women only make 78 cents overall for every dollar that men make, this varies widely depending on the group of women. The United States Department of Labor's report *Highlights of Women's Earnings in 2001* states that

> [t]he women's-to-men's earnings ration varies significantly by demographic group. Among blacks and Hispanics, for example, the ratios were about 87 and 88 percent, respectively, in 2001; for whites, the ratio was about 75 percent. Young women and men had fairly similar earnings; however, in the older age groups, women's earnings were much lower than men's (1).

However, gender inequality persists on the highest levels of the economic ladder. The article 'Women Relatively Scarce in Realms of Top Earners' makes the case that

> far more men are earning high salaries than women, with the gap narrowing only in the lowest income categories, according to a report in the New York Times on a study by the Internal Revenue Service. The IRS examined wages reported by employers in 1998 and found that 43,662 men had annual salaries of $1 million or more, while 3253 women had top earnings; a 13 to 1 ratio. Men outnumbered women 10 to 1 in the $500,000 to $1 million category, and 9 to 1 in the $250,000 to $500,000 range. The gap closed as salary range decreased, with women and men roughly equally represented in the $25,000 to $30,000 category (1–2).

This data reveals the feminisation of poverty. It also reveals a blind spot in standard feminist analysis of women's wages. According to the United States Congress Joint Committee on Taxation, 90 per cent of American families make less than $100,000 a year, and, according to Bernie Sander, the annual income per person in the US is $28,553. This makes the $25,000–30,000 category – in which women's and men's wages are largely equal – very close to the national average. However, feminist analyses of these numbers often emphasise the fact that men comprise the vast majority of top wage earners, despite the fact that the majority of women are not 'topped' in this particular manner. For example, Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier refer to the data that '97.3 percent of top earners are men' to help make their valid point that there is still very much a need for feminism today (6). Yet, as is characteristic of much feminist work on the gender wage gap, they fail to mention the situation of men who are not 'top earners,' and the relatively equal wages of men and women at lower income levels. If feminist analysis is truly differentiated for class, it becomes clear that for the majority of American women, especially in post-boomer generations, there is more gender parity in terms of wages except for the richest ten per cent of the population.

Even *Newsweek* has emphasised the fact that, increasingly, women earn more of the family income. Peg Tyre and Daniel McGinn note that women who make more money than men is 'a trend we had better get used to' (45). In 2001, in 30.7 per cent of married households with a working wife, the wife's earnings exceeded the husband's (ibid., 45). A 2002 report from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics indicated that women now make up 46.5 per cent of the labour force. However, the highest debt-to-income ratio in history undermines real wages and the progress that many women have made (Casper 4).[2] People coming of age after the baby-boom generation have attained middle-class status only with both women and men in the labour market working longer hours; setting up dual or multiple income homes; going into debt; postponing marriage and children; and/or having fewer children (Casper 3–5). In *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*, Barbara Ehrenreich pointed out that, according to the Economic Policy Institute, the living wage for one adult and two children is $30,000 a year (213). But 60 per cent of American workers earn less than the $14 hourly wage that this standard of living requires. The economic situation may look better in terms of gender equality, but in terms of overall economic well-being, the situation is worse for both women and men with the exception, again, of the very top wage earners.

Third wave feminist thinking, then, is informed by the fact that the majority of young Americans have experienced relative gender equality in the context of economic downward mobility. It has also been shaped by the racial and ethnic diversity of post-boomer generations. According to the 2000 US census, non-Hispanic whites account for 73 per cent of baby boomers and an even larger proportion of older Americans, but they account for only

64 per cent of Generation Xers and 62 per cent of the Millennial Generation (United States Census Bureau 1). These post-civil-rights generations were raised on a multicultural diet, and their attitudes about racial, cultural and sexual diversity have continued to be shaped by the increasing globalisation of entertainment and image-based industries, including the import of Asian cultural products such as anime and kung-fu films; the national dissemination of grassroots cultural practices like grunge, hip hop, and car culture; the increasing visibility of gays and lesbians in the media; and the normalisation of porn imagery.

The economic and demographic determinants of third wave feminist thinking can be catalogued as follows. First, women are *as* likely or *more* likely to identify with their generation as with their gender. Because post-boomer men and women have substantially narrowed the wage gap, because they are likely to occupy similar entry-level to mid-level positions in workplace power structures, and because these realities mean economic struggle, women now often have more in common with men of their own age group than they do with women of previous generations.[3] Secondly, codes for 'good' and 'bad' as well as gender ideals are no longer polarised. This shapes the third wave's simultaneous endorsement and critique of media representations, particularly sexual imagery.[4] It also shapes third wave cultural production. For example, various aspects of girlie culture use the humorous reappropriation of traditions and symbols to craft identities in the context of structural disempowerment, such as reclaiming words like girl, bitch, and cunt. This playful reappropriation of stereotypes is often interpreted as marking a lack of seriousness, but such play is a serious part of the third wave's critical negotiations with the culture industries. Thirdly, women and men of the third wave tend not to locate meaning and identity in one place, particularly not in a job or profession. Owing to corporate downsizing and the shift to the service sector that occurred just as the oldest post-boomers reached their full-time employment years, these generations cannot expect to spend their entire lives in one workplace accruing benefits and advancing over time. While women in this demographic expect to work, the satisfaction that work offers is most often diminished. As is necessary in a global economy and workforce, workers' identities tend to be flexible and multifaceted, even contradictory. Finally, worldwide globalisation has contributed to a further concentration of wealth at the very top of the pyramid, shifting venues of political struggle from patriarchy to the World Trade Organization. The 'enemy' has been decentralised. While feminist perspectives are still valuable in what Peggy Orenstein calls 'this era of half-change,' an economic and demographic analysis has shown that these perspectives cannot fully describe the lived conditions experienced by post-boomer generations (11).

Thus, it is clear that third wave feminists are not simply daughters rebelling for rebellion's sake.[5] Third wave lives have been and will continue to be profoundly shaped by globalisation and the new economy it fosters. What is

common to the diversity of third-wave thinking is a complicated legacy; the third wave is torn between the hope bequeathed by the successes of the civil rights movement and second wave feminism, and the hopelessness born of generational downward mobility and seemingly insurmountable social and political problems worldwide. Of necessity, the third wave locates activism in a broad field that includes the kinds of issues often called 'women's issues,' but that also encompasses environmentalism, anti-corporate activism, human rights issues, cultural production and the connections between these. In this era of half-change, when it is clear how global events intersect local lives, here is what the third wave knows: women's issues – and women activists – cannot and do not stand in isolation.

Technoculture and third wave feminism

Although third wave thinking can be understood in the context of post-boomer economics and demographics, it must be acknowledged that many women and men choose to identify with third wave feminist perspectives whether or not they are part of a post-boomer generation. The third wave, then, refers *both* to a feminist generation *and* to emerging forms of feminist activism. These uses of the term overlap but are not the same. They both, however, emphasise that feminism takes shape in relation to its time and place. As feminists of all generations craft responses to our current context of technoculture, new forms of activism are emerging. A discussion of feminism and technoculture demonstrates how feminist activism has shifted and why that shift cannot be wholly attributed to generational difference.

Jodi Dean describes technoculture as an economic-political-cultural formation characterised

> by the rise of networked communication [such as] the Internet, satellite broadcasting, and the global production and dissemination of motion pictures; by the consolidation of wealth in the hands of transnational corporations and the migration and immigration of people, technologies, and capital; [and] by the rise of a consumerist entertainment culture and the corresponding production of sites of impoverishment, violence, starvation, and death (1).

This is a familiar litany of the changes wrought by globalisation. However, Dean raises the question of individual rights, a concept that marks a fundamental contradiction in feminisms generally. Dean argues that 'technoculture is marked by the end of patriarchalism,' since the conditions of women's lives changed substantially in the last half of the twentieth century (1). Women now make up a substantial percentage of the paid global workforce, and although working conditions are often appalling, as major wage earners for their families they have increasingly had some modicum of control in

relation to sexual partners, marriage, and childbearing. For many women, Dean suggests, the patriarchal family has become 'one option among an increasingly diversified set of living and working relations' (2). This is increasingly true of women in developing countries. According to Perdita Huston, the concept of individual rights contained within globalisation breaks down traditional notions of male superiority and privilege, thereby improving women's status (4). Further, globalisation has made it necessary for women to work as providers for their families, which improves women's status since the provider function is seen as most valuable (Huston 13).

This sets up a difficult dilemma. According to John Cavanaugh *et al.* in *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*, globalisation has radically contributed to the concentration of wealth and inequality in terms of income distribution to the extent that 475 people now have fully half the world's wealth, which impacts upon women, who are disproportionately poor (30). But globalisation has also brought about an erosion of the gendered division of labour that traditionally denied women opportunities for education and independence. This is a question that feminism must face: if individual rights come at the price of the negative aspects of globalisation, to what extent should that concept of rights define feminist praxis? This is complicated by the fact that, according to Dean, the twin tiers of globalisation and the end of the patriarchy are linked with a 'decline of symbolic efficiency' (1). This means that 'arguments and authorities that might be persuasive in one context may have no weight in another one, [and] the identity we perform in one setting might have little to do with the one we perform in another' (Dean 2).

There are three distinctions to be made here. First, the de-authorisation of patriarchy might be claimed as one of the victories of second wave feminism, but because that de-authorisation is part of a larger breakdown of master narratives, second wave feminism itself is understood by the third wave as offering perspectives that are persuasive or useful only in some contexts. Secondly, the third wave must negotiate the profound contradiction that the collapse of central authority in postmodern global capitalism, which has given women greater authority, visibility, and cultural importance, is the same collapse that reinforces 'the vigor of global capital' (Dean 7). There has been a shift from a top-down hierarchical culture of power to a power focused in multinational corporations and dependent upon global flows. In this context, power understood as possessed by individuals has become inaccessible to almost everybody, so second wave feminism's promise to obtain more power for women is impossible. Thirdly, the decentralisation that has enabled some women in the First World to access education and better jobs, that has helped to narrow the wage gap, and that has facilitated the construction of empowered women as a consumer demographic, is the same decentralisation that supports globalisation and the inequities it creates between nations, as well as the environmental destruction it perpetuates. Consequently, women's increasing visibility within American culture may

have given women greater cultural capital, but at the expense of developing countries and the environment, in a contracting national economy. Women have made gains at great cost, and may not have gained much at all – bitter realities that can be glossed over through a narrow (and much more pleasurable) focus on the expanded possibilities for racial and sexual minorities in consumer culture – a focus that has tended to characterise third wave writing until recently. Neither is this focus irrelevant. Both cultural and economic dimensions must be taken into consideration simultaneously. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri note, a strictly economic analysis 'fails to recognize the *profound economic power of the cultural movements*, or really the increasing indistinguishability of economic and cultural phenomena' (275; emphasis in original).

Through its celebratory and critical engagement with consumer culture, the third wave attempts to navigate the fact that there are few alternatives for the construction of subjectivity outside the production/consumption cycle of global commodification. Cornel West asks how we can speak of the 'profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness, and social despair so widespread' in black America, a question worth considering in relation to the situation of post-boomer generations more generally (38). Because the nihilism West invokes has been particularly attributed to 'the hip hop generation,' rap music and hip hop culture can be read as providing a powerful perspective on the economic and demographic determinants shaping post-boomer lives, and as expressing the complex emotions created by struggling to survive. In this view, it is also significant that second wave feminists and members of the civil rights generation – all baby boomers – share a sometimes patronising concern over the state of the next generation. African American Generation X scholars such as Mark Anthony Neal articulate the importance of generational difference in shaping worldview as well as artistic and activist strategies. The attraction of large segments of the contemporary youth market to rap music and hip hop culture cannot be merely understood as a pathological interest in violence or a 'White Negro' appropriation of black male cultural expression. It also indicates a strong post-boomer identification with rap's harsh representation of economic struggle and its obsessive fantasies of economic success. These identifications occur because young women and men of all races have come of age in a contracting economy. It is interesting, then, that the primary third wave feminist texts have tended to avoid the kinds of harsh economic truths found in rap, instead favouring stories of successful sex-gender rebellion and emphasising the pleasures of girl-culture consumption enroute to cultural critique.

However, as third wave feminists grow up and out of youth culture, having come of age through claiming power, the problems created and perpetuated by technoculture must be addressed. As Dean puts it, 'if this is post-patriarchy, something is definitely missing' (3). A paradox for the third wave is that this 'something' is missing when it seems like alternative images are part of

dominant culture like never before. Multicultural fashion models, images of female athletes like Mia Hamm and Marion Jones, the commodified male body, lesbian chic – as corporate America searched for new markets in the 1990s, difference was glorified and on display. But in this brave new world of niche marketing, everyone is valued as a potential consumer, and no one is valued intrinsically. What looked like progress was a fundamental incorporation into the global machine. As Naomi Klein points out in *No Logo*, a documentation of the rise of anti-corporate activism, 'for the media activists who had, at one point not so long ago, believed that better media representation would make for a more just world, one thing had become abundantly clear: identity politics weren't fighting the system, or even subverting it. When it came to the vast new industry of corporate branding, they were feeding it' (113). Third wave approaches to activism, and the third wave suspicion of traditional forms of activism, have been forged in this crucible of empowerment and exploitation. Australian third wave feminist Anita Harris argues that young women's alternative ways of conducting political organisation, protest, debate, and agitation have been shaped in response to

> the co-optation of left politics as merely a marketable style . . . The trend towards an increased surveillance of youth, the re-discovery of young women in particular as the new consumers, and the cultural fascination with girlhood, have all resulted in a deep suspicion of overt activism as the best method for protest and the creation of social change (13).

As such, the third wave is a movement committed to local action and characterised by dispersal and diversity, as opposed to a single-leader and single-issue movement, a strategy that resists co-optation and supports survival in global technoculture.[6] Committed to cultural production as activism, and cognizant that it is impossible for most Americans to wholly exit consumer culture, third wave feminists both use and resist the mainstream media and create their own media sites and networks, both of which are key components of successful activism in technoculture. As Harris argues, 'these new practices of resistance respond to corporate concentration with a maze of fragmentation, to globalization with its own kind of localization, to power consolidation with radical power dispersal' (14).

As socialist feminists have long argued, feminism is an integral part of larger social justice struggles that are framed by global capitalism. The hip hop phrase 'It's all about the Benjamins' titles this chapter because it signals that the global markets that have made difference visible only value difference for its carriers' ability to consume. This has necessitated the reconceptualisation of 'feminism as a movement to end all forms of oppression' (Warren 328).[7] Therefore, anti-corporate activism like the 1999 Seattle protests has, of necessity, become part of feminism's focus, which makes feminism as a movement less visible than it once was – less visible and more widely dispersed

simultaneously, part of multiple social struggles. To think about third wave feminism globally is to understand that 'young feminist membership is much larger than may be initially imagined, and . . . is concerned with a feminism beyond merely claiming girls' power' (Harris 9). Feminism has become part of a global struggle for human rights that incorporates women's and gender issues. Third wave theory is a theory broad enough to account for various axes of difference, and to recognise multiple forms of feminist work, including environmentalism, anti-corporate activism, and struggles for human rights. While gender play and cultural production are important parts of a third wave approach to feminist action, they are only one part of the third wave and they take place in only one site. Third wave perspectives recognise these forms of activism, and place them alongside many other kinds of work.

Notes

1. Generational designations – usually developed for marketers and workplace executives – are always somewhat arbitrary. The 'baby-boomer' generation is commonly designated as those born between 1943–1960, 'Generation X' as 1961–1981, and the 'Millennial Generation' as those born between 1982 and 1998 ('Guide to Recent U.S. "Generations"').
2. For more on this see Stephanie Coontz's *The Way We Really Are* (126–128).
3. This situation parallels that of African Americans and Hispanics, who have also seen a drastic decline in real wages during the past thirty years, who have continued to identify primarily with their communities, and who have had an enormous impact on post-boomer generations in terms of both demographic numbers and cultural influence.
4. For examples of third wave perspectives on sexual imagery, see the magazines *Bitch, BUST*, and *Fierce*.
5. For more on this view of the third wave see Phyllis Chesler's *Letters to a Young Feminist* or Anna Bondoc and Meg Daly's collection *Letters of Intent*.
6. On the question of leaders in the third wave, see Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards' 'Who's the Next Gloria?'
7. While Karen Warren, who is known for her work on ecofeminism, is not identified as a third wave feminist, her insistence that 'at a conceptual level the eradication of sexist oppression requires the eradication of the other forms of oppression' (327) is a concept that has been thoroughly internalised in the third wave.

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2

Contests for the Meaning of Third Wave Feminism: Feminism and Popular Consciousness

Ednie Kaeh Garrison

In the US, consciousness of feminism is tightly woven into the cultural-historical consciousness – or lack thereof – of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and it has been since its introduction into our cultural lexicon in the early twentieth century. This is not the same as saying we live in a feminist culture; rather, it is a claim about the object 'feminism' (with already constituted and contested meanings) among the repertoire of discursive tools by which we categorize, position, label, and understand those who advocate the rights of women, the oppressiveness of patriarchy, and the linking of these tools to the ideological and material dominance of any number of unequal social systems, among them racism, capitalism, heteronormativity, classism, and cultural and political imperialism. This accounts for how feminism as ideology/praxis is simplified and how feminist cohorts and formations are constantly constructed. This chapter begins with a claim that some will find discomforting: that this thing we call third wave feminism is neither new, nor does it escape the historical-cultural context of its articulation. The very claim to know what third wave feminism means is riddled with contradictions and problems. Few can agree about what and whom it encapsulates – advocates and detractors alike. The only general consensus to have emerged is that it has become a name for young women who identify as feminists (but not the feminists of the sixties and seventies) and, especially among its detractors, it is a name assigned to those who have no real clear sense of what feminist ideology/praxis, feminist movement, or feminist identity have meant across time and place. In both cases, the construction of third wave feminist meaning has hinged upon a series of simplifications and mis-conceptions about the object 'feminism' that circulate in the national, popular imaginary.

This chapter provides a brief sketch of some of these simplifications and mis-conceptions, and appeals to feminist-aligned comrades to consider more fully the significance of the media as a central site of consciousness formation and knowledge production in the US.[1] The media plays a more

important role in cultural knowledge production of feminist consciousness than feminist thinkers have acknowledged. While work has been done on representations of women in the media and the contradictory uses of feminist and sexist imagery in advertising to convince women to engage in certain relations of consumption, not enough work has been done to examine how representations of feminism (not only as entirely negative, unfeminine, strident, self-indulgent, threatening to heteronormativity, but also as white, middle-class, and straight) obfuscate forms of feminism, different feminist constituencies, sites of feminist consciousness-raising and political activism, its relevance to men, women and not so finitely gendered people, and the ways feminism can enable us to work our ways out of the traps of racist, capitalist, and patriarchal logics. Deborah Rhodes contends that for 'those interested in social movements in general and the women's movement in particular' more attention must be given to the ways 'the media choose to present (or not to present) as news about women and how they characterise (or caricature) the women's movement' (685). Citing Hall (340–342) on the ideological effects of the media, as well as Gitlin (3–7) and Goffman (10–11) on the effect on cultural perception of standard journalistic framing devices, Rhodes makes the same argument as this chapter about the cultural significance of the media as 'increasingly responsible for supplying the information and images through which we understand our lives' and as a cultural institution that 'play[s] a crucial role in shaping public consciousness and public policy' (685). In the case of the production of third wave feminist meaning, our inattentiveness to the power of the media as a source of knowledge and meaning contributes to the relatively limited success of feminist revolution. We fail to fully understand how the media operates to ideologically re/contain the possible meanings attached to the object feminism.

Why the American mass media matters in the making of meaning

One of the most expansive and interpolating of public-sphere sites in the US, the media synthesizes a constellation of communications genres (e.g. the tripartite 'radio, magazines and television,' video, film, Hollywood, newspapers, books, Madison Avenue, billboards, advertising, the Internet) which comprise a hegemonic and seductive public cultural institution dictated by political, economic, and cultural ideologies. It also goes by other names: mainstream media, mass media, consumer media, popular media, popular culture, monopoly mass media, corporate media, and mass circulation press. This list exposes who and what has power in producing the media. Rather than monolithically blaming 'them' – those faceless, disembodied people in power – these names offer ways to think about how we both collude with and attempt to resist the discursive repertoires that recursively limit what counts as feminism in the dominant and dominating – or mainstream – American culture.

Those who possess this power are not usually aware of their positions of privilege in relation to the others over whom they have power, nor are they conscious of their protective strategies and manipulations. They already have the (implicit) consent of most of the population, and that population tends to do most of their work for them. They not only benefit absolutely from the system as it exists, but also believe the system, as it exists, works in their best interests.[2] One way to see the hegemonic power of this cultural-ideological apparatus in operation is to examine the discursive repertoire of tropes deployed as 'so naturalized and overdetermined in American culture' (McDermott 675) that we do not recognize them as socially constructed moralistic contests for cultural and political authority. In her investigation of the cultural authority-granted anti-feminist feminists like Christina Hoff Sommers, Patrice McDermott explains that

> the new critics [of feminist scholarship and Women's Studies] have derived their credibility from their use of familiar and culturally powerful conventions of rationalist discourse. Rationalist discourse is the defining language of debate in the public sphere, and any serious bid for socially sanctioned entry into public debate must be framed by these linguistic conventions (675).

While rationalist discourse is commonly deployed in the struggle for recognition and equal access to the public sphere, McDermott argues that anti-feminists like Sommers are granted more authority because they deploy simplified moralistic linguistic codes to discredit the cultural authority of feminism. Besides Sommers, McDermott identifies Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge, Katie Roiphe, Wendy Kaminer, and Karen Lehrman as 'new critics of feminism [who] are not fundamentally engaged in an empirical attack on feminist methodology; rather, they are launching a moral attack on feminist cultural authority' (676).[3] One typical argument goes that teachers and students of Women's Studies are ugly girls who have been ignored by men or, if they are not 'ugly,' are angry lesbians who have been sexually abused by men and are taking it out on society at large by training young women to reject men and traditional family values by becoming feminists and lesbians (as interchangeable identities). These homophobic (anti)feminist critics of feminism and Women's Studies depend on the perception of the logical reasonableness of discursive tropes that dominate mainstream public conversations and debates about women, the women's movement and feminism. The efforts of their sponsors and the commercial media (often the same) to push and validate their work and ideas on 'the public' reinforces Farrell's claim, in the special issue of *Signs* on feminism and the media, that feminists cannot underestimate 'the importance of the media in shaping the public's understanding of feminism' (645). Despite the transformative goals of feminist ideology/praxis, American feminists exhibit an astounding

level of gullibility in their engagement with the media. This gullibility is connected to the unexamined attachment feminists have for being 'American,' which is cultivated by the media as one of the most powerful interpellating forces producing a sense of shared experience and identity in the US. As Benedict Anderson has notably remarked, the combination of print technology and capitalism has been a primary function of the creation of the 'imagined community' of the nation. Thus, we imbue the media – our late twentieth–early twenty-first century site of the merger between print/communications technology, capitalism, and 'human linguistic diversity'[4] – with an exponential power by accepting as true its representations of concepts like feminism, women, and issues that are presumed feminist because they are regarded as 'women's issues.' This particularly salient site of cultural transmission, production, and articulation in America in the 1990s is at the same time always already a public market of commodities on parade. The double function of the media as a culture market leads to the representation of the object 'feminism' and its variants as a label or lifestyle or brand as it gets reconstituted as a commodity for sale.[5] In this late capitalist, consumer society, it is worth recalling Jean Baudrillard's dictum that '[i]n order to become object of consumption, the object must become sign; that is, in some way it must become external to a relation that it now only signifies' (22). The logic of consumption – 'the commercial imperative of popular media' (Farrell 644) – extracts from the object its politics, the substance of its context, so that its representation signifies the satisfaction of needs, but only as a simulation of satisfaction. The object of consumption – feminism – stands in for actual political relations, deferring the political in favour of 'the idea of the relation' between lifestyle practice and political commitment. And, as bell hooks pointed out as early as 1984, '[t]he willingness to see feminism as a lifestyle choice rather than a political commitment reflects the class nature of the movement' (27) hooks' observation that the willingness of some feminist movement participants to reduce feminism to lifestyle choices links bourgeois liberal feminism to Farrell's 'commercial imperative of popular media.' The popular cultural dominance of this version – liberal feminism – can only ever have limited success because it is too thoroughly entrenched in the system against which more radical and transformative feminist movement moves. This is not to reject liberal feminism out of hand, but it is not a good tactic for countering late-capitalist consumerist logics which rely on the 'commodification of resistance [as] a hegemonic strategy' (Garrison 143).

Synthesizing from a number of efforts to define the category liberal feminism, Chela Sandoval re-articulates this 'mode of consciousness in opposition' under the title 'equal rights,' explaining that '[o]n the basis that all individuals are created equal, subscribers to this particular ideological tactic will demand that their own humanity be legitimated, recognized as the same under the law, and assimilated into the most favoured form of the human in

power' (*Genders* 12). That is, the goal is to assimilate humanity into the form of those in power – to take their shape. This goal does not infer changing the power structure systemically, but rather changing the specific cohort who is in the position of power within the existing structure. Likewise, in her study of social movement studies of the women's movement, Stacey Young opens with a discussion of the 'grammar of liberalism' (1). Next to the first appearance of liberal feminism in her text is the following footnote: 'Women's movement activists and feminist theorists often identify liberal feminism with the National Organization for Women, the National Women's Political Caucus, and other organizations engaged in electoral politics' (209). This list makes sense, given Young's explanation of the relationship between liberalist ideology and government:

> Liberalism's focus on government at the expense of other levels of society leads feminists who subscribe to liberalism's theory of power to prioritize engagement with institutions of governance as the strategy of choice for feminist change. This is premised on the assumption that women's oppression is merely an accident or an oversight, or a rather superficial, hollow vestige of obsolete social organization, and that the machinery of liberal institutions can be harnessed to effect women's equality with men, since this goal is consistent with 'equality' – a central tenet of liberalism (4).

The explications of Sandoval and Young reveal that liberalism can be one strategy among many, even though the dominance of the logic of liberalism in the public sphere, with its discourse of rationality, positions those who counter it as unreasonable or 'aberrant and abnormal' (Young 3).

Audre Lorde's famous (and often mis-applied) statement – 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' (110–113) – is instructional here. The cultural dominance of liberal feminism limits the possibilities of a transformative feminism by supporting the belief that we cannot fight the system as it exists outside its own terms. In effect, it does nothing to change 'the master's house' except to allow a few people in, who previously were confined to the periphery. Further, a condition of inclusion (and access to the tools) for those few is to maintain the integrity of 'the master's house' by not demanding any substantial structural or institutional changes. Such a position is limited and restricted, and does not represent the width and breadth of feminism, nor will it achieve the goals of the libratory movements into which I, and many others who believe in the transformative possibilities of critical political consciousness, want and need to include feminism. Just because liberal feminist organizations and projects are the site for the majority of what gets acknowledged as legitimate feminist activism in this country, it does not mean that these locations are necessarily, always and/or only, the best locations from which to participate as feminist activists. Nor definitions

of activism that privilege this form of political participation necessarily be the best way to be activist. Who determines, and to what ends, the forms of political participation that matter? Because of the tradition promulgated by the corporate, consumer media that recognizes political participation only at the level of organizational practice, legislative negotiation and engagement with the 'official' political process, taking action – and having it recognized as legitimate and worthwhile – is frequently determined by what and who gets recognized and covered (and how) by the media.

Popular consciousness of feminism

One way to understand the emergence of third wave feminism is to examine the interrelated simplifications and diversionary discourses of fear, anxiety, and discouragement that dominate American mainstream public debates and conversations over the object 'feminism,' especially the spectres that have become associated with what has been identified as backlash politics. This is the name Susan Faludi has given for the cultural-ideological apparatus that allows those in power to stay in power by manipulating popular consciousness of the women's movement and feminism, among other volatile radical movements and ideologies. In fact, the rhetoric of backlash broadly coincides with the construction of the 'failures' of the sixties revolutions and the rise in media popularity of conservative groups like the Moral Majority and the Christian Coalition. While Faludi's book is largely a descriptive project, its value is in pointing out the subjectivity of the media and its agents, and for providing specific examples of how 'false images of womanhood' (xv) are used to manipulate, confuse, and deter not only women and feminists, but the whole nation.

According to Faludi, the backlash thesis reported on so consistently throughout the 1980s in the mainstream press pits liberation against marriage and motherhood. She self-consciously positions the media as the central perpetrator of the backlash against women through demonstrating the processes by which mass media managers, owners, and producers, who believe the myth of the 'female crises,' repackage it to the public so that the public will also believe it. Her primary sources are the plethora of articles, news stories, television shows and Hollywood films throughout the decade that encouraged women to believe their 'biological clocks' were more powerful than their 'selfish' desires for corporate careers, that childless women were dangerous psychopaths, that women who did not marry by their early thirties were more likely to be killed by terrorists than find husbands and were, therefore, doomed to unfulfilled (for which read: childless) spinsterhood, that women who tried to balance family and career were doomed to be failed mothers, and so forth. These stories invoke the discursive tropes of 'the family,' 'motherhood,' and traditional sex roles to feed off anxieties women and men experience when women do not fulfil the capitalist

heterosexual contract. Not only do women get blamed for the kinds of instabilities which postindustrialism and late capitalism have created in our culture, but feminism (usually the version that is only interested in corporate ladder climbing) gets constructed as the enemy, conveniently providing a figure (a 'straw woman/feminist') for traditionalist ideologues and 'average' women to target. In this script, the specificities of race, class, sexuality, and so on are erased to the extent that our national narratives of women fulfilling their civic duties through motherhood and the socialization of children draw upon racist, heterosexist and classist discourses of Republican motherhood and 'true' womanhood.[6] Likewise liberal feminism, historically successful at deploying the non-specified discourse of maternal womanhood to advocate for women's rights, can be separated from this version of feminism, which might be more appropriately qualified as corporate or careerist feminism.

A primary discursive technique of backlash deterrence produces and commodifies the categories of 'the feminist' and 'real women/femininity' as opposing perspectives and competing factions. This technique can be witnessed in the popularized conflicts between generational cohorts of 'the feminists' and 'young women,' the latter continually labeled a 'postfeminist' generation. As Suzanna Walters contends, popular conceptualizations of postfeminism '[encompass] the backlash sentiment . . . as a more complex phenomenon of a recent form of antifeminism' (117).[7] Since at least the early 1980s the terms postfeminism, postfeminist generation, generation gap, inter-generational conflict, young women, and youth apathy have circulated in the media and the US popular imaginary, to be joined in the 1990s by second wave feminism and second wavers (both of which existed prior to this decade) in contradistinction to third wave feminism and third wavers. The ways these terms empower and constrain popular consciousness are important to understanding American feminism in the 1990s and at the turn of this century. In other words, the emergence of third wave feminism cannot be explored without also considering the popular construction of the political object postfeminism as a term that discursively (and recursively) distances multiple cohorts of young women after 1980 from those who participated in the 'feminist' decades of the sixties and seventies. The phrase 'vocabulary of postfeminism' is my short-hand for the mainstreamed discursive repertoire of tropes that combine stereotypes incubated in the popular media about feminism and women who come of age at the end of or after the women's movement of the 1960s and 1970s and whose interactions with the object 'feminism' are influenced by the popular rhetoric of backlash.

In the US this vocabulary of postfeminism requires a particular Oedipal metaphor to keep the crone spectre of the (second wave) feminist separated from young women, divesting them of the object/label/subject 'feminism' and especially of radical feminism which argues for systemic transformation

rather than simply the right of women to participate equally in an intricately oppressive society. This generational metaphor is compelling because Oedipal familial dramas are so culturally sanctioned. Even the terms 'second wave' and 'third wave' are made to echo the metaphor. Gina Dent ascribes part of the blame for this association to descriptions of feminist movement that assume the wave metaphor is itself a generational metaphor, even though '[t]his generational language hides other differences within it – national trajectories, sexual orientation, professional status, etc.' (70). This aligns my own problems with this metaphor: generations posed as suspended in conflict or separated by a gap presuppose only two conflicting factions;[8] it feeds so well into the media's tendency to categorize feminism and feminist conflicts simplistically and oppositionally; and the appeal to the family romance is a convention of patriarchal social organization which sustains itself and perpetuates oppressive hierarchies and aggressive competition. An indication of the investment in this simplistic and oppositional generational conflict model is evidenced in the preference for the term 'postfeminism' over the last 20 years. For example: the 'post-feminist generation' Susan Bolotin wrote about in 1982 in *The New York Times Magazine*, becomes a cohort of 'twentysomethings' in Paula Kamen's 1991 book, *Feminist Fatale*, only to explode again into the postfeminist 'post-Pagliaites' described by Ginia Bellafante as representative of contemporary feminism in a *Time* article in 1998 asking (yet again!) if feminism is dead. This longitudinally extensive 'postfeminist generation' facilitates a cynical and apathetic view of youth at any point after the sixties (a time when students and other young people played a particularly important role in liberation movements), and it enables the 'feminist crone' to exist at a safe distance in a mythological past reviled or romanticized, depending on one's investments in feminist ideology and politics.

In addition to constructing two oppositional generations, the vocabulary of postfeminism is also employed in the popular imaginary to reinforce the solipsistic confusion of the category 'women' with 'generic women,' which is then confused further by metonymically fusing 'women' to 'feminism.' The consequence of these two semantic moves is that the differences that matter between women and the meanings attached to feminism are simplified and homogenized. It should be clear that the costs of excessively privileging *these* differences among women and feminists is that US popular media representations of feminism continuously reproduce a feminism that is white, straight, and middle-class, and that feminists remain incapable of effectively countering these representations. It may be true that it is easier for some feminists to focus on generational difference, especially when anxiety is high about accusations of racism, homophobia, and classism among those who sense, even subconsciously, the costs of declaring their experiences of oppression as legitimate. For white and/or straight and/or middle-class feminist women who claim the authority to speak about oppression on the

basis of their subordinate position under patriarchy (and for whom the authority to speak feels so hard-won) to complicate this authority by recognising privilege and oppression simultaneously when the dominant cultural logic insists that one is *either/or* and not *both/and* may help to alleviate some of the panic. The diversion into generational difference is such a response and says something about who counts as a feminist in this context. Perhaps this solipsism in popular consciousness helps to explain why so many of the 'experts' who get to represent feminism in the media are largely the same. This is one way, as well, to account for the relative absence of feminists of colour, out lesbians and poor feminists critically engaging mainstream media culture.

Indeed, it is telling that more people of colour, lesbians, and poor feminists participate in the production and dissemination of other popular cultures that are not the mainstream. Across the spectrum, American feminists are affected by these public discursive representations of feminism. They reproduce them; subtly re-enforce and collude with their construction, dissemination and propagation; mis-apply the stereotypes (or mistake stereotype as archetype) and consequently make assumptions in their encounters with those outside their age group (assuming all feminists can place themselves in one or the other of these age cohorts). In the formation of third wave feminist meaning, the mainstream preoccupation with this specific generational conflict tends to become the defining difference that sets 'third wave' apart from 'second wave.' This is not to say that age and generation do not matter; however, to centre them almost exclusively is too simple. US feminists across generational, cohort, and political orientations are also products of a particular cultural ideological apparatus, like those who produce, create, and disseminate the media. To assign blame only to one or the other does not get at the shared culturally imbedded roots of our thinking about oppositional struggle. Such expectations exist within the popular consciousness of 'the people,' and thus it is rational for it to be a framing device of the media, but this means it is also an expectation of academics, activists, and other advocates of feminism. As the contributors to one academic anthology, Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan's *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue*, repeatedly point out, the cultural dominance of the idea of patriarchal descendence pervades the feminist academy as much as any other cultural institution. Despite tendencies to collapse what one participant in an email discussion on the Pleiades website called 'the third wave *brand* of feminism' (Deborah; emphasis added) into the more publicly familiar vocabulary of postfeminism, feminism in its third wave is far more critically engaged with second wave feminism and the history and cultural legacies of mid-twentieth-century social movements than the popular renderings of it would suggest. We need to refuse to let third wave feminism become just another brand because the strategic usefulness of the name-object is too powerful to be co-opted so completely.

My internal contest for third wave feminist meaning

As a young feminist who has been researching and writing about the emergence of third wave feminism in the US since the early 1990s, I am especially concerned about what feminism means and how different cohorts and individuals contest for the power to determine its meaning. I have been both delighted and distressed by what I have seen, and both reactions are the strongest when I have examined the intersections between feminist knowledge production and popular knowledge of feminism in the efforts of those invested in creating a constituency that can be called the third wave. One of the greatest challenges for third wave feminists engaging with the media, moving into media institutions and/or producing alternate media cultures that register outside the mainstream may be to reconstruct the ways the popular consciousness of feminism is conceived and articulated. Coming to feminist political consciousness today involves weeding through disjointed, conflicting, and apparently contradictory conversations. This includes contending with the tension between what gets to be establishment feminism in the eyes of the media, subsequent popular consciousness of feminism, and more complex articulations, comprehensions, and practices (often expressed as 'academic' – that is, intellectual – and therefore suspect and unrealistic). Such a project entails new historiographies of the second wave that do not reinscribe good feminist/bad feminist, activist feminism/self-indulgent feminism splits, but also ones that take seriously the criticisms of racism, classism, heterosexism and homophobia, and so on, not only of the women's movement and of variously privileged feminists, but also of other movements and constituencies that comprised the mythical time 'the sixties' (which really spans three decades) most importantly, and of American culture more generally. And today it also means seriously working through the implications of a globalized (and transnational) feminist consciousness. What has come to count as 'third wave feminism' in the American popular imaginary, and in much of what counts as third wave feminist writing/cultural production, tends to be problematically and insufficiently localized. One of the lessons to be learned is the difference between the self-referential and the self-reflexive.

What made the emergence of a notion of a third wave of feminism in the 1990s so meaningful – when the second wave really was not over, when second wave feminists continue to be very much engaged in the political and cultural life of the country, and when the term 'feminism' (however problematically defined) was a strong force in the popular lexicon – was not that it should signal the willingness of a specific age-cohort to take up the name 'feminist,' but that it ought to signal a far more important shift in the strategic consciousness of feminist ideology/praxis. Although it is by no means guaranteed, and although I am increasingly pessimistic and disgruntled with the term's usage, I do still want to believe the name-object 'third wave

feminism' has transformational potential. However, this potential can be realized only when feminists and their allies take the lead in defining and demarcating its content, not in flippant, irreverent, sound-bite versions of intellectual wish-wash palatable to the media and the public, but with careful attention to the messiness, the contradictions, the ambiguities, and the complexities such an endeavour inevitably entails. To initiate such a project, we must adamantly deny that all third wave feminist ideology/praxis does is designate a particular generation of young women to the ranks of an already hegemonic feminist history/genealogy/establishment. This is necessarily an intervention into the public sphere, and not simply an 'academic' exercise. The mass media as public sphere has already done much of the work to solidify such a version, and many well-intentioned feminist identified writers and celebrities have fallen unwittingly into line. As for me, if the general consensus has solidified around third wave feminism as just a nifty moniker for a specific age cohort, then I am not one. I refuse to walk such an easy, superficial road.

Notes

1. I am not prepared to speak beyond the boundaries of the US at this time, although cognizant that the US media is a dominant and dominating force globally. Rathers than gesture superficially and prematurely to something so profoundly important and imperialistic, I want to reserve my comments on the impact of the US media in the global circulation of US feminisms for future work.
2. The theories of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser are helpful to understanding this dynamic. Sandoval's re-articulations in *Methodology of the Oppressed* of Althusser's 'science of ideology' is particularly relevant to the present analysis.
3. See Diane M. Blair and Lisa M. Gring-Pemble for an analysis of the romantic quest narrative used by many of these same authors.
4. While the media comprises far more than print technologies, its discursive quality as a mode of distribution and communication in the late twentieth century is still dependent upon notions of text, linguistic meaning construction, and language. The merger of print technology and capitalism, as Anderson's term 'print-capitalism' infers, is one of the foundations of our contemporary monopoly mass media.
5. For more on this see Baudrillard (10–56) as well as Robert Goldman, Deborah Heath and Sharon L. Smith's 'Commodity Feminism,' Shelley Budgeon and Dawn H. Currie's 'From Feminism to Postfeminism' and Bonnie J. Dow's *Prime-Time Feminism*.
6. See Ann DuCille's article for powerful critiques of this phenomena as appropriated by bourgeois, white American feminists from the mid-nineteenth century through to the late twentieth century.
7. Judith Stacey's work linking the term postfeminism to ideas of post-revolutionary, postindustrial late capitalism and Ann Brooks's work linking it with postmodernism should not be mistaken for the popular appropriations of postfeminism as signifier of a generational cohort who rejects its mothers' feminism. I would not, however, argue that academic treatments of postfeminism fail to understand a vernacular version of postfeminism; instead, I tend to read these efforts as attempts to rescue

an evocative word for more political purposes. In this sense, then, the term post-feminism is as much a contested concept as any.

8. An exception is Nancy Whittier, who uses Beth E. Schneider's concept of 'political generations' to study more complexly the history and persistence of the radical feminist community in Cleveland, Ohio, between the 1960s and 1990s.

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3

Feminist Dissonance: The Logic of Late Feminism

Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert

Since Julia Kristeva penned 'Women's Time,' the metaphor of waves has become a trope for understanding and describing what seem to be breaks in the history of feminist thought. These breaks, if breaks at all, are, for Kristeva, three different and successively held attitudes to linear temporality, or historical progression. It has become common-place to refer to 'first,' 'second,' and, more recently, 'third' attitudes or generations as if they were waves in the feminist critical tradition, denoting historically bracketed phases of thought – from the suffragist movement of the late nineteenth century, through the Women's Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, and into the newest recognisable phase of feminist thought, commonly understood as poststructuralist and/or postmodernist. Yet the metaphor of the wave is more suggestive than its common use implies and, paradoxically, runs the risk of simplifying the tradition it is called upon to describe. For instance, whether or not the first wave was '[u]niversalist in its approach' and '*globalise[d]* the problems of women of different milieux, ages, civilisations' and 'varying psychic structures' (Kristeva 197; emphasis added), it also followed on from (and continued) a long history of critical thinking, writing, and political activism by and on behalf of women. This history is formed through the voices of women as diverse as Elizabeth Stanton, Sojourner Truth, Mary Astell, and Mary Wollstonecraft, among many others.

Waves are characteristically complex phenomena, and this complexity is registered by the word's operation as verb *or* noun: both the occurrence of rhythmic or undulating movement and a sequence of perceivable peaks in rhythmic motion as manifested at (usually) the surface of a material body (most often the sea). To perceive a wave at all, we artificially arrest the movement by which it is constituted, and separate out *one* of *myriad* manifestations of that movement. At the most abstract level a wave is understood as an energy-carrying disturbance propagated through displacement of the medium without any overall movement of matter. A wave is also a gesture, a sign, an attempt at non-verbal communication, and associated with the perpetuation of movement (waving someone on). If the metaphor

has any lasting purchase in the tradition of feminist consciousness, it might indicate shifting constellations of relations within the abstract medium constituted by thinking women at any moment of time. This sense is apparent in Kristeva's delineation of women's time as at once attitudinal and generational, and she maintains that the third attitude can endorse the parallel existence of all three phases in the same historical moment. But coexistence would be impossible if the generational feature were to be identified as phasic, so that only those born after a specific historic moment could be described as third wave; or if the term identified a movement *beyond* something; or if the contradictions shaping female identity were analysed as merely cultural phenomena. The presentation of recent shifts in feminist self-consciousness and practice as a third wave presents historical and theoretical problems in a way that risks a new mode of 'false consciousness' for women. These risks are properly illuminated by Fredric Jameson's account of postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism.

In this chapter we propose that some strands of third wave feminism seem at least indirectly committed to an anti-realism in epistemology, at odds with the second wave materialist analysis of social and economic conditions, and that such theoretical strands cannot run parallel, or coexist, in any meaningful sense. Instead, we argue that third wave cultural insights, into the aesthetic and affective manifestations of subject identity, can be *woven into* an account of constituted identity, and that this in turn facilitates a critique of the politics of representation; without relegating the feminist dream to the acting out of parodic surface manifestations. As a working alternative to the nomenclature 'third wave,' we propose a return to, and revision of, 'materialist' feminism. This is because we believe that materialist feminism, updated in the light of global capital, is the most appropriate theoretical device for grasping and explaining the contradictions that structure female identity. This tension, between constituted identity and the presentation of that identity, produces contradictions between experience, representation, and aspiration, which engender the effect of dissonance that is characteristic of contemporary feminist thought. We qualify the term 'dissonance' by 'feminist' to indicate both muted truth claims concerning the nature of the conditions of the experience, and the belief that critical positions are still available to 'late' feminism, and indeed necessary to its survival of 'developed' patriarchy.

In our search for strands that can be woven together, we have attempted to avoid simplifying events, theories, and personalities, collectively referred to as second wave, in order to generate a historical genealogy of the third wave.[1] The symbolic beginning of the second wave is assumed to be 1968, but a change in emphasis can be detected throughout the 1970s from the earlier liberal agenda of equal pay and opportunities to a broader set of political goals. Within the Women's Movement in the 1970s, liberal, socialist and radical politics seem to have coexisted with ecofeminism, peace campaigns,

and anarchism. Underlying the diverse commitments, and acting as a driver for the change in emphasis, was a concurrence of opinion that women have never been simply *excluded from* the social contract. Modern social structures, it was recognised, managed to *include* women *within* the political order, in such a way that formal demands for equal treatment could be seen to be met, without producing the more substantial transformation of the social structures it had been thought would necessarily follow. Theories of patriarchy seemed to offer the most convincing explanation for this phenomenon.[2]

Never simply essentialist, second wave feminists set the terms of the current equality and difference debates, agreeing that the liberal political slogan 'equal *but* different' mystified the fundamental fact that masculinity is 'always already' valued over femininity, and men are guaranteed a form of sanctioned domination over women. Claims that the appropriate values to replace those present in, and perpetuating, the system were those associated with femininity, clashed with arguments by Mary Daly, Shulamith Firestone, and Stevi Jackson that characteristics associated with femininity were themselves a by-product of the very system to be replaced. Although any description of second wave feminism as simply essentialist betrays the complexity of the principal arguments, underpinning almost all arguments was a real belief in the moral equality and value of men and women. This belief in metaphysical equality existed alongside beliefs that the two sexes are biologically different and that, because social systems change over time, the *type* of human subject also changes. Significantly, the idea of a changing human subject inaugurated a break from 'abstract individualism,' typical of the first wave, but it was this which was carried over to give substance to the second wave notion of emancipation. A number of questions concerning the nature of emancipation, and the causal origins of oppression, perplexed second wave feminists. To give direction to the discussion, socialist and Marxist feminists analysed the material structures of patriarchy and capitalism, but had first to decide whether or not patriarchy should be analysed as a set of social institutions distinct from capitalism, with its own history and its own causal origins. Dual systems theorists argued that patriarchy and capitalism were two distinct systems that may or may not intersect. Unified systems theorists argued that capitalism and patriarchy can be seen as a single, unified set of social relations, and that therefore one conceptual scheme ought to be adequate (Nicholson 39–42). In a nutshell, the problem was how to explain the relation of production to reproduction: whether women's subordination to men is an effect of economic dependency, a dependency that is the result of women's role in sexual reproduction, a role that is required by capitalism; or whether economic dependency is just another facet of a more general system of male power, which may or may not coincide with the specific organisation of labour defined as capitalism.

Prefiguring third wave concerns about the apparent benefits of (global) capital to some women, Marxist feminists argued that there is a tension

within liberal capitalism because it both requires a reserve pool of labour and extends its labour market, so that the potential consumer market can be increased. This discussion came to a head in the domestic labour debate of the 1970s. As pointed out by Shelia Rowbotham and Veronica Beechey, dual systems theorists (often referred to as socialist feminists) had a tendency to be softer on Marxism. This was because they could accommodate gender analysis within an exposition of patriarchy, rather than forcing the economic analysis of Marxism to answer the questions outlined above. In *Women's Estate*, Juliet Mitchell contended that the two systems were theoretically irreducible, and argued that there had been a tendency in Marxism towards reductionism, which meant that the economic base was taken to determine the function and role of reproduction, sexuality, and socialisation.

The merits of this particular interpretation of Marxism aside, we can see emerging here a genealogy of a number of 'third wave' questions, concerning the acquisition of mature subject identity. If we accept that an adult subject will desire things that will, in effect, maintain the current social organisation, and if we believe that the congruence of sex, gender, and sexual orientation is the result of various processes that secure desires, and that our sense of who we are depends on these beliefs, desires, and behaviours – then it makes sense to look for a theory which describes ways in which the individual is *assigned a place* in the social order. By extending and developing Marx's account of ideology it seemed possible to make some sense of women's false consciousness, as Michèle Barrett argues in *Women's Oppression*. For this reason dual systems theorists, such as Mary McIntosh, turned to Althusserian Marxism, seeking in his theory of interpellation an account of ideology that would be able to explain the exigencies and force of patriarchal ideology.

Often consciously working outside academic or institutional constraints, radical feminists developed a plethora of views about the complex nature of subject identity, and the ways in which heterosexuality functions to maintain social stability; views which influenced the above arguments between dual and unified systems theorists. 'Grass roots' issues relating to sexuality were brought to bear on the political agenda, mainly through work arising from women's refuges, rape crisis centres, and around pornography. This culminated in the separatist and political lesbianism debates, a feature of the middle 1970s to early 1980s (Evans 54–74). These arguments, centring on embodied identity and sexuality, occurred as the British left, most notably the *New Left Review*, moved onto a philosophical terrain that could accommodate psychoanalysis and theories concerning the cultural significance of various forms of representation. According to Kristeva, interest in semiotics and psychoanalysis was fuelled by a perceived 'saturation of socialist ideology' and the assumed exhaustion of its potential as a programme for a new social contract (200).

Whatever the reasons for the Left's hospitality, from a critical incorporation of Lacanian psychoanalysis – exemplified by Luce Irigaray, Juliet Mitchell,

Jacqueline Rose, and Jane Gallop – arose a curious and powerful hybrid of literary and cultural studies. Terry Lovell suggests that the convergence of textual with socio-historical analysis made the rather eclectic Cultural Studies a natural environment for developing feminist theory. Within Cultural Studies, humanist and economist readings of Marx were replaced by an interest in Marxian theorists such as Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault. The critique of the subject, the idea that our experience of, and belief in, unified subject identity is actually a consequence of antecedent linguistic and psycho-sexual processes, led to a series of arguments about the nature of psychoanalysis, the historical character of the human subject, its tendency to define and represent the other, and about the exclusionary quality of the sociosymbolic contract. Although Marxism and psychoanalysis are concerned with processes of change, conflict, and resolution, there is fundamental disagreement as to the nature of the processes in question. In effect, Marxists could argue that psychoanalysis was an individualised response to the misery of alienation and that the abstraction of the *experience* of alienation, from its material context, resulted in a way to reconcile the individual to the status quo. 'Freudian Marxism' is not an oxymoron, but the distinct theories cannot occupy the same symbolic space without a fair amount of groundwork. This is still true for any psychoanalytic – Freudian, Lacanian, or Kleinian – reading of cultural texts.

In Britain, identity theory made its appearance in the 1980s, as 'identity politics' emerged on the national political stage. The 1980s saw a tremendous change in the political culture, and there is an intricate relationship between the rise of Thatcherism, 'free market' fiscal policy, Left disunity, and the demise of feminism as a political force. During the 1980s, with a number of important exceptions including the Miner's Strike and anti-Section 28 demonstrations, there was a general decline in British trade union and labour activity, with a resulting diminishment of collective spaces for feminist debates. A further factor in the demise of feminism as a political force over the 1980s can be located in tensions emerging within the Women's Movement itself, that had already been brewing for over a decade. Conflicts between radical and socialist feminists, between middle-class and working-class feminists, between black feminists and white feminists, and between heterosexual and lesbian feminists, were played out in local organisations, at conferences and through the editorial boards of *Spare Rib, Trouble and Strife* and the *Feminist Review*. These conflicts forced feminists into recognising their own 'specific location,' and acknowledging the universalising tendencies within feminist thought. It was no longer feasible to argue that just because an individual had a certain sexed body s/he naturally would, or ought to, align with a particular political movement. As a consequence, the goals of feminism as a political movement became harder to identify and justify with any confidence. This recognition occurred as divisions concerning the appropriate place for feminist activity became entrenched.

The metaphysical argument over the principle of identity, reflected in 'identity politics,' came down to the claim that the belief in subject identity (the autonomous rational agent of liberalism, the proletariat of Marxism or the individual of radical feminism) was premised on a prior commitment either to an ontology of natural kinds, underlying certain forms of materialism, or to principles of rational, logical identity underlying certain forms of rationalism. Poststructuralist feminists argued that radical and Marxist feminists deployed this problematic principle of identity and this explained the elision of experiences and exclusion of women not conforming to this cognitive framework: particularly black women, lesbian and transsexual women, and working-class women.[3] The critique of the subject led to an investigation of the differences *between* men and women, differences *within* the group 'women,' and differences embodied in 'one' woman. Feminist theory became aligned with a method of reading: a mode of interpretation aiming to uncover the hidden or suppressed Other in texts. This, in turn, produced a focus on the ways in which meaning is constructed and how values percolate through language and texts. Consequently, questions concerning representation became questions about 'reality' itself.

The demise of feminism as a coherent political force occurred simultaneously with the consolidation of academic feminism with, for example, the publication of Ann Oakley and Juliet Mitchell's collection *What is Feminism?* Academic feminism has, in turn, been described as a de-radicalisation of feminist theory and this has been linked by us ('Institutional Discrimination') as well as by Joni Lovenduski and Vicky Randall to the rise of 'municipal feminism,' the filtering through of women and feminist theory into public institutions including, but not exclusively, those of higher education. There are two main reasons why an increase in the mass of women in higher education institutions might be causally related to a de-radicalisation of feminist theory. The first refers us to the ways in which the institutional body manages to exert a determining influence on the type of work done. The second refers us to the type of academic theory prevalent under those conditions.

An institution can be defined as a form of physical organisation, which includes sedimented relations of power and lines of funding management. A certain 'norm' of academic practice and an image of an 'ideal' academic practitioner filter through. The rules of academic practice produce normative principles in the material and questions appropriate to study and research.[4] This is endemic to all forms of academic enquiry but was exacerbated, specifically in relation to feminist research, by the impact of vicious budget cuts and related casualisation dating from the 1980s; just as Women's Studies courses had been gaining ground. This coincidence offers a case for claiming that the type of academic work sustainable under these conditions is of a form and content that could be safely funded and published. A further explanation for the deradicalisation of feminist theory concerns the nature

of the theory itself. Identity politics and theory have provided strategic and theoretical problems. Kate Soper has argued that feminist discourses of difference have effectively pulled the rug from under feminism as a politics. Once the *diversity* of women is recognised and privileged over *community*, any sort of collective and goal-directed action becomes harder to justify. Furthermore, the focus of feminist theory rapidly became *itself*, and the purpose of theory became the reflection upon – and the interrogation of – internal divisions and conflicting subject positions *within* feminist theory. This type of autogenetic feminist theory is directly influenced by psychoanalytic literary theory and poststructuralist linguistics, which in effect amounts to a rejection of realism: the reflection of the (Continental) linguistic turn. If feminist theory *can* be reduced to a mode of reading, then there is no privileged female standpoint and men can justifiably call themselves 'feminist,' a claim made in several collections, most notably Alice Jardine and Paul Smith's collection *Men and Feminism*. Under these conditions political goals had to be reassessed. Owing to its rejection of the values of modernity and to its anti-realism in ethics, post-1980s feminist strategy became constrained within an increasingly sophisticated demonstration of the ambivalence or ambiguity of conceptual discrimination. The only aim left was to experience, or perhaps to desire, outside the parameters of 'Western logic.'

Kristeva heralds the challenge to the principle and logic of identity as inaugurating the third feminist stage (214–215). But such a challenge reverberates within epistemology, and, in consequence, it becomes increasingly difficult to argue about the causal origins, effects, and even nature of material practices – the very issues central to 'second wavers.' Against the grain, some theorists – such as Liz Stanley, Michèle Barrett, and Alison Assiter – have attempted to revise traditional epistemology in the light of feminist criticisms, and to take subjectivity into account, whilst retaining a form of realism. An alternative has emerged in the feminist deployment of the kind of discourse analysis proposed by, for example, Foucault. Work by Margrit Shildrick and Lois McNay aims both to maintain an idea of material social conditions and to stress the located, partial, and social nature of knowledge.

Feminism is a fundamentally modern project, with the general political goal to end the oppression of morally valuable human subjects: women. Without wishing to collapse the third wave into the poststructuralist, and the poststructuralist into the postmodern, this problem of substantive goal remains a common feature. Throughout the diverse strands we can identify a few consistent solutions offered to the problem: a critical return to the body, queer theory, cyberfeminism, cultural or popular feminism, and postfeminism. The first replaces the concept of the moral agent with the concept of the (unnatural) body, and attempts to give content to the term 'oppression' by referring to negative and positive physical effects. The second is a revision of identity politics as queer theory, where images and representations are deployed in a way which is supposed to force a renegotiation of basic political

categories and a reappraisal of the purposes of political action. The third strand, perhaps more honestly, tends towards the elimination of the problems of a human subject, moral agency, and consciousness by reducing 'mind' to 'brain,' and 'brain' to a computational data processing organ. As discussed by Stacy Gillis in this volume, the idea of 'cyberfeminism,' however appealing, is revealed as a contradiction when physicalists eliminate the very gender categories on which feminism bases its politics, and then reduce subjectivity to causally determined physical laws. Some subtle strands of third wave feminism bypass the cloistered space of textual exchange, restating the second wave commitment to grass-root activism, and intervene directly in popular cultural struggles. Our abiding concern here is with the intended outcome of these modes of activism. Finally we should note that some, such as Naomi Wolf, argue that liberal aspirations really have been met and that the social conditions, which made feminism a pertinent analysis of the failings of formal structures, have now been superseded.

The critical question is whether or not feminism can claim to *be* postmodern if the actual conditions of modernity remain. So far we have suggested that the 'third wave' was prefigured by a recognition that feminist theory had to be able to recognise not only one location, but also multiple locations, acknowledge the universalising tendencies within feminist thought, and account for the fact that it subsumed individuals under general concepts. Yet if, in this context, we retain a commitment to the material objects and processes of scientific investigation, we can prise apart the real and its representation, and rescue epistemology. The powerful second wave argument that processes, systems and structures distribute tasks and roles to the detriment of an identifiable group of individuals (women) can be secured, and give direction to a reinvigorated idea of praxis: critical theory and practice. We maintain that the problem is not *only* one of representation, but emerges at an intersecting point, where the particularities of representation coincide with systems of distribution. We might describe this in terms of a feminisation of labour within global, multinational, and very modern capitalism.

This analysis seems to return us back to the second wave intersection of radical and Marxist feminism, but with an assurance that the 'new' feminist agent needs to be aware of her own conditions, to restrain any enthusiastic generalisations, and to be sceptical about the determination of possibilities. However, if the subject *is* a consequence of antecedent processes, structures, engagements, and relationships then that, in one sense, is precisely what she *is*. As Rosi Braidotti has persuasively argued in 'The Politics of Ontological Difference,' our being women, just as our being mortal and our being in language, is one of the constitutive elements of our subjectivity. One is both born *and* constructed a woman, but the consequences of the construction are real. If we concede to Judith Butler the claim that no identity can exist before or outside or beyond the gendered acts that perform it, it does not follow that gender is itself a performance: the performance of a performance

or the sediment of various performances. This would be, in effect, to presume either the spectre of a transcendent subject, or a libidinal scene, behind or before such acts, or result in a despairing behaviourist cry that identity is no more than the sedimentation of prior acts.

Some specific theoretical strands are incommensurable and cannot coexist within a newly sublated 'third' stage. The phasic account of these analytical stages obscures this incommensurability by conflating various arguments within general trends. Indeed, some arguments concerning the philosophy of history would endorse a 'logic' of historical change; others would question the reliability of the construction of historical narrative and, without begging the question, these arguments cannot be assumed to be successive historical moments. The generational account of feminist phases seems to express anxiety and disappointment, with each stage or generation responding by rejecting its predecessor; a fairly common trend identified by Harold Bloom as the anxiety of influence. Unfortunately, because patriarchy is built upon the symbolic and real severance of productive matrilinear relations, the generational transitions within the feminist tradition are inherently fraught, and conflict is aggravated by increasingly competitive conditions within, and without, the academy. The disappointment, however, indicates more than infantile and sororal conflict, or a dream of the perpetually new, because it is a gesture towards the structural conditions of unfulfilled aspirations.

Cultural, or populist, third wave feminists might revalourise constituted female identity and its representation, whilst incorporating both a radical analysis of the signifying chain and a belief that the agent can somehow manipulate that which is signified. The point that marks third wave feminism as the pivotal moment of late (developed) patriarchal capitalism is whether or not it can grasp both the agency within self-representation and the appropriation of that agency.[5] Thus, the argument about the commodification of the feminine aesthetic becomes an argument about whether or not valourisation is identical to reification. As Rebecca Munford argues in this volume, the *real* argument is whether the recent reification of 'difference,' its fetishisation as intensity, self-affirmation, and even grrrl power, is a precise response to particular social conditions. What appears to be the creative harnessing of 'archaic' power might instead turn out to be the subordination of the aesthetic itself to modern commercial logic; the repetitive sameness of the exchange commodity form that must appear always to be new (Lunn 157).

We can align the fetish of exaggerated femininity, camp exchange, with the relatively recent myth of an iconic and free female individual struggling to find her own destiny. This myth fairly grooves along in the rut of a bourgeois society, which perpetually threatens to eclipse the subjectivity in question (Jacoby 41). There are fragments of truth discernible in camp exaggeration of the feminine: glimpses of the contingency of the general. A sense of this contingent relationship, between individual and universal, can help to make explicit the contradictory governing principles shaping identity. It would be

dangerous, however, to rest in feelings of well-being brought about through the conscious play of cultural form. These may offer no more than a substitute gratification, cheating subjects out of the same happiness that it deceitfully projects. Dissonance, for Rosi Braidotti in *Patterns of Dissonance*, is the effect of the lack of symmetry between the discourse of the crisis of modernity and the impossible elaboration of theories of subjectivity. Rather than conceiving the crisis in this way, it seems more effective to define the *true* crisis in terms of the fragile attempts of the subject to express her conflicting and dissonant experiences of modernity as a struggle against the very forces that incorporate her (constituted) subjectivity. The notion of dissonance itself presents this uncomfortable and almost unintelligible experience of contradiction, and gestures towards the social antimonies structuring it.

The question remaining is twofold: Is there an appropriate theoretical tool for analysing the contradictions of modernity? And how might we develop an attitude towards and a movement through these contradictions? Ascribing logic to feminist theory is a consequence of our primary commitment to a materialist analysis of linear historical sequence and a parallel belief that theoretical labour has, at most, quasi-autonomy. The description of feminism as 'late' indicates the risk of the incorporation, and consequent de-politicisation, of critical thought under the conditions of global gendered capital. Whether or not any form of critical thought can withstand the onslaught of bureaucratic procedures within the academy is a moot point. It may turn out to be the case that self-defined third wavers are right to be suspicious of the inherent neo-conservatism of academic feminism.

Notes

1. See Gillian Howie for a discussion of feminism, materialism, and postmodernism.
2. For variations upon this see Olivia Harris and Kate Young's collection *Patriarchy Papers*, Zillah Eisenstein's collection *Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism* and Annette Kuhn and AnneMarie Wolpe's collection *Feminism and Materialism*.
3. For an elaboration of these debates see Barrett ('The Concept of Difference'), Chris Weedon, and Linda Alcoff.
4. For more on this see the chapters by Janice Moulton, Susan Sherwin, and Jeffner Allen under 'Part I: Methodology' in *Women, Knowledge and Reality*.
5. For more on this see Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford's article on agency and representation in third wave feminism.

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4

'Feminists Love a Utopia': Collaboration, Conflict, and the Futures of Feminism

Lise Shapiro Sanders

> Feminists love a utopia. . . . [U]topias offer hope and fuel the imagination. They present near-perfect feminist worlds and new social contracts based on "feminine" qualities and achievements. They promise to transform human nature itself through feminist social revolution. (Kitch, *Higher Ground: From Utopianism to Realism in Feminist Thought and Theory*)

What is the historical relationship between feminism and utopia? And what relevance does utopia have for feminism today? Despite the pragmatism that has consistently been associated with feminist efforts to redress discrimination against women, the discourse of utopia has deeply informed feminism. In her critique of the place of utopia in American feminist theory, Sally Kitch contends that utopianism – as a thought process and a strategy for envisioning social change – cannot 'accommodate the complexities of feminist concerns – gender difference, differences among women, or the intersection of sex, race, and class with various social domains' (2–3). In her view, 1970s slogans like 'Sisterhood is Global!' and 'Let a Woman Do It!' signal the essentialist, binary, and idealizing aspects of feminism's past. To advance her argument for a move beyond utopia, Kitch distinguishes between utopianism, which rejects the past in favour of a vision of future perfection, and realism, which in its pragmatic self-reflexivity emphasizes the value of contingency and change. This distinction leads her to conclude that '[i]f utopianism maps uncharted territory, then realism functions mostly in the known, pluralistic, confusing, and inevitably imperfect world. It is immersed in history' (9).

Although this distinction is an intriguing one, Kitch may be too quick to discard utopianism as a model for feminist thinking, as a way of imagining alternatives to an oppressive present and as a mode through which ideals may be envisioned. I concur with her suspicion of utopianism as structured through the desire for a static and codified ideal that, through a metonymic fallacy, takes the experiences and desires of a part for those of the whole – in

which, as she puts it, 'some women become all women' (5). Yet, on occasion, Kitch herself takes the part for the whole in her analysis, taking *some* utopian visions for *all* utopianism. For Kitch, realism presents an alternative to the dangers of utopian thinking; in my view, utopian thinking has value, but only as long as it remains open to the very things feminism must acknowledge and embrace: in Kitch's words, 'contingent truths, inevitable conflicts, and complex motivations and loyalties . . . the serendipity and vagaries of human life, identity, relationships, and institutions' (12).

Despite – or perhaps because of – their connotation of ideal or perfect worlds, utopias have long been recognized as suspect for their 'prescriptive rigidity' (Wilson 258) and for their desire to 'freeze time,' to 'produce the future on the model of the (limited and usually self-serving) ideals of the present' (Grosz 270). Moreover, the very meaning of the word utopia, coined by Thomas More in 1516 – from the Greek *eu* meaning happy or *ou* meaning not, and *topos* meaning place – suggests an impossibility in the term itself: utopia may be the good place or the impossible place; the good place may be no place, or no place may in fact be the good place; utopia may be beyond place altogether.[1] This may be the only possibility for imagining utopia's relevance to – and promise for – feminism: utopia is only viable if it is left permanently open, contested, in contradiction with itself, if it is never put into practice as unchanging entity, but remains a shifting landscape of possibility. Utopia's potential lies in its transformative nature, but this transformative quality must be bought to bear on the very meaning of the term for it to be significant in the future.

The desires and frustrations associated with utopia are particularly relevant for feminism today, often viewed as troubled by differences that divide rather than unite its constituencies. Feminism's transformation – from a political struggle emphasizing women's shared oppression to an anti-essentialist discourse focusing on the construction of female identity and on the material and cultural differences among women – has resulted in a range of new and often splintering perspectives on what feminism means in the present, even in a rejection of the designation altogether – hence the contentious term postfeminism. Postfeminism should not be confused with third wave feminism, as Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake remind us in the introduction to *Third Wave Agenda*: 'many of us working in the "third wave" by no means define our feminism as a groovier alternative to an over-and-done feminist movement. Let us be clear: "postfeminist" characterizes a group of young, conservative feminists who explicitly define themselves against and criticize feminists of the second wave' (1). These 'young' feminists include Katie Roiphe, who wrote *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism on Campus* ostensibly to present her encounter with 'victim feminism' at Harvard, and Rene Denfeld, whose *The New Victorians: A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order* has been regarded as a sequel to Roiphe's account. Naomi Wolf's work, particularly *Fire With Fire:*

The New Female Power and How to Use It has been labelled postfeminist by some, including Heywood and Drake and Deborah Siegel; however, Wolf's explicit effort to claim and reinterpret feminism beginning with the publication of *The Beauty Myth* suggests that she holds a more complicated position in contemporary feminism than the label postfeminist implies. Finally, postfeminism should not be solely associated with the writings of younger feminists; in recent years Camille Paglia, Christina Hoff Sommers, and Sylvia Ann Hewlett have all been criticized for their postfeminist leanings, even as they purport to advance feminism's goals. Hence the concept of the 'post' in postfeminism must be read not (or not merely) through the logic of generational difference but through the political and social implications of the claims made in these texts, as well as the ways in which they have circulated in the media and the popular imagination.[2]

Third wave feminists, by contrast, see their work as founded on second wave principles, yet distinguished by certain cultural and political differences. The editors and contributors to *Third Wave Agenda* see feminism's second and third waves as 'neither incompatible nor opposed,' defining the third wave as 'a movement that contains elements of second wave critique of beauty culture, sexual abuse, and power structures while it also acknowledges and makes use of the pleasure, danger, and defining power of those structures' (Heywood and Drake 3–4). However, the third wave is not only concerned with cultural and sexual politics, but also with political and social issues ranging from ongoing wage discrimination, access to education, and domestic violence to eating disorders, globalization, and the effects of racism and classism on the movement – all historically feminist concerns. Third wave feminism, like its predecessors, therefore resists a single definition, as Misha Kavka has noted. In the introduction to *Feminist Consequences*, she observes that

> the problem is not the death or the end of feminism, but, rather, coming to terms with the fact that political, strategic and interpretive power has been so great as to produce innumerable modes of doing – whether activist, practical, theoretical, or just "quiet" – that have moved well beyond the mother term, already fractured at its origin (xi).

Even this usage of the maternal metaphor, or as Rebecca Dakin Quinn phrases it, the 'matrophor,' is indicative of the simultaneity of feminist efforts to establish connections among women and the resistance to generational logics fraught with hierarchy (179).

This chapter addresses the question of generational and other differences in feminism through recourse to the work of self-identified second and third wave feminists, as well as those uncomfortable with the very notion of waves, generations, and other conceptualizations of feminism's history and progression. These reflections take the form of a series of juxtapositions, highlighting contrasts and contradictions, in an effort to explore the

possibilities a newly expanded conception of utopia might hold for the future of feminist theory and (in) practice. In short, I want to question the wholesale rejection of utopianism as a possibility for the future of third wave feminist vision. In contrast to Kitch, I contend that feminisms in general, and the third wave in particular, need the imaginative potential of utopian thinking to counter the anxiety of historical insignificance (particularly in regard to the generational logic that frames third wave feminism purely in reaction to the second wave) and the frustrations of postfeminism (which shuts down ongoing efforts to work toward change on the level of both theory and practice). What animates feminism *is* the productive potential of utopic vision, even when some accounts of feminism disavow this connection; and the definition of utopia may be productively expanded and enriched through its association with feminism's multiple futures.

The characterization of feminism as occurring in generations or 'waves' has been well documented in recent scholarship in a number of anthologies that strove to articulate the connections and distinctions between 'second' and 'third' wave feminism. The first publication to draw on the term 'third wave' for its title – M. Jacqui Alexander, Lisa Albrecht and Mab Segrest's *The Third Wave: Feminist Perspectives on Racism*[3] – articulated one of the defining features of the third wave in its analysis of the critique by women of colour and Third World women of the white, middle-class biases of the second wave. Anthologies like Barbara Findlen's *Listen Up! Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* and Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism* (the latter containing contributions by such second wave icons as Gloria Steinem and Angela Davis) used autobiographical and personal narratives to provide a perspective on the lives and experiences of feminists of the 'next' generation (sometimes merged in the popular imagination with 'Generation X'). Heywood and Drake's *Third Wave Agenda* aimed to present a more critical perspective on feminism in the late 1990s, one informed by cultural theory and interdisciplinary academic scholarship, but nevertheless with a personal or autobiographical component. This anthology also strove to present 'the voices of young activists struggling to come to terms with the historical specificity of [their] feminisms' (Heywood and Drake 2), defined generationally and through the hybridity and contradiction they viewed as constitutive of the third wave. 'Even as different strains of feminism and activism sometimes directly contradict each other, they are all part of our third wave lives, our thinking, and our praxes: we are products of all the contradictory definitions of and differences within feminism, beasts of such a hybrid that perhaps we need a different name altogether' (Heywood and Drake 3). This sense of a feminism that is constructed by – indeed, animated through – contradiction and difference is fundamental to many conceptions of third wave and contemporary feminisms. None of these writers and activists imagines feminism as a monolithic, universalized entity – another legacy of the gains wrought by the

transformations of the second wave. Drawing upon the critiques of universalism and essentialism from within and outside of the movement, third wave feminists have come to emphasize the diversity of women's experience over the similarities amongst women, often to such a degree that feminism's present and future can seem irretrievably fractured.

The foundational third wave anthologies of the 1990s were followed by Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards's *Manifesta*, written as a response to the perception that feminism had little to no significance for women under 35. In essays on Barbie, the girls' movement, Katie Roiphe and the other 'backlash babes,' and accounts of activism throughout feminism's history, Baumgardner and Richards highlighted the tensions between younger women who 'never knew a time before "girls can do anything boys can!" and older women who may feel their accomplishments have gone unrecognized. (17). As the authors note, the efforts of younger women to 'rebel against their mothers' can result in self-imposed blinders to the ways that feminists of all ages can learn from one another. Instead, they suggest the need to recognize feminism's history: 'Pragmatically, recounting the stories of feminism shows older women that the next generation is aware of their struggles, and shows younger women that their rebellion has a precedent. Having our history might keep feminists from having to reinvent the wheel every fifty years or so' (Baumgardner and Richards 68). *Manifesta* also includes a response to Phyllis Chesler's *Letters to a Young Feminist*, which was perceived by many young feminists as condescending, self-aggrandizing and poorly informed; Baumgardner and Richards's 'Letter to an Older Feminist' replies, 'You're not our mothers . . . stop treating us like daughters' (233). The questioning of the meanings of the term generation, with its implication of a matriarchal lineage and its associations with the concept of inheritance and the logic of reproduction, characterizes *Manifesta*'s effort to carve out a space and identity for third wave feminism that is neither a reaction to the second wave nor a rejection of feminism's past – rather a positive articulation of feminism's future.

Baumgardner and Richards's resistance to being treated as 'daughters' echoes the concerns of other feminists of varying ages. As Gina Dent observes in her contribution to *To Be Real*,

> the fact that everyday feminism doesn't always look like the [capital F] Feminism that appears in books anymore is partly a function of the generational shift that has led to the description of the feminist movement in waves. This generational language hides other differences within it – national trajectories, sexual orientation, professional status [and a myriad of others]. (Dent 70) To speak solely of feminism in waves, in other words, results in another form of universalizing tendency, and polarizes its practitioners by demanding that they identify with the members of 'their' generation. Judith Roof puts this another way:

> adopting a generational metaphor means espousing more than a convenient way of organizing the relations among women of different ages, experience, class position, and accomplishment. It means privileging a kind of family history that organizes generations where they don't exist, ignores intragenerational differences and intergenerational commonalities, and thrives on a paradigm of oppositional change. (72)

The polarization of feminism has a positive as well as a negative side, however, for the introduction and negotiation of conflict can energize a movement and open up new epistemological possibilities. In response to concerns like Roof's, Devoney Looser observes, '[t]oday's generational conflicts seem to me to be about what exactly the reproduction of feminist knowledge (and the reproduction of feminists) will look like. . . . How many of us adhere to a naïve expectation of linear history? Do we expect that feminism must have "a" history?' (Looser and Kaplan 5; emphasis in original.) Looser's implication that feminism does not have a singular, linear past or a unified identity suggests the importance of viewing feminism through multiple lenses and the need to question the desire for commonality that has shaped so much of feminism's history.

Yet for an 'older feminist' like Steinem, the sensitivity of Baumgardner and Richards's manifesta to the significance of history, whether one or many, may not be characteristic of the movement as a whole. Despite her respect and admiration for many of the essays included in Walker's *To Be Real*, Steinem noted in her foreword that

> I confess that there are moments in these pages when I – and perhaps other readers over thirty-five – feel like a sitting dog being told to sit. . . . Imagine how frustrating it is to be held responsible for some of the very divisions you've been fighting against, and you'll know how feminists of the 1980s and earlier may feel as they read some of these pages. (xxiii)

Steinem's frustration suggests the impasse that could ensue if generations of feminists were to neglect opportunities to learn from one another's experiences, failures as well as successes. As Baumgardner and Richards note, this impasse may result from a lack of consciousness on the part of some younger women:

> The chasm between [the younger generation's] belief in basic feminism (equality) and its feminist consciousness (knowledge of what one is doing and why one is doing it) explains why, according to a 1998 Time/CNN poll, more than 50 percent of women between eighteen and thirty-four say they are simpatico with feminist values but do not necessarily call

> themselves feminists. Lack of consciousness is one reason that the movement is stalled. (83)

For Baumgardner and Richards as well as for Steinem, then, young women need not only to recognize the history of feminism and to acknowledge the gains of the past, but also to articulate a more conscious and explicit relationship to feminism's present and future.

Other writers grappling with the relationship between feminists of different generations locate the impasse in an inability on the part of some older women to 'listen' to and engage with the contributions of younger, 'junior' or less established feminists. This is made evident in several essays in Devoney Looser and E. Ann Kaplan's collection *Generations: Academic Feminists in Dialogue* that recount tensions at conferences such as the CUNY Graduate School's 1994 symposium on 'Women's Studies for the Year 2000' and the Berkshire Conference on the History of Women. Yet conflict between feminists is nothing new; indeed it is often brought to the centre of conversations about the possibility of solidarity and community. Jane Gallop's dialogues with Marianne Hirsch and Nancy K. Miller in the anthology *Conflicts in Feminism* and with Elizabeth Francis in *Generations* provide some insight into the often 'painful refusal[s] of commonality' that arise within feminism (Gallop and Francis 126). For Gallop, since feminism is founded in the desire for community and unity against common enemies, it 'produces the expectation that it should be different, and so when it isn't different it's much more painful . . . feminism makes all of these things that weren't supposed to be seem much worse, more like betrayal' (Gallop and Francis 129); whereas for Francis, community has always been suspect: as she observes, '[f]eminism always had this individualistic impulse, so it wasn't just about community . . . community was always an impossibility' (Gallop and Francis 130). In this context, then, rifts between generations of feminists can signal the challenges of envisioning community as either a conceptual model or a practical organizing principle for feminist action. When feminism confronts its own failure to provide common ground in the present, it also confronts a long history of tensions between individual and collective visions for the future.

Indeed, the debate over community can be usefully set alongside the debate over utopia as I have articulated it here. Just as utopia can only be productive for feminism if it resists the impulse toward stasis, so community can only operate successfully if it resists the tendency toward universalism. For Iris Marion Young, notes Judith Newton, 'the word *community* itself is problematic in that it "relies on the same desire for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism on the one hand and political sectarianism on the other"' (340; emphasis in original). The resistance to community's universalizing tendencies results in a move toward coalitional alliances such as those expressed in Nancie Caraway's call

for 'multicultural coalitions without domination in which persons live together in relations of mediation among feminists with whom they are not in sisterhood but in solidarity' (201; citied in Newton). To this more 'realist' vision Newton, 'a woman of a certain age and a veteran of the sixties,' responds: 'I myself might prefer what Sheila Rowbotham once called greater "cosiness" than this, something involving communal dining, socialist volleyball, a sense of humor, wine at twilight, and comforting food' (341). But generational differences are not the only ones distinguishing different visions of solidarity, coalition, and alliance for the women whose work is cited here, and indeed it is striking that both Newton and the editors of *Third Wave Agenda* find themselves drawn to yet another formulation of community that is presented by bell hooks as a 'yearning' for an end to domination: 'Rather than thinking we would come together as "women" in an identity-based bonding we might be drawn together rather by a *commonality of feeling*' (hooks 217; emphasis in original). The emphasis on feeling instead of identity works to enable such alliances but not to ignore the presence of power and hierarchy in the historic relations among women; it strives to make a place for the articulation of conflict without fraying the various strands of the feminist movement altogether.

hooks' expression of unity in the effort to work for social justice meets up with Caraway's vision of solidarity to destabilize the opposition between realist and utopian approaches to feminist practice. The collaborative tactics involved in these formulations, and in projects ranging from many of the co-edited volumes described here to the pedagogical work that goes on daily in the feminist classroom, help us to conceive of a new approach to the place of utopia in contemporary feminism. And indeed the question of utopia's relevance to feminist pedagogy is another place where my argument both intersects with and departs from Kitch's critique. Kitch argues that

> feminist pedagogy has been especially susceptible to utopian thinking. When students demand a classroom that is a "safe space" for women, for example, they imply a utopian desire for learning to occur without offense. But can it? If a "safe space" promotes misinformation or unexamined conclusions, even in the name of protecting feelings, then it interferes with learning and perpetuates ignorance. (102)

Certainly any pedagogical environment that does not both allow and encourage students to critically examine their own and others' assumptions does a disservice to all its members. But what Kitch's discussion of feminist pedagogy makes clear is that she envisions utopia as a conflict-free zone – something that may be historically supported in actually existing utopic communities and movements of the past and present, but that need not necessarily be the case. Elsewhere she observes,

> Indeed, feminism's varied and contentious history may help explain the attraction of utopianism, which seems to offer harmony among the myriad positions that have characterized feminist thought and theory over the years. But is harmony the highest goal? Doesn't the quest for harmony itself indicate a utopian mind-set in its automatic distrust of conflict, dialectic and debate? How do we know that feminism is better off with a unified rather than a cacophonous voice? How do we know that internal dissension is not feminism's greatest strength? (107)

This notion of utopianism as 'harmony' echoes the desire for feminist community expressed by Gallop and Newton, yet is not identical to the concepts of solidarity, coalitional alliance, and commonality of feeling described above. Each of these concepts allows for the establishment of connections to facilitate political and social change, yet emphasizes the importance of difference and dissension. In drawing these concepts together I want to underscore the importance of Kitch's call for dialectic and debate, cacophony rather than harmony, in feminist practice. An expanded conception of utopian thinking would allow for the productive expression and negotiation of conflict, and would clarify utopia's potential as a mode of envisioning social change that emphasizes the transformative over the perfected vision. As this chapter has shown, the contention and conflict that inevitably arise as individuals and collectives negotiate their visions of alternatives to oppression are an integral component of feminism's future – a future that need not discard entirely its utopian past.[4]

I do not imagine that collaboration provides an idealized answer to the conflicts feminism faces today. Rather we might envision collaboration, and the larger model of pedagogy inspired by the interrogation and refusal of masterful knowledge as advocated by Barbara Johnson in her essay 'Teaching Ignorance,' as a kind of mutual education that refuses utopia's tendency to freeze potential into mastery, yet resists the desire to discard utopia altogether (Johnson 72; cited in Moore 65). Johnson's work on the gender politics of pedagogy strives to detach the exchange of knowledge from its association with being 'masterful' (too often aligned in the West with being male) and, as Jane Moore suggests, may be useful to feminist efforts to produce other forms of knowledge (Moore 72). This would also entail following Judith Butler's call to ask ourselves – as students and teachers, rather than mothers and daughters or even 'sisters' – some exceedingly difficult questions, and to leave those questions 'open, troubling, unresolved, propitious' (Butler 432) – questions whose answers only lead to more, and more productive, questions.

Notes

1. These comments have been informed by conversations with Amy Bingaman and Rebecca Zorach, and by Elizabeth Grosz's comments on utopia's relationship to space and time; see especially Grosz 267ff.

2. For a fuller discussion of postfeminism, see Heywood and Drake, Siegel, and Baumgardner and Richards. For a critical analysis of the backlash against feminism following the second wave, see Susan Faludi.
3. Although this collection was first mentioned by Kayann Short in an article in 1994 it was not published until 1998, after the publication of *Third Wave Agenda*.
4. On this point, see also Lauren Berlant, who argues against the imperative to 'learn the lessons of history' (125) and remains committed to the possibilities of utopian thinking, which she sees as productive even, or especially, in its failures. She also suggests the need to explore more fully the 'transmission of feminist knowledges and support intergenerationally' (154), a project addressed in this chapter.

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5
Interview with Elaine Showalter

Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford

SG and RM: *What do you understand by the terms third wave feminism and postfeminism?*

ES: Third wave feminism is just another way of talking about the contemporary moment rather than calling it postfeminism. Third wave feminism implies a movement, a wave suggests movement, whereas I am very dubious about the existence of a new feminist movement. I think of the wave as more temporal than revolutionary. Postfeminism is a term open to a lot of different, and conflicting and problematic interpretations. One way of thinking about it that has been very common is to interpret postfeminism as meaning after feminism, or what you have left when feminism is over. That kind of negativism is extremely prevalent everywhere, not only in the popular press – which is not interested in feminism – but within second wave feminism itself. A lot of people who participated in the women's liberation movement think that we are going through a very bad patch, and feminism is in a mess, and feminism is in decline and feminism had failed, and so on. I am much more literal about it. Postfeminism means after a women's movement. Now one of the ambiguities there is whether you could say we are between women's movements and my own suspicion is that we are not. I think that it is unlikely that there will be another women's movement.

SG and RM: *Why do you feel that there will not be another women's movement?*

ES: Because of what it takes to make a movement. Movements, by their nature, are infrequent and localised events and they have certain conditions. You cannot predict when one is going to start exactly but you can understand the historical framework and what it takes to create a revolutionary movement. First, it takes a specific and attainable goal, a goal that is clear so that everyone can see what it is and everyone can agree on what it is. And people need to believe that it is possible to get it by action, so they are willing to give up their divisions, their differences, their competitions and their hierarchies, in the interests of obtaining this goal. If you look at women's movements in the past, although feminism has always been complex in what it wanted, they had very specific goals – whether it was the vote, or

rights to abortion, or equal pay for equal work, or access to education, or any of the many things that have motivated the various movements. They were clear and specific. The ideals behind feminism now are much more diffuse and controversial. Second, a movement needs leadership. There is a real dearth of charismatic feminist leaders right now, at least in the US and the UK. Feminism has been very uncomfortable with leadership. It has not been a goal of feminism to develop leaders. Indeed, you might say that is was quite the opposite. Some revolutionary movements will have a specific goal to educate, develop and train leaders. But not the women's movement. The idea was that leaders were temporary and would give way to a universal sisterhood as soon as the problems were solved. So, women who do assume leadership find themselves dealing with a lot of hostility as well as a lot of support.

SG and RM: *What happened to second wave feminism? Where did it start to fall apart as a movement?*

ES: I think that a radical movement, by its very definition, is not going to last very long. Movements are short-lived entities, like a chemical that has a lot of complex elements but a very short half-life. But I do not think that the absence of a movement as such is a matter of concern. Feminism can go on independently of a woman's movement.

SG and RM: *You have talked about the lack of leadership at the moment. The women's movement has tended to put forward people who will lead for a short while and then the movement almost devours them through mythologisation (e.g. the Pankhursts, Gloria Steinem). Do you think that the feminist movement is crippled by what it does with its leaders?*

ES: No more so than any other revolutionary movement. Leaders of other revolutionary movements have not fared that well either. But, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, if feminism is really going to expand and develop and gain power in the world, Western feminism needs to re-examine some of the premises that have been around for generations – some of the baggage from earlier phases – and really think about whether it continues to be meaningful to insist on these assumptions. Some of the ideals that were exhilarating are now confining. It is easy to get trapped in some of these old methods of thinking. For example, the women's liberation movement, because it was so connected with leftist politics and a certain kind of utopian socialist thought, had an automatic belief that one did not want to look for women exercising leadership and achieving power in social spaces of which it did not approve. But if we want to look at leadership, big business, government and the military are some of the places that you find women with the strongest leadership abilities. Rather than demanding a pure political space where feminism develops its leaders we should think about where female leadership exists and what we can learn from it. Feminism has operated for several decades on an ethics of powerlessness, and we need to investigate an ethics of power. In the twenty-first century you

cannot pretend anymore that no women have power. I am very interested in women in the business world. There are quite a number of women in the UK who are achieving prominence. Look at Laura Tyson of the London Business School or Nicola Horlick – or any of these women who have been very successful in business and politics. I am very struck by the fact that in a lot of feminist discussions these women are not mentioned. You still get women who are speaking out of the authority of failure.

SG and RM: *What do you think feminism should be doing at this point in history?*

ES: The big area where I would like to see feminism engaged in an entrepreneurial, effective and power-orientated way is in childcare. It is the kind of issue around which women could organise, although it is somewhat more problematic than, say, the vote because you do not worry about the quality of a vote – but you do worry about the quality of childcare. You cannot exactly agree to it until you know exactly what it is you are going to get. A lot of the attitude of feminism towards childcare is passive: Give it to us, we demand it and we are entitled to it. I know that when I was in the women's movement we were more active. One of the things we did in my group, which had seventeen people in it, was start a day-care centre. We just started it. We said we do not just want childcare, we *have* to have it and we *must* have it. So, five of the seventeen women took responsibility for it. And they tried to think of different ways that they could get it – and they found a space, got the university to sponsor some of it and found ways to get money. They played various angles so that they could get some of the space and costs subsidised, and they had various fund-raising sales, and eventually they launched it. That day-care centre is still running – both of my kids went to it. A *fait accompli* is one of its own best arguments politically. It would be interesting now to see women who have money and leverage thinking about how to make childcare work. Could we set it up as a business? Why does it always have to be the government providing it? Commercial childcare does not have to be a shameful enterprise, a Kentucky Fried Children. Yet too many feminist conferences on childcare include academics, social workers, welfare mothers and so on, none of whom has any real leverage although they have good ideas. I would invite some rich women to these discussions. There are different kinds of alliances that feminism could look to now, and I think feminism could adopt a more active attitude: We will make what we need, we are determined that we are going to have what we need, and we are not just going to go around begging. I do not want to take a high moral ground because there is too much moralism in feminism already but I think there needs to be a reconsideration of these old taboos about power, and we need to have discussions with women who represent all different kinds of experiences and backgrounds. Often second wave feminists regard anything that subsequent generations do – whether that is activism, organising and/or theorising – with a real resentment and anger. There is a real sense that many second wavers do

not think that subsequent generations are 'doing it right'. This generational conflict is not exclusive to feminism. When I talked at the Third Wave Feminism conference at the University of Exeter, I suggested that feminist tension is partly an accident of timing. At the beginning of the twentieth century there was enormous optimism among women because feminism was really a very young movement and young women were joining it. But at the millennium, many women who had come out of the women's liberation movement were aging. They did not see the millennium as a new beginning; they saw it as an ending, they saw it in terms of decline. Many of them certainly sound as if they are very embittered, very negative, and very pessimistic. I also think that the women's liberation movement was extremely successful in its time and place. I am continually impressed when I think how much was accomplished by relatively small groups of extremely committed women in the right place at the right time. We really seized the day. With the new generation in the twenty-first century, I do not see that the issues have emerged with sufficient force and I do not think that enough leaders have come forward. I personally do not feel any resentment towards them, but I do not think that third wave feminism has really gelled. If anything, it seems that it is still trying to accommodate the feminism of the 1970s in some of its leftist shibboleths. In addition, many new issues have not been forcefully engaged.

SG and RM: *You have talked about feminist leaders. How much do you think we need feminist icons?*

ES: I do not know how many feminist icons there are. There are certainly some female icons. But again, when I did *Inventing Herself*, people were so annoyed with me, not just that I said Princess Diana had been an icon for women but that I said Oprah Winfrey was an icon for women. As many people objected to Oprah Winfrey as to Princess Diana. I gave a talk in London about the book and that was what I was most denounced for. People said, 'Oh Oprah Winfrey, she is just a creature of the media.' But she is also now a powerful and socially engaged woman – albeit with some very different ideas than second wave feminism had. The issue is not just claiming women as feminist icons, but working with them or getting them to work with you. Gloria Steinem was such a person for the women's liberation movement. There are a lot more strong female figures right now but they are not often given the sense of feminist support that would make them interested in taking leadership. So I do not think that we need feminist icons, but we do need women who are powerful economically and politically as well as women who make things happen. There are also the schisms within academic feminism which alienate some people.

SG and RM: *The women's studies/gender studies/feminist studies debates can be invigorating but are also marked by acrimony and, at times, deception. In contrast to this, we feel that we should celebrate feminism being in other places than feminist or women's studies. We need to celebrate letting go of feminism.*

ES: That is a very good way to put it. And I think that is exactly what it is – letting go of it. Letting go of it because that is the foundational step in making alliances. You really have to ask what it is that you want, and how much you want. If you really want something to happen then you are willing to give up some of the pleasures of ownership, so to speak, in terms of making alliances with other people who can work with you. It would be very interesting to get some of the women who are in business and government to work on women's leadership centres, to work with undergraduates in order to give them the mindset and the tools to make things happen, and training in everything from money management to public speaking.

SG and RM: *In what ways can we make an individual difference? How do we give leadership skills to women? Most women have to learn anew in a vacuum, whereas men are given this sort of training almost as a birthright*.

ES: Structured mentoring is very important. I think there should be a lot more of it. Maybe some of these very powerful women could be encouraged to take half a dozen younger women to mentor, and to show them how to master some of these skills. I try to do that myself on a very small scale with various students who I have had working for me. They do some research work for me, but I also involve them in the various kinds of activities that are part of my career, and help them learn how to write a book review, a lecture and a recommendation.

SG and RM: *There is a second wave perception that self-proclaimed third wave feminists, for example, the writers of zines like* BUST *and* Bitch, *do too much playing, too much popular culture and not enough doing, not enough politics. This sense of moral superiority between generations is aggravating but how can we resolve the accusations of too much popular culture?*

ES: Women are not given the right to play, and popular culture is a form of women's play. I am quite fond of English football, but I do not put the amount of time into it that men do into various sports. I do not play golf. I am not interested in cars. I think that you get a feeling for a place and for people by participating in popular culture. I do not know why I should feel guilty about it. These lines around popular culture are much too rigidly drawn and I do not see why it is necessary for women to deny themselves pleasure.

Part II
Sex and Gender

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Introduction: Sex and Gender

Margrit Shildrick

Consider 'sex and gender', the once uncontested and foundational pair in the quest for women's liberation. The terms sound almost old-fashioned, a reminder of where Western feminism started out, no less, in Mary Wollstonecraft's first iconic challenges to the seemingly inviolable link between the 'fair' sex and feminine gender characteristics. And did not second wave feminism, in attempting to consign gender to the contingent set out to conclusively break that link, only to have it returned as the more or less dismissive accusation of either material or strategic essentialism, an accusation wielded by scholars of the third wave, eager to establish other grounds for critiquing identity and difference? But the question – the challenge – of sex and gender, though it so often signals a tiresome relic of past debates, is not so easily settled. The operative ploys of poststructuralism, and its extension into postmodernism, have served feminism well in the unremitting struggle to revalorise difference without solidifying any one category of difference, but as Jacques Derrida once remarked, the deconstructionist is like a tightrope walker who risks always falling back into what s/he rejects. The task of the third wave – and we should hesitate before that named and bounded category – is, then, not so much to advance a successor theory as to apply a thoroughgoing but always unfinished critique that holds open the spaces of possibility. To gloss Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: for all that we might deconstruct them, the central beliefs and values of modernity are things which we cannot do without. Whatever we choose to call the methodologies associated with third wave feminism, there can be no final word on sex and gender.

Like many other committed poststructuralists, nonetheless, I want endlessly to qualify the founding categories of the feminist debate, to take apart the implicit assumptions and metaphorical devices that serve to occlude the underlying power structures that operate as much within feminism as outside it. Whilst it arguably made good political sense in the 1970s and the 1980s to swiftly advance the feminist project through oppositional thought and action, we have since grown more sophisticated. The masculine/feminine

binary may long have revealed its constructed nature, its theoretical and empirical inadequacy, but what has become equally apparent – to postconventionalists at least – is that sex is no less contingent. The debate over the category of women, and whether or not that is consistent with any given biological status, has not of course passed without a struggle. Perhaps it is inevitable that initially every group challenging the external status quo, as second wave feminists unquestionably did, must define and police its own boundaries to the extent of both excluding recognisably troublesome differences, and declining to acknowledge internal inconsistencies. When Donna Haraway referred to white Anglo-American feminists as 'kicking and screaming' in their reluctance to come to terms with racial differences, she could have made the point about a host of other equally pressing differences.

That desire for the putative security of an identity in common runs deep, and the politics of sexual difference in its initially oppositional interpretation seems to offer a seductive and potentially inclusive clarity. What feminists guided by the insights of poststructuralism have done is break apart that clarity and greatly complicate the parameters of reference. Above all, they insist that the conventional meanings of sex and gender should be rethought. The scholars – Judith Butler, Denise Riley, Eve Sedgwick, Elizabeth Grosz, Julia Kristeva and, in a different way, Luce Irigaray – who first engaged with a serious deconstructionist critique of the accepted and unquestioned grounds of feminist theory met with hostility and incomprehension as much as excitement, and a widespread feeling that the solidarity of the agenda for women (that seemingly self-evident category) was being betrayed. Although acceptance of those theoretical concerns is now well-established, there is however a new danger. These names are now so familiar in feminist scholarship that we forget at our peril that critique must be endless. When Butler, for example, wrote of the performativity of both gender and sex in *Gender Trouble* and then qualified that analysis in *Bodies that Matter* with reference to the enforced materialisation of the sexed body, it marked not a backtracking on her own work, but a more complex understanding of the persistence of sexed and gendered categories. The operation of power-knowledge and its manifestation in cycles of resistance and disciplinary *recoupment*, that Michel Foucault so convincingly outlined in *The History of Sexuality* and other works, point to the improbability that any mode of transformation – and I include theory here as much as substantive operations – should result in permanent escape from the grasp of normativities. It is less a matter of overturning prior conceptual meanings and material functions as one of a critical engagement that seeks always to complicate the terrain rather than arrive at new groundings.

While the bare terms sex and gender rarely express much critical leverage in third wave feminism, the meaning of the replacement term, sexual difference, itself has undergone a significant change. Far from marking a binary-based and conceptually dependent pair (male/female), it is now

more likely to signal precisely what cannot be contained by the binary: those sexual differences that are other than the binary itself, rather than the other of the primary masculinist term. Misunderstood as she so often is, and widely misconstrued, I would argue, as a covert essentialist, it is Irigaray who has opened up the path, or rather paths, to a more productive deployment of the signifiers of difference that were initially encompassed by the rubric of sex and gender. I do not mean that Irigaray herself would necessarily recognise, or approve, all the avenues that latter-day feminists explore in the name of difference, but that her understanding of how dominant discourses operate, and what it takes to 'jam the theoretical machinery' of masculinist power, remains a fruitful and dynamic source of ongoing deconstructive enquiry. Perhaps even more importantly Irigaray, like Kristeva, has never been afraid to stress the ethical import of postconventional theory – particular in the face of claims that postmodernism cannot deliver an ethics. I have dealt with this extensively in *Embodying the Monster* and *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries* so suffice it to say that the feminism of the third wave is always intensely concerned with the ethics of the other, whoever that other might be. The figure of 'woman' to whom the second wave directed its attention takes her place as just one marker among a multiplicity of significant differences.

How, then, do all these considerations play out in the chapters collected in this section? Perhaps most telling, although third wave theorists almost take it for granted, is that feminist scholarship is no longer determined by, nor confined to, the writer's status as a woman. I do not mean to suggest that positionality is irrelevant. Clearly the specificity of differences do matter, but not in a rigid way that would presuppose the limits of enquiry, or enforce the hierarchical claims of standpoint. The question of 'speaking as a woman' is a well-established point of friction between feminists of varying theoretical perspectives, with at one extreme those who believe that only 'biological' women can qualify, while at the other the signifier 'woman' becomes so fluid as to be meaningless, a position without content that is open to all. But perhaps both points of view miss a more significant consideration that Butler would endorse. It is that we do always speak from some identifiable position, albeit provisional and contingent, and more importantly that that position is both undecidable and subject to the governmentality of iteration, which at the same time is endlessly transformative. In short, to repeat 'I am x' is always to subtly change the nature of the claim, as though in a game of Chinese whispers. Now, this tension between the solidification of identity and its coincident undermining is precisely one that must engage theorists of the third wave. Rather than providing a foundational position, identity is always at stake but not, thereby, without valency. The point is to contest the givenness and persistence of any identity claim – including those that are transgressive – without denying its substantive import.

The issue here is not simply to hold open a transformative ontology, and the intertextuality of identity, but to engage with questions of ethics. Perhaps one of the greatest shifts from second to third wave feminism has been the move from an exposition of a feminist morality concerned with issues of right and wrong, good and bad, to an ethics without programmes or rules. Although he is scarcely mentioned, perhaps we should thank Derrida for this, and Emmanuel Levinas too, for his focus on ethics as a response to and responsibility to the other. At some level the question of the ethical is embedded in all the papers and made more or less explicit. The emergence of ethics in feminism theory is reflected in developments of Kristevan texts, which are the focus of Mary Orr's contribution. Tracing the passage from early interests in language itself to more recent work in psychoanalysis and the sacred, Orr suggests that Kristeva has been engaged always with the question of the outsider. Certainly Kristeva's notion of 'an ethics of respect for the irreconcilable' (182) marks the point at which feminism can usefully re-engage with her work.

Where Kristeva has elicited a concern with the maternal, many of the chapters here deal directly with issues of female/feminine/feminist identity. For Alison Stone the third wave take-up of the 'woman question' concerns how the contestation of the category by women themselves can yet preserve a feminist politics, while for Andrew Shail the issue devolves on the relationship of men to feminism. Shail enjoins a critical optimism precisely because of the third wave's refusal to conceive of gender as what he calls 'a two-dimensional oppositionality'. In the two other chapters the project of queering identity takes on substantive form, where the difficulty for any queer politics is to avoid the policing of its own boundaries, the demand for its own identity papers. Like Stone, Wendy O'Brien addresses herself to the naturalisation of sex and gender but roots her analysis in a rethinking of the subversive potential of pornography. As she understands it, pornography mobilises sexual identities that are fluid and non-hierarchical, and that sustain feminism's project of destabilising normative binaries. The confusion of sexual identities, and the tension between a deliberate queering and the desire for the security of identity, is productively complicated in regard to transgenderism. Edward Davies' contribution takes up that problematic both by reviewing transsexuality and transgender and by appealing for a new kind of self-reflexivity towards the question of identity.

The critique of sex and gender – only as an absent presence – remains, then, one central mode of enquiry, but those concepts no longer occupy the position of primacy afforded to them, both theoretically and empirically, in earlier feminist outings. The close attention now paid to global concerns, to non-normative sexualities, to the discourses of race and ethnicity, to post-coloniality, and to the cultural imaginary more broadly, has greatly enhanced not only the political, but also the ethical valency of feminism. These moves to a more outgoing and ultimately less self-concerned understanding of the

feminist agenda – constitutive of what we loosely call the third wave – have undoubtedly complicated the issues, but at the same time mobilised a much richer analysis of the operation of power and difference. The unenviable task of any editor of a collection is to impose some putative consistency and sense of what marks out a particular section from any other. Yet many other chapters from across the range of categories in this collection might have found a place here. It is certainly not the case that sex and gender have merged into the background, but rather that there is now recognition that they are fully and inextricably imbricated with all the other quasi-structural and discursive inequalities that are at work in our lives. The need for critique is indeed interminable.

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6

Kristeva and the Trans-missions of the Intertext: Signs, Mothers and Speaking in Tongues

Mary Orr

> Kristeva's thought is peculiar: it is transparent enough that it tends to be reduced very quickly to a set of bipolar opposites by her critics (and thereby criticized as being everything from ultraanarchistic to ultraconservative); but at the same time, it is opaque enough to be uncritically idealized by her most fervent admirers. (Jardine, *The Poetics of Gender*)
>
> With respect to feminism, then, Kristeva leaves us oscillating between a regressive version of gynocentric-maternalist essentialism, on the one hand, and a postfeminist antiessentialism, on the other. Neither of these is useful for feminist politics. In Denise Riley's terms, the first *overfeminizes* women by defining us maternally. The second, by contrast, *underfeminizes* us by insisting that 'women' do not exist and by dismissing the feminist movement as a proto-totalitarian fiction. (Fraser, *Revaluing French Feminism: Critical Essays on Difference Agency, and Culture*; emphasis in original)

Although published in the same year, these two responses to Julia Kristeva's work offer a résumé of the complex, positive–negative reception which her *oeuvre* has generated both outside and within specifically feminist circles. The key to both quotations is their antinomic structure; advances in one area are counterbalanced by regress in another. In the light of Kristeva's own and repeated denial of the label 'feminist' (*Au risque de la pensée* 117–118) in spite of her iconic status within (French) feminism, it seems timely therefore to investigate whether Kristeva's work still has a part to play in shaping feminist debates of today, in this nexus of fertile exchanges about a 'new' or 'third wave' of feminism. While her contributions to feminist psychoanalysis and the maternal as 'subject-in process' have already been ruled out of court by many feminists, such as Janice Doane, Devon Hodges and Diana Meyers, Kristeva's work on language, including the pre-semiotic, continues to elicit positive support from critics of a no less feminist hue such as Toril Moi and Anne-Marie Smith. Kristeva's example-in-writing thus positions her both

outside feminism of whatever wave, yet directly within the *aegis* of feminist concerns of all waves. This chapter does not try to settle the question of Kristeva's 'feminist' credentials, but asks how far her 'feminist–postfeminist' position and politics make her work, at the very least, a whetstone to sharpen contemporary third wave feminist theory and practice.

This chapter returns to some basic tenets of feminist enquiry: to identify and question the omissions in the cultural story. This approach (which also challenges previous feminist accounts) here makes specific reference to Kristeva's early and ground-breaking *Semeiotikè* – published in 1969 but made up of essays composed as early as 1966. Even Kristeva's most prominent advocates, let alone her detractors, have largely ignored it, so that it has been severed from Kristeva's better-known contributions on the abject, the pre-semiotic, the *chora*.[1] Marginalisation of whatever kind is a quintessentially feminist issue, regardless of wave or nationalising identity (such as Anglo-American, French, subaltern feminisms), for theory and practice. Moreover, given that Kristeva has recently spoken of herself in terms of 'severing' (*Au risque de la pensée* 86) by referring to the image she used in her novel *Possessions* of '*la femme décapitée*' ['the woman beheaded'],[2] some serious feminist work needs to be done to conjoin, not further separate, her thinking into decisive phases. This chapter begins the task of reconnection by recuperating in *Semeiotikè* a number of key constants fundamental to it, but also central to Kristeva's so-called psychoanalytical period from the 1980s onwards. This maps onto the field in which third wave feminism emerged, informed by 'French' feminisms. By arguing here for the retrospective significance of the essays which make up *Semeiotikè*, a more holistic feminist reevaluation of Kristeva's *oeuvre* and consideration of her current work on revolt and gendering genius can be stimulated. At the same time, the unsettling, unsettled and polyphonic nature of the essays in *Semeiotikè* challenges the kind of neat bipolarisations encapsulated in the epigraphs about Kristeva's work in particular, and about feminist critical discourse more widely. *Semeiotikè*'s not always fully formed ideas therefore arguably continue to be relevant to particular concerns, problems and confusions within current feminism. As a concerted rereading of *Semeiotikè* in its entirety is not possible here the third essay, 'le texte clos' (the closed text), will serve as a textual model of Kristeva's thinking as symbiosis and open connection, rather than clean disjunction into dialectical thesis, antithesis and synthesis. A suggestive space within a multifaceted collection, 'le texte clos,' and its open host *Semeiotikè* together alert contemporary feminist (re)thinking to the necessary interdisciplinarity of its concerns, assite of inevitable pitfalls and empowerment.

'Le texte clos': the translinguistic, the Lady and the novel

'Le texte clos' is the third essay in *Semeiotikè* and is fundamental to the wider investigations of language and semiotics in the collection not least because

it is here that Kristeva first introduces the concept of 'intertextuality' as permutation of texts, and within a context that acknowledges her indebtedness to Bakhtin.[3] Kristeva opens discussion, however, on the importance of the translinguistic as the realm of semiotic practices of various kinds. Quickly moving from oral exchanges to the text as a translinguistic medium which redistributes orders of language, and then to intertextuality, Kristeva firmly places such productivity of translinguistic practices within the *space* of the text. The teeming multiplicity of translinguistic text and its space as model of cultural production is perhaps best encapsulated by the index to *Semeiotikè* (316). Here, translinguistic text is glossed as (i) irreducible to an utterance (*énoncé*) which can be broken into parts; (ii) a site where categories of language are redistributed; (iii) transgression of the laws of grammar; (iv) a 'writing–reading' (that is an active appropriation of the other into total participation);[4] (v) estrangement from language (*étrangeté à la langue*); and (vi) theatricality of the text. This translinguistic arena of the text is later qualified in *Semeiotikè* to distinguish the *phenotext* (the signifying structure of the printed (fixed, closed) text) from the *genotext* (the signifying productivity).[5] As with Kristeva's notion of the translinguistic and the genotext, the intertext is therefore infinitely open signification, irreducible to a singular given or indeed the 'other' (e.g. popular or vernacular) of the text. While a potential totality, it is the dynamic, dialogic and socially bounded operations of the translinguistic that allow ideologemes to become apparent in signifying systems, whether oral discourses or textual language. If the intertext cannot itself be designated 'feminist' (this or other situations outside the text being absent), Kristevan translinguistics has profound significance for current feminist considerations of female agency, imagination and finding voice. Not only does Kristeva's work complicate and question theories of linguistics, it also practises translingual production since *Semeiotikè* is conceptualised and written in French as Kristeva's second, not mother, tongue. If interesting work has begun on translingualism as literary imagination and production, as Steven G. Kellman demonstrates, feminists currently unhappy with monolingual oppression in high theory and cultural production need to take fresh stock of the territories Kristeva's early work opens up.

While the first three pages of Kristeva's essay are extraordinarily dense and allusive, the contextual and conceptual scene is set for two interconnected and important qualifications. The first is to mark the late medieval period (thirteenth–fifteenth century) as the transition from symbol to sign: universals give way to phenomena, and the symbol as solution of contradictions was displaced by sign as connector by means of non-disjunction, a term Kristeva later qualifies (*Semeiotikè* 58). In short, for Kristeva this is the moment where hermeneutics (theological or metaphysical) was replaced by semanalysis before it was known as such. Second, late medieval literature and in particular Antoine de La Sale's *Histoire du petit Jehan de Saintré* (1456) is for Kristeva the paradigm or prototype of the polyphonic novel à la Bakhtin. As perhaps the earliest

prose text ('roman,' novel) or at least among the first recorded in written form, *Histoire du petit Jehan de Saintré* combines historical discourse with a heterogeneous mosaic of prior texts to permit Antoine de La Sale's own narration as the story of Saintré to emerge in a rhetorical representation which also circumscribes the history of the book. Doubles and doubling of discourse are the signature of *Histoire du petit Jehan de Saintré* with non-disjunction (pseudo-oppositions revealed as such) as further structural variant. A throwaway line then opens up a second knot of analysis of this medieval text to qualify 'non-disjunction': 'Recent research has proved the analogies between the cult of the Lady in provençale literature and ancient Chinese poetry' (68–69). For Kristeva, these genres are first and foremost a hieroglyphic semiotic practice based on connective disjunction of two sexes which are irreducibly differentiated yet simultaneously alike. If Western literature then made the Dame 'the Other' to distinguish her from 'the Same' (the male author), de La Sale's text for Kristeva sets the Dame on the cusp of same–other textual politics. Not yet and uniquely a divine or idealised Lady, nor merely a human character capable of unfaithfulness and falsehood, neither mother nor mistress, the Dame is the figure of the non-disjunctive which centres and grounds the work and the authority (of taste, language) to whom the male protagonist and writer defer. Is Kristeva tacitly pinpointing the critical role (in all senses) of such highly literate and often at least trilingual women for artistic renewal at critical periods of cultural history? Does her reading, and more important writing, of the Lady speak into Kristeva's own intellectual trajectories? And how far does Kristeva's recuperation and rewriting of the story of Saintré as the story of the writing process reshape the fiction of closure (*le texte clos*) within the open (translinguistic) work of a culture for female and male voices?

As theory about repositioning, the translinguistic is key to Kristeva's *Semeiotikè* and wider *oeuvre*. For current feminist agendas concerning race, identity, multilingualism and self-representation, Kristevan translinguistics offers a rich field for future work whether in high theory, on poetic language or the pre-semiotic. The seeds of the dynamics of translinguistic transference are, moreover, also visible in 'le texte clos.' These will be taken up by Kristeva with reference to the translation and transmission of the sensate (*le sensible*) and to the situation of being in another's language on the one hand. On the other, they will inform her most recent psychoanalytic work on revolt and its disorders.[6] Perhaps most important of all the highly 'intellectual' Kristeva of 'le texte clos,' an essay marked by its abstract, difficult and convoluted style and structures, confronts and re-envisages from a central-European woman's perspective a central image of Western philosophy, Plato's cave. The open–closed space of forms and the language of representation may be otherwise configured as the genotext or non-disjunctive space of cultural production. If actual maternity (and its figurations in 'Stabat Mater' in *Histories d'amour*) are in the future of 'le texte clos' and *Semeiotikè* as a whole,

the latent ideas of 'le texte clos' and analysis of the Dame in particular address dynamic doubling and open closure, the 'yin and yang' of non-disjunction as alternative to mimesis, and the anchoring of (translinguistic) text in individual formations of language which is (and is not) the mother tongue even for monolingual speakers. The early writing therefore finds in the image of the woman beheaded not some variant of castration in the feminine, but an endowment of the female head as necessary for *her* embodiment of text. How this textual body connects to material incorporation with a gendered identity finds expression as the economy of the Dame, overtly hidden in the text. It is the passage between the lines, in the throwaway lines in language (tantamount to Freudian slips) and in the script of experience readable only after the event that connection occurs. Brief scrutiny of the post-'le texte clos' phase in Kristeva's work highlights such transmissions less as theory but more as praxis.

Chinese woman, the maternal and the in-between ('l'entre-deux')

The issue in Kristeva's *oeuvre* which has provoked most feminist critical attention and ire is the maternal. For Doane and Hodges for example, Kristeva's psychoanalytic work on the maternal and the pre-semiotic almost blithely ignores women's sociopolitical contexts: 'A signifying practice like Kristeva's, a discourse that refuses to discuss the social, political and economic situation of women (except as symptoms or an archaic relation to a maternal object) can offer little insight into the complex sources of female depression and little hope for a cure' (77). For Lisa Lowe, 'the examples of China and Chinese women are cited only in terms of Western debates, are invented as solutions to western political and theoretical problems' (141). Kristeva's vaunting of pre-patriarchal, non-Western matriarchal systems such as that found in ancient China is for Lowe offensively orientalist, a version of maternity which perniciously returns to male–female binaries. Such critical assertions, however, omit to investigate the rather more complex network of sociopolitical and other material contexts informing Kristeva's thinking directly after *Semeiotikè*. These omissions in the cultural story may not ultimately 'solve' some of the inherent problems and difficulties with Kristeva's figurations of the maternal perceived above, but they do mitigate and therefore reorientate them.

The informed comparison between the cult of the Lady in provençale literature and ancient Chinese poetry already present in 'le texte clos,' while of vital importance to Kristeva's later intertextual rereading of Marina Warner in 'Stabat Mater,' first finds a political rather than a post-theological outlet.[7] It suggests that Kristeva had already become interested in China, including its policies on women, rather earlier (and not necessarily for the same reasons) than the *Tel Quel* group. As Kristeva has stated in a recent interview:

> If we were interested in China, it was because we had the impression that its national tradition – Confucianism, Taoism, the place of writing, the specificities of the Chinese language, the role of women in this culture etc. – could influence socialist ideology which purported to be global, and to lead it in an interesting direction. We thought that from such a springboard, whatever impasses were in existence would then no longer be the same. (*Au risque de la pensée* 38)

To return to the received account also circulated by feminist critics, *Tel Quel*'s disillusionment with the intellectual left in France, especially adherence to French-style communism, shifted their interest in the early 1970s to Maoism, and was actualised in the visit of a number of its members to China to see Maoism in action for themselves. This version fails to distinguish the group 'they,' or lumps Kristeva synonymously with 'them.' Kristeva was the only woman of the party – the others were Philippe Sollers, Roland Barthes, François Wahl and Marcelin Pleynet – and the only member to have learned some Chinese prior to departure. Pleynet's travel account – *Le Voyage en Chine* – is a fascinating record of how different Kristeva's position was on a number of counts, particularly as she is not the centre-stage for most of it. In terms of interaction with Chinese people, Pleynet notes for example at the Great Wall that she is mistaken for a Chinese person until she speaks Chinese, and also records how her long skirt was a constant source of fascination for Chinese *women* of all ages as different to their ubiquitous blue trousers (108). However, Pleynet perhaps more significantly recounts her difference within the *Tel Quel* group dynamics: in intellectual and political discussions about the role of intellectuals in galvanising petit bourgeois commitment she is noted as particularly pessimistic (43). She is often the more persistent on visits in trying to gather information, and is noted as spending free or journey time learning Chinese. While Pleynet arguably corroborates Lowe's view that Kristeva only saw China through a westernised optic – the group as a whole and especially Barthes rarely moved outside tourist space, or if visiting hospitals or other institutions found the official translators a barrier – Kristeva's already non-French and ex-Soviet Block positionings constitute a differently 'Western' stance regarding China. While she fulfils the role of the 'translinguist' and was the spokesperson of the group about women's affairs her encounter as intermediary, both as translator and the 'in-between' of cultures, was not new to the visit to China.[8] This foreigner-yet-insider situation constituted Kristeva's position from her earliest interventions in Barthes' seminar in 1965, and her role within *Tel Quel* itself. Indeed, she has described herself as the 'lightning conductor' or go-between of its factions (*Au risque de la pensée* 35–36), as the doubly coded *woman* stranger (*étrangère*) within.

While Moi (171–172) has accused Kristeva of an over-romanticised theorisation of the marginal figure as subversive, the interest of the *étrangère* Kristeva

pinpoints is precisely her shadowy, ambiguous yet ubiquitous status. The *étrangère* (like the Dame) is not locked into national, temporal, geographical or symbolic essences but evades them even as she is named by them and may be as much inside such boundary definitions as outside them. Thus, on Kristeva's own admission, while it was Mao's then focus on the role of women in China (as a key but under-exploited additional workforce) that first drew her, not least because this chimed with her growing awareness of French women's issues, the common reference points were the particularity of women's sexuality, their writing and their place in society (*Au risque de la pensée* 42–43). In France and endorsed by the visit to China, Kristeva discovered that both the female body and the libido, let alone the maternal or role of the mother, were subjects of 'non-conversation' by women themselves.[9] In terms of reconnecting the metaphorical decapitated head to the disembodied body of the Kristevan *oeuvre* in all its parts, the visit to China was therefore strategic on several counts. It triggered Kristeva's entry into more creatively 'political' as opposed to 'high' academic language, which purports to be gender neutral. Kristeva cannot then be accused of not being aware of the sociopolitical contexts of 'real' women or only of white, Western middle-class ones. Her 'French' *étrangère* persona and position-in-writing thus found more expressive outlets, perhaps facilitated precisely by her disappointment and rupture with Maoism (as system) and, as a close reading of Pleynet indicates, by a separation from *Tel Quel* group identity, even mentality. The agendas around women's issues (whether *about* Chinese or French women) meshed with her own revolution of poetic language and bodily experience.

Kristeva's disappointment with Maoism is then much more directly striking in her writing as compared with either Sollers' or Barthes'. Both fictional and political voices clearly emerged alongside her 'abstract' French as part of her own 'translinguistics' but channelled also towards psychoanalytical investigations with a tacit but gendered agenda. While the focus remains on the areas of lack in Jacques Lacan's (rather than Sigmund Freud's) theorising of woman, Kristeva's transmissions and translations of her discovery of the missing elements in Mao's policy for Chinese women into discussion of the maternal and female psychoerotic relationships, from the female and *étrangère* viewpoint, need to be made more prominent in feminist critiques of Kristeva's 'maternal.' Too much emphasis has been placed on reading the primordial (essentialising, mythologising, archaic Chinese, etc.) and pivotal roles of the mother in Kristeva's theories of the pre-semiotic, including the importance of the mother for a child's (rather than as feminists would like, a daughter's) successful entry into language. Her work on the maternal is much broader when seen in its proper context, since it includes material, and specific cultural frames, as well as a search for feminocentric conceptualisations of maternal erotics. To find a voice for such terrains, Kristeva has paradoxically never used her mother tongue, and undertaken her own psychoanalysis through French to reach the pre-linguistic and the pre-semiotic.

Everywhere, her focus on being an outsider-to-language (*l'entre-deux*) chimes with her own experiential and intellectual developments in the main as a voluntary exile from her mother tongue/land, and adoptive position of French.

The comparison in 'le texte clos' between the Dame in provençale literature and ancient Chinese poetry can therefore be illuminating by reversing the terms of comparison. Redolent of female configurations of oral-textual sophistication in primordial matriarchal cultures such as China's, it is not so much the Virgin-mother who is the site of the non-disjunction of the real, the sign and the symbolic, but her translinguistic cousin the Dame. As acme of oral and written expression, this significantly childless maternal but matriarchal construction facilitates cultural production. The throwaway line in 'le texte clos' is then a double return of that expressed in Kristeva's post-1970s writings. Moving beyond *l'écriture féminine*, Kristeva's reconsideration of revolutions in poetic language and of poetic 'translation' of the sensible world beyond language in Marcel Proust moves in tandem with her theorisations of the child's pre-linguistic and linguistic developments or with the abject and child psychoses. Productivity stems from a translinguistic 'yin and yang' of the host text and its new guest (analogous with the relation of mother and foetus/child). *Semeiotikè* thus lets slip the constants of Kristeva's work, especially its junctures, but also the ongoing context of its inception, the *Tel Quel* group and Barthes' seminar. Marginalised within both, her subsequent marginalisation from the seats of power within high theory urgently requires further feminist re-evaluation and rectification.

It is then Kristeva's labour on the productivities of the translinguistic (and intertextual) including the pre-semiotic which needs resoundingly to be affirmed, so that her contribution as productive *étrangère* within *Tel Quel* (as neither mother nor *daughter*) is given proper weight.[10] With such feminist lenses, the racisms and gendering of postmodern theories becomes more visible. One example is pertinent here and comes from early reception of Kristeva's work. In the preface to his *Essais critiques* (7–8), Barthes notes a 'defraction' of semiology from 1967 onwards, illustrating his statement with a list of exponents. Beginning with Jacques Derrida's books (*livres*), followed up by the action of *Tel Quel* (to which Kristeva belonged as a 'fellow-traveller' and by dint of her personal connections with Philippe Sollers), he finally mentions Kristeva's contribution, but as *travail* not *livres*. Barthes' use of *travail* visibly denotes its low status compared to the production of *oeuvres* (accolade *par excellence* of male artistic and critical endeavour). *Travail* is not only paid work and the opposite of pleasure or play (the concepts central to Barthes's theories of textual pleasure); it is the French word for 'going into labour,' that is quintessentially *maternal* work. As much more than a definition of maternity especially from male perspectives, Kristeva's *travail* or 'mothership' of the term 'intertextuality' as translinguistic productivity is the first step of her wider feminocentric work within French psychoanalytic theory, which

makes the maternal pivotal as *process* not role. It seems striking that Kristeva finds 'mothership' of her own critical French 'voice' precisely through her transmissions within *Tel Quel* about Chinese women. The double-voiced discourse (*entre-deux*) of her critical writing from the earliest to the most recent will, post-1974, be further combined in her creative writing and actual maternity. The 'beheaded' and 'incorporated' aspects of her 'mothership' are therefore not separate stages, but a process. Is there something that feminist research from various perspectives can adopt or re-adapt from Kristeva's work(s) as *travail*?

Speaking in tongues: a feminist or woman's language?

> I've had a lot of difficulty with the feminist movement for I don't feel comfortable with movements and militant groups. It happened that the huge explosion of French feminism coincided with the institutional and personal criticism that I was leveling at the Left (I was just back from China) and my disengagement concerning these ideologies. Feminism quickly seemed to me like another form of dogmatism. I won't go into details about my discussion with various feminist groups – it's all past history – but I was struck by the fact that these groups often repeated the ossifications and dogmatism of 'macho' groups to which they were opposed. . . . In contrast, the basic questions that the movement posed – the particularity of female sexuality, the role of the mother for the autonomy of the child, dependence *vis-à-vis* the mother, the place of the mother in language and symbolic apprenticeship, the particularities of 'écriture féminine' and woman's art, and other themes have always interested me. . . . I was trying to pursue them in my own way (*Au risque de la pensée* 117–118).

In the light of this statement, Kristeva's recoil from feminist groups cannot neatly be labelled 'postfeminist' while the constants of her work – the translinguistic, the étrangère, the maternal – remain clearly key issues for third wave feminist agendas. Language, as Kristeva has known from the outset, is vital to women's empowerment and their articulation of counter-representations. To inhabit the dominant other's tongue has always been both a subversive and a survival strategy, as postcolonial writers and critics, male and female, have recognised. It is this speaking in tongues that connects Kristeva more with the outsiders and precursors of feminist movements *per se*. For visible and vocal pre-modern women, education was key, particularly the command of several languages and writing. Such women polyglots as successful transmitters and cultural negotiators inhabited space, thanks to powerful male protectors for their own awareness of how to circumnavigate local ideological exigencies. Kristeva's 'politics' fits such a lineage of linguistic adoption, adaption and male group patronage rather than that of direct

confrontation or separatism within feminist groupings. As for Simone de Beauvoir before her, Kristeva's rapid prominence within intellectual circles in France which are largely modelled on (male) classical philosophy would have been much more difficult otherwise. This course has also directly informed Kristeva's recent exploration of female genius – Hannah Arendt, Colette and Melanie Klein – outside such classical models to showpiece the situation of women's insider–outsider status to major Western patriarchal frameworks. Such a standpoint and situation is exactly that of the Lady in 'le texte clos.' Feminists – whether third wave or not – need to take stock of their mutual heritage with women 'fellow-travellers' in male circles who ground gender agendas in the longer histories or different geographies of feminocentric endeavour. It is also arguable that some of the most lasting 'feminist' work has taken place outside overtly feminist organisations, groups or generational metaphors. Is Kristeva's concept of the *entre-deux* an apt description of her own being-in-writing position between feminism and direct action on women's issues, the constellation of parts she herself played in her visit to China?

The polyglot position of the *étrangère*, whether mediating between discourses or languages, also serves as a model of retrospective and proleptic vision. In spite of strides within such areas as feminist linguistics, psychoanalysis, politics or *écriture féminine*, the *travail* of women of/in other tongues needs more overt recognition. Such recuperation would do much to disinvest translation (as text and process) as 'lesser' work to theory, as well as to promote insights on a range of women's issues from non-Western and non-postmodern vantage points. While Woman as single essence or construct does not exist, the ability of the *étrangère* to speak in several tongues has a timely relevance to counter the conformity generated by globalisation. The woman speaker in tongues moreover conjoins interdisciplinary and intellectual pursuits with political and religious interests where neither head, nor body nor incorporated spirit is excluded, severed or hierarchised. As against the 'high' language of her early work, Kristeva's recent interviews and essays further frame the speaker in tongues within the knotty realm of the everyday and 'ordinary' language including its psychological dimensions, which are much harder to grasp cognitively or assimilate linguistically. Can the concept of the *étrangère* provide a tool which respects cultural, sexual and gender difference and complexity for 'ordinary' women? While *Semeiotikè* would seem irrelevant both in its contents and opaque formulations, the semanalytic search and outcome Kristeva proposed for it was not the further abstracting of language or theory, but a bid to find a 'materialist gnoseology,' embodied ways of knowing. While the template for such an epistemology has not been clarified by Kristeva or by feminist thinkers, the many facets of *Semeiotikè* as demonstrated in her later works do push towards the issues of real women. Perhaps the concept of the *étrangère* needs more radical work (work in the sense of *travail*) to address the needs of women outsiders to social inclusion because

they are outcasts, pariahs, victims of mental, physical or religious violence, torture and persecution. Doing maternal work (*travail*), whether birthing or other cultural labour, certainly provides a common point for feminist and women's agendas within first- and non-first-world cultures. Kristeva's theories of the maternal, in spite of such re-qualification, may none the less fail to satisfy feminists of various camps and waves in their bid to renegotiate reproduction. Perhaps it is then that the insufficiencies in Kristeva's theories of the maternal signal where feminist work and reflection need to be targeted. More strategically than before, the 'mother' question for feminist thinking and action is concomitantly the daughter question. How best may third wave feminists renegotiate the work of their foremothers? Can feminist psychoanalysis return the repressed of a daughter's entry into language and sexuality? How important is being a 'Daddy's girl' for women intellectuals? These questions are no less pertinent to Kristeva's intellectual trajectories as to her *oeuvre*. A 'biosemanalysis' narrative, where the personal is the critical, may prove a further and fruitful site for questioning critical value itself. In male high theories, it has been the fashion to divorce the author and text and to avoid biographical reference of all kinds as anecdotal or the worst kind of author intention. The works of critical theorists are thus frequently examined in the light of periods or intellectual movements, not personal evolutions, emotions or experiences. While postmodern feminist work has too frequently cloned such an approach, many non-first world feminists follow earlier feminist paths, recuperating forgotten women and their works in order to uncover and critique patriarchal structures, texts and language – a model of which third wave feminists should take stock. And while Kristeva's early writing can be accused of blind adherence to male critical modes of high theorising, it is precisely this linguistic cloak in the other's tongue which divulges both its subversive force and its 'biosemanalysis.'

Throughout, this chapter has argued strongly for the non-suturing of Kristeva's work into periods by recuperating something of the plethora and constants of Kristeva's early *Semeiotikè* in 'le texte clos.' By looking at nodal points, the importance of connecting instead of severing in Kristeva's work, her confrontations with male-bounded territories have been exposed. It is within a translinguistic, interdisciplinary and dynamic form of thinking that Kristeva's particular contributions open up the spaces of the cultural, the daughterly and the polyglot to twenty-first-century thinking women. In the entirety of her work, Kristeva's *travail* on and through language as a psycho-political circumscribed space recuperates places where women have been kept outsiders to cultural definition itself. Thinking in waves, then, may not actually do justice to the interdisciplinary concerns or the nexus of contemporary women's issues. Perhaps this is the lesson for current feminisms to take forward from Kristeva's early work as *travail*, both process and expression, ever in dialogue as the *entre-deux* for the onward transmission of feminocentric understanding and for understanding our feminist histories.

Notes

1. See my *Intertextuality* for the manifold reasons for such marginalisation of the early Kristeva on both sides of the Atlantic – lack of translations until 1980, lack of a female, let alone feminist, philosophical tradition in France – in my discussion of the reception of Kristeva's neologism and 'intertextuality' within the context of *Semeiotikè* more widely.
2. Unless otherwise stated all translations are mine.
3. For further discussion of this as the core definition of Kristeva's intertextuality, see Orr (25–32).
4. This is developed in the fifth essay of *Semeiotikè*, 'Pour une sémiologie des paragrammes' (120).
5. This is further developed in the eighth essay, 'L'engendrement de la formule' (219–221).
6. The essay 'L'autre langue ou traduire le sensible' picks up the ideas of being a stranger to language addressed in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, both taking forward the ideas in the first essay of *Semeiotikè*. Her work on revolt and its disorders includes *Sens et non-sens de la révolte, La révolte intime, Contre la dépression nationale* and *L'Avenir d'une révolte*.
7. See also Kristeva's co-authored work with Catherine Clément (42–43).
8. Kristeva was commissioned by the feminist press *des Femmes* to write *Des Chinoises* (1974) [*About Chinese Women*] on her return.
9. See her initial rectifications of this in *La Révolution du langage poétique* and *Histoires d'amour*.
10. 'Gadget' is Kristeva's own rather downplayed synonym for intertextuality (*Au risque de la pensée* 110).

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7

On the Genealogy of Women: A Defence of Anti-Essentialism

Alison Stone

Within feminist philosophical and theoretical contexts, third wave feminism may be defined as encompassing 'all critical work . . . that points . . . to the homogenizing or exclusive tendencies of earlier dominant feminisms' (Heyes, 'Anti-Essentialism' 161).[1] Third wave feminists object, in particular, to exclusive tendencies within the dominant feminist theories of the 1970s and 1980s, theories that emerged more or less directly from second wave feminism as a political movement (e.g. Catherine MacKinnon's critique of pornography reflecting feminist activism around the sex industry). Subsequent feminist thinkers, writing in the later 1980s and 1990s, articulated their objections to these exclusive tendencies primarily through critiques of 'essentialism'. The central target of anti-essentialist critique was the belief – arguably widely held amongst second wave feminists – that there are shared characteristics common to all women, which unify them as a group. Anti-essentialists of the third wave repeatedly argued that such universalising claims about women are always false, and function oppressively to normalise particular – socially and culturally privileged – forms of feminine experience.[2] The widespread rejection of essentialism by feminism's third wave generated problems in turn. Ontologically, the critique of essentialism appeared to imply that women do not exist at all as a distinct social group; and, politically, this critique seemed to undercut the possibility of feminist activism, by denying women the shared identity or characteristics that might motivate them to engage in collective action. The central problem of third wave feminist theory, then, is that it risks undermining feminism both as a political practice and as a critique of existing society premised on the ontological claim that women constitute a (disadvantaged) social group.

Confronting this problem, I argue that feminists could fruitfully reconceive women as a social group of a particular type: a *genealogy*. This would allow feminists to oppose essentialism without undermining either political activity or claims about women as a definite social group. I defend a 'genealogical' conception of women in the following stages. I begin by reviewing critiques of essentialism, offering a brief account of the ontological and political worries

these critiques have raised. I then assess two notable feminist responses to these worries: strategic essentialism and Iris Marion Young's idea that women form a series. I suggest that neither response satisfactorily resolves the problems generated by anti-essentialist critiques. I then argue that, without sharing any common characteristics, women can still exist as a distinctive social group, susceptible to political mobilisation, insofar as they constitute a genealogy.[3] I derive the project of a feminist appropriation of the concept of genealogy from Judith Butler, whose professed aim in *Gender Trouble* is to outline a '*feminist genealogy* of the category of women' (5; emphasis in original). Tracing this concept of genealogy back to Friedrich Nietzsche, I suggest that all cultural constructions of femininity re-interpret pre-existing constructions and thereby compose a history of overlapping chains of interpretation, within which all women are situated. Thus, although women share no common understanding or experience of femininity, they are nevertheless assembled into a determinate social group through their location within this complex history. I conclude that a genealogical approach could enable third wave feminist theory to overcome its earlier problems and stimulate, rather than deter, feminist political activism.[4]

Essentialism and its critics

Let us recall what was at issue in the heated controversies over essentialism that dominated much 1980s and 1990s feminist writing. At first glance, the various critiques of essentialism from this period seem to address quite disparate targets. Elizabeth Spelman's classic critique *Inessential Woman* (1988) castigates recurring tendencies within feminism to take certain privileged women's experiences or situations as the norm. Meanwhile, post-structuralist thinkers such as Judith Butler emphasise the relations of power and exclusion underpinning any general claims about women. The diverse theoretical backgrounds and orientations of these critiques of essentialism have led some commentators, such as Gayatri Spivak, to conclude that 'essentialism is a loose tongue' ('In a Word' 159). Yet, retrospectively, it is possible to identify all these critiques as targeting essentialism in a recognisable philosophical sense. Philosophically, essentialism is the belief that things have essential properties: properties that are necessary to those things being what they are. Applied within feminism, essentialism becomes the view that there are properties essential to women, in that any woman must necessarily have those properties to be a woman at all. So defined, essentialism entails a closely related view, *universalism*: that there are some properties shared by, or common to, all women – since without those properties they could not be women in the first place. Essential properties, then, are also universal. 'Essentialism' as generally debated in feminist circles embraces this composite view: that there are properties essential to women and which all women (therefore) share. Notice that, on this definition, the properties that are

universal and essential to all women might be either natural or socially constructed. As this suggests, critics of essentialism from the later 1980s and 1990s typically attacked any view ascribing necessary and common characteristics to all women, even if those characteristics were taken as culturally constructed.[5]

Traditional views of womanhood, prevalent before second wave feminism, are usually essentialist and assume that all women are constituted as women by certain biological features (wombs, breasts, or child-bearing capacity) – features that all women are presumed to share, necessarily *qua* women. Second wave feminist formulations of the sex/gender distinction problematised this picture, arguing that sexed biology is both different from, and causally inert with respect to, gender (an individual's socially acquired role and sense of identity). So, while being *female* may require certain anatomical features, being a *woman* is something different, dependent on identification with the feminine gender (the social traits, activities, and roles that make up femininity). Following this recognition of the gap between gender and sex, many influential second wave feminist theorists tried to identify an invariant set of social characteristics that constitute femininity and that all women, *qua* women, share. Possibilities included women's special responsibility for domestic, affective, or nurturant labour, the view, for example, of Nancy Hartsock, their construction as sexual objects rather than sexual subjects, as suggested by MacKinnon, their comparatively weak ego-boundaries – Nancy Chodorow's version of psychoanalytic theory or, as famously argued by Carol Gilligan, their relational style of ethical and practical reasoning.[6]

In the 1980s and the 1990s, however, numerous feminist thinkers showed repeatedly that such universal claims about women are invariably false. It cannot plausibly be maintained that women's experiences have any common character, or that women share any common location in social and cultural relations, or sense of psychic identity.[7] Essentialism, then, is simply false as a description of social reality. Moreover, critics pointed out that the descriptive falsity of essentialism renders it politically oppressive as well. The (false) universalisation of claims about women in effect casts particular forms of feminine experience as the norm and, typically, it is historically and culturally privileged forms of femininity that become normalised in this way. Essentialist theoretical moves thereby end up replicating between women the very patterns of oppression and exclusion that feminism should contest.

One might, at this point, object that we can uphold essentialism without postulating any social or cultural characteristics common to all women if we, instead, identify women's essential properties with their biologically female characteristics. This need not entail returning to the traditional, misleadingly anatomical, definition of womanhood: one might hold that femininity is socially constructed in diverse ways, but that all these constructions are united in that they build upon and interact with individuals'

biologically female characteristics. However, this option was foreclosed by the feminist philosophies of the body that developed in the 1990s. Judith Butler, Moira Gatens, and Elizabeth Grosz, in particular, argued that bodies are thoroughly acculturated, and so participate in the same diversity as the social field that they reflect. First, social forces continually alter and reconfigure bodies' physical characteristics, not merely superficially but at a deep internal level. Secondly, our bodies are first and foremost the bodies that we live, phenomenologically, and the way we live our bodies is culturally informed and constrained at every point. Sexed embodiment is therefore not external but *internal* to the gendered realm of social practices and meanings. Consequently, one cannot appeal to any unity amongst female bodies to fix the definition of women, since the constitution and significance of bodies varies indefinitely according to their socio-cultural location.

The increasing rejection of essentialism within feminist thought posed two well-known, closely interwoven, problems. Ontologically, anti-essentialism 'cast doubt on the project of conceptualising women as a group' (Young 713). In denying women any shared features, anti-essentialism seemed to imply that there is nothing in virtue of which women can rightly be identified as forming a distinct social group. This ontological denial appeared, in turn, to undermine feminist politics: if women share no common social location, they cannot readily be expected to mobilise around any concern at their common predicament, or around any shared political identity or allegiance. Moreover, if essentialism is false then it becomes unclear how feminists can 'represent' women's interests, since women have no unitary set of interests for the putative representatives to articulate. Thus, the third wave's two-pronged critique of the descriptive falsity and political oppressiveness of essentialism left feminism in a dilemma: 'a specious choice', as Cressida Heyes puts it, 'between difference-denying generalizations and a hopeless fragmentation of gender categories' (*Line Drawings* 11). Feminists have offered several responses to this dilemma, and I shall now critically assess two of the most significant: strategic essentialism and the idea that women form a series.

Two responses to anti-essentialism

Confronted with the spectre of a dissolution of feminist politics, many feminist theorists in the 1980s and the 1990s espoused 'strategic' essentialism, the position that some form of essentialism is necessary as a political strategy. Gayatri Spivak, for example, argued that one should acknowledge that essentialism is descriptively false (it denies the real diversity of women's lives) but, in limited contexts, one should continue to act *as if* essentialism were true, so as to encourage a shared identification among women that enables them to engage in collective action ('Feminism'). Many of the bold statements in Luce Irigaray's later

work can be construed as strategically essentialist. In *Thinking the Difference*, she claims that women share certain bodily rhythms that give them a deep attunement to nature (24–26). Rather than attempting to describe women as they really are, Irigaray may well be urging women to *think* of themselves as sharing certain rhythms, as a strategic identification that will galvanise them to collectively resist ecological degradation.

A crucial and largely overlooked difficulty afflicts this strategic essentialist position. Any political strategy will be effective in proportion as it allows agents to gain a grip on the real events and forces that make up the social field, and to intervene materially into this field. But a strategy can be effective, in this sense, only insofar as it embodies an accurate understanding of the character of the social field. Consequently, a strategy of affirming fictitious commonalities amongst women cannot be expected to facilitate effective action in a world where women do not really have any common characteristics or experiences. If strategic essentialism is nonetheless held to be effective, this must be because its proponents continue, tacitly, to presuppose that women do share a common social position into which intervention is required. Unless women share such a position, there is little reason to regard strategic *essentialism* as an effective lever for change.

This suggests that, although strategic essentialists explicitly deny upholding essentialism as a description of social reality, implicitly they must continue to presume the descriptive truth of essentialism just in taking it to be politically efficacious. Consider, for example, Denise Riley's statement that 'it is compatible to suggest that "women" don't exist – while maintaining a politics of "as if they existed" – since the world behaves as if they unambiguously did' (112). For Riley, essentialism is strategic in that it enables us to engage with, and resist, the social practice of treating women as if they constituted a unitary group. Yet in saying that the social world treats women in this way, Riley is implicitly embracing a form of descriptive essentialism after all: she is claiming that all women share a common mode of treatment, a common way of being positioned by social institutions. This confirms that, ultimately, one cannot defend essentialism on merely strategic grounds without first showing it to be descriptively true as well. But since, in fact, essentialism is descriptively false (as we have seen), it cannot be defended as politically effective either.

In 'Gender as Seriality', Iris Marion Young offers a preferable solution to the onto-political dilemma posed by anti-essentialist critiques. Importantly, she suggests that we can retrieve feminism as a social ontology, while still recognising the descriptive falsity of anti-essentialism, if we rethink the *type* of social group that women are. Specifically, she advocates reconceiving women as a *series*, a specially non-unified kind of group: 'vast, multifaceted, layered, complex and overlapping' (728). Deploying the taxonomy of Jean-Paul Sartre's *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Young distinguishes series from groups in the strict sense: the latter are collections of individuals who mutually

recognise significant areas of shared experience and orientation to common goals.[8] In contrast, membership in a series does not require sharing any attributes, goals, or experience with the other members. The members of a series are unified passively through their actions being constrained and organised by particular structures and constellations of material objects. Women, for example, are passively positioned in a series by the particular set of gender rules and codes infusing everyday representations, artefacts, and spaces. Young's understanding of women as 'serialised' allows her to deny that women share any common identity or characteristics, by arguing that they take up the constraints of gender structures in variable ways, within the contexts of entirely different projects and experiences. At the same time, she can consistently claim that women retain the broad group status of a series insofar as the same set of 'feminising' structures remains a background constraint for them all (728). Having secured women status as a social group – in this broad, non-unified sense – Young concludes that women can become conscious of their group status and so become motivated to act together politically.

Young's approach has a drawback: her defence of women's group status tacitly reinstates the essentialism she explicitly repudiates. Although she denies that women share a common experience or identity, she does affirm that all women are 'oriented around the *same* objects or . . . structures' (728; emphasis added). Young concedes that the content of these structures varies contextually but still maintains that, despite their diversity, these structures share certain unifying characteristics – they all embody a central set of expectations about normative heterosexuality and appropriate gender roles (729–730). For Young, it is precisely through these allegedly unifying features that social structures co-operate in constituting women as a single, distinct gender. Thus, she retains a coherent feminine gender only by invoking a form of essentialism with respect to the constraining structures of the social milieu. Anti-essentialists can plausibly object, though, that no single set of expectations about sexuality or gender roles unifies all the social structures to which women relate. The problem, then, is that ultimately Young continues, like the strategic essentialists, to rely on the tacit invocation of an implausible form of descriptive essentialism.[9]

Young's important insight into the need to reconceive femininity as a non-unified type of social group can be more consistently developed if we rethink femininity as not a series but a specifically *genealogical* group. This genealogical rethinking of femininity entails a concomitant rethinking of feminist politics as *coalitional* rather than unified. We should rethink collective feminist activities as predicated not upon any shared set of feminine concerns but, rather, on overlaps and indirect connections within women's historical and cultural experience. Let me outline how a genealogical and coalitional rethinking of feminism could surmount the dilemma generated by critiques of essentialism.

Women as genealogy

Several prominent feminist thinkers have suggested that the concept of genealogy might allow us to reinstate, from an anti-essentialist viewpoint, the idea that women are a distinct social group. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler appropriates this concept to outline a genealogical understanding of what it is to be a woman (5). Similarly, Gatens proposes 'a genealogy of the category "woman" or "women" . . . a genealogical approach asks: how has "woman"/ "women" functioned as a discursive category throughout history?' (76) These references to genealogy imply that femininity is historically constructed in multiple, shifting ways, its fluctuations in meaning registering changes in social relations of power. However, Butler and Gatens do not explicate precisely what a genealogical rethinking of femininity consists in. To fill in this gap, we must trace the concept of genealogy back to Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morality*.[10]

One of Nietzsche's principal aims in the *Genealogy of Morality* is to deny that any common characteristics unite all the institutions, practices, and beliefs classified under the heading of morality. As such, Nietzsche adopts an anti-essentialist approach to morality. He understands its diverse practices and beliefs as falling under the rubric of morality solely because they belong within a distinctive history. This history is to be studied through a novel form of enquiry – 'genealogy'. The genealogist traces how some contemporary practice has arisen from an indefinitely extended process whereby earlier forms of the practice have become reinterpreted by later ones. Genealogists treat any current phenomenon as arising as a reinterpretation of some pre-existing practice, which it harnesses for a new function, and to which it assigns a new direction (Nietzsche 54–56). Thus, a genealogy takes shape when a practice (such as punishment) becomes subjected to repeated reinterpretations that impact upon its meaning and structure. For instance, an early aim of punishment was to secure a yield of pleasure for the punisher, but subsequently the practice became reinterpreted – moralistically – as serving to restore justice in the wake of a criminal infraction (Nietzsche 57).

According to Nietzsche, any reinterpretation must install itself by accommodating, as far as possible, the meanings embedded in the pre-existing practice, though necessarily it sheds any irreconcilable elements of those meanings. Reinterpretation is therefore a conflictual process in which present forces strive actively to take over recalcitrant elements of the past.[11] Crucially, for Nietzsche, any practice that succumbs to reinterpretation has itself already taken shape as the sedimentation of earlier layers of interpretation. But these layers of meaning do not just accumulate: because irreconcilable elements of meaning are shed with each instance of reinterpretation, a process of attrition takes place through which earlier layers of meaning gradually get erased altogether. Consequently, no common core of significance endures through all the successive waves of reinterpretation of any practice: for

example, no common significance is shared by punishment practices in ancient times and today. Similarly, the earlier meanings of all the other practices making up morality are gradually, but inexorably, scratched out through recurring acts of reinterpretation.

In studying some item genealogically, then, we situate it within a given group – for example, the group 'morality' – not because of any essential characteristics that this item shares with all the other members of this group, but because the item is appropriately historically related to the others in the group. More specifically, a set of such items is grouped together only because each emerges as a reinterpretation of one or more of the others. For Nietzsche, any set of items related in this overlapping way comprises a genealogy. Nietzsche's concept of a genealogy as a chain of historically overlapping phenomena opens up a promising way of reconceiving women as a social group without yielding to essentialism. Genealogically, we can understand women as a social group, yet not as united by common characteristics but, rather, infinitely varying while entangled together historically.

The point of departure for a genealogical analysis of femininity is that femininity is a mutable cultural construction, not something causally determined by biological sex. To identify femininity as cultural is not necessarily to treat it as the attribute of an immaterial mind. Part of what it is to live, think, and experience as a woman is to acquire a feminine way of living one's *body*, a way of living physiologically. Moreover, acquiring femininity need not mean being passively moulded by external cultural forces. Femininity is acquired, over time, insofar as one actively takes up and internalises available cultural standards. As Butler puts it, acquiring a gender involves 'an incessant project, a daily act of reconstruction and interpretation . . . a subtle and strategic project . . . an impulsive yet mindful process of interpreting a cultural reality laden with sanctions, taboos and prescriptions' ('Variations' 131). However, each appropriation of existing standards concerning femininity effects a more or less subtle *modification* of their meaning with reference to changing contexts, power relationships, and histories. As Butler states, 'gender identity . . . [is] a personal/cultural history of received meanings subject to a set of imitative practices' (*Gender Trouble* 138). Received meanings regarding gender are subjected to a continuous process of practical reinterpretation, or 'imitation', with reference to differing histories of personal and cultural experience.

This constant modification makes the meaning of femininity considerably less unified than it might, on superficial acquaintance, appear. There is no unitary meaning of femininity on which all women agree: although all women may identify with femininity, their femininity invariably differs in content. Nonetheless, on a genealogical approach, all women remain identifiable *as* women. Although they do not share any characteristics simply *qua* women, in each case their femininity reworks pre-existing patterns of cultural interpretation. Through this reworking, each woman becomes located within a historical chain comprised of all those (women) who have successively

reinterpreted the meaning of femininity. All women are thus located within chains of reinterpretation that bring them into complex filiations with one another.

Following Nietzsche's understanding of a genealogy, any reinterpretation of femininity must overlap in content with the interpretation that it modifies, shedding some elements of that pre-existing interpretation while preserving others. Consequently, each woman finds herself in a series of gradually diminishing connections with women of previous generations. Intra-generationally, too, each woman's reinterpretation of femininity must overlap in content, to varying degrees, with other women's reinterpretations of the same set(s) of pre-existing meanings. Over time, though, successive modifications in meaning necessarily build upon one another so that determinate historical patterns of interpretation of femininity emerge, each pursuing a particular direction. As this branching occurs, the process of attrition whereby earlier elements of meaning get worn away ensures that quite separate cultures of femininity emerge, within which different women become located, who cease to share any common experience of femininity. In these cases, women remain connected only indirectly, via the vast chains of overlapping meaning that span the gap between them. Thus, instead of forming a unitary group, women are connected together in complex and variable ways, through historical chains of partially and multiply overlapping interpretations of femininity.

This seemingly abstruse point about the ontology of women suggests that anti-essentialism can support and stimulate feminist politics. Although women do not form a unitary group, united in possession of shared characteristics, they remain a social group in that they constitute a genealogy. And, as a distinctive social group, women remain in a position to mobilise together in pursuit of distinctive concerns. Nonetheless, since a genealogy is a specially non-unified group, and women's concerns are correspondingly diverse, a non-unitary mode of collective activity is appropriate. Accordingly, those who advocate a genealogical approach generally endorse a coalitional politics. Butler states that her genealogy of woman forms the 'prerequisite' for a 'new sort of feminist politics' that operates 'within the framework of an emergent coalition' (*Gender Trouble* 5; 14). Similarly, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson contend that 'feminist political practice . . . is increasingly a matter of alliances rather than one of unity around a universally shared interest or identity. . . . This, then, is a practice made up of a patchwork of overlapping alliances, not one circumscribable by an essential definition' (35).

Coalitions may be said to arise when different women, or sets of women, decide to act together to achieve some determinate objective, whilst yet acknowledging their differences as irreducible. A genealogical conception of femininity allows us to explain why women might, despite their irreducible differences, reasonably seek to mobilise together on such a coalitional footing. From a genealogical perspective, coalitional alliances are appropriate in several ways. Each woman's historically shaped experience inevitably overlaps in

content with that of at least some other women, giving them areas of partial commonality that they might reasonably seek to transform together. Moreover in each woman's case, there will be many other women with whose experience her own has no direct overlap, yet to whom she remains indirectly connected through the whole web of overlapping relations between women. She might, therefore, seek to act in concert with such women because improvements in either of their situations could be expected, indirectly, to have positive repercussions for the other. Between these types of case, other forms of motivation for feminist coalitions are possible, corresponding to women's different degrees of cultural overlap and connectedness.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have addressed what is arguably the central problem facing third wave feminist theory: that its anti-essentialism risks fragmenting women as a social group, thereby dissolving the possibility of feminist politics. Many feminist thinkers have attempted to resolve this problem while preserving anti-essentialism, but the most promising of these attempts – strategic essentialism and the idea of women as a series – are inadequate: their defences of feminist politics work only by tacitly reinstating essentialism as a descriptive claim about social reality. In contrast, I have sought to develop a more consistently anti-essentialist feminism by outlining a conception of women as a genealogy inspired, in part, by Judith Butler. According to my argument, every cultural construction of femininity takes over and reinterprets pre-existing constructions, which themselves are the precipitates of still earlier layers of reinterpretation, so that all these constructions form overlapping chains. These chains of interpretation make up a distinctive (although complex, internally diverse) history within which all women are (differently) situated. Thus, although women do not form a unity, they are assembled through their location within this history into a determinate social group, amenable to collective mobilisation on a coalitional basis. This suggests that the idea of women as a genealogy can be fruitful, both in explaining how women can exist as a social group despite their lack of common characteristics, and in facilitating a reinvigorated feminist politics that avoids recourse to spurious grounds of unity. By drawing on the concept of genealogy, third wave feminism can overcome its earlier difficulties and encourage, rather than impede, feminist social critique and political activism.

Notes

1. Thanks to the participants in the 'Essentialism and Difference' panel at the *Third Wave Feminism* conference (2002) and the 'Feminist Philosophy' panel at the Pacific American Philosophical Association conference (2003), especially Vrinda Dalmiya for her (unpublished) 'On Strategies, Essences – and their Denials'.

2. Here I am identifying as 'third wave' those feminist thinkers who criticise essentialist tendencies within dominant second wave theories. I do not mean to suggest that there are firmly demarcated second and third waves: third wave critique depends on close dialogue with second wave theories (Heyes, 'Anti-Essentialism' 142–143), and is animated by the same political opposition to women's exclusion and oppression that galvanised the second wave (Prokhovnik 187–189). Nonetheless, the two 'waves' differ insofar as the third offers a 'more complex theorisation of multiple forms' of oppression that received relatively little attention within the second (Prokhovnik 176).
3. A genealogy is usually understood as a particular type of historical explanation. However, just as a 'history' can be the object of a historian's study as well as the study itself, I use the term 'genealogy' for the already existing historical chains which genealogists reconstruct.
4. Throughout, I assume that feminist activism grows in some way from women's (socially constituted) experiences. I regard this as a key insight of second wave feminism, which a viable third wave approach should preserve even as it attends to the historical and social constitution of experience. For more on this see Joan Scott.
5. This may sound odd, since 'essentialism' is often contrasted with 'constructionism'. But social constructionists can readily be essentialists if they believe that a particular pattern of social construction is essential and universal to all women (as is the case, I suggest below, with key second wave theorists such as Chodorow and MacKinnon). For a related analysis of the essentialism within constructivism, see Diana Fuss.
6. I am simplifying here, as several of these thinkers – especially Gilligan – have revised their theories to mitigate the exclusive tendencies critics detected in them (e.g. Jill Taylor *et al.*).
7. One could, of course, defend statistical generalisations, such as that women perform most domestic labour. However, the most influential second wave theorists (e.g. Hartsock 231; 237) sought stronger commonalities within women's life-situations and experiences.
8. For Sartre, groups in the strict sense involve shared goals and experience, so that series count as groups only in a broad or, as he says, 'neutral' sense (256).
9. Young inherits this residual essentialism from Sartre, who counts series as groups at all only insofar as they are *self-alienated* versions of groups in the strict (unified) sense. Series are self-alienated groups because their unity is located outside them in objective artifacts or structures (Sartre 258–259). Thus, Sartre still really understands series on the model of unified groups, of which series are a deformation.
10. Gatens (76–77) draws explicitly on Nietzsche as does Butler in *Gender Trouble* – although Butler's view of Nietzsche is mediated through Foucault.
11. Arguably, Nietzsche grounds reinterpretations in the will to power, whereby bodily forces naturally strive to *overpower, dominate* the practices confronting them (55; emphasis in original). His anti-essentialist view of morality thus remains subtended by an essentialist account of bodily forces. This problem need not affect feminist appropriations of genealogy, though: they can explain reinterpretations of femininity solely in terms of diverse *cultural* contexts (11–12).

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8

'You're Not One of Those Boring Masculinists, Are You?'[1] The Question of Male-Embodied Feminism

Andrew Shail

> [T]his is akin to saying that a non-white view is desirable because it would help to fill in a hole to lessen the critical pressure and to give the illusion of a certain incompleteness that needs the native's input to be more complete, but is ultimately dependent on white authority to attain any form of "real" completion. . . . Indigenous anthropology allows white anthropology to further anthropologize Man. (Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red*)

Can men *be* feminists? Is 'male feminism' even viable? Is it at all politically requisite? If the progression central to the development of anti-patriarchal cultural consciousness is 'Feminine, Feminist, and Female' (Showalter, *Literature* 13) can men have any business in the sisterhood? If women 'need to need men less in order to enjoy them more' (Greer) then 'male feminism' may be equivalent to ignorant sabotage. But every third waver must have asked whether social and sexual justice need men to be more than pro-feminists? In this chapter I discuss problems with existing models of male-embodied feminism as well as the two potential validations of male-embodied feminism in masculinity studies and transgender studies, before positing a way out of the male-embodied feminist impasse.

From *in* feminism to *doing* feminism

The question of men and feminism was raised in the earliest Women's Liberation Movement conferences and demonstrations, and academia has been both the forum *and* the subject of discussion on male-embodied feminism.[2] In 1976, Annette Kolodny claimed that men in the academy were hijacking feminist achievements when the label of feminist gave them the privilege of teaching areas that others had made possible, often by risking their entire professional careers (831). Elaine Showalter suggested in 1983 that feminist criticism was being co-opted by academic men who found in it 'the mixture

of theoretical sophistication with the sort of effective political engagement they have been calling for in their own critical spheres.' ('Critical' 131) 'Cross-dressing' academics Jonathan Culler and Terry Eagleton, she argued, exemplified a broad attempt to silence feminism by speaking 'for' it. The following year Stephen Heath concurred:

> The effects of feminism in academic institutions with the development of women's studies and an awareness generally of the need to consider women and their representation have led to a situation where "things to do with women" are tolerated . . . if not accepted, as an area of interest, of possible study, with men thus able to make radical gestures at little cost. (18)

Male-embodied feminism appeared as the latest repetition of 'an age-old rapine, colonizing, and finally silencing gesture' (Smith, 'Good' par. 2), a symptom of (distinctly non-feminist) competitive professional anxiety.

Worse, Heath wrote, as men are 'agents of the structure to be transformed' (1) male-embodied desire to be 'in' feminism was just the last feint in a long history of patriarchal colonisations. Alice Jardine argued that 'men are jumping on the feminist theory bandwagon at a time when it is experiencing a certain success in the academy and – paradoxically – at a time when the larger political context in which we are living gets more reactionary for women' (57). The male-embodied impulse to 'enter' feminism was identified as, at worst, confidence that feminism posed no practical danger to male hegemony and as fuelled, at best, by a desire to lessen a sense of guilt. This first phase of scholarship on 'male feminism' read the phenomenon as both signalling the demise of feminist activity in Western culture at large and as an echo of a familiar historical reduction of women to the stakes in a homo-erotic struggle. 'Male feminism' implied both that women must be taught by men how to win their rights, and an approach expressible as 'thanks for bringing this patriarchy stuff to our attention ladies, we'll take it from here' (Kimmel, 'Who's Afraid' 62). Rowena Fowler pointed out that women were beginning to warn of the dangers of wholesale male engagement with feminist criticism 'at the same time that men are using the complaint of exclusion to launch a counterattack on it' (51). Even those revising Heath could not deny that it was all too easy for a 'male feminist' voice to become entangled with patriarchal rhetoric, a common conclusion being that the men–feminism relationship could not therefore confidently extend beyond 'conscientious hearing' (Smith, 'Good' par. 6).

In a 'second phase' of scholarship on male feminism at the end of the 1980s, Michael Cadden, Andrew Ross, Joseph Boone and Paul Smith, amongst others, pointed to the male academic with no pre-feminist career as the *bona fide* male feminist, men who 'have no choice but to work with feminism because its discourses are preeminently instructive in relation to issues which are simultaneously men's problems and feminism's cause' (Smith, 'Men in

Feminism' 39). Boone and Cadden cited Showalter's part in bringing about their collection when arguing that the targets of her rejoinder were not identical with the whole phenomenon of 'men and feminism.' The real 'male feminists,' it was argued, were not the big names attempting to hijack the theoretical fruits of feminist struggle for their own otherwise insufficiently revolutionary academic ends, but a generation of men who, they wrote, had been '"engendered" by feminism' (Boone and Cadden 2). While the emergence of this generation did not in itself allay the problem of appropriation, it did 'create a scenario qualitatively *different* from . . . "Bandwagoning" or "Divide and Conquer" theories of male feminism' (Boone 11; emphasis in original). Boone, and most of the contributors to *Engendering Men* (1990), also suggested that labelling male feminism rapine was based on an unsubstantiated belief that male interest was driven by heterosexual desire (23). The subsequent collections *Between Men and Feminism* (1992) and *Men Doing Feminism* (1998) suggest a widespread academic acceptance of at least the possibility, if not the necessity, of something like male-embodied feminism.

For example, Finn Fordham's study of gender and poetry is typical of work that permissive ideas on male-embodied feminism have generated. He argues that Geoffrey Hill and Derek Walcott – '[d]espite their tendencies towards masculinist qualities' – because of the supposed cross-gendered activity of writing poetry and with a shared muscular anger at the treatment of mothers, 'should be acknowledged as being able to turn just these qualities towards the defence and achievement of radical feminist ends' (93). Fordham's misreadings of feminism and postfeminism enable him to place himself 'in' the one versus the other, commenting erroneously that postfeminists 'argue for representations [in poetry] of strong, independent and successful women, rather than of women suffering, suppressed or victims' (93). It could be argued that male gender scholars are disadvantaged because of a tendency amongst critics to ascribe bad feminist scholarship by women to phallogocentric normativity and that by men to willing collusion. But there seems little possibility of such qualitative equivalence: trivial theoretical complexity in Fordham and the work of many other 'male feminists' answers the title question affirmatively while simultaneously suggesting a vast insufficiency in the kinds of theorising seen as 'adequately' feminist. It seems that even if there are sincere reasons why men *can* be feminists, there is no question of *needing* men to be feminists – if this is the limit of their contribution.

Masculinity

As most of the impossibilities of male-embodied feminism bemoaned in the first phase related to descriptions of men 'penetrating' a women-only subject, these might seem obsolete with masculinity qualifying as both a gender and an object of critical attention. Michael Kimmel – a major scholar of masculinity – claims that it is through studies of masculinity that feminism

can become intelligible to men ('Who's Afraid' *passim*). But Lynne Segal notes that having exposed 'the institutional space women fought so hard to create just over two decades ago' (232) to the possibility of neutralisation in helping promote the shift from women's studies to gender studies, she was faced with the appalling spectre of an emerging masculinity studies that claimed equivalence with feminism. 'What men found when finally, in the wake of feminism, they turned to survey themselves… provided an analogue of women's adversities: evidence of constraint, unease, misery' (237). The ethos of contemporary men's movement literature – paralleling a 'men's struggle' alongside 'women's struggle,' rewriting oppression histories of feminism and putting feminism down as unsuccessful or over-successful venture – inflected the emerging masculinity studies.[3] Because the formation of the discipline of masculinity studies owed so much to the transformations in thinking about masculinity effected by feminism, masculinity scholars have something of an alibi in calling masculinity studies 'a feminism of its own' (Bristow 60) at the same time that masculinity studies implicitly repeats backlash assessments of feminism. Tania Modleski contends that male feminism is also the successor of the backlash cultural text, just another attempt to come to terms with feminism by appropriating it (63), a 'position that protects male authority, while *appearing* to relinquish it' (74; emphasis in original). Similarly, the chronology of *the* four collections on men in feminism – Alice Jardine and Paul Smith's *Men in Feminism*, Joseph Boone and Michael Cadden's *Engendering Men*, David Porter's *Between Men and Feminism* and Tom Digby's *Men Doing Feminism* – suggests an intimate link with the deradicalisation of feminist theory in the 1980s, described by Gillian Howie and Ashley Tauchert elsewhere in this collection.

Transgender

Recent claims to male-embodied feminism have asserted that '[h]aving a woman's experience and perceiving as a woman isn't what makes a woman feminist – plenty of them aren't' (Hopkins 50) *and* that 'women's experience' is a phenomenon not specific to the female body, available to men because of a radical discontinuity between sex and culturally constructed genders. Is male feminism tenable by claims to possessing a transgendered self? Given that separate-sphere ideology perceived women as 'more gifted than men in the realms of authenticity – in arenas that involve emotion, care-taking, relational ethics' (Voskuil 612) – how is the association of femaleness with authenticity in the incantation 'women's experience' able to read the historical text of gender? The argument to validate the possibility of practicing feminism would go something like this:

> To suppose that men are merely clones of feminism's nemesis is to severely oversimplify the mechanisms of gender. The feminist argument for the

> importance of recognising the danger and arbitrariness of the myth that is the phallus can risk history turning back into nature if it subscribes to the identification of masculinity with biological maleness produced by such statements as 'the problem of feminism was and remains men'. (Naomi Segal 36)
>
> Judith Halberstam and Eve Sedgwick have critically dissolved the assumption that everything that can be said about masculinity pertains in the first place to men, Sedgwick writing that 'I as a woman am also a producer of masculinities, and a performer of them.' (13)
>
> While female masculinities appear pathological in order that male masculinity may emerge as the 'real thing,' masculinity has always been produced by and across both male and female bodies, and the identification of men with oppression is one of the myths that have hampered a thoroughgoing theorisation of gender and 'ensured that masculinity and maleness are profoundly difficult to pry apart.' (Halberstam 2)
>
> Halberstam poses female masculinity as the requisite device for opposing 'a more generalized discussion of masculinity within cultural studies that seems intent on insisting that masculinity remain the property of male bodies.' (15)

Could feminism practised by non-masculine male-embodied subjects be therefore not just possible but not helpful or even necessary for the successful dissemination of a radical critique of gender? No. Christine Battersby points out that claims to mental androgyny do not entail any special sympathy with women: 'when a writer like Coleridge insisted that the mind of the great artist is androgynous, he certainly did not mean that such a mind has any special empathy with woman' (7–8). Such valorisations of femininity disguise the fact that it is not femininity but femaleness that has been persistently downgraded in the production of knowledge and in our culture at large. Not only do transgender and queer – their supposed anti-normativity dependent in part upon seeing feminism and woman as normative – dispose of feminism all too easily as a quasi-biological, 'old world' belief system. Battersby's analysis isolates the degree of *anti*-feminism Judith Butler locates in queer theory ('Interview' par. 6).

Body

The preceding discussion of sex relies upon and contributes to the stability of concepts that must be suspended. As Elizabeth Grosz, Moira Gatens, Rosalyn Diprose and Butler approach in various lexicons, sex is the primary product of the 'intextuating' (Grosz 34) of bodies. Often thought of as an argument that ontological sex differences do not exist, this genealogy of thought points out that their being held as constitutive of 'sex' is the result of the

operation of gender on bodies, and that sex is the result of the discursive 'production of intelligibility' of all physical variations in reference to genitalia/reproduction. The (only) two taxonomic terms – 'male' and 'female' – created thereby are then specified as primary states of being. When looking at a body, certainty of its membership in one or another part of a two-sex system is derived from this operation of gender on the form of ontological knowledge available for use in classification. Bodies that present as neither entirely male nor entirely female expose the complexity of 'sexing levels' *and* the morphological similarity elided in the penis/vagina 'distinction,' and accounts of surgical 'corrections' provide a glimpse of the effect of gender on the production of knowledges about (and of) 'sex' in the first place. Following the Enlightenment progression from sex understood as variation (with men being simply women with a greater 'vital heat') to sex-as-difference (with maleness and femaleness engineered as distinct and 'opposite' in every physical degree), diversity of characteristics discovered (where the vast majority of similarities discovered are simply *not* reported) in bones, flesh organs and chemicals are generated into 'sex' by pre-existing convictions of dualism. Gender, therefore, 'ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex . . . gender is the discursive cultural means by which "sexed nature" is produced and established as "prediscursive"' (Butler, *Gender* 7) and a productive apparatus for the establishment of sex.

Germaine Greer commented that a colloquium on men and feminism might as well be entitled 'Men and Menstrual Pain' (qtd. in Digby, Introduction 1). This menstruality/femaleness association contributes to the marking-female of a certain set of bodies, in spite of the fact that neither menstruality nor any of the other contemporary criterion of 'femaleness' (hormonal sex, gonadal sex, chromosomal sex, internal morphologic sex, external morphologic sex or procreative sex) maps uniformly onto each other. Menstruality and reproductive capacity have a historical relationship, impregnability being the most common recourse for arguments of the pre-discursivity of dichotomous sex, and menstruality being the oldest assigned index of reproducibility/impregnatability. But as Butler argues:

> although women's bodies generally speaking are understood as capable of impregnation . . . there are women of all ages who cannot be impregnated, and even if they could ideally, that is not necessarily the salient feature of their bodies or even of their being women. What the question ['doesn't your theory ignore the fact that male bodies can't produce children whilst female bodies can?'] does is try to make the problematic of reproduction central to the sexing of the body. But I am not sure that is, or ought to be, what is absolutely salient or primary in the sexing of the body . . . under what discursive and institutional conditions, do certain biological differences – and they're not necessary ones, given the anomalous state of bodies in the world – become the salient characteristics of sex?' ('Interview' par. 11)

Although, as Valérie Fournier writes, 'the flesh of the wounded body has a vivid and compelling reality (the presence, certainty, immediacy and totality of pain) that can be drafted into the substantiation of ideas' (69), pain is one of the discourses by which a specific body is constituted female; it is recruited as part of the framework that enables some bodies to act as the containers of the notion and process of sex, and references to it as a touchstone rehearse the establishment of sex as prediscursive. This is not to say that the female-embodied do not feel a disproportionate degree of pain in their lifespan, or that pain is an alienation from female-embodiment, but that pain is generative of, rather than derived from, dichotomous sex. The act of signifying the body as prior to signification, so easily rehearsed by anyone invoking menstruality, demarcates a body that it then claims to find prior to all signification (Butler, *Bodies* 30). Jennifer Harding's account of medical discourse on hormones describes another inadvertently sex-generative shoring-up of the total morphological uniformity of 'femaleness.' Simultaneously, variable and characteristically ambiguous genital tissue is *only nostalgically* transformed into sexual characteristics amenable to 'being-one-half-of-the-human-race' – into sex.

This is *not* to base an argument for male-embodied feminism on the supposed 'absence' of 'femaleness.' The qualitative distinction between experiencing femininity as a female-embodied subject and as a male-embodied subject remains. So after writing in 1983 that '[t]he "feminine male" may have experiences that are socially coded as "feminised" but these experiences must be qualitatively different from female experience of the feminine' (10), in 1992 Moira Gatens maintained that

> to say that 'woman' has no essence, that she is a constructed fiction, a product of social narratives and practices is not to say that she does not exist… it calls for a commitment to a historical, or genealogical, approach to understanding the specificity of social, political and ethical relations *as they are embodied* in this or that community or culture. (104–105; emphasis in original)

And in her discussion of the uses of the term 'experience' by Australian judges in rape trials, central to her argument is the idea that while some men have experience of being raped, very few – if any – have experience of being female-embodied and being raped (138–141). Even if the female-embodied do not experience uniform subjugation, they do experience the consequences of their sexing female in a qualitatively specific way and so have a commonality independent of their subordination.[4]

To acknowledge that 'sex' and 'naturalness' itself is constituted through discursively constrained performative acts is not to argue either that embodied history is not a prime determinant of experience, or that a political imbalance between male embodiment and female embodiment does not delimit

comprehensions within the capacity of the body politic.[5] In the words of Rosalyn Diprose, 'the moral, legal, industrial and interpersonal evaluation of sexual difference is productive: it produces the modes of sexed embodiment it regulates…any injustice experienced by women begins from this mode of production and maintenance of sexual difference' (viii). Diprose acknowledges that while the idea of the generation of sex through the apparatus of gender is a necessary addition to feminist thought, 'the value and status enjoyed by men in patriarchal social relations is generated through the constitution of women's modes of embodied existence as other to the norm . . . sexed bodies are constituted within an economy of representation of sexual difference which limits possibilities for women' (ix). Female sexed identity is both constituted *and* excluded by social relations.

Wariness about male-embodied ideals of the dissolution of sex is of course warranted. If 'no feminist theoretician *who is not also a woman*' (Schor 109; emphasis in original) ever espoused claims to a female specificity, a discourse of sexual indifferentiation could very well be the latest ruse of phallocentrism, the radical negation of female-embodiment repeating one of the gestures on which male-embodiment is founded where, as Grosz comments, '[m]en take on the roles of neutral knowers only because they have evacuated their own specific forms of corporeality and repressed all its traces from the knowledge they produce' (38). Butler advocates *displacement* of the term 'women' (*Gender* 4) rather than dismissal because she is aware, first, of the danger (and male-embodied tradition) of marking 'the female' as non-existent/false consciousness/'make-up' and, secondly, that the contemporaneity of sexed embodiment does not make it any less of a reality.[6] Because gender designates the operation of power on bodies productive of dichotomous sex, claims to a viable male-embodied feminist space on the basis of a transgendered self therefore not only oversimplify the functions of the term 'experience' but leave a gender ontology that is essentially intact in sex.

Male-embodied feminism's irrelevance so far has not, therefore, been that all men 'doing' feminism can do is talk about whether men can be feminists, but a pervasive failure to learn just what feminism is, perhaps because masculinity has no programmed ability to relinquish maleness, whereas femininity has a history of such schizophrenia.[7] Works on male feminism exemplify and further the dissemination, into popular consciousness, of another picture of sex-as-difference, ontological being-as-dichotomously sexed, relying on gender ('sex' being a result of the productive apparatus of gender) while claiming to relinquish gender altogether. Even before the advent of deconstructive feminist philosophy's genealogy of 'sex,' female-embodied feminists were unsettled with the sex-gender distinction. Christine Delphy was wondering in 1984 if '[*g*]*ender in its turn created anatomical sex*, in the sense that the hierarchical division of humanity into two transforms an anatomical difference (which is in itself devoid of social implications) into a relevant distinction for social practice' (144; emphasis in original). The sex/gender

distinction cannot be the basis of a (male-embodied) feminist practice when an exploration of the phallocentric alignments of mind with masculinity and that of body with femininity – linked to the male-embodied sexualisation of knowledges – 'is prerequisite to transforming the presuppositions underlying prevailing knowledges' (Grosz 32). For the liberal sex/gender distinction to be at the centre of male feminism (and of arguments for the viability of male feminism) upholds the longevity of maleness and contributes to the internal stability of the terms 'men' and 'women.' This is the reason for the term 'male feminism,' and any practice it comprehends, to *not* be employed.

Feminism

Male-embodied feminism, unlike masculinity-in-crisis literature, accepts that there are no essential femaleness–femininity and maleness–masculinity relationships. It accepts that femininity and masculinity are transposable and even, where masculinity studies fails, that a multiplicity of genders are possible. It does not, however, make the step beyond the supposed pre-discursivity of maleness. As long as male-embodied feminism falls back on beliefs of dichotomous sex, masculinity will always be the preserve of maleness, and maleness will always exist to rebuild masculinity on, allowing crisis – maleness itself being a product/result of the operation of gender upon a set of bodies – to be masculinity's enjoyed condition in perpetuity. It is very easy to be pro-feminist when difference establishes as pre-discursive a range of gendered political operations.[8] With the UK Men's Movement still substantiating Richard Doyle's statement in 1986 that feminists are 'would be castrators with a knee-jerk, obsessive aversion to anything male' (qtd. in Kimmel, *Manhood* 305) it is not 'men being feminists' but the radical problematisation of maleness that would successfully dissolve such 'male-embodied' thinking.

If the unity of the subject of feminism is effectively undermined by the representational discourse ('women') in which it functions, feminism providing a single ground which is invariably contested by the (anti-)identity positions it thereby excludes (e.g. anomalous bodies that are not covered by markers of impregnability, XX chromosomes, ovaries, unambiguous genitalia, regular periods, etc.), to argue that the subject of feminism should include men is not the point. Maleness is one of the primary mechanisms by which 'women' as the other half of a dichotomously sexed production is constituted and maintained. To be anywhere near feminists, the male-embodied cannot continue consolidating the mechanism 'sex' whereby discourse produces the effects that it names. The steady dissemination of the second wave account of the constructedness of gender will continue to be undermined if the closing of the sex-gender loop (that gender epistemologies materialise bodies as sexed) is not mapped onto this model by third wave feminism. Comprehension of the conscious logic – gender is a cultural interpretation of

sex – must be accompanied by comprehension of the subterranean operation of power, the other half of the loop, the largely unheard of idea that gender, even when utterly relinquished, still functions (perhaps its primary function) in the materialisation of the sexed body. The critique of the sex/gender distinction 'is a critique without which feminism loses its democratizing potential' (Butler, *Bodies* 29). Indeed, sociologists are acknowledging that 'the cutting edge' of contemporary social theorising around the body may be located within feminism (Williams and Bendelow 130).

If the third wave of feminism cannot orient its critical practice in the sexed specificity of 'femaleness,' the contingencies of female-embodiment *can* continue to provide grounds for feminist politics.[9] Injuries and violations can be verified without reference to sex. Butler writes that the category of women, through deconstruction, 'becomes one whose uses are no longer reified as "referents," and which stand a chance of . . . coming to signify in ways that none of us can predict in advance' (*Bodies* 29). Where maleness is both a myth of its own non-existence and a result of the constant repetition of the metaphysics of heterosexism and phallogocentrism, the genealogy/relinquishing of maleness would be a major in such mobilisation.[10] If uncertainty remains as to whether there is any possibility of effective subversion from within the terms of a discursive identity, possibilities of recirculation for the sites from which gender is produced always exist. Any invocation of maleness, of which discourse surrounding 'male feminism' is a thorough example, denies the possibility of both disrupting the regulatory fiction of the sex/gender distinction, and dissolving sex as the primary intextuant of bodies. Feminism must not remain reducible in the popular imagination to 'another' articulation of sex-as-difference. It could be argued that the feminist project needs 'women' as much, or as little, as it needs 'men,' but the point is not to argue for the practicability of male-embodied spokespeople, rather that the dissolution of the operations of power constitutive of sex needs to be capably imagined. It is time – in this third wave of feminism – to acknowledge *not* that 'men' can be feminists but that the critique of the category of sex can and must exist beyond the historically contingent sexed ontology that is femaleness.

Notes

1. Arlene Rimmer to Arnold Rimmer, in the *Red Dwarf* episode 'Parallel Universe.'
2. See Amanda Goldrick-Jones for an account of men's pro-feminist organisations and publications in the US, UK and Canada since the 1970s.
3. Anti-feminist rhetoric still substantiates the rationale of the *UK Men's Movement*. Lynne Segal points to the 'me-tooism' of UK men's movement/'damaged masculinity' texts like Anthony Clare's *On Men: Masculinity in Crisis* as demonstrative of the kinds of backlash thinking that informed masculinity studies.
4. Gatens' *Imaginary Bodies* is composed of works written between 1983 and 1996, revised as chapters for the monograph.

5. It is as crucial to note the Nietzsche/Freud/Spinoza/Lacan/Foucault contribution to the genealogy of bodies as it is to note that even Foucault does not address the question of the body-as-dichotomously sexed (Butler, *Bodies* 69). For a genealogy of the notion of 'experience' aimed at removing the concept from feminist epistemology, see Patrick Hopkins.
6. As Ashley Tauchert points out, male-embodied 'feminists' have a great excuse for failing to engage with the specific oppressions focused on the female-embodied; 'the ideological dominance of Enlightenment philosophy means that refusing the gender-neutral approach becomes interchangeable with arguing that you shouldn't treat people as individuals' (50).
7. For an exposition of this see Luce Irigaray 86–105.
8. Feminist body philosophy is not an attempt to create sameness and erase difference, it is an account of how, amongst other things, sex-as-difference, and sex-as-*the*-difference, is articulated.
9. Grosz argues that feminism must successfully make female-embodiment the object of knowledge through a structural reorganisation of (covertly male-embodied) positions of knowing and their effects on the kinds of object known (40) and that the abandonment of knowledges and reversion to intuition or experience is no solution. If experience provides the ground for feminist activism, therefore, it cannot provide the basis for the corpus of feminist politics.
10. This is not to advocate the same 'forgetting' of maleness that informs the perspectives and enunciative positions constitutive of *knowledges*, the isomorphism of theory with male-embodiment already extant.

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9

Finding Ourselves: Postmodern Identities and the Transgender Movement

Edward Davies

In 'A Brief History of Gender,' Ann Oakley maps out the trajectory of the category of 'gender' as 'an essential tool of modern feminist analysis' (29).

> Whereas first-wave feminism focused on the question of women's civil and legal rights, second-wave feminism is distinguished for taking up the challenge contained in Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion that women are not born, but made. . . . But, just as time has moved on for feminism and women since the beginning of second-wave feminism, so it has moved on for gender, too. (29)

One of the most significant directions in which understandings of gender have 'moved on' is foregrounded by the challenges posed to the determinacy of gender and identity by transgender theory. As Emi Koyama puts it:

> Though the second wave of feminism popularized the idea that a person's gender is distinct from her or his physiological sex and is socially constructed, it largely left unquestioned the belief that there was such a thing as true physical (biological) sex. The separation of gender from sex was a powerful rhetorical move used to break down compulsory gender roles, but it allowed feminists to question only half of the problem, avoiding the question of the naturalness of essential female and male sexes. (249)

Emphasising the very complex articulations of gender constituting sexual identity, transgender theorists have highlighted the possibilities of an understanding of (sexual) identity that moves across and beyond conventional categories of gender.

Nevertheless, just as transgender theory throws into question the viability of 'woman'-centred analysis, the gender fluidities and flexibilities promised by transgender theory have been received with suspicion by some second wave feminists. In particular, the issue of male-to-female transformation(s)

has been charged with reinforcing essentialist notions of 'femininity' and as a colonisation of 'women's spaces' – most (in)famously by Germaine Greer in *The Whole Woman* (93). Koyama identifies the conceptualisation of these 'women-only' spaces with the ways in which second wave feminists 'prioritized sexism as the most fundamental social inequality while largely disregarding their own role in perpetuating other oppressions such as racism and classism' (248). The inclusion of Koyama's 'Transfeminist Manifesto' in Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier's third wave anthology, *Catching a Wave*, is some measure of how transgender and third wave feminism are seeking to find ways of informing and enabling each other's discourse. The notion 'that there are as many ways of being a woman as there are women and that we should be free to make our own decisions without guilt' (Koyama 246) is thus aligned with a broader call by third wave feminists for a reconsideration of *who* can be (and is 'allowed' to be) a 'feminist.' As Rebecca Walker highlights, third wave feminists many of whom have grown up transgendered, bisexual and interracial, are seeking to (re)create identities that 'accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities' (xxxiii). This redefinition of feminism, then, calls for a reconsideration of the range of identities within feminism – including transgender, transsexual and cross-sex identities.

This chapter offers a critical interrogation of dominant understandings of the categories of sex, gender, social sex role and sexuality that have played such a vital role in both feminist and transgender theorising. In so doing, it points towards the ways in which transgender theory 'moves on' gender politics to contribute to contemporary feminist analysis – in ways which are both concomitant with, and inform, third wave feminism. Although 'new' sexual identities are likely to be conceived of through the image of extant ones, this does not mean that 'gender rebels' should no longer challenge the constrictions of heteronormative sexual identification. Lynne Segal reminds us that 'an awareness that gender is "socially," "performatively" or "discursively" constructed is very far from a dismantling of gender' (63). The deployment of the expression 'self-representation' in this chapter does not refer to self-generated representation but, rather, to the 'constant interplay between private experiences and public knowledge' (Ekins and King 20). Here, too, cross-sex is employed in lieu of transsexuality, which is used here to refer exclusively to sexualities which are neither gay nor heterosexual. Similarly, transsex designates those who incorporate both sexual biologies/physiologies or to those who have merged sexual biologies. Trans-man, trans-woman and trans-people are used to pertain to those previously designated as transsexuals, and transgenderist as an umbrella term to relate to all those with 'unconventional' sexual identities, or to those who have strong sympathies with such people. My emphasis on the specific usage of these terms is intended to counter the ways in which they otherwise circulate both inside and outside of feminist analysis with neither sufficient consideration nor understanding. It is, therefore, the careful delineation of these terms which enables this

chapter's more rigorous interrogation of transgender theory. This interrogation will be undertaken through a concerted investigation of three motifs which emerge in theoretical and fictional works on the subject of transgendered dress and behaviour: silence and secrecy; the 'realness' of transgendered identities; and political transgendering. It is the features of these three motifs which can often be detected in the 'factual' and 'fictional' life-narratives of those who cross the dichotomised divide of sexual identity.

Silence and secrecy

While I do not wish to repeat the necessity of overcoming the hesitation to speak sex truth that characterises and ratifies Michel Foucault's 'repressive hypothesis' (17–49), silence and secrecy *have* worked to shape Western notions of what is and is not 'real' gendering. This is an incredibly rich intellectual field which I will not summarise here; rather, I will gesture towards the sorts of work being done. Harriette Andreadis, for example, recounts that in the Occident in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the boundaries between what we now term female heterosexuality and lesbian identity had not been demarcated. That is, the machinations of silence and secrecy had not begun to construct 'lesbianism' and, as such, women's same-sex erotics could covertly flourish. Andreadis argues that the deliberate hiding of such erotics by those involved may have only been a strategy to evade drawing attention to their desires (131), and describes the dynamic of silence and secrecy surrounding early modern same-sex erotics as an 'erotics of unnaming' (125). In the seventeenth century, she argues, female–female sex relations were brought out into the open by increasingly revealing narratives which, consequently, made the relations easier to suppress (140).

As Foucault describes, modern Occidental society has been possessing of a steadily increasing injunction to discover the truth of a person's being in his/her sexual behaviour. The nineteenth-century vehicle of articulation of the incitement to talk about sex became scientific discourse – including an identificatory naming – which operated via political, economic and technical apparatuses and was informed by the medical and legal establishment (43). '[N]early one hundred and fifty years have gone into the making of a complex machinery for producing true discourses on sex' (Foucault 68), what, in the nineteenth century, came under the term 'sexuality' to function as a specific field of truth. Thus, 'normal' sexuality became something prescribed by the state, with sexual behaviours defined as 'abnormal' being pathologised and designated as grounds for medical treatment, and thereby created as sexual identities. Heterosexuality was, for all social classes, perceived as *the* sexuality that best maintained family cohesion and moral values. The conditions under which sexuality was discussed were closely proscribed. Attempts to ensure that sexual practice was channelled into reproduction

between heterosexual partners were based on the bringing of sex into the province of analysis and intervention by the new concept of 'the population' exceeding the notion of 'the people.' These conditions also gave rise to the culture of sexuality-as-taboo that fits the impulse to speak its 'truth.' The fact that sexuality was designated a secret subject served to fuel the urge to make it speak, subsequently defining it further. In the new Enlightenment age of bipolar sexing only those genders and sexualities given a name were accepted as socially admissible despite the creation of a variety of sexualities. Whereas sexualities could not proliferate outside the systems of power that gave rise to them, the same discursive apparatus did not produce a limited range of genders. Within juridical systems of power – that produce the sexual subjects that they subsequently come to represent – gendered subjects are produced on axes of domination other than those on which naming is strictly practised. As Judith Butler writes, '[g]ender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred' (22) – a multiplicity of genders continued to exist in silence and secrecy beyond the ratifying bounds of bipolar sexing and the correlative of the *scientia sexualis*, sexuality (Foucault 68).

If a *politics of naming* was created as a form of control – pathologising what were deemed to be undesirable behaviours as identities – then the fact that gendered identities are never so uncomplicated 'to permit self-assortment' (Halberstam 24) suggests a continuing gender-unnaming. It has always been implicit in the unnaming of a multiplicity of genders that gender does not follow from sex, so 'even if the sexes appear to be unproblematically binary . . . there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two' (Butler 10). Rather than the pregendered person resisting or transcending the historical specificities of their gender – Judith Halberstam comments that 'there are some very obvious spaces in which gender difference simply does not work right now' (41) – gender is always in the midst of a breakdown as a signifying system. That butch or femme appear stable signifiers next to trans-man and trans-woman should not detract from the 'instability and transitivity' (Halberstam 146) latent in all secret genders. David Glover and Cora Kaplan argue that popular linguistic shifts imply that modern gay and lesbian gender identities 'did not emerge solely in a space created for them by medical and legal judgments' (93) – the force that Foucault argues accounts for the entirety of modern homosexuality – but were the product of a complex interaction between subcultural values and practices (alien to the logic behind the *scientia sexualis*) and the juridical forces Foucault describes. Feminism, queer theory and, now, transgender studies challenge these silences and secrecies through encouraging self-reflexive and open discourses of gender identities.[1] Indeed, the modern day theoretical descendant of such an erotics is perhaps queer theory, which propounds the idea of 'living "beyond gender"' (Ekins and King 2). However, transgender theorists and/or activists have identified drawbacks with the sex/gender/sexual anonymity offered by queer theory. Lee Etscovitz ventures that 'a self without

boundaries is not really a self' (488). Without boundaries there are problems of self-definition, problems in terms of discrimination based on this unacknowledged social location, and problems with the loss of a sexual standpoint for political action. Rather than accepting the possibility of transcending gender altogether, many transgenderists support the politics of naming a plethora of possible genders, genders which are tailor-made for the individual. A politically gendered standpoint might instigate a 'return' from the silent and secret gender-hinterland. Richard Ekins and David King point out that 'adopting an identity which makes sense of things – "finding oneself" as it is sometimes put – can therefore be immensely liberating' (5). Should this new wave of feminist theory – the third wave – revert to the erotics of unnaming in order to avoid the straightjacketing of sexual identity?

Which transgendered identities are real?

Feminism, queer theory and transgender studies have all foregrounded questions about the existence of 'real' sexual identity. Feelings of non-identification with what is accepted as 'real gendering' often make the transgendered person feel different from those who 'do' gender in the 'correct' way. The transgenderist's increased 'realness,' however, might come from his/her/hir propensity not to conceal the fabricated nature of gender. That is, the performance of sexual identity makes that identity 'real' – real in the sense constructed by symbolic interactionists' belief that consensual notions of what is real will eventually have an influence on the shaping of reality (Ekins and King 37). Jay Prosser's reading of Leslie Fienberg's *Stone Butch Blues* indicates how a transperson can reveal the possibility of constructing not only gender but also sex itself, thus bringing to life Butler's claims in *Gender Trouble*. According to Butler, sex, gender and sexuality have largely been constructed. Juridical notions of power penetrate, through limitation, prohibition, regulations, control and protection, the subsets they claim to act on. This 'construction' does not designate biological/physiological manipulation (e.g. SRS – sex-reassignment surgery) but the process of performing sexual identity. The notion of 'sexual construction' predicts the possibility of creating new sexual identities although it remains to formulate how this might be done. The sequence of construction for a new gender/sexuality may run as follows:

- Imagining the sexual identity – evolution.
- Outing the sexual identity – revolution.
- Establishing the sexual identity – involution.
- Reviewing the sexual identity – evolution.

Such a gender 'paradigm' may indeed take a very long time to establish, as pointed out by Bernice L. Hausman in her description of the 'slow accrual'

(198) of the effects of Butler's idea of 'subversive repetition.' However, this process may be accelerated through the dissemination of information in a plethora of media.

More gender performance equals more gender reality because as a gender receives more reinforcement, it becomes a more 'recognisable' whole. If gender performance can also challenge the silence and secrecy of gender control, it promises the possibility of new – or previously concealed – genderings. In this way, what might be paradoxically called 'postmodern identity' may transpire to be more 'real' than 'scientifically' evidenced sex. Nevertheless, there are those transgenderists who believe that certain aspects of their sexual identity, usually their biological/physiological sex, are wholly inbuilt and not subject to choice or performance at all. This argument has some weight when one takes into account the emergence of comparable trans-identities in differing familial, social and cultural settings (Diamond 103). Thus it must be acknowledged that the notions of what is 'real' are problematic. For instance, when considering history from a Foucauldian perspective, it is apparent that notions of gender are largely historical. So our present notions of the 'reality' of gender largely derive from the work of those nineteenth-century scientists who emphasised the differences in male and female biology and physiology. This prompted a separate 'discourse of feeling' for each of the (supposedly) dimorphic sexes (Glover and Kaplan 25). This saw the genesis of surgery at birth for intersexed people to ensure that they were brought back in line with an 'acceptable' sex identity. In the Western scientific paradigm, where seeing was believing, genitalia materialised as the prime indicator of sexual identity (Harding 31). In effect those who *internally* transgressed conventional notions of sex, gendering, and/or sexuality became 'invisible' or 'unreal' sexual beings.

The sex and gender bipolarity initiated by Enlightenment medical science influenced pre-operative transpeople in the 1950s. Those using the argument of 'trapped in the wrong body' were given priority for SRS. Although of great benefit to completely cross-sexed people, this discourse of cross-sex identity worked to obscure the realness of those transgendered identities which were neither completely male nor completely female.[2] Queer theory and transgender studies, developing – and challenging – second wave feminism's calling into question of conventional notions of gender, foregrounded the possibility of new, perhaps undiscovered, genders. As theoretically and politically active movements, both feminism and transgender studies have also had an influence on individual self-representations of sexual identity. For instance, trans-woman Kate Bornstein has self-represented as lesbian while Eddie Izzard and Markisha Greaney have self-represented as 'male lesbians.' Yvonne Cook, identified by Marjorie Garber as, 'a man who considers himself to be a lesbian and who dates a woman who cross-dresses as a man' could be considered as an example of a male lesbian with a female gay partner (4). Of course, those offering such representations of sexuality may be 'making up' these identities

for political and/or personal reasons. However, their self-representations could become genuine manifestations of sexual identity if one accepts that some identities are undiscovered or can be constructed over time. The self-representations of sexuality offered by such people can be referred to as *transsexuality*: sexualities that 'trans' conventional notions of attraction and sexualities that sometimes attract each other. 'Transsexual' is thus the equivalent to a 'post-operatively homosexual transperson' without the latter either having had or wishing for a change of body.

Transsexuality may be an accurate description of the sexuality of some transvestites and may serve as a way for the transvestite to reveal his/her/hir identity to self and/or (sympathetic) others. Many transvestites are unlikely to be at home with the current gender 'market' of heterosexual or homosexual. Garber, for instance, regards the realness of *transvestic* identity as a queerly postmodern kind of metaphoric essence. The endeavour to evoke a third term in the form of the transvestite is Garber's project in *Vested Interests*. This third term is not an inherent identity for Garber but a space for escaping from and for re-figuring heterosexual categories of gender and, indeed, the very concept of category itself (Garber 11–12; 17). Rather than positioning it as an *a priori* essence, Garber regards gender as a signifier. Nevertheless, some transgender theorists would rather that signifiers of sexual identity referred to actual, if historically based, states of gendered being. Ekins and King describe how transgender can refer to 'gender reversal, gender mobility and gender migration' but also note that it can now denote any dress and/or behaviour that transgresses conventional gender categories (4). In 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto,' Sandy Stone portrays trans- and cross-sex as identities based in the gender borderlands, rather than as fixed. Nevertheless, s/he describes such identity as acceptable and 'real.' It is not only a temporary stage of transition from one sex to another but also a state of permanent gender 'residence' (39).

Challenges to the notion of cross- and transsex as pathological conditions that could be rectified by bringing the subject in line with corporeal existence at the other 'pole' of the two-sex economy, appeared in the 1980s. Marie Mehl found that the transperson was no more susceptible to mental illness than members of the general population (Stone 292–293). Reports such as Mehl's engendered a revolution in transsex self-representations, by opening up the opportunity for pre-operative transpeople to venture non-pathological and individualistic personal narratives of sexual identity: that is the transperson is his/her/hirself before, during and after SRS, thus validating the 'realness' of sexual identity. Bornstein, for example, frames the 'realness' of sexual identity in relation to the question of choice in her declaration that: 'I am a transsexual by choice, not by pathology' (118). Such self-representations have been expanded by transgender theory to include variations of gender and sexuality. Ekins and King note that media and research investigations into 'male-femaling' omit empirically interactive research into individual

self-descriptions of sexual identity and erotic feelings based on knowledge of transgenderists situated in their own social environments (15; 26–27). This type of research, when also applied to 'female-maling,' allows for varying notions of sexual identity that scientific/medical research has tended to overlook. It is also research that is more likely to identify transgenderists since, as Michael Gilbert notes, the transgenderist (as opposed to 'transsexual' or 'transvestite') is still only likely to be self-identified (2).

Political transgendering

The political benefits behind cross-dressing and sex-changing would have been missed before the 1960s (Ekins and King 16) but were 'outed' by events such as the Stonewall riot. It was not until the 1960s that gays, lesbians and cross-dressers instigated actions to rearticulate their identity labelling: from 'criminal' and 'pathologised' to 'natural' and, subsequently, to 'empowering.' Transgendered people have begun to take similar political action with some publicly announcing their trans-identity in order to identify it as acceptable and real. Others wish to instigate alternative sexual identities when they feel that the present gender environment is a threat to their well-being. Transgendering is not inherently political, as Suzanne Kessler and Wendy McKenna have argued, and it does not have to be political to be transgendered (1). Nevertheless, many transgenderists seek to politicise their sexual identity because of the discrimination and exploitation they encounter as a result of being transgendered. Political transgendering involves describing the essence of trans-identities to counter overtly hostile perceptions of such identities – to which Koyama's 'Transfeminist Manifesto' attests. Sexual identity should be subject to political analysis and activity because of the effect that it has on an individual. But is political gendering a valid way to initiate gender or must gender always be inevitably tied to sex and sexuality? Perhaps what political transgendering and/or self-presentation as transgendered are rooted in – and driven by – is some genuine initial experience of transgendered being or identity. However, political transgendering presumes that it is possible to initiate sexual identity. Indeed, the claim is that from evolution to involution, politically driven self-representations of unconventional sexual identity may eventually change actual sexual identity. Explicitly performing unconventional sexual identity would mould the psychic, physical and social essence of all or some sexual identities via a kind of consciously chosen evolutionary path. This would no doubt take a significant period of time, theoretical postulation and political activity.

Hausman theorises what she terms Bornstein's 'regendering' as largely a political strategy designed to disrupt dimorphic sex and gender systems rather than an account of real gendering (199). She argues that the idea of regendering is unrealistically disconnected from the effects of the lived body. However, as suggested above, perhaps regendering can, eventually,

lead to 'real' gendering, given enough time and performative effort. Political regendering may be possible if new or undiscovered genders, such as the male lesbian and female gay, are supported. These genders are deliberately complex and are therefore difficult to define by producing an easily identifiable, and inferior, or superior 'other' gender. In the West, unconventional sexual self-representations have presented a personal and political challenge to heteronormativity through spoken language, body language and written narrative. A self-identification of 'lesbian-identified transsexual woman' (Whittle 206), an identity label that might validly be condensed to 'lesbian trans-woman,' brings to mind Kate Bornstein's own self-representation as lesbian.

Literature, via the protection of fantasy (or 'fiction'), can explore variable landscapes of gender while not being obliged to ground ideas in the framework of established critical thinking and theory. In other words, fictional narratives may also allow the text to 'trans' with impunity.[3] The emphasis of many third wave feminists on the political significance of telling personal (hi)stories to dismantle the rigid parameters of a 'cohesive fully down-for-the-feminist-cause identity without contradictions and messiness' (Walker xxxi) has resonances with this strategy. For example, the protagonist of Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues*, Jess, eventually comes to realise that although s/he cannot find a bodily 'home' in the female, or the (almost) male body, s/he could actually *choose* to have a transgendered body (179). Throughout the work, Jess changes significantly in embodiment and these changes prompt hir to construct and locate hir corporeally sexual, and socially gendered identity – 'home' – in a permanent state of transition (187). While Janice Raymond posits that a radically political transgender should transcend gender altogether to avoid remaining in the grasp of 'the law of gender' (222–223), Prosser does not argue that transgender should be conceived of as 'postgender,' in which 'post' often signals the escape from what it prefixes – as this would deny how transgender has been lived and embodied throughout recent history (203). Even while positing it as a gendered and largely a human construction, Prosser allows that 'home' can, and does, exist and that it is often something that the transgenderist, like Jess, spends a lifetime striving to find (205). Texts such as *Stone Butch Blues* thus subvert closed narratives by combining feminist self-reflexivity with transgender theory's radical gender politics. This example demonstrates that literary fiction, by crossing or bridging boundaries of its own, has the potential to mirror transgendered identity insofar as it becomes a trans- or intergeneric space (Prosser 191).

The master's tools

The political and textual subversion discussed and employed in this chapter is a way of working with Audre Lorde's interrogation of the political viability

of using the 'master's tools' to dismantle 'the master's house' – in this instance, the gradual (re)negotiation of the language of gender. The master's tools can indeed dismantle the master's house but Lorde is right in predicting that different tools will be needed to erect a different type of 'house' in its place.

> It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths. *For the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house*. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change. And this fact is only threatening to those women who still define the master's house as their only source of support. (160; emphasis in original)

Transgendered textual subversion might lead to a positively radical politics of naming but does not dismiss the erotics of unnaming for those who wish to try to evade the constraints of heteronormative gender labelling. A positive politics of naming will require the silent and secret discourses to be replaced by reflexive articulation and openness about one's sexual location and allegiances. This politics of naming will allow for the recognition and acceptance of the 'interdependence of mutual (nondominant) differences,' that Lorde argues will bring forth eclectic solidarity amongst oppressed social identities: 'Only within that interdependency of different strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world. . . . Difference is that raw and powerful connection from which our personal power is forged' (159). This notion is echoed in Koyama's 'trans-feminist manifesto': '[w]e have become increasingly aware that diversity is our strength, not our weakness. No temporary fragmentation or polarization is too severe to nullify the ultimate virtues of inclusive coalition politics' (244). The possible partnership of feminism with transgender theory will be a mutually beneficial one, while denying neither of these movements the right to its own identity.

Notes

1. Sandy Stone has helped to identify a major operation of silence and secrecy with which transpeople (post-operative transsexuals) have been – and still largely are – expected to comply (295). This silence and secrecy was, and is sometimes still, maintained when the transperson feels obliged to merge into the established sexual order through denying their pre-operative history. Marjorie Garber and Leslie Feinberg have both described this *passing* of sexual identity as a culturally imposed self-denial, designed to ensure that the subject fits in with the dictates of establishment culture. This binary understanding of sexual identity does not allow for a transgendered identity.
2. Prosser argues that physicians between the 1950s and 1970s unwittingly colluded with their candidates for cross-sex surgery, to produce narratives of cross-sexed identity (290–291). Pre-operative clients had a sense of what the post-operative cross-sexed person would be. The results were narratives of sexual identity that

gave the impression the subject was 'ill' before surgery and would only properly become him/herself after surgery.

3. This notion of the 'neutral' subject of literature image must be tempered with an acknowledgement that, particularly in the West, the 'subject' has traditionally been synonymous with masculinity and maleness.

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10

Qu(e)erying Pornography: Contesting Identity Politics in Feminism

Wendy O'Brien

Contemporary approaches to sexuality demonstrate a simultaneous dissatisfaction with identity categories, and an acknowledgment of the difficulty of moving beyond or through these. In the face of relativism, strategic essentialism is at best a temporary measure and most likely counter-productive as we are caught in the bind of attempting to articulate our identity politics by means that regulate our identities further. Identity politics (ranging from separatism to strategic essentialism and reiterative performativity) operate on the grounds of 'authenticity', whether of anatomy, preference or experience. Yet these efforts to explain or articulate identity, even in the most temporary or contingent sense, are recuperated hegemonically as discourses of inclusivity give way to hierarchies of dissidence, pleasure, or even marginalisation. If the necessary articulation of sex and sex identity is at best a temporary totalisation, exclusive rather than inclusive in its function, in what sense can sexuality theorists speak of the practices, possibilities and transgressive potentialities of 'sexualities,' without this implicit classification and its dimorphic discursive and material function?

This complex mix marks both the possibilities and the limitations of third wave feminisms. In this chapter I suggest that the inclusivity, playfulness, and self-reflexivity of pornography point to a way out of this bind. Rather than seeing pornography as an injurious or regulatory site for the production and policing of normative identities, I propose that a reclamation of pornographic experiences would facilitate a dialogic and negotiable move through, and across, categorical pleasures and practices. Working through the complexities of pornographies, identities and discursive/theoretical boundaries, we might actively pursue a dialogic approach regarding second wave and third wave voices on sex and subjectivity. As Helene A. Shugart argues, it is an oversimplification to think of the relationship between second and third wave feminisms as generational or chronological (133). To do so is teleological, implying that one project is finished or superseded by the other, and thus positions a variety of contextually specific agendas as competitive. Cathryn Bailey suggests that third wave feminism is often seen as predicated on

a categorical rejection of the second wave agenda (21). Rather than seeing third wave feminisms as entirely discontinuous from second wave agendas, we might talk through, and exacerbate the frictions between, the many positions that we group as either second or third wave. The issues tackled by feminisms are complex and shifting, so it is evident that we need to respond in complex, shifting and multiple ways.

As one of *the* major issues of the second wave movement, pornography is a necessary and complex subject of these 'talks'. I resist the (implicit) designation of pornography as a solely second wave issue. Third wave feminism is not 'beyond' pornography. It is problematic to say that we are now comfortable with pornography, or to simply invert anti-pornography arguments to say that sexually explicit imagery is necessarily indicative of female empowerment. For the third wave to be forged in such reactionary terms would mark its tenuousness, to start with and to close down discussions about censorship, violence and sexual harm would be to lose the productive tensions with second wave concerns about the effects of cultural representations of women – surely still a salient concern for feminisms? To abandon paradigms of victimisation cannot mean that we close our eyes to the complexities of cultural signification and identity regulation. It is my suggestion that we talk about pornography more, not less. The caveat here is that we strive to move our discussions beyond the polarised framework of 'for' and 'against', strive to resist the all too easy oversimplification of second wave feminisms, and strive to address with frank honesty the difficult and contradictory questions of desire, pleasure, and guilt that inform our thoughts on pornography and on feminisms. Whether between second wave and third wave feminisms, between feminist and queer approaches, or between pro-pornography and anti-pornography agendas, discursive competitiveness only serves hegemonic goals. Perhaps, by engaging in honest talk about the possibilities and limitations of pornography, we might foster a discursive site that is dialogic and negotiable; one that eludes the limits of competitive identity politics, which designate ontologically what we *are* and must be as feminists, queers, and/or subjects of desire.

Judith Butler's *Against Proper Objects* explores the tensions between feminist and gay and lesbian theories, specifically critiquing the positioning of gay and lesbian studies as 'the proper successor to feminism' (3). According to Butler, certain lesbian and gay theories suggest that gender is the 'proper' object of feminism, and 'sexuality' the 'proper' object of gay and lesbian studies (1). Furthermore, when gay and lesbian studies subsume the category of gender, feminism is also subsumed and superseded by the more 'expansive and complex' gay and lesbian studies (4). The quest for discursive validation or privilege, in terms of the 'proper' object of analysis, highlights the contestation of the categories of sex/gender/sexual identity in contemporary theories of sexuality. This signifies the specific contradiction that we might *know* that which we cannot know, in either a cognitive or an ontological

sense. The implication that gender implicitly *means something* and that sex also implicitly *means something* contributes to the powerful demarcation of sex from gender. Concomitant with the policing of boundaries of identity, then, is the policing of the distinction between sex and gender, with each now relegated to separate discursive or analytical sites. By demarcating the grounds of identity and identification, unwittingly, the boundaries of disciplines, and the necessary tensions between these, work in complicity with normativity. So it is this territory of identity and identification that we need to make much more labile, both in our conceptualisations of sex/spectatorship, and in our dialogues regarding the slippery possibilities of sexual subjectivity.

At a time when theories of relativism have prompted a renegotiation of feminist boundaries, pornography often remains a sticking point. Many of the anti-pornography arguments to date have assumed that we know in advance not only the audiences of pornographic representations but also the *effects* of these images. Robin Morgan's famous decree 'pornography is the theory, and rape the practice' literalises Andrea Dworkin's vehement critique of pornography as an unquestionable instruction for murderous misogyny (Morgan 88). For Dworkin, pornography is 'anti-woman propaganda which functions to perpetuate male supremacy and crimes of violence against women because it conditions, trains, educates and inspires men to despise women, to use women, to hurt women' ('Pornography and Grief' 288). Dworkin's argument conflates pornographic images with a blueprint for misogynist behaviour, and equates penetrative sex with murder, citing the 'penis/sperm' as 'an agent of female death' (*Pornography* 55). In these extreme cases of anti-pornography rhetoric, the effects of the image are unquestionable. Predicated on a series of conflations (penis/phallus, image/effect, sex/murder), this thinking disavows the culturally, historically, and/or subjective specificities of either sexual or spectatorship practices.

The emotive and persuasive push of the anti-pornography arguments have perpetuated the reification of both the terms and the outcomes of pornography. This powerful legacy is one that third wave feminists need to address, rather than abandon, should we wish to move pornography debates beyond paradigms of victimisation. If we acknowledge, as Elizabeth Wilson suggests, that 'the whole anti-porn campaign is an absolute disaster insofar as it is based on a monolithic and over-simplified view of masculinity and male sexuality' (32), then we need to thoroughly interrogate the terms that have functioned as the mainstays of pornography analysis and debate. Objectification, penetration, and identification, for instance, are terms that conceal a greater complexity that that which is conventionally acknowledged within heteronormative discourses on pornography. More than this, though, the great majority of anti-pornography arguments have, too simply, naturalised dimorphic identity as moored to the grid of male power and female powerlessness; particularly in penetrative scenarios. It is certainly fair to say that the terms 'male' and 'female' conceal a greater complexity than is

acknowledged in anti-pornography discourses. Illustrative of this, one could argue that pornography foregrounds sexual possibility rather than sexual prohibition, that 'genitalia' is less a functional marker of identity than a site and source of pleasure and potential and that, in its emphasis on anal penetration and in its popularity as a masturbatory stimulus, pornography exceeds the procreative imperative. Already excessive of heteronormatively defined sex practice then, pornography dislocates the simulated connections between anatomy and sex identity that are culturally naturalised as causal.

Binary conceptualisations of sex and gender have affected an understanding of gender as the 'cultural overlay' of an ontologically prior anatomy or biological physicality. Fundamental to this is the understanding – often implicit, though maintained through more overt means when necessary – that corporeality and thus identity are a case of 'either/or'. Either a body is anatomically male, or anatomically female. With genitalia, as the metonymic representation of anatomy, such a conceptualisation of bodily difference fails to account for a number of bodies, desires and sexual acts which, rather than being produced by the binary 'either/or', might better be described as 'and/both' or 'neither'. Pornography, as a site where 'anything goes', refuses the normative string of associations that naturalise sex as ontologically prior. I would suggest that pornography is problematic for hegemony because it serves as a space where we might conceptualise genitals as a starting point rather than a foregone conclusion. Anatomy may or may not have a degree of physical immutability (depending on your thoughts concerning surgery and hormone treatment), but genitalia nonetheless can be culturally understood, and certainly used sexually, in a number of ways. The fluidity of power-play and the excesses of role-play in pornography belie the naturalisation of gender and sex acts as an anatomical corollary. The policing of this connection is relaxed in pornography and the excesses of the representations celebrate sexual identity in terms of possibility rather than prohibition. The representative playfulness of pornography indicates that that most fraught of categories 'sexual identity' need not be dictated by either genitalia or gendered behaviour. As Paula Webster suggests 'pornography implies that we could find all races, genders, ages, and shapes sexually interesting, if only in our minds' (35). Pornography renders these possibilities graphically, and it is *this* subversive potential that invites censors.[1] The blurring and shifting of boundaries in pornography reveal the inconsistencies and permutations in the 'monolith' that heteronormativity constructs of itself.

Pornography need not be seen to operate in the service of the *status quo*. In exploring pornography as a site of negotiation rather than consumption, we might see pornography less as a sealed unit of instruction for sexual identities, and more as a field of excess significations in which desires, sexes, and practices, even looks, are considered more as negotiations, or options, than as hard and fast rules. Both Lynda Nead and Jennifer Wicke argue that too often has pornography been read as though the viewer is not involved

in an active sense of production. In this sense, pornography has functioned as the last bastion of the classic realist. Wicke writes:

> It needs to be accepted that pornography is not "just" consumed, but is used, worked on, elaborated, remembered, fantasised about by its subjects. To stop the analysis at the artefact, as virtually all the current books and articles do, imagining that the representation is the pornography in quite simple terms, is to truncate the consumption process radically, and thereby to leave unconsidered the human making involved in completing the act of pornographic consumption (70).

Wilson does remind us that we need to resist the unproblematic use of 'pornography' as a category (31), assuming that we can know in advance its effects on women or its viewers. The possibilities of pornography are determined to a large degree by what we bring to the text, rather than what might be read off it. So this is largely about the complexities of our desires, not about the normative desires that are foisted upon us by the text. In fact, pornography arguably foregrounds audience desire more than other cultural text; either as a prerequisite or an outcome of viewing. With orgasm simplified as the 'proof' of sated desires, viewers are acutely aware of the interplay between their own desires and the text. The success of pornography to arouse is contingent on the assumption of interactivity. Viewers assess their pornography experiences on this basis. The images and scenarios are either arousing, or not, and this encourages a sexual self-reflexivity not a passive state of consumption.

Notable pornography scholarship, by exceeding the polarised framework, contributes to a reconfiguration of pornography as a site of complex signification, rather than one that is inherently harmful or inherently liberating. Among the work of note here are essays or texts by Laura Kipnis, Elizabeth Wilson, Nadine Strossen, Alison Assiter and Avedon Carol, Catherine Lumby, Lynne Segal, and Linda Williams. This work is crucial in moving pornography debates away from the paradigm of feminine victimisation, and indeed, moving pornography scholarship away from the paradigm of polarised debate. There is a distinction though, between this work, which refigures pornography as a system of representation worthy of academic enquiry, and the work that posits gay male pornography as a celebratory site of slippery desire. The academic analysis, and spectator enjoyment of gay male pornography, does not require justification in the face of the anti-pornography discourses of second wave feminism. Feminist analysis of pornography is not yet at the point where we can embrace, without guilt, the notion of transgressive and libidinous possibilities in sexually explicit imagery. Before we can adequately theorise spectatorship practices, and the complex significations of pornography, we need to finally move beyond the weighty legacy of pornography as necessarily harmful, disrespectful and

shameful to women. Crucially, we need to interrogate the term 'pornography' and all that this has come to signify. It is not useful if we oversimplify the 'effects' of pornography by failing to distinguish between the various representations of, for instance, non-consensual sex, sadomasochism, child pornography, and consensual heterosexual pornography. The politics and the conditions of production, distribution, and spectatorship vary markedly in each case, and for this reason we need to encourage an open and sustained analysis of all pornographic forms, rather than assuming a category of homogeneity that we identify simply as sexually explicit imagery. The feminist pornography scholarship listed above moves towards this important goal by opening discussions about the complex issues of guilt, desire, and lust as these articulate with our feminist politics.

It is notable then that although little has been written about the transgressive possibilities of straight pornography, there are a number of texts dealing with gay male pornography as a site conducive to the fluid nature of identity and desire. I would identify this material as useful in two major ways. First, it provides a springboard for a feminist/queer rethinking of questions of sex/spectatorship and pornography and secondly, in these discourses themselves we glimpse the conflation of heterosex with the hegemonic, and it is this conflation that needs to be countered if we are to think about pornographic representations in more complex ways. David Buchbinder, for instance, writes that the viewer of gay male pornography is able to identify as either subject or object, with these positions becoming interchangeable (63). For Buchbinder, this fluidity is not possible when viewing heterosexual pornography (63). Richard Fung also argues that in gay pornography, but not in straight, 'the spectator's positions in relation to the representations are open and in flux' (154). Earl Jackson, Jr reworks Laura Mulvey's theory of spectatorship, applying this to pornography and concluding that positions are fluid for gay viewers of pornography, but not for straight viewers (75). For Mulvey, the scopophilic drive and the narcissistic drive form the two mutually exclusive components of conventional spectatorship. The radical separation of scopophilia, a pleasure derived from looking, and narcissism, a pleasure derived from identification, 'implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen' (Mulvey 18). Jackson insists that spectatorship positions are fixed for heterosexual males (75), adhering to the radical separation of narcissism/scopophilia; the male viewing subject identifies with male bodies on screen and desires female bodies. However, Jackson presents a model of gay male spectatorship in which these two drives are in flux. 'The gay male spectator, on the other hand, regularly identifies with the figure he objectifies. In other words, he experiences a coalescence of drives that are radically dichotomized in his heterosexual male counterpart' (75). Is it not possible, though, that fluidity, similar to that which is celebrated in gay pornography, might also be available to viewers of 'straight' pornography? If we assume that gay pornography is

characterised by fluidity and interchangeability, and heterosexual pornography by stasis and restriction, then does this not contribute to the means by which heterosexuality is assumed to be monolithic, unchanging, and exclusive rather than inclusive?

Jackson's insistence that heterosexual spectatorship cannot operate in terms of a slide between identification and desire reinscribes the accrued performative power of the heteronormative. The insistence that 'heterosexual' viewers will attain pre-determined effects from viewing pornography implies that either the 'heterosexual' is pre-discursive, and thus such a viewer is guaranteed to read according to innate and universal 'heterosexual' codes, or that the text transparently conveys a strictly heterosexual meaning, predictably and readily internalised by the viewer. Either way, heterosexuality here is accorded more power than it either deserves, or indeed possesses. Heterosexuality is not homogenous or immutable in its power unless we think it so; the success of the heteronormative is a performative effect. To elide the specificities of sexual practices, identifications, desires, bodies, erogenous zones, and so on, is to contribute to the ease with which a reified 'heterosexuality' becomes an all-powerful and unquestionable regulatory regime.

For all the constructivist principles that characterise contemporary sexuality theories, there is a risk that we perpetuate the normative terms of reference by simply inverting the essentialist grip on our self-conceptualisations. Having displaced, at least in some quarters, the anatomistic authenticity of genital sex, we now risk reifying the non-normative performative as an 'authenticity' of its own. A reluctance to theorise heteronormativity *as* performativity implies that the heteronormative is hermetically sealed in its power. Rather, we might examine the political implications of suggesting that an anatomically female subject performing femininity is an act of false consciousness or a perpetuation of the heteronormative expectations for gendered behaviour. To assume that the 'doing' or performing of femininity only wields a performative power when the anatomical referent/s are male, transgender, or intersexual is to assume a subversive potential only in cases of a corporeal/performative mismatch. Performativity, in this case, comes to signify the 'non-normative'; and the normative goal of a 'match' is naturalised by discursive silences that accede corporeal inherence. The reliance on anatomy to locate performances or sexual acts as queer does little to problematise sex as ontologically prior. To fuck with gender, as Elizabeth Grosz points out, is not necessarily to fuck with someone of the same sex (217). With all the variant possibilities of queer experience, queer identification, and acts or instances of queer subversion, straight pornography, perhaps not surprisingly, is barely given a look in. This is an oversight that perpetuates the performative power of heterosex rather than delving into its possibility, incompleteness and ultimate ontological failure.

If heteronormativity is the structuring principle for the regulation of sexualities, then it would seem that rather than dismissing straight pornography

as unqualifiedly harmful, aesthetically embarrassing, and sexually clichéd, we might recall that this is a site of performativity too. Straight pornography is one of the sites where the heteronormative rehearses its performative power and thus a space where it is also threatened with its own instability. Straight pornography, aesthetically embarrassing and politically questionable as it may sometimes be, is its own parody, its own tenuous effort to reiterate power and in this sense an ideal site to catch the 'norm' of the heteronormative with 'its' pants down. Certainly, according to the hegemonic ideal of the heteronormative, there *should* be a radical separation of identification and desire. A male heterosexual viewer *should*, according to the hegemonic code, view only heterosexual pornography and clearly identify as male, desiring only the 'available' female body on the screen. This would, were it the case, accord with Mulvey's contention that '[m]an is reluctant to gaze on his exhibitionist like' (20). The problem with this prescriptive approach to male spectatorship is that it overlooks the fact that heteronormativity is a hegemonic *ideal*, rather than either actual or innate in its power. The heteronormative depends upon performances of normativity, and so there is vulnerability to, or a space for, both discursive and libidinal instability here; not as that which merely destabilises the monolithic trajectory of the heteronormative, but also as that which encourages a free play of libidinal intensities, explorations and gratifications in the 'spectator' as pornographic participant.

The apparent stasis and restriction of the heteronormative can be refigured as a potential inclusivity by acknowledging that heterosexuality and heterosexual pornography are characterised by more than they seem. Intelligible binary performances of identity are reliant on exclusions of 'other' possibilities. Far from lamenting this heterocentric structure, a gesture that contributes to heterocentric performativity, pornography serves as a visual and visceral reminder that these possibilities remain as a source of potential disorder. Qu(e)erying pornography prompts a consideration of sex and sexual representation not as a regulatory power, but as a *loss of control*. The lack of control in pornography is both corporeal and conceptual, signifying a failure of the assumed causal connections between penetration and power, or desire and practice. Queer pornographic experiences reveal points of friction in the regulation of identities. Far from a prescriptive template for misogyny then, pornography has the potential to reveal the tenuousness of the heteronormative, and to give rise to playful and subversive slips in identification, desire, and practice.

The excess of pornography, and the unpredictable spectatorship practices that it invites, marks pornography as a useful textual site for challenging the naturalised conflation of the phallus and the penis. Many anti-pornography arguments have perpetuated the conflation of penetrative acts and power, and the corollary; that to be penetrated is disempowering. This thinking clearly contributes to ideologies that feminise receptive gay men, naturalise feminine powerlessness, and heterosexualise gay male sexual practices

(assumptions about fixed top/bottom partners). The penis/phallus conflation is dependent on and, in a circular fashion, contributes to the ubiquity of polarised conceptualisations of sexuality. Phallic/castrated or phallic/lack binaries are both the cause and the outcome of the stringently policed boundaries of masculinity and femininity. Feminists have long had problems with the figuration of women in terms of lack yet, rather than seeking an inversion of this position, contemporary theoretical perspectives seek to displace the binary notion, which allocates a space such as this at all. By considering phallic power as a reiterative performance, we recognise the ascription of power as unstable and subject to challenge/s. As Catherine Waldby argues, '[t]he penis does not *act* the phallus in sex unless it is lived by one or both partners *as* the phallus' (270; emphasis in original). We might understand the correlation between phallic power and the penis, or penetrative acts, to be constructed through a reiterative history in which the penis has 'acted' powerfully, and has been 'treated' as powerful, thus successfully appearing and becoming inscribed as 'intrinsically' powerful. This syllogistic power must constantly cover over its own lack of causality, and the hyper performance of phallic power in pornography offers both an example and an ironic wink at the desperation of this.

So, if pornography is seen as a site of this rehearsal, its excess functions as a *metapornography*; a parody of the means by which power is ascribed to, and inscribed in, specific sexual acts.[2] In this sense pornography is potentially much more self-reflexive than is commonly credited. For instance, Lynne Segal writes of the three recurring features within many pornographic narratives as being the 'ubiquitously sexually desiring, visibly sexually satisfied female . . . the image of the huge, hard, magical, male member – always erect, forever unflagging' and in more recent pornographies, scenarios with two or more men and one woman (68). For Segal, the continual repetition of these images in pornographic texts indicates the foundational anxiety, insecurity or instability of masculinity: '[t]he most conspicuous of male emotions, and the anxieties they express, are surely not-so-hidden in the relentless repetition of these themes. Do we not see only too clearly here fear of female rejection, terror of phallic failure and homosexual feeling disguised as heterosexual performance?' (68) So, pornography plays out the conventions of power, yet at the same time reveals the 'construction' or vulnerability of this power.

But heteronormativity does not often *seem* vulnerable. Butler writes of the need for heterosexuality to continually assert itself through reiterative processes, in order to present itself as monolithic and immutable ('Imitation' 23). For Butler, this belies the precariousness of the construction of heterosexuality as seamless and impermeable: 'One of the reasons that heterosexuality has to re-elaborate itself, to ritualistically reproduce itself all over the place, is that it has to overcome some constitutive sense of its own tenuousness' ('Gender as Performance' 34). The success of heteronormativity depends

upon subjects adopting an intelligible or binary sexed position. The sanctions and punishments against those who fail or refuse to do so are severe. Yet for all this, Butler suggests that the taking up of a particular sexual position *always* involves becoming haunted by what is excluded. If all sexualities are constituted at least as much by exclusion as inclusion, then perhaps the acknowledgment of these already constitutive possibilities or ghosts (as Butler calls them) might prove a destabilising force. In seeing 'straight' pornography as a rehearsal of attempts to shore up the tenuousness of heterosexuality, making it homogeneous and discrete, we might also see it as a means of access or exposure to the ghosts, which, through their exclusion, both constitute and threaten binary identity categories. Jonathon Dollimore maintains that 'what this means for the thoughtful is that their sexual subject positions are not necessarily petrified identities forever haunted by what they ruthlessly exclude; they may actually facilitate access to scenes of sexuality which are always already, *and pleasurably* in-formed by what in other respects they exclude' (536; emphasis in original). For 'straight' viewers, then, pornography gives rise to these ghosts, gives them a space to play, and undermines the performative power of the heteronormative.

For this reason, we cannot determine what desires and identifications are apparent in the individual viewing practices of those watching straight pornography. The visual presence of male bodies in straight pornography problematises arguments that suggest an objectification only of female bodies. For instance, what of the male viewer's fascination with the ever-erect penis in straight pornography?[3] The isolation of this viewing pleasure as a manifestation solely of identification fulfils a heteronormative agenda. However, even the slightest blurring of identification and desire here provides access to the excluded ghosts of homoeroticism. The shifting focalisation and the relative lack of character and narrative identification in pornography resist the viewer's easy identification with one character, body, or desire. Eschewing psychological realism, pornography denies the viewer the relatively stable subject positions more typical to realist feature films, for instance. With the extreme close-up of the penis/vagina or penis/anus interface the trope of heterosexual pornography, it is impossible to demarcate clearly between desires to 'be' and desires to 'have'. The scopophilic and narcissistic desires are not mutually exclusive. This slippage of desire and identification is exacerbated by the overlap between the boundaries of the 'homosocial' culture of men viewing 'straight' pornography blurring with the 'homoerotic' effects of men viewing 'straight' pornography. For 'straight' men to view penises in action in groups or even to encourage one another in these viewing habits creates a space for the possible transference of identification and desire among one another in addition to those bodies on the screen. The significance of such 'transgressions', as the blurring between the homosocial and homoerotic, is that these instances cannot be simply dismissed as fantasies, but rather as constitutive sexual 'acts'.

Queer conceptualisations of pornography might recognise, then, that the demarcations of activity and passivity, identification and desire, and the subject and object of the 'gaze' are much more fluid than conventional readings of pornography acknowledge. Such conceptualisations see pornography as a means of accessing the multiplicity of desires and identifications that might escape the bounds of sexualities as they are performed day to day. Dollimore writes that 'exclusion/inclusion is one of the most unstable of all binaries' (536). Far from assuming, then, that only homosexuality and other 'unintelligible' subjectivities are haunted by the spectre of heterosexism, we might recognise that heterosexuality and the means by which its tenuous power is secured are constantly threatened by all the sexual possibilities that it excludes. By virtue of this necessary exclusion in order to shore up the boundaries of heterosexuality, these excluded potentialities are imbued with a destabilising force. If sexual specificity is determined largely through difference and opposition and if this demarcation is already tenuous then to destabilise the fixity of one term within this structure necessarily effects a destabilisation of all terms. To destabilise that which moors each of these terms in place, then, is to set these terms in a state of referential flux in which they might take on and incorporate new significations free of the injurious effects of 'normative' or 'non-normative' labelling strategies.

Far from a clear case of 'either/or', sexual subjectivities might thus be mapped as reiterative paths or histories forged from an excess field of significations. In this sense, the tenuous path of subjectivity tracks through an amorphous and endless field of possibilities and alternatives that simultaneously constitute and 'haunt' the subject. Each moment, each performance, and each axis of the trajectory are both constitutive (we exist only in such performances), but also shifting, transitory, resisting the bind of the past and future of the trajectory, and rather revelling in the presentist moment of possibility. Figured this way, pornography is a veritable 'haunted house', where viewing subjects might explore and celebrate the multifaceted dimensions of their sexualities and, at the same time, that these viewing practices might operate as a destabilisation of the hegemonic production of sexualities, bodies, and pleasures as binary.

Notes

1. Nadine Strossen identifies the 'radically egalitarian premise that sex and sexual expression can break down any other barriers separating people' as that which has framed porn as threatening to 'established political, as well as moral and cultural, norms' (165).
2. For an example of this self-reflexivity in pornography see *Blue Movie*.
3. Segal suggests that pornography allows for more complex pleasures and identifications than have been recognised by anti-pornography feminists: 'Cross-sex identification (present in men's enjoyment of the ubiquitous lesbian number in pornography) and homosexual attachment (present in men's pleasure in watching other penises in action) all inform the content of pornography and men's responses to it' (73).

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Part III
Popular Culture

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Introduction: Popular Culture

Pamela Church Gibson

The title of this section is, perhaps, problematic – some might think it constitutes an oxymoron, and others the debasement or betrayal of their ideals. Arguably, feminism has not been fully 'popularised,' has not infiltrated popular consciousness or the public domain in quite the ways for which second wave activists worked and hoped. Certainly, it has found certain routes into the popular imagination and now inhabits particular spaces within society and within the media – even if these are not always the most coveted spaces. The often-fraught and sometimes unpredictable history of the multifaceted relationship between feminism and popular culture needs to be charted, so that the paradoxes of the present situation can be properly contextualised – for they constitute the backdrop to this section and illuminate its concerns.

This section is positioned within a particularly controversial arena, a context where, within the many different strands of the media, particular and perverse misconceptions of feminism are displayed and discussed while, elsewhere, many of its own ideas – often unattributed – have been developed and valorised. And today, of course, a small number of women have finally attained positions of power within the media industries themselves – though some of them might cavil at attributing their success to the activities of the much-maligned second wave. Significantly, the historical moment that saw the advent of second wave feminism was followed swiftly by the birth and subsequent rapid growth of media studies as an academic discipline. Early feminist theoretical work on film – and, later, television – was very different from that found in this anthology, not only in approach but also in selection of subject matter. Today, feminist critics can freely peruse the truly popular, and commercial successes within television and cinema, formerly off-limits, are now analysed within the academy in a way unimaginable, or merely unacceptable, to second wave pioneers.

As second wave feminism spread, the media took note and has monitored all subsequent developments, sometimes taking great delight in making a travesty of feminism and its concerns by creating one caricature after another, and elsewhere providing a popular platform for issues raised under

the feminist banner. The grotesque parody of a 'feminist' which was proffered up for popular consumption in the early seventies is still with us – the dungaree-wearing, bra-burning, man-hating, crop-haired, strident woman. This potent myth still lurks in the popular psyche, responsible for those endless, infuriating remarks that begin 'I'm not a feminist, but . . . .'

However, despite the existence of this bogeywoman and her successors, there have been other, more progressive developments – some within the media, far more in the actual study of popular culture, a growth area within the academy. Significantly, the main groundwork for the future of feminist theory took place within the discipline of film studies. In the early seventies, this fledgling discipline – with no canon as yet, and no restrictive tradition with which to contend – could embrace new and radical ideas, particularly developments within French critical theory, such as structuralism, semiotics and Lacanian psychoanalysis. The work published in the journal *Screen* during that decade was to determine the future direction of film theory – and to ensure that it had, from the outset, a specifically feminist perspective. Laura Mulvey's essay of 1975, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,' was, surely, the single most significant essay ever to be published. Endlessly referenced, constantly cited or challenged, it has shaped the way in which we discuss cinema – its presentation of women, the nature of the cinematic apparatus itself and the whole notion of 'the male gaze' – and its influence has fed through into other disciplines. In the eighties, when dominant trends within visual imagery prompted analysis of the 'female gaze,' the phenomenon of 'male-on-male looking' and the notion of 'homospectorial' spectatorship, it was Mulvey's essay that was used to construct the form and content of these new theoretical moves and manoeuvres.

Mulvey was herself an avant-garde film-maker whose critical work did not embrace the truly 'popular.' Although she may have focused on classic Hollywood cinema in her seminal essay, it was specifically in order to indict it – and, furthermore, she used, as illustration, the Hollywood cinema of the past. This preference for popular forms locked safely away in the past was to dominate feminist criticism for some time. Only in the late eighties were specific moves made to counter this tendency and to legitimate the discussion of contemporary, commercially successful films – only then could film theorists engage with commercial cinema without some inherent sense of shame.

Many women who worked within cinema studies at the time of its emergence and critical dominance in the early seventies were refugees from other, more established and intransigent, areas of academic activity. Later, these scholars would return to their parent disciplines as these relaxed, accepted the new directions within critical theory and found a home for feminism. But perhaps the very way in which feminism has become accepted within the academy, and that so many disciplines have now been forced to accommodate it, is both an asset and a disadvantage. The fact that so much discussion now takes place there – rather than outside – is in itself problematic, even counter-productive.

It is a truism that theory is no substitute for action. Ironically, many of those feminist scholars whose work is central to the academy and its activities are themselves political activists – Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Donna Haraway, for example. That is one question to be asked: is feminism 'popular' for the wrong reasons and with the wrong people? It is 'popular' with those within academic 'management,' who can devise new, attractive syllabi and attract potential students. And most of us who work in academia are delighted to be involved in these new courses, to conduct our debates in the confines of our seminar rooms or within the pages of refereed journals. However, although we might be both pleased and practically engaged, it is surely important to pause and ask whether or not we have been neutered, cloistered, walled-up within the academy, unable to affect the lives of women outside the Western higher education system.

At this juncture, it is necessary to introduce a second media caricature derived from more misconceptions of feminism: the media configuration of the 'postfeminist' as 'empowered' woman with no need for outmoded second wave ideas, first presented to us in the eighties as shoulder-padded, lipstick-wearing and stiletto-borne. These women, too, are seen as threatening and so must be pilloried publicly. Women who choose work first and foremost are still caricatured within film and on television as ball-breaking monsters – a process given new life in the popular culture of the eighties, when women were making significant gains in the real workplace. Sigourney Weaver appeared as an unpleasant career woman, patronising her secretary and stealing her ideas, in the film *Working Girl* (1988), while in *Disclosure* (1994) Demi Moore played another undesirable woman-in-authority, this time guilty of the sexual harassment of her erstwhile lover, Michael Douglas. The begetter of these women – and others seen on screen then and now – was of course Joan Collins' portrayal of über-bitch Alexis in *Dynasty*, perhaps the most well-known television series of the eighties. Alexis was not the world's best mother but she did, nevertheless, have children – she is perhaps the first memorable depiction of the idea that there had sprung into existence Women Who Want to Have It All. This lasting media obsession can sometimes involve the forgiveness of such women – when, and if, they choose to opt out of the workplace in favour of motherhood alone, like the heroine of Allison Pearson's recent, reactionary and highly successful novel, *I Don't Know How She Does It* (2002). Women like this are paraded to show us the advantages of abandoning ambition and opting for home, hearth and heart. The alternative postfeminist stereotype – the neurotic, thirty-something, professional 'singleton' – is considered here in Kristyn Gorton's chapter on postfeminism and *Ally McBeal*.

Another media construct linked to the pernicious idea of postfeminism is the figure of the 'girl' – happy and confident in her sexuality, with no need for the tiresome ministrations of older, meddling feminists. The phenomenon of 'girl power' – in both postfeminist and third wave discourses – is discussed

here by Rebecca Munford. It may be worth noting a very recent appearance in the overcrowded 'Chicklit' category – an 'etiquette guide' for young women, with an entry on 'Bitter Feminists' listed amongst those you should handle 'diplomatically.' We are told: '[w]omen are pretty equal these days. They drink beer, understand the offside rule AND wear low-cut tops. Even if you can't relate to old-style feminists, be grateful to them' (Ivens 194). This is an interesting development – pained 'gratitude' from those reaping the rewards of earlier struggles. Other chapters in this section deal with further problematic topics, including cyberfeminism – which, as Stacy Gillis suggests here, does not really provide a simple way of giving us gender fluidity in pragmatic form as a painless way of moving beyond the repressive binaries of Western patriarchy. Rather much of cyberspace is, seemingly, an unpatrolled paradise for unreconstructed men, who revel in the chance of childish kicking-out, away from the raised consciousness created by the meddling feminists of popular demonology. But there are other more significant theoretical difficulties which indicate that to celebrate cyberfeminism as straightforward opportunity and way forward is premature.

Another contentious subject – the notion of the newer 'empowered' heroines of the nineties – is also tackled here. Patricia Pender considers *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, a series that has not only provided viewers with consistent pleasure but has also provoked a good deal of debate within the academy. There is much in this series to give pleasure – not least the heroine's impeccable blue-collar credentials, still rare within primetime television. *Sex and the City* similarly engaged public interest and became a point of critical focus – and yes, I do know how problematic it is for feminists compared to *Buffy*. Nevertheless, the emotional epicentre and the formal structuring device of this second programme is a strong, supportive relationship between four women. Millions of women watch it – partly perhaps because men are there in the series not so much to-be-looked-at as to-be-discussed-and-derided. Glossy and aspirational, it is pure fantasy and in many ways worrying fantasy. Nevertheless women watch it, talk about it and write about it. So why have both programmes been axed within the same year? Perhaps the new female action hero of mainstream cinema, analysed here by Cristina Lucia Stasia, may be granted a longer lifespan.

There are other pragmatic problems of far greater significance. Feminism has been hijacked not only by social democracy, where lip-service has been paid to women's concerns, but also by a negative tendency within postmodernism. Arguably, there has been a corresponding marginalisation of the kinds of feminism that wanted to change the world, whether through liberating women from their biology or by rejecting the binaries of Western thought. Some would suggest that popular culture has contributed to this dumbing-down. Although there may be some truth in this allegation, it has nevertheless provided feminism with what Mrs Thatcher so memorably called 'the oxygen of publicity.' And while feminism has life, it still has

radical potential, whether within the realms of philosophy or the practicalities of everyday life. We need to ensure that there are no more insidious, covert attempts to fob us off – or move us further to the periphery.

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11

'Wake Up and Smell the Lipgloss': Gender, Generation and the (A)politics of Girl Power

Rebecca Munford

> In *BUST*, we've captured the voice of a brave new girl: one that is raw and real, straightforward and sarcastic, smart and silly, and liberally sprinkled with references to our own Girl Culture – that shared set of female experiences that includes Barbies and blowjobs, sexism and shoplifting, *Vogue* and vaginas . . . So wake up and smell the lipgloss, ladies: The New Girl Order has arrived. (Karp and Stoller, *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order*)

In her discussion of 'girl power' in *The Whole Woman*, Germaine Greer laments the 'catastrophic career of "girls," "girls behaving badly," "girls on top"' (399). Beginning with the Buffalo Girl, Vivienne Westwood, Greer maps out a lineage of career girls through Madonna, Courtney Love and Björk, who have acted as figureheads for 'succeeding generations of aggressively randy, hard-drinking young females, who have got younger with every passing year, until they are now emerging in their pre-teens' (400). Having denounced three decades earlier the 'relentless enculturation' and stereotypes of female passivity and modesty to which girls were subjected in *The Female Eunuch* (92), she identifies an equally, if not more, insidious form of indoctrination in the construction and marketing of 'girl power' – that is, of the paraphernalia of *sexualised* femininity – to girls and young women by the media. 'The propaganda machine that is now aimed at our daughters is more powerful than any form of indoctrination that has ever existed before . . . To deny a woman's sexuality is certainly to oppress her but to portray her as nothing but a sexual being is equally to oppress her' (410–411). The trajectory of Greer's analysis thus highlights a discursive shift from the decorous 'good girl' to the sexually aggressive 'bad girl' in popular constructions of girlhood and its representations – a Madonna/whore dichotomy that is all too familiar.

Like Greer, many feminist critics have been quick to position 'girl power' and its 'bad girl' icons as a form of popularised postfeminism – a depoliticised product of 'backlash' rhetoric (Faludi 14).[1] The extent to which girl power might be understood as a postfeminist discourse is substantiated by the

ways in which its purported icons have perceptibly distanced themselves from the political agendas of second wave feminism. Advocating 'girl power' as a popular philosophy based on the virtues of Thatcherism and the Wonder Bra, the Spice Girls, for example, offer a simultaneous extrication from and identification with feminism in their autobiography: 'feminism has become a dirty word. Girl Power is just a nineties way of saying it. We can give feminism a kick up the arse' (The Spice Girls 48). At the same time as offering an ostensible, albeit vague, nod to their feminist inheritance, the Spice Girls are complicit with the dominant view 'that feminism (or feminists) deserve a kick up the arse – rather than the anti-feminists and backlashers who made the word dirty in the first place' (Whelehan 45). Informed by, and strategically aligned with, the much publicised strand of 'power feminism' associated with those prominent postfeminist writers who have been acclaimed by the media as ambassadors for a new generation of young women – Naomi Wolf, Katie Roiphe, Rene Denfeld and Christina Hoff Sommers[2] – girl power is thus positioned, and positions itself, as 'a postfeminist movement, in the sense of coming after and perhaps overcoming feminism' (Hopkins 2). In its popular configuration girl power is identified as a postfeminist position insofar as it volunteers an updated replacement for – *and displacement of* – second wave feminism.

Nevertheless, this understanding of girl power as postfeminism – in both Greer's account and the Spice Girls' vapid championing of the slogan – conflates mass-mediated representations (and celebrations) of the 'bad girl' with the eclectic manifestations of girl culture that have been central to self-proclaimed third wave feminists' formulations and contestations of (post)feminist identities since the beginning of the 1990s. As Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards – journalists, activists and advocates of girl culture – describe:

> The Third Wave of the movement doesn't have an easily identifiable presence but, if you're looking, you can't help running into hubs that are unique to this generation. . . . All are expanding feminism, and reclaiming the word *girl*, but in very different ways. (79–80; emphasis in original)

For in spite of its homogenised media representation – too frequently metonymically represented by the Spice Girls – girl culture is a far more eclectic and politically grounded phenomenon. In addition to the Third Wave Foundation and the San Francisco-based Young Women's Work Project, Baumgardner and Richards identify the writers of zines such as *Bitch, BUST*, and *HUES* as well as female musicians including the Riot Grrrls, Queen Latifah, Courtney Love, and Me'shell Ndege'ocello as occupying part of that intersection of culture and contemporary feminism called 'Girlie' (135–136). While second wave feminist critiques, exemplified by that of Greer above, have foregrounded the ways in which popular culture disseminates hegemonic gender representations, third wave feminists have refocalised the traditionally

fraught relationship between feminism and popular culture to re-examine the politics of subjectivity. This re-examination often includes a celebration of popular modes of femininity, including 'the tabooed symbols of female enculturation – Barbie dolls, makeup, fashion magazines, high heels – and says using them isn't shorthand for "we've been duped"' (Baumgardner and Richards 136). For these young women the discursive shift from the patriarchal 'good girl' to the postfeminist 'bad girl' is not so clearly demarcated. Rather, these opposing identities foreground the *instability* and *contradiction* of patriarchal definitions of femininity[3] – as well as the 'tyranny of expectation' (Steinem xiv) imposed by their second wave foremothers.

Nevertheless, third wave feminists' attention to, and engagement with, the popular has been dismissed as a privileging of style over politics – of individual over collective empowerment.[4] What is entangled in third wave formulations of girl identity, and mirrored in Greer's concerns about '[t]he propaganda machine that is now aimed at *our daughters*' (emphasis added), therefore, is the trope of mother–daughter conflict. As Shelley Budgeon describes: '[t]he consequences of generational difference for a unified feminist movement are often framed within the context of an antagonistic relationship between younger and older women in which references are made to "bad daughters" and "lifestyle" feminists vs "victim" feminism' (11). Foregrounding on the one hand a slippage between mainstream notions of postfeminism and third wave feminism and, on the other, an intergenerational dialogue between second and third wave feminisms, this chapter interrogates the politics of gender and generation in two key manifestations of third wave 'girl power' in Western culture – Riot Grrrl and Girlie. In so doing, it will locate girl culture as a crucial site for an interrogation of the ways in which young women are negotiating the tensions between individual and collective empowerment to (en)gender feminist identities within and against dominant (post)feminist discourses.

Third wave grrrls: 'revolution girl-style, now'

Although the term 'girl power' entered the mainstream popular cultural imagination with the arrival, in 1996, of the Spice Girls in Britain, it had been coined some years previously by members of US Riot Grrrl – 'a recent young feminist (sub)cultural movement that combines feminist consciousness and punk aesthetics, politics and style' (Garrison 142).[5] Through the circulation of girl-centred zines and the creation of all-female record labels (for example, Righteous Babe Records), the 'do-it-yourself' ethos of early Riot Grrrl challenged conventional conceptualisations of the necessarily gendered relationship between (male) production and (female) consumption within the corporate music industry. Garrison, for example, explores the ways in which the members of Riot Grrrl deploy democratised technologies to 'produce hybrid political texts such as zines and music through which they disseminate

knowledge and information about subjects such as (but not limited to) feminism in local-national distribution networks' (144). Thus, Riot Grrrl provides 'an aesthetic and political response' (Wald 594) to dominant representations of patriarchal girlhood by forging spaces in which girls and young women are empowered to resist and, moreover, to *produce* their own self-representation(s).

In foregrounding age as a key signifier of difference in formulations and understandings of young feminists' identities, Riot Grrrl, however, not only points up a politics of gender, but also of generation. Central to its pro-girl ethos is a reclamation of girlhood as a space from which to negotiate speaking positions for girls and young women whose experiences and desires are marginalised by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of a feminism that speaks for them under the universalising category of 'woman.'[6] Mary Celeste Kearney proposes that in order to readdress the contradictions of female adolescence 'riot grrrls appropriate the accoutrements of girlhood, femininity, and alternative youth culture for an ironic (dis)play and disruption of the signifying codes of gender *and generation*' (158; emphasis added). Here, the aesthetics of style proffer a response not only to the (mis)representations of patriarchal girlhood, but also to what is often *perceived* as the rigidity of second wave identity politics. This notion that young women's 'paradoxical identity with traditional feminism began in childhood' (Klein 208) is borne out by the model of hybridity and contradiction vital to the 'kinderwhore' aesthetic propounded by Courtney Love – a grrrl icon who has been embraced by third wave feminists both inside and outside of the Riot Grrrl movement. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, for example, position her transgressive performance of femininity as emblematic of the contradictions brought together by third wave feminism.

> Glamorous and grunge, girl and boy, mothering and selfish, put together and taken apart . . . Love bridges the irreconcilability of individuality and femininity within dominant culture, combining the cultural critique of an earlier generation of feminists with the backlash against it by the next generation of women. (Introduction 5)

In this respect, Love's performance of 'ironic femininity' is highlighted as decentring dominant configurations of both patriarchal femininity (across the Madonna/whore binary) and feminist identity (across the victim/power dichotomy).

Insofar as this playful reconfiguration of the signifiers of 'femininity' and 'girlhood' destabilises traditional categories of gender, it is resonant with Judith Butler's conceptualisation of the performativity of gender – a theorisation that has held sway in contemporary feminist theory (albeit contentiously) in the period concurrent with the emergence of girl culture and girl power. 'The effect of gender,' Butler proposes, 'is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which

bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self' (179). Nevertheless, the parodic reiteration of these acts can destabilise notions of normative gender by exposing 'the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction' (179). Drag in particular, Butler argues, is exemplary of gender as performance by playing 'upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed' to implicitly reveal that 'the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin' (175). In its parodic recontextualisation of girlhood and playful severing of signifier and signified, Riot Grrrl similarly points up the possibilities of resignification; it foregrounds a possible analysis *and* disruption of both normative (patriarchal) constructions of gender, and 'a stable subject of feminism, understood as a seamless category of women' (Butler 7). Still if, as Kate Soper suggests, 'politics is essentially a group affair' (234–235), then Butler's poststructuralist critique of gendered subjectivity is at odds with Riot Grrrl's claims for a politics of agency and empowerment that is rooted in a notion of a collective 'girl' identity. The contention here, however, is that while Riot Grrrl proffers a performative recontextualisation of girlhood which reveals the inauthenticity of normative gender roles, it is unwilling to surrender a conception of women – or, specifically, *girls* and *young women* – as social subjects and agents. By yoking together thrift-store dresses with heavy combat boots, luminescent red lipstick with Hello Kitty hairclips and backpacks, and emblazoning the words 'slut' and 'whore' across their bodies, the members of Riot Grrrl deploy performative strategies that rely less on a dissonance between anatomical sex and gender identity (as in the instance of drag) than on a tension between opposing discourses of gender *within* female-embodied sexed identity – in particular the Madonna/whore and girl/woman binaries.

Kearney goes further in her claim that Riot Grrrl represents a reconfiguration of second wave identity politics.

> Reaffirming adolescent girlhood as a radically marginal and therefore powerful position from which to act, riot grrrls foreground distinctions between girls and women that are effaced in the blanket universalist notions of "females," "femininity," and "feminism." But instead of bonding as "girls," these female youth have appropriated the word "girl" from its dominant connotations and reformulated that social category by creating a new identity that better represents their revolutionary spirit. (156)

Drawing on Linda Alcoff's 'politics of positionality,' Kearney proposes that Riot Grrrl's reconfiguration of identity politics posits a notion of group identity created through the group members' 'similar external relations to the dynamic social processes of history, economics, and politics' (169). Indeed, insofar as Riot Grrrl both contests normative constructions of gender and

locates – and recuperates – a notion of 'girl identity' as lived experience, it demonstrates Alcoff's assertion that 'the position women find themselves in can be actively utilized (rather than transcended) as a location for the construction of meaning' (452). Locating the underground music community as a third wave reconfiguration of second wave consciousness-raising groups, Melissa Klein similarly highlights the ways in which Riot Grrrl reformulates (rather than rejects) the politics and praxis of second wave feminism – even if it applies them 'to third wave forms' (215).[7] Likewise, the proliferation of Riot Grrrl zines highlights the importance of communication and community as sites of (self-)representational empowerment – by both 'subvert[ing] standard patriarchal mainstream media . . . and [giving] girls a safe place to say what they feel and believe' (Rosenberg and Garofalo 811).[8] Crucially, then, Riot Grrrl's emphasis on style can be understood as part of a politics of *identification* that is vital to both individual and collective empowerment.

But is this formulation of girl power establishing another hegemonic girlhood? In spite of its aims to create 'a heterogeneous community of adolescent girls which crosses local, regional, and even national boundaries' (Kearney 154), Riot Grrrl has been positioned as a largely white, middle-class movement.[9] In her analysis of Gwen Stefani's deployment of 'girliness,' Gayle Wald points towards the ways in which the strategy of (re)appropriating girlhood 'signifies ambiguously' (588) in that it effaces 'critical questions of national, cultural, and racial appropriation . . . under the sign of transgressive gender performance' (590).[10] One of the dangerous paradoxes of Riot Grrrl, then, is that while its challenge to universalist notions of 'feminism' and 'women' reiterates the 'critiques of the white women's movement initiated by women of color, as well as from the many instances of coalition work undertaken by US Thrid World feminists' (Heywood and Drake, Introduction 8), by constructing another hegemonic narrative of girlhood it risks repeating the very same exclusions for which second wave feminism has been condemned.

Girlie girls: (re)fashioning feminism

The Girlies, identified with the writers of zines such as *BUST* and *Bitch*, have similarly located 'girl power' as a site of feminist agency and resistance. In their glossary to *Manifesta*, Baumgardner and Richards offer the following definition:

> Girlies are adult women, usually in their mid-twenties to late thirties, whose feminist principles are based on a reclaiming of girl culture (or feminine accoutrements that were tossed out with sexism during the Second Wave), be it Barbie, housekeeping, or girl talk. (400)

For example, while Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller, the editors of *BUST*, announce the arrival of 'The New Girl Order' (see epigraph) the zine *Bitch*

(subtitled *Feminist Responses to Popular Culture*) claims that '[t]he much-touted "girl power" and "girl culture" have the potential to counteract the now-documented plunge in girls' self-esteem during their pubescent years... *Bitch* is about formulating replies to the sexism that we see every day' ('So What are We Doing Here' par. 1). The replies to this quotidian sexism take the form of both celebration and critique – with interrogations of Martha Stewart and Barbie alongside articles on breasts and hair removal. According to Baumgardner and Richards, these zines offer 'new avenues into feminism for women who might not have found their way to a NOW meeting' (150). Girlie culture thus positions itself as a meeting place for a generation of young women who self-identify as feminist, but do not necessarily relate to existing (second wave) feminist institutions.

By reappropriating the 'accoutrements' of girlhood as *adult* women, Girlie presents another model of contradiction and conflict that destabilises traditional categories of gender and generation. In particular, it responds to the friction between (second wave) feminism and popular culture by creating a space 'that makes being an adult woman who calls herself a feminist seem thrilling, sexy, and creative' (Baumgardner and Richards xx). While it is tempting to quickly dismiss this shift as a simplistic symptom of the apolitical 'individualism' of the Spice Girls-style girl power described by Katherine Viner – '[s]uddenly feminism is all about how the individual feels right here, right now, rather than the bigger picture' (22) – it can be better understood as crucial to third wave feminists' reconfigurations of the politics of subjectivity. For, like Riot Grrrl, Girlie celebrates the 'accoutrements' of traditional 'femininity' not only to abjure patriarchal definitions of femininity, but to challenge the 'inflexibility' of second wave identity politics. As Rebecca Walker puts it:

> For us the lines between Us and Them are often blurred, and as a result we find ourselves seeking to create identities that accommodate ambiguity and our multiple positionalities: including more than excluding, exploring more than defining, searching more than arriving. (xxxiii)

Girlie thus presents a challenge to both 'the "feminine mystique" so comprehensively analysed by earlier feminist writers such as Betty Friedan, as well as the equally constraining "feminist mystique" of sexual difference' (Wilkinson 39). For Girlie girls, 'femininity' is not opposed to feminism, but is positioned as central to a politics of agency, confidence and resistance.

Nevertheless, the extent to which this celebration of 'girliness' really challenges dominant discursive structures remains unclear. 'With Girlie, there is danger that Spice Girls Pencil Set Syndrome will settle in: girls buy products created by male-owned companies that capture the slogan of feminism, without the power' (Baumgardner and Richards 161). The dangers of colonisation and recirculation are perhaps best exemplified by *The Girlie Show* (launched on Channel 4 in the UK in 1996) and the Spice Girls – two

phenomena which highlight the dangerous slippage between feminist agency and patriarchal recuperation. Created by David Stevenson and fronted by (arch-ladette) Sara Cox, Clare Gorham and Rachel Williams, *The Girlie Show* represented the ascendance of 'babe feminism' – of 'women dressing like bimbos, yet claiming male privileges and attitudes' (Gamble 43).[11] Meanwhile, the positioning of the individual members of the Spice Girls into five clearly delineated – and marketable – categories of femininity (Baby, Scary, Posh, Sporty and Ginger) demonstrates the extent to which this 'brand' of girl power represents the commodification and *containment* of feminism – the triumph of 'image power' over 'political power' (Hopkins 18). The alacrity with which the media has embraced 'girl power' and its icons indicates the precarious boundary between the '(re)fashioning' of feminism proposed by the third wave Girlies and the 'fashionable' (post)feminism propounded by the Spice Girls and *The Girlie Show*. Girlie highlights the extent to which the politics of subjectivity requires an understanding of the agency within self-representation as well as the appropriation of that agency.[12]

It is no surprise, then, that the 'fashion statements' of this lipgloss-coated form of 'girlie' feminism have been received with suspicion by second wave feminists. For example, while Debbie Stoller positions the Ur-girl, Madonna, as 'a poster girl for postmodern fashion' ('Feminists Fatale' 44), Margaret Marshment asks whether she 'offers[s] a mockery of conventional femininity, or just another way to be fashionable and "sexy"?' (147) Moreover, while Riot Grrrl presents a politics of identification and activism evidenced by self-defence and skill-sharing workshops, the extent to which Girlie's critique of dominant social forms translates into action at an institutional level has not been fully articulated. Can the meditations on blow jobs and mini-backpacks included in *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order* really comprise part of the 'foundation of the personal ethics upon which a political women's movement will be built'? (Baumgardner and Richards 20) By focusing its critique on cultural manifestations of dominant social forms rather than the institutions and economic structures which maintain them, Girlie risks reinforcing a binary between culture and politics that privileges individual over collective empowerment. There is a radical difference between embracing lipgloss to revalorise traditional paradigms of 'femininity' and lobbying for changes in legislation and public policy. As Baumgardner and Richards put it, Girlies need to 'know the difference between saying we want equal pay and knowing how to go about getting it' (162). The problem with Girlie is that, unlike Riot Grrrl, too often the lipgloss, high heels, Barbies and vibrators are more visible than a body of politics – rendering it a ready site for postfeminist colonisation.

Bad girls and rebellious daughters

'[T]here have always been, and will always be, differing versions of what feminism is about, with the "new" or latest trajectories invariably keen to

mark their distance from the "old"' (Segal 205). The extent to which Riot Grrrl and Girlie have positioned themselves – and been positioned – in an antagonistic relationship with second wave feminism bears out Lynne Segal's suggestion that intergenerational conflict has been embedded in accounts of feminist histories and, crucially, the wave paradigm. In her critique of gender as performance, Nicole Ward Jouve proposes that without 'male and female, masculine and feminine – there would be nothing: no generation (the root is the same for gender). No meaning' (10). It is one of the paradoxes of girl culture, then, that while it refuses to surrender a prediscursive structure for girls' and young women's subjectivity, it positions itself in an antagonistic relation to generation. In this light, third wave configurations of girl culture can usefully be understood as dramatising one of the central contradictions confronting young feminists – that is, how to reconcile 'the discursive destabilization of the humanist notion of "a" feminist self and the historic mobilization of a politically engaged feminist "we"' (Siegel 61). It is this tension, this blending of (third wave) poststructuralist strategies with (second wave) identity politics, that provides a space for a reconsideration of the political viability of configurations of 'ironic femininity' as allowing for a notion of feminist agency. Nevertheless, the domineering mother and the rebellious daughter are destructive caricatures. The danger in girl culture – and in the wave paradigm more generally – is that it reiterates the trope of mother–daughter conflict. Reinforcing this intergenerational schism – and ghettoising feminist histories – opens up a space for patriarchal recuperation as girl power emerges as the site of that dangerous and deceptive slippage between third wave feminism and postfeminism.

Notes

1. This media-defined notion of postfeminism should be distinguished from academic feminism's deployment of the term in relation to postmodernist and poststructuralist theoretical developments. In the latter, it is understood 'as an expression of a stage in the constant evolutionary movement of feminism . . . encompassing the intersection of feminism with a number of other anti-foundationalist movements including postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism' (Brooks 1).
2. Underpinned by a differentiation between 'victim feminism' and 'power feminism,' the configuration of postfeminism propounded by these writers suggests that 'the gains forged by previous generations of women have so completely pervaded all tiers of our social existence that those still "harping" about women's victim status are embarrassingly out of touch' (Siegel 75). See in particular Christina Hoff Sommers (55).
3. This resonates with Simone de Beauvoir's understanding of the contradiction and instability of female identity which comes 'from not regarding woman positively, such as she seems to be, but negatively, such as she appears to man. . . . And her ambiguity is just that of the concept of the Other: it is that of the human situation in so far as it is defined in its relation to the Other. . . . And here lies the reason why woman incarnates no stable concept' (175).

4. As Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake put it: 'Our hybrid engagement with culture and/as politics sometimes looks problematic to second wave activists, who might accuse us of exchanging engagement with institutional and economic inequities for a self-referential politics that overestimates the power of critiquing, reworking and producing pop- and subcultural images and narratives' ('We Learn America' 52).
5. For more on the history of Riot Grrrl see Melissa Klein (213–217).
6. Debbie Stoller, for example, argues that (second wave) feminism 'was prepared to celebrate everything about womanhood – everything but the girl' (Stoller, 'Growing Up Girl' 184) while, with yet more sinister implications, Baumgardner and Richards question whether second wave feminism's involvement with the Girl's Movement has become 'an excuse to overlook the young women who are making strides right beside them' (186).
7. For instance, while the girl-only moshpit provides a 'safe-space' for young women, Riot Grrrl music 'often functions as a form of CR' (Klein 215). See also Jennifer L. Pozner's analysis of Ani DiFranco's lyrics (par. 9–11).
8. For more on Riot Grrrl zines see Klein (217–218).
9. 'Although there has been much discussion recently of race as an issue within Riot Grrrl and society in general, no one seems to have conceived any viable solution to the racial homogeneity of Riot Grrrl' (Rosenberg and Garofalo 811).
10. In particular, Wald highlights the ways in which Japanese all-female bands Shonen Knife and Cibo Matto challenge stereotypes of Asian femininity in their engagement with 'the cultural and racial specificity of hegemonic girlhood' (593).
11. The programme included features on faking orgasms, 'Reader's Husbands' and 'Toilet Talk.' See Greer (*The Whole Woman* 408) and Imelda Whelehan (50–51).
12. For more on this see Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford.

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12

(Un)fashionable Feminists: The Media and *Ally McBeal*

Kristyn Gorton

Popular representations of feminism in the media sell: whether in music, film or television, images of independent women appeal to a wide audience.[1] One has to only look at recent chart hits such as Destiny's Child's 'Independent Woman' (2000), or Kelly Clarkson's 'Miss Independence' (2003), films such as *Charlie's Angels* (2000) or *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001), or popular fictions such as *Bridget Jones's Diary* (1996) to appreciate that women's 'liberation' is a marketable commodity. Throughout these representations it is implied that women have achieved the goals of second wave feminism – financial autonomy, a successful career, sexual freedom – and, therefore, that the demands associated with the movement of the 1970s have been superseded. Indeed, this image is so widely acknowledged that the cover of the 29 June 1998 issue of *Time* magazine declared feminism to be dead. One rhetorical mechanism through which the media have articulated this distorted perspective is by the construction of a 'then' and 'now': two distinct feminisms, one representing women 'today,' and the other, either labelled 'second wave' or 'seventies' feminism, depicting feminisms of the past. These two interpretations of feminism are set against each other, with an implication that women have either moved to a less politicised and less effective feminism; or, more generally, that there is no more need for feminism.

At the heart of these new representations of women is the claim that contemporary feminist politics, in contrast to the intellectual debates of the 1970s, have been weakened by an increasing attention to fashion and style. Thus, the *Time* article tells its readers: 'In the 70s, feminism produced a pop culture that was intellectually provocative. Today it's a whole lot of stylish fluff' (Bellafante 56). Statements such as this imply that feminism has evolved into a movement concerned with style over substance: the personal apparently has triumphed over the political. Whatever the veracity of this representation of modern feminism, it does aid in the construction of women as consumers, for whom feminism is reduced from a political movement to a certain style that can be bought. However, this representation rests upon an artificial divide between the contemporary feminist movement and its

predecessor: it thus elides a whole series of continuities in both the experiences of women over the last three decades, and the feminist responses to those experiences. Interestingly, this elision also tends to increase the consuming audience, as older feminists are constructed as secondary consumers of the new model.

If we are to show the viability and relevance of feminism to women today, we must address the issues highlighted by third wave feminists, including negotiating the legacy of second wave feminism, critiquing the impact of identity politics and understanding the role the media plays in feminism. For example, in *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards suggest that we adopt a 'pro-woman line' in our critique of the media's influence on feminism (112). Crucially, this strategy distinguishes itself from second wave feminist projects in that it 'presumes' a level of feminism in order to critique issues such as pleasure and enjoyment as well as power and equality (Baumgardner and Richards 118–119). This chapter will examine how Ally McBeal – the show, the character and the actress who portrays her – not only offers a way of understanding how the media uses representations for its own agenda but also demonstrates the enjoyment female viewers take in consuming these representations. This enjoyment is not to be dismissed, as it carries its own political resonance. The pleasures women take in these representations, and the representations themselves, suggest a continuing dialogue with earlier feminist concerns, which cannot be so easily dismissed as it is in *Time*'s simplified account of feminism 'today.'

Ally McBeal, the show and the character, has been used by those in the media and the academy alike to represent a break with earlier second wave feminisms. Simon Heffer, for example, writes in the *Daily Mail*: 'After years of TV programmes that have sought to pretend to the contrary, Ally McBeal herself repudiates the main mantra of feminism: that a high-achieving young woman has no need of a man' (13). Heffer's comment echoes the show's general premise: that a successful career woman in her late twenties/early thirties cannot be fully satisfied without a man. Amanda Rees similarly argues that

> [l]ack of a partner for the Ally McBeals of this world doesn't just imply the absence of masculine attention, but the presence of very real emotional turmoil and self-doubt; having a husband or a boyfriend, it would seem, is the real mark of success. (365)

Likewise the show's writer-producer David E. Kelley, well known for other series including *LA Law* and *Picket Fences*, proposes that Ally McBeal is 'not a hard, strident feminist out of the 60s and 70s. She's all for women's rights, but she doesn't want to lead the change at her own emotional expense' (qtd. in Bellafante 58). As Kelley suggests, Ally McBeal is characterised as

a woman who wants the power to make choices in her life, but does not want to have to fight for them herself – or for them to impinge on her personal expression. That is, she wants the benefits of feminism without running the risk of being associated with the criticisms of feminism. Kelley thus positions Ally McBeal as a postfeminist, and this is largely how she has been received in the media. She has come to represent a women who has achieved some of the goals of second wave feminism, in that she is financially independent, successful in her career, and unafraid to demand sexual satisfaction. Yet, as Rees points out, she is in 'emotional turmoil' over her status as a single woman. Although most of the episodes in *Ally McBeal* take place in a law firm, love and marriage are always foregrounded. Ally is seen as a woman who puts her trust in the possibility of 'true love' – privileging this ideal over any other. On the one hand, this characterisation reiterates the cultural assumption that women will place sensibility over sense, even in the work-place. On the other hand, Ally's faith in love distinguishes her from her colleagues and is often the reason for her success in court. Either way, the personal is inexplicitly linked with the political – personal in the sense that things happen to Ally (she is constantly in the throes of a new love affair, or a new case or a debate about love and marriage). These events become political not only on the show itself but also in the way the show and its main character are portrayed in the media.

I would suggest that this media-defined notion of postfeminism tries to define 'today's' woman in order to legitimate its own history and its shift away from feminism.[2] Instead of wanting to move beyond representations of woman, postfeminism wants to move beyond representations of feminism that 'outdate' its own image. For example, the *Time* cover noted above depicts 'Ally McBeal' as the reason why feminism may no longer be a viable political movement. The cover has three faces in black and white, Susan B. Anthony, Betty Friedan and Gloria Steinem; and one in colour, Calista Flockhart, identified not by her own name, but by the character she portrays on television: Ally McBeal. Beneath Flockhart's photograph is the question: 'Is Feminism Dead?' The *Time* cover, amongst other readings, demonstrates the media's ability to construct icons in a political movement that has struggled against such representation. The media thus reduces the complexities of the feminist movement into a marketable success or disaster story, one that interferes directly with the practice of feminist politics: the faces that line the cover are there to question feminism as a relevant movement. The *Time* cover suggests a linear progression which implies that feminism has moved from a 'we' solidarity of the 1960s and 1970s to a 'me'-based feminism in the twenty-first century. The staring faces also appear as reminders of the media's role in turning feminism into a kind of fashion-show politics. There can be no doubt that one of the intentions or underlying readings of the cover is that feminism has changed its style over the years. The shift from the severe matron-like appearance of Susan B. Anthony to the glossy, lip-sticked

face of Ally McBeal reinforces the postfeminist argument that women today can be feminist *and* attractive to men. While the attention to fashion in shows such as *Ally McBeal* presents interesting ways to talk about feminism, women's sexuality and women's relationships, what does it mean in terms of feminist theory?

Although all of the faces and names in black and white correspond directly, the face at the end of the feminist spectrum is incorrectly identified as 'Ally McBeal.' Indeed, most viewers who recognise the face would identify her with this name. However, Ally McBeal is the name of a television character, and of the show itself, not of the actress, Calista Flockhart. Calista's 'real' identity has been exchanged for a constructed one. In this example, then, 'today's' feminist is a woman who is identified by the character she represents, not by her own name. Her agency is exchanged for the character she portrays. The metonymic shift may appear trivial but, in a political movement that stresses agency, it is an important one. Notably, it suggests the breakdown of the relationship between the personal and the political. Calista Flockhart does not share the same political agency that her 'foremothers' on the cover possess. She is relegated to the fictionalised version of herself, and deprived of a voice of her own. This identity-swapping also highlights the importance of 'celebrity' within feminism.[3] From the Spice Girls to Ally McBeal, there is an elision between popular culture representations of feminism and feminism itself. Nevertheless, despite *Time*'s then/now distinction, the celebritisation of feminism is far from new: the media played a similar role in constructing 'role models' for feminism in the 1970s. Indeed, Germaine Greer has recently argued that

> the media identified "newsworthy" candidates for leadership and massaged their images briefly before setting up cat-fights between them. I was dubbed the "High Priestess of Women's Liberation," Gloria Steinem was "The New Woman," and Betty Friedan was "The Mother Superior." (228)

In the 1970s, as much as today, feminism was sold to women as a simplified product ready for consumption.

Ally's contemporary position as a female 'role model' is directly addressed in the episode 'Love Unlimited.' While representing a woman whose husband wants to annul their nine-year marriage on the basis of his 'sex addiction' problem, Ally is asked to be the 1999 role model for young professional women by Lara Dipson, Executive Vice President of *Pleasure* magazine. Ally's refusal to enter into such a contract results in a battle over identity, feminism and fashion. Lara tells Ally that:

> We are going to have to make a few adjustments in the way you dress. And I'd really like to fatten you up a little bit. We don't want young girls glamorising that "thin" thing. Now my sources tell me that you feel an

> emotional void without a man. You're really going to have to lose that if women are going to look up to you. (Kelley)

Dipson's character, dressed in a 'power suit' (complete with shoulder pads), clearly represents a popular image of a 1980s and 1990s feminist while Ally, dressed in a short mini skirt, is positioned as a postfeminist. The scene thus points up an interesting analysis of the nature of postfeminism, the relationship between (post)feminists, and the demands they *imagine* coming from second wave feminism. In this case, Ally growls at Lara and bites off her nose (to spite her face). The scene then switches and we, as viewers, realise that this fantastical meeting is Ally's dream. In constructing this dialogue as part of Ally's dream – or nightmare – there is a suggestion that women unconsciously deal with the effects feminism has in their lives. Indeed, there is an implication that women have inherited the legacy of second wave feminism from their mothers, but have other needs and wants which cannot be satisfied within this paradigm.

As Ally tells John, the dream represents her conflicting desires for someone she can 'be totally weak with. Somebody who will hold me and make me feel *held*' (Kelley; emphasis in original). She pauses and emphasises the 'held.' She adds: 'I think I crave some kind of dependency and that makes me feel like a failure as a woman. You know I had a dream that they put my face on the cover of *Time* magazine as the "Face of Feminism"?' (Kelley) Kelley not only takes on the media's reaction to his character, but also engages with some of the anxieties he perceives within feminism: that is, a desire to be successful in terms of a career and a desire to be dependent upon a man. While most feminists would argue that these two desires are not incompatible, they would appreciate that this is a common assumption made about feminism – as common and as falsely stereotypical as dungarees and bra-burning. The underlying implication in the fantastical meeting between Lara and Ally, then, is that second wave feminism demands that women subscribe to their ideals, style and politics. Lara tells Ally that she needs to change the way she dresses and to gain some weight – otherwise young girls might glamourise the 'thin thing' – while Ally defiantly states that she does not want to be seen as a role model.

As Ally suggests in the analysis of her dream, there is a crisis between the desire for dependency and the desire to be an independent woman. In particular, there is confusion over what it means to be a feminist as well as what it means to be a successful woman. This anxiety has prompted a renewed interest in feminism: from the media, which recognises the commercial marketability of feminism, from second wave feminists such as Gloria Steinem and Kate Millett,[4] and from a younger generation of feminists such as Natasha Walter, Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards.[5] For instance, in the foreword to Rebecca Walker's collection, *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Gloria Steinem begins her

critique of feminism 'today' by returning to a gathering from the 1970s. In setting up the scene, she describes the women largely in terms of what they are wearing. She writes: 'Standing near a table full of food, there is a white writer with long hair and a short skirt, and an energetic, thirtyish black woman in a maid's uniform complete with frilly apron.' Her description of the group of women finishes with the question: 'who is the feminist?' and, in an attempt to subvert her readers' expectations, she answers: 'all of them' (xiii–xiv). Steinem moves on to explain that this meeting was held in order to raise awareness about household workers' rights. The woman in the short skirt was Steinem, and the woman in the maid's uniform was Carolyn Reed, who organised the event in order to draw the party's attention to the diversity of household workers and to demonstrate the 'tyranny of expectation' (xiv). Steinem effectively uses this example to demonstrate how a 'feminist' has been, and continues to be, understood largely by her appearance, not by her politics. This 'room-sized' metaphor is also deployed to remind us of the diversity in feminism – as well as the *necessity* for the diversity. Feminists do not all look alike, nor should they. However, as Steinem argues, through the media's influence, images of feminism are being sold as *the* image, rather than as one image amongst many. Her analysis prompts us to question whether an emphasis on fashion or style leads to a de-politicisation of feminism; or has it changed the way in which feminism is political?

To this end, Natasha Walter's *The New Feminism* examines the mechanisms through which feminism can be reclaimed for women today. Like Steinem, Walter opens her study by taking notice of the women around her: 'You see women driving sleek cars to work through urban traffic; you see women with dreadlocks arguing for the environment... They are wearing a minidress one day and jeans and boots the next' (1–2). For Walter, these diverse images of women are evidence that a certain kind of feminism is no longer needed, and that a 'new' feminism is necessary. The ability to wear a minidress one day and jeans and boots the next signifies for Walter an ability to wear what we like and a need to redress issues within feminism. Part of Walter's 'new' feminism, which could be called postfeminism, is to separate the personal and the political – thus dismantling one of the central foundations of second wave feminism. Walter argues that this separation will give 'the social and political demands of feminism more edge' and 'free up the personal realm' (5–6). She continues to argue that '[f]eminism has over-determined our private lives and interpreted too many aspects of our cultural life as evidence of a simplistic battle, patriarchy versus women' (6). This assessment of second wave feminism thus echoes Kelley's characterisation of Lara Dipson. Both Walter's interpretation and Kelley's dramatisation foreground the sense in which postfeminists perceive second wave feminism as a 'tyranny of expectation' rather than as a political foundation. On the one hand, there is a similarity between Steinem's and Walter's arguments: they both locate appearance and diversity as decisive issues in feminist politics, and

recognise the way that fashion has been an issue within feminism *and* critiques of feminism. Yet, on the other hand, Steinem continues to recognise the necessary relationship between the personal and the political in her acknowledgement that '[t]he greatest gift we can give one another is the power to make a choice. The power to choose is even more important than the choices we make' (xxvi). The power to choose is distinctly political – as pro-choice campaigns in the United States attest to. Whether we wear minidresses or jeans and boots is inconsequential – what is important is the freedom to make that decision.

What the character of Ally McBeal shares with writers such as Walter, then, is an ambivalence about what it means to be a feminist – and this ambivalence sells. In contrast to the one-dimensional Lara Dipson, who Kelley clearly positions as a kind of militant second wave feminist, Ally is struggling with her desires to be independent and to be 'held.' Whereas Dipson clearly knows what she wants and who she is, Ally does not. Is she a postfeminist, or a third wave feminist? Is she a feminist at all? These questions are deliberately left unanswered. We, as viewers, are left to wonder just what side of the fence Ally is on. We are also left wondering what this ambivalence offers us. Perhaps one of the most important aspects of this anxiety is that it has re-engaged debates and discussions about the *need* for feminism. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, for example, argue that their collection, *Third Wave Agenda*,

> makes things "messier" by *embracing* second wave critique as a central definitional thread while emphasising ways that desires and pleasures subject to critique can be used to rethink and enliven activist work. We see the emphasis on contradiction as continuous with aspects of second wave feminism. (7; emphasis in original)

Heywood and Drake thus make it possible for us to conceive of a third wave of feminism that can critically negotiate the legacy of second wave feminism as well as the anxieties and uncertainties expressed in postfeminism. Through an examination of programmes such as *Ally McBeal* we are able to tease out the conflicts and 'messiness' that inform part of the 'third wave agenda.'

This re-engagement also allows us, as feminists, to consider the enjoyment that female viewers experience from popular representations of feminism. It is of no coincidence that the fictional Lara Dipson is from *Pleasure* magazine, as pleasure is a contentious issue in the criticism of soap operas such as *Ally McBeal*. Should women enjoy a character like Ally McBeal with all her snivelling, whining and man problems? Or maybe we should ask *why* women enjoy a character like Ally McBeal? Much of feminist television criticism has focused on how these fictionalised images of women are destructive and counter-productive to feminist issues. More recently, however, criticism has

recognised not only the pleasure and enjoyment some women experience whilst watching shows such as *Ally McBeal* but also the problems inherent in the condescending nature of criticism that implies that women are neither able to decipher nor critically engage with the images they see. In the example of the scene between Ally and Lara, some female viewers may feel both repulsion for Ally's 'need to be held' and a deep understanding of that need. In other words, programmes such as *Ally McBeal* become pleasurable insofar as they offer play with some of the conflicting inheritances of feminism: desire for both independence and companionship. Articles in the media and in the academy suggest that Ally represents a woman that other women identify with. Laura Morice, for instance, writes: 'Let's leave the debate over Ally's impact on the women's movement to the critics and allow ourselves a rare guilty: watching a woman we can relate to – flaws and all' (par. 7); while Judith Schroeter argues that Ally 'personifies typical conflicts that arise from an increasingly individualised society – thus, conflicts we all face in our daily lives. . . . Ally McBeal can provide support and help us cope with them' (par. 4). These articles suggest not only that women look for some escape or a 'rare guilty' from the active experience of being a woman, but also that they find a kind of escape in characters such as Ally McBeal. Still, why do female viewers choose a character like Ally McBeal to identify with or as a means of escape?

Critics such as Tania Modleski and Ien Ang theorise feminist ways of reading the soap opera from seeing it as a postmodern narrative to offering new versions of the *femme fatale*. In her work on 'melodramatic identifications' (85) Ang argues that as critics we must remember that characters like Ally McBeal are fictional, and for that reason are designed to engage the viewer at the level of fantasy, rather than reality. Ang suggests that these characters 'do not function as role models but are symbolic realisations of feminine subject positions with which viewers can identify *in fantasy*' (92; emphasis in original). The concept of fantasy is central to Ang's argument, and she conceptualises it within a psychoanalytic framework; that is, she does not understand fantasy as an illusion, but as a version of reality – as a fundamental aspect of human existence. She also operates from within poststructural theories on subjectivity, arguing that 'being a woman implies a never-ending *process* of becoming a feminine subject – no one subject position can ever cover satisfactorily all the problems and desires an individual woman encounters' (94; emphasis in original). Extending this logic to *Ally McBeal*, it can be argued that Ally, as a character, allows women to explore their feelings of anxiety about their position within a male-dominated workplace, about being thirty-something and about marriage and having children. Perhaps what *Ally McBeal* offers some female viewers is an opportunity to escape from what Steinem identifies as the 'tyranny of expectation.' Whether it comes from imagined expectations, such as the ones Ally dreams Lara Dipson to have, or from broader cultural demands, a programme like *Ally McBeal*

offers a momentary escape and/or a chance to relate to the hopes and fears many women share.

Another reason why so many female viewers enjoy a programme such as *Ally McBeal* lies in the format and reception of the show. Modleski's influential *Loving with a Vengeance: Mass-produced Fantasies for Women* reconsiders the critical positioning of the soap opera as a 'feminine' form in order to undermine its value. Modleski understands the 'feminine' nature of the soap opera as positive, and even subversive, of dominant narrative forms. In particular she foregrounds how the soap opera's narrative, 'by placing ever more complex obstacles between desire and fulfilment, makes anticipation of an end an end in itself' (88). The structure of most episodes of *Ally McBeal* relies on this very notion of a constant deferral of desire, happiness and a definite ending: although most of the shows centre on Ally's desire to find 'Mr Right,' she never manages to find him. Indeed, the fact that Ally never finds 'Mr Right' in the first few seasons may also be why the show enjoyed so much success. In contrast, the fourth and fifth seasons see Ally settling down in a new house with a new man, Victor, and a child, Maddie; not exactly the traditional family but the more settled Ally's life gets, the more the ratings seem to fall. Perhaps as Ally settles down her viewers can no longer enjoy the play and ambiguity in her life.

Therefore, we might best understand the success of *Ally McBeal* and similar programmes as demonstrating the enjoyment viewers experience, not only in representations of femininity, but also in more general representations of the 'personal.' Some women enjoy Ally's fantasies, in part, because the demands of second wave feminism have *not* yet been met: women one-sidedly look to the personal because they are still disproportionately excluded from public power and influence. If apathy is the political response to this form of social exclusion, perhaps the atomised consumption of fantasy is its social consequence. Indeed, while *Ally McBeal*'s success has generally been read within the academy as a representation of the triumph of postfeminism, the contention here is that it demonstrates the continuing salience of the demands of second wave feminism to modern women. Thus, if we are to convincingly defend feminist theory's relevance to the modern world, we should not drop the demands of second wave feminism, but rather integrate these demands with the insights of third wave feminist discourse on pleasure and enjoyment, with a view to deepening its critical edge.

Notes

1. Thanks to Paul Blackledge and Jenny Wheeldon for their help with this chapter.
2. Ann Brooks argues in *Postfeminisms: Feminism, Cultural Theory and Cultural Forms* that there are two competing definitions of postfeminism in circulation: one propagated by the media; and the other, an intersection between feminism and poststructuralism (2–4).

3. For more on celebrity see Chris Rojek.
4. Kate Millett claims she is 'out of fashion in the new academic cottage industry of feminism' (G4).
5. In addition to television programmes such as *Ally McBeal* and *Sex and the City*, the phenomenon of Chicklit, exemplified by Helen Fielding's *Bridget Jones's Diary*, has sparked new discussions and debates regarding feminism, consumerism and female empowerment which coincide with the renewed interest in feminism reflected by titles such as Rebecca Walker's *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*; Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism*; Marcelle Karp and Debbie Stoller's *The BUST Guide to the New Girl Order*; and Cameron Tuttle's *The Bad Girl's Guide to Getting What You Want*.

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13

'Kicking Ass is Comfort Food': Buffy as Third Wave Feminist Icon

Patricia Pender

> *Buffy*: I love my friends. I'm very grateful for them. But that's the price of being a Slayer . . . I mean, I guess everyone's alone, but being a Slayer – that's a burden we can't share.
> *Faith*: And no one else can feel it. Thank god we're hot chicks with superpowers!
> *Buffy*: Takes the edge off.
> *Faith*: Comforting! (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, 'End of Days')
>
> I definitely think a woman kicking ass is extraordinarily sexy, always . . . If I wasn't compelled on a very base level by that archetype I wouldn't have created that character. I mean, yes, I have a feminist agenda, but it's not like I made a chart. (Joss Whedon qtd. in Udovitch, *Rolling Stone*)

What accounts for the extraordinary feminist appeal of the hit television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and how has its ex-cheerleading, demon-hunting heroine become the new poster girl for third wave feminist popular culture?[1] In this chapter I examine *Buffy* through the problematic of third wave feminism, situating the series as part of a larger cultural project that seeks to reconcile the political agenda of second wave feminism with the critique of white racial privilege articulated by women of colour and the theoretical insights afforded by poststructural analysis. I suggest that if one of the primary goals of third wave feminism is to question our inherited models of feminist agency and political efficacy, without acceding to the defeatism implicit in the notion of 'postfeminism,' then *Buffy* provides us with modes of oppositional praxis, of resistant femininity and, in its final season, of collective feminist activism that are unparalleled in mainstream television. At the same time, the series' emphasis on individual empowerment, its celebration of the exceptional woman, and its problematic politics of racial representation remain important concerns for feminist analysis. Focusing primarily on the final season of the series, I argue that season seven of *Buffy* offers a more

straightforward and decisive feminist message than the show has previously attempted, and that in doing so it paints a compelling picture of the promises and predicaments that attend third wave feminism as it negotiates both its second wave antecedents and its traditional patriarchal nemeses.

'Third wave feminism' functions in the following analysis as a political ideology currently under construction. Buffy makes a similar claim about her own self-development when (invoking one of the more bizarre forms of American comfort food) she refers to herself as unformed 'cookie dough' ('Chosen' 7022). Ednie Kaeh Garrison proposes that the name 'third wave feminism' may be 'more about desire than an already existing thing' (165), and Stephanie Gilmore has suggested that, ironically, the defining feature of third wave feminism 'may well be its inability to be categorized' (218). Transforming such indeterminacy into a political principle, Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier state that one of the aims of their recent anthology, *Catching a Wave: Reclaiming Feminism for the 21st Century*, is to 'render problematic any easy understanding of what the third wave is' (5). While there are arguably as many variants of third wave feminism as there are feminists to claim or reject that label, the characteristics I have chosen to focus on here are those that provide the most striking parallels to *Buffy*'s season seven: its continuation of the second wave fight against misogynist violence; its negotiation of the demands for individual and collective empowerment; its belated recognition and representation of cultural diversity; and its embrace of contradiction and paradox.

Combining elements of action, drama, comedy, romance, horror, and occasionally musical, *Buffy* sits uneasily within the taxonomies of television genre. Darker than *Dawson*, and infinitely funnier than *Felicity, Buffy* was explicitly conceived as a feminist reworking of horror films in which 'bubbleheaded blondes wandered into dark alleys and got murdered by some creature' (Whedon qtd. in Fudge par. 2). From its mid-season US premiere in 1997 to its primetime series finale in 2003, the chronicles of the Chosen One have generated, in the affectionate words of its creator and director Joss Whedon, a 'rabid, almost insane fan base' (Longworth 211). Subverting the conventional gender dynamics of horror, action, and sci-fi serials, as well as the best expectations of its producers, the series has followed the fortunes of the Slayer as she has struggled through the 'hell' that is high school, a freshman year at U.C. Sunnydale, and the ongoing challenge of balancing the demands of family, friends, and relationships, and work with her inescapable duty to fight all manner of evil. As the voiceover to the show's opening credits relates: 'In every generation there is a Chosen One. She and she alone will fight the demons, the vampires and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer.'

Television critics and feminist scholars alike have been quick to appreciate the implicit feminist message of the series as a whole. Buffy has been celebrated as a 'radical reimagining of what a girl (and a woman) can do and be' (Byers 173); as a 'prototypical girly feminist activist' (Karras par. 15); and as a 'Hard

Candy-coated feminist heroine for the girl-power era' (Fudge par. 17). Her ongoing battle with the forces of evil is seen as symbolic of several second wave feminist struggles: the challenge to balance personal and professional life (Bellafante, 'Bewitching' 83), the fight against sexual violence (Marinucci 69), and the 'justified feminist anger' young women experience in the face of patriarchal prohibitions and constraints (Helford 24). More metacritically, the series has been analysed in terms of its 'wayward' reconfiguration of the mind/body dualism (Playden 143), and its refusal of the 'inexorable logic' of binary oppositions (Pender 43). Despite the fact that the series itself has ended, the furore of attention it continues to generate both within and outside the academy assures *Buffy* an active afterlife. The last two years alone have seen an online journal, three one-day conferences, and four anthologies devoted to the burgeoning field of 'Buffy Studies' with at least another six publications, and three further conferences in the academic pipeline.[2]

But what propels such feminist fandom? What inspires this excess of affect? Rachel Fudge addresses this question directly when she writes that the impulse that propels Buffy out on patrols, 'night after night, forgoing any semblance of "normal" teenage life,' is identical to the one 'that compels us third-wavers to spend endless hours discussing the feminist potentials and pitfalls of primetime television' (par. 8). Fudge claims that Buffy 'has the sort of conscience that appeals to the daughters of feminism's second wave,' women for whom 'a certain awareness of gender and power is ingrained and inextricably linked to our sense of identity and self-esteem. (par. 8). In her examination of Buffy as the third wave's 'final girl,' Irene Karras argues that Buffy's appeal lies in her intentional 'slaying [of] stereotypes about what women can and cannot do' (par. 15). Karras applauds the show's combination of sexuality and what she calls 'real efforts to make the world a better and safer place for both men and women' (par. 15). Blending an exhilarating athleticism with a compulsion to activism, Buffy's spectacular agency – her (literally) fantastic facility for kicking ass – has come to function as feminist comfort food.

When fellow Slayer Faith consoles Buffy with the thought '[t]hank god we're hot chicks with superpowers' (first epigraph), the gesture is offered as sympathy and support; it helps to 'take the edge off' the burden they 'can't share.' In this exchange, the Slayer's burden is assuaged in part by what Whedon refers to as her 'sexiness' (second epigraph); in part by the very exceptional qualities or superpowers that isolate her to begin with; and perhaps ultimately by the sharing of confidences and, by extension, of responsibilities. The 'comfort' offered here is a complex conglomerate, and one that rewards further scrutiny. The title of this chapter, 'kicking ass is comfort food,' comes from the episode 'The Prom' (3020), which occurs immediately prior to season three's apocalyptic Ascension. Buffy has just been told by her lover, Angel, that – in the event that they survive the imminent end-of-the-world – he will be abandoning their relationship and leaving town.

To complicate matters, a jilted senior denied a prom date has secretly been training hellhounds to attack partygoers wearing formal attire. Buffy's mentor Giles attempts to console his devastated charge with the conventional cure for a broken heart:

> *Giles*: Buffy, I'm sorry. I understand that this sort of thing requires ice cream of some sort.
> *Buffy*: Ice cream will come. First I want to take out psycho-boy.
> *Giles*: Are you sure?
> *Buffy*: Great thing about being a Slayer – kicking ass is comfort food. ('The Prom')

Kicking ass becomes comfort food for Buffy when her supernatural abilities provide her with an extraordinary outlet for more conventional frustrations. Action – in this case a cathartically violent form of action – serves up a supernatural solace for a range of quotidian, human afflictions.

Kicking ass offers Buffy psychological and physical relief: it allows her to simultaneously redress straightforward social evils and to palliate more personal sorts of demon. For the feminist viewer, the spectacle of Buffy kicking ass is similarly comforting; equally, exhilarating and empowering, Buffy provides the compound pleasures of both the hot chick and her superpowers. Recent feminist critiques of the heteronormative assumptions and moral policing that underlie second wave theories of visual pleasure ensure that as feminist viewers, we too can find the spectacle of 'a woman kicking ass… extraordinarily sexy' (second epigraph).[3] At the same time, as Elyce Rae Helford has argued, Buffy can stand metaphorically for young women everywhere who are angered by having 'their lives directed by circumstances or individuals beyond their control' (24). In an era which can sometimes seem saturated with condemnations of feminism's increasing frivolity, Buffy's indomitable militancy – her unrelenting vigilance – can be consumed by the feminist spectator as primetime panacea. Buffy's predilection towards, and consummate abilities in, the art of kicking ass thus simultaneously soothe and sustain, and inspire and incite the compulsion to feminist activism.

While over the last seven years the series has addressed a staggering range of contemporary concerns – from the perils of low-paid, part-time employment to the erotic dynamics of addiction and recovery – it is significant that the final season of *Buffy* makes a decisive shift back to feminist basics. Season seven eschews to a certain extent the metaphorical slipperiness and pop-cultural play that is typical of its evocation of postmodern demons and instead presents a monster that is, quite literally, an enemy of women. The principal story arc pits an amorphous antagonist, The First Evil, against the Slayer and her 'army,' a group that has swelled to include in its ranks 'Potential' Slayers from around the globe. Staging the series' final showdown with a demon that is overtly misogynist and creating an original evil with

a clearly patriarchal platform, *Buffy*'s season seven raises the explicit feminist stakes of the series considerably.

Unable to take material form, The First Evil employs as its vessel and deputy a former preacher turned agent-of-evil called Caleb. Spouting hellfire and damnation with fundamentalist zeal Caleb is, of all of the show's myriad manifestations of evil, the most recognisable misogynist: 'There once was a woman. And she was foul, like all women are foul' ('Dirty Girls' 7018). Dubbed 'the Reverend-I-Hate-Women' by Xander ('Touched' 7020), Caleb is a monstrous but familiar representative of patriarchal oppression, propounding a dangerous form of sexism under the cover of pastoral care. 'I wouldn't do that if I were you sweet pea,' Caleb at one point warns Buffy; 'Mind your manners. I do believe I warned you once' ('Empty Places' 7019). At other times he calls her 'girly girl' ('End of Days' 7021), a 'little lady' ('Empty Places'), and, once (but only once), 'whore' ('Touched'). Buffy's response (after kicking him across the room) is to redirect the condescension and hypocrisy couched in his discourse of paternal concern: 'You know, you really should watch your language. Someone didn't know you, they might take you for a woman-hating jerk' ('Touched'). In comparison with the supernatural demons of previous episodes, Caleb's evil might seem unusually old-fashioned or even ridiculous, but successive encounters with the Slayer underscore the fact that his power is all the more insidious and virulent for that. Mobilising outmoded archetypes of women's weakness and susceptibility – 'Curiosity: woman's first sin. I offer her an apple. What can she do but take it?' ('Dirty Girls') – Caleb effectively sets a trap that threatens to wipe out the Slayer line. Within the context of the narrative, Caleb's sexist convictions – 'Following is what girls do best' ('Dirty Girls') – and, more importantly, their unconscious internalisation by the Slayer and her circle pose the principal threat to their sustained, organised, collective resistance.

In its exploration of the dynamics of collective activism, *Buffy*'s final season examines the charges of solipsism and individualism that have frequently been directed at contemporary popular feminism. 'Want to know what today's chic young feminist thinkers care about?' wrote Ginia Bellafante in her notorious 1998 article for *Time* magazine: 'Their bodies! Themselves!' ('Feminism' 54). One of the greatest challenges Buffy faces in season seven is negotiating conflicting demands of individual and collective empowerment. Trapped by the mythology, propounded by the Watcher's Council, that bestows the powers of the Slayer on 'one girl in all the world,' Buffy is faced with the formidable task of training Potential Slayers-in-waiting who will only be called into their own power in the event of her death. In the episode 'Potential' (7012) Buffy attempts to rally her troops for the battle ahead:

> The odds are against us. Time is against us. And some of us will die in this battle. Decide now that it's not going to be you. . . . Most people in this world have no idea why they're here or what they want to do. But you

> do. You have a mission. A reason for being here. You're not here by chance. You're here because you are the Chosen Ones.

This sense of vocation resonates strongly with feminist viewers who feel bound to the struggle for social justice. However, such heroism can still be a solitary rather than collective endeavour. On the eve of their final battle, after decimating her advance attack, Caleb makes fun of what he calls Buffy's 'One-Slayer-Brigade' and taunts her with the prospect of what we might think of as wasted Potential:

> None of those girlies will ever know real power unless you're dead. Now, you know the drill . . . 'Into every generation a Slayer is born. One girl in all the world. She alone has the strength and skill. . . . ' There's that word again. What you are, how you'll die: alone. ('Chosen' 7022)

Such references make it clear that loneliness and isolation are part of the Slayer's legacy.

Balancing the pleasures and price of her singular status, Buffy bears the burden of the exceptional woman. But the exceptional woman, as Margaret Thatcher and Condaleeza Rice have amply demonstrated, is not necessarily a sister to the cause; a certain style of ambitious woman fashions herself precisely as the exception that proves the rule of women's general incompetence. In one of the more dramatic and disturbing character developments in the series as a whole, season seven presents Buffy's leadership becoming arrogant and autocratic, and her attitude isolationist and increasingly alienated. Following in the individualist footsteps of prominent 'power feminists,' Buffy forgoes her collaborative community and instead adopts what fans in the United States and elsewhere perceived as a sort of 'You're-Either-With-Me-Or-Against-Me' moral absolutism ominously reminiscent of the Bush administration (Wilcox) – an incipient despotism exemplified by what Anya calls Buffy's 'Everyone-Sucks-But-Me' speech ('Get It Done' 7015).

The trial of Buffy's leadership is sustained up to the last possible moment, and its resolution repudiates recurring laments about the third wave's purported political apathy. 'According to the most widely publicized construction of the third wave,' describe Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake, '"we" hate our bodies, ourselves, our boring little lives, yet we incessantly focus on our bodies, and our boring little lives. . . . "We" believe that the glamorization of nihilism is hip and think that any hope for change is naïve and embarrassing' ('We Learn America' 47). Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards respond to such allegations directly when they write 'imagine how annoying it is to hear from anyone (including the media and especially Second Wave feminists) that young women aren't continuing the work of the Second Wave, that young women are apathetic, or "just don't get it"' (85). Baumgardner and Richards state that they have reacted 'by scrambling to be

better feminists and frantically letting these women know how much we look up to them.' Ultimately, however, they have 'refused to accept this myth' (85).

Drawing attention to the Slayer's increasing isolation, Caleb highlights the political crisis afflicting her community, but in doing so he inadvertently alerts Buffy to the latent source of its strength, forcing her to claim a connection she admits 'never really occurred to me before' ('Chosen'). In a tactical reversal Giles claims 'flies in the face of everything . . . that every generation has ever done in the fight against evil,' Buffy plans to transfer the power of the Chosen One, the singular, exceptional woman, to the hands of the Potentials – to empower the collective not at the expense of, but by force of, the exception. In the series finale, Buffy addresses her assembled army in the following terms:

> Here's the part where you make a choice. What if you could have that power *now*? In every generation one Slayer is born, because a bunch of men who died thousands of years ago made up that rule. They were powerful men. This woman [pointing to Willow] is more powerful than all of them combined. So I say we change the rules. I say *my* power should be *our* power. Tomorrow, Willow will use the essence of the scythe to change our destiny. From now on, every girl in the world who might be a Slayer, *will* be a slayer. Every girl who could have the power, *will* have the power. Can stand up, will stand up. Slayers – every one of us. Make your choice: are you ready to be strong? ('Chosen'; emphasis in original)

At that moment – as the archaic matriarchal power of the scythe is wrested from the patriarchal dictates of the Watcher's Council – we see a series of vignettes from around the world, as young women of different ages, races, cultures, and backgrounds sense their strength, take charge, and rise up against their oppressors. This is a 'Feel the Force, Luke' moment for girls on a global scale. It is a revolution that has been televised.

In transferring power from a privileged, white Californian teenager to a heterogeneous group of women from different national, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds *Buffy*'s final season addresses, almost as an afterthought, the issue of cultural diversity that has been at the forefront of third wave feminist theorising. Garrison has drawn attention to the connections between Chela Sandoval's articulation of 'US Third World Feminism' and US third wave feminism, representing the latter as a movement fundamentally indebted to the feminist critique articulated by women of colour. Garrison claims that, 'unlike many white feminists in the early years of the Second Wave who sought to create the resistant subject "women," in the Third Wave, the figure "women" is rarely a unitary subject' (149). This understanding of third wave feminism is borne out by Baumgardner and Richards, who argue

that 'the third wave was born into the diversity realized by the latter part of the second wave,' a diversity represented by the works of African American and Chicana feminists, Third World feminists of colour, and US Third World feminists (77). Heywood and Drake make the third wave's debts to Third World feminism explicit when they state that the arguments that women of colour scholars introduced into the dominant feminist paradigms in the 1980s 'have become the most powerful forms of feminist discourse in the 1990s' ('We Learn America' 49). They claim that while third wave feminism owes 'an enormous debt to the critique of sexism and the struggles for gender equity that were white feminism's strongest provinces, it was U.S. Thrid World feminism that modeled a language and a politics of hybridity that can account for our lives at the century's turn' (Introduction 13).

From some of its earliest incarnations academic third wave feminism has presented itself as a movement that places questions of diversity and difference at the centre of its theoretical and political agenda. However, as Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford have pointed out, the 'extent to which third wave feminism has learned how to incorporate, rather than to exclude' (5) remains an issue for ongoing concern. Examining what she sees as the serious limitations of predominantly Western third wave feminism, Winifred Woodhull warns that the third wave risks repeating the exclusionary errors of earlier feminist practices. 'Given the global arena in which third wave feminism emerges,' she writes, 'it is disappointing that new feminist debates arising in first-world contexts address issues that pertain only to women *in* those contexts' (6; emphasis in original). Woodhull claims that the significance and potential of third wave feminism 'can be grasped only by adopting a global interpretive frame, that is, by relinquishing the old frameworks of the west and developing new ones that take seriously the struggles of women the world over' (6). In its most rigorous and responsible guise, then, third wave feminism's call for cultural diversity is the political response to the critique of white racial privilege articulated by second wave feminists of colour, and the theoretical consequence of incorporating the discourse of difference elaborated by poststructural theory more broadly. In its less careful incarnations, as *Buffy* demonstrates admirably, it can perform the very strategies of occlusion and erasure that its more critical proponents are at pains to redress.

Buffy's racial politics are inarguably more conservative than its gender or sexual politics, a situation pithily summarised by one of the few recurring black characters of the show's first three seasons, Mr. Trick: 'Sunnydale... admittedly not a haven for the brothers – strictly the Caucasian persuasion in the Dale' ('Faith, Hope, and Trick' 3003). While the final season of the show has seen an expansion of *Buffy*'s exclusively white, middle-class cast with the introduction of character Principal Robin Wood and the international expansion of the Slayer line, such changes can easily be dismissed as mere tokenism. Season seven makes repeated recourse to racial stereotypes – most

notably in its primitivist portrayal of the 'First Slayer' and the 'Shadow Men' as ignoble savages, and its use of formulaic markers of cultural difference to distinguish the international Slayers. As Gayle Wald has warned in a slightly different context, feminist scholarship must be wary of uncritically reproducing simplistically celebratory readings of popular culture that focus on gender performance 'as a privileged site and source of political oppositionality,' in which 'critical questions of national, cultural, and racial appropriation can be made to disappear' (590). A critical analysis of *Buffy*'s racial representations need not be considered a critique of the palpable pleasures provided by the show but rather, as Wald suggests, 'a critique of the production of pleasure through gendered and racialized narratives that signify as new, transgressive, or otherwise exemplary' (595).

In extending the Slayer's powers to young girls across the globe, *Buffy*'s season seven can be seen to begin to redress – albeit belatedly and incompletely – the national, cultural and racial privilege the show has assumed through its seven-year cycle. Bringing ethnic diversity and racial difference to the Slayer story, a generous reading of *Buffy*'s finale might see it as an exemplary narrative of transnational feminist activism. A more critical reading might see it as yet another chapter in a long, repetitive story of US imperialism. I would suggest that these readings are not as inimical as they might initially seem; season seven's narrative implies that both of these readings are admissible, perhaps even mutually implicated. In her analysis of what she calls 'the globalization of Buffy's power,' for instance, Rhonda Wilcox has argued that '*Buffy* can be seen as both a metaphor for and an enactment of globalization,' one that contemplates both its negative and positive aspects. Wilcox claims that the series celebrates capitalist institutions such as the mall at the same time that it recognises and critiques the 'cultural presumption' inherent in the idea of 'all-American domination of the world . . . through the spread of technological goods and through governmental aggression.' Similarly, I would suggest that the idealised vision of universal sisterhood with which *Buffy* concludes needs to be read against the immediate political context in which its final season is screened; a context that illuminates some of the same gestures of cultural imperialism that the series elsewhere successfully critiques. *Buffy*'s celebration of what is effectively an international military alliance under ostensibly altruistic American leadership demands special scrutiny in our current political climate. In the context of the indefensible arrogance of Bush's 'War on Terror' and the spurious universalism of his 'Coalition of the Willing,' *Buffy*'s final gesture of international inclusivity is imbued with unwittingly inauspicious overtones.

It would be a mistake, I think, to underestimate or to collapse too quickly the contradictions embedded in *Buffy*'s cultural politics, contradictions that are in turn indicative of the crosscurrents that distinguish the third wave of feminism. The refusal of misogynist violence, the battle against institutionalised patriarchy, and the potential of transnational feminist activism are

issues that remain at the forefront of the third wave agenda, and themes that *Buffy*'s final season explores with characteristically challenging and satisfying complexity. The fact that its success in critiquing its own cultural privilege is equivocal should be read less as a straightforward sign of failure than as a reflection of the redoubtable contradictions that characterise third wave feminism itself. Fudge has suggested that *Buffy* 'constantly treads the fine line between girl-power schlock and feminist wish-fulfillment, never giving satisfaction to either one' (par. 17). Adopting one of the signature rhetorical and political strategies of feminism's third wave, *Buffy* has consistently welcomed such apparent contradiction with open arms. I suggest that in its examination of individual and collective empowerment, in its ambiguous politics of racial representation, and its willing embrace of contradiction, *Buffy* is a quintessentially third wave cultural production. Providing a fantastic resolution – in both senses of the word – to some of the many dilemmas confronting third wave feminists today, *Buffy* is comfort food for girls who like to have their cake and eat it too.

Notes

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2. See the *Academic Buffy Bibliography*, the *Encyclopaedia of Buffy Studies* and David Lavery's '"I Wrote My Thesis on You": *Buffy* Studies as an Academic Cult.'
3. For more on this see Debbie Stoller.

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14

'Wham! Bam! Thank You Ma'am!': The New Public/Private Female Action Hero

Cristina Lucia Stasia

The vocabulary of images and labels of the new female action hero is gaining cultural currency.[1] Images of girls 'kicking ass' proliferate in magazines such as *Cosmogirl* and in the fashioning of thongs and baby t-shirts, while television provides us with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Dark Angel, She Spies* and *Alias*. As Susan Hopkins describes, the gender of mass-mediated heroism – and its means of production and consumption – are changing:

> the new girl hero has entered virtually every sphere of male power. The girl of today's collective dreams is a heroic over-achiever – active, ambitious, sexy and strong. She emerges as an unstoppable superhero, a savvy supermodel, a combative action chick, a media goddess, a popstar who wants to rule the world. Popular culture has never been so pervasively girl-powered. (1)

More recently, action movies have begun to explore the market for savvy female heroes. Inspired by, and inspiring, 'girl power,' a new sort of action hero has emerged: the female kind.[2] From *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (2001) and the crossover hit *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2000) to *Double Jeopardy* (1999) and *Enough* (2002), images of women fighting and fighting back – physically and verbally – are available.

Importantly, the female action hero has two personae: the public action hero, who acts on the offensive, and is iconicised in films such as *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life* (2003), *The Matrix Trilogy* (1999–2003) and *Charlie's Angels* and *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle* (2003); and the private action hero, who acts out of self-defence, and appears in films such as *Double Jeopardy, Enough* and *Panic Room* (2002). While the public female action hero is thus comparable to the contemporary male action hero, the private female action hero is a descendent of the heroine of the 1970s rape-revenge movie, exemplified by *I Spit on Your Grave* (1978). Although the generic histories of these films are both rich and relevant, looking at the new public/private female action heroes solely in their

respective genres can obfuscate the vital connections between them and the ways they signal and problematise current political conditions. Instead, this chapter will analyse the ways in which they draw on, and engage with, the histories of their genres in order to theorise the emergence of the new public/private female action hero(es) as a figuration of female (feminist?) agency and action. In so doing, it will also examine the ways in which the new female action hero constitutes a new genre that informs and typifies third wave feminist discourses.

The distinction between public and private has of course been a critical category for feminist theorising in all three waves of feminism. Nevertheless, as is highlighted here, the public and private female action heroes' actions are not confined to one sphere. Rather, I am employing the terms 'public' and 'private' in order to delineate the primary spheres within which the new female action hero functions and to demonstrate the different ways that the new public and private female action heroes index both cultural anxieties about women's changing roles and genre transformation. Where both the *Alien* and *Terminator* sequels (1986 and 1991 respectively) hardened their female action heroes, Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) and Sarah Connor (Linda Hamilton), at the apex of 'muscular cinema' (Tasker 1), the new female action hero combines conventional 'femininity' and traditionally male activities (public and private); fashion sense and social responsibility (public); and nurturing and aggression (private). Insofar as the new female action hero embraces her 'femininity' while not letting this mitigate her power, she can be identified with the form of third wave feminism understood as Girlie – and which has been translated in popular culture into 'girl power.'[3] With particular reference to *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* and *Enough*, this chapter will examine the ways in which the public/private division is replicated in the new female action hero, and the extent to which she might typify – and/or reify – forms of third wave feminist action and agency.

'I'm only trying to turn you into a lady'[4]

Yvonne Tasker argues that 'the pleasures of the action cinema are primarily those of spectacle rather than dialogue' (6). This emphasis on spectacle is borne out in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (a film inspired by a video game), which fundamentally comprises four long action sequences. On the one hand, these sequences function to showcase Lara's (Angelina Jolie's) body, thus reinforcing a conventional configuration of the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of woman within the cinematic (Mulvey 436). However, the spectacle that is privileged here is not just Lara's body, but the intense action sequences behind which she is the driving force. Nevertheless, Lara's agency is mitigated by its codification as an appropriation of phallic power. As Jeffery A. Brown proposes: 'the image of heroines wielding guns and muscles can be conflated within the binary gender codes of the action cinema to render these women

symbolically male' (53) – thus reaffirming the conventional 'maleness' of the action film genre. However, this 'symbolic' reading of Lara only works to reassert psychoanalysis as the dominant theoretical lens. Lara has agency: she freely moves around dangerous spaces, outperforms the other characters and drives the plot forward – this is her quest. She operates in the *offensive* mode. Nevertheless, this agency is (re)incorporated as spectacle. Where in the male action hero film women often function as spectacle, as a female action hero, Lara becomes a double spectacle – both as woman *and* as hero.

In this respect the new female action hero updates the 1980s action heroine. Brown, for example, argues that 'the more progressive depictions of the action heroine place her at the same level of erotic portrayal as the male icons of the screen, as primarily subject and secondarily object' (68). Unlike the 1980s action heroine described by Brown, who was shot in ways which emphasised her muscles and not her (lack of) breasts, Lara is continually shot in ways which focus on her breasts, thighs and butt. She is thus figured as primarily object before subject. In her discussion of the 1980s action heroine, Tasker notes that muscles 'become appropriated for the decoration of the *female* body' (142; emphasis in original). The new female action hero, however, is neither masculinised nor muscularised. Rather, she is hyperfeminised – particularly thanks to the fake breasts and hair extensions Jolie wears for the role. This femininity also functions to remind the audience that while she may fight men, Lara is still there for erotic pleasure. Clearly, this new female action hero is as titillating as she is threatening.

In addition, as already highlighted, the new female action hero is distinguished from the 1980s action hero because she is a girl – a positioning which, as will be elaborated here, further counters the threat of her agency by offering the hope that she will 'settle down.' While her youthfulness is played up through costuming, she is also infantilised through her relationship with her father (Jon Voight), whom she calls 'Daddy.' 'As a girl who has not accepted the responsibilities of adult womanhood' (Tasker 15) there is the possibility that things will change when she does. Despite of its 'saving the world' plot, *Tomb Raider* provides Lara's 'public' action with a motivation that is located in the 'private' sphere through the father–daughter relationship. Indeed, the film's dénouement manifests what happens when the female action hero successfully completes her male-directed mission: she is returned to the private sphere. Having pleased her father, Lara signals her exit from tomboyish girlhood into traditional 'womanhood' by appearing in the white dress she had earlier rebuffed, ready to embrace her role as 'Lady Croft.'[5] That the film ends with her picking up a gun, thus destabilising the image of traditional femininity, suggests that it is only the need for a sequel (and the centrality of the discourse of her 'strong' femininity to the franchise) that limits the absence of any threat.

It is Lara's girliness that also causes her to be easily dismissed by critics. While male fans quoted and cheered on Ripley (Brown 69), Lara is more

popular as pinup than action hero. Furthermore, she is completely unthreatening to the critics. There is no mention of feminism or lesbianism in the reviews, unlike those of *Thelma and Louise* (1991) or *Aliens*. Similarly, the heroes of *Charlie's Angels* are dismissed as girl power fluff and the film as an 'empty-calorie plot . . . skeptics may laugh their booty off when told that the Angels are icons of empowerment' (Corliss 66). The female public action hero is not threatening because she is an impossible ideal – super beautiful, super sexy and super hero. The action heroine of the 1980s might have presented the muscular female body 'first and foremost as a functional body, a weapon' (Brown 56), but the new female action hero underscores woman-as-spectacle. Simon West, the director of *Tomb Raider*, foregrounds this tension between female sexuality and female action when he argues that 'Angelina should be a role model for action actors. We turned her into something you wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley – but then again you would' ('Crafting Lara Croft'). Like the 'new girl hero' discussed by Hopkins, Lara is feisty and feminine, but she is not ultimately threatening – to (heterosexual male) audience fantasies, to the action genre as a (symbolically) male genre, to women's to-be-looked-at-ness or to patriarchy. And this is the crux of the new female action hero – as 'strong' as she is, she is ultimately there for (male) pleasure.[6]

'Self-defence is Not Murder'[7]

In contrast to the public female action hero, exemplified by Lara Croft, the private female action hero situates her audience differently – as female.[8] Her heroic actions are located in the home, and the actions outside the home respond to the drama within it. That this inflection of the female action hero genre has its roots in the 1970s' rape-revenge movie rather than in the traditional male action movie is significant. As Carol Clover argues: 'the most spectacular donation of yesterday's meat movie to today's blockbuster is the female victim-hero' (18). Similarly, and unlike the public female action hero who acts on the offensive, the private female action hero is a victim-hero. She is spurred into action because of personal harm and thus acts *defensively*. Peter Lehman describes the rape-revenge plot: 'a beautiful woman hunts down the men who raped her and kills them one by one, frequently revelling in the pleasure of the man's agony when he realises who she is and what she is about to do' (103). Similarly, the private action hero film often culminates in spectacular violence when the woman as hero finally gets her revenge. In *Enough*, for example, Slim (Jennifer Lopez) hunts down her abusive spouse, prolonging his demise for her pleasure. However, the private female action hero and film do not simply function as updates of the rape-revenge victim-hero and film. One major difference is that the private female action hero is not a virginal, teenage girl – she is usually married and a mother (as in the case of the heroes of *Enough* and *Double Jeopardy*).

The private female action hero has domestic and caretaking responsibilities – unlike the public female action hero, for whom action is a career; the private female action hero has a 'day job.'

The villains of the private action hero film also differ. While the rapists in rape-revenge movies were 'typically characterized as extremely repulsive, a character which frequently employs stereotypes of class and ethnicity' (Lehman 108), both *Enough* and *Double Jeopardy* provide a different villain: the professional, white husband. This new incarnation of the villain, and the update from rape to spousal abuse, seen in both films reflects a shift in cultural understandings of violence against women. 'Given the action film's binary logic, villains conventionally damn the virtues that the [action] film extols' (Gallagher 220). In *Enough*, Mitch (Billy Campbell) scoffs at equality and believes that Slim's beatings are the price that she pays 'for having such a good life.' The villains in private action hero films are direct reflections of the larger institutional structures which maintain them; and their 'bad guyness' is located in specific material structures – Slim's husband's, for example, in a privileged upbringing marked by his father's abuse of his mother.

As *Enough* demonstrates, the private female action hero is aware of alternative options to violence, but the film dramatises their limitations: when a cop suggests a restraining order, Slim asks him what an abused and stalked woman is supposed to do with it, throw it at her husband when he comes to kill her? Slim's efforts to deal with the abuse in the public sphere – through the police and women's shelters – force her to return to the private sphere of action when they only partially acknowledge the public aspects of what she must deal with. For the private action hero, it is not that the best defence is a good offence, it is that the only defence is a good offence. Still, as *defensive* as her original action may be, Slim is an action hero. She uses male abuse as a justification to engage in action hero activity usually limited to male heroes: she undertakes 'action hero boot camp' – learning Krav Maga, using techno gadgets and strategising an attack. Her agency is not only located in her transformation from victim into survivor, but from rape-revenge hero to action hero.

Nevertheless, this private female action hero still has her limitations. Like the public female action hero, she is still motivated by men. Male motivation – whether offensive (being sent on a quest by your dead father) or defensive (responding to male violence) – mitigates the agency of the female action hero. Tasker proposes that:

> in terms of the fantastic powers traditionally ascribed to the hero and heroines of a narrative, such a need to explain can be self-defeating. It is perhaps such factors that have led to the frequent repetition of rape-revenge narratives as a way of producing appropriate motivation. (20)

Furthermore, the private female action film reprivatises (and heterosexualises) women's actions. This reprivatisation can also be read as a response to the

fact that 'more recent [action] films reposition the male hero as the protector of domestic space' (Gallagher 214). The private female action hero, however, reminds the viewer that violence still occurs in the home, and that women can not only fight back, but that they can depend only on themselves.

Unfortunately, this also positions the private female action hero as a hybrid of the 'Angel in the House' and Rambo. The private female action film features a hero acting not just out of revenge, but for the protection of someone else – usually, and in the case of *Enough*, a child. Slim's power emerges from her response to being beaten; her masochism is rewarded, but not until after she has suffered broken bones and psychological torture. When asked how she is doing, Slim replies: 'Gracie [her daughter] is safe.' She is intent not on saving the world action hero-style, but saving those she loves mother-style. Still, even this display of a powerful woman has been enough to alienate reviewers and male audiences. It is possible to argue that 'because of their presentational distance from reality, contemporary action films do not call upon their male viewers to enact the fantasies of masculinity that appear on screen' (Gallagher 213). But the distance is significantly shorter between a female audience member and the domestic location on screen in the private female action hero film than between the exotic locales of the public female action hero situation. Nevertheless, the majority of critics dismiss *Enough* as manhating, revenge movie drivel – or, as Peter Howell scathingly puts it, 'this estrogen-fueled freakout.' It may be that this discomfort is located with the hero, rather than the film itself: 'sometimes, fantasies of female omnipotence scare people with the notion that women might imitate that violence' (King and McCaughey 13). Women could never imitate Lara, but they could possibly imitate Slim.[9] It is pertinent, then, that the final scene of the film depicts Slim with a 'good guy,' holding Gracie. She is repositioned firmly within the private sphere – and in her 'proper' place as wife and mother. Once again, the reincorporation of the female action hero within traditional familial and domestic paradigms functions to mitigate the threat of her action.

Third wave heroes?

Early third wave feminist writing is often charged with neglecting institutional analysis, and with conflating individualism with political activism (Heywood and Drake, 'We Learn America' 52). This tension is exemplified by the new female action hero who, like third wave feminism, has emerged in an era of late capitalism. As Hopkins proposes: 'Girl Power effectively encapsulates the newly aggressive and confident girl cultures – cultures which have been opened up for aggressive commodification . . . (Post)feminism has been embraced as a fresh strategy for stimulating consumption' (3). While her brash femininity and tough girl antics are resonant with third wave 'Girlie' culture, the new female action hero reifies third wave feminism into slick

visuals and girl power sound bites. The public action hero, like girl power, offers girls the encouragement to do anything without providing them with the knowledge or tools to do so. In its emphasis on self-defence as an effective strategy for protection, the private female action hero foregrounds a more pragmatic form of agency which builds on the self-defence and anti-rape movements (the former of which was popularised as a third wave form of agency by Riot Grrrl in the early 1990s). However, as is demonstrated so clearly in *Enough*, self-defence does nothing to affect the institutional structures that maintain violence against women. As such, the private female action hero advocates individual battles instead of public action, self-defence instead of political agitation.

In this respect, the new female action hero is derivative of early third wave feminist theory – individualistic, almost always white, middle-class and straight. The public female action hero performs her actions in a world free of gender discrimination; the private female action hero exists in a world where gender discrimination is personal, not institutional.[10] The new female action hero thus manifests the girl power mantra 'girls can do anything!' without acknowledging how this action is mitigated by race, class, sexuality and, yes, gender. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake argue that early third wave feminist texts 'rarely provide consistent analysis of the larger culture that has helped shape and produce those experiences' (Introduction 2). Often, third wave feminism encourages, to borrow Elspeth Probyn's term, 'choiceoisie' (152) – a philosophy that 'envisions all major life decisions as individual options rather than culturally determined or directed choices' (Helford 291). But, 'choice' is circumscribed by race, sexuality and class. Like the first and second waves of feminism, third wave feminism is not a coherent movement: it is fractured into multiple feminisms from diverse subject positions. Heywood and Drake, amongst others, have highlighted how US Third World feminisms, women of colour feminisms, working-class feminisms and queer feminisms are all integral to third wave feminism. 'A third wave goal that comes directly out of learning from these histories and working among these traditions is the development of modes of thinking that can come to terms with the multiple, constantly shifting bases of oppression' (Introduction 3).[11] But this multiplicity is not taken up by the new female action hero. Bonnie Dow warns about the 'danger of confusing lifestyle, attitudinal feminism with the hard political and intellectual work that feminists have done and continue to do . . . the danger is in believing that image is equal to politics and material change' (214). The new female action hero films manifest this danger as they provide attitudinal feminist heroes who spout feminist rhetoric and kick ass, but who neither acknowledge that oppression exists at an institutional level, nor that its forms are diverse.

My concern is that these new female action heroes provide images of an equality that has not been achieved, and that they mitigate their viewers' interests in exploring inequalities. It is easy to be seduced by images of

strong women fighting, but these images capitalise on a basic belief in feminism evacuated of any consciousness of why girls still *need* to 'kick ass.' Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards identify a 'chasm between this generation's belief in basic feminism (equality) and its feminist consciousness (knowledge of what and why one is doing it)' (83). They claim that 'we need a consciousness of women's place in society and of how the battles already won were achieved' (83). Even as the new female action hero rebels against traditional female behaviour to engage in violence, this rebellion is ultimately located in a cinematically articulated body for which action-as-spectacle is privileged over action with consequences. The threat that would otherwise be posed by this new hero is thus contained by individual instead of institutionally motivated action. As 'fun' as rebellion against both a traditionally male genre and traditional female behaviour might be, rebelling against the rules is not synonymous with changing them.

Although girl power, within mainstream hegemonic popular culture, is a severely diluted and over-simplified form of feminism, it is not necessarily anti-feminist. It provides a model of empowerment that has taught girls to say 'girls rule' and to see the joys of sisterhood instead of 'I-want-to-be-a-Mrs-hood.' It has given girls popular culture to identify with, and to enact. Indeed, some of third wave feminism's key challenges included a refusal to accept victim status, and an insistence on moving freely in all spaces – ideals that the female action hero enacts in spectacular fashion. However, as Steve Neale reminds us: 'mass-produced popular genres have to be indeed understood within an economic context, as conditioned by specific economic imperatives, by specific economic contradictions' (172). Ultimately, the new female action hero is limited by girl power's championing of feminism-by-purchase. There is an increasing recognition by marketers that feminists will put money where their politics – however diluted – appear. This reifies third wave feminism's insistence that women can be 'fierce' *and* 'feminine' into a sugar-coated form of girl power which is exploited to market and commodify the empowerment and agency of women – albeit ones building bombs instead of cakes. While the new female action hero expands the role of women in action movies, the public female action hero is an impossible ideal and the private female action hero privileges self-sacrifice. If the new female action hero is to manifest the larger category of third wave feminism, rather than the problematic of girl power, it will need to move beyond the sexy heroism of Lara and the heroic altruism of Slim to locate the potential for both genre transformation and female (not girl/mother) action heroism across the traditional delimitations of the public/private spheres.

Notes

1. I would like to thank the editors for their comments on an earlier version of this chapter and my mom, Vera Kornelsen, one of two women in the first Canadian

police graduating class that assigned women to regular patrol duties, who taught me what a female action hero is – in public and private.

2. While the appearance of '"muscular cinema" during the 1980s calls on a much longer tradition of representation' (Tasker 1), while the female action hero predates even this action-explosion, and while the emergence of the action-adventure film as a genre in the 1980s involved female action heroes from the start – for example, *Red Sonia* (1985) – I will examine the specificities of her contemporary incarnation. I refer to her as hero because calling her a heroine makes her easier to control. That 'heroine' remains while terms like 'authoress' are obsolete is an indication of the anxieties surrounding the female action hero.
3. For more on this see Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (134–136).
4. Hillary (Christopher Barrie) to Lara in *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider*.
5. Interestingly, in *Lara Croft Tomb Raider: The Cradle of Life*, Lara chooses her own missions and dresses less provocatively. Nevertheless, the punishment for the female action hero who transgresses male authority and motivation is made explicit in the thoroughly demonised independent former Angel, Madison (Demi Moore), in *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*. Madison defers to no one: 'I don't take my orders from a speaker box anymore. I work for myself now'; 'Why be an angel when I can play God?' Apparently, however, only the omniscient Charlie is allowed to play God, and Madison is tossed into a pit and burned to death.
6. The primary audience for *Tomb Raider* is the players of the video game, teen boys. However, casting Jolie, who is a visible bicon and has a significant queer female fanbase, has important implications.
7. Ginny (Juliette Lewis) to Slim in *Enough*.
8. Almost all the reviews identified women as the target audience.
9. It is telling that discussions of imitating the *male* action hero tend to focus only on children, suggesting a commonly perceived susceptibility to influence.
10. In this way, the new female action hero is similar to her television counterpart, Xena. Elyce Rae Helford explains that in *Xena* 'the problem is solved in isolation from the larger culture by an individual hero who proposes individualist solutions that never threaten the patriarchal/classist structure that is plainly evident' (294).
11. For more on this see Baumgardner and Richards (77).

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15

Neither Cyborg Nor Goddess: The (Im)Possibilities of Cyberfeminism

Stacy Gillis

This chapter traces the discursive strands located within the (often) monolithically defined cyberfeminism. As cyberfeminism is often identified as a compelling component of third wave feminism – owing to the metonymic slip of both cyberfeminism and third wave feminism with 'the popular' – the conservative ramifications of cyberfeminism have implications for those activities and theories grouped under the label of the third wave. The communication technologies of cyberspace are regarded as the opportunity needed to bring about the global feminist movements of the new millennium, the 'third wave' of feminism. The Internet is thus vaunted as the global consciousness-raising tool which the first and second waves lacked. What could it mean to claim that '[o]n the edge of the millennium, feminists are paying closer attention to the Internet – as a powerful cultural space and an important political tool' and to ask 'what role will the Internet play in the "global women's movement" and how are feminists on-line shaping and re-shaping what the "global women's movement" is imagined to be?' (Hunt 147) Yet the myth of cyberfeminism – that women are using cyberspace in powerful and transgressive ways – far exceeds what is actually taking place online.

This chapter will identify how cyberfeminism's transgressive potential is limited by the specificities of embodied online experiences. Yet cyberfeminism is also limited by its semantic parameters. Cyberfeminism – that is feminism in cyberspace – is problematised because cyberspace is not easily defined: it can be merely the interface with the World Wide Web, or include the Internet (of which only a small portion is the World Wide Web) and/or the denoted realms of computer games, science fiction and cyberpunk texts. Cyberfeminism is similarly not easily defined. For Susan Hawthorne and Renate Klein, it is 'a philosophy which acknowledges, firstly, that there are differences in power between men and women specifically in the digital discourse: and secondly, that CyberFeminists want to change that situation' (2). Melanie Stewart Miller defines cyberfeminism as '[a] woman-centred perspective that advocates women's use of new information and

communication technologies for empowerment' (200). For Mary Flanagan and Austin Booth it is '[g]rounded in both practice and theory . . . a new wave of feminist theory and practice that is united in challenging the "coding" of technology and in investigating the complex relationships between gender and digital culture' (11). The semantic shifts between these definitions do not just suggest the loose parameters of a new study, they indicate that cyberfeminism is unsure of its theoretical territory. Thus cyberfeminism is hampered by a lack of rigorous definition, something which, as will be shown, is aggravated by – and aggravates – its lack of political and historical agency.

Donna Haraway's 'A Cyborg Manifesto,' a chapter in her *Simians, Cyborgs and Women*, is an ur-text for cyberfeminism, with its promise of an evolutionary move away from the reification of the patriarchal hegemony.[1] Her cyborg feminism – which must be distinguished from current models of cyberfeminism – is an 'ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism and materialism' (291).[2] Yet in this global 'techno-patriarchy' (Klein 210) that is the early twenty-first century, the figure of the cyborg works in the service of the reproduction of sex and gender ontologies. Undertaking an analysis of the uncritically bound components of cyberfeminism – which include, but are not limited to, cyborg theory and feminism – this chapter takes its inspiration from Rosi Braidotti's argument that 'it would be more beneficial to all concerned if the tensions that are built into the end-of-century crisis of values were allowed to explode inside feminism, bringing its paradoxes to a fore' (210).[3] Exploring the ramifications of cyberfeminism will demonstrate that – like third wave feminism – ownership of the 'brand' is contentious.

Future cunt

We are the modern cunt
positive anti reason . . . .
we are the virus of the new world disorder
rupturing the symbolic from within
saboteurs of big daddy mainframe
the clitoris is a direct line to the matrix . . . .
infiltrating disrupting disseminating
corrupting the discourse
we are the future cunt (VNS Matrix)[4]

One of the differences between the second and third waves of feminism has been the need to negotiate and engage with the new technologies that have emerged since the personal computing revolution of the early 1980s. Cybernetic developments have not merely enabled more immediate communication between disparate groups; rather, they have prefigured new ways of thinking through the Enlightenment body and, as such, intersect

with the feminist project. Ednie Kaeh Garrison coined the term 'technologic' to refer to

> a particular practice of communicating information over space and time, a creation of temporary "unified" political groups made up of unlikely combinations and collectivities . . . the combining of diverse technologies to construct powerful cultural expressions of oppositional consciousness . . . and the construction of feminists' politics of location. (150)

Garrison goes on to point up the revolutionary potential of the Internet for bringing together (sub)cultural groups such as the Riot Grrrls. Likewise Scarlet Pollock and Jo Sutton identify the Internet as an extension of the modes of networking supposedly common to the feminist community: '[d]ialogue, encouraging others, listening, sharing, dealing with conflict are all brought into play' (33); and Dale Spender argues that 'the medium is more attuned to women's way of working in the world than to men's . . . [and] has the capacity to create community; to provide untold opportunities for communication, exchange, and keeping in touch' (229). Yet, while the Internet appears to offer the opportunity for transparency and dialogue for both third wave feminists and cyberfeminists, few are willing to examine under *what* conditions this transparency and dialogue take place.

Alison Adam claims that the apolitical nature of cyberfeminism is evidenced in the way in which it avoids ethical questions, just as third wave feminism is excoriated by 'real' feminists for its apparent inability to politicise women ('Ethical' 168). Without a political analysis reflection on material conditions – and ultimately self-knowledge – becomes impossible. Self-professed cyberfeminist Faith Wilding conflates cyberfeminism and postfeminism, defining cyberfeminism as 'a promising new wave of (post)feminist thinking and practice. Through the work of numerous Netactive women, there is now a distinct cyberfeminist Netpresence that is fresh, brash, smart and iconoclastic of many of the tenets of classical feminism' (Wilding and the Critical Art Ensemble par. 1).[5] One could easily exchange 'third wave' for 'cyberfeminist' here. Despite Maria Fernandez and Faith Wilding recently noting that cyberfeminism makes little mention of 'the crucially different conditions – be they economic, cultural, racial or ethnic, geographic, or environmental – under which women worldwide experience sexuality and pleasure, aging, menopause, motherhood, child rearing, ecology and the environment' (21) this is still a cyberfeminism that is predicated on *women's* use of technology. A careful distinction needs to be made – just as there are those who engage with third wave feminism but who would not profess to be third wave feminists, there are those women (and men) who engage in gender and technology studies who would not profess to be cyberfeminists.

Cyberfeminism claims Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant as its 'mothers,' drawing upon the feminist strategy of 'leaders' and 'waves.'[6] There are,

however, substantial theoretical differences between these two 'mothers.' Haraway positions the image of the cyborg as breaking down the binary oppositions of meat/metal and consequently allowing for the possibility of post-gender. The cyborg, for Haraway, is a 'myth about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions, and dangerous possibilities' (154). Sadie Plant, on the other hand, takes an essentialist position and points up women's supposed affinity with the new 'freedoms' of cyberspace.

> The Internet promises women a network of lines on which to chatter, natter, work and play; virtuality brings a fluidity to identities which once had to be fixed; and multi-media provides a tactile environment in which women artists can find their space. . . . Women are accessing the circuits on which they were once exchanged, hacking into security's controls, and discovering their own post-humanity. (265)

Dissent from those two models – the post-gender cyborg and the cyber-goddess – has not been readily forthcoming because Haraway and Plant thus validate (any and all) activity by women online. This is 'Internet' as metaphor, not a materialist examination of the Internet. The result of 'all' woman-centred online activity being authenticated is an apolitical and dehistoricised cyberfeminist consciousness which, as Judith Squires puts it, 'has become the distorted fantasy of those so cynical of traditional political strategies, so bemused by the complexity of social materiality, and so bound up in the rhetoric of the space flows of information technology, that they have forgotten both the exploitative and alienating potential of technology' (369). This is not to argue that there are not fruitful debates taking place concerning the gendered nature of information technology; rather, what is being disputed is the branding of these debates as cyberfeminist. Cyberfeminism – seduced by the metaphor of the cyborg and the claims of techno-affinity – places itself outside history.

Although cyberfeminists have been quick to claim *any* activity by women online (excluding, obviously, pornography websites) delineating some of the different ways in which the web is used enables a more subtle understanding of the interactions between gender and technology. Firstly, there are those IRL ('in real life') off-line women's groups which use the web as an organisational tool for larger activities off-line in order 'to gain publicity, to solicit donations, to serve as an education resource, to create organizational networks' (Hunt 155–156).[7] Secondly, there are those who consider that web activity itself constitutes feminist activism. Amy Richards and Marianne Schnall, for instance, equate cyberfeminism solely with networking and activism: '[t]he Internet's international scope means it can help women feel part of a global sisterhood' (par. 8).[8] Cybergrrls and webgrrls build cyberfeminist websites for the purpose of 'informing, inspiring and celebrating women' (cybergrrl.com) and claim to manipulate technology in order to

resist patriarchal subject positions. Carla Sinclair defines a grrl site as 'created by a woman who addresses issues without acting like women are victims. Grrrls take responsibility for themselves – we don't blame men for anything, but instead focus on ways to improve and strengthen ourselves. Grrrls enjoy their femininity and kick ass at the same time' (qtd. in DeLoach par. 1).[9] This is revealing about the gender fantasies of which thinking about the Internet permits rather than the Internet itself – drawing simultaneously upon Riot Grrrl and girlie ideologies. That is, thought about the Internet is mediated through various technologically inspired gender fantasies, something which Sinclair picks up in her power-feminist claim that grrl sites are for those who engage in grrl-power 'without acting like women are victims.' Cyberfeminism has also been claimed by online women artists. subRosa is a 'reproducible cell of cultural researchers committed to combining art, activism, and politics to explore and critique the effects of the intersections of the new information and biotechnologies on women's bodies, lives and works.' Similarly Karen Keifer-Boyd's *The Cyberfeminist House* is a web-based art game intended to teach 'how to investigate the complex ways that power, oppression, and resistance work in our media-saturated visual culture.' This is not to disparage these forms of cyber-interaction and cyber-activism, but rather to question whether these very disparate activities are – or should be – labelled cyberfeminism.

Sex/Gender≠Body

I'm just a simple girl
In a high tech digital world . . . . (Jewel)

The great promise of the Internet has been that it would dissolve gender and sex boundaries, allowing for a free mingling of minds. There are three versions of this promise: (1) the consumer relationship has reduced the relevance of the demographic complication of sex; (2) we regard any form of technology as eliding sex; and (3) with the repudiation of the 'body' in cyberspace, the phenomenological equation of 'body equals woman' is erased. This thesis goes untested and masquerades as demonstrative 'new' sex by virtue of the kinds of thinking that feed into it. Let me not, to the meaningless exacerbation of utopian conceptions of information technology, any impediment admit: 'Neither male (physically) nor female (genetically) nor their simple reversal, but something else: a virtual sex floating in an elliptical orbit around the planet of gender that is left behind' (Kroker and Kroker 18). Why are we so keen to believe that the Internet appears to provide a space in which feminist politics and praxis can take place outside the patriarchal hegemony? Empirical studies have demonstrated that although the potential for gender-fucking whilst online is tempting, it remains largely science fiction. What is more important is that the Internet is constructed ideologically as a promise that

the dissolution of the sexed body is imminent. However, although sexed and gendered characteristics can be re-coded at the press of a button, embodied patterns of behaviour resist any revolutionary change, as I have argued elsewhere with reference to the body in cybersex. The Internet does question the Enlightenment notion of self – as a gendered, raced and psychically sound individual – particularly in the way a subject relates to writing. But the cyber-body retains, for example, characteristics of gender and race *because* both are a social configuration. The body circulating through cyberspace does not obviate the body at the keyboard. The conditions for the cyber-dissolution of the body remain the gendered and racial body, so although the Internet raises questions about the Enlightenment notion of self by *silencing* once again the very question of embodiment, it also reifies the paradigms that endorse this selfhood.

Moreover, gender online operates in many of the same ways that it operates off-line. Kira Hall's empirical research on social interaction online indicates that the post-gender world of the cyborg is certainly not to be found in cyberspace. She notes that 'rather than neutralizing gender, the electronic medium encourages its intensification. In the absence of the physical, network users exaggerate societal notions of femininity and masculinity in an attempt to gender themselves' (167).[10] Susan Herring's work supports this, identifying two types of online posting: adversarial flaming which is used largely by men (e.g. a superior stance, posting long/frequent messages and participating disproportionately) and attenuated and supportive style used largely by women: '[w]omen's messages . . . tend to be aligned and supportive in orientation, while men's messages to oppose and criticize others' (115).[11] This is not to argue that technology is necessarily masculinised as Nina Wakeford's work on gender dynamics in an Internet café has usefully drawn the distinction between gendered on- and off-line behaviour of computer users. One need only to look to the history of the other communications revolution of the twentieth century – the telephone – for a historical example of this. A radical impact of the telephone was its exponential increase in the identification of the domestic as a locus of consumption. Ideas of predominantly female users, operators and female-coded technology expressed a fantasy of sex evolution that distracted from the degree to which the telephone supplemented existing economic arrangements and the notions of sexed embodiment that expressed and bolstered them (Martin 63–65). Cyberfeminism repeats this model in making the naïve assumption that gender politics do not exist online and that the sexed embodiments materialised by gender are suspended.

Indeed, the relationship of gender and technology has a long history, as Andreas Huyssen noted when he argued that '[a]s soon as the machine came to be perceived as a demonic, inexplicable threat and as the harbinger of chaos and destruction . . . writers began to imagine the Maschinenmensch as woman . . . Woman, nature, machine had become a mesh of signification

which all had one thing in common: otherness' (70). The machine is coded as feminine because technology has been demonised as other; technology is othered because it is feminised, particularly information technology. In the desire to embrace and endorse cyberspace as a new and free space for all women, cyberfeminism denies the long history of technology and gender. Braidotti reminds us that gender boundaries and gender difference become exaggerated in both cyberpunk and the cyborg film genre:

> on the one hand an eroticized fetishization of the technological has pervaded through the imaginary of our societies, on the other hand, the technological is not associated with any sex, let alone the feminine, but rather with a transsexual or sexually undecided position. It coincides with a sort of flight from the body. . . . In such a context, the female body is constructed as the site of the natural, of *bios* and *zoe*, hence also of procreation. (233)

Even a cursory examination of the cyberpunk novels and films of the past twenty years – from William Gibson's *Neuromancer* (1984) to Andy and Larry Wachowski's *The Matrix Trilogy* (1999–2003) – demonstrates that they explicitly draw upon the *film noir* tradition, speaking the language of hard-boiled masculinity.[12] This can be dismissed as merely the masculine relationship with the machine 'which seems to bring out the worst in some men. It's been there with cars (the biggest, the brightest, latest, fastest) and it's there with computers as well' (Spender 183). But rather than enabling the argument that men have an unalterable relationship with technology, those working in the field of gender and technology – which *could* include cyberfeminism if it engaged a political agenda and developed a technologically materialist approach to history – should seek to understand the *why* and the *how* of this relationship.

If masculinity is the predominant model of behaviour online, it must also be emphasised that this is a white masculinity. That fewer than 20 per cent of global households have electricity – let alone Internet access – raises the question of whose politics this fantasy obscures and permits. Braidotti points out that gender, age and ethnicity act as major axes 'of negative differentiation' in access and participation in the new high-tech digital world (176). Indeed, the question of whose cyberspace this is shifts the focus away from gender, something which cyberfeminists have been reluctant to do. While the Internet is used by both men and women, it is predominantly a white and Western activity. Beth E. Kolko *et al*. argue that just as 'first and second-wave feminists often failed to include race and the issue of Third World women in their politics, so too have many cyberfeminists elided the topic of race in cyberspace' (8).[13] Third wave feminists have noted that the politics of this wave of feminism emerged from the work of those who were excluded by the rhetoric of second wave feminism:

> [t]he term *feminism* is itself questioned by many Thrid World women. Feminist movements have been challenged on the grounds of cultural imperialism, and of shortsightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle-class, white experiences, and in terms of internal racism, classicism, and homophobia. (Mohanty 7; emphasis in original)

Such third wave feminists as Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake acknowledge that third wave feminism looks to US Third World feminism for 'languages and images that account for multiplicity and difference, that negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways, and that give voice to a politics of hybridity and coalition' (9). But third wave feminism (in its academic incarnation at least) is still very white just as cyberfeminism still feeds on a sci-fi aestheticisation of whiteness.

Dianne Currier points towards Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's model of assemblage as a 'diagnostic tool with which to begin mapping how assembled bodies and technologies and social spaces and practices intersect with systems of knowledge and power' (535). This model of assemblage could help us to understand the category of woman as understood within the technological *and* the social: 'we must understand cyberspace as not simply a technologically generated space or place, but as a series of assemblage comprised of elements of the technical, social, discursive, material, and immaterial' (536). The assemblage model is a useful way of thinking outside the confines of the cyborg/goddess metaphor which has dogged cyberfeminism. Ethnographic research on the discourses of the technological, social, material and immaterial may allow cyberfeminism to claim a place in feminist theory as well as history. Klein gestures towards this when she asks 'what is happening to women's bodies/minds/souls in real and cyberlife – is technology serving women – or are we serving it?' (187) Deborah Wheeler's work on how the intersection of women and the Internet is used in Kuwait, Wakeford's work on the cultures of the Internet café and Justine Cassell and Henry Jenkins' collection on gender and computer games are a few examples of the research on gender and technology that avoid the seduction of the cyborg and cyber-goddess metaphors in cyberfeminism.

Deifying/Reifying

At the core of the problem with cyberfeminism are the following questions: Is a feminist in cyberspace a cyberfeminist? And, more to the point, if you are a woman in cyberspace, are you a cyberfeminist?[14] These parameters exclude men from the (cyber)feminist project and obscure the potential for explorations of gender and technology, rather than *women* and technology. Cybercultural theorists and feminists need to reclaim materialist territory from cyberfeminists, moving away from the utopic.

Adam's call for a cyberfeminist ethics goes some way to demanding that this feminism – like third wave feminism – be accountable for itself. At the same time, we should bear in mind her point that cyberspace is deeply conservative, resting on a 'technological determinism which is uncritical of technological advances, which accepts as inevitable that technology will be used in a particular way' ('What Should We Do' 20). While cyberfeminism appeared to offer a get-out clause in the gender debates of the 1980s and 1990s, it merely reified sex and gender in ways that are all too familiar. Cyberfeminism was quick to claim a polemical stance which is not reflected in its activities. By extension, it damages the potential political nature of third wave feminism. These 'new' feminisms – cyberfeminism and third wave feminism – need to more carefully interrogate their politics and their histories. For cyberfeminism, this entails disentangling cyborg feminism, gender and technology studies, cybercultural theory and e-activism. Only then can cyberfeminism re-assemble itself, both politically and historically. Haraway's polemic ends with the oft-quoted lines 'I'd rather be a cyborg than a goddess' but the permutations of cyberfeminism have not seen this through. Cyberfeminism, to date, has been neither cyborgic nor deifying – merely reifying.

Notes

1. That the two versions of this essay – the first entitled 'A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980s' appearing in *Socialist Review* in 1985 – are often conflated is an indication of the unrigorous qualities of some cyberfeminist debates.
2. See Chela Sandoval for an articulation of Haraway's cyborg feminism as 'oppositional consciousness' (408): 'Haraway's cyborg textual machine represents a politics that runs parallel to those of U.S. Thrid World feminist criticism' (412).
3. See Kira Hall for the distinction between liberal and radical cyberfeminisms. Liberal cyberfeminism posits computer technology as a means towards the liberation of women. Radical cyberfeminism manifests in women-only strategies: 'Cyberfeminist practice has already adopted many of the strategies of the avant-garde feminist movements, including strategic separatism (women-only lists, self-help groups, chat groups, networks, and woman-to-woman technological training)' (Fernandez and Wilding 20).
4. VNS Matrix is a group of artists who posted their 'Cyberfeminism Manifesto' on a Sydney billboard in 1991. They were among the first to claim the term 'cyberfeminist.'
5. Barbara Kennedy associates cyberfeminism with postfeminism because both question identity: 'Post-feminism seeks to rethink the feminist voices of the 1990s, to present a situational ethics, where we need to move beyond debates of binary thinking in which gender is perceived as immutably masculine or feminine: we should be concerned to go beyond established notions of gendered identity or subjectivity' (283).
6. For more on the damaging impact of this see Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford: 'the trouble with [the wave] model is that generations are set up in competition with one another and definitions of feminism are positioned around the "leaders"

of these generations, whether it be the Pankhursts, Gloria Steinem or Germaine Greer. Current feminist figures are compared incessantly (and unfavourably) with these past "leaders"' (176).

7. Appendix 2 of Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards' *Manifesta* attests to the organisational power of the Internet when used as a method of communication and information-sharing (339–381).
8. An example of e-activism is feminist.com which is 'a space for feminists – men and women – to strategize about problems and create solutions; share information and build a lasting community.'
9. See Laura Handy's 'CyberFeminism. virtual. activism. real. change' for an example of cybergrrl activism: 'Using the Internet for feminist activism empowers women to use technology while working towards feminist social change. It is CyberFeminism. . . . Be empowered – be a CyberFeminist!'
10. Hall's research was conducted largely on electronic bulletin boards as email was not prevalent in 1996.
11. See Tove Håpnes and Bente Rasmussen for a discussion of the relationship between hacker culture and masculinity.
12. See Flanagan and Booth for a counter to this; their collection brings together feminist science fiction and cyberpunk with cybertheory.
13. In MUDs (Multi-User Domains) you can construct categories for age, gender, timezone, and so on, but not race (Kolko 216). Similarly, Blair and Takayoshu note that grrl-avatars 'raise the question of who can be a cybergrrl, in their construction of WebGrrl and CyberGrrl as thin, white women with long, flowing, brown hair and white faces' (17; footnote 2).
14. For example, consider the difference between those women who work with technology, and the cyberfeminist artist – the woman working on a factory line building microchips and the subRosa cyberfeminist artists are separated by more than geography and dial-up procedures.

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Part IV
Challenges

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Introduction: Challenges

Nicole Ward Jouve

Globalisation – our awareness of it is recent. *The Berlin Wall fell barely fourteen years ago*. The event signalled an end to the Cold War. It put paid to the division of the earth between the Western and the Eastern blocks: between the First and the Second Worlds, which had divided the countries of the so-called Third World into the one or the other sphere of influence. With the symbolic fall of the Berlin Wall the world became unified.

Our minds have become permeated by a new, diffuse awareness: the world *is* one, we are all interrelated. Globalisation. The French call it *mondialisation*, 'world-isation.' The Anglo-Saxon name is weirdly suggestive: 'globe-isation,' as if the earth were being seen from outer space, a globe in orbit among other planets and stars. It suggests satellite vision, distant control, rather than being part of it. Perhaps it says something about the power that forged the word – the United States, the only 'hyper-power' left around.

The World Trade towers fell barely two years ago. A small-scale event in itself: less than 3000 deaths, compared to the 150,000 of the civil war in Algeria, 1,000,000 deaths in the Sudan, the reported 3,000,000 in the region of the Great Lakes. But one with huge implications. The symbol of triumphant neo-liberalism was destroyed, the hyper-power attacked on its own soil. Since then we have had two world-scale wars (Afghanistan and Iraq) between 'the West' and 'terrorism.' It did not take long for the world to become divided up into two again.

Second wave feminism sprang against a revolutionary or 'liberation' background (Vietnam War protests, Black Power, May 1968), when the world was divided up into two blocks, and in a boom, optimistic context: the world could be changed and women were going to do it. Third wave feminism, today, wakes up in a context of recession, in a period of self-questioning and doubt as to whether anything can be changed. Yes, in Western countries at least there have been substantial gains in legal terms and in the work place. Indeed, many young women think that there is no need for feminism any longer. But there are still pay differentials, violence against women,

demeaning or exploitative forms of advertising, pornography and prostitution, and only a minority of women make it to the various Parliaments, multinational boards or circles of power. The recent march, in France, of young women of Muslim origin from the *cités, Ni putes ni soumises* (neither whores nor subjected), a slogan dating back to the 1970s, reveals that not only do ancestral forms of misogyny die hard, but they can come back with a vengeance. And in what used to be called the Third World things appear to have changed little, and perhaps even got worse: women still head the list of the world's poor, still suffer from discrimination and oppression (political, economic, religious) and from slavery (as in the Sudan). Everywhere women continue to be the victims of rape in war (as in Bosnia, Chechnya or the various African wars).

In all these respects third wave feminism can and does continue the struggle of previous generations. Yet there is a pressing need to think about the new patterns that are emerging, and how they should affect our sense of priorities – all the more as they are shot through with paradoxes. For instance, the huge leap in Internet communication and information technology has brought about 'global' new forums of exchange, political protest and debate for feminists. But it has increased the gap between those (in the North) who have access to the technology and those (in the South) who do not. And it has facilitated the pornography industry.

The primacy of ecology

We have an unprecedented and growing awareness that this 'little globe' is alive, ours to share with each other and the animals and plants whose survival may be bound up with ours in more ways than we understand. Ours to husband. Despite the excitement of space exploration and the race to Mars, this earth is all we have. It is our children's future. We *know* we are damaging it, yet we keep on exploiting it, caring only for the short term, catering to our own profit or engineered need. In my lifetime, practically all 'wild' species have become endangered or come under preservation orders. Deserts are expanding.

In early second wave feminism this seemed to be a particularly woman-centred cause. There was much theory, art and writing as well as ecological action that claimed a special bond between 'Women' and 'Nature.' I think for instance of Susan Griffin's *Woman and Nature* (1979) or of *Cassandra* (1988) by East German writer Christa Wolf. Since then there has been much theoretical dispute, many attacks on what has been daubed 'essentialism' or on the claimed 'goodness' of 'Nature.' The fact remains that the earth, as we use and manage it, has been further despoiled and polluted in the last 30 years. On the so-called ecological issues women today fight by the side of men of like conviction through NGOs or associations. Yet it is often women who head and champion particular causes, such as Arundhati Roy opposing

the construction of a dam in India, or Indian women resisting the adoption of Genetically Modified Crops in the name of ecological diversity. It seems to me to be an area where the *practical imperatives* and the *positioning* are more important than the *theoretical* questions. Niamh Moore reflects on this issue in her chapter here. And so does, on another tack, Mridula Nath Chakraborty in her chapter, refusing to be trapped in the 'essentialism' debate.

Can sisterhood still be 'global'?

There is today an unprecedented level of interdependency between the various states and people of the planet. But the gap between the haves and have-nots has increased in the past 20 years despite the (proclaimed) best intentions of the World Monetary Fund, as if the interdependency simply speeded up the transfer of riches instead of bringing about a spirit of solidarity: a quarter of the world population enjoy three quarters of the world's riches. Hundreds of millions live with less than a dollar a day whilst every American contributes three dollars in taxes to the arms industry. Westerners use up 50 litres per person of water daily whilst in other parts of the world 14,000 people a day die for lack of drinkable water. This is supposed to be a post-colonial era, but neo-liberalism, endemic corruption and new forms of imperialism have perpetuated and sometimes worsened colonialism.

In this respect too, women (feminists among them) are at the forefront of new caucuses about 'development,' sustainable or otherwise. Is it time to revive the old slogan 'Sisterhood is global'? It collapsed as 'differences' forcefully asserted themselves: class, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion… And it was shown to have been imperialist in its assumptions: privileged women from the North dictating to women of the South what they should do to be free. But have we thrown the baby with the bath water? Denise deCaires Narain explores this question in her chapter, a discussion of the place of 'Third World' feminist texts in feminist genealogies.

As a privileged Northern feminist, can I at least change *my* attitude? Perhaps I can become better informed and more respectful, more ready to listen and suspend judgement, and give support only if asked for it. Will the world's resources and riches ever be better shared unless human beings (North and South) become more responsible, and develop a true spirit of solidarity? Is this not the form of 'development' that is most required and most rare?

New forms of division and violence

To the hopes triggered by the fall of the Iron Curtain, the opening up of borders, and the start of a new millennium and the Age of Aquarius (the new brotherhood of man), there has succeeded the realisation that the world is

more divided than ever. To some, the new World War is between God (Islam) and Evil (the corrupt and predatory West). To others, it is between 'the Good' (civilised and intrinsically civilising) democracies, and 'the Axis of Evil' (international terrorism supported by 'rogue' states). Or between neo-liberal capitalism as embodied by the countries of the G8 and the 'Group of the 77' representing 133 countries of the South. There is also an anxiety of identity. People tend to fold back upon themselves along ethnic and community lines (e.g. Hispanic Americans in the US, Pakistanis in Bradford or *Maghrébins* in France) so that the 'melting pots' mechanisms that used to absorb waves of immigrants into one nation, or enabled communities (as in the former Yugoslavia) to live peacefully side by side seem to be failing. A world that was supposed to have become unified is generating an appalling series of *civil* wars (the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, the region of the Great Lakes). As if, whenever *division* or *duality* seem to have been superseded, they come back in force: rather like the devil (whose name means duality) who, being chased away, came back with seven even worse devils. The recent divisions *inside* Europe, the Western Alliance and the United Nations over whether to go to war or not in Iraq, are testimony to the speed with which the spirit of conflict can possess us. There are collective, unconscious forces at work none of us control. Women least of all: how many of them are at distinctive decision-making positions in any of the above?

Yet, at a deep level they may well be, as Winifred Woodhull's chapter on African feminists testifies. And in her chapter on Muslim feminism Sherin Saadallah shows how much subtler (and more hopeful) issues are than Westerners tend to think. And feminists are active alongside other 'alter-mondialists.' What is being created through such forums is the seed-bed of future change. But for such change to happen, positive confrontation (a necessary stage) will need to mutate into dialogue and eventually co-operation with the adversary and sometimes even with the oppressor – to give birth to a 'third term.' If I identify the Other as evil, I project my own evil onto him or her, and thereby create a deadlock.

It 'begins with me.' It is primarily by working on ourselves – for me, through spiritual development – that we can best resist the spirit of division. After 11 September 2001 I felt profoundly anxious and destabilised. I went to an inter-religious evening of meditation. The first thing we were asked was to spend time looking into *our* hearts to identify the *source* of the violence. I found panic fear. At the end of the evening I had recovered peace. It was a useful reminder that the violence of others can only destabilise me if there is already fear or anger inside me. Opposition, however righteous, simply begets more conflict. The victim (or subaltern) needs to confront her own relation to violence (and masculinity if the oppressor is masculine) as part of her progress towards freedom.

The growth of individual conscience

Individuals everywhere are becoming more aware, more independent of structures. Whilst this can lead to individualism and selfishness, it yet signals that, in our newly unified and newly divisive globe, we are beginning to perceive that we are all responsible, and to act upon it. In the face of *pensée unique*, of the increasingly obsolete positions of traditional political parties and the doctoring of issues by governments and international institutions, new or renewed forms of 'participative' democracy are being born. Counter-weights, balancing mechanisms, are becoming operative. Witness the world-wide demos that took place over war with Iraq.

This is the hallmark of women's actions. They often are community leaders: like the women of Burundi who organise committees of reconciliation in villages torn by ethnic divisions, or the Palestinian and Israeli women who continue to work together in the midst of sectarian hatred. The chapters that follow are permeated by a conviction that solutions must be personally and responsibly arrived at: be contributions to a *particular* cause rather than a call to *universal* forms of action that necessarily subsume and swallow difference. What is demanded of us, it seems to me, is a difficult act of balance: to be aware of the larger issues, and yet to remain centred, in touch with all that we are, including our own bodies – each assuming her (or his) *difference*. For only individual consciences (I use the plural deliberately) stand today in the face of the economic and political powers. But individual consciences are useless if they are themselves possessed by *the spirit of power*: whether its servants, or its masters. There is hope. I am struck by how swiftly growing numbers of young people reach levels of consciousness and even wisdom which it took people of my generation a lifetime to reach. The chapters in this section may be evidence of this.

The need for new ideals

1789–1989. Two centuries from the Fall of the Bastille to the Fall of the Berlin Wall. Two centuries in which the ideals generated by the Enlightenment, the American and French Revolutions, Socialism and Communism, led men to believe that they could create a Brave New World, overthrow the Bad with the Old, replace the (evil) power of the privileged by the (good) power of the underdog (the dictatorship of the proletariat). The failure and the death of many million in *all* twentieth-century revolutions have put paid to such utopian dreams. Bizarrely, leaving aside Muslim fundamentalists, the only *revolutionising* country left around is the United States, at present attempting to export Democracy as once the Soviet Union did Marxism. The situation leaves many of us without anything to work for. There is a *deficit* of ideals, of ways forward and of objectives that could fire up the imagination and unite us in a common cause. Vaclav Havel said to Michel

Camdessus, the former head of the World Monetary Fund: 'You do not need to change your economy. You need to change your *values*.'

Thirty years ago feminists also believed in revolution: if only women were to take power, or came to power, the world would change for the better. We can still hope: look at Ingrid Betancourt in Columbia, Aung San Suu Kyi in Malaysia. But not just because they are women; because of who they are and the values they stand for, whether they succeed or not. Experience has made us realistic, mostly about ourselves, and more modest. But the tasks ahead are as huge and exciting than ever. The chapters in this section help to get the ball rolling.

16

Wa(i)ving it All Away: Producing Subject and Knowledge in Feminisms of Colour

Mridula Nath Chakraborty

This chapter is an intervention into post-identity and post-second wave feminist debates about essentialism and difference.[1] Hegemonic feminism has obviated the possibilities of coalitions with differential feminisms by abandoning essentialism as a necessary tool with which to theorise identity politics. Hegemonic feminism's prioritisation of sex over race has been characterised by – and is symptomatic of – its anxiety over race, racial identity politics and racialised essentialism. This anxiety, in turn, marks itself as white, neutral and normative. Wendy Brown, in arguing for 'the impossibility of women's studies,' notes this anxiety as the 'compensatory cycle of guilt and blame' which is 'structured by women's studies' original, nominalist, and conceptual subordination of race (and all other forms of social stratification) to gender' (93). Robyn Wiegman 'interprets this anxiety as indicating that women's studies – perhaps Western feminism as a whole – cannot *not* be inhabited by the powerful pain of racial wounds' ('Institutionalism' 125; emphasis in original). Since the 'specificity of sexual difference cannot be taken as a singular constant, but is . . . linked to explicit political questions of rights and equality' (Price and Shildrick 18) it has become imperative that hegemonic feminism reinterrogates its Eurocentric agenda. Instead of perpetuating the wave metaphor, in which each successive wave signifies a further 'evolution' in the progressive narrative of feminist history, hegemonic feminism needs to attend to its wake-up call the 'differential consciousness' of other feminisms present through their 'oppositional ideology' (Sandoval 43). Feminists of colour argue that the very idea of a phase/stage/wave-based consciousness is an ideological construct of the Eurocentric subject that seeks to subsume and consume the challenges posed to it through notions of 'inclusion' and 'solidarity.' Chandra Talpade Mohanty insists on 'a shared frame of reference among Western, postcolonial, Third World feminists in order to decide . . . the specificity of difference based on a vision of equality' ('Under Western Eyes' 502). Since this vision is located within a paradigm of decolonisation, debates in twenty-first century

feminism are imbricated in 'race' as a relational as well as an essential category. This chapter makes the case for an embodied essentialism that is imagined within the locus of race in all its nominal and constructed force, and that acknowledges woman as an *essentially* racialised category within configurations of the contemporary nation state.

Hegemonic feminism is a useful way of historicising what has been variously (and troublingly) called white or Western feminism. Chela Sandoval reminds us that this feminism 'transcodes political practice to reproduce exclusionary forms of knowledge' (47). The Eurocentric teleological narrative of a 'unified female subject' is a 'fictional landscape' which can only lead to the 'intellectual exhaustion that characterised the discussion of identity throughout the 1990s' (Wiegman, 'Apocalyptic' 805). Judith Butler also points out how the 'contemporary feminist debates over the meaning of gender lead time and again to a certain sense of trouble, as if the indeterminacy of gender might eventually culminate in the failure of feminism' (ix). Indeed, this fear colours the dominant tenor of anti-essentialism that shifted from debates of gender to those around race in second wave feminism. Where once hegemonic feminism – complicit in the project of Enlightenment – could confidently represent a unified subject, it can no longer purport to speak on behalf of an increasingly fragmented constituency. When its singular identity was threatened by the 'communities of resistance' and 'imagined communities' of colour, dominant feminism had to insist that these racialised categories were neither politically contingent nor valid; rather they were essentialist ways of imagining the female body (Mohanty, 'Cartographies' 5).

Just as the Western canon announced the death of the author at the moment in which female and feminist subjectivities claimed their place in literature, hegemonic feminism deployed what Naomi Schor calls 'the shock troops of anti-essentialism' (vii) against the tensions posed by feminists of colour who mobilised around common racial and cultural grounds. The insistence on the category of anecdotal and historical experience and the uses of cultural memory and non-academic intellectual scholarship in the process of identity formation, conjured up the bogeyman of essentialism. Essentialism became the ugly four-letter word of feminism, and was held responsible for, as Diana Fuss puts it, the 'impasse predicated on the difficulty of theorizing the social in relation to the natural, or the theoretical in relation to the political' (1). Even more of an entrenched word now than when Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak urged feminists to take 'the risk of essence' in 1989, an 'essentialist' identity is the most contentious issue in contemporary cultural politics. At a time when hegemonic feminism is fighting a desperate battle of hermeneutics to hold on to its preferred identity and constituency of 'woman,' it is not surprising that it wants to remove essentialism from the battlefied. Whether the challenge is real or nominal, hegemonic feminism demands that race-based essentialism be written out of its parlance.

A(nother) history of oppositional consciousness

With reference to why hegemonic feminism finds the prospect of an essentially racialised identity so troublesome, Wiegman contends that theory constantly hotfoots between feminism as a subjective formation and feminism as a knowledge formation ('Apocalyptic' 819). Because the notion of subject formation is crucial to the feminist academy, a 'host of theoretical, identitarian, and seemingly generational differences have come to interrupt feminism's on-time arrival in a post-patriarchal future' ('Apocalyptic' 808). In order to perpetuate its self-narration of continuity and unity, hegemonic feminism has to make invisible its culpability in the project of racial homogeneity and insist upon 'woman' as its proper and natural object of study. However, despite being challenged and interrogated relentlessly on the foundational premise that hegemonic feminism serves the entire identitarian constituency of 'neutral' womankind, white privilege remains intact while the arguments used to defuse the tension that difference produces have become much more sophisticated and insidious. When women of colour have argued that feminist politics need to be professed from different locations within specific histories of oppression, hegemonic feminism has broadened the very idea of difference to argue that its own project comes from a different place and is thus equally valid. Because mainstream feminism is so suspectible to selective amnesia, it forgets all too readily its role in the creation of the explicitly racialised woman. Furthermore, because feminists are also citizens of nations, and because the Western nation state has become even more powerful post-9/11, members of the dominant majority respond to their national narratives and make Others of those who they have always claimed to include in 'the sisterhood.' Governments in Western nations operate on a code of racial logic, reflected in myriad social practices. In the feminist nation, the response is effected through parallel constitutions, codes of conduct and other regulatory bodies in the shape of academic hirings, Project fundings, publishing practices, conference circuits and keynote speaker allocations.

Hegemonic feminism derives the very definition and understanding of its subjectivity from the idea of difference. Whether it is the New Woman engaged in its imperial mission of civilising the heathen woman, or the neo-colonial feminist invested in bringing liberty and freedom to the veiled Islamic one, hegemonic feminism imagines itself only by creating its Other. Arising 'out of the matrix of the very discourse denying, permitting and producing difference,' (Sandoval 41) this Other, however, is not just a test-subject for consciousness-raising: it articulates an entire '*history of oppositional consciousness*' (ibid., 53; emphasis in original). The spectre of embodied Otherness, which takes the form of racialised Black and coloured women, makes explicit the colonising underpinnings of a self-serving white narrative. In its attention to histories of slavery, imperialism, colonisation, global capitalism, migration movements and other displacements of violence, this

differential consciousness centralises racialised gender and is thus able to provide a textured reading of the race relations that haunts the body of hegemonic feminist knowledge. On the one hand, it diagnoses the processes whereby narratives of race and racialised bodies are willfully produced and perpetuated through sanctioned ignorance and deliberate malevolence; on the other hand, it deploys the constantly shifting terrain of the experiencing subject in its identitarian trajectory from Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'strategic essentialism' to Judith Butler's 'performance.'

Concomitant with the debate on essentialism is the notion of difference posited in the biological and cultural essence of womanhood. According to the *Encyclopedia of Feminist Literary Theory*, difference is a 'tool for analyzing literature or cultural practice' and a concept that has been traditionally understood as 'organized into hierarchical pairs, into binary oppositions (such as male/female) in which one term is seen as the dominant original, and against which the other is seen as derivative, inferior, secondary' (116–117). Feminists of colour have repeatedly argued, raved and ranted against the discursive production of racialised women as the 'they' versus the 'us' of Eurocentric women. Racially constructed women are either seen as 'traditional' and trapped in social mores that position them as 'fragmented, inarticulate voices in (and from) the dark' (Mohanty, 'On Race' 180) or exotic hothouse flowers who represent special interest groups. Western women, meanwhile, are free to pursue their legitimate goals in feminism, unconstrained by any of the racial 'chips on the shoulder' that paralyse their coloured sisters. So the issue of 'universal' day care for women can be argued *ad nauseum* without taking the time to 'see' for whom the service caters and who the service providers are. Another example is the Palestinian female suicide bombers who are perceived as traitors to the feminist cause, without any questioning of the Eurocentric stake in 'international' feminist politics. Differences can only provide exotic variety at the feminist table as long as they attest to the culinary positional superiority of the dominant majority. The continuing ghettoisation of African and other Third World feminisms in 'separate sessions at conferences, separate chapters in anthologies, separate and unequal political agendas and activist efforts' (Woodhull 10) is a symptom of the management politics of white feminism, as it struggles to keep its 'normal' place in the hierarchy. Essentialism, no longer understood in terms of gender alone, has been reinterpreted and reinforced in racialised forms, with difference as the pivot upon which universalism and internationalism now spin. Embodiment is invoked both as a racial absolute as well as a relational concept in service of the cultural artefact of identity. This means that the oppositional feminist is both validated and erased, at the same moment, by virtue of her difference, and difference alone. This has repercussions for the feminist of colour who comes to occupy a tenured space within the feminist academy and has power to speak – indeed is invited to speak – on behalf of difference *but* against essentialism.

The transatlantic debate between essentialism and difference is tied to the establishment and consolidation of multicultural white settler states. White settler states arrange themselves politically, institutionally and socially within the binaries of insider and outsider, resident and alien, citizen and subject, home and exile, and settler and immigrant, while the 'native' and the 'aborigine' is violently and systematically erased from the map. The national narrative in such states is based on 'an assimilationist universalism, deployed through a language of liberal pluralism and citizenship' (Bannerji 17). The Others in such states are necessarily categorised and pathologised in opposition to the normative Eurocentric subject. Racialised subjects have the double burden of proving that they are equally valid candidates for citizenship at the same time as having their difference marked and fetishised. While the Canadian and Australian models of state-sponsored official multi/biculturalism differ from the popular and populist communitarian versions of the same in the US and the UK, the point needs to be reiterated that the racial logic underpinning these social and government policies has been particularly disingenuous. The feminist nation acts in much the same way.

> [N]on-white, non-Western women in "white/Western" societies can only begin to speak with a hesitating "I'm a feminist, but" . . . in which the meaning and substance of feminism itself becomes problematised. Where does this leave feminism? Feminism must stop conceiving itself as a nation, a 'natural' political destination for all women, no matter how multicultural. Rather than adopting a politics of inclusion (which is always ultimately based on a notion of commonality and community), it will have to develop a self-conscious politics of partiality, and imagine itself as a *limited* political home, which does not absorb difference within pre-given and predefined space but leaves room for ambivalence and ambiguity. In the uneven, conjectural terrain so created, white/Western feminists too will have to detotalise their feminist identities and be compelled to say: "I'm a feminist, but" . . . (Ang 57–58; emphasis in original)

Ien Ang contends that mainstream Western feminism operates like a nation with boundaries defined through the binaries of inclusion and exclusion, insider and outsider, and citizenship and alien residentship. Just as the border patrol of white settler colonies use markers such as race, religion, language and culture – which are based on the three-worlds theory – to regulate entry into their lands of opportunity, dominant white feminism uses the binary categories of theory and experience to gatekeep its hallowed portals. Thus the racially experiencing subject can only be an 'icon' of difference.

To continue with the metaphor of nation-under-seige, the moment a matter of internal security and/or solidarity crops up, the feminist of colour is regarded with the suspicion reserved for non-citizens and aliens. This is

exemplified in a particular kind of post-9/11 rhetoric E. Ann Kaplan adumbrates:

> While in the 1990s, US women were appropriately taken up with different projects to do with continuing to improve gender equality and organizing around women's needs, *women in the rest of the world* were in different situations, with different needs and agendas…To put the question perhaps too strongly for the sake of argument: *have at least some feminists achieved enough regarding gender equality that we can set aside such issues* [of diversity] and deal with terrorism?…problems have not been solved for euro-centric women, let alone for diasporic women or women living in cultures that repress women and their bodies. Do *we need to reorganize our priorities* so that we focus on *what women can do to help with the battle of our times, namely terrorism*, moving on from thinking about what can be done for women, to *what women can do for the world*…? (10; 15; emphases added)

Kaplan's 'we' cannot underscore more concretely the militant Christian propaganda that targeted and signalled out people of colour, demanding that they prove their nationalistic affiliations following the destruction of the Twin Towers in New York City in 2001. It is depressing indeed to envision a 'common' future of feminism that is so totally implicated in the machinations of modern rogue nations. Sara Ahmed uses the trope of 'strange encounters' to describe this kind of 'stranger fetishisation' and 'stranger danger' that, on the one hand, celebrates otherness and difference in the name of plurality and, on the other, sets off alarms in the neighbourhood watch scheme of feminism at the slightest questioning of its limits (4).

Essentialism's great text: the body

How do the marginalised and disenfranchised voices in the First World feminisms conduct dialogue as they weave in and out of the ayes and nayes of their racially essentialised identities? The central metaphor for this chapter is hotfooting, referring to the constant dance, from one foot to another, of the feminist of colour, as she inhabits the hotspot reserved for her in the postcolonial academy. Chicana feminist Norma Alarcon diagnoses this phenomenon as the constantly shifting 'space of *la differand*, the site of a conflict, collision or contest' (67) whereby the feminist of colour hotfoots between being and not being the native informant, between being and not being the race-maid in the academic kitchen, between trying to negotiate her newly acquired job profile and, at the same time, self-reflexively, interrogating the conditions of possibilities that make her presence viable. Walking on the razor's edge between desire and rejection, agency and abjection, and token subaltern and empowered migrant intellectual, the feminist of colour masters the game of hotfooting. She learns to speak of, for and from a position

of privilege in the margins but becomes, in the process, the voice of the margin within the centre. As Gargi Bhattacharya testifies, the 'most risky disguise is taking the centre – by yourself, on the enemy's terms. The least elegant passing, the walking-on-daggers bargain which never stops cutting' (251). In the nation of feminism, the feminist of colour comes to occupy the transnational borderland, earns frequent flyer points for 'worlds-travelling' (Lugones 390) and constantly negotiates an insider–outsider position.

It would not even be an understatement to declare that at the feminist table not everyone is equal. The unfortunate development in the past two decades has been the way in which hegemonic feminist projects have followed the example of their respective multiculturalist narratives and national imaginaries, refusing to insist on a cogent and embodied critique of the discourse of difference. There are two ways in which this has happened. First, difference has been ghettoised into area-studies types of global feminism, for example, African, Chinese, Caribbean, First Nations, Indian, Iranian, Kenyan, Middle-Eastern, Somalian and so on, and then relegated to items in poorly funded women's studies departments. Secondly, difference has branched out into broader postcolonial categories such as US Third World feminism, postcolonial feminisms, immigrant feminisms, feminisms of colour and so on. These categories would not have such nomenclatural power and meaning in contexts outside white-dominated multicultural nations. Most informed analyses of the first kind (i.e. global feminist models) take into account the political economy of their socio-cultural milieu and are contingent upon broad-based approaches to questions of equity rather than a simple gender divide. They offer sustained critiques of rising fundamentalism and other patriarchal forms of oppression in their own nations, of the effect of the developmental model of World Bank-funded projects, environmental degradation, structural adjustment programmes, globalisation, sweat-shops and other kinds of North-initiated neo-colonial modes of exploitation. Models of US Third World feminisms, on the other hand, have been linked to the phenomenally successful rise of postcolonial studies in the Anglo-American academy in the past two decades. They constitute what Sandoval insists is a 'new typology' (53) that engages with multiculturalism, racialised class formations, immigration and naturalisation laws, street-level and institutionalised racism, social sector responsibility, reproductive health, affirmative action and constructions of whiteness. They have enjoyed great success, as the postcolonial academy falls over itself in the scramble for the Other on its own home grounds, but have also been trapped between the Scylla and Charybdis of their 'matter' and 'essence.' Questions of silence, voice, appropriation, agency, experience and identity have reigned paramount in such debates, leading to feminism's 'melancholy' (Wiegman, 'Apocalyptic' 805).

The challenge to hegemonic feminism has thus been great, both in terms of the articulations of feminists of colour and the material positions they have come to acquire within institutions. The institutional presence of

feminists of colour is both a symptom of the desire in the academy for epistemologies of the Other, and subsequent attempts to contain and consume the Other. Paying attention to issues at stake would require that white feminists depart from their positions as the neutral subjects and referential points of feminism and stop posing a divisive resistance to the Other in order to retain the status quo. This entails challenging the motives behind the qualifications of class, sexuality and age which intersect with any and every analysis of race. As theorists of colour work through these motives and qualifications, they are quite aware of the enormity of the task ahead of them. But attention-deflecting challenges like this are not only a denial of the deeply entrenched racial grooves of feminism, but actually leave all of us in a cul-de-sac of sanctioned ignorance, wilful inertia and inevitable stasis. The discourses of 'all of us are Others' and 'all of us are Different' that have become alarmingly prominent in feminist phraseology, negate the experiential and essential fact of being racialised and embodied entities. When difference is thus deployed to render all forms of gender oppression theoretically equal, it brings into play a historically amnesiac and politically crippling model of feminism, without allowing for a recognition of the incommensurability of the difference involved and the impossibility of reaching a 'home' in feminism. Of course, feminists of colour have questioned the very motives for trying to arrive at a congenial and convivial model of home. After all we arrive, literally as well as conceptually, from other homes to create new and multiple homes. Ang argues that the ubiquity of the difference factor can allow a white feminist to 'become a "politically correct" anti-racist by disavowing the specificity of the experience of being a racialised "other," reducing it to an instance of oppression essentially the same as her own, gender-based oppression' (61).

Departures and arrivals

The Spivakian concept of strategic essentialism has, in the past, offered feminists of colour many grounds for the negotiation and performance of identity politics. It allows for an assessment of the implications as well as the complicities of feminists of colour in what Inderpal Grewal calls the transnational flow of capital, labour and bodies (53). But it has also complicated the role of the feminist of colour as the 'self-marginalising or self-consolidating migrant or postcolonial masquerading as a "native informant"' (Spivak 6). In order to work through the machinations of this schizophrenia, I advocate a head-on collision with essentialism as it speaks to us and on the terms it is practised and enacted socially. I no longer want to sidestep, slide and elide, or surreptitiously slip in the issue of the situated knowledges, special 'affects' and investments we as coloured bodies bring into feminism. The first step is to name this way of knowing the world as an *embodied epistemological essentialism*. This has resonances with what Evelyn Hammonds calls

our 'invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible and pathologized' bodies (170) and what Spivak calls 'women marked by origins' (262). This essentialism is the heritage/baggage we carry on our backs as Cree/First Nations, Indian/South Asian, Egyptian/Middle-Eastern, Hispanic/Chicana, Korean/Asian-American. We know our worlds both through our origins and through social and political nomenclature. This essentialism is that which gets talked about whenever we congregate, break bread, eat each other's salt, wash lentils together, speak in our tongues and speak bitter. This essentialism contains the perks and privileges, pains and pitfalls that accrue to us all as racialised entities. It is an essentialism that I no longer wish to disavow or apologise for. I want to claim back the essentialism that makes me a woman of colour in the first place, however mediated that place and location is. What it means to be a woman of colour is embedded and linguistically expressed in the experience of the body, and I want to recuperate the validity of this in-body experience so as to make its 'deep contextual knowledges' available and relevant to a third wave of feminism (Alexander and Mohanty xx).

M. Jaqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty persuasively argue that what feminism remembers is 'contingent, yet grounded and strategic' (xxii). If this third wave is to be possessed of any lasting significance then it must remember and document the lessons of the second wave. We have to create the genealogies and histories of its counterhegemonic moments. The only way of not forgetting these lessons is constant repetition and representation. Whether hegemonic feminism is tired, or whether feminists of colour want identity to be a beginning rather than an ending, we have to keep on talking about identity without mincing our words. This means not embracing the idea of a transnational feminist praxis without doing our homework. A horizontal comradeship of women is possible but we need to change the very manner in which we conduct our feminist democracies. This may mean a turn to the literary, and using the 'information retrieval' model that Spivak warns against, so that we know *who* we are talking about ('Post-marked' 77). We need to learn our enemies well, something imperialists, colonists and the minions of transnational globalisation know all too well. But we need to know our friends as well, as Maria Lugones advises (401). The company we keep conceives of our identities in essential terms, notwithstanding the important work done in the borderlands on hybridity and metisage. The 'not here, not now' of migrant identities can be grounded and employed well in the service of feminism through the essential lessons of embodiment we have learnt.

How does one come to the feminist table with a 'flesh and blood' understanding of specific, specialised experiences which have become so entrenched in the past two decades so as to be essential to us? If identity politics continue to be organised around the tropes of racial hegemony and oppositions to it (no matter how hybrid or deconstructed those binaries might be) how do we continue to talk about selfhood as both foundational

and relational? One becomes a woman of colour not only through what Himani Bannerji calls an 'agentic' process of 'anti-imperialist political conscientization' (25) but also through an accident of history and the experience of the body as political. When colour becomes the 'cognate of race' in multiculturalised corporatised language, we cannot but be essential. All essentialism is strategic. Whether it is the normative invisible category of the so-called white women or the nomenclature of choice for their visible non-white counterparts, essentialism has always been a way of standardising acceptability and gauging inclusion. The current trend of anti-essentialism merely reinscribes the racist and ethnocentric assumptions of hegemonic feminist theorising. This chapter has argued for essentialism to be urgently revalued as a political tool for epistemological feminist transformation because even when we speak of the hybrid and the heterogeneous, the standard is an imagined entity. If we are to understand communities of feminist affinity, we have to begin with the definitional. The desire for a feminist unity which is transnational and global is utopic – unless we start with this premise, there can be no third wave.

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17

Muslim Feminism in the Third Wave: A Reflective Inquiry

Sherin Saadallah

Pam Alldred and Sarah Dennison argue that the first wave of feminism represented the 'struggle for equality and integration,' the second wave criticised 'dominant values and sometimes inverted value-hierarchies to revalue qualities associated with the feminine,' while feminism in its third wave transgresses boundaries through 'deconstructing the presumption of a gender binary or the conventional ways of doing politics' (126). Does third wave feminism provide a space for Muslim feminism? Certainly, the pluralities embraced under third wave feminism offer a more welcoming space than previous feminisms. Patricia McFadden, referring to African feminist consciousness, refutes the claim that the notions of gender, feminism and woman are necessarily Western, arguing that the problem with this theoretical model is that it regards '"women" as a construct [as] also western. . . . When gender and women disappear from the conceptual landscape, then *feminist resistance politics* is also displaced, leaving us without a political means of responding to patriarchal exclusion' (61; emphasis added). This has allowed an oppositional strategy to emerge, pitting West against East, one feminism against another. Susan Muaddi Darraj sums up the apparent tensions for the West in the terms 'Arab' and 'feminist':

> Indeed, it comes as a surprise to many Western women and Western feminists to learn that there is, and has been, a strong Arab feminist movement in the Middle East at least since the beginning of the twentieth century. Whenever I use the terms "Arab feminism," it generally elicits such comments from American feminists as "That sounds like an oxymoron!" and questions such as "Can you be a feminist if you're still veiled?" and "How can a Muslim woman be a feminist if she shares her husband with three other wives?" (190)

This chapter will avoid the binaries predominant in many feminist writings in order to delineate the similar problems which women face across borders,

religions and strands while advocating an expansive definition of the 'third wave.'

Muslim feminism refers to a feminist movement which emerges from Islam, both as a religion and as a belief structure which is historically and culturally reinforced. This is not to say that all those women using Islam as a base for their activism should be considered Muslim feminists. Muslim feminism has also been called Islamic feminism but in no way should it be mistaken with Islamist feminism which is the domain of women who belong to the rank and file of the organised conservative Islamist movement. That said, Muslim feminism emerges from the same intersections as Islamist feminism – Islam and woman. Can Muslim feminism empower and emancipate? The gap in emancipation between Western and non-Western feminists should not be understood as the result of claims reinforcing the supremacy of one culture over the other or a distinctive superiority of one form of feminism over another. What it should be understood as is the manifestation of arguments concerning the 'ownership' of feminism – something which third wave feminism challenges. Deniz Kandiyoti affirms Mcfadden's point, arguing that 'there is a culturalist bias in [such] a discussion that reduces it to querying whether certain conceptions of rights and citizenship, and for that matter feminism, may find any resonance in a Middle Eastern environment' (53). This gap is largely the result of structures of power mediated through culture and the definition of gender roles. In delineating the parameters of a Muslim feminist consciousness, the contextual differences must be understood as informing feminist emancipatory strategies.

Defining Muslim feminism

Attitudes towards the relationship between religion and feminism range from the advocates of a culturally defined feminist movement to a more critical wave of scholars who consider the interaction between Islam and feminism as debilitating to the feminist project. However, the argument for Muslim feminism should be based on the notion of empowerment and a rights-based approach, one which refutes the criticism that it is only culturally relativist manifestation. This will accentuate its power as a movement responding to the contemporary political and socio-economic realities in the majority of post-fundamentalist Muslim societies.[1] This is not to negate the importance of a pluralist feminist movement which is representative and inclusive of all 'women.' Rather, it is important to identify Muslim feminism as a *tactical change* in the feminist movement rather than as a non-feminist project. To do this one must be able to identify who – from the array of activists using the terms 'woman' and 'Islam' – should be able to claim the label of feminist. The distinction between the different versions of

feminism where these terms meet is crucial as it allows for a difference between the emancipatory movement and, for instance, an activism linked to a conservative agenda.

Azza Karam argues for three categories of feminist activity in contemporary Muslim societies:

1. Secular feminism – a discourse grounded outside religion and engaged with international human rights (13);
2. Islamist feminism – a discourse emerging from the socially and intellectually conservative Islamist movement, *Al Harakah Al-Islamiyya* (9);
3. Muslim feminism – a discourse engaging with Islamic sources while reconciling Islamic faith with international human rights (11).

The first category – that of secular feminism – emerged in the Middle East during the early twentieth century when such figures as Hoda Sha'rawy, Ceza Nabarawi and Bint El Sahti' began to question the status of women. Secular feminism is still a powerful movement in Muslim societies and has brought about notable achievements. However, as secular feminists separate religious and feminist discourses, they have increasingly faced challenges from the state, the general public and conservative religious movements.[2] This has led to the rise of alternative feminist movements such as Muslim feminism. This chapter will focus on the distinctions between Muslim feminists and Islamist feminists and the designation of the former as a third wave feminist movement. Superficially there appears to be few differences between Muslim and Islamist feminists. However, within Islamist feminism, women are understood to be 'oppressed precisely because they try to be "equal" to men and are therefore being placed in unnatural settings and unfair situations, which denigrate them and *take away their integrity and dignity as women*. . . . [Islamism] gives women a sense of value, political purpose and confidence' (Karam 10; emphasis added). The Islamist argument is a reflection of neo-patriarchal attitudes, delineating a *conservative* rather than a *progressive* attitude to change.[3] Muslim feminism, on the other hand, allows for an emancipated female presence within Islam.

Sharazad Mojab echoes many contemporary critiques of postfeminism, arguing that although 'focusing on identity, culture, language, discourse, desire and body . . . has made enormous contributions to our understanding of patriarchy' (142–143), this new form of postfeminism has lacked the political impetus of liberal feminism's achievements in terms of legal equality. 'In this theorization, the women of the world are fragmented into religions, ethnicities, tribes, cultures, nations and traditions, which determine the agenda of women's and feminist movements. The political ramifications of this cultural relativism are clear' (Mojab 143). The danger of a postfeminist position is that it also assumes a general 'completion' of the aims of second

wave feminism. I would suggest that it is more useful to speak of a 'third wave' of feminism. This third wave should be understood as possessing a globalised perspective which is inclusive of commonalities whilst transcending difference. This new wave of feminism represents a new generation of feminism/ists working towards constructive solution(s) to women's situation while embracing diversity. This allows for a feminism which is non-monolithic and a feminism which responds to the emerging necessities and real issues facing women *today* rather than attempting to fit *all* women into the structures conceptualised by the second wave. This is not to reject the precepts of the second wave, but to acknowledge that contemporary global structures and interactions require a 'new' feminism.[4] In terms of the relationship between Islam and feminism, the placing of all Islamised discourses in one basket corroborates Mojab's argument that postfeminism is only a contemporary version of liberal feminism. Embracing diversity entails ascertaining the diverse nature of feminism today, including Muslim feminism.

Miriam Cooke confirms the importance of making a clear distinction between Islam and Islamic fundamentalism (Islamism) (58). This is, in essence, the main locus of critique which directs this chapter's argument. Supporting and analysing objectively the rights-based discourses of Muslim feminism does much to delineate the parameters of cultural relativism in lieu of a culturally sensitive universalism of rights, opportunities and advocacy. Within this framework, Islamist feminists should be understood as female *activists* for the Islamist movement. The belief structures of Islamist 'feminists' in many ways counter the emancipatory models of feminism. Such Islamist activists as Zeinab Al-Gazali and Safeenaz Kazem are advocates of established Islamist conservative principles pertaining to women's conduct and space. Muslim feminism, on the other hand, is a rights-based movement which promulgates Islamic connotations. In doing so, it reinterprets the religious discourses so as to integrate with global feminism(s).

Muslim feminism is, for the most part, a quest for equality, equity and empowerment within an Islamic context. Muslim feminists such as Asma Barlas, Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi, to name but a few, are dismantling the status quo of male-dominated Islamic interpretation and acculturation which serves to reinforce women's subjugation. This interpretation and acculturation must be understood as separate from Islamic texts, as Amy E. Schwartz points out: 'Islam rightly understood reflects a philosophy of enlightenment and egalitarianism . . . unsavory practices relegating women to second-class citizenship are not intrinsic to true Islamic values or to the Shari'a [Islamic Law] and never were' (3). There is a clear divergence in the aims and strategies of Muslim feminists and Islamist feminists. According to Cooke,

> [w]hen public intellectuals situate themselves as Islamic [Muslim] feminists, they address themselves to dominant religious discourses. It is from official

> historiography and hermeneutics that they derive their strategies to construct a feminist position that resists exclusion and locates authority within the same cultural boundaries. (82)

Cooke's recognition of the difference between Islamic/Muslim and Islamist discourses clearly addresses a problem which besets this field of study. That is, semantic confusion allows for ideological confusion. Cooke claims that 'Islam and Islamism are not the same' (58); this chapter claims that Muslim and Islamist are equally distinctive. A Muslim feminist movement is condoned by Muslim society while initiating change from within the framework of Islam's universal terms of reference.

In contrast, Islamist feminists possess a more conservative approach to the status of women in Muslim societies. Islamism or Islamists align feminism with the 'unthinkable.' Thus, while identifying the essence and logic of Muslim feminist strategies, it is crucial to recognise the existence of ultra-conservative trends which reinforce the status quo. Using the legal reforms to improve maternal custodial rights in the post-revolutionary Islamist society in Iran as an example, Mojab confirms that Islamist feminism, and its various forms

> do not have the potential to be a serious challenge to patriarchy. The experience of the Islamic Republic has shown, as a matter of fact, that Islamic theocracy reinforces the traditional patriarchal system. Thus, far from being an alternative to secular, radical, and socialist feminisms [it] . . . justifies unequal gender relations. (131)

The context defines the aims, and limitations, of this women's movement. These reforms were undertaken not because women were denied access to their children but because children were denied access to their mothers. Mojab's example is in clear contrast to the essence of Muslim feminism as expressed in other contexts. One could take as an example the restitution, in Egypt, of the principle of *Khul'* (the right by women to initiate divorce by economically forfeiting themselves) and the appointment of female judges, after a concerted battle with the establishment *'ulama* (religious scholars) and conservative Islamist forces. In the latter example, Muslim feminist discourses were empowering while in the case of the Islamist polity of Iran the tactics for activism were, in essence, non-feminist. Despite being progressive, they owed their conceptualisation to *Islamist* terms of reference. Thus, Islam and feminism *are* compatible, while Islamism and feminism are not.

Challenging the cultural paradigm of submission

To grasp the challenges that Muslim feminists face, it is necessary to understand the structural and hierarchical dynamics which they are attempting to

dismantle. Is it specifically Islam or is it its interaction with host culture(s) that allows the dynamics of interpretation and practice and thereby delineates the rationale behind the male–female power dynamics in Muslim societies? In trying to understand the nature of the interaction between religion and cultural interplay, special attention must be given to the interpretation of the original Islamic Texts and the practices that impacted on these interpretations. In this way, a distinction is made between religion as sacred Text, its interpretation and the level of practice which is strongly influenced by cultural and historical syntheses. The interaction of the Text, interpretation and cultural practice amount to religious acculturation. Acculturation too often consists of specific and particular traditions and beliefs which are not open to discussion and are resistant to change. In referring to the role of religious ideologies and more specifically fundamentalism, Shahin Gerami attributes a subsidiary, but effective role to religion in shaping culturally defined gender roles: 'culturally defined distinctions determine men and women's political, economic, and spatial positions within social organization. Religious ideologies that solidify these functions also promote gender identities that further reevaluate and redefine previously established sex roles' (13). This argument is useful in formulating assumptions about the relationship between culture and religion in the identification of gender roles and sexual identities. The effect of culture on the conceptualisation of religion – and not vice versa – is crucial in shaping the paradigm of religious interpretation and practices that strengthen certain notions about gender and gender dynamics within Muslim societies and consequently reinforce patriarchal power models. This is the basis from which Muslim feminists are seeking to effect change and to bring about empowerment for women.

For Asma Barlas, as for other Muslim feminists, 'Muslim women can struggle for equality from within the framework of the Qur'an's teachings' (1). The interplay between the three levels of the religion – the Text, interpretation and practice – is also maintained by Barlas who advocates the importance of questioning the contextual/extratextual realities that shaped the understanding of the original Text of the Qur'an and its interpretation. Scholars have indicated that the 'inequality and discrimination [against women] derive not from the teachings of the Qur'an [the Text] but from the secondary religious texts (Barlas 6). Islam and, more specifically, the Qur'an, despite the possibilities of egalitarian and non-patriarchal interpretations, has become more conservative with regard to the role of women. Thus, religious commentaries and exegesis contributed to a growing trend through history whereby women's confinement and inequality were reinforced by male-dominated interpretation. The need to respond to such interpretations is one of the priorities of Muslim feminism.

Male-dominated interpretation and jurisprudence have contributed in part to this. This, however, was related to the context in which such processes

were taking place and the cultural specificities that determined ideological and political models throughout Islamic history.[5] The impact of these cultural actualities are reflected in the secondary religious texts which endorsed and enforced the subservience of women. This religious acculturation is an interaction between the three overlapping levels of religion – the Text, (male-dominated) interpretation, and cultural practice – which produces a particularised understanding of Islam. In turn, this produces traditions and belief structures which police power relations and gender roles. It is the parameters and complexities of religious acculturation which Muslim feminists are challenging in order to gain emancipation for women in Muslim societies. Muslim feminist scholars must engage with the facets and dynamics of religious acculturation in order to bring about a fuller understanding of the terms of reference from which Muslim feminism derives its arguments.

Sources and dynamics of religious acculturation

Barbara Stowasser asserts that when studying the Qur'an against the background of pre-Islamic society (known as *Jahiliyya*) it is evident that 'both the social status and the legal rights of women were improved through Qur'anic legislation' (15). However, at the same time, she points out that 'the process of progressive exclusion and increasing restrictions imposed on women [was clearly] visible through comparison of the original Qur'anic legislation with the series of commentaries which later ages produced' (28). Fatima Mernissi also argues that the rights of women were diminished by the Qur'anic code. Referring to the history of the pre-Islamic period, and taking examples from the historical period which saw the birth of Islam as a religion, Mernissi demonstrates a strong female power dynamic in this society (*Women's Rebellion* 51–54; 66–67). This is further confirmed by Leila Ahmed's analysis in *Gender and Islam* of male–female power dynamics in the same period and the transition, subsequent to the rise of Islam, from a matrilineal to a patriarchal social order in Arabia. Thus, Islam can be understood as bringing about a new social contract which regulated gender roles and women's space. According to Ahmed, the Qur'an provided an *ethical* code for the organisation of Muslim society (88).

This ethical code should be distinguished from the *legal* code of Islamic law, developed over centuries, and across different Islamic empires and caliphates. 'The specific content of laws derivable from the Qur'an depends greatly on the interpretation that legists chose to bring to it and the elements of its complex utterances that they chose to give weight to' (Ahmed 88). One cannot dispute the historical facts that these legal codes brought about a regulating social order that, in many instances, had, at its foundations, the ethical *protection* of women. The Qur'an is based on the 'man as provider' model in which the division of labour positions women as dependants. This does not, however, disrupt the equality between men and women before

God. However, contemporary politics and praxis bear witness to a strong conservative strain within contemporary Muslim societies, which obviates the rights allowed to women according to the Qu'ran and the Sunna.

> It was the secondary religious texts that enabled the "textualization of misogyny" in Islam. These texts have come to eclipse the Qur'an's influence in most Muslim societies today, exemplifying the triumph not only of some texts over others in Muslim discourses but also of history, politics and culture over the sacred text, and thus also of the cross-cultural, transnational and nondenominational ideologies on women and gender in vogue in the Middle East over the teachings of the Qur'an. (Barlas 11)

Muslim feminism emerges from these tensions, working within these 'cross-cultural, transnational and nondenominational ideologies' while claiming emancipation for women through the possibilities of Qur'anic interpretation. In doing so, 'they root themselves in the territory of Islam to demand authority and to speak out against those who are trying to exalt them as symbols but exclude them as persons' (Cooke xxv).

The more ephemeral aspects of acculturation occur at the level of religious practice which is produced by the intersection of the first two levels of religion (Text and interpretation). This means that although there may be a predominant religious practice in most Muslim societies with reference to gender roles, this does not negate the variances which occur between Muslim societies. An example of this is the use of female seclusion and segregation. In Egypt this practice has been largely dismantled, in contrast with more conservative societies such as Saudi Arabia. Despite this variance, the basic principles apply for most Muslim societies in which women today experience a higher level of segregation, seclusion and limitations of power.

> Counter to the developments in other heavenly religions, Islamic historical memory has contributed to the reinforcement of the patriarchal foundations already being established in the Arab society where Islam first appeared. It has also integrated other exogenous cultural aspects, and influences that came to be assimilated during the spread of the Islamic Empire allowing for sexual inequality to reassert itself. (Mernissi 69)

Thus, the ideal of the 'submissive situation' has been maintained through centuries of 'Islamic historical memory.' This historical memory is the result of the interplay of the varying cultural practices.[6] Some traits observed in Muslim societies today may be traced back to a cultural practice that is *external* to religion. This is part of the status quo that Muslim feminists are challenging through introducing their own understanding of the Qur'an. In doing so, they present their arguments from within Islam's universal terms of reference and thereby safeguard their position as advocates of authenticity. Their aim,

interrogating cultural practice *through* the Text, is to enhance structural change that will translate into realistic goals.

Muslim feminism/third wave feminism

The focus of this chapter has been to define the main characteristics of Muslim feminism, an intersection of the discourses of Islam and 'woman.' Although both Muslim feminism and Islamist women's activism draw inspiration from the Qu'ran, the former is engaged with international human rights, not just rights 'allowed' by certain interpretations of religious texts. In identifying the sources of challenges to the strategies of Muslim feminism, religious acculturation and its influence in determining gender roles, power dynamics and women's space in contemporary Muslim societies have been pointed up as crucial to understanding the condition of both women in Muslim societies and also Muslim feminism. This acculturation process has both historical and dialectical dimensions. The interaction between the Text, interpretation, and practice produces a complex religious acculturation that defines certain engagements of Islam in society in general. It has also had a powerful influence on the patriarchal structures and the apparent immutability of gender roles.

In Muslim societies cultural norms and traditions promulgate a system that is conservative and patriarchal. Furthermore, in dealing with the *Kadiyyat Al Mara'a* (the woman question), one is also dealing with several other variables, such as the loci of traditionalism versus modernity, 'Westernism' versus 'authenticity,' and the local versus the global. These systems of definition divide rather than unite, and the division is usually manifested in a dichotomy between the East (Islam) and the West. Feminism has become one of the binary categories positioned within these debates. Diverse forms of feminism, such as Western feminism and Muslim feminism, take on competitive connotations. It is in the third wave of feminism that we find a way out of these binary oppositions. Third wave feminists have turned to US Third World feminism for the terms of their argument, indicating an engagement with feminist discourses which moves beyond the Anglo-American models endorsed by the second wave (Heywood and Drake 9). Third wave feminism allows for a multiplicity and in denouncing the specificity of the rigid paradigm of a universal 'feminism,' the third wave allows for a pluralistic approach to the feminist project. This includes both Western and non-Western feminisms and incorporates such burgeoning trends as Muslim feminism.

The impact of Muslim feminism is more comprehensive than secular feminism, which has been resisted in Muslim societies because of its identification as a Western intrusion and thus a threat to 'authenticity.' While this may be debatable from an academic point of view, the compounding of cognitive realities and worldviews in Muslim societies attest to the opposite. As empowerment and strategic life choices become manifest in different kinds of feminist activism, stereotypes and understandings of what feminism constitutes

are changing. Difference does not entail the 'other' but is, in fact, an authentic and alternative expression. Third wave feminist discourses allow Muslim feminism a space in which it can be both authentic and 'other.' This is in contrast to secular feminism which draws upon second wave feminism in its understanding of a 'universal' woman and does not allow for culturally specific authentication. Third wave feminism provides a space for the emerging feminist strategies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Pluralism, hence, should be actively encouraged, to negate the divergence (whether real or illusionary) of Western and Eastern feminist ethos. As we try to define third wave feminism, we may also want to redefine feminism. Feminism should be defined by emancipatory activism rather than by an ethno-specific ideal type. This is where Muslim feminism finds its strengths and this is why Muslim feminism is one of the many voices of third wave feminism.

Notes

1. Post-fundamentalism refers to a phase of socio-economic and political development following the appearance and development of Islamic fundamentalism (Islamism). Islamic fundamentalism is a movement with paradigmatic shifts in the understanding of Islam as a religion and faith, way of life and state system.
2. The most influential of whom are the Islamists- and religious-based hierarchies (e.g. the Coptic Church in Egypt).
3. See Hisham Sharabi's *Neopatriachy* for a discussion of these mechanisms.
4. A new feminist historiography is required which interrogates the wave metaphor. See Deborah Siegel's 'Reading between the Waves' for more on the 'postfeminist' moment. See Stacy Gillis and Rebecca Munford for the relationship between the wave metaphor and backlash politics.
5. For more on this see Mernissi's *Woman's Rebellion* and Sherin Saadallah's 'Gender and Power in Muslim Societies.'
6. An example of these varying cultural practices is the concept of *Jariyya* (female slave). This was introduced during the Abbasid caliphate (750–1258 AD) after contact with the Sassanians (Ahmed 83).

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18

Ecofeminism as Third Wave Feminism? Essentialism, Activism and the Academy

Niamh Moore

> From my vantage point, the project of ecofeminism is understanding, interpreting, describing and envisioning a past, present and a future, all with an intentional consciousness of the ways in which the oppression of women and the exploitation of nature are intertwined. Without an appreciation of the past, we don't know where we have come from. Without knowledge of the present, we can't know where we are. And, more importantly, without a vision of the future, we can't move forward. (Vance 126)

This chapter provides a critical reflection on third wave feminism from an eco/feminist perspective.[1] Beginning with a brief sketch of eco/feminism, it focuses on tensions between eco/feminism and (other) feminisms. Questioning whether ecofeminism reproduces essentialist accounts of 'women' and 'nature' which reify both, it provides a more challenging reconfiguration of these categories.[2] Ecofeminist attention to the gendered politics of 'nature' can destabilise distinctions between different waves of feminism, because 'nature' is a current which runs through all waves. Embedded in conflicts over 'nature' and essentialism are crucial subtexts about the importance and status of theory and activism. Attention to these subtexts is vital, not least because there is little explicit consideration of these in ecofeminist literature (with the notable exception of Noël Sturgeon). These debates about theory/activism map onto debates about the distinctions between the second and third waves of feminism. The shift from second to third wave has been marked by the institutionalisation of women's studies and feminism in the academy, and a concomitant anxiety about the effects and meanings of this development. This has raised questions over whether feminism has 'retreated' from the streets to the academy, and remains an academic phenomenon only, or whether feminist activism continues in any form.[3] Drawing on work by academic ecofeminists, and research on an instance of women's involvement in environmental activism in Canada, this chapter develops an ecofeminist perspective on third wave feminism, and through

this raises questions about theory/activism in the second and third waves, and the implications for feminists of taking 'nature' seriously. These questions are intimately related because arguments about the 'nature of woman' have underpinned their exclusion from the (public) sphere of politics, from rationality, and from the process of knowledge-building.

Eco/feminism

Like third wave feminism, and indeed much of feminism, ecofeminism remains an internally diverse body of theory and practice. Nonetheless, despite this diversity, ecofeminists cohere around an interest in the relationship between the feminisation of nature and the naturalisation of women's lives. Trenchant critics see ecofeminism as merely reproducing normative connections between women and nature, such as that women's nature is to nurture, which feminists have long been working hard to challenge. Lynne Segal, for example, has written, sceptical of ecofeminist claims to be a *new* wave, that '[t]he ecofeminism of the eighties, which overlaps with "cultural" feminism and has been called a "new wave" in feminism, suggests that women must and will liberate the earth because they live more in harmony with "nature" ' (6–7). Segal implies that there is little new about ecofeminism as it seems decidedly familiar, resonant both with cultural feminism and with patriarchal accounts of femininity. Advocates of ecofeminism see a more thoughtful engagement with nature, which they view as crucial for the development of feminism. Catriona Sandilands asserts that, '[i]n inhabiting a theoretical space which is critical of other feminism, ecofeminism suggests that liberal, radical, and socialist positions have inadequately addressed the ways in which the domination of Nature lies alongside the domination of women' (90).

These controversies over ecofeminism, and over the place of nature in feminism, map onto already existing tensions over essentialism in feminism, and have come to mark in a particular way the shift from second to third waves. Arguments about women's 'nature' have underpinned many of the rationales for women's exclusion from the public sphere, from politics, education and employment, and confinement to the private realm, to domesticity and child-bearing and rearing. For second wave feminists, challenging assumptions about the nature of women, and insisting that women's oppression was a *political* issue, rather than an inevitable fact of women's biology, were crucial steps for second wave feminists. The concepts of essentialism and social constructionism emerged out of such challenges. Thus gender emerged as a category of analysis that explicitly rejected biological, or natural, explanations of women's lives, and women's oppression was posited as a social construction. In Ann Oakley's formulation in 1972, 'sex is a biological term: gender a psychological and cultural one' (159). Sherry Ortner's classic essay was entitled 'Is female to male as nature is to culture?'

Challenging biological determinism and other essentialisms has subsequently been a crucial political strategy for feminists. Rejecting essentialist associations between women and nature has been vital for feminists in suggesting the possibility of bringing about social and political change.

Heated discussions, and accusations, of essentialism have continued to echo through many of feminist controversies of the 1980s and 1990s, from the supposed maternalism of Greenham Common women to the debates over pornography and sado-masochism of the sex wars. Naomi Schor, in the introduction to *The Essential Difference*, notes that 'the essentialism–anti-essentialism debates define 1980s feminism' (vii). The growing dominance of post structuralist feminism in the academy – and the related commitment to anti-essentialism – has contributed to the abjection and repudiation of essentialist positions, often identified with radical feminism, spiritual feminisms, and ecofeminism.[4] So dominant has anti-essentialism become in feminist theory that accusations of essentialism have become akin to accusations of not being a 'proper' feminist. In this context, then, ecofeminist activists and theorists, who seek to re-open the apparently closed question of 'women and nature' have had difficulty in convincing (other) feminists of their feminism. From certain feminist perspectives ecofeminism appears almost anachronistic, and claims that ecofeminism might be part of a third wave of feminism appear incongruous. Critics consider concerns about the perceived essentialist, and hence retrograde, feminist politics of ecofeminism to be well-founded, given, for example, the maternalist rhetoric which purportedly pervades ecofeminism.

This threatened, or perceived, expulsion from the academic feminist sisterhood because of alleged essentialism has confused some academic ecofeminists who have been somewhat shaken by the realisation that their feminist credentials have not been so obvious to others. Academic ecofeminists have responded to criticisms of essentialism in two significant ways. First, they have distanced themselves from any apparently essentialist manifestations of ecofeminism, and produced accounts of ecofeminism which stress ecofeminism as anti-essentialist (e.g. Chris Cuomo, Catriona Sandilands) or strategically essentialist (e.g. Sturgeon). Secondly, many academic ecofeminists are beginning to distance themselves from ecofeminism, often through resorting to different terminology – such as ecological feminism.[5] Significantly, while there is now a substantial literature which questions the role that accusations of essentialism have come to play in feminism, ecofeminists have rarely drawn on this literature to support a more nuanced approach to questions of women and nature. Rather ecofeminists', arguably defensive, responses to criticisms of essentialism suggest that some are more concerned with theoretical adequacy and institutional status, than with understanding political activism, or women's everyday experiences of nature. In this process the project of ecofeminist theory-building has become increasingly abstracted from movement politics and women's everyday lives, caught up in

an impasse over theories of essentialism which have little meaning for activists. Through their quiescent acceptances of criticisms of essentialism, ecofeminists risk ceding the radical potential of ecofeminism to interrogate the lack of attention given to the politics of nature within feminism.

Ecofeminism as third wave feminism?

In the context of these divergences over essentialism, it is interesting to note that a number of ecofeminist writers have explicitly linked ecofeminism with a third wave of feminism.[6] Ecofeminists' investments in linking their project with the supposed cutting edge of feminist theory and/or activism could be understood as a further defensive response to being linked with essentialism and the second wave. But the project of delineating different waves of feminism is not just one of simple chronology. Efforts to separate the waves of feminism are of interest for their theoretical and political project of naming and boundary creation. Giving specific characteristics to one wave, and not to another, involves an attempt to make some links and to disavow others. Some versions of feminist history would see an implicit teleological progress in feminism from first to second, and to third waves. Here I explore which links and associations ecofeminists are trying to sever or disavow, in the process of linking ecofeminism and a third wave, and what account of the relationship between second and third waves is being offered.

Noël Sturgeon, drawing on an interview with Ynestra King, a US-based ecofeminist academic and activist, notes that King calls ecofeminism 'the "third wave of the women's movement", indicating her sense, at one time, that this most recent manifestation of feminist activity was large and vital enough to parallel the first-wave nineteenth century women's movement and the second-wave women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s' (23). Sturgeon concurs, but then qualifies her support for this account of ecofeminism, regarding it as a 'potentiality rather than an actuality' and claims her work to be 'an attempt to analyze what prevents the closing of that gap between the vision and the practice' (23). Val Plumwood provides a different focus for her argument for ecofeminism as a third wave of feminism. She argues that ecofeminism's critique of dualisms 'gives it a claim to be a third wave or stage of feminist theory.' She qualifies this, drawing explicitly on the wave metaphor:

> The programme of a critical ecological feminism orientated to the critique of dualism is a highly integrative one, and gives it a claim to be a third wave or stage of feminism moving beyond the conventional divisions in feminist theory. It is not a tsunami, a freak tidal wave which has appeared out of nowhere sweeping all before it. Rather it is prefigured in and builds on work not only in ecofeminism but in radical feminism,

> cultural feminism and socialist feminism over the last decade and a half. At the same time, this critical ecological feminism conflicts with various other feminisms, by taking account of the connection to nature central in its understanding of feminism. It rejects especially those aspects or approaches to women's liberation which endorse or fail to challenge the dualistic definitions of women and nature and/or the inferior status of nature. (39)

Plumwood makes a number of related points here. She emphasises ecofeminism's critique of dualisms, particularly the gendered character of nature/culture dualisms, and its critique of feminisms which ignore nature. In addition she traces ecofeminism's emergence from other feminisms, even as it also draws on the critical resources and insights these feminisms have produced to further the transformatory project of eco/feminism. Whereas Plumwood emphasises ecofeminism's conceptual contributions to feminist theorising, King and Sturgeon focus on ecofeminism as a movement of activists. They see ecofeminism as a third wave of activism, which is analogous to the first and second waves, but which implicitly goes beyond these waves. Plumwood, however, stresses the links between the waves, understanding ecofeminism as emergent from the second wave.

My argument here draws on an instance of eco/feminist activism in Canada in the early 1990s to provide a resounding rebuttal to pessimistic rhetoric about the dea(r)th of feminist activism, and the dismissal of activism as essentialist, which is uninformed by empirical inquiry. This research reveals the limitations of those accounts of ecofeminism which are framed by abstract theories of essentialism – and also of academic ecofeminist accounts of activists as essentialist or strategically essentialist.[7]

Women's environmental activism in Clayoquot Sound, Vancouver Island, British Columbia

The Friends of Clayoquot Sound, a radical, grassroots environmental organisation, formed in the village of Tofino in the late 1970s to protest clear-cut logging of temperate rainforest in Clayoquot Sound, on the west coast of Vancouver Island in Canada.[8] Frustrated with the limitations of conventional politics, the Friends turned to non-violent civil disobedience, and to the blockading of logging roads. The Clayoquot Sound Peace Camp was set up to provide a place for people to stay the night before the early morning blockades of logging roads, and to provide a space for learning about non-violence, and for practising the creation of alternative community. Over the course of the summer of 1993 over 800 people were arrested for blockading a logging road into Clayoquot Sound, in one of the largest acts of non-violent civil disobedience in Canadian history. I will focus on two key points at which eco/feminism overtly inflected the campaign. The first

point was the explicit introduction of consensus decision-making with 'feminist principles' in meetings by the Friends of Clayoquot Sound. The second point involves looking at how feminist principles were manifested, focusing on the meaning of feminism in the *Welcome Handout* given to people arriving at the Peace Camp. These instances of ecofeminism at the Camp will challenge notions of activists as inherently essentialist.

In the late 1980s the Friends committed itself to consensus decision-making processes, non-violent philosophy and practice, and feminist principles. However, this significant shift from a more *ad hoc* approach to organisation was not uncontentious. Valerie Langer described the meeting which led to these changes:

> *VL*: We had a meeting – like we're always having meetings – and two of the men at the meeting just dominated the whole time and after, finally after an hour – both of whom, you know, are men that I admire, and I am still friends with – they just dominated the meeting and finally B – – – – – said, "you know I'm just tired of listening to you two have your private conversation. I've had something to say for the last half hour and don't get a chance to get a word in edgeways, and I think it's time regardless of whether you have more [to say]", – 'cos they kept on saying we have another thing to add – "regardless of whether you have something more to say, I think you should give somebody else a chance to talk", and this created a furore and you know there was this, "whenever I have something to say I shouldn't be shut up, that's creativity". What came out of it, was that the meeting kinda blew up, and these two – one guy said "oh, I didn't realise" and the other just said, "ah, I can't stand this 'feminist stuff', I'm getting out of here" and left.
>
> *NM*: Had anybody mentioned feminism at this stage?
>
> *VL*: He did. Because the people who were saying they thought it was time they stopped talking and somebody else get a chance too, were all the women in the group. So, we decided at that meeting that we should begin consensus model decision-making and have a process for running our meetings. You know anarchy was fine until you didn't get to speak, until somebody else always got a chance to speak so and you and you couldn't get a word in edgewise. So we started at that time organising ourselves as a consensus decision-making organisation with feminist principles and it happened to be the feminists in the group who were willing to stick it out, and, I shouldn't say, yeah, the feminists in the group, some of whom were men. Yeah, who said, "yeah, I agree totally and this is . . . let's start looking at how we do it". So the organisation shifted again there towards having a structure and a process. (Langer)

This exchange illustrates how much feminist discourses about gendered communication styles have so permeated contemporary culture as to become almost commonsensical, however much they are also resisted in practice. Although feminism was not initially mentioned when the challenge was to the 'right' to dominate discussion space, this was identified as 'feminist stuff' and subsequently rejected by one man and accepted by the other. In Langer's account, feminism was not tied specifically to women; on consideration, she included men in her understanding of the 'feminists in the group.' This version of feminism can be situated historically in the context of a politics in which (white, privileged) feminists can no longer define feminism as being only about women or gender. This feminism takes for granted the explanatory and analytical power of second wave feminism in its understanding of social and political relations. In the wake of criticisms, specifically from women of colour, feminists have had to rethink the subject of feminism, and the process of doing feminist politics. Langer's account of feminism in the Friends is not defined around any particular subject or identity as 'women', but rather as a way of understanding power relations as a matrix of interlocking systems of dominance and subordination, and a politics which demands attention to process and practice.

Eco/feminism was further contested at the Peace Camp of 1993. In deciding to set up a Peace Camp, the campaign drew explicitly on histories of women's activism, such as the anti-nuclear Greenham Common Peace Camp in the UK. Despite, or perhaps because of, this legacy of second wave feminism, there were a number of significant differences between Greenham and Clayoquot. Unlike the encampment at Greenham, Clayoquot was not a women-only camp though there were many women there, and women were actively involved in the construction and organisation of the Camp. Furthermore, maternalist discourses of caring for the earth much invoked against Greenham were not generally appealed to publicly or collectively by women at Clayoquot. The Camp was said to be based on 'feminist principles,' and some even articulated these as 'ecofeminist principles.' However, the meaning of eco/feminism in the context of the Camp was not always clear; and eco/feminism was contested vigorously at times by feminists and ecofeminists, and men and women.[9] The non-violent philosophy and practice of consensus decision-making at the Camp were more widely and more visibly enacted while links between non-violence, consensus and feminism were not transparent. *The Code of Non-Violent Action* was very visibly displayed on the noticeboard near the kitchen where people queued for meals:

1. Our attitude is one of openness, friendliness and respect towards all beings we encounter.
2. We will not use violence, either verbal or physical, towards any being.

3. We will not damage any property, and will discourage others from doing so.
4. We will strive for an atmosphere of calm and dignity.
5. We will carry no weapons.
6. We will not bring or use alcohol or drugs.

That these ideals might be linked with 'feminist principles' was perhaps less obvious to those who might understand feminism as solely about 'women's issues.' There was no explicit textual mention of feminism or gender issues here. Perhaps the most visible place where feminist politics were made explicit was on the *Welcome Handout* that people received on arriving at the Camp.[10] Under the sub-heading of 'Intent of Clayoquot Peace Camp,' it read:

> This is an action base-camp. We are here to bear witness to the destruction, to peacefully resist that destruction, and to educate ourselves and the public about these issues.
>
> You are welcome to participate in the day-to-day running of the Camp, and planning of actions – everyone is a participant. We ask that you volunteer each day to help the Camp run smoothly.
>
> We use a consensus process based on feminist principles. We believe that sexism, racism, and homophobia are forms of oppression which are linked to the oppression of Nature. We strive to make Camp a safe space, free of oppression. (McLaren 76)

Here, then, is some indication of the meanings of feminism for the Camp organisers. Notably, feminist principles were not just specified in terms of gender, or sexuality, but feminist principles were defined in terms of linking sexism, racism, and homophobia with the 'oppression of Nature.' Feminism was here defined as not just being about women, but about challenging all oppressions, including the oppression of nature, and that these oppressions might be linked. This feminism, with its emphasis on the oppression of nature, might be more overtly understood as ecofeminist.

Explicit in this feminist approach to politics and organisation is the recognition, born of second wave feminism before many years, that feminism cannot be about women only, but must address all oppressions. Furthermore, feminism is defined through processes – consensus and non-violence – rather than through the construction of any identity politics. The category of woman as the basis of feminist politics has been shattered and not only for deconstructive feminist theorists. For activists, the questions of sustaining activism across differences has been crucial. In a small community where the politics of race, class, gender, and nature, to point only to the most salient material conditions of people's lives in Clayoquot Sound, are everywhere visible, to understand feminism as only about women, and then as only about certain women, remains impossible. This manifestation of eco/feminism

is not a reification of 'women and nature,' but rather a critical perspective on hegemonic constructions of women and nature. Additionally the group identified themselves in a relationship to a place, as *friends* of Clayoquot Sound, rather than through an identity politics. This ecofeminist politics involved a commitment to non-violence and to the construction of an alternative community. Campaigning was not only about blockades, but also about envisioning different ways of living. At the Peace Camp, feminism was rather invoked as a particular understanding of power and politics, embodying an alternative system of values, and a decision-making process which sought to challenge hierarchical power relations embedded in more conventional decision-making processes, including the decision-making processes which ultimately led to the Peace Camp and to the blockades.

Essentialism, activism and the academy in the third wave

> It is a confused pattern that waves make in the open sea – a mixture of countless different wave trains, intermingling, overtaking, passing, or sometimes engulfing one another; each group differing from the others in the place and manner of its origin, in its speed, its direction of movement; some doomed never to reach any shore, others destined to roll across half an ocean before they dissolve in thunder on a distant beach. (Carson 114)

Reflecting on the intersections of ecofeminism and a possible third wave of feminism yields a number of fruitful insights about issues which are of ongoing concern for feminists – the changing face of feminism since the 1970s; the Gordian Knot of theory, academia and activism; and specifically how nature figures in accounts of feminist politics and what it means to be a 'woman.' Debates about second and third wave feminisms are also debates about the status and extent of feminist activism, and about a tension between nostalgia for the 1970s, and the future orientation of the third wave. Anxiety that feminist activism is on the wane and that the women's movement was a phenomena of second wave feminism has been intimately bound up with the expansion of women's studies in the academy. However, throughout the 1980s and 1990s, while many academic feminists were bemoaning the decline of the women's movement and feminist activism, those in the newly emerging field of ecofeminism were pointing to the growth of women's grassroots environmental activism around the world – the Chipko movement in India, Greenham Common in the UK, and the Kenyan Greenbelt movement, to name just a few. Ecofeminist activism also continues with the work of Vandana Shiva, Julia Butterfly Hill, and Starhawk. This activism belies academic concerns about the decline of activism. This activism suggests another perspective on concerns about the supposed fading away of the women's movement. Diamond and Kuppler point out that:

> Scorned, trivialized, or ignored by many in the academy, the strength of ecofeminism is in the streets. Many critics have claimed that ecofeminism is hopelessly mired in essentialism, reifying the female body and the essential femaleness of nature. While not denying the presence of essentialism within this complex constellation, we also believe that close attention to the practices of ecofeminism recovers what much academic discourse loses. (176)

The activist practices of those campaigning in Clayoquot Sound demonstrate that ecofeminist activism does not inherently involve the reification of the female body and the essential femaleness of nature. Activists in Clayoquot have been engaged in a radical reconfiguration of the meaning and practice of feminist politics – one which ought to be heartening to academics concerned about essentialism and an apparent wane in activism. Women's activism in these movements contributes to feminist efforts to rethink how 'nature' figures in our understandings of (feminist) politics.

Women continue to be involved in political activism, peace activism, anti-immigration and anti-racist work, environmentalism, anti-globalisation movements, and the protests in Seattle, Prague, Genoa, and beyond. While there may be a decline in women-only activism, many women involved in these protests are feminists, and/or have been inspired by other feminist actions. It may not, after all, be the case that feminism or the women's movement has lost its way, just that academic feminism thought it had. Feminist activism has changed shape and is no longer identifiable, visible, in the same way. Eco/feminist activism can remind us that feminism is no longer – if, indeed, it ever was – only about women or gender. Careful attention to ecofeminist and other activisms can highlight how activists are engaging in a process of refiguring the project of feminism, providing a useful rebuttal to angst about the demise of feminist activism, and to nostalgia for the second wave activism of the 1970s.

Controversies over nature, particularly the 'nature of women,' have been central to all waves of feminism, first, second and third, and the need to resist reductive accounts of women and nature persists. An ecofeminist analysis, through its attention to the gendered politics of nature, has the potential to radically destabilise the wave metaphor as a way of constructing and telling histories of feminism. As Carson notes, waves make a confused pattern; it is difficult to tell where one wave might begin and another end. While the wave metaphor is used to gesture towards different historical periods in feminism, and the (supposed) definitive features of these periods, it is the case that 'the second wave doesn't suddenly cease to exist so that the third wave can come of age. Rather the latter brings to the fore features of the former that have been hidden, marginalised, subordinated and considered secondary' (Shaw 45). This understanding of the relationship between second and third waves, which is analogous to Plumwood's account mentioned earlier, resists reducing the relationship between waves to one of chronology or

generation. This account of waves is more properly understood as genealogical rather than straightforwardly chronological or generational (Foucault 76ff.). As Alison Stone's chapter in this volume demonstrates, a genealogical approach to eco/feminism can provide an important counter to essentialism. Thus an ecofeminist destabilisation of the metaphor of waves points to the ongoing and continuing need for eco/feminists to work to challenge particular configurations of women and nature. Theories of essentialism are not always adequately able to convey the myriad complex and changing relationships between women and nature. The development of adventurous methodologies and theories for exploring the transformations in meanings of women and nature has been a challenge through all waves, and remains a necessary and ongoing project for eco/feminists, one which activists are engaged in as much as academics are.

Notes

1. With thanks to: participants in the *Third Wave Feminism* conference at the University of Exeter (July 2002) for comments on the oral version of this chapter; to Margaretta Jolly for ongoing conversations about Greenham, feminism, and activism; to the editors for their comments; to Maxine Badger, Bridget Byrne, Rebecca Duffy, Andrea Hammel, Joan Haran, Tee Rogers-Hayden, and Anne Rudolph for comments and conversations on earlier drafts of this chapter; and to Elle Osborne for conversations about waves on the beach at Brighton. The writing of this paper was supported by a Sociological Review Fellowship at Keele University.
2. Throughout I use 'eco/feminism' to gesture towards sometimes fruitful, sometimes unproductive, tensions between ecofeminism and feminism. Ecofeminism is both 'of' feminism and offers a critique of it. Ecofeminism is not unusual here as such tensions define feminism. There has been a proliferation of feminisms as critiques of feminism have been made by lesbian feminists, black feminists, and from the disability movement.
3. For some, such as Hokulani Aikau, Karla Erickson, and Wendy Leo Moore, the third wave denotes a cohort of women who have come to feminism through academia rather than through activism in the second wave women's movement. Others, such as Ednie Kaeh Garrison and Rhoda Shaw, use the third wave to denote a cohort of women who have come to feminism through popular culture, particularly music, and phenomena such as Riot Grrrl and through use of new media technologies and the Internet, and relatedly through environmental and anti-globalisation activism.
4. See Joan Haran's dissertation for an excellent account of this process.
5. Sandilands writes that 'I craved a language that would describe my growing sense that nature must be an important consideration in any feminist political vision; [. . .] But the exhilaration I felt as a new convert was over quite soon, and I have never felt so strongly that I belonged in ecofeminism, despite my increasing commitment *to feminist ecological politics* and theory' (3; emphasis added). Similarly, Cuomo reflects that

> [a]lthough I've been attracted to thinking at the intersections of feminism and environmentalism for years, I hesitate to call myself an ecofeminist. Indeed, I prefer to think of my work as *ecological feminism*, in an effort to keep the

> emphasis on feminism, and also to distance my approach somewhat from other work done by self-titled ecofeminists. (5–6; emphasis added)

Similarly, Noël Sturgeon struggles with the label of ecofeminist as a result of '[d]ealing with my own objections to the essentialism of some ecofeminist arguments, and the effects on my work of a widespread assumption by academic feminist peers that such essentialism permanently and thoroughly tarnish ecofeminism as a political position' (168). These reflections suggest that a simple shift in terminology will solve the dilemma of essentialism.

6. Although very few have explicitly addressed ecofeminism's relationship with first or second waves of feminism, do see Barbara T. Gates' *Kindred Natures* on the former.
7. These examples are necessarily brief. For more on this see Niamh Moore's dissertation for an extended account of ecofeminism in the campaign and for attention to women's personal narratives as a resource for exploring more nuanced accounts of 'women' and 'nature' than theories of essentialism, anti-essentialism, and strategic essentialism allow.
8. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to provide a detailed account of this campaign. There are a number of excellent sources of information on this campaign, including Tzeporah Berman *et al.*'s *Clayoquot and Dissent*, Magnusson and Shaw's *A Political Space*, and the Clayoquot Sound Research Group.
9. For further detail on the contestation of eco/feminism at the Camp, see the chapter entitled '*It was like a war zone*: The Peace Camp and the Gendered Politics of (Non)Violence' in Moore.
10. Not everyone received a copy of the *Welcome Handout* on arrival. Moreover, in a very explicit contestation of the meanings of eco/feminism, one woman spent an evening crossing out the word feminism on a large bundle of the handouts.

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19

What Happened to Global Sisterhood? Writing and Reading 'the' Postcolonial Woman

Denise deCaires Narain

While debates continue about how third wave feminism might be defined, it is generally agreed that this 'wave' embraces the diversity of women; and that it refuses the homogenising definition of woman-as-victim, as well as the universal 'solutions,' associated with second wave feminism. This clearly implies a generational approach to feminist history. But just as the spurious distinction between 'activist' and 'theoretical' feminisms, summarised as 'Anglo-American versus French' in discussions in the late 1980s and 1990s, ignored the majority of the world's women, so, third wave feminism risks repeating the complacent assumption that the West *is* the world. Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake have highlighted 'the profound influence of U.S. Thrid World feminism on the third wave' (9), pointing up the ways in which the essays in their collection, *Third Wave Agenda*, have found in the work of writers such as bell hooks, Chela Sandoval, Toni Morrison and Audre Lorde (to name only a few) 'languages and images that account for multiplicity and difference, that negotiate contradiction in affirmative ways, and that give voice to a politics of hybridity and coalition' (9). Although Heywood and Drake do warn of the dangers of appropriation and borrowing by white US (third wave) feminists, I remain concerned about the place of 'Third World' women's texts in the genealogy of the waves. Alka Kurian puts the issues succinctly:

> While feminists would surely not deny that the oppression of women is a matter of international concern, the west has tended to dominate both the theoretical and practical aspects of the movement. The customary division of the history of feminism into "waves" stands as a good example of this, since these categorisations are conventionally organised around American and European events and personalities. Thus, however unintentionally, the "grand narrative" of feminism becomes the story of western endeavour, and relegates the experience of non-western women to the margins of feminist discourse. (66)

What is at stake, then, is not *whether* but *how* other definitions of what it means to be 'woman' can substantively inform feminist discourses.

Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*, published in 1984, clearly represents an intervention aimed at a more inclusive definition of woman, and the women's movement. Morgan's construction of women as a 'global sisterhood' hinged upon classifying women as a constituency unified by their common experience of the oppressive structures of 'Big Brother' – Morgan's unself-consciously culture-specific term for patriarchy (1). She proposes that women in *all* geographical locations and *all* cultures are systematically, and similarly, positioned outside *His*tory which results in 'shared attitudes among women which seem basic to a common world view' (4). Further, she continues, there is not 'anything mystical or biologically deterministic about this commonality. It is the result of the *common condition* which, despite variations in degree, is experienced by all human beings who are born female' (4; emphasis in original). This paradigm implicates *all men* equally, regardless of their class, race or geographical location, in the execution of patriarchal power and simultaneously suggests that *all women* are equally and similarly oppressed by patriarchy. Moreover, this approach absolves *all women* of any complicity in these dominant power structures. Chandra Talpade Mohanty, while recognising the 'good intentions' which generated Morgan's anthology, points to this crucial elision in her paradigm, and argues that in presenting women 'as a unified group' Morgan suggests that they are 'unimplicated in the process of history and contemporary imperialism' (81). Mohanty suggests instead that 'the unity of women is best understood not as *given*, on the basis of a natural/psychological commonality; it is something that has to be worked for, struggled towards – *in history*' (84; emphasis in original).

In the context of literary discourse, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's influential text *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* was published in the same year as Morgan's *Sisterhood is Global*. In this work, Gilbert and Gubar read the figure of Bertha, the 'madwoman in the attic' from Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), as Jane's 'truest and darkest double' (360) – the angry, repressed self with which Jane must be reconciled to attain full selfhood at the end of the novel. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak astutely exposes the way in which Gilbert and Gubar's argument – like that of Morgan above – assumes an individualist female subject whose ontological and epistemic coherence is predicated upon the erasure of the native woman, Bertha. She argues that Gilbert and Gubar's reading of Brontë's text *requires* that Bertha be sacrificed

> so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction. I must read this as an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer. ('Three Women's Texts' 270)

Spivak's intervention here exposes the ways that second wave feminist scholarship has often compounded the distortions and misrepresentations of dominant discourses, constructing 'the' Third World woman as homogenously victimised by (traditional) patriarchal cultures and in need of rescue by Western feminism. Spivak and Mohanty, in warning feminists of the dangers of *speaking for* 'the other woman,' have generated productive anxieties and produced a welcome degree of self-consciousness about how feminist research should be defined and conducted – and to what 'end.' In challenging naïve assumptions about 'woman' as a universal category, then, the interventions of a range of black and/or postcolonial feminist critics have been crucial. Indeed, the challenges made to second wave feminists by black/postcolonial feminists have been one of several powerful forces which have fractured 'the women's movement' and generated the desire for other forms of feminism, including 'third wave.'[1]

These interventions have also generated a degree of anxiety within Western feminist scholarship, which has resulted in a more cautious approach to postcolonial women's texts. However, this wariness also risks prohibiting engagement with texts by postcolonial/Third World women for the fear of 'getting it wrong.' Or, when such texts *are* dealt with, there is a tendency for attention to remain primarily focused on the anxieties generated by these texts *for* Western feminist readings. So while there is now a widespread emphasis on 'diversity,' there is relatively little by way of sustained and detailed engagement with texts by women of 'other cultures.' The 'familiar' cultures of the West remain the most frequent focus of feminist enquiry. When this is coupled with the trajectories associated with third wave feminism, interest in 'other' women is invariably articulated in terms which relate largely to migrant or diasporic women in metropolitan locations. Winifred Woodhull, to take just one of many examples, argues that:

> If anything can be said with certainty about third wave feminism, it is that it is mainly a first world phenomenon generated by women who, like their second wave counterparts, have limited interest in women's struggles elsewhere on the planet. (1)

As Heywood and Drake suggest in their introduction to *Third Wave Agenda*, more work needs to be done to foster coalitions between third wave and Third World women's concerns (10). Unless such connections are fostered, third wave feminism risks conceptualising 'difference' in terms which are entirely metropolitan. Diversity and difference, in this context, coupled with the focus on pleasure, play and the ironic manipulation of performative gender codes may result (has already resulted?) in a retreat into individualism and a political ethos in which 'anything goes.' In this context, working with difference may end up being articulated entirely in terms of a consumable, chic, metropolitan hybridity, rather than as an engagement with 'other'

contexts and representations. There are several possible responses to these scenarios. One would be to acknowledge the many ways that the concerns of third wave feminism *intersect with* those articulated by postcolonial/Third World women writers. Examples might include: the emphasis on playfully confounding expectations with regard to Arab women's sexuality in Hanan Al Shaykh's *Only in London* (2001); or the experimentation with the 'popular' romance form associated with the Onitsha market presses in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1991); or the use of parody in Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* (1997) to explicitly undermine the convolutions of postcolonial feminist discourse itself. These, and many others, would all provide examples of texts which question second wave feminism from postcolonial perspectives in ways that resonate with the concerns of third wave feminism.

Another approach would be to explore the contexts of *reception* of postcolonial women's texts to emphasise the forces that determine which texts get translated, disseminated, marketed and taught – and *why*. For example, Amal Amireh and Lisa Suhair Majaj hope that their edited collection, *Going Global*, will

> contribute to a transnational feminist practice bringing women together through real cross-cultural dialogue. By exploring the reception contexts of Third World women's writing and by drawing attention to the power relations governing the production and reception of both writers and texts, we hope to bring new insight into the relationship between First and Third World women. (20)

This is an important dynamic in interpreting postcolonial women's texts. However, it is vital that contexts of reception outside the West are also considered to nuance the discussion, and to avoid the circular argument which implies that any Thrid World text which is widely read in the West must *inevitably* be evidence of the West's appetite for consuming the exotic.[2] Essays, like those included in *Going Global*, which attend in detail to how Third World women's texts are received, are important contributions to the creation of a challenging critical framework which might militate against the tendency to read these texts as a medium for retrieving 'information' about 'the native woman.' Amireh and Majaj suggest that the exclusive emphasis on how *different* Third World women's texts/realities are from those of Western women has damaging consequences: 'The knowledge acquired by the Western reader as a result of this transcultural encounter does not forge a bond between First and Third World women, however, but merely emphasizes the Western reader's superiority to these "Other" women' (8).

How, then, can we encounter other women/each other differently? Or, as Sarah Ahmed eloquently puts it: 'How can women encounter each other differently, given that such encounters are already mediated by the divisions

of labour and consumption that position women in different parts of the world in relationships of antagonism?' (171) Ahmed argues persuasively that we must 'think of feminist transnational activism as a way of *(re)encountering what is already encountered*' (178; emphasis in original) to move beyond the difference represented by the other women that we, paradoxically, think we already know. Ahmed's insistence that we take responsibility for, and work with, our differences is a position which allows for a more dynamic understanding of a feminist ethics. It is also one which recognises – as second wave feminism did not – that such an ethics involves a series of intimate, provisional negotiations rather than definitive prescriptions. Ahmed offers a convincing argument against silence as an acceptable response to the difficulties of engaging with the other woman, positioning it as a form of 'cultural relativism' which

> assumes that the best way to avoid speaking for others is to avoid speaking at all . . . [it] also functions as a kind of solipsism that confirms the privilege that it seeks to refuse (I can only speak about myself, or I can only speak about the impossibility of my speaking). . . . It remains a form of speech based on taking "me" or "us" as the referent; it confirms the other's status as the stranger who is always and already marked by difference, and who hence cannot speak (my language). . . . Cultural relativism assumes distance and difference in order precisely not to take *responsibility* for that distance and difference. (166–167; emphasis in original)

Ahmed's argument here usefully works with and extends the stark conclusion which Spivak reaches when she proposes that '[t]he subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with "woman" as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish' ('Subaltern' 104).

Where second wave feminism is often associated with an emphasis on *breaking the silence*, postcolonial feminist interventions have often worked to expose the impossibility of such naïve understandings of voice. I would argue that there is now a growing commitment within postcolonial and black feminisms to move beyond this impasse towards 'real cross-cultural dialogue' (Amireh and Majaj 20). In what follows, I offer brief discussions of a selection of postcolonial women's texts which might contribute to this trajectory in contemporary, 'transnational' feminism(s). I argue that attending to postcolonial women's literary texts offers insights into the problems and possibilities of representing 'woman' which are informed by the specificity of the particular local contexts out of which these texts are written, while simultaneously engaging with a 'global' literary discourse. As such, these texts provide the kind of detailed and contestatory representations of Third World women which might avoid the generalisations and reductions that

currently characterise feminist discourses. This is not to suggest that a turn to the literary – and a return to 'close reading' – will deliver an unproblematic Third World woman's voice, but to heed the complex ambivalences about woman's 'voice' which such texts inscribe.

Jean Rhys's work provides a useful starting place because her work foregrounds the complicated negotiations with 'difference' which third wave feminism risks eliding. Her representations of women are rendered in terms which starkly oppose 'black' and 'white' and have generated considerable debate: amongst feminists because her women protagonists are often passive and fragile in their interaction with men/patriarchal culture; and amongst Caribbean critics because, as a white Creole, the representation of her 'black' characters is often perceived as dubious. Spivak, for example, argues that Christophine, the black servant in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), 'cannot be contained by a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native' ('Three Women's Texts' 272). Within Caribbean women's writing, Rhys also occupies an ambivalent position for, although she is often cited as an important 'literary mother,' many critics feel compelled to comment on her distance from the 'grassroots' black population (Moredecai and Wilson xvii).

'White' women in Rhys's texts are fragile drifters who depend on men for money and on their 'feminine charms' to attract men in the first place. Rhys is careful to expose this manipulation of femininity as the consequence of the limited options for social stability available to women, particularly for the white Creole woman, whose insecure economic position requires her to cling tenaciously to familiar signifiers of 'ladyhood' (dress, deportment, voice and so on). In *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), this fragile white Creole subjectivity is constructed explicitly in relation to black women. In the former text Christophine and Tia, Antoinette's servant and childhood 'companion' respectively, are presented as powerful presences, securely rooted in the place, culture and people of the island and able to express their opinions clearly and boldly. So, when Antoinette calls Tia a 'cheating nigger,' Tia retorts by scathingly exposing how Antoinette's privileges as a white Creole are compromised by the family's economic vulnerability: 'Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger' (21). Christophine in particular gets some of the best (feminist) lines in the text. For example, as Antoinette's husband's disregard for her becomes apparent, Christophine advises her: 'A man don't treat you good, pick up your skirt and walk out. Do it and he come after you' (91).

A similar dynamic informs *Voyage in the Dark*, where Anna Morgan, an eighteen-year old, white Creole, leaves her island for England and where she attempts to make a precarious living, supplementing her earnings as a chorus girl by accepting money from the men she sleeps with. As the novel

progresses, Anna's purchase on 'ladyhood' as a means to consolidate her 'white privilege' becomes precarious. Her English stepmother, Hester, interprets this dereliction of (racial) duty as a direct consequence of her childhood in the West Indies and the intimacy of her relationship with the family's servant, Francine:

> I tried to teach you to talk like a lady and behave like a lady and not like a nigger and of course I couldn't do it. Impossible to get you away from the servants. That awful sing-song voice you had! Exactly like a nigger you talked – and still do. Exactly like that dreadful girl Francine. When you were jabbering away together in the pantry I never could tell which of you was speaking. (54)

The merging of voices which Hester 'hears' offers an image of precisely the kind of belonging that Anna yearns for as an adult. Cut-off from her island home, Anna becomes increasingly estranged from her surroundings in London, and 'internal monologue' replaces her excited conversations with Francine. For Hester, the merging of voices generates fear and anxiety as the boundary between 'black other' and 'white ladyhood' is rendered unstable.

In both of these texts, Creole speech is invested with a kind of physicality and expressiveness which is in marked contrast to the anxious, faltering internal monologue which characterises the 'voice' of the white Creole woman. For Rhys, then, the Creole speech used by black women symbolises their greater agency: these subaltern women *can* speak; it is the white Creole woman who is presented as mute and without a position from which to articulate her subjectivity. The white Creole is presented as *victim* while the black woman represents *resistance*. But Rhys is careful to indicate the historical circumstances which short-circuit the friendship between Tia and Antoinette and which rupture the dialogue between Francine and Anna. As such, *Wide Sargasso Sea* presents Christophine as astutely aware of her world in *political* terms and suggests that her powerful agency derives from the *righteousness* of her claim. Atoinette's and Anna's attempts to 'unlearn their privilege' (Spivak, 'Questions' 62) fail and they are required to abandon alliances with Tia and Francine or risk being abandoned themselves.

This is not to suggest that there are no uneasy resonances in Rhys's representations of women, however. Her white Creole protagonists are presented as subjects who invest in and actively desire dresses, make-up and other paraphernalia of femininity. The power of such 'politically incorrect' desires was perhaps underestimated in second wave feminism and it is Rhys's understanding of these ambivalent pressures which makes her work so compelling. However, her failure to engage with the possibility that figures like Francine or Christophine may themselves be *desiring* subjects suggests that black women, in her *œuvre*, function too 'simply' in the realm of the political. White Creole women are presented as victims of patriarchy but are rendered

with a psychological complexity which foregrounds their ability to interpret their gendered oppression. As a result, 'black' and 'white' women are inscribed textually in terms which are too ontologically distinct for full 'conversations' between these constituencies of women to be possible. But the conversations between readers/critics which Rhys's texts make possible are crucial steps towards mapping out the conditions – in societal and narratological terms – in which such conversations might be(come) possible.

Unlike Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, a black Antiguan now resident in America, is a writer whose work is unequivocally accepted as part of the Caribbean literary tradition. Kincaid's second novel, *Lucy* (1991), charts the challenges faced by the eponymous heroine who arrives in America from the West Indies to work as an au pair. Central to the process of attaining independence are the choices Lucy makes about her gendered identity. The novel presents these choices in stark terms. Lucy's mother attempts to socialise her daughter as 'a lady' – an 'ambition' which Lucy categorically refuses. Lucy's strategic embrace of 'sluthood' is both a rejection of her mother's prescriptive values and of the colonial ideology which informs such values. But, despite the rage against the mother which fuels much of the narrative, Lucy also heeds her mother's advice that she should never take a man's side over a woman's and understands the importance of her mother's instructions for getting rid of an unwanted pregnancy.

Lucy's employer, Mariah, represents another definition of 'woman,' one which appears blandly 'feminine' and which incites Lucy to embrace 'funk':

> Mariah with her pale-yellow skin and yellow hair, stood still in this almost celestial light, and she looked blessed, no blemish or mark of any kind on her cheek or anywhere else. . . . The smell of Mariah was pleasant. Just that – pleasant. And I thought, But that's the trouble with Mariah – she smells pleasant. By then I already knew that I wanted to have a powerful odor and would not care if it gave offense. (27)

Mariah is also presented explicitly as a 'feminist.' When Lucy tells Mariah of her mother's limited aspirations for her, Mariah tries to comfort her by drawing parallels with women in history and culture and offers Lucy a copy of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In doing so, Lucy suggests, Mariah 'had completely misinterpreted my situation. My life could not really be explained by this thick book that made my hands hurt as I tried to keep it open' (132). The explicit rejection of 'Western feminism' as overly 'academic' is emphasised by the contrast it provides to the intuitive, 'common-sense' advice Lucy's mother offers. It is tempting to interpret this as a 'stand-off' between 'feminism' and 'womanism' with Mariah representing an intellectualised universalist-feminist approach and the mother embodying a womanism grounded in local knowledge and orally disseminated wisdom.[3] But, while this does resonate with many elements in the novel, it elides some of

the ambiguities in Kincaid's representations of both Mariah and the mother, and reinstalls a binary opposition between the 'worlds' they inhabit, which are presented in more complex and ambiguous terms. Nonetheless, Lucy is presented as engaging explicitly in a battle with her mother figures and the second wave feminisms they represent. In the process of this battle, Lucy negotiates a feminist position of her own which takes from both her 'mothers,' but which is welded to an acute understanding of the global power structures in which she must operate as a postcolonial subject.

This position affects the stylistic choices Kincaid makes. While aspects of West Indian culture are inscribed positively, Kincaid does not make use of Creole speech as an alter/native discourse with which to challenge the hegemony of Standard English. Where Rhys signals Christophine's vocal power in her pithy use of Creole, Kincaid's text 'translates' the mother's words, using reported speech and deliberately avoiding the delivery of Creole speech. In other words, Kincaid refuses the orthodoxy of Creole speech as the *inevitable* repository of the 'authentic' Caribbean woman's voice. Instead, Kincaid uses Standard English to articulate the abject subject slot that designated the postcolonial woman in stark terms: 'I was not a man; I was a young woman from the fringes of the world, and when I left home I had wrapped about my shoulders the mantle of a servant' (95). Where Lucy is sharply aware of the structures of power which circumscribe her relationship with her employer, Mariah remains blithely unaware of them. For example, Lucy notes that the diners on the train all look like Mariah while those waiting on them look like her; and she is baffled when Mariah claims that the reason she is so good at fishing is because she has 'Indian blood': 'I could swear she says it as if she were announcing her possession of a trophy. How do you get to be the sort of victor who can claim to be the vanquished also?' (40–41). In this way, the novel offers a comprehensive catalogue of the ways in which expansive gestures, however 'well-meaning,' are often complicit with oppressive structures. As such, the novel can be read as a stark exposition of the ways that liberal feminism fails unless it interrogates its motives with scrupulous rigour.

The novel ends with Lucy writing her full name and the words 'I wish I could love someone so much that I would die from it' (164) in a notebook given to her by Mariah. But, overcome by a 'great wave of shame' (164), she weeps and the words become blurred. I would read this as signalling the crucial importance Lucy invests in having access to the material resources necessary to articulate 'selfhood' in public discursive spaces. It also suggests that Mariah's 'gift,' however compromised by her unawareness of her privilege as 'gift-giver,' can be received in ways that enable Lucy to start the process of contesting her place discursively. That the words Lucy writes, including her own name, are immediately erased suggests that assertion of 'voice' is both fraught and provisional. It is part of my argument to suggest that the dialogic possibilities which Kincaid mobilises could fruitfully inform feminist academic

writing in ways that might revive its relevance to contemporary culture. Further, detailed comparative work of the kind I have suggested in relation to Rhys and Kincaid provides the possibility for the kind of contestation over the reception of their texts which might confound their 'expected' designation.

Here, I can only gesture in the direction of other possibilities for unsettling homogenising assumptions about 'the' postcolonial woman. To do so I turn to Assia Djebar's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartment*, which is set in the period following independence and is concerned with the impact on gender relations of postcolonial structures of power. Djebar takes the title for the story from an Orientalist painting by Eugene Delacroix, but her story refuses the eroticised stasis of the painting and instead offers a series of conversations, and fragments of stories and songs in which the lives of several women intersect. Sarah and Leila have both survived torture in prison during the struggle against the French colonisers – the latter is depressed and ill while the former works to transcribe traditional women's songs which are in danger of being lost. Anne, a French woman, has returned to Algiers to escape an unhappy marriage but she is the one who sits with Fatma, the water carrier, who slips in the hammam and hurts her hand. The story works to deconstruct the passivity and stasis of Delacroix's painting but Djebar's narrative strategy is one which suggests, in its emphasis on translation, listening, singing, conversation and constantly shifting narrative perspectives, that there is no definitive representation of Algerian women that can replace Delacroix's Orientalist image. The story maintains that the ebb and flow of 'conversations' will allow the patient listener/reader *glimpses* into these women's lives which are always provisional. In the 'Overture' to the collection, Djebar argues:

> Don't claim to "speak for" or, worse, to "speak on," barely speaking next to, and if possible very close to: these are the first of the solidarities to be taken on by the few Arabic women who obtain or acquire freedom of movement, of body and mind. (n. pag.)

The hesitancy that Djebar advocates is not one that sits easily in the academic context in which most of 'us' work as feminist scholars, where combative and conclusive interventions stake out our feminist credentials. However, it strikes me as a discursive register which might usefully inform critical practice so that we, as critics, might take the risks necessary to get 'very close to' a much wider range of women's texts which, in turn, might make our 'glimpses' of what it means to be 'woman' more varied and nuanced.

In reading Rhys alongside Kincaid and in suggesting connections between them and a broader range of postcolonial writers, the differences *within* and *between* postcolonial locations can be foregrounded to begin the work of unravelling the homogeneity of the category 'Third World' women, and its

supposed distinctness from 'First World' women. The remit of third wave feminism needs to be actively shaped by Third World women's texts and its agenda revived by their interventions. As Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards argue:

> There will never be one platform for action that all women agree on. But that doesn't mean feminism is confused. What it does mean is that feminism is as various as the women it represents. What weaves feminist movement together is consciousness of inequities and a commitment to changing them. (47–48)

If this rhetoric is to become reality in any meaningful sense, it is imperative that third wave feminists attend in detail to the kinds of contestations over feminism which many Third World women's texts engage in. Only then will 'diversity' and 'difference' meaningfully inform feminist discourses and make it possible to revisit notions of a global sisterhood.

Notes

1. For more on this see Heywood and Drake (8–9).
2. Graham Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic* is a recent example of this problematic circular argument.
3. Alice Walker defines 'womanist' as: 'A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," that is, like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior . . . Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender' (xi–xii; emphasis in original).

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20

Global Feminisms, Transnational Political Economies, Third World Cultural Production

Winifred Woodhull

Third wave feminism and the wider world

Third wave feminism claims – rightly so – that new modalities of feminism must be invented for the new millennium.[1] But is it enough to generate new conceptions of feminism and new forms of activism that pertain almost exclusively to people in wealthy countries, as the third wave has generally done so far? This chapter will argue that in an increasingly globalised context, it is crucial that feminism be conceived and enacted in global terms, and that Western feminists engage with women's movements the world over. Feminism's third wave emerged in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when information technology and transnational finance became the most powerful economic forces in the postindustrial Western countries, enabling those nations to dominate the rest of the world more effectively than ever before. Two aspects of this development fundamentally shaped Western feminism of the 1990s: the erosion of the Left's long-standing bases for political solidarity with the Third World; and the growing importance of information technologies in mobilising feminist political constituencies, as well as linking women with common interests and concerns, and thus creating new forms of community. Owing to the de-industrialisation in the 1980s, this period was characterised by corporate downsizing, underemployment, and high unemployment, especially in Europe. Western democracies were failing to fulfil their post-World War II promise to provide a decent life to all members of their societies. Economic recession intensified racial strife and fuelled xenophobia directed at two groups of Thrid World peoples: labourers who 'accepted' grossly exploitative wages and working conditions in the industrial plants that relocated overseas, and non-European immigrants in Europe and the US who were employed mainly in low-wage itinerant positions ('stealing our jobs'). Immigrants and 'foreign' labour, however, were not the only scapegoats in an economic shift that resulted in the collapse of the relatively stable and favourable terms of employment that had

prevailed in the West since World War II. Women, too, became targets, for as employment prospects disappeared along with a living wage, angry white men in the 'Moral Majority' charged women not only with 'stealing our jobs' but also with abandoning their husbands and children in their selfish pursuit of their own goals, and thus undermining the bedrock of social stability: the patriarchal nuclear family. A powerful anti-feminist backlash eventually prompted both mainstream and extreme right-wing media pundits to declare the demise of feminism.

In the face of these developments, a key mandate of third wave feminism was to prove that feminism was alive and well. The most comprehensive reflections on third wave feminism that appeared in the US – Leslie Heywood and Jennifer Drake's *Third Wave Agenda*, Jacqueline N. Zita's special issue of *Hypatia* and Rory Dicker and Alison Piepmeier's *Catching a Wave* – attest to feminism's capacity to adapt to historical change and to confront the issues currently affecting women and others subject to sexual domination and harassment. Other modes of expression by 'third wavers' showed that feminism was not only adapting in the 1990s but was assuming vibrant new forms, not least by renewing its efforts to move beyond the walls of the academy into arenas of everyday life. In the overlapping realms of culture and activism, there was a particularly striking manifestation of the third wave's determination and inventiveness in the concerts of the Riot Grrrl musicians. The Riot Grrrls tied their 'in-your-face feminism' to assertions of their own desires and pleasures as well as to grassroots political movements against racism and class exploitation as Rebecca Munford explores in this collection. The Riot Grrrls railed against the corporate power that was invading every realm of experience in order to commodify it and capitalise on it. Corporations, they said, were co-opting expressions of opposition to the status quo in order to neutralise their subversive potential and, at the same time, to profit financially from their popular appeal, as with the Spice Girls.

The Riot Grrrls continue to attract huge audiences and to generate a broad base of fans not only in North America and Europe but in venues such as Jakarta. Their activism is one of the most potent expressions of third wave feminism. Yet despite their engagement in real-world conflicts and their international appeal, the Riot Grrrls' politics focus on the situation of women in the global North. In this respect, they are typical of third wavers, who appear to have forgotten second wave feminism's roots not only in the US Civil Rights Movement but also in Third World liberation movements as well, in which radical feminists of the 1960s and 1970s considered their own struggles to be inextricably implicated. In those decades, there was an acute consciousness of radical feminism's links to Gandhi's non-violent resistance to British domination, Vietnam's anti-imperialist struggle against the US, and Algeria's anti-colonial war against France, whose sexual torture of female freedom fighters like Djamila Boupacha was publicly denounced

by Simone de Beauvoir and other French feminists. The awareness of these links seems to have faded, despite the third wave's emergence in tandem with the processes of globalisation. Globalisation involves the globally binding technologies of satellite communications and the Internet as well as other *potentially* democratising technologies such as video and CDs, fax machines and cell phones, alternative radio and cable television. Given the global arena in which third wave feminism emerged, it is disappointing that new feminist debates arising in the first-world contexts mainly address issues that pertain only to women *in* those contexts, as if the parochialism and xenophobia of the economically depressed 1980s were still hanging over feminism like a dark cloud.

At their best, third wave feminists attend to issues of race and class as they shape the politics of gender and sexuality in the global North – hence the myriad community groups, websites, zines, and scholarly publications devoted to economic inequality and the gender struggles of minority women in North America and Europe.[2] Not surprisingly, many third wave feminist websites promote women's empowerment in and through computer technologies. The latter include sites such as DigitalEve and Webgrrls International: The Women's Tech Knowledge Connection which celebrate women's involvement in the field of information technology and encourage all women to make use of it in any way that may be helpful to them and to feminist causes. Symptomatically, however, most of these sites either unabashedly promote capitalist self-advancement in the name of feminism, or else mistakenly assume that their sincere appeal to feminist action, self-help, and solidarity really addresses a worldwide audience. For example Girl Incorporated, which 'designs Web sites and online marketing strategies that make sense,' passes itself off as feminist simply by virtue of being a women's business that markets to women in business. DigitalEve, on the other hand, which is feminist in a more meaningful sense insofar as it aims to broaden women's access to a masculinist domain and to put information technology in the service of feminism, characterises itself as a 'global' organisation – by which it means that it has chapters in the US, Canada, the UK, and Japan. Thus it seems that in third wave (cyber)feminism, the First World, perhaps unwittingly, is synecdochally the whole world. At their worst, third wavers use new technologies, as well as more traditional ones such as the print media, to proffer glib commentaries about the supposed 'elitism' of second wave feminism. Throwing out the baby with the bath water, they summarily dismiss intellectuals' hard-to-read reflections on the politics of feminism, ostensibly with a view towards making feminism less intimidating and more widely accessible. In the process, many of the most audible third wavers depoliticise feminism altogether. In a web interview, the co-author of the well-known third wave *Manifesta*, Jennifer Baumgardner, opines, for instance: 'Name an issue, if that's what you're interested in, then it's the most important, whether it's eating disorder, sexual harassment, child care, etc. . . . Feminism

is something individual to each feminist' (Straus par. 19). This is consumerism, not politics.

My analysis of this dynamic might risk the charge of elitism from those third wavers who applaud the accessibility of pleasure-affirming work and who see established feminist academics and their theories as oppressive and exclusionary. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that political theory plays a crucial role in feminist politics; that it plays as crucial a role in the analysis of popular cultural forms as it does in the analysis of elite ones; and that it is unhelpful to oppose theory to activism (or to personal needs and interests), as if the one were ethereal and the other real. Only theory can enable us to distinguish, for example, between meaningful modes of participatory democracy made possible by mass communication. Similarly, only theory can allow us to grasp, for example, the political implications of mass-mediated representations of gender, sexuality, and power – as demonstrated by the chapters in the 'Popular Culture' section of this collection – or the new sexualities, pleasures, and forms of embodiment that are coming into being through human interaction in the new media, as Stacy Gillis does in her exploration of desire and bodies in cybersex. Pleasure is an issue for the third wave, but it is certainly not a simple one: theory can cast light on the subjective processes, bodily experiences and social bonds that generate pleasures and assign value to them. It can also promote an understanding of the links between Western women's pleasurable play with affordable fashions in clothing and make-up, and the sweatshops in which Thrid World women and immigrants labour to produce those sources of middle-class (and largely white) enjoyment. Finally, only theory can enable us to grasp how the relation between elite and popular culture has been radically reconfigured in recent decades by global media networks. As Peter Waterman points out, the publishing industry that disseminates elite literature and scholarship 'can hardly be isolated from the more general electronic information, media, and advertising conglomerates into which publishing is increasingly integrated' (52). Theories of the political economy of global media are especially important for third wave feminism, since it is so heavily invested in mass-mediated forms of political affiliation, feminist solidarity, and pleasurable, politically engaged subjectivity. The crucial role of theory *in* and *as* politics, as well as the importance of thinking through the mutually constitutive relations between Western feminisms and feminisms in other parts of the world, should be key issues for twenty-first-century feminists of this new 'wave.'

The transnational/cosmopolitan public sphere and global forms of citizenship

For more than a decade, scholars in the humanities and social sciences have been investigating the globalisation process with the purpose of determining the extent to which it fosters the development of a transnational public

sphere and global forms of citizenship.[3] A transnational public sphere is considered to be important because it is rooted in civil society, that is a social space that is controlled neither by the market nor by national governments, and that promotes a sense of involvement with the affairs of other, unknown, nonkin citizens (Sreberny-Mohammadi 19). As flows of capital and labour alter national and ethnic landscapes worldwide, and as global media networks facilitate new forms of rapid communication, it becomes conceivable that a transnational public sphere could be expanded to include parts of the Third World (and for that matter the First World) that have so far been excluded, resulting in new freedoms for many people. Of course, fundamental questions remain regarding the possibility that the mere existence of electronic linkages could guarantee meaningful political participation for ordinary citizens, and that new public 'spaces' would work to the benefit of women, ethnic and religious minorities, and others who have traditionally been excluded from effective involvement in the public sphere: '[i]n situations in which there is (as yet?) no civil society, can transnational news media, exile publishing, and the Internet really help in the creation of such a space?' (Sreberny-Mohammadi 10). Despite these basic questions, the possibility of a transnational public sphere that empowers the disenfranchised is an enticing prospect. The counterpart of a transnational public sphere is global citizenship, which involves both deepening democracy and expanding it on a global scale, so that 'issues such as peace, development, the environment, and human rights assume a global character' (Sreberny-Mohammadi 11). Indispensable elements in global citizenship include intergovernmental politics (as in the UN), international solidarity movements, independent media, and grassroots democracy. In addition, cultural expression is crucial since it alone encourages sensuous and affective investment in social arrangements, both real and imagined. As such, it has greater power to generate progressive change and sustain egalitarian relationships than do rational calculations of shared interest.

For example, given the scattering of African writers and intellectuals across the globe, as well as new modes of political and cultural expression that bear witness to the sweeping economic and social changes of the past 20 years, it is important to consider the political activism and cultural production of African feminists in a global frame. To adopt a global frame surely means taking into account, as all Third World feminists are obliged to do, the neo-liberal economic forces driving globalisation, a process characterised by cross-border flows of finance capital and commodities, as well as by unprecedented migrations of cultures, ideas, and people, the majority of them poor labourers or refugees. It means taking seriously the repressive effects of that process, which stem from the operations of exploitative multinational corporations and transnational institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF, as well as the power plays of the world's wealthiest nation states, the US being at the top of the pyramid of those that call the

political shots on the international stage at the same time as exercising daunting control over flows of information and culture through vast media networks spanning the entire planet. Finally, adopting a global frame suggests examining the ways in which feminist projects the world over are inevitably being shaped by the growing disparities of wealth, power, and well being not only between the North and the South, but between the rich and the poor in both those arenas.

Yet while it acknowledges the harm inflicted by globalisation, the interpretive frame I propose considers its potentially liberatory dimensions as well. David Rodowick defines the media state as 'a virtual information territory' which, in conjunction with the 'deterritorialized transnational communities' spawned by hegemonic forces, produces a 'cosmopolitan public sphere' (13) – another term for the transnational public sphere. This new public sphere is said to be capable of fostering innovative forms of political activism despite its genesis by the very communication technologies and migratory flows that make possible state-of-the-art modes of domination. A transnational space fraught with contradiction, it is noticeably eroding the traditional functions of the state, sometimes in progressive ways. Echoing many earlier theorists of globalisation, Rodowick argues that one dimension of this space concerns the transnational concept of human rights, which is increasingly being defended on the ground by interstate and non-governmental organisations in situations where states fail to protect the rights of their citizens. He demonstrates too that, like human rights, citizenship is now a concept that is meaningful and effective beyond the frontiers of individual nation states. Owing in part to the communication networks linking individuals and communities in different parts of the world, growing numbers of citizens are in a position to put direct democracy into practice with respect to 'issues that are increasingly global and local at the same time' (Rodowick 14).

The other dimension of the cosmopolitan public sphere is 'defined by the global reach of electronic communication and entertainment networks' (Rodowick 14). While global media forms may themselves elude state regulation and restrict both the content and the dissemination of information in ways that undermine democracy the world over, they are not monolithic; rather 'they are heterogeneous and contradictory with respect to their source (print, film, television, video, radio, and the varieties of computer-mediated communication) and to modes of reception' (Rodowick 14). Media conglomerates create networks (e.g. satellite communications, cellular phones, and the Internet), the velocity and global range of which offer myriad possibilities for political intervention on the part of activists operating independently of repressive states. They provide technological resources that can be taken up by alternative media and channelled into new circuits. Once they have been 'recontextualised in *immigré* and activist communities' (Rodowick 14), they can help to generate new modes of identification and

forms of collective action that are consonant with democratic politics worldwide.

African feminism in the wider world: women's rights/human rights

How is African feminism conceived and enacted in global terms? How is the concept of human rights being defended by the most democratic, independent African non-governmental organisations in the transnational public sphere that is being created by progressive users of global media networks? How do these efforts affect African women? There are multiple examples: in Algeria, which has been in a violent civil war since 1991, feminists of the older generation – notably Khalida Messaoudi – continue to defend women's rights, legitimising and strengthening local grassroots movements through reference to the UN Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women.[4] Messaoudi's democratic activism on the world stage works for oppressed citizens in the name of human rights, independently of control by any state; as such it implicitly contests the presumption of wealthy countries to embody democracy and to define it for the rest of the world, even as the US and other first-world powers impose economic policies that undermine democratic forces in countless venues across the globe. Another example of a genuinely progressive African NGO defending human rights as a transnational concept is the group Women in Nigeria (WIN). The WIN collective is a grassroots African feminist organisation, one that sees women's liberation as inextricably linked to the liberation of poor urban workers and peasants in Nigeria, and that aims to 'merge the concern for gender equality into popular democratic struggles' (Imam 292). WIN works actively, through direct democracy in its own activities and through 'conscientisation,' to overcome hierarchies and conflicts not only of gender and class but also of language, region, ethnicity, and religion in its promotion of all Nigerian women's interests.

Women in Nigeria necessarily focuses much of its effort on dealing with the socioeconomic fallout of IMF- and World Bank-inspired structural adjustment policies (SAPs) imposed in Nigeria, as well as in much of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa since the late 1970s. These policies, which are intended to stabilise economies in order to make them attractive to lenders and foreign investors, require governments of poor nations to ensure that their people produce mainly for export, which often has the effect of requiring that most consumer goods be imported and purchased at inflated prices. Moreover, in the name of an 'open economy,' price controls and protective tariffs are abolished, with the result that local small- and medium-sized businesses are forced to fight a losing battle against multinational giants. Finally, in order to direct all possible elements in a nation's economy towards servicing the debt, the SAPs also impose radical

reductions in public spending, which may cover everything from roads and transportation that do not directly serve foreign investors, to civil service jobs and pensions, as well as education, health, and other social services.

Ayesha M. Imam demonstrates that since the SAPs have been in place in Nigeria, the macroeconomic effects have been devastating. The rate of growth of the GDP has fallen precipitously (7.9 per cent in 1990 to 4.3 per cent in 1991); the value of the local currency, the Naira, has fallen dramatically against the US dollar, and the external debt has increased exponentially. At the social level, the effects of SAPs have been almost uniformly negative, with a general decrease in the standard of living and purchasing power. Contributing factors are growing unemployment, wage freezes, and delays of several months in payment of wages and/or benefits, if payments are made at all. As employment shrinks in the public sector, there is increasing pressure on the informal economy, which translates into greater competition and lower returns on labour there. Other factors include staggering levels of inflation and the effects of the cuts in social services, which disproportionately affect women and children. There have been marked decreases in the number of girls attending school at all levels, marked increases in infant mortality, and alarming increases in the numbers of people infected with HIV and AIDS. For feminist groups like WIN, a key concern in all of this is the dramatic increase in rape and domestic violence that has resulted from the combination of rising economic hardship, declining opportunities for meaningful political action, a burgeoning of misogynist fundamentalisms of all kinds, and the fact that in many African cultures, woman-beating is seen as the right of husbands and male relatives.[5]

Unfortunately, the situation in Nigeria – the terrible effects of the SAPs, the repressive government, official and unofficial violence against women – exists, in various forms, all over sub-Saharan Africa. And while democratic and feminist NGOs *are* doing invaluable work in the defence of human rights in both national and international arenas, I am sceptical not so much about the liberatory *potential* of the transnational public sphere and grassroots democratic politics in Africa, but about their liberatory effectiveness in the here and now. As Imam points out, already in the mid-1990s, the SAPs had taken such a toll that it was almost impossible for WIN to raise funds for its operations by selling books and T-shirts, as it had done in the past, as a means of resisting state control and state appropriation. It could no longer even rely on donated meeting space because the economic crisis was so acute. In order to support its 'projects, campaigns, research, meetings, and publishing activities' (Imam 305), it was increasingly relying on grants from external sources. And while its policy in the mid-1990s was to accept outside funding only for projects that WIN had designed independently, it is hard to imagine that the organisation has been able to remain as autonomous as it once was.

Conclusions

Nigerian feminists have, since the late 1990s, expanded their means of political organising to include email networks and websites.[6] Yet even as we take seriously the possibilities opened up by the newest forms of mass communication, we would do well to explore the ways in which groups like WIN might benefit, or do benefit, from more established media networks, such as the forms of piracy that enable Africans to circulate videos outside official channels, with row after row of subtitles in Wolof, Arabic, and other African languages. WIN has reported some success in using popular theatre for consciousness raising; could it also make use of mass-circulated popular cultural forms such as romance novels, as writers and publishers are doing in Nigeria and Ivory Coast?[7] Could other African feminist organisations adjust the romance formulas to appeal to particular ethnic or national audiences, drawing on local traditions that provide a point of entry for raising questions about the gender politics of intimate relationships, work, and cosmopolitan modes of identification? Could they do so in a critical way that does more than to market print commodities profitably? We must also continue to give due attention to the ways in which older forms of cultural production, such as 'elite' literature, still enjoy considerable prestige and the power to shape people's thinking in many parts of the world, including Africa. However 'elite' it may be, a good deal of the literature published by well-known African writers since the mid-1990s takes up many of the same issues that concern activist groups, such as the WIN collective. That is, the writings of Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria/UK), Lília Momplé (Mozambique), Nuruddin Farah (Somalia/UK), Nadine Gordimer (South Africa), and many others address the ways in which today's global economies adversely affect Africa. They promote feminist and other grassroots democratic struggles, while enjoining readers to imagine and embrace new forms of political subjectivity. The questions concerning the accessibility and political effectiveness of these different modes of communication, within the transnational public sphere, are pressing ones: not just for Africans and Africanists, but for everyone if indeed we live in a globalised world. The larger issue is that reflections on the emancipatory possibilities of both the new and traditional media need to incorporate a serious consideration of the parts of the world that are not wealthy, that is most of the world. This issue is especially acute for third wave feminism, since the latter is defined by the historical moment of its emergence, a moment of unprecedented interrelation between the local and the global, and between the West and 'the rest.'

Notes

1. An earlier version of this piece appeared in the special issue on *Third Wave Feminism and Women's Studies* of the *Journal of International Women's Studies* 4.2 (April 2003). <http://www.bridgew.edu/SoAS/jiws/April03/>.

2. See Abby Wilkerson for more on sexuality and race, and Michelle Sidler for more on class inequities.
3. For an introduction to globalisation from a social science perspective see Sandra Braman and Annabelle Sreberny-Mohammadi's *Globalization, Communication and Transnational Civil Society*; Georgette Wang, Jan Servaes and Anura Goonasekera's *The New Communication Landscape*; or Nigel Dower and John Williams' *Global Citizenship: A Critical Introduction*.
4. See Ronnie Scharman for more on Khalida Messaoudi.
5. One sensational instance of official anti-woman violence in Nigeria that made international news in 2002 involved Safiya, a divorced Muslim woman in her thirties who was accused and convicted of 'adultery' that ended in an out-of-wedlock pregnancy. The Islamic government of the state in which she resides in Northern Nigeria condemned her to death by stoning. Subsequently, under pressure from democratic forces in Nigeria, foreign governments, NGOs, and international feminist and human rights campaigns conducted *via* email, telephone, fax, and letter writing, a stay of execution until Safiya had given birth to her baby was granted (which of course was not the desired outcome). Her fate is yet to be determined.
6. Thanks to Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka for pointing this out in response to a version of this piece presented at the 'Cultures in Motion: The Africa Connection' conference at the University of Tennessee (6–9 Feb. 2003). For an example of innovative uses to which the Internet is being put in the African/diasporic cultural arena see Daniela Merolla on Couscousnet, which links members of scattered Berber communities.
7. See Brian Larkin for more on the circulation of films, and Moradewun Adejunmobi for more on the uses of romance fiction.

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