ABOLITION ARCHIVES, FEMINIST FUTURES

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This book is dedicated with love to Robert Adelman (1952–2022)

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Introduction

Periodizing the Archive

Abolition Archives, Feminist Futures presents a feminist political agenda focused on prison abolition, family abolition, and anti-/postwork refusal together with a methodological defense of the kind of scaled-up feminist theories that can address the systemic structural phenomena they target. Focusing on a small archive of Marxist feminist theory consisting of two texts, Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* and Donna Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs," and one project, Angela Y. Davis's prison abolitionist writing from 1971 to the present, my readings concentrate on the texts' contributions to that political agenda—which is nothing if not ambitious—and also to theorizing at the level of structured social relations and collective political activity that such an agenda requires. My readings are anchored in a three-part periodization scheme, with *Abolition Archives, Feminist Futures* situated in a third and present period characterized by a renewed commitment to scaling up political thought and practice to the level of systemic social problems and planetary crises.

The political agenda focused on the prison, family, and work is where the book ends up, most explicitly in the final four chapters. In the introductory pages that follow, however, I want to focus more on how I get there, particularly in the earlier chapters, which is by way of a reading of an archive of US Marxist feminist theory with roots in the 1970s. Besides making a case for a political agenda, *Abolition Archives, Feminist Futures* is at the same time, albeit in another register, an effort to revive and reinvent the project that I call US Marxist feminist theory, but which has also been known as socialist feminism and occasionally materialist feminism.[1] It is important to emphasize at the outset that I focus narrowly on US Marxist feminism and do not, with only a few exceptions, engage the rich and vibrant archives of Marxist feminist work produced in myriad sites across the globe. More specifically, the book seeks to

expand what is recognized as US Marxist feminist theory from the long 1970s to include manifestos often excluded from this archive: Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex* (1970), Davis's prison abolitionist writing that commences with "Political Prisoners, Prisons, and Black Liberation" (1971), and Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs" (1985). What immediately strikes me about these texts is that they are not customarily considered works of Marxist feminist theory. On the contrary, the three are most often seen to represent not only different but also competing frameworks: Firestone's book is usually remembered as a radical feminist text, Davis's prison abolitionist writings are typically classified as part of the Black radical tradition, and Haraway's cyborg manifesto is commonly posed as a foundational work of feminist poststructuralism. Because each of these formations—radical feminism, Black radicalism, and feminist poststructuralism—is tacitly understood as an adversary rather than an advocate of Marxist feminist projects, these texts have been largely absent from the US Marxist feminist theoretical archive. My investment in recognizing these aforementioned texts as examples of Marxist feminist theorizing is not to correct the historical record; rather, it is intended as a first step toward the work of excavating and reconstructing valuable contributions to contemporary theoretical and political insights from resources not usually included in the standard list of citations.

Why Marxist Feminist Theory?

Not only is Marxist feminist theory my point of entry into all the arguments that follow, but what it requires and means to theorize in relation to this archive are questions that I take up periodically throughout the chapters. For both of those reasons I want to pause here to offer readers not already interested in or convinced of the salience of Marxist feminism three reasons I continually return to these texts and consider so many of them a valuable addition to the archives of feminist thought and practice. But first, let me describe what my reasoning excludes: that Marxist feminism is important because it can add emphasis to the often-neglected category of class. I agree that class is the least often specified element of the list of intersecting categories in feminist scholarship, and to the extent that it does appear, it is often fully subsumed under other categories like gender, race, and nation. My case for Marxist feminism, however, hinges not on what is often reduced as class to a subject-centered idiom so much as the more structural focus on the systems of racial heteropatriarchal capitalist hierarchy, the political focus on collective action, and the more capacious, cross-class institutions of prison, work, and family.

To make a brief case for why anyone might care about the future of Marxist feminism, I will narrow the question in such a way that I might be better positioned to attempt a response: Why should *feminist political theorists* care? I have three responses. One centers on why capitalism is critical to theorizing the political; a second argues that anticapitalism is a potent arena for political action; and the third focuses on why Marxist feminism is well poised to theorize the present stage of capitalism.

Within the field of political science, whether or not Marx was understood as a political thinker often hinged on whether or not he had a credible theory of the state. But in contrast to traditions of Marxist critique that reduce politics to the state and confine it to a separate sphere, including the concept—justifiably irksome to generations of political scientists—of the state as the superstructural executive committee of the bourgeoisie, what better readings of Karl Marx offer is an understanding of capitalism as a fully *political economy*. Consider how the mode of production, as the most expansive of Marx's concepts, refuses the distinction between the political and the economic posited by bourgeois political economy and repeated to this day in a good deal of political theory (Read 2003, 87). By this reading, the crude base/superstructure division, which was occasionally deployed as a weapon in a war of position with idealisms of various sorts, is at best misleading. Sandro Mezzadra explains Marx's approach this way: "Marx tears off crucial political categories from the privileged relation to the state—such as those related to the nature of power and the relation between the individual and collective dimensions of experience and action—strips them of any autonomy and purity, and effectively and productively 'contaminates' them by immersing them in the 'profane' world of economy and society" (2018, 75). As a case in point, Mezzadra observes that the most iconic concept of Marx's theory of capitalism, exploitation, is not a mere technical category; it is meant instead to reveal the class relations of domination and subordination concealed by the ideal of formal juridical equality (2018, 75). This Marxist account is confirmed also by Elizabeth Anderson, whose liberal perspective identifies this domination and unfreedom as a consequence of the power of employers rather than of the capitalist class. Most workplaces can be described as illiberal "private governments" in which employers have expansive forms of "sweeping, arbitrary, and unaccountable" power over employees (2017, 54). The bourgeois fiction of the employment contract is supposed to reconcile bourgeois property rights and individual autonomy by concealing the hierarchy and command that are the prerequisites of exploitation, "because," in Ilana Gershon's succinct formulation, "contracts allow people to actively consent to being told what to do" (2024, 144). But this is a potentially flimsy

fiction, both because the consent we are encouraged to lend to the labor contract is an all-or-nothing offer and because, as Alex Wood notes, since most details of the job are not specified by the contract, employer control over the worker is indispensable (2020, 23).

What Marx characterized as the hidden abode of the private workplace, "on whose threshold there hangs the notice 'No admittance except on business'" (1976, 280), is best conceived, as Anderson suggests, as a private government wherein the contract allows us to imagine illiberal oligarchic rule as the epitome of liberal democratic freedom. The two other capitalist institutions that are the focus of the interior chapters, the prison and the family, are equally relations of political rule. That the prison is a privatized government is obvious, since the absence of liberty within a tyrannical regime is precisely what is meted out as punishment, with even the legitimating ruse of the contract as the mechanism of entry dramatically dispensed with. Yet, as an illiberal outpost in the heartland of liberal societies, it too remains a rigorously camouflaged hidden abode to which most residents' exposure is both minimal and strictly mediated. "Prisons are, after all," Brett Story observes, "by design and definition, spaces of disappearance" (2019, 167). The family also functions as a privatized government, an even more hidden abode of privatized relations, a regime for the allocation and management of reproductive labor, acceptably riven by hierarchies of gender, sexuality, and age. The marriage contract, which continues to form the cultural soul of the institution even when couples are not legally married, conceals the relations of household economic cooperation that the institution and its ideologies devise and secure. This, then, is the first reason the past and future of Marxist feminist theory might be relevant to the interests of feminist political theorists: the political character of the structured relations of work, prison, and family that these theorists have targeted.

The second and closely related reason I think it matters whether or not something like Marxist feminism continues as a project is that the radical economic analyses and demands at its center of gravity, and even more specifically its commitments to anticapitalist economic perspectives and provocations, have proven capable of mobilizing broad constituencies. This claim runs counter to the liberal truism that majorities are built not from the margins but from the center, that successful campaigns are those that issue from and on behalf of an imagined moderate middle. To cite an example from the feminist 1970s, this was why Betty Friedan was famously appalled by the theories and practices of radical feminists and especially lesbian feminists. If the feminist movement is cast "in antilove, antichild terms," she warns in 1970, we risk alienating potential supporters like herself and the figure of "everywoman"

with which she identified (1976, 164, 159). This "fringe" element threatened to "take NOW [National Organization for Women] 'out of the mainstream'" (1976, xvii), thereby subverting the organization's central mission as defined in its 1963 "Statement of Purpose" (NOW 1994). That the mainstream is not the majority is evident from Freidan's attempt in *The Feminine Mystique* to appeal to white, heterosexual, upper-middle-class, college-educated, suburban housewives suffering from the effects of their culturally mandated domesticity (Friedan 1963). The limitations of Friedan's political calculations were astutely critiqued by bell hooks, who summarizes more lucidly the point I want to make. Narrowing the focus to women poised for entry into professional/managerial occupations, hooks argued, was a missed opportunity to build a broader movement. Had questions of unemployment, workplace conditions, the value of domestic labor, and higher pay for women of all classes been at the top of the agenda, "feminism would have been seen as a movement addressing the concerns of all women" (1984, 98–99). Ellen Willis echoes this claim, arguing that the so-called extremism of the radical sectors of the feminist movement, which Friedan worried would turn the "everywoman" off of feminism, in fact had the opposite effect: "Radical feminism turned women on, by the thousands" (1984, 92). "It is," Verónica Gago writes from a more contemporary perspective, "a hackneyed political argument that in order to include more people in a movement, it must moderate and soften its slogans, its demands, its formulations" (2020, 173). The mass feminist movement in Argentina that Gago references teaches a very different lesson: "Feminism becomes more inclusive as it takes up a critical anti-capitalist practice" (2020, 199). Beth E. Richie's assessment of the legacies of the feminist antiviolence movement in the United States includes a chapter title that succinctly summarizes my argument, "How We Won the Mainstream but Lost the Movement," which might serve as an apt title for any number of activist histories and as a good reason to reconsider feminist demands for the refusal of work and for prison and family abolition (2012).

The third source of Marxist feminism's value for political theory is its set of advantages for theorizing the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism. This claim may be unpersuasive at first glance, since one story of Marxist feminism's demise, which we will explore in chapter 3, was that it failed or was slow to recognize that transition. But the archive does offer a number of methodological maneuvers and conceptual tools with which to approach massive changes in waged and unwaged work since the 1970s, when "women's work" under Fordism emerges as the template for the flexible or precarious (depending on one's class position) forms of post-Fordist service sector employment and the

increasing burden (once again, depending on one's class position) of unwaged household and community work. This means that Marxist feminist studies of reproductive labor, both waged and unwaged, are more broadly relevant to contemporary modes of labor exploitation. Chapter 7 explores one example of this, with an argument about how the managerial advice to love your work banks on the feminized ideal of romantic love in order to encourage all waged workers to cultivate, or at least appear to cultivate, more intimate relationships with their jobs. This specific confounding of the traditional separation of private and public spheres, which, instead of tainting private family life through an encroachment of the commodity form, familializes our working lives, is revealed by a Marxist feminist method that takes reproduction, not production, as the point of entry into the study of contemporary capitalist social formations. After all, reproduction, Verónica Gago notes, is prior to production in that it creates "the condition of possibility for capital accumulation" (2020, 116). Whereas Marx, by descending from the circulation of labor in the employment market into the hidden abode of production to discover the exploitation of labor as the secret of capital accumulation, defetishizes the neoclassical sphere of circulation, Gago explains that "feminists dig deeper and defetishize the sphere of production" by exposing its entanglement with "the *underground* of reproduction" (2020, 118).

Periodizing Frames

My readings of this small archive of Marxist feminist texts are framed by a three-part theoretical periodization scheme. The first of the three, "the long 1970s," identifies the conjuncture from which the archive originates. The second, "around 1990" or "the long 1990s," names the recent past, a period characterized by a dominance of the turn to the subject and the ethical turn in US scholarly production against which the archive is posed. The third, "the fierce urgency of now," borrows Martin Luther King Jr.'s phrase from 1969 to provisionally name a new and still emerging emphasis on theorizing at the level of systemic structures and collective subjects, a methodological reflex and political sensibility with which my project is aligned (M. King 1986).

Before we begin, a word about periodization is in order. The categories I deploy are, of course, as incomplete and provisional as any other such framing devices. As a way to underscore that partiality and in response to those critics who find in periodizing arguments a tendency to "obliterate difference and to project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity," Fredric Jameson conceptualizes one of his own periodizing categories, postmodern-

ism, as a cultural *dominant*: "a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features" (1991, 49). As a heuristic practice of figuration, the positing of a temporal frame is meant to highlight a major tendency, and consequently it is always a somewhat haphazard practice. Consider two instructive examples: Michel Foucault's claim that the carceral system was completed on February 22, 1840 (1979, 293), and Virginia Woolf's announcement that modernism arrived "on or around December 1910" (1924, 4). These pairings of epochal concepts and precise dates underscore the ironic standpoint—one that simultaneously affirms and undermines the proposed periodization—from which we should, no doubt, view all such historical framings. That they are ultimately arbitrary in empirical terms does not negate their possible epistemological benefits.

The Long Feminist 1970s

The three texts that make up my mini-archive of US Marxist feminist theory hail from the period of second-wave feminism during the long 1970s, a periodization that, as I use it here, spans the late 1960s to the middle 1980s.[2] Because my focus is on US Marxist feminist theory, the dates that I have selected to frame the long 1970s begin in 1970. This was the year that the first of my key texts and the first book-length contribution to US Marxist feminist theory of this period, Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*, was published. In fact, it was a banner year for feminist theory: Just a sample of other publications that year includes Toni Cade Bambara's *The Black Woman: An Anthology*, Anne Koedt's "The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm," Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Pat Mainardi's "The Politics of Housework," Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful*, New York Radical Women's *Notes from the Second Year*, Radicalesbians' "The Woman-Identified-Woman," Leslie Tanner's *Voices from Women's Liberation*, the Third World Women's Alliance's "Black Woman's Manifesto," and Cellestine Ware's *Woman Power*.[3] The feminist long 1970s, for the purposes of my analysis, closes with Haraway's "Manifesto for Cyborgs," submitted to *Socialist Review* and published in 1985 as the final contribution to the journal's postmortem on the theoretical project's demise. Davis's prison abolitionist writings both are captured by and well exceed this periodization category. Indeed, her work presents an opportunity to produce an alternative temporal assemblage that can bring old and new into a different relation, because part of what I want to do is to use the entire range of Davis's abolitionist writing from 1971 to the present to reimagine some older Marxist feminist projects directed against work and family on the model or through the lens of her abolitionist method.

Returning to the long 1970s for theoretical resources is a complicated endeavor for any number of reasons, one of the most prominent being the vehement disdain that often has been directed toward it, especially, but not only, toward radical feminism. Part of this was no doubt fueled by the vulnerability that follows the waning of a movement and the accompanying backlash, a purging from the ranks of the radical demands and utopian desires that threatened to draw the most fire from revanchist antifeminist critics. The regret, shame, and distaste, if not sheer mortification, with which so many later feminists approached the period (or, more often, ignored or dismissed it) have only recently subsided enough for less fraught, more open, and creative reencounters and reaccountings to take place. We will give further consideration to this phenomenon in chapters 2 and 3. Here I want to pursue a different line of inquiry, because the wholesale rejection of the period is also secured by the historiographical schemas and classificatory systems through which the period has been narrativized. Some of "the stories we tell" about the feminist past, as Clare Hemmings dubs them, obstruct the path toward a different future by impeding new and potentially more timely readings of the texts that, in order to fit them into these stories' chapters, have been relentlessly edited for consistency. It is no doubt true that every historiographic narrative will be reductive to one degree or another. Such accounts are necessarily selective and partial; the process of forcing narrative or conceptual order on the chaos of events and the complexity of multiple texts demands winnowing and encapsulation. Any story of the past will pose generalizations, but, as Hemmings observes about the dominant narratives of the 1970s, feminists have often seemed intent on "generalizing the seventies to the point of absurdity" (2005, 130).

Periodizing and Dividing: Sameness and Categorical Difference in the Second Wave

Two historical framing devices in particular pose obstacles to my project of changing the story of the Marxist feminist past to make more room for its possible futures. The first of these is the periodizing metaphor of the wave that divides the history of US feminism into two or three periods of intensified feminist activity. Perhaps the most glaring problem of the model, at least from the perspective of my interests here, is that, as Nancy Hewitt notes, it assumes that the years between the first and second waves were a feminist-free zone (2010, 5), ignoring the labor, communist, antiracist, and Marxist feminist writing and activism that occurred between the first and second waves, from the 1920s to the early 1960s. Kimberly Springer describes how the wave model excludes the

nineteenth- and twentieth-century feminist activism of women of color, from enslaved women's resistances to antilynching campaigns and anti–Jim Crow activism before and between the waves, not to mention the abolitionist, civil rights, and Black power movements that served as precursors for both feminist waves (Springer 2005). Specifically, the rich archive of writings and activism of the Black women affiliated with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) from the 1930s into the period of the Cold War and well beyond, who theorized at the intersections of Black self-determination, civil rights, feminism, Marxist-Leninism, and internationalism, is ignored by this narrative scheme (Gore 2011; McDuffie 2011; Burden-Stelly and Dean 2022). The wave model of periodization also excludes the contributions from feminists in the labor movement, who, as Dorothy Sue Cobble documents, laid the groundwork for some of the key advances credited to the second wave (Cobble 2004, 145; Cobble et al. 2014, 4). In this way, the wave model effectively echoes the anticommunism that discounts the Old Left and ignores feminisms developed within and alongside it (Weigand 2001, 3, 6). Erik McDuffie's historical study of the period of the Old Left between 1917 and 1956 finds that it was a crucial site where Black communist women forged radical Black feminist theory and politics, thereby setting the stage for new iterations of Black feminism in the long 1970s (2011, 3). Most relevant for my purposes is Angela Davis's deep connection to elements of both Old Left communism and New Left Black radicalism, as Davis joined the Communist Party through the Black-led branch organization the Che-Lumumba Club and worked closely with the Panthers (McDuffie 2011, 197).[4]

A second problem with the wave model is the way it tends toward the homogenization of its periods: A wave is defined as a coherent formation moving in the same direction, the consonance of which accounts for its force. There is some merit to this figuration, as both the first wave and the second wave are intended to denote periods of particularly intensive and widespread feminist activity. Yet, the wave metaphor gives emphasis to the consolidation within each wave, underestimating the heterogeneity and conflicts within each period (Hewitt 2012, 659). Unsurprisingly, the loudest voices—that is, those that are most legible and credible to the broader public—can easily come to represent the whole. This is what has lent credence to accounts of the feminist long 1970s that limit its participants to a list of white, middle-class, cis, heterosexual women thinkers and groups, and, in so doing, at once ignore broad swaths of feminist history and disallow its potential contemporary relevance.

The other historiographic narrative that is inadequate for my purposes is the philosophic classificatory scheme that divides the period of the long 1970s in particular into liberal, Marxist, radical, and socialist approaches, with

additional categories appended over time. This classificatory practice has the advantage of registering and attempting to account for some theoretically generative and practically consequential conflicts among various feminist tendencies. In particular, naming what some took to be feminism in its "pragmatic mode" as liberal feminism, a theoretical position with a long genealogy and characterized by specific assumptions, values, and problematics, remains, I would argue, a pedagogical imperative for US feminist theorists. The opposition to liberal feminism was also a profoundly generative, even constitutive contrast for many early US radical and Marxist/socialist feminists. Accounts that rely on this rubric are thus better able to document the philosophic differences and political disagreements among feminists; the problem is that it trades the wave's tendency to emphasize unity for an overestimation of division.

Cycle of Struggle

As a way to open up the period of the long 1970s to new ways of seeing, I want to replace the classificatory systems centered on waves and the categorical distinctions among tendencies with a different periodizing concept: the cycle of struggle, a concept borrowed from autonomous Marxist discourse. A cycle of struggle designates a specific time and space of intensified political activity, heightened conflict, organizational experimentation, and tactical innovation. Sidney Tarrow, naming such cycles "cycles of contention," describes them "as the crucibles within which new cultural constructs born among critical communities are created, tested, and refined" (2011, 204). The autonomist Marxist affinity for the concept is connected to two of its key commitments: first, the operative hypothesis that capitalist restructuring occurs in response to the power achieved by working-class militancy in periods of political recomposition and innovation; and second, the aspiration to conceive the working class in more expansive terms as a potentially organized multiplicity rather than a unified group. To frame groups and movements as part of a cycle of struggle is not to impose homogeneity among them, but rather to discover more fluid and partial forms of resonance. "A cycle is formed," Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri specify, "when the activists are able to operate a political translation by which they both adopt and transform the protest repertoires, modes of action, organizational forms, slogans, and aspirations developed elsewhere" (2017, 293). In a text from 1975 the Zerowork collective puts it this way: "There is nothing simple or mysterious about a cycle of struggle. The class struggle has many circuits, sectors, internal divisions and contradictions, but it is neither a mystical unity or a chaotic mess" (Midnight Notes 1992, 109). Whereas the concept of

the second wave imposes unity and the list of theoretical categories poses division, my wager is that the notion of a cycle of struggle can better capture both the heterogeneity among groups and within movements and also their points of articulation. More specifically, by approaching second-wave feminism as part of a broader cycle of struggle in what I demarcate as the long 1970s, my dates for which span the period 1970–1985, we can locate further resources for the continued development of anticapitalist feminist thought and politics.

Both the wave and the cycle of struggle capture the intensity and hence limited duration of 1970s activism. Whatever spatial and temporal scale a cycle manages to achieve, it tends to be characterized on the ground by space and time compression; the expanded connections and enriched collaboration that define a cycle are typically experienced by participants as a rapid pace of change and invention. Historical accounts of the participants' experience in radical, Marxist, and other feminist liberationist politics in that period convey an excitement and affective intensity that is unsustainable over a longer term. Ann Snitow describes her fellow feminists' "astonishing and bracing rage at patriarchy," which was, she observes, "necessary but insufficient to the long haul" (2015, 2). The cycle of struggle was also characterized by the speed with which events unfolded and change occurred. In her book *Woman Power: The Movement for Women's Liberation*, published in 1970, Cellestine Ware, a Black feminist theorist and a member of New York Radical Feminists, reports from her position on the front lines that "feminist time is not like standard time in America." She explains it this way: "Liaisons are formed, educations are acquired, philosophies are discarded, and groups form, reconstitute themselves and dissolve all in a matter of seasons." And "all the time," Ware continues, "there is the excitement of knowing that women are making history" (1970, 121). In their introduction to the collection of texts from that moment, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, Rosalyn Baxandall and Linda Gordon provide a poignant characterization of a cycle of struggle both in general and in the long 1970s in particular. "The movement developed so widely and quickly," they explain, "that it is impossible to trace a chronology, impossible to say who led, what came first, who influenced whom" (2000, 12). Feminists were on the move, often quite literally: "Feminists move from city to city, often to meet other women known from their last location" (Ware 1970, 121). Consequently, there was a dramatic proliferation of groups, with Firestone alone cofounding four feminist groups in Chicago and New York in just a few years. But the borders between these groups were porous; many moved between them or belonged to more than one. Demita Frazier, who was a member of the Combahee River Collective, puts it this way: "We were all refugees

from other movements" (quoted in Kahn 1995, 12). The cycle encompassed a plethora of groups with competing analyses informing different strategies and tactics. "But," Baxandall and Gordon argue, "the clarity and discreteness of these positions should not be exaggerated," because at the same time, "there was cross-fertilization, none was sealed off from others, the borderlines and definitions shifted, and there were heated debates *within* tendencies" (2000, 13). Decentralization was prized in this cycle of struggle in order to prioritize differentiated participatory activism, but so too were communication and connection: "There was substantial accord even among groups that considered themselves at odds," Baxandall and Gordon report (2000, 1). "Even with only mimeograph and ditto machines," Carol Hanisch recalls, "ideas spread like wildfire across the country and around the world in newsletters, position papers, journals and letters, and through word-of-mouth, interviews, and progressive organizations" (2001, 10–11). This circulation of people and ideas is illustrated by how often the categorical divisions that are meant to represent competing feminist frameworks broke down in practice. On the ground, 1970s liberal feminism often intermixed with radical and Marxist activist analyses and agendas (S. Gilmore 2013; Olcott 2021). In her history of 1970s feminist projects in cities of the upper Midwest, Anne Enke reveals that even the sites that were clearly identified as feminist were never neatly sealed: "Feminist spaces did intersect with spaces not so named, and people with multiple allegiances moved in and out of them, transforming them along the way" (2007, 257). Similarly, while the division between radical and socialist or Marxist feminism (sometimes narrated as the feminist-politico split) did mark a difference within some regions, as Alice Echols documents (1989) and Ware confirms (1970), others assert that it has been overdrawn (Baxandall and Gordon 2000, 13). Florynce "Flo" Kennedy can serve as a particularly interesting example of the porousness of the borders among liberal, radical, and Marxist feminists. As she was concurrently a Black power activist who provided legal representation for the Panthers and Assata Shakur, a radical feminist writer and activist, an early COYOTE sex worker rights advocate, and a member of NOW until 1970 and later co-founder of the National Women's Political Caucus, her politics are, from the perspective of the categorical approach to feminist historiography, utterly illegible. That is perhaps one reason, as the historian Sherie Randolph notes, she is so notably absent from feminist histories (2015, 6).

By framing the period as a cycle of struggle we can perhaps better register the tendrils of connection that linked different feminist groups, the modes of circulation and communication that are not formalized as alliances or even as coalitions. In the 1970s, different feminist groups were neither formally

nor informally joined, but by the same token, neither were they uncurious about, unaware of, or unaffected by one another; a plethora of feminist collective formations—including, among others, Marxist, anarchist, Black, lesbian, liberal, Chicana, Asian American, and radical feminist—traded in ideas and shared practices.

Cycles and Feminist Manifestos

The period enjoyed a dizzying rate of theoretical and practical innovation. Snitow describes the period as "a zone of invention" (2015, 7) animated by an "atmosphere of freewheeling, shameless speculation" (2015, 101) that seems quite foreign to our current cultural fixation on blaming and shaming. The US feminist movement in the 1970s was decentralized, but the connections and contacts among the far-flung groups were many. "Conversation," Baxandall and Gordon observe, took place via "posters, tracts, poems, manifestos, songs, cartoons, slogans, and serious art" (2000, 1). In a predigital period, before even the Xerox machine, "mimeographed pages stapled together into pamphlets were the common currency of the early movement" (2000, 15). Yet "by the mid 1970s," they report, "over 500 feminist magazines and newspapers appeared throughout the country" (2000, 15). "Above all," Ellen Willis recalls, radical feminism produced "a prodigious output of leaflets, pamphlets, journals, magazine articles, newspaper and radio and TV interviews" (1984, 91). The British feminist Sheila Rowbotham describes how she treasured every pamphlet, which she would then circulate: "Everything was so precious because we had so little" (quoted in Littler 2023, 61). The feminist periodicals that were part of this "revolution in ephemera" are best understood, as Agatha Bein argues, as efforts to stage conversations among writers and readers over time and across space rather than venues to present already fully formed ideas or to communicate established findings (2016, 48). In the preface to her 1970 edited volume, Leslie B. Tanner explains that because there were never enough texts to pass around in her own group, let alone "enough to pass on to other women," the compilation she put together was intended to serve as "a true form of communication between women" (1970, 13). This feminist practice with print represent a collective struggle to express feminist knowledges and desires, stage encounters, and forge connections.

The manifesto form, of which the texts by Firestone, Haraway, and Davis are examples and which were often produced and widely circulated in the 1970s, was arguably the paradigmatic form of writing and communication during this cycle of struggle. One reason is that manifestos are very much of a moment, an

urgent conjunctural form of writing. More precisely, the manifesto is characterized by a distinctly disjointed temporality; it is a genre with a long history that leans hard into the leading edge of the present poised to spill over to the future. Manifestos are typically activist texts that intervene in the present in an attempt to make a break from the past—this is what Mary Ann Caws calls "the back-turning of manifestos" (2009, 437)—by capturing and encapsulating the past in a brief narrative, in order to then account for the present in the interest of generating a radically different future (Winkiel 2008, 12).

The theory-practice relation is a particularly close one in manifestos. But movement-based or -adjacent theoretical work in the context of a cycle of struggle often tends toward manifesto-like writing. Movements typically produce fully political theories in which tactical positions and strategic agendas are neither tacked on nor derived secondarily from theoretical analyses but rather are fully constitutive of them, baked into their analytical apparatuses. For example, texts from the archive of Marxist and socialist feminism from the 1970s often would include a closing discussion under a subheading like "Implications for Practice and Organization" or "Notes on Strategy." Despite being positioned as if they were afterthoughts, the practical concerns they addressed there were in fact integral to the conceptual work of theory-building these authors were conducting. One question socialist feminists were preoccupied with in that moment, whether feminist and anticapitalist movements should be relatively autonomous or fully intersecting, was at the heart of the debate between dual and unified systems theorists, an impetus for their competing models of capitalist patriarchy rather than merely unintended political consequences.

Manifestos, particularly of the purest kind, tend toward aggressive claims; to borrow a Nietzschean imagery, they philosophize with a hammer, inflicting uncommon concepts on the terrain of common sense. The type of 1970s feminist manifesto that Breanne Fahs describes "features a starkly different brand of feminism from the more likable, friendly, and benign one we have come to know today," a feminism that "honored a sweaty, frothing, high-stakes feminist anger that swept through the writing" (2020, 2). And yet, as generic forms of writing, such manifestos were fundamentally collaborative efforts at interaction; this is, after all, precisely what a genre is and what it can do by proposing a prior provisional agreement with the reader. In that sense, the manifesto, written by an individual or, more often, by a group, is a paradoxical form of exchange that is simultaneously a declaration of independence. Manifestos in this period circulated among the Left, serving as means of communication but—and this is important—not necessarily of dialogue. In their "statements of purpose" 1970s feminist groups like Redstockings, the Chicago Women's

Liberation Union, the Combahee River Collective, the National Black Feminist Organization, and the Third World Women's Alliance announced who they were and explained what they believed by marshaling a recognizable structure of exposition and an economy of words. Manifestos are a literature of recruitment, efforts to constitute the "we" that they often presume (Lyon 1991b, 113), and, in that cycle, they were often competing with fellow travelers in the struggle for members and influence. Whether single-authored or written collectively, a manifesto's virtuosity is marshaling affects like hope and anger that might open readers up instead of fear that can shut them down. And although crafted in some ways for maximum accessibility, they are also, again paradoxically, best tackled through collective reading practices. L. H. Stallings instructively informs the readers of her recent *Dirty South Manifesto*, "You will need to meditate on what is clear and accessible as much as you will need to mark and remark upon what requires clarification." You will need, she continues, to argue with yourself and with others about the meaning and utility of the arguments (2020, 9). Stallings's apt description of the manifesto as "a guerilla form of writing and slow studying" (2020, 6) nicely conveys the activist political commitments to collaboration and collective interpretation to which the form aspires. Manifestos, as instances of a future-oriented genre of provocation, are at their best when they are at once easily accessible and oddly estranging. As a famously uncompromising genre of writing, these programmatic statements were not distributed in an attempt to forge unity among the decentralized activist projects of this cycle. With a discursive style that is typically singular and divisive, the manifesto functioned nonetheless as a way to maintain connection—if not exactly anything so close or formal as an alliance or even a coalition. Instead, they were, once again paradoxically, shared as statements of autonomy.

Anticapitalism in the Cycle of Struggle

What the concept of the cycle of struggle is particularly able to register and illuminate are the ongoing connections not only among feminists but also between feminist and nonfeminist sectors of the Left more broadly over the course of the long 1970s. There was enough of a sense of affinity among different sectors in this cycle for Left feminists to use the singular designation of "the movement" (Baxandall and Gordon 2000, 7). It is a myth that the feminist movement broke from the rest of the Left: "The alleged split simply did not happen," Linda Gordon insists, "certainly not with socialist feminists and rarely among 1970s feminists in general" (2016, 348; see also Evans 2015,

148). Marxist feminism in that period, conceived broadly to include everyone from the early politicos to the later socialist feminists, were particularly committed to maintaining more formal connections to the nonfeminist Left, but other feminist tendencies also participated in the exchange and circulation of ideas and practices. Radical feminists too were clearly influenced by, if not always willing to personally engage with, other Left political projects. "With few exceptions," Ellen Willis observes, "those of us who first defined radical feminism took for granted that 'radical' implied antiracist, anticapitalist, and anti-imperialist" (1984, 93). In contrast to accounts of the 1990s that highlight the perceived splits within the Left between those focused on political economy and those interested in culturally oriented politics, Lisa Duggan recalls the movements of the 1970s cycle of struggle as "hybrid, mongrel mixtures." Far from separating out, for example, class politics from the politics of race and gender, "the progressive-left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s might be conceptualized as overlapping, interrelated (if conflicted) *cultures of downward redistribution*" (2003, xvii). Again, the borders between movements were fluid, which a few random but perhaps lesser-known examples can illustrate. The connections between radical feminist and Black power groups have been documented (Randolph 2015, 6), but it is also the case that the Panthers provided food to support the twenty-five-day occupation by disability justice activists of a government building in California in 1977 (Russell and Malhotra 2019, 9), Huey Newton argued in 1970 that the women's liberation and gay liberation fronts are the Panthers' friends and potential allies (2009, 155), and Kathie Sarachild's well-circulated how-to of consciousness-raising—the definitive method of radical feminism—cites as roots of the idea a history of first-wave feminism, Mao, and Malcolm X (1978a, 146).

The cycle also included protoqueer and antiliberal forms of gay liberationist activism that, as Roderick Ferguson explains, "were putting to use the political discourses that were being crafted by various progressive struggles" (2019, 3). That convergence, however—this "confluence of histories and political struggles"—has been concealed by the "dominant narratives of queer political histories" (2019, 149, 2–3). Two examples serve as cases in point. The first is Terence Kissack's history of the New York Gay Liberation Front and Stephan Cohen's study of gay high school youth activism in New York, both of which explain that these activists saw themselves as part of "the movement" and "participated in antiwar demonstrations, Black power rallies, and actions undertaken by radical feminists" (Kissack 1995, 108; S. Cohen 2008, 26). A second example comes from Emily Hobson's history of the radical gay and lesbian Left in San Francisco in the 1970s and 1980s. This Left too, which "drew inspiration from

anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist movements around the world," has been occluded within most gay and lesbian historiography (2016, 3, 5). Indeed, as Emily Thuma notes, the fact that by the late 1960s and into the 1970s "antiracist, new left, feminist, and gay liberationist movements, to varying degrees, joined ranks with increasing frequency in expressions of solidarity" helps to account for the intensity of the state's counterinsurgency campaign (2019, 5).

The point I want to make here is that anticapitalism was not exclusive to self-identified Marxists in this period. It is critical to recognize the connections between segments of 1970s feminism and the broader Left if we are to register Davis's intellectual and political formation at the intersection of the CPUSA and the Panthers, with a broader feminism figuring in only later; Firestone's early combination of radical and Marxist feminism before the advent of socialist feminism; and Haraway's heretical combination of Marxism, poststructuralism, and socialist feminisms. Considering 1970s feminism as part of rather than separate from the larger cycle of struggle can help to open up the older categorical and temporal divisions and enable other resonances to be registered. If we are to build a better future for Marxist feminist theory and practice, we can start by expanding the archive of its past.

Scaled-Down Feminism in the Long 1990s

The periodization of the long feminist 1970s and the concept of the cycle of struggle are intended to situate and enable my small expansion of the Marxist feminist archive. A second periodization is offered as a way to characterize, in a telescoped form, the recent past, which arguably persists into the present moment, against which my archive can be conceived as a counterarchive. As a way to account for the potential value of the texts by Firestone, Haraway, and Davis today, I being with a periodizing category, proffered with appropriate ambivalence by Victoria Hesford and Lisa Diedrich as "around 1990" (2014, 106) and by Angela McRobbie as "1990 (or thereabouts)" (2004, 256). The ironic precision of the date, which is then flagged by these authors as an approximation, is intended here to highlight the frame's dramatic simplification of a far more complicated story of a seismic shift in feminist theory. To signal the historical significance of this shift, as well as to echo my previous periodizing category, I will also refer to this period as "the long 1990s." My wager is that this latter rather bird's-eye category, which clearly fails to register such a great deal of difference and detail, might nonetheless serve to chronicle the more epochal tectonics of broad and deep shifts in academic knowledge production

that I want to foreground. Some narratives of this shift center on the rise and subsequent hegemony of poststructuralism.[5] My description here is different: The periodizing category frames a story about the scaling down of theory coincident with the subjective and ethical turns, which swept through a number of academic disciplines and field formations, including feminist theory, "around 1990" and into the "long 1990s."[6]

This is the beginning of the story I want to tell. The long 1970s marks the dominance of an aspiration to social systematicity and commitment to collective subjects in feminist thinking. Feminist theory was scaled up in this period to account for the depth and breadth of patriarchal powers and the radical change necessary to confront them. What stands out in so much of the radical and Marxist feminist work from that time is the unabashed embrace of large-scale structural and long-term utopian theorizing. Because of my interest in feminist theory that focuses on the structures of work, family, and prison, this is a particularly rich archive. Feminist theorists took aim at the system of capitalist waged and unwaged reproductive labor, the sociohistorical institution of the family, and the prison industrial complex. Ascending from the depths of subjective interiority, they set out to investigate transindividual patterns, institutionalized procedures, normative values, structures of oppression, and axes of inequality.

The periodizing category of "the long 1990s," in contrast, spotlights what Victoria Browne describes as feminist theory's "scaling down of theoretical scope and ambition" after the long 1970s (2014b, 15). More specifically, it marks a shift in feminist theory from a dominance of the scaled-up focus on structures and politics to the priority given to the scaled-down emphasis on subjects and ethics. This arguably still influential, if not still hegemonic, model of theoretical production shifted the intellectual center of gravity from patterns and repetitions to breaks and differences; from the common and typical to the particular and distinctive; from the political projects of collective subjects to the ethical dilemmas of abjected remainders. Anna Kornbluh, noting that the "woman" of this version of feminist theory is figured as "affect, experience, materiality, mystique, difference," describes the effect of this approach to (anti) theorizing this way: "Political analyses of the world, political demands upon it—collective, cohesive enunciations of how things should be arranged for broader benefit—melt under the blazing gaze of woman, who in turn spends her time in unfinishable colloquy with sisters of infinite facets" (2021, 53, 55). Analytical practices become tethered to the subject; close reading, thick description, and specific anecdotes focused on questions about the variable meanings of cultural practices became first fashionable and then expected. Stuart Hall's critique of the debates around postcolonial scholarship from the

early 1990s serves as an apt characterization of a broader theoretical tendency in that period. Having first posited and then refused an economistic, teleological, and determinist Marxism, postcolonial scholarship offered in its place not better political economic theorizations "but instead a massive, gigantic and eloquent *disavowal*"; it is as if, Hall recounts, once it was decided that the economic "in its broadest sense" does not determine history, then "it does not exist at all" (1995, 258). In the wake of the turns to the subject and ethics, US feminist theory narrowed noticeably, doubling down on studies of subjectivity and the ethics of intersubjective encounter within and across identities.

Let me say something more about each of these developments, beginning with the turn to the subject. Feminist theory's scaling down in the long 1990s involved a retreat from the structures, institutions, patterns, and systematicities that had so preoccupied 1970s radical and Marxist feminists to the destructured phenomena of events, singularities, differences, and localities that are better suited to the register of the subject. Models of subject construction and constructed subjects abound in this period: performative (Butler 1990) and eccentric (De Lauretis 1990), to name just two. What characterizes the subject-centered frame, Linda Zerilli explains, "is not a certain theory of the subject (autonomous, dependent, or interdependent) but the fact that the subject (be it as a philosophical, linguistic, or psychoanalytic category) is the nodal point around which every political question of freedom gets posed" (2005, 10). That is, freedom is conceived not as social transformation but as "freedom from the constraints of subjectification" (2005, ix), and politics is thereby tethered to the problem of the self and its transformation (2005, 14). Elisabeth Armstrong confirms this shift in focus, focusing her story on the retreat from the long 1970s project of feminist movement building: "The subject has replaced early second wave attention to institutional organization," such that instead of the focus on collective organizing, "politics operate in the interstices of subject formation" (2002, 94, 55). The subject, Armstrong notes, thus becomes both the subject and object of politics (2002, 57), both intellectual touchstone and criterion of political judgment. Since these are theories of constructed subjects, there are, of course, references to structures and institutions, but they tend to be secondary considerations, instrumental to the privileged question of how, as Foucault describes it, we might "promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries" (1983, 216).

To the extent that the subject is not only the preferred unit of or touchstone for analysis but also the measure of political judgment, subjective agency becomes a preoccupation of feminist theory by the early 1990s. This is because rather than imagining collective liberation, individual agency becomes the

measure of freedom (Einspahr 2010, 4). Zerilli makes a comparable claim, noting that feminist subject-centered theories "remain tied to a conception of politics that makes agency the condition of any political existence whatsoever" (2005, 12). This fixation on subjective agency appeared early on as the recitation of an example or possibility tacked on to the conclusion of an otherwise rather deterministic structural analysis: a hopeful glimmer of resistance in an otherwise seemingly hopeless situation. But the identification and affirmation of subjective agency amid systematic domination were more often later developed into a more sustained, and certainly often helpful, critique of some structural models.

One can pick any number of topic areas in feminist studies since the 1990s for examples of the "turn to agency" that often accompanied the turn to the subject. Deterministic structural analyses of sex work, cosmetic surgery, or transnational bride services, to pick some random examples, were countered with subject-centered accounts of sex workers who are sex-positive entrepreneurs (Hartley 1997), patients who are not "cultural dopes" but rather "competent actors" who seek relief from their suffering over their appearance (K. Davis 2003, 13), or "mail-order brides" who acted on the basis of their own choices, self-interest, and self-determination to make moves that they viewed as empowering (Constable 2005, 173, 183; Zug 2016, 209). There were excellent reasons for these maneuvers, which managed to push back against the simplistic models of villains and victims that are the mainstay of bad structuralist analyses. The problem is that forces of constraint and axes of inequality seem to fade away; it is as if the fact that the individual subjects were not passive, were not desperate, and made choices nullified the argument of the literature focused on social formations, the analytics of which these authors sidelined (if not exactly abandoned).

It is also, as Jennifer Einspahr explains, "to confuse agency with resistance and resistance with freedom" (2010, 4). Anna Krylova concurs. In her critical account of the dominance of agency in the discipline of history, Krylova notes how agency comes to be conceived as a universal capacity of humans to make creative use of their structural and ideological context, but neglects the question of whether or not their agentic action thereby effects changes at the level of the structural and ideological relations of power (Krylova et al. 2023, 886–87). In her ethnography of pious women in the Egyptian mosque movement, Saba Mahmood takes the move that Krylova rightly criticizes a step further, perhaps to its logical conclusion, by more decisively severing not only the connection between individual agency and resistance to oppression and domination but also that between individual agency and feminist political action. In an effort to refuse liberalism's normative vision of freedom as equivalent to individual freedom and autonomy, Mahmood disavows any critical structural analysis. Enmeshing herself

in the thick texture of her informants' lives (2005, 38), she claims that a full accounting of agency demands that it not be reduced to resistant or subversive instances. Instead, Mahmood replaces the affirmation of political action with an affirmation of an ethical project of self-cultivation that is more consistent with her subjects' accounts of their practices. Social structures as forces of subjectification and targets for transformation are sidelined and individual ethical practices of self-transformation override collective feminist political projects. This, she argues, is the only way to do justice to the subjectivity of her interlocutors because, in this case, the relationship between agency and structures is an obstruction to understanding their individual experience. To do justice to her gendered subjects, she delinks gendered analysis from feminist politics.

But these are minor quarrels, perhaps just matters of theoretical taste and tactical disagreement. My more significant contention is that in reacting against bad structural analyses we find also a tendency to either embrace or default to the model of the liberal individual. I will explore this claim further in the next chapter. For now, consider, for example, how Shane Phelan defended a scaling down from Marxist feminist theories of capitalist patriarchal systems on the grounds of a call for local analyses guided by the methodological criterion of specificity. "Specificity," Phelan argues, "appeals to that in each of us which is irreducible to categories . . . [and] gives recognition to the individual" (1991, 135n, 136). Note how easily Phelan slides from specificity to individuality—that is, to a unique individuality that cannot be captured by identity categories. It is not just that the individuated subject is the privileged unit of analysis; it becomes difficult to distinguish the individuated subject from the figure of the liberal individual. Drucilla Cornell offers another example from the 1990s with her defense of a feminist theory of freedom as the freedom to be ourselves conceived as a fundamental right (1998, x). More specifically, this vision of freedom is centered on the individual's right to the self-representation of one's being as a sexed and sexual person, as well as the ability to design a life of their choice (1998, 45). Jennifer Einspahr's astute explanation of the limited conception of freedom in subject-centered feminist work offers an apt rebuttal to Cornell's proposal: "If freedom is essentially about what kinds of subjects we are, then freedom can all too easily be equated with 'free will,' a feeling of being free, or an 'internal' state, while crucial questions about what kind of world we would like to share together go unasked" (2010, 4). In the literatures on the topics of sex work, cosmetic surgery, and transnational bride services cited above, why would the choices of individual women be offered as a refutation of structural determination unless we recognized in them the expressions of a more or less free will? Mahmood wants to refuse the normative vision of liberal humanism,

but by continuing to locate agency (defined as active capacity) in the concrete individuated subjects with whom she wants us to empathize, she does not similarly renounce methodological individualism. The conception of freedom "that centers primarily on the subject's very formation and on the external and internal forces that hinder its freedom" is deeply entangled, Zerilli observes, with the model of the self-sovereign subject and autonomous individual (2005, 10, 15). Whereas I referred above to the concern with subjective agency, it is often, in fact, individual agency that is at issue.

Before moving on to the ethical turn, a historical side note might be in order. It is not surprising that so many feminists turn to the terrains of the subject and ethics in the aftermath of the 1970s cycle of struggle. Laura Kipnis observes that both Marxists and feminists resort to theories of subject—she specifies psychoanalytic theories—in moments of defeat (1993, 102–3). It makes sense: Activist periods require theories of collective organization, systemic cognitive mappings, innovations in strategy and tactics, proposed targets, the identification of weak links, and the like. When the fact that people can and do rise up receives adequate empirical confirmation, other questions and concerns can take precedence. In a phase of retreat, with the hopelessness and apathy it can breed, the problem becomes one of making sense of the absence of political rebellion. Baruch Spinoza's question takes on a renewed urgency in such moments: "Why do men fight *for* their servitude as stubbornly as though it were their salvation?" (Deleuze and Guattari 1983, 29). The answer, particularly in periods of relative quietude, is often taken to hinge on developing a better theory of the subject, one that can account for the avoidant techniques and conservative attachments that might be anchored in the individual's interior life.

Similarly, in periods of political dormancy, individual ethical agency perhaps appears more possible, more legible, more credible than something so grand as collective political activity. But whereas the turn to the subject is a turn from structures in a way that can slide into or enable the figure of the individual, ethics turns from politics and even more decisively to the individual. My dissatisfaction with ethical action as an alternative to political practice, it bears mention, is not about its prescriptivism, which Gilles Deleuze, among others, tries to attenuate by distinguishing ethics, understood as immanent to intersubjective practices, from morality, which is tied to transcendental values (Deleuze 1988, 23). The problem I raise here about ethics has to do rather with its unit of analysis and value; my argument is predicated on the assumption that movements and other collectivities are the key subjects of politics and individuals the expected subject of ethics. Politics concerns the organization and governance of social cooperation that requires some degree or form of in-

stitutionalization and thus is the province of agonistic collective action. This is keeping with Marx's description of the species-being of humans in terms of the capacity to make the world that creates its subjects, the point being that this world-building is a collective—that is, a species—capacity, not an individual one; individuals cannot create social worlds. Ethics, on the other hand, remains closely tethered to the specificity of individual and interindividual judgment, choice, and accountability. Consistent with this centering of individual behavior and consciousness, Drucilla Cornell, to recall an earlier example, defines the ethical as "an attitude towards what is other to oneself" (Benhabib et al. 1995, 78). Describing the appeal of attention to individual choice and accountability, Mark Fisher reminds us that individuals can be held ethically responsible in ways that social structures—he names the capitalist system—cannot (2009, 69). Lauren Berlant is less generous in their speculation about the attractions of the ethical turn in literary fields: The embrace of ethics "just sounds so *comforting*, so fundable, so theoretically palatable, and so politics-lite" (2004, 447). The turn to ethics, as Berlant exposes so incisively, is part and parcel of an "impulse to recement individuality-with-consciousness at the center of critical thought" (2004, 447). The point I want to emphasize is that the ethical turn represents another scaling down from the collective to the individual as the typical unit of ethical judgment and action.

"The Fierce Urgency of Now"

My first two periodization categories, the long 1970s and the long 1990s, are deployed to frame my project: The chapters that follow will dip into the feminist library of the long 1970s cycle of struggle to compose a counterarchive to the subjective and ethical turns dominant during the long 1990s in feminist theory. The third and final period plays a role in the argument that is more evocative than substantive; it is intended as a placeholder for, rather than a name to place on, those tendencies within and across political movements and scholarly production that identify a building momentum behind scaled-up theoretical and political agendas.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1969 words, directed to a *now* that is now past, continue to resonate today in the face of multiple challenges, some older, some newer, but all undoubtedly fierce. If 1970 marks the feminist turn toward theories of social systems and feminist collectivities and "around 1990" the turn to the subject and ethics, my sense is that we are now in, or perhaps still on the cusp of, another hegemonic shift in social, cultural, and political theory. The times are auspicious for scaled-up thinking: New political struggles are taking

aim at systemic global problems, and a variety of theoretical projects are scaling up alongside them. Abolitionist critical and political projects are proliferating rapidly in novel and ambitious directions including not only prison, family, and work abolition but also various other institutional forms and the structure of gender itself.[7] "Problems such as global exploitation, planetary climate change, rising surplus populations, and the repeated crises of capitalism," Srnicek and Williams observe, "are abstract in appearance, complex in structure, and non-localised" (2016, 40). The sheer scale of global capitalist processes demands new concepts, methods, and targets of political action; toward this end, a plethora of academic and sometimes also political projects are chipping away at the dominance of subject-centered and ethically focused paradigms. The subjective and ethical turns were arguably enabled, at least to some degree, by the renaturalization of capitalism under the conditions of neoliberal restructuring that helped to render it less legible as a viable target of activism by the mid-1980s and well past the 1990s. Since then, new cycles of anticapitalist militancy emerged in the United States with the alter-globalization, Occupy, Standing Rock, and Black Lives Matter movements, among other campaigns, which have served to put capitalism back on the map, as it were. Today, analyses of contemporary capitalism continue to spread and mutate along with scaled-up concepts like extractivism, logistics, infrastructure, and financialization.[8] Adding significant weight to this momentum are the ever-expanding activism and knowledge production addressed to climate change along the scaled-up registers of the Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, and Chthulucene.[9] To be clear, these are not the projects enlisted in *Abolition Archives, Feminist Futures*. The momentum they are intended to evoke is, however, perhaps a way to render more legible and perhaps more timely the scalings of the political agenda and methodological provocations at the heart of this project.

Chapter Previews

The intellectual core of the argument revolves around chapters that present readings of texts by three authors: Firestone's 1970 *Dialectic of Sex*, Haraway's 1985 "Manifesto for Cyborgs," and an archive of many of Angela Davis's prison abolitionist writings from 1971 to 2024. My central claim is that although these texts from the past are not often remembered as examples of Marxist feminist theory, they have much to offer the present and future of Marxist feminist political theorizing. It is true that these are indeed old and, no doubt for many of us, familiar texts. The book by Firestone and essay by Haraway serve as bookends marking the beginning and end of the period of the long 1970s;

Davis's prison abolitionist writings begin in that era even if they also continue to the current day. The fact that each of these texts could be classified as a manifesto and, as such, a situated form of writing designed to speak to and from a particular moment might render my contention about their contemporary relevance all the more perplexing. What these texts offer to readers of feminist theory today, I will argue, are valuable instances of Marxist feminist political theorizing originating from a period in which feminist theory was sometimes, or even often, scaled up to the level of social structures. What I believe they can do is to provide instructive examples of how and why we need to continue to analyze and contest the larger institutional formations that sustain gender, race, class, sexual, and national hierarchies.

The political heart of the argument is located in three chapters that defend and develop specific versions of the US feminist projects of prison abolition, family abolition, and the anti- and postwork politics of the refusal of work. Although prison, family, and work are the subjects of separate chapters, they share two key features. The first is that they are gendered and racialized institutions, each of which is deeply entangled with the logics and rationales of a capitalist political economy. Thus, for example, "the family is the reason we are supposed to want to work, the reason we have to go to work, and the reason we *can* go to work" (S. Lewis 2022, 4). Waged labor functions in turn as the political economy's primary mechanism of income allocation, labor management, and social belonging. The prison, finally, depending to a significant degree on our class, race, and gender, serves as a way to dispose of those deemed surplus to the twin pillars of the US capitalist social formation, work and family. Second, the structures of prison, family, and work all form relations of rule governed by, respectively, despotic, patriarchal, or oligarchic logics, each of which is the site of astounding levels of privatized violence. The fact that the three institutional formations are currently the targets of vibrant modes of political theory and practice makes these political projects, as well as the texts that inform them, all the more timely. Related to those political projects, a fourth chapter then proposes that another older form, the Marxist character of the lumpenproletariat, might be reimagined as a way to figure a collective feminist agenda of prison abolitionism, family abolitionism, and the refusal of work.

Two more chapters function as a hinge between the intellectual touchstones of Firestone, Haraway, and Davis and the political projects of prison abolition, family abolition, and the refusal of work. One seeks to make an explicit case for the importance of theories of structured social relations as one component of the feminist methodological repertoire. The analysis focuses in on the contributions of Louis Althusser to theory and politics directed to the

level of liberal capitalist social structures, of which prison, family, and work are exemplary, and tries to work through some of the possibilities and limits of this kind of scaled-up theorizing. The other chapter that serves to pivot between the two sets of chapters outlined above focuses on the concept of the archive and thinks about what can happen when we put together texts that we had read in isolation: Which aspects of the texts become newly visible or meaningful when we find them echoed in, developed further, or refuted by another text or set of texts? Approaching Marxist feminist theory as an archive, or set of archives, rather than as a canon or tradition, is a way to place texts in generative relation to one another without fixing them in place, limiting their number, or predetermining their connections.

Those are the general parameters of the argument; the contents of the specific chapters are as follows. The first two chapters set some groundwork for the larger argument on the book. To review the earlier sections of the introduction, my project is framed as an attempt to draw on texts from the period of "the long 1970s" to pose alternatives to tendencies in feminist theory dominant during "the long 1990s" and arguably up to the current period characterized by "the fierce urgency of now." To locate contributions to Marxist feminist theory in texts often excluded from that archive, I approach the 1970s as a "cycle of struggle" during which the boundaries among tendencies are porous. What I think texts from that period have to offer is a methodological case for a scaled-up focus on structures and politics over a scaled-down emphasis on subjects and ethics. The next chapter, chapter 1, then draws on a variety of theoretical resources, but particularly the so-called structuralist Marxism of Louis Althusser, to explore the obstacles to, and some resources for, theorizing at the level of structured social relations necessary for the feminist structural and political agenda I go on to defend.

The following two chapters focus on single texts. Chapter 2's discussion of Firestone's 1970 *The Dialectic of Sex* centers on four concepts designed to animate different dimensions of Firestone's potential legacy, each of which offers a specific way of thinking about the relationship among past, present, and future: the utopian manifesto, the vanishing mediator, an allegory of the present, and an archive of the future. Chapter 3's analysis of Haraway's 1985 essay "A Manifesto for Cyborgs" reads it in relation to Karl Marx and Frederick Engels's *Communist Manifesto* in order to highlight its most notable achievements and contemporary relevance: Haraway's updating of Marx and Engels's mapping of industrial capitalism with a prescient analysis of a post-Fordist regime of accumulation and her figure of the cyborg as a collective political subject to replace the proletariat as revolutionary subject.

Chapter 4 takes a break from the exploration of the texts by my three thinkers. The chapter draws on the previous discussions of texts by Firestone and Haraway, together with the "Xenofeminism Manifesto," to explore their relation to one another as an archive of Marxist feminist theory. The concept of the archive is presented as an alternative to the categories of tradition, canon, oeuvre, kinship, and legacy that can help us to reconceive the temporalities of feminist theoretical production and reimagine the relations among the Marxist feminist past, present, and future.

Chapter 5 returns to the book's intellectual archive to read Davis's Marxist feminist prison abolitionism both as part of a larger political project that takes aim at the prison industrial complex and also as a method with a distinctive theoretical infrastructure. These dimensions of Davis's feminist abolitionist method of political theorizing, which is structuralist, utopian, and (post)coalitional, will serve as a methodological guide for the later chapters focused on the institutions of the family and waged work. The temporalities of the chapter on Davis are thus complicated, both because I find important continuities across time in her writings on the prison and because that entire archive, including her most recent contributions, will be used as a method with which to revive the 1970s feminist projects of family abolition and the refusal of work. The analysis in chapter 6 focuses on a critique of the institution of the family, the essence of which is a privatized system of social reproduction, the couple form, and biogenetic-centered kinship. This chapter revisits 1970s feminist family abolitionism and develops an argument for its contemporary relevance. Chapter 7 focuses on further developments in the feminist refusal of work, proposing a contemporary anti- and postwork politics that draws on 1970s feminist critiques of the narratives of heterosexual love and romance to develop a critique of the management discourses of love and happiness at work that are currently deployed to recruit workers into a more intimate relationship with waged work. Finally, chapter 8 draws on Haraway's dilemmas of collective feminist subject formations and Davis's early interest in the lumpenproletariat as a collective political force to make a case for the lumpenproletariat as a conceptual and historical basis upon which to formulate a critical Marxist feminist standpoint and articulate a political project against the prison, family, and work.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1 Some clarification of my use of terms is in order. First, I specify this as US Marxist feminism, but in the 1970s it was sometimes better captured more broadly as Anglo-American Marxist feminism. Second, I prefer the modifier *Marxist* because of my interest in that theoretical practice, but in the long 1970s many US feminists preferred the word *socialist* to signify a broader, less orthodox, and more decidedly feminist approach. Since I hope to use the term *Marxist feminism* capaciously, I will not generally honor the Marxist-socialist distinction, except to acknowledge the vocabulary used in historical texts.

2 My use of the term *the long 1970s* draws on Dan Berger's periodization category of the long 1960s, which spanned the late 1950s through the early 1970s (2010, 4). As Berger notes, especially when one includes feminism, Black power, and anti-imperialist movements in the mix, "some of the most significant aspects of 'the sixties' actually occurred in the 1970s" (2010, 4).

3 Instead of 1970, I could have selected any proximate year. For example, 1969 marked the founding of the socialist feminist groups Bread and Roses, Redstockings, and the Chicago Women's Liberation Union and the publication of Margaret Benston's essay that arguably initiated the Anglo-Canadian-US Marxist feminist domestic labor debate, "The Political Economy of Women's Liberation."

4 Three exemplary texts can at least hint at the wealth of resources for Marxist feminist theory overshadowed by the waves. Claudia Jones combined her commitment to Marxist-Leninism with her commitments to feminism and antiracism (C. Davies 2007, 33–34). In "We Seek Full Equality for Women," first published in 1949, Jones posits that "the triply-oppressed status of Negro women is a barometer of the status of all women," to argue for cross-racial feminist and communist solidarity (quoted in C. Davies 2011, 87). Second is Selma James's overlooked exposé of the lives of working-class women housewives and workers, "A Woman's Place," first published by the Marxist newspaper *Correspondence* in 1953 under a pseudonym to avoid anticommunist repression in the McCarthy era (Dalla Costa and James 1972, 77).

The poignant description of women's dissatisfaction with marriage, motherhood, domestic work, and waged work reads like a radical version of Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, one that, focused more on the figure of the working-class housewife than on Friedan's suburban professional-managerial class housewife, emphasizes that the women in her account "*like the work in neither the home nor the factory*" (Dalla Costa and James 1972, 76). Finally, Eleanor Flexner, who served as executive director of the communist-adjacent Congress of American Women, was the author of the masterful and groundbreaking history of the feminist first wave, *Century of Struggle*, published in 1959. The volume stands out for its attention to working-class and African American women's contributions and to suffragism's deepening racism over time (Dubois 1991, 87). In her history of US communist feminism, Kate Weigand explains how Flexner's analysis in *Century of Struggle* built upon the knowledges acquired from the Old Left's work on women's history and emphasis on the intersections of race, sex, and class (2001, 146–47).

5 This includes my first book (Weeks 2018).

6 For reasons that will become clear later in the following chapter, the fact that Althusser—no friend of either subjects or ethics—died in 1990 renders this periodizing frame even more apt for the purposes of my argument.

7 For one example of a case for gender abolition, see Bey 2022.

8 For an introduction to the categories of extractivism, logistics, infrastructure, and financialization, see Mezzadra and Neilson 2019.

9 On the terms *Anthropocene*, *Capitalocene*, *Plantationocene*, and *Chthulucene*, see, for example, Haraway 2016b.

1. STRUCTURAL PEDAGOGIES

1 In light of how far the concept of structure has traveled over time and place and across disciplines, and how often it has been used, to borrow William Sewell's wry observation, as "a word to conjure with in the social sciences" (1992, 2), not to mention the often very different way that it is deployed in the humanities, a few preliminary specifications about how I will go on to use the term are in order. First, although as Sewell notes, sociologists and anthropologists have sometimes sorted through what counts as structures or nonstructures differently (1992, 3), for my purposes I will adhere more to the sociological approach insofar as I focus on social, political, and economic structures rather than cultural or linguistic patterns. Second, some also draw a sharper distinction than I will between structures and institutions, grafting them to the distinction between the general and particular, macro and micro. Celeste Montoya explains that structures stand above institutions; although they are closely related, the term *structure* refers to larger and deeper patterns within which institutions are embedded (2016, 369). Although this distinction certainly has merit, I will go on to use the terms *structure* and *institution* more or less interchangeably. I find the structure-institution distinction less useful at the level of abstraction at which I will labor, first because my focus is not on capitalism as an abstract logic but rather on a particular capitalist social formation historically