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The Rhetoric of the Manifesto

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Abstract

The Rhetoric of the Manifesto By Anne Sinkey

From as early as Marx's "Brumaire," the historical experience of failed revolutions was reflected in political rhetoric that lamented the broken promises of liberal ideals; the tension between maintaining hope for such ideals to be fulfilled, on the one hand, and skepticism that such ideals are unattainable, on the other, came to constitute the manifesto genre in the avant-garde of the early 20th century. This dissertation provides readings of manifestoes from Marx, the avant-garde (Futurism and Dada), Valerie Solanas, feminism, gay liberation, and Queer Nation as exemplary of a tradition of dissent that exposes tensions within liberal politics. Specific rhetorical strategies enacted in the genre expose ways in which the liberal subject was always already performative, always already constituted as a citizen through political language, and always already part of a process that was failed and/or incomplete.

I recontextualize the history of feminist and queer criticism as belonging to the manifesto tradition to show that feminist political theory, indeed, political theory in general, cannot move "past" the problems of liberalism until these problems are historicized, and until the assertion of liberal vocabularies and dissent against their limits are seen as two components of a single gesture. This failure to recognize historical influence is built into the rhetorical strategies of the genre via strategic deployment of notions of history and the future. Such strategies, adopted by feminist and queer theory, risk the unwitting perpetuation of the *dream* of a unified, complete liberal subject, a risk that is taken through the denial of the inherited strategies of the manifesto. By re-reading the significance of gender and sexuality into the history of the manifesto, I argue that queer and feminist political theory has the opportunity to reclaim a hidden tradition of criticism and dissent within the historical trajectory of liberal politics.

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Introduction: The Manifesto and Contemporary Theory

The Contemporary Proliferation of Manifestoes

The seeds for what eventually became this project were planted in the late 1990s while I was an undergraduate student studying feminism and Continental philosophy. This combination steeped me deeply in critiques of contemporary politics and activism. At the same time that feminists worried about the emergence of “post-feminism,” Baudrillard had already declared reality a “simulacrum,” and I read all I could on the so-called “postmodern condition,” I was also aware of the proliferation of often ironically self-titled “manifestoes” that were being published at the time. On the one hand, Mary Ann Caws published a collection of avant-garde art manifestoes in 2000, Kathleen Hanna of the band Bikini Kill published the 1991 “Riot Grrrl Manifesto” through photocopied zines and album notes, and the First National Conference of Sex Workers penned the “Sex Workers’ Manifesto” in 1997. My curiosity about the status of these texts in this specific cultural and political situation led me to questions that later blossomed into this project. Why did these authors choose to write manifestoes? What did it mean to write a manifesto? What did these texts have in common? How were they related to contemporary understandings of politics and activism?

I continued to learn more about political philosophy and legal theory, and I continued to collect manifestoes along the way. Early in my research, I saw a deep-seated connection between the claims being made in manifestoes and the promises made through discourses of liberal politics. In many ways, these texts followed the liberal tradition of seeking universal inclusion under rights-protection; these may well reflect

last vestiges of the identity politics to emerge in post-civil-rights society. However, the story of the manifesto as a simple perpetuation of liberal political rhetoric, of the promise of universal inclusion, ignored the fact that liberal politics has had detractors from the start. Were these texts liberal texts, or were they challenging liberal political precepts? The answer was not so simple, and I found that part of the problem lay in changing conceptions of politics over time and place. To investigate the relationship between manifestoes and liberal politics, I would need a different way of understanding the political and its relationship to identity. I would need a different way of understanding the history of the liberal project. The way politics, and political subjectivity, were invoked in these various texts had something in common—some way that “fit” into the rhetoric of a manifesto—but the specific shape of the political and the subject was being negotiated. There was something very tricky, and very interesting, going on in the text of the manifesto.

This dissertation provides a genealogy of the manifesto genre that involves redefining the project of liberalism and the predominant narrative of contemporary queer and feminist political theory’s history. My genealogy of the manifesto genre shows that liberal politics were always already incomplete. The practice of liberal politics from its very inception was performative. There was never any complete and fulfilled iteration of liberal ideals. It is because of the failure of liberal politics to live up to its promises—to enact universality, to instantiate rights, to construct a coherent, isolated and free individual identity, that the possibility for political speech—critique, dissent, disagreement—emerged in the specific aesthetic/rhetorical forms that it did, through the

manifesto genre. This project shows that the historical emergence of the liberal project and the genre of the manifesto go hand in hand.

I argue that the theoretical debates in contemporary feminist political theory were inherited as part of a tradition of manifesto rhetoric. Currently, the difficulties and complexities of the deployment of identity politics are represented in terms of two opposing camps: one invokes identity politics and is rooted in liberal or cultural feminism, while the other invokes the deconstruction of identity as political practice and is rooted in post-structuralism, postmodernism, and queer politics. Both sides, however, are dealing with a set of interrelated problems about the status of liberal precepts as they relate to sexual and gender identity categories: rights, identity, individuality, historical progress, and possibilities for critique. This dissertation historicizes this impasse, these debates, to argue that the problems that emerged in feminist political theory were inherited from and enabled by specific historical factors, factors that enabled the emergence of the manifesto genre. I claim that these problems have a history, and that these problems have been part of the discourse of liberal politics since its very inception. I show that the strategies employed by the manifesto genre enabled the foregrounding of gender in critiques of liberal politics, such that gender (and later, sexuality) became a way of representing larger forms of exclusion and failures within liberal vocabularies.

Feminist political theory, queer theory, and indeed, political theory in general, cannot move “past” the problems of liberalism until these problems are historicized, until the assertion of liberal vocabularies and dissent against their limits are seen as two components of a single gesture. At the same time, by re-reading the significance of gender and sexuality into the history of the manifesto, I believe that feminist political

theory has the opportunity to reclaim a hidden tradition of criticism and dissent in relation to liberal politics. Critical responses to liberal politics—forms of dissent voiced through the manifesto genre—are not separate from or inimical to liberal politics; dissent and exposure of the limitations of liberal politics are part the history of the liberal project. This political project was incomplete from the start.

As my chapters will show, I read the manifesto genre as an emergent set of inherited rhetorical responses to liberal politics' failures. In this way, I depart from previous literature on the manifesto. Manifestoes traditionally have been the concern of social scientists on the one hand, and art historians/critics on the other. Unlike Martin Puchner, for example, who argues that there are two kinds of manifestoes with divergent and parallel histories, artistic manifestoes and political manifestoes, I complicate this art/politics distinction.¹ Rather, these texts foreground aesthetic and performative dimensions of the political, as well as the political significance of concerns usually relegated to the “merely aesthetic” or non-political. This contamination of art and politics, as well as divergent theoretical traditions, is key to the manifesto. Manifestoes did not invent a practice involving the performative and constitutive functions of language; rather, they *exposed* the performativity and failed constitutive functions of vocabularies from liberal politics: they exposed what was always already there. By tracing the oscillation between exposure and hiding of the failures of the liberal project through manifesto-writing, my project provides an alternative context in which to define politics.

¹ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

The Problems and Strategies of the Manifesto Genre

I have identified three specific problems that reflect the varied historical influences on the genre. These concerns illustrate the difficulties of critique of liberal vocabularies, but they are also what enables the manifesto genre to be critical, what makes the manifesto political: it is through the unsettled playing-out of these problems in individual texts in specific historical and geographical contexts that the tensions emerge within and between their practice of grappling with liberalism and the manifesto genre. It is in this play, this practice, this uncertainty, where criticism and politics happens. These three problems make up the specificity of the manifesto genre.

We can trace the genre, then, as a tradition of critique and dissent, by tracing ways in which these problems are addressed, ignored, complicated, resolved, and even ridiculed. I trace this tradition through a reading of liberal rights-declarations and counter-declarations in the United States; through the work of Marx before and after the revolutions of 1848; through the plethora of avant-garde art manifestoes in the early 20th century; and from the feminist and gay liberation movements of the 1960s through to the emergence of Queer Nation in the '90s. Each specific text and historical moment I choose to read is related in some way to the three problems that make up this list.

Three problems that typically serve as the critical basis for contemporary manifestoes, concerns whose roots I trace as part of this genealogical project, are as follows: **1)** the status of universality; **2)** the problem of history and influence; and **3)** performativity: a concern with the interrelated processes of politicization, interpellation of subjects, and linguistic constitution. To say that these three concerns constitute the genre is to say that through analysis of manifesto authors' treatment of these problems, the genre is

comprehensible as a form of historical practice, as a tradition of dissent, and as an enabler and disabler of contemporary political, theoretical, and critical discourse. This project traces the historical emergence of these problems through the history of liberal politics and the rhetoric of the manifesto. By tracing this history, I contextualize contemporary political debates in feminist political theory and elsewhere as historical debates, as inherited as part of the liberal political project.

1) The Status of Universality

As Janet Lyon argues in *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, the manifesto genre emerged as a form of political contestation at the same time that the modern understanding of politics, the public sphere, and the political subject were being formed. Lyon writes, “The rise of the manifesto is thus coeval with the emergence of the bourgeois and plebian public spheres in the West...the manifesto addresses and at the same time elicits an entity called The People, each constituent of which is hailed as an entitle universal subject of the modern state.”² Lyon continues, “The manifesto arose as a public genre for contesting or recalibrating the assumptions underlying this newly ‘universal’ subject.”³ Lyon’s insights into the relationship between the manifesto genre’s emergence and modern forms of liberal politics are significant. I agree that at the same time that the vocabulary and terrain of modern politics were being produced, the manifesto emerged as a genre engaged in dialogue with and inherent to such politics. The politics of the manifesto, then, contested and subverted definitions of the “political,”

² Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999): 1-2.

³ Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, 3.

traditional structures and institutions of power and identity, even as they were under construction. Lyon argues:

when the conditions of possibility emerged for an ideology of a universal subject with universal rights and sensibilities—that is, when political and economic developments in post-Enlightenment Europe generated the modern concepts of equality and rational autonomy—the manifesto arose as a public genre for contesting or recalibrating the assumptions underlying this newly “universal” subject. In this influential instantiation, the manifesto is the form that exposes the broken promises of modernity: if modern democratic forms claim to honor the sovereignty of universal political subjecthood, the manifesto is a testimony to the partiality of that claim.⁴

Lyon notes that the manifesto emerged as “testimony to the partiality” of claims to universality as enunciated by liberal political vocabularies. I would extend Lyon’s analysis to argue that this testimony contested the partiality of universality in two ways: first, by exposing the contradiction between claims to universality in theory and the reality of the partial application of liberal precepts in practice; and second, by exposing the impossibility of a true universality, since all descriptions of the universal must have a limit to their purview, a limit to their horizons, which will involve some outside or exclusion.

The distinction between these two complaints against universality, particularly in the context of universal human rights and other aspects of the vocabulary of liberal politics, is important because the claims in manifestoes often vacillate between these two complaints although, I argue, they are in tension with one another. Manifestoes often

⁴ Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern*, 3.

articulate the failure of universal rights to be applied in practice: the contradiction between protections outlined in rights-declarations or enunciated through liberal political vocabularies on the one hand, and the reality of marginalization and lack of rights-protection by individuals on the basis of their identity, such as women, persons of color, the poor, or non-citizens, on the other hand. This contradiction between the promise of universal rights protection and the reality that rights are only available to be claimed by certain types of individuals is a typical complaint in manifesto rhetoric.

A complication arises, however, in how manifestoes are used to remedy this contradiction between the promise and practice of universality. If the manifesto is used to expose this contradiction or “broken promise” in order to extend rights-protection to include a specific group identity, to extend the purview of rights and to seek inclusion within the limits of this so-called universal protection, the manifesto risks further excluding and marginalizing other individuals who remain outside this newly-configured universal.

However, if the manifesto author questions the possibility of universal rights-protection entirely, if she recognizes that universality itself is problematic and impossible to implement in pragmatic terms, then the manifesto author must find another basis on which to claim certain privileges and contest certain abuses—a basis other than universal human rights, a basis outside of this central liberal concept. Investment in universal rights and the desire for inclusion within its protection, then, comes into conflict with a more radical critique of the (im)possibility of universal rights protection. This tension, however, is productive; it enables the genre to create strategies for dealing with this conflict. If the manifesto stops short of seeking inclusion, it remains in the space of

exposing the hidden exclusions of universality, which enables it to utilize both kinds of critiques of universality together.

Analysis of the genre's genealogy shows competing gestures in its treatment of universality. In critiquing the universal as partial and exclusionary, the manifesto exposes the connection between rhetoric and history—the fact that universality is an historically emergent idea tied to a specific revolutionary moment that has passed. The author of the manifesto is left with a choice between either asserting an alternative small-u universality—with a wink and a smile—or halting at critique of universals without replacement, which leaves us in the unsatisfying place of partiality and historical contingency when compared to the promises of universal rights under liberal vocabularies. The exposure of universality as exclusionary can be experienced as a loss, but only when the concept of universality seems possible. It's only when the history of liberal politics' attempt to create universality is seen as always already failed that the manifesto can claim that exposure of this failure is not a loss (of anything except an illusion).

This manifesto strategy is illustrative of debates in contemporary political theory. Theorists in disciplines from philosophy to law to literature have been preoccupied with critiquing the notion of universality, and specifically universal rights, in recent years. For example, Martha Nussbaum's argument in *Sex and Social Justice* attempts to redeem the structure of universal rights for women by replacing talk of "rights" with that of "capabilities."⁵ Richard Rorty argues in favor of the "liberal ironist" whose separation of

⁵⁵ Nussbaum argues that "there are universal obligations to protect human functioning and its dignity" and "any tradition that denies these things is unjust." In order to meet these obligations, Nussbaum sees the need for an account of those capabilities of human life that are most central, "even if a partial and highly

the public and private spheres enable her to support liberal politics without the philosophical justifications of liberal philosophy, such as claims to universality.⁶ Gayatri Spivak argues for the strategic use of universality and essentialism in specific contexts.⁷ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žižek have argued for contextualizing the emergence of the concept of universality within a capitalist historical framework; Butler argues that the current political situation calls for social movements to move beyond “competing universalities” to find a “basis of commonality...without recourse to transcendental claims.”⁸ Throughout contemporary feminist and political theory, the problem of universality emerges as a recurring theme. I intend to show that these contemporary theoretical concerns borrow strategies that are inherited from the history of manifesto rhetoric.

As my genealogy of the genre will show, the exposure of universality as exclusionary became associated with the category of gender, and later sexuality, from the beginning of the liberal project. As counter-declarations evolved into the genre of the manifesto, the genre was used to unmask ways in which liberal universality equated universality with masculinity (and thus excluded the feminine). As critiques of the exclusion of women from liberal politics grew in force, critiques of gender exclusion came to stand in for critiques of exclusion as such. The category of gender was mapped onto the critique of

general account.” Martha Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 30, 34.

⁶ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

⁷ Spivak invokes the possibility of deploying a “strategic essentialism” in part because, she argues, some sort of universalizing is impossible to avoid, in part because it can be useful and necessary in certain contexts. She writes, “rather than define myself as specific rather than universal, I should see what in the universalizing discourse could be useful and then go on to see where that discourse meets its limits and its challenge within that field.” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990): 11.

⁸ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London and New York: Verso, 2000): 167.

the universal; the failure of liberal universality became understood as a gendered failure. It is through this process that the category of gender became central to liberal politics and traditions of dissent.

The very emergence of Western feminism, of its attention to and critique of categories of gender and sexuality, is a consequence of failures of the liberal project to enact universality. This historical mapping of gender onto liberal vocabularies, the understanding of liberal exclusions through gender and sexuality, points to the deep connection between feminist history and the manifesto tradition. When contextualized within the genealogy of the manifesto, the traditional narrative of the history of feminism as a history of *liberal* feminism comes into question. Rather, an alternative narrative emerges that situates feminism and feminist political theory as reflective of and indebted to a rhetorical tradition of the practice of manifesto-writing.

2) A Concern with History and Influence

The moment in which liberal politics emerged was a revolutionary moment rooted in enlightenment ideals of rationality, trust in the scientific method, belief in the universe as an ordered system, and a teleological view of history as progress and advancement. Arguably, the history of philosophy since the Enlightenment can be read as a series of attempts at redescribing and reasserting this worldview in the face of historical and experiential evidence to the contrary. To oversimplify, the status of rationality was under consistent attack by the crises of history: revolutions, counter-revolutions, and their failures. Manifestoes were used to navigate between the desire to assert transhistorical claims that revise previously-made historical claims—claims that might fulfill the

promises of liberal politics, and, alternately, exposure of the fact that all claims are contingent, and that any transhistorical claim is destined to be partial and exclusionary.

At the same time, manifesto authors recognized the power of historical narratives, of origin narratives, of sweeping descriptions of history in terms of power and oppression. As a strategy borrowed from Marxist rhetoric, such transhistorical descriptions of history were rhetorically necessary to set up a theatrical scene of imminent crisis demanding political action; however, such descriptions were also themselves inherited as a certain way of understanding history, of experiencing human action in relation to the past. The powerful liberal belief in history as progress was repeatedly challenged by experiences of multiple (and sometimes failed) revolutions, as well as the experience of the fruits of liberal modernity as leading to, for example, the First World War. This contradiction between understandings of history and the future were navigated through various strategies in manifesto rhetoric: immanent critique, denial, nihilism, historical forgetting, and the promise of the emergence of some not-yet-understood “post-” future. Throughout their varied responses, however, the tricky relationship between rhetoric and history, between inherited language and the desire to replace such inheritance with alternatives, as well as the awareness of how discourse is limited by historical context, were highlighted through the manifesto genre’s treatment of the problem of historical influence.

On the level of language, it is true that many manifestoes invoke a narrative history and make transhistorical claims in an attempt to call attention to the present as a moment of crisis, as well as to promise a utopian future that will inevitably emerge in accordance with what some authors believed to be natural law or destiny. The language of the

manifesto sets up a division between history and the future, focusing on the immediacy of the current situation, calling attention to the current moment. As Mary Ann Caws notes, “the manifesto moment positions itself between what has been done and what will be done, between the accomplished and the potential, in a radical and energizing division.”⁹ This call to action is premised on a history that is enumerated through a series of abuses and grievances. Along with these grievances, many texts list a correlated series of demands. The urgency of these demands is supported by a description of a potential future that is often couched in utopian language. Just as manifestoes illustrate ambivalence about inherited conceptual and linguistic traditions, they also show ambiguity in their treatment of the future: it is simultaneously created by human action *and* predetermined.

While this narrative history, list of grievances and demands, and promise of a utopian future all contribute to the urgency and immediacy of manifesto rhetoric, such rhetorical strategy has the effect of setting up yet another tension. Present conditions, and specifically present *identities*, are described as the historical products of progress gone wrong. This awareness of the historical constitution of identities contributes to the manifesto strategy of identity-destabilization as a form of critique and political intervention. However, the description of history’s abuses cannot be so devastating as to be total, as to disallow any possibility for recourse, let alone promises for a utopian future. In offering a description of the limits and problems of an existing political vocabulary, in pointing to the performative and constitutive effects of such a vocabulary, the description must be harsh enough to require action but not so harsh as to remove any

⁹ Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): xxi.

possibility for change. The constitutive function of established vocabularies cannot be total, or else change and difference cannot occur.

Manifestoes often describe the current political and social situation as intolerable, and this situation is often depicted as the result of a specific, sweeping, and unfortunate historical narrative. The manifesto must offer a damning description of the past and present in order to warrant its prescription for action and a future. But in providing a description, the manifesto may become too invested in making the case for this *description* to offer a plausible *prescription*. Such focus on potential futures and possibilities would require the subject interpellated through the manifesto to surrender her entitlement to indignity, to surrender her identity as historically constituted through oppression. Thus the manifesto navigates between supporting personal investment in a constructed and oppressed identity on the one hand, and enacting the deconstruction of historically-inherited identities on the other.

When the manifesto does offer a description of a coming, utopian future, this future is postulated as inevitable, as the unavoidable result of history's abuses. The future described in the manifesto already exists and is already finished; this closure precludes any possibility for dialectics or alternative futures. A tension emerges between a call for action/change and a description of inevitability. Are we to act or just sit back and enjoy the revolution? What would action entail in this context of inevitability? Despite this tension, the simultaneity of calls for immediate action and promises of an inevitable utopian future provide the manifesto with both rhetorical urgency as well as historical legitimacy.

As I have discussed, the practice of manifesto-writing navigates the difficult problem of how to imagine and invoke a history while rejecting the limits of historical inheritance. At times, in their treatment of historical influence and the promise of a utopian future, *both acceptance and critique* of liberal concepts (such as rights, or a view of history as progress) emerge within the same manifesto; their simultaneity further illustrates the difficulties of navigating between intelligibility, legitimacy, and acceptance on the one hand, and radical critique, vocabulary deconstruction, and the risk of (further) marginalization, on the other hand. As manifesto-writers become more self-reflexive, more attuned to the complexities of inherited views of history and their significance to claims for action and critique, the manifesto develops into a recognizable but historically contingent, constantly evolving genre. The manifesto becomes the site where authors express their increasing preoccupation with issues of recuperation and risk, dangers of co-optation, and crises of legitimacy.

It is because of this need for the manifesto to navigate between construction and critique, between awareness of the limits of historical influence and the promise that “the New” will eventually emerge, that manifesto authors often employ strategies such as parody and immanent critique in their texts. Indeed, through my genealogy of the genre, I will argue that manifestoes became intelligible as a genre during the avant-garde, precisely the time that the manifesto became subject of its own parody. Parody is important, because it is through parody that play with similarity and difference occurs, where the author can interrupt the re-iteration of history, or iterate it differently.

Parodic manifestoes and counter-declarations expose the constitutive function of rhetoric, undermine the legitimacy of an original text, and point out the difference

between promises made through a text and the limits of its effects. Just as manifestoes risk inadvertent reinvestment in the inherited identities they intend to deconstruct, manifestoes and counter-declarations that employ parody must navigate the tension between the implicit reification of the original text and their attempt to undermine the original's legitimacy and authority. Parody is one strategy that manifesto authors use in a general attempt to recast the problem of history and influence to their advantage, to point out the bankruptcy of the past.

Such strategies recast the liberal project as failed, incomplete from the start, and blind to the performative, constitutive functions of political language. The specific kinds of problems, the strategies that emerged for dealing with these problems, the specific ways in which political action becomes mapped onto formal aesthetics—this history, the history of the manifesto, is intimately tied to liberal politics. The genealogy of the manifesto is, then, a genealogy of the liberal project, insofar as it is a genealogy that traces ways in which the liberal project failed to be complete.

3) Performativity: A Concern with Processes of Politicization, Interpellation, and Linguistic Constitution

Contemporary theory has been preoccupied with processes of performativity. The notion of a “performative utterance” comes from J.L. Austin’s text, *How to Do Things with Words*, which was initially delivered as a lecture in 1955 and published in 1962. Austin uses the example of wedding vows, the statement of “I do,” as a type of utterance that does what it says, a statement that “acts” rather than merely describing an act.¹⁰

¹⁰ Austin describes performative sentences as examples where “to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be aid in so uttering to be doing or

While Austin contrasted performative from other kinds of utterances, theorists after Austin have noted ways in which performativity functions in other kinds of language. The idea of language as performative emphasizes the ways in which language shapes and creates reality, rather than merely describing reality. Austin's description of performativity contributed to a deeper understanding within the rhetorical tradition of the ways in which language is a creative and meaning-making activity.

Borrowing from the work of Judith Butler, feminist theorists initially discussed performativity in terms of gender performance. Butler argued that the appearance of gender identity as "natural," was an effect of a series of performances enacted on and through the body. Gender parody, such as drag, exposes "natural" gender as a series of imitative acts without an original. Performativity, then, is a term that describes the exposure of gender identity as contingent, learned, fluid, and a site of potential for gender to be performed otherwise.¹¹ Butler's *Gender Trouble* was a pivotal intervention in the redefinition of identity and gender within contemporary feminist theory. But performativity extends beyond gender as well as language. I borrow the concept of performativity as a way to discuss the complex processes through which language, in the strongest sense of the word, enables performances of identity. Performativity describes the complex intersection of language and subjectivity. This dissertation takes the traditional object of rhetorical analysis, political language, and focuses on the specific interventions of manifestoes and declarations. My analysis of manifestoes shows ways in

to state that I am doing it: it is to do it." J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962): 6.

¹¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1999): 173-177.

which political language was always performative; this performativity is what manifestoes play with and expose.

A similar idea has been circulating within contemporary rhetorical theory as well, but in the language of “constitutive rhetoric.” While consideration of audience in the rhetorical situation has been a part of the tradition since Aristotle, attention to the centrality of audience reception in specific kinds of argumentation was revived in the 1950s and 1960s through the work of Chaim Perelman.¹² Perelman’s “new rhetoric” argues that what is considered “reasonable” is considered so by a “universal audience,” and such reasonable-ness in an argument is predicated on specific kinds of rhetorical techniques and strategies, rather than straightforward logical proofs. Such techniques must be based on pre-existing beliefs of the audience, on that which with the audience and the speaker are in agreement.¹³

While Perelman’s rhetoric moved firmly away from positivist logic and towards an understanding of the importance of “social truths,” contemporary rhetoricians have pushed this relationship between language and audience further. If we take seriously Althusser’s notion of interpellation and the production of ideology, such theorists argue, we must shift our view of rhetoric from persuasive to constitutive.¹⁴ The subjects/audience of the rhetorical event are in fact constituted through the event and do

¹² Chaim Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, trans. William Kluback (Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982).

¹³ Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, 14, 21, 39

¹⁴ Althusser defines interpellation as the ideological process of the constitution of subjects. He uses the example of a police officer who “hails” someone on the street by calling out “Hey, you there,” a process through which the individual spoken to becomes a subject in relation to ideology (that is, *subjected to* ideology). Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review, 2001).

not precede it; constitutive rhetoric “calls its audience into being.”¹⁵ Maurice Charland has discussed this process in the case of the “peuple québécois” in Canada:

that subject and the collectivized ‘peuple québécois’ are, in Althusser’s language, ‘interpellated’ as political subjects through a process of identification in rhetorical narratives that ‘always already’ presume the constitution of subjects. From this perspective, a subject is not ‘persuaded’ to support sovereignty. Support for sovereignty is inherent to the subject position addressed by *souverainiste* (pro-sovereignty) rhetoric because of what we will see to be a series of narrative ideological effects.¹⁶

As Charland argues, the performative, interpellative, and constitutive functions of political rhetoric are fundamentally intertwined with the construction and identification of audiences with identity categories, and this identification not only concerns power, but often performs an elision of the constitutive process itself, such that the audience is hailed as pre-existing the interpellative enunciation.

Charland’s description of constitutive rhetoric is useful for my analysis, as it describes how political rhetoric functions in the manifesto and declaration: the audience or “we” may be hailed as pre-existing; the manifesto may self-consciously announce that group identity through its declaration; or it may anticipate the formation of the identity and audience in the imminent future. At times, distinctions between the “we” and “you” of the past, present and future may be articulated; other manifestoes may slide between the “we” of the past and future as interchangeable, despite the fact that this “we” may not exist prior to the event of the manifesto’s declaration of its existence. In any case, the

¹⁵ Maurice Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Quebecois,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 134.

¹⁶ Charland, “Constitutive Rhetoric,” 134.

complications of identity—the exposure of its multiplicity, contingency, and the processes of its constitution—are often what give the manifesto its critical impact.

As my analysis of specific manifestoes will show, many manifestoes are used to expose political rhetoric as constitutive, the interpellation of political subjects as performance and process. However, some texts hide the fact that they only offer replacement interpellative structures, not an escape from the interpellative process itself. I trace how manifesto authors navigate between the exposure of the constituting function of a dominant, entrenched, and legitimate political vocabulary as problematic and exclusionary, while deciding whether to hide their own process of counter-constitution by not exposing or making explicit the terms of the counter-construction that is being offered *as* a counter-construction. Rather, this contestation and alternative construction might be presented as pre-existing, its description as “truth.” Some manifesto authors do, in fact, expose the terms of this construction as a construction, but to do so, the manifesto author must surrender her claim to truth and appeal to the audience on pragmatic grounds and through the strength of her claims about the harms of the established vocabulary. She must use the manifesto to criticize a vocabulary for being contingent without having anything other than contingency to offer in its place.

Similarly, my readings show that tricky strategies of identification play out in the manifesto to set up camps of “us” and “them” and to demand that the reader situate herself in relationship to these identities. As Mary Ann Caws notes, manifestoes are “generally posing some ‘we,’ explicit or implicit, against some other ‘they,’ with the terms constructed in a deliberate dichotomy.”¹⁷ The manifesto directly addresses and demands participation from its audience; “it wants to make a persuasive move from the ‘I

¹⁷ Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): xx.

believe’ of the speaker toward the ‘you’ of the listener or reader, who should be sufficiently convinced to join in.”¹⁸ The audience is situated via strategic use of dichotomies and personal pronouns. This architecture of identity positions instructs the manifesto reader on how to read, receive, and experience the event of the manifesto. This process involves a reorientation of identification vis-à-vis the traditional political subject. The site and content of the traditional “citizen” are destabilized through strategies of identity and difference.

The processes of identification that play out in the manifesto overlap with the problem of history and influence as well. As I noted earlier, manifestoes often include a list or narrative of complaints or abuses suffered in the past, abuses that have constituted the “we” of the manifesto. Any list of specific grievances and demands must be specific enough to translate into programmatic action, yet not so specific as to limit the purview of the “we” of the audience. The manifesto’s description of history’s abuses, the limits of established political vocabularies, and the problems with the identities they create must be condemnatory enough to require revolutionary action to bring about change, but not so condemnatory as to be alienating to readers who cannot identify with the “we” who has been constituted through this history. If a listener or reader fails to identify with the “we,” if she fails to agree with specific aspects of the enumerated list of grievances and demands, then she will be less likely to react to the urgency of the manifesto’s call to action or to believe in the possibility of its promise for change and a future.

While the redescription of identity, the reversal and revaluation of previously oppressed or devalued identities, and the attempt at renegotiation of the architecture of interpellation are all important aspects of manifesto rhetoric, such redefinition and

¹⁸ Caws, *Manifesto*, xx.

reevaluation involve a series of tensions that must be negotiated. Manifestoes simultaneously constitute a “we” in opposition to the pre-existing definition of who “we” are, and yet manifesto authors must resist the establishment of an oppositional identity that is dependent upon that to which it is opposed. The creation of an oppositional identity risks investment in one’s own identity as subjected, as oppressed, as devalued. If the terms of subjection are to be altered, if revolution is to succeed, then that oppositional identity would have to be sacrificed for something yet unknown, something that cannot be guaranteed to be better, more useful, or more liberatory. The manifesto cannot define the content of the “liberated” self it promises; it can only be posited as a not-yet-created empty category, an identity that is not yet intelligible and thus not yet co-optable. Because the only identity that is currently known is the identity that has been constituted through existing political vocabularies, the re-described and re-valued identity is still unknown, it has yet to be imagined, and it can only be articulated in terms of the currently-available vocabulary, or it cannot be articulated at all.

The combination of the problem of historical influence and the limits of identity-resistance without replacement lead manifesto authors to invoke what I call the strategy of the “post.” Manifestoes pause at the moment between the announcement of a radical break from the past and the promise of a future, but some authors intentionally remain at the cusp of this moment. Instead of promising a specific future, the manifesto is used to invoke an empty, unnamed coming change. Just as the prefix “post” is used to define that which comes after something but lacks a name, the manifesto is used to articulate the coming of the “post” as a strategy for escaping the problems of historical inheritance and the danger of replacing one limited identity-construction with another, less desirable one.

Manifestoes must insist that “we” are here but we are not who we are; or, we are not who “you” or “they” say we are; or, we exist but don’t yet know who we will become. This unknown but becoming identity is what is announced and constituted through the manifesto. Even when the content of that identity remains undefined or empty, the formal effects of the manifesto’s enunciation of “we” brings this identity into being, marks its beginning, or anticipates its development. But through this negotiation of identity, the construction of the “we” as contingent and contested, the “we” becomes politicized. As specific forms of identification, namely gender and sexuality, become understood as “the way” to counter established interpellations, this enactment of identity-resistance becomes increasingly *recognized* as political, although such identity-resistance was always already political. This increasing recognition of the impact of manifestoes on identity and its lived effects correlates to the increasing recognition of the manifesto as a genre.

Why Genre?

It is through the concept of genre that rhetoric—as in the manner and context in and through which something is said, the formal constraints of representation—and history—the material context out of which something is enabled to be practiced and experienced—collide. Together, the rhetorical and the historical converge into the concept of genre as a way of articulating a kind of historical practice, a way of doing.

I categorize the manifesto as a genre because it situates manifestoes as legitimate and important literary and rhetorical texts available to analysis as much as any other literary form. I invoke the status of literature in part to provoke the resistance that I intend to

explore—the challenge that contemporary politics has become reduced to the “merely” aesthetic—and to challenge this bifurcation, this reification of hierarchical categories of “real” politics and “mere” literature or art. Manifestoes are political texts. Manifestoes are literature. To write a manifesto is to politicize something; to write a manifesto is to create a work of art.

However, the manifesto has a certain relationship to language and politics unlike other forms of writing. It is meta-writing. It writes about what it says even as it says it, challenges the possibility of what it says, the possibility of saying, as it speaks. In this way, the manifesto formally invokes and foregrounds the performativity of language and subjectivity. Just as an event doesn’t really “happen” when framed by the context of a stage, unlike an event not bounded safely by the context of theater or the literary, the manifesto pushes the boundary of this division—it is both happening and the appearance of/reference to happening, the questioning of the boundary between happening and not-happening. It is this complex understanding of the notion of genre that informs my reading of the manifesto as genre, the manifesto as historical practice. By looking at specific examples in the development of the genre, I analyze the strategies and limits of the genre, and I articulate its relationship to modern politics and the needs of specific historical contexts.

This question of genre is also a question of rhetoric, since the emergence (or lack thereof) of specific genres is tied to available historical forms. The manifesto is limited, as a genre, both by its status as a counter-discourse to liberal politics, and by its own membership in a genre, by the limits of intelligibility of the genre, and by audience expectation of what the manifesto can and cannot do. Audience response to a manifesto,

the construction of the rhetorical situation, will involve both audience perception of what a manifesto is and does as well as the extent to which a manifesto adheres to or transgresses these expectations. As Kathleen Jamieson writes, “the perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows *not merely from the situation* but also from antecedent rhetorical forms.”¹⁹ We cannot analyze or question the function or effects of recent or current manifesto rhetoric without first analyzing the genre’s emergence and historical function. And, as my genealogy and narrative will show, the problems that emerge in manifesto rhetoric are precisely the problems inherited by contemporary politics, including strategies for resistance and dissent.

Although I invoke contemporary, postmodern or post-structuralist theoretical concerns with language, my account of the manifesto genre goes beyond the merely linguistic. I also ground the genre in material and historical contexts: there is no trans-historical manifesto genre. My analysis tells a story of the ways in which the genre develops and changes over time. Specific kinds of problems and strategies for dealing with these problems, the problems specific to the manifesto genre, are expanded and reinvented within different historical contexts. In particular, revolutions, counter-revolutions, and their failures provided the material, historical experience which the rhetoric of the manifesto genre reflects.

What makes the manifesto genre so complex, in fact, is the way in which the manifesto emerges in conversation with itself. The genre is an intertextual genre, a genre dependent upon the critique and reinvention of historical texts, of strategies previously employed by the genre. The classificatory function of the traditional genre performs an

¹⁹ Kathleen M. Hall Jamieson, “Generic Constraints and the Rhetorical Situation,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6:3 (1973): 163.

elision of difference and foregrounds ways in which different texts are examples of the same “ideal” generic form. In contrast, the manifesto genre openly exposes its indebtedness to other genres, as well as its difference from itself, and from other manifestoes. Through this play of similarity and difference, as illustrated through the strategy of parody, the manifesto genre employs rhetorical strategies without illusion regarding their problems and limits. The manifesto is an acutely self-aware, self-reflexive, and (at times) even self-deprecating genre.

I identify the manifesto as a genre to legitimize the manifesto; I also do this to question the function of generic classification. Although I show that the manifesto is a genre, it is a genre that changed and expanded over time. As Jamieson writes, “genres should not be viewed as static forms but as evolving phenomena....Rhetors perpetually modify genres. New genres do emerge.”²⁰ The manifesto genre, historically, has been used to grapple with certain kinds of problems by using specific kinds of strategies, problems related to specific historical experiences of the failures of liberal political vocabularies. However, the recent proliferation of self-described “manifesto” texts requires a re-evaluation of the function of manifesto rhetoric, not only within the texts themselves, but also their potential effects in our current political and theoretical context. That is why it is important to look at the history of manifestoes now: they can tell us so much about the limits of dissent and protest in the past in order to help us understand the gestures, structures, strategies, and vocabularies of protest inherited from the liberal tradition, manifested in our current political situation. We see now that politics, identity, and aesthetics are fundamentally interwoven; the manifesto traces a history of their

²⁰ Jamieson, 168.

intersections, the various shapes they took in different contexts, and various ways in which this interrelatedness has been hidden or exposed through political rhetoric.

Although the historical experience of multiple and failed revolutions led authors to write manifestoes as exposures of the limits of liberal politics, particular ways in which ideas about history and future are deployed in manifestoes risk perpetuating deferred hope in future revolutions, deferred hope that can be interpreted as a form of nostalgia for a revolution that never occurred. In addition, these strategies for dealing with the problem of historical inheritance promote investment in the “new,” in the future, that contributes to a kind of historical forgetting. Although manifestoes are a genre in explicit conversation with other manifestoes and with other historical texts, deployments of certain understandings of history and the future, of beginnings and ends, end up enabling the denial of influence from manifesto history. It is for this reason that contemporary theory, particularly queer and feminist political theory, ignores its indebtedness to the specific rhetorical tradition of manifesto-writing.

I identify a particularly strong inheritance of manifesto rhetoric in contemporary post-structuralist, postmodern, queer, and feminist political theory. As will be shown through my analysis of the function of gender in manifesto rhetoric, the history of feminist critique is especially interwoven with the history of the manifesto genre. The problem with contemporary queer and feminist political theory is that it fails to account for ways in which inherited tradition has enabled and disabled certain kinds of problems, and thus certain kinds of critique. The danger is that feminist politics vacillate between a series of responses to the “problems” of liberal politics without acknowledging and learning from the past. This project is an intervention, an attempt to illustrate the interconnected history

of liberal vocabularies and rhetorics of dissent. A genealogy of the manifesto genre shows that liberal politics have been unstable, incomplete, and performative from their very inception, and this insight changes the way we must think about the liberal project, histories of criticism, and the relationship between politics and aesthetics.

Chapter Overview

I begin with a comparison between the 1776 “Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies” and Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s 1848 “Declaration of Sentiments.” Through my reading of the strategic addition of the category of “women” to the original declaration, I expose Stanton’s text as a parodic counter-declaration where rhetorical strategies function to destabilize rights claims. Stanton’s text illustrates the exclusions enacted through liberal claims to universality and highlights the performativity of political rhetoric. Such rhetorical strategies serve as a critical antecedent to the manifesto genre: Stanton’s text is an early example of strategies of identity-multiplication and destabilization as well as the way in which the category of gender becomes “mapped” onto larger forms of identity-exclusion enacted through liberal vocabularies. My reading of Stanton’s text illustrates how counter-declarations reflected the experience of the failure of revolutionary liberal ideals to be fully enacted.

An important factor in the emergence of the genre—the failure of 18th and 19th century revolutions to meet political and ideological expectations—comes under increased scrutiny in the second chapter. I provide readings of Marx and Engels’ “Manifesto of the Communist Party” and Marx’s “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” to analyze the relationship between historical context and rhetorical antecedents to the manifesto genre.

A close reading of these texts shows that the use of imminent critique and historical narrative deployed in the Manifesto, in conjunction with the awareness of language as a form of action and the dangers of co-optation of revolutionary movements discussed in the Brumaire, created the rhetorical mixture of strategies that would constitute the manifesto genre in the early 20th century. My reading of the Manifesto through the retrospective context of the Brumaire illustrates concerns with the problem of history, inheritance, recuperation, and the dangers of totalizing narratives as critique—concerns that would inform the manifesto genre as an intertextual, self-reflexive, parodic, and suspicious genre.

Within the context of avant-garde art movements in the early 20th century, the manifesto becomes recognizable as a genre, although as a genre that questions and contests its own strategies, one that points out its differences with other texts and with itself (and thus an unusual kind of genre). Close readings of texts from Futurists and Dada illustrate ways in which the manifesto was used to redefine distinctions between art and politics; in addition, these manifestoes utilize varying strategies, from denial to nihilism, to avoid the difficulties of historical inheritance and risk of cooptation. I show how women Futurists enact rhetorical strategies for exposing the category of the citizen as a gendered category; this gesture demands an alternative historical narrative of an alternative kind of feminism. Avant-garde texts extend the process through which gender “stands in” for the exclusion of liberal identities at large.

This alternative feminist history continues through an analysis of Valerie Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto*, another text that illustrates the way in which liberal exclusions were understood through the category of gender. The parallels between Solanas’ manifesto

and her infamous violent act, the shooting of Andy Warhol, complicate straightforward distinctions between text and event. Solanas' manifesto is also notable for the way in which it invokes an as-yet-undefined "post" identity as a strategy for escaping historical influence and resisting cooptation. This strategy is invoked in later manifestoes from lesbian feminists, such as Charlotte Bunch. Bunch also employs strategies of identity-reversal and multiplication to complicate liberal notions of gender, sexuality, and the citizen. Furthermore, readings from the feminist groups WITCH and CLIT offer varying strategies for resisting historical influence and co-optation: WITCH invests hope in the possibilities for performative protest to destabilize and denaturalize liberal identity categories, while CLIT's overwhelming anxiety about cooptation leads the group to disavow communication and intelligibility entirely.

The alternative history of feminism that I offer through these readings, a vision of feminist history as manifesto history, opposes commonly-accepted distinctions between forms of political activism: essentialist, modern, liberation identity politics on the one hand, and postmodern, queer, progressive politics of identity-destabilization on the other. Rather, my genealogy of the manifesto shows that these are not opposed traditions, insofar as they are all part of the complex *manifesto* tradition. This recontextualization continues through the final chapter, where texts from gay liberation and Queer Nation are read in terms of their strategies for resisting historical influence. Gay and queer manifestoes also illustrate a shift in the way in which the manifesto was used in varying historical and cultural contexts: the influence of the "sexual revolution" and the AIDS crisis in the eighties provides insight into how gay sexual practices came to "stand in" for

political action, such that the experience of sexual pleasure itself became understood as a revolutionary act.

I analyze the imagined identity politics/queer politics divide established by Queer Nation as an example of a larger process that occurs throughout the history of the manifesto: a form of historical forgetting, of denying one's theoretical inheritance, one's indebtedness to the manifesto tradition. Queer Nation's historical forgetting provides insight into the ways in which understandings of identity, temporality, and history *inherited from* the manifesto genre actually contribute to this denial of *membership in* the genre. The manifesto's emphasis on an oppressive narrative history, its future-oriented calls for action, the structure of its oppositional identity categories, and the ways in which specific kinds of identity—gender, and later, sexuality—come to “stand in” for larger processes of identity exclusion: these various strategies that constitute the genre invite a form of amnesia that risks the inadvertent reaffirmation of the very liberal vocabularies that the manifesto is intended to oppose. These risks inform my conclusion, a call for a post-revolutionary, post-nostalgic manifesto practice that enables critical redefinitions of what “counts” as political action and of who “counts” as a citizen.

Chapter One

“Men and Women are Created Equal”: Declarations, Parodic Counter-Declarations, and the Category of the Citizen

This chapter provides a reading of the “Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies” as a prime example of an Enlightenment text that, at the moment of its creation, enacted a revolutionary break from the past through the establishment of a liberal vocabulary of universality, rights, and the identity of the citizen. The “Declaration” illustrates the integration of politics, science, a view of human nature, and of history as progress and advancement, where morality is based in “nature’s god” and the social world, like the natural world, is represented as logical, rational, and systematic. In contrast to my reading of this declaration, I offer a reading of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s “Declaration of Sentiments”; I reclaim Stanton’s text as part of a revolutionary critical history antecedent to contemporary critiques of liberalism. I argue that Stanton’s declaration illustrates the ambiguity of rights-claims, ambivalence about the status of universality, an awareness of the complexities of constitutive, performative language, and a fundamental assertion that these negotiations are *political* negotiations. My reading of Stanton’s text shows that the exclusions enacted through liberal politics were contested from the start, and that these exclusions were described primarily through the lens of gender. The exposure of gendered exclusions within liberal vocabularies would be taken up by the manifesto genre in the subsequent century.

If we redefine the liberal project as incomplete and rights as always already unstable, then counter-declarations are a part of this liberal history. The exclusions of liberal politics and the contestation of such exclusions through counter-declarations and, later,

manifestoes, constitute an interdependent, interrelated rhetorical history. Stanton's text shows that the gendering of the liberal category of the citizen, the bearer of rights, meant that the liberal project would always be incomplete insofar as it excluded women. While Stanton's counter-declaration contributes to a deeper understanding of the connections between liberal discourse and rhetorics of dissent, as well as the pre-history of the manifesto genre, my reading of Stanton's text also demands a re-evaluation of the narrative history of the emergence of feminist political theory as more deeply rooted in the earliest of liberal claims. The exclusions enacted through liberal texts such as the "Declaration of Independence" were primarily understood by their critics as gendered, and so descriptions of such gendered exclusions constituted the rhetorical strategies of feminist political theory—the problems of feminist theory—that developed in the twentieth century.

In Stanton's text, she divorces the revolutionary liberal language of the "Declaration of Independence" from its initial historical context, which enables Stanton to co-opt and parody its rhetorical strategies, to expose its hidden performativity, as a strategy for denaturalizing and countering the exclusions enacted in the text. Stanton adopts the form and content of the "Declaration" to undermine and complicate its universal claims: to show rights as unstable and the category of the citizen as gendered. I focus on these two texts to show how historical shifts—from 1776 to 1848, an experience of the failure of liberalism to live up to its promises, the failure of the declaration to fully create that which it declares—contributed to the rhetorical strategies of Stanton's counter-declaration, strategies that can be traced to the emergence of the manifesto genre, recognized as a genre, in texts written by members of the avant-garde.

The counter-declaration, I argue, is a conceptual antecedent to the manifesto, and its use of co-optation and parody shows it to be a relative of the genre—and thus part of our contemporary theoretical inheritance. Contemporary debates over the existence and claiming of rights, the status of universality, and gendered category of the “citizen” have proliferated in recent years. However, political declarations, counter-declarations, and manifestoes have been grappling with such concerns for a long time—in fact, since the very founding declarations of the American and French Revolutions.

My project extends an insight offered by Janet Lyon that the historical emergence of the manifesto as a genre was coeval with the emergence of modern liberal politics. The specific rhetorical strategies employed in manifestoes—forms of rhetoric, poetics, linguistic techniques, aesthetic conventions and an awareness of the aesthetic dimensions of the political—are tied to a particular historical context, political vocabulary, and conceptions of rights, political identity, and the public sphere. This project traces manifesto rhetoric as a way to identify strategies of political dissent and the negotiation of identities constituted as oppressed within (and at the limits of) liberal political vocabularies. In the same way that a parody of a text is enabled by the existence of and historical distance from its original, counter-declarations and manifestoes were enabled by the development, institutionalization, and failure of liberal political vocabularies. Their intelligibility and the force of their critique is simultaneously enabled and limited by their relationship to an original, an original that claims to establish a revolutionary new kind of politics and citizenship on the basis of god-given, inalienable, pre-existing truths.

The Declaration of Independence: Self-Evidence, Universal Rights, and Constitution through Exclusion

Historical analysis of the function and content of the “Declaration of Independence” typically have focused on the role of the document in the context of the American Revolution; its indebtedness to antecedent political philosophies, particularly John Locke’s “social contract” theory or various forms of communitarianism or classical republicanism; studies of Thomas Jefferson’s life, psychology, and his authorship of the document; and empirical questions about the statements made in the declaration regarding human nature.²¹ For example, in *A People’s History of the United States*, Howard Zinn argues that the “Declaration of Independence” functioned to create support for secession from Britain in the context of class conflict.²² Alan Dershowitz’s *America Declares Independence* articulates contradictions in the declaration, such as the contradiction between natural law and the consent of the governed, and analyzes historical, logical, and empirical questions raised by the document, such as whether Thomas Jefferson believed in the Christian God and whether scientific studies support the assertion that humans share an innate moral judgment, the “natural” moral law described in the declaration.²³

²¹ Allen Jayne’s *Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence: Origins, Philosophy, and Theology* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1998) provides a literature review of the subject. Jayne’s book undertakes an investigation of Jefferson’s intentions, and the ideals behind these intentions, through an analysis of who Jefferson read in order to argue that Jefferson’s theology was linked to his political philosophy. Jayne outlines two general interpretive “camps”: the liberal Lockean camp, and the communitarian/classical republican camp. Jayne situates Carl Becker’s 1922 *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Ideas* firmly within the former camp. Proponents of the latter camp include Caroline Robbins’ *Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (1959), Bernard Bailyn’s *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (1967), and Gary Willis’ *Inventing America* (1978).

²² Howard Zinn, *A People’s History of the United States 1492-Present* (New York: Perennial Classics/Harper Collins, 1980, 2001).

²³ Alan Dershowitz, *America Declares Independence* (John Wiley and Sons, 2003).

One interesting tendency in this literature is epitomized in Edward Dumbauld's 1950 *The Declaration of Independence and What It Means Today*, where Dumbauld attempts, like others, to provide a historical and political background for the Declaration. Dumbauld writes, also in his Introduction, of his desire to "interpret it correctly."²⁴ This concern with "correct" interpretation underlies many of these investigations of the political philosophies and "true intentions" of Jefferson and his Declaration in an attempt to interpret the Declaration as legitimization for a specific political party or policy in current debate.

I would argue that this preoccupation with "correct" interpretation exposes the importance of the Declaration in its *failure* and the importance of the *denial* of this failure, a point I will return to later in this chapter. In contrast to other commentary on the document, Jay Fliegelman's *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* situates the document historically within a culture of performative oratory in the mid-18th century.²⁵ Following Fliegelman, I would like to read the "Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies" in terms of its performative, constitutive rhetoric. I analyze the way in which the Declaration is constitutive of the American citizen; not only who the declaration constitutes but how this constitution does or does not occur. In doing so, I provide a different reading of the text of the "Declaration of Independence" than the readings provided by much of the

²⁴ Edward Dumbauld, *The Declaration of Independence and What It Means Today* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950): viii.

²⁵ Jay Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993). Fliegelman's reading of Jefferson's Declaration situates the text in terms of "a new affective understanding of the operations of language, one that reconceives all expression as a form of self-expression, as an opportunity as well as an imperative to externalize the self, to become self-evident" (2). Fliegelman articulates this imperative for self-expression in terms of the "natural" that "reveal[s] the paradoxical mutability of self-assertion and self-concealment" in a specific historical "culture of performance" where the importance of oratory was primary (3).

existing literature. By reading the Declaration through the lens of constitutive rhetoric, Stanton's objections to the text become clearer: the text is a performance, and a performance that constitutes the citizen through exclusion, through *gendered* exclusion. Insofar as the Declaration is a founding document and rhetorical intervention in liberal politics, and insofar as my take on Stanton's counter-declaration questions the claims of the document, this re-reading of the Declaration is also a re-reading of the discourse of liberal politics and its emergence as a political vocabulary.

I do not intend to argue that the "Declaration of Independence" was the only text, or even the primary text, that participated in the establishment of a discourse of liberal politics and constructed the content of American identity. The French "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" is certainly another example of a similar text, and the American Constitution arguably has had more influence on the translation of American liberal political vocabularies of rights, freedom, and equality in jurisprudence. I choose to read the "Declaration of Independence" in part because it provides an exemplary case study in this vocabulary, and a close reading of its form and content is necessary for purposes of comparison with Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments." Indeed, a number of future movements, rebellions, and governments would model their own texts after the "Declaration of Independence." However, the Declaration uses language and participates in the construction of a vocabulary that is, undoubtedly, larger than itself. My argument is that the "Declaration of Independence" illustrates key aspects of liberalism that are also key to understanding the ways in which subsequent dissent will be understood and practiced; the Declaration describes and constructs a specific structure to politics and

identity that will continue to structure the shape of dissent through the manifesto and its antecedent, the counter-declaration.

The Declaration: Self-Evidence, Revolution, and Representation

The “Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies” was written in 1776 to announce and provide legitimization for secession and independence of the American colonies from British rule. It is essentially a document that announces separation from Britain and establishes the “rights of men” as the basis for this independence. The Declaration constitutes an American public through a series of appeals to rights, natural law, and a list of grievances which legitimate the criminal-revolutionary action of secession.

The “necess[ity] for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another,” for the people of the colonies to establish separation from British colonial rule, is founded on a claim to “separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.”²⁶ This first paragraph is written to establish the move towards independence as “necessary” and in accordance with God and Nature’s laws; this description of human “entitlement” constructs and legitimates the subjects of the declaration in terms of “laws of nature” and “Nature’s God.” The declaration calls freedom an “entitlement,” enumerating the reasons for separation as a gesture of “respect to the opinions of mankind” since God and

²⁶ “The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, In Congress, July 4, 1776” courtesy of the Indiana University School of Law—Bloomington, <http://www.law.indiana.edu/uslawdocs/declaration.html>, accessed February 2, 2004. All subsequent quotations of the “Declaration of Independence” were taken from this source.

the Laws of Nature are described as *already* in accord with the move towards independence. This independence and its declaration is situated within “the course of human events,” which contextualizes the Declaration within a historical narrative of human “necessity” and provides legitimization through placement of the act of separation within a teleological historical process, rather than a revolutionary or rebellious act of the colonists against the proper authority of Britain or British law. This enables the authors to situate the right of colonial independence, based on holy and natural rational law, to overrule the law of Britain.

The second paragraph begins, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” These famous lines reiterate the claim to rights’ foundation in natural law, foundational rights that are logical, rational, and “self-evident.” The content of rights begins to be described here, including “Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.” Since these rights are endowed by the “Creator,” are self-evident and inalienable, they again serve as justification for separation from Britain.

The next lines continue this argument: “to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed,--That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or abolish it, and to institute new Government...” This defense establishes the function of government as the protector of rights which precede government itself, such that if the government no longer protects rights, it ceases to have legitimacy as a government and must be changed. By situating rights as pre-existing civil

law, by declaring rights to be part of natural law which supersedes civil or human law, the authors' declaration of independence from a government which does not respect the natural law of rights is constructed as not only wise; it is necessary: "But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security."

The declaration by the colonies of their independence from Britain is thus not described as a result of economic or social crisis so much as the natural and necessary result of the "long train of abuses" from British "despotism." The declaration self-legitimizes as the "right" and "duty" of the colonies in accordance with natural and religious law. The authors of the declaration set up an argument that offers evidence for its announcement, despite the fact that its terms are described as "self-evident": if a government fails to protect the rights of individuals established by Natural law, then it should be abolished. Britain has failed to protect the rights of the colonies; therefore, the thirteen colonies should abolish their ties to the British government. The argument relies upon a description (construction) of the individual as entitled to (by Nature and God) but denied (by Britain) certain rights; the assertion of such rights and their subsequent violation provides the basis for legitimate secession from British rule.

The Declaration then enumerates a series of grievances against the British government, including grievances about adequate democratic representation, taxes, and trade. After twenty-seven grievances are listed, previous attempts to address these problems by the colonies are cited: "In every stage of these Oppressions We have Petitioned for Redress in the most humble terms: Our repeated Petitions have been

answered only by repeated injury. A Prince whose character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant, is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.” I see this as marking the Declaration as a final statement of severed ties after a long series of attempts at redress. The fact that such attempts have not been successful, the argument goes, proves the status of the British prince as a “tyrant” who is “unfit to be the ruler of free people.” The British people, “our British brethren” as well, have been complacent in these rights abuses, “they too have been deaf to the voice of justice and of consanguinity.” The failure of the British people (or ruler) to appropriately respond to the grievances of the colonies is cited by the authors as evidence of the impossibility of future ties between the colonies and Britain and the need for radical change: “We must, therefore, acquiesce in the necessity, which denounces our Separation, and hold them, as we hold the rest of mankind, Enemies in War, in Peace Friends.”

The last paragraph defines the authors of the declaration and those under its purview as “Representatives of the united States of America, in General Congress, Assembled, appealing to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions...in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies.”

Representation, Authorship, and the Performance of Self-Evident Truths

This short text is ripe for analysis, and I will start at the end. I note the fact that the declaration is signed by “representatives of the united States of America...in the Name, and by the Authority” of the “People.” While we may take it for granted that we currently live in some sort of “representative democracy” in the United States, the simple construction of representation here is important. This document, which founds the

United States as an entity separate from British rule, a declaration of rights that is also a declaration of separation and revolution, gains its authority through signatories who stand in as representatives for the “people”—a people who have come into being through the act of declaration itself, but to whom the declaration appeals for its legitimacy. In this sense, the very author-ization of the declaration—its naming, giving shape, molding, and signature—is grounded on a power that stands in for something else, a transference of consent and voice. The signers of the declaration speak for “people” to whom they also appeal for their authority. This illustrates a historical shift—the revolutionary emergence of democracy—which is articulated here through constitutive rhetoric. Such rhetoric involves deferral, a standing-in-for, which is in tension and contrasts with the appeals to natural law, to God, to the essential and “inalienable” mentioned earlier in the document. I point out that the very possibility for claims made in the Declaration—claims to representation as well as legitimacy via “Nature’s God”—were enabled by a specific historical context. This context led to the declaration of claims that were masked as transhistorical and inalienable when their iteration was, rather, a performance enabled by a moment.

The status of the Declaration is curious: it describes the terms of its independence as “self-evident truths” and yet it announces these “truths” through the declaration (if they were self-evident, they would not necessarily need to be declared) and backs up its declaration’s announcement with evidence of abuses. The text as a “declaration” is performative; it “declares” its freedom and constitutes/represents those whom it frees as independent, as citizens. But the terms of this construction are not exposed. The citizen and his rights are constituted through the declaration although their prior existence is

presupposed within the terms of the performance. American identity, the American nation, and “foundational” American ideals of rights, equality, and freedom are rhetorical effects of the declaration that assumes their existence prior to the interpellative event.

Revolutionary Rights, Sameness, and Harm

The “Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies” is important not only in that it set out a natural rights philosophy as the basis for American government, but it also “links social change to patriotism and to the ideas underlying the Constitution of the United States,” as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell writes in *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*.²⁷ The very basis for the emergence of American government was revolutionary separation from Britain, revolutionary “social change.” By linking the justification for American government with rights-declaration based in radical separation from Britain, the “Declaration of Independence” establishes a tradition of revolutionary change as part of American identity and patriotism. More importantly, the declaration calls into being an identity of American citizen, an identity which functions as part of a system of rights and a theory of natural laws and equality.

Two other significant aspects of the Declaration are that it establishes 1) American identity as collective and abstract, based in universal human rights, a shared “sameness”, and rational justification; and 2) the liberty of American identity as constituted through a narrative of harm, injury, and injustice. The constitution of American identity in terms of abstract rights enabled individual subjects to claim inclusion under its purview, as later occurred in the case of women, slaves, and immigrants, in contrast the practice of rights-

²⁷ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989): 52.

attribution that was limited to white, property-owning men at that time. Thus the discourse of abstract rights enabled women to make claims about their exclusion from those same rights. As Joan Wallach Scott writes, “The abstraction of a genderless individual endowed with natural rights made it possible for women to claim the political rights of active citizens and, when denied them in practice, to protest against exclusion as unjust, a violation of the founding principles of the republic.”²⁸ It is this exclusion, I will show, that sets the stage for texts like Stanton’s “Declaration of Sentiments.”

Wendy Brown explains the difficulties of the articulation of political identity through claims about past injuries and victimizations, the very articulation of which is demanded by the language of American liberal politics set up in the “Declaration of Independence.” Brown writes, “politicized identity emerges and obtains its unifying coherence through the politicization of *exclusion* from an ostensible universal, as a protest against exclusion: a protest that thus reinstalls the humanist ideal—and a specific white, middle-class, masculinist expression of this ideal—insofar as it premises itself upon exclusion from it.”²⁹ This contradiction is tied to the discourse of abstract rights, created and invoked in an attempt to protect the subject from harm and infringement. The problem is that the very discourse meant to protect ends up constructing the subject not only as vulnerable but as reliant upon the state for protection and reliant upon a narrative of suffering for its own definition and constitution: “the language of recognition becomes the language of unfreedom, how articulation in language, in the context of liberal and disciplinary discourse, becomes a vehicle of subordination through individualization, normalization,

²⁸ Joan Wallach Scott, “‘A Woman Who Has Only Paradoxes to Offer’: Olympe de Gouges Claims Rights for Women,” *Rebel Daughters: Women and the French Revolution*, Sara E. Melzer and Leslie W. Rabine, eds., (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992): 102.

²⁹ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): 65.

and regulation, even as it strives to produce visibility and acceptance.”³⁰ Thus the constitution of the citizen-subject as autonomous, rational, and free occurs through appeals to and dependence on rights whose ostensible universality is only possible through exclusion. These exclusions, from the very beginning, were understood in terms of gender: the equation of universality and citizenship with the masculine.

Declaration, Manifesto, Failure

Although the “Declaration of Independence” became the foundational text of American independence, legitimated through its recognition and the continued survival of the American government, it offers a case study of rhetoric that succeeded in enacting what it declared, became entrenched, hid the terms of its own construction as performative, and ceased to be radical or revolutionary with time. In this sense, the Declaration fails to remain a radical document because it was successful; its success brought legitimization that denies its status as revolutionary. This domestication of the document is connected to the domestication of rights-claims generally; rights-claims became entrenched, they became anti-revolutionary but remained the vocabulary through which one must articulate political and moral claims in order to be taken seriously or “heard” in the public sphere. The success of the Declaration leads to its failure to continue to be radical or revolutionary. It is assumed to have manifested that which it declared.

However, the success of the Declaration, its adoption and recognition as a founding document of American rights, freedom, and identity, also led to the recognition of its failure to live up to its own description of rights-protection: the self-evident truths

³⁰ Brown, *States of Injury*, 66.

declared in the text have been exposed, through history, as unobvious precepts in need of constant reiteration to maintain their status as “truth,” and as promises for rights-protection that have not been (and may be impossible to be) fulfilled for all people.

The Declaration is a performance of American identity and independence that, like all performances, needs to be re-iterated in order to maintain the appearance of stability and ontological existence. The mountains of analysis about Jefferson and the Declaration and consistent appeals to its foundational status are not unlike the expectation that schoolchildren memorize recitation of the “Pledge of Allegiance” (“We, the People of the United States of America...”). The subsequent re-iteration of and appeals to the foundational status of the Declaration are in fact evidence of its status as performative; there would be no need to re-assert its primacy or its vocabulary otherwise.

However, it is the failure to be more than momentary performance that enabled its success. The consistent re-iteration of the Declaration has enabled it to maintain its power and ability to structure and constitute the terms of American identity and remain the source of pride in American independence. It is also the practice of constant reiteration that opens the gap in the rhetoric through which the manifesto can function as critique—the possibility to be iterated otherwise. The failure of the Declaration to fulfill its promise of universal rights and equality both demands re-iteration and has enabled contestation of its vocabulary and performative status through counter-declarations and manifestoes. The performance of exclusion that occurs in the Declaration enables the emergence of counter-declarations and the development of the manifesto genre.

The Declaration and the Architecture of Citizenship

In this chapter, I have offered my reading of the “Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies” as an example of a founding text in the construction of the liberal identity of the U.S. citizen. My reading shows the Declaration was founded on the basis of representation of citizens who do not pre-exist the declaration. Although the Declaration provides an example of a moment when liberal rights were still new and revolutionary, the Declaration performs constitutive rhetoric that appeals to the pre-existence of the rights it creates. While the text bases its claims on the existence of “god-give rights,” I see this primarily as a linguistic operation. A rhetorical analysis of the Declaration helps to unmask such claims as processes of legitimization that elide explicit engagement with the performative function of political rhetoric. In addition, the Declaration constructs U.S. citizen identity in terms of sameness and harm which contradicts the Declaration’s language of universal rights and individual freedom. It is the rhetorical masking and failures of the Declaration and its antecedents that enabled the historical development of rhetorical criticism through counter-declarations and, later, manifestoes. Counter-declarations that expose the Declaration as performative and incomplete demand a re-evaluation of the liberal project, although they are enabled by the gaps in the rhetoric of liberal politics. Counter-declarations are not opposed to the liberal project; they just expose the performativity that was always already there.

The Declaration participated in a construction of American identity, a successful construction of an architecture of self-understanding and political negotiation that laid out the terms, limits, and content of future resistance. The content of this construction was a promise that was not and, perhaps, cannot be fulfilled. The Declaration was successful in

constructing a failed identity: an identity whose subjects were not identical to themselves; a permanence whose only permanence was in its permanent denial of its own momentary status. The manifesto genre and counter-declarations would alternate between critiques of this failed identity as a failure, with hopes of future success, and critiques of this identity as a failure that also fails to recognize the failure of identities as such.

The fact that liberal declarations such as the “Declaration of Independence” could not deliver on their promises, could not construct an abstract, isolated and individual citizen as the bearer of inalienable universal rights, provided the space through which counter-declarations and manifestoes could be imagined and created. The specific terms of liberal rights declarations, the vocabulary of liberal politics, in effect prescribed the paths for future political dissent and shaped the terms of such dissent through the genre of the manifesto. The historical moment of revolution was described in the Declaration in terms of liberal rhetoric that hid its own status as performative. The gap between the promises of the rhetoric of liberal politics and its lived reality, experienced as exclusion and injustice, became harder to ignore over time. The combination of the historical experience of this disjunction between promises of rights and equality and the reality of inequality and exclusion led critics to question the rhetoric of liberal politics. This questioning took the form of counter-declarations, such as the one written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, which protested such exclusion in part by exposing the performativity of political rhetoric.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments"

I have argued that the "Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies" provides an example of the discourse of liberal politics that constructed the category of citizen—a category whose exclusions and gaps shaped the conditions under which dissent in the form of counter-declarations and manifestoes were written. This section provides a reading of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" as a parodic counter-declaration to the "Declaration of Independence." I argue that Stanton's mimicry of the form and content of the original text of the "Declaration of Independence" is parodic, and that this mimicry highlights the disjunction between the Declaration and her counter-declaration: the contrast between the liberal rhetoric of rights and equality and Stanton's lived reality of exclusion on the basis of gender, the contrast between the inclusive "we" of the citizens constituted through the Declaration and the outsider location of the excluded, female "I" who voices Stanton's counter-declaration. Parody highlights these differences in such a way that the legitimacy and foundational appeals to pre-existing, inalienable truths in the original Declaration become exposed as an attempt to mask the performative status of political rhetoric, the contextual limits of the Declaration *as performance*.

My analysis of Stanton's text as a parodic counter-declaration provides insight into her text as a rhetorical antecedent to the manifesto genre. Stanton's text counters the exclusions and highlights the performativity enacted through liberal political rhetoric, and her use of parody illustrates a concern with historical influence and co-optation: Stanton understands that her declaration must be a *counter*-declaration, it must be a parody of an original, and it must engage in the rhetoric of the original in order to undermine it, despite

the rhetorical limitations of this co-optation. Analysis of her use of parody underlines the significance of the problem of historical inheritance for critical projects, a problem that will continue to be a concern in the manifesto genre. Stanton's counter-declaration is important as an early conceptual antecedent to the manifesto. The strategies employed by Stanton would be adopted by manifesto-writers fifty years later, when the manifesto began to fully develop as an identifiable genre in this tradition of dissent.

Stanton and Contemporary Feminist Theory

The significance of Stanton's text extends beyond its antecedent role in my genealogy of the manifesto. This reading of Stanton's text provides evidence for my claim that contemporary debates in feminist political theory have a history rooted in the liberal project and its incomplete iterations. Stanton exposes the Declaration as constituting a gendered rather than universal subject, a bearer of rights that are unstable rather than inalienable. My reading of Stanton's text shows similarities between the strategies of her critiques and the problems that still concern feminist theorists today. I intend to historicize these "recent" theoretical problems in feminism in order to recontextualize the development of feminist political theory as a part of the genealogy of the manifesto genre. Only by showing that these problems have a history, that they are rooted in traditions of dissent in relation to the rhetorical and historical failures of liberal politics, will feminist political theory have the opportunity to move "past" inherited rhetorical strategies and potentially engage in more useful and innovative analysis.

Contemporary feminist and political theory is preoccupied with questions about the status and utility of notions such as rights, universality, and the category of the citizen.

Some theorists, such as Martha Nussbaum, argue for the extension of liberal rights-protection to include women. According to Nussbaum, liberalism's "radical feminist potential is just beginning to be realized."³¹ Liberalism's historical failure to include women, Nussbaum argues, can be "linked to specific failings in the tradition's handling of women's issues," however, "what we see here is not a failure intrinsic to liberalism itself. It is, in fact, a failure of liberal thinkers to follow their own thought through to its socially radical conclusion."³²

In contrast, other feminist writers, as well as some legal scholars, question the utility of claims to rights, particularly universal rights. Judith Butler, for example, argues that universality is an impossible goal.³³ She argues that the universal is generally considered to be separate from the particular, the specifically cultural, and the ideological. However, any claim that assumes to be universal must take place within a context, and that context will always be culturally and linguistically specific. Butler notes that the assertion of universality occurs via claims. Claims involve translation; that is, "to make a claim on one's own behalf assumes that one speaks the language in which the claim can be made, and speaks in such a way that the claim can be heard."³⁴ In addition,

...for the claim, performatively, to enact the very universality it enunciates, it must undergo a set of translations into the various rhetorical and cultural contexts in which the meaning and force of universal claims are made. Significantly, this means that no assertion of universality takes place apart from a cultural norm,

³¹ Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999): 56.

³² *Ibid.*, 59, 65.

³³ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000): 178.

³⁴ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žižek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left* (London: Verso, 2000): 178.

and...no assertion can be made without at once requiring a cultural translation....

Without translation, the only way the assertion of universality can cross a border is through colonial and expansionist logic.³⁵

The implication is it is impossible to articulate any universality outside of particular cultural, historical, or linguistic contexts.

In addition, some legal scholars (who may or may not explicitly define their work as feminist) argue that historically, exclusion has been the hidden basis and effect of legal claims to universal rights, such that “if the law needs this exclusion in order to present and demarcate its own territory and subjects, the principle of exclusion stands in and before the law.”³⁶ This point is reasserted by Joy James, who argues that rights upheld by law perpetuate violence, not inclusion or equality: “As an Enlightenment project, constitutional law posits ‘law’s innocence,’ as law first ‘marks out the areas’ within which racism or sexism are allowed to operate legally and then rationalizes their operation.”³⁷ Also, Giorgio Agamben has argued that the universalizing concept of “the people” is “not a unitary subject but a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles” of insider and outsider, included and excluded.³⁸ These feminist and political scholars

³⁵ Ibid., 35.

³⁶ Costas Douzinas and Ronnie Warrington, “A Well-Founded Fear of Justice: Law and Ethics in Postmodernity,” *Legal Studies as Cultural Studies: A Reader in (Post)modern Critical Theory*. Ed. Jerry D. Leonard (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995): 215.

³⁷ Joy James, *Resisting State Violence: Radicalism, Gender and Race in U.S. Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 56.

³⁸ Agamben points out

an ambihobly inherent in the nature and function of the concept ‘people’ in Western politics. It is as if what we call ‘people’ were in reality not a unitary subject but a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles: on the one hand, the set of the People as a whole political body, and on the other, the subset of the people as fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies; or again, on the one hand, an inclusion that claims to be total, and on the other, an exclusion that is clearly hopeless; at one extreme, the total state of integrated and sovereign citizens, and at the other the preserve—course of miracles or camp—of the wretched, the oppressed, and the defeated.

Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): 177.

claim that exclusion is not a result of incomplete implementation of liberalism's universal rights; exclusion is *inherent* to universal projects.

I offer a reading of Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" as a parodic destabilization of the concept of liberal rights. While I tend to agree with the post-structuralist, feminist view supplied by Butler et. al, the truth or utility of this view is not the point; my point is that these problems, these criticisms, and the ways in which they are voiced have a specific and under-examined history. My reading of Stanton will illustrate that the contemporary preoccupation with critiques of universal rights within feminist and political theory is, in fact, deeply rooted in a rhetorical history of critiques of liberal politics as an incomplete, imperfect project. These critiques have been articulated via counter-declarations and manifestoes from very early in the history of liberalism. These problems, then, are not new; rather, the problems of rights and universality have been inherent to the liberal project for hundreds of years. My reading of Stanton is intended to historicize the emergence of these specific theoretical problems and preoccupations: to understand where they come from and how they are rooted in the failures of liberal politics.

Grievances and Inclusion, Mimicry and Mockery

In July 1848, the Woman's Rights Convention held at Seneca Falls, NY, unanimously adopted the "Declaration of Sentiments." Elizabeth Cady Stanton borrowed from the "Declaration of Sentiments" of the American Anti-Slavery Society of 1833 and offered her version, authored by the four women who planned the Seneca Falls convention.³⁹

³⁹ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989): 52.

Her list of grievances covered topics including “(1) violations of natural rights; (2) disabilities of married women; (3) religious discrimination; and (4) denials of opportunity for individual development.”⁴⁰

The “Declaration of Sentiments” was modeled after the “Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies.”⁴¹ It adopts its structure and repeats exact phrases from the original. When comparing the two declarations, however, a few notable differences emerge. The most noticeable differences are the addition of women to the category of “man,” to read “man and women,” as well as different content in the list of grievances outlined in the documents. But the initial three paragraphs of Stanton’s declaration contain significant changes from the original, despite exact adoption of entire sentences and vocabulary. I have mapped a few key differences between the phrasing of the two texts, with differences in italics:

⁴⁰ Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, 53.

⁴¹ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments” (1848) in Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Vol. 1: In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840 to 1866* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 78-81. “The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies, In Congress, July 4, 1776” courtesy of the Indiana University School of Law—Bloomington, <http://www.law.indiana.edu/uslawdocs/declaration.html>, accessed February 2, 2004.

Stanton's Declaration

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for *one portion of the family of man* to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them...

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all *men and women* are created equal...

...that to secure these rights governments are instituted...

Whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it...

...it is their duty to throw off such government... Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her.

Declaration of Independence

When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for *one People* to dissolve the *Political Bands* which have connected them with another, and to assume among the Powers of the Earth, the separate and equal Station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them...

We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all *Men* are created equal...

That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men...

...whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it...

...it is their Right, it is their Duty, to throw off such Government... Such has been the patient Sufferance of these Colonies; and such is now the Necessity which constrains them to alter their former systems of Government.

The History of the present King of Great-Britain is a History of repeated Injuries and Usurpations, all having in direct Object the Establishment of an absolute Tyranny over these States.

The “Declaration of Sentiments” rejects the position and situation of women within liberal politics from a number of angles. It objects to men’s refusal to allow women to vote, the requirement that women follow laws to which they did not consent, and to a general lack of political representation on the part of women. It objects to the status of women in the family by comparing marriage to “civil death,” through the requirement that a wife obey her husband, the lack of consideration for the woman in divorce laws, and the lack of rights to property and wages in the marriage contract. It objects to the inability of woman to gain an education and thus achieve “wealth and distinction.” It ends by rejecting the position of women in the church, its refusal of her full participation in the church. These numerous objections are described in moral, social, and religious terms as the deprivation of liberty, in opposition to inalienable and God-given rights, and thus in opposition to all that is “Right and True.”

Gender, Universality, Equality and Difference

Through the “Declaration of Sentiments,” Stanton articulates the categories of human, man, and citizen as inclusive of both men and women. She not only includes “women” in the statement, “all men and women are created equal,” but through the enunciation of the declaration, her position as a woman places her in a peculiar situation. She speaks from a subject-position excluded from the original Declaration by claiming the status of woman, although she uses the same language as the original. I see this adoption of an excluded subject-position as functioning to condemn the original authors and the subsequent executors of the original Declaration for asserting a false universal, for asserting the independence and outlining the rights of “man” and “citizen” without including women

under their purview. By asserting “all men and women are created equal,” Stanton both undermines the legitimacy of the original Declaration and seems to seek inclusion within its rhetorical sphere, protection under the rights it asserts, participation within the community it constitutes, and recognition by its authors and executors.

In addition, by altering the simple statement that “all men are created equal” to read “men and women are created equal,” Stanton places “men” right next to “women” in the text, as if they are part of the same *kind* of subject as well as equally important. And yet, the fact that Stanton writes “men and women” and not “human beings” or “citizens of America” also highlights the difference between men and women; “men” and “women” may inhabit the same space in the structure of the sentence, but the addition of “women” highlights gender, that is, gender difference, as well as the exclusion and omission of “women” from the original text. Men and women are *not* the same, or else it wouldn’t matter whether or not “women” were mentioned in the text. Thus, the addition of “women” to the text reinforces Stanton’s recognition of the equality between men and women, but the linguistic separation of “men” and “women” functions to highlight gender, which is a difference, a difference that destabilizes the original Declaration’s claim to equality.

In my reading, the simple addition of “women” to the phrase “all men are created equal” exposes the exclusion that functions in the use of “men,” revalues “women” through inclusion in the text, and maintains the description of genders as binary, separate, and different from one another. It is the juxtaposition of this description of gender difference with the assertion of equality—“are created equal”—that further undermines the supposed “equality” of the original Declaration. Stanton’s revised phrase rewrites

equality in terms of difference, an equality at odds with the notion of equality as sameness that was asserted in the original Declaration. Thus not only does Stanton's revised phrase point to the omission of women from the category of citizen; it destabilizes the Declaration's claims to equality by presenting it as an equality that was not achieved.

In declaring that "men and women are created equal" and in her subsequent list of grievances against women in the Declaration, Stanton consistently describes any difference that might exist between men and women as the result of history and the consequences this history has had on women. Stanton describes history as a history of oppression, of abuses by men against women: "the history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." This history includes a number of disparities in distribution, opportunity, and public representation, such as voting rights, property rights, unequal taxation, marriage laws, and access to employment. Concrete differences in the rights-claims of men and women have not only led to economic disadvantages for women, but, more importantly, have "made her, morally, an irresponsible being," and given "to the world a different code of morals for men and women" that result in the destruction of women's "self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependant and abject life."⁴² For Stanton, this "social and religious degradation" of women at the hands of men, a result of an entire history driven by "absolute tyranny" over women, is the cause of any differences between men and women. Stanton ends by explicitly calling for the inclusion of women into the category

⁴² Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "Declaration of Sentiments" (1848) in Ann D. Gordon, ed., *The Selected Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, Vol. 1: In the School of Anti-Slavery, 1840 to 1866* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997): 78-81.

of citizen, a category that she has exposed as gendered and exclusive. As “citizens of these United States,” women, Stanton declares, “demand the equal station to which they are entitled.”⁴³ This entitlement to “equal station,” then, must exist in spite of the strength of this historical narrative of women’s oppression.

Stanton’s emphasis on historical influence is central to her counter-declaration. Stanton not only exposes the ways in which the original Declaration excluded women, which demands a re-evaluation of its rhetoric of “equality” and “rights,” but she also describes the difficulties of exposing these problems given the historical exclusion and de-valuing of women within liberal society. Stanton’s historical experience of harm, then, leads her to examine and engage the rhetorical failures of liberal politics. Stanton’s emphasis on history, on ways in which women’s character is molded by an imperfect society that espouses false rhetoric of equality and inclusion, directly relates to her use of parody. It is because of the difficulties of this history, because of its impact on women, that Stanton is cautious about the rhetorical possibilities for her own critique. She opts for parody, for mimicry of the original Declaration, as a way to engage in a rhetorical space that has excluded her as a woman while acknowledging that she, too, has been victimized by a history of exclusion, oppression, and male tyranny. Stanton claims rhetorical “entitlement” to “equal station” as a strategy to counter her description of the reality of historical exclusion, and Stanton composes her counter-declaration as a strategy to counter the influence of a history that prevents women from declaring the subject-position of woman *and* citizen.

⁴³ Stanton, “Declaration of Sentiments,” 79-81.

Conservative or Performative?

Through my reading of the “Declaration of Sentiments,” I resituate the place of Stanton’s text within a tradition of counter-declarations enabled by liberal claims and their failures, counter-declarations as an antecedent to the manifesto genre. Stanton’s strategy of parody, a strategy that kept the structure of the “Declaration of Independence” but subverted its content, functions to expose the limits of liberalism’s claims to rights. Her acceptance of the original vocabulary, however, is also what enables her counter-declaration to function as critique. I see Stanton’s use of this inherited vocabulary and structure of the original declaration as a strategy for dealing with the dangers of co-optation—the problem of historical inheritance—that will emerge as a pivotal problem in the manifesto genre. Stanton’s declaration is more than a rejection of women’s exclusion from the category of citizen in the original declaration; her counter-declaration, as parody, is part of a revolutionary critical history of texts antecedent to the manifesto as a critique of the failures of liberal politics.

The problems taken up by the manifesto genre are fundamentally rhetorical, but they emerged as responses to historical experiences of inequality. It was this historical experience that led Stanton to adopt specific rhetorical strategies, such as parody. The shape of Stanton’s rhetoric was determined by the rhetoric of liberal politics: Stanton does not write a new Declaration, but rather a counter-declaration. The relationship between liberal rhetoric and the strategies of its critics are deeply connected, and this relationship will continue to be evident in the development of the manifesto. Stanton foregrounds a description of an experience of historical reality at odds with the available rhetorical resources of liberal politics. This description highlights the experience of

exclusion on the basis of gender and functions to undermine the legitimacy of liberal rhetoric.

In her analysis of Stanton's text, Karlyn Kohrs Campbell notes that the differences between the "Declaration of Independence" and the "Declaration of Sentiments" are important in that they inject gender into the vocabulary of liberalism:

Instead of separation, women demanded admission. Instead of dissolution enforced by war, women promised to use legal and persuasive means to achieve their ends, including, if possible, the pulpit they had condemned. Instead of relying on themselves and their resources, women relied on the impersonal forces of the Right and the True for their final triumph. These differences indicate that, despite the radical character of individual demands, the supporters of the Declaration of Sentiments perceived theirs to be a reformist, not a revolutionary, movement.⁴⁴

Kohrs-Campbell challenges what she sees as a conservative undertone in Stanton's text. But Stanton's strategy of including women in the document to expose the partiality of the original text's "universality" is what makes her text parodic and, I would argue, what makes her text successful as critique. Her parody exposes the content of the original as exclusionary but also highlights the rhetoric of the text as political rhetoric, as enacted within a rhetorical context, as performative. Stanton exposes the "Declaration of Independence" as a document concerned with legitimacy; she exposes its strategies to undermine its legitimacy and thus the effect of the document. In this way, Stanton's counter-declaration performs a manifesto strategy of challenging universality, the content

⁴⁴ Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989): 56.

of the identity of (hu)man, the function of rights, and the role of language as constitutive as well as the limits of such constitutions as performative and thus contingent upon enunciation. Her counter-declaration exposes the fact that the declaration of a universal citizen-subject as bearer of rights was constituted via exclusion—exclusion of women, exclusion of the private sphere. A universal that is dependent upon exclusion is a failed universal. In addition, Stanton exposes the Declaration as a failure insofar as it attempts to be more than performance.

When we place Stanton's counter-declaration within a tradition that contributed to the emergence of the manifesto genre, we see that Stanton's text shows how the identity of "citizen" was, from its very inception, a gendered identity. Her declaration challenges the implicit gendering of American identity by exposing the assumption that citizen=man. The fact that women had been excluded from public participation is reflected in the language of the founding document of American identity. To challenge this exclusion is to challenge not only the language of the "Declaration of Independence" but the very terms of inception of American identity—in terms of universality and natural rights. Such exclusions needed to be hidden in order for the rhetoric of universal rights to function effectively.

The rhetorical construction of the public sphere, the purview of universal rights as initiated through the "Declaration of Independence" and subsequent calcification as U.S. liberal politics, concerns the abstract, postulates the existence of a shared "sameness" between individuals, and universalizes this "sameness." The private sphere, associated with women, was seen as the domain of the particular and the location of difference. By seeking inclusion into the public sphere, Stanton's text disrupts the "sameness" of the

public sphere by juxtaposing it with the private, particular “difference” of women’s lives and needs. As illustrated through the simplest of strategies—the inclusion of “women” in the phrase “all men and women are created equal, for example—my reading shows that her text does not ask that women become “like men” to gain inclusion into the category of citizen and thus protection under rights. Rather, her text demands inclusion of difference—a demand that cannot be reconciled with universal rights that require a shared “sameness” between individuals. Her demand, then, is not conservative but quite radical in its injection of both lived and linguistic difference into the categories of universal rights and American citizen. This destabilization is a prerequisite for re-politicizing an identity category that has been taken for granted.

Throughout the declaration, Stanton asserts the equality of men and women; however, the addition of women asserts the need for Stanton’s text, for a separate declaration that accounts for the specific concerns of women. This simultaneous assertion of equality and difference makes Stanton’s declaration both effective in pointing out the contradictions of the original declaration as well as contesting the terms of the vocabulary it invokes. It displays that not only are women, in the most basic sense, left out of the original declaration in name and in the process of its construction, but when considered in relationship to the larger rhetorical tradition of dissent, the contestation of this omission begs for a reappraisal of the function of rights. The foundations of the original declaration are called into question through Stanton’s parody. Substituting “women” for “men” throughout the text does more than just extend protection to include women; it fundamentally challenges the content and function of rights-protection itself.

By claiming Stanton's declaration as parody, I argue that her text functions to both assert the primary importance of rights protection as well as to challenge the entire project of liberal rights-declaration by pointing out the failure of rights to be universally applicable. The use of parody allows Stanton's claims to be particularly condemning of the articulation of rights in the original declaration, but it also limits the scope of her critique; the "Declaration of Sentiments" is only intelligible in relation to the original declaration which destines the text to always be a secondary corrective. But this secondary-ness, in turn, demands a re-evaluation of the "primacy" of the "original." Stanton's text is both enabled and limited by the vocabulary of the Declaration, and the performativity of the Declaration is exposed by Stanton's counter-declaration. Together, the texts are two sides of the same coin.

To return to Kohrs-Campbell's critique of Stanton's text as conservative, as seeking inclusion under the purview of masculine rights, I would counter that the very act of exposing the category of American citizen, the holder of universal rights, as exclusionary effectively undermines the category and the rights Stanton seeks. Her text is a precursor to a genre that will illuminate not only the un-universalizability of rights and the gendered category of citizen but the performative function of the Declaration, of declarations, in constituting identity and figuring the definitional purview of the political.

It is important that the way in which this tradition begins, through counter-declaration, is through parody. The insight provided by Stanton's text, an insight developed through the emergence of the manifesto, is that liberal political vocabularies are constituted through a tension between rationalist, enlightenment language and their contingency on an historical moment, as well as their inability to fully enact their promises, to enact all

that the “Declaration” was meant to declare. The practice of parodic counter-declaration, as illustrated by Stanton, is an early attempt to unmask and perform this contradiction. This tension, the space that emerges between liberalism’s promises and failure, opens space for critique through the manifesto; it enables the emergent practice of counter-declarations that point out the inadequacies of liberal political vocabularies by foregrounding the performativity and exclusions they enact.

Conclusion: Stanton’s Counter-Declaration, Parody, and Re-definition of the Citizen

In light of my argument that the rhetoric of liberal politics is intertwined with projects that expose its limits, I propose an alternative way of thinking about the history of the liberal project. The vocabulary of liberal political theory was always already performative; the citizen it constituted was always already partial, gendered, and particular; the rights it bestowed were always already unstable and contingent. This means that failure and dissent were always already built into the liberal project from the start. Gender was always already an issue for liberal politics. To resituate gender as primary, as built into the liberal project from its beginnings, demands a re-evaluation of the narrative of feminism in relation to liberal politics, as well as of the function of feminist political theory as a critique against liberal politics. Liberal politics is not something feminism has just recently begun to see as problematic; nor is the history of feminism a history of *liberal* feminism. A narrative that locates the emergence of feminist criticism within contemporary theory only blinds us to the ways in which past traditions have enabled certain kinds of problems to emerge. In a sense, the failures of

liberal politics enabled feminism's emergence, enabled it to become preoccupied with the problems it tackles, enabled it to take the shape that it has.

The constitutive gestures that we see in early rights-declarations, such as the "Declaration of Independence"—the description of rights as pre-existing their declaration, the erasure of the performative aspect of the political rhetoric, the slippage in authorship through signatories as "representatives"—all influence the manifestoes that were penned as reactions against, exposures of the limits of, early declarations and the vocabularies they instilled. However, they borrow some of the original's same gestures and strategies while simultaneously exposing them as failed, as failures.

Within this rhetorical tradition of dissent, strategies such as parody were used to renegotiate liberal vocabularies while accounting for the influence of rhetorical inheritance as limiting possibilities of thinking "the new." Such strategies enabled critiques to be intelligible to the existing logic and language while pushing that language to expose its own gaps and fissures, by pushing the limits of what counts as political and who counts as a citizen. My account of Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" as a parodic counter-declaration to the "Declaration of Independence" situates Stanton's text as a rhetorical precursor to what would soon emerge as the manifesto genre. Analysis of rhetorical antecedents to the manifesto is important, not only for context, but also because the manifesto genre is a tradition in constant conversation with its past. As the genre develops, manifestoes will be used to unmask the failures of previous declarations, and the genre will continue to find its success in the failures of the past, as well as, at times, in its own failure, as we will see highlighted in the case of the avant-garde. Although the manifesto, as an identifiable genre, would not emerge until (as I will argue) the avant-

garde of the early 20th century, I have provided a reading of Stanton's text as a way of showing that the rhetoric of liberal politics was experienced by and described as incomplete and unfinished from its inception; that the earliest critiques of liberal rhetoric illustrate an awareness of the problem of historical inheritance (as evidenced through the use of parody); that descriptions of liberal politics as constituting universality through exclusion—specifically *gendered* exclusion—were evident from early in the history of the development of liberalism in the West; and that the way in which the legitimacy of liberal rhetoric was undermined, even at this early historical moment, was and would continue to be through the exposure of the performative, constitutive nature of liberal political rhetoric, through the highlighting of political speech as *rhetorical* speech, with a context, strategies, and limits. As I will continue to argue in the coming chapters, the recognition of political discourse as performative and enabled by specific historical contexts demands to a re-evaluation of the way we think about liberal politics, as well as a re-evaluation of the predominant historical narratives of gender, feminist and critical theory.

Chapter Two

“Leap Here! Dance Here!”: Immanent Critique and Linguistic Action in Marx

The 1848 text, “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ends with the famous refrain: “Working Men of All Countries, Unite!”⁴⁵ Although the phrase became a rallying cry of the Communist party in Russia for many years, more recently, less earnest versions of the phrase have permeated popular culture: the British band, The Smiths, released their song “Shoplifters of the world, unite” in 1987; a simple internet search provides calls for everything from screenwriters to “hippy bloggers” to unite. The ubiquity of this phrase illustrates the rhetorical impact of the Communist Manifesto, both in contemporary culture as well as for our discussion of the manifesto genre.

In this chapter, I provide a comparative reading of Marx and Engels’ “Manifesto of the Communist Party” and Marx’s “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” to illustrate ways in which the specific historical context of revolutions—in particular, the experience of their failure—is reflected through the rhetorical strategies of the manifesto genre. Although the Communist Manifesto was not the first self-titled manifesto, it recognized in the literature on manifestoes as having primary importance.⁴⁶ While I

⁴⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848), in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978): 500.

⁴⁶ The literature generally credits the Diggers (also known as the Levelers), a radical, agrarian, English group led by Gerard Winstanley, with composing the first self-titled manifesto in 1649. The Diggers enabled the poor to cultivate communal farmland in response to rising food prices in the 1640s. However, the Communist Manifesto continues to dominate recent manifesto theory. See, for example, Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestoes, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006). I will discuss and counter Puchner’s argument regarding the primacy of Marx and Engels’ manifesto throughout in this chapter.

agree that the text is important to an understanding of the development of the manifesto genre, I will show that the 1848 Manifesto lacks self-reflexivity regarding the problem of historical influence and the exposure of performativity in political rhetoric. Although the 1848 Manifesto provided certain formal features that would influence the genre as it developed in the early 20th century, reading the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” retroactively through the lens of the 1851 Brumaire illustrates the 1848 Manifesto as still antecedent to the genre. The Manifesto’s use of immanent critique and historical narrative, combined with the awareness of co-optation and the difficulties of revolution described in the Brumaire, *together* compose the genre as we recognize it today.

The rhetorical shifts between these two texts reflect the specific historical experience of the 1848 revolutions. Through analysis of the transition from the 1848 Manifesto to the 1851 Brumaire, my reading of Marx’s texts illustrates how shifting historical experience became described in the context of specific theoretical and rhetorical problems, and how those problems became part of the manifesto genre. I show how the specific political context of failed revolutions is described by Marx through a focus on performative, linguistic action in his Brumaire in a way that was hidden in the Manifesto. My reading provides an example of the complex relationship between history and rhetoric, the way in which specific rhetorical strategies and theoretical concerns are reflections of historical experience, and how such strategies and concerns become subsumed back into the political over time, as they will in the development of the manifesto genre. In this way, analysis of Marx and Engels’ Manifesto as antecedent to the genre shows the complex relationship between politics and aesthetics, a relationship that counters contemporary views of the manifesto genre as *either* aesthetic *or* political,

but not both. This chapter, then, offers a re-reading of Marx's Manifesto and Brumaire within the context of my larger argument about the manifesto genre: that the genre exposes the failures of liberal politics.

I connect the problem of inevitability that emerges in the Manifesto to the appeal to "inalienable rights" in the "Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies" as well as Martin Puchner's arguments in his book, *Poetry of the Revolution*.⁴⁷ I counter Puchner's reading of Marx to argue that the manifesto complicates easy distinctions between language and action to become a self-conscious form of linguistic action. My close reading of excerpts from Marx's "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" provides, I argue, a map of how we should read the Manifesto: as a call for a "proletarian revolution" which highlights its own jumps, starts, gaps, fissures, and ultimate contingencies, to great effect. Both the transhistorical progress narratives of the Manifesto *and* a concern with history and co-optation will become preoccupations of the manifesto genre. In addition, a reading of the Brumaire as performative, linguistic action situates Marx's work squarely within contemporary debates about constitutive rhetoric and the performativity of the political.

Marx's Historical Context: Accounting for Contradiction and Change

The liberal politics of 18th century revolutions were experienced as a radical break from the past, a break grounded in scientific rationality and certainty, and part of the same progressive historical logic that led to the industrial revolutions of the early 19th century. Liberal rhetoric emerged from a time of revolutions, both industrial and

⁴⁷ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006).

political. But the vocabulary that was used in liberal politics was one of order, harmony, and universality, of systems rather than chaos. A belief in science, in the rational possibility for explaining and understanding the world, was increasingly applied to a number of fields of human experience; it was this faith in science and progress that led to the creation of the social sciences in the 19th and early 20th centuries. While fields such as psychology, economics, and sociology became increasingly understood as scientific rather than merely descriptive endeavors, philosophers continued to find ways of accounting for human experiences of conflict within what was understood to be a rational, ordered world. Faith in rationality and progress increasingly contrasted with an experience very different than the one promised under liberal political systems: class division, gender inequality, failed and deferred revolutions. Theoretically, the task became finding ways of accounting for conflict and discord within an ordered, rational system. This increasingly became the problem of how to account for history. As Robert J. Antonio notes in his account of the development of critical theory, the strategy of immanent critique, as adopted by Hegel and Marx, was one strategy for accounting for conflict within an ordered, teleological system.⁴⁸

In the work of Hegel, the historically specific situation of civil society in the late 18th century was rationalized by giving it metahistorical status as part of a grand dialectic. Modernity was posited as self-justifying, with subjects coming to self-consciousness through labor, and Spirit moving through negation to an end-point of freedom and

⁴⁸ Antonio argues that critical theory is more of a “method of analysis,” immanent critique, than a theory per se. His description of the function of immanent critique supports my view of its use as a strategy for accounting for experiences of conflict within an ordered, teleological system. Antonio writes, “Immanent critique is a means of detecting the societal contradictions which offer the most determinate possibilities for emancipatory social change. The commentary on method cannot be separated from its historical application, since the content of immanent critique is the dialectic in history.” Robert J. Antonio, “Immanent Critique as the Core of Critical Theory: Its Origins and Developments in Hegel, Marx and Contemporary Thought,” *British Journal of Sociology* 32:3 (September 1981): 332.

rationality.⁴⁹ Through the dialectic, Hegel was able to subsume conflict and contradiction within a larger order, a teleology. The irony was that in Hegel's attempt to account for historical change and conflict, he arguably posits a system in which modernity is "marking the End of History: once the conditions for 'absolute knowing' were established, everything subsequent could only be an afterthought."⁵⁰ In dealing with the problem of history, Hegel runs into the problem of the future.

Marx's philosophy is enmeshed in Hegel's dialectic, and while Marx's take on the dialectic is discussed in concrete terms of human life rather than abstract spirit, the status of history continues to play a foundational role in his political philosophy.⁵¹ Given the historical context in Europe after Napoleon, this concern with history could be seen as a way of making sense of the French Revolution. It is this contradiction between the promises of the revolution and its failure to be fully fulfilled that requires an explanation of history, of how change does (and does not) occur. In Hegel and Marx, we see attempts to make rational sense of the failure of revolutions to bring about the universal equality they promised. By trying to make sense of the process of historical change, Marx both accounts for liberalism's emergence *and* exposes its contradictions.

I want to point out that the claims made in Marx's texts were enabled by a specific historical context, an experience of the failure of liberal revolutions to deliver on their promises. While Marx remains important to the history of critical theory and the tradition of German idealism, I want to foreground his concern with history as it relates to the emergence of the manifesto genre. The strategies Marx used to account for historical

⁴⁹ Antonio, 332.

⁵⁰ Alex Callinicos, *Social Theory: A Historical Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1999): 54.

⁵¹ Antonio, 333.

change and this experience of contradiction included strategies that became formally and conceptually important to the genre. Marx's use of immanent critique, his navigation of the problem of inevitability, and the formal structure of his Manifesto remain central to the genre. However, my reading shows that it was the combination of the rhetoric of the Manifesto *and* the Brumaire that influenced the development of the genre as it emerged in the early 20th century.

This analysis also shows the indebtedness of the genre to the philosophical tradition of German Idealism, as well as the genre's similarities with the development of critical theory and the Frankfurt School in the 20th century. While Marx used immanent critique as a strategy for addressing his view of history, it is his own self-criticism of the Manifesto in the Brumaire that contributed to a key element of the tradition within manifestoes and critical theory: a practice of building off of the problems with one's own rhetorical/theoretical tradition. Just as critical theory was indebted to and critical of Marxism, manifestoes became a genre, I argue, at the moment where their authors began to recognize themselves as participating in and being critical of a rhetorical tradition.

“Manifesto of the Communist Party”: Imminent Critique and the Problem of Inevitability

There is a danger in providing an historical narrative in which the circumstances of the past are described as wholly constituting present conditions, such that alternatives or change seem impossible. This problem is typical of any project of radical critique. If one describes an oppressive system as all-powerful and all-consuming, then how might we imagine a way out of the system? The stronger the description of oppression and the

more total the system seems, the more difficult it is to imagine any exterior to that system, any way of ever knowing how or when one might escape its grasp.

In the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” Marx allows for revolution to emerge from within the system, as being enabled by its very totality. Revolution comes from within, rather than from without, from inside the system, rather than outside of it. By shifting the location of critique from inside rather than exterior to the system, his critical, universal and totalizing descriptions of history and society do not eclipse possibilities for change and revolution; indeed, they become the rhetorical forerunners to conditions that bring about change. The tension that emerges in this text between inevitability and calls for action becomes important to the genre, as the status of history is contested, politicized, and re-imagined through the texts of manifestoes.

The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” written by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels outlines the context for and platform of the emergent Communist party in Europe.⁵² The text was originally published in 1848—often called the “Year of Revolutions”—a year widely acknowledged as marking pivotal changes throughout Europe.⁵³ A reflection of the revolutionary moment in which it was written, (and with subsequent updated prefaces), the Manifesto is also one of the more famous (and early) examples of a self-

⁵² Although the “Manifesto of the Communist Party” is attributed to both Marx and Engels, I will refer to the text as Marx’s manifesto for purposes of simplicity. In addition, my readings are limited by my reliance upon the work of translators; I assume that the linguistic connotations of specific words and phrases are similar enough in the original version to support my reading of the translated text.

⁵³ 1848 saw revolutions in countries throughout Europe, most notably in France, Italy, the Habsburg Empire, and the German states. These revolutions followed a period of rapid industrialization and growing class divisions, combined with the widespread dissemination of political ideologies and belief in the possibilities for revolution (as witnessed in prior revolutions in France and the U.S., for example).

titled manifesto.⁵⁴ Its very declaration is a testament to belief in the necessity of revolution emerging from contradiction, speed and change.

The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” performs a compelling description of total (universal) influence over human life under capitalism and the bourgeoisie; yet it is the very totality of the system that will enable the creation of an alternative to that system. The logic of history demands the use of immanent critique. Through immanent critique, there is no need to posit the existence of an outside, an exterior to the system, which would suggest that the system is not total; rather, a gap emerges from *within* the system in its very expansiveness and unmitigated hunger. It is this gap that is exploited by the proletariat and enables revolution to occur, enables the Manifesto to even exist as a document that unmasks this process and raises consciousness of the imminent self-destruction of the capitalist system. The complexities and tensions that emerge with immanent critique reflect the complexities and tensions of the manifesto genre: texts that expose the simultaneous ubiquity and bankruptcy of the inherited political and social system. If manifestoes expose the limits of the project of liberal politics, if they depict liberalism as always already incomplete, then it is through this aporia that the possibility for critique, for the practice of the genre, emerges. It is this aporia that enables Marx’s practice of immanent critique.

The “Manifesto of the Communist Party” begins its first section, “Bourgeois and Proletariat,” with a sweeping and total analysis of history: “The history of all hitherto society is the history of class struggles,” a conflict between “oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another, carried on an uninterrupted, now hidden, now

⁵⁴ When I use the capitalized version of the word “Manifesto” in the rest of this chapter, I will be referring to the “Manifesto of the Communist Party”; when referring to the manifesto genre in general, I will use the lower-case “manifesto” instead.

open fight, a fight that each time ended, either in a revolutionary re-constitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.”⁵⁵ The placement of this definition of history at the very beginning is key as it sets the stage upon which the drama of the Manifesto will unfold. This definition of history provides the context in which the Manifesto has meaning, as belonging to a historical tradition and movement that is *the* basis of all human history. This is a universal description across time and space, not an accidental and contingent current problem. The history of conflict, for Marx, takes on epic proportion; participation in this historic struggle takes on mythical status. The specific contexts of the 1848 revolutions are seen by Marx as examples of the universal logic of history.

Marx and Engels then move to the contingent and current historical moment in which this eternal historical conflict has created the specific classes of bourgeoisie and proletariat.⁵⁶ What marks this epoch as different from the past is the speed with which the conflict emerges and the system spreads—globally reaching “the East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonization of America, trade with the colonies...”⁵⁷ This “rapid development” of “ever growing” markets has “established the world-market, for which the discovery of America has paved the way.”⁵⁸ The rapidly expanding system is a system of social and economic class, but it is also political: “The executive of the modern State is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party” (1848), in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978): 474.

⁵⁶ Marx and Engels, “Manifesto,” 474.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 474.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 474, 475.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 475.

With political and economic control, this ruling class has reduced all human relations to relations of exchange, and “has left remaining no other nexus between man and man than naked self-interest, than callous ‘cash payment’.”⁶⁰ As a result, “the bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe” such that human esteem, value, and honor become reduced to the values of the market, as determined and controlled by the bourgeoisie.⁶¹ The work of the “physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science” becomes mere participant to the exchange system; the human and moral value of this work becomes equalized and secularized as “its paid wage-labourers.”⁶²

The totalizing understanding of history as class conflict becomes even more dramatic at this point in the Manifesto, where Marx and Engels provide a description of the current epoch in vivid and forbidding language. Here, the continued existence of the bourgeoisie, and of the hierarchical social and political system, depends upon “constantly revolutionizing” production and society such that “constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones.”⁶³ Totalizing language of “constant,” “uninterrupted,” and “everlasting” is used to describe not only the course of all human history, but the specificity of the current context.

To shift from a description of all human history to the specific situation of 19th-Century Europe allows Marx and Engels’ text simultaneously to paint the current situation as participating in an historical drama of epic proportions while also insisting on

⁶⁰ Ibid., 475.

⁶¹ Ibid., 476.

⁶² Ibid., 476.

⁶³ Ibid., 476.

the contemporary urgency and uniqueness of the current moment. Just as Hegel hypostasized modernity within a metahistorical model of dialectic history, Marx privileges this moment of revolution as similarly within a context of grand historical progress. Participation in an epic historical drama of class conflict provides legitimacy and honor to human activity, while the description of the contemporary epoch as particularly critical infuses the current struggles with the force of an imperative.

The Manifesto's descriptions of the perpetual destruction of human relationships and value continue: "All...relations...are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind."⁶⁴ The repeated use of "all" here is key to the description of a tragic situation and an unstoppable fate where "man is at last compelled to face...his real conditions." The continued existence of the bourgeoisie, the political and economic systems, and the hierarchical social structure, then, *depend upon* the constant, rapidly increasing, total destruction of all human value, the sacred, the substantial, the stable. For Marx, conflict and revolution are already built into the system. For him, it's not a question of seeking inclusion within the system, when the system's existence is predicated and dependent upon exclusion and division.

At this point in his text, Marx's description of the connection between labor and needs emerges, including the ways in which human needs are produced and contingent upon historical context. Marx and Engels describe the way in which new industry leads to the production of new products, which then produce new wants that ensure the system's continuation: "In place of the old wants, satisfied by the productions of the country, we

⁶⁴ Ibid., 476.

find new wants, requiring for their satisfaction the products of distant lands and climes.”⁶⁵ In my reading, the relationship between the will of those in power (the bourgeoisie), the production of goods in the market, and the creation of human wants is highlighted to illustrate not only the power of the bourgeoisie over the deepest and most private areas of human psychology—human wants—but also to illustrate the malleability of those very “personal” locations that are often taken for granted as untouchable, as unassailable, as uniquely our own. Here, Marx shows how the significance of the public is dependent upon the devaluing of the private, which enables public control over the private to continue unchecked. Marx politicizes the private sphere of needs and desires by connecting them to the very public working of labor and production.

If even human wants are colonized by the bourgeoisie, the political system, by participation in capitalist markets and consumption of its products, then the reach of this system, the power of the bourgeoisie, is shown to be that much more total and unstoppable. Not only does the system control the production of goods; it also controls the production of knowledge: “as in material, so also in intellectual production.”⁶⁶ The possibility for wants, for desires, and for the production of ideas that are personal, local, or unique becomes less and less likely, as “the intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sided-ness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature.”⁶⁷ As the uniqueness of local wants, ideas, and literatures become subsumed and “property” of the world, the possibility for local resistance, for protest from the margins, diminishes. Increased world control and political centralization

⁶⁵ Ibid., 476.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 476.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 476, 477.

eclipses the possibility for any exterior to the system to remain. Indeed, any protest or revolution will have to come from within the system, since the system is total; there is no exterior to it; its expanding universality is the prerequisite for its continued survival.

In fact, the expanding nature of bourgeois society has become so total that it has teetered out of the control of even the bourgeoisie. “Modern bourgeois society” becomes “like the sorcerer, who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.”⁶⁸ What emerge are constant “crises” that in all their “absurdity” become an “epidemic”—“the epidemic of over-production” where “there is too much” of everything: “too much civilization, too much means of subsistence, too much industry, too much commerce.”⁶⁹ The sheer enormity of the system will topple under its own monstrous weight.

The connection between class and politics is reiterated—“But every class struggle is a political struggle”—despite the fact that the creation of class consciousness as political consciousness is prevented among the proletariat through “competition between the workers themselves.”⁷⁰ Since the bourgeoisie are similarly in competition with themselves, they are “compelled to appeal to the proletariat.”⁷¹ This situation empowers the proletariat, however, as “the bourgeoisie itself, therefore, supplies the proletariat with its own elements of political and general education, in other words, it furnishes the proletariat with weapons for fighting the bourgeoisie.”⁷² For Marx, the consciousness that leads to revolution reflects the inevitable logic of history; this enables Marx to

⁶⁸ Ibid., 478.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 478.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 481.

⁷¹ Ibid., 481.

⁷² Ibid., 481.

describe revolution as imminent while legitimating the need for his own work, for the development of theory to raise consciousness.

The description of the proletariat being given their weapons from their oppressor, the bourgeoisie, is one more example of Marx's contention that the possibility for critique—as consciousness and then active resistance leading to revolution—occurs from within the existing system, and not from some safe external location, nor from some site of objective knowledge or truth that is accessible by the proletariat. In this sense, “what the bourgeoisie, therefore, produces, above all, is its own grave diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”⁷³ These final lines of the first section of the Manifesto sum up the description of the class and political system as producing the seeds of its own speedy demise. The destruction of the system is inevitable.

The second section of the Manifesto, “Proletarians and Communists,” sets out a declaration of goals and an enumeration of demands that will bring about desired revolution. A list of ten “measures” is outlined, from the abolition of property to the free education of all children.⁷⁴ In the third section, “Socialist and Communist Literature,” the central function of literature to this history is reiterated. During a description of “Feudal Socialism” where politics have failed, “a literary battle alone remained possible.”⁷⁵ The Manifesto continues a step-by-step overview of historical changes whereby the inevitable self-destruction of the capitalist system will lead to the desired end in communism. The final stanzas of the Manifesto take us to the inevitable endgame of capitalism where “the Communists everywhere support every revolutionary movement

⁷³ Ibid., 483.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 490.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 491.

against the existing social and political order of things.”⁷⁶ At this future, inevitable moment, “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.”⁷⁷

This claim of inevitability provides legitimacy to the argument for the proletariat’s resistance—if the revolution and success of the proletariat is inevitable, then to resist would be self-defeating and pointless. However, such description of inevitability seems to undermine the need for action—rather, one would just need to ride the continually-expanding bourgeois wave of self-destruction, since that momentum is inevitable and outside of the control of either some external force or of the proletariat. Indeed, then, what the Manifesto declares, here, (since it assumes that revolution is inevitable), is merely to name what already exists rather than to create—to make manifest—something new.⁷⁸ While Marx writes in an attempt to raise consciousness that will lead to revolution, the deeper understanding of the function of rhetoric, of the relationship between language and action, remains unproblematized. The movement from language to consciousness to political action remains theorized in Marx’s Manifesto as straightforward and inevitable. Marx does not leave room for detours or wrong turns on this route to social change.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 500.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 500.

⁷⁸ This point is reiterated by Alvin W. Gouldner in *The Two Marxisms* and James Arnt Aune in *Rhetoric & Marxism*. Aune writes, “Marxism has two rhetorical problems. First, it must explain why audiences should accept its prescriptions, given the inevitability argument.... A second problem, however, is more significant. What sorts of communicative processes enable historical actors to see liberatory possibilities?” Aune invokes Alec Nove’s *The Economics of Feasible Socialism Revisited* to argue that “classical Marxism tends to see the need for revolution as self-evident, without considering that people might need to be persuaded to that belief.” While Aune’s take is decidedly rhetorical and downplays the significance of consciousness in Marx’s theory, I would extend his diagnosis of Marxism’s “problems” to be similarly symptomatic in the later development of the manifesto genre, as well as its influence on critical theory, contemporary feminist theory, and political theory. James Arnt Aune, *Rhetoric & Marxism* (Boulder, San Francisco, and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994): 13-14.

While a concern with history would continue to influence the genre, it is the Communist Manifesto's analysis of the *transparency* of history that differs from later examples of the genre. Indeed, it is the *opacity* the path from criticism to revolution that will lead Marx to question historical influence in his Brumaire. This mixture of the Manifesto's deployment of the rhetoric of historical logic (as imminent) as well as the method of imminent critique, combined with the Brumaire's warnings of the dangers of historical influence, led Marx to focus more explicitly on the rhetoric of political speech, on language as political action, as well as its limits. This later element will be adopted in the development of the manifesto genre in the avant-garde of the early 20th century.

Marx's "Manifesto of the Communist Party" is indebted to Hegel's notion of the dialectic in its description of history, of the role of human actions within the grand narrative of historical progress. For Marx, the capitalist system is already speeding towards its inevitable demise, and his use of immanent critique enables him to maintain his description of history and the system as total while establishing a site from which critique can occur. This type of critique is important as it continues to inform the method of the manifesto as a kind of critical practice. In addition, Marx's general preoccupation with history continues to plague the genre, as the genre continues to influence the theoretical problems of contemporary feminist and political theory. However, it is the complexity of the relationship between language and action, the performative function of political rhetoric, which is obscured in Marx's Manifesto. This complex relationship is taken up more explicitly after Marx's experiences with the subsequent failures of the 1848 revolutions to live up to their promises in the short-term. This historical experience is reflected in the language of the Brumaire, such that the inevitability and teleology

invoked in the Manifesto becomes tempered by a concern with co-optation and historical influence.

Puchner and the Manifesto as Performative

The tension between naming and creating, between discovery and construction, in the rhetoric of this Manifesto will continue to be a concern in the genre. In the same way that authors of early rights-declarations intended to “declare” and claim pre-existing, inalienable rights, rather than to create such rights through the act of declaration, so this manifesto situates itself as merely describing an inevitable future, as attempting to raise consciousness about a fact, rather than making an argument for—or creating a vocabulary and discursive, epistemological context for—revolutionary changes in the existing social, political, class system. Marx’s Manifesto, as political rhetoric, is a performative text that masks its own status as performative.

In his reading of the Communist Manifesto, Martin Puchner provides a detailed account of what he calls a “Marxian Speech-Act Theory” to argue that Marx’s Communist Manifesto was itself the first modern manifesto, the uber-manifesto against which future manifestoes would be measured.⁷⁹ While I see the genre as developing later than Puchner does, his reading provides an interesting discussion of some important elements of the Manifesto, and is illuminating of the genre in general. Puchner uses

⁷⁹ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006). Puchner’s argument is not only that “The *Communist Manifesto* influenced the course of history more directly and lastingly than almost any other text” and “the *Manifesto*’s unparalleled success was due in no small part to its ingenious composition, to the fact that Marx and Engels created with this text nothing more than a new genre” but that after the writing of the Communist Manifesto, others began “avoiding the Manifesto for fear of displacing it” (11, 40). Puchner writes: “On the one hand, using the genre defined by the Manifesto can mean reverence. On the other hand, each new manifesto also functions as an open or tacit challenge: apparently the Manifesto failed to do the whole job” (40).

Marx's text to argue that the Manifesto attempts to disentangle authority from speech acts, to challenge the tacit connections between speech, action, and legitimization. The Communist Manifesto

...challenges the type of declaration that rests on the assumption that whatever is being manifestoed...is grounded in authority and thus immediately turned into action. The revolutionary manifesto will break the conjunction of authority, speech, and action...and instead create a genre that must usurp the authority it does not yet possess, a genre that is more insecure and therefore more aggressive in its attempts to turn words into actions and demands into reality.⁸⁰

Puchner notes “the difference between a hidden agonism and a manifest one is precisely what marks the emergence of the manifesto as a distinct genre.” He continues, “It is only with Marx that the poetry of the future revolution arrives not only at its own content but also at its own form, that the manifesto exposes its speech acts as self-authorizing and openly ‘agonistic’ manifestations.”⁸¹

What Puchner calls “the difference between a hidden agonism and a manifest one” is an important distinction to make, and I would like to explore it further. I disagree with Puchner's contention that the Communist Manifesto—and the genre in general—must attempt to hide its “insecurity” by concealing its own construction, its own performance and participation in manifestoing, or making manifest, even when agonistic. Some manifestoes do hide their own participation in this process, and this hiding, I argue, is at work in the tension that emerges in the Communist Manifesto's use of inevitability.

However, as I argue in my reading of the Brumaire, the historical context of failed

⁸⁰ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 12.

⁸¹ Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 19.

revolutions led Marx to become very aware of this problem and the tension that emerges in the Manifesto. The contrast between the Manifesto and the Brumaire illustrates problems that become important for the genre: the status of history and the exposure of performativity in political rhetoric. These problems, however, reflect an historical experience of failure: the failure of revolutions, the failure of the liberal project, and the failure of the “inevitable” to arrive. This historical experience required Marx to rethink the materialist view of the role of consciousness, or, as I will argue, to problematize the relationship between language and action, to become acutely aware of the performative function of political rhetoric.

Through his definition of the difference between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions, Marx outlines a strategy of radical self-doubt that is not “insecure” but, alternately, is more effective because of its self-critique and awareness of historicity, its awareness of the possibility of assimilation. As Puchner notes, “The last sentence, like all those of the *Manifesto*, is thus addressed to a recipient who does not yet fully exist. It performatively creates its addressee as agent in the manner the Declaration of Independence creates the ‘good people’ of America as the agent on whose behalf the representatives issuing the Declaration act.”⁸²

Indeed, the Manifesto engages in performative construction of the categories of proletariat, bourgeoisie, communist, etc. And, as I have noted, the function of inevitability in the text is similar to the “inalienable rights” claimed in the U.S. “Declaration of Independence.” But where the Declaration failed to acknowledge its own status as a performative, constitutive text, I argue that a reading of the Manifesto in the context of the Eighteenth Brumaire shows that the “Manifesto of the Communist Party”

⁸² Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution*, 31.

highlights its own status as a performative, constitutive document—a manifesto that is self-consciously using language as action, making manifest through language. However, my reading of Marx’s Brumaire suggests that Marx reconsidered his view regarding the relationship between language and action, and its stakes for those invested in facilitating political change. In the Brumaire, the categories that are being constituted—bourgeois and proletariat—not only do not yet fully exist, but are (and should be) consistently questioned, destroyed, reconstructed, and revised if the revolution is to be effective. It is this focus on performativity and self-reflexivity that, in conjunction with the rhetoric of Marx’s Manifesto, will construct the genre during the avant-garde of the early 20th century.

Historical Influence and Self-Criticism in “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte”

As I have argued through my reading of the “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” Marx and Engels proposed a strategy for dealing with the problem that emerges when one provides a totalizing critique of an oppressive, universal system. The problem is that the more total the description of the system becomes, the more difficult it becomes to imagine a place from which one could escape or critique that system. If the system is total, if it colonizes even the most intimate aspects of the human experience, then how is one to know whether one has truly escaped, or whether the system has merely assimilated and recuperated attempts at escape and critique? In the Communist Manifesto, the site from which critique—and revolution—emerges is not from outside the capitalist system. Rather, the system’s inevitable collapse is already destined due to the self-destructive, ever-expansive appetite of the system. Thus revolution occurs from within, from a gap

within the system, from inevitable collapse, rather than from an attack from outside.

Immanent critique is a critical strategy that enables the Manifesto to raise consciousness about the problem described above, a problem with the status and influence of history.

However, as I argue through my reading of Marx's "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," this problem of historical inheritance—of the danger of assimilation, recuperation, and the status of critique—continues to "haunt" the question of revolution. Here, Marx explicitly engages this "ghost" and describes a situation of radical critique and self-interrogation that distinguishes bourgeois from proletarian revolutions. Marx's description of proletarian revolutions is relevant to the emergent genre of the manifesto, where the text must navigate this problem of historical inheritance and the location of critique, often (and increasingly so, as I will illustrate in the manifestoes of the avant-garde) through this very strategy of self-criticism, interruption, destruction, and contingent reconstruction.

In addition, my reading of Marx's Brumaire foregrounds elements of the performative in his treatment of language and politics, or what I call linguistic action. As James Martin has argued, "Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire* embodies a recognition (though not a theorisation) of the 'performative' character of politics," such that recent theories of political performativity from Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe, and Butler include "key elements" that are "*already present* in Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire*: the parodic character of the 1848 revolutions, and Louis-Napoleon in particular; the colliding fantasy worlds of

the different bourgeois, socialist, and Royalist parties; the struggle by Bonaparte and the parties to hegemonise empty signifiers such as ‘Order’ and ‘the Republic’.”⁸³

Marx’s “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte” was written in 1851-2, a few (but eventful) years after the 1848 publication of the “Manifesto of the Communist Party.” Given the multiple revolutions in Europe during the intervening years, Marx’s Brumaire depicts a much more cautious attitude towards history and influence than the one described in his Manifesto. The historical experience of repetition, multiple revolutions, and the continued deferral of the supposedly “inevitable” future society is reflected in Marx’s shift in perspective towards history and revolutions. The lessons of 1848 are evident in Marx’s emphasis on historical contingency, the dangers of co-optation, and the function of language as political action. In the context of the series of failed revolutions that transpired in the years between 1848 and 1851, Marx’s Brumaire emerges as a retrospective and cautious postscript to the rhetoric of his 1848 Manifesto.

The Brumaire outlines Marx’s historical materialism; he discusses the historical context in which humans are defined and live as well as the humanist context of history. Marx writes,

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all the dead generations weights like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something entirely new, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they

⁸³ James Martin, “Performing Politics: Class, Ideology and Discourse in Marx’s *Eighteenth Brumaire*,” in *Marx’s ‘Eighteenth Braumaire’: (Post)Modern Interpretations*, ed. Mark Cowling and James Martin (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2002): 132-133, 140.

anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle slogans and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language.⁸⁴

The inheritance of history makes any attempt at revolution difficult, since one cannot know whether one has created something truly revolutionary, or whether one is merely regurgitating the failed traditions of the past. The way in which this problem of historical inheritance is described by Marx is important. He describes history in terms of a “nightmare” and “spirits,” in terms of being “made” as well as the materials borrowed as “names, battle slogans and costumes” that are “present[ed]” in a dramatic “scene” as “disguise” and “borrowed language.”

This way of describing the problem as concerning the human psyche; drama, performance, and costume; material construction and “weight;” as well as the language of “names, battle slogans” is key. This description of revolution and historical inheritance directly relates to the way we read the Communist Manifesto, since the Manifesto is the founding/constituting document of the revolutionary communist party in Europe. Thus, I argue, what Marx provides through the Brumaire is, in a sense, a map of how to read—and how not to read—the Manifesto, or at least how to read the Manifesto with a certain skepticism and awareness of its own risk of recuperation. This re-reading of the Manifesto is enabled by historical shifts, failed revolutions, and skepticism regarding Marx’s own project. He turns his attention away from totalizing historical narratives and towards performance and the future, towards a concern with historical repetition and the limits of the possible, as illustrated in the line, “The social revolution of the nineteenth

⁸⁴ Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd edition (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1978): 595.

century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past.”⁸⁵

I see Marx’s description of the problem of historical inheritance as a “nightmare on the brain of the living” and in terms of “spirits of the past” as underscoring the relationship between one’s contingent historical situation and the limits of what can be imagined, thought, and then enacted in any political scene. To be haunted by a spirit, or terrorized through a nightmare, is to be interrupted in one’s conscious, material life by elements of something invisible, yet vividly experienced and potentially, frighteningly, immobilizing. The impact of a nightmare or a haunting is to break down the division between the seen and the unseen, the present and the absent, which demands that one question that which seems most obvious—one’s material surroundings, the limits of one’s own knowledge. Such language of “nightmares” and “spirits” highlights the connections between the influence of history, the limits of thought and action, and the problem of critique.

Similarly, Marx describes the problem of historical influence in dramatic terms—in terms of performance, of material creation, of costumes and stages, to highlight the performative nature of the production of revolutions as well as the way in which they are enacted, costumed, and character-ized. In addition to allusions to the dramatic stage, Marx underscores the importance of language and the literary in this drama. Marx continues,

In like manner the beginner who has learnt a new language always translated it back to his mother tongue, but he has assimilated the spirit of the new language

⁸⁵ Marx, “Eighteenth Brumaire,” 597.

and can produce freely in it only when he moves in it without remembering the old and forgets it in his ancestral tongue.⁸⁶

Marx emphasizes the connection between language and epistemology: rhetoric in its strongest sense, as discourse or vocabulary, enables the limits of and architecture through knowledge is established, through which thought and communication occurs. He shows an awareness of rhetoric and performativity that goes beyond the view presented in the Manifesto. Thus, language is connected to the structure of the material world that humans create just as the relationships that emerge both in material and communicative contexts are limited and enabled by rhetoric. We can read this as the lines that might be relevant to actors on the stage, or as the refined structures of poems where form and content converge to inspire, push, and play with meaning, as in his references to *poetry* and to the *future* (“The social revolution of the nineteenth century cannot draw its poetry from the past, but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself, before it has stripped off all superstition in regard to the past.”)⁸⁷ Poetry is the food of revolution; when stale, it becomes superstition, but when fresh, it feeds new activity and thought.

I suggest that we read Marx’s explicit description of the problem of historical inheritance on revolutionary projects in terms of language and performance as it directly relates to his own linguistic revolutionary project in the “Manifesto of the Communist Party.” The Brumaire can be read as an exposure of the dangers of the Manifesto, if allowed to be recuperated into what he calls a “bourgeois revolution.” Marx’s distinction between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions becomes a warning to those who would

⁸⁶ Marx, “Eighteenth Brumaire,” 595.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 597.

enable the revolutionary impact of communism to assert itself without skepticism and self-doubt. Marx writes:

Bourgeois revolutions...storm more swiftly from success to success; their dramatic effects outdo each other; men and things seem set in sparking brilliants; ecstasy is the everyday spirit: but they are short lived; soon they have attained their zenith, and a long depression lays hold of society before it learns soberly to assimilate the results of its storm and stress period. Proletarian revolutions, on the other hand, like those of the nineteenth century, criticize themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again more gigantic before them, recoil ever and anon from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until the situation has been created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves cry out:

Hic Rhodus, hic salta!

Hier ist die Rose, hier tanze!⁸⁸

These last two lines are translated in a footnote as “Here is Rhodes, leap here! Here is the rose, dance here!” which is a reference to one of Aesop’s fables and a call to “show us right here what you can do”—a way of calling for action that backs up words, for doing that backs up saying.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid., 597-8.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 598. Tucker’s complete note (footnote 5) reads:

“Here is Rhodes, leap here! Here is the rose, dance here!” The words are from a fable by Aesop about a braggart who claimed he could produce witnesses to prove he had once made a

When we apply the definition of a proletarian revolution to the proposals in the Communist Manifesto, Marx seems to be simultaneously urging the revolution to be careful—to wait, to interrupt itself, to question its own aims, to not be carried away by its own momentum, while also encouraging this caution in the service of a larger momentum that pushes the revolution towards the poetic, the fabled, which is also the convergence of language and action—the imperative to “leap here...dance here!” My reading of this passage is that Marx implores the revolution to be careful of its own language, its performances, its blind spots, in an effort to enable the revolution to account for the problem of historical inheritance, to enable the truly new to emerge as poetic action. This emergence of poetic action, this moment of “leap” and “dance”—this moment of “here” and “now”—is the moment of the manifesto, the performance of the convergence of action and politics when enacted correctly, radically, critically, proletarian and revolutionarily. It is in the aporia opened by liberalism’s failure to fully constitute its vocabulary that the possibility for alternatives emerges.

The combination of the strategies from the Manifesto and the Brumaire—strategies for dealing with the status of history—were influenced by the failure of revolutions and provided a vocabulary, a set of strategies, later taken up by the manifesto genre. These strategies include the narrative of a totalizing history leading to inevitable change and immanent critique, as well as an emphasis on linguistic action and the tyranny of historical inheritance. Marx’s Manifesto functions as a formal antecedent to the genre, while his Brumaire negotiates the problem of historical inheritance while foregrounding

remarkable leap in Rhodes, to which claim he received the reply: “Why cite witnesses if it is true? Here is Rhodes, leap here!” That is, “Show up right here what you can do.” The German paraphrase of the Greek quotation (*Rhodus means rose*) was used by Hegel in the preface to his *Philosophy of Right*.

the performativity of politics, of language as action. While the Brumaire serves as a retrospective antidote to the Manifesto's call for revolution—a revolution that failed to be sustained, but only repeated as “farce”—the Brumaire also instructs the genre and reclaims its ability to expose the failures of the past.

Conclusion: Marx, Temporality, and the Emergence of a Genre

In this chapter, I argued that Marx's Brumaire exposes the risks that are taken in the Communist Manifesto. My reading of the Brumaire illuminates the way in which the genre attempts to merge language and action, the way in which the manifesto exposes the performativity of political rhetoric and the aesthetics of the political. Puchner notes in his reading of the function of exclamation points in the Manifesto:

There is more postponement still in the form of an exclamation mark that both emphasizes the urgency to act and postpones the act itself once more. In its silent gesture, the exclamation mark even mimics the act; it is already some sort of act, but not the right one. The exclamation mark is one more seam between manifesto and revolution, one more mediation, more of an act than a text, perhaps, but not act enough. In this way, the manifesto is a genre that imagines itself to be on the verge of action, anticipating, preparing, organizing this action, and perhaps participating in it already, if only in a preliminary manner. The manifesto simply cannot wait for its own end so that real action, the only thing it cares about, can begin.⁹⁰

⁹⁰ Martin Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution: Marx, Manifestos, and the Avant-Gardes* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006): 43.

Puchner's description of the Manifesto's urgency, its own relationship to action, is important, but Puchner's description of a dichotomy between anticipated and "real" action does not fully account for a rhetorical view of language, where rhetoric is always already historical and embodied. Puchner fails to account for how the manifesto itself points to language's ability to act, to be action, to enact, to make manifest, to perform and constitute that which it speaks.

As I discuss in this dissertation, this dichotomy is what the manifesto breaks down. The failure that the manifesto exposes is the failure of previous declarations and manifestoes to fully enact that which they promised. The success of a manifesto is found in the pointing to failures of the past; the possibility of the manifesto is enabled by the failures of the past. It opens the gap between the action-promises of past declarations and their failure to be realized, at times questioning the possibility of action at all, through interruption and criticism, and alternately at times pushing language to its limits and becoming action itself: leaping here, dancing here.

As I argued in the previous chapter, precursors to the manifesto genre included counter-declarations that contested and exposed liberal rhetorics of rights and universality as based on exclusions, exclusions that came to be understood primarily as gendered exclusions. In Marx, those exclusions were described in terms of class, rather than gender, although Marx's theory of class and class consciousness would become re-gendered by factions of feminist politics in the 20th century. In my reading of Marx's Manifesto and Brumaire, I have shown that the rhetorical elements that later developed into the manifesto genre (which I will discuss in the next chapter on the avant-garde) were illustrative of an experience of failed revolutions. The manifesto genre developed

out of rhetorical traditions that contested liberal exclusions, but its development was predicated on the failure of revolutionary change to easily, quickly, or fully occur.

It is the significance of history and immanent critique, though, that makes Marx's texts an integral part of the genealogy of the manifesto genre. Later examples of the genre will continue to adopt similar notions of temporality, the roots of which can be found in the early Manifesto and Brumaire of Marx. It is important to understand that the way in which temporality is managed in the manifesto genre is rooted in an experience of failed revolutions, which leads the genre to illustrate, at times, nostalgia for a revolution that was promised but never fulfilled. Such nostalgia, I worry, is rooted in a linear notion of history as progress that demands that manifesto writers both account for historical influence and find a way "out" of history. The danger is that nostalgia, predicated on both the view of the revolution as promised progress and the experience of its failure, inadvertently reinforces that which manifesto writers seek to counter through exposure: the incomplete, inadequate logic of liberal political vocabularies. It is this understanding of history and the future that risks becoming a conservative gesture in contemporary examples of the manifesto genre.

Marx's turn to the future, to the site of linguistic action, influences the genre as evidenced by future manifestoes' invocation of the future as "post," left open, devoid of content, and thus full of infinite, unarticulated potential. It is this uncritical adoption of a certain understanding of history and the future that permeates the manifesto genre throughout the 20th century, and, I will argue, is one of the reasons why the problem of historical inheritance remains central to the genre and to contemporary theory today. As James Art Aune has noted, an antiquated notion of temporality from Marx's writings was

taken up by later Marxists and remains generally unquestioned.⁹¹ Along those lines, I will return to a similar argument throughout this dissertation: that inherited notions of history and the future, of beginnings and endings, continue to influence contemporary political and feminist rhetoric; the failure to recognize inherited rhetorical problems and strategies *as inherited* risks staying “stuck” in the problems of the past, as well as inadvertently re-enacting history through active forgetting.

⁹¹ Not only have theorists neglected to analyze Marxist deployments of temporality; Aune notes that “only Raymond Williams has spoken significantly for the need of a sense of place in Marxist theory.” James Art Aune, *Rhetoric & Marxism* (Boulder, San Francisco and Oxford: Westview Press, 1994): 146.

Chapter Three

“The very first dawn”: Legitimization Anxiety, Gender, and Experimentation in Avant-Garde Manifestoes

An analysis of manifestoes of the avant-garde in the early 20th century, from the Futurists through Dada, illustrates that during this period, the manifesto became recognizable as a genre. In the tumultuous period leading up to WWI, the practice of manifesto-writing emerged as an active fusion of art and politics that became understood as “the way” to be political, as “the way” to voice dissent. This “way” of being political, through manifesto-writing as a practice, proliferated during this time as a variety of authors experimented with the genre’s form and content. What these manifestoes have in common, however, what makes this practice of manifesto-writing into a *genre*, has to do with a self-reflexive concern with the influence of history and danger of co-optation; an understanding of the relationship between art and politics that demands redefinition of both; the description of an experience of modern cultural crisis as a crisis of gender; and the persistent but ironic performance of negation that slides into nihilism. During the flourishing of the avant-garde, the manifesto emerged as a genre that calls attention to its own political agendas, its own rhetorical strategies, and its own promises and limits. Unlike genres that function to mask differences and foreground similarities within and between texts, the manifesto genre plays with, rather than hides, its differences: differences from its historical precursors, differences from other manifestoes, and differences within itself.

As I argued in the previous chapter, the manifesto genre that emerged in the early 20th century borrowed rhetorical strategies from counter-declarations of liberal dissidents, but it was the work of Marx that is most reflected in the genre as it developed during the avant-garde. Specifically, the combination of Marx's "Manifesto of the Communist Party" and his "Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte" provided mixed rhetorical inheritance to the avant-garde manifesto. These rhetorical influences from Marx's Manifesto include a totalizing description of history, assertion of an inevitable future, calls for immediate action, and the redefinition of subjectivity as a political act; influences from the Brumaire include an awareness of the role that language plays in enabling the imagination and implementation of change—the relationship between language and action—as well as a concern with "false revolutions" and co-optation, reflections of Marx's experience of unmet expectations in the wake of the 1848 revolutions. Together, these influences provided the rhetorical resources needed to create the manifesto genre, a specific kind of textual practice that both integrated and raged against historical influence, both employed and exposed the limits of universality, and both hid and openly mocked the performative functions of public rhetoric as illustrated through the very act of manifesto-writing.

In addition to analysis that shows the coming-of-age of the manifesto genre during the avant-garde, I focus on readings of manifestoes written by women in the avant-garde to insist on the centrality of gender to the genre as well as to understandings of exclusion in liberal politics. It is through the manifesto genre that the exclusions enacted through liberal politics became understood as gendered exclusions, and it is also through the manifesto genre that such gendered exclusions were contested. I offer analyses of gender

in Futurist texts by Marinetti, de Saint-Point, and Loy to examine the ways in which the cultural crisis of modern, liberal society was experienced as a crisis of gender, as well as ways in which the negotiation of cultural conflicts were understood as renegotiations of gender and sexual identities. My readings show that writings by avant-garde women exposed the hidden exclusions (and thus inadvertent reproduction of liberal values) enacted through texts written by their male counterparts. Participation in the practice of the manifesto genre enabled these women to both contest and to expose the limits of critical projects, including the limits of the genre with which they engaged. Rather than presenting these women writers as subordinate, marginal correctives to masculine, avant-garde excesses, I push the work of women avant-garde manifesto-writers to the forefront to illustrate the centrality of women's writing to the development of the genre, as well as the centrality of gender to the genre as a tradition of critique against liberal political vocabularies.

My readings of manifestoes written by avant-garde women contribute to an alternative historical narrative of the history of feminism, as these women opposed the masculinist tendencies in Futurism as well as the liberal and, specifically, anti-sexual tendencies of the women's suffrage movement at the time. By privileging the texts of avant-garde women who rejected the label of "feminist," I offer a history of a different *kind* of feminism, of feminism as part of a tradition of dissent, of feminism as critique. This genealogy diverges from contemporary narratives of feminism in terms of women's rights, as a series of legal and legislative battles for inclusion within liberal politics. Rather, my genealogy of feminism intersects with my genealogy of the manifesto to redefine understandings of liberal politics and its relationship to traditions of dissent.

Feminism emerged as a reflection of the ways in which specific forms of exclusion, as enacted through liberal politics, were understood as gendered; the exposure and critique of such exclusions became formalized as an identifiable tradition through the manifesto genre.

I have argued that the manifesto genre was enabled by and exposed the gaps in liberal vocabularies, in concepts such as “citizen” and “rights.” Like parody, manifestoes only make sense in reference to their object of critique, to their original, to the discourse and system that they challenge. In the case of the avant-garde, a conflict emerges between a missionary desire and rhetorical agenda invested in gaining popularity and importance, which runs up against the way in which intelligibility and legitimacy are predicated on the adoption of rhetorical strategies that betray historical influences. This conflict is one element that constitutes the manifesto genre. Such anxiety about influence underlies the Futurists’ attempt to destroy their inheritance to the original, to deny any relation or indebtedness to history and inherited concepts of politics and identity. Valentine de Saint-Point points to a gap in the Futurists’ own conception of identity, of valorized masculinity, as problematic, and employs reversal of gender categories to destabilize Futurist definitions of sex and gender, male and female. Mina Loy continues the tradition of exposing prior manifestoes as incomplete in their descriptions of gender categories, distancing herself further from Futurist rhetoric in her strategies of reversal and rhetoric of destruction. Finally, Dada fights against this problem of reference and recuperation, of relationship to the “original,” traditional discourses of identity and politics, by foregoing translatability. Dada manifestoes express the futility of any effort to escape influence in manifesto-writing, a sentiment compounded by the solidification of the genre as genre:

not only must new manifestoes engage with the inherited and failed vocabularies of liberal politics, they must also navigate the vocabulary and strategy of prior manifestoes, and the elision of difference that occurs with the emergence of generic expectations.

I will show that the manifestoes of the avant-garde illustrate the gaps in liberal notions of identity and show the limits of liberal definitions of the political. In the aftermath of WWI, I see the turn towards nihilism in Dada as a strategy for attempting to escape the influence of history in avant-garde manifesto texts. The status of the past, the ideas of technology and “progress” enabled by modernization heightened in the buildup to WWI, are reflected by avant-garde manifesto authors through their adoption of specific strategies for dealing with the problem of history and the exclusions enacted through liberal politics. These strategies will be rediscovered in different political, historical, and rhetorical contexts, as I will show in coming chapters on Valerie Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto* and the writings of lesbian feminists in the 1970s.

Theories of the Avant-Garde and an Alternative to the Art/Politics Binary

I focus on the relationship between the aesthetic and the political in these texts to challenge the divide between art and politics that appears in the existing literature about manifestoes. In the emergence of the avant-garde manifesto, I identify a process through which the practice of political speech becomes mapped onto the aesthetics of the manifesto such that the rhetorical and aesthetic conventions of the genre become political: to write in the form of a manifesto becomes a form of political practice. It is also during this period that through self-conscious exposure of the performative, rhetorical nature of political language, writers begin to play with the form of antecedent

rhetorics of dissent, as well as with the structures of other contemporary manifestoes. This high-stakes playfulness is part of the practice of the manifesto: the genre emerges as identifiable in its versatility and variety, in its intertextuality, in its conversation with and contestation against other manifestoes. Avant-garde manifesto authors self-consciously deploy the form with an awareness of its performativity and the complex ways in which the political becomes folded onto specific aesthetic forms.

Academic discussions of manifestoes and the genre typically focus on the use of manifestoes by early 20th century avant-garde artists and artistic movements. Such discussions situate the manifesto in terms of debates about the emergence of the avant-garde, relationships between aesthetic movements, the avant-garde's relationship to "modern" art, and, at times, relationships with political movements including communism and fascism. The relationship between Futurism and fascism has been of particular concern to subsequent theorists of the avant-garde; indeed, what became understood as the "aestheticization of politics" in fascism spawned an entire body of literature on the dangers and merits of such practice, given the unanimous condemnation of Italian Fascism.⁹² Such literature treats the avant-garde as a unique example of the intersection of art and politics as separate spheres. As Anne Bowler has noted, the primary theorists of the avant-garde, Peter Bürger and Renato Poggioli, insisted on the

⁹² Debates about "the aesthetic ideology," as noted by Martin Jay, have continued to concern theorists from Walter Benjamin to Paul de Man. See Jay's essay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology," for an excellent analysis of various kinds of engagement with the art/politics "problem," as well as ways in which the understanding of "the aesthetic" has shifted in different theorists' analyses. Martin Jay, "'The Aesthetic Ideology' as Ideology; or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?" in *Cultural Critique* 21 (Spring 1992): 41-61. For more on the historical relationship between futurism and fascism, see George L. Mosse, "The Political Culture of Italian Futurism: A General Perspective," in *Journal of Contemporary History* 25 (1990): 253-68.

unique relationship between art and politics that emerged in the avant-garde, but the two realms remain understood as primarily separate spheres in this tradition.⁹³

Bowler's analysis reflects my own dissatisfaction with the existing literature on the avant-garde and its manifestoes: both social historians and art historians privilege an understanding of one side of the art/politics binary in their analyses of the avant-garde (and the manifesto) at the expense of a critical analysis of the ways in which the manifesto genre *exposed* art and politics as *always already* enmeshed, and how exposure of this relationship demands new ways of understanding the functions and limits of what "counts" as both art and politics.

Many manifestoes that emerged from early 20th century avant-garde artists and collectives focus on the relationship between art, life, and society, precisely to challenge what "counts" as politics. However, manifestoes differ greatly in the extent to which they either point to or attempt to conceal the shift in definition from the aesthetic as "mere style" to a stronger notion of the aesthetic as the shape of culture, the limits of language, and the relational structures of identity. The manifesto often points to its own rhetorical strategies, to its status as performative and constitutive, and thus to the relationship between power and truth, to question the given, while often simultaneously hiding the contingencies of its own production or the terms of its own attempt at legitimization. This "hiding" occurs throughout manifestoes of the Futurists, even as

⁹³ I agree with Bowler's observation when she writes, "art-historical accounts have consistently attempted to bracket political questions in favor of the role of Futurist aesthetic innovations in the subsequent trajectory of the modernist avant-garde." She distinguishes two strands in the literature that adopt opposing strategies to decouple Futurism from fascist politics: one relies on "implicit assumptions about the separation of art and politics," while the second isolates a first and second wave of Futurism in order to identify the first as "aesthetic" and the second as "political." Examples of the first strategy include earlier works by Bürger, Poggioli, and (I would argue) Blum and Calinescu; examples of the second strategy include Perloff and, I would add, Adamson. Meanwhile, historical and sociological analysis overwhelmingly assumes a certain kind of political meaning to avant-garde aesthetics that fails to challenge the art/politics binary.

they perform redefinitions of identity and politics. In contrast, Dada manifestoes composed after WWI self-consciously resist the concealment of their oppositions and redefinitions, pointing to the contradictions of the manifesto's rhetorical strategies. Members of the avant-garde began to realize that even the way in which dissent and redefinition was voiced—through the manifesto—could have limits and become traditional, become domesticated and lose its critical force. This realization contributed to the emergence of the manifesto genre as a genre in constant conversation and critique with itself, that is, with other manifestoes.

The Historical Context of Futurist Manifestoes

The avant-garde project of merging art and politics in an attempt to create a new Europe emerged full-force in the first decade of the 20th century. As Walter Adamson has noted, modernization and industrialization during this time radically reorganized cultural meanings and identities, often through various forms of commodification.⁹⁴ Avant-garde art projects objected to what they saw as the all-consuming materialization of culture and society, focusing on the redemptive power of art as a political tool for altering the nature of social experience and community.⁹⁵

A number of avant-garde art movements, notably Futurism, emerged from this context to both reflect and react to its contradictions and rapid changes. This time also

⁹⁴ Adamson writes,

In this world of the new urban crowd, many modernists believed that the qualitative dimension of existence as a whole was threatened by a 'materialism' bound up with an emerging commodity culture. While their conceptions of a cultural corrective were quite various, they agreed that art had a fundamental role to play in overcoming commodification and restoring, or reinventing, the qualitative dimension of experience.

Walter Adamson, "Avant-garde modernism and Italian Fascism: cultural politics in the era of Mussolini," *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 6:2 (2001): 232.

⁹⁵ Robert Jensen, "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art," in *Art Journal* 47: 4 (Winter 1988): 363.

brought a crisis of legitimization of the artist in capitalist society. While the avant-garde as a movement situated itself in contrast to past artistic endeavors and imagined itself as offering critical opposition to the banality of contemporary culture, it was the historical emergence of art markets that, ironically, enabled art “movements” to gain force. As Robert Jensen has noted, the proliferation of modern art in the late 19th century contributed to the rise of the gallery industry which, in turn, radically shifted the relationship between art, artists, and the art industry such that the “success of the modernist artist was bound indissolubly to the commercial gallery.”⁹⁶ The (successful) artist in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was a product of capitalism, evidence of the “historical legitimacy” of liberal, modernist ideals of history as progress.⁹⁷ The social and political system of liberal politics and capitalist economics birthed the avant-garde, and the avant-garde then exposed the limits and failures of the system that enabled its birth.

This complex, codependent relationship with its object of critique is reflected in the way in which the avant-garde manifesto emerged as it did within the historical context the early 20th century: the avant-garde situated itself self-consciously in opposition to the commercialization of art and its traditions, even though its success and dissemination were predicated on participation in the art markets—markets eager to turn the “radically new” into fashion—that were part of the commodity culture under attack.⁹⁸ Futurist art, in particular, widely circulated in galleries worldwide between 1912 and 1915, despite

⁹⁶ Jensen, 361.

⁹⁷ Jensen, 360.

⁹⁸ As Jensen notes, “The avant-garde defines itself in opposition to modernism, yet is unthinkable without it;” and “the chief paradox of avant-gardism, thus, is that it takes its identity from opposing that which it most relies on: the trade in art.” Jensen, 360, 361.

(and perhaps because of) its self-promotion as an opposition movement to both modernism and to other forms of the avant-garde.⁹⁹

It is in this context of a desire for authenticity and escape from the past that I begin with a reading of manifestoes from Futurism. The “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” was written by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in 1909 and quickly followed by Umberto Boccioni and others’ 1910 “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” and “Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto.” These texts outline the movement’s glorification of war, destruction, speed, and change that led its members to later become associated with fascism, although the texts I analyze here predate WWI. The manifestoes describe Futurist resistance against current institutions of art, politics, and morality, and call for violent destruction of all vestiges of the past. Futurism is, as its name suggests, radically about the future. Celebrating the emergence of technology, science, speed, and power, Futurism describes the world as fundamentally changing, or changed: “the triumphant progress of science makes profound changes in humanity inevitable.”¹⁰⁰ Futurists claim the “right to destroy works of art” in order to create “a new a greater beauty on the ruins of the old.”¹⁰¹

Futurist manifestoes draw from the rhetorical antecedents of counter-declarations and the work of Marx to enact the redefinition of the political and identity, description of history and imminent future, and concern with co-optation. I begin with a reading of Boccioni’s “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters” and Marinetti’s “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” to examine key themes that emerge in these texts. Futurist

⁹⁹ Jensen, 364.

¹⁰⁰ Umberto Boccioni et al. “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters,” (1910) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 182.

¹⁰¹ Milanese Cell of the Futurist Movement, “Futurist Synthesis of the War” (1914) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 171.

manifestoes exhibit an overwhelming anxiety towards the dangers of appropriation and disappearing possibilities for originality: they revile any and all historical influence despite an awareness of the contingency of current social conditions. Futurists oppose the moral and absolute value systems of the past, and instead suggest alternative absolutes of violence, change, and newness. Even in light of the apparent impossibility of such defiance, Futurist manifestoes exhibit hesitant, even self-conscious shifts between awareness of and defiance against historical influence. Like their precursors in the work of Marx, Futurists call for action in spite of descriptions of a future that they cast as inevitable.

My reading also shows that connections between aesthetics, politics, morality, religion, and the material world are emphasized in these manifestoes to the effect of redefining the purview of the political and expanding the potential impact of Futurist critique. However, I argue that at times their emphasis on the power of the aesthetic as specifically *linguistic* remains ambivalent: the relationship between language as action, or the potential for language to be action, is complicated in Futurist texts.

Futurist manifestoes also navigate identity and audience identification through use of pronouns “we” and “I” as well as a highly masculinized aesthetic and world-view. The explicit gendering and valuing of masculinity in Futurism illustrates the manifesto as a rhetorical tradition that interprets the exclusions enacted through liberal politics through the lens of gender. Futurism takes this process of gendering the political to feverish extremes, and this poses an interesting conundrum for women Futurists. I explore the connections between value, newness, masculinity, and violence in Futurism in order to provide a reading of texts by Valentine de Saint-Point and Mina Loy as proposing

counter-manifestoes to the Futurists later in the chapter. I use texts written by these women to show the centrality of gender to the history of the liberal project and to the history of the manifesto. By situating the manifestoes of avant-garde women within my genealogy of the genre, I provide an alternative narrative that challenges existing narratives of feminist history, the history of the avant-garde, the emergence of the manifesto, and the relationship between art and politics in liberal society.

Futurist Redefinition of the Political as Aesthetic and Moral

I have argued that manifesto-writing emerged as an aesthetic practice understood to be simultaneously political in a performative sense. Futurist texts are great examples of manifesto-writing as self-consciously political and aesthetic intervention. Ronald Vroon notes that Futurism “saw itself from the very beginning as something far grander than a literary movement” whose “goal was nothing less than to reorganize human perception in light of this revolution.”¹⁰² This “extra-literary posturing” took the form of writing in manifestoes to distance the movement from the merely literary.”¹⁰³ The specific rhetorical strategies employed through the manifesto enabled writers to expose and challenge political/aesthetic convergences, to redefine that which can be thought and the form such thought can take. The fact that Futurists chose to voice their claims by writing manifestoes, I argue, points to the function of the genre in the process of politicization of human activities, identities, and categories that were previously not considered political or legitimate of discussion within the public sphere. This process of politicization gets mapped onto the aesthetic conventions of the genre such that the aesthetic comes to

¹⁰² Ronald Vroon, “The Manifesto as a Literary Genre: Some Preliminary Observations,” *International Journal of Slavic Linguistics and Poetics* 38 (1988/1995): 163-173.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 163.

“stand in” for the political. The act of being political, of participating in political speech, takes on a certain shape and set of expectations of what it should look like; these expectations, this aesthetic, then becomes itself political. The manifesto takes on a certain shape and set of expectations as a genre; the practice of manifesto-writing, as an act, becomes an inherently political act.

Futurists offer an early example of the manifesto genre, as is the case in Marinetti’s manifesto. The genre is constituted through awareness of its own limits. Paradoxically, the manifesto becomes recognized as a genre at the moment where it becomes recognizable as such to its author who thus rebels against her own historical influences while simultaneously attempting to achieve legitimacy. Futurists recognized that the genre, as it becomes a self-consciously performative genre, risks losing its “political” impact, risks exposing itself as “mere” performance. Unless the manifesto is successful in redefining the art/politics convergence, the text risks being received as an inadequate example of both. The genre becomes established when it departs from its precursors and traditions while remaining indebted to them. Via such departure, the manifesto becomes established as a genre, as a style with generic features, specific intentions, and a certain kind of intelligibility understood to be in contestation with itself.

In addition, the Futurist manifestoes show evidence of specific cultural shifts that were occurring in this time, which are reflected in their manifesto content and form. Futurist manifestos show what I argue is a shift in the way the category of the citizen and identity are constructed, a reaction against traditional identity categories and against the threat of illegitimacy, which becomes interpreted as a defensive gesture against a crisis of masculinity. The Futurists are defending against the threat of illegitimate identity, of not

being taken seriously, of being devalued, of being emasculated.¹⁰⁴ This is the case in terms of identity in general, as well as in terms of the identity of the artist. In the Futurists, we see an example of artists understanding themselves and their creation as political and cultural work. Futurist art was more than a style or “school”; it was a *movement*. To read Futurist manifestoes, then, demands a more complex understanding of the relationship between the political and the aesthetic than the one provided in most critics’ readings of the movement’s texts.

“Our frenzied scribbling”: Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism”¹⁰⁵

Filippo Tommaso Marinetti is credited with creating and leading the political movement that came to be known as Futurism. Although Marinetti later became involved in Italian electoral and fascist politics, in the first decade of the 20th century, Marinetti was primarily a poet, rabble-rouser, and promoter of experimental theater.¹⁰⁶ In 1909, Marinetti effectively created Futurism with the writing and publication of its first manifesto, which he ran on the front page of the leading Paris newspaper, *Le Figaro*.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁴ Cinzia Blum reiterates my point about the way in which social and identity crises were translated into gendered crises: the “sexual overtones” of Futurist writings “cast the futurist epistemological and aesthetic model into a gendered situation, which sets up an aggressive, virile subject against a feminized reality that must be conquered and destroyed,” and “the manifesto hinges on a rhetorical strategy that brings gender into relation with political and aesthetic issues, and in which femininity works as a mark of impotence, disease, and fragmentation.” Cinzia Sartini Blum, *The Other Modernism: F. T. Marinetti’s Futurist Fiction of Power* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996): 31.

¹⁰⁵ As noted in the chapter on Marx, my readings of some of these texts are limited by my reliance upon translators, but I assume that specific words and phrases maintain similar enough connotations in their original language to support the close readings that I provide.

¹⁰⁶ Marinetti’s name was listed on the ballot of a local election in 1919—and interestingly enough, the fascists lost that election. Mabel Berezin, *Making the Fascist Self: The Political Culture of Interwar Italy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997): 30.

¹⁰⁷ Jensen, 363.

This manifesto, the 1909 “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” exhibits traces of self-consciousness, an awareness—only momentary—of the contradiction (and futility) of its project of critique, rejection, and renewal. My reading of Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” begins with an analysis of identity and the use of pronouns in the text. I finish this section with a reading of what I see as two endings in his manifesto, the second of which haunts the first as an embarrassing—but desirable—awareness of the project’s own impossibility, inevitable self-destruction and futility. My reading shows Marinetti’s text to be haunted by anxieties about historical influence, anxieties inherited from Marx and enabled by an experience of historical progress moving towards its violent extremes. Marinetti’s text simultaneously denies and exposes anxiety about history through this double ending.

“We jumped”: Subjectivity and Action

Marinetti begins the manifesto by telling a story of a “we” rather than appealing to the “you” of “Italian Painters” that we will later see in Boccioni’s manifesto. This “we, . . . my friends and I” is described as an impatient, fevered, waiting group who “stayed up all night” “for hours” as they “trampled our atavistic ennui into rich oriental rugs, arguing up to the last confines of logic and blackening many reams of paper with our frenzied scribbling.”¹⁰⁸ The description of time, hours and nights spent awake, contrasts with the energy of “frenzied scribbling” and hints at action about to take place, a limit about to be reached. This eruption occurs in the next paragraph when the “we”—described as “alone, awake, and on our feet”—feel “an immense pride” in their loneliness as well as

¹⁰⁸ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909), in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 185.

an opposition to outsiders, “against an army of hostile stars glaring down at us from their celestial encampments.”¹⁰⁹ Responding to the noises of technology—the “huge double-decker trams that rumbled by outside, ablaze with colored lights” and “famished roar of automobiles” the first action occurs—“we jumped.”¹¹⁰

It is here that the “we” shifts to the “I” of the speaker, calling to his friends: “‘Let’s go!’ I said. ‘Friends, away! Let’s go!’”¹¹¹ Whereas the first four paragraphs of the manifesto refer mostly to the “we” of “my friends and I” (“we had stayed up all night,” “we had trampled our atavistic ennui,” “we felt ourselves alone,” “we jumped,” and “we listened”) the fifth paragraph suddenly shifts pronouns to the “I” of the speaker, at the same time that quoted speech first appears in the text (“‘Let’s go!’ I said. ‘Friends, away! Let’s go!’”)¹¹² The shift from the previous “we” to this “I” is interesting to note. The “we” of the first part of the manifesto portrays a group afflicted by boredom and loneliness, their camaraderie and belonging as protection against an outside universe of “stars” and in response to a mechanical environment of machines, cars and trams. The “I,” in contrast, is an I that calls to its group, that speaks and demands action, that names and acts rather than broods and reacts. It is in the shift from “scribbling” to the “‘Let’s go!’” that the move from thought to action is made, as the move from the “we” to the “I” is made. This implies a sense of self-recognition that comes with action, an emergence of identity as separate from the group as simultaneous with a demand to move and, in a sense, to continue to assert one’s group as a “we” against the others. It is almost as if the voice here must become an “I” that calls to the “you” of the group (the rest of the “we”)

¹⁰⁹ Marinetti, “Futurism,” 185.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 185.

¹¹² Ibid., 185.

before the “we” can take action against the “they” of the rest of the world. The “I” of Marinetti’s manifesto constitutes itself through a speech-act, simultaneously an urgent call to escape: “‘Let’s go!’ I said.” As soon as this “I” subject calls itself into being, it is called on to *act*, to *run*, to *leave*. The Futurist “I” is, from its inception, an “I” of opposition.

Such renegotiation of subjectivity through the pronoun placement reflects Marinetti’s sentiment, repeated in his “Technical Manifesto,” that individuality was “the fetish of an outmoded liberalism,” and, as such writers should avoid use of the “I” in their texts.¹¹³ The past opposed by Futurists consists of more than old art and politics. As Cinzia Blum notes, “the ultimate target is the old ‘I’ of traditional literature.”¹¹⁴ However, old forms of identity are replaced by Futurists identities; identity itself is not discarded. The point is “to produce a reassuring representation of self, founded on exclusive opposition and on the devaluation of otherness. The declared destruction of the literary ‘I’ does not involve the deconstruction of the unitary subject, but its ‘multiplication’, its transformation into a new all-powerful one.”¹¹⁵

I agree with Blum, but I also note that insofar as the Futurists are concerned with self-legitimization, Futurism hides the conditions and rhetorical twists of its strategic redefinitions. Futurist manifestoes illustrate what Lynne Pearce calls a tension between the category of “we” as *comrades* and “we” as *bystanders*. “We” are invited to participate against oppression, even as “we” are simply asked to bear witness to the

¹¹³ Daniel Cottom, “Futurism, Nietzsche, and the Misanthropy of Art,” *Common Knowledge* 13:1 (2007): 95.

¹¹⁴ Cinzia Blum, “Rhetorical Strategies and Gender in Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto.” *Italica* 67.2 (1990): 203.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

inevitability of cultural change.¹¹⁶ The Futurists illustrate one of the many ways in which manifestoes articulate “uniquely modernist approaches to the problem of group identity.”¹¹⁷ The Futurists illustrate a “duality of disinterestedness and self-interest,” their specific negations “can only work by pretending not to be doing what they are doing.”¹¹⁸

It is this “pretending” that will erupt at the end of this text, as my reading will show; it is defiance against and tacit admission of this pretending that will characterize the manifesto as a particularly Futurist manifesto. In this way, this Futurist manifesto repeats the very gesture that we saw at work in the Declaration of Independence: the construction of a subject whose existence is assumed to precede the moment of the declaration and whose limits are hidden under the language of universality. The Futurists decry the old model of subjectivity as weak and worn, as limited and useless. However, the hiding of this founding gesture, which is part of what makes the old model of the subject suspect, is repeated in the rhetoric of this manifesto. It replaces an old contingent subject with a new contingent subject but remains reluctant to expose and admit this contingency.

“The very first dawn”: History and Inevitability

The shift in pronoun and shift to action in the “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” announces a break with history and a new beginning in time: “Mythology and the Mystic Ideal are defeated at last..... Let’s go! Look there, on the earth, the very first dawn!

¹¹⁶ Lynne Pearce, *The Rhetorics of Feminism: Readings in Contemporary Cultural Theory and the Popular Press* (London: Routledge, 2004): 43.

¹¹⁷ Johanna E. Vondeling, “The Manifest Professional: Manifestoes and Modernist Legitimation.” *College Literature* 27:2 (2000): 128.

¹¹⁸ Vondeling, “The Manifest Professional,” 132.

There's nothing to match the splendor of the sun's red sword, slashing for the first time through our millennial gloom!"¹¹⁹ Here the past, defined by "mythology" and "ideal" is suddenly denounced, out of this emergence into action. The conflation of history with time and the mythic, the ideal, points to the totality of this break. This shift is represented as complete, all-encompassing, and revolutionary.

The declaration simultaneously announces and prescribes this break, as the listening "friends" are called to "shake the gates of life, test the bolts and hinges. Let's go!"¹²⁰ In this way, action is called for, a testing of the glue that holds "life" together, at the same time that the narrator describes a celestial shift, as if to describe a state of affairs outside of his control. This shift between description of historical change and prescription for action provides the moment with both inevitability and urgency, with the desire to "go with the flow" of what is already happening, as well as to push with the momentum and create that which is desired: rebirth, redemption, and utopia.

At this point in "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," the narrative detours into a story about beasts, car crashes, "maternal ditches" and other images that push the reader "out of the horrible shell of wisdom" such that we can "give ourselves utterly to the Unknown, not in desperation but only to replenish the deep wells of the Absurd!"¹²¹

The scene is described succinctly by Robert Jensen:

[Marinetti describes] an early-morning ride that Marinetti and two friends took, each at the wheel of an automobile, speeding through the darkness like the horsemen of the Apocalypse. Befitting the revelatory character of the experience,

¹¹⁹ Marinetti, "Futurism," 185.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹²¹ Ibid., 185-6.

they announce the defeat of myth and idealism through the new world of technology, embodied by speed.¹²²

The shift into narrative steps back from overtly performative, constitutive language into a mode of description: the manifesto describes action rather than performs action.

Yet as soon as readers have acclimated to this odd narrative, the text abruptly halts: Marinetti proposes a list. After the speaker's car has been dragged from the aforementioned ditch, the "we" again converges to announce a series of eleven statements: "we, bruised, our arms in slings, but unafraid, declared our high intentions to all the *living* of the earth."¹²³ This list of declarations is similar to those we will see in Boccioni's manifesto: "love of danger," "exalt aggressive action...the punch and the slap," "the beauty of speed," and "except in struggle, there is no more beauty."¹²⁴ Elements of modern technology, machines, transportation, factories and the electric are celebrated, while all that is old, weak, institutional, or established is condemned.¹²⁵

I think it is important note the verbs; these eleven statements are enacted through language that focuses on the aesthetic. The "we" of the manifesto will "sing," "say," "hymn," "glorify," "exalt" items such as "poetry" and "literature" while also calling to "stand," "hurl," and "destroy." Value is created through language, as in "glorify" and "hymn." Also, the shift between "say" and "destroy" as just another item in the same list provides equivalence between these two actions, as if to assert the similarities between saying and destroying, the ability of language—and of creating value through language, as in "glorify" and "hymn,"—to create and to destroy.

¹²² Jensen, "The Avant-Garde and the Trade in Art," 363.

¹²³ Marinetti, "Futurism," 186.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

However, the statements assert that “we will sing of” the violence, technology, speed, and destruction that accompanies this manifesto, and this “singing of” asserts linguistic and experiential distance between the singing and the doing, the “of” of which “we” sing. I see Marinetti as displaying ambivalence towards the relationship between action and language, an uncertainty about the status of the manifesto as action and performative declaration. Must the singing be singing *of* doing, singing *about* action, rather than action itself? Is the singing a singing *about* action that is already happening elsewhere or is this an action that we create through our songs? If that is the case, then the “singing of” might be a form of prophecy of the future, a singing for what will follow the “of” that we create through our singing.

At moments, this manifesto invokes inevitability, but then it steps back into a mode of description rather than prescription. Marinetti’s manifesto also alternates between temporal modes. Changes in society are inevitable, they are already happening, they have already happened, and Futurists simply respond to new conditions: “So let them come, the gay incendiaries with charred fingers! Here they are! Here they are! . . . Come on! Set fire to the library shelves!”¹²⁶ Changes are described as outside of the control of individual actors, masking their call to action as a reasonable reaction, a response to specific historical circumstances. All that is needed is to “let them come” and to watch their coming—they, rather than us—and yet we are also invited to participate in the destruction, to bring about the “joy of seeing the glorious old canvases bobbing adrift on those waters, discolored and shredded! . . . Take up your pickaxes, your axes and hammers, and wreck, wreck the venerable cities, pitilessly!”¹²⁷ This inevitability mirrors

¹²⁶ Ibid., 188.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 188.

the imminent revolution of the Manifesto of the Communist Party, and it is what grants the genre its activity and immediacy: an announcement of the arrival of that which the manifesto invokes and creates.

Complicit Self-destruction: “We want it to happen”

It is at the close of the manifesto where an interesting slippage occurs. Near the end, the “we” admits an awareness that time will continue to age us, and that “when we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts—we want it to happen!”¹²⁸ The principle of new=good, old=bad will continue even when “we” become old as well. Through this “injustice, strong and sane,” they—the young—will hunt down this aged “we” with “our decaying minds” and “hurtle to kill us, driven by hatred: the more implacable it is, the more their hearts will be drunk with love and admiration for us.”¹²⁹ The success of this philosophy of incessant youth and change means that all that currently exists must be destroyed. In fact, this is desirable—“we want it to happen”—because it is through what is ultimately self-destruction that the truth of “our” aesthetic revolution will be seen, that love will be shown to “us”: “Art, in fact, can be nothing but violence, cruelty, and injustice.”¹³⁰

After this admission of awareness of “our” own imminent destruction, a destruction that is prophesied and desired, the reader is brought back to the present, where “we are still untired! Our hearts know no weariness because they are fed with fire, hatred, and speed!”¹³¹ With the focus squarely on the present, on youth, on the current imminent

¹²⁸ Ibid., 189.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 189.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 189.

¹³¹ Ibid., 189.

moment of change and destruction, the manifesto declares a powerful assertion of strength, control, and aggression, the battle-cry of the Futurist present: “Erect on the summit of the world, once again we hurl our defiance at the stars!”¹³²

“Once again”: The Second Ending

Although these lines have the tone of finality, the manifesto is not yet finished. Rather, I argue, it is in these next, following lines of the manifesto that read almost as post-script in which an echo of anxiety emerges. Here, the manifesto’s fear of historical influence, a flickering awareness of contingency, bursts and promptly is silenced. Yet it still remains in the manifesto—indeed, as its closing gasp. After what I deemed the battle cry of “we hurl our defiance at the stars,” a questioning “you” erupts, second-guesses, and haunts in a new paragraph:

You have objections?—Enough! Enough! We know them...we’ve understood! ...Our fine deceitful intelligence tells us that we are the revival and extension of our ancestors—perhaps! ...If only it were so!—But who cares? We don’t want to understand! ...Woe to anyone who says those infamous words to us again!

Lift up your heads!

Erect on the summit of the world, once again we hurl defiance to the stars!¹³³

Here, the “we” faces objections from a “you”—perhaps an internal “you,” a faction of the group, and perhaps a “you” that is opposed, outside from the collective “we.” The objection, however, illuminates a contradiction and suspicion. How are “we” to know

¹³² Ibid., 189.

¹³³ Ibid., 189.

whether we are any different, and therefore better, than our predecessors, than all that we rage against and destroy? In fact, it is “our fine deceitful intelligence [that] tells us” this is the case—not only as a possibility, but as a wish, as something to be desired—“If only it were so!”

The acknowledgement that “we” might not be as new, original, different, or innovative as we thought (which would bring into question Futurism itself) is not only questioned but acknowledged and embraced. This contradiction is welcomed, desired, and wished for. It is as if the Futurists would prefer not to follow their own philosophy, to undermine their own manifesto in its very writing, the movement at the moment of its founding, to self-destruct the basis of their own philosophy of perpetual self-destruction. The pauses in the text in this final section, seen within the ellipses and dashes, interrupt the certainty of exclamation marks and the momentum that leads up to the previous end of the manifesto. In both content and form, these sentences undermine the entire manifesto that has been written up to this point.

As quickly as this occurs, denial and apathy set in: “But who cares? We don’t want to understand!...Woe to anyone who says those infamous words to us again!”¹³⁴ In defiance against this knowledge, in light of the impossibility of their own project, all that can be appealed to is ignorance, threat of force, and futile assertion. And it is with this call to action, in spite of knowledge of its futility and contradiction, that the final battle cry is echoed for the second time: “Erect on the summit of the world, *once again* we hurl defiance to the stars!”¹³⁵ While this repetition takes on more weight given the previous acknowledgement of contradiction and impossibility, it also strengthens the Futurist

¹³⁴ Ibid., 189.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 189, emphasis added.

gesture at the same time. If Futurism is about change, destruction, renewal, power, and the unknown, then it is all the more Futurist to assert defiance in the face of knowledge, as well as to assert it *once again*, even if it is exactly the same as before. It is all the more Futurist to look in defiance to the future, rather than dwelling on one's inheritance from the past. It is all the more Futurist to end with an action, with a lifting of the head, rather than with an argument, to choose action over argument. And this action takes the linguistic form of the manifesto, a form of performative textuality that acts what it says, that performs rather than argues, even while exposing its own failures, impossibilities, limits, but asserting all the same.

“But Italy is being reborn”: Boccioni’s “Manifesto of Futurist Painters”

While Marinetti's text illustrates ways in which the manifesto brings attention to and questions the act of founding, performativity, and constitutive rhetoric, his text also betrays a preoccupation with the influence of history and the impossibility of its escape. Similarly, Boccioni's text offers insight into the relationship between aesthetics and politics, as well as a concern with strategies for escaping the influence of history. These concerns and strategies are pivotal to the genre as exposing the limits of the vocabulary of liberal politics as performative, failed, and incomplete.

The 1910 “Manifesto of Futurist Painters” was written in Italy by Umberto Boccioni and others in the spirit of Futurist embrace of human technological change against nature and history. The manifesto addresses its intended audience in the first line: “To the young artists of Italy!”¹³⁶ The focus of this manifesto is directed towards the “creative

¹³⁶ Umberto Boccioni et al. “Manifesto of the Futurist Painters,” (1910) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 182.

artist” and the manifesto’s “cry of rebellion” “associates our ideals with those of the Futurist poets.”¹³⁷ These “comrades” who are “sickened by the foul laziness” of those stuck worshipping an outdated Roman aesthetic may be artists and poets, but their contempt is not limited to art’s “old canvases, old statues and old bric-a-brac” but against “everything which is filthy and worm-ridden and corroded by time. We consider the habitual contempt for everything which is young, new and burning with life to be unjust and even criminal.”¹³⁸ Desirable poetry and art is conflated with youth, rebellion, and newness, and this absolute newness is expanded to include “everything.”

The purview of the artist is explicitly connected to the purview of the larger political and cultural epoch: “But Italy is being reborn. Its political resurgence will be followed by a cultural resurgence” where education, machine technology, as well as “new flights of inspiration are emerging and dazzling the world with their brilliance.”¹³⁹ Political changes lead to cultural changes, they argue, which lead also to changes in education, in intellectual life, in the material and economic production of a society, and the entire landscape of “inspiration”—whether through machines or classrooms or canvases.

By connecting the aesthetic to the larger spheres of culture and politics, by defining culture and aesthetics along binaries of old/new, the Futurists redefine what counts as political and who counts as a citizen able to make legitimate political claims in the public sphere. By claiming the genre of the manifesto, and by asserting the connections between art and politics, the claims of artists gain importance. The call for change is for something more wide-reaching than a shift in “style” or narrowly aesthetic. The problem of the old aesthetic is more than a problem of old-fashioned or tasteless, stale art; the old

¹³⁷ Boccioni, “Manifesto,” 128.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 182, 183.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 183.

aesthetic takes on epic weight to stand in as a metaphor for culture, politics, morality, and human inspiration. A critique of an outmoded aesthetic, then, is a critique of an outmoded—and dangerous—epistemology and psychology, whose replacement will be found in the poetry and art of the Futurists. This expansive redefinition of aesthetics brings urgency and force to the Futurist manifesto, as well as a challenge to any claim that aesthetics should be dismissed, relegated as “mere” poetry or expression. The Futurists acknowledge that political change and historical shifts have form and shape; there is an aesthetics to their politics. In this Futurist manifesto, we see the way in which the aesthetic comes to “stand in” for the political. The Futurists don’t combine art and politics: they illustrate ways in which they were always already interrelated, and this insight demands a redefinition, then, of how we understand both terms.

When the Futurists make a case for an expanded redefinition of the aesthetic as political, they point to the interrelatedness of cultural spheres as well as the impact of historical context on these spheres: “Living art draws its life from the surrounding environment.”¹⁴⁰ Whereas previous artists created in a “religious atmosphere which fed their souls; in the same way we must breathe in the tangible miracles of contemporary life” such as airplanes, submarines, communication technologies, “the spasmodic struggle to conquer the unknown.”¹⁴¹ Technology and historical context enable the possibility for inspiration and the search for “the unknown;” Futurists believe that this quest has become increasingly poignant in the modern industrial and technological context. In my reading, Futurists’ expanded redefinition of the aesthetic also involves an awareness of historical context on aesthetics. Specific changes in material conditions lead to the enabling of

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 183.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 183.

certain aesthetic forms, to the emergence of the manifesto genre; such an enabling involves a political process, a performative and constitutive practice. Emergent aesthetic interventions, in turn, enabled new interpellative structures and new modes of understanding to take shape. It is this possibility of emergence that is celebrated in Futurist texts.

Authenticity and the Problem of “False Moderns”

The Futurists condemn the products of past environments as outdated and embrace a “revival” only enabled by current conditions: “...we declare war on all artists and all institutions which insist on hiding behind a façade of false modernity, while they are actually ensnared by tradition, academicism and, above all, a nauseating cerebral laziness.”¹⁴² Here, we see a skepticism emerge towards “artists and institutions” who pretend to be modern, but who somehow fail to be fully so. These “false moderns” fail to shake off all influences from the past, perhaps Boccioni says due to “laziness”—they have not been adamant enough in their rejection and destruction of influence.

Institutional artists, academics, and critics are condemned by the Futurists as “affected archaeologists with their chronic necrophilia,” “complacent pimps,” “gouty academics and drunken, ignorant professors,” “priests of a veritable religious cult” who “condemn Italian art to ignominy of true prostitution.”¹⁴³ Such devastating, parodic, and sweeping condemnations of all aspects of the current cultural, political, and artistic enterprise lead the text to its culmination in a series of eight “final conclusions” that punctuate the manifesto with the urgent staccato of enumerated demands. As Marjorie Perloff has

¹⁴² Ibid., 183.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 183-4.

noted, enumeration is “a way of arresting the attention of the audience” because “numbering implies that the author means business, that the goals to be achieved are practical and specific.”¹⁴⁴ And Boccioni does “mean business”; these conclusions include the total destruction of “the cult of the past,” “all kinds of imitation” in favor of promoting “all attempts at originality, however, daring, however violent.”¹⁴⁵

In this list of conclusions, the Futurists emphasize the role of language in the aesthetic revolution at hand when they claim to “rebel against the tyranny of words” that are used to describe works of art, such as “ ‘Harmony’ and ‘good taste’ and other loose expressions which can be used to destroy the works of Rembrandt, Goya, Rodin.”¹⁴⁶ This emphasis on language and its role in the valuing, description, and definition of art, I argue, reiterates the Futurists’ attempt to redefine the aesthetic. There is danger in how one describes, understands, and labels art, such that these labels can destroy the art itself. Instead, the Futurists call to “sweep the whole field of art clean of all themes and subjects which have been used in the past” and turn instead to “the glory in our day-to-day world, a world which is going to be continually and splendidly transformed by victorious Science.”¹⁴⁷ The final three lines of the manifesto, after the list of conclusions and before the signing of author’s names, declare death to the old ways of creating and seeing, again conflating youth with rebellion and destruction, history with corpses and decay: “The dead shall be buried in the earth’s deepest bowels! The threshold of the future will be swept free of mummies! Make room for youth, for violence, for daring!”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁴ Marjorie Perloff, “‘Violence and Precision’: The Manifesto as Art Form,” *Chicago Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring 1984): 78.

¹⁴⁵ Boccioni, “Manifesto,” 184.

¹⁴⁶ Boccioni, “Manifesto,” 184.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

In their emphasis on youth, originality, authenticity, and uniqueness, we can see the weight of the Futurists' fear of appropriation and inheritance. This danger is total; it demands total rejection of all history and its prior content—its politics, its language, its aesthetics, its psychology, and its material conditions. In rejecting all that exists because it is old, the Futurists accept that all that exists is a product of past tradition. Their conclusion is apocalyptic: destroy everything because the influence of history is total. I argue that Boccioni's "Manifesto of the Futurist Painters" is terrorized by its own anxiety of historical influence. Drawing on the resources of the genre, Boccioni's text emphasizes contingency as well as absolutism, complete rejection of history and admission that history's inheritance is total. However, the acceptance of the new, the violent creation of the new, is alternately described as inevitable, as impending, as urgently requiring action, and as already occurring. The problem of historical inheritance in the genre is illustrated in its complexity.

Where the historical context of failed revolutions led Marx to account for the problem of historical influence in his *Brumaire*, here again the problem of history and influence remain central. Futurists employ rejection of the past as a strategy for dealing with this problem, the difficulty of accounting for inherited vocabularies, of imagining and constituting something new out of remnants of the old. It is by embracing the technological products of modernity—the machine, the airplane, the train, virility, and war—that Futurists attempt to escape from history.

Gender, Sexuality, and Identity in Futurism

As I suggested in my reading of Marinetti's "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," the shift in pronouns from "we" to "I" and back to "we" highlights the importance of group identity to Futurist values. I would like to focus now on the way in which this group identity is a specifically *masculine* group identity. While Marinetti asserts the political redefinition of the literary "I," it is also only through participation in a "we" that significant action takes place—the "we" in "we jumped."¹⁴⁹ However, this "we" as well as this "I" is undeniably a gendered category, a hyper-masculine category. Not only does Futurism embrace traditional masculine values (progress, violence, strength), it also equates the feminine will history, and thus with all they reject. In Marinetti's manifesto, he urges the reader to "destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind, [we] will fight moralism, feminism, every opportunistic or utilitarian cowardice."¹⁵⁰ In their place, violence is valorized: "We will glorify war—the world's only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gestures of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman."¹⁵¹

Beyond its characterization of gender roles, Futurism had a complex relationship with feminism, and with women.¹⁵² On the one hand, the utility of women for Futurism was reduced to their domestic roles and breeding capacity, as noted by Aimee Pozorski:

"Marinetti's misogyny and belief in Italian race-superiority ultimately inspired

¹⁴⁹ Marinetti, "Futurism," 185.

¹⁵⁰ Marinetti, "Futurism," 187.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁵² Marinetti, in particular, had a peculiar and contradictory relationship with feminism. Natalya Lusty notes that Marinetti was, oddly enough, marginally tied to the women's suffrage movement: he participated in a 1912 suffrage march and he read his manifesto to a women's club in London that included a number of suffragettes in its audience. Lusty suspects that Marinetti was more drawn to the suffragette's militancy than to their platform—he admired "their methods rather than their demands"—in addition, perhaps, to the fact that he shared their opposition to expressions of women's sexuality. Natalya Lusty, "Sexing the Manifesto," 251.

documents declaring women valuable only for reproducing ‘pure’ babies offered up as the future of the Italian race.”¹⁵³ We will see this reduction, in a more complex form, in my reading of a manifesto by Valentine de Saint-Point. In Futurism, principles of destruction, aggression, and masculinity are asserted in opposition to all that is known, weak, static, historic, and feminine. Unless the feminine can be redefined in terms of destruction and aggression, as de Saint-Point attempts to do, it will remain reviled by Futurist philosophy.

I note (and condemn) Futurist notions of racial and masculine superiority, but I also point out that for the Futurists, the desirable subject is gendered as masculine, rather than as gender-neutral (as we saw in the cases of early rights-declarations, where “man” stood in for “human,” and no mention was made of “woman”). The misogyny of the Futurists involved *acknowledgement* of the feminine rather than its pure erasure. Indeed, the superior Futurist masculine subject is defined *in relation to* an inferior feminine subject, which places the two in a binary power relationship. Masculinity is ultimately on the defense against femininity; it is pure aggression and power, but also aggression against and power over the threat of its feminine opposite.¹⁵⁴ While this keeps the feminine devalued in relation to the masculine, it provides the feminine with content, with visibility and presence that can be used to challenge the way in which the feminine is described, as well as the relationship between femininity and actual women. As Cinzia Blum notes,

¹⁵³ Aimee L. Pozorski, “Eugenicist Mistress & Ethnic Mother: Mina Loy and Futurism, 1913-1917” *MELUS* 30:3 (Fall 2005): 43.

¹⁵⁴ Barbara Spackman relates this sort of defensive masculinity to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s notion of “homosexual panic”: “in an effort to stabilize the boundaries between homosociality and homosexuality, Marinetti’s texts superimpose national borders onto sexual ones.” Spackman’s analysis reinforces my reading of Marinetti’s text, as well as the function of gender in the genre. Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): xii.

Woman is consistently co-opted to construct this fiction of power and consistently erased as subject. Ultimately, however, the representation of the feminine also produces meanings in excess of that power, exposing the anxieties that underwrite it. In fact, virulent misogyny, homophobia, the eroticization of violence add up to a paranoid self-definition.¹⁵⁵

This “paranoid self-definition” contributes to the Futurist gesture of inevitable, invited self-destruction, as I illustrated in my reading of Marinetti’s manifesto. Marinetti overtly acknowledges the gendered subject of traditional politics as a masculine subject, but he presents this subject as a defense against an historical experience of masculinity as incomplete and failed—its inadequacy built into its gendered status, its partial status. Futurism speaks in defiance against this status. It attempts to escape the “failed” masculinity of the past—the gendered subject of liberal politics—by invoking a “true” new and improved future masculinity, a purely affirmative subject. Marinetti’s interpretation of the anemia of history through the lens of gender, however, draws from rhetorical precursors to the manifesto genre, such as those illustrated in my reading of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s counter-declaration. The exclusions enacted through liberal vocabularies become understood primarily as gendered exclusions, such that cultural and political crises are interpreted as crises of masculinity.

I point out this acknowledgement of gender in Futurism as an introduction to my reading of two manifestoes written by women active in the avant-garde: Valentine de Saint-Point and Mina Loy. De Saint-Point was a Futurist dancer and her curious position as a Futurist woman sets up my reading of her “Manifesto of Futurist Woman.” Mina

¹⁵⁵ Cinzia Blum, “Rhetorical Strategies and Gender in Marinetti’s Futurist Manifesto,” *Italica*, Vol. 67: 2 (Summer 1990): 209.

Loy had a more complex relationship with Futurism. Her poetry and prose oppose Futurist philosophy, but insofar as such texts were often responses to Futurism, they were (at times) limited by and indebted to their referent. As Pozorski again notes, Loy's writing "was originally intended to reject Futurist ideology, but often was reduced to only adopting it."¹⁵⁶

I have argued that the manifesto genre participates in processes of revision and redefinition in reference to its historical precursors. Stanton's "Declaration of Sentiments" parodies and rewrites "The Declaration of Independence of the Thirteen Colonies." Marx and Engels' "Manifesto of the Communist Party" exposes the limits of political discourse declared in early rights-declaration such as the "Declaration of Independence," while Marx's "Eighteenth Brumaire" resituates the reading of even his own manifesto. The Futurists both extend and subvert Marx's description of society and inevitable revolution. In my reading of de Saint-Point and Loy, I will show that both women participate in the genre insofar as their manifesto-writing is in conversation with previous declarations and manifestoes.

De Saint-Point and Loy complicate the manifestoes of the Futurists by exposing their subject-constructions as gendered and limited; however, both women resist available strategies that parade as explicitly "feminist" to attempt a different kind of subversion: subversion through the writing of manifestoes. Loy, for example, uses the manifesto to oppose both the desexualized politics of the suffragists and the masculinization of the Futurist manifesto. Whereas male Futurists attempted to gender the manifesto as masculine, de Saint-Point and Loy's adoption of what Lusty calls this "masculine polemical mode" foregrounds the genre's negotiation of the problem of historical

¹⁵⁶ Pozorski, "Eugenicist Mistress & Ethnic Mother," 42.

inheritance: de Saint-Point and Loy “both perform their antagonisms within the formal constraints of the genres they also inspire to reformulate.”¹⁵⁷ By using the manifesto, these writers complicate and construct alternative gendered subjectivities by tackling the topic of gender head-on.

Despite their refusal of the term “feminist” and their lack of inclusion in mainstream (liberal) histories of the women’s movement, the strategies avant-garde women employ via manifesto-writing invoke the problems with universality, historical influence, and performativity that continue to concern feminist political theory today. It is my hope that by shifting the context away from the traditional, liberal history of feminism and towards my alternative genealogy of the manifesto, the problems of contemporary theory can be adequately historicized and, perhaps, better understood in terms of their limits. I choose to focus on the texts of these women to offer a revised narrative of feminist politics that includes the avant-garde, as well as to reassert the centrality of gender to the manifesto genre and to liberal politics.

Valentine de Saint-Point, “Manifesto of Futurist Woman”

Valentine de Saint-Point is known less for her manifestoes than for her work as a Parisian dancer and artist.¹⁵⁸ Her four manifestoes include the 1912 “Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F.T. Marinetti),” the 1913 “Futurist Manifesto of Lust,” the 1915 “Theater of the Woman,” and the 1914 “La Métachorie,” which is also her only manifesto written specifically about dance.¹⁵⁹ She met Marinetti in 1912 and performed

¹⁵⁷ Lusty, “Sexing the Manifesto,” 246-247.

¹⁵⁸ Blum, *The Other Modernism*, 105.

¹⁵⁹ Leslie Satin, “Valentine de Saint-Point,” *Dance Research Journal* 22:1 (Spring 1990): 3. For more about Saint-Point, see also Günter Berghaus, “Dance and the Futurist Woman: The Work of Valentine de

her “metadance” (or “superdance,” depending on the translation), a style of dance related less to “steps” than to “geometric shapes” in New York in 1917, by which time she was firmly a Futurist.¹⁶⁰ De Saint-Point’s 1912 Manifesto, however, became known as the first and most popular Futurist manifesto to be written by a woman.¹⁶¹ Although de Saint-Point was a self-described Futurist, she defiantly attacks Futurist definitions and devaluations of femininity through her manifestoes. De Saint-Point redefines both femininity and sexuality through her texts while attempting to maintain her status as Futurist, attempting not to alienate Futurist misogynists by too radically redefining Futurist representations of gender. By decoupling and redefining certain Futurist representations of gender difference, de Saint-Point’s manifesto employs strategies of reversal, strategies enabled by her use of the manifesto genre.

Valentine de Saint-Point’s 1912 “Manifesto of Futurist Woman” was written as an explicit response to Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism.” The status of this manifesto as a reply is foregrounded when de Saint-Point begins her text with a quote by Marinetti’s manifesto where he claims “we will glorify war...and scorn for woman.”¹⁶² As a woman and a Futurist, de Saint-Point argues for the specific role of women in the Futurist movement and philosophy—a role that, I argue, focuses on the power of creation and employs a redefinition of the identities of woman and man that complicates the distinction between gender and identity. This redefinition of gender not only provides for a distinction between masculinity/femininity and male/female, but also asserts the

Saint-Point (1875-1953),” *Dance Research Journal* 11:2 (Autumn 1993): 27-42; M. Barry Katz, “The Women of Futurism,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 7:2 (Autumn 1986-Winter 1987): 3-13.

¹⁶⁰ Katz, “The Women of Futurism,” 3-4; Satin, “Valentine de Saint-Point,” 1, 3.

¹⁶¹ Lusty, “Sexing the Manifesto,” 254.

¹⁶² Valentine de Saint-Point, “Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F.T. Marinetti)” (1912), in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 213.

existence of multiple ways of being feminine. At times, these are reduced to a binary—nurse/warrior, mother/lover—and yet the manifesto opens up room for women to perform femininity otherwise, as well as to perform both femininity and masculinity.

De Saint-Point's manifesto also illustrates the tension between awareness of historical context and contingency—in the case of gender and value, here—and the contradictory, simultaneous appeal to transhistorical “instinct” of women in the service of the future. Despite this contradiction, de Saint-Point's text provides an excellent example of a manifesto that politicizes identity, specifically gender and sexuality; disentangles and inverts the values that are placed on gender definitions and expression; and asserts the centrality of creation, making, calling, and women's creative capacities in the service of destruction of the past.

I see de Saint-Point's manifesto, a response to Marinetti, as continuing a tradition of counter-manifestoes that expose the limits of previous manifestoes to out-do, overturn, or redefine the terms of dissent. While de Saint-Point's text, like that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's “Declaration of Sentiments,” follows as a response to an original, male-authored text, her text is in no way secondary in status. My reading of her response and overt acknowledgement of the masculinity of Futurism foregrounds the centrality of gender in the genre, as well as its centrality to my alternative narrative of the emergence of contemporary problems in feminist political theory. As my reading will show, gender was always already part of the political vocabulary of liberalism; these texts just expose the liberal project as partial (masculine) and thus incomplete. In this case, de Saint-Point embraces the basic tenets of Futurism that Marinetti asserted in his founding manifesto, but as a woman, and thus an object of “scorn,” de Saint-Point turns this devalued identity

into an asset. In her manifesto, I argue, de Saint-Point both accepts the condemnation of her femininity within Futurism and challenges Futurism to separate actual women from their characteristics (i.e., the person from the gendered expression). This separation enables her to identify multiple and contradictory aspects of femininity or “instinct.” She argues that men can exhibit feminine characteristics, that women can exhibit masculine characteristics, and that people rarely act entirely masculine or entirely feminine. In this way, not only is masculinity performed as a defense against the failure of the liberal category of “citizen” to enact its status as complete and universal; femininity is just as performed and therefore just as incomplete.

De Saint-Point also plays with the way in which femininity is devalued, both culturally and within Futurism. In this way, de Saint-Point exhibits an anxiety about legitimization similar to that in other Futurist manifestoes, except her anxiety is about the illegitimacy of gender—of *her* gender. On this last point, de Saint-Point touches on Futurism’s doctrine of rejection and opposition; in a way she “out-Futurists” the Futurists by asserting that not only do women deserve scorn, but everyone deserves scorn—asserting equality by asserting that all are equally worthless.

“They all merit the same scorn”: Gender and History in de Saint-Point

The title of de Saint-Point’s manifesto, “Manifesto of Futurist Woman (A Response to F. T. Marinetti),” situates itself in conversation with masculinist Futurism, and specifically with Marinetti’s representations of Futurism. This conversation with Marinetti is reinforced by de Saint-Point’s placement of a quote from Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” at the beginning of her manifesto: “We will

glorify war—the world’s only hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman.”¹⁶³ In response to Marinetti’s call for “scorn for woman,” de Saint-Point counters with her opening paragraph: “Humanity is mediocre. The majority of women are neither superior nor inferior to the majority of men. They are all equal. They all merit the same scorn.”¹⁶⁴

In these two initial paragraphs, de Saint-Point sets the stage for her rebuttal to Marinetti’s misogyny. De Saint-Point both agrees with and subverts Marinetti’s claim: she agrees that women deserve scorn, but men do as well. This is one form of gender equality: both genders are equally despicable. When we consider this as an assertion of gender equality in terms of traditional liberal assertions of the equal worth of citizens, contrasted to the unequal distribution of rights in practice at this point in history, de Saint-Point’s choice to describe equality as an *absence* of value is key. To be equal is to be equally nothing, equally worthless. De Saint-Point subverts the connection between value and equality in terms of gendered identity in the beginning of her text—not to re-value women here, but to de-value both women and men. By devaluing men as well as women, de Saint-Point resists the assumption that value is something to be desired, that worth merits worth. Thus she rejects the moral and value system assumed in gender categories, which I argue is a strategy to resist recuperation. The old system might want her to *want* value. If the feminine is going to be devalued—if *she* is going to be devalued as a woman—she’s going to take men down with her.

¹⁶³ F. T. Marinetti, “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” qtd. in Valentine de Saint-Point, “Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F. T. Marinetti),” in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 213.

¹⁶⁴ De Saint-Point, “Futurist Woman,” 213.

Gendered Epochs and the Model “Brute Animal”

As she continues her manifesto, de Saint-Point argues that femininity is not the sole terrain of women, and masculinity is not the sole terrain of men. Rather, de Saint-Point connects the ebb and flow of masculinity and femininity in culture throughout various historical epochs: “The whole of humanity has never been anything but the terrain of culture, source of the geniuses and heroes of both sexes. But in humanity as in nature there are some moments more propitious for such a flowering.”¹⁶⁵ She offers a description of human history in terms of the coming and going of certain gendered attributes, as a culture might be more masculine for some years, and then become more feminine. Through the use of language of nature and the changing of seasons, de Saint-Point situates “us” on the edge of a great summer: “In the summer of humanity, when the terrain is burned by the sun, geniuses and heroes abound. We are at the beginning of a springtime; we are lacking in solar profusion, that is, a great deal of spilled blood.”¹⁶⁶ Through her description of historical epochs as changing seasons, de Saint-Point naturalizes her claim that a human “flowering” is about to occur; at the same time, this ebb and flow of history is described in terms of gendered attributes, most notably, virility and violence.

To see all of human history in terms of gendered expression is, I argue, to point to the primacy of gender in history: gender is not accidental to history, but rather it makes up its tone, a distinct character to each epoch. Within epochs, though, all great people contain the best of both masculine and feminine. De Saint-Point writes, “Every superman, every hero...is the prodigious expression of a race and an epoch only because he is composed

¹⁶⁵ De Saint-Point, “Futurist Woman,” 213.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 213.

at once of feminine and masculine elements, of femininity and masculinity: that is, a complete being.”¹⁶⁷ In this description, both the feminine and the masculine are necessary for the flow of history as well as the completion of human experience and life. Both may be equally reviled, but both are also equally necessary. This move of describing gender as reviled but necessary undoes the earlier move of describing equality as equal worthlessness; the value of necessity is placed back onto the categories of gender.

At this point in the manifesto, de Saint-Point shifts to her current epoch, which she describes as a feminine-dominated period, where “*what is most lacking in women as in men is virility.*”¹⁶⁸ Given the current historical situation, de Saint-Point argues, “That is why Futurism, even with all its exaggerations, is right.”¹⁶⁹ However, the problem is not just that women are weak; “we have to impose on everyone, men and women who are equally weak, a new dogma of energy in order to arrive at a period of superior humanity. ...in the period of femininity in which we are living, only the contrary exaggeration is healthy: *we have to take the brute animal for a model.*”¹⁷⁰ What de Saint-Point argues here is that her historical epoch is too feminine, and thus more masculinity is needed to achieve desired balance, to ensure the creation of complete “beings” and fulfilled citizens in history.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 213.

¹⁶⁸ De Saint-Point, “Futurist Woman,” 214.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 214.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 214.

Historical Contingency and Gender Categories

Although “Manifesto of Futurist Woman,” predates fascism, it exhibits the same proto-fascist tendencies represented in Futurist texts written by men. While I do not intend to downplay the relationship between Futurist texts and fascist politics, I propose a reading of de Saint-Point’s text that focuses on its rhetorical treatment of sex, gender, and history in the context of the manifesto genre, rather than a judgment of the adoption of similar rhetoric for fascist political goals. What I find interesting about this passage is that de Saint-Point agrees with the Futurist claim that strength is better than weakness, that masculinity is better than femininity—both for men as well as for women—but that this is the case only given the current historical epoch in which we live, only given the historical context. If we were in a different, more masculine, “virile” context, perhaps de Saint-Point would be calling for increased femininity. In foregrounding the need to take “the brute animal for a model” in our current epoch, she foregrounds the fact that historical conditions call for different cultivation and expression of genders, which also assumes that different gender expression is possible and is contingent on its relation to historical context.

De Saint-Point goes on to challenge any singular definition of women, and of femininity, as pure weakness. Not only does she distinguish between the “woman” and the “female” when she writes “every woman ought to possess not only feminine virtues but virile ones, without which she is just a female.”¹⁷¹ Also, she argues that “Women are Furies, Amazons, Semiramis, Joans of Arc...Cleopatras, and Messalineas: combative women who fight more ferociously than males, lovers who arouse, destroyers who break

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 214.

down the weakest....”¹⁷² These women were not only warriors, but they were “more ferocious” than males. De Saint-Point valorizes the warrior woman who creates life, but does not hold onto this creation, her child; the woman will not be made weak through her connection to the life she creates:

Let the next wars bring forth heroines like that magnificent Catherine Sforza, who, during the sack of her city, watching from the ramparts as her enemy threatened the life of her son to force her to surrender, heroically pointing to her sexual organ, cried loudly: “Kill him, I still have the mold to make some more!”¹⁷³

Through this vivid example, de Saint-Point asserts that women are potentially more powerful than men in their ability to create future life, not in the connection to the past or to possessing that creation. Woman, de Saint-Point argues, gains her strength when not limited by that which she enables to live, when she no longer clings to her children and family, but as past creations, lets them go in service of her future potential. In addition, de Saint-Point describes Sforza’s heroism through the act of exposing her body, which, as Spackman argues, “is thus at once an exhibition of virility—a making public of what should remain private—and an affirmation of femininity, of her sexual difference from men.”¹⁷⁴ This public, defiant sexual display of the female sexual body is described as occurring in the service of war, but its valorization of women as sexual beings opposes typical Futurist representations of women’s domesticity. De Saint-Point counters that women can be both mothers *and* warriors.

¹⁷² Ibid., 214.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 214.

¹⁷⁴ Spackman, *Fascist Virilities*, 40.

In the next section, de Saint-Point again plays with “feminine” characteristics that have been devalued. She accepts the cultural definitions of the feminine, accepts the devaluing of these definitions, but also asserts that these same characteristics can be strengths as well as weaknesses. Since “by instinct, woman is not wise, is not a pacifist, is not good. Because she is totally lacking in measure, she is bound to become too wise, too pacifist, too good during a sleepy period of humanity. Her intuition, her imagination are at once her strength and her weakness.”¹⁷⁵ Here, de Saint-Point revalues the devalued aspects of femininity to argue that these characteristics are expressed differently according to historical epoch, and to assert that these devalued characteristics can also become women’s redemption. De Saint-Point concludes, “So that is why no revolution should be without her. That is why, instead of scorning her, we should address her.”¹⁷⁶ De Saint-Point deftly moves from accepting the devaluation of women provided by the Futurists (Marinetti) to asserting the necessity of women for the revolution. By accepting the Futurist claims about women but placing them in a larger historical context and redefinition of identity, de Saint-Point is able to make a place for women within Futurism other than as objects of scorn. To “address her” is to bring women into a conversation from which they have been excluded: to “hail” or interpellate the feminine subject that has been historically “scorned” and excluded.

¹⁷⁵ De Saint-Point, “Futurist Woman,” 214-215.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

“A Political and Cerebral Error”: Feminism and Instinct

Despite this revaluation of women, de Saint-Point argues against feminism as a “political” and “cerebral error.”¹⁷⁷ She writes, “*We must not give woman any of the rights claimed by feminists. To grant them to her would bring about not any of the disorders the Futurists desire but on the contrary an excess of order.*”¹⁷⁸ Even in de Saint-Point’s rejection of feminism, though, she plays a trick: because Futurism values disorder over order, Futurism should reject feminism (order) but embrace women (disorder). By revaluing disorder and devaluing the label of feminism, de Saint-Point effectively argues for Futurism to accept and value women and the feminine while devaluing the title of feminism—a feminism that devalues women’s “virility” and sexuality, that tries to make women what they are not, which is not any sort of “true” (Futurist) feminism at all, in de Saint-Point’s view. It is worth noting that during this time, the word “feminist” was not often used, so the fact that de Saint-Point engages with the term (if only to dismiss it) illustrates her knowledge of feminism as well as her wish to distance herself from it, to make her pro-woman position translatable to the Futurists in a way that claiming the “feminist” label would not.

De Saint-Point sets up a series of binaries that illustrate different aspects and expressions of femininity: woman “is a warrior or a nurse,” and later, “woman should be mother or lover.”¹⁷⁹ While these binaries limit the ways in which women can express themselves, as well as limit the possibility that a woman could be both parts of the binary simultaneously, de Saint-Point also points to the fact that the expression of one aspect over the other is dependent upon context: “It’s the same woman who, in the same period,

¹⁷⁷ De Saint-Point, “Futurist Woman,” 215.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 215.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 215, 216.

according to the ambient ideas grouped around the day's event, lies down on the tracks to keep the soldiers from leaving for the war or then rushes to embrace the victorious champion."¹⁸⁰ This suggests, again, the connection between context and expression of gender identity, the idea that gender is contingent upon historical and environmental conditions, and as such it can be expressed differently at different times.

However, de Saint-Point also appeals to "instinct" here, which contradicts my more radical reading of her description of gender as contextual and contingent. De Saint-Point writes, "For centuries the feminine instinct has been insulted, only her charm and tenderness have been appreciated," which asserts the existence of a timeless instinctual force, rather than a construction that is malleable and dependent upon historical forces. It is this instinct that de Saint-Point appeals to: "*Woman, become sublimely unjust once more, like all the forces of nature!* Delivered from all control, with your instinct retrieved, you will take your place among the Elements, oppose fatality to the conscious human will."¹⁸¹

Although this tension emerges between the notion of "instinct" and de Saint-Point's emphasis on changes in historical epochs, context and gender expression, the elevation of the feminine to "instinct"—and to injustice, power, and force, all attributes valued by the Futurists—de Saint-Point actively revalues the feminine that has been devalued both by culture and by the Futurists. De Saint-Point focuses on the power of creation, the ability to create children and life, as proof that the feminine, and women, have a privileged relationship to the future and to future life, as well as the ability to enact violence and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 215.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 215.

destruction in the service of bringing about a better future. In the final section, de Saint-Point writes:

Let's Conclude:

...Woman, for too long diverted into morals and prejudices, go back to your sublime instinct, to violence, to cruelty.

For the fatal sacrifice of blood, while men are in charge of wars and battles, procreate, and among your children, as a sacrifice to heroism, take Fate's part. Don't raise them for yourself, that is, for their diminishment, but rather, in a wide freedom, for a complete expansion.

Instead of reducing man to the slavery of those *execrable sentimental needs*, incite your sons and your men to surpass themselves.

You are the ones who make them. You have all power over them.

*You owe humanity its heroes. Make them!*¹⁸²

While de Saint-Point has reduced women's strength to their ability to procreate, she has carefully navigated the devaluation of femininity by both culture and Futurism to revalue certain feminine potential within the inverted value system of the Futurists. This occurs through careful coupling and decoupling of distinctions between femininity and masculinity, women and females, different expressions of feminine instinct (such as mother/lover, nurse/warrior, and the Futurist privileging of disorder and the future), and the creation of the new, which ultimately is the purview of the mother.

Through this valorization of the mother—although a vision of a mother-warrior who cares only for the act of creation, and does not cling to that which she has created—de Saint-Point points to a gap in the previous manifesto written by Marinetti and asserts her

¹⁸² Ibid., 216.

own legitimacy as a Futurist woman. De Saint-Point keeps the definitions of the feminine and of “the good” provided by Futurism, but she makes weakness into strength, takes the singular identity of “woman” and multiplies, complicates, and contests it, all while rejecting “feminism” and asserting the equal impoverishment of men as well as women.

A Tradition of Re-Gendered Counter-Manifestoes

My reading of de Saint-Point’s “Manifesto of Futurist Woman” provides one more example of what I argue is a tradition of manifesto-writing by women with the primary purpose of redefining the gendered subject and asserting this redefinition as political. In the same tradition as Stanton and de Saint-Point, I also argue that Mina Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto” belongs to this tradition of counter-manifestoes that expose the exclusions of prior texts, exclusions that become mapped onto the category of gender. Gender exclusion comes to stand in for the larger exclusions and inadequacies of liberal vocabularies. It is in this way that gender is central to the history of the liberal project and the history of manifesto-writing.

De Saint-Point’s realization about gender’s contingency is enabled by the specific ways in which politics become mapped onto the aesthetics of the manifesto genre during this particular moment in history. Avant-garde authors’ self-conscious play with the aesthetics of the manifesto genre foregrounds the performativity of the political, the ways in which historical influence constructs the experience of reality, and the interpellation of subjectivities. In the case of avant-garde women who write manifestoes, this emphasis on performativity is mapped onto the category of gender. This simultaneous promotion

of gender and performativity occurs through the practice of manifesto-writing. As a rhetorical tradition, the practice of the genre will end up influencing the subsequent understandings of gender as performance that emerges in queer and feminist political theory decades later. It is because of the influence of the manifesto tradition on contemporary theory that I insist on recontextualizing the history of dissent and the emergence of feminism as indebted to the manifesto.

Rita Felski has traced some of the complex ways in which modernity has been understood as gendered, whether as masculine rationality or as feminine excess.¹⁸³ I follow Felski's analysis to foreground the ways in which representations of the failures of liberal politics are voiced through language of gender. An understanding of the liberal project as always already performative and incomplete, a fact exposed through manifestoes, is pivotal to the history of feminist political theory in the narrative that I propose. In the case of both Loy and de Saint-Point, however, traditional (at the time) feminism was not adequately critical for their purposes, nor would it be acceptable within avant-garde circles that were already experiencing anxiety concerning co-optation and legitimacy; to accept traditional feminism ironically was to risk participating in a sanctioned, liberal ideology.

However, avant-garde women's rejection of the label of "feminist" further illustrates the manifesto's role in exposing the inadequacy of available avenues for political dissent and resistance. Just as Marx was concerned about the difference between bourgeois revolutions, which suffer from the fluctuations of their own momentum, and proletarian revolutions, which succeed because of their critical self-reflexivity, Mina Loy exposes early twentieth-century Futurism and feminism as potentially bourgeois revolutions.

¹⁸³ Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Loy's manifesto, I argue, also illustrates an anxiety about historical influence and legitimacy that I traced throughout earlier manifestoes and their precursors in Marx and feminist counter-declarations. Each subsequent manifesto builds on the genre's strategies of overcoming the limits of the past. This fear of influence is based on a description of the reach of the current system as total, as we saw in Marx, and this description and associated anxiety leads to a call for total destruction, total revolution. In Loy, as in the Futurists, this call for total revolution risks its own annihilation. As I will show later in my reading of Dada manifestoes, such total destruction also risks unintelligibility and the inability to translate critiques into current language and categories at all.

“Are you prepared for the Wrench-?”: Mina Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto”

Poet Mina Loy was involved with the Futurists while she lived in Florence, although she rejected the “Futurist” label, noting instead that “Marinetti influenced me—merely by waking me up.”¹⁸⁴ However, her 1914 text “Aphorisms on Futurism,” the first Futurist manifesto written in English, helped to popularize the movement.¹⁸⁵ Loy’s biographers describe her relationship to Futurism as “ambivalent”: Rob Sheffield suspects that “Futurism is just an excuse for Loy to write herself a manifesto. She doesn’t proselytize for Futurism: The Concept so much as for Mina Loy: The Futurist.”¹⁸⁶ Indeed, Loy’s performance of identity was complex. She was known to have changed her name numerous times throughout her life, from Mina Lowy to Mina Lloyd to Ducie Haweis and back again. Loy’s critics represent her as a shadowy, secretive figure, “everywhere

¹⁸⁴ Carolyn Burke, “Mina Loy’s ‘Love Songs’ and the Limits of Imagism,” *San Jose Studies* 8:3 (1987): 37-46, qtd. in Lusty, “Sexing the Manifesto,” 247.

¹⁸⁵ Robert Sheffield, “Mina Loy in Too Much Too Soon: Poetry / Celebrity / Sexuality / Modernity,” in *Literary Review* (Summer 2003): 630.

¹⁸⁶ Sheffield, 630.

but paradoxically nowhere.”¹⁸⁷ When, in Paris in the 1920s, it was rumored that “Mina Loy” didn’t exist, but was a made-up moniker, Loy “turned up at one of Natalie Barney’s notorious salons and formally declared, ‘I assure you that I am indeed a living being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown.’”¹⁸⁸ Her interest in the complexities of identity might have influenced her opposition to elements of both Futurism and suffragist feminism, as well as her renegotiation of gender and sexuality through the writing of her “Feminist Manifesto.”

Written a few months after “Aphorisms on Futurism,” Mina Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto” (1914) begins with the lines “The feminist movement as at present instituted is Inadequate.”¹⁸⁹ This beginning defines the topic of the manifesto (the “feminist movement”) and articulates the present situation as problematic, “inadequate” and in need of attention and change. The way that Loy’s text situates itself in opposition to an existing movement—an existing method of political action and dissent—points to its participation in a specific conversation. Loy is already assumed to be against the misogyny of the Futurists, but she is also suspicious of the obvious and available response to such misogyny via the suffragist understanding of feminism. Loy’s decision to situate her discussion in terms of feminism presumes an anxiety about available methods of dissent and a concern with ineffective strategies for change, an anxiety that I will continue to highlight throughout my reading of her manifesto.

The second lines continue, “Women if you want to realise yourselves—you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illusions must be unmasked—

¹⁸⁷ Lusty, “Sexing the Manifesto,” 245.

¹⁸⁸ Roger Conover, ed., *The Lost Lunar Baedeker: Poems of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), qtd. in Lusty, “Sexing the Manifesto,” 245.

¹⁸⁹ Mina Loy, “Feminist Manifesto” (1914) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 611.

the lies of centuries have got to go—are you prepared for the Wrench-?”¹⁹⁰ Loy addresses “women” as the intended audience of this manifesto, which both situates women as the audience and points to the constitution of women through this address: “Women if you want to realise yourselves.” Where de Saint-Point discussed gender by addressing fellow Futurists, who were presumably men, Loy directs her manifesto to “scorned” women, to the devalued outsiders of Futurist philosophy.

I see Loy’s direct address of women, her pointing to the event of interpellation, as involving both the content of the identity category of “women” but also the desire and need to assert control over self-definition, away from the Futurists: to “realise yourselves.” I note that the “selves” who require realization are plural; Loy is speaking to a collective about a realization of collective identity, both calling on women to recognize themselves in this address and to realize that this collective identity is, in some way, unrealized. Just as Futurism redefined and valorized the “I” through redescription as an empowered, masculine “we,” so does Loy redefine a feminized “we” in an effort to enable the valorization of a feminine “I.” Loy simultaneously appeals to “women” through her address and denies the realized existence of women, a simultaneous appeal to and denial of identity. However, where early declarations such as the “Declaration of Independence” asserted the pre-existence of the subject it addressed and constructed, Loy’s call for women to “realize yourselves” exposes this construction as construction. Loy’s text illustrates its own process as performance and constitutive, rather than masking this gesture, as in other Futurist manifestoes. The exposure of and engagement with the performative aspect of the manifesto’s politics is enabled by Loy’s alternative description of women.

¹⁹⁰ Loy, “Feminist Manifesto,” 611.

Loy's call for self-realization is immediately followed by a prophecy of imminent crisis: "you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval."¹⁹¹ I would suggest that although Loy foresees a "psychological" crisis, her description of this crisis through the writing of a manifesto situates it as a political crisis, as manifestoes are political texts; Loy is exposing the way in which gender is always already political. Here the collective realization of the identity of woman and imminent crisis intersect to demand radical action: "There is no half-measure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about Reform, the only method is Absolute Demolition."¹⁹² Loy calls on women as a collective but unrealized identity to "unmask" their "pet illusions" which involve the "lies of centuries" and the "rubbish heap of tradition," and this invocation of history as "lies" and "rubbish" is involved in the imminent "psychological upheaval" Loy foresees. The mistrust of history and distaste for tradition echoes Futurist values, even though Loy's audience is the "weak" and "scorned" women who were mocked in Futurist manifestoes.

As her reference to the "wrench" implies ("are you prepared for the Wrench-?") the action that is demanded against history and tradition involves preparation and the use of tools. A wrench is a small tool: it can tighten or loosen the smallest parts of a structure; it can be used for building or for demolition. Loy calls on women to use their tools, their "wrenches," for total demolition, for destruction, rather than for reform or small changes; as such "Absolute Demolition" is situated here as the only reasonable response to Loy's description of history/tradition and the impending "upheaval" of the future. Here, we see another example of the manifesto strategy that moves from a description of an inherited

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 611.

¹⁹² Ibid., 611.

social system as total to a call for complete rejection and destruction of that system. Loy's anxiety of historical influence is total enough for her to be suspicious of anything short of "absolute demolition." This call for total destruction signals an awareness of the constructedness of gender, an understanding that the very category of "woman" is a product of the system she seeks to oppose. Only by total destruction can the problem of historical inheritance, of inherited identity categories, be resolved.

"Parasitism, Prostitution—or Negation": Redefinitions of Femininity

Loy continues with her critique of the "first illusion it is to your interest to demolish" which is the "division of women into two classes—the mistress, & the mother," a division that "every well-balanced & developed woman knows that is not true."¹⁹³ The content of this division, Loy argues, is based on the false value of virtue; the falsity of the distinction is backed up by the claim that "well-balanced & developed" women are already aware of its falsity. As such, only women who are not "well-balanced & developed" would not see the falsity of this distinction. I highlight Loy's point that what needs to be destroyed are categories of identity, the "mistress" and the "mother," specific models of gender identity and their binary relationship to one another. Loy not only opposes the mutual exclusivity of these two categories, but their dependence upon one another as a binary pair. As such, both must be destroyed.

In addition, Loy appeals to "nature" to ground this claim: "Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty for expressing herself through all her functions."¹⁹⁴ In contrast to women's "natural" ability for full expression of herself as both mistress and

¹⁹³ Ibid., 611.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 612.

mother, to the “reality” of self-realization beyond “the choice between Parasitism, & Prostitution—or Negation,” women are “looking to men to find out what you are not” and have become blinded by “superstition” and the “mental attitude” towards sex and their character.¹⁹⁵

Although the appeal to “nature” here assumes some objective “true” way in which women might become realized according to their “true nature,” Loy again exhibits a preoccupation with false beliefs and failed promises in the form of “superstition.” In her preoccupation with the risk of falsity, of incomplete or inadequate options for politicization and self-definition, Loy asserts the existence of a true, “natural” alternative, although this can only take the form of an absence, “negation,” and “what you are not.”

According to Loy, the difference between mistress and mother, between parasitism and prostitution, is a difference caused by the imposed value of virtue. Loy writes,

To obtain results you must make sacrifices & the first & greatest sacrifice you have to make is of your ‘virtue’ The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity—is too easy a stand-by—rendering her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value—therefore, the first self-enforced law for the female sex, as a protection against the man made bogey of virtue—which is the principal instrument of her subjection, would be the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity throughout the female population at puberty--.¹⁹⁶

Women, who gain “fictitious value” through their virtue, “physical purity,” and virginity, have sacrificed their potential for “concrete value” and “acquisition...of character”; the

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 611, 613.

¹⁹⁶ Loy, “Feminist Manifesto,” 612.

valuation of virginity has usurped the value of individual character. The radical solution to this is, Loy argues, is to destroy physical purity altogether, whose locus is in the body itself. Such “surgical destruction of virginity” would entail a certain medicalized violence against all young women, the destruction of the bodily location of virtue to alleviate the significance of virtue; in essence the wholesale rape of all young women to alleviate the significance of rape itself.

I see a similarity between Loy’s call for enforced destruction of female virginity and strategies in the manifestoes of both Marinetti and de Saint-Point. Just as the Futurists prophesied and anticipated their own destruction in their old age—“we want it to happen!”¹⁹⁷—Loy usurps the risk of influence, the threat of partial recuperation, through intentional obliteration, through chosen self-destruction of that which is vulnerable to valuation outside of one’s own control. The method through which this escape from history occurs is through surgery, a technological and artificial alteration to the “natural” body. The products of history’s progress—technology—enables the methods for escape from history. De Saint-Point’s answer to the devaluation of women is to describe men and women as equally “merit[ing] the same scorn;” Loy’s answer to the devaluation of non-virgin women is to remove the existence of its valued opposite, to get rid of virginity and virgins altogether, in order to “protect” against this “man-made bogey of virtue.”

In addition, Loy argues for the destruction in women of “the desire to be loved,” another vulnerability outside of one’s control; “the desire for comfortable protection” by men and through marriage; and the “realisation in defiance of superstition that there is

¹⁹⁷ Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909), in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 189.

nothing impure in sex."¹⁹⁸ These "illusions" that women should destroy are again psychological and concern desire; they are internalized perceptions of appearances that blind women from "nature" or reality.

An Open Future and the Limits of Imagination

Loy argues that the end result of this destruction, in addition to the recognition that "Every woman has a right to maternity" separate from and outside of marriage, "will constitute an incalculable & wider social regeneration than it is possible for our generation to imagine."¹⁹⁹ These final lines resist the temptation to describe a utopian future, when women would be able to integrate all aspects of themselves and define their own valued characteristics. Instead, the shape of the future remains undefined, an "incalculable" and unimaginable "regeneration" on the social level.

I note that Loy is resistant to describe any significant content in her vision of the future other than these minimal notes regarding childbirth and marriage. This absence, this keeping-open in her description of the future, points again to the totality of Loy's call for destruction. The boundaries of the changes that Loy foresees are so complete, she cannot even imagine what form they will take, what they will entail, or who women will become. It makes no sense to attempt description of this open future given the limits of available linguistic resources, and so Loy leaves her prophecy intentionally vague as another way to emphasize the totality and devastation of the current situation as well as the urgency of her call for women's self-realization. This leaving-open of the future as a response to a devastating critique of historical influence continues to be a recurring

¹⁹⁸ Loy, "Feminist Manifesto," 613.

¹⁹⁹ Loy, "Feminist Manifesto," 612, 613.

strategy in the genre. The status of history, the narrative it is given, provides motivation and shape to the genre.

My readings of manifestoes by Loy, de Saint-Point, Marinetti, and Boccioni have illustrated ways in which the manifesto emerged as a recognizable genre in the early 20th century. Borrowing from rhetorical precursors in Marx and counter-declarations, these texts exhibit the desire for and simultaneous skepticism about achieving authenticity, uniqueness, and something free from historical influence. As I will show in my readings of Dada manifestoes, as well, much of the avant-garde was preoccupied with legitimization and an anxiety concerning inauthenticity and historical influence.

From Futurism to Dada

Just as I traced a shift between the texts of Marx's Manifesto and Brumaire, a similar shift can be read between the texts of the Futurists and the texts of Dada. The most important historical event that separates the two movements is the First World War. As David Blackbourn notes in the Epilogue of his history of Germany, the war impacted every sector of society, shifting the ways in which nationality, citizenship, and gender were experienced.²⁰⁰ The momentum that grew from the July Crisis brought Europe into a war on a scale that had not been experienced before. The brutal experience of war was demoralizing for many in Europe which led to a general skepticism towards ideals such as honor and valor, as well as the search for authenticity modeled through avant-garde projects. As Adamson notes, the avant-garde prior to the war "agreed that art had a fundamental role to play in overcoming commodification and restoring, or reinventing,

²⁰⁰ David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century: A History of Germany, 1780-1918* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

the qualitative dimension of existence.”²⁰¹ However, “none of them anticipated the enormous cultural impact of the war, especially the way it accelerated trends towards mass society and the democratization of culture,” one effect of which was to “undermine the credibility of the model of avant-garde activity.”²⁰²

Adamson argues that only the Anglo-American strands of the avant-garde survived WWI, with the exception of Dada.²⁰³ I agree that Dada illustrates an intensification of negation, a tendency already at work in the Futurists, which is a reflection of the interwar-era rise of fascist political institutions. As a self-conscious rebuke to the failures of Futurist manifestoes—failures illustrated by the co-optation of Futurist sentiments into fascist ideology—Dada attempted to distance itself from what was now avant-garde “history” through overt exposure of its rhetorical strategies, strategies used to escape historical influence and to account for the experience of its failed war-revolutions.²⁰⁴

Interwar-era distrust in traditional values extended to gender as well: “if the war dehumanized, it also emasculated.”²⁰⁵ Thus, even the crisis of masculinity (and defense against this crisis) that is so prominent as a form of defensive overcompensation in descriptions of Futurism, which predates WWI, contrasts with exposure and nihilism in the texts of Dada. The masking of the performative construction of Futurist manifestoes gave way to the practice of deconstructing the manifesto in Dada. I relate this shift in the

²⁰¹ Adamson, “Avant-garde modernism and Italian Fascism: cultural politics in the era of Mussolini,” 232.

²⁰² Adamson, 232.

²⁰³ Adamson, 232.

²⁰⁴ However, Dada is not the Brumaire to Futurism’s Communist Manifesto. Both Futurism and Dada illustrate an overwhelming concern with the problems of historical influence and the dangers of co-optation in a way that was not present in Marx’s Manifesto. In addition, the various manifestoes written by women in the avant-garde provide internal challenges and overt gendering/sexualization of Futurism in a way not seen in Marx’s Manifesto—Marx understood liberal exclusions in terms of the primacy of class, not gender. As I argued in the previous chapter, the *combination* of critical movements’ calls for idealist revolution as well as their tendencies towards negation, suspicion, and parody constitute the critical tradition of the manifesto genre.

²⁰⁵ Blackburn, 467.

practice of manifesto-writing to a historical shift brought about by the realities of the First World War. The experience of the Great War destabilized notions of historical progress and allowed a new kind of manifesto, a hyper-manifesto, to emerge. This hyper-manifesto, however, was also an anti-manifesto.

Unlike Futurism, Dada openly and proudly mocks its own manifesto as it composes it, through the process of its composition. As shown in my readings of Futurist manifestoes, specific rhetorical antecedents regarding the problem of history combined with specific kinds of mapping of the political onto the aesthetic to constitute the genre. Dada takes this experimentation to extremes, and through this experimentation Dada illustrates the tensions and critiques that emerge as part of the genre. In many ways, Dada manifestoes are the best manifestoes in which to examine the genre because of their experimentation, because of their attempt at negation and mockery of the genre's contradictions. In their writing of multiple manifestoes and anti-manifestoes, Dada also exposes the manifesto genre as a genre of parody in conversation with previous texts.

I provide a brief overview of Tristan Tzara's 1918 "Dada Manifesto" as well as a more detailed analysis of the 1921 manifesto "Dada Excites Everything" to illustrate ways in which Dada manifestoes grapple with problems of history, the performative, and legitimacy. The 1921 text "Dada Excites Everything" is notable in that its signatories deny any nationality; its description of Dada in terms of contradictions, questions, negations, and rejection; the treatment of Dada as "speech"; its contradictory temporality; a concern with the fake and with forgeries; and the status of Dada as non-artistic vis-à-vis other avant-garde movements (such as Futurism). However, I argue that in focusing on the formal features of the genre, in emptying and resisting content, Dada manifestoes

protect against avant-garde anxiety about recuperation by risking unintelligibility and practicing nihilistic negation. These texts play with the mapping of the political onto the aesthetics of the genre, and they push this process to its limit, also pushing the understanding of the political as performative.

“Idon’tgiveadamnism”: Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto”

From the beginning of Tristan Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto,” the manifesto form is explicitly noted: “To proclaim a manifesto you have to want: A.B.C., thunder against 1,2,3.”²⁰⁶ Tzara immediately points to the typical feature of enumeration and resistance in the genre—the need to gain attention, to make demands, and to protest against something, no matter what it is. Dada’s “Idon’tgiveadamnism” challenges the usefulness of any manifesto, even the one that he is writing, that the reader has just begun to read; “their readers snicker and keep going: what is the use?”²⁰⁷ The Dada manifesto, then, must be an anti-manifesto:

I am writing a manifesto and I don’t want anything, I say however certain things and I am on principle against manifestoes, as I am also against principles.... I am writing this manifesto to show that you can do contrary actions together, in one single fresh breath; I am against action; for continual contradiction, for affirmation also, I am neither for nor against and I don’t explain because I hate common sense.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁶ Tristan Tzara, “Dada Manifesto” (1918) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 297.

²⁰⁷ Tzara, “Dada Manifesto,” 297.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

Despite the uselessness of manifestoes, the lack of any “final Truth,” the fact that “all action is vain,” Dadaists insist: “we have the right to proclaim.”²⁰⁹ Not only does this proclamation resist content (“DADA MEANS NOTHING”); the “we” that proclaims resists itself as well:

I always speak for myself because I don’t want to convince anyone, I don’t have the right to drag others along in my current, I am not obliging anyone to follow me.... So DADA was born of a desire for independence, of a distrust of the community. Those who belong to us keep their freedom. We don’t recognize any theory.²¹⁰

Dada’s “we” contradicts the independence of its “I,” its proclamation mocked by the absence of any content. The proclamation itself remains unfinished: “I proclaim the opposition of all cosmic faculties to this gonorrhoea of a putrid sun coming out of the factories of philosophic thought, the fierce battle with all the possible means of.”²¹¹ The proclamation ends there, sentence unfinished, means of opposition left empty and undefined.

“No Nationality”: Signatories of “Dada Excites Everything”

Tzara’s “Dada Manifesto” was written in 1918, at the end of WWI. A few years later, in 1921, the group-authored “Dada Excites Everything” provides another example of the complexity of Dada manifestoes. The title of the text “Dada Excites Everything” is printed in all-capital, block letters, with a series of smaller lines to the right of the title. These small lines of text—given significance due to their placement next to, on the same

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 298, 299, 302.

²¹⁰ Ibid., 301, 302.

²¹¹ Ibid., 303.

horizon as, the document's title—read, in parentheses, “The signatories of this manifesto live in France, America, Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, etc., but have no nationality.”²¹² I would juxtapose this statement of “no nationality” on behalf of the authors of the manifesto with the signatories of the “Declaration of Independence,” where the authors sign the Declaration as representatives of “the people” of the newly-created nation-state. In the Declaration, “the people” are assumed to pre-exist the act of declaration itself, such that these “people” are appealed to as the legitimate basis for the Declaration. The Declaration appeals to, as its basis, the very citizens it constitutes. Even in the cases of Marx, the Futurists, de Saint-Point, and Loy, most manifestoes are written as claims made to and/or on behalf of some sort of collective or group. This group may not be connected to an emergent nation-state, as in the Declaration, but rather can take the form of a gender, the “proletariat,” or the “young artists of Italy.”

By rejecting a claim to “having” a nationality, the signatories of “Dada Excites Everything” reject group membership in a national identity. In this process, the signatories also disentangle citizenship from location: these authors live in a place but do not claim that state as their “nationality.” These signatories are not citizens. If that is the case, then, to where do they belong? What is the power structure and institutional architecture within which they make their claims? How has the rejection of citizenship, of nationality, altered the terrain of the interpellative process?

This rejection of national belonging is placed at the beginning of the text, although it is set off to one side in small typeface and in parentheses: “(The signatories of this manifesto live in France, American, Spain, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Belgium, etc.,

²¹² “Dada Excites Everything,” (1921) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 290.

but have no nationality.)”²¹³ Such placement signals importance, while the typeface and parentheses minimize importance. This simultaneous emphasis on national location, of “living in,” combined with the rejection of “having” a nationality, highlights the relationship between subjectivity and citizenship, between individual and group identity, and its relationship to the performative and constitutive functions of the manifesto and public declaration. This highlighting is intended to point to the link between citizenship and the ability to make claims in the public sphere. By eschewing nationality, this manifesto’s signatories question the limits of who counts in the public sphere, of who is able to legitimately make claims, to write manifestoes, and how this is connected to nationality, group identity, and citizenship. By rejecting established forms of national membership, Dada uses the text to challenge the sense of “belonging” constituted via liberal vocabularies—to expose this constitution of citizenship and nationality as a process, an incomplete performance. Through this small parenthetical remark, the authors challenge the status of the category of the citizen.

My reading is reinforced by the fact that the manifesto later addresses itself to “Citizens, comrades, ladies, gentlemen” and again, later, to “Citizens.”²¹⁴ This addressee/these addressees are hailed as “you” throughout the majority of the manifesto, although the only “we” emerges as an “us” near the end of the text, when a request is made for someone to define Dada, even though this is the manifesto, a genre understood to participate in group definition: “50 francs reward to the person who finds the best way to explain DADA to us.”²¹⁵ Whereas most manifestoes are intended to constitute and found a group identity, this manifesto leaves the content of this “we” open, almost

²¹³ “Dada Excites Everything,” 290.

²¹⁴ “Dada Excites Everything,” 291.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 291.

forgoing the words “us” or “we” entirely, and when using “we,” doing so in a statement of unknowing, of ignorance as to who “we” would be, how “we” Dadaists might be explained.

I read this questioning and rejection of group identity through the removal of pronouns “we” and “us” in the manifesto as a reconstitution of subjectivity through language, participation in political activity (manifesto-writing and activism), and its connection to nationality. The signatories of “Dada Excites Everything” separate and question the function of manifestoes in declaring identity as political. This manifesto exposes this process as contingent, partial, contradictory, and unsuccessful. This exposure reveals the limits of the category of the citizen and the bankruptcy of its founding gesture, the declaration, the constitution, and representation of “the citizen” through signatories.

“Dada doesn’t speak”

It is interesting that rather than complicating the “you” of the addressee, this manifesto chooses the site of the “we” and of Dada to make its critique and challenge to subjectivity. Throughout the manifesto, Dada is described in terms of contradiction, questioning, negation, and opposition. The text asks “Has Dada ever spoken to you” in order to later claim “Dada doesn’t speak. Dada has no fixed idea. Dada doesn’t catch flies”; and later still, to claim “if you find all your ideas useless and ridiculous, know that it is Dada beginning to speak to you.”²¹⁶ Similarly, the manifesto contradicts itself when it first claims “Dada knows everything. Dada spits everything out” and then, later, “Dada

²¹⁶ Ibid., 290.

is never right.”²¹⁷ These repeating contradictions keep the definition of Dada in constant flux, as a constant reversal, its content consistently slipping away.

I focus for a moment on the contradictory statements concerning Dada and speech. “Dada Excites Everything” begins with this question, “Has Dada ever spoken to you?” and follows up with a series of “about”s—“about Italy, about accordions, about women’s pants....”²¹⁸ On the left of this list, which traces vertically down the page, are a series of three “YES-NO” as equivalent options to the series of “about”s. At the conclusion of this series, the text centers the words “NEVER NEVER NEVER” in block letters, followed by the contradiction: “Dada doesn’t speak. Dada has no fixed idea. Dada doesn’t catch flies.”²¹⁹

The fact that the series of what I’m calling the “about”s reads like a list, straight from top to bottom, invokes the familiar feature of enumeration in the manifesto genre. However, the three instances of “YES-NO” to the left of the list suggests the list might be a quiz of sorts, along with the expectation for an answer. This invitation to consider an answer is followed by the complete rejection of the random and multiple options provided through the repetition of “NEVER NEVER NEVER” and “Dada doesn’t speak.”

I suggest that this series of “about”s and their subsequent rejection relates to a point I made earlier in my discussion of the Futurists. In my reading of Marinetti’s “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” I questioned Marinetti’s use of the preposition “of” when he wrote “we will sing of” violence, speed, technology, etc.²²⁰ This linguistic distance

²¹⁷ Ibid., 290, 291.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 290.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 290.

²²⁰ Marinetti, “Futurism,” 187.

between the “we” and the thing of which “we sing” suggests a distinction between the action and the singing, which I read as a possible denial of the ability of the manifesto (as “singing”) to be a form of action, to be violence. The series of “about”s in “Dada Excites Everything” invokes this question, as the text asks whether Dada has “ever spoken to you...*about* odors, *about* salads, *about* genius...”²²¹ This question, this hesitation about the status of manifesto as action, is suggested in these lines, but as soon as this tension emerges, the entire problem is rejected through the “NEVER NEVER NEVER” and “Dada doesn’t speak.” I read this as a way in which “Dada Excites Everything” self-consciously points to its own status as a manifesto, including its own uncertainties and complications, only to reject the very thing it has shown itself to be: to speak itself as silence in “Dada doesn’t speak.”

In addition, reading this list as a series of questions, an invitation for an answer, foregrounds the process of invitation, call and response, through which subjectivization occurs. The text is used to play with this process of “hailing” the reader by posing the question of whether interpellation occurs at all in the text: “Has Dada ever spoken to you.” Such emphasis on linguistic action, on conversation, heightens awareness of the way in which the manifesto, as a genre, participates in an ongoing negotiation of categories and strategies in relation to other, previous manifestoes.

Beginning, Always, “NEVER NEVER NEVER”

A problem that often emerges in the manifesto genre, visible in the precursor of Marx’s Brumaire, is a concern with historical influence: how to account for one’s past. In the manifesto, a strategy that is often used in an attempt to overcome or escape this

²²¹ “Dada Excites Everything,” 290, emphasis added.

problem occurs through a totalizing description of a tragic history, urgency of action in the immediate present, and promise of an imminent, utopian future. However, these various gestures, intended to provide rhetorical urgency and legitimacy to manifestoes, threaten to expose the manifesto as “mere” performance, as posturing. For example, my reading of Marx and the Futurists pointed out the complexity between claims of an inevitable future and the immediate imperative to act. Through the practice of manifesto-writing, authors are able to combine such competing gestures to describe revolution as presently occurring, as about to occur, or as already occurred.

Such temporal slippage is also evident in “Dada Excites Everything,” but I argue that it is self-consciously invoked as a way of exposing this aspect of the manifesto genre. Such slippage and contradiction is evident in the transitions between “Has Dada ever spoken,” “Dada doesn’t speak,” and “It is Dada beginning to speak.”²²² Elsewhere, Dada as timeless history is invoked in “Dada has always existed” and “The Holy Virgin was already a Dadaist” despite the fact that “Dada is never right.”²²³ Where previous manifestoes strategically attempted to mask this temporal slippage, Dada manifestoes expose the slippage as part of their own strategy.

Danger of Fakery and Forgery; Dada as Anti-Aesthetic

Throughout this chapter, I have illustrated ways in which the manifestoes that emerged from various avant-garde art movements were overwhelmingly concerned with questions of legitimization, the danger of co-optation, and a desire for uniqueness and authenticity paired with skepticism about its possibility; these gestures are what make up

²²² Ibid., 290.

²²³ Ibid., 291.

the manifesto as an identifiable genre. The risk of co-optation, particularly in this historical moment, is also self-consciously reflected in “Dada Excites Everything,” when the text warns “Citizens, comrades, ladies, gentlemen, Beware of forgeries! Imitators of Dada want to present Dada in an *artistic* form which it has never had.”²²⁴ The fact that such legitimization concerns were wrapped up with the status of the artist, as I have argued, is reflected in the conflation of forgery with Dada as “artistic form” in this text. Dada is concerned with fakes, with imitators, but particularly with imitators who attempt to make Dada into a “merely” artistic movement, a movement whose separation from politics fails to question and reformulate the art/politics relationship. Unlike other avant-garde movements—the text lists cubism, expressionism, futurism, and ultraism, to name a few—Dada rejects its status as an “artistic” form. Rather, Dada foregrounds the process by which political significance becomes infused in specific aesthetic forms, as happens in the emergence of the manifesto as a genre. By playing with and deconstructing the form of the manifesto, Dada exposes the process by which politics take on an aesthetic shape, and subsequently how the practice of specific aesthetic can stand in as a form of political action. Dada presents itself as having always already been political.

In “Dada Excites Everything,” Dada’s exposure of the genre’s rhetorical strategies takes the form of parody and mockery—itsself a feature of the manifesto. “Dada Excites Everything” tells us a lot about the manifesto genre at the same time that it pokes fun at its limits and contradictions. Dada does not, however, pretend to offer some sort of superior alternative; Dada is not yet sure what Dada is, other than slippage, change,

²²⁴ Ibid., 291.

rejection, and “PURE IDIOCY.”²²⁵ “Dada Excites Everything,” as a manifesto, embraces contradiction, multiplies it, overtly performs it, and exposes the terms of its performance throughout.

As is also the case in Tristan Tzara’s 1918 “Dada Manifesto,” Dada manifestoes enact self-conscious, parodic, and overt exposure of the genre’s features and complexities. One effect of such parody is the erasure of content as a result of this focus on form. As Dada manifestoes retreat into self-conscious ironic distance, parody, and rejection for rejection’s sake, they risk losing all content and intelligibility and becoming empty noises. Dadaists have seen the gaps and limits of attempts at enacting meaningful speech, the silences that inhabit declaration; they have chosen to utter noise without meaning instead of risking recuperation that comes with translation, instead of risking the partiality and exclusion that comes with having content. Dada would rather not assert than to assert something incomplete, so all Dada will assert is a parody of assertion.

While the manifesto genre provides rhetorical resources with which to criticize prior manifestoes and movements—in this case, the use of Dada manifestoes to criticize the avant-garde, as well as manifestoes as such—Dada elevates parody to a new degree of intensity. Rather than risk failing to deliver on a promise of something better, Dada resorts to pure negation. This aspect of Dada manifestoes has been noted by art historians and cultural theorists, with whom I agree. For example, Luca Somigli notes that Dada constructs an “‘empty’ avant-garde in which the performance of by now traditional gestures and procedures serves to reveal the bankruptcy of the very project of

²²⁵ Ibid., 291.

defending the autonomy and difference of ‘art’.”²²⁶ John Erickson also describes Dada in terms of resistance, negation, and revision; as a “non-movement” Dada uses “manifestoes to declare its presence and non-alignments.”²²⁷ Calinescu concurs: “The overwhelming importance of the negative element in the actual programs of diverse avant-gardes shows that ultimately they are committed to an all-encompassing nihilism, whose unavoidable consequence is self-destruction (here dadaism with its suicidal aesthetics of ‘antiart for antiart’s sake’ is an example in point.”²²⁸ In its effort to escape the co-opting influence of history, Dada risks sacrificing intelligibility in exchange for self-consciousness, contradiction, and a gesture of collapse. The Dada manifesto as a critical project reflects the strategies of anarchism, especially when we are told, as Tzara writes in “Mr. AA the Antiphilosopher Has Sent Us This Manifesto”: “Stick your damned fist in your own damned face and drop dead, all of you.”²²⁹

A sort of impending doom that haunts the manifesto genre’s appeals to inevitability, skepticism towards historical influence, and concern with redefinition becomes outright cynicism in Dada, where it was hidden or resisted in earlier manifestoes. Marx described the inevitability of the proletarian revolution as well as the risk of co-optation, the difference between proletarian and bourgeois revolutions. Similarly, Futurists understood that they could not completely reject history, for they, too, were its products; this knowledge haunts Marinetti’s manifesto as post-script and outright denial backed up with the threat of violence. In Dada, risk has turned into paranoid defeat; the manifesto

²²⁶ Luca Somigli, *Legitimizing the Artist: Manifesto Writing and European Modernism 1885-1915*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003): 56.

²²⁷ John D. Erickson, “The Apocalyptic Mind: The Dada Manifesto and Classic Anarchism.” *Manifestoes and Movements*. French Literature Ser. 7. (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1980): 100.

²²⁸ Calinescu, 96.

²²⁹ Tristan Tzara, “Mr. AA the Antiphilosopher Has Sent Us This Manifesto” (1920) in Mary Ann Caws, ed., *Manifesto: A Century of Isms* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001): 309.

has emptied of all content and retreated into the safety of the “fuck you,” the rejection of vulnerability that comes with speech and with subjectivity. Dada is safe and Dada is never wrong because Dada says nothing. Dada does not exclude anyone because Dada refuses to include anyone. It has “resolved” the tensions of the manifesto by opting to make nothing, to manifest nothing.

This “play” with the status of history reflects a preoccupation in avant-garde manifestoes with the dangers of co-optation as well as a desire to escape historical influence. While this concern was evident in Marx’s *Brumaire* following the failure of the 1848 revolutions, it is in the avant-garde manifestoes where these problems constitute the manifesto as an identifiable genre. I believe that this preoccupation with the problem of history has to do with the fact that these texts were composed during a period of crisis and war, a period where modernization began to seem more like apocalypse than infinite progress, where competing political ideologies were taking hold at alarming speed. As Elizabeth Goodstein has noted, the advent of modernity brought about a change in the way in which individuals experienced time; the value placed on history as progress brought about an experience of boredom or “wasted” time. Citing the work of Reinhart Koselleck, Goodstein argues that “the concept of progress redefined history itself.” The way in which modern time was understood shifted, such that

The modern “semantics of historical time” delimited a new form of futurity marked on the one hand by its “unknownness” and on the other by its ever-increasing proximity to the present. The profound significance of the modern notion of progress follows from the convergence of these factors. The idea of progress meant that action was oriented toward an uncertain, yet imminent

future—and thus that in contrast to the world of tradition, past experience no longer provided a reliable orientation for human life.²³⁰

The experiences of WWI perpetuated this shift in the way in which time and history were understood, such that the problem of historical inheritance became so overwhelming, the only strategy to escape it was through nihilistic negation. The relationship between the liberal political understanding of time as progress and avant-garde obsession with the future are intertwined. As Matei Calinescu has noted, “It was modernity’s own alliance with time and long-lasting reliance on the concept of progress that made possible the myth of a self-conscious and heroic avant-garde in the struggle for futurity.”²³¹ While this self-conscious heroism is evident throughout the manifestoes of the Futurists, Dada reflects a larger crisis in the way history and time were experienced.²³² Rather than declaring the coming of a better and brighter future against the tyranny of the past, Dada attempts to escape the influence of history through contradiction, reversal, and nihilism.

De-humanization and the Avant-Garde

In *Five Faces of Modernity*, Matei Calinescu describes modernity as an historical process of de-humanization, a process of deconstructing the modern—what I would call liberal—concept of “man.” Just as I trace the antecedents to the manifesto genre to Marx, Calinescu also traces the beginnings of this attack on humanism to Marx as well.

He writes:

²³⁰ Elizabeth S. Goodstein, *Experience without Qualities: Boredom and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005): 122.

²³¹ Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987): 95.

²³² For an interesting interpretation of Dada montage in the context of trauma, see Brigid Doherty, “‘See: We Are All Neurasthenics!’ or, The Trauma of Dada Montage,” *Critical Inquiry* 24: 1 (Autumn 1997): 82-132.

The first symptoms of the crisis of Man's concept in the thought of the social and political avant-garde are clearly present in Marx, and there is little doubt, on a more general plane, that the de-individualization (if not the downright dehumanization) of history was to a large extent a contribution of nineteenth-century revolutionary radicalism. In Marxism, for instance, Man has often been described as an essentially bourgeois concept, the ideological heritage of the revolutionary struggles of the bourgeoisie against feudalism.²³³

Like Calinescu, I trace the emergence of the avant-garde as part of an experience of crisis, of dissatisfaction with liberal vocabularies for describing "man." This dissatisfaction found expression through the rhetorical strategies of the genre of the manifesto. Through the manifesto, the avant-garde redefined traditional liberal concepts by exposing "man" as masculine (and thus a failed universal), as suffering from historical influence, and as a subjectivity that is performative as well as political. I also situate this process of avant-garde manifesto-writing in historical context. With the advent of industrialization and two World Wars, the first half of the 20th century illustrated the products of liberal, capitalist society as leading to destruction and genocide rather than perfection and progress. The dehumanization brought on by wars within liberal politics led to the de-humanization of the concept of identity through the manifesto. This de-humanization took the form of total rejection of history and an obsession with co-optation and authenticity.

By resituating the avant-garde within the context of the manifesto, a genre of intersection between politics and aesthetics, I counter traditional understandings of the

²³³ Calinescu, 126.

avant-garde (and of the manifesto) as either artistic or political, but not both, not as negotiating the ways in which we understand these two terms as separate, not as exposing ways in which the artistic and the political are always already intertwined. My reading of texts from the Futurists and Dada show how the political act of manifesto-writing took on a specific form—became recognized as a formal genre—within this period, such that to write a manifesto became the way in which one politicized something.

In addition, my reading of these texts traces ways in which representations of history and culture become gendered, and as such, the contestation of gender categories becomes a way in which political contestation occurs. The experience of crisis of liberal society in the early 20th century was experienced as a crisis of masculinity; avant-garde women used the genre of the manifesto as a way to renegotiate the available gender concepts as offered by both masculinist Futurists as well as liberal suffragists. The centrality of gender to my readings resituates the avant-garde within a tradition of feminist criticism, although contemporary narratives of feminist history (as well as avant-garde women writers) generally did not and do not identify the avant-garde as feminist. As I will argue in the coming chapters, however, it is beneficial to retell the story of feminist history in terms of the manifesto in a way that connects the avant-garde to the “second wave.” When we recontextualize the history of feminist thought as a history of manifesto-writing, a more nuanced and complex understanding of “the political” emerges. Such an understanding integrates politics, aesthetics, and the performative in a way that redefines the liberal project and historicizes contemporary debates in feminist political theory.

Chapter Four

“SCUM,” History, and the Strategy of the “Post”: Valerie Solanas and *SCUM Manifesto*

Valerie Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto* gained notoriety in 1968 when Solanas shot and wounded Andy Warhol and his colleagues. After voluntarily surrendering to police, Solanas told the press: “Read my manifesto and it will tell you what I am.”²³⁴ The media and critics have followed her directive. Since the late 1990s, Solanas’ manifesto has been analyzed in the context of queer theory (Winkiel), the history of manifestoes (Lyon), and the history of avant-garde art performance (Harding), to mention a few.²³⁵ In general, these analyses have read the manifesto in the context of Solanas’ violent act. When addressing the manifesto itself, her text is most often read as participating in and contesting a specific avant-garde and/or anarchic feminist tradition. Janet Lyon argues that the text is part of an “anarcho-libertarian tradition according to which individual liberation is linked to the overthrow of capitalism.”²³⁶ James Harding argues that “as an event, indeed as a performance, the shooting of Andy Warhol thus placed Solanas

²³⁴ Howard Smith, “The Shot That Shattered the Velvet Underground” in *Village Voice* 13:34 (6-13 June 1968): 54.

²³⁵ Solanas’ life and manifesto regained fame after the 1996 cinematic release, *I Shot Andy Warhol*, reasserted Solanas into the popular imagination. As I have been working on this project, I have often had the opportunity to explain to people that I am writing about manifestoes. In response, the overwhelming majority asked, “Will you be writing about the SCUM Manifesto, then?” The fact that Solanas’ manifesto was mentioned more often than, say, the “Manifesto of the Communist Party,” attests (if only anecdotally) to the sustained visibility of Solanas’ text in popular culture.

²³⁶ Janet Lyon, *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999): 174.

directly within the radical anti-art traditions of the avantgarde even as her act profoundly tested those traditions.”²³⁷

Because of her notoriety, some of the writing about Solanas provides useful analysis regarding the function of manifestoes generally, especially the relationship between the text and acts of violence, or between text and events/acts generally. We know that Solanas wrote the manifesto prior to the violent act of shooting Warhol; we know that when questioned, she referred back to the manifesto as explanation for her act. We can assume that Solanas intended the text and her act to be seen in relation to one another. I would like to push this discussion of the relationship between Solanas’ act and text. I provide a reading of Solanas’ manifesto as a text that foregrounds the performativity of the political, exposes liberal notions of the citizen-subject as gendered and inadequate, and attacks the problem of historical influence by invoking what I call the “post”: a post-sexual, post-gendered utopian future.

Solanas’ text serves as evidence of a forgotten thread within the critical tradition, a thread that connects the avant-garde of the early 20th century to the women’s and gay/lesbian liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Just as I resituated the manifestoes of the avant-garde within a tradition of the manifesto, I also resituate Solanas’ manifesto within the context of the genre, a tradition that foregrounds gender as a strategy for exposing the limitations of liberal politics.

Solanas has been discussed in relation to the avant-garde of the 1960s, on the one hand, and as influential to feminist politics on the other. I complicate these divergent narratives by foregrounding her text as a form of political and aesthetic action. Solanas’

²³⁷ James M. Harding, “The Simple Surrealist Act: Valerie Solanas and the (Re)Assertion of Avantgarde Priorities,” *The Drama Review* 45, 4 (T172), (Winter 2001): 147.

text is a political/aesthetic intervention against the separation of these spheres; her text functions to redefine the purview of the political. While the “hiding” of gender that occurred in previous manifestoes, such as those of the Futurists, was exposed by women such as Mina Loy and Valentine de Saint-Point, Solanas continues this tradition of exposing the gendering of the avant-garde, the continued presence of an unexamined masculine universal within the project. By gendering the avant-garde, Solanas reasserts the relationship between aesthetics and politics.

I also situate Solanas within the manifesto tradition as a way of retelling the narrative of the history of feminist political theory. In my reading, Solanas serves as a bridge between the politics of the avant-garde and the aesthetics of 1970s feminist politics. As I will argue in the next chapter, one reason that I resituate Solanas within the context of the manifesto tradition rather than that of just the avant-garde or just 1970s feminism is to challenge the rhetoric of the “second wave” of feminism in the U.S.

I address a number of important aspects of Solanas’ manifesto that relate to my discussion of the manifesto genre as exemplary of a tradition of dissent against vocabularies of liberal politics. My reading shows that Solanas foregrounds gender (specifically, failed masculinity) as central to contemporary culture and history. She contests and revalues gender categories while exposing their performative aspects by using the unlikely discursive tools of scientific, natural, and psychological language against masculine society. Solanas redefines the subject of traditional liberal politics. An emerging, post-sexual category of SCUM females is birthed through the manifesto as evolving through sexuality, anti-sexuality, and, I argue, (yet unspoken) post-sexuality. This evolution of gender into the “post” and her reluctance to name it, to give it content,

illustrates Solanas' concern with co-optation; her use of the manifesto genre enables her to analyze the difficult relation between language as constitutive as well as critical of subjectivity, experience, and what "counts" as the political.

Ultimately, Solanas' utopia is summoned only in terms of an inevitability and an agenda, a placeholder, a "post" that is as-yet-unspoken, as-yet-unintelligible. But her manifesto, I argue, influenced other writers within the second wave of feminism in the U.S., particularly lesbian feminists. I locate Solanas as central to the story of the second wave—to connect backwards to the avant-garde as well as forward to the emergence of the queer—to re-evaluate the history of the second wave and its indebtedness to the history of discourses of dissent, that is, the genre of the manifesto.

Social Consequences of Masculinity as a "Deficiency Disease"

Solanas begins her manifesto with a stark description of the status quo as intolerable for women and in dire need of change:

Life in this society being, at best, an utter bore and no aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex.²³⁸

Solanas backs up her call for the destruction of men by explaining that the one purpose they might have, reproduction, has now been usurped by reproductive technologies. Such technologies have rendered men useless. But to Solanas, men are beyond useless. Solanas derogates masculinity through multiple vocabularies in addition to that of utility: the language of science, evolution, and genetics; the language of psychology,

²³⁸ Valerie Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto* (1967), (San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1996): 1.

psychoanalysis, and interpersonal relationships. In her description, these various ways of describing male deficiency reinforce one another. Solanas describes men as a “biological accident,” “incomplete female, a walking abortion, aborted at the gene stage,” “deficient, emotionally limited; maleness is a deficiency disease and males are emotional cripples.”²³⁹ Her description of genetic deficiency leads to a discussion of psychological and mental deficiency:

The male is completely egocentric, trapped inside himself, incapable of empathizing or identifying with others, of love, friendship, affection, or tenderness. He is a completely isolated unit, incapable of rapport with anyone. His responses are entirely visceral, not cerebral; his intelligence is a mere tool in the service of his drives and needs....²⁴⁰

As such, Solanas argues, man is a “half-dead, unresponsive lump” who is “trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes.”²⁴¹

Solanas’ description of men is total—she leaves no room for exceptions in her opening description of masculinity—and this description is normalized through Solanas’ use of the language of science, genetics, evolution, and nature: “he is...eaten up with guilt shame, fear, and insecurity, feelings rooted in male nature, which the most enlightened training can only minimize.”²⁴² Solanas compares men to apes, to animals, but “to call man an animal is to flatter him; he’s a machine, a walking dildo. It’s often said that men use women. Use them for what? Surely not pleasure.”²⁴³

²³⁹ Solanas, 1.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 1-2.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 2.

²⁴² Ibid., 2.

²⁴³ Ibid., 2.

In her description of masculinity, Solanas maintains traditional concepts of genders as distinct, separate, of men as wholly alike and wholly different from women. She roots her division of the sexes in scientific and naturalistic explanation which normalizes this division. But what differs in Solanas' description is that the characteristics of men, rather than women, are derided; men's "nature" is described as fundamentally flawed. This counters the historic practice of male philosophy and its attempts to describe and define women (Rousseau, et al.). Solanas maintains the conceptual division of the sexes, but redefines their characteristics and thus devalues men using the same negative characteristics usually applied to descriptions of femininity and of women. Solanas describes male nature as "psychically passive" where passivity is usually attributed to women, not men. She explains this difference by arguing that man

hates his passivity, so he projects it onto women, defines the male as active, then sets out to prove that his is ("prove he's a Man"). His main means of attempting to prove it is screwing (Big Man with a Big Dick tearing off a Big Piece.) Since he's attempting to prove an error, he must "prove" it again and again. Screwing, then, is a desperate, compulsive attempt to prove he's not passive, not a woman; but he is passive and does want to be a woman.²⁴⁴

Solanas reverses traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity by arguing that "true" male traits ("vanity, frivolity, triviality, weakness, etc.") are falsely attributed to women by men, in an attempt to mask male inadequacy.²⁴⁵ Men, rather, want to be "like women" by "claiming as his own all female characteristics—emotional strength and

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 3.

independence, forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc.”²⁴⁶

According to Solanas, women actually have what have been defined as masculine/positive characteristics; women are already “complete” and do not need to overcompensate, as men do for their masculine incompleteness. Such overcompensation takes the form of insatiable masculine sexuality, as well as (and connected to) degradation of women. Masculinity, then, is defined by its inadequacy, in its failed attempt by men to pretend to be like women—pretending to be strong, independent, etc. The one site of male success, Solanas notes, is in the realm of “public relations”: “He has done a brilliant job of convincing millions of women that men are women and women are men.”²⁴⁷

In her description of masculinity—a description provided as evidence and explanation for her opening call to “destroy the male sex”—Solanas has managed to de-naturalize traditional descriptions of femininity as negative/weak and masculinity as positive/strong. She has taken vocabularies historically used to explain female inferiority—science, nature, genetics, psychology, psychoanalysis—and turned these vocabularies against men. She has connected masculinity to a need to overcompensate for inadequacy, and this need to perform, to attain and achieve, is both connected to sexuality for Solanas as well as futility. Male sexuality stems from masculine incompleteness—from men’s desire to become complete, like women: “Screwing is, for a man, a defense against his desire to be female. Sex is itself a sublimation.”²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 3.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 4.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 4.

Solanas, then, connects sexuality—specifically male sexuality—to defensiveness against psychological and mental inadequacy. This inadequacy and its resulting defensiveness, Solanas argues, has resulted in a series of problems for society. The bulk remainder of *SCUM Manifesto* (until her concluding call for change) is an outline of what problems stem from male inadequacy. Solanas writes, “the male, because of his obsession to compensate for not being female combined with his inability to relate and to feel compassion, has made of the world a shitpile.”²⁴⁹ Solanas’ text sets up a series of breaks via subheadings, a list of problems that have resulted from the inadequacy of men. To note some items from her subsequent list of subheadings, “He is responsible for:” War; Niceness, Politeness, and ‘Dignity’; Money, Marriage, and Prostitution; Work and Prevention of an Automated Society; Fatherhood and Mental Illness; Isolation, Suburbs, and Prevention of Community; Authority and Government; Prejudice; Competition, Prestige, Status, Formal Education, Ignorance, and Social and Economic Classes; ‘Great Art’ and ‘Culture’; Sexuality; Boredom; and, of course, Disease and Death.

What is unique in Solanas’ polemic is not that she attributes everything from war to money to marriage to government to the work of men; indeed, she explicitly states that men, not women, are the cause of most of culture and society. What is unique is the explicit way in which she attributes these cultural products to men and then redefines and devalues them through this association with masculinity. Society is not great because it was made by men; rather, society is flawed because it was made out of expressions of male inadequacy. The fact that women are not historically producers of society and culture is a compliment, not a burden, to women. Thus, Solanas heightens the importance of representations of gender in history and culture. Gender, and specifically,

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 4.

flawed masculinity, is the primary cause of culture, society, and its institutions. Through reversal of the traditional valuation and definition of gender categories, Solanas participates in the counter-declaration tradition of exposing the universal as exclusionary, as masculine. However, as the rest of her manifesto will show, Solanas does not remain in a space of straightforward reversal; Solanas is not simply a “difference” feminist.

The Individual and Solanas: Subjectivity, Essentialism, and Performativity

Despite Solanas’ description of men and women as opposed, of all men and all women subsumed into distinct and mutually exclusive categories, she does leave room to complicate these distinctions. The very description of masculinity as a defense against its own inadequacy implies, I argue, a certain performativity to gender that is decidedly queer in tone.²⁵⁰ Men perform masculinity (which is, Solanas says, actually femininity) as a way to belie their own gendered failure. Solanas politicizes gender in a way that subverts traditional gender definitions and vocabularies of hierarchy. Although she uses the language of science, nature, genetics, and evolution to provide an account of “true” masculinity (as weak and incomplete), it is the male social and behavioral reaction *against* this nature that has given rise to what we know of culture and society. While men may be doomed by their nature to never be complete, they are enabled through their defiance against their nature to perform an oppositional gender that is, in fact, quite productive. But its products—the family, government, art—are destined to be failures, because they are rooted in a defense against a primary failure—failed masculinity; for masculinity that denies its desire to be femininity is just that, failure itself.

²⁵⁰ See Laura Winkiel’s “The ‘Sweet Assassin’ and the Performative Politics of SCUM Manifesto” in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (NY and London: Routledge, 1999) for more on Solanas in the context of queer theory. I also discuss Winkiel later in this chapter.

First, however, I would suggest that Solanas' treatment of gender identity in the manifesto involves an implicit critique of the liberal political subject. Solanas' foregrounding of gender in her historical narrative redefines the universal subject of liberal politics as a gendered subject; indeed, this gendered subject is inadequate as well. For Solanas, any discussion of the individual or political ideology is also a discussion of masculinity and thus of failure. Her use of vocabularies of science, nature, psychology—"legitimate," man-made disciplines invoked by and reinforcing of the liberal political project—exposes her recognition of the limit of available vocabularies of critique. Discourses of sexuality had long been used to police morality, to paint racial and ethnic minorities as dangerous, and to translate xenophobic fears of contamination by an "other." Sexual morality was used as a way to distinguish between good and evil, legitimate and illegitimate, and between what "we" do and what "they" do. Solanas invokes these discourses—of men as evolutionarily inferior, as their sexuality as betraying of inadequacy—because these discourses are all we have. In addition, her use of these vocabularies will expose their own inadequacies as well as the failure of masculinity, of masculine models of liberal identity. Solanas genders the subject, politicizes this gendered subject, and points out its failures and inadequacies by using the very tools, the discourses, created by liberal politics.

Sexual, Anti-Sexual, and Post-Sexual: SCUM and Sexuality

I already noted Solanas' proposal that technologies take over the task of human reproduction. Solanas does not, however, reclaim sex for the sake of pleasure or intimacy. Solanas writes:

Sex is not part of a relationship; on the contrary, it is a solitary experience, non-creative, a gross waste of time. The female can easily—far more easily than she may think—condition away her sex drive, leaving her completely cool and cerebral and free to pursue truly worthy relationships and activities; but the male, who seems to dig women sexually and seeks constantly to arouse them, stimulates the highly-sexed female to frenzies of lust, throwing her into a sex bag from which few women ever escape.²⁵¹

Solanas sees sex as solitary, as separate from human relationships and communion, and thus a “waste of time.” This decoupling of sex and relationships, or of sex and love, essentially counters traditional mores that value sex only in the context of loving relationships. This sex-love relationship is de-naturalized by Solanas—women can choose to “condition away” the sex drive. The use of the word “drive” here denotes a natural, innate urge and reflects essentialist, naturalist language used elsewhere in the manifesto. However, Solanas counters this naturalistic language with an emphasis on women’s choice, on the ability of women to choose not to be subject to their drives.

In addition, I note Solanas’ opposition between “frenzies of lust” vs. women “cool and cerebral and free to pursue” relationships of her own accord. Solanas blames men for enticing women into sexual frenzy in a way that women are historically blamed for the seduction of men. Here Solanas seems to blame sex for bringing on a specific psychological state—of arousal or “frenzy”—that she counters with the “cool and cerebral” freedom of choice, of women’s power over their sex drives. Yet Solanas places responsibility on the woman, since she does not ultimately need sex in the way men do.

²⁵¹ Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 27.

The way in which Solanas advocates for this certain asexuality—or, I would argue, post-sexuality—is not through traditional prudence, which Solanas also despises: “The nicest women in our “society” are raving sex maniacs. But being just awfully, awfully nice they don’t, of course, descend to fucking—that’s uncouth—rather they make love, commune by means of their bodies and establish sensual rapport....”²⁵² Women averse to sexuality because of its moral “dirtiness” are not, Solanas writes, actually moving beyond male sexuality. It is, rather, the women who are most despised and degraded sexually, who do not fit into the value system of so-called feminine morality, marriage, and prudence, who are able to “transcend” male sexuality due to their position within the masculine sexual-morality system:

On the other hand, those females least embedded in male “Culture,” the least nice, those crass and simple souls who reduce fucking to fucking; who are too childish for the grown-up world of suburbs, mortgages, mops and baby shit; too selfish to raise kids and husbands; too uncivilized to give a shit for anyone’s opinion of them; too arrogant to respect Daddy, the “Greats” or the deep wisdom of the Ancients; who trust only their animal, gutter instincts; who equate Culture with chicks; whose sole diversion is prowling for emotional thrills and excitement; who are given to disgusting, nasty, upsetting “scenes,” hateful, violent bitches given to slamming those who unduly irritate them in the teeth; who’s sink a shiv into a man’s chest or ram an icepick up his asshole as soon as look at him, if they knew they could get away with it, in short, those who, by the standards of our “culture” are SCUM....these females are cool and relatively cerebral and skirting asexuality.

²⁵² Ibid., 27.

Unhampered by propriety, niceness, discretion, public opinion, “morals,” the “respect” of assholes, always funky, dirty, low-down SCUM gets around...and around and around...they’ve seen the whole show—every bit of it—the fucking scene, the sucking scene, the dyke scene—they’ve covered the whole waterfront, been under every dock and pier—the peter pier, the pussy pier...you’ve got to go through a lot of sex to get to anti-sex, and SCUM’s been through it all, and they’re now ready for a new show; they want to crawl out from under the dock, move, take off, sink out. But SCUM doesn’t yet prevail; SCUM’s still in the gutter of our “society,” which, if it’s not deflected from its present course and if the Bomb doesn’t drop on it, will hump itself to death.²⁵³

I find this passage notable for a number of reasons. This is the first mention of “SCUM” in the text (other than the title of the manifesto). The introduction of SCUM occurs in the context of a discussion of sexuality, and an explicit discussion at that. Rather than remaining private and secondary, Solanas places sexuality at the forefront of public culture, masculine culture, and critiques its effects on the psyches of both men and women.

It is also through this passage that Solanas’ treatment of sexuality and what she terms “anti-sex” leads me to believe that she prepares a space for what is actually “post-sexuality” despite the fact that this “post” status goes unmentioned. Solanas writes, “you’ve got to go through a lot of sex to get to anti-sex, and SCUM’s been through it all, and they’re now ready for a new show....”²⁵⁴ I would like to relate this passage to Solanas’ tactic of using traditionally masculine and “legitimate” vocabularies—nature,

²⁵³ Ibid., 28.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 28.

science, psychoanalysis, evolution—to undermine masculinity. Because gender and sex are the focus of her description of identity, history, the social order, to be anti-sex is to be anti-liberal identity, in my reading. Solanas performs more than a simple reversal or revaluing of the devalued here, however. While Solanas risks privileging SCUM as “outside”—as least embedded in male culture, as having secret information or experience unavailable to others, and thus “chosen” or “special” in some way—Solanas’ “outsiders” are not pure or untouched. Solanas’ outsiders, or SCUM, are privileged because of their knowledge and experience of male sexuality as inadequate, their rejection of sexual morality and the consequences of sexual transgression. SCUM are not virginal—SCUM females are sexually experienced—nor are they asexual. SCUM females have been sexual, they have experienced a sort of sexual “stage” in which they “get around...and around and around...they’ve seen the whole show—every bit of it...”²⁵⁵ Solanas sets up a progression for SCUM from sex to anti-sex, a trajectory or evolution, to use scientific language, through which SCUM females learn to “reduce fucking to fucking.”

SCUM females are in fact stuck between anti-sex and post-sex, and Solanas, through her manifesto, urges SCUM to take that step, to enter into the “new show...crawl out from under the dock, move, take off, sink out.” SCUM needs to have “been there” to get to the “new show,” and a simple replacement of sexual object, of homosexual relation for heterosexual relation, is inadequate for Solanas. To be a “dyke” remains a “scene” to experience, equivalent to the “fucking” and “sucking” scene mentioned by Solanas in sequence. There is a historical narrative in her treatment of sex and SCUM females. Women *become* SCUM. They become SCUM through the intersection of an experience

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 28.

and renunciation of public morality regarding gender, sexuality, and women's own mastery of their sexual desire and power.

I see this passage as opening a space for women to “leap”—to invoke Marx—from sex, to anti-sex, to post-sex. But just as the “post” terminology is an empty holder for a place that has not yet been named, Solanas chooses not to name this “post,” recognizing that the manifesto, and the call for action, occurs on the cusp of change—announcing its arrival prematurely leads one to empty promises of utopia, the very empty promises offered by the object of critique, masculine liberal society.

The “post” stands in as a placeholder for that which comes after but is as yet unnamed. This is Solanas' hope for sexuality—to move SCUM from anti- to post-, out of mere opposition and into something new. But this new, this “post,” remains nameless and without content. As soon as the “post” is enunciated, it becomes limited and able to be co-opted, reinscribed into masculine logic. So Solanas opts for a silent, unnamed space for the new. Her refusal to name the “post” or even to acknowledge it shows her resistance to it even as she sets it up, even as she announces the labor pains of post-sexuality's birth. Solanas' concern with co-optation is evident through her instantaneous step back from the verge of the “post” in the passage under analysis when she says, “But SCUM doesn't yet prevail; SCUM's still in the gutter of our ‘society,’ which, if it's not deflected from its present course and if the Bomb doesn't drop on it, will hump itself to death.”²⁵⁶ In addition, Solanas' decision to precede her section on sexuality, and the gap she prepares in it for the emergence of the new and the introduction of SCUM females, with a section on the hypocrisy of “hippies” and other examples of failed attempts at cultural subversion, shows Solanas' preoccupation with the dangers of co-optation and

²⁵⁶ Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 28.

the difficulties of enabling the new given the limits of available vocabularies in contemporary masculine culture. For Solanas, “hippies” represent the very problem of historical inheritance. This discussion also situates the emergence of post-sexuality as contingent on gender: only SCUM *women* have the opportunity to “leap” into the space of the post-sexual.

Hippies, Hypocrisy, and the Honesty of Drag

While Solanas leaves open the possibility that women can choose freedom, “cool and cerebral,” by conditioning away something so seemingly “innate” as a sex drive, Solanas does not leave open the opportunity for men to do the same. In her discussion of male hippies and drag queens, for example, Solanas rejects possibilities for men to easily opt out of the existing gender/power system. Indeed, with her description of culture as so totally indebted to inadequate masculinity, an inadequacy practiced by men through sex, no easy solution would be available for men who want to opt-out; co-optation and hypocrisy lurk at every turn.

Solanas describes the male drive to move to the suburbs as an attempt at individuality through isolation, but Solanas also derides the attempt of male “hippies” to subvert the traditional suburban family unit through life as a commune. Solanas writes:

Trapped inside himself, emotionally isolated, unable to relate...like a scared rabbit, he scurries off, dragging Daddy’s little asshole along with him to the wilderness, the suburbs, or, in the case of the “hippie”—he’s way out, Man!—all the way out to the cow pasture where he can fuck and breed undisturbed and mess around with his beads and flute.

The “hippie,” whose desire to be a “Man,” a “rugged individualist,” isn’t quite as strong as the average man’s, and who, in addition, is excited by the thoughts of having lots of women accessible to him, rebels against the harshness of a Breadwinner’s life and the monotony of one woman. In the name of sharing and cooperation, he forms the commune or tribe, which, for all its togetherness and partly because of it (the commune, being an extended family, is an extended violation of the female’s rights, privacy and sanity) is no more of a community than normal “society.”²⁵⁷

Solanas argues that the rhetoric of community that is espoused by so-called “hippies” contradicts reality, which is that men are willing to give up the comforts of civilization in exchange for free sexual access to multiple women and a life filled with work more attuned to his “basic” nature—“to live at the species level, his time taken up with simple, no-intellectual activities—farming, fucking, bead-stringing.”²⁵⁸ However, Solanas argues, the ultimate benefit of communal life for the “hippie”—that of free sex with multiple women—backfires when jealousies and the desire to possess women arise, which they inevitably do.

According to Solanas, men don’t understand that sex is isolating and boring. The inability for “hippie” men to live communally without letting sex get in the way of this life is, Solanas argues, another example of male inadequacy:

Men cannot cooperate to achieve a common end, because each man’s end is all the pussy for himself. The commune, therefore, is doomed to failure: each “hippie” will, in panic, grab the first simpleton who digs him and whisk her off to

²⁵⁷ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 16.

the suburbs as fast as he can. The male cannot progress socially, but merely swings back and forth from isolation to gang-banging.²⁵⁹

This image of the “good husband” is countered by Solanas’ description of most men as paranoid hoarders of women and hermits; the alternative, however, is to be a “gang-banger,” in Solanas’ terms. Man’s desire for sex with women, the way in which he denies his fundamental masculine inadequacy, is what ultimately dooms him. However, men who eschew masculinity—which Solanas seems to equate with eschewal of heterosexuality—don’t fare much better.

Solanas accounts for men she calls “faggots” or “drag queens” as the best examples of men who are honest about their true desire to be women, to not be men, to be individuals by being different in some way. She notes that masculinity is predicated on conformity to rigid rules, and those who do not conform are threatening to the ruse of masculinity itself. This explains, Solanas notes, why men are so frightened by “fags”: “Differentness in other men, as well as in himself, threatens him; it means *they’re* fags whom he must at all costs avoid....”²⁶⁰ Although Solanas mocks this aspect of masculinity, the way in which masculinity is so fragile that it must protect itself from the threat of the effeminate man, Solanas also mocks the inadequacy of the drag queen as well:

The male dares to be different to the degree that he accepts his passivity and his desire to be female, his fagginess. The farthest-out male is the drag queen, but he, although different from most men, is exactly like all other drag queens; like the functionalist, he has an identity—he is a female. He tries to define all his troubles away—but still no individuality. Not completely convinced that he’s a

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 16.

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 16-17.

woman, highly insecure about being sufficiently female, he conforms compulsively to the man-made feminine stereotype, ending up as nothing but a bundle of stifled mannerisms.²⁶¹

Solanas' description of the drag queen as well as the "hippie" underscores the totality of the effects of masculinity, of gender, on society and identity. Even men's own attempts to escape their nature, as well as the society/culture which is created as a reaction against/response to/denial of this nature, are inadequate and subsumed into the same system that men have themselves created. Men cannot escape the influence of history on their gender and sexual identities. Solanas disparages men to the extent that even men's own attempts to subvert their own failing system are themselves doomed to fail. Men even are inadequate in their attempts to confront their own inadequacies.

No genuine social revolution can be accomplished by the male, as the male on top wants the status quo, and all the male on the bottom wants is to be the male on the top. The male "rebel" is a farce; this is the male's "society," made by him to satisfy his needs. He's never satisfied, because he's not capable of being satisfied. Ultimately, what the male "rebel" is rebelling against is being male.²⁶²

In contrast, Solanas leaves room for SCUM females to move beyond such rebellion by, I argue, becoming post-sexual: an improvement and evolution in Solanas' eyes from sexuality, whether hetero- or homo- or anti-.

Not all women, however, are able to escape historical influence. Solanas sets up a contrast between men and women, but also between different kinds of women—between

²⁶¹ Ibid., 17.

²⁶² Ibid., 21.

SCUM and what she later terms “Daddy’s Girls.”²⁶³ She also notes the difference between “male females”—women who accept masculine “culture” and devalue/definition of femininity, and “female females”—akin to SCUM.²⁶⁴ In invoking distinctions between men in drag, male-females, and female-females, Solanas notes alternative reactions to the inadequate culture created by failed masculinity. These reactions include the attempted acceptance of the culture via incessant and unsatisfying sexual and economic conquest; inadequate and ineffective rebellion through reversal of gender and sexual norms; or something else entirely—SCUM. By moving from reversal to a form of transcendence, by moving from the status of “male female” to “female female,” by transitioning from sexual to asexual to post-sexual, Solanas reveals her strategy for escaping from history.

Why Must There Be Anything at All? Inevitability and Technology

The male changes only when forced to do so by technology, when he has no choice, when “society” reaches the stage where he must change or die. We’re at that stage now; if women don’t get their asses in gear fast, we may very well all die.²⁶⁵

Solanas’ text presents a tension we have seen previously between an immediate call for action in the face of dire and impending doom—“act or die”—and a description of history and promise for a future that is inevitable, whether one acts or not. From this perspective, the revolution is going to happen with or without you, so you might as well join. While Solanas calls for women to destroy men, she also notes that “this moral issue

²⁶³ Ibid., 37.

²⁶⁴ Ibid., 23.

²⁶⁵ Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 21.

will eventually be rendered academic by the fact that the male is gradually eliminating himself” through “wars and race-riots” and the fact that “men are more and more either becoming fags or are obliterating themselves through drugs.”²⁶⁶ As such, male inadequacy will lead to its own self-destruction, and “the female, whether she likes it or not, will eventually take complete charge, if for no other reason than that she will have to—the male, for practical purposes, won’t exist.”²⁶⁷

The argument for change through inevitability continues when it comes to the future of females as well. Solanas considers the question, anticipating a silent objection, as to “whether or not to continue to reproduce males” and follows this with the next question, “why produce even females? Why should there be future generations? What is their purpose?”²⁶⁸ For Solanas, the extinction of men is just one step in the larger inevitable future which leads to the extinction of women as well: “Eventually the natural course of events, of social evolution, will lead to total female control of the world and, subsequently, to the cessation of the production of males and, ultimately, to the cessation of the production of females.”²⁶⁹ The way in which Solanas reconciles this tension between the inevitable future destruction of men and women and her immediate call for action is that “SCUM is impatient....”²⁷⁰ Solanas writes:

But SCUM is too impatient to hope and wait for the debrainwashing of millions of assholes. Why should the swinging females continue to plod dismally along with the dull male ones? Why should the fates of the groovy and the creepy be intertwined? Why should the active and imaginative consult the passive and

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 34.

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 35.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 35.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 36.

dull on social policy? Why should the independent be confined to the sewer along with the dependent who need Daddy to cling to?²⁷¹

Solanas' call for action—the impetus behind her writing of the manifesto—adheres to an evolutionary and natural historical logic, a teleology. It is through the narrative of historical progress, the rise of salvation through technology, that SCUM females find a future. Solanas invokes such vocabularies to legitimize her proposals, using such inherited rhetoric but altering the content of its cry. Like the SCUM female who evolves from male female to female female, through sexuality to anti-sexuality, from hetero- to homo- to post-sexual, Solanas' historical logic and language of inevitability invokes the rhetorical tradition of Marx and the manifesto to give legitimacy to her text's content while questioning the very future that she states as imminent. SCUM is destiny, but why must there *be* destiny?

The language of inevitability and future chaos, a discourse exemplified by the manifesto genre and inherited in Solanas' manifesto, remains in tension with Solanas' call to action by SCUM and “female females.” In this passage, the logic of evolution is taken to its extreme and leads Solanas to question why any future is necessary, why action is required at all. Solanas shows awareness that her invocation of historical narratives of progress, evolution, and technological advancement suggest the existence of some sense of “fate” or the “way things are supposed to be”—this fate, it turns out, is to be questioned as well. Solanas questions the status quo by invoking its discourses and inverting their subjects, turning them against themselves; she then questions the history-as-progress discourse itself by asking why there must be fate, why there must be men, why there must be women, why there must be any future at all. This questioning, as

²⁷¹ Ibid., 37-38.

limited as it is in the text, betrays Solanas' realization that even the idea of history is historically inherited. If the way we think about history is limited by tradition, how are we to imagine or explain a future that is not also limited by tradition? Solanas addresses this problem by turning her attention to specific forms of activism that enable the emergence of a new definition of political action, a new political aesthetic.

SCUM Tactics: The “Unwork Force”

Solanas outlines her strategies for destruction of male society, including: creation of an “unwork force, the fuck-up force” who apply for and receive employment only to not work and/or provide goods and services for free until they are fired; destruction of all “useless and harmful objects—cars, store windows, “Great Art, etc.,” takeover of broadcast media; and finally a program to “couple-bust—barge into mixed (male-female) couples, wherever they are, and bust them up.”²⁷² Until the inevitable extinction of the male species, SCUM will allow men to live only if they belong to the Men’s Auxiliary of SCUM—“men who are working diligently to eliminate themselves, men who, regardless of their motives, do good, men who are playing ball with SCUM.”²⁷³ These men will be evaluated through “Turd Sessions, at which every male present will give a speech beginning with the sentence, ‘I am a turd, a lowly abject turd,’ then proceed to list all the ways in which he is. His reward for doing so will be the opportunity to fraternize after the session for a whole, solid hour with the SCUM who will be present.”²⁷⁴ Even after joining the Men’s Auxiliary and attending “Turd Sessions,” this does not guarantee that SCUM will allow any specific man to live; this is a “necessary but not sufficient

²⁷² Ibid., 38-39.

²⁷³ Ibid., 39.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 39-40.

condition for making SCUM's escape list—it's not enough to do good—to save their worthless asses men must also avoid evil.”²⁷⁵

Just as Solanas was skeptical and dismissive of men's attempts at counter-culture through life in the commune as a “hippie” or a drag queen, Solanas is similarly suspicious of attempt to subvert “society” through traditional activist methods. A discussion of tactics and goals near the end of the text declares that “Dropping out is not the answer; fucking-up is” although “Dropping out, however, is an excellent policy for men, and SCUM will enthusiastically encourage it.”²⁷⁶ In the case of SCUM's tactics:

SCUM will not picket, demonstrate, march, or strike to attempt to achieve its ends. Such tactics are for nice, genteel ladies who scrupulously take only such action as it is guaranteed to be ineffective. In addition, only decent, clean-living, male women, highly trained in submerging themselves in the species, act on a mob basis. SCUM consists only of individuals; SCUM is not a mob, a blob. Only as many SCUM will do a job as are needed for the job. Also, SCUM, being cool and selfish, will not subject itself to getting rapped on the head with billy clubs; that's for the nice, “privileged, educated” middle-class ladies with a high regard for the touching faith in the essential goodness of Daddy and policemen. If SCUM ever marches, it will be over the President's stupid, sickening face; if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.²⁷⁷

In addition to eschewing traditional tactics, even police retaliation for marches in public, SCUM's tactics promise to be more stealthily executed, and therefore more effective and, perhaps, more violent. Solanas makes a distinction between civil disobedience and

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 40.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 41-42.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 42-43.

SCUM's tactics (which she calls "criminal"). Civil disobedience is useless, Solanas argues, because "such tactics acknowledge the rightness of the overall system and are used only to modify it slightly, change specific laws" while "SCUM is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights in it."²⁷⁸ It is interesting that SCUM's style of tactics are described as "selfish, always cool" as well as "furtive, sneaky, underhanded" in opposition to civil disobedience which, by inference, must be somehow disorderly, passionate, and therefore ineffective. She notes that "SCUM is against half-crazed, indiscriminate riots, with no clear objective in mind" but instead "SCUM will coolly, furtively, stalk its prey and quietly move in for the kill."²⁷⁹ Again we see Solanas make connections between psychological characteristics, emotions, and political engagement.

In foregrounding the gendered and sexed nature of culture as compensatory masculinity, and in defining such masculinity in psychological terms of desire and emotion, Solanas politicizes gender through her manifesto while situating the self and the psyche at the center of political action and social change. For Solanas, the personal is already the political. Just as Solanas recognizes the dangers of inherited notions of history, gender identity, and sexuality, she also spells out the dangers of inherited modes of dissent. By highlighting ways in which certain kinds of practices "count" as political action, Solanas exposes these practices as sanctioned by the existing system. Instead, Solanas proposes a new political aesthetic beyond existing definitions of the political.

²⁷⁸ Solanas, *SCUM Manifesto*, 43.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

The Future Feminine Utopia

Throughout the *SCUM Manifesto*, Solanas offers a scathing criticism of existing masculine society. She uses vocabularies traditionally employed against women—medicine, psychology, evolution—to make claims about culture as gendered and masculinity as failed. She uses the tradition of the manifesto genre to invoke historical narratives and the promise of a “post” future. But through most of the text, this future remains unnamed, unmentioned, a silence that haunts the text. Solanas is reluctant to shift from negative criticism to positive description. This illustrates her awareness of the dangers of co-optation and reinscription, dangers described in her discussion of drag, the danger of SCUM that remains sexual, never pushed into anti- or post-sexuality. In a few brief and rare moments, however, Solanas lets a bit of utopia in. She lets her guard down and invokes rhetoric of the “true” and the “real” future utopia that awaits post-sexual SCUM females.

In actual fact, the female function is to relate, groove, love, and be herself, irreplaceable by anyone else; the male function is to produce sperm. We now have sperm banks.

In actual fact the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems, crack jokes, make music—all with love. In other words, create a magic world.²⁸⁰

Solanas later notes that women do not have to try so hard to prove their individuality and uniqueness: “A woman not only takes her identity and individuality for granted, but

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 13.

knows instinctively that the only wrong is to hurt others, and that the meaning of life is love.”²⁸¹

At the end of the text, Solanas argues that “After the elimination of money there will be no further need to kill men” because they will lose their power; the time that follows will enable “the rest of the women” to be “busy solving the few remaining unsolved problems before planning their agenda for eternity and Utopia...”²⁸² This passage is in direct contrast to Solanas’ questioning of fate and the future elsewhere in the manifesto. On the one hand, Solanas invokes the inevitability of a post-masculine era that is described blatantly in terms of “eternity and Utopia.” On the other hand, Solanas elsewhere wonders, in regards to the coming era when technology has enabled society to cease production of males, “why produce even females? Why should there be future generations? What is their purpose?”²⁸³

I point out this tension in part because it is illustrative of a tension within the manifesto genre itself, and Solanas’ manifesto provides an excellent example of it. Solanas provides motivation for her call to action, her call for women to become SCUM, by invoking the promise of a future feminine Utopia. This promise helps to alleviate doubts that the actions SCUM takes will be in vain; the end, Solanas promises, justifies the means. However, Solanas stops short of providing too much content to this future Utopia. Indeed, the future still contains a “few remaining unsolved promises” and the “eternity and Utopia” that is promised is only imagined in the form of a plan, an “agenda.” Solanas can promise a map of Utopia, but she cannot define or describe Utopia itself. Similarly, Solanas can push SCUM women past the experience of sex and

²⁸¹ Ibid., 19.

²⁸² Ibid., 45.

²⁸³ Ibid., 35.

anti-sex, but she cannot yet articulate or speak what follows, the “post” of “post-sex” or even “post-SCUM.” It is her hesitancy that exposes Solanas’ concern with co-optation, her awareness that the ability to imagine the future is limited by the discursive and ideological structures of the present, and this explains her move towards what otherwise looks like nihilism: the question of why there must be a future at all.

While Solanas’ promise of an “agenda for eternity and Utopia” and her question, “why should there be future generations?” seem opposed in tone, I see Solanas’ radical question as, in fact, quite utopian. This question illustrates Solanas’ willingness to throw up her hands and declare ignorance about the coming post-masculine future, her acknowledgement that the “post” she promises through her manifesto is devoid of content on purpose. But this claim of ignorance is not defeat; it is a leaving-open of an as-yet-unintelligible future. To claim knowledge of the future would be to foreclose it, to rein it into existing discourses. To get rid of men is to get rid of the system that defines and thus constructs women; to get rid of this system is to get rid of the entire structuring discursive framework of political, social, moral, and cultural knowledge and experience. Without this structure, this framework, how are we to know whether there will be anything intelligible, any “future generation” to speak of? This, I argue, is Solanas’ point. There will be a future, Solanas promises, but she cannot yet speak it; and that is what will enable it to emerge: its failure to be articulated—to be articulate-able—in the discourse of Solanas’ manifesto. Solanas uses the manifesto to expose the limits of manifesto-writing as a form of political practice, the reason why Marx was forced to employ immanent critique. The manifesto genre is used to seek a way to stand outside of the influence of

liberal politics, and yet the problem of total historical inheritance reaches all the way to the level of language, identity, and ways of imagining history and the future.

How to Read *SCUM*: Harding and Solanas' Violence as Street Theater

While Solanas' manifesto was relatively unknown during the time of its creation in 1967—Solanas sold a limited number of copies herself on the streets of New York—its text, along with interviews with Solanas, were published after the act that made her famous (the shooting of Andy Warhol and two of his colleagues in 1968).²⁸⁴

Overwhelmingly, analysis of Solanas' manifesto has occurred in media and academic circles for its relationship to Solanas' biography, as a window into her intentions, as a rationale for the act of shooting Warhol. The manifesto, then, has been read retrospectively as antecedent or explanation for Solanas' violent act. Because of the media attention surrounding Solanas' actions and celebrity, *SCUM Manifesto* as a text already holds a complex relationship to identity and performance—the identity of Solanas as attempted murderer, her performance of the shooting of an avant-garde/pop art icon. In most readings of the text, however, the act and the person (Solanas' history, her motivations) have eclipsed analysis of the text itself. The curious relationship between

²⁸⁴ Freddie Baer, "About Valerie Solanas" in *SCUM Manifesto* (San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1996): 49, 52-53. According to Baer, Solanas was angry at Andy Warhol for not following up on his promise to produce her play *Up Your Ass*. Solanas had appeared in films by Warhol and was supposedly "in" with some of the people at the Factory, but when Warhol failed to return her script, she felt betrayed. Solanas became convinced that Olympia Press publisher Maruice Girodias was trying to swindle her out of her writings, so she waited in vain for him outside the Chelsea Hotel on June 3, 1968, with a .32 automatic at her ready. After a few hours, Solanas reportedly went to the Factory looking for Warhol, who wasn't there, coming up the elevator seven times before arriving with Warhol. Allegedly, while Warhol was taking a phone call, Solanas shot him three times, the third of which hit; she then shot at art critic Mario Amaya and Warhol manager Fred Hughes, at which point the gun stopped working and Solanas fled. She turned herself in that evening to a police officer at Times Square.

the text and the violent event, specifically violence against an avant-garde icon (Warhol), demands attention.

In his essay, “The Simple Surrealist Act,” James Harding accounts for Solanas’ self-conscious intentions—“Read my manifesto and it will tell you what I am”—regarding the connection between the text and the event of the shooting.²⁸⁵ In his reading, Solanas’ actions subsume the text of her manifesto in the tradition of the avant-garde. Harding notes the “historical avantgarde’s rejection of the classical privileging of text over performance in mainstream bourgeois theatre,” and he reads Solanas as privileging performance over text as an avant-garde gesture.²⁸⁶ By seeing Solanas as participating and intervening in this avant-garde tradition, Harding’s reading swallows the text into the act by calling the manifesto “a prop in a series of performances leading up to and ultimately defining the shooting itself as an avantgarde performance.”²⁸⁷ He ultimately cares more about the relationship of the manifesto to the act than he does about the manifesto itself:

To a great extent, the theoretical complexities of Solanas’s act of violence have less to do with the actual content of the SCUM Manifesto than they do with the role that the manifesto played as a physical, material object in Solanas’s activities prior to the shooting, activities that clearly constitute their own brand of experimental street theatre.²⁸⁸

I take issue with Harding’s description of the manifesto as a mere “prop” in the service of her ultimate action, the shooting of Warhol. The utility of seeing Solanas’ text

²⁸⁵ James M. Harding, “The Simple Surrealist Act: Valerie Solanas and the (Re)Assertion of Avantgarde Priorities,” *The Drama Review* 45, 4 (T172), (Winter 2001).

²⁸⁶ Harding, 151.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

in relationship to her actions is that it suggests that the two are similar in some way, that the text and the act are both somehow practiced, both somehow “happen” in the same sense of the term. I am suspicious of the tendency to subsume the text into the action, however, without calling attention to both the textuality of the act as well as the performativity of the text. Solanas’ directive to read her manifesto, given in the context of her action, points to the textuality of the act. What is missing, however, is an analysis of the performativity of the text—the way in which the text is itself an action, a practice, an intervention, a doing, a thing that “happens” in its own violent way.

This is particularly interesting once we consider the element of failure—the failure of manifestoes to enact, or to be seen as action, or to be considered “enough” or “the right kind” of action. I have argued earlier that part of the impetus that led to the emergence of the manifesto genre was the failure of declarations of liberal politics to live up to their claims, as well as the failure of previous manifestoes to adequately provide strategies for dealing with the problems of universality, history, and performativity. Manifestoes are written in the context of the failure of earlier texts with the hope that this version will be better, that this time it will be better. This critical tradition, also, illustrates a tendency towards nihilism.

If we look at the object of her violent act (the masculine icon of pop-art aesthetics, Andy Warhol) and the objects of critique in her manifesto (men and non-SCUM women) Solanas exposes a series of additional failures. Mina Loy and Valentine de Saint-Point re-gendered the Futurist project by exposing the exclusionary masculine universal put forward by Marinetti and Boccioni while resisting overt “feminist” (liberal) strategies as inadequate forms of reversal. Similarly, Solanas exposes the failure of the sixties avant-

garde to expose its masculinity while cautioning against a feminist politics of mere reversal of existing vocabularies. She performs this exposure through a redefinition of a political aesthetic that requires that readers treat her manifesto as both violence and literature. It is my worry that the privileging of the act over the text in fact in the literature about the *SCUM Manifesto* ignores the way in which the text enacts, the way in which the manifesto is a performance and not a mere antecedent to or explanation for “real” action, for “real” violence.

Winkiel: *SCUM* as Script

Laura Winkiel’s essay about Solanas, “The ‘Sweet Assassin’ and the Performative Politics of *SCUM Manifesto*,” takes a slightly different view of the relationship between Solanas’ act and her manifesto. However, Winkiel also ultimately subsumes the text of the manifesto into the context of the act of shooting Warhol.²⁸⁹ Winkiel argues that Solanas’ manifesto is “a document that performs a political identity,” and that “Solanas’s implicit suggestion, ‘I am what you read in my manifesto,’ evoked a politically performative identity that is multiple, dynamic, and citational.”²⁹⁰ Winkiel also notes the way in which the manifesto is a text that creates that which it assumes to pre-exist, it manifests but hides the process of creation by describing that which it created as already existing, as description rather than construction:

The seeming spontaneity of the polemical utterance unabashedly asserts the correctness of its political position and assumes the pre-existence of SCUM

²⁸⁹ Laura Winkiel, “The ‘Sweet Assassin’ and the Performative Politics of *SCUM Manifesto*,” in *The Queer Sixties*, ed. Patricia Juliana Smith (New York and London: Routledge, 1999): 62-85.

²⁹⁰ Winkiel, 63.

females. But the paradoxical pose of spontaneity is calculated to do something with the words themselves: the text produces SCUM females.²⁹¹

Winkiel sums this up best in her fourth footnote: “The production of SCUM females is a political myth that creates its own reality.”²⁹²

I find it interesting that Winkiel notes this gesture in the context of this manifesto, while I would extend it to apply to many declarations and manifestoes (as I have argued earlier in the case of the “Declaration of Independence”). But I note that Winkiel foregrounds the way in which the *SCUM Manifesto* performs, constitutes, creates, and enacts a certain identity—SCUM females—and suggests a specific description of our cultural context. I see Winkiel as accounting for the performativity of the text, even though Solanas attempts to mask this gesture as performance (at least until Solanas questions whether there should be a future at all).

However, in keeping with other analyses of Solanas, Winkiel combines her discussion of the manifesto and the context of Solanas’ shooting of Andy Warhol, even though the effect of this discussion is to reaffirm the separation between text and act—as well as the privileging of the act over the text.

The symbolic transformation by which superfluous, illegitimate actors effect a take-over of legitimate activity takes place through the event. The event helps break down the boundaries between theater and the world or between art (aesthetic, imaginative representation) and life (pragmatic representation). The artistic “event” has a long history within the avant-garde whose project is to link art with politics in order to alter consciousness and effect historical change. The

²⁹¹ Ibid., 63.

²⁹² Ibid., 80.

artist must anticipate that the event's reception will be favorable to the type of social change she seeks. *To this end, Solanas's manifesto provided the script—an imaginative representation—with which to interpret the shooting.* But, conversely, the event generated a news-worthy stage from which to gain visibility and legitimacy to encourage citing the “script” at all. The event's theatrical framing and the written script work in tandem. The event serves as an instrument or vehicle by which the script might be launched. Once launched through event, however, the script circulates beyond the control of its author.²⁹³

Again, while I think it is certainly productive to imagine the relationship between Solanas' manifesto and the act of shooting Andy Warhol, I would like to push Winkiel's reading a bit. Winkiel's description of Solanas places her directly within a tradition of avant-garde performance art that intends to alter perception and experience by calling attention to framing devices that separate art from life—the stage within which “real” action becomes “merely artistic,” or literary, or imaginary. However, I read Winkiel as describing the shooting as “the event” and not the manifesto. The manifesto, the text, retains its position as descriptive, as explanatory, rather than as performative or as its own form of practice. The manifesto is the “citation” or footnote for the main attraction, the violent shooting.

***SCUM* as “Real” Event**

Rather, I find it useful to consider the function of the manifesto as manifesto—its performance separate from the “framing” context of the so-called “real” act, the shooting. We could read Solanas as reinstating a traditional separation between art and life here in

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 71 (emphasis added).

the difference between the manifesto text and the act of shooting, but I read her as attempting to trouble this distinction, as exposing the inadequacy of the distinction and of the practice of manifesto-writing itself. She exposes the limits of aesthetic practice in the avant-garde that is not sufficiently self-critical in questioning gendered universality, and thus not critical. Also, she exposes the limits of the political as understood as separate from the aesthetic by foregrounding the status of her text as performance, as an act and an intervention that seeks a new political aesthetic via the invocation of the “post.”

Harding and Winkiel’s analyses are illustrative of a tendency in the literature about manifestoes to make a distinction between text and act, between manifestoes and political action. But to see manifestoes as merely about politics, as merely about action, misses the point. In addition, the literature on manifestoes separates the history of the genre into separate spheres: one for the “political” manifesto, another for the “aesthetic.” In contrast, my reading of Solanas’ text highlights the ways in which her manifesto redefines the separation between language and action, politics and aesthetics. Solanas adopts the genre of the manifesto—a genre that has already undergone a process by which the political becomes mapped onto an aesthetic form, such that the practice of manifesto-writing becomes a political act. She uses this genre and its strategies for exposing gendered universality, politics and identities as performative, and the influence of history as total within systems of liberal politics. In doing so, Solanas redefines the purview of the political and what “counts” as a form of political activism.

Along these lines, I find that another useful element of Harding’s analysis is his re-contextualization of Solanas’ manifesto within both the avant-garde as well as feminism, insofar as these are interconnected traditions: “Solanas’s feminist concerns derive much

of their force from the avantgarde context that generated them and that scholars have generally overlooked.”²⁹⁴ Harding places Solanas as acting within both theoretical and political traditions simultaneously, but he characterizes the “cultural margins occupied by the avant-garde and the cultural margins occupied by women” as “fundamental and uncompromisingly irreconcilable.”²⁹⁵ While this might be the case if we accept the traditional narrative of the emergence of the feminist movement, my analysis of gender and the manifesto genre challenges Harding’s contrast between the avant-garde and feminism. Rather, I recontextualize the emergence of feminist criticism within the context of the manifesto genre to recuperate connections between the critical traditions of the avant-garde and feminist theory. The avant-garde and contemporary feminism utilize strategies exemplified in the manifesto genre for exposing the limits and failures of liberal political vocabularies.

Winkiel offers a more complementary account of the relationship between Solanas and feminism while analyzing *SCUM* within the contemporary context of queer performativity.²⁹⁶ Winkiel’s essay intends to “counter her image as a ‘straightforward’ feminist revolutionary who was anti-sex.”²⁹⁷ Winkiel opposes the omission of Solanas’ text within a history of “antisex lesbian feminism” as outlined by Steven Siedman.²⁹⁸ While Winkiel notes that Solanas’ resistance to “dropping out” in her manifesto makes her an odd poster child for any form of popular social movement, Winkiel ultimately

²⁹⁴ Harding, “The Simple Surrealist Act,” 147.

²⁹⁵ Harding 148. I should note that Harding’s statement is in the context of his discussion of Susan Suleiman’s work on French feminist thought.

²⁹⁶ Laura Winkiel, “The ‘Sweet Assassin’ and the Performative Politics of *SCUM Manifesto*,” 62-85.

²⁹⁷ Winkiel 63.

²⁹⁸ Winkiel 67. Winkiel references Steven Siedman’s text “Identity and Politics in a ‘Postmodern’ Gay Culture: Some Historical and Conceptual Notes” from *Fear of a Queer Planet*, ed. Michael Warner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 105-42.

attributes the manifesto with influencing not only 1960s feminism, but the entire “political, social, and cultural shift known as the sixties.”²⁹⁹

Solanas and the “Second Wave”

In her history of the “second wave,” of the feminist movement, *Daring to Be Bad*, Alice Echols cites Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto* as “one of the earliest, wittiest, and most eccentric expressions of second-wave feminism.”³⁰⁰ Echols explains that Solanas’ notoriety following the shooting of Warhol led her to emerge as

something of a *cause célèbre* among radical feminists. Ros Baxandall declared her “our movement’s Victoria Woodhull.” Dunbar visited her in jail, while Ti-Grace Atkinson and others attended her trial. In the wake of the shooting, *SCUM* was finally published and it became obligatory reading for radical feminists.³⁰¹

One of the early radical feminist groups of the second wave, Cell 16, reportedly read *SCUM* “as their first order of business.”³⁰² Echols notes that Solanas’ analysis of sexuality, in particular, was highly influential to second wave feminist thought:

“Atkinson began her November 1968 article, ‘The Institution of Sexual Intercourse,’ with a short quotation from Solanas’s *SCUM Manifesto*. And in 1974, she characterized Solanas’s polemic as ‘the most important feminist statement written to date in the English language.’”³⁰³ Despite evidence of the importance of Solanas’ manifesto to the women’s

²⁹⁹ Winkiel, 78, 79.

³⁰⁰ Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967-1975* (Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota Press: 1989): 104.

³⁰¹ Echols, *Daring to Be Bad*, 105.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 158.

³⁰³ Echols, 174. In addition, Jill Johnson wrote that “The only radical feminists around here worthy of the name that I know of are Ti-Grace Atkinson and Valerie Solanas and they don’t have to use the word lesbian to define the man as the enemy we can take instruction from the pathological purity of their fury.” Jill Johnson, *Lesbian Nation: The Feminist Solution* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973): 175. I should

movement—evidence that supports the recontextualization of feminist theory within a manifesto tradition—at least some traditional historical narratives of the women’s movement in the 1970s credit Solanas with significant influence. Solanas’ function in this traditional historical narrative, however, is rendered secondary to the “real events” of the women’s movement (legislative changes and general inclusion into the liberal public sphere).

Solanas and other texts from the second wave focus on the psychological impact of gender roles and expectations on women (as well as men); the re-evaluation and re-valuation of gender roles and characteristics in relation to morality and discourses of health/sickness; the adoption of Marxist language of oppression, the category of women as a class, and liberation; and a tension between essentialism and performativity. These texts are concerned with the relationship between language, identity, and experience; with sexuality and sexual identities as constructed; and with the dangers of co-optation and the difficult task of subverting such deep-seated beliefs and identities.

It is important, I believe, to trace the ways in which these texts deal with the category of the “post,” as I phrased it earlier: an opening and imagining of a future place that occurs through analysis of the limits of currently-available discourse and vocabularies, such vocabularies’ devastating impact on women’s sexual and gender experiences and identities, as well as the possibility that such discourses can be changed, performed differently, exposed as inadequate, and subverted. The second wave uses rhetoric of the manifesto as a way to explore these questions and relationships because the genre of the

also add that an excerpt from Solanas’ manifesto was anthologized in Robin Morgan’s 1970 collection, *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Movement*.

manifesto, its tradition, enables engagement with the discourse of liberal politics by exposing it as inadequate, its subject-constructions as incomplete.

As shown through my readings of texts from Solanas and, in the coming chapter, lesbian feminists, it makes sense to situate the problems of contemporary feminist political theory within the history of a practice of manifesto-writing, as such recontextualization provides insight into the centrality of gender and exclusion as they function within liberal politics. To reclaim Solanas as part of an avant-garde tradition *and* to reclaim Solanas a precursor to second-wave feminism involves re-injecting the political into the aesthetic, redefining what “counts” as politics. Such redefinition enables us to see the history of the liberal project as intimately tied to categories of gender and sexuality, categories that were incomplete, performative, and unstable from their inception.

Chapter Five

Reading the “Post” into the Second Wave: Lesbian Feminism and the Manifesto Genre

This chapter offers evidence in support of an alternative narrative of the history of feminism and feminist theory. My alternative narrative contrasts with traditional histories of feminism as the uncomplicated extension of liberal vocabularies to include women, as well as the more recent narrative of a “modern” sixties that gave birth to a “postmodern” nineties. I not only read elements of nineties “postmodern” politics into earlier texts, but I also challenge the way in which the notion of “politics” functions in this analysis. Rather than imagining previous political deployments of identity as regressive or modernist, I contextualize lesbian feminist texts from the sixties and seventies within a history and practice of manifesto-writing. This practice, I have argued, exposes ways in which political rhetoric was always already performative.

The “postmodern” revelation that politics are performed, that identities are multiple and unstable, that universality involves exclusion—these are not new revelations. Rather, my reading of the history of the manifesto situates the genre as actively exposing these exclusions in liberal discourse from its very inception. My placement of lesbian feminist manifestoes within this history of the manifesto genre challenges narratives of the history of feminist identity politics that fail to account for the fact that the liberal project was, from its inception, gendered, incomplete, and performative. Such failures point to a problem that I will discuss in more detail in the following chapter: the ways in which manifesto strategies lend themselves to historical “forgetting” that focuses on the new in exchange for the denial of theoretical inheritance.

I provide close readings of Charlotte Bunch's 1973 text "Lesbians In Revolt," texts from the Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH), and the Collective Lesbian International Terrors (C.L.I.T.) as exemplary of texts written by lesbian feminists during the "second wave" of women's liberation—an historical moment where political concerns were sharply focused on identity and representation. I highlight the redefinition of the political enacted through these texts to reflect contemporary critiques of identity politics (such as queer theory, postmodern feminisms, and critiques by feminists of color). However, contemporary critiques (from activism as well as theory) that cast radical politics texts from the sixties and seventies as examples of "bad" identity politics (in order to then cast contemporary politics/theory as "better" or "more liberatory") are problematically ahistorical and fail to account for the complexities of these original texts and activism.

My analyses of feminist and lesbian texts from this time counter accusations that they invoke "essentialist" identity politics or "modern" liberal rhetoric. I choose to focus on these groups and texts as illustrative of three kinds of manifesto strategies that are evident in many lesbian and feminist texts from this era. Bunch's text employs reversal as a strategy for exposing and renegotiating terms of sex, gender, and politics to open up space for a "post" identity to emerge—an identity in need of development and creation. Texts from WITCH illustrate ways in which feminist enacted overtly performative resistance to liberal identity categories—the performative deconstruction of subjectivity as a form of political action and critique. Finally, CLIT's manifestoes expose the constitutive and performative functions of language to radically question the traditional category of gender, the citizen, and even the human.

I opened the previous chapter with my reading of Solanas' manifesto as a performative text that participates in the tradition of the manifesto genre—that is, a political and avant-garde tradition—to foreground the second wave's indebtedness to this history of dissent and to the vocabularies it enabled. The path from Solanas to lesbian feminism points, I argue, both backwards to traditions of Marx and the avant-garde, as well as forward to representations of feminist political theory as anti-identity, postmodern feminist politics in the 1990s. Lesbian feminists extended and developed manifesto strategies for use in their specific historical context; this extension involved a deeper understanding of the exclusions enacted through liberal politics as both gendered *and* sexual exclusions, as well as the growing significance of media representations in the constitution of identities in liberal society. This intimate relationship between critiques of sex/gender and critiques of rhetorical exclusions enacted through liberal vocabularies illustrates ways in which the development of feminism, as a movement and a form of critique, reflects strategies inherited from and indebted to the practice of the manifesto genre.

Narrative #1: Feminist History as *Liberal Feminist History*

Within the field of Women's Studies, feminism is often understood to be a collection of different kinds of politics, or different "feminisms." General distinctions are made between liberal, radical, and socialist feminisms, as well as others.³⁰⁴ In addition, the

³⁰⁴ Steven Buechler summarizes the distinctions between four strands of feminism, as made by Myra Marx Ferree and Beth Hess in their 1985 *Controversy and Coalition: The New Feminist Movement*: "career feminists seek desegregation of the labor force; liberal feminists pursue equal rights; socialist feminists challenge the intertwining of capitalism and patriarchy; and radical feminists redefine the nature of community." Steven Buechler, *Women's Movements in the United States* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1990): 218.

history of feminism is discussed in terms of “waves”: the “first wave” spans roughly 1848-1920 and focuses on the fight for women’s suffrage; the “second wave” includes the 1960s and 1970s, with a focus on more recent efforts to secure equal rights (such as the Equal Rights Amendment, or ERA).³⁰⁵ However, scholars within the social sciences generally identify the history of feminism as a history of *liberal* feminism. In *Women’s Movements in the United States*, sociologist Steven M. Buechler argues,

The women’s rights sector of the contemporary women’s movement that emerged out of the presidential and state commission on the status of women and culminated in the formation of NOW in 1966 exemplifies the universality of an equal rights or liberal feminist orientation within women’s movements. The liberal feminism of the women associated with the early NOW was a direct descendant of the equal rights ideology that had animated the suffrage movement in a prior era.³⁰⁶

Although Buechler does note that “liberal feminism” is a “somewhat contradictory hybrid of worldviews” that hinge on the important “equality/difference” debate, he isolates the significance of such tensions in terms of “the history of legislative and judicial action concerning the status of women in the United States.”³⁰⁷ Buechler’s account of the

³⁰⁵ Buechler, *Women’s Movements*, 2-3. Steven Buechler’s account of the history of feminism is one example of such periodization. Some critics, such as Rebecca Walker, argue that contemporary feminism has entered into a new, “third” wave, as evidenced by the resurgence of identity politics in the 1990s. Others, such as Barbara Arneil, argue that the “first” wave begins much earlier, with the writing of Mary Wollstonecraft’s 1792 *Vindication of the Rights of Women*.

³⁰⁶ Buechler, *Women’s Movements*, 107-108. Buechler defines liberal feminism as a “worldview [that] placed a characteristic emphasis on notions of equality and equal treatment, on the symbolism and vocabulary of natural rights, on the centrality of the individual, and on the need for equality of opportunity.”

³⁰⁷ Buechler, *Women’s Movements*, 109, 221, 222. Buechler describes the equality/difference debate as arising from the “dual identity of feminists as human beings who make equality claims and as women who assert differences from men.”

history of feminism in the U.S. is one example of a narrative that represents feminism, and feminist history, primarily as a liberal project.

Within political science, narratives of the history of feminism have also focused on ways in which women have voiced claims for inclusion within liberal politics: protection under universal rights and equality sought through judicial and legislative means. For example, Sidney Tarrow's analysis of social movements locates feminism as rooted in women's initial exposure to civil rights and New Left politics. Tarrow goes on to highlight ways in which the women's movement kept "much of the original élan of civil rights" through its growth into major national organizations, the election of women to key political offices, and its (failed) efforts to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.³⁰⁸ Tarrow represents American feminists as "polite middle-class women who worked quietly in conventional politics and interest groups" who "never made the dramatic splash" of other movements of the time.³⁰⁹

As my readings of "second wave" feminist texts will show, feminist history is better situated within the context of the history of the manifesto, a history of practices of dissent against the exclusions enacted through liberal politics. However, it is true that some elements of the women's movement in the late 1960s voiced claims that sought inclusion and legitimacy within the vocabulary of liberal politics. The early relationship between the women's movement and lesbian women illustrates one way in which some feminists enacted their own exclusions in pursuit of a liberal agenda of "equality."

³⁰⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 171-2.

³⁰⁹ Tarrow contrasts American feminism with the "splash" of "French students" and "other confrontational movements of the 1960s." Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 172.

The years 1969-70 had seen the emergence of what Betty Friedan called the “lavender menace” within the National Organization of Women, when (much to the chagrin of Friedan) the visibility of lesbians within NOW led Rita Mae Brown and others to resign and form coalitions with Redstockings, the Gay Liberation Front, and finally their own group, Radicalesbians.³¹⁰ By 1973, the purge of lesbians within the feminist movement had subsided, and NOW began to back efforts against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. It was also in 1973 that Carol Hanisch, member of the group New York Radical Women, wrote “The Liberal Takeover of Women’s Liberation” that bemoaned the increasing power of “liberal opportunists” who play “in the hands of the left/liberal male establishment” and focus on legislation over larger issues of “power.”³¹¹ “That they have attempted to bury us historically as well as shut us out from the present has become increasingly clear,” Hanisch wrote.³¹²

This attempt to “bury” the history of radical lesbian feminism within the larger, familiar narrative of the women’s movement as a liberal project extends to gay and lesbian histories as well. Barry D. Adam’s popular text, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement*, identifies this difference between other sixties movements and early gay and lesbian politics when he writes, “Gay liberation never thought of itself as a civil rights movement for a particular minority but as a revolutionary struggle” for participatory

³¹⁰ Following Friedan’s homophobic coining of the term, a group of women crashed the 1970 Second Congress to Unite Women by wearing shirts with the words “lavender menace” printed on them. This “lavender menace” later formed what would be known as Radicalesbians. Carolyn Dever, *Skeptical Feminism: Activist Theory, Activist Practice* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003): 144; Bhaskar A. Shukla, *Feminism: From Mary Wollstonecraft to Betty Friedan* (New Delhi: Sarup and Sons, 2008): 111.

³¹¹ Carol Hanisch, “The Liberal Takeover of Women’s Liberation,” (1973) in *Feminist Revolution*, ed. Redstockings of the Women’s Liberation Movement (New York: Random House, 1975, 1978): 162-167.

³¹² Hanish, “Liberal Takeover,” 166.

democracy and expanded sexual possibilities: “Civil rights had become passé.”³¹³

However, he argues that the movement quickly split into factions between those who identified with the more radical precepts of the “New Left” and those more concerned with seeking legal recognition and rights-protection.³¹⁴ By the early seventies, Adam writes, the liberal factions won out: “With the general decline of New Left movements in the late 1970s, self-professed gay liberation fronts faded as well, leaving reformist groups in the political field and engendering a new proliferation of gay and lesbian interest groups organized within existing institutions.”³¹⁵ Adam’s representation of the rise of the gay and lesbian rights movement as a liberal project (and associated decline of more radical factions of the movement) unfortunately foregrounds the institutional, liberal aspects of the movement. However, just because the movement’s liberal elements became powerful and popularized doesn’t mean that the narrative history of the movement is accurately depicted as a purely liberal project.

In another example, Alexandra Chasin’s critical analysis of the relationship between advertising, consumption, and gay/lesbian identity characterizes the history of the gay and lesbian movements as “consistently focused on expanding individual rights” and the “drive for the full range of the benefits and privileges of citizenship....”³¹⁶ Although she goes on to identify problems with this liberal agenda (assimilation, simplified models of oppression), she only identifies one alternative “thread” in the movement, which she terms “progressive,” as concerned with the ability of individuals to have enough

³¹³ Barry D. Adam, *The Rise of a Gay and Lesbian Movement* (New York: Twayne Publishers/Simon & Shuster Macmillan, 1995): 84, 82.

³¹⁴ Adam, *Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 86

³¹⁵ Adam, *Gay and Lesbian Movement*, 89.

³¹⁶ Alexandra Chasin, *Selling Out: The Gay and Lesbian Movement Goes to Market* (New York: Palgrave, 2000): 15.

resources and opportunity to *exercise* the rights they are given: “a value on access [is] the defining difference between progressive and liberal agendas.”³¹⁷ These characterizations of the history of gay and lesbian politics (and specifically in the context of this chapter, lesbian feminist politics) fail to acknowledge the ways in which texts that emerged from the feminist, lesbian, and gay movements challenged traditional liberal structures of identity (sexual and gendered, individual and community), foregrounded the performative aspects of political rhetoric, and contested the exclusions enacted through liberal politics. In other words, these characterizations fail to recognize the ways in which these texts belong to the tradition of the manifesto genre.

In contrast to these traditional narratives, my readings of texts written by lesbians and feminists during this time illustrate ways in which the women’s movement’s initial failure to include lesbian identity within their rhetorical claims for liberal rights led lesbians to question and redefine sexual and gender identity through strategies of manifesto rhetoric. Small feminist and lesbian publications flourished during this time, and such texts recorded ways in which the “lesbian purge” within feminism, in fact, *enabled* lesbian activists to articulate the importance of lesbian identity as *separate* from the identity “woman.” Just as the gaps and failures of the identity category of the universal citizen of liberal politics enabled the emergence of the manifesto and its counter-identities, the gaps and failures of feminist identity enabled the emergence of lesbian feminism and its counter-identities. At the same time, lesbian feminists attempted to bridge this divide by extending the definition of “lesbian” to include heterosexual feminist women through use of the term “woman-identified woman.” Thus lesbian feminism came to constitute a counter-identity and a space for the emergence of a “post”

³¹⁷ Chasin, *Selling Out*, 19, 22.

identity as well. The initial rejection of lesbians from the movement enabled the representation of the lesbian identity as a counter-identity, an identity under deconstruction, an identity explicitly performed for political purposes.

This historical moment—the moment when manifesto rhetoric was utilized by lesbian feminists to articulate and challenge liberal representations of politics, sex, and gender—was a moment that is ignored by both of the traditional narratives of feminist history: the narrative within social science of feminist history as *liberal* feminist history, as well as the postmodern/queer feminist narrative of the “second wave” as a regressive, “essentialist,” “modernist” movement. My analysis resituates texts written by lesbians and feminists during this time within the context of the tradition of manifesto-writing. This shift in context enables a more expansive understanding of liberal political rhetoric as historically interwoven with manifesto rhetoric, as well as the centrality of categories of gender and sexuality in this historical process

Narrative #2: Modern Feminism vs. Postmodern Feminism

My readings of lesbian feminist texts from the 1960s and 1970s challenge contemporary critics of identity politics who see radical politics in the sixties and seventies as the culmination of a certain “modern” sensibility that later gave birth to our current “postmodern” context. My analysis invites readers to re-read the radical second wave, to read the postmodern into the modern, to read post-identity politics into identity politics, and to historicize activist tradition—not in order to discover the “truth” of activist history, but to remain aware of the limits of contemporary activist strategies assumed to be “better” simply because they are presented as new.

I offer two examples of this second narrative concerning sixties and seventies political strategy. First, I engage with an argument made by Marianne DeKoven in *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* concerning the status of the sixties as the “full, final flowering of the modern and the emergence of the postmodern;” second, I summarize a particular strand of feminist/queer political theory that situates itself as an antidote to “bad” identity politics.³¹⁸

DeKoven’s *Utopia Limited* offers an argument that I agree with and invoke here: that texts from sixties and early seventies political activism dispute the traditional liberal definition of politics to argue that politics are highly personal—the personal is political—by foregrounding issues of the construction of identity. This redefinition of both identity and politics will be evident in my reading of lesbian feminist texts. DeKoven writes,

the focus of political contestation, of what is considered political, has shifted markedly to questions of identity and subjectivity, particularly in relation to cultural practice. Second-wave feminism’s defining contribution to this shift was its core belief and organizing tool, embodied in and marked by the phrase ‘the personal is political’. . . the New Left extended the domain of the political, and women’s liberation extended it further, so that ‘actions’ could be almost anything and appear almost anywhere. . . .³¹⁹

DeKoven argues that the “work” of politics shifted tremendously during this time to encompass an entire range of new practices, such as consciousness-raising, forms of artistic performance, and other “therapeutic” or “aesthetic” practices having to do with

³¹⁸ Marianne DeKoven, *Utopia Limited: The Sixties and the Emergence of the Postmodern* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004): 3.

³¹⁹ DeKoven, 255-256.

challenging ideas, thoughts, ideology, recognizing oppression, and reimagining self and community.

Where DeKoven and I disagree, however, is with her characterization of the sixties as a time of high modernism which gave way to our current postmodern era. DeKoven sees the “utopian master narratives” of the sixties as well as this very concern with identity politics as evidence of modernity—as opposed to where we are now, who we are now, the postmodern politics we practice today.³²⁰ The narrative that emerges in DeKoven’s text is that politics today are fundamentally different than they were in the sixties and early seventies, and the sixties and seventies were the “full final flowering” of an earlier, modern period.

While change has occurred, obviously, in the intervening 35-45 years, I fear the implicit progressive (or regressive, depending on your view of the value of the “postmodern,”) narrative that emerges in this modern/postmodern distinction; I worry that such categorization will inadvertently dismiss recognition and study of the complexities of this era, as well as the potential loss of an historical recuperation of activist strategies from the sixties and seventies (and the recognition of their continuing legacy in contemporary activism). Just as the narrative I discussed in the previous section represented the entire history of feminism as a liberal project, DeKoven’s narrative similarly represents the history of feminism, up to the seventies, as a modern, liberal project. Both characterizations ignore ways in which feminist history involved the contestation against and exposure of exclusions enacted in liberal politics, as well as ways in which such contestation occurred through strategies of the manifesto genre.

³²⁰ Ibid., 8.

Thus, I would like to complicate the modern/postmodern distinction through an analysis of sixties and seventies feminist texts in the context of the manifesto genre.

DeKoven argues that this shift towards a politics of identity “epitomize[d] the sense of participatory democracy as pertaining primarily to a politics of the self—of a modern, utopian ideal of a unified subject, a subject divided against itself by a corrupt society made whole in a utopia of participatory democracy.”³²¹ In this description, activist critiques of oppression and its effects on identity were part of a larger political project intended to achieve individual *wholeness*: the “articulation of participatory democracy... [was] directed not primarily toward the reconstitution of society...but rather toward the reconstitution of the self.”³²² DeKoven sees in this drive towards “reconstitution” of the self, healing the wounds inflicted by society and culture, as reflective of both an Enlightenment and modern notion of the self (unified, rational, free) but also Enlightenment and utopian ideals concerning the possibility for critique—the “capability of an avant-garde...to locate itself sufficiently outside of—at a critical distance from—society to see its ills clearly and to imagine alternatives that will cure them all.”³²³

In contrast to DeKoven, my reading shows that lesbian feminist texts hold open the possibility that the self that is politicized need not be the Enlightenment, modernist, unified, rational self, but instead is a self in constant need of creation, in need of re-making, because it is contingent, contextual, multiple and shifting. My reading of Charlotte Bunch’s text, for example, will counter claims that Bunch invokes traditional or essentialist identity politics. In addition, I would temper DeKoven’s characterization of sixties activism as entirely faithful to the notion of a critical avant-garde; my readings

³²¹ Ibid., 124-125.

³²² Ibid., 133.

³²³ Ibid., 154.

show that these texts illustrate an awareness of complicity in the workings of power, the dangers of historical influence, that do not necessarily preclude critical distance.

DeKoven's description of sixties activism takes a slightly celebratory perspective on the identity politics that emerged during this time. More often, contemporary feminist political theorists have become critical of identity politics, particularly in reference to second-wave feminism.³²⁴ The narrative that emerges in some of these criticisms assumes that the political activism of second-wave feminists and gay/lesbian liberation movements invoked a universal identity: "woman" or "gay" or "lesbian." Writings by feminists of color, for example, contest the exclusions enacted through such strategies of universalizing identity. To cite examples that span three decades, the Combahee River Collective's 1977 "A Black Feminist Statement," Chandra Talpade Mohanty's 1984 "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," and Patricia Hill Collins' 1990 *Black Feminist Thought* argue that the invocation of a singular "woman" or "lesbian" identity results in the marginalization and invisibility of "other" women, including non-Western women, persons of color and the poor.³²⁵ Such critics focused on bringing an intersectional analysis of race and class into feminism's focus on gender; as the Combahee River Collective writes, "we are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression and see as our particular task the

³²⁴ For an excellent analysis of the pro-, anti-, and anti- anti- identity politics debates, see Susan Bickford, "Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy, and the Complexities of Citizenship," *Hypatia* 12:4 (1997): 111-31. Linda Alcoff's "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory" articulates the importance of a theory of positionality in the context of the debates over the meaning of "woman." Linda Alcoff, "Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," in *Signs* 13:3 (1988): 405-436.

³²⁵ The Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement" (1977) in *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*, eds. Gloria Hill, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith (NY: Feminist Press, 1982); Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," (1984) in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Mohanty, Chandra Talpade, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991); Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

development of integrated analysis and practice based on the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking.”³²⁶ In addition, as Susan Bickford notes, such exclusions enacted through the universalization of the (white, Western, middle-class) identity of “woman” inhibit the development of the movement by fostering divisiveness between communities and foreclosing coalitions and movement-building across differences. Such assumptions about identity foreclose possibilities for multiple group memberships (and thus identifications).³²⁷

Taking a slightly different perspective, critics including Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, and Wendy Brown argue that texts from such movements unproblematically invest identity with liberatory potential. Michel Foucault, for example, starts his ambitious series on *The History of Sexuality* by denouncing the strategies of gay liberation as perpetuating “a trend that has doomed us for centuries.”³²⁸ Judith Butler argues against the “constrain[ed]” discourse of identity that “preclude[s]” truly “radical inquiry” and argues for a “new shape of politics” that resists identity for feminist theory.³²⁹ And Wendy Brown condemns feminism for retaining antiquated, modernist epistemological foundations for identity and politics, citing feminist’s “fear” of the postmodern turn as the source of feminism’s ineffectiveness in the instable, fluctuating,

³²⁶ Combahee River Collective, “Black Feminist Statement,” 13. For an excellent discussion of intersectionality and identity politics, see Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” in *The Public Nature of Private Violence: the Discovery of Domestic Abuse*, ed. Martha Albertson Fineman and Roxanne Mykitiuk (New York and London: Routledge, 1994): 93-118.

³²⁷ Susan Bickford, “Anti-Anti-Identity Politics: Feminism, Democracy, and the Complexities of Citizenship,” *Hypatia* 12:4 (1997): 111-31

³²⁸ Michel Foucault. *Foucault Live*, ed. Sylvere Lotringer (New York: Semiotext(e), 1989): 218.

³²⁹ Judith Butler, “Preface 1990” in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999): xxix.

contested terrain of politics.³³⁰ These and other critics of identity politics worry that the assertion of a single, unified identity and the voicing of political claims on the basis of that identity obscures the fact that identity is multiple, shifting, intersectional, contextual and constructed. The problem is that accounts of identity and politics in some queer and postmodern feminist theory are positioned in contrast and opposition to second wave identity politics; it is this contrast that I contest. Such narratives are problematically ahistorical and privilege what is represented as new without accounting for the work that has preceded them.

What some queer and feminist theorists proposed throughout the 1990s and in lieu of traditional identity politics was a redefined, radical politics focused on performative resistance to identity, performing the incoherence of identity, or playing the “game” of identity. Such strategy attempts to de-naturalize identity by exposing its constructedness and playing off its contradictions. However, the narrative that emerges in such work ends up constructing the identity politics of second-wave feminism and gay liberation as problematic, as the case study of what *not* to do, of identity politics in their most harmful and least effective form. The definition of political practice that becomes remembered by feminists in the nineties maps the category of modern, essentialist identity politics onto texts and activism from the seventies, in contrast to progressive, postmodern politics in the nineties. Not only does this false, modern identity politics/postmodern identity-destabilization divide remember the history and definition of politics incorrectly, but this postmodern=good, modern=bad categorization risks reasserting a narrative of linear, historical progress. Such a narrative, in which nineties feminism has progressed beyond

³³⁰ Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995): 37.

the limited feminism of the second wave, invokes a definition of history which is itself modern, and thus inherited.

Feminist History as Manifesto History

Recontextualizing lesbian feminist texts within the tradition of a practice of manifesto-writing illustrates that manifestoes have always exposed the performativity of the political; the genre from its inception has mapped the exclusions inherent to liberal politics onto identity categories of gender. Lesbian feminists composed manifestoes in the sixties and seventies that constituted a “post” identity that demanded creation, an identity that served as a strategy for escaping the influence of history. This history, moreover, remained understood primarily in terms of gender and, increasingly, sexuality. Contemporary feminist political theorists recast and remember this earlier deployment of identity as problematic, and this (incorrect) remembering serves as a strategy for contemporary feminists to attempt to escape the historical influence of their second-wave predecessors. The contemporary strategy for standing outside of the problem of history, then, involves *forgetting* past strategies for dealing with the problem of history, a problem negotiated throughout the manifesto genre. I will analyze this strategic forgetting in more depth in the context of queer politics in the following chapter.

Throughout the 20th century, matters of sexuality became increasingly public sites of contestation and conflict. Sexuality came to stand in for much larger issues of morality, politics, and racial/class fears. As Dagmar Herzog notes, sexuality became “a space for working out a remarkable range of matters that (on the surface) would seem to have little

to do with sex.”³³¹ As I argued earlier, the exclusions and failures of vocabularies of liberal politics were, from the very beginning of the rhetorical tradition of the manifesto genre, mapped onto the idea of gender such that gender “stood in” for liberal exclusion as such. The closer we move to the end of the 20th century, such mapping increasingly occurs through the lens of sexuality as well as gender, as understandings of the relationship between the two became more complex. As had previously occurred with gender, representations of sexuality became ways through which individuals contested elements of liberal politics that were unstable, exclusionary, and problematic.

The texts I choose for close analysis illustrate the continued tradition of contesting liberal identity categories as a method of political protest. When these texts are seen in the context of the manifesto-writing tradition, it becomes clear that such texts are part of an ongoing redefinition of the political—not only in terms such as “the personal is political,” but increasingly in terms of the political importance of representation and the media. Thus while the manifesto genre sustains its momentum in the second wave, the contestation of the political continues to shift towards a concern with forms of representation beyond language, to a concern with various other forms of media and signification.

Just as the rise of art “markets” led to the emergence of avant-garde art movements (which were critical of the markets that birthed them) in the early 20th century, the emergence of an increasingly consumer-oriented media-saturated culture led to the emergence of movements concerned with media representations and their political impact on identities. Todd Gitlin and other civil rights scholars have shown that the press’

³³¹ Dagmar Herzog, *Sex After Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005): 261.

function of disseminating images of violence against African-Americans played a large role in garnering public support for the movement.³³² The successes of civil rights organizations, such as the NAACP, in mobilizing media attention for the benefit of the movement inspired the student, anti-war, and feminist movements that followed. For example, Sara Evans' *Personal Politics* details the way in which the "second wave" learned the importance of media representation, particularly images of women, from their experience in the civil rights movement.³³³ And as Ann C. Hall notes, women in the sixties and seventies became attentive to ways in which women were represented in film, on television, and in advertising, as well as the lack of women as producers of media.³³⁴ As Hall describes it, feminists "during the sixties and seventies were shocked to discover that their worst enemy was the media."³³⁵ This influence led feminists in the sixties and seventies to increasingly use critiques of cultural *representations* of women and lesbians as a way to critique the notion of the liberal citizen-subject, as we will see in the example of texts from CLIT. The concern with historical influence and the constitutive functions of language that run so deep in the manifesto genre progressively take the form of a concern with media representations in the late sixties and seventies.

As the genre of the manifesto continued to be recognized as the way that protest "happens," manifesto authors became increasingly concerned with cultural representation, media, singular identity politics, and group visibility. As culture became

³³² For more on the relationship between the civil rights movements and the media, see Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (University of California Press: 2003); Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (NY: Vintage, 2007).

³³³ Sara Evans, *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* (New York: Vintage Books/Random House, 1979).

³³⁴ Ann C. Hall, *Delights, Desires, and Dilemmas: Essays on Women and the Media* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 1998).

³³⁵ Hall, *Women and the Media*, xiii.

increasingly popular, so did the popularity of culture as the location of critique. Just as the Futurists embraced the products of modernization—technology—as a way to escape historical influence, just as Marx saw the capitalist system as containing the seeds of its own demise, lesbian feminists in the “second wave” used the tools provided by a media-focused mass culture to offer their criticisms of inherited patriarchal definitions of gender, sexuality, and the political. My close readings of selected feminist and lesbian texts show the centrality of the manifesto tradition to “second wave” feminism. Situating these texts within the context of the manifesto tradition enables a more detailed understanding of representations of gender and sexuality, performativity, and their relationship to political rhetoric than the traditional narrative of “first” and “second” waves in the liberal history of feminist politics. These texts also illustrate the continued development of the manifesto genre throughout the 20th century as a consistent practice of redefinition of liberal categories of identity, increasingly through the lens of gender and sexuality; the exposure of exclusions enacted through liberal discourses of “universal rights”; and the embrace of strategies enabled through explicit engagement with the performative and constitutive functions of language and other modes of representation.

The “Game” of Identity: “Lesbians in Revolt,” WITCH, and C.L.I.T.

I begin my reading with Charlotte Bunch’s “Lesbians in Revolt,” originally published in *The Furies* in 1972,³³⁶ followed by an analysis of writings from the 1968-9 Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell (W.I.T.C.H.)³³⁷ and the 1974 Collective

³³⁶ Charlotte Bunch, “Lesbians in Revolt” (1972) in *Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, ed. Chris Bull (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001) 126-131.

³³⁷ “W.I.T.C.H.,” in *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movements*, ed. Robin Morgan (New York: Vintage Books, 1970): 603-621.

Lesbian International Terrors (C.L.I.T.).³³⁸ First, I provide a reading of Bunch's text that complicates the representation of lesbian feminists as invoking "essentialist" identity politics. Rather, through close analysis of her use of pronouns, strategies of audience identification, and the function of the idea of the "woman-identified woman," I argue that Bunch's text offers multiple definitions of "woman" and "lesbian." Bunch invites her readers not simply to coalesce around a unified, activist identity of "woman" but, rather, to create a new identity—a creation that she represents as political activism. Strategies from the manifesto tradition are evident in Bunch's use of reversal to redefine categories of gender, sex, and politics, and Bunch's call for lesbian women to create a new identity invokes the category of the "post" in a fashion similar to Solanas. My reading of Bunch's text illustrates a complex relationship between second-wave feminism, particularly radical and separatist lesbian feminism, and a protest against the way politics was understood to be "done"—an invitation to redefine what "counts" as political within liberal vocabularies. This redefinition not only understood politics as personal, as having to do with identity and what was often considered "private" rather than "public," but it also foregrounded the political functions of representation, language, media, of cultural meanings and ways in which these meanings are mediated.

"Lesbians In Revolt" offers an example of a second-wave lesbian text that situates the *refusal* of patriarchal definitions of lesbian identity as central to creating what Bunch saw as a new sort of politics. In the context of the manifesto tradition, Bunch's text reflects an experience of exclusion within existing categories of liberal politics, an exclusion understood and experienced in terms of gender and sexuality. As such, Bunch's text is

³³⁸ C.L.I.T. "Collective Lesbian International Terrors," in *Off Our Backs* 4.2 (May 31, 1974): 16; "C.L.I.T. Statement #2" in *Off Our Backs* 4.8 (July 31, 1974): 11-22.

part of a larger rhetorical tradition of dissent against the exclusions enacted through liberal vocabularies. Bunch invokes multiple identities for the category “woman,” arguing that lesbians should refuse imposed identity categories and instead, choose to build new selves.

The second group under investigation is WITCH, who, through radical, performative resistance to identity, foreground the constitutive and performative functions of language, strategies inherited from the manifesto tradition. WITCH is an example of a group whose identity was understood as self-consciously constituted through action and language, rather than simply given; group and individual memberships were fluid and performative, with membership based on commitment to specific strategic issues rather than timeless, essential identities. WITCH distinguishes between the identities of “woman” and “witch,” offering parodies and satires of “woman” to performatively destabilize the regulatory constructions of identity by patriarchal power, in addition to offering a genealogical deconstruction of “woman” through such power. WITCH provides an example of the continued development of manifesto strategies of performance and parody in service of critiques of liberal vocabularies.

Finally, I provide a reading of texts from CLIT as an example of a group created in response to “media attacks.” CLIT locates media representation and construction of lesbian identity as central to political action and foregrounds the constructedness of identity through language, discourse, and media representation. CLIT also articulates what they saw as the dangers of co-optation of simplistic oppositional identities by regulatory institutions, further arguing that such co-optation occurs linguistically and concerns knowledge as well as identity. CLIT defines the lesbian as an identity-resister,

and through this definition CLIT performs a strategic “game” of identity that looks a lot like the postmodern destabilization of identity categories that would become the academic fashion of the 1990s. Manifestoes written by CLIT resist not only traditional categories of sex and gender; CLIT’s exposure and rejection of traditional liberal identity categories extend to question the identity of “human being.” Where previously in the manifesto tradition, liberal practices of exclusion through claims to universal rights were understood through the lens of gender, CLIT reverses this gesture to expand the exposure of gender exclusion beyond gender, to encompass the largest categories of liberal identity exclusion: the human.

We Lesbians: Bunch’s Revolt

As I have shown in my analysis of the manifesto tradition, from precursors in Stanton’s counter-declarations through Marinetti’s Futurist manifestoes, pronouns have functioned as rhetorical strategies for renegotiating the representation of identity categories vis-à-vis the traditional liberal subject. Pronouns are used to expose the political significance of identity categories as constituted through liberal vocabularies. In addition, pronouns function to situate the writer in relationship to her audience, to destabilize and reconstitute categories of “us” and “them” that challenge the traditional status of the liberal citizen. This attempt at broadened identification in audience is evident in Charlotte Bunch’s 1972 manifesto, “Lesbians in Revolt.” Bunch strategically employs pronouns to draw the reader in to the text, invites her to identify with the “we” of the text, and then suddenly makes sweeping rejections of all men and all heterosexual

women. A careful analysis of pronouns in Bunch's text illustrates Bunch's strategies of identification and reversal, strategies inherited from the manifesto genre.

In the opening paragraph, Bunch states that "the development of lesbian-feminist politics as the basis for the liberation of women is our top priority; this article outlines our present ideas."³³⁹ This first sentence sets up Bunch as the author speaking on behalf of a collective of lesbian feminists whose goal is the liberation of women. The description of the goal as the liberation of all women, not just lesbians, leaves the hetero-identified woman sympathetic to the "we" of the text, since Bunch's "we" has all women's liberation in mind.

Curiously, for the rest of this paragraph, Bunch does not refer to lesbians as "us" but uses "the lesbian" or "she": "the lesbian is in revolt....she defines herself....the lesbian rejects...she defies his world...."³⁴⁰ The use of "she" and "the lesbian" distances Bunch from the identity being discussed, the lesbian feminist, and makes Bunch's description of lesbians appear like a description of reality rather than a self-interested self-portrait. In the rest of this paragraph, the word "our" is only used to describe "our society" and "our sexist, racist, capitalist, imperialist system."³⁴¹ In order for the reader to identify with the author's "we" here, she only needs to belong to "our" society and to accept its description as "sexist, racist," etc.; she need not already identify as a lesbian feminist.

Bunch simply "describes" the situation of "the lesbian" in "our" society, which, in her representation, is a situation where the lesbian is both the primary victim and primary threat to that society. Just as previous women used the manifesto genre to expose the

³³⁹ Charlotte Bunch, "Lesbians in Revolt" (1972) in *Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, ed. Chris Bull (New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 2001):126.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 126.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 126.

gendered exclusions of liberal categories such as universal rights (where human rights = male rights), Bunch also exposes liberal rhetoric's *sexual* exclusions (where human rights = heterosexual rights). This double exclusion, seen through the lens of both sex and gender, is what places Bunch doubly "outside" liberal vocabularies. As Bunch notes, this double exclusion is also what makes her doubly threatening: Bunch's multiple exclusions from liberal categories provide her with multiple opportunities to expose the limits of the liberal vocabulary of equality and universal rights.

In the second paragraph, under the heading "Lesbianism is a Political Choice," Bunch returns to the structure of pronouns used in the first paragraph. She sets up a clear distinction between "us" and "them": "Male society defines lesbianism as a sexual act, which reflects men's limited view of women: they think of us only in terms of sex. They also say lesbians are not real women.... We say that a lesbian...is woman-identified."³⁴² Here, the "us" invoked by Bunch refers to "women" and the "they" refers to "men" (which is also interchangeable with "male society" at this point). Again, hetero-identified women are still invited to identify as a member of "us," even though lesbians are the topic of discussion. This is also where the definition of lesbian first emerges, which becomes very important for reader identification as well. Bunch will deploy multiple definitions of the identities "lesbian" and "women" as a form of reversal to destabilize and renegotiate their definitions. The reversal, multiplication, and destabilization of identity categories enable Bunch to invoke the category of the "post": to invite lesbian women to "create new selves."

Bunch defines a lesbian as "woman-identified," someone who "commits herself to other women for political, emotional, physical, and economic support;" "Women are

³⁴² Ibid., 126.

important to her. She is important to herself.”³⁴³ This definition invites all self-loving women, feminist-identified or not, to identify with the term “lesbian.” The commitments required for lesbians do not include sexual “support” by this definition. *Any* woman could potentially self-define as a lesbian, given this definition, whether she has been sexually attracted to women or not. This broad definition further invites identification with the “we” of the text and with Bunch as the author. As noted by Lynne Pearce, the shift from 3rd person to 1st person, from “lesbians” to “we,” “maximizes authority over the object of utterance” by first aligning itself with an invisible position of authority that positions the identity at stake as “other,” and then identifying the speaker as part of this latter group identity “as a gesture of collective oppression that instantly excludes” any reader that is not a member of this group.³⁴⁴ Bunch’s categories of “us” and “them” multiply and reverse to alternately include and exclude men, women, feminists, lesbians, and lesbian-feminists. By rejecting any sexual definition of lesbian, Bunch’s text invites broad identification from women and feminist readers generally; in fact, any feminists who suspect that lesbian identity must have a sexual aspect are condemned as falling prey to male society, since “male society defines lesbianism as a sexual act, which reflects men’s limited view of women: they think of us only in terms of sex” and “woman-identified lesbianism is, then, more than a sexual preference; it is a political choice.”³⁴⁵

³⁴³ Ibid., 126

³⁴⁴ Pearce identifies this gesture as a form of specifically feminist rhetoric, while I would situate it as part of the larger manifesto tradition. Lynne Pearce, *The Rhetorics of Feminism: Readings in Contemporary Cultural Theory and the Popular Press* (London: Routledge, 2004): 53.

³⁴⁵ Bunch, “Lesbians in Revolt,” 126, 127.

We Feminists: “Lesbianism is Not Enough”

Bunch negotiates the complexities of multiple audience identifications through strategic use of pronouns; similarly, she addresses the multiple identifications of her audience through her discussion of intersecting oppressions. Bunch describes the relationship between sexual oppression, gender oppression, and oppressions based on race, class, and “tribe.” In the section “Lesbianism, By Itself, is Not Enough,” Bunch states that “not all lesbians are consciously woman-identified, not are all committed to finding common solutions to the oppression they suffer as women and lesbians.”³⁴⁶ Here, the oppressions suffered by women and lesbians are collapsed; “common solutions” to both are possible through the recognition of the political function of gender and sexual identity and identifications.

In asserting that gender relations and sex are political issues, Bunch invokes a distinction between reform and revolt in order to perform a reversal of identity categories; “Men who rule, and male leftists who seek to rule, try to depoliticize sex and the relations between men and women in order to prevent us from acting to end our oppression and challenging their power.... reformists define it as a private question of whom you sleep with in order to sidetrack our understanding of the politics of sex. For the lesbian-feminist, it is not private; it is a political matter of oppression, domination, and power.”³⁴⁷ Here, Bunch invites those who see sex as political to identify with the lesbian-feminist, again collapsing lesbianism and feminism into one identity, also inviting the lesbian, feminist, and women to understand sex as a political issue. Bunch also re-asserts the importance of sex here, after earlier trying to erase sex from the definition of

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 127.

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 127-128.

lesbian identity. Like Solanas, Bunch invokes a trajectory by which lesbians initially enact rejection and reversal of inherited vocabularies and definitions of gender, sex, and the political. Reversal, however, gives way to another stage where these terms are exposed, redefined, and redeployed: a stage that moves ever closer to the “post,” as in Solanas’ “post-sexuality.”

I would argue that in her definition of lesbian as the “woman-identified woman,” Bunch is articulating what the lesbian should become, not what the lesbian is. Bunch opens a space in which a “post-lesbian” identity might emerge. But Bunch argues that lesbians will not become liberated by merely imagining a new, de-sexed identity. Rather, she invites readers to identify with lesbians by bracketing the sexual aspect of the identity; but once the reader becomes sympathetic to the “we” identity of the author, sex is again asserted as not only political, but the primary source of oppression in our society.

By privileging identity here, Bunch’s text opens itself to accusations of (bad) modernist identity politics: assuming or invoking an essential, fixed notion of identity that lies beneath oppression and remains hidden from view. But by focusing on the mutability of identity, the influence of social forces on its production, the identity invoked here is not fixed, essential, or in need of “liberation.” It is in need of creation—creation through manipulation of social structures, specifically language and media.

History and Privilege: Feminism is Not Enough

The influence of Engels is evident in the section “Sexism is the Root of All Oppression,” where Bunch argues that “the first division of labor, in prehistory, was

based on sex.”³⁴⁸ This “original imperialism was male over female.”³⁴⁹ Here, sex and gender are collapsed; it is unclear exactly what Bunch means by “sex.” The text continues by connecting the sexual division of labor in history with other, multiple oppressions: “men continued this pattern of suppressing people, now on the basis of tribe, race, and class.”³⁵⁰ Bunch connects the oppression of women to other forms of oppression and their associated social movements, including civil rights as well as Marxism and labor issues. And though “there is no reason to believe that our liberation will come with the smashing of capitalism, racism, or imperialism today,” “our war against male supremacy does, however, involve attacking the latter-day dominations based on class, race, and nation.”³⁵¹ By connecting the history of the oppression of women with the oppression of other groups, Bunch makes room for coalitions between groups and individuals. However, the oppression of women as *women* remains primary in this narrative. Privilege in all its forms must be attacked and rejected, Bunch argues, but male privilege is the worst privilege of all.

Next, Bunch articulates the unique position of lesbians within this historical context of male oppression and imperialism. Privilege, Bunch argues, is not only what fuels male supremacy; it also keeps women from revolt:

Most of our privileges as women are granted to us by our relationships to men...whom we now reject. This does not mean that there is no racism or class chauvinism within us, but we must destroy these divisive remnants of privileged

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 128.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 128.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 128.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 128.

behavior among ourselves as the first step toward their destruction in the society.³⁵²

Rejecting privilege, then, is the key to liberation. And lesbians, in particular, are socially positioned to reject male privilege: “we have no heterosexual privileges, and when we publicly assert our Lesbianism, those of us who had them lose many of our class and race privileges.”³⁵³ Because lesbians are denied male privilege by association and are stripped of their other privileges by being lesbian, “lesbianism is a threat to the ideological, political, personal, and economic basis of male supremacy.” The lesbian’s position of non-privilege is what poses such a threat to male society.

Being lesbian, then, is represented by Bunch as a way of moving beyond the oppression of the male/female binary. Non-privilege is also the basis for her rejection of solutions offering reform; she is in revolt because she has nothing to lose.

The lesbian receives none of these heterosexual privileges or compensations since she does not accept the male demands on her. She has little vested interest in maintaining the present political system since all of its institutions...work to keep her down. If she understands her oppression, she has nothing to gain by supporting rich white male America and much to gain from fighting to change it.

She is less prone to accept reformist solutions to women’s oppression.³⁵⁴

This paragraph is interesting in its positioning of lesbians as particularly threatening to male society due to their position outside of privilege. Lesbians are privileged because they lack male privilege. The rather non-threatening and inviting definition of lesbian as “woman-identified woman” from the beginning of the text has evolved into a definition

³⁵² Ibid., 128.

³⁵³ Ibid., 128.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 129.

of lesbian as potentially powerful due to her position as excluded from privilege, precisely because of the gendered and sexed exclusions enacted through liberal vocabularies. The redefinition of lesbian in Bunch's text is a redefinition of the liberal terms of gender, sexuality, and politics. Not only does Bunch expose the rhetoric of liberal universality as excluding women and lesbians; it is this exclusion from liberal logics that enables the redefinition of identity categories of sex and gender. This an invitation to dissent, an invitation with promises of power, an offer of "something better than submission to personal oppression. We offer the beginning of the end of collective and individual male supremacy."³⁵⁵

The hetero-identified woman and the feminist were, initially, invited to identify as lesbian under the definition of "woman-identified woman." But now, near the end of the manifesto, Bunch asserts that to be an effective lesbian in revolt, being heterosexual or feminist is not enough. The "woman-identified woman" now also means completely rejecting all heterosexual women and all men:

As long as straight women see lesbianism as a bedroom issue, they hold back the development of politics and strategies that would put an end to male supremacy....Being a lesbian means ending identification with, allegiance to, dependence on, and support of heterosexuality....Lesbianism is the key to liberation and only women who cut their ties to male privilege can be trusted to remain serious in the struggle against male dominance. Those who remain tied to men, individually or in political theory, cannot always put women first.³⁵⁶

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 129.

³⁵⁶ Ibid., 130.

Some of the very women who were invited to identify as lesbian early in the manifesto are now required to cut all ties to heterosexuality, men, and male “political theory” if they want to continue to identify as lesbians, if they want to ever hope to end any form of oppression. This leads to Bunch’s final call for “our own political movement” that can instigate “changes that will have more than token effects.”³⁵⁷

Identity and the Need for Self-Creation

A reading of “Lesbians in Revolt” as offering an unproblematic, undifferentiated identity category for “lesbians” or “women” or “men” would be plausible. This text is open to accusations that it follows the very “liberatory” logic that Foucault warns against, positing the existence of some “true” identity of “woman” or “lesbian” that is affirmed in order to subvert male supremacy. Indeed, Bunch writes “to be a lesbian is to love oneself, woman, in a culture that despises women” which seems to assume that there *is* an unproblematic, static self available to love, as if the simple affirmation of “lesbian” as a coherent, liberatory identity will itself resist patriarchal power.³⁵⁸ However, I counter that such a reading of Bunch’s text misses the complex ways in which she invokes multiple identities, as well as her call for lesbian identity to be created, rather than “uncovered” or “discovered.” The identity inherited from liberal patriarchy is inadequate for Bunch; rather, the limits of historically-imposed identity categories can be broken through use of rhetorical strategies of the manifesto tradition to create a new, “post” identity that does not yet exist. Bunch began her text by stating “our” top priority, which

³⁵⁷ Ibid., 131.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 126.

is the “development” of lesbian-feminist politics. This development involves the redefinition of liberal categories of gender, sexuality, identity, and politics.

However, Bunch invokes multiple definitions of “lesbian” and “woman” in this text, distinguishing between the sexual identity “lesbian” constructed by patriarchy, and the difficult, still undeveloped identity “lesbian” as “woman-identified woman,” available only through the refusal of patriarchal identity categories. Bunch writes:

Male society defines lesbianism as a sexual act, which reflects men’s limited view of women; they think of us only in terms of sex. They also say lesbians are not real women, so a real woman is one who gets fucked by men. We say that a lesbian is a woman whose sense of self and energies, including sexual energies, center around women—she is woman-identified.³⁵⁹

Bunch defines a lesbian as a “woman-identified woman,” rejecting male culture’s definition of “lesbianism as a sexual act” which offers a “limited view of women.”³⁶⁰ However, being a lesbian is not enough to subvert male supremacy; lesbians must be aware of the “limits of individual solutions to oppression” and be feminists as well: “lesbians must become feminists and fight against woman oppression, just as feminists must become lesbians if they hope to end male supremacy.”³⁶¹ Neither feminism nor lesbianism alone can topple patriarchy, as these singular identities risk recreating the exclusions enacted through liberal vocabularies. Bunch sets up distinctions between the lesbian, the feminist, and the lesbian feminist; these multiplications and complications of available identity categories function as destabilizing rhetorical strategies that open up possibilities for a new, “post” identity to be created.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 126.

³⁶⁰ Ibid., 126.

³⁶¹ Ibid., 127.

Bunch argues that “to be a lesbian is to love oneself.”³⁶² Bunch’s rhetorical negotiation of identity categories shows that the “self” Bunch asks lesbians to love is in the beginning stages of *creation*, an identity that needs “development” as much as lesbian-feminist politics. To be a lesbian involves some sense of being “post,” post-woman or post-patriarchal identity. Bunch argues for the refusal of male-defined identity for women and lesbians: “if she understands her oppression, she has nothing to gain by supporting white rich male America and much to gain from fighting to change it.”³⁶³

This idea, that political critique occurs through the rejection of imposed identities, reflects similar rhetoric to Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto*. I read Solanas as arguing for SCUM females to go beyond the sexual to become anti-sex and, eventually, post-sex. Similarly, Bunch’s descriptions of the difficulties of resistance, of the fact that being a lesbian alone is “not enough” because identities are still imposed from outside, point to a troubled notion of identity and its relation to inherited culture. In this way, Bunch’s text grapples with the familiar problem of the status of history in manifesto rhetoric. Where previous strategies for dealing with the problem of historical inheritance included defensive denial (Futurists) and foregoing translatability (Dada), Bunch draws from Solanas’ strategy of reversal that opens a space for something new, as-yet-unimagined, and thus un-co-optable, to be created.

The impact of a self-created “post” identity goes beyond women and lesbians. Bunch writes that lesbians’ “refusal to submit” will force men to “build new selves”:

our refusal to submit will force some to examine their sexist behavior, to break down their own destructive privileges over other humans, and to fight against

³⁶² Ibid., 126.

³⁶³ Ibid., 129.

those privileges in other men. They will have to build new selves that do not depend on oppressing women and learn to live in social structures that do not give them power over anyone.³⁶⁴

It follows that all women, as well, need to “build new selves.” The way such selves are built occurs through rejection of imposed identity, through revolt against definitions of sexuality and gender, through the politicization of identity, sexuality, personal relationships, and the politics of self-identification.

Re-Placing Lesbian Identities in Historical Context

This reading of “Lesbians In Revolt” foregrounds Bunch’s distinction between multiple identity categories (woman, feminist, lesbian, lesbian-in-revolt), her refusal to adopt dominant definitions of “lesbian” in order to create a “new self” that one can “love,” and her placement of identity-refusal and re-creation as central to political resistance and struggle. Bunch’s text demonstrates not only an awareness of the dangers of what some contemporary feminists would condemn as modern identity politics, but a performative resistance to those dangers. “Lesbians in Revolt” thus complicates the postmodern feminist account of second-wave identity politics. Any narrative that constructs the second-wave feminist or gay “libber” as regressive, problematic, utopian, and naïve in order to construct the post-modern feminist as better, more liberatory, more radical, and more critical inadvertently invokes narratives of progress that are part of the very “modern” sensibility that is being critiqued.

Rather, I situate these lesbian feminist texts outside of the context of the “second wave” and into the history of the manifesto genre. Instead of foregrounding differences

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 129.

between the second wave and the postmodern, I foreground connections between manifesto strategies from the avant-garde and Solanas, through lesbian feminism, and forward into the work of contemporary feminist political theory. I hope this recontextualization rescues the “second wave” from being dismissed as inadequate, modern identity politics at their worst. I also hope that this recontextualization opposes romantic memoirs or nostalgic characterizations of sixties and seventies radical politics as somehow “truly” radical, political, effective, and liberating. Such nostalgia risks challenging contemporary political activism as defeatist, cynical, or otherwise absent. Nostalgic narratives inadvertently breed more defeat, cynicism and apathy—the “hell in a hand basket” excuse for inaction. While what “counts” as politics continues to change with historical context, our definitions of activism are often more inherited and more complex than we may acknowledge. It is important to ask not only what women during this time were saying through the manifesto, but how they were saying it, and I think it is telling that the manifesto genre was the primary way in which lesbian feminist claims were made during this time. While lesbian feminists utilized inherited strategies of manifesto rhetoric, and contemporary feminist theory is indebted to this same rhetorical tradition, the way in which the genre is used to critique liberal exclusion—gender exclusion—expands over time in relation to political and historical context.

“I Am a WITCH”: Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell

Similarly, another group, WITCH, articulates ways in which identity is made, not given; this description enables WITCH to enact an explicitly performative and parodic destabilization of the identity of “woman” through genealogy of this identity category

and a number of direct-action “hexings.” According to Robin Morgan’s *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement*, WITCH was a loose-knit organization that began in 1968 and consisted of a number of “covens” in at least six cities across America.³⁶⁵ The best-known acronym, Women’s International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell, changed according to various “hexes,” or direct actions, against specific targets. Such “hexings” included a protest against the United Fruit Company in Washington, D.C., for international trade policy and policies towards women workers; a protest against the University of Chicago Sociology Department for firing a feminist professor, which included “shower[ing]” the department “with hair cuttings and nail clippings;” and protests against AT&T telephone company and a number of bridal fairs nationwide.³⁶⁶ According to which “hexing” was taking place, WITCH came to stand for Women Indentured to Traveler’s Corporate Hell; Women Infuriated at Taking Care of Hoodlums; Women Incensed at Telephone Company Harassment; Women’s Independent Taxpayers, Consumers, and Homemakers; Women Interested in Toppling Consumption Holidays; and Women Inspired to Commit Herstory.³⁶⁷

According to the statement issued by the New York Covens, WITCH is:

an all-woman everything. It’s theater, revolution magic, terror, joy, garlic flowers, spells.... WITCH lives and laughs in every woman. She is the free part of each of us, beneath the shy smiles, the acquiescence to absurd male domination, the make-up or flesh-suffocating clothing our sick society demands.

³⁶⁵ Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage Books: 1970).

³⁶⁶ Morgan, 604.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 604.

There is no ‘joining’ WITCH. If you are a woman and dare to look within yourself, you are a Witch. You make your own rules. You are free and beautiful. You can be invisible or evident in how you choose to make your witch-self known.... Whatever is repressive, solely male-oriented, greedy, puritanical, authoritarian—those are your targets. Your weapons are theater, satire, explosions, magic, herbs, music, costumes, cameras, masks, chants, stickers, stencils and paint, films, tambourines, bricks, brooms, guns, voodoo dolls, cats, candles, bells, chalk, nail clippings, hand grenades, poison rings, fuses, tape recorders, incense—your own boundless beautiful imagination. Your power comes from your own self as a woman.... You are a Witch by saying aloud, ‘I am a Witch’ three times, and *thinking about that*.³⁶⁸

As a group, WITCH is configured in opposition to specific problems: the firing of a feminist professor, or a transit rate hike. Although this text calls on women to participate *as women*, the focus is not on positing some essential identity of “woman” but rather to come together against a certain problem, to host public protest against a specific infraction. Thus, although the identity of “woman” is certainly invoked here, the focus is on practicing issue-specific political dissent.

The Washington, D.C. coven claimed that WITCH was “a total concept of revolutionary female identity.”³⁶⁹ WITCH’s manifestoes construct the identity of “witches” through language and action, not through appeals to common “nature” or innate similarities; their identity is made, not given. The variety of acronyms suggests a fluidity of group identity and a fluid concept of the identity “woman” itself. One does

³⁶⁸ WITCH, “New York Covens,” in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage Books: 1970): 605-606.

³⁶⁹ Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 604.

not 'join' WITCH; rather, membership entails holding a certain critical perspective towards one's own identity as a woman, as well as towards institutions that oppress and constitute that identity, and *acting* on this critical perspective. Membership simply entails a declaration, an enunciation, saying aloud 'I am a Witch,' focusing attention on the ways in which identity is not given, but constituted through language and power, as well as the ways in which this very enunciation is itself political action, performative construction. Such overt exposure of the process of gendered identity-construction via language similarly exposes liberal gender identity constructions as performative. By foregrounding this performativity, WITCH denaturalizes identity, which enables the possibility for the identity of "woman" to be performed and enacted differently.

Reclaiming the Weapons of the WITCH

The reclamation of the "witch" name signals reevaluation of inherited morals at the same time as it acquiesces to adherence to the moral binary of good/evil. WITCH women reclaim the "witch" label as positive rather than negative; they do not escape the category, however. The rhetoric of WITCH's manifestoes set up a dichotomy between the identities "witch" and "woman," adopting the subversive title of "witch," with all its historical connotations, in order to deconstruct, de-stabilize, and de-naturalize the oppressive identity category of "woman." By trading the identity of "woman" for that of "witch," the group invokes the performance of witch identity as one way to perform "woman" differently. The adoption of the "witch" identity invokes the part of that identity that involves resistance, the site from which resistance emerges.

Although WITCH is composed of women, the identity invoked here is not universal “womanhood” but the identity of “witch” as resistance to the imposed, normalized identity of “woman.” Institutions that are opposed by WITCH are not limited to institutions that solely hurt women; WITCH acknowledges the intersection of multiple sites of power that manifest in everything “repressive, solely male-oriented, greedy, puritanical, authoritarian.”³⁷⁰ Thus, the group comes together to support issues not solely woman-focused, forming loose coalitions that do not restrict membership. Opening identificatory membership opportunities enables WITCH to avoid the danger of inadvertently investing in and perpetuating an identity that is constituted through oppression. Although WITCH cannot invoke an alternative identity not imbricated in the history of patriarchy, since such an identity does not yet exist, the overt adoption of WITCH performs a reversal not available through the adoption of the identity of “woman.”

For WITCH, the site of resistance comes from within—from the reclamation of the devalued, from the tools at hand, as limited as they might be. WITCH’s choices of weapons are notable: “theater, satire, explosions, magic, herbs, music, costumes, cameras, masks....”³⁷¹ While the weapons, the tools of subversion, may be limited, they are mundane as well as multiple. Although WITCH engages in issue-specific, context-specific actions and protests, their strategies are unapologetically *performative*. In a Butlerian reading, these performances interrupt the repetitive iteration of feminine identity through parody and satire, masks and costumes, unmasking the contradictions inherent in identity, destabilizing the “naturalness” of gender identity, exposing the

³⁷⁰ Ibid., 606.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 606.

performativity inherent in the identity of “bride,” for example, or of women’s role in the institution of family.

For example, one direct action staged by WITCH included a protest against a bridal fair in New York intended to “confront the whoremakers at the Bridal Fair (and at every bridal fair across the country) but more important, confront and overthrow the institutions of marriage and capitalism which make such bridal fairs possible!”³⁷² The leaflet for WITCH’s 1969 “Un-Bridal Fair” calls for “witches, gypsies, feminists, students, our black and Puerto Rican sisters, professional women, housewives, welfare women” and “all oppressed women of every age and marital status” to “*Confront*” the opposition at the Un-Bridal Fair.³⁷³ This diverse audience is asked to “*Bring* posters, brooms, costumes, consciousness, anger, witches’ brews, love, bridal gowns, tambourines, hexes, laughter, solidarity, and alternatives” through which

We will create our own rituals and festivals, perform our own anti-fashion shows, meet each other and the brides-to-be attending the fair in self-defense against the common enemy. We will distribute WITCH “shoplifting” bags, share free cocoa and experiences, cast spells, celebrate guerrilla theater, and demand an *end* to the patriarchal structure and the profit-oriented society.³⁷⁴

WITCH’s opposition to the larger, intersecting structures of capitalism and patriarchy illustrates their awareness of multiple sites of oppression, while their appeal to a multitude of *kinds* of women reflects their recognition that multiple sites of oppression construct multiple oppressed identities. Similarly, the “weapons” of protest are multiple,

³⁷² WITCH, “Confront the Whoremakers At the Bridal Fair,” in Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 613.

³⁷³ WITCH, “Confront the Whoremakers At the Bridal Fair,” in Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Powerful*, 610.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 610-611.

including everything from “laughter” to “costumes,” although items directly associated with theater and performance are a common theme. This list of “weapons” reflects WITCH’s awareness of the need for multiple strategies against multiple sites of oppression, while the emphasis on performance and theater highlights the function of the protest as a form of performance, as an exhibition. The definition of this direct action as an “Un-Bridal Fair” involving the invention of “our own rituals and festivals” and “anti-fashion shows” places WITCH’s action in direct opposition to the activities of the Bridal Fair, which exposes the Bridal Fair’s own performative and theatrical status. Such exposure serves to de-naturalize the marriage industry and institution by exposing it *as performance* through reversal and parody.

However, WITCH is not satisfied with mere reversal; the “Un-” of the “Un-Bridal Fair” and the “anti-” of the “anti-fashion shows” are only useful to WITCH as tactics in the service of a larger, more expansive critique of society that will bring about alternative forms of consciousness and identity. WITCH writes:

Although we resist society’s demand for legal and commercial trappings to the simple act of living together, our alternative is *not* “not marrying” within this present sick, racist, sexist society. The so-called “sexual revolution” of the last decade has only made the pressures on women more subtle, and provided the greed-brokers with even more complicated means of insuring their consumptive hegemony over us.³⁷⁵

This passage illustrates WITCH’s awareness of the limits of parody and reversal without associated shifts in consciousness and society: the ability of “sick, racist, sexist society” to recuperate reversal within its logic. WITCH acknowledges the limits of its critical

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 613.

resources, but continues to invest in strategies that expose and parody what they see as oppressive institutions.

The adoption of a “witch” identity also entails a performative resistance to constructions of femininity and “woman” through critical, alternative genealogy; a number of texts by WITCH, most notably the Chicago Coven’s “Witches as Women’s Hidden History” describe a narrative history of women’s oppression, contextualizing their appropriation of the “witch” identity as “a revolutionary image for woman,” focusing on the aspect of women’s identity that has historically resisted power, on women that “did fight hard and in their fight they refused to accept the level of struggle which society deemed acceptable for their sex...the center of motion both as agitators and as targets, as women today must assume positions of leadership if radical politics are to relate to the real oppression of people.”³⁷⁶ Here, WITCH offers a historical overview of not only the oppression of women, but of the struggle against that oppression. In doing so, WITCH contests liberal political participation as historically deemed “appropriate” for women, arguing for a politically radical feminist politics that engages in performative public dissent.

By overtly eschewing protest strategies of liberal feminism, WITCH participates in an alternative feminist tradition indebted to women Futurists and Solanas. This tradition, the manifesto tradition, engages in political activism that exposes and parodies the exclusions enacted through liberal vocabularies, rather than claiming admittance under their purview. As Futurists objected to suffrage tactics and Solanas objected to forms of what

³⁷⁶ WITCH Chicago Covens, “Witches as Women’s Human History,” (1968) in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage Books: 1970): 609-610.

she saw as prescribed protest, so does WITCH invoke a politics of identity-destabilization that undermines the rhetorics of liberal politics.

In the case of WITCH, we see not only an example of feminist *awareness* of the constructedness of identity but also an overtly performative *resistance* to the ways such identity becomes constituted through the intersections of institutions, discourse, and power. WITCH was a little-known group, but they offer an important counterpoint to postmodern feminism's accusation that second-wave feminism lacked insight into the performative destabilization of identity. WITCH also counters the retrospective repackaging of the story of the second wave as a story of liberal feminism and its limited definition of the political. Rather, WITCH's texts describe group and individual identity as constituted through language and action, not given, fixed or essential; parodic performance of the contradictions between "witch" and "woman" identities effectively destabilizes the "given-ness" of female identity and exposes the workings of power in its construction. These strategies are inherited as part of a tradition of dissent exemplified by manifesto rhetoric. WITCH challenges accusations that they support a liberal notion of universality by highlighting the exclusion of women and pushing this exclusion via the adoption of the term "witch." The problem of historical inheritance is directly addressed by offering alternative historical narratives. In addition, WITCH highlights the performativity of both identity and political action via its open membership rules and direct-action "hexings."

“The Divorce is Final”: C.L.I.T., or Collective Lesbian International Terrors

Another little-known group, CLIT, focused on representations of identity as central to political struggle and resistance to power. CLIT articulated the dangers of the co-optation of identity by power, highlighting the difficulties of inhabiting an oppositional, resistant identity. CLIT defines lesbians as *identity-resisters*, a definition that serves as a political strategy similar to that employed by some contemporary feminists. In manifestoes from CLIT, this identity-resistance inherited from the manifesto tradition increasingly concerns media representations. While use of manifesto rhetoric has historically involved methods that foreground the constitutive and performative functions of language, the “linguistic” is widening to involve other forms of cultural representation for lesbian feminists: television, film, advertisements, etc. CLIT continues the manifesto tradition of blurring lines between aesthetics and politics while redefining each in turn. The group focuses on the link between representation and the limits of intelligibility—between what we are taught and what we can imagine and understand.

CLIT adopts strategies from the rhetorical history of the manifesto tradition, but they apply these strategies to the specific historical context of the late sixties and early seventies. As noted by WITCH, the emergence of the “sexual revolution” produced new forms of potential co-optation of gendered and sexual identities, enabled new forms of liberal exclusion to be replicated through what was intended to be oppositional, critical rhetoric. This cultural shift in the definitions and experiences of sexual and gender identities provided an entirely different context for the deployment of manifesto strategies than that of the Futurists or Valerie Solanas.

In the May 31st, 1974 issue of the feminist publication *Off Our Backs*, the radical lesbian feminist group called Collective Lesbian International Terrors, or C.L.I.T., published a statement introducing themselves to the feminist community. CLIT defines itself as a group constituted in “recent media insults” against representations of lesbians.³⁷⁷ As a group, CLIT is called to “counterattack” in order to achieve the goal of not being “co-opted as Lesbians into a feminist closet but rather to become strong, militant Lesbian voices responding collectively and individually to media infractions.”³⁷⁸ CLIT outlines a series of binaries between writer and reader, thinker and “star-follower,” producer and consumer, constituting their membership (and readership) as women who should “respond in thoughtful writing and decisive action.”³⁷⁹ CLIT calls for a total boycott of “straight media” in hopes that this will “halt” co-optation of Lesbians. Since the straight press “does not actually describe what is going on in the world, but rather feeds us its distorted perceptions,” “buying the straight media, we become paralyzed by the hopelessness of the world situation.”³⁸⁰ Just as Marx intended to awake the self-consciousness of the proletariat as a class and saw this as a prerequisite for revolution, CLIT believes that media representations of gender and sexual identity limit consciousness and identificatory possibilities necessary to bring about social change.

However, CLIT’s call is not only for a boycott of straight media due to their “disfigurement” of representations of women’s identities and experiences. CLIT is acutely aware of the limits of argumentative strategies, of the dangers of co-optation. This process of co-optation is described by CLIT: “they pretend not to understand what

³⁷⁷ C.L.I.T. “Collective Lesbian International Terrors,” in *Off Our Backs* 4.2 (May 31, 1974): 16.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

we are saying; thy upset us to the point where we rephrase everything in hopes of acceptance; we walk away frustrated; then two months later they present our ideas, distorted, as their own—appearing liberal.”³⁸¹ Because of this danger, their goal is the eventual and total lack of understanding between a developing, independent lesbian media and the mainstream “liberal” press. CLIT believes:

it is far more important to become unintelligible, i.e., un-co-optable, to the Man, and to become more intelligible to Lesbians.... We have to figure out ways to protect our minds from the disfigurement of straight culture and its heterosexual despair. One goal is to reach the point of not even understanding what they are talking about, or the mentality that creates their perception of the world.... We must remember that it is impossible to argue with a mind-fucker.³⁸²

Through temporary isolation of the lesbian community from the mainstream and feminist media and community, CLIT hopes to create not only independent lesbian media, but an entirely new form of lesbian knowledge, language, truth, and identity. Instead of allowing lesbian ideas to be co-opted and misrepresented by the media, CLIT refuses to “engage...in the male debate. We will not waste any more of our earth time trying to teach the Man or his media anything. The divorce is final.”³⁸³

CLIT articulates the problem for lesbians as a problem focused on media, where straight feminists and liberals are conflated with “The Man” and his media. The problem for lesbians is a problem of co-optation, the problem of historical inheritance, of a lack of a location of resistance that would allow lesbian experience to emerge. The problem of co-optation is also a problem of intelligibility; only by becoming unintelligible,

³⁸¹ Ibid., 16.

³⁸² Ibid., 16.

³⁸³ Ibid., 16.

untranslatable, can lesbians create conditions that will allow an alternative knowledge and language to emerge. The emergence of a “truly” lesbian media will then strengthen possibilities for critical analysis of the political and cultural system. Just as Solanas invoked the empty future space of the “post-sexual,” as I have argued, CLIT attempts to hasten the arrival of the “post” by foregoing communication with society, a strategy CLIT uses for escaping the influence of history. CLIT argues that attempts to participate in creating representations of lesbians in straight media have only led to “disfigurement” and “distortion”; any attempt to engage in conversation with the mainstream media is bound to fail and hurt lesbians. Politics is practiced through media, language, conversation, and representation. These are not marginal aspects of politics, but the main focus of CLIT as a group.

Where WITCH invited participation from a variety of women, CLIT enacts strict policing of lesbian identity, warning against not only the heterosexual “closet” but the “feminist closet” as well, and warning against alliances with “liberal media” as well as, we can assume, conservative media.³⁸⁴ The identification enacted in this text positions the reader against mainstream media, feminists, and lesbians who attempt to converse or collaborate with any media smacking of “the Man.” Obviously, such a strict oppositional identity category makes coalitions impossible between groups who attempt to “engage in male debate.” We might read this as a polemic against coalition itself, against the dangers of appropriation that (I think CLIT would argue) are inherent to collaboration.

While WITCH reflected a belief in the power of reversal and parody to critique liberal politics, in contrast, CLIT shows skepticism towards the simplicity of such strategies. CLIT isn’t so sure that the location of critique is available within existing society. Thus,

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 16.

CLIT shows a tendency towards separatism and wholesale rejection of available forms of dissent. CLIT's strategies reflect those practiced in Dada manifestoes, where the danger of co-optation leads to attempts at unintelligibility. Such strategies remain indebted to the manifesto tradition as a way of addressing the problems of historical inheritance and the complications of performative and constitutive rhetoric. Rather than trading "woman" for "witch," for example, CLIT hopes to avoid identification itself.

CLIT is attempting to point out the dangers of adopting a simple identity category and its representation in mainstream and even "liberal" media. This description is strategic, an attempt at temporary protection against co-optation, an attempt to create a space that might foster a more developed critique of the limits of representations of lesbian identity, a first step towards a more complex deconstruction of lesbian identity as constructed through language, through media representation.

CLIT's Identity-Resistance and the Media State

In the July 31st, 1974 issue of *Off Our Backs*, CLIT published "CLIT Statement #2," an attack on the "Media State" and a polemic against camp, mainstreaming, bisexuality, straight women, and language.³⁸⁵ CLIT describes the "Media State" as "involved in the most important war game plan of the century—they are defining what a lesbian is to the people of America."³⁸⁶ The definition of lesbian by the Media State ends up co-opting "the thrust of what lesbians actually mean—women of resistance, women who cannot be controlled by the man."³⁸⁷ Against the definition of lesbian by the Media State, CLIT

³⁸⁵ C.L.I.T., "C.L.I.T. Statement #2" in *Off Our Backs* 4.8 (July 31, 1974): 11-22.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

defines lesbian identity through resistance, as resistance to imposed identity categories. To CLIT, a lesbian is an identity-resister.

CLIT warns against complicity with the Media State, which disguises itself “as the condescending liberal, civil-rights oriented, humanitarian teacher of the rabble masses.”³⁸⁸ CLIT distrusts liberal political and identity vocabularies, warning “Never let your oppressor define you—that’s what has hurt us all along.”³⁸⁹ The Media State determines the roles and identities of everyone under its purview; no one is immune from its “mind-fuck”: “all are playing appropriate parts in this game.”³⁹⁰ CLIT articulates a number of institutional discourses that have historically constituted lesbian identity, and CLIT illustrates ways in which such mainstream definitions cast the lesbian as “illegitimate, criminal and deviant.”³⁹¹ These discourses are connected to the liberal, Media State, and function to constitute lesbian identity that can only be resisted by rejecting seemingly “positive” representations, normalization, and acceptance—the “crumbs that the Media State and its supporters are throwing at her. Oppressed people always act this way—it comes from starvation.”³⁹² While the Media State makes its “false plea for acceptance of the lesbian from the people,” CLIT warns that

within a year or two at best, the lesbian will be locked into her new media image and accepted in the oppressor’s definition of herself (which is not herself). When we, she, wakes up and sees the small print and screams, “this isn’t me, this is just

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 11.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 11.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 11.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 11.

³⁹² Ibid., 11.

as oppressive as the way they used to treat me” (ignore, ridicule)—it will be too late on the Media clock. No one will listen....³⁹³

CLIT recognizes that reversal, exhibited in strategies from Futurist and WITCH manifestoes, risks inadvertent engagement with a system that forecloses possibilities for critique. The danger is that “witch,” for example, could come to stand in for the category of “woman” in such a way that it perpetuates liberal exclusions, defined by CLIT as the “mind-fuck” of the Media State.

CLIT provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between power and language, arguing against acceptance of inherited (masculine) definitions or “names,” pointing out a potential disjunction between naming and knowing, and positing the identity of “woman” with the potential to exceed male-imposed categories, to resist the power implicit in naming.³⁹⁴ CLIT points to the constitutive functions of language and its role in restricting identity definitions, to examples of the media defusing the power of women’s language and feminist claims: “it comes as no surprise that the Media State has gunned down feminist language by misuse, overuse, diffusion and defusion” such that “women in the movement even misuse it.”³⁹⁵ This relates back to CLIT’s strategy of unintelligibility, against “thinking of ideas as commodities in the market place.”³⁹⁶

CLIT articulates itself as a collective identity of “C.L.I.T.s” that chooses to write under pseudonym for its “freeing effect” and “room to experiment with writing.”³⁹⁷ Their hope is to expose the power relationships in language, the constitutive power of language and categorization, in order to allow a language of resistance to emerge, a

³⁹³ Ibid., 11.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 12.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 12.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 11.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 12.

language not “based on secrecy—how to look like you’re saying something without saying anything.”³⁹⁸ CLIT draws attention to both language’s power to constitute reality and identity as well as the gaps, disjunctions, between language and reality. Language is used by CLIT to expose the bankruptcy of language itself within specific historical contexts.

The texts of both CLIT and Solanas reclaim representations of female sexual transgression in the service of political and social revolution. Where Solanas pushes SCUM females beyond anti-sex and into the yet-unimagined space of the post-sexual, CLIT adopts this same strategy to foreground the significance of sexuality and unthought-of possibilities for pleasure and desire. The group—the very name of the political organization—is the acronym CLIT, short for clitoris, the physical location of female sexual pleasure, the source of female orgasms that were historically denied by medicine and denigrated by psychoanalysis. The clitoris traditionally is left out of constructions of what “counts” as (penetrative, heterosexual) sex, although it is the primary source of female sexual pleasure. Thus CLIT stands in for potential female pleasure outside of the discourses of masculine, liberal culture and medicine, as the name of an unintelligible body, of its illegitimate experience of pleasure. In the adoption of this overtly sexual name, I see CLIT invoke an as-yet-unarticulated discourse of female pleasure and desire—the CLIT—as the basis for the collective identity: the group *is* CLIT. The significance of the name of this group, then, is not only meant to be shocking to traditional moral sensibilities. CLIT, like SCUM, opens the space of the “post” that cannot yet be named, the empty future that will emerge after their “terrorism,” after the deconstruction of established discourses, identities, experiences, and sexualities.

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 12.

The path to the “post,” however, occurs via strategies of separatism and radical refusal, identity-deconstruction that extends beyond sex and gender to encompass the very identity of “human.” In overt rejection of liberal discourses of human rights, CLIT argues that attempts to legitimate lesbian identity by invoking human rights are similarly bound to normalize lesbians. “Dykes don’t know any humans” since the “human being theory” privileges men: “men have everything to gain from this blurring of the sexes lie.”³⁹⁹ CLIT’s radical rejection of the category of “human” takes the function of gender in critiques of liberal exclusions full circle: whereas the category of gender was initially “mapped” onto larger categories of identity-exclusions in liberal politics, such that critique of gender identities came to “stand in” for critiques of liberal politics as such, in CLIT the starting point of the identity-deconstruction of gender and sexuality leads back to that largest possible identity category available within political discourse: the category of the “human.” CLIT’s rejection of “human,” rather than “citizen” or “American,” reflects the total nature of their critique based on an understanding of the totalizing effects of historical influence. CLIT sees the “disfiguring” impact of patriarchal, capitalist, liberal society as extending beyond overtly “political” definitions—that of the “citizen,” for example—and reaching all the way to the most basic and capacious definitions available: the human.

While CLIT may appear more cynical than WITCH regarding available possibilities for critique (insofar as CLIT would be skeptical of WITCH’s tactics of reversal and parody), CLIT also reflects an idealism in their belief that unintelligibility will lead to the emergence of a “post” identity. WITCH engages in mocking debate where CLIT refuses to speak. This distrust of parody and heightened awareness of the risk of co-optation is

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 11-12.

evident in CLIT's rejection of practices of "camp" as well. CLIT identifies camp with a specifically gay male reaction to the "pain" brought on by exclusion from the Media State, a form of "comic relief and distance from the weird family scene."⁴⁰⁰ However, the Media State simultaneously oppresses gay men *and* reinforces their male privilege in such a way that gay men can "keep on laughing at momma," can employ the "artificiality" of camp.⁴⁰¹ CLIT lacks this privilege; non-communication and unintelligibility are their only options.

CLIT's manifesto is notable for its focus on language, media representation, and discourse as the focus of political action and the harms against lesbians. CLIT, as a group, is constituted as a reaction against certain harms that have been inflicted not directly against individual lesbian women, but against the *representation* of lesbian identity in media. Through their emphasis on the strategy of unintelligibility, CLIT opposes efforts to fill in the content of the identity of lesbian as anything other than open opportunity, anything other than "post." CLIT manifestoes can be read, I argue, as foregrounding the dangers of historical inheritance and co-optation via strategies borrowed from the manifesto genre.

Although we might read CLIT's call for separatism as idealistic, as if lesbians who do not communicate with "the Man" will gain some privileged knowledge into the "real" status of lesbian identity, their call for more and multiple representations of lesbian identity in lesbian-owned media is an attempt to destabilize and de-naturalize current representations as somehow "normal" or given. This strategy of identity-multiplication reflects strategies employed by Futurist women, while rejection of translatability reflects

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

strategies inherited from Dada. CLIT exposes liberal exclusions of identity through analysis and rejection of available sex and gender identity categories. While CLIT's adoption of such inherited manifesto strategies continues to "map" gender and sexuality onto practices of liberal exclusion, the historically specific situation of the rise of media and pop culture, along with the emergence of the "sexual revolution" and increased acceptance of liberal feminism, is reflected in their manifestoes. CLIT also radically extends identity-destabilization as a method of political critique to include the category of the "human," an extension beyond strategies deployed in previous manifestoes. These historical and rhetorical connections and the complex processes of critique they illustrate are ignored by feminist histories that represent the "second wave" as a liberal, modern, or essentialist project. Situating these texts within the manifesto tradition not only exposes the complex performances of these texts and the under-theorized trajectory of the manifesto tradition; it exposes the theoretical inheritance of contemporary feminist political theory.

Conclusion: Lesbian Liberation and Postmodern Negation

As my readings of texts from the "second wave" have shown, the deployment of categories of subjectivity and politics in lesbian feminism has much more in common with "postmodern" identity-destabilization and performativity than is usually acknowledged. Contemporary feminist political theory that represents the second wave as essentialist, modern, liberation, identity politics fails to recognize this point. By placing the "second wave" out of the conventional narrative history of feminism and into

the history of the manifesto genre, my reading exposes the “postmodern” aspects of these texts.

I continue to challenge the imagined divide between the modern and postmodern, between identity politics and the politics of identity-destabilization, through the next chapter. While manifestoes have privileged the category of gender in their exposure of liberal exclusions up to this point, the work of lesbian feminists enabled representations of sexuality to gain prominence in manifestoes. In the next chapter, I analyze the specific ways in which categories of excluded sexuality come to “stand in” for critiques of failed, liberal universality in texts from gay (male) liberation and, later, in Queer Nation and queer theory. This analysis sheds light on the ways in which inherited rhetorical strategies from the manifesto genre contribute to a kind of forgetfulness, an insistence on the new, within contemporary feminist political theory as well as queer theory. Throughout various examples of the manifesto genre, texts continually invoke understandings of the past and the future, of temporality and the “new,” in a way that “forgets” the genre’s history and inheritance. This “forgetting” has implications for our understanding of the manifesto genre as well as our understanding of the situation of contemporary feminist theory.

Chapter Six

From “Refugee Camp” to Queer Nation: The Manifesto and Historical Forgetting

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued for the recognition of the manifesto as an historical tradition and an identifiable genre. My readings of manifestoes from the inception of liberal politics have provided a narrative of the development of the manifesto tradition. This tradition, this historical practice of manifesto-writing, exposes contemporary feminist political and queer theories as rhetorically indebted to the manifesto; thus, my genealogy of the manifesto demands a recontextualization of the histories of feminism, gay and lesbian liberation, and liberal politics. In this chapter, I focus on manifestoes from gay liberation, Queer Nation, and queer theory to illustrate that the queer project, like feminism, is part of this same tradition of the manifesto genre. By reading queer texts as manifesto texts, I challenge the distinction made by some ‘90s queer theorists between identity politics and queer politics. Rather, my readings of earlier, gay “liberation” manifestoes show that the “gay” project was always already “queer.”

However, analysis of inherited rhetorical strategies from the manifesto tradition in queer texts also illustrates ways in which the practice of manifesto-writing changed in the late 20th century to increasingly focus on liberal exclusions of sexual identities, such that the expression and celebration of illegitimate sexuality itself became seen as a form of political protest. This shift from an emphasis on gender exclusion to sexual exclusion

illustrates the ways in which manifesto strategies continued to be adopted, expanded, and reapplied according to changing historical and cultural contexts.

I use my analysis of what I see as a false identity politics/queer politics distinction to explore in more detail a tendency that has been at work throughout the tradition of the manifesto: the enactment of a certain kind of historical forgetting. As I have noted in previous chapters, use of manifesto rhetoric often involved the deployment of specific understandings of temporality, of history and the future, which led manifesto authors to deny their own theoretical inheritance, to deny their relationship to the manifesto as a tradition. In the case of Queer Nation and queer theory, I examine what I see as the dangers of queer forgetting as examples of the larger risks of the deployment of history and the future in the manifesto genre. These dangers include inadvertently reaffirming a liberal, teleological narrative of history that is part of the same liberal project that the manifesto is meant to oppose; similarly, homogenizing difference by ignoring ways in which examples of so-called “identity politics” actually represented identity as unstable and multiple rather than unified and static; adhering to historical diagnoses of specific kinds of “problems” that demand “solutions,” leading to prescribed strategies of dissent; and foreclosing alternative opportunities for reimagining political vocabularies otherwise.

Queer Nation understood itself to be self-consciously resistant to “traditional” or “assimilationist” politics of other, older, gay and lesbian groups in the movement. But how did the movement of 1970s gay liberation—represented here in my readings of manifestoes written by Carl Wittman and Charles Shively—come to be seen as assimilationist? To answer this question, I reintroduce an historical element to queer theory and practice to situate queer theory within the tradition of the manifesto; this

recontextualization of the emergence of “the queer” problematizes this queer/gay, queer/identity politics distinction. As I will show in my readings of texts by “gay liberationists” Wittman and Shively, as well as the anti-identity politics group Queer Nation, politics in the manifesto were always already “queer.”

Queer Manifestoes and Historical Context

The eighties and nineties brought a number of important analyses of sex and gender that continued to question the deployment of identity in political activism and problematized what was seen as the universalized (white, middle-to-upper class, straight) subject that was reified through the identity politics of “liberation” movements of the sixties and seventies. As I discussed in the previous chapter, feminists of color, such as the authors of *This Bridge Called My Back*, as well as critics such as Gayle Rubin, called into question excluded identities and differences that were marginalized in 1970s liberation movements, as well as the implications of a radical critique of gender and sexuality implicit in feminism and gay/lesbian liberation.⁴⁰² Although writers such as Andrew Sullivan argued for gay marriage under claims to equal rights in his 1996 *Virtually Normal*, this call for assimilation stood in contrast to Cathy Cohen’s call in 1997 for coalition between non-normative, “queer” identities including “punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens.”⁴⁰³ Sullivan and Cohen, for example, had very different visions for what a queer community should be. While some of these arguments—the argument that “we’re the same as you”—were successful, they came at

⁴⁰² See Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa, eds., *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (1981) and Gayle S. Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality* ed. Carole S. Vance (1984).

⁴⁰³ Cathy J. Cohen, “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” in *GLQ* Vol. 3 (1997): 437-465; Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal* (NY: Vintage, 1996).

the cost of excluding different identities from the movement, as Cohen notes, which in turn led to increased factionalization within the movement, infighting, and splintering of interest groups on the basis of specific identity categories. In part because of these divergent visions for the queer community, activists and scholars in the eighties and nineties exhibited a continued concern with liberation movements, definitions of identity, and strategies for political dissent.

In addition to these discussions within feminist and GLBT political circles, the academy began to engage with philosophical critiques of identity and its relationship to language during these times. The discipline of “gay and lesbian studies” evolved into what became known as “queer studies” and gained popularity in the nineties.⁴⁰⁴ Queer studies integrated the “linguistic turn” in philosophy with critical traditions borrowed from psychoanalysis, literary criticism, cultural studies, and post-structuralist theory to interrogate the historical construction and cultural representations of gay, lesbian, and queer identities.⁴⁰⁵ These theoretical endeavors emerged soon after the historical moment in which AIDS started to devastate the gay community, the Equal Rights Amendment failed to be ratified, and Reagan’s presidency ushered in a backlash against the progressive movements of the previous decades.

⁴⁰⁴ Even at that late date, the editors of the 1993 *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* deliberately rejected the title of “queer” for their anthology because “the forms of study whose institutionalization we seek to further have tended, so far at least, to go by the names of ‘lesbian’ and ‘gay.’” Thus, even though the popular adoption of the “queer” (anti-)identity category most likely occurred earlier, the institutionalization of “queer studies” was much slower to take hold. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds., “Introduction,” *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993): xvii.

⁴⁰⁵ Annamarie Jagose’s useful 1996 text, *Queer Theory: An Introduction*, identifies queer theory’s theoretical and disciplinary influences from sources including Louis Althusser, Sigmund Freud, Ferdinand de Saussure, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault. Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 1996): 78.

Although my analysis of queer manifestoes illustrates the indebtedness of the queer project to the manifesto tradition, queer manifestoes utilized historical manifesto strategies as a way to represent and respond to changing political and historical realities. Despite my recontextualization of the queer project within the manifesto tradition, I also offer an analysis of differences in the ways in which the manifesto was used in the queer project to provide insight into the development of the manifesto genre.

Previously in the history of the manifesto, gender was used as a way of identifying exclusions inherent in liberal vocabularies of universality, such that gender exclusion came to stand in for liberal exclusion as such. In the late 20th century, the identity category of sexuality increasingly takes on this function. Although the revaluing of female sexuality was evident in manifestoes from women Futurists, as well as Solanas and lesbian feminists, the deployment of sexuality in those manifestoes was mediated by an awareness of gender. Not only did gender exclusion remain primary in feminist manifestoes; the representation of the lesbian as a sexual identity was always already gendered. In gay and queer manifestoes, gender analysis recedes in importance, and liberal exclusions of specifically sexual identities and practices gain importance. Women manifesto-writers exposed the ways in which the subject of liberal politics was a gendered subject; gay and queer manifestoes expose the liberal subject as a sexual subject.

Similar strategies of identity-problematization are at work in feminist and in queer manifestoes, evident through the use of pronouns, subversion of the liberal public/private divide, and vacillation between strategies of argumentation and the rejection of communication. However, the “mapping” of sexuality onto critiques of liberal

vocabularies occurs differently in queer texts. Just as critiques of gender exclusion came to “stand in” for larger political critiques of liberal exclusions as such, here, critiques of sexual exclusion have the same function. I explore the significance of this “mapping” of sexuality onto the politics of the manifesto through analyses of representations of sexuality in texts from gay liberation and Queer Nation. The recontextualization of gay and queer texts within the manifesto tradition sheds light on the politicization of sexuality in these texts, a politicization that is both a reflection of and reaction to changing historical circumstances. In gay and queer manifestoes, the critique of liberal exclusion of sexual identities leads to the valorization and exhibition of such excluded, illegitimate sexual practices and identities; while the content of this “mapping” and “standing-in” of excluded identity categories changes over time, the function of this gesture as illustrative of rhetorical strategies in the manifesto tradition remains the same. Recontextualizing gay and queer manifestoes within the manifesto genre helps us understand how the act of gay sex itself came to be seen as a form of political protest—how promiscuity, as Charles Shively writes, came to be seen as an act of revolution.

Wittman’s Manifesto: Refugee Liberation

Carl Wittman’s 1969 “A Gay Manifesto”⁴⁰⁶ begins by invoking the metaphor of the homosexual “refugee”: “San Francisco is a refugee camp for homosexuals. We have fled here from every part of the nation, and like refugees elsewhere, we came not because it is so great here, but because it was so bad there. By the tens of thousands, we fled. . . .”⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁶ Carl Wittman, “A Gay Manifesto,” (1969) in *Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, ed. Chris Bull (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2001): 67-79.

⁴⁰⁷ Wittman, 67.

The metaphor of the refugee invites a comparison between the situation of gays in “Amerika” and the situation of refugees from international wars, as victims of violence and impossible governments. The refugee has been displaced, forced—has not chosen—to leave home and to create a new community, a “ghetto” as Wittman calls it, “a ghetto rather than a free territory because it is still theirs.”⁴⁰⁸ The refugee belongs to no country, cannot seek recourse through protection under civil rights, but can only appeal to human rights or seek to create a new community within the “ghetto, out of self-protection.”⁴⁰⁹ This refugee metaphor paints a picture of gay flight on an epic scale (“by the tens of thousands, we fled”), a forced exodus that has already occurred. This description depicts San Francisco’s “gay ghetto” as comprised of lost victims in need of help and self-determination. And Wittman’s manifesto offers to provide this self-determination.

Out of his account of this ghetto, Wittman describes a newly-discovered “awakening of gay liberation ideas and energy,” a dramatic shift in gay consciousness:

Where once there was frustration, alienation, cynicism, there are new characteristics among us. We are full of love for each other and are showing it; we are full of anger at what has been done to us. As we recall all the self-censorship and repression for so many years, a reservoir of tears pours out of our eyes. And we are euphoric, high with the initial flourish of a movement.⁴¹⁰

With this emotional language, Wittman describes the promise of a new life, healing of the wounds that forced gays into becoming refugees in their own country. The very constitution of the ghetto, of the gay community, occurs through physical relocation and

⁴⁰⁸ Ibid., 67.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 67.

exodus. The community identity of “gay” as Wittman describes it is enabled by its outsider status, its extra-national non-belonging, as signified through the category of the refugee. It is through the loss of belonging to the rest of America, then, that belonging to the gay community is possible. Despite its constitution through exodus, however, the gay community that Wittman invokes is not satisfied with its outsider status. In typical manifesto fashion, Wittman’s text describes a historical turning point demanding action: gay liberation will not be relegated to the ghetto, will not be complacent with “self-protection.”

Wittman enumerates seven topics demanding attention by separating them into section headings: orientation, women, roles, oppression, sex, “our ghetto,” and coalition, before concluding with “an outline of imperatives for gay liberation.” This list of definitions and demands is directed “primarily for ourselves, a starting point of discussion. If straight people of good will find it useful in understanding what liberation is all about, so much the better.”⁴¹¹ The audience of this manifesto, then, is “we” homosexuals, although “straight people” are not rejected, but invited to read and join in an attempt at “understanding liberation”—though, perhaps, “they” are still not one of “us.”

Carl Wittman situates the self-definition of personal and collective gay identity as central to gay politics. He writes, “Liberation for gay people is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values.”⁴¹² The fact that the community’s refugee status is limited by their location within the confines of a gay “ghetto” subsequently limits the potential of their transformation and construction. The problem with the ghetto is that “it

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 68.

⁴¹² Ibid., 71.

is still theirs. Straight cops patrol us, straight legislators govern us, straight employers keep us in line, straight money exploits us.”⁴¹³ The first step towards liberation is creating a self-defined gay identity and community based on that identity. Wittman’s discussion of the community in geographical terms illustrates his awareness of the influence of material conditions on group and individual subjectivity. It is the historically specific, contingent constellation of insiders and outsiders, the included and the excluded, which enables and disables specific forms of rhetoric, subjectivity, and thus experience to emerge.

This identity, then, is created through the *displacement* of identity connected to geography, of belonging to a country, to citizenship. Gay identity and gay community are enabled, constructed, only out of the *refusal* of straight identity and culture, which is tied to nationality, as evidenced through the metaphor of the refugee. Here we see Wittman invoking an identity category that does not yet exist, but whose shape is being formed through the displacement of prior identity categories. Wittman’s text slips between assertion of gay identity and the leaving-open of its future emergence through as-yet-unknown cultural and political formations. One way in which Wittman’s text leaves open this sense of a future, unknown subjectivity is through his discussion of sexuality and sexual identity.

Sexual desire and gender as they currently exist, Wittman argues, are culturally imposed: “Nature leaves undefined the object of sexual desire. The gender of that object is imposed socially.”⁴¹⁴ “Indoctrination” exists for both homosexuality and heterosexuality, Wittman argues. “A Gay Manifesto” points to the flexible relationship

⁴¹³ Ibid., 67.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 68.

between desire, behavior, and social categories of identity, arguing that gay men might be persuaded to “turn on to women” when social and cultural change occurs: “when 1) it’s something that we do because we want to, and not because we should, and 2) when women’s liberation changes the nature of heterosexual relationships.”⁴¹⁵ This potential shift in sexuality assumes the mutability of identity and desire within different cultural and categorical contexts, which functions to denaturalize given identities in an effort to illuminate gay oppression as contingent and therefore changeable. “We’ll be gay until everyone has forgotten that it’s an issue. Then we’ll begin to be complete.”⁴¹⁶

Through a number of subsections in Wittman’s text, he performs the revaluation of homosexuality and bisexuality, devaluing heterosexuality through use of language of “disease”—the same rhetoric used against homosexuality in psychoanalytic and medical discourses in the 20th century. Wittman argues, “Exclusive heterosexuality is fucked up. It reflects a fear of people of the same sex, it’s anti-homosexual, and it is fraught with frustration.... For us to become heterosexual in the sense that our straight brothers and sisters are is not a cure, it is a disease.”⁴¹⁷

Just as Wittman argues against the idea of “natural” homosexuality, bisexuality, or heterosexuality, and argues for the cultural and social construction of all sexualities, Wittman also argues against seeking equality with straight society if it can only be achieved by becoming the *same* as straight society. Wittman opposes any sort of sameness argument, gay marriage, assimilation, and associated attempts at legitimacy, because “showing the world that ‘we’re just the same as you’ is avoiding the real issues,

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 68.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 69.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 69.

and is an expression of hatred.”⁴¹⁸ Rather, Wittman calls on the gay community to stop “mimicking” straight roles: “*Stop mimicking straights, stop censoring ourselves.*”⁴¹⁹

The “ghetto” community and “refugee” status of gay men in San Francisco, then, has enabled just enough self-awareness, just enough deconstruction of the connection between society, political system, and sexuality, to enable Wittman to start to imagine a different kind of society and a different kind of sexual identity. Wittman uses the phrase “straight society” in its strongest sense, also calling for the creation of a gay community in a similarly strong sense. Wittman’s idea of “straight society” involves “concepts” such as “inequality,” “white, English, male, capitalist,” binaries of “male/female, on top/on bottom, spouse/not spouse, heterosexual/homosexual, boss/worker, white/black, and rich/poor....”⁴²⁰ In opposition to straight society—which includes everything from racial oppression to capitalism—Wittman calls for a radical redefinition of society, starting at the level of identity: “Liberation for gay people is defining for ourselves how and with whom we live, instead of measuring our relationship in comparison to straight ones, with straight values.”⁴²¹ Such self-definition is difficult, if not impossible, within straight society.

Thus the status of gay men as refugees is both a curse and an opportunity. It is a curse because it involves the pain of social and psychological rejection. But it is an opportunity because it opens a space through which criticism, and eventually change, can occur. This is why the re-creation of “straight values” and cultures within gay society is such a

⁴¹⁸ Ibid., 71.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 70.

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 70.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 71.

problem—the imposition of “outside” contamination, of sameness, would sacrifice this potential for revolutionary change.

Wittman destabilizes the “universal” category of citizen as not only masculine, as illustrated historically in feminist manifestoes, but also as heterosexual. By claiming the status of “gay refugee,” Wittman exposes liberal categories of universality to be exclusionary, a strategy inherited from the history of manifesto-writing. Through the exposure of the “universal” subject as heterosexual and thus partial and exclusive, Wittman undermines categories of liberal identity. This strategy enables Wittman to denaturalize the heterosexual subject, to foreground the ways in which liberal identity categories are enacted performatively, and to begin to imagine a context in which the construction of sexual identities is enacted differently. Wittman concedes that significant cultural changes could lead to entirely new kinds of sexual identity and desire, so he keeps open the possibility that new forms of sexuality will emerge in this context. Because the influence of the history of exclusion has created the category of the gay “refugee” community, once this history shifts, Wittman argues, the category will also have to shift.

Wittman’s use of the metaphor of the gay “refugee” illustrates his strategy of identity-destabilization as a method for critiquing practices of liberal identity-exclusion. However, this strategy has its risks. Wittman’s manifesto is used to describe an us/them distinction that ignores the ways in which “they”—the “insiders”—are themselves *outsiders*, with identities that are also unstable. This oppositional self-definition ignores the way in which *all* citizens are refugees, belonging is always performative, the identity of citizen is always constituted through political rhetoric, since sexuality is used to “stand

in” for the problem of exclusion as such. The “mapping” of process of liberal identity-exclusion onto categories of sexuality risks privileging the political potential of sexual identity-destabilization while ignoring other forms of identity-construction. Not only are gay men like refugees, so are individuals excluded from liberal “universals” on the basis of race, gender, disability, etc.; in fact, *all* citizens constructed through liberal political rhetoric perform similarly unstable identities. This larger point, this more radical critique of liberal vocabularies, risks elision in Wittman’s text if the community and subjectivity Wittman invokes retains primacy as an oppositional-sexual category. In addition, although Wittman believes that only after society has “forgotten” the significance of gay identity will “we” be “complete,” his definition of “us” “outsider” “refugees” risks promoting identification with an oppositional status, risks creating subjects whose self-definition is dependent upon their exclusion and subjection.⁴²²

Despite similarities between the respective fights of, for example, gay men and the proletariat, Wittman argues for what he sees as an entirely new form of political strategy, a form that acknowledges the bankruptcy of inherited forms of dissent. Current forms of protest simply don’t work for “us,” Wittman argues. His manifesto shows a concern with the limits of available rhetorics of political dissent, with the limits of what “counts” as the political. Wittman’s manifesto attempts to inject the emotional, the sexual, and that which pushes beyond language into his understanding of the political and thus of political dissent. Although Wittman’s privileging of sexuality, rather than gender, in his critiques of processes of identity-exclusion is somewhat new in the history of the manifesto, the rhetorical strategies of identity-destabilization employed through the metaphor of the gay “refugee” are inherited from the manifesto tradition.

⁴²² Ibid., 69.

What Sex Means for “Us” Refugees

Wittman cedes that gay men and lesbians might differ in regards to the role of the sexual and sexual pleasure, as he notes in the section “On Women.” While he notes that gay men might be less chauvinist than straight men, he believes that some problems between gay men and lesbians “will become clearer when we begin to work together” with a major problem being “differing views on sex: sex for them has meant oppression, while for us it has been a symbol of our freedom. We must come to know and understand each other’s style, jargon and humor.”⁴²³ And in the section “On Sex,” Wittman notes that women’s historical role as sexual objects, rather than sexual subjects, places women in a different relationship to sexuality as freedom. Wittman allows for difference here, as “a few liberated women will be appalled or disgusted at the open and prominent place that we put sex in our lives; and while this is a natural response from their experience, they must learn what it means for us.”⁴²⁴

Wittman’s description of the role of sexuality in women’s liberation is interesting, especially in light of the discussion of the post-sexual in my previous chapter. I find it curious that Solanas, for example, situates sexuality at such a primary location in her manifesto, as does Wittman; both acknowledge a coming, as-yet-undetermined new practice of sexuality and sexual identity—the “post” in the post-sexual. The social construction of sexuality, of sexual pleasure, and particularly of sexual transgression, plays a primary role in the manifestoes of both Solanas as well as Wittman. But Solanas and Wittman get to this same place of the “post” through very different means. Solanas’

⁴²³ Ibid., 70.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 74.

treatment of sexuality was secondary to her treatment of gender. In Solanas' manifesto, the "mapping" of categories of gender onto liberal processes of exclusion remains primary, although Solanas leaves room for the emergence of a post-sexual, not necessarily a post-gendered, subject. Solanas' post-sexual SCUM is still, for all we can tell, female. There is no post-sexual masculine SCUM subject for Solanas; the best future status men can hope for is that of a "turd."

In contrast, Wittman notes the importance of gender, but focuses primarily on ways in which liberal categories of the "universal" citizen function to exclude sexual identities. Exclusion on the basis of sexual identity, desire, or expression comes to "stand in" for larger process of exclusion as such. As Wittman himself notes in a preface to his manifesto published four months after its initial dissemination, "A Gay Manifesto" underemphasizes the "problem of male chauvinism"; Wittman discusses his increasing awareness of the fact that "gay women's lib has forced us to talk of ourselves as 'gay men's' lib—we never did speak for lesbians, and can't get away with it anymore."⁴²⁵ I would extend Wittman's afterthought to argue that the privileging of sexuality in gay manifestoes risks elision of the intersections between gender and sexuality, race and sexuality, etc. Wittman's ability to speak on behalf of an ungendered sexual identity category—as a gay "refugee" rather than a gay *male* "refugee"—inadvertently perpetuates the exclusions enacted through liberalism's denial of its gendered exclusions. Just as some factions of the women's movement inadvertently replicated liberal exclusions through the exorcism of lesbian women from the movement, Wittman risks inadvertently replicating liberal exclusions by failing to acknowledge that sexual

⁴²⁵ Carl Wittman, "Refugees From America: A Gay Manifesto, Author's Preface: 4 Months Later" (1970), Council on Religion and the Homosexual, Inc., Danowski Collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University: ii-iii.

identities are also gendered identities. Whereas lesbian feminists spoke as lesbian *women*, Wittman speaks as a *gay person*; it is only later that he realizes his omission.

What sex “means for us” is the crux of Wittman’s manifesto. Because Wittman conflates the political, cultural, psychological, and the sexual in his description of “straight society,” he leaves room for the potentially radical transformation of politics and culture through “gay society,” a society that is still developing within the confines of the “ghetto” but whose shape is forming primarily through sexual practice and pleasure. In contrast to feminist critiques of the sexual objectification of women, Wittman argues that gay men should *choose* sexual objectification, since “sexual objectification is a focus of our quest for freedom. It is precisely that which we are not supposed to share with each other.”⁴²⁶

In an effort to describe the significance of sexual pleasure and the potential, unexplored variety of sexual practices, Wittman invokes metaphors of music, art, and hallucinogenic drugs, all extra-linguistic metaphors. I read his choice of metaphors here as a tacit admission of the difficulties of describing sexual pleasure and practice within the structures of language, of “straight” language, even the limits of the manifesto. Wittman argues that sex is “both creative expression and communication” which, like music, “is infinite and varied” such that “what we have called sexual ‘orientation’ probably just means that we have not yet learned to turn on to the total range of musical expression.”⁴²⁷ For Wittman, sexual practice, identification, and pleasure are all learned, and thus they have been perverted through their devaluation by straight society. Instead, so-called “perversion” is defended by Wittman, revalued, and left open as a potential

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 74.

space for liberation. This redefinition of what “counts” as “natural” sexuality challenges the liberal category of citizen-subject by de-naturalizing it. This redefinition of the liberal subject exposes and questions what “counts” as normal or abnormal. Just as Stanton, de Saint-Point, Loy, and Solanas *gendered* the citizen-subject to expose the “universal” as exclusionary, Wittman *sexualizes* the citizen-subject to expose the “perversion” of the “natural.”

Shively and “Revolutionary Sensuality”

Wittman’s celebration of sexual variation and experimentation reflects a slightly later manifesto from gay liberation, Charles Shively’s 1974 “Indiscriminate Promiscuity as an Act of Revolution.”⁴²⁸ Shively’s text, as its title indicates, argues that the very act of gay sexual practice and experience of pleasure is itself revolutionary, as it opposes heterosexual society and its binaries, the nuclear family, gender distinctions, and culture’s “denigration of sexuality and of the body.”⁴²⁹ Shively argues that “getting back into, back to our bodies, our sexuality can be a revolutionary perspective for ourselves. How much less utopian can I be?” Such a perspective—the return to the bodily and the flesh—is, according to Shively, not utopian, precisely because flesh is so mundane, so basic, so already-here, and thus taken for granted. He writes, “To rest everything on the ‘flesh,’ ‘lust’—prevailing practice instead of magisterial theories? Why can’t our bodies,

⁴²⁸ Charles Shively, “Indiscriminate Promiscuity as an Act of Revolution” (1974), in *Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay & Lesbian Liberation*, ed. Chris Bull (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press/Nation Books, 2001): 132-141.

⁴²⁹ Shively, 133.

commonplace things found in every home—why can't they be the source of change and revolution?"⁴³⁰

Shively goes on to argue that not just sexual promiscuity—the celebration of the basic, the bodily, and pleasure—is revolutionary; in particular, *indiscriminate* promiscuity is revolutionary because of its anonymous and thus radically democratic character. Shively writes,

We need to be *indiscriminate*. No one should be denied love because they are old, ugly, fat crippled, bruised, of the wrong race, color, creed, sex or country of national origin. We need to copulate with anyone who requests our company.... We need to leave behind the whole mentality of measurement; it is a massive tool of social control. We all measure ourselves against some standard, find ourselves wanting, and feed inferior, guilty, wrong, weak—in need of authority, direction, correction, ruling and enslavement.⁴³¹

One subverts class and social distinctions, Shively argues, when one becomes truly sexually indiscriminate. While “precious differences” should be recognized and valued, the valuing of such differences through practices of discrimination is what should be avoided.⁴³² Ultimately, Shively leaves room for a radical experience of sexual pleasure enabled by indiscriminate promiscuity to open up possibilities for reevaluation of categories of self and other that resist the order of the prevailing culture.

For Shively, the basis for revolutionary change starts by paying attention to that which seems most personal and experiential and is most “obscene” to straight society: bodily sensation and experience. The status of gay and indiscriminately promiscuous sexual

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 133.

⁴³¹ Shively, 138.

⁴³² Ibid., 138.

desire and pleasure as different and devalued within straight culture is what makes it so dangerous, and therefore the basis for revolution:

It is so easy to wander from sensation—to go away from what we feel into what they want us to feel, believe, think, and experience. Maybe, I'd do better to say “Revolutionary Sensuality” is intended to be a revolutionary perspective for ourselves—the antithesis to bourgeois decadence. But I prefer to talk of “Cocksucking as an Act of Revolution” Because our sexuality is not only strange, but dangerous and lethal, to the existing powers....⁴³³

I point out Shively's re-valuing of bodily experience and pleasure to characterize a specific representation of sexuality that was common among gay manifestoes of the 1970s: a valorization of gay sexuality as itself liberatory and revolutionary. The shift from gender to sexuality in manifestoes from the Futurists, through Solanas and the lesbian feminists, and finally through gay liberation illustrates adaptation in the manifesto genre according to changing historical and cultural contexts. Because the identity category of sexuality is foregrounded in these manifestoes as primary, the exclusion of sexual identities comes to represent the larger exclusion of identities within so-called “universal” liberal politics. Insofar as non-normative, excluded sexual identities involve representations of pleasure and desire, the political significance of sexual acts—and sexual pleasure—become the focus of the manifesto. This series of equivalencies leads the experience of sexual pleasure itself to become seen as a political act: promiscuity becomes revolutionary, fucking becomes freedom. The texts of Wittman and Shively provide great examples of the process through which a specific kind of representation, of aesthetic, becomes politicized via manifesto-writing. By recontextualizing gay

⁴³³ Ibid., 133.

manifestoes within the tradition of the genre, the way that gay sexual practices came to “stand in” for political action becomes clear.

Sexual Politicization and Historical Context

As I discussed in the previous chapter, lesbian feminists focused on the exclusion of the “lesbian” identity from liberal categories of universal citizenship, though “lesbian” was understood to be both a sexual and a gendered category. In addition, the relationship between sexual expression and political action was complicated among lesbian feminists due to the specific way in which women have been historically sexually objectified; as Bunch wrote, “Male society defines lesbianism as a sexual act, which reflects men’s limited view of women: they think of us only in terms of sex. They also say lesbians are not real women.... We say that a lesbian...is woman-identified.”⁴³⁴ Bunch’s definition not only resists the sexualization of lesbian identity by male culture; she also highlights the identity of lesbian as gendered through the designation of “woman-identified woman.” In addition, the “sexual revolution” of the sixties was cause for suspicion among many feminists, lesbian or otherwise. As WITCH noted, “The so-called ‘sexual revolution’ of the last decade has only made the pressures on women more subtle, and provided the greed-brokers with even more complicated means of insuring their consumptive hegemony over us.”⁴³⁵ The complications of gender’s impact on the experience and reception of sexuality evident in lesbian feminist manifestoes are generally absent from the manifestoes of gay male liberation.

⁴³⁴ Bunch, “Lesbians in Revolt,” (1972) in *Come Out Fighting: A Century of Essential Writing on Gay and Lesbian Liberation*, ed. Chris Bull (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2001): 126.

⁴³⁵ WITCH. “Confront the Whoremakers At the Un-Bridal Fair” (1969), in Robin Morgan, ed., *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women’s Liberation Movement* (New York: Vintage Books: 1970): 613.

However, the politicization of gay sexual practice was problematized by a different historical situation. The meaning of this kind of political, sexual aesthetic, the connection between pleasure, the exposure of excluded sexual identities as excluded, and the associated critique of liberal political categories of the universal citizen-subject changed in response to a significant historical moment—the AIDS crisis of the eighties. As described by Pat Califia, the resignification of gay sex with disease and contagions brought about by early representations of AIDS threatened a culture of public sex, a culture that overlapped with important segments of gay male culture. Califia laments the loss of an experience of pleasure, an experience rooted in a certain understanding of sex as liberatory, political action, threatened by the rise of HIV and AIDS in the gay community: where the gay community and gay press used to promote sexual experimentation and revolutionary pleasure, prohibitions against “unsafe sex” somberly took their place. Califia writes:

It seems that the only way we can legitimately talk about our sexuality is under the rubric of death and disease. We can't celebrate, defend, or describe queer pleasure even though it was the quest for pleasure that made so many of us HIV-positive. This hypocrisy and prissiness robs the gay press of much of its old feistiness, earthiness, and power to rock the world.⁴³⁶

The relegation of gay men to the “ghetto” forgotten by straight society—a relegation that Wittman had revalued as providing critical, progressive potential for the constitution of alternative gay identities and communities—began to threaten the very existence of the gay community. Government and health officials imagined AIDS as a “gay plague” that was a direct result of what they saw as “indiscriminate promiscuity.” For AIDS activists

⁴³⁶ Pat Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 1994): 21.

attempting to appeal to a conservative government for medical research, economic resources, and visibility through education, the rhetorical strategies of Shively's "revolutionary sensuality" began to sound dangerously co-optable by the right-wing religious, government and medial establishments for attacks against gay men as sick, perverse, deviant, and deserving of AIDS as a "gay disease." As Cindy Patton asks in *Sex & Germs: The Politics of AIDS*, "how does anyone remain sex-positive when the newspapers and passersby see homosexuals = AIDS = death?"⁴³⁷

Although the impact of HIV and AIDS on the gay community led to shifts in the community's understandings of sexual pleasure, freedom, and danger, this shift only illustrates the ways in which manifesto rhetoric continued to be adopted within varying historical and cultural contexts. Despite this shift between pre- and post-AIDS representations of gay sexuality, despite the differences between manifestoes from gay liberation and manifestoes from lesbian feminists, analysis exposes similarities among these various texts that situate them as belonging to the manifesto tradition.⁴³⁸ As I will show through my readings of manifestoes from Queer Nation, texts that emerged within post-AIDS queer culture continue to deploy pronoun use, destabilization and multiplication of identities, reversal of the liberal public/private divide, awareness of the risks of co-optation, and the benefits and dangers of both argumentation within and refusal of liberal political vocabularies. While the identities at stake remained understood

⁴³⁷ Cindy Patton, *Sex & Germs: The Politics of AIDS* (Montreal and New York: Black Rose Books, 1986): 4.

⁴³⁸ I use the term "post-AIDS" to refer to the period after the mid-nineties when HIV and AIDS finally became integrated into mainstream cultural knowledge and when some medical advancements and public health campaigns helped to slow the death rate of those infected with HIV. However, I am very much aware that HIV and AIDS still remain a significant health and economic issue today, and the use of the term "post" in this context is not intended to suggest otherwise.

as sexual identities, as in texts from gay liberation, these rhetorical strategies illustrate a direct inheritance from the manifesto tradition.

Through an analysis of the similarities between texts from Queer Nation and gay liberation, between queer manifestoes and the traditions of the genre, it becomes clear that the imagined division between queer strategies of identity-destabilization and what understood as “assimilationist” identity politics of gay liberation is a false distinction. Rather, both gay liberation and queer theory belong to the tradition of the manifesto. Their adherence to manifesto rhetoric, specifically, the deployment of certain understandings of temporality, history, and the future, contributes to the reification of this false identity politics/queer politics distinction: strategies inherited from the manifesto genre are part of the reason why queer politics deny their inheritance to the manifesto genre. The genre provides the rhetorical tools through which historical influence is negotiated and, ultimately, forgotten.

“The Freedom to be Public”: The Language of Queer Nation

Queer Nation emerged in early 1990 culled from a group of young individuals involved in ACT-UP (Aids Coalition To Unleash Power) New York City. In response to a series of “gay bashings” in the area at that time, AIDS activists decided that a defense of gay visibility beyond the issue of AIDS was necessary; one source notes that two attendees at the original meeting were victims of recent violence.⁴³⁹ According to E.J. Rand, the first action of Queer Nation was to identify locations where violence against gays had occurred in the city through the posting of handbills that read “My Beloved Was

⁴³⁹ That is, a violence other than that of government inaction in the face of the AIDS crisis. Robin Podolsky, “Birth of a Queer Nation,” *Advocate* 561 (October 9, 1990): 52.

Queer-Bashed Here.”⁴⁴⁰ Other sources cite Michelangelo Signorile as the founder, and subsequent chapters emerged via events across the country.⁴⁴¹ Queer Nation received coverage within the gay community during Gay Pride in summer 1990, when they anonymously distributed a leaflet entitled “Queers Read This/I Hate Straights.” Group actions included “kiss-ins” at straight nightclubs, sit-ins at southern Cracker Barrel restaurants, and protests at the 1992 Academy Award ceremonies.⁴⁴²

In one of the earliest publications to explain the emergence of Queer Nation, writer Alexander S. Chee’s 1991 “A Queer Nationalism” in *Outlook* notes that for Queer Nation, language was key; “It is a matter of language and a war of words.”⁴⁴³ The performative and constitutive functions of language were at the center of the message of Queer Nation, the impetus behind the reclamation of the epithet of “queer” as part of the group’s self-definition. This revaluing of the “queer” label is described by Chee as a form of empowerment. Chee identifies the user of the “queer” epithet as himself suffering from weakness, his name-calling a form of defensiveness against perceptions of “questionable” sexuality or masculinity. By reclaiming the “queer” epithet, Chee reverses the power dynamic enacted through the interpellative context of queer name-calling, as if to respond, “Yes, I am queer, and that scares you.” Thinking back to the kids who “shouted *queer* at me as if it would keep them safe,” Chee writes that “Now that

⁴⁴⁰ E.J. Rand, “A Disunited Nation and a Legacy of Contradiction: Queer Nation’s Construction of Identity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 28:4 (October 2004): 288-289.

⁴⁴¹ James N. Baker, “What is Queer Nation?” *Newsweek* 118:17 (August 12, 1991): 24; Liz Highleyman, “What is the history of Queer Nation?” *Bay Area Reporter* (San Francisco, CA, June 10, 2005): 10; Esther Kaplan, “Defining the Nation: A Queer Manifesto,” *The Village Voice* 35:33 (August 12, 1990): 36.

⁴⁴² James N. Baker, “What is Queer Nation?” *Newsweek* 118:17 (August 12, 1991): 24; L.A. Kauffman, “Queer Guerillas in Tinseltown,” *Progressive* 56:7 (July 1992): 36; “Queer Nation barred from Cracker Barrel,” *Southern Voice* (July 27, 1991): 22.

⁴⁴³ Alexander S. Chee, “A Queer Nationalism,” *Outlook* (Winter 1991): 17.

I call myself queer, know myself as queer, nothing will keep them safe.”⁴⁴⁴ For Chee, reclamation of the queer epithet is a protective and redemptive gesture, a practice of self-reconstruction, a retaking of power through language and naming, and a threat to those who perpetuate homophobic constructions of gay identity.

Similarly, the various acronyms that comprised subgroups of Queer Nation chose their titles carefully, with irreverence and humor, in the tradition of groups such as WITCH and CLIT. Queer Nation “focus groups” included:

Suburban Homosexual Outreach Program (SHOP), Lesbians and Bisexuals In Action (LABIA), Defending Our Rights In the Streets Super Queers United Against Savage Heterosexuals (DORIS SQUASH), Homosexual Ideological Mobilization against the Military (HI MOM), Artists Slaving Under Tyranny (ASLUT), Grand Homosexual Organization to Stop Televangelists (GHOST), Queers Undertaking Exquisite and Symbolic Transformation (QUEST), United Colors of Queer Nation, Queer Planet, Queer State, Welcome Wagon.⁴⁴⁵

Thus Queer Nation, like lesbian feminists in the seventies, employed manifesto strategies that focused on language, self-naming, self-determination, and performative activism. Support for the constitution of group membership through action—identity as performed in action—was reflected in both Queer Nation and the feminist group WITCH. Just as one became a “WITCH” by saying “I am a witch,” Chee writes that “All Queer Nation/SF requires for membership is that you are a queer and you show up: stand up and be counted, in the street, in a bar, in the suburbs, in places of worship and places of

⁴⁴⁴ Chee, 19.

⁴⁴⁵ Chee, 17.

legislation. Stand, fight, shout, laugh. Safety in numbers and in laughter are the strategies.”⁴⁴⁶

Despite the similarities between the strategies from lesbians and feminists, such as WITCH and CLIT, and the strategies of Queer Nation, the latter understood itself as a radical departure from the activism of the past, a group constituted in direct opposition to previous, “assimilationist” forms of activism, including activism from the gay and lesbian “liberation” movements. In no small part because the retroactive redescription of gay and lesbian movements as *liberal* movements had already begun, and because the liberal factions of such groups had indeed gained limited legitimacy and visibility in the public sphere, Queer Nation underestimated their own affinity with and indebtedness to a tradition of dissent, a manifesto tradition. In addition, the various academic and political critiques of “identity politics” as forms of liberal exclusion of identities most likely influenced Queer Nation as well; they hoped to avoid the inadvertent perpetuation of liberal exclusions enacted by, for example, some feminists against lesbian women, or the complacency that led to the formation of ACT-UP as a response to what they saw as apolitical inaction of Gay Men’s Health Crisis in 1983.⁴⁴⁷

In regards to the manifesto tradition, however, the self-description of Queer Nation as new, as anti-identity politics, as anti-assimilationist, as not indebted to historical influences, is part of what illustrates their deployment of manifesto strategies: through the adoption of manifesto rhetoric, Queer Nation saw its strategies of identity-destabilization as a kind of *new* politics, a *future*-oriented politics, that, through its understanding of

⁴⁴⁶ Chee, 16.

⁴⁴⁷ Marc Carl Rom, “Gays and AIDS: Democratizing Disease?” in *The Politics of Gay Rights*, ed. Craig A. Rimmerman, Kenneth D. Wald, and Clyde Wilcox (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 222.

temporality and history, denied its theoretical inheritance to gay liberation, as well as to the manifesto tradition.

“Queers Read This”

One of the early texts distributed by Queer Nation was a leaflet passed out during Gay Pride in summer 1990. The manifesto was entitled “Queers Read This” and, on the back, “I Hate Straights.” The text included a series of numbered sections that took on topics ranging from HIV to queer-bashings to Jesse Helms.⁴⁴⁸ This text illustrates how Queer Nation both inherited rhetorical strategies from the tradition of manifesto practice as well as attempted to push beyond this inheritance.

As we saw in examples of manifestoes as early as the Futurists, this text similarly uses pronouns to constitute its audience vis-à-vis the point of view of the speaker. The pamphlet says it is “published anonymously by queers.” As Esther Kaplan notes, it was understood to be distributed by Queer Nation.⁴⁴⁹ Although this authorship is collective and anonymous (no single queer individual takes responsibility for or ownership of the text) and the text contains multiple numbered sections with very different tones and, we can infer, authors, it starts with the point of view of a singular “I”: “How can I tell you. How can I convince you, brother, sister that your life is in danger.”⁴⁵⁰ From the very

⁴⁴⁸ Anonymous Queers, “Queers Read This/I Hate Straights,” Pamphlet handed out at Gay Pride New York City in June 1990. Accessed at <http://www.actupny.org/documents/QueersReadThis.pdf>. E.J. Rand’s reading of the manifesto notes that “Although first distributed by hand at the New York City and Chicago Gay Pride parades, the flyer was quickly reprinted and circulated within the year through much of the gay and lesbian community nationwide. However, it has never been published in its original format” (Rand 304). The original did not contain page numbers, and subsequent reprintings have varied in length and contents. I will refer to the flyer authored by “Anonymous Queers” as titled “Queers Read This/I Hate Straights” and will exclude page numbers for purposes of citation.

⁴⁴⁹ E.J. Rand, “A Disunited Nation and a Legacy of Contradiction: Queer Nation’s Construction of Identity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 28:4 (October 2004): 289.

⁴⁵⁰ Anonymous Queers.

opening of the text, the author is situated as a singular person making an appeal to the reader as kin, as “brother” and “sister” who must be warned “that your life is in danger.” As E. J. Rand notes, the calling-out of the title of the flyer—“Queers Read This”—effectively “hails” the reader as queer, and thus member of a queer community: “By choosing to read the flyer, then, an individual is implicitly interpellated as a queer, and a queer identity, with its potential for empowerment and risk, is constituted,” Rand writes.⁴⁵¹ The function of the title and use of pronouns in the beginning of the text situates both author and reader as part of the same “we,” although “you” fail to recognize that “we” are in danger.

This shift from the “I” to the “you” continues for a few sentences before a “they” is introduced, against whom “we” must fight: “straight people.” The text reads:

Don’t be fooled, straight people own the world and the only reason you have been spared is you’re smart, lucky or a fighter. Straight people have a privilege that allows them to do whatever they please and fuck without fear. But not only do they live a life free of fear; they flaunt their freedom in my face.... Straight people are your enemy.⁴⁵²

“They”—straight people—are “your enemy,” connected in this paragraph to media, rights, and public space: “their images are on my TV, in the magazines I bought, in the restaurant I want to eat in, and on the street where I live.” The subject-positions constituted by “Queers Read This” are clear: “we” queers, a family of brothers and sisters, against the enemy of straights, whose culture we cannot help but breathe and live in. “They”—straight people—are the owners of culture, a culture that kills: “They are

⁴⁵¹ Rand, 291.

⁴⁵² Anonymous Queers.

your enemy when they don't acknowledge your invisibility and continue to live in and contribute to a culture that kills you. Every day one of us is taken by the enemy."⁴⁵³

The "they" shifts in the next section, however, to include another enemy: queers who seek assimilation in and legitimization by straight culture. Rather, "being queer means leading a different sort of life. It's not about the mainstream, profit-margins, patriotism, patriarchy, or being assimilated. It's not about executive directors, privilege and elitism. It's about being on the margins, defining ourselves; it's about gender-fuck and secrets, what's beneath the belt and deep inside the heart; it's about the night."⁴⁵⁴ The text begins with a direct address to "queers" that it hails in a moment of interpellation, a moment that constitutes the reader of the manifesto as one of "us queers." This subjectivity, however, is established quickly as oppositional, as negation, described in emotional terms of what it is *not*. I agree with Rand, who reads the "flyer as a manifesto of queer rage [that] incorporates anger and violence as an integral part of a queer identity and as part of what distinguishes queers from gays and lesbians."⁴⁵⁵ The subject-positions of "I," "us," and "them" are established, with the tyranny of "them" also established, and then specific tactics for negotiating this us/them battle are introduced. These tactics include instilling fear and taking power by force: "Until I can enjoy the same freedom of movement and sexuality, as straights, their privilege must stop and it must be given over to me and my queer sisters and brothers. Straight people will not do this voluntarily and so they must be forced into it. Straights must be frightened into it."⁴⁵⁶ This division between "us" and "them," queers and straights, not only constitutes

⁴⁵³ Anonymous Queers.

⁴⁵⁴ Anonymous Queers.

⁴⁵⁵ Rand, 295.

⁴⁵⁶ Anonymous Queers.

queer subjectivity as oppositional; it also describes this opposition as a struggle that involves power, intimidation, and potential violence.

It is important to note that the title of this section is “An Army of Lovers Cannot Lose”: “We are an army because we have to be. We are an army because we are so powerful. (We have so much to fight for; we are the most precious of endangered species.)” The “army” consists of the “I” as well as the “sisters and brothers” who have been addressed in the previous paragraph, united against the “they” of the straight world. This is more than just any army, but one that subverts the traditional image of an army as comprised of soldiers with a specific kind of sanctioned violence and disciplined masculinity, with this image of a queer army, an army of Lovers: “it is we who know what love is. Desire and lust, too. We invented them.” This army is no less angry than a traditional army, but the use of the army metaphor invokes both reclaimed masculinity, militancy, and the continuing fact that gays and lesbians are not allowed in the U.S. armed forces.

This army of lovers is militant, but militant in their tactics of loving: “Every time we fuck, we win.”⁴⁵⁷ The act of the army practicing “love” is a form of resistance: being an active army of lovers is itself subversive. The queer community is valorized for its outsider status, privileged because of this status, because of its connection to sexuality and desire. “Everyone of us” is defined in terms of the body and its parts, particularly its sexual parts: “everyone of us, every body, every cunt, every heart and ass and dick is a world of pleasure waiting to be explored. Everyone of us is a world of infinite possibility.”⁴⁵⁸ I note the double use of “everyone” as one word. In the army of lovers,

⁴⁵⁷ Anonymous Queers.

⁴⁵⁸ Anonymous Queers.

“every” and “one” come together to be united: one is all and all is one. It is through representation of sexuality as subversion that Queer Nation intends the very structures of subject/object to shift and converge: for radical sexuality and a community based on it, the “army of lovers,” to alter the structural interpellation of subjectivity.

In traditional manifesto style, this text also invokes inevitability—we can’t help but be an army—but also the pressing need for action: our “army” “cannot lose.” As an army of lovers, “we” are already predestined to win, chosen due to our pre-established relationship to sexuality and pleasure, to our outsider status: “Remember there is so, so little time. And I want to be a lover of each and every one of you. Next year, we march naked!”

This text pays special attention to the physical, body, space, public, and visibility: “Let’s name every space a Lesbian and Gay space. Every street a part of our sexual geography. A city of yearning and then total satisfaction. A city and a country where we can be safe and free and more.”⁴⁵⁹ “Queers Read This” invokes the idea of a nation of queers, an army, with its own land and boundaries. Just as Wittman invoked the metaphor of the gay ghetto, the refugee status of gay men in San Francisco, Queer Nation self-consciously takes this refugee status and declares independence, declares belonging to a new nation: the Queer Nation.

The privileging of sexuality and sexual pleasure, the army which is an army of sexual love, harkens back to the text of Shively, where experiences of sexual pleasure and practices of sexual experimentation were represented as radical and subversive. The AIDS crisis had immensely complicated the relationship between sexual practice and the constitution of community, of sex as the path to liberation. When indiscriminate, *unsafe*

⁴⁵⁹ Anonymous Queers.

sexual practice could lead to death, the easy connection between sexuality and freedom became more complex. But *Queer Nation* reinstates another form of this notion of connection between sexual activity, community membership, and revolutionary change, reclaiming the liberatory potential of sexuality and love as the privileged terrain of the queer. Despite the change in historical circumstances that came with the AIDS crisis, in the texts of gay liberation and *Queer Nation*, the gesture is the same: that sex=freedom, that “every time we fuck, we win.” Although there has been a shift in language from “gay” to “queer,” there is not much distance between descriptions of the figure of the “gay refugee” and calls for belonging as citizens of an imagined community, a “queer nation.” Both descriptions of subjectivity and citizenship have a long history within the strategic arsenal of manifesto rhetoric; the genre provides strategies through which liberal exclusions of so-called “universal” identities are exposed, contested, and understood in terms of gender and sexual identity. Through deployment of identities of both “gay refugee” and “queer nation,” exclusions enacted through liberal notions of the citizen are explicitly countered. Although the specific historical and cultural situation of the late 20th century led gay liberation and *Queer Nation* to privilege sexual identities over gendered identities, the exposure of exclusions as a rhetorical gesture remains the same.

It is important that the pamphlet was distributed during Pride 1990, an event that involves parades, the re-taking of public space by the gay community, a space in which carnivalesque displays of the body, same-sex affection, and performative gender/sexuality were enabled as constituting an alternative counter-public. It makes sense that the main text of *Queer Nation*—its declaration or manifesto—would be distributed within such a queer space, self-consciously drawing attention to the

importance of visibility and the public, to the bringing of the “private” realm of sexuality into the public sphere. At issue is not a liberal right to privacy, but rather the subversion of the public/private divide, the limits of what counts as political and the deconstruction of existing gay identity in terms of liberal logics and discourses of disease and shame: “Being queer is not about a right to privacy; it is about the freedom to be public, to just be who we are.”⁴⁶⁰ We saw subversion of the liberal public/private split in Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s inclusion of women and their “private,” domestic concerns into the most public of documents, the “Declaration of Independence”; Futurist women similarly subverted feminine identities associated with public and private, such as mistress and mother, to illustrate ways in which these categories exclude and devalue. Following this tradition, it is the constitution of the subject via public space, the shape that subject takes, the similarity between a gay refugee and a citizen of Queer Nation, that is foregrounded here.

The difficulties of communication, however, are lamented throughout the text of this manifesto. The very first sentence is a question, but it ends with a period that makes it into a statement rather than a call for response: “How can I tell you. How can I convince you....”⁴⁶¹ How to tell of the danger, despite the intimacy of interpellation as brother and sister, the safety of the situation of gay space during Pride? Difficulties of communication are partnered with heavily emotional language of fear, terror, joy, and pleasure; with language of the body; and with language about space and geography. How to translate to those like “us” but realize some “straights” might be reading too? This is addressed differently in the last section of the flyer, entitled “I Hate Straights,” which I analyze in the next section. However, I want to note that this section follows a list of

⁴⁶⁰ Anonymous Queers.

⁴⁶¹ Anonymous Queers.

“Rules of Conduct For Straight People” which includes “2) If you must slow dance, be an inconspicuous as possible” but ends with “7) Go Fuck Yourself.”⁴⁶² This list betrays ambivalence between wanting to be heard by straight culture, to reverse the power structures of straight society, to shame the shamer, and the acknowledgement of the difficulties of this task, a difficulty that becomes experienced as an impossibility, such that the only option is reduced to vulgar rejection, “Go Fuck Yourself.” Just as the avant-garde retreated from argumentation into insult, a tactic of manifesto rhetoric and its inheritance, Queer Nation similarly invokes argumentation, the reversal of value systems, and the outright rejection of communication itself. The tensions within the manifesto genre between revealing and hiding the status of the manifesto as a performance, between remaining in a space of pure critique and offering content to a possible future, are manifested in the texts of Queer Nation.

“I Hate Straights”

Although inherited rhetorical influences from the manifesto genre are evident throughout queer texts, these texts also perform a “forgetting” of this inheritance. Such forgetting is itself a product of the genre’s strategies for avoiding co-optation through the deployment of a specific understanding of temporality and history. Although queer politics sets itself up in opposition to the “identity politics” of gay liberation and “assimilationists,” a reading of Queer Nation’s “I Hate Straights” illustrates similarities between the manifestoes of the varied factions. I point out these similarities to counter the imagined identity politics/queer politics divide and to ask why it is that queer theory

⁴⁶² Anonymous Queers.

denies its theoretical inheritance and what this “forgetting” can tell us about the historical practice of manifesto-writing.

The back side of the flyer distributed by Queer Nation at 1990 Gay Pride is entitled “I Hate Straights.” Like “Queers Read This,” “I Hate Straights” is spoken from the authorship of a singular “I” but on behalf of a community of queer subjects. The “we” is invoked, but less often than the “I” in this section. The “they” of the text remains “straights” and refers less to assimilationist gays than does the “they” of “Queers Read This.” Where feminist texts, such as Bunch’s “Lesbians in Revolt,” utilized pronouns as a strategy to reverse and multiply the subjects constructed through the text, as well as to bring the audience in to an inclusive definition of “we lesbians,” the voice of “I Hate Straights” is much more personal, almost confessional, seemingly directed towards a sympathetic and non-straight audience. The author, then, of “I Hate Straights” is less concerned with invoking group consciousness or membership among queers than with describing the difficulties of queer experience and the actions that should be taken in response.

“I Hate Straights” plays off of the stereotypical heterosexual defense against the charge of homophobia, the claim that “some of my best friends are gay.” The text begins, “I have friends. Some of them are straight.”⁴⁶³ Unlike “Queers Read This,” the “I” of this text focuses on his proximity to straight individuals—individuals rather than groups, straight rather than gay. There is genuine care and friendship between the “I” of the text and its “straight friends”: “I see my straight friends. I want to see them, to see

⁴⁶³ Anonymous Queers.

how they are doing, to add newness to our long and complicated histories, to experience some continuity.”⁴⁶⁴

The problem, though, is that this desire for communion, for friendship on an individual level, is thwarted by the existence of straight culture which renders the queer “I” of the text invisible: “Year after year I continue to realize that the facts of my life are irrelevant to them and that I am only half listened to, that I am an appendage to the doings of a greater world, a world of power and privilege, of the laws of installation, a world of exclusion.”⁴⁶⁵ This sentence broadens the perspective from that of a singular queer seeking straight friendship to an invisible community at the mercy of straight culture that does not acknowledge or value queer life.

The basic message of the text, other than the expression of queer anger over this invisibility in spite a desire for connection, is the expression of anger at not being listened to. There is a contradiction in the text as it professes and declares itself as an attempt to be heard, its own failure to be heard, its desire to be heard, and the difficulty of communicating queer anger at not being heard. This contradiction is represented in a way similar to women manifesto writers who simultaneously describe the negative aspects of their marginal status “outside” of, excluded from, liberal politics and the public sphere, while also valuing this exterior positionality for its critical potential. In the text of “I Hate Straights,” this negative experience of exclusion is described in highly emotional language. Where Stanton, for example, *named* how liberal exclusion had impacted woman’s psychology to make her “morally, an irresponsible being,” “I Hate Straights” *describes* this experience of exclusion in detail.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid.

The text invokes the liberal value of family to describe the situation of queer exclusion: “the ones we are born into disown us when they find out who we really are, and to make matters worse, we are prevented from having our own [family]. We are punished, insulted, cut off, and treated like seditionaries in terms of child rearing....”⁴⁶⁶

The experience of queer life is defined in terms of rejection by family, of being cast out of a community, and of not belonging, which appeals to the traditional, liberal “family values” that are usually seen (by straight society) as lacking in gay culture. Just as Wittman invoked the constitution of the gay refugee via his outsider status, this text similarly constitutes the queer as outsider while focusing on the emotional toll this takes. The very fact of such rejection, of having no family, is a fact that is ignored by straight culture, as those “straight friends” cannot understand queer experience. Being listened to is set up as a difficulty, perhaps an impossibility, given the current cultural and social situation—the hegemonic rule of straight society.

This failure to be heard, tied with the wounds of familial rejection, invoke anger in the text of “I Hate Straights”; although it may be “unconscious,” straights are playing into the same culture that has harmed and continues to isolate the queer individual. The experience of being cast out of a family, rendered to the margins of society, and then having that experience be ignored, causes anger and gets in the way of relationships with straights: “I hate having to convince straight people that lesbians and gays live in a war zone, that we’re surrounded by bomb blasts only we seem to hear, that our bodies and souls are heaped high, dead from fright or bashed or raped, dying of grief or disease, stripped of our personhood. I hate straight people who can’t listen to queer anger....”⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁷ Ibid.

The various tactics taken by straights to avoid responsibility and culpability in this situation are listed and condemned with impatience: “Why must we take care of them, in the midst of our just anger brought on by their fucked up society?!”⁴⁶⁸

The text invokes queer anger, brought on by queers’ excluded position outside of straight society, subsequently ignored and defended against by straights with which queers seek friendship and connection, which leads to self-blame among the queer community, self-destructive behavior rooted in the hiding of anger: “They’ve taught us that good queers don’t get mad. They’ve taught us so well that we not only hide our anger from them, we hide it from each other. WE EVEN HIDE IT FROM OURSELVES. We hide it with substance abuse and suicide and overachieving in the hope of proving our worth.” Thus the danger of not being listened to, of unacknowledged queer anger, is that such anger and denial of anger turns inward against the self. Meanwhile, attacks on queers continue, “they bash us and stab us and shoot us and bomb us in ever increasing numbers and still we freak out when angry queers carry banners or signs that say BASH BACK.”⁴⁶⁹

The text rallies against the silencing of queer anger: “LET YOURSELF BE ANGRY. Let yourself be angry that the price of our visibility is the constant threat of violence, anti- queer violence to which practically every segment of this society contributes. Let yourself feel angry that THERE IS NO PLACE IN THIS COUNTRY WHERE WE ARE SAFE...” Being listened to is tied up with being safe, with safety, with survival. The attempt to voice queer anger, to be heard, to declare “I Hate Straights” is a matter of queer survival. “I Hate Straights” calls for queers to stop pretending that they aren’t

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid.

angry, to stop being patient with straight guilt and defensiveness, to “Tell them ‘GO AWAY FROM ME, until YOU can change.’”⁴⁷⁰

The fact that straights cannot and have not experienced the rejection and trauma of queer life excludes them from understanding, at the same time, I argue, that it invites understanding: this very flyer is a calling-attention-to-anger, which is a desire for connection and listening. The text ends with: “After they survive [queer experience], then you’ll hear what they have to say about queer anger. Otherwise, let them shut up and listen.” These final lines leave open the possibility of an empathetic understanding of queer anger, of straights being able see, with effort, the difficulties of queer experience.

“I Hate Straights”’ expression of sadness at rejection from straight society and simultaneous call for angry, defensive violence (“BASH BACK”) illustrates some of the contradictions and tensions that emerge in the manifesto genre, tensions adopted in the rhetorical strategies of this text. From as early as Marx’s *Brumaire*, the historical experience of failed revolutions was reflected in political rhetoric that lamented the broken promises of liberal ideals; the tension between maintaining hope for such ideals to be fulfilled, on the one hand, and skepticism that such ideals are unattainable, on the other, came to constitute the manifesto genre in the avant-garde of the early 20th century. Vacillation between these sentiments took varied forms according to different contexts: Futurism violently asserted hope in a utopian future at any expense, even inevitable self-destruction, while disillusionment with avant-garde projects and the aftermath of WWI contributed to Dada’s nihilistic attempts to reject intelligibility and communication entirely. In Solanas, this tension is mediated by the invocation of a potential, as-yet-

⁴⁷⁰ Ibid.

unnamed “post” identity, a strategy similarly employed by lesbian feminist Charlotte Bunch. The contrasts between WITCH and CLIT, also, provide excellent examples of this tension: WITCH invests hope in the critical functions of parodic, performative protest and identity-reversal, whereas CLIT exhibits such fear of co-optation that they, like Dada, forego communication through radical rejection of straight society’s modes of representation.

The queer subject constituted through “I Hate Straights” is an oppositional subject, similar to the “gay refugee” in Wittman’s “Gay Manifesto.” Insofar as both texts describe the constitution of the gay or queer subject through processes of violence, expulsion, and exclusion, they both take similar risks. The gay or queer subject risks becoming invested in his or her own exclusion or subjection, reliant upon rejection for self-definition. Insofar as the queer subject of “I Hate Straights” is constituted through an experience of invisibility/silence that causes anger, the existence of queer subjectivity is dependent upon this experience of anger and invisibility. To be heard, then, is to risk self-destruction. Another risk is that maintaining an us/them, insider/outsider divide ignores ways in which *all* subjects are constituted through the performative workings of power, the constitutive functions of political language, and the failures of liberal politics. “I Hate Straights” is written to communicate the emotional difficulties of communication between straights and queers, but by singling out queer/straight communication, the text risks ignoring the larger difficulties of communication as such, the fact that all speech functions performatively, and that all performances of linguistic community-constitution involve exclusion. These risks are the same in both “liberationist” and “queer” texts, and these risks are inherited strategies specific to rhetoric of the manifesto genre, with the

ways in which specific understandings of identity—gender or sexuality—signify the larger workings of exclusion through the enactment of liberal vocabularies.

For example, in the preface to his lovely book, *Homographesis*, Lee Edelman describes the process through which the sexual identity category of “gay men” is brought “into the realm of representation—if only in order to represent that which cannot be permitted representation, or that which must be represented as occasioning a crisis in and for the logic of representation itself.”⁴⁷¹ Edelman identifies what he sees as a unique function of gay sexual identity, the way in which the anxiety provoked through gay sexuality’s resistance to representation, its unknowability, simultaneously “finds representation as a resistance to the logic of representation [and] thus effectively, if counter-intuitively, secures the order of representation and renders gay sexuality central to any enterprise of legibility, of identity-determination, that occurs within in.”⁴⁷² While Edelman’s description of the function of gay identity in resisting and reaffirming the logic of representation is insightful, his reading of this process through the lens of sexuality, specifically, gay sexuality, illustrates the “mapping” that I have described at work. It may be true that the category of gay sexuality functions in this way, but the history of the manifesto tradition shows that such complex processes, such interventions in liberal logics of identity and universality occur through categories beyond that of sexuality. To recontextualize the queer project as a manifesto project requires opening up the identity categories beyond sexuality, perhaps even beyond gender: to escape the “gay ghetto” reaffirmed through queer theory’s myopia.

⁴⁷¹ Lee Edelman, *Homographesis: Essays in Gay Literary and Cultural Theory* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994): xiv.

⁴⁷² Edelman, xv.

As manifestoes, queer texts are unique in their mapping of the category of sexuality, rather than gender, onto critiques of liberal universality, but they still struggle with the same problems that constitute the genre. The intensity of queer suffering from the queer/straight divide is evident. But by investing so much effort in an expression of queer anger, the text's author fails to recognize that it could be the specific way in which the queer/straight, us/them opposition is structured that creates, sustains, and perpetuates this anger. And the establishment of this queer/straight, us/them opposition is part of inherited manifesto rhetoric, an inheritance that Queer Nation insists on denying.

Queer/History: Rebellion and Remembering

Queer Nation was a young, more “fun” offshoot of the AIDS activist group ACT-UP and understood itself as “a new generation of activists.”⁴⁷³ Indeed, the entire idea of embracing the epithet “queer” was self-consciously “meant to be confrontational—opposed to gay assimilationists.”⁴⁷⁴ While some Queer Nation writers, such as Chee, articulate a debt of inheritance of previous social movements such as civil rights, more often, Queer Nation's texts—in addition to some of what would later become known as “queer theory”—denied its historical influence in favor of youthful rejection of its elders, the claiming of inherited strategies as new strategies.⁴⁷⁵ Even in Chee's admission of influence from civil rights, his language reflects that of Valerie Solanas in her *SCUM Manifesto* when he writes: “People are tired of groups with egos, processes, personality cults, and politicking. So far Queer Nation is individuals confronting individuals. This is not about institutions yet. We do not want a budget, charter, or a history beyond our work

⁴⁷³ Allan Bérubé and Jeffrey Escoffier, “Queer/Nation,” *Outlook* (Winter 1991): 13.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁷⁵ Chee, 15.

in the street.”⁴⁷⁶ Queer Nation, like authors of manifestoes before them, opposed movements and political activism that sought inclusion within vocabularies of liberal politics. And Queer Nation, like authors of manifestoes before them, believed themselves to be “reinventing the wheel,” so to say, rather than following in a long-practiced tradition of dissent. These two sentiments contributed to a general suspicion in Queer Nation of institutions and hierarchical organizations that extended beyond “budgets” and “charters” to include “history.” Queer Nation didn’t *want* a history.

As Queer Nation was a short-lived, dispersed activist effort that never quite gained the status of a movement on its own, queer theory, on the other hand, took the academy by storm in the 1990s. From Eve Sedgwick to Judith Butler to Michel Foucault, queer theory and gay histories were becoming ubiquitous on college syllabi as women’s studies gave way to gender studies gave way to queer studies. However, this shift from the gay to queer—within activism, with Queer Nation, as well as in the academy, with the rise of queer theory’s critique of identity politics and subjectivity—came with a case of amnesia in regards to theoretical influences. This has been noted by queer writers as well as analysts of the queer, including E. J. Rand in his discussion of R. Shilts’ 1991 *Advocate* article: “Shilts...blatantly asserts, ‘The queering of America, 1990-style, is not really about ideology or even politics. It’s about the gay generation gap and the age-old rebellion of the young against the old.’ The difference of queers, cast as youthful rebellion and an odd sense of style...offers them as a scapegoat...”⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁶ Chee, 15.

⁴⁷⁷ R. Shilts, “The queering of America: Looking back at 1990 and the resurrection of the gay movement,” *Advocate* (January 1, 1991): 32-28; qtd. In E. J. Rand, “A Disunited Nation and a Legacy of Contradiction: Queer Nation’s Construction of Identity,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 28:4 (October 2004): 302.

I focus here on an essay by Steven Maynard that discusses the forgetting of the “mothers and fathers,” as it were, in Queer Nation and queer theory in the 1990s.⁴⁷⁸ Maynard offers a useful description of the tension that emerged between gay historians and queer theorists, a tension that illustrates some of the nuances of this theoretical amnesia in the case of Queer Nation. Queer Nation provides a useful example of a larger dynamic internal to the manifesto genre. From its beginnings with Marx/Engels and throughout its development in the avant-garde, the manifesto genre has been used to address issues of historical inheritance. The combination of belief in liberal ideals and the experience of their bankruptcy led to this concern with history: was the revolution deferred, or was it all just a pipe dream? Did the hegemony and oppression of inherited political vocabularies render attempts at revolution inadequate, such that we must get rid of all vestiges of the past? Or is the very notion of revolution itself inherited and in need of reinvention? Queer Nation’s specific “forgetting” of its theoretical inheritance, its indebtedness to rhetorics of the manifesto tradition, illustrates that these questions, questions that constituted the manifesto genre, also perpetuated a tendency to deny historical inheritance. I argue that this denial, this forgetting, is inherent to the genre’s deployment of temporality and history, and that this forgetting has implications for contemporary social movements and political theories.

Maynard opens his article on queer theory and history with the story of an effort by Queer Nation Toronto in 1991 to instruct the queer community there on its history through the dissemination of posters that said “Respect Your Elders” and “Know Your

⁴⁷⁸ Steven Maynard, “Respect Your Elders, Know Your Past”: History and the Queer Theorists, *Radical History Review* 75 (1999): 56-78.

Past.”⁴⁷⁹ The fact that Queer Nation felt the need to take on this issue, Maynard argues, points to a large problem within the queer community—a tension between the work of historians, particularly gay historians, and the (ahistorical) work of queer theorists. The problem, Maynard argues, is that “social historians reject queer theory as jargon, queer theorists often have little patience for History.”⁴⁸⁰ While this history/theory distinction might involve oversimplification, Maynard agrees that “queer theory lacks historical perspective and appreciation”.⁴⁸¹

queer theorists routinely equate all gay historical writing with empiricism, seemingly unaware or unwilling to allow that historical work can be theoretically-charged, and that there are important distinctions to be made between naïve empiricism and an empirical idiom of historical investigation.⁴⁸²

Following Maynard, I would suggest that queer theory’s resistance to so-called identity politics and focus on the political uses of identity-destabilization causes queer theory and politics to see identity-stasis where there is none, or where there is at least room for destabilization to occur. In addition, queer rejection of historical analysis dismisses the

⁴⁷⁹ Maynard, 56.

⁴⁸⁰ Maynard, 59.

⁴⁸¹ Maynard, 59.

⁴⁸² Maynard, 61. Maynard offers some productive suggestions for how to bring together the categories of queer theory and gay history as queer/history, however, when he suggests that we might “trace the history of ‘queer’ as an identity category and to write the histories of the individuals and groups who, in different times and places and in divergent ways, adopted and lived out a queer identity” (Maynard 71). Another alternative to bring together the queer and history would be “to develop a distinctly queer historical practice” like that of Jennifer Terry in her “Theorizing Deviant Historiography” or what Martha Umphrey calls “queered history” that Maynard describes as “which would refer to the historian’s critical stance rather than to the historian’s object of study.” (Maynard 72). “In indicating some of the trouble with Martha Umphrey, I am suggesting that any effort to devise a queer history must historicize the ‘normal’ against which the potentially expansive categories of ‘outlaw’ and ‘deviant’ are defined, and it must recognize if not resolve the messy historical issues of subjects’ self-consciousness and self-identities” (Maynard 73). See Jennifer Terry, “Theorizing Deviant Historiography” in *differences* 3 (Summer 1991): 55-74; Martha M. Umphrey, “The Trouble with Harry Thaw,” *Radical History Review* 62 (Spring 1995): 8-23.

destabilizing function of historical contextualization in the vein of Michel Foucault, of historical analysis as a “genealogy of problems.” As I argued in the previous chapter, queer critiques of the “liberation” identity politics of the 1970s retrospectively paint such movements as reaffirming essentialist identities, where close readings of manifestoes shows these same movements as enacting a performative destabilization of identity as political practice, a practice rooted in traditions of dissent exemplified by the manifesto genre. Manifesto rhetoric influences queer politics’ opposition to the “old” in true avant-garde fashion.

Queer politics describes itself as performing the political destabilization of identity categories in contrast to what it understands as gay liberation’s strategies of identity-affirmation. Despite the risks noted in my reading of “I Hate Straights,” I see the queer project as intending to avoid the problem of historical influence, of becoming invested in one’s own subjection, by seeking the destruction of identity. I would like to explore the architecture that builds this desire for disappearance. There is some pleasure to be taken in this destruction of the notion of a unified, narrative experience or identity, or in the desire for it: the possibility and joy of a utopian future, a place with no exclusion that is somehow “better.” This strategy of identity-deconstruction replicates a liberal, progressive narrative. Teleology is invoked in the name of deconstruction and contingency. There is some irony in seeing the task of queer theory as a liberatory project invested in the destruction of experience and the pleasure taken in the articulation of this destruction.

My readings of queer manifestoes resituate queer politics within the history of inherited strategies and aesthetic conventions of the manifesto genre. Situating queer

texts within the manifesto tradition helps to explain the contradictions between language in “Queers Read This” and “I Hate Straights.” On the one hand, these manifestoes function as an invitation to both “us” and “them” to listen and understand: a statement of solidarity with something. At the same time, these manifestoes invoke oppositional identities and strategies of negation in Dada fashion with language such as “Go Fuck Yourself.”⁴⁸³

As my reading of the genre of the manifesto has shown, manifesto practice risks being caught up in the very same liberal logics against which it rebels, a risk that led some manifesto authors to invoke radical strategies of unintelligibility, as in Dada. In addition, the emergence of the genre *as a genre*, with its own recognizable rules and familiarities, enabled what began as a genre of contradiction to be perpetuated as a set of strategies, as a style, as something fixed. As manifesto-writing became understood as a form of political action—to write a manifesto was to politicize something—the strategies employed through the genre became increasingly adopted without criticism or reflection about their tensions and limits. The very solidification of the manifesto *as a tradition* ends up sabotaging the manifesto’s ability to enact critical analysis: the genre becomes domesticated, familiar, rendering its strategies invisible. But the risk goes beyond the problems with familiarity. The ways in which categories of the subject are constructed in the manifesto, categories of us/them, as sexual subjects or gendered subjects or otherwise unstable subjects, risk reinscribing the same liberal vocabularies and gestures to which it is opposed. Liberal discourses of progress, the utopian promise for the future dissolution of the self, are inherited and evident here.

⁴⁸³ Anonymous Queers.

Jacinth Samuels has argued that liberal preoccupations with inclusivity, universality, and equality are in fact mirrored in the umbrella term, “queer”: “the queer subject is...constitutive not of a genuinely autonomous, anti-essentialist subject, but rather the unwitting *reproduction* of the very liberal humanist subject which it was originally intended to critique.”⁴⁸⁴ The effect, then, is that queer subjectivity “performs the same elision it was intended to remedy,” that in an attempt to encompass and destabilize multiple identities, it ends up homogenizing and assimilating difference in the process.⁴⁸⁵ Samuels’ warning is valid, but I would shift the definition of the “liberal humanist subject” that he invokes. Rather, this liberal subject was always already performative, always already constituted as a citizen through political language, always part of a process that was failed and/or incomplete. What queer theory risks, rather, is the unwitting perpetuation of the *dream* of a unified, complete liberal subject, a risk that is taken through the denial of the inherited strategies of the manifesto. Because the manifesto author is invested in the future and condemns the past, because the manifesto author insists on the new, on anticipated action, on the “post,” and because the manifesto author is overwhelmingly concerned with the limitations brought on by historical influence, rhetorical strategies enacted through the manifesto mask the ways in which they are traditions, ways in which they risk becoming *traditional*. The deployment of temporality and history in the manifesto genre leads manifestoes to disavow their membership in a genre, their indebtedness to a tradition.

⁴⁸⁴ Jacinth Samuels, “Dangerous Liaisons: Queer Subjectivity, Liberalism and Race,” in *Cultural Studies* 13:1 (1999): 97

⁴⁸⁵ Penn, qtd. in Samuels, 92.

The Manifesto and Contemporary Queer/Feminist Theory

Throughout this project, I have connected the practice of manifesto-writing to some of the core problems that emerged within liberal politics: the exclusion of identities in the name of so-called universality, for example, or elision of the performative and constitutive functions of political rhetoric. Through readings of manifestoes from multiple sources, I have traced the manifesto genre's emergence as a series of exposures of the failures of liberal politics. The specific historical circumstances in which manifestoes were written—circumstances of revolutions, counter-revolutions, and their failures—were reflected in the strategies manifesto authors used to expose these failures. One main strategy for exposing universality as exclusionary occurred through the mapping of the identity category of gender onto the practice of the manifesto, which ostensibly enabled critiques of excluded gender identity to “stand in” for critiques of exclusion as such. Through this process, analysis of the excluded status of “woman” was used as a tactic for exposing the limits of liberal discourse.

As the end of the 20th century arrived, sexuality increasingly took over the function of gender in manifesto practice. Many within feminism have argued over the relationship between feminism and queer theory—whether one is indebted to, subsumes, or replaces the other—but I see the shift into queer analysis as an extension of feminist analysis. This extension shows the adoption of manifesto strategies applied to a changing historical and cultural situation: the rising significance of sexuality in social and cultural life, particularly representations of sexuality within a media-infused culture. Where feminist manifestoes used the excluded category of “woman” to expose the limits of liberal universality, queer theory multiplied this excluded category to include sexual minorities

and other gender-variant identities. However, allowing any specific excluded identity—gender, sexuality, etc.—to “stand in” for the larger processes of exclusion as such within liberal politics involves risk. Such “mapping” risks limiting the view of the subject to one aspect—limiting subjectivity to identification with an excluded gender or sexual identity—which risks ignoring the other, important ways in which exclusion occurs (race, ethnicity, age, disability, ad infinitum).

By historicizing the emergence of the manifesto genre, by identifying the genre as a form of historical practice, a more complex understanding of the relationships between liberal politics and dissent emerges, one that recognizes the limits of liberalism and its function in prescribing the “problems” that require “solving” by critical theories and social movements. If we are going to move past these problems, we have to move past the inherited strategies of the manifesto; first, though, we need to learn what these (limited) strategies are. This project is just the beginning of that intervention and analytic effort.

**Conclusion:
Towards a Post-Revolutionary, Post-Nostalgic Manifesto Genre**

The 2009 Triennial show at Britain's Tate Galleries, titled "Altermodern," declares at the beginning of its "Altermodern Manifesto" that "Postmodernism is Dead." The manifesto continues:

A new modernity is emerging, reconfigured to an age of globalisation –

understood in its economic, political and cultural aspects: an altermodern culture

Increased communication, travel and migration are affecting the way we live

Our daily lives consist of journeys in a chaotic and teeming universe

Multiculturalism and identity is being overtaken by creolisation: Artists are now

starting from a globalised state of culture

This new universalism is based on translations, subtitling and generalised dubbing

Today's art explores the bonds that text and image, time and space, weave

between themselves

Artists are responding to a new globalised perception. They traverse a cultural

landscape saturated with signs and create new pathways between multiple formats

of expression and communication.

The Tate Triennial 2009 at Tate Britain presents a collective discussion around

this premise that postmodernism is coming to an end, and we are experiencing the

emergence of a global altermodernity.⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ Nicolas Bourriaud, "Altermodern Manifesto," Tate Triennial 2009, Tate Britain. April 22, 2009. <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/altermodern/manifesto.shtm>.

The “Altermodern Manifesto” explicitly invokes temporality, of the notion of “periods” (such as the postmodern) that begin and end. At the same time, this manifesto notes shifts in our contemporary historical context, shifts that must alter the ways in which we imagine social change and its relationship to the liberal (Western) project: these shifts include globalization, migration, creolisation, hybridity. A change in our historical, geographical context is already happening, a change in the way in which we understand time and space in an increasingly post-industrial, media-saturated, technology-infused, globalized world. Whether we call our time “postmodern” or “altermodern,” our changing global situation provides an opportunity to evaluate a shift in the practice of manifesto-writing, in the opportunities for and limits of dissent.

I like manifestoes: their irreverence, righteousness, and aggression. But they worry me. I worry that their obsession—our obsession—with the future, with the “post,” is a remnant of the genre that keeps us stuck in old problems and strategies, stuck without understanding that we are reenacting historical strategies. Remaining in the space of these same problems means settling for the same limited forms of response, critique, and activism. Ultimately, though, our attention must go beyond the manifesto, back to that against which the manifesto protests. It becomes clear that established and available forms of critique and protest are enabled and disabled—and therefore sanctioned and recuperated—by the specific promises and failures of liberal politics.

In her introduction to *Novel Gazing*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies what she calls a “hermeneutics of suspicion” evident in the history of critical theory; this hermeneutic, she argues, has contributed to the thorough adoption of a “paranoid position” by queer

and feminist critics in the 1980s.⁴⁸⁷ According to Sedgwick, this paranoid position involves an “anticipatory” “aversion to surprise” that leads the paranoid to defensively and consistently seek knowledge. Sedgwick insightfully relates paranoia to a particular understanding and deployment of temporality that is both obsessed with knowing the future and contingent on a totalizing description of the past:

The unidirectionally future-oriented vigilance of paranoia generated, paradoxically, a complex relation to temporality that burrows both backward and forward: because there must be no bad surprises, and because to learn of the possibility of a bad surprise that would itself constitute a bad surprise, paranoia requires that bad news be always already known....temporal progress and regress of paranoia are, in principle, infinite.⁴⁸⁸

The result of this understanding of temporality by the paranoid position is that “no time could be too early for one’s having-already-known, for its having-already-been-inevitable, that something bad would happen; and no loss could be too far in the future to need to be preemptively discounted.”⁴⁸⁹ In addition, this temporal focus leads to descriptions of knowledge that are “inescapably narrative”: an enactment of epistemological processes of exposure, revelation, and demystification.⁴⁹⁰

What Sedgwick identifies as the problem with the paranoid position is that it risks inadvertently reinscribing the logics of the dangers against which it defends: many

⁴⁸⁷ Sedgwick borrows the “hermeneutic of suspicion” label from the work of Paul Ricoeur, who used the term to categorize critical strategies evident in the works of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud. The notion of “paranoid position” is borrowed from Melanie Klein to inform Sedgwick’s deployment of paranoia in the context of “critical practices,” as “changing and heterogeneous relational stances.” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction Is about You,” in *Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction*, ed. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997): 4, 6, 7-8.

⁴⁸⁸ Sedgwick, *Novel Gazing*, 10.

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

paranoid critics adopt an “anticipatory mimetic strategy” that can lead to “an explanatory structure that a reader may see as tautological.”⁴⁹¹ In addition, the paranoid position results in hiding ways in which queer experience invokes “reparative practice”: such practices “become invisible or illegible under a paranoid optic.”⁴⁹² Sedgwick uses the paranoid vs. reparative distinction to recuperate elements of the reparative as displayed through practices of queer camp.⁴⁹³

Cynthia Willett, too, sees progressive potential in practices of queer camp. In her analysis of the functions of comedy in redefining traditional understandings of freedom and liberty, Willett cites camp’s “power of comedy to liberate us from ourselves” as evidence for a new definition of negative freedom. She writes,

Negative liberty as freedom from external intervention does not suffice to locate this freedom.... The liberating force of laughter’s ironic stance, whether it occurs as camp, carnival, or farce, shifts the core meaning of negative freedom from individual choice to self-liberation. This freedom emerges in the transgression of norms that define our choices and identities in the first place.⁴⁹⁴

I would extend Sedgwick’s analysis of paranoid and reparative positions to my concern with the rhetoric of the manifesto, to the ways in which it perpetuates historical forgetting. Like the paranoid, the manifesto author adopts a radically suspicious understanding of the historical workings of liberal politics, such that totalizing descriptions of past oppressions demand revolutionary action towards an inevitable future. Like the paranoid, the manifesto’s function is represented as epistemological

⁴⁹¹ Ibid., 12, 14.

⁴⁹² Ibid., 25.

⁴⁹³ Ibid., 28.

⁴⁹⁴ Cynthia Willett, *Irony in the Age of Empire: Comic Perspectives on Democracy and Freedom* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2008): 146.

exposure, as unmasking liberal ideals as bankrupt, as exposing liberal categories of universality as exclusionary. And, like the paranoid, the manifesto risks inadvertently reinscribing elements of the same liberal logics to which it is opposed, overlooking potentially reparative alternatives in the process.

In a way, this project reenacts this epistemological gesture of exposure: I expose the work of contemporary politics as ignoring their indebtedness to the manifesto tradition. My desire to expose inherited strategies could play into a persistent paranoia: to want to acknowledge, or know (as expose) one's theoretical inheritance in order to stave off surprises, to "see it coming," to say "I told you so." However, such knowledge need not necessarily lead to a prescribed set of critical practices, problems that demand answers, or set of epistemological imperatives. As Sedgwick writes, "for someone to have an unmythified, angry view of large and genuinely systemic oppressions does not intrinsically or necessarily enjoin on that person any specific train of epistemological or narrative consequences."⁴⁹⁵ The implication is that knowledge of one's theoretical inheritance need not set up a familiar argumentative path, but rather, such knowledge can be used to imagine and practice new epistemological projects, new kinds of narratives, new ways of imagining and representing experiences—and, new experiences.

When I started this project, I imagined that my conclusion would pose the question: what does it mean to write a manifesto today? Now, the question has shifted: *should* one write a manifesto today? I am wary of re-enacting a familiar story: the "fall of man," the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, the loss of innocence. I fear that in participating by a

⁴⁹⁵ Sedgwick, *Novel Gazing*, 4. Sedgwick attributes this insight to Cindy Patton as a response to early conspiracy theory-type suspicions surrounding the growth of HIV and AIDS in the gay community in the 1980s. According to Sedgwick, Patton considered the possibility that they had evidence that the worst of the conspiracy theories were true, and then calmly asked, "what would we know then that we don't already know?"

genre that exposes the failures of liberal vocabularies, manifestoes risk re-telling this story, which is a story of loss, a story that inadvertently perpetuates belief in the ideal, the desire for fulfillment of what was denied, of rediscovery of that which was lost.

Yes, the promises of liberal politics were never fulfilled. At the same time, there is no “outside” to liberal politics. The “revolution” ceased to remain revolutionary.

Manifestoes too often express nostalgia for the revolution, for the promise of a revolution that never arrived. But the “things” that were lost—belief in universal rights, an idea of historical progress, and a religious faith in human rationality—never existed from the beginning. All we have lost is the dream of liberal ideals, and all that is left to lose is our narrative of loss.

So, should one write a manifesto today? Yes, but with caution. The practice of manifesto-writing must involve surrendering the injury inflicted by the broken promises of liberal politics. The practice of manifesto-writing must give up its nostalgia for the revolution. Rather, the value of the manifesto is in its ability to unmask, make profane, expose, and redefine. The manifesto should be used to help us reconsider what it means to “be political.” If we can work towards creating a post-revolutionary, post-nostalgic manifesto genre, such that our hope for a “post” doesn’t blind us to our past, we might be able to recuperate elements of the manifesto as a historical practice in the service of discovering new forms of politicization. We might rediscover ways in which to redefine and re-imagine political ideals and performances of citizenship through practices that we already know: parody, performance, and even camp, as noted by Willett.

This is why recent movements, responding to historical changes such as those noted in the “Altermodern Manifesto,” are hopeful: communication across geographies that have

been differently-impacted by liberal politics and history; the growth of coalitional, multi-issue political activism, such as witnessed in some anti-globalization movements.

Activists at the 2003 World Social Forum in Brazil adopted the slogan, “Another world is possible.” As noted by Stefan Skrimshire, this slogan is intended to function as an antidote to what he calls “the fatalistic trend in contemporary political life,” a trend exemplified by rhetoric of “the end”: “We need to see discourses of the end as...rhetorical tactics for preserving an established discourse.”⁴⁹⁶ As I have argued through my reading of the problem of historical inheritance in manifestoes, certain ways of thinking about history and the future—of beginnings and endings—risk becoming conservative gestures that reinforce the very liberal project that they intend to escape. The “end” is too often tied up with liberal notions of a progressive, linear history that demands that we 1) account for its influence, and 2) strategize a way “out.”

To remove ourselves from the rhetoric of “ends”—to stop recycling rhetorical vacillation between utopia and fatalism, between argumentation and “fuck you”—we need to reconsider how we use understandings of history in our calls for change. This dissertation is intended to serve as a step in that direction, an offer to start a new conversation. By recontextualizing the narrative history of feminist and queer projects, their relationship to the liberal project, and the risks and benefits of inherited rhetorics of dissent, we might begin to gain insight into what kinds of “other worlds” are possible, and how best to construct them.

⁴⁹⁶ Stefan Skrimshire, “Another *What Is Possible?* Ideology and Utopian Imagination in Anti-Capitalist Resistance,” *Political Theology* 7.2 (2006): 201, 204.

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