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Feminism in Time

Margaret Ferguson

Like the White Rabbit, those of us addressing you from the pages of this special issue on “feminism in time” are late, quite late, for what remains (arguably) a very important date—with a highly enigmatic figure whose continued existence is subject to debate in these and other (related) sets of pages written shortly before and shortly after the turn of the millennium. As a figure, *feminism* has multiple, changing, and disputed referents. The name in the dominant modern sense given by the *Oxford English Dictionary*—“advocacy of the rights of women (based on the theory of equality of the sexes)” —came rather belatedly into English: 1894–95, according to the *OED*’s entries for the substantive and adjectival forms of the word. This philological fact may surprise you (it did me), since many students of feminism, including one in this collection (Laura Mandell), date the birth of feminism in its modern form to the European Enlightenment. Yet more specifically, but also more partially, with reference to the coordinates of “national” language and geography as well as to those of linear time, feminism’s “birth” has been (and is here too) provisionally located in the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft, in particular her famous *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792).

“Birth” is in quotation marks because the contributors to the present issue recognize not only that the entity we are calling feminism has multiple incarnations but that even the historical variant best known to Anglophone cultural historians—the feminism of “equality,” or “liberal” feminism—is contested and knowable only in relation to other historical constructions, including the ideals of “liberté, égalité, frater-

nité” formulated during the French Revolution. Like psychoanalysis, Mandell argues, feminism “is both antidote to and child of Enlightenment thought.” Mandell studies feminism as a “friend” of psychoanalysis and, in so doing, speculates provocatively on a fragile but “realistically utopian” alliance between (the study of) history and the affective set toward the future that several writers here call *hope*.

The historical appearance of the word *feminism* is clearly a belated signal of the developing (international) movement for “Woman’s Rights,” which Queen Victoria, writing to Sir Theodore Martin in 1870, denounced as “mad, wicked folly.”¹ Both the substantive and the adjective derive from the Latin *femina* (woman) via French, a language that British and American writers have often associated with dangerous imports. The *OED*’s first illustration of *feminist* in the sense suggested in my first paragraph comes from an 1894 issue of the *London Daily News*, about “what our Paris Correspondent describes as a ‘Feminist’ group . . . being formed in the French Chamber of Deputies.” The name *feminism*, in the modern incarnations acknowledged by the *OED* (related terms from the same root include *femininity*, from 1386; *feminivorous*—perhaps fortunately, “rare”—from 1820; and *feminize*, from 1652), seems from the start to be associated with social notions alien to normative Englishness: Ibsen’s “feministic propaganda” is mentioned in a 1902 example of that adjective, and a 1908 example of the noun states that “in Germany feminism is openly Socialistic.” Yet another example, also from 1908, announces that “some thinkers in Hungary anticipate feminist developments even in Turkey.” Feminism and feminist(ic) cultural tendencies are multinational and potentially dangerous as they enter the time/space of the *OED*’s representation of English.

Translation across geopolitical borders is a central facet of feminism in its modern incarnation; translation and cultural appropriation, with their attendant political ambiguities, are central also to earlier feminist thinkers, who are often called *protofeminist*. That word is as debatable, in my view, as the fashionable contemporary term *postfeminist*; both prefixes imply that feminism has a single, linear history.² If you

¹ Quoted in Amartya Sen, “Many Faces of Gender Inequality,” *Frontline* (India), November 9, 2001, 1, available through the Web page “Gender and Inequality” at www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/inequal/indexgen.htm.

² To be sure, *postfeminist* was coined by Toril Moi in an attempt to bridge the

grant, however, that there are different (and, I would argue, ongoing, mutually illuminating, even mutually constitutive) histories of feminism, then you can find traces of both the “equality” and the “difference” versions of feminist thinking (and discursive practices with real social ramifications) in the work of a writer as historically distant from us as Christine de Pizan. Certainly, those of us who read her today need to draw on the analytic resources of both perspectives to assess the cultural import of her *Cité des dames* (1405). In that text Christine prudently articulates some quite radical theological, legal, and economic ideas in the voices of three goddesses named Reason, Rectitude (*Droit-ture*), and Justice. The book appropriates while freely modifying arguments from many secular and religious sources, including the Bible, in order to call for greater justice for women as a group vis-à-vis men. At the same time, it locates and often exploits differences among women along the lines of religious belief and lineage—what an earlier culture called “race.”³

To claim a writer from the “medieval” (or, depending on your disciplinary investments, the early modern) period as a feminist rather than a protofeminist thinker is not to locate feminism in a hypothesis of timelessness or eternal return that is often stereotypically associated with female psyches and bodies: the time that Julia Kristeva appraises in her important—and eerily prescient—essay of 1979 called “Women’s Time.” “Father’s time, mother’s species,” as Kristeva quotes Joyce, and she also cites Freud’s dictum that “hysteria [is] . . . linked to place.”⁴ In contrast

split between advocates of gender equality and theorists of difference. Misha Kavka claims that Moi coined the term in 1985 (in *Sexual/Textual Politics*) “to advocate a feminism that would deconstruct the binary between equality-based or ‘liberal’ feminism and difference-based or ‘radical’ feminism” (“Feminism, Ethics, and History; or, What Is the ‘Post’ in Postfeminism?” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 21 [2002]: 29). For a selected bibliography on that binary see n. 17 below.

³ For more detailed analyses of the *Cité des dames* and Christine’s other feminist writings see Maureen Quilligan, *The Allegory of Female Authority: Christine de Pizan’s “Cité des Dames”* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991); and Margaret Ferguson, *Dido’s Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 179–224.

⁴ Julia Kristeva, “Women’s Time,” trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, in *Feminist Theory: A Critique of Ideology*, ed. Nannerl O. Keohane, Michelle Z. Rosaldo, and Barbara C. Gelpi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 33.

to the gendered schemes that oppose the idea of female timelessness to a “masculine” or “nationalist” conception of “time as project, teleology . . . linear unfolding” (Kavka, 29),⁵ Christine de Pizan’s ideologically complex, appropriative, and often highly allegorical style of writing points to a temporality that, although it spirals forward to a desired future, is neither cyclical, predictable, nor progressive, in the evolutionary sense of that word. Christine’s style gestures toward a complexly layered temporality that the writer can neither properly name nor fully control. Some of her stylistic effects in and about time invite comparison to the self-conscious, sometimes experimental stylistic effects achieved in this collection: the writer is at once an analyst of culture, an advocate of (some kind of) feminist politics, and a maker of a cultural artifact that blurs the line between fiction and criticism. Consider, for instance, Rachel Blau DuPlessis’s use of “chapter” headings recalling those of eighteenth-century English novels to divide her essay “Marble Paper: Toward a Feminist ‘History of Poetry.’” Deliberately inviting her reader to wonder about the genre of discourse we are reading, DuPlessis engages in a post-modern version of Christine’s revisionist historiographical project. Christine produces a slyly heterodox revision of Christian providential thinking that transforms elements of Augustine’s City of God as well as of his City of (fallen) Man into a utopian vision of a female-ruled convent-empire that offers an alternative to past and present social arrangements that, according to her reading of culture, oppressed wives, widows, and maidens. Her City of Ladies is located neither on earth nor in heaven but in discourse—“in litteris,” as Thomas More puts it in the prefatory letter of his *Utopia* (1516). Christine’s writing challenges the evolutionary historicist claims of some philosophers of history, even very rigorous ones

⁵ Cf. Rita Felski on “repetition” in “Telling Time in Feminist Theory,” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 21 (2002): 23–25; cf. also Anne McClintock’s discussion of nationalist discourses in which women are figured as the “atavistic and authentic body of national tradition (inert, backward-looking and natural) embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity,” while men represent the “progressive agent of national modernity (forward thrusting, potent and historic)” (*Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Context* [New York: Routledge, 1995], 358–59, cited and discussed in Betty Joseph, “Gendering Time in Globalization: The Belatedness of the Other Woman and Jamaica Kincaid’s *Lucy*,” in *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 21 [2002]: 71).

such as Reinhart Koselleck, who, despite his rich phenomenologies and histories of various “historical” temporalities, fails to make gender into a significant category of analysis. Christine undermines Koselleck’s contention that only with the Enlightenment “has the axiom of the uniqueness of all history and its individuality . . . become conceivable. This was a counter-move against previous historical experience which, in the sense both of antiquity and Christianity, had not expected anything fundamentally new, but something similar or analogous in the future.”⁶ One could argue that Christine’s female-ruled utopia is merely an analogical structure located within Christian conceptual frames, but one could also argue that, in imagining a female-ruled Christian empire, she imagines something truly new. Moreover, since she (like other female heretical writers) invites us to rethink what Christianity was and is, she warns us against resting easily even with a sophisticated notion of long-durational modernity such as Koselleck’s. His (widely shared) vision of modernity as beginning with the Enlightenment decides prematurely that it is not possible for a fifteenth-century woman to conceive something we might recognize as new.

Christine might be invoked as one muse for the present collective enterprise, for like many contributors to this issue, she “interrogate[s] a notion of historicity that emphasizes the *punctual* emergence of its objects of study.”⁷ Accepting belatedness and revising history to make herself *early*, a Joan the Baptist to a bisexual Christ/Christine deity, the author of the *Book of the City of Ladies* challenges those who want their objects of study to be fixed in one time, to be “punctual” in the (negative) sense that Peter Sallibrass ascribes to that adjective when he criticizes college courses “on the seventeenth century” that “would be about writers who wrote (‘on time’) in the period one was studying (Milton, Donne, Behn). In such a course, one might incorporate ‘pre-

⁶ Reinhart Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History: Timing History, Spacing Concepts*, trans. Todd Samuel Presner et al. (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 121.

⁷ See Peter Sallibrass, here discussing Margreta de Grazia’s *Shakespeare Verbatim: The Reproduction of Authenticity and the 1790 Apparatus*, in “Editing as Cultural Formation: The Sexing of Shakespeare’s Sonnets,” in *The Uses of Literary History*, ed. Marshall Brown (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 130.

cursors' or earlier writing as 'background,' but that only reproduces the notion of a series of punctual moments that can be related chronologically through their dates of origination" (130). For Stallybrass—meditating on the way that Margreta de Grazia's research on the editorial "construction" of Shakespeare makes him into "the contemporary of the French Revolution rather than of the Armada" (130)—being "in time" in the sense of being punctual, or even "in sync" with many pedagogical and disciplinary conventions, is not the goal of the cultural or literary historian.

The writers in this issue build conceptual bridges linking various early modern female writers and their friends and allies—ranging from the sixteenth-century Marguerite de Navarre, through the seventeenth-century Margaret and William Cavendish and the late-eighteenth-century Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, to the nineteenth-century Emily Dickinson and the ancient (enigmatic) Sappho, as revived by an American female editor in the Paris of 1900—with various theorists, poets, and fiction writers of our own belated or postmodern era. In making these links across times and (mostly European and North American) places of verbal production and (by no means disinterested) reception and redeployment of words, the essays in this collection both explore and dramatize looping, epistemologically complex notions of time— notions perhaps especially well exemplified by readings and writings of lyric poetry and by those collaborative, revisionist, and retrospectively illuminating (albeit also sometimes blinding) texts that go under the rubric of psychoanalytic discourse.

Differing in methodological and period investments, the contributors to this issue nonetheless all reflect intensively on our title phrase, appropriated, ironically enough, from a millennial academic event that has already had a different textual reincarnation in a journal centrally and consistently concerned with feminist issues. In the year 2000, at a meeting of the Modern Language Association (MLA) held just before New Year's 2001—a year that would bring its own stunning version of a rupture or arrest in time—the program announced three sister panels titled "Feminism and Time," "Feminism in Time," and "Feminism against Time." Organized by Robyn Wiegman and the Executive Committee of the MLA's Women's Studies Division, these panels were re-created in print (a medium that fixes the partly oral, partly written nature of the

conference presentation) for a special issue of *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, "Feminism and Time," published in the spring of 2002. Wiegman—a contributor to the present collection and the only one of us institutionally housed in, indeed an innovative leader of, women's studies programs—graciously lent this special issue the title of the middle panel of the MLA event. Both our title and our pages might well be approached as intertexts to the *Tulsa Studies* issue, in which the original MLA papers reappear in "revised, amplified versions."⁸ That issue and the present one, moreover, are parts of much larger webs, extending backward, sideways, and forward in time (sometimes to that mode of textual potentiality we call "forthcoming") while treating threads of the topic signaled by our title. Necessarily limited, the acts of thinking represented in these pages exhibit some hopes of provoking new thoughts, or at least new intellectual connections, for the reader.

These essays reflect on the title in ironic, typically postmodern, appropriative, and postmillennial ways. Our efforts to work with and against the puns lurking in the title phrase—among them, "in time" as "in history" but also as "in sync" and/or (less positively) as "in mere clock or metronomic time," as opposed to other, more complex temporal modes that allow for, indeed require, recursivity, willed and unwilled repetition, layering, excavating, and hence alliance with geographic and spatial metaphors such as Mikhail Bakhtin's "chronotope"—illuminate a point Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak makes in an essay of 1992. (Think about this convention of using a present-tense verb to describe past actions preserved in language, in the so-called narrative present.) In that essay, about the "politics of translation" and included in a volume subtitled *Contemporary Feminist Debates*, Spivak remarks that "one of the ways to get around the confines of one's 'identity' as one produces expository prose is to work at someone else's title, as one works with a language that belongs to many others. This, after all, is one of the seductions of translating. It is a simple miming of the responsibility to the trace of the other in the self."⁹ The problem of translation—across

⁸ Quoted from Holly Laird's introduction, "From the Editor: Feminism and Time," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 21 (2002): 8.

⁹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Politics of Translation," in *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates*, ed. Michèle Barrett and Anne Phillips (Cambridge: Polity, 1992), 177.

times, spaces, languages, and territories claimed by nation-states—is one of the strands that bind these essays (loosely but intriguingly) together.

Another is their concern with feminism as a scene of ongoing (albeit discontinuous) debate about identity, subjectivity, psychic and political change, and the quality—called a “virtue” in one enduring sociolect—called hope. Goethe names it *elpis* and gives it as the last of his primal words (*Urworte*).¹⁰ Paying homage to DuPlessis’s innovative effort to sketch a revisionist feminist literary history in these pages—a history that raises questions about muse figures and about translations across boundaries between high and low cultures, between standardized and colonized languages, and between male and female verbal producers—I want to propose Walter Benjamin as a second, paradoxical muse for this special issue. Author of an enigmatic but highly influential essay on the art of the translator, profound interrogator of how we conceptualize the relations between the present, the past, and the future, Benjamin also repeatedly yokes the quality of hope to the faculty of memory: “Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he wins.”¹¹ For Benjamin, hope belongs to the past as well as to the future; indeed, it emerges as a quality that inhabits a version of the complex temporality that many recent feminist thinkers, among them Kristeva, Joan Wallach Scott, Drucilla Cornell, Diane Elam, and Jennifer L. Fleissner, associate with the “future anterior” tense and define (in one of several quite complicated and collectively built, hence changing and unstable, formulations) as the “inconclusive futurity of what will always already have been: a ‘time’ which can never be entirely remembered, because even if read as already constituted, the past is being constituted even as it is read.”¹² This is the tem-

¹⁰ Quoted from Goethe’s *Urworte Orphisch*, in Geoffrey Hartman, “Benjamin in Hope,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999): 346.

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 255. For an acute discussion of this passage see Shoshana Felman, “Benjamin’s Silence,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999): 212. For the German original of the passage see “Über den Begriff der Geschichte,” in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. in 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1972–89), 1:2, 695.

¹² Drucilla Cornell, “Rethinking the Time of Feminism,” in *Feminist Contentions*:

porality that Elam describes as “what women will have been,” which Fleissner glosses as “the still unknown past as contained within the future.”¹³

Several contributors to the present issue think hard and productively about how the past of feminism not only lives on in the present but is retroactively both constituted and partially revealed by the act of reading or interpretation—“partially” because our inability to achieve a mastery of knowledge is built into the enterprise and recognized as an affective as well as an epistemological problem. Wiegman, citing a feminist precursor, Sheila Rowbotham, calls it an “agony.” Feminists call attention to their inability (also, in ethical terms, a refusal to claim the ability) to say for sure where construction stops and discovery begins; the ambiguity is potentially fruitful but also fraught with political tension, since the problems of ethnocentrism and “projection” lurk there, inevitably; we also cannot say for sure whose future our hopes (and words and actions) may help build—or stifle. The latter problem may lead to postmodern anomie if one is comfortably situated in a university humanities department. In a special issue of *Critical Inquiry* devoted to Benjamin, Geoffrey Hartman writes of Benjamin’s conception of hope as a “revolutionary virtue . . . which refuses to leave even the dead undisturbed” (346).¹⁴ However, for Benjamin and for Hartman, too—the former a scholar-

A Philosophical Exchange, by Seyla Benhabib, Judith Butler, Drucilla Cornell, and Nancy Fraser (New York: Routledge, 1995), 52. Cornell is paraphrasing Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Scott’s notion of the “future anterior” is part of an effort to theorize “emancipation” as the act of making “fluid the sedimentation of readings that give us a ‘past’ that is purportedly just ‘there’ as the always already having been” (Cornell, 52); in this theoretical enterprise Scott revises notions developed by Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger, and Jacques Lacan, among others. For discussion of a “futural past” tense as the tense of feminism see Kristeva, 32–33.

¹³ Diane Elam, *Feminism and Deconstruction: Ms en Abyeme* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 41; Jennifer L. Fleissner, “Is Feminism a Historicism?” *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature* 21 (2002): 48.

¹⁴ This issue of *Critical Inquiry* also includes—as a supplement?—what the cover describes as “more on ‘What Ails Feminist Criticism?’” an exchange that took place between Susan Gubar and Robyn Wiegman in the journal’s summer 1998 and winter 1999 issues. See Susan Gubar, *Critical Condition: Feminism at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), in which her first *Critical Inquiry* essay and her response to Wiegman are revised and expanded.

writer driven to suicide by the Nazis in 1940, the latter a scholar-writer dislocated as a child by the Holocaust—hope is less a religious virtue than an “envious and all too human quality” (346). Hope, in their view, is bound up with the vicissitudes of professional politics and—beyond that local scene—with the larger injustices committed over time on the stage of global economics and politics. “The hope for others competes with the hope for oneself,” Hartman remarks, before quoting a statement by Benjamin (in *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*) that anyone who writes in the name of feminism from a modern Western university cannot afford to forget: “Only for the cause of those who have no hope is hope given us” (346). If that formulation sounds a bit grand for this venue, perhaps I can reduce it to a more modest plea that feminists engaged in discursive battles with each other not forget the acts of imaginative and political translation invited by our situation of enormous (if relative) privilege. Although I am skeptical of statistics about various forms of literacy, I take seriously the claim in a recent *Nation* article that “only 3 percent of the world’s population is online.”¹⁵

If this issue and allied texts brood on a conception of feminist time that actively resists theories of linear or “progressive” (as evolutionary) time, it is worth remembering that in the context of modern nationalist and imperial ideologies, discourses about what I am calling “feminist” time—and am stressing as a nonnormative, queer, hopeful time—should suggest not only discontinuities among the histories of different groups of women but also the need to render “other” others visible in our research and writing, whether our objects of study are past or present. Our writing is produced in a postmodern university culture that is part and parcel of a globalizing but also a national (U.S.) culture that includes numerous sites of “premodern” misery right in its geotemporal midst—the bag lady on your corner, whether you live in New York or in Davis, California, for instance, or those women workers who inhabit “fringe” sites sometimes given brief attention in the U.S. media, such as the *maquiladoras* of northern Mexico whose products we may wear on our back.¹⁶

¹⁵ Andrew Boyd, “The Web Rewires the Movement,” *Nation*, August 4–11, 2003, 17.

¹⁶ See “No Guarantees: Sex Discrimination in Mexico’s Maquiladora Sector,” a report of the Human Rights Watch, August 1996, available at www.hrw.org/reports/1996/Mexio896.htm: “*Maquiladoras*, or export-processing factories, along the U.S.-

Resisting, actively critiquing, celebratory nationalist and/or imperial claims that global capital is a “progressive” temporal phenomenon, we should also be wary of temporal schemes in our own work that suggest that we (but, as always, who is “we”?) have somehow moved, in time, from a liberal, equality-based feminist thinking to a thinking about difference. Although the metaphor of successive “generations” has been fruitfully used to delineate shifts in conceptual emphasis and to specify points of disagreement among modern American feminists working mainly but not only in academic sites,¹⁷ we need to remember that the term *generations*, like the term *wave* and indeed like *feminism* itself, is a metaphor with no fixed referent. The generational metaphor, like the “first/second wave” metaphor, seems to me too vulnerable to naturalization and to assimilation to a reductive view of historical process (as progress) to be of much analytic use in the present moment of global capitalism. Although Kristeva herself shows how the generational metaphor can specify certain important features of local change, movements from time X to time Y—like those from mother to daughter and/or from the time of the nation-state to the time of the global super-state—occur in a more complex space-time than any linear scheme

Mexico border account for over US\$29 billion in export earnings for Mexico and employ over 500,000 workers. At least half of the Mexicans employed in this sector, mainly in assembly plants, are women, and the income they earn supports them and their families at wages higher than they could earn in any other employment sector in northern Mexico.” At the same time that they earn higher wages than they would elsewhere in their “own” country, these women are routinely raped on the way to work and also, as the Human Rights Watch report notes, “routinely suffer a form of discrimination unique to women: the maquiladoras require them to undergo pregnancy testing as a condition of employment and deny them work if they are pregnant.”

¹⁷ There is a large literature on the shift or turn in American feminists’ intellectual (and affective) emphasis: see the bibliography in Robyn Wiegman, “What Ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion,” *Critical Inquiry* 25 (1999): 362–79, esp. nn4–6; see also Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman, eds., *Feminism beside Itself* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Leora Auslander, “Do Women’s + Feminist + Men’s + Lesbian and Gay + Queer Studies = Gender Studies?” *differences* 9, no. 3 (1997): 1–30; Joan Wallach Scott, “Deconstructing Equality versus Difference; or, The Uses of Post-structuralist Theory for Feminism,” in *Conflicts in Feminism*, ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York: Routledge, 1990), 134–38; and Jane Moore, “An Other Space: A Future for Feminism?” in *New Feminist Discourses: Critical Essays on Theories and Texts*, ed. Isobel Armstrong (London: Routledge, 1992), 65–80.

requires or allows us to think. Writing in a (transnational European) theoretical tradition that runs, if not counter to, then certainly askew to the history of theory assumed by some American feminists who write either to celebrate or to attack the “postmodern,” “poststructural,” or “linguistic” turn they see in (Anglophone) feminism, Kristeva provides a useful perspective on a “time which the feminist movement both inherits and modifies.” Feminism, she suggests, can in some guises be like nationalism—a phenomenon with specific historical coordinates but also with an unpredictably powerful tendency to blend into a religious ideology buttressed by fantasies of a collective past. To guard against being “in” feminism as in a religion, Kristeva insists (as Wiegman does in these pages) on a self-critical epistemology mindful of what we do not know about others. The present as Kristeva limns it is one that Euro(-American) women cannot possess as “our” present, because it is “where the most deeply repressed past gives a distinctive character to a logical and sociological distribution of the most modern type” (32).¹⁸

The year 2000 (Y2K), when the title of the present collection first (to my knowledge) appeared in print, was of course a space of time well suited for, and amply productive of, meditations on temporalities and on the strange (and historically varying) tactics that human beings have adopted for dividing time into signifying portions.¹⁹ Those tactics of periodization, as feminists like Joan Kelly Gadol argued several decades ago, often privilege some groups at the expense of others. Kelly rela-

¹⁸ For her use of the generational trope see Kristeva, 33, 36–38. For perceptive remarks on the affective import of generational schemata in feminist thought—invested with nostalgia, with grief, and sometimes, for those who identify themselves discursively as members of a “younger” generation, with “the nagging melancholy of being displaced, of having come lately”—see Kavka, 31. Cf. Joseph’s remarks on the “implicit discourse of progress that operates in much cross-cultural analysis,” including analysis by Euro-American feminists (69).

¹⁹ For provocative thoughts on periodization as a facet of that specifically historical concept of time associated with the Enlightenment see Koselleck, *Conceptual History*, esp. 118–23. See also Margreta de Grazia, “World Pictures, Modern Periods, and the Early Stage,” in *A New History of Early English Drama*, ed. John D. Cox and David Scott Kastan (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 6–21; and the introduction by Marshall Brown and various essays in “Periodization: Cutting Up the Past,” special issue of *MLQ* 62, no. 4 (2001).

tivized the notion of the Renaissance (did women have one, she famously asked?) as Marx had demystified the same honorific period designation by discussing what it had brought not for art or literature but for African slaves and laborers newly “freed” from the land in parts of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²⁰

The millennial moment, with its *fin de siècle* preludes and many postmortems, generated a number of significant stock-taking texts by feminists writing in (North American) English. *differences* devoted its fall 1997 issue to “women’s studies on the edge,” guest-edited by Joan Wollach Scott. Susan Gubar and Robyn Wiegman debated “what ails feminist criticism” (formerly “who killed feminist criticism”) in *Critical Inquiry* in 1998 and 1999 (see n. 14). In the fall of 2002—the same year that saw the previously mentioned special issue of *Tulsa Studies*, “Feminism and Time,” *Signs* published a special issue titled “Feminism and Cultural Memory.” Introduced by Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, that issue, like the present one, suggests that “special” issues with texts begun on or around the turn of the millennium are not so special at all; clearly, publishers hope to profit from such deviations from the (perhaps obsolete) “rule” of eclectic general issues.

As even this brief listing of kindred work in U.S. academic journals implies, the present collection—which had the long gestation time typical of multiply authored publications in the humanities, and which also bears the marks of its hybrid ontology as a group of papers that were (with two exceptions) presented orally at a conference and then revised for publication—can fairly be seen as the product of a certain zeitgeist: a ghost of time that pops up with particular intensity at anniversarial

²⁰ See Joan Kelly [Gadol], “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” (1977), in *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 19–50; and Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Friedrich Engels and Ernest Untermann, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, 3 vols. (Chicago: Kerr, 1906–9), 1:823: “The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black-skins, signalled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production.” Marx is, arguably, parodying Hegel’s description of the Renaissance as the “blush of dawn, which after long storms first betokens the return of a bright and glorious day” (*The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree [New York: Dover, 1956], 410–11).

points that seem to call out for arrest, for self-reflection, for a stepping out of the chronological game in order to reformulate (some of) its rules and to remind newcomers what those rules were and what they might become. Notice that I do not include the phrase “what those rules *are*.” I also try not to define what feminism *is*. Indeed, like several other authors in this special issue, I attempt to question the very notion of a “present” moment that we can possess as an object of knowledge. As Saint Augustine famously asserted, “The present has no space” (*Praesens autem nullum habet spatium*).²¹ That statement occurs as part of an extended meditation on the similarities between linear time and human language as “sequences of parts” (e.g., the syllables and letters of a word or the words of a sentence) that reveal their meanings only retrospectively and partially. Whereas Augustine’s Christian theology leads (led?) him to emphasize how time’s workings resemble those of Latin syntax in their joint failures to “represent” the timeless nature of God (in a “philosophy of essence,” Henri Marrou observes, “time always appears as a bit of a scandal”),²² several contributors to this issue stress the ontological and epistemological differences between historical time (considered as chronicity) and the modalities of time created in and by language. Translating and transforming the linguistic theories of Emile Benveniste, for instance, Mandell explores Benveniste’s (counterintuitive) idea that the word “I” refers not “to a concept or to an individual” but “to the act of individual discourse in which it is pronounced.” According to Benveniste’s theory of reference and subjectivity, the “I” designates the “speaker” of an utterance, or—in Mandell’s own more complex and revisionary formulation—the way the pronoun “I” works in language makes it refer to a social relation that exists both in time and beyond simple chronicity, because, “in the case of written artifacts, the performance of subjectivity of any person at a previous historical

²¹ See Augustine, *Confessions*, 11.15, quoted from the edition of Martin Skutella (1934), corrected by H. Juergens and W. Schaub (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1981), 277–78.

²² Henri Marrou, *L’ambivalence du temps d’histoire chez Saint Augustin* (Montreal: Institute d’Etudes Médiévales, 1950), 43; for a detailed analysis of Augustine’s treatment of (linear) time in the *Confessions* in relation to a theory of language and “retrospective” meaning making, see also Margaret Ferguson, “Augustine’s Region of Unlikeness” (1975), revised in *Innovations of Antiquity*, ed. Ralph Hexter and Daniel Selden (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69–94.

moment is not yet complete insofar as reading past texts performs acts now." Like Virginia Woolf, who queried masculinist assumptions about the word "I" in *A Room of One's Own* (1928), some of the women poets Angela Leighton studies here explore and perform mind-bending acrobatics around the notion of an "I" in and out of gender, in and out of time. Leighton follows various lyric "I's" which (who?) purport to "speak" (in a writing that inevitably misrepresents speech) from beyond the grave and which thus create "temporal vertigo" in the reader. "When I was dead," Christina Rossetti writes in the first line of a poem called "At Home," locating the ghostly voice in a time Leighton defines as "ulterior . . . to death's."

As the contributors to this issue play with the possible meanings of the title phrase *feminism in time*, several resist the idea invited by one reading of it: that a phenomenon called feminism is contained by, that is, conceptually subordinated to, linear time. In a paper presented at the conference from which this collection derives, Jennifer Wicke suggestively remarked that as an analytic category, "feminism, unlike race, class, gender or sexuality, is trapped between transcendence and immanence."²³ I take Wicke to mean that feminism—in this respect strongly resembling the phenomena signaled by the word *nationalism*—is at once a varying set of historical practices and an ideal "returning" at various historical times and places, as certain religious ideals return, and therefore requiring critique and reinterpretation rather than simple rejection. One ideal that has returned repeatedly, in both religious and political discourses about justice, is that of a society without private property. This ideal is intricately tied to those strands in feminist thinking that protest the conception of women as the property of men (consider, for instance, the English common-law notion of the *feme covert*, the wife whose legal agency was subsumed by her husband's so that she was, in the words of one seventeenth-century legal commentator, "vailed, as it were, clouded and over-shadowed" by her husband).²⁴ Sev-

²³ Jennifer Wicke, "Disappearing Acts: Feminism's Vanishing Chronotope" (paper presented at the conference "Feminism in Time," University of Washington, Seattle, October 11, 2002), 5.

²⁴ T. E., *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights* (London, 1632), sig. I7. The passage is quoted and discussed in Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 27.

eral essays in this collection obliquely explore connections between feminist agendas (and conceptions of agency), on the one hand, and, on the other, critiques of private property that also include new visions of societies in which women are not the second sex. Such critiques have occurred over a long arc of time, from Plato's *Republic*, through passages in the Christian scriptures (most notably, Acts 4:32–35), the Abbaye de Thélème episode in Rabelais's *Gargantua*, and More's *Utopia*, to a host of more recent works that link socialist and feminist goals.

Although the writers in this collection offer quite different, sometimes dramatically conflicting, takes on the idea of “feminism in time,” our approaches to the topic are distinctly marked, as I have suggested, by the fact that we all have terminal degrees in literary studies and (except for Wiegman) write from the institutional site of literature departments in modern U.S. universities. Given that we are here writing for a journal of literary history, our disciplinary (de)formation is not surprising, but it may be worth mentioning again—as a situating gesture and in closing—that this special issue repeatedly engages questions about how feminism works in relation to nationalist ideologies and problems not only of translation but also of exclusion from space-times inflected (or, in the sixteenth-century case discussed by Carla Freccero, consequentially formed) by nationalist ideologies. Freccero, like Wiegman and Joan DeJean, is deeply concerned with some of the ways that categories of gender and sexuality—especially heteronormative categories—are constructed in relation to those of race and class. DeJean blends a feminist historical inquiry with a meditation on how the religious and racial category of Jewishness was constructed in the capital of the nineteenth century (as Benjamin called Paris), and many essays in this issue pursue feminist inquiry within the emerging parameters of queer studies.

In addition to their shared interest in complex temporalities and (at least intermittently) in what Wiegman calls “intersectionality”—“the project of studying without subordinating the intertwined constructs of gender, race, class, and sexuality” (“What Ails Feminist Criticism?” 386n6)—the authors represented here have other points of overlapping (if not evenly distributed) concern. Both Jeffrey Masten and DuPlessis yoke feminist historiography, in theory and practice, to a scholarly inquiry into questions about intellectual property—one writing agent's uses of another's words, oral or written—and about the material on which words

were most often written (during a certain historical period, at least): paper. Masten and Freccero examine facets of marriage, whether it is considered as a socioeconomic institution (a building block, Freccero argues, for an emergent, racially “pure” and heteronormative French state) or as a historical institution that (in the case of the aristocratic English couple Masten studies) created a scene of textual intercourse that challenges some modern accounts of Margaret Cavendish as an eccentric (Woolf) or a representative of a Tory “absolutist self” (Catherine Gallagher).²⁵ A final thread linking these essays is a concern with ghosts, with phenomena that live on after seemingly mortal traumas.

No less important than the points of congruence are the points of disagreement among critics attempting to diagnose the present condition of U.S. feminism in this collection and in related texts. One particularly lively disagreement is between Wiegman and Wicke. At the conference from which this collection is derived, these two critics presented such dissonant accounts of the topic that one could not explain the differences simply in terms of institutional vested interests (in American studies and women’s studies on Wiegman’s part, in comparative literature and “globalization studies” on Wicke’s). Some members of the audience found themselves wondering how two highly educated students of modern culture whose native tongue was American English could see such different subject/objects under the name of feminism. To put it bluntly, Wicke’s paper “outed,” and attempted to analyze, a phenomenon that she believes “has been apparent for any number of years in curricula, university press publishing, trade books, dissertation topic selection and other parasymptomatic cultural venues: gender and sexuality, especially in combinatorial forms, remain at the heart of the enterprise” (i.e., the capitalist “way we live now,” as she explains elsewhere),²⁶ but the

²⁵ See Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). For Woolf’s famous view of Cavendish (the duchess of Newcastle) see *A Room of One’s Own* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1991). Gallagher’s influential essay, “Embracing the Absolute: The Politics of the Female Subject in Seventeenth-Century England,” was published in *Genders* 1 (1988): 24–39.

²⁶ See Wicke, “Disappearing Acts,” 1–18; and Wicke, “The Way We Live Now,” introduction to *Postmodernism and Feminism*, ed. Margaret Ferguson and Jennifer Wicke (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 1–9. See also Wicke, “Postmodernism: The Perfume of Information,” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 1 (1988): 145–60.

most urgent and exciting work does not happen or is not recognized under the sign of “feminism” or “feminist theory” (“Disappearing Acts,” 5). In short, feminism as we knew or fantasized it is dead. For Wiegman, in contrast, feminism is “a political and intellectual project that is itself historically transforming and transformative, and whose transformations are neither [wholly] produced by nor wholly disengaged from the historical and psychic temporalities of the subjects who act in feminism’s name”; in short, feminism is alive, if not altogether well, and is constantly changing and constantly (if also discontinuously, unpredictably) challenging us (it may indeed “be our most challenging Other”). Despite their very different visions of feminism today (and hence of its mode of being yesterday and tomorrow, here and elsewhere), Wicke and Wiegman share an interest in mapping or diagnosing a condition at once subjective—felt, experienced—and objective, but in neither guise fully knowable. Wicke writes about “a feminism in time that is an odd admixture of knowledge and affect, a felt or lived relation to a discursive practice” (“Disappearing Acts,” 3), whereas Wiegman begins her meditation on “being in time with feminism” with Rowbotham’s description of a “long inchoate period”—where she was in 1983, where Wiegman feels herself to be now—“during which the struggle between the language of experience and the language of theory becomes a kind of agony.” A history of feminism blurs into a phenomenology and at the same time an autobiography of, not feminism *per se*, but one’s own and others’ relations to what might be, what one hopes might be, signified by that word. Hope for change—and theoretical speculations on how desires for and conceptions of the future shape the activity of selecting and interpreting aspects of the past—remains a horizon of most of these essays rather than an explicit topic. Perhaps that can be explained, in part, because, as first-world and white scholars trained in literary analysis and writing for a journal of literary history, we are especially prone to respond to the “splitting of feminism into ever more particular sites of difference” by seeking to “figure out the present situation—often articulated as a concern about whether there is still such a thing called ‘feminism’—by writing the past” (Kavka, 30). Perhaps, too, we are wary of utopian thinking and ethical pseudosolutions to social problems we recognize as systemic and as challenging most commonsensical notions of the individual subject. The question of agency—a seriously interrogated agency that is not

synonymous with religious (or modern American nationalist-religious) notions of “free will”—is repeatedly addressed in these essays and is indeed a logical prelude to any careful meditation on “the unknown future”—what lies outside our experience but what we must nonetheless attempt to theorize, predict (however partially), and shape.²⁷ How we perform these acts will affect not only ourselves but others less powerful and wealthy than we are. They are the others not “represented” among this issue’s authorial perspectives. I do not lament that fact as an ethical lapse; the fallacies of gestural representation according to a “rainbow coalition” of identity politics are clear to most readers of this journal.²⁸ I do, however, want to notice yet another important meaning lying in wait in our issue’s title: a “feminism in time” is (or should be) a feminism that attempts to encompass the perspectives of those millions of women around the world who lack access to literacy, among the other unevenly distributed cultural and material goods.²⁹ These are the women for whom feminism, in its “old” Enlightenment sense of equal rights, may not come in time—may not come, that is, in our time, which is also theirs.

Professionally invested in writing, or rewriting, the (European) past in ways that question some of its (Eurocentric) assumptions, and convinced that such labor has cultural, even political, value for an understanding of the present, I am inspired by this collection of essays to think anew about what we can learn from (and about) the multiple and uneven temporalities refracted in Western academic institutions—especially in that multidisciplinary and institutionally unfixed knowl-

²⁷ See Reinhart Koselleck, “The Unknown Future and the Art of Prognosis,” in *Practice of Conceptual History*, 131–47.

²⁸ Wicke makes a similar point, in the context of a meditation on the problems of identity politics, in “The Way We Live Now,” 6.

²⁹ For this interpretation I am indebted to David Simpson. For one of many recent media discussions of the trend toward greater inequality of wealth distribution see Jeffery D. Sachs, “A Rich Nation, a Poor Continent,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2003, available through the Web page “Inequality of Wealth and Income Distribution” at globalpolicy.igc.org/soecon/inequal/index.htm. Sachs, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, discusses an Internal Revenue Service report stating that some four hundred Americans had an average income of nearly \$174 million, or a combined income of \$69 billion, in 2000—more than the combined incomes of the 166 million people living in four of the African countries (Nigeria, Senegal, Uganda, Botswana) that President George W. Bush visited in July 2003.

edge project called (sometimes debatably) women's and gender studies. If a Nobel Prize–winning Indian economist, Amartya Sen, can write on the “many faces of gender inequality” in words delivered orally, and in English, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in April 2001, then published in revised form in the British journal the *Guardian*, then published again in expanded form in the Indian journal *Frontline*, and now available to us in all those forms on the Net, then why shouldn't readers of this special issue consider Sen's comments a significant intertext for the following pages' reflections on alternative possibilities for construing authorial subjectivity and ownership of intellectual (and other kinds of) property? Sen considers gender inequality under such intriguing rubrics (for our purposes) as “mortality,” “natality,” and “special opportunity”—that is, education.

The essays in this issue suggest, indeed, various points of connection with Sen's categories and economic perspective; they also provide actual and potential support for Misha Kavka's old-fashioned idea that the “inherently totalizing term, ‘feminism,’ is but one name for the pursuit of justice, unifying the multiple histories of particular struggles that sometimes overlap with and sometimes work against one another” (36).³⁰ Justice, of course, is an abstraction, and its contents cannot be specified in advance (Kavka, 33), but at the present time it does not seem to me enough to say that an idea of justice “must be formulated each time anew in terms of the particular needs and possibilities of people within local cultural formations” (Kavka, 33). We have to attempt to think locally and more than locally at once—which means that we have to think of feminism in a kind of time that, pace Augustine, does have space. Some of that space, like all of time, cannot be seen with the eye (or “I”) working alone.

³⁰ Kavka's formulation draws on and contributes to a large body of feminist work interrogating how postmodern or poststructuralist theories of “difference,” with their emphasis on discourse, may collide with theories (and practices) aiming to improve women's economic standing and quality of life. For an orientation to this body of work see Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, “Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism,” *Theory, Culture, and Society* 5 (1988): 373–94.

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