

Right to Vote or Right to Revolt? Arendt and the British Suffrage Militancy

Although feminist reception of suffrage has moved beyond Elaine Showalter's dismissive claim that "the suffrage movement was not a happy stimulus to women writers" (239),¹ British suffrage militancy (1903–1914) still remains marginalized in feminist political and cultural theories of modernity, and it seems that feminist political philosophy has yet to catch up with the unprecedented female militancy. As a result, suffrage militancy remains a crucial event in the history of feminism without an extensive philosophical or theoretical elaboration and as such demonstrates a certain failure of thinking and remembrance. As far as political theory is concerned, the role of suffrage militancy is confined primarily to historical and controversial intervention. Although not focused on British militancy per se, Denise Riley's and Joan Scott's influential writings are crucial exceptions in this regard because they underscore the implications of suffrage movements for certain unsolved dilemmas of feminist theory today. Riley's *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History* analyzes the British nineteenth- and twentieth-century suffrage movement in an account of the theoretical implications of the unstable

collective category of “women” for feminist politics, while Scott’s *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* inquires into the implications of the French suffrage movement for the still unreconciled contradiction between the feminism of equality and the feminism of difference.

To date, the most important work on the British suffrage militancy has been done by feminist historians, cultural critics, and literary scholars of modernism. Socialist historians such as Sheila Rowbotham and Jill Liddington² have constructed the initially neglected or forgotten contributions of working-class and labor women to suffrage movements both on the regional and national levels. Feminist cultural critics, like Lisa Tickner, Barbara Green, Jane Marcus, and Janet Lyon, have moved from the reconstruction of the history of the suffrage movement in the twentieth century to the analysis of the forms of its political activism, its diverse artistic and literary productions, and its visual iconography.³ Tickner’s groundbreaking study, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–1914*, is primarily devoted to the visual iconography and artistry of suffrage activism, its elaborate street theater, and especially its dramatic pageants, such as the Women’s Coronation Procession of 1911, the largest of the suffrage marches.⁴ Also concerned with spectacle, Green’s work *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938* examines the complex negotiations between the suffrage movement and new cultural phenomena of modernity, such as advertising culture, increased commodification, and the disciplining of female bodies. In the context of literature, Marcus and Lyon focus on the parallels between the suffragettes’ interruptions of male political discourse and the iconoclastic impulse of the artistic avant-garde movements.⁵ For Marcus, interruption is a key rhetorical strategy of acquiring a voice and assuming the position of the speaking subject in the political and aesthetic arenas:

“Interruption” of male political discourse, *as invented by Christabel Pankhurst, practiced for a decade at by-elections and in storming the houses of Parliament and taught to thousands of women of every class [. . .] is the real key to the genius of militant suffrage in giving the women of England a political voice.* (Introduction 9)

While Marcus tends to deemphasize antagonism and feminist militancy, stressing instead violence suffered by women (16), Lyon examines the

militant revolutionary rhetoric produced by suffrage and English avant-garde movements. She argues that suffragist and vorticist manifestos, despite their different goals and praxes, share an iconoclastic, militant, antibourgeois stance and use similar rhetorical strategies, such as reversal and defamiliarization of stereotypes, in order to attack conservative political and artistic institutions.

Building on these studies, which recover suffrage militancy as an important political, historical, and cultural phenomenon, I want to raise a new question, which has not yet been addressed by feminist critics and theorists of modernity—namely, the question of the political and philosophical implications of the suffragettes' redefinition of the right to vote as the right to revolt. Such a redefinition means that suffragettes' contributions to political modernity are not limited to the enfranchisement of women, although historically this has been an enormous victory.⁶ Equally significant is the suffragettes' discourse of revolution, which, as Hannah Arendt argues (28–29), reveals the inextricable connection between freedom, the emergence of female political and artistic subjectivities, and the creation of new forms of political life.⁷ In order to reconstruct the suffragist political discourse of revolution, I will focus primarily on the militant stage of the British suffrage campaign, for it is the experience and justification of female militancy that propelled suffragettes to redefine the right to vote as a more fundamental right of women to revolt. Such analysis of the political discourses of revolution and female subjectivity produced by suffrage militancy is long overdue.

British suffrage militancy is mainly associated with the political activism of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a British suffrage organization founded in 1903 by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughters, Christabel and Sylvia, and to a lesser degree, with the Women's Freedom League (WFL), which emerged out of a split in the WSPU in 1907 over struggles about strategy, internal governance, and connections to the labor movement.⁸ As Rowbotham argues, although the militants were a controversial minority within the suffrage campaign, they nonetheless “set the pace,” “exploded gender stereotypes,” and “challenged all the prevailing assumptions about womanhood” (*Century* 11). The first militant protest organized by the WSPU occurred in 1905, when two of its leaders, Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst, interrupted the Liberal political meeting in Manchester and subsequently provoked an arrest on charges of the “assault” of a policeman in an attempt to end the press blackout of suffrage political agitation. Indeed, the first crucial task of suffrage

militancy was to break the “conspiracy of silence” and to force an entry as speaking subjects into the political arena of discourse and action. In fact, such a forced entry and insistence on women’s active participation in the political can be seen as the first militant act of the suffragettes. In response to the British Liberal government’s continued refusal to consider woman’s suffrage legislation and in protest of the increasingly violent repressions against the suffragettes, the WSPU’s militant tactics escalated from the interruption of male political discourse to large-scale demonstrations; deputations to the prime minister; hunger strikes;⁹ window-smashing campaigns; destruction of letter boxes, property, commodities, and shopping windows; slashing of paintings in museums; and, finally, to isolated acts of arson. After having claimed access to what Arendt calls the political space of appearances—the space where women could act as political subjects among equals—through their street demonstrations, processions, and marches, the suffragettes responded to the refusal of the vote by contesting and destroying the public circulation of letters and commodities that blocked their access to citizenship. As their window-smashing campaign in London’s fashionable shopping districts suggests, they also turned against the new techniques of advertising, display, and consumption, techniques that positioned middle-class women primarily in the position of commodities and consumers rather than political subjects of speech and action. At the same time, in order to justify their militancy, suffrage activists produced in their numerous speeches, letters, manifestos, and journalism unprecedented definitions of femininity, law, revolution, and politics. By skillfully quoting historical precedents of militant protest and revolutionary struggle in the formation of British law and constitutional reforms, from the Magna Carta to male suffrage campaigns in the nineteenth century, suffragettes not only drew upon the tradition of male political radicalism that asserted the right to oppose a despotic government, as Laura Mayhall points out, but through this practice of citation, they produced an original notion of women’s revolutionary politics, the implications of which have yet to be fully appreciated and articulated by feminist political theory.¹⁰

Emerging from the practice and justifications of female militancy, the centerpiece of suffrage political praxis lies in the redefinition of the women’s right to vote as the right to revolt. As Teresa Billington-Greig, the founder of the WFL, eloquently put it, “[O]ur revolt itself was of very much greater value than the vote we demanded” (148).¹¹ Contesting the opposition between militant and constitutional methods (that is,

methods of protest that either break or respect the law), Billington-Greig's defense of "the duty [. . .] to rebel" (116), "the sacred duty of insurrection" (137), and "the right to rebellion" (147) finally culminates in the claim that the deeper meaning of militancy lies not in the fight for the vote but in the defense of women's right to revolution: "Militancy," she writes, is not "the mere expression of an urgent desire for the vote, but [. . .] an aggressive proclamation of a deeper right—the right of insurrection" (147). Despite all the differences between the two main British militant suffrage organizations, the WSPU and the WFL, and despite all the internal debates within both of these organizations about militant tactics, internal governance, and their relations to the labor movement, "the right to insurrection" was in fact the paradigmatic expression and legitimation of suffrage militancy. We see the same definition of militancy as revolution again and again in numerous suffrage speeches and manifestos. In her 1908 speech at St. James Hall, "The Militant Methods of the NWSPU," Christabel Pankhurst proclaimed that suffrage militancy "is seeking to work the most beneficial revolution in human affairs that the world has yet seen" (in Marcus, *Suffrage* 42). Similarly, Emmeline Pankhurst, in her 1913 New York speech, "Why We Are Militant," skillfully appeals to the ideals of the American and French revolutions in order to claim legitimacy for suffrage militancy as a new revolutionary movement: "I want to ask you whether, in all the revolutions of the past, in your own revolt against British rule, you had deeper or greater reasons for revolt than women have to-day?" (159). At the same time, she disqualifies the vehement antisuffrage campaign by defining it as yet another manifestation of British reactionary "horror" of revolutionary change (153).

How should we understand this revolutionary supplement of women's right to vote—a signifier of gender equality and female autonomy—by the right to insurrection? What kind of revolution is implied in suffrage proclamations? Certainly, this appeal to revolutionary tradition takes us beyond the logic of identification and assimilation to the juridical values of the nation-state suggested, for instance, by Julia Kristeva, who associates the first generation of feminism with the feminism of equality ("Women's" 193–94). On the contrary, the right to revolt manifests the necessary tension, the intimate connection and irreducible disconnection, between law and power, between political speech and the militant "deeds," and between democratic institutions and revolutionary acts. More fundamentally, the redefinition of women's right to vote as the right to revolt implies a dramatic shift from the contestation of gender inequality—which is primarily

a negative struggle—to what Arendt calls the positive freedom to create new forms of political life. Irreducible to juridical and privatized notions of rights, the right to revolt announces women’s participation in a transformative, creative notion of praxis, with its inaugural temporality and plurality of political agents. As Arendt compellingly argues in *On Revolution*,

[T]he modern concept of revolution [is] inextricably bound up with the notion that the course of history suddenly begins anew, that an entirely new story, never known or told before, is about to unfold [. . .]. Crucial [. . .] to any understanding of revolutions in the modern age is that the idea of freedom and the experience of a new beginning should coincide. (28–29)¹²

That is why she argues that in order to understand the role of revolution in modernity we need to think together political freedom, the creation of the “new story,” and the institution of a new beginning in history.

This convergence of freedom, novelty, and revolution changes the meaning of all three of these terms. First of all, revolution in Western modernity has to be distinguished from historical change, resistance, or the restoration of lost liberties, as it refers to the occurrence of the unprecedented event that inaugurates a new course in history. The “revolutionary pathos of the absolutely new” distinguishes modern revolutionary struggle from previous forms of protests. As Arendt writes, “[O]nly where this pathos of novelty is present and where novelty is connected with the idea of freedom are we entitled to speak of revolution” rather than the struggle for the restoration of lost liberties (34). Second, novelty also acquires a new sense in the context of the eighteenth-century revolutions. As Arendt points out, although the concept of novelty existed prior to the revolutions of the eighteenth century, it was primarily associated with new discoveries in science and with new ideas in philosophy. For Arendt, it is the migration of the “new” from the realm of scientific and philosophical thought to the public realm of political action that radicalizes this notion and links it with the praxis of the multitude rather than with the property or the achievements of a chosen few. Likewise, the revolutionary conception of novelty has to be distinguished from the modern desire for the new “at any price,” which so often deteriorates into the individual consumption of commodities.

And finally, revolutionary struggles change the meaning of freedom itself. First of all, political freedom in the contingent historical world is different from liberation, even though liberation is its necessary

precondition (33–34). Liberation is primarily negative—it is the struggle to end oppression or to regain lost liberties—while freedom is positive, implying the creation of a new way of life. Second, freedom is neither given by nature nor the property of the individual subject, but is fundamentally relational, contingent, and created by acting with others in the polis. As a modality of being with others, freedom, Arendt argues, requires a public space of the “in-between”: it implies a participation in public speech, action, and government. And most importantly, for Arendt, freedom in the positive and revolutionary sense reveals for the first time the capacity to create with others new forms of political life: revolutionaries are “agents in a process which spells the definite end of an old order and brings about *the birth of the new world*” (42, emphasis added). This configuration of revolutionary freedom as intersubjective, relational, political agency to create with others new political structures—to enact the “birth” of a new world—is even more shocking and unprecedented when claimed by femininity, associated in Western modernity either with reproductive necessity and commodified objects of sexual exchange in the private sphere or with consumerism, labor, or philanthropy in public life,¹⁵ but never with political agency or revolutionary praxis.¹⁴ Because such agency is relational, created through and for action, it does not require or presuppose a common gender identity.

When suffragettes reinterpret the right to vote as the right to revolt, they not only negate their exclusion from existing liberties but also demand a positive right to freedom understood as the engagement in the transformative praxis inaugurating new gender politics. Although dependent on the struggle against women’s exclusion from the political, freedom implied by the right to revolt exceeds the negative contestation because, according to Arendt, it manifests itself primarily as the capacity to create new forms of political life. Thus, in order to understand the implications of the suffragettes’ redefinition of the vote as the right to revolt, we have to analyze the double aspect of their militancy: its iconoclastic side, negating women’s exclusion from the political, and its creative side, inaugurating the unforeseeable. Associated more frequently with suffrage militancy, the iconoclastic side manifests itself, in a manner evocative of the iconoclastic impulse of the artistic avant-garde, as destruction and disruption: as the “breaking” of silence (in particular, the press blackouts of suffrage coverage); as the contestation of derogatory signs of femininity (the political activist as a hysteric) and the interruption of male political discourse; as the shattering of shop windows and the destruction of private property

and fetishized and commodified art objects; as the self-starvation of the hunger-striking suffragettes exposed to extraordinary brutality and the violence of forcible feedings; and, finally, as the jamming of the circulation of letters, commodities, and signifiers. Yet, the escalating destructive force of the suffrage campaign is inseparable from the creation of the new: from women's capacity to act, to create an unprecedented change in political life, to re-create themselves as political subjects. Indeed, as historians of the militant suffrage movement document, suffrage activism launches into the public space new representations and signifiers of femininity, new theories of the political, new rhetoric of public persuasion (enacted, for instance, through its spectacular marches, processions, advertising, journalism), and finally, new modes of circulation of bodies, signs, and images between and within public and private spaces.

The destructive aspect of suffrage militancy is intertwined with the contestation of women's exclusion not only from the vote and human rights but more fundamentally from political subjectivity. Given the tenacity of this exclusion, which failed to be redressed by rational arguments of the constitutional suffrage societies in the nineteenth century, suffragettes cannot merely identify with the democratic principles of equality without a prior "act" negating women's exclusion from the public sphere and the limited political system of representation constructed on the basis of this exclusion. As suffrage activists frequently point out, the exclusion of women from political rights deprives them of agency and de facto puts them in a position of "outlaws" in the existing political order. In her 1906 essay written in Holloway prison, "The Militant Policy of Women Suffragists," Billington-Greig declares that in order to remove "the bar" to women's citizenship, one needs first to "expose the outlawry to which women were subjected" (111). As she famously put it, "To be so shut out from the rights and privileges of law is to be an outlaw" (113–14). In an ingenious reversal of the law/outlaw opposition, suffragettes claim that it is by obeying the law that they perpetuate the "outlaw" position of women, whereas militancy, by contesting the law, can give women the status of legal subjects. The outlaw status of women is not limited only to the public sphere of politics and work, but is even more pronounced in the private sphere. In fact, the most frequently cited evidence of women's exclusion from political rights is taken from marriage, divorce, and family law regulating the private sphere. For strategic reasons, suffragettes especially stressed the paradox that even the most idealized social vocation of femininity—motherhood—did not give women parental rights over the

future of their children: “Our marriage and divorce laws are a disgrace to civilization,” proclaimed Emmeline Pankhurst in her New York speech, “Why We Are Militant.” And she adds, “I wonder that a woman will face the ordeal of childbirth with the knowledge that after she has risked her life to bring a child into the world she has absolutely no parental rights over the future of that child” (in Marcus, *Suffrage* 157).

As suffragettes never tired of pointing out, the unacknowledged consequence of the exclusion of women from political equality signified by the vote is the loss of the status of the subject as such. According to Billington-Greig, “There is not consciousness in the mind of many men that women are human beings. They are regarded merely as sex-beings, segregated wholly, and not always honorably, for sex uses” (115). Or as Emmeline Pankhurst put it, “A thought came to me in my prison cell [. . .]: that to men women are not human beings like themselves. Some men think we are superhuman; they put us on pedestals [. . .]. Other men think us sub-human; they think we are a strange species unfortunately having to exist for the perpetuation of the race” (160). Whether idealized or denigrated, women, as long as they are excluded from the political, do not have the status of the human, are not treated as ends in themselves, but merely as means of sexual exchange or as sexual commodities. And this is a significant shift in the argument for human rights: such rights do not depend on a presupposed human nature or particular attributes of that nature but, on the contrary, constitute the possibility of political subjectivity for women. In her defense speech to the jury in 1912, Pankhurst claims, in language reminiscent of Kafka’s *Trial*, that those who are excluded from the category of the subject become subjected to the law only for the sake of punishment: “[W]here it was a question of rights and privileges a woman is not a person, but where it was a question of pains and penalties woman is a person” (in Jorgensen-Earp 132–33). Yet, ironically, as the refusal of the British government to grant the arrested suffragettes the status of political prisoners demonstrates, suffragettes were not quite recognized as political persons even in the instances of punishment.

The suffragettes’ struggle against women’s exclusion from democratic citizenship can be read, as Scott has argued, as the exposure of the unacknowledged “paradox” of liberal democracy, which guarantees universal equality to all “persons” while excluding women and other subjugated groups from the status of the subject on the basis of “difference” construed as inequality or inferiority. This paradox rests on the ideological confusion between three kinds of opposition—universality/

difference, autonomy/subjugation, equality/inequality—that justify the exclusion of subjugated groups from the universal subject on the basis and in the name of difference. Scott argues that the contradiction between universal equality and exclusionary gender difference is doomed to be repeated in suffrage struggles for equality. Emerging at the site of the contradiction between universal equality and exclusionary difference, suffrage, according to Scott, not only exposes but also reproduces this contradiction in the very demand for human rights (universal equality) for and in the name of women (gender difference) (2–19). Furthermore, contemporary Western feminism, split between the feminism of equality and the feminism of difference, is still caught in the historical legacy of this performative contradiction. In her account of the British nineteenth- and twentieth-century suffrage movement, Riley analyzes a similar instability of the collective category of “women,” which vacillates between the claims of sexed and class particularity and sex-blind humanity. Deployed by both the proponents as well as the conservative opponents of the vote, this vacillation had been used either to disqualify or to support women’s political aspirations. As Riley writes,

[S]uffragist feminisms had for many decades been stretched to the breaking-point on that well-worn Procrustean bed of a “sexed versus human” or a “differentiated versus inclusive” democracy. While the manifold political labors for the suffrage were both imperative and eventually satisfied, the abyss between “women” and “human” opened under them at every turn [. . .]. [W]hat the feminist demand for the vote did was to lay it bare. (94)¹⁵

However, by redefining equality symbolized by the vote as the right to revolt, suffrage militants also reformulate this contradiction, or the “abyss” between the sexed particular and universal equality inherited from liberalism, as an enabling condition of revolutionary practice. In suffrage agitation, the negation of women’s exclusion from the political and the very instability of the signifier of “women” leads to the reclaiming of the right to an ongoing revolt, without which the vote loses its political value and becomes a “banal,” “respectable little thing” (Billington-Greig 142) or, even worse, another commodity. By redefining the vote as the right to revolt, suffragettes reinterpret the contradiction between equality and women’s exclusion from the political as the justification of the ongoing political struggle, which suspends the neutrality of the law and enables its transformation. Through their contestation of gender

inequality, suffragettes discover that “difference” can be linked not only with the exclusion and subjugation of women but also with positive freedom, with women’s capacity to make a difference in political life, with the inauguration of what Arendt calls “an entirely new” and, therefore, entirely different “beginning” (37), which requires human plurality. In other words, the crucial implication of suffrage militancy is the redefinition of the logical contradiction between universality and difference as the enabling tension between gender equality and the unpredictable creative novelty of positive freedom.

Difference as the unpredictable novelty produced by the revolutionary struggle is strongly emphasized in suffrage writings. In her 1908 speech at St. James Hall, Christabel Pankhurst proclaims that suffrage militancy is “the most beneficial revolution in human affairs that the world has yet seen” (in Marcus, *Suffrage* 42) and links this emergence of the unprecedented novelty of female militancy with the irrepressible movement of freedom: “[D]id you ever know a great movement for human freedom that could be crushed by repression and coercion?” (50). Suffragettes themselves are struck again and again by the “strange” novelty of the new historical beginning their activism created. For instance, when Christabel Pankhurst describes the invention of the famous motto “Votes for Women,” she underscores both the obviousness and the novelty of this utterance: “We must find another wording and we did! It was so obvious and yet, *strange to say, quite new* [. . .]. Thus was uttered the famous and victorious battle-cry: ‘Votes for Women!’” (qtd. in Mackenzie 26). Similarly, in 1903, Anne Kenney, a mill worker, Labour activist, and later one of the leading members of the WSPU, stresses the overwhelming sense of the new when she agrees for the first time to organize a meeting of the factory women of Oldham and Lees to discuss women’s suffrage: “The following week I lived on air [. . .]. I instinctively felt that a great change had come” (Mackenzie 23–24). Emmeline Pankhurst repeatedly argues for the necessity of finding new methods and inventing new possibilities both within the suffrage movement and in politics at large. And, like the Futurists, she links the new with the figure of youth: “[I]t occurred to me that if the older suffrage workers could in some way join hands with the young [. . .] and resourceful suffragists, the movement might wake up to new life and new possibilities [. . .] find new methods, blaze new trails” (18). When in 1905 Pankhurst comments on the tactics of heckling Liberal politicians, she, like so many other suffragettes, stresses the sense of an unprecedented beginning not only in the suffrage movement but in

history itself: “This was the beginning of a campaign the like of which was never known in England, or, for that matter, in any other country” (32). Billington-Greig captures perhaps the most essential aspect of the new revolutionary beginning when she connects militancy with the emergence of a new thought and compares revolution to a new political birth: “[A] great rising of new thought, a great seeking after freedom, has manifested itself around the suffrage agitators wherever they have worked [. . .]. ‘*We have been born anew*’ said one to me—a suffragist of thirty years standing—‘It has been a revolution’” (116, emphasis added).

The creative freedom of women’s militancy both evokes and redefines another paradox of revolutionary action, namely, the incommensurability between constituted and constituting power, articulated for the first time in the course of the French Revolution by Sieyès in terms of “his famous distinction between a *pouvoir constituant* and a *pouvoir constitué*” (Arendt 163). The problem this distinction presents for political theory in general and for feminist politics in particular is double: as both Giorgio Agamben and Arendt argue in different ways, one has to differentiate the constituting power from the national sovereignty, on the one hand, from the existing political order (Agamben 42) and various forms of historical determinism (Arendt), on the other.¹⁶ If the constituting power is identified with national sovereignty, then its excess is interpreted, as has historically been the case, with the transcendence of the sovereign will and disconnected from the multiplicity of contingent political struggles. If the constituting power is confused with the constituted order, or with historical development, then it falls under the provenance of historical necessity and is disconnected from political freedom. For Agamben, this double ideological misinterpretation of constituting power calls for the ontology of potentiality from which transformative political praxis will receive its justification and theoretical elaboration. Agamben’s ontology of potentiality aims to liberate the constituting power from the sovereign will, from rationality, and from the absolute self-grounding of Being (*Homo* 40–41; *Potentialities* 254). In contrast to the absolute realization of sovereign will, the excess of potentiality, Agamben argues, persists in the political order in the form of impotentiality, that is, as the negative capacity of not being or not doing. The important implication of Agamben’s thought is that potentiality conserving itself in the political order deprives that order of its historical necessity. By distinguishing potentiality from sovereignty (which is incapable of impotentiality), Agamben stresses the contingency of the historical world (*Potentialities* 261), which is the domain of human

freedom. However, Agamben does not develop the relation between contingency and freedom; in particular, he does not show how impotentiality can be a source of a creative praxis.

Although Arendt shares with Agamben the critique of sovereignty and historical necessity, she rejects impotentiality as the only source of freedom. Instead, Arendt distinguishes the constituting power both from sovereign will and historical necessity by focusing directly on the “grammar of action” and the “syntax” of political power. Such grammar and syntax underscore the multiplicity, plurality, contingency, and intersubjective character of political praxis. And the only possible legitimation or foundation of such relational power can stem from the very act of beginning, which contains its own principle. According to Arendt, the constituting power emerges when divergent actors, divergent singularities, come “together for the purpose of action,” and it disappears with their dispersion (175). She writes, “[T]he grammar of action: that action is the only human faculty that demands a plurality of men; and the syntax of power: that power is the only human attribute which applies solely to the worldly in-between space by which men are mutually related, combine in the act of foundation” by forming political alliances (175).

Although Arendt herself does not analyze the racial and gendered aspects of revolutionary praxis, her emphasis on the multiplicity and plurality of political action nonetheless allows us to expose the greatest limitations as well as the deepest class and race divisions within the British suffrage movement. Both the constitutional and militant campaigns were shaped by the class and imperialist discourses structuring British citizenship and the right to vote in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Despite the diversity of the suffrage movement emphasized in street demonstrations, suffrage militancy, as many suffrage historians point out, was dominated by white middle-class women, although, as Liddington, Norris, and Rowbotham show, the contributions of working-class women to both constitutional and militant organizations were significant. Conflicts over the coalition with the labor movement, which was reluctant to grant women’s suffrage priority, as well as the debate on adult (that is, universal) suffrage versus women’s suffrage on the same terms with men, was another dividing issue not only between the Pankhursts and Charlotte Despard, a socialist and cofounder of the WFL, but also one of the reasons Sylvia Pankhurst, also a socialist, left the WSPU in 1913.¹⁷ Nonetheless, despite these persisting class conflicts and divisions, there were significant, if limited, instances of collaborations and solidarity among British

middle-class and working-class women. As Rowbotham puts it, “In the context of the British class structure the very existence of such cross-class collaboration (in the suffrage movement) was extraordinary” (*Century* 16). Such collaborations have been far more difficult, if not impossible, in the colonial context of the British Empire. As Antoinette Burton points out, “[L]ike contemporary class and gender systems, imperialism was a framework out of which feminist ideologies operated and through which the women’s movement articulated many of its assumptions,” just as the vote “represented the conferring of formal political power in the imperial nation-state” (13). Although far less frequently analyzed by suffrage historians, imperialist discourse was not only a legacy of the Victorian feminism coming to age at the height of the British Empire and not merely a response to imperial anxieties, skillfully used by antisuffrage propaganda, that implied that granting the vote to British women at home would instigate revolts in the colonies (14–17). The imperialist framework of the Edwardian suffrage movement was also symptomatic of its implicit or explicit sense of British cultural and racial superiority and the expression of its civilizing mission with respect to “Oriental” women. In particular, the constitutional suffrage organizations, as Burton argues, represented Indian women as “helpless victims awaiting the representation of their plight and the redress of their condition at the hands of their sisters in the metropole” (7). Although militant suffragettes constructed “an ‘Oriental’ woman who was less passive than the suffragists’ version of her” (199), and although they might have had some influence on Gandhi’s struggle for independence,¹⁸ they still saw themselves as the center of the women’s revolutionary movement around the world. The “Oriental” woman was therefore not granted the same right to insurrection and was not seen as an equal partner in the suffragettes’ revolt.

In the context of Arendt’s work on revolution, the suffragettes’ demand for inclusion within British citizenship and its constituted gendered, class, and imperial structures—the demand for the vote—also reclaims for British women the constituting, revolutionary power: the more fundamental political right to revolt. In fact, suffragettes’ justifications of militancy reclaim constituting power on the two fundamental levels of political praxis, namely, as “deeds” and “words,” as political discourse and action. As Emmeline Pankhurst explains in her summation to the jury during the 1912 “conspiracy trial” following her arrest after the window-smashing campaign, “[W]e did not content ourselves merely with discussion [. . .] . [W]e were not merely content with words [. . .]

but we felt that we were distinct as a militant class [. . .] determined not only to talk about our grievances but to terminate them [. . .]. In fact we adopted a motto, ‘Deeds, not words’” (Jorgensen-Earp 128). Pankhurst implies that women’s political agency and autonomy depend not on their common gender identity, but on their capacity to act in the public sphere, on their “deeds” in relation to words. Such a relative priority of action suggests that the identification with the inherited structures of democratic discourse of equality is an insufficient basis for female political subjectivity and transformative political practice. Although initially the priority of deeds was meant to redress the historical failure of constitutional suffrage organizations to obtain the vote through political argumentation, it also received another justification from the analysis of the political act itself. In the case of excluded groups, political change requires an act that not only negates their exclusion but also inaugurates new forms of political power and language. Consequently, to inscribe themselves within the institutional structures of parliamentary democracy as political subjects, suffragettes claim for themselves *both* the *negative* and as yet insignificant *novelty* of revolutionary power, which exceeds existing political and linguistic frameworks.

Despite their famous rallying cry “deeds not words,” suffragettes’ “deeds” never cease to contest and reinvent words themselves, so that the domain of political and public speech, as Mayhall, Jorgensen-Earp, and Tickner, among others, argue, becomes an important area for suffrage militancy.¹⁹ Paradoxically, the collective organization of the suffrage movement as “a militant class” cannot proclaim the priority of “deeds” over words without the prolific creation of political discourse, that is, without creating new speech acts. Consequently, political speech, in its performative and innovative dimensions, is itself characterized by the tension between constituted/constituting power from within, as it were. Whether a brilliant rhetorical tactic of quotations, which wrestles and reappropriates words from the “mouths” of Liberal politicians advocating male militancy (as Christabel Pankhurst puts it, “[W]e are prepared to take the words of one Cabinet Minister from his own mouth, and apply them to our own agitation” [in Marcus, *Suffrage* 42]); or the strategy of “heckling” and ridiculing Liberal candidates; or making and publishing their own numerous public speeches, suffragettes transform speech acts into militant acts, which, in the domain of language, reappropriate old words and create new explosive significations. Indeed, the law recognized this militant transformation of political speech, as the suffragettes were

frequently charged and sentenced for the “incitement to riot.” Consider, for instance, the suffrage stone-throwing campaign, mostly at the windows of parliamentary buildings, in response to the Liberal government’s refusal to receive women’s deputations and hear their grievances. In one of the most symbolic gestures of protest against the government’s violation of the Bill of Rights, in 1909 Lady Constance Lytton threw stones at a government car (aiming low to avoid injuries to the passengers). The stones were wrapped in paper on which she wrote quotations from one of Lloyd George’s speeches: “I found some much thinner paper which kept closely round the stone. I took four or five. On each one I wrote a different thing, I think they were all taken from Mr. Lloyd George’s recent speech.” One of the inscriptions on the stone that hit the car was, “To Lloyd George—Rebellion against tyranny is obedience to God—Deeds, not words” (qtd. in Mackenzie 133). The same quotation was previously used on banners in the suffrage demonstration of June 1908. In this militant act of protest against the suppression of women’s public speech, the stone is both a missile and a political letter, aiming at Liberal politicians with their own words reappropriated for the suffragettes’ ends. As Ada Cecil Wright put it in the defense of her stone-throwing act, she wanted to create a new memorable form for her words: “I would put my words into a form that would not be forgotten” (112). As this militant and often parodic tactic of citationality suggests, militant acts create new uses, new modes of circulation, new meanings of gender, and new political forms of language.

Such reappropriation and redefinition of language for the purposes of a new revolutionary act is especially striking in the rhetorical war over the meaning of politically charged words, such as “revolt,” “conspiracy,” “rush,” or “militancy.” In a characteristic gesture, Emmeline Pankhurst, charged with conspiracy, begins her address to the jury with a stunning linguistic reinterpretation of the very word “militancy”:

I want to call your attention to some of the definitions of the word “militant.” It is a word which is liable to be misunderstood, my lord [. . .]. I find in Webster’s dictionary militancy defined as “a state of being militant, warfare.” Well, that sounds like violence, doesn’t it? [. . .] Then, again, it is defined as meaning “a conflict, to fight.” In Nuttal, I find it is “to stand opposed to, or to act in opposition.” In the Century dictionary I find a quotation [. . .] which refers to a “condition of militancy against social injustice.” [. . .] And so I could go on showing you that the word

*“militant” is not necessarily interpreted to mean only violence.
(in Jorgensen-Earp 226–27)*

In these twists and turns of various definitions, the word “militancy” itself becomes militant, indeterminate, giving rise to new conflicting interpretations. And because political militancy is so closely intertwined with linguistic struggle over the meaning of common words, as well as with political organizing, it ceases to be apolitical violence, which according to Arendt, traditional political theory associates with the state of nature.

Pankhurst’s militant legitimation and deployment of “militancy”—that is, of the signifier of the suffragettes’ political action—reveals two different performative effects of militancy. On the one hand, militancy is intertwined with opposition or taking a stand against social injustice—in this case, with the contestation of class and gender inequalities. Such a stand or “state” implies an antithesis, a determinate negation of the status quo, and thus a rational demand, argument, positionality, and a clearly defined agent of opposition. This is a negative and iconoclastic meaning of militancy, closely related to the negative struggle for liberation. On the other hand, militancy, though feared as violence, is a new event, the inaugural act of revolutionary struggle. It is a force of invention, which exceeds positionality, agency, articulation. The transformative force of such an act cannot be integrated either into the constituted framework of power or into the notion of negation without a remainder. In this sense militancy does not have a clearly defined agent: it vacillates between activity and passivity, it is a transitive force that women as much undergo as put into practice. As a verbal deed exceeding the letter of the law, militancy in fact undoes the classical opposition between political act and speech; it makes uncertain whether the origin of the political lies in words or in acts. Such contradictory meanings of militancy as both negative and transformative force, articulation and inaugural act, embody what Kristeva aptly calls the “sense” and “non-sense” of revolt (*Sense* 1–19).²⁰

The suffragettes’ defense and legitimation of both the negative force and creative novelty of the revolutionary praxis, of its destructive and constituting power, leads them to reflect on the relation between such acts and their institutionalization into law. Implicitly, such reflection posits revolutionary action rather than the juridical notion of the social contract as the origin of the law and the cause of its historical transformations. As Billington-Greig eloquently argues, every law, every political right, originates in the constituting power of revolt and is only retrospectively

transformed into an institutionalized articulation of human rights and liberties. Current laws have their origins in past revolts against former governments: “[A]ll history is full of examples of the fact that liberty is only won by revolt. The political liberty of men, religious liberty, liberty of speech have all been finally obtained by conflict with existing authority” (114). Thus, the split between words and revolutionary acts characterizes not only women’s militant action but law itself. Revolt and conflict threaten the law and the specific form of political power embodied in it, not from the “outside,” as it were, but revealed as the forgotten, disavowed origins of the law and the source of its historical transformations. This is the great “historical lesson” suffragettes draw from previous revolutionary struggles by excluded groups, in particular, the militant struggle for male suffrage, in order to justify their own revolt against the government. As Emmeline Pankhurst puts it, “[T]he extension of the franchise to the men of my country [has] been preceded by very great violence, by something like a revolution, by something like civil war. [. . .] Men got the vote because they were and would be violent” (in Marcus, *Suffrage* 154). For instance, in the speech to the court during the 1908 trial of the suffragette leaders charged with inciting crowds to violent action—“to rush the House of Commons” (52)—Christabel Pankhurst brilliantly evokes Cromwell’s revolution and the violent history of the struggle for male suffrage and British parliamentary reforms in the nineteenth century:

Charles I, because he did not rule in a manner acceptable to his subjects—just as Mr. Asquith is not ruling [. . .] in a manner acceptable to us—was beheaded. Revolution after revolution has marked the progress of our country. The Reform Bills were got by disorder [. . .]. There was a general rebellion, but as a consequence the Reform Bill of 1832 was won. (67–68)

As the implicit threat of beheading and other skillful citations of historical examples of revolution suggest, the rupture and inaugural force of militant revolt both gives rise to the law and prevents the law from coinciding with its own content. The emphasis on the role of revolutionary struggle in the constitution and the history of the law not only challenges its neutrality but opens the possibility of its transformation. Thus, what provokes women’s insurrection is indeed their historical exclusion, not only from the vote and citizenship but even from the negative status of political offenders. Yet, what enables and legitimates their revolt in the first place is the fact that revolutionary struggle, always already inscribed within the law as

its origin and principle, makes the law open to further transformations. Thus, militancy is not a purely external opposition to the law, but rather, a new reactivation of its founding revolutionary principles (and I use the term *principle* in Arendt's sense of *principium*, that is, in the sense of a beginning giving rise to its own rule) in the ongoing struggle for the transformation of the legal system and the realization of a more expansive notion of freedom.²¹

By stressing the revolutionary foundation and the ongoing transformations of the law from the Magna Carta to the nineteenth-century Reforms Bills (1832, 1867, 1884) expanding male freedoms and suffrage, suffragettes argue that the seeming neutrality of the law, misrepresented as the social contract, represents an unstable compromise between two kinds of power: the insurrectionary forces struggling for a new and more expansive conception of freedom and the conservative force of the government aiming to subjugate these forces in order to reproduce the already constituted political order and its gendered relations. In other words, it is a struggle between the constituting, inaugural force of the revolutionary act—the power of the new beginning—and the constituted, conserving power of law.²² According to Billington-Greig, “Government authority and the law represent at any given time not the progressive ideals of liberty of which the people are capable, but the amount of liberty the forerunners of the people have been able to wrest from earlier and equally unwilling governments” (114–15). She refers here to the forgetting of what Arendt describes as the two sides of every revolutionary event—the act of founding the new beginning and the task of the preservation of this new structure of freedom: “[T]he spirit of revolution contains two elements which to us seem [. . .] contradictory.” On the one hand, there is the “exhilarating awareness of the human capacity of the beginning [. . .] the birth of something new on earth”; on the other, “the act of founding the new body politic, of devising the new form of government involves the grave concern with the stability and durability of the new structure.” According to Arendt, in the revolutionary “act of foundation” these two aspects of power “were not mutually exclusive opposites but two sides of the same event, and it was only after the revolutions had come to their end, in success or defeat, that they parted company.” This caesura between the inauguration of the new and the preservation of the law is for Arendt a symptom of the failure or the “forgetting of revolutionary spirit” (223). The dialectic between the limited gains of past revolts and the conservative force of the government is repeatedly disavowed in order to preserve

social stability and to prevent the irruption of new revolts in the present. Consequently, the neutrality and periods of relative stability of the law are merely effects of the “sedimentation,” to use Ernesto Laclau’s term (34), of previous struggles for freedom rather than a juridical contract or the final realization of freedom. The fetishistic disavowal of the ongoing struggle for the reformulation of what constitutes the political aims to obliterate the gap between words and acts, between the constituted power of the law and the constituting, inaugural force of revolt.

To prevent this closure of the political, or the forgetting of the revolutionary spirit, and to legitimate their militant activism, suffragettes not only asserted their right of revolt against the despotic government—the right, as Mayhall points out, well established in British political radicalism²⁵—but, in more radical ways, justified the necessity of women’s ongoing revolutionary struggle²⁴ by stressing the temporal disjunction between revolutionary acts and their belated political institutionalization. In other words, women reclaimed the right to militant revolt not only because the despotic government had overstepped the bounds of the social contract but because the law itself was temporally “out of joint”—to displace Derrida’s quotation of Shakespeare to interpret Marx’s legacy (1–5) to a feminist context—with its past revolutionary conditions and with new aspirations of freedom of current and future generations. As Billington-Greig argued, current laws were the institutionalized effects of forgotten male struggles for liberty in the past, and therefore their articulation was limited, belated, and insufficient for the political aspirations of the new generation, in particular for women’s aspirations of freedom and equality. Because the law articulates and preserves the historical victories of past generations, there is an irreducible temporal lapse between institutionalized rights and new demands for freedom: “Government [. . .] rests upon and acts in accordance with the limited foundations of liberty which have already been laid. These foundations have been laid by the rebels of the past. The wider foundations of greater liberty must be laid by the rebels of the present” (Billington-Greig 115). The conservative force of the preservation of the status quo separated from the principle of a new beginning and the belatedness and nonsynchronicity of the law with the new aspirations for freedom show the necessity of the ongoing struggle to expand outdated formulations of political rights. It is this temporal belatedness of the law vis-à-vis new demands for liberty that justifies Billington-Greig’s seemingly aporetic association of “duty,” usually understood as respect for the law, and “rebellion,” usually understood as contestation of the law.

Rather than leading to anarchy, or apolitical violence, suffrage militancy reenacted the democratic duty of revolt in order to reactivate its own revolutionary principles and thus to prevent the law from ossified obsolescence. In so doing, suffrage militancy also protected the irreducible futurity of freedom, which could not be limited to contemporary political forms, created by former male generations. Consequently, for suffragettes the right to revolt was rooted not only in the limited gains of past revolts, in which women did not participate, but primarily in the creative character of political praxis, emerging from what Arendt calls the political condition of natality.

The final complication that suffragettes introduced, albeit very cautiously, in their justification of revolt refers to the libidinal, sexual aspects of the law and revolt itself. The caution and reticence on the politics of sexuality was no doubt partially an effect of hostile stereotypes of suffragettes as uncontrollable hysterics, “sex war” fanatics,²⁵ repressed spinsters, or “masculine” women, as well as of the persisting Victorian legacy of the “sexual purity” arguments for women’s citizenship. Nonetheless, despite this reticence about sexuality and politics, suffragettes managed, on the one hand, to expose the brutal violence of the law’s power as an obscene, “savage” passion and, on the other hand, to admit the joyous passion of the revolt. In “Man Still a Semi-Savage,” the most provocative section of her article “The Woman with the Whip,” Billington-Greig wants to uncover the “savage,” “primal passions” of the guardians of the law—passions barely hidden by “an artificial garment of culture.” And she adds that “party passion is itself a strong unreasoning force” (127). In her 1913 speech delivered in New York, titled “Why We Are Militant,” Emmeline Pankhurst, by contrast, affirms the joy and “exultation” of the rebellion directed against this irrational force of law: “If there are any men who are fighters in this hall [. . .] I tell you, gentlemen, that among the other goods that you, consciously or unconsciously, have kept from women, you have kept the joy of battle. We know the joy of battle” (in Marcus, *Suffrage* 162). What Pankhurst reclaims here for women is what Arendt describes as a revolutionary experience of “the exhilarating awareness of the human capacity of beginning, the high spirits which have always attended the birth of something new on earth” (223).

As my interpretation of suffrage militancy in the context of Arendt’s theory of revolution shows, suffrage writings, far from being merely a historical precedent, make a significant theoretical contribution to current feminist discussions of agency, gender, human rights, and

power. Despite all the limitations of the suffrage movement, its reinterpretation of the right to vote as the right to revolt reclaims and redefines in the context of gender politics an important legacy of the revolutionary tradition, namely, the productive tension between the constituted, institutionalized character of power and its inaugural, constituting force. This split is either forgotten or reproduced in most contemporary discussions, which lack a clear awareness of its origins in revolutionary praxis. Because of this separation from praxis, the constituted/constituting power appears more frequently as the opposition between historical determination and contingency. As Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Michel Foucault, Giorgio Agamben, Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and other poststructuralist theorists argue, the historical relations of power and knowledge constitute political identities, discourses, and institutions in a contingent and indeterminate manner and therefore do not preclude possibilities of political transformation. Yet, the emphasis on the incompleteness and contingency of historical reality is not necessarily and not always linked to agency and freedom—which is why we observe so many misinterpretations of these theorists in terms of either determinism or voluntarism. By contrast, Arendt's theory of revolution and suffrage militancy demonstrates that the split between the constituted and the constituting effects of power emerges from praxis itself and reveals, therefore, not only the contingency of political relations but also their intersubjective, relational agency and the unpredictable force of radical novelty.

EWA PLONOWSKA ZIAREK is Julian Park Professor of Comparative Literature and Founding Director of the Humanities Institute at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She is the author of *The Rhetoric of Failure: Deconstruction of Skepticism, Reinvention of Modernism* (State University of New York Press, 1995); *An Ethics of Dissensus: Feminism, Postmodernity, and the Politics of Radical Democracy* (Stanford University Press, 2001); the editor of *Gombrowicz's Grimaces: Modernism, Gender, Nationality* (State University of New York Press, 1998); and the coeditor of *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis* (State University of New York Press, 2005) and *Time for the Humanities: Praxis and the Limits of Autonomy* (Fordham University Press, 2008). She is currently working on a book project on feminist aesthetics.

Notes

- 1 Showalter argues that the main achievements of the Women Writers' Suffrage League were political rather than artistic. For a critique of Showalter and an alternative account of the Women Writers' Suffrage League as the first professional organization, see Mulford 186–90.
- 2 For an excellent discussion of British suffrage militancy in an international frame and for an analysis of the conflicts and complicated alliances among WSPU, socialist, and labor women, see Rowbotham, *Women in Movement* 165–77. Unlike Rowbotham's comparative analysis of the class

and regional composition of the suffrage movement in an international context, Liddington reconstructs forgotten biographical narratives of working-class “radical suffragists” and “rebel” suffragettes, whose contributions have been overshadowed in previous historical accounts by the focus on such “heroic personalities” as the Pankhursts. In *Life and Times of the Respectable Rebel*, she reconstructs a forgotten part of women’s history and analyzes the significant alliance between socialism and suffrage movements by focusing on the activism of Selina Cooper (1864–1946). Together with Jill Norris, she also reconstructs a local tradition of labor and suffrage radicalism among working women from Lancashire cotton towns who, despite their radicalism, allied themselves with constitutional suffrage societies. By contrast, in *Rebel Girls*, Liddington presents the narratives of eight rebellious working-class suffragettes from the Yorkshire region.

- 3 In addition to the book-length studies described here, see also Rita Felski’s comparative analysis of the new in the context of feminist discourses of evolution and revolution (145–73).
- 4 In addition to visual iconography, Tickner, in the last chapter of her study, devotes significant attention to the rhetorical arguments of suffrage and antisuffrage campaigns (151–237).
- 5 Although a more detailed discussion of suffrage and modernism is beyond the scope of this article, I would like to suggest that feminist critics usually follow one of three paths in order to conceptualize the key role of suffrage in the formation of modernism. Aiming to recover marginalized

suffrage literature and art, the first, thematically oriented, approach analyzes the direct political function of suffrage literary and visual productions in support of the movement. Recovery and analysis of the literary production of suffrage artistic organizations (for instance, the Women Writers’ Suffrage League, founded in 1908) has produced important collections of primary texts, such as *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women’s Suffrage Campaign*, edited by Glenda Norquay. Oriented toward “the battle of representations” of femininity and the movement, this collection privileges those suffrage texts that aim for “direct intervention” in public debate and political struggle. These often propagandistic literary works, for example, Elizabeth Robins’s *The Convert*, adapt popular and conventional literary genres of melodrama, autobiography, the conversion narrative, or more direct polemical tracts for the instrumental political purposes of persuading the audience, gaining new converts to the cause, and changing social structures (2–8). Rejecting “elite” notions of experimental writing, Wendy Mulford similarly privileges representational modes of writing to articulate sex and class oppression (179–92). Inspired by cultural studies methodology, the second approach (Felski, Green, Rowbotham, and Tickner) examines the role of suffrage and suffrage art in the revision of the broader cultural discourses of modernity and in so doing makes a crucial contribution to “gender of modernity” studies. Jane Marcus’s *The Young Rebecca*, a study of the contributions of Rebecca West’s radical feminist, socialist, and literary journalism to the cultural and political discourses of modernity, is another example of this

- approach. The third approach, practiced by Marcus and Lyon, among others, focuses more directly on the relation between suffrage and modern experimental literature. For an analysis of the impact of suffrage rhetoric on modernist women writers, for instance, see Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* 1–17.
- 6 In 1906 the conservative *Daily Mail* coined the term “suffragette” to refer to the militant brand of the suffrage movement.
 - 7 Such an interpretation of the suffrage movement in the context of Arendt’s analysis of revolution might seem controversial since Arendt does not consider the question of gender in the context of politics. However, rather than criticizing directly Arendt’s limiting division between the public and private spheres, as other feminist critics have done, I want to show how suffrage ideas can expand and supplement Arendt’s vision of politics.
 - 8 Laura E. Nym Mayhall rightly contests the exclusive association of militancy with the WSPU and points to the uses of militant tactics by other suffrage organizations. For a historical reconstruction of working-class militancy, see Liddington, *Rebel Girls*.
 - 9 For a discussion of suffragettes’ hunger strikes in the context of Agamben’s notion of “bare life,” as developed in *Homo Sacer*, see Ziarek, “Bare Life.”
 - 10 For an excellent analysis of important connections between militant suffrage and the tradition of British political radicalism, see Mayhall.
 - 11 The Women’s Freedom League (WFL) emerged in September 1907 out of a split from the WSPU. One of the main causes of this split was dissension over the type of governance—conspiracy or democracy—that militant action required.
 - 12 Recently, Arendt’s political philosophy has attracted the renewed attention of feminist scholars. See, for instance, Seyla Benhabib’s analysis of Arendt’s conflicting relation to Benjamin and Heidegger, as well as an excellent analysis of Arendt’s notions of human rights, natality, and responsibility by Peg Birmingham.
 - 13 As Riley points out, socially engaged British women encountered significant difficulties in translating their social activism, including philanthropy, into political emancipation (80–81).
 - 14 At the same time, Arendt stresses the fragility of the convergence of revolution with positive freedom, collective praxis, and the inauguration of new forms of political life. It is this fragility that links revolutionary hopes with melancholy. She shows how in the course of the nineteenth century the notion of revolutionary freedom was divorced from political action and novelty and associated instead either with the concept of historical necessity (of which the Hegelian dialectic of necessity and freedom is the most famous philosophical articulation [53]) or with its opposite, with the liberation of a natural, prepolitical equality and liberty.
 - 15 Focusing on the debates between adult suffrage and limited suffrage on the same terms as men, Riley points to another crucial instability of the category of “women,” namely, its splitting by class and property in the British context and by race in the American context (94).

- 16 In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben credits Arendt with the articulation of the vicious circle of any attempt to confuse constituting power with the absolute principle of national serenity exceeding the law and located in the state of nature (41). For my critique of Agamben's inability to take gender and race into account in his discussion of biopolitics, see Ziarek, "Bare Life."
- 17 For an excellent discussion of these political divisions, see Rowbotham, *Century* 7–26 and *Women* 165–77. For a discussion of class divisions in the militant movement, see also notes 4, 5, and 10.
- 18 According to Burton, Gandhi visited London in 1906, admiring the suffragettes' courage and willingness to serve time in prison. It is possible that he may have met some suffragettes (199–200).
- 19 Mayhall rightly argues that rhetoric itself, and not only the visual iconography emphasized by feminist critics, is an important part of suffrage militancy (342–44). A similar rhetorical approach is taken by Jorgensen-Earp (17); however, discursive analysis also plays an important part in the work of Green; Lyon; Norquay; and Tickner.
- 20 For a discussion of Kristeva's notion of revolt in the context of Frantz Fanon's displacement to Africa of the dialectical model of revolutionary hope, see Ziarek, "Kristeva and Fanon."
- 21 For Arendt's discussion of the principle as the paradoxical unity of the beginning and principle, of the new that establishes its own principle, see 212–14.
- 22 Walter Benjamin famously interprets the constituting and constituted power as the law creating and the law preserving violence in his essay "The Critique of Violence."
- 23 For further discussion of the relation between suffrage and British political radicalism, see Mayhall.
- 24 Although, as Arendt points out, the term "permanent revolution" was already coined in the nineteenth century by Proudhon, among others, women were excluded from being the agents of such revolution until suffrage militancy at the beginning of the twentieth century (163).
- 25 See, for instance, Rebecca West's brilliant response to this charge in her 1913 *Clarion* article, "The Sex War" (in Marcus, *Young Rebecca* 174–78), as well as her well-known critique of Christabel Pankhurst's sexual puritanism in "On Mentioning the Unmentionable: An Exhortation to Miss Pankhurst" (202–6).

Works Cited

- Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998.
- . *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999.
- Arendt, Hannah. *On Revolution*. London: Penguin, 1963.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *The Reluctant Modernism of Hannah Arendt*. Lanham: Roman and Littlefield, 2003.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Critique of Violence." *Reflections*. Ed. Peter Demetz. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken, 1978. 277–300.

- Billington-Greig, Teresa. *The Non-Violent Militant: Selected Writings of Teresa Billington-Greig*. Ed. Carol McPhee and Ann FitzGerald. London: Routledge, 1987.
- Birmingham, Peg. *Hannah Arendt and Human Rights: The Predicament of Common Responsibility*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2007.
- Burton, Antoinette. *Burdens of History: British Feminists, Indian Women, and the Imperial Culture, 1865–1915*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1994.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995.
- Green, Barbara. *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938*. New York: St. Martin's, 1997.
- Jorgensen-Earp, Cheryl R., ed. *Speeches and Trails of the Militant Suffragettes: The Women's Social and Political Union, 1903–1918*. London: Associated U Presses, 1999.
- Kristeva, Julia. *The Sense and Nonsense of Revolt: The Powers and Limits of Psychoanalysis*. Trans. Jeanine Herman. New York: Columbia UP, 2000.
- . “Women's Time.” Trans. Alice Jardine and Harry Blake. *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. Columbia UP, 1986. 188–215.
- Laclau, Ernesto. *New Reflections on the Revolution of Our Time*. London: Verso, 1990.
- Liddington, Jill. *Life and Times of the Respectable Rebel*. London: Virago, 1984.
- . *Rebel Girls: Their Fight for the Vote*. London: Virago, 2006.
- Liddington, Jill, and Jill Norris. *One Hand Tied behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*. London: Virago, 1984.
- Lyon, Janet. “Militant Discourse, Strange Bedfellows: Suffragettes and Vorticists before the War.” *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14.2 (1992): 100–35.
- Mackenzie, Midge. *Shoulder to Shoulder: A Documentary*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975.
- Marcus, Jane. “Introduction: Re-reading the Pankhursts and Women's Suffrage.” *Suffrage* 1–17.
- Marcus, Jane, ed. *Suffrage and the Pankhursts*. London: Routledge, 1987.
- . *The Young Rebecca: The Writings of Rebecca West, 1911–17*. New York: Viking, 1982.
- Mayhall, Laura E. Nym. “Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1908–1909.” *Journal of British Studies* 39 (2000): 340–71.
- Mulford, Wendy. “Socialist-Feminist Criticism: A Case Study, Women's Suffrage, and Literature, 1906–14.” *Re-reading English*. Ed. Peter Widdowson. London: Methuen, 1982. 179–92.
- Norquay, Glenda, ed. *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women's Suffrage Campaign*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1995.
- Riley, Denise. “Am I That Name?": *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. London: Macmillan, 1988.

Rowbotham, Sheila. *A Century of Women: The History of Women in Britain and the United States*. London: Viking, 1997.

———. *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Scott, Joan Wallach. *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996.

Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of Their Own*. London: Virago, 1978.

Tickner, Lisa. *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907–1914*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988.

Ziarek, Ewa Plonowska. “Kristeva and Fanon: Revolutionary Violence and Ironic Articulation.” *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva’s Polis*. Ed. Tina Chanter and Ewa Plonowska Ziarek. Albany: SUNY P, 2005. 57–76.

———. “Bare Life on Strike: Notes of the Biopolitics of Race and Gender.” *The Agamben Effect*. Ed. Alison Ross. Spec. issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* 107.1 (2008): 89–105.