

## INTRODUCTION

### AROUND 1970

#### *The Feminist-as-Lesbian and a Movement in the Making*

*Women's liberation* is a term that draws some people toward it and repels others.<sup>1</sup> As a name for a particular moment and style of feminist protest, *women's liberation* both evokes and elides the complex array of feminist movements that emerged in the United States and beyond in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The name has come to stand, variously, for a radical as opposed to liberal form of feminism, grassroots rather than centrally organized feminism, a white middle-class rather than women of color feminism, a transnational postwar feminism, a nationalist and provincial form of feminism, a hopeful and exciting feminist moment, and a depressingly racist and essentializing feminist moment. That women's liberation stands for all of these things and more attests to the complexity and unsettledness of its historical moment. It also attests to the asymmetry of power in the

production of history as an account of what happened and why. In this book I argue two things at once: that the women's liberation movement was a historical event of great significance, but what that significance was and is remains subject to intense feelings of attachment and disidentification that occlude its historical complexity. *Feeling Women's Liberation* addresses those feelings as key to any understanding of the movement as a significant historical event. Hence my organizing claim: the women's liberation movement was an upsetting event in postwar American history, and its upsetting eventfulness has had repercussions for how its archive has since been read by those within and without the so-called second wave of feminism.

In particular I argue that subsequent accounts of the movement by academic and popular feminism, queer theory, and mainstream public culture have tended to locate the meaning of the movement in developmental narratives of success or failure that depend on a reading of its archive as both origin and blueprint for its ensuing manifestation as a specific kind of feminism. That is, instead of approaching the archive as an array of rhetorical materials that sought to persuade and enact a new political constituency and world into being, it has instead largely been read as evidence of specific and coherent theoretical and ideological standpoints, which are then defended or criticized in a more knowing present. The consequences of such narrativizations, I suggest, are a tendency to naturalize the whiteness of women's liberation and to make its so-called bourgeois preoccupations—its revolt against marriage, the vaginal orgasm, and housework, along with its fight for the legalization of abortion and for sexual harassment laws—seem inevitable and uncontested political goals of the movement. One of the main contentions of this book, therefore, is that it is the failure to historicize the *production* of women's liberation as a *white* women's movement that has led to the reductive and incomplete readings of its archive and the feelings of attachment or disidentification that animate those readings.

Most of the happenings, position papers, manifestoes, essays, and media coverage I analyze in *Feeling Women's Liberation* either took place in or were written around 1970. I return to 1970 because that was the year "women's liberation" exploded into the national public sphere. Although groups of women had been meeting within the context of the New Left and black freedom movements and calling themselves women's liberationists since at least 1967, and although the Miss America protest, the first nationally recog-

nized public action of the nascent movement, took place in 1968, it wasn't until 1970 that women's liberation became a dominant story in the national press.<sup>2</sup> The “watershed” year for the women's liberation movement was 1970, not only because of the media's increased coverage of its events and people but also because of the explosion in mainstream publishing of feminist position papers, manifestoes, and anthologies.<sup>3</sup> Books like Robin Morgan's anthology *Sisterhood Is Powerful* and Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* were published in 1970 and became best sellers with an international audience. Other works, like Shulamith Firestone's *The Dialectic of Sex* and Toni Cade's *The Black Woman*, were also published in 1970 by mainstream publishers and to widespread media attention. The year 1970 was also when the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) was not only brought, once again, before the congressional subcommittee responsible for constitutional amendments but it was also rushed through congressional committees and debated in both houses, something not seen in the fifty years the ERA had been a political goal of feminists and largely the result of effective feminist lobbying of Congress.<sup>4</sup> While the ERA fight became one of the news stories of the year, other defining events that became part of the emergence into the national public sphere of women's liberation—the persecution and arrest of Angela Davis by the FBI, the sit-in and subsequent takeover of the *Ladies' Home Journal* by New York radical feminists, the nationally organized Women's Strike for Equality, and the zap action by the Lavender Menace at the Second Congress to Unite Women—all took place in 1970 and received widespread media coverage and movement recognition.<sup>5</sup>

Most of the few historical studies and memoirs of women's liberation also highlight 1970 as a major turning point in the trajectory of the movement. Two of the most influential histories of the movement, Alice Echols's *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* and Ruth Rosen's *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America*, locate the fragmentation and ultimate dissolution of women's liberation as a social movement in the “gay/straight split” that erupted in 1970. Alice Echols, for example, locates the breakdown of the movement from a radical, politically activist movement to a cultural, lifestyle-orientated movement in the “eruption of difference” caused by the controversy over lesbianism that began in the New York chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in 1970.<sup>6</sup> While Benita Roth, Kimberly Springer, and Barbara Ryan, in their sociological analyses of the Chicana, black, and women's liberation movements, note the emergence of the “lesbian issue,”

in and around 1970, as one of the major reasons for the tensions within and subsequent factionalism of the various feminist movements of the era.<sup>7</sup>

I also turn to 1970 because it was the year that Kate Millett became, for a moment, the most famous feminist in America. In its provocative assertions that sexuality was a primary site for the reproduction of social power, along with its passionate and, at that time, unique critique of the portrayal of heterosexuality by writers like Norman Mailer and Henry Miller, Millett's *Sexual Politics* was probably the first explicitly feminist PhD dissertation in the American academy, as well as one of the first cultural and intellectual products of the women's liberation movement.<sup>8</sup> Just one month after publication, the book went into its fourth printing with over fifteen thousand copies sold. *Life* magazine even went so far as to call it the *Das Kapital* of the women's movement, and *Time*, as part of its extensive analysis of the women's liberation movement in the summer of that year, called Millett the Mao Tse-tung of the movement and put her on the front cover.<sup>9</sup> In 1970 Kate Millett also figured in a related public drama: in December she was accused by *Time* of being bisexual and, therefore, of harming the credibility and legitimacy of the then fledgling women's movement. At the same time, some within the movement accused her of simultaneously pretending straightness to the media while claiming lesbian sisterhood in private.<sup>10</sup> In the short space of one year Millett had gone from radical feminist icon of the mainstream media to designated betrayer of an entire movement.

For these reasons, Kate Millett plays a central and recurring role in *Feeling Women's Liberation*. Her notoriety in 1970 as both the media-anointed leader and lesbian betrayer of the movement meant she became a figure around which, to use Alan Sinfield's phrase in relation to Oscar Wilde's public notoriety in 1895, "contest and change" occurred, both in the movement and in the national public sphere.<sup>11</sup> Her outing as bisexual by *Time* and the attendant crisis over lesbianism in the women's liberation movement were part of a series of events that marked the emergence of a new figure—the feminist-as-lesbian—which, in turn, has had a defining effect on the way in which women's liberation in particular and feminism in general has been remembered and represented, in both the supercultural domain of the mass media and in the subcultural domains of popular and academic feminism and queer theory. By following the figure back to that moment—a beginning, but just one, of women's liberation—this book analyzes the "disconcerting nexus" out of which Kate Millett became, if only for a mo-

ment, a representative figure of women's liberation. This return to 1970 is conducted not as an attempt to reconstruct some hidden, originary truth of the movement, nor as a biographical resurrection of Millett as a (lost) heroine of that era. It is conducted in order to access some of the forces, both social and cultural, that not only produced the issues and shape of the U.S. women's liberation movement but also the images and narrative accounts through which the movement has since been constructed as an object of knowledge and memory.

Of course, other media events happened both before and after 1970 that have since formed part of how women's liberation is known and remembered in the public sphere. Shirley Chisholm's run for the Democratic nomination for president in 1972 and the Bobby Riggs versus Billy Jean King tennis match in 1973 were both directly associated with women's liberation. The King versus Riggs tennis match was billed as a battle of the sexes, received prime-time TV coverage with an estimated fifty million viewers, and drew thirty thousand people into the Houston Astrodome to witness King's easy win over Riggs. A debate on feminism in 1971 at Manhattan's Town Hall, organized as "a dialogue on women's liberation" and featuring Germaine Greer, Diana Trilling, Jacqueline Ceballos, and Jill Johnston, also became a notorious media event when Johnston, the dance critic of the *Village Voice* and agent provocateur for an absurdist form of lesbian feminism, recited a feminist lesbian manifesto and proceeded to roll around on the stage kissing with two friends, much to the horror of the event's moderator Norman Mailer.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Miss America protest of 1968 received TV and print media coverage of its boardwalk protests and, indirectly, of its attempt to disrupt the pageant itself, while several prime-time TV series, including *Maude* (1972–78) and *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* (1970–77), can be included in the archive of film and TV shows that made women's liberation a nationally mediated event in the 1970s. However, while other things happened both before and after 1970, it was the events of 1970 that have had a defining effect on how second-wave feminism, and women's liberation in particular, has been remembered and narrativized by academic and popular feminism, queer theory, and mainstream public culture. I argue that it is from the conjunction of mainstream media coverage of the movement and the simultaneous eventfulness of the movement's revolt and claims to political and social agency during 1970 that the feminist-as-lesbian first emerged as a figure of and for women's liberation, and it is through this figure that many of the metaphors, phrases, and terms of the

movement circulated—even if they also connect with, as they no doubt do, events that happened prior to or after 1970.

#### THE ARCHIVE OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

What is found at the historical beginning of things is not the inviolable identity of their origin; it is the dissension of other things, it is disparity.

—Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”

One of the primary motivations for writing this book was my desire to seek a way out of what had become, by the late 1990s and early 2000s, a debilitating and profoundly distorting set of theoretical, institutional, and political antagonisms in the United States between feminist and queer studies.<sup>13</sup> The debates seemed so fraught with feeling that I wanted to figure out where the antagonism had come from—a question that led me back toward the women's liberation movement. It seemed to me that so much of the suspicion between feminist and queer studies rested on divergent convictions about the historical effects and meanings of the women's liberation movement within their respective fields and related subcultures. While feminist historians and scholars have attempted to provide new historical narratives and archives that would prove in emphatic fashion the insurgent radicalism of women's liberation and its transformative effect on U.S. postwar history,<sup>14</sup> much of the recent “queer desire for history,” while offering a rich repertoire of theoretical and methodological concepts for thinking about what a queer historiography might look like, has almost completely bypassed the second-wave era.<sup>15</sup> Like ships passing in the night, a feminist concern with its own history and the queer desire for history have left each untouched and often unnoticed by the other.

*Feeling Women's Liberation* intervenes in this political, theoretical, and historical impasse in two ways. First, rather than simply claim the movement's historical importance and centrality to postwar social transformations at the outset and then try to prove it, I ask: How has the history of women's liberation been produced; what stories have been constructed and disseminated as memories of women's liberation, in the mass-mediated public sphere as well as the subcultural worlds of feminist and queer studies? In order to answer that question I return to the emergent moments of the women's liberation movement by “read[ing] along the grain” of its archive.<sup>16</sup> Such attention to the *productive detail* of the women's liberation movement is vitally important at this historic juncture precisely because it

can render explicit some of the overdetermined and reductive ways in which the movement has become an object of knowledge in contemporary memoirs, conventional historical studies, subcultural memory, and collective cultural memory. By conducting an immersion analysis of the mainstream media coverage of the movement in 1970, combined with archival research in women's movement collections, including a wide-ranging reading of the movement's position papers and early published collections, I follow along the production of the women's liberation archive in order to track the conditions of possibility through which ideas of the movement and its political imaginary were shaped.

Although Ann Laura Stoler's subject is the formal and institutionalized archive of the colonial state rather than the more ephemeral, scattered, and disorderly archive of a movement like women's liberation, her methodological emphasis on focusing on the archive's production, on reading for "its regularities, for its logic of recall, for its densities and distributions," is pertinent to the question of how feminist and queer scholars and activists in the United States might read the documentary remainders of a protest movement like women's liberation.<sup>17</sup> Changing our conception of the archive from a repository of things to a process of knowledge production, as Stoler argues for, is to read the documentations of the past for the "evidentiary paradigms" that make claims to truth and for political action intelligible "at a particular time, for a particular contingent and in a particular way." The point of such an approach to the archive is less to establish the falsity of the powerful's claims to epistemological authority than to emphasize the effectivity of those claims—an effectivity that lies beyond or in excess of the claims made on its behalf by the powerful: "The task is less to distinguish fiction from fact than to track the production and consumption of those facticities themselves."<sup>18</sup> For Stoler, this kind of tracking work allows us to map "the conditions of possibility which shaped what could be written, what warranted repetition, what competencies were rewarded in archival writing, what stories could not be told and what could not be said."<sup>19</sup>

In contrast to Stoler's methodological emphasis on how particular histories are constructed through conventions of knowledge production and arrangement, the published histories and memoirs of women's liberation have, for the most part, tended to tell the same story. They have employed a narrative that might be called, for convenience's sake, "from simplicity to complexity." Positing a particular, singular origin of the movement, namely the experiences of young, white, middle-class women in postwar America,

they then either trace or assume a burgeoning complexity as the movement realized the disparateness of other women's experiences. Sara Evans's groundbreaking historical study *Personal Politics: The Roots of Women's Liberation in the Civil Rights Movement and the New Left* asserts the cataclysmic influence of the civil rights movement on the women's movement but in a way that reinscribes the separation of issues of race from those of gender. The story she writes is, as she acknowledges, a partial one—that of young, white, middle-class women's rise to political consciousness through the political resistance of African Americans in the civil rights movement. For Evans, the beginnings of women's liberation can be located in the journey many young, white women took from the respectable neighborhoods of their southern or northeastern childhoods to the outposts of rural Mississippi in the summer of 1964. By regarding the civil rights movement as inspiration and analogy for the women's movement, Evans cannot easily incorporate the participation of black women in the women's movement more generally, though she does acknowledge the separate directions black and white women took out of organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) into feminism. Instead, through an adherence to a coherent, unified narrative, the beginnings of the women's movement are fixed, inadvertently perhaps, in a singular origin: the politicization of young, middle-class, white women through the example of the civil rights movement.<sup>20</sup>

In *Daring to Be Bad*, perhaps the most influential history of women's liberation, Alice Echols takes up the story where Evans leaves it. While Evans narrates the origins of the women's liberation movement, Echols describes its emergence and subsequent decline as a distinct movement. And like Evans, Echols has a particular story to tell: "This book analyzes the trajectory of the radical feminist movement from its beleaguered beginnings in 1967 through to its ascendance as the dominant tendency within the movement to its decline and supplanting by cultural feminists in the mid 1970s."<sup>21</sup> While Echols's concentration on the life span of one wing of the movement offers an incredibly rich and illuminating account of radical feminism—one to which this book is indebted—it also tends to force the ferment of disparate views and "cohorts" constitutive of the larger movement into an overly schematic presentation of its history.<sup>22</sup> The radical feminists become the instigators and crusaders of women's liberation, and those groups on the margins of women's liberation disappear from view. This problematic schema occurs as a consequence of the develop-



mental causality intrinsic to the telling of any story, having less to do with any intentional exclusion or oversight on Echols's part. Because her history of women's liberation is told as a story—with a beginning, middle, and end—cultural feminism, lesbian feminism, and women of color feminism, are all presented as descriptive terms of a discrete array of feminisms that came after the initial insurgencies of radical feminism. Echols's story of radical feminism creates, in its wake, the implicit, if not explicit, idea that the diversity of feminisms today is a marker of the failures of the women's liberation movement in the mid- to late 1970s.<sup>23</sup>

More problematic, perhaps, than the narrativization of history exemplified in the texts above is the tendency in *The Feminist Memoir Project: Voices from Women's Liberation* (1998), edited by Rachel Blau DuPlessis and Ann Snitow, to present personal accounts of the movement as transparent conduits of real historical truth. In their introduction, DuPlessis and Snitow assert that the goal of their collection is to “stand against the belittling and demonizing, not only of feminism but of many of the political struggles of the sixties.”<sup>24</sup> By collecting reminiscences from women active during the era of the second wave, the editors hope that the historical importance of the movement's actions and accomplishments will be made more manifest in a present that has largely “relegated” it “to the footnotes and the margins” of the history of that time.<sup>25</sup> While the intention to connect past and present in our historicizations of the women's liberation movement is important and necessary in a contemporary world that prefers its feminism to be over and done with, the question of why the women's liberation movement has been relegated to the margins of the historiography of the 1960s and belittled (to a much greater degree than other protest movements of the 1960s, as the editors state) is never directly addressed. Moreover, the choice of contributors in conjunction with the introductory remarks of the editors tend, as a whole, to restage some of the problems endemic to the “remembering” of the women's movement—the same problems they are attempting to counteract.<sup>26</sup> As Beverly Guy-Sheftall writes in her contribution to *The Feminist Memoir Project*, she was “not surprised by the predictable picture of ‘second-wave’ feminists being mostly white.” Nor could she have been surprised by her “disappointment at the small number of narratives by African-American women” in the collection.<sup>27</sup> And yet, Guy-Sheftall is surprised, “startled” even, at coming across mimeographed documents from the National Black Feminist Organization (NBFO) while researching her contribution. Guy-Sheftall's surprise comes from remembering her partici-

pation in women's groups at Spelman in the late 1960s, seeing the publication date of the documents as being in 1973, and realizing that her participation in the women's movement began long before written histories of the movement have recognized the participation of African American women. Her surprise is a moment when the "ruse of history" breaks down,<sup>28</sup> a moment when she realizes that her memories and the documentary remains of the past have diverged. Guy-Sheftall's moment of surprise reminds us that the women's movement has been remembered, even by its participants, in a particular way, one that *The Feminist Memoir Project*, rather than critiquing, tends to reenact.

In *The World Split Open*, a more recent historical study and one I draw on throughout this book, Ruth Rosen attempts to argue against a singular origin for the movement, locating its beginnings in the changing political, social, and cultural contexts of the United States in the twentieth century. As she writes in her introduction:

Many readers, I suspect, probably know that American feminism was shaped by the political culture of the fifties and sixties. But it also developed out of much longer and deeper political traditions—such as the disestablishment of religion as a state force and a profound distrust of centralized government; the celebration of individual enterprise and initiative; a class politics expressed mostly through race and gender; a long evangelical tradition that has existed outside political parties and government; and a deep and abiding belief that in America, one can always reinvent oneself.<sup>29</sup>

Here, Rosen explicitly claims the second-wave women's movement as a particularly American phenomenon and simultaneously embeds the movement in the general sweep of "American history." And yet, while the intention is to reveal the inextricable influence and constitutive effect of the women's movement on American history—to reclaim its importance to and for American history—Rosen's perspective also tends to suggest that the movement was, in some sense, inevitable. As a result, any analysis of feminism as a dissident movement becomes difficult, for the "shape" of the movement has already been prescribed by historical trends greater than its own, heterogeneous particularity.

The problem, as Joan Scott, among others, has noted, is a historiographical one.<sup>30</sup> The history of the second wave is told as a story—one that tends to efface the very heterogeneity and threat Rosen is trying to account for.

Indeed, the structure of Rosen's book follows a trajectory similar to the other published histories of the movement: the first chapter begins with the "Dawn of Discontent" and the last chapter with the "Proliferation of Feminism." Like Evans, Rosen locates the "discontent" mainly in the lives of white, middle-class women, and like Echols, she understands the "proliferation" of feminisms to be something—as the order of her chapters suggests—that happened after the initial eruption of women's liberation. Rosen's history, like the other texts noted above, engages in what I would call a project of recovery, one that re-remembers a history that has been lost or submerged by a hegemony that has repeatedly made feminism disappear from the social and political landscapes of American history. And in the attempt to recover what has been forgotten, Rosen wants to restate the seriousness of the movement and claim its rightful place in the historical record. But by restating that history in the form of a narrative, which intrinsically depends upon a progressive development (even if that development ends in the unhappiness of a disintegrating movement in the 1980s), Rosen's account, like those of Evans's, Echols's, and the collected memoirs in DuPlessis and Snitow's book, inevitably presupposes what the origin, and the success, of the women's movement's "story" is.

There are ironies to this story. In the desire to order and account for the movement's rise and fall, the very real presence of racism, heterosexism, and classism in the movement becomes calcified into a unified account of the movement that tends to cement, rather than bring into question, the ahistorical assumptions that women's liberation—and the women's movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s more generally—was a racist and classist movement. The presence of other voices, groups, and political affiliations at the beginnings of the movement are elided and covered over in the attempt to account for the movement's limitations and failures. This kind of narrative straightjacketing leads to historical oversights that, as Guy-Sheftall's moment of surprise suggests, produce major shifts in the perceptions and memories of historical reality. The consequences for how the women's movement is remembered can be startling. Flora Davis in *Moving the Mountain: The Women's Movement in America since 1960* writes about the early 1980s as a period when "feminists were thrown on the defensive. They lost some battles and won others, and overall progress for women stalled. Nevertheless, new feminist groups kept emerging, many of them now being formed by women of color."<sup>31</sup> And yet, two hundred pages later, she writes, "in 1973, with black militancy fading and male chauvinism

rampant, the National Black Feminist Organization was founded. Within a year, NBFO had spawned ten chapters and spawned a conference.<sup>32</sup> The presence of historical facts that contradict the story Davis wants to tell about the movement does not produce a reevaluation of the story. Rather, it goes unremarked upon, as if the fact of black women's feminist activism in the early years of the second wave belongs to another story. What counts as history ultimately is not the complex, contradictory, heterogeneous mess of any moment or era but a story that is already familiar.

Katie King, in her analysis of U.S. feminist discourses titled *Theory in Its Feminist Travels: Conversations in U.S. Women's Movements*, brings the deployment of such singular narratives of the past into critical view. She reveals the inevitable implicatedness and partial perspective of all attempts to write the history of a political movement by the participants themselves or by others, like me, who are invested in that movement as a consequence of our relationship to feminism.<sup>33</sup> For King, such histories are "origin stories," which are "interested stories, all of them. They construct the present moment, and a political position in it, by invoking a point in time out of which that present moment unfolds—if not inevitably, then at least with a certain coherence."<sup>34</sup> King's critique is meant to be neither reductive nor dismissive; her intention is not to argue against the necessity of historical inquiry but to problematize the way stories of the second-wave era tend to elide the contingency of their production in the present. By analyzing moments and events that were "instances of contests for meaning within U.S. feminism," when "whole systems of signifiers are reduced to one," King interrogates moments where the ferment of the early women's liberation movement gets fixed into a dominant account.<sup>35</sup>

One of the moments King traces is the construction of lesbianism as a magical sign for feminism within women's liberation. Employing Foucault's method of descriptive comparison, King traces the discursive travels of the term *lesbian* within the early writing of the movement, charting the way it came to stand for feminism at the expense of either an analysis of heterosexuality as a set of discourses and social relations or the constitution of relationships between feminism and other structures of social differentiation and ordering, like race and class. King's analysis of the production of feminist histories of the women's liberation movement, and her analysis of the changing signification of lesbianism in the movement in particular, has influenced my work. But whereas King focuses entirely on the competing discourses within the women's movement itself, I want to situate the emer-

gence of the lesbian as a figure of and for second-wave feminism both within and outside the movement. The moment when the “shit hit the *Time* fan”—when Kate Millett was outed by *Time* magazine, and lesbians were being kicked out of various feminist groups and organizations in 1970—was a moment when feminism and lesbianism became explosively conjoined for those outside as well as inside the movement.<sup>36</sup> The emergence of the feminist-as-lesbian figure (rather than just the internal discursive “travels” of the term *lesbian*) was a moment, I argue, when the phenomenon of the women’s liberation movement was apprehended through a limited set of associations that still define, to a large degree, the way in which the movement is known and remembered today.

Unlike the histories and memoirs discussed above, my interest in this moment, and in its relation to the history of American feminism and women’s liberation in particular, is based less on restating the importance of the women’s liberation movement to postwar American history than on attending to the productive detail of its claims to political, social, and cultural presence. Reading along the grain of the movement’s archive opens up the complexity of the movement’s eventfulness to a scrutiny that does not reduce or foreclose the possibilities of meaning inherent to it; it also invites us to pay the kind of loving attention to a past that might make us want to turn away from it, rather than toward it. Here, then, *Feeling Women’s Liberation* intervenes in the burgeoning field of queer historiography by drawing attention to the danger, rather than (just) the pleasure, of a loving look backward at the past. The queer desire for history as a practice of producing loving attachments to what has often remained marginal or discarded in the writing of history, while capable of generating archives that can be world and community making in the present, tends to elide or downplay the implicatedness of any putatively queer history in cultural and social regimes of normalization. With a kind of fascinated myopia, the queer desire for history can too often settle on the ephemera and marginalia of queer lives and subcultures rather than asking what Wendy Brown calls “the more difficult questions about the bearing of the past on the present.”<sup>37</sup> By analyzing the conjuncture of feminist *and* mass cultural representations of the women’s liberation movement, I try to avoid the risk of too quickly substituting the pleasures of thinking otherwise for the continuing practice of a necessary, active, yet always interested estrangement from the past. Methodologically, then, I am concerned with the predicament we are all—feminist and queer—faced with when we want to articu-

late the forgotten or diminished history of the subjugated, marginalized, or simply dismissed to the possibilities of a future that will take into account what happened and offer something different and perhaps better. How do we keep the knotty achievements, as well as the difficulties and failures, of a movement like women's liberation—a movement that forms part of the conditions of possibility for queer and feminist theory and studies in the present—in critical sight while paying it the kind of loving attention needed to conjure up its complex eventfulness?

#### THE EMERGENCE OF THE FEMINIST-AS-LESBIAN AND THE EVENT OF WOMEN'S LIBERATION

Rather than produce another story of women's liberation, or conduct a loving look backward at its lost possibilities as something to be recuperated in the present, I understand my return to the movement's beginnings as an attempt to enact a responsibility toward its eventfulness by mapping a relationship between what, in Wendy Brown's terms, "we have inherited" from that era and "what is not yet born."<sup>38</sup> Drawing upon recent theorizations of the event in feminist history and cultural studies, I approach women's liberation as a surprising eruption of action and thought that coalesced into a feminism that was generative of new meanings and practices—of feminism but also of femininity, sexuality, race, and so on.<sup>39</sup> To understand women's liberation as an eruption of the new is not, however, to approach it as something unconnected to older forms of feminist protest and to other protest movements of the era; instead, it is to see the movement as having effects that exceeded its immediate context and continue to infuse and constrain the present in ways that we are more and less knowing about. To understand women's liberation as an event is to approach it as both possibility and legacy.

The primary vehicle for this mapping between historical inheritance and imaginative projection is the feminist-as-lesbian, a figure who appeared at the beginning of the twentieth century, when feminism rather than women's rights became a social and political force, and a figure who reappeared, in a different form, during the momentous days of the early women's liberation movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when dyke baiting became a prominent tactic of antifeminists and anti-lesbian feminists and lesbian feminism came into being partly as a response to that baiting.<sup>40</sup> Defined as the "ball-busting, selfish, hairy extremist," we all know,

now, what a feminist is.<sup>41</sup> Susan Douglas's succinct description denotes the figure through which popular cultural conceptions of feminism have been organized in mainstream culture since the 1970s. Yet I would argue that the feminist-as-lesbian, as I call her in order to delimit her from the historical specificity of lesbian feminism, has also tended to be the figure through which generalized perceptions of second-wave feminism have been organized as memory in the academy and in queer and feminist subcultures. As the "flannel shirt androgyn[e,] closeminded, antisex puritan[, ] humorless moralist[, ] racist and classist ignoramus[, and] essentialist utopian," to use Bonnie Zimmerman's portrait of the stereotypical lesbian feminist, she often stands for the perceived essentialism of second-wave feminism and for the limits of its cross-class and cross-race alliances.<sup>42</sup> The exaggerated terms by which both Douglas and Zimmerman describe the feminist-as-lesbian can be read as an effect of her hypervisible presence across the borders between mass culture and subcultures, as well as those between feminist and queer studies and theories. She's a monster; she's ridiculous; she's laughable, contemptuous, shameful or fearless, joyful, and full of hubris. As a repository for a complex array of affect and emotion, the figure draws us to a sense, a practical knowledge, of women's liberation that often goes unacknowledged or unaccounted for.

Indeed, it is through such overfamiliarity or hypervisibility that the figure of the feminist-as-lesbian operates in the present as a ghost rather than as an icon or symbol of second-wave feminism.<sup>43</sup> Avery Gordon offers an example of hypervisibility in her reading of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in *Ghostly Matters*. For Ellison, the visibility of the African American male's blackness blinds the white onlooker to the complexity of the man's individual personhood while also maintaining the (empowering) ignorance of the white onlooker's partial vision. According to Gordon, it is precisely the way in which visibility can become "a type of invisibility" that "apparitions and hysterical blindness[es]" are produced.<sup>44</sup> The feminist-as-lesbian, in her hypervisibility, blinds us to the complex forces that first produced her while also blinding us to our own *interest* in her; she is de-realized—made to appear insubstantial and anterior to history—in a way that echoes the vaporization of the black man in Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

Today the feminist-as-lesbian is everywhere and nowhere. Sometimes she appears in classroom discussions when students are asked to describe their understanding of feminism. At other times she appears in movies and television shows about modern young women and in magazine and news-

paper articles about the apparent demise of feminism in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. And sometimes she appears in the work of scholars eager to differentiate queer from lesbian and lesbian feminism or one kind of feminist theory from another.<sup>45</sup> This everywhere and nowhere characteristic of the feminist-as-lesbian is itself a sign of her spectrality: she floats from discursive domain to discursive domain, present yet without substance; she is necessary to the discussion or representation but never its subject. The spectrality of the feminist-as-lesbian works in complex ways to screen us from the multiple ways in which the various feminisms of the early second-wave era challenged the postwar American social and cultural hegemony, and in her continuing hypervisibility, the figure also reminds us that those challenges are not yet over.

As a spectral remainder of the women's liberation movement, the feminist-as-lesbian is both an effect and affective repository of the movement's engagement with the world, and as such, she is a product of forces neither entirely internal nor external to women's liberation as a movement and as a counterpublic sphere. The manifestation of power that produced the apparition of the feminist-as-lesbian has to be understood, therefore, in a doubling sense: as an imposition (it was, for example, *Time* magazine who publicly outed Kate Millett, not the women's movement or Millett herself) and as agency (a significant minority within the movement would go on in the early 1970s to propose a form of lesbianism as the *only* credible feminist position). It is in this moment of conjunction, rather than as the outcome of any developing political position or designed repression, that the feminist-as-lesbian emerged in the way that she did, looking the way she did, and representing the things she did. *Feeling Women's Liberation* attempts to examine this fundamental ambivalence in the production of the feminist-as-lesbian by first diagnosing the moment of the figure's arising—the “eruption of forces” from which she emerged.<sup>46</sup> I then trace out from that moment the economies of emotion, feminist and nonfeminist, from which she was fashioned, if not always deliberately, as a figure of and for women's liberation.

While operating as a clue, a remainder, of what is unknowable and unrepresentable about the movement's emergence onto the scene of political contestation and revolt in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the figure of the feminist-as-lesbian also operates as a screen memory that works to contain and displace our knowledge, not just of the women's liberation movement but of the second-wave era more generally. The ambivalence of the feminist-



as-lesbian also has to be understood, then, as intrinsic to her legibility as a *shorthand notation* for women's liberation.<sup>47</sup> While she screens us from the multiplicity and possibilities of the early years of the second-wave era, she is also a remnant of those possibilities. An excavation of the ways in which feminists thought, if not always acted, their resistance to heterosexuality in the early years of the women's liberation movement also forms part of my return to the documentary remainders of women's liberation. Though it might be common knowledge in the corridors of women's studies programs that women's liberation challenged the institutions and cultural norms of heterosexuality, how that challenge was enacted in the movement's manifestoes and position papers is less obvious, and so I ask: What rhetorical forms, metaphors, and phrases were deployed and accrued meaning as part of women's liberation's political revolt against what at the time was called sexism? And how did lesbianism become a "domain of active and intense problematization" in the early years of the movement in ways that both did and did not change the conceptual and experiential parameters of female sexuality?<sup>48</sup>

And, finally, by returning to the details of her production, *Feeling Women's Liberation* asks how the feminist-as-lesbian figure covers over or, perhaps more appropriately, "whites-out," the complex ways in which the histories and practices of racism shaped the movement itself and accounts of it.<sup>49</sup> That women's liberation was formally recognized as a movement by the recorders and commentators of mainstream America when white, middle-class women picketed the Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 and marched down Fifth Avenue holding up placards demanding their liberation in the summer of 1970, is hardly surprising in a society stratified by race and class hierarchies. However, this process of publicity whereby some women (young, white, and middle class) and not others are seen as political activists, as feminists, and recorded as such by the national media has very real repercussions for what we know of the women's liberation movement in the present. The moment the movement became "history"—was taken note of and its events recorded—was also the moment when that history was formed through distortion and elision. The hyper-visibility of the feminist-as-lesbian figure, as an image memory of the women's liberation movement, emerged out of this process of representation through distortion and elision.

At the same time I understand the whiteness of women's liberation as something in need of historicization. My return to the emergent moments

of women's liberation is also, then, an attempt to trace the contours of its thought as productive of an economy of emotion that marked the movement as white. While the rhetoric of the political movements of the era traveled across the borders of constituency and geography that made them distinct from each other, the circulation of affect and emotion it enacted changed dramatically depending on the political constituency addressed. The images and metaphors of anger in the Black Power movement, for example, conjured starkly different histories of social injustice and objects of resistance than those in the women's liberation movement, even if some of the words and phrases remained the same. To feel an emotion, as Alison M. Jaggar writes, "presupposes the existence of a social group" that feels things the same way. Conversely, an emotional appeal will only work if it makes you feel recognized as part of the group the appeal presumes in its address.<sup>50</sup> The emotional economy of women's liberation rhetoric presumed, in Lauren Berlant's terms, "a commonality of experience for people marked by femininity" based on the ideas and images of an "ordinary" or "normal" femininity—even if the appeal was made in order to reject those ideas and images.<sup>51</sup> The materials of women's liberation I read in this book—the best-selling and/or widely distributed essays first published in the alternative press or anthologized in mainstream publishing venues—offer an "archive of feelings" through which women's liberation became a name and a movement that some women, and not others, could identify with and invest in as a political and social possibility.<sup>52</sup> The whiteness of women's liberation, in other words, was not simply a social fact of women's liberation but was actively produced, in part, by the movement's rhetorical self-invention.

Here, then, I understand race, like gender, to be performative in the Butlerian sense: as a habit of iteration that reproduces a continuity of social and cultural effects but in ways that simultaneously opens up the possibility of deviation or contradiction. Butler's notion of performativity resonates with recent theorizations of race in social theory and performance studies and is useful for thinking about race as something people enact and reproduce in their everyday lives.<sup>53</sup> In addition, the reproduction of race—in this case the reproduction of women's liberation as a white women's feminism—also depends upon the capacity to recall previous ways of doing and thinking whiteness or, more specifically, white femininity, even if those recollections are, at the same time, always an active reinvention of the past that lead, potentially, to deviant or contradictory ways of doing

white womanhood. Here, then, the dynamic historicity of Butler's notion of performativity as something that both recalls and invents the past gives me a way to think about how women's liberation became a movement of and for white women, rather than to simply assume it or state it as fact and leave it at that. It also enables me to think about how women's liberation may have reproduced white femininity in ways that both conformed to and deviated from the norm. What exactly did the performance of whiteness in women's liberation consist of? How was the whiteness of women's liberation continuous with that of mainstream American culture and society, and how was it not?

#### ECONOMIES OF EMOTION AND SHORTHAND NOTATIONS

But social thought is not abstract. Even when they correspond to and express the present, the ideas of society are always embodied in persons or groups.

—Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*

In order to track the economies of emotion from which the feminist-as-lesbian was fashioned as a figure of and for women's liberation, I employ a method of reading the archive that depends upon approaching particular terms and phrases as "access points" to the contingencies of the movement's moment of invention.<sup>54</sup> The emphasis of my analysis is on the creativity of the movement's rhetorical enactment as a distinct feminist movement—on the newness of its beginnings—rather than on an evaluation of the relative merits of its particular practice of feminism. In this sense my project echoes the work of other scholars interested in returning to the social movements of the 1970s in order to ask what was novel or inaugural about the politics of those movements.<sup>55</sup> But at the same time my project is not simply one of recuperation of a lost or misinterpreted feminist moment. Instead, I attempt to counter overly reductive or monolithic accounts of the movement by reading its textual archive as an effect of the movement's entanglement in its historical context, that is, as a product of the movement's involvement in mass cultural and subcultural public spheres and social worlds not of its own making. My reading of the widely circulated phrases and terms of the early years of the movement is also an attempt to track the way in which the newness, contingent and compromised, of the movement can only be apprehended in relation to what was already known at the time of its emergence as a distinct form of feminism.

Sara Ahmed's understanding of the social and cultural productivity of

emotion will be helpful in my reading of the archive precisely because she provides a model for conceptualizing the rhetorical enactment of women's liberation as a political idea and constituency made manifest through circuits of feeling that are, in turn, the effects of past forms of social struggle and political contest. Drawing upon various schools of thought on the emotions, Ahmed argues that emotions reside neither in objects or bodies but "take the shape" of the contact between different bodies or between bodies and objects.<sup>56</sup> Operating through "affective economies" that are the result of previous histories of contact, emotions are produced through the association of signs, figures, and objects "in relationships of difference and displacement," which shape our social worlds.<sup>57</sup> For example, in the United States in the 2000s fear, hate, and sometimes both circulate through the association of "the terrorist" with "Muslim" and "Arab," which produces relations of difference between "American" and "Arab" or "Muslim" that, while full of present geopolitical tensions, are also infused with, and thereby given meaning by, the histories of European and American colonialism and anticommunism.

Although Ahmed's argument that emotions are social processes rather than innate biophysical phenomena makes both phenomenological and sociological claims, the material of her analysis is rhetoric, and in this sense, her work converges in interesting ways with Daniel Gross's work on seventeenth-century political rhetoric. Taking up the Aristotelian notion of rhetoric as "a theoretical art that contrives human affairs," Gross argues that passions and emotion were, prior to the emergent hegemony of modern science, understood as the "unnatural" product of human interaction and social organization.<sup>58</sup> In his readings of thinkers from Hobbes to Adam Smith to the political pamphlets of the English Civil War, Gross demonstrates that emotion is, in effect, "a function of social difference" that works precisely through an uneven distribution across the relationships between different social actors and locations.<sup>59</sup> The passions we associate with some social figures (for example, the shame of the poor man) in contradistinction to those we associate with others (the reasonableness of the professional) are neither evidence of human nature nor the social effect of some inner psychic failure or success on the part of one individual over another. Instead, for Gross as for Ahmed, emotions are the makers of social distinction and a function of publicity. Rhetoric, in other words, as the communication of sentiment not only organizes social distinctions but

also actively makes us more invested in, and sympathetic to, some performances of social presence rather than others.

Ahmed's and Gross's concern with reestablishing the interdependency of politics and emotion through the constitutive presence of rhetoric in the making of social worlds frames my attempt to track the political appeal of women's liberation as a world-making force, which generated its own creatures of publicity and forms of social presence. What both Ahmed and Gross demonstrate, in convincing detail, is that emotions *do* a lot of social and political work, and they cannot be separated from the historical or social as something private or biological. Indeed, emotions shape the social and political worlds in which we live and are infused by a history that makes them work—have meaning—in the present.

To think about the production of women's liberation as an effect of the circulation of emotions at the time of the movement's arising is to also realize the difficulty feminists face in changing their own and others' perceptions—feelings—about a movement like women's liberation. As Baxandall and Gordon state in the introduction to their illuminating collection of women's liberation documents, *Dear Sisters: Dispatches from the Women's Liberation Movement*, there are long-standing “widespread misconceptions” about the women's liberation movement in both the historical record and popular memory.<sup>60</sup> Thinking about the social and cultural work emotions do helps us to realize why those misconceptions are not easily corrected by an increased documentation of the movement's achievements and writings, as Baxandall and Gordon hope, nor by education, as Ruth Rosen hopes in *The World Split Open*. Rather, those “misconceptions” will only disappear once the affective economies of fear, contempt, and shame (to name just three of the negative emotions associated with feminism and women's liberation more particularly), which so effectively produce and reproduce feminism in the social imaginary, have little or no claim on our feelings. A project for the long term surely, but one for which we need to confront the emotions that shaped the figures of women's liberation and our responses to them.

In addition to drawing upon theories of emotion and rhetoric in my reading of the women's liberation archive, I also look to public sphere theory and theories of collective memory as a way to think about the entangling of the U.S. national public sphere and the counterpublic sphere of feminism in the production of women's liberation as an event that could

be named and thought into being in and around 1970. In particular I draw on Maurice Halbwachs's field-forming work on collective memory and his conception of social thought as, in effect, a memory that in "its entire content consists only of collective recollections or remembrances" of people and groups.<sup>61</sup> As collective memory, social thought contains "social frameworks" and notions of people and groups through which we understand ourselves and our relation to the world. These frameworks "confine and bind our most intimate remembrances": we cannot think of ourselves and others without them.<sup>62</sup> One of Halbwachs's primary examples of a social framework was the notional practice of family life. As a social framework that provides ideas of persons and their relations, "the family" works to meld the particular with the general. While each individual family remembers through the particular events that mark and orientate its history, those events are also, simultaneously, general—weddings, birthdays, funerals—or experienced through general genres of emotional response (the scripts of normative feeling or sentiment that people are disposed to follow when something extraordinary or unexpected happens, as in a child's death or infidelity). This melding of the general with the particular leads to the figures of the family, like the mother, expressing "an entire character," just as each event "recapitulates an entire period in the life of the group."<sup>63</sup> For Halbwachs, this representativeness embedded in the work of the family as social framework leads to specific scenarios and figures becoming shorthand notations for complex social lives and histories.

Although, as Andreas Huyssen and others have argued, Halbwachs's paradigm for conceptualizing social and group memories is less able to explain the fragmentation and multiplication of collective memories in today's mass-mediated age, Halbwachs's assertion that societies remember through people and scenarios that are, in turn, "contained" by generalized notions and images nevertheless remains a useful way of understanding why collective memories and historical accounts of political events and social movements revolve around recurring names, phrases, and figures, which act as shorthand notations for complex political contestations and struggles.<sup>64</sup> For this reason, Halbwachs's understanding of the reproduction of social thought through generalized notions resonates with Lauren Berlant's recent work on the "intimate public" of women's culture. Rather than social life and memory, Berlant looks to mass culture as a form of public life that invites us to invest a sense of belonging to a commonality of experience in commodified "genres of intimacy."<sup>65</sup> Despite the obvious

differences of object and theoretical paradigms, both Halbwachs and Berlant are interested in the ways in which people become invested in conventionality and its byproduct: the reproduction of the normal as social continuity.

For Berlant, as for Halbwachs, stereotypes (and in Berlant's case mass cultural genres) become forms through which people feel and imagine themselves part of the everyday world of the present. Rather than offering fantasies of the exceptional, the mass-mediated, intimate public spheres Berlant examines offer people the fantasy of being ordinary, which is to say, they offer people, and in Berlant's case of "women's culture" all those who identify with and invest a sense of self in the category "women," the fantasy of being part of a generalizable—white and middle-class—notion of what it means to be a woman. Unlike Halbwachs's overly monolithic understanding of collective memory, Berlant makes clear the distinction between protopolitical forms of publicity and those that traffic in commodified forms of affective belonging, and for this reason her work adds to Halbwachs's insights about the inheritance of the past in the present: she demonstrates that social thought is made in multiple domains of communal and public life and that, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the relationship between the political and the mass cultural is both overly enmeshed and complicated by the mediating capacity of consumer capitalism. How women's liberation became a style of protest with its own forms of feminist subjectivity and collectivity, in other words, was not made in an exclusive domain of politics nor in the mass-mediated public sphere but through their entanglement with each other.

Women's liberation, in becoming a political movement, drew upon and saw its objects in the intimate public spheres of mass-mediated women's culture, as well as in the everyday experiences of women's supposedly ordinary "private" lives. It was precisely "the affective and emotional attachments located in fantasies of the common, the everyday, and a sense of ordinariness" that were the source of feminist collectivity and belonging in women's liberation and also the grounds of its political struggle.<sup>66</sup> One of the hypotheses of *Feeling Women's Liberation* is that the cultural struggle over the meaning of second-wave feminisms, and of who second-wave feminists were, was fought over and through the perceived ordinariness of the lives and bodies of middle-class white women, and this struggle has had effects not only on how the women's liberation movement constituted itself as a movement but also on how the movement is remembered and felt

today. That the women's liberationist was most often seen and imagined as a white, middle-class woman has repercussions for how she operates as a shorthand notion or what I would call, in this mass-mediated age, an image memory of women's liberation.<sup>67</sup> The figure of the women's liberationist or her sister figure, the feminist-as-lesbian, is recognizable through the knowledge of what she is not and through the already established cultural preconceptions of what she "looks" like. And as an image memory of women's liberation, she continues the legacy of thinking—remembering—feminism as a white woman's cause. She is one example among many of how the history of racism (as well as of class and sexuality) is thought and felt through generalizable bodies and characters rather than through the abstractions of historical exegesis and argument. Indeed, part of the insidious and enduring power of racism—in both feminism and society in general—can be located in the way in which social memory binds us to a past thought and is felt through the enduring shorthand notations, or image memories, of particular types of bodies and collectivities.

The emergence of the feminist-as-lesbian figure as a shorthand notation for women's liberation eclipsed the heterogeneity and subversive force of the movement in its emergent moment. It has also tended to condemn second-wave feminists, who constructed a feminist cultural imaginary through the articulation of a transformed and transformative meaning of lesbianism, to the twilight world of a "wrong" or "embarrassing" feminism. In taking up Drucilla Cornell's call for an "ethical investigation" of the "historical meaning given to the category feminism,"<sup>68</sup> I hope not to reveal "what really happened" during the rise of the women's liberation movement, nor claim the rightfulness of those who took up "women's liberation" or, indeed, lesbian feminism as a political identity, but to open up the complexity of the movement's emergence as an event of second-wave feminism and to lay bare some of the processes of elision, reduction, and displacement through which we have come to know of that event and those feminists.