

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The 1970s was the time of my childhood. I remember it fondly but also as a different time, a time out of step. In my world three events cut the 1970s off from the 1980s: the death of my father, moving from primary school to high school, and the election of Margaret Thatcher. None of these changes made my life happier or less complicated, and perhaps for this reason a dreamworld of the 1970s has tended to set the scene for my flights of fancy and imagination. In the 1980s, in England, feminism was a public activity—one that was a visible and active participant in the various political protests against what we now routinely call the neoliberalism of Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government's foreign and domestic policies. From the miners' strike in 1984, to the long encampment of the Greenham Common antinuclear, antimilitarization women's peace camp, which began in 1981 and lasted in some form until 2000, to the organized and widespread resistance to Clause 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988, forbidding local authorities to "promote" homosexuality, feminism was part of the everydayness of British national public life. It was in the news and on the TV: it helped create the atmosphere—the structure of feeling—of that time. My interest in the feminisms of the 1970s is structured through this sense of its manifest presence in "my" 1980s, as well as the distinction of affect that make the 1970s, for me, a different time from the 1980s.

This affective distinction between one decade and another—a distinction that is both personal and public—was mediated, for me, through a longing for, and fascination with, "America." The America I fell in love with was the fictional version on British TV, and it was the aesthetics of the American mass culture of the 1970s—the jerky, heady, campy energy of its racial and sexual masquerade—that also set the scene for my interest in feminism in the 1970s. For me, "women's liberation" first functioned as part of this mediated landscape—a landscape that suggested, at least on first viewing, a playful excess of gendered, sexual, and racial genres of being. *Women's liberation* became a term that incited complex and diffuse imaginings that were neither wholly "political," in the strong sense of the word,

nor particularly coherent as an attitude or position from which to argue for or against the kinds of feminism it was supposed to represent. Instead, it tended to operate as a metaphor for something not representable: it was both a promise and a mystery.

Now, of course, I don't think of women's liberation that way. And that is no bad thing. To stay stuck in a nostalgic longing for the thereness of its imagined promise is precisely what I have tried to resist in this book. We owe the complexity of its historical manifestations a much more rigorously confrontational and skeptical response than that. But I offer this bit of "me-ness" here as a reminder of how political projects and movements operate as constellations of imagined and actualized goals and achievements, as well as holding spaces for often diverse, contradictory, and unthought-through aspirations for something other than what we already know. In other words, women's liberation allowed me to think and feel myself a feminist before I knew what that might mean.

There are others who have also allowed me that holding space, and who have offered the kinds of intellectual inspiration and support that have made this book possible. First and foremost, I have to thank my mother, Patricia Bullock, for keeping us going, for unconditional love, and for allowing me the space to imagine otherwise. She was also the first really, really smart woman I met, and the person who set in motion what happened next. Thanks too go to my sisters, Zoë and Kate Hesford, for their love and support as well as their notoriety on their too infrequent visits to the United States. I owe a lot to my friends back home—they have been generous hosts, made me laugh, and kept me up with everything Brit side: a big thank you to Ness and Paul Wilson, Phillippa Maye, Esther Oxford, Andrew Kaye, and, a little closer to New York, Anne O'Byrne.

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