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# The Radical Feminist Manifesto as Generic Appropriation: Gender, Genre, And Second Wave Resistance

Kimber Charles Pearce

In June of 1968, self-styled feminist revolutionary Valerie Solanis discovered herself at the heart of a media spectacle after she shot pop artist Andy Warhol, whom she accused of plagiarizing her ideas. While incarcerated for the attack, she penned the "S.C.U.M. Manifesto"—"The Society for Cutting Up Men." By doing so, Solanis appropriated the traditionally masculine manifesto genre, which had evolved from sovereign proclamations of the 1600s into a form of radical protest of the 1960s.

Feminist appropriation of the manifesto genre can be traced as far back as the 1848 Seneca Falls Woman's Rights Convention, at which suffragists Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Coffin Mott, Martha Coffin, and Mary Ann McClintock parodied the Declaration of Independence with their "Declaration of Sentiments" (Campbell, 1989). Like the suffragists, radical feminists of the late 1960s emulated manifestoes of male-governed groups; specifically, the manifestoes of the New Left Movement. Disillusioned with the sexism and lack of female representation in the New Left, radical feminists formed their own groups, such as the New York Radical Feminists, Redstockings, The Feminists, and Cell 16. The groups published manifestoes to recruit members, address feminist issues, and sever ties with the larger, male-dominated anti-war and civil rights movements.

This essay analyzes radical feminists' generic appropriation of the manifesto and their efforts to transform the genre into an idiom of resistance against the patriarchy. I use the term "generic appropriation" to mean the making over and setting apart as one's own the substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics of a recurrent rhetorical form. The manifestoes of New York Radical Feminists, New York Radical Women, Redstockings, the "S.C.U.M. Manifesto," and Kate Millet's "Sexual Politics: A Manifesto for Revolution" were among texts selected to examine the radical feminists' generic appropriation. I use the texts as evidence to support three claims: that sexism in the New Left Movement provided the exigency that motivated radical feminists to appropriate the manifesto genre for the purpose of solidifying a new women's liberation movement; that radical feminists appropriated the generic elements of the manifesto as a form of historicism that challenged the authority of male history and guided feminist action in response to that history; and that radical feminist manifestoes differed from one another according to the amount of emphasis authors placed on physical, psychological, and social oppression and strategies of resistance. The radical feminists' appropriation of the manifesto form demonstrates how rhetors may transform a genre into one of a different symbolic action with a new rhetorical purpose. However, in some ways, generic appropriation constrained radical feminists' rhetoric to the prior discourse of the patriarchy to which they were opposed.

*Genre and the Practice of Feminist Appropriation*

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson have argued that a genre will consist of "the kinds of forms that rhetoricians ordinarily call 'strategies'—substantive and stylistic forms chosen to respond to situational requirements" (p. 18). If genre is a strategy of framing symbolic behavior in a given situation, then it follows that the appropriation of a genre by rhetors who have not produced it is a tactical manipulation of generic form. I argue that generic appropriation alters the address of the audience and induces a message expectancy violation that changes the auditors' understanding of the rhetorical act. I view this oppositional practice as one that is vital to the symbolic action of gendered resistance, which, in the words of Marie MacLean, "contests, affirms solidarity, gains victories within a society, operating from a position of weakness" (p. 40).

Campbell has acknowledged the practice of generic appropriation in nineteenth-century woman's rights conventions and speeches (1989; 1995). Jamieson and Campbell have identified "rhetorical hybrids," which are rule-governed blends of the elements of previously established genres that emerge out of occasions that embrace more than one purpose. This study addresses generic appropriation by examining radical feminist manifestoes as historic enactments of the practice—rhetorical acts of mimicry that contested both the male domination of the New Left Movement of the 1960s and the traditional premises of the patriarchy.

In the analysis of radical feminist manifesto-writing, one must recognize that the use of the tactic of appropriation for recovering feminist ideals from a network of representations established by men has been controversial. Helene A. Shugart (1997) has grouped the literature that addresses feminist appropriation into two categories: that of scholars who have rejected appropriation by oppressed groups as inherently inappropriate (e.g., France, 1988; Johnson, 1989; Showalter, 1985; Tetzlaff, 1993), and that of scholars who have endorsed appropriation as an empowering tool for liberation (e.g., Cixous, 1976; Cranny-Francis, 1990; Kaufmann, 1989; Nogle, 1981; Ostriker, 1985, 1986; Weimann, 1988; Yaeger, 1988). Those who have rejected appropriation view the feminist use of patriarchal forms as a perpetuation of oppression. Gerda Lerner has stated the position: "revolutionary ideas can be generated only when the oppressed have an alternative to the symbol and meaning system of those who dominate them" (p. 222). Concurring with scholars who object to appropriation, Janet Lyon has faulted feminist manifesto-writing for embracing a genre that "is predominately masculine, and in its ideological exclusion of women from the public sphere considerably masculinist" (p. 102).

Scholars whom Shugart has categorized as proponents of appropriation endorse the strategy because of its function as social criticism. As Marielouise Janssen-Jurreit has argued, "Ideological weapons that men use against women can be turned around and used as a collective means of self-affirmation against men" (p. 318). Some theorists, such as Michel de Certeau (1980, 1984, 1988), have considered the appropriation of imposed symbolisms by marginalized groups to be unavoidable. Sidonie Smith (1991) has described feminist manifesto writing as an act of appropriation that supplies rhetorical power by rendering new concepts accessible to an audience familiar with the discursive exercises of the patriarchy. Similarly, Jo Freeman has confirmed the value of appropriation to the women's liberation movement of the 1960s as providing a strategy for the promotion of "(1) the growth of a pre-existing communications network [of the New Left] which was (2) co-optable to the ideas of the new movement" (p. 197).

*Emergence of Radical Feminist Manifestoes from the New Left Movement*

New Left organizations of the 1960s, such as the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), the Black Panther Party,

and the large anti-draft movement were male-governed as a rule, which led to a lack of female representation in the movement. Lydia Sargent has described how women were treated when they spoke about women's rights:

Early attempts to confront sexism were met with derisive name-calling: "bitch, lesbian, castrator." Early attempts to speak about sexism at [New Left] meetings or demonstrations were turned into circuses by men catcalling, whistling, and shouting for women to get off the stage and "have a good fuck." (p. xv)

Major New Left manifestoes, including C. W. Mills's "Letter to the New Left," the "Founding Statement of SNCC," "The Port Huron Statement" of the SDS, and the "Platform and Program" of the Black Panther Party excluded women's issues. The texts chronicled histories of class, racial, and ethnic oppression, but neglected women's oppression. They enumerated grievances against capitalists, racists, and the military establishment, but disregarded chauvinists. They declared the need for a new societal order, but left women out of the directive. In 1965, the neglect of women's issues in the movement was confronted, when SNCC members Casey Hayden and Mary King published a widely-read article in the radical pacifist magazine *Liberation*, entitled "Sex and Caste: A Kind of Memo." They wrote:

Nobody is writing or organizing or talking publicly about women, in a way that reflects the problems that various women in the movement come across. [A]ll the problems between men and women and all the problems of women functioning in society as equal human beings are among the most basic that people face. (pp. 135-136)

In 1967, a group of radical women affiliated with the Chicago chapter of SNCC responded to the New Left's insensitivity to female issues in a manifesto they drafted, "To the Women of the New Left." They called for women to organize and define an independent set of issues, goals, and methods for liberation; their document became a prototype for other radical feminist texts. One woman involved in drafting the document, Shulamith Firestone, went to New York to organize a women's group in 1967. The manifesto genre, which had appeared repeatedly among New Left organizations, was appropriated once again in a text entitled, "The Feminists: A Political Organization to Annihilate Sex Roles." For a majority of groups that assembled between 1967 and 1970, including Redstockings, The Feminists, and Cell 16, the generic appropriation of the manifesto became a means to resist male oppression and pursue a feminist identity.

### *Radical Feminist Historicism and the Manifesto Genre*

Radical feminists appropriated the generic form of New Left manifestoes to introduce the women's movement as an alternative to the New Left Movement by chronicling the oppression that led to the current moment of revolution and listing grievances and proposals against the patriarchy (Lyon, 1991). However, unlike New Left texts, which were concerned with contesting capitalism, racism, and the national military establishment, feminist manifestoes sought to recruit candidates for membership by providing a rationale for the women's liberation movement on the basis of its opposition to the patriarchy, and by specifying actions those sympathetic to the movement should take in pursuit of equality. Feminist writers mimicked the introductions of male-authored, New Left manifestoes by identifying past patterns of male oppression in order to guide feminist responses in the present and future. The prologue of New York Radical Women's "Principles" exhibited the historicism common to radical feminist manifestoes by defining the group on the basis of its rejection of masculine history and culture: "We are critical of all past ideology, literature and philosophy, products as they

are of male supremacist culture" (p. 520). The opening statement of "Redstockings Manifesto" also displayed the feminist style of historicism that supported radical feminist writers' challenges to the patriarchy:

We identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, imperialism, etc.) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women, a few men dominate the rest. All power structures throughout history have been male-dominated and male-oriented. (p. 113)

The anti-masculine historicism of feminist manifestoes reflected the type of discourse Brenda Robinson Hancock (1972) has categorized as "affirmation by negation," in which feminism is defined not so much by what it is, as by that to which it is opposed. The greatest liability for authors using this dialectical approach was that, by devoting great effort to exposing the history of male supremacy in order to mobilize the movement in opposition to it, the development of radical feminist ideology was deferred. However, the rhetorical purpose of the manifestoes was not to offer detailed doctrine, but instead to appeal to a broad spectrum of women. In lieu of revealing women's history and feminist principles in specific terms, groups invited women to join in defining the terms of feminism by assuming control of their historical identities, which, heretofore, had been subject to the judgment of men. New York Radical Women's view of the true feminist persona illustrated the breadth of inclusion the group envisioned for the radical woman, but again with reference to male derision: "She is Everywoman: ugly, dumb (dumb broad, dumb cunt), bitch, nag, hag, whore, fucking and breeding machine, mother of us all. Until Everywoman is free, no woman will be free. When her beauty and knowledge is revealed and seen, the new day will be at hand" (p. 520).

The dialectical historicism of the manifesto genre was ideal for revealing how women's history had been suppressed by men and how feminism should arise in response to that oppression; it allowed for the recognition of a hostile worldview against which feminists could unite. The practice of feminist historicism gave rise to the name of the splinter group of New York Radical Women, W.I.T.C.H. (Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy of Hell), as an acronym, flag issue, and metaphor of activism. The group's Chicago Coven, who protested feminist Professor Marlene Dixon's dismissal from the University of Chicago by donning witch regalia to shower the Sociology Department with hair and nail clippings, issued a manifesto that explained the group's name in "Witches as Women's Hidden History":

[Witches in Europe and America] were the center of motion both as agitators and as targets, as women today must assume positions of leadership . . . if women are to gain true equality in a revolutionary movement. (p. 543)

Historicism was deployed in radical feminist manifestoes in opposition to the patriarchy and invited women to join a reform movement that promised power and visibility—a movement that members could shape as the revolution ensued. This historiography, Joan Kelly has observed, "made it evident that the mere fact of being a woman meant having a particular kind of social and hence historical experience" (p. 4).

### *Radical Feminist Grievances and Proposals*

The radical feminist focus on the female experience, in relation to the history of male supremacy, set the stage in manifestoes for grievances and proposals against the physical, psychological, and social oppression of women. Often, feminist authors stressed one category of oppression over the others, which influenced the proposals for action they set forth in different texts. Authors advanced different views of the

effects of physical, psychological, and social oppression on women's lives depending on their opinions of the relative gravity of those forms of subjugation. Consequently, their proposals for resistance ranged from psychosocial remedies, consciousness-raising and group discussion, to physical maneuvers to eradicate patriarchy, including sabotage and murder.

Grievances and proposals for action against physical repression were most vivid in manifestoes adopted by militant organizations, such as the Boston-based Cell 16, whom, as Alice Echols has written, "with their program of celibacy, separatism, and karate seemed the quintessential radical feminist group" (p. 158). Before each gathering of the group, members read aloud from Valerie Solanis's "S.C.U.M. Manifesto" (The Society for Cutting Up Men), which was published in the wake of her shooting of Andy Warhol. Solanis's deeply-held grievances against men and her proposals for physical resistance matched the militancy of Cell 16, who published one of the earliest radical feminist journals, *No More Fun and Games*, and who advocated violent guerrilla tactics, secrecy, and murder under certain circumstances.

As a text that addressed the physical and sexual abuse of women, "S.C.U.M." followed the dialectical pattern of the manifesto by identifying contradictions in male sexuality and recommending feminist solutions to the bodily exploitation of females. Solanis called for "civic-minded, responsible, thrill seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex" (1970, p. 514). The male depicted in the "S.C.U.M. Manifesto" was a despicable figure who used sex as a means to fuse with the female and claim as his own "all female characteristics—emotional strength and independence, forcefulness, dynamism, decisiveness, coolness, objectivity, assertiveness, courage, integrity, vitality, intensity, depth of character, grooviness, etc." (1970, p. 514-515). Solanis wrote of the male, "he'll swim through a river of snot, wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit, if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy waiting for him" (1984, p. 462). The images of sexual predation in Solanis's descriptions of males exalted women and supplied a rationale for her extreme plan of action against men—one that avoided petitioning and nonviolent protest, and resorted directly to violence:

SCUM will not picket, demonstrate, march or strike to achieve its ends. Such tactics are for nice genteel ladies who scrupulously take only such action as is guaranteed to be ineffective. . . . If SCUM ever marches, it will be over LBJ's stupid, sickening face; if SCUM ever strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade. (1970, p. 518)

Solanis's proposals for militant feminist action paralleled the nationalistic rhetoric of the Black Panther Party and New Left groups who saw violence as a justifiable means of resisting domination. Other radical feminists concerned with physical oppression appropriated images from the anti-war diatribes of Vietnam protestors. The language of Marxism and neo-colonialism, favored by New Left intellectuals, was central to Barbara Burris's treatment of the female body in her "Fourth World Manifesto":

[R]ape is an individual male imperialistic act against an individual woman while the abortion laws are male group control over their collective female territories. . . . [G]roup colonization of women is the way our bodies are defined as open territory for exploitation (compare the exploitation for sexual satisfaction of the male colonizer to exploitation of raw materials—female bodies are the raw materials). (p. 108)

Representations of the female body subjected to male abuse and exploitation were common in most radical feminist manifestoes. Nevertheless, some feminists objected to militant proposals for solving women's problems through physical insurrection and

argued that such solutions appropriated the most reprehensible qualities of a male culture of violence. "Politics of the Ego: A Manifesto for New York Radical Feminists" waived physically-oriented grievances and violent proposals and argued that no cause of female oppression was more powerful than men's attempts to obtain psychological ego satisfaction from dominating women (with the "ego" being defined not in Freudian terms, but rather as "the sense of individual self as distinct from others" (p. 443)). By de-emphasizing physical oppression and calling for the internalization of an alternate, feminist self, New York Radical Feminists offered a program of radical feminist psychology: "We must begin to destroy the notion that we are indeed only servants to the male ego, and must begin to reverse the systematic crushing of women's egos by constructing alternative selves that are healthy, independent and self-assertive" (p. 445).

The rhetoric of radical feminist psychology, which inspired the widely touted slogan, "The Personal is Political," was premised on the argument that the emancipation of the self would lead to increased solidarity in the collective movement. Groups, such as Redstockings, argued for psychological revolution and aimed to convince women that self-exploration and acts of personal resistance would destabilize male dominance in the lives of individuals, and by extension, throughout society. Kathie Sarachild wrote of the psychology of "consciousness-raising," which Redstockings considered "a historical form of women's resistance to oppression" (p. 146):

The purpose of consciousness-raising was to get to the most radical truths about the situation in order to take radical action. . . . Action comes when our experience is finally verified and clarified. . . . Learning the truth can lead to all kinds of action and this action will lead to further truths. (p. 148)

The psychological politics advanced by Redstockings and similar groups drew fire from militant feminists and "politicos," who attacked "consciousness-raising" as a passive argument for women's liberation. In response, "consciousness-raisers," such as Redstockings' Carol Hanisch, defended "personal politics" and declared, "I refuse to go out and 'produce' for the movement" (p. 77). In the midst of the factionalism that arose over radical feminist plans for revolutionary action during the late 1960s and early 1970s, a sociological approach to women's liberation appeared and incorporated elements of both the physical and psychological arguments for feminist resistance.

Manifestoes that focused on radical feminist sociology underscored the deleterious social influence of biological determinism and encompassed the grievances and proposals of feminists concerned with the physical and mental repression of women. Groups such as the Feminists recognized in their grievances against the patriarchy that the traditional sex role system allowed male domination to assume institutional forms in society. As the Feminists proclaimed, "[A]ll those institutions which were designed on the assumption and for the reinforcement of the male and female role system . . . must be destroyed" (p. 114). In patriarchal society, the argument went, woman is led to confuse socially constructed notions about biological sex differences with her human potential.

In "Sexual Politics: A Manifesto for Revolution," Kate Millet clarified the social policies of the patriarchy. Millet attempted to synthesize concepts from all factions of radical feminism and depicted the condition of women in a way that identified socialization as the root cause of every form of oppression in a male-defined culture:

[Sexual politics] consist of the following: 1) the formation of human personality along stereotyped lines of sexual category. . . . 2) the concept of sex role, which assigns domestic service and attendance upon all females. . . . 3) the imposition of male rule through institutions: patriarchal religion, the proprietary family, marriage, "The Home." (pp. 111-112)

Millet's manifesto was well received within the radical feminist community and eventually became a national bestseller. Her theory of sexual politics even garnered a "Marxist Appreciation" in 1971 from a group of socialist feminists. Nevertheless, "Sexual Politics" was never fully accepted as an ideological panacea for radical feminist conflicts concerning the means and ends of feminist resistance. Millet's sociological argument suffered from the same shortcomings as other manifestoes by failing to outline a viable plan of action to eliminate female oppression. Critics, such as Kipp Dawson, argued that Millet's dialectical orientation toward feminist sociology did not transcend the patriarchal society it purported to critique: "[Millet's] inability to see clearly how a sexual revolution could come about . . . is itself a product of that same class of society which created, molded, and depends on . . . sexual politics" (p. 5).

Dawson's response to Millet's "Sexual Politics" highlighted the conceptual impasse radical feminist authors encountered in emulating New Left manifestoes. In terms of rhetorical invention, the practice impeded the conception of a feminist identity independent of the New Left methodology of dialectical historicism, which feminists used to discern patterns of oppression from the history of male supremacy. By following the dialectical sequence of radical historicism, authors advanced feminist programs to resist physical, psychological, and social oppression according to the organizational principles of the manifesto genre, which demanded that grievances and proposals respond to the historical forms of oppression identified in the prologue. Authors began manifestoes with chronicles of male supremacy that focused on selective categories of oppression deemed important by the organizations for whom they wrote and responded to their groups' interpretations of history when proposing what was to be done to bring about a feminist revolution. Appropriation of the organizational principles of the manifesto provided consistency to the arguments advanced in different documents, but it led to a proliferation of dogmatic viewpoints on the proper course of feminist resistance.

### *Implications*

Generic appropriation, the making over of the substantive, stylistic, and situational characteristics of a rhetorical genre, is a means by which rhetors in a subordinate position may contest domination, affirm solidarity, and gain victories within an imposed system of symbolism. The rhetorical tactic may take the form of parody, rhetorical hybrids, or as with radical feminist manifestoes, mimicry performed to acquire an authoritative voice within an established order of representations.

By seizing upon the genre of the New Left manifesto, feminist authors rendered a popular form of protest useful to radical women for solidifying the second women's movement in America. But facing discordance in the movement similar to that which male authors of manifestoes experienced in the New Left, radical feminist writers could agree on the sources of women's oppression in society, but not on which forms were most damaging, and how feminists ought to respond with action to bring about a revolution. By 1975, organizational disputes in radical feminism and political setbacks, such as the failure to secure the passage of an Equal Rights Amendment, led to the decline of radical feminist manifesto writing. Radical feminist rhetoric gave way to the discourse of the better-established liberal wing of the women's movement, who experienced a number of successes during the 1970s. As radical women became absorbed in liberal feminism, they contributed their ideas to more professionalized organizations willing to seek change within the establishment, such as the National Organization for Women, the Women's Equity Action League, the National Women's Political Caucus, and other groups.

Radical feminists' generic appropriation of the rhetoric of the manifesto invites further interrogation of the discursive strategy by rhetoricians, since the practice of appro-



priation implies both emancipatory and hegemonic outcomes for oppressed groups. In any case, the sophistication of radical feminists' appropriation of the manifesto genre must be acknowledged, for the conventional and historical determinants of the form allow for only a thin margin of error in its polemical rhetoric. As Lyon has observed of the textual dynamics of the genre: "The formal membrane of the manifesto must hold together an unlikely dyad of idiosyncratic rage and utopian social scripture, for it aims to programmatize anger as it creates audiences" (p. 101). Writing their rage in a genre that eschews negotiation in favor of polarization, radical feminists appropriated a speaking position that allowed them to raise awareness about the women's liberation movement in a way that less inflammatory forms of rhetoric could not have achieved.

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