Can the Third Wave Speak?

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Abstract
This article suggests that self-proclaimed third-wave
feminism is tied to institutional imperatives and impasses
in Women's Studies. It offers an alternative contemporary
feminist tendency in "cryptofeminism," which suspends
the necessity of affirming feminist identity and reflects
critically on the unpredictable uses and legacies of
feminist thought.

Résumé
Cet article suggère que la troisième vague féministe auto-
proclamée est reliée aux réalités institutionnelles et aux
impasses dans l'Études des femmes. Elle offre une
tendance féministe contemporaine en "cryptoféminisme"
qui suspend la nécessité d'affirmer l'identité féministe et
reflète avec un regard critique les usages imprévisibles et
des legs de la pensée féminine.

The metaphor of waves is a rich one for thinking about the time, space, and motion of thought but insofar as it has been applied to modern Western feminism, what the metaphor seems to have provided is fairly narrow: a periodization that borrows one feature of waves in particular - the sense in which waves constitute movement. What distinguishes feminist theory, for better or worse, from other veins of cultural and political theorizing are its complex historical links to social movement, to activism and to a politics of identity. Whether or not one should add "always" to that statement, though, is currently a very vexed question, since "always" has a way of becoming definitional, and prescriptive of a particular future for feminist theory. The current debates about the future of Women's Studies and the nature of the relationship between second- and third-wave feminisms turn on differences over the question of what makes theoretical exploration feminist, if not an instrumental relation to activism outside of the academy and not the identity-consolidating reference back to a feminist subject (Wiegman 1999/2000, 121). Indeed, one might say that the debates turn on the issue of prescriptiveness itself, and specifically moral prescriptiveness, attributed and interpreted in different ways.

This essay will affirm a current feminist tendency that leaves open the question of what makes theory feminist and so suspends the "always" that links feminist theory to activism and identity. Because what I shall call "cryptofeminism" abjures these prerequisites, it does not announce itself as a tendency or as a distinct third wave of feminist knowledge production. By imposing some coherence on this kind of work and giving it a name, I mean to propose that our sense of what constitutes a third wave of feminist theorizing be

enlarged from the kind of work that defines itself - and is marketed - as such, to include work that does not seek its guarantee of legitimacy or effectivity in familiar feminist ways.

But why cryptofeminist? The prefix "crypto" distinguishes the tendency I am naming from postfeminism, a construction of the popular media which, in the mid-1980s, sparked a trend of argumentation to the effect that the need for feminism as a movement and a mode of thought had waned or disappeared. This was apparently due to feminism's own successes, to a perception that feminism no longer seemed worthwhile, or to feminism's rejection by a younger generation of women who refused to be seen as victims. Since that time, we have seen the continuous recycling of media lifestyle pieces focused on younger women's adoption of porn styles or middle-class women's happy return to domesticity. "Post" in this construction means historically subsequent and also carries the sense of a phenomenon that is predicated on the cancellation or rejection of what came before. But the prefix "post" can also signify an uncertain, unpredictable continuation of something prior, perhaps on a different level or in different domains or in different terms, and in this sense, by cryptofeminism I do mean something like postfeminism. The value of the prefix, "crypto," though, is precisely its ambiguity and undecidability. On the one hand, "crypto" has a neutral, scientific sense that I wish to call into play, where it refers to a life form with a concealed part that is below the observable surface - as in cryptobranch: "an animal with concealed or covered branchiae or gills" (OED). In this sense, cryptofeminism describes a kind of work that is feminist in a subterranean way; its analysis is indebted to developments in late twentieth-century feminist thought but it is not integrated into a feminist tradition because it has exceeded what has seemed to be the proper or recognizeable scope of feminist inquiry, understood as the struggle for gender equality or the enunciation of sexual difference. But I also wish to call upon the more colloquial sense of the prefix "crypto,"

seen in such terms as crypto-communist, or crypto-fascist, in which the prefix almost always serves as an accusation of concealed adherence. Insofar as cryptofeminism calls up this sense, the term registers something of feminism's current unfashionability - the way that calling someone a feminist would indeed function in many contexts today as an accusation. Maybe partly for this reason, and partly for more sound intellectual reasons (for instance, a discomfort with identitarian struggles organized around notions of authentic being) cryptofeminism does not flag its concerns or its methodology as specifically feminist. The significance of this implicit distancing, or disidentification, or disregard for origins, is not decidable in any abstract, totalizing way. It is certainly true that feminism within the corporate academy is not immune to trends and to the commodifications of newness, but this does not seem to me to be the only condition that explains cryptofeminism. I see this tendency as a development out of feminist appropriations of poststructuralist theories of power and subjectivity and as the result of a self-reflexive turn within feminism which has brought with it a curiosity about the history of feminist critical tools and an inclination to be watchful about the kind of work that they do. Cryptofeminism may well be a peculiarly Anglo-American phenomenon and probably also a discipline-specific one too - work that is fairly localized in historically-inflected cultural studies. Feminist knowledge-production may not look like this from the point of view of other disciplines, and it is doubtful that it looks like this globally: all the more reason to be clear that I do not mean to position it as a universal frontier.

Under the banner of cryptofeminism, I think of a number of examples within cultural studies, since that is my field: the recent work of Lauren Berlant on "national sentimentality," in which she traces the legacy of 19th-century feminism's elevation of a sentimental identification with suffering into "the rights talk of national and international public spheres." Berlant argues that in "the eradication of pain [for] the achievement of

justice" in contemporary American public culture, we should read the legacy of a feminism that focused on spectacular and exceptional instances of private pain (2000, 44). By "exaggerating the value of transformations that happen primarily within individual consciences," this sentimental feminism of the later 19th-century participated in laying the groundwork for this reduction of the social and of subjectivity to the zone of trauma (44). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is also doing work that exposes some of the new problems produced by feminism's successful incorporation into broader political discourses. Her work on the "credit-baiting" of poor women in rural India through World Bank and NGO programmes that extend loans to women in the name of female empowerment criticizes the incorporation of "unexamined universalist feminism" within institutions of global governance (1999, 220, 245). For Spivak, the extension of credit to poor rural women, celebrated in the West as a panacea for developing-world poverty, puts liberal feminist ideas in the service of global capital as it endeavours to extend its reach. There is also the recent work of Mary Poovey, no doubt the most provocative example of cryptofeminism I can think of, since she goes so far as to frame her current work on the history of the disciplining of Western forms of knowledge as an attempt to move beyond the "paradigm of denunciation" and unmasking which she believes characterizes her own earlier, feminist work on Victorian writing and gender (1998, 23). What interests her now, she writes in the Introduction to A History of the Modern Fact, are epistemological developments that "predat[e] - but prepar[e] for - the emergence of the identity categories that dominate so much of late 20th-century [social and cultural] criticism" (1998, 25). Like Berlant and Spivak, Poovey can be seen to be stepping back from the givenness of "women" as an identity category and as a category that guarantees progressivity, and asking how it can congeal and be put to use in unexpected and problematic ways.

       In trying to suggest what might be valuable

about cryptofeminism, I am trying, in part, to find a way of accounting for my bewilderment at the evaporation of a recognizably feminist agenda or identity in most of my own current work, though I would like to think that it comes out of feminist theorizing. To be more precise, the work comes out of an internal critique of feminist thought that studied feminism's implication in modern forms of liberal governmentality or statecraft (Foucault 1991, 102). From there, I have moved on to research focussed on childhood, citizenship, and globalization: from "woman" as the subject and object of moral governance, in other words, to the child as the target of schemes of subject-shaping. But since I keep finding myself in a position where I am supposed to have something to say about third-wave feminism, even though I feel distant from the trenches and even though I actually think of my students as the third wave and my mentors as the second wave, I have decided that I am probably not alone in this limbo. This position is not exceptional, in fact it is probably not even generational, and so it might be interesting to ask how it stands alongside a different tendency that proclaims itself as feminism's third wave: how does cryptofeminism do a different kind of work from some of the other books on the shelves - some academic, some more popular, but sharing a kind of programmatic promise with titles such as Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist, Doing Feminism and Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future?

       If self-reflexivity is one of the hallmarks of this self-proclaimed third-wave work, there are nevertheless different kinds of reflexivity, and I want to suggest that cryptofeminism's reflexivity is more open and uncertain in its effects than the kind exemplified in these sorts of third-wave primers, which tend toward autobiographical explorations of the politics of subjectivity and self-representation (Gillis and Munford 2004, 173). The critical reflexivity of cryptofeminism, instead of focusing on the theme of women's experience (now diversified in its range and adapted to contradiction), scrutinizes feminism's own conceptual instruments and the traditional

forms of legitimation of feminist knowledge, namely, the evidence of personal experience, the relevance of knowledge to activism, and knowledge's capacity to provoke identification, thereby producing a collective feminist subject. Attentive to differences in historical contexts, cryptofeminism recognizes, for instance, that to invoke the authenticity of experience (the second-wave slogan "the personal is political") in the age of a diminishing public sphere is not to counter oppression with consciousness-raising but to enlist the currency of personalized, therapeutic rhetoric in what Berlant describes as a culture of private pain. Instead of providing a "roadmap to activism" (Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 23) or leading to the articulation of a generationally-coherent standpoint, therefore, cryptofeminism's methodological and historical reflexivity leads in unpredictable directions, towards unforeseeable objects and problems that emerge from a reckoning with multiplicity and mutability in the operations of power and - perhaps most especially - a reckoning with feminism's own lessons about the dangers of reduplicating problems of normativity and hegemony through a discourse of identity.

Gillis and Munford note that self-identified third-wave feminism defines itself against an academy that it perceives to have "little impact on the material needs of women, which can only be redressed by activist activities" (2004, 169). However, this anti-academic stance does not prevent the self-identified third wave from finding a place within the academy, specifically within Women's Studies programmes and departments where its activist and generationally-specific credentials are absorbed as a means of renewing some of those traditionally feminist forms of legitimation I've named above. Thus, while other observers worry that the third wave's framing of itself in terms of generational antagonism leads to unproductive divisiveness within feminism and "threatens the progress of feminist politics" (Gillis and Munford 2004, 176), in some institutional settings that very antagonism underpins a kind of

paradoxical relegitimation, an affirmation that the struggle is still, at least, being renewed, and still characterized by spontaneous, autonomous pulls toward an activist outside to the academy. Cryptofeminism, in contrast, is not amenable to these young versus old, outside versus inside the academy oppositions: it is a matter of theoretical orientation rather than age, and insofar as it is located within the academy, in disciplines outside of Women's Studies, it does not need to foster anti-academic, young women's activist and autobiographical feminist discourse, as a kind of ethnographic support and institutional-political necessity. What gives cryptofeminism its minimal coherence as an alternative tendency, is not a particular theme or agenda of thought, but its movement away from the kinds of impasses which attend the reinforcement of those traditional forms of legitimation in the place where feminist knowledge-production has been institutionalized, in the field of Women's Studies.

There are other possibilities to explore in the metaphor of waves, besides the idea of movements in linear succession: the way that waves move in two directions, with a forward and backward movement; the way that sound waves radiate outward, dispersing and diffusing as they go; and finally, the way that waves move particles around, and sheer accident or contingency determines what particles, what remainders, they leave in their wake - as well as what will be made of those remainders.

The idea of a multidirectional movement complicates the emphasis on periodization that goes along with the most familiar invocation of feminism's three waves as a three-point linear succession. Feminism's waves are not self-identical, unidirectional, or discrete. As Cecily Devereux has argued, in spite of attempts of "post-imperial, third-wave" feminists to distance themselves from early twentieth-century feminism framed within imperialist and eugenical ideologies, some of the positions of those early Canadian feminists (like the demands for birth control, sexual education, and support

for mothers) persist in present pro-choice feminist agendas (2005, 12). Drawing the line between the second and third waves is a necessarily arbitrary and political act, since we lack a clear sense of the boundaries of the second wave (Bailey 1997, 19). For instance, the critique of the unicity of "woman" and the uniformity of women's oppression which has become axiomatic in the third wave can be seen as an internal critique - as the second wave's critique of itself - and hence this wave may be understood as already containing within itself a kind counter-movement, which casts back certain presuppositions. What similarly interferes with an easy sense of feminist waves moving in linear succession is the fact that certain underground, low-budget forms of third-wave feminist cultural production (photocopied 'zines, graffiti) not only resemble in their mode of production "all those uncopyrighted, mimeographed articles that made their way across the country during the second wave" (Orr 1997, 37-38), they also return to the manifesto tone of the early second wave, to the extent of reinvoking and rehabilitating some of that moment's key catchwords - "solidarity" and "patriarchy," to name a few. Riot Grrrls can sound a bit like Valerie Solanas, and so clearly there is a complex temporality at work in the third wave, which may involve, as one of its features, different chronotopes or space/times for academic and subcultural feminism - not to mention for Anglo-American feminism and the feminisms of other geopolitical spaces.

It is certainly possible to identify a number of features that distinguish the self-proclaimed third wave: there are the themes of multiplicity and contradiction and ambivalence; the new centre of gravity in sexuality (with personal testaments to the power of transgressive pleasure clearly indebted to the early 1980s pro-sex critique of anti-porn feminism), and the axiomatic sense of the entanglement of racism and sexism which is perhaps one of the reasons why we see more situated, textured, micrological and empirical forms of analysis (one hardly ever hears talk of the symbolic order

anymore, for instance); there is the displacement of the assumption of a mechanical solidarity by talk of coalitions or temporarily achieved affinities (Dean 1997, 245); there is the prominence of the strategy of ironic appropriation and complicitous critique, especially of received modes of femininity; there is an unmistakeable intercalation with popular culture. Indeed, one of the most striking characteristics of the third wave is its "complex and shifting, rather than simple and binary" (Wald 2002, 194) relationship with consumerism. Third wave feminism is a fully mediatized feminism; it represents itself in a hall of mirrors, in other words, in a field that profers different representations of feminism - as consumable image (what we might call commodity feminism), sometimes as historical image capable of informing a self-reflexive, genealogical awareness of feminism as a discontinuous struggle, but more often than not as an image which simply announces that feminism is history, in the sense of being a thing dead and buried.

The striking emergence of a cluster of practices centring on the signifier "girl"' is another distinguishing feature of self-identified third-wave feminism. These practices range from the conspicuous, strategic performance of girlishness by female performers attempting to create avenues of feminist agency, to the appearance of "girl studies" as a new ethnographic subfield of Women's Studies. On the one hand, the discovery of the girl as a new feminist frontier can be understood in terms of a project to disentangle girlhood from associations with helplessness and triviality; however, as Gayle Wald has argued, the risk attending these attempts at rearticulating girlhood is that of rehabilitating a new ethnocentric universal. So even as the appearance of the girl at the centre of the third wave provides another distinguishing feature, it is also indicative of the way in which the third wave encounters and to some extent repeats familiar problematics.

The prominence of the girl, and the new emphasis within feminist cultural studies on youth

culture, more generally, speak to the self-proclaimed third wave's interest in questions of generational difference, and indeed to the way in which it has participated in the construction of itself as the daughter of the second wave. If sisterhood was the preferred figure for female relationality in the second wave, the mother-daughter relation seems to be the figuration that drives the third wave and this shift in figures of female relationality registers another shift, from a focus on women's difference from men to differences between women themselves. So a second metaphor seems to be embedded in our sense of feminism's waves, as soon as we start describing a third. When we talk about feminism's three waves, it seems difficult not to imagine successive generations of politicized women in corsets and serious political t-shirts and ironic fish-nets (in that order), all related along a maternal line that joins and divides them through the dynamics of reproduction, inheritance, and Oedipal conflict.

To be fair, the generational metaphor is not always a liability in feminist discourse: it has been used productively, for example, in psychoanalytic understandings of the trouble that 20th-century feminism has had in acknowledging aggression and rivalry between women (Creet 1991; Whitford 1994). The generational paradigm can be a conceptual lever that opens questions about feminism's repressions and internal struggles - and those struggles do sometimes play themselves out along generational lines. But even then, there can be certain oversimplication at work, since these struggles, as Diane Elam has argued, are often really about coming to terms with power in feminism and the historically-acquired power of feminism. More specifically, the struggles are about the thorny problem of institutional incorporation which has raised new questions for feminism that a model of power focused on marginalization and exclusion is ill-equipped to address. "If feminists have achieved positions of power, and if feminist arguments have achieved a certain cultural weight, how is feminism to deal with this phenomenon?," asks Elam (1997, 56-57).

Perhaps the principal means through which feminism has managed the problem of power is identity politics, or what Elam describes as "patriarchy with a face-lift" (64): a politics that recognizes individuals insofar as they conform to a particular identity category; hierarchies of difference and identity; and a relation that establishes identity through opposition. Whether we see identity politics as a singular event that explodes the false universality of women's experience at some point late in the second wave or as the transhistorical project of feminism itself, what is striking at this juncture is how aptly these features of identity politics describe the generationalism of self-proclaimed third-wave feminism, which finds its coherence in a differentiation from a second wave positioned as prior in a family line.

I am certainly not the first to register a worry about the work of the generational metaphor. My own worry about the generational metaphor has to do with the way that it functions as an incitement to identity politics. The metaphor sets in motion a mirror game, whereby on the one side (the side of institutionally-located feminists), invoking the mothers-and-daughters figuration functions passive-aggressively calling up the obligations of familial loyalty and indebtedness, while on the other side, rejection of the dutiful daughter position through the assertion of a transgressive generational difference ensures that this tendency remains constitutively bound - in the mode of rebellious offspring - to the tradition that it thinks it is departing from. I do not mean to trivialize the work of younger women with the use of the term "rebellion"; my point is that there is an incitement to frame third-wave work as generational, and I want to suggest that this incitement may be found in maternal gestures of voice-giving which stem from the desire to "neutralize a perceived threat of nonreproductivity or nonattribution," as Judith Roof puts it, in post-second-wave work (1997, 73). A rebellion that is all in the family is at least a sign of progeny, of continued life, and a sign of life which may perhaps also serve to

identify and recentre a specifically Anglo-American parentage. So the daughter's rebellion may be the counterpart of a strategy of crisis-management, and may amount to taking up an autobiographical voice that is bequeathed from elsewhere, from a place of anxiety and relative institutional privilege. Hence the worry that is registered in the title of my essay, which asks a question about who is speaking and under what conditions a third wave could possibly speak.

I return now to the suggestion I made earlier that there is a tendency historically coincident with the self-identified third wave that does not speak as such, by which it will now be clear that I mean: a tendency that does not frame its project in generational terms or, indeed, in identitarian ones, and perhaps could not even say how it is connected to practical struggle, since it has exceeded its original organization around an identitarian domain and around one particular form of subjection. I will try to give cryptofeminism a less nebulous shape now by comparing its way of dealing with the problem of moral prescriptiveness to that of the generationally-defined third wave, since these two tendencies, as I suggested at the outset, both respond to a problematization of moral prescriptiveness within feminism, although they attribute and interpret that problem in different ways.

As I have observed, the self-proclaimed third wave interprets the principles and dispositions of the second wave as normative, and hence as moral in the sense of a code that is embodied and enforced by an authority that waves the flag of sisterhood but acts like a puritan mother. The rebellion that takes shape in relation to this moral spectre assumes the form of the bad daughter's impropriety - her refusal to inherit second-wave property. These gestures are not necessarily unconscious; they can be self-reflexive and ironic. But even then, there is still the stabilization of a sense of generational difference that, in turn, stabilizes a family narrative of feminism.

Here is an example from an essay in a collection entitled, Jane Sexes It Up: True Confessions of Feminist Desire, in which the editor, Merri Lisa Johnson, provides autobiographical reflections on her inheritance of a second-wave reading of violent sex as misogynist violation and wittily figures this ambivalently-received inheritance in terms of the influence of an eccentric aunt. Johnson describes the appearance of this overly directive aunt at moments in her own life in which "pleasure and power interlace," such as in her enjoyment of the representation of violent masculinity in David Fincher's 1999 film, Fight Club. "Interpreting the correspondence between sex scenes and fight scenes in terms of violence against women seems off," she observes: "Is feminism helping me to see the movie more clearly, then, or is it a lady wearing a fancy hat in the row ahead of me in a theater? [...] As feminists, we've learned to critique [violent masculinity], we know there's something wrong with it, it has been removed to the space of transgression, that which we are not supposed to want" (Johnson 2002, 42-43).

And thus, she observes, "My doubts about feminism as a mode of analysis reveal themselves most irresolutely in moments like these, when my feelings or experiences conflict with what I think a feminist should feel, when I respond as a feminist - flattening out the nuances of life and love according to this false icon of the cultural imagination ('Go get something pierced,' Aunt Feminism shoos me from her room)" (2002, 38-39).

As Johnson argues that the inherited critiques are inadequate to the ambivalence of her own generation, her point entrenches a sense of generational difference that, in turn, reinforces a family narrative of feminism. Her essay acknowledges and indeed probes the constructed nature of pleasure and desire, but it is worth noting the way in which it is shaped by an assumption (an expectation? a demand?) that the purview of third-wave discourse is historically-differentiated experience, that it is this kind of generationally-inflected native informancy. Cryptofeminism, in contrast, is not bound by this self-referential scope, and this is partly

because it sees the problem of moral prescriptiveness somewhat differently, as history's bequest of a proper sphere for feminist thought, and it responds to this problem by adopting distance from the moral-political demands associated with that proper sphere.

From the point of view of cryptofeminism, the problem of moral prescriptiveness has to do with the way that feminist theorizing traditionally has been forced to seek its legitimacy in identitarianism, sentimental power, and activist relevance, and especially the way that these traditional forms of legitimation have been institutionalized. While it is clear that any intellectual project or institutional site organized around a category of social identity is vulnerable to impermanence and hence to becoming primarily defensive, as Wendy Brown has noted there is something particularly perverse about the way that Women's Studies has come to sustain itself as the arena that re-enacts "in an emotional register" the discovery of the incoherence and exclusivity of its own foundational category, women (Wiegman 1999/2000, 215). Brown maintains that the field is bound to rehearse a "compensatory cycle of guilt and blame" precisely because it is structured by an "original...conceptual subordination of race (and all other forms of social stratification) to gender" (Wiegman 125). And Women's Studies continues to be fundamentally structured this way because it has not ceased to see its raison d'être as primarily affective and political: as Robyn Wiegman puts it, it exists to reproduce "the social organization of women as a political sign," to generate a sense of belonging in subjects who will see themselves, in spite of it all, as one with the field's object of study (121).

Needless to say, this political and affective project reproduces the intellectual problem of identity studies, that schemas of power developed to understand oppressions related to identity fall short of grasping the historicity and multifacetedness of subjection. Such identitarian schemas also tend to underwrite political projects that necessitate the codification of specific social markings as positivist, isolatable attributes which then become means of bureaucratic regulation (Brown 1995, 66). The problem is not just that the contemporary institutional context of Women's Studies fosters a version of the third wave that is bound by the kinds of identitarian constraints I've been associating with the generational metaphor. It is also that Women's Studies seems ill-equipped to recognize and respond to a changed context of knowledge-production of which one important feature is the assimilation of feminist discourses. Women's Studies own institutionalized demand for knowledge with evident ties to identity and social activism currently dovetails with the structural (ie., funding-related) demand for practical, instrumental knowledge that would tie all of our knowledge-production in the humanities and social sciences to bureaucratic projects of social change or improvement, with change or improvement often implicitly invested with the imperatives of capitalist innovation or national competitiveness in a global context.

Cryptofeminism responds to late twentieth-century feminism's internal critique of the universality of "woman" and more especially to genealogical work on feminism's historical entanglement in class formation and race making and the deployment of sexuality with a wariness about doing work that would authorize itself using the traditional legitimations of feminist intellectual work - the sentimental claim to be working on behalf of others (Wiegman 1999/2000, 116), "the disguise of some female virtue" (Whitford 1994, 387) or the logic of pain and suffering that re-naturalizes identity and thereby "resubjugates the resisting subject" (Brown 1995, 64). If the above-named historical processes have formed some of the conditions of possibility for the construction of "woman" as a moral category, then perhaps it makes sense to resist the pressure from within and without feminism to frame our questions in the terms of sentiment or virtue or injury.

In arriving at that last point, I realize that I arrive at a contradiction that exposes my own strategy of

oversimplification, because clearly, even from my description of the self-identified third-wave, it is clear that this tendency sees itself as resisting pressure from within and without feminism to frame its questions in virtuous terms. What this shows is that we should not attempt to draw sharp lines between tendencies: it is probably true that sometimes one is a cryptofeminist and sometimes one engages in the kind of feminist generational discourse that I have been describing, depending on the context and the nature of the question. Perhaps the difference is between a narrowly generational discourse that serves the purpose of a kind of ethnographic informancy, and a broader genealogical (as opposed to generational) sense of feminisms' histories that moves one out to other questions, so that something that might initially have been called feminist theorizing outgrows the confines of gender or women's experience and takes one to other domains, which now absolutely require a historical sense of the impact that feminist discourse has had on conceptualizations of such things as the public sphere, political community, and minority struggle. As I suggested earlier, waves radiate outward, dispersing and diffusing as they go, and they also leave material in their wake. Part of what cryptofeminism does is to track what has been made of those remainders, or - to borrow Joan Scott's more elegant phrasing - what "shifted geological formations" the "reverberations" of feminism have left behind (2002, 11).

Let me end with a caveat: Of course one needs to worry about how this kind of dispersal and transcoding of feminism into cryptofeminism is an intellectual development that is shaped by other kinds of conditions, ideological and structural ones. What does it mean to be cryptic when you are already pronounced to be passé? As Cathryn Bailey points out, the self-proclaimed third wave is undoubtedly influenced by "the negative stereotypes [of feminism] issuing from backlash media"; the hall of mirrors in which feminism represents itself today "not only influence[s] those hostile to feminism but may also work insidiously on feminists,"

and not just, as she proposes, the younger, "developing feminists" who explicitly distance themselves from the second wave (1997, 24), but also those feminist lifeforms - to return to my scientific conceit - who seem to be keeping their distinguishing branchiae or gills concealed.

One of the defining contradictions of our moment, indeed, is this contradictory coexistence of feminism's social and institutional assimilation, on the one hand, with what Barbara Godard (2002) has described as the wholesale decapitalization of feminist cultural production under conditions of neoliberal restructuring, on the other. Writing of the fortunes of state-sponsored feminist cultural production in Canada after two decades of restructuring, Godard observes that the promotion of market values (through the new funding imperatives to address a large audience, to promote high cultural value or produce practical, applied knowledge) has had particularly withering consequences for feminist cultural production with a broadly critical and transformative project.

And yet, in spite of this destruction of state-funded feminist spaces of cultural production, as E. Ann Kaplan reminds us, feminism has made certain gains since the 1970s and 1980s and these gains have "creat[ed] new situations with problems that could not have been foreseen when second-wave women made their demands for gender equality, fair treatment and social change to accommodate women's needs" (Kaplan 2003, 5). Among other developments, Kaplan is thinking of the way in which motherhood and other kinds of domestic labour can now be represented in the problematic, class-bound language of choice (4). Somewhat along the same lines, Patricia Mann has argued that among the radical social unmoorings effected by the advent of neoliberalism is the "social enfranchisement of women" that entails major dislocations to the patriarchal middle-class family. This state of things has a further unintended consequence in the increasing centrality of what used to be considered women's issues, most notably the issue of childcare (1997, 229, 223). On the one

hand, then, many of the conditions of possibility for feminist research and cultural production of the exploratory, dissenting kind have disappeared; on the other hand, we have to reckon with the ambiguous consequences of certain feminist successes. There are, in short, different kinds of amnesias that need to be guarded against: there is the kind of amnesia that fails to register change (feminism's institutionalization), there is also the kind of amnesia that is too distracted by what seems new to observe constellations of the past and present in our midst and take account of important losses.

I do not have a comfortable or satisfying way of reconciling cryptofeminism with these structural conditions, but I think what can be said is that cryptofeminism might be equipped to take account of such conditions, precisely insofar as neoliberalism involves an absorption and co-optation of some of the language and imperatives of second-wave feminism - including, as I suggested earlier, the idea that knowledge-production must legitimate itself through some evident link to social betterment. Maybe the historical experience of feminism's institutionalization and assimilation that cryptofeminism takes as its point of departure and turns into methodological first principle - to avoid assuming "fixed relationships between entities [and to] treat them [instead] as the mutable effects of (temporally, culturally, historically) specific power dynamics" (Scott 2002, 6) - positions cryptofeminism to be able to critique the current constraints on our knowledge-production that go by progressive names. In any case the challenge seems to me to be one of finding a register for speaking about the present that avoids both the apocalypticism that would see our moment as an endtime of feminist history and the epochalism that would fixate on the idea of distinct and self-identical eras, permitting our own to be heralded as totally new.

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