Part III

Temporality and the Political

Temporality and the Political I: Utopia

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Refugees from Utopia: Remembering, Forgetting and the Making of *The Feminist Memoir Project*

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Rachel Blau DuPlessis and I, old friends from the Women's Liberation Movement, discovered in the late eighties a shared indignation – and grief. The books about the sixties were beginning to come out. Histories mostly written by men who had been there, these books skirted the Women's Liberation Movement with a finesse it was hard to quarrel with. One would stop the story before the movement came on the scene. Another would deal with it as an impressive side show – noises off. At around the same time in histories and general discussions, women's movements, along with a range of Black radical movements, were being corralled into a closed pen to keep in dangerously limited examples of 'identity politics.' The charge was that our movements had been chauvinistic in ways that the original democratic and civil rights movements of the earlier sixties were not.

Rachel and I recognized some truth in this critical analysis of some movement developments, but a kind of general constriction of meaning and empathy seemed to be at the heart of this critical writing. Had feminists and anti-racists really claimed to be unified tribes, chanting about the wonderful true woman and the special beauty of Black? As we remembered the complex cultures of women's mobilization in the late sixties and seventies, ours had been a mass movement and had included multitudes. Our problem had not been nationalist claims and narrow interests. Rather, the movement initiated a wild proliferation of opinion and (often utopian) desire. We compared memories, and our sense was that what had lain just one step beyond the initial excitement of shared

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discovery was chaos. Chaos and skepticism about all fixed ideas of identity. Sometimes tribal, sometimes cosmopolitan, second wave feminism had never been theoretically unified, and it always contained within it rival claims about feminism's subject and ground for analysis. Feminists differ fundamentally in their understanding of women's near universal subordination and most contemporary feminist thought has developed under the sign of difference.

Sometimes an activist's nightmare, this very instability has also been a source of movement strength. As Rachel and I were to write: 'feminism [has] constantly broadened its concept of liberation and deepened its recognition of the difficulty of achieving that liberation, the limitations of its own founding ideas' (DuPlessis and Ann Snitow 1998, p. 18). The narrow accounts we were reading seemed to us a subtle form of dismissal. We felt both too soon forgotten and actively misremembered.

This paradoxical mixture of accelerated forgetting and distorted remembering raised questions for us about our own movement story that we couldn't answer. What had we actually done, and, even more elusive, who had we been? What trace of those actions and selves did we hope to leave behind? Would any of the sweep of our intentions survive us? Could the women's movement leave historical markers of itself that we ourselves could continue to identify with and approve? Or had our past been a brief utopian moment, separate from other experience, exciting, but destined to be essentially irretrievable – not only for others who were not there, but even for ourselves?

Around 1992, thinking of all this – the variety of the movement, its boldness, its erosion, the limited accounts of the sixties – with a primitive urge to record and save, Rachel and I put out a far-reaching call for memoirs of early second wave women's movement activism. We asked people to describe what brought them into the movement and to reflect on what they thought they were doing. We wanted them to add depth to memory and to explore the rich variety of interests that we remembered but couldn't find in the record so far.

We also started to seek explanations for what we began to recognize as an older habit of forgetting past women's mobilizations. What were the motors for forgetting what women do? Feminists seem to start from scratch every other generation, a pattern we could trace in Western history since the story of feminism began in the Enlightenment. We wrote that *The Feminist Memoir Project* was meant to stand 'against historical forgetting.' This bit of brave rhetoric still rings for us, though it became obvious from the first that difficulties would abound. Remembering was going to be much harder than we had thought. Could memoir make

the journey into history? Memory and history were in some unstable relationship, and we were trying to intervene in a process we had only dimly grasped.

We began to conceive of *The Feminist Memoir Project* as both more and less than an accurate account of the movement that had so transformed our lives. Beyond any questions of faithfulness or fact, there was a tussle here, an agon of memory. Who would interpret the movement? Whom would memory serve? What atmosphere would envelop the movement in public retrospect?

As the memoirs came in and were subject to an arduous editing process, we came to think that the stories were best understood as a complex mixture of primary and secondary sources. Here were the actual activists, offering their fingerprints, tracings of who they were that hadn't changed and were still entirely recognizable after 20 years. Here were the voices of the kinds of people who made this particular, passionate attempt at changing history. That earlier time seemed present again in their words, like a scent suddenly released from a sealed bottle.

At the same time, these stories they told about themselves had already taken various hortatory shapes. Twenty years after the initial burst of intense experience, a number of narrative conventions had taken a firm hold. Here were tales of conversion or disillusionment, attempts at self-justification, confessions, rousing calls to act, to hope, to inspire and so on. Still, it was obvious that in the medium of this kind of direct memory, facts were shape changers.

After much discussion, we decided that any charges that these stories were interested narratives or that they were sometimes factually inaccurate were beside the point. Memory had inevitably done its selective, simplifying, distorting work. These pieces were both histories and polemics, both raw material and highly compressed narratives, fused together by political desire. Our writers wanted something from these histories and, we freely admitted, so did we. We shared a wish that memory might serve as a fountain of sustained future action. We had a political motive for building up a collective story that would prove enduring – and productive. Our first title for the book was *Live, From Feminism*. The movement was not to be the past: '[w]e intend no elegy,' we proclaimed in our introduction. Though this comment was, unerringly, a symptom that elegy was indeed one operable genre in this work, we wanted much more.

And, therefore, we feared that the 37 pieces we had collected could easily blow away. We ended by calling the book *The Feminist Memoir Project* because we saw remembering as a group undertaking that would

require more and more volumes. Ours would be just one of the first and would foster an ongoing project of remembering. In one of the response pieces that we invited people to contribute at the back of the book, Ellen Willis expressed skepticism about this hope. She wondered what the next and future generations would make of these passionate effusions; the state of (revolutionary) mind they reproduced was rescued from a world of thought, feeling and meaning that was, in 1998, as foreign as the mating practices of Hittites. Feminist theorist Jane Flax had a similar response. She felt that the pieces, feisty and fighting as they were, nevertheless exuded a subtle atmosphere of trauma and loss. Like Ellen Willis, she saw the pieces as sealed off; the writers seemed to know their world was gone and only they had escaped to tell us. No matter how many first-hand accounts we collected, a meta question kept arising: who would listen?

Of course, almost everything and everyone gets forgotten. We know hardly anything about the belief systems or – still more elusive – about the texture of how belief was lived in even the immediate past, for example, in the lives of our grandparents. Hence, to remember is to swim against a great human tide. Cognitive psychologist and theorist of memory, William Hirst, poses this as a problem of what he calls 'stickiness.' Many elements contribute to which memories are 'sticky': which get remembered both by participants and across generations. Some of these mechanisms can be seen as relatively neutral, like a tendency to remember red. Others can be classed as political: to remember is to craft a version of one's own story; to forget, too, can be an active, politically charged choice.

We began our work because it seemed to us that women in the public sphere, particularly active, feminist women, move on a fast track towards oblivion. I began to keep a list of the ways in which women's public acts disappear from the sustained public record. Beyond the universal obscurity shared by all, some of these barriers to memory arise from traits in women's cultural practices and movements themselves, while others arise in a tussle between active political women and their detractors.

History and memory

Like many others, Hirst makes the common, useful, if hard to sustain distinction between 'history' and 'collective memory.' History may tell us that women have been present as key players in any number of movements. Documents exist; first-hand accounts list their names.

But collective memory of these movements is quite a different matter. People retell the past, knocking off edges that don't fit how the group desires to name and know itself. One might expect that remembering movements specifically for and about women would provide an exception – surely in political spaces where men are almost entirely absent, women must be memorable *faute de mieux*? But on the contrary, I have only to consult my high school textbook: the mighty US women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth century were contracted to one paragraph, two names, one issue.

The first time Hirst and I discussed the problem of forgotten women's movements I asked him, 'so, why is women's past activism so much more invisible than men's?' He laughed: 'Because we live in a patriarchy of course!' This flat-footed statement helps; it offers a starting point, an image of women speaking, speaking, speaking while listeners drift away. Women are rarely in charge of the story or in a position to insist on their centrality to the remembered significance of events. They have stories of course, but these are not often enough rehearsed, not inscribed on stones.

An example: Hirst and I are colleagues at The New School, a university with a distinctively radical history. Over the years, I've heard this history recited dozens of times at convocations, graduations, formal dinners and awards ceremonies. This telling and retelling is a perfect example of the 'collective memory' process. The New School identifies its founding moments as inspiring, heroic, and still resonant and moving in the present. The story produces a continuing pride and creates and recreates a treasured identity. The founding moment was a rebellion against politically conservative, repressive, entrenched academics. Columbia University had fired some of its professors who had spoken up against the US entry into World War I. Out of this bold nucleus of heroic *refusniks* (of course all male – Columbia had no women professors) came The New School's first generation, dedicated to the proposition that first-rate social science should be a force in the world, that there was no contradiction between serious academic research and engagement in social action.

During my 23 years at the university I have always loved this story. But there were always bumps, rough places, glitches I was too busy to attend to. In their history of The New School, Peter M. Rutkoff and William B. Scott write the following sentence about Clara Mayer, student organizer and key supporter in the foundation of The New School: '[For] fifty years only Alvin Johnson played a more important part in the life of the New School' (1986, p. 34). What? But maybe she was merely a handmaiden,

a typical role for women then and since? But no. Clara Mayer emerges in this account as a key shaper of The New School project.

And there were many others. One finds their names on The New School's founding document: Mrs George Haven Putnam, Mrs Willard Straight, Mrs Charles L. Tiffany, Mrs Learned Hand, Mrs Henry Bruer, Mrs Ruth Standish Baldwin, Mrs George W. Bacon, with secretary Mrs Victor Sorchan. One cannot easily discover their full names since until the sixties women continued to be cloaked in the names of their husbands. The fact remains: women were central. The school was founded in 1919, a culminating moment in feminist activism, the year before women voted in their first national election. And there it is, at the end of a list of subjects The New School intends to study: 'Women in the modern social order'. Sixty-five per cent of the students were women in the beginning. Seventy per cent of the students at the relatively new undergraduate division, Eugene Lang College, are women now. Far from thinking that these facts require marking, many of my colleagues think that it is liberation enough that gender is not named, not marked. Women often keep their own names now. Gender should not matter, therefore it does not matter. *Point final*.

The problem for feminists is obvious enough and often repeated: to be in a marked category is a subordinate position, but pretending not to be subordinate doesn't actually erase the array of problems that form around gender difference.

Hirst's research, in this and other publications, shows that the most effective way to make part of a story disappear is not, as one might suppose, to drop the story altogether, but rather to tell it again and again leaving out the part one thinks distracting, uninteresting, contrary to the central image or idea one treasures. It is another of his observations that groups seek a shared narrative; whatever doesn't fit fades from the account. And so it is with the story of The New School. Women's central position in the founding and development of the school has simply been dropped. There's an unsettling oxymoron in the concept of women-founders, something, perhaps, diminishing to our proud institution's glory.

The Black Civil Rights Movement provides another example of displacement. No doubt The New School women had habits of self-abnegation and deference to male leaders. Women's self-effacement, fears and the social price they pay for prominence are also elements in this story of forgetting. But African-American women activists had even more reasons to be ambivalent about promoting themselves: they feared damaging the fragile, new-minted stature of movement men.

Women were unquestionably central to the Civil Rights struggle, but when Rosa Parks wanted to speak at the first mass rally after the bus boycott she initiated, she was told she had done enough. Instead, Martin Luther King, Jr presided. Many of these effective, relentless, hard-working movement women live in memoirs but the readily available facts about them haven't been translated into national histories or collective public images. Here are some of the important people from the Civil Rights mobilizations of the fifties and sixties: Daisy Bates, Mary Fair Burks, Johnnie Carr, Septima Poinsette Clark, Dorothy Cotton, Georgia Gilmore, Thelma Glass, McCree Harris, Vivian Malone Jones, Diane Nash, JoAnn Gibson Robinson, Shirley Sherrod and Modjeska Monteith Simkins.

A different kind of example: feminist theorist and psychologist Nancy Chodorow did a study of the generation of female psychoanalysts before her own, women trained in the thirties and forties in the wake of Freud, students of Karen Horney and Melanie Klein. She asked these analysts questions born out of the feminist thinking of the seventies. To her dismay, her interlocutors completely rejected the terms and categories implied by her questions. They didn't think their gender had mattered at all. They didn't think the importance of the figure of the mother in psychoanalytic thought had any direct application to them beyond individual and technical questions of transference with particular patients. They didn't feel any special sisterhood or recognize a disadvantage shared with other women in the field. And on and on.

Initially, this was a story Nancy Chodorow didn't like. She was particularly worried that her interviews kept pushing her towards the conclusion that these mother figures suffered from false consciousness, an old and comfortable explanation feminists avoid for good reason: once again, stupid women don't understand their own situation; once again, they are the objects not the subjects of knowledge about themselves. But without using the explanation of false consciousness, where could Chodorow go while, in disbelief, she listened to her elders reject gender as an important category in their life histories?

She came up with an elegant solution to her problem:

> I came to conclude that my interviewees, rather than being gender-blind, had different forms of gender-consciousness than I and experienced a different salience of gender as a social category and as part of professional identity. Gender salience became a central concept in my research.
>
> (Chodorow 1989, pp. 201)

'Gender salience' is a useful concept for taking apart any illusion that 'gender' itself is a stable, transhistorical category. Chodorow was looking for her own world of feminist thought in the self-understanding of these older analysts she valued, but her terms turned out to be much more historically specific than she had initially understood. 'Gender' is not a free-standing identity, and for her interlocutors it was a variable far less salient than 'Jewish' or 'professional-woman-who-is-also-a-mother.' If feminists are right to see gendered identity as a changeable and contingent category, they must necessarily recognize variations in gender salience. Why would we expect an unchanging through-line in something so liable to manipulation, interpretation and absorption into any number of systems of meaning?

Well and good: but what if one were to add another variable to Chodorow's account, the surprising force in these women's lives of forgetting? Their mothers' generation was responsible for one of the largest drives for universal citizenship since the eighteenth century. Women's suffrage is one reductive way to name it, but the women activists who pushed for the vote wanted so much more. Some of them saw women as special, different from men, while others were skeptical on that point. But a collective sense of outrage at exclusion and restriction unified this struggle, keeping it alive for over 70 years. These militant women activists didn't call themselves feminists, but they shared a sensibility with Chodorow that the women of the thirties and forties she studied lacked. What had happened?

Not a single one of the interviews Chodorow quotes mentions or even faintly resonates with this dramatic, heroic immediate past. Many of these women were born in Europe or the US before women could vote. Their mothers, active or not, had fought in one way or another for the space this first generation of professional women were to so confidently inherit. Yet not a scintilla of memory, of acknowledgement that the generation of women before them couldn't go to school as they went to school, couldn't choose whether or not to be mothers as some of them had chosen, couldn't imagine a work world shared by both men and women. No echo, no gratitude, no continuity, no awe. Nothing. As Shulamith Firestone (1970) and others have argued, psychoanalysis closed down a broader discussion of politics, history and women's place in both. Psychoanalysis has had its own role in the history of forgetting. It pathologized the relationship between generations, locating distortions and forgetting firmly in the realm of the private.

Who wants to forget feminism?

These are examples of active, distorting forgetting taken at random. The New School and Civil Rights sagas emphasize the wish of the fathers to be the true and only begetters of public institutions and historical events. The saga of the psychoanalysts, who had no consciousness of the feminist struggle that created the professional space they inhabited, reveals the younger professionals' ambivalence about just how salient they wished their elders' struggles to be. Ironically, psychoanalysis provides a possible reading of this kind of forgetting between mothers and daughters. How else to emerge as a whole self, free of what Chodorow's fellow explorer of this territory, feminist psychologist Dorothy Dinnerstein (1999 [1976]) saw as the abjection of childhood, 'the chagrins of the nursery'? These analysts preferred a timeless sense of their position. Theirs was a genderless triumph. In these stories, it would seem that both men and women can collude in pushing women into the background in collective accounts of public events.

It is past disappearances like these that mark *The Feminist Memoir Project* with anxiety, with the anticipation that all these amazing works and days of the sixties and seventies will not be recalled a mere moment later, even as soon as in the lives of the sons and daughters. Indeed current forgetting is already far advanced.

Mary Hawkesworth (2004) made a study of the current, commonly repeated announcement of 'the death of feminism' and came up with this stunning conclusion: there is no death of feminism. In fact, feminism is growing worldwide. What we are seeing, she argued in 2004, is not death, but the *wish* that feminism be dead, that it disappear.

Susan Faludi had made a similar analysis in *Backlash* as early as 1991. The free women of the Women's Liberation Movement had made everyone nervous. Faludi studied a wide range of popular and pseudo-scientific literature in the USA which warned women that if they proceeded along this path of rebellion, no one would love them, they would fail to have babies, they would die sad and alone. These admonitory texts were an invitation to forgetting: women, forget this folly; put the rage of feminism behind you; forget, and we will love you again, take you back into the fold.

The reasons for forgetting were overdetermined and this backlash message offered a number of narratives from which the variously disaffected could choose. Sylvia Walby (1970) has catalogued some of these common scenarios of death and disappearance. Some say feminism is

over because it has succeeded. (Feminists have gotten all they wanted and now can go home; younger women don't feel the need to complain like their unlovely elders.) Others say feminism has died because it was narrow and self-absorbed, or internally incoherent, or in error about what women really want, or overwhelmed by cat fights. (In other words, feminists killed the movement themselves because of limitations or mistakes; feminism died by its own hand.)

The idea that backlash itself has lowered feminist vitality rarely figures in these popular death announcements, but a number of feminist theorists have tried to measure the effect of such hostile or dismissive narratives on how feminism looks to a next generation. How much harm does a dismissive story – stripped of glamour and romance – do to the future?

Feminist psychoanalyst and Lacanian theorist Miglena Nikolchina (2004) offers a particularly devastating assessment of the situation: the-death-of-feminism party do not merely wish women to forget; they want women, the mother in women, to entirely disappear, to die so that we all may live – separate, whole and beholden to no one. Nikolchina argues that each generation of feminists thinks that this time women have made it out into the world only to have their public presence buried once again; the collective desire to bury the memory of women's power, presence and influence trumps the facts of the record every time. Each time, women expect to be remembered at last, and each time, to their surprise, they are slated once again – by both men and women – for oblivion.

Scenarios like Hawkesworth's and Nikolchina's are not subject to proof. They are polemical accounts of a recurring injustice. What they introduce is a sense of urgency, an angry demand for active explanation. They recognize that forgetting women's social and political presence is normal, but they see this 'normal' as a psychopathology of everyday life, a serious flaw in the collective project of culture. They hypothesize that, while forgetting is eternal, women's acts are more aggressively forgotten than men's. Women disappear with a difference. Thin as the record may sometimes be, the stories, symbols and rituals in which the patriarch is the central character remain. He has left his trace and, willy-nilly – and with varying faithfulness – we contrive to weave him back into the stories we tell about ourselves.

How forgetting works

Minute by minute, memory by memory, how does it work? Only that which is most 'sticky,' to use Hirst's wonderful word, that which is most

repeated, most narrated, most encoded in ritual, most elevated to the mythic, or most shockingly, publically traumatic survives as the story of who 'they' were in the past and what 'they' did. It helps if there are pictures. It helps if there are martyrs. It helps if there are charismatic and photogenic leaders. It helps if the story is clear and conforms in some way to already existing narratives people are prepared to hear.

The particular problems the Women's Liberation Movement might have in relation to these rules-of-the-memorable are immediately self-evident. I remember our saying angrily to the press at those early rallies, 'Don't take my picture!' We meant: we've been objectified enough. We hated the early images of feminist events showing cool chicks with short skirts who were so beautiful when they were angry. We carried this image phobia quite far, not taking many pictures of each other either. (The search for photographs to accompany *The Feminist Memoir Project* revealed a surprising lack. The contrast with the visual record of the Civil Rights Movement – with its brilliant representations of heroes, martyrs and key historical moments – was dramatic.)

To escape the usual disparagement, we also resisted being written about, refusing to be interviewed unless they sent female reporters. Sometimes the press raided the 'research' pool, sending women out to cover us who had never had the chance to be reporters before. At other times men with microphones and cameras simply stormed away, leaving our events uncovered. We had no notion then of what, a mere moment later, everyone knew, that all ink is good ink, and that ink there will be – or else silence and invisibility.

Though our dream that the revolution would not be televised is still worth consideration, for the most part our refusals of representation were a losing game, expressing a utopian wish instantly defeated in a fast-expanding media universe. We felt our movement was earthshaking, but we had an underdeveloped sense of ourselves as historical actors. Grandiose as we no doubt sometimes were (and at moments the memoirs show this trait grandly), we were amateurs at self-promotion, neophytes as myth-makers, suspicious of what we saw as male styles of heroics. Because revolutionary moments seem to suspend time and are lived vividly, in a glistening present, memory seemed beside the point. We simply didn't register how much representation would come to matter.

Nor did we see any value in having charismatic spokespersons, like Martin Luther King, Jr. The Women's Liberation Movement eschewed leaders. Of course, like all movements, it had them, but they were endlessly savaged by activists who were fighting against the whole

world of leaders, hierarchies and elites (*The Feminist Memoir Project* is full of stories of leaders attacked and chastened). The egalitarian ethos of that time encouraged anonymity, teamwork, anti-hierarchical social structures.

One might well think that at least the Women's Liberation Movement had the intensity of trauma on its side. After all, it had many martyrs too. The victims of domestic violence, rape and illegal abortions were rescued from the private dark where shame and the walls of home had long hidden them. But shame is glamour's antithesis; shame dies hard and forgetting is one of its prime expressions. When feminists brought these stories into the light, the fact remained that those who suffered or died were victims, not heroes. And they were so many! Too obscure to name – no list of names here – their situation was as common as dirt. With rare exceptions, suffering women remained relative creatures without individual, tragic fates.

These stories were not sticky while the backlash narrative had the clarity, simplicity and power to alarm through a brilliant clustering of hostile ideas of what feminism is all about: ugly, bra-burning, man-hating, child-murdering, hairy lesbians. This linked chain of words began as a relatively simple case of backlash. But such defamation has turned out to have a longevity that the complex and diffuse movement itself lacks. By now, the ugly, man-hating feminist is a well-established figure of myth – one my students faithfully reproduce each semester as we begin our work of discussing feminism.

Hirst suggested to me that the disparity between the memory of the extraordinary social transformations arising from and parallel to the movement and the negative image of the horrible, miserable feminist arises from the movement's failure to promise happiness, a story with a readable ending. Feminist narratives are internally contradictory, diverse, reactive, unsettling, unclear. Feminists want a different world but have usually distrusted the closure of unity or happy endings. Though vital struggles continue, there is no beloved community once one has left the original commune of the seventies sisterhood.

These observations are not meant to name the faults in feminism. On the contrary, feminist values, and some of feminism's best thinking, underpin the traits that also encourage forgetting. What, after all, is the feminist story? Women are all so different; we want freedom to do a wide variety of things. We have no sustainable identity as a group, nor do we want one.

What's more, feminism makes no promises. Feminism may be about freedom but freedom is an empty set. Can feminism get one love, or

security, or happiness? In contrast to traditionalist movements, which promise so much depth of feeling, does feminism keep you warm at night, provide you company in old age, offer a sustaining sense of meaning and purpose? Not only does feminism fail on all these counts, but it fails by design. Only in brief periods among a few groups was feminism meant to be an all-encompassing ideology, a full description of the world, a panacea for all ills or a comfortable, permanent home.

Usually, feminism has been a disturber of the peace, a critique of our comfy resting places, a skeptic about what is usually on offer as happiness. Feminism is a complaint about oppression. Often accused of whining, feminists are constantly expressing a broad and persistent dissatisfaction with how things are generally organized. Feminist theorists often yearn for the unstable, indeterminate and ironic. They are skeptical about mythical, enduring identities, heroes and magical coherence of any kind.

Feminism has few rituals to share with a next generation. It is nervous about any assertion of eternal verities about man, woman, god, truth. Though feminists often describe glorious utopian imaginaries – from men doing housework to an end of the house as we know it – it's hard to make those wishes stick as solid or real. Instead, what is apparent is that these women are unsatisfied. What, dear god, do they want?

The sticky, soothing story is the backlash story: the terrifying ugliness of female autonomy. Feminism *is* threatening. Though most feminists defend women's right to pleasure, they can't guarantee that pleasure will come with the collapse of known, deeply elaborated, mythically sanctioned identities.

Women are more forgotten than men, but feminists are suspicious of the ways in which men have achieved stickiness. The male narrative of creation and centrality and glory and autonomy is a story which feminism challenges at its root. Is there another form for remembering? Hirst tells me he thinks not, and I see no reason to dispute his conclusions. His research demonstrates that human beings remember badly: they need the help of simplification, the motive of self-serving teleologies, the false unity of sharing a story with the tribe. Revision is continuous and earlier structures of feeling are abandoned without leaving much trace. What remains in popular memory once the erasing tide recedes is, first of all, very little, and second, very unreliable and approximate. Stickiness depends on the distortions that are myth and ritual and is often sealed further by fear and trauma, death and martyrdom. Memory is a terror-monger; memory is faithless.

In *The New Yorker* as I write this, Ariel Levy (2009) is complaining that women are both the perpetrators and the victims of 'cultural memory disorder.' Sometimes they themselves distort the record of what women have done. At the same moment, Gail Collins (2009) is being interviewed about her new book, *When Everything Changed: The Amazing Journey of American Women from 1960 to the Present*; she is arguing that the colossal achievements of women and women's movements are not becoming part of what we call US history. Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn (2009) are on the stump recounting the argument of their best seller, *Half the Sky*: female babies are being aborted and women are being starved and terrorized and enslaved and murdered all over the world but this goes unremarked because it happens every day. How can something that happens every day be a crisis? Kristof and WuDunn try to sensitize their readers, to get them to register shock at what is ubiquitous, normal, generally accepted.

Each of these writers sounds the call: women are constantly forgotten. But there is small reason to think this outcry will alter the general process of forgetting. An undertaking like *The Feminist Memoir Project* can't build a bridge to historical remembering on its own. Though we hope we have created moments of 'stickiness,' we can't know how much we have succeeded. But in this act of collecting we have expressed a faith in a long-term project of change. Inequality lies deep, but most feminists share a belief that even such ingrained stories can shift. We gathered memoirs describing a fleeting moment in a long and slow process. Women are dissatisfied; they continue to express discontent. They are the ones most likely to herald that there is a relationship between what Dorothy Dinnerstein called 'sexual arrangements' and 'human malaise.'

Our utopia and the future

Perhaps, finally, my outcry here about the forgetting of women is beside the point. Such a complaint can easily descend into a politics of *ressentiment*. After all the years I've spent in political movements, I've come to think that 'I've-been-left-out' is one of our deepest-lying human emotions – right up there with rage, hate and desire. Memory cannot repair loss and is only one aspect of continuity. Unlike religion, feminism does not demand eternal loyalty to unchanging beliefs – nor should it. The continuing density of sexism can be trusted to form its own reaction, and those who need some aspect of what has been the feminist project over the last several 100 years will keep reinventing it. This has already happened repeatedly and is happening all over the world as I write this.

Feminists now living have an understandable attachment to the bodily, animated particulars of their movement experiences. It is bound to be galling to discover that, in the usual course of things, these treasured, specific memories are not only as evanescent as foam but also, on their way out, subject to a sort of patronizing diminishment reserved for women's efforts to enter history. There is always the personal question of how to survive being forgotten or aggressively misunderstood. Inevitably, with longevity or luck, one outlives one's formative moment. In the case of those who were a part of ecstatic, hopeful, utopian movements, this common tragedy of the mismatch between an individual's life and the arc of history is likely to be particularly acute. For them, forgetting goes beyond personal loss to the loss of a whole world.

But one step beyond these feelings, that one's acts and words of protest have been specially chosen for neglect and insult, lies another, more reliable experience feminists share: in modernity, feminism keeps returning. Though obscurity and abuse dog feminism, self-conscious feminist struggles are constantly finding new forms. Even if each return is greeted as if it were for the first time – the New Woman again and again – still, she keeps coming. And she keeps bringing back some version of feminist resistance. Her central questions recur: what is it to be designated 'woman'? Why does patriarchy keep insisting on this relatively fixed identity? How stable or unstable are gender categories and what have we to lose or gain in changing gender meanings?

Future feminists may develop a critique of the instability of gender that we cannot now imagine. They may say that continuity or discontinuity with the past are dangers to them not for our reasons but for their own. They may choose to define and ramify an activist feminist tradition because *all* historical through-lines have been destroyed. Our ambivalence about leaving a bloodline – records of leaders, martyrs, heroic triumphs – may develop new political meanings.

How much harm does it do when a particular manifestation of feminism fades from collective memory? In responding to my general consternation, Hirst explained that recalling earlier states of mind is one of the weakest links in human remembering. So let that old set of feelings go? Trust in whatever continuity feminism is likely to have over time? Be content to leave personal traces and records like *The Feminist Memoir Project?* Accept forgetting and at the same time try to create 'stickiness' on one's own terms? After all, the power of patriarchy to sustain its myths, rituals and emotions will continue to arouse women's long-term resistance to those selective stories.

The Feminist Memoir Project was intended to be a place where that tightly woven story of male domination and achievement could be shifted from central position and placed alongside other accounts of what the reality of then felt like. Though to talk back to forgetting is both difficult and, in some respects, doomed to failure, this unequal dialogue, this flash of presence of the other, just might subtly change the story. Later tellers will determine what effect this try at telling had. Unless one believes in the eternal powerlessness of the other, telling may be some small part of change, a part of a slow shift in the gender story in the *longue durée*.

Near the end of our time working on *The Feminist Memoir Project* I had this dream: I was in the stacks of a library climbing an unnaturally tall ladder past dark volumes upon volumes to an empty top shelf, on which I levered an unwieldy, bound copy of our book. I seemed to be saying to the book something like, 'stay there and wait for your readers to find you.' The feeling was: this was the future. The future might find us obnoxious, unintelligible, grotesque. Or, perhaps instead, our exoticism would be exciting to them. They would read, misread, project upon us with their own purposes in whatever languages they would talk – and we would seem to listen.

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AQ1

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