

## CHAPTER 5

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# Conjuring the Apocalypse: Radical Feminism, Apocalyptic Temporality, and the Society for Cutting Up Men

I'm not a lunatic, asshole, I'm a revolutionary.

Valerie Solanas<sup>1</sup>

Beginning in the 1970s, as second-wave North American feminism began to gain momentum and terrorism “at home” simultaneously became a prominent political and cultural concern for the United States, feminism and terrorism began to present in the cultural imaginary as isomorphic practices. I argued in Chapter Three that, in the first instance, feminism and terrorism were perceived as causally related. That is, feminism was constructed within dominant discourse as responsible for increased numbers of women participating in clandestine activities directed at overthrowing the state. However, perhaps more importantly, white urban terrorist groups were constructed as being dominated by women as both organizers and protagonists of the terrorist drama. In this context, feminism came to be thought as culpable for (white urban) terrorism *per se* in the United States.

What is often referred to as second-wave feminism comprised a spectrum of groups with widely divergent understandings of the problem of women's subordination and an equally divergent set of strategies for effecting cultural and political change. However, in the earlier phase of second-wave feminist activism, a small number of women's groups, those we have come to label “radical feminists,”<sup>2</sup> came to dominate the political scene of feminism. Ellen Willis writes that the radical feminist “movement took shape in 1968 and ended, for all practical purposes, five years later”<sup>3</sup>—a period coinciding with the peak of home-grown US “urban terrorism” carried out by various left-wing groups.<sup>4</sup>

I argued in Chapter Four that terrorism, as a tactical practice, signifies within the Western imagination as the apocalyptic end to modernity. This chapter argues that the crosswiring of radical feminism with terrorism that began in the late 1960s/early 1970s in the United States was made possible by terrorists' and feminists' shared articulation of an apocalyptic outlook culminating in a call to arms—itself an effect of envisioning the radical transformation of a society based on linear time. I exemplify this argument via an analysis of Valerie Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto*—a text that literalizes the idea of feminism as terrorism—in order to critique the gendering of Western modernity.

### Valerie Solanas: Radical Feminist *Zeitgeist*

As the New Right has struggled to make sense, however inadequately, of the events of September 11, 2001 and their aftermath, these self-proclaimed moral watchdogs of US culture have breathed new life into the discourse that crosswires feminism with terrorism. As in the 1970s, for the New Right, feminism, once again, is responsible for the terrible affliction of terrorism. Feminism, as their language and imagery would suggest, is itself terrorist.

We will recall from Chapter Three that in a 1992 fundraising newsletter, Reverend Pat Robertson described feminism as “a socialist, anti-family political movement that encourages women to leave their husbands, kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians.”<sup>5</sup> Phyllis Schlafly has warned that feminists not only “want to *kill* everything masculine” but also that “you can't negotiate with the feminists because you will lose. *They will slit your throat.*”<sup>6</sup>

It could be said that these constructions are at odds with the status accorded present day feminism in US dominant culture, where feminist principles now circulate widely in the popular domain, albeit in different forms, to varying degrees of acceptance, and often ambiguously or contradictorily. Feminist principles, that is, have a certain degree of cultural currency and legitimacy<sup>7</sup> and, as such, feminists and their demands are not ultimately all that unreasonable.

The paranoid fear of feminism, as a catalyst of terrorism, articulated by the New Right is however contextualized (though not excused) if we juxtapose Robertson's comments with the words for which Valerie Solanas, founder and sole member of the feminist terrorist organization known as SCUM—the Society for Cutting Up Men—is most notorious. Solanas is remembered for shooting Andy Warhol in 1968 and, in the shadow of her spectacular debut into infamy, what is often overlooked is that she authored one of the most angrily outspoken texts of US radical feminism. The *SCUM Manifesto*,

self-published by Solanas in 1967, is one of the few concrete legacies of Solanas' existence. In the opening paragraph, she writes:

No aspect of society being at all relevant to women, there remains to civic-minded, responsible, thrill-seeking females only to overthrow the government, eliminate the money system, institute complete automation, and destroy the male sex.<sup>8</sup>

Later in the manifesto, she describes SCUM's activities in this way:

SCUM will always operate on a criminal as opposed to a civil-disobedience basis, that is, as opposed to openly violating the law and going to jail in order to draw attention to an injustice. Such tactics acknowledge the rightness of the overall system and are used only to modify it slightly, change specific laws . . . SCUM is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights within it. Also, SCUM—always selfish, always cool—will always aim to avoid detection and punishment . . . SCUM will coolly, furtively, stalk its prey and quietly move in for the kill.<sup>9</sup>

Solanas' feminist vision operates at the discursive nexus of feminism and terrorism. An iconoclastic text, the *Manifesto* advocates a violent and clandestine politics that renders the extermination of the male species as the only plausible solution to the age-old problem of women's subordination. Solanas' manifesto is straightforward. She deploys the modern discourse of eugenics to argue that "the male is a biological accident"<sup>10</sup> whose continued existence is no longer justified. She writes: "The elimination of any male is, therefore, a righteous and good act, an act highly beneficial to women as well as an act of mercy."<sup>11</sup>

Opposed to the liberal feminist agenda of groups such as the National Organization of Women (NOW), which argued for women's equality *within* the system, Solanas' angry and incendiary stance was emblematic of the so-called radical edge of feminism that proposed the complete overthrow of the system itself. In 1977, interviewed for the *Village Voice*, Solanas described SCUM as: "hypothetical . . . There's no organization called SCUM . . . I thought of it as a state of mind. In other words, women who think a certain way are in SCUM."<sup>12</sup> If SCUM was a structure of thinking, a world view, then, in 1968, for a number of women at the forefront of the women's liberation movement, particularly the hard line "movement heavies,"<sup>13</sup> Solanas embodied the contemporary feminist *Zeitgeist*.<sup>14</sup>

When, on 13 June 1968, Solanas appeared in the State Supreme Court, she was represented by black radical feminist lawyer, Florynce "Flo" Kennedy,<sup>15</sup> who hailed Solanas as "one of the most important spokeswomen

of the feminist movement.”<sup>16</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson, a New York NOW member being groomed for feminist leadership by Betty Friedan, heralded Solanas as “the first outstanding champion of women’s rights”;<sup>17</sup> her show of solidarity horrifying Friedan and other NOW members.<sup>18</sup> Atkinson later attributed her departure from NOW to form the radical women’s liberation group, “The Feminists,” to the influence of Solanas’ manifesto. At an August 1968 meeting of representatives of women’s organizations held at Sandy Springs, Roxanne Dunbar “read aloud excerpts from Valerie Solanas’ *SCUM Manifesto* and proclaimed it the ‘essence of feminism.’”<sup>19</sup> As Alice Echols writes, “Solanas’ case became something of a *cause célèbre* among radical feminists . . . In the wake of the shooting, [the] *SCUM [Manifesto]* was finally published by Olympia Press and it became obligatory reading for *radical* feminists.”<sup>20</sup>

While the term suggests a unitary movement defined by a coherent political agenda, “radical feminism” in fact developed in uneven and often haphazard ways,<sup>21</sup> encompassing the activities of numerous, often quite small, independent women’s groups of the late 1960s and early 1970s, working to address the structural inequities that characterized the positioning of women both locally and nationally, and often globally and/or universally. There were several concerted efforts to establish a common agenda for women’s liberation out of these disparate concerns and to mobilize women on a large scale. From 1968 to 1973, the issue of how to theorize and actively address the problems of women’s subordination within dominant culture would be hotly contested, and eventually, “radical feminism” would give way to “cultural feminism.”<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, in 1968, “radical feminism” within the broader women’s liberation movement was a force to be reckoned with. It is clear that, for radical feminists, Solanas’ outspoken misogyny resonated with their own developing feminist beliefs. The formative work of feminists such as Dunbar, Atkinson, and Shulamith Firestone, for example, echoes Solanas’ manifesto in both tone and content, arguing fiercely for the elimination of sexual difference and the annihilation of the structure of gender relations that underpins Western culture. In 1970, in a landmark text of second-wave feminism, *The Dialectic of Sex*, Firestone argued that “the end goal of feminist revolution, must be . . . not just the elimination of male *privilege* but of the *sex distinction* itself.”<sup>23</sup> These women interpreted Solanas’ call for “sexocide” as an attempt to shift the boundaries of, and reinvigorate, the debate that had been opened up by liberal feminists, and they boldly declared their solidarity with Solanas’ understanding of the gendered biases of modernity.

It is this version of feminism—the radical feminist activist paradigm of which Solanas is perhaps the most extreme representative—that, since the late 1960s, has been discursively aligned with the phenomenon of (white

urban) terrorism. And it is this version of feminism that was invoked and condemned by the New Right in the aftermath of September 11, 2001; imagined as, and standing in for, feminism more generically.

### Radical Feminist Tactics

Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, radical feminists advocated a variety of activism that paralleled “revolutionary” terrorist tactics of the era. At the level of popular culture, this produced feminism as aligned with terrorism. Consequently, dominant culture tended to respond to both feminists and terrorists in remarkably similar ways, perhaps most notably by constructing them as mad. Like the “revolutionary terrorism” of the time, radical feminism’s tactics of shock and disruption aimed to destabilize and eventually overthrow dominant order.

Radical feminism’s transformative politics rested on a program, albeit largely uncoordinated, of *tactical* intervention. The radical feminist activist paradigm privileged the “action” as a key mechanism in the fight for gender equality. As Marianne DeKoven explains, within the New Left, “an ‘action’ could range from the familiar modes of march, rally, sit-in, leafleting, petition and protest, to various forms of street or guerrilla theatre, to a bombing or a bank robbery.”<sup>24</sup> DeKoven notes that feminism adopted the New Left’s commitment “to spontaneity, creativity and diversity in its expression.”<sup>25</sup> Of the various forms of actions popularized by the New Left, radical feminism often opted for “guerrilla theater” to draw attention to their political message, or what the Yippies<sup>26</sup> called the “theatre of the apocalypse.”<sup>27</sup> Like terrorism, feminism operated opportunistically. Radical feminism “extended the domain of the political . . . so that ‘actions’ could be almost anything and appear almost anywhere.”<sup>28</sup> For example, at “the Miss America demonstration of August 1968 . . . young women crowned a live sheep to symbolize the beauty pageant’s objectification of female bodies, and filled a ‘freedom trashcan’ with objects of female torture—girdles, bras, curlers, issues of *Ladies Home Journal*.”<sup>29</sup> Like their terrorist counterparts, through their staging of spectacle, radical feminists seized public attention. As Echols notes, the Miss America Beauty Pageant protest “marked the end of the movement’s obscurity because the protest . . . received extensive press coverage.”<sup>30</sup>

Also in 1968, a group of New York based radical feminists including Robin Morgan formed a feminist activist group called WITCH. WITCH staged an impressive publicity campaign for the radical feminist cause in the late 1960s by performing—“dressed as witches and bearing broomsticks”<sup>31</sup>—a series of spectacular public “hexings,” most notably on the stock exchange on Wall Street and on the annual Bride Fair at Madison Square Garden. WITCH’s

guerrilla theater was inspired by the Yippie-style activism popularized by Jerry Rubin and Abbie Hoffman.<sup>32</sup> The Yippies' political lineage itself can be traced back to the French radical avant-garde Situationist movement, which, like Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre, conceptualized the everyday as a space for the expression of political dissent and the enactment of sociocultural transformation.<sup>33</sup> As with terrorism, shock and surprise were key elements of WITCH's political activism. Like terrorism, WITCH-style radical feminism sought to create a spectacle to expose the inadequacy of "the system" and force a space for radical critique. And like terrorism, WITCH had a publicity agenda. It sought to create "actions" that would capture the attention of the mainstream mass media in order to promote its political position.<sup>34</sup>

Crucially, WITCH articulated the importance of the everyday to its political program: "Our short-term purpose is to . . . attack where we are least expected . . . and to reveal that *the routine of daily life is the theatre of struggle*."<sup>35</sup> Like terrorism, WITCH aimed to disrupt the routine of the everyday, and, in so doing, focus attention on the basic repression inhering in social order. Or in other words, radical feminists such as WITCH configured the everyday as a site of radical transformation. In deploying methods of tactical intervention, WITCH constructed itself in the mould of (metaphorical) terrorists. Indeed, the acronym WITCH stood for the "Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell." In this context, radical feminism looked like a form of terrorism.

### Feminism, Modernity, and the Politics of Utopia

As Rita Felski points out in *The Gender of Modernity*, the relationship between "modernity" and feminism is by no means straightforward. If the term "modernity" signals both the variety of identifiable structural changes in the organization of everyday life that have taken place alongside the processes of modernization as well as the set of discursive practices that have legitimized those structural transformations, historically, in its challenge to the variety of forms of women's oppression, feminism has simultaneously shaped, and been shaped by, modernity itself.<sup>36</sup> Feminism's relationship with modernity is dialogical; it is produced by the subjects silenced by the grand narratives of modernity, empowered and in dialogue with those grand narratives themselves.<sup>37</sup> As a response to, or as an engagement with, the problems of women's subordinate status as it is prescribed by the conditions of modernity, feminism has both deployed modernity's dominant discourses and formulated its methodologies in relation to the idea of the modern.

Apocalypse and utopia, as important and complementary visionary motifs of secular modernity, have been deployed to drive the transformational

project of a range of modern social movements. While the two discourses are intertwined,<sup>38</sup> they both perform distinct functions in the modern imaginary. Both discourses may be understood to have their roots in premodern religious rhetoric, but both have taken on specifically modern inflections in the modern episteme, which, among other things, replaces Divine Wisdom with individual Reason as the guiding principle of history, is structured around notions of progress that depend upon a linear conceptualization of history, and thinks representation through the structure of binary opposition. Both discourses have, to a great extent, been secularized, and it is their modern secular forms that I discuss here. Inasmuch as radical feminism's vision of social transformation is informed by these modern discourses of utopia and apocalypse, it articulates as a specifically modern movement for social change.

As Krishan Kumar notes, modern conceptualizations of utopia—beginning with the coining of the term by Thomas More in 1516—have differed in fundamental ways from its premodern (religious) antecedents. In modernity, utopia often gets reworked in terms of the dialectic, as the final and perfect resolution of the dialectical process, in the Hegelian sense of opposition between two contradictory but interacting forces (thesis and synthesis) and their continual reconciliation on a higher level (synthesis). In Hegel's formulation, this dialectical process always produces a residue that, in the next stage of the progress of history, gets cast as the new antithesis. Utopia occurs, then, when synthesis is reached without a residual.<sup>39</sup> Further, the modern concept of utopia is constructed as a goal that individuals in society can, and must, actively work toward.<sup>40</sup>

In modernity, the discourse of utopia has played an important role in imagining the ideal form of the modern nation-state,<sup>41</sup> which is envisaged as representing perfectly the society it governs by balancing uniformity, complete equality, and unlimited freedom for all its citizens through the perfection of its regulatory mechanisms. As Louis Marin has described More's utopia, it is

[o]n the one hand, a free play of imagination in its indefinite expansion measured only by the desire, itself infinite, of happiness in a space where the moving frontiers of its philosophical and political fictions would be traced; on the other hand, the exact closed totality, rigorously coded by all the constraints of the law, binding and closing a place with insuperable frontiers that would guarantee its harmonious functioning.<sup>42</sup>

Given that the utopian vision of the perfect state is that which reflects perfectly the desire of all its citizens, representation is fundamental to the imagining of the utopian state in modernity. The utopian state—as the perfect

expression of modern political formations—is that in which the spacing of representation, the space which produces difference in modernity, is overcome once and for all, revealing the fundamental sameness, indeed the synthesis, of the government and its people.

The imagining of a perfect society in which all conflict is resolved has provided much of the impetus for modern reform. As Kumar points out, “social movements need utopias.”<sup>43</sup> He goes on to claim that second-wave feminism is a case in point,<sup>44</sup> and indeed, the liberatory promise of utopia has profoundly shaped the feminist call for equality between the sexes. The imagining of a society without discrimination based upon sex has inspired feminists to search for direct political activist strategies that enable them to challenge and transform what they envisage as the causes of women’s subordination.<sup>45</sup>

### Evolution versus Revolution: Feminist Discourses of Social Change

According to Felski, there are two main tropes through which feminism has envisaged the process by which modern society will attain perfection, namely through evolution and revolution. This troping influences the production of the two dominant paradigms of second-wave feminist activist strategy: ongoing reform as it is posited by liberal and institutional forms of feminism and the call for violent feminist revolution that characterizes radical feminism, respectively.

Discursively, the evolutionary paradigm configures the shift toward the feminist utopia as “an organic process of development”<sup>46</sup> whereby, through piecemeal reform, in the context of the inexorable flow of history, society gradually progresses toward a feminist vision of perfection. The evolutionary paradigm has profoundly shaped institutional feminism—such as that of NOW—in which the individual is understood as shaping history both from *within*, and in relation to, the state.

In feminist rhetoric, evolutionary progress toward utopia is juxtaposed with the revolutionary paradigm, which envisages “the violent overthrow of an existing régime, but . . . simultaneously encompasses a wider . . . process of radical and fundamental change.”<sup>47</sup> The sense of the inevitability of the attainment of utopia is substituted here by an explicitly modern understanding of the centrality of the individual as dynamic agent of history. It encompasses a notion of individuals bringing on, forcing even, the advent of utopia.

Revolution is thus understood as a rupture of history “in that it affirms the schismatic nature of the transformative moment, as a qualitative leap towards an unimaginable future.”<sup>48</sup> Revolution presents as the *Aufhebung*—the force gesture of the dialectic, the moment of fracture within the history of



representation. Positioned as taking place, not from within the state, but from *outside* (and against) the state, it constitutes a challenge to the state's existence. And as a prerequisite for the achievement of utopia, it intersects with the eschatological discourse of apocalypse. In modernity, the apocalypse is secularized in terms of revolution.<sup>49</sup> Moshe Amon notes that "the twentieth century is rife with apocalyptic premonitions,"<sup>50</sup> which since the sixteenth century (and here we can understand Amon as referring to the rise of modernity) have characterized "the age of revolution." I suggest below that revolution in its apocalyptic formulation is necessarily based on a principle of *eradication* as opposed to one of synthesis.

The discourse of apocalypse has its origins in Judeo-Christian religious philosophy. In contrast to utopia, which works in terms of synthesis, the religious apocalypse turns upon a notion of eradication, that is, in terms of destruction, selection and elimination "of those who, depending upon the ideological context of the particular text, either have unwarrantedly harassed God's people and failed to acknowledge him, or failed to acknowledge the advent of his Son."<sup>51</sup> In the modern, secular reworking of the religious apocalypse, the focus has tended to be less on a revelatory promise and more on the advent of unmitigated destruction.<sup>52</sup>

The modern secular apocalypse is thought in terms that signal the ideal modern nation-state as embodying postapocalyptic harmony. In certain instances, the modern apocalypse is constructed, both by the state itself and by those who challenge the state from outside, as the event that will bring on utopia. In order to bridge the gap between the lived experience of society and the utopian vision, individuals must bring on the apocalyptic eradication of those who stand in the way of the dream.

For some theorists, the envisaging of utopias which, when put into concrete political practice, rely on an apocalyptic *début*, corrupts and contaminates the idea of utopia. Leszek Kolakowski, for example, states: "Utopias . . . have become ideologically poisonous . . . Their advocates managed to convince themselves that they had discovered a genuine technology of apocalypse to force the door of paradise."<sup>53</sup> In political practice, the version of utopia that relies on revolution as rupture or disjuncture is signaled by this notion of apocalypse as ushering in the new world. As Hans Magnus Enzensberger suggests, "the idea of apocalypse has accompanied utopian thought since its first beginnings, pursuing it like a shadow . . . [W]ithout catastrophe, no millennium, without apocalypse, no paradise."<sup>54</sup> In the modern vision of revolution, utopia and apocalypse are thus linked, manifesting themselves at distinct stages in the history of the end of the world. Apocalypse is that which comes directly *before*, and produces, utopia. Seen as a challenge to the state "from below," apocalypse can be equated with revolution.

### Radical Feminism's Apocalyptic Vision of Revolution

In the radical feminist vision of the path to salvation, the apocalyptic presents in a particularly pronounced manner. It was not uncommon for radical feminists to preach violence as a way of forcing an apocalyptic end to social order in order to enable the rebuilding of society from scratch. As Echols notes, in the late 1960s, young radical feminists were strongly of the opinion that “nonviolent protest had long since outlived its usefulness.”<sup>55</sup> Todd Gitlin writes that, in response to their perceived oppression both within and without the New Left, “the women’s groups reacted . . . with their own version of revolutionary apocalypse.”<sup>56</sup> At the level of popular culture, too, radical feminism was perceived in apocalyptic terms: “sisterhood is, indeed, powerful [and . . .] hastening the Last Days of Patriarchy.”<sup>57</sup>

If terrorism’s affect is generated by its rupture of the ordinary (linear and routine) time of modernity, so too, radical feminism relied upon the premise of linear and routinized time for its political effect. Radical feminist “actions” had rhetorical power because they unfolded against the backdrop of ordinary time. However, more fundamentally, radical feminism conceived of its transformative project in teleological terms. Radical feminism, like the New Left “Movement” out of which it grew, was built upon “the belief that the collapse of society was imminent.”<sup>58</sup> Radical feminists perceived themselves as poised on the brink of total revolution. Morgan, a key figure in the early stages of radical feminism, described, in overtly apocalyptic tones, a world wrecked by the male-created havoc of “ecological disaster and nuclear threat.”<sup>59</sup> And in 1971, journalist and feminist activist, Vivian Gornick, positioned the rise of radical feminism at the culmination of 25 years of postwar social protest in the United States, constructing it as the catalyst, indeed the *Aufhebung*, of total revolution:

Beginning with a general loss of faith in the meaning and comfort of middle class capitalism, it has gathered momentum . . . sweeping through the country to include the hungers and protests and demands of a whole variety of “have-nots.” Beginning, most notably, with blacks and then students, it has ended, most vociferously and *most dangerously and most radically*, with women . . . who are beginning to say “No, in thunder” . . . who are determined now . . . to make a lunge for that brass ring which threatens—more than any other element of social revolution abroad ever could—to bring Western society toppling.<sup>60</sup>

In the radical feminist imagination, women were bearing witness to the last days. In rising up against patriarchal oppression, women would destroy the system of gender relations that underpinned it. As DeKoven states, “this

rising up was conceived teleologically, as a stage in the historical sequence of capitalism, imperialism and world socialist revolution.”<sup>61</sup> In the aftermath of the revolution, configured in the radical feminist imagination as apocalypse, women would remake the world *anew*. But first, women would have to bring about the end—patriarchal society would be forced to confront its eschaton. In this sense, radical feminism constructed itself as positioned at the culmination of history, indeed, of modernity itself: the moment of the annihilation of the “old order.”

Enzensberger has noted that “the apocalyptic fantasy [is] inescapably bound up with the terror, the demand for vengeance, for justice.”<sup>62</sup> For those who witnessed radical feminism from the outside and those who practiced it alike, radical feminism presented as an “explosion” of “cumulative rage” bent on the destruction of social order.<sup>63</sup> For many radical feminists, this anger needed to be mobilized for the feminist revolution. As the anonymous authors of “What is Liberation?” stated, “women must learn the meaning of . . . the violence that liberates the human spirit.”<sup>64</sup> It is often suggested that terrorism is born of the frustrated anger associated with perceived oppression.<sup>65</sup> In their harnessing of anger as a revolutionary tool then, the radical feminist vision resonated with contemporary terrorist visions. Indeed, for some sections of the early radical feminist movement, the parallels between feminism and terrorism would take a concrete form: women had to be prepared to use physical violence to force the revolution. For example, according to Echols, Atkinson excoriated “women’s liberationists for failing to ‘pick up the gun.’”<sup>66</sup> And Echols claims that, rather than drawing inspiration from the achievements and examples of earlier generations of US feminists, radical feminists looked to the tradition of armed revolution in the third world for inspiration.<sup>67</sup> This kind of radical feminist call to arms facilitates a discursive alignment of terrorism and feminism. However, radical feminism resonated with the practice of terrorism in ways beyond this, specifically in its conceptualization of the everyday as the site of both women’s oppression and feminist transformation.

### Radical Feminism and the Everyday

While Lefebvre is mostly silent on the role of gender in the reproduction of the everyday, he does note that “everyday life weighs heaviest on women,”<sup>68</sup> lamenting their humiliations, which include “child-bearing and child-rearing, basic preoccupations with bare necessities, money, tradesmen, provisions, . . . the survival of poverty and the endlessness of want.”<sup>69</sup> While it goes unelaborated in his analysis, we can understand Lefebvre as articulating the idea that the routinization of the quotidian produces a fundamental power differential

between beings gendered as “male” and those gendered “female”; that the everyday is a technology of the subordination of women to men. This is the nature of the “oppression” that radical feminism perceived so acutely, and it is this subordination against which radical feminism directed its energies.

Terrorism operates to render the power relations underpinning social order visible. So too, one of radical feminism’s chief objectives was to expose the invisible structure of gendered power relations implicit in the everyday. Firestone powerfully claimed that “sex class is so deep as to be invisible,”<sup>70</sup> and that radical feminism’s challenge lay in exposing the structures of women’s oppression, “the organization of culture itself.”<sup>71</sup> Her rallying call thus emphasized the need to address the conditions of lived experience, the organizational parameters of what I have described as “the everyday.” As with terrorism then, the everyday became a key site for radical feminist tactical intervention.

As DeKoven states, in radical feminist politics, “resistance is as pervasive and diffuse as power itself, and . . . is seen to inhere in everyday cultural tactics, practices and modes of performance not themselves necessarily overtly political.”<sup>72</sup> This idea took expression in the radical feminist catchcry, “the personal is political,” which shifted focus to “the realm of particular subversive or resistant or counter-hegemonic identifications, modes of subjectivity, *tactics of the everyday*, and cultural or subcultural practices.”<sup>73</sup> To enact their agenda of the transformation of the everyday, radical feminists deployed “consciousness-raising” (known in radical feminist speak as “CR”). CR was conceived as a practice that could politicize women, educating them in the fundamental oppressions at the heart of “personal” and “ordinary” life. Its methodology consisted of women’s discussion groups, designed to facilitate the recasting of women’s experiences of “personal problems” as “social issues fought together rather than with personal solutions.”<sup>74</sup> Radical feminists thus took the feminist struggle to the heart of everyday cultural practices, calling for women’s negation of the everyday roles they inhabited, and in particular, the refusal of the gendering of the routines prescribed by the “domestic.” In this sense, *radical feminism constituted the refusal of patriarchal routine*. It defied, outright, modern temporality.

### The Terrorist Time of Radical Feminism

Julia Kristeva claims that the distinction between radical feminism and the forms of feminism that preceded it revolves around a difference in orientation toward time, around a temporal disjuncture. This claim can also be read as

distinguishing between the “evolutionary” and “revolutionary” paradigms of feminist activism discussed earlier:

In its beginnings, the women’s movement, as the struggle of suffragists and of existential feminists, *aspired to gain a place in linear time as the time of project and history*. In this sense, the movement, while immediately universalist, is also deeply rooted in the socio-political life of nations . . . In a second phase, linked . . . to the younger women who came to feminism after May 1968 . . . *linear temporality has been almost totally refused* . . . This current seems to think of itself as belonging to another generation . . . in its conception of its own identity and, consequently, *of temporality as such*.<sup>75</sup>

Kristeva suggests that feminism after May 1968, for which we can read “radical feminism,” entails the conceptualization of a radically different temporality. If we accept that linear time is based on the routinization of the everyday, we can understand Kristeva as signaling radical feminism’s refusal of the routine of (patriarchal) everyday life, conjuring the end of modern, linear and routinized time. Kristeva argues (and we should note her apocalyptic overtones here):

The new generation of women is . . . *attempting a revolt which they see as a resurrection but which society as a whole understands as murder*. This attempt can lead us to a not less and sometimes more deadly violence. Or to a cultural innovation. Probably to both at once. *But that is precisely what the stakes are, and they are of epochal significance*.<sup>76</sup>

I have argued that terrorism politicizes the structural violence that makes modern social order possible. For Kristeva, feminism also operates in these terms: “Modern feminism has only been but a moment in the interminable process of coming to consciousness about the implacable violence (separation, castration, etc.) which constitutes any symbolic contract.”<sup>77</sup> Radical feminism thus manifests as the reinvestment of the sociosymbolic violence experienced by women in relation to the foundational pact of modernity, namely the social contract. In making this claim, Kristeva understands the social contract as, in Carole Pateman’s terms, a “sexual contract” that operates to the exclusion of women.

As Pateman states, the social contract is “structured through time by a permanent exchange between the two parties, the exchange of obedience for protection.”<sup>78</sup> There are two points in traditional social contract theory accounts of the state that are of interest here. First, the state is understood to be constituted of rational individuals.<sup>79</sup> That is, the notion of the state operates according to a principle of exclusion that differentiates between rational individuals and their (“irrational”) oppositional Other. Second, social

contract theory posits the importance of the state in the protection of the individuals it governs from the threat posed by the Other. Together, these criteria define the boundaries of civil society. Importantly, a contract that only includes rational individuals characterizes those who are excluded as irrational and constructs them as a threat to the rational foundations of modern society—a threat from which the state must be protected.<sup>80</sup>

Pateman argues that the original social contract established not only political right but also *patriarchal* right. Citing a long history in which modern Western culture considers women to be fundamentally irrational, she argues that historically women have been excluded from membership of the state, which is founded, for social contract theory, in a contract between rational, consenting individuals.<sup>81</sup> Further, in drawing a distinction between the public and private spheres as a necessary prerequisite for the existence of civil society, patriarchal social order required the exclusion of women from the public realm. In other words, women are positioned as excessive to both the state and its operation in the public sphere.<sup>82</sup>

In a separate text, Pateman argues that there has been a broader cultural concern with what Rousseau termed “the disorder of women,” dating back at least as far as the story of the Garden of Eden, but which becomes “a general social and political problem”<sup>83</sup> in modernity. Women come to represent the forces of chaos that threaten the ordered world of modernity “because their being, or their nature . . . necessarily leads them to exert a disruptive influence in social and political life. Women have a disorder at their very centers—in their morality—which can bring about the destruction of the state.”<sup>84</sup> The belief in the disorder of women has functioned throughout modern Western history as a rationale for their subordination and containment, for example, within the family structure and the domestic realm. However, despite attempts to contain her, the threat of Woman never disappears. Indeed, such attempts arguably augment the threat of her (potential) subversion of order. If “women are seen as guardians of order and morality as well as inherently subversive,”<sup>85</sup> then, paradoxically, moral order depends upon the cooperation of women, that is, those who are positioned within the cultural economy as inherently subversive.<sup>86</sup> Positioned at the border between order and disorder, society and nature, Woman remains an unsettling reminder of the potential for the loss of order against which the project of modernity rails. In this way, women become representative of an enemy *within* the borders of “civilized” society. Or as Hegel expressed it, the community “creates its enemy for itself within its own gates,” namely “womankind in general.”<sup>87</sup>

Given that Woman is positioned as simultaneously necessary but subversively excessive to the gendered order of modernity, feminism mobilizes the terror of disorder that lurks beneath the ordered veneer of modernity.

Feminism—a movement that, within the Western cultural imagination, signifies the transgression and overturning of the gender laws that structure dominant order—signifies the unleashing of the terroristic threat of the disorderliness of women that lies at the heart of Western patriarchal culture. The threat is, as Eileen MacDonald puts it, that Valerie Solanas’ “Society of Cutting Up Men . . . would triumph.”<sup>88</sup>

Further, inasmuch as women are positioned as *integral* to the reproduction of society from one generation to the next, feminism represents for the modern imagination a movement against the naturalized order of the world that stems *from within*. Feminism desublimates the terror of the loss of (gendered) order that underpins and drives the organizational project of modernity—it mobilizes the destructive seed that lies within modernity itself. And it is radical feminism, speaking in terms of rage and violent retribution, that proclaims the revenge of “the disorder of women” most loudly.

For Kristeva, it is no coincidence that many women, post-1968, turned to terrorism as a solution to the problems of the world:

When a subject is too brutally excluded from this socio-symbolic stratum . . . she may, by counter-investing the violence she has endured . . . combat what was experienced as frustration—with arms which may seem disproportional, but which are not so in comparison with the subjective or more precisely narcissistic suffering from which they originate.<sup>89</sup>

Kristeva reads women’s participation in the political violence of terrorism as the reinvestment of women’s rage at their exclusion from civil society. In this sense, radical feminism and terrorism are not, as dominant discourse seeks to convince us, causally related. Feminism does not lead to (female) terrorism. Rather, *feminism and terrorism are structural equivalents*. They respond to the sociosymbolic violence upon which modernity is predicated. And in doing so, they present in the cultural imagination as geminate practices.

Valerie Solanas’ terrorist vision for the radical overthrow of patriarchal society constitutes a pronounced instance in which the radical feminist vision intersects overtly with the terrorist vision. Indeed, just as Joseph Conrad’s *The Secret Agent* literalizes the idea of terrorism as the disruption of linear time, Solanas’ *Manifesto* literalizes the terroristic threat of (radical) feminism.

### Solanas and the Terrorist Spectacle

Genet just reports, despite what Sartre and de Beauvoir, two overrated windbags, say about the existential implications of his work. I, on the other hand, am a social propagandist.

Valerie Solanas from the locked ward at Bellevue Hospital in 1968<sup>90</sup>

In the early afternoon of 3 June 1968, the summer of the student uprisings across the United States, Valerie Solanas waited outside the new offices of Andy Warhol's retro-chic art gallery, the Factory, at 33 Union Square, New York. It was a warm day, but Solanas was heavily dressed and she had even applied a little makeup—from all accounts, something she reserved for special occasions. When Warhol arrived in a taxi with his assistant, Jed Johnson, Solanas rode with them in the elevator up to the gallery. Solanas and Warhol exchanged a few words, and then Warhol and his entourage went about their business, ignoring Solanas' presence. A few minutes later, Solanas pulled a .32 caliber automatic pistol from a paper bag and fired three times at Warhol. Only one bullet hit Warhol, but it seriously wounded him, "entering through the left lung and hitting the spleen, stomach, liver and oesophagus before penetrating the right lung and exiting from the side."<sup>91</sup> She then fired at a visiting art dealer, hitting him in the left buttock, before turning and catching the elevator down to the ground floor. Later that evening, having surrendered herself and the gun to a traffic policeman in Times Square, Solanas was taken to the 13th Precinct Booking Room where she openly confessed to the shooting of Warhol. It is this incident for which most people remember Solanas, if they remember her at all.

In characteristically egotistical fashion, Warhol attempted to subordinate Solanas' attack to his own agendas by framing it as a hostile attempt to mobilize his promise, made earlier that year, that "in the future everybody will be famous for 15 minutes." Undermining the political nature of her actions, he constructed Solanas' action as "a mere attempt to use him as a trampoline to fame."<sup>92</sup> However, Solanas' own conceptualization of the incident was radically different. Solanas clearly envisaged the shooting as a radical, tactical intervention that would seize public attention and focus it on her feminist politics. For Solanas, the attack constituted a propaganda stunt that would operate in the violent, spectacular, and publicity-centered terms of terrorism, to foreground a political agenda.

In the immediate aftermath of her arrest and questioning, confronted by "a mob of journalists and photographers shouting questions,"<sup>93</sup> Solanas referred them directly to her feminist manifesto: "I have a lot of reasons. Read my manifesto and it will tell you who I am."<sup>94</sup> In so doing, Solanas attempted to redirect popular attention to her political cause linking her "radical gesture" with the politics of feminist revolution outlined in her manifesto.

Solanas' attempt on Warhol operated according to the same propaganda principle that is central to terrorism. It must be recognized as "a carefully orchestrated and radically disturbing aesthetic performance"<sup>95</sup> that can be located within a twentieth-century paradigm of spectacular political intervention, which encompasses the rise of terrorism as an important weapon in



the arsenal of resistance. However, in the media spectacle that followed the shooting, her manifesto received very little attention, and the seriousness of her revolutionary aims was lost; her guerrilla action was always already mediated by her victim's celebrity status. As Germaine Greer, one of the few people to consider Solanas with any seriousness, wrote, Solanas "was too easily characterised as a neurotic, perverted exhibitionist, and the incident was too much a part of Warhol's three-ring circus of nuts for her message to come across unperverted."<sup>96</sup> Splashed across the front page of *The New York Times*, Solanas' story was relayed as a vicious personal vendetta, emptied of its feminist politics.<sup>97</sup> Overshadowed by Warhol's seductive public persona, Solanas was labeled as the crazy woman who shot Warhol. Cast as a man-hating lesbian, Solanas enjoyed no more than a fleeting flirtation with infamy that almost completely obscured the political views she stood for. The unanimous conclusion of the media was that Solanas was mad.<sup>98</sup>

It is not merely Solanas' choice of target that enabled her attack to be written off as an act of insanity. Her casting as "crazy" expresses much about the way she is positioned in relation to dominant culture and the nature of the fear she inspires. Madness, as many theorists from Thomas Szasz to Michel Foucault have argued, is one of the tools by which dominant culture contains the threat posed by those who challenge its modes of operation, its legitimacy, or both.<sup>99</sup> Madness is one strategy by which the political valence of the terrorist is nullified. We can thus read Solanas' "madness" as a mark of her positioning within dominant discourse as a (female) terrorist.

Solanas' actions can be understood as a subversion of the practice of terrorism as one which is only "permissible" or "tolerated" if it is employed under the auspice of male defined aims and objectives. Solanas appropriates a masculine method of revolution for the purposes of feminist objectives, challenging the gendered nature and, by implication, the very form of the modern state. As such, she inhabits the space of the (male) terrorist. She thus manifests as the "inversion of the inversion,"<sup>100</sup> and by way of containing the threat she represents, dominant culture responds by classifying her as mad.

Solanas represents the most extreme manifestation of the feminist political struggle; the willingness to take the fight for women's liberation to its most terrifying and confronting limit. Her ideas and her program for action constitute for the state the most disastrous and threatening possibility of women's participation in terrorism. It was her politics—namely, the vision of violent feminist revolution that she outlines in the *SCUM Manifesto*—that constituted her as "terrorist."

Solanas' manifesto resonates as a form of terrorism in several key ways. First, and perhaps most obviously, like terrorism, Solanas' revolutionary project is configured as a clandestine movement that deploys violence to political

ends. The genocidal vision of Solanas' one-woman organization is based on terrorist tactics:

SCUM will not picket, demonstrate, march, or strike to attempt 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 strikes, it will be in the dark with a six-inch blade.<sup>101</sup>

However, beyond this, the *Manifesto* can be read as a radical critique of the (gendered) organization of power within the state. Like terrorism, then, Solanas' program for action is perceived within dominant discourse as an attack on the state. The manifesto can be understood as an apocalyptic text that conjures the implosion of the gendered order that underpins modernity. Her program for clandestine and violent revolution proposes a *tactical* intervention that politicizes the terror of the loss of order that lies at the heart of modernity. In these ways, the blueprint for feminist revolution that Solanas lays out operates according to the same principles as the revolutionary terrorism of the era. It signifies the apocalyptic end to the ordered world of (patriarchal) modernity.

### Reading the *SCUM Manifesto* as an Attack on the State

Solanas' manifesto is an apocalyptic text, and in this sense, it resonates with contemporary forms of terrorism. Lois Parkinson Zamora argues that the difference between apocalyptic and utopian literature is a matter of focus. She writes:

Effective apocalyptic literature has always focused its descriptive powers on the imperfect old world rather than the perfect new world . . . Its focus is on the "before" rather than the "after."<sup>102</sup>

Further, while "the apocalyptic narrator's psychological investment is in the 'happily ever after,' his [sic] narrative emphasis is on the 'lived,' that is, on time rather than eternity."<sup>103</sup> Solanas' ideal society is shaped by a utopian vision. She envisages a world in which competition, which she constructs as the primary cause of unhappiness, is eliminated, and peace, love, and happiness reign. She writes, "the female function is to explore, discover, invent, solve problems, crack jokes, make music—all with love. In other words, create a magic world."<sup>104</sup>

However, the *SCUM Manifesto's* emphasis lies on the shortcomings of the lived experience of modern Western patriarchal society. In the introductory pages, Solanas writes, "the male . . . has made the world a shitpile."<sup>105</sup> She

goes on to paint her apocalyptic vision in no uncertain terms. Her tone is millennialist; her call to action couched in the language of urgency, situating SCUM's arrival on the political scene at the moment of the apocalypse. She dedicates approximately two thirds of the manifesto to an annotated list of the myriad atrocities that shape modern American life and for which men can be held accountable, among them war, mental illness, the suppression of individuality, racial, ethnic and religious prejudice, ignorance, boredom, hate, violence, disease, and death. As Gornick notes, Solanas "describes everything as dead or dying."<sup>106</sup> Solanas envisions, that is, a world on the brink of apocalypse—indeed, in the grip of suicidal autoimmunity.

In Gornick's estimation, Solanas' enraged treatise against men crystallized radical feminist wrath:

[Hers] is the voice of one *who can no longer be satisfied with anything less than blood*. Set in such a mental framework, Solanas speaks the true feelings of the quintessential feminist heart, and those feelings are feelings of black rage. Rage of an ungiving, unstinting, unmediating nature. Rage to the death. Rage out of the racial unconscious which accumulates the experience of centuries and drops onto each woman as she is born.<sup>107</sup>

The kind of "black rage" that Gornick claims motivates the violent activist strategy of *The SCUM Manifesto* is characteristic, as I have noted, of what Enzensberger has labeled "the apocalyptic fantasy."<sup>108</sup> That is, the unbounded rage that frames the pages of the manifesto positions it within the apocalyptic genre. Further, though, underneath the blatant fury and the allocation of the blame for women's subordination to men, Solanas' manifesto may be understood as a critique of the exercise of male power and its relation to women's subaltern position in the modern democratic nation-state.

One of the characteristics of the text, which has rendered it an unpalatable read for many, and which has been used to justify its dismissal, is its appropriation of prominent male-generated cultural and scientific theories to justify Solanas' call for the termination of men's existence. In modern Western culture, these theories have achieved cultural dominance by appearing to have universal significance, and likewise, appearing to be scientifically objective. However, as Genevieve Lloyd discusses, this theoretical tradition has played a crucial role in the legitimation of male domination of the female.<sup>109</sup> Thus, for Solanas to assume these theories in support of the notion of female superiority marks a confronting inversion of Western thought and a source of discomfort for the modern reader.

Solanas bases her powerful call for feminist revolution on arguments borrowed from the science of eugenics.<sup>110</sup> Her theory revolves on a notion of

men's genetic, and consequently emotional, inferiority, delivered in the language of biological determinism.<sup>111</sup> Claiming that women are the superior beings of the human race, Solanas argues that it is thus necessary—indeed urgent—that women embark on a process of what we might call “gender cleansing.” In this sense, Solanas’ critique parallels the eugenics argument that shaped Hitler’s apocalyptic project of cleansing the German nation.

In claiming that men are imperfect versions of women, Solanas inverts the notion popularized in Western thought since Greek times that women are imperfect incarnations of the male, and consequently dangerous.<sup>112</sup> She reverses the idea that women’s imperfect biology demands their subordination and asserts that the “natural” order of things is one encompassing the subordination of men to female control. In Solanas’ theory:

The male is completely egocentric, trapped inside himself, incapable of empathizing or identifying with others, of love, friendship, affection or tenderness . . . His responses are entirely visceral, not cerebral; his intelligence is a mere tool in the service of his drives and needs; . . . He is a half dead, unresponsive lump, incapable of giving or receiving pleasure or happiness.<sup>113</sup>

Solanas confronts head on the gender binary on which the modern state turns, challenging the modern cultural construction of men as rational and women as irrational by inverting the body of modern theory that has established women’s fundamental irrationality as scientific fact.<sup>114</sup> Thus, one of the origins of the threat Solanas poses to the state is her complete inversion of the dichotomy of gender difference that forms the basis for the logic of the state as it is elaborated in social contract theory.

More explicitly, if we understand the state in Anthony Giddens’ terms, as the institutional apparatus that governs social life,<sup>115</sup> then Solanas argues passionately that men’s institutional command constitutes an important mechanism by which men achieve and retain power over “the superior sex”<sup>116</sup> in the modern world. Paralleling Pateman’s critique of the state as a gendered entity, Solanas argues that modern social organization is based upon the systematic exclusion of women from civil society. She alludes to women’s exclusion when she addresses the methods by which women must make amends. She writes:

Dropping out is not the answer; fucking up is. Most women are already dropped out; they were never in. Dropping out . . . strengthens the system instead of undermining it, since it is based entirely on the non-participation, passivity, apathy, and non-involvement of the mass of women.<sup>117</sup>

In her suggestion that women “are already dropped out,” Solanas echoes Pateman’s suggestion that the state, and by extension the social order it

implies, is patriarchal and exclusive of women.<sup>118</sup> In this sense, *The SCUM Manifesto* resonates within the cultural imagination as an attack on the modern state, and therefore as terrorist.

### The *SCUM Manifesto* as an Attack on Modernity

Like terrorism, the call for sexocide expressed in Solanas' manifesto is a possibility produced by the conditions of modernity. For example, technology—which, in the dominant cultural imagination, represents the essence of modernity—is central to the realization of the goals of the manifesto. Solanas claims that, with modern reproductive technologies, “it is now technically possible to reproduce without the aid of males . . . and to produce only females. We must begin immediately to do so.”<sup>119</sup> Solanas privileges technology as central to the emancipation of women from “male control”; it is the tool that provides the feminist revolution with its *Aufhebung*. She writes, “the male changes only when forced to do so by technology . . . when ‘society’ reaches the stage where he must change or die. We’re at that stage now, if women don’t get their asses into gear fast, we may very well all die.”<sup>120</sup>

Women are constructed here, in a particularly modern sense, as the rational agents of history's transformation, indeed its termination. And technology, so central to both the imagining and the implementation of modernity, provides them with the means to achieve their ends. In this sense, SCUM's use of technology marks a moment of reversal, the turning of modernity against itself.

I have suggested that terrorism configures the everyday of modernity as the site of the apocalyptic implosion of the order of modernity. Terrorism attacks the regulation and systematization of everyday life on the terrain of the everyday. It marks, in Derrida's terms, the (terror of the) moment of “suicidal autoimmunity.” I have also discussed how radical feminism constructs the everyday as the site of women's oppression and the site of radical transformation of gendered order. If we think back to the quotation from Solanas' *SCUM Manifesto* that I cited at the beginning of this chapter, the routine time of the everyday features as the site of SCUM's “radical gesture.” Solanas claims that “SCUM will coolly, furtively, *stalk its prey* and quietly move in for the kill.”<sup>121</sup> Stalking exploits the predictability of a victim's behavior, a predictability that is produced by the routinization of quotidian life. Solanas' program for political action, like terrorism, thus registers as tactical. It relies upon the routine of the everyday in order to intervene and turn the order of the everyday of modernity against itself. Like terrorism then, Solanas' feminist vision draws attention to and exploits the seeds of destruction—in this instance, the linear and routine time of the everyday—implicit in the

structural configuration of (patriarchal) modernity. In so doing, the manifesto calls up the apocalyptic implosion of modernity and as such resonates as similar in form to terrorism.

Solanas advocates that women seize control of the institutions that shape the production of everyday life, not in order to exercise bureaucratic power, but in order to systematically destroy it. Not content to wage a war for women's equality within the framework of conventional feminism, Solanas demands the destruction of "the system." She writes, "SCUM is out to destroy the system, not attain certain rights within it."<sup>122</sup> In this way, Solanas differentiates SCUM from more liberal and/or institutional forms of feminism in that her terrorist statement aims directly at dismantling the entire fabric of society; a complete overturning of the status quo and its replacement with something entirely novel. Like forms of revolutionary terrorism carried out in the United States in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Solanas demands the radical revision of society.

Importantly then, Solanas is not interested in merely attacking the state. *She wants, wholeheartedly, to dismantle it.* She writes, "SCUM is against the entire system, the very idea of law and government."<sup>123</sup> It is in this claim that the apocalyptic temporality—the very same conceptualization of time that underpins the practice of terrorism—that shapes Solanas' version of feminist revolution is most apparent. In her anarchist call to abolish law and government, we can understand Solanas as conjuring not just the end of the state but, perhaps more importantly, apocalyptic end-time. If the modern state is both embedded in, and imagined as the supreme expression of the order implied by the linear and routine time of modernity, then Solanas' attack, in summoning the end of the state, also musters the apocalyptic end of modernity itself. While it is dependent on linear time for its actualization, Solanas' call for the complete destruction of the state expresses the apocalyptic temporality that I have argued characterizes both terrorism and radical feminism.

The manifesto, noting that women make up the majority of the population, goes on to say:

If a large majority of women were SCUM, they could acquire complete control of this country within a few weeks . . . The police force, National Guard, Army, Navy and Marines couldn't squelch a rebellion of over half the population, particularly when it's made up of people they are utterly helpless without.<sup>124</sup>

It is perhaps this image, an image of masses of newly empowered women wrenching control from the patriarchal state in the most violent way, that is the most powerful threat to modern social order that Solanas envisages. With this image, Solanas invokes the reinvestment of that "implacable violence"<sup>125</sup> to

which Kristeva refers—namely women’s anger at their exclusion from the social contract—that lies at the heart of the foundational sociopolitical contract of modernity. Gornick, deploying apocalyptic signifiers, similarly reads the manifesto in terms of the reinvestment of the violence of women’s exclusion:

Solanas’ fury had been prophetic . . . Solanas had understood, from the very beginning in the savage, guttersnipe terms of her generation’s mad, stripped-down expressiveness—the rage beyond reason—that the dispossessed of the world are beginning to spill onto civilization’s ground. She had understood *that having been pent up so long, having swallowed their humiliation time and time again . . . women, like blacks, were about to go genuinely mad with the anger that comes to the dispossessed like a flash flood*, upon the heels of the first dawning realization of what has actually been taken from them.<sup>126</sup>

Solanas thus takes the threat to male society implicit in feminism to its absolute limit, an action that can only inspire the most paranoid and repressive reaction from the state that operates upon women’s exclusion, since it is a threat that stems from the excluded themselves—a threat that, according to the tenets of social contract theory, must be contained for the protection of society. In the passage quoted above, Solanas makes reference to women’s uprising as a “rebellion of over half the population . . . made up of people [men] are utterly helpless without.”<sup>127</sup> Here Solanas can be read as highlighting the ambiguous positioning of women within modern social order. That is, while women are constructed as excluded from civil society, they are nonetheless necessary to the smooth functioning of modern social order. In this sense, women’s disenfranchisement notwithstanding, the threat of female insurrection Solanas beseeches signifies, like terrorism, as a threat *from within*. In this context, like terrorism, Solanas’ vision—a vision that entails the empowerment of the dispossessed—represents the threat of the rise of the subaltern classes to power. But more crucially, it unleashes the terror held in check by the gendered order of modernity, the terror upon which the “sexual contract” is founded. It summons the violent and terrorizing revenge of the “disorder of women.” This revenge implies the end of the linear and routine time of (patriarchal) modernity, and by extension, the apocalyptic finale of (patriarchal) modernity itself.

### The Death of Modern Representation

In *Je, Tu, Nous: Toward a Culture of Difference*, Luce Irigaray writes that:

Certain modern tendencies, certain feminists of our time, make strident demands for sex to be neutralized. This neutralization, if it were possible,

would mean the end of the human species . . . To wish to get rid of sexual difference is to call for a genocide more radical than any form of destruction there has ever been in History.<sup>128</sup>

Solanas' project of annihilating the entire male population constitutes one method by which this neutralization of sex might take place. This would indeed constitute a genocide of unprecedented proportions. However, what makes Solanas' proposition a radical one is not only the literal destruction of material bodies; it is also the obliteration of the binary structure that underlies the symbolic order of gender relations in Western culture. In this context, the *Manifesto's* method for ushering in a feminist utopia represents not only the end of the male sex but also the end of the representational order of gender relations underpinning modern order—an eradication that summons the apocalyptic end of (gendered) modernity.

Greer writes of Solanas that “more than any of the female students she had seized upon the problem of the *polarity* which [places] men and women . . . in a limbo of *opposite sides*.”<sup>129</sup> Here Greer signals Solanas' engagement with modern forms of representation as a technology of (patriarchal) power.<sup>130</sup> Indeed, the problematic of modern forms of representation constitutes a central concern of Solanas' manifesto. As DeKoven notes, the call for

[n]ot just insight and change from men, [but also] retribution, possibly to the extent of total annihilation . . . is elaborated . . . fully and unambivalently by Valerie Solanas in the *SCUM Manifesto* . . . This is very different from eliminating oppression or even from anarchist acts of targeted assassination. The target here is an entire identity category.<sup>131</sup>

As I have argued, the othering of Woman enables modernity to be constituted as a gendered project of imposing order. Solanas' call to exterminate men is a form of genocide that transfers the category distinction from race to sex; what I have been calling sexocide: it bears certain similarities with Hitler's genocide of the Jews and raises similar issues concerning representation in modernity.<sup>132</sup>

The utopian vision of the state is often conceptualized in terms of absolute homogeneity. That is, the modern nation-state is integrally concerned with the problem of perfect representation. As Jon Stratton argues:

The nation is thought of as the *undifferentiated entity* made up of individuals who represent themselves to themselves as an imagined community having the identity of a particular nation. The state represents the nation, something expressed through the importance of voting to the modern state.<sup>133</sup>



For the modern state, the apocalypse, as a method by which utopia can be ushered in, gets constructed in terms of the eradication of those who impede the homogeneity of the nation-state. That is, apocalypse engages with the problem of representation.

In modern historical terms, the solution to this problem of perfect representation by the state has, under certain conditions, been thought to lie in the practice of genocide. It is in this context that “the discourse of race [has been] appropriated by the state as the most important way of limiting membership of the nation.”<sup>134</sup> As Zygmunt Bauman identifies, genocide only becomes thinkable in modernity:<sup>135</sup> when technology is privileged as the major vehicle of progress and bureaucracy becomes central to the functioning of the modern state, mass extermination becomes a realizable goal. While this is true, there is a further feature of modernity that facilitates the possibility of thinking genocide, namely the modern representational order based on binarisms—Othering—that enables the “classifying out” of certain groups of people from society.

Historically speaking, perhaps the most powerful example of genocide, in terms not only of scale but also of impact on the modern imaginary, is Hitler’s extermination of the Jews and other groups seen to pollute the homogeneity of the state such as gays, gypsies, and the intellectually disabled, during the Second World War. This “event” is commonly described in terms of the apocalypse: For example, the usual claim made about the term “Holocaust” is that it means “burnt offering” and is used to describe the Nazi genocide because of its connotations of widespread or total destruction. Similarly, the Hebrew term commonly used in Israel is *Shoah*, meaning destruction. Jonathan Boyarin argues that we live “in the shadow of the apocalypse . . . The specific event I am thinking of as casting that shadow is indeed the Nazi genocide.”<sup>136</sup> It is possible to think of the Holocaust as apocalypse not only because it involves widespread destruction and decimation reminiscent of the Last Days, but also because it is organized around a principle of eradication, a central feature of apocalypse thinking. This idea of eradication is only possible because of the process of Othering that characterizes modern representation.

Raphael Lemkin, who coined the term, defines genocide in the following way: “Genocide is directed against the national group as an entity, and the actions involved are directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group.” He constructs genocide as depending upon “a conceptualisation of a group of people, and all the social and cultural things associated with that group, as a totality.”<sup>137</sup> That is, it is dependent upon the identification of certain individuals as Other (“them”) to the imagined community (the “we”) that forms the basis of the nation-state.

Stratton states, “it was the modern, discursive production of Otherness that made genocide a meaningful possibility.”<sup>138</sup> It is in this context that genocide registers as a specifically modern possibility and that Boyarin can claim that the Holocaust represents “the funeral pyre of the Enlightenment and of a certain culminating vision of Europe as the problem of difference resolved.”<sup>139</sup>

Just as modernity renders genocide a thinkable practice, the modern structure of gender representation—dependent as it is upon the binary opposition of Man and Woman, operating in a society that privileges technology as progress and administered by the bureaucratic state—gives rise to the possibility of sexocide. It is this possibility that Solanas articulates. The invocation of a revolution based on a notion of eradication is foregrounded by Solanas’ allusions to the gas chambers of the Nazi Holocaust. In the final section of the *Manifesto*, she draws on Holocaust narratives that describe how Jews were led to the shower rooms of concentration camps and gassed to death. She beckons the day when, “the few remaining men can . . . go off to the nearest friendly suicide centre where they will be quietly, quickly and painlessly gassed to death.”<sup>140</sup> In Solanas’ view, the path to feminist utopia is not based on a notion of synthesis, on the resolution of the dialectic configured in evolutionary terms. Rather, it is based on revolution and is intricately bound up with the issue of representation in modernity.

Solanas’ manifesto, while it inevitably draws upon the binary structure of representation characteristic of modernity in order to make its case, when imagined in practice, powerfully undermines that very system of representation. In this sense, in a manner that parallels the practice of terrorism, SCUM represents a manifestation of the “suicidal autoimmunity” of patriarchal modernity. That is, like terrorism, the manifesto exploits the terrain of (patriarchal) modernity in order to mobilize the de(con)structive potential of (patriarchal) modernity in the service of obliterating (patriarchal) modernity itself. Solanas’ apocalypse marks not only the end of this world as we know it, but also the end of gender representation. As Gornick notes, “of course, to contemplate such a world is also to contemplate the eventual end of the family as we know it, competitive society as we know it, sexuality as we know it.”<sup>141</sup> In other words, Solanas puts into play a vision of apocalypse beyond which modernity is no longer thinkable or representable, let alone operational. Like terrorism, she conjures (gendered) modernity’s *dénouement*.

### Postscript: The Erasure of Solanas From Feminist Histories

While Solanas was hailed as an inspirational figure by radical feminists in the late 1960s, feminists have, on the whole, shown a marked reluctance both to engage critically with Solanas’ work and to allocate a place to her in the

history of the US feminist movement. In the extensive body of theoretically diverse feminist academic research that exists today, Solanas is barely mentioned, let alone acknowledged as worthy of in-depth critical analysis. If she is remembered, it is in passing: she is alternately paid homage for expanding the boundaries of the feminist debate and making “normal female anger seem reasonable in comparison”<sup>142</sup> and dismissed as the woman who went “too far” and gave feminism a “bad name.”

And yet, constructed within dominant readings as the lunatic fringe of feminism, Solanas’ specter looms. She is the repressed that, in Freud’s terms, always threatens to return and unravel the “good” work of “legitimate” feminism. She manifests as the stereotypical figure of the man-hating, crazed lesbian—a figure all too easily deployed by feminism’s adversaries to discredit the feminist movement as nothing but the ravings of irrational women.

The dominant culture ascription of Solanas as mad is perhaps one justification for feminists to distance themselves from either Solanas herself or her plot to exterminate men. Historically, feminists have had a difficult task establishing the legitimacy of their claims in a cultural context that has often conflated feminist demands with the culturally prescribed markers of insanity. Perhaps then, Solanas may be understood to blur the boundaries that feminists have sought to assert between feminism and madness, constituting a reason for feminists to dissociate themselves from her. However, given the feminist tradition of questioning the processes by which madness is ascribed to women in Western culture,<sup>143</sup> this explanation is unfitting as it fails to scrutinize why feminists have been so eager to uncritically categorize, and dismiss, Solanas as mad.

As I have begun to suggest, by the mid-1970s, radical feminism was commonly thought to have been superseded by “cultural feminism,” and “feminism” or “women’s studies” began to be constituted as a legitimate intellectual discipline.<sup>144</sup> Concurrent with feminism’s mainstreaming and institutionalization, its relationship to “violence” began to transform. Whereas radical feminists had celebrated Solanas, the female terrorist, as inspirational, by the mid-1970s, the female terrorist had become a much more problematic figure for feminism. Rather than seeking to annihilate sexual difference, cultural feminists—some who had originally identified as radical feminists—attempted to revalue those qualities traditionally associated with femininity. For example, motherhood began to be (re)valorized by feminists in the United States as an exclusively feminine experience that offered up a vision of an alternative world based on women’s values.<sup>145</sup> At this point in the history of second-wave feminism, the alignment of women with “peace” and men with “violence” gained rhetorical significance within US feminist thought. Against this backdrop, cultural feminists constructed the female terrorist, not

as a celebrated icon of revolution but, rather, a victim of “male violence”—explained away as the “demon lover.”<sup>146</sup>

It was not until the mid-1970s that histories of second-wave feminism began to be written, by which stage, the last vestiges of radical feminism had either disappeared or been reworked and subsumed by the cultural feminist project.<sup>147</sup> Bearing in mind the problematic positioning of the female terrorist at this time, it is not surprising that Solanas only appears momentarily. However, it is not just that the female terrorist resonates uneasily with the cultural feminist project. Imagining the feminist revolution in the apocalyptic terms of eradication outlined by Solanas has important implications for feminism. Given that feminism as both a social and philosophical practice draws upon the binary distinction between men and women as its fundamental organizing category, Solanas’ proposed annihilation of the male sex poses a profound threat to the production of identity that is so crucial to the feminist project, and in this sense threatens the existence of feminism itself. Proposing an *apocalyptic* methodology for attaining the feminist promise of equality, which is formulated not in terms of synthesis, but in terms of *eradication*, threatens the structure of representation that enables feminism to constitute itself as a forceful and legitimate social movement of modernity. Solanas’ manifesto thus describes a limit case for modern feminism, a historical end point beyond which feminism becomes both unimaginable and impracticable. Positioned at the beginning of second-wave feminism in North America, Solanas’ manifesto gets ignored by feminists because it implies the destabilization of the defining category, the differentiation between men and women, that forms the basis of feminism’s ability to represent itself—at a point in time when feminists were struggling to construct women as a category in order to effect (institutional) social and political change.