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From the Hammer to the Fist: The Pleasures and Dangers of March, Progress and Protest in Creating Social Justice from the First Wave to the Present¹

Colleen J. Denney²

Abstract

The visual history of the British suffrage campaign for social justice began with elegant, organized pageants of pictorial unity; but the beautiful spectacles were not enough to convince the British government of women's desire for equality under the law. Militant activists of the Women's Social and Political Union (hereafter WSPU) eventually employed aggressive tactics, letting go of the restrained politics of respectability. This study examines the link between the visual protests of first-wave activists and those of second- and third-wave advocates, in order to establish a dialogue about the presumed transgressions of women's bodily presence and feminists' use of body language. Starting with the toffee hammers that the WSPU suffragettes used in 1912 to smash windows, traditional cultural assumptions about women's bodily possibilities, like the windows themselves, were shattered. I seek to answer a question that has never been posed in feminist art historical debate: What is the bond between the hammer and the raised fist within feminist protest in its quest for social justice?

Keywords: Activism, Body Imagery, Visual Culture

Postmodern feminist women all struggle for fair representation under the law; whether it is a battle over control of their own bodies, access to public space without facing street harassment, or basic rights to equal pay, their bodies are the center of debate. Edwardian suffrage women put their actual bodies on the line: Marching in processions, advertising meetings with sandwich boards, chaining themselves to government fences, suffering forced-feedings, in all such cases theirs were bodily sacrifices that invited comment just by their very presence in the public domain. Then, as now, women suffered a keen and constant surveillance, as Kitty Marion, a British suffragette member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), confessed: "What a lesson in self-denial, self-abnegation, self-discipline. The first time I took my place on the 'Island'

¹ This essay is part of a book project in progress, *Raise Your Banner High! The Visual Culture of Women's Activism from London to Paris, 1860 to the Present* (forthcoming McFarland Press). The research travel for this study was made possible, in part, by a Seibold Fellowship, College of Arts and Sciences, 2013-2014; and a Social Justice Research Center Fellowship, 2013-2014; both at the University of Wyoming, Laramie, WY, USA.

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in Piccadilly Circus, near the flower sellers, I felt as if every eye that looked at me was a dagger piercing me through and I wished the ground would open and swallow me.”³

Marion’s experience was far from unique; rather, it was part of the vast visual history of the British suffrage campaign for social justice; the most impacting way they demonstrated their collective desire for the vote was through a series of marches and pilgrimages of pictorial unity (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. *From Prison to Citizenship Procession*, June 17, 1911, London, England. Source: Museum of London. 50.82/1660.

Women marched in white dresses with elaborate hats, fully gloved, wearing sashes in the colors of their respective suffrage organizations, making a spectacular performance of femininity on parade. As Barbara Green suggests, “the suffragettes cultivated a delicate relationship between activism and fashionable femininity, developing... an ornamental body as civic body”(3). But the beautiful spectacles and the suffragettes’ efforts to present themselves as respectable women worthy of the vote, were not enough to convince the British government of women’s desire for equality under the law. They had to push against the government physically. A move from “spectacular activism” to “militant warfare” for the WSPU was necessary and was also a sign of the processions’ failure, according to WSPU members, Marion and Emmeline Pethick- Lawrence (Qtd. in Green 71). While Martha Vicinus astutely argues that, “Such huge public events... asserted the power of women to use public space for political purposes”(266), the militant WSPU eventually upped the ante by employing aggressive tactics, letting go of such restrained politics of respectability.

³ Marion, *Autobiography*; in *Suffragette Fellowship Collection*. Picadilly Circus is a hub of public activity still today in Central London.

The WSPU were the first suffrage group to take on more strident actions, modeling themselves on the tactics of men in the labor movement, particularly in Manchester where Christabel Pankhurst, along with her mother, Emmeline, founded the group in 1903 (Harrison 36-38). While traditionally suffrage historians have pitted the WSPU against the other suffrage groups, principally the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), which Millicent Garrett Fawcett led, many suffrage women belonged to both main groups. The NUWSS chose to fight for suffrage along constitutional lines but they did join forces with the WSPU and other suffrage groups to create demonstrations and processions. Nonetheless, the WSPU approach represented a new and modern form of politics since they were the first suffrage group to foreground the tactics of militancy and, more broadly, to align themselves with trade-union tactics and other kinds of direct action. However, the term "militant" was not equated with WSPU violence until 1908 when certain members started to break windows of government buildings as a form of protest. The next shift came when the 1910 Conciliation Bill failed to pass, a bill that would have enfranchised women. Understandably, some 300 women rushed the House of Commons demanding to be heard; this day came to be called Black Friday because of the unprecedented police brutality the women suffered while trying to conduct a peaceful demonstration. The last straw for the WSPU members was when Parliament proposed a Manhood Suffrage Bill in late 1911, excluding women; this final conflict launched their West End window-smashing campaign.

First-wave suffrage women embraced the public realm, perhaps not always fully cognizant of its dangers, often, as with Marion, leaving careful records of their lived experiences, both on the streets and in prison, that are filtered through the lens of memory. Activist women's yearning to push at the boundaries of their respective cultures often means that they meet with violent confrontation, yet these women, historically and today, push on through to the other side, propelled by a need, a desire, that will result in the immanent pleasures and gratifications of being *represented*. It is their public struggles to fulfill their desire for recognition and a place at the table to which I turn in this study which argues that there is a direct link between Edwardian, first-wave activists' visual protests and those of global second and third wavers in terms of their transgressions of women's traditional bodily presence and their use of body language.⁴

Body Language of Pleasure and Danger

When examining women's body language in such march and protest situations, originally, we could articulate the differences in body language between the first-wavers of the Edwardian suffrage processions (Fig. 1) and second-wave feminists, as in this American National Organization for Women (NOW) march (Fig. 2), disparities which rested on Edwardian suffrage women's emphasis on their sexual differences from men.

⁴ Outman-Kramer and Galán present a series of articles that address contemporary, global, gendered protests of women in the streets. The present study seeks to situate the back history that allows for such public activism and its outward bodily expression.



Figure 2. *NOW March.* C. 1973. Author's collection.

The NOW women are vocally engaged and physically strident, their fists raised to demonstrate their outrage and desire for change; while the suffrage women march in orderly lines, silent and in control of their emotions. The NOW women speak out freely, stepping outside the feminine construct to voice their anger; but the suffrage women maintain bodies of distinction rather than imitating gestures and voices of male power.⁵ How do we reach this 1970s' moment of angry women, who feel both the freedom and the necessity to exhibit physically their quest for social justice?

In a study that characterizes a woman's place in the nineteenth-century public space, Judith Walkowitz addresses the pleasure/danger ambiguity of the woman's presence: either her body is

⁵ Existing alongside these outward-focused protests we continue to experience silent marches in the tradition of the first-wave suffragists. For example, the mothers and grandmothers of Argentina, the *Madres de Plaza de Mayo*, marched silently wearing the "first diaper" of their lost children, in protest over their missing children and grandchildren under a militant regime between 1977-1982 (see Ackelsberg and Shanley (92-93); and Reuter).

for male consumption; a symbol of her husband's wealth; or a threat to the social order (21): the pleasure is all his, the danger all hers. Yet, Walkowitz complicates this observation by arguing:

No figure was more equivocal, yet more crucial to the structured public landscape of the male *flâneur*, than the woman in public [who was] presumed to be both endangered and a source of danger to those men who congregated in the streets. In the mental map of urban spectators, *they lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning.* [my emphasis] (21)

Yet these suffragists could not *make things mean* in the representational sense because they were not yet represented as citizens. In this regard, they were not yet part of the dialogue in its two-fold expression: they were not represented by a vote, nor, because they had no voice in government, were they capable of controlling their own representations. Their bodies signified what a man could or could not do to them.

Because of this equivocality, it took a transgressive, resistance narrative, as in the NOW photograph, to do battle in public space. This conceptualization is one that the women have written on their bodies as well; the woman in the foreground right, for example, has written her desire for freedom on her t-shirt, which reads "Women's Liberation NOW," both a nod to the request for immediate attention to action and also to the NOW group's central place in the dialogue. Just as her raised fist is a gesture that marks her desire for action, echoed in the body language of the other marchers behind her, in the suffrage demonstration all the women carry white pennons to symbolize hope for change, their own white garments and hats reiterating that desire. Yet they speak from a quiet space, whereas the NOW image seems noisy, angry and in charge. The NOW women have crossed the line from "bearers of meaning" to "makers of meaning," unlike their suffrage forebears.

Marion opened this examination with a moment of surveillance that is symbolic of the battle suffrage women faced. Michel Foucault articulates their dilemma as bearers of meaning with regards to his analysis of Bentham's Panopticon, concluding that, "visibility is a trap... the major effect of the Panopticon [is] to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assumes the automatic functioning of power" (200-201). It is a metaphor for power and, as in Marion's experience, it is omnipresent within the culture, exercising its value system on anyone who steps into the limelight and acts out, as these women did. Whether they were in the papers, on the streets, or in prison, the cultural forces subjected them to this all-seeing Panopticonic eye and, in this regard, their visual productions worked both to extend that visible space and to respond to the powers in place. Throughout this text, then, we will see that suffrage women and their descendants both play into that responsibility and push at its boundaries. The moment when the suffrage women created the shift that showed their true cognizance of this double-edged dilemma, brought them into alignment with the second-wavers of the NOW image. It happened in 1912 when the WSPU members used toffee hammers and stones wrapped in stockings to smash windows in London's major shopping district in the West End as a protest about not being seen as potential "makers of meaning." As the *Illustrated London News* report announced in "Glass Smashing for Votes! Suffragettes as Window-Smashers" (Fig. 3), they were moving outside of their own personal space by swinging their hammers and doing physical damage symbolically to the patriarchy through the destruction of emblems of male power, such as the department store front we see in Figure 3.



Figure 3. “Glass-Smashing for Votes!’ Suffragettes as Window-Breakers.” *Illustrated London News* (9 March 1912). Source: Museum of London, ID. No. 2001.69/79.

In this moment they created the shift to women protesters who dismiss feminine comportment in order to voice their cause, as have the NOW marchers. The window-smashing illustration demonstrates physically, just as does the NOW photograph, the women’s desire for change in a threatening way, one not evident in the *From Prison to Citizenship* procession (Fig. 1). Both groups are transgressive in their bodily presence and in their refusal of feminine body language. Their physical presence in public space creates a talking back to the Panoptoconic eye and also a defiance of it in their corporeal refusal of proper feminine etiquette.

Returning to Marion’s experience in public space of having the perception of all eyes on her, Green offers up a female *flâneuse* (a strolling, leisurely female who owns the street in the way

that Charles Baudelaire's male *flâneur* long did), in answer to Janet Wolff's call for her presence; but she posits her in the person of the suffragist. Laura Mulvey first proposed this kind of surveillance under the guise of the male gaze in narrative cinema where the woman exists only for her "looked-at-ness;" Mulvey argues that the passive woman in visual media produces, in the male spectator, both anxiety (as an image of castration) and pleasure (through the two avenues of escape, voyeurism and fetishism). While Mulvey later responded to her own critique as perhaps too rigid a dichotomy, Green argues that "what has remained persuasive is the notion that feminine spectatorship is a problem in popular culture and that femininity is aligned with a certain kind of visual pleasure."⁶ Suffrage imagery conflates these problems. Suffrage women put themselves in public spaces to represent their desire for citizenship; yet, both they and their means of expression, be it banners, posters, or the parades themselves, were caught up in this narrative of visual pleasure and hence they had to continually push against it and resist it. One desire: Political representation, gives rise and makes use of another desire: A body politic; a public, collective body, that is reflective of the first desire to belong to a group of citizens. Hence, in looking again at the window-smashing illustration alongside the NOW photograph, it is apparent that both groups of women are protesting not only for basic rights of equality but also for a banishment of a system of "looked-at-ness" that presumes to keep such women in a limited space for male delectation, a system that is itself responsible for women's oppression. Hence, they are fighting on two fronts: to dismiss the patriarchal system of women's objectification for male scopophilic satisfaction, in order to be on equal footing with men. They are not in a liminal space but rather in the public realm, fighting for their own space within it that will no longer diminish them only in relation to patriarchy's desires. They play across this knowledge in both images, the WSPU women slyly pulling small toffee hammers from their purses to do the damage, using the accoutrements of femininity to fight back. More telling, the illustration highlights the fact that they put stones inside dark stockings with which to smash the windows, a symbolic gesture toward the critique of suffrage women as miserable, unloved blue stockings that, through education, wore away their femininity. Similarly, the NOW women, many of whom are holding onto their purses as they march, defy such symbols of femininity in their own outward body language.

The Hammer

Multiple discourses on the body became evident in the major shift of outward body language of the WSPU suffragettes that reverberated throughout subsequent women's protests, demonstrating that the 1970s did not represent the first instance of outward expressions of anger at an unjust system. Starting with the toffee hammers that the WSPU used in 1912 to smash windows (Fig. 3), traditional cultural assumptions about women's bodily possibilities, like the windows themselves, became shattered. Such acts ended not only any public sympathy for the movement, but also resulted in the NUWSS and other groups distancing themselves from the WSPU (Harrison 60). But, for many in the public arena, the militant suffragette became *the* image of the suffrage movement. The WSPU's strategic window-smashing campaign brought together the various sites of danger of London's West End with which Marion opened this analysis. Aggressive body language came into being with this event (Fig. 3). We witness a concerted

⁶ Green (38; and 189 n. 26), responds to Wolff's initial essay (34-50); to Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," (14-26); and Mulvey, "Afterthoughts on 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' Inspired by King Vidor's *Duel in the Sun*," (29-38). Denney addresses the *flâneuse* in relation to women professionals' entrance into British public space.

alteration in body language that reflects significant and escalating anger on the part of the suffragettes about the lack of progress in the cause. The strike of the hammer created both the literal and symbolic break with peaceful protest. They damaged over 270 premises and police arrested over 220 suffragettes. This event stands in a direct line with an image from the first public protest of the Women's Liberation Movement in the U.S., showing a member of the group called New York Radical Women (NYRW), as a *Bra-Hurling Protestor at the Freedom Trashcan* (Fig. 4) during the 1968 Miss America Pageant.



Figure 4. *Bra-Hurling Protestor at Freedom Trashcan, Women's Liberation Movement Protest at 1968 Miss America Pageant.* Source: AP Images.

While I will return to this photograph later, when I discuss posters and demonstrations, here it is significant in terms of the protestor's free and easy body language and in her actual act of raising her fist to throw away the accoutrements of femininity, here a bra. The women also threw girdles and other confining objects into the can, in order to give their own bodies' literal and symbolic freedom. Like the WSPU protestors, they played across both freedoms, recognizing and denying feminine body language, seeing it as a marker of male dominance and female submission, and also dismissing the symbols of that oppression, here the bra, which the protestor delightfully hurdles through the air. More telling, as in the forward momentum of the women in the window-smashing illustration, other images from this event show that she is egged on by women behind her. Their shouts of encouragement are almost laudable in the same way we are meant to imagine the actual jarring sound of the smashing of hammers and stones against glass in the WSPU demonstration. This immense, Edwardian, bodily swing created an unbroken bond between the hammer and the raised fist within feminist protest in its quest for social justice.

I recently attended the London Globe Theatre's production of Jessica Swale's new play, *Blue Stockings*, about the 1890s' campaign of women at Girton College, Cambridge, England, to possess the right to graduate. I was just as shocked as some of my fellow theatergoers to discover the vehement form that male protests took in 1897 when the vote was called to allow women to earn their degrees.



Figure 5. Stearn and Sons, *Effigy of Girton Girl outside St. Mary's, The University Church, Cambridge University, Cambridge, England.* 1897. Source: GCPH 9/1/4 The Mistress and Fellows of Girton College, Cambridge.

On the main campus, suspended above the protestors was an effigy of a Girton Girl on a bicycle in blue stockings (Fig. 5); I pair it with John Tenniel's 1870 political cartoon, "An 'Ugly Rush'" (Fig. 6), in order to demonstrate the kinds of bellicose body language and appearance men attributed to radical women in nineteenth-century England. The lunge forward of the "ugly" radicals in the cartoon is as symbolic as it is real; it places them outside of accepted norms, similar to the liminality of the suspended Girton Girl. Their body language is not that of the demure mother observing the scene close by, but an active engagement in debate reflected in their bodies' postures.



Figure 6. John Tenniel, "An 'Ugly Rush'." *Punch* (1870). Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. www.punch.co.uk.

Yet, these images date from long before the 1912 window-smashing campaign, and illustrate not women's real body language but rather men's fear of women's burgeoning power and voice in the debate. Rendering them as ugly harridans, whose bodies were awkward and aggressive, was a way of dismissing them. When women took over this radical body language themselves, however, John Bull, as a symbol of British patriarchal positioning, could not dismiss them so easily. Similarly, the the NYRW protestor, with bra suspended in the air (Fig. 4), mocks the culture that only values women's beauty and their ability to maintain the status quo, one that is a façade, easily created with the very items the woman is throwing in the freedom trashcan.

Regarding the Girton Girl effigy, some reports say the male students pulled it down and burned it following the defeat of the Girton College call for change; others say that angry male students decapitated it, tore it to bits and stuffed its remains through the gates of Cambridge's Newnham College for Women. Regardless of which method of destruction they used, the male students were out of control throughout the night, attacking local shops for lumber to build a bonfire. They destroyed the effigy, partly because it existed outside of their known social order, geographical space and patriarchal understanding of the female body. The effigy represented a female body that exhibited the hubris of moving beyond the domestic space in the same way that the NYRW (Fig. 4) attacked traditional values in their protest against a beauty pageant, constructed according to patriarchal dictates for male delectation.

Ironically, the male Cambridge students were exhibiting the same kind of outward hysteria they had, until then, projected onto the female students. In the gendered politics of modernity, advanced women were represented as radical feminists *and* hysterics.

We see an example of positional hysteria in Bernard Partridge's 1906 "Shrieking Sister" (Fig. 7), which represents not an actual woman but a construction of the patriarchal press whose purpose was to undermine the concept of the women's peaceful protests, discrediting them by misrepresenting them.



Figure 7. Bernard Partridge, "The Shrieking Sister." *Punch* (1906). Reproduced with permission of Punch Ltd. www.punch.co.uk.

But a woman's hysteria was also a real psychological phenomenon; ironically, it could paralyze her into a posture of boredom. I argue elsewhere that, as a prelude to feminist action, women in their domestic interiors gathered strength to cross the domestic threshold, as in this cartoon from the *American Woman's Journal* of 1917 showing a woman at a window waiting for the vote who proclaims "The Best is Yet to Be" (Fig. 8).⁷

⁷ "Les Femmes Ennuycées: Bored Women in European Culture; Presaging a Call to Action," in *Raise Your Banner High!* (in progress; forthcoming McFarland Press).



Figure 8. Fredrikke S. Palmer, “The Best is Yet to Be.” *Woman’s Journal (U.S.)* (1917), vol. 48. Source: Emmet Chisum Special Collection, Coe Library, University of Wyoming Libraries.

Rita Felski observes, “The figure of woman pervades the culture of the *fin de siècle* as a powerful symbol of both the dangers and the promises of the modern age”(3). But, with the advent of the suffrage marches, the conflation of women’s bodies with the domestic interior was eternally altered, and became irretrievably broken when the WSPU began violent protests.⁸

The suffrage women were just one type of protester who crossed over the threshold and used public spaces, such as London’s Trafalgar Square, as sites of resistance (Fig. 9).

⁸ See Gordon 281-301; and Denney 58-63.



Figure 9. *Harriet Kerr, WSPU (Women's Social and Political Union) member, Speaking at Trafalgar Square. c. 1908. Source: Museum of London. ID. No. 50.82/1282.*

Walkowitz says London became a site for women's and workers' intervention:

London had become a contested terrain: new commercial spaces and journalist practices, expanding networks of female philanthropy, and a range of public spectacles, from the Hyde Park "Maiden Tribute" demonstration of 1885, to the marches of the unemployed and the matchgirls in the West End, enabled workingmen and women of many classes to challenge the traditional privileges of elite male spectators and to assert their presence in the public domain. (11)

Just as the London streets became the site of contested voices, a woman's body became the site of much debate. If she could be burned in effigy, that was only the beginning of her dismemberment.

In fact, her body was on center stage, both physically and emblematically. Walkowitz's observation holds true in this photograph of Harriet Kerr at Trafalgar Square (Fig. 9), as such bodies "lacked autonomy: they were bearers of meaning rather than makers of meaning." And yet, Kerr's outward gestures now separate her from the peaceful suffrage marchers; she both steps into the man's space and challenges it with her body language, conflating the pleasure of speaking out with the danger of doing so in the same way we see the NOW marchers do and the NYRW protestor do (Figs. 3 and 4). Outward body language equates directly with protest; it also cancels out a feminine construct of self.

Raise Your Banner High!

Following her first arrest with Annie Kenney, when they called for “Votes for Women” at a Manchester election meeting in 1906, Christabel Pankhurst explained,

My conduct... was meant as a protest against the legal position of women today. We cannot make any orderly protest because we have not the means whereby citizens may do such a thing; we have no votes; and so long as we have no votes we must be *disorderly* [my emphasis]. There is no other way whereby we can put forward our claims to political justice. (Qtd. in Housego and Storey 16)

Inflected in Christabel’s public voice is her pleasure in being able to express her anger at the sense of injustice that befell her and Annie as second-class citizens, as well as the real and present danger they both suffered at the hands of the crowd who physically attacked them once they became “disorderly.”

Like Christabel and Annie, who unfurled a banner emblazoned with “Votes for Women” at the meeting in order to represent their ideals and to begin to *make things mean* something ideological in terms of their goals, other suffrage women also created their own banners. Their use of a non-high art medium, that sat outside of traditional artistic genres for visual, propagandistic purposes, mirrored their own physical exclusion from the status quo. Further, their use of art needlework allowed the women to position themselves to this public as participating in traditional womanly activities, thus testifying to their “womanliness,” a word that critics and advocates alike debated in terms of the suffrage women’s suitable or unsuitable behavior (Tickner 81). They raised these banners high in parades as organizational rallying points; throughout the processions, as they passed parade watchers the banners became informative and educative as to suffrage goals; and the banners acted as identifiers of collective group values. The banners united, in their form and content, women’s work and women’s history, honoring women of spiritual, moral, and intellectual purpose and yet they also belonged to a tradition of radical protest, preceded as they were by Trade Union banners.⁹

Attached to the body, the banner continued to be a prominent visual form of radical protest during the second wave; the joyful articulation of first-wave women positioned above a WSPU banner, brandishing their pennons, sashes and scarves triumphantly in this photograph of WSPU members freshly released from Holloway Prison in London (Fig. 10),

⁹ Records tell us that there were thousands of banners created for the various suffrage processions. Tickner 254-61 provides us with a list of the extant ones in “Appendix 4. A Checklist of Surviving Banners.”



Figure 10. *Release of Prisoners from Holloway Prison, c. 1912-13.* Source: Museum of London, ID no. 50.82/1508.

reverberates in this 1985 London Gillick ruling march (Fig. 11), in which under 16s stride alongside older women.



Figure 11. *Under 16s Protest the Gillick Ruling, London, England, 1985.* Source: Morning Star Photographic Archive 6/17/1, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

We see the same looks of elation, freedom and victory as they push forward, holding their handmade banner and pennons as markers of their ability to become *makers of meaning*; the NOW

marchers (Fig. 2), similarly, march behind and alongside large banners that advertise and articulate their cause. With such acts, these women are able to write themselves into the culture, as the suffragette Constance Lytton suggested, when she said of the body politic in relation to her hunger strike in the Holloway hospital ward,

I have decided to write the words “Votes for Women” on my body, scratching it into my skin with a needle, beginning over the heart and ending it on my face. I proposed to show the first half of the inscription to the doctors, telling them that as I knew how much appearances were respected by officials, I thought it well to warn them that the last letter and a full stop would come upon my cheek, and be still quite fresh and visible on the day of my release. (164)

Lytton invented herself as a visual instance of the body politic in the same way that suffrage women selling newspapers literally embodied the suffrage quest for justice (Fig. 12), conflating the symbol of the domestic interior, the apron, with that of their public cause; they walked the London streets to sell suffrage newspapers, merging their bodies with the imagery on the page.¹⁰



Figure 12. WSPU Suffrage Women, Patricia Woodlock and Mabel Capper, Advertising Meetings, July 1908. Source: Museum of London, ID. no. NN22779.

This act was a very bold one, forcing their viewers to read their bodies as they read the news. Further, the image shows women in solidarity, arms linked in a moment of camaraderie and

¹⁰ There is a plethora of such imagery. See, for example, *Poster Parade*, June 1908, Museum of London.

sisterhood. This image stands in a direct line to the NOW march image, in which viewers read the message on the woman's t-shirt in the foreground, her passionate gesture echoing the cause written on her chest: Women's Liberation NOW. While her first-wave counterparts still cling to a domestic phrasing, however, she has broken completely free, liberated by The Pill from domestic inevitability.

Active Agitation

This set of actions and its aftermath, with women moving from a traditional stance to one of increasingly active agitation, blending their bodies with the cause, is, I argue, part of a resistance pattern that pairs the concepts of pleasure and danger. In this regard, this study recognizes the importance of symbolic inversions that belong to the dialogue of the carnivalesque in Mikhail Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World*. While the British suffrage processions, as in figure 1, might look, to the untrained eye, like festivals, they were, rather, political protests. Nonetheless, public response to them can be couched in terms of carnivalesque language and expectations. Barbara Babcock argues that symbolic inversion

...may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behavior, which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political. (14)

The suffragists fought both the battle of stepping outside accepted norms, literally, in their marches, and the battle of contradicting accepted notions of feminine behavior both within the orderly processions and once they escalated to violent protests. Yet, even while their pageants were orderly, silent and dignified, they were often subjected to judgmental eyes. As Millicent Garrett Fawcett pointed out, recalling the march of 13 June 1908 that the NUWSS organized, one "stern-looking and very long-legged man" walked "rapidly down our lines facing us and saying form time to time, 'Yes, yes, all one type, all alike, all old maids'" (Garrett Fawcett 191-92). Such positioning meant that some of the public, at least, were more likely to align suffrage marchers with:

[g]rotesque realist images [of] the human body as multiple, bulging, over- or under-sized, protuberant and incomplete. The openings and orifices of this carnival body are emphasized, not its closure and finish. It is an image of impure corporeal bulk with its orifices... yawning wide... (Stallybrass and White 9)

Such language belongs to the dominant culture; carnival's big failing is not being able to get beyond its own complicity. As Tickner has argued, suffrage processions were elegant spectacles in which the women were compliant and colluding, but she elaborates that while...

...[t]hey were indeed part of the spectacle,... they also produced and controlled it; as active agents, they need not passively endure the gaze of onlookers who were curious or perhaps indifferent. They could invite, it, respond to it, work with it and then move on. Their bodies were organized collectively and invested politically and therefore resistant to any simply voyeuristic appropriation. (Tickner 81)

Stallybrass and White's positioning and Tickner's assertion of acknowledgement and resistance, come into play in French, 19th-century political public protests as Maurice Agulhon outlines. Granted he is speaking specifically of political protests for citizens' rights in France, but he asserts a dichotomy that is useful here: that static representations are associated with constitutional politics while active representations are associated with radical politics (88). Specifically, the French Marianne of Bourgeois Liberalism consists of a "fixed allegory: an image of serenity; seated or standing but immobile posture; orderly hair; covered bosom; a mature, even maternal figure" whereas the Marianne of Popular Revolt is a "live allegory: an image of vehemence; always standing and sometimes on the march; free floating hair; uncovered bosom; youthful figure." If we extrapolate those observations to the imagery of the first-wave and second-wave marches and protests, we can see how Agulhon's theory is played out in the bodily representation of suffrage women in public and how such imagery either inflects, gives rise to, or counteracts later images of women protestors. For example, returning to "The Shrieking Sister" (Fig. 7), we see the NUWSS constitutional reform leader, Garrett Fawcett, putting a calming, precautionary hand on an out-of-control, raging, fist-clenching, arm-waving suffragette who brandishes that supposed weapon of suffragettes, the umbrella, to which she has attached a flag that reads "Female Suffrage" (Denney 153). The constitutional reformer and the radical suffragette are not in unison here but rather represent the two poles of static and live allegory and, in this sense, pin down the two types of body language which the Edwardian, patriarchal, cultural image-makers determinedly reproduced in their critiques, whether this dichotomy reflected reality or not. Yet, reconsider the "hysterical, shrieking sister's" body language, presumed to be that of the unstable woman and hence easily dismissed; in Agulhon's construct she takes control; women protestors from the 1912 window-smashing campaign through the 1960s onward reiterate her outwardly-focused body language. In fact, the women's body language in the 1912 illustration (Fig. 3) mirrors the affronted gesturing of the shrieking sister in the 1906 *Punch* cartoon. Such emotional gesticulating is also present in the NOW march women's posturing and in woman protestor's actions in the *Bar-Hurling* event from 1968 (Fig. 4). All are examples then of Agulhon's theory of active representations appearing in cases of radical protests. Ironically, the *Punch* image of the shrieking sister belongs to a series of representations used to undermine the suffrage cause and, in 1906, did not correspond with how suffrage women presented themselves. It does, however, address the 1906 debate which sought to decrease the power of the suffrage collective body by presenting women as unattractive and out of control, a positioning that is aligned with the observations of the man in Garrett Fawcett's observations above.

Hence, the nature of these outward, active bodily manifestations among the first and second wave belong to the politics of transgression. Stallybrass and White explain the structure as one of hierarchy in which "the low troubles the high" in the sense that:

The high/low opposition in each of our four symbolic domains—psychic forms, the human body, geographical space and the social order—is a fundamental basis to mechanisms of ordering and sense-making in European cultures... [T]ransgressing the rules of hierarchy and order in any one of the domains may have major consequences in the others. (3)

We can also layer over Agulhon's static and lived allegory and Stallybrass and White's structure, Bakhtin's analysis of the grotesque body.¹¹ Let the effigy (Fig. 5) stand as the example here:

[T]he grotesque body is the open, protruding, extended, secreting body, the body of becoming, process, and change. The grotesque body is opposed to the Classical body, which is monumental, static, closed, and sleek, corresponding to the aspirations of bourgeois individualism; the grotesque body is connected to the rest of the world. (Qtd. in Russo 62-63)

Bakhtin's grotesque corresponds to Agulhon's live allegory whereas the Classical body corresponds to Agulhon's concept of the fixed allegory. The grotesque body is threatening and excessive, always pushing beyond the norm. The male students of Cambridge could not have found a more fitting representation of the grotesque than the female effigy that, in a Bacchanalian kind of frenzy, they then destroyed. Stallybrass and White would see them involved in a "recurring pattern" as a result of this hierarchical structure which creates a:

...mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously opposed and excluded at the social level. It is for this reason that what is *socially* peripheral [our Girton Girl effigy] is so frequently *symbolically* central (like long hair in the 1960s). (5)

We can liken the actions of the Cambridge men to those of some later British male youth on Greenham Common who attacked the homemade tents of the women protestors with excrement and pig's blood.¹² Stallybrass and White argue that such grotesque women:

... outrage local youths by breaking the norms of women's dependence upon men and by their independent sexual stance and are visited, in consequence, with a "charivari"—a scapegoating carnivalesque ritual, usually carried out by young men against those whom they feel have broken the customs of courtship and sexual duty in the locality: charivari was a rowdy form of crowd behavior often used against "unruly women," and here it is an overt reminder of patriarchal dominance. (24)

This kind of charivari is certainly what the Cambridge boys were performing; it is not at all dissimilar to that practiced on suffrage women who walked the streets handing out pamphlets, one of whom was subjected to being stripped and tarred in public by angry young medical students, who had also smashed windows at The Women's Press in Central London (Roberts and Mizuta xiii-xiv).

But the grotesque body/live allegory also represents the social body. As Mary Russo believes, "The grotesque body is open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple, and changing; it is identified with non-official 'low' culture or the carnivalesque, and with social transformation" (8). One telling, and apparently incongruous image in this regard, shows a group of British suffrage

¹¹ Stallybrass and White (6-23) conflate their hierarchical order with Bakhtin's "world turned upside down" theories.

¹² Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp (1981-2000) protested the Royal Air Force's Greenham Common, Berkshire, England, as a site for the deposit of nuclear weapons. It garnered national and international attention.

women smiling broadly and somewhat mischievously while they jointly hold up a smashed window (Museum of London). The photograph is displayed in an elegant matt that carries the studio name Martin Studio, Dundee, as if it stands as a celebration, marked by a special studio event. These women bear no resemblance to the harridans and hysterical women whom *The Times* stereotyped in its assessment of the window-smashers as “out with their hammers and their bags full of stones because of dreary, empty lives and high-strung, over-excitables natures” (Qtd. in Harrison 32-33). While the window-smashing women bear no physical resemblance to the female grotesque, their actions have moved them beyond the boundaries of normativity.

If we recognize that the public pageants of suffrage come out of a tradition of the carnivalesque, sitting outside of everyday experience as extraordinary and liminal, then we can see their movements as belonging to the Bakhtinian grotesque body on display as part of that transformative moment. Russo, in fact, associates the “shrieking sisterhood” construct of the first wave and the “bra burner” construct of the 1960s (neither of which existed except as figments of men’s imaginations) with the female grotesque (14). The grotesque body, like the live allegory, pushes at the Classical body (which is akin to Agulhon’s static allegory); it is associated with radical politics and live allegory rather than with something fixed. The ire of the Cambridge male students is partly because they cannot suppress this spirit, as it exists outside of the norm.

Posters and Demonstrations

That women had no other recourse than to act out in a grotesque fashion against the staid, idealistic representations of women and hysterical ones alike, is evident in the first public protest of the second wave in America (Fig. 4), a demonstration that Robin Morgan organized with her group, the New York Radical Women (NYRW) at the 1968 Miss America Pageant in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Just as with the harridan and hysterical imagery, against which the first wavers fought, in relation to the more traditional positioning of women as feminine and compliant, so too, as Susan J. Douglas reports, these second-wave women balked at being “treated like a cross between Pussy Galore and Hazel”(151), references to the sexualized plaything of James Bond films and the perfect, nurturing housekeeper of 1960s American television. Just as with our first wavers, Douglas argues, such “media stereotypes were strangling their goals and ambitions. So they singled out the dominant media imagery of women for attack” (151). The event took on a guerilla theatre flair. The women’s intentions were not lost on the public; they demonstrated with their handmade posters (Fig. 13) that paired a contemporary media image of a woman cut up into body parts, like a steak, with the message of “Break the Dull Steak Habit,” alongside one that read “Welcome to the Miss American Cattle Auction.”



Figure 13. *Cattle Auction, Women’s Liberation Movement Protest at 1968 Miss America Pageant.* Source: AP Images.

To drive the point home, they crowned a live sheep as “Miss America.” Ironically, in *Cattle Auction*, while both women are dressed respectfully, the man observing their posters with judgmental hands on his hips needs a girdle, the kinds of things these women were throwing in the *Freedom Trashcan* (Fig. 4) as examples of the many “titillating symbols of female containment” (Douglas 139).

With regards to these second wavers’ use of handmade posters to articulate their protest, Paula Hays Harper points out that the suffrage posters produced in Great Britain and America pre-World War I were the first propaganda picture posters, noting that suffragists “were the first group to adapt this... art form to a political function and set the precedent that was so quickly followed on a massive scale, by the makers of official government propaganda posters” (150). The NYRW posters conform to Hays Harper’s characterization of first-wave suffrage intent: They “were made by convinced individuals with no commercial motives. They supported an antiestablishment cause and were directed to an audience that did not care so much about art as about the issues”(150). That the NYRW were cognizant of their links with their suffrage predecessors is evident in their proclamation of the event as the first militant, feminist confrontation with the law since Pankhurst and Kenney spoke up at the 1906 election meeting (Wander 254; Caine 259-60). But what is perhaps most telling is that, in their pamphlet that records the events and their subsequent arrest, “Why Miss World?” one of the women echoes Kitty Marion, loud and clear, and also specifically ties their experience to that of the suffrage women prisoners:

I felt like the event symbolized my daily exploitation. I saw the contestants being judged by men, and I know what it feels like to be judged and scrutinized every day when I am just walking down the street.

She then relays part of the history of British beauty pageants, stating that in order to guard the contestants’ reputations, chaperones “rule the girls like Holloway prison warders” (New York Radical Women 249-50).

But, while the event brought many more women to the movement, it largely backfired with the media. Margaret Marshment explains:

This protest was itself the subject of media representation (...mainly by men)... It was directed at male control of definitions of women, but was interpreted as an

attack on other women defining themselves; it aimed to attack ideological stereotypes of female beauty, and was interpreted as an attack on beauty itself; it was a protest against the trivialization of women, and was itself trivialized; it aimed to challenge the power of men to define women and was itself defined by men. (127)

The institutional markers that operated to put 1960s feminists in their place were the same ones that functioned to discredit the WSPU militants. These 1960s protests were dismissed as the ravings of unhappy, unfeminine women who could not catch a husband and hence had become hysterical. They belong to the same female grotesque framework as the WSPU women, targeted as old maids and whose window-smashing campaign similarly backfired, the newspaper illustration headline stating specifically “Suffragettes as Window-Breakers” to discredit them.

The Fist

Yet, like their first-wave ancestors, these second-wavers changed their body language; discarding the outer signs of femininity was both symbolic and real; they stepped outside of those feminine confines to create a lived allegory of protest, their body language literally embodying their desire for social justice, taking *over* the language of the presumed “hysteric” to exhibit their anger, their desire to *represent*. This ideology is also present in British feminist posters of the 1970s, such as *Women Unite Now* (Fig. 14) and *Lesbian Employment Rights* (Feminist Library Poster Collection, Bishopsgate Library). Like their American contemporaries in the NOW march (Fig. 2), these British women exhibit a body language of raised, clenched fists, which pervades in actuality and in symbols on the posters; these British women march together with picket signs, voices at high pitch.



Figure 14. *Women Unite Now. International Women's Day Demonstration, c. 1972.* Feminist Library Poster Collection, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

But the ultimate image of raised fists unites the years 1971 and today, showing Gloria Steinem and Dorothy Pittman-Hughes in the original photograph by Dan Wynn for the U.S. *Esquire Magazine* alongside a contemporary revisitation of their solidarity, emblemized by their mimicking of the original photograph in which they raise their fists, their expressions gleeful, their smiles broad and determined, almost eerily mirroring both the body language of women released from Holloway Prison (Fig. 10) and the NYRW protestor's blissful disregard for propriety (Fig. 4).¹³ As co-founders of the U.S. feminist *Ms. Magazine* and the Women's Action Alliance, these two prominent feminists have long engaged in grassroots organizing that created the first U.S. women's shelters, showing that the home was often the *least* safe place for women to be.

Coupling their defiant, empowered body language is a circa 1975 poster for a Women's Therapy Centre in London (Fig. 15) which talks back to imagery of the cloistered, domestic woman

¹³ The origins of the raised fist to symbolize "black power" is the subject for another study. I thank Kerry Pimblott, an expert on the Black Women's Movement, for discussing this issue with me. On the dialogue between the Civil Rights Movement and the Women's Liberation Movement see Collins.

we see in Palmer's image of the hopeful woman at the window waiting for the vote (Fig. 8) and embraces the issue of violence to women's bodies.

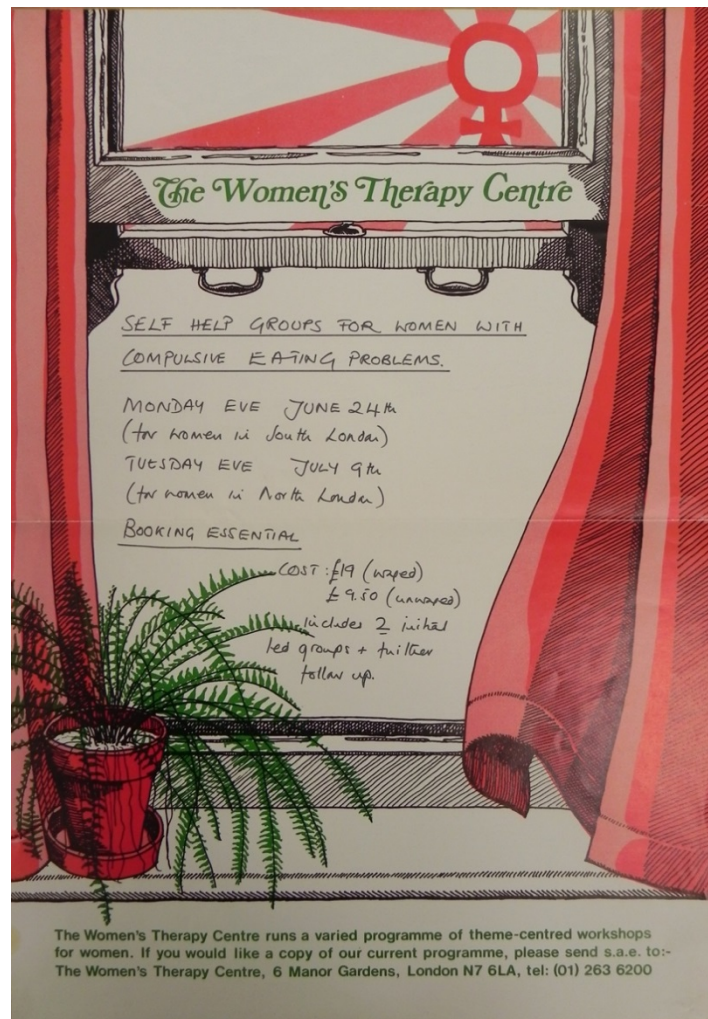


Figure 15. *Women's Therapy Centre Poster*, c. 1975. Feminist Library Poster Collection, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

I could not ask for a better image with which to end. The poster depicts a light, airy room, with a view through a now-open window, which allows in a light breeze that lifts the curtains. On the horizon is the woman's symbol encased in the sunrise. The suffrage activists propelled us beyond this windowsill through their own shift, taking over the hysterical, outwardly focused body, which had, until then, been used against them. Our roots lie with them. Embracing their own agency, they forever admonished the woman at the window waiting wearily for change.

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