

# Delayed Critique: On Being Feminist, Time and Time Again

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## Abstract

In this article, I argue for a systematic critique of transphobia in feminism, advocating for a reconciling of trans and feminist politics in community, pedagogy, and criticism. I claim that this critique is both delayed and productive. Using the Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival as a cultural archive of gender essentialism, I consider how rereading and revising politics might be what is “essential” to feminism.  
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## Résumé

Dans cet article, je défends l’idée d’une critique systématique de la transphobie dans le féminisme, en préconisant une réconciliation des politiques transgenres et féministes dans la collectivité, la pédagogie et la critique. Je soutiens que cette critique est à la fois tardive et productive. En utilisant le Festival Michigan Womyn Music comme archive culturelle de l’essentialisme de genre, j’envisage comment la relecture et la révision des politiques pourraient être ce qui est « essentiel » pour le féminisme.  
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In “On Being in Time with Feminism,” Robyn Wiegman (2004) supports my contention that history, theory, and pedagogy are central to thinking through the problems internal to feminism when she asks: “... what learning will ever be final?” (165) Positioning feminism as neither “an antidote to [n]or an ethical stance toward otherness,” Wiegman argues that “feminism itself is our most challenging other” (164). I want to take seriously this claim in order to consider how feminism is a kind of political intimacy that binds a subject to the desire for an “Other-wise” (Thobani 2007). The content of this “otherwise” is as varied as the projects that feminism is called on to justify. In this paper, I consider the marginalization of trans-feminism across mainstream, lesbian feminist, and academic feminisms. Part of my interest in this analysis is the influence of the temporal on the way in which certain kinds of feminism are given primacy in the representation of feminism. Following the work of Clare Hemmings (2011), I want to intervene in the kinds of stories that are being told about feminism; I want to contribute to a less partial narrative, one where the feminisms included do not simply reproduce histories of belonging for some women. At stake in this paper is a willingness to risk my own unintelligibility, to admit—if even temporarily—to not knowing how to think together all of the tensions that the theoretical project of feminism raises.

In what follows, I will argue that trans-feminism has been a structuring aspect of much contemporary feminist thinking on gender and sexuality. Simultaneously, I will examine some of the conditions that have excluded trans<sup>1</sup> subjects and trans issues from feminist cultural, material, and discursive spaces. In particular, I will consider the politics of trans-exclusion in the entrance policy of Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival as a case study and connect this to other exclusions in feminism. I argue that the persistence of these trans-exclusions needs to be evaluated in relation to the ongoing forms of resistance by trans scholars, trans activists, and trans allies. Encouraged by the belief that feminist

theory, activism, and pedagogy can lead to a disruption of hegemonic relations, I am hopeful that the marginalization of trans-feminism is losing currency. Moreover, I am interested in how feminism, as a politic of critique, can be routed toward self-reflexivity in order to re-imagine itself. To conclude my analysis, I will engage in a personal practice of “recitation” (Hemmings 2011) and “reparative reading” (Sedgwick 2003). In this exercise, I aim to signify how feminist political subjectivity is a process of becoming, but also of return, with compassion, to a moment of my own opacity around trans politics in order to read it differently for the present and hopefully for the future. This analysis, then, is about how feminism is a timely project; it is a system of making sense of, valuing, and structuring politics as well as the projection of an image that is outside of, but pivots on, the self. The shape of this project, I suggest, takes and makes time.

### Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival

The origins of this paper began with my insistence that Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival (MWMF) was out of time with contemporary feminisms. At the time, MWMF was still hosting an annual “womyn-only” music and cultural festival in Michigan, USA. Responding to misogyny, homophobia, and racism, MWMF was created in 1976 to provide a place for women where their “difference” would be celebrated and not vilified, protected and not threatened. The majority of the festival participants have historically been lesbian feminists (Kirby 2013). For the duration of the festival years, known colloquially as “Fest,” “Michfest,” or just “Michigan,” festival attendees camped out for a week on what was described as “women’s land”<sup>2</sup> and participated in community-building through anti-oppression and self-empowerment workshops, volunteer work, and communal eating and showering. In May 2015, MWMF released a statement that it would be closing its doors that summer, in its 39<sup>th</sup> festival year (Merlan 2015). The closure of this iconic festival no doubt elicited a range of reactions across disparate feminist communities, including disappointment, ambivalence, and satisfaction.

I chose MWMF as a case study through which to analyze the ongoingness of transphobia within feminism precisely because of the lengthy duration of both the festival and its trans-exclusive entrance policy, the “womyn-born-womyn policy.” I suggest that, prior to

closing its doors in 2015, MWMF was peculiarly out of time with itself, an anachronism that was intentional, produced, and revered as such. Through a range of cultural practices, the most obvious being the trans-exclusive entrance policy, MWMF presented itself as a kind of impermeable time capsule of second-wave cultural feminism, an insular and insulating refusal to change in order to preserve its attachments to the presumption of violence inherent in a specifically sexualized gender binary. However, the festival’s “womyn-born-womyn only” admission policy, which functioned to exclude trans women and undermine trans men, performed its own kind of discursive and material violence in the demarcation of whose bodies count as women. As a festival grounded in feminist principles and attended by feminist participants, the festival also asserted which feminist subjects counted as the worthy subjects of feminism.

The expulsion of two trans women from the festival in 1991 resulted in the formalization of the “womyn-born-womyn policy” in 1993, and, significantly, in the establishment of the protest movement Camp Trans that same year (Sreedhar and Hand 2006, 161). Each year thereafter, Camp Trans was mobilized as a temporary site of trans politicization and community building, occupying land adjacent to the MWMF grounds (camp-trans.org). Despite this and other highly visible forms of dissent and critique over the following two decades, the exclusive policy persisted and, as recently as 2013, the director of MWMF defended its necessity as a way to preserve women’s space (Hurst 2013). Despite the exclusivity of the policy which targeted the barring of certain women, the festival nonetheless sustained a significant place in the life of many feminist subjects. Why and how was it justifiable that safe space for some women pivoted on the formal exclusion of trans women, especially when trans women are so often the recipients—not perpetrators—of violence? That this violence is often at the hands of other women is perhaps not surprising, as feminist theory has made clear the ways in which symbolic violence materializes in everyday practices and actions.

MWMF’s trans-exclusive policy demonstrated explicit transphobia and reified an essentialist gender ideology, where gender is both biologically and socially constructed, in order to secure an imagined (festival) culture of (liberated) female victims and (distanced)

male perpetrators. Through sustaining this binary, MWMF cast itself as a utopic “womyn’s space” that operated outside of the very oppression it insists upon. In my view, those who attended MWMF colluded with transphobia, benefited from it, and sought to preserve transphobia as an inevitable aspect of feminist culture and therefore feminist politics, activism, and theory. Furthermore, MWMF perpetuated a division between cisgender<sup>3</sup> women and trans women by insisting on the incompatibility between “women’s spaces” and trans spaces (Nicki 2006, 159), women’s issues and trans issues, and feminist politics and trans politics. I actively write against these distinctions. That transphobia—and its attendant avowals and disavowals—needs first to be recognized in order to be reconciled with contemporary feminisms is an argument I take seriously. This concern prompts me to ask: what does feminism make time for and what does feminist time make?

What strikes me as untimely and therefore paradoxical about MWMF’s entrance policy is that it was at odds with the structuring tenet of liberal feminism, mainly the intellectual and activist pursuit of gender equality. More critically, it was at odds with an increasingly diverse range of third and fourth wave feminist politics whose very participants are aligned as and with trans-feminist subjects. The “womyn-born-womyn-only” policy, and the festival culture it created, actively reinforced the hegemonic ideology that gender and—by extension—sexuality are biologically determined. Alice Echols (1989) described this gender essentialism as the key signifier of second-wave cultural feminism, which involved a deepening—rather than an eradication—of gender difference between men and women in the pursuit of an elevated alternative female culture (6). Elements of cultural feminist ideology continue to influence contemporary claims for “women’s rights,” “women’s culture,” and “women-only spaces.”

MWMF was one site where the persistence of such claims were dramatized. It signaled what “being female” might mean in a space that was constituted in defense of its right to claim itself as such. MWMF was positioned at the intersections of female, feminist, lesbian, and queer subjectivities that continued to struggle for forms of recognition both within and outside the festival boundaries. That these subjects may have been both trans and non-trans was a condition that structured the festival, revealing that the parameters of what

“being female” might mean were not as clearly demarcated as some MWMF organizers and attendees would have liked to believe. The double-edged insistence on sustaining the kind of “don’t ask, don’t tell” gender injunction alongside an explicit request for trans people not to attend (Sreedhar and Hand 2006, 162-163) revealed that festival organizers were aware that the policy—and, by implication, the festival itself—was frighteningly precarious, capable of being undone *or* upheld by a wide range of “female-bodied” subjects at any given moment. The desire to contain “female bodies” at the festival was as much an effort to celebrate, empower, and liberate “womyn” as it was to categorize, discipline, and police them as such.

Looking backward, how will we read the feminist politics of MWMF and its relationship to trans subjects and to contemporary articulations of womanhood? Perhaps more critically, moving forward, what lessons will we, as diverse feminist subjects— theorists and activists alike—learn not only from the trans-exclusive policy, but its *endurance*? What information does this struggle for meaning and recognition between different groups of feminists suggest about the ways in which access and privilege continue to structure feminist cultural and institutional spaces? Significantly, how will we make sense of the delayed nature of the boycotts to the policy and the festival’s resolution to uphold the policy and to close its doors instead (Merlan 2015)?

### **Lesbian Feminism and Histories of Exclusion**

To understand the persistence of Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival as a feminist site for community and intimacy for some and as a feminist site of exclusion and hostility for others, it is useful to consider how the practiced prohibition of lesbian feminism from the second-wave feminist movement and its remembering has had ongoing effects on the relation between feminism and lesbian, queer and trans politics (Echols 1989; Jay 1999; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Lorde 1984; Nestle 1987). Freeman (2010) examines how lesbian feminism continues to constitute a “drag” on normative narratives of feminist history (62). She asks how drag might be thought of temporally, as “the excess...of the signifier ‘history’ rather than of ‘woman’ or ‘man’” (62). In exploring how the lesbian feminist performs a temporal drag on the present by re-signifying as current the presence of a politics of sexuality, separatism, and

essentialism that characterized segments of the second-wave feminist movement, Freeman argues that this “drag” can be “a *productive* obstacle to progress, a usefully distorting pull backward, and a necessary pressure on the present tense” (64; emphasis in original). For her, temporal drag destabilizes feminism as a linear series of progressive movements leading to a better (i.e. *queer*) feminist present. As Freeman emphasizes, the historical and ongoing use of the specter of the lesbian feminist as an ambivalent symbol of second-wave feminism is significant and speaks to the tensions over MWMF in the contemporary feminist movement.

While I contend that lesbian feminism is no more or less attached to gender than other feminisms, its history of exclusion from feminism has come with a sense of loss (Love 2007). This loss manifests—and perhaps rightly so—in a melancholic desire for lesbian spaces, discourses, and intimacies. I suggest that this desire is melancholic because it pivots on the loss, exclusion, and negation that is always already a structuring element of lesbian desire under heteropatriarchy. Thus, the specificity of lesbian feminist transphobia is often mobilized around a fear of loss. This is apparent in the familiar rhetoric of “losing” those members of the lesbian feminist community who transition, become partnered with trans subjects, or identify as bisexual. It is particularly visible in the arguments made about the so-called decline of butch lesbians, a historical debate described as the “border wars” between butches and transsexual FtM, transgender, and trans-masculine subjects (Halberstam 2005; Noble 2006). The renewal of this rhetoric in recent criticism demonstrates the endurance of loss as a condition of contemporary identity politics (Halberstam 2015).

This projected sense of loss is most clearly evident in the sentiment of “giving up” lesbian feminist space to include trans subjects. Rather than an extension of lesbian feminist politics across a broader range of subjectivities navigating misogyny, racism, classism, and homophobia, this kind of politic tightens rather than expands lesbian feminism—as demonstrated by MWMF and other struggles over “women’s space.” For example, in “Reclaiming Raunch? Spatializing Queer Identities at Toronto Women’s Bathhouse Events,” Catherine Jean Nash and Alison Bain (2007) initially position their research as invested in how queerness as a politic and not just an identity might allow for

enlarging “women’s spaces” to include trans subjects. And yet, their conclusion laments what they deem is a lack of “material and symbolic spaces where lesbian identities can be expressed” (58). Drawing on the logic of cultural feminism as an elevation of “female” over “male” embodiment, Nash and Bain charge trans and butch lesbian masculinities with eroding women’s spaces for *cisgender lesbian feminist subjects*. What is striking about this article is not its commonplace transphobia, but rather how it initially displaces it only to confirm it in the end. In this way, I suggest that feminism is often mobilized as a Trojan horse for certain lesbian (and queer) politics that resist a logic of loss through a retreat into gender essentialism.

### **Discursive Struggles: Trans-Feminism in the Academy**

Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival’s entrance policy was a manifestation of an ongoing history of transphobia within feminism that, despite decades of opposition, continues to find an audience across a range of discursive and cultural modes. The most scathing and by now historical document promoting transphobia in the name of feminism has been Janice Raymond’s (1979) *The Transsexual Empire: The Making of the She-Male*, which posited that trans women seek to undermine feminism through their admission into feminist and women’s communities. Emerging out of the ideological moment of cultural feminism, Raymond’s text continues to effect the present as it is called on to justify and make sense of contemporary expressions of gender essentialism and transphobia. For example, in 2013, Janice Raymond was invited to speak *as a representative feminist* at the Montreal Massacre memorial event organized by Vancouver’s Rape Relief—a women’s shelter renowned for its explicit transphobia (Eliot 2004; Chambers 2007)—that was immediately boycotted by trans activists and allies (Vancouver Rape Relief and Women’s Shelter 2013). There has also been a marked expansion of transphobic feminisms, particularly with the formation of groups identifying as “Trans-Exclusive Radical Feminists” (TERFs). TERFs subscribe to a scarcity version of so-called radical feminism, arguing that they are the border-vigilantes of its project. TERFs have organized online and in feminist and queer community spaces and have become known for bullying, harassing, and even physically assaulting trans women and trans

feminine people (Williams 2013). Echoing Raymond's vitriolic and transphobic text, Sheila Jeffreys' (2014) *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* has been revered by TERFS. However, the successful mobilization of trans activists and trans allies against the promotion of the book has effectively shut down a number of public launches (Goldberg 2014). It is evident that through the leadership of trans advocates and activists, broad based resistance to explicitly violent forms of feminist transphobia are gaining momentum.

Significantly, the tightening of MWMF borders in 1993 occurred at the same time as what can now be categorized as the explicit emergence of trans-feminist scholarship in the 1990s (Enke 2012, 1). Making space for trans scholars, trans studies, and trans-feminism within the academy, however, has been a continual struggle, landmarked by Sandy Stone's response to Raymond's personal attack on her in "The *Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto*" (Stone 2008). Critical scholars continue to describe a complicated relationship between trans scholarship and feminist studies (Noble 2006, 2012; Scott-Dixon 2006; Stryker 2007). Anne Enke (2012) suggests that, while "Gender and Women's Studies is one place where transgender studies has managed to make itself an institutional home," it is nonetheless "an ambivalent home" (2). Enke argues that "trans might be central, not marginal" to the project of academic feminism, but maintains that, in the contemporary university, "trans literacy remains low" (2). In an assessment of his experience working in the institutional structure of an academic Women and Gender Studies Department, Bobby Noble reflects:

Trans-entities have always been present inside feminist spaces; to make a claim to the contrary is to fly in the face of at least thirty years of writing and debate about the presence of trans bodies 'on the front line.' The degree to which those bodies remain *located within* or *dislocated from* stories about actively reimagined pasts as well as academic and disciplinary communities and their nomenclatures is precisely the stake to be won or lost. (283)

The stakes remain high in how feminist space will be occupied, particularly in academic institutions. Feminist pedagogy holds the promise of transforming exist-

ing power relations and engaging in inter-generational knowledge transmission; however, the preservation of exclusionary spaces and hierarchical relations is equally possible.

Susan Stryker (2007) argues that the necessary inclusion of trans issues in academic feminism must be accompanied by the presence of trans scholars at the faculty level (67). She emphasizes that the failure to do so is neither "intellectually responsible, nor ethically defensible" (67). She further insists that "it is past time for feminists" to locate the urgency of transgender issues within feminist institutional environments (68). Critically, what both Noble and Stryker point to is not only the struggle for discursive space from which to launch trans-feminist critiques, but material space as well. Advocating for the adoption of affirmative action programs for trans scholars, Stryker (2007) argues that the construction and preservation of the borders of academic feminism remains contested (68). Academic feminism is also situated in increasingly neoliberal and corporate institutions that can be ambivalent about or hostile to Gender and Women's Studies programs, which in some instances experience conditions of precarity (Carlson 2010). In a similar way that "loss" becomes mobilized in lesbian feminist imaginings of space, academic feminism, as currently positioned in the contemporary university, might be reticent to assert its goals for fear of closure or co-optation (Eichler 1999). How individual departments and institutions navigate issues related to access for marginalized subjects is certainly heterogeneous; however, as long as trans scholars and trans issues remain marginal to academic feminism, the borders of the discipline will be subject to contestation and critique.

### **On Critique, Recitation, Repair**

I am certainly not the first to suggest that what we read and write matters, that what we give time to is politically relevant. In his discussion of the centrality of pedagogy in the production of liberatory knowledge, Paulo Freire (1993) wrote about the intimacy between dialogue and critical thinking, which "discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and the people and admits of no dichotomy between them—thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as static entity— thinking which does not separate itself from action, but con-

stantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved” (92). Friere’s emphasis on “process” and “transformation” that is “immerse[d]” in a “temporality” is instructive to my project here, as it points to the critical potential for dialogue to generate—not stifle—knowledge (92). This critical intention and its connection to time—as it is the most anxious of times that beg for the most serious of questions—is taken up by Wendy Brown (2005) who offers “critique as a practice of affirming the text it contests” (16). The pursuit of knowledge, through a loving engagement with a text, is to Brown a “reclamation” wherein “critique takes over the object for a different project than that to which it is currently tethered” (16). I don’t use the word “loving” here blithely, but rather I wish to draw attention to the affects that are mobilized in turning towards a text that at once generates discomfort, frustration, or even worry as well as the optimistic promise of possibility. In a project like feminism that is bound by its politics in time, there is certainly a lot at stake in returning to a text—or a cultural object like Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival—that might signify an intellectual impasse or appear anachronistic to current political urgencies. As I hope to demonstrate below, that there is an affective dimension to what counts as a feminist priority might signal where our affective attachments lay dormant and this is precisely where critique is required.

In her analysis into Western narratives of feminism, Hemmings (2011) performs one such powerful strategy through her concept of recitation, which she describes as a “reading process” that begins “from the affective investments” in narratives of absence (180). This process of textual recitation, which could mean interrupting, substituting, or revisiting earlier texts, is envisioned as “a breaking open of the presumed relation between past and present” and not the pursuit of “a new, fixed relation between the two” (181). She insists that, in order to engage in this practice of recitation, our “attention” must be directed towards “what happens” in this process of dialogue between the prior occlusions and “what is, importantly, *already there*” (180; emphasis in original). I would suggest that Hemming’s strategy builds on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (2003) discussion of “reparative reading,” which is an “impulse” that is “additive and accretive”: “it wants to assemble and confer plentitude on an object that will then have resources to offer an inchoate self” (149). Particular-

ly in relation to the encounters between feminism and lesbian, queer, and trans politics or, more specifically, the encounter of the knowledge-seeking subject with feminism itself, the impulse to repair offers political, affective, and intellectual possibilities that extend beyond the not-so-simple injunction to critique what is obviously there. Thus, both recitation and reparative reading signify a temporal modality of knowledge that asks texts—and authors—to be accountable in the present, perhaps for a better future. This accountability is not only to the absences, the ignorance, or the injuries the text may have produced, but also to its context, its process, and its relationality. To return to a text with an eye to compassionate critique is to offer it a chance to speak again, to articulate itself differently, and, perhaps most importantly, to recognize its attachments. This is a process of generosity—but what else could we offer “our most challenging other” than an invitation to learn?

I return, then, to my own feelings around MWMF. I am moved by the idea that remembering has a pedagogical function; in dramatizing a “difficult return,” it enables a “reckoning that beckons us to possibilities of the future, showing the possibilities of our own learning” (Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert 2000, 4, 8). To allow that feminism is temporally bound is to acknowledge that politics can—and do—change. To insist, as I have throughout this paper, that feminist projects make and take time is to draw attention to the “directions” that feminisms take in relation to the worlds they make and unmake around them (Ahmed 2006). I offer, here, a recitation of my own writing in the effort to undertake a reparative reading, as a gesture of accountability and of compassion, to a feminist self I am no longer in time with, but that I need to make time for in the present, if only to learn with her. I hope, in continuing to fumble through my own intellectual and emotional opacity, that the feminisms I encounter and am a part of can become not only increasingly accountable to trans-feminisms, but can become deeply unsettled and moved towards new possibilities by these relations.

### **Rereading My Own Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival History**

Towards the completion of my undergraduate degree, when I was pursuing a major in Women’s

and Gender Studies and a minor in Sexuality Studies, I wrote a course paper called “Moving Beyond Fantasy: Lesbian Feelings, Utopias, and Performances Across Space and Time.” I recall that, in the process of writing, I felt thrilled about the unfolding dialogue between my developing ideas and the primary texts. For the first time in my education, I felt visible within the grammar of my own writing. As a self-identified lesbian feminist throughout my early-mid twenties, I often felt the drag my politics produced as I forced lesbian/queer critiques into Women’s Studies classrooms and feminist critiques into what seemed like the predominantly male canon of queer theory. Through reading feminist theory, I had begun to register how “another world” of queer lesbian feminism was being articulated in theory. I wanted, desperately, to be part of this world—and my feminism, in line with my body, was drawn to this utopic space. Thinking about utopias is a theoretical and imaginative way to acknowledge what is not real, but what is simultaneously longed for—and the discursive resonances of those imaginings, in writing, do have real effects. This excerpt from my 2008 paper signifies, I think, how my own sense of invisibility and undesirability as a cultural agent took precedence over critically engaging with those effects:

The Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival is a fully functioning and legitimate temporary lesbian world, renowned, revered, and reviled for its ‘Womyn Only’ policy. The ‘Womyn Only’ policy, which is not explicitly stated on Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival website or registration form, has nonetheless given rise to charges and protests against the Festival’s ‘transphobia.’ The Festival’s conviction to create a female-only space has resulted in their rigid definition of ‘woman’ as a womyn-born-womyn only. Clearly, transsexual and transgender men and women are excluded from this definition and the Womyn’s Music Festival, resulting in the formation of a radical opposition festival, Camp Trans. Furthermore, while the utopic vision of the female-world of Michigan welcomes and relies on its lesbian participants, the ‘Woman Only’ policy can raise uncomfortable issues even for lesbians, as many lesbians feel they are at odds with the essentialist and feminizing notions of what ‘woman’ means. Nonetheless, the Festival operates as an alternative space within culture where normative notions of gender and sexuality can be abandoned and challenged, provided these challenges are concomitant

with the particular kinds of lesbian feminist politics and ideologies the Mich Fest represents... Within young queer urban subcultures, Mich Fest can represent a regressive, stale climate that some politically correct queers aggressively avoid. (McKenna 2008, 15-16)

In this analysis, I contemplated for whom MWMF might be a utopic space and theoretically grappled with its “womyn-born womyn only” policy. I have never attended the festival and have for a long time been critical of the policy; yet, what I want to insist on here is that my logic ran parallel to the discourses that other cisgender feminists continue to make—that is, critique of MWMF is entertained only up to the point that it demands that non-trans women give up aspects of their privilege (for evidence of this, see Cvetkovich 2006; Browne 2011). While I *sympathized* with the problematic of a politics of exclusion, this excerpt reveals how my provisional acknowledgement of “transphobia” was eclipsed by an assertion that MWMF still offered a “good time” to some women—specifically, cisgender lesbian feminists. Significantly, it is my “nonetheless” that signifies my prior willingness to grant to cisgender lesbian feminists the choice of a “utopic,” “temporary,” and “legitimate” space against the rights of trans people, specifically trans women, to also participate in this liberatory choosing (McKenna 2008, 15). I certainly did not consider myself politically equipped enough to be a trans ally when writing that, but I also did not imagine that I had attachments that might be transphobic either. However, when rereading the anxiety that is expressed in my acknowledgement of the opposition to MWMF contained in the phrase “that some politically correct queers aggressively avoid” (15), I can account for possessing a real “fear of the risks involved” in expressing what I *already knew* were untimely lesbian feminist politics and desires (Freire 1993, 92). I would later be forced to reconsider those politics; however, in this excerpt, my unease about my own temporal subjectivity was supported by an orientation to a feminism that clung, with equal anxiety, to trepidation about change, to a way of thinking about gender that relied on a sex/gender binary, and melancholically believed in the inevitability of inequality.

To acknowledge this, as I did then in an accidental way, speaks to the way in which our temporal attachments inform our politics and to how these partial truths are often buried in our criticism. Significantly,

it was in my pedagogical relationship to the non-identitarianism of Sedgwick and in the proximity of trans activist communities that I began to abandon what I thought I already knew in order to learn something different. This is not simply a story of my relation to trans-feminism, but of how my encounters with the inherent difficulties of feminist theory have provided me with the analytical tools from which to view the world beyond my own limited subjectivity. As my feminism has transformed in relation to letting go of certain ideas and directing itself towards uncertain ones, I continually come up against the limits of my ability to imagine otherwise. These new impasses are made all the more frightening when I experience prior incarnations of my self within them, aspects still struggling for recognition against the sheer magnitude of my own unknowing. But to occupy a temporality that engages with the prior, present, and future fears of error, misrecognition, and ignorance is precisely to learn—what is pedagogy, politics, or intimacy without the hope that being shaken up, broken open, or reassembled anew is really possible?

### Conclusion

To speak out against the temporal pull of the mainstream, to interrupt the hegemony of liberal feminism as *the* platform for gender equality for certain privileged “women” is to elucidate a kind of “drag” against the overwhelming flow of feminist discourses moving in the direction of liberation for some “women.” To recall Freeman (2011), there is indeed something “productive” in the “obstacle” posed by this undertow (64)—it demands us to look beside, behind, and perhaps underneath the tendency to represent feminism as a politic stuck within—and captivated by—the gender binary. I suggest that we might now be able to conceive of the possibility of being feminist in a fourth-wave moment. This is not to dismiss the movements and politics that inform the contemporary, but to consider them alongside the urgencies of the present, one of which is, I argue, the prioritizing of trans-feminism within all feminisms (Enke 2012; Irving 2014; Serano 2007; Stryker 2006). As trans women—particularly those who are racialized—continue to be among the most socially and economically marginalized women, experiencing accelerated rates of incarceration and violence, a feminism that ignores, downplays, or undermines these realities is certainly anachronistic and ahistorical. Moreover, the

contributions of trans people to a variety of liberation movements across race, class, sexuality, and gender, including their own, is of critical significance to any political project that seeks to challenge and account for gender inequality.

Instead of turning away from a moment of my own opacity to understand trans politics in relation to feminism, I have argued that non-trans feminists have a responsibility to become more familiar with the inequality those moments engender. Precisely because transphobia is difficult, confounding, or uncomfortable—*least* of all for cisgender people—requires actions of solidarity and allyship by those who have the privilege to interrogate and, ultimately, to challenge this form of gender inequality. Through this return to a prior failure to take seriously the transphobia inherent in Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival’s trans-exclusive entrance policy, I have hoped to demonstrate the possibility for reevaluation that time enables. The temporal influences feminist politics not only by situating them within a nexus of power relations between the historical, the present, the local, and the global, but also through the sheer banality of time’s passage. Subjectivity is not static and neither are our politics; indeed, the possibility that we can and will change makes feminism a worthy venture. As Michigan Womyn’s Music Festival shut its gates for the last time last year, the struggle for recognition, representation, and access to resources for trans subjects remains, beyond the festival grounds. How trans-feminism, trans activism, and the diversity of trans people will be included within broader feminist accounts of this complex history continue to unfold. This closure, I argue, is certainly delayed, but with some confidence I can say that it is, indeed, about time.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> I employ trans here as an umbrella term that is inclusive of such gender identifications and gender expressions as transgender, transsexual, gender queer, gender neutral, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Without having attended the festival, I am unclear about how the festival framed this assertion in relation to settler colonialism and Indigenous peoples land rights.

<sup>3</sup> Cisgender refers to someone whose gender identity and gender expression aligns with the sex categorization made at birth by a medical practitioner.

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