

Taking Back Times Square

Feminist Repertoires and the Transformation of Urban Space in Late Second Wave Feminism

Claire Bond Potter

Charlotte Bunch, a peace activist and former member of the radical lesbian feminist collective The Furies, looked out over more than five thousand women and men summoned by the radical feminist group Women Against Pornography (WAP) to the streets of midtown Manhattan on October 20, 1979. The fall sun glinted off Bunch's glasses as handmade signs waved before her: "Porn Hurts Women," "Pornography Is A Feminist Issue," they declared. Linking the sex trade in Times Square to human rights abuses everywhere, Bunch closed forcefully. "Pornography," she said, "is not just symbolic violence. . . . It is part of an international slave traffic in women that operates as a multinational corporation. . . . As in all international struggles, we begin in our own streets, and nowhere is that more appropriate than here on Forty-Second Street—Times Square—the pornography capital of America."¹

The crowd that had marched through the world's most famous red-light district was rallying in another grim public space behind the New York Public Library, Bryant Park. They followed a red banner held by women's liberation icons who had fought sexism since the 1960s: Susan Brownmiller, Bella Abzug, Florynce Kennedy, Andrea Dworkin, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan. With a four-beat rhythm, marchers filled streets normally dominated by the sex trade with feminist voices: "Two, four, six, eight, pornography is woman-hate," they chanted. A pamphlet handed out to bystanders declared that pornography was "violence disguised

Radical History Review

Issue 113 (Spring 2012) DOI 10.1215/01636545-1504903

© 2012 by MARHO: The Radical Historians' Organization, Inc.

as sexuality,” crimes “protected in part by [other] women’s reluctance to speak out against it for fear of ridicule and rejection by men.” As the line flowed past theaters featuring live sex and porn movies, activists fell out “to plaster small, Day-Glo stickers on the ticket booths and posters.” Feminists defaced these emporiums and disputed their meaning, pushing past men who taunted the marchers before entering places like the Sound Peep Classics and the Roxy Burlesque.²

With their bodies and voices, feminists from Alaska and San Francisco, union organizers, members of the New York Urban League, and college students transformed Times Square for a day. But important and unresolved questions have clung to the history of a movement that began in a call for women to unify against violence in the 1970s and ended in the so-called “sex wars” of the 1980s. What made attempts to restrict sexual expression a *feminist* goal, much less a radical one, at a moment when conservatives were redoubling their efforts to restrict sexual expression and women’s right to govern their own bodies? And why would radical feminists call on a hetero-patriarchal state to control sexual commerce, unless those radicals had *become* conservatives, as other leftist intellectuals had by the late 1970s?³

Such questions were painful, and remain painful today, since they originated from within radical feminism and divided former political allies.⁴ Antipornography activists have always insisted that their movement has been misrepresented, a claim that should nag at historians more than it does. Evidence suggests, in fact, that feminist antipornography activists were always alert to potential confusion about how an antipornography movement would be perceived, and worked (if, perhaps, unsuccessfully) to distinguish themselves from the censors and from conservatives. At the 1979 march, marshals scuffled with police to keep willing conservative allies out of their ranks. One group forced to the sidewalk had attempted to join behind a banner that read “Protect Our Children,” a thinly veiled reference to Christian activist Anita Bryant’s homophobic Florida crusade. Some conservatives had signs ripped from their hands and torn to shreds, although other advocates for obscenity legislation evaded such treatment. Memories of the event are conflicted and inconsistent. In 2010, Morality in Media president Robert Peters recalled no violence, only having had a great time with an interfaith group “at that huge demonstration in Times Square.”⁵

Radical feminism, like other left and New Left movements, had always been prone to ideological schisms. However, the early and well-organized opposition that antipornography activists faced from other radical women circumscribed the movement’s possibilities almost from the beginning, as did the political tensions of a decade that saw the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the reversal of liberal gender and sexual equality agendas, and the abandonment of AIDS victims by the political establishment.⁶ Whatever else they were, however, feminist antipornography politics were not conservative, nor is it credible that these radical women became conservatives without being aware of it. Rather than writing antipornogra-

phy activists out of feminism, writing a history of the movement requires, as Anne Enke argues, that we “seek to understand not only what was going on outside of feminist-identified arenas but, equally important, how feminists constructed and maintained borders around what counted as feminism[.]”⁷

Women Against Pornography generated a powerful critique within radical feminism. Two of the consequences of this critique have been the failure to take antipornography feminism seriously *as feminism*, and an exaggeration of its support for a conservative nation-state that sought not to liberate women in the 1980s, but to promote social policy based on gender difference and the consolidation of the heteropatriarchal family. Movement conservatives sought to protect women by exchanging influence over the public sphere for moral control in the home. In addition, scholars often do not take evidence about the New Left genealogy of the antipornography movement seriously enough. This obscures what remained radical about activists who stood on the shoulders of numerous civil rights and antiviolence activists: their assertion that the free movement of bodies through public space, and the power to represent oneself, were fundamental characteristics of what Nancy Fraser has called “actually existing democracy.”⁸ In other words, historians should shift their focus toward an analysis of what activists chose to represent about their relationship to power and the state, rather than how their opponents and critics represented and interpreted these relationships.⁹

Revisiting these activists’ relationship to the state by embedding it in a theory of democracy can lead us beyond the charges of censorship that scholars like Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin incited during the 1970s and 1980s in their writings and their political work, and that they have also refuted so forcefully.¹⁰ I propose a new understanding of the tactics radical feminists deployed to fight pornography as “feminist repertoires” that were meant to transform political society rather than to activate the power of the state alone, as anti-obscenity activists like Robert Peters advocated. Here I am following analysis by the late Charles Tilly about how we might identify the promise and the limits of democratic protest. Popular politics, he argues, succeed in relation to *regimes* that produce and contain them: such regimes are constituted through a web of relationships that include the state, but are not fully constituted by a state apparatus or even the law. Popular politics make themselves visible to regimes through *repertoires*, “the limited, familiar, historically created arrays of claim-making performances that under most circumstances greatly circumscribe the means by which people engage in contentious politics.”¹¹ Hence, this theoretical intervention might not just explain what the feminist antipornography movement was, but it might also explain its political limits.

As important as rewriting this history would be, a second question can be drawn from Tilly’s work: how do regimes and repertoires shape and constrain *each other* as they do their political work? Through their policies and structures, he notes, regimes limit the possibility for collective claims, making the possibility of acting

within those constraints crucial to the success of repertoires. At the same time, the repertoires deployed by a movement are also often restrained by internal beliefs, or conflict, about what constitutes legitimate politics. Hence, as Tilly argues, the “previously established [political] performances and repertoires” that legitimize civil resistance can, in and of themselves, “limit the initiatives available to ordinary people.”¹² For example, we might reflect on the contests over censorship that were so central to feminism’s sex wars and ask whether it was legitimate, or even possible in the 1980s, to imagine a discussion about women’s bodies on an embattled left that did not validate all forms of sexual freedom and choice.

An emphasis on repertoires also takes action and performance into account as phenomena that compete with laws to define what Tilly calls “democracy-capacity,” or *the space available for freedom within a given regime*. Thinking of the marches, the chants, the orange stickers, and other tactics that feminists mustered in commercial sex districts, we need to ask creative questions about what feminists did as well and what they demanded, and then rethink whether such actions constituted a desire for censorship. Looking at performances like the march on Times Square as *repertoires* suggests that feminists viewed urban space as perpetually dominated by a complex and patriarchal *regime* constituted by corrupt police, capitalist pornographers, organized crime, and a public that tolerated violence against women. Instead of asking, as others have, what effect Women Against Pornography had on Times Square, I ask: how did this organization seek to reshape urban space by appealing to like-minded citizens rather than the state? How did questions about urban renewal converge with and diverge from a feminist antiviolence agenda during the 1980s? And most importantly, what does this moment tell us about a relationship between radical feminism and the state that might definitively confirm or liberate antipornography feminism from the “stigma” of conservatism?

Urban Space and Feminist History

The history of Women Against Pornography’s presence in the Times Square district, which lasted from 1979 to 1993, occurred against a backdrop of recession, slum clearance, and a planned urban revival that was declared “complete” by the *New York Times* in December 2010.¹³ A commercial sex district that also contained small businesses (restaurants, groceries, and hardware stores) and nonsexual entertainment, by the 1970s Times Square was for some a neighborhood in crisis and for others a heterogeneous landscape of personal freedom. To African American gay writer Samuel Delany, it was a rich, international, multiracial, cross-class sexual democracy characterized by loving contact between male strangers. Differently, politicians, bankers, and business interests saw thirteen acres of decay that had the potential to generate millions of dollars for investors, revive the tourist industry, and rescue a city in fiscal default.¹⁴

Antipornography feminists acknowledge that they were able to use contemporary urban renewal efforts to their advantage. Women Against Pornography was initially financed by \$3,000 in seed money donated by journalist Susan Brownmiller, poet Adrienne Rich, and author Frances Wyatt, as well from small donations and donations in kind from the small-business owners in the area. However, they did receive support from public, civic, and foundation sources. An office provided rent-free by the Mayor's Midtown Enforcement Committee, as well as \$50,000 raised from organizations like the League of Theater Owners and the 42nd Street Redevelopment Company, have long been cited as evidence that the organization was working on behalf of a cleanup effort that would pave the way for corporate investment.¹⁵

Activists have never hidden these connections to city and state government. They saw them as unimportant at the time and others did not. Although WAP was later viewed as naive, numerous progressive causes (public media outlets, Planned Parenthood, employment for disabled citizens, and the Legal Aid Society, to name a few) were fully or partially funded by public and corporate money, while philanthropists have historically funded public work that forwards their own interests.¹⁶ Former activists recall these practical alliances with state agencies as strategic rather than defining. In an early press release, Women Against Pornography recognized the danger to a movement like theirs if they were perceived as advocating state censorship, and noted that state and social homophobia that regarded lesbian culture as inherently pornographic complicated their task. Articulating their mission as “educating women and men about the true nature of the messages in pornography, which are woman-hating and violent,” the activists vowed that they would not participate in “a ‘clean-up’ or any action involving the suppression or destruction of pornographic materials or establishments.”¹⁷ As Carolyn Bronstein points out, however, organizers’ persistent use of the phrase “clean up” after 1979 had the exact consequences that the authors of this earlier flyer had feared.¹⁸

Our focus on repertoires would allow us to acknowledge connections to the Disneyfication of the district, but without obscuring organizers’ stated reasons for targeting the neighborhood in the first place: its international status. Susan Brownmiller recalled the 1978 Women Against Violence in Pornography and Media conference organizers, who were proud of themselves for being in solidarity with Call Off Your Old Tired Ethics (COYOTE), a sex workers alliance, as “innocents” and “clueless” for not understanding that their march had been “co-opted” by COYOTE’s charismatic Margot St. James. A more important problem was that San Francisco was a media backwater. “I was there for the postmortem,” Brownmiller recalled, “and I said, ‘The only way we’re going to make any headway is if you come to the media capital of the country. And we have Times Square.’ They had a street. I said, ‘But we have Times Square and if we had a march in Times Square, we’d get attention.’”¹⁹

In this case, a feminist repertoire included linking the space to be transformed to the political issue at hand and then to the urban media market that would draw the attention of a national and international audience. Targeting Times Square gave these activists precisely what they wanted: automatic, free publicity that made a comparatively understaffed and underresourced organization seem powerful. Building on this, in 1980 WAP members made themselves commercially available as regional pornography experts. They created guided tours of the district and its live sex shows based on the feminist tours and slideshows that had been pioneered in San Francisco's Tenderloin. Aimed at exposing the brutality of the sex trade and reinterpreting sexual "fantasies" as exploitative commerce, they became a popular and inexpensive activity for out-of-town and international visitors who might have been too timid to visit a sex district alone. But a history of antipornography feminism has to take into account that ordinary commercial spaces mattered too. Small-business owners in Times Square who were not selling sex and were not corporate supported WAP with donations and gifts because they too associated the sex trades with urban decline. Similarly, in the minds of many radical feminists, pornography was most insulting and damaging in the everyday locations, such as newsstands and the home, that were *not* designated for commercial sex. For Karla Jay, who had begun her antipornography activism in 1976 during the campaign against the movie *Snuff* (a movie which claimed to depict the murder of a woman in its climactic scene), displays of women's bodies on the covers of *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, and *Hustler* at neighborhood bodegas and candy stores were an extension of Times Square and "really . . . an assault." Such displays were often at "the back of the store," Jay recalled; "but then, you had to go to the back of the store to pay."²⁰

By 1979, Times Square represented not just the economic failure of a city in the grip of recession and white flight, but also the failure of the state to reign in crime; feminists added to this critique the state's failure to defend female citizenship. The neighborhood supported a vigorous world of small-time drug dealers, hustlers, and prostitutes that men in search of recreational erotic contacts valued. It was also a place that, in the words of one urban geographer, "most New Yorkers, especially women, wanted to avoid."²¹ Even when pornography could be avoided, the act of doing so reminded women that their social freedom and peace of mind was circumscribed by anonymous images of breasts and vaginas that were meant to stand in for all women. Susan Brownmiller remembers that the quickest subway route from her apartment in Greenwich Village to the New York Public Library, where she wrote *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1973), took her through Times Square. Increasingly intimidated by the hustling, advertisements for live sex acts, and pornographic movies there, she recalled her resentment and anger as she began to devise elaborate routes that allowed her to avoid images and people whom she found sexually threatening.²²

The quality of distress that both Brownmiller and Jay articulated is often

cited as evidence that antipornography feminists neither cared about nor connected to the lives of the actual women in the sex industry. Yet, my research shows that the feminist repertoire in Times Square also included delivering concrete assistance to women who were subject to exploitation and violence by men. “Being in Times Square in the ‘70s,” bar owner Maggie Smith recalled, “gave me a firsthand glimpse of the degree to which women could easily make choices that ended them up in prostitution My commitment was to enable them to make a choice about whether to stay or go.” Smith, who joined WAP to connect it more closely to the lives of sex workers, retrained prostitutes as waitresses, work that allowed them to rent apartments and free themselves from the control of pimps. One pimp, she remembered, responded to a woman’s decision to leave him by setting her “and the apartment on fire.”²³

The Limits of Antipornography Feminism

The importance of space—private and public—to the feminist antipornography movement cannot be overstated. Furthermore, as Sara Evans noted in 1993, a feminist theory of public life had not yet been adequately developed. Such a theory, Evans wrote, required “call[ing] attention to public arenas that are not governmental and to political activity and modes of influence that political theory generally slights.”²⁴ Evans highlights attention to repertoires. By 1979, feminist antipornography performances sought to transform the public arena into a place where women’s full citizenship was possible, while conservative antiobscenity repertoires emphasized the danger that all forms of uncontrolled sexuality posed to familial and domestic space alone.

The confusion between movement conservatism and radical feminist antipornography politics might also be attributed to the emergence of a younger generation of women who were not conservative activists, but were not persuaded by (or who were uneducated in) feminism’s core principles even as they participated in sexual politics. “I felt that the steam had run out of the women’s movement,” Brownmiller confided, recalling her hopes that antipornography politics would revive radical feminism.²⁵ But antipornography activism may have had an even greater potential to draw unwanted supporters like conservative Robert Peters, who had no connection to feminism. One Smith College student who attended the march on Times Square told *New York Times* reporter Barbara Basler that she opposed abortion and did not support any feminist issue other than the fight against pornography.²⁶

Supporters who knew little about feminism’s history, and the endorsement of organizations like Morality in Media for the Times Square cleanup, would make an antipornography agenda increasingly difficult to articulate within a fragmenting feminist movement by the time the sex wars broke into the open in 1982 at Barnard College’s “Scholar and the Feminist IX.” WAP, excluded from the planning committee, revealed the simmering breach in radical feminism by picketing

the conference. The following year that breach widened amid charges of homophobia and harassment. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon (neither of whom belonged to WAP or any other organization) created a strategy that attempted to activate the Constitution to act on behalf of “victims of pornography” through civil rights litigation. During a joint residency at the University of Minnesota, these two scholars developed a model antipornography ordinance for the city of Minneapolis that would permit people who believed they had been harmed by pornography to sue for civil damages.²⁷

The ordinance strategy further muddled the distinction between radical and conservative politics by proposing that feminists could redefine the state as an arena for conflict with the pornography industry.²⁸ Other radical feminists, many of whom were scholars and public intellectuals, saw this strategy as no different from a conservative censorship agenda. Organized as the Feminist Anti-Censorship Task Force (FACT), they were allied with the American Civil Liberties Union, an organization that had fought for sexual freedom and free speech since the 1920s. They also acquired influence in feminist and queer communities that were increasingly apprehensive about the retraction of sexual rights. “It should give you pause that the *New Right* agrees with you,” wrote one critic of WAP in 1983. “Jerry Falwell agrees with you. Every self-righteous Pharisee that ever lived agrees with you.”²⁹

An analysis that highlights the importance of feminist performance — whether in the streets, a city council hearing, or a courtroom — might question whether censorship was the correct description for the strategies pursued by MacKinnon, Dworkin, and their supporters in the feminist antipornography movement. Even though censorship would certainly have been an outcome of making the production or consumption of pornography subject to civil or criminal penalties, as opponents argued in print and in court, antipornography feminists repeatedly contended that they were against censorship or the reimposition of obscenity laws.³⁰ What antipornography feminists sought primarily was the transformation of public erotic consciousness to separate sex from violence. The 1979 march points out that forcing a heterogeneous citizenry to *see* the Times Square sex trade as they saw it was a central method for enacting feminist antipornography repertoires, as was women’s demand to *be seen* not as breasts and vaginas, but the way they chose to present themselves.³¹

For radical feminists, the state, as it actually existed, was merely a manifestation of an often invisible and more insidious *regime* — the patriarchy, a formation which was constitutive of, but broader than, capitalism or the state. In Times Square, feminist repertoires talked back to patriarchy in a way that evaded either calls for protection from the state or the necessity of speaking in the language demanded by the state. By pursuing a repertoire that made them visible on their own terms, feminists who fought pornographers were asking larger questions about the power of capitalism to define sexuality, the city, and women’s citizenship in public space.

Feminist antipornography repertoires employed the grammar, behavior, and

logic that radical activists had learned in the civil rights, antiwar, antinuclear, women's liberation, labor, and antiviolence movements. They asked questions about sex that drew on this history, not the history of a conservative movement that sought to confine sex to a patriarchal family. Differently from evangelicals and movement conservatives in the 1970s who, as Faye Ginsburg has argued, saw state enforcement of male responsibility as the key to women's safety, feminists asked: How might women be safe from men?³² What conditions promote shared democracy between men and women? How did racism and economic inequality shape the sex industry and force women into it? How did the legacies of slavery, war, and imperialism shape the presentation of erotic performances? What did it mean to name women's pain as pleasure? Might one not cut through verbal obfuscations like "actress," "model," and "fantasy" to reveal sex workers as proletarianized labor? Finally, how did sexuality, class, race, and gender limit women's capacity to engage as citizens if, as women, they were articulated primarily as commodities marketed in public space, for the pleasure of men?

If in the later stage of the ordinance movement antipornography feminists imagined using the courts as a remedy, this should point us to the fact that the movement evolved and adapted as the pornography industry began to relinquish its hold on urban space and produced more products for domestic consumption. But a legal approach was not viable prior to 1983 when antipornography feminism still relied on social movement credentials to retain its credibility as a radical movement. Recalling planning meetings prior to the 1979 march, Karla Jay emphasized: "People like myself, who defined ourselves as radicals, didn't want to take a legal approach."³³ Radical feminists may also have believed that repertoires associated with mass mobilization were a more viable path to change than lawsuits that would pit individual women against well-financed corporations. Feminist activists "were very early targets of the pornographers," Brownmiller said. She recalled that Al Goldstein, the publisher of *Screw*, used to leave copies of the magazine in front of her door to "taunt" her: "He wrote a piece calling my mother a two-dollar whore who was so ugly that she had to give blow jobs because no man would want to be inside her."³⁴

Radical feminists did not see the courts as entirely irrelevant prior to 1983, having successfully addressed rape, domestic violence, and abortion through changes in the law. But this was different from seeing the state as a protector. Activists with women's liberation backgrounds believed that political change occurred by altering consciousness. Feminist repertoires that named pornography as violence rescripted images of desire in magazines popular with a middle-class audience, like *Screw* and *Playboy*, or popular cult pornos like *Deep Throat* (1972) for the ordinary middle-class consumers who were being openly targeted by a previously underground industry. The success of prior activism provided important "antecedents" to feminist antipornography activism, Jay noted, both strategically and ideologically.

“Many of the women were building on their personal experience of having been coerced either by force, or maybe by bribes or other ways, into sexual acts they didn’t want to perform,” she recalled. “And . . . they assumed that it had to be true in pornography, and, of course, then there were cases of women who . . . said that they had been forced to do [movies] like *Deep Throat*.”³⁵

In addition, while antipornography feminism is often remembered as a movement that was defeated by other radical feminists, this does not mean that its adherents were, or became, conservative. It demonstrates only that they lost to another faction whose repertoire was more persuasive to a sexual public that evolved dramatically in the 1980s. Importantly, radical women who are not commonly associated with antipornography feminism were persuaded by its agenda in the 1970s. Barbara Deming, a longtime antiviolence and civil rights activist and lesbian feminist, was drawn into antipornography activism through her lover, Jane Gapen, an activist on behalf of battered women. Deming broke with old friends in the War Resisters League over her support for Andrea Dworkin, Jay, and Leah Fritz during the *Snuff* protest in 1976. Eventually sued by a movie theater owner who was picketed by the group, Deming wrote to Congresswoman Bella Abzug about the danger pornography posed to women. Earlier, she had assumed that women “had no right to defend ourselves against pornography—though it is clearly an assault against women. But now I begin to have second thoughts about all of it. . . . Yes free speech is vital. But so is the common defense.”³⁶

A diverse set of feminists acted together in 1979 on a premise that the ordinance movement later made insupportable: “the common defense” and free speech were not mutually exclusive realms. “The mid-seventies anti-rape movement,” as Beryl Satter has noted, “argued that the purest insight into the meaning of sexual violence came from women who were the most emotionally devastated by the experience.”³⁷ Creating a space for women to speak, Andrea Dworkin wrote, as well as learning to listen “with concentration and poise,” were techniques crucial to a feminist repertoire, since patriarchal regimes specialized in silencing their opponents.³⁸ The 1979 march on Times Square featured repertoires of speaking out and non-judgmental listening, which had been honed in earlier campaigns against rape and battering, forms of testimony and performance that were simultaneously scripted and spontaneous. As one set of planning notes described the ritual, a “speak out” should be “brief (less than ½ hour) of open mike,” extending the knowledge generated about sexual violence to a larger audience of women. Although observers were intended to experience the event as an unmediated exchange of feelings, organizers described the technique as “a planned, shaped series of testimonies from women, taking place on the stage of the auditorium in front of other women.” Men would be asked to leave the room, allowing participants to experience a woman-defined space, perhaps for the first time. Speakers would “cover the multitude of issues we have already touched upon and raised in our CR’s and meetings.”³⁹

Women Against Pornography closed its doors in 1993, but its early history clearly opens doors for scholars interested in the divisions over sexuality that emerged in feminism in the 1980s. This history also demonstrates how, despite the internationalism that is now the hallmark of women's, gender, and sexuality studies as a field, nationalist paradigms may have skewed our view of its appeal.⁴⁰ For example, the model civil rights ordinance promoted by Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin that would have allowed people who had been harmed by pornography to sue for damages was not successful in the United States, despite increasing support from conservative activists throughout the 1980s. Aspects of the ordinance that pertained to women's equality were, however, incorporated in Canadian obscenity law in 1992, due to the work of radical feminists there.

An inquiry that centers regimes and repertoires takes our story beyond the borders of the United States and suggests that there is much to learn from a comparative and transnational approach to a feminist history of urban space. By 1988, English and Scottish feminists had become embroiled in their own "sex wars" when Parliamentarian Clare Short introduced a bill to sell the sporting papers, or "Lads mags," from the top shelf of newspaper kiosks because of the scantily clad women on the cover. This redefined mainstream publications as pornography. The "top shelf campaign" was popular among Tories and Christian groups in England. But the campaign was immensely popular on the left as well, in labor unions (particularly printer's unions) and university unions, where Marxist students viewed pornography as a barrier to women's equality. Similarly, feminists in postapartheid South Africa, where sexual violence is an endemic problem, have argued that pornography is a violation of the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁴¹

Years later, Karla Jay asked Charlotte Bunch about her role that day in Times Square, and what impact it had on her subsequent reputation as a radical feminist. "You know, I was thinking about the antiporn movement," Jay recalled, "and I remember that you weren't on one side or the other." She said, "I wasn't." I said, "And how did that play out for you?" She said, "Oh, both sides attacked me."⁴² The "sex wars" are said to have destroyed feminism, but the many interests that came together in Times Square suggest that Women Against Pornography's battle against the sex industry tells a different, and more interesting, story about hopes for a feminist public sphere that persisted into the Age of Reagan. When radical feminists marched on Times Square, they viewed themselves as fighting on behalf of, not against, sexual freedom, and they understood that 42nd Street was not just a national, but an international, stage. As Bunch's words at the beginning of this piece suggest, the effect of feminist antipornography repertoires was to rearticulate the representation, commodification, and sale of women's sexuality as a human rights project and an effect of patriarchal imperialism. Rearticulating popular understandings of Times Square as a space defined by violence against women and not as a locus of desire and fantasy

was crucial to this feminist vision—but policing was not. Hence, Times Square’s existence as an internationally famous site for male pleasure made it the ultimate expression of social tolerance for the international subordination of women as well. By adopting feminist repertoires, Women Against Pornography argued, women everywhere could continue the fight in their own “Times Squares”—from a grocery store in Queens to a PX in South Korea to a pornography theater in Peoria.

Notes

I would like to thank Nancy Barnes, Edward Ball, Susan Brownmiller, Beverly Gage, Karla Jay, Paul Sabin, the anonymous *RHR* readers, and the editors for their suggestions. An early draft of this essay was presented at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. Oral history research was funded by the Colonel Return Jonathan Meigs First Fund and the Office of Academic Affairs, Wesleyan University.

1. Reprinted as “Lesbianism and Erotica in Pornographic America,” in *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*, ed. Laura Lederer (New York: William Morrow, 1980), 93.
2. “5,000 Join Feminist Group’s Rally Against Pornography in Times Square,” *New York Times*, October 21, 1979; “Six Questions About Pornography,” flyer, folder 1, box 3, Women Against Pornography Papers (WAPP), Schlesinger Library, Harvard University.
3. For the feminist antipornography movement, see Carolyn Bronstein, *Battling Pornography: The American Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); for antiobscenity campaigns, see Whitney Strub, *Perversion for Profit: The Politics of Pornography and the Rise of the New Right* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); for obscenity laws and sexual freedom, see Leigh Ann Wheeler, “Rescuing Sex from Prudery and Prurience: American Women’s Use of Sex Education as an Antidote to Obscenity, 1925–1932,” *Journal of Women’s History* 12, no. 3 (2000): 173–195. For the rise of neoconservatism, see Justin Vaisse, *Neo-conservatism: The Biography of a Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).
4. See Lisa Duggan and Nan D. Hunter, *Sex Wars: Sexual Dissent and Political Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995). For rebuttal to arguments made by FACT and their allies, see Dorchen Leidholt and Janice G. Raymond, eds., *The Sexual Liberals and the Attack on Feminism* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1990). Critical perspective on the struggle can be found in the epilogue to Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) and Alice Echols, *Shaky Ground: The Sixties and its Aftershocks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 95–128; Jane Gerhard, *Desiring Revolution: Second Wave Feminism and the Rewriting of American Sexual Thought, 1920–1982* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001); Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts* (New York: Routledge, 1997); and Andrew Ross, “The Popularity of Pornography,” in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 171–208.
5. Kevin Mumford, *Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in New York and Chicago in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Robert Peters, interview by author, September 20, 2010, 16–17. All interviews took place in New York City and are in the author’s possession. They are all transcribed but have not yet been published. Page numbers refer to the unpublished transcript.
6. Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly, and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007).

7. Christina Greene, *Our Separate Ways: Women and the Black Freedom Movement in Durham, North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Kimberly Springer, *Living for the Revolution: Black Feminist Organizations, 1968–1980* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Anne Enke, *Finding the Movement: Sexuality, Contested Space, and Feminist Activism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 253–55.
8. Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” in *The Cultural Studies Reader*, 3rd ed., ed. Simon During (New York: Routledge, 2007), 518–36.
9. Wendy Brown sees antipornography feminism producing a perverse appeal to a masculinist state; *States of Injury* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995).
10. Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight For Women’s Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2000); and Catherine A. MacKinnon, *Only Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).
11. Charles Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), vii.
12. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
13. Charles V. Bagli, “After 30 Years, Times Square Rebirth Is Complete,” *New York Times*, December 3, 2010.
14. Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York: NYU Press, 1999).
15. Susan Brownmiller, interview by the author, August 27, 2009, 15; Bronstein, *Battling Pornography*, 209.
16. Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie, eds., *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
17. “Lesbian Feminist Concerns in the Feminist Anti-Pornography Movement,” October 1979, “Literature” folder, box 1, WAPP.
18. Bronstein, *Battling Pornography*, 210–11.
19. Brownmiller, interview by author, 13.
20. Karla Jay, interview by author, September 1, 2009, 42.
21. Alexander J. Reichl, *Reconstructing Times Square: Politics and Culture in Urban Development* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999); Selwynn Raab, “Codd Says That Police Layoffs Could Make the City ‘Less Safe,’” *New York Times*, June 28, 1975; “P.B.A. Gives Out Leaflets Again,” *New York Times*, July 18, 1975; Lynne B. Sagalyn, *Times Square Roulette: Remaking the City Icon* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 16–18.
22. Susan Brownmiller, interview by author, 42.
23. Maggie Smith, interview by author, September 20, 2010, 20.
24. Sara M. Evans, “Women’s History and Political Theory: Towards A Feminist Approach to Public Life,” in *Visible Women: New Essays on American Activism*, ed. Nancy Hewitt and Suzanne Lebsack (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 126.
25. Brownmiller, interview by author, 12.
26. “5,000 Join Feminist Group’s Rally Against Pornography.”
27. Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, *Pornography and Civil Rights: A New Day for Women’s Equality* (Minneapolis: Organizing Against Pornography, 1988).
28. Feminist antipornography activists saw the state as an arena for conflict where women did not yet have equal standing. Because of this, most radical feminists were interested in state-centered activism only to the extent that the state prevented women’s realization as full democratic citizens; Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 2000).
29. Joan Van de Water, Kenmore, New York, to Susan Brownmiller, December 12, 1983.

- “General Correspondence,” box 2, WAPP. I have been fortunate to have had access to a draft manuscript by Leigh Ann Wheeler that outlines the ACLU’s link between speech and sexuality in depth.
30. See Nan D. Hunter and Sylvia A. Law, “Amici Curiae of Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce in *American Booksellers Association v. Hudnut*,” *Michigan Journal of Law Reform* 21, nos. 1–2 (1987); *American Booksellers Association v. William H. Hudnut*, No. 84–3147, 1985 U.S. App. LEXIS 22623 (7th Cir. Aug. 27, 1985); and Nadine Strossen, *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women’s Rights* (New York: NYU Press, 2000).
 31. John Stoltenberg, “‘I Am Not A Rapist!’ Why College Guys Are Confronting Sexual Violence,” in *Feminism and Men: Reconstructing Gender Relations*, ed. Steven P. Schacht and Doris W. Ewing (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 89–90.
 32. Faye D. Ginsburg, *Contested Lives: The Abortion Debate in an American Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
 33. Jay, interview by author, 39.
 34. Brownmiller, interview by author, 8.
 35. Jay, interview by author, 14. When many of these same New York women had held a one-day conference on sex work in 1971, they did so in conjunction with the predominantly African American, and antistatist, National Welfare Rights Organization. Unlike civil rights initiatives that looked to the federal government to recognize and protect citizenship rights, NWRO used grassroots action to redefine those rights in relation to poor, black, and Latina mothers’ needs, and positioned the state as the barrier to realizing those rights. While NWRO used expressly political tactics like testimony and litigation to force the state to comply with the law, where they were perhaps most effective was at the local level. There, these reformulated rights and needs could be implemented through political repertoires such as community mobilization, demonstrations, cooperative action, cultivation of local leadership, and institution building. Annelise Orleck, *Storming Caesar’s Palace: How Black Mothers Fought Their Own War on Poverty* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Felicia A. Kornbluh, *The Battle For Welfare Rights: Politics and Poverty in Modern America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).
 36. Barbara Deming, draft of letter to Bella Abzug, undated, and notes about prosecution of *Snuff*, March 25, 1976, in “WAVAW — Thoughts 1967–77,” folder 676, box 34, Deming Papers, Schlesinger Library, Harvard University. For more on Deming’s relationship to antipornography politics, see Martin Duberman, *A Saving Remnant: The Radical Lives of Barbara Deming and David McReynolds* (New York: New Press, 2011), 159–175.
 37. Joan Scott, “The Evidence of Experience,” *Critical Inquiry* 17, no. 4 (1991), 773–97; Beryl Satter, “The Sexual Abuse Paradigm in Historical Perspective: Passivity and Emotion in Mid-Twentieth Century America,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12, no. 3 (2003), 424–64.
 38. Andrea Dworkin, *Heartbreak: The Political Memoir of a Feminist Militant* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 105.
 39. “Speak Outs,” 1979, folder 3, box 1, WAPP.
 40. Joanne Meyerowitz, “Transnational Sex and U.S. History,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 5 (2009), 1273–86.
 41. Anna Marie Smith, “‘What Is Pornography?’ An Analysis of the Policy Statement of the Campaign against Pornography,” *Feminist Review*, no. 43 (1993), 71–87; Teboho Maitse, “Political Change, Rape, and Pornography in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” *Gender and Development* 6, no. 3 (1998), 58.
 42. Jay, interview by author, p. 47.