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DISRUPTIVE SUBJECTS: *OPERAISMO* AND RADICAL FEMINISM IN ITALY AND THE UNITED STATES

MEHMET DOSEMECI

md053@bucknell.edu

<http://disruptnow.org>

Mehmet Dosemeci is Associate Professor of History at Bucknell University in the United States. His current research projects include the history of radical social struggles and the global history of international solidarity. Dosemeci has recently published his second book, *The History of Disruption: Social Struggle in the Atlantic World* (Verso Press). In his spare time, he runs a website featuring documents on the past and present of social disruption and would love for you to check it out or contribute: disruptnow.org.

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Disruptive Subjects: *Operaismo* and Radical Feminism in Italy and the United States

_Abstract

This _*Article* examines the role of disruption in two pivotal instances of subject formation in the late 1960s and 1970s Atlantic World: *Operaismo* (Workerism) and radical feminism in Italy and the United States. To do so, it traces the history of the self-creation of workers and women as political subjects. It underscores how this becoming-subject emerged, both conceptually and tactically, through the disruption of their assigned role, place, and function within society. It describes the autonomous, unruly, and unexpected subjectivities that emerged from this disavowal and the new forms of politics, praxis, history, being-with, and against that women and workers created. The conclusion discusses the fortunes of disruptive politics and subjectivity since the 1970s and what these historical struggles can say to the liberation struggles of our present.

> "Europe now lives at such a mad, reckless pace that […] she is running headlong into the abyss. This pathological tearing apart of humanity's functions and the crumbling away of its unity […] the differentiations, the stratification, slavery, and exploitation.
>
> Humanity is waiting for something other from us.
>
> Comrades, we must invent and we must make discoveries […] we must work out new concepts, and try to set afoot, a new human being."
>
> —Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961[1]

On 24 May 1968, a 100,000-strong crowd of French students and workers, chanting "your struggle is ours," began their march to Place de la Bastille. This conjoining of university and factory uprisings, no less through a symbolic reenactment of the events of 14 July 1789, sent chills down the spine of De Gaulle's government. The French state, faced with the terrifying prospect of workers and students uniting to form a new revolutionary subject, sprang to action, creating a wall of police to drive the demonstrators back to the Latin Quarter. In the days that followed, the careful and tactical policing of the streets was matched by an even more calculated media operation to segregate the masses of revolting French into their constituent parts. As Prime Minister Georges Pompidou later remarked, "I wanted to treat the problem of the youth separately." To divide the students and workers back into their sociological identities,

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where the strike would become a wage or "bread and butter issue," and student demands an "educational" problem.[2] As long as the workers remained sequestered inside their occupied factories, while the students relived the 'myth of the barricades' in the confines of the Latin Quarter, the French state would remain intact. A few months later, Alain Touraine underscored this tactic of compartmentalization. "In the hands of its managers," he argued, society was "dismantled like a machine, each piece dealt with in a special shop or milieu."[3]

In the 1960s, the compartmentalization of the social terrain, the differentiation of human beings into exclusive spheres, functions, and social kinds, became a focal point of analysis and action. For those seeking to maintain the status quo, compartmentalization served several functions. First, it gave rise to different hierarchies, experiences, vocabularies, and senses of belonging among the oppressed, creating distinctions (as with the workers and students of France) that divided opposition to the existing regime. At the same time, the compartmentalization of daily life, of what kinds of people, under which conditions, could or should do what, and where, became a means to marketize human activities such as leisure, education, shopping, housework, and healthcare, creating new pathways of predation for capital investment.

Detractors of the status quo also began to focus on the regime's production of, and reliance on, the segregation of human beings by social kind. On the broadest level, various currents of the New Left on both sides of the Atlantic explored the mechanisms of this differentiating power, questioning what it meant to be a student, an artist, a worker, a woman, and why these roles took place at specific and segregated sites (the school, the factory, the studio, the home). In questioning their externally given and often naturalized identities, these groups came to understand the regime as an ordering power: as a power that named, sorted, distributed, and partitioned humans into discrete subjects with separate functions, capacities, and geographies.

Just as quickly, the New Left took to disrupting this ordering power. Put simply, if this 'regime of order' subdued its subjects by enforcing a set of social identities, liberation, for these groups, lay in the simultaneous disavowal and appropriation of this authority.

This *_Article* examines the role of disruption in two pivotal instances of subject formation in the late 1960s and 1970s Atlantic World: *Operaismo* and radical feminism

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in Italy and the United States. To do so, it traces the history of the self-creation of workers and women as political subjects. It underscores how this becoming-subject was carried out through disruption. This disruption involved, crucially, two simultaneous actions. The first was a negative one, a withdrawal of consent, a refusal to be categorized, ordered, dispensed, and understood on terms assigned by the regime of order. Disruption, in this negative sense, meant the removal of oneself from one's ascribed place and role, a de-activation, a 'radical subtraction,' a becoming 'inoperable' to the regime of order. Second, simultaneous to, and made possible by this negative act, was the positive assertion of subjectivity; the 'entering into history,' the deployment, self-valorization, and self-determination of a political subject by itself on new terms that were previously unrepresentable within the existing order.

Examining the role of disruption in subject formation brings together two political concepts that, despite their occasional historical overlap, have followed disparate lineages. Disruption, and attendant terms such as disturbance and disorder, have historically referred to the interruption of the normalized functioning or flow of society. As a political tactic, disruption has occupied a central role in countless social struggles, including food riots, slave revolts, pirate and maroon raids in the eighteenth century; strikes, sabotage, and other forms of industrial warfare in the nineteenth century; urban uprisings and university occupations in the twentieth. In most such cases, disruption referred to the physical disturbance of production and distribution of the social relations upholding them. More recently, the term has been appropriated by management gurus to describe the effects of innovations that radically alter or displace existing markets (think the Model T Ford, smartphones, generative artificial intelligence).

Historically, disruption signified the active intervention of human beings into the operation of their societies. Political subject formation, by contrast, has often been theorized as something that society assigns, cultivates, or confers onto its individual members. Be it through socialization, our relation to the means of production, interpellation by the law, habitus, disciplinary technologies, or language—theories of subject formation describe the process whereby human beings are molded into subjecthood.

The political moments when disruption and subject-formation have been historically conjoined are those of modern revolution. The wholesale transgression of established laws and cosmologies that mark revolutionary disruptions have often been

accompanied by radical changes to subjecthood—the moment of the appearance of the citizen, people, worker, etc. as political subject. This *_Article* builds upon this active process of disruptive subject formation, using the concept to examine the self-constitution of workers and women within the workerist and feminist struggles in Italy and the United States.

Antagonism was key to this disruptive politics. The new subjects of *Operaismo* and radical feminism not only rejected their ascription by the existing order but made clear that their subjectivity was incompatible with its future continuation. They did not seek to recalibrate the existing distributions of the regime or to be incorporated on equal footing with other social kinds. They were 'unruly' or 'unexpected' subjects precisely because (and only in so far as) they disrupted the ordering power of the regime itself. At their limit, they struggled to not only redefine their social identities but to annihilate their beings as women and workers altogether.

But what were workers or women if they refused both the identities of their oppression *and* integration—on more equal terms—into the universal order of their oppressors? This *_Article* examines the radical solutions to this question as they were articulated by workers and radical feminists in Italy and the United States.[4] It details how, in less than a decade, these disruptive subjects created new forms of politics and history, new ways of being-with and against, as well as new languages and practices of care, provisioning, and refusal.

1_*Operaismo* and Self-Valorization

"I would prefer not to."
—Bartleby[5]

In March 1973, 10,000 workers occupied Fiat's giant Mirafiori automotive plant in Turin, blockading all entrances to the factory. A terrified union leadership, whose credibility rested on its ability to control such wildcat actions, issued a call to strike. The workers of Fiat were not in the mood to listen. Neither, as it turned out, were those in the rest of the city. The following day, the occupations spread to shops in Lingotto, Bertone, Pininfarina, Spa Stura, Ricambi, Lancia, Carello, Spa Centro, Ferriere, and Grandi Motori. By evening, most of Turin's factories were in the hands of their workers. The unions and bosses scrambled to get hold of the situation, and in three days, hammered out a new national contract with terms extremely favorable to labor.

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The first back-to-work day, announced with the new contract, was ignored completely. In the second, 60% of the Fiat workforce did not show up, the ones that did continued their assembly work behind barricaded factory gates.

Factory occupations as a form of disruptive politics were nothing new, especially in Italy. They had been used to both extract concessions from capital and, at times, as a revolutionary tactic for worker control. So, what was different about these takeovers? To one Fiat line worker, the historical context was clear:

> This occupation is different from the one the workers did in 1920. In 1920, they said let's occupy but let's work. Let's show everyone that we can run production ourselves. Things are different today. In our occupation, the factory is a starting point for the revolutionary organization of the workers—*not a place to work*![6]

Another line worker added:

> If the police had come to the gates, we wouldn't have attacked them there. We would have drawn them inside the factory, onto our own ground […] where we're always ready to answer violence on terms we understand [...] If the police had come into Mirafiori, the place would have been out of action for three years.[7]

In their analysis of the occupations, the group *Potere Operaio* (Workers' Power) concluded that, "[t]he workers took over the factory, not to defend it, nor to run it, but to use it as an enormous resource of political strength."[8]

What were these Italian workers saying? What did it mean that the factory was "not a place to work?" That they would meet police violence with the destruction of the factory that employed them? For over a century, workers had regarded their labor as the source of their current and future political power. How could its implied abnegation be 'an enormous resource of political strength?'

Between 1969 and 1977, Italian workers went to war with the entirety of Italian society. They waged war against capital and the Italian state, against the unions and political parties that were supposed to represent them, and, perhaps most profoundly, against the order of work itself. The scale of industrial conflict was astounding. In terms of lost working time, the 'Hot Autumn of 1969' alone registered as the third largest strike wave in human history (after May 1968 France and the 1926 British general strike). Yet, unlike these intense but short-lived disruptions, Italian workers maintained a near constant state of industrial agitation, with ebbs and flows, for nearly a decade. This state of 'perpetual conflict,' confounding bosses, political parties, and unions alike, spilled outside the factories, and at times became unassimilable.

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Worker disruption both informed and found political expression through the simultaneous explosion of extra-parliamentary groups operating outside Italy's post-war institutional structure, most notably the militant intellectuals that coalesced around the banner of *Operaismo.* This imbrication of radical thought and direct action, first questioned but ultimately rejected the long-cultivated understandings of proletarian subjectivity, and rearticulated, in radical terms, what it meant to be a worker.

Operaismo, or Workerism, emerged from an attempt by dissident leftist intellectuals to reground analysis of workers' struggle in the actual experience of workers within the factories. It was heavily influenced by two Trotskyist splinter groups, the Johnson-Forest Tendency in the United States and *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in France, both of which had advocated for workers' self-organization and self-management outside (and in spite of) the institutions and doctrines of the labor movement.[9] Building on these efforts, the Italian Workerists scrapped the 'objective' analysis of capitalism and class undertaken by almost all of orthodox Marxism and set about investigating capital as it was experienced at the point of its production, by workers, on the shop floor.

These 'workers' inquiries'—involving rich descriptions of the "microsystems of struggle" inside the factory—illuminated the shifting class composition of Italy's industrial workforce. The post-war Fordist restructuring of Italian manufacturing and the mechanization of southern agriculture had led to a massive uprooting of Italians, as nine million workers—nearly a fifth of the total population—resettled into the 'Industrial Triangle' between Milan, Turin, and Genoa. Bound to repetitive machines, socially degraded by and economically segregated from their northern counterparts, the newly arrived migrants from the rural south found themselves at the bottom of a hierarchical world enforced by abusive foremen and divisive pay scales. Whereas the Italian Communist Party (PCI) perceived their high rates of absenteeism and turnover, their lack of integration into the established unions, their low participation in official strikes as a sign of the new migrants' primitive or pre-political consciousness, the Workerists drew different conclusions. For the militant intellectuals of the group *Potere Operaio,* the passivity of the 'new forces' signaled not the absence of politics, but the sign of a profound disavowal of the organization of industrial work. Worker inquiry revealed that these new mass workers had no stake in the established unions, did not take part in strikes because they considered them useless, and—more radically—rejected the union's emphasis on skill, worker pride, and its representational and

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bureaucratic form of organization. In their refusal of, and insubordination towards, the totality of industrial organization, the workerists saw the germ of a new revolutionary subject. A worker, animated not by the dignity of labor that creates all wealth, but by a desire not to work, by the hatred of work.[10]

These interpretative differences were founded on radically divergent understandings of worker subjectivity. Within both bourgeois and orthodox Marxist analyses, class was a sociological and economic concept. It described a social aggregate to which one belonged, either through existing social stratification or one's relationship to the means of production. In both cases, class was something you were placed into; it existed as an external and objective category. For the Workerists, such interpretations turned the working class into a very strange entity. Supposedly, the subject of history, its entire definition had been given to it by others: by capital, by sociology, by economics, by the state, by unions, by communist parties, by intellectuals: everyone, that is, but themselves.

By contrast, *Operaismo* sought the basis of class in worker subjectivity—in how workers reacted politically to the world of capital. This subjectivity did not exist naturally, externally, or objectively, but was created by the workers themselves through struggle. Without struggle, the Workerists argued, there could be proletarians but no proletariat, workers but not a working class. The first of these terms referred to the laborer's function within the regime of order, their objective existence as humans forced to sell their labor-power in order to survive. The second set of terms was subjective; the political self-understanding of workers that came about through the abnegation of this existence. While capital produced workers, i.e. restructured human beings as labor-power, the Workerists argued that struggle produced the working class.

In these claims, *Operaismo* went even further than E.P. Thompson's landmark shift in Anglophone new-left historiography. Workers were not just "present at their own making," they became the proletariat, understood themselves as a class, by disrupting what capital had forced them to be.[11] For this reason, the Workerist conception of subjectivity also differed from traditional formulations of class consciousness. It was not the process whereby the worker came to realize its objective relation to the means of production (true consciousness) or was led astray from this realization (false consciousness). Nor could working class subjectivity be imparted by the representatives of labor. With *Operaismo*, class became an entirely political concept,

one that was composed and decomposed through the workers' refusal of their own life condition. As Marx had shown in his historical works, the Workerists averred, "proletarians became a class on the 1848 barricades."[12]

The Refusal of Work

The industrial agitation that exploded with the Hot Autumn of 1969 confirmed *Operaismo*'s analysis. In September, negotiations over a labor contract sparked a wildcat strike by workers of the Fiat Mirafiori plant. Shortly after, similar strikes broke out at the Alfa Romeo and Pirelli factories, and within a month had spread throughout the industrial triangle. By the end of the year, some 5.5 million workers—more than 25 percent of the Italian labor force—had walked off the job, resulting in over 520 million worker-hours lost. The strikes were initiated by the rank-and-file, violated no-strike contract clauses, and bypassed the union structures, which had, by December, lost all control. One worker from the Mirafiori body shop declared:

> Today we can make it with our own means. We don't need any union representation anymore, or nobody else's. This means that we now decide not only the form of the struggle, but also its goals, the style of its leadership, the way of organizing it and spreading it. This is what manufacturers and union bureaucrats alike are more afraid of.[13]

The demands of workers were less about the usual issue of compensation than the hierarchical organization of labor within the workplace. Above all, workers demanded an end to practices that tied wages to individual and collective productivity. This included an end to piecework, merit pay, and production bonuses. The most popular slogan of the Hot Autumn, "Less work! More pay!" went to the heart of this radical demand, severing the nexus between remuneration and productivity—undermining a fundamental pillar of wage labor.[14] They demanded control over promotions, which they saw as a corporate mechanism to mold workers into subjects submissive to managerial authority, goals, and values. Or as the Autonomous Assembly of Alfa Romeo stated, an end to the current practice of "selection based on […] your willingness to lick ass."[15]

Taken together, these demands signified the collective desire for a different organization of work. Yet, to *Operaismo*, the true revolutionary potential of 1969 lay in what the workers did, not what they asked for. It was through their direct actions, their refusal, their insubordination, that workers came to see themselves as a political class. Examples of this abound. On an individual level, workers would arrive late for

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their shifts and leave early. Or they simply refused to show up. Absenteeism was rampant throughout the factories of the industrial triangle, averaging 14% daily in the early 1970s with peaks of over 30% in certain months. Collectively, workers unilaterally declared paid rest periods, a practice they referred to as 'appropriation.' They held political meetings inside the factories, on the company's time. It was here in these autonomous assemblies where Italian workers developed new tactics of worker disruption. Some, such as the 'hiccup' and 'chessboard' strikes, were masterfully coordinated slow-downs of the assembly line, with successive sections of the plant, or workers with last names beginning with certain letters, downing tools at pre-arranged and staggered times. These "articulated strikes" caused enormous headaches for foremen, crippled production, easily bypassed union officials, and cost the rank-and-file workers nothing in terms of lost wages.[16] A 1969 article in *Rinascita* entitled "Pirelli: A Victory for Workers' Inventiveness" likened the new disruptive tactics to an autonomous symphony. "The reduction of work speeds is a masterpiece of consciousness (*autocoscienza*) and technical ability. It is as if an orchestra had managed to play a difficult symphony, harmoniously, without the conductor, and at a tempo agreed upon and regulated by the players of the single instruments."[17] Or as one worker stated more poetically, it was about "the workers learning to make the bosses dance to the rhythm of their own music."[18] Other disruptive innovations, like the *corteo interno*—intra-factory marches that proceeded from shop-to-shop harassing foremen, strike breakers, and management—had a more spontaneous, slightly menacing, carnivalesque character, resurrecting medieval and early modern practices of charivari or 'rough music.'[19]

Factory management and bourgeois commentators decried this 'rage against work,' declared these new tactics 'illegal,' and denounced their practitioners as 'gangs of half-lunatics' and 'self-improvised Zulus.' The established unions were equally unimpressed. They saw in these worker disruptions "a political primitivism, stemming from a barely nascent trade-union consciousness," and, indeed, as "a cause for embarrassment."[20] Supporters, in contrast, read in these coordinated disruptions workers' capacity for self-management and the fruits of workplace democracy.

For the workers, they were enjoyable in themselves. Slowing down production, moving freely around the factory floor, coming in late, claiming paid breaks, and coordinating disruptions using the foremen's phone all gave workers a sense of control

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over their workplace while achieving what workers wanted: less work. Yes, the strikes impeded production and were adept displays of worker power. But more than their value in wresting concessions from management, these disruptions all had the immediate effect of reducing the tempo, discipline, and length of work. They exemplified, as one radical student observed, the art of "practicing the objective."[21] A concept that would later come to be known as 'prefigurative politics.'

The Struggle Against Labor

For Mario Tronti and other members of *Operaismo*, the refusal of work had an even greater significance. It attested to not only the disruption of production, but a more fundamental disruption to the role and function of the worker within society. As Tronti argued in *Workers and Capital*:

> This refusal of work, this struggle against work, this relentless sabotage of its own identity as a commodity—labor power—that is sold in exchange for wages, cannot be reduced to a simple 'resistance' on the part of a living, laboring humanity to its domination by capital. Its definition, if this word even applies, is articulated in its active destruction or sabotage of its own objective existence as labor-power, its own identity as a category of capital.[22]

In the refusal of work, Tronti saw a refusal to be categorized, deployed, dispensed, and defined as workers by capitalism. This led to some startling arguments. For the Italian Workerists, the creation of the proletariat required the nullification of their identity as laborers: the extraction of themselves from their assigned function; a de-activation of their labor-power. Quite radically, the Workerists claimed that the disruptions of the labor struggle had nothing to do with recovering the wealth stolen from it. This is what socialism, in its aim to redistribute the gains, or even ownership, of productive activity had gotten wrong all along. The labor struggle was a struggle *against* labor. A workers' struggle against their own self-understanding as those who provided labor power.

Read in this light, the industrial agitation that crippled Italy's industrial triangle was the workers' attempt to render themselves, as workers, inoperable. The coordinated disruptions, the spontaneous factory marches, the organized passivity and absenteeism, the flouting of shift schedules and foremen directives, were all ways of practicing and showcasing their own debilitation.

"To struggle against labor requires proletarians to take themselves, their own condition as wage-laborers, as a limit to be overcome," Tronti wrote in "The Strategy of Refusal." The working class must "reach the point of having as its enemy the whole

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of capital, including itself as part of capital."[23] Workerism wagered on the possibility that there was a force in workers that they could mobilize against themselves, not to extend but to destroy their own condition. It was therefore a workerism against work, refusing a naturalized subjectivity imposed by the capital relation.[24] In this sense, 'the dignity of labor' and 'pride of the producer,' which the socialist movement had conferred on the working class like some title of nobility, was nothing other than self-reification. True self-valorization, by contrast, began with sabotage. Worker sabotage, not of production but of themselves as a productive force. By becoming inoperable, Antonio Negri argued, "[w]orkers imagine their lives not as work but as the absence of it, their activity as free and creative exercise."[25]

By the mid-1970s, across the North Atlantic, and for reasons also predicted by the Workerists, the good times were largely over. Hampered by the industrial agitation of workers, the oil shock, and the collapse of Bretton-Woods, capital accumulation had entered a crisis of immobility: a period when manufacturing profits fell below a certain threshold, triggering a precipitous drop in capital reinvestment. Within the urban industrial centers of the North Atlantic the restructuring of capital led to corporate policies of relocation and labor redundancy (greatly diminishing the power of worker militancy). It was no coincidence that the 1973 occupation of the Fiat Mirafiori plant proved to be the high point of radical and autonomous agitation in the factories. After this, the traditional unions slowly reasserted control over the workers, using their diminishing strength not to disrupt production but fighting alongside capital to continue it. That same year marked a similar turn in the manufacturing core of the United States where, for the first time in the history of the UAW, the union mobilized to keep a plant open.[26] This restructuring sounded the death knell for the radical subjectivity of the industrial working class. The moment when the worker was forced to affirm capital in order to affirm their own existence, when it could no longer exist in antagonism to, or as the antithesis of capital, marked the moment when disruption became all but symbolic on the factory floor.

For the Workerists, these developments signaled a shift in the site of autonomous conflict, away from the industrial plants to the entirety of the 'Social Factory.' The struggle for autonomy and self-determination, displaced from the shop floor, now migrated to the community: to struggles over housing and urban space, to grocery stores, utility bills, and child-care, to sex, housework, health, and the human body.

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These new sites of conflict also involved production, not of goods but of the human beings who made them. And from this terrain of social reproduction, there emerged a new subject of human liberation.

2_Women's Liberation

"Bitch is beautiful.
Bitches seek their identity strictly through
themselves and what they do.
It is an act of affirmation by self and not
negation by others."
—Bitch Manifesto (1968)[27]

"No longer daughters, no longer wives, we will
destroy your families."
—Witches of the March on Rome (1975)[28]

In a speech to the city-wide meeting of radical women's groups at the Free University in New York City on February 17, 1968, Anne Koedt remarked that, within New Left organizations, women's "roles centered on food-making, mimeographing, general assistance work, and as sexual supply for their male comrades after hours."[29] The accounts and memoirs of activists in the women's liberation struggle are filled with similar realizations about the gender roles within the Movement. Despite the New Left's self-avowed questioning of hierarchy, activist women quickly found out that its anti-authoritarian bulldozer stopped short at the gender wall. Rayna Rapp, who had joined the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in 1964, recalled how these "movement men […] had empathy for the Vietnamese, for black Americans, but not for […] the women in their lives; not the women they slept with, shared office space with […] demonstrated with."[30] Black women activists faced even greater hurdles. In addition to the challenges confronting white women, women in the black power struggle were haunted by a mythic matriarchal legacy of slavery, the untrue yet widely held assumption that black women were already liberated as heads of black families and their work outside the home. Leading Black Power women, such as Kathleen Cleaver or Angela Davis, were forced to 'genuflect' to men or were seen as 'domineering' when they declined to. Like their white counterparts, Black women were routinely sexualized and excluded from meaningful discussions. The leader of the

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Black Panther Party, Huey Newton, refused to allow a black women's caucus at the Revolutionary People's Constitutional Convention in 1969. Stokely Carmichael, when asked about the position of women in SNCC, charmingly replied, "prone," apparently so fond of the joke as to repeat it, with regularity, on his speaking tours.[31]

In Italy, the situation was not much better. Italian New Left women made up a huge part of the student struggle but were often relegated to secretarial roles within it, a situation later satirized by the quip "from the angel of the hearth to the angel of the copying machine." In this regard, the Italian new left was even worse than the old. Women's committees of the Italian Communist Party, as well as the *Unione Donne Italiane* (Union of Italian Women), a semi-independent organization financed by the communists and active since 1945, provided a large platform to organize and advocate for issues faced by women. The student and extra-parliamentary groups of the New Left had no comparable substructures. The CPUSA, though minuscule in size compared to PCI, had also acknowledged the existence of 'male chauvinism' and 'the woman question.' As Barbara Epstein noted: "At least in the old left […] one could bring up the issue, even if the communists regarded it as a 'bourgeois matter' to be solved 'after the revolution' […] Inside SDS, you see, it was simply laughed at."[32] Irrespective of race, on either side of the Atlantic, and despite their intense commitment to the cause, New Left women were silenced and ignored, routinely assigned menial tasks, and forced to use their bodies as social currency.

The combination of their subordinate status, the earnest airing of their grievances to the men they fought with, respected, and loved, and the anger provoked by their derisive reaction gave birth to the women's liberation struggle. In the United States, activist women began forming autonomous women-only groups within the structures of the New Left. By 1969, they were leaving the Movement in droves. Italian women made the leap a year later: women-only groups emerged during the radically open political situation of 1969; initially established in larger cities, they soon mushroomed across Italy.[33]

Women's self-extraction from the New Left struggles led to a multifaceted questioning of the function and identification of women within society. Radical feminists in both Italy and the United States rejected their ascription as sex objects, as emotional crutches, as nurturing mothers, and daughters in need of protection. They rejected long-standing conceptions of what a woman's body was, whose it was, and

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what it was for. They rejected centuries-old binaries of sexual difference around male and female endowments of reason, objectivity, agency, and completeness that had legitimized their subordination. They rejected doing all the housework and not being paid for it. Perhaps most radically, they rejected the past and present forms of disruptive politics, its theory, its practice, its history as male—and therefore complicit in the world they sought to dismantle. The shedding of old skins gave birth to many new ones, as radical feminists in Italy and the United States created new definitions, new cosmologies, new methods, and new languages of womanhood.

Disruptive Talk

In 1791, at the height of the French Revolution, Olympe de Gouges asked: "Will women always be divided one from another? Will they never form a single body?"[34] On the eve of the women's liberation struggle in the 1960s, women across the Atlantic faced the same question. Though having attained franchise in most countries, in some respects, their situation had become worse. In the intervening 175 years, the regime of order had etched stark lines between the 'private' domestic realm and the 'public' domain of politics and the economy. The demarcation was entirely gendered, enacted through the forceful expulsion of women from the labor force and their subsequent confinement to the household. As the nuclear family gradually replaced larger kinship and community networks as the primary unit of middle-class society, this confinement became even more pronounced, tying women individually to men while segregating them from each other.

Finding one another became the first step. Women began with the political organizations they were already a part of, forming women-only collectives within SDS and the Black Panther Party in the United States and within the unions in Italy. Some of these groups split off to create independent women's organizations that became the backbone of Italian and American radical feminism. In the United States, New York Radical Women (1967), Women's International Terrorist Conspiracy from Hell or W.I.T.C.H. (1968), The Feminists (1968), Cell 16 (1968), and Redstockings (1969) were established in the late 1960s. In 1970, *Rivolta Femminile* (Feminine Revolt) opened its first chapters in Rome and Milan, and *Lotta Feminista* (Female Struggle) groups formed in Rome and Padua.

While the performative actions of these organizations, such as the burning of 'instruments of female torture' at the 1968 Miss America Pageant and the Witches' 'Hex' on Wall Street, caught the media's attention, their real focus was a turn inward, to an exploration of themselves and their life conditions. W.I.T.C.H. exhorted women to "form your own Coven of sister Witches" while *Rivolta Femminile* urged women to "Leave the piazzas!" and "bring the street into the house!"[35] Gathering in small groups of between 10 and 30, usually at someone's home, women began to share and analyze their individual experiences, frustrations, and feelings. This process, termed 'consciousness-raising' in the United States and *autocoscienza* in Italy, revealed to participants not only the structures that upheld male supremacy but also of women's internalization and performance of, and therefore complicity in, their own oppression.[36] "Dismantling the feminine," as Carla Lonzi, the Italian pioneer of *autocoscienza*, put it, required erasing the effects of centuries of emotional and intellectual patriarchal domination, including over their own sense of self.[37] Joan Cassell, author of *A Group Called Women,* described consciousness raising as "the subjective identity-altering experience in the women's movement."[38] A process that "free[d] the group from the 'oppressor' ideology," creating what Lonzi called a "void," where an autonomous sense of being-woman could collectively emerge and exist.[39]

Topics varied by group and context, each opening up and politicizing areas of life that had previously drawn scant attention: female sexuality, child-care and housework, sexual violence, social roles and expectations, pornography, marriage, and women's health.[40] Whatever the focus, consciousness-raising groups rejected speaking about it through the Marxist vulgate of grand narratives, universalist claims, and analyses of objective conditions that pervaded Italian and American radical political discourse. Much like the worker inquiries of *Operaismo*, "The personal is political" of U.S. radical feminists, or the *partire da sé* [starting from oneself] method in Italy elevated a subjective narrative that began from how women experienced domination in their everyday lives.

The new praxis and objects of consciousness raising had a significant effect on how many radical feminists conceptualized liberation, shifting the focus away from equality towards autonomy and self-determination. The equality sought by liberal organizations such as NOW failed to address the institutional and ideational entrapments that were brought up in consciousness-raising sessions.[41] Moreover, consciousness-raising

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revealed that the issues facing women could never be resolved or overcome through formal channels available in a liberal democratic society. The personal was political, yes, but there was no mechanism within the existing framework to address this politics. To underscore the point, in January 1969, New York Radical Women 'gave back the vote' and burned their voter registration cards, a symbolic rejection of representative democracy and of women's franchise, which had done so little to change women's situation in America.[42] Whether implicitly or explicitly, many radical feminists believed that "voting was a 'mockery of democracy' and equality in a fundamentally unequal society an obscenity."[43]

Italian radical feminists saw the struggle for equality as not only counter-productive, but in fact a snare that would lead to the erasure of women (a position some radical feminists have stuck to despite the recent surge in trans activism). Feminine Revolt argued that formal or natural equality within categories created by patriarchal societies was a myth that veiled a fundamental contradiction. The category of the universal human being, though theoretically asexual, was in practice, sexed as male. The inclusion of women into the universal subject of the social contract implied that sexual difference could only be resolved by the obliteration of female characteristics. As one of the first Italian feminist collectives Demau (The Demystification of Authority) argued, the equal integration of women into male society was only possible through "the masculinization of women."[44] On the other hand, when sexual difference was affirmed, it was used to identify women with reproduction and thus to exclude them (as women) from the polis. As the NY Radical Feminists noted: woman's "sexual difference is rationalized to trap her within [social reproduction], while the male sexual difference is rationalized to imply access to all areas of human activity."[45] Equality, within this framework, implied that the polis was only open to women who agreed to neuter themselves.[46]

In both cases, becoming equal meant becoming like a man. Carla Lonzi took this perspective to its logical conclusion. "But do we, after thousands of years, really wish for inclusion, on these terms, in a world planned by others? Existing as a woman does not imply participation in male power but calls into question the very concept of power. It is in order to avoid this attack that we are now granted inclusion in the form of equality."[47] For Lonzi, the framework of equality served to defang feminism of its disruptive power, a way to enervate the unruly subject of women through her

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assimilation into male society. Equality was a veil, a ruse, an "offer of legal rights to a colonized people […] the mask with which [women's] inferiority is disguised."[48]

Consciousness raising cemented the belief that the cause of women's oppression lay in the structures of patriarchal society. Integration on equal terms within a system expressly designed to subordinate them was an absurdity akin to the integration of Blacks into Apartheid. For many radical feminists, women's liberation could be achieved not through equality but rather by their disavowal of the world of men.

The Politics of Separation

Irrespective of how radical feminists defined the structures of patriarchy or the attributes and causes of sexual difference, most agreed that the past and present of male civilization were not something to aspire to. By and large, the characteristics either possessed by men or revered within patriarchal society were repudiated for causing the untold suffering, violence, and domination that men had wrought on humankind throughout history. As the *Movimento Femminista Romano* succinctly put it: "He is demolishing the world; self-destruction alone is the only goal offered, while we are dragged along, tied as we are to this great carriage of death." Rather than "participating in the defeat of man," many Italian and American radical feminists sought to extract themselves in order to create "spaces [of] life in this cemetery that calls itself male society."[49] This "global devaluation of the male world," as Lonzi termed it in her infamous 1970 pamphlet, "Let's Spit on Hegel," was a critical step for women to recognize within themselves a radically different capacity, an "Unexpected Subject" that would "effect a complete transformation of life."[50]

Self-extraction from the world of men was, however, easier imagined than done. If the brothers, fathers, partners, husbands, and co-activists of women were, regardless of individual beliefs, the physical human beings that upheld and benefited from the structures of patriarchy, then most women were caught in the distinct situation of living alongside their adversaries. In 1969, Almanina Barbour, a black militant woman from Philadelphia, made the sardonic yet incisive observation that "[t]he women's movement is the first in history with a war on but no enemy."[51] In this sense, women's liberation faced a particularly difficult organizational problem. As The Furies, a Washington D.C. based lesbian-feminist collective, aptly summarized: "You can't build a strong movement if your sisters are out there fucking the oppressor."[52]

All this made separatism a loaded issue. For some radical feminists, separatism was a temporary necessity. In 1970, the California Bay Area paper, "It Ain't Me Babe" carried an editorial arguing that while functioning among men within the patriarchy was extremely oppressive, the "creation of a woman's culture cannot simply be the carving off of an enclave to bear the status quo more easily—but a site to crystallize and strengthen our rebellion."[53] Separatism also did not necessarily rule out political alliances with men. Even militant feminist groups like *Rivolta Femminile* argued that "the woman who rejects the family and the young man who rejects military service are partners on the same path of refusing to participate in patriarchal structures."[54]

Others took a more hardline stance. Cell 16 called for separation and celibacy, both personally and politically, as the only means to break out of the self-conditioning impressed upon women by patriarchal society. They advocated forming and living in female-only communes and spoke only to female reporters, eschewing all interaction with men. The Feminists, led by Atkinson, institutionalized the principle of separation within their organization, stipulating that only one third (and by 1971, none) of its membership could include women living with men—in legal or informal partnerships. They described heterosexual love as a sort of Stockholm syndrome, "the response of the victim to her rapist," and married women as at best "hostages," and at worst "collaborators."[55]

Sexually, separatism was intimately tied to feminist debates over the political significance of lesbianism. For lesbian-feminists in the United States, lesbianism was the logical outgrowth of feminism. The Radicalesbians claimed that lesbians, by virtue of their distance from contaminating maleness, were better positioned to "give each other a new sense of self" than heterosexual women who were "bound in one-on-one relationships with their oppressors" and thus "dependent upon male culture for their self-definition."[56] The Furies took this approach to its limit, arguing against heterosexuality as itself a form of patriarchal oppression. To them, lesbianism was not a 'bedroom issue' of sexual preference, but a political choice.

In just a few short years, radical feminists in Italy and the United States had achieved much. They shifted the site of disruptive politics away from the factories, universities, and streets to the home, dissolving, in the process, the distinction between the public and private realms.[57] They had introduced a totally new framing by which to analyze

the regime of order (the patriarchy), and explored the mechanisms, both overt and subtle, physical and psychological, through which it divided humanity by social kind.

Despite these accomplishments, by the late 1970s, criticisms of the Italian and American radical feminist project began to mount. Leftists and liberal feminists indicted the insularity of consciousness raising and *autocoscienza*, arguing that the separatism it fostered had pigeon-holed women into an irrelevance of their own making. Transgender, sexual lesbians, and women of color in both the global north and south charged them with ignoring their double or triple oppressions and universalizing to all women subjectivities created by a small and privileged subset. They were accused of a 'cultural feminism' turned increasingly inward and away from the very real political struggles facing half of humanity. These indictments, however harsh, had a legitimate basis. Yet, from the perspective of Italian and American radical feminism, they spoke from conceptions of politics and history which were themselves male, patriarchal, and unsuited to women's liberation.

In 1969, when the New York Radical Women burned their voter registration cards and 'gave back the vote,' they had not only rejected the liberal feminist struggle for gender equality, but also the suggestion that women's liberation was the completion of earlier feminist struggles. This sentiment, shared by many Italian and American radical feminists, had significant implications for their disruptive politics. On the most immediate level, it disrupted the notion of historical continuity and progress within the women's struggle—rejecting, at the moment of its birth, the metaphor of waves to describe the history of feminist politics.

More broadly, radical feminism denounced the very idea of the progressive movement, prevalent since the mid-nineteenth century, as male. "The future of the world does not lie in moving continually forwards along a path mapped out by man's desire for overcoming difficulties," Carla Lonzi wrote.[58] Rather than seek refuge in a struggle vouchsafed by the red star, men needed to instead "disrupt their historical role as protagonists."[59] An idea echoed by the American feminists Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, who urged the women's liberation struggle to "slow male-history making."[60] To a certain degree, the unruliness of the radical feminist subject lay precisely in her refusal of a progressive temporality that culminated in a redeemed future. Unlike almost every other struggle since the French Revolution, radical feminists refused to speak from what Derrida called "the grammar of the future anterior" (the emancipated

position when liberation *will have* taken place). There was no arc of history, it did not bend toward justice, and it was certainly not propelled by historical subjects.

Workerism had sought to turn workers from the objects to the subjects of history; they had understood self-determination or self-valorization as the autonomous deployment or entrance of the worker into history. For radical feminists, by contrast, history itself was a patriarchal construct. As an anonymous woman of the *Movimento Femminista Romano* stated in 1979, "I don't want the word of history; rather I want to be subtracted from history; except that this subtraction must find a means of expression. Otherwise […] having always been defined and used as my absence, [history] is filled by the greed of order."[61] Almost a decade earlier, Lonzi had argued that "history was based on nonperishable traces;" it was monumental, erected (and erectile), and male.[62] By contrast, Lonzi claimed that, "[w]omen's difference [was] her millennial absence from history" and urged women to profit from this difference.[63] If women had entered history at all, Lonzi maintained, it was in the brief episodes of a perishable and perished past where women had manifested themselves as the "interruption, for the first time, of the monologue of patriarchal civilization."[64] In such a temporality, "[t]here are no goals […] We are the world's dark past, we are giving shape to the present," Lonzi declared.[65] Disrupted from history, "[t]he future of the world [was] open" shaped by "[a]n entirely new word put forward by an entirely new subject. It ha[d] only to be uttered to be heard."[66]

3_Conclusion

The political subjectivities examined in this *_Article* were made possible by disruption. In both cases, subject-formation required an initial disavowal of previously naturalized subject-positions. This disavowal not only disrupted the assigned place and function of workers and women within the division of social kinds but, more profoundly, refused to acknowledge the ordering system that made such divisions possible.

In practice, both groups rejected integration within the existing framework of capitalism and patriarchy as offered by the PCI, the Italian unions, and liberal feminism, forming instead autonomous organizations that articulated new collective forms of subjectivity with their own practices, languages, and value systems. And they were not alone. One can trace similar disruptive histories of students, artists, and

advocates of Black Power, of hippies and yippies, to name just a few of the radical subjectivities that emerged from the Great Refusal.

For the regime of order, the autonomous becoming-subject of workers and women was registered as terror. And rightly so. There was simply no other way within the epistemic universe of capitalism and patriarchy to understand the "refusal of work" or witches chanting "no longer daughters, no longer wives, we will destroy your families." Faced with these existential threats to its own continuation, the regime of order struck back: responding with state violence, economic restructuring, co-option, and, later on, overt mechanisms of erasure and forgetting.

In Italy, the autonomous projects of workers and women became casualties of the ever-escalating violence between the Italian state and the armed terrorist resistance against it. This violence, actively encouraged by the state through a *strategia della tensione* (the strategy of tension), had the intended consequence of pushing elements of the women and worker liberation toward armed confrontation and was used as an excuse to repress the much larger autonomous struggles that refused to be drawn into the *Anni di Piombo* [Years of Lead].

At the same time, the regime of order created and celebrated narrow pathways of social mobility previously denied to working-class and female subjects. For the price of accepting the prerogatives of the regime, the PCI, Italian unions, and lean-in feminists were granted access to the halls of corporate and governmental power. The scars of this Faustian bargain, in which the entry of a privileged few was purchased at the expense of the many, cut deep, were numerous and remain. Perhaps its most pernicious outcome has been to relegitimize a politics of representation that the autonomous struggles described in this *_Article* had viewed as an anathema. In effect, substituting out a praxis of disruptive self-determination for an outwardly directed politics of recognition and inclusion.

The result was the near-foreclosure of the project of liberation. Without disruption, the popular twenty-first century mutations of these struggles have been led into strange corners: appropriating the structural critiques of 1970s liberation struggles while abandoning their goal to remake the world anew. This has given rise to a pessimistic politics, at times verging on Nietzschean *ressentiment,* which mandates the recognition of past and present structural oppression but stops short of practicing ways to overcome it. The twenty-first-century concept of privilege exemplifies this contradiction,

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continually demanding that society recognize its oppressive structure as its sole reality. The substitution of class warfare by the terms 'classism,' 'class privilege,' and 'classist' over the past decade in US leftist discourse has become perhaps its most absurd and terrifying variant.

Thankfully, these trends have been challenged by a global upsurge in disruptive politics, most recently by struggles that have developed a sweeping abolitionist agenda, autonomous zones practicing prefigurative politics, by anti-fascist and environmental resistance, and by new forms of multi-racial organizing. In these struggles, one can find the radical subjectivities created through disruption. This *_Article* has offered one history of their antecedents; there are many others.

_Endnotes

1 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 316.

2 Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 69.

3 Alain Touraine, *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform* (New York: Random House, 1971), 60.

4 Emerging in the United States in the late 1960s, the struggle for women's liberation became, by the early 1970s, a transnational phenomenon involving the translation and circulation of texts, international conferences, and collaborative networks across the Atlantic. My focus on Italy and the U.S. stems from the desire to bypass the dominant historiographical binary between empirical Anglo-American and theoretical French feminisms and to underscore how the becoming-subject of women was relational to national context—specifically the struggles of Black Power in the U.S. and Workerism/Autonomia in Italy. These traditions lent a particular separatist and autonomous force to Italian and American radical feminist struggle, informing practices aimed not at gender equality but towards the formation of 'unexpected subjects' in ways that existed, but were not as dominant, in other areas of the North Atlantic. For working class disruption and subject-formation, the decision was much more straightforward. In the late 1960s and 70s, there simply was no other worker struggle comparable—in terms of either disruptive militancy or theoretical sophistication—to Italian workerism. The experiments that came closest would be: the Hungarian workers in 1956—which, though fascinating, occurred well before the temporal scope of this article and was cut brutally short by Soviet invasion; and the Black autonomous unions in the auto factories of Detroit: The Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement (DRUM) and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers (LRBW). While the historical context of Black worker disruption in the United States had much in common with the Italian worker struggle (including a similar history of exclusion from established unions and shared intellectual roots that connected *Operaismo* with James Boggs and the Johnson-Forrest Tendency), the duration of militancy (years versus months) and its scale (millions of workers versus thousands) weighed heavily in my selection.

5 Herman Melville, *Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street* (Minneapolis: Indulgence Press, 1995).

6 George Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics: European Autonomous Social Movements and the Decolonization of Everyday Life* (Oakland: AK Press, 2006), 25.

7 Potere Operaio, "Workers' Struggles in the Capitalist Crisis," *Radical America* 7, no. 2 (1973): 1.

8 Potere Operaio, "Workers' Struggles."

9 The Johnson-Forest Tendency was founded by C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya and later joined by Grace Lee Boggs. They studied working class life and struggles within the Detroit auto industry, publishing pamphlets such as "The American Worker" (1947), "Punching Out" (1952) and "Union Committeemen and Wildcat Strikes" (1955). Through their publishing arms, *Correspondence* and *News and Letters*, the Tendency advocated both for workers autonomy and self-organization, theorized on the critical role of the Black worker in the socialist revolution, and were among the first to popularize the 1956 Hungarian workers struggles in the United States. See Martin Glaberman, ed. *Marxism for our Times: CLR James on Revolutionary Organization* (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1999). The journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was founded by two former Trotskyites, Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort, and sought to underscore the experience of workers' struggle at the point of production, unmediated by official unions or party organizations. Nicola Pizzolato, "Transnational Radicals: Labour Dissent and Political Activism in Detroit and Turin, 1950–1970," *International Review of Social History* 56, no. 1 (2011): 1–30. For an analysis of the group see: Stephen Hastings-King, *Looking for the Proletariat: Socialisme ou Barbarie and the Problem of Worker Writing* (Boston: Brill, 2014). Philippe Gottraux, *Socialisme ou Barbarie, Un Engagement Politique et Intellectuel dans la France de l'Après Guerre* (Lausanne: Payot, 1997).

10 Asad Haider and Salar Mohandesi, "Workers' Inquiry: A Genealogy," in *Viewpoint Magazine*, Issue 3, September 27, 2013, <https://viewpointmag.com/2013/09/27/workers-inquiry-a-genealogy/>.

11 E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harlow: Penguin Books, 2013), Preface.

12 Gigi Roggero and Davide Gallo Lassere, "'A Science of Destruction': An Interview with Gigi Roggero on the Actuality of Operaismo," in *Viewpoint Magazine*, April 30, 2020, <https://viewpointmag.com/2020/04/30/a-science-of-destruction-an-interview-with-gigi-roggero-on-the-actuality-of-operaismo/>.

13 Nicola Pizzolato, "Workers and Revolutionaries at the Twilight of Fordism: The Breakdown of Industrial Relations in the Automobile Plants of Detroit and Turin, 1967–1973," *Labor History* 45, no. 4 (2004): 419–443.

14 Potere Operaio, "Italy 1969–70: A Wave of Struggles," *Potere Operaio*, no. 27 (1970).

15 Autonomous Assembly of Alfa Romeo, "Against the Boss," transl. by Bruno and Judy Ramirez, *Radical America* 7, no. 2 (1973).

16 For an early English account of factory disruption see, S. G. Tarrow, *Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965–1975* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

17 Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso Press, 1990), 303.

18 Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 303.

19 Ilaria Favretto, "Rough Music and Factory Protest in Post-1945 Italy," *Past & Present* 228, no. 1 (2015): 207–247.

20 Favretto, "Rough Music and Factory Protest," 210.

21 Lumley, *States of Emergency*, 305.

22 Mario Tronti, *Workers and Capital* (London: Verso Press, 2019) as cited in Jason E. Smith, "Form-of-Life: From Politics to Aesthetics (and Back)," *The Nordic Journal of Aesthetics*, no. 44–45 (2012–2013): 50–67.

23 "The Strategy of the Refusal" was written in 1965 as #12 of the "Initial Theses" in *Workers and Capital*. See Tronti, *Workers and Capital*, 234–252.

24 Roggero and Lassere, "A Science of Destruction."

25 Antonio Negri, "The Workers Party Against Work," in *Books for Burning: Between Civil War and Democracy in 1970s Italy*, eds. Antonio Negri and Arianna Bove (London: Verso Press, 2005), 51–117, here: 109.

26 Dan Georgakas, Marvin Surkin, and Manning Marable, *Detroit, I Do Mind Dying: A Study in Urban Revolution* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2012), 189.

27 Jo Freeman, "The Bitch Manifesto," in Women's Liberation Movement Print Culture / Duke Digital Repository, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r3hm5j>.

28 Carla Panico, "Le autonome: Storie di donne del Sud," *Malanova*, excerpt from *Gli autonomi: L'Autonomia operaia meridionale. Napoli e Campania – Parte seconda* (Vol. XI, DeriveApprodi, 2022), accessed October 16, 2025, <https://www.malanova.info/2022/12/09/le-autonome-storie-di-donne-del-sud/>, translation by the author.

29 Anne Koedt, "Women and the Radical Movement," in *Radical Feminism*: *A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 26.

30 Ruth Rosen, *The World Split Open: How the Modern Women's Movement Changed America* (New York: Viking Press, 2000), 118.

31 Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 107.

32 Barbara Epstein, *Free Speech Movement Oral History Project*, interviews conducted by Lisa Rubens (Berkeley: UC Berkeley, 1999), 10.

33 To be sure, separation from the wider leftist struggle was neither total nor easy. This was especially the case for Italian (particularly Roman) feminists who were reluctant to abandon their connections to the broader left-wing struggle. This 'double militancy' was seen as critical to engaging lower-class women who would not naturally come into contact with feminist politics, as well as drawing on proletarian women's experiences as a way to diversify the largely educated middle class composition of their founding members (escaping a siloization that often dogged their U.S. counterparts). Such double militancy was rarer in the United States, where both the politicos of the New Left and the separatist women's groups enforced a stricter political monogamy.

34 Lynn Hunt, ed., *The French Revolution and Human Rights: A Brief Documentary History* (Boston: Bedford, 1996), 125.

35 For the W.I.T.C.H. Manifesto see, https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/4588-witchy-bitchy, for *Rivolta Femminile* Manifesto see, *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, eds. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 37.

36 Maud Anne Bracke, *Women and the Reinvention of the Political: Feminism in Italy, 1968–1983* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 20.

37 Carla Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, eds. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), pp. 40–49, here: 41.

38 Joan Cassell, *A Group Called Women: Sisterhood & Symbolism in the Feminist Movement* (New York: David McKay, 1977), 79, 161.

39 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 41.

40 Not all radical feminists, much less all feminists, engaged in consciousness raising. Yet the centrality of the practice in the first days of women's liberation, the insights into women's oppression that emerged from them, ensured that consciousness raising had an outsized influence on the struggle as a whole.

41 Sara Davidson, "An 'Oppressed Majority' Demands Its Rights," in *Life Magazine*, December 12, 1969, 71.

42 Voichita Nachescu, "Radical Feminism and the Nation: History and Space in the Political Imagination of Second-Wave Feminism," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, no. 3 (2009): 29–59 here: 35.

43 Marilyn Webb, "We Are Victims," in *Voice of the Women's Liberation Movement*, February 1969, 5–12, here: 6.

44 Demau Collective, "Manifesto Demau," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, eds. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 33–35, here: 35.

45 New York Radical Feminists, "Politics of the Ego," in *Notes from the Second Year*, eds. Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt (New York: Radical Feminism, 1970), 124–126, here: 126.

46 Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp, "Introduction: Coming from the South," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, eds. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 1–29, here: 15.

47 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 42.

48 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 41.

49 Movimento Femminista Romano, "Towards a Project," in *Italian Feminist Thought: A Reader*, eds. Paola Bono and Sandra Kemp (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 72–75, here: 74.

50 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 41.

51 Ti-Grace Atkinson, "Radical Feminism," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 80–92, here: 82.

52 Rita Mae Brown, "The Shape of Things to Come," in *Lesbianism and the Women's Movement*, eds. Nancy Myron and Charlotte Bunch (Baltimore: Diana Press, 1975), 71–82, here: 74.

53 Berkeley Women's Liberation Group, "Towards a New Culture," *It Ain't Me Babe* 1, no. 5 (1970): 2–3, here: 2.

54 Katsiaficas, *The Subversion of Politics*, 35.

55 New York Radical Feminists, "A Political Organization to Eliminate Sex Roles," 117.

56 Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman," Duke Library Digital Collections, accessed January 29, 2025, <https://repository.duke.edu/dc/wlmpc/wlmms01011>.

57 The radical feminists of the 1970s were not first to challenge these boundaries. As Dolores Hayden remarked, between 1880 and the Great Depression U.S. feminists, "[c]hallenged two characteristics of industrial capitalism: the physical separation of the household space from public space, and the separation of the domestic economy from the political economy." Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 3.

58 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 44.

59 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 47.

60 Beverly Jones and Judith Brown, "Toward a Female Liberation Movement," in *Radical Feminism: A Documentary Reader*, ed. Barbara A. Crow (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 17–56, here: 43.

61 Movimento Femminista Romano, "Towards a Project," 72.

62 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 41.

63 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 41.

64 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 42.

65 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 42.

66 Lonzi, "Let's Spit on Hegel," 44.