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Experience, echo, event: Theorising feminist histories, historicising feminist theory

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My fantasy of feminist history . . . is of a quest for understanding that is never fully satisfied with its own results. It is one in which critical reading replaces the operations of classification, in which the relationship between past and present is not taken for granted but considered a problem to be explored, and in which the thinking of the historian is an object of inquiry along with that of her subjects. (Joan W. Scott, *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011: 22))

Feminists thinking and the practice of theory

In her conceptually daring, often daunting, history of the ‘event of women’ in Chinese feminism, Tani Barlow encourages us ‘[t]o think theoretically while acknowledging the historical specificity of theoretical work’ (2004: 66). In *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*, Barlow manages to do just that: offering historical catachresis as a theoretical and historical method for exploring the production and reproduction of the subject ‘women’ in Chinese history, as well as a means for delineating the conditions of possibility for Chinese feminism. After establishing her conceptual and methodological framework, Barlow then describes in some detail four ‘examples of women thinking’ in different moments in twentieth-century Chinese history: during what she calls ‘colonial modernity’,¹ during Maoist revolutionary nationalism, during de-maoicisation and market restructuring, and during the globalisation of the 1990s.²

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Through her various examples of women thinking, Barlow attempts to pinpoint 'moments of consolidation [that] come with the naturalization of a new logic' (2004: 9), at the same time as she denaturalises that new logic by demonstrating the multiplicity out of which it emerged. In order to explore the process of consolidation, Barlow emphasises the future anterior tense in history writing, which stresses the importance of invoking the horizon of the future in the past (2004: 2–3). The difficulty for the historian in the present is keeping open the longings in the past for a better or different future for women, even when, or especially when, the anticipated future has not come to be (2004: 3). By emphasising the future anterior in historical writing, we become concerned not only with what women *really* were in the past, but also with what women will have been in the past anticipating a future that does not exist in the present. In this mode of historical writing, thought itself becomes a historical event, and 'women' becomes a name, a term, that demands – without guarantees – continuing acts of interpretation.

In this special issue, following the example of Tani Barlow, we want to theorise history and historicise theory. In particular, we are interested in the future anterior of a theoretical event of feminism, or of feminists thinking historically. That theoretical event is both the concept and category of 'experience' as historical evidence and the publication in 1991 of Joan W. Scott's essay 'The Evidence of Experience'. In this introduction, we seek to extend that theoretical event into the pages of *Feminist Theory* by doing two things at once: by taking the 'thinking of the [feminist theorist/] historian as an object of inquiry', as Scott urges in her recent articulation of what she calls her fantasy of feminist history, and also exploring what her work anticipated and helped make possible for feminist theory – the historicisation of feminist theory. We do so in an attempt to take stock – and to risk an interpretation of – what history can do for feminist theory.

Different feminists theorise differently, depending on the events they are responding to and the objects and methods that shape their theories. This difference of theorisation is multiple: it includes differences of place and time (post-1968 France or Chile, around 1990 in the US, post-1989 Germany, during the era of colonial modernity in China, to name just some relatively recent not-so-random examples); differences of object (commercial art, national and international liberation and women's movements, psychoanalysis, violences against women, poetry, conversation); and differences of discipline and interdiscipline (history, political science, philosophy, law, literature, women's studies, performance studies).³ But while 'feminist theory' is multiple, we would also want to argue that it is always also more than its differences – that it is a highly contested and therefore ambiguous production of something relatively new in the world: women thinking *as women*. Although we are aware that a phrase like 'women thinking *as women*' risks conjuring the spectre of essentialism, our point is to historicise feminist theory (including the debate over essentialism in feminist theory) as a production of modernity and post-modernity – as an invention that forms part of what Denise Riley, among others, has described as the emergence of 'women' as a historical category that 'arranges people' in and through other categories of modernity, like the social or the body (2003: 7).

Although not trained as historians, we have found ourselves turning to the work of historians like Joan Scott and Tani Barlow because they each attempt to theorise the historicity of women thinking and theorising, and because they do so precisely by making the categories, or terms, through which the project of feminism/feminist theory becomes possible, the objects of their investigation. To turn to history is to move away from a dependency on universalising abstractions and towards an attempt to historicise abstractions in thought. Feminist theory, for Scott and Barlow, is not a progress story of better and more apt abstraction, or, for that matter, better and more apt differentiation, but a discontinuous and interested accumulation of different feminists/women thinking in relation to the specificities of their locations and contexts. The universal does not disappear in this kind of feminist theorising but rather appears as something to be investigated in the act of its invocation.

To understand feminist theorising in this way reveals affinities with the work of thinkers such as the historian and poet Denise Riley, as well as the postcolonial literary scholar Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. And indeed, both Scott and Barlow acknowledge the influence of Riley and Spivak on their own thinking, especially in relation to the methods they deploy (Scott's 'reading for the literary' and Barlow's adaptation of Spivak's notion of catachresis).⁴ And like Riley and Spivak, both Scott and Barlow assert the necessity of understanding the historical meanings and productions of feminism within the changing and multiple contexts of the globalising forces of (post)colonialism, (post)modernity, and (neo)liberalism. This is feminist theory writ large – theorising that does not shy away from its own historicity and, therefore, its own limitations. In this special issue we return to the groundbreaking historico-theoretical interventions of Joan Scott in order to foreground the problem of historicity for feminist thought, a problem most famously raised by Scott more than twenty years ago: how are 'women' both the particular and the universal; that is, how are they both subjects in history and imagined 'arrangements of people' that mobilise state policies, national and transnational political movements, cultural productions, and social norms? It is our view that these questions continue to animate the project of feminist theorising, and rather than be irritated by the seemingly continuous necessity of 'women' for feminist theory, we suggest a turn to history in order to theorise the rich complex of problems and possibilities they – that is, 'women' as a material and conceptual multiplicity – pose for the political and theoretical futures of feminism.

The evidence of experience

In 2010, with the twentieth anniversary of the publication of Scott's essay 'The Evidence of Experience' on the horizon, we organised a symposium and reading group at Stony Brook University in order to celebrate and critically revisit this influential essay and its reverberations across feminist thought and its institutional and (inter)disciplinary spaces.⁵ Joan Scott and Tani Barlow participated in the symposium, which generated conversation around several concepts that have

been key in feminist theorisations of history in the current *fin de siècle* – experience, echo, and event. These key terms form the thought-kernels out of which this special issue has evolved. Indeed, our return to ‘The Evidence of Experience’ – in multiple spaces and forms: in the symposium, reading group, and now here in this introduction – was and is an attempt to enact a space for thinking through a *consolidation* of theoretical assumptions and effects in feminist theory over the last twenty years or so. Scott’s essay, in its conscious provocations directed at historians *and* feminist theorists, can be read both as an important participant in the process of consolidation noted above, but also as a self-reflexive act of anticipation of what that consolidation might bring. In other words, ‘The Evidence of Experience’ is a text of feminist theorising that provides access to the historicity – the multiplicity, the excess – out of which certain assumptions in feminist theory have emerged in the twenty years or so since the essay was first published.

As Joan Scott notes in her interview for this special issue, ‘The Evidence of Experience’ grew out of the exciting and contentious interdisciplinary feminist theory seminars at the Pembroke Center for Teaching and Research on Women, which she co-founded with Elizabeth Weed at Brown University in 1981, and was written as a direct response to an article in the *American Historical Review* by the intellectual historian John Toews (1987). It was the pleasure of her engagement with post-structuralist and psychoanalytic theory in the Pembroke seminar, *and* her increasing impatience with the mis-use of experience in social history as transparent social reality, that, according to Scott, formed the impulse for her to write the essay, and it is these two competing desires – the desire to participate in a ‘new’, non-field-specific kind of thinking, and also the desire to ‘speak back’ (Butler, 2011: 16) to some of the prevailing orthodoxies of her field – that situate Scott’s essay at a particular historical moment of feminist theorising.

That particular historical moment could be named ‘around 1990’, a date that references a set of debates through which a series of breaks – between essentialism and post-structuralism; ‘second wave’ feminism and postcolonial/women of colour feminism; Anglo-American and French feminisms; national/Western and transnational feminisms; feminist and queer theory etc. etc. – were manufactured as narrative devices in the telling, in the West at least, of a developmental story of feminist theory. This moment has also been called the ‘crisis’ of the category of ‘women’ – a moment signalled by the publication of Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble*, when she, and so-called ‘postmodern’ feminists in general, were accused of destroying feminism by bringing into question the category of women. While Butler and her fellow post-structuralists might have won that particular debate – within the context of academic feminist theory at least – the crisis it references has tended to be misrecognised as one between contrasting theoretical and political approaches rather than, as Scott presciently acknowledged at the time, a crisis that was fundamentally historical. As the political theorist Linda Zerilli writes, the ‘situation that Butler and others critically described is not one that they created but one that they found’ (2009: 89). That is, the crisis of the category ‘women’ formed part of the eruption of feminisms in the postmodern/postcolonial era and

was not, as some critics have asserted, simply the (disastrous) result of feminism's turn to post-structuralism. Or, as Kimberly Lamm would have it in her article here, to understand the crisis – its emergence and its effects – requires feminism to look beyond its own fields of knowledge production and into the cultural, social, and economic forces of global capital expansion in the late twentieth century.

For Scott, writing in 'The Evidence of Experience' about how to historicise sexual and gender difference, this historical moment – the era of 'postmodernity' or of a new stage in the globalisation of capitalism – demanded a historicisation of the categories historians used to write this 'new' history. The work of the historian – her methods and theoretical archive, as well as the questions she posed – had to be understood as historically situated, as contingent to the events she found herself responding to. According to Judith Butler, this 'speaking back' to the assumptions of her audience is Scott's mode of address as a historian: 'the writing of women's history [for Scott] depends upon the preliminary efforts of [E. P.] Thompson and others to historicize labor and the working class, but it also speaks back to such histories', which 'is a way of opening up a new conceptual field for history. It is a kind of paradoxical speech that calls into question the conditions of its own speaking' (Butler, 2011: 16). This is the self-reflexivity of the feminist historian/theorist that would situate her thought historically, and engage critically with the conditions of its possibility, while simultaneously foregrounding its participation in an emergent set of political concerns.

In 'The Evidence of Experience' we see Scott enacting this dual focus. The central concern of the essay is to diagnose the present moment of social history writing: the emergence, by the late 1980s, of the history of difference as a dominant trend in social history. Scott wants to question the increasingly foundational status of 'experience' in this kind of historical writing because it suggests to her a paradox of historical impulse: the impulse to assert the irreducibility of social difference (like that between men and women, people of colour and whites), and the equally strong impulse to offer objective explanations of that difference. For Scott, this paradox is revealing of a desire at work in the writing of such histories, the desire to recognise and defend the 'unitary subject' (of women, gays, blacks, workers, etc.) 'in the name of his or her experience' (1991: 791); it is also the desire to ground histories of difference in the 'evidence' of that difference – in the descriptive details of a woman's domestic life, or a gay man's 'hidden' sexual life, or a black man's exclusion from employment and educational opportunities. Here, the evidence of experience authenticates not only the subject under historical observation, but also the ability of the historian to *know* that experience and represent it. The historian and the subject of history are mutually constituted, and the reciprocal nature of the relationship secured by the turn to experience. In Scott's reading of this moment in the writing of social history, experience becomes a foundational category in the assertion of disciplinary legitimacy for historians of difference: it is a term that enables historians to claim the right to speak on behalf of a marginalised past. In other words, it is a term that, if we interpret it within the context of its utterance, provides an 'access

point' to a political (and disciplinary) moment of consolidation for the writing of the history of difference (Barlow, 2004: 15).

While Scott's essay is concerned with diagnosing a moment of consolidation – a political moment that encompasses more than the disciplinary shifts of history writing – it is also equally concerned with anticipating a mode of historical writing that would not continuously fall into the trap of being blind to its own historical contingency. As Scott writes, 'a change of object seems to be required' in order to write the kinds of histories that would be attentive to their conditions of possibility (1991: 792). This object would be one 'that takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation', whereby the explanation would be, in effect, one interpretation substituted for another (1991: 792, 794). The method of historicisation suggested here is one that would attempt to analyse the processes of creation that would make a term – like 'women' – historically enacted and varied in its meaning, and also a method for making explicit the 'way of reading' inherent to the interpretation offered by the historian. It is a method of history writing that requires its own theorisation in the act of being written, and it is a way of theorising that cannot evade the historical questions it necessarily produces for the political project of feminism.

Echo, or against the reproduction of feminist thought

Conventionally, a generation is around twenty years, and so this special issue might be said to contribute to the generational narrative through which feminism is most often articulated. However, we want to resist the familiar (and familial) appeal of generational narratives that would position us as a newer/younger generation of feminists – read: daughters – writing and thinking after Scott, or after the 1990s, or after post-structuralism. We understand that it is hard to avoid narratives of reproduction, and realise that even as we disavow them, we participate in them. We also recognise that, in certain situations, narratives of reproduction might be strategically useful for feminism. Nonetheless, we argue that being overly reliant on such narratives of reproduction,⁶ both functional and dysfunctional ones, is conceptually limiting for feminists. We want to acknowledge our debt – our inheritance, if you will – without asserting a reproductive logic. We think we might do this, not by denying influences or asserting that our thought is autonomous, but by emphasising the pleasure of certain critical practices – of reading and re-reading, teaching and citing, thinking and writing about feminist texts like 'The Evidence of Experience' in different times and places – from the often happenstance experience of first encountering a text to the sometimes alienating experience of reading a text with others. This is what we might call, echoing Antonio Viegó (2007) echoing Richard T. Ford (2005),⁷ a feminist 'drama of transmission', which is offered in the hope that we might transmit desire without identity.

We also believe this notion of a drama of transmission of desire, and not identity, provides an interpretation of sorts for Scott's turn, in her later work, to psychoanalysis as providing theoretical and methodological tools to grapple with

pleasure, ambiguity, and indeterminacy in history, as well as with forms of fantasy as engines of socio-historical change. Psychoanalysis helps Scott historicise the field of women's history itself, and to challenge and even undermine what Robyn Wiegman calls a 'field's own disciplinarity' (2012: 74), referring to gender studies in general rather than women's history in particular.⁸ In 'Feminism's History', Scott provides a brief history of the field of women's history, and delineates the losses and (often unacknowledged) gains of the shift from insurgency to institutionalisation (2011: 27). Scott needs psychoanalysis to help her make a critique of disciplinarity and its normative narrative of reproduction, especially when she is no longer positioned outside, but is securely inside, the structures of power she had once sought to overturn. Now that she is inside, now that she has become disciplined by History's own disciplinarity, the theories and practices of psychoanalysis help to remind her – and us – that we are never fully realised subjects of knowledge and history.⁹

In 'Fantasy Echo' (2001, 2011) and 'Feminist Reverberations' (2002, 2011), two essays published a decade after 'The Evidence of Experience',¹⁰ Scott gives us a concept – the echo – that does the 'serious analytic work' she first called for in her earlier essay by helping us to understand both the process of writing history and the historicisation of identity categories. Scott deploys the term 'fantasy echo' (the term itself is a fantasy echo of a student's mis-hearing of a professor's use of the French phrase *'fin-de-siècle'*) to suggest repetitions of identities and modes of political struggle that are 'not exact', but still resonate across different times and places. Echoes are not, as is often thought, 'reproduction[s] of the same'. Rather, they 'are delayed returns of sound; they are incomplete reproductions, usually giving back only the final fragments of a phrase. An echo spans large gaps of space (sound reverberates between distant points) and time (echoes aren't instantaneous), but it also creates gaps of meaning and intelligibility' (Scott, 2011: 52). If we consider the echo in relation to the practice of history and its production of historical objects, including theory as historical object, then we can begin to see the importance of delayed returns, incomplete reproductions, and gaps in meaning that are produced and sometimes bridged, if only momentarily. In this scenario, the archive becomes not a 'mournful place', but a 'provocation', as Scott puts it in her epilogue, 'A Feminist Theory Archive', to *The Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011: 147). Our failure to reproduce something precisely or understand something adequately is often a spur to a new thought or method or genealogy rather than the end of the story.

Scott's concept of the echo is itself a provocation to encourage us to think through some of the interventions feminist scholars have made into how we do history, identity, theory, and politics, and we want to make use of it here as providing a method-image for our own return to Scott's essay, and in particular, her return to Samuel R. Delany's memoir *The Motion of Light in Water* ([1988] 2004). In many ways, Scott's essay 'The Evidence of Experience', and Scott herself, act as relays to Delany's memoir and its own attempt to provide a 'formal mechanism' to bring together – to cross the gap between – (both personal and historical)

scenes of desire and materiality (Scott, 2011: 49). Later, reading Laplanche and Pontalis on fantasy, Scott will make use of their insight that fantasy ‘is not the object of desire, but its setting’ (Laplanche and Pontalis, quoted in Scott, 2011: 49), and we want to apply Scott’s later reading of fantasy as spatial concept to her earlier reading of Delany. Reading Scott’s work transversally, it seems to us that the concept of the echo does serious analytic work before Scott theorises the concept itself; it is the future anterior of ‘The Evidence of Experience’, at work both internally and externally to the text. Within the essay, Scott argues not only that Delany makes visible sexual experiences that had been previously invisible, but also that he attempts to discern and articulate the modes of perception and affect that structure our desire. By taking up Delany and the sexual experiences of the 1960s that he both illuminates and distorts, a dual process his title, *The Motion of Light in Water*, concept-metaphorises, Scott also provides a setting for a fantasy of feminist history and history writing in the 1990s. Put another way, Delany’s memoir becomes provocation for Scott’s fantasy of feminist history.

We think this is especially important as a reminder that Scott’s fantasy of *feminist* history is *queer* – queer understood here not as an identity but as a method of analysis. In a fascinating analysis of the strained relationship between the projects of queer theory and lesbian and gay history, Lisa Duggan (1995) explores why, in the mid-1990s, history departments were not hiring historians of sexuality. Duggan identifies several reasons for this problem, including issues of the production and reproduction of (the same) knowledge, as well as the perception among many historians at that time, and still today, that sexuality is a marginal aspect of historical and social experience. Although she acknowledges that Scott is one of the ‘very few figures who can cross the gap between the practice of history and the arguments of critical theory’, Duggan concludes her essay by taking Scott to task for criticising lesbian and gay historians without actually citing any in ‘The Evidence of Experience’. Duggan asserts that, ‘Scott’s critique, following upon her use of Delany, focuses on the work of historians of homosexuality as illustrative of the practices of difference in general’ (1995: 185). To back up this assertion, Duggan then cites a long passage from Scott, which begins, ‘Histories which document the “hidden” world of homosexuality, for example, show the impact of the silence and repression on the lives of those affected by it and bring to light the history of their suppression and exploitation’ (Scott, quoted in Duggan, 1995: 185). Duggan mentions the work of Henry Abelove, Allan Bérubé, John D’Emilio, Jonathan Ned Katz, Martha Vicinus, and Jeffrey Weeks, and asserts that Scott’s argument in ‘The Evidence of Experience’ would not hold up if she had read these historians.

In ‘The Discipline Problem’, Duggan argues convincingly for the need to ‘cross the gap’ between critical theory and history, and she makes a compelling early argument for what Carolyn Dinshaw would describe a few years later as ‘the queer desire for history’.¹¹ We also think Duggan’s problematisation of the citation practices of Scott and others does important work in tracking the disciplinary effects of citation.¹² Still, we take issue with Duggan’s reading of ‘The Evidence

of Experience' because it seems to us that, rather than aiming her critique at lesbian and gay historians, Scott aims at historians in general and herself in particular. Her first interpretation of Delany's text is a beautifully rendered example of desire (not least her own) in history writing: 'The point of Delany's description, indeed of his entire book, is to document the existence of those institutions in all their variety and multiplicity, to write about and thus to render historical what has hitherto been hidden from history' (Scott, 1991: 775). That this interpretation should so often be taken as the single and conclusive interpretation of the evidence of experience that Scott offers in 'The Evidence of Experience' confirms for us the point Scott tries to make throughout: that a desire to see ourselves in history spurs the practice of history and history writing. Yet, it is precisely this reproductive logic that Scott queers by the end of 'The Evidence of Experience', when, in her second reading of Delany's memoir, she turns to the future anterior of Delany's fantasy scene of a New York bathhouse in the 1960s, in order to read, not what was once hidden but is now visible, but what remains ineffable about the experience of sexual possibility and projection Delany's memory recounts. The 'motion of light in water' is a concept-metaphor that, for Scott, disturbs any notion of a simple return from past to present and back again. It is an image that simultaneously suggests both the complexity of interpretation necessary to the work of historians, and the impossibility of the reproduction of the (feminist and queer) past in the present.

In *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (2004) Barlow extends further the method Scott arrives at at the end of 'The Evidence of Experience', a method Scott describes as 'reading for the "literary"' (1991: 796). Like Scott, Barlow also reads for the literary, or in her terminology, she reads 'historical evidence for catachreses' (2004: 1), but as she writes in a recent essay, her formulation of historical catachresis is also an attempt to foreground the difference of the historical from the literary (and philosophical): 'when I reworked Spivak's famous insistence that a catachresis is a non-correspondence of signifier and referent and consequently that proper nouns are abyssal ... I sought to remind philosophers that for historians the inverse is the problem, i.e., historical signifiers are excessively full. Our problem is excess, not abyss' (Barlow, 2013: 61). Historical catachreses are not empty signifiers but loaded terms whose emergence – whether as neologisms or through a reorientation of their referentiality – tells us something about the complex temporality of historical events precisely because they have no fixed meaning but are nevertheless central to particular political and social claims. By tracking the instability of terms like *nǚxìng*, which translates as 'female sex', and *fūnu*, which defines women within family relations and kinship roles, through twentieth-century Chinese intellectual thought, Barlow attempts to address the historical becomingness of 'women' as a category of and for Chinese feminism. In her more recent work, Barlow has turned to Alain Badiou's philosophical examination of the event in order to think through how 'women' is 'evental' and therefore 'a constitutive element of modernity per se' (Barlow, 2013: 53). For Barlow, the importance of conceptualising 'women' as an event (rather than as a category) lies in its ability to account for the historicity of phenomena that are both local and global without

resorting to the over-determinations of world-systems theories on the one hand, and the cultural relativism of regionalist histories on the other. Barlow's turn to the event also allows feminist history to escape from the trap of gender – which tends to assume a history already split into an illusory two-ness, or that demands a 'writing into history' of a missing constituency that is already known and named. That is, Barlow's turn to the event is both an echo of and a response to what Joan Scott called for twenty years ago: it envisions a history that can map the process – a process that is both universal and contingent – of the production of 'women'.

The shape of the issue: Event, echo, experience

In this special issue, we have brought together articles that utilise and transform our three key terms for feminist historical studies – experience, echo, and event. In doing so, we hope not only to point to new interdisciplinary theories and methods of doing feminist theory, but also to foreground the historicity of feminist theorising. The issue begins with Tamara Lea Spira's article, 'Intimate Internationalisms: 1970s "Third World" Queer Feminist Solidarity with Chile', which offers an example of historical reverberations – third world/queer/feminist/poetic ones – across time and space. Spira looks back to the multiplicity of international and internationalist revolutionary politics of the 1970s, and, in particular, to the circulation of revolutionary feeling and desire between and among women of colour feminists in the US and insurgents in Chile before and after the fall of Allende. From the vantage of our neoliberal present, the time of revolution appears to be past. And yet, by attending to the complex historical specificities of revolutionary modes of struggle, and by closely tracking the circulation of the discourses, images, and feelings of struggle across borders, disciplines, and constituencies, we counter both a nostalgia for a (failed) revolutionary past and a melancholia towards an (inevitable) neoliberal future. Or, as Joan Scott has put it in a gloss on why 'reverberation' is a useful concept-metaphor for the work of feminist struggle, 'The word "reverberation" carries a sense both of causes of infinite regression – reverberations are subsequent echoes, successions of echoes – and of effect – reverberations are also repercussions' (2011: 79). In Spira's account of the reverberations of the Chilean revolution from the global south to minoritarian discourses in the global north, internationalism is enacted through poetry – poem as object and poetry reading as event become the setting for a fantasy of revolution that transmits desire without identity.

Heather Turcotte's article, 'Feminist Asylums and Acts of Dreaming', is also concerned with transnational and transhistorical reverberations, not of revolution, but of violence – across different sites – the law, state immigration policies, non-governmental feminist advocacy, and, even, literature, in this case Buchi Emecheta's novel *The Joys of Motherhood*. Turcotte heeds Scott's call for a change of historical object, and asks that we explore the histories of difference covered over by the homogenising designator 'violence against women'. In her

delineation of the complex connections between petro-violence in Nigeria, US political asylum law, and the ambiguous role of law in feminist justice projects, Turcotte argues for a 'feminist historiography of justice' as a method to expand transnationally and extend historically our analysis of what violence is and does. Turcotte discusses the case of Rosemary Okere, a Nigerian journalist who, along with her husband, had written about Nigerian government corruption. After she and her husband were ambushed by Nigerian military police, and her husband was killed, she sought political asylum in the United States. Moving out from this individual story, Turcotte historicises the subjectivities that emerge out of the convergences of petroleum violences, gender within the site of the law, and US state immigration policies.

Rachel Tillman's article, 'Politics, Historicity, and Persuasion: A Feminist Materialist Engagement with Linda Zerilli's Politics of Freedom', offers a philosophical analysis of the material and embodied aspects of feminist politics. Tillman challenges the political theorist Linda Zerilli's aestheticised vision of politics through an attention to embodiment and its historicity. We read Tillman's work as a reverberation of the historical and its material excesses into other domains of thought, in this case political theories of the human condition beginning with Arendt. That Zerilli's work would appear so prominently in this special issue on theorising feminist histories and historicising feminist theories made sense to us. Zerilli's influential recent theorisation of a feminism beyond subjectivity emerges out of the debates in feminist theory – it is an echo of the event of women thinking – around 1990. Scott's analysis of the material and discursive practices of subjectification anticipates Zerilli's turn away from subjectivity, as well as some of the potential problems of failing to consider the way history creates questions for theory.

In her article 'Modern Spectacle and American Feminism's Disappointing Daughters: Writing Fantasy Echoes in *The Portrait of a Lady*', Kimberly Lamm, like Spira and Turcotte, also argues that literature as event is a key site for the articulation of a feminist fantasy of freedom. Lamm utilises Scott's double take on Delany in 'The Evidence of Experience' to read Henry James's *Portrait of a Lady* as providing 'an intricate picture of how feminism "echoed" across Euro-American culture'. The paradoxes are multiple in James's novel: having inherited the freedoms fought for by women who came before her, Isabel Archer can 'insist upon mattering', and yet what is also transmitted in this drama of feminist freedom is a fantasy image of alliance that covers over the uneven distribution of capital between men and women and among women. Lamm's article elucidates a reproductive logic by which mothers and daughters create surplus value for capitalism *across generations*, as well as a visual logic through which subjectivities – even feminist ones – are produced as objects of exchange and consumption in capitalism's spectacle culture. For Lamm, as for Scott, what is called for is an 'ever-unfinished act of elucidation' (Scott, 2011: 4), not in order to assert feminism's independence from capitalism, but to examine the historicity of the enmeshing of the two.

In an attempt to trace backwards from the present moment of theorising feminist histories to a specific past moment around 1991, the special issue ends with an interview with Joan W. Scott in which our questions encourage her to return to the eventfulness of the experience of thinking and writing ‘The Evidence of Experience’, not in order to provide an origin story for, say, post-structuralist feminist theory, but rather to allow us to think anew and again about the reverberations of that moment into the present.

Notes

1. Drawing on theorists of ‘semicolonialism’ in the Chinese context, Barlow argues that an ‘already well-established colonial knowledge informed the Great Powers’ experiments’ in China. Barlow uses the term ‘colonial modernity’ to emphasise the ways in which, ‘by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries most of the vast plane of the earth’s surface had been colonized or partly colonized, and because of this spatial extension of the colonial project, colonial knowledge circulated through the colonial capitals’ (2004: 88).
2. Barlow’s ‘examples of women thinking’ are Ding Ling, Li Xiaojiang, and Dai Jinhua. Ding Ling exemplifies women thinking during both colonial modernity and Maoist nationalism, which seems to suggest that Ding Ling herself is, for Barlow, something of a historical catachresis, which Barlow defines as ‘ubiquitous, descriptive, proper nouns that become legible repositories of social experience’ (2004: 1).
3. To define feminist theory in this way – as a multiplicity of objects, methods, and moments – is to also differentiate it from philosophy which tends to claim, whether through logic or origins, what Alain Badiou calls a relatively ‘invariant relationship to thought’ (Badiou, 1999: 33).
4. Riley’s and Spivak’s influence on Scott and Barlow, and on us, is immense. The crucial shift Scott makes in her argument in ‘The Evidence of Experience’ is preceded by a discussion of Spivak’s analysis in ‘A Literary Representation of the Subaltern: A Woman’s Text from the Third World’ (1987) of what Scott calls the ‘contrast between the work of historians and literary scholars’ (1991: 790–791). We discuss Spivak’s influence on Scott further in our interview with Scott in this issue. Barlow also shows her debt to Spivak in *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism*. The epigraph that opens Barlow’s first chapter, ‘History and Catachresis’, is from Spivak: ‘A concept-metaphor without an adequate referent is a catachresis’ (Spivak, 1993: 60). Barlow’s debt to Riley is clear in her fascinating ‘Appendix to Chapter 1: Historiography and Catachresis’. In that further supplement to the already massive volume, Barlow performs one additional, though not final, interpretation: from history to historiography and from Chinese history and the event of Chinese women to the other modern and colonial national histories and other historical catachreses – ‘Indian women’, ‘slave women’, etc. (2004: 365–372). Barlow acknowledges Riley’s (along with Scott’s) key historiographic insight: ‘All history writing, including feminist historiography, exists in larger discursive formations such as social science or biblical exegesis, which may or may not be penned by women but do condition where the subject women appears and what role it plays at any given moment’ (Barlow, 2004: 371). Where Barlow believes Riley fell short was in the evidence she mustered, or more to the point, failed to muster. Formally, Riley’s slender text might be said to condense the excesses of history into poetry.

5. 'The Evidence of Experience' re-conceived the theory and practice of doing feminist history and has been frequently cited and anthologised in the twenty years since its publication. Most significantly, perhaps, it is included in the anthology *Feminists Theorize the Political* (Butler and Scott, 1992) edited by Scott and Judith Butler. In that collection, the title has been changed from 'The Evidence of Experience' to "'Experience'", with the single word in scare quotes to signal Scott's taking of the category itself as an object of inquiry.
6. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed notes that 'national shame works as a narrative of reproduction', and demonstrates how the uncovering of a national wrong is often a necessary precursor to re-forming a relation of pride in the nation – we need to 'move on' by accepting and apologising for the wrong, but apologising also makes us feel good about our nation.
7. In *Dead Subjects*, Viego turns to Lacanian psychoanalysis to help him think about ethnic-racialised subjectivity. For Viego, Lacanian theory offers an anti-racist critique through its theory of the subject, which emphasises the importance of the unconscious in subjectivation (2007: 5). Viego explores what happened when psychoanalysis travelled to the US in the mid-twentieth century with refugees from war in Europe, becoming invested in assimilation and strengthening the ego. Drawing on Rey Chow's concept of 'coercive mimeticism' (Chow, 2002), which Viego glosses as 'a twenty-first-century mode of inhabiting ethnic-racialized identity where one's social and cultural intelligibility is predicated on one's coming to successfully resemble what is recognizably "ethnic-racialized"' (Viego, 2007: 26), Viego argues that Lacan's theories of desire and/as radical maladaptation offer a route to complex personhood for ethnic-racialised subjects (2007: 71).
8. In *Object Lessons*, Wiegman offers an affective and effective history of the present of disciplinarity in an age of interdisciplinarity, arguing that, 'The kind of disciplinarity that might be said to accrue to both disciplines and interdisciplinary programs is a consequence of what I would call the work of field formation, which requires a reproductive apparatus that can generate and sustain the critical rationalities, objects of study, and modes of inquiry that enable a field to both claim and perpetuate its identity as a self-legitimizing academic authority' (2012: 75).
9. In her lively and smart response to Scott's paper at the symposium out of which this special issue emerged, Kathleen Wilson began by expressing surprise at Scott's turn to psychoanalysis. Wilson admitted her resistance to thinking about psychoanalysis 'lay in the ways it was used by historians, to posit ahistorical and transcendental categories that were seen as existing across time and cultures, flattening the historical differences that were of such keen interest to me' (2010: 1). Like Scott, however, Wilson also expressed pleasure in the possibility of psychoanalysis being used 'to restore chaos to the order of things that constitutes disciplinary history' (Wilson, 2010: 8).
10. 'Fantasy Echo' and 'Feminist Reverberations' are reprinted in Scott's recently published *Fantasy of Feminist History* (2011).
11. The phrase 'queer desire for history' is from Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval* (1999). See also the Roundtable Discussion with Dinshaw, Lee Edelman, Roderick A. Ferguson, Carla Freccero, Elizabeth Freeman, Judith Halberstam, Annamarie Jagose, Christopher Nealon, and Nguyen Tan Hoang for the special issue of *GLQ* on 'Queer Temporalities', edited by Elizabeth Freeman (Dinshaw et al., 2007).
12. Duggan anticipates Clare Hemmings' (2005, 2010) fascinating work tracking the citation practices of feminist theorists.

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