The Authority of Experience and Sisterly Affects
Feminist Manifestos, Past and Present

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1. Introduction

A lot has disappeared from the archive and the repertoire of feminism and feminist activism (to draw on Diana Taylor's useful distinction). Not so long ago, it was reported that even the original document of the *Declaration of (Rights and) Sentiments*—that document which we consider to be one of the earliest manifestos for women's rights in the US dating back to 1848—had gone missing. Under *#FindTheSentiments*, then United States Chief Technology Officer, Megan Smith, announced a treasure hunt that has elicited many responses. I am tempted to draw on the symbolism of this reported »loss,« this absence in the archive, with an eye to recent developments in the repertoire of the field. Feminism in the lost-and-found?

Mary Beard, British classicist, historian, public intellectual, and savvy social media user has published a booklet titled *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, and in this little volume, Beard harkens back to and reminds us of the feminist archive and resuscitates older forms of feminist critique and strategy: she investigates the »culturally awkward relationship between the voice of women and the public sphere of speech-making, debate and comment: politics in its widest sense« (Beard 2018, 8) and sees public speech as »a—if not the—defining attribute of maleness« (ibid., 17). Like her feminist predecessors, among them certainly the author/s of the *Declaration of Sentiments*, she is concerned with women's voices and authority (ibid., 30) and with the patriarchal »rules of rhetorical operations,« that is with gendered regimes of representation and ideological structures of power asymmetries (ibid., 40). »What we need,« Beard writes, »is some old-fashioned consciousness raising« (ibid., 45). This certainly sounds familiar.

Beard is one among quite a few feminist scholars on both sides of the Atlantic who lately have turned (back) to the feminist manifesto as a genre of feminist expression and intervention (even though we may still debate if Beard's text is a manifesto in the conventional sense). These texts are (re)claiming the label of feminism as they are calling for an interrogation of what we talk about when we talk about feminism today. Not surprisingly, the authors address very different issues under

this label, and their texts range from being written in the form of letters or memoirs to full-fledged manifestos harkening all the way back to Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. However, what many of them seem to share, as I am going to show in more detail, is a commitment to a kind of rescue work, a new »invention of tradition,« or even a »salvaging« or reinvention of feminism. Salvaging it from what and for whom, we may wonder. Perhaps not surprisingly, in many contemporary »scenarios« (again, Taylor), the political language and work of feminism is at stake, even at risk. Some of the manifestos explicitly state the need for renewing feminist politics under the arc of intergenerational transition, intersectionality, and/or anti-capitalism. Two concepts prominently guide my observations: first, the idea of an »authority of experience« which has been front and center of feminist world making from the beginning and, second, the role of affect in American political culture and, specifically, in feminism, closely connected to mobilizing fellow-feeling and building solidarity in civil society.

I will revisit the history of feminist public protest (of which the *Declaration of Sentiments* is part) through the concept of »the authority of experience.« This notion has had quite a career in feminist history and, in a series of semantic reconstructions and variations, I am addressing the considerable cultural and political work it has done. However, I am not engaging with the category of »experience« per se; instead, I will trace the specific constellation that conjoins »authority« and »experience« and the genealogy of this tandem in US culture. The present moment, like no other, calls for an examination of this concept and its function in a series of publications and political projects that have appeared or are conducted under the label of »feminism.« Notwithstanding its intuitive, common sensical meaning—that experience plays some role in the way we acquire knowledge and that we find certain (truth) claims more legitimate than others based on our own experience—it has quite a winded history and also has been used, time and again, as a strategy of self-empowerment, of unconditional authorization, as an unquestionable ground of explanation, and as ultimate justification (*Letztbegründungsdiskurs*).

For the US, this discourse could be traced all the way back to the *Declaration of Independence*, if you will, and to its Lockean empiricist underpinnings. The *Declaration of Sentiments* mimics these. »The authority of experience« does gain a particular kind of concretization in the context of political agency, activism, and affect. Indeed, I argue that it ties in with conceptualizations of legitimacy, knowledge, and public feeling. At the same time, sentimentality undergirds political claims with references to suffering, anger, and the need for emancipation—it echoes in political documents and protest cultures, imagining relations of belonging and care via (metaphors of) kinship as part of a larger »imagined community« (Anderson 2006). In the history of feminism and its manifestos, a more specific imagined community of women has often been the collectivity of the »sisterhood« (cf. Gerund 2013) as empowerment and claim. This sisterhood puts a shared experience but also a

kind of fellow feeling at the center of feminist activism. Before I address the new feminist manifestos and their political language, let me backtrack a little.

2. »The Authority of Experience«

An obvious reference for what I am alluding to in my title is *The Authority of Experience*, a 1977-feminist classic edited by Arlyn Diamond and Lee R. Edwards for the University of Massachusetts Press with the subtitle *Essays in Feminist Criticism*. The agenda behind this title requires some explanation. Most obviously, the idea of »experience« is closely linked to the practice of »feminism« here and to »feminist criticism« which the volume seeks to define. From today's perspective, the essays in this volume articulate the major concerns of the so-called »second wave feminism« of the 1960s and 70s in the literary field.

First, a considerable number of the chapters engages in a representational critique of depictions of women by male authors (from William Shakespeare to Geoffrey Chaucer, to Ernest Hemingway) in order to either challenge their stereotypical quality or to praise their complexity. (Much like Kate Millett's undertaking in her well-known, yet, at the time controversially discussed book *Sexual Politics*, published in 1969.) Second, some of the remaining essays in the book are concerned with the recognition of female writers and their work (from Kate Chopin and Virginia Woolf to Katherine Anne Porter and Doris Lessing), applauding their representational strategies and aesthetics. (Similar projects of the time were Patricia Meyer Spacks's *The Female Imagination* from 1975 or Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* from 1977.) Listening carefully to women's literary voices was considered the logical next step after having scrutinized (and for the most part discarded) the much more dominant (yet ›unauthorized‹ and thus discredited) male voices *about* women. Needless to say, at this point, many texts of a female-authored literary tradition were only, one by one, »re-discovered,« newly made accessible in print (and we are here anticipating the canon debates of the 1980s when all of this literature was, in fact, recovered and available—and was ›competing‹ with the standard selection on the canonical reading lists of colleges and universities). Third, the paratexts of the volume (Foreword, Prologue) address their authors' concern with literature and art as reflective of »life« at large and with the false claim of the »impartiality of criticism;« rather they seek to identify and cherish what Gerda Lerner's anthology, published in the same year, calls *The Female Experience* (1977).

So much for this volume and its cultural and political context. Why, now, call this book *The Authority of Experience*? Is the emphasis on experience—the authority of experience—as opposed to the authority of something else? Patriarchy, for instance? Or is it on the authority of experience—authority rather than powerlessness? Authority here clearly hinges on authorship. Both readings appear to be quite

suggestive. What is at stake in the title (and the collection at large) is the institutionalization of feminist criticism and feminist practices that claims and nobilitates certain kinds of experiences as the basis for new kinds of scholarly practices within a given culture of professionalism; the authority of experience lays claim to »institutionalized forms of authority« (Sawaya 2003, 48) performing a feminist professionalism in literary studies and making women »heard« in the academy and in public.

Still, the publication by Diamond and Edwards documents a debate and a professional culture that is in many ways limited: the volume champions a white middle-class feminist criticism, an uncritical »love of literature,« and an equally problematic sense of the relationship between what the editors call »life« and »art.« It produces the (institutional) authority of white feminism in literary studies. Still, let me quote one paragraph that appears in both the foreword and the prologue, and that has a decidedly activist, even manifesto-ish ring to it, even if, from today's perspective, it appears somewhat modest in its claims:

> »We believe that women are not automatically or necessarily inferior to men, that role models for females and males in the current Western societies are inadequate, that equal rights for women are necessary, that it is unclear what by nature either men and women are, that it is a matter for empirical investigation to ascertain what differences follow from the obvious physiological ones.« (Diamond/Edwards 1977, xiv)

It is with the authority of experience (as women?) that they make these observations and these claims. The rhetorical gesture is vaguely signaling both, an empiricist and a mildly essentialist notion of difference.

3. Against the Authority of Experience

15 years later, in 1992, in another volume of feminist essays, the concept of »experience« along with any authority derived from it becomes scrutinized—and ultimately debunked. In the book, *Feminists Theorize the Political*, co-edited by Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott, feminism and feminist practices are not narrowly defined as somehow related to literature (the scope of disciplines represented in this volume is much broader and includes philosophy, history, political science as well as literary and cultural studies—all under the arc of poststructuralism); feminist practices themselves seem to become more complicated and phrases such as »contingent foundation« (Judith Butler), »the end of innocence« (Jane Flax), or »agonistic feminism« (Bonnie Honig) attest to this. (In a similar vein, collections such as *Conflicts in Feminism* (Hirsch/Keller 1990) and *Radically Speaking: Feminism Reclaimed* (Bell/Klein

1996) do similar critical work at the time and share this broad multidisciplinary scope and self-reflexive perspective.)

Co-editor Joan W. Scott devotes her own book chapter to the concept of »experience.« In response to Diamond and Edwards, she writes:

> »Documenting the experience of others in this way has been at once a highly successful and limiting strategy for historians of difference. It has been successful because it remains so comfortably within the disciplinary framework of history, working according to rules which permit calling old narratives into question when new evidence is discovered.« (Scott 1992, 24)

But Scott takes issue with the kind of »uncontestable evidence« that the authority of experience allegedly constitutes, hence the limitations. In fact, she cautions against necessarily taking »experience« at face value (she even puts the term in quotation marks) and argues for »the constructed nature of experience« (Scott 1992, 25) and for its »discursive character« (Scott 1992, 31) and production. According to Scott, »the evidence of experience . . . reproduces rather than contests given ideological systems—those that assume that the facts of history speak for themselves« (Scott 1992, 25). In that sense, the explanatory power of »experience« is not any better than that of notions such as »brute facts« or »simple reality« (such simplistic positivism is a rhetorical shortcut and ultimately a refusal to present a more sophisticated argument, any argument.) Experience—and with it any claim of an authority of experience—is dismantled as dangerous feminist fantasy work.

In concluding, thus, Scott puts the (feminist) discussion about experience to date on its head as she argues against its foundational status: »It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience« (Scott 1992, 26) or, in Teresa de Lauretis's (1984) words, »experience constructs subjectivity« and thus the category itself is part of/performs ideological work. Therefore, it becomes obvious that experience »is not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain.« (Scott 1992, 38)

In hindsight, we may agree with poststructuralist feminists that »the authority of experience« has not served women (and feminism) well, and that there are many good reasons for the alignment of feminism with poststructuralism. With Scott, we can trace the denigration of feminist radical intellectual thought due to its proclaimed basis in a dubitable »authority of experience.« And in fact, referring to »experience« does different things for different groups. Whereas the notion of knowledge through experience (in those empiricist approaches that contend that all knowledge is derived from the senses and that echo in sentences like »all experience has shown«) is historically dominant in the US, it has (specifically in the context of and in response to feminist claims) often been shortened to subjective feeling or self-awareness (*Selbsterfahrung*) and to a notion of a compromised kind of knowledge. In the hegemonic patriarchal script, women, it seems, never actually

make it all the way from experience to knowledge—they appear to remain stuck in particularity, partiality, and a kind of »secondary« (de Beauvoir 2010) subjectivity that falls short of the status of autonomous subjecthood. The »authority of experience,« in this context, connotes the absence of authority, not authenticity or power. In a gendered discourse (about women), »experience« seems to be less often coupled with »knowledge« or producing knowledge (in a rational mode) and more often with »feeling« and with being affected by the sensual/sentimental/sentiments (often in an irrational way).

The feminist strategy to use the affective mode for projects of self-empowerment and for the instituting of a counter-hegemonic discourse has not always been helpful as it is complicit with the dominant gender regime to such an extent that it, time and again, seems to collapse into the latter. In sum, we may ultimately speak of an affective (and effective) sentimentalization of »experience« in US gender discourses: even as »experience« draws on enlightenment notions (as the *Declaration of Sentiments* from 1848 does), it becomes newly imbricated with 19th century gender models. This imbrication has at times been successfully enlisted for strategies of (self)authorization on the grounds of a dramatic affective investment but has also remained a kind of baggage and an obstacle for social change in the long run. Joan Scott is aware of that. Whether strategic or not, in the context of feminism, a kind of sentimentalization of experience and its authority has often been put to work for but also against the purposes of gender-specific public protest. One of the joint, yes, co-foundational moments of feminism and of sentimentalism certainly is the experience (and capability) to »feel right« about injustice and human suffering (as Harriet Beecher Stowe has it in the afterword to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), i.e., to experience injustice not only cognitively but also affectively or bodily. It is this primal scene of a feminist civil sentimentalism that still echoes in contemporary feminist culture, for instance in some of the rhetoric of the ›Women's Marches‹ and various kinds of hashtag feminisms.

Clearly, as the late Lauren Berlant has argued, feminism has been complicit in its ongoing sentimentalization in the last decades. 19th century sentimentalism is the backstory of 21st century feminism—as can perhaps be seen even in *#MeToo* protests. Take, for instance, the narratives of the experience of sexual harassment with Harvey Weinstein as male protagonist and villain. Do they tend to ultimately reinforce female victimhood? Are they echoing the less graphic 19th century sentimental plots of beautiful »damsels in distress,« of glamorous »long suffering heroines,« and of ugly seductions? Susan Watkins contends that this is the case as »tales of his depredations combined ritzy settings, celebrity gossip, prurient details and Schadenfreude at the downfall of mighty men, all wrapped up in impeccably feminist sentiments« (Watkins 2018, 72). It goes without saying that pointing out the specific cultural intelligibility of tales of sexual abuse is not intended in any way to make light of the trauma of its victims.

4. The Return (or Recrudescence) of the Feminist Manifesto

This leap brings me from 1977 and 1992 to the present, and to ask about the ways in which the »authority of experience« (à la 1977) and/or the skepticism about it (à la 1992) are still lingering and where on the scale between these two positions we can locate current feminist work in view of its forceful sentimental undercurrents.

In the following, I refrain from focusing on the different initiatives and highly visible »hashtag-feminisms« we can presently observe, instead I will concentrate on those texts that continue or re-activate the narrative of feminism and feminist politics that began in the 19th century and continued in the 20th century and that contribute to what has been called a new movement. Clearly, the »authority of experience« is still relevant in feminist responses to different kinds of crises in the present moment, and in the past couple of years, quite a number of new books on feminism have been published. Reading them (with a background in feminist theory and feminist criticism), one wonders about their incessantly programmatic gesturing. What many of these recent publications share is that they use two keywords to draw the readers' attention and make themselves understood: the generic label of »feminism« and the genre of the »manifesto.« In fact, feminist manifestos of various kinds have been mushrooming lately as an American and even transatlantic or transnational phenomenon, and they echo a radical feminist discursive mode of earlier decades. To various degrees, the new feminist manifestos engage with feminist movements of the past, with the critical state of the present that still—or once more—leaves much to be desired, with backlash-scenarios, and propositions for further change and political action. Some of these texts that go by the name of manifesto also strike a self-reflexive if not combative and bitter tone. The authority of experience manifests itself against the authority of the powers that be—Fahs even describes feminist manifestos as a »feminism of againstness« (Fahs 2020, 13-14).

Here is a quick survey of some of the new feminist texts claiming the genre of the (political) manifesto: Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards' *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future* (2000); Gillian Anderson and Jennifer Nadel's *We: A Manifesto for Women Everywhere* (2017); Mary Beard's *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (2018); Jessa Crispin's *Why I Am Not A Feminist: A Feminist Manifesto* (2017); Sara Ahmed's *The Feminist Killjoy Manifesto* (in *Living a Feminist Life* [2017]); Claire D. Simone's *That's What Women Do: A Feminist Manifesto* (2014); Marie Rotkopf's *Antiromantisches Manifest. Eine poetische Lösung* (2017); Penny A. Weiss and Megan Brueske's *Feminist Manifestos: A Global Documentary Reader* (2018); Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017); Breanne Fahs' *Burn It Down!: Feminist Manifestos for the Revolution* (2020); Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99 %: A Manifesto* (2019). Some of these books are anthologies, collecting and canonizing pre-existing

manifestos, and they create a feminist cultural memory and archive; some point to particular anniversaries that have inspired them—of the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 or the year 1968; yet again others offer a political agenda in the form of advice and self-help; and some present individual viewpoints on the history, the achievement, and the legacy of the feminist movement. Certainly, the feminist manifestos are a larger and quite diverse phenomenon, and I would like to offer some observations on how I conceive of this new trend as both cultural symptom and cultural work.

Taking a step back, some of the archetypes of the genre may be noteworthy: what kind of text do we expect under the label of a manifesto? The political manifesto (as distinguished from an artistic or literary manifesto) usually displays characteristic rhetorical strategies of political language (following the typology of Klatt and Lorenz [2010] and earlier work by Schultz [1981] and Fähnders [1997]): The modern manifesto (as we understand it today) gradually emerged at the end of the 18th century (a major semantical paradigm shift occurred with the French Revolution, in some regards the *Declaration of Independence* was, of course, also a manifesto, at least at the time when it was first presented); it is a form of mass-media communication with clear authorial intent, often seen as propagandistic or demagogical, in any case oppositional to hegemonic discourse; its aim is to reach a larger public and to contribute with its intervention to the shift of public discourse (and the improvement) of civil society and social justice (it is usually independent of ›the government‹ and of institutionalized political parties as such). Its tone is persuasive and didactic, even apodictic at times, urging its readers to action, interpellating them as potential activists often with an imperative command. It suggests pugnacity on one or more current issues of social/political critique and sharply and often quite dichotomously pits one perspective of things against another, opposing view and attacks the latter in no uncertain terms. It is a performative speech act well beyond other kinds of everyday diction. Looking toward the future, it often summons a »language of hope« (Colman 2011, 73).

To sum up, Walter Fähnders identifies four essentials of manifestos. They are programmatic, public, unequivocal, and collective (»Programmatik, Öffentlichkeit, Eindeutigkeit und Gruppencharakter,« Fähnders 1997, 23). The manifesto is usually signed by or on behalf of a collective or a group of people, it is about ›a few‹ addressing ›the many.‹ It connects public protest to civil sentimentalism because it combines civil engagement with an affective and at times civil religious investment in the common good publicly indicting social ills while aiming at a political mobilization of the masses. And finally: the number of manifestos rises in times of political crisis. A search for the term manifesto (from 1950 to 2008) with the GOOGLE Books NGram Viewer allows us to trace the frequency of manifestos for specific years and epochs. Not surprisingly, it allows for identifying 1968 as a climax in manifesto-writing, in fact Fahs notes in her introduction that »feminist mani-

festos exploded onto the scene from 1967 to 1971« (Fahs 2020, 1-21); my bet is that another peak can soon be expected to rise for the present moment and the years that the GOOGLE Books NGram Viewer does not yet cover.

The feminist manifesto, in particular, draws on and at the same time creates an »affective subjectivity« (Fahs 2020, 74) and seeks »recognition and acknowledgment of historical circumstances and the need for change« (Colman 2011, 78). In the context of the events around 1968, whose anniversaries we have been commemorating not so long ago, we may think of Valerie Solanas's *SCUM-Manifesto* (1968), the *Redstockings Manifesto*, the *Bitch manifesto*,[1] or even the anthology *Sisterhood is Powerful* edited by Robin Morgan (1970). Many titles imply a female collective: bitches, sisters etc. The feminist manifesto at that time produced »a new literacy for women,« as Rhodes (2005, 28) has it, and »with its clear purpose and context, its ambiguous authorship, and its very public audience, eventually became a preferred method of communicating radical feminism to women ›out there‹« (Rhodes 2005, 48). Thus, the manifestos of the present tap into an important tradition of political tracts and pamphlets and appropriate the symbolic capital of the feminist manifesto-genre fully formalized some 50 years ago, and they share a sense of urgency. To what end? Why the use of manifesto and why now? Singling out five of those new feminist manifestos, I want to probe the ways in which these texts stick to the generic manifesto prototype—or depart from it.

4.1 Mary Beard's *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (2017)

Mary Beard's *Women and Power: A Manifesto* (mentioned earlier) is the publication of two lectures given by the renowned British classics historian and blogger for the *Times Literary Supplement* as the London Review of Books-Lectures at the British Museum in 2014 and 2017. Acting as a kind of public historian, Beard is concerned with *The Public Voice of Women* and with *Women in Power* (as the titles of the talks indicate). She chronicles the silencing of women from the *Odyssey* (a text that for the first time has recently been translated into English by a woman, Emily Wilson) to contemporary politics, diagnosing the absence of powerful women in the cultural imaginaries of the West, again moving from classical antiquity to the present with suggestive examples from Medusa to Angela Merkel, Theresa May, and Hillary Clinton. Beard in 2017 is (still) concerned with women's voices and authority (Bear 2018, 30) and with those who impede them. Her call for »old-fashioned consciousness raising« (ibid., 45) says it all: reading Beard's text one cannot help but wonder about the year. Consciousness raising was the preferred term and method of radical feminism in the 1960s and 70s. Could this be a publication from 2017? It is, but it is also full of *déjà vu* moments. To »think about power differently« (ibid., 87)

1 These three are among those collected by Breanne Fahs.

seems a vague thing to call for, and her examples—those that are not drawn from antiquity or conservative politicians who happen to be female—include at its most radical the founders of the Black Lives Matter movement whose marginal presence might recall Toni Morrison's critique of »Africanist presences« in white literature (cf. Morrison 1992).

Beard's booklet (which comes in a neat bibliophile appearance) is interpellating women still in the spirit of liberal feminism. Apart from that, it remains unclear what should make these two essays a manifesto: part-history book, part-anecdotal memoir, *Women and Power* certainly does not exhibit many of the characteristic features of the political or even feminist manifesto as we know it. Rather its »trickle-down feminism« points to a minimalist consensus about women's rights and recognition only. Mary Beard was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire (DBE) in the 2018 Birthday Honours for services to the study of classical civilizations, and her coffee-table booklet is easily the »bestseller« among all the manifestos as she pursues a clear and certainly not unproblematic narrative of progress.

4.2 Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017)

My second example, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dear Ijeawele: A Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions* (2017) is another neat little booklet, just like Beard's publication. It is a manifesto by title only, in terms of genre it is actually one long letter the author writes to a childhood friend of hers, who has just become the mother of a girl and who seeks her advice on how to raise her daughter a feminist.

With her letter to her friend, Adichie, the glamorous star of Afropolitanism, well-known as a public speaker and as the author of *Americanah*, positions herself in the neighborhood and halo of other such texts by African American authors in a similar register: Of course, there is James Baldwin's letter to his 14-year old nephew, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), which is also echoed more recently in Ta-Nehesi Coates's *Between the World and Me* (2015); and then there is, closer in style and mood, Barack Obama's children's book dedicated and addressed to his daughters, *Of Thee I Sing: A Letter to My Daughters* (2010). With the latter, Adichie's certainly shares a heavy dose of sentimental pathos.

The letter Adichie has published is a piece of intimate communication that she shares with her audience (the letter form is also a convention of the early sentimental novel, of course) and thus clearly the opposite of a manifesto. Thus, Adichie's »manifesto« is a rather privatized version of »a feminism that focuses dementedly on ›self-empowerment‹« (to quote from another feminist text, Crispin 2017, x). It comes in neat propositions but is actually primarily an advice book in the self-help mold. It is about training and forming a feminist habitus, so to speak,

in raising a daughter. Many sentences are imperatives, such as »Be a full person« (Adichie 2017, 9), »Ask for help,« or »Give yourself room to fail« (ibid., 11), or »Never speak of marriage as an achievement« (ibid., 30). Sentences begin with »Teach her that…« or »You should teach her« or »Teach her to reject likeability« (ibid., 36) or »Teach her about difference« (ibid., 59). While some pieces of advice are rooted in a racialized and/or culture-specific Nigerian context (such as: »Try not to link hair with pain,« ibid., 44), the suggestions overall conform with enlightened US middle-class standards: they are about growing-up, about romance, sex, partnership, clothing (dressing-up) etc.—after all: the personal is political.

4.3 Sara Ahmed's *A Killjoy Manifesto* (2017)

Sara Ahmed's *A Killjoy Manifesto* is published as part of her book *Living a Feminist Life* (Ahmed 2017). Those of who are familiar with Ahmed's work know that she has been posting her »feminist killjoy-blog« (feministkilljoys.com) for the past years and that, out of protest against her university and its »failure to deal with the problem of sexual harassment« (Ahmed's homepage), she resigned her academic post to become an independent scholar and a public speaker.

In *Living a Feminist Life*, Ahmed calls in a newly foundational moment of feminism(s) that re-directs us to the »authority of experience«; it »is built from many moments of beginning again« (Ahmed 2017, 6) and she claims to witness »the buildup of a momentum around feminism« (ibid., 3). Throughout her book she follows a remarkable citation policy: »I do not cite any white men. By *white men* I am referring to an institution . . . My citation policy has given me more room to attend to those feminists who came before me. Citation is feminist memory« (ibid., 15). Thus, the authority of experience is seen as constitutive of the collective in the archive and the repertoire and is used in an essentialist mode for social closure and exclusion. On a formal level, this text appears much more manifestoish than Beard's two essays or Adichie's letter. Unlike Beard, Ahmed has propositions (or should I say articles of faith?), and I will briefly go through them. The ten principles of the manifesto include:

- Principle 1: I am not willing to make happiness my cause.
- Principle 2: I am willing to cause unhappiness.
- Principle 3: I am willing to support others who are willing to cause unhappiness.
- Principle 4: I am not willing to laugh at jokes designed to cause offense.
- Principle 5: I am not willing to get over histories that are not over.
- Principle 6: I am not willing to be included if inclusion means being included in a system that is unjust, violent, and unequal.

- Principle 7: I am willing to live a life that is deemed by others as unhappy and I am willing to reject or to widen the scripts available for what counts as a good life.
- Principle 8: I am willing to put the hap back into happiness.
- Principle 9: I am willing to snap any bonds, however precious, when those bonds are damaging to myself or to others.
- Principle 10: I am willing to participate in a killjoy movement.

Ahmed's »principles« involve consciousness-raising and the recognition of intersectionality. The negativity or »negative affect« of the principles echo Alexis Shotwell's work on implicit understanding and her argument that negative affect can be productive, as »a certain kind of bad feeling can be important for producing meaningful solidarity across difference, particularly for individuals who benefit from racist/social/political structures« (Shotwell 2011, 73). It may be important to feel (or to be made to feel) uncomfortable about one's own privilege in order to be able to identify across from one's own particular social position at all. Ahmed's text certainly comes closer than many others do to the manifestos of radical feminism we know from earlier decades, and it tosses out the »cruel optimism« (Berlant's term) of liberal feminist thought.

4.4 Marie Rotkopf's *Antiromantisches Manifest: Eine poetische Lösung* (2017)

Marie Rotkopf's rather poetic *Antiromantic Manifesto* is a German-language book which is written in prose and lanky verse form. In her collage of texts, the French artist and cultural critic also calls into question the entire project of liberal feminism as such. Rotkopf writes against a »Western romantic ideology« (Rotkopf 2017, 19) that for her is inseparably linked to a »hypocritical unity-discourse about freedom« (»verlogenes Einheitsdenken über die Freiheit«, ibid., 19). »Europe« has already been »decomposed/corroded« by it: »We are no *community*« (ibid., 25—Rotkopf uses the English term in the German-language text). The legacy of feminism is not one to be treasured:

> »We remember, in Europe, in May 1968, it was always the women who cleaned up the party headquarters and the community kitchen. We know that women stand up, speak up, answer, and plan the activities. We are certain that this remains the most important thing: that women are to believe and then think that the decisions had been made by themselves . . . We call it *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* (children, kitchen, church) the still present ideology under which German women continue to live—the woman question . . . The daughters of Germany, they are the mothers. The childless protestant chancellor, the secretary of defense a mother of seven

children; we know how much the exception proves the rule . . . The gender-theory has clearly been buried with Alice Schwarzer being charged for tax evasion.« (ibid., 41-42, 45, 49)

Rotkopf's text (at times written in a stream-of-consciousness technique, at times with biting irony) throughout represents a kind of »femino-pessimism« (I am making up this neologism in analogy to Afro-pessimism; »femino« is a term that does not exist in English or German, but it exists in Esperanto), and it is perhaps the most radical version of a broader transatlantic tendency to a profound skepticism about liberal feminism among its (former) exponents. Denying all nostalgic reminiscing while looking back, Rotkopf opts for residing in alienation to available feminist identifications that she finds compromised across the board. Disowning the sentimental, it affirms the »unmotherly« (Fahs 2020, 15) in manifesto culture. It is this position that can also be identified in my last example.

4.5 Cinzia Arruzza, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser's *Feminism for the 99 %: A Manifesto* (2019)

»Can Feminism for the 99 % succeed as a new kind of populism?« sociologist Akwugo Emejulu asked not so long ago. Linking feminism and populism seems to produce a contradiction in terms. Or maybe not? Emejulu suggests that a new feminist movement currently »seeks to co-opt the languages and practices of populist politics« (Emujulu 2017, 63). The branding of a »populist feminism« in a sentimental cloak may seem problematic, however, the volume by Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser expands on the »feminism of the 99 %« by describing the emergence of a transnational feminist movement that is articulating a critique of capitalism in the neoliberal age. First, the authors explicitly critique the tradition of liberal feminism (still affirmed, for instance, by Beard) as useless, even harmful for the present moment. Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* is referenced as a popular piece of »corporate feminism« which reveals the complicity of liberal feminism with capitalism. Other kinds of feminisms are equally harmful (such as »carceral feminism« [Sandberg 2013, 29] which is complicit with a criminal justice system). Like Beard, this text also invokes Hillary Clinton; yet, the fact that the majority of women did not vote for her is considered to be symptomatic of a crisis in (liberal) feminist politics. Second, the eleven propositions of the book link radical feminist practice to class struggle and seek to bridge identity politics and class politics (Arruzza/Bhattacharya/Fraser 2019, 8); they also show the relevance of feminism in ongoing struggles of decolonization and anti-racism. Third, the authors focus on an international feminist movement that uses the tactic of the strike and other forms of civil disobedience to gain political influence on a global scale.

5. What is Manifestly Feminist in the Feminist Manifestos?

The new feminist manifestos show the concern with ongoing gender discrimination and the need for new critical interventions. At times, the genre of the manifesto serves more as an attention-grabbing (or bookselling) device than as an actual literary formula in order to appeal to a wider audience of women. The comeback of the »authority of experience« is pursued in the name of public protest and a civil sentimentalism of sisterly solidarity. The discursive maneuvering of these texts differs quite a bit, but there are recurring patterns and questions.

First, all the texts engage with the legacy of feminism and feminist achievement, i.e., its history, its erosion, its transformation, and the ongoing relevance of feminist issues. Looking back, some produce a nostalgic longing for feminisms' glorious days in the past and try to work past its pastness, so to speak. Already the investment in this particular genre of the manifesto could be considered somewhat nostalgic. On the other hand, these publications are also themselves part of the transformation processes that they are skeptical about. The rhetorical posturing varies and ranges from re-invigorating, re-affirming, and amplifying feminist »voices« in the tradition of second wave feminism, to a plea for a renovation of feminism or a radicalization, even reversal of a trend.

Second, all texts equally engage in a »salvaging« feminism (as a concept and as a term) of sorts that aims at saving utterances, positions, and programs for a full-fledged feminist archive and at making it accessible to the younger generations. This salvaging is another dimension of retrospection, also remembering past freedom struggles. This may be seen in the lingering and reinvigorated notion that there exists a specific sense of entitlement with regard to women (as feminists), a sense that may harken back to 19th century constructions of women's moral superiority based on suffering and victim status. Manifestos are not only looking back, however, their »romantic quality« (Fahs 2020, 4) also registers in their imagination of the future and of feminist projects to be continued, and it plays out in the sets of principles and demands for political and social justice hammered out in the texts.

Third, unlike most manifestos (including feminist manifestos) of the past, some of the texts have one single, individual author on the cover who is speaking first and foremost for herself and out of her own experience, as academic professional, activist, writer, but claim in more or less indirect ways to be a representative voice based on her respective authority of experience which in turn is presented as somewhat exemplary. Mary Beard encourages a collaborative spirit (rather than individual leadership that needs followers, Beard 2018, 86-87). Perhaps she is speaking as an older professor to younger women about feminism. Adichie speaks as a private person, as a friend to a friend. Cherished fantasies of »sisterhood« are not always fully articulated, and certainly not delivered here. The authority of experience that is claimed here remains highly individualistic and excessively particularistic. Sa-

ra Ahmed uses (and problematizes) the »we,« even as she also speaks of an »I« and a »you.« She positions herself as a drop-out of the academic system and thus as a renegade scholar and feminist activist. Against any privatization of feminist activism, manifesto-books such as the one by Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser clearly remain within the genre-rule and offer a collective authorship to the reader. They offer more of a self-reflexive discussion of the intersubjective intelligibility of their experience and the conditions for sharing as they outrightly reject the logic of private/individual optimization in the neo-liberal mode as part of feminist projects.

Fourth, due to their anecdotal style and their outspoken didacticism, some of these texts partially appear more in the self-help genre than they adhere to the manifesto-formula; certainly, Ahmed and Adichie can be labelled therapeutic advice literature. Other examples among the larger body of works (such as *We: A Manifesto for Women Everywhere*, Anderson/Nadel 2017) are even reminiscent of Benjamin Franklin's cultivation of virtue and his notorious lists. Thus, while the revolutionary zeal of the second wave feminists is being recalled, their political thrust, epitomized in the rallying cry »the personal is the political,« is being neutralized, if not reversed at times. In the pages of these texts, according to Crispin, we often find »a friendlier version of feminism where political and sociological understanding of the pressure under which women attempt to live their lives is replaced with personal choice« (Crispin 2017, 16). Has feminism really become one more arena for self-optimization and enhancement? The new manifestos cannot always resist and escape the »corporate and popular ursurpation« (Fahs 2020, 6) of the label. In many instances, the genre of the manifesto has become awkwardly hybridized.

Fifth, the sisterly effects of the feminist manifesto operate in the »present tense« (ibid., 4) in at least two respects. For one thing, manifestos are not made to become canonical literary texts—even as we hang on to them and some of them become ›classics‹—they are foregrounding their own use value as pamphlets, as *Gebrauchsliteratur* for the moment out of which they emerge. As such, they suggest immediate responses and have little tolerance for stalling and delay. The temporality of the manifesto—even as it looks back to a feminist history and anticipates a utopian futurity—is the here and now, at times inhabiting the present in a quite self-conscious mode.

6. Conclusion

The return of the feminist manifesto can be discussed as a cultural symptom of the general crisis of political language (and of feminist rhetoric more specifically) and as an attempt to work through this crisis—by way of a disavowal of a (liberal) feminist tradition (Rotkopf 2017), a salvaging and continuation of exactly this tradition

(Beard 2018), a privatized feminist sentimentalism (Adichie 2017), or by way of a re-entry and re-engagement (Ahmed 2017; Arruzza/Bhattacharya/Fraser 2019). All four strategies I see as attempts to resist the status quo and various trends in the political arena (including those that have hijacked a feminist rhetoric for ethnonationalist politics, those that Sara R. Farris has referred to as »femonationalist«). As much as we may be tempted to dismiss these new efforts at the manifesto as problematic, biased, too individualistic, and ultimately as lacking in sophistication, their designs can perhaps be appreciated under more pragmatic considerations. All authors use mixed-media formats and employ their manifestos to reach out and connect to a wider public via blogs, twitter, appearances on television, and the radio. Thus, they negotiate different sites of feminist practice for different audiences while they make use of the notion of sisterhood and sisterly affects in political education-projects.

Referring back to the beginning, this essay concludes with a remark on the anecdotal hashtag-initiative *#FindTheSentiments* with which I began. This initiative has not only followers but also critics. While some assert that this campaign draws attention to an important document (with a consciousness-raising strategy), others find the initiative silly and superficial. If the White House wants »to excite Americans about their history or women's history,« Ann D. Gordon (2015) suggests, it could recognize that »Historians of women are a busy lot, and many of them find new evidence or ›treasures‹ every day. Encourage them. Perhaps even read their work.« Gordon goes on to talk about federal programs, funding, and recognition. And she ends: »Engaging citizens in the quest for more historical evidence is a terrific idea that numerous historians already practice but sending them on what is very likely to be a treasureless hunt is not a winning plan.« The challenge or a »winning plan,« if we want to call it that, cannot only entail saving the feminist archive or fondly remembering activism of the past but also finding new ways in which this archive can nourish a feminist (or femino-pessimist) repertoire—in whatever medium or form—whose scenarios are not only nostalgic »re-enactment« but also rehearsal and »pre-enactment« of new collectivities and of social change—to come.

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