

Reversing the Gaze: Spectacle and the Antinuclear Movement CPSA Paper Submission

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Abstract: Moving beyond the cultural feminist/poststructuralist debate over the feminist merits of women's identity politics and drawing upon Foucault's relational and inter-active accounts of power and identity, this paper asks how female enactments of motherhood and hysteria functioned in the American antinuclear movement as an embodied tactic. It argues that *hysterical motherhood* was tactically effective to the extent that it redirected the societal gaze from the spectacle of the female protesters to the embodied performances of militarized men.

Introduction

This paper will ask the question of how women's embodied performances functioned in the American antinuclear movement of the 1980s, such that, despite its limitations, the movement may be credited with playing a vital role in undermining the logic of deterrence theory and the promise of mutually assured destruction. What is intriguing about the antinuclear movement and merits further investigation is not just the fact that many of the women performers chose to organize under the sign of motherhood, but that the motherhood being performed was often times "hysterical." Borrowing from Susan Bordo's analysis of hysteria, agoraphobia and anorexia nervosa as embodied forms of protest against gender norms – albeit forms that are noteworthy for acting "as if in collusion with the cultural conditions that produce them, reproducing rather than transforming precisely that which is being protested" (1989, 22) – this paper will examine the hysterical motherhood performed during the antinuclear movement as an embodied form of gender protest. But, whereas Bordo focuses on the strategic/political use of particular forms of embodiment at the level of individual psychology, this paper will analyze the mass enactment of hysterical motherhood by thousands of American women in terms of its broader cultural implications and strategic effects.

Certainly, the idea that female bodies offer women a unique vantage point from which to criticize the military state is not new. Cultural feminists would cite and celebrate women's vast participation in the antinuclear movement as an example of this. The issue raised by black feminists, postcolonial scholars, and poststructuralists is whether or not the figure of "woman" itself is an insidious power-effect. They would question the critical potential of a social movement that valorizes female gender identities and, worse yet, *gives women voice* – subduing the clamour of competing experiences, knowledges, and desires. But, while the resultant debate raises important questions about the feminist merits of women's identity politics, it does not exhaust questions about the critical potential of *performing hysterical motherhood in an age of nuclear annihilation*. Nor does it help us to understand what this performance may or may not have accomplished – at the level of identity, culture, and/or in terms of the security practices of

the state. This paper seeks to open up the predominant discursive frames that have enabled and constrained our understanding of *the issue*, highlighting alternative possibilities for analysis.

Moving beyond what might be called the cultural feminist/poststructuralist debate over the merits of identity politics and heeding the methodological precautions urged by Michel Foucault, this paper will examine the embodied tactics employed by the female antinuclear protesters primarily in terms of their strategic effects at their point of application - the level of inter-action. Rather than making assumptions about power's intentions or its most insidious manifestations in advance, it aims to interrogate the events themselves as a demonstration and negotiation of power relations. Such an approach enables us to move away from an *a priori* cultural feminist understanding of appropriate political consciousness and, while utilizing Judith Butler's theorization of gender embodiment, also enables us to move beyond Butler's more prescriptive view of what (in the place of women's identity politics) constitutes an appropriately postmodern political strategy. By beginning at the level of inter-action – at the bodily sites of dramatization where women *became* mothers, symbolic or otherwise, who enacted hysteria under and for the public gaze – the antinuclear movement's subversive potential can be re-thought at the level of practice, as a guerilla tactic deployed within a shared, albeit highly contested and shifting, cultural terrain.

The question is “to what effect”? To answer this question we must move our attention away from the spectacle provided by the bodies of women – the crying, the chanting, the emotional pleas to save the children, the weaving of brightly coloured scarves, and the jumping across military fences – although all of these were important discursive events. Certainly, women's bodies created a drama of sorts, but arguably the story and perhaps the movement itself depended upon the other cultural actors that provided the backdrop for the female performers – such as the state that was called forth to enact its sovereign power by placing women under arrest to restore order, the foreign policy analysts and weapons scientists who spoke in unemotional terms about the calculated merits of M.A.D., and the workers who routinely and dispassionately assembled weapons with first-strike capacity. Ultimately, the story occurred at the level of inter-action where identities were brought into play to be performed, contested, and negotiated, and at the level of affect where the distinction between spectator and spectacle was always somewhat fluid. The multiple levels of gazing that took place during the antinuclear movement testify to an infrequently analyzed aspect of Foucault's conceptualization of disciplinary power - the inherent instability and reversibility of the panoptic gaze. This paper argues that the subversive potential of the antinuclear movement lay in the ability of the female protesters to redirect the societal gaze – such that by enacting hysterical motherhood the protesters effectually incited and dramatized sovereign power and hegemonic masculinity in a way that made them appear not only particular, but also rather strange.

Hysterical Motherhood as a Rallying Cry

At the Eighth Annual Convention of the National Women's Studies Association (1986), Dr. Helen Caldicott, one of the leading public figures of the antinuclear movement, made the following plea to a largely female audience in what was known as her “Farewell Speech” or her last major public address:

How many of you are prepared to try to save the world? ... You and I were only conceived and born to save the earth... It's our responsibility; an aroused woman is unstoppable... We are the curators of all life on earth... I want you to sit down tonight and write a letter. If you've got your own children: to them. If you

haven't: to the children of the earth. Tell them what you're going to do to save their lives. And don't let a day pass from now on until you die without doing something ...The age of women has arrived, it's now on our shoulders, it is our responsibility to save the earth! (1989, 15)

What is noteworthy about this quote is that Caldicott invokes what this paper calls "hysterical motherhood" as a rallying cry to motivate and unite women *as* mothers, both biological and otherwise – i.e.: as symbolic mothers of the nation and mothers of the earth. More noteworthy, is the fact that to this and similar pleas tens of thousands of women from all over the United States responded, emerging from their familiar routines and domestic hearths to invade, surround, and/or otherwise unsettle what they perceived to be predominantly white male encampments of order, civility, and reason. The Pentagon, the nuclear weapons labs, the weapons depots, and the arms manufacturers – the very places vested with the cultural authority to provide these women with "domestic" security – were particularly vulnerable as targets.

Without arms and often without words, the bodies of "aroused women" functioned symbolically and unequivocally as their weapons and their texts:

At one Nevada Test Site action, protesters marched to the entrance and planted crosses in the ground while the women wailed in mourning as loud as they could – a hideous, piercing, relentless wailing that lasted for about 15 minutes. At a Hiroshima Day Protest at the [Livermore nuclear weapons] laboratory in 1989, a group of women went to the front gate and reenacted the bombing of Hiroshima, writhing and screaming so loudly that scientists came out onto the balcony of the building to see what was happening. (Gusterson 1998, 198)

These scenes and others like them were dramatic, even unnerving, by intention and in effect. An unbridled emotionalism was unleashed as women hurled their bodies, screams, tears, and feminine and domestic symbols (fabric arts and pictures of children's handprints) against the grey stone buildings, scientific jargon, patriarchal logic, and disembodied rationality that belonged to the nuclear weapons scientists, defense strategists, and foreign policy makers – i.e. the world of men.

Of course, not all of the protesters in the antinuclear movement were women and, of those who were, not all enacted hysteria or motherhood. The concern of this paper is how these two elements – hysteria and motherhood – became articulated on and through numerous female bodies in a way that was literally screaming to be read. And the question is "to what effect?" In the book, *Nuclear Rites: A Weapons Laboratory at the End of the Cold War*, Hugh Gusterson imagined that the nuclear weapons scientists (the subject of his ethnography) must have observed the protests with a sense of bewilderment:

One must imagine how these protests were experienced by a community of scientists accustomed to laboring over their weapons in anonymous and disciplined isolation...only to find their lives suddenly *invaded* by thousands of people from nearby towns – singing, shouting, weeping, praying people, many dressed as skeletons, grim reapers or clowns...women and teenage children, screaming and crying as they are dragged by burly policemen into paddy wagons. (1998, 171, italics added)

The protesters were an affront to what Richard Ashley and Rob Walker describe as the “promise of transcendence” associated with the modern figure of white Western man – i.e.: the promise that through reason and disembodied rationality man can quiet uncertainty, master ambiguity, tame emotion, discipline recalcitrance, and ultimately achieve objective knowledge, autonomy, and control (1990, 262). This was the promise of Western security and it was firmly embedded within the logic of deterrence theory and mutually assured destruction or M.A.D. But, the mere presence of the protesters, in addition to their provocative displays put this promise in doubt – threatening the borders of masculinity with the unruliness that reason and disembodied rationality promised to expel and contain.

However, as the above quote also makes clear, inasmuch as the protesters constituted a threat to those borders, they also solidified them – such that, at least from the point of view of the weapons scientists, the protests may have furthered the divide between “themselves” and the irrational, childlike “others” who their weapons were designed to protect. In the words of Susan Griffin,

It is [the] uncouth howlings [associated with the pain, grief, and horror of war] that those who are planning war have managed to mute in their imagination. But, of course that howling is not entirely lost. In the shared imagination of our civilization, it is the “other” who carries emotion, the women who howl. (1989, 83)

This raises the question of whether or not women can strategically occupy hysterical motherhood to subversive effect.

The obvious difficulty is that these contemporary performances rely upon the modern binaries that have positioned women as essentially bodily beings who are closer to nature than culture and, hence, largely incapable of disembodied rationality or abstract reasoning. Although this paper invokes the concept “hysterical motherhood” somewhat provocatively, its usage builds upon a long history. Explains Natalie Zemon Davis:

The female sex was thought to be the disorderly one par excellence in early modern Europe... [While] the men of the lower orders were also believed to be especially prone to riot and seditious unrest...with the women, the disorderliness was founded in physiology. As every physician knew in the sixteenth century... [h]er womb was like a hungry animal; when not amply full by sexual intercourse or reproduction, it was likely to wander about her body, overpowering her speech and senses...The male might suffer from retained sexual juices too, but...he had the wit and will to control his fiery urges by work, wine, or study. The women just became hysterical. (1978, 147-148)

Far from giving women political voice, the understanding of women as their sex, as “dominated by their reproductive system” has historically functioned to marginalize women from the body politic and to constitute women as a social threat (Rose 1999, 360).

For instance, the potential risk of political contagion - the idea that feminine hysteria could spread, incite, and otherwise contaminate the body politic – was cited by the Committee for General Security as a reason to deny women “a voice” in late eighteenth century revolutionary France: “[W]omen, by their constitution, are open to exaltation which could be ominous in public life. The interests of the state would soon be sacrificed to all kinds of disruption and disorder that hysteria can produce” (See Gatens 1996, 54). The committee that

made this statement was vested with the task of policing the health and safety of revolutionary France's emerging social body. According to Carol Smart, it was a similar social engineering impulse combined with a similar perception of women as social threats – i.e.: as “inherently unstable because of [their] menstrual cycles and reproductive capacities” - that underpinned a surge of legislative activity in late nineteenth century Victorian England designed to regulate women's sexual and reproductive behaviour (1992, 13). The significance accorded to the institution of marriage at this time largely lay in its ability to contain women's unruliness such that while an unmarried mother was believed to be a threat both to child and the larger social order, “[t]he married mother...existed within a restrictive system of tutelage which gave her husband almost complete governance over her should she become a threat” (Smart 1992, 24). In this way, any problem the married woman posed was contained within the household; patriarchal authority within the home was necessary for the health of the larger body politic (Smart 1992, 24).

If we fast forward to the 1980s and examine the American anti-nuclear movement, the picture may not have drastically changed. Consider the story Gusterson relates that was told to him by a nuclear weapons scientist's wife:

After feeling uneasy about her husband's work for many years, she decided in the 1980s to attend a protest at the laboratory gates, where she was clearly made visible to many of her husband's colleagues as they arrived for work. Inside the laboratory her husband was apprehensively watching the protest with his supervisor on closed-circuit television when the camera showed his wife at the front of the crowd. His supervisor turned to him and asked, “Isn't that your wife? Can't you keep her under control?” (1998, 214)

Clearly, the actions of the women protesters signified a refusal to be contained and a challenge to patriarchal authority and sovereign reason.

As Bordo has noted, at the level of individual psychology, the retreat from language in addition to the nervous tremors, faints, and crying spells associated with nineteenth century medically documented cases of hysteria is both regressive and expressive as a hyper-literal, caricatured presentation of femininity: “The bodies of disordered women in this way offer themselves as an aggressively graphic text for the interpreter – a text that insists, actually demands, it be read as a cultural statement, a statement about gender” (1989, 16-17). The female hysteric says with her body what cannot be said within the dominant discourse as it exists outside the “knowledgeable practice of power” itself (Ashley and Walker 1990, 262) – in this case a regime of truth that delimits who can speak about nuclear weapons and what can be said. Hence, Bordo argues that such pathology ought to be read as a form of embodied protest, one that mocks culture and reason even as it colludes with the gendered system of meaning that it so vehemently and painstakingly protests (Bordo 1989, 20). Seen this way, the strategic occupation of hysterical motherhood can be conceived as both a refusal to limit oneself to one's assigned place in the body politic and a usurpation “of women's traditional place as mother and as Other” in order to break the rules (Harris and King 1989, 2) – a gesture that simultaneously signals protest and retreat (Bordo 1989, 21).

The Politics of the Hysterical Body: The Threat of Social Contagion and Other Unruly Affects

Rather than addressing the question of “why?” or the socio-political conditions that precipitated women's vast participation in the antinuclear movement under the banner of motherhood, the point of departure for this paper is to interrogate the protesting female body in

and of itself. As Bordo has noted, “For whatever the objective social conditions are that ‘produce’ a pathology [like hysterical motherhood], the symptoms themselves must still be produced (however unconsciously or inadvertently) by the subject” (Bordo 1989, 22). A focus on the symptoms, as opposed to the sociopolitical conditions underlying the motivations and consciousness of the female protesters, requires us to move beyond the essentialist and instrumental accounts of the body that have come to predominate explanations of women’s actions in the antinuclear movement. This paper will elaborate an altogether different account of the body – suggesting that the body is productive of meaning and communicative in ways that may disrupt or exceed our intentions and control. But before doing so, it will briefly outline the essentialist and instrumental accounts of the antinuclear protesters that it is differentiating itself against.

Those accounts associated with spiritual or cosmic feminism may be described as essentialist. As Kathy Ferguson explains, spiritual and cosmic feminists tend to view women’s public displays of emotion in terms of “the real” – i.e.: in terms of women’s return to a pre-discursive realm conceived as a realm of pure emotion and authentic knowledge that exists prior to language and that exists, symbolically at least, as prior to Man (1993, 101-111). Ynestra King describes the politics that emerges from this – indeed, the politics that emerged during the antinuclear movement – as “libidinal”:

It is the very lifelessness of [the bureaucracy and “the world of men”] that threatens the continuation of life on the planet... This libidinal politics – by which I mean the spontaneous emergence of a love of life into the public arena is... an attempt to devise a formula for connecting human beings with what is most deeply feeling and most deeply alive in themselves... Libidinal politics assumes that if people actually knew these parts of themselves, they would transform the social and economic structures that oppress human beings and are killing the planet. (King 1989, 282)

The body, in these accounts, is conceptualized as “a site of ‘authentic’ human experience beyond the... reach of societal manipulation” (Umansky 1996, 23). A return to the body, it was thought, enabled woman to get back in touch with her deepest emotions, her truest self, and to, quite literally, access a potentially disruptive body of knowledge that had been subsumed within the language of culture and reason.

However, some feminists have questioned the wisdom of resurrecting this historical figure of peaceful, nurturing, life-sustaining “woman” at “a time of declining radical feminist activity and increasing rightwing backlash,” arguing that the “particular resurgence of women’s activism... was a return to the doctrine of ‘Woman as Mother’ cloaked in feminist garments” (Lederman 1989, 245). Concerned about a movement premised on gender binaries and equally concerned about belittling a movement that energized such large numbers of women, some scholar activists sought a more instrumental account of women’s bodies. This account highlighted the promise of a movement capable of bringing together traditional notions of femininity and radical feminist politics without a return to essentialism: “Can the old idea of female specialness and the newer idea of feminist outlook forged in social oppression join in a movement? And just how?” (Snitow 1989, 35) The answer seemed to be by focusing on the strategic purposes to which dramatic enactments of motherhood might be put while tempering any notion of a direct correspondence between women’s *inner* selves and their public manifestations of hysterical motherhood. This demanded re-envisioning a resurgent essentialism

as a strategic move and incorporating it as part and parcel of a radical and militant feminist politics:

The militance and creativity of women's peace movements, as exemplified by the encampments at Greenham Common and Seneca, force a rethinking of theory as political strategy akin to civil disobedience and guerilla theater... [a] practice that seeks to undermine conventional authority and hierarchy. Sometimes this leads to conscious and subversive use of women's traditional place as mother and as Other, the outsider, the person at the margins of power. (Harris and King 1989, 2)

The emphasis was on women's "conscious," intentional, and "ironic" use of maternalist rhetoric and imagery – a positive outcome, it was believed, of the mutually beneficial influence of feminist theory and feminine practice (Harris and King 1989, 3; see also Snitow 1989).

Unlike essentialist accounts in which the female body was the message and the text, in more instrumental accounts the body performed or delivered the text. In both accounts the body is essentially passive. In the first case, it is a deep reservoir of knowledge and emotion that the speaking self can choose to embrace or ignore. In the latter case, the body is essentially a vehicle and significant in terms of how it is used and the messages it utters and projects. Either way, it is essentially expressive – an expression of one's true inner person or one's will such that one may perform oneself differently at different times, "strategically" even if the occasion demands, without foregoing the notion of a real and abiding self.

This paper will elaborate a radically different account, one in which the body is itself constitutive of the subject or self it is said to express. This is what Butler means when she says that the body does not just perform; it is performative. The self does not precede its bodily enactment and its utterances (Butler 1990, 1999a, and 2003). Further, there is no "real" to measure one's performance of oneself against. As Butler explains, identity is itself a fabrication, elaborated and made real through one's performance of it:

[While] coherence is desired, wished for, idealized...this idealization is an effect of a corporeal signification. In other words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (1999a, 417)

This performative account of the body has a variety of implications that are relevant if we want to understand the particular symptomology of hysterical motherhood.

First, it complicates the instrumentalism of strategic essentialism and similar accounts that describe the performances of antinuclear protesters as "ironic," as these rely upon a rupture between identity and conscious intent (Beasley and Bacchi 2000, 344; Sasson-Levy and Rapoport 2003, 381). Interestingly, while Kathy Ferguson's analysis of cosmic feminism made a point of noting the suggestion that the "bewitchment rituals" and other audacious activities of the protesters were undertaken with "tongues firmly in their cheeks," her own recollections belie this notion of irony (1993, 113):

[Contrary to suggestion]...My own brief experience with cosmic rituals during a visit to Seneca Falls Women's Encampment for a Future of Peace and Justice in August, 1985, was somewhat different; my impression was that most of the women either believed wholeheartedly in the incantations or else were rather embarrassed by them, but I detected little irony. Perhaps I didn't know how to look.... (1993, 205)

Of course, questioning the characterization women's consciousness as ironic need not imply that a direct and stable correspondence exists between performance and identity.

Butler's performative account of the body suggests the linkages are far more dynamic, significantly complicating not only instrumentalism, but also essentialist and standpoint accounts. Understanding subjectivity as embodied is to ask how it is that the body itself fabricates, re-affirms, and, at times, disrupts stable notions of identity - generally working to enable, but occasionally making difficult, a seamless repetition of the self. Says Peter Digereser, elaborating upon the work of Butler, "Whatever sense of givenness or facticity we may possess about our bodies is a matter of historically sedimented practices and performances" (1994, 656; see also Butler 2003, 419-420). In addition to our gestures and actions, this includes the narratives we create to join together seemingly incongruous performances and potentially disruptive bodily events - such that rather than disintegrating, the "I" may be continuously re-affirmed in speech and other citational practices (Butler 1999b, 236). In the case of the antinuclear movement, a performative account of the body would suggest that the enactment of hysterical motherhood did not simply emerge from women's *a priori* experiences, subjugated knowledges, and identities, but were also, and quite significantly, productive of them.

The final point taken from Butler is that bodies are essentially communicative in that they perform for an audience the imagined interiority of the actor - whether male or female, rap star or soldier, mother or female athlete. Moreover, bodies do not just transmit messages and images of the self, but are, in themselves, productive of identity and social meaning. Butler describes the body as "an active process of embodying certain cultural and historic possibilities" (2003, 416). One's performance of one's body is therefore always a social and communicative act. Butler argues that the fabrication of one's self is made possible and sustained through a process of repetition or a "reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (1999a, 420). Yet, the very instability inherent in the demand of constant and continuous repetition means that any incongruous practice or incongruous experience of a reiterative practice offers the possibility that identity and social meaning can be produced anew. As Butler explains, the failure to repeat may put the self or any aspect of one's socially performed identity into "a potentially productive crisis" (1999b, 239; see also 1999a, 421) - of the sort that "I" may never be able to be myself again. But, far from mourning this loss, for Butler this is where "the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found": "in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction" (1999a, 421).

Agency for Butler, therefore, can be realized to the extent that we can re-enact, re-experience, and, to a certain extent, re-invent the self at the level of the body. Of course, this is not tantamount to a simple refusal to play one's part - i.e.: the outcome of a radical will or a return to a radical notion of a prediscursive self. As Digereser explains, "[a general refusal] would presuppose the very conception of the self that Butler's genealogical position precludes" (1994, 659). But, within a specific terrain where pre-established meanings, significations, and

discursive practices both enable and constrain any performance of the self, there is always room for maneuverability in terms of interpretation and personal/political aesthetics. Partial refusals occur all the time and offer a multitude of political possibilities. With regards to gender, Butler advises us to “consider gender...as a corporeal style, an ‘act’...which is both intentional and performative, where ‘performative’ suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning” (1999a, 419-420). Certainly, “hysterical motherhood” should be understood as just such an “act” – a refusal, yes, but not merely the product of a pre-given and abiding gendered self. Instead the act or enactment of hysterical motherhood should be understood as both purposive political performance and performative – productive of social meaning and constitutive of the gendered woman performing it.

The question, to go back to where the paper began, is “to what effect?” Unlike essentialist and instrumental accounts, which have tended to celebrate women’s refusal to remain contained, Butler’s analysis raises questions about whether or not women’s ‘liberation’ can be achieved through the celebration of a gendered identity (conceived strategically or otherwise): “It is one thing to use the term [woman] and know its ontological insufficiency and quite another to articulate a normative vision for feminist theory which celebrates or emancipates an essence, a nature, or a shared reality which cannot be found” (2003, 424). Certainly, a number of black feminists challenged the vision of shared reality advanced by white antinuclear activists as common to all women as real or potential mothers (Umansky 1996; see also Chandler 1989). But, Butler rather uniquely challenged the very viability of any binary notion of gender identity as a basis for feminist politics and, in so doing, redefined for many what may or may not count as subversive feminist politics.

Indeed, in the place of feminism’s reliance on a natural, given identity as a rallying point for political action, Butler suggests that a coalitional politics could (should) be developed out of a “parodic proliferation” of gender acts which mocks the facticity and presumed correspondence of sex, sexuality and gender (Digeser 1994, 659-660; see also Butler 1990). The concern of this paper is that Butler’s vision sets up a somewhat static (and intellectually limiting) divide between what constitutes a progressive (i.e.: subversive) versus non-progressive feminist politics. The objection of this paper is that even seemingly ‘progressive’ practices which aim to transgress gender norms are neither independent of societal power structures, nor are they unproblematic in terms of the new normativities they set up or the signs and systems of representation they employ for political effect. As is the case with hysterical bodies and anorexics, who seemingly embrace (even exceed) gender norms, Victoria Pitts argues that gay, lesbian, and transgendered body modifiers, who visibly repudiate such norms, are similarly engaged in “an embodied ‘battle’” in which the relationship between power and resistance is not one of dichotomy, but continuous struggle (2000, 447). Expressed by Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick, “Performativity is the process of becoming – ‘kinda subversive and kinda hegemonic’... – that is the very condition of embodiment” (1999, 414). This is the frame in which this paper will read the enactment of hysterical motherhood – as both subversive and hegemonic (neither just one or the other, but always and necessarily a bit of both).

This moves us beyond the debate about the merits of women’s identity politics and a framework of analysis that would have us decide the good and bad of hysterical motherhood prior to studying the power relations that inhere in its points of application. Following Foucault, this paper defines power as a relationship and power relations as a type of inter-action (Castellani 1999, 253-254). As Foucault explains, power is not so much a confrontation between two

individuals with opposed interests, identities, and wills as it is “a question of government” or a form of management that aims to structure the field of possibilities available to other actors:

It operates on the field of possibilities in which the behaviour of active subjects is able to inscribe itself. It is a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; it releases or contrives, makes more probable or less... (1994, 138)

The individual is not exogenous to power relations and thus does not submit to power, willingly or otherwise in the Foucauldian sense. The individual is itself “the product of a relation of power” (Foucault 1980, 74). To investigate the subversive potential of hysterical motherhood at its points of application is therefore to investigate it at the level of inter-action whereupon struggle is ongoing; identities are in motion; and performances and practices may be sedimented, re-negotiated, *or* disrupted during the course of their operation.

For the remainder of this paper it is the relational and non-static aspects of identity that will be the focus of investigation. Taking the relational and inter-subjective aspects of identity seriously means that the power relation between *hysterical mothers*, on the one hand, and the weapons scientists, defense planners, and Reagan administration, on the other hand, cannot be determined as static or judged in advance. It seems this tendency to reify the power relation between the two sides is a real, if unintended, consequence of Butler’s analysis. One of the critiques of Butler, raised by Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi, is that Butler’s analytics of power “remain[s] largely limited to the social/cultural construction of a particular bodily subject in relation to [the binary linguistic construction of] gender/sexual difference”(2000, 347). Thus, subjects are created in relation to and through their negotiation with textual signs and signifiers that demarcate and delimit male and female traits and characteristics. Ian Burkitt elaborates: “[Butler] claims her analysis is a relational one because the categories of ‘female’ and ‘woman’, ‘gain their troubled signification only as relational terms” (1998, 489-490). The problem Burkitt identifies is that this relational analysis “concentrates solely on the relations between signifiers” (1998, 490). As Beasley and Bacchi point out, it does not focus enough on “inter-subject relations” or “interactions between [male and female] bodies”; nor does it investigate the “social space” in which these interactions take place (2000, 347).

These critiques in addition to Foucault’s relational and inter-active conceptualization of power enable a more dynamic, inter-subjective account of power relations between fleshy, communicative, and mobile bodies that differentially inhabit and manipulate socio-material space. The spatial dimension of power relations, so important to Foucault, is under-analyzed in Butler even though social relations and practices get constituted within and constitute social space in ways that Burkitt suggests “need not be fully elaborated in language, nor exhausted by the study of linguistic forms” (1998, 491). Beasley and Bacchi emphasize the need for a more relational account of identity and a more inter-subjective account of power relations: “Bodily materiality is after all produced and lived precisely in relation to other bodies” (2000, 347). A performative account of hysterical motherhood that analyzes women’s sociality in terms of the materialization of power’s operations on and through the female body, but does so largely in isolation from the interactions between male and female bodies, cannot fully consider the strategies and tactics continuously at play in inter-subjective relations. Such an account thereby circumscribes our conceptualization of the social, the political, and even what can be thought in terms of the subversive potential of the antinuclear movement and embodied subjectivity (Beasley and Bacchi 2000, 347-348).

What this paper is advancing, therefore, is a performative account of hysterical motherhood that considers the identities of the female antinuclear protesters and their spectators (particularly white, middle-class males) in relation and, hence, as continuously contested, renegotiated, and always in formation. Drawing upon Butler, this embodied battle must be analyzed not just in terms of its *effects* on individuals and the social body preconceived, but also in terms of its long-term consequences at the level of *affect* – i.e.: its ability to re-organize the very bodies and identities thought to constitute the body politic. But, moving away from Butler, drawing upon her critics and the work of Foucault, this paper argues that if we don't consider fully the inter-subjective aspects of identity formation and the various relational and spatial aspects of power, we may over-emphasize the way in which women's identity politics congeal meaning, identity, and experience, thereby re-ifying gender binaries. We may miss the potential fluidity of identity as it is negotiated in relation - symbolically, textually, dialogically, and spatially – between two or more embodied actors. Thus, the argument is that the embodied form of protest that I am calling “hysterical motherhood” was a communicative action – a “tactic” or an “act” (in the Butlerian sense), but one that acted upon the actions of men. It was both an act and an inter-action that structured the field of the possible – re-organizing the “I” that was woman, but doing so in a way that also brought into question the naturalized and sedimented performances of men. It is to the final elaboration and application of this argument that this paper now turns.

Reversing the Gaze: Hysterical Motherhood as an Embodied Tactic

As a symbolic act, what has been noteworthy about the antinuclear movement, is the very vibrant and exaggerated – some might say ‘spectacular’ – visual contrasts it created to juxtapose the feminine from the masculine. Whether it be the dramatic displays of emotion; the brightly coloured scarves, fabric arts, and yarn that female participants from The Ribbon and Women's Pentagon Action used to encircle the Pentagon; or the “banners, dolls, children's photographs, quilts, christening dress, lovers' photos” that women from Seneca Women's Peace Encampment used to decorate the military steel mesh fence that separated them from the military depot, at the symbolic level an insurrection was undeniably taking place (Paley 1989, 220; see also Pershing 1993). The expressive, the domestic, and the personal associated with the world of women was counterpoised to the estrangement, uniformity, and anonymity associated with world of men such that the former became identified with vibrancy, creativity, and life, and the latter with inflexible power structures, inertia, and death (Pershing 1993).

Women's bodies were employed to powerful effect in these symbolic contests. Their soft features, flowing dress, and colourful props - such as the “women-extenders” or scarves they held between them (Popkin and Delgado 1989, 193) – were juxtaposed to grey, concrete, and angular militarized zones. Although recognized by other scholars, these embodied actions have been assessed primarily as an appeal for dialogue and evaluated in terms of the message communicated to the spectators of this spectacle - which ostensibly included the specific male targets, curious onlookers, the media, and the public at large. The dialogical and inter-active nature of the power relation between spectator and spectacle has not yet been seriously investigated. If anything the stability of this power relation and the identities constituted within it – the identities of spectator and spectacle - have largely been presumed.

Identity itself, which is supposedly at the heart of the identity politics debates, has rarely been the object of investigation in studies of the antinuclear movement. Gusterson's ethnographic study (1998) - that asks questions about the disciplinary practices at work in the sedimented performances of nuclear weapons scientists and, to a lesser extent, the antinuclear

movement – is an important exception. But even Gusterson does not think through the instability of the panoptic gaze which constitutes and reconstitutes the relational identity between spectator (weapons scientist) and spectacle (protester). What makes this odd is that it is this very instability that has turned his ethnographic gaze onto the nuclear weapons scientist, reconstituting the scientist as spectacle, thereby revealing the very fluidity of that identity. As discussed earlier, Gusterson only expresses the incredulity the weapons scientists must have felt when trying to go about their daily work only to “find their lives suddenly invaded” by the spectacular imagery and over-the-top performances of the antinuclear protesters (1998, 171). But, surely this example raises the question: in this exchange, in this particular inter-action, between weapons scientist and protester, who was watching whom? In this particular moment, can we clearly unambiguously differentiate between the spectator and the spectacle? The answer I think is “No” and this brings us to another relatively under-analyzed, albeit very related, aspect of Foucault’s work – the inherent instability and democratic potential of the panoptic gaze. It also brings us back to this paper’s central argument and conceptualization of hysterical motherhood as a tactic. Throughout the antinuclear movement, the relationship between spectator and spectacle was always somewhat fluid and the subversive potential of hysterical motherhood as a tactic lay largely in its ability to redirect the societal gaze from the bodies of women to the bodies and practices of militarized men.

This tactic worked precisely because, like all identities, the identity underpinning the enactment of hysterical motherhood only ever existed in relation. Although not conceptualized in terms of the inter-active nature of identity, Amy Snitow makes this point: many of the female antinuclear protesters “enacted an exaggerated Nurturant Mother in order to draw attention to its usually invisible counterpart, a Deadly Dad” (1989, 36). To this extent, the success of the antinuclear movement ultimately depended on the male or masculinized actors with whom it shared a stage. Some of these actors, however, only existed in the figurative sense – as representations of the *real*. This was the case with *The Sovereign*, the figurative embodiment of the executive and patriarchal power of the state, whose spectacular power and murderous tendencies - relics of a pre-modern age - were made manifest in the enactment of hysterical motherhood and in the pictures, lectures, pamphlets, and films that described the physical effects of a nuclear blast on the human body (Gusterson 1998, 197-204). These visual mediums inspired feelings of terror associated with The Bomb such that the unchecked murderous potential of sovereign power could be revealed for all to see as a resurgent, albeit illegitimate, presence in the modern age.

Mothers were at the forefront of efforts to make this sovereign specter real again in people’s day to day lives so that its presence could be contested. They were joined by Physicians for Social Responsibility, Social Workers for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament, the Union of Concerned Psychoanalysts and Psychotherapists, and others who were uniquely charged with securing the health and well-being of the body-politic – responsibilities that were supposed to be shared with the modern state. This alliance tried to portray the logic of deterrence and Reagan’s particular vision of securing and revitalizing the American body-politic through nuclear Armageddon as quite simply “MAD.” Towards this end, the gaze was re-directed towards the psyches of actual men and an association was established between the murderous tendencies of the state and the psychological pathologies of men in power. Actual and quasi-psychological assessments depicting an immature male psyche “acting out” feelings of sexual inadequacy gained ascendance in the antinuclear movement and throughout popular culture (Caldicott 1986; Dinnerstein 1977). In her book, *Missile Envy: The Arms Race and*

Nuclear War, Caldicott explains, “The hideous weapons of mass genocide may be symptoms of several male emotions, reflecting inadequate sexuality, a need to continually prove virility, and a primitive fascination with killing” (1986, 239). As a result, “psychic numbing,” “denial,” and “technostrategic discourse” were increasingly identified as the *real* problem - such that scientists, doctors, psychologists, mothers, and feminists were often in firm agreement that emotionalism was not clouding the nuclear deterrence debate, but was allowing the threat to be viewed in more “accurate” terms (Caldicott 1986, 248-249; Cohn 1989; Ehrlich 1983). As seen through the feminized gaze, disembodied rationality began to appear “more masculine than rational” (Gusterson 1998, 221).

This begs the question: who exactly were *these men* that were plotting and rationalizing nuclear war and how was a man supposed to relate to *them* and to *himself* if his own reflection was being partly cast through a feminized gaze? In December of 1983, 40,000 British women converged at Greenham Common (to protest NATO’s decision to position cruise missiles there), holding up mirrors in a symbolic attempt to turn the gaze of the soldiers guarding the perimeter back onto themselves (Beck; Pershing 1993). While American protesters may not have employed this particular tactic, parallel cases, illustrative of the multiple levels of gazing, abound – some of which will be recounted here. It will also be suggested that acts of encircling and surrounding men and masculine symbols were not merely symbolic acts, but were inter-active in a much more direct and immediate sense, with affects not only at the level of cognition, but also at the level of the body. Because these acts worked not so much to repress, but to re-structure the possibilities of thought and practice available to individual bodies, they had the potential to performatively re-organize the individual who was thought to exist prior to his/her bodily acts.

This is the constitutive affect of the gaze which exists *in* and *as* relation. It is a technique of power or, as Foucault explains, referring to Bentham’s panopticon, “a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation” (1995, 201). But, it is one that Foucault notes is potentially democratic, and thus unstable, as at any time anyone can “come and observe any of the observers” (1995, 207). Kevin Goddard (2000) and Alexandra Murphy (2003) have argued that it is misleading to interpret the gaze in monolithic or necessarily hierarchical terms. In part, their argument is that even those who seemingly submit to the gaze of the other – such as strippers or, in this case, hysterical mothers - can use that submission “as a form of power in itself” (Goddard 2000, 2; Murphy 2003). To understand this is to understand the fluidity of the gaze: “The gaze is then not something absolute and monolithic – establishing a final identity – but becomes a fluid means of currency between roles whose form changes...” (Goddard 2000, 2). In any event and in any text (including this one), there are “multiple levels of gazing” occurring:

Object and subject of the gaze are in a binary relationship – to some extent even depend on each other for their identity. No gaze is, therefore, a gaze in isolation, and every gaze is as much a gaze at the self as it is a gaze at another / an other. (2000, 7)

Certainly, this was the case in the example given earlier of the nuclear weapons scientists, *inside* of the weapons lab, *looking out* at the antinuclear protesters, while the protesters stood *outside*, *looking in*.

An even more poignant example is the story recounted by a woman involved in Women’s Pentagon Action:

[W]omen [staged outside the Pentagon entrance] spontaneously began to chant, “Shame, shame, shame,” shaking their fists and raging at the Pentagon officials

gathered at the entrance and looking down from their windows. As the woman chanted and drummed a woman emerged from the Pentagon. She had quit her job as secretary to join the action. She had said she had seen many demonstrations before, but none had spoken to her in the way this did. (King 1989, 288)

This particularly dramatic moment in many ways typifies what this paper argues was an ongoing by-product of the antinuclear movement. Identities arguably were being negotiated continuously and *in* relation: hysterical mothers in relation to deadly dads in relation to curious onlookers...and so on and back again in various directions.

The societal gaze, if *one* can be said to exist, took in all of this – occupying all three gazes at various times. Regardless of what one thought about the enactment of hysterical motherhood, tactically it was effective to the extent that it re-cast the societal gaze and re-cast the identity and sedimented performances of men as a question. When the societal gaze corresponded to the gaze of the antinuclear protesters, hysterical motherhood was effective. For this to happen, the antinuclear movement needed men to perform the very masculinity that it reviled. Female antinuclear protesters needed their Others: they needed their diagrams, their technostrategic discourse, their dispassionate defense of M.A.D., and their depictions of the weapons and their effects in terms of “missile erector[s], thrust-to-weight ratio[s], soft laydown[s] and deep penetration” (Caldicott 1986, 239; see also Gusterson 1998, 211).

It is perhaps not surprising then that particularly absurd manifestations of hysterical motherhood and acts of civil disobedience often went hand in hand. Both elicited, even demanded, responses – often from these very men. Women involved in Women’s Pentagon Action, for example, used balls of string and yarn in order “to weave a net over the door of the Pentagon” while other women used their bodies to occupy the Pentagon stairs such that, according to one first-hand account, “the military brass who were coming and going had to sometimes step over the women” (Linton and Whitham 1989, 182). A particularly evocative image, of a military official stepping over the head of a woman lying across the Pentagon steps, was captured in a picture that appeared in the New York Times and other newspapers (Linton and Whitham 1989, 182). Also evocative was the practice whereby female protesters faced with arrests would make their bodies go limp such that police would be seen dragging the bodies of white, middle class women – the real and symbolic *mothers of the nation*, who ostensibly the state’s security policies were designed to protect (Gusterson 1998, 215-216; Linton and Whitham 1989, 183).

Needless to say, this produced some dissonance not just for larger society, but for the individual men who had to negotiate these situations. Recalls one woman who, along with others, climbed the fence of the Seneca Army Depot, “We were carted off by young soldiers – many of them black and Hispanic – all of them perplexed, most of them quite kind” (Linton and Whitham 1989, 182). In other instances of civil disobedience, the police refused to be baited and just stood by as protesters persistently sought to provoke arrest. Often in these situations, the women had to negotiate arrests with police so that the face of sovereign power could be revealed and the stand-off could end (Linton and Whitham 1989, 182-183; Gusterson 1998). In this way, state repression and enhanced militarization could somewhat ironically be deemed a success. Amy Lederman, for example, recounts the “undeniable impact” of the Seneca Falls Peace Encampment:

In upstate New York, Seneca Army Depot no longer looked like the friendly base next door. Tall fences, new guard towers, shiny rolls of razor wire, and

bothersome low-flying surveillance helicopters proclaimed it to be what it is, the key East Coast transshipment point for nuclear weapons and storage place for the neutron bomb and Pershing IIs. (1989, 225)

This statement she made proudly, despite noting that after the Peace Camp “folded,” the U.S. government’s preparations for a first strike were still on course.

Conclusion:

Thus, it could be said that as a result of the antinuclear movement nothing changed. As Gusterson pointed out, the protests faded, but the weapons labs remained (1998, 227). On the other hand, as a New York Times reporter surmised, it did lead President Reagan “to soften his longtime opposition to arms control talks and [inspired] him to offer several sweeping proposals to negotiate sharp reductions in nuclear arsenals with the Soviet Union” (Butterfield 1982). Significantly, the United States has never again been poised on the brink of nuclear war; administration officials no longer publicly muse about the possibility of “limited” nuclear war. While the United States has retained its *super-power capacity* to initiate and ‘win’ a nuclear war, what has arguably changed is that its identity as a *reasonable* and *mature* super-power has since largely resided in its ability to demonstrate restraint – i.e.: to demonstrate that it will not recklessly or casually consider nuclear weapons as a legitimate tool of war.

To this extent, the enactment of hysterical motherhood re-structured the field of possibilities in which statecraft or the performative acts of the state occurred and it did this largely by acting upon the actions of individual men. By directing attention to themselves, hysterical mothers also drew societal attention to those with who they existed in a reciprocal relation – the weapons scientists, military analysts, and weapons builders. Under the societal gaze, these men had to re-negotiate their identities in relation - affectively altering what *reasonable* men could think, do, and say. Like all forms of governance, the feminine gaze both constrained and enabled – making it hard for *men to be men* by rendering the ritualized performances of militarized men disturbing and making new enactments possible such that what it meant to be a man could change.

Of course, this paper is not suggesting that this occurred in a linear, straightforward fashion or that all men similarly reacted to the feminine gaze. Women were also the objects of the male gaze – often in hateful ways. Gusterson pointed out that many of the nuclear weapons scientists reviled their anti-intellectualism, describing the protesters as having “a lot of hysteria but not a lot of solid thinking behind them” (1998, 204). Other men tried to delegitimize the merits of their protest - calling them “lesbian communist bitches” or attacking their right to speak as mothers when they had purportedly *abandoned* their families to engage in protest action (Pershing 1993, 75).¹ Through remarks and accusations like these, men attempted to throw back the disciplinary gaze in rather reactionary ways – re-inscribing what *good citizens, real women, and good mothers* could think, do, and say.

Nevertheless, the subversive potential of the hysterical enactment of motherhood lay in the ability of the protesters to introduce a certain degree of instability and fluidity in the societal gaze – such that these very men could become the objects of our investigation, appearing not only “reactionary,” but more generally strange, as those we differentiate ourselves against. The implications of this argument are many. First, it suggests that we have much to lose by trying to ascertain the good and bad of identity politics in advance of studying its socio-political effects at its points of application - on, in, and through the materialization of the body. Second, it suggests

¹ Also see Linton 1989, 239; Young 1990, 41-88; and Paley 1989, 220).

that embodiment itself is a negotiated resource, a tactical deployment, produced and re-produced during the course of inter-action with various societal scripts and other physical bodies. It is produced as part of a power relation and thus is both deeply personal and inherently political with both intended and unintended sociopolitical effects. Finally, this analysis suggests that the always potentially unruly body is not just a matter of security in the traditional sense – i.e.: the object of various personal and sociopolitical programs of containment and governance. The body is performative of security texts as well – rendering distinctions between identity practices (in terms of performance and performativity) and security practices (in terms of statecraft or the performative acts of states) tenuous at best and thereby rendering problematic the idea that state security practices can be understood primarily as the outcome of deliberating and talking heads.

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