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Between the Waves: Currents in Contemporary Feminist Thought

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With a continuing focus on liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and essentialism, one would be forgiven for thinking that feminist theory is unable to break free from the 'second wave'. This is not the case. This article reviews three books which take on these feminist issues and offer new readings on the questions at the heart of feminism. Each provides clear links to feminism of the past but also connects to present debate and makes suggestions for future directions for feminism. There is plenty of literature which bemoans the end of feminism and some which triumphantly hails our era as post-feminist: no longer in need of feminist theory. Contrary to such claims, each book tackles the problem of women's oppression from a different perspective, each presents different solutions and in so doing they demonstrate that feminism is alive and well.

Abbey, R. (2011) *The Return of Feminist Liberalism*. Durham: Acumen.

Weeks, K. (2011) *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Witt, C. (2011) *The Metaphysics of Gender*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Keywords: feminism; essentialism; liberal feminism; Marxist feminism; gender

The three books reviewed here engage with ideas rooted in earlier thinking (liberal feminism, Marxist feminism and essentialism), but they provide innovative critical perspectives and new types of evidence in an ongoing debate over issues which simply will not and should not go away. They advance feminist works of the late 1990s and early 2000s in rejecting and moving beyond the binary categorisations of equality/difference, sex/gender and public/private (see, e.g., Hutchings, 2003; Prokhovnik, 2002).

There is considerable debate over 'where feminism is at', especially in the literature dealing with key concerns of 'third wave feminists' (Budgeon, 2011; Gillis *et al.*, 2005). An apparent rupture between 'third and second wavers' (Siegel, 2007) is under debate, while Clare Hemmings (2005) provides a critique of how the overall history of feminism is represented. Both Deborah Siegel and Hemmings highlight the importance of the relationship between ongoing feminist concerns and earlier theories. A perennial problem for second wave feminism was the question of women's identity: should feminism treat women as a group? This approach was criticised for its tendency towards the exclusion of some women and for taking the experience of white, Western, middle-class women to be the common experience of all women. What then of the alternative approach – to treat women as individuals rather than as one group? This, a largely liberal feminist approach, was criticised for its abstraction of women from their real experience of everyday life, denying the significance of any particular identity and the possibility that different women will experience the same phenomenon differently. The question of women's identity has been visited in several interrelated forms in the second wave:

1 *essentialism* (a debate on whether or not women share common features by virtue of
2 being a woman), *intersectionality* (the argument that sex-based oppression does not occur
3 separately to or exclusively from other socially and culturally constructed categories such
4 as race or class) and the shifting focus from equality to difference (tackling inequality
5 requires respect for *difference and diversity* among women). These issues of identity remain
6 key themes for feminist theory. For Hemmings the story of feminism should not be the
7 story of one school of thought displacing another; rather we should draw links between
8 the common feminist features of these approaches and treat feminism 'as a series of
9 ongoing contests and relationships' (Hemmings, 2005, p. 131). That feminist theorising
10 is diverse and multifaceted should be seen as a good thing, and the three books discussed
11 here show that there are still important political issues which demand the attention of
12 feminists. In different ways, they demonstrate that political and social problems, and
13 responses to them, do not rise up out of a void, but are part of an ongoing conversation
14 with the feminist theory of the past, upon which may be built theories about the future.
15 Most of all, they either directly or indirectly refute the claims of 'post-feminism', the
16 notion that we somehow live in 'post-patriarchy' (Siegel, 2007, p. 126). In other words,
17 they demonstrate that we still need feminist theory. More specifically, we need feminist
18 theory to deal with its own problems – problems of which we are well aware, especially
19 feminism's (in) ability to engage with the social and political oppression of *all* women.
20 While it is not particularly useful to categorise feminist writing as either reformist or
21 revolutionary, a dualism which, for example, Weeks (2011, p. 228) rejects, the books
22 under consideration here do draw on both reformist and revolutionary ideas. However,
23 they are much more than that; they are works which are actively concerned with
24 processes of re-conceptualisation.

25 26 **The Metaphysics of Gender**

27 Charlotte Witt's argument in *The Metaphysics of Gender* is complex, but may be sum-
28 marised as the claim that the social roles we occupy are unified by gender, gender is the
29 function that organises our social roles, and gender is 'uniessential'. Witt enters the highly
30 contested debate on essentialism with this book and she does so with a notion of
31 essentialism taken from Aristotle. Gender (a function) is uniessential (a functional prop-
32 erty) to social individuals (an entity) – what makes us who we are, as social individuals,
33 is gender. Therefore, we have a number of social roles which we inhabit, often at the
34 same time (e.g. parent, professional, friend), and these are united by one function: gender.
35 Gender is a social norm and, as such, it unites the social roles we occupy and conditions
36 our practical agency: the expectations and obligations which arise from our gender trump
37 all others. This approach to essentialism is not the same as 'traditional' feminist debates on
38 the subject. Alison Stone notes that arguments about essentialism have taken either a
39 'natural' or a socially constructed view of women 'whereby a particular pattern of social
40 construction is essential and universal to all women' (Stone, 2007, p. 27, note 5). Both
41 views came to be criticised because both ascribed 'necessary and common characteristics
42 to all women' (Stone, 2007, p. 18). So essentialism in feminist theory has been concerned
43 with a highly problematic search for some feature which all women share. However,
44 Witt's concern is different; she aims to explore the metaphysics of essentialism. Her

1 analysis demonstrates how gender norms are constituted, how our social roles are
2 gendered in a variety of ways.

3 Our social positions depend on social recognition and this varies depending on both
4 cultural and historical contexts (Witt, 2011, pp. 29–30). Witt argues that an individual is
5 both responsive to, and evaluable under, a social norm. In being responsive, the indi-
6 vidual (self-consciously or not) calibrates their behaviour according to a social norm: even
7 when reacting against a norm, an individual can be understood to be responsive to it
8 (Witt, 2011, pp. 31–2). Witt's account of social normativity is ascriptivist in that an
9 individual is evaluated by social norms regardless of whether or not she identifies with
10 them: even an individual who rebels against her social position is as responsive to, and
11 evaluable under, that identity as is the individual who complies with it (Witt, 2011, p.
12 43). Witt argues that the account of ascriptivism is valuable to feminist theory for two
13 reasons: (1) it explains why women appear subject to social norms regardless of whether
14 or not they endorse them; and (2) feminist criticism should be directed against the norms
15 themselves and 'restrictive social positions' (Witt, 2011, p. 47).

16 Witt separates the social individual from persons and from human organisms (together,
17 these three form the self). Social individuals occupy a social position; in fact, we tend
18 to occupy numerous social positions and we are all subject to the norms that go with
19 these. Persons are individuals with a first-person perspective (they are self-conscious, can
20 think for themselves) and 'a necessary condition for the possibility of autonomy' (Witt,
21 2011, p. 54). Social individuals exist in the social world, but persons do not need a social
22 world in order to exist (Witt, 2011, p. 56). The term 'human organism' refers to
23 membership of the human species. The distinction between persons and social individ-
24 uals is difficult to grasp and appears to rely on Witt's ascriptivist account of social
25 normativity: identity is fixed by social position: it can be chosen, embraced, or it can be
26 thrust upon us, and we merely react to it (Witt, 2011, p. 63). Breaking down the self
27 into three parts appears conceptually difficult and is, perhaps, unnecessary as the three are
28 ineluctably linked and despite the capacity for self-reflection, the individual is a self who
29 occupies a social position that is not of her choosing but which is ascribed to her by her
30 culture or society (Witt, 2011, p. 126). The functions of a person are curtailed by those
31 of the social individual. Critical reflection – the ability to think for ourselves – can be
32 limited by our social location because gender essentialism is a social phenomenon and it
33 takes place at the level of the social individual. For Witt, essentialism is not biological
34 (at the level of organisms) because gender is a social construct and the liberal focus on
35 our capacity for self-reflection (at the level of persons) does not rescue the self from
36 essentialism because persons are not gendered – social individuals are (Witt, 2011, p. 58).
37 This is a very brief discussion and Witt appears to feel it is sufficient to explain her
38 notion of gender as being a distinctly social phenomenon. Witt does not fully engage
39 with important thinkers in this debate. For example, on Witt's account identity is
40 experienced by social individuals but seemingly chosen by persons. On this point
41 engagement with some of the literature on gender and agency such as Butler's theory
42 of gender as performance would have been useful (Butler, 1990; Lloyd, 2007). As it is,
43 Butler's work gets only two brief mentions (on pp. 8 and 35). Witt acknowledges de
44 Beauvoir's work ([1949]1997) on the social positions of men and of women, but does

1 not go into any detail (Witt, 2011, p. 42). Witt's feminist argument appears to amount
2 to the claim she makes on page 47 – that feminist criticism should be directed towards
3 oppressive social norms – but she does not explain at any length how uniessentialism
4 does this work.

5 Witt argues that the social role which unifies us is gender and not race. She conceives
6 the unifying social role, or the 'mega social role', as that which organises 'fundamental
7 social functions'. Our society is organised by patriarchy, and there 'are no fundamental
8 social functions organized by race; we can see this by noting that the existence of races
9 is variable: not all societies recognize racial differentiation, and not all of them recognize
10 the same racial categories' (Witt, 2011, p. 102). Gender norms can be inflected by race,
11 but gender is prior in its ability to define and to organise social roles. Witt argues that this
12 view can be compatible with the literature on intersectionality and gives the following
13 example: 'as Black feminists have noted, the issue of women in the workplace has an
14 entirely different set of norms for Black women than it does for Caucasian women'
15 (Witt, 2011, p. 101). However, this argument is rather brief and it fails to engage with
16 intersectionality's criticism that there is a need 'to account for lived experience at
17 neglected points of intersection – ones that tended to reflect multiple subordinate
18 locations as opposed to dominant or mixed locations' (McCall, 2005, p. 1780), and more
19 recent criticisms of what Mridula Nath Chakraborty calls 'hegemonic feminism'
20 (Chakraborty, 2007). The notion of a 'mega' social role seems incompatible with the
21 more nuanced accounts of intersectionality available.

22 While it may appear that Witt is covering some familiar territory, she does shine light
23 on the metaphysics of this territory. Even so, it would have been interesting to see more
24 engagement with some of the work on essentialism, and, most of all, Witt needed to do
25 more to defend her claim that gender is the 'mega' social role she says it is. Surely the
26 point of the intersectionality literature is that race is as significant as gender and certainly
27 that women experience oppression in different ways. Although the latter point might fit
28 with Witt's argument that, logically, women can experience oppression in different ways
29 even though it is also a common experience because of the engendering social norm, it
30 does not even skim the surface of the ways in which women oppress other women.
31 Witt's rejection of race as a mega social role and the discussion of essentialism in feminist
32 theory are both too cursory, and Ruth Abbey's approach to the literature on
33 intersectionality is much more thorough.

34 **The Return of Feminist Liberalism**

35 Ruth Abbey's book provides in-depth analyses of the work of three contemporary
36 feminists: Susan Moller Okin, Jean Hampton and Martha Nussbaum.¹ Abbey argues that
37 what unites these three thinkers is that their body of work operates within the parameters
38 of liberalism, with each thinker working towards a reconfiguration of liberalism, rather
39 than a rejection of it (Abbey, 2011, p. 4). Abbey acknowledges that, for each of her
40 chosen subjects, there are problems with using liberalism for feminist purposes but, rather
41 than reject liberalism because of its limitations, the goal of each thinker has been to
42 reconfigure liberalism in order to make it compatible with feminism. She approaches the
43 three authors' theories by analysing the ways in which Okin's work is used in that of
44

1 Hampton and Nussbaum. Abbey contrasts Okin's advocacy of shared meanings with the
2 universalism of liberalism. She argues that Hampton is an 'accidental contractarian' and
3 that the 'real normative and theoretical work is done by her Kantian belief in the intrinsic
4 worth of each person that should be respected in most human association' (Abbey,
5 2011, p. 3). With Nussbaum, Abbey examines the 'human capabilities approach' and
6 scrutinises 'the problem that adaptive preferences pose for Nussbaum's feminist liberalism'
7 (Abbey, 2011, p. 4). Abbey's review of feminist liberalism places Rawls at the centre of
8 liberalism because of Okin's emphasis on the family and the basic structure, Hampton's
9 contractarian and Kantian approach, and Nussbaum's political liberalism and capabilities
10 approach (Abbey, 2011, p. 5). The engagement of these feminists with the work of
11 Rawls can, according to Abbey, be understood as reciprocal: his work provides fertile
12 ground for rethinking feminist liberalism (in the diverse ways listed above) but, in
13 addition, these feminist criticisms of Rawls make a significant contribution to an assess-
14 ment of his work and its legacy (Abbey, 2011, p. 6).

15 Abbey appears to argue that feminist liberalism is making a *return* because although
16 liberalism has largely been dismissed by many feminists in recent decades, some have
17 continued to find valuable aspects in liberalism for feminism (Abbey, 2011, p. 2). Abbey
18 also notes a need for feminist theory to return to liberalism as it is, she argues, largely
19 liberal values which have enabled feminist success in practice, here she points to achieve-
20 ments such as increased access for women to the workplace, political institutions and
21 higher education (Abbey, 2011, pp. 7–8). Throughout, Abbey refers to 'feminist liber-
22 alism' rather than 'liberal feminism', and she provides three reasons for this. First, this is
23 because the thinkers to whom she refers approach feminism as 'an extension of their
24 liberalism' (Abbey, 2011, p. 8). Second, 'feminist liberalism' adopts a distinctly non-
25 masculine approach and seeks, for example, to apply 'liberal values across the public-
26 private divide' (Abbey, 2011, p. 9). Finally, emphasis on 'feminist liberalism' helps to
27 express the 'variety of forms contemporary liberalism takes' (Abbey, 2011, p. 9). Abbey
28 highlights a number of points of connection between Okin, Hampton and Nussbaum,
29 such as the demands they make of the state and their engagement with, and criticism of,
30 the public–private divide. Abbey highlights one particular area of interest addressed by all
31 three thinkers: diversity among women.

32 She reflects on the calls for equality made by Okin, Hampton and Nussbaum in the
33 form of justice, moral personhood and global justice, but she is also critical of the ways
34 in which these thinkers struggle to recognise differences among women in the pursuit of
35 equality. She questions the degree to which Okin's work engages with such differences,
36 and she argues that Okin should be more concerned with the literature on
37 intersectionality because it is concerned with 'women's self-interpretations' – the idea
38 that different women may experience the same phenomenon differently (Abbey, 2011, p.
39 98). Attention to women's self-interpretation fits with Okin's interest in using empirical
40 work (women's self-interpretation would appear to be a valuable resource), her use of
41 women's own experiences and understanding of their situation, and her Kantian insist-
42 ence that women be understood, by themselves and others, as ends in themselves (Abbey,
43 2011, pp. 100–1). Abbey also finds that Hampton's work is unable to deal satisfactorily
44 with the criticisms raised in the literature on intersectionality. She notes that Hampton's

1 analysis of rape is Kantian rather than feminist, which means that for Hampton the act
2 of rape is wrong because it ignores the right of the victim to be treated as a moral equal.
3 This does not take into account self-interpretations, ‘the meaning of rape can depend
4 on particular features of the perpetrator(s) and the recipient’ (Abbey, 2011, p. 138).
5 Hampton’s approach, Abbey argues, focuses on an abstract and universal argument that
6 inequality, discrimination and violence against women are wrong because they do not
7 respect the intrinsic worth of each human being (Abbey, 2011, p. 141).

8 Abbey finds Nussbaum guilty of making generalisations about women, or aggregating
9 women’s experiences (Abbey, 2011, p. 162). Although, in Nussbaum’s defence, Abbey
10 points out that Nussbaum ‘seems to make room for attention to women’s diverse
11 self-interpretations’ (Abbey, 2011, p. 164), she then cautions us to be aware of the
12 problem of adaptive preferences in Nussbaum’s work. Adaptive preferences arise from
13 situations in which women face limited options and respond by becoming ‘satisfied with,
14 and attached to, what they have or can achieve, so that their stated preferences reflect
15 their subordination and shrunken horizons’ (Abbey, 2011, p. 174). This is similar to the
16 problem Witt highlights – oppressive social positions can limit our capacity for self-
17 reflection. It is a problem for feminist liberalism because free choice is valuable for
18 liberals, but a feminist perspective also alerts us to the way oppression works to limit an
19 individual’s perception of what options are permitted in his/her subordinate social
20 position (Abbey, 2011, pp. 174–5) and, therefore, some choices are open to critique.
21 Abbey quotes Anne Phillips (2001): ‘Nussbaum’s dilemma reflects the fact that she is 2
22 “simultaneously hooked on the idea of choice and critical of most people’s choices”’
23 (Abbey, 2011, p. 176). There is a problem with divorcing intuitions about what is
24 valuable from individual preferences – should we value preferences which could result
25 from ‘adaptation to injustice’ (Abbey, 2011, p. 176)? Women appear to make choices
26 which are not to their benefit and ‘Okin, Hampton and Nussbaum advocate a range of
27 techniques to rectify the fact that many women make choices that work to their
28 disadvantage’ (Abbey, 2011, p. 179). These techniques include demanding the state
29 mandate equal pay or, less specifically, raising women’s awareness of their equal moral
30 worth (Abbey, 2011, p. 179).

31 Abbey argues that, for these thinkers, the overall category of ‘women’ is still useful
32 because all women are oppressed in similar ways, but none of the thinkers denies the
33 impact of factors such as race or poverty. These feminist liberals have the tools – in the
34 form of moral individualism – to engage in a critique of all forms of oppression, ‘for a
35 society that permits individuals to be disadvantaged in these ways fails to respect the
36 dignity and equal personhood of all its members’ (Abbey, 2011, pp. 216–7). Whereas
37 Witt sees a need for feminism to focus on the social roles of women, Abbey’s emphasis
38 is on individualism as a way of tackling women’s inequality. In highlighting issues of
39 intersectionality and of adaptive preferences, Abbey demonstrates the potential of femi-
40 nist liberalism to deal with these feminist issues while maintaining liberal emphasis on
41 individuality.

42 In her conclusion, Abbey acknowledges that there are ‘shortcomings’ to the way in
43 which Okin, Hampton and Nussbaum address, or indeed fail to address, differences
44 among women and argues that both their liberalism and their feminism demands that

1 greater attention be paid to differences for four reasons. First, their rejection of *a priori*
2 gendering of humans means not only that their feminist liberalism does not hold that
3 women should be like men in order to qualify for moral consideration, but also that there
4 can be no generalised standard for what it means to be a woman. Second, the liberal
5 tradition in which these feminists work has been valuable to them because it supports 'the
6 normative resources' with which to challenge unjust hierarchies and differences in power.
7 It is, therefore, within the means of feminist liberals to challenge the unjust hierarchies
8 to which the literature on intersectionality draws attention. Third, as has been noted,
9 these theorists are Rawlsian feminist liberals and, as such, they should be concerned with
10 women's self-interpretation in order to understand how this either fits or rubs up against
11 principles of justice (after all, principles of justice should be accepted by all rather than
12 imposed on some) (Abbey, 2011, p. 263). Abbey concludes this point with a warning: 'if
13 feminist liberals fail to attend to women's diverse self-interpretations, they render them-
14 selves unable to consider how heavily their recommendations might fall on some
15 members of society' (Abbey, 2011, pp. 269–70). And finally, incorporating differences
16 between women calls on the mobilisation of the Kantian conception of the person:
17 women need to see themselves as 'ends in themselves', and not means to the ends of
18 others, and here Abbey argues that this 'is necessary but not sufficient for a change in
19 women's self-understandings' (Abbey, 2011, p. 271). This position fits with her earlier
20 criticism of Hampton for relying on this conception in her analysis of rape. Treating
21 people as ends in themselves does not highlight how different women experience and
22 interpret such acts differently.

23 For feminist liberals, then, the fact of women's oppression demands an emphasis on
24 women's diverse experiences (while managing the problem of adaptive preferences) and
25 an emphasis on women's moral equality with men. Part of the initial appeal of liberal
26 feminism was its desire to achieve the 'achievable' to bring about women's rights, and the
27 fact that its goals, now in the form of feminist liberalism, have to be less specific and have
28 a broader focus does not mean that this version of feminism has lost its desire for reform.
29 It still seeks to confront the patriarchal elements of liberalism, but it also means that
30 feminism and liberalism continue to engage in a dialogue, challenging each other's
31 theoretical views. Abbey's feminist liberalism is then involved in a process of theoretical
32 dialogue between two evolving traditions: feminism and liberalism.

33 34 **The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and** 35 **Postwork Imaginaries**

36 In *The Problem with Work*, Kathi Weeks combines feminist and non-feminist approaches
37 in the form of Marxist, Marxist feminist and utopian thought. As the title suggests,
38 feminism is one element of her analysis, and her focus on work and the way in which
39 society functions around work also have strong implications for feminist theory – not
40 least in the way in which she challenges the assumption that when alternatives to work
41 are theorised, a common response is to turn to the family. This has obviously created
42 limitations for women in terms of seeing their options located in either work or family.

43 Weeks' book addresses the concept of a 'postwork' society. She argues that we need
44 to engage with the meaning of waged work not only because it is so significant to our

1 lives (the means by which we acquire necessary goods – food, clothes and shelter), but
2 because ‘it is also the basic means by which status is allocated, and by which most people
3 gain access to healthcare and retirement’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 6). She goes on to argue that
4 work is a process of subject making and, indeed, ‘a site of gendering’ (Weeks, 2011, p.
5 9). Work is organised through gender – ‘the productivity of gender-differentiated labor’
6 constructs the workplace and the home ‘including the gendered division of the house-
7 hold roles and waged occupations’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 9).

8 Weeks develops an argument for a ‘postwork society’ through a number of avenues
9 including Weber’s analysis of the Protestant work ethic (which she uses to expose the
10 irrationality of that ethic), and two accounts of Marxism which she labels ‘socialist
11 modernization’ and ‘socialist humanism’, both of which are rejected in favour of the
12 autonomist Marxist tradition. Weeks also explores the Marxist feminist ‘Wages for
13 Housework’ campaign, and the potential of utopian thought for advancing a postwork
14 society. Of these, the latter three are given most attention and appear to be most
15 significant to her argument.

16 Weeks’ objection to Marx’s critique of the work ethic, or the very idea of the work
17 ethic, is that the alternative he provides is not an actual remedy to the system of which
18 he is so critical. For Marx, work, albeit reformulated, remains necessary, and he does not
19 posit an alternative (Weeks, 2011, p. 91). Accordingly, Weeks (2011, p. 92) turns to the
20 autonomous Marxist tradition and, in particular, she draws on the work of Antonio
21 Negri. She reads Negri as providing an alternative future in which work as it currently
22 exists is rejected as a viable strategy and is instead transformed (Weeks, 2011, pp. 100–1).
23 Weeks provides a reading of the 1970s Marxist feminist ‘Wages for Housework’ cam-
24 paign and reworks it ‘as a contemporary demand for guaranteed basic income’ (Weeks,
25 2011, p. 113). She focuses particularly on the work of Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma
26 James and argues that the demand for wages for housework was meant neither to
27 ‘celebrate’ nor to ‘sanctify’ work which involved a rejection of the gendered division of
28 labour and a refusal to engage with ‘some all-too-familiar romanticization of the domestic
29 realm’s relations and rituals’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 124). Weeks points out that those involved
30 with the campaign ‘rejected not only the capitalist but also the socialist remedies defended
31 by other feminists at the time’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 125). She argues that the Wages for
32 Housework campaign interested Dalla Costa and James (1973) ‘initially at least, as a 3
33 mechanism for the development of feminist subjectivity’ (Weeks, 2011, p. 127). Here she
34 draws parallels with the project of autonomous Marxism. She also emphasises the power
35 and potential of making a *demand* – something which is both a perspective (renders
36 visible the issue of women’s place in society) and a provocation (a call to action through
37 various means such as commitment to a cause or formation of a collectivity) (Weeks,
38 2011, pp. 128–31).

39 For Weeks, the struggle against oppressive working hours should be considered part of
40 the same demand as the struggle against the family structure of reproductive labour
41 (Weeks, 2011, p. 152). Weeks, like Witt and Abbey, is returning to sites of contestation
42 and disagreement and like the others she does so in order to move forwards. Weeks uses
43 the refusal of work as a tool with which to reconfigure three aspects of Marxist
44 feminism: ‘publicising work, politicizing it and radically transforming it’ (Weeks, 2011,

1 p. 24). Publicising work involved drawing attention to reproductive labour – labour
2 which was socially necessary but not financially rewarded. Publicising this drew attention
3 to the fact that time spent outside (paid) work was not leisure time, it was unpaid work
4 time. Yet even Marxist feminism did not go far enough in reconfiguring work, it
5 challenged the organisation of work but it did not directly challenge the value placed on
6 work (Weeks, 2011, p. 25), for a criticism of work's value, Weeks turns to Autonomous
7 Marxism. Therefore, Weeks' project involves a reading of Marxist feminism, combined
8 with the Autonomous Marxism literature, in so doing she reinvigorates Marxist feminism
9 in general and the 'Wages for Housework' campaign in particular. In agreement with
10 Hemmings, Weeks conceives the story of feminism as 'not only a story of progress but
11 also sometimes ... of forgotten ideas and stifled aspirations' (Weeks, 2011, p. 117). She
12 argues that her interest is in re-engagement with forgotten ideas to challenge the present
13 'and reinvigorate its possible futures' (Weeks, 2011, p. 117). Weeks argues for what she
14 sees as a 'transfigurative politics' which contains the possibility for future subjectivity – 'a
15 process of creating new subjectivities with new capacities and desires, and, eventually,
16 new demands'. Time spent not working can be theorised as time which contains
17 'potential social productivity' (Weeks, 2011, p. 169). This opens up the possibility of
18 imagining alternatives to the present 'dominant ideals' of both work and family (Weeks,
19 2011, p. 170). This, she argues, creates the possibility for a more inclusive feminism.

20 In her final chapter, Weeks shifts focus to the utopian potential of a demand for
21 shorter working hours. Weeks analyses what she refers to as 'utopian artefacts', but she
22 is also interested in the function of utopia (Weeks, 2011, p. 204). Weeks approaches this
23 body of literature by analysing it in the context of two features: one of estrangement
24 (which functions to 'alter our connection to the present'), and one of hope (which
25 provides 'provocations toward alternatives' and therefore looks to the future) (Weeks,
26 2011, pp. 204–5). Estrangement takes us out of our setting and renders it unfamiliar: in
27 so doing, it provides us with a point from which to engage critically with the present
28 (Weeks, 2011, p. 205). The second function – hope – provokes a desire to act and
29 inspires our political imagination. It also provides a force for mobilisation: 'utopias can
30 serve as inspirational models; they can help to activate political will, to mobilize and
31 organize movements for social change' (Weeks, 2011, p. 206). Weeks argues that utopian
32 visions need not serve as blueprints, but they do 'do the work of estrangement and
33 provocation' (Weeks, 2011, p. 211).

34 Weeks returns to the idea of making a demand. Inevitably, a demand is made in the
35 realm of practical and, indeed, pragmatic politics (Weeks, 2011, p. 219), but a demand
36 which is utopian is 'necessarily larger in scope' than a policy proposal (Weeks, 2011, p.
37 220). Weeks argues that the central idea of the utopian demand is that it can be both
38 reformist and revolutionary (Weeks, 2011, p. 228). The refusal of work raises important
39 questions for feminism, for what takes the place of the 'privatized family', and for the
40 'structures of production and reproduction' (Weeks, 2011, pp. 110–1). For Weeks the
41 answer is 'life'. A demand for the reform of working hours and basic income is reformist,
42 but championing 'the political project of "life against work"' is a general rubric within
43 which to frame the kinds of antiwork critiques and postwork imaginaries represented
44 here by the demands for basic income and shorter hours' (Weeks, 2011, p. 230).

1 Accordingly, Weeks aims to juxtapose life with work (Weeks, 2011, p. 231) and this
2 opens up a number of possibilities for thinking about future conceptions of work. The
3 juxtaposition is an interesting idea, but it is given very little space.

4 Weeks' final chapter is perhaps the most engaging of the book and the notion of a
5 utopian demand offers hope not only for Weeks' concept of a postwork society, but for
6 feminist theory as a whole. Weeks' feminism combines the real with the possible and calls
7 on the imagination to help in this process. The possibility of conceiving a future radically
8 different from, but connected to, the present or, in the words of Catriona Mackenzie,
9 'imagining ourselves otherwise' (Mackenzie, 2000), is key to Weeks in the struggle
10 against oppression. It could also be a route endorsed by Witt whose work highlights the
11 problem of oppressive social roles, but then leaves to feminist theory the task of tackling
12 them (Witt, 2011, p. 132).

13 14 **Conclusion**

15 The work of these three theorists involves a process of transformation, returning,
16 re-conceptualisation and an ongoing belief that change is still possible. Contemporary
17 feminism has taken on the issues of identity I raised in the introduction with essentialism
18 being described by Jane Spencer as 'a battle constantly revisited' (Spencer, 2007, p. 300).
19 Issues raised in the second wave which created arguments around intersectionality are
20 being discussed in third wave criticisms of more recent attempts to create a universal
21 identity of woman. For example, recent movements such as feminist punk movement
22 'Riot Grrrl' have drawn criticism for their failure to understand sexism in the wider
23 context of racial and class oppression (Munford, 2007, p. 272). Finally, after the many
24 challenges to the notion that 'woman' could ever be a homogenous group from Black,
25 post-modern and post-structuralist feminists, contemporary feminism is very sensitive to
26 diversity and difference. The three books reviewed here respond, to varying degrees, to
27 these issues. Witt deals directly with essentialism, Abbey with the challenge of
28 intersectionality for feminist theory and the means of incorporating diversity and differ-
29 ence. Weeks' book is a broader take on these themes: she provides a feminist analysis of
30 work and the way in which it defines us as subjects. Each book returns to important
31 features of the feminist debate (essentialism, liberal feminism and the Marxist feminist
32 'Wages for Housework' campaign) and in so doing each author demonstrates agreement
33 with Hemmings' arguments that telling the story of feminism is not a story of displace-
34 ment but is rather one of returning, reconceptualisation and reinvigorating these key
35 feminist ideas. All tackle social roles and prescribed identity, Witt through the gendering
36 of social roles, Abbey draws attention to the need for engagement with women's diverse
37 self-interpretations and Weeks looks at the gendering of both work roles and non-work
38 roles. In different ways, the books discussed here draw attention to future possibilities for
39 feminism: the alteration of gender norms which are oppressive; feminist liberalism
40 reinvigorated; utopian demands for a better life. There is no single feminist response to
41 the problem of inequality: each of the thinkers frames the problem differently and,
42 therefore, each posits different political solutions. In getting on with the task of doing
43 feminist theory, these authors demonstrate that the problem feminism faces is not
44 necessarily one of definition – it is the ongoing fact of women's oppression. The varied

debates on how to tackle gender oppression are still flowing, regardless of whichever wave sets them down on our shore.

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About the Author

Ros Hague is a Lecturer in the Division of Politics and International Relations at Nottingham Trent University. Her research covers two main areas: gender and the environment (specifically the attitudes to nature found in people who live and work with nature and also in fictional representations of nature). Her book *Autonomy and Identity: The Politics of Who We Are* (Routledge, 2011) looked at the concepts of autonomy and identity in order to develop a new, feminist, understanding which sees autonomy as a process by which we change and develop our identity. Ros Hague, Division of Politics and International Relations, School of Social Sciences, Nottingham Trent University, Burton Street, Nottingham NG1 4BU, UK; email: ros.hague@ntu.ac.uk

Notes

I am very grateful to Laura Brace and to the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this article. Thanks also to Lucy Sargisson for suggesting I write this piece.

1 Hampton and Nussbaum have written specifically on feminism but also on other topics and Abbey confines her analysis to the former works.

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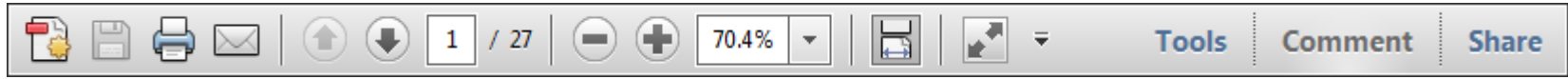
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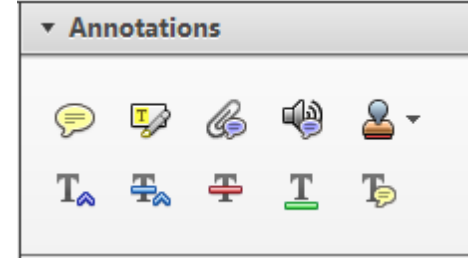
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standard framework for the analysis of microeconomics. Nevertheless, it also led to the emergence of strategic behavior in the number of competitors in the industry. This is that the structure of the industry, which led to the emergence of strategic behavior, are exogenous to the industry. Important works on this by Shleifer and Vishny (1988) and henceforth we use the 'black b



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there is no room for extra profits and the number of competitors are zero and the number of firms (net) values are not determined by the number of firms. Blanchard and Kiyotaki (1987), in their paper on perfect competition in general equilibrium, show that the effects of aggregate demand and supply shocks in the classical framework assuming monopolistic competition are an exogenous number of firms

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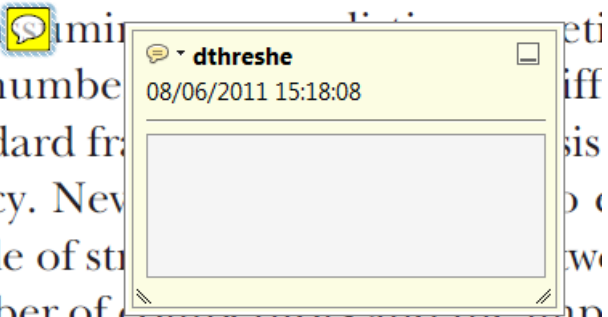


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and supply shocks. Most of the industry structure is determined by the number of firms. The standard framework for the analysis of microeconomics. Nevertheless, it also led to the emergence of strategic behavior in the number of competitors and the impact of aggregate demand on the industry structure also with the demand-



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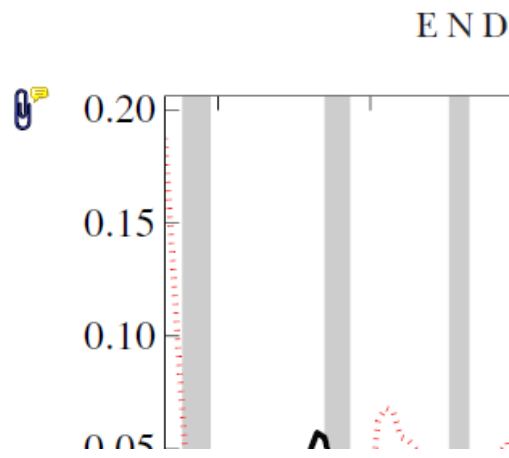
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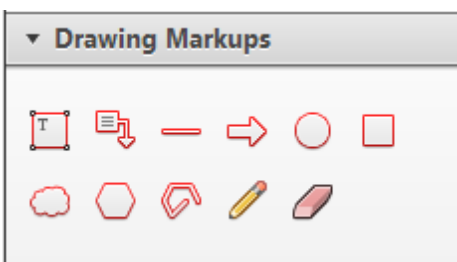


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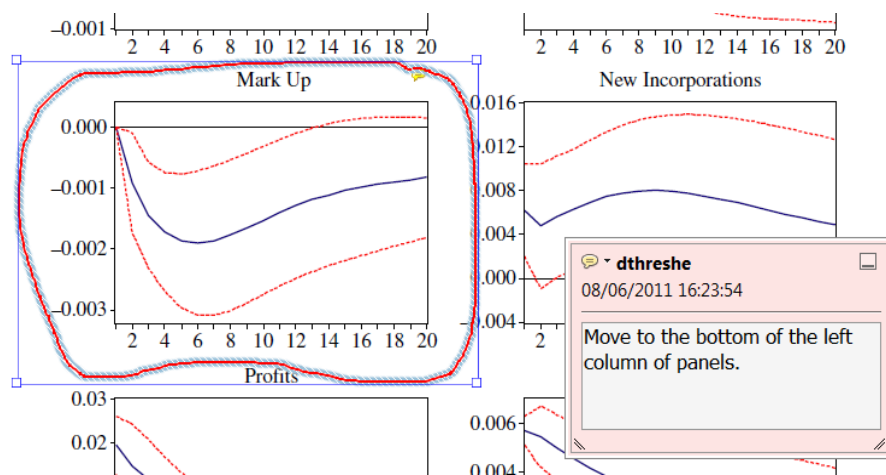


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