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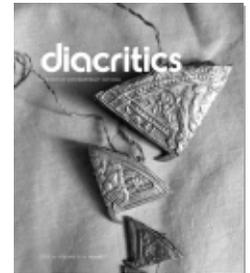
Time After (Postfeminist) Time: Gender, Capital, and Helen
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Greg Forter

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TIME AFTER (POSTFEMINIST) TIME: GENDER, CAPITAL, AND HELEN PHILLIPS'S *THE NEED*

GREG FORTER

Abstract: This essay reads Helen Phillips's extraordinary novel of motherhood, *The Need* (2019), alongside recent theorists of post-politics. Phillips's novel is illuminating because it reveals how an adequate understanding of the post-political requires supplementing current accounts with the categories of gender and heterogeneous time. *The Need* subverts the postfeminist articulation of politics as an arena in which "feminism" is practicable only in preemptively curtailed and diminished form. It does so by cracking open the "reality" enforced by neoliberal motherhood to show how its apparent solidity rests on the excision of alternate times—on a foreclosure of the temporal otherness that is the condition for historical change.

>> POST POST-POLITICS

The diagnosis of contemporary societies in the Global North as post-political has been accompanied by a number of proposals for reanimating politics on the other side of that condition. The proposals vary considerably in their theoretical details and political implications. In what follows, I focus on two especially compelling arguments by Slavoj Žižek and Jacques Rancière. The fruitfulness of their contentions lies in the way each invokes the category of the unreal (the impossible, the apparent) to disrupt the purportedly homogeneous “reality” on which post-politics rests. This invocation is, I argue, indispensable to challenging and thinking beyond the post-political consensus; yet in the hands of Žižek and Rancière, the insight remains insufficiently alert to the particularities of gender and inadequately attuned to the temporal dimension of the homogeneity enforced by post-politics. My essay therefore reads these theorists alongside Helen Phillips’s harrowing novel of motherhood, *The Need* (2019). The book is one of several recent fictions that develop speculative realist forms for retrieving without prematurely substantializing the impossible-unreal of post-politics. It does so by tracing the production of unreality to a specifically *postfeminist* foreclosure of historical time’s non-identity with itself.

In *The Ticklish Subject*, Žižek famously distinguishes between the conventional activities of technocratic politics and what he calls the political act. The former limits its aims to what “works well within the framework of existing relations”—to solving problems and allocating resources within a context that structures all decision-making but remains unsusceptible to reflection or critique. At stake here is a framework in which radical change has been forestalled by the “common sense” that capitalism is the only game in town, liberal democracy has proven itself the best possible mode of governance, and all the great ideological antagonisms of the past (whether class-based, racial, or gender-related) have been resolved into the technocratic management of diverse “interests.” The “political act . . . proper,” in contrast, “*changes the very framework that determines how things work.*” Žižek suggests we couch this “in terms of the well-known definition of politics as the ‘art of the possible’: authentic politics is, rather, . . . the art of the *impossible*—it changes the very parameters of what is considered ‘possible’ in the existing constellation.”¹ His subsequent ruminations on this concept suggest that the act has a specific kind of content. If post-politics operates under the assumption that capitalism simply and inexorably “is”—if it takes for granted capitalist globalization as the final horizon of human history, such that all that politics can or should do now is manage the vicissitudes of our economic system’s purportedly “objective necessity”—then the authentic act will entail an impossible “*repoliticization of the economy.*” We shall have to set *limits* to capital’s freedom, “subordinat[ing] the process of production to social control.” Only then can we hope to counter “the depoliticization of economics” and the “common acceptance of Capital and market mechanisms as neutral tools/procedures to be exploited.”²

Greg Forter is Professor of English at the University of South Carolina. He has published numerous articles and three books, the most recent of which is *Critique and Utopia in Postcolonial Historical Fiction: Atlantic and Other Worlds* (2019). His current book project, “World Enough, and Time,” examines the relations among capitalism, temporal heterogeneity, and contemporary narrative forms.

Email: gforter1@mailbox.sc.edu

Rancière eschews the language of impossibility but offers a set of insights that strikingly echo Žižek’s claims. In a post-democratic order, Rancière argues (post-democracy denoting his equivalent of what other theorists call post-politics), the properly political moment is forestalled by a specific “partition of the sensible” that he names *consensus*. The latter entails not merely broad-based agreement about the scope of legible political action but the total eradication of heterogeneity from the social field, such that those belonging to the part *of* society that is denied a part *in* society cease even to appear as politically intelligible. The condition of possibility for this operation is the naturalization of contemporary capital’s constitutive fiction: “What characterizes the mainstream fiction of the police order,” Rancière writes, “is that it passes itself off as real, that it feigns to draw a clear-cut line between what belongs to the self-evidence of the real and what belongs to the field of appearances, representations, opinions and utopias. Consensus means precisely that the sensory is given as univocal.”³ Or again, in slightly different terms:

Consensus is an agreement between sense and sense, in other words, between a mode of sensory presentation and a regime of meaning. Consensus . . . says: it is perfectly fine for people to have different interests, values and aspirations, nevertheless there is one unique reality that is experienceable as a sense datum which has only one possible signification. [This unique reality] is “economic globalization,” precisely for the reason that it presents itself as a global development that is clear-cut and irrefutable, regardless of one’s opinions about it.⁴

Elsewhere Rancière is even more explicit about the economic imperatives governing this “mainstream fiction of the police order.”⁵ I return to those imperatives below. Here, let me stress that this description of consensus in terms of the (coerced and fictive) adequation between *sense data* and *meaning*, which exhausts reality by limiting it to a “univocal” “signification,” reprises the circumscription of politics to the merely possible that Žižek criticizes. At issue in both cases is a foreclosure of the radically heterogeneous that opens onto alternate tendencies and possibilities within the present reality.⁶ Both thinkers lament how the regime of post-politics enforces an identification of reality with what (empirically) is, extirpating what is not (what *was* or *could be*, what *might have been* or *may come to pass*) from the field of the possible.

It follows that, for Rancière as for Žižek, the authentically political act will entail a disruptive reframing of political intelligibility and practical possibility. Politics is “an activity that redraws the frame within which common objects are determined,” writes Rancière. It “breaks with the sensory self-evidence of the ‘natural’ [i.e., consensual] order,” as well as “with the order of the police by inventing new subjects.” Politics “re-frames the given by inventing new ways of making sense of the sensible, new configurations between the visible and the invisible, and between the audible and the inaudible, new distributions of space and time—in short, new bodily capacities.”⁷ This means that an effective political intervention must politicize what post-politics has depoliticized; it will have to throw into audible relief the collective enunciation of the part which has no part—transforming the particular demand of the excluded into a figure for a new universality and thereby

making apprehensible to sense a reality that the regime of consensus has disappeared, rendered *unreal*, and excluded as impossible-to-politics.

Here then is a first reason for bringing these two thinkers together: despite Žižek's critique of Rancière for being, in effect, insufficiently Lacanian,⁸ they share a commitment to politics as an activity that must today begin by cracking open and expanding the very contours of what counts as "real." Žižek's dedication to the "art of the impossible," Rancière's reclamation of "the mechanisms of appearance"—of the non-identity of what is with what is visible and the retrieval of "modes of subjectification that allow . . . a person to be included as excluded, counted as uncounted"⁹—these are both ways of indexing what I'd call the ontological implications of their arguments. The formulations are aimed at confronting the depths to which the post-political consensus has naturalized (ontologized) the social, pre-appropriating the practically intelligible and equating the visible, audible, and possible with reality *tout court*. Žižek and Rancière respond to this view by urging the performance of constitutive acts that render the invisible, the inaudible, and the impossible *real* (again). This is not a matter of giving to these qualities a new ontological substance. In Rancière's case, the point is to counter the post-democratic eradication of "the sphere of appearance of the people" and to trouble the "structure of the visible where everything is on show and . . . there is . . . no longer any place for appearance."¹⁰ At issue, in other words, is the act of making appearance *appear* once more—and appear *as* appearance rather than as a substantive reality that's exhaustively describable and identical to itself. For Žižek, the art of the impossible does in fact aspire to establish a new "positive Order which gives body to this negativity"—i.e., to the negativizing energies of the act. But this is so only because, in his Lacanian lexicon, no purportedly ontological order is ever intrinsically substantive and self-consistent, relying as each does on a constitutive "gap" that orders (even as it disturbs) the surface of all presents.¹¹ This will be as true of a world established by the act as it is of our current, post-political order.

These last points lead to a second reason for placing Rancière and Žižek side by side. Their commitment to reclaiming the realms of appearance and "impossibility" from the consensual reality of our present has an extraordinary corollary in contemporary

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aesthetic practice. In one sense, this resonance serves as mere confirmation of Rancière's reflections on art and literature. "The aesthetic rupture," he writes in *Dissensus*, "arranges a paradoxical form of efficacy . . . the efficacy of *dissensus*." This "is not a designation of conflict as such, but is a specific type thereof, a conflict between *sense* and *sense*."¹² The artwork is thus for Rancière efficacious inasmuch as it performs a labor homologous to that of the authentically political act: it introduces the possibility of *dissensus* into an otherwise closed social field, exposing the gap between *sense* (data) and *sense* (meaning) that permits the heterogeneous to *appear*.

I will be focusing on a novel that requires us to complicate such formulations, however. The book is Phillips's speculative-realist novel of motherhood, *The Need*.¹³ It belongs to a group of contemporary novels that one might call "post-post" fiction—a group that includes works by Zoë Wicomb, Eugene Lim, Amitav Ghosh, Mohsin Hamid, Karen Thompson Walker, and Phillips herself.¹⁴ The double "post" in my terminology is meant to suggest that these works intuit a politics *beyond* post-politics, but one that differs in crucial respects from both Rancière's and Žižek's understandings. The difference hinges on the speculative-realist dimension of these novels' forms. Whether embodied in the inarticulate scream of history's unrepresented victims (Wicomb's *David's Story*), the figuration of fiction as a technology for involuntary time travel (Lim's *Dear Cyborgs*), the fantastical animation of Nature to counter our climate-ravaged present (Ghosh's *Gun Island*), the magical doors that universalize uprootedness by annihilating time and space (Hamid's *Exit West*), or the depiction of sleep as a collective intimation of a future beyond 24/7 capital (Walker's *The Dreamers*), these works combine a *speculative* inquiry into the unreal with a *realist* mode of description and characterization. A central purpose of such forms is to expand the bounds of what counts as real by estranging the real with what it precludes as radically heterogeneous to itself. These works, in short, expose the fissures in our purportedly closed, self-identical present, dissolving the real through formal maneuvers that call impossible worlds into being.

In the case of *The Need*, two additional features bear notice. The first has to do with time. *The Need* suggests that the closures of our present rest not only on the excision of those heterogeneities described by Rancière and Žižek, but on a colonization of time that forecloses the specter of *temporal* heterogeneities. Such heterogeneities are the very condition of historical change; *The Need* both conjures and urges us to retrieve them. It does so by introducing a glitch in time through which the speculative enters and troubles the real. The world of the book's protagonist, Molly, is breached by the entrance of a second character, Moll, whose life and world were indistinguishable from Molly's until a fatal, decisive instant when the double's children were killed by an antifeminist suicide bomber. At that moment, when something inassimilably *different* happens in one of the two worlds, a "seam" opens up between them and Molly's double comes into (and comes to threaten) Molly's life. A glitch in time is thus the condition for an Event that both expresses alterity (symptommatizing another, parallel, but till-now invisible world) and produces it (in the form of characterological doubling). The glitch itself could be apprehended through the theoretical lens of Rancière: in a recent work, he has turned

his attention to the problem of time's non-identity to itself.¹⁵ But it is Jonathan Crary's discussion of the temporal aspirations of 24/7 capital, with its quasi-ontological integration of human beings into a time of spurious novelty and static redundancy, that resonates most powerfully with the arguments so far and with Phillips's literary response to this dilemma.¹⁶

Second, the novel explores the specifically *postfeminist* dimensions to the post-political. This strand of my argument relies on claims made by Nancy Fraser that are part of a larger effort to retrieve and reframe the insights of "social reproduction" feminists of the 1970s and 1980s: Maria Rosa Della Costa and Selma James, Silvia Federici, Lisa Vogel, Leopolda Fortunati, and Maria Mies.¹⁷ These thinkers were among the first to challenge the Marxist construal of social reproduction—the largely gendered labor of "making" the laborer who is the source of capitalist value-production—as epiphenomenal or "unproductive labor." Fraser's reframing is especially valuable for the way it "illustrat[es] the process of reconfiguration and commodification of social reproduction during the neoliberal phase of capitalism."¹⁸ It stresses the contradictions obscured by today's consensus that feminism has been rendered moot by the institutionalization of its aims. A purportedly "'progressive' neoliberalism," she writes, "celebrates 'diversity,' meritocracy, and [women's] 'emancipation' while dismantling social protections and re-externalizing social reproduction."¹⁹ A "deeply regressive political economy" is conjoined with a "progressive" politics of recognition to become "the dynamic center of a new hegemonic bloc."²⁰ This is the very substance of "postfeminism" and the point of its intersection with the post-political: post-politics may be our shared condition, but women in general—and mothers in particular—are burdened with the surplus conscriptions of an individualized, neoliberalized, and (hence) meretricious "emancipation."²¹

It's in response to this foreshortening that *The Need* conjures forth an "impossible" reality lurking within the everydayness of contemporary motherhood. That other world is *temporally* out of joint with the mundane reality to which it adheres. Yet it abrupts into that reality as the inassimilable, undigested Other of the postfeminist/post-political.

>> NEED IN *THE NEED*

Even a cursory description of Phillips's novel reveals its import for the questions at hand. The book's protagonist, Molly, is a mother of two who works as a paleobotanist on a dig at an old Phillips 66 service station. Her story unfolds along two main axes. At work, Molly has dug up from the Pit a number of objects that appear at first glance mundane enough, but turn out to exhibit inexplicable variations on their ordinary counterparts:

A glass Coca-Cola bottle with the unmistakable white script tilting to the left rather than to the right on the red background. . . . A rusty Altoids tin that was a bit deeper and narrower than usual. The gorgeous hint of [undatable] potsherd. And . . . the small plastic soldier with a monkey tail emerging through a hole in the back of his uniform.²²

All of these objects “seem . . . to correspond to similar known objects from specific eras: the pre-Columbian potsherd . . . the toy soldier from the 1960s, the Coca-Cola bottle from the mid-1970s, the Altoids tin from the 1980s.” Most significant among them is a Bible whose binding and type suggest it was printed in the early 1900s, but in which God’s pronouns are rendered throughout in the feminine: “*God saw the light, that it was good: / and God divided the light from the darkness. / And God called the light Day, and the darkness she called Night.*”²³ The meanings attaching to this object will become clear momentarily.

These “eccentricities” in the non-fossilized record have their corollary in the fossils that Molly and her colleagues unearth from the Pit. “Peculiarly,” Phillips writes, “about 15 percent of the species that [the] team had found in the eight years since the quarry opened did not match anything in the known fossil record or in our modern flora.”²⁴ The sheer quantity of such “mystifying” fossils makes the site extraordinary. But it’s the nature of the fossils’ unplaceability that invites particular scrutiny. The narrator says of one specimen that, while some of its elements appear to give it a family resemblance to the orchid and the iris, it “look[s] nothing like an orchid or iris”—indeed, “it [doesn’t] look like any known species on the planet.”²⁵ Such a description intimates that the fossils’ relation to the geological record mirrors precisely that of the objects discovered by Molly to their historical counterparts. Both sets of things are disconcerting because of their

strange (dis)similarity to objects already known; both resist integration into conventional habits of perception and understanding, confronting their finders (and this book’s readers) with the “eeriness of . . . recognizable object[s] that [are] slightly yet fundamentally off.”²⁶

One implication of the reading so far is that *The Need* shares with theorists of the post-political a commitment to cracking open the contours of what the contemporary order calls “real” (the possible, the self-evident). It retrieves from the apparent solidity of reality an experience of the *impossible* as actual, of the heterogeneously uncanny as immanent to the univocality of the real. These experiences do not, of

course, correspond exactly to their analogs in the thought of Žižek and Rancière. As a work of fiction, *The Need* works over and transforms the material world on which it meditates rather than merely describing or depicting it. The residue of that material’s social content nonetheless remains: the economic order that at once subtends and is ontologized by the regime of post-politics takes the form, in Phillips’s novel, of an emphasis on the *workplace* as a site from which the impossible is ordinarily foreclosed—but where it

The economic order that at once subtends and is ontologized by the regime of post-politics takes the form, in Phillips’s novel, of an emphasis on the *workplace* as a site from which the impossible is ordinarily foreclosed—but where it instead infects the ordinary with intimations of a different order.

instead infects the ordinary with intimations of a different order. The sedimentation of “immaterial” labor (science) upon the site of petrocapi-talist exchange (the gas station) directly links this labor to the history of extractive capitalism.²⁷ And the purportedly disinterested nature of scientific work—its apparently merely formal subsumption to the logic of the commodity form²⁸—is undermined by the novel’s insistence on the exchange value of what science unearths: the discovery of eccentric objects leads the team to offer tours, complete with display cases and admission fees, and to enter the circuits of platform capitalism by developing a robust social media presence.

The novel departs from Žižek and Rancière in the way it tethers the impossible and the “real appearance” to the issue of historical time. The paleobotanist is a kind of historian who recovers fragments from the geological past, with the ultimate aim of piecing those bits together into a coherent whole—a story. Along the way, she discovers all manner of more recent detritus—objects extrinsic to the labor of scientific reconstruction—that should nonetheless be datable. Such “trash” ought to conform to our knowledge of actual objects from the non-fossilized past, and hence be largely unremarkable, fully digestible to even the casual, non-specialist minds of those who encounter them. In this book, however, both modes of apprehending the past (the professional’s and the layperson’s) are disturbed by the abruption of the *temporally* heterogeneous. It is as if *The Need* were proposing that the effort to order the what-has-been into a coherent, “historicist” narrative leads instead to the discovery of a join through which alternative pasts have entered. That join emerges (it bears repeating) *at work*: Molly comes at last to realize that “the Pit is a seam . . . between possibilities . . . between different possible worlds.”²⁹ This conjoining of the workplace with “different . . . worlds” betokens the prospect of a social order in which labor has been differently organized: it opens the possibility for productive associations secreted within yet obscured by the temporal and economic regimes of our present.

The second axis of the book’s plot leads through the home rather than the workplace. Here, too, the ordinary is overtaken by the extraordinary, and the real by the impossible-unreal. This is so first in a quotidian sense concerning motherhood. *The Need* proposes that mothers themselves must perform the impossible on a daily basis. The labor of maternal care requires of even middle-class white women a ceaseless attunement to their children’s needs (hence one meaning of the book’s title); and those needs are in turn so extravagant—so primordial and high in their stakes—that they cannot by definition be met (women can never be attuned *enough*):

In the bedroom, someone was throwing up.

[Molly] could not stand. She could not stand.

She stood. She walked to the bedroom.

Her foot slipped on a slick patch on the floor.

“I’m bad, I’m bad.” Viv [her daughter] was weeping. “I just threw up on our baby.” . . .

Molly let go of Viv and ran back to the toilet. . . . There was no way she could handle this.

It was impossible.³⁰

One could object that this scene takes place when Molly is left to parent on her own, with her husband, David, overseas on a business trip, and that both she and the children are suffering from a debilitating stomach flu—so *of course* mothering feels impossible to her! But that would be to underestimate the seriousness of the book’s exploration. In fact, David is home for just a few brief pages in the entire book, as if to dramatize how the burdens of childcare and social reproduction continue to fall on women. And the domestic chapters in *The Need* provide a relentless portrait of the exhausting, quotidian emergencies and demands that make up so much of a mother’s life and are inseparable from the most profound experience of maternal joy. “Moment by moment,” Molly thinks at one point, she was “maddened by [her children] and melted by them, maddened/melted, maddened/melted, maddened/melted.”³¹

This quotidian experience of impossibility is clearly linked to the fact that Molly is employed. That is, motherhood feels impossible to her partly because she both mothers *and* has a job outside the house (though her class position makes it possible to externalize some of the labor of childcare onto the childcare worker, Erika). The novel should in fact be read as an allegory for the price exacted by neoliberal feminism from even those women who are its direct beneficiaries. The substance of that benefit is that such women are urged to “have it all.”³² The phrase is an especially vacuous vehicle for what Herbert Marcuse once called “affirmative culture,” yet it gestures toward an important (if still occluded) truth.³³ The “all” that women are invited to “have” is a shrunken caricature of feminism’s expansive demands for social change, including the demand for *collective* liberation from exploitation and gender oppression and the utopian articulation of non-patriarchal relations. The caricature pre-appropriates and reduces those wishes to narrowly personal fulfillments in narrowly defined spheres: work and home.³⁴ One thing that *The Need* is committed to showing is how this colonization of feminism operates homologously to the consensus around the political described by Žižek and Rancière. The colonization seeks to foreclose all other ways of conceiving the meaning and bases of (gender) liberation. It pre-defines the possibilities for women as a meritocratic, individualized satisfaction in work beyond the home (the illusion of non-alienated labor without systematic change) and a practically compulsory embrace of maternal fulfillment within it.

It is in exploring this scenario that Phillips’s novel is at its most inventive. Molly’s intimation of motherhood’s “impossibility” gives way, in the end, to a much more radical evocation of the impossible. A being emerges from the seam who *is* yet *is not* Molly. She reprises the structure of “impossible” objects by embodying the “eeriness” of a “recognizable” *person* who’s “slightly yet fundamentally off.”³⁵ In Rancière’s terms, this double is a person who “counts as uncounted, [is] included as excluded.” The eeriness is an effect, once more, of a heterotemporal disturbance: the new Molly—the novel calls her Moll—carries with her a tragic *past* that echoes Molly’s while diverging from it. This characterological doubling will turn out to offer glimpses of some other way of figuring freedom, some alternate constellations among sense data and the meanings that might be attached to that data.

But let us not get ahead of ourselves. A premonition of this Gothic doubling is evident already in the way the novel bifurcates Molly along the two axes I've been describing. "Usually she was pleased to descend into the Pit," Phillips writes,

a little break from the rest of her life, no one requesting milk from her body or asking her why pee is yellow. . . . In the Pit, in times of observation, she forgot that she was a mother. That she existed at all, really, except as a pair of eyes and hands. [Back home she entered an] alternate life, the secret animal life where she sliced apples and thawed peas and wiped little butts and let her body be drained again and again and refilled again and again. Where her moniker was cried out in excitement and need dozens of times a day.

The division here is between an immersion in the "animal life" of the body that makes one an adjunct to childhood need, and a temporary respite from that immersion by way of mental absorption in work. Motherhood is a labor of the body, we might summarize—while (palaeobotanical) work facilitates a forgetting of maternity inasmuch as it transcends "mere" body by assimilating it to the observational projects of the mind (hands work in tandem with eyes). Hence the comic force of a sentence like this one: "The phrase *The life of the mind* passed through her head, followed immediately, instinctually, by *The life of the diaper*."³⁶ The excremental needs of the child are no less central to the project of mothering than are those of nutrition and sustenance. Both belong to the creaturely activities that lie on one side of the fault line separating the "secret animal life" of mothering from the observational labor of scientists in the Pit.

To say that this split prefigures the Gothic haunting to come, however, is also to suggest that the division cannot be maintained. The life of the diaper ceaselessly intrudes upon the life (and labor) of the mind. The home continually seeps into and contaminates the sphere of work. At one point in the Pit—while in the throes of exactly the kind of absorption in work I have just described—Molly's milk suddenly comes down. "It often came at moments of high emotion. That slight ache or buzz, valves pressured into opening, the simultaneous relief and frustration, her bra damp in two focused spots. Reminder: Mother. Reminder: Animal."³⁷ This reminder of maternal animality serves already to interrupt the autonomy and smooth functioning of the workplace; it signals the impossibility of forgetting or fully assimilating maternity through work, suggesting indeed that the realm of production is everywhere subtended by the not-yet-capitalized labor of reproduction, which capitalism at once relies upon, obscures, and devalues. An even more telling sequence extends this point while echoing Nancy Fraser. Fraser argues that "the proliferation of expensive, high-tech mechanical pumps for expressing breast milk" "symptomizes the contradiction between production and reproduction" in the contemporary United States.³⁸ While the global reach of capital means that, increasingly and everywhere, the "liberal-individualist and gender-egalitarian" dimensions of neoliberalism interpellate women into the sphere of production while continuing to burden them with labor's reproduction, specific conditions in the U.S. have made the breast pump the "'fix' of choice" for the resulting dilemma.³⁹ Those conditions include "a high rate of female labor-force participation, no mandated paid

maternity or parental leave, and a love affair with technology.” The chosen “fix” has in turn “changed [breastfeeding] beyond all recognition. No longer a matter of suckling a child at one’s breast, one ‘breastfeeds’ now by expressing one’s milk mechanically and storing it for feeding by bottle later by one’s nanny.”⁴⁰

The sequence in *The Need* that expands on this insight is worth quoting at length:

She returned to her office, pulled closed the curtain that served as a door, unbuttoned her shirt, unfastened the cups of her nursing bra, inserted the tubes into the shields, hooked herself up to the machine, turned the dial to its highest setting.

Viv had covered her face in horror the first time she witnessed her mother pumping milk for her brother. “What it doing to you?” she said, staring at the machine through her fingers, at her mother’s nipples extending and retracting, misshapen by the plastic funnels. . . .

Here, now, in Molly’s office, the milk was not coming, not quickly enough. . . . She needed at least three ounces from each [breast]. And after that, she needed to deliver the milk to the minifridge and transform from one kind of person into another, pull herself back together for the tour. . . .

Every time she pumped she felt sorry for cows. When she poured cow’s milk for Viv she experienced a flash of mother-to-mother gratitude: *Thank you, Ma Cow, for letting me steal your milk for my own offspring.*⁴¹

Here, the fix that is meant to ameliorate neoliberalism’s “impossible” demands on working women is instead revealed as the submission of women to a grotesque parody of resource extraction. Molly is milked—implicitly but clearly—exactly as is a cow;⁴² her “nipples extend . . . and retract . . . [and are] misshapen by the plastic funnels” of the breast pump. Her body is made to submit to a procedure that echoes both the extractive violence of the fossil economy to which the Phillips 66 station refers *and* the archeological labor of digging up fossils from that defunct station. This technological mediation of milk as it moves from Molly’s breast to Ben’s mouth accrues, in the process, a complex significance. It works alongside the placement of that technology in the workplace to suggest the collapse of the two poles that structure the neoliberal fantasy of “having it all” (and of “work/life balance”). Molly must “transform from one kind of person into another” *at work*; she’s required to oscillate, while in the workplace, between “mother” and “worker,” body (animal) and mind. The oscillation reveals again how the workplace relies on the non-capitalized labor of a domestic sphere whose significance capitalism also devalues. That sphere returns here to *haunt* the workplace in the form of a mother harnessed to and monstrously assimilated by the machinery of extractive capitalism.

>> MOLL(Y): ECSTASY OF THE DOUBLE

The emergence of Molly’s double from the seam provides a kind of fantastical enactment of the contradictions in motherhood traced so far. How exactly is this so? The simplest answer is that the novel insists on a second dimension of the “need” named by its title: Molly, we might say, *needs* a double; successful mothering *requires the invention of a rep-*

licant caretaker, since it's strictly speaking *impossible* to meet the social demands that the contemporary order places on this institution. We'll see that this fantastic doubling has the further effect of cracking open the post-political, postfeminist present in two ways: it haunts that present with an undigested *past* that condenses and distills the psychic cost of striving to "have it all"; and it enacts what Jonathan Crary has called a "turbulent convergence of the lived present with ghosts from a fugitive and still indiscernible *future*," thereby gesturing toward the possibility of realizing alternatives to that consensus.⁴³

In the novel, the key to these questions is Molly's discovery of that inexplicable, gender-nonconforming edition of the Bible. The moment word gets out about this find, with its blasphemous assertion of a female godhead, the hate mail and threatening phone calls begin. The ensuing "dread" that settles over the team takes heightened form on the tours they lead for those curious about the newly discovered objects.⁴⁴ Molly reflects at one point that it is not "the more ragged members of the tours who frightened her," as these are often the "mildest" in behavior. Instead she is troubled by the "unremarkable" among them—that woman "a couple weeks back," for example, who was "just a plain thirtysomething in jeans and a baseball cap and a sweatshirt" but about whom there was "something uncanny." When this woman presses through the crowd "to get closer to the glass case . . . containing the Bible," she begins to tremble, and her eyes meet Molly's: "such sad weak bloodshot eyes, how irrational and small of [Molly] to dislike this innocent person, she was about to interrupt the tour to say something to her, *Are you all right, Can I help you, Would you like to take a seat?*"⁴⁵ Before she can do "the kind thing," however, there's a "flicker" on the other side of the gas station window—and through the door walks her babysitter, Erika, with Molly's two children in tow, and Molly experiences "one of those rare sweet relaxed moments of motherhood: this late-afternoon tableau of her children with adults who delighted in them."⁴⁶ The people on the tour laugh and move aside to let the children through; the "unremarkable" woman seems startled, but she, too, makes way for the children before disappearing into the parking lot.

That is all that transpires in the scene. Or at least, it is one version of all that transpires. In actual fact (and the actuality of this fact is paramount), a second version of the scene takes place. The emergence of Moll from the seam reveals that, in some other, parallel world, ordered just like this one but slightly differently, Moll has lived Molly's life exactly—with the same exact experiences of childbirth, motherhood, and work; the same internal-affective history and crises about her marriage—until the episode just recounted culminates differently for her, and tragically. In this other world, the children arrive just *after* their mother has done the "kind thing" by speaking to the woman on the tour. That woman therefore does not see the children as they enter the former gas station, and isn't dissuaded by their presence from committing the act she has come to commit. She "reache[s] one hand up into the air and place[s] one hand against her stomach. . . . Then she reache[s] under her sweatshirt, presse[s] herself somewhere, and detonate[s]."⁴⁷ The result is that Moll's children are killed by an act of anti-feminist terrorism, while Molly's children are not. Moll awakens from the blast on the other side of the seam (in Molly's world), and only gradually comes to realize that she *is* on this other

side, that here there exists a double of her who continues to live and work and mother in blithe unawareness of her grief.

A central point that follows from this is that Moll comes into Molly's world by way of a *rift in the fabric of time* that makes their identical lives diverge. The temporal glitch or non-coordination that allows the children to arrive at different moments (depending on which world they inhabit) marks out the space in which something like an originary Event can take place.⁴⁸ That Event—the act of explosive violence—both is and engenders a radical alterity. It is such alterity in that it shatters the smooth unfolding of the (neoliberal-feminist, post-political) present. And it engenders alterity inasmuch as it splits off from Molly an alternate being (Moll), who enters Molly's world as a *real appearance*, an other whose ontological substance remains inassimilable to hers, belonging as it does (within the laws of Molly's world) to the realm of the uncanny and the merely apparent.

The formal inventiveness of Phillips's novel is born of the seriousness with which it strives to depict this uncanniness *as real*. The novel's form is indeed best captured by the term I invoked earlier, "speculative realism" (borrowing from Ramón Saldívar). It combines a *speculative* inquiry into how the unreal intrudes on empirical reality with a resolutely *realist* mode of description and characterization. The aim of this form is to denaturalize and expand the real by confronting it with what it precludes as radically heterogeneous to itself. In Saldívar's essay, which appeared during the Obama presidency and thus before both Trump's candidacy and the murder of George Floyd, this heterogeneity concerns what has been invisibilized by the consensus that the contemporary U.S. is a "postracial" society. In the case at hand, the real is defined instead in relation to the postfeminist, post-political consensus. The significance of the book's speculative dimension thus centers on what disturbs that consensus and troubles the reality sustaining it.

Three points about that disturbance bear particular notice:

First, the children are killed *at work* and therefore only *because* Moll(y) works. (If she did not work, they would not die.) Their deaths are also the result of an action aimed at the "blasphemy" of a feminized God, hence an act of fundamentalist terror that finds women's empowerment scandalous. If, then, the attack inaugurates the book's speculations on the alterity of the real, the (realist) purpose of this speculation must be explained with reference to our contemporary gender order. One explanation might go like this: motherhood in the postfeminist era entails not merely the anxieties and fears that probably accompanied it in any era but the *surplus* terror of an inextinguishable guilt, the imputation that paid work is both a necessary part of a woman's self-fulfillment and an act of negligence so egregious that it raises the possibility that one's children will die from it. Without this guilt, the compulsion to mother—an essential component of "having it all"—would be hard to instill and even harder to reproduce. It is the sense that one has never been quite vigilant enough and that the impending dangers are of an existential nature that subtends the postfeminist ideal of womanhood and the related fetishization of mothering (and equally, of mother's milk). Hence Molly considers at one point "what a phenomenon it was to be with her children, to spend every moment

so acutely aware of the abyss, the potential injury flickering within each second.”⁴⁹ The novel actualizes this potential for injury while also showing that it is indeed a temporal matter, a question of what “flicker[s] . . . within each second”: no moment of a mother’s life today can perhaps escape the strobe-light vision of an “abyss” into which her children may *already have fallen*.

One can put this point a bit differently by saying that the specter of impending danger turns out to signal a calamity that has already afflicted one’s children (the future is already past), and that the *reality* of the children’s destruction therefore inhabits every moment of a mother’s life. This means that the mother, too, is shadowed by the counter-mother whom she already is by virtue of that inhabitation. The doubling of Moll(y) is *The Need’s* way of figuring this psychosocial dilemma: it denotes the porousness of the membrane separating successful mothering from its disastrous underside. Molly *is* Moll, in this sense, not just because the novel construes each one as an ontological iteration of the other, but because the very substance of this doubling is that the “same” woman both succeeds and fails to keep her kids safe from harm. That is also why the book begins two weeks after the inaugural Event has spit Moll out onto Molly’s side of the seam. In the reader’s experience, Moll is *always already present* in the world that Molly inhabits, so that there is never a moment when Molly exists independently of her double.

A second effect of this characterological doubling is the production of maternal rivalry. Unlike the cow with whom Molly experiences a cross-species solidarity whenever she breast-pumps, the other mother appears from the start as antagonist and threat. This is of course a way of revealing how the neoliberal appropriation of feminism intertwines it with narrowly personal success and self-empowerment, thus curtailing the categories of solidarity and the collective. Moll appears in Molly’s world bereft, enraged, and ruthlessly determined to reclaim the children she has lost. Molly herself acknowledges as much when she thinks to herself, when trying to figure out what she could possibly say to David about what’s happened in his absence: “There is another version of me. She came through the Pit. Her children are dead. She wants our children.”⁵⁰ This is the logic of the either/or, of a fight to the death for the right of one mother to exist at the expense of the other. Molly thus reflects that Moll is “perhaps in hiding, plotting her next and darkest move,”⁵¹ while Moll states ominously: “Maybe

Unlike the cow with whom Molly experiences a cross-species solidarity whenever she breast-pumps, the other mother appears from the start as antagonist and threat. This is of course a way of revealing how the neoliberal appropriation of feminism intertwines it with narrowly personal success and self-empowerment, thus curtailing the categories of solidarity and the collective.

. . . when your children are killed you kill in turn.”⁵² The murderousness of maternal rivalry—and that it concerns possession of the children—could hardly be clearer. And so it transpires that the greatest pain Molly experiences is not when she is made to witness Moll sleeping with her husband, but when she overhears Moll suckling her own son, Ben—the sound of her own usurpation and maternal redundancy. The question raised by such scenes is whether a mother who has already lost her children isn’t in fact a better mother than the mother who, because she’s never lost them, takes her own children for granted.

Third and quite strikingly, this rivalry is countered by and gives way to the utopian vision of a different order in which solidarity and mutual aid hold sway. This process pertains directly to the “ghosts from [an] indiscernible future” that Crary opposes to a contemporary world that declares itself temporally homogenous, bereft of “the otherness that is the motor of historical change.”⁵³ Within *The Need*, the otherness at issue concerns that second order of meaning in the book’s title to which I have referred: the sense that Molly *needs* Moll—that the impossible other-mother must be made possible—in order to counter the real impossibility of mothering in the present conjuncture. The protagonist’s doubling then becomes legible as the conjuring of a replicant-mother who can help to ameliorate the burdens of motherhood in a world that purports to free women to have it all.

The evidence for this order of solidarity is of various kinds. There is, to begin with, Molly’s uncertainty about her right to banish Moll from the present: “she could not quite find the . . . words” “that would cast Moll out of her life forever,” could not discover “the unassailable argument against” the other’s presence in Molly’s world.⁵⁴ She tries to say “*You have to. You are a*” and “*You could go back, or try to,*” but these words are blocked by her ceaseless doubts: “Go back how? . . . And to what? To whom?”⁵⁵ “The person who was perhaps in hiding, plotting her next and darkest step,” dissolves into “the person who was perhaps in dire need of help and comfort, food and shelter.”⁵⁶ One result of this dissolution for Molly is a “curious camaraderie with the person she wanted to eliminate, the person who wanted to eliminate her.”⁵⁷

The two women therefore come to an “arrangement” that grants legitimacy to Moll’s claim on the children—legitimacy of the uncanny (m)other within the real; of the impossible within the possible. At least for the present, they will co-parent the children in shifts, being careful not to reveal that there are two of them. The arrangement is not without its costs. Molly suffers terribly from having to share “her” children and from witnessing Moll’s success in loving them. This is the novel’s way of allegorizing how the neoliberal definition of women’s success in relation to individual “empowerment” means that genuine experiences of solidarity will always also be a source of pain. Cooperation is (an) alien to the system that can accommodate it only in the pre-appropriated form of “teamwork”—a working together that marshals “solidarity” for the collectively distorted ends of exploitation.

Finally, and most remarkably, the co-parenting between mother and her other becomes not so much a secret arrangement as an openly acknowledged fact. During the

stomach flu that afflicts Molly and her children and makes her feel that caring for them has become “impossible,”⁵⁸ Moll swoops in to mother all three of them, with no attempt to hide from the children the fact that they now have *two mothers*. “Hi, other Mommy,” says Viv to Molly when she (Molly) awakens to find it so. Phillips writes that Molly “was loath to admit that this was the realization of an old fantasy of hers: to be in two places at once. To have two bodies. To give herself over to recovery while her children were in the hands of someone who loved them exactly as she did.”⁵⁹ The suggestion here is that Moll corresponds to the wish-content of Molly’s secret need, that the double can alone make it possible to succeed at mothering by supplementing (doubling) the site of maternal love. Moll is literally “the realization” of this unreality, the actualization of this impossibility of “hav[ing] two bodies” and “be[ing] in two places at once.” At precisely the moment when mothering comes to seem most impossible, this other kind of impossibility—the impossible foreclosed by our dominant arrangement of sense data with sense—abrupts to render the impossible possible.

The effects of this are not, moreover, restricted to the immediately maternal. As relationships with her co-workers sour, Molly starts to feel “extraordinarily lonely,” but then she thinks: “She need not be lonely. There was someone. One person who understood everything and more.”⁶⁰ This person (Moll) can counter her loneliness precisely because the two women share an identity-in-uncanny-difference. “With each exchange [of memories], Molly’s body . . . grow[s] more excited, an inner flush spreading through her at the affirmation of their shared random memories, a shedding of all loneliness, a level of unity rapidly approaching the divine.”⁶¹ The corporeal aspect of this de-alienation is key to the novel’s largest ambitions:

They were already standing so close, but Moll took a step closer; matched her body up to Molly’s: thighs to thighs, torso to torso. . . . Molly smelled the unwashed smell of herself, doubled, heady. Moll’s face drooped onto Molly’s neck.

Despite having conceived and borne and birthed and nursed children, this was the most intimate human sensation she had ever experienced: Moll’s warm tears moving across the skin of her collarbone. . . .

She found herself opening to it, open to it, this subtlest interplay between two echoing forms.

But it was too much. She needed to step back.

Yet she could not. She was addicted to it, the movement of the tears, the lack of gap between them.⁶²

The unity here should not be confused with that naïve form of utopianism that pretends to have eradicated all differences, separations, and mediations. The socially necessary forms of these are clear from the fact that what unites the women is grief (i.e., internal *non-unity*, woundedness), and from the fact that this “most intimate human sensation” is still an “interplay between two echoing forms.”⁶³ The iterative relation of the women’s

two bodies and the non-assimilation of each to the other remains untransformed by the experience of oneness. What Moll provides instead is the real intimation of some *other order of being*, the concrete negation of those socially *unnecessary* forms of alienation that make motherhood “impossible,” that render guilt and disconsolate grief constitutive of maternal experience. This negation contains within it the *corporeal* intuition of a sociality that the current reality forecloses.

This intimation is bodily because the eroticized body provides perhaps the most readily available template for a negation of the real or given world. In an earlier passage, Molly is

puzzled . . . that orgasm [isn't] widely considered a phenomenon that challenges everything we believe about human existence—doesn't it serve as proof of an alternate state of being? Isn't the fact that people can feel this way, so in thrall to this enigmatic force, so carried away by it, even for an instant, evidence that the state in which we spend most of our time is merely one possibility?⁶⁴

Orgasm is imagined here as the intimate, corporeal equivalent of the Event in “objective” reality. It shatters the homogeneity of time no less than the immediate unity of the self. It provides at once an interior self-distancing that places the self outside itself (*ek-stasis*) and an epiphanic revelation “that the state in which we spend most of our time is merely one possibility” among others. This affirmation (through the self's negation) of multiple worlds, this opening up through corporeal *ek-stasis* of “alternate state[s] of being”—what is it but a way of describing the intermittent eruption of the “impossible” into our current partition of the sensible? It is an effort on the novel's part to say that the orgasm has momentous political consequences, a kind of intimate devastation/revelation that intuitively without substantializing the most radical forms of heterogeneity. To the extent that the body is, in addition, the site for registering the sense data that our partition of the sensible at present pre-limits, we could do worse (the novel suggests) than reclaim this alternate bodily capacity: the capacity for figuring a future sociality—and a female solidarity—based in the self's uncanny encounter with its own ecstatic self-replications.⁶⁵

>> INCONCLUSION

My reading has sought to expand our sense of what comes after the post-political by exploring two dimensions of post-politics that its theorists tend to downplay. The first of these is time. Phillips's book invites us to attend to the temporal closures of our present, to grasp how the constriction of politics to the realm of (neoliberal) possibility and the univocality of the real is sustained by a temporal regime that seeks to eradicate the ghosts of historical time. These ghosts are heterogeneous, inassimilable dimensions of reality that are produced, not by the mere fact of our being-in-time (as in Derrida's *hauntology*), but by the specifically historical regime of post-politics, with its commitment to homogeneity and the “static redundancy” that integrates subjects into the networks of communicative capitalism. In *The Need*, that heterogeneity takes the form of a temporal

glitch through which the *speculative* enters the *real*. The glitch is the condition of possibility for an Event that both expresses alterity and produces it (in the form of characterological doubling). My argument has been that this glitch is the novel's main formal wager, the means by which it enacts the non-univocity of the real by introducing into that reality the temporal heterogeneity that the post-political order would foreclose.

My essay's second contribution concerns the articulation of postfeminism with the post-political. If post-politics achieves its effects through a broad-based consensus about the politically possible and the short-circuiting of ideological antagonisms through the technocratic management of agreed-upon "interests," then one such set of interests is surely that of women's advancement. We live in an age where it goes without saying that women should be "empowered" and that the state should facilitate that empowerment. *The Need* helps us see how this consensus at once *dissembles* the impoverished character of neoliberalism's version of feminism; *masks* that feminism's contradictory kernel (a contradiction centered on the relations between production and social reproduction); and *is haunted* by the specters of what the consensus precludes. The doubling of the mother in Phillips's novel stages this spectral haunting: it breaches the present with a devastated past that is at once "impossible" and constitutive of neoliberal motherhood; yet it holds out the promise of a future collectivity based in women's ecstatic self-extensions and the cooperative satisfaction of mothers' needs.

Notes

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- 1 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 199.
- 2 Žižek, 353.
- 3 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 156–57. In Rancière’s work, the “police order” is more or less equivalent to the reigning regime of consensus. “Partition of the sensible” refers to the taken-for-granted ways of dividing and linking up the domains of sense perception and meaning (two modalities of “sense”)—divisions and linkages that, in Rancière’s view, have profound consequences for what is politically possible at any given moment.
- 4 Rancière, 152.
- 5 “Marx’s once scandalous thesis that governments are simple business agents for international capital is today [the] obvious fact on which ‘liberals’ and ‘socialists’ agree. The absolute identification of politics with the management of capital is . . . the openly declared truth by which our governments acquire legitimacy” (Rancière, *Disagreement*, 113).
- 6 I use the term “foreclosure” in its non-psychoanalytic sense, to name the rendering of something or some possibility “out of bounds” in advance. In psychoanalytic terms, the concept is more appropriate to Žižek than to Rancière. Žižek in fact asserts explicitly that post-politics rests on the *foreclosure* of political antagonism from the Symbolic order, which then returns in the Real “in the guise of new forms of *racism*”; Rancière, in contrast, conceives of post-democracy as employing a variety of tactics for disavowing politics as the “supplementation of all qualifications by the power of the unqualified,” i.e., for *disavowing* politics as the disruption of “the police” by the part that has no part (see Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 199; Rancière, *Dissensus*, 61).
- 7 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 147.
- 8 See Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 234–35, where Žižek argues that Rancière fails to grasp how the police order is sustained by its “obscene double,” which constitutes yet disturbs consensus in and as its foreclosed supplement.
- 9 Rancière, *Disagreement*, 102, 119.
- 10 Rancière, 103.
- 11 Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject*, 236–39 (quotation on 238).
- 12 Rancière, *Dissensus*, 147.
- 13 On speculative realism as a literary practice, see Saldívar, “The Second Elevation of the Novel.” My usage differs from Saldívar’s on several fronts, not least in my hesitation to link this literary form to the *philosophical* schools of speculative realism, dirty realism, object-oriented ontology, and so forth. In the name of an anti-anthropocentrism that in any case sits uneasily with their Promethean regard for the philosophical enterprise, these theories tend to bypass the problematic of subjectivity that seems to me critical to any adequate analysis of contemporary capital and the post-political. For a careful critique along these lines, see Sutherland, “The Contortions and Convolutions of the ‘Speculative Turn.’”
- 14 For discussions of some of the relevant fictions in slightly different contexts to this one, see Forter, “World Enough, and Time”; Forter, “Nature, Capitalism, and the Temporalities of Sleep.”
- 15 Rancière, *Modern Times*.
- 16 Crary urges the retrieval of “ghosts from [an] indiscernible future” to counter a 24/7 capitalism that robs our world of “the otherness that is the motor of historical change” (24/7, 109 and 8–9).

17 For a persuasive assessment of the strengths and limits of the new turn to social reproduction, and especially the assumption amongst those engaged in it that social reproduction is not really “value producing,” see Mezzadri, “On the Value of Social Reproduction.” Mezzadri’s essay forms part of a 2019 dossier in *Radical Philosophy* that aimed to take stock of the publication of Tithi Bhattacharya’s edited collection, *Social Reproduction Theory*. The dossier makes a compelling case for the continued relevance and radicality of the earlier group of feminists over and against the collection’s effort to turn social reproduction into a “theory.” I’m largely persuaded by these arguments; Fraser’s essay on care, however, which appears in the Bhattacharya volume, seems to me to withstand many of the criticisms mounted within the dossier.

18 Mezzadri, 34.

19 Fraser, “Crisis of Care?”, 33.

20 Fraser, *The Old Is Dying*, 12.

21 *The Need’s* focus is on middle-class, white motherhood in the U.S.; one could doubtlessly criticize it for the types of experience it excludes, including those of non-white women in the Global South who receive hardly any of the “benefits” said to flow from the integration of feminism’s goals into the liberal democratic state. Still, there seems to me something deeply valuable in a book that reveals the cost paid by even the most privileged women for the postfeminist/neoliberal dispensation.

22 Phillips, *The Need*, 31–2.

23 Phillips, 32.

24 Phillips, 30.

25 Phillips, 22.

26 Phillips, 31.

27 Put differently, the novel insists on the continued material basis of our purportedly dematerialized, digital age. The insight parallels Malm’s in *Fossil Capital*, 301–02.

28 On the distinction between real and merely formal subsumption of labor under capital, see the Appendix to Marx, *Capital*, Volume 1, especially 1025–49.

29 Phillips, *The Need*, 73.

30 Phillips, 236.

31 Phillips, 19.

32 See Slaughter, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All”; Belkin, “The Opt-Out Revolution.”

33 Affirmative culture, Marcuse writes, “anticipates the . . . truth that . . . a form of social existence is possible in which the economy does not preempt the entire life of individuals”—but it does so by displacing such truth to the “higher” realms of the spiritual or the aesthetic, thereby “excus[ing] the poverty, martyrdom, and bondage of the body . . . the subjection of the body to the domination of the soul” (“The Affirmative Character of Culture,” 81).

34 I leave aside the more recent and dispiriting extension of these developments into a digital feminism that, for all its apparent powers of mobilization, tends toward the logic of branding, the fetishization of celebrity, and the substitution of personal style for collective action. (A Tufts University poll found in 2016 that “only 20 percent of millennial women disagreed with the statement that feminism ‘is about personal choice, not politics’”). On this development, see Faludi, “Feminism Made a Faustian Bargain with Celebrity Culture.” The quotation concerning the Tufts poll comes from Faludi’s article.

35 Phillips, *The Need*, 31.

36 Phillips, 57.

- 37 Phillips, 13.
- 38 Fraser, "Crisis of Care?", 34.
- 39 Fraser, 33, 34, 35.
- 40 Fraser, 34–5. Though Fraser's reading of the historically specific significance of the breast-pump is convincing, her construal of a time when breast-feeding by privileged white women was the norm relies on historical elisions. Her account leaves out the coerced breastfeeding of white infants by Black enslaved women in the antebellum South, as well as the suspicion of breastfeeding instilled in women (across racial and class divides) by the infant formula industry in the mid- to late- twentieth century.
- 41 Phillips, *The Need*, 16–7.
- 42 Indeed, the empathy for cows and the expression of cross-species maternal solidarity in the quotation can be read as the residue of a solidarity among women that the neoliberal-feminist consensus forbids, at best diminishing and relocating it to the realms of teamwork and individualized "mentorship" (for climbing the professional, corporate, or political ladder).
- 43 Crary, *24/7*, 109 (emphasis is mine).
- 44 Phillips, *The Need*, 21.
- 45 Phillips, 27.
- 46 Phillips, 28.
- 47 Phillips, 145.
- 48 I draw here loosely on Badiou's conception of the Event in *Being and Event*, which has influenced Žižek's theory of the act. Also pertinent is the Deleuzian insight articulated by James Williams: "From the point of view of the existence of two possible worlds, the event is all important" (*Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*, 78).
- 49 Phillips, *The Need*, 18.
- 50 Phillips, 109.
- 51 Phillips, 227.
- 52 Phillips, 185.
- 53 Crary, *24/7*, 8–9.
- 54 Phillips, *The Need*, 164.
- 55 Phillips, 209.
- 56 Phillips, 227.
- 57 Phillips, 209–10.
- 58 Phillips, 236.
- 59 Phillips, 245.
- 60 Phillips, 192.
- 61 Phillips, 227–28.
- 62 Phillips, 186.
- 63 On the distinction between basic (socially necessary) and surplus (socially exploitative) forms of mediation, repression, and alienation, see Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, 35–40, and Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 79.
- 64 Phillips, *The Need*, 46.
- 65 One could restate this insight by saying that the novel helps us bring together the queer-theoretical arguments for a sociality based in imperfect self-replications with the project of thinking beyond the closures of our post-political present. See especially Bersani's *Homos*.

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