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## **Acts of Institution: Embodying Feminist Rhetorical Methodologies in Space and Time**

*While feminist scholars consider bodies, dress, and space central to inquiry into gendered rhetorics, we lack methodologies that situate these factors—and the additional factor of time—in an integrated system. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of “acts of institution” can help feminist rhetoricians to construct richer accounts of the gendering of the female body. The example of rhetorics surrounding women factory workers in World War II America demonstrates how rhetorical practices produce gender differences through embodied, spatiotemporal rhetorics. In this case wartime adjustments did not bring about long-term changes because they relied on a fundamental antithesis between men and women.*

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Rosie the Riveter has become a popular figure in American public memory.<sup>1</sup> An icon of feminist advances in the workplace, Rosie supposedly showed that a woman could do a man’s job and do it well. Between 1940 and 1945, the percentage of women in the labor force grew from twenty-eight to thirty-four percent, which meant that the 1940s witnessed the largest proportional rise in female labor force participation in the twentieth century (Acemoglu, Autor, and Lyle 499). Due to manpower shortages, women were needed in industrial spaces that had previously excluded them, such as railroad yards, shipyards, and heavy manufacturing plants. Yet Rosie’s popular image has been contextualized and qualified by historical scholars, who have shown that the war failed to dislodge the traditional image of women as homemakers or to create significant gains in employment equality for women (see Honey; Milkman). For instance, James Kimble and Lester Olson have shown that the “We Can Do It!” poster currently emblazoned on coffee mugs, t-shirts, and posters carried a much more circumscribed feminist

message than its circulation today suggests. As Kimble and Olson suggest, rather than constituting a radical rupture in prewar gender ideology, the war actually facilitated “considerable continuity between women’s pre- and postwar employment, and between pre- and postwar definitions of femininity” (535). Why was this the case? One reason for this might rely on a “rhetoric versus reality” explanation—wartime propaganda (rhetoric) suggested that women’s opportunities were unlimited but actual industrial practices related to women’s work (reality) failed to change. But such an explanation would oversimplify the constitutive relationships between “rhetoric”—the symbolic injunctions about women workers—and “reality”—the materialization of those injunctions into the physical space of the factory.

During World War II in America, propaganda materials contributed to a material-symbolic system that included bodies, dress, space, and time. This system continually promoted women’s employment by emphasizing differences between men and women; these differences were materialized in workplaces. Gender ideologies determined which jobs women were given: Writers argued that women’s smaller bodies and deft fingers made them ideal riveters, welders, and airplane mechanics. The assumption that women were naturally interested in their appearance affected how they dressed for work; *The New York Times* fashion section, for example, featured frequent descriptions of the latest uniforms for female workers, designed to appeal to women’s sense of vanity as much as safety. Arguments about women’s domestic work shaped the physical spaces of industry: Some factories added day-care centers, lunch rooms, and even beauty salons to accommodate women workers. Ideas about women’s stamina and home duties shaped time schedules: Some factories developed new ways of scheduling shifts for women workers. Thus women’s entry into technical spheres was accomplished by defining specifically feminine attributes that could be useful for war production and by shifting workplace arrangements accordingly.

In this essay I argue that feminist rhetoricians should pay more attention to gendered rhetorics of bodies, clothing, space, and time *together* in order to construct more thorough accounts of the rhetorical practices that sustain gender differences. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theories of language and materiality, I suggest a methodology for feminist rhetorical history that helps rhetoricians understand how the gendering of the female body occurs in specific historical periods through what Bourdieu calls “acts of institution.” To show how the rhetorics of bodies, dress, space, and time work together, I identify three “clusters” of rhetorical practices that bring these elements together: delicacy, appearance, and domesticity. These three clusters link bodily practices with spatiotemporal ones; during the war, they justified adaptations in factory workspaces to suit women. Yet each of these clusters involves arguments about women workers that ultimately

exaggerate women's differences from men. Ultimately, these wartime adjustments did not create many meaningful changes for women because they still relied on a fundamental antithesis between men and women, one that was materialized in bodies, dress, space, and time.

### Methodologies for Feminist Rhetoric

Methodological issues have occupied an important place in feminist historical scholarship. Just as women rhetors have had to reinvent rhetorical strategies in order to speak effectively, feminist rhetoricians have had to reinvent rhetorical methodologies in order to research nontraditional subjects. In 1992 Patricia Bizzell outlined three avenues for feminist rhetorical scholarship: one, offering resistant readings of canonical texts; two, recovering women who might be considered rhetors; and three, searching in alternative sites for women's rhetorical practices (51). Following Bizzell's call for feminist research in the history of rhetoric, rhetoricians have developed and practiced a wide range of methodologies, ranging from Richard Leo Enos's "rhetorical sequencing" (77) to Vicki Tolar Collins's "material rhetoric" to Jacqueline Jones Royster's "critical imagination" (84).<sup>2</sup> Cheryl Glenn has argued that gender studies should inform feminist historiography because they help us to understand power relations (see *Rhetoric Retold*). In accordance with this research program, we have turned our attention to rhetorics of space (Enoch, "A Woman's Place"; Mountford; Johnson), dress (Mattingly), the body, and, to a much lesser extent, the social organization of time.

Feminist scholars have pointed out that bodies, dress, and spaces have traditionally been shaped around a male/female binary. For instance, Roxanne Mountford has shown how the masculine rhetorical tradition of religious oratory, predicated on the power and authority of a male body, has required female preachers to reconfigure the physicality of preaching (67).<sup>3</sup> Carol Mattingly has demonstrated the ways that women rhetors drew upon dress as a rhetorical resource in the nineteenth century. In terms of space, Jessica Enoch has argued that we turn our attention toward rhetorics of space as "those material and discursive practices that work to compose and enhance a space" ("A Woman's Place" 276). Nan Johnson has demonstrated that nineteenth-century rhetoric handbooks defined rhetorical spaces along gendered lines, privileging spaces where men tended to perform, such as the presidential debating platform, the pulpit, law court, or public lecture hall, but not the spaces where women performed rhetoric, such as the parlor or classroom (157).

Less attention has been paid to gendered rhetorics of time. Yet, following feminist geographer Doreen Massey, I argue that rhetorics of space are always accompanied by rhetorics of time (264).<sup>4</sup> While rhetorics of space may dictate

how a material space should look, who should use it, and so on, rhetorics of time dictate when that space should be used, who uses it when, and how activities are scheduled and sequenced within that space. By mentioning time, then, I am not just referring here to the rhetorical concept of *kairos*, or timing, but to something closer to *chronos*, or quantitative time. While we often think of quantitative time as an abstract, neutral backdrop for our activities, it too is shaped by rhetorical injunctions about its organization and use. In this case I am referring to the time structures that governed women's work: the organization of work into shifts, legislation and policies that limited how long women worked and at what times of the day, and time schedules of services that supported women workers (such as transportation, shopping, cafeterias, and day-care centers). These time structures are shaped by arguments about women's bodies, needs, and nature as much as by practical necessity. For instance at the start of the war, most states had laws in place that limited the number of hours women could work each week, and often *when* they could work. These laws dated back to 1908, when the United States Supreme Court upheld an Oregon law dictating that women could not work for more than ten hours a day (see Brandeis's opinion on *Muller v. Oregon*). The justification for this law was based not on worker's rights but on the notion that women needed special protection because of their reproductive roles. In this way the Supreme Court legislated a gendered rhetoric of time, one that dictated how long women could spend in particular kinds of spaces.

To date much of our inquiry into gendered material rhetorics has been segmented into particular categories (body, dress, space, and to a lesser extent time). We lack methodological frameworks that allow us to examine these factors *together*. Accordingly, I would like to suggest a new methodology for feminist rhetorical work here: investigating rhetorics that contribute to the gendering of the female body in space and time. In particular, this research method would ask scholars to examine what rhetorical strategies have been used to emphasize, exacerbate, or construct differences between men's and women's bodies and downplay similarities. Further, it would consider how notions about gender difference shape material spaces as well as time structures (such as work schedules or hours of operation for stores). Feminist rhetoricians should consider how these elements work jointly as an integrated system that produces gender difference and female subordination. Bourdieu's work on language and materiality provides one way for feminist scholars to do so.

In *Language and Symbolic Power*, Bourdieu argues that one of the functions of performative language is to enact categories that "produce what they designate" or that "actualize" power relations (121, 37). One of the primary functions of such language are symbolic acts that Bourdieu terms "acts of institution," acts that impose new differences or exploit pre-existing differences (such as biological

ones) in order to “produce discontinuity out of continuity” (120). These acts of institution create or exacerbate minor differences between men and women in order to perpetuate a system of masculine domination; a similar phenomenon is at work in discourses that reproduce differences of class, race, and sexuality. As Judith Butler points out, “Sexual difference . . . is never simply a function of material differences that are not in some way both marked and formed by discursive practices” (1). In other words, sexual difference is both material *and* discursive, with neither the material nor the discursive taking priority over the other.

In rhetorical terms acts of institution use the figure of antithesis to position two things as diametrically opposed, even though the things in question (such as the size of male and female bodies) might actually be distributed along a more gradual scale. For instance, Jeanne Fahnestock has noted that scientific discourse often exaggerates the actual distribution of a given attribute (for example, brain size) in men and women, constructing an antithesis that cuts out the overlap between men and women in a given sample (84). Bourdieu suggests that the rhetorics of the body, dress, space, and time all work to reproduce gender and power structures in this antithetical mode (70). In *Masculine Domination* Bourdieu provides a sense of how space and time coalesce in Kabyle society (a Mediterranean area group that Bourdieu selects as paradigmatic of masculine domination):

The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded: it is the sexual division of labour, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each sex, of their place, time and instruments: it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women, or within the house, between the male part, the hearth, and the female part—the stable, the water and vegetable stores; it is the structure of time, the day and the farming year, or the cycle of life, with its male moments of rupture and the long female periods of gestation. (9–10)

The division between men and women is also incorporated into symbolic bodily behaviors; Bourdieu describes how Kabyle women are taught to hold their bodies (“bent, with arms folded on the chest, before respectable men”) (24). Clothing also provides a resource for “acts of institution”; in Kabyle society, Bourdieu writes, women wear belts that symbolize the closure and chastity of the female body (15). These arrangements of space, time, bodies, and dress were not separate or arbitrary but part of a social system that produced and exaggerated a system of masculine domination. By paying attention to “acts of institution,” feminist scholars can help to identify and critique the symbolic injunctions of body, dress,

space, and time that reproduce and exaggerate gender differences in other socio-historical contexts.

### Act One: Delicacy

One of the primary symbolic resources for masculine domination rests on antithetical logics that continually figure men's bodies as strong and women's bodies as weak. Notions of women's delicacy have shaped labor practices and protectionist laws since at least the start of the century, often limiting the kinds of work women could do, for how long, and in which kinds of workplaces. During World War II, notions of women's delicacy persisted, even as women were recruited to fill in for men in war industries.

One line of reasoning sought to repurpose women's delicacy—formerly a liability—into an advantage for wartime labor. Propagandists suggested that women were somehow more suited for certain kinds of war work than men, given their quicker fingers, their better attention to detail, and their greater capacity for routine, tedious work. In *Wanted: Women in War Industry*, Laura Nelson Baker connects technical jobs to women's previous experiences with more refined, artistic tasks, noting, for instance, that a former pianist took a job operating a milling machine and that artists, sculptors, and pottery makers became expert handlers of plastic molds for dies (16). Baker also writes that women could find opportunities in the aircraft industry because of their “more deft hands” and their smaller bodies:

Things about women that have always been considered liabilities in production work are now assets in an aircraft plant. Their size and build, for instance. You don't have to be an Amazon at all, for all except a few jobs; you're better off if you aren't. It's a lot easier for a fly-weight worker to crawl inside a wing or walk across a piece of framework than for a larger woman or a man. (18)

Women's smaller bodies and lesser muscular strength had previously been considered failings, reasons not to hire women; here they became advantages. As historian Ruth Milkman has suggested, wartime propaganda justified women's labor not by degendering technical work but by regendering certain types of technical work as feminine (9). Revaluing the delicate female body served this purpose, casting some formerly masculine jobs as suitable for women. On another level, however, these arguments exaggerated differences between men and women, creating an antithesis where a sliding scale might be more apt.

Visual images from the era exemplify these two rhetorical purposes: emphasizing the delicacy of the female body and contrasting that delicacy with all

things masculine (whether male bodies or machines). Drawing on what Cara Finnegan has termed “image vernaculars” or “the enthymematic modes of reasoning employed by audiences in the context of specific practices of reading and viewing in visual cultures” (34), these images used visual antithesis to contrast women’s hands with the intricate objects they worked on (for instance in Figure 1, below). These images were often accompanied with captions that emphasized women’s delicate, nimble figures; Figure 2, for instance, was originally published with this caption: “Scarlet fingernails give emphasis to the important work that feminine fingers are doing on this inspection line. Performing a delicate and repetitive job, women at this Midwest aircraft motor plant use dial indicator gauges in the process of inspection of ball sockets used in airplane motors.” Surely, many women are taller and stronger than many men; men might perform fine-motor tasks as well as women. By figuring all women as delicate and petite, propagandists erased the similarities between men and women.

Even as women were being touted as nimble, patient workers, however, they were also singled out for their greater susceptibility to fatigue. Here women’s “delicacy” was once again a liability; presumably, women’s more fragile bodies could not handle the same type of strain and effort as men’s could. In 1943 and 1944, a number of national reports warned that women workers had higher rates of absenteeism than did men. A 1943 report of the National Industrial Conference Board, for example, noted that the average woman missed 14.4 days of



Figure 1: Women Assemble Control Boxes for Bombers, Circa 1942.



Figure 2: Women Inspect Ball Sockets for Airplane Motors, Circa 1942.

work a year, as opposed to 9.6 days for men (“Absentee Loss” 21). While some suggested women’s domestic duties accounted for this difference (a factor I address later), others attributed the higher rates to greater incidence of fatigue or illness among women workers (Stark E7). Women, it was argued, simply had less strength and stamina than men did; they were unaccustomed to working long hours, and their bodies required more rest. These assumptions were often based on anecdotal evidence at best; and while women’s delicacy may have limited them from some types of labor, it did not limit them from long hours of particularly tedious, unskilled work requiring manual dexterity.

Protective clothing for women industrial workers was justified in part by similar arguments about delicacy. For instance, J. E. Walters suggested that “women’s skins are more sensitive to men’s to primary irritant[s]” (62). For this reason, Baker notes, special creams are offered at some factories “to protect a woman’s delicate hands and help her keep that school girl complexion” (95). Even footwear was described under the rubric of delicacy—Baker noted that in one shipyard women wore “heavy, bulky men’s work shoes” that had been purchased in “the smallest sizes obtainable” and fitted with pads “to protect women’s higher arched feet” (91). This sentence creates a subtle distinction between men’s feet (big, clunky) and women’s smaller, more delicately shaped feet.



Writers recommended temporal and spatial changes in the factories themselves to accommodate women's delicate bodies. In *Women at Work in Wartime*, Katherine Glover suggests "reasonable working hours, adequate rest periods and lunch time, rotation of shifts, [and] proper rest room and lunchroom facilities" (12). Similarly, in 1942 the United States Women's Bureau advocated shorter working hours for women, arguing that the fine processes women performed required greater concentration and precision than heavier tasks. For this reason they "lend themselves best to the maintenance of an even production schedule throughout the day, *provided* daily and weekly hours are sufficiently short and rest periods are arranged suitably to fit the needs of the job" (*Equal Pay* 7). While these kinds of changes to the temporal structure of factory work would surely benefit male workers as well as female ones, they were usually advanced on the basis of women's greater susceptibility to fatigue and strain. In a throwback to the reasoning of *Muller v. Oregon* circa 1908, Baker noted that legislation for women "may be necessary to protect the interests of women—the homemakers and mothers of the race" (191). She cites the eight-hour day and forty-eight-hour week, as well as laws requiring regular rest days, meal periods, and rest periods, as particularly useful, since "[w]omen tend to tire more quickly than men" (194). Similarly, in *Mothers in Overalls*, Eva Lapin advocated switching women to different shifts less frequently (every two or three months rather than every two or three weeks) because "women's nerves and body need time to get accustomed to different hours" (15). All of these temporal adjustments were supported on the basis of a common assumption—that women were somehow more vulnerable than men were to fatigue.

Factory layouts were also shifted to accommodate women's bodies. The Women's Bureau and other groups lobbied for more restrooms and lunch rooms in factories because these would help to alleviate women's fatigue, and they surveyed factories to determine whether they had been implemented. One study, for instance, found that only 48 out of 137 plants surveyed made food available (whether in a cafeteria or at a canteen) and that 73 out of 137 lacked lunchrooms (*Women Workers* 21). In addition to their availability, the cleanliness of these rooms was also stressed: "[S]ince most women are more affected than men are by dirty, dark, badly ventilated, and disorderly surroundings, it is important that workrooms and all service facilities be kept at least decently clean" (*Women Workers* 36). Bathrooms became a major focus in some industries; Patricia Cooper and Ruth Oldenzel have shown that clean, spacious restroom facilities for women became a benchmark for evaluating work spaces in the railway industry (9). Factory work spaces were adapted to suit women's smaller bodies. Glover argued that machines could be redesigned to accommodate women's shorter average heights and lesser ability to lift heavy weights (10). For instance, she describes how plants provided wooden platforms to help women reach heavy-duty

machines, how steel jigs were replaced with lighter ones made out of masonite, and how complex operations were broken down into smaller units “to make the work more suitable for the greater quickness but less strength of women” (11).

Bourdieu writes that an act of institution “*signifies* to someone what his identity is, but in a way that both expresses it to him and imposes it on him by expressing it in front of everyone . . . and thus informing him in an authoritative manner of what he is and what he must be” (121). Rhetorical acts stressing women’s delicacy operated in this way to impose a certain kind of identity onto women—one that was bolstered through an integrated material-symbolic system. It was not only rhetorics of the body but also the integration of these rhetorics into dress, spaces, and time structures that reinforced women’s identity as delicate, weak, fragile, and therefore in need of extra protective measures.

### Act Two: Domesticity

A second rhetorical “cluster” of acts of institution constructed women’s war-time labor as essentially domestic in nature, even when that work occurred in a factory—a space previously constructed as the exact opposite of the home. These acts of institution helped to figure technical work as being squarely in line with women’s domestic duties, which in turn naturalized and reinforced women’s groundedness in the home rather than the workplace. Bourdieu notes that this fundamental distinction between the “public, masculine universe” and “private, female worlds” shapes collective expectations about what acts are natural or normal for a man or a woman to do (*Masculine Domination* 57). Thus work tasks performed outside the home are often figured as “natural” for a woman if they can be cast as analogous to those tasks performed inside the home. For example, nursing and teaching have historically been justified as “women’s work” because women typically cared for sick family members and raised children in the home. A similar logic applied to jobs for women in World War II; as Milkman notes, in World War II analogies to the household were extended to quite a wide range of jobs (5).

Propagandists often represented technical work as being similar to domestic tasks. One refrain, from the Women’s Bureau’s bulletin *What Job Is Mine on the Victory Line?* was as follows:

If you’ve sewed on buttons, or made buttonholes, on a machine,  
 You can learn to do spot welding on airplane parts.  
 If you’ve used an electric mixer in your kitchen,  
 You can learn to run a drill press.  
 If you’ve followed recipes exactly in making cake,  
 You can learn to load shells. (qtd. in Lapin 6)

These arguments functioned primarily to show women that their previous experience would translate into wartime work and to make these new kinds of jobs seem more familiar to a female audience. However, rather than challenging traditional notions about women's bodies, these discourses often reinforced them, limiting technical work to those tasks that could be associated with traditional forms of women's domestic labor.

Further, this logic meant that women's responsibility for domestic work in the home was rarely challenged. Instead, changes to spatial and temporal structures of factories were made to *accommodate* women's domestic work. Lapin describes some of the problems stemming from the fact that many women worked "double duty," performing domestic work as well as industrial work. The time schedules of factories did not always line up with stores and services. For instance, women who shopped after work for groceries would find that by 5:30 or 6:00 pm, the stores were crowded and mostly picked clean of fresh meats and vegetables (24). Accordingly, Lapin outlines some possible solutions, such as keeping stores and other services open longer, offering shopping services, and building centralized dining rooms and laundries (24–26).

In addition to changing the time structures of shops and services outside the factory, many suggested new time structures to accommodate women's domestic work. Glover suggested that women with domestic duties could be alleviated from night shift duty (12), that employers consider staggering work shifts or offering time off for housework, and that they consider offering part-time work so that women could work half-days, perhaps alternating with another woman on the same job (23). Along similar lines Lapin argues that part-time work had been used successfully in England, allowing women to use off days to do housework or to trade child care with other workers (11).

The spatial layout of factories changed as well. Some factories added day-care facilities to allow women with young children to work (see Baruch; Enoch "Engaging"). Lapin recommended recreational facilities for the younger women workers, those without families who would otherwise "drift toward unwholesome friends and diversions" (26). In addition, attention was given to housing for workers (male and female). Communal housing arrangements were put in place at some factories or in factory towns, often with assistance from the Federal Housing Program. Alternative arrangements such as dormitories, communal dining arrangements, and day-care centers were generally considered temporary, to last only for the duration of the war. And, as historians have shown, advertisements for household goods assured American women a bounty of modern conveniences after the war when they once again resumed their places in the home (Honey 122–23).

Overall, gendered rhetorics of domesticity shaped the types of jobs women performed, the physical layout of factories and the towns that sprang up around them, and even the time schedules of factories and services for workers. The *forms* of domestic arrangements may have shifted somewhat to accommodate women workers, but the fundamental association between women and the home was left intact.

### **Act Three: Appearance**

The third rhetorical cluster present in wartime propaganda emphasized that female technical workers were expected to retain a feminine, attractive appearance as they entered traditionally masculine workplaces. Even if they worked on a dirty shop floor, it was assumed that women would naturally want to look their best, primarily in order to attract the opposite sex. Acts of institution related to appearance served the conservative function of maintaining a heterosexual system. As Honey has noted,

Though the economy required that women assume male roles, don functional clothing, and engage in physically demanding dirty work, the emphasis on female sexuality gave the message that these new roles did not signify fundamental changes in the sexual orientation of women themselves or in their customary image as sexualized objects. (114)

The emphasis on appearance reinforced the “natural” distinction between men (strong, hardy, rugged) and women (soft, delicate, pretty). In this way the emphasis on appearance might be counted among what Bourdieu calls the “continuous, silent, invisible injunctions” that prepare women to accept “arbitrary prescriptions and proscriptions,” which are imprinted on “the order of bodies” (56).

Wartime writers rarely rejected the assumption that women were “naturally” interested in personal adornment. For instance, Baker seems to assume that her female readers count fashion among their primary concerns: “You must admit, for it is a well established fact, that you are a vain creature. And all the factory jobs in the country, whatever their other compensations, would not appeal to you if you had to appear before your fellow workers wearing some ‘simply horrid looking thing!’” (89). Descriptions of clothing suggested that female war workers should maintain an attractive appearance even if they were working in overalls and steel-toed shoes. For instance, the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) developed clothing prototypes for defense workers and promoted them

for their practical as well as attractive qualities. For instance, they developed a pink seersucker jumpsuit, which featured a practical hip pocket in which women could store a handkerchief and compact (Davis 39), and a cap with a high, peaked visor “to accommodate delicate curls and pompadours” (44). The AHEA made sure the garments they developed met standards of fashion as well as function (see Figure 3 below), because, as one expert noted, a factory full of women in men’s overalls would surely lead to a slump in morale (45).

Propaganda and news reports often advertised the sartorial benefits to women’s new jobs. When new women’s uniforms were announced, they were regularly presented in *The New York Times*, often accompanied with photographs and described in the same language used in fashion columns. For instance, on January 9, 1943, *The Times* featured a new uniform for women bus drivers. Designed by couturier Helen Cookman, the uniform consisted of “[a]n excellent quality of gray-beige covert cloth” fashioned into a “single-breasted jacket,” “slim, fly-front, flared skirt buttoned from belt to hem,” and “a detachable belt with generous pouch pockets” (“Uniform Designed” 16). The article assured readers that the uniform offered “definite lures” for the much-needed female bus



Figure 3: Defense Fashions Featuring Nipped-In Waists to Emphasize a Feminine Figure.

driver. Ostensibly, reporters used the language and style of fashion discourse not only to make industrial work seem glamorous but also to connect readers to an unfamiliar world of work by using a more familiar set of terms. But they also assumed that women workers would be motivated more by a snappy uniform than by patriotic or economic concerns. The “image vernaculars” in depictions of wartime defense fashions served to reassure audiences that women in work clothing would still be attractive and feminine—that the war would not disrupt basic values of femininity. As “acts of institution,” they ensured that women would not forget their roles as the “decorative sex” but would embody that role even if they worked on a dusty, dirty factory floor.

While spatial and temporal structures of factories shifted primarily to accommodate women’s domestic duties and perceived delicacy, some adjustments were also made to accommodate women’s appearance. Beneath descriptions of safety measures lurked concerns about women’s appearance. According to a report by Herbert E. Fleming, at least one wartime company went so far as to “provide for plastic surgery in case of the slightest accident that might mar a girl’s beauty” (4). Substandard housing arrangements for female workers were decried not only on the basis of health but also of beauty. Susan B. Anthony II wrote in *Out of the Kitchen—Into the War* that so-called “hot beds”—those used by several women who were on different work shifts—did not provide “beauty or rest” (101). Thus even mundane measures—enclosing mechanical equipment to prevent accidents and providing housing for workers—could be justified under the rubric of “beauty” as well as practicality and safety.

Women’s hairstyles received particular attention, justifying both spatial and temporal changes in factories and factory towns. In a presentation to the Academy of Political Science, Charlotte Carr mentioned beauty parlors among her list of services (laundry services, day care, and so forth) that must be provided in any factory town where women would be employed (12). Theresa Wolfson mentioned that going to the beauty parlor represented recreation for women workers, something she found “sorely lacking in the planning of the war industry” (52) and something that women would think worthy of a day off. Given that women were assumed to hide a coiffed bob or pompadour under their safety hats, it is not surprising that both beauty parlors and the time to visit them were in demand. Perhaps for this reason, some factories even added beauty shops so that women would not need to take a day off to get their hair done (“Beauty Shops” 16).

Overall, the evidence on appearance served to feminize and even glamorize war jobs that could otherwise seem dirty, tiresome, and mannish. The case of African-American women offers an important counterpoint here. In much of the wartime literature on women workers, the woman in question is implicitly white. When black women were hired for wartime jobs, they usually performed work

that had not been demasculinized. Instead, they often worked on jobs that were still framed as masculine. For example, during the war, black women in the railway industry performed track repair work, a job that required heavy lifting and that was not assigned to white women (Cooper and Oldenziel 10). Thus notions about women's bodies were overlaid with notions about raced bodies. It is important for feminist rhetorical histories to account for differences between women, of course, even as they trace dominant trajectories within an historical period. The "order of bodies" worked alongside orders of race and class, as well as gender.

### Rewriting Feminist Rhetorical Histories

After the war, renewed attention to homemaking as women's natural role, one grounded in biology as well as culture, shifted attention away from the role of the woman worker. As early as 1944, experts proclaimed that woman's primary career after the war would once more be that of homemaker. (Of course, this proclamation applied mainly to white, middle-class women, since lower class women and women of color were still expected to work). For instance, Rosalind Cassidy's article "Careers for Women" named homemaking as "the greatest career for women in the postwar world" (489). In 1945 *New York Times* columnist Edith Efron noted that the issue of women's proper place—whether "behind a desk or in front of a stove"—was once again subject for debate and that some were already advocating women's return to the home as a way to offset the job shortages that would arise when men returned from war ("Career" SM8). In 1945 and 1946, *The New York Times* ran a series of articles in which columnists and readers debated the "career woman versus housewife" issue, with writers weighing on both sides. Some, like Margaret Barnard Pickel (Dean of Women at Columbia University), rehashed older arguments about women's supposed physical and emotional delicacy, suggesting that women needed to face the fact that they "start with the handicap of less physical strength, a lower fatigue point, and a less stable nervous system" (46). Once again, arguments about women's biology and psychology were marshaled to urge women to focus attention on homemaking and child-rearing.

One interpretation for this might be that the arguments that facilitated women's entry into the wartime workplace were simply overturned after the war. But these arguments could be overturned so easily only because wartime discourse never fully dislodged heterosexist assumptions about men and women to begin with. The rhetorical and material shifts that permitted women to enter into the workplace on a broader scale never really challenged the notion that women were different than men—weaker, more domestic, and more fully invested in the frivolities of beauty and appearance. As Bourdieu notes, acts of institution discourage "any

attempt to cross the line, to transgress, desert, or *quit*" (122). The emphasis on delicacy, domesticity, and appearance in wartime discourse attempted to deter women from "quitting" the gender roles to which they had conventionally been assigned. Further, the rhetorical injunctions presented in propaganda were materialized in the physical space of the factory, its layout, time schedules, and the bodily performances that took place within it, making them all the more resistant to change.

The four categories of analysis here—bodies, dress, space, and time—help to offer a fuller rhetorical history of gender in a given historical setting and also help to account for the persistence of the gendered division of labor. By studying these "acts of institution," feminist rhetoricians can better understand the gendered environments in which rhetors have been situated historically and to trace the evolution of these acts of institution over time. Further, we can better account for why existing gender arrangements are so difficult to dislodge through rhetorical action—it is not only ideas or beliefs that must change but also material arrangements of bodies, spaces, and times. These elements form an integrated material-symbolic system predicated on an underlying antithesis, one that fails to recognize similarities and overlaps between men and women. For this reason an integrated rhetorical methodology provides a more thorough way to investigate the particular configurations of this material-symbolic system in different historical contexts.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The author thanks Jessica Enoch and Michelle Bailiff and *Rhetoric Review* reviewers John Lucaites and Barbara Warnick for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this essay.

<sup>2</sup>While Collins advocates "material rhetoric" as a methodology for feminist historical work, her definition is much narrower than what I am envisioning here. Collins defines her methodology as "the theoretical investigation of discourse by examining how the rhetorical aims and functions of the initial text are changed by processes of material production and distribution" (547). My use of the term *material* or *materialization* refers more broadly to the enactment of gendered rhetorics in space and time: the ways in which rhetorics of gender difference, for instance, shaped bodily practices, workplace arrangements, and even the schedules for women workers. In this way I am following work by Bourdieu, but also Chris Shilling (see *The Body and Social Theory*) and Judith Butler (*Bodies That Matter*).

<sup>3</sup>Feminist scholars are not alone in treating the body as an important site of rhetorical inquiry. Many scholars have recently advanced definitions of rhetoric that bring bodies into the purview of rhetorical analysis and action. For example, in *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, Wayne Booth defines rhetoric as "*the entire range of resources that human beings share for producing effects on one another*" (xi). Working from Booth's definition, Debra Hawhee argues that "words, images, spaces and bodies are all part of the rhetorical enterprise—the range of resources—for producing effects" (159) while Jack Selzer argues in the introduction to *Rhetorical Bodies* that scholars should consider "what it might mean to take very seriously the material conditions that sustain the production, circulation, and consumption of rhetorical power" (9).



<sup>4</sup>Massey writes that “any conception of space has a (logically) necessary corollary in a particular ‘matching’ conceptualization of time” (264). Accordingly, she suggests that cultural geographers should understand time as “the product of interaction” (274).

<sup>5</sup>Image courtesy of the United States. Office of War Information. Overseas Picture Division. Washington Division; 1944. LC-USW3-009451-C. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8d44934>>. Retrieved November 21, 2008.

<sup>6</sup>Image courtesy of the United States. Office of War Information. LC-USE6- D-005881. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8b07357>>. Retrieved November 21, 2008.

<sup>7</sup>Image courtesy of the Farm Security Administration—Office of War Information Photograph Collection. LC-USW3- 058607-C. <<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/fsa.8d44302>>. Retrieved November 21, 2008.

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