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A “suitably dead” woman: Grieving Andrea Dworkin

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates the discursive register through which lives become grievable by focusing on a case study of the discourses surrounding the death of radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin. I argue that Dworkin becomes embroiled in an interlocking nexus of illicit subject positions that set the terms of her grievability and obstruct recognition of her as a rational being by framing her (1) as the quintessential emotional and irrational woman who is not worthy of the respect typically offered to the dead and (2) in relation to her wild, unruly, and excessive body, which is conflated with her feral work.

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Death is a media-worthy topic because it is often unpredictable as well as disruptive, and negative content sells.¹ Whose death is deemed worthy of recognition in the public sphere and whose is rendered invisible are quite another matter, as is how that loss is communicated. Those lives we publicly mourn and those we efface, Butler avers, express something about our ties to others, who we are as a nation, and what we perceive as our ethical responsibility, setting the stage for whose life is worthy of protection and whose vulnerability is not our concern.² Grief is often understood as a private rather than political emotion, something to be contained and expressed within the domestic sphere rather than a modality of subject or community formation; yet, Butler suggests that grief has the possibility of furnishing “a sense of political community of a complex order.”³ Identifying the obituary as an important source for the distribution of our grief, Butler argues that it functions as “an act of nation building” because it serves as the “means by which a life becomes, or fails to become, a publicly grievable life, an icon for national self-recognition, the means by which a life becomes noteworthy.”⁴ Whose lives are represented in the obituary genre, and what this representation infers, has become the subject of sustained interdisciplinary inquiry, particularly quantitative study, only in recent years.⁵ As a cultural form, the obituary is largely overlooked in communication studies, although Tumolo, Biedendorf, and Ayotte offer an important exception in their examination of the discourses that marked the passing of French philosopher Jacques Derrida.⁶ The ideological and rhetorical possibilities of those discourses beyond obituaries, such as op-ed pieces, commentaries, letters to the editor, and review essays, which also serve important

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identity formation and community building functions, have not received due scholarly attention.

This study investigates death discourses as an important cultural form and mechanism of power by examining those that mark the passing of the radical US feminist theorist and activist, Andrea Dworkin (1946–2005). The author of over a dozen books and a prolific speaker, Dworkin was committed to challenging gender and sexual polarity, patriarchal oppression, and violence against women, striking against longstanding, sacred edifices underpinning Western culture. Dworkin explored with voracity those issues even feminists would sometimes eschew, taking on rape, incest, battery, and pornography, providing one of feminism's most daring voices. Often remembered for her commanding 1986 testimony before the Attorney General's Commission on Pornography, her antipornography advocacy work generated nationwide debate on the role of pornography, women's rights, and First Amendment Rights, and made her an enemy of the pornography industry. Although she was an outspoken advocate of the feminist cause, Dworkin's relationship with feminists was somewhat strained: "Some dismissed her as a victim feminist, an un-reconstituted radical feminist whose rhetoric was an embarrassment to a movement now established in universities."⁷ For her part, Dworkin thought some feminists bore responsibility for "a lot of what's gone wrong [in feminism]"⁸—and, in her critiques, she provided an important challenge to liberal feminist orthodoxy. Although Dworkin was a controversial figure, the revolutionary tone of her work and the radical ideas she espoused inspired many⁹ and secured her space among the 10 percent of women included in Posner's inventory of public intellectuals.¹⁰

Following Dworkin's death of acute myocarditis in 2005, numerous discourses emerged in the form of op-ed pieces, commentaries, obituaries, and review essays. That *her* death was deemed worthy of public note is meaningful since women's deaths have a pattern of erasure in the Western world with myriad studies pointing to a longstanding bias towards men.¹¹ However, perhaps more important is how Dworkin is remembered—the ways in which her life is represented and the extent to which it is marked as grievable. Dworkin makes a particularly useful case study for mapping the contours of grievability since, perhaps more than any other feminist of her time, she stretched the public's imagination to its conceivable limits.¹² As Dworkin was a contentious figure who elicited criticism, it is expected that critique would be evident in the discourses surrounding her death; this essay seeks to capture the discursive register through which that sentiment is articulated and the terms by which Dworkin becomes recognizable as a grievable figure.

Using feminist rhetorical analysis, I analyze the discursive strategies that emerged in the discourses that were written to mark Dworkin's passing. I conducted a search of news outlets using Academic OneFile and Google from the date of her death on April 9, 2005 to one month later, May 9, 2005. I examined thirty-eight op-eds, articles, commentaries, obituaries, and letters to the editor that were featured in mainstream US and British news outlets. In what follows, I argue that Dworkin becomes embroiled in an interlocking nexus of illicit subject positions that seek to contain her, and which set the terms of her grievability, by defining her in relation to emotionality and the body while positing her as an unreasonable person and a person without reason. In my analysis, I proceed by demonstrating that Dworkin is framed (1) as an emotional and irrational woman who is not worthy of the respect typically offered to the dead and (2) in relation to her wild, unruly, and excessive body, which is conflated with her work. Dworkin is positioned as

someone whose visibility requires that she be commented upon, but these framing strategies obstruct recognition of her as a rational being whose work is worthy of consideration, positing her as the quintessential emotional and unruly woman and casting limits on her grievability. Although I move beyond the obituary form to uncover the ideological work being conducted by all discourses surrounding Dworkin's death, it is helpful to begin by contextualizing this effort with a discussion of how women historically have been represented in the genre and the cultural work such discourses accomplish.

Grievable lives

The obituary serves as an important point of departure when considering the cultural influence of death discourses and the ways in which they operate as mechanisms of power, ordaining whose deaths are deserving of mourning and articulating the terms upon which that mourning is based. This is no small matter, Butler avers, "for, if a life is not grievable, it is not quite a life."¹³ Existing research points to a persistent bias towards men in obituaries across time and space, indicating a pattern of erasure and lack of public recognizability for women, and gesturing towards a hidden side of sexism. Fowler and Bielsa, for example, found that women's representation in obituaries has seen only a marginal increase between 1900 and 2000, with female obituaries currently hovering around 19 percent in major British newspapers and 14 percent in *The New York Times* and the French based *Le Monde*.¹⁴ That women constitute less than one-fifth of obituaries in the studied samples in 2000, which represents a mere single digit improvement over a one hundred year time span, prompts Fowler and Bielsa to question the ostensible "death of patriarchy."¹⁵ Not only are more obituaries written for men than women, but also men's obituaries tend to be longer and are more likely to be accompanied by a photograph.¹⁶ The photographs that do accompany women's obituaries, memorials, and death notices have a greater age discrepancy than do their male counterparts, portraying deceased women as much younger than their age at death and indicating a greater focus on their appearance than men.¹⁷ Men's occupational status and achievements are more frequently cited than that of women¹⁸ and "obituaries give greater recognition to women who were members of the helping professions, whereas men are afforded greater recognition in more competitive occupations such as business."¹⁹ Such bias is apparent even in the obituaries of similarly situated professionals. Drawing on a study of men and women in prominent professions, Noppe states that obituaries of eminent male psychologists identify their "superior intellect and legacy-giving activities" while similarly situated female psychologists were praised for "their humane behavior and ability to maintain families despite their demanding and successful careers."²⁰ Key decision makers have noted the absence of women with seemingly scant reflexivity: "The comparative dearth of suitably dead women for the main obituary columns is a question that has long challenged the editors."²¹

The monuments we construct to honor women's memory also reflects an asymmetry. Notably, women's tombstones tend to be smaller than men's; they also are less expensive.²² In the virtual world, women fare no better. Web memorials created by nonprofessionals in virtual cemeteries also demonstrate a gender bias, with more memorials being written for men than women.²³ The gender stratification that permeates Western culture not only follows women throughout life but also follows them and is perhaps more potent in death.

As obituaries, death notices, and memorials assign and circumscribe value for the deceased through their patterns of inclusion and exclusion, they operate as potent ideological forms that regulate whose identities the broader public should affirm and whose will be consigned to the margins. They serve as an important part of the historical record of a culture, articulating a biography of a life²⁴ and constructing a public identity for the deceased that expresses and emphasizes the deceased's social value as a citizen.²⁵ Fowler asserts that obituaries are a "particularly influential form of collective memory" that function to "reveal and shape 'how societies remember,'" paralleling "the school history textbook in shaping a whole generation's stock of knowledge."²⁶ As "carefully constructed rhetorical compositions,"²⁷ such discourses deploy a persuasive, socializing, and disciplinary function for the broader citizenry, as Bawarshi asserts:

The purpose of the obituary, then, is not to console those closest to the deceased or to help them maintain a sense of continuity in the face of loss, but to ascribe the deceased with a social identity and value, one that is recognizable to others within the community.²⁸

As cultural forms surrounding death constitute, reify, and circumscribe particular beliefs and values, they operate as mechanisms of power, rendering particular lives intelligible, desirable, and inhabitable, and demarcating those realms of thought and action that are worthy of public recognition. Consequently, they serve a strong policing function, especially around public figures, as they lend insight into "the cultural history and values of an era."²⁹

Although it is impractical, though not impossible, to write an obituary for everyone, Butler argues that we need to "ask, again and again, how the obituary functions as the instrument by which grievability is publicly distributed."³⁰ How we distribute our grief tells us something about ourselves, as well as the ties that constitute us.³¹ Pointing to the deaths we do not acknowledge—such as civilians killed in the war in Afghanistan, those who perished from AIDS, and Palestinians killed by Israeli troops—Butler questions how our frames for perceiving people as relatively human "set limits on the kinds of losses we can avow as loss."³² Butler draws our attention to the fact that

there are no obituaries for the war casualties that the United States inflicts, and there cannot be. If there were to be an obituary, there would have had to have been a life, a life worth noting, a life worth valuing and preserving, a life that qualifies for recognition.³³

Butler asks us to consider how acts of permissible public grieving define and limit whose life is intelligible and worthy of mourning and, consequently, whose life merits protection by such valuation.³⁴ Similarly, we must be mindful of how those deaths which are disavowed, precluded from public grieving, work to constitute the public sphere through their denial: "The public will be created on the condition that certain images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain losses are not avowed as losses."³⁵ In the articulation and valuation of human life through discourses surrounding death, the question becomes: What are the mechanisms and strategies through which some lives become recognized and others lose their intelligibility and right to be mourned? Further, I would argue, because inclusion does not necessarily imply intelligibility or validation, when a life is recognized through public expressions of mourning, we also must consider the rhetorical scaffolding that sets the terms of that inclusion. In examining the cultural contours of such discourses, we might identify

whose life emerges as recognizable and whose is effaced, while also considering the conditions under which such recognizability emerges.

A “suitably dead” woman?

It is meaningful that Dworkin was selected for remembrance considering the longstanding marginalization of women in symbolic forms surrounding death. However, inclusion alone does not confer or ensure affirmation or political power. The discursive strategies through which a life gains visibility may function as yet another strategy of containment or disavowal as impressions sometimes are rendered, and made visible, as a regulatory strategy: “The creating of an impression can be a technique of power.”³⁶ Providing an example of intellectual disavowal in their analysis of the discourses³⁷ surrounding Derrida’s death, Tumolo et al. found that hostile writers depicted Derrida’s philosophy as lacking merit because of the complexity of his writing, disinclination to define deconstruction, and “his allegedly deceitful use of convoluted prose to obscure a lack of content.”³⁸ These writers also assailed Derrida for his associations with Paul de Man and Martin Heidegger, promoting moral relativism, and enabling an academic demagoguery that produced scholarship characterized by impenetrable prose and an ostensible lack of rigor.³⁹ Interestingly, Tumolo et al. found that many hostile and sympathetic writers failed to take up his ideas with any diligence, giving the term “uncivil mourning” to those discursive acts that use “death as an opportune moment for advancing supplementary claims without engaging the ideas of the deceased.”⁴⁰ It is illuminating to examine Dworkin’s death discourses with Derrida’s in mind because, although Derrida was ensconced in academic life and Dworkin was somewhat skeptical of “the premises of the feminism that comes out of the academy,”⁴¹ both sought to influence intellectual and cultural thought, and were notable public figures. Dworkin is a particularly interesting case to examine because not only was she a woman attempting to influence public culture in a meaningful way, but also she attacked long established pillars of traditional culture with particular force and in ways that provoked controversy, as did Derrida; Grant tells us that “Andrea Dworkin made people angry.”⁴² Consequently, it would not be unusual for Dworkin to receive criticism. My interest here is not centered on, though not disinterested in, the nature of the criticisms, which are expected and in some cases justified and important. Instead, I turn my focus to the frames through which the criticisms are enacted and what those frames suggest about her, and more broadly, women’s, recognizability, as well as the rhetorical resources available to describe women who push traditional sensibilities to their limits. Of particular interest are two recurring frames that emerge; the first depicts Dworkin as the quintessential emotional woman and the second ties Dworkin to her body. By analyzing how Dworkin is portrayed in the discourses surrounding her death, we might map the processes by which her life, for some, becomes ungrievable. Each section is preceded by a discussion of these frames and their role in representing women.

Dworkin’s unruly emotions

Western discourses have long depicted emotions as chaotic, irrational, antisocial, dangerous, and in need of control.⁴³ Although emotions are important, indeed pivotal human

expressions that enable ways of understanding the world, they frequently are cast as negative, anti-intellectual, and the grounds upon which to deny authority. Concurrently, women are repeatedly instantiated as the gender most connected with emotion, a convenient configuration that both constitutes and validates the hierarchy between men and women.⁴⁴ This has contradictory, though largely negative, results because emotionality is posited as “the source of women’s value, their expertise in lieu of rationality,” while it is simultaneously depicted as “the origin of their unsuitability for broader social tasks.”⁴⁵ The figure of the emotional female is constructed also in contradictory terms, as both pliant and easy to control and as potentially uncontrollable and dangerous, thus justifying woman’s subjugation.⁴⁶ Epicentral to rendering women untenable as knowing beings, the figure of the emotional female has long functioned as a silencing strategy to suppress women’s agency, police their activity, and cast whatever opposition they may summon on a continuum between trifling and lunacy. As Lutz argues, “given [emotion’s] definition as nature, at least in the West, emotion discourses may be one of the most likely and powerful devices by which domination proceeds.”⁴⁷ Positing feminists as emotional, particularly angry, is a recurring strategy employed to delegitimize their political disapprobation. Ahmed argues, “Feminists who speak out against established ‘truths’ are often constructed as emotional, as failing the very standards of reason and impartiality that are assumed to form the basis of ‘good judgment.’”⁴⁸ When feminism and feminists are framed as “hostile” and “emotional,” both become an “extension of the already pathological ‘emotionality’ of femininity.”⁴⁹

In the discourses that mark her passing, Dworkin is frequently depicted through emotional terms—as angry, bewildered, hysterical, pitiable, and crazy. This rendering, which is connected to her intellectual work, posits Dworkin’s life as not worthy of the respect typically conferred on the dead, thus positioning her as an ungrievable figure and fashioning her work as dubious. Some may view diminishing Dworkin’s value as an intellectual or framing her in negative terms in this context as a breach of decorum. Protocol largely dictates that death discourses honor the dead—or at least do not actively assail the deceased. Tumolo et al. state that “overtly hostile and dismissive tone[s]” are “atypical” of the obituary genre, which the authors refer to as “a type of written eulogy.”⁵⁰ Because the force of such convention is strong, some writers felt compelled to acknowledge its existence before indicating that it would not be honored in Dworkin’s case. Young writes that she feels the pull of such convention, but she will disregard it: “Decorum requires accentuating the positive when speaking of the recently deceased; here, there is little positive to accentuate, except for a badly misused talent and a badly misdirected passion.”⁵¹ Young states that Dworkin was “a preacher of hate,” and then works to identify the source of, and circumscribe, Dworkin’s influence:

Dworkin’s admirers laud, and wildly exaggerate, her role in the battle against domestic violence and rape; if she deserves “credit” for anything, it’s helping infect feminist activism on these important issues with anti-male bigotry and paranoia . . . Her melodramatic assertion that the everyday life of women in our culture is an “atrociousness” could only trivialize real atrocities . . . On some level, Dworkin deserved compassion as a troubled woman with a history of sexual and physical abuse . . . Yet Dworkin was never relegated to the lunatic fringe where she belonged: her texts have been widely assigned in women’s studies courses, and prominent feminists from activist Gloria Steinem to the philosopher Martha Nussbaum have offered their praise, treating her hatemongering as extremism in defense of the oppressed.⁵²

As Young indicates why she believes Dworkin emerges as recognizable—her texts are used at universities, notable figures have praised her, and she has admirers who believe she has made a difference—she works to “set the record straight” by indicating how Dworkin pushed the movement off track by inspiring misandry and redirecting its energy “into a futile, divisive campaign against pornography.”⁵³ Dworkin recognized that some women defended pornography and perceived it as “a superficial target” in the struggle for women’s rights, but Young does not address Dworkin’s responses to such positions or the reasons that she thought it “incarnates male supremacy.”⁵⁴ By positing Dworkin’s ideas as “infect[ing] feminist activism” she invokes a metaphor of pathology, suggesting that Dworkin acts as a communicable disease as she frames Dworkin as an emotional, troubled, pitiable woman whose ideas are not only dubious, but also dangerous. Instead of designating Dworkin’s experiences of sexual and physical abuse as possessing some sort of value in establishing relationships with other survivors or informing her perspective on the systemic nature of women’s oppression, Young deploys them as the context for bolstering her claim that Dworkin is unstable. Yet women’s experiences have long been pivotal to feminist politics: “Women’s testimonies about pain . . . are crucial not only to the formation of feminist subjects (a way of reading pain as structural rather than incidental violence), but to feminist collectives, which have mobilized around the injustice of that violence.”⁵⁵ Young also extends her reach beyond Dworkin to castigate those who have found value in Dworkin’s ideas, condemning their culpability in the spread of Dworkin’s errant messages. While Young’s criticism here is clear—she believes that Dworkin espoused a rhetoric of misandry, overstated women’s plight in our culture, and inspired paranoia with her claims—she situates her critiques in the familiar trope of the emotional woman. Dworkin is not simply a human who is wrong in her ideas or approach, a person with whom, as intellectual equals, we must disagree or diverge in quality or tone. Instead, she emerges as a “melodramatic” and “troubled woman” who should be dismissed to the “lunatic fringe.”

As writers work to circumscribe Dworkin’s influence, they simultaneously attest to her power by the mere act of writing. If Dworkin had no consequence or power in the culture, if she had not struck a chord, there would be no effort enacted to limit her sphere of influence or “set the record straight.” In a letter to the editor of *The Boston Globe* affirming and bolstering Young’s assessment of Dworkin, Reverby also restricts the limits of Dworkin’s grievability: “Not every practicing feminist, even those of us raised properly by our mothers on matters of decorum, can easily mourn the passing of Andrea Dworkin.”⁵⁶ Similarly, *The New Criterion* invokes the Latin phrase meaning “Of the dead, nothing unless good” before dismissing its relevance in Dworkin’s case. As the periodical brands itself as “devoted to engaging, in Matthew Arnold’s famous phrase, with ‘the best that has been thought and said,’”⁵⁷ *The New Criterion*’s condemnation is designed to carry weight:

We were prepared to let the untimely death of the radical feminist Andrea Dworkin last month at 58 pass without comment. It is not that we subscribe to the admonition that *de mortuis nil nisi bonum*—we don’t—but rather that we felt that the less said about Ms. Dworkin the better.⁵⁸

Although *The New Criterion* prefers to consign Dworkin to silence and invisibility, this is not possible because noted intellectual Catharine MacKinnon ensured Dworkin’s presence

through a laudatory op-ed piece published in the visible *New York Times* in which she states, “her voice was fresh, her ideas original and powerful,” and “the range of her literary contribution alone . . . is exceptional.”⁵⁹ After dismissing MacKinnon’s positive evaluation as “poppcock,” *The New Criterion* asserts: “Dworkin did not have many virtues as a thinker or writer, but no one can say she was obscure.”⁶⁰ The periodical acknowledges her visibility for the express purpose of circumscribing her influence and limiting her grievability. Then it draws on a quote from Dworkin to justify why she is not worthy of praise:

“Being a woman in this world is having been robbed of the potential for human choice by men who love to hate us.” That was her central message: the world, and especially men, are unfair to women. That was her theme, her only theme, which she repeated in various registers of anger, bewilderment, and hysteria for nearly thirty years. One might feel sorry for Andrea Dworkin. In many ways she was a pitiable figure. But only *The New York Times* could rush such a ridiculously hyperbolic celebration into print.⁶¹

The New Criterion critiques Dworkin’s repeated protestations against women’s oppression in US culture. Interestingly, repetition is a strategy that Dworkin knowingly used in her writing. When discussing her love of classical music and Bach in particular, for example, Dworkin said, “Repetition, variation, risk, originality and commitment created the piece and conveyed the ideas. I wanted to do that with my writing.”⁶² In discussing one of her first pieces of writing, Dworkin said she kept circling back to a particular theme; it was her way of “creating movement yet insisting on the permanence of some elements of the scenario.”⁶³ It is fair to state that Dworkin repeatedly addressed women’s oppression; however, *The New Criterion* does not merely portray her as a repetitious bore—she is framed as a woman who is emotional: angry, bewildered, and hysterical. Tomlinson argues that the trope of the angry feminist “constitutes part of a cultural training program that makes antifeminism and misogyny a routine element in everyday speech and written argument” as it works to “delegitimize feminist argument even before the argument begins, to undermine feminist politics by making its costs personal, and to foreclose feminist futures by making feminism seem repulsive to young women.”⁶⁴ Further, Tomlinson asserts, “clichés like the angry feminist put animosity—not argument—at the center of political discussions, interpellating readers as always already antifeminist.”⁶⁵ In addition to representing her as emotional, the periodical renders her pitiable, a potent frame that serves to strip Dworkin of her autonomy and power as it condescendingly positions her as someone who needs help. Notably, like Young, the periodical also extends its critique to censure and regulate those who support Dworkin and give her work visibility.

Some writers express concern with what they perceive as Dworkin’s unwarranted attack on men. Gornal uses this perspective explicitly as his justification for why Dworkin does not merit esteem or mourning in his last words on her: “If you think the dead deserve more respect, forget it. In life, Dworkin had none for men.”⁶⁶ In a move that serves to divide women, Gornal suggests that Dworkin held in contempt the women for whom she struggled:

She appeared to despise her own “gender class”-mates, dismissing by implication her sisters as dim-witted, suggestible victims . . . trying to make women (especially those who—the fools!—actually liked hetero sex and chose not to share her dank, dark, dungaree dungeon) uncomfortable with who they were and how they lived their lives. She was, of course,

good value and I particularly enjoyed the old feminazi's wild gender libels, including such generalised offensive loopiness as . . . her conclusion that the swing to the right in American politics "expresses the rage of white men against women and people of colour who are seen to be eroding the white man's authority." Yes, dear.⁶⁷

While some writers render Dworkin angry and pitiable, Gornal instead initially fashions Dworkin's work as wild and silly; he posits her as amusing while he frames her intellectual work as wild slander unworthy of serious consideration. In providing what some may perceive as a paternalistic "Yes, dear," he frames Dworkin as a complaining wife or an inferior other who he is placating but with whom he certainly disagrees, objecting to what he perceives as her overgeneralization of men and even suggesting in his article that her experiences of sexual and physical abuse may be entirely fictional. By indicating that her experiences, which ground her life's work and serve as the basis for her literary output, may be lies, Gornal goes further than any other writer in maligning Dworkin's character and positing her as truly irrational.⁶⁸ For if a person has based her entire career and literary output on such fabrications, then she truly must be deranged. Additionally, Gornal takes aim at her sexuality, metaphorically conflating lesbianism with a musty, cold prison cell, while eliding her purposeful subversion of gender and sexual polarity. Indeed, Dworkin and her partner, John Stoltenberg, advocated for gender and sexual fluidity, a position they embodied as they both publicly identified as gay but lived together for thirty years, marrying in 1999. One might view Dworkin's refusal to be identified as heterosexual as a purposeful attempt to undermine the kind of homophobia that seems to take shape in Gornal's critique.

The critiques of Dworkin that situate her within the frame of the emotional, irrational woman are not confined to those that are purely negative. Fox posits Dworkin's work as lacking reason even as she praises her: "Though some critics dismissed her work as unreasoned diatribe, Ms. Dworkin remained an outspoken champion of the causes in which she believed."⁶⁹ Drawing on a review of one of her books by Laura Miller, Fox further animates Dworkin as emotional by suggesting that Dworkin was "utterly convinced that all truth can be found in her own roiling, untempered emotions."⁷⁰ Hunter-Tilney writes that Dworkin was "an angry voice at the extreme fringes of the feminist movement"⁷¹ and Pollitt calls her "the counsel of despair, and crazy, too."⁷² Gornick, who indicates that Dworkin's "excess" was necessary to the movement, states that her ideas were, at one time, "like a welcome buzz saw, cutting through to the raw truth of unfiltered emotion" but eventually, "the sound of her voice became not only wearisome but stupefying."⁷³ While it is important and necessary for writers to identify where they believe Dworkin succeeded and failed in her work within the women's movement, it is notable that the critiques frequently invoke, and fall back on, the figure of the dangerous, uncontrollable, emotional woman, as if there is no language beyond the tropes that precede us with which to conceptualize those things about Dworkin that make us uncomfortable. There is a certain irony in using patriarchal modes of language and thought to describe a woman who dedicated her life to struggling against such definitions. Ahmed notes that it is difficult for feminists to "intervene in the conditions in which we are received" since the "conditions in which we speak are not of our making," but we must "persist in explaining why our anger is reasonable, even in the face of others who use this anger [or emotion] as evidence of poor reason."⁷⁴

In a critique that illuminates anger as a reasonable and even useful response to oppression, Ind frames Dworkin in terms of her emotions, but positions these feelings in the struggle for women's rights: "Andrea was angry, there is no doubt about it. But we needed anger and we needed somebody to occupy the extreme position."⁷⁵ Ind moves us in the direction of understanding anger as an important political tool around which to organize and express injustice in a culture that is inscribing the harm we reject. Anger articulates what we are for and what we are against, its presence summoning an epistemological force, advising us that what we are experiencing or interpreting does not cohere with our vision of justice. It involves, as Ahmed states, a particular reading of the world that is a rational assessment of injustice.⁷⁶ This reading aids us in understanding the importance of subverting the emotion/reason binary: "We need to contest this understanding of emotion as 'the unthought,' just as we need to contest the assumption that 'rational thought' is unemotional, or that it does not involve being moved by others."⁷⁷ The binary between emotion/reason enables misrecognition—we fail to recognize the epistemological value of emotion and we erroneously believe that reason is not informed by sentiment. Meanwhile, we delegitimize and pathologize the political outrage stemming from systemic and institutional oppression. Ahmed urges us to reject the emotion/thought binary and recognize how emotions are part of a mediated, thinking experience:

Focusing on emotions as mediated rather than immediate reminds us that knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world.⁷⁸

By adopting such a perspective, we are positioned to identify how emotion/reason symbiotically suffuse and inform one another, and eschew the gendered hierarchy the traditional binary imposes.

As these writers critique Dworkin's life and work, and circumscribe her grievability based, in part, on her perceived emotionality, they not only activate and reify time worn tropes of the emotional female and fail to engage new modalities with which to express the complexity of Dworkin and their own responses to her (for Dworkin forces us to look at ourselves) but also they fail to register how emotion itself is part of their sense-making process. Ironically, many of these writers express themselves in an emotional tone, unable to recognize that the ways they have been moved by Dworkin is itself part of their sense-making experience. While critique is important and necessary, identifying the frames through which criticism is registered provides a sense of how our modes of expression are informed, and limited, by the conditions that precede us.

Dworkin's unruly embodiment

Women have long been denied positions of esteem in the Western intellectual tradition. This positioning is due to a variety of interlocking forces, including women's framing as the gender that is most tied to emotion and defined by the body. Despite the progress women have made in Western cultures, the twin specters of emotionality and embodiment as strategies of containment are remarkably persistent, morphing across time and space, but never disappearing. In the first wave of the women's movement, Farrell notes, US

antisuffragist propagandists utilized imagery of women's bodies to depict suffragists as "overbearing," "mannish," and as "primitive, coarse beast[s], too ugly, too big, too fat."⁷⁹ A second-wave feminist, Dworkin expressed how norms regarding women's embodiment functioned to contain women in her 1974 book *Woman Hating*:

Standards of beauty describe in precise terms the relationship that an individual will have to her own body. They prescribe her mobility, spontaneity, posture, gait, the uses to which she can put her body. They define precisely the dimensions of her physical freedom. And, of course, the relationship between physical freedom and psychological development, intellectual possibility, and creative potential is an umbilical one.⁸⁰

Thirty years later, Wolf argued that beauty norms continue to work as a mode of subjugation for women: "Like any economy, [beauty] is determined by politics, and in the modern age in the West it is the last, best belief system that keeps male dominance intact."⁸¹ Today, with the rise of what Gill has termed the postfeminist sensibility, a rationale has emerged that justifies the obsessive preoccupation with, and policing of, women's appearance and sexuality.⁸² Rather than identifying the unremitting utility of the female body as an instrument of women's oppression in a neoliberal order, third-wave feminists advocate the sexualization of the female body and expressions of femininity that heighten the differences between men and women as a route to power and self-improvement. Press notes that third-wave feminists, in a move that is compatible with neoliberal conceptions of the self, embrace women's sexual appeal and the idea that the self can and should be continually reconstructed in an effort to achieve perfectibility.⁸³ Self-policing becomes a necessary route to attain this ideal and second-wave feminists are cast as repressive and anachronistic for being suspicious of the sexualization and feminization of women's bodies.⁸⁴ It is perhaps not surprising, then, at a time in which we witness a re-emphasis on policing the contours of female embodiment, that Dworkin's appearance becomes hypervisible in the discourses surrounding her death. For some, Dworkin's embodiment emerges as yet another condition upon which the grieving of her life becomes difficult.

Of the thirty-eight death discourses analyzed, Dworkin's appearance was mentioned in 61 percent of them. Some writers bring visibility to the fact that Dworkin was vilified as a result of her appearance during her lifetime. MacKinnon, for example, describes how Dworkin's appearance became a strategy of policing Dworkin, and, by extension, women's embodiment, while she was alive: "Where the physical appearance of male writers is regarded as irrelevant or cherished as a charming eccentricity, Andrea's was reviled and mocked and turned into pornography."⁸⁵ That Dworkin did not conform to notions of traditional womanhood or standards of beauty in her embodiment remained a frequent topic of discussion in the discourses marking her death, but often without the thoughtful critique provided by MacKinnon. Writers unreflexively remark upon Dworkin's embodiment or feed into patriarchal norms for female attractiveness by failing to identify or properly contextualize the patriarchal and neoliberal rhetorical contours that make appearance a seemingly legitimate criterion by which to assess a woman's worth, particularly in the last word on her life. Simultaneously, Dworkin's unruly, excessive appearance is conflated with her work. These strategies function to frame Dworkin as a person who is hard to mourn or take seriously as an intellectual.

Using a humorous frame that amplifies his disdain for Dworkin, Gornal states that

Dworkin seemed to have only contempt for the body given her by nature, altering it to lend physical shape to her self-image—in Dworkin’s case not by plastic surgery, but by swallowing whole far too many portions of Susie Orbach’s maxim that fat is a feminist issue.⁸⁶

Gornal suggests that Dworkin’s unruly embodiment was reflective of and animated her feminist stance, thus containing feminism as he ridicules Dworkin’s appearance. In contrast, Roberts rejects the idea that Dworkin’s appearance, which she refers to as “mammoth,” was a feminist response to patriarchal norms. Instead, Roberts frames her appearance as a self-esteem problem: “It seemed to me that her weight (and her dungarees), far from being a symbol of feminist defiance . . . were just as strong an example of self-hating as the botox and breast enhancement bimbo, devoid of self-esteem.”⁸⁷ For Pollitt and Gornick, Dworkin’s appearance emerges as a foil for feminism. Conflating her looks with her work and positioning both as turbulent and feral, Pollitt describes Dworkin as “she of the denim overalls and the wild hair and wilder pronouncements.”⁸⁸ Pollitt draws on, and affirms, Dworkin’s above quotation regarding standards of beauty and argues that today “feminism is all sexy uplift—a cross between a workout and make-over.”⁸⁹ Yet, she remembers Dworkin in the following manner:

Andrea Dworkin was a living visual stereotype—the feminist as fat, hairy, makeup-scorning, unkempt lesbian. Perhaps that was one reason she was such a media icon—she “proved” that feminism was for women who couldn’t get a man. Women have wrestled with that charge for decades, at considerable psychic cost.⁹⁰

Pollitt’s description of Dworkin was subsequently picked up and repeated by Gornick who states, “For many people in the feminist movement, Dworkin was, as Katha Pollitt put it, our walking nightmare: a ‘fat, hairy, makeup-scorning, unkempt lesbian’ whose image the anti-feminist right exploited to the hilt.”⁹¹ On one level, these writers desire to register their concern regarding the ways in which they believe Dworkin hindered the feminist movement through her unruly embodiment. What is surprising, however, is that the importance of appearance and the ability to get a man to the legitimacy of feminism are subtly affirmed, rather than critiqued, and in a backhanded way, lesbianism is presented as an image problem for the movement to overcome. Further, there is a lack of discussion regarding or a refusal to accept Dworkin’s strategic and purposeful efforts to eschew beauty norms for women and there is no impugning of the broader cultural efforts to contain her on this basis.

Some writers indicate that Dworkin’s appearance was used as a strategy of vilification, but they simultaneously combine that insightful analysis with commentary that further grounds Dworkin in her maligned body, rather than her mind, and/or functions to limit her grievability. For example, *The Economist* states that her appearance was used as a tool of derision, but in a second breath, the magazine suggests that she qualifies as a feminazi, while failing to unpack the cultural work that enables such a naming:

While some of her critics simply disagreed with her analyses, others mocked her as too fat, too slovenly, too humorless . . . too strident, too man-hating. When the term “feminazi” became a right-wing tool of derision in the early 1990s, many of its users probably had Ms. Dworkin in mind.⁹²

Viner notes, and details, a similar strategy of mockery: “Dworkin was famous for being fat. She was the stereotype of the Millie Tant feminist made flesh—overweight, hairy,

un-made-up, wearing old denim dungarees and . . . bad trainers—and thus a target for ridicule.”⁹³ She offers laudatory words for Dworkin, affirming her place in feminism, yet Dworkin’s contested embodiment pervades her commentary. Viner is one of the few writers to mention that Dworkin “had a stomach stapling operation” and, as an inapposite example of her wit, she states that Dworkin “joked that she really ought to go on a diet.”⁹⁴ She also affirms Dworkin’s refusal to adorn herself as “rare and deeply threatening,” but concedes that “Dworkin came to represent the opposite of what women want to be.”⁹⁵ Immediately following this comment, Viner quotes feminist literary critic Elaine Showalter stating she doubts many women will get up early to go to Dworkin’s funeral. In making these moves, Viner inadvertently grounds Dworkin in the body, affirms the limits of cultural mourning for Dworkin, and subtly fuses those limits with her appearance.

Other writers simply mention Dworkin’s appearance in passing, as a brief statement before a main line of argument and, in so doing, affirm that appearance is relevant in the last word on the intellectual’s life. For example, Miller estimates her weight, while he casts her as a sickly person: “Often in ill-health, perhaps because of her obesity (she was often estimated to weigh more than 300 pounds) . . .”⁹⁶ *The Times of London* also comments on her weight: “Dworkin maintained a deliberately raw appearance, wearing overalls and sneakers and letting her hair fill in an uncombed mane. She suffered long term obesity . . .”⁹⁷ Fox focuses on the unruliness of her appearance—“With her unruly dark curls and denim overalls, Dworkin was for decades a visible presence on the lecture circuit”⁹⁸—as does August, who fuses her appearance and work: “Ignoring critics who mocked her uncompromising polemics and unapologetically unfashionable appearance, she drew on her experiences as a battered wife and rape victim.”⁹⁹ Although *The Telegraph* states in its opening line, “many felt her inflammatory writing (and possibly her appearance) did little for the cause,” in the twenty-second paragraph of the article, some helpful context for mentioning her appearance is provided:

[S]he was contemptuous of reactions to her appearance. “When women write about me,” she said, “they always talk about how they think I must feel about how I look. I find all of this close to absurd.” Nevertheless, her refusal to make any concessions for female beauty was bound up in her philosophy, not least because while some women regarded it as an act of bravery, others saw it as a symptom of her problems.¹⁰⁰

That *The Telegraph* draws on Dworkin’s own words to provide some context for her decision-making is helpful in gesturing towards the idea that hers was an act of resistance. However, almost immediately, *The Telegraph* indicates that her appearance was a symptom of her “problems”—which functions to pathologize her appearance and her work. The framing of appearance as a legitimate basis on which to evaluate a woman’s efficacy in a whole range of contexts—even intellectual—underscores the continuing problem that women face in the twenty-first century: appearance remains a strong instrument of woman’s containment and a pivotal criterion with which to assess a life’s worth.

Ungrievable Dworkin

The discourses surrounding death are one of the most consequential yet overlooked socializing elements in a culture, acting as powerful statements about who and what the broader culture values and whose lives are considered worthy of intelligibility, visibility, and

grievability. Historically, women's deaths have been marginalized in such forms, but their mere presence does not confer status or value, as this study demonstrates. Although it is important to express points of disagreement with the contributions made by intellectuals and activists, the discursive frames by which such discontent is registered is telling. Interestingly, both Derrida and Dworkin were subjected to hostile criticism in the discourses marking their deaths due to their work, which suggests a suspicion of intellectuals who struggle against the status quo. However, Tumolo et al. note that sympathetic writers came to Derrida's defense in the face of hostility, whereas in Dworkin's case, hostile writers came out in opposition to sympathetic writings and negative discourses built on one another. Interestingly, in both cases, attempts were made to discredit the contributions that Derrida and Dworkin made; however, attacks on Derrida tended to focus on the complexity of his writings, his intellectual decisions, and his associations with others, whereas Dworkin's critiques were framed by her emotions and embodiment, suggesting continued difficulties in perceiving women outside of stereotypical discursive modalities.

In the long arm of history, women have been cast in essentialist terms as the opposite of the disembodied, rational male who espouses his objective expertise. Perceived as outsiders, women who desire admittance to the male domain of reason have been compelled to work within what Code calls the malestream, by which she means androcentric structures of Western thought: "Women who seek inclusion will at best achieve the status of aliens, immigrants, whose presence is tolerated not on their own terms, but on the natives' terms."¹⁰¹ Dworkin made the "malestream" the target of censure in her radical feminist writings, struggling against the prevailing power structure. MacKinnon states, "how she was treated [in life] is how women are treated who tell the truth about male power without compromise or apology. It is why few do."¹⁰² Writers ironically invoked androcentric perspectives as they rendered her an emotional, irrational woman unworthy of the norms of decorum befitting the dead, while failing to rigorously engage her ideas or fully acknowledge the depth of the complexities she faced. Remarks regarding her appearance serve as further proof of her "alien" status. At a time when the body is perceived as a route to women's power, Dworkin's embodiment was frequently cast, and affirmed, as a reason for her ridicule and lack of power, rather than as an attempt to exist outside of patriarchal definitions. As worn and tired as these strategies are, they continue to be impressively strong instruments of political and intellectual containment, not only of women as individuals, but also of feminism as a form of community building and mode of political thought.

Feminism provides a "history of disagreeable women," Ahmed states, who are "often judged as willful women because we are unwilling to participate in sexist culture; more than that, we are willing to critique the very requirement that women be willing."¹⁰³ Consequently, "when we are not willing to adjust, we are maladjusted."¹⁰⁴ Dworkin is framed as maladjusted, an effort that works to question her contributions and trivialize the political efforts of which she was a part. Although Dworkin was a complicated, conflicted person, framing her in such a reductive manner fails to illuminate and indeed silences that complexity, rendering Dworkin—and, notably, those like her—unworthy of grief. Rather than experiencing a quiet erasure through absence, the public refusal of grief emerges as a powerful strategy that works to circumscribe Dworkin even as it allows her presence. As damaging as this enactment is, Dworkin herself may provide insight

on whether an unruly, maligned presence is still preferable to a tidy absence: "I still think it is worth everything to say what you believe. There are always consequences, and one must be prepared to face them. In this context there is no free speech and there never will be."¹⁰⁵

Notes

1. Folker Hanusch, *Representing Death in the News: Journalism, Media and Mortality* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 5–6.
2. Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004).
3. *Ibid.*, 22.
4. *Ibid.*, 34.
5. See, for example, Mushara Eid, *The World of Obituaries: Gender Across Cultures and Over Time* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2002); Bridget Fowler, "Mapping the Obituaries: Notes Towards A Bourdieusian Interpretation," *The Sociological Review* 52, no. 2 (2004): 148–72; Bridget Fowler and Esperanca Bielsa, "The Lives We Choose to Remember: A Quantitative Analysis of Newspaper Obituaries," *The Sociological Review* 55, no. 2 (2007): 203–26; Nigel Starck, "Death Can Make a Difference," *Journalism Studies* 9, no. 6 (2008): 911–24; Nigel Starck, "Sex after Death: The Obituary as an Erratic Record of Proclivity," *Mortality: Promoting the Interdisciplinary Study of Death and Dying* 14, no. 4 (2009): 352.
6. Michael Warren Tumolo, Jennifer Biedendorf, and Kevin Ayotte, "Un/civil Mourning: Remembering with Jacques Derrida," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (2014): 107–28.
7. Judith Grant, "Andrea Dworkin and the Social Construction of Gender: A Retrospective," *Signs* 31, no. 4 (2006): 967.
8. Dworkin as quoted in Katherine Viner, "She Never Hated Men," *The Guardian*, April 12, 2005, Arts & Books section.
9. Christine Stark, "Andrea Dworkin and Me," *Feminist Studies* 34, no. 3 (2008): 584–90.
10. Richard Posner, *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 168, 196.
11. Starck, "Death Can Make," 916; Illene Noppe, "Gender and Death: Parallel and Intersecting Pathways," in *Living with Dying: A Handbook for End-of-Life Practitioners*, ed. Joan Berzoff and Phyllis Silverman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 210–11. See also Eid, "The World of Obituaries," who reports a pattern of erasure in the West and Middle East.
12. Shulamith Firestone produced similarly provocative writings. However, Firestone was diagnosed with schizophrenia later in life, and this influences the tone of the discourses marking her death.
13. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 34.
14. Fowler and Bielsa, "The Lives We Choose," 208.
15. *Ibid.*
16. Noppe, "Gender and Death," 210.
17. Shirley Matile Ogletree, Patricia Figueroa, and Danielle Pena, "A Double Standard in Death? Gender Differences in Obituaries," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 51, no. 4 (2005): 337–42.
18. Eid, *World of Obituaries*; Noppe, "Gender and Death," 210; Ogletree, Figueroa, and Pena, "A Double Standard," 341.
19. Noppe, "Gender and Death," 210.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Starck, "Death Can Make," 917.
22. Noppe, "Gender and Death," 210.
23. Pamela Roberts and Lourdes Vidal, "Perpetual Care in Cyberspace: A Portrait of Memorials on the Web," *Omega: Journal of Death and Dying* 40, no. 4 (2000): 521–45.
24. Starck, "Sex after Death," 342.
25. Anis Bawarshi, "The Genre Function," *College English* 62, no. 3 (2000): 356.
26. Fowler, "Mapping the Obituaries," 148.

27. Lisa Shaver, *Beyond the Pulpit: Women's Rhetorical Roles in the Antebellum Religious Press* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2012), 19.
28. Bawarshi, "The Genre Function," 355–6.
29. Tumolo, Biedendorf, and Ayotte, "Un/civil Mourning," 111.
30. Butler, *Precarious Life*, 34.
31. *Ibid.*, 22.
32. *Ibid.*, 32.
33. *Ibid.*, 34.
34. *Ibid.*, 37.
35. *Ibid.*, 37–38.
36. Sara Ahmed, *Willfull Subjects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 140.
37. The term "discourses" is employed here instead of obituary because some of the discourses studied by the authors lapse into opinion, which situates those discourses outside of the obituary genre proper.
38. Tumolo, Biedendorf, and Ayotte, "Un/civil Mourning," 115.
39. *Ibid.*, 116–18.
40. *Ibid.*, 109.
41. See Dworkin's "Prostitution and Male Supremacy," in *Life and Death: Unapologetic Writings on the Continuing War Against Women* (New York: The Free Press, 1997), 139–51.
42. Grant, "Andrea Dworkin," 967.
43. Catherine Lutz, "Engendered Emotion: Gender, Power, and the Rhetoric of Emotional Control in American Discourse," in *The Emotions: Social, Cultural and Biological Dimensions*, ed. Rom Harre and W. Gerrod Parrott (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), 166.
44. *Ibid.*, 166; Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 170.
45. Lutz, "Engendered," 158.
46. *Ibid.*
47. *Ibid.*
48. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 170.
49. *Ibid.*, 170.
50. Tumolo, Biedendorf, and Ayotte, "Un/civil Mourning," 108, 111.
51. Cathy Young, "The Misdirected Passion of Andrea Dworkin" *The Boston Globe*, April 18, 2005, Opinion section.
52. *Ibid.*
53. *Ibid.*
54. Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 99.
55. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 172.
56. Susan Reverby, "Spent Years Refuting Dworkin," *The Boston Globe*, April 19, 2005, Opinion section.
57. The New Criterion, "About the New Criterion," *The New Criterion*, <http://www.newcriterion.com/aboutus.cfm> (accessed July 19, 2015).
58. New Criterion, "Unheralded Genius?" *The New Criterion* 23, issue, May 2005, Notes & Comments section.
59. Catharine MacKinnon, "Who was Afraid of Andrea Dworkin," *The New York Times*, April 16, 2005, Opinion section.
60. New Criterion, "Unheralded Genius."
61. *Ibid.*
62. Dworkin, *Heartbreak: The Political Memoir of a Feminist Militant* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), 2.
63. Dworkin, *Life and Death*, 11.
64. Barbara Tomlinson, *Feminism and Affect at the Scene of Argument: Beyond the Trope of the Angry Feminist* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2010), 1.
65. *Ibid.*

66. Jonathan Gornal, "For Ms. Dworkin, Fact Wasn't a Feminist Issue," *Times of London*, April 18, 2005, 11, Life section.
67. Gornal, "For Ms. Dworkin."
68. Taking her 1999 rape allegation in Paris, which some critics viewed as dubious, as a point of departure, Gornal suggests that *all* her accounts of abuse were fabricated.
69. Margalit Fox, "Andrea Dworkin, Writer and Crusading Feminist, Dies at 58," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2005, Life section.
70. Ibid.
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72. Katha Pollitt, "Andrea Dworkin, 1946–2005," *The Nation*, April 14, 2005, Gender and Sexuality section.
73. Vivian Gornick, "Welcome Buzz Saw in the Gender War," *L.A. Times*, April 19, 2005, News section.
74. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 177.
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76. Ahmed, *Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 171.
77. Ibid., 170.
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79. Amy Erdman Farrell, *Fat Shame* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 82.
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89. Ibid.
90. Ibid.
91. Gornick, "Welcome Buzz Saw."
92. The Economist, "Obituary in Brief: Andrea Dworkin," *The Economist*, April 28, 2005, World section.
93. Viner, "She Never Hated Men."
94. Ibid.
95. Ibid.
96. Stephen Miller, "Andrea Dworkin," *The Sun*, April 12, 2005, News section.
97. Times of London, "Andrea," 58.
98. Fox, "Andrea Dworkin, Writer and Crusading."
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100. The Telegraph, "Andrea Dworkin," *The Telegraph*, April 13, 2005, Obituary section.
101. Lorraine Code, *What Can She Know? Feminist Theory and the Construction of Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 120.
102. MacKinnon, "Who was Afraid."
103. Ahmed, *Willful Subjects*, 154.

104. Ibid., 157.

105. Dworkin, *Heartbreak: The Political Memoir*, 71.

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