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Feminist Afterlives. Assemblage Memory in Activist Times.

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Date of publication: February 23rd, 2019

Edition period: Edition period: February 2019-June 2019

To cite this article: González, S. (2019). Feminist Afterlives. Assemblage Memory in Activist Times. [Review of the book]. *Social and Education History* 8(1), 115-117. doi:10.17583/hse.2019.4043

To link this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.17583/hse.2019.4043>

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Reviews (II)

Chidgey, R. (2018). *Feminist Afterlives. Assemblage Memory in Activist Times*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan

Feminist *Afterlives. Assemblage Memory in Activist Times* examines the relationship between historic and contemporary social movements, and their influence on cultural memory. Presented in four sections, and divided into eight chapters, the book provides a new analytical and methodological framework, *assemblage memory*. This examines how women-led social movement memories and activists' pasts materialise, while their images and ideas become transmissible in time, and interact with the present. This innovative approach has been developed by Dr. Red Chidgey, Lecturer in Gender and Media at King's College of London, whose research has principally focused on alternative cultural production.

Chapter 1, *Introduction: Feminist Afterlives*, presents how the *connective turn* has increased the access to and transmission of activism memories. As a result, figures from past struggles become hypervisible in contemporary feminism, such as militant suffragettes and Rosie the Riveter. The influence of these feminist activism memories is analysed using an assemblage approach, focused on the role of both visual and communicative practices, and their impact on cultural memory.

Part I, *Assemblage Memory*, situates the analytical model in relation with other studies of social movements. Chapter 2, *Postfeminist Memory cultures, Late Capitalism and the Organisation of Ghosts*, discusses the negative impact of postfeminism on feminist activism. Recently, however, unexpected allies and new feminist activists have arisen, which have brought feminism back into the public sphere. Although new forms of mobilisation and protest have been enabled by social media, memory practices still have a vital role. Thus, Chidgey proposes the affirmative approach of *assemblage memory* to evolve postfeminist regimes. Chapter 3, *A Proposition for Remembering Activism: A Toolkit for Assemblage Memory*, explores how

assemblage memories are articulated trans-temporally through non-linear processes. Memories can be categorized by duration and intensity through four interrelated trajectories. These are termed *discursive*, *embodied*, *material*, and *affective* memories. Assemblage memory therefore reassembles social movement, activism, and protest memories into a new archive of contemporary imaginaries, containing both mainstream and historically dismissed memories.

Part II, *The Militant Suffragettes*, explores the memories of suffragette protest within the UK. Chapter 4, *The Material of Authorised Protest Pasts*, analyses suffragette militancy within institutional memory campaigns, cultural production, and archives. Today, their activism is recognised as innovative, and their radical tactics considered justified. Conversely, suffrage memories are limited to the act of winning the vote, rather than as a broader revolt against women's oppression. Chapter 5, *Embodiment as a Technique of Protest Memory*, argues how the suffragette assemblages can be used in the present, to embody activist protests, national campaigns, or ceremonies. As a result, although suffragettes are linked with current political concerns, outcomes differ due to the processes of de-territorialisation and re-territorialisation.

Part III, *Rosie the Riveter/We Can Do It!*, explores the memory of Rosie the Riveter in the WWII context, and its influence on international feminism. Chapter 6, *Memory Economics of a Feminist Icon*, examines the historical, economic, and political conditions that contributed to this poster becoming a feminist icon. The analysis covers mainstream and online media in the Anglo-American context, from second wave feminism to the present. Chapter 7, *Remix, Resonance and the New Austerity*, focuses on interviews with feminist media producers, demonstrating how the *We Can Do It!* image has been remixed and reinterpreted, in order to embody contemporary feminist concerns. These assemblage memories also provide historical analogies between the reaction to the UK's post-war austerity measures and current economic recession.

Part IV, *The Assemblage Researcher*, outlines the methodologies and key characteristics of assemblage memory research. Chapter 8, *Assemblage Memories: Walking Through Emergent and Restless Methods*, offers a

critical analysis of the author's own activism memories in relation to the suffragette assemblage. The appendix provides a reflective account of the book's methodological process, in order to help future memory researchers to set out an agenda and connect with other challenges in the field.

This book provides an affirmative theory and methodology of assemblage memories, while also seeking to track how these memories have travelled across activism, archives, media, and commercial sites, in relation to discourses of contemporary feminism. Using the suffragettes and Rosie the Riveter assemblages as empirical case studies, Chidgey argues that memories are restless and flexible entities with no final destination, and are continuously repurposed in new assemblage memories.

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