

PREFACE

This issue of *Feminist Studies* continues our exploration of the intertwining themes of women's paid work and women's gendered bodies. Essays on literature, history, and anthropology demonstrate the importance of the personal, physical self within even the seemingly neutral workplace. A call for interdisciplinarity, for an understanding of the connections between seemingly disparate issues, unites the wide-ranging subject matter of this issue. These connections appear visually, as Josephine Withers makes us aware, in the painter May Stevens's subtle exploration of the relations between her memories of her actual mother and her understanding of her surrogate political mother, Rosa Luxemburg. Stevens, in Withers's explication of her work, dramatizes once again the inescapable connections between the personal and the political.

This familiar phrase, however, can never be understood as a simple slogan. Elizabeth Lunbeck, in dissecting the consequences of the new psychiatric interpretation of female sexual independence in the early twentieth century, shows how complicated the politics of the personal—the female personality itself—can be. Her research reveals the familiar sexual double standard masquerading under a new medical vocabulary of the “hypersexual” personality. Although psychiatrists prided themselves on making minute distinctions in defining deviance, when confronted with youthful high spirits, they saw only “voracious sexuality and irredeemable immorality.” At the very time when women appeared to be making substantial legal and economic gains, psychiatry sought to deploy revised definitions of female normalcy.

Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* encountered the full force of the new concern with female sexual deviance when it was first published. Psychiatric prescriptions have continued since to dog interpretations of the novel. Gillian Whitlock argues that we need to rethink Hall's novel and her intentions in writing it; a careful examination of the central imagery reveals a pioneering effort to create a specifically lesbian language and imagery. The heroine, Stephen Gordon, cannot find authenticity either in the “green world” of nature or in the social world of her aristocratic ancestors; as an outsider, she must forge her own vocabulary, expressive of her own body, her own sexuality. This theme of the price a woman must pay for refusing to adjust is echoed in the poem “For

the Rocks Inside." Milana Marsenich looks back at a violent past, now contained "inside" the body, but still vitally present.

Both Marjorie Murphy and Lois Rita Helmbold examine current historiography on women, work, and the family. Helmbold argues that a compartmentalized history has led to false generalizations about the strength of the American family—both white and black—during hard times. Drawing from a wide sample of interviews done in the late 1930s by the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor, she documents a pattern of family disintegration under stress. The burden of holding the family together often fell most heavily upon women, but when unemployment and overcrowding broke down family cooperation, women were frequently the first to suffer. As Helmbold concludes, "Responsibility and sacrifice were expected and taken for granted, but reciprocal support was not necessarily forthcoming." Murphy too calls for overcoming the artificial barriers dividing labor, black, ethnic, and women's history in order to achieve a better understanding of women's working conditions and daily lives. She points to the importance of recent studies of women's leisure-time in adding an especially vital component to our understanding of their working lives. From a contemporary perspective, Judith Small's prose poem, "Working the Float," shows how rich and layered women's workplace lives can be, as it explores through a set of interlocking vignettes the multiple languages women must employ to survive at work, to reach out to friends, to retain a sense of themselves.

The dramatic changes in the balance between paid work and family work that have so affected the lives of Western women in recent years have also, in different ways, reshaped the lives of women in China. Marlyn Dalsimer and Laurie Nisonoff's "The Implications of the New Agricultural and One-Child Family Policies for Rural Chinese Women" shows that the emphasis on work outside the home and the devaluing of traditional work have left many women trapped in the double day. The authors point out that, although rural families are being urged to have only one child for the collective good, there are no provisions for collective childcare; ironically, only-children will be brought up in isolated families, without the benefits of peer relationships or cooperative nurseries. By the time they are adults, they will have had little experience with collective institutions or behavior. The political implications of this contradiction have yet to be fully realized.

Aihwa Ong, in her review essay on recent work on women and technology, examines a different configuration of tensions between work and family in capitalist societies. Rather than defining technology as automatically alien to women, Ong shows the complexity of the issues. She argues, for example, that we cannot assume that household technology simply brings increased work for women. Rather, we need to understand the cultural context in which these changes are occurring. Her own work on Malaysia shows that rural families encourage young women to leave home to work in the microchip industries to gain necessary cash. These women electronics workers both help their families and loosen their own ties with traditional, local customs. Their entry into a transnational work force and culture has ramifications that we have not yet fully comprehended; the relation of gender and technology, Ong maintains, is central to contemporary social and economic developments; indeed, it may provide a "lens for a critical assessment of the late twentieth century."

Each of the essays and creative works we hope will contribute to this assessment of our contemporary situation, demonstrating not only our understanding of the complications of the past but also our comprehension of the complexities of the battles before us. If Radclyffe Hall's vision of a new language for lesbians is to be realized, to be generalized into a new language, a new way of looking, for all women, we must understand better the relations between the past and present use and abuse of women's work and women's bodies. The artist May Stevens, in a moving poem joining her ninety-year-old mother with the premature death of her son, speaks of discontinuities, even as she perceives continuities.

Neruda:

The blood of the children in the streets is like
 the blood of the children in the streets.
 My life is not like it is unlike why pretend?
 There are no mistakes only choices I want to get
 to the bottom of things: how can I care about things
 when he took our life?

This effort to understand the incomprehensible, to see the connections between personal grief and public injustice, remains one of the difficult ongoing tasks of feminists during the 1980s. The broadly based interdisciplinary work of women's studies, called

for by so many of our authors, may prove to be one means of making essential connections.

Christine Stansell and Martha Vicinus,
for the editors