

## PREFACE

We begin this issue of *Feminist Studies* with art, poetry, and prose that inspire our political engagement. The art works are by women from southern Africa—the cover art calls us to join in the struggle for Namibian liberation, the inside prints in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

The poems are from a reading by women of color at the University of California at Berkeley, in 1985. Janice Mirikitani, Paula Gunn Allen, Cherríe Moraga, and Audre Lorde joined in this historical multiracial protest against apartheid, lending their voices to the demand that the regents of the University of California divest holdings in companies doing business with South Africa. The divestment a few months afterwards intimates the power of women's political culture, in concert with other initiatives, to effect genuine change.

Annette Kolodny's "Dancing between Left and Right: Feminism and the Academic Minefield in the 1980s," revisits the terrain of her influential *Feminist Studies* essay, "Dancing through the Minefield: Some Observations on the Theory, Practice, and Politics of a Feminist Literary Criticism," and finds that the minefield constituted by men's fears of sharing power and influence with women has not yet been safely detonated, notwithstanding ten years of (ostensible) dialogue between feminist and male critics. She demonstrates the ways in which male critics have expropriated, misrepresented, and attempted to contain the radical challenges posed by feminist criticism and calls for a renewal of political commitment on the part of feminists in the academy. In this disheartening political climate, when, as Kolodny suggests, feminist scholarship and criticism have become for too many a chic intellectual activity rather than part of a political practice, we found her call both timely and courageous.

The essays that follow suggest some of the differences in perspective and method that make contemporary feminist inquiry so lively a project. Those by Mary Poovey, Jane Caputi, and Susan Jeffords examine gender ideologies in various forms of public discourse. They share an emphasis on the processes of representation as a site of struggle for the control of consciousness. Two of these essays, those by Poovey and Jeffords, bring a materialist feminist perspective to bear on their different eras and subjects, reading their texts as inscriptions of ideological conflict shaped by

their historical moment. Caputi's essay implies a radical feminist vision, one in which contemporary mass culture manifests and serves the interests of pervasive patriarchal power.

Poovey offers a complex analysis of gender and class ideologies in Victorian England, as inscribed in family law and as articulated in the contradictory polemics of one writer with a personal stake in legal reform, Caroline Sheridan Norton. Poovey demonstrates the power and consequences in legal and social discourse of the ideology of natural difference between women and men, and its corresponding allocation of equal rights to men in the public sphere and of legal protection to (married) women in the private. She suggests that the genre of melodrama provided some of the roles and terms through which Norton paradoxically both challenged and confirmed the ideological status quo, although she remained unable to perceive the political and economic interests that might have linked her situation to that of working-class women in a struggle, not merely for protection, but for equality.

While Poovey delineates the ideological tensions that shaped both women's and men's discussions of women's legal status, Caputi ascribes an essentially seamless masculinism to both contemporary mass culture and contemporary political discourse. She accumulates a persuasive array of examples to argue that the logic of militarism and male domination is facilitated by a blurring of linguistic boundaries between the organic and the artificial. Her radical feminist analysis, conflating the Nuclear Age and what she elsewhere designates the Age of Sex Crime, treats current representations of technology and war as analagous to pornographic representations of male domination over women. Susan Jeffords's discussion of Vietnam War films of the *Rambo* ilk historicizes their militarism and masculinism by analyzing them as symptoms of an effort to regenerate an American manhood challenged by feminism, by changing relations of gender, and by the defeats inflicted in the war itself. For Jeffords, these films illustrate a widespread antifeminist revisionism now pervading U.S. culture. Unlike Caputi, who assumes an elemental and original "reality" in the natural world, which she urges feminists to "re-member," Jeffords is wary of "originary" myths. She attributes to these films themselves a dangerous insistence on the myth of an originary body, the ostensibly "healthy" body of American masculinity that must be rediscovered by debriding it of its "unhealthy" accretions

of effeminacy and defeat. This insistence, Jeffords argues, enables American patriarchy to deny the construction of masculinity as representation.

Three of the essays and reviews in this issue represent and address recent feminist thinking on gender, science, and technology. In reviewing three books on reproductive technology, Sarah Franklin and Maureen McNeil urge us to beware the deceptiveness of individual choice as an ideal in an arena in which more choices, even for those who can afford them, do not necessarily guarantee women more power or more control over our own bodies. They ask feminists to think beyond the liberal humanist politics of individual choice to practices and policies that will genuinely empower women in the crucial realm of reproduction. Our second review essay by Helen E. Longino features books by Evelyn Fox Keller, Ann Fausto-Sterling, and Sandra Harding on gender, science, and feminism. Longino searches out their commonalities and differences and raises important questions for future consideration. She finds Harding's book, *The Science Question in Feminism*, the most controversial of the three, especially in its effort to subsume the natural sciences and the social sciences under one philosophic rubric. Reflecting on these texts' handling of central questions of "objectivity" and "truth," Longino concludes that feminist scholars must better distinguish a critique of the sciences *per se* from a critique of a positivist philosophy of science.

Responding more joyfully to Harding's work, Donna Haraway reads *The Science Question in Feminism* "in order to make it yield a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects." For Haraway, feminist objectivity means, as her title implies, "situated knowledges," that is, knowledges explicitly located in specific and partial perspectives. Haraway's essay suggests a way out of the impasse of dichotomy between, on the one hand, an ostensibly passionless empiricism that claims to induce universal, objective truths or laws and, on the other, postmodernist relativism and/or feminist hostility to any claims for scientific objectivity. Haraway envisions liberatory possibilities for both epistemology and politics in a science of "passion and position," derived from "webs of connection" that will give us partial but cumulatively better accounts of the world.

The disagreements among these authors reminds us of the multiplicitous nature of feminist thought today. Given these differ-

ences, book reviewing itself, from the assignment of a book to a particular reviewer to the review's reception by its audience (including the book's author), has proved highly charged politically and emotionally. The editors of *Feminist Studies* thought our readers might be interested in a forum on the subject of feminist book reviewing. Accordingly, Natalie Zemon Davis, Julia Penelope, Margery Wolf, Cynthia Neverdon-Morton, and Linda Gardiner, familiar names as reviewers and book review editors, have contributed their reflections. The consensus among them is reflected in Davis's concluding words: "Whatever we do, let's do it so as to advance a critical discourse that keeps our debates bubbling excitedly (and) keeps our changing community strong. . . ."

Deborah Rosenfelt and Claire G. Moses,  
for the editors