

preface

The emotional need comes first and then the pictures.

—Nan Goldin, 1998

IN THIS ISSUE WE EXPLORE some of the catalysts for feminist consciousness, looking specifically at the relationship between feeling and technology. Many of the articles published here examine the ways in which feminism and the mass media have developed alongside one another, inventing visual and other languages that shape new emotions and perceptions. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller explores the effects of emerging audio and print technologies on the lives and self-representations of late-nineteenth-century feminists Annie Besant and sisters Helen and Olivia Rossetti; Cheryl Hindrichs explores the idea of a feminist optics in work by filmmaker Germaine Dulac and writer Virginia Woolf; Sarah Ruddy discusses the language of loss in the photographs of Nan Goldin; and Myra J. Hird calls for a re-examination of the feminist potential of scientific disciplines such as biology and neurology. Some of our authors also examine the ways in which future perceptions can be changed by encounters with the past, either in fact or in fantasy: Roberta Gold looks at the ways in which Second Wave feminism in New York adapted many of the strategies of the earlier tenants' rights movement, and Catherine Pavlish uses the figure of Emily Dickinson to meditate on the pressures of a feminist consciousness in both Dickinson's era and our own.

In "Body, Spirit, Print: The Radical Autobiographies of Annie Besant and Helen and Olivia Rossetti," Elizabeth Carolyn Miller explores the promise of new printing techniques for women in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries who were trying to create new forms of political and artistic speech. Annie Besant, whose *Autobiography* was pub-

lished in 1893, had a quixotic and high-profile career as an organizer, socialist, and theosophist before she became the first woman president of India's National Congress in 1917. Sisters Olivia and Helen Rossetti published their joint autobiography, *A Girl among the Anarchists*, in 1903 under the assumed identity "Isabel Meredith." The Rossettis were active in the anarchist movement and founded the anarchist journal the *Torch* in 1891, when Olivia was sixteen and Helen was only twelve. Miller discusses these two texts in the context of late-nineteenth-century innovations in print and audio technology, arguing that their authors used changing ideas about the relationship between speech, writing, and the body to forge a new idiom for women's political speech and political subjectivities.

Revolutions in technology are also the subject of Cheryl Hindrichs's "Feminist Optics and Avant-Garde Cinema: Germaine Dulac's *The Smiling Madame Beudet* and Virginia Woolf's "Street Haunting." Through close readings of Woolf's 1927 essay and Dulac's 1923 movie, Hindrichs shows how the emerging technology of cinema revolutionized the relationship between seeing and knowing in ways that had enormous potential for feminists. Exploiting the tension between narrative progression and moments of lyrical reverie by literally pausing the story while viewers and/or readers are treated to fantasy sequences and flights of fancy, Woolf and Dulac seek to produce a feminist vision by challenging the familiar comforts of narrative suspense and gender norms.

The question of what constitutes a feminist vision is also at the center of Sarah Ruddy's essay on the photographs of Nan Goldin. In "'A Radiant Eye Yearns from Me': Figuring Documentary in the Photography of Nan Goldin," Ruddy explores the ways in which Goldin uses photographs to build what Ruddy calls an "affective documentary." The friends that Goldin captures in her images form a kind of queer family, the people Goldin has loved and lost as AIDS and poverty do their work. Ruddy argues that rather than producing a conventional documentary record of their lives, Goldin memorializes her own intimacies and her own losses, even as she defies them. Using the work of psychoanalytic theorists such as Judith Butler and Julia Kristeva, Ruddy shows that Goldin's photography represents a "melancholic intimacy" with her own fragile world. The essay concludes with a brief meditation on yet another kind of intimacy,

the closeness of Nan Goldin's emotional and actual geographies and the author's own.

Goldin's work asks questions about the fraught encounter between our desires and the transience of the material world. Myra J. Hird's review essay, "Feminist Engagements with Matter," also explores the relationship between consciousness and the body. She discusses five key texts in the field: Vicki Kirby's *Judith Butler: Live Theory*, Elizabeth A. Wilson's *Psychosomatic: Feminism and the Neurological Body*, Luciana Parisi's *Abstract Sex: Philosophical Biotechnology and the Mutations of Desire*, Donna Haraway's *When Species Meet*, and Karen Barad's *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. These works are all, in different ways, examples of the "new materialism," an emerging branch of feminist scholarship that explores "engagements with matter," as opposed to more traditional feminist critiques of scientific rationality. The texts reviewed challenge "the culture/matter distinction," choosing instead to "formulate questions about how to live in or with science collectively." Hird argues that these works contribute to new perspectives in feminist materialism, suggesting that evolutionary and neurological accounts of emotions might inform feminist concerns with embodiment. Rejecting the idea that there is a philosophical space between matter and culture, she traces the beginnings of a "fascinating ongoing conversation about ontology and epistemology involving physics and philosophy." Ultimately, according to Hird, this branch of feminism navigates the "messy entanglements that proliferate the cosmos."

Roberta Gold, in her essay "'I Had Not Seen Women like That Before': Intergenerational Feminism in New York City's Tenant Movement," explores entanglements of a different kind. Gold examines women's cooperative activism in 1960s and 1970s New York across generation and across race and provides an historical example of young women finding inspiration in the accomplishments and mentorship of women from a previous political era. The essay demonstrates how young women involved in tenants rights struggles were supported by a network of veteran women organizers who "had been schooled in the Popular Front struggles of the 1930s and 1940s." Gold argues that squatter struggles "became both a training ground in which Popular Front veterans nurtured the next

generation of activists and a venue in which these activists pursued a remarkably integrated vision of class, racial, and gender justice.”

Finally, the creative pieces provocatively slide between the past and the present. In Catherine Pavlish’s “Becoming Emily,” time collapses for a woman confined to a psychiatric hospital. Although set in the contemporary moment, the story’s protagonist is convinced she is the nineteenth-century poet Emily Dickinson. As a younger woman, the main character is possessed by Dickinson, which allows her to come into possession of her voice and desires. Pavlish imaginatively weaves Dickinson’s poetry with the critical response to her work. Thus, “Becoming Emily” is a rumination on the force of women’s creative power to transform material constraint. H.E. Wright’s short story, “Baby,” moves between the past, present, and personal transformation in a different way as the main characters Lola and Cady prepare to expand their family through the age-old method of the turkey baster. On the way to this life-transforming moment, the narrative returns to past events as the protagonists reflect on their childhoods and their relationships with their own parents. The poems, “still” and “The Center at Halstead,” by Natalie E. Illum explore the suspension of time, depicting moments when life’s movement is held in abeyance. The poems’ themes include the fragility of the body, shifts of community affiliation, and the power of words to heal and to provoke restlessness.

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