The collaboration, thoughtfulness, intellectual energy, and enthusiasm that our editorial collective puts into each issue almost always ensure that we feel a great deal of pride when it goes to print. All the same, we feel a special sense of pride this time. This issue commemorates the scholarship of our former editorial director Claire Goldberg Moses and her pioneering innovations in feminist publishing. Many of the essays here were specially prepared for our “35 Years of Feminist Scholarship Conference” held in April 2011 to celebrate Claire on her retirement. The conference convened current and former Feminist Studies editorial board members and other colleagues for a day of scholarly exchange, reflection, and celebration. We include tributes paid that day by former editors Deborah S. Rosenfelt and Suzanne Raitt, relating how Claire’s stewardship steered Feminist Studies to become a journal of national and international repute and how a feminist sense of egalitarianism and shared ownership guided her commitment to building an editorial collective.

It is only fitting that an issue that pays tribute to Claire Moses finds as its thematic center a series of reflective considerations on the state of the field and its key disciplinary shifts. We begin with a genealogical interrogation of sorts. In “The History of Lesbian History,” Martha Vicinus draws on her disciplinary location as a historian to review the last thirty years of scholarship on lesbian history and its associated theoretical paradigms. Vicinus revisits her earlier reading of Havelock Ellis’s Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 2, Sexual Inversion. Vicinus turns the reader’s attention to Ellis’s own contradictory ambivalence in his
efforts to attach meaning to the word “lesbian.” Vicinus points out that this conceptual ambivalence finds parallels in later understandings of the category “lesbian.” The piece offers an insightful and textured engagement with the relevance of the term “lesbian,” the role it has played in expanding our understanding of women’s friendship and intimacy, and the ways in which race and class have fractured and expanded mainstream analyses.

Judith Kegan Gardiner’s “Female Masculinity and Phallic Women—Unruly Concepts” becomes a perfect companion piece for Vicinus’s “The History of Lesbian History.” While Vicinus explores the last thirty years of scholarship on lesbian history, Gardiner turns her analytical lens to a selective discussion of the last forty years of theorizing on the category “female masculinity.” Moving from the 1970s to the present, Gardiner’s discussion engages Robert Stoller’s Splitting: A Case of Female Masculinity, Judith (Jack) Halberstam’s Female Masculinity, and Judith Butler’s “The Lesbian Phallus and the Morphological Imaginary” as well as Henry Rubin’s sociological study Self-Made Men: Identity and Embodiment among Transsexual Men. Gardiner’s interrogation offers a lucid analysis of the shifting nomenclature for and understandings of female masculinity. The piece critiques earlier psychoanalytic studies in which female masculinity was considered a psychological syndrome, as well as contemporary gender queer expressions of female masculinity that potentially make space for nonmisogynistic expressions of the phallic, FtM trans expressions of masculinity, and masculine expressions of femininity. One of the questions guiding Gardiner’s analysis of the scholarship is the extent to which, despite the expanded expression of gender variance, the codes of what constitutes masculinity remain fairly intact. She argues that despite the desire to separate masculinity from maleness, masculinity as an idea continues to be reified and cautions us to ask how “progressive” contemporary theories of gender variance really are.

Leisa D. Meyer’s “Strange Love: Searching for Sexual Subjectivities in Black Print Popular Culture during the 1950s” pivots on Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham’s characterization of the 1880s to 1920s as marked by a “politics of respectability,” wherein black women’s sexual restraint and moral reform were seen as integral to the well-being of the community at large. Rather than embracing the silencing effects that result from the pursuit of “respectability,” Meyer provides persuasive
evidence to show that there was a great deal of public talk about sex and sexuality within the black community. Meyer examines a range of periodicals published out of Chicago in the 1950s, including the Chicago Defender, Ebony, Jet, and Tan Confessions. Just as Vicinus historicizes the category “lesbian” without losing its productive conceptual instability, Meyer offers us a provocative analysis of how “black print popular culture magazines explicitly engaged sexuality and served notice of their intent to contest the hegemonic white presumptions, myths, and stereotypes.”

The next cluster of articles trains its gaze on feminist activism. Like the work on sexuality described above, the essays by Nancy A. Hewitt, Ruth Milkman and Veronica Terriquez, and Claire Moses also take familiar categories—feminist “waves,” immigrant rights movements, and “feminism” itself—and destabilize them productively. In “Feminist Frequencies: Regenerating the Wave Metaphor,” Hewitt reimagines the well-worn trope of the “waves” of feminism not as sweeping and singular tides, but rather as multifarious radio signals. Arguing that the older oceanic sense of the term “waves” suppresses the diversity of earlier feminisms and, in the case of the First Wave, reduces more than a century of activism around a variety of issues into the story of a white-dominated, middle-class suffrage movement, she proposes replacing it with another concept—the radio wave. As she explains, “If we think of feminist movements as composed of both short and long waves, and if we imagine the lecturers, organizers, writers, newspapers, ’zines, rallies, and so on as transmitters, then it is possible to expand significantly the richness and complexity of each phase of feminism.” The metaphor of radio waves with their different wattage, volume, and geographical extension recognizes explicit hierarchies within movements and may help us “hear” the history of feminist organizing even in apparently “quiescent moments,” such as the period from the 1920s to the 1970s. Hewitt summarizes, “Radio waves allow us to think about movements in terms of different lengths and frequencies that occur simultaneously; movements that grow louder or fade out, reach vast audiences across oceans or only a few listeners in a local area; movements that are marked by static interruptions or frequent changes of channels; and movements that are temporarily drowned out by another frequency, but then suddenly come in loud and clear.”
Milkman and Terriquez’s study amplifies a feminist frequency not often heard in discussions of feminist movements: the leadership role that women play in immigrant rights movements. Using interviews and focus group conversations, the authors of “We Are the Ones Who Are Out in Front: Women’s Leadership in the Immigrant Rights Movement” explore the experiences of Latina leaders in a variety of types of organizations in Los Angeles. For these women, the process of migration has offered education and employment not available to them in their countries of origin, while their male counterparts experience through migration a loss of status in the home as well as at the workplace. “Once you get here,” says an indigenous Mexican interviewee, “the whole system they had back home, the stay-at-home wife, that changes.” The result is a new generation of women, educated and eager to participate in the public sphere. These women, Milkman and Terriquez find, meet a demand for leadership from the immigrant rights movement, which has been in ascendance since the 1986 imposition of the Immigration Reform and Control Act. Although obstacles to women’s leadership are greater in older, more patriarchal organizations such as labor unions and hometown associations where men have long dominated leadership, in organizations that emerged in the last few decades during the peak of feminist struggles in the larger society, patriarchal traditions carry little weight. In community-based organizations, workers’ centers, and student movements, women occupy the majority of leadership positions. As one student leader told the authors, “It’s a woman-run show.” Importantly, a large majority of interviewees identified as feminists, even though some were critical of what they saw as mainstream “Anglo” feminism. Milkman and Terriquez argue that, in effect, feminism has been “a resource” for women leaders in their quest for rights both for themselves and for their broader communities. As one union leader explained: “That’s the only way to survive in this machista world.”

Claire Moses’s own essay, “‘What’s in a Name?’ On Writing the History of Feminism,” based on a talk delivered on several occasions to international audiences, completes this cluster. Moses asks, “What is at stake in naming a particular form of women’s collective action ‘feminism’? … What does the history of the scope of the term ‘feminism’ tell us about its political successes and shortcomings?” She brings her experience as a historian of women’s movements in Europe and the
United States to bear on constructions of feminism, tracing the history of the label from its earliest appearance in France in the 1880s all the way to the broad present. Moses shows us how the boundaries of the meanings given to “feminism” by activists themselves have stretched and shrunk, becoming at some times more inclusive and, at others, more narrow. If, in late nineteenth-century France the term embraced activists with a wide range of political stances—from socialist to monarchical—and a multitude of organizing priorities and strategic approaches, the range of meanings given to feminism shrank drastically in the early twentieth century following movement victories on the question of suffrage. If, in the 1970s in the United States, feminism included a wide span from liberal Democrats to the young leftists of the Women’s Liberation Movement, Moses finds her students in the 1990s and 2000s resistant to using the label at all, in spite of the goals of gender equality they share with her. Her essay is a passionate “defense of both feminism and the study of history.” Moses advocates a broad conception of feminism, refusing to cede the field to those who would limit it to privileged women and narrow its meaning to exclude struggles around class, race, or imperialism. She argues that it matters what we call ourselves: the periods of history when feminism took on the broadest meanings were those that brought the greatest gains for women. How we name ourselves “matters because our history matters. … It matters because, in this increasingly globalized world, women are strengthened by also belonging to a global movement and reflecting their commitment to a global movement in their naming. It matters, in other words, for us to believe ourselves joined in a common vision of women’s empowerment.”

Art offers another means of allowing us to see the familiar from a different angle. As Ori Z. Soltes puts it in his essay about our featured artist, “Finding Home: The Transcultural Worlds of Siona Benjamin,” art is not only a mirror, but “a unique series of windows through which the astute viewer may peer.” Benjamin grew up as a Jew in Mumbai, India, before becoming an immigrant to the United States. In Soltes’s words, “she has spent a lifetime finding diverse modes of home in different places under radically different conditions (a Jewish girl in a Zoroastrian or Catholic school in a Hindu and Muslim community and a Jewish immigrant woman of color in a country built by immigrants but still often hostile to them).” These experiences
have led her to define herself as a “transcultural artist” and to ask “Where do I as a non-Westerner fit in? Where do I as a person of color fit in? Where do I as a woman fit in?” Benjamin draws on a rich array of transnational, historical, and contemporary influences to answer these questions. According to Soltes, “Her painting falls into—and tumbles out of, bursts out of—the tradition of miniature painting, particularly of the Mughals . . . in the Indian subcontinent.” But in her work we also find traces of Persian miniatures, Jewish sacred figures, Byzantine icons, European illuminated manuscripts, medieval Christian paintings, Indian Hindu art, Bollywood posters, Amar Chitra Katha comic books, and American Pop Art. Benjamin’s art brings a new perspective to “feminist issues of acceptance and rejection, recognition and blindness within the series of male-dominated societies in which she has lived, as well as with the Western-hegemonic feminist movements within those societies.” Soltes concludes that Benjamin’s opus, with its myriad reference points, eludes easy categorizations. “Her work refashions an array of traditional forms of art in their styles, subjects, and symbols in order to undercut a range of commonly held concepts regarding gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. She thus undercuts the very concept of definition—which means ‘to draw a boundary around’—and adds a lush chapter to the history of art as she shapes her own distinct new world.”

The poetry in this issue also challenges conventional ways of seeing. In “Arte Povera,” Rachel Blau DuPlessis invokes the early twentieth-century Italian art movement of the same name and inverts the premises of the movement. While Arte Povera as a movement engaged broader social issues and questioned the validity of the individual’s reality as art, DuPlessis pushes us to understand the embedded nature of the individual female artist’s reality within social issues. As with the movement, we see placements of words that seemingly have little to do with the one that precedes and follows it. Words are placed with staccato-like effect on the page, their frantic positioning similarly conveying the desire to create art in the midst of the everyday “house, book, mug, window, / daughter, dogs (gone), desk, Apple™.” And it is not lost on the reader that the minutiae of the everyday may, in no small part, give rise to arte povera in its most literal sense of poor art.
Shirley Geok-lin Lim’s “A Life” and “C” deftly play on the use of the alphabet of one’s childhood to convey the dire stakes of adulthood and coming of age. In “A Life,” A’s are part of the father’s scholastic desires for his daughter so that she can achieve what he was unable to, while in “C” we find a trajectory of “commitment,” “conjugal,” “collaboration,” “Cancer.” In “Stop Already,” she offers a dialogue with an unnamed but demanding “Muse” who “Unsleeping, nags, uncaring of son / Or husband.” The imbrication between childhood symbols and life is echoed again in her final piece, “Third,” where this time the interplay occurs between giving birth for the third time and the number three.

Minnie Bruce Pratt and Alicia Ostriker both invite us to see ourselves in relationship with nature and its wonders. Pratt in “Talking to Myself” is keenly attuned to all that surrounds her and indeed in conversation with it: “maple twigs, / the tiny bud vases...” continue “still talking to / me holding in my hand their broken chatter.” A similar sense of self in dialogue with nature is found in Pratt’s “The Gulls’ Cry”; as they cry “How? How?” she observes, “I know it’s me making meaning in their voice.” In Ostriker’s “What the Butterfly Is Thinking” we find not empathy but disidentification. For as Ostriker writes, the butterfly is “Not a narcissist like me, it is not thinking about extending its brief life.” An interesting parallel between Pratt and Ostriker is that they have both paired these pieces about nature with reflections on aging and human demise. In Ostriker’s “Alzheimer’s” the use of the possessive is pointed and poignant as we see how the illness comes to possess a friend, making her unrecognizable to those who care. On the other hand, “Breast Dream” is anything but a dream; rather, the piece captures the anxiety of loss, of “glancing down suddenly” to find that she “had only one.” Pratt’s “Edge, Hedges” juxtaposes self and nature in ways that do not suggest rejuvenation as much as decay: “Moss in the cracked asphalt” alongside “the smell of drying clothes from 455 rooms / of sick, injured, bedridden people.” Pratt’s “Magnified” is thematically reminiscent of Ostriker’s “Alzheimer’s.” In “Magnified,” there is again the sense of a person and life disappearing, a loss she wishes could be abated “if I had my pocket lens to swivel out / and magnify what I would see.”

Ostriker’s final piece, “The Broken Seed,” pays tribute to Claire Moses. It is a piece that beautifully captures the best of Claire: her
ability to think in generational terms and to nurture the growth of those who walk alongside her and follow behind her. It is only fitting that we end with an excerpt from this tribute: “the gray tendrils / underground / shut their eyes and suck / the future limbs struggle forth / crack through dirt / start breathing for themselves / and for us.”

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