

PREFACE

This issue marks a beginning for *Feminist Studies*, the third year of its publication by a collective board, and from behind the “Mask,” which is the title of our cover, we want to give you a glimpse of who we are. In 1977, the administrative office of the journal was moved to the campus of the University of Maryland where the women’s studies program began to supply space and some administrative support. *Feminist Studies* itself, however, remained an independent journal, making it a kind of rarity among publications of its kind. At the same time, the work of the journal was divided among an editorial board, and a period of transition, reorganization, and redirection—including an eighteen-month hiatus in publication—followed. Then in March of 1978 *Feminist Studies* vol. 4, no. 1 appeared and the new life of the journal, as the product of a collective group, officially began.

The metamorphosis was energizing if not always orderly, and its impact lingers on in the shape of policies we wish to change or to initiate, ways of doing things that we wish to refine, publication schedules which we intend to live up to, and simple errors that we mean not to repeat. For all the awkwardness of being transformed, however, the collective enters the eighties as a group with a conscious set of policies and procedures, all of which will grow and be reshaped in years to come, but all of which are coherent enough—at last—to describe to you, our readers. First of all, who are “we,” the collective on the other side of the cover? There are nine of us, all of whom are committed to the women’s movement and all of whom, in one life or another, have been academics. Two of us currently live on the West Coast, the rest of us on the East Coast, but the number of West Coast editors is growing. Three editors live in New York: Ros Petchesky who teaches political theory and women’s studies at Ramapo College, Rayna Rapp who is on the graduate faculty in anthropology at the New School for Social Research, and Judy Walkowitz who teaches in the history department at Rutgers University. In Philadelphia, Rachel Duplessis and Judy Newton both teach English and women’s studies, Rachel at Temple University and Judy at LaSalle College. Farther south, Carol Pearson teaches in the women’s studies program at the University of Maryland, and Heidi Hartmann is an economist with the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C. On the West Coast, Mary Ryan will be in the history department at the University of California, Irvine and Judy Stacey is in the sociology

department at the University of California, Davis. (Kathy Parsons, who teaches philosophy at Smith College, has recently decided to move off the editorial board, but to continue work with the journal as an associate editor.)

Our managing editor, Claire Moses, also teaches in the women's studies program at Maryland and gets released time to oversee, along with our one paid assistant, Denni Johnson-Claggett, all the administrative and production work of the journal. Claire and Denni, that is, handle all the promotion, advertising, subscriptions, and mailing of the journal, functions which are taken care of for most journals by a private or a university press. They also take responsibility for all the business, and much of the editorial, correspondence, and they coordinate the entire editorial process of the journal from its beginning, when authors submit manuscripts, through the printing of the end product, the published issues.

When a manuscript is submitted to the journal, it goes to the office of the managing editor where it is recorded, one copy put on file, and the other sent to an editor in an appropriate field. The editor looks over the manuscript and sends it to two consultants or associate editors. *Feminist Studies*, it should be noted, is fully refereed, and all consultant and editorial work is voluntary, a labor of love and politics. The consultants or associates read the manuscript and write analyses. The editor then reads these reports, evaluates the manuscript, and decides for or against further consideration. If the manuscript looks promising, the editor sends it out to two editors on the board, and if their responses are favorable, the original editor initiates a "round robin" to the entire collective, announcing her intention to accept the manuscript unless other editors wish to read it first. Several of us usually do, and one or two readings later the manuscript is accepted, although acceptance is almost always contingent on revisions. It is here that most of the hard, long, and sometimes emotionally difficult work of the journal takes place. Because most manuscripts are discussed at board meetings, and because the decision to accept is a collective one, involving the comments and reservations of several editors and consultants, the revision process is complex, painstaking, and sometimes painful. But working together on revisions can also be the most satisfying part of the acceptance process for author and editor both. Certainly it is in working with authors that we, as editors, feel we make our most creative and taxing contributions to feminist scholarship and thought. It is the collective nature of our work and the care with which we approach revisions that make our review process lengthy and sometimes downright slow.

The editorial board, our collective, meets on the average of five times a year on the East Coast—West Coast editors fly, or are flown, in perhaps twice. We meet early—usually in New York but sometimes in Philadelphia—and always at someone's apartment or house. We meet all day and work through a long agenda, making collective decisions about the content and shape of upcoming issues, about manuscripts to be accepted or revised, about priorities, politics, policies, about the latest refinements in our round robin process. We drink coffee. We eat a lot of fruit and (even more) carbohydrates. We schedule longer meetings, meetings that last a day and a half, meetings that are three-day retreats, because there is never enough time, not for business only, but for thinking, for being creative, and for finding out the shape of each other's lives. (We long for time, after the work is over, simply to drink wine together at twilight!) At home again we work with authors on revisions, usually calling or writing them several times. We also write and call each other, many of us paying for our own calls and postage. Finally, we send the accepted and edited manuscripts to the business office where Claire oversees the copy editing, proofreading, and final printing of the journal. An issue emerges—it is late, but we feel good.

Manuscripts, however, are rejected as well as accepted, and perhaps three-quarters of the business of a feminist journal is carried on with authors whose work does not appear—this time—inside its cover. At our board meetings we talk about the politics of rejection, about the nature of a rejection letter, about the purpose of reader's comments. It is our feeling that reader's comments are important, for they can be helpful to individual authors and useful to the project of feminist scholarship and creative work as a whole. We talk about how to be responsible, exacting, and nurturing at the same time, and we examine where we have failed to be psychically and intellectually helpful.

As an interdisciplinary journal, we invite work that is available to the general reader, but we continue to publish work that is specialized when it makes a significant contribution to feminist scholarship in its field. What we look for in any manuscript is both its contribution to feminist scholarship and thought and its political relevance, its theoretical or strategic importance to social change. It is our aim to be clear at least about the political direction of a manuscript we publish whether we agree with its politics or not. Yet we also publish articles whose political content is not defined because we consider the work to be important, informative, or new. We ask how we are to struggle on real issues while remaining sisterly, and we find that one approach is to publish

a debate. In the last issue, for example, we printed Kay Trimmerger's essay and Peggy Dennis's response. In this issue, we publish a Symposium on Women's Culture and Women's Politics, and we also print Annette Kolodny's "Dancing Through the Minefield" and invite a response to be published in a future issue. Our selection of manuscripts, to work a change on one of Kolodny's phrases, might be characterized, not as "playful pluralism," but as tolerant partisanship.

If there are directions in what we seek, one is scholarship that relates questions of gender to those of race, class, and social conditions. In literature and culture, for example, we are moving away from readings of individual authors and texts toward a focus on context and historical development, toward a focus on the text as it relates to cultural tensions or ideologies. Although we have also begun to solicit book reviews, our reviews will not attempt to provide comprehensive coverage of feminist scholarship. Rather, we plan to choose books for review on the basis of their potential contribution to the theory and political development of the women's movement. In every field, we have made it a priority to publish work by and about black, Hispanic, and other Third World women and by women of all classes. It is also a priority to publish work by and about lesbians and to develop a feminist analysis of homosexuality and heterosexuality in their social and historical contexts.

What we are looking for, in short, is scholarship and creative work that is substantial and politically directed. For if there is great excitement in this work, in this labor, that informs our scholarship, our personal lives, and our politics; if it is exhilarating to feel in touch with the currents of one's own field and with the currents of others; if it is satisfying to tailor a manuscript, craft an issue, and produce a journal, the point of all this is always practice. The point is to change the world in a feminist direction. From behind the "mask," we invite you to join with us—in sisterhood and in response.

Judith Lowder Newton,
for the editors