

preface

In this issue of *Feminist Studies* we offer our readers essays, commentaries, and creative writing that speak to the concept of alterity, the challenges of living/being in (but sometimes not necessarily of) the system, whether in terms of “mainstream feminisms,” white patriarchal culture, Western religions, or disabled and nondisabled bodied sensibilities. Readers will find that each piece in the following pages suggests strategies for resistances and/or disruptions of institutionalized “norms” by offering alternate readings or counter-narrative scripts which make available new interventions and pedagogical possibilities. In challenging conventional assumptions, our authors use the politics of visibility to expose exclusions and insist upon accommodations and reciprocity. They demand as well that the academy and its scholarship be more consistently linked with and shaped by nonacademic settings and activism.

At the head of this issue are two articles that respond to the call for feminists to pay greater attention to disability studies. Our lead article exemplifies a feminist theory of disability in which the theory emerges out of practice and lived experience. In “What Her Body Taught (or, Teaching about and with a Disability): A Conversation,” Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, and Georgina Kleege focus on their challenges and strategies as feminist scholars and teachers with disabilities in the classroom. Key to their discussion is the function of different structures—pedagogical and institutional—that both enable and deter their efforts. In the classroom, students “forgetting” about their disabilities or “normalizing” them seems to erase the “productive tension” through difference that their presence introduces. Their goal is not to “erase” disability, but rather to reconfigure students’ understandings of disability as not having a “master status”—to change the way disability “matters” to the students. On the topic of technology in the classroom what becomes immediately clear is that types of technology that work to aid some

teachers with disabilities exclude others. Brueggemann suggests the need to think more radically about technology as not just a means of providing certain types of “access” for teachers and students with disabilities but also as creating possibilities for what can happen in a classroom when the presumption is that people learn in vastly different ways. Throughout their interaction they demonstrate that introducing disability and people with disabilities into college classrooms “changes and challenges the rhetoric of higher learning.”

Building on Brueggemann, Garland-Thomson, and Kleege, Judy Rohrer, herself a nondisabled feminist scholar, demands that nondisabled feminists more fully explore the possibilities suggested by disability studies in their theorizing and activism. Rohrer argues for a disability theory of feminism—what she terms “full-inclusion feminism”—as a strategy encompassing inclusion, accommodation, integration, mutuality, and interdependence as “paths toward attainment of one’s rights and self-determination.” Starting with the context since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990), Rohrer explores methodological and thematic areas that are relevant to her own scholarly interests, including body politics and choice, among others. She “mobilizes disability” or employs a disability analysis in her investigation of and theorizing on these areas to demonstrate “what is possible by moving to a disability theory of feminism.” She notes, for example, how a disability analysis might enable a more fulsome feminist deconstruction of the “politics of difference” as disability “poses an Other who could at any moment become the Self.” On the theme of interdependence Rohrer suggests that including disability provides “another crack in our culture’s dominant individualist narrative” as, caught in the tension between “independence” and “needing help,” women with disabilities are “redefining ‘independence’ and reclaiming ‘self-determination and interdependence’” and in doing so broadening our “exploration of feminist ethics.”

The call from disability scholars to “engage seriously and deliberately” with disability analysis in our feminist teaching, research, and activism parallels the challenges raised in the next cluster of articles on Native American women and the politics of the colonial gaze to, in Andrea Smith’s words, “articulat[e] political projects that both address sexism and

promote indigenous sovereignty simultaneously.” The first article in this cluster, Wendy Kozol’s thought-provoking “Miss Indian America: Regulatory Gazes and the Politics of Affiliation” examines the analytical challenges of reading 1960s and 1970s photographs of (often) anonymous Native women featured in Miss Indian America beauty contests, photographs that were commissioned by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. For Kozol, the question is not to find the essence “of a real Indianness” that such photographs deny, but rather to consider how “visual culture participate[s] in constructing historically specific notions of identity and experience.” In conceptualizing her essay Kozol explains that she deliberately shied away from trying to discover who the “real” women were behind the smiling faces in the photographs and instead chose to concentrate on unexpected and often unintended readings of cultural identity and citizenship that emerged from the images. As she moves through the myriad contexts that produced the Miss Indian America beauty contests, Kozol draws on the work of Ella Shohat, by asking readers to imagine a politics of “affiliation” rather than “assimilation” as a means of interpreting “the dialogic nature of identity formations.” Thus, although Miss Indian America beauty contests seem on the one hand to feed into a variety of popular stereotypes—from the perennial Indian Princess to the Noble Savage—on the other they also offer unpredictable juxtapositions that undermine fixed assumptions about ethnic, racial, gendered, and national categories.

Artist Phoebe Farris’s essay, “Contemporary Native Women Artists: Visual Expressions of Feminism, the Environment, and Identity,” points to ways in which the flat and anonymous Native American “femininity” of state-sponsored mid-twentieth-century beauty contests is belied by a vibrant, complex, and discursively powerful contemporary Native feminism that is decidedly anticolonial. Farris highlights seven Native women artists whose works in multiple media (photography, installations, folk arts, collage, painting) are on the cutting edge. Although each is unique in her own right and represents a range of communities and ethnicities from North America to the northern Caribbean, these women (the late Helen Hardin, Nadema Agard, Carm Little Turtle, Rose Powhatan, Kay Walking Stick, Jaune Quick-To-See Smith, and Farris herself) define their aesthetic

production as centrally in dialogue with the politics of context, production, materials, and viewership. They examine the issues faced by all Native peoples, both in the United States and abroad, alongside/within the diversity of histories and strategies that characterize contemporary Native culture. They are not interested in a static recovery of the past, as much as an awareness of history that shapes their understanding of contemporary issues facing Native Americans as they navigate the challenge of personal relationships, globalization, and hybridity. Following up on the dialogue between Kozol's and Farris's articles on the pitfalls and possibilities of the visual, Roberta Murphy offers us a meditative story, "Spectography," on a young girl's search for an imagined past and a possible future.

Also targeting stereotypes, Andrea Smith argues that any serious conceptualization of Native American women as feminist activists demands a rejection of the reductive "dichotomy of feminist versus nonfeminist." For her, one must first understand the diversity of opinions about feminist activism that exists among Native women and how they have uniquely conceived both their role as activists and their theoretical frameworks. For instance, says Smith, those who embrace the term feminist reject its white origins and consider it "an indigenous concept white women borrowed from Native women." In addition, for many Native women the traditional (some would say stereotypical) assumption that a feminist's first aim is to combat sexism is inadequate for dealing with the equally important problem of Native American sovereignty. Thus for Native women activists, the fight against sexism is inextricably linked to the fight for sovereignty; feminism cannot simply manifest itself in the fight against sexism. Rather, sexism, homophobia, child abuse, domestic violence, and other manifestations of "gender [in]justice" are embedded in issues of Native sovereignty, because the impact of colonial "attacks on Native women's status are themselves attacks on Native sovereignty." Addressing the multiplicity of bodily meanings explored in both the disability and Native American women clusters, we end this section with Suzanne Owens's poem "Asleep," which speaks to different modes of "seeing" bodily substance and subtext.

In the final pieces of this issue we turn to the complex problem of gender, access to power, and the public sphere. In her review essay, "Redis-

covering Christianity after the Postmodern Turn,” Jacqueline deVries points to a new attempt at academic reframing as feminist literary critics and historians rethink nineteenth-century western women and their engagement with Christianity. Long regarded as a bankrupt topic, Victorian women’s complex relationship with religion is now being studied as a means of theorizing a number of issues: spirituality as a cultural and historical phenomenon; the nuanced and the interdependent relationships linking class, race, gender, nation, and empire; the less obvious role of women in reshaping “widely held Christian beliefs in the nineteenth century”; and as such their participation both in the public sphere, as well as outside of “official theological and institutional structures.” This new scholarship, says deVries, is especially noteworthy because the emerging framework of reinterpretation has been fuelled by a range of “post-modernist, linguistic, and semiotic analytical tools,” suggesting that the change in attitude about women and Christianity has emerged in part through the development of interdisciplinary methodologies. Moving on to Rosetta Marantz Cohen’s “Word Problems” we find a poem that encapsulates precisely the notion explored by deVries of how the traditionally imagined “separate spheres” necessarily cut and crosscut each other in their complexity and mutual constitution.

Raising similar questions in an early twentieth-century context, Anne E. Fernald’s essay, “A Feminist Public Sphere?” uses Virginia Woolf’s career as a case study for exploring the possibilities of having a woman’s (and feminist) voice affect the public sphere. Focusing on Woolf’s work as both a journalist and a fiction writer, Fernald argues that Woolf sought to participate in public debate and be recognized as a “respected mainstream cultural authority” without giving up her “feminism or her independence of mind.” According to Fernald, Woolf consistently engaged with the public sphere in her writing, whether as an anonymous reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* whose opinion became part of the London literary world, or in her signed response to the misogyny of Desmond McCarthy in the *New Statesman*, or in her exposure of the eighteenth-century public sphere as above all exclusionary in *Orlando*, or in her imagining of a “counter public sphere” in *Three Guineas*. Central to Woolf’s approach, Fernald suggests, was her desire to prove that a “woman and a feminist could make a living,

claim mainstream cultural authority, and reshape public discourse.” This recurring challenge inherent in the politics of gendered discourse and gendered bodies is echoed in the poetry of Greg Nicholl and Laura Hinton, and in Allison Whittenberg’s moving short story “Ride the Peter Pan.”

for the editors,
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