

preface

IN 1996, THE OLE MISSISSIPPI Homecoming Queen described her feelings in the campus newspaper, *The Daily Mississippian*, upon receiving her crown: “After weeks of anticipation, the crowning day is here . . . I can’t believe 47,000 eyes will be watching me.” In this issue we investigate the politics of location. Exposed to public scrutiny, categorized, and judged, women have long borne the burden of maintaining cultural and social norms. Sometimes those norms are patriarchal and racial, as Karen W. Tice explains in her article on campus beauty pageants, but the feminist movement has also generated its own forms of exclusion, as Michelle VanNatta shows in her analysis of constructions of the battered woman. As Mary E. Curran’s review essay explains, our bodies gain their meanings from their contexts, and while, as Karen Zivi describes in the case of HIV-positive mothers, very different contexts can produce surprisingly similar paradigms, the articles in this issue also demonstrate the wide variety of “ideals” against which women’s bodies and their identities are measured. Socioeconomic, racial, and sexual stratifications all shape the ways in which our cultures watch women and warn us off when we seem to defy the hierarchies in which we are often obliged to find our being. But in spite of this, we continue to challenge the terms of our own visibility, and all the articles and the creative pieces in this issue bear witness to women’s resistance as well as to their exposure. As Simone de Beauvoir declared, there is nothing self-evident about being a woman, and women can make themselves visible in the most unexpected and uncomfortable ways, as Jehanne-Marie Gavarini’s art demonstrates.

The lead article in this issue, “Queens of Academe: Campus Pageantry and Student Life,” by Karen W. Tice, examines the phenomenon of campus beauty pageants, which have been popular in colleges and universities around the United States since the 1920s. As Tice argues, although “primarily designed to showcase beauty, femininity, and middle-class con-

duct as well as to contain difference and divisions, beauty pageants have also been sites of struggle over representation and cultural identity,” particularly in the area of race. Over the last two decades, campus beauty pageants have become even more widespread, with corporate sponsorship and increased press coverage both domestically and abroad. Tice examines the history of campus beauty pageantry through case studies of two southern universities, Kentucky State University (KSU), founded in 1886, and historically black, and the University of Kentucky (UK), located only thirty miles from KSU, founded in 1865, and historically white. She places her discussion of practices at these two institutions in the context of the modernization of beauty pageants since the 1970s and closes with an analysis of two state-wide pageants for college women in Kentucky, the Kentucky Derby Princess Festival and the Kentucky Mountain Laurel Festival. At KSU, pageants showcased the middle-class manners, refined bearing, and respectability of their African American contestants, who, until the 1970s, were almost all light-skinned. At UK, pageants were designed to demonstrate that even highly educated women could be “cuties,” as the UK queens were called. The social protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s meant that the racist and sexist assumptions behind beauty pageants were challenged in a variety of ways: for example, in 1975, two men entered the UK queen pageant, and in the same year, African American women on the UK campus protested that they had been passed over in publicity for the competition. By the 1990s, in an attempt to refute charges of sexism, campus pageants, like their national and international counterparts, started to judge women not only on their looks, but also on their talents, their characters, and their academic achievements. Often the crown brought with it scholarship money or other benefits, and many campuses no longer required entrants to parade in a swimsuit. But the two Kentucky state-wide pageants that Tice examines are still largely, in her words, “a celebration of idealized white virginal femininity,” and at the end of her article she calls for a more critical attitude to pageant traditions on college campuses: “There are many other ways for college campuses to enable and acknowledge student achievements, to fight racism and homophobia, enlarge meanings of student success, and to produce meaningful campus rituals other than those that normalize the impor-

tance of disciplining female students' bodies and the merit of narrowly defined professionalized and consumer selves."

Conventional femininity (and feminism) are also interrogated in Sonia Kruks's analysis of recent work on Simone de Beauvoir. Scholars disagree about "how to read Beauvoir," but they are held together by a common desire to "return to [Beauvoir's] work as a site where we may address impasses that confront feminist theory today." Taking up a challenge issued in these very pages twenty-five years ago, Kruks uses three themes to examine how these six books go "back to *The Second Sex*, to unwind its arguments and rewind them in a different way." Rather than discard Beauvoir as an infertile relic of feminism's flawed Second Wave, Kruks celebrates the proliferation of "clear and creative unwindings and rewindings of Beauvoir's arguments." *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir* and Margaret Simons's *Beauvoir and "The Second Sex": Feminism, Race, and the Origins of Existentialism* treat Beauvoir as both "philosophically independent of Sartre" and "a significant contributor in her own right to the continental philosophy 'canon' and beyond." Sara Heinämaa's *Toward a Phenomenology of Sexual Difference: Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Beauvoir* and Toril Moi's *Sex, Gender, and the Body: The Student Edition of "What Is a Woman?"* represent "new post-structuralist readings of Beauvoir" that "draw from her nondualistic and non-reductionist account of feminine embodiment." Yet other Beauvoir scholars such as Fredrika Scarth (*The Other Within: Ethics, Politics, and the Body in Simone de Beauvoir*) and Debra Bergoffen (*The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*) explore her work as the basis for a system of values and ethics. Kruks sees this body of literature as evidence of "the remarkable fecundity of Beauvoir's texts."

In this issue's art essay, Stephanie Ellis describes the art of Jehanne-Marie Gavarini, a French artist who now lives and works in the United States and whose work is featured in this issue. Gavarini began her career as an artist as a member of a small performance collective that staged its shows in the public streets and squares of Western Europe. After moving to the United States, Gavarini switched her focus from the art of gesture to an art based on objects, both found and made. Her work is both politically challenging and visually evocative, and like the academic work in this issue, it draws our attention to places and contexts. When she was asked to

stage an installation at the Alliance Française in San Francisco, she displayed busts of iconic French enlightenment figures that had been stored on dusty shelves at the back of the building and juxtaposed them with circles of salt in which she wrote synonyms for power and synonyms for innocence. In sharing a space, the salt and the statues were implicitly linked together, and each affected the ways in which the other was seen. In *Strange Attractors*, an arrangement of objects made by Gavarini from small things she picked up at dollar stores and elsewhere shows how “the façade of the everyday” is challenged by “the sensibility of the different,” in Ellis’s words. In installation art in particular, the space becomes part of the meaning of the work; the work expresses the dynamics of the space.

Whereas Gavarini is interested in material locations, Karen Zivi examines the effects of ideological location. In “Contesting Motherhood in the Age of AIDS: Maternal Ideology in the Debate over Mandatory HIV Testing,” she examines the apparently contentious debate about mother-to-child HIV transmission and mandatory testing of mothers and infants. She looks beneath the competing narratives deployed by those on both sides and finds “a striking consensus.” Both opponents and proponents of mandatory testing of pregnant women and infants “frequently rel[y] on similar aspects of maternal ideology to make their vastly different cases.” Zivi’s analysis should cause us to think more critically about the costs of the compromises on which the world of policymaking and politics has come to depend. Regardless of who deploys it, maternal ideology makes it difficult “to hold on to the language of autonomy” and “to continue fighting for women’s rights and healthcare needs by acknowledging their personhood both apart from and in connection with motherhood.” Only by consciously challenging these ideologically problematic motherhood narratives will women and women’s rights advocates improve “the health and lives of women, as well as infants” without sacrificing “women’s needs and rights.”

In the second review essay in this issue, Mary E. Curran reviews a selection of books that all consider the role played by location in the construction of sexual identities. Like Tice and Gavarini, she demonstrates that we depend on our contexts to define our selves. As Curran notes, “place is much more than the stage of performances; it is the context through

which and in which identities are produced.” Michael P. Brown, in *Closet Space: Geographies of Metaphor from the Body to the Globe*, looks at the closet as both a material space and a political strategy; Glen S. Elder, in *Hostels, Sexuality, and the Apartheid Legacy: Malevolent Geographies* analyzes gender relations in workers’ hostels in apartheid and contemporary South Africa, and argues that “the movement of women on the South African landscape” is a form of “embodied resistance to apartheid and gender and sexual oppression”; Clare Hemmings, in *Bisexual Spaces: A Geography of Sexuality and Gender*, explores the difficulties of defining and delineating bisexual space, and shows that when “bisexual identity or community is the result of struggles over the meaning of bisexuality . . . the specifics of bisexual political and cultural location tend to be overlooked”; and *De-Centering Sexualities: Politics and Representations beyond the Metropolis*, edited by Richard Phillips, Diane Watt, and David Shuttleton, looks at the construction of sexual identity in small towns and rural areas of Europe, Australia, and North America. Taken together, all four books demonstrate the ways in which particular places have their own local cultures that can produce extraordinarily diverse possibilities for identity construction. However, as Tice’s article makes clear, this variety always unfolds in the context of coercive categories of racial and sexual difference; cities can be prisons as well as playgrounds.

Similarly, Michelle VanNatta in “Constructing the Battered Woman,” considers the relationship between sexual identity and place by examining how the “battered woman” identity regulates access to domestic violence shelters. VanNatta contends that “shelter workers are likely to perceive women abused by women rather than by men as not fitting their model of the ‘real battered woman.’” “[B]attered women’s programs are usually designed specifically to help heterosexual women and set up with the understanding that abuse is a behavior directed by men at women.” Consequently, “lesbians and bi-women face particular problems within most shelters.” Armed with an identity-based definition of “battered woman,” the shelter service providers’ intake process pushes lesbians and bisexual women to the margins where they are inadequately served. There, they join those who not only may be either poor or homeless, but also are not white, heterosexual, passive, English-speaking, or U.S. born.

Whereas most of the service providers fail, without prompting, to see the absence of lesbian and bisexual women among the clients they serve as evidence of a problem, VanNatta finds this blind spot disturbing. Most problematic, however, is that clinging to this idealized “battered woman” compromises the domestic violence movement’s ability to achieve its “stated goal . . . of ‘empowering [all] women.’” If the point is to stop violence against women, VanNatta reasons, the experiences of all battered women must be both normal and legitimate. Sexuality, like the other parts of the identities of women who are battered, should not be used to bar the shelter door. Seeing all women and the diverse types of violence they experience more clearly requires acknowledging the limited usefulness of an uncomplicated theory of patriarchy and misogyny. Seeing and hearing all battered women can create a context out of which can emerge new types of organizations and efforts prepared to serve “a multiplicity of people.”

The creative work in this issue also explores the ways in which contexts make meanings. Eloise Klein Healy’s poems examine the fine line between representation and reality. In “Sheena, Queen of the Jungle, Lived,” North Hollywood is synonymous with illusion, the place where Hollywood scene painters and set designers live, but at the end, the “Sheena” of the title really does become the magical stereotype set up at the beginning of the poem. Similarly, the “girl child” in “For the Girl Child” breaks away from the oppressive context in which she is told “change or be changed” and heals “the strangeness of her own disavowed body”; and “Trouble Ahead” wittily encapsulates the dilemma of biographical representation in a three-line haiku. In Stephanie Dickinson’s story, “Man of War,” a young woman is lured by promises of a photo shoot with famous actors into going away for the weekend with a man several decades older than she. As the story develops, she gradually becomes aware that he sees her body as material for a very different video than the one she had imagined, and she takes an unexpected revenge. De Anna Stephens Vaughn also writes about seeing and being seen differently. In her poem “Factories,” the developing pregnancy of a factory worker is compared to the work she does: “my mother shaped hinges/in a Detroit factory, curled/their bolts’ diameters into snug/ fists”; and in “Hysteresis of Light,”

electricity brings light to a coalminer's house in which his daughter struggles to understand the erotic charge of dirt and cleanliness. In our final creative piece, Shouhua Qi's "The Evidence," a young hairdresser is arrested on trumped-up prostitution charges, and the violence and cruelty of her accusers teaches her that she has never been in control of the way men view her.

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for the editors