

REWORKING PASTS AND ENVISIONING FUTURES: THINKING “OTHERWISE” ABOUT WOMEN’S STUDIES

by Catherine M. Orr

Mary F. Rogers & C.D. Garrett, *WHO’S AFRAID OF WOMEN’S STUDIES? FEMINISMS IN EVERYDAY LIFE*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2002. 176p. bibl. index. \$75.00, ISBN 0-7591-0173-6; pap., \$24.95, ISBN 0-7591-0174-4.

Robyn Wiegman, ed., *WOMEN’S STUDIES ON ITS OWN: A NEXT WAVE READER IN INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002. 502p. bibl. index. pap., \$24.95, ISBN 0822329867.

Ann Braithwaite, Susan Heald, Susanne Luhmann, & Sharon Rosenberg, *TROUBLING WOMEN’S STUDIES: PASTS, PRESENTS, AND POSSIBILITIES*. Toronto: Sumach Press, 2004. 248p. bibl. pap., \$28.95 Cdn, \$24.95 US, ISBN 1-894540-36-8.

Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy & Agatha Beins, eds., *WOMEN’S STUDIES FOR THE FUTURE: FOUNDATIONS, INTERROGATIONS, POLITICS*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005. 368p. \$65.00, ISBN 0-8135-3618-9; pap., \$24.95, ISBN 0-8135-3619-7.

For those of us who enjoy thinking *and reading* about the political, cultural, and structural implications of our work as women’s studies scholars and teachers, we have much to celebrate with the publication of recent texts, anthologies, and special journal issues about the state of women’s studies.¹ By this I mean that important theoretical work about the field, often written by a new generation of women’s studies scholars, is inviting, even demanding, us to “think otherwise” about our women’s studies’ histories, objectives, constituencies, relations with other knowledge production projects, and the future of the field itself.² Most remarkable about this latest round of books that assess the field is the trend toward questioning the present functions of narrating women’s studies’ pasts. To what uses, many of the authors in these texts ask, are the stories we tell about ourselves being put? (This is especially topical given the recent proliferation of autobiographies by the field’s first-genera-

tion practitioners.) As a result of this new line of inquiry, most of the texts I review here indicate a shift in thinking to a more affirmative—and thereby more productive—discourse about the prospects and possibilities open to the field in the future.

Mary F. Rogers and C.D. Garrett raise a provocative question in *Who’s Afraid of Women’s Studies?*: Why does a fear of feminism seem to persist even while women’s studies has experienced such phenomenal growth? Their extended response lands them in the middle of the “women versus gender” debate, a valuable and constructive topic of recent feminist theorizing. Gender, however, is clearly troubling these authors. The “real danger,” they argue, is that gender studies “dilutes feminism’s visibility, . . . does not challenge patriarchy, [and] . . . reinforces people’s sense that women and men are *opposite* sexes and that there are *essential* differences between them” (pp.x–xi). Although this is not a set of claims

with which all feminist academics would agree, nor is it a satisfactory rejoinder to the authors’ central question, Rogers and Garrett nevertheless tap into an anxiety — pervasive among women’s studies practitioners — that crisis is afoot. In this way their response is not especially surprising: anxieties surface when the historical coherence of any field’s prevailing narrative falters. Here, as with a number of contexts, the reaction to crisis is a demand to return to the past.

The passion that springs out of *Who’s Afraid of Women’s Studies?* emanates from a desire, first, to delimit women’s studies’ proper objects, methods, and goals and, second, to police the boundaries set up by this particular delimitation from outsiders who don’t subscribe to its tenets. Ultimately, then, the authors are endeavoring to *discipline* women’s studies, a high-stakes endeavor that will always require a delicate touch, a nuanced argument, and, given the field’s history, a healthy

resistance to drawing boundaries too rigidly. Unfortunately, the authors give way to the temptation of strict limits, despite their rhetoric of openness that emphasizes multiple feminisms. *Who's Afraid of Women's Studies?* resonates with a pessimistic assessment that chides current women's studies practices and practitioners for straying from the path set forth by the field's founding generation.³

To accomplish this disciplining endeavor, Rogers and Garrett map separate genealogies for women's studies and gender studies, a rendering that rings somewhat false. For example, questions about the limitations of women's studies' object of analysis, methods, constituencies, raised over the years by the very authors they quote — Judith Butler, Gayle Rubin, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Shane Phalen, Donna Haraway — fail to raise the “gender question” for Rogers and Garrett. Gender studies, according to the authors, has its origins in “sex roles” research in sociology, anthropology, and social psychology. But nowhere are readers able to discern that contestations among feminist theorists fomented a vast amount of research about gender in the context of women's studies. (That so many women's studies programs, including my own, are — quite deliberately and with no outside pressure — changing their names to account for this expanded focus demonstrates that gender studies is hardly an alien invasion.)

A passage that makes this effacement apparent uses the words of Judith Butler (who penned a fairly well-read text titled *Gender Trouble*) — “No one stands within a definition of feminism that would remain uncontested”⁴ — yet proceeds to argue, in the authors' words, that gender studies is “seducing women's studies away from its feminist

foundations” (p.x). The concern I am raising is *not* that Rogers and Garrett are making an argument about what the feminist foundations of the field should be; that is an important conversation that I would like to read about. The problem for me is the implication that consensus has been reached. Rogers and Garrett completely disregard debates that have yielded some of the most important theoretical contributions of women's studies — debates about the incongruity of feminist politics and its foundational assumptions (think: critiques of women's studies by women of color, lesbian feminists, postcolonial scholars, poststructuralist theorists, gender/queer activists, etc.). In other words, despite their claims to support feminisms' diversities and contestability, the authors' stake in a singular, fixed, and static rendering of women's studies' feminist foundations is unmistakable.

The irony is that although the authors advance what I consider an ill-conceived framework for disciplining the field, the bulk of *Who's Afraid of Women's Studies?* nonetheless manages to be a well-researched and accessible introductory text that orients readers to basic areas of inquiry in women's studies. In each of their six chapters (“Bodies,” “Anger, Agency, and Desires,” “Sexuality,” “Feminist Methods,” “Differences,” and “Backlash”), Rogers and Garrett review foundational feminist issues in broad sweeps, consider various points of view among feminist scholars and activists in easy-to-follow prose, and conclude with inspiring pleas to maintain feminist agendas and multicultural alliances.

So here is the mystery: Who is the target audience for this text? For which introductory-level women's studies student is the disciplinary turf war that introduces the book a high-stakes is-

sue? Which women's studies novice needs to know, let alone will care, that the academic enterprise she or he has just decided to investigate is supposedly doing battle with the journal *Sex Roles*? Or that authors who go by the names of Carol Gilligan and Susan Faludi used to write about women and now write about men? Women's studies has much to say about our everyday lives, as the book's subtitle iterates. Readers new to women's studies are best served when *their* concerns, not ours, form the framework of the field's introductory materials. Despite the useful middle of this text, the authors' dual intentions of both disciplining and introducing women's studies works against their purpose.

Overall, I am sympathetic to Rogers and Garrett's discomforts with recent shifts in women's studies' objects of analysis. Questions of disciplinarity are serious ones, given that they determine legitimacy and, therefore, resource allocation from administrative bodies in our respective institutions. However, I think we need assessments of the field that offer more nuanced accounts of how and from where these shifts occur, and they should not be slipped into introductory texts as an inoculation technique for students. While *Who's Afraid of Women's Studies?* is unsuccessful as a text that seeks to genuinely respond to questions about the state of the field, it nevertheless covers some well-trodden territory of crisis narratives about current and future areas of interest for women's studies practitioners. In this way, the subsequent texts reviewed here formulate a sort of response to the more general laments Rogers and Garrett echo.

Robyn Wiegman's anthology, *Women's Studies on Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*, signals a deliberate break with the

field's pasts as they have been constructed in previous narrations and histories. In addition to mapping out a grounded and theoretically nuanced reading of the state of women's studies, Wiegman challenges academic feminists who consistently seem to find "the present at fault for its lack of coherence with the past" (p.3). Banished are the questions that frame considerations of women's studies as a story of loss and lament. Rather, Wiegman wants "scholars to trace the difference that resides in the present and to judge that difference in relation to the institutional project of academic feminism" (p.3). In other words, she asks: What if women's studies was assessed based on its present incarnations—as a highly diverse, prolific, and influential intellectual movement that has found an unsettling but accommodating home in the academy? What if we stopped judging ourselves by an ever-present past that only legitimizes women's studies existence inside the academy by sometimes-real/sometimes-imagined constituencies and events outside of it?

It is not that Wiegman and the bulk of her contributors dismiss out of hand the field's relationship to its past. On the contrary, both inspiration from and anguish about the field's past provide a point of entry for deeper analysis. The different path that Wiegman introduces is marked by critical reflection, not nostalgia or, as she calls it, "celebratory self-narration." For example, in the opening section of the anthology, "Histories of the Present," authors take on the past with chapters

that include provocative treatments of the nationalist narratives embedded in women's studies by Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal, the historiography of feminism by Jane O. Newman, and Rachel Lee's consideration of women's studies' investment in "women of color" as a category of difference.

As Lee notes, a number of women's studies programs use "women of color" both as a course designation for undergraduate degree requirements and as a sort of prop in what she terms the field's "contradictory logic of fetishized marginality." She argues that "the narration of Women's Studies'



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critical progress inheres in the field's ability both to incorporate the 'outside' and to substitute itself for the 'outside.' . . . [W]omen of color remain eminently useful to the progress narrative Women's Studies wishes to create for itself, where the fullness of women of color's arrival within Women's Studies is always 'about to be'" (pp.88–89). In other words, Lee is arguing that "women of color" within women's studies — both the designation and the people the designation represents

— provides a sort of "racial alibi" that covers for the field's own "blind spots" and puts off considerations of how curriculum, research, and administrative practices continue to marginalize women of color (p.83). In critically analyzing the stories that women's studies tells about its pasts, presents, and futures, authors like Lee are presenting us with a different mirror through which we see our own disciplinary practices.

Most of these essays are contextualized by, rather than fearful of, the institutionalization of women's studies in the academy. In the section "Institutional Pedagogies (A Forum),"

short position papers continue to challenge narratives of lament and loss and thus open up productive lines of inquiry.

Among the most interesting contributions is Bonnie Zimmerman's "The Past in Our Present: Theorizing the Activist Project of Women's Studies," in which she considers the ways in which our curricular requirements for activist projects, community service, and internships attempt to reconstruct an activist women's studies history

for our students: "[W]e cannot go back to the model of activism and academia that existed in 1972," Zimmerman reminds us (p.186). Although an obvious statement, it provides a refreshing starting point for opening up new lines of investigation of the community-based curricular elements common to many women's studies programs:

[I]t is not clear to me that this work necessarily does any-

thing to transform the balance of power or undermine oppressive institutions in the larger society. Indeed, the emphasis within Women's Studies on volunteer activities, whether in the public sector or in the nonprofit agencies that employ so many of our graduates, may actually reinforce current power structures and relations by taking on some of the work that used to be considered the responsibility of the state. (p.188)

Although a basic insight about the cooptation, this sort of claim is rarely fostered in a context that uses the field's activist past to judge its academic present.

Ultimately, these different approaches to familiar themes in women's studies will lead readers to, as Wiegman puts it, "think about the field *otherwise*" (p. 3). And because of Wiegman's pioneering work in this volume and other recent publications, many of us do. Although this anthology lacks a certain amount of institutional diversity (a topic I take up elsewhere⁵), it nonetheless sets a standard for assessing the state of women's studies that is genuinely innovative and desperately needed. *Women's Studies on Its Own* lays out an important intellectual foundation upon which others already have begun to build.

The next book is a good example of building on these new foundations. Co-authors Ann Braithwaite, Susan Heald, Susanne Luhmann, and Sharon Rosenberg join to make use of Wiegman's initial insights about the temporal dimensions of women's studies' narratives in a multi-vocal volume titled *Troubling Women's Studies: Pasts,*

Presents, and Possibilities. Donning the title "bad girls" in their Canadian women's studies circles, the authors take inspiration from Judith Butler's embrace of unstable categories (hence the term "troubling" in the title) to delve deeply into women's studies' "origin stories."

This book emerges out of our collective observation that for many people currently working within Women's Studies, including ourselves, the term 'Women's Studies' — in both an intellectual and institutional sense — is increasingly seen to be an unstable or even impossible term to define and uphold. Indeed, each of us came to this collective project with our own unease about Women's Studies, and a shared belief — albeit for often quite different reasons — that something about how this particular intellectual project is currently organized and practiced is not (no longer?) working. (p.10)

In this way, these authors are addressing the same "crisis" as Rogers and Garrett, yet their response is to question whether change and instability must necessarily constitute a crisis. They cast aspersions on the limited set of responses women's studies practitioners have thus far mustered, having "either attempted to claim and shore up a singular meaning of 'Women's Studies' as a discipline or, alternatively, ... [suggesting] that Women's Studies itself is no longer a worthwhile project" (p.11).

Intellectually honest about the limitations, contradictions, and possibilities of women's studies, these authors devote a significant amount of

space to our *personal* relationships with the field. So many of us defend women's studies as a sanctuary outside of the marketplace/traditional-disciplines/politics-as-usual spaces. To outsiders, we often praise this intellectual movement as if we invented ourselves through it. At the same time, we frequently feel betrayed by the myriad of ways it disappoints, falls short, fails us. *Ambivalence* is the key term here. *Troubling Women's Studies* provides a sobering look at the attachments we have to our own revolutionary desires, especially as they manifest themselves through our chosen (inter)discipline. Although some will find this acceptance of the field's inherent and inevitable instability rather disconcerting, I admit that I find it emancipating and full of productive possibilities for seeing women's studies — and our individual relationships to it — otherwise.

The text derives much of this effect from its form. It is a "tag-team" anthology of sorts, very much a mutually constituted project (as evidenced by the co-authored introduction and references to each others' work throughout), but with different chapters that reflect individual authors' perspectives, methods, and topics of interest. Although a conclusion that reiterated the significance of the "big picture" would have helped drive their insights home (the book simply ends with the fourth author's somewhat esoteric essay), the format nonetheless displays a collaborative method that sustains its overarching argument in ways that the anthologies reviewed here do not.

Susan Heald's chapter, "Just My Opinion? Women's Studies, Autobiography and the University," begins the book's complex and multifaceted argument by considering the role of autobi-

ography in feminist pedagogy. Heald argues that although “finding one’s voice” and personal “empowerment” are concepts central to women’s studies contexts, they are problematic nevertheless as they so easily converge with the cult of individualism and effacement of larger economic and social structures that disempower various identity groups. Heald’s critical observation is that, more and more, students don’t seem to “get it.” In other words, in their readings of autobiographies from women in various oppressive contexts, the students fail to grasp the *social* contexts out of which these stories emerge. Their focus is on product rather than process. “At best,” she says, “it seems, many students relegate the material they read to the category ‘opinion,’ and their readings seem to encourage or facilitate the easy surfacing of their own unreflected ‘opinions’” (p.59). Rather than exposing discourses in which we are all entangled, Heald argues, students take their cue from other disciplinary traditions based on positivist assumptions about “facts” and more aligned with the needs of the increasingly corporate logic of higher education. In other words, students dismiss autobiography as not speaking in the voice of “the Expert,” and offering just one more opinion in a world of opinions that, of course, includes their own. This is quite the dilemma for feminist academics who seek to challenge their students’ received wisdom.

Ann Braithwaite takes the process-not-product theme and turns her attention toward the recent wave of autobiographies by early Second Wave feminists and first-generation women’s studies practitioners. She wants to question what it is — and likewise what should it be — that these stories “pass on.” Why is it, she asks,

that so many of these authors make an integral and necessary connection between feminism(s) as a social movement and Women’s Studies as part of the institution of academia so central to their ruminations? Why are these two different sites consistently yoked together throughout this genre? What are the stakes in making and insisting on such a connection as a defining moment for either of these fields? How do contemporary practices of Women’s Studies in academe themselves replay some of these troubled and troubling habits of passing on? (p.101)

Drawing from Katie King’s work on “origin stories” and the role of “magical signs,” Braithwaite argues that “the women’s movement’ comes to act...as a new magical sign, a new place of condensation, displacement and reduction” (p.105). What her contribution to the volume makes clear, then, is that rather than reflecting on women’s studies’ relationship with The Women’s Movement (certainly a multifaceted and contradictory complex in its own right), most of these authors simply state the relationship as indisputable, unproblematic, and even *automatic*. In this sense, expertise in women’s studies emerges from an unreflective reproduction of an event that subsequent generations did not experience. Thus, women’s studies becomes that which is always already lost. Of particular concern to Braithwaite is how these narratives about the emergence of women’s studies claim that race and class were at the center of this field’s attention from the beginning. Given that academic feminists of color are much less likely

to cast their stories of the movement/field relationship as stories of nostalgia and loss,⁶ it is clear to both Braithwaite and her readers that these narratives that yolk the two together are indeed troubling.

Susanne Luhmann’s contribution, “Trying Times for Women’s Studies: Lost Pasts, Ambivalent Presents and Predetermined Futures,” takes a psychoanalytic approach to women’s studies narratives. Luhmann looks closely at the field’s frequent expressions of ambivalence and loss — the former being an important dynamic in attachment and the latter being a result of established narratives that begin to “falter.” To extend her therapeutic metaphor, the move here is to see destabilization in the field as an opportunity for reflection and growth rather than as a cause for panic and resistance. Rejecting the generational representations that cast the field’s “founding mothers” as “heroines” that the current generation (the daughters?) should emulate, Luhmann, echoing Wiegman, questions the insistence that women’s studies’ present or its future must be shaped by its past. Stripping any sense of nostalgia away, she states:

We know that in so many ways women’s studies’ institutional history has not been a tale of unfettered progress and improvement; it has not moved in a linear fashion towards achieving institutional stability, changing the university, producing transformative knowledge, solving the problem of interdisciplinarity and whatever else were its founding goals. Yet still the view of heroic and progressive histories prevail. (p.183)

Yikes! Luhmann cuts me, and any other women's studies devotee, to the quick. Yet I have to admit that in so many ways, she's right. The field has not accomplished those early goals. But now what?

The final essay by Sharon Rosenberg provides some complicated solace. "At Women's Studies' Edge: Thoughts on Remembering a Troubled and Troubling Project of the Modern University" is the most experimental, emotionally charged, and *difficult* (in multiple senses) of the four essays in *Troubling Women's Studies*. Taking up the theme of vulnerability, both in terms of women's vulnerability to violence and women's studies' vulnerability to the corporate logic currently creeping through most academic institutions, Rosenberg rethinks women's studies through methodological processes: "looking away" and "getting lost." These two terms are fleshed out in her conceptualization of feminist collective memory as it emerged in the aftermath of the Montréal massacre, in which fourteen college women were murdered for being, in the eyes of the man who gunned them down, "a bunch of fucking feminists." Her "central assumption" is "that there is no neutral formation of memory nor a singular history to be passed on; rather, there is a demand to recognize that every remembrance is partial and invested and, on these terms, to attend to ways in which a complex, multi-dimensional, layered memory formation may be kept alive" (p.213).

Working against any notion that equates the loss of life with losing one's disciplinary foothold, Rosenberg nevertheless moves in interesting but sometimes hard-to-follow ways between memories of the massacre and the vulnerabilities of feminist knowledge formations. While she under-

stands that grief and loss may push us to build walls against the intrusion of vulnerability, to shore up our foundations, to see difference as threatening, ultimately she argues that such loss cannot be "contained within prior conceptualizations and familiar terms" (p.229).

The specific purpose of *Troubling Women's Studies* is to ask feminist academics to think carefully about how specific interests are served by particular pasts. As Elizabeth Grosz has observed, "It is the present that writes the past rather than, as positivist historiography has it, the past that gives way to the present" (p.174). This is a brave, exciting, and important book for any women's studies practitioner who has experienced pangs of doubt about where the field is headed. Honest reflections about where we have been, after all, will chart less anxious paths toward our future.

The prospects and opportunities ahead of us constitute the organizing principle for Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Agatha Beins's anthology, *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*. "How," the editors ask, "does the field need to adjust its goals and methods to respond to and effect change in the contemporary world and thrive into the future?" (p.1). Although it contains several essays from the October 2000 "Women's Studies for the Future" conference that were already electronically published (<http://ws.web.arizona.edu/future/>), along with reprints from other sources, *Women's Studies for the Future* nevertheless provides a valuable and multilayered discussion, among a diverse array of feminist scholars. Its approach and tone mark a certain level of the field's maturity given the recent proliferation of Ph.D. programs in the U.S.

The editors are interested in teasing through a set of issues associated with institutionalization, especially how institutionalization is experienced and negotiated at program and department levels at contemporary research universities. In this way, I found the *administrative* side of my women's studies self hailed by this text.

In focusing on the future, the anthology seeks to preempt any suspicion that it is preoccupied with the field's failures or impossibilities. In fact, Kennedy, a second-wave veteran, declares failure fatigue: "the endless criticisms sound like a Greek chorus, locking women into failure and victimhood and preventing feminist scholars from analyzing the nature of the social institutions that they inhabit" (p.3). Kennedy's collaboration with Beins, an MA graduate from her program, provides a framework of engagement and compromise across not just feminist generations, but also theoretical divides. They are self-conscious and accepting of the other's orientations (Kennedy calls herself a materialist, whereas postmodern theories are most compelling to Beins) and model a spirit of collegiality: "We have learned in working together that it is useful to understand that we are both right. Women's studies' vitality as a field comes from its ability to encompass contradiction. Our differences and similarities have been equally fundamental in the way we have related to and developed this anthology — broadening what is included but staying focused on the challenges of successful institutionalization" (p.3).

The book's five sections organize future considerations for the field into a finite number of key questions: "What is the Subject of Women's Studies?" "How Does Women's Studies Ne-

gotiate the Politics of Alliance and the Politics of Difference?” “How Can Women’s Studies Fulfill the Promise of Interdisciplinarity?” “What is the Continuing Place of Activism in Women’s Studies?” and “How Has Feminist Pedagogy Responded to Changing Social Conditions?” Again, Wiegman’s influence is easily discerned, not just in her contribution in the opening section (“The Possibility of Women’s Studies”) but also in a number of essays that continue to build on both her insights and her publications. For example, Vivian M. May’s “Disciplining Feminist Futures? ‘Undisciplined’ Reflections about the Women’s Studies PhD” draws heavily on essays from *Women’s Studies On Its Own* to respond to the question that struck May when she attended a conference on the topic: “How could the women’s studies PhD—its parameters, methods, implications, and goals — still somehow be an absent presence *at its own conference*?” She notes the frustration of graduate students and faculty alike with the field’s multiplicities of “methods, constituencies, identities, geographies, and activism” (p.185). In responding to her colleagues, May echoes a number of the contributors in the anthology that see the field’s future in positive terms because they have let go of certain tendencies of the past:

The very “messiness,” indeterminacy, and lack of sameness that signify problems to others are, to me, part of the promise of both the women’s studies PhD and the field. In fact, nostalgic efforts to adhere to some form of coherence, or to retrieve an originary women’s studies that allegedly thrived and existed before things became so “con-

tested,” stifle women’s studies’ potential. (pp.185–86)

Although she returns several times to the wise words of Anna Julia Cooper, nineteenth-century black feminist educator, for a conceptual framework about the “worth” of an education, May flits and scurries between author and quote to construct an organized cacophony of voices that build a messy and indeed undisciplined response. She talks about women’s studies as a “compound space” rather than a “bounded territory” (p.188), and models, in both style and substance, a playfulness and optimism that beat away any memory of lament and loss.

The range and unevenness of the essays — in terms of style of expression, assumptions, uses of data, foci, and so forth — are predictable outcomes in an anthology, especially one based on proceedings from an interdisciplinary conference. What’s interesting is how the direct questions (above) provide the organizational framework as well as a set of limitations for the anthology function. Although that is not unique to this publication, reading about women’s studies’ futures got me thinking about the ways we tend to categorize our present in the most mundane of our disciplinary materials, like anthologies. I find myself wondering why Lorenia Parada-Ampudia’s article, “The Institutionalization of Women’s and Gender Studies in Mexico: Achievements and Challenges,” was included in the “Activism” section and not in “Alliances and the Politics of Difference,” given that it said so many interesting things about the influence of NGOs on curriculum but almost nothing about activism *per se*. In the same way, I found Monica Brown and Miroslava Chávez-García’s

“Women’s Studies and Chicana Studies: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future” to have at least as much relevance for the “Promise of Interdisciplinarity” section as for the “Alliances and Politics of Difference” section where it was placed. In fact, Brown and Chávez-García speak to these politics of location when they recount how conference organizers initially asked that their panel (the only to address Chicana/Latina issues exclusively) “combine” with the presenter on Jewish American feminist issues as a way of organizing or, more cynically for Brown and Chávez-García, consolidating the difference (the authors successfully convinced the organizers otherwise). Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s “Under Western Eyes’ Revisited” could easily have traded places with Banu Subramaniam’s “Laboratories of Our Own,” and so on.

Feeling the pressure to arrange essays in a “logical” manner for my own anthology project, I am sympathetic to conference organizers and editors trying to balance sections or create coherent categories where none necessarily exist. However, frameworks of reading and understanding ideas and identities *are* fostered by the ways panels are constructed and anthologies arranged. Any tendency to populate the “difference” section with the “hyphenated” authors speaks to how even our interdisciplinary logics seek the familiar dualisms.

So here is yet another challenge for the future of women’s studies: how can our compound spaces contain and display our intellectual allegiances and identity-based orientations in ways that allow for multiple readings and understandings? How can familiar forms, like anthologies and conference panels, that transport our ideas and

orientations to others embody or encourage the field's embrace of ambivalence? What, in other words, can we use to tell different stories about our and others' relationships with our chosen interdiscipline? Following May, I hope we begin to experiment with different academic modes of address and make "messiness" an asset, at least in some of our spaces and with some of our practices. I take my inspiration from so many of the voices included in these texts that make "thinking otherwise" about women's studies so very seductive.

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Notes

1. In addition to the texts under review here, see the recent *Feminist Studies* forums on disciplining women's studies (v.24, no.2, 1998),

interdisciplinarity (v.27, no.2, 2000), and the women's studies Ph.D. (v.29, no.2, 2003); the special issue of *Women's Studies Quarterly* titled "Women's Studies Then and Now" (v.30, nos.3–4, Fall/Winter 2002); the special issue of *NWSA Journal* titled "25 Years of NWSA: Vision, Controversy, Transformation" (v.14, no.1, Spring 2002); Ellen Messer-Davidow's *Disciplining Feminism: From Social Activism to Academic Discourse* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2002); and Florence Howe, ed., *The Politics of Women's Studies: Testimony from 30 Founding Mothers* (New York: The Feminist Press, 2000).

2. I refer here to Robyn Wiegman's demand that women's studies practitioners "think about the field otherwise," which, as will be elaborated on below, asks us to cease using the past as an idealized blueprint for the future.

3. This tradition is illustrated well in Howe, 2000, when she invokes a family bond that extols the accomplishments of the founding mothers and laments the current amnesia, presumably among the field's "daughters."

4. Butler, Judith, "The End of Sexual Difference?" in *Feminist Consequences: Theory for the New Century*, ed. Elisabeth Bronfen and Misha Kavka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp.414–34.

5. See Catherine M. Orr and Diane Lichtenstein, "The Politics of Feminist Locations: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Studies," *NWSA Journal* v.16, no.3 (Fall 2004), pp. 1–17.

6. Braithwaite cites a fairly damning quotation about *The Feminist Memoir Project* by Barbara Smith, and Luhmann makes similar claims in the following chapter. Beverly Guy-Sheftall comments often about the different relationship women of color generally, and black women specifically, have with feminism and women's studies. See, for example, Beverly Guy Sheftall and Evelyn M. Hammonds, "Wither Black Women's Studies: An Interview, 1997 and 2004," in *Women's Studies for the Future: Foundations, Interrogations, Politics*, eds. Elizabeth Lapovsly Kennedy and Agatha Beins (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University, 2005), pp.61–71.