

Jennifer Lynne Musto  
University of California, Los Angeles  
jmusto@ucla.edu

Wiegman, R. (2002) *Women's Studies on Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 502 pp. ISBN 0-8223-2950-6.

The institutionalization of Women's Studies within the academy has provided scholars and activists with a productive space, however fractured, in theorizing the possibilities and limits of a field steeped in interdisciplinarity. Editor Robyn Wiegman, along with twenty eight contributors to *Women's Studies on Its Own: A Next Wave Reader in Institutional Change*, take to task assessing the ways in which the field of Women's Studies has evolved over the past 30 odd years while reflecting upon its future in producing feminist knowledge, despite, or perhaps in light of the manifold differences that exist in writing/theorizing "woman."

Many ideas from this collection stem from a series of informal discussions in which Wiegman and fellow colleagues exchanged both their hopes and frustrations with the "historic project" of Women's Studies (Wiegman 2002: 2). Divided into four sections: "Histories of the Present," "Institutional Pedagogies," "The Shadow of Capital" and "Critical Classrooms," this volume proffers a cartographic sketch, or what Wiegman calls a "positive political grammar", in accounting for the ways in which feminist scholars configure knowledge, organize within academic institutions, respond to corporatized campus culture, and develop pedagogical strategies. Doubling as both a historical primer and theoretical atlas, *Women's Studies on Its Own* provides academics in general and feminist scholars in particular with a valuable resource in thinking through the intellectual possibilities of interdisciplinary scholarship.

Apropos to the various debates and theoretical contentions that have defined the field of Women's Studies,<sup>1</sup> this collection presents divergent views on the project of academic feminism as it emerges vis-à-vis institutions in the United States, Canada, and Australia. In

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<sup>1</sup> Academic feminists have, in recent years, been divided over where to "house" feminist scholarship. To this point, Brown's essay, "The Impossibility of Women's Studies," provocatively argues against stand-alone Women's Studies programs and departments, citing the intellectual and theoretical limitations of a field too often mired in identity politics. She thus concludes that feminist knowledge production has greater critical purchase within traditional disciplines.

addition to its exploration of the ways in which Women's Studies differs from its more *disciplined* counterparts, so too do the contributors take analytic stock of how interdisciplinarity promotes, stifles, and at times stalls feminist scholarship from developing more nuanced theoretical languages of intelligibility. How, for example, can Women's Studies cultivate both a breadth and depth of knowledge that does not mimic disciplinary moves toward canonization? Though the strength of interdisciplinarity rests in its flexibility and creativity, one wonders if such flexibility simultaneously arouses a kind of institutional displacement or what Rachel Lee describes as the "seduction of non-territoriality," which to her mind proves more paralyzing than productive (Lee 95).

On a different though equally significant note, Dever, Cuthbert, and Pollak explore the ways in which Women's Studies degrees might be translated into vocational skills (Dever, Cuthbert, and Pollak 316). The authors point toward the confusion that exists when individuals outside the academy, particularly potential employers, have little if any knowledge about what one *does* with a Women's Studies degree. As evidenced by the aforementioned and seemingly disparate examples, *Women's Studies on Its Own* reads more like a theoretic web of interconnected ideas and points of departure than a seamless anthology of like-minded essays.

In an effort to "trace the difference that resides in the present and to judge that difference in relation to the institutional project of academic feminism," (Wiegman 2002: 3), *Women's Studies on Its Own* explores questions ranging from the abstractly theoretical to the routinely practical. Points of critical inquiry include but are not limited to:

- What interdisciplinary practices might foster a more dynamic relationship between political activism and feminist knowledge production? (Zimmerman 189)
- How might feminist practitioners better engage with knowledge produced at the intersections of race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and nationality? (Lee 85)
- Is departmentalization the most efficacious way with which to secure tenure faculty lines? (Warhol 225)
- In what ways are feminist practitioners responding to the increasing corporatization of the academy on the one hand and the increasing

marginalization of adjunct Women's Studies faculty on the other? (Subbaraman 259)

- What pedagogical strategies and tactics prove useful in challenging asymmetrical dynamics of power and “curricular remembering and forgetting?” (Moallem 369)

It seems interesting to note that in the same moment that Women's Studies departments and programs in the United States have become more securely entrenched within the academic establishment, however temporarily, concerns have mounted as to whether the current disciplinary configurations of feminist knowledge reflect the field's earlier aims; namely to serve as the “academic arm of the women's movement” (Zimmerman 184). Without waxing too nostalgic about the days in which academic feminism was, or at least gave, the appearance of being inextricably connected to political activism, this collection nevertheless explores the current relationship between theory and praxis, and why, as Sneja Gunew finds, such binarized distinctions between *thinking* and *doing* remain unique to US academic feminism.

While *Women's Studies On Its Own* succeeds in critically accounting for the theoretical inconsistencies and institutional limitations of producing feminist knowledge in an increasingly corporatized academic landscape, there nevertheless appears to be an underwhelming exploration of how globalization and the transnational flow of ideas and bodies have contributed to how we think about and theorize the field(s) of Women's Studies. With the exception of Sneja Gunew's piece, “Feminist Cultural Literacy: Translating Differences, Cannibal Options,” and Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal's chapter, “Transnational Practices and Interdisciplinary Feminist Scholarship: Refiguring Women and Gender Studies,” this volume remains particularly specific to North American feminism(s) in general and American Women's Studies departments and programs in particular.

To this point, Sneja Gunew draws upon Braidotti's notion of feminist knowledge as “situated practice,” and argues that newfound feminist collaborations across the globe are necessary in order to “dispel the prevailing notion that North American feminism is a homogenous colonizing force” (Gunew 57). Rather than promoting a revamped version of global sisterhood<sup>2</sup>, however, feminist scholars might instead invest in what Kaplan and Grewal's refer to as “transnational feminist practices” in charting the movement of feminist

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<sup>2</sup> See Robin Morgan, ed. 1984. *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. New York: Anchor Press.

subjectivities, policies and practices between and across institutions and borders (Kaplan and Grewal 7).

Despite its particular focus on the institutionalization, departmentalization, and professionalization of Women's Studies within the North American academic landscape, *Women's Studies on Its Own* nevertheless provides students, researchers, and activists with a theoretically engaging and programmatically useful guide to one of the academy's more dynamic fields of study.

### **Reference**

Morgan, Robin (ed.) (1984) *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*. New York: Anchor Press.