

preface

WHAT WILL FEMINISM DO?

In our classrooms and communities, this question has been posed with intensifying urgency and creeping skepticism over the past few years. Perhaps this provocation responds to the climate of court decisions and legislation attacking abortion rights, or to the uprisings in places across the world that pivot around questions of women's and minoritized gender rights, or to the growing outrage over the events unfolding in Palestine, Congo, Sudan, and Haiti. For those of us invested in feminist inquiry and activism, this is a critical moment to revisit our commitments as well as the possibilities of our shared and varied field of study and engagement. The ever-expanding terrain upon which we document, theorize, archive, and debate the who, what, how, and why of anti-oppressive work demands incisiveness, precision, rigor, and thoughtfulness.

The range of ways we as feminist scholars approach this moment is abundant and not bounded by discipline. Feminist scholars mine the depths and recesses of our worlds to uncover upending, world-making, creative exegesis, and paradigmatic, epistemological, and ontological shifts and ruptures. In this issue of *Feminist Studies*, we have the pleasure of offering a diverse array of pieces that encapsulate this field-defining breadth. There's no single theme connecting these exciting pieces. Although single-topic special issues have become common in feminist academic journals, this issue presents an opportunity to showcase pieces that signal both current and future directions for feminist inquiry and reinforce our collective's dedication to publishing groundbreaking feminist scholarship.

Anja H. Lind's "(De)Constructing the Vulva: Locating the Labia in Trans 'Vaginoplasty'" offers a compelling sociocultural exploration of

medical discourses about vulvas and vaginoplasties. Attentive to colonial histories as well as the stakes of sexual embodiment, Lind pushes us away from ideal embodiments and socially constructed physical attributes toward a more robust figuration of vulvas. Underpinning the fascinating core argument of this article is a formidable critique of the medical profession and the disciplining force of medical discourses. Furthermore, it beckons us toward future study of trans people's experiences of wanting vaginoplasty and their postoperative perspectives. This piece moves us between trans and feminist studies with a palpable urgency.

Stacey Colliver's "Porn Vilification and Age Verification: Regulating of Online Pornography and Sex Work" is a provocative critique of efforts to control online pornographic content; it is anchored in the concerns of sex workers about the technological and legal channels used in efforts to avoid young people's exposure to sexually explicit material. Colliver underscores the importance of using technological restrictions that do not further criminalize sex workers or render their work unsustainable. Feminist discussions of pornography have long been contentious, and we have published the work of many scholars (Jennifer Nash, Heather Berg, and Ariane Cruz) offering novel logics and language to grapple with the practice of pornography. Colliver's distinct intervention in this field is to simultaneously account for new technological and legal efforts to limit or ban pornography while also recognizing young people's proliferating access to pornography. We expect this piece to prompt a lot of impassioned conversations.

Rebecca Rossen's "Bodily Transfigurations and Transgenerational Trauma in the Multimedia Art of Yuliya Lanina" focuses on two of the artist's works that were created amid debilitating back pain and that mark her attempt to engage in somatic dialogue with her pain. Rossen discusses how Lanina's multimedia video performance *My Dear Skeleton* (2020) as well as her stop-motion animated film *Gefilte Fish* (2020) address personal, familial, and transgenerational trauma through their exploration of suppressed and entangled histories of genocide, sexual violence, and immigration. Rossen points to how, in both works, Lanina uses bodily excess and transfiguration not only to confront victimization in visceral ways, but also to counteract silencing. In so doing, these works engender radical new forms of embodiment and fantastical feminist realms that constitute sites of healing and self-reclamation.

Pang Laikwan's "Writing behind Bars: The Fandom That Queers Our Political Subjectivity" provides close readings of materials both produced by and publicly available about Gwyneth Kwai-Lam Ho, a female political prisoner in Hong Kong. Pang carefully unpacks Ho's resistance to heroization and her struggle to hold onto her political commitment and psychic longing during (and despite) her confinement. Pang centers an often-overlooked area of Ho's work—her fandom writings—in her examination of the unexpected ways Ho pursues freedom in the face of imprisonment. Pang argues that we should not separate political engagement from something considered entertainment; so-called private emotions and psychic spaces also bring forth important insights about political freedom that we should engage to advance our political goals.

Lillian Marie Nagengast's conjunctures essay discusses queer and feminist studies as sites of possibility for studies of rural America that challenge reductionist representations proliferating in the wake of the 2016 US elections and the Donald Trump presidency. Nagengast argues that the works of Ryan Lee Cartwright, Carly Thomsen, and Clare Forstie not only unsettle the metronormativity or urban assumptions embedded in feminist and queer studies; they offer more capacious approaches to the rural, advancing our understanding of the significance of geographic location to social relations of power. Rather than approach rural Americans as "bad subjects" who must be disciplined or whose failures must be decried, Nagengast instead discusses how the works of Cartwright, Thomsen, and Forstie "think with" rural America in ways that—as Jennifer Nash and Samantha Pinto urge us to do in their recent volume on intersectionality/Black feminist theory—widen the boundaries of feminist projects¹.

In her poem "Daphne, 2000s," Hannah Baker Saltmarsh explores the intricate and complex affectations and strategies we develop and embody to survive sexual violence and evolve sexual agency. Like Daphne, who escapes violation by transforming into a laurel tree, we grow and adapt, try new protections and tactics. But whether our "impulses [are] to lock a door or/ rip it off its hinge," the power of female transformation and growth, both internal and external, can resist, repel, and reawaken.

1. Jennifer C. Nash and Samantha Pinto, "A New Genealogy of 'Intelligent Rage,' or Other Ways to Think About White Women in Feminism," *Signs* 46, no. 4 (Summer 2021): 883–910.

We close this issue with a News and Views commentary on a five-year survey (2018–2023) of our field’s institutional health by Tracey Jean Boisseau and Heather Rellihan, with Adrianna L. Ernstberger. The authors surveyed WGSS directors, chairs, faculty, and staff about their perceptions of the relative security or precarity of their programs and careers, and of the field at large. The authors note that while quantitative metrics provide important data about the health of institutions, their own survey, which includes both quantitative and qualitative questions, “also defines the state of the field through the subjective experience of WGSS practitioners.” They comment on the views of their respondents about exhaustion and burnout and illustrate how the field is in a paradoxical position where it is “more important than ever; more at risk than ever.”

Whether through challenging the primacy of medical discourses wedded to a gender/sex binary, or considering pornography’s simultaneous proliferation and attempts to restrict it, or examining the political possibilities of fandom writings, or “thinking with” rural America, or emphasizing the significance of the fantastical in the aftermath of victimization, what’s found in these pages is a refusal of boundaries — disciplinary or otherwise. These authors show us what feminism does and can do. The future is feminist.

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for the *Feminist Studies* collective