
Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure.

WIEGMAN, ROBYN. "Feminism, Institutionalism, and the Idiom of Failure." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 11.3 (1999): 107. *Academic OneFile*. Web. 3 Jan. 2010.

<http://find.galegroup.com.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/gtx/start.do?prodId=AONE&userGroupName=yorku_main>.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 1999 Indiana University Press

Essays that come into being in the utopian idiom of contemporary cultural critique often take a great risk when they arrive at the moment of producing proper evidence. Instead of approximating the language of disciplined knowing, they tend to turn to coincidence and conjecture; instead of taking refuge in method and procedure, they make their cases according to ideals of political success and failure. Critical activity of this kind is born in disjuncture, if not disidentification: the present time of writing is never the future the critic strains to think. What, then, serves to guarantee knowledge as political progress? The nothing that persists as the haunting answer to this question makes legible the anxiety at the heart of academic feminism's chief rhetorical strategy, the critical claim, which generates value by promising to carry thought beyond the failure of the present. In its function to transport feminism into the future, the critical claim generates for academic work a positive political use value, and in this the anxiety over knowing and doing--over politics and academic production--is seemingly eased.

Throughout the 1990s, the opposition recorded here has settled most contentiously in debates about the category of women and its saliency as a guarantee for knowledge and political movement. For such feminist scholars as Judith Butler, Joan Scott, and Denise Riley, it is the refusal of women as a foundational referent that gives to feminism the internal critique necessary to rethink its own historical emergence within modern forms of liberal governmentality. Such rethinking functions to revise accepted notions of power, politics, and subjective agency, thereby challenging the foundational assumptions of certain activist agendas common to feminism's earlier practices. It is this challenge that numerous scholars--Susan Gubar, Susan Bordo, and Martha Nussbaum, for instance--find unproductive if not damaging for feminism, as theoretical considerations are seen to overwhelm the imperative for a public political voice, and feminism's ability to define and inhabit social change is jettisoned in favor of academic insularity. These debates have constituted much of the claim-making in academic feminism in the 1990s, and there is no good reason to think that a resolution is necessary; surely its end is not in sight, as Rey Chow's contribution to this volume quite powerfully suggests.

For women's studies, that institutional domain that first named the imperative toward interdisciplinary feminist analysis, the debate over the category of women has been particularly momentous, in part because of the field's distinct function in establishing woman as a legitimate object of study and in fighting for the legibility of "her" epistemological importance in knowledge production more widely. To the extent that "academic feminism" as a term describes this historical project of challenging the university by institutionalizing new knowledge formations, it indicates something quite profound about the indivisibility of politics and academic institutional intervention. And yet, to conjoin academic to feminism today is almost always a distinct insult, an accusation that draws its blood precisely because politics and academics have come to be so firmly opposed. It is this opposition between the political as a set of social movement ideals and the institutional as a project of academic transformation that underlies to a great extent the mood swing in academic feminism in the 1990s, where feminist articulations of the political agenda that impelled it into the academy have been held in check by a diagnostic analysis that seeks to understand the tenor of bad feeling (and hurt feelings) of feminism's current institutional success. Witness Bidy Martin's title, "Success and its Failures," in the special *differences* issue "Women's Studies on the Edge." The edge that here signifies the dynamic of error and achievement, of cutting edge and over the edge, evokes a mood among many women's studies practitioners that might best be described as post-exuberant despair.

I use the language of mood and feeling to indicate the depth of the attachment that feminism inculcates in the subjects who organize themselves under its sign. From such attachment a great deal has been won, and yet feminism's inability to predict, much less inhabit, its radical future has meant that disappointment, sometimes intense feelings of betrayal, have been both the persistent accompanist to attachment and its persistent detractor. It is in this context that the hegemony of the critical claim arises, for it is the strategic function of the claim to give to cultural critique a world making use value and in this, the tension between

critical analysis and social protest is, if not settled, at least momentarily relieved. Feminism, in particular, has struggled over the dynamic of knowing and doing, over the difference that each constitutes to the other, weighing one over the other, at times defending real world politics as a culmination of both. Much of the mood swing in the 1990s has been self-consciously cast as a consequence of academic feminism's lost relation to activist practices, with theoretical know-how having very little understanding of what the how could possibly be. The pressure on certain theorists--think here of Judith Butler--to define in practical terms what her work compels feminists to do brings the political imperative embedded in the rhetoric of the claim into definitive view. Butler's refusal to render her utopianism in a language that manages the anxiety her work now symptomatically evokes has led to a number of bitter attacks, including those that hold her responsible for bringing feminist politics to a crashing halt. I will take up some of the issues surrounding Butler's work shortly, but for now I want to register how unsure, even insecure, academic feminism has become about the meaning, practices, and goals of its own project of institutional intervention. [1] Indeed, "academic feminism" as a term registers today a series of internal contradictions, most of which collate around the perceptible disparity between feminism's academic success and its loss of "real" world revolutionary political power.

My contribution to this special issue on feminization and U.S. culture works within the tensions described above between the academic and the "real," knowing and doing, and institutionalization and politics in order to interrupt the temporality of the critical claim by inhabiting the specter of failure that haunts contemporary feminism. What I have to say about feminization has no thesis-driven precision, in part because of the way that my primary focus-feminism's idiom of political failure-is always overwritten by the sense that failure consigns women to the domestic, narcissistic, or irredeemably sentimental once again. I will be less concerned, then, with the specifics of Ann Douglas's now classic argument in *The Feminization of American Culture* than with the specter of political failure that drove her central claim, which saw in the disestablishment of theology from state institutions a parallel formation to women's feminization in the marginalizing realm of a commodified and hence paradoxically privatized public sphere. That "feminization" could stand as the descriptive term for these social transformations and that Douglas could at times be so harsh toward the women she studied provides an unpredictable, even skewed angle from which to consider current discussions about academic feminism by an unlikely pair, Martha Nussbaum and Wendy Brown, who collectively, if contradictorily, read failure as the primary characteristic of academic feminism's present tense.

For Nussbaum, academic feminism as embodied in the work of Judith Butler is seen as interrupting feminism's historical continuity by luxuriating in theoretical pleasure and thereby abandoning practical politics. Calling for a return to "old-style" feminism that aims toward the transformation of "laws and institutions," Nussbaum depicts Butler's ambivalence toward institutional intervention as a collaboration with "evil" and in doing so rejects the academy as an institution to be grappled within the politics of the "real" (38,37,45, 37). Poststructuralist theory, in her terms, has domesticated the feminist enterprise, leading to narcissistic performances that parody real feminist struggle. In contrast, Brown marshals some of the keenest insights of poststructuralism to consider the very political project-the academy-that Nussbaum's rendering of the real so symptomatically excludes. By defining "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" as a consequence of its anti-intellectual political affect, Brown critiques the privileging of the political over the academic that has accompanied the "institutionalization of identitarian political struggles," and turns to law as a mirror (not as in Nussbaum as an escape) for understanding the failure that haunts women's studies: an account of complex subject formation (98). From these essays, academic feminism emerges as a deeply conflicted arena; it is at once too theoretical and not theoretical enough, too political and not political enough. By analyzing each essay's narrative of present failure, I explore one of the most paradoxical features of feminist academic discourse in the 1990s: its struggle with "academic feminism" itself.

Now and Then

Feminism is by definition as well as by historical fact a reactive force; it is most generally an argument against political and social systems, ideological practices, and cultural discourses that subordinate women and the feminine on one hand and that arrange human potential, roles, and qualities through binary apparatuses on the other. In this, its project remains temporally constrained: coming after, forging a response, being responsive to whole worlds and histories of freedom's oppressive failure. For feminism in the academy in general and for women's studies in particular this problem of origins has always strained against the imperative to originate--to construct our own curriculum, define its core knowledge, and inaugurate a field that can do more than correct the partialities of traditional knowledge formations.

Feminist scholars have thus sought feminist antecedents and repeatedly managed the problem of origins and originating intentions by defining the scope and subjectivity of contemporary academic feminism through a progressive historical narrative that proceeds from U.S. social movements. Thus defining its drive toward institutionalization as a consequence of resistant politics, women's studies has been able to found itself on a claim of innovative insurgency, and it has ridden this wave of self-defined insurgency until institutional development and incorporation have become visible enough to compel a critical reassessment of what it means to be self-located on "the edge."

I have no wish to argue here with the narrative of women's studies' becoming as a consequence of social movement. [2] But I am interested in how feminist scholars understand the process we operate in the middle of: crafting a knowledge formation for feminism from an originating identification with social movements whose profound political force had a great deal to do with their ethos of anti-institutionalism--i.e. their critique, in method and political content, of state practices and functions (segregation, imperialist war, domestic wage discrimination, anti-immigrationism). This contradiction--between state critique and intervention in the institutions of the state--was not for feminism a founding contradiction. Rather it has emerged as one of the central features of feminism's academic legibility, and it speaks to what is for academic feminism a problem: having institutional power.

As the director of a women's studies program that has earned in the 1990s the "right," as our own documents have called it, to hold fulltime faculty appointments and therefore to judge the credentials of feminist scholars, the problem of institutional power has been a haunting one. The responsibility of "building the program"--which means increasing enrollments, fighting for campus space, enhancing library holdings, hiring and retaining faculty, extending the intellectual domain of curricular projects (into areas such as biological and natural sciences long untouched by women's studies) -- is overwhelming in its time consumption and profoundly constitutive of a subjective focus that threatens to become overdetermined by the goals of institutionalization as ends in themselves. It was in this subjective space, in this context of affect and exhaustion, that I returned, for the first time since graduate school, to *The Feminization of American Culture* and its deep lament that educated middle-class white women in New England would find themselves by the end of the nineteenth century further unmoored from the established domains of political life, which is to say more entrenched in the realm of a sentimental privacy that tried to make powerlessness into "influence" and disenfranchisement into the occasion, if not the condition, for the production of social and moral good.

From one perspective, Douglas's despair over the sentimentalizing process, which she saw as a consequence of consumption and hence as a failure of political clarity and nerve in the face of the industrial development of consumer capitalism, was a predictable feminist response to a certain kind of social marginalization. But the language of her analysis was overlain with judgement and blame toward those women (and the ministers who came to need them) who directed their energies into sentimentalism's primary domain: mass market literary culture. Let me quote at length:

Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already in part capitulated. It is a form of dragging one's heels. It always borders on dishonesty.... Many nineteenth-century Americans in the Northeast acted every day as if they believed that economic expansion, urbanization, and industrialization represented the greatest good. It is to their credit that they indirectly acknowledged that the pursuit of these "masculine" goals meant damaging, perhaps losing, another good.... Yet the fact remains that their regret was calculated not to interfere with their actions. We remember that Little Eva's beautiful death, which Stowe presents as part of a protest against slavery, in no way hinders the working of that system. The minister and the lady were appointed by their society as the champions of sensibility. They were in the position of contestants in a fixed fight: they had agreed to put on a convincing show and to lose. The fakery involved was finally crippling for all concerned. (11)

Douglas was quite aware of her own harsh assessment--shortly before the above passage, she defends her position as a necessary one: "it does no good to shirk the fact that nineteenth-century American society tried to damage women like Harriet Beecher Stowe--and succeeded.... To view the victims of oppression simply as martyrs and heroes ... is only to perpetuate the sentimental heresy I am attempting to study here" (11).

Subsequent studies of sentimental culture, such as Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* (1986), have turned against Douglas's interpretation to seek the sentimental collaboration. Where Douglas inscribed agency to the women she studied who failed to resist in ways that spoke to structure and not sentiment, Tompkins and others countered with a vision of agency found in the very strategy of "influence." From their perspective, women resisted their social marginalization by elevating the realm that consigned them to

secondary status; hence sentimental culture became an important intellectual site for feminist analysis by providing a context for thinking about how power operates outside of and in opposition to its sanctioned channels. This is not to say that scholars after Douglas found nothing amiss in the sentimental culture they explored, for certainly "influence" rarely survived the critique of its contradictory and often passive abolitionism. [3] But their interest in sentimental culture was a powerful attempt to position it as an antecedent for contemporary feminism, not as in Douglas to write it as the inaugural co-optation, the feminization that would lead to feminism's seemingly transhistorical lack of effectivity. As Douglas wrote about her project, "I expected to find my fathers and mothers; instead I discovered my fathers and my sisters. The best of the men had access to solutions. ... The problems of the women correspond to mine with a frightening accuracy that seems to set us outside the process of history" (11). In the scenario of the family drama that Douglas uses to characterize her study, "sisters" emerge in the rightful place of the mother and anger becomes the palpable register for history's failure to unfold for women a progressive narrative. In the eight years that came to separate *Feminization of American Culture* from *Sensational Designs*, feminist scholars would find the mother in sentimental culture and they would indeed love and admire her. But for Douglas, sentimentality remained too contemporary; it was repetition and sameness, not historical-political difference. This is why her book reads today as a betrayal: she could not admire the women she studied, nor could she explain them without blaming them; she most certainly did not want to be one of them. [4] And yet, in the context of her own literary commitments (her love, as she says at the outset, of Little Eva's decorousness), she could not find in historical distance an adequate guarantee that she had fully escaped being one of them. The complex identification and disidentification that motivated Douglas's feminism had a great deal to do with her refusal to accede to the category of woman as a representative figure for either women or feminists. What she seems to have found most dismaying about nineteenth-century white middle-class women was their embrace of the feminine as the content of woman's categorical designation, and hence their acceptance of the limited social orbit to which women were consigned. Like Mary Wollstonecraft and other feminists in the Anglo-American tradition, Douglas would risk "siding with the enemy" (11), as she put it, in order to critique the feminine as the site and source of feminism's transformative historical possibilities. [5] I am tempted to say that she wanted for herself as for the women she studied, all sisters, "real" institutional power, even as that description risks the binary constitution of gendered domains that Douglas found lamentable for nineteenth-century white middle-class women. Cast outside official domains of national political life, white middle-class women, Douglas asserts, substituted the pleasures of consumer culture for the harder work of structural transformation. While they "advocate[d] important reforms," they "pursued partially feminist goals by largely anti-feminist means; genuine success was hardly possible" (51). *The Feminization of American Culture* thus stands as a meditation on political failure, on the way that class privilege had consumed radical intentions and given marginality a feminized and in Douglas's terms faulty cache. It is to Douglas's own credit, to use a bit of her language, that she found herself implicated in their pleasures, not just an inheritor but a critical agent trying to figure out what women in her own day seemed unable to do and know.

Then

Douglas's critical strategy is an interesting counter to second-wave historiography, which has tended to rest its self-understanding, indeed its very sensibility of the political, on an ideal of subversion (if not outright dissent) that offers reconnection and retrieval as the means for overcoming the contemporary feminist subject's monumentalized alienation. History for Douglas carried the weight of "not" and "never yet"; it held forth the ideology of change but seemed unable to engineer it. The continuity history yielded thus reconfirmed the omnipresence of feminization's social entrapments, which meant that for Douglas a sentimentalized attachment to the category of woman worked against feminism at every turn. It is this rendition of feminism as undone in its nascency that finally renders *The Feminization of American Culture* such an eccentric text-and even more so when read in the context of recent critiques that cite the present as the tense in which feminism has gone wrong. [6] Martha Nussbaum's "The Professor of Parody" is exemplary in this regard, offering a vision of "old-style" feminism to counter the "naively empty politics" of those who follow Judith Butler and her theoretical detachment from the category of woman. While Nussbaum is not alone in her postulation that poststructuralism has ruined feminism's good health, it is certainly the case that her *New Republic* essay has given to media culture a new interpretative frame for *Time's* 1997 front-page query "Is feminism dead?" While in the 1980s feminists might have read *Time's* query as evidence of the recuperative project we now call "backlash," today it calls forth an answer that locates the undoing of feminism from within.

Written as a manifesto for a return to "old-style feminist politics," "The Professor of Parody" defines Butler's work as lacking "a fierce sense of the texture of social oppression and the harm that it does" (42). This is Nussbaum's final statement:

Hungry women are not fed by [Butler's theory], battered women are not sheltered by it, raped women do not find justice in it, gays and lesbians do not achieve legal protections through it. ... The big hope, the hope for a world of real justice, where laws and institutions protect the equality and the dignity of all citizens, has been banished.... Judith Butler's hip quietism is a comprehensible response to the difficulty of realizing justice in America.

But it is a bad response. It collaborates with evil. Feminism demands more and women deserve better (45). In trying to resuscitate, in her terms, a feminism dedicated to "working for others who are suffering" (44), Nussbaum repeatedly turns to the real as the register of the truth that Butler abandons: "the material conditions of real women," "real bodies," "real struggles," the "real issue of legal and institutional change" (37). To be trained on the real is feminism's historical inheritance and academic feminism's critical, at times distinctly moral, imperative. "For a long time now," the essay opens, "academic feminism in America has been closely allied to the practical struggle to achieve justice and equality for women" (37). In finding in the past a historical means for achieving justice in the future, Nussbaum deploys the critical claim in its most familiar temporal construction, overriding the differential of the present in order to make continuous the past and the future. In this imposition of historical continuity as the already known truth of political struggle, Nussbaum offers poststructuralism in general and Butler in particular as spectacular deflections of what might otherwise be understood as contemporary feminism's own complex entanglement with failure. That this is a convenient strategy for repressing the possibility that feminism may not already know how to counter the political problems that called it into being is surely obvious. But such obviousness has not weakened the enthusiasm for situating poststructuralism as the locus of failure, the means for abandoning both politics and the real. In this increasingly celebrated strategy, academic feminists renegotiate their relation to both the university and knowledge production--a renegotiation that gives to critical thought a use value by claiming its justice in the real.

In "The Professor of Parody," Nussbaum achieves her own self-presentation as an undisputed agent of justice by casting the "institutional" as the antithesis to Butler's collaboration with "evil" while paradoxically writing the academy as itself other to the real: "Feminist theory has been understood by theorists as not just fancy words on paper; theory is connected to proposals for social change.... Indeed, some theorists have left the academy altogether, feeling more comfortable in the world of practical politics, where they can address... urgent problems directly" (37). Here, the academy functions to disestablish feminism's political relation to the real by exchanging a focus on legal routes of redress for theoretical and highly linguistic accounts of the social constitution of subjects. In the context of this newly wayward and overtly "symbolic" feminism, "young feminists" have been led to believe "that the way to do feminist politics is to use words in a subversive way, in academic publications of lofty obscurity and disdainful abstractness.... They can do politics in [the] safety of their campuses...making subversive gestures at power through speech" (38, 45). [7] What Douglas found in the feminization of American culture--a political quietism that abandoned political assaults against institutions in favor of the pleasures of influence in literary culture--Nussbaum seems to find in academic feminism, an emphasis on the manipulation of words and the cultivation of a kind of domesticated, because privatized self: "The great tragedy in the new feminist theory in America," Nussbaum writes, "is the loss of a sense of public commitment" (44). While feminization as a process of political domestication circulates in both Nussbaum and Douglas, the category of "theory" marks their critical difference from one another. For in seeking an arena of possibility that did not entail women's enmeshment in sentiment, in feeling as the primary motive and defining feature of their social subjectivity, Douglas rejected the imposition of a vocabulary of pain and its triumph, preferring in her own terms "theorizing" as that which the "Victorian lady" avoided and which her twentieth-century descendants, even the "overtly politicized" ones, were likely to avoid as well (199). Douglas's "theory," of course, operated without the overdeterminations of poststructuralism's inauguration of a humanities subfield, critical theory, that is today both the source and figure for defining feminism's abandonment of the real. With theory as the interloper in a contemporary context that tends to wager the symbolic against the real and writes abstraction as antithetical to practical politics, "The Professor of Parody" engages the sentimental formulation by transforming suffering into "real" knowledge and making pain the defining feature of feminism's relation to and understanding of the construction of female subjects. Intended as a counter to Butler's narcissistic entrapments in the self, Nussbaum's language for social change--"working for others who are suffering" and for "the public good"--posits feminism in a modality of

identification that arises at the scene of women's disempowerment and loss. Coupling such identification with a definition of the public good as "building laws and institutions" (44), Nussbaum gives to "old feminism" an unquestioned relationship of justice to women.

In defining for old feminism this relation of justice, Nussbaum produces the critical claim that in turn operates as a political guarantee for feminism's futurity. Where Douglas resisted this guarantee, in part by defining both past and present as the failed ground of feminism's coherent relation to the future, Nussbaum reorganizes, through rhetorical excision, the political imaginary of the present in order to make past and future coincident. In the process, she resolves through declaration and repression the crises of institutionalism that have arisen within feminism since its second wave inception. I would define these crises as: the functional institutionalization of a normative woman as the referent for women within feminism, and the institutionalization of feminism as a structural and discursive form of power in the academy. Nussbaum negotiates the first by defining old feminism's agenda of the real as the way "feminist theory still looks ... in many parts of the world" (37). Her specific example is India, where academic feminists have thrown themselves into practical struggles, and feminist theorizing is closely tethered to practical commitments such as female literacy, the reform of unequal land laws, changes in rape law (which, in India today, has most of the flaws that the first generation of American feminists targeted), the effort to get social recognition for problems of sexual harassment and domestic violence. These feminists know that they live in the middle of a fiercely unjust reality; they cannot live with themselves without addressing it more or less daily, in their theoretical writing and in their activities outside the seminar room. (38, emphasis mine)

By defining the project of Indian feminism as akin to the work of "the first generation of American feminists," Nussbaum produces simultaneously the third world woman of color as a referent for the real and the trajectory of feminism in the U.S. and its state-based tactics of intervention as feminism's accepted global form. The shift from woman's normative white, middle-class, heterosexual, and first world referent to that of the Indian feminist, in short, enables a kind of critical repression of the political dynamics of naming and annexation that accompany U.S. feminism's enunciation. [8] In this move, Nussbaum tags Butler with the charge of U.S. provincialism and produces a global feminist future attendant to "the real situation of real women" (38), one in which "old feminism" in the U.S. evinces no complicity with power because its referential object--suffering women--exists as the public counter to academic feminism's privatized narcissism and abandonment of the real.

In this way, Nussbaum produces "old feminism" as the authentic and authenticating project of social transformation, one whose real world legibility relies on a tacit privatization of the university as a public political institution in its own right. Through her retrieval of a sentimental discourse as the affective foundation for global feminist agency, Nussbaum reclaims the very notion of the liberal humanist subject that Butler and other poststructuralist feminists have been trying to think without. She thus dismisses as narcissistic the profound anti-institutionalism that accompanies certain theoretical attempts to consider the subject as an effect and not an origin of institutional practices and discourses. In thus expelling anti-institutionalism as a political question about subject formation, "The Professor of Parody" can dismiss any imperative to register the feminist critical genealogy that has critiqued western feminism's alliance with the state and modernity, especially as that alliance has reiterated a secular humanism that fashions U.S. feminism as the privileged discourse of global feminism. [9] Nussbaum offers us instead McKinnon and Dworkin as central figures in a tacitly national history of late-twentieth-century feminism, thereby bypassing those discourses that challenge the U.S. as the subjective and political content of both feminist knowledge and activism. [10] In doing so, Nussbaum is able to assert as an unquestioned truth legal institutional intervention, but the force of her critical claim as the production of continuity between past and future rests on the eradication of both the critical and political contexts of past and present. That is, she banishes the late-twentieth-century feminist tradition of critiquing the state as the end logic of political reform (giving to poststructuralism alone the critical honor of this offense), and jettisons consideration of the institution within which she finds herself: the academy.

The second crisis of institutionalism is found here, in the transformation that the academic institutionalization of feminism has created in both the structural production of knowledge and in intradisciplinary and transdisciplinary modes of analysis--which is to say, the transformation that has enabled feminism in the academy to both claim and inhabit institutional power. While Butler has demonstrated an increasing ambivalence about feminism's relation to institutionalized power, especially old feminism's dedication to institutional apparatuses as the counter to various kinds of social exclusion, it is certainly the case that her own critical stature is part of, if not evidence for, feminism as an academic

institutional power. Herein lies the reason that Nussbaum opens her essay by citing those academic feminists who have left the academy to pursue directly the real: real feminists don't openly inhabit institutional power in the name of feminism, for that name, as I have discussed, has as its real referent "those who are suffering." This is the moral judgement that underlies Nussbaum's critique (or should we call it her criminalization?) of Butler, which functions as an indictment against academic feminism in the 1990s, whose relation to power can no longer (if ever) be claimed as a wholly oppositional one. [11] To reclaim the oppositional formulation and to write feminism on the side of women without contradiction or complicity, Nussbaum must forfeit the analytical opportunity that her anger at failure makes intellectually palpable: a consideration of how feminism's institutionalization in the academy has given not only depth and texture but a lengthy archive to a difference previously unperceived between thinking about feminism as a politics and thinking about politics through feminism. [12] Being wed to the former, Nussbaum produces the latter as a kind of betrayal and in doing so she sacrifices insight into the processes of institutionalization through which feminism has become a knowledge formation, one whose relation to politics lacks the assurance of an "old-style" political guarantee.

My reading of Nussbaum is not a defense of Judith Butler per se, though readers no doubt sense my considerable lack of sympathy with "The Professor of Parody"'s strategy for guaranteeing feminism's futurity. That future of feminism as a monotheistic politic, narratively equipped with its own fallen angel and moralistically dedicated to pain as an agenda for both knowledge and social change, is finally too allergic to the possibility of any future that second wave feminism has not already imagined. In this regard, Nussbaum's characterization of contemporary feminism is yet another contribution to the growing list of generational laments that invest in accusation and attack to rescue feminism's future from certain academic feminists. That these apocalyptic narratives, as I call them, always find the specter of feminism's political end in the academy is one of the paradoxical features of "old feminism" today: it has come to define itself against the very project of institutional intervention it inaugurated, and hence against those women who inherited from it a feminism animated by the questions, contradictions, and complicities of academic feminism's relationship to both politics and knowledge.

Now

In her postulation of a referential real as the defining feature of feminist politics, Nussbaum tacitly establishes a model for feminist knowledge production that is familiar to anyone currently working in women's studies. It views feminism in the academy as fulfilling its political mission by reproducing social activism and in this, it sets as the standard of political judgement a trajectory of movement (of knowledge, bodies, and practices) into and out of the academy, from the so-called ivory tower to the real. In this system of value, women's studies garners its value by reproducing within the academy the social organization of women as a political sign outside of it, which thereby defines the field as a site of belonging in the social identitarian sense. For many feminist scholars, belonging to women and belonging to women's studies are thus completely compatible, if not seemingly identical, as the field's object of study and the subjects who study "her" are (politically speaking) one.

The costs of this configuration of knowledge and politics--and the structure of belonging it has generated--are at the heart of Wendy Brown's incisive and controversial essay "The Impossibility of Women's Studies." Reading the history of feminism's institutionalization in the academy as a necessary error, Brown writes at the end of her essay: "The story of women's studies suggests that our current and future contests over meaning and knowledge, and for freedom and equality, should probably avoid consolidating victories in the form of new degree-granting programs in the university" (98). Where Nussbaum reads the academy as the site for the depoliticization of feminism through a turn to theory, Brown critiques the institutionalization of "identitarian political struggles" as producing a conflation of the political with the academic (98). [13] Brown's call for the end of degree granting women's studies programs is not, however, a diagnosis that the work of academic feminism is itself at an end. Indeed, she tries to avoid the temporality of the apocalyptic formulation by writing the present as incommensurable with the past, and the future as an open question: "[The faltering of women's studies] does not tell us what to do instead. Perhaps the present moment is one for considering where we have been so that we might, in a Nietzschean vein, affirm our errors. Perhaps it is a moment for thinking" (98). In this hesitant arrival at her essay's final word thinking, Brown offers a striking reversal of the temporal promise of the critical claim, engaging feminism's generational battle at its most theoretical pitch by interrupting the transportation of the past's utopianism into the definitional shape of both the present and the future. The importance of this defense against continuity as the precondition for both assessing and challenging the various problematics that animate women's studies as a field cannot be underestimated, as it enables us to take seriously what "old feminism,"

as Nussbaum calls it, has come to disavow: feminism's complex and contradictory entanglement in academic knowledge production.

And yet, even as Brown compels us into a rigorous consideration of this entanglement, her essay's extrapolation of the content of the present that interrupts the critical claim's linkage between past and future comes to figure critical thought as outside, indeed other to women's studies as an institutional site. In the context of this essay, any formulation that aligns women--as political category or strategic academic endeavor--with an immunity to thought recalls Ann Douglas's explication of the conundrum of feminization in which feminism's failure was founded on its excision of rigor in favor of women's affect-bound social circumscription. For Brown, women's studies seems to be a contemporary analogy to the nineteenth century's domestic enclosure, with affect overwhelming its internal organization and the intellectual faltering, as she describes it, on the grounds of its object of study's inescapable demand for a faulty coherency. "Indisputably, women's studies ... was politically important and intellectually creative," she writes at the outset. "Women's studies as a contemporary institution, however, may be politically and theoretically incoherent, as well as tacitly conservative--incoherent because by definition it circumscribes uncircumscribable 'women' as its object of study, and conservative because it must resist all objections to such circumscription if it is to sustain that object of study" (83, emphasis mine). In this passage, Brown aims her analysis at the "contemporary institution of women's studies" which, as she describes it, must defend its chosen object of study, even (perhaps especially) against feminist scholarship's own transdisciplinary critique of the category of woman. If Nussbaum implicitly posits "academic feminism" as constituted by an opposition between theory (the academic) and politics (suffering in the real), Brown relocates this axis wholly within the university and reverses its assessment. Affect is thus immobility, not as in Nussbaum the very engine of political movement, and critical thought is not only constituted by theory but the very force of feminism's political intervention in the academy.

To trace Brown's remapping of the problematic of "academic feminism," I want to return to the departmental scene that she uses to open her essay, where the difficulty of efforts to reform the undergraduate curriculum in her own department provides the first evidence of the impossibility of women's studies. She writes:

we found ourselves completely stumped over the question of what a women's studies curriculum should contain.... [W]e focused intently on the question of what would constitute an intellectually rigorous as well as coherent program. We speculatively explored a number of different possibilities.... Each approach seemed terribly arbitrary, each featured some dimension of feminist scholarship that had no reason to be privileged, each continued to beg the question of what a well-educated student in women's studies ought to know and with what tools she ought to craft her thinking. . . . Why, when we looked closely at this project for which we had fought so hard and that was now academically institutionalized, could we find no there there? That is, why was the question of what constituted the fundamentals of knowledge in women's studies so elusive to us? (81-82)

Brown lists a number of crucial issues that contributed to this impasse: the multiple divides that have emerged within women's studies between ethnic studies, feminist theory, and queer studies; the proliferation of feminist scholarship into methodologically incompatible domains of knowledge where no "single conversation" emerges; and the inability of gender to adequately configure the complexity of social identity (82-83). "We were up against more than any one of these challenges," she writes, "because we were up against all of them" (83). These intellectual challenges bring to crisis "the unanswered question of what women's studies is" (84).

While Brown acknowledges that "the definitions of all disciplines wobble," she finds that "[t]here is something about women's studies... and perhaps about any field organized by social identity rather than by genre of inquiry, that is especially vulnerable to losing its *raison d'être* when the coherence or boundedness of its object of study is challenged" (85, 86). She thus turns to law to trace the core intellectual problem that haunts all identity-based academic endeavors: their reduction of "the powers involved in the construction of subjects" into singular identitarian domains (86). Where Nussbaum cites law as the political enterprise that, in linking gendered, racial, sexual, and class-based discriminations, can provide the answer for feminism as a project of justice, Brown finds law powerfully lacking, unable to speak to "the difficulties that women's studies encounters in its simultaneous effort to center gender analytically and to presume gender's imbrication with other forms of social power" (88). This is the case, she writes, because "the injuries of racism, sexism, homophobia, and poverty ... are rarely recognized or regulated through the same legal categories, or redressed through the same legal strategies. Consequently, legal theorists engage with different dimensions of the law depending on the identity category with which they are concerned" (88).

Such fragmentation within the legal apparatus demonstrates for Brown two crucial points: first, that the social powers at work in subject formation are neither compatible nor evenly distributed across the social field, which means that "formations of socially marked subjects occur in radically different modalities, which themselves contain different histories and technologies, touch different surfaces and depths, form different bodies and psyches" (92); and second, that this problem "can only be compounded by programs of study that feature one dimension of power -- gender, sexuality, race, or class--as primary and structuring. And there is simply no escaping that this is what women's studies does, no matter how strenuously it seeks to compensate for it" (93). As a consequence, "the model of power developed to apprehend the making of a particular subject/ion will never accurately describe or trace the lines of a living subject" (93, emphasis mine).

This last statement is one that would receive little rebuttal in contemporary academic feminism, as it defines the very problematic that has animated feminist theory for over a decade. Why, then, does Brown turn the problematic that occupies the field into that which necessitates its dissolution? And why must an object of study and a field formation be repeatedly figured as structurally, which is to say inescapably, the same? To answer these questions, we need to examine not only how women's studies comes to be inhabited, in Brown's account, by affect and not intellect, but how this inhabitation functions to conceal competing forms of identity in the contemporary academy: that between identity studies on one hand and the disciplines on the other.

In her description of the various imperatives that led her department to seek curricular reform, Brown analyzes the incoherency that structures the core requirements of the major: "Introduction to Feminism," "Feminist Theory," "Methodological Perspectives in Feminism," and "Women of Color in the United States." These courses, which produced in students, respectively, pleasure, fear, dislike, and guilt, evince a split between generic inquiry (theory and method) and political inquiry (women of color), there by installing the intellectual need for an analysis that exceeds gender's particularist logic in an emotional register, as a "compensatory cycle of guilt and blame" (93). For Brown, this cycle is "structured by women's studies original, nominalist, and conceptual subordination of race (and all other forms of social stratification) to gender" (93), which means that women's studies cannot not be inhabited by the powerful pain of racial wounds. As she writes, "Insofar as the superordination of white women within women's studies is secured by the primacy and purity of the category gender, guilt emerges as the persistent social relation of women's studies to race, a guilt that cannot be undone by any amount of courses, readings, and new hires focused on women of color" (93). As one of the crucial last sentences in her essay's section on law, this "insofar" functions as a kind of relay in which the theoretical explanation of the category of gender is transformed into a social relation, one that cannot be retrieved for articulation in an intellectual register, as no "amount of courses, readings," etc. can undo the founding problem of the field. Under these terms, no resignification, no performative rearticulation, indeed no possible difference in the deployment of women is possible. The critique launched by feminists of color against the reduction of women to white women can never hit its target, as the category of women remains structurally predetermined to yield an exclusionary result "insofar as the superordination of white women within women's studies is secured by the primacy and purity of the category gender."

Brown's response to this impasse, to the structural impossibility (in her terms) of rearticulating women to yield anything but an exclusionary effect, is to call for teaching the women's studies curriculum in something other than its own degree granting site. Might we, she asks, move such "basic courses as 'Introduction to Feminisms,' 'Introduction to Feminist Theories,' and 'Histories and Varieties of Women's Movements' ...into the general curriculum of other disciplinary and especially interdisciplinary programmatic sites" (97)? And yet, in talking about her own department's failure to find the "there there" for a coherent women's studies undergraduate curriculum, Brown's focus on the faculty demonstrates how their distinct disciplinary identities have come to compete for intellectual and pedagogical priority within women's studies as a field. "Our five core and three most closely affiliated faculty are trained respectively in American literature, American history, Chinese history, English literature, Renaissance Italian and French literature, Western political theory, European history, and molecular biology" (82). While Brown notes that all these scholars "have strayed from the most traditional boundaries of these fields, just as we have learned and taught material relatively unrelated to them," the faculty nonetheless experience the women's studies classroom as the scene of intellectual disappointment as students are not simply unprepared in "the faculty's areas of expertise" but drawn to "some variant of feminist sociological or psychological analysis -- experientially, empirically, and practically oriented -- or in studies of popular culture. Yet not one of our core faculty worked in [these areas]" (82, 81, 82). The "gap" thus created

between student interest and faculty expertise is the gap between two forms of identity production: the social relation of identity that produces political belonging in women's studies and the intellectual formation of identity that proceeds from disciplinary training and the academic construction of "expertise" (92). Where Brown diagnoses the problems of installing the former as the faulty coherency of a women's studies curriculum, she leaves the latter identity structure of traditional disciplinarity in place. In this way, her essay privileges disciplinary identity over corporeal identity, which reverses the political imperative but not the organizing structures within which knowledge and bodies, identities and thought, in the university now move.

It is in this broader context that I want to resituate the impossibility of women's studies that Brown so cogently cites. For while identity studies in general have sought to intervene in the university by critiquing its practices of excluding particular groups of subjects, they have been less successful in establishing the study of identity as a knowledge project that distinctly challenges the identitarian form of the university's intellectual reproduction in the disciplines. This is the case, it seems to me, regardless of the earliest intentions of programs in identity studies that organized themselves as critical interruptions into disciplinary practices through a foregrounded discourse of interdisciplinarity. Through interdisciplinary frameworks, identity studies sought to overcome the professionalized divide between knowledge domains in the university (between, for instance, the study of literature and political economy). [14] And yet, given the academy's own political economy of knowledge production, identity studies have and continue to rely on faculty both trained and located in traditional disciplines, which means that intellectual subjective formation as well as intellectual belonging are predicated on the identity and authority conferred by disciplinary structures. This is not to say that scholars experience no abjection in their relation to disciplinary structures, but it is to foreground the fact that knowledge identity is today disciplinarily based, which often has the powerful effect of rendering identity studies solely as domains of belonging in a corporeal identitarian sense. In this dynamic where one may be a woman, one also is a literary critic, political scientist, sociologist, or critical theorist, which means that knowledge production as we know it today is also an identitarian project, one articulated around privileged objects of study and their equally privileged modes of inquiry. That these intellectual identities have come to rest in Enlightened modernity on their dis-establishment from the corporeal does not make them less identitarian; rather it reveals how profoundly shaped by structures of identity is the domain of academic knowledge production on the whole. Brown's notion that other academic sites are adequate to feminist knowledges in ways that women's studies is not reads finally as an attempt to escape the feminized "wounded state" that the institutional location has become in her analysis. [15] It is for this reason that the courses she lists for integration into the existent organization of the university by necessity omit "Women of Color." That referent-and the problematic of a "notoriously fraught relationship" it cannot help but bring (93)-is rendered wholly internal to women's studies; indeed, it seems to have no living trace once women's studies as an institutional unit has been critically undone. [16] But to teach "Introduction to Feminisms" in English, Political Science, or History--or in American Studies, Cultural Studies, or other underfunded interdisciplinary sites--will not in the end give complexity to our students' understanding of the present that "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" so cogently charts, nor will it make possible the kind of radical refashioning of feminist scholarship as an interdisciplinary domain attentive to the complexities of power and subject formation. This is the case because the evacuation of identity as the primary object that organizes an institutional site in favor of other interdisciplinary and disciplinary projects presents no opportunity to radically reconfigure the intellectual constitution of academic feminist subjects, those who might through new practices of doctoral training and new modes of inquiry articulate a "there there" for women's studies by critically engaging the problems that the study of identity presents in its present tense. After all, it is precisely the existence of women's studies today as an interdisciplinary institutional domain defined in relation to identity that makes productive the movement of courses and knowledge from women's studies to other institutional arenas, for it is only under the auspices of women's studies that feminism can emerge as a legitimate object of study embroiled in rethinking and remaking identity as a critical category of inquiry.

This does not mean, however, that I think Brown is wrong to suggest that academic feminism mobilize itself by teaching what we think of as basic women's studies courses in various sites throughout the institution. To offer "Introduction to Feminisms" in the sociology or English department, instead of such discipline-based mainstay courses as "Sociology of Gender" or "Women and Literature," does offer a radical reconfiguration of feminist knowledge. It allows for a different kind of intellectual circulation and the displacement of the stable unity of women and gender in multiple domains. Such mobility, however, cannot be in lieu of the continued reshaping of objects and modes of inquiry within women's studies, which

is to say that the mobility that Brown calls for can only be sustained in relation to the continued function of women's studies as an extradisciplinary domain for thinking about identitarian projects. Why assume, after all, that feminism's knowledge project can be reinvigorated and rescued from within the apparatus that has produced practitioners who admit to being "completely stumped over the question of what a women's studies curriculum should contain"? The present that Brown calls into thinking as an interruption of the assumptions of the past provides the necessary first move in the reanimation of feminist knowledge production in the academy, but such a move begets another: a theoretical investigation of the organization of knowledge that structured the field's inaugurating understanding of its object of study and that continues to consign identity-based studies to their most reduced and realist referential function as affect and not intellect, as particularity and not complexity. When Brown calls for thinking to interrupt the past's temporal determination of the future, it is this that must be interrupted as well: the particularist reduction whereby the university's distillation of bodies from knowledge yields an understanding of identity studies as the sole institutional domain within which the complexity of power cannot possibly be thought. [17]

To say that the study of identity needs more critical thinkers like Wendy Brown might appear contradictory in the context of my criticisms, but it is precisely because "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" allows us to understand so much that one feels compelled to labor over what remains obscured. [18] Women's studies does "need a combination of, on one hand, analyses of subject-producing power accounted through careful histories, psychoanalysis, political economy, and cultural, political, and legal discourse analysis, and, on the other, genealogies of particular modalities of subjectification that presume neither coherence in the formations of particular kinds of subjects nor equivalences between different formations" (95). But this does not mean that, because "[t]he work I am describing ... will add up neither to a unified and coherent notion of gender nor to a firm foundation for women's studies," it will "no longer [be] women's studies" (95). Why refuse the possibility that attention to the issues she defines will productively contribute to the redefinition, resignification, and redeployment of the intellectual force, frame, and function of the field? If it is women that we must let go of, as along with Brown I believe we must, then we must also refuse the assumption that intellectual domains and their objects of study are referentially the same.

In this present that is not possibly the same as the past nor a simple predictive platform for the future, academic feminism's attachment to the institution is decidedly insecure. Political failure haunts us on all sides, and we have very little vocabulary outside accusation and injury for understanding the institutionalizing process of feminism's transit from the street to the university. While Brown comes closest to offering us the object lessons that identity-based studies might be made to yield, she is finally, paradoxically, too optimistic, as the contemporary university offers quite literally "no there there" for the study "of the powers involved in the construction of subjects" (86). The present of thinking that Brown calls for needs to register this institutional failure, not as preamble to dismissing women's studies as an academic endeavor but in order to extend the critique of identitarian belonging to the disciplinary formations that currently structure women's studies' own knowledge production.

Un-Belonging

In "The Impossibility of Women's Studies," Brown argues that a mode of social belonging has been installed as the political rationale for the field, thereby rendering it an intellectually domesticated site. In doing so, she makes two central claims: first, that the most important contemporary force inhibiting critical thought about power and the living subject is identity studies; and second, that the mobilization of feminist knowledge will be possible, indeed more probable, in the absence of women's studies as an institutional entity. I have sought to counter these two assumptions by positing that the critical diagnosis of the field offered by Brown is not intellectually possible from outside it, that indeed it is the productive disparity between the field's own critical horizons and its internal critique that have rendered "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" possible as a critical project. In addition, I have defined a second and equally formidable identitarian project in the academy, one whose effect of fragmentation is no less intense than the structural incommensurabilities that Brown finds in law: the disciplines. In doing so, I have tried to emphasize that within the disciplinary apparatus of knowledge production, one does not simply study literature, politics, or social organization. One is constituted as belonging on an identitarian basis, where the imperative to be a biologist, philosopher, political scientist, even a critical theorist is to partake in an identitarian project. My purpose in these moves is to define the idiom of failure within feminism as a condition and consequence of the problematic of identity as an object of knowledge, and hence I have interrupted Brown's determination of an end to the project of institutionalization by placing institutionalization itself at the center of consideration of feminism's own struggle with the specter of failure.

Am I, then, trying to rewrite the idiom of failure I have unsystematically tracked? Not exactly. Failure, it seems to me, is the unavoidable consequence of imagining political transformation, especially in the context of the differentials that collate around investments in institutions, social practices, and various kinds of critical agencies and projects. I have been interested in these investments in the work of three very different kinds of critical thinkers--Ann Douglas, Martha Nussbaum, and Wendy Brown--in part because of what they strangely share: the somewhat tortuous suspicion that feminism is itself the victim of processes of feminization, which means that feminism has been (or in Douglas continues to be) undone by narcissistic and indulgent approaches to the political. For Brown, the institutionalization of feminism's presumption of social belonging within the category of women structures this foundational association, making women's studies a domain of anti-intellectualism in its dedication to modes of guilt and pride or what we might understand as the psychic economy of racialized pain. Nussbaum, on the other hand, splits the affective economy of suffering from a critical narcissism that dominates her rendering of academic feminism's intellectual obsessions in order to retrieve a humanist subject animated by the "suffering of others," a subject who sees the future in a "real" world now disarticulated from the academy's illusory attachment to abstraction. For Douglas, feminization is a process that fully counters institutionalization of any kind; it is both a mode of affect and a set of social practices that distance and differentiate women from the realm of politics and power.

In their permutations of the relationship among feminism, failure, and the feminizing specter of different kinds of institutionalization--of women's relation to the domestic (Douglas), of critical theory (Nussbaum), of race as the labor of affect underlying women's identity production (Brown)--these texts cannot be said to constitute a critical taxonomy, nor do they assemble anything as solid as a history of feminist use of the idiom of failure. They are linked rather by a certain coincidental reading, one animated by the desire to un-belong to the reproductive mechanics of the critical claim's inhabitation of time. On this score, each of the texts I have examined provide importantly different renderings of feminism's relation to past, present, and future, interrupting or consolidating the binary apparatus of knowing and doing that I have defined as the motivating anxiety for the critical claim's contemporary deployment. As a kind of exercise in un-belonging to both the normative notion of the category of women and to the critical claim's utopic assurance that knowledge production can find a real world guarantee in political activity, this essay seconds Brown's suggestion that we engage more deeply with what it means to be where we think we are.

My thanks to a group of generous readers of drafts of this essay: Rey Chow, Inderpal Grewal, Susan Gubar, Caren Kaplan, Donald Pease, Leonard Tennenhouse, and Philip Gould.

ROBYN WIEGMAN is the incoming Margaret Taylor Smith Director of women's Studies at Duke University and former Director of women's Studies at the University of California, Irvine. She is currently completing two projects: a manuscript on the institutionalization of identity studies in the U.S. academy and an edited collection on women's studies as a knowledge formation. She has co-directed the Dartmouth Institute on the Futures of American Studies since 1998.

Notes

(1.) This insecurity is regularly demonstrated by faculty debates over departmentalization, Ph.D. programs, and other features of institutionalization. A recurrent expression is that interpellation into the institution's traditional forms of production will imperil distinctly feminist knowledge projects, and hence marginality (in unit structure, size, and resources) is necessary to guarantee academic feminism's political futurity. The escape from marginality and downright exclusion that marked the historical impulse toward academic intervention is thus turned on its head as the process of institutionalization signifies now as a source of political corruption, if not the very mechanism for feminism's academic domestication.

(2.) In "Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures," I take up some of the problematical consequences for academic feminism's future that arise from the narrative of revolutionary transit from the street to the university.

(3.) See Sanchez-Eppler for an important reassessment of the sentimental form's relation to abolition.

(4.) Toward the end of *The Feminization of American Culture*, Douglas devotes a chapter to Margaret Fuller, who is the only fully formed female figure in the book to warrant the author's admiration. Tellingly, Fuller's life is described as "an effort to find what she called her 'sovereign self' by disavowing fiction for history, the realm of 'feminine' fantasy for the realm of 'masculine' reality.... Fuller protected and sanctioned herself by commiserating profusely with the cost her life exacted of her; but she never thought she had done, could have done, or should have done, otherwise. Self-pity never became sentimentalism: it never seriously sapped her boldness" (317). Even here, Douglas's distaste for the feminine and for the strategies of political reform and response that arose from the symbolic and social location of traditional woman puts her on the side of masculine accomplishment.

- (5.) See Gubar's "It Takes One to Know One" for a compelling discussion of the impulse toward "misogyny," as she calls it, in Wollstonecraft's work.
- (6.) See especially Gubar, "What Ails Feminist Criticism." For a direct response to Gubar, see Wiegman, "What Ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion."
- (7.) Nussbaum's tactic in reading across the range of Butler's work--from *Gender Trouble* to *Excitable Speech*--is to argue that little is new. Defining Butler's main idea as "gender is a social artifice" (40), Nussbaum proceeds to find in Plato, John Stuart Mill, and a host of contemporary feminist thinkers (Andrea Dworkin, Catharine McKinnon, Nancy Chodorow, Gayle Rubin, and Susan Moller Okin) ideas that Butler claims as her own. In Nussbaum's account, Butler's difference from her predecessors is her refusal not only to write in a clear and coherent language but to link her insights to "realizing justice in America" (45).
- (8.) In her letter to the Editor in a subsequent issue of *The New Republic*, Gayatri Spivak challenges Nussbaum's turn to Indian feminism to secure U.S. feminism's political guarantee. Spivak writes, "This flag waving championship of needy women leads Nussbaum finally to assert that 'women who are hungry, illiterate, disenfranchised, beaten, raped ... prefer food, school, votes, and the integrity of their bodies.' Sounds good, from a powerful tenured academic in a liberal [U.S.] university. But how does she know?" (43).
- (9.) For a discussion of U.S. feminism's increasing status as the hegemonic discourse of global feminism, and hence its complicity with a whole set of practices around development and first world rescue of the nonsecular world, see Grewal and Kaplan's introduction to *Scattered Hegemonies: Post-modernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* and their essays "Warrior Marks" and "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides."
- Nussbaum also represses the critique from within the national domain concerning the state as the arbitrator of rights. Most recently, this critique has been forwarded by Janet Halley and Gayle Rubin, who trace how feminism's hard won legal remedies for sexual harassment and antipornography have become the means for policing nonnormative sexualities in both the workplace and public sphere. Nussbaum's use of gays and lesbians in her list of those in need of legal protection is the figural trace of this particular repression. It functions strategically to cast Butler as a traitor to her own--to both women and queers. My thanks to Janet Halley and Gayle Rubin for sharing their work in progress with members of the University of California Humanities Research Institute group of which I was a part in fall 1998.
- (10.) In giving centrality to McKinnon and Dworkin, Nussbaum also virtually silences those who have long challenged the political projects of both thinkers. See, for instance, the debate now referred to within feminism as "the sex wars" in Freccero, King, and Rubin ("Thinking Sex").
- (11.) In saying this, I am not upholding the model of power that has attended the theorization of the liberal state, one that sees power in the stark terms of domination and oppression, complicity and oppositionality. Rather I am indexing how feminism's initial movement into the academy brought with it this particular understanding of power and in such a way that the growth of academic feminism has existed in tension, if not at times contradiction, with this originating conception of the political.
- (12.) It is not clear to me whether this difference has emerged as a consequence of institutionalization or whether institutionalization makes it newly legible.
- (13.) While women's studies and ethnic studies typically function as the common referent for identity studies, it is important to articulate the interdisciplinary project of American studies, inaugurated in the 1930s, as the U.S. academy's first form of identity-based knowledge. Indeed, what's compelling about the case of American studies is that it was the identity projects of the 1960s that served as its structural "other" and initiated the kind of crisis over its object of study that Brown tracks in the domain of women's studies. For more on American studies, see Pease.
- (14.) As Lisa Lowe has discussed, it is the organization of the disciplines that bifurcates the realms of culture and political economy, which in turn produces structural antagonisms for accounting for subject construction across various social domains. She writes: "The traditional function of disciplinary divisions in the university is to uphold the abstract divisions of modern civil society into separate spheres for the political, the economic, and the cultural. The formation and reproduction of the modern citizen-subject is naturalized through those divisions of social space and those divisions of knowledge" (12).
- (15.) In *States of Injury*, Brown argues that a discourse of injury has replaced a discourse of freedom in leftist political projects in the past two decades, and in doing so she offers a compelling way to understand how civil rights reform has itself been reformulated to yield laws that protect the privileges of the majority. In "The Impossibility of Women's Studies," she seems to reiterate her reading of injury as the primary

formulation of difference in the public sphere by defining it as the discourse that organizes women's studies as an academic field.

(16.) My point in locating the way "The Impossibility of Women's Studies" seems trained on figuring out for feminists some kind of escape from this situation should not be read as an accusation that Brown hopes to dismiss altogether the significance of race. That reading would be deeply inaccurate. And yet, while I agree with Brown that the women of color rubric within women's studies has a problematical history and political construction, I would base my argument against its placement in a core curriculum not on the affect that it generates but on the various intellectual displacements that it provides: how it reduplicates but does not reveal its complicity with the university's broader condescension of race with particularist bodies; how it reinscribes a national political horizon for thinking feminism's relation to race and racialization by constraining the question of "color" within the referential framework of the U.S.; and how this constraint produces both intellectual and political difficulties for thinking through the challenge of international/transnational/postnational knowledges in the field. For important new work on the problems and complexities of the women of color course, see both Lee and Moallem.

(17.) In her 1981 essay, "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism," Myra Jehlen provides important directions and caveats for my own thinking in this essay. Here, she talks about the critical difference between "feminist thought" and "thinking about women" (76), and she uses her own disciplinary training and location -- literary study -- to reconsider that discipline's "fundamental axioms" (76, 77). Such a project propels her into the heart of feminist literary criticism's interest in sentimental culture and moves her to critique the project of heralding women's sentimental resistance by noting that "the map of an enclosed space describes only the territory inside the enclosure" (80). To the extent that my essay calls for an interrogation of women's studies in the wider space of the university -- and of the organization of knowledge in the university more widely -- it seeks a larger map on which to chart the implications of feminist knowledge. But it also risks encasing the question of feminist knowledge in its own enclosed space, the academy, which cannot possibly stand in as an adequate representation of the production of knowledge in the social formation as a whole. My hope in drawing attention to issues of academic production and thereby of failing to heed what is now a popular call to academic feminists (that we write for popular audiences and seek translations between scholarship and the public sphere) rests on the necessity of an interrogation that has been avoided for far too long.

(18.) Brown's essay, it seems to me, is the most important discussion of women's studies as an academic field since the 1983 publication of Gloria Bowles and Renate Duelli Klein's edited volume, *Theories of Women's Studies*. It is certainly the most rigorous challenge to the institutional operation of the field ever written by someone who labored there for years.

Works Cited Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.

Bowles, Gloria, and Renate Duelli Klein, eds. *Theories of Women's Studies*. Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983.

Brown, Wendy. "The Impossibility of Women's Studies." Scott, ed. 79-101.

_____, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.

Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Avon, 1977.

Freccero, Carla. "Notes of a Post-Sex War Theorizer." *Conflicts in Feminism*. Ed. Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller. New York: Routledge, 1990: 305-25.

Grewal, Inderpal, and Caren Kaplan, eds. "Introduction: Transnational Feminist Practices and Questions of Postmodernity." *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1994. 1-33.

_____, "Warrior Marks: Global Womanism's Neo-Colonial Discourse in a Multicultural Context." *Camera Obscura* 39 (Sep. 1996): 5-33.

_____, "Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides." *Between Women and Nation: Transnational Feminisms and the State*. Ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, and Minoo Moallem. Durham: Duke UP, 1999. 349-63.

Gubar, Susan. "Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of 'It Takes One to Know One.'" *Feminism Beside Itself*. Ed. Diane Elam and Robyn Wiegman. New York: Routledge, 1995: 133-54.

_____, "What Ails Feminist Criticism?" *Critical Inquiry* 24.4 (Summer 1998): 878-902.

Halley, Janet. "Sexuality Harassment." Ts.

Jehlen, Myra. "Archimedes and the Paradox of Feminist Criticism." *Feminisms: An anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Robyn Warhol and Diane Price Herndl. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1991. 73-96.

King, Katie. *Theory in Its Feminist Travels: Conversations in U.S. Women's Movements*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.

Lee, Rachel. "The Prisonhouse of White Women's Exclusions: Now What? for Women of Color." Wiegman, ed.

Lowe, Lisa. "The International Within the National: American Studies and Asian American Critique." *Cultural Critique* 40 (Fall 1998): 29-47.

Martin, Biddy. "Success and Its Failures." Scott, ed. 102-31.

Moallem, Minoo. "Women of Color in the US: Pedagogical Reflections on the Politics of the Name." Wiegman, ed.

Nussbaum, Martha. "The Professor of Parody." *The New Republic* 220.16 (22 Feb. 1999): 37-45.

Pease, Donald E., Jr. "Futures." *The Futures of American Studies*. Ed. Robyn Wiegman and Donald E. Pease, Jr. Durham: Duke UP, forthcoming.

Riley, Denise. "Am I That Name?" *Feminism and the Category of "Women" in History*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Criminalization of Sodomasochism and the Legacy of Anti-Porn Feminism: Two Decades of Panic." Ts.

_____. "Thinking Sex: Notes For a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole S. Vance. New York: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1984. 267-319.

Sanchez-Eppler, Karen. *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1993.

Scott, Joan Wallach. "Experience." *Feminists Theorize the Political*. Ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott. New York: Routledge, 1992. 22-40.

Scott, Joan Wallach, ed. *Women's Studies on the Edge*. Spec. issue of *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 9.3 (Fall 1997).

Spivak, Gayatri. Letter to the Editor. *The New Republic* 220.16 (19 Apr. 1999): 43.

Tompkins, Jane. *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*. New York: Oxford UP, 1985.

Wiegman, Robyn. "What Ails Feminist Criticism? A Second Opinion." *Critical Inquiry* 25.1 (Winter 1999): 362-79.

_____. "Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures." *New Literary History* (forthcoming).

_____. ed. *Locating Feminism: On the Politics of Women's Studies*. Durham: Duke UP, forthcoming.

Gale Document Number:A69300393
