



GUEST EDITORIAL: THE POLITICS OF RESISTANCE

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How do we create an oppositional worldview, a consciousness, an identity, a standpoint that exists not only as that struggle which also opposes dehumanization but as that movement which enables creative, expansive self-actualization? – bell hooks

In “The Politics of Radical Black Subjectivity,” bell hooks pondered the meaning of resistance. Resistance, she noted, is an activity connected to the process of coming into subjectivity. It can manifest in fleeting acts of rebellion or in uprisings that subside as spontaneously as they emerge. These resistances are spaces of possibility. For hooks, revolutionary resistances are borne from these acts of rebellion but are marked by critical awakenings that demand the recognition of the subject, new ways of being in the world, and creative social change (15). In this short passage written over two decades ago, hooks captured both the tensions and aspirations of feminist resistance historically and in her contemporary moment of writing, while also anticipating the importance of continued struggle for feminist futures. Feminism as a diverse body of thought and movement of struggle has and continues to pose radical challenges to the subject of resistance and the many forms resistance takes, and it has been marked by both fleeting acts of rebellion as well as monumental struggles for social change, often operating in concert with one another.

In this inaugural issue of *Feral Feminisms*, entitled “The Politics of Resistance,” we explore resistance in its multiple forms, from spontaneous rebellion to deliberate, systematized struggle. This special issue was borne out of the collective work of a group of graduate students who spent hours planning, organizing, and finally staging a conference that came to be known as “Dynamic Resistances: Complicating, Screwing & Perpetuating Structures in our World,” which took place at York University on September 14 & 15, 2012. When we were planning the conference, we knew that we wanted to create a space that would bring activists, artists, writers, performers and academics together to discuss the dynamic forms that resistance takes, and to establish a forum that encouraged conversation and critique of feminist struggles in their multiple forms. This first issue of *Feral Feminisms* extends the critical conversations that began in the space of the conference, inviting further reflection on the dynamism of feminist resistance.

Notably, contributors to this issue speak to the complexities, contradictions, tensions, critiques, and exclusions of and within feminism and our social world more broadly. The section that opens this issue, “Interrogating Knowledge Production,” draws attention to the ways in which knowledge production occurs through struggle and contestation. In particular, it is the effects and reconfigurations of institutional power dynamics that our contributors examine in the opening section. Their ideas resonate with the ongoing debates around the issues of belonging and privilege within the

feminist movement and fit into the long-standing scholarly tradition of exploring the ways in which knowledge is generated and legitimized (Haraway 1991; Lather 1991; Luxton and Mossman 2012). Eclectic in their themes and theoretical stances, the three pieces in this first section ask what it means to produce feminist knowledge in the context of competing claims, and they converge on the point that institutional spaces of knowledge production should maintain an openness and flexibility so that they are spaces of democracy. “*The Freewoman: Feminism, Dialogism and Women’s Education*” by Marva Milo carefully considers the notion of “dialogic feminism” in *The Freewoman*, an early-twentieth-century British periodical that was a platform for the debates on the roles of women in public and private spaces. In order to illustrate the workings of “dialogic feminism,” she focuses on the debates surrounding women’s place in higher education in the pages of *The Freewoman*. Milo contrasts this independent periodical with other suffragist magazines such as *The Vote* and *Common Cause*, emphasizing *The Freewoman’s* commitment to dialogical interrogations of feminist issues and its resistance to adopting unified conceptions of womanhood. The anonymously written creative piece, “Ambivalently Yours,” is a creative exploration of a culture jammer’s personal struggles to reconcile her “conflicting” identities as a feminist and academic who is passionate about gender equality, fashion and the color pink. Inspired by feminist artists who radically challenge the status quo, the author raises interesting questions around alternative and everyday ways to enact change. Ambivalently Yours’s formulation of conscious ambivalence as an act of resistance invites readers to see contradictions and uncertainty as constitutive parts of activist practice. In the last piece of this section, “Interrogating Inquiry: Resistance and the Academic Mode of Production, (or, A Discourse into Left Field),” Hans Rollmann offers a provocative critique of the academic mode of intellectual engagement. He illuminates the contradictions between the radical potential of feminist theory and calcified approaches to knowledge exchange within conference spaces. Humorous and pointed, his cultural commentary asserts a possibility of resistance to institutionalized power structures of higher education. Rollmann’s vision of resistance entails making the process of knowledge production honest, interactive, and accessible.

The second section, “Vulnerability, Speech, and Resistance”, is comprised of pieces that rearticulate subjectivity. The first two pieces can be situated within the larger tradition of feminist poetics of resistance from such poets as Audre Lorde (1984) and Adrienne Rich (1979), both of whom wrote about the necessity of turning silence into action using language. Lorde’s assertion that poetry is about survival, about naming our experiences, and about defying the all-knowing white fathers, surfaces in Sheila Stewart’s poetry, wherein she explores the conditions of speech and the subordination of the female speaking subject. Her first poem, “Dulcet,” ventures into the author’s embodied experiences of being silenced within the austere setting of a church, where she finds comfort not in the words of god, but in Lorde’s voice of resistance. “Our Father” similarly challenges the sovereign patriarchal voice, playing with the meanings of “father” and contesting the authority of the father to name, tell stories about, and erase female subjectivity. In “Prière de Bonheur” by Isabel Baraona, resistance is expressed as a “prayer for happiness,” or a sardonic lamentation for

women to have a bit of reprieve in a patriarchal society that defines, overextends and diminishes them. The poem disrupts patriarchal definitions of feminine subjectivity through its representation in the plural – to feminine *subjectivities* that spill over the boundaries they are corralled within.

The next two articles in this section further explore the nuances of resistant subjectivities through a politics of vulnerability. Feminist recognition of the vulnerability of the subject and the subject's relations in the world has prominently surfaced in feminist writings, particularly in those of Judith Butler (2004), to counteract a politic of autonomy that denies the interdependence of subjectivities and bodies. In "Invisible Manifesta," Noel Glover draws attention to how problematic it is that acts of resistance, in order to gain legitimacy, must be "recognized" by a witnessing public that reads the subject as whole, impartial, autonomous, and locatable in identity categories. Glover argues for a politics of resistance that is not so easily visible and that understands subjectivity to be partial, multiple, fractured, vulnerable, interdependent, and rhizomatic. He draws on Donna J. Haraway's cyborg as the ideal metaphor for a political subjectivity that resists reductive codification by a witnessing public. In the last piece of this section, Weronika Rogula, in her short film, *A Slav for You*, explores the everyday resistances of her mother and demonstrates how resistance is never solidly steadfast, but rather marked by human vulnerabilities, shame, wounds, and occasional failures. Rogula employs a split screen to represent the discordance between her mother's sense of self, her ties to Poland, and her dis-identification with the Canadian nation where she has spent the last 22 years since her arrival from Poland. The film comprises images and audio of her mother as she is shaped by and resists assimilation—from the visuals of her exploitation as a low-paid wage labourer in Canada to her narration in Polish that testifies to her refusal to speak English and assimilate. This piece contains a number of tensions: vulnerability and failure, desire to belong and dis-identification, and pride and shame, all of which inform her mother's sense of self and animate the author's own resistances.

In the final section, "Bodily Resistances," the authors play with the notions of visibility and invisibility of bodies, and their relegation to the "abject" through colonial imagining, medicalization, de-sexualization, and artistic representation. The discursive production of gendered, racialized and sexed bodies has been a privileged theme in feminist thought, especially within the past twenty years. Scholars like Susan Wendell (2006), Margrit Shildrick (1997), and Anne Fausto-Sterling (2000) have critically examined how certain bodies are deemed dangerous and unruly by epistemic authorities, and consequently either posited as deviant or pushed to the margins of public consciousness. As a result, they have resisted by summoning the lived body in all of its messy, leaky, and sensory corporeality into theory and activism. The creative and scholarly pieces assembled in the final section contribute to this conversation by untangling the webs of Othering and the pathologization of black, disabled and disordered bodies. "Hair Talk: A (Silent) Conversation between Afro- and White-Textured Roots" by Charmaine Grant, Sarah Steadman, and Pierrette Masimango fuses photography and poetry in order to reveal the complexities of racialized embodiment. Disrupting dominant understandings of beauty as synonymous with

whiteness, their piece interrupts the process of Othering and resists colonizing ways of relating. At the heart of “Hair Talk” is the desire to overcome barriers that punctuate social life and impede mutual understanding. Jen Rinaldi and Samantha Walsh’s “Two Women, Shared Stories: Contending with the Appropriation of Resistance in the Context of Sexuality” offers two personal narratives that explore the corporealities of resistance for bodies that are gendered female and culturally coded as “disabled.” Although different, both narratives explore how the bodies of women with invisible and visible disabilities are understood to be violable and subject to public inquiry in a patriarchal society. While Rinaldi’s resistance lies in struggling against femininity’s demand to sexualize and objectify her body for male pleasure by asserting her body for herself, Walsh examines how her resistance to an ableist society incites her to “flaunt it,” to display her sexuality in the face of cultural attempts to de-sexualize bodies marked by disability. Lastly, “bodily loco/motion: seeing un-/disorder, the body, and embodied archives in Eadweard Muybridge’s *Animal Locomotion*” by Jessie Travis, focuses on a politics of archival representation of corporeality. Rejecting the narratives of normalcy, Travis explores personal history to unearth “the un-productivity, the corporeal deviance, the excess, and the disorderliness” of the body. Intrigued yet unsettled by the work of English photographer Eadweard Muybridge, Travis situates the lived realities of the disordered body within the space of a photographic archive in order to resist conventional ways of representing the body.

Taken together, the articles, poems and creative pieces presented in this special issue of *Feral Feminisms* speak to feminism as it is rooted in activist movements and intellectual histories of resistance. Ranging from the theoretical to the confessional, they examine shifting meanings and modes of activist, artistic and intellectual feminist practice. Some of the pieces included in this issue come directly from the conference and others were solicited through a call for papers. The enthusiastic response to our call for papers shows that the spaces where resistance is taking place, from the everyday to the radically transformative, deserve further attention in various feminist forums.

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