

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

ROSE WEITZ, *The Politics of Women's Bodies: Sexuality, Appearance, and Behavior*. New York: Oxford University Press. 2003, xii + 299 p.

A little over a decade ago, as a graduate student, I encountered Rose Weitz's brilliant collection of writings focused on women's bodies and the ways in which women's lives are produced and controlled through social ideals, public representations, and practices relating to female bodies. That encounter influenced and broadened my academic life. It opened my understanding of gender and bodily issues from 'mere' concerns about women's body image and representation to a broader view on the ways that 'the body' plays out in women's lives across politics, media, economies, and professions at local and societal levels.

The intervening decade has produced a third wave of feminist writing and activism, a new corpus of feminist work on 'body' topics that include New Reproductive Technologies, genetics, global issues relating to sex work and labour exploitation, transgender studies, and disability studies, and an established discipline on the Sociology of the Body that includes postmodern, poststructural and postcolonial streams. Thus, a second, revised edition *The Politics of Women's Bodies* is not only important in terms of reaching a new generation of scholars, but also in terms of incorporating recent developments both in feminist theory and in the sociology of the body. In fact, the tensions between new and familiar readers, and between new and more traditional scholarship in feminist and body theories make it quite difficult to construct a review of the second edition without simultaneously considering the first. This is particularly so because the difference between the first and second editions is not great: of 20 original articles, only five have been replaced.

In terms of the quality of scholarship that has been brought forward to the second edition from the original book, there is little doubt that this is an exemplary collection of central feminist writers: contributors include Iris Marion Young, Sandra Lee Bartky, bell hooks, Judith Lorber, Dorothy E. Roberts, Katha Pollitt, Catherine Kohler Riessman, and Weitz herself. Indeed, the selections from these women in particular continue to comprise a central place in the feminist canon when it comes to theorizing about women's bodies. Herein lies the difficulty for the reviewer: while these writers are indeed exemplary and important, some of the articles included feel dated. Hook's (1992) "Selling Hot Pussy" centers its discussion on Tina Turner, Imam and Naomi Campbell. Although hooks' essay is beautifully written and its argument can be applied to more contemporary representations of Black women, it has an almost historical feel that may preclude its appeal to a new, and perhaps younger audience. Likewise, Kohler Riessman's article, dating back to 1983, on the one hand continues to offer a

powerful critique of medicalized sexual reproduction, yet it fails to take into account recent developments which include women's active appropriations of medicalization (I am thinking here of the growth of planned elective Caesarian sections, and of 'cosmetic' surgeries such as clitoral hood removal and hymen reconstruction, for example). Again, while these developments do not necessarily refute Riessman's arguments, they do complicate them, and it would strengthen the reading if such complications were addressed.

Other original offerings better withstand the passage of time, not necessarily because they are more important or better composed, but because they continue to be relevant in terms of developments in contemporary social theory. Kathryn Pauly Morgan's article on issues of colonization and cosmetic surgery and Eugenia Kaw's piece on the medicalization of racial features both draw on poststructuralism and postcolonialism to strengthen their arguments, while Sandra Lee Bartky's canonical paper on Foucault and Feminist approaches to the body remains a sharp and extremely useful exegesis on the possibilities of blending feminist theory with poststructuralist thought.

In terms of the revised sections of the newer edition, some sections shine more than others. Deborah Tolman's article "Daring to Desire: Culture and the Bodies of Adolescent Girls" is a gem: in it she deconstructs the commonplace idea of young women's sexuality as passive, reactive and 'only' a way for young girls to get what they really want, a relationship. Instead, Tolman's respondents give us a clear sense of young women's sexual desire, and their struggles to satisfy those desires within the narrow moral confines that surround young female sexuality. Weitz herself offers a lovely paper on women's relationship with technologies of hair that manages to be fun without being frivolous; in her analysis we are given clear connections between the personal and the political in ways that one suspects most women could easily relate to. On the other hand, there are weaknesses in the new additions. Sharon Batt's powerful analysis of the imperative of beauty that is embedded in funding and services for women dealing with cancer has been lost, replaced with a much more personal and less political piece by Mary Lowenthal Felstiner about coping with arthritis. Considering the burgeoning Disability Studies literature, it seems there could have been many stronger essays by and about women with disabilities that would more clearly connect the personal to the social and the political.

In the end, then, would a new reader's encounter with this second edition be likely to alter and expand her or his academic horizons, as did my encounter with the original a decade ago? Or, would an old friend of the book find a second encounter satisfying in terms of revisiting canonical essays while being introduced to potential new classics? As a member of the latter group, I suspect that Weitz's book will have a great deal to say to fresh readers; on this basis, I actually intend to include it the new edition as a textbook for an upcoming Sociology of the Body course. However, as a seasoned reader, I wonder about the way that Weitz has chosen to update the text. While the book retains its almost iconic status in the traditional feminist literature on gender and bodies, it is also somewhat disappointing in terms of its failure to expand its own boundaries beyond the issues and theoretical frameworks raised in the original edition.

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