



Winter 1996

IRW NETWORK

Letter from the Director

It's almost as if I have died and gone to *Herland*. No doubt this euphoria derives from the proverbial honeymoon that isn't yet over, and any week or month now I will go crashing down onto the in-basket piles. But even when that happens, I don't think I will stop feeling very grateful for the opportunity to work with the exemplary staff of IRW, Beth Hutchison, Assistant Director, and Arlene Nora, Administrative Assistant. This feminist utopia is also presided over by the presences of my remarkable predecessors in this job, the women who have made IRW the intellectually vibrant, distinguished, diverse, and welcoming institution I hope to help maintain: Catharine R. Stimpson (1981-1986), Carol Smith (1986-1992), and Cora Kaplan (1992-1995). Cora's recent, greatly lamented departure for the University of Southampton, UK, makes it all the more urgent that her tutelary spirit remain in permanent residence.

Even 27 Clifton Avenue, however, inhabits a post-utopian time. As Judith Butler said in her recent talk at IRW, "The End of Sexual Difference?," it is a time not just of "backlash" but of real crisis, when it becomes imperative to rearticulate feminist theory, scholarship, and activism precisely at the points where feminism is most under attack. Beijing represents the resilience, viability and hopefulness of global feminist work, but also, as Judith Butler pointed out, the continued necessity to struggle against the erasure from politics and public discourse of women's variegated movements and self-articulations.

IRW's *Toward 2000 Seminar on the Future of Feminism* will be addressing precisely these issues and challenges over the coming three years, asking what paradigms, what sorts of scholarship, what relations to activism, are most useful for the move into the "next wave" of feminism. The question at the heart of our work: in what new and/or adapted ways do we need to think, as feminist scholars and activists of the twenty-first century, in order for feminism to serve best the needs of all kinds of women? We undertake this exploration fully cognizant of the potentially limitless levels of our differentiation, difference, diversity, as well as of the ways in which we can--must--make common cause.

Lowering my gaze, and my rhetoric, from this grand(iose) horizon, and fixing it back on the rosy pink rooms of 27 Clifton Avenue, I see phantom images of events to come, full of people from all over Rutgers and its communities, from all disciplines and interdisciplines, eating, drinking, listening, and talking. See you there.

--Marianne DeKoven



Inside . . .

Michele Wallace on Black Women in Early Sound Film
 Judith Butler on Queer Theory and Sexual Difference
 Susan Friedman on Geographies of Gender
 Calls for Papers:
 Gender ■ Technology ■ Place
 Women Work
 Upcoming IRW Events
 IRW on World Wide Web
 and more!

1995-96 *Thinking About Women* Series

This year's *Thinking About Women* lecture series--*Feminism Questions Modernity*--investigates the impact of feminist questions in continuing to reconfigure the narratives of modernity and therefore of postmodernity.

Michele Wallace

On September 28th, Professor Michele Wallace (English, CUNY) opened the *Thinking About Women* lecture series with her paper, "Bessie, Josephine and Fredi: Representations of Black Women in Early Sound Film." Over 120 undergraduates, graduate students and faculty members filled the multipurpose room at the Cook Student Center.

In conjunction with Professor Wallace's lecture, the IRW held two public screenings of the rarely seen 1939 film *Imitation of Life*. These screenings, together with the film clips shown during the talk, provided attendees with a useful frame of reference for Wallace's critique of the shifts in representation of black women brought about by sound film.

Professor Wallace began her discussion on the work of Fredi Washington, Bessie Smith, and Josephine Baker by describing the effect of the introduction of sound to early film on African American actors, actresses, and entertainers generally. Then, referring to Fredi Washington's character in *Imitation of Life* and Bessie Smith's character in *St. Louis Blues*, Wallace discussed the differences in representations of light and dark skinned black actresses in early sound film, and changes in those representations over the years.

Clips from *ZouZou* (starring Josephine Baker) and *Voodoo* (Fredie Washington) illustrated the ways in which the ethnocentric lens of primitivism depicted black actresses as the eroticized other. The advent of sound film partly countered this objectification through the representation of black women's voices. The convergence of race, gender, and sexuality was explored in further detail when Professor Wallace fielded audience questions at the end of her formal presentation.



At the reception preceding her talk, Michele Wallace (far right) talks with Cheryl Clarke; Deborah G. White (History) and Don Gibson (English) chat in the background.

Judith Butler



Judith Butler (right) with Marianne DeKoven

According to Butler, sexual difference is the site where biological and cultural questions are posed and re-posed. The following questions exemplify the challenge that sexual difference poses to available ontology: how does sexual difference limit parameters of the biological, the psychic, the social? how is the biological field produced, constructed, and redefined by the racial? how are notions of being unsettled by posing the question of sexual difference? Following a warm round of applause at the talk's conclusion, the audience engaged in a lively and extended question and answer session with Professor Butler. Attendees solicited Butler's comments on a wide range of topics--from the political force of terminology debates to the relevance of her work to transsexual/transgender issues.

In the second lecture of the *Thinking About Women* Series, celebrated feminist and queer studies theorist Professor Judith Butler (Rhetoric, UC Berkeley) contemplated the question of sexual difference with an enthusiastic overflow crowd of approximately 300 people. Butler's talk, entitled "The End of Sexual Difference?," addressed several of the critical issues of contemporary feminist debates: the status of foundational terms in modernity; the value of the interrogative mode in understanding the use of terms of universality; the reappropriation of such terms as a challenge to their traditionally negative usage; a critique of the notion that there are proper objects of inquiry to be taken up by queer studies (sexuality) and women's studies (gender); and the interplay between sexuality, gender, and race in the terminology debates at the recent U.N. Conference on Women.

Susan Stanford Friedman

The final Fall semester *Thinking About Women* lecture, "Beyond Gynocriticism and Gynesis: The New Geography of Identity and the Future of Feminist Criticism" by **Susan Stanford Friedman** (Virginia Woolf Professor of English and Women's Studies, U Wisconsin-Madison), drew a lively interdisciplinary audience to the Miron Conference Room (and foyer--the larger meeting rooms at the new Crockett Center will be a welcome addition!)

Professor Friedman discussed the shifts in feminist constructions of identity from the 70s through the 80s to the present. In the 70s and 80s, gender and sexual difference were asserted as foundational to understanding the oppression of women in a transhistorical patriarchy. This assertion produced an exclusive and binaristic focus on authorial gender (gynocritics) and on sexual difference (gynesis). In the mid-90s, we have arrived at multiple, dispersed, situational, relational, contradictory and hybrid theories of positionality in our constructions of subjectivity.

While these contemporary discourses suggest that gender can no longer be considered a privileged or primary locus of difference, Professor Friedman concluded that, nonetheless, we must for political reasons--the perpetuation of various historical forms of sexism and patriarchy--continue to practice the modes of criticism based on analysis of women writers and of the discursive effects of sexual difference.

Discussion following Professor Friedman's lecture was animated and prolonged, and Professor Friedman graciously responded to audience questions. Some audience members wholeheartedly endorsed the notion of a geographics of multiply proliferating, varyingly weighted differences, while others worried about the negative implications for feminism of eliminating the special theoretical status of the categories of gender and sexual difference.



Susan Stanford Friedman (right) with Marianne DeKoven

Upcoming *Thinking About Women* Lectures

- February 8 **Bonnie Smith** (History, Rutgers-NB)
Masculinity and Historical Modernism
- March 21 **Drucilla Cornell** (Law School, Rutgers-Newark and Political Science, Rutgers-NB)
A Just Alliance: Rethinking Kant for Feminism
- April 18 **Sara Suleri Goodyear** (English, Yale)
Feminism and Minority Discourse in Postcolonial Literatures

Each *Thinking About Women* lecture begins at 4:30 p.m. and is preceded by a reception at 4:00 p.m. See the Spring Calendar for details about these and other events.

Seminar: Toward 2000

The IRW's faculty/graduate student seminar *Toward 2000* is an ongoing reading and discussion group dealing with current issues and future directions in feminism as we approach the millennium. This Fall, **E. Ann Kaplan** (Professor of English and Director of the Institute for Humanities, SUNY-Stony Brook) led a lively discussion of her work on "Feminism, Aging and Changing Paradigms." Some younger Seminar participants disputed the rejection of Second Wave feminism in recent "Third Wave" books that have received much media attention.

Ann Snitow (Professor of Humanities, Eugene Lang College, The New School) drew a large audience for her talk "Feminisms in Translation: Dialogues Among Women in Eastern Europe and the U.S." She discussed the difficulties of making feminist connections across the incommensurabilities of U.S. and Eastern European contexts.

Based on results of a campus mail poll of IRW affiliates this Fall, we have decided to meet three Wednesdays next semester from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. The tentative dates are February 14, March 6 and April 3. Sessions will address questions of post-colonialism, global feminisms, sexuality and theory/praxis. Watch for confirmed dates, topics and facilitators early next semester.

Interviews with Visiting Scholars



Visiting Scholars **Alison Laurie** (left) and **Gail Reekie** (center) enjoy a relaxed moment with **Ruth Wilson Gilmore** (Geography).

Gail Reekie

Dr. Gail Reekie, an Australian Research Fellow, visited the IRW during Fall semester from the Research School of Social Sciences at Australian National University in Canberra. Dr. Reekie summarized her research on questions of legitimacy/illegitimacy in her paper, "Legitimate Questions: History and the Contemporary 'Problem' of Illegitimacy in Australia, Britain and the U.S.," which she presented to our Visiting Scholar Colloquium. She is also participating in the "Culture and Politics of Reproduction" seminar being held at the Center for Critical Analysis of Contemporary Culture (CCACC).

Dr. Reekie's research interrogates the social and historical construction of illegitimacy. The questions she is considering include the following: why is the distinction between legitimacy and illegitimacy so durable despite current, more liberal, attitudes towards sexuality? What are the rhetorical effects of the term *illegitimacy*? When did illegitimacy begin to be regarded as a social problem?

Asked what she has enjoyed most about her stay in New Brunswick, Dr. Reekie expressed her pleasure at having so many opportunities to interact with and hear lectures by prominent feminists. She has also taken advantage of the cultural opportunities that the area offers—from the Metropolitan Opera in New York to a local production of *The Scarlet Letter*. Next year Dr. Reekie will continue her comparative analysis of the construction of illegitimacy with fieldwork in Britain.

Alison Laurie

Alison Laurie joined us for the month of November from Victoria University of Wellington in New Zealand, where she is a lecturer in Women's Studies. A pioneer in lesbian, gay and bisexual studies in New Zealand, she has been consulting with scholars at Rutgers, CLAGS and the Lesbian Herstory Archives regarding oral history and discourse production, particularly as they relate to the media depictions of the Parker-Hulme murder case immortalized in Alan Jackson and Fran Walsh's film *Heavenly Creatures* (1994).

In her paper, "Heavenly Lesbians? Murder Revisited," Professor Laurie criticizes the filmmakers' decision to reify the defense psychologist's (unsuccessful) claim that the two teenage girls charged with murdering one of their mothers were insane. The resulting literal depiction of the girls' supposed *folie a deux*—with life-sized plasticine figures murdering the adults who irritate them—distorts the girls' mental states while side-stepping the complicated family dynamics which led to Mrs. Reiper's tragic murder. The theoretical and long-standing cultural effects of linking lesbianism with behavior seen as necessarily "mad" or "bad" stimulated much discussion among those attending the colloquium.

During her stay in New Jersey, Professor Laurie also met with members of Rutgers' Anthropology Department to discuss queer theory and presented a paper at Montclair State University.

Scholars in Residence for Spring 1996

For Spring Semester, our two academic-year scholars, **Nancy Isenberg** and **Elizabeth Faue**, will be joined by **Sara Dickey** (Anthropology, Bowdoin) and **Patricia Cholakian** (Romance Languages, Hamilton). **Professor Isenberg** (History, Northern Iowa) presented her paper "'Pillars in the Same Temple and Priests of the Same Worship': The Feminist Politics of Church and State in Antebellum America" to the Visiting Scholars Colloquium in November and will continue to work on her project "Engendering the Law: Legal Fictions and Feminism in America" during the Spring.

Professor Faue (History, Wayne State), whose 1995-96 project is "Provisioning the Returning Soldier: Gender, Citizenship, and Veterans' Politics in the Welfare State," will be presenting in the Spring, as will Professors Dickey and Cholakian. **Professor Dickey's** project is "The Intimate Relations of Class and Power: Domestic Service in Urban India." **Professor Cholakian** will be working on "Claiming Identity: Women and the Politics of Self-Representation in Seventeenth Century France."

The Spring/Summer newsletter will provide more information about our noteworthy guests. IRW Visiting Scholars may be reached by telephone at (908) 932-9072.

African American Women Make History

The IRW has submitted a proposal to the Rutgers-New Brunswick Provost to present two events featuring the contributions of African American women to the cultural and intellectual life of the community. Professor **Nell Painter** of the History Department at Princeton University is tentatively scheduled to present a talk on February 1 regarding her work on African American women in/and history. The talk will be confirmed and publicized when our request for funding support is approved.

In conjunction with this initiative, the IRW will host a roundtable discussion featuring several distinguished Rutgers professors and administrators during late February or March 1996. We hope that **Nancy Lane**, Director of Corporate Affairs at Johnson & Johnson in New Brunswick and member of the Rutgers University Board of Governors, will be able to moderate this discussion. Watch for more details in January!

Upcoming IRW Conferences

Gender, Race and the Transformation of Work

The **Rutgers Center for Women and Work** and the IRW are collaborating on a lecture series—*Gender, Race and the Transformation of Work*—featuring noted women in the fields of economics, labor and contingent work. The series will conclude with the keynote address for the IRW's 14th Annual Celebration of Our Work Conference, the theme of which this year is **WOMEN WORK**.

Ruth Milkman will speak Tuesday March 26, 4:30 p.m. on domestic work and global trends. On Tuesday April 16, 4:30 p.m., **Elizabeth Higginbotham** will address race and workplace discrimination. Both talks will be held at the Labor Education Building on Cook Campus.

The IRW and the Center for Women and Work are in the process of confirming **Heidi Hartmann** as the keynote speaker for **WOMEN WORK** Tuesday May 21 at the Douglass Student Center. Thanks to **Dorothy Sue Cobble**, Associate Professor, Labor Program, and Director of the Center for Women and Work, for initiating this productive collaboration.

The IRW's 14th Annual Celebration of Our Work Conference focuses this year on how gender structures our understanding and experience of women's labor both in and out of the waged workplace. The conference typically attracts professors and students from other four-year institutions in New Jersey and the region as well as public school teachers and community activists. The IRW will join forces with the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers to mount panels.

Panel proposals addressing the theme **WOMEN WORK** will be accepted until January 31, 1996. Contact the IRW for more information.

Gender ■ Technology ■ Place

For the past two years the IRW has supported graduate student conferences creating a forum for the exchange of ideas and debate across disciplinary boundaries. This year we invite papers for **Gender ■ Technology ■ Place**, the IRW's third annual graduate student conference.

Karen Barad, a theoretical physicist and feminist philosopher who is Associate Professor of Physics and Women's Studies at Pomona College, will keynote. Her exciting interdisciplinary work concerns both quantum physics and feminism. Developing a concept she calls "agential realism," Barad proposes that (in Donna Haraway's words) "'agency' is not about 'subjectivity' that can be in any sense separate from 'objectivity.'"

We have seen the geography of the world repeatedly realigned in response to changing economic, political, and cultural perceptions and practices. It seems appropriate to look at the relations between gender and technology as they appear in different configurations from place to place. The range of possible topics include revolutionary politics/emancipatory technologies, media and technology, cold war conversion, global workplace/global assembly line, representation(s) and/of technology, and technochix. We particularly want to encourage papers on revolutionary and emancipatory technologies and gender relations. The conference committee will finalize the program by the end of January.

The conference will be held Saturday, March 30, 1996 at the Douglass Student Center. To request conference registration materials or submit an abstract or proposal, contact the IRW Conference Program Committee at 27 Clifton Avenue, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08903 or fax (908) 932-0861. E-mail messages should be directed to roza@rci.rutgers.edu.

Home Page and E-mail Updates

The IRW home page is under construction and should be open for browsers in January 1996. The World Wide Web address will be <http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~bhutch/> -- please check it out!

When complete, the home page will provide information about IRW visiting scholars, events, conferences, and other projects, as well as links to other Web resources on women and gender. The hypertext system will also allow us to provide both more detailed information about our speakers and their topics and also fast-breaking news about event locations and schedules.

The IRW is now accessible by e-mail, which may be sent to irw@rci.rutgers.edu.

The IRW Network is published twice annually by the Institute for Research on Women, Rutgers University.

Staff:

Marianne DeKoven, Director
Beth Hutchison, Assistant Director
Arlene Nora, Administrative Assistant
Colleen Goode, Women's Studies Intern
Teresa Geisert, Work Study Assistant
Tamika Oddman, Work Study Assistant

27 Clifton Avenue, Douglass Campus,
Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey
08903

(908) 932-9072
fax (908) 932-0861
e-mail irw@rci.rutgers.edu

Faculty/Graduate Student Seminar

The Center for Russian, Central and East European Studies (CRCEES) and the Women's Studies Program announce a seminar for academic year 1996-97--*Locations of Gender: Central and Eastern Europe*. Applications are due February 10, 1996. Contact Barbara Balliet, Associate Director of Women's Studies (908/932-9331) or Joanna Regulska, Director, CRCEES (908/932-9551) for application information and additional details.

IRW Network - 6

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit Number 19
New Brunswick, NJ