

***HABITUS DETRITUS* (EDITORIAL 2013)**

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The foundation of feminist scholarship is criticality. Criticality toward social, economic, and environmental injustice becomes advocacy and activism for social justice by responsibly listening to voices of people who are marginalized and oppressed. Their stories reveal power structures that control people, cultural narratives, and hegemonic worldviews and by responding to these stories, we imagine ways of stopping harmful, inequitable, and discriminatory practices and envisioning eco-utopian well-being alternatives.¹ “An emancipatory, critical social science develops out of the social relations of the research process itself, out of the enactment of research praxis that uses intellectual effort to work toward a more just society” (Lather, 2004, p. 208).

Lather (1991) writes, “Feminist researchers see gender as a basic organizing principle which profoundly shapes/mediates the concrete conditions of our lives” (p. 71). For example, as we (Karen and Debbie) approached a main entrance to the University of Illinois-Chicago in May 2011, we passed a bar and grill advertisement of a woman offering herself for consumption along with the meat she serves on a platter stopping us in our tracks. (See Figure 1.) This is just one of a myriad of representations influential in how women are perceived and how they have come to understand themselves. Social justice action researchers, such as the authors in volume 8, have taken signs such as this from visual culture and engaged in research that opens emancipatory windows as a form of intervention, providing alternatives to dominant views of desire of power. Theirs is the type of research praxis Lather (2004) describes. Since the 1970s, action research has entered educational research as a

1. See Keifer-Boyd (2010) for examples of each of these four strategies.

critical problem posing and solving methodology. Attention to how race, class, gender, and sexuality intersect to legitimize the inherent cultural privilege of those at the intersections of White, male, heterosexual, and middle to upper class, directs activism to disrupt oppressive social constructs, which limit difference lived at multifarious intersections.

Intersubjective Critical Emancipatory Strategies

Feminist critical emancipatory research methods are interactive and dialogic transformative actions that challenge dominant social power, and are reciprocal in nature with the aim to promote equitable social justice (Alcoff, 1996; Lather, 2004). Unreflexive, *culturally normal* meanings are re-envisioned by those involved in the social justice action research advocacy project, rather than from others’ representation of their experiences. These re-envisioned meanings are situated within historical conditions with respect for daily experiences and in confrontation with experiences that are assumed normal and natural, but are, in fact, cultural constructs.

The body is a normative assumption, an idealized form, an abstraction. *Embodiment* is a contextual and enacted body that has assimilated inscriptions of systems of markers or signs that are derived from material, visual, discursive surroundings. Embodiment scholarship views the body as the *condition* and *context* through which social actors have relations to objects and through which they give and receive information. While the *lived body*, refers to people’s experiential knowledge, “the body is not outside of history, for it is produced through and in history” (Grosz,



Figure 1. Chicago bus stop sign. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2011.

1994, p. 148). *Subjectivity* is a performative and instantiated experience that is deeply sedimented in the body and is resistant to change. Subjectivity includes the habitual, which is screened from consciousness, and yet also defines boundaries of conscious awareness. “When changes in incorporating practices take place, they are often linked with new technologies that affect how people use their bodies and experience space and time” (Hayles, 1992, p. 162). New technologies in medicine, nearly instant communication, and access to a history of written words and visual images, have shifted the ways we understand and experience our bodies and our worlds.

Habit: TRANSLATE-abilities

Habits of looking, seeing, and understanding, mark the ways we understand the world.

Humans tend to form beliefs, based on cultural habits and ideologies that go far beyond what logic would justify, especially when our beliefs are not constrained by experience. In the process of inculcating members into culture, beliefs and habits are passed from member to member, parent to child, in ways that make sense to the group, while the specific experiences connected with the experience may have been lost in time. Stereotypes and prejudice are examples of embedded cultural habits. Philosopher of education, Harry Brody (1982) called the cache of nearly instant images that come to mind when we encounter cultural codes, our *imagic store*. These relatively generic mental constructs, or schema allow us to orient ourselves conceptually as we make sense of our worlds. (See Figure 2.) Brody (1982) once argued at a well-attended lecture that we always know, just from casing the outside of a restaurant, whether we should wear our best grownup clothing and bring the platinum visa, or dress casually and bring the kids.

It isn't only building facades that excite our imagic store. Our store includes personal, cultural, and political ideas as well, and sometimes they are so well defined, they become stereotypes. We believe we know what

a terrorist, prostitute, drug addict, big game hunter, and even a teacher looks like. We know their gender, body shape, and clothing choices. Of course, intellectually we know that people in each of these categories come in all shapes, sizes, and genders, but our imagic store is biased. The authors in this volume address and deconstruct stereotypical habits of looking and understanding related to aspects of gender, culture, and identity in multiple ways that challenge dominant culture understandings.

Blaike's (2013) consideration of “the body as a mediator of social and physical capital” highlights a thread that runs thorough many, if not all of the articles in this volume (p. 57). In these articles, bodies, enhanced with clothing, accessories, medical intervention, and gendered performances, highlight the impact of our cultural schemas, biases, and unreflexive assumptions.

Jackson (2013) shares a research strategy she uses with young Black women to explore their identities juxtaposed with cultural habits of looking. She takes us to a difficult historic moment when people of color were used as objects in sideshows, and specifically reminds us of Sarah Baartman, known in the 19th century as the Black Hottentot Venus. Her students' social and physical capital, are explored though critical participatory action research.

Wobovnik (2013) gives readers insights into how high heeled shoes have become significant cultural indicators of both social and physical capital.



Figure 2. At the Moscow-Sheremetyevo International Airport (Шереметьево), disoriented travelers can iron out wrinkles with the plugged in iron in a public corridor of the airport while making sense of a new place. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2013.

In her article, *These Shoes Aren't Made for Walking: Rethinking High-Heeled Shoes as Cultural Artifacts*, she directly engages with stereotypes of high heel shoes and the people who wear them, noting that men and women think of these special cultural objects very differently. A pink high-heeled purse, which Karen photographed in 2013 at a flea market in Klagenfurt, Austria, incorporates several stereotypes of femininity into one cultural artifact. (See Figure 3.)



Figure 3. High-heeled pink purse at a Klagenfurt, Austria, flea market. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2013.

LaJevic (2013) considers her own scared body as a vehicle of social and physical capital and reminds us to consider human bodies as palimpsests, multi-layered signifiers of ideas and emotions that mark each of us as unique multifaceted individuals. The distinct marks/scars many of us carry from injury, disease, or genetics both reveal and conceal. She engages with cultural expectations of beauty—bodies that are clear and unmarked with no scars, wrinkles, or sunspots; “perfect skin [with] no memory” (p. 30).

Pérez de Miles (2013) gives us a glimpse into cultural and gendered social and physical capital in her post-colonial understanding of Nelson Pereira dos Santos’s 1971 film, *Como Era Gostoso o Meu Francês (How Tasty Was My Little Frenchman)*, considering narratives and images of savages and barbaric anthropophagy (cannibalistic) rituals as a way to disrupt the apparatus of patriarchal and neo-colonial power.

Is it possible to disrupt habits of looking? Brunner (2013) uses the strategy of oppositional reading to uncover visual rhetoric embedded in im-

ages produced for *Esquire Magazine*, and challenges readers to consider “mythological impotence, cultural nostalgia, and objectification” (p. 31).

Habits are repeated actions, repeated ways of knowing and doing. Judith Butler’s (1990) theorized that repetition of gendered cultural narratives further defines ideas of femininity, masculinity, and other markers of identity. Agency is the capacity to alter habitual ways of doing and knowing. Butler (1990) posits that, it is the *deed*, the action, not the *doer*, that needs to change. This emphasis on *action* rather than *embodiment* highlights changing the social practices that construct identity rather than place the burden on the individual to accept how she is constructed “in and through the deed” (Butler, 1990, p. 142).

Feminisms of difference (Cohen & Weiss, 2003; Grosz, 1994, 2005; Irigaray, 1987; Stone, 2006) is a theoretical stance that acknowledges that there are ontological sexual differences. This view has been critiqued as an essentialist premise in which agency is not possible without disruption of all identity (Best, 2007). Clara Fischer (2010) looks to education theorist John Dewey’s “explication of the self, which accommodates both a permanent, connected, and coherent self, on the one hand, and a flexible, dynamic self, on the other” to draw our attention to the “moral responsibility we each have as agents in the transformation of oppressive systems” (p. 69). A feminist lens works to re-evaluate patriarchal habits embodied in our actions.

Identities, such as woman, Muslim, Black, White, trophy wife, trophy hunter, athlete, historian, diva, and other positionalities posited as standpoints by authors in volume 8 of *Visual Culture & Gender*, are produced in relation to cultural systems and environments. The authors in volume 8 grapple with how identities are (per)formed in habitual ways and how to acknowledge woman’s specificity, that is, “how to retain a commitment to sexual difference and sexual specificity while also transforming the historical meaning of these distinctions” (Best, 2007, p. 67). The authors in volume 8 of *Visual Culture & Gender*, offer feminisms of difference that challenge historically received positions and are pathways to “living as ourselves in opposition to patriarchal accounts, as well as a future

project to realize” (Best, 2007, p. 66).

Evans (2013), in her self-reflexive narrative, looks to photographic images by David Chancellor to confront habitual ways of understanding cultural stereotypes of men and women. In this article, she brings to readers’ consideration wealthy big game hunters focusing on one particular image of a woman surrounded by her taxidermy-enhanced trophies. While working with Evans on her article as VCG editor, Karen came upon detritus in a flea market in Klagenfurt of deer hoofs as hooks to hang clothing. We leave Karen’s sighting to the reader to consider moral responsibility toward other species. (See Figure 4.)



Figure 4. A rack of hoofs at a Klagenfurt, Austria, flea market. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2013.

Are the hoof hooks utilitarian trophies of human power and privilege?

Feminist Archival SENSE-abilities

Two articles in volume 8 bring a *feminist archival sensibility* to our attention. A feminist archival sensibility involves reflexivity while engaging and encouraging the voices of many to develop a generative archive of women’s experiences, is time sensitive toward the urgency to document feminist work in the making, and redresses how dominant patriarchal culture has omitted or erased feminist work.

This urgency to bring women’s experiences into mainstream discourse has changed since the early days of feminism when there was less accessibility to large databases and high-tech tools. Germane Greer archived women artists’ issues in her 1979 book, *The Obstacle Race* in which she

writes:

The intention is to show women artists not as a string of over-rated individuals but as members of a group having much in common, tormented by the same conflicts of motivation and the same practical difficulties, the obstacles both external and surmountable, internal and insurmountable of the race for achievement. (p. 6)

Stermitz (2013) brings these ideas into a contemporary genre as she draws on artfem.tv, an archive of feminist video, she founded in 2008¹ to interrogate current aspects of remix and re-editing criteria within feminist video works by women. She critiques subverted women’s media images by remixing them from commodified constructs into a disclosure of gendered ideals while deconstructing sexism and racism in dichotomous social system.

Weida, Bradbury, and Edwards (2013) speculate about the future as they invent and critique a “tween hoard” that was inspired by the Staffordshire Hoard treasures from medieval times. Unlike the recently discovered hoard weapons, this hoard consists of personal possessions, installations, photographs of objects and social networking “artifacts, illuminating contemporary issues of girl culture, bullying, and iconicity of girlhood material culture” (p. 7).

RESPONSE-abilities²

We assembled with more than 40 artists and educators at the National Art

1. ArtFem.TV is an online television programming presenting Art and Feminism. The aim of ArtFem.TV is to foster Women in the Arts, their art works and projects, to create an international online television screen for the creativity, images and voices of Women. ArtFem.TV is a non-profit artist run ITV and media art portal about Art and Feminism and has been founded in the year 2008. For inquiries please contact foundress, curator and editor Evelin Stermitz [es@mur.at]. (Quoted from http://artfem.tv/ArtFem_TV/)

2. TRANSLATE-abilities, SENSE-abilities, and RESPONSE-abilities are the frameworks for a theory of creativity as social process developed by Keifer-Boyd, Wagner-Lawlor, and Trauth (in press).

Education Women’s Caucus (NAEA WC) 6th annual Lobby Session in Fort Worth, Texas in March 2013. (See Figure 4, 5, and 6.) The annual NAEA WC Lobby sessions serve as an informal forum for personal and political discussion and action. Each Lobby session has had a theme that emerged from the events of the year. In 2013, with Sandy Hook elementary school shooting in Newton, Connecticut, and escalations worldwide of wars and violence against women, children, and homosexuals, we asked “what are my personal responsibilities and our collective responsibilities to end violence?”



Figure 5. Working together at NAEA WC Lobby 2013 session.



Figure 6. NAEA WC Lobby 2013 session dialogue.



Figure 7. Karen Keifer-Boyd and Deborah Smith-Shank at the NAEA WC Lobby 2013 session in Fort Worth, Texas. Photograph by Jane Cera.

We believe that the foundation of feminist scholarship is criticality, and that criticality is desperately needed.

We dedicate volume 8 to our extended families—mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and children—throughout the world to join forces in listening, witnessing, and acting in response to injustice. (See Figure 8.) They are fully in our hearts, minds, and spirits as we write this editorial, edit this journal, and anticipate our ongoing life journeys.



Figure 8. Cloud formation over the Karawanken Mountains and Wörthersee in Klagenfurt, Austria. Photograph by Karen Keifer-Boyd, 2013.

Breaking stereotypes and other habits of looking and understanding are central to this issue. We remember Trayvon Martin and his family, the teachers and students at Sandy Hook and their families, victims of rape around the world and their families, and those others whose lives are marked by unnecessary pain. There has been so much violence this year that the evening news almost seems to normalize the violence.

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