

The editors had an enormous task, and one that could never possibly be completed, as they themselves note: to collect a series of essays offering scholarly insight into the broad, interdisciplinary, and amorphous field of feminist theory. They were well aware that, no matter how they attempted to cover the field, they could never satisfy everyone or include every relevant idea. They have done a remarkable job of collecting a series of essays on a wide range of themes of interest especially to feminist scholars in the social sciences. Gaps in such a project are unavoidable. However, the gaps that I have identified here are not their gaps alone: they are ours. Our inclusion of pre-1985 nonacademic texts in our syllabi, our anthologies, and our scholarship reminds us that we do conceptualize feminist theory as arising from feminist politics as well as from academic debates. What would feminist theory look like if we included activist theory post-1985? That *Handbook* is yet to be written.

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The Pedagogy of Feminist Theory

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Feminist theory is pedagogical. At least, this vital new volume should prompt scholars to consider the multiple ways in which pedagogy and feminist theory interact with one another, especially when approaching feminist theory the way that Lisa Disch and Mary Hawkesworth do as editors. In their introduction to the text, they contend that feminist theory is "more fruitfully conceived as a multifaceted, multisited project than as a bounded field," and is "oppositional research" because "it

challenges the right of the powerful across these diverse disciplines to define realities” (1–2). In this essay, I proceed from these convictions to explore several pedagogical dimensions of the multifaceted and oppositional work that feminist theory can do.

In the most straightforwardly pedagogical sense, this volume compels teachers across a variety of disciplines to rethink the way they approach their courses. One can easily envision building a course on any number of subjects with *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* as the primary course text. Rather than building an introductory political theory syllabus around the same coterie of canonical (dead, white, male, Euro-American, mostly patriarchal) thinkers — with or without feminist, antiracist, and postcolonial critiques alongside the classic texts — why not focus such a course around the *Handbook* entries on “Politics” (Linda M. G. Zerilli), “State/Nation” (Johanna Kantola), “Institutions” (Celeste Montoya), “Governance” (Ki-young Shin), and so on? Rather than centering, for example, Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan* or traditional debates about political representation, this volume enables teachers and students to engage these foundational questions from a critical perspective, whether it is Shatema Threadcraft’s reading of Hobbes on embodiment (208–10) or Disch’s analysis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the perplexities of political representation (791–98). Not only does emphasizing the pedagogical power of feminist theory work to (potentially) decolonize our syllabi by critically approaching traditional objects of study, it also foregrounds important processes of academic inquiry: self-reflexivity, problematization of one’s assumptions, the denaturalization of uninterrogated inherited knowledge, and so on.

However, this text is pedagogical in other ways as well. It demonstrates and performs a mode of critique that is educative for various disciplines of inquiry. Many of the chapters demonstrate the way that feminist theory is both deconstructive through using feminist approaches to critique the standard modes and objects of knowledge production and reconstructive by mobilizing those approaches for transfiguring our ways of knowing. In this way, the *Handbook* models a process of doing scholarship, as it goes about interrogating — and potentially educating — a variety of disciplines. Disch and Hawkesworth arguably interpellate this sort of audience in the introduction, positioning “scholars who are unfamiliar with feminist theory and who want to confront feminist thinkers and make themselves accountable to feminist arguments in their areas of expertise” as an “aspirational” audience for the work. For them, the text can be “transformative” by “challeng[ing] the mistaken notion that feminist theory

pertains only to questions related to women, gender, or sexuality, offering nothing that mainstream scholars might wish to take into account” (10). That is, feminist theory can and should play a pedagogical role for *all* scholars, rather than only those who are already impacted by feminist thinking.

Deboleena Roy’s chapter on “Feminist Science Studies” aptly illustrates this modality of feminist theory-as-pedagogy. The essay analyzes the way that feminist thinking has challenged and thus reshaped the contours of scientific discourses and practices around science’s purported objectivity and neutrality, the underrepresentation of women, dichotomies of sex/gender, interactionist paradigms, and developmental systems theory. For each of these, Roy illustrates the way that feminist theory has much to teach scientists, such as the necessity of “consider[ing] the epistemological moorings of their scientific research by rethinking research priorities, reformulating research questions, considering participatory research and design methods, rethinking language and visual representations, and more” (837). Feminist approaches, though, further problematize the reformed scientific models — for instance, the way that developmental systems theories attempting to move beyond a sex/gender dichotomy can still “slip into” reductionist, binary conclusions (839). That is to say, feminist theory interrogates scientific inquiry through a continual process of critique and reconstruction. Crucially, feminist thinking itself is not excluded from this mode of pedagogical critique in Roy’s account. Roy engages Vicki Kirby’s work on the ontology and language-producing capabilities of bacteria, attending to the way that “biology has communicative capabilities” and consequent “ontological openness” (842). Nevertheless, even Kirby’s new materialism needs to be problematized through the lens of feminist science studies’ “social justice epistemologies” in order to ask whether this mode of ontological openness actually supports the flourishing of the bacteria themselves on their own terms, or only does so in ways that reinscribe humanist concerns and slot them into productivist, biocapitalist processes (845). Roy’s chapter thus demonstrates the way that feminist theory not only does pedagogical work on the discipline it interrogates, but by subjecting that realm of feminist thinking to critique, it also works on the feminist approaches themselves.

Roy’s chapter thereby illustrates a further pedagogical effect that the *Handbook* produces, one vital for feminist theory itself. The text implicitly demonstrates the constant need for feminist theory to be open to learning and transformation; the critical formulations that feminist theory generates must also be interrogated and problematized. For

instance, Threadcraft traces a genealogy of feminist work on embodiment that moves across these multiple registers. The chapter begins with a discussion of different routes feminist thinkers have taken to challenge the “somatophobia” of ancient and modern Western philosophy that render “the modern body politic” as both “symbolically” and “literally” male (209–10). However, this white feminist work — whether in the vein of Simone de Beauvoir or of Luce Irigaray and Adrienne Rich — too often “overemphasiz[ed] the biological,” “replicat[ed] the nature/culture split,” and rarely if ever “attended to racialization in the production of differentiated modes of embodiment” (214). As such, Threadcraft turns to black feminist thought, feminist work utilizing the rubric of disciplinary power, and notions of necropower in order to think through the modes of power and domination flowing through the politics of the body while still maintaining a critical perspective on these theoretical projects. That is to say, Threadcraft’s chapter — like many others throughout the *Handbook* — performs a constant critique of the conclusions and approaches of feminist theory. I suggest that this trajectory is pedagogical in two senses: first, it analyzes the substance of transformations in feminist knowledge, and, second, it models a practice of reflexivity and self-critique that is implicated in the project of feminist theory.

There is a possible danger in this dimension of feminist theory’s pedagogical force directed toward feminist thinking itself, that of inadvertently constructing a linear model of the unproblematic constant improvement of feminist theory. Indeed, the “waves” model of the history of feminisms risks partaking in this model of temporality, as Bonnie G. Smith notes (977–78). However, the receptivity to contestation and transformation that the *Handbook* practices — both in its overall construction and in its various chapters — works against unintentional reproduction of what Smith describes as the “progressive individual of liberal theory” who is “autonomous and rational, moving progressively through time on a trajectory of improvement” (978–79). By postulating feminist theory as a multisited and open-ended project, the *Handbook* enables its readers to practice a kind of feminist thinking that is heterogeneous and agonistic. As Disch and Hawkesworth note in their introduction, “feminist theories have been diverse and contentious,” (2) and even a project like the *Handbook* must be careful not to impose a clear-cut taxonomy obscuring this fact even as it identifies certain common characteristic of feminist theory (4). This might be the final

pedagogical effect of the text: figuring critical inquiry as an unfinished and contested process rather than a teleological self-improvement.

Near the end of their introduction to the volume, Disch and Hawkesworth position feminist theory as “what Latour (1988, 43–49) calls an ‘obligatory point of passage,’ a body of knowledge that must be taken into account by scholars, regardless of whether they have a particular interest in women, gender, or sexuality” (11). I suggest that the pedagogical dimensions of feminist theory epitomized by this volume are essential to this centripetal force pulling other modes of knowledge production into a feminist matrix. Whether creating possibilities for the classroom, challenging established modes of knowledge production, or insisting upon and modeling self-critical scholarship, the *Handbook* compels one to grasp the relationship between feminist theory and pedagogical endeavors.

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Profusion, Contestation, Missing Pieces

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Although I have not read *The Oxford Handbook of Feminist Theory* cover to cover, the chapters I have read confirm the editors’ definition of feminist thinking as an intellectual endeavor aimed at “denaturaliz[ing] that which passes for difference, . . . challeng[ing] the aspiration to produce universal and impartial knowledge, and . . . engag[ing] the complexity of power relations through intersectional analysis” (4). It is not possible to consistently chart the immensity of this task in a few pages. The reflections that follow are thus general and limited, highlighting insights, questions, and gaps that struck my own chords, as a feminist who has