

Knowing *feminisms*



edited by

Liz Stanley

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KNOWING FEMINISMS

On Academic Borders, Territories and Tribes

Edited by Liz Stanley



SAGE Publications
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

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First published 1997

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SAGE Publications Ltd
6 Bonhill Street
London EC2A 4PU

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
32, M-Block Market
Greater Kailash – I
New Delhi 110 048

British Library Cataloguing in Publication data

A catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library

ISBN 0 8039 7540 6

ISBN 978-0-8039-7541-5

Library of Congress catalog record available

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Introduction: On Academic Borders, Territories, Tribes and Knowledges

Liz Stanley

Knowing feminisms and the in-between

What this book is about, what this book is for: two proposals for readers. *Knowing feminisms*: feminism as the source of new knowledge, that which runs counter; as the source of action which is based upon such knowledge; as a means of turning analytic attention upon the objects of knowledge-production; as a source which redefines who and what is subject, who it is that can know, as well as what it is that is known. Feminism as the analysis of old knowledge and the source of new knowledge: it makes you think. *Knowing feminisms*: countervailing that which is not feminist, analysing injustice, insisting upon change; but also encountering difference, dissent and disagreement within; struggling to accept the epistemological ramifications of difference; difference in knowing as well as difference in being: situated knowledges. Feminism as itself a focus of analytic attention and inquiry: it makes you think about this too.

In recent feminist explorations of the sites and problematics of difference, the notion of 'borderlands', analysed by Gloria Anzaldúa (*Borderlands/La Frontera*, 1987) as '*la frontera*', has become of critical importance. Here in the borderlands difference is often experienced neither as separation nor as silence, but rather as an interface expressed through a babel of voices speaking together, speaking past each other, in which some voices sound, resound, more than others, and in which echo connotes power. This interface is a frontier that sees the coming and going of peoples, the speaking and silencing of voices, the casting of gazes which look but do not necessarily see. Around this frontier are gathered the differences of 'race', ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class, age, dis/ability, and more; and it is this frontier which constitutes the cultural space in which 'difference' becomes the point at which fundamental epistemological disputes surface around seismic linguistic and ideational shifts. The frontier thereby provides 'the space between' for debate, contention, disagreement.

Anzaldúa's '*la frontera*' is a powerful idea, invoking a borderland in which a second and subordinate cultural group 'grates against the first and bleeds', an area 'set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them* . . . a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional

residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants . . . Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled, gassed, shot' (1987: 3). Of course Anzaldúa is writing here about a literal *frontera* along the border between Mexico and the USA which then creates a symbolic as well as cultural borderland, for it is the constitution of states which produces the possibility of statelessness as a condition of mind as well as of living. The rapings and maimings, stranglings, gassings and shootings that Anzaldúa writes of are very real ones produced out of massive shifts and migrations of peoples and the formation, from out of what was once simply land, of distinct and separate, but certainly not equal, nation-states. In Anzaldúa's words, '*Los atravesados* live here . . . those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the "normal"' (1987: 3), and the borderlands create people whose everyday ontological condition is one of constant liminality, of constant 'crossing over' between two states of being.

The notion of borderlands signifies that there is also a territory *between*, on the borders of – precisely a state and a space of liminality, the in-between. Borderlands are a kind of space, social as much as physical or geographical, which are co-inhabited by people of different cultures, classes, ethnicities, religions, languages, as well as sexualities and genders and politics. A borderland is a contested zone, if not always politically, or in terms of national identities as in, for example, Northern Ireland or Ruanda or the former Yugoslavia, then certainly socially in terms of the re/construction and re/negotiation of identities and biographies and thus also of knowledges. Thus the US Christopher Street riot in which 'fags and dykes' fought back against contemptuously harassing police, thereby helping to bring 'lesbians and gay men' into existence: the ghetto became a corridor into political life.

The academic frontiers and borderlands that are the subject of this book are also epistemological borderlands, as sites of interface between different knowledges, different knowledge-claims, in which difference is spoken through the conjunction *knowledge/power*. These borderlands are differently constituted, where the prior production of symbolic frontiers – those who have knowledge and those who merely experience – has given rise to material organisations and institutions and governing bodies and 'states'. These spatial complexities of knowledge/power give rise to ontological problematics: just who are the people who 'cross over, pass over, go through the confines of the normal', who inhabit the academic borderlands and live in 'constant liminality'? Or rather, who and what do they become, what 'are' they in an existential sense?

As the tourist guide-book says, 'The institutions and organisations of Academia are masculinist in two closely related senses. The first is that historically the knowledge-makers, guardians and teachers of this tribe have been male. For many centuries this was a profession and status barred to women, and only within the last century have women been admitted. The second is that 'knowledge' is by definition rational, scientific and universal. These seminal characteristics are counterposed against those of emotionality,

the natural and particular, and these and related characteristics – termed ‘binaries’ – are associated with the known characteristics of the sexes. Women are ‘other’ to the citizenry here. They are the labour that makes it work – the secretaries, kitchen staff, cleaners, minor administrators, support staff and librarians – but they are largely invisible as ‘people’ therein. The status of citizen is reserved for those who are male/academic. Sex outweighs the otherness of ‘race’, at least in the formal institutions of Academia; but class is of the essence, for ‘education’, the chief product of this place, is considerably more than just book-learning – it is an ineffable grace of mind that only the lineage of centuries can bestow. Moreover, gender among the Academic tribe has both the power to magnificently increase size and attractiveness (in the male) and can produce near invisibility (in the female).’

Example 1: A door to a classroom on ‘Feminist Thought’ opens; in come a porter and two architects chatting and measuring; I remonstrate; oh sorry they say, we didn’t realise there was a lecturer here. Example 2: I walk down through the building to another meeting of this class; a student clutches my sleeve preventing me from moving; give this note to my lecturer, they say; I answer, I am not a servant, take your hand off my arm and say please when you want things done for you. Example 3: In the same class I am half-way through explaining a particularly abstruse point in feminist deconstructionist ideas to a perturbed student; another member of the class talks over me with an instruction to go and have it explained by a male colleague in the department ‘because he lectures on this in the theory course’. Example 4: Bearing examination papers, I enter an examination room; a suited man bustles up to me: stop, you can’t come in, go outside until I say; fine by me if you don’t want a co-examiner for the next three hours I respond, and go away. These examples concern the fixing of women in particular positions within the academy. Unless you status-mark others, dress in obviously smart ways or are by other means clearly distinguishable from students and secretaries (smart, but not smart skirts), or teach in mystificatory and so ‘clever’ ways, then changing combinations of ‘they’ assume you are a student (female, stupid), or they take you for ‘women’ (those nose and bum wipers of the academy known as ‘the secretaries’), or they treat you as by (sexual) definition inferior or invisible members of your profession. And this ‘they’ is not a unitary group confronting a unitary ‘us’.

We are, however, all passing women in the academy, not just those of us who manage sexuality or ‘race’ or disability or class in this way. Franz Fanon remarked upon the masks that black people under colonialism wear, never being ‘out’ to their oppressors, while Simone de Beauvoir noted the similar way in which women constrain themselves as Other to men. How comforting: ‘women’ do this. But for those of us who are not men, passing is a necessary condition of entry into the academy as a member: behaving as though we are safe, tamed, reasonable, collegial. How is it possible to be so subservient as to ‘be reasonable’ in the face of inequality, exploitation, oppression? Yet we do it all the time, we apparently pass as one of that ‘they’ that we are other to.

What – and who – am I as a woman and a feminist within the academy?

For many, I am positioned and fixed according to assumptions concerning position and thus function and status because of my sex and age. My four examples are of course not 'feminist' in any *a priori* sense; they concern responses to women in a putatively male space, and the feminism here lies in the way that such events are experienced as well as analysed, as being about status and power of gendered kinds. However, once understood within such a frame, this then transmutes like a new kind of philosopher's stone. There is nothing either inferior or diminishing about being or being seen as a student or a secretary; what *is* diminishing are the twin assumptions that women in the academy can be nothing but these and that to be them is to be at the beck and call and governance of males, for no matter what position men may be in the academic hierarchy in relation to each other, their common assumption is that women are indeed *a priori* lower. What feminism provides is a comprehension of the blinkered stupidity of such a way of thinking about the world, as well as the resultant injustices that arise from it.

These gendered ontological problematics thus have feminist epistemological consequentiality – or rather feminism analytically creates such epistemological consequentiality around them. Feminism sees new knowledge, sees 'coming to know' in a different way, as having its origin within such ontological problematics and the practical inquiries that arise from them. It has articulated ontological difference as the site of epistemological distinction: a feminist theory of knowledge linked to a feminist way of knowing, and this in turn linked back to a feminist way of theorising being. Moreover, ontology (a theory of being and living) and epistemology (a theory of knowing) become two symbiotically-linked 'moments' within a feminist praxis. What results is a truly radical approach to theorising knowledge, one which refuses the scientistic distinction between mind/knowledge and body/experience, instead situating knowledge as in and of grounded experiences viewed in a particular and feminist analytic way.

It has become conventional to speak and to write about such ideas and attendant issues in connection with the presence of 'women's studies' within the academy. This term both is and is not appropriate to describe the intellectual and academic activities discussed in this book. Insofar as 'women's studies' is constituted by separate or semi-separate organisational existence within educational institutions, then for most of the contributors it either does not exist or exists in relation to ideas and research and publications rather than separate classrooms, degrees or jobs or departments. Moreover, to make the complex more complex, it may exist in relation to such organisational facts of academic life, but not in relation to any convincing inter-disciplinarity, and instead take the form of the consanguinity of slices of disciplines which pertain to the topic women/gender: women and health, women and science, women and this and that. And, to make it even more complex, exclusion paradoxically may permit the easier or greater expression of feminist ideas and feminist practice within the zones of exclusion. Contributors write of the possibilities of exclusion and the limitations of inclusion, as well as conversely. They also write in relation to women's studies

and/or feminism and/or gender; some contributors situate themselves firmly in relation to one of these as constituting a particular kind of gaze upon the academy as well as presence within it, but some utilise elements of all three to indicate shifts over time which may be organisational, personal or relate to the wider parameters of intellectual life in which the configurations 'gender', 'feminism', and even 'women', have changed markedly.

'Higher education' is less a figurative and symbolic space than it is a concrete and very grounded organisational place in which, within any one institution, there are the overlapping territories of intellectual allegiances and the discrete territories of departments, faculties and schools, all in complex interaction with each other. Within this organisational edifice the intellectual space of ideas and knowledges sits uneasily, often hardly remembered let alone invoked in the ordinary round of the activities that constitute 'doing the business' required by government policy and funding council injunction. Moreover, both the intellectual space of 'education' – for it does still exist, in the interstices and squeezed until the pips squeak though it is – and the organisational place of 'universities' are marked by the separations and hierarchies of status and reward: Foucault's notion of knowledge/power is as appositely applied within and on 'us', as it is without and on 'them'. At its simplest, this can be seen in the fact that the greater the status and monetary reward, then the less likely there are to be women in organisational positions; and the greater the intellectual approbation, the less likely it is that what women do will be included within it. Indeed, there are clear signs that higher education is becoming one of the last bastions against the recognition of 'women's worth': it is salutary to note that business, manufacturing and government organisations are all more likely to value and to promote women than educational ones. 'Academic man' is a living reality, however Neanderthal he often seems in the flesh. And at another level, the gendered nature of knowledge/power is witnessed by the apparatus of science, objectivity, detachment, rationality and the use of these in simultaneously creating hierarchies in which one form of knowing – scientific, apparently detached and presumed to be objective – stands over and against others.

However, feminisms in the academy do not simply face, confront, receive, these dominant ways of knowing. In a very real sense feminism has been itself a creator and maintainer of intellectual and political borderlands in its own right, which have been brought inside by students, staff, research, writing, publication, teaching, and to which 'the academy' has necessarily had to respond. This has occurred through rejection, negotiation, admission, acceptance, assimilation, silencing, ignoring, or indeed all at more or less the same 'moment'. But whichever, this response has occurred around some kind of *acknowledgement*, whether of the looming presence or the looming absence, of feminist ideas if not of feminist persons or practices. Inside, some of us have become 'them', while the rest of us pass to one degree or another.

The contributors to this book explore a wide variety of the ontological and epistemological borderlands and border disputes thus created. They do so in

their own ways, some stressing organisational problematics, others biographical resonances, others ideas and powers, most some combination of them. They explore the intertwining ontological problematics and epistemological consequentialities sketched out above. The pages of this book offer another kind of space, in which its contributors can explore these intellectual concerns in relation to 'what is happening' in academic life as experienced from their particular vantage-points. They reflect upon different aspects of academic and intellectual life, including at those other borders and boundaries that exist, for example between academic organisations and those of 'outside' groups, organisations, audiences, institutions. This constitutes the broad shared framework within which the differences of the contributors are located. Such differences are occasioned both by different feminisms and by the different disciplines within which these feminisms are located, as well as the differences of age and status, class, 'race' and sexuality, and type and status of institution. Moreover, mapping and theorising such sameness/difference must also take note of that 'meta-difference' which is created out of the fact that both feminism and the academy are experiencing independent change, as well as also changing because of the growing relationship of interdependency between them. 'Everything is changing at once' has been heard more than once recently in the bulging classrooms of contemporary academic life. The resultant chapters are consequently points of departure, and not closures, for readers wanting to reflect upon their own vantage-points, experiences and interpretations.

Organisations, lives and careers

Feminists are ontologically outsiders, 'Other' to the academy. This 'otherness' exists in the sense that 'the stranger' in Georg Simmel's analysis is other: the stranger is someone inside but marked off, different and, although within, not within in the same way that 'real' insiders are. The stranger *travels between*, and in doing so brings their ontological borderland with them, indeed who wears it like an almost visible marker which sets them apart in their difference. This difference is not merely experienced; it is *lived*, it becomes the stuff of which 'a life' is thus composed, and it is central to identity and feeling, and thinking.

But feminist academics are not just 'women, full stop'. Those categorically important features of life as it is lived, such as 'race', sexuality, class, age, all make a difference, as does how people understand and act upon such matters. People do not inhabit conveniently separated pure identities: 'black? over there please', 'Romanies, in that one please', 'lesbians over there, heterosexuals in here', 'old people, no not there, in *there*'. Goodness knows 'biological [sic] sex' is a myriad enough, so what chance anything else being singular? And the political analysis of the ontological problematics that underpin and help give rise to feminism are not of merely arcane interest, for they have direct and very powerful ramifications for how people understand their lives and the possibilities they perceive those lives as not/having.

Some of the contributors have chosen to examine wider changes through the lens of their particular biographical trajectories, while for others this has remained implicit, a part of the backcloth to the themes and issues they foreground in their writing. But whichever, it is important to remember that such changes *always* have auto/biographical implications, *always* impact on collectivities of individual lives and careers. Embedded within these overlapping textual accounts of disciplines, feminist ideas, institutional re/arrangements, then, lie the interconnected biographies of thousands of people, as academics, students, researchers, administrators, secretaries, and a vast array of 'support staff'.

The term 'career' is often used to indicate general developments and patterns in a life, as well as in occupations. Ironically, various of the changes attendant upon shifts in educational funding policies in Britain have made one kind of academic biography/career, that of the social science or humanities researcher, become nearly extinct. Much more typical now is the successive arrival of cohorts of new researchers who then, lemming-like in their later 20s or early 30s, leave for other careers, mostly outside of academic life altogether. Nonetheless, and perhaps because of its very precariousness, research in these areas continues to attract well-qualified, energetic and productive women researchers: here organisational entry can be affected, for barriers are as few as the long-term career rewards. It is of course no accident that there is a relationship between low-status academic occupations and roles and the relatively high presence of feminists and other women. The invisible colleges of high-position, high-status, networks and associated processes of gatekeeping – the boy's club, the 'good ol' boys' – remain as important in academic life as they ever were, albeit cross-cut by an ethos of greater openness and the existence of procedures and practices apparently designed to regulate entry around formal qualifications and measurable attributes. The re/definitions of 'competence', 'skill' and 'importance' in gender terms is as important here as it has been in the workshops and factories of industrial capitalism. To the (marked) extent that higher education remains if not the preserve then still the shelter and support of 'the good ol' boys', then the existence of educational 'interstices' remains an important way-station for women in general, feminists in particular, to establish themselves and legitimate their credentials, including promoting the competing knowledges that have arisen from the flames of feminism itself.

Of course 'feminism' has never been as unitary as the use of the singular presupposes; it has always been marked by difference, tension, division; and it has always encompassed competing knowledges, competing feminist world-views. There has never been the lining up of a single and undivided feminist epistemology confronting an equally single and undivided masculinist one, no matter what rhetorics of such binary oppositions have existed (and on both 'sides'). And, over the last twenty-five years or so, there have been considerable (in both main senses of this word) changes in the constitution, structure, concerns, activities and preoccupations of 'feminism', as it has been perceived from 'outside' as well as from 'inside'. However, understanding the

links and tensions between individual and collective biographies, and the intellectual and political changes that have occurred to the organisational as well as ideational face of feminism, is clearly no simple matter. Understanding the process of the formation of ideas necessitates 'biographising' social structure and 'structuralising' biography. Conscious deliberation on these matters by those in the heart of the storm of change, as are the contributors to this book, speaks both to the immediacy of the moment and also traces the actually longer-term shifts that have occasioned 'now', the moment, and will eventuate 'then', the future. It is important not to see 'now' as uniquely without origin, but rather to trace its ancestry, its links with other social movements, other re/formations of identities, other accompanying economic and social structural changes. We are not alone.

Gaining entry into high status professional and other occupations via low status sectors is a strategy that many of those ontologically 'Other' have adopted, and sometimes, as with feminists, with marked success within the academy. At the same time, within some disciplines and institutions there have been successful organisational and intellectual closures against feminist ideas. However, perhaps paradoxically, this has sometimes not only permitted but actively facilitated the development of feminist work, albeit in the margins and on the borders, in the organisational and intellectual 'interstices'. What this raises is the conundrum that 'success', in the form of the incorporation of some versions of feminism, also brings with it costs, the intellectual and epistemological costs of assimilation and the consequent overlaying of an erstwhile oppositional epistemological frame by one which looks from the inside out, seeing out there sedition, dissension, irrationality, chaos. Descartes' nightmare peopled by wild women, 'Other' feminisms, other feminists.

As the mention of Descartes' troubled nightmares indicates, what should not be forgotten is the intensely *emotional* character of much of the reaction and resistance to dissenting feminist ideas, including such reactions by incorporated feminisms to those *other* Others, the feminists who are not like 'us', who are too extreme, too different, neither rigorous nor rational nor acceptable. *We* are not like *that*! Casting political, theoretical, analytical and methodological conflicts and debates in emotional terms is to see the passions at work here, ostensibly beneath the surface of intellectual life but actually running sharply through every idea, every theory, every analysis. Prick them and they bleed, the hotness and urgency spilling out into reviews, essays, papers and articles. To read 'dispassionate' responses to feminist work, feminist ideas, feminist women, with a finger over the vein is to feel the pulse of anger, denial and sometimes the stirrings of hatred. It all matters a good deal, you see.

There is no *necessary* synonymy of constructions of knowledge, appropriate investigative methodologies, desired outcomes and praxes, between the varieties of feminisms beyond that which gives rise to common use of 'feminism' as a marker of political and ethical stance (and, let us not forget, this is a great deal of synonymy). The common insistence there is something rotten in the state of the relationship between the sexes/genders may be what

binds us, with this 'something' the bone of fierce contestation. What results from such contestations are competing varieties of feminism intertwined with competing strands of conceptual and theoretical analysis within the various academic disciplines. At one time in Britain, for an actually very short period, it was possible to propose that the centre of academic feminism was constituted by Marxism, and all else degrees of peripherality. But soon (all too soon for some) such certainties were disturbed by the arrival of those 'other' feminisms, so that invocations of 'feminism' became marked by the naming of varieties, like naming the genuses of flowers: *Marxist* feminism, *socialist* feminism, *radical* feminism, *liberal* feminism, oh, and *revolutionary* feminism: and we should not forget that academic careers have been built upon the naming of these varieties and the maintenance of divisions between them. Now there are no longer even these certainties (not that there really ever were, for few of us understood our ideas and praxes for long within such confined and static terms).

Both feminisms and the academic disciplines are boundaried systems, but with (increasingly) complex borders. Consequently great interactional complexities arise in the interfaces between, both within any 'one' discipline and between it and other disciplines, and also regarding other organisations that these disciplines have dealings with. All of the academic disciplines are non-unitary and what is centre and what constitutes the peripheries is a contested matter. And it is not just the applied disciplines which have applications outside of the academy: the abstractions of philosophy and theology, for example, can drive corporate training programmes and the ethical committees of medics every bit as much as the ideas of accounting or engineering resound in the so-called 'real world'. Everywhere we look, the abstract and the academic meld into the concrete, become endemic in all fields of social life.

This is not to imply that fierce boundary-marking does not mark the borders, for it most certainly does; the ideological practices of organisational entities are intimately involved here, for their very existence is at stake. Difference is the name of the professional organisational game, marking off separations and distinctions, insisting upon the unique scope of particular professional knowledges and the inevitability and certainty of the translation of these knowledges into spheres of autonomous activity unamenable to the specificities of given rules. Professional autonomy is the central concept here, the jealously preserved and practically often unrealised grail that is nightly and daily defended against any attempted incursion into professional decision-making space.

Identity crises are at the centre of the disciplines as much as the professions; these are contested domains. Substantive work – concerned with what is 'out there' but also what is 'in here' – can illuminate the boundaries, the contested areas, the shifting centres of power and control, and thus become the motor force of changes over time. 'Biographies', it is worth noting, are not confined merely to persons, whether factual or fictional or heroic; complex organisations too have 'a life', a birth and a death, a character, experience

epiphanies and dis/junctures and phases and trajectories, and engage with other organisational entities. These particular identity crises are fashionably associated with postmodernist and deconstructionist ideas but actually long precede the existence of these, lying at least in part in the long-term organisational features of disciplines as, inwardly, changing alliances of shifting and disputing networks and groupings, and, outwardly, settled and programmatic essences founded on unchanging truths about the natural/social world. The crisis that is the existence of shifting identity/ies is the name of the academic organisational game. No wonder feminism is often experienced as a threat rather than a promise, for, by making the game open, it gives the game away. 'Nothing is settled' shifts the known ground – good grief, things might *really* change!

The boundaries between feminisms and a discipline are no longer clear, not least because of the impact of some feminist ideas and the progress of some feminist women. 'Within' and 'without' consequently have become difficult to tell apart, and especially so when those who may remain in some sense ontologically 'Other' nonetheless come to call the departmental, theoretical or methodological shots and so gain the means to operate epistemological closure. This can be intellectually creative because the borderlands thus opened permit unaccustomed exchanges: hierarchy meets inversion. But, of course, the re/making of knowledges need not necessarily follow from a very few gaining organisational clout. However, at the least this leads to shifts in organisational composition: and whether this will lead to wider-reaching change remains to be seen. The re/writing of knowledge certainly encompasses the re/making of organisations and institutions; however, it is the converse move that is politically and ethically more ambiguous: a changing institution can change in ways that have little or no epistemological or political consequentiality.

There can be, indeed there often are, un/intended consequences of a feminist rewriting of knowledges, especially so with regard to 'other' audiences and perhaps particularly the mass media. Feminist work, on rape and advertising, Victorian novels and child abuse, portraiture and pornography, child abuse and the structure of households, has come to the tender attentions and peculiar practices of the mass media, grist to the ever-rumbling mills that churn out Greenham woman, absailing dykes, political correctness, Camille Paglia, and goodness knows what else next. Feminism, the wicked witch of the north, of the first world, the wicked witch in your (whose?) own home, *sells*. But paradoxically there is a good deal more realised in feminist terms about the seventeenth-century persecution of witches than there is about the construction and use of 'witch-like' imagery in the here and now, and in particular regarding the relationship of this to the stereotyping and corralling of 'feminism' itself. Note that 'post-feminism' conveniently stereotypes and lethally disempowers.

It seems that academic feminisms are by and large less than fully concerned about their own construction and reproduction, in organisational or epistemological terms. There is no 'feminist woman' at the heart of this

multi-discipline of women's studies, feminism, gender studies: only the shivering, suppressed, oppressed, subjugated 'woman' that is the focus of collective theoretical and analytical attention. All the light is upon these poor categorical creatures, their plight, why it has occurred, what can be done about it, and little of the spotlight is turned upon those strapping resourceful women who provide this allegorical analytic gaze. And in taking such a stance to its 'research subjects', academic feminisms too much resemble the disciplines within which they are situated. At the centre is still a 'missing person': methods, their epistemology as much as methodology, serve to slice off aspects of the people who are the objects of academic attentions. The person missing is one who is complex and rounded, who is 'raced' and classed and gendered, who has a body and emotions and engages in sensible thought, and who inhabits space and place and time, and a person who may be a man but can be pathetic and weak, or who may be a woman but can be confidently powerful. The disciplines are concerned with 'bits' of social life, but even in their own terms what they choose to omit is considerably more than it need be: sociology, for example, still fails to assign bodies and places to 'social life', and economics still fails to encompass people at all. And as for the physical sciences, people are neither their objects nor their subjects: all subjectivities are banished by Method, so they say. So they say.

Difference: women, feminisms, gender

The very successes of feminism within the academy have occluded the provisionality of basic terms and concepts: 'women', and/or 'feminisms', and/or 'gender'. For some, the use of such terms may result from strategic choice, for others these may be almost accidental usages, and for still others their choice is an indication of clear political and analytical intention. Whichever, it should be recognised that a variety of terminological usages co-exist, sometimes indicating deep conceptual and political difference and disagreement, sometimes indicating nothing so much as casual choice. Nonetheless, these conceptual choices, howsoever made, are still analytically and epistemologically consequential, shaping as they do topics of interest, the epistemological parameters of inquiry, and the basis and claims of the knowledge that results. More simply, they also draw a line, create a frontier, between who is in and who is out, and so they help bring different styles of feminism into contest with each other. Gender? oh, I know your sort; wimmin? Yes, well.

'Contested feminisms' indicate not only the disagreements and sometimes conflicts that exist but also the preoccupation of different 'schools' or styles of feminism with each other, with their internal definitional, knowledge-producing and claims-making activities. Paradoxically, in the very 'moment' at which feminisms appear most to disagree they are also the most intimately involved, with their gaze settled firmly upon each other. In the same way that Foucault remarked on the vast preoccupying armoury of the Victorian injunction not to speak sex that spoke sex all the time, let us remark on the