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## Book Review: Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement

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**Different Wavelengths: Studies of the Contemporary Women's Movement.** Reger, Jo (ed.). 2005 New York and London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. 286 pp. (Includes compiled bibliography; index) \$35.95 (Paperback)

Reviewed by Anna Feigenbaum<sup>1</sup>

Jo Reger's edited collection *Different Wavelengths* seeks to fill a gap in studies of Third Wave feminism by offering a variety of empirical analyses addressing feminists' contemporary political practices. Reger employs the term 'Third Wave' to demarcate contemporary feminisms, particularly those engaged by young women in the United States. In contrast to other edited collections and anthologies of Third Wave writing, Reger's text focuses on the Third Wave from a social movement perspective, asking broader questions about the state of women's activism today and its relation to feminism's past. The collection features a number of emerging feminist researchers who have already published on the Third Wave, including Kimberly Springer, Astrid Henry and Ednie Kaeh Garrison. Alongside these writers are doctoral students and established feminist scholars, Nancy A. Naples, Leila J. Rupp and Verta Taylor.

Reger's introduction to the collection immediately lays out the ambiguity of the term 'Third Wave.' Reger argues that when the Third Wave is narrated in opposition to the 'Second Wave,' researchers tend to construct generational rifts and false visions of past and present organizing. For example, in such narratives the 'Second Wave' is often deemed a white women's movement plagued by racism, while the Third Wave is seen as having already overcome racism and replaced it with a celebration of difference. This kind of progress narrative erases the anti-racist work of women during the Second Wave and often distorts the histories of non-white women during this period. At the same time, such narratives fail to examine how racial oppressions and privileges still function in feminist activism today. Reger rejects these progress narratives which are based on generational shifts, promoting instead a position that sees feminism as always full of tensions, debates, differences and diversity. She argues that activism is never entirely new, while at the same time there are emergent strategies and tactics that characterize contemporary activism and distinguish it from past organizing. By looking for connections between feminisms—and between feminists—we can offer more nuanced historical visions and better understand contemporary praxis.

The best contributions in Reger's collection take this position, generating specific accounts of contemporary feminist practice. Among these is Florence Maätita's chapter "*Que Viva La Mujer: Negotiating Chicana Feminist Identities.*" Maätita uses interviews to look at how participants in a Californian university Chicana feminist group negotiate 'feminist' and 'Chicana' identity labels. Maätita discusses how these women came to feminism and what struggles they faced taking on feminist positions and subjectivities. Particularly of interest is Maätita's discussion of the barriers to feminism these young women experienced: the whiteness of the feminist movement, negative images of the feminist movement, and familial/cultural expectations. These barriers are complex and layered—constructed through media representations, cultural heritages, misogynist

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practices and colonial legacies. The room Maätita's gives to her interviewees brings a conversational tone to the piece, opening up spaces for dialogues about the images and intersections of feminist politics as they impact young woman's everyday lives. This makes it an excellent chapter for an introductory women's studies course or research methods seminar.

Another insightful chapter in the collection also focuses primarily on interviews. Sally Hines piece "I'm A Feminist But...Transgender Men And Women And Feminism" looks at how transgender men and women's engagements with feminist and lesbian communities shifted over the course of their sex/gender transitioning. Like Maätita, Hines gives a lot of space to her subjects, allowing room for varied relations and definitions of feminism. Hines' piece, focused on transgender men and women in the UK, is also the only piece in the collection that is not exclusively about the United States. Although the subtitle of *Different Wavelengths* does not designate the United States as its focal point, all of its other analyses are focused on the US.

Media and mediated feminisms also feature strongly in the collection. There are two quite different chapters on Third Wave feminism and zines. Zines—small, low-cost, DiY (Do it Yourself) magazines—are perhaps the most prevalent mode of Third Wave cultural production. The rise of feminist zine culture is generally attributed to the early 1990s Riot Grrrl punk movement which arose largely as a response to misogyny in punk culture and politics. However, recently feminist scholars, including Reger in her introduction to this collection (xxi), link contemporary zine-making with the manifestos and small magazines of early women's movements.

The first of *Different Wavelength's* chapters on zines by Kirsten Schilt looks at white privilege as expressed and addressed in early 1990s Riot Grrrl zines. While Schilt's analysis importantly highlights how white privilege was reproduced in some Riot Grrrl publications, her focus on zine-making as an individual rather than collective practice flattens the history of Riot Grrrl, prematurely declares the movement dead, and implicitly reproduces a narrative of whiteness that positions women of color as outsider voices of critique.<sup>2</sup> This is perhaps the result of her method of analysis which takes both short zine excerpts and sound bites of theory out of their political contexts, rearranging them to fit into a progress narrative of young women's "racial awakenings" (47).

The second article on zines by Dawn Bates and Maureen C. McHugh engages in a different approach, offering an overview of Third Wave feminist zine makers' politics and practices. While many zines are made by individuals, it is common for contemporary groups of young feminists to use the zine format for manifestos, event programs and documentation of individual and collective experience. As Bates and McHugh usefully outline, zine making has developed largely as a response to the conglomeration of the corporate media which degrades, distorts and censors women's, and particularly

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<sup>2</sup> While the Riot Grrrl movement in the United States has largely subsided, residual activist practices connected to the movement remain an important part of contemporary feminist praxis. Ladyfests, Girls Rock Camps and Riot Grrrl Inc. are a few examples of ongoing projects stemming from the Riot Grrrl movement in the United States. In addition, Riot Grrrl groups, bands and events are still quite common in England and Wales. The forthcoming fall 2007 collection *Riot Grrrl: Revolution Girl Style Now!* (London: Blackdog Publishing) chronicles the impact and continuation of Riot Grrrl on contemporary feminisms.

feminist's, voices. By situating zine-making within a political-economic account of the contemporary media landscape, Bates and McHugh are able to make connections to feminists' past publishing practices and the need for autonomous media production. Their analysis thus creates the space for linking Third Wave feminist practices to broader autonomous media and anti-capitalist movement. However, the fact that these connections remain 'silent', both in this chapter and throughout the collection, is significant. While these studies offer a diverse reading of contemporary women's organizing, none explicitly address the many feminist groups engaged in broader anarchist, queer, anti-capitalist and anti-globalization movements.

The majority of the more theoretical pieces in this collection are versions of previously published papers. For those new to Third Wave feminist research, Astrid Henry's "Solitary Sisterhood," Kimberly Springer's "Strongblackwomen and Black Feminism" and Colleen Mack-Canty's "Third Wave Feminism and Ecofeminism" offer a good overview of different theoretical developments in US Third Wave feminist theory. However, those already engaged with Third Wave feminism may be disappointed that the collection offers little in the way of new theoretical work. This is, of course, due in part to the time lag of academic book publishing. Yet, it may also be that the collections' inclusion of only theoretical essays explicitly engaging the term Third Wave in the context of the United States has led to the exclusion or oversight of innovative new work on contemporary women's movements. Emergent scholars such as Ingrid Hoofd, Alexandra Zavos, Iris van der Tuin and Emma Dowling (to name just a few researchers outside of the US) are generating a contemporary feminist theory looking at young women's practices that embraces and extends upon Third Wave feminist tenets. Turning to such work we could ask questions such as: How does contemporary US feminism relate to other national and transnational movements? Why are so many young feminists engaged in queer, anti-capitalist and anarchist politics? What might we learn from the definitions and explorations of contemporary feminism being formulated in other national and transnational contexts?<sup>3</sup>

The final essay in the collection, Ednie Kaeh Garrison's "Are We on a Wave Length Yet?", offers an alternative to the oceanographic wave model and its inherent problems. Garrison argues that the oceanographic model maintains an elite history that defines the highs and lows of feminist activism. The model shows a longing for a cohesive, united women's movement which can make it blind to dispersed forms of feminist activism going on. In place of this oceanographic wave model, Garrison proposes a metaphor of radio waves or wavelengths. She suggests that radio wavelengths can help us conceptualize multiple forms of feminism occurring simultaneously. Just as there are different wavelengths we can tune into, there are different modes of activism we can engage. Garrison suggests that, like a radio, feminism is something we carry with us as we both receive and transmit ideas.

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<sup>3</sup> Two recent publications that offer autobiographical accounts of feminists' contemporary national and transnational activism are Labaton, Vivien and Dawn Lundy Martin (eds.) 2004. *The Fire This Time: Young Activists and the New Feminism* (New York: Anchor Books) and Melody Berger (ed.) 2006. *We Don't Need Another Wave: Dispatches from the Next Generation of Feminists* (New York: Seal Press). However, as Jo Reger points out, there has not yet been a collection of empirical research on these modes of activism.

In her exploration of this radio metaphor Garrison makes a strong argument for the multiplicity of feminist activism. The anti-globalization movement was recently theorized as a “movement of movements,” a concept which has now been widely adopted. Perhaps it is also fruitful to think of the Contemporary Women’s Movement as a movement of movements—dispersed and not always visible to those looking for unity, centrality or cohesion. At the same time, it is dangerous to over-romanticize such fragmentation. Dispersal is often due to the absence of funding, lack of resources and economic structures that make it difficult for many people to participate in social movements. However, if we think of the Contemporary Women’s Movement as a movement of movements, we can ask a different set of questions focused on the needs and potential of fragmented feminist groups. How do we build communication infrastructures between groups? Would it be possible to host more regional meetings or public forums that brought different groups together? What is the potential for mass demonstrations that move beyond the models of International Women’s Day marches and Pro-Choice rallies?

Jo Reger’s collection prompts feminist researchers to ask questions that can promote movement building. Her call for empirical studies—while not offered by all those in this collection—highlights the need for feminist researchers to further engage with contemporary feminist activism. Naomi Wolf, *Buffy the vampire slayer* and *Bust* magazine—however popular and pleasurable they may be—are not the Third Wave activist vanguard. To gauge activism and provide praxis-oriented research relevant to movement participants, we must continue to look at local organizing as well as its relation to transnational movements. We must search beyond images of the Third Wave that the big publishing houses and corporate media provide. Riffing on Garrison’s metaphor, perhaps we need to turn up the volume and scan through the crackle for different stations because the contemporary women’s movement will not be televised.