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### Looking at Lesbian Feminism 1970-2005: Conversations Across Generations

Polly Thistlethwaite  
*CUNY Graduate Center*

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and search systems. Tara, who has a great deal of experience getting websites online, is helping out this spring as a part-time web page project manager. Thanks are also due to the members of the IRN's Librarian Advisory Board—**Ellen Greenblatt, Mike Handis, Polly Thistlethwaite, Daniel Tsang,** and others—who are helping with the thesaurus project. The IRN main Advisory Board, as well as the Latin American and Caribbean Editorial Board, and the Asia Regional IRN Network, and many other volunteers will be working hard and fast this spring to create connections between thesaurus words and concepts across four languages: Chinese, English, French, and Spanish. (If you're interested in helping with this project of translating, transliterating, and establishing relationships between "queer" terms across languages, please contact us at [clagsglobal@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:clagsglobal@gc.cuny.edu).) For more updates and information about the IRN, visit [www.irnweb.org](http://www.irnweb.org). ♦

# Looking at Lesbian Feminism 1970 — 2005: Conversations Across Generations

BY POLLY THISTLETHWAITE

## What has become of lesbian feminism?

Over 100 activists, scholars, and writers convened at the CUNY Graduate Center on Friday, October 28, 2005, for intergenerational discussions about lesbian-feminism. Activists from the first 'organized' lesbian movement paired with lesbian activists who came out post-lesbian-feminism to talk about lesbian-feminism and the body, culture, sex, and movement building. Together with a moderator, participants in the four featured discussions shared convictions and experiences about class, race, transgender politics, misogyny, privilege, dating strategies, sexual styles, and liberation struggles.

E. Francis White, Mistress of Ceremonies, said in her introductory remarks, "If CLAGS is going to put on an event about lesbian-feminism, it doesn't assume a middle class white



Tami Gold and  
Cheryl Clarke

women's movement; the roots are more complex than that." Organizers Marcia Gallo and Polly Thistlethwaite worked with a planning team that shared that conviction: Marion Banzhaf, Jennifer Cheng, Paisley Currah, Carmen Vazquez, and Fran White.

Mandy Hu moderating "the body" discussion posed a challenging question

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*New Editors of GLQ, continued from page 7*

work – including the Archive and Gallery sections, which publicize forms of intellectual production beyond the academic essay. In order to keep up with the sheer mass of important work regularly published in the field, we've incorporated, under the editorship of Jody Greene, the short book reviews formerly published in the *Lesbian and Gay Studies Newsletter*. We have a new Social Science Review Editor, Martin Manalansan, who joins Laura Doan, *GLQ*'s Humanities Review Editor. Under the direction of Chris Straayer and Tom Waugh, the recently renamed *Moving Image Review* is regularly incorporating interviews and roundtable formats, bringing together diverse scholars and practitioners in order to think broadly about contemporary moving image cultures. And we welcome and look forward to working with an entirely new editorial board, whose members represent a wide range of disciplinary specializations inside LGBTQ studies.

To some extent the success of *GLQ*'s first decade is one of the things that makes planning its second decade challenging – there are many more venues for queer scholarship, including ones that are not designated as such; there have been significant institutional and political changes, some of which have neutralized the non-normative charge of queer critique. Committed to a flexibility that is alive to the possibilities of continued change, we want to publish work that newly expands the recognizable limits of what has come to be known as LGBTQ studies. ♦

Note: This article is adapted from the Editor's Statement published in *GLQ* 12.1. *GLQ* is published quarterly by Duke University Press. For subscriptions and further information, see [www.dukeupress.edu](http://www.dukeupress.edu).

right off the bat. She asked how post lesbian-feminist transgender identities challenged lesbian-feminist identities. Marion Banzhaf, a veteran of women's health, reproductive rights, and AIDS movements, responded by tracing links among those and transgender politics. "Lesbian feminism demystified the body using tools taken from the establishment," she said, likening this to the trans movement's challenging the medical establishment. Carolyn Connelly, performer and Babeland education coordinator, voiced concerns about lesbian feminism and transphobia.



*Karen Thompson and Staceyann Chin*

Discussion followed about the role of misogyny and male supremacy, economic obstacles for sex-reassignment surgery, and a perceived threat to butches posed by FTM identities.

The culture discussion followed, with poet Staceyann Chin talking about lesbian invisibility in relation to the visibility of her color. With lawyer Karen Thompson moderating Chin and filmmaker Tami Gold, the culture discussion featured three women talking passionately about still having to "wear all the isms" in a world that fails to recognize fem identities. Chin contrasted her real world with the glamorous lesbians on Showtime's "The L-Word" saying, "Some days I go out and don't look all that sharp." The difference between lesbians imagined and lesbians in the neighborhood is an endless source of struggle, irony, and comedy.

Filmmaker Jean Carlomusto moderated activist participants Jennifer Cheng and Carmen Vazquez in the conversation about s-e-x. Cheng calls herself a "queer sex-positive femme lesbian who loves her sneakers as well as

her stilettos," and recounted her program to date women of color given the relatively larger response she was getting from white women. Both Cheng and Vazquez both said they went looking for great sex and became lesbians as a result, not the other way 'round. Butch-identified Vazquez said "sex is a gender thing," connected to intimate exchange of power and vulnerability. She embraces both femaleness and maleness in her female body. Neither Cheng nor Vazquez embraced the stereotypical lesbian-feminist model of "side-by-side reciprocal sex."

With psychotherapist Judy Wenning moderating, poet Cheryl Clarke, historian Blanche Wiesen Cook, and writer Surina Khan rounded out the afternoon's featured conversations. Clarke recounted her early path as a writer. Cook and Khan emphasized the contributions by lesbian feminists of color to the discussions of racism which played later in feminist arenas with reverberations beyond and outside of feminist circles. This conversation addressed the conservative political backlash and the changing faces of resistance to new and old forms of resistance to reinforced and re-imaged oppressions. It also wound around to confessions from some who did like to watch the L-Word.

Over 30 have signed up to participate in a yahoo group to follow up these conversations in an online forum. Contact the CLAGS office ([clags@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:clags@gc.cuny.edu)) for more information.

The conference was funded by the New York Council for the Humanities. WBAI (99.5 FM - Pacifica Radio) in New York City, taped the conference for broadcast at a time still to be announced. To listen to the raw, unedited tapes, go online to the Archives page at [www.clags.org](http://www.clags.org). ♦



*Event Coordinators Marcia M. Gallo and Polly Thistlethwaite.*



*Blanche Wiesen Cook, Judy Wenning, and Surina Khan*

*Polly Thistlethwaite is an Associate Professor and Associate Librarian for Public Services at the CUNY Graduate Center. She has worked extensively with the Lesbian Herstory Archives, and she was recently awarded a PSC/CUNY Research Grant to study GLBT public history in Berlin.*