

conceptualization in the writing.

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***Feminist Engagements: Reading, Resisting, and Revisioning Male Theorists in Education and Cultural Studies.*** Kathleen Weiler, editor. New York: Routledge, 2001; 256 pages; ISBN 0415925762; \$21.95US (paper).

The essays in *Feminist Engagements* respond to a very good and timely question: what is the significance of feminist engagements with male theorists? The question invites some serious considerations of what counts as feminist scholarship and how this scholarship relates to what is often seen as masculinity masquerading as universalism. On the whole, however, the collection is markedly uneven in terms of the calibre of arguments made in the individual essays. This is to be expected in any collection of essays, but the bimodal quality distribution in *Feminist Engagements* is especially pronounced.

Rather than using feminist engagements with male theorists as occasions to further our thinking *about* the uneasy and useful tensions that get produced, many of the essays here seem just to point to them. At least half the authors tend to rehearse common complaints about male theorists (who don't acknowledge women in their paradigms or whose paradigms are actively sexist). This is an obvious starting point. But too often the essays skip to an equally obvious endpoint (that feminists find male theorists and their paradigms extremely useful for doing feminist work) without lingering enough on the very interesting middle points. Some essays tend to rely heavily on summarizing the work of male theorists (essays by Cally White, Jane Kenway, and Annette Henry, for example) while authors such as Elizabeth Adams evince more adoration than critique.

This said, some essays do engage with the problem in more subtle and careful ways. Particularly good are Frances Maher's essay on John Dewey, Kathleen Weiler's "Rereading [of] Paulo Freire," Alice Pitt's psychoanalytic inquiry into "The Dreamwork of Autobiography," and Patti

Lather's assessment of "Critical Pedagogy and Its Complicities." For instance, instead of pointing out particular silences in Dewey's thought, Maher investigates theories of pedagogy to explore "how their silences about gender...have operated to silence and confuse *as well as liberate and encourage*" (15; my emphasis). Her original and intricate analysis considers "the female teacher" in Dewey's work as a particular kind to authority figure in order to examine the gendered assumptions behind both feminist theory and progressive education. Weiler's, perhaps the best essay in the collection, provides a trenchant critique of Paulo Freire's troubled relationship to feminism and his claims to actually be a woman. She attends carefully to Freire's use of pronouns and considers what is at stake when editors and translators try to gloss over Freire's sexism. Meanwhile, Pitt uses psychoanalytic theory and an analysis of trauma to consider education beyond the moment of actual knowledge transmission. She provocatively suggests that "the detours of *Nasträglichkeit* [deferred revision]...return us to the problem of education, of how knowledge comes to matter in belated time" (104). Finally, Lather's work is a theoretical *tour de force*, engaging with the history and critique of post-modern theory to highlight the possibility of "knowing from our failures of knowledge" (188) and gesturing to "a double-edged story that attests to the possibilities of feminist practice yet, in the very telling, registers the limits of it as a vehicle for claiming truth" (191). Her analysis indexes the liberatory power of feminism while acknowledging the limitations and the failures of knowledge that feminism can produce. These four essays all advance feminist thinking by assessing the analytical paradigms that we have inherited.

This book needs more essays like its strongest ones - essays that analyze feminist theory's relationships to histories of theory more generally. As a collection overall, the unevenness of *Feminist Engagements* can be said to belie the work of the best thinkers between its covers.

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