

Yee, Jessica, ed. 2011. *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. ISBN 978-1-926888-49-1. Paperback: 15.00 CAD. Pages: 176.

Reviewed by Julie E. Dowsett
York University

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Feminism has been institutionalized and professionalized, both within and outside of academia. Today “feminist theory” can be listed as an area of expertise on an academic curriculum vitae almost as legitimately as something like “modern political thought.” A degree in women’s studies can be parlayed into a middle-class career that involves sitting around tables talking about “women’s issues.” The institutionalization and professionalization of feminism has concerned many feminist activists. For example, only some women have enjoyed its benefits, particularly those already privileged by their race, class, gender identity and/or sexuality. In addition, there are larger concerns about the process of institutionalization threatening politicized forms of feminism. These and other concerns are addressed in the edited volume *Feminism for Real: Deconstructing the Academic Industrial Complex of Feminism*. In her introduction, Jessica Yee poses what is perhaps the central question of the volume: “when feminism itself has become its own form of oppression, what do we have to say about it?” (12). The various contributors – who locate themselves as insiders, outsiders or both to institutionalized/professional feminism – offer a variety of replies to this question. In a format reminiscent of *Canadian Woman Studies*, the book largely consists of short, accessible articles with some interviews, poetry, photographs and art thrown into the mix. In their various modes of expression, many of the contributors offer insightful and much-needed critiques of what Yee dubs “the academic industrial complex of feminism” (hereafter AICF). At the same time, the book could have been improved with a better developed introduction, a clear definition of the AICF, the omission of some entries of questionable relevance to the topic at hand, and the addition of a conclusion or epilogue.

The strongest contributions to this collection are personal narratives from a diverse group of women (and one Two-Spirit man) that examine their experiences with feminism. Most of these contributors deal with feminism in academia, although some deal with non-academic institutionalized/professional feminism. In the former group, the contributors describe their experiences of oppression in women’s studies

and other feminist classes. Many describe feminist theory as disconnected from real experiences (93, 105, 124). For example, in her piece “Feminism and Eating Disorders: Wishful thinking for a more caring attitude,” Cassandra Polyzou makes the persuasive argument that due to the way feminists have theorized eating disorders, the notion of a feminist with an eating disorder has become a contradiction in terms (127). Feminists who struggle with eating disorders (including Polyzou herself) are disparaged as “bad feminists” who have betrayed the cause (130-132). Many contributors contend that insofar as feminist theory is connected to experience, it still tends to privilege the experiences of white middle-class women. For example, Krysta Williams and Erin Konsmo point out that women’s studies and other feminist courses continue to allow tokenism (that is, including one article from an Indigenous person and/or a person of colour) to stand in for actual engagement with questions of race (30). Shabiki Crane discusses how her first-year women’s studies class rarely mentioned colonialism and consistently represented non-white women as victims, such as Muslim women who wear the hijab (78). The AQSazine Collective demands an end to erroneous assumptions about the feminist politics of hijab-wearing Muslim students in the feminist classroom (75). Although most of the contributors dealing with feminism in academia discuss their experiences in undergraduate classrooms, Diandra Jurkic-Walls discusses her experiences in graduate school. She critiques the prevalence of back-biting and more feminist-than-thou (or lefter-than-thou) discourse; moreover, she suggests that feminist academics accuse each other of being racist because they have yet to figure out where feminism stands on race and racism (145-147).

There are also strong contributions that describe people’s experiences with non-academic institutionalized and professional feminism. For example, Andrea Plaid discusses the distinction between “The Degreed” and the “Self-Taught” in the sex-positive community and critiques the assumption that the latter have a less nuanced understanding of political or social issues (98). Latoya Peterson, editor of the well-known blog *Racialicious* and a college drop-out, describes how she inadvertently became enmeshed in the world of third-wave feminist activists and writers. Louis Esme Cruz, an Indigenous Two-Spirit man, reads activist spaces that are “women-only” as another form of colonialism in that contemporary gender binaries have been imposed by Europeans onto Indigenous people (54).

Unfortunately these and other important contributions are somewhat overshadowed by a poorly developed introduction, the

inclusion of some seemingly irrelevant pieces and the lack of a proper conclusion. Although the book is supposed to be “deconstructing the academic industrial complex of feminism,” at no point in her introduction does Yee define what she means by the term. The scope and definition of the AICF remains unclear throughout the book; however in subsequent interventions, the feminists who live and work within the AICF are described in a variety of ways. For example, they are graduate students who sit around with their fair trade coffee reading 900 pages a week, they are writers who preach the “one-true feminism” and perhaps most revealingly, they can really put together a white hipster outfit (39, 47, 173). In other words, these are self-important women who immerse themselves in the aesthetic of the working class in a fallacious attempt to escape their own privilege. Although the nature of the AICF becomes clearer over the course of the book through such descriptions, a better developed introduction involving not only a definition of the AICF but also an overview of book as a whole would have been helpful. The confusion created by the term AICF is heightened by the inclusion of some entries of questionable relevance. For example, it is unclear how Nimikii Couchie’s poems or Lisa Mantie’s article on the lack of feminist voices in the mainstream media relate to the mandate of the book. In the concluding article, “On Learning How *Not* to Be An Asshole Academic Feminist,” Kate Klein offers a prototypical narrative of her developing feminist consciousness at university, yet offers little on the titular topic. Instead of allowing the Klein piece to stand in for a conclusion, an epilogue or conclusion from Yee might have rendered some of the problems with the introduction less pressing and given the book as a whole a greater sense of cohesiveness.

Whatever its flaws, many contributors to *Feminism for Real* offer insightful discussions of how the institutionalization and professionalization of feminism has been advantageous for some women at the expense of others. This might be best expressed by Shaunga Tagore in her poem describing feminists

debating about feminist organizing in high theory discourse while barely-paid migrant workers prepare lunches for seminars, conferences, forums and get deported the next day (37).

As a whole, the book offers a long-overdue intervention into the persistence of colonial relations, racism, classism and elitism in institutionalized and professional feminism today. This book is particularly recommended not only for academic feminists, but for all left academics

and “Degreed” people (working in social justice-related fields) who wish to critically interrogate their roles.

Aronsen, Lawrence. 2010. *City of Love and Revolution: Vancouver in the Sixties*. Vancouver: New Star Books. ISBN 978-1-55420-048-1. Paperback: 24.00 CAD. Pages: 208.

Mills, Sean. 2010. *The Empire Within: Postcolonial Thought and Political Activism in Sixties Montréal*. Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press. ISBN 978-0-7735-3965-1. Paperback: 29.95 CAD. Pages: 302.

Reviewed by Douglas Nesbitt
Queen’s University

These two city-focused studies provide invaluable contributions to an emerging literature on Canada and Quebec’s “sixties” – an ambiguously periodized “decade” sometimes beginning as early as 1956 and often extending well into the 1970s.

Each historian clearly identifies his sixties in relation to various phases in the history of their respective city’s conception of the left. For Aronsen, Vancouver’s “sixties” extend loosely from 1963 to the fall of Saigon in 1975. Yet, most of his research focuses upon the years 1967 to 1972. Montréal’s radical “decade” also begins in 1963, a year in which the Front de libération du Québec (FLQ) is formed and the electorally-oriented Rassemblement pour l’indépendance nationale (RIN) becomes increasingly engaged with the anti-colonial ideas of Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and others. Mills does not declare the “sixties” to be over in 1972, but concludes his study with the Common Front general strikes of that year.

Aronsen’s work focuses primarily on the cultural transformations of post-war society, overturning a staid Protestant Vancouver. Following a tour through Kitsilano’s emergence as the centre of Vancouver’s hippie scene, we move to the east side where the Vancouver Free University (VFU) emerged to meet the needs of the local community in an equally counter-cultural – though not explicitly radical – leftist way. This distinction sets the VFU apart from other free university experiments in North America, including Toronto’s Rochdale College, which were