

Jaime Harker and Cecilia Konchar Farr, eds. *This Book Is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics*

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The 11 essays assembled by co-editors Jaime Harker (University of Mississippi) and Cecilia Konchar Farr (St. Catherine University) in *This Book Is an Action: Feminist Print Culture and Activist Aesthetics* affirm the significance of print culture as a form of activism within second-wave feminism. Viewing print as a revolutionary form of self-expression, feminists built a communications network “authors, illustrators, typesetters, editors, publishers, distributors, bookstore owners, reviewers, and readers” dedicated to working collaboratively to produce and promote works by, for, and about women. In the process, they shined a light on taboo subjects, radical theories, and experimental forms of literature often dismissed as inferior by mainstream publishers, editors, and literary critics. The result “a diverse feminist literary canon” is their legacy to us.

Taken from Robin Morgan’s pivotal *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), this volume’s title underscores the revolutionary power of second-wave print culture. Volume contributors from the fields of women’s and gender studies, English, Medieval Studies, queer studies, and librarianship document how activists from the 1960s to the early 1980s adopted feminist business practices to produce “the distinctive feminist culture of letters that emerged with the reawakened women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s” (2). By fostering the production of experimental forms of literature, including poetry and genre fiction, feminist editors and publishers enabled a diverse literary output to flourish at a time when a patriarchal and capitalist publishing establishment often dismissed women’s words as inferior.

This Book Is an Action is organized into two sections. Part I addresses the structures and systems of production and distribution. In “Feminist Publishing/Publishing Feminism: Experimentation in Second-Wave Book Publishing,” Jennifer Gilley uses two case studies “the publication of *Sisterhood is Powerful* and *This Bridge Called My Back*” to explore the role of class and race in efforts to interject feminist politics into the economics of book publishing. In her study of feminist newsletters and newspapers of the 1970s, Agatha Beins documents the critical role ephemeral publications played in linking feminists and ideas in an era before the internet and social media. Julie Enszer’s essay, which analyzes how feminists created *Women in Distribution* (1974–1979) to aid small lesbian and feminist publishers in circulating their books and journals to wider audiences, highlights a critical question confronting feminists of the 1970s “is it possible to create an economically sustainable business “to support and nurture feminist revolutions” (13)? In the final essay of this section, Yung-Hsing Wu counters the notion of close reading and feminism as antagonists, arguing that “reading, because it involved identification, [crystallized] a consciousness women had not possessed before” (88).

Part II consists of seven essays arranged chronologically by topic to offer close readings of important second-wave texts. Jill E. Anderson examines alternative natures in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* and *The Edible Woman*, while Lisa Botshon explores how Anne Roiphe challenged patriarchal

conceptions of motherhood in *Up the Sandbox!*. Jay Hood complicates our understanding of Erica Jong's *Fear of Flying* in his close reading of representations of the body, while Jaime Cantrell focuses on the performance of lesbian hypervisibility in Jane Chambers's lesbi-dramas. In "Creating a Nonpatriarchal Lineage in Bertha Harris's *Lover*," Laura Christine Godfrey takes a critical look at Harris's use of epigraphs about female saints to create "a more imaginatively realized community of women who successfully live outside the confines of patriarchal society" (203). Phillip Gordon's piece argues that *The Color Purple* became the first American AIDS narrative. The final essay, by Charlotte Beyer, reappraises Sara Paretsky's portrayal of feminism in *Indemnity Only*, arguing that narratives about strong women like V. I. Warshawski facilitated the transmission of second-wave feminism into mainstream culture.

Readers seeking a nuanced exploration of feminist publishing and key texts produced during second-wave feminism will find *This Book Is an Action* a valuable addition to their libraries.

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