The Scholar & Feminist Conference
50 Years of Meeting the Moment



For half of a century, The Scholar and Feminist Conference has provided a mutually galvanizing space for scholars, activists, and artists to confront the most pressing issues at any given moment. Defining scholarship as for action from the very beginning, the conference has with unflagging regularity “met the moment” with intersectional feminist knowledge to inspire and build a robust response to contemporary crises. In many ways, the conference has grown up alongside academic feminism itself, yet, rather than uncritically mirror this history, it has consistently pushed back against feminism’s institutionalization. The conference highlights provocations, controversies, foundational gaps, and struggles that both cement its field-forming position and trouble a feminist progress narrative.

The conference’s history of meeting the moment with a vigorous feminist response provides a toolkit for understanding the present. This year, it asks: what are feminist responses to the global rise of authoritarianism and fascism, white Christian nationalism, ethnic cleansing and colonial violence, attacks on higher education and academic freedom, and assaults on queer and trans rights?



Which practices of solidarity and feminist arts of transformation can mobilize resistance, provide sustenance, and produce social change? What can we learn from moments in our past, and how do they serve as a springboard for action today?

SCHEDULE

Read the full program online:

Friday, February 27

10:00 a.m.
Welcome by Rebecca Jordan-Young

10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Meeting the Moment: BCRW Directors on Defending Feminist Knowledge
Leslie Calman, Elizabeth Castelli, Janet Jakobsen, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Temma Kaplan, Premilla Nadasen, Catharine R. Stimpson

12:00 - 1:30 p.m.
Lunch (Lower Level Lobby, Diana Center)
Introductory remarks by Jean Howard

1:30 - 3:00 p.m.
Protectionist Feminism and its Legacies: From the Sex Wars to Carceral Feminism
Elizabeth Bernstein, Lisa Duggan, Greta LaFleur, Sophie Lewis, Lila Abu-Luhgod, Amber Musser

3:15 - 4:45 p.m.
The University in/and Crisis
Abigail Boggs, Nick Mitchell, C. Riley Snorton, Thenmozhi Soundararajan, Anupama Rao, Maya Wind

4:45 - 5:45 p.m.
Break and refreshments (James Room, 4th Floor, Barnard Hall)

5:45 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Performance by Toshi Reagon and BIGLovely (LeFrak Theater, Barnard Hall)

Saturday, February 28

10:00 a.m.
Welcome

10:30 a.m. - 12:00 p.m.
Transnational Feminist Perspectives on Survival, Solidarity, and Transformation
Zahra Ali, Sa'ed Atshan, Manijeh Moradian, Catherine Sameh, Evren Savci, Neferti X. M. Tadiar

12:00 - 1:30 p.m.
Lunch (Lower Level Lobby, Diana Center)

1:30 - 3:00 p.m.
How We Write Black Feminism Now
Tina Campt, Edwidge Danticat, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, Saidiya Hartman, Jacqueline Woodson

3:15 p.m. - 4:45 p.m.
Keynote by Judith Butler
with an introduction by Jack Halberstam

5:00 - 6:30 p.m.
Reception (James Room, 4th Floor, Barnard Hall)

ASL Interpretation

Live ASL interpretation will be provided by Brandon Kazen-Maddox of Body Language Productions and DB-TIP (DeafBlind Training,Interpreting and Professional Development). If you have questions about accessibility, please don't hesitate to contact a member of BCRW's staff.

Beteween Sessions

Weaving Dreams Exhibition: Showcases handmade quilts and other textile artifacts by quilting artist and Barnard Professor Kim F. Hall, curated alongside pieces by her mother, Vera P. Hall, and Barnard alum Carter Watts '25 (Milstein Lobby)

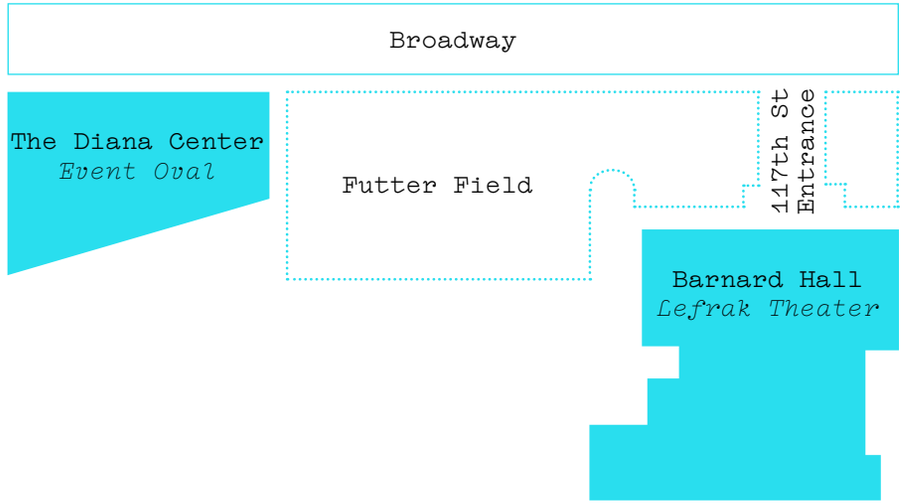
Bookstand by Word Up Community Bookshop: A curated selection of books by conference speakers and related authors, available for browsing and purchase (Main Lobby, Diana Center)

Instagram

@thebcrw

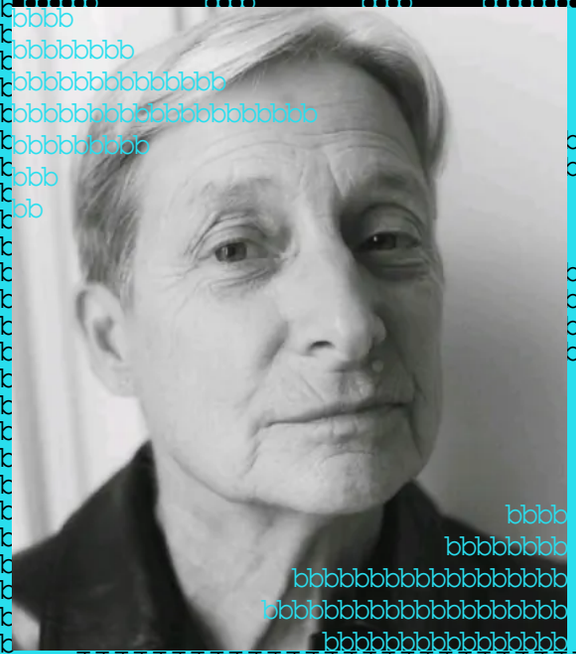
Map

All panels are located in the Event Oval. The performance and receptions are located in Barnard Hall.



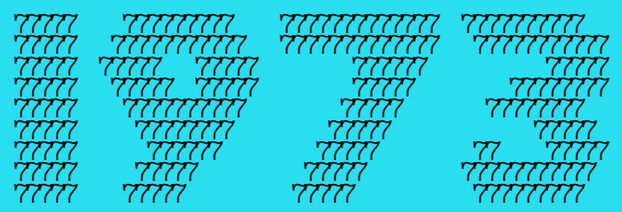
JUDITH BUTLER

Keynote speaker



Judith Butler joins the 50th Scholar and Feminist Conference as a thinker whose work has set the terms of feminist debate for decades. From the theory of gender performativity to later work that rethought kinship and precarity and developed new frameworks for building coalition across movements, Butler's scholarship has reshaped how feminist, queer, and trans studies understand power, vulnerability, and collective life.

Their presence at S&F 50 reflects not only the breadth of this work, but its urgency in the present. In their 2024 book, *Who's Afraid of Gender?* and recent public engagement, Butler examines the central role of "gender" in authoritarianism, censorship, attacks on trans life, and global crises of democracy. Their urgent work models feminist frameworks for thinking collective responsibility and resistance in a moment of profound uncertainty.

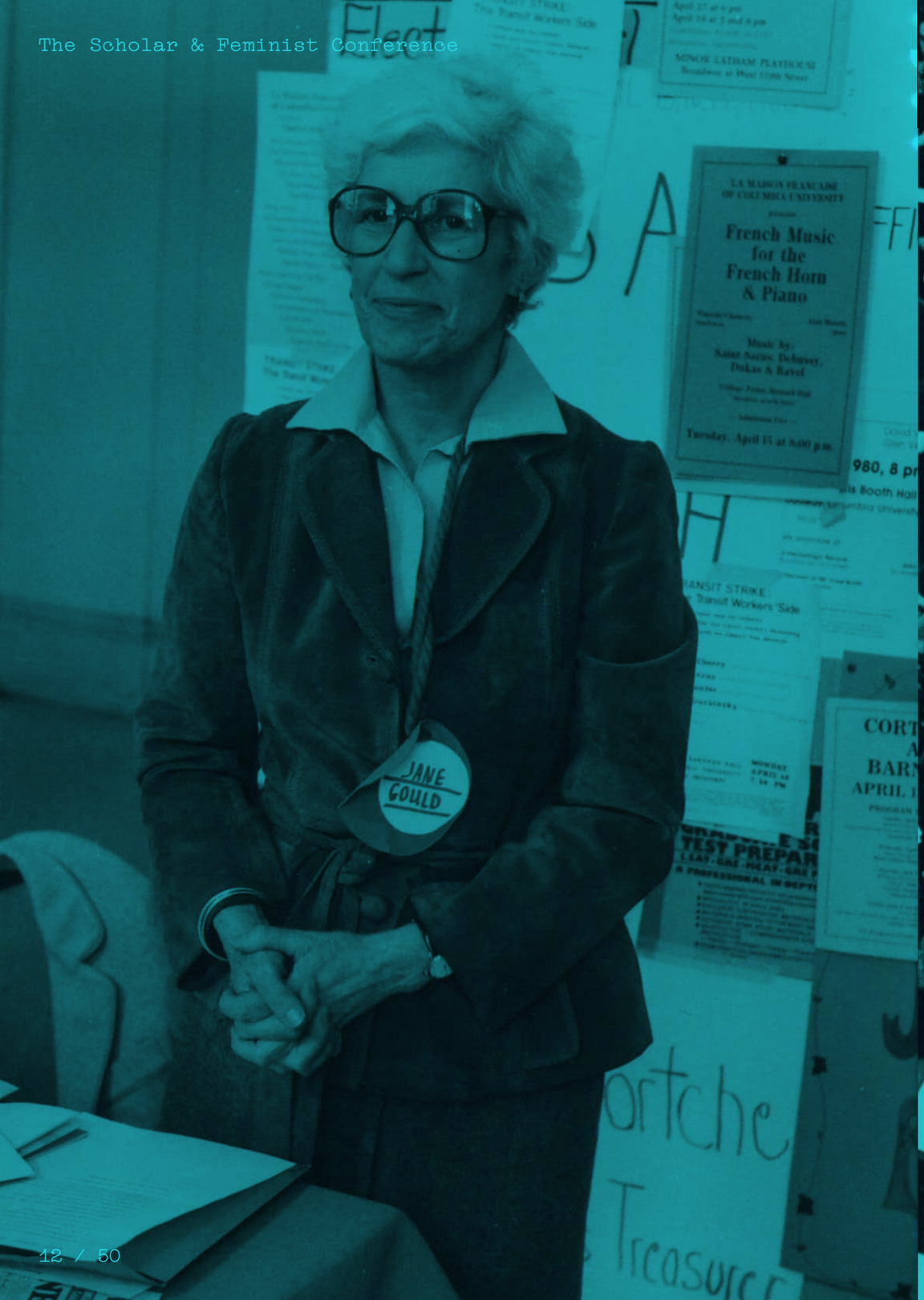


As we mark the fiftieth Scholar and Feminist Conference, we begin by looking back to 1973. Just two years after what was then known as the Barnard Women's Center was founded, it hosted its first conference, "Women Learn from Women." Organized by a small collective from eight New York-area colleges, the conference asked foundational questions: How far will legal solutions take us? What are emancipated lifestyles? Do women have a separate experience of education?



Welcoming nearly a thousand participants, it created a space defined by collectivity, accessibility, and shared inquiry. With no keynote speakers, an entry fee of one dollar, and free childcare, the conference invited knowledge to circulate freely among women. Crucially, when activists from Columbia's School of General Studies urged organizers to include movement voices alongside academic ones, the event transformed from an academic meeting into a new kind of feminist convening, one that recognized knowledge as something produced not only about women but by women through lived experience and collective process.

This model took formal shape the following year with the first official Scholar and Feminist Conference, "Conflict, Compromise, Creativity" (1974). Under the leadership of Jane Gould and coordinated by Susan Sacks, the conference established the premise that would define the next five decades: feminist scholarship must be inseparable from the work of social transformation. Hundreds gathered in Barnard's gym for panels, followed by thirteen participatory workshops, structures shaped by a collaborative, consensus-driven planning process that reflected feminist principles in action. The questions posed at that first meeting—about the impact of feminism on scholarship and on participants' own understandings of women's lives—continue to resonate today. In the pages that follow, we highlight moments from this evolving history, tracing how the Scholar and Feminist Conference has continually "met the moment" while experimenting with new forms of feminist knowledge-making, community-building, and collective imagination.


JANE GOULD
French Music for the French Horn & Piano



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At the sixth Scholar and Feminist conference, “The Future of Difference” (1979), Quandra Prettyman gave a workshop titled “Visibility and Difference: Black Feminism in History and Literature.”



1980 “Class, Race and Sex: Exploring Contradictions, Affirming Connections”

1981 “The Dynamics of Control”

1982 “Towards a Politics of Sexuality”

1983 “The Question of Technology”
Temma Kaplan appointed Director

1984 “Women and Resistance”

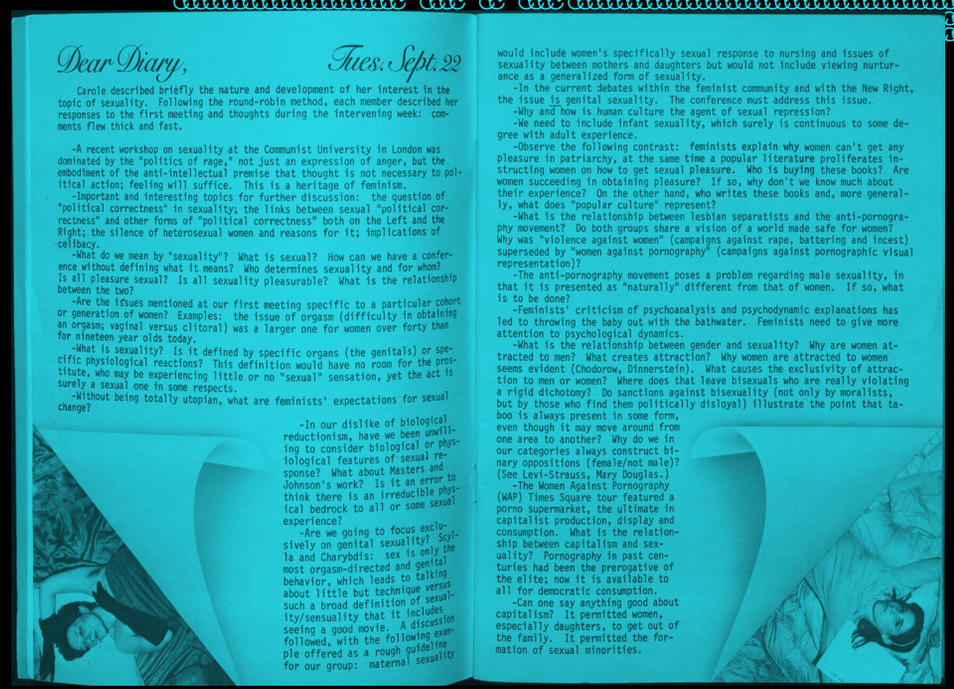
1985 “Women in Culture and Politics”

1986 “Women’s Images and Politics”

1987 “Women in the 21st Century: Looking Forward and Looking Back”

1988 “Motherhood Versus Sisterhood”

1989 “Women and Public Policy: Making the Difference”



Dear Diary, *Tues. Sept. 22*

Carole described briefly the nature and development of her interest in the topic of sexuality. Following the round-robin method, each member described her responses to the first meeting and thoughts during the intervening week: comments flew thick and fast.

-A recent workshop on sexuality at the Communist University in London was dominated by the "politics of rage," not just an expression of anger, but the embodiment of the anti-intellectual premise that thought is not necessary to political action; feeling will suffice. This is a heritage of feminism.

-Important and interesting topics for further discussion: the question of "political correctness" in sexuality; the links between sexual "political correctness" and other forms of "political correctness" both on the Left and the Right; the silence of heterosexual women and reasons for it; implications of celibacy.

-What do we mean by "sexuality"? What is sexual? How can we have a conference without defining what it means? Who determines sexuality and for whom? Is all pleasure sexual? Is all sexuality pleasurable? What is the relationship between the two?

-Are the issues mentioned at our first meeting specific to a particular cohort or generation of women? Examples: the issue of orgasm (difficulty in obtaining an orgasm; vaginal versus clitoral) was a larger one for women over forty than for nineteen year olds today.

-What is sexuality? Is it defined by specific organs (the genitals) or specific physiological reactions? This definition would have no room for the prostitute, who may be experiencing little or no "sexual" sensation, yet the act is surely a sexual one in some respects.

-Without being totally utopian, what are feminists' expectations for sexual change?

-In our dislike of biological reductionism, have we been unwilling to consider biological or physiological features of sexual response? What about Masters and Johnson's work? Is it an error to think there is an irreducible physical bedrock to all or some sexual experience?

-Are we going to focus exclusively on genital sexuality? Scylla and Charybdis: sex is only the most orgasm-directed and genital behavior, which leads to talking about little but technique versus such a broad definition of sexuality/sensuality that it includes seeing a good movie. A discussion followed, with the following example offered as a rough guideline for our group: maternal sexuality would include women's specifically sexual response to nursing and issues of sexuality between mothers and daughters but would not include viewing nurturance as a generalized form of sexuality.

-In the current debates within the feminist community and with the New Right, the issue is genital sexuality. The conference must address this issue.

-Why and how is human culture the agent of sexual repression?

-We need to include infant sexuality, which surely is continuous to some degree with adult experience.

-Observe the following contrast: feminists explain why women can't get any pleasure in patriarchy, at the same time a popular literature proliferates instructing women on how to get sexual pleasure. Who is buying these books? Are women succeeding in obtaining pleasure? If so, why don't we know much about their experience? On the other hand, who writes these books and, more generally, what does "popular culture" represent?

-What is the relationship between lesbian separatists and the anti-pornography movement? Do both groups share a vision of a world made safe for women? Why was "violence against women" (campaigns against rape, battering and incest) superseded by "women against pornography" (campaigns against pornographic visual representation)?

-The anti-pornography movement poses a problem regarding male sexuality, in that it is presented as "naturally" different from that of women. If so, what is to be done?

-Feminists' criticism of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic explanations has led to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Feminists need to give more attention to psychological dynamics.

-What is the relationship between gender and sexuality? Why are women attracted to men? What creates attraction? Why women are attracted to women seems evident (Chodorow, Dinnerstein). What causes the exclusivity of attraction to men or women? Where does that leave bisexuals who are really violating a rigid dichotomy? Do sanctions against bisexuality (not only by moralists, but by those who find them politically disloyal) illustrate the point that taboo is always present in some form, even though it may move around from one area to another? Why do we in our categories always construct binary oppositions (female/not male)? (See Levi-Strauss, Mary Douglas.)

-The Women Against Pornography (WAP) Times Square tour featured a porno supermarket, the ultimate in capitalist production, display and consumption. What is the relationship between capitalism and sexuality? Pornography in past centuries had been the prerogative of the elite; now it is available to all for democratic consumption.

-Can one say anything good about capitalism? It permitted women, especially daughters, to get out of the family. It permitted the formation of sexual minorities.

Diary of a Conference on Sexuality

The 1982 Scholar and Feminist Conference, “Toward a Politics of Sexuality,” became a flashpoint in the feminist “sex wars” when Barnard administrators, under pressure from antipornography activists, confiscated 8,500 copies of its program, the now-legendary Diary of a Conference on Sexuality. The resulting national controversy underscored the conference’s intellectual and political urgency, as presentations by Gayle Rubin, Hortense Spillers, Amber Hollibaugh, Dorothy Allison, Esther Newton, and others helped generate frameworks that continue to shape feminist, gender, and sexuality studies.



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Hortense Spillers' essay reframed the 1982 feminist conference, arguing Black women's sexuality occupies the interstices of discourse. She critiqued white feminist assumptions and calls for a new Black feminist grammar.

Barnard College
Women's Center
Presents:

THE SCHOLAR AND THE FEMINIST XI: *Women and Resistance*

PROGRAM

A Conference sponsored by
The Barnard College Women's Center

Saturday, April 14, 1984
8:30am to 6:30pm

THE WOMEN'S CENTER
Barnard College
New York, NY 10027





Women in the 21st Century: Looking Forward and Looking Back (1987)

Organized by Temma Kaplan, “Women in the 21st Century” exemplifies the conference’s turn toward transnational, intersectional feminist analysis, bringing together thinkers and organizers through workshops that imagined feminist futures across science, law, art, literature, disability studies, student activism, and global political economy.



1990 “Apocalypse Now? Race and Gender in the Nineties”

1991 “Women, the Environment, and Grassroots Movements”
Leslie Calman appointed Director

1992 No conference

1993 “Women as Change Makers: Building and Using Political Power”

1994 “Women, Work, and Family in a Changing Economy”

1995 “Growing up Female”

1996 “Our Families: A Feminist Response to the Family Value Debate”

1997 No conference

1998 “Women in Film: Images and Image Makers”

1998 “Single-sex Education: In the Public Interest?”

1999 No conference



June Jordan gave BCRW's first Reid Lecture in 1975, presented at the Scholar & Feminist in 1984, and spoke at the 30th Anniversary Conference in 2001. Her talk at that conference became the title essay to her book *Some of Us Did Not Die*.

2000 "Next Wave Feminism: Feminist Intersections and International Alliances"
Janet Jakobsen appointed Director

2001 "Models of Resistance: Conversations Between Activists Across Generations"

2002 "Public Sentiments: Memory, Trauma, History, Action"

2003 "Why? Feminist Analyses of the State of the World: How We Can Make a Difference"

2004 "Power & Representation in a Media-Saturated Age"

2005 30th Anniversary: "Past Controversies, Present Challenges, Future Feminisms"

2006 "Engendering Justice: Women, Prisons, and Change"

2007 "Fashioning Citizenship: Gender and Immigration"

2008 "The State of Democracy: Gender and Political Participation"

2009 "The Politics of Reproduction: New Technologies of Life"

2010 "Feminism and Climate Change"



2010 “Feminism and Climate Change”

2011 “Movements: Politics, Performance, and Disability”

2012 “Vulnerability: The Human and the Humanities”

2013 “Utopia”

2014 “Locations of Learning: Transnational Feminist Practices”

2015 “Action on Education”
Tina Campt appointed Director

2016 “Sustainabilities”

2017 “Haptic Bodies: Perception, Touch, and the Ethics of Being”

2018 “Subverting Surveillance: Strategies to End State Violence”
Castelli appointed Director

2019 “The Politics and Ethics of the Archive”



Dean Spade at the “‘they said in the name of self-defense’: Technologies of Surveillance and the Selling of the In/Security State” panel at “Subverting Surveillance: Strategies to End State Violence” (2018)





“Haptic Animalities” panel and a workshop from “Haptic Bodies: Perception, Touch, and the Ethics of Being” (2017)



Performance curated, written, and produced by Cara Page at the 2018 conference “Subverting Surveillance: Strategies to End State Violence”



2020 “Climate Crisis, Climate Justice”

2021 “Art & Political Imagination”

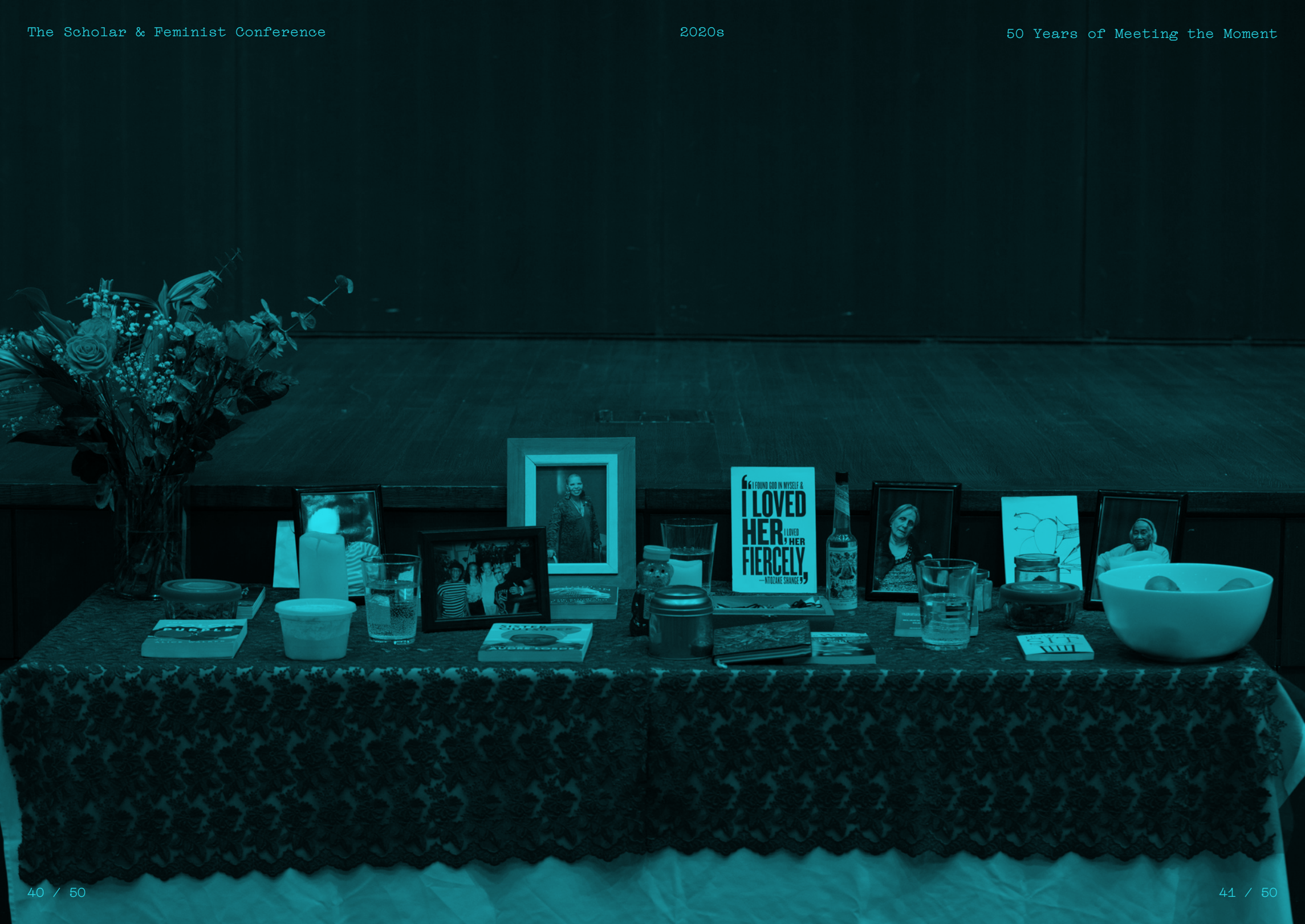
2022 “Living in Madness: Decolonization, Creation, Healing”
Premilla Nadasen appointed Director

2023 “Housing Justice/Housing Futures”

2024 “Anti-Colonialism, Black Radicalism, and Transnational Feminism”

2025 No conference
Rebecca Jordan-Young appointed Director

2026 50th S&F conference


"I FOUND GOD IN MYSELF &
I LOVED
HER, I LOVED HER
FIERCELY,"
—NTOZAKE SHANGE
PURPLE
SISTER
OUTSIDER






DARE TO USE
THE F-WORD
FEMINIST



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LEAD ORGANIZER: Margot Kotler,
Barnard Center for Research on Women

BCRW STAFF: Hope Dector, Tracy Fenix, Rebecca Jordan-Young, Margot Kotler, Sandra Moyano-Ariza, Pamela Phillips, Nico Wright

PROGRAM DESIGNER: Neta Bomani,
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Sexuality Studies, Barnard College

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