

Spring 2014

**IA 288 – Feminist Theatre Practices**

Mondays & Wednesdays 10:30-11:50am Emily Dickinson Hall room 4

Instructor: Talya Kingston, Visiting Assistant Professor of Theatre  
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Course tumblr: <http://feministtheatrepractices.tumblr.com/>

*For feminist performance to change the world, we must continue to dream that it can change for the better, that utopia, as a tangible force for wishful thinking—not in a naive, idealist sense but in a fiercely pragmatic political fashion—can fuel our passion to imagine the world as it might be, rather than acquiescing to the world as it is*

- Jill Dolan



What is feminism today, and how is it relevant for theatre and performance work? This class will serve as an introduction to the work of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century women playwrights, performance artists, and critical thinkers. We will confront feminism as a tool for reading and interpreting issues of gender and sexuality in plays and performances. We will also consider how, and to what extent, feminism influences practices of writing, performing, and spectatorship. Students will be expected to attend performances, read and write critically and perform their discoveries.

## EXPECTATIONS FOR EVALUATION

\* Note: at Hampshire College we give the students written evaluations rather than grades.

In this course, students are expected to spend at least six to eight hours a week of preparation and work outside of class time. This time includes reading, writing, interviewing, transcribing, rehearsing and attending performances.

- Attend all classes (unless cancelled due to inclement weather – call the Hampshire College hotline (413) 559.5508 for closing information). If you are going to be absent, I expect an e-mail or phone message (ahead of time if possible) explaining the absence (copy TA Sophie in on the email). In this case I also expect you to make up any work that you missed.
- Arrive on time and stay until the end of each class. 5 minutes after the scheduled start of class I will close the door to avoid disruptions and maintain privacy during our discussions.
- Participate: ask questions, discuss materials – your input is important!
- Come to class prepared – it is essential to keep up with the readings and assignments.
- Attend all out of class performances, workshops and screenings.
- Complete all assignments in a timely manner. It is particularly important when involved in group work where others are relying on you.
- Submit a well curated portfolio of written and performance responses and a retrospective self-evaluation at the end of the course.

### A word about plagiarism:

This course will closely follow Hampshire College's general guidelines regarding academic honesty. Make sure that you've looked at our official statement regarding plagiarism: <https://intranet.hampshire.edu/cms/index.php?id=7357>

## COURSE ITINERARY

### **Week 1-3 What is Feminism Now? Readings and Oral History Performance Project**

bell hooks, *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics*

Penny Weiss, "I'm Not a Feminist But..." in *Conversations with feminism: political theory and practice*,

Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, "A Day Without Feminism" in *Manifesta: young women, feminism and the future*.

Initial free-write on what the word feminism means - not to share out loud, but to use as a basis for group discussion of fears, dreams and baggage. Create a word cloud from free writes.

Homework: Pick a quote from the readings and write a response to it. Why does this statement resonate for you? What experiences /thoughts/questions does it raise? Small group Image Theatre exercises in class. Homework: oral history project: short interviews about feminism and research stories of feminist history on this campus/area. In small groups create short oral history performances of your interviews creatively using campus spaces.

### **Week 4&5 Protest Performances**

Cindy Cooper *Words of Choice* (2009)

Coco Fusco *Our Feminist Future* (2008)

Field trip: *Arguendo* by the Elavator Repair Service at Williams College

Field trip: *The Vagina Monologues* on campus

Discussion of different forms of direct action protest performances. Assignment: pick a feminist issue that feels urgent to you (e.g. closure of Planned Parenthood Centers in Texas, same-sex marriage, equal pay for equal work, etc.). Design a performance that highlights/protests/opens up discussion about the problem. Write a 3-page proposal describing both the problem and how your performance might address it. If it helps you could imagine that you are writing it for a potential funder or collaborator. Draw the reader in and be both specific and creative – you have an unlimited imaginary budget! Pitch your ideas to us in a performative way.

### **Week 6 Feminist performance and identity**

Anna Deavere Smith *Four American Characters* (2009)

Sue Ellen Case chapter

Field trip: "Black Women and the Arts in the 21st Century: a conversation with Toni Morrison, Bernice Johnson Reagon and Sonia Sanchez."

Peggy Shaw *Menopausal Gentleman* (1998)

Tray Anthony *da Kink in My Hair* (2013)

Sharon Bridgforth *con flama* (2002)

Field trip: Black/queer/diaspora/womyn Festival including performances of Sharon Bridgforth's *con flama* and Tray Anthony's *Da Kink in my Hair*

Workshop with Sharon Bridgforth and Tray Anthony centered around questions of lineage, ritual and expectations of beauty. Gendered writing exercise in class and then crafted into a personal identity monologue that was shared. Discussions of intersectionality.

**Week 7&8 Project 50/50 by 2020: Rediscovering early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Women playwrights**

Theresa Rebeck "A Thousand Voices"  
Diana Son "Girls Just Wanna Write Plays"  
Tina Howe "Women's Work: white gloves or bare hands"  
Susan Gaspell *Trifles* (1916) – read together in class  
Sophie Treadwell *Machinal* (1928)

Explore the inequality in playwrights who are being produced in this country and why this might be important to note. Flash back to first wave feminism – inequalities that were being experienced in the United States at the beginning of the Twentieth Century and how this landscape is reflected in the plays of Gaspell and Treadwell.

**Feminist Performance Criticism**

Over Spring break: Inspired by Jill Dolan's reviews on [thefeministspectator.com](http://thefeministspectator.com), create a long form feminist review of a theatrical performance, television show or film. How does looking at the performance from a feminist perspective alter or heighten what you are seeing? Remember to give enough context and description for your analysis and opinions to make sense.

\*\*\*\*\* BREAK \*\*\*\*\*

**Week 9&10 Project 50/50 by 2020: Second Wave Feminism & Feminist Theatre**

Betty Friedan *Feminist Mystique* (1963)  
Valerie Solanas *SCUM manifesto* (1967)  
Ntozake Shange *For Colored Girls...* (1974)  
Wendy Wasserstein *The Heidi Chronicles* (1988)

Guest Artist Jennifer Lee screened her documentary film "Feminist Stories from Women's Liberation" and talked to us about interviewing some of the major players in the second wave feminist movement. We will perform scenes from *The Heidi Chronicles* for her. In class performance of new solo play *Are you Queer Enough to be Here: stories from the 1970s Lesbian Feminist Movement* by Maggie Scott and conversation with Maggie and director Vipassana Greene.

What inequalities were being experienced in the United States during the late 1960s-1980s and how were they represented in the plays of Shange and Wasserstein? How do these plays read to us today?

**Week 11 Feminist casting and directing**

Ellen Donkin *Upstaging Big Daddy*.

Screening of *For the Country Entirely: a Play in Letters* and discussion with guest Professors Ellen Donkin & Jill Lewis on *Directing Gertrude Stein*

What does it mean to direct a theatrical event as a feminist or with feminism in mind? How does feminism effect: the way that you select a play or material? the way that you approach the material? the way that you hold auditions, invite participation or cast the work? the way that you configure rehearsal and performance space? the way you speak to your collaborators? the way you invite audience members in to the work?

### **Week 12&13 Reframing the classics**

Alicia Solomon reading

Aristophanes *Lysistrata* & screen “*Operation Lysistrata*”

Performances – see at least one of the following:

*Iphigenia and Other Daughters* by Ellen McLaughlin at Smith College

*Medea & Jude* a new adaptation by Zach Apony directed by Katja Gottlieb-Stier

*Electra & Orestes* a new adaptation by Sorryl Sutor

How does the comedy and message in *Lysistrata* resonate with your own feminist sensibility?

Exploration of various US theatre companies and projects that took a classic play written by a man and found a way, though gender-bending, or cross casting, or deconstruction, etc. to re-dress it. Report (from the stage or the audience) on the upcoming productions of *Medea*, *Electra* and/or *Iphigenia and Other Daughters* (at Smith College) – how have they drawn from the original stories and ancient Greek theatre conventions and interpreted them to fit a contemporary feminist perspective?

### **Culminating Public Feminist performance/speak out/celebration.**

Featuring original student work developed in class, scenes from feminist plays, music (both live and recorded), faculty/staff/audience speak out & desert reception.

**In class afterwards: post-show conversations and compliments**

### **Week 14 Contemporary feminist playwriting**

Constance Congdon, *Paradise Street* (2010)

Annie Baker, *Body Awareness* (2012)

Both these plays were written recently by feminist playwrights in the Pioneer Valley. Describe the feminist voices that are present in these plays

### **Portfolios & self evaluations are due by May 5<sup>th</sup> – no extensions**

Think about how have your ideas about feminism expanded, shifted, been challenged by the material that you have examined this semester? What material stays with you and why? How will this effect your future work?

## Feminist Theatre Practices bibliography

(a work in progress)

- Aston, Elaine. *Feminist Theatre Practice: A Handbook* (Routledge, London and New York, 1999)
- Case, Sue-Ellen. *Feminist and Queer Performance: Critical Strategies* (Palgrave Macmillan: 2009) Part Two
- Hélène Cixous, "The Laugh of the Medusa" in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl eds. *Feminisms: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* NJ: Rutgers, 1991), 347-362
- Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (University of Michigan Press, 1988)
- Dolan, Jill. *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance* (University of Michigan Press, 1993)
- Donkin, Ellen & Susan Clement ed. *Upstaging Big Daddy: directing theatre as if gender and race matter* (University of Michigan, 1993)
- hooks, bell. *Feminism is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (South End Press: 2000)
- Martin, Carol ed. *A Sourcebook for Feminist Theater and Performance: On and Beyond the Stage* (Routledge, New York, 1996)
- Mulvey, Laura. "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Screen* 16.3 Autumn 1975 pp. 6-18 (for discussion of the male gaze)
- Solomon, Alicia. *Re-dressing the cannon: essays on theater and gender* (Routledge New York 1997) Introduction & chapter 5

Scripts (included in this class):

- Anthony, Trey "Da Kink in My Hair" (Unpublished script, 2013)
- Baker, Annie. "Body Awareness" in *The Vermont Plays* (Theatre Communication Group 2012)
- Bridgforth, Sharon "con flama" (Unpublished script, 2002)
- Cooper, Cindy, creator "Words of Choice" in *Front Lines: Political Plays by American Women* ed. by Alexis Greene and Shirley Lauro. (The New Press, New York, 2009)
- Congdon, Constance "Paradise Street" (Unpublished production script 2010.)
- Fusco, Coco "Our Feminist Future" in *A Field Guide for Female Interrogators* (Seven Stories Press: 2008)
- Glaspell, Susan "Trifles" (1916) in *Plays by American Women 1900-1930* ed. by Judith E. Barlow (Applause New York 1985)
- Shange, Ntozake. *for colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf: a choreopoem* New York: Scribner Poetry, (1997)
- Shaw, Peggy. "Must" in *A Menopausal Gentleman: the solo performances of Peggy Shaw* (University of Michigan Press, 2011)
- Treadwell, Sophie "Machinal" (1928) in *Plays by American Women 1900-1930* ed. by Judith E. Barlow (Applause New York 1985)
- Wasserstein, Wendy. *The Heidi chronicles and other plays*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1991)

Films:

Enslar, Eve. "The Vagina Monologues" (2007 HBO)

Lee, Jennifer. "Feminist Stories from Women's Liberation" (2013)

[www.feministstories.com](http://www.feministstories.com)

Kelly, Michael Patrick "Operation Lysistrata" (2006)

[aquapiofilms.com/lys01.html](http://aquapiofilms.com/lys01.html)

Websites:

[www.thefeministspectator.com](http://www.thefeministspectator.com) *The Feminist Spectator: reviews and ruminations on how theatre, film and television shape and reflect our lives*, blog by Jill Dolan

[worksbywomen.wordpress.com](http://worksbywomen.wordpress.com) *Works by Women*: Supporting theatrical work written, directed and/or designed by women.

[wptheater.org](http://wptheater.org) The Women's Project Theater in New York.

[www.womenarts.org](http://www.womenarts.org) Support Women in Arts Network – Swan Day this year is April 4 & 5.

[www.themagdalenaproject.org](http://www.themagdalenaproject.org) an international network of women in contemporary theatre

<http://guerrillagirlsontour.com> feminist artists using smart humor to address sexism with performance art