

Feminist Theory and Performance
T D 387D

Prof. Jill Dolan

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Course Description:

This seminar will investigate the mutual usefulness of feminist theory and performance. In addition to engaging contemporary theoretical debates and quandaries, the course will also contextualize and historicize the field. That is, where in the 80s and early 90s, the question of realism's utility as a form was important to feminist performance theorists, in the early 21st century, questions of political efficacy are raised in different ways, not only to form, but also to venue, modes of production, and other materialist considerations. Likewise, while in the 80s and early 90s, identity politics and the parsing of differences among feminisms was an important critical/analytical tool, now issues of how community is built across vectors of identity are perhaps paramount (in an era some consider "post"-identity politics). The course will engage specifically with material questions of production: where is "feminist performance" performed and how is it received? How is it produced, for whom, by whom, within what funding structures and opportunities? That is, in addition to asking theoretical questions about subject formation, reception, spectatorship, and the complexities of "authorship," the course will also attempt a kind of sociology of contemporary feminist performance. Although we will employ importantly specialized theoretical vocabularies, we will also incorporate issues of practice. Students will be asked to engage, from production standpoints, the performance and plays we read, so that we can think about our theoretical questions pragmatically.

By the end of this course, you should be able to

- Apply feminist performance theory to practice
- Apply feminist practice to theory

- Engage a theoretical vocabulary around issues of identification, subject formation, mimesis, modes of production, performance art, realism, epic theatre, and transformational theatre
- Name and analyze plays by important contemporary American women playwrights and performers
- Think in complicated ways about individual vs. group production strategies
- Rehearse details about the history and current status of feminist performance
- Write critically, using theory and practice
- Think creatively, using theory and practice

Course Texts (all, including packet, are available on reserve in the Fine Arts Library):

Texts (available behind the counter under "Dolan" at B&N on the drag, 457-0581):

Canning, Charlotte. *Feminist Theatres in the USA*.

Diamond, Elin. *Unmaking Mimesis*.

Dolan, Jill. *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (purchase not required).

_____. *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance* (purchase not required).

_____. *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (purchase not required).

Martin, Carol, ed. *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance*.

Modleski, Tania. *Old Wives Tales*. (also in packet)

Newton, Esther. *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*. (available on reserves in PCL)

Plays (available on reserve and can be ordered through internet at BN.com, Amazon.com, Applause Books, or locally through Bookwoman or BookPeople):

Parks, Suzan-Lori. *In the Blood*.

Moraga, Cherrie. *Heroes and Saints and Other Plays*.

Smith, Anna Deavere. *Fires in the Mirror*.

Terry, Megan. *Plays by Megan Terry*.

Wallace, Naomi. *In the Heart of America and Other Plays*.

Wasserstein, Wendy. *The Heidi Chronicles*.

Angelos, Davy, Dibbell, Healey, and Kron. *The Five Lesbian Brothers (Four Plays)*.

Packet (available at Abel's Copy Shop, 715D W. 23rd St., 471-5353):

Joan Scott, "Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis"

Karen Shimakawa, "Swallowing the Tempest: Asian-American Women Onstage"

Ellen Donkin/Sue Clement, "Introduction to Upstaging Big Daddy"

Elke Lampe, "Anne Bogart, Director"

Sydne Mahone on Crossroads Theatre (interview)

Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution"

Vicki Patraha, "On Split Britches' Little Women, The Tragedy"

Split Britches, Little Women, The Tragedy

Sue-Ellen Case, "Toward a Butch-Fem Aesthetic"

Kate Davy, "Fe/Male Impersonation"

Spiderwoman Theatre, Sun, Moon, Feather

Rebecca Schneider, "Seeing the Big Show"

Marsha Norman, 'night, Mother (also on reserve)

Josephine Lee, "The Asian-American Spectator and the Politics of Realism"

Elizabeth Wong, China Doll

Suzan-Lori Parks, Death of the Last Black Man in America

Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante, Stuff

Adrienne Kennedy, Funnyhouse of a Negro, Movie Star has to Star in Black and White

Tania Modleski, "The White Negress and the Heavy-Duty Dyke"

Ann Pellegrini, "You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: Sandra Bernhard's White Face"

Robbie McCauley, Sally's Rape

Robbie McCauley, "Thoughts on My Career"

D. Soyini Madison, "That Was My Occupation: Oral Narrative, Performance, and Black Feminist Thought"

Tania Modleski, "Doing Justice to the Subjects: The Work of Anna Deavere Smith"

Ann Pellegrini, "Citing Identity, Sighting Identification: The Mirror Stages of Anna Deavere Smith"

Course Expectations:

I expect that you'll attend every class meeting, without exception, and that you'll arrive on time. I also expect that you'll come fully prepared, with questions that will enable you to join our discussions about the reading. Since we're reading a variety of material each

week, while you might, for instance, not have anything to say about one essay, you might have a lot to say about a play or performance. I'd like you to be able to comment on both at every meeting.

More formal expectations include:

1) Bi-Weekly Response papers. Every other week, when you come to class, I'll expect you to have written a 500-word response to the readings. These responses should be critical in their approach, and can 1) focus on all the week's reading, or 2) on one particular section of the reading. The response, however, must be as specific as possible. That is, it should not be "musings"—it should directly address a portion of the text. For example, in reading "The Discourse of Feminisms," you might analyze the utility of the "three feminisms" for work in performance. How might they help classify and understand women's work in the field? You may place yourself in these responses, but be very careful not to generalize or give a non-critical response (ie., "I liked it") without saying exactly why and backing your remarks with direct quotes from the text. These responses should help you focus your reading and your comments in class discussion, and help you develop article reading skills and creative ideas. I'll let you know when these are due.

2) Facilitation/Production Groups. You will be assigned two of these four-person working groups over the last two thirds of the semester. Your task, each time, will be to meet with your group (well ahead of time), to devise several things:

a. A plan for how to facilitate discussion of the articles and the plays assigned. You can divide up the reading however you'd like, or find ways to approach it together, as a group. Be creative here. The point is to derive as much usefulness as possible from the readings, and to read them against each other in ways that are mutually illuminating. The point is also to engage your colleagues in a stimulating, thought-provoking discussion. You should have some email discussion with me early in the semester regarding the direction you might take; you can also come to my office hours to discuss possibilities.

b. A performance or staging of a scene from one or both or all of the plays/performances assigned for the week. This event can take place inside or outside our dreary classroom, in or outside the building, depending on available space. The point of the staging is

to experiment with how the theory we read illuminates practical issues with embodiment and production. Your goal will be as creative as possible in your choices (that is, a "realist" play can be staged in a Brechtian manner, or vice-versa; a one-woman show can be performed by many; women can be performed by men; etc.). Although all of these stagings will be "poor theatre," I'm looking for how you imaginatively and critically use the theory and the plays for the week. Along with your staging, you might develop a dramaturgical program to hand out to your colleagues, to help steer the discussion. Or not. Two hours of our meeting time is yours to work with. I should have email or face contact with at least one representative from your group well ahead of the meeting you facilitate. The groups will be shuffled for the second repetition of the assignment later in the semester.

3) A theoretical process paper, no longer than 10-pages double-spaced. This will be the written portion of the facilitation/production project. Your goal will be to stage, on paper, a theoretical investigation of the practice you undertook with your group in staging the theory and the play/performance on which you worked. The paper (written individually) should critically describe your production choices (not in terms of complaining about others or extolling your own work, but in terms that define why and how you made the choices you did, and how well you think they "worked"). It should also investigate the theoretical issues raised in the texts assigned for the week. Please see the journal Theatre Topics for models of the kinds of writing I'm looking for. You might also decide to write a process paper on one of the plays you didn't choose, as a group, to stage, and imagine the choices you would have made, with theoretical explanations, for staging this performance through this set of theoretical questions (or others we've read through the semester). I'll expect you to email me or come see me during office hours to discuss an appropriate structure for your papers, as each of you will come to this assignment with different needs, and I'm willing to be flexible.

4) Final Written Project. For this project, you can choose to do a second theoretical process paper, as above, or you can choose to write a ten-page critical paper on a pertinent topic of your choice. I'd like to be flexible about your needs here. If you choose this last

option, I'll need to work with you throughout the semester to develop your topic with you and make good suggestions.

Course Outline:

Week One, Tuesday, September 4:

Welcome, introduction. Response paper date assignments.

Week Two, Tuesday, September 11: Introducing the Field (124)

Dolan, *Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Chapter One, "The Discourses of Feminism" (1-18).

Dolan, *Presence and Desire*, "Introduction" (1-39) and "In Defense of the Discourse" (85-97).

Dolan, in Martin, *Sourcebook of Feminist Performance*, "Introduction: Fathom Languages" (1-20).

Joan Scott, "Gender as a Category of Historical Analysis" (28-50).

Karen Shimakawa, "Swallowing the Tempest: Asian American Women Onstage" (367-380).

Week Three, Tuesday, September 18: (Read *Canning* this week, 215)

Day off, Rosh Hashanah. Will be made up in work you do outside of classing with your facilitation groups.

Week Four, Tuesday, September 25: *History/Modes of Production* (89)

Canning, *Feminist Theatres in the USA*.

Donkin/Clement, *Upstaging Big Daddy*, "Introduction" (1-9).

Elke Lampe, "Anne Bogart, Director," (14-47).

Sydne Mahone interview on *Crossroads Theatre* (119-140).

Dolan, *Presence and Desire*, Chapter Four (99-118) and Chapter Seven (151-158).

Recommended: Martin, History section.

Week Five, Tuesday, October 2: *Transformations to Brecht to Post-Modernism* (34 +2 plays)

Megan Terry, *Viet Rock*.

Diamond, Chapter Two, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory" (43-55).

Naomi Wallace, *In the Heart of America*.

Week Six, Tuesday, October 9: Performance and Performativity (67 + play)

**Student Facilitations Begin

Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution" (270–282).

Dolan, Geographies of Learning, Chapter One (1–22) and Chapter Four (65–91).

Patraka, "On Split Britches' Little Women: The Tragedy" (6–13).

Split Britches, Little Women: The Tragedy.

Week Seven, Tuesday, October 16: Drag and Impersonation, Post-Structuralism and Ethnography (111 + play)

Case, "Towards a Butch–Femme Aesthetic" (282–299).

Davy, "Fe/Male Impersonation" (231–247).

Newton, Margaret Mead Made Me Gay, Part One, "Drag and Camp" (11–89).

Five Lesbian Brothers, The Secretaries.

Week Eight, Tuesday, October 23: Forms, Contents, Contexts (47 + 2 plays)

Dolan, Presence and Desire, Chapter One (43–68).

Wendy Wasserstein, The Heidi Chronicles.

Spiderwoman Theatre, Sun, Moon, Feather.

Schneider, "Seeing the Big Show" (153–175).

Week Nine, Tuesday, October 30: Realism (65 + 2 plays)

Dolan, Feminist Spectator as Critic, Chapter Two, "Feminism and the Canon" (19–40).

Marsha Norman, 'night, Mother.

Dolan, Presence and Desire, Chapter Eight, "Lesbian Subjectivity in Realism" (159–177).

Lee, "The Asian–American Spectator and the Politics of Realism" (34–60).

Elizabeth Wong, China Doll.

Week Ten, Tuesday, November 6: Forms in Production, Context, Community (5 plays)

Moraga, Giving Up the Ghost, and Shadow of a Man.

Suzan–Lori Parks, In the Blood and Death of the Last Black Man.

Coco Fusco and Nao Bustamante, Stuff.

Week Eleven, Tuesday, November 13: Exploding Forms and Culture (74 + 2 plays)

Diamond, Chapter One, "Realism's Hysteria" (1-39) and Chapter on Kennedy (106-141).

Adrienne Kennedy, *Funnyhouse of a Negro, Movie Star Has to Star in Black and White*.

Week Twelve, Tuesday, November 20: Refiguring Identity Politics (35 + tape)

Sandra Bernhard, *Without You I am Nothing* (view videotape).

Modleski, 80-100.

Pellegrini, 49-64.

Week Thirteen, Tuesday, November 27: Performing (Oral) History (114 + play)

Robbie McCauley, *Sally's Rape*.

Diamond, Chapter Six, "Performance and Temporality" (142-181).

Patraka interview, "Obsessing in Public," in Martin (205-238).

McCauley, "Thoughts on My Career" (265-282).

Madison, "Theories of Flesh" (319-342).

Week Fourteen, Tuesday, December 4: Performing the Present (86 + play/tape)

Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror* (text and tape).

Martin, essay and interview, in Martin, 81-93, 185-204.

Modleski, 101-135.

Pellegrini, 67-88.

**Thursday, December 6, noon, in my office, final papers/projects are due.

Selected Bibliography (includes course materials and additional citations that might be helpful)

Austin, Gayle. *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1989.

Arrizon, Alicia. *Latina Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999.

Aston, Elaine. *Introduction to Feminism and Theatre*.

Becker, Becky. "Robbie McCauley: A Journey Toward Movement." *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000).

Canning, Charlotte. *Feminist Theatres in the USA*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Case, Sue-Ellen. *Feminism and Theater* (New York: Routledge, 1988).

_____, ed. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Theatre and Critical Practice*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1990.

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Davy, Kate. "Fe/Male Impersonation: The Discourse of Camp." In Janelle Reinelt and Joseph Roach, eds. *Critical Theory and Performance*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1992.

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Donkin, Ellen, and Sue Clement, eds. *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theatre as if Gender and Race Matter*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan Press, 1993.

Fusco, Coco and Nao Bustamante. "Stuff." *TDR* 41:4 (Winter 1997).

Greene, Alexis. *Women Who Write Plays: Interviews with American Dramatists*. Hanover: Smith and Kraus, 2001.

Goodman, Lizbeth. *The Routledge Reader in Gender and Performance*. London: Routledge: 1998.

Hart, Lynda, ed. *Making a Spectacle: Feminist Essays on Contemporary Women's Theatre*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1989.

_____ and Peggy Phelan, eds. *Acting Out: Feminist Performances*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1993.

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_____. *Between the Body and the Flesh: Performing Sadoomasochism*. New York: Columbia UP, 1998.

Kennedy, Adrienne. In *One Act*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1988.

Lampe, Elke. "From the Battle to the Gift: The Directing of Anne Bogart." *TDR* 36:1 (Spring 1992).

Lee, Josephine. *Performing Asian America: Race and Ethnicity on the Contemporary Stage*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1997.

Mahone, Sydne, ed. *Moon Marked and Touched by the Sun: Plays by African-American Women*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994.

Martin, Carol, ed. *A Sourcebook of Feminist Performance*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

McCauley, Robbie. "Thoughts on My Career, The Other Weapon, and Other Projects." In Elin Diamond, ed. *Performance and Cultural Politics*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Newton, Esther. *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*. Durham: Duke UP, 2001.

Madison, D. Soyini. "That Was My Occupation: Oral Narrative, Performance, and Black Feminist Thought." In Della Pollock, ed. *Exceptional Spaces: Essays in Performance and History*. Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina Press, 1998.

Modleski, Tania. *Old Wives' Tales and Other Women's Stories*. New York: NYU Press, 1998.

Patraka, Vivian. *Spectacular Suffering: Theatre, Fascism, and the Holocaust*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999.

Pellegrini, Ann. *Performance Anxiety: Staging Psychoanalysis, Staging Race*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Perkins, Kathy, and Roberta Uno, eds. *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Savran, David. In *Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1988.

Seyda, Barbara. "Divine Testimonies: Sydné Mahone and Crossroads Theatre Company (an Interview)." *TDR* 40:1 (Spring 1996).

Shimakawa, Karen. "Swallowing the Tempest: Asian American Women On Stage." *Theatre Journal* 47 (1995).

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Solomon, Alisa. *Redressing the Canon: Essays on Theatre and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1997.