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“Ruminations for the Next Generation of Feminist Spectators”

I’m delighted to be giving this keynote address, and more honored and appreciative than I can say about receiving this Lifetime Achievement Award from WTP. Fifty-four-years-old seems a little young for such an honor, but on the other hand, feminist generations and cycles move so quickly, even in our relatively small field of feminist theatre and performance studies, in many ways I do feel like an elder stateswoman. I began coming to the WTP pre-conferences in 1982, at the end of my first year as a graduate student in performance studies at NYU. The Women & Theatre Program was a formative site for my thinking then, and thirty years later, remains one of my “homes,” a place to which I return eagerly to see friends and colleagues and to meet new feminist scholars and hear their work. I’m gratified that despite the vagaries of the feminist movement in the intervening years, the WTP continues to exist and to produce scholarship that represents the diversity of our field.

My talk today is drawn from the new introduction I’ve written to my first book, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, which the University of Michigan Press plans to reissue in July 2012. I’m gratified that this book, which was written in the mid-1980s as my NYU dissertation, has what University of Michigan Press editor LeAnn Fields would call “legs,” since it’s remained in print for these last 23 years. I hope the upcoming reissue will continue to make it a useful text for teachers, students, practitioners, critics, and scholars still interested in thinking about performance and theatre through a feminist lens. I’m sharing this introduction draft with you today as a kind of rumination on the state of feminist criticism—as Heidi Holland said apocryphally in Wendy Wasserstein’s *The Heidi Chronicles*, where have we been and where are we going? I look forward to your responses, which I’m sure will influence the trajectory of my work—it always has and it always will.

Thinking back over these years since *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* was first published, I'm amazed at how much has changed in American theatre and performance, as well as in the American academy and in other aspects of culture. In theatre, film, television, and the new media explosion wrought by the internet, even the most prescient feminist spectator couldn't have foreseen how dramatically the forms and contents through which we imagine our lives might change. Compared to the cultural landscape of the mid-80s, when women at best played second-banana to male leads on television, or sexy but irrelevant girlfriends in film, or predictable mothers, virgins, or whores in theatre, complicated, central female characters full of quirky agency have now become more and more common. Examples of women's advances in popular culture are happily too numerous to list.¹ The last three decades' watershed moments offer heartening signs that gender equity is at least progressing in entertainment and the arts. Yet as I'll detail in this talk, we still have a long way to go. Women's gains and losses in theatre and performance, in particular, are more complicated and perhaps, on the aggregate, less positive. And all these culture changes have occurred within a historical moment that's oscillated wildly across the political spectrum, from a more progressive pole at one end to a much more dangerously conservative one on the other.

With that context in mind, I'll do six things in this talk today: I'll offer a rethinking of "the feminisms" and how I use them in the book; I'll think again about the question of experience as a narrative of feminism and performance; I'll discuss liberal feminism in the context of "popular" or mainstream theatre and its possibilities; I'll revisit the feminist critique of form, content, and context; I'll check in on "the ideal spectator," to see how he's doing; and finally, I'll end with an argument for feminist performance criticism as a tool of advocacy and activism. Ready?

One of *The Feminist Spectator as Critic's* primary original contributions was Chapter One's explanation of the "discourse of feminisms," and the book's insistence that rather than offering a monolithic approach to politics or culture, feminism should be parsed into various sub-strands. I

structure the book's argument, in fact, according to the three different strains of feminism that predominated at the time. This taxonomy gave me a much more precise way to discuss the work accomplished differently by feminist theatre and performance artists and critics who approached gender (as well as sexuality, race, class, and other identity vectors) from diverse and often diverging ideological perspectives.

The distinct strands of liberal, cultural, and materialist feminism were meant to be descriptive and explanatory. And they did, at first, lend precision to the political implications of performance. The feminisms helpfully extended the performance critique, providing language that probed deeply into the apparatus of representation, its modes of production, and how it generated meaning. But over time, the feminisms hardened into prescriptive and judgmental, rather than critically generative, categories. The critique of cultural feminism, especially, became hegemonic, along with post-structuralism's insistent (and persuasive) analysis of its attendant gender essentialism.² Cultural feminist values also began to align with a vociferous anti-pornography activism, which some commentators saw as entirely anti-sex and censorious. The division between anti-porn and "pro-sex" feminism helped demonize cultural feminism, especially in the academy, where materialist feminist theorizing was on the rise. As a result, the pleasures of women's culture became associated with the dogmatism of cultural feminism and were derided as exclusive, predominately white, and politically and aesthetically old-fashioned. "Cultural feminist" became a derogatory label, applied most often by materialist feminists touting sexier, more radical social interventions.

Cultural feminism takes some hard knocks in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*. While I stand by my critique of essentialism, my deliberate rejection of cultural feminist theatre and performance came from the historical context in which I wrote. Describing and analyzing work by the Women's Experimental Theatre and *At the Foot of the Mountain*, for instance, I accused them of legislating that all women respond to their productions with the same affective and political investments. This might have

been a fair assessment of how some cultural feminist theatre exchanges happened. But much of what I called the works' "constraining ritual systems" came from an historic need for affirmation and community against the harsh reality of a culture that made no room for women and their histories outside of patriarchal rule. When I wrote this book, "patriarchy" itself was an old-fashioned word, which had been replaced by the more gender-neutral phrase "dominant culture" to mark the axis of social power and ideological control. (It strikes me that now, even that language is a bit quaint.)

The Women's Experimental Theatre and *At the Foot of the Mountain*, however, were two of the first feminist theatres to use performance to counter the claims of a society that was openly and arrogantly run by white men. The cultural feminist theatre work of the moment wanted to reach a community of women, to find a common theme within the politics of gender that might provide a site of recognition and further political agitation. The ritual "sacraments" to which I objected in this theatre practice came from a place of real need, it seems to me now, and a desire to honor women and their connections underneath a deeply felt, daily, material oppression. That the differences among and between women were soft-pedaled to privilege gender was a sign of the times, rather than a malicious, intentional white-washing or exclusion.

The critique I launched also came partly from my own experiences feeling excluded by some of these performances' rigidity. I was then honing my proudly post-structuralist critical perspective and was younger by at least 10 years from many of the women whose cultural feminist theatre work I engaged. I held myself separate from what I perceived as a rather presumptuous bid for community, attaching myself instead to the materialist feminist and post-structuralist instabilities of unknowingness and refusing cultural feminism's forceful master narrative. I wasn't alone in feeling the constraints of a feminism that saw itself as righteous and "true," or of performances that blindly assumed everyone would feel only positively about their mothers, for example. Cultural feminism at the time tolerated

little debate or disagreement, and tended to chastise those incredulous enough to want to argue with its values.

When I criticized those aspects of the work, I neglected to describe its consistent emotional appeal. In fact, I've been working on and off for years now on a project called *From Flannel to Fleece*, which details my own experiences in women's music production and other aspects of lesbian feminist women's culture in the mid-1970s. In all the recent academic work on memory, I'm surprised that we haven't been authorized to remember, fondly, the affective import of women's culture, which did indeed stem from a kind of cultural feminist impulse. I still viscerally remember attending my first Holly Near concert on the Harvard campus in Cambridge in the late 70s, and how utterly stirring emotionally and inspiring politically that event was for me. I was hailed by her voice, by her politics, by the community I felt grow around me in the auditorium where she performed. So much of cultural feminist production prompted these affective revelations, which led many of us to fashion politically, sexually, and intellectually progressive identities. It was only five or so years later that I would learn the critique of a culture in which I had participated so happily. Now, when I've presented work-in-progress from this project, I've sometimes been accused of valorizing an exclusively white, middle-class, college-educated moment in U.S. lesbian feminism.³ This false claim promotes the continual misrecognition of cultural feminism's contributions to feminist and American progressive culture. Women's culture in Boston was diverse and a site of continual struggle rather than one of sameness and happy agreement.

In fact, I'm interested, again, in the intersection of experience and politics, art and ideology, in a way that was once also verboten in feminist critical theory. Post-structuralism taught us to be suspicious of claims to authentic experience, but in the process, helped shut down an important aspect of how we understand subject formation and perpetuate our own interventions in knowledge. I'm certainly not interested in returning to some notion of experience as fully "true," but I am eager to return to a way of narrating the events of our lives that allows us to respect their meanings in our

histories. I'm interested in retelling, for instance, my own early experiences with materialist feminist performances at the WOW Café in New York, as well as my women's culture days in Boston, in part because these are histories that need to be continually retold. As culture changes and history moves on, we forget that even the tenuous strides we've made weren't always in place. Doesn't it help to *rehearse* how it felt *not* to have numerous cultural avenues for seeing our lives reflected, in however partial and refracted a way?

Or doesn't it help? Or does it only help, well, me? I dread becoming the finger-wagging lesbian feminist who tells her younger colleagues, "You have no idea what it was like then!" But isn't the point that if we *don't* recall, and learn, and remember *then*, we can't truly appreciate or expand or push further with the *now*? Why is it that every year, gay pride celebrations across the country commemorate the events of Stonewall, but so few public, national, annual events celebrate specifically lesbian or women's historical watersheds? Is it because this history continues to be quotidian, instead of cataclysmic? Isn't it in the very stuff of the everyday that history also lives?

So, for instance, here's another piece of my own historical experience that I hope might be illustrative. Walking through New York's East Village now, where the real estate has been swallowed nearly whole by NYU, it's hard to remember that in the early 1980s, before gentrification, people regularly transformed local dive bars into performance spaces where they exploded genres with satire, parody, and more architectural ways of using space.⁴ Rents were relatively cheap, allowing artists to live in the neighborhoods in which they created their plays and performances. Karen Finley performed for predominantly heterosexual audiences in the subcultural clubs and performance spaces springing up all over downtown New York. The feminist anger and desire she embodied was staged simultaneously in different but equally novel ways by lesbian performers at other East Village clubs, where formal and political experimentation permeated the scene.

In 1984, *TDR: The Drama Review*, under the structuralist scholar/artist Michael Kirby's editorship, assigned a group of writers to scavenge the East Village on the same arbitrary evening and to write about the performances they saw at clubs within a few blocks radius of one another.⁵ Club Chandalier [sic], Limbo Lounge, 8BC, and the WOW Café, among others, were featured in the round-up, which documented a range of performances with subaltern forms, styles, and contents. I was then the managing editor of *TDR* and joined the passel of writers sent to observe the scene.

November 30, 1984, was my first night at the WOW Café, where I joined Kate Davy for her *TDR* writing assignment. I was assigned to cover Club Chandalier, which Kate and I visited later that night. I wrote about *Chit Chat with Carmelita Tropicana*, my first experience of Alina Troyano's enduring stage persona. I also saw Tammy Whynot, Lois Weaver's alter-ego, for the first time that night, since she appeared as a guest on Carmelita's chat show. That night was my first experience of the lesbian and feminist antics of the WOW Girls, as they came to be known, performing in their own space and at clubs across the East Village. Spectators moved easily from one show to the next, often joined by performers, who mingled in the audiences and often acted in sets at two or three different clubs each night.

I remember feeling like an outsider during that first visit, standing at the bar at Club Chandalier waiting for Carmelita, who was bartending, to take my drink order. I'd assumed that the club operated like a regular theatre, and had dutifully called in advance to secure two tickets, mispronouncing the name of the act in the process (did I call it "Chiquita Banana Chats" instead of "Chit Chat with Carmelita Tropicana"?). As I waited at the bar, Carmelita shouted to her friends, making fun of the message I'd left without knowing that I was the caller. I hid my embarrassment and settled in for the show, surrounded by people who knew one another, all of whom were vaguely recognizable from the performance earlier that night at the WOW Café just a few blocks away. Experiencing the spirit of improvisation, of flouting the rules, and of lesbian irreverence and parody in the raucous show that night took my breath away.

As many scholars and performers have documented since, the WOW girls formed a community attracted as much by the café's social possibilities as its artistic laboratory.⁶ (And let me do a shout-out here to Kate's book on WOW, which is the first history of the space and has received an honorable mention at ATHE this year for best book in the field.) As Kate notes, WOW never aspired to legitimacy; none of its committed collective members would have dreamed of applying for city, state, federal, or foundation grants to support their outrageous lesbian performances. No one at WOW aspired to legitimacy of any sort, which gilded the work with the artistic and political freedom of outlaws.

In many ways, the WOW girls weren't thinking about politics when they made their theatre, but instead, focused on pleasure. As many of its former denizens insist, WOW was a community theatre. The Café's social club aspect meant that its audiences were a known quantity. The performers served as one another's spectators and vice versa, which gave everyone the freedom to be extreme in their on-stage efforts. Word of mouth eventually brought a larger following to WOW. The Café's growing audience spoke to the nerve it touched in a subculture hungry for comedy and eager to shrug off the yoke of feminist political correctness. WOW offered materialist feminism in action—all the seams showed and a lucid, witty critique of dominant culture and dominant feminism ruled the day.

When performers like Holly Hughes and companies like Split Britches began performing outside the Café's confines, their backgrounds brought attention to WOW as an incubator for radical acts of an off-brand lesbian culture. In true materialist feminist style, the work was raw, "poor theatre," without the window dressing of fancy costumes or sets, and the dialogue was often scripted from improvisation (when it was remembered at all). As Shaw, Weaver, and Margolin would later attest when their work became central to the growing feminist performance theory and criticism that *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* describes, their content derived from their desire. They fantasized, imagined, and created in a liberating experiment with a form that had never addressed them before. Performance became a space in which they asked themselves and one another who they wanted to be, what they wanted to do, who

they wanted to love, and then put it together in a mash-up pastiche of old styles and new meanings.

The rough-hewn performances thrilled audiences with their verve and novelty, and moved people with their raw bravery.

The work at WOW and by performers and playwrights who grooved to its aesthetic became the foundation of materialist feminist critical practice. A handful of playwrights from the U.K. were also exemplary—Caryl Churchill and the late Pam Gems among them—but the community-based, perversely sexy, nearly improvised work at WOW became paradigmatic of performance that called attention to its modes of production and the representational apparatus on which it commented with irreverence and delight. Because of the historical moment in which I first wrote, and because I was doing my graduate work in New York, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* offers political pride of place to those who worked at WOW tweaking the theories and practices of feminism. Gender- and sexuality-based social movements now trumpet the styles and semiotics of genderqueer and transgendered subjects, who thoroughly rearrange the alignments of conventional binary categories. In fact, I wrote *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* well before “queer” had been reclaimed from its pejorative past and resignified as a label of resistance and rebellion. In the years since Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* was published in 1990, subaltern communities of gender rebels have created ever-evolving mutations of gender performativity and its descriptive labels. The efficacy of “feminist” and “lesbian” as subject positions in which sexuality and gender might collide in new permutations are now much debated. Some young people refuse to be called “lesbian”; in fact, my former student, Jaclyn Pryor, who now teaches in the Five Colleges enclave in Northampton, Massachusetts, told me that her students consider “lesbian” an assimilationist, accommodationist label tainted by neoliberal desires and “homo-normative” practices like marriage and child-rearing.⁷ Debbie Bazarsky, my colleague at Princeton’s LGBT Center, when I sent around on email a Stonewall Foundation notice about a scholarship for lesbian activists, told me she was sorry they used

the word “lesbian,” as so few of the politically-oriented students she works with on campus identify with that term.⁸

Nonetheless, the lesbian feminist theatre and performances I describe in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* in some ways were the harbinger of “genderqueer,” even though that language was decades from circulating. As I argue in the book, Garnet McClit, the leading character in Holly Hughes’s *The Lady Dick* (1987), demonstrated the Brechtian “not . . . but,” “not woman” perhaps, but “not man,” either, as she embodied the dissonance of gender performativity that was then enacted under the exuberant, irreverent, boundary-breaking new performance codes at WOW. Like Holly’s play, the Five Lesbian Brothers—Moe Angelos, Babs Davy, Dominique Dibbell, Peg Healy, and Lisa Kron, whose work had yet to gel as the ensemble they would soon become when I was writing the book—chose a name that would also spin the sign system, creating conditions in which social practices and monikers like “genderqueer” might flourish.

This performance work also presaged what Judith Halberstam termed “female masculinity,” in her 1998 book of that name, in which she analyzed the performance of traits once considered male on bodies once considered female. Halberstam popularized “drag kings,” performers like Dred and Shelly Mars, who performed masculinity in theatrical or club settings without trying to “pass” as men.⁹ Diane Torr, on the other hand, who worked for a short time with at WOW, began giving gender workshops in the early 80s in which she taught women how to be misrecognized as men on the street.¹⁰

I recall these memories, these histories, to demonstrate that although the names often change, ideas develop in complex and repetitive, rather than linear, ways. I think often now, in this regard about liberal feminism, and what feminist and queer scholars now critique as “neoliberal” ideology and political strategies. The feminisms made “liberal feminist” as much of an accusation in the mid-80s as “cultural feminist”; certainly, aspiring to mainstream success or even commenting on popular or conventional women playwrights became anathema to a certain kind of feminist performance

theorizing. But even as I participated in this critique, I remember seeing performances in dominant cultural forums that moved and inspired me, shaping what I imagined was possible. For example, I'll never forget the chills I felt watching Lily Tomlin perform *Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* on Broadway in 1986, when, in the virtuosic one-woman performance's second act, a sound cue played Geraldine Ferraro's acceptance of the Democratic vice-presidential nomination in 1984. In that moment, even a Broadway theatre became a place to collectively recall and celebrate history in the making.¹¹ (Parenthetically, the first Broadway play I ever saw was Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow Was 'Enuf* in 1977 or '78, which was also formative for me.)

What Tomlin performed and described as the "goose bump" moments of theatre and politics have multiplied, as more women have ascended to higher political office and positions. But these women remain exceptional. American culture's paucity of imagination about how to represent the full range of women's experience reminds us of their singularity much too frequently. And the success of a few individual women demonstrates what progressives decry as the false victories of neoliberalism.¹² These successful women, according to the critique, repeat their individual triumphs apart from a concerted social movement that continues to fight for women's equality. As Janelle Reinelt remarks about Lucy Prebble (*Enron*) and Laura Wade (*Posh*), two visible British women playwrights of the 2010s, "these women writers are solo acts—they don't speak about feminism often or (in some cases) ever, and they don't seem to act or speak collectively."¹³ Reinelt argues that they "are much more likely to be self-contained within their own writing agendas, not connected to other women's groups or committed to speaking on behalf of feminist theatre. This is, by now, an old story: the loss of a movement, the neoliberal emphasis on singular achievement, women playwrights reluctant to identify as 'women' playwrights, and so on."¹⁴

And yet, it does seem that in the U.S., liberal feminism is reinvigorating itself with renewed activism. Julie Crosby, Producing Artistic Director of the Women's Project in New York, even says, "What

is clear is that a spectacular number of advocacy efforts on behalf of women theatre artists during the past year seems to be having a serious impact.”¹⁵ A town hall meeting convened by playwrights Julie Jordan and Sarah Schulman at New Dramatists in New York in 2008 reopened attention to the status of women playwrights.¹⁶ In 2008 and ‘09, a study by Emily Glassberg Sands, who was then a senior economics major at Princeton, used empirical analysis to study artistic directors’ responses to plays submitted to their theatres and found distinct patterns of gender discrimination when the plays were written by women.¹⁷ A number of high profile essays and speeches—including Marsha Norman’s piece in *American Theatre* and Theresa Rebeck’s 2010 Laura Pels keynote address for ART/NY—decried how little has changed since Susan Jonas’ and Suzanne Bennett’s landmark 2002 study of women in theatre for the New York State Council on the Arts.¹⁸ The advocacy group 50/50 in 2020 was launched in 2008 to call concerted attention to women’s persistently unequal treatment in American theatre.¹⁹

When I wrote *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, academic feminists like me might have dismissed such liberal bids for acceptance into existing power structures. But after years with so little change in women’s status, or even a back-sliding in numbers of productions by women, we need these groups to bolster the activist movement for change in the profession and in the nation. In the 1980s, feminism was a vibrant, growing field of critical and artistic practice. I expected feminist performance to flourish, expand, and proliferate in ways that required a useful taxonomy like the feminisms to productively sort out all this work. I never would have predicted that within 25 or so short years, feminism would be declared dead, not just by the mainstream media eager to chart newer ideological “fads,” but by academics and even activists who began to see the method and the movement as archaic or static.²⁰

At this point, in fact, a critical mass of feminist performance work is neither visible nor taken seriously enough for scholars to make the fine distinctions among it that once seemed necessary. And in the current political atmosphere of conservative retrenchment and Tea Party machinations, when even a once-revered Democratic president seems unable to chart a progressive course, feminists can no

longer afford to disparage one another's work or split critical hairs about which forms, contents, and contexts do more radically activist work. We need to work on all fronts at once and support one another's different methods, languages, and means, so that feminism can be a useful coalitional practice in politics and the arts.

In addition, second-wave American feminism now coexists alongside new articulations of gender politics. "Third wave feminism" refers to a younger generation of women, who've renewed attention to popular culture as a site for critical intervention. The third wave would reclaim women's bodies, pleasures, and sexualities from what they consider second wave feminists' constraining critique of women's objectification. (In that regard, their goals resemble the materialist lesbian feminist practices of the WOW Café in the 1980s.) But third-wavers agitate from within capitalism and dominant ideology, instead of believing that feminist practice can remain outside its reach.²¹ Following the lead of these activists and cultural commentators, I have come to believe that we should look within as well as outside the mainstream for our critical and creative pleasures and politics. We can use feminist criticism to consider commercial and non-profit theatre in addition to subcultural performance.

The feminist debate about form and content, as well as context, has also shifted profitably since *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* was first published. The critique of realism the book participates in advancing was productive and incisive, as it called attention to theatre form as well as content. But 25 years on, realism has in fact accommodated a certain kind of difference, as more women, people of color, and women of color use it to tell new stories. Lynn Nottage's *Ruined*, for instance, uses realism to describe in vivid detail the civil war in the Congo and the suffering it caused for African women. Danai Gurira's *Eclipsed* (2009) mines similar territory with similar formal strategies, addressing the costs for women in the Liberian civil war. Even David Lindsay-Abaire's *Good People*—for which the amazing Frances McDormand won a Best Actress Tony Award this year—employs realism tinged with feminist understandings to address the complexity of gender, race, and class in contemporary Boston. Realism

still might not be the most formally or ideologically radical genre, but if part of a necessary feminist intervention is to make sure that new stories are told about subjects and subjectivities that were once completely invisible in the most accessible mainstream forums, then even realist plays might contribute important and progressive narratives.

In addition, the dominant culture's most preeminent venues no longer exclusively showcase conventional, fourth-wall, domestic realism as they did in the 1980s. Mainstream theatre has opened to much more eclectic styles, forms, and genres, rather than championing realism as the only viable theatrical choice. For only several examples, on Broadway during this past season, *Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*, by Rajiv Joseph, boasts as a character a talking tiger (played by Robin Williams), who observes and comments on the play's action even after he's killed by another character. In the revival of *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying*, Daniel Radcliffe (the erstwhile star of the Harry Potter film franchise) sings and dances his heart out, interrupting himself regularly to wink at the audience in a nearly Brechtian breaking of the musical's fourth wall. But then, as Stacy Wolf proposes in her new book, *Changed for Good*, the musical—a staple of American theatre—is far from realist, and in fact provides multiple opportunities for commentary and feminist resistance, even though the form itself was also once considered a conservative chestnut of popular American culture.²²

Sleep No More, another 2011 hit in New York, is an environmental, site-specific adaptation of *Macbeth* by the British physical theatre troupe Punchdrunk, in which spectators, all wearing identical white plastic face masks, prowl around five floors of several retrofitted warehouses in Chelsea's far west side. Moving through the setting at their leisure and according to their own whim, spectators watch actors perform scenes all around them, sometimes even right next to them, in darkened spaces decorated with layers of objects and décor redolent of the 1940s hotel in which the story is set. These few examples and the many others like them indicate that theatre's search for novelty broke the habit of domestic realism. Even the most popular, "dominant" American theatre and performance is no

longer hegemonically realist—and of course, anti-realist, avant-garde, and experimental theatre movements thread throughout American theatre history.

That said, departing from generic traditions alone doesn't insure that these plays or performances are feminist. Feminist critics need to investigate the interplay between form and content without assuming that one or the other genre or style most naturally or ably accommodates progressive gender, sexuality, race, or class content. Likewise, even more experimental forms don't necessarily predict progressive meanings. The fact that women now direct so many post-modern, experimental theatre companies—Anne Bogart of the SITI Company, Elizabeth LeCompte of The Wooster Group, and Marianne Weems of The Builders Association, among others—indicates that women artists, too, use alternative forms and genres to tell stories and practice their craft. But these companies aren't necessarily or always feminist either, although sometimes, indeed, they are. How they represent and interpret gender and sexuality is as fluid and unpredictable as any other company. Form, style, and genre—as well as gender, sexuality, race, or class—never automatically forecast radical content. Feminist spectatorship and criticism now require looking closely at each performance, because progressive meanings sometimes come in surprising packages, and conservative ones in forms we might expect to be more radical. I find the effects of form and content harder to predict, these days.

What does this mean, then, about the figure I call “the ideal spectator” in my book, the white, male, middle-class, heterosexual character whose seat I suggested we feminists should steal? Has his primacy been reduced over the last 25 years, as forms have adapted and opened, and as the habitus—or taste patterns—of American theatre has expanded?²³ Yes and no. What Laura Mulvey analyzed as “scopophilia” (or pleasure in looking) in her psychoanalytically-oriented, foundational essay on visual pleasure in film, remains intact and deeply gender-biased as one of representation's operations.²⁴ I continue to see too many plays, performances, and films that take white straight male experience and

desire as their focus, barely nodding to women's existence, let alone addressing us as heroes or heroines of our own narratives.²⁵

But as I've suggested, representations in which women do exist with power—in film and television, ironically, more than in theatre—have begun to proliferate, and women spectators now have more options for positioning ourselves vis-à-vis the misogynist ones that remain. The language of resistant reading, like post-structuralism, has been popularized, so that women are generally more aware of their status and their agency as spectators. Adopting the male gaze to participate in our own objectification—one of the few, bleak options Mulvey outlined in 1975—now seems less likely than agitating for more representations in which women are central to the narrative and active, desirous subjects of our own. As I argue in the book, a woman is never a “denotative” sign; she always connotes something outside herself. Yet John Berger's notion that representation breaks down into the “surveyor and the surveyed” (54) seems a bit too pat in an age when subject positions and how they're narrated and visualized on stages and screens large and small has become more multiplicitous and complex. Nonetheless, popular forms still pander to young white males whom especially film studio executives persist in believing will bring in the most box office. Feminist spectators need to continue honing our critical interpretive strategies and consider film, theatre, performance, and television necessary sites for political intervention. We should promote feminist criticism as a strategy widely available for calling out sexism and other exclusions.²⁶

In fact, I've come to think of feminist criticism as cultural commentary in which more and more of us should participate. I recently became involved with the OpEd Project, a group founded to increase the number of women and people of color published on editorial pages in the nation's most visible public forums. We need more avowedly feminist voices analyzing current events and offering trenchant critiques that use the methods and insights of theatre and performance studies. I think of history once again, and the NEA debacle of the 1990s, in which Holly Hughes, Tim Miller, John Fleck, and Karen Finley

were so tyrannized for their embodiments of marginalized sexualities and subjectivities. In her politically acute performance *Preaching to the Perverted*, in which she ruminated on the ravages of those years, Hughes wrote how few progressives mounted counter-campaigns against the Right's arguments about the corruptions of their performances and its unsuitability for public funding. That silence represents a deep betrayal, one in which I refuse to participate again. We need to write; we need to speak; we need to use all of our skills, as feminist spectators of culture, as well as of performance, to popularize countervailing arguments and different solutions.

Under the terms of the NEA Four charade, the "ideal spectator" became "the taxpayer" in the American imagination. The white, heterosexual, male, middle-class citizen was reasserted as the sole arbiter of appropriate American values, sweeping away dissent and difference with his state-approved hegemony. That travesty set the tone for a general censoring of performance and art by sexual minorities through the 1980s and 1990s that's continued into the 21st century, all framed as referenda on how taxpayers' money should be spent.²⁷ The Right still controls the terms of the debate, so that the imaginary tax-paying citizen is never an LGBT person, a person of color, or even a political progressive. These highly visible controversies over art exhibitions and performance funding help push gays, lesbians, people of color, and feminists out of the sphere of national influence. If the NEA Four performers' work wasn't eligible for federal support because they offended the "average citizen," then people who fell outside the "normal" were suddenly no longer citizens at all.

Although we've been through several presidential administrations since the NEA fracas, and although American culture sometimes seems more open to LGBT subjects and to women, the challenges of our political system remain intractable. Even under Obama's administration, in 2010, *Hide/Seek*, the first exhibit ever devoted to LGBT portraiture at the Smithsonian, suffered its own censorship controversy. A 1987 video called *A Fire in My Belly*, by the late gay artist David Wojnarowicz, was considered offensive to the religious right. The video, which Wojnarowicz created as his partner was

dying from HIV/AIDS, shows ants crawling on a crucifix to represent his partner's suffering. The Catholic League protested the video, which was subsequently pulled from the exhibit by the Smithsonian. Progressive commentators complained bitterly about this sop to the Right, which once again claimed the taxpayer and the waste of "his" money to protest the art in question. The video was moved to New York's Museum of Modern Art after it was removed from the Smithsonian exhibit. But the specter of censorship continues to hang over American culture.

In many ways, these debates about which art and performance is allowed to be seen, let alone funded, harkens back to my book's argument about canon-formation. The powerful still arbitrate the canon, whether of art, theatre, film, performance, or books. The news here is also both good and bad. Despite the generally poor statistics on the production of plays by women in New York, more women's plays are now accepted as "good American drama." Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive* (which received the Pulitzer in 1998), Theresa Rebeck's *Omnium Gatherum* (finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2003), Lynn Nottage's *Ruined* (the Pulitzer Prize winner in 2009), and Sarah Ruhl's *In the Next Room (or the vibrator play)* (finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2010) have been published and anthologized and regularly receive productions at regional theatres around the country. While only Rebeck and Ruhl have been produced on Broadway, more plays by women have traveled the regional theatre circuit, and several have received multiple productions in the same season. As Brandi Wilkins Catanese argues, these regional theatres are sites at which "philanthropic-foundation dollars, critical acclaim, and extensive media coverage converge, [which makes them] instrumental in producing playwrights whose work can be trusted, especially in difficult economic times, to sell tickets and to facilitate the exchange of cultural capital between artists and institutions."²⁸ But few regional theatres will risk producing a play (by a woman or a man, for that matter) that hasn't been test-driven at least in an Off-Broadway theatre in New York. New plays are developed to death, all with an eye toward making money and pleasing what's too often the lowest common audience denominator. This means that standards of canon-

formation remain startlingly the same as they did when I compared *'night, Mother's* reception to *Death of a Salesman's* in the early 1980s. As in American politics, a few exceptional women sneak in, but the canon itself remains predominantly male.

Even more egregiously, the critical response that's instrumental to canon formation in the first place continues to flaunt its gender bias. Both Emily Mann and Theresa Rebeck have told stories of the devastating response to their work from male critics, who wrote about their plays with a brutality that could have ended both women's careers. Mann recalls in vivid detail the critical reaction to her play, *Still Life*, when it opened Off Broadway in 1981. In the documentary style she favors, using language drawn from her interviews with a Vietnam vet, his wife, and his lover, the play describes the visceral aftermath of war and violence. In his review, Frank Rich, then the first-string critic of the *New York Times*, accused Mann of "fuzzy-headed writing" that "leaves the audience cold." "Good intentions," he sniffed, "don't stand a chance in the face of sheer incompetence."²⁹ The review exemplifies misogynist criticism that condescends to its subject and refuses to acknowledge or respect the artists' style as politically or aesthetically significant. As a powerful arbiter of taste and quality, and as a gatekeeper to the canon, Rich refused Mann entrée.

Likewise, Rebeck addressed the ravages of criticism in her Laura Pels Keynote address for ART/NY's annual meeting in March 2010. Rebeck described the progress of her 1999 play, *The Butterfly Collection*, from a workshop production at South Coast Rep in California to a fall 2000 production at Playwrights Horizons in New York. The play generated a great deal of excitement, Rebeck recalls, but "When the *New York Times* published its review it was not what anyone expected. The reviewer . . . dismissed the play . . . as a feminist diatribe. He accused me of having a thinly veiled man-hating agenda, and in a truly bizarre paragraph . . ., he expressed sympathy to the director [Barlett Sher] because he had to work with someone as hideous as me. . . . [T]here was a flurry of upset [over the review's tone]. But with a review that bad, the play closed. . . . Everybody knew that that was a crazy

misogynistic review. But no one would produce the play. Ever again. And you should know that many people consider it my best play. Still.”³⁰

Rebeck goes on to say that after the *Times* review appeared and the production closed, she could no longer get any of her work produced. One “nice” person after another told her that she should produce her plays under a male pseudonym, since clearly, the New York critics “don’t like you personally.” This outrageous suggestion came from people who thought they were being sympathetic and helpful. Rebeck has recovered, and now has very successful career, but she said that she told this story in her speech “because I don’t want to hear from anybody that there isn’t, or hasn’t been, a real gender problem in the American theater.”

Male critics have a stranglehold on the business of writing about new plays, performances, or productions, especially in New York. The continuing predominance of white male critics means that work by women, and/or people of color, and/or gays and lesbians, and especially anyone who crosses several of these categories, are instantly suspect as “special interest” vehicles, and how they speak to wider audiences is rarely considered.³¹ Exceptions, once again, are allowed in: Tarell Alvin McCraney, the young African American gay male playwright, became wildly popular a couple of seasons ago. Sarah Ruhl does very well on the regional circuits, and Lynn Nottage’s latest play, *By the Way, Meet Vera Stark*, received a successful run at New York’s Second Stage. But nonetheless, you can feel the critical antipathy for work by women, partly just by noting to how they rave over work by men.

Even when male critics aren’t mounting overt attacks on women’s work, their reviews often epitomize the indifference of critics to the significance not just of women’s work in the theatre, but of women’s place in the world. With gender equity—let alone racial or economic equality— still not a far-gone conclusion, criticism needs to provide a different quality of attention to women’s expression and experience. Theatre won’t change until the critics’ corps in the U.S. diversifies and until more critics of other races and genders start writing from a broader perspective on the myriad stories that deserve to

be told and embodied in performance. As Sarah Schulman insists, “The American theatre will neither reflect the American playwright nor serve the American audience until it decides to expand what is known about being alive, instead of endlessly repeating already established paradigms.”³² Attending closely to the critical (and audience) reception to plays by women, and detailing their production context, advertising and marketing, acting choices, and design yields a wealth of insights into the plays’ potential for meaning and for breaking through the persistent male dominion on definitions of universality or even simple *worthiness*.

I want to end these ruminations with a few last thoughts on my own on-going feminist critical practice. Since I wrote *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, what’s changed for me the most is my relationship with the artists whose work I analyze. I commented with some concern at the end of *The Feminist Spectator as Critic’s* afterword, “The feminist critic who writes frankly of a feminist production’s problems risks a certain ostracism from the creative community” (120). I complained that At the Foot of the Mountain wanted to read what I said about them before they would release publicity stills to help illustrate the book (a request I refused). Even as I developed a method for a new and hopefully more radical feminist performance criticism, I remained influenced by a lingering commitment to objectivity, believing that even a feminist critic should separate herself from artists’ intents. Or maybe this wasn’t lingering objectivity so much as militant post-structuralism, the *cri de coeur* of the death of the author, which meant that even newly discovered feminist artists couldn’t be directly engaged.³³

I see my relationship to theatre- and performance-makers quite differently now. I no longer consider myself an objective arbiter of even feminist theatre, but as an advocate for women’s work and for a feminist perspective on theatre in general. In addition to my scholarship, I’ve maintained a blog since 2005 called *The Feminist Spectator* (in honor of and in reference to my first book) on which I write, several times a month, critical essays of various lengths on current theatre and performance, as well as film, television, and the occasional novel. My one rule of thumb is to write only about work I like, work I

feel deserves my time and critical effort, or about work I might not like that's touched a cultural nerve and hasn't yet been addressed from a feminist perspective (for instance, the films *The Black Swan* and *The Social Network*). I'm tired of ad hominem attacks by powerful male theatre critics like Ben Brantley and Charles Isherwood, who delight in trashing productions that don't conform to their own preconceived, mystified standards.³⁴ I've determined to use a practice of "critical generosity" that I developed (very much influenced by my colleague David Román) with Jaclyn Pryor and Paul Bonin-Rodriguez when we worked together at University of Texas at Austin.³⁵ To be critically generous means to be responsible for a deeper knowledge of the work you engage; means that you take into account its production context and resources, its history and goals; and that you consider its players and producers as people laboring to create meaning with the materials at hand. The terms "good" and "bad" have no purchase here. Feminist criticism isn't about facile value judgments or consumer reporting; it doesn't arbitrate taste. It strives to consider what theatre and performance might *mean*, what it might *do*, how it might be *used* in a world that requires ever more and better conversations about how we can imagine *who we are and who we might be*.

Many of the vexed issues to which I point in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic's* afterword continue to preoccupy my thoughts and my writing. The utopian "space-off" representation and what Teresa de Lauretis called the "view from elsewhere" (119) led me eventually to theorize the "utopian performative," moments in performance in which audiences feel themselves aligned emotionally toward a felt experience, however fleeting, of a better world. In my book *Utopia in Performance*, I addressed what I called the potential "militant optimism" of "radical humanism" to work backwards (and forward) from the categories of feminism into a redefined, more capacious commonality as an organizing assumption of theatre and performance.³⁶

To do this without rejecting the specificity of feminism—or gender or sexuality, race or class—requires emphasizing coalition. I imagine, in my mind's eye, a festival ground with no borders and no

entrance fee (and with eternally good weather), to which interested, curious, or determined spectators can come to watch, debate, and engage performance, sometimes experiencing *communitas* and sometimes not.³⁷ I picture a wide-ranging affair in which people of all sorts gather in subgroups named according to numerous identities, interests, and affinities, then disperse and form others, arguing, agreeing, debating, and delighting in what they see, without judging one another harshly. Such a setting would allow this redefined and reinvigorated feminist performance and criticism to “carry its radical meanings to a wider audience” (120). In the mid-80s, I wondered, “How does social change really happen through cultural production?” (120). After the many years since I wrote this book, I still hold faith that it *does*, even if the mechanisms for how change occurs evolve unpredictably, transforming with new technologies, new audiences, new forms and structures, new styles and contents.

I wrote *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* with a journalist’s eye toward accessibility, a theorist’s desire to generate new feminist meanings and practices, and a polemicist’s intent to argue passionately for a way of considering theatre and performance in all its gendered, raced, and sexual complexity. I hope the book continues to clarify and exemplify a useful critical practice. I also hope this talk and the introduction from which it borrows persuades readers to consider “the feminisms” and the other methods I detail as interrelated and mutually enhancing. These categories and strategies are and have always been more porous than they once seemed. I’ve tried to situate feminist criticism within a constellation of practices that consider liberal, cultural, and materialist feminist performance and theatre part of a web-like genealogy, rather than a straight line marking hierarchical progress through a taxonomy of feminist arts and social movements. While I think “the feminisms” still have meaning, I now believe they’re best used in conjunction with one another, rather than as really distinct descriptive categories.

To be critically generous means to engage performance openly and honestly, with heart as well as mind, with history and the future fully in view. It means to preserve the humanity of the artist and

the critic by engaging with respect instead of contempt, to open more and better avenues for dialogue, imagination, and desire. I'm grateful to everyone who participates in this journey.

¹ In television, for only two examples, Edie Falco plays a drug-addicted but supremely competent and empathetic ER nurse on Showtime's *Nurse Jackie*; Kyra Sedgwick plays the southern-bred chief of a major Los Angeles police crimes squad on *The Closer*, a TNT network show she also produces. The proliferation of cable channels—including Showtime, HBO, TNT, the CW, and others—in addition to the three traditional television networks means a broader array of outlets with producers looking for fresh ideas. Showtime, in fact, sponsored producer Ilene Chaiken's lesbian soap opera, *The L Word* (2004-2009), which broke ground as the first show on television to feature mainly lesbian characters in its on-going storyline. In film, although "rom coms" and buddy movies still dominate the American box office, women filmmakers' inroads have at least been acknowledged over the last two decades. For only one example, Kathryn Bigelow became the first woman to win Best Director Academy Award for *The Hurt Locker* (2008), a war film that barely featured women at all. Among the 21 women who've won Academy Awards for screenwriting since 1929, Diablo Cody won for *Juno* (2007), Diana Ossana won for *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), and Sofia Coppola won for *Lost in Translation* (2003).

² See Echols, *Born to be Bad* and Diana Fuss, *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature, and Difference* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

³ See my *From Flannel to Fleece: Lesbian Cultural Production from 1970-1990* for a recuperation of the project of women's culture (forthcoming).

⁴ One of the first, for example, was playwright/director John Jesurun's serial *Chang in a Void Moon* which began performance installments in 1982 at Limbo Lounge. On a postage-stamp-size stage, Jesurun used unusual viewing angles and design elements to change how the audience saw the action progress. The serial was a post-modern pastiche of forms and contents, performed by an eclectic ensemble, which attracted a large and committed following. See Ronald K. Fried, "John Jesurun's *Chang in a Void Moon*," *TDR: The Drama Review* Vol. 27, 2 (Summer 1983):

⁵ *TDR: The Drama Review*, special issue on East Village performance, Vol. 29, 1 (Spring 1985).

⁶ See Kate Davy, *Lady Dicks and Lesbian Brothers: Staging the Unimaginable at the WOW Café* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); see Diane Torr and Stephen J. Bottoms, *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles: Investigating Gender as Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); and Holly Hughes and Carmelita Tropicana, eds., *Memories of the Revolution: The WOW Café* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, forthcoming).

⁷ Email correspondence with Jaclyn Pryor, Thursday, April 7, 2011.

⁸ Email correspondence with Debbie Bazarsky, April 2011.

⁹ Judith Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998). See also Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹⁰ See Torr and Bottoms, *Sex, Drag, and Male Roles*.

¹¹ For a feminist discussion of Tomlin's play, see chapter three, "Finding Our Feet in One Another's Shoes: Multiple-Character Solo Performance," of my *Utopia in Performance*, 63-88.

¹² Stanley Fish offers an often cited definition of neoliberalism by Paul Treanor: "Neoliberalism is a philosophy in which the existence and operation of a market are valued in themselves, separately from any previous relationship with the production of goods and services . . . and where the operation of a market or market-like structure is seen as an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide for all human action, and substituting for all previously existing ethical beliefs" (qtd. in Fish, "Neoliberalism and Higher Education," *New York Times*, 9 Mar. 2009 <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/03/08/neoliberalism-and-higher-education/>. Accessed 27 April 2011. See also Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003).

¹³ Janelle Reinelt, "Creative Ambivalence and Precarious Futures: Women in British Theatre," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 62, 4 (December 2010), 555.

¹⁴ Reinelt, 553.

¹⁵ Julie Crosby, "It's All About You: The March Toward Parity in the American Theatre," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 62, 4 (December 2010), 572.

¹⁶ As I note in "Making a Spectacle, Making a Difference," "Women playwrights—as a kind of discovered species—seem to arrive over and over again every ten years or so" (562).

¹⁷ See <http://www.emilysands.com/emilysands.com/Home.html>. Accessed 28 April 2011.

¹⁸ See "Report on the Status of Women: A Limited Engagement?" prepared for the New York State Council on the Arts Theatre Program by Susan Jonas and Susanne Bennett, January 2002, available at <http://www.womenarts.org/advocacy/WomenCountNYSCARreport.htm>. See also Marsha Norman, "Not There Yet," *American Theatre*, November 2009, available at <http://www.tcg.org/publications/at/nov09/women.cfm>. Accessed 12 June 2010. See also the text of Rebeck's keynote address, archived on the League of Professional Theatre Women's website, available at <http://www.theatrewomen.org/theresa-rebeck-laura-pels-keynote-address-on-March-15th-2010>. Accessed 5 July 2010.

¹⁹ Information about the "50/50 in 2020 Project" is available on its Facebook page and at www.WomenArts.org. Accessed 5 July 2010.

²⁰ For astute feminist critiques of the move to position feminism as old-fashioned, see for only two examples Biddy Martin, *Femininity Played Straight: The Significance of Being Lesbian* (New York: Routledge, 1996), and Susanna Danuta Walters, "From Here to Queer: Radical Feminism, Postmodernism, and the Lesbian Menace (or, Why Can't a Woman Be More Like a Fag?)" *Signs* Vol. 21, 4 (Summer 1996): 830-869. And in the academy, for example, in the movement of sexuality studies and gender theory away from a focus on women toward genderqueer and trans studies, women and feminist subjects are sometimes seen as archaic and irrelevant, ignored instead of considered as part of the continuing texture of an expanding field. **Also add Susan Faludi *Backlash* and her *Harpers* article.**

²¹ Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley, in their persuasive introduction to *Feminism in Popular Culture*, say, "[T]here remain powerful attachments in some feminisms to the idea that feminism can exist in an 'outside,' and vanguard, position," which they suggest is the basis of "disagreements over the relationship between second-wave and post- and third-wave feminisms." Joanne Hollows and Rachel Moseley, "Popularity Contests: The Meanings of Popular Feminism," in Hollows and Moseley, eds., *Feminism in Popular Culture* (New York: Berg, 2006), 2. They elaborate by suggesting that some critics want to hold on to the notion of the feminist critique as "outside," while others argue that it's impossible to get outside "the construction of subjectivity [within] the production/consumption cycle of global commodification" (14).

²² See Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002) and Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

²³ On "habitus" and the ideology of taste, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (New York: Routledge, 1984).

²⁴ See Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* Vol. 16, 3 (Autumn 1975): .

²⁵ See for only several examples from the 2010-2011 Broadway season, Rajiv Joseph's *The Bengal Tiger at the Baghdad Zoo*; Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem*, and Stephen Adly Guirgis's *The Motherfucker with the Hat*, which were uniformly fawned over by critics.

²⁶ For an extended argument about the need to popularize the precepts of feminist performance criticism, see my "Making a Spectacle, Making a Difference," in the special issue on contemporary women's playwright of *Theatre Journal* Vol. 62, 4 (December 2010), 561-565.

²⁷ **CITE TT PIECE, Susan Miller's My Left Breast, etc.**

²⁸ Brandi Wilkins Catanese, "Taking the Long View," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 62, 4 (December 2010), 548.

²⁹ See Frank Rich, "Stage: 'Still Life' by Emily Mann at American Place Theatre," *New York Times*, 20 Feb. 1981 <http://theater.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9907E6DC1739F933A15751C0A967948260&sc=1&sq=Frank%20Rich,%20Still%20Life&st=cse>. Accessed 2 May 2011.

³⁰ See Rebeck, Laura Pels keynote.

³¹ See Sandra L. Richards and Kathy A. Perkins, "Black Women Playwrights in American Theatre," *Theatre Journal* Vol. 62, 4 (December 2010), where they note "the lack of African American critics writing for major newspapers" (545).

³² Sarah Schulman, "Supremacy Ideology Masquerading as Reality: The Obstacle Facing Women Playwrights in America," *Theatre Journal*, Vol. 62, 4 (December 2010), 567.

³³ See Barbara Christian, "The Race for Theory" [reference to come].

³⁴ See, for example, Ben Brantley's gleefully mean review of *Spider-Man: Turn Off the Dark*, "Theater Review: Good vs. Evil, Hanging by a Thread," *New York Times*, 7 Feb. 2011, <http://theater.nytimes.com/2011/02/08/theater/reviews/spiderman-review.html?ref=spidermanturnoffthedarkmusical>.

While I agree that a budget in excess of \$65 million is outrageous for a musical (but why not for a film?), Brantley's review took predictable, supremely uncharitable swipes at the production, which he and other critics evaluated before its official (long-delayed) opening. Director Julie Taymor received particularly harsh criticism for her work on a musical that had initially been her vision.

³⁵ See Dolan, Paul Bonin-Rodriguez, and Jaclyn Pryor "Colleague-Criticism: Performance, Writing, and Queer Collegiality," in *Liminalities: A Journal of Performance Studies*, special issue on paradigms of performance studies, 5.1 (April 2009) (online at <http://liminalities.net/5-1/>). She also David Román, *Acts of Intervention: Performance, Gay Culture, and AIDS* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1998), for his foundational work on critical generosity.

³⁶ See my *Utopia in Performance*. See also José Estaban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

³⁷ See Victor Turner, "Liminality and Communitas," in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago, Aldine Publishing, 1969), 94-113, 125-130.