

**Prof. Jill Dolan**

**ENG 408/AMS 408**

**Fall 2009**

**11:00 – 12:20, T/Th, McCosh B45**

**Office hours: Tuesdays, 9-11, McCosh 44b**

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**Women in American Theatre: Doing Gender, Race, Sexuality Onstage and Off**

**Course Description:** This course addresses the history and theory, practices and polemics of women working in American theatre and performance. Materials will concentrate on contemporary examples, but will also consider theatre's role in the struggle for women's visibility advanced by American feminism of the 1960s and '70s. We'll study women playwrights, solo performers, and collective theatre companies, asking how organizational structures, as well as the written form and content of their work, influence how women are seen and received in the theatre industry. We'll delve into feminist, queer, critical race, and performance theory to consider what kinds of methodologies best pose questions useful to our investigation. We'll host distinguished guests who are currently practicing in the field, and we'll discuss a vital range of work by women, from solo performers such as Deb Margolin, Anna Deveare Smith, and Marga Gomez to playwrights such as Sarah Ruhl and Theresa Rebeck to directors such as Tina Landau, Anne Bogart, and Lisa Peterson. Our conversations will be polemical and forward-thinking: What is the future of women's work in this field? What needs to change—in terms of social attitudes, cultural climates, theatre's modes of production, and audiences' expectations of what "women" or "feminist" means—for women to achieve equality in theatre and performance? What is particular about theatre work by women? Is it most distinguished by identity issues such as gender, race, and sexuality or perhaps by form, content, context, style, or other aesthetic questions?

**Course Texts** are available as e-reserves on Blackboard, except where noted in the course outline.

**Course Outline**

**Week #1: Introduction**

**Thursday, 9/17**

**Required performance:** Between 9/17 and 10/11, please see a performance of Emily Mann's *Having Our Say* at the McCarter Theatre Center. Tickets are available free to Princeton students; see the McCarter web site for information at [www.mccarter.org](http://www.mccarter.org).

**Week #2: History and Theory**

**Tuesday, 9/22**

- Charlotte Canning, *Feminist Theaters in the U.S.A.* New York: Routledge, 1996. Introduction: "Two projects, celebration and critique," 1-9; Chapter 2: "Feminism, Theatre, and Radical Politics," 39-62. (51)
- Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins, eds., *Women in American Theatre* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, revised and expanded third edition, 2006). "Feminist Theatre," 265-301; Roberta Sklar, "Reflections," 317-319. (38)

**Thursday, 9/24**

- Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991). Chapter One: "The Discourse of Feminisms," 1-18. (18)
- Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins, eds., *Women in American Theatre* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, revised and expanded third edition, 2006). "Feminist Theatrical Theories," 328-335. (7)

**Recommended:**

- Elin Diamond, "Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism," in Carol Martin, ed., *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 120-135. (15)

**Highly Recommended:** I strongly encourage you to attend the "Women in Theatre: Issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" conference, Saturday, 9/26, 9:30-6:00, 185 Nassau St.; [www.princeton.edu/arts/wit](http://www.princeton.edu/arts/wit). Please email me directly to reserve a space.

**Week #3: 1960s and 70s Agit-Prop and Avant-Garde Performance**

**Tuesday, 9/29**

- Discuss conference.
- Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Chapter Two: "Feminism and the Canon," 19-40.
- Marsha Norman, "Introduction," in Alexis Greene, editor, *Women Writing Plays: Three Decades of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 1-7.

**Thursday, 10/1 Presentations on plays/playwrights/productions begin here.**

- Myrna Lamb, *But What have You Done for Me Lately?* (via PDF email attachment)
- Rochelle Owens, *Futz*, in *Futz and What Came After: Five Plays by Rochelle Owens* (New York: Random House, 1968). (via PDF email attachment)
- Charlotte Canning, Chapter One, "Social Change, Artistic Ferment: USA," in Alexis Greene, editor, *Women Writing Plays: Three Decades of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 17-27. (10)

**Week #4: Comedy**

**Tuesday, 10/6**

- Marga Gomez, excerpts from *Memory Tricks*, *Marga Gomez is Pretty Witty & Gay*, and *A Line Around the Block* in *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color*, eds Kathy Perkins and Roberta Uno (New York: Routledge, 1996), 191-198.
- Carmelita Tropicana, *Chicas 2000* in *I, Carmelita Tropicana: Performing Between Cultures* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000).

**Thursday, 10/8**

**Guests:** Carmelita Tropicana and Marga Gomez

**Highly Recommended:** An Evening of Latina Performance, 7 p.m., Matthews Acting Studio, 185 Nassau St., Lewis Center for the Arts. Free.

**Week #5: Pulitzer Plays**

**Tuesday, 10/13 Plays to be reviewed or analyzed selected and due dates contracted by today.**

- Wendy Wasserstein, *The Heidi Chronicles* (New York: Dramatists Play Service, 1990).
- Dolan, "Feminist Performance Criticism and the Popular: Reviewing Wendy Wasserstein," *Theatre Journal* 60.3 (October 2008): 433-457. (25)

**Thursday, 10/15**

- Suzan-Lori Parks, *Top Dog/Underdog* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2001). (Play at Labyrinth Books)

**Recommended:**

- Wendy Wasserstein, *Third* (published in *American Theatre*).
- Paula Vogel, *How I Learned to Drive* in *The Mammary Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1998).
- Marsha Norman, *'night, Mother*. (online, Firestone Library)  
<http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?WODR;PL010256>.
- Beth Henley, *Crimes of the Heart*. (online, Firestone Library)  
<http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?WODR;PL007944>.

**Week #6: Subcultural Spaces v. Broadway Houses**

**Tuesday, 10/20**

- "All About Eve: Madison's Apple Island and the Fictions of Lesbian Community." *New Theatre Quarterly* 37 (February 1994): 28-32. (6)
- Kate Davy on the WOW Café. (via PDF email)
- Alisa Solomon, "The WOW Café," in Carol Martin, ed., *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 42-51. (9)

**Thursday, 10/22**

- Sarah Ruhl, *In the Next Room (or, the Vibrator Play)* (via PDF email attachment)
- "Joking Aside: A Conversation about Comedy with Christopher Durang, Gina Gionfriddo, Sarah Ruhl, and Wendy Wasserstein," in Alexis Greene, ed., *Women Writing Plays: Three Decades of the Susan Smith Blackburn Prize* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 181-190. (9)
- "An Interview with Sarah Ruhl," in Greene, ed., *Women Writing Plays*, 228-233. (5)

**Highly recommended:** Performance of Ruhl's *In the Next Room (or, the Vibrator Play)* at Lincoln Center Theatre, matinee, Sunday, October 25<sup>th</sup>, ticket info to come.

**Week #7: Collective Experiments**

**Tuesday, 10/27**

- Discuss performance, *The Vibrator Play*.
- Split Britches, *Split Britches* in Sue-Ellen Case, ed., *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice, Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
- Sue-Ellen Case, "Introduction," *Split Britches: Lesbian Practice, Feminist Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

**Thursday, 10/29**

**Guests:** Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw of Split Britches

**Recommended:**

- *Lesbians Who Kill* in *Split Britches*.
- Five Lesbian Brothers, *Four Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000).
- Dolan, "Blogging on Queer Connections in the Arts and the Five Lesbian Brothers," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.3 (2006): 491-506.
- Women's Experimental Theatre, *The Daughter's Cycle Trilogy: Electra Speaks* (via PDF email attachment)
- Spiderwoman Theatre, *Sun, Moon, Feather* in Perkins and Uno, eds., *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color*, 297-309.

**Week #8: Break**

**Tuesday, 11/3**

**Thursday, 11/5**

**Week #9: The Jazz Aesthetic**

**Tuesday, 11/10**

- Sharon Bridgforth, *The Bull-Jean Stories* (Austin: Redbone Press, 1998). (Play at Labyrinth Books)
- Lisa Moore, Omi Osun Olomo, Sharon Bridgforth, eds., "Introduction," *The Austin Project* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009, forthcoming) (via PDF email attachment)
- **Guest:** Sharon Bridgforth, on The Austin Project

**Thursday, 11/12** (Prof. Dolan out)

- Workshop paper, project, or performance ideas in groups.

**Week #10: Regional Theatres**

**Tuesday, 11/17**

- Discuss performance of *Having Our Say* at McCarter.
- Emily Mann, *Execution of Justice* in *Testimonies: Four Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1997).
- Emily Mann, "The Female Gaze," in Alexis Greene, ed. *Women Who Write Plays: Interviews with Contemporary American Dramatists* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 75-81. (6)
- "Emily Mann," in David Savran, *In Their Own Words: Contemporary American Playwrights* (New York: TCG, 1988), 145-160. (15)

**Thursday, 11/19**

- **Guest:** Emily Mann, artistic director, McCarter Theatre.

**Recommended:**

- Emily Mann, *Mrs. Packard* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009).

**Week #11: Solo Performance**

***Tuesday, 11/24***

- Dolan, "Performance, Utopia, and the 'Utopian Performative'," *Theatre Journal* 53 (October 2001): 455-479.
- Peggy Shaw, *Menopausal Gentleman* (via PDF email).

***Thursday, 11/26: Thanksgiving Holiday.***

**Week #12: Autobiographical Performance**

***Tuesday, 12/1***

- Deb Margolin, "I'm Just Saying," special section of *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* 52:3 (Fall 2008), 95-98.
- Deb Margolin, *Index to Idioms*, *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* 52:3 (Fall 2008), 160-173.
- Dolan, "Seeing Deb Margolin: Ontological Vandalism and Radical Amazement," *TDR: The Journal of Performance Studies* 52:3 (Fall 2008), 98-117.
- Deb Margolin, "Count the I's; or, the Autobiographical Nature of Everything," *Women & Performance Journal* 10:1-2: 23-32.

***Thursday, 12/3***

- Coco Fusco, Nao Bustamante, *Stuff*, in *Out of the Fringe: Contemporary Latina/Latino Theatre and Performance*, eds. Caridad Svich and Maria Teresa Marrero (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000), 41-69.

**Recommended:**

- Robbie McCauley, *Sally's Rape* in Sydné Mahone, ed., *Moon Marked and Touched by the Sun: Plays by African American Women* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 1994), 211-237.
- Vicki Patraha, "Robbie McCauley: Obsessing in Public," in Carol Martin, ed., *A Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 205-237.

**Week #13: Politics and Performance**

***Tuesday, 12/8***

- Young Jean Lee, *The Appeal*, in *Song of the Dragons Flying to Heaven and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009), 105-143.

***Thursday, 12/10***

- Migdalia Cruz, *Telling Tales*. (via PDF email)
- "Migdalia Cruz," interview, in Alexis Greene, *Women Who Write Plays: Interviews with American Dramatists* (Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2001), 106-134.

**Week #14: The Future?**

***Tuesday, 12/15***

- Alice Tuan, *Ajax (por Nobody)*, in Mac Wellman and Young Jean Lee, eds., *New Downtown Now: An Anthology of New Theatre from Downtown New York* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 245-312.
- *The Feminist Spectator*, "Batch." (online)

**Thursday, 12/17**

- Lynn Nottage, *Ruined* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2009). (Play at Labyrinth Books)
- *The Feminist Spectator*, "Ruined." (online)

**Recommended:**

- Nottage, *Crumbs from the Table of Joy and Other Plays* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2004).
- Nottage, *Two Plays: Intimate Apparel and Fabulation: or the Re-Education of Undine* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2006).

Reading week research presentations, Wednesday, January 6, 2010, 1-4 p.m.

**Course Requirements**

Since this is a seminar class, your regular attendance is required and consistent, high quality oral participation is assumed. You should plan to contribute actively in each class session, offering concise and succinct observations about the reading or performances and engaging your colleague's ideas. Don't be late for class; consistent lateness will lower your final course grade by one letter. More than three absences, for any reason, will lower your final grade by at least one letter (depending on how many more than three absences accumulate). If you have questions about your class participation, your lateness, or your absences and how they're affecting your grade, please email me or visit me in office hours.

**Assignments**

1. Three different in-class presentations, no more than five minutes each, about the plays/playwrights/productions we're discussing, cycled through the semester, with written notes of 250-500 words to be posted on Black Board by 5 p.m. the day prior to our class meeting (30%):
  - a. *Biographical*, on the day's playwright, with one or two interesting anecdotes not easily found.
  - b. *Production history*, with detailed information—including images—on one exemplary performance: how it looked, what choices were made, who was cast, and what that might have meant to the production.
  - c. *Dramaturgical questions*: About the play's form and content, to begin our conversation.
2. Six Blackboard posts submitted by 5 p.m. the day prior to class meetings, spread out over the course of the semester, with several narrative questions about the day's reading to launch our discussion (approx. 100 words). You must manage the scheduling of these posts, and spread them throughout the semester. (12%)

3. **Production review or play analysis of something we've not seen or read in class (23%, 10% for 1<sup>st</sup> draft and 13% for revision), turned in on a date of your choice, to be pre-arranged with me, during the semester. Productions or plays must be selected and due dates arranged by October 13<sup>th</sup>. Send me an email indicating which production you'll see, where, and why, or which play you'll read, and when you'll turn in your first draft (500 words). Your second draft will be due one week after I return the first draft with comments. More details about this assignment (i.e., organizing questions, things to look for, etc.) to come.**
4. **Final project/paper (structured as idea generating workshop, 11/12; 150-word proposal, describing your paper's thesis argument or your performance or project concept, including at least three sources on which you'll draw, due 12/1; oral presentation or performance of your final work during Reading Week, 1/6; final project/paper, due Dean's Day, 1/12) (35%). Ideas for projects:**
  - a. **A research paper about/analysis of one of the recommended plays (approx. 10 pages or 2500 words).**
  - b. **An essay-length response to one of the recommended articles (approx. 10 pages or 2500 words).**
  - c. **A series of reviews of plays by or about women for the daily Prince or a similar print or internet news outlet (adding up to approx. 2500 words).**
  - d. **A 5-10 minute original performance (solo or group), that in some ways addresses the materials of the class. The performance could be site-specific (that is, performed in a location of your choice that's meaningful to the work); could be in a theatre you reserve and arrange; or could be in the classroom. The parameters depend on what you want to accomplish by embodying some of the ideas and issues of the class for your colleagues. No more than 10 minutes of performance, plus a three-page/750 word written explanation/assessment of your work.**
  - e. **An artistic response to a play, production, or performance, drawn from materials inside or outside of class. This might be a painting, drawing, or sculpture; a short play; a series of poems, etc.**
  - f. **A critical journal, cataloguing your responses to an issue related to women and theatre that you follow throughout the semester (for example, the issue of discrimination against women playwrights) in the press or on line, engaging with the ideas dialogically.**
  - g. **A paper, project, or performance of your devising, approved by me in advance.**

### **Select Bibliography**

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- Chinoy, Helen Krich, and Linda Walsh Jenkins, eds. *Women in American Theatre*. New York: Theatre Communications Group. (1981) Rev. and expanded 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2006.
- Corthron, Kia. *Come Down Burning*, in Kathy Perkins and Roberta Uno, eds., *Contemporary Plays by Women of Color*. New York: Routledge, 1996, 90-105.
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- . *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.
- . *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance*. Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2001.
- Five Lesbian Brothers. *Brave Smiles: Another Lesbian Tragedy*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000.
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- Lamb, Myrna. *But What Have you Done for Me Lately?* in Myrna Lamb, *The Mod Donna and Scyklon Z*. New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971, 143-166.
- Margolin, Deb. "Mining My Own Business," in David Krasner, ed., *Method Acting Reconsidered: Theory, Practice, Future*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000, 127-134.
- . "Count the I's, or, the Autobiographical Nature of Everything," *Women & Performance Journal*, 23-32.
- . In Jo Bonney, ed., *Extreme Exposure: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts*. New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2000, 323-331.
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- Shimakawa, Karen. *National Abjection: The Asian American Body Onstage*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002.
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