Women’s And Gender Studies Newsletter

April 2011

Dear Faculty and Staff members,

Dear Students,

An analysis of different types of feminisms has been the focus of our programming this year. This newsletter gives you an overview of our event highlights. In November, we hosted the Guerrilla Girls on Tour, who injected a dose of Second Wave activism into this campus with their performance “Feminists are Funny.” In January, writer/actor Dael Orlandersmith presented workshops and performances for Dana Yeatson’s class “Performing Others.” The Obie-Award winner and Pulitzer Prize finalist crosses race, class, and gender boundaries in creating characters for the stage. Mimi Parker presented her film-in-progress on activist Ann Braden, who for decades had been organizing and demonstrating for civil rights and an end to wars in Vietnam, the Gulf and Iraq. In March, we hosted the fourth annual Gensler Symposium “The F Word: Producing Texts and Enacting Feminism,” which covered the whole gamut of feminisms, from the dilemmas and discontents encountered by readers of “The Feminine Mystique,” to the gender politics of bodybuilding, to drawing feminist inspiration from or voicing criticism to hip hop lyrics, as well as connecting feminist activists through blogging. In April, we focused on issues related to Palestine. Najla Saíd (pictured in the middle of this page), daughter of the late Edward Saíd, gave a feminist reading of her father’s work on orientalism, while simultaneously communicating the plight of people living in the war zones of the Gaza Strip and Lebanon. Joseph Massad (Columbia University) advocated for a one-state solution in Israel and also focused on the fraught relationship between Western notions of homosexuality and the concept of Islam. Chellis House also hosted a wide variety of high-caliber lunchtime talks: Writer Nancy Means Wright spoke about the work of proto-feminist Mary Wollstonecraft. Karin Gottshall read her luminous poems. Ellie Bagley gave an overview of the development of feminist theology since the 1960s. David Bain presented his book-in-progress about his grandmother, a survivor of domestic violence, who was acquitted for the murder of her husband in 1908. Students Ansally Kuria and Fanny Zhao talked about their gender work in Kenya; Julia Sisson about empowering girls to become athletes; and Safa Khan and Rhubini Kunasegaran about sexism in the finance and film industries.

I would like to thank all of our presenters for dedicating their time to the Women’s & Gender Studies event program and Chellis House. We learned so much and are looking forward to another inspiring series of events next fall!

I wish you all a restful summer!

Karin Hanta
Director of Chellis House
Bodies, Performance, and Artistic Revolution: An Interview with Playwright Rebecca Wear ’10.5

by Lark Mulligan

Few Middlebury students have explored the WAGS program with such creativity and passion than recent graduate Rebecca Wear ’10.5. A Theater/WAGS joint Major, Wear is most known for her edgy humor and her ability to synthesize seemingly opposing images and ideas with an artistic nuance that never fails to elicit an array of complex, visceral responses in her audiences. In an interview, I asked Wear to reflect on her political and artistic achievements while at Middlebury.

What is your interest in studying WAGS and Theater in conjunction with one another? What is the connection?

R.W: In both WAGS and theatre, you’re constantly dealing with undercurrents. Whether it’s considering how gay marriage may inadvertently denigrate radical queer relationships, or trying to piece together the ever-convoluted and devastatingly complex thread of Stoppard’s plays, there are detective games in both fields. At their core, both deal with the construction of identity and the formation of relationships. Harold Pinter, the playwright famous for his pregnant pauses, once said, “The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don’t hear.” WAGS opened me up to the existence and validity of the unheard, and theatre gave me a forum within which to explore these juxtapositions.

Based on your work, it seems that Gender Studies and Theater have a significant connection through the performance of the body as well. In your work you have explored how bodies are policed, interconnected, assaulted, reclaimed, desirous, and desirable. How do you think the body bridges the gap between performance on the stage, and performance in everyday life?

R.W: I think my fascination with kinesthetics stems partially from being a WAGS major; in both theatre and WAGS, I’m always considering bodies. The way two hands touch, the unconscious decision to lean into a slap, who walks through the door first… any of these will immediately begin exploring power dynamics, and I am always interested in the possibility of subversion within those dynamics. History, knowledge, and possibilities are inscribed into our bodies. If we ignore the expressions of human lust, then we ignore the ways in which we construct and contest identity politics. Luce Irigaray once wrote, “If we don’t invent a language, if we don’t find our body’s language, it will have too few gestures to accompany our story. We shall tire of the same ones, and leave our desires unexpressed, unrealized.” Irigaray manages to blend radical theory into a love letter, and I’m eternally fascinated by this work.
In what ways does theater offer that language to the framework of Women’s and Gender Studies?

R.W: Using theatre, we can take the intellectual, the ephemeral, and the political from WAGS, and turn it into a kinesthetic language, which will probably come across as far more relatable, or at least, more compelling. For the climax of my senior work, *Carnal Embrace*, I directed the stunning Lilli Stein in a monologue from Mac Wellman’s *Whirligig*. Lilli, who had played a variety of oft-maligned or manipulated characters, finally finds empowerment and self-vindication in the piece. She breaks away from a group of Alice in Wonderland rapists-turned-monsters, and creates her own world. And this is precisely into where theatre comes. WAGS, and similar areas or study, show us how to deconstruct and begin understanding systems of injustice. And theatre, and other forms of art, allows us to construct worlds with alternate possibilities.

Can you talk more about the process of directing your senior work?

R.W: When blocking that monologue with Lilli, I knew I wanted to incorporate a sense of movement into this piece, to create physical possibilities that mirrored the language. Originally I had Lilli (and the rest of the company) running around on stage, but her presence was much stronger, and the focus of the audience remained on her, when she stayed still, so I simply had everyone move like the wind, trees, or spirit warriors around her. Everyone built towards the climax, at which point, they simply stopped still – and a sense of infinity was presented...So, the last few sentences are what I wrote in my senior work. Are they actually true? Well, blocking-wise, yes. But in terms of the artistic justification I had for their blocking – potentially true. I’m not entirely sure why I directed them in that way – just as maybe you’re not entirely sure why you’re turned on by androgyny, or why your method of collecting field research fits better into a differently-gendered science system; but I don’t think we should always have to justify these expressions or desires (I believe it was Peter Brooks who first articulated this for me). And luckily, within theatre, I don’t have to. In fact, it’s better if I don’t – the audience will draw their own complex conclusions if I’ve done a good job presenting, and not condescending.

What sorts of struggles have you faced at Middlebury, and how do you think they translate into your art?

R.W: Well, other than the fact that the vast majority of Midd kids really have no idea what WAGS majors study…As a young, queer woman of color, I have definitely struggled to find my voice. I think most young people, regardless of their identity, struggle to be articulate in a language that doesn’t really allow expression. Almost everyone I know struggles to be articulate in the face of geographical politics, or the prison industrial complex, or whatever other large, annihilating force they’re challenging.

The obligatory question: who is your favorite playwright?

R.W: Naomi Wallace is hands down one of my favorite playwrights. When I think about the kind of theatre I want to create, words like visceral, luminous, playful, unsettling, and sensory come to mind. Wallace is all of those and more. She creates these incredibly sensory, often tactile, moments of deep connection that explode into huge directorial possibilities. Glowing blue hands, the scent of vinegar, footprints in sand… all of her images are striking, organic, and yes – magical. Wallace is also surprisingly transgressive. She is also one of the few playwrights (that I have read) who have strikingly and directly written transgender and queer characters.

Is there anything else you would like to share?

R.W: I just want to end this interview by saying that I am unemployed, and on the off chance that anyone reading this wants to offer me a job, preferably one that involves social justice, art, or disgusting amounts of doughnuts, I am easily reachable through Karin Hanta. Kathy Griffin, I feel like we could really get along well...
Playwright Caridad Svich turned **Julia Alvarez**’s novel *In The Time of The Butterflies* into a Spanish-language play. Performances started at New York City’s Repertorio Español Theater in March.

**Julia Alvarez**’s publisher, Algonquin Books, has started a National Book Club, and their first pick was *In the Time of the Butterflies*. All events are webcasts, as well as actual interviews, in which the writer of the book is interviewed by a well known other author. On March 21, Julia was interviewed by Edwidge Danticat: http://www.algonquinbooksblog.com/bookclub/.

**Rivi Spitz-Handler** (Chinese) recently published an essay “Short Prose Forms in a Global Sixteenth Century Context.” *Prose Studies* 32.1 (September, 2010). In January, she presented two papers at the Modern Language Association conference in Los Angeles: “Looking Forward, Looking Back: Reconsidering the Return to Antiquity Movement’s Influence on Late Ming Literary Theory” and “Rectifying Li Zhi’s Name.”

**Amy Morsman** (History) published a book entitled *The Big House After Slavery: Virginia Plantation Families & Their Postbellum Domestic Experiment* with University of Virginia Press in September 2010.


Leger was also interviewed on a program devoted to documentary film on February 24, 2011 on VPR’s “Vermont Edition.”

**Kevin Moss** gave a paper at a conference in Amsterdam on Sexual Nationalisms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Politics of Belonging in the New Europe in March. The paper was titled “Queers Go West: Homosexuality and Nationalism in Films from Russia and Bosnia”


**Students**

WAGS minor **Shabana Basij-Rasikh ’11** was awarded the Vermont Campus Compact 2011 Madeleine M. Kunin Public Award for outstanding public service, effective leadership and community building, and commitment to systemic change and community impact. Shabana was honored for all her various community initiatives throughout her four years at Middlebury College. Since starting her college career in 2007, Shabana founded the NGO Hela to build a school for girls in her ancestral village in Laghman Province of Afghanistan and is on her way to raising $100,000 for its construction. She also founded the Afghan Youth Initiative, a non-profit and non-governmental organization that aims to build a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan by empowering today’s youth.

*Basij-Rasikh receives her award from former Governor M. Kunin.*
Kenyon Farrow, former executive director of Queers for Economic Justice, visited Middlebury College for the second time in three years on Wednesday, January 26. Farrow, whose last talk was about the co-evolution of Black musical culture and HIV/AIDS, spoke about how both the mainstream LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) and queer social justice movements have “failed to create an infrastructure to support people” — whether they be bullied teenagers or exhausted, full-time activists.

Farrow spoke to a crowd of about forty-five students, staff, faculty, administrators, and townsmen, emphasizing that though the mainstream LGBT movement is often criticized for pushing a white, heteronormative model that marginalizes less normative queer youth, the more radical queer left may also harm young queer activists by reflecting a corporate approach to organizing that does not leave time or energy for “self-care.”

Farrow began thinking about what could be done to strengthen the queer youth support system in particular when even the mainstream media began to cover the “rash” of LGB-identified teen suicides in the fall. However, the thinking became all the more personal when Farrow lost one his own friends and colleagues, Joseph Jefferson—a young gay activist and HIV/AIDS advocate of color—to the same faulty support system. Farrow explained that “ageism in the queer community” often makes it difficult for young queer-identified individuals to seek help from older people, especially those youth in the queer community of color or other further marginalized communities where there is a perception that older queer-identified people might “prey” on younger queer-identified folks. This ageism and distrust—which is complicated by a multitude of other intersecting identities—is one of the factors Farrow sites as problematic in many grassroots and community-based organizations.

“There are better models out there,” said Farrow, than the non-profit, capitalism-influenced approach, which relies on “the notion of the productive citizen” and “may create a sense of isolation.” As one advances up the non-profit corporate ladder, “options for self-care decrease” as time with family and friends becomes less important than the never-ending responsibilities of any community-serving organization. “The work and how we go about it is in fact part of the problem,” Farrow emphasized repeatedly.

Calling for “a different kind of engagement with the world,” Farrow described moving away from both the top-down, legislation-oriented LGBT movement and the non-profit-industrial complex currently overtaking the queer left, toward a more organic movement that would value connection and intergenerational mentorship over productivity, although it would ideally still recognize the multiple systems of oppression that the queer left is fighting against, as well as the hierarchical nature present in both the LGBT and queer social justice movements. At a time when depersonalization and dehumanization are becoming the norm in our culture, Farrow insists, “I want you and me to know before it is too late that we matter to each other.”
The Guerilla Girls are an activist-art collective from New York City whose mission is to expose male dominance and racism in the fields of visual arts, music, theater, and film. Most known for their outrageous signage and trademark gorilla masks, the self-proclaimed “consciences of our culture” use humor to combat mainstream misperceptions of “angry feminists” – to show the world that “feminists are funny”. Promising to “reinvent the ‘f’ word”, the Guerilla Girls have been shaking up museums and theaters throughout North America and Europe since 1985 with protests, stickers, billboards, street performance, and flash mobs. In 2001, a group of former Guerilla Girls members branched off to create Guerilla Girls On Tour – a separate entity that deals exclusively with sexism, misogyny, and racism in the field of performance arts.

On November 12, 2010, two members of The Guerilla Girls On Tour performed for a crowd of Middlebury students, staff, and faculty in McCullough Social Space. The show took the form of an over-the-top, vaudevillian sketch comedy act. Overriding their quirky humor was a very clear and biting feminist agenda: they shared some of their famous satirical posters, spoke out against patriarchal exploitation and discrimination, and asked audience members to share with the crowd the names of any female artists and playwrights on campus. They ended the show with a cartoonish skit about a female playwright (Rebecca Wear ’10.5) who is blatantly denied access to a theater by a villainous male producer.

While the show was met with huge laughs and applause, many folks in the “Gender Studies crowd” (including myself) left feeling somewhat unsatisfied. For example, some students felt that in the final sketch, the Guerilla Girls on Tour could have taken a more nuanced, critical perspective on sexist discrimination – one that portrays its often invisible, institutionalized nature. Further, many folks were uncomfortable with the racialized/racist implications of a sketch in which the two white performers donned Obama masks and danced to Lady Gaga as images of “starving third-world people” were projected on a screen behind them. In a different vein, some audience members afterwards pointed out the problematic biological essentialism littered throughout their humor; take, for example, the poster slogan “Female by Birth, Feminist by Choice”. Though most attendees left feeling star-struck to have witnessed two Guerilla Girls in person, WAGS and Sociology courses have taught students to look critically at performances like these. I left the Social Space that night hearing different capitulations of, “That was so second wave” – a term that has become derogatory among my generation of radical feminists. Some even questioned the importance of fighting sexism in the art world, accusing the Guerilla Girls of having a limited, white, bourgeois focus, and suggesting that their time would be better spent fighting for
things like universal healthcare and prison abolition.

While I think these are all valid and important critiques, it is important to remember that groups like the Guerilla Girls were some of the original innovators of this kind of independent, in-your-face feminist activism – a form of activism that seems to be lacking in a generation of feminist and queer activists that have become obsessed with finding paid careers within the non-profit sector. From the perspective of The Guerilla Girls on Tour, perhaps it is us who need to re-evaluate our tactics. Over the course of the past decade, groups such as INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence have become increasingly concerned with the growth of the “non-profit industrial complex” (NPIC), a sprawling alliance among capitalist foundations, activists, and government agencies that prevents revolutionary uprisings against State and institutional oppression by diverting funds from radicals and into less “politically charged” causes. For example, rather than contesting things like male privilege and police brutality, those in the anti-violence movement have been forced to pour their energies into service-oriented projects like women’s shelters (which are important, but even they know they can only do so much). Instead of treating the root causes of racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism, classism, and transphobia, non-profits are often so restricted by the conditions of their funding that they are only permitted to treat the symptoms. A threat to the root causes could pose a threat to the funders and their friends. Further, with the creation of the “career activist” comes the troubling apprehension that those who are supposed to be struggling against oppression now have an economic incentive for its continuation. The result is an uncomfortable interdependence among white, wealthy foundation owners, oppressive government agencies, and the activists who are supposed to be challenging and transforming such structures.

The Guerilla Girls and their sister groups have resisted buying into this system. On their website, the Guerilla Girls proclaim that they wear masks not only to protect their anonymity and safety, but also because, “it’s not about the money or the notoriety.” In other words, being a Guerilla Girl is not a résumé builder that will win you a cushy activist job in a hip Seattle office. Modern activists have all but forgotten what radicals like the Guerilla Girls once stood for: you are not always supposed to live a financially comfortable life if you want to take an unpopular stand against discrimination and violence.

Further, I worry that many of the critiques I have heard of the Guerilla Girls on Tour have been coming from a perspective that tends to privilege policy work as the only legitimate avenue for social change. Not only has my generation all but forgotten the value of radical grassroots organizing, but we have even forgotten the time-honored feminist art of…well, art. The Guerilla Girls on Tour and their sister groups remind us that without art and artistic minds, we risk abandoning the productive creativity that is necessary for both producing radical change, and for surviving under oppression. While policy is certainly one piece of the feminist puzzle, it has to be accompanied by creative anti-institution efforts. If we limit ourselves to working within a broken system, then we as feminists run the danger of forgetting what a better world could look like – a world without institutional racism, a world without capitalism, a world without transphobia and ableism, and a world without patriarchy. Policy work is crucial, but only art – conceived in the broad sense of positive creation – can help us heal, re-imagine, and rebuild.

While some of their content may seem justifiably outdated or even irrelevant from the perspective of young, queer, anti-racist, “no-wave” feminists, the form and structure of The Guerilla Girls’ work is something that my generation desperately needs to revive.
At the annual Gensler Symposium on March 17th, Stephanie Coontz and Samhita Mukhopadhyay spoke at the first session of *The F Word: Producing Texts and Enacting Feminism* called “Feminist Texts/Feminist Lives.” Coontz is a historian, professor, and author. Her most recent book is *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, which discusses the role of Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* in second-wave feminism as well as the “dilemmas and discontents of the wives and daughters of ‘The Greatest Generation.’” Mukhopadhyay is the executive director and editor of the blog *Feministing*, which has the largest readership of any online feminist publication (500,000/month). *Feministing* publishes feminist and pro-feminist writing, criticism, and analysis by feminists and their supporters.

In her presentation, Coontz argued that Betty Friedan’s 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* had a lasting influence on feminist movements, largely because at the time of publication it gave language to a group of women who before had not had access to the sorts of ideas and language presented in its pages. Although some women had been attending colleges in the 1940s and 1950s, most young women were sent to school to learn how to become better wives and thus have the potential to marry higher after entering the marriage market. School, therefore, was not necessarily meant to empower young women with knowledge or to prepare them to enter the workplace well-armed.

Coontz acknowledged that with *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan was most certainly reaching out to a certain type of woman who already had specific privileges—white, middle-class, able-bodied, etc—but who still needed that language and empowerment to mobilize herself. Coontz explained that in the 1960s when the book was published, battered women in middle-class households were largely undocumented, if at all reported, and that one case study in particular even argued that with the emergence of feminism “the balance of the home had been disrupted by interrupting a functioning system, which included abuse.” Coontz claimed that the book was very important for women of the second-wave movement because it filled a gap in the language of a specific type of woman, giving them proactive ways with which to discuss their very specific and real experiences,
which is something anti-oppression activists and feminists of all types seek to do even today.

Mukhopadhyay focused on the modern use of the blog as a means of communication, education, and activism. She said that while she was in college in the late 1990s and early 2000s, participating in radical activism was much different and much more accessible than it is now—gathering a bunch of students in a bus to a protest or a convention was easy, for example. However, after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 and the subsequent moral panic which created a toxic environment for dissenters, Mukhopadhay said that she noticed a dip in the willingness of activists to engage in travel and public events. That, she said, was one of the catalysts that led to the birth of online activism and idea exchange.

Although Feministing is a very successful blog and is many young folks’ very first introduction to feminism, Mukhopadhyay admits that online activism is not always the most effective way to organize. She points out, however, that online activism often leads to offline activism, and that many of Feministing’s readers and contributors are active feminists in their respective communities. Blogging’s greatest problem, she says, is that “the Internet has limits—[it’s] not accessible to all people” due to various systems of privilege and oppression that allow only certain types of people to use the Internet and access this new knowledge and language. Mukhopadhyay pointed out that there “is a language [in our generation] saying that ‘these things’ don’t happen,” or possibly that young folk do not see the needs for activism as older generations may have, in large part due to only having lived in an era of revived rugged individualism, nationalism, and pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps narratives.

Ultimately, Coontz and Mukhopadhyay represent unique members of different generations who provided and are providing different but equally important media to help people identify privilege and oppression while empowering marginalized folks to demand access to fundamental needs they should not be denied. However, shifting the general public’s views of hierarchies that have been functioning and benefitting certain groups of people for centuries has never been easy and never will be or, as Mukhopadhyay put it, “Changing people’s minds is actually really hard—we haven’t actually changed the predominant narratives and notions of where we’re supposed to be [at this point in time].”
Shattered Thoughts on Fractured Feminisms

By Joey Radu

At 3 P.M. on Friday, March 18, in Axinn 229, feminism was fractured. Kidding! That happened quite a while before the final event of this year’s Gensler Symposium discussion, “Fracturing Feminism.” Nevertheless, the event’s two guests did an excellent job of addressing the peculiar state of feminism/s in the world today. Krista Scott-Dixon, who earned a PhD in Women’s Studies from York University and is the editor of the first collection of transfeminist essays—Trans/forming Feminisms: Transfeminist Voices Speak Out (Sumach Press, 2006)—spoke about nutrition as a feminist/social justice project in her talk, “Guess Who’s Coming to Dinner: Confessions of a Feminist Nutritionist.” (You can find the full text of the talk on her blog: go/stumptuous.) Kimberly Wallace-Sanders, who earned a PhD in American Studies from Boston University and is the author of Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender and Southern Memory (University of Michigan Press, 2007), spoke about the value and limits of contemporary feminist consciousness-raising that often occurs outside of any formal feminist texts.

Although both of these talks were extremely fascinating (and played very well off of the ideas raised in the earlier Gensler Symposium events), and could easily comprise material for lengthy articles in themselves, I am instead going to share some brief and scattered thoughts on two issues these lectures raised for me:

When Is Positivity Unhealthy?

At the end of Scott-Dixon’s talk, I asked her a lengthy question about how her ideas of “deep health” and her work at a fitness program called LeanEating interact with her understandings of critical disability theories, fat-positivity movement/s, and the concept of health-at-every-size (HAES). Given that she spends much of her time championing fitness as a feminist site of resistance to patriarchal standards of beauty, ingrained ableism, commodification of bodies, etc., it was unsurprising that she gave an eloquent answer: at LeanEating, they “work with what [they] have,” with an understanding of how bodies differ (even and especially from day to day) and without a push towards an ideal body type. She asks two questions of herself and her clients: What adds value? (to their lives and selves), and, Have we made fitness accessible? (She rightfully sees this as her responsibility to pursue.)

All this having been said, she went on to note that some of what she sees in the fat-positivity movement in Toronto (where she lives) troubles her; she worries about the embrace of unhealthy behaviors and attitudes under the guise of bodily self-determination. Although we chatted more about this later Friday evening, I still went away conflicted. (A successful event, then!)

What does it mean to be troubled by someone else’s ‘unhealthy’ habits? I worry about my friends who smoke, but I resist imposing myself on their behavior. Likewise, Scott-Dixon is concerned about certain fat-identified folk who seem to almost be making a purposeful effort to be unhealthy, but she does not dispute their right to live this way. Are we getting into a ‘tolerance’ vs. ‘acceptance’ debate here? I.e., we should tolerate others’ unhealthy behaviors, but not accept them?

I think of Melissa McEwan of the blog Shakesville, who wrote that fat hatred is “hard to let go of, even for fat people, because letting go of that hatred, and replacing it with acceptance, can feel akin to giving fat people permission to be fat [emphasis hers].” Her follow-up, of course: “feeling like permission is yours to give is a manifestation of privilege.” And indeed, whenever I hear straight folk talk about “tolerating” or “accepting” queerness, I quickly turn the discussion around to instead interrogating their own heterosexual privilege—are they willing to work to give it up? Likewise, conversations among able-bodied folk about the pros and cons of creating physical access for people with disabilities are actually conversations about whether able-bodied folk are willing to confront our ableist society that privileges certain bodies and abilities over others.

How can all of that relate to fat-positivity, though? Well, I think that, moving forward, I need to continue critically investigating how my thin privilege is affecting my efforts to work in solidarity with fat-positive movement/s, and figure out how to reconcile promoting the HAES philosophy (whose first word is indeed that very broad health) with avoiding further marginalizing fat folk in our communities. Self-determination is sacred, I continually remind myself, and there is neither liberation nor subversion in reproducing dominant cultural norms of body-policing and -surveilling, or in determining for others what constitutes well-being, fulfillment, or happiness.
Who Should Be Thrown Overboard?

In her highly energetic and often hilarious talk, Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (Emory University) compared how she came to her feminist consciousness to the ways in which many people do today (e.g., hip-hop feminism). While initially praising these diverse methods of consciousness-raising, she did eventually turn to some criticisms of them. Using the metaphor of a feminist social justice movement as a boat, she described how it was undoubtedly important to grow the movement and stretch the boat (“like spandex”); however, there came a point when she had to wonder whether newcomers were more likely to cause the boat to sink. Not because there were too many people, she argued, but because some of these people just don’t seem to have an understanding of the core values of feminism (particularly Black feminist thought and third-wave feminism). In essence, her contention was that it takes work to be a feminist—it shouldn’t be easy, and if we make it too easy, it will be diluted to such a level as to be useless.

I have to admit that when Wallace-Sanders said this (particularly when she exclaimed—I’m paraphrasing slightly—GET OFF MY BOAT!), I was cheering. (As much as one can be said to ‘cheer’ in an academic symposium.) She was phrasing, clearly and groundedly, what I’d been trying to articulate for months: the idea that there is a limit to what is acceptable from people who claim to be working in solidarity with you. But darn if it isn’t one of the trickiest of topics, since there is so much room to unintentionally replicate the same systems of oppression we seek to dismantle!

Although most definitely helped along by a few classes at Middlebury, I came to much of my consciousness-raising through blogs (and still haven’t read many feminist texts considered to be utterly canonical, even though when I look at most of them now they read to me as being completely familiar), so I am absolutely with Wallace-Sanders on being open to different ways of reaching an anti-oppression mindset. Indeed, I think it is essential to create new and multitudinous avenues of access to these ideas, because we know that critical feminist, race, disability, queer, etc. theories—though often much more in touch with lived experiences than other areas of academia—are still often locked away behind Ivory Tower walls or complex and inaccessible language. And in my mind, there is nothing less valuable whatsoever about social justice consciousnesses achieved through blogs, hip-hop, or activism. (Indeed, I am in truth more wary of theory and theorists than I am of radical activism, though I recognize all can be problematic and problematized.) What these all share, though, is effort and end result: no one has the perfect anti-oppression consciousness, but we have a general idea of what one ought to look like, and work to achieve that within ourselves.

While I want to feel like I’ve checked my educational privilege with the above paragraph, I have to now acknowledge that all that I’m writing is still completely situated within my status as white, middle-class, currently nondisabled, a U.S. citizen, largely outside the State’s prison/surveillance system, etc. Yes, one can definitely come to a feminist consciousness in a variety of ways, but this can be incredibly difficult to do when one is fighting for survival in a society that is racist, capitalist, ableist, hetero/cis/sexist, etc. Although I can say from personal experience that, on this raft of social justice, the temptation to toss people overboard who don’t ‘get it like I do’ is often great, our time is much better spent making lifesavers out of meager gum wrappers and pocket lint to assist those still tossed about in that terrible, broiling ocean.

Krista Scott-Dixon and Kimberly Wallace-Sanders.
In *American Plastic: Boob Jobs, Credit Cards, and Our Quest for Perfection*, WAGS and SOAN professor **Laurie Essig** investigates the crumbling U.S. economy through the lens of cosmetic surgery. Americans spend just under 12.5 billion dollars annually on cosmetic procedures; in 2008, Americans purchased 10.8 million surgeries in the hopes of “perfecting” their bodies. The vast majority of these procedures are bought on credit by low-income Americans: nearly 75% of those getting cosmetic surgery earn less than $60,000 a year and one third earn less than $30,000. In light of these facts, Essig describes debt for cosmetic surgery as “the sub-prime mortgage crisis of the body.” Following a deregulation of credit, cosmetic surgery became accessible to those outside of the wealthiest class. In particular, financial institutions and cosmetic advertising have targeted white, working- and middle-class women as the primary consumers of cosmetic surgery, promoting gendered and racialized standards of beauty to which these groups must adhere. Yet only sixty years ago these procedures were only available to the super wealthy. What happened? It is not that plastic surgery has become accessible to low-income Americans because they are getting richer, but because “they now have more and more opportunities to take on debt”.

The success of the plastic industry is a product of neoliberal economic and social ideology. Neoliberalism is often equated with the “American dream”, or the idea that any hardships or successes in one’s life are a result of one’s own free decisions – as if we are all “rugged individuals” who have complete control over our lives. According to this line of thinking, the solution to individual problems like poverty and joblessness is to change one’s self; the market will ensure that those who are meant to succeed do actually succeed. Neoliberalism thus leads to deregulation of the economy, privatization of government services, and, Essig argues, an increased reliance on technologies that improve one’s individual body in the hopes of improving one’s financial and social life. And at the same time as Americans are earning less and spending more, the usual paths for “getting ahead” are continually being diminished, as the welfare state is violently dismantled. The growth of the plastic industry has resulted from a combination of racist and ableist beauty standards, combined with a neoliberal belief that the individual is the source of her own social and financial hardship.

Plastic surgery is a hope for millions of Americans who believe that if they can just perfect their body, then maybe they will get that perfect job, or that perfect spouse. Said Essig in an interview, “Under the current ‘commonsense’ (i.e. hegemonic way of thinking), we all have to take individual responsibility for the choices we make. If we’re unemployed or impoverished or sick, we do not deserve to be taken care of by the State, but rather have to find a way out by ourselves as individuals. For people getting cosmetic surgery, most of whom are middle-aged white women who are working or lower middle class, getting a body that looks younger or more feminine is seen as a way to a more economically secure future. This is either because they imagine it as leading to success in their careers or success in their romantic lives.”

But what makes a surgery cosmetic, and what makes a surgery necessary? Essig relates that, “An editor at *Allure*, Joan Kron, once told me that all cosmetic surgery is actually reconstructive: For a person who feels like a ‘freak’ — they are old and their face sags or they are ‘not feminine’ because they are flat-chested — the need for cosmetic surgery is similar to the need to reconstruct the body after an accident. She may be right since in our hyper-ableist society, any body that does not appear to be productive and fit is considered ugly and in need of reconstruction. Age and lack of gender coherence are certainly ways of marking bodies as unfit.” The line between cosmetic and necessary surgeries is definitely difficult to draw, given that ‘necessary’ is often defined according to what society demands of us, and society demands that we are white, able-bodied, and take responsibility for our own problems. This way of thinking gets complicated when we consider, for example, “People who wish to amputate a healthy limb [who] describe themselves as ‘trans-abled,’ and see their ‘true’ selves as amputees and therefore feel like they too should have access to the surgeries they desire.” Access to surgeries often requires proving to the medical-industrial complex that this is a necessary bodily modification, yet how does one do so without becoming entangled in the mess of what “necessary” means?

Further, things become sticky when “cosmetic” is turned into a denigrated category. For example, many argue that gender-affirming healthcare for transgender people is merely cosmetic, and should not be paid for by health insurance or the State. Essig points out that, “In the Netherlands and elsewhere where there is a National Health System, cisgendered women with flat chests have gained access to paid-for breast implants to look more feminine if they can prove to a board of medical experts that their flat-chestedness is indeed stopping them from living their full gender expression. I think these strategies for gaining access to cosmetic procedures are double-edged swords. On the one hand, they pathologize the body as it is (so a flat chested trans woman and a flast chested cisgendered woman both occupy the ‘wrong’ body that can
be made ‘right’ through surgery). On the other hand, it is an incredibly empowering experience for most people who get cosmetic surgery — whether trans or cisgendered. And paying for it with insurance or through a NHS is way better for society, probably, than paying for it through medical credit at 30% interest, which is how most cosmetic procedures are paid for here in the U.S.”

The purpose of Essig’s book is not to evaluate whether cosmetic surgery is inherently good or bad, or whether the people who consume it are oppressing themselves. Instead, Essig simply wants to highlight the growth of the plastic industry as a sign that we need a paradigm shift in American culture and politics. Instead of improving our bodies in the hopes of improving our lives, we need to demand economic reform and structural changes in the government that will help us out of our financial troubles. Instead of accepting as true the beauty norms that are produced and reproduced by racist, capitalist advertising, we need to stretch the meaning of the “beautiful” and “normal” body. The problem is not that plastic surgery exists, but rather the systems that justify its necessity and accessibility.

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**Filmmaker Explores Southern Social Justice**

_by Elizabeth King_

Filmmaker Mimi Pickering brought her in-progress film *Southern Patriot* to Middlebury College this January, where she shared her experience making the film and working at Appalshop with a group of approximately thirty-five students, staff, faculty, and townspeople. Appalshop is a non-profit organization based in Kentucky, whose goals are “to document, disseminate, and revitalize the lasting traditions and contemporary creativity of Appalachia; to tell stories the commercial cultural industries don’t tell, challenging stereotypes with Appalchian voices and visions; to support communities’ efforts to achieve justice and equity and solve their own problems in their own ways; to celebrate cultural diversity as a positive social value; and to participate in regional, national, and global dialogue toward these ends.”

Although Pickering herself was born in California, she began work at Appalshop in 1971 and has been making videotapes and films there ever since. *Southern Patriot* is Pickering’s newest film and is in its final stages prior to release. *Southern Patriot* follows the life of Anne Braden, an unsung hero of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Braden, raised in Anniston, Alabama, had not wanted her story to be told because she feared that her role as a white woman in the Black civil rights movement would eclipse the work done by Black activists, and she wanted history to stay focused on their successes.

Anne Braden moved to Kentucky after her education in Virginia, which her father blamed for her radicalism, and married Carl Braden. Braden said that it was not really until after her college experience that she could truly put words to the injustice she had felt for years. However, after several years of organizing against the Southern police state, she explained, “All my life police had been on my side—they didn’t bother you, unless maybe you were speeding, and then if you talked to them real nice they’d maybe let you off. I realized for the first time I was on the other side.”

Braden was a transformative force, in that she worked and wrote for organizations that worked outside of the system--such as the Southern Conference Educational Fund and its paper *The Southern Patriot*--and avoided the stymieing effects that many non-profits face. She also founded the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice. Her 1958 book *The Wall Between* centers on a case that was brought against the Bradens for buying a house in a primarily white neighborhood for a Black family. It was read and praised by Martin Luther King, Jr., with whom Braden also worked.

Pickering’s *Southern Patriot* also focuses on Braden’s push for coalitional politics. Braden noted in particular that “The Achilles heel of this country [is that it has] a mostly white peace movement [and a] mostly people of color justice movement. We’re talking about the same issue. The people running this [police], they wouldn’t say it in these words, [but they think] the lives of people of color don’t matter. The people running this country... [They would say] the people in Iraq don’t matter because they’re not white.” If people working towards the same goal for different reasons would collaborate, things could have the potential to get done more efficiently, while also satisfying and helping larger groups of people.

Ultimately, Pickering’s film released the crowd into the night with the realization that although we should be aware of our privileges and recognize how our identities function in society, that that is not the only thing we have to understand. As Braden says, “I don’t think guilt is a productive emotion. I haven’t known anyone who got [into activism] because of guilt... Everyone white who got involved in this struggle glimpsed a world that they wanted to live in. All through history there’ve been people who envisioned something better, and that’s what you want to be a part of.”
Lights come up and the 52 year-old, Harlem-born playwright takes a seat on the Seeler stage for a post-show Q&A. The audience is still catching its breath from two ferocious works-in-progress we just heard read: Rave, a solo piece, performed by New York actor Jack Gwaltney, and Man of Water, featuring Middlebury Assistant Professor Alex Draper together with Mr. Gwaltney.

Coming in, we knew the buzz. Ms. Orlandersmith is an Obie Award-winner and a Pulitzer Prize Finalist with credits from major theatres around the country. She’s toured extensively with Nuyorican Poets Café and she’s just coming off rave reviews for a new solo work she performed at the Mark Taper Forum in Los Angeles.

But it’s not her resume we’re thinking about right now. It’s Dael herself, and – let’s face it – the unusual specter of a female African American playwright flanked by two, white male actors who just played roles that she created.

“I’m known mostly as an actor-playwright,” she tells us, “but these days, I’m writing for other people. Right now, that includes white people.”

Earlier that day, Dael had visited my J-term class, Performing Others: Writing and Staging the Solo Show, and she had coached the students to be fearless in their choice of characters. Like the Seeler audience, they heard a paraphrase of Dael’s comments published last fall in The Dramatist:

“One person cannot write for an entire race or sex. And when you try to do that, you take on every bias that has been put on you, and you perpetuate it.”

In that same class, students got the benefit of presenting their short solo works to Dael. Her feedback often came in the form of a question: “What happened to her before that?” “Why does he want that?” “Who is this woman talking to, and why?”

Dramaturgically, these are not unusual questions, but coming from Dael they took on a heightened importance. For her, this was no academic exercise. Lives were at stake!

By the time Dael’s post-show talk ended, word was out and the spell was cast. “She is so no-bullshit,” I heard someone say.

The next morning, students from “Performing Others” were joined by Tara Affolter’s “Teaching August Wilson” class for a monologue writing workshop with Dael. Swear to God, I left the room and when I came back, Tara and Dael were wrestling on the floor. Okay, I don’t swear that, but Dael had asserted that you can’t understand Wilson without placing him in relation to Eugene O’Neill. Tara wasn’t buying it: Wilson’s work could stand on its own, and didn’t need to be legitimized by connecting it to his white predecessor.

Next, Dael offered another assertion about August Wilson: to understand his work, you have to hear the blues in it. So we tried an experiment: with a slow blues playing on the piano, a monologue from “Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom” was passed around the room and students, regardless of race or gender, took their turn at being Levee, the aging, black, cornet player.

We then turned to our own writing and to hearing more of Dael’s feedback on it. Before the workshop ended, though, Dael turned the tables, soliciting our feedback on the two pieces we’d seen the night before.

Thinking back, I had noticed the night before that during the Q&A no one had ventured into criticism. Dael herself had been quiet about the scripts. “I’m still processing,” she said when I dropped her back at the Middlebury Inn.

But there in the workshop on her final day, she dove in: “Rave is too long,” she said. “I could hear it. Tell me when you cut out.”

We did. And she listened. For students who were now seeing Dael for the third time in two days, it was a perfect arc: the artist turned teacher was now the artist as student. And anyone interested in the intersection of race, ethnicity and art just got a two-day master class.
Practicing Transformative Justice at Middlebury and Beyond

by Lark Mulligan

On March 21 and 22, Owen Daniel-McCarter and Baylie Roth ’9.5, from the Transformative Justice Law Project (TJLP) in Chicago, presented two workshops on Transformative Justice and Prison Abolition. As the founding collective member and project attorney for TJLP, Daniel-McCarter works to provide free, holistic legal services to low-income transgender people of color targeted by the legal system throughout Illinois. Baylie Roth, recently graduated from Middlebury, is now a part-time organizer with TJLP.

In the first workshop, Daniel-McCarter discussed the particular legal issues faced by transgender immigrants of color in the U.S., including an analysis of how current immigration policies disproportionately bar trans people from gaining citizenship. One of the ways this can happen is through citizenship requirements involving past criminal convictions. In most countries, due to systemic discrimination in the job market and the legal system, trans people are disproportionately likely to engage in criminalized activities like sex work and to be policed and incarcerated, making them overrepresented in the criminal legal system whether or not they actually engaged in criminalized activities. This citizenship requirement based on criminal convictions effectively bars many trans people from gaining citizenship.

Daniel-McCarter also discussed how immigrant detainment practices uphold systems of misogynist, racist, homophobic, and transphobic violence and discrimination. Given that the immigration system is based on civil, not criminal law, many of the Constitutional protections that apply to criminals and courtroom proceedings do not apply. Non-English speaking immigrants who are being deported are often not given attorneys, or told why they are being deported. Further compounding the problems in the deportation system, transgender immigrants are typically housed in immigrant detention centers according to their gender as assigned at birth, subjecting them to multiple forms of violence and harassment at the hands of other detainees and officers. In most detention facilities – for immigrants and citizens alike – trans people are also often placed in solitary confinement, ostensibly in order to “protect” them from harassment. However, not only does this action constitute an added layer of punishment just for being transgender, but it also leaves transgender inmates more susceptible to violence at the hands of correctional officers, and without any witnesses in the case that they would want to report it.

The lecture concluded by addressing how these problems are of concern to the Abolitionist and Transformative Justice movements, outlining next steps that activists could take in dismantling interlocking systems of oppression. Rather than simply trying to make detention centers nicer or the naturalization process more accessible, taking an abolitionist or transformative approach to these problems means questioning the fundamental purpose of these practices. For example, Daniel-McCarter stressed that anti-oppression activists need to focus the conversation on why immigrants are coming to this country in the first place – which may have more to do with imperialism, transphobia, and capitalism in their countries of origin than with the inherent attractiveness of the U.S. – rather than discussing how to let a wider diversity of people into a dangerously racist, misogynist, transphobic country. To give another example, abolitionists would be more interested in discussing what sorts of discriminatory police practices or racist laws bring trans people of color into contract with the criminal legal system in the first place, rather than trying to get them housed in prisons according to their gender identity.

In the second workshop, Daniel-McCarter and Roth led a discussion of how state-sponsored systems of control negatively impact and create divisions among oppressed communities, including people of color, folks with disabilities, immigrants, women, poor people, and transgender people. In particular, they pushed the audience to question whether current national legal battles demanding things like hate crimes legislation and marriage recognition are actually harmful to certain marginalized communities.

For example, the workshop leaders introduced the idea that, while hate crime laws theoretically seem like they could protect marginalized people from violence, in reality the people who are arrested and convicted for hate crimes are the same majority targeted by the rest of the criminal legal system: young Black and Latino men – and this includes hate crimes on the basis of race. This is one example, then, of how colluding with the State can lead to unintended consequences. As long as we as activists fail to fundamentally question State practices like policing and detainment, which are always going to disproportionally affect certain groups as long as we live in a society saturated by prejudice, we cannot expect to produce radically liberatory outcomes.

With regards to the marriage equality movement, the two presenters stressed that marriage is a contract with the State that has historically excluded people of color, people with disabilities, and other marginalized communities. The vast majority of people who participate in marriage are heterosexual, normatively gendered, white, and able-bodied, i.e., people who are typically not targeted by State institutions of violence like the criminal legal system. This means that we need to question whom the marriage movement really benefits.

Rather than fighting for marriage, anti-oppression activists should work to ensure that all of the hundreds of benefits awarded to married couples are given to everyone, no matter what their relationships look like.

Ultimately, the State – as an institution that benefits from and perpetuates white supremacy, capitalism, patriarchy, and other oppressive ideologies – has a stake in making sure that marginalized people stay divided. Anti-oppression activists need to be critical of the State, and recognize its role in privileging some groups and marginalizing others.
On March 8, 2011, the 100th anniversary of International Women’s Day, the WAGS Department honored the nominees of the Fraker Prize, an award given out yearly for the best paper written in the field of women’s and gender studies. Trustee emerita Drue Gensler set up the prize in honor of Alison G. Fraker, a passionate WAGS student who passed away in 1989 two weeks short of graduation.


The jury selected Colleen Carroll’s paper, which she had written for Andy Wentink’s J-Term course, Innocents Abroad: American Travel Writing, 1818-1918. Its primary sources were culled from unpublished travel writing materials in the Miscellaneous Manuscript collection in Special Collections. Colleen chose the journal of Mary Elizabeth Martin, wife of missionary Carl O. Martin, written in China in the mid-1860s. In a brief 8 1/2 pages, Colleen addressed not only standard conventions of 19th-century travel writing and the “transplanted domesticity” and “cultural isolation” imposed on missionary wives, but other significant issues related to gender, racial, and religious discourses that permeated the missionary movement. She accomplished this, to quote one member of the Fraker Price committee, with great nuance and sophistication. Her essay is imbued with a sensitivity to and awareness of gender theory without depending on references to secondary sources in the field but rather on the content of the primary source itself.

Excerpt from Colleen Carroll’s paper:

(…) In 1859, a young American woman, Mary Elisabeth Allen Martin, joined her new husband Carl Martin in his mission to China, leaving her known world in Vermont for the unknown and unimaginable world of Foochow (Fuzhou), China. Her diary provides a look into the life of a missionary wife and, despite having traveled a great distance to China, Mary’s personal geography is revealed to be a confined one. With a few important exceptions, she remains isolated from the “real” China and instead lives within the missionary community. This community, which prizes domesticity, allows the missionaries and their families to create continuity and normalcy within the foreign environment. However, the isolation of the community means that any disruptions, or ruptures in the continuity, are thrown into stark contrast and serve as painful reminders of the threats posed by the outside environment. A close examination of Mary’s diary reveals the strength and importance of this community-building project in the structure of her daily life but also reveals
that the community, and its carefully constructed domestic sphere, ultimately cannot shelter her from the threats of her environment, including violence, illness and personal tragedy. (...) Women were not allowed to be ministers and thus could not hold the official title of missionary, creating a gendered division of labor that relegated the women to the home. The husbands worked in the missionary field and had access to the “authentic” China, while the wives’ role was rooted in the domestic sphere and the community within the missionary compound. In fact, the official stance of the missionary boards was that “the center of her [the missionary wife] appropriate sphere is, indeed, within the domestic circle” (qtd. in Hunter 1984, 11). (...)

On Wednesday, March 2, she says, “This afternoon I took my crochet work and went over and sat awhile with Mrs. Gibson...Prayer meeting this evening at Mr. Maclay’s. Mrs. Gibson was asked to lead in prayer, but declined” (Martin, 16). Later in July, Mary summarizes the duties of the missionary wife when she writes, “A busy day as usual and such oppressive hot weather when it seems as though one could not stir, but children must be taken care of and household duties attended to in hot as well as cold weather” (Martin, 23). On many occasions, her most notable departure from domestic life is to go “on the hill.” Mary’s daily life—sewing, cleaning, taking care of her children, attending church and prayer meetings and visiting with friends—is really no different from what her life would be in a small community in Vermont. (...)

The riot and aftermath is not only a literal break into the closed missionary community when the mob enters Mary’s home, but also a figurative rupture of their isolation from the outside environment and the Chinese people. Mary’s description of the approach of the mob harkens back to Hunter’s description of the missionary compound as a barrier between the “idealized form of domestic nature and the savagery beyond” (2010, 25). Mary writes,

Soon we heard yells and screams in the street below and Carlie said ‘they were coming’—at these words I trembled all over from head to foot but soon recovered my strength and courage... By this time the mob were fully upon us hurling their missiles against the doors and windows and uttering furious yells more like demons than like men (Martin, 8).

The mob therefore represents all the threats posed by China to Westerners as well as reflects the racial stereotypes projected upon the Chinese and the Oriental world by Western society. The members of the mob are no longer humans, but “demons,” who threaten to violate the domestic space, representative of pure and pious Christian womanhood. For Mary, the violence of the mob is only inflicted on the physical space of her home but she later mentions that some women were actually violated on the night of the riot. Interestingly, this is only given passing reference but a newspaper clipping inserted in the diary provides more detail. Two Chinese women who had converted to Christianity were beaten and raped by the mob but Mary does not relate how or even if the perpetrators were punished.

Mary’s tragedy, the death of her husband and youngest son, Lucius, from cholera, changes her worldview drastically so that she is no longer able to remain isolated within the safe bubble of the missionary community. Her loss does not cause her to engage with her Chinese surroundings any more than she did prior to the deaths, rather she must find a new means to cope with her foreign environment because her domestic world is shattered. She relies on her faith to provide meaning for her future life while living in a world marked by nostalgia and commemoration of the past. A comparison of her diary entries pre- and post-tragedy reveals this changed worldview. Before the deaths, she noted important occasions or milestones with little detail or commentary. On her birthday in February 1864 she writes, “Today is my twenty-fifth birthday. I feel much older in experience. I have been called to endure not only care and anxiety, but sorrow and anguish of spirit. I was married before I was twenty-one, left home and friends to come with my husband to this far off land. Two very precious children were given to us, one of which God has taken to himself and very shortly after, my dear husband followed. But God has been very good to me in these great afflictions and has led me to realize more fully than ever before that this world is not our home (Martin, 50).
WAGS Fall 2011 Courses

WAGS/ENAM 0114 Reading Women’s Writing (Spring 2012)
Why and how do women write? Does literary history reveal distinctive styles, patterns, and continuities in the works of female authors? We will begin to address these questions through our close reading of a wide variety of women’s literature in English, including poetry, fiction, essays, and drama from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries. Secondary readings will reflect on the concept of gender as a central organizing principle. Employing various methods of literary analysis, the course will address issues of interest to students in a wide range of disciplines, including philosophy, psychology, and history, as well as literature. 3 hrs. lect./3 hrs. disc. LIT (M. Wells)

WAGS/ENAM 0172 Writing Gender and Sexuality (Spring 2012)
In this course we will analyze and produce writing that focuses on expressions of gender and sexuality. Readings will include work by Collette, Baldwin, Leavitt, Powell, Tea, Claire, and others. Students will draft and revise creative non-fiction and fiction with some attention to poetry. During class we will discuss form, craft, and the writing process; experiment with writing exercises; and critique student work in writing workshops. Each student will meet with the instructor a minimum of three times and produce a portfolio of 20 revised pages. (This course is a prerequisite to ENAM 0370, 0375, 0380, or 0385). ART (C. Wright)

WAGS/SOAN 0191 Introduction to Sociology of Gender (Fall 2011)
What is gender and what would a sociology of it look like? When did gender become a category of inquiry and more importantly why? We will look at how the meaning and performance of gender changed over time, from Classical Greece to Victorian England, to the contemporary U.S. We will also look at how gender changes depending on one’s position in social space, e.g. one’s race, class, sexuality, and nationality. Finally, we will consider how the need to look at gender is the result of a variety of discourses, from psychoanalysis to capitalism to movements of liberation such as feminism. 2 hrs. lect., 1 hr. disc. CMP, SOC (L. Essig)

WAGS 0200 Foundations in Women’s and Gender Studies (Fall 2011, Spring 2012)
This course provides an introduction to the interdisciplinary field of women’s and gender studies. Examining gender always in conjunction with the categories of race and class, the course foregrounds how inequalities are perpetuated in different fields of human activity and the creative ways in which groups have resisted these processes. The course is organized in sections to illuminate the effects of particular social institutions and structures on our gendered lives. Each section will introduce a broad overview of feminist interventions in different fields of inquiry. Cumulatively, the course reveals the importance of gender as an analytical category to understand social reality and to comprehend important areas of culture. 3 hrs. lect. CMP, SOC (S. Moorti)

WAGS/WRPR 0201 Writing for Social Change (Fall 2011)
This course explores the many choices we face as speakers and writers when communicating across race, gender, sexuality, religion, culture, class and ability. Drawing on works by W. E. B. Dubois, James Baldwin, Beverly Tatum, Paulo Freire, Dorothy Allison, Arundhati Roy, Amy Tan, Seyed Hossein Nasr, Desmund Tutu, and others, the class explores a range of genres and voices and examines patterns of domination and subordination in diverse cultural contexts. Students will learn strategies for both creative and critical writing and respond to formal and informal writing assignments. The class will hold occasional writing workshops, and final projects will provide opportunities for collaboration. ART, CW, LIT (C.W. Wright)

WAGS/JAPN 0245 Josei Undo: Women’s Activism in Contemporary Japan (Fall 2011)
In this course we will critically evaluate Japanese feminism since the late nineteenth century. We will focus on the following themes within Japanese feminism, namely, the structure of work and family life, the relationship between the state, women, and the military, and the politics of reproduction and women’s bodies. In addition, we will consider the role of feminism in Japanese society and the connections between global feminisms and Japanese local political struggles. This course will help students develop a deeper understanding of Japanese society and the position of women in society. It will also help students contextualize gender relations and feminist activism cross culturally. 3 hr. lect./disc. AAL, SOC (L. White)
WAGS/SOAN 0262 Mobile Women: Transnational Work Patterns (Spring 2012)
The course examines women’s work in the formal labor sectors to offer a critical perspective on contemporary local and global patterns. The materials will cover concerns that are central to women in the United States such as the glass ceiling, the wage gap, and the pink-collar ghetto. The course will also offer a transnational perspective through an analysis of the central role migrant female laborers have come to play in the global economy. This section will cover issues such as the traffic in domestic workers, nannies and sex workers. We will interrogate how feminist theories are able to accommodate the uneven development of women’s rights at the global and local levels. Through a few case studies students will also be introduced to alternative work patterns established by groups such as the greenbelt movement in Kenya and SEWA in India. 3 hrs. lect. CMP, SOC (S. Moorti)

WAGS/FMMC 0267 Gender, Sexuality, Media (Fall 2011)
In this course, we will explore the intersecting roles played by gender and sexuality in our media, focusing specifically on film, television, and digital culture. We will examine the multiple ways in which popular media texts construct and communicate gender and sexuality, and we will analyze the role of gender and sexuality in the processes of spectatorship and meaning-making. We will study a wide range of theories of gender and sexuality in media including feminist film theory, queer media theory, and literature on gender and sexuality in video game history and culture. (FMMC 0102 or FMMC 0104 or WAGS 0200 or by approval of instructor) 3 hrs. lect./3 hrs. screen. SOC (L. Stein)

WAGS/SOAN 0304 Women, Culture, and Power in Comparative Perspective (Fall 2011)
This study of women cross-culturally raises a number of difficult and delicate issues. Do women constitute a legitimate category of analysis? What explains the diversity of women’s roles across societies? How do we assess women’s status and power? What forces create changes in women’s roles? This course attempts to answer these questions and to compare and contrast women’s roles in a variety of societies. Analysis will concentrate on three primary domains: family and kinship; symbolic systems; and political economy. Course readings deal primarily with non-Western societies, but not exclusively so. 3 hrs. lect./disc. AAL, CMP, SOC(E. Oxfeld)

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“Queering the Curriculum”
Mellon Grant

WAGS professors Sujata Moorti and Laurie Essig won a Mellon grant to host a three-day workshop to interrogate and think through the contributions queer studies can make in a liberal arts setting from October 5 to 8 at the Breadloaf Campus. Queer studies is a very productive epistemology, able to analyze not just sexualities and gender, but nationality, race, class, and other forms of social power. It is also generally difficult to find courses on queer issues at most small liberal arts colleges. Too often it is assumed that if the course is not geared specifically toward sexuality, queer issues have no place in it. Nothing could be further from the truth. Queer studies can be incorporated into a variety of courses from U.S. History to courses on biology and a variety of departments from religion to geography. Middlebury faculty will meet with colleagues from Dennison, DePauw, Furman, Harvey Mudd, Scripps, and Vassar Colleges at Breadloaf.
Eurydice

O essential woman
barefoot snake-bitten
beautiful
your husband calls

and you go because it is
a calling

in your musical silence
will you marry his foot-
steps the snake pit that
preponderance below O

you O beautiful habit O
O woman most famous

for disappearing

-- Joey Radu

The Raspberry Room

It was solid hedge, loops of bramble and thorny
as it had to be with its berries thick as bumblebees.
It drew blood just to get there, but I was queen
of that place, at ten, though the berries shook like fists
in the wind, daring anyone to come in. I was trying
so hard to love this world—real rooms too big and full
of worry to comfortably inhabit—but believing I was
born
to live in that cloistered green bower: the raspberry
patch
in the back acre of my grandparents’ orchard. I was
cross-
stitched and beaded by its fat, dollmaker’s needles. The
effort
of sliding under the heavy, spiked tangles that tore
my clothes and smeared me with juice was rewarded
with space, wholly mine, a kind of room out of
the crush of the bushes with a canopy of raspberry
dagger-leaves and a syrup of sun and birdsong.
Hours would pass in the loud buzz of it, blood
made it mine—the adventure of that red sting singing
down my calves, the place the scratches brought me to:
just space enough for a girl to lie down.

-- Karin Gottshall