

Compositional and Critical Strategies for Feminine Writing in Performance¹

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Abstract

Keywords:

Comment [SR1]: Please confirm bio & correspondence info are correct. If you would like to add acknowledgements or make any adjustments, please let me know.

Comment [SR2]: Please provide an abstract (approx 50-100 words).

Comment [SR3]: Please provide (up to 5) keywords.

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7 Live performance takes many forms. Sometimes *what* the performance is communicating to an
 8 audience is much easier to discern than *how* that performance is communicating. Making
 9 meaning from a performance is a complicated process, particularly if that performance draws on
 10 forms of expression an audience may be unaccustomed to or unfamiliar with. What then does
 11 one do with a performance like *Experiments in Écriture Féminine* that specifically draws on
 12 theory that critiques the tradition of making a *correct, customary, or familiar* meaning out of
 13 texts and bodies? Brienne Waychoff and Kari-Anne Innes give us clues: Error. *Erreur. Faut.*
 14 Hope. *Possibilité.* Although I was a respondent for the show when it was presented at Bowling
 15 Green State University in the spring of 2010 and at the National Communication Association
 16 annual convention in that fall, my analysis and interpretation of *Experiments* is more
 17 exploration than evaluation. To help locate myself in the vast terrain covered by Brienne
 18 Waychoff and Kari-Anne Innes's script and essay, I trace *Experiments* through three main
 19 questions: Number One. How do feminine modes of composition and interpretation affect the
 20 way(s) performance communicates to an audience and why? Number Two. How does the
 21 explicitly feminist act of grounding the *place* of performance in women's bodies add to, enhance,
 22 or potentially renew disciplinary conversations about the politics of performance?

23 Number Three. “[*The Seamstress sews in the shadows.*] –R. Bowman, 2003, p. 36”

24 (Bowman and Bowman 213). In “On the Bias,” ~~From Performance of Literature to Performance~~
 25 ~~Composition~~” Ruth Bowman and Michael Bowman weave together a particular genealogy of
 26 performance studies that tracks the movement from Oral Interpretation to Performance
 27 Composition. Text from performed scripts, definitions from dictionaries, and sewing patterns;
 28 combine with theory to create an essay whose formal elements metonymically reflect the
 29 arguments put forth by their analysis. ~~Brienne and Kari-Anne~~ Waychoff and Innes's script and

Comment [SR4]: I think something went awry in the formatting. Should this be part of the previous paragraph (with “In” as the beginning of the next one)?

30 performance resonates much like “On the Bias” as a model for composing a mode of inquiry that
 31 poetically enacts the representational logic of their object of study *as* their mode of analysis.
 32 ~~“On the Bias” uses Bowman and Bowman use~~ weaving, patterning, and alteration as ~~their~~
 33 metonym while ~~Brianne and Kari Anne~~ Waychoff and Innes use *écriture féminine* as theirs.
 34 Significant to both is the movement away from more dominant or linear narrative paradigms
 35 toward the unfamiliar, particular, and circular models of constructing meaning. Put another way,
 36 both essays privilege feminine structures over masculine ones. *The Seamstress sews in the*
 37 *shadows.*

Comment [SR5]: Revised for parallel structure. Is this okay?

38 Both the script and performance of *Experiments* activate or produce the effects they are
 39 talking about as they talk about them. Hallucinatory excess is produced by the contradictions,
 40 repetitions, pulsations, and over-flows that compete simultaneously for attention but offer no
 41 **fixed place** to **locate** meaning. By activating particular theoretical concepts of Hélène Cixous,
 42 Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, ~~Brianne and Kari Anne~~ Waychoff and Innes rewrite the female
 43 body and feminine form over, against, and through themselves. *Two lips touching, never*
 44 *becoming one, touching not kissing, more than two, the woman has many.* The overflowing
 45 excess of the female body emerges as the **place** of invention for *Experiments* but never stays
 46 **fixed** in one **place**. How can one **locate** a **place** if it never stays **fixed**? In *Heuretics* Gregory
 47 Ulmer cites a lengthy passage from Barthes’s writing on *place* and *location* in thought:

Comment [SR6]: Potential redundancies are highlighted in yellow. Please review and advise regarding replacements/intentional repetitions.

48 places then are not the arguments themselves but the compartments in which they are
 49 arranged. Hence every image conjoining the notion of a space with that of storage, of a
 50 localization with an extraction: a region (where one can find arguments), a *vein of some*
 51 *mineral, a circle, a sphere, a spring, a well, an arsenal, a treasury, and even a pigeonhole.*
 52 (33–34)

Comment [SR7]: The introduction to this quote reads somewhat awkwardly. Please consider rephrasing.

Comment [SR8]: Please advise whether the emphases are in the original or added.

53 | Instead of locating place in a meaning that can be trusted to signify the same thing **over and over**,
 54 | *Experiments* simultaneously uses the female body as the place ~~at which~~**where** meanings coincide
 55 | and **as** an underlying feminine logic to inform the process of extracting meaning. How the script
 56 | and performance are composed reveal crucial information about the ways we could read either.
 57 | ~~Brianne and Kari-Anne~~**Waychoff and Innes** go to great lengths to remind us **over and over** that
 58 | narratives of feminine writing rely less on unifying logics or generalizations, ~~but~~**and** emerge
 59 | **more** in proportion to the pluralities~~y~~ and differences of the female body. Barthes calls this
 60 | ability to appreciate and draw out the plurality that constitutes the text *interpretation* (6). *Notice*
 61 | *that the back is bare, naked, which you did not notice before because you were drawn to the eye.*

62 | Stigmata: One of the most striking aspects of watching *Experiments* is the complex
 63 | relationship that develops and builds between the women’s bodies and their *écriture féminine*
 64 | index. What feels insignificant or maybe even odd the first time they perform the **movement**
 65 | **sequence** grows into a complex and hallucinatory interpretive refrain that expands, alters, and
 66 | exceeds the index they continually draw from ~~and refill~~ like a well. The particular actions of their
 67 | female bodies performed at a particular time and in a particular manner then strategically
 68 | repeated again and again is a political act of/as textual composition. The “soft” labor of women’s
 69 | bodies is all too often rendered invisible and insignificant in relation to more “hard” labor forms
 70 | associated with masculine or male bodies. ~~Brianne and Kari-Anne~~**Waychoff and Innes** explicitly
 71 | mark multiple forms of women’s bodies softly laboring in the movement sequence by composing
 72 | different actions of the body itself—twirling legs, hair in hands, knees on floor, fists in crotch—
 73 | and softly performing those seemingly similar actions differently. The paths carved out by the
 74 | bodies onstage form a series of *systematic marks*. Barthes writes that there is

Comment [SR9]: Is this the “ten-second-preparation sequence”?

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75 no other proof of a reading than the quality and endurance of its systematics; in other
76 words: than its functioning. To read, in fact, is a labor of language. To read is to find
77 meanings, and to find meanings is to name them; but these named meanings are swept
78 toward other names; names call to each other, reassemble, and their grouping calls for
79 further naming: I name, I unname, I rename: so that the text passes: it is a nomination in
80 the course of becoming, a tireless approximation, a metonymic labor. (11)

81 Similarly, the pattern of actions performed onstage are systemic marks of ~~Brianne and Kari~~
82 ~~Anne~~Waychoff and Innes's readings of *écriture féminine* composed in such a way that the *how*
83 of the performance serves as the *what* of interpretation. The political act of rendering the labor of
84 a woman's body visible is matched in the equally political act of composing the performance, of
85 privileging one action over another in a particular moment of performance. This political
86 economy of performance composition might also be called *adaptation*.

87 In the ~~essay~~ "Adaptation, ~~Two Theories~~" Paul Edwards summarizes the core dynamic of
88 Linda Hutcheon's argument in *A Theory of Adaptation* that adaptation is a critical and political
89 act. He writes that

90 an interest in the adapter's creative process (a story of writing that includes questions of
91 motive and influence) relates to what she calls "the politics of intertextuality" (xii). What
92 historical circumstances cause an adapter to replay a tale about religious martyrdom
93 during the Reign of Terror in the key of Nazi atrocities? What personal circumstances
94 drive us to make stories about real or fictional others resonate with, even allegorize,
95 stories about ourselves? (373)

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97 | ~~Brianne and Kari-Anne~~Waychoff and Innes use their performing bodies to create critical space
98 | for engaging *écriture féminine* as both a method and a theory. The play of denotation against
99 | connotation at the beginning of every new “sequence,” the paradoxical nature of corporeal and
100 | linguistic citationality in their representational strategies, and the literalizing of the theoretical
101 | metaphors in their patterns of speech and movement are just a few examples of how ~~Brianne and~~
102 | ~~Kari-Anne~~Waychoff and Innes adapt *écriture féminine* in specific and particular ways that which
103 | emphasize and imagine a complex performativity of both the female body and femininity.
104 | Perhaps more significantly, rethinking performativity in such a way imagines a future moment
105 | for the discipline to reclaim feminist practice in our collective discursive practice(s). The
106 | adaptation and patterning of feminist practice and theory that ~~Brianne and Kari-Anne~~Waychoff
107 | and Innes sew into *Experiments* establish a crucial tie between the politics of everyday life and
108 | the politics of performance. Rather than solely focusing on what the performance says about
109 | everyday life ~~Brianne and Kari-Anne~~, Waychoff and Innes explore how performance
110 | communicates back to the everyday. They mark their structures of communication as political
111 | acts by constructing meaning through-in particular, historicized, and material manners. Perhaps
112 | the most satisfying element of *Experiments* is its continued insistence on treating performance as
113 | more than a conceptual permission slip. Instead, Waychoff and Innes ~~Brianne and Kari-Anne~~ use
114 | the act of composing and performing to demonstrate what makes performance unique as a
115 | theoretical and practical mode of creating and communicating ways of knowing. *The texts that*
116 | *flee. The message is sent. Improper, unfinished, continually moving. Puffs of air.*

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118 | **Works Cited**

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- 126 Ulmer, Gregory. *Heuretics: The Logic of Invention*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994.