

FEMINIST CULTURAL ACTIVISM

Semester 1, 20 credits

Please note that this outline is indicative as of Summer 2023 and is subject to change.

Convenors

If you have any queries about this module, email the convenor: Dr. Boriana Alexandrova (boriana.alexandrova@york.ac.uk)

Who should take this module?

This is a core (compulsory) module for the MA in Women's Studies (Hums). Students taking other MA programmes may choose to take this module as one of their options. Research students wishing to take this module should discuss it with their supervisor and check with the CWS office if places are available.

Description and Aims

This module will explore the vast multimedia scope of feminist DIY cultures across borders, alongside the vibrant, evolving interdisciplinary field of creative/artistic research methods. We will engage with a broad selection of performance art works, photographs, films, music, comics, and other underground cultural artefacts such as zines, posters, badges, and other feminist paraphernalia in order to: complicate our understanding of the meaning and potential impact of global feminist art-activism; critically reflect on the varying contexts in which feminist art-activism materialises (including how it politicises our classroom!); and explore creative methodologies of generating and voicing feminist ideas, inspired by the art-activisms studied. Each week, we will focus on a specific artform or art-activist action and reflect on how the crossover between artistic practice, thought, and embodiment can produce new approaches to knowledge, as well as to our relationships with others, ourselves, and our environments.

Ultimately, this module is about mobilising creativity to enable thinking beyond conventions and borders. Through study, seminar discussion, and collaborative/creative activities, we will work to reimagine how we think and how we can practice our intellectual and political work differently. In addition to the traditional seminar discussion format, seminars will also create a safe space where students can experiment with using creative methods (inspired by the primary material) to test new embodied approaches to feminist thought. The module features a starting reading list compiled by the convenor but this will be evolved collaboratively in the course of term, as students make their own contributions to it weekly based on their unique cultural and personal backgrounds, experiences, and interests, thereby fostering a genuinely collaborative and non-hierarchical mode of learning. The module will also feature a collaborative blog that will enable students to share their insights and, if they wish, their creative processes and/or outputs from the workshops.

Key questions to think about

What constitutes "feminist activism" or "feminist research," and what, if any, are the limits of these definitions? How does art become (political) action and a way of knowing? What risks, privileges, and ethical responsibilities do activists, artists, thinkers, and participants bear in an art-action's given context? How can we incorporate the legacy of feminist cultural activism into our own daily feminist praxis as well as our academic methodologies?

Teaching format

The module will be taught through weekly workshops and occasional film screenings. The weekly 2-hour workshops will combine seminar-style group discussions with low-key, no-special-skills-required creative practice as a way to allow ourselves to delve more deeply into the material studied: pushing beyond dry theoretical abstraction towards an ethically informed, empathetic, and embodied methodology of feminist engagement.

Learning outcomes:

After successfully completing this module, students should:

- Be able to demonstrate a critical, nuanced understanding of feminist cultural activism in multiple global and interdisciplinary contexts.
- Have broadened and deepened their understanding of the ways in which feminist theory and art can materialise as both political action and intellectual praxis.
- Be able to critically interlink advanced theoretical concepts in feminist and queer scholarship with activist, artistic, and academic practice.
- Have enhanced their skills at oral presentation, essay writing, collaborative teamwork, and creative, political, and self-expression.

Indicative Programme

Week 1 Introduction: Creative practice as political/intellectual action.

Film screening in preparation for week 2: *Act & Punishment* (2015, about Pussy Riot).

Week 2 Punk in the streets: Riot Grrrl Cultures Across Borders. Artform: zines, patches, badges, iron jackets.

Week 3 Queer Photography as Anti-Fascist Resistance in World War 2: Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore

Week 4 Critical reflection: Theorising creative practice pt 1

Week 5 Workshop on the module assessment, incl. the creative-critical portfolio

Week 6 Vulnerability as Resistance: Exploring & Protesting Violence through Performance Art

Week 7 Speaking the unspeakable: Migrant and refugee women's histories in spoken word. Primary works by: Warsan Shire, Rafeef Ziadah, and Marlene NourbeSe Philip.

Week 8 Feminist comics in the digital age. Primary works: Marjane Satrapi, *Persepolis*, Alison Bechdel, *Dykes to Watch Out For* (selected comics), and student selections of comic/graphic novel artworks. Film screening in preparation for week 8: Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* (2017).

Week 9 When the personal becomes political: Storytelling as a form of activism. Primary works: *The Coming Out Monologues* (Budapest 2012) and Hannah Gadsby, *Nanette*.

Week 10 Critical reflection: Theorising creative practice pt 2. Beginning work on module assessment.

Week 11 Assessment support session.

Assessment

Students can choose to submit one of two modes of assessment, which will make up 100% of their module mark:

1. An essay of 3500–4000 words, analysing one or several creative/artistic methods of: feminist research, art-activism, and/or knowledge production.
2. A creative project (such as a photographic portfolio, a photo essay, comic, collage, piece of music, short film, etc.) inspired by a week on the module plus a 1,500-2,000-word critical reflection discussing the project's creative and political choices and placing them in a critical and scholarly context.

The essay topic or creative project will need to be discussed with and approved by the convenor before or at the week 10 seminar.

Indicative Reading

Ahmed, Sara. *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Buser, Michael, and Jane Arthurs. "Cultural Activism in the Community: Creative Practice, Activism and Place-Identities." UWE Bristol Research Projects (blog), October 2012. shorturl.at/dpSUV

Butler, Judith, Zeynep Gambetti, and Leticia Sabsay, eds. *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Chilton, Gioia. "Altered Inquiry: Discovering Arts-Based Research Through an Altered Book." *IJQM: International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, no. 12 (2013): 457–77.

Claycomb, Ryan. "Performative Lives, Performed Selves: Autobiography in Feminist Performance." In *Lives in Play: Autobiography and Biography on the Feminist Stage*, 27-54. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012.

Cole, Julie. "Review: Art, Activism, and Feminisms: Sites of Confrontation and Change." *NWSA Journal, Feminist Activist Art*, 19, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 175–80.

- Cvetkovich, Ann. *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Darms, Lisa, ed. *The Riot Grrrl Collection*. New York: Feminist Press, 2013.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Freedom Is a Constant Struggle: Ferguson, Palestine, and the Foundations of a Movement*. Haymarket Books, 2016.
- Firat, Begüm Özden, and Aylin Kuryel, eds. *Cultural Activism: Practices, Dilemmas, and Possibilities*. *Thamyris/Intersecting: Place, Sex and Race* 21. Amsterdam ; New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011.
- Fox, Oriana. "Once More with Feeling: An Abbreviated History of Feminist Performance Art." *Feminist Review*, no. 96 (2010): 107-21.
- Garlough, C.L. "On the Political Uses of Folklore: Performance and Grassroots Feminist Activism in India." *Journal of American Folklore*, 121, 480, 2008, pp.167-191.
- Gauntlett, D. *Making is connecting: the social meaning of creativity, from DIY and knitting to YouTube and Web 2.0*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011.
- Grosz, E. A. *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*. New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Guerrilla Girls website: <http://www.guerrillagirls.com>
- Halberstam, Judith. "Imagined Violence/Queer Violence: Representation, Rage, and Resistance." *Social Text*, no. 37 (1993): 187-201.
- Harris, A., ed. *Next Wave Cultures: Feminism, Subcultures, Activism*. London: Routledge, 2008.
- Judd, Bettina. *Feelin: Creative Practice, Pleasure, and Black Feminist Thought*. Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2023.
- Lorde, Audre. *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde*. Trumansburg, NY : Crossing Press.
- Manfredi, Julia Monteiro. "Performed Stories of Social Justice." In *Taking Risks: Feminist Activism and Research in the Americas*, edited by Julie D. Shayne and Margaret Randall, 115-18. SUNY Series, Praxis: Theory in Action. Albany: SUNY Press, 2014.
- O'Neill, Maggie. "Transnational Refugees: The Transformative Role of Art?" *FQS: Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 9, no. 2 (May 2008).
- O'Neill, Maggie, and Phil Hubbard. "Walking, Sensing, Belonging: Ethno-Mimesis as Performative Praxis." *Visual Studies* 25, no. 1 (March 23, 2010): 46-58.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14725861003606878>.
- Powell, Kimberly, Joe Norris, and Kakali Bhattacharya. "Embodying Moral Discourses Through Arts-Based Methodologies: Poetry, Visual Arts, Movement, Sounds, and Performance." *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies* 20, no. 1 (February 2020): 3-6.
- Marcus, Sara. *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution*. 1st ed. New York: HarperPerennial, 2010.
- Miller, K. "Iconographies of Gender, Poverty, and Power in Contemporary South African Visual Culture." *Feminist Formations* 19 (1), 2007: 118-136.
- Miner, V. "Writing Feminist Fiction: Solitary Genesis or Collective Criticism?" *Frontiers*, no. 6, 1/2, 1981.
- Mullin, A. "Feminist Art and the Political Imagination." *Hypatia*, vol 18, no. 4, 2003, pp 189-213.
- Piepmeyer, A. *Girl Zines: Making media, doing feminism*. New York: New York UP, 2009.
- Schultz, Laura Luise. "The Archive Is Here and Now: Reframing Political Events as Theatre." In *Performing Archives: Archives of Performance*, edited by Gunhild Borggreen and Rune Gade, 199-217. Performance Studies International. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 2013.

Sharpe, Christina. *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016.

Spence, J. & J Solomon. *What Can a Woman Do With a Camera?* London: Scarlet Press, 1995.