Experimental Writing by Women

This course is at its heart revisionist and interventionist: it attempts to place experimental writing by women at the centre of our study of literary history at the same time as it attempts to offer a model for how to read and shape the present. Asking questions about aesthetic and social forms; canonicity and archival gaps; formal experiment and lived experience—each class will be oriented around a particular female writer, placed within their social, cultural, and publishing contexts. Some of the writers, artists, and theorists covered include: Mina Loy (in the context of proto-Dada and modernism, as well as reprints and revivals by feminist poets in the 1970s and 80s), Christine Brooke-Rose (via genre theory, French theory, Nouveau Roman); Bernadette Mayer (alongside 1960s conceptual and feminist art, and contemporary conceptual writing by women), Kathy Acker (in the context of politically radical autobiography, queer Bay Area writing, as well as various NYC scenes, including Acker’s influence on the Riot Grrrl movement); Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (alongside ‘multilingual writing’, experimental translation by Caroline Bergvall and Don Mee Choi, and world literature, Cha’s video and performance works); Andrea Brady (in the context of: a special 2015 Chicago Review issue on sexual violence; writing on the lyric by Denise Riley and Claudia Rankine; her own criticism and activities as the founder of a feminist listserv and the curator of the Globe Road festival).

Essays:
Taking my inspiration from the citational practice of Sara Ahmed’s Living a Feminist Life, this syllabus does not contain any work by straight white men. I invite you to try the same in your coursework essays. The essay can focus on any of the writers and/or their milieu discussed in our sessions, or on a particular question that connects a number of different practitioners and genres. Ultimately, the aim is to read this work attentively, rigorously, and hospitably; in other words: to allow a research question to emerge from the work itself. Moreover, we don’t just want to read female artists as ‘women writers’ at the expense of taking them seriously as ‘writers’ and thinkers; at other times, an explicit exploration and interrogation of feminist politics, aesthetics, sociality, and the very category of ‘woman’ is exactly what is required to understand how a particular poem or poet thinks and works. You may want to consider questions about form, experiment, and politics, or you may want to query the usefulness of those categories and come up with an alternative approach.

More information about the essay’s format and length, and various rules and regulations can be found in the ‘Green Book’ for M.Phil students on the Faculty’s intranet.
WEEK 1: KILLJOYS AND SHE-DANDIES
Andrea Brady, ‘The Book of the City of Ladies’ (in which she appropriates lines from contemporary male poets that address an unnamed female figure). Listen to the recording here.

Lisa Robertson, ‘Proverbs of a She-Dandy’ (2017), consider this essay-poem in the context of ageism.


‘A Forum—on recent actions in response to sexism, misogyny, and sexual assault in literary communities’ Chicago Review, 59.1/2 (Fall 2014 / Winter 2015) [read the introduction and then choose one response to focus on]

Additional reading:
Valerie Solanas, 'The SCUM Manifesto'
Verity Spott 'Trans* Manifesto—As A' and 'Against Trans* Manifestos', Datableed, 3
https://www.datableedzine.com/verity-spott-trans-manifesto (1 page)
https://www.datableedzine.com/verity-spott-against-trans-manifestos (1 page)

WEEK 2: ‘WOMEN ARE THE CAUSE OF MODERNISM WHATEVER THAT IS’

Loy, ‘O Marcel—Otherwise I Also Have Been to Louise’s’, The Blind Man, 2 (1917).


HOW(ever) 3.1 (January 1986). [Two Reappreciations of Gertrude Stein]

HOW 2, 1.5 (March 2001). [Special Mina Loy symposium]

Kate Eichhorn, The Archival Turn in Feminism: Outrage in Order [introduction]


Additional reading:
Arjun Appadurai, ‘Archive and Aspiration’

WEEK 3: FLUTTERING AROUND A CANON: FORMAL CONSTRAINTS AND THE INVISIBLE ‘WOMAN WRITER’
Christine Brooke-Rose, excerpts from Thru, Between, and Life, End of


Additional reading/listening:
Brooke-Rose, Invisible Author: Last Essays (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2002).

Foucault, ‘What is an Author?’

Joanna Walsh, 'The Anti-Canon of Christine Brooke-Rose: An Algorithmic Appreciation'.

Audio interview with Phillip by Uljana Wolf (the intro is in German but the interview is in English), starts at 3:02.
WEEK 4: KATHY ACKER & THE POLITICS OF (FAKE) AUTOBIOGRAPHY
Kathy Acker, excerpts from The Childlike Life of the Black Tarantula by The Black Tarantula and My Death My Life by Pier Paolo Pasolini
Eve Sedgwick, ‘Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You’, in Touching Feeling (Duke UP)
Jonathan Flaherty, ‘Prurience’, talk for MLA 2017 panel on ‘Critical Moods’

Additional reading:
Maggie Nelson, The Argonauts

WEEK 5: Multilingual Writing and ‘the Mainly White Room’
Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Clio History (New York: Wedge, 1982) [artist book]
Cha, Dictee [excerpts]

Additional material:
Watch some videos by Cha.
Also look up the work of Adrian Piper—brief intro here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKPtKrKvXyo
Look up Vahni Capildeo’s work.
Ngugi Wa Thiong’o, excerpt from The Language of African Literature, 3pp.

WEEK 6: ZANY SUBJECTS AND AFFECTIVE LABOUR
Bernadette Mayer, [excerpts] Sonnets (Tender Buttons, 1989/2014)
Bernadette Mayer, excerpts from her work in 0 To 9 (a magazine she co-edited with Vito Acconci)
Holly Melgard, REIMBURSEMENT up on Troll Thread (2013) and Money ‘by’ Maker, also on Troll Thread (2012); ‘Undocumented Labor’, unAmerican Activities (2015), listen to the recording of Melgard’s reading on Archive of the Now (10 mins.)

Voluntary background reading:
Laynie Browne and Caroline Bergvall (introductions) to I’ll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women
Audre Lorde, ‘Poetry is Not a Luxury’, in Sister Outsider
Generally useful resources:

- You have access to Kanopy via Moodle (login with Raven), which has thousands of films, documentaries, and brief video interviews (with, for example, Meredith Monk)
- **Vida: Women in Literary Arts** (includes the Vida Count)
- Useful reading list on poetry/poetics compiled by poets: [http://www.thevolta.org/thevolta-resources.html](http://www.thevolta.org/thevolta-resources.html)
- Read the *Harriet* blog & *Jacket2* for news and reviews of modernist, contemporary, and other historical forms of poetry / avant-garde writing.
- Listen to recorded readings, interviews, and more on PennSound and Archive of the Now