Radical Acts: Theater and Feminist Pedagogies of Change. Edited by Ann Elizabeth Armstrong and Kathleen Juhl. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Books, 2007; pp. 329. \$17.95 paper.

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In her preface to *Radical Acts: Theater and Feminist Pedagogies of Change*, Joan Lipkin addresses the potential audience for this anthology as “Dear Gentle, Pissed Off, Utopian Reader” (3). With this salutation, Lipkin acknowledges the contestatory nature of the collection assembled by editors Ann Elizabeth Armstrong and Kathleen Juhl. *Radical Acts* is a complicated package of revealing personal narratives, practically theorized pedagogical techniques, and in-depth conversations with artists and activists who imagine theatre practice and performance theory as symbiotic with feminist ideologies. Armstrong and Juhl assert that their contributors “present a matrix that allows us to chart how feminist teachers, artists, and activists seek freedom by engaging multiple perspectives through theatre” (20). This matrix privileges the classroom as a potentially powerful space for communal politics and social change, yet does not supplant its surrounding communities. It is also a structure that recognizes the inherent theatricality of pedagogy to challenge or reinforce (sometimes simultaneously) dominant ideologies of education, theatre practice, and social life.

Armstrong and Juhl anticipate their book’s diverse audience, grouping similarly focused essays together with a brief beginning précis to contextualize their tone and trajectory. Such framing is a nod to Ellen Donkin and Susan Clement’s *Upstaging Big Daddy: Directing Theater as if Race and Gender Matter* (1993). In many ways, *Radical Acts* is a sequel to *Upstaging*, which offered a primer for feminist directors, including rehearsal and performance techniques and narratives about the challenges for feminist theatre artists. In *Radical Acts*’ second part, “Activating Practice,” contributors extend the conversation about feminist praxis begun in *Upstaging*. A small but significant difference is that these authors offer strategies to produce teachable moments about feminism in the theatre classroom (as opposed to the rehearsal room), while also extolling the use of theatre techniques to illuminate teachable moments in women’s studies classrooms. This section includes conversations with artists/teachers (e.g., Kate Bornstein, Deb Margolin, Sharon Bridgforth) whose work spans a range of performance and pedagogical interventions. These professionals present their philosophies and techniques, ever mindful of the thorny matrices of difference that circulate for feminist performers who consider their artistic practice inherently linked to education (within or outside a formal classroom setting) and for feminist educators whose postmillennial students may view even third-wave feminism as distant history.

Contributions to the anthology’s opening part, “Positioning Our Voices,” invoke a “personal is political” tone reminiscent of the germinal women’s studies collection, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). Included is the 2002 ATHE keynote address by Cherrie Moraga, one of *Bridge*’s coeditors, which recollects

“fall[ing] in love with the power of theater to teach” (48). Some writers in this opening part echo this romance, recalling how work on specific theatre texts or productions exposed previously unarticulated political, pedagogical, and personal oppressions and the performative means by which to make them spoken and visible. Others describe the academy’s problematic relationship to women and feminism, unmasking the normative values of the professional theatre world, values reinforced by the relationship between conservatory training structures and the entertainment industry’s market demands. Such relationships are cast as conservative reentrenchment in the face of rapidly changing student demographics and globally interconnected academic and commercial institutions.

Invigorating analyses of clashes between the real and the ideal are found in *Radical Acts*’ final part, “Engaging Community.” Here, too, contributors elaborate themes in another significant feminist text: Jill Dolan’s *Geographies of Learning: Theory and Practice, Activism and Performance* (2001). Like Dolan, the writers here illustrate how feminist theatre pedagogy requires commitment beyond the academy into local and global institutions of culture and politics. Essays situate personal narratives and project “diaries” within larger performance discourses, examining the complicated exchanges that take place when “safe” classroom communities encounter wider communities of social actors. Moments of contestation, the authors argue, can be frightening and regressive but also thrilling and transformative. Closing this section is an interview between Armstrong and Norma Bowles, the founder and artistic director of Fringe Benefits Theatre, in which the two discuss the complications and rewards of using theatre to engage complex social debates, then stage and calibrate public feedback about those same debates. While feminist principles of facilitation, collaboration, and consensus infuse Bowles’s dramaturgical method, her attention to a “comprehensive, multiculturalist/humanist view of various ‘isms’ and the interplay between them” (305) widens the scope of individuals and organizations who might use her Theatre for Social Justice pedagogy to achieve very specific “activist goals” (304). The interviews throughout *Radical Acts* enact of one of the anthology’s more indirect goals: to archive feminist artistic and activist practices while simultaneously interrogating the record of the impact and legacies of those practices.

An idealistic pulse beats throughout *Radical Acts*. Reading the whole or even sections, it seems self-evident that feminist performance pedagogy, with core values of open dialogue, productive affect, nonhierarchical collaboration, and the recognition of situated knowledge, should be the hallmark of any progressive teacher. With such potential, I found it dismaying that the book was published by a nonprofit press so small that the editors themselves have done the bulk of its marketing, sales, and even delivery. The publisher’s limited reach makes it difficult to conceive of *Radical Acts* breaking through the rather intransigent domain of academic theatre texts or even the more interdisciplinary market for women’s studies textbooks. When I asked the editors about the decision to center the text on pedagogy, they reiterated their assertion that feminist theatre practice is inherently pedagogical and feminist pedagogy

embraces principles of performance as a means of self-reflexively interrogating the larger world. They also found, when shopping the book to publishers, that pedagogy was an easier “sell” than feminism.

Although the ideas discussed in *Radical Acts* raise productive questions about the relationships among feminist theory, practice, and performance, the circumstances of this anthology’s publishing raise troubling questions about the viability of those questions in the current academic market. Rereading this book in the context of the 2008 presidential campaign, which saw stark and troubling articulations about women and feminism in the platforms of Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin, I would argue that more, not less, writing about feminist practices is needed. I fear, however, *Radical Acts* may represent a closing curtain instead of an opening salvo in a new era of book-length, avowedly feminist praxis for theatre pedagogy and performance.