

BLOG

How to Play a Woman

APR 22, 2017 - STAGES OF RESISTANCE

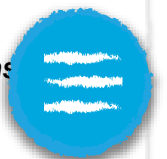
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by Jocelyn Kuritsky



Photo by Jody Christopherson

*This piece is part of a blog salon, curated by **Caridad Svich**, called "**Stages of Resistance.**" The series welcomes reflections on themes related to making work for live performance in political and aesthetic resistance to forms and systems that oppress human rights and censor or severely limit freedom of expression. We are in increasingly hostile, volatile times around the world, and this salon hopes to serve as a space for considered, thoughtful, polemical articulations of practice and theory on the subject of resistance, the multiple meanings of political art, and the ways in which progressive, wholistic cultural change may be instigated through artworks. Stay tuned for more articles and reflections this series throughout March and April 2017!*





"People had a preexisting mental notion of what a female candidate would look like, and she doesn't look like it. She is being penalized for having a series of traits that people find unacceptable in a woman."

— **Malcolm Gladwell, interview with CBC News**

When Donald Trump won the election, the level of fury I felt was almost indescribable. Why I felt such intense fury more than *anything* else is still, to me, a bit of a mystery. Aside from the obvious rupture of American politics before my eyes, and the understandable emotional flurry that that would and did inflict, there was something else going on - I knew the depth of the kind of anger I felt was something different. His election didn't ignite sadness, or despair, or even confusion in me as much as it ignited dragon fire rage.

Not too long ago, I was at a dinner, and, as it inevitably does, conversation tread toward politics. A guest I was eating with remarked they liked Hillary but wished Hillary had conducted her campaign with better oratory skills. And, at a meeting, around the same time, someone articulated total disgust for Clinton, but proudly noted they'd voted for her, despite it all.

We're now about two and half months into the most incoherent, bombastic presidency of my lifetime (and arguably everyone's lifetime), and I still have the rage, though it simmers behind a pensive facade. And I think about Clinton, a lot. I think about women, a lot.

I have been a performer in New York for over ten years now. Daily, I am around a variety of women who work as representatives for the human experience, onstage, onscreen, in radio, and in new media. Last year I started an initiative called The Muse Project. MP's mission is to ask women stage actors what they want to put out into the community, and then help them design the roles and worlds they want to experiment with... I think about representation, a lot. I think about behavior a lot. I think about Clinton. I think about women. I think about women as *actors*, both literally and professionally.

To me, while Trump is galavanting around with 'plainspoken' rhetoric that translates as authenticity, Hillary Clinton has become something else. To me, she seemed and seems earnest and careful, with small pockets of spaces unseen, somewhat mysterious. There's a gap with her, and this gap is what so many have criticized as being dishonest or *inauthentic*, but I just see a calculated gap. There is a consciousness of performance, which



is what always made me trust her.

I think about what the possibilities of women leadership could have been and can be... I think about women. I think about women actors. I think about performance.

Every truly compelling performance I have ever seen onstage breaks a norm, and, as a result, it is not always liked. Sometimes, I would say, it is universally disdained, especially when it comes to women actors. She's too shrill, or blunt, nervous, or monotone, flat, loud, disheveled. She tries too hard. Women performers are critiqued for their perceived beauty, lack thereof, and how they use it, endlessly. Small, subtler performances from women are not always as easily or so readily criticized, but the ones that are 'tone deaf' to our conventions are still often poked at. To me, the greatest performances I can think of wiggle and thrash beyond the lines. Sometimes something breaks. And they're often too much. They seem too self aware. Marian Seldes springs to mind.

I think about how much Hillary Clinton has endured and evolved during her many years in the public eye, balancing onslaught after onslaught of judgement, feedback, attack, and criticism. And I grieve the possibility she has become a kind of martyr.

I think about women.

I still have not completely examined the rage I hold. It would probably be a mistake to attempt to understand it all right now, anyway. But it is there. The only truth I really know is that it's there, in me, churning, around me. The Women's March on Washington in January was possibly the largest single-day protest in U.S. history. There is a deep, mysterious pocket of anger in me, about me; and maybe deep in many. This pocket, this space, this gap is something I hypothesize Secretary Clinton has known for a while. It's something she perhaps circulates with discerning distance, a space of constant navigation for her, and a knowledge that the place she seeks and the gap between her perceived identity and that place is filled with an amorphous, fire breathing fury. And, maybe, for me, for us, a consciousness about performance is surfacing, a realization there are roles we need to examine, stretch, pummel, play with, and ambitiously seek out if we are to move forward and act. But right now, there is a gap.

I think about women. I think about roles. I think about performance. Every day. I think about dangerous, uneven, crackling, pushy, bubbling, nervously constrained, screechy performances; and I wonder about the moat of rage we will have to swim to begin. And, even more-so than it potentially being the right thing to be wondering about, it's becoming an impolite, manic curiosity.



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