

GESM 110g: PERFORMING RACE

Fall 2020

Monday/Wednesday, 3:30-4:50, ONLINE

Professor Dorinne Kondo

Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity, Professor of Anthropology

Office: KAP 448F

Office hours by appointment, via Zoom or Skype

kondo@usc.edu

In light of the #Black Lives Matter movement and the urgency of its fundamental challenges to structural inequality, this course spotlights performance as a site where we can view, critically appraise, and challenge the structure of power relations in our historical moment. Performance and performativity have become one of the most generative theoretical concepts of the last thirty years. Our course highlights theatrical/ aesthetic and everyday performances that unsettle our contemporary, culturally specific notions of fixed categories, including race, gender, sexuality, culture, and genre. As a fulfillment of the General Education requirement in the Arts, “Performing Race” offers students the opportunity to explore their own creative potential and to understand the arts and performance within a larger historical, social, cultural context.

Critical race studies scholars and feminist theorists have expanded performance as a theoretical concept beyond the stage, to include the practice of everyday life. For example, works in feminist philosophy alert us to the ways we “perform” our genders according to particular cultural conventions. Literatures in critical legal studies examine the ways we perform racialized identities in the workplace, constantly negotiating normative ideas of racial appropriateness and social convention. Concepts of race and racism have been profoundly affected by structural approaches (Foucault’s biopolitics; Berlant’s “slow death;” Gilmore’s “vulnerability to premature death”) that go beyond the notion of individual prejudice. We will explore the concepts of performativity and performance within these larger structural contexts, utilizing theoretical tools that have had a profound impact on the ways scholars think about gender, racial, sexual, and cultural identities.

We will read and view works that thematically foreground the fluidity of gender, race, and sexuality, such as David Henry Hwang’s *M. Butterfly*. We add the further transgressions of genre, when we encounter pioneering works in so-called documentary theatre: actress and playwright Anna Deavere Smith’s *Twilight: Los Angeles 1992*, based on the Los Angeles uprisings/ civil unrest. I served as a dramaturg on that production and on two other world premieres of Smith’s plays. We will also view her most recent play, *Notes from the Field*, about the school-to-prison pipeline among youth of color, and we will use as inspiration Smith’s *Master Class* on HBO for an exercise in documentary theater performance. These works cross lines of race, gender, age and sexuality, complicating our notions of “the real” and “the fictive,” of “documentary” and “well-made play.” Such performances raise foundational questions: what counts as a play? What are the boundaries among drama, journalism, and ethnography? How fluid is identity? Are all boundary crossings equivalent?

Students will undertake their own creative projects early in the semester. Both will be interview-based, following guidelines developed by Anna Deavere Smith in her pioneering form of documentary theater. Students will interview each other and create a performance based on those interviews for the class to view. A short analysis/ self-critique will add reflective and analytic dimensions to the *making* of the student's art.

Using this exercise as a “warm-up,” students will find someone—or, if you like, several people—who can inspire a performance. This can be either a verbatim documentary performance or a performance piece inspired by close examination of one or more other people.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES FOR THE ARTS (GE-A)

Thematically, the course addresses the objectives for requirements in the arts:

- 1) analysis, through the multidisciplinary engagement of concepts/ theories of race and performance;
- 2) making, through the requirement that students create a performance piece;
- 3) connectivity, through consideration of issues of race and inequality—issues thematized in the art featured during the semester;
- 4) context, through placing the art works within a historical and cultural frame;
- 5) engagement, through exposure to theater and performance in Los Angeles and beyond.

We will watch zoom plays, filmed plays, and television programs as objects of study and analysis. If arrangements can be made, we will have at least one visit by a theatre professional to our class.

Students should learn about key approaches to power and racial formation in the U.S., learn experientially and through textual analysis about critically important issues of performativity and performance. Above all, the course aims to foster a lively appreciation of the excitement and power of theatrical performance during our journey together this semester. While we will encounter sobering truths about race and power, we should also be moved and have fun along the way!

CLASSROOM CONDUCT

We are tied to our computers these days; ordinarily, I limit use of computers in the classroom. You are responsible for remaining focused and paying attention during our classroom meetings. While we will have some “asynchronous” classes that include assignments you will complete on your own time, structure can be helpful. Designated time for viewing cannot fully ensure that anyone will view something attentively, but it can help. Structure can help us through the amorphous unfolding of time/ days in quarantine. Please try to find a quiet, distraction-free place for our Zoom sessions.

We will view some of the visual material as a class; occasionally, you will be able to complete the assignment on your own time. In these instances, our class will not meet, as the play/ film/ video constitutes class time. Consult your syllabus for schedules.

READING LIST

BOOKS, PLAYS, SCREENPLAYS

Please purchase these online through your favorite online bookseller. Some of these may be available as eBooks through the USC Library; if you plan, the USC library can also supply pdfs of individual chapters.

- Banks, Daniel and Claire Sylver, editors. *Casting a Movement: The Welcome Table Initiative*. New York: Routledge, 2019.
- Hudes, Quiara Alegría. *Elliot, a Soldier's Fugue*. New York: Dramatists Play Service, 2007.
- Hwang, David Henry. *M. Butterfly*. New York, NY: Plume Books, 1993.
- Kondo, Dorinne. *Worldmaking: Race, Performance and the Work of Creativity*. Duke University Press, 2018.
- Miranda, Lin-Manuel. *Hamilton: An American Musical*. In *Hamilton: The Revolution*. Edited by Jeremy McCarter. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016.
- Nwandu, Antoinette. *Pass Over*. New York, NY: Grove Press, 2019.
- Rivera, José. *Marisol*. Dramatists Play Service Inc, 1999.
- Smith, Anna Deavere. *Notes from the Field*. New York: Anchor, 2019.
- Smith, Anna Deavere. *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*. New York: Anchor, 1993.

ARTICLES AND CHAPTERS

These articles and chapters will be in “Content” on Blackboard.

- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York, The New Press, 2010.
- Butler, Judith. “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory.” *Theater Journal* 40 (1988): 519-531.
- Carbado, Devon. and Mitu Gulati, *Acting White? Rethinking Race in “Post-Racial” America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, selections.
- DiAngelo, Robin J. *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk About Racism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2018.
- Gallela, Donatella. “Racializing the American Revolution Review of the Broadway Musical Hamilton.” *Advocate*. OpenCUNY, 2015. <https://gcadvocate.com/2015/11/16/racializing-the-american-revolution-review-of-the-broadway-musical-hamilton/>
- Gilmore, Ruth Wilson. *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California*. 1st ed., University of California Press, 2007.
- Kondo, Dorinne K.. “‘M. Butterfly’: Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity.” *Cultural Critique*, no. 16, Oxford University Press, Oct. 1990, pp. 5–29.
- Lipsitz, George. *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*. Twentieth anniversary edition. Temple University Press; 2018.
- Marcus, Hazel and Moya, Paula eds., *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*. New York: Norton, 2010, selections.
- Mcintosh, Peggy. *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (1989) 1*. On Privilege, Fraudulence, and Teaching As Learning, 2019, 29–34. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351133791-4>.

Puccini, Giacomo, Giacosa, Giuseppe and Illica, Luigi. *Madama Butterfly*. Metropolitan Opera. Madama Butterfly. <https://www.metopera.org/discover/synopses/madama-butterfly/>.
Ybarra, Patricia. "How to Read a Latinx Play in the Twenty-first Century: Learning from Quiara Hudes." *Theatre Topics*, vol. 27 no. 1, p. 49-59. 2017.

VIDEOS

[Miss Saigon](#)

[Madama Butterfly](#)

[Pass Over](#)

[Twilight](#)

[Notes from the Field](#)

DVD (in class): *Master Class*

[Hijabi Monologues](#)

[Hamilton](#)

PODCASTS

[Token Theatre Friends on Hamilton](#)

OFFICE HOURS: By appointment, via Zoom or Skype.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Students must work independently on all individual assignments; collaborating on individual assignments is considered cheating and will be penalized accordingly. All USC students are responsible for reading and following the USC Student Conduct Code, which prohibits plagiarism. Some examples of behavior that is not allowed are: copying all or part of someone else's work (by hand or by looking at others' files, either secretly or if shown), and submitting it as your own; giving another student in the class a copy of your assignment solution; consulting with another student during an exam; and copying text from published literature without proper attribution. If you have questions about what is allowed, please discuss it with the instructor.

Students who violate University standards of academic integrity are subject to disciplinary sanctions, including failure in the course and suspension from the University. Since dishonesty in any form harms the individual, other students, and the University, policies on academic integrity will be strictly enforced.

STATEMENT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Disability Services and Programs (DSP) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from DSP. Please be sure the letter is delivered to your course instructor (or TA) as early in the semester as possible. DSP is located in GFS 120 and is open from 8:30am to 5:00pm, Monday through Friday. Website and contact information for DSP: dsp.usc.edu, phone: (213)740-0776.

REQUIREMENTS

VISUAL MATERIAL: FILMED PLAYS, ONLINE ZOOM PLAYS, TELEVISION PROGRAMS

Please consult the syllabus for the schedule of viewings. Some will be asynchronous, in which case our course will not meet as a group. Other materials are available only on DVD. In these and other cases, we will view the plays/videos together.

READINGS

Each reading assignment should be completed before the designated day of the assignment. This is to ensure that you have read and thought about the texts BEFORE we encounter them in class. You will post on Blackboard, on the discussion forum for the week. Please post as an attachment, as that is easier for me to grade.

For academic articles, think about the following questions:

- 1) What is the major point of the article? What is the author's argument?
- 2) Against whom does the author seem to be arguing?
- 3) What seems to be the historical/ theoretical context in which the article was written?
- 4) If the rhetorical style is particularly interesting or remarkable, how does the author use rhetoric to accomplish his/ her ends?
- 5) What is your position vis-à-vis the author's argument?

For dramatic works, keep in mind the following:

- 1) What is the play "about?" What themes does the play engage?
- 2) Who are the major characters, and what are their "journeys?"
- 3) What is the structure of the play: e.g., classic Aristotelian drama, non-linear, etc.?
- 4) Make a note of the style of the play.
- 5) If you can, locate the play in a larger context of history: plays, too, can have "arguments," reacting to particular dramatic works or a history of dramatic work.
- 6) Try to read passages aloud. We will be doing this in class. Unlike academic arguments, a play must be heard, embodied, in order to live.
- 7) Envision what the play would look like on stage. This can help you think like a director or a designer.

GRADING

- **PARTICIPATION** **10%**

Performances and film screenings are MANDATORY. You are responsible for this material, which will feature in your paper topics and exams. I will also be calling on people randomly in class, and if you are unprepared, this will be taken into consideration in your grade. Participation will also include in-class discussion and being a thoughtful respondent to your classmates. Your comments in class should demonstrate your engagement with the readings. Due to the fact that some of our work will be asynchronous, I am asking you to post an EXIT TICKET on the discussion board, in the discussion forum for the week. After each class, post something that you learned/ are taking away from the class meeting or viewing that day.

- **WEEKLY POSTINGS** **20%**

Please use the guidelines above as models. **POST BY NOON THE DAY BEFORE CLASS.** This is to allow the presenter(s) to read and incorporate questions in their presentations, if they so choose. Postings are one **SHORT** paragraph of summary (the gist of the argument in a few sentences) and one **DISCUSSION** question, not an informational question. You are free to ask informational questions, but you need to post an open-ended discussion question in addition. The point is to generate conversation, not raise a question that can be easily answered.

- **PAPERS ONE AND TWO: FIVE PAGES** **25% total; 12.5% each**

The papers will analyze the theatre performances we see. One key aim of the class is to sharpen your critical faculties so that you can more effectively analyze cultural productions. If applicable, refer to relevant works that we have read in class as well as outside sources. Please be careful about plagiarism.

- **PERFORMANCE ONE** **10%**

Students will be paired, and using the methods Anna Deavere Smith has developed over the years, you will interview each other and construct a performance form those interviews. In preparation, we will study her acting theory. At the heart of her methods are a supposition of **DIFFERENCE** from the Other, and scrupulous observation and listening.

Students will be graded on effort, on performance and on the degree of insight displayed in their self-reflective autocritique.

▪ **PERFORMANCE TWO** **10%**

You will conduct research outside class, to create a performance based on someone different than yourself. You can do a verbatim documentary performance in the style of Anna Deavere Smith, or use the interview/ observations to create a fictional piece. Please be sure to obtain permission from your interviewee/ source of inspiration!

In both performances, feel free to use props, “costume,” even music or other multimedia if you wish.

▪ **PRESENTATION** **15%**

Each student will be responsible for leading a discussion that analyzes the texts for a given series of assignments. The presentations should be at least 60 minutes long

The presentation is meant to encourage participation and engagement in the readings. It should give you the opportunity to be creative, to express your ideas clearly, and to take responsibility for active learning. The best learning comes through teaching.

Be sure to consult with me as you conceptualize your presentation.

▪ **FINAL EXAM** **10%**

THE FINAL IS A TAKE-HOME EXAM. I will preview the topics for the exam before I post it.

All exams and papers should be submitted on Turnitin. Be sure you are familiar with this function. Make sure you have uploaded properly and completed the process, or your submission may not register. Turnitin has a cut-off time/date; unless you have a family emergency, **NO LATE PAPERS OR EXAMS WILL BE ACCEPTED.**

CLASS SCHEDULE

**ALL DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND SUMMARIES SHOULD BE POSTED BY 12 pm
THE DAY BEFORE CLASS.**

WEEK ONE: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RACE, PERFORMANCE; CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

Monday, August 17

Introduction: syllabus, themes, readings, course mechanics, self-introductions.

Wednesday, August 19

Conversations about Race and Racism

Reading: Introductions to: *White Privilege*, *Golden Gulag*, *The New Jim Crow*

Introduction and Chapter 1 of *White Fragility*

The first sixteen pages of *Doing Race*.

Presentation. We may need 2 people.

WEEK TWO: RACE, POWER, PROTEST

Monday, August 24

Watch *Twilight: Los Angeles* in class.

Wednesday, August 26

Preparation for interview and performance:

Finish *Twilight: Los Angeles*.

Reading: Kondo, "The Drama Behind the Drama," from *Worldmaking*.

Presentation.

WEEK THREE: ICEBREAKER AND WARM UP

Monday, August 31

Watch Anna Deavere Smith's "Master Class" in class.

Reading: Kondo, "(En)acting Theory," from *Worldmaking*.

Wednesday, September 2

Interview each other. We will use class time for your interviews. Plan for at least 45 minutes; you will have a chance to edit as you prepare for your performance.

WEEK FOUR: PERFORMANCE AND PERFORMATIVITY

Monday, September 7

LABOR DAY, no class.

Wednesday, September 9

Performances.

PERFORMANCE AND IDENTITY

WEEK FIVE

Monday, September 14

Performance and Performativity

Reading: Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution.”
Selections from Carbado and Gulati, *Acting White*. **Presentation.**

Wednesday, September 16

Writing Center, workshop on Clarity & Flow.

WEEK SIX

Monday, September 21

Writing Center, workshop on Proofreading & Polishing.

Wednesday, September 23

Paper One, Writing Day.

Paper due Friday, September 25 by 5pm.

WEEK SEVEN

Monday, September 28

Asynchronous viewing of:

1) [Hijabi Monologues](#)

2) *Ramy*, Episode 1

Wednesday, September 30

Reading: Selections from Said, *Orientalism*.

Presentation. Include *Ramy* and *Hijabi Monologues* in your presentation.

WEEK EIGHT

Monday, October 5

Watch *M. Butterfly* in class.

Wednesday, October 7

Finish *M. Butterfly*

Reading: Kondo, “*M. Butterfly*”: Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist Identity.”

Presentation.

WEEK NINE

Monday, October 12

Hamilton, by Lin-Manuel Miranda. View on Disney+ asynchronously.

Listen to Podcast on *Hamilton*, featuring *Token Theatre Friends*.

Wednesday, October 14

Reading: *Hamilton* (script).

Donatella Gallela, “Racializing the American Revolution Review of the Broadway Musical *Hamilton*.”

Presentation.

WEEK TEN

Monday, October 19

In class, we will view scenes from Elliot; performance and production vs. play/script.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GbKR7nM3o20>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQddG-F7VPM>

Reading: Patricia Ybarra, *How to Read a Latinx Play in the Twenty-first Century: Learning from Quiara Hudes*.

Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Elliot: A Soldier's Fugue*.

Presentation

Wednesday, October 21

History, Memory and the Afterlife of Trauma.

Reading: Dorinne Kondo, *Worldmaking*, Chapter 6 and “Seamless.”

In class, we will view Act One of the play.

WEEK ELEVEN

Monday, October 26

Reading: *Pass Over* (script).

Lipsitz, Intro, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.

Presentation.

Wednesday, October 28

View *Pass Over* in class.

WEEK TWELVE

Monday, November 2

Whiteness and Activism in U.S. Theater

Reading: “[We See You, White American Theater](#),” articles.

Banks and Syler, “Introduction” to *Casting a Movement*.

Kondo, “Racialized Economies,” from *Worldmaking*.

Presentation.

Wednesday, November 4

Paper Two Due At 5pm.

WEEK THIRTEEN: Final Week of Classes

Monday, November 9

Performances.

Wednesday, November 11

Last Day of Class

Review, summary, handing out final exam. Final exam due at 5 p.m., analyzing BOTH your performances and setting them within a context of what you have learned about “performing race” during the course.

EXIT TICKET: You will post an exit ticket after each class. Additionally, post one for the class as a whole: name at least one thing you learned during the course of the semester.

WEEK FOURTEEN: Final

FINAL EXAM, November 23. Final exam due at 5 p.m. **NO LATE EXAMS ACCEPTED, UNLESS YOU CAN DOCUMENT A FAMILY EMERGENCY.**