

CORE 101g: Symbols and Conceptual Systems  
Transmediality in the Americas  
(DRAFT: 8/26/24)

Fall 2024  
Time: TTh 2-3:20pm  
Location: WPH 107

Prof. Erin Graff Zivin  
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Office hours: Th 12-1 [by appt.](#) (THH 156M)



Jean-Michel Basquiat, *Horn Players* (1983)

**Course description:** This course will explore recent experimental cultural production in the Americas across genres and media: film, music, photography, narrative, digital media, painting, sculpture, and happenings/performance art. Planned in conjunction with exhibitions, lectures, and film screenings on campus and at local cultural institutions (including the the USC Fisher Museum of Art, Broad Museum, and the California African American Museum), the course will offer a hands-on approach to practical and conceptual issues central to artistic experimentation. Together, we will pay close attention to the specificity of each medium while underscoring the inevitable interdependence between what appear to be disparate genres and media (as well as the bodily senses that allow us to experience them—indeed, to *mediate*). In addition, we will cogitate over the distinct forms such transmedial relations can take: adaptation, reenactment, translation, distortion, ekphrasis. Finally, we will analyze the ethical and political effects of multimedia cultural production, over and above questions of content or representation, in works by César Aira, Michelangelo Antonioni, Louis Armstrong, Jean-Michel Basquiat, Jorge Luis Borges, Kwame Brathwaite, Julio Cortázar, Ralph Ellison, Dora García, Narcisa Hirsch, Arthur Jafa, Simone Leigh, Cildo Meireles, Nicholas Payton, Steve Reich, Cauleen Smith, Cecil Taylor, and Mickalene Thomas. Rigorous verbal, written, and creative participation and collaboration will be required of all students.

## Schedule:

### Week 1. Introduction (8/27, 8/29)

#### In class:

- Introductions
- Presentation assignments (sign-up sheet)
- Schedule Broad Museum visit (complete poll [HERE](#))
- Cildo Meireles, *Babel*
- Kwame Brathwaite, *Black is Beautiful* (images)
- Nicholas Payton + Marcus Gilmore, "[Black is Beautiful](#)"

#### At home:

- Henry Jenkins, "[Transmedia Storytelling 101](#)"
- Jenkins, "[Transmedia 202: Further Reflections](#)"

### Week 2. Transmedia storytelling (9/3, 9/5)

#### In class:

- 9/3, 2pm: Private tour of "[Sci-Fi, Magick, Queer L.A.: Sexual Science and the Imagi-Nation](#)" (meet at [USC Fisher Museum main entrance](#))
- 9/5: Visit by Professor Henry Jenkins

#### At home:

- Ta-Nehesi Coates, *Black Panther* (selection)\*
- *Black Panther* (film, available on many streaming platforms)
- Niels Niessen, "Black Panther Transmedia: The Revolution Will Not Be Streamed"\*
- Henry Jenkins, "The Reign of the "Mothership": Transmedia's Past, Present, and Possible Futures"\*
- Prepare 1-2 questions for Professor Jenkins (due 11:59pm on Monday 9/2)

### Week 3. Disobedient adaptation (9/10, 9/12)

#### In class:

- 9/12, 2pm: Lecture by Prof. Michael B. Gillespie (NYU), SCA 112

#### At home:

- Michael B. Gillespie, *Film Blackness* (Introduction)\*
- Gillespie, "[Another Country, or The Time of a Return: Killraven #33, pgs. 16-17](#)"
- Prepare 1-2 questions for Professor Gillespie (due 11:59pm on Monday 9/9)

### Week 4. Transmedial painting (9/17, 9/19)

#### In class:

- Visit to [Broad Museum](#) (Jean-Michel Basquiat + Mickalene Thomas exhibitions), details TBA

#### At home:

- bell hooks, *All About Love* (selection)\*
- "[Time Decorated: The Musical Influence of Jean-Michel Basquiat, Part I with Terrace Martin](#)"
- "[Time Decorated, Part II with James Spooner](#)"

- [“Time Decorated, Part III with Dr. Todd Boyd”](#)
- Ed Schad, [“Up Close: Jean-Michel Basquiat’s With Strings Two”](#)
- Upload selfie/video response to one work by Basquiat or Thomas (due 11:59pm Friday 9/20)

### **Week 5. Writing music I (9/24, 9/26)**

#### In class:

- Louis Armstrong, [“\(What Did I Do To Be So\) Black and Blue”](#)
- Meshell Ndegeocello, [“What Did I Do?”](#)
- 9/24: Special guest (zoom): Prof. Michael Sawyer (U. of Pittsburgh)
- 9/26: Guided tour, [“Simone Leigh”](#) (meet at entrance to [California African American Museum](#))

#### At home:

- Ralph Ellison, [Invisible Man \(Prologue\)](#)
- Michael Sawyer, [The Door of No Return: Being-As-Black](#) (pp. 154-182)\*
- Fred Moten, [In the Break](#) (pp. 63-84)
- Alexander Weheliye, [Phonographies](#) (Chapter 2)
- Prepare 1-2 questions for Prof. Sawyer (due 11:59pm Monday 9/23)

### **Week 6. Writing music II (10/1, NO CLASS 10/3)**

#### In class:

- Cecil Taylor, [“All the Notes”](#) (video)
- 10/3: NO CLASS (Instructor observing Jewish New Year)

#### At home:

- César Aira, [“Cecil Taylor”](#)
- Erin Graff Zivin, [“Transmedial Ekphrasis”](#)\*
- Write paragraph response to Aira (due 11:59pm Monday 9/30)

### **Week 7. MIDTERM I (10/8, 10/10 NO CLASS)**

#### In class:

- 10/8: MIDTERM EXERCISE #1
- 10/10: NO CLASS (Fall Break)

### **Week 8. Sympathetic adaptation I (10/15, 10/17)**

#### In class:

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer*
- *The Sympathizer* (HBO Series)

#### At home:

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (selection)\*
- *The Sympathizer* (HBO Series)
- Write paragraph comparing one aspect of novel to series (due 11:59pm Monday 10/14)

### **Week 9. Sympathetic adaptation II (10/22, 10/24)**

In class:

- 10/22: virtual class meeting
- 10/24: special activity (TBA)

At home:

- Viet Thanh Nguyen, *The Sympathizer* (selection)\*
- *The Sympathizer* (HBO Series)
- Write paragraph comparing one aspect of novel to series (due 11:59pm Monday 10/21)

**Week 10. Shadows and Noise (10/29, 10/31)**

In class:

- 10/29, 7pm: Special event with Prof. Viet Thanh Nguyen and Maegan Houang; [Soho Warehouse](#)
- Special event: lecture, Prof. Amber Jamilla Musser (TBA)

At home:

- Amber Jamilla Musser, *Between Shadows and Noise* (selection)\*
- Prepare 1-2 questions for Prof. Nguyen and Ms. Houang (due 11:59pm Monday 10/28)
- Prepare 1-2 questions for Prof. Musser (due 11:59pm Monday 10/28)

**Week 11. Distorting media (11/5, 11/7)**

In class:

- Narcisa Hirsch, *Come Out* (film)
- Hirsch, *EL Aleph* (film)

At home:

- James Baldwin, "[A Report from Occupied Territory](#)"
- Steve Reich, "[Come Out](#)"
- Will Robin, *Sound Expertise*, "[Steve Reich and the Politics of Race](#)" (podcast)
- Brent Hayes Edwards, *Epistrophies: Jazz and the Literary Imagination*, pp. 246-252\*
- Jorge Luis Borges, "The Aleph"\*
- Write a paragraph on the use of distortion in Reich/Hirsch (due 11:59pm Wednesday 11/6)

**Week 12. Happening and Repetition (11/12, 11/14)**

In class:

- Narcisa Hirsch, *Marabunta* (film)
- Michelangelo Antonioni, *Blow-Up* (film; selected scenes)
- Dora García, *Segunda vez* (film)

At home:

- Allan Kaprow, "[How to Make a Happening](#)"
- Kaprow, "[18 Happenings in 6 Parts](#)"
- Julio Cortázar, "[Blow-Up](#)"
- Julio Cortázar, "Second Time Around"\*
- Write one page describing a happening you could imagine staging in L.A. (due 11:59pm on Monday 11/11)

- Submit final project proposal (due 1:59pm on Thursday 11/14)

**Week 13. Visual rhythms, MIDTERM II (11/19, 11/21)**

In class:

- Cauleen Smith (selected films)
- Arthur Jafa (selected films)
- 11/21: MIDTERM EXERCISE #2
- 11/21, 7pm: Special event with Cauleen Smith and Arthur Jafa, SCA 108

At home:

- Kara Keeling, [\*Queer Times. Black Futures\*](#) (selection)
- Prepare 1-2 questions for Smith and Jafa (due 11:59pm Wednesday 11/20)

**Week 14. Final project workshop (11/26, 11/28 NO CLASS)**

In class:

- 11/26: Final project workshop
- 11/28: NO CLASS, Thanksgiving

**Week 15. Final project presentations (12/3, 12/5)**

In class:

- Final project presentations

At home:

- Submit final project (due 1:59pm Thursday 12/5)

**Course Materials:**

Most assignments included on this syllabus can be accessed using the link provided. Readings marked with an asterisk (\*) can be found on Brightspace. Please check regularly for updates.

**Course Requirements:**

**PARTICIPATION.** In order to participate fully in class discussions, each student must complete the weekly reading/viewing assignments (under “at home”) before our first class meeting on Tuesday of each week, unless otherwise specified. Come to class ready to discuss anything that has been assigned that week. Attendance at in-class and zoom meetings, as well as on- and off-campus special activities, is mandatory. If you have an unavoidable conflict or reasonable justification, including sickness, religious observance, or employment, please let me know as early as possible via e-mail or in [office hours](#). Communication is key!

**WEEKLY ASSIGNMENTS.** Most weeks, you will be required to upload written or recorded responses to assigned works. Please upload your contribution to Brightspace by 11:59pm on the Monday night \*before\* class, and read/view \*all\* contributions by your classmates before coming to class on Tuesday.

**PRESENTATIONS.** You will be responsible for two in-class presentations. The first presentation (15-20 minutes in length) is based on one of the required readings/viewings. The presentation will not summarize

the work nor give biographical information about the artist or critic, but rather critically engage the themes, images, metaphors, arguments, or rhetoric of the work in question. You should include discussion prompts to lead the class in a short discussion of the text. The second will be a brief (5-7 minute) presentation of your final project at the end of the semester.

**MIDTERMS.** There will be two midterm exercises. There are no make-ups for midterms except for emergencies or unavoidable conflicts such as those mentioned above. Remember, communication is key!

**FINAL PROJECT.** The final project will be due on Thursday, December 5. Assignments handed in late will receive a lower grade. In addition, you will be required to turn in a one-page abstract for your final project, which will describe in prose form your main concept and argument (due Thursday, November 14). Late or missing abstracts will result in a lower grade for the final project.

**FINAL GRADE.** The final grade will be calculated in the following manner: in-class participation (15%), weekly assignments (10%), presentation #1 (15%), midterm exercise #1 (15%), midterm exercise #2 (15%), final project presentation (10%), and final project (20%).

### **Statement on Academic Integrity**

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

**AI POLICY:** This course aims to develop creative, analytical, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, all assignments should be prepared by the student working individually or in groups. Students may not have another person or entity complete any substantive portion of the assignment. Developing strong competencies in these areas will prepare you for a competitive workplace. Therefore, using AI-generated text, code, or other content is prohibited in this course, will be identified as plagiarism, and will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.



## **Statement on University Academic and Support Systems**

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:**

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for [undergraduate-](#) and [graduate-level](#) SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

### **Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-2500

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323) 442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.