

Race, Gender, and Performance

Professor Robin Bernstein

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Aesthetic and Interpretive Understanding 26
Harvard University, Spring 2018
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11am-noon
Sever Hall, Room 202

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Performance surrounds us. We see performances online, in movies and on TV, on the sports field, and in theatre, activism, and our minute-to-minute interactions. The purpose of this course is to help you analyze these performances from a variety of critical perspectives. “Race, Gender, and Performance” introduces you to powerful theoretical tools that will enable you to look anew at familiar performances and see things that you never noticed or thought about before. The course also spotlights feminist, queer, and anti-racist performances that are less mainstream and therefore less familiar to most students. Thus the class makes the familiar strange and makes the strange familiar. Throughout the semester, we ask, how do diverse performances produce or disrupt formations of race, gender, and sexuality?

In Unit 1, titled “Foundational Concepts in the Performance of Race, Gender, and Sexuality,” we gain familiarity and dexterity with basic concepts in performance theory. In Unit 2, “Constructing Race, Gender, and Sexuality through Performance,” we engage

with major theorists—including Erving Goffman, Judith Butler, Diana Taylor, and Laura Mulvey—who offer different accounts of how performance constructs norms and makes race, gender, and sexuality *real*. We end the course with Unit 3, “Deconstructing and Reconstructing Race, Gender, and Sexuality through Performance,” in which we examine feminist, queer, and anti-racist efforts to use performance to create social change.

Required Texts and Performance

Books (all on reserve at Lamont and available for purchase at the Coop):

- Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*
- David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly* (this title is also available online through Hollis)
- Taylor Mac, *Hir: A Play*
- Marsha Norman, *'night, Mother* (this title is also available online through Hollis)
- Coursepack

Live Performance

- Claudia Rankine, *The White Card*

Course Requirements and Grading

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| Productive participation, active listening, punctuality, and respectful citizenship in section and lecture | 20% of final grade |
| 8 in-section writing exercises (each graded credit/no credit) | 24% of final grade |
| Attendance at <i>The White Card</i> , March 2, 7:30pm (credit/no credit) | 6% of final grade |
| Midterm Exam, February 27 | 10% of final grade |
| Performance Analysis #1, due Thursday, March 8 | 10% of final grade |
| Performance Analysis #2, due Thursday, April 12 | 10% of final grade |
| Final Exam OR Final Paper | 20% of final grade |

Useful Information

All books (including the course pack) and all films are on reserve at Lamont Library.

Every student will attend a performance on March 2, 2018, at 7:30 of Claudia Rankine’s play, *The White Card*, at ArtsEmerson (a joint venture with Harvard’s American Repertory Theater). Each student will receive a **free** ticket to the performance, and attendance is **mandatory**. If you know in advance that you will be unable to attend the performance on March 2, you must inform your TF immediately, and a ticket for a different date will be provided for you. If you do not inform your TF of a conflict by February 1, you will need to purchase a ticket for an alternate night at your own expense. *Please note that this performance is in Boston, not Cambridge.* We will gather at the Harvard T stop on March 2 at **6:30pm** to travel together.

Some of our required readings and viewings include nudity and/or explicit sexual content. We will also view and read about some anti-racist performances that critically stage racist imagery. If you do not wish to engage with such materials, you should not enroll in this course.

Professor Bernstein holds office hours every week, but the times vary. Please reserve time online at <<http://wgs.fas.harvard.edu/hours>> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID). Prof. Bernstein's office is Boylston Hall, Room G31 (ground floor).

With a student's consent, meetings during office hours will be "walking meetings." The professor and student will talk while strolling around campus. *Any student may opt for a traditional, "sitting meeting" instead.* If you opt for a sitting meeting, you need not offer any explanation, and no questions will be asked. We will of course stay inside during inclement weather. For more information about the intellectual and health benefits of walking meetings, see Nilofer Merchant, "Sitting is the Smoking of Our Generation," *Harvard Business Review* 14 January 2013 <http://blogs.hbr.org/cs/2013/01/sitting_is_the_smoking_of_our_generation.html>.

Sections will meet on Thursdays or Fridays. In the second week of the semester, each student will be assigned to a section. Sections will meet for the first time in the third week of class. We will make every effort to place you in your first choice of section.

Each section will begin with a brief writing exercise based on that week's reading and/or lectures. Your TF will give you a prompt—a provocative question, for example, or an invitation to put two ideas into conversation—and you'll write freely for 5-10 minutes. These exercises give you an opportunity to practice writing about performance, and you will brainstorm ideas that you may later expand in your papers. Your TFs will collect and read these exercises, *but they will not grade them, nor will they comment on them extensively.* You will receive credit simply for completing 8 exercises over the course of the semester.

Students will take collective responsibility for the success of every section discussion. You are expected not only to complete the required reading and viewings, but also to think about them before class and to arrive in section with thoughts and questions. In section, all students will listen actively to and engage productively with their classmates, and all will express thoughts in a respectful manner that advances the conversation. Practices that disrespect one's colleagues (for example, texting, interrupting, hogging the floor, launching personal attacks, surfing the web, or answering cell phones) will hinder conversation; such practices, therefore, are unacceptable.

Laptops are not permitted in lecture except by permission of the instructor. If you wish to use a laptop, please speak with Professor Bernstein. Laptop use in sections is at the discretion of the Teaching Fellow. Recording of sound or images in lecture or section is strictly prohibited.

Students must arrive on time for lectures and sections, all of which start seven minutes after the hour. If you miss lecture or section for a Harvard-recognized religious holiday or for a documented illness, you will be excused. To be excused for any other absence, you must submit a dean's note. Extracurricular activities, including activities relevant to this course, are not acceptable reasons for missing lecture or section.

Each undergraduate student will either take a final exam or write a 12-15 page final paper. Most students will take the exam, which is the default option. You should write a paper only if you are burning to work on a specific, relevant project. If you wish

to write a paper in lieu of taking the exam, you must submit a proposal to your TF by March 27. If your TF and professor decline your proposal, you must take the exam.

Graduate students will have a different set of writing requirements and may have expanded reading assignments. Grad students will meet with the professor in the second week of the semester to co-create a set of writing and reading assignments that will best meet grad students' needs. Each graduate student must write a final paper of 20-25 pages in lieu of taking the exam.

Late papers will be penalized one third of a letter grade for each day overdue. Failure to complete any assignment can lower your grade in excess of the stated percentage.

Any student needing academic adjustments or accommodations should present a letter from the Accessible Education Office (AEO) as soon as possible. All discussions will remain confidential, although the AEO may be consulted to discuss appropriate implementation.

This course adheres to Harvard University policy on permitted collaboration, which reads as follows:

Discussion and the exchange of ideas are essential to academic work. For assignments in this course, you are encouraged to consult with your classmates on the choice of paper topics and to share sources. You may find it useful to discuss your chosen topic with your peers, particularly if you are working on the same topic as a classmate. However, you should ensure that any written work you submit for evaluation is the result of your own research and writing and that it reflects your own approach to the topic. You must also adhere to standard citation practices in this discipline and properly cite any books, articles, websites, lectures, etc. that have helped you with your work. If you received any help with your writing (feedback on drafts, etc), you must also acknowledge this assistance.

Course Schedule

The assigned texts are listed in a recommended order for reading or viewing.

*The italicized questions may guide your reading **if you wish**.*

You are welcome to ignore the italicized questions.

Unit 1: Foundational Concepts in the Performance of Race, Gender, and Sexuality

Tuesday, January 23. What is performance? What does it mean to say that gender, race, or sexuality is performed?

Thursday, January 25. What is performance studies? How does it relate to the study of race, gender, and sexuality?

- Read pamphlet, “A Student’s Guide to Performance Studies”
https://writingproject.fas.harvard.edu/files/hwp/files/peformance_studies.pdf

Tuesday, January 30. Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Performance

- View *Black Is. . . Black Ain’t*, directed by Marlon Riggs, 1994, 87 minutes. Streaming through Hollis.

What does the film suggest blackness is or isn’t? Where is blackness? In bodies? In culture? In history? Somewhere else entirely? How does the film show blackness intersecting with gender and sexuality? What is the importance of AIDS in the film? Why do you think Marlon Riggs shows himself running naked through the woods? How would the film have been different if those scenes were excluded?

Thursday, February 1. Why Study Public Bathrooms?

- View *Toilet Training: Law and Order in the Bathroom* (directed by Tara Mateik, produced by the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, 2003). 26 mins. Online at <https://vimeo.com/85470055>.
- Read Daneen L. Brown, “‘Life or Death for Black Travelers’: How Fear Led to ‘The Negro Motorist Green-Book,’” *The Washington Post*, 1 June 2017. Online at https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/06/01/life-or-death-for-black-travelers-how-fear-led-to-the-negro-motorist-green-book/?utm_term=.8d980c43eba8

- Skim some digitized editions of *The Negro Motorist Green Book*:
<https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/the-green-book#/?tab=about>.

How have public restrooms been sites in which gender, race, and sexuality have been defined and policed? How are public bathrooms a site of power? How can performance studies help us to think about public bathrooms—and vice versa?

Unit 2:

Constructing Race, Gender, and Sexuality Through Performance

Tuesday, February 6. Gender, Race, and Sexuality as Performances in Everyday Life

- Read Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959). “Introduction,” pp. 1-16; Ch. 1, “Performances,” pp. 17-76; “Conclusion,” pp. 238-255.
- Read Robin D.G. Kelley, “Confessions of a Nice Negro, or Why I Shaved My Head,” in Don Belton, ed., *Speak My Name: Black Men on Masculinity and the American Dream* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), pp. 12-22. Access online through Harvard Google Books
<<https://books.google.com/books?uid=113128061519289194438&hl=en>> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).
- Assignment for Performance Analysis #1 distributed in class

What is Goffman’s concept of a “front”? What specific fronts does Kelley describe in his essay?

Thursday, February 8. Using Goffman to Analyze Race, Gender, and Sexuality

- Read Kenji Yoshino, “An Uncovered Self,” in *Covering: The Hidden Assault on Our Civil Rights* (New York: Random House, 2006): pp. 3-27. Online at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:EBSCO_9781588361721> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).
- Spencer E. Cahill et al, “Meanwhile Backstage: Behavior in Public Bathrooms.” Online at <http://www.csun.edu/~tph53095/Meanwhile%20Backstage%20Reading.pdf>. This essay is based on a longer journal article by Cahill et al that was published in 1985 in *Urban Life (The Journal of Contemporary Ethnography)*.

How do Yoshino and Cahill et al use Goffman’s ideas to analyze race, gender, and sexuality?

Tuesday, February 13. Gender as a “stylized repetition of acts”

- Read Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,” *Theatre Journal* Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988): 519-531. Access online through Hollis subscription to JSTOR.

As you read “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,” try to paraphrase this sentence: Gender is “a stylized repetition of acts” that “sediment” on the body over time. You’ll know that you understand Butler when you can explain this idea confidently in your own words. Do not get stuck on any individual sentence. Read with the overarching goal of figuring out what Butler means when she says that the gendered body is “the legacy of [stylized] sedimented acts.”

Thursday, February 15. Using Butler to Analyze Performance

- Read Jeremy C. Justus, “Piss Stance: Private Parts in Public Places: An Analysis of the Men’s Room and Gender Control,” *Studies in Popular Culture* 28.3 (April 2006): 59-70. Access online through Hollis subscription to JSTOR.

How does Justus use Butler to analyze performance in men’s bathrooms? How might Goffman have enabled Justus to expand or complicate his argument?

Tuesday, February 20. Stylized Repetitions of Acts and the Historical Persistence of Performance

- Read Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), “Acts of Transfer” and “Scenarios of Discovery: Reflections on Performance and Ethnography,” pp. 1-78. Online at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:GEN_9780822385318> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).

How does Taylor distinguish “archive” from “repertoire”? What is the significance of this distinction for the performance of race, gender, and nation?

Thursday, February 22. Looking and Being Looked At

- Read Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 14-26. Access online through <https://link-springer-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-1-349-19798-9_3.pdf> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).

As you read Mulvey, try to define, in your own words, “to-be-looked-at-ness.” Read with the goal of understanding how this phrase fits into Mulvey’s general argument about how Hollywood narrative cinema structures the gaze in gendered ways. Do not get stuck on Mulvey’s use of Freud and Lacan, who are not central figures in this course.

Tuesday, February 27. MIDTERM EXAM

Thursday, March 1. Looking and Being Looked At: Race, Gender, Sexuality, Nation

- Read David Henry Hwang, *M. Butterfly*

Think about Mulvey and M. Butterfly together. How does Mulvey enable us to analyze M. Butterfly? And how does M. Butterfly complicate or contest Mulvey?

Friday, March 2, 7:30pm: REQUIRED EVENT: Claudia Rankine, *The White Card* <<https://americanrepertorytheater.org/events/show/white-card>>. The performance is at the Emerson Paramount Center, 559 Washington St, Boston, MA 02111

<<http://www.emerson.edu/about-emerson/campuses-facilities/boston/paramount-center>>. We will gather at the Harvard Square T stop at **6:30** and travel together; however, if you prefer to travel on your own to the show, that's fine.

What questions does The White Card raise about visibility and invisibility, looking and being looked at?

Tuesday, March 6. Physical Space and Performance, Part 1

- Read Stephen A. Berry, *The Jim Crow Routine: Everyday Performances of Race, Civil Rights, and Segregation in Mississippi* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), pp. 1-60 (“Introduction: Living Jim Crow” and Chapter one, “Intimate Spaces: Performance and the Making of Jim Crow”). Access online through Hollis subscription to Project Muse.

How did racial segregation rely on performance? How did some African Americans use performance to resist segregation?

Thursday, March 8. Physical Space and Performance, Part II

- **PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS #1 DUE at the beginning of class!**
- Bryan Reynolds, “Rest Stop: Erotics at Harvard.” In Harvey Molotch and Laura Norén, eds., *Toilet: Public Restrooms and the Politics of Sharing* (New York: NYU Press, 2010): 43-46. Access online through Hollis subscription to Project Muse.
- Read Patricia Marx, “Do I Look Fat?” *New Yorker*, 23 April 2007, Vol. 83, Issue 9, pp. 27-28. Access online at <<http://ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24811241&site=ehost-live&scope=site>> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).

How, according to Reynolds and Marx, do built environments arrange performances to construct gender and sexuality?

Tuesday, March 13. NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK!

Thursday, March 15. NO CLASS. SPRING BREAK!

Unit 3: ***Deconstructing and Reconstructing Race, Gender, and Sexuality Through Performance***

Tuesday, March 20. Feminism and Realism

- Read Jill Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Research Press, 1988). Ch. 2, “Feminism and the Canon: The Question

of Universality,” pp. 19-40. Access online through Hollis subscription to Project Muse.

- Read Marsha Norman, *'night, Mother*. Access online through Hollis.

What is realism? What characteristics of realism appear in 'night, Mother? What are Dolan's critiques of realism?

Thursday, March 22. Brecht's Challenges to Realism and Expressionism

- Read Bertolt Brecht, “The Modern Theatre is the Epic Theatre,” “The Literalization of the Theatre,” “Theatre for Pleasure or Theatre for Instruction,” and “A Short Organum for the Theatre,” in Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. by John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964), pp. 33-47, 69-77, 179-205 (coursepack)

As you read Brecht, aim to understand how he contrasts “Epic Theatre” (also known as Brechtian theatre) with “dramatic theatre” (which includes realism). What are Brecht's critiques of realism (or dramatic theatre)? How does Epic Theatre respond to the problems Brecht sees in dramatic theatre?

Tuesday, March 27. Can Realism be Anti-Normative?

- Read Taylor Mac, *Hir: A Play*
- **Proposal for final paper due for students who wish to pursue this option.**

Hir attempts to use the conventions of realism to stage anti-normative gender. In your view, does it succeed? How do whiteness and disability factor into its reconfiguration of realism?

Thursday, March 29. “Gender” and other Quotations

- View *Chicago* (directed by Rob Marshall, starring Catherine Zeta-Jones, Renee Zellweger, Queen Latifah, and Richard Gere, 2002). Access online through Hollis's subscription to Kanopy.

What systems does Chicago critique? How do gender and race figure in those systems? How does the film implicate the audience in those systems?

Tuesday, April 3. Fugitivity and Freedom: The Crafts

- Guest Lecture: Christofer Rodelo
- Assignment TBD

Thursday, April 5. Historicizing Race and Gender in “The Little Mister”

- Guest Lecture: Will Pruitt
- Assignment TBD

Tuesday, April 10. Can Performance Save Lives? A Case Study: AIDS Activism

- Read Catherine Saalfield and Ray Navarro, “Shocking the Pink: Race and Gender on the ACT UP Frontlines,” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 341-369. Access online at <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/books/9781135200923> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).

- Read Doug Sadowick, “ACT UP Makes a Spectacle of AIDS,” in *High Performance* 13:1 (1990): 26-31 (coursepack).
- View in class: *Stop the Church* (dir. Robert Hilferty, 1991) AND excerpts from *Fight Back, Fight AIDS: 15 Years of ACT UP* (dir. James Wentzy, 2002)

How and why did ACT-UP use performance in activism during the 1980s and 90s? What were the effects of these performances?

Thursday, April 12. Restrooms and Resistance

- **PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS #2 DUE at the beginning of class!**
- NO READING ASSIGNMENT

Tuesday, 17. Hope

- Read Jill Dolan, “Feeling the Potential of Elsewhere,” in Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 1-34. Access online through <<http://muse.jhu.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/chapter/159045>> (you will be prompted for your Harvard ID).

How does Dolan define a “utopian performative”? How does a utopian performative differ from a depiction of utopia? How can ordinary people perform utopia?

Thursday, April 19. Gaiety

- Read Sara Warner, *Acts of Gaiety: LGBT Performance and the Politics of Pleasure* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012), “Preface,” pp. ix-xxii. Access online through Hollis subscription to Project Muse.

What are acts of gaiety, and why are they politically useful? How have the performances we’ve seen this semester engaged feelings for political purposes?

Tuesday, April 24 . Ridiculous?

- View <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1vvPvaDkIUo&feature=fvw>
- Read <http://www.nytimes-se.com/>
- View <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dO6Oi3XUYgg>

Can performance change the world? If so, how?

DATE TBD: Final Exam

Papers in lieu of final exam are due at the beginning of the exam.

Have a good summer!