

WGS 340 (47984): Performing Afrofuturisms: The Aesthetics of Social Change

AFR 372E (30379), TD 357T (26844), TD 387D (26934)

Spring 2014 | WIN 1.164

Tuesday and Thursday, 11:00am-12:30pm

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Office hours: Thursday 12:30-1:30pm or by appointment

Course Description

From daily acts to epic feats artists are using performance in the service of social change. In this course we will look at how the aesthetics of Afrofuturism—a fusion of science fiction, African cosmologies, history, fantasy, and technology—have been employed to envision, create and perform visionary futures while actively engaging with the past. Students will investigate how artists both in the Americas and Africa use such philosophies as a model for radical creativity and imagination. The creation of unique performance works will allow students to make use of Afrofuturist aesthetics and philosophies in their exploration of art as a catalyst for social change. (Previous performance experience is not required.)

Requirements

1. *Class Attendance* is a requirement and use of the full class period is expected. You will be allowed three sick, personal, physical or mental health days without grading consequences. More than three absences during the term will result in a reduction of your overall course grade (A->B, B->C, etc.).
2. *Informed Participation*: You are required to complete the assigned readings and bring hard copies to class along with questions and comments about each reading.
3. The *Course Reader* is available from Jenn's Copies: 2518 Guadalupe at Dean Keeton.
4. ***NOTE**: *The use of laptops, mobile phones and other electronic devices is NOT permitted in the classroom except under special circumstances.*

Methods of Evaluation

50% Performances (2)

25% Archive

25% Attendance and Participation

+/- grades will be assigned according to the system in effect since the fall of 2009

Assignments

Performances

- 1 *Riff* Create a collaborative performance that riffs off of an Afrofuturist work. You may draw from film, literature, music, performance or the visual arts in the creation of your performance piece. Your performance should address a current social or political issue. It must happen in a

public space (for an audience beyond your classmates). Please limit your performance to 15 minutes.

2 *Imagine a future*

Create a performance which employs the aesthetics of Afrofuturism to imagine, enact, manifest a new/radical/changed future. Consider the following questions: How might your performance enact social change? What is the role of the audience in this work? How does place or site affect the meaning of the work? How do your aesthetic choices inform the meaning of the performance? What do you leave behind (remnants, images, sounds, etc)? This may be a solo or collaborative performance.

Archive (aka *Techno Fossils*)

In *Further Considerations on Afrofuturism* Kodwo Eshun writes: "Imagine a team of African archaeologists from the future....Imagine them reconstructing the conceptual framework of our cultural moment from...fragments. What are the parameters of that moment, the edge of that framework?"

Picture yourself fifty years into the future. What do you see when you look back on this moment? What fragments have you left behind? Create a *techno fossil*, an archive of this moment in the form of your choice: journal, zine, handmade book, blog, website, object, soundtrack, etc. This archive is intended to: (1) describe the Afrofuturist aesthetics, context, history, ideas from which you are working (2) provide a chronicle of your personal artistic process, interests, methods and philosophies and (3) document specific performance work/s created in this class. You may include information about the development and production of the work. This assignment is not only intended to serve as an important archive of your performance art, it offers the opportunity to place your work into larger artistic, cultural, political, philosophical, historical conversations. Your *techno fossil* will become part of the UT Digital Repository.

Required Readings

Afrofuturism, Afrikadaa online magazine, www.afrikadaa.com, June, July, August, 2013

Ellionore Bellio, *The Anti-Art of Kongofuturism*, Chimurenga Chronic, South Africa, 2013

Tegan Bristow, *We Want the Funk: What is Afrofuturism to Africa?*, The Shadows Took Shape exhibition catalogue, Studio Museum in Harlem, 2013.

Tisa Bryant, *Autodidact*, Encyclopedia Project, Volume 1: A-E, Encyclomedia, 2006

Mark Dery, *Black to the Future: Afro-Futurism 1.0*, *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, Duke University Press, 1994

Mark Dery, *Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate and Tricia Rose*, *Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture*, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 179-222

Kodwo Eshun, *Further Considerations on Afro-Futurism*, CR: The New Centennial Review, Volume 3, Number 2, Summer 2003, pp. 287-302

Kodwo Eshun, *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet, 1998

Alondra Nelson, *Afrofuturism: A Special Issue of Social Text*, 71 (Volume 20, Number 2), Summer 2002

Mark A. Rockey Moore, *What is Afrofuturism?*, rahkyt.wordpress.com/2011/04/24/what-is-afrofuturism, (Orig. published February, 2000)

Francesca T. Royster, *Feeling Like a Woman, Looking Like a Man, Sounding Like a No-No: Grace Jones and the Performance of Strange in a Post-Soul Moment*, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, DePaul University, Chicago, USA Published online: 13 Mar 2009

Martine Syms, *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, rhizome.org, December, 2013

Ytasha L. Womack, *What is Afro-Futurism?: An Interview with artist/educator Akpem, D. Denenge*, 22 Mar. 2010 <<http://postblackthebook.blogspot.com/2010/03/afro-futurism-interview-with.html>>

Additional readings may be assigned.

Schedule and Due Dates

week 1 | Step into the Afrofuture

Tuesday, January 14

Course Overview

Thursday, January 16

Film: *The Last Angel of History* (John Akomfrah)

Readings

Mark Dery, *Black to the Future: Afro-Futurism 1.0*, Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture, Duke University Press, 1995

Mark A. Rockey Moore, *What is Afrofuturism?*, rahkyl.wordpress.com/2011/04/24/what-is-afrofuturism, (Orig. published February, 2000)

week 2 | Afrofuturism and Performance

Tuesday, January 21

Film: *The Changing Same* (Cauleen Smith)

Readings:

Mark Dery, *Black to the Future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate and Tricia Rose*, Flame Wars: The Discourse of Cyberculture, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1994, pp. 179-222

Ytasha L. Womack, *What is Afro-Futurism?: An Interview with artist/educator Akpem, D. Denenge*, 22 Mar. 2010 <<http://postblackthebook.blogspot.com/2010/03/afro-futurism-interview-with.html>>

Thursday, January 23

Performance as Social Change

week 3 | Performing the Future

Tuesday, January 28

Performance Exercises

Thursday, January 30

Film: *Space is the Place* (Sun Ra)

Readings:

Anne Gregory, *A New Take on an Old Star: Who Ra?*, Afrikaada.

Kodwo Eshun, *Synthesizing the Omniverse* [154-163] in *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet, 1998

week 4 | Retro-future Aesthetics and African Science Fiction

Tuesday, February 4

Film: *Pumzi* (Wanuri Kahiu)

Readings:

Tegan Bristow, *We Want the Funk: What is Afrofuturism to Africa?*, The Shadows Took Shape exhibition catalogue, Studio Museum in Harlem, 2013.

Kodwo Eshun, *Further Considerations on Afro-Futurism*, CR: The New Centennial Review, Volume 3, Number 2, Summer 2003, pp. 287-302

Thursday, February 6

Readings:

Ellionore Bellio, *The Anti-Art of Kongofuturism*, Chimurenga Chronic, 2013
and from Afrikaada:

The Next Narrative, Jean-Pierre Bekolo, 14-17

Remix Africana: Computational Code in the Generation of 'Art', Mukwae Wabei Siyolwe, 40-41

Cyrus Kabiru: From Dreamer to Visionary, Djenaba Kane, 90-93

Thus Spoke Wangechi, Anne Gregory, 94-97

week 5 | Performing Gender and Sexuality

Tuesday, February 11

Performance Proposals Due

Thursday, February 13

Readings:

Francesca T. Royster, *Feeling Like a Woman, Looking Like a Man, Sounding Like a No-No: Grace Jones and the Performance of Strange in a Post-Soul Moment*, *Women & Performance: a journal of feminist theory*, DePaul University, Chicago, USA Published online: 13 Mar 2009

week 6 | Techno Fossils

Tuesday, February 18

Readings:

Tisa Bryant, *Autodidact*, Encyclopedia Project, Volume 1: A-E, Encyclomedia, 2006

Thursday, February 20

Performance Archives

week 7 | Performances (#1)
Tuesday, February 25

Thursday, February 27

week 8 | Performances (#1)
Tuesday, March 4

Thursday, March 6

week 9 | Spring Break
Tuesday, March 10-15

week 10 | Cyborgs+ Robots, Aliens + Extraterrestrials
Tuesday, March 18

Readings:

Kodwo Eshun, *Operating System for the Redesign of Sonic Reality* [007-001] in *More Brilliant Than the Sun: Adventures in Sonic Fiction*, London: Quartet, 1998

Thursday, March 20
Performance Exercises

week 11 | Anti-Futurism Futures
Tuesday, March 25

Readings:

Martine Syms, *The Mundane Afrofuturist Manifesto*, rhizome.org, December, 2013

Thursday, March 27
Performance Exercises

week 12 | Making Theory: Future Cells and Selves
Tuesday, April 1

Thursday, April 3

week 13 | Performances (#2)
Tuesday, April 8

Thursday, April 10

week 14 | Performances (#2)
Tuesday, April 15

Thursday, April 17

week 15 | Performances (#2)
Tuesday, April 22

Thursday, April 24

week 16 | Archives: Presenting the Techno Fossils
Tuesday, April 29
Archive Due

Thursday, May 1
Final Class Day

University Policies and Resources

Attendance

Class attendance is a requirement and use of the full class period is expected. You will be allowed three sick, personal, physical or mental health days without grading consequences. It is up to your discretion how you use these three days. Being late to class or leaving class early (by 15 minutes or more) will count as an absence. A 4th absence will result in the lowering of your final grade by one grade. Absences, tardiness and/or early departures beyond this could result in course failure. If a serious medical or personal situation occurs affecting attendance, please discuss it with your professor. A student who misses classes or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform the instructor as far in advance of the absence as possible, so that arrangements can be made to complete an assignment within a reasonable time after the absence.

Academic Integrity

According to the General Information catalog, “the value of a university degree depends on the absolute integrity of the work done by each student for that degree, a student should maintain a high standard of individual honor in his or her scholastic work”.

University of Texas Honor Code

The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since such dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced.

Documented Disability Statement

The University of Texas at Austin provides upon request appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. For more information, contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 232-2937 (video phone).

Use of E-Mail for Official Correspondence to Students

Email is recognized as an official mode of university correspondence; therefore, you are responsible for reading your email for university and course-related information and announcements. You are responsible to keep the university informed about changes to your e-mail address. You should check your e-mail regularly and frequently—I recommend daily, but at minimum twice a week—to stay current with university-related communications, some of which may be time-critical. You can find UT Austin’s policies and instructions for updating your e-mail address at <http://www.utexas.edu/its/policies/emailnotify.php>.

Religious Holy Days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, I will give you an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL)

If you are worried about someone who is acting differently, you may use the Behavior Concerns Advice Line to discuss by phone your concerns about another individual's behavior. This service is provided through a partnership among the Office of the Dean of Students, the Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), and The University of Texas Police Department (UTPD). Call 512-232-5050 or visit <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/bcal>.

Emergency Evacuation Policy

Occupants of buildings on the UT Austin campus are required to evacuate and assemble outside when a fire alarm is activated or an announcement is made. Please be aware of the following policies regarding evacuation:

- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of the classroom and the building. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when you entered the building.
- If you require assistance to evacuate, inform me in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow my instructions or those of class instructors.

Do not re-enter a building unless you're given instructions by the Austin Fire Department, the UT Austin Police Department, or the Fire Prevention Services office

Course Drop Policy

The State of Texas has enacted a law that limits the number of course drops for academic reasons to six (6). As stated in Senate Bill 1231:

"Beginning with the fall 2007 academic term, an institution of higher education may not permit an undergraduate student a total of more than six dropped courses, including any course a transfer student has dropped at another

Resources for Learning & Life at UT Austin

The University of Texas has numerous resources for students to provide assistance and support for your learning.

The UT Learning Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/utlc/>

Undergraduate Writing Center: <http://uwc.utexas.edu/>

Counseling & Mental Health Center: <http://cmhc.utexas.edu/>

Career Exploration Center: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/careercenter/>

Student Emergency Services: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/>