

**AFR 372E 30570**  
***Performance Ethnography as Community-Building***  
***Austin/Los Angeles Domestic Study Program***  
**2019**

**Dr. Omi Osun Joni I. Jones**  
**Office Hours: W, 10-12 CST**

[jonijones@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:jonijones@austin.utexas.edu)

**Professor Sharon Bridgforth**  
**Office Hours: Available by Appointment**

[Sharon.bridgforth@gmail.com](mailto:Sharon.bridgforth@gmail.com)

**Classroom BEN 1.106**

***Everything is related and therefore what we do in our work with others will inevitably be done to us.***

**M. Cristina Gonzalez**

***To me, the most important doorway into the soul of a person is his or her words.***  
**Anna Deavere Smith**

***I believe that life and art are not separate. It is important that artists integrate all aspects of themselves, their histories, identities and beliefs into the creation process and into the vision of their lives as artists. As artists we document the cultures, place(s), issues, and times we live in. Who are you? Where are you from? How do you fit/or not fit in your world? This is the bone and marrow of the work. These are the areas of focus for our class.***

**Sharon Bridgforth**

### **Course Description**

This course introduces students to the rigors of creating and mounting art for social change through community engagement. Students will contrast the activist art strategies in Austin, Texas and Los Angeles, California by engaging in a series of art practices and art presentations in each city. Through collaboration, innovation, and vulnerability students will create work that encourages embodied engagement with the audience, and reveals how innovation is born of risk-taking and community commitment. The work developed in this course will be shared during the Block Party at the end of the semester.

*It is not necessary to identify as an artist to take this course.*

### **Objectives**

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to define performance ethnography, employ strategies for audience engagement, conduct ELP, use storytelling as an activist tool, and shape ethnographic data into performance.

## **Required Readings**

Course Readings Will be Available on Canvas.

## **Assignments**

### **Artists as Activists (5 pts.)**

Students will conduct archival and print research on Austin-based artists who have agreed to work with the Domestic Study Program. This research will occur prior to meeting the selected artists. The preliminary research will be submitted to Prof. Sharon as a two-page, double spaced, typed presentation that includes images, audio, and video. The presentation should address the significance of the artist, their contributions to the communities they serve, information about the artist's lineage and aesthetics, and how the artist's work serves social justice. This presentation is worth 5 pts. On the same day this presentation is due, students will share elements of this research with the class. This oral presentation is required but not graded. This work will evolve into a multi-media installation about the artist, their work and their life that will be presented at the "Block Party."

### **Everyday Life Performance (10 pts.)**

Students will use ELP techniques in the performance of a 30-second excerpt from the oral history assignment in Introduction to Ethnographic Methods. Students will "witness" the community member by 1) giving attention to the energy, personality, and intent of the community member; 2) approximating the vocal and physical characteristics of the community member; 3) including one artifact that reflects the community member; 4) suggesting the location and circumstances under which the oral history was gathered; and 5) including a referent specific to the community member. The performance must be memorized.

### **Engagement Exercise (10 pts.)**

With one or two other students, students will create an exercise designed to encourage the audience/witnesses to participate in a specific aspect of their research. The exercise should be explained clearly, be guided respectfully and encouragingly when implemented, and have a precise moment of closure. Students will conduct the exercise with their classmates, and may use notes as they guide the exercise.

### **Solo Work (20 points)**

Students will create a solo performance that grows from a semester-long developmental process based on their identities, personal excavation, and family history research. The first layer of the work will be a written draft of the work submitted to Prof. Sharon prior to the start of class; this is ungraded but due on the date indicated on the syllabus. Students will be asked to share and discuss excerpts in class. The next layer is a second draft in the development of the work that reflects revisions and refinement in consultation with Prof. Sharon; this will be worth 5 pts.

Evaluation is based on timeliness, presentation, preparedness, and attention given to the development of the work. Points will be deducted if work is either turned in or presented late. The final layer is an in-class performance of an excerpt from the solo work worth 15 points. No additional performers are permitted; this should be a solo presentation, even if the larger work calls for multiple performers. Props, music, and projections are optional. Evaluation is based on timeliness, presentation, preparedness, and attention given to the development of the work.

### **Performance Ethnography Block Party (50 pts.)**

Students will participate in a public performance—a “Block Party”—that combines self-reflexivity, documentation of Austin and Los Angeles activist artists, ELP, engagement exercises, and the ethnographic research they have conducted throughout the semester. Emphasis will be placed on how Austin and Los Angeles use distinctive methods for employing art at the service of activism. **There may be additional rehearsals required outside of classroom time that the students must attend.**

### **Participation (5 pts.)**

Students must actively participate in class discussions and exercises. Students must also attend local events throughout the semester. Such participation will earn students full credit.

### **Attendance**

Students are allowed one unexcused absence from class. If students have more than one unexcused absence, their final grade will be lowered by one letter. If students arrive more than 10 minutes late to class, or leave before class has ended, they will be counted as absent. If students have an emergency, notify the professor as soon as they are able.

## **Course Protocols**

\*Rules for respectful discussion will be followed. These rules will be established and agreed upon by everyone early in the semester. If a student violates these rules, that student will be counted as absent for the day.

\*Being on time for class and events means arriving early.

\*As we work to build community with many people, consider how your style of dress may exclude you from being seen, heard, and understood. We will discuss dress codes for our public events.

\*During in-person instruction, devices are not to be used in class. During in-person instruction, notes should be taken in a notebook.

\* The University of Texas rules and regulations regarding plagiarism and intellectual honesty will be enforced. For details please see: [deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis\\_plagiarism.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/scholdis_plagiarism.php)

\* Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Disability Programs and Resource Center at San Francisco State University.

<http://access.sfsu.edu/content/students>

\* By UT Austin policy, students must notify the professor of their pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If students must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, they will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

## **Course Schedule**

### **FIELD SITE: AUSTIN**

- JAN 28 Introduction to Performance Ethnography  
*Exercises:* Augusto Boal, *Theatre of the Oppressed*  
Sharon Bridgforth, Guest Artist, *Finding Voice*
- FEB 4 ***Due: Artists as Activist First Draft***
- 11 *View in Class:* Robbie McCauley's *Sally's Rape*  
*Read:* Joseph and Cook, "Life is Living"  
Jones, "South of Pico: Migration, Art, and Black Los Angeles"
- 18 *View in Class:* Johnson, *Sweet Tea*,  
*Read:* Lowe, "Social Vision and a Cooperative Community"  
*Exercises:* Developing Improvisation as a Tool for Social Change
- 25 *Read:* Excerpts from *Fires in the Mirror*, Anna Deavere Smith  
*View in Class:* Anna Deavere Smith's TED Talk  
*Exercises:* Building Solo Work  
Using ELP
- MAR 4 ***Due: ELP***
- 11 NO CLASS  
MAR 14-15 *Attend:* Black Studies Conference

### **FIELD SITE: LOS ANGELES**

- 16 ARRIVE IN LOS ANGELES  
*Guest Artist:* Adelina Anthony
- 17 *Event:* World Stage Performance
- 18 *Event:* "Black Super Hero Magic Mama," Geffen Theatre

- 19            *Tour:* Hollywood
- 20            *Event:* California African American Museum
- 21            *Guest Speaker:* Cauleen Smith, Filmmaker  
*Event:* Njideka Akunyili Crosby Mural, MOCA
- 22            *Tour:* Universal Studios
- 23            ARRIVE IN AUSTIN

### **FIELD SITE: AUSTIN**

- 25            ***Due: Solo Work Draft I***
- APR 1            ***Due: Solo Work Draft II***  
*Rehearse:* Performance Ethnography for “Block Party”
- 8            ***Due: Engagement Exercise***
- 15            ***Due: Solo Work Final***  
*Rehearse:* Performance Ethnography for “Block Party”
- 22            *Rehearse:* Performance Ethnography for “Block Party”
- May 1            ***Presentation: “Block Party”***
- 8            Reflections on the “Block Party”  
Summation of the Course