Course Title: The Performance of Race

Instructor's name and home department:

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Course Description: The focus is on various kinds of performance, with a particular emphasis on the way racial difference accentuates or distorts performance. Major theoretical resources would include Jean-Paul Sartre and his discussions of “the gaze” and “bad faith” in *Being and Nothingness* and in *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Frantz Fanon’s discussions of the same topics in *Black Skins, White Masks*, Irving Goffman’s theories of performance in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* and *Stigma*, and Judith Butler’s ideas about performativity. Sartre, Fanon, Goffman and Butler discuss various types of performance, but from different angles. Sartre’s negative critique of bad faith encourages a type of scrupulous (and exhausting) pursuit of authenticity, Fanon surveys the bleak landscape of corporeal incoherence in the face of the racialized gaze, Goffman describes both narcissistic “impression management” as well as “team” performances that are symbiotic and aid in the stabilizing of social networks, and Butler draws our attention to the “anxious repetition” that is central to gendered (and, by extension, racialized) identities. The theorists discussed encourage us to read everyday actions and dispositions, including those that apply to race, class and gender, not as inflexible and “given,” but as relatively freely chosen dramaturgical processes: this means they are amenable to editing, change, and re-orientation.

Grading scheme:

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<th>Assignment 1: Essay (2000 words)</th>
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<td>Assignment 2: Essay (2500 words)</td>
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<td>Presentation 1: (20 minutes)</td>
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<td>Presentation 2 (20 minutes)</td>
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<td>Final examination:</td>
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Syllabus (rough), divided into 8 units

1st unit: Basic theories of performance and history of approaches to mimesis, theatre, “amour propre” (Rousseau) the “impartial spectator” (Adam Smith), etc

2nd unit: Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, “the gaze,” and bad faith

3rd unit: Sartre and *Anti-Semite and Jew*

4th unit: Fanon, Sartre, the racialized gaze and the dissected body

5th unit: Goffman, impression management and collaborative performances; Goffman’s *Stigma* as it applies to race

6th unit: Judith Butler and performativity; race as consolidated through a series of repetitions that masquerade as essence

7th unit: Performance and dialogue: Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*), Habermas, Julia Kristeva (*Strangers to Ourselves*) and Fanon on the potential of ideal speech to help negotiate racial difference

8th unit: The future of the performance of race: social media and new kinds of expressivity