Race and Performance Studies

The list below traces the ever-evolving contours of performance studies: from the anthropological study of people and theater to the study of race and performance/the performance of race. As an academic field emerging around the mid-20th century in the US, performance studies has its early foundations in anthropology and theater. This duality had the effect of neglecting the study of music and performance, which was later revisited outside of traditional musicological frameworks. Parallel developments in the philosophy of language set a very early precedent for conceptualizing performance in literary studies. The affective turn and theories of performativity and repertoire upset the epistemic primacy of the written text.

As scholars on minoritarian knowledge gained access to the field, their scholarship charted the ways in which their subjects had long theorized and enacted performance against and outside of a patriarchal, Eurocentric view. These scholars staged ethical interventions into the traditional methods of performance studies (ethnography, thick description, participant observation, artist interviews) to do justice to the subjects and objects they studied. In other words, apart from selecting diverse subject matter, their scholarship was deeply concerned with how knowledge about performance was being created. While performance studies has always been self-reflexive about method, scholars of race, gender, and sexuality pushed the envelope even further and continue to do so.

Language, Theatre, Performativity, and Affect


Race, Racialization, and Performance