Decolonial Poetics :: Decolonial Rhetorics

This course is a reading- and writing-intensive course with a focus on race and ethnicity in the Américas, in particular the U.S. and its colonies. We’ll be reading the work of writers of color, in particular queer poets of color and women of color poets, reading and writing critical and autobiographical essays in regards to their work, as well as writing poems and event reports, composing movies and multimedia presentations, and workshopping our various compositions in class. Throughout the semester students will be asked to reflect upon their work, that of their peers, and that of the artists and critics we are reading, with the goal of improving productive and analytical skills through these simultaneous and recursive processes.

Throughout the course we will be grappling with key questions: How are stories told? How are poems and other written texts made? What is being argued in these various texts, and how is it being argued? How can creative works be critical and critical works be creative or artistic? What do race and class, gender and sexuality, writing and language have to do with healing and the project of decolonization? How can the U.S. and the Américas as a whole be known differently (and perhaps more accurately) through the lens of these writers and our own compositions and discussions?

Recognizing that people of color of multiple sexualities and genders have contributed to the struggle for decolonization, and recognizing that truly effective decolonial efforts must not only address issues of gender and sexuality but see them as integral parts of both the process of colonization and decolonization, this course prioritizes the perspectives, experiences, voices, and critical and creative work of women of color and queer people of color. Within this, we will be focusing on queer and womanist poetics of color and the process of decolonization with the hope of understanding and articulating what decolonial poetics are, how they function, and how they support and embody decolonial movement. As such, in this course we will be focusing on the contributions of queer/female poets, writers, artists, theorists, and activists of mono- and multiracial Pacific Islander, Arab/Middle Eastern, Native, Asian, Latina/o, and African descent living within and beyond the colonial reaches/territorial confines of the U.S.

In addition to reading books, we will also be listening to music, engaging with relevant cinema, viewing visual art, and entering the space of museums as both stimuli/sources of inspiration and other forms with which to dialogue creatively/critically. In addition, we will be using theatre, performance, and movement to find new ways of writing in, about, and through our bodies, identities, and experiences.
Throughout the course we will be looking at the following topics and issues: colonization and decolonization; racism and white supremacy; womanisms and queerness; (trans)gender (identity); heterosexism and queerphobia; misogyny and patriarchy; classism; capitalism; poor/working class lives; women of color realities; queer people of color realities; multiraciality and mixed-race identities; notions of the U.S. and North America; dis/ability; ableism; decolonial erotics; the role and place of the body (and issues of corporeality in general); healing; slavery; genocide; war; imperialism; violence; spirituality and religion; land; diaspora; im/migration; Indigeneity; memory; the use of culturally-specific images and allusions; eth(n)ics; multilinguality; non-European forms; history/herstory; and individual and collective liberation.

Further, we will examine how the above intersect with issues of writing, reading, analysis, and production, such as: the role of language; argumentation and persuasion; diction; editing, craft, and revision; how to give public readings; submitting work for publication; research skills; narrative structure and sequencing; repetition and innovation; invention; audience (analysis and resistance); distribution, circulation, and delivery; the audio/oral/spoken qualities of the written and performed word; mixed compositions and learning across/through genres; (rethinking) grammar, syntax, and punctuation; how to do critical readings of texts (written and otherwise); visual poetics; pedagogy; digital and electronic interfaces; humour; improv; movement; sound; the visual (more broadly); the somatic; and the connections between poetry and prose, text and context, page and performance, the individual and the collective/historical/herstorical.

The course's pedagogy is informed by traditions in grassroots social justice organizing, decolonial theatre and performance, and Ethnic and Women’s Studies. As part of this work, we will be engaged with the prioritization of oppressed voices, interruption of oppression, application of our work to the larger world for the purposes of social justice, integration of our own personal and collective/histor-herstorical narratives, and utilization of movement and performance as means of both producing and critiquing texts.

**Class Schedule**

Class meets on Mondays, Tuesdays, and Thursdays from 8-8:50am in Bessey 106 and on Wednesdays from 8-8:50am in Bessey 214. We will meet on Tuesday, March 14, 2006 and Tuesday, April 4, 2006 in Bessey 214. We will not meet on Monday, January 16, 2006 as it is a campus holiday, nor will we have class on Monday, March 6, 2006, Tuesday, March 7, 2006, Wednesday, March 8, 2006, and Thursday, March 9, 2006 due to spring break. The last regularly scheduled class will be on Thursday, April 27, 2006. The final session of the course will be on Friday, May 5, 2006 from 7:45-9:45am in Bessey 214.

**Office Hours**

I am available to meet with students on Mondays from 9-11am in my office in Bessey 281. I can also meet with students outside these hours by appointment. Students can also email me or leave messages for me in my mailbox in the Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures Department mailroom in Bessey 229.
Technology

This section of WRA 125 is composing- and technology-intensive. Computers will be integrated throughout course instruction to enhance and further our discussions and explorations into text genesis and critique. We will use computers to begin effective online research using search engines and MSU-subscribed indexes and databases, aid us in source citations and bibliography formation, and to examine the invention and revision process as we create art, essays, movies, audiovisual presentations, and performances. Students are required to save their work from each session, whether through email, or to a disk, CD, or their AFS space. Students are also allowed to print their work; MSU e-tokens must be purchased in order to do so. Some texts for the course are online; for these texts, students can type the URL listed or go to ANGEL [http://www.angel.msu.edu], an online course site, and click the appropriate hyperlink to take them there. Also on ANGEL are required PDF files for students to read/view.

Class Participation

Students are expected to attend all class sessions and be on time. Excessive tardiness or leaving early will lower your grade; each instance constitutes a partial absence. Two partial absences equal one full absence. Students who miss more than eight class sessions will fail the course. Students are expected to do the reading for each session, complete all assignments, and be ready for class discussion. As cell phones and pagers disrupt class discussion, they must be turned off for the duration of class. Students are expected to complete all drafts and be prepared for peer review. Message boards exist on ANGEL for each of the main assignments, as well as for the course’s texts and classroom discussion. While posting on these message boards is not required, it is one way to improve one’s class participation grade for the course. In addition to regular participation, students are required to present three revised poems and process papers to the workshop over the course of the semester. These are due the session prior to their being workshopped; sufficient copies must be provided for the class. Students’ peers will take home the student texts, read them, provide written feedback, and be prepared to discuss them the following class. Poet-writers will be evaluated for the quality of their work/presentation and peers for the quality of feedback given. Grades for this activity will be factored into the class participation grade. Students are also required to complete two event reports tied to the themes and issues of the course. Class participation, in class, out of class, and online, is a significant portion of the final grade.

Accessibility

MSU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Students with disabilities who need accommodations should inform the instructor during office hours and register with the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities in Bessey Hall 120 to receive assistance. The RCPD website is http://www.rcpd.msu.edu and phone number is (517) 353-9642.
Grades

Class participation constitutes 25% of a student’s final grade. There are three main assignments for the course; each constitutes 25% of the final grade. In order to receive full credit, all drafts must be of high quality and be submitted on time, and all peer review sessions must be attended. Assignments will be marked down 1.0 for each class session they are late. Failure to complete a draft or being absent/unprepared for peer review will result in the assignment being marked down 1.0. Plagiarism is not allowed. First instances will result in failure for the assignment. Second instances will result in failure for the course. All grades for the course are on a 4.0 scale.

Assignments

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. There are three main assignments for the course: a collection of poetry (individual works and corresponding process papers, revised portfolio, and public reading), research project (proposal, annotated bibliography, final paper, and PowerPoint presentation), and a movie (screenplay, storyboard, final product/screening, and reflective statement). Each constitutes 25% of the final grade. Assignments must be stapled, typed, double-spaced, in twelve-point font, and with one-inch margins. The student’s name, course number, semester/year, date, and assignment name should be on the top left-hand side of the first page. The exceptions to this are the portfolio covers and poems, which are single-spaced and for which only the student’s name is needed. There are three main assignments for the course:

1. Poetry: Individual Poems (10 total)
   Process Papers (10 total)
   [Where is the poem at in its process? How does it achieve the goal(s) of the assignment? Where does it still need work? What does it make you think about writing? How is it connected to and/or influenced by the readings?
   Students are to answer the above questions in a minimum 1 page essay, unless other questions have been provided for reflection that week.]

   Portfolio:
   Cover/Title Page
   Poems (5 revised)
   Process Paper (8 pages)
   [Minimum 1 page on each revised poem, re-answering the original questions, and also describing the process of revision, + 3 page general review of your poetic work overall and the writing process thus far.]

   Reading
   [Public reading of selected works before an audience.]

2. Research Project: Proposal (2 pages)
   [Why have you chosen these 2 poets? What is your thesis?
   Is it based on a theme or aesthetic in their work?
   Who is your audience? Why is your paper important?
   How is it relevant to the project of decolonization?]
Annotated Bibliography (8 sources)
[MLA formatted. 4 from course, 4 from your own research.
Provide a brief summary of each. Describe how each is related
to your topic and how you plan to use it in your project.]
Research Paper (7 pages, excluding the bibliography/works cited)
[MLA formatted. No annotations.]
PowerPoint Presentation
[6-8 minute presentation, incorporating visuals.]

3. Movie: Screenplay
[A written textual representation of your proposed movie.]
Storyboard
[A visual representation of your proposed movie, scene by scene.]
Final Product/Screening
[A multimedia representation of your poetic work, and
introduction of this film to the class.]
Reflective Statement
[A 2-3 page reflection on your creative process.]

Required Texts


Required supplemental texts are listed beginning on page eight of the syllabus and in the schedule section of the syllabus as assigned. Students are encouraged to purchase dictionaries and thesauri if they do not have them.
Authors


Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was born in 1951 in Pusan, Korea and grew up in Korea, Hawai‘i, and San Francisco, traveling later between them, Paris, and New York. A Korean visual and performance artist, filmmaker, editor, and writer, she was the editor of an anthology, Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus: Selected Writings, and author of a mixed-genre book, Dictée. She was raped and murdered by a stranger in 1982 in New York a week after Dictée was published. Cha’s film and video work include Secret Spill, Mouth to Mouth, Permutations, Vidéome, Re Dis Appearing, Passages Paysages, and Exilée. She taught at Elizabeth Seton College.

Qwo-Li Driskill was born in 1975 and raised in rural Colorado. Ze is a queer/transgender/Two-Spirit activist, educator, editor, poet, essayist, playwright, uncle/aunt, and person with disabilities of Cherokee, African American, Lumbee, Lenape, Osage, and Irish heritage. Ze is author of two chapbooks, Burning Upward Flight and Book of Memory, a CD, In Our Oldest Language, and a poetry collection, Walking with Ghosts. Hir work has appeared in Revolutionary Voices: A Multicultural Queer Youth Anthology, Nurturing Native Languages, Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry, and Sky Woman: Indigenous Women Who Have Shaped, Moved or Inspired Us. Formerly Seattle-based, ze teaches at Michigan State University.

hattie gossett was born 1942 and grew up in New Jersey. A pansexual African American performance poet, essayist, organizer, and educator, she is author of the poetry collection, presenting…sister noblues. Her work also appears in This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, Body and Soul: The Black Women’s Guide to Physical Health and Emotional Well-Being, and Aloud: Voices from the Nuyorican Poets Cafe. She has taught at Rutgers University, Empire State College, and Oberlin College, and lives in New York City.

Aurora Levins Morales was born in 1954. A bisexual Puerto Rican/Ashkenazi Jewish writer, activist, professor, mother, survivor, and person with disabilities, she spent most of her childhood in Puerto Rico and teen years in Chicago. She is co-author with her mom, Rosario Morales, of a poetry/prose collection, Getting Home Alive, and author of an essay collection, Medicine Stories: History, Culture and the Politics of Integrity, and Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of Puertorriqueñas, a prose poetry retelling of Puerto Rican women’s herstory. Her work has appeared in This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color, Cuentos: Stories by Latinas, Women Writing Resistance: Essays on Latin America and the Caribbean, and Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios. Levins Morales has taught at San Francisco State University, the University of Minnesota, and University of California, Berkeley, where she lives.

Rosario Morales was born in 1930 in New York City. A Puerto Rican writer, activist, and mother, she spent most of her childhood in Spanish Harlem and the South Bronx, living later in Puerto Rico, Chicago, and New England. She is co-author with her daughter, Aurora Levins Morales, of the poetry/prose collection, *Getting Home Alive*. Her work has also appeared in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, *Esta puente, mi espalda: Voces de mujeres tercermundistas en los Estados Unidos*, *Cuentos: Stories by Latinas*, *Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings*, and *Puerto Rican Writers at Home in the USA*. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Haunani-Kay Trask was born in 1949. She was raised on the island of O‘ahu, Hawai‘i, with genealogical ties to both Māui and Kaua‘i. An ‘Ōiwi Maoli activist, professor, aunt, and writer, she is author of a book of theory, *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory*, a collection of essays and speeches, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai‘i*, two poetry collections, *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* and *Night Is a Sharkskin Drum*, a CD-ROM, *We are not happy Natives: education and decolonization in Hawai‘i*, and co-author of the photography book, *Kii‘ê: Thirty Years of Land Struggles in Hawai‘i*. She also co-wrote and co-produced the award-winning documentary, *Act of War: The Overthrow of the Hawaiian Nation*. Her work has appeared in *The Colour of Resistance: A Contemporary Collection of Writing by Aboriginal Women* and *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language: Contemporary Native Women’s Writings of North America*. Professor of Hawaiian Studies and former Director of the Kamakakiokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa, Trask is a member of Ka Lāhui Hawai‘i, the largest sovereignty movement in Hawai‘i.

Marvin K. White was born in 1966 in Oakland, where he was raised. A gay African American poet, playwright, performance artist, and organizer, he is the author of two books of poetry, *last rights* and *nothin’ ugly fly*, and former member of the performance group, Pomo Afro Homos. His work has appeared in numerous anthologies including *The Road Before Us: 100 Black Gay Poets*, *Sojourner: Black Gay Writing in the Age of AIDS*, *Think Again*, and *Roll Call: A Generational Anthology of Social & Political Black Literature & Art*. 


**Required Supplemental Texts**


Schedule

Week One
M 1/9  Read: ANGEL Gamba Adisa/Audre Lorde “A Litany for Survival” and “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action”
T 1/10 Read: R. Zamora Linmark Rolling the R’s pp. 1-19
W 1/11 Read: R. Zamora Linmark Rolling the R’s pp. 20-40
R 1/12 Read: ANGEL Gamba Adisa/Audre Lorde “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” and Introduction; R. Zamora Linmark Rolling the R’s pp. 40-58

Week Two
M 1/16 No Class
T 1/17 In Class: Writing Center Orientation / Peer Review Workshop, 300 Bessey
Read: ANGEL Gloria Anzaldúa “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” bell hooks “Language: Teaching New Worlds/New Words,” and Carol Lee Sanchez “tribal chant”
W 1/18 Poem 1: Due for Peer Review
Read: R. Zamora Linmark Rolling the R’s pp. 59-72
R 1/19 Read: R. Zamora Linmark Rolling the R’s pp. 73-127

Week Three
M 1/23 Poem 1: Due for Instructor
Read: R. Zamora Linmark Rolling the R’s pp. 128-149
T 1/24 Read: ANGEL Judy Scales-Trent “Stories We Tell” and Mohja Kahf “My Grandmother Washes Her Feet in the Sink of the Bathroom at Sears”
W 1/25 In Class: Margaret Cho I’m the One That I Want
Read: hattie gossett presenting…sister noblues pp. 1-34
R 1/26 Poem 2: Due for Peer Review
Read: hattie gossett presenting…sister noblues pp. 35-82

Week Four
M 1/30 Poem 2: Due for Instructor
In Class: Library Orientation and Research Workshop, Red Cedar Lobby
Read: hattie gossett presenting…sister noblues pp. 83-108
T 1/31 In Class: Library Orientation and Research Workshop, Red Cedar Lobby
Read: hattie gossett presenting…sister noblues pp. 109-143
R 2/2 Research Project: Proposal Due for Instructor
Read: ANGEL Alice Walker “Womanist” and “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens”; Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales Getting Home Alive pp. 1-27
**Week Five**

**M 2/6**  
Poem 3: Due for Instructor  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 1  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 28-48

**T 2/7**  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 1  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 49-65

**W 2/8**  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 1  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 66-92

**R 2/9**  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 1  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 93-136

**Week Six**

**M 2/13**  
Poem 4: Due for Instructor  
Research Project: Annotated Bibliography Due for Peer Review  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 137-162

**T 2/14**  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 163-196

**W 2/15**  
Read: Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales *Getting Home Alive* pp. 197-213

**R 2/16**  
Research Project: Annotated Bibliography Due for Instructor  
Read: *ANGEL* Michelle Cliff “A Journey into Speech”; Theresa Hak Kyung Cha  
*Dictée* pp. 1-22

**Week Seven**

**M 2/20**  
Poem 5: Due for Instructor  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 2  
Read: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictée* pp. 23-42

**T 2/21**  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 2  
Read: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictée* pp. 43-76

**W 2/22**  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 2  
Read: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictée* pp. 77-89

**R 2/23**  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 2  
Read: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictée* pp. 90-136

**Week Eight**

**M 2/27**  
Poem 6: Due for Instructor  
Research Project: 1st Draft Due for Instructor  
In Class: “Siyazama: Traditional Arts, Education, and AIDS in South Africa” Exhibit, MSU Museum, Heritage Gallery  
Read: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictée* pp. 137-164

**T 2/28**  
Read: Theresa Hak Kyung Cha *Dictée* pp. 165-181

**W 3/1**  
Research Project: 2nd Draft Due for Peer Review  

**R 3/2**  
Read: Haunani-Kay Trask *Light in the Crevice Never Seen* pp. xv-40
Spring Break
M 3/6 No Class
T 3/7 No Class
W 3/8 No Class
R 3/9 No Class

Week Nine
M 3/13 Poem 7: Due for Instructor
Read: Haunani-Kay Trask Light in the Crevice Never Seen pp. 41-68
T 3/14 Research Project: Final Draft Due for Instructor
Research Project: PowerPoint Presentations
In Class: Keali‘i Reichel Kawaipunahele, Lei Hali‘a, and E Ō Mai
Read: Haunani-Kay Trask Light in the Crevice Never Seen pp. 69-96
W 3/15 Research Project: PowerPoint Presentations
In Class: Keali‘i Reichel meleleana and Ke‘alaokamaile
Read: ANGEL Gamba Adisa/Audre Lorde “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power”
and Aurora Levins Morales “Radical Pleasure: Sex and the End of Victimhood”
R 3/16 In Class: Poetry Workshop 3
Read: ANGEL Beth Brant (Degonwadonti) “Recovery and Transformation” and
“Physical Prayers”; Yan María Castro MIS KA’AN Ú (“Claridad en el horizonte cuando va saliendo la luna”) and Qwo-Li Driskill Walking with Ghosts pp. 1-23

Week Ten
M 3/20 Poem 8: Due for Instructor
In Class: Poetry Workshop 3
Read: Qwo-Li Driskill Walking with Ghosts pp. 24-53; ANGEL June Jordan “A Far Stretch Well Worth the Effort”
Read: ANGEL Lourdes Portillo “Screenplay for Columbus on Trial” and “Storyboard for Columbus on Trial”
W 3/22 In Class: Lourdes Portillo Columbus on Trial, Esperanza Vasquez Aguueda Martinez: Our People, Our Country, and Edward Lee Invisible Son
Read: Qwo-Li Driskill Walking with Ghosts pp. 54-68
R 3/23 In Class: Poetry Workshop 3
Read: Qwo-Li Driskill Walking with Ghosts pp. 69-93
**Week Eleven**

**M 3/27**  
Poem 9: Due for Instructor  
In Class: Poetry Workshop 3  
Read: ANGEL Pat Parker “For the Straight Folks Who Don’t Mind Gays But Wish They Wouldn’t Be So BLATANT” and “Where Will You Be?”

**T 3/28**  
Movie: Screenplay and Storyboard for Peer Review  
Read: Marvin K. White *last rights* pp. 1-27

**W 3/29**  
Read: Marvin K. White *last rights* pp. 28-51

**R 3/30**  
Movie: Screenplay and Storyboard for Instructor  
In Class: Qwo-Li Driskill, Poetry Reading and Book Signing  
Read: Marvin K. White *last rights* pp. 52-76

**Week Twelve**

**M 4/3**  
Poem 10: Due for Instructor  
Read: Marvin K. White *last rights* pp. 77-117

**T 4/4**  
Movie: Workshop  
In Class: Sweet Honey in the Rock *Breaths* and *Selections 1976-1988*  
Read: Marvin K. White *last rights* pp. 118-138

**W 4/5**  
Poetry Portfolio: Due for Peer Review  
Read: Becky Birtha *The Forbidden Poems* pp. 1-30

**R 4/6**  
Movie: Workshop  
Read: Becky Birtha *The Forbidden Poems* pp. 31-66

**Week Thirteen**

**M 4/10**  
Poetry Portfolio: Due for Instructor  
Movie: Workshop  
Read: Becky Birtha *The Forbidden Poems* pp. 67-104

**T 4/11**  
Read: Becky Birtha *The Forbidden Poems* pp. 105-130

**W 4/12**  
Read: Becky Birtha *The Forbidden Poems* pp. 131-155

**R 4/13**  
Movie: Workshop

**Week Fourteen**

**M 4/17**  
Movie: Workshop

**T 4/18**  
Movie: Workshop

**W 4/19**  
Movie: Workshop

**R 4/20**  
Movie: Workshop

**Week Fifteen**

**M 4/24**  
Movie: Reflective Statement Due for Instructor  
Movie: Screenings

**T 4/25**  
Movie: Screenings

**W 4/26**  
Movie: Screenings

**R 4/27**  
Last Day of Class
Finals Week

F 5/5  Final Session