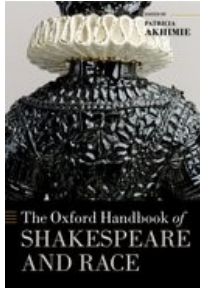




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CHAPTER

## 13 Trans Studies at the Crossroad: From Racialized Invisibility to Gendered Legibility

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### Abstract

This chapter argues that race and gender are social practices that evolve over time, in each other's presence, and in different social spaces. To correct the early modern studies' tendency to privilege narrative texts, this chapter uses global and performance studies methods—as critical tools that are designed to capture transformative cultural practices—to highlight embodied significations of transness. The chapter concludes with a reflection on pedagogical implications of multidisciplinary. Providing critical tools to understand atypical bodies, trans studies solidifies critical race studies' support of minority life experiences. Critical race methods, with their attention to the social production of hierarchies, can also help trans studies address its often-unacknowledged whiteness.

**Keywords:** [tacit transness](#), [trans as method](#), [racialization of gender practices](#), [performativity](#), [multidisciplinarity](#)

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## CHAPTER 13

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# TRANS STUDIES AT THE CROSSROAD

### *From Racialized Invisibility to Gendered Legibility*

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ALEXA ALICE JOUBIN

IN 1976, singer Joni Mitchell traversed race and gender by performing blackface acts and declaring that they are a “Black man trapped in a white woman’s body.” In 1998, Mitchell told *New York Times* that they were “the only Black man at the [Halloween] party” (Strauss). In what ways are similar claims complicated by pandemic-era hate crimes, such as the police murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis in 2020 and the mistreatment of, and protests against, Darren Merager who identified as a woman in a Korean spa in Los Angeles in 2021? Racism and transmisogyny deny people’s access to public spaces, and public performance has been seen as a way to reclaim inclusive social spaces, even though it is a winding path.

Why did Isobel Thom’s nonbinary performance of Joan of Arc in Ilinca Radulian’s *I, Joan* at the London Globe, 2022, reignite bitter debates about individuals’ right to self-determination and about who counts as ‘trans’ (Marshall 2022)? If the historical Joan does not identify as a white cisgender woman, does the legend undermine feminist causes?

How does Hawaiian playwright Kepano Stephen Richter come to write his Latinx-inflected *East Side Story* which features a Black Romeo and a Mexican Julia who comes out as a trans woman at the masked ball (in production at the time of writing)?

Does Belinda Sullivan’s ‘doubled drag’ performance of Falstaff as the Witch of Brentford in the 2013 African-American Shakespeare Company production of *Merry Wives of Windsor* (dir. Becky Kemper) diminish ‘the impact of what would otherwise seem to be ... transphobic violence’ (Kemp 2019, 276)? Why are such performances, similar to cisgender interpretations of Viola in *Twelfth Night*, typically received as pragmatic and temporary gender nonconformity to score personal gains in patriarchal worlds rather than as transgender expressions (Craig 2013)?

Actors' offstage racial identities add nuance to the picture. How does British-Indian (Insight) actor Shubham Saraf's trans performance of Ophelia, against Michelle Terry's cross-cast white Hamlet, traverse gender and racial lines in Federay Holmes and Elle While's 'post gender' production of *Hamlet* at the Globe in 2018? Similarly, how does British-Ugandan actress Sheila Atim's trans masculine performance of Cesario in Adam Smethurst's film *Twelfth Night* (2018) complicate class aspirations and embodiment of genders?

How do racialized imaginaries queer gender practices in the Taiwanese film adaptation, *As We Like It* (2021), which features an all-female East Asian cast including a Franco-Taiwanese lead and two trans actresses? How do gender-based exclusions help racial prejudices 'perform' discriminative acts through the trans feminine white Desdemona and blackface Othello, both of which are performed by an adult boy actor, in the period drama *Stage Beauty* (2004)?

What do trans-inclusive and antiracist campaigns have in common beyond their cognate agendas of social justice? Race and trans studies are fields of study borne out of necessity, the necessity to understand the world, and the necessity for all to live a liveable life. Joan of Arc is compelled to put on men's clothes not only to lead an army but also to be themselves which should not require further justification (Heyam 2022). Transness is not a zero-sum game, and Thom's interpretation of Joan does not infringe women's rights.

Similar questions of racial and gendered otherness loom large in my personal life as an immigrant and as a woman of colour with imposter syndrome seeking refuge from politics that cause personal harm. However, I had shunned these issues as research questions even though, or perhaps because, they are too close to home. It is fair to say that I had been in transit and on the road. This sense of transitivity and marginalization has shaped and energized the kind of work I do.

My chapter outlines the promise and perils of racial and trans invisibility and visibility, the notion of performativity, the productive relationships between trans and performance and adaptation studies, how I learned not to turn foreign shores into home turf and lose my edge in the comfort zone, and how I both passed through and sustained transitory spaces in my writing and pedagogy.

## EPISTEMIC INVISIBILITY

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What one sees correlates to how one sees, and whether one is truly seen by having one's presence properly acknowledged hinges on whether the society actively tackles epistemic invisibility of minorities. Growing up in Taiwan as someone belonging to the dominant ethnic group and speaking the dominant local languages, I did not have a marked, or remarkable, identity until I immigrated to the USA. I did not pass through and could not pass by. I became noticeable, racialized, and gendered. I became a stranger even to myself. As Sara Ahmed writes, one is estranged in the epistemological



impasse—the collision of cognitive differences in the articulation of belonging (1999, 330; 2017, 43–44). Sailing ‘to unpath’d waters, undream’d shores’ (4.4.566–567), as *The Winter’s Tale’s* Camillo puts it, I had been looking for a place to call home. I never feel quite at home in any department. I have received a number of labels, and I have called myself a few at different points in time. Depending on the context, I have been seen as a Shakespearean who works across time periods and cultures, as someone who is expected to represent minority communities in some form, and as a digital humanities educator who brings critical race and gender studies to bear on each other. Along the way, I realized that there are critical advantages to taking up a position on the periphery, to being ‘the visibly non-white and audibly foreigner-sounding person in the room’ (Dhar 2023, 161). In some cases, the notion of home is overrated, because it stifles critical conversations that are needed. Conversely, I have also carefully avoided the ‘Oppression Olympics’ (Martínez 1998, 5) of ‘centering [only] the [most] marginalized’ experiences (Táíwò 2022, 70–71; Daniels 2022) in the classroom and in my research.

The presence of people like me has been rendered invisible or hyper visible due to tokenism, the politics of prioritizing better-known ‘minorities’, and epistemic exclusion (Settles et al. 2019). At a conference, despite my sitting in the front row with the only other woman of colour, the speaker on stage stated that ‘there is no woman of color in this room. Let that sink in.’ I felt erased and rejected. The irony here, as Angela Davis and Neferti Tadiar theorize, women of colour is a category created to enable ‘political coalition of diverse, particular histories of struggle—Native American, Chicana/o, African American, Hawaiian, Asian American, as well as immigrant Third World women struggles’. We need to deploy the category with ethics of care even as we combat notions of ‘intrinsic and exchangeable identities within dominant cultural representations’ of women of colour (3). At another in-person public event, I was the only non-white speaker on a three-person roundtable where the speakers’ names and photos were projected on the large screens. I was scheduled to speak last. Once the speaker before me finished their remarks, however, I was forgotten and passed over. Eventually, several audiences had to intervene to correct the oversight. When covering this high-profile event, journalists omitted my name from the list of panellists and failed to comment on the incident. Both illegibility and undesirable legibility are harmful and politically restraining.

It has been a challenge to make my presence and scholarship legible against institutionalized forms of epistemic invisibility, but my positionality has made me more self-conscious when entering other people’s headspace, bringing respect and metacritical distance in my analyses to works produced in global cultural spaces.

It is even more challenging to do so in the time of hate in which we live, because students and readers often bring my racial and gender identities to bear on the scholarship I produce, creating superficially positive and sometimes negative associations. A female scholar of Asian descent, for instance, may be expected to write about race in a particular way. While Abdulhamit Arvas maintains that most scholars in critical fields of embodied identities ‘have personal investments’, and while we both recognize that the personal is political, I caution against the tendency to disproportionately place the

epistemological and pedagogical burden on racial and gender minorities. The ways in which one is labelled by the society impacts how one's identities are made to 'perform' in various contexts.

## MULTIDISCIPLINARY WORK: BURDEN AND PROMISE

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One solution to hate and divisive politics is multidisciplinary work that creates bridges between different ways of thinking, because hate is a product of artificially created social silos. Tools from various disciplines help us catch things that may otherwise fall through the cracks between established fields.

The disciplinary silos impose an uneven burden of multidisciplinary work on scholars working in marginalized fields. Those who work in marginalized fields are more often compelled to explain their work's relevance to more dominant fields. This is a form of ghettoization caused by institutionalized racism that disciplines one's identity and research output. Due to the current structure of academia and hierarchies of cultural prestige, editors rarely require footnotes on Aristotle but tend to demand extensive and potentially distracting explanations of non-white and non-Western subjects. Some publications relegate non-white knowledge to an ancillary position, serving as a footnote to white critical theory. The white Euro-American norms have pre-determined what is worthy of scholarly interest.

This phenomenon of national profiling comes from the assumption that performances in the United Kingdom and the United States are normative and aesthetically universal, whereas global performances bear only location-specific meanings. According to this view, the aesthetic meanings of such performances are either indecipherable or uninteresting. As Rey Chow observes, despite 'the current facade of welcoming non-Western "others" into putatively ... cross-cultural exchanges', there is still 'a continual tendency to ... ghettoize non-Western cultures ... by way of ethnic, national labels' (2000, 3).

This problem is a symptom of power-knowledge structures. When the production and dissemination of knowledge favours and supports Anglo-Eurocentrism, it creates disciplinary silos that obscure long, global histories. They render non-Western knowledge less relevant. This institutionalized bias has put the burden of multidisciplinary work on minorities. In order to communicate the importance of their work, some scholars adopt a comparative approach and write about how the Global South is relevant to theories and histories of whiteness. To overcome the epistemic invisibility of certain subjects of study, or 'the epistemic function and the mechanisms for cultivating ignorance', we need to develop what Nancy Tuana calls 'liberatory epistemology'. This method takes into account the manufactured ignorance that emerges 'from the systematic experiential differences among social groups' (Tuana 2019, 132).

While interdisciplinarity often involves the transfer or fusion of methods between disciplines, multidisciplinary projects are situated at the crossroads of disciplines either because the subject matter is itself multidisciplinary in nature or it can best be understood through multiple perspectives. I have learned to work with, rather than work out of, the gap between disciplines, because, in some cases, disciplinary boundaries are erected and patrolled by gatekeepers who need them to validate their own authority.

To counter these dominant assumptions driven by the aforementioned power-knowledge structure, I adopt a rhizomatic approach to intercultural and transhistorical performances that capture both the divergence and convergence of cultures (Deleuze and Guattari 2004, 7, 16, 25). ‘Divergence’ from racial and gender norms is often accompanied by convergences or a *mélange* of motifs and dramaturgy. A rhizomatic network of knowledge captures multiplicity more effectively through non-hierarchical entry and exit points in data sets and the interpretations of culture. It re-evaluates the perceived lack of connections between ‘what may otherwise seem to be isolated instances of artistic expression’ (Joubin 2023, 227).

This approach also enables parallel examination of cognate cultural phenomena, such as cross-gender casting and race-making, across extended periods of time and locations. It helps us overcome the limitations of localized cases through scale jumping. Neil Smith uses the term scale jumping to describe social movements that escape the ‘traps of localism, particularism, and parochialism’ by expanding their geographic reach and by turning local campaigns into global movements (1992, 57–79). As Ambereen Dadabhoy observes, our gaze is often ‘implicated in [our] own racial, gendered, and classed positions’ (2020, 230). Maintaining global perspectives can break down binarism and enhance our cognitive bandwidth. Details we learn about global patterns in the *longue durée* in comparative performance historiography are more valuable than the perceived singularity of any given event. The intersection between race and trans studies is one such example. As the next section shows, there are overlaps between gendering and race-making practices—processes through which embodied identities are produced and contested.

## RACE-MAKING AND TRANS PRACTICES

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Since race-making is a technology of representation that structures social norms, films that feature casts of the same race can be read as ‘race films’ or films about race, just as films starring cisgender actors should be read through a trans lens to uncover cisgender sexism and tacit transness in their characters. Hung-i Chen and Muni Wei’s film *As We Like It* (2021) uses Franco-Taiwanese mixed race actress Camile Chalons’ cross-gender and bilingual performance of Celia and two openly trans actresses’ ‘backpassing’ acts to queer the gender territories of *As You Like It*.<sup>1</sup> Boasting an all-female cast with

<sup>1</sup> Some individuals in trans communities use ‘backpassing’ to refer to ‘the act of passing as one’s birth gender post-medical-transition for physical safety, job security, or social convenience’ (San Francisco Public Library 2017).

cross-gender roles as a talk-back to 'the patriarchy who would not allow female actors on stage' (closing credits), *As We Like It* is set in a futuristic Internet-free neighbourhood in Taipei, where courier delivery of hand-written love letters is the norm and where somatic bonding through palmistry, instead of online dating, reigns supreme. The film does away with such binary gender accessories as moustaches or wigs. It presents characters of all genders—played by actors identifying as women—matter-of-factly without apology or additional justification. The film does not change the names or genders of the characters in Shakespeare.

In counselling the lovelorn Rosalind who presents themselves as Roosevelt, Celia fashions herself into an authority on courtship by frequently playing up her French cultural background and Taiwanese heritage. Camile Chalons' facility with the French language is deployed as a technology of race-making to construct 'Western' authority, while her lighter skin tone contributes to the form of androgyny that is celebrated in the film. In this context, Chalons' use of French and skin-whitening makeup is mapped onto an unarticulated but positive notion of Whiteness. The presence of mixed race actors questions the imposition of 'traditional monoracial categories' and counter the 'enforcement of monoracial norms' (Daniel et al. 2014, 6). The race-making processes in the film thus construct, assign, and perform select racial categories.

The sisterly affection between Celia and Rosalind-as-Roosevelt informs and extends beyond their joint project to test Orlando's true character. Several scenes hint at romantic interests between Celia and Roosevelt, Roosevelt and Orlando, and Celia and Oliver. The arrangement is a nod to the fact that while, on the page, Rosalind seems to be the only cross-gender role (as Ganymede in the Forest of Arden), on the early modern stage, Celia's role as well as Rosalind's Ganymede as a doubled drag both involve cross-gender enactment by boy actors.

There is one potentially anti-trans caveat. Presenting themselves as a palmist named Roosevelt, Rosalind opens a palm reading salon in Arden, an Internet-free district. When Orlando follows Roosevelt's flyers advertising their service and arrives at the salon, he produces a photo of Rosalind and asks for Roosevelt's advice on how to win her heart. As the session progresses, Orlando becomes distracted and begins to remark on the similarity between Roosevelt and Rosalind in several categories ranging from their hair texture to body odour. The scene concludes with Orlando catching on to the supposed imperfection of Rosalind's cross-gender act, which is a toxic filmic trope of outing trans characters against their will. It is here the Franco-Taiwanese Celia comes to Rosalind's rescue.

The intersection of race and trans studies is also palpable in Richard Eyre's *Othello*-inspired period drama film *Stage Beauty* (2004), in which the seventeenth-century star, an adult boy actor, Ned Kynaston, takes on the role of Desdemona in stylized stage performances before transitioning to playing Othello in blackface later in his career as dictated by the conventions of the period. When playing exclusively female roles onstage, he presents as feminine offstage as well. After King Charles II bans men from performing female roles, Kynaston is bereft of his self-worth and is rejected by his male lover. Kynaston takes up the role of Othello as part of his journey to binary,



heterosexual masculinity. In its imagination of historical theatre practices, the film makes a tacit connection between femininity and Desdemona's whiteness, and between masculinity and what Kynaston imagines to be Moorish mannerisms. Kynaston is proverbially baptized as a cisgender man when he performs the act of killing Desdemona onstage. In playing Desdemona, Kynaston associates 'dying beautifully' with fragile, white femininity, projecting ideal womanhood on his trans embodiment of the role. He deploys shifting social practices of race and gender to fashion a series of self-images in each stage of his career and private life, revealing that racialized practices are profoundly constituted by exclusionary gendered narratives. Race and gender are closely intertwined in the multiply-determined identities of Kynaston, Desdemona, and Othello.

Modern performances of the early modern in *As We Like It* and in *Stage Beauty* demonstrate that, far from being fixed identities on bureaucratic forms and categorization operations, race and gender are social practices that evolve over time, in the presence of each other, and in different social spaces. Naturalistic acting and acoustic strategies in the former film attempt to make cross-gender enactment 'invisible' and transparent, while heavy stylization of stage presentations of Desdemona and Othello in the latter film draw attention to the gendering and race-making practices themselves, making cross-gender roles legible and the primary theme of its narrative.

## PERFORMATIVITY, RACE, AND TRANS STUDIES

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Distinct from conventional understanding of performance as an artistic form, performativity—how language tacitly or overtly conditions social actions—permeates all narratives. Characters and readers behave in particular manners to fit in or decolonize social norms. Socially structured reciprocal, and reiterative speech acts and nonverbal communication are key components of our cultural life. By drawing attention to embodied performativity, I am challenging anti-corporeality (a distaste for bodily ideas, Stam 2005, 6) and the privileging of formally printed texts over such ephemera as live performance, film screenings, and publicity photos. In his study of the literary prejudice against film, Robert Stam describes logophilia—giving pre-eminence to written words over visual signs—as class prejudice (7). Ella Shohat has similarly called for a move beyond 'an iconophobia rooted in the adoration of the word, and beyond a logophobia rooted in the fetishism of the image' (2004, 43). In its capacity to both resist and celebrate the artificiality of racial and gender norms, performance is a useful tool to deconstruct naturalized, default positions on these social practices.

Since the performativity of language enacts both tacit and overt transness, I define trans performance capaciously to include not only testimonial memoirs and works by trans-identified actors that address diverse gender experiences but also,

significantly, trans-adjacent productions that depict tacit transness but without characters who explicitly identify as trans. As important as it is to celebrate trans self-representation, there are key benefits to expanding the scope of trans literature through the notion of performativity, one of them being the exposure of the partiality of all gendered positions. One of the preconceptions is cisgender sexism, the belief that cisgender people's lives are more natural and legitimate than those of trans people (Serano 10). We can de-centre cis-sexism that has been passed on as a default position in literary criticism by re-reading works that were previously mislabelled as non-trans.

Performance and adaptation studies are useful lenses to examine, simultaneously, racial and trans practices, because of the sociality—or communal characteristics—of race and gender. Performance in general can also peel back layers of assumption about sartorial and social meanings of race and gender. The performance space is a transitory space through which actors and characters traverse. Drawing on C. Riley Snorton's *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity*, my trans methodologies promote an understanding of race and trans 'in transitive relation' (since these categories overlap in their referentiality to embodied difference (2017, 6). Trans, in this context, is an umbrella term as well as a verb, 'the expression of an action that requires a direct object to complete its sense of meaning' (Snorton 2017, 6). The performing arts are conducive to this understanding of transness as an action that is conducted in relation to a direct object, as in transing gender and transing history.

My theory of performativity hinges on two tenets: (1) that gender as social practices—mannerism, sartorial choices, grooming habits, uses of voice—evolve over time and in different social spaces; and (2) that these practices are constituted, and sometimes undermined, by performative speech acts, by words that delineate ever-moving social boundaries and interpersonal relationships. Building upon these premises, my performativity theory is informed by trans perspectives. I deploy it here to interpret dramatic actions that represent tacit transness even if the characters or actors do not use our contemporary vocabulary of 'identifying as trans'.

The performing arts are an important tool for tackling monoracial assumptions and cis-sexism, given their power of embodied representation, as seen in *As We Like It* and *Stage Beauty*. Both cis and trans practices can be performative in this context, which puts dominant and minoritized social groups on equal footing. In *Stage Beauty*, Restoration-era rehearsals and performances of *Othello* make up a large portion of the film about fluid gender and racial practices. This film shows that there is affinity between adaptation studies and trans studies, because both reject the notion of purity and both involve culturally transformative practices. Adaptations transform narratives into new forms of artistic expression. Both fields investigate the consistent rewritings of artistic and embodied experiences.

Trans studies offers parallel tools to accomplish the same task to denaturalize 'originary' concepts in the field of gender studies. Over the past decade, trans studies has broken down not only notions of prescriptive normativity in body image and social behaviours, but also traditional hierarchies of binary genders, or the supposedly

‘natural’ and typical male and female bodies. The hierarchies, as we have seen, are not natural but merely naturalized by cisgender history.

Seen through a trans studies perspective, Kynaston’s blackface Othello is ‘transitive’, because it is part of his transition from what some characters see as ‘deviant’ to conformist roles. The stage space is also transitive for Kynaston, because he constructs new identities for his characters and himself there. His performance of violent Black masculinity depends upon the projected vulnerability of white femininity, previously presented by him through the role of Desdemona. In the end, Kynaston’s appropriations of racial and gender roles expand existing social structures for discussing race and gender.

The notion of performance can be a double-edged sword, for, after all, detractors often accuse trans people of ‘performing’ to ‘pass’ as someone else to deceive the society and to gain access to the ‘wrong’ restroom. Nonetheless, trans performances can serve socially reparative purposes through characterization and representation. Moreover, performance illustrates how seemingly contradictory notions can be true at the same time. It destabilizes the idea of singularity and the perceived absolutism of signifiers such as gender.

The notion of social performance becomes, in works such as *Stage Beauty*, a negating trait of trans life and racial minorities. As a trans character played by a cis-actor, Kynaston reinscribes the sexed body into the social-constructivist discourse about gender. As a white actor playing a Black character, Kynaston follows Restoration-era conventions to trans Othello’s race in his blackface performance. Just as he routes imaginations of ideal femininity through Desdemona’s fragile whiteness in earlier scenes, towards the end of the film Kynaston structures toxic masculinity through his blackface Othello. Race becomes a prosthesis and a heuristic device in Kynaston’s gender practices.

As useful as performance may be in deconstructing all sorts of binaries, racial minorities and trans artists should not be expected to shoulder the burden of deconstructing the gender binary or racialized norms. Trans practices and ‘diversity casting’ should not be instrumentalized to service more dominant communities. Scholarship should serve the marginalized communities. For instance, in queer scholarship that uses the notion of performativity, trans individuals are sometimes written over and rendered invisible. As a result, Jay Prosser raises objections to Judith Butler’s use of trans sufferings merely as a metaphor for her theory of gender performativity (1998, 45–47).

## PEDAGOGY: INCLUSIVE VOCABULARY

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Since our students come from different backgrounds, our students are themselves multidisciplinary, which calls for multidisciplinary pedagogical methods. We can practise critical race-oriented trans studies and trans-inclusive race studies in the classroom by exploring such questions as: How might the meanings of Shakespeare’s plays change

if we consider them as trans performances rather than cis-centric stories requiring suspension of disbelief about cross-gender roles? What if the body of a Black trans character and an actor's somatic presence exist on a continuum rather than in a binary relationship of 'substitution'? How do racism and transmisogyny draw on each other's oppressive regimes and ideologies? How does race-making—the production and dissemination of racial categories in life and the arts—enforce representational practices of gender? Why has the enactment of race-making and gender practices been historically predicated upon substitutions (as in substituting an actor in drag with the character being depicted)?

Racial and trans experiences and perspectives can be productively incorporated into a socially inclusive classroom. Global perspectives can help us tackle the pervasive whiteness and cis-sexism by deconstructing the binary logic of a Black-white and masculine-feminine order and by attending to such 'between and betwixt' characters (*King John* 4.2.77-78) as Aaron and Tamora's baby in *Titus Andronicus*, the child of Launcelot Gobbo and an unnamed 'Moorish' woman in *The Merchant of Venice*, the changeling in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Cleopatra, Viola, and others who can be read as trans or mixed race. False binaries naturalize some concepts as monolithic and fixed.

One caveat in the teaching of minoritized experiences is some students' assumption that critical race and trans studies are only relevant to nonbinary students of colour. In some cases, students are hindered by the idea that only those who embody particular identities are entitled to speak up or care about minority issues. Olúfemi O Táíwò has cautioned against the tendency to only listen to the 'lived experience' of oppression and not take action against injustice (2022, 70), and Judith Butler has similarly argued that 'no one needs to represent all Black experience in order to track, expose and oppose systemic racism' (Gleeson 2021). All forms of knowledge of transness and race are useful in allyship and our collective pursuit of social justice, including knowledge that is derived from one's embodied experiences as well as knowledge that emerges from thinking through a trans lens and being adjacent to transness and racialized otherness (see McRuer and Johnson on disability studies, 2014, 141). Cultivating a sense of belonging is critically important, but personally embodying all of the identities and practices is not a prerequisite to opposing racism and transmisogyny.

The first step towards building an inclusive classroom is an inclusive vocabulary. It is important to examine implicit biases that structure the language about race and gender so that language ceases to function as a proxy for discrimination. While there is nothing inherently immoral with seeing the world through one's cisgender situatedness, it is problematic when one perspective becomes the only legitimate way to know the world or a set of normalized prejudices (e.g., white cis-sexism) that organize social life. I would like to offer an overview of terminology and a reflection on the practice of content warning.

While recognizing the validity of binary trans practices, I have avoided such directional terms as 'male-to-female (MTF)' or 'female-to-male (FTM)'. Now considered offensive and reductive, these terms single trans characters and individuals out. As

Susan Stryker writes, those labels ‘make about as much sense as calling someone a heterosexual-to-gay man’ (2008, 11). More productive are such umbrella terms as trans masculinity and trans femininity to describe masculine and feminine expressions with the understanding that individuals who use those terms in self descriptions may not always identify fully as binary male or female in all contexts. While imperfect, these terms do move us beyond the traditional idea of ‘cross-dressers’ teetering the stage for pity or laughs.

Similarly problematic is the concept of crossdressing. Beyond consciously self-identified usage, the word crossdressing is a misnomer in most contexts, because it is informed by the cis-sexist idea of sartorial camouflage. It suggests that trans bodies are inauthentic. Crossdressing is a convenient fiction about compartmentalized, binary genders. It is not an effective tool to analyse a work such as *Twelfth Night*, because it is a directional label that privileges some gender practices over others.

In the same vein, the categories of ‘preferred’ pronouns and names are not affirming, because they erroneously emphasize preferences over lived realities by suggesting gender expressions are a ‘lifestyle’ with choices. One’s names and pronouns are not a preference but rather a fact.

Further, such phrases as ‘homophobia’ or ‘transphobia’ should be replaced by the more accurate terms: anti-gay and anti-trans. Using the—phobia suffix outside clinical contexts reflects able-bodied biases and medicalizes bigotry (Rothman 2012). The —phobia suffix implies a pathological fear certified by the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM). Individuals who discriminate against gay or trans people do so not out of pathological fear but rather hate.

## PEDAGOGY: ETHICS OF CARE

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It is equally important to use words and acronyms intently, with precision, and with care. Sometimes, BAME (‘Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic’ in the UK) and BIPOC (‘Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour’ in the USA), instead of ‘Black’, are used to discuss Black issues when someone feels uncomfortable naming Blackness. Defaulting to a supposedly inclusive acronym about people of colour in general is a form of euphemism at best and racist erasure at worst. My aforementioned experience at the conference may be a result of this type of usage, since the speaker used ‘women of color’ to refer exclusively to Black women rather than to the general population of non-white women.

In social and journalistic contexts, those acronyms are sometimes perceived to lessen the discomfort of the dominant group under the pretence of inclusiveness, similar to how the acronym LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) is tossed around in discussions of cis-homosexuality that exclude the ‘T’ on the list. When an umbrella term such as LGBTQ conflates gender identity with sexual orientation, speakers who use the acronym often render the ‘T’ (trans community) silent and invisible. In



these cases, the speaker does not mean what they say when they use the acronym. They empty out the words and turn them into a harmful social ritual of ‘inclusion’.

Beyond language, we can reexamine some practices that are assumed to be inclusive. It can be counterproductive to ask participants in a room to share their personal pronouns publicly, because having readily available, fixed, and comfortable pronouns is itself a privileged position. Some people are not ready to share their pronouns, while others do not wish to be forced into public confessions. Still others may change their pronouns depending on context or over time. When implemented unilaterally as a one-size-fits-all imposition, this gesture of inclusion risks becoming empty rituals.

Similarly, while it is important to centre racial minorities’ voices, there is a fine line between respectful deferral and tokenism. Some students may not wish to draw attention to a particular part of their life experiences. Other students’ cultural background and immigration and minority status may not be readily visible, such as mixed race backgrounds of multiracial individuals (Parker et al. 2015).

These gestures of inclusion may not be inclusive in some contexts due to some individuals’ need to avoid tokenistic racial and gender visibility.

One strategy to prevent the emptying out of these supposedly inclusive social rituals about race and gender is the ethics of care, which is informed by the assumption that all characters and readers need care and give care to each other. Literary criticism can and should be a process of care. One may become aware of a character’s need for caring, and proceed to meet that need which has been identified (Tronto 1998, 16–17). As students bring their personal experiences to bear on the discussion of fictional and dramatic situations, the same ethics of care can ensure openness and inclusiveness. Instructors can thus become intellectually equipped and emotionally ready to support students with different needs. Education is only reparative when it is designed from the ground up to be truly inclusive, rather than being a mindless replica of evolving political correctness.

## PEDAGOGY: HARMFUL VISIBILITY

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Another notion that has been habitually regarded as inclusive is the idea of visibility for minoritized communities, especially trans people of colour. Trans visibility is not always empowering or desirable. On one hand, trans visibility remains important to some people in the community, as evidenced by the International Transgender Day of Visibility created by Rachel Crandall-Crocker in 2009. It was meant to counterbalance the more sombre Transgender Day of Remembrance which honours trans homicide victims. On the other hand, some individuals do need the stability afforded by binary gender practices that align with predominant notions of normativity. The stability enables greater access to resources. The sense of safety is very valuable. In these cases, increased visibility can be harmful. Therefore, it is useful to keep in mind that emphasizing visibility can be liberating for one group of individuals while causing distress to another.

A trans-inclusive notion of performativity, informed by the aforementioned ethics of care, can correct some of the biases that have been baked into the language in circulation. The problems caused by the aforementioned cis-sexism are twofold. First, it enforces undesirable visibility by legitimizing the notion of dramaturgical substitution of one fixed identity for another equally fixed identity. Second, text-centric scholarship tends to regard gender practices as more fixed, which reflects the bias that printed text is also fixed. Performance dislodges these unexamined assumptions that text alone encompasses everything the words connote.

## PEDAGOGY: RETHINKING CONTENT WARNING

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Last, but not least, content warning can be restructured in these new contexts. Some commonly listed warnings may attend only to certain groups' comfort. Misgendering acts (using the wrong pronouns, deadnaming a person, or calling someone by their birth name after they have changed their name) are not typically considered traumatizing or triggering by Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) training programs and content warnings. Outside of trans studies courses, transmisogyny is rarely considered 'triggering'. Course content warnings, if used, should critique institutionalized cis-sexism which has led to the assignment of cisgender status to all characters. This bias makes it seem natural for cis artists and scholars (including those who are heterosexual and homosexual) to claim and exercise authority, while silencing a range of social practices that go under the label of trans.

In literary studies, more often than not, such warnings are based on characters' explicit actions or language. The themes considered traumatizing often reflect the concerns of mainstream minorities if not those of the majority community. We can use theories of performativity to guide students to pay attention to characters' intentions that may or may not have been explicitly stated, and develop a more inclusive list of potentially triggering themes.

Take *Titus Andronicus*, for example. Dominating a typical list of triggering themes are violence and sexual assault, focusing on the rape of Lavinia. While the centring of Lavinia's plight comes with good reasons and could be used to promote social justice in the context of the #MeToo movement, it would be problematic to leave out antiBlackness and infanticide. When warnings focus on Lavinia and gloss over the white Nurse's deriding comments about the yet unnamed Black baby as she urges Aaron to kill the 'joyless, dismal, black, and sorrowful issue ... as loathsome as a toad' (4.2.69–70), they send a message that prioritizes the comfort of cisgender white women in the classroom. Further, towards the end of the tragedy, Lucius coerces Aaron the Moor to confess to his crimes 'of murders, rapes, and massacres' (5.1.64) by threatening to hang him and his baby son ('Hang him on this tree, / And by his side his fruit of bastardy' 5.1.47–48).

Content warnings that ignore these incidents contribute to the myths, identified by Celia R. Daileader, about black male rapacity and the constant need to shield white women from inter-racial contamination (2005, 8–9).

## CONCLUSION

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We can expand students' horizon by examining unspoken assumptions about racial identities and by identifying tacit transness. It is socially and aesthetically important to create and study works led by trans artists which have testimonial, educational value, but it is equally meaningful to reinterpret works that have been labelled otherwise. In particular, highlighting tacit transness is an important step to decolonize testimonial transness which has been instrumentalized for the benefit of cisgender communities in the form of 'inspiration porn' (Young 2014).

For example, how do gendered encodings inform Banquo's and Macbeth's loaded question to the witches: "You should be woman, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so" (1.3.40–41) and "what are you" (43)? A trans-inclusive perspective enhances our understanding of Shakespeare's plays, as well as characters who go through various forms of transformation, such as Viola (as pageboy Cesario for most of the dramatic action in *Twelfth Night*), Falstaff (as the Witch of Brentford to escape Ford's house in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), Rosalind venturing into the woods as Ganymede in *As You Like It* (note that Celia, Phoebe, and Audrey were also played by boy actors in Shakespeare's time), and Imogen (as the boy Fidele in *Cymbeline*). Cesario tells an inquisitive Duke Orsino that he is 'all the daughters of [his] father's house, / And all the brothers too' (2.4.117–118). The trans lens opens up such moments for diverse interpretations beyond literal-mindedness. These characters have transformative experiences, move between demarcated social spaces, or break free of social impositions.

In a similar vein, trans methods help us refocus our attention on 'invisible' racial identities, just as critical race studies enrich trans studies by drawing attention to non-white gender formations such as *hijra*, two-spirit, Polynesian *fa'afafine*, and the all-male Kabuki and the all-female Takarazuka theatres' cross-gender practices. Such works as the aforementioned *As We Like It* have not been studied or taught as part of the emerging canon of trans cinema and of 'race works' due to the tendency to gravitate towards explicitly trans narratives and the assumption that only the work of actors of colour in Anglo-American contexts are worthy of analysis. As David Sterling Brown (2021) and others have pointed out, studying Shakespeare and race should involve an investigation of the construction of normativities, such as whiteness, rather than simply identifying representations of blackness in a typical 'race play' such as *Othello*.

Sexism often racializes gender expressions, and racist attitudes appropriate gender stereotypes. In scrutinizing marked and unmarked, visible and invisible, and remarkable and commonplace identity practices, critical race and trans studies reveal that most

claims of political neutrality or historical objectivity are nothing more than an illusion based on willing acceptance of presumptions.

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# SHAKESPEARE, RACE, AND TRANS STUDIES

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THE following contributions by Alexa Alice Joubin and Abdulhamit Arvas examine how racial and gender practices often inform and intersect with each other in their work on early modern drama including Shakespeare and performance and adaptation studies. Far from being fixed identities on bureaucratic forms and categorization operations, race and gender are in fact social practices that evolve over time and in different social spaces. In particular, Joubin shows that trans studies—with its critical tools to understand gender variance and atypical bodies—solidifies critical race studies' orientation towards recognizing and supporting minority life experiences. Critical race methods can also help trans studies address its often-unacknowledged whiteness. Likewise, Arvas argues that critical race studies offers insights to realize the hierarchical organizations of humans to create and maintain certain modes of governmentality. Both trans and racial practices are inseparable components of real-life experience and embodiment. The study of embodied beings and identities, therefore, has much to gain by bringing the two realms to bear on each other. Joubin and Arvas apply performance studies methods—critical tools that are designed to capture transformative cultural practices on stage and on screen—to critical race and transgender studies. Both of them recognize that the personal is both political and pedagogical. After mapping out some tenets of their current work on early modern trans, race, and Shakespeare studies, they conclude with pedagogical implications of putting





race and trans studies in conversation. Rather than reading the pieces one after another and from the beginning to the end, as one would with conventional chapters, readers are invited to toggle between corresponding sections within the two companion pieces.



she has received grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Humanities Center, and the Schomburg Center for Research in African-American Culture. Recent essays include 'I Can't Love This the Way You Want Me To: Archival blackness' in *Postmedieval* (2020) and 'Can You Be White and Hear This? The Racial Art of Listening in *American Moor* and *Desdemona*' in *White People in Shakespeare*.

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