

IHUM: Bodies in Place, Section 05 (Szabo)
11/21/03

Anna Deavere Smith: Twilight in Los Angeles

In lecture and section we have talked a lot about the ways in which “reality” is relative and subjective, and the extent to which and ways in which individuals carry around their own realities in their heads. We’ve considered virtual worlds as a collective extension of this idea, focusing on the idea of the computer game as a way of simulating reality in an environment without immediate real-world effects. We’ve also considered what gets left out when we attempt to translate one medium into another -- text into computer game, culture into textual analysis, real world experience into symbolic system -- and thought about what new insights we gain into both the subject of our attention and the medium of expression when we make this effort. This film shows another side of the discussion about competing realities, demonstrating what happens when individual and group “realities” conflict in real-world, material terms.

Questions for viewing and followup discussion in panfora and in class next Wednesday, 11/26/03 :

1. How would you describe Smith’s technique? As you consider this question, review some of the ideas about narrative, representation, setting, and performance that we have discussed this quarter. How have her specific choices affected the impact of the piece?
2. What would you say was the ultimate theme or message of the piece? Do you feel like Smith had a particular agenda or point of view she was trying to get across, or was she trying for a balanced portrait? What conclusions does the piece draw, if any?
3. Did the film change or add to your understanding of the LA Riots, their causes, and their effects? What specifically influenced you?
4. Now view the piece from a variety of disciplinary perspectives: how would you critique it as a performance? As a piece of history? As an artwork? As a social commentary? As an anthropological report? How does viewing the film in each of these lights change or add to your understanding of the work?
5. Go back to our texts. How might you translate T-LA into a *Crito*-like dialogue? What would a *Pillow Book* of this material look like? From whose perspective might it be effectively written? A Richard II-like drama, with attention to the downfall of a particular individual figure (rather than a social event)? Whose downfall? What would Smith’s “Sad L.A.” (one translation of *Tristes Tropiques* is “Sad Tropics”) narrative about her work look like (think “The Making Of...”)?