

Biosketch — Richard Robeson
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Richard Robeson is Adjunct Assistant Professor of Bioethics, Wake Forest University Center for Bioethics, Health and Society; and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Social Medicine, University of North Carolina School of Medicine. His teaching applies Platonist pedagogical methods to the examination of bioethics issues in a narrative ethics sub-specialty he calls “dramatic arts casuistry”: the development and presentation of case studies using devices typically associated with dramatic art.

He first came to the attention of UNC’s Department of Social Medicine in 1984, after his “Analgesia,” an original multi-media — text, dance, projected images and music — theater piece that examined the psychological and emotional detritus of substance abuse, played at Durham’s North Carolina Central University to standing-room-only audiences and critical acclaim. After working initially as Consultant on a multi-year public bioethics project headquartered in Social Medicine, he was invited to join the faculty in 1989-90, first as Visiting Scholar and shortly thereafter he assumed his current position. His Second-Year Seminar, “Medicine and Theater” to-date stands alone in the development of original, multidisciplinary contributions to Lit-Med pedagogy, including being invited to give Grand Rounds in UNC’s Department of Family Medicine — a rare if not unique honor for an undergraduate medical school class.

“Camera Obscura,” the most recent iteration of this process, was created during the Spring 2011 semester in the WFU Master of Arts in Bioethics course, “Performable Case Studies” (BIE727).

Professor Robeson’s research interests are focused on the interaction of narrative and counter-narrative, especially those that are hidden or largely unexplored. As a former high school football and track athlete, and a lifelong sports fan, he believes that there is much about sports, its ethics, narratives and counter-narratives that fit this characterization. His 2007 paper, “Athlete or Guinea Pig — Sports and Enhancement Research,” co-authored with Wake Forest University bioethics scholar Nancy MP King, has been called a radically different line of inquiry into the sports-ethics intersection. A concomitant interest is the promulgation of the medical humanities, and dramatic arts casuistry in particular, as a means of examining bioethics issues that is not otherwise

available. Guest Faculty invitations have included Tuskegee University National Center for Bioethics in Research & Healthcare (NCBRH) (2001) and Wake Forest University School of Law (2008). And his work in this regard was the centerpiece of an environmental ethics/policy/research project at the UNC School of Public Health (2002-07).

Robeson holds degrees in History (1974) and Literary Criticism (1975) from North Carolina State University, with special concentrations in Philosophy and Religion, Creative Writing and African American Studies. In addition to his lifelong interest in sports he has an equally enthusiastic devotion to music, as an expression of belief and narrative, for its potential to facilitate healing, and as arena in which its practitioners can benefit from the kind of body-awareness that is typical of athletes but almost unheard-of in musicians. This inspired him to become a fitness professional. He completed his training in 1999 at Baylor Sports Medicine Institute (BSMI), for which he later served as Examiner in the BSMI Certification Services Practicum. Other consultancies include the NC Humanities Council, the NCBRH, and several terms as Grants Panelist for the NC Arts Council in Literature (Poetry and Fiction) and Music (General Support, New Works, and Composer Fellowships).

His own work has been supported by the NC Humanities and Arts Councils, The Duke Endowment, The AJ Fletcher Foundation, the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Although nourished during his formative period on American musical idioms, a lifelong interest in the art of improvisation led inevitably to the study of classical traditions that encompass improvisational imperatives. His teachers have included — in addition to American composer and guitar virtuoso Ralph Towner (Naropa Institute, Boulder, CO) — masters of North Indian (Hindustani), South Indian (Carnatic) and Middle Eastern music.

May 2009 marked the conclusion of a two-semester residency in the UNC-Chapel Hill Dept. of Music, during which he taught Guitar and was Interim Director of the UNC Guitar Ensemble. He is the first person in UNC's history to hold simultaneous appointments in its medical school and its music department.