

Conversation Starters

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992

1. In her 1993 essay, "The Shades of Loss," Anna Deavere Smith says, "Using the power of entertainment, spectacle, and dialogue, theater and film can participate in civic discourse and even influence national attitudes." Does this statement have the same meaning in 2012? What is the job of artist and audience in this conversation?
2. Does it matter that these interviews are presented verbatim as noted on the copyright page? Thinking of the recent ruckus over Mike Daisey's reporting of working conditions at Apple's plants in China in *The Agony and Ecstasy of Steve Jobs*, what is the relationship between play, documentary and journalism?
3. One way that the author has tremendous influence over the narrative is through the ordering of the monologues. How does Smith arrange these pieces? Does it change anything about what we are hearing? Can we glean anything about her objectives?
4. Smith places herself squarely in the center of these stories. What role does she play as documentarian? Is she, as interviewer, a character?
5. What is your recollection of the Rodney King story or of the L.A. riots? How does your knowledge of these events influence your experience reading the play? Is it important to be given any historical information before experiencing the play?
6. Is there a call-to-action? What do you feel after reading the last page? What do you think viewers felt when leaving the original performances?
7. How important are the line-breaks in the text? In written form, is this in verse? Or some other form?

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