

ART 6933 Critical Methodologies Section 09G4

Instructor: Coco Fusco

Class schedule: Mondays 11:45-2:45, FAC 102

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Preferred communication method: Email

Office Hours: Tuesdays 10:30 – 11:30 and Wednesdays 11:00-12:00

Office: Fine Arts Bldg. D, Room 233

DESCRIPTION:

This seminar will focus on writing for artists. It is designed to help sharpen student's technical and conceptual fluency with writing about art, including but not limited to his or her own work. There will be weekly writing assignments, the purpose of which is to isolate and clarify the key elements of writing used to describe and comment on art and aesthetic experience. We will devote sections of the course to experimenting with description, analysis and critique, and personal chronicles. Students will also be expected to produce artist's statements, a thesis proposal and an annotated bibliography.

Every week we will spend the first part of class analyzing brief examples of different kinds of prose styles, genres and expository tactics that artists and critics use to write about art and the experience of being an artist. We will look at personal chronicles, memoirs reviews, manifestoes and theoretical tracts by contemporary artists. After that students will have time to work on writing assignments while the instructors works one-on-one with each student, reviewing their research methods, outlining strategies and commenting on their writing. You should bring a laptop to class if you have one. If not we will find a place for you to work on a computer during class. If students do not complete the writing assignment in class they should do so prior to the class the following week.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS: All readings for this course are available via Dropbox. Students should download all the readings at the beginning of the term and complete assigned readings prior to each class. Students must complete all assignments on time in order to pass this course. This course is a writing workshop and in order to participate you must write on a weekly basis. No incompletes will be issued.

Writing assignments when produced in class or as homework should be typed in 12-point font and double-spaced with 1-inch margins. Unless otherwise noted in the syllabus, each assignment should be 250 words long. 250 words are equivalent to a page of text that is formatted in this manner.

OBJECTIVES AND GOALS: This class is designed to improve students writing and interpretive skills. The goal is to encourage students to become more effective spokespeople for their respective creative practices and to enhance their ability to use different modes of aesthetic analysis strategically.

ATTENDANCE POLICIES: Students are expected to attend and participate in all sessions. If you are absent due to illness, a family emergency, religious observance, or another academic obligation, you must provide a written explanation to the instructor and when warranted, a note from a medical professional or your advisor. The UF policy on attendance can be found here:
[https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx - absences](https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx-absences)

METHOD OF EVALUATION: You will be assessed based on the quality of your participation in class and your writing assignments. Any student who may be in danger of not receiving credit or not passing the course will receive a written warning prior to the end of the term. The final grade for the course will be determined by the following: quality and consistency of the student's participation in discussions (50%); quality of writing assignments (50%). The UF policies on grading can be found here:
<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>

Policy on cell phones, laptops and recording: Cell phones should be turned on silent during class sessions. Laptops may only be used to produce work in class. Seminars may not be recorded without prior consent of the instructor.

For students with disabilities: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation. Link to Disability Resource Center:
<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>

Policy regarding non-completion of assignments: Students must complete all assignments on time and participate in discussions regularly to pass the course.

AUGUST 22: INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS

Analysis of a text by Rosalind Krauss.

Students will complete the *Getting to Know Your Goals Questionnaire* and discuss their responses.

AUGUST 29: DESCRIPTION: OBJECTS

Analysis of Foucault's description of *Las Meninas* in **The Order of Things**

Writing Assignment: 250 words. Describe an art object. That object can be flat, such as a drawing or painting, or a three dimensional sculpture. Start out by making a list

of all of its physical characteristics and then build two or three paragraphs from there. Concentrate exclusively on describing the thing, not on its author, its history, the experience of seeing or its context. It is highly recommended that you work from direct observation of the object and not from a photograph of the work. We can hold class in the MFA studios this week to be able to look at the works being written about.

SEPTEMBER 6: DESCRIPTION 2: EVENTS/ENVIRONMENTS

Analysis of text by: Michael Asher, September 4 – September 28, 1973, Heiner Friedrich Gallery, Cologne, West Germany.

Writing Assignment: 250 words. Describe an art event or an immersive artwork (such as an installation). Start again with a list of elements you want to take into account. What are the materials involved in the creation and presentation of the event? Are they all visual or are some meant to appeal to aural, oral or olfactory senses? Is there a story? How does the event progress? Is there a proscribed order of things in the environment? Consider what makes an event or an environment different from an object. Take into account how time plays a role in shaping the work. Consider the work's duration and its pacing, is there any point at which you can apprehend the entire work? How does the event or environment affect your body? How does experience in time affect you as a viewer?

SEPTEMBER 12: CHRONICLE

NB: PLEASE ATTEND LECTURE BY WANDA RAIMUNDI ORTIZ TONIGHT AT 6PM. YOU WILL BE ASKED TO WRITE ABOUT ARTIST LECTURES LATER IN THE TERM SO TAKE NOTES!

Analysis of Rev. Billy's "Counter Visions in the Disney Store" in **What Should I do if Reverend Billy is in My Store**

Writing Assignment: Describe one afternoon or evening's activity that leads to the creation of an artwork or describe the experience of creating an artwork. You could be in your studio or out doing research, gathering materials or engaged in another activity that contributes to your creative process. Or you could be performing in front of an audience or before a camera. Single out important details of the allotted time period. Make a list of the activities. Recall and describe what your physical, emotional and intellectual experiences were during the activity. Try to diversify the sensory experiences recalled if it is appropriate. Consider tactile, aural, oral and olfactory experiences as well as visual experiences in your chronicle. The key to writing a compelling chronicle is not to be exhaustive in your account of what happened – you are best off being selective in what you decide to reveal. Allow the kind of impression you want to create to determine the choice of details.

SEPTEMBER 19: MEMOIR Analysis of “A project by *Louise Bourgeois: Child Abuse*,” *Artforum*, Dec. 1982. and of Ann Hamilton’s *Making Not Knowing*

Writing Assignment: Recall a personal relationship, an event or experience in your past that has had a lasting impact on your art practice. Because the length of the text will be short, choose a particular highlight of the relationship, the event or the experience to concentrate on for this exercise. Also include at least two sentences that explain how that highlight is representative of what is important to you and that make clear why it is important to your current art practice. What you choose to focus on does not have to be momentous – sometimes seemingly minor events end up having lasting importance for us. What is key here however is making the connection between past and present as explicit as possible.

SEPTEMBER 26: ANALYSIS – QUALITATIVE JUDGEMENT AND CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Analysis of Isabelle Graw, “Too Early, Too Late: Market Success Versus Symbolic Relevance, from **High Price: Art between the Market and Celebrity Culture**

Writing Assignment: Choose an artwork and devise an argument in favor of or against its relevance. Keep in mind that the goal is not to explain *why* you like the work – you are supposed to justify its importance to the field of art. That said, your attraction to the work could be included in your argument. Ground your assessment in aspects of the work – such as its form, its topicality, the locale of its presentation, or its capacity to alter your understanding of art and its significance.

OCTOBER 3: ANALYSIS – CONTEXTUAL CRITICISM

Analysis of Claire Bishop’s *Out of Body: Black Box, White Cube, Public Space*

Writing Assignment: Choose an artwork and explain how it is expressive of or particularly relevant to the cultural moment from which it emerges. Consider the many ways that art can be meaningful that extend beyond formal considerations. Does the work have particular social, political, economic or spiritual significance? You may also want to consider its patrons or viewers. Who are or were they? Were there limitations that made the work inaccessible to certain people? Is/was the work especially meaningful to any particular group? Does/did the place in which the work was presented affect its significance? Were there any political, cultural or religious rituals that were implicated or commented on by the work? Were their historical elements in the work that would be particularly resonant and affect audience response to the work?

OCTOBER 10: ANALYSIS - THEORETICAL

Analysis of Slavoj Žižek’s “Why are Laibach and the NSK not Fascists?” and “Jack Bauer and the Ethics of Urgency,” *In These Times*, 2006

Writing Assignment: When theorists address the visual arts they usually do so to illustrate a socio-cultural logic or system that they are attempting to analyze. For example, Walter Benjamin argued that photography and film were the forms best suited to representing the social formations of early 20th century capitalism, while Frederic Jameson argued that video art was most evocative of the phenomenon of cognitive mapping that he argued was endemic to the postmodern era of late capitalism. Many theorists also single out individual works to illustrate their theories: for example, Jacques Lacan discusses anamorphosis in Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors* to elaborate his theory of the Gaze.

Choose a theoretical term or idea you are interested in. Make sure you can provide a precise definition of the term's meaning in two or three sentences. Select an artwork that is expressive of this theoretical term or idea. Make a list of elements of the artwork that you seek to relate to the theoretical term. Then, elaborate an argument that demonstrates how they are related.

OCTOBER 17: ARTIST STATEMENTS 1

Analysis of *Untitled Statement* by Maya Lin (from *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*) and William Powhida's "Decoding the Trump Regime"

Writing Assignment: An artist statement is a brief summary of an artist's intention as expressed through their work. It is the text that most frequently represents the artist's point of view and is publicly circulated at galleries, museum exhibitions and in the context of grant proposals and other solicitations.

For this assignment, you should write a straightforward artist statement, which means that you should take its premise seriously and not satirize the form. It should include: a summary of your vision of art; a sentence or two that characterizes your practice; a list of key materials and processes in your work; and a list of important critical and historical influences. If there is a philosophical or theoretical idea that is central to your artistic practice you should note what it is and what strategies you use to address it.

OCTOBER 24: ARTIST STATEMENTS 2

NB: Make sure to attend lecture by LaToya Ruby Frazier

Analysis of *Statement* by Dieter Roth (1976)

D. Roth was born 46 years ago among the butchering Germans at that horrible stretch of time, when that cannibal, awful Hitler, Adolf, was just getting the Germans going at their best hit; butchering war. Hell was loose, both Roth survived, beating and scolding he survived, shitting and pissing in his timid pants, poor shaking little turd, he even managed to live through that rainstorm of bombs and grenades awful

smashing horror, brought about on all, the living and the dead, by the horridly cruel

cool English and the annihilatingly maneating cannibals those fantastically cruel citizens of the so-called United States of North America, horrible mankillers. Roth got out of that place (described) by chance of being one of the citizens of his horrible home country, namely, self-righteously, murderously Christian Switzerland. He survived, pantpissing there for twelve years. Then one of the friendly helped him out of it, getting to wonderful, wonderful Copenhagen. Having managed to happily survive there for a year matrimony got him, catching up with him. An awfully, dreadfully fearful drain he fell down into, wriggling there, at the bottom, pissing in his wet pants, shitting and drinking terrible, awfully pissing lots, screaming for mercy. Again he managed to escape, this time to a place that soon proved to him to be full of his like, butchering bastards, dwellers in shit, pissing in their pissing wet pants, eating each other's awful bodies and souls, dwellers of Hell. He did escape though, to another place, thoughtful eyes watching him (the eyes of his second parents, his children), doubling hi raging shame. Steamer of the dampsteamingwets, shit pissing pants, stumbling around the corners of all the encompassing butcher's shop. Turdknicking awful bastard of fear, complaining. (D.R., Barcelona, 1976)

Statement by Rachel Harrison:

In much of Harrison's work, there is a kind of internal tug-of-war of elements, what the formalists called "relational" with respect to composition, extended to include social, economic, material, and "mediation" factors. And while other deployments of discontinuity and non sequitur often lead you back to an interpretive place, a place of thought, Harrison's work leads you to a place of non-thought, looking at the specific thing before you. The sculptures sit in the room like yearning creatures caked in the sludge of capitalist desire. Nothing here really seems anchored: like an acrobat, these impermanent materials put on a tour de force of formalistic skill. If social possibility is to be found here, it is in the way of families with nothing much to talk about anymore. The art is equivalent to being stranded in an airport.

Writing Assignment: There are numerous ways in which artists have adapted the artist statement format. They have made fun of its conventions, conveying the sense that their irreverent attitude is a key component of their artistic personae. They have expanded the statement to make more general comments about art and cultural theory. They have produced manifestoes as proposals for projects that are aimed at changing the rules of art.

For this assignment you should try to create an artist's statement that communicates your sense of who you are as a creative being, or what your view of art is without sticking to the rules of the previous assignment. You can use parody, storytelling, bombast, or critical theory to elaborate your statement.

OCTOBER 31: ARTISTS DEFINE THEIR TIMES

How and when do artists enter polemics about cultural politics?

Read: <https://hyperallergic.com/368290/censorship-not-the-painting-must-go-on->

dana-schutzs-image-of-emmett-till/

Writing Assignment: There have been numerous heated debates in 2017 about the relationship between art and politics. Some discussions have questioned whether public funds should be given to artists; others have focused on whether artists can or should make works about traumatic histories affecting ethnic groups other than their own. Other debates have been centered on public monuments that represent the Confederacy. Finally, many commentaries have emerged about the relevance of dystopian fiction – especially *1984* and *The Handmaid’s Tale* to our political present.

Choose one of these topics and write your own opinion piece on the subject.

Interesting articles for background:

Margaret Atwood: *What The Handmaid’s Tale Means in the Age of Trump*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/books/review/margaret-atwood-handmaids-tale-age-of-trump.html>

The Real Housewives of Gilead :

<https://www.advocate.com/commentary/2017/6/27/real-housewives-gilead>

Anne Ellegood: On Understanding the Complexities of Jimmie Durham’s Native Identity

<https://news.artnet.com/opinion/anne-ellegood-jimmie-durham-1033907>

Karen L. Cox: *Why Confederate Monuments Should Fall:*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/15/opinion/confederate-monuments-white-supremacy-charlottesville.html>

Ten Good Reasons to Eliminate Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts:

<http://www.heritage.org/report/ten-good-reasons-eliminate-funding-the-national-endowment-orthe-arts>

NOVEMBER 7: DISCUSSION SESSION

We will devote this class to an extended group discussion of the topics you will have written about relating to art and politics.

NOVEMBER 14: Analysis of Hito Steyerl’s *In Defense of the Poor Image*

PLEASE BE SURE TO ATTEND CAMERON ROWLAND’S LECTURE AT 6PM!

Writing Assignment: Choose two of the artist’s lectures from the fall of 2017 and write a two-page analysis in which you compare and contrast the different styles of

presentation and works by each artist. Remember to describe in your own words what each lecture was about. Remember to use examples.

NOVEMBER 21: NO CLASS

NOVEMBER 28: THESIS PROPOSALS

Presentation on strategies for writing effective thesis papers.

Writing Assignment: Your thesis proposal is a description of what you will create for your thesis exhibition. If you have not reached that point in your course of study then imagine a thesis exhibition you would like to create in the future. The proposal is also an outline of the argument that you will develop to analyze your work. The proposal should include a description of the works that will be presented in the exhibition that includes physical details (medium, scale, materials). You should also map out the argument you will elaborate about the meaning of your work, the key influences that shape it, and the theories and or ideas about art that are most important to your practice.

DECEMBER 5: Final Session Group presentation and assessment of writing samples.

END OF COURSE