Course Description

Theodor Adorno stated that “...even the abolition of art is respectful of art because it takes the truth claim of art seriously.” The roots of contemporary art and literature lie in the diverse activities of 20th and 21st century vanguards who prioritized concept, process, and procedure over creativity, originality, and expressivity. Far from abolishing art, or rendering it impersonal or meaningless, these movements expanded the category of art so that today art proliferates: mere concepts can create. Avant-gardes and their legacies challenge conventional ideas about creative process and redefine the role of artists and writers. Situating these radical ideas in history, students will explore techniques from the automatic practices of Surrealism and chance operations of Dada, to composer John Cage and the Black Mountain School, and on to proto-digital works by Fluxus and Oulipo. These lineages exert influence today on artists and writers as varied as John Baldessari, Tacita Dean, Paul Chan, Christian Marclay, Ann Hamilton, Charles Bernstein, Jen Bervin, Christian Bök, and Harryette Mullen. This course will guide students through hands-on exercises to move from concept to creation in their own art and writing. Students will participate in experimental modes to gain tools and methods for shaping and understanding their work.

Required Texts

*Schizophrenia* by Bhanu Kapil
*Sleeping with the Dictionary* by Harryette Mullen
Various handouts and pdfs via email and the course blog

(Highly) Recommended Text

*Against Expression: An Anthology of Conceptual Writing* by Craig Dworkin & Kenneth Goldsmith

Course Requirements

- 8 Assignments: 40
- Analyses: 10
- Participation & Attendance: 20
- Initiative & Growth: 10
- Final: 20
- Total Possible Points: 100
Project Assignments

This semester you will have **8** project assignments. Each project will be based on a different theme, but everyone will follow the same structure.

**01.** Begin by defining the process you will use to complete your project. Write down what you plan to do before you do it. A good way to approach this is to write a step-by-step “recipe” for your project. This can and should be skeletal, but just make sure you don’t forget any major bones!

Spend some time thinking this through because every detail has significance. Although this may seem like a tedious extra step, you’ll find that this planning stage is actually where you get to be most creative. This is your opportunity to inject your personality into your project and really make it your own. In the next step, when you are actually making your project, you will be executing your own instructions, so you’ll be following the steps in a more rote style.

**02.** Next, do your process, following the steps you laid out above. Try to stick to your plan!

Andy Warhol said, “Paintings are too hard. The things I want to show are mechanical. Machines have less problems. I’d like to be a machine, wouldn’t you?”

Try to execute your process as a machine would, without attachment to the outcome. Let things unfold.

**03.** Last, create a “report” to document your process. Your report could be the final product of your process, for example, a poem or a drawing. Or, if your process was ephemeral, you may need to devise a creative way to document it. Your report could be a photograph or series of photographs, a sound recording, a video, a pile of ashes, a transcribed memory, an interview with a witness, etc.

At this stage you have another opportunity to be creative in determining the appropriate form for your report. Think about what kind of “report” best captures the spirit of your project.

Of the **9** project themes we will cover, it is up to you to decide how to divide them up, but at the end of the semester, you must have:

- **6** writing projects and **6** art projects (of these, at least one must be an object)

The themes for the projects will be:

- **Automatic Writing or Drawing** (due 9/9)

  Automatism is a process used by the Surrealists to overcome the limitations of rational thinking by tapping into the subconscious mind. The spontaneous techniques of automatic writing and drawing include stream of consciousness, free association, blind drawing, *frottage* (rubbing), and *decalcomania* (blotting). Automatic process is always unedited in the moment, but artists and writers often use automatism to generate material, which they then shape through conscious editing after the fact.
Rules and Constraints (due 9/16)
A constraint is any set of rules you set out to follow. These rules limit your behavior in some way as you interact with a material or text. The limitation could be mild or extreme.
*Consider doing an “event score” based on your visit to the Yoko Ono exhibit at MoMA.

Assisted or Reciprocal Readymade or Appropriation (due 10/7)
To make an assisted or reciprocal readymade, you will “find” a readymade object and alter it in some way. To make an assisted readymade, add or change something about the object. To make a reciprocal readymade, use the object in a way that wasn’t intended, as in Duchamp’s famous example: “Use a Rembrandt as an ironing board!”
Your readymade “object” can be a thing, a text, an image, a piece of media, etc.

Chance (due 10/14)
Chance or randomness will determine your choice of actions, choice or marks, choice of words, selection of images, etc. Using the roll of a die to determine an action is an example of a chance process.

Cumulative or Generative (due 10/21)
A cumulative process is the repeated addition of material or text according to a set of rules. Layering and collage are examples of cumulative processes. In a generative process, a complex form emerges out of the repeated interactions of simple parts. Conway’s Game of Life is an example of a generative process.

Erasure or Degenerative (due 11/4)
A subtractive process is the removal or deletion of material or text according to rules. Erasure is an example of a subtractive process. In a degenerative process a complex structure disintegrates as the result of an action, or a repeated action. Entropy is an example of a degenerative process.

Permutations (due 11/11)
Permutation is a mathematical process in which a material or text is systematically recombined into every possible variant.

Translation (due 11/18)
Translation is the transformation of data or material or text from one form to another. Translation could take place between languages, for example translating a Spanish text into German, or between media, for example, translating musical notes to color, or encoding text as image, or between cultures, for example, translating a symbol or gesture that relies on shared contextual understanding into a new context. Every translation alters meaning.

Don’t worry if these themes don’t make sense yet. We will be discussing them in the coming weeks.
Analysis Assignment

Twice this semester, you will be assigned to open the discussion on the work of one of your peers. In order to have a productive conversation, your peer, the artist/writer, will be responsible for submitting her/his work to you by 6pm on the Sunday prior to our class meeting, which gives you 72 hours to draft an analysis. During this time you should compose a short paper on the text/artwork to be discussed. Should the writer/artist that you have been paired with fail to submit her/his work to you in advance, you will simply write an analytical response to one of the readings assigned that week. The writer/artist will forfeit discussion of her/his work.

For this short paper, you will submit an analysis (also known as a close reading or explication) of the student work that has been submitted. However, this is not a review (“I like” or “I don’t like”), critique (“this is good” or “this is bad”), or workshop (“here’s how to improve”). Rather, it is an opportunity to flesh out what you notice about the pieces that have been submitted, so that we can have a thoughtful conversation about the effects of the experiments undertaken. Review, critique, and workshop will more than likely arise organically from this approach, but the emphasis will be on looking at the work on its own terms—a concept essential to this course, since we are dealing with experimental modes, many of which are irrelevant to or even defy traditional standards of value.

This engagement might present itself in a variety of ways, such as in the forms of observations or questions. But what we are especially and ultimately concerned with is your ability to read a text—whether visual or written—closely, argue for that reading, and extend that interpretation to larger connections between other texts and ideas we encounter in this course.

Be sure your analysis is written thoughtfully, consistently, and possesses clear arguments that can support equally strong, but complicated and even debatable readings of the works at hand. Be sure to organize your ideas well and to provide clear evidence in support of your interpretations by using quotations and/or specific concrete details from the pieces. Your ability to read closely and make connections is crucial. The explication should be approximately 2 double-spaced pages (600 words) in length, have logical conclusions, use interesting language, and correct grammar and spelling.

*Please see the attached poem and its analysis, each written by graduate level creative writing students; this should give you an idea of what’s expected.

Midterm Review

At the middle of the term, you will meet with us to discuss your progress. You will be given a grade based on what you’ve done so far, and a recommendation for ways to improve for the remainder of the course. The midterm will reflect 30 points of your overall grade (5 assignments and 1 analysis).
**Final Project**

The final project is an open choice. You can choose from one of the many procedures you’ve learned and practiced this term and create a new project or revise an old one. You’ll also submit a report, as well as an overall self-reflection statement (that may be an artist statement/ars poetica, or perhaps even a manifesto). We’ll discuss this further toward the end of the term.

**Initiative & Growth**

To be discussed in class.

**Late Assignment Policy**

Late work is not accepted. If you must be absent on a day that an assignment is due, please make arrangements with us to turn your assignment in before that date.

**Academic Honesty**

Anyone caught cheating on a quiz, test, or any assignment or plagiarizing will fail the course immediately and will be referred to the college for further disciplinary action.

Plagiarism occurs when you claim to be the originator or producer of words, opinions, facts, or number that belong to an author whose work you found online or in a book, magazine, or newspaper. Any student caught plagiarizing will immediately fail the course and will be referred to the College for further disciplinary action.

For more information on Baruch College’s honesty policy:

http://www.baruch.cuny.edu/academic/academic_honesty.htm

Plagiarism will be an ongoing topic of discussion and debate in this course.

**Accommodations Policy**

Baruch College is committed to making individuals with disabilities full participants in its programs, services, and activities through compliance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. It is the policy of Baruch College that no otherwise qualified individual with a disability shall be denied access to or participation in any program, service, or activity offered by the university. Individuals with disabilities have a right to request accommodations. If you require any special assistance or accommodation, please contact the instructor in the first week of classes.
Non-Discrimination Policy

We do not condone and will not tolerate discrimination on the basis of race, religion, color, sex, gender identity, age, national origin or ancestry, marital status, parental status, sexual orientation, disability, etc. Because this class relies heavily on discussion and participation, respect for one another is imperative. Many of the topics we will explore are sensitive and some might even be considered controversial. Often we may disagree with one another's points-of-view, which is okay, but please remember that racism, sexism, homophobia, religious slurs, etc. will not be tolerated. As students, adults, and writers we are responsible for the environment created in this class. We must strive to keep our minds open and must be allowed to explore many angles and perspectives. This will enable us to refine our critical thinking skills and further our learning and living process.

For further information, please consult the CUNY Non-discrimination Policy:

“It is the policy of The City University of New York and the constituent colleges and units of The University to recruit, employ, retain, promote, and provide benefits to employees and to admit and provide services for students without regard to race, color, creed, national origin, ethnicity, ancestry, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, legally registered domestic partnership status, disability, predisposing genetic characteristics, alienage, citizenship, military or veteran status, or status as a victim of domestic violence.”

http://portal.cuny.edu/cms/id/cuny/documents/level_3_page/010682.htm
Tentative Schedule
(subject to revision)

Readings for September 2
“Death of the Author” by Barthes
“Surrealist Manifesto” excerpt by Breton
“Uncreative Writing” Intro. by Goldsmith
All avail. via email as pdfs

September 2 AUTOMATISM
Agenda: What to expect this semester
Contemporary examples of surrealist-style poems.
Presentation: Automatic Surrealist Techniques in Art
Exercise: Exquisite corpse exercise
Homework: Do an automatic writing or drawing—see Jack Kerouac’s “Spontaneous Prose”

HW Field Trip: Visit the MoMA on your own by September 7. See the Yoko Ono exhibit. Take a photo of one of her instruction pieces from *Grapefruit* and perform it. Bring in some form of documentation next week. Remember, MoMA museum entrance is free with CUNY student ID. Bring your ticket stub to class on 9/9.

September 9 RULES-BASED SYSTEMS
Group 1 Automatism Critique
[schedule here]
Discussion: Rules Readings
Presentation: Fluxus & Rule-based Art
Exercise: Fluxus Workbook
Informal Crit: Ono Projects
Homework: Do a constraint — could be an “event score” or “(soma)tic” ritual…

Readings: [Appropriation]: Various authors, “Appropriation Precursors;” Marcel Duchamp, “Apropos of ‘Readymades,” Ariana Reines’ *Cow* (excerpts), M. NourbeSe Phillip’s *Zong!* (excerpts), Cathy Park
Hong’s “Delusions of Whiteness,” Bhanu Kapil’s *Humanimal* (exerpts), Barabara DeGenevieve Interview (video)

**September 16 APPROPRIATION**

**Group 2:** Rules and Constraints Critique

[schedule here]

**Discussion:** Appropriation Readings.

**Presentation:** Appropriation Art

**Exercise:** Cut up exercise

**Homework:** Make an assisted/reciprocal readymade (due Oct 7)


**September 23 – NO CLASS**

**September 30 – FIELD TRIP**

Poetry Field Trip: TBA

Individual meetings

**October 7 – CHANCE**

**Group 3:** Appropriation Critique

[schedule here]

**Discussion:** Chance Readings

**Presentation:** Chance Art, Dada and Surrealism

**Exercise:** Chance Activity

**Homework:** Do a chance project

**Readings:** [Cumulative/Generative]: Lyn Hejinian’s *My Life* summary and excerpts; TS Eliot’s “The Waste Land” in Hypertext; Darren Wershler-Henry and Bill Kennedy’s Apostle Engine

**October 14 – CUMULATIVE/GENERATIVE**

**Group 4:** Chance Critique

[schedule here]

**Exercise:** Cumulative/Activity

**Discussion:** Cumulative/Generative Readings

**Presentation:** Cumulative/Generative Process Art

**Homework:** Do a cumulative or generative project

**Readings:** No readings, but you could start next week’s early – there’s a lot 😊
October 21 MIDTERM – RECAP CLASS

Group 5: Cumulative/Generative Critique
[schedule here]

Individual Meetings


October 28 – ERASURE/DEGENERATIVE

Discussion: Erasure/Degenerative Readings
Presentation: Erasure/Degenerative Process Art
Homework: Do an erasure or degenerative process

Nov 4 – PERMUTATIONS

Group 6: Erasure/Degenerative Critique
[schedule here]

Discussion: Permutations Readings
Presentation: Permutations-based Art, Futurist Art
Exercise: Permutations exercise
Homework: Do a permutation
Readings: [Translation]: Ekphrasis; Jack Spicer’s After Lorca (excerpts); Caroline Bergvall’s VIA (36 Dante Translations) via text & audio; Louis Zukofsky (excerpts of homophonic translations of Catullus)

November 11 TRANSLATION

Group 7: Permutation Critique
[schedule here]

Presentation: Translation Process Art & Homophonic Translation
Homework: Do a translation
Homework: Final Project Proposals and Portfolios Due Nov 18

November 18 FINAL PROPOSALS / PORTFOLIO PROCESS
Group 8: Translation Critique
[schedule here]

Individual meetings

November 25 THANKSGIVING – Class Cancelled

December 2 FIELD TRIP / EXHIBITION PREP
Art Field Trip: Jenny Perlin: Open Sentence at New Media Artspace
Work time and individual meetings

December 9 LAST CLASS

Final show!
10 RULES FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS
FROM JOHN CAGE

Rule 1: Find a place you trust, and then, try trusting it for awhile.
Rule 2: (General Duties as a Student)
Pull everything out of your teacher.
Pull everything out of your fellow students.
Rule 3: (General Duties as a Teacher)
Pull everything out of your students.
Rule 4: Consider everything an experiment.
Rule 5: Be Self Disciplined. This means finding someone wise or smart and choosing to follow them. To be disciplined is to follow in a good way. To be self disciplined is to follow in a better way.
Rule 6: Follow the leader. Nothing is a mistake. There is no win and no fail. There is only make.
Rule 7: The only rule is work. If you work it will lead to something. It is the people who do all the work all the time who eventually catch onto things. You can fool the fans—but not the players.
Rule 8: Do not try to create and analyze at the same time. They are different processes.
Rule 9: Be happy whenever you can manage it. Enjoy yourself. It is lighter than you think.
Rule 10: We are breaking all the rules, even our own rules and how do we do that? By leaving plenty of room for "x" qualities.

Helpful Hints:
Always Be Around.
Come or go to everything.
Always go to classes.
Read everything you can get your hands on.
Look at movies carefully and often.
SAVE EVERYTHING. It may come in handy later.