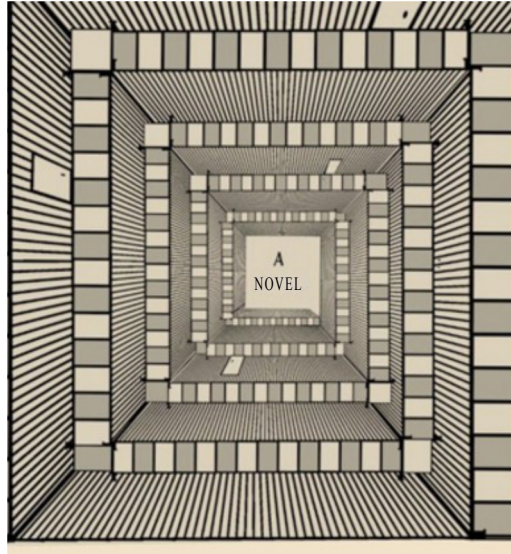


AML 2410/4800: The Contemporary and Its Artists

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Class: T 8-9 (3:00-4:55) / R 9 (4:05-4:55) / MAT 114

Office: TUR 4343 / R 7-8 (1:55-3:50) and by appt.



COURSE DESCRIPTION

In this course we will explore the increasingly significant role of the artist, and the status of art more generally, in American literature and culture. The past 16 years have indeed witnessed an upsurge in the novel of the artist (or *Künstlerroman*) in “literary” fiction, and the genre’s influence can also be seen in recent genre fiction as well as comics and film. This prevalence suggests that the role of the artist, art’s social and political functions, our overall conceptions of what art is and can do, and how art is produced in our particular historical-material conditions, are undergoing serious questioning, réévaluation, and maybe reinvention. So, what is art now? After all, our contemporary global situation is far different from that of even 16 years ago. What changes—cultural, socio-political, economic, etc.—since the turn of the millennium have prompted this reconsideration and of art and artists?

We will contextualize our course with the rise of what Mark McGurl calls The Program Era—spanning from the immediate postwar period to the present day—an era of unparalleled production in American literature from within the university. Then, reading a younger generation of artists who grew up in The Program Era, we will see a break as the novel of the artist becomes attached to popular genres like the superhero genre, apocalypse, the historical novel, and science fiction, and to other media like comics and film. Exploring the contemporary moment, or the period after the Program Era, we will answer questions like: Is art timeless (but then what would it mean to be a “contemporary” artist)? What are the conditions of the production of contemporary art? How do various genres respond to high/low cultural divides at different historical moments? What are the cultural, sexual, and racial politics of contemporary art?

REQUIRED TEXTS (in order of reading)

Junot Diaz, <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i> (2007)	978-1-594-48329-5
Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home</i> (2006)	978-0-618-87171-1
Ruth Ozeki, <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> (2013)	978-0-143-12487-0
Juliana Spahr, <i>That Winter the Wolf Came</i> (2015)	978-1-934-63917-7
Emily St. John Mandel, <i>Station Eleven</i> (2014)	978-0-804-17244-8
Ben Lerner, <i>Leaving the Atocha Station</i> (2011)	978-1-566-89274-2
David Mitchell, <i>Slade House</i> (2015)	978-0-812-99868-9

I prefer that everyone purchase the editions indicated by the ISBNs provided above. That way we will all literally be on the same page. The UF bookstore will have all these titles available. You can also search books by ISBN at bookfinder.com to find the cheapest available used copies online. The Amazon Marketplace is another place to find booksellers. *{Just make sure you order your books with plenty of time to read them for class. Don't, for example, order a book from a California bookseller a week before our class discussion.}*

Short readings, supplementary readings, and films will be made available electronically on our Canvas site or will be viewed during class meeting times.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

You are responsible for managing your time and completing all assignments before their due dates. We will, of course, discuss assignments in class, and I have included deadlines on our schedule of readings. Apart from that, your assignments are your assignments.

Participation 20%

In such a small class, your silence will stand out quite noticeably. On the other hand, though, we have a great setup in which to have more in depth discussions than in a larger scale class. You are therefore expected to actively participate in each class discussion. This means completing all required reading

before class. After all, you can't comment on something you haven't read. On that note, in this class, no one is entitled to their opinions. That is, opinions do not require reading, interpretation, or thought. You must come prepared to support what you say.

Strong participants have insightful comments that help us work toward common understandings; respond critically, but fairly, to others; build on others' arguments and suggestions; answer others' questions and complicate those questions; elaborate on earlier discussions; and otherwise connect the class's conversation to previous readings. In short, students who engage in class discussion with an open mind and a willingness to work collectively, to suspend their preformed opinions, and to revise their own interpretations will earn higher than average participation grades.

I also strongly encourage you to bring in outside examples to help illustrate some of the main issues of this class and to broaden your claims. This is primarily a course in literature, but, as we will see, the goals of the class have broader applicability to artwork more generally. If it is relevant to the class, please, by all means, direct us to film clips, (web) comics, sculptures, landscape art, painting, photography, music, performance art, and so on. Indeed, many of our texts discuss just such alternate modes of artistic creation, and we will want to explore the significance of such representations in literature.

Short Position Papers (800 words/ea.), 30T (10T ea.)

Throughout the semester you will be required to write three (3) position papers on any three of our texts (excluding supplementary texts). This choice is meant to give you some range to explore your interests and begin sketches of what could become a final paper. You may choose any three you like. These papers should be brief, about 800 words each. This makes them fairly low-stakes: you aren't expected to make the most brilliant, nuanced argument of your semester in these papers. Rather, treat them as opportunities to explore a novel, film, or comic you find interesting; to brainstorm talking points for class discussion; to unpack core concepts and ideas; etc. Whenever you write a position paper, you must come to class prepared to discuss its core ideas in relation to the text at hand (this will count toward participation).

I encourage you to *begin early*. Don't hold out and hope that the final two texts of the semester will be equally fascinating to you. And don't burden yourself with that much work at the end of the semester! If done properly, you'll be able to adapt portions of one or two of these papers for your final project.

Bibliographic Entries (200 words/ea.), 10% (5% ea.)

Building on the collective nature of this class, you will all contribute to a class-wide bibliography. In the first few weeks of class you will select two texts from our reading list (film included) and find a secondary source on each. (Some of you may double up on texts, but you must coordinate to avoid doubling sources.) You will then write annotations, of about 200 words each, which explain the sources' main points, methodologies, stakes, etc. Bibliographic entries are due one week after we finish discussing the corresponding text. This collective work will then prepare a list of sources for everyone to use for their final papers.

Abstract (300 words) & Final Research Paper (3,000 words), 40T

An abstract, in this case, will force you to make an argument and outline your final research paper. This is meant to be exploratory, a way to get some thoughts on the page and logically organize them in the form of a tentative argument. You don't have to stick to that argument in your final paper. The point is to start early and to keep up the constant process of self-revision.

You will then write a final, research-driven, argumentative paper of about 3,000 words. The paper must be synthetic, i.e. deal with at least two different texts from our class. You are expected to make use of the

collective bibliography and perform further research for your own specific interventions. Discuss your abstract with me before writing the paper. If you choose, you may write on a text outside of class, but you must demonstrate to me its applicability to goals of the class and I must be familiar enough with it before authorizing your project.



View of *No Longer Art: Salvage Art Institute*, 2015, Neubauer Collegium, University of Chicago, Chicago. Photo: Neubauer Collegium.

GENERAL RUBRIC AND GRADING SCALE

- A An A paper gives a strong and original argument. It is logical, well argued, supported, and organized. It demonstrates a thorough and complex engagement with the text(s) and builds on the themes and concepts discussed in class. Papers at this level also contain strong prose and are mostly free of typos, as well as mechanical and stylistic errors.
- B B papers fall noticeably short in one of the criterion for a strong argument listed above, but still demonstrate a thorough and complex engagement with the text(s) and the themes and concepts discussed in class. Work at this level needs minor revision, but is otherwise stylistically and mechanically sound, with few errors.
- C If you just complete your assignment, you're probably looking at a C. C designates average work, which falls noticeably short of the criteria for B and A range papers. C work needs significant revision in terms of its content and organization. C papers often appear as summaries rather than arguments, but it still shows effort and kernels of a potential B or A range paper.
- D AD paper is disorganized, poorly argued, or too obvious in terms of its argument. It may also lack textual support for the arguments being made. Work in this range is in need of almost

complete revision and contains numerous spelling and/or mechanical errors that affect the clarity of the student’s writing.

E An E paper is short of (almost) all the criteria listed above. It is incomplete or so poorly argued that it does not satisfy the basic requirements of the assignment. E work is also full of spelling/mechanical errors, which make the writing unclear and/or unreadable.

A	4.0	93-100 (100)	B	3.0	83-86 (85)	C	2.0	73—76 (75)	D	1.0	63-66 (65)
A-	3.67	90-92 (91)	B-	2.67	80-82 (81)	C-	1.67	70-72 (71)	D-	0.67	60-62 (61)
B +	3.33	87-89 (88)	c+	2.33	77-79 (78)	D +	1.33	67-69 (68)	E	0.00	0-59 (0)

Final grade appeals may be made by fdlng out a form available from Carla Blount, Program Assistant.



ASSIGNMENT SUBMISSION & GUIDELINES

1. Electronic and hard copies of all assignments are due at the beginning of class on their due date. *Late work will not be accepted.*
2. All papers must be formatted according to the MLA Handbook, 7th Ed. For a helpful guide, see <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/> for help with MLA guidelines.
3. You should print your papers double sided. Save some trees, ok? It also makes a smaller pile for me to carry around.
4. You are responsible for maintaining duplicate copies of all work in this course (you never know when you might need it) and retaining all returned, graded work until the semester is over.

5. Electronic submissions without accompanying hard copies will be noted as complete, but I will not offer comments on such papers until I receive the hard copy. For particularly overdue hard copies, you may have to wait quite a while before receiving your grade.

6. Papers for this class will be graded rigorously for complexity of thought and the quality of their arguments. I will therefore not grade any paper that makes sexist, racist, homo- or xenophobic 'arguments.' The scare quotes are there because such stances do not subscribe to anything remotely resembling critical thinking or logical or academic rigor.

COURSE POLICIES

Attendance and Lateness:

Attendance is mandatory, in all physical and intellectual senses. After three absences you will accrue grade penalties: minus half a letter on your final grade for each absence. Any more than six absences and you will earn an automatic zero in the course. Not only because you will lose participation credit, but also because, after several absences, you will not know what we are doing in class.

Exceptions will be made for students travelling for university-sponsored events and for religious holidays. You must tell me about these absences in advance so that we can make arrangements to have you make up missed work within an appropriate timeframe.

If you enter the classroom unreasonably late, which disrupts the entire class, you are absent.

Exemption from these policies *may* be considered for students in exceptional circumstances and who discuss these absences with me *well in advance*.

Readings:

All readings are to be completed *before* the class meetings in which they are to be discussed. If you've not done the reading, then you have nothing to say. Accordingly, then, you are unable to participate and therefore absent.

Devices:

You don't need them in class, except the few days we discuss readings provided as pdfs. Active use of smartphones and other devices, otherwise, will not be tolerated (except for UF campus-wide emergency messages). Please put away your devices upon entering class. If you can't do this, you get to leave and take an absence.

Caveat: Life happens to us all, so if you need your phone on a particular day for reasons like family emergencies, your job, etc., just let me know prior to class. Or, if you absolutely need your phone, feel free to quietly step out of class for a reasonable amount of time. Simply use common sense and common courtesy.

Classroom Behavior:

This is a small class that involves lots of discussion and participation. It goes without saying then that your courtesy for the rest of the class is expected at all times. I ask that you treat our classroom as intellectual arena in which to discuss complex, and possibly uncomfortable, ideas. Disrespectful behavior will result in dismissal, and accordingly absence, from the class.

Course Evaluations:

You are encouraged to do a course evaluation at the end of the semester at <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/>.

UNIVERSITY POLICIESStatement on Academic Honesty:

All students must abide by the Student Honor Code. For more information about academic honesty, including definitions of plagiarism and unauthorized collaboration, see <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/scpr/process/student-conduct-honor-code/>.

Statement of Humanities and Composition Credit:

This course can satisfy the General Education requirement for Composition or Humanities. For more information see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/general.education.requirement.aspx>.

Statement of Writing Requirement:

This course can provide 6,000 words toward the UF requirement for writing. For more information see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/advising/info/writing.and.math>.

Statement on Sexual Harassment:

UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual discrimination for its students, staff, and faculty. For more about UF policies regarding harassment see <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/policies-2/sexual-harassment/>.

Statement of Student Disability Services:

The University of Florida complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act. To request accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center in Peabody 202, which will provide documentation. Accommodations cannot be made until I have received documentation. For more about the DRC see <https://www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/>.



SCHEDULE OF READINGS AND DUE DATES

*This is a tentative schedule and is subject to revision throughout the semester.

**Remember, the due dates of your position papers depend on the texts to which you respond.

	TUESDAY	THURSDAY
The Creative Writing Program and its Legacies		
Week 1	1.5 Introduction; Harbach, "MFA vs NYC"	1.7 Raymond Carver, "Cathedral"; Junot Diaz, "Drown"
Theoretical Groundwork		
Week 2	1.12 Mark McGurl, from <i>The Program Era</i>	1.14 McGurl cont.
Freaks and Geeks		
Week 3	1.19 Junot Diaz, <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i>	1.21 <i>TBWLOOW</i>
Week 4	1.26 <i>TBWLOOW</i>	1.28 Alison Bechdel, <i>Fun Home</i> Andrew Hoberek, "After <i>Watchmen</i> "
Week 5	2.2 <i>Tun Home</i>	2.4 <i>Fun Home</i>
Art's Changing Climates		
Week 6	2.9 Ruth Ozeki, <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i>	2.11 <i>ATFTTB</i>
Week 7	2.16 <i>ATTTTB</i>	2.18 <i>ATFTTB</i>
Week 8	2.23 <i>ATTTTB</i> Juliana Spahr, <i>That Winter the Woli Came</i>	2.25 <i>TWTWC</i>
Week 9: Spring Break. No class, but try to do some reading anyway.		
"Since the world is ending / Why not let the children touch the paintings?"		
Week 10	3.8 Emily St. John Mandel, <i>Station Eleven</i>	3.10 <i>SE</i>
Week 11	3.15 <i>SE</i>	3.17 Ben Lerner, "Angle of Yaw" and <i>Leaving the A tocha Station</i>
Week 12	3.22 <i>LTAS</i>	3.24 <i>LTAS</i> Abstracts due
Horrors and/or/as Hopes		
Week 13	3.29 Jim Jarmusch (dir.), <i>Only Lovers Left Alive</i> (in-class screening)	3.31 <i>Only Lovers Left Alive</i> cont.
Week 14	4.5 <i>Only Lovers</i> discussion	4.7 David Mitchell, <i>Slade House</i>
Week 15	4.12 <i>SH</i>	4.14 <i>SH</i> Woods, "Soul Cycle"
Week 16	4.19 Final thoughts, lingering issues, denunciations, etc. Final paper due	