

ENGL 442 (Section #32848R) Fall 2018

Professor Gambrell

414 Taper Hall

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Class meetings: T/Th 9:30-10:45, THH 105

Office Hours: T/Th, 10:45-11:30, and by appointment

Learning Out of Place: Independence, Community, Creativity

Over the last 15 years, digital tools for creating and distributing texts have become so widely available and easy to use that anyone who has time, Internet access, and a certain degree of obsessiveness can publish a book. Old-school impediments to making one's work public -- editorial review by the seasoned staff of a publishing house, large fees charged by conventional "vanity" publishers, and the like -- are now routinely bypassed by writers who operate at a distance from a traditional literary marketplace whose gate-keeping practices seemed relatively solid and familiar as recently as a generation ago.

The technology might be new, but the larger cultural conversation about independent literary and artistic production is not, and our task in ENGL 442 is to consider the mixed meanings of creative and intellectual self-reliance, largely (though not exclusively) in a post-1920 U.S. context. For a writer or artist, what exactly does it mean to "do it yourself"?

We will start by briefly examining key 19th-century predecessors of contemporary debates about independent cultural production, including works by Douglass, Emerson, and Whitman. Moving into the 20th century, we will observe the "indie" impulse at work across a range of verbal, visual, and sonic contexts. Our central texts will be four very recent novels by mid-career writers who engage in provocative ways with questions about forms of knowledge, creativity, and expression as they emerge within or apart from sanctioned contexts like the university or the creative industries (Jennifer Egan's *A Visit From the Goon Squad*, Jeffrey Eugenides' *The Marriage Plot*, Dana Johnson's *Elsewhere, California*, and Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, smartest kid on earth*). We will also read non-fictional writings and view documentaries about historical flashpoints in the development of post-1968 "DIY" or "self-taught" cultural production (Alice Bag's *Violence Girl*, Aaron Rose's *Beautiful Losers*, and Jessica Yu's *In the Realms of the Unreal*). Finally, throughout the course I will be introducing you to current literary and artistic experiments published on the Web.

Books (on order at the University Bookstore):

Alice Bag, *Violence Girl*

Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*

Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot*

Dana Johnson, *Elsewhere, California*

Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*

Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan, smartest kid on earth*

*Some additional readings, marked with an asterisk, will be provided in handouts. The *Beautiful Losers* documentary is widely available on streaming services. *In the Realms of the Unreal*, to my

knowledge, is only available as a physical rental or purchase, so I will circulate my own copy in advance of the due date. (If you would like, I can arrange a screening for the group.)

**Please note: Readings and visual assignments are due on the date listed on the syllabus

Part I: Learning in Place

Week One

T, August 21 Introduction

Th, August 23 Zadie Smith, "Permission to Enter" (*The New Yorker*, 7/30/2012)
(handout)

Week Two

T, August 28 Thomas Jefferson, draft of the *Declaration of Independence*, published in Jefferson's Autobiography (handout)*; Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave, written by himself* (1845) (excerpts/handout*); Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (excerpts, 1855 edition/handout*)

Th, August 30 Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot* (1-127)

Week Three

T, September 4 Jeffrey Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot* (128-227)

Th, September 6 Eugenides, *The Marriage Plot* (228-end)

Week Four

T, September 11 Brainstorming session for project #1; please come to class prepared to discuss your own essay ideas.

Th, September 13

Unit 1 Wrap-Up

Suggested: Antonio Gramsci, "Intellectuals and Education"; Jacques Ranciere, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*

Project #1 + commentary due in class

Part II: From a Different World

Week Five

T, September 18 Jennifer Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, pp. 1-108

Th, September 20 Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, pp. 109-233

Week Six

T, September 25 Egan, *A Visit from the Goon Squad*, pp. 234-end; Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author" (handout*)

Th, September 27 Alice Bag, *Violence Girl*, pp. 1-201

Week Seven

T, October 2 Alice Bag, *Violence Girl*, pp. 201-end

Th, October 4 Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics* (chapters 1-3)

Week Eight

T, October 9 Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan, smartest kid on earth*

Th, October 11 Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan, smartest kid on earth* (continued)

Week Nine

T, October 16 Chris Ware, *Jimmy Corrigan, smartest kid on earth* (conclude)

Th, October 18 Brainstorming session for project #2; please come to class prepared to discuss your own project ideas.

Week Ten

T, October 23 Project #2 due in class (present projects to group)

Th, October 25 MIDTERM BREAK

Part III Independence, Community, and Creativity

Week Eleven

T, October 30 Jessica Yu, *In the Realms of the Unreal*; Michael Moon, *Darger's Resources* (excerpts/handout*)

Th, November 1 Yu, *In the Realms of the Unreal* (conclude)

Week Twelve

T, November 6 Dana Johnson, *Elsewhere, California*, pp. 1-97

Th, November 8 Johnson, *Elsewhere, California*, pp. 98-196

Week Thirteen

T, November 13 Johnson, *Elsewhere, California* (conclude); brainstorming session for final project

Th, November 15 Reading Quiz

Week Fourteen

T, November 20 Play *The Stanley Parable* (video game); Ian Bogost, *How to do Things With Videogames* (excerpts/handout*)

Th, November 22 Thanksgiving Holiday

Week Fifteen

***PLEASE NOTE: There is a possibility that I will replace this week's assignment with the LACMA exhibition that opens mid-November: "Outliers and American Vanguard Art." I will keep you posted about this.**

T, November 27 Aaron Rose, *Beautiful Losers* (documentary, available for rental at Amazon)

Please visit Cassidy Curtis's *Graffiti Archaeology* project online at

<http://www.grafarc.org>

Please explore the Graffiti Research Lab site at

<http://www.graffitiresearchlab.com/blog/>

Th, November 29 Aaron Rose, *Beautiful Losers* (conclude)

FINAL EXAMINATION

Thursday, December 6, 11am – 1 pm. MEET IN THE REGULAR CLASSROOM FOR FINAL PROJECT PRESENTATIONS; final writings are also due at this meeting.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE PROFESSOR'S DISCRETION.

Ground Rules and Grade Tabulations:

It is very important that you come to class on time with your assignment prepared, and that you are ready to participate in discussion, with your phone, laptop, or tablet powered off and put away. Bring your books or handouts to class on the day they are discussed. Keep up with the readings! You will thank yourself for doing this when the reading quiz rolls around.

Grade Weights:

Project One: 15%

Project Two: 25%

Project Three: 30%

Reading Quiz: 20%

Class Participation: 10%

Class attendance is required. Excessive absences (more than three) will have a substantial impact upon your final grade.

Plagiarism will result in a grade of "F" for the course. Please feel free to come to me with questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

PLEASE NOTE: THIS SYLLABUS IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE AT THE PROFESSOR'S DISCRETION.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in *SCampus* in Section 11, *Behavior Violating University Standards* <https://scampus.usc.edu/1100-behavior-violating-university-standards-and-appropriate-sanctions/>. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in *SCampus* and university policies on scientific misconduct, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct/>.

Discrimination, sexual assault, and harassment are not tolerated by the university. You are encouraged to report any incidents to the *Office of Equity and Diversity* <http://equity.usc.edu/> or to the *Department of Public Safety* <http://capsnet.usc.edu/department/department-public-safety/online-forms/contact-us>. This is important for the safety whole USC community. Another member of the university community – such as a friend, classmate, advisor, or faculty member – can help initiate the report, or can initiate the report on behalf of another person. *The Center for Women and Men* <http://www.usc.edu/student-affairs/cwm/> provides 24/7 confidential support, and the sexual assault resource center webpage sarc@usc.edu describes reporting options and other resources.

Support Systems

A number of USC's schools provide support for students who need help with scholarly writing. Check with your advisor or program staff to find out more. Students whose primary language is not English should check with the *American Language Institute* <http://dornsife.usc.edu/ali>, which sponsors courses and workshops specifically for international graduate students. *The Office of Disability Services and Programs* http://sait.usc.edu/academicsupport/centerprograms/dsp/home_index.html provides certification for students with disabilities and helps arrange the relevant accommodations. If an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible, *USC Emergency Information* <http://emergency.usc.edu/> will provide safety and other updates, including ways in which instruction will be continued by means of blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technology.