

**HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS  
UNDERGRADUATE UPPER-DIVISION SYLLABUS**

**Political Writing**

Melody Nixon

Summer Session II, 2020  
Monday & Wednesday: 1:00-4:30pm PST  
Online, Zoom

Course credits: 5  
Office Hours: 4:30-5:30 M & by appointment

"The actual obligation a writer undertakes.... is not one of choice, but of substance."  
—Theodor Adorno, "Commitment"

"She was, she knew, in a queer indefinite way, a disturbing factor."  
—Nigella Larson, *Quicksand*

"There is nothing objective about the experience of confronting and engaging with  
literature."  
—Kate Zambreno, *Heroines*

**Overview:**

In academia we are often trained to read texts as though they always already have meaning. We are also trained to write academic and literary texts from a space of already understanding, already knowing our argument and form. But what kinds of potential and power can be found in the uncertainty of argument and form, and in the experimentation that leads us to new forms and ideas?

In this course we will explore the politics of writing by moving beyond rehearsals of established form into an analysis that asks: What are the philosophical and political implications of the writing forms we choose? And what exactly makes writing political? We will draw from a variety of theoretical texts to explore historical, literary, and critical thought on the potency, merit, and valence of writing, as well as the role of the artist/writer in society. And we will read creative texts from a variety of text-based art forms (nonfiction, poetry, video, visual art, and performance) to think through their historical, economic, epistemological, and ontological implications; examining for example, the neoliberal implications of inserting the self, the "auto," into one's essays; or the meaning of using techniques like negative space, erasure, and fragmentation to explore domination.

In addition, this course takes from the Greek definition of "making" (*poiesis*) to investigate the ways that writing forms are in fact unstable and in flux, and always contestable as a notion. Arguably, writing's political potentiality lies in this flux. What does this contestability allow the "makers" of written texts? Can writing come out of a space that is not yet embodied? Further, are we as academics-in-training and students

encouraged to consider the social texts of political and social structures, political ideologies, and systems of violence (—isms) from the same position of already knowing? What happens when we view the political structures that shape us—like the writing forms we use—as contestable, not yet embodied, or not yet wholly thought?

**Purpose:**

The goal of the summer seminar is to interrogate writing's political potentiality through an examination of philosophical concepts like commitment, autonomy, non-identity, improvisation, and fragmentation, to ask: How do we dismantle the violent systems that we are constituted by, and that profoundly enable us? With what do we replace them? Can, and if so how can, nonintervention function as a form of dismantling?

We will work to understand how these questions are utilized in the work of "makers," largely contemporary, who might be described as political, or politically motivated, or social-justice orientated.

**Structure:**

This is a joint critical theory and writing course, with a practical "making" component each week. We will incorporate into each week a half-hour writing/improvising/making session, to explore together: Here together now, how can we allow new subjectivities and relations to emerge?

**Online:**

We face the unique challenge of working together as a group in an online space. As such, our classroom will follow some specifically designed guidelines and activities for online. Some examples: all students will be requested to use "gallery" view in Zoom, as this facilitates a group feeling. We will use breakout rooms to engage in smaller group conversations. We may develop a playlist to listen to during our "making" workshop time. I will run through further guidelines at the beginning of class. Please email me, **ideally before class begins**, if you have any specific concerns, ideas, or needs with regards to the online classroom.

Course Requirements:

**Attendance and discussion participation (30% of final grade).**

You are expected to attend each class meeting and to arrive promptly. Excessive absence will result in a lowered or failing grade. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for turning in any creative response due that day, and for notifying me about the absence. You are also expected to engage deeply with the readings and bring comments and questions to class discussions. A good rule of thumb: for each of the readings, develop at minimum **one comment** and **one question** that you feel comfortable voicing in class. When in class, I ask that you are fully present, with your attention given over exclusively and continuously to our collective work. With this in mind, texting, emailing, tweeting, and accessing the internet for anything other than our class during class time all detract from your learning. If you have accessibility requirements that require specific internet or software use during class and you would like me to know about this, please speak to me at the beginning of the summer session.

**4 Written Exercises: 500 – 750 words (10% each = 40%)**

**1 Final Project: up to 10 pages (30%)**

For the written exercises, you will turn in 1-3 pages of creative/critical writing inspired by course texts and based on what you take to be the generative structuring principles of specific texts. Your written exercises can be a direct response to the prompt I provide, or they can be a response to, challenge for, or re-working of any of the points raised in class.

For the final project, you may turn in a new work or a revision and significant expansion of a previously written exercise. In both cases, the themes of the course should play a significant role in these texts. The final project will be an extended meditation on the themes of the course through creative, critical, or hybrid critical-creative entry points.

Primary texts we will be working with (please note, you do NOT need to purchase these, this is a guide only. We will be working with short excerpts of these texts and others):

Theodor Adorno, "Commitment" (1962 essay)

Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to my Native Land" in *The Collected Poetry* (UC Press, 1983)

Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Douglas Kearney, *mess and mess and* (Noemi Press, 2015)

Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2008)

Morgan Parker, *There Are More Beautiful Things than Beyonce*, (Tin House Books, 2017)

Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, (Graywolf Press, 2015)

Jean-Paul Satre, "What is Literature?" (1948 essay)

Jennifer Tamayo, *POEMS ARE THE ONLY REAL BODIES*, (Bloof Books, 2013)

All texts will be shared online in ecopy for student use throughout the course.

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Schedule

*The schedule below follows two classes a week on Monday and Wednesday. Classes will incorporate a mix of lectures, in-class writing/making time, and discussion.*

**Week 1**

Class One: Why Write

Readings:

W.E.B. DuBois – "Of the Meaning of Progress"

George Orwell – "Why I Write"

Creative text:

Phillis Wheatley – poem from *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*

## Class Two: Political Commitment

Readings, excerpts:

Jean-Paul Satre, "What is Literature?"

Theodor Adorno, "Commitment"

Joey de Jesus, "Poetry does not exclude commitments to political and social life,"  
Facebook post, Nov 11, 2019.

Written Exercise 1: In about 500 words of prose, or in a poem, write about the last *political* thing that happened to you. This could be an instance of discrimination that you experienced directly, a moral or ethical concern about something happening in the contemporary world, a concern about injustice that you witnessed first-hand or saw via mediated accounts. Think: an event or a specific incident. Think: personal narrative. Try to keep the story as personal and as close to your experience as possible.

## **Week 2**

### Class One: Historicity and Undetected Domination

Reading, excerpt: Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Creative text, poem from: Morgan Parker, *There Are More Beautiful Things than Beyonce*, (Tin House Books, 2017)

### Class Two: Domination and the Self

Reading, excerpt: Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (Pluto Press, 2008)

Creative texts:

Glen Ligon, "I Feel Most Colored," 1951 (visual work, accessible online).

Amiri Baraka, poem from: *Hard Facts*, (Peoples War, 1975)

Written Exercise 2: In about 500 words, develop a political argument for an idea you *strongly* feel is true. This could be an abstracted idea (e.g., democracy in North America is not true democracy) or a more concrete idea (why I refuse to shop at Walmart/ take a virginity pledge/ read the president's Twitter feed/ why I support the Extinction Rebellion movement, etc.). Don't worry, at this stage, about making the piece literary – focus instead on developing a single, well-tuned argument that contains your passion for the subject.

## **Week 3**

### Class One: Identity, and non-identity

Readings: Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (Seabury Press translation, 1973), specifically: "After Auschwitz," "Metaphysics and Culture,"

Creative text, poem from: Douglas Kearney, *mess and mess and* (Noemi Press, 2015)

### Class Two: The page and performance

Reading, excerpt: Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minnesota, 2009).

Creative texts: Mahogany L. Browne with Amari Tims, "Blurred Vision" (CUPSI, 2015) (accessible online at Youtube).

LaTasha N. Nevada Diggs, In Visible Architectures, Artists Space (accessible online at Youtube).

Written Exercise 3: Using a combination of persuasion through argument (as demonstrated by Adorno and Nyong'o), and persuasion through critique of structures (as with Kearney and Diggs), write about 750 words on the same episode, topic, concern or incident you described in written exercise one, but comment on your agency in the incident and/or your relationship to it as well as your thoughts about the event itself. (If you wish to write about a separate incident than that outlined in exercise one, you may do so.)

## **Week 4**

### Class One: Interruptions part 1: The non-sovereign, the non-self

Reading, excerpt:

Fred Moten, *In the Break: the Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minnesota, 2003)

Creative texts, poem from: Aimé Césaire, "Notebook of a Return to my Native Land" in *The Collected Poetry* (UC Press, 1983)

David Hammons, "Concerto in Black and Blue," (Ace Gallery, 2013) (Accessible online via Youtube.)

### Class Two: Interruptions part 2: Fragmentation as a solution?

Reading:

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute* (SUNY, 1988), excerpt: "The Fragment."

Creative texts, poems from: Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, (Graywolf Press, 2015)  
M. Nourbese Philip, *Zong!* (Wesleyan Press, 2008)

Written Exercise 4: Using the text of an earlier exercise, or about 500 words of new prose or one poem on a topic of your choosing, rework the text from a traditional format into an altered form, to reflect and deepen its content. Can you write a collective work, from the point of view of the *we*? Can you adjust the actual shape and form of the text on the page, to reflect an underlying argument or struggle? Feel free to experiment, to try something you have not done before.

## Week 5

### Class One: Queer Wildness and Writing

Reading, excerpt:

Jose Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia—excerpt*, (Apogee Journal Issue 3, 2014)

Creative texts:

House of Ladosha, *Trigger: Gender as a Weapon and a Tool* (Video art, performance art, drag, New Museum, 2017) (images accessible online).

Juliana Huxtable, poem from: *Mucus in my Pineal Gland* (Capricious, 2017).

Poem from: Tommy Pico, *IRL* (Tin House Books, 2015).

### Class Two: Expanding the lens: transnationalism

Reading:

Olu Oguibe by Saul Ostrow, *BOMB Magazine*, April 1 2004 (accessible online).

Creative texts:

Hisham Bustani, *The Perception of Meaning* (Syracuse University Press, 2015).

Jennifer Tamayo, poem from: *POEMS ARE THE ONLY REAL BODIES*, (Bloof Books, 2013).

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**Final projects are due one week after the final class, at midnight PST on September 2, 2020. Graded projects will be returned to you via email. If this is an issue, please speak to me directly.**

**Any requests for extensions must be submitted *twenty-four hours* before the assignment due date.**

**NB: Please submit in Word doc format only (no PDFs, unless your work has extensive/unusual formatting)**

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## **Important Summer Session Remote 2020 Deadlines:**

Session 2:

Drop: Monday, August 3

Request for “W”: Friday, August 14

Summer is unique. **You will not be dropped for non-attendance or non-payment.** You must drop yourself. Dropping before the deadline results in a full-tuition reversal/refund. Withdraw posts a W for the grade and full tuition is charged (no refund).

For all dates and deadlines, including ‘change of grade option’ (P/NP) and grades due, here is the summer academic calendar: <https://summer.ucsc.edu/studentlife/index.html>

For questions about dropping, requesting a W grade for a course, or withdrawing from the summer quarter, email [summer@ucsc.edu](mailto:summer@ucsc.edu).

## **DRC Remote Accommodations:**

The Disability Resources Center reduces barriers to inclusion and full participation for students with disabilities by providing support to individually determine reasonable academic accommodations. Operations continue via remote appointments. If you have questions or concerns about exam accommodations or any other disability-related matter, email the DRC Schedulers at [drc@ucsc.edu](mailto:drc@ucsc.edu) for an appointment.

## **Small Group Tutoring**

Small Group Tutoring (SGT) supports students academically to advance educational equity by designing inclusive learning environments outside of the classroom. In SGT, you can expect the Tutor to facilitate cooperative group activities designed to have students work together on the course content and develop study skills for the course. SGT is offered at least three times each week for the entire quarter. The Tutor is an undergraduate student who took the class, did well, and is trained to facilitate group sessions to focus on students’ needs to succeed in the course. SGT is open to all students enrolled in the class and they must sign up on our online system: TutorTrac. When students sign up for SGT, they are committing to attend every week. For Summer 2020, students can begin signing up for tutoring on **Monday, June 22rd** and tutoring will begin **Wednesday, June 24th**. Students only have to sign up once for tutoring and their appointments will repeat weekly. Sign-ups will close on **Friday, August 14th** for all Summer Session Sign-Ups. This means that after **August 14th**, no new students can sign up for tutoring.

Want SGT to be successful for you? Bring your books, lecture notes, questions, and be open to working collaboratively with your peers. You can sign up using this link: [https://ucsc.edu-redrock.com/tracweb40/NoAccess.4sp?errText=insufficient%20credentials%20to%20view%20content](https://ucsc.edu/redrock.com/tracweb40/NoAccess.4sp?errText=insufficient%20credentials%20to%20view%20content)

You can also find the link on our website: <https://lss.ucsc.edu/index.html>

## **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic integrity is the cornerstone of a university education. Academic dishonesty diminishes the university as an institution and all members of the university community. It tarnishes the value of a UCSC degree. All members of the UCSC community have an explicit responsibility to foster an environment of trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility. All members of the university community are expected to present as their original work only that which is truly their own. All members of the community are expected to report observed instances of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty in order to ensure that the integrity of scholarship is valued and preserved at UCSC.

In the event a student is found in violation of the UCSC Academic Integrity policy, he or she may face both academic sanctions imposed by the instructor of record and disciplinary sanctions imposed either by the provost of his or her college or the Academic Tribunal convened to hear the case. Violations of the Academic Integrity policy can result in dismissal from the university and a permanent notation on a student's transcript.

For the full policy and disciplinary procedures on academic dishonesty, students and instructors should refer to the [Academic Integrity page](#) at the Division of Undergraduate Education.

### **Title IX:**

The university cherishes the free and open exchange of ideas and enlargement of knowledge. To maintain this freedom and openness requires objectivity, mutual trust, and confidence; it requires the absence of coercion, intimidation, or exploitation. The principal responsibility for maintaining these conditions must rest upon those members of the university community who exercise most authority and leadership: faculty, managers, and supervisors.

The university has therefore instituted a number of measures designed to protect its community from sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and other related prohibited conduct. [Information about the Title IX Office](#), the [online reporting link](#), applicable campus resources, reporting responsibilities, the [UC Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment](#), and the UC Santa Cruz Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Reports of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment can be found at [titleix.ucsc.edu](http://titleix.ucsc.edu).

The Title IX Office is actively responding to reports and requests for consultation. If you are not currently working with someone in the office and want to make a report/request a consult, you can expect the fastest response by using our [online reporting link](#).

For more information please visit the [Title IX Operations under Covid-19](#) page.