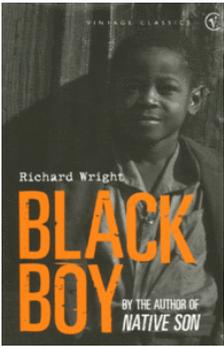


I Speak for Myself: A Study of Subversion through Multi-Modal Self-Narration of the Marginalized Body



Instructor: Rebekah Taussig

E-mail: rtaussig@ku.edu

Office Location:

Office Hours:

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Instead of reading more works by the powerful, the authoritative, and the established, this course will dig through a wide range of mediums to listen to the voices of the marginalized, the oppressed, and the subversive. We will investigate the historical significance of these voices finding platforms to speak for themselves and consider broader implications of this act. The goal of this course is to foster a critical examination of cultural scripts surrounding marginalized identities, who is given the authority to narrate which stories, and the relationship between self-representation and activism. Historically, we see a strong correlation between human rights activism and a surge in self-narration for those groups claiming their status as humans and citizens. Throughout the semester, we will examine the various forms and methods people of oppressed groups use to propel their voices, including performance, essay, podcasts, YouTube channels, blogs, film, graphics, essays, memoirs, and critical texts. We will ask questions about the role language, space, trauma, and community plays in identity and oppression. We will consider the audience, interrogate the purpose, and analyze the genres these people use to make their stories known. We will parse out the definition of activism, consider the ways in which our assigned works align with or deviate from this definition, and discuss the role activism has in our current polarized communities.

The course begins with the theoretical grounding of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson and their work on life narrative, bridging easily into the first unit, where we explore some of the more traditional forms of narration, including memoir and essay. The course grows into an examination of community and anthology in the second unit, looking carefully at several collections of creative work gathered by artists, writers, and academics who share a common experience of oppression. This portion of the class provides a compelling segue into discussions of intersectionality, as well as the boundaries and potential functions and limitations of community. While the previous two units include some variety in mediums, the third unit focuses specifically on multi-modal forms of expression as forms of self-narration. Here we will explore social creativity in the infinite corners of the internet, from vlogs to podcasts to musical

performance. As we explore a breadth of inventive avenues used to make the voices of the marginalized heard, we will become more aware of the cultural scripts around us. By the end of the semester, students will be equipped to recognize cultural scripts, identify subtle forms of oppression and exclusion, and mindfully cultivate more inclusive communities.

COURSE GOALS

What we will strive for in this class (and hopefully the rest of college) (and life in general):

1. Cultivation of curiosity and sustained inquiry
 2. Ability to listen with an open-mind to opinions that differ from our own
 3. Willingness to interrogate widely held assumptions
 4. Willingness to suspend closure, bottom lines, or easy resolutions
 5. Willingness to take intellectual risks
 6. Acceptance of messing up, making mistakes, and fumbling
 7. Tolerance for ambiguity, paradox, and uncertainty
 8. Metacognitive awareness (or learning to think about our own thinking processes)
- (list adapted from Sheridan D. Blau)

UNITS AND READINGS:

Unit 1 – Speaking for Oneself: Memoir and Essay

Primary Texts:

Black Boy, Richard Wright (1945)

Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches, Audre Lorde (1985)

“States,” Edward Said (1993)

The Kiss, Kathryn Harrison (1997)

“Sex and the Gimp Girl,” Nancy Mairs (2008)

Are You My Mother?, Allison Bechdel (2012)

Don't Call Me Inspirational: A Disabled Feminist Talks Back, Harilyn Rousso (2013)

Man Alive: A True Story of Violence, Forgiveness, and Becoming a Man (2014)

Between the World and Me, Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015)

PDF Critical Texts:

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, excerpts from *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* (2010)

James Charlton, excerpts from *Nothing About Us Without Us* (1998)

G. Thomas Couser, excerpts from *Recovering Bodies: Illness, Disability, and Life Writing* (1997)

Unit 2 – Speaking with Your Community: Anthology and Creative Collections

Primary Texts:

Making Soul, Making Face, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa (1990)

Criptiques, edited by Caitlin Wood (2014)

Dear Journal, issues 1 and 2, edited by Dunja Kovecevic and Laina Hughes (2015, 2016)
Side Entrance, Hind Makki, <http://sideentrance.tumblr.com/>

PDF Critical Texts:

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, excerpts from *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* (2010)

Unit 3 – Multi-Modal Social Creativity

Primary Texts:

The Disabled Life, Jessica and Lianna Oddi, <http://thedisabledlife.tumblr.com/>
“Coming Out As Bi When Your Muslim and Married,” Zahra Noorbakhsh
<https://bitchmedia.org/article/you-can-be-both-bisexual-and-muslim%E2%80%94im-proof>

Another Round, Tracy Clayton and Heben Nigatu,
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/anotherround>

See Something, Say Something, Ahmed Ali Akbar,
<https://www.buzzfeed.com/seesomethingsaysomething/see-something-say-something-a-new-podcast-about-being-muslim>

This is Cripple, Sid Marco, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QMLNt0J23PA>

Ivan Coyote and Rae Spoon perform Gender,

Failure <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n08vFSKIts>

Examined Life, Sunaura Taylor and Judith Butler

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0HZaPkF6qE>

“In My Language,” Amanda Bragg <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnylM1hl2jc>

Aimee Mullins, “The Opportunity of Adversity,”

https://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_the_opportunity_of_adversity

Aimee Mullins, “My 12 Pairs of Legs,”

https://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_prosthetic_aesthetics

Alive Day Memories: Home from Iraq (2007), directors Jon Alpert and Ellen Goosenberg Kent

The Collector of Bedford Street (2002), director Alice Elliott

Music by Prudence (2010), director Roger Ross William

PDF Critical Texts:

Tanya Titchkosky, *Reading and Writing Disability Differently: The Textured Life of Embodiment* (2007)

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, excerpts from *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narrative* (2010)

MAJOR ASSIGNMENTS

Unit Projects:

For each unit, students will be given one of two options; they can create an original work that follows the conventions of one of the assigned works within the unit (e.g. original essay, graphic representation, podcast episode, speech, etc.) with a short reflection on form and purpose, or students can write an analysis (including thesis and close reading) of one of the assigned works. Students are required to produce at least one creative project and one analysis paper over the course of the semester.

Group Discussion Summaries:

At the beginning of the course, students will be assigned to groups of 3-4 that they will maintain over the length semester. Each student will be assigned a number ranging from 1-4, depending on the size of the group. Roughly once a week, I will assign short writing prompts unique to each assigned number. For example, all of the students assigned the number one might be asked to write about the metaphors used to describe bodies in a particular text, while all of those assigned the number two might be asked to write about the ways these same bodies defy stereotypes, and so on. When students get to class, each member in the small group will have thought about our assigned reading from a different angle and will be given the opportunity to discuss and provide a written summary of their group's larger takeaway. These will be gathered over the course of the semester.

CLASSROOM ENVIROMENT:

Our time together is made up of partner exchanges, group work, presentations, and class discussions. It is likely you may not agree with everything that is said or discussed in the classroom. Courteous behavior and responses are expected at all times. When you disagree with someone, be sure that you make a distinction between criticizing an idea and criticizing the person. Expressions or actions that disparage a person's or race, ethnicity, nationality, culture, gender, gender identity / expression, religion, sexual orientation, age, disability, or marital, parental, or veteran status are contrary to the mission of this course and will not be tolerated. Without respecting your own thoughts and the thoughts of your classmates, we will not get very far. All of our voices are valid and valuable and will be treated as such. (Read three more times with self-induced italics before proceeding.)