

Course: Magic Circles
Professor: Nick Barner
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Meetings: Tues-Fri, 1:00 P.M. in BB4G
Office Hours by appointment

Magic Circles: temporary autonomy and art without audience

Course Description:

Of Nordic Larp, Elvia wilk writes that the “Magic Circle” can be “defined as a ‘membrane’ that circumscribes virtual worlds. Once you step into the magic circle, you have committed to suspension of disbelief. You have bought into the communal fantasy, the collective delusion, and agreed to the terms.”

Our course will examine the methods by which artists construct playful, political, and spiritual spaces outside of, or otherwise protected from, normative pressures and the dynamics of viewership, wherein they might “mediate and reinvent the self.” From the esoteric and extra institutional—such as *tabletop games, larp, online networks, alter egos, film sets, intentional communities, music scenes, new religious movements, group therapy, interactive theater, one-on-one performance art, and escape rooms*—to critically sanctioned forms of traditionalism—such as *the picture frame, stage, and camera lens*—we’ll learn about (and experiment with) the myriad ways creative producers establish new social contracts to access ways of being repressed or elided by dominant culture. We’ll examine art that works in non-presentational modes, does not imagine an audience, and rejects larger social entanglement in favor of personal or communal introspection. What happens when, instead of breaking down the gallery walls, for a time, we simply lock the door?

Over two weeks, students will first engage in a collective reimagining of the classroom space through meditation, group writing, discussion, and some small lectures. The remainder will unfold as a private group performance of learning, documented to a mutually agreed upon degree using collaborative methods and materials. The idea is for students to have an opportunity to teach one another through their art practice. Readings will be assigned by both the instructor and the students, so the material could veer in all sorts of directions, but will represent a sampling of relevant theory, journalism, poetry, fiction, and hybrid forms.

Possible co-thinkers may include *Fritz Haeg, Cory Doctorow, Giorgio Agamben, Genesis Breyer P-Orridge, Ursula K. LeGuin, Fred Moten, Hellen and Scott Nearing, Herbert Marcuse, Antonin Artaud, Ellen Willis, Adrian Piper, C G Jung, André Breton, Jacques Rancière, Guy Debord, Donna Harraway, Anna Tsing, Clair Bishop, and others.*

Magic Circles is open to all métiers, but students should feel comfortable integrating research into their practice and join with a desire to contribute to this collective, experiential style of critical expression that reflects the ethos of our topics of study.

Assignments:

Pool of Materials: 30%, due @ Meeting 3.

The pool of materials will be our reservoir of writings, artworks, media, and ephemera from which we'll compile the rest of the lessons and the actions of the course. Each student will contribute at least two pieces from their own research. Students must select a piece from the pool that **they did not contribute**, and this is what they will use to develop their actions/interventions and to inspire their further research in the class.

This assignment satisfies Learning Goal “Critical Studies 300 #4: “Collect and organize quantitative information related to course material.”

Actions/Interventions: 30%, due sometime during Week 2.

Each student, either as part of a group or as an individual, will contribute to the collective processing of the Pool of Materials through a premeditated action or intervention that reacts to, theatricises, or otherwise confronts/examines their specific selection from the Pool of Materials. These should represent a thorough ethic of research, engagement, analysis, or interpretation and inspiration vis a vis the catalyzing material.

This assignment satisfies Learning Goal “Critical Studies 300 #1: “Generate class discussion from course material through active questioning, challenging ideas across and through disciplines, and making connections beyond the classroom.”

Final Reflection: 15%, due at any point in the student's presumably long and fruitful life. Cannot be completed late.

This is simply a short piece of writing that reflects on the process of integrating private art and private experiences into the broader practice of real life.

This assignment satisfies Learning Goal “Critical Studies 300 #2: “Investigate and analyze key events, movements, and ideas in a diverse range of subject areas relevant to course topic, demonstrating comprehension of diverse methodologies with a range of global and cultural contexts and perspectives.

Attendance/Participation: 15%

Schedule (subject to drastic change):

Meeting #1: Introduction to the course; small lecture on magic circles, TAZs, art communes, Jungian archetypes, and social practice vs private performance; group reading of Wilk's essay on larping, *Ask Before You Bite*, magic circles in general, and 'bleed', along with Alan Kaprow's *Education of the Un-Artist: parts i, ii, and iii*.

Assignment: Reading TBD, bring in an object to transmute our space from an arts classroom into anything else.

Meeting #2: Invocation of Genesis Breyer P-Orridge's *Psychic Bible*. Context presentation on **The Temple of Psychick Mouth**.

Assignment: Contribution(s) to the Pool of Materials.

Meeting #3: Volunteer led presentations on Pool contributions. Group reading of Ursula K. LeGuin's *A Non-Euclidean View of California as a Very Cold Place to Be* (or some other text more relevant to our concerns so far) followed by Reflection exercise.

Assignment: Peruse the Pool of Materials and choose which you would like to work from for the rest of the course.

Meeting #4: Last meeting of the first week. Final meeting before actions begin. Group meetings on actions/interventions.

Assignment: Readings TBD

Meetings #5: Full meetings dedicated to action/intervention development and group knowledge/skill sharing.

Assignment: Finalize actions/interventions.

Meeting #6: Guest Lecture & Workshop

Assignment: Finalize actions/interventions.

Meetings #7, #8: Action time. Closing ceremony.

Attendance Policy:

A student will be assigned a No Credit (NC) grade for Critical Studies courses after missing in excess of three classes without a reasonable excuse, unless the student withdraws from the course by the 10th week of the semester, as per the grading policy (see below).

Grading Policy:

Standard Grading Options

High Pass (HP): Passing with Excellence

Pass (P): Passing with Quality

Low Pass (LP): Passing

No Credit (NC): Work did not meet the criteria for credit.

Other Grading Options

Incomplete (I):

A temporary Incomplete grade may be given to a student who has maintained satisfactory attendance and completed passing work throughout most of a course, but as a result of extenuating circumstances is unable to complete the course requirements by the end of the semester. Incomplete grades are not assigned for Summer, Interim, Practicum, or Winter Session courses.

Incomplete grades are assigned through submission of an Incomplete Contract to the Registrar's Office. The Incomplete Contract is an explicit agreement between student and faculty of the work remaining to be completed, and the date by which the work must be submitted for final review. The contract must also be approved by the school or program responsible for the course.

Incomplete grades assigned for fall semester courses must be resolved no later than the end of the following spring semester. Incomplete grades assigned for spring courses must be resolved no later than the end of the following fall semester. Earlier deadlines for completion may be set at the discretion of the faculty and must be specified on the Incomplete Contract. Incomplete grades not replaced by final LP, P, or HP grades by the stated deadline will revert to NC (No Credit) grades on the transcript.

No Grade Recorded (NG):

Placeholder grade entered by the Registrar's Office at the close of the grading period which indicates that no grade has yet been assigned by the faculty of record. "NG" grades not changed to a final evaluation by the end of the following semester will convert to "NC" on the transcript.

Withdrawn (W):

Grade assigned by the Registrar to indicate withdrawal from a course after the end of the add/drop period. Students may withdraw from a course without academic penalty through the 10th week of the semester. The course remains on the student's record with a "W" grade. "W" grades have no impact on semester or cumulative grading calculations, and do not count toward a

student's residency or full-time status.

Grade Appeals:

When a student wishes to appeal a grade: the student must first appeal to the instructor who assigned the grade in question. Where there is no satisfactory remedy through appeal to the instructor, the student may file written appeal to the dean of the school in which the course is offered. The decision of the dean is final.

“NC” grades may not be changed to a grade except by means of a petition to the dean of the School involved. Such changes must be initiated by the instructor of the class or, in the instructor’s absence, the dean of the school offering the course and submitted to the Registrar. Such a petition must include a written explanation from the instructor of the class explaining the reasons for changing the grade and a signature of support from the dean of the school offering the course. Petitions for the change of an NC grade must be submitted during the student’s term of residency at the Institute and are considered only under exceptional, extenuating circumstances.

Auditing:

Auditing a class is an arrangement made between the student and the instructor. No official record will be kept and no credit will be given.

GPA Equivalencies:

On the official academic transcript, CalArts calculates student progress by indicated attempted units and the completed units, but does not use a Grade Point Average (GPA) as part of its marking system. However, when a GPA is required for external purposes, the following formula may be used: HP=4.00, P=3.00, LP=2.00, NC=0.00.

Services for Students with Disabilities:

CalArts will provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who have registered with the Student Affairs office. Registration with the Office of Student Affairs is on a voluntary, self-identifying basis. Services are available only after a student has presented certified, current documentation of the disability from an appropriate medical or educational specialist, and this documentation has been reviewed and accepted as complete.

Plagiarism:

Critical Studies endeavors to teach students the essential skills and basic ethics involved in any academic enquiry. To this end, we are committed to observing the policy on plagiarism set out in the CalArts Course Catalog. This stipulates that plagiarism is the use of ideas and/or quotations (from the internet, books, films, television, newspapers, articles, the work of other students, works of art, media, etc.) without proper credit to the author/artist. Critical Studies holds to the view that plagiarism constitutes intellectual theft and is a serious breach of acceptable conduct. It is also the policy of CalArts that students who misrepresent source material as their own original work and fail to credit it have committed plagiarism and are subject to disciplinary action. In the case of Critical Studies, any student caught plagiarizing will immediately be given a ‘no credit’ for that class. The student will not be allowed to re-write the paper, and if there is further evidence of plagiarism, Critical Studies will recommend more severe disciplinary action, including suspension or dismissal.

If you have any questions regarding plagiarism or want direction on how to credit source material, ask the member of faculty and refer to reference guides on permanent reserve in the CalArts library. The CalArts reference librarians may be able to offer additional information as well.