

## Bruce Nauman: The End of Art and the Beginning of Sculpture

Harvard University

Department of Visual and Environmental Studies

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Mon: 3-5 Wed: 1-5

Office Hours: M:5-6; Th:1:30-3:30 (or by appt) office located in sculpture studio

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION:

If sculpture takes place in space, and one's space is delineated and defined by one's relationship and dialogue with materials, objects or elements, then perhaps sculpture operates and resides in any space: written, visual, or verbal. If so, the challenge is how to reference these observations and experiences in innovative ways. Simultaneously, one must critically analyze what materials, if any, are necessary to manifest these experiences. Inevitably, it is through a critical and analytical process that the importance of thought will come about.

The focus of this course will be to investigate the relationship between space, materials, and thought through the work of contemporary artist, **Bruce Nauman**. Although at first the task may seem quite palpable and simple, the aim of this course is to make the student aware of the endless possibilities of sculpture. We will think of how to manifest our ideas, from beginning to end, while engaging the ever present problems of presentation posed by the studio and the actual "exhibition site."

Through Nauman's visual and written work, this course will challenge the student through problems and questions regarding thinking, space, making, process, interaction and materiality. We will realize how sculpture can be a container of violence, a tool for thought, a vehicle for critique, and a manifestation of laughter.

Thus, this investigation will be a three-part process. First, this will require the investigation of what constitutes a "material" or "materiality": does the preconceived notion of "materials" stagnate or expand our visual vocabulary? Second, we must define "space," e.g., public/private, social/political, and so on. Third, what is the role of thought in this whole process? Does thought precede making, does making precede thought, or is there another space, another form of thought unique to the sculptural process?

Students will be challenged by three projects. The first will ask the student to work with non-traditional material in a non-traditional manner. The second will ask the student to work in a non-traditional space. The third project will be open in order to allow the student to implement her/his ideas and the course materials into a problem and project of their own. This last phase will allow the student

artist to begin the development of her or his own manner of thinking about sculpture. Critiques and class discussions will take place by comparing theoretical reading material with Nauman's work.

Throughout this process, the student will learn of sculpture's different functions and of the endless sculptural possibilities available when the discourses of space, material, and thought are thought of and conceptualized in different and innovative ways.

### **CLASS STRUCTURE:**

This class is a composite of studio practice, class discussions, assigned readings, and visual presentations. As always, the logic of the syllabus falls prey to chance and improvisation, thus, *we might sidetrack where deemed necessary*. In this light, I may add or delete readings as I see fit.

Although most of the readings have been assigned below, I will be assigning other readings throughout the semester. Although there may be multiple readings assigned each week, I will not necessarily lecture on each reading. It is the responsibility of the student to read each and every one of the assigned readings so as to allow for a better comprehension of the overall theme of the week. It is my belief that a healthy learning process is partially guided by curiosity and challenge. Additionally, students shall feel free to ask questions in class.

The student will be expected to attend all class meetings, and to contribute regularly, constructively, and actively to class discussions and critiques.

CLASS ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY! YOU ARE PERMITTED TWO (2) ABSENCES, ANY ABSENCE OVER THIS WILL AUTOMATICALLY REDUCE YOUR GRADE BY A FULL GRADE POINT. I.e, Three absences will lower an A to a A-, or A- to B+.

There will be eight (8) required books you will need to purchase:

1. The Body in Pain, Elaine Scarry
2. Jealousy, Alain Robbe-Grillet
3. Crowds and Power, Elias Canetti
4. An Introductory Guide to Post-Structuralism and Postmodernism, Madan Sarup
5. Bruce Nauman, Robert C. Morgan
6. Please Pay Attention Please, Janet Kraynac
7. America, Jean Baudrillard
8. On Bullshit, Harry G. Frankfurt

# SYLLABUS

## **Week I: Feb. 1:**

Shopping Period: Explain Course

## **Week II: Feb. 6 & 8: Foundation**

Mon: Meet w/me and Tom; have Tom Howell sign you up

Wed:

Slides:

Read:

Sarup: Introduction; conclusion; pp. 129-132; pp. 168-177

Morgan: p. 1-17; 270-284

Handout:

1<sup>st</sup> Class Project (due Wednesday, Feb.27<sup>th</sup>)

## **Week III: Feb. 13 & 15:**

Mon:

Read:

Sarup: pp. 32-38 (Derrida)

Kraynak: pp. 94-109; 185-196 (writings; interview)

Buren: The Function of the Studio

Wed: Commands (PPAP; Get Out...; Clown Torture)

Read:

Canetti: pp. 290-296; 303-316; 377-379

Scarry: pp. 3-23 (Introduction)

Morgan: p. 317 (Writings); pp. 146-154 (Essay); 326-327 (Writings)

## **Week IV: Feb. 20 & 22:**

Mon:

*President's Day—No Class!*

Wed:

View:

*House of Games*, by David Mamet

Read:

Morgan: pp. 206-207; 340-341

Robbe-Grillet: Read all

## **Week V: Feb. 27 & March 1:**

Mon:

Critique 1<sup>st</sup> Class Project

Wed:  
Continue Critiques  
Handout 2<sup>nd</sup> Class Project (due March 29<sup>th</sup>)

**Week VI: March 13 & 15:**

Mon:  
Slides:  
Read:  
    Morgan: 116-145  
    Kraynak: 20-36

Wed:  
Read:  
    Morgan: pp. 36-42  
    Scarry: pp. 3-23 (Introduction)  
    Canetti: pp. 27-59

**Week VII: March 20 & 22:**  
*Spring Recess—No Classes!*

**Week VIII: March 27 & 29:**

Mon:  
Open Studio

Wed:  
Critique 2<sup>nd</sup> Project

**Week IX: April 3 & 5:**

Mon:  
Continue Critiques of 2<sup>nd</sup> Project  
Handout 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Project (due April

Wed:  
Read:  
    Baudrillard: 1-11; 27-105; 121-128  
    Kraynak: 197-227 (Interview)

**Week X: April 10 & 12:**

Mon:  
View:  
    *Twenty-Nine Palms*, by Bruno Baretto

Wed:  
Read:  
    Canetti: 15-24;  
    Kraynak: 155-170 (Interview)

**Week XI: April 17 & 19:**

Mon:

In-Class interview with guest

Wed:

Read:

Scarry: pp. 278-326

**Week XII: April 24 & 26:**

Mon:

Read:

Frankfurt: Read all of *On Bullshit*

Wed:

Open

**Week XIII: May 1 & 3:**

Mon:

Critique 3<sup>rd</sup> Class Project

Wed:

Continue Critiques

Information on Grading: Spring 2006

You will be given a letter-grade at the end of the semester. Since the three projects will be graded on a 100-point scale, I have given you a breakdown and equation of the numerical to letter grade relationship. Class participation may earn you some extra points: you can only GAIN from participation, not lose points!

A	95-100	Excellent quality
A-	90-94	Better than good, not quite excellent
B+	87-89	Very good quality
B	83-86	Good quality
B-	80-82	Better than fair, almost good
C+	77-79	Fair
C	73-76	Less than fair quality
C-	70-72	Below Fair quality
D	60-69	Unacceptable quality, but project was turned in
F	0-59	Fail

I define "excellent" according to amount of work ethic and intellectual curiosity exhibited, as well as overall productive participation in class. You can estimate "good" and "fair" on a sliding scale, and thus accordingly.