

ETS 142

FINAL PROJECT: AGENCY IN A POSTMODERN WORLD

“How...can you have ‘agency’ if all subjects are social constructions?”

~Nealon and Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox*, p. 202.

A great question indeed! Certainly, we have done a lot this semester to demonstrate the power cultural narratives have to shape our ideas and actions. But as bleak as our coursework may have seemed at times, we do have agency. We can respond in meaningful ways to our cultural contexts and, with persistence, change the landscapes in which we operate. Literary theory should be empowering. It should allow us to see what we’re up against. It should help us to discover the power we have to transform culture, to resist and reshape the ideologies we find troubling and to support and strengthen those that point the way to a brighter future.

Your task in this final project is to imagine that path.

To Complete This Project, You Must:

- Work in a group, the size of which is limited by each person’s ability to make sustained, meaningful contributions to the work as a whole
- Incorporate visual elements into a creative (not merely informational) project
- Explain and explore what agency is—what it requires, what it looks like, what it doesn’t look like, etc.
- Incorporate major concepts from each of our units this semester
- Explore specific features of contemporary life that complicate the ability we have to exert agency
- Establish the significance of the issues you’ve engaged—what’s at stake, for whom, why, etc.

To Compose the Final Essay, Each Person Must:

- Compose his or her own summation of the project. This written explanation should be approximately 1500 words in length.
- Introduce the purpose of the project early, the issues at stake and the nature of the agency required. Then, highlight the details in the project that were crucial for conveying the key concerns from each unit.
- Reflect on the project, on what it conveys about agency and the postmodern condition, on your experiences with the ideas in the course, etc.

A Few Tips:

- While it is empowering, the concept of agency presents challenges (it’s certainly more complicated than a Nike slogan). To establish the “problem,” then, locate your project within a specific discourse, one concerning some aspect of how we understand ourselves and each other.
- Having located a problem, consider solutions to explore. Agency is a response, one that’s “constrained and enabled” by cultural contexts; it’s different from “success” or “failure” as determined by dominant ideologies.
- Consider an appropriate scope for your story. Is it a hero’s journey? A simple act of resistance? A combination of the two? Shape your narrative in a way that will allow you to explore the unit concepts in detail and to make a complex statement about the nature of agency in our world.
- Consider an appropriate form for your story. Should it be told using (and, perhaps, tweaking) the conventions of a particular genre? Should postmodern elements be incorporated to help you make your points (about a unit concept, about the possibilities for / limitations on agency), or should these elements be subverted and dismantled?
- Consider an appropriate ending. How conclusive will it be? How will it support the broader statements you’d like to make? How will it work to substantiate your central ideas? How “in the red” will the characters in your project push the “agency meter”? Why?

ETS 142
FINAL PRESENTATION

GROUP MEMBERS:

	Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
<u>Group Grade</u>					
<i>Claim(s) about Agency:</i> Complexity of ideas regarding the nature of agency (the possibilities & the limitations)					
<i>Unit Analyses:</i> Explanation of how overall claim(s) relate to the concerns from each unit; nuanced explanation of those concerns					
<i>Significance:</i> Develops what's at stake, for whom, why, etc., by situating the claim(s) and unit concepts within appropriate discourses					
<i>Technical aspects:</i> Eye contact; articulation; proper pacing; organization and preparedness; appropriate length.					
<i>Creative aspects:</i> Inventive form, insightful details, ingeniously entertaining presentation, *T words.					
<u>Individual Grade:</u>					
<i>Essay—Content:</i> Central issues in contemporary life and their significance explained in relation to agency and the concepts from the units; explanation of the way these concepts were demonstrated in the project.					
<i>Essay—Form & Organization—</i> Intro establishes the issues and project focus; body paragraphs clearly relate project's focus to unit concepts; conclusion recaps and reflects (on the project, on your experiences in the course, etc.)					