Intellectual Traditions
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What Does It Mean to be "Free"? Freedom and Constraint in Art and Literature.

Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains.
—Jean-Jacques Rousseau

My freedom thus consists in my moving about within the narrow frame that I have assigned myself for each one of my undertakings. I shall go even further: my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. The more constraint one imposes, the more one frees oneself of the chains that shackle the spirit.
—Igor Stravinksy

I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.
—Audre Lorde

This course in Intellectual Traditions examines concepts of freedom from the Enlightenment to the present. From the American and French revolutions to abortion laws and vaccine mandates, "Freedom" has been a ubiquitous—and famously vague—concept in liberal democracies. But what does it really mean? How do conflicting senses of "freedom" influence our daily life? More specifically, what, if anything, can art and literature contribute to our conversations about freedom and its purported opposites tyranny and constraint? Can constraints be a potent form of agency? These are complex questions we will be considering via specific texts and our own writing. We'll look at the role of formal "constraints" in modern and contemporary writing and other media, and the ways that various media and movements have tried to model a dynamic freedom-in-constraint. Texts (including artworks and visual media) by Audre Lorde, Amanda Gorman, Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, John Cage, M. NourbeSe Philip, Guillermo Gomez-Peña, Ludwig Wittgenstein, among others will likely be included. You will have the opportunity to experiment with written forms, write short essays, and conduct collaborative, interdisciplinary research in areas of contemporary social concern that interest you.

Required Texts:

- M. NourbeSe Philip — *Zong!*
- John Cage — *Diary: How to Improve the World (You Will Only Make Matters Worse)*
- Guillermo Gomez-Peña — *The New World Border: Prophecies, Poems & Loqueras for the End of the World*

Course Requirements:

- Attendance and active participation. Participation, like writing, takes practice. Not everyone is comfortable sharing and engaging from day one, so I see this as another opportunity for you to learn and to get feedback. I consider "full participation" to consist

of showing up on time, remaining for the entire class session, making/posing at least one (1) substantial comment/question that advances or deepens class discussion **OR** active listening and engagement in group discussions. Please get in touch with me if you have any concerns about speaking in class!

- Informal, exploratory writing exercises. These will be both in-class and take-home assignments, including "translation" exercises, a semester-long IT notebook or diary, and weekly responses to selected texts.
- A 3-5 pg. "Manifesto" that responds to one of the texts we've discussed in class and asserts a view you have about "freedom."
- A 7-9 pg. essay that encourages you to become deeply interested in a text. Choose one poem or artwork from the course and conduct research on it using the Marriott Library and its databases. Use this research, and your own interests, to form a thesis or opinion regarding the work that you will develop through this essay.

See syllabus for due dates. I will provide plenty of additional instructions and rubrics for each assignment once the semester gets going.