

Give Us Our Daily Class Time: the Teaching Philosophy of Budd Dees

I often start my courses with a brainstorming exercise called 'Give Us Our Daily Cupcakes'*. As a class we create a list, as superfluous as we can, with no guidelines at all. Then I give these instructions:

Intuitively choose three words from the brainstorm list.

Think of a real problem in your life.

Use these three words to analyze your dilemma from a new perspective.

Example:

Words from brainstorm list: *Quentin Tarantino, bellybutton, billboard*

Problem: *I am having issues with my new roommate.*

Creative Analysis: *Remember in that Tarantino movie when Uma Thurman was buried alive? She had to reassess the space necessary for action in order to free herself. I will reassess my space. Think of the expansiveness of my bellybutton. Live there; it is an autonomous space for me alone. If it makes me feel better I can imagine intimate billboards on my stomach describing selfish urges. Or draw them there under my shirt. When I work out a compromise with my roommate, I'll remember this secret.*

Intuitively Choose

The absurdity of this exercise helps transform acceptable sites for ideation. This activity structures our relationship to artistic research and contemplation throughout the semester. So the first pedagogical push for our projects is one of expansiveness. Anything can be fodder for art making; as in improv comedy, the answer is always yes. The materials of 'New Media' and contemporary art reflect this need of receptivity and openness.

Think of a Real Problem in Your Life

The second is to find an idea's locality and intimacy. Artists speak from their own voices, to evaluate, with their own authorities, their lives and interactions. I find this exciting because it demands the activation of an identity and agency as an artist and thinker. External research is integral to this practice; but the point is to understand this research from one's own perspective to make use of it with sincerity.

Analyze Your Dilemma from a New Perspective

Even though the 'analysis' to the above problem is absurd, the third instruction is about returning to reality. It asks the brainstorm to be useful. It demands that young artists reconsider in a way that is outside of themselves. The way to this solution requires patience; it meanders. This final step encourages empathy by doing away with the need for efficiency and impatience. And empathy is the most important part.

I sometimes fail to maintain empathy as an artist and person, but experiencing playful and contemplative classroom time helps me, too.

* I first experienced 'Give Us Our Daily Cupcakes' in 2011 during Free University at the Civic Media Center, Gainesville, FL. Almah LaVon SecretNBold lead and created the exercise, during which she wore a single red forearm band with fringe.