

Poetic Thinking Across Media

Fall 2014

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Course Description

This class is offered for advanced undergraduates and graduate students. Our goal is to examine the human capacity to approach life and the worlds we inhabit *poetically*: in manners of writing, speaking, and artistic creation that are not governed by systematic, logical reasoning. We will consider how poetic works across media raise personal, communal, ethical, and political dilemmas. Studying mythological, religious, literary, cinematic and virtual works, we will ask how poetic works think-through these dilemmas by employing rhetorical strategies and creating complex symbolic systems. Considering how a variety of poetic thinkers approach such notions as “orientation” or “pilgrimage,” we will examine how they contemplate, poetically, what love, war, death, and life itself may mean. Beyond intellectual excitement, this course strives to offer students the modes and means to creatively examine one’s own direction.

Course Requirements

The aim of this course is to combine reading, viewing, and debating with experimenting in poetic thinking, across media. Reading, class discussion, writing, and creative exercises (such as producing videos, launching tumblr pages, building websites, coding twines or games etc.) will promote knowledge and intellectual skills, as well as new modes of creativity. The course site for readings, interaction, and posting “Responses” is **poeticthinking.lacunastories.com**

Students are expected to:

1. Participate actively in our discussions (**30%** of grade)

2. Regularly contribute to their blogs/course blog. At least 10 self-authored contributions to the website during the term, and at least 10 comments to other participants' contributions. Please post by 9 pm Sunday (for Monday's session) or 9 pm Tuesday (for Wednesday's session). Make an effort to read new posts before each class session. **(50% of grade)**
3. Create and present a final project which is a contemporary expression of poetic thinking (e.g. a website, a new media project, a writing project, etc.) in a separate blog post and in front of the class, on December 11th. **(20% of grade)**

BULLETS KEY

- Hosted on Lacuna Stories, *poeticthinking.lacunastories.com*
- Find on your own outside of Lacuna Stories
- ★ Assignment (most of these will be submitted on Lacuna Stories as "Responses")
- (R)** Required, *i.e. we will be discussing this in class*
- (SG)** Suggested, *i.e. this will likely come up or be referenced in class*
- (SP)** Supplemental, *i.e. use this to read more, enrich your writing, and use for your projects*

WEEKLY READINGS AND ASSIGNMENTS

1. Introduction and Overview

2. A Sense of Direction

- Lewis-Kraus, Gideon *A Sense of Direction: Pilgrimage for the Restless and Hopeful*. pp. 1-102 **(R)**
- OED Definitions of "Orientation" and "Pilgrimage" **(R)**
- Review "Way of St. James" on Wikipedia **(SG)**
- Explore online: El Camino de Santiago (e.g. YouTube, Twitter, Tumblr etc.) **(SG)**
- ★ First reflection on the readings in "Responses" on Lacuna Stories due Sept 28th at 9PM

3. Ecclesiastes/Kohelet

- Read the Ecclesiastes **(R)**
- Harold Bloom on The Book of Job and Kohelet **(SG)**
- ★ Choose two-three of Ecclesiastes' assertions to present them in class. Please be prepared to explain why you have chosen them. You can write up your presentation as "Response" on Lacuna Stories ahead of time to organize and arrange your thoughts and reflections.

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. What are the meanings Robert Alter assigns to Ecclesiastes' notion of "merest breath" (the Hebrew *havel havalim*)?

2. How does Ecclesiastes' claim, "All is mere breath" relate to his observations regarding the human world; to his actions (e.g. "I built myself houses..." (Ecc., 2:4)?

4. Friedrich Nietzsche

- Nietzsche *Also Spoke Zarathustra* (part 1) (R)
- Nietzsche biography (R)
- Harold Bloom, Nietzsche and Emerson (SG)
- Penguin Nietzsche reader: "Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics" and on "Morality" (SP)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. Who or what is Zarathustra?
2. What may his ideas mean today?
3. If you read "Logic, Epistemology, Metaphysics": what is in Nietzsche's view, what is the difference between "explanation" and "description"?
4. What is Nietzsche's view of false judgment?
5. How does Nietzsche describe the origin of the concepts of good and evil?

5. Jonathan Harris Questioning the Limits of Genre

- View the following websites, focusing on the homepages and stories sections: number27, The Whale Hunt, Balloons of Bhutan, Cowbird (R)
- Different Ways of Looking (R)
- Jonathan Harris Collects Stories (R)
- Jonathan Harris tells the web's secret stories (R)
- ★ Choose at least one of Harris's artworks OR one story from cowbird.com that you find appealing/intriguing and be prepared to explain why you have chosen it. You can write up your presentation as "Response" on Lacuna Stories ahead of time to organize and arrange your thoughts and reflections.

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. How does Harris connect his personal biography to the core ideas that drive his
2. work?
3. What is Harris's view regarding technology's ability to help us present our thoughts and life stories?

6. Plato's Allegorical Thinking

- Plato, "Allegory of the Cave" (R)
- Paul Auster and J. M. Coetzee, from *Here and Now* (with youtube clip) (R)
- Plato's biography (SG)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. What is the definition of allegory?
2. In what ways does the allegory of the cave make claims about human perception?
3. What insights does Plato wish to convey with poetic means (allegory)?
4. How do J. M. Coetzee and Paul Auster use Plato's allegory? With what effect do they manage to convince/make a point regarding what money is? The meaning of the financial crisis?

7. Martin Heidegger: What is a work of art?

- Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art" (R)
- Explore: On-line reactions to Heidegger (e.g. on Social Media) (R)
- Explore: Digital Art at The Creators Project (R)
- "Heidegger's Aesthetics," at the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SG)
- "Human, All Too Human" (BBC documentary) (SP)
- Heidegger on Future of Philosophy (SP)
- Martin Heidegger biography (SP)

8. Gerhard Richter in Search of Orientation

- Oxford English Dictionary entry on "Atlas" (R)
- Read Helmut Friedel, "Gerhard Richter—Atlas" This is the introduction to Gerhard Richter, Atlas (R)
- Read Gerhard Richter, Biography (R)
- View Gerhard Richter, Atlas (On Reserve, library- selections from the book) (R)
- View Atlas: <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/art/atlas/> (R)
- View a video presentation of Atlas as an artistic project:
<http://www.gerhard-richter.com/videos/exhibitions-1/gerhard-richter-atlas-54> (SG)
- ★ Choose at least on set of images from Atlas to present/discuss in class. You can write up your ideas as "Response" on Lacuna Stories ahead of time to organize and arrange your thoughts and reflections.

Further resources: recent lectures on Richter's work (please view in this order):

- <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/videos/talks-3/unfinished-business-52> (SP)
- <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/videos/talks-3/perspectives-and-viewpoint-47> (SP)
- <http://www.gerhard-richter.com/videos/talks-3/not-the-picture-but-the-picturing-49> (SP)
- "ART REVIEW; Helplessness And Beauty In the Vision Of a Skeptic"
- <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/02/15/arts/art-review-helplessness-and-beauty-in-the-vision-of-a-skeptic.html?scp=8&sq=%22Gerhard+Richter%22&st=nyt> (SP)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. In what ways may we think of Gerhard Richter’s compilation of images as an atlas?
2. How does he combine historical images with images of nature or maps of cities?
3. Is there certain logic to the order of images?

WORKSHOP

9. Play as Orientation

- MacKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory*, “Allegory”, pp.1-10 (R)
- Play *Dys4ia* <http://www.newgrounds.com/portal/view/591565> (10 minutes) (R)
- Play *Lim* until you get stuck, or finish <http://mkopas.net/files/Lim/> (10 minutes) (R)
- Play *Year Walk* <http://store.steampowered.com/app/269050/> (2-3 hours, \$5.99 as a steam download. If you’re having trouble downloading steam, email Melissa to make other arrangements to play) (R)
- ★ 1) Describe how the experience of playing Year Walk was different from how it would have been as a different form of media (a similar story as a poem, video, website, etc), **or: 2) Write out the design of a game with an intentional “allegorithm” of your choosing. Post your ideas as “Response” on Lacuna Stories the evening before class.**

You may want to consider the following questions and answer them in a “Responses” blog post:

1. What is an “Allegorithm”? What kinds of “Allegorithms” are at play in these games?
2. What is poetic thinking as it relates to video games? Are *Dys4ia* and *Lim* games at all?

10. Plato on Love—The Symposium

- Plato, *The Symposium* (R)
- David Sedley, “Philosophy, Forms, and the Art of Ruling” (R)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. Who are the different participants of the text?
2. What are their views of love?
3. Focus on Socrates’s view of love: do you find yourself in agreement with him? Why?

Proposal due for final project: *1 paragraph including a brief description of your idea, what media you will use to construct your project and how it relates to themes in the course. Email to Amir and Melissa, or You can write up your proposal as “Response” on Lacuna Stories to get useful comments and feedback from instructors and your fellow students--crowdsourc collaborative proposal building!*

11. On Love—Roland Barthes’ A Lover’s Discourse and Adam Phillips’ Monogamy

- A Lover’s Discourse and Monogamy (R)
- Roland Barthes’ biography (SG)

- Adam Phillips' biography (SG)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. How do Barthes and Phillips describe (or not) their genre?
2. In your view, what are the two most illuminating explications of love in Barthes?
3. What is the relationship (if any) between love and monogamy in Phillips' view?

12. On Love—Ovid's *Orpheus and Eurydice* and Rilke's *The Sonnets to Orpheus*

- "Orpheus" from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (R)
- Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*, concentrating on 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 9, 22, 26 (R)
- Ovid's biography (SG)
- Rilke's biography (SG)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. What are the spatial tropes Ovid employs and to what effect?
2. Who is Rilke's addressee in the *Sonnets*?
3. What notion of love and of poetry emerges from Rilke's *Sonnets*?

13. On Loss: Julian Barnes and Joan Didion

- Julian Barnes, "The Loss of Depth" from *Levels of Life* (R)
- Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (at least the first 60 pages) (R)
- Barnes' biography (R)
- Read Didion's biography (R)
- Interview with Joan Didion (SG)
- Robert Pinsky, "'The Year of Magical Thinking': Goodbye to All That" (SG)
- Michael Wood, "His Shoes" (SG)
- Joyce Carol Oates, "Julian Barnes and the work of grief" (SG)
- A conversation with Julian Barnes (SG)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. What is the relationship between personal experience and insight in Barnes' text?
2. How does Barnes use spatial metaphors (metaphors of height, depth, length, tropics etc.) in his presentation of grief?
3. How does Barnes employ the figure of Orpheus in the description of grief?
4. In what sense is the year Didion describes "magical"?
5. What is the role (or effect) of temporal markers (such as specific times, years, historical events, etc.) in Didion's writing?
6. How does Didion describe grief?

14. *Her*

- View the film *Her* (R)
- Film Reviews of *Her* (R)
- Love Objects, NY Review of Books (R)

15. Michel de Montaigne on Transience and Wisdom

- Montaigne's "To philosophize is to learn how to die," "On Solitude" (R)
- Montaigne's biography (R)
- Sarah Bakewell, *How to Live: Or A Life of Montaigne in One Question and Twenty Attempts at an Answer* (SG)
- Alain de Botton on Montaigne (SP)
- ★ What stories and quotes does Montaigne bring to support his views? Which of these do you appreciate most? Be prepared to present one in class. You can write up your ideas as "Response" on Lacuna Stories ahead of time to organize and arrange your thoughts and reflections.

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. How does Montaigne tie together the pursuit of wisdom and his understanding of death?

*****FINAL PROJECT WORKSHOP (to be scheduled outside of class)

- Brainstorm final projects
- New media- tumblr, youtube channel, video, animation, blog, website, twine, game (using Processing)
- Creative writing project- poetry, fiction, short theater piece or screenplay, creative non-fiction
- Visual art, music, performance art, other ideas welcome!

16. Franz Kafka's Fables

- Kafka's "HE," "A Little Fable" (R)
- Kafka's biography (R)
- David Grossman, "Writing in the Dark" (R)
- Hannah Arendt, "Introduction" to *Between Past and the Future* (R)
- Franz Kafka, *Zürich Aphorisms* (SG)
- ★ Write a Response to today's readings on Lacuna Stories. You may want to use one of the questions below as a prompt, or come up with your own.

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. Who is Kafka's "HE"? Who or what is Kafka's mouse?

2. In what ways does David Grossman use Kafka's aphorism to make certain assertions about his own writing? Are Grossman's assertions directly related to Kafka's text? Please be ready to explain your answer.
3. In what ways does Arendt use Kafka's aphorism to make certain assertions about what she views as the relationship between past and future? Are Arendt's assertions directly related to Kafka's text? Please be ready to explain your answer.

17. Tim Hetherington on War

- <http://www.hbo.com/documentaries/which-way-is-the-frontline-from-here-the-life-and-times-of-tim-hetherington/index.html> (R)
- View the photographs and four videos by Hetherington at: <http://www.hrw.org/features/tim-hetherington> (R)
- View Sebastian Junger, "Which way to turn after Hetherington's Death" (R)
- T. Hetherington's biography (R)
- Listen to NPR story on Hetherington's death
- Read Hetherington Diary (R)
- Susan Sontag, excerpts from *On Photography* and *Regarding the Pain of Others* (R)
- ★ Choose at least one set of images from Hetherington work to present/discuss in class. You can write up your ideas as "Response" on Lacuna Stories ahead of time to organize and arrange your thoughts and reflections.

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. What do Hetherington's child soldiers seem to say to the camera?
2. In what sense is Hetherington's Diary a diary?
3. Can photography, specifically photojournalism dedicated to the depiction of war and conflict, orient the beholder? If so, why?

18. Annie Leibovitz's Pilgrimage

- Annie Leibovitz, *Pilgrimage* (On Reserve, library) (R)
- Excerpts from *Pilgrimage* (R)
- A Conversation on *Pilgrimage* with Annie Leibovitz, (R)
- A Conversation on her work (before *Pilgrimage*) with Charlie Rose (R)
- ★ Choose at least one set of images from *Pilgrimage* to present and discuss in class. You can write up your ideas as "Response" on Lacuna Stories ahead of time to organize and arrange your thoughts and reflections.

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. In what ways does the mode of artistic creation (camera) serve to advance Leibovitz's sense of orientation?

2. How do the images relate to the text? Please prepare 1-2 examples and be ready to explain why you have chosen them.
3. Can you find an internal order in the sequence of the images, stories, the invoked historical figures?

19. Doing Things With Words

- JL Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, pp.1-21 (R)
- Ian Bogost, *Carpentry* (R)
- Look at tinyurl.com/codepoetryslam

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. Is “doing things with words”, in Austin’s sense, a way to evade the meaninglessness expressed in Ecclesiastes? Why or why not?
2. Do words “do” something when you use them to code? Why or why not?

20. Wanderlust

- Read at least 4 chapters from Rebecca Solnit’s *Wanderlust* (R)
- Conversation with Lewis Kraus (R)
- Peter Manseau, “The Walking Cure: On the road with a terminally self-aware spiritual seeker” (R)

You may want to consider the following questions:

1. Can modern pilgrimage serve as a mean of orientation? If so, in what sense?
2. How do the myriad ways of walking Solnit describes reflect off of each other?
3. Which kinds of wandering, if any, resonate with you?

Final Project Presentations: December 11 (during exam block)