“Artistic life begins in instinct and moves toward calculation. It begins in inspiration and moves toward repetition it begins in blind obsession and ends in self-possession. Whichever version you subscribe to, the loss of innocence is inevitable, and it is indeed a loss — but one that has its compensations.”

Tony Hoagland; *Real Sofistikashun, 2006*

**GROWING UP**

I am reading LiPo. The TV is on
with the sound off.
I’ve seen this movie before.
I turn on the sound just for a moment.
When the man says, “I love you.”
Then turn it off and go on reading.

Linda Gregg; from *All of it Singing*

“To desire to play, to make literary structures that play into and in unknown or unknowable realms, those of chance and death and the lack of language, is the desire to live in a world that is open and dangerous, that is limitless. To play, both in structure and in content, is to desire to live in wonder.”

Kathy Aker, “Biting the Error: Writers Explore Narrative”

**DESCRIPTION & OBJECTIVES**

The delight of this introductory course will be to dig our hands into the topsoil of contemporary poetry and prose to explore the complex and complementary tools writers use to eclipse the gap between thought and expression: as Juan Felipe Herrera suggests, “let us gather in a flourishing way.”

As developing writers we have the daunting privilege of exploring the multitudinous gates of the mind. Carlos Drummond de Andrade writes instead, “This landscape? It doesn’t exist. What exists is vacant space, to be planted.” Learning as we walk, the heavy knobs and tuning forks of the Muse’s radio humming in our hands; listening as we travel: for voice, for form, for image, language, music, anything buzzing through the static...

Through a range of texts we will consider the collapsed binary that places rawness and vision in conflict with the skillful employment of craft. Returning to Tony Hoagland, we will open space for “blind obsession,” and “self-possession,” to intersect. As a collective we will work to retrieve and demystify the tools writers use to remove themselves from the endlessly anxiety-provoking game of stake, focused on uprooting objective significance toward the reflective and socially conscious project of dismantling repressive ideas.
COURSE STRUCTURE:
The first half of the semester will be devoted to the craft of poetry and poetry workshops. Beginning Monday, March 15th we will transition into the prose/fiction component of the semester. Each week will be split evenly between a Monday craft discussion and your Wednesday workshops. Every Monday, we will end our craft discussions with an in class writing exercise based off the week’s readings.

Workshops will begin the third week of class (Wednesday, February 10th). You will be divided into two groups for workshop. Every other Wednesday the groups will alternate. Everyone will submit two poems, two pieces of short fiction, and one piece of nonfiction throughout the semester.

READINGS
You are required to read all course materials assigned. You can find the readings with their corresponding discussion dates at the end of this syllabus. This course recognizes that your passion to write is informed equal parts by your dedication and enthusiasm as a reader. Therefore, it is imperative that you come to class having already completed the week’s reading assignment. I will supply all ancillary texts to the class via PDF two weeks ahead of time, or upon request.

SUBMISSIONS
Submissions will be read, annotated, and discussed by all members of the workshop. To have ample time to respond to your peer’s submissions, pieces for workshop must be distributed one week in advance. Additionally, it is your responsibility to bring two annotated copies of each student’s submission to class (the original poem with your handwritten annotations, handed to you the week before & a photocopy to turn in). Please bring in 12 hard copies of your upcoming submission on the days you are assigned to submit them.

Poetry submissions should be no longer than 3-6 pages of poetry. For fiction submissions, please bring in a short story that is 10-15 pages. Let the poem fill the page as it wants to. Beyond poetry: fiction, prose, analytical essay, critical point, etc. should be double-spaced, and written in a legible font.

CRITICAL POINT // mini-symposia
To hone our critical vocabulary, and ensure active participation in the class, on select Mondays, you and two of your peers are required to present and co-lead a seminar discussion; meaning, beginning Monday, February 8th, with the work of Terrance Hayes, students will be responsible for guiding the class’s discussion for that day. Your aim, in constructing a CRITICAL POINT is to present general observations of the featured writers’ work that resonate with you. What dominant techniques do they employ and what topics are most evident in their poetry? As a presentation aid, each member of the group must write a creative short response (500-750 words) based on a, “deep reading,” of a single poem, or excerpt.

Each student must participate in two mini-symposia, in which the student delivers a paper (800-1000 words) OR creative short response based on a, “deep reading,” of some aspect of the week’s featured texts. The paper must feature an identifiable argument/thesis formulated to answer a specific critical question with a clear and elegant line of reasoning in support of the argument. The paper can specifically discuss the book under question, the author of the book, and/or a set of poems. What the symposium paper is meant to explore the classes responses to individual style and voice.
FINAL PORTFOLIO & STATEMENT OF POETICS

At the end of the semester, you will submit a final portfolio containing all of the submissions you have worked on in class over the semester: including two revised poems, and one revised story. As an introduction to your revised portfolio, you will also write a one-page Statement of Poetics outlining the craft decisions you employed in your revision process, drawing explicit connection between the craftsman from which you adopted the methodology and how you have chosen to further their pursuit.

WORKSHOP PROCEDURES AND ETIQUETTE:

The workshop is a sacred space. The act of writing opens the gates onto our most vulnerable selves, and the workshop must mirror that process as it provides a generative sounding-board for conscious exposition and critique. The basic philosophy of the workshop is that we learn best about writing by writing and listening to others constructively critique our work, and then by revising.

WRITERS, when your work is being workshopped, I will ask you not to say anything until after we have heard from your classmates. After an open, salon-style discussion you will then be able to ask your peers any remaining questions that you might find useful in the revision process. Keep in mind that you have not come to defend your work; moreover that there is no expectation for you to explain it, either. Rather, you will respect the critical response of your peers as reference for your revision process.

READERS, when we are around the table, with drafts spread out before us, a lot is called for in terms of awareness, paying attention, thoughtfulness, and intuition. As storytellers, we are trying to understand how the piece is working: Who is the speaker? Is the speaker driving the narrative, or is the situation creating narrative momentum? How do image and metaphor contribute to the architecture of the piece? By discussing the resonant movements within the piece, through the lens of our readings on contemporary poetics and craft, we will build an active vocabulary for generative critique.

We will discuss workshop etiquette at length, together in class. However, my expectation is that we enter the workshop as conscious participants working towards a collective understanding of literary craft. This means we are not judging a work based on our personal taste, and moreover, it is not our focus to distinguish the piece as good or bad. How does it tick?

EXPECTATIONS

Attendance: Needless to say, attendance is required. Please inform me in advance if you are going to miss a session. Students who miss more than three sessions will not pass the course. Each student is allowed one excused absence. Please be on time, three late arrivals to class (10 minutes or more) will be treated as an absence.

Late Work: Late poems and stories will not be accepted. The revision process is unending. However, due dates for critical points, stories, and poems are concrete. I understand what it is like to be overworked, if you are feeling the weight let me know (in person, via email, through text etc.) and I will work with you to adapt the syllabus to your circumstances.

Integrity: I will not tolerate any sort of plagiarism. If you turn in work that is not your own, you can expect a failing grade and a meeting with a higher academic authority.

Conference: You are required to schedule office hours with me at least once during the semester. (I will pass around a sign-up sheet in the second week of class.) Please come prepared to ask detailed questions or with specific topics for discussion. Email me directly to set up an appointment.
**Electronics:** All electronic devices must be silent and out of sight for the duration of class. You may ask permission to use your laptop during craft discussions to read relevant PDF’s and ebooks. If I catch you misusing your technology I will ask you to put it away. If forced to intervene a second time, you will be excused from class for the day.

**Contact:** Please feel free to email me with any questions and concerns you have, and I’ll do my best to respond to you within 24 hours. I prefer to communicate through email, but I have provided my phone number in the case that you might need to contact me more urgently.

**Regarding Difficult Materials:** I have heard more than one poet respond to the question, “why do you write?” with the aphorism, “you write to save your life,” and for all its kitschiness, I do believe it is in some sense true. With this in mind, some of the texts I have assigned contain difficult material, and with this hope to prepare you. Moreover, I also would like to foster a community of respect where you feel comfortable as both student and peer to speak out if you are feeling uncomfortable with certain class materials. I would also like to caution you about bringing autobiographical material into workshop. Unless there is overbearing evidence to suggest otherwise, I will treat your submissions as works of the imagination. However, if I should encounter something in your submissions concerning a cry for help (murder, suicide, rape etc.) I will reach out via email to check in. Depending on the nature of the situation I may ask that you remove the piece from workshop. That being said, if you are struggling, in or outside of the classroom, please feel safe to reach out to me so I might help guide you toward NYU’s available mental health and wellness resources.

**Disability Disclosure Statement:** Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980. NYU’s Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities

726 Broadway, 2nd Floor, New York, NY 10003-6675 • Telephone: 212-998-4980
Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114 • Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd

**Student Wellness Policy:** Unless we see explicit evidence in workshop that the speaker of a work is the writer themselves, we assume the speaker is fictional. However, certain content relating to murder, depression, suicide, sexual assault, or severe mental distress, such as seems to be a possible cry for help, will likely prompt the instructor’s attention. Please send an email putting this work in context before submitting work, especially for workshop, that may be interpreted as such. If you do feel you need someone to talk to at any point in the semester, please feel safe to reach out to me and I can guide you to the NYU Wellness Center.

### GRADING

- Participation: 25%
- Critical Point: 25%
- Statement of Poetics: 15%
- Final Portfolio: 25%

### EXTRA CREDIT

Visit a museum and write a subjective reflection or alternative narrative inspired by a selected artwork. Turn this transcription in as an ekphrastic poem.

**REQUIRED MATERIALS**

- *Lighthead*, Terrance Hayes
- *The Carrying*, Ada Limón
- *Leaving The Atocha Station*, Ben Lerner

I will provide the class with PDF access to all other relevant materials.
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<tr>
<th>WEEK 1</th>
<th>Monday, February 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Introductions, What is Poetry?, “Acts of Mind,” Exercise</th>
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<td>Monday, February 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fragmentation &amp; Litany: Terrance Hayes</td>
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<td><em>Lighthead // Sonnets for My Past and Future Assassin</em></td>
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<td>Wednesday, February 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Poetry Workshop #1</td>
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<td>Readings: “A Wrong Turning In American Poetry,” Robert Bly</td>
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<td>WEEK 3</td>
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<td>Memory &amp; The Body: Ilya Kaminsky</td>
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<td>“Poetry is Not A Luxury,” Audre Lorde, Sylvia Plath, “The Stones,”</td>
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<td>Poetry Workshop #2</td>
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<td>“Against Sincerity,” Louise Glück, Sam Sax, “Lisp,” Dean Young</td>
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<td>WEEK 4</td>
<td>Monday, February 22&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>Readings: <em>Bright Dead Things // The Carrying</em></td>
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<td>Wednesday, February 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Poetry Workshop #3 (Submission Order Inversion)</td>
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<td>Readings: David Berman, Langston Hughes, W.C.W</td>
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<td>WEEK 5</td>
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<td>Thingyness &amp; Dead-dog Diction: Eileen Myles</td>
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<td>Readings: Frank Stanford, Diane Suess, Rita Dove, Danez Smith</td>
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<td>Readings: Ocean Vuong, Gary Snyder, Matthew Dickman</td>
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<td>WEEK 6</td>
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<td>Line &amp; Breath: Natalie Scenters-Zapico, Roberto Bolano</td>
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<td>Readings: <em>Trés // The Verging Cities</em></td>
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<td>Wednesday, March 10&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Radical Revision Workshop #1 (Submission Order Inversion)</td>
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<td>Readings: Alejandra Pizarnik, Ross Gay, Charles Wright</td>
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<td>Power of The Narrator: Dennis Johnson</td>
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<td>Readings: “Car Crash While Hitchhiking,” &amp; “Strangler Bob”</td>
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<td>Fiction Workshop #1</td>
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<td>Readings: Raymond Carver, J.D. Salinger</td>
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<td>WEEK 8</td>
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<td>Character and Persona: Maggie Nelson</td>
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<td>Reading: <em>Bluets</em>. “Sea Swell,” Vampire in Love, Enrique Villa Matas</td>
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<td>Wednesday, March 24&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Fiction Workshop #2</td>
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<td>Readings: David Foster Wallace, Daniyal Mueeeniddin</td>
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WEEK 9
Monday, March 29th  The Authority of Youth: Ben Lerner
Readings: begin Leaving The Atocha Station

Wednesday, March 31st  Fiction Workshop #3 (Submission Order Inversion)
Readings: finish Leaving The Atocha Station

WEEK 10
Monday, April 5th  Atmosphere & Setting: Zadie Smith
Readings: “Two Men Arrive in a Village,” Zadie Smith

Wednesday, April 7th  Fiction Workshop #4
Readings: F. Scott Fitsgerald, Flannery O’Connor

WEEK 11
Monday, April 12th  Cast of Characters: Anne Carson
Reading: “The Anthropology of Water,” // “River of Names,” D.A.

Wednesday, April 14th  Radical Revision Workshop #2
Readings: Carlos Fuentes, Cormac McCarthy

WEEK 12
Monday, April 19th  Memoir & The Consistency of Time: Joan Didion
Readings: “Goodbye To All That,” // “The White Album”

Wednesday, April 21st  Nonfiction Workshop #1 (Submission Order Inversion)
Readings: “Feet in Smoke,” John Jeremiah Sullivan, Roland Barthes

WEEK 13
Monday, April 26th  Birth of The Reader: Maxine Hong Kingston
Readings: The Woman Warrior // I love A Broad Margin To My Life

Wednesday, April 28th  Nonfiction Workshop #1
Readings: Statement of Poetics Handout

WEEK 14
Monday, May 3rd  Re-vision(ing) the “i”
Readings: Fernando Pessoa, Denise Levertov, Hoagland, Wendell Berry

Wednesday, May 5th  Nonfiction Workshop #2
Readings: Afaa Micheal Weaver, Alberto Rios

Thursday, May 6th  Statement of Poetics Salon
Readings: Statement of Poetics Handout

WEEK 15
Monday, May 10th  Last Day of Classes Poetry Reading & Celebration

Wednesday, May 12th  Final Portfolio Due

“Lighting one candle / with another candle / spring evening.”
— Buson

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1 The day listed for the reading is the day it is due.
2 I reserve the right to alter this reading schedule at any point during the semester.