syllabus

description. This semester we shall ask ourselves a deceptively straightforward question: How, if at all, can we write the contemporary rather than rewriting the past? To begin to begin to answer, we shall keep in mind Heidegger’s observation that not-being-at-home is a more fundamental human condition than being-at-home as we investigate how the possibility space called innovative writing may become richer by living alongside, in, and/or among several art forms and genres at once. What might happen, for instance, at the intersection(s) of fiction/poetry/nonfiction and photography, collage, music, architecture, painting, literary theory, new-media composition, book arts, critifiction, the lyric essay? Medical textbooks, car manuals, movie subtitles, indexes, footnotes, menus, comics, tables of content, appendixes, news reports, the safety card in your airplane seatback, video games? In other words, our goal will be to explore the productive energies of liminal zones, hybridization, pla(y)giarism, the permeability of formal and generic boundaries that might give rise to interesting and illuminating configurations. Along the way, I shall invite us to resist, rethink, and/or expand such notions as “the workshop” and “the workshop critique”; “narrativity”; writing’s “past,” “present,” and “future”; and the pragmatics of the current literary marketplace—all in order to bring into greater relief why and how we do what we do.

recommended pre-requisites: An undergraduate and/or graduate degree in creative writing; familiarity with recent conversations in contemporary fiction; some background in the major movements of critical theory; a nodding acquaintance with at least one art form other than fiction/poetry/nonfiction.

evaluation methods. At least two extended textual projects; weekly narratologically amphibious creative responses to readings; one 60-minute oral presentation & conversation on an experimental text from those listed below, with emphasis on the how and why of specific techniques at work within it; remarkably active class participation; reading and responding thoughtfully and respectfully to your fellow students’ work and to that of established writers and theorists. PLEASE NOTE: You may NOT put up work here that has appeared in any other workshop, anywhere, ever, cross your heart.

workshop. When your piece (equivalent of at least seven, double-spaced, typed pages) is up in a workshop, please make enough copies for everyone in the class and distribute those copies in class one week in advance of the workshop.

leading class discussion. Leading class discussion will constitute an important part of
your grade. You should therefore plan to put a good deal of time and effort into the event, think of it as something equivalent to a short research paper. You will have up to 60 minutes. In that time, you will need to accomplish the following: 1) provide significant background information about the author, text’s publication history, critical reception, your own perspective on it (your job here is to contextualize the text at hand and provide optics through which the class can begin to understand it in fruitful ways); 2) provide the class with 2-3 rich questions (for which you don’t know the answer) about the text and lead a conversation about those questions. An effective presentation will be enjoyable, informative, illuminating, thought-provoking, well-organized, and well-paced. Make sure you have read and reread the material on which you will present. Check all tech setup well in advance of your presentation.

**grading.** Final grades will be calculated on a 100-point system:

- 25 experimental texts (12.5 each)
- 25 creative responses to readings
- 25 leading class discussion
- 25 participation & attendance

**letter grade values.**

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**attendance.** You are expected to attend all class sessions, to arrive on time and stay for the entire class session, to bring any texts under discussion, and to participate actively in our discussions.

**participation.** This course is discussion-based and highly interactive. You are required to be present in all senses of the word, genuinely involved. While active participation is essential, it is also essential that you respond respectfully, expressing differences of opinion without silencing, excluding, interrupting, or monopolizing. Failure to participate actively and frequently will hurt your grade considerably.

**absences/tardiness.** Each absence after the first will lower your final grade for the course by one letter grade. Two late arrivals or early departures will count as one absence.

**due dates.** Assignments are due at the beginning of the class for which they are assigned.

**late assignments.** No late assignments will be accepted.

**success in the course.** Successful students in this course typically demonstrate a high degree of intellectual/creative curiosity, as well as an ability to respond positively to feedback from their instructor and peers. An “A” student not only does well on written assignments, but is prepared (not only has read the material, but actively brings insights into and questions about it to the class), turns in assignments on time, and contributes
meaningfully and consistently to discussion.


**classes & readings.**

Jan. 08 Introductions. What does “experimental” mean, what doesn’t it mean, & what does it do?

15 Raymond Federman, *Double or Nothing* (1971; presentation). Workshops.


29 Young-Hae Chang & Heavy Industries, *Traveling to Utopia and Bust Down the Door* (ca. 2000, online; presentation). Workshops.


19 **No Class.**


12 **Spring Break.**


Apr. 02 David Clark, *88 Constellations for Wittgenstein* (2009, online; presentation). Workshops.


16 Shelley Jackson: *Skin Project* (ongoing, online; presentation). Workshops.

23 Conclusions, Sadness, & Joy.