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Memory Palaces: A Workshop on Experiments in Fiction and Nonfiction

*Spring 2018, DRAP-GA 3026
Wednesday, 5:30–8pm, 14 University Place Conference Room*

At a time when digital techniques for saving and indexing allow us to consolidate endless memory in pocket-sized devices, what memorial power remains in a sentence or paragraph? More than a course on memoir, this is an intensive introduction to the work of art as mnemonic device, or system to aid and deepen, and/or create, memory. Writing has long been associated with memory, whether as a support for memory and the construction thereof, or, conversely, as a technology that weakens our ability to recall through its vicarious capacities. Whether you think writing helps you or hinders you with regard to remembering, considering writing's relationship to memory is one way of analyzing qualities and styles of writing, without using categories like "good" or "bad." We will find this aspect of writing's relationship to memory extremely useful; it is a point to which I will return over the course of the semester.

This is a creative writing class, but it is more than this. In this course we will explore strategies by means of which memory may be housed in and recovered via writing. Following Mary Carruthers's description of medieval visual and literary technologies for encoding information in *The Book of Memory*, we will develop our own "memory palaces," provisional structures though they may be. And we will consider other texts and works of art that both act as mnemonics and describe tactics for seeking, containing, inscribing, preserving, overwriting, and reimagining memory, particularly in the postcolonial context. We will examine the ways in which various forms, genres, occasions, and materials provide diverse kinds of support for the memories we wish to retain or narrate. Nor will we overlook the dynamics of forgetting.

This course aims to familiarize students with varied creative texts that at once describe the art of memory and engage in acts of recollection, recovery, and memorialization. Readings and artworks selected for the syllabus frequently defy straightforward generic classification. They offer examples of the ways in which works of literature—along with sculpture, installations, film, and other forms of visual art—emerge out of authors' careful thinking through of relationships between language and memory, as well as between images and memory, even before or beyond disciplinary categorization. The course will permit participants to examine, for example, works of memoir by fiction writers, a work of fiction by a poet, poems by a lawyer, and numerous other works whose

genre (among other professional affiliations) is either ambiguous or less relevant to our study than their other features and qualities.

Through two short writing exercises and a longer final exploration, students will test, recover, conserve, and refashion memory in writing, completing a publishable piece by the end of the course. Regular workshop sessions will allow students to receive feedback on their own endeavors as well as to respond to the writing of their peers.

Required Texts:*

Adnan, Etel. *Sitt Marie Rose: A Novel*. Sausalito, CA: Post-Apollo Press, 1998.

Bäcker, Heimrad. *Transcript*. Edited by Friedrich Achleitner. Translated by Patrick Greaney and Vincent Kling. Champaign, IL and London: Dalkey Archive, 2010.

Butler, Octavia. *Kindred*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003 [1979].

Delany, Samuel. *The Motion of Light in Water*. New York: Arbor House/William Morrow, 1988.

Gladman, Renee. *Calamities*. Seattle, WA: Wave Books, 2016.

Philip, M. NourbeSe. *Zong! As told to the author by Setaey Adamu Boateng*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2011.

Sebald, W.G. *Austerlitz*. Translated by Anthea Bell. New York: Modern Library, 2011 [2001].

Additional Texts (to be supplied electronically):

Bal, Mieke. "Introduction." In *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. Pages 3–14. Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1997 [1985].

Bergson, Henri. "Of the Survival of Images." In *Matter and Memory*. Pages 133–177. Translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer. New York: Zone Books, 1990 [1896].

Carruthers, Mary. *The Book of Memory*. Cambridge, UK, and New York: Cambridge UP, 1990.

Doherty, Brigid. "Hanne Darboven's 'Real Writing' of History." In *Hanne Darboven: Menschen und Landschaften*. Pages 31–46. Hamburg, DE: Christians, 1999.

* Please buy these texts. They are widely available in paperback.

Heschong, Lisa. *Thermal Delight in Architecture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002 [1968].

Jabès, Edmond. *The Book of Resemblances: The Ineffaceable, The Unperceived*. Vol. 3. Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop. Middletown, CT and London: Wesleyan UP, 1992.

Lambert-Beatty, Carrie. "Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility." *October*. 1, no. 129. 2009: 51–84.

Lin, Tan. "The Patio and the Index."

https://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/the_patio_and_the_index

Luria, Aleksandr R. *Mind of a Mnemonist: A Little Book About a Vast Memory*. Translated by Lynn Solotaroff. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1987 [1968].

Mac Low, Jackson. "Daily Life." In *Thing of Beauty: New and Selected Works*. Edited by Anne Tardos. Pages 116–121. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Perec, Georges. *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces*. Edited with an introduction and translated by John Sturrock. New York and London: Penguin, 2008 [1974].

Stein, Gertrude. "Objects." In *Tender Buttons*. Pages 3–17. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1997 [1913].

Villa, José Garcia. "Elegy for the Airplane." In *Doveglion*. Edited by John Edwin Cowen. Introduction by L. H. Francia. Page 106. New York: Penguin Classics, 2008.

Visual Media:

Hanne Darboven, "Der Mond ist aufgegangen" (*The Moon is Risen*), 1981 (film)
<https://vimeo.com/191255669>

"Walid Raad - Artist Talk"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BtrLac0iak>

Course Requirements:

1. Attendance at weekly meetings of the course; completion of assigned readings (listed below, with date *by which time they should be completed*) before course meetings.
2. Attendance of at least one session of the professor's office hours.
3. Two short writings assignments.

4. One final writing assignment.

Classroom Policies:

1. Bring relevant readings to weekly meetings of the course.
2. Turn phone ringers, laptops, and tablets off prior to beginning of each class and do not utilize electronic devices during class.
3. Texting during class, for any reason, is not permitted. If you must send a text message or look at your phone, please leave the room and return when you are done.
4. Please do not eat during class. Covered drinks are OK.
5. Though this probably goes without saying, rudeness and/or hostility of any kind will not be tolerated. If you find that I or anyone else has said or done something of an unfair or in any other way distressing nature, please alert me so that we may address it.
6. If you have need of any accommodation regarding course materials, classroom space, deadlines, etc., please let me know.

Grading Distribution:

1. Participation in and preparedness for in-class discussion: 20%
2. Two short writing assignments: 25%
3. Participation in and preparedness for workshop sessions: 25%
4. Final writing assignment: 30%

Schedule of Readings and Assignments:

Week 1: January 24 – *The Creation of Memory, or an introduction*

IN CLASS: We'll meet one another and go over the syllabus. After this, I will give a short talk about the subject of the course and why I think the topic is useful for our work as writers. Finally, I'll explain the assignment for the following week and say a few things about sentences and recollection.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 1, "Models for Memory," in Carruthers, as well as Gladman. Pay close attention to Gladman's sentences and come to class having selected *two* you find particularly interesting. Glance at the description of the first writing assignment, included on this syllabus, and begin thinking about it.

Week 2: January 31 – *Sentences and Recollection, part 1*

IN CLASS: I will introduce the first writing assignment of the semester, which is to write 10 sentences (henceforth, “Assignment 1”); more about this assignment below. We’ll discuss the Gladman and do a short exercise.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 2, “Descriptions of the neuropsychology of memory,” in Carruthers. Re-read Gladman, paying close attention to the features of sentences we have discussed. Complete Assignment 1.

Week 3: February 7 – Sentences and Recollection, part 2

first short assignment due

IN CLASS: You will turn in Assignment 1. We’ll have a more in-depth discussion of the Carruthers.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 3, “Elementary memory design,” in Carruthers, as well as Mac Low and Villa, plus an additional short reading TBD.

Week 4: February 14 – Lists

visit from writer Shiv Kotecha

IN CLASS: I will turn back Assignment 1 with comments. We’ll discuss the reading and do a short exercise related to the possibilities offered by the list as an organizational tool and also as a narrative device.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 4, “The arts of memory,” in Carruthers, as well as Perec and Heschong. With reference to the comments I have given you, please revise Assignment 1 and prepare to turn it back at the next meeting.

Week 5: February 21 – Architecture, Delight

revision of first short assignment due

IN CLASS: I will collect your revisions at the beginning of class and make copies of them. We will begin to read and discuss everyone’s work as a group. I will also explain Assignment 2; more about this assignment is below. We will discuss the reading and some uses of space in relation to memory.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 5, “Memory and the ethics of reading,” in Carruthers, and Stein. Complete Assignment 2.

Week 6: February 28 – Words

second short assignment due

IN CLASS: You will turn in Assignment 2. We will continue the discussion of Assignment 1 from last week. We'll discuss the reading and do a short exercise, related to the feeling, sound, and material of words. We will also discuss how you may propose a final project for the class.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 6, "Memory and authority," in Carruthers, and Lin. Complete a proposal (this is intended to be speculative and preliminary!) for a final project for the class.

Week 7: March 7 – *Traces, part 1*
proposal for final project due

IN CLASS: You will turn in your proposal for the final project for the class. I will turn Assignment 2 back to you with comments. We'll discuss the reading.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Chapter 7, "Memory and the book," in Carruthers, and Jabès. Revise Assignment 2 and prepare to hand in a new draft at the following meeting.

****SPRING BREAK****

Week 8: March 21 – *Traces, part 2*
revision of second short assignment due

IN CLASS: I will collect your revisions at the beginning of class and make copies of them. I will turn these copies back to everyone in the class. I will also turn back your final project proposals with comments.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Bal and Luria. Read everyone's Assignment 2 and prepare to discuss during the following class. Revise your final project proposal to hand in.

Week 9: March 28 – *Narrative*
revised proposal for final project due

IN CLASS: We will workshop Assignment 2 and discuss narrative.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Sebald. Begin working on your final project for the class. Optional reading: Bergson.

Week 10: April 4 – *The Archive, part 1*

IN CLASS: We will continue to workshop Assignment 2 and discuss the Sebald.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Bäcker and Philip. Continue working on your final project for the class; prepare a first draft of the project to hand in at the following meeting.

Week 11: April 11 – *The Archive, part 2*

first draft of final project due

IN CLASS: Hand in the first draft of your final project. We will discuss the Bäcker and Philip.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Adnan. Watch the Raad video.
Optional reading: Lambert-Beatty.

****Friday, April 13th, at 12:30pm — Event with artists Nick Mauss and Ken Okiishi on the work and life of Hanne Darboven; please plan to attend and read Doherty before the event****

Week 12: April 18 – *History, part 1*

IN CLASS: I will hand back the first draft of your final project with comments. We will discuss the Adnan, alongside Walid Raad's work.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Delany and additional reading TBD. Revise the draft I have handed back to you based on my comments and prepare to hand it in at the next meeting.

Week 13: April 25 – *Notebooks*

visit from photographer and writer, Stanley Wolukau-Wanambwa; class will meet at 6pm, at the WALTHER COLLECTION, 526 W 26th St Suite 718

IN CLASS: We will discuss Wolukau-Wanambwa's work, along with the Delany. I will collect your new drafts of your final projects.

ASSIGNMENT FOR THE FOLLOWING MEETING: Read Butler.

Week 14: May 2 – *History, part 2*

IN CLASS: We will discuss the Butler and final projects.

Final version of your final project is due on May 9.

Short Writing Assignments:

Assignment 1: *Due February 7*

Write 10 sentences. Though these sentences may be interlinked or in some way narrative in nature, they do not have to be. In other words, these can be 10 distinct sentences unrelated to one another. Please do not organize the sentences into a paragraph. Please use double or triple spacing between each sentence. Each sentence should be a wonderful and extraordinary sentence.

Assignment 2: *Due February 28*

Write 10 paragraphs. Though these paragraphs may be interlinked or in some way narrative in nature, they do not have to be. In other words, these can be 10 distinct paragraphs unrelated to one another. Please do not organize the paragraphs into a story or essay. Please use double or triple spacing between each paragraph. Each paragraph should be a wonderful and extraordinary paragraph.

Final Assignment:

Your final project for this class should be a piece of writing of your own design. It should represent a substantial amount of work, yet be of such a length that you can accomplish it during this course. Please do not attempt to write a long novel or dissertation-length work of criticism! A short story or essay is probably a better sort of thing to try your hand at. I am also open to other forms, genres, and formats. We will discuss all this at greater length as the course unfolds.

Proposal due March 7

First draft due April 4

Final version due May 9

Additional Dates to Save!

Fridays, April 6th, 13th, and 20th, at **5:30pm** – CEH events on writing, editing, and publishing; please plan to attend

Friday, April 13th, at **12:30pm** — Event with artists Nick Mauss and Ken Okiishi on the work and life of Hanne Darboven; please plan to attend