This term’s teaching will be organised on the basis of six seminars, introducing a wide-range of material that falls under the canonical radar, tracing trans-Atlantic influences, and focusing on the complex relations between politics and aesthetics, addressed in numerous different ways by a diverse set of poets. Each week focuses on a particular set of individual texts, which will be bolstered by background reading. These individual poems, essays and interview transcripts will allow us to constellate out into the complex intersection between aesthetic and political radicalism during the post-war period, examining the networks of mutual influence, tension and creative ferment at this time.

The course begins with Muriel Rukeyser, whose autobiographical ‘Poem out of Childhood’ charts the emergence of her writing from an earlier period – the era of Sacco and Vanzetti, the Depression, the New Deal, the Scottsboro Trial, the Communist Party USA, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. Rukeyser is set alongside the hugely influential Charles Olson, whose experience in and eventual disgust with government led him to the writing of an influential new kind of political poetry, the project of the polis in poetry, dealing with questions of localism, internationalism and empire. The second seminar examines a parallel alternative community in Britain, considering the relations of poems (and poets!) to politics, as well as to the trans-Atlantic question of American influence, principally through the underground newsletter The English Intelligencer and the Caribbean Artists Movement. Conducting a different sort of aesthetic and political project to that of Olson, British avant-garde poets reacted against the perceived parochialism and localism of official British verse culture represented by the likes of John Betjeman and the ‘Movement’ writers, aiming at international links and alternative histories of land and empire. Our third seminar focuses on American queer poetry, examining the thriving scenes of queer poetry in San Francisco, Boston, and New York from the 1950 through to the 1970s, and considering questions of State Repression, linguistic disguise, camp, queer performativity and abjection. Our fourth seminar concerns The Black Arts Movement in the States: a highly politicised artistic and political movement, described by critic Larry Neal as the “aesthetic and spiritual sister to the Black Power Movement”, we will see how this very different work challenges our sense of the relations between poetry and politics discussed thus far. Our fifth seminar addresses Feminist Poetics in Britain and America, addressing such topics as the experience of incarceration, domestic labour and the role of experimental writing with the Women’s Movement. Our final class focuses on more recent political poetry emerging from Britain and the States, considering the address to questions of imperialism, work, race, class and gender in the climate of the War in Iraq, the 2010 student movement in the UK and Occupy and Black Lives Matter in the United States.

This is a story of two imperial powers – the United States in the Cold War ascendency, the British Empire in decline – and the varieties of identity grouped under the term ‘nation’, as well as the attendant and reinforcing narratives of race, gender, sexuality and class that these poets fiercely contested and organised round. Some weeks are concentrated in either Britain or America, some in both, following ties of community, friendship, and shared political and aesthetic concerns. This is a story too about the institutions of publishing – the practice of small presses, using technology like the typewriter, the mimeograph machine, and the photocopier, to produce cheap editions, is central, recalling the practice of the radical pamphleteer or the political, samizdat magazine (many of these poems were printed as political broadsides, posters, comminiqués by radical groups). So considering the materiality of the texts will be important. Each week you will be provided with a substantial amount of material, but I also highly recommend that you seek out the originals – the English faculty library and the UL are well stocked for this material, and it’s worth your time getting a feel for these poems as part of their original context to get some sense of its materiality and how that might be in itself be connected to political questions.

One of the broader questions we’ll consider over these six classes will be the relation between ‘difficulty’ and ‘resistance’ in aesthetic terms, and political resistance: for instance, the demands of what has been termed the ‘populist modernism’ of the Black Arts Movement; or the turn towards simplicity and directness in much Women’s Movement poetry of the 1970s, and the reaction against this in the work of experimental feminist writers like Wendy Mulford and Denise Riley, with their politicised interrogations of the categories placed under the first-person. All this complicates the lines too easily drawn – on both sides – between ‘mainstream’ and ‘avant-garde’ as two entirely separated camps. Linguistic and political experimentation are far more multifaceted than these rigid categories of literary history allow, though it is absolutely true that they are often central to the ways that poetic groups define their work.
Two important books which cover the vast array of neglected or too scantily-analysed writing in this tradition in America are Cary Nelson’s *Repression and Recovery* and Lorenzo Thomas’ *Extraordinary Measures*. Both challenge canonical conceptions of modernism in relation to race, gender and class. In terms of other places to start, Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry, 1945-1960* provides many of the groupings and terms we still use, helpfully or not, as a critical short-hand to refer to various currents in American poetry: Black Mountain, The New York School, the Beats and so on.

There was no real comparable anthology for UK poetries at the time, for various reasons – not least of which, the domination of a quietist and conservative literary mainstream, attested to in particular by the controversy surrounding Eric Mottram’s editorship of *Poetry Review* in the 1970s – though *A Various Art*, which emerges much later, is useful. Also Keith Tuma’s anthology of British and Irish poetry, for its juxtaposition of older poets and more ‘mainstream’ poets with the avant-garde; Michael Horowitz’s *Children of Albion*, which seeks to curate a British counter-cultural poetics heavily influenced by Allen Ginsberg; and, in the 1990s, *Conductors of Chaos*, ed. by Iain Sinclair in the 90s, which locates the various currents of the ‘Cambridge School’, London Poetries and so on alongside W.S. Graham and earlier traditions of British surrealism and the ‘New Apocalypse’. That said, though anthologies are helpful, in the end, the best way to encounter this work is in its original context of pamphlets and books, where single authors’ works can be engaged with at length and seen as part of an extended and developing practice, rather than being clipped into bite-sized, representative, ‘greatest hits’ chunks.

The list of reading below is large: the aim is to introduce you to this field, and to understand it as a living tradition that still profoundly affects the way poets work now, rather than to close it off as an object of distanced scholarly study, a consumable object to be judged solely on the criteria of ‘taste’. It insistently is not that: rather, it is work which answers the reader back, which might profoundly change them and their lives.

**Housekeeping**

Content Warning: much of this material deals with controversial politicised issues and uses inflammatory language and material: it should be noted in particular that material presented in Weeks 2 (on British poetries), Weeks 3 and 4 (on the Black Arts Movement and queer poetry) and Week 5 (on feminist Poetry) contain racial and sexual slurs.

Presentations: Each week is organized around a selection of principal texts, poems and essays. These are designed to give some sense of the general field, and to encourage further research around them. I will distribute these core texts by email each week. (The others should all be available in university, faculty and college libraries.) Each week you will pair up to give presentations on any aspect of that week’s reading that interests you. Extra information and a list of prompts for potential questions / areas of discussion will be included in that week’s reading document, which will be emailed to you, but you are free in your presentations to concentrate on any aspect of the texts that interests you, hopefully, but not necessarily, informed by the critical reading for the class. Please do feel free to bring in material of relevance beyond the reading list. While ‘context’ is important, what’s key here is the reading of the poems, particularly when we’re thinking about material that is often relegated to an exemplum of a literary-historical trend, and not given the same accord as canonical texts.

Essays. Some of you may wish to write on material from this course for your termly essays. If so, please do feel free to contact me and we can arrange a brief meeting to discuss the topic.
[Week 1] Black Mountain College and Beyond: Experiments in Poetry, Politics & Education

Poetry

Muriel Rukeyser, ‘Poem out of Childhood’
Charles Olson, ‘The Kingfishers’
Denise Levertov, ‘Beyond the End’
Ed Dorn, ‘Thesis’

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Essays and Criticism

Charles Olson, ‘Projective Verse’
Muriel Rukeyser, ‘The Fear of Poetry’
Denise Levertov, ‘Statement for Don Allen’

Further Reading


Poetry

Wendy Mulford, ‘Permutations’; ‘Picture Book Child’; ‘Nada Mas’
Elaine Feinstein, ‘Lines Outward’; ‘Dance for a Dead Aunt’; ‘A Dream of Spinsterhood’; ‘Mother Love’; ‘For Marina Cvetayeva’
Tom Raworth, ‘An Island east of Ireland’; ‘Southland’; The University of Essex’; ‘University Days’
John James, ‘A Former Boiling’
Louise Bennett, ‘Colonisation in Reverse’
Edward Kamau Brathwiate, ‘The Emigrants’
Rhonda Springer, ‘unborn child’
Linton Kwesi Johnson, ‘Time Come’; ‘Ingla is a Bitch’

Essays and Criticism

Elaine Feinstein, ‘Remembering Prospect’
J.H. Pryme, ‘Resistance and Difficulty’
Terry Eagleton, ‘Recent Poetry’
Ann Walmsley, ‘The Caribbean Artists Movement’

Additionally:

Poemeat Number Eight: The New British Poetry (1965)
The English Intelligencer (1966-1968)

FURTHER READING


[WEEK 3] THE BLACK ARTS MOVEMENT

Poetry

Amiri Baraka, ‘Black Art’; ‘Black People’; 1968 court transcript
Carolyn Rodgers, ‘The Last M.F.’; ‘U name this one’
June Jordan, ‘Poem about Police Violence’
Sonia Sanchez, ‘Blk/Rhetoric’
Lorenzo Thomas, ‘The Bathers’

Essays & Criticism

Umbra Editors, ‘Foreword’ (Umbra magazine)
Larry Neal, ‘The Black Arts Movement’
Carolyn Rodgers, ‘Black Poetry – Where It’s At’
Amiri Baraka, ‘The Black Aesthetic’

Further Reading


* Consider also the parallel nationalist cultural movements in America such as the Chicano/a/ movement and the work of the Nuyorican poets. See, for starters: Gloria Andaluza, Borderlands / Urayoán Noel, In Visible Movement: Nuyorican Poetry from the Sixties to Slam.
[WEEK 4] QUEER POETRY IN BOSTON, SAN FRANCISCO & NEW YORK

Poetry

Robert Duncan, ‘This Place Rumoured to Have Been Sodom’
Frank O’Hara, ‘Homosexuality’; ‘Ode to Joy’
John Ashbery, ‘They Dream Only of America’; ‘The Fairies’ Song’
Adrian Stanford, ‘Memories of Rittenhouse Square’
Judy Grahn, ‘The Psychoanalysis of Edward The Dyke’; ‘Poem’
Pat Parker, ‘[Move in Darkness]’; ‘[My lover is a woman]’; ‘For Willyce’; ‘My Lady ain’t No Lady’; ‘I Fell in Love some Time Ago’
Willyce Kim, ‘[I am 5’1”]’; ‘Poem for Zahava’
Audre Lorde, ‘Recreation’; ‘On a Night of the Full Moon’
Adrienne Rich, ‘from Transcendental Etude’
Karen Brodine, ‘They Outlawed Touch’; ‘Flood’
Eileen Myles, ‘An American Poem’

Essays and Criticism

Robert Duncan, ‘The Homosexual in Society’
John D’Emilio, ‘Capitalism and Gay Identity’
Bruce Boone, ‘Gay Language as Political Praxis’
Elly Bulkin, ‘Kissing/Against the Light: A Look at Lesbian Poetry’
Audre Lorde, ‘Uses of the Erotic’; ‘The Master’s Tools will never Dismantle the Master’s House’

FURTHER READING


* For the more submerged history of queer poetry in Britain, see Mark Hyatt, How Odd; Lee Harwood, The Man with Blue Eyes; Harry Fainlight, selected poems in Fuck You.
[WEEK 5] FEMINIST POETRY IN THE UNITED STATES AND BRITAIN

Poetry

Diane Di Prima, ‘for H.D’; ‘Ave’
Denise Riley, from Marxism for Infants; ‘Affections Must Not’
Wendy Mulford, “[we like to live simply]”; “[more than usual fatigue]”; ‘How do you Live?’
Anna Mendelsohn (Grace Lake), ‘London 1971’; ‘from Viola Tricolor’; ‘The fourteenth flight’
Lucille Clifton, ‘miss rosie’, “[if i stand]”; ‘for DeLawd’; ‘[being property once myself]’; ‘the way it was’; ‘to ms. Ann’; ‘turning’
Wanda Coleman, ‘Beyond Sisters’; ‘No Woman’s Land’; ‘Women of My Color’
Audre Lorde, ‘Who Said it was Simple’; Revolution Is One Form Of Social Change

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Criticism

Silvia Federici, ‘Wages against Housework’
Wendy Mulford, ‘Notes on Writing: A Marxist / Feminist Viewpoint’
Sam Solomon, ‘Denise Riley’s Socialized Biology’

FURTHER READING


[WEEK 6] CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL POETRY

Poetry

Juliana Spahr, ‘It’s All Good, It’s All Fucked’
Verity Spott, from *Click Away Close Door Say*
D.S. Marriott, ‘Murking’ / ‘16 Bars’
Simone White, from *Dear Angel of Death*, ‘Or, on being the other woman’

Essays & Criticism

David Lau, ‘Occupy Oakland: Poesis and Political Practice’
Danny Hayward, ‘Transgression for Anti-Fascists’
D.S. Marriott, ‘Response to Race and the Poetic Avant-Garde’
Simone White, ‘Flibbertigibbet in a White Room / Competencies’
Cathy Park Hong, ‘Delusions of Whiteness in the Avant-Garde’
Sandeep Parmar, ‘Not a British Subject’

FURTHER READING
