M.Phil. in Criticism and Culture

Reading Difficult Poems

Convenor: Dr Ian Patterson

Theoretical approaches to cultural criticism in modernist poetry. The six classes will read seven difficult twentieth-century poems, or extracts from longer poems, in parallel with various kinds of theoretical writing, generally designed to focus on possible relations between poetic thinking, knowledge, language and justice.

SYNOPSIS
Week 1: Justice
Louis Zukofsky, Marx, Pietz on fetishism

Week 2: Anxiety
W. H. Auden, Freud, Nicholas Abraham

Week 3: Knowledge
Hugh MacDiarmid, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault

Week 4: Language
W. S. Graham, Heidegger, Maurice Blanchot

Week 5: Artifice
Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Marcelin Pleynet, Julia Kristeva, Charles Bernstein

Week 6: Complicity
J. H. Prynne, M. Merleau-Ponty, Guy Debord

PRESCRIBED READING
Photocopies of all reading will be provided

Seminar 1. Justice and Power


Seminar 2. Anxiety

• Auden, In Time of War: a sonnet sequence with a verse commentary, first printed in Auden and Christopher Isherwood, Journey to a War (Faber, 1939); reprinted in The English Auden (Faber, 1979). [Also reprinted, with some changes, in Collected Poems and elsewhere, as ‘Sonnets from China’]

• Freud, Civilisation and its Discontents, trans. David McLintock with an introduction by Leo Bersani (Penguin, 2002), esp. chapters 3 and 4; and Introduction.


• Torok; translated by Benjamin Thigpen and Nicholas T. Rand (Stanford University Press, 1995), pp. 107-132

Seminar 3. Knowledge

• Hugh MacDiarmid, extract from In Memoriam James Joyce, in Michael Grieve and W. R Aitken (eds), The Complete Poems of Hugh MacDiarmid, 2 vols (Martin Brian & O'Keefe, 1978), vol. 2, pp 738-759


• Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge, trans. A. M. Sheridan (Tavistock, 1972), Part IV, Chapter 3, pp. 149-156


Seminar 4. Language
• W. S. Graham, ‘Implements in their Places’; ‘What is the Language Using Us For’, in Implements in Their Places (Faber, 1977); reprinted in Collected Poems 1942-1977 (Faber, 1987), and in Matthew Francis (ed.), New Collected Poems (Faber 2004)


• Maurice Blanchot, from The Space of Literature, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln, Nebr.: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), pp. 38-45; reprinted in Jon Cook, Poetry in Theory [see secondary and further reading, below]

Seminar 5. Artifice


• Veronica Forrest-Thomson, Poetic Artifice (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), chapters 3 and 4 (pp. 65-111)


Seminar 6. Complicity

• J. H. Prynne, Unanswering Rational Shore (Glasgow: Object Permanence, 2001), reprinted in Poems (Fremantle Arts Centre and Bloodaxe Books, 2005), pp. 517-533

• Guy Debord, ‘The Commodity as Spectacle’ etc, from The Society of the Spectacle, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith ( New York, 1994)

Secondary and Further Reading List

**General**


**Seminar 1**

- Barry Ahern, Zukofsky’s “A” : An Introduction (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983)

- Peter Quartermain, Disjunctive Poetics: From Gertrude Stein and Louis Zukofsky to Susan Howe (Cambridge University Press, 1992)

- Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, ‘Tuning the Senses: Cavalcanti, Marx, Spinoza and Zukofsky’s “A” 9’, Sagetrieb 11 (Winter 1992), 57-91


**Seminar 2**


- S. Christie, ‘Disorientations: Canon without Context in Auden’s “Sonnets from China”’ (PMLA, 2005)

**Seminar 3**


Seminar 4


Michel and Margaret Snow (eds.), The Nightfisherman. Selected Letters of W. S. Graham (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999)

Seminar 5


Postmodern Poetries Transnationally (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), pp. 114-127

- William Empson, Seven Types of Ambiguity; Some Versions of Pastoral


**Seminar 6**

for a full bibliography of primary and secondary material on J. H. Prynne, see http://www.ndorward.com/poetry/articles/etc/prynne_checklist.htm
