The Craft of Non-Fiction: The Power and Promise of Multiple Perspectives  
(Cross-listed as 26:510:506: The Poetics of History)

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Office Hours: Wednesday afternoon, every week, M-F, most weeks, simply email to set time and place, including virtual places.

In this hybrid of workshop and craft class, we are going to explore the promise, possibilities, challenges, and perils of reading and writing from multiple perspectives. It is an old and distinguished approach to literature, non-fiction as well as fiction and poetry. Yet at the moment it is at once out of fashion in non-fiction and (for reasons political and ethical as well as aesthetic) something we desperately need more of. We will read essays, drama, oral history, long form journalism, history (and even some poetry and fiction), all of which explores experience, observes and describes, analyzes and tells stories, from more than one point of view. For the purpose of comparing and contrasting, we’ll also read work written, emphatically and quite self-consciously, from a single self-assured perspective. As we read, we will engage in a series of exercises that work the muscles that allow us to see, hear, feel, think, and write about events, moments, scenes, phenomena, issues, problems, debate, controversies, conflict (past or present) from more than one point of view.

Here’s what I will expect of you:

**ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION**: I will expect you to do all the reading and come to class prepared to contribute to a lively discussion of our common reading and one another’s writing (prepared with thoughts and comments and questions and constructive criticism, all of which go beyond the easy, the predictable, the clichéd and especially the black and the white). **To put it another way**: **Attendance and class participation are not optional**. They are a fundamental part of your responsibility as a citizen of this class. What’s more, the less you speak, the more I’ll have to, and believe me when I say that you will tire of that very quickly. All this and still I realize that life will sometimes get in the way: I’d appreciate it if you’d let me know as soon as possible in advance.

**WORKSHOPS**: For our craft workshop sessions, you will do your best to distribute your work ahead of our meetings, probably on Canvas, and I will expect that (ahead of class) each of you will read and if possible reread each of the pieces on the agenda for that week. Your marginalia and closing comments should be carefully considered, thoughtful, humane, penetrating, and honest most of all. Imagine a writer friend, a close writer friend, has asked you to read an essay she’s working on in order to help her figure out how to do what is trying to do better (as opposed to what you would do if the piece were yours). There is nothing is to be gained, for your friend or for the art, by holding back. That said: How you are honest will inevitably shape how helpful your comments will be. The more you are able to say about the experience of reading and the chemistry of the experience—the voice, the language, the structure—the piece the better. The less you say about
what you liked and didn’t like, what worked and didn’t work, the better. I will expect you, ahead of class, to mark up the hard copy of each other’s work.

Same with our outside readings: Think of it this way: A discussion is like a paragraph. A good one very rarely starts with a bad first line. The last thing I want to know is whether you liked the book. Save it. Better to talk about what they writer did, how she did it, what you learned from her about writing, what you might like to imitate, borrow, or steal. I will expect you, ahead of class, to mark up the hard copy of each other’s work.

**Be Aware:** The literature of multiple perspectives often emerges in and out of conflict, sometimes wars of words, sometime actual wars, with all the forms of tension, conflict and often violence in between. Bad stuff happens in the pages of the books we read. Brace yourself, go slow, and take breaks when you need to.

**Readings will include:**

Henry Louis Gates, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man” (as essay I will post from the collection of essays by the same name)
Wallace Stevens, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird”
Anna Deavere Smith, *Fires in the Mirror*
J. M. Coetzee, *The Lives of Animals*
Goodman, *Blackout* (to be distributed in class, DO NOT BUY)
Colum McCann, *Apeirogon* (it’s long, but if you do what I am doing – starting now, actually a few weeks ago -- we can read 40 pages a week and talk about it when we have finished it)
Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, Eyal Naveh, *Side by Side* (selections, which I will distribute)
Janet Malcolm, *The Silent Woman*

**The Tip of the Iceberg of Further Reading (I’ll keep adding to this as we go along):**

Today, writing from perspectives different one’s own often (if not always) gives rise to conversations about (if not indictment for) “appropriation.” I am sure we will talk about it in class. For those of you interested in taking deeper, more sustained dives, I’ll recommend two very different ways of thinking about it: Martin Puchner, *Culture: The Story of Us, From Cave Art to K-Pop* and Paisley Rekdak, *Appropriate.*

William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury* and *As I Lay Dying*
Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon*
Anna Deavere Smith, *Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992*
Tayari Jones, *An American Marriage*
Russell Banks, *The Sweet Hereafter*
J. Anthony Lukas, *Common Ground*
Iain Pears, *An Instance of the Fingerpost*
Svetlana Alexievich, *Zinky Boys, The Unwomanly Face of War, Voices from Chernobyl*
Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*
Arlie Hochschild, *Strangers in their Own Land: Anger and Mourning on the American Right.*
Gillian Flynn, *Gone Girl*
Readings and Craft Workshops: Subject to Change with Plenty of Notice

Week 1 (January 17) Introduction Points of View in Non-Fiction, What, How, and Why
Reading: Gates, “Thirteen Ways,” Stevens, “Thirteen Ways” (Recommended, Apeirogon, to 40)

Week 2 (January 24) Craft Workshop

Week 3 (January 31): From Interviews to Monologues to Dialogues
Anna Deavere Smith, Fires in the Mirror
(Recommended, Apeirogon, to 120)

Week 4 (February 7): Craft Workshop

Week 5 (February 14): Lectures, Seminars, Conversations, Responses
J. M. Coetzee, The Lives of Animals
(Recommended, Apeirogon, to 200)

Week 6 (February 21): Craft Workshop

Week 7 (February 28): Trying to Contain Multitudes
Goodman, Blackout
(Recommended, Apeirogon, to 280)

Week 8 (March 6): Craft Workshop

Spring Break

Week 9 (March 20): The One and the Many
Janet Malcolm, The Silent Woman
(Recommended, Apeirogon, to 360)

Week 10: (March 27) Craft Workshop

Week 11 (April 3): Apeirogon
Colum McCann, Apeirogon
Sami Adwan, Dan Bar-On, and Eyal Naveh, selections from Side By Side

Week 12 (April 10) Craft Workshop

Week 13 (April 17): Final weeks readings to be determined together

Week 14: (April 24): Craft Workshop
Learning Goals:

Goal 1: By the end of this semester, you will have spent 14 weeks reading and thinking about (as writers) a few of the varieties of literary non-fiction that explore experience from multiple points of view. In addition to reading and thinking, we will do a series of bi-weekly writing exercises in which we experiment with the kinds of non-fiction that we are reading.

Goal 2: That experience will supplement and complement the experience you gain in your poetry and fiction workshops and craft classes, increasing your range as a writer and improving your ability to write critically about structure, craft, and literary traditions of the work of a wide variety of writers.

Goal 3: All that should strengthen your preparation for entry into the public life of literature, which includes locating your own work in the context of contemporary literary practice, preparing that work according to professional standards, teaching creative writing, and participating in diverse literary communities.

Academic Integrity:

We are ALL required to follow the University’s Policy on Academic Integrity, which falls under the Code of Student Conduct. The policy and the consequences of violating it are outlined here: HYPERLINK "http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/office-dean-student-affairs/academic-integrity-policy" http://www.ncas.rutgers.edu/office-dean-student-affairs/academic-integrity-policy.

I strictly follow the University’s rules regarding plagiarism and other academic irregularities. Please consult me if you have any questions about what is and is not appropriate regarding the use of sources or citation.

You must also include the honor pledge, “On my honor, I have neither received nor given any unauthorized assistance on this examination (assignment)."

Accommodation and Support Statement

Rutgers University Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further the mission of access and support:

For Individuals with Disabilities: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter barriers due to disability. Once a student has completed the ODS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and reasonable accommodations are determined to be necessary and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be provided. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the
semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at ods.rutgers.edu. Contact ODS at (973)353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

**For Individuals who are Pregnant:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

**For Absence Verification:** The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (e.g., illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

**For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries:** The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (e.g., broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu.

**For English as a Second Language (ESL):** The Program in American Language Studies (PALS) can support students experiencing difficulty in courses due to English as a Second Language (ESL) and can be reached by emailing PALS@newark.rutgers.edu to discuss potential supports.

**For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment:** The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm. For more information, students should refer to the University’s Student Policy Prohibiting Sexual Harassment, Sexual Violence, Relationship Violence, Stalking and Related Misconduct located at http://compliance.rutgers.edu/title-ix/about-title-ix/title-ix-policies/.

**For support related to interpersonal violence:** The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance can provide any student with confidential support. The office is a confidential resource and does not have an obligation to report information to the University’s Title IX Coordinator. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based line available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support.

**For Crisis and Concerns:** The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a support plan to address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Students, faculty and staff may contact the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

**For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-being:** The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805. If you are not quite
ready to make an appointment with a therapist but are interested in self-help, check out TAO at Rutgers-Newark for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support: https://tinyurl.com/RUN-TAO.

For emergencies, call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.