ENGLISH 190T
Storytelling in the Arts

Spring 2015
M/W 1:15-3:05

Instructor:
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Office hours:
M/W 12-1; 6:15-7;
and by appointment

Required materials:
Course reader
& class handouts

*The Proposal*
by Anton Chekhov

*The Widening Spell of the Leaves*
by Larry Levis

*We the Animals* by Justin Torres

*Jesus's Son* by Denis Johnson

iTunes credit (~$10)

Sketchbook

When we look closely at a photograph or painting, a story emerges, but how do we begin to interpret the meaning of that story without narration or passing time? When we listen to music or watch a ballet, we have a sense of emotion and intention, but why? And how has the artist created such things for us?

This is a workshop course, but one that will ask us to explore beyond the literary, into the world of the visual and performing arts. As we look, listen, and read we will assemble a practical vocabulary of techniques for producing stories. Each unit will operate around a central theme and artistic goal, pairing literary works with paintings, films, songs, and performances. As we learn the many ways stories are told and experienced, we will bring these insights into our own work, producing stories of greater nuance and resonance.
Course Requirements

Class Participation (25%) This includes attendance, punctuality and involvement in class discussions (including on the course blog), as well as a presentation on a piece of your choice.

Absences: Attendance is required and essential to your experience of the course. Individual workshops are especially affected by absences and are impossible to recreate. If you have a legitimate reason to be absent, please arrange this in advance; otherwise unexcused absence will reduce your overall grade by 1/3 of a letter grade. Chronic absences will affect your grade significantly.

Presentation: In the first half of the quarter, you will lead a 20-minute discussion on “story” you’ve chosen. This might be a conventional narrative, a song, a painting, a recording of a play, etc. I will model this presentation the first few class meetings, and am available to help you plan your discussion. Handouts, in-class writing exercises and other ways of involving the class are very much welcomed.

Course blog: We’ll be posting some of the work for class on our class blog, including annotations on the art we read or view, and responses to classmates’ work. I’ll ask that you post a short comment on our class blog about some of our readings. We’ll also produce and respond to some short writing assignments. The blog content will be entirely private to our class. We’ll use edublogs.org, a simple and functional site for academic coursework.

Song of the day: We’ll begin each class period with a few songs, played as we come into the room and get ready for the day. I’ll ask that each of you provide me with some songs you love, either gifted through iTunes or copied to disc. Barring X-rated material, anything goes!

Viewing parties: Gathering outside of class-time to view dance, drama, and documentaries in long-form will be an optional part of our course. We’ll meet on a few Monday evenings throughout the quarter, from 6-8. Snacks will be provided. Please note that these gatherings are voluntary — DVDs and other materials may be borrowed or downloaded or checked out from the library on your own time. But I do hope you’ll come!

Stanford Honor Code

The Honor Code is the University’s statement on academic integrity written by students in 1921. It articulates University expectations of students and faculty in establishing and maintaining the highest standards in academic work. The Honor Code is an undertaking of the students, individually and collectively:

1. That they will not give or receive aid in examinations; that they will not give or receive unpermitted aid in class work, in the preparation of reports, or in any other work that is to be used by the instructor as the basis of grading;

2. That they will do their share and take an active part in seeing to it that others as well as themselves uphold the spirit and letter of the Honor Code.

3. The faculty on its part manifests its confidence in the honor of its students by refraining from proctoring examinations and from taking unusual and unreasonable precautions to prevent the forms of dishonesty mentioned above. The faculty will also avoid, as far as practicable, academic procedures that create temptations to violate the Honor Code.

4. While the faculty alone has the right and obligation to set academic requirements, the students and faculty will work together to establish optimal conditions for honorable academic work.
**Written critiques (10%)** One of the most valuable elements of a writing class is the opportunity to have your work seriously critiqued both by your instructor and your peers. It will be as beneficial to your writing to think critically and generously about your classmates’ work as it will be to have your own writing discussed.

**Attendance at Readings (15%)** Attendance at three readings in the Creative Writing program is required. A list of readings this quarter can be found at [http://creativewriting.stanford.edu](http://creativewriting.stanford.edu) and [http://events.stanford.edu/](http://events.stanford.edu/).

**Assignments (20%)** This includes all writing exercises you’ve completed in class and for homework, and a longer story, chapter, or series of sketches submitted for the traditional workshop. We'll conduct mini workshops and/or cold reads (reading the assignment aloud to the class and then inviting response) for many of these assignments, as well as sharing assignments on the course blog. We'll also produce and respond to some short writing assignments. Some of these you will turn in to me for brief comments or to discuss in voluntary conferences. All others are to be kept in your sketchbook and turned in the penultimate week of class.

**Final portfolio (30%)**: One of goals in this course is to produce a lot of writing, in the service of exploration. Not everything we write or dream up will be worth pursuing, or will allow us to do our best work. (As Louise Glück once wrote, "The only real exercise of will is negative; we have towards what we write the power of veto.") We'll present some of the work we produce to our classmates, either in workshop or on the course blog. As the quarter progresses, we'll choose some things to pursue and some things to discard. A final portfolio of the work we pursue will be due at the end of the quarter; our goal will be 20-25 pages of revised writing. This portfolio may be composed of a single long essay, a chapter of a novel, or a series of short stories, sketches, or investigations. The main criteria will be sustained engagement and thoughtful revision. The portfolio may not constitute a "completion" of the work you pursue, but it should be a significant step toward polish and achievement.

**Make-Up Work:** If you miss a class, or cannot make three readings, please read an author interview on either The Paris Review's website, as part of their Art of Nonfiction series [theparisreview.org/interviews](http://theparisreview.org/interviews) or on the Identity Theory website [identitytheory.com/interviews/](http://identitytheory.com/interviews/) and write a two-paragraph analysis of it, due by the last day of class.

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**Grading**

- Participation 25%
- Assignments 20%
- Written critiques 10%
- Readings attendance 15%
- Final portfolio 30%

**Accommodation**

Students who may need an academic accommodation based on the impact of a disability must initiate the request with the Office of Accessible Education (OAE). Professional staff will evaluate the request with required documentation, recommend reasonable accommodations, and prepare an Accommodation Letter for faculty dated in the current quarter in which the request is being made. Students should contact the OAE as soon as possible since timely notice is needed to coordinate accommodation.
Provisional schedule:

**Act 1: Gesture, ephemera, nuance**  
[Monday, March 30 - Monday, April 6]

**Readings:**  
Mark Doty on imagery  
Robert Hughes on Krasner, Pollack, & Rothko  
Henry James, “The Real Thing”

**Viewings:**  
*Sasha Waltz: A Portrait*  
Anderson Collection of Modern Art @ Stanford

**Act 2: Energy & drama**  
[Wednesday, April 8 - Monday, April 20]

**Readings:**  
Anton Chekhov, *The Proposal*  
Allen Ginsburg, “Howl”  
Robert Haas, “Howl at Fifty”  
Alex Ross, “Sunken Cathedrals: Music at Century’s End”  
Denis Johnson, *Jesus’s Son*

**Viewings:**  
*A Chorus Line*  
The Royal Swedish Ballet, *Juliet & Romeo*

**Act 3: The sense of time**  
[Wednesday, April 22 - Wednesday, May 6]

**Workshops round 1**

**Readings:**  
*Levis, The Widening Spell of the Leaves*  
Lorrie Moore, “Dance in America”  

**Viewings:**  
*Tartuffe* @ Berkeley Rep  
*Rivers & Tides: Working with Time*

**Act 4: Point of view**  
[Monday, May 11 - Wednesday, May 20]

**Workshops round 2**

**Readings:**  
Alice Munro, “For the Love of a Good Woman”  
Nicole Krauss, “The Young Painters”  
John Berger, “Uses of Photography” & “Paul Strand”

**Viewings:**  
*PolyFauna*  
*The Godfather*

*No class Monday May 25*

**Act 5: So much depends upon an image**  
[Wednesday, May 27 - Wednesday June 3]

**Readings:**  
Justin Torres, *We the Animals*  
Amy Bloom, “Silver Water”

**Viewings:**  
*Hedwig & the Angry Inch*

**Viewing parties:** time and location TBD  
Monday, April 6th: *Sasha Waltz: A Portrait*  
Monday, April 20th: *A Chorus Line*  
Monday, June 1: *Hedwig & the Angry Inch*  
Sat April 11, 8 p.m.: *Tartuffe* @ Berkeley Rep (class trip)