Postwar US Poetry: The New Americans and Beyond

Prof. Jasper Bernes

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Office hours and location TBA

Book List

Bernadette Mayer, Midwinter Day (bookstore)
Daniel Kane, All Poets Welcome (order used copy online)
Course Reader (bound photocopies)

Course Description

This course will examine influential American poetry of the postwar period, taking as its starting point the poets included in Donald Allen’s landmark anthology The New American Poetry: 1945-1960. After a reading of the Beat, Black Mountain, Berkeley Rennaissance, and New York School poets found there, we will probe the limits of Allen’s selection, considering figures proximate to the New Americans or influenced by them. Topics to be discussed will include the relationship between New American poetry and its modernist predecessors, the status of poetic form, and the connection between these literary movements and the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. Although we will rarely be able to read entire books of poetry, given the demands of coverage, we will pay especially close attention to the textual history of the books, journals, and anthologies in which course materials first appeared. Requirements for the course will include regular blog posts, presentations, and a final paper (10-12 pages for undergraduates; 12-15 for graduate students).

Course Requirements

Participation: 10%
Blog Posts: 20%
Presentation: 20%
Final Paper: 50%

Schedule

Week 1 – The New American Poetry Frank O’Hara or Charles Olson?
Thursday, September 29
  • The New American Poetry (1960): preface, Charles Olson (2-39), Frank O’Hara (239-270)
Tuesday, October 4
  • O’Hara, “Personism” (1961); Olson, “Projective Verse” (1950)

Week 2 – Black Mountain
Thursday, October 6
  • Robert Creeley, from For Love (1962); Edward Dorn, from Gunslinger, Book 1 (1968)
Tuesday, October 8
  • Stephen V Joyce, Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture, chapter 2

Week 3 – The Beats
Thursday, October 13
  • Allen Ginsberg: “Wichita Vortex Sutra” (1966); Diane DiPrima, Revolutionary Letters (1971)
Tuesday, October 15
• Diane DiPrima, from Memoirs of a Beatnik; Amy Hungerford, “Supernatural Formalism in the Sixties,” from Postmodern Belief

Week 4 – Berkeley/San Francisco Renaissance
Thursday, October 20
• Jack Spicer, from After Lorca (1957); Duncan from The Opening of the Field (1960)
Tuesday, October 22
• Spicer, “Vancouver Lecture 1: Dictation” and “A Textbook of Poetry” (1964)

Week 5 – Black Arts
Thursday, October 27
• Gwendolyn Brooks, from Riot (1969); LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka, from Black Magic (1969)
Tuesday, November 1
• Baraka, from “The Myth of a Negro Literature” (1963); James Smethust, The Black Arts Movement

Week 6 – New Social Movement Poetry
Thursday, November 3
• Adrienne Rich, from Diving into the Wreck (1974); Audre Lorde, from Coal (1976); Rodolfo Corky Gonzalez, “Yo Soy Joaquin” (1967)
Tuesday, November 8
• From Stephen Voyce, chapter 4, from Poetic Community: Avant-Garde Activism and Cold War Culture

Week 7 – New York School, 1st gen
Thursday, November 10
• John Ashbery, Three Poems (1973); James Schuyler, from Freely Espousing (1966)
Tuesday, November 12
• Daniel Kane, All Poets Welcome (Chapters 1, 4)

Week 8 – New York School, 2nd gen
Thursday November 17,
• Bernadette Mayer, Midwinter Day (1982)
Tuesday, November 22
• Alice Notley, “At Night the States” (1987)

Week 9 – Chance, Procedure, and Concretion
Tuesday, November 29
• Daniel Kane, All Poets Welcome (Chapters 5, 6)
Thursday, December 1
• Jackson MacLow, from Stanzas for Iris Lezak (1971); N.H. Pritchard, from The Matrix (1970); Clark Coolidge, from Flag Flutter & US Electric (1966)

Week 10 – Language Poetry
Tuesday, December 6
• Ron Silliman, from ABC (1983); Lyn Hejinian, from My Life (1980)
Thursday, December 8
• Ron Silliman, “The New Sentence” (1977)