

POETICS LAB SPRING SEMESTER



Still from Autonomy by Caroline David



COURSE OVERVIEW

The Poetics Lab course is an intensive faculty/student seminar, play-space and transdisciplinary think-tank involving a small group of faculty and students from across the Institute. Selected faculty and students explore various aspects of an announced topic, thinking and creating together on a range of relevant problems and provocations. Registration is by permission only; a selection process takes place during the semester before the class. The topic for 2018 is PLAY.

Poetics (from the Greek word for making) is used in the broad sense: it is the study and practice of the principles by which things are made -- including art, design, architecture and writing. Poetics is both plural and singular: the mission of Poetics Lab is to explore this contradiction. In light of the plurality of kinds of making that can be called poetics, what resonances, exchanges, and complementarities are possible among them? How do such exchanges deepen our attachments to our particular practices and platforms? How do they open and transform them? The answers to these questions are not known in advance. They emerge from cross-disciplinary work. This is the mission -- the ongoing experiment -- in which Poetics Lab is engaged. The means are the end.

The course is composed of lessons and exercises on the theory and practice of play in a range of disciplinary and interdisciplinary contexts. In addition to in-class exercises, students keep process journals where in particular they think about how to import what they're learning in the class into their own particular practices, and the class culminates in a charrette -- a several-week-long set of collaborative projects on the theme of the class.

COURSE GOALS

While Pratt is rightly focused on helping students acquire the necessary individual skills in their discipline of choice, the evolving nature of work and workplaces increasingly require collaborative and interdisciplinary skillsets. And because Pratt is not a vocational school but an Institute whose stated goal is to help develop leaders in their fields, it is especially important that, while students develop the skills that make them expert in their fields, they also cultivate what is essentially the reverse of that: the

"beginner's mind" necessary to collaborate and to give oneself over to a problem/project rather than simply staying in one's comfort zone. Accordingly, the goals of this course are:

1. To foster a culture that places high value on both disciplinary and interdisciplinary engagement,
2. To encourage a creative process that is collaborative, team-based, primarily problem-oriented and project-oriented,
3. To foster recognition of research, reading and writing as integral part of the creative process.
4. To build and evolve a productive model for transdisciplinary faculty and faculty-student collaboration.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Via their completion of assignments (charrette, archive project, exercises) and their participation in class discussion, students will demonstrate:

1. Their grasp of the fundamental theory, history and contemporary cruxes of the topic,
2. Their ability to incorporate research and writing into their creative/design work and vice versa, and
3. Their collaborative abilities both in bringing their own expertise to bear on a team project and in their effective use of team members' contributions.
4. In conjunction with all of these and via the various media involved, students will demonstrate their critical analysis and reasoning skills and their oral and written communication skills.

COURSE STRUCTURE

Because of the sustained and intensive nature of the course -- the amount of making and reading involved, and collaborative commitment to work outside of class time as well -- it was decided that the course be offered at three credits.



The Charrette

The centerpiece of the class is the charrette, a several-week-long, team-based project with both research components (involving new readings and/or other resources specific to the project) and a studio component.

Based on class readings, exercises and discussion, students will begin pitching ideas for the charrette early on in the semester, and as the semester goes on, the class will workshop the ideas and decide collectively which one(s) will be the focus/foci of the charrette. The charrette is meant to engage leading concerns that have emerged in the course of the class, and it might involve the production of short videos or written pieces on a particular topic, event designs, performances, pedagogical materials, teach-in components, institutional actions and initiatives, re-envisionings of the course itself (but this is not an exhaustive list). The charrette enables participants collaboratively to mobilize and deploy -- in an intensive way -- knowledge and skills, presentations, discussions and readings.

The later weeks of the class will be devoted mostly to charrette team meetings: class time is set aside for team meetings and collaborative work with professors and discussion of project-specific readings and/or visitors, in addition to whatever meetings have been scheduled outside of class.

The final week(s) are devoted to charrette presentations: teams will present their projects, along with any additional materials (rationales, documentation, etc); the archive project is also due in final form by class time on the final week.

Poetics Lab Archive

All students will participate, collaboratively with faculty and other students, in working up materials for the Poetics Lab archive. These may well be presentations of a charrette project, multi-unit projects where each person or small team is responsible for individual components, pedagogical materials, performances, texts, videos and so on.

Although these projects are not due until the final week of the semester, students will have to have planned to work up aspects of the charrette project for the archive and thus to be working in parallel on

both projects, or to work in parallel on a separate project for the archive that is less of an offshoot of the charrette and more of an independent project: pedagogical projects are especially encouraged.

Graduate Section

The course is designed to enable students, graduate and undergraduate, to have the opportunity to work side-by-side with their much more experienced professors, just as the professors themselves will have wildly varying skill and knowledge levels when it comes to various aspects of the topic (e.g., technical skills in particular media, relevant discipline-specific theory and knowledge bases, etc.): this heterogeneity is crucial to the process.

Graduate students will register for PLAB 699.

Presentations

During the first phase of the class (the first seven weeks), there will normally be one or two faculty presentations and one exercise per class session.

Typically, faculty presentations will focus on (1) a Problem (what crux, conflict or contradiction is currently formative for a given field or issue?), (2) a Provocation (in what ways might it be possible to defy the dominant logic in a given field or issue without merely sabotaging oneself-- or is the art of failure an option?), (3) a Conjuncture (what time is it in a particular field or in relation to a specific issue, what historical trajectories have led to this point, what forces are marshaled on various sides of it, what choices do we have in this moment -- and above all, what futures can we hope to build?), or (4) Margins (where are the most generative and/or exciting margins of a given field or issue, and how does one build a sustainable practice there?).

EVALUATION

Student level of achievement of the course Student Learning Objectives is graded on the criteria listed below:

Charrette: 50%

Archive: 30%

Other class participation: 20%



Assignments not completed by due date are automatically downgraded. A grade of Incomplete (INC) will be considered only for medical reasons or other documented serious circumstances beyond your control. Grades break down as follows:

A	4.0	Excellent Sustained level of superior performance in all areas of course requirements
A-	3.7	
B+	3.3	Above average Consistent level of performance that is above average in a majority of the course requirements
B	3.0	
B-	2.7	
C+	2.3	Acceptable Performance that is generally average and course requirements are achieved
C	2.0	
C-	1.7	Below average Poor level of work and performance and achievement of the course requirements
D+	1.3	
D	1.0	
F	0.0	Failure Accomplishment of the course requirements is not sufficient to receive a passing grade
INC	N/A	Incomplete Automatically expires after the following semester

One unexcused absence is allowed, two will reduce grade by half a grade; three will normally constitute failure.

MATERIALS

Materials necessary for this course include any media and supplies that you prefer to use for the production of sketches, finished comps and presentations, as well as any that may be required by your instructor for specific exercises or class activities. Digital scans, printouts and storage media will also be required.

CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class participation is a key part of this course. You are expected to present your work clearly and concisely in group working sessions and during class exercises. You must also contribute to classroom discussion at every meeting: ask questions, make a comment or observation and respond to questions asked by faculty a guest presenter or classmate. You are also encouraged to listen carefully to what others have to say and actively participate in engaging your classmates' work.

Each class runs for 2 hours and 50 minutes. You are expected to arrive on time and be prepared to be present for the entire period. Although in-class work sessions are an integral component of this course, homework on assignments will be necessary. Significant progress on work will be expected between classes. You are responsible for coming to class with the completed assignment work as well as related materials.

General class conduct:

You must adhere to all Institute-wide policies listed in the Pratt Bulletin and Student Handbook, including policies on academic integrity, plagiarism, computer and network use. Personal wireless devices (cell phones, beepers, etc.) must be inaudible and unused at all times during class.

Required at each class:

Specific deadlines and project schedules will be established on an individual basis, we will provide realistic guidance on what constitutes sufficient progress. Unless specified, you are expected to bring to class (in print and digital format) not only that week's progress, but all previously completed work on the assignment as well as all related research materials.

READINGS

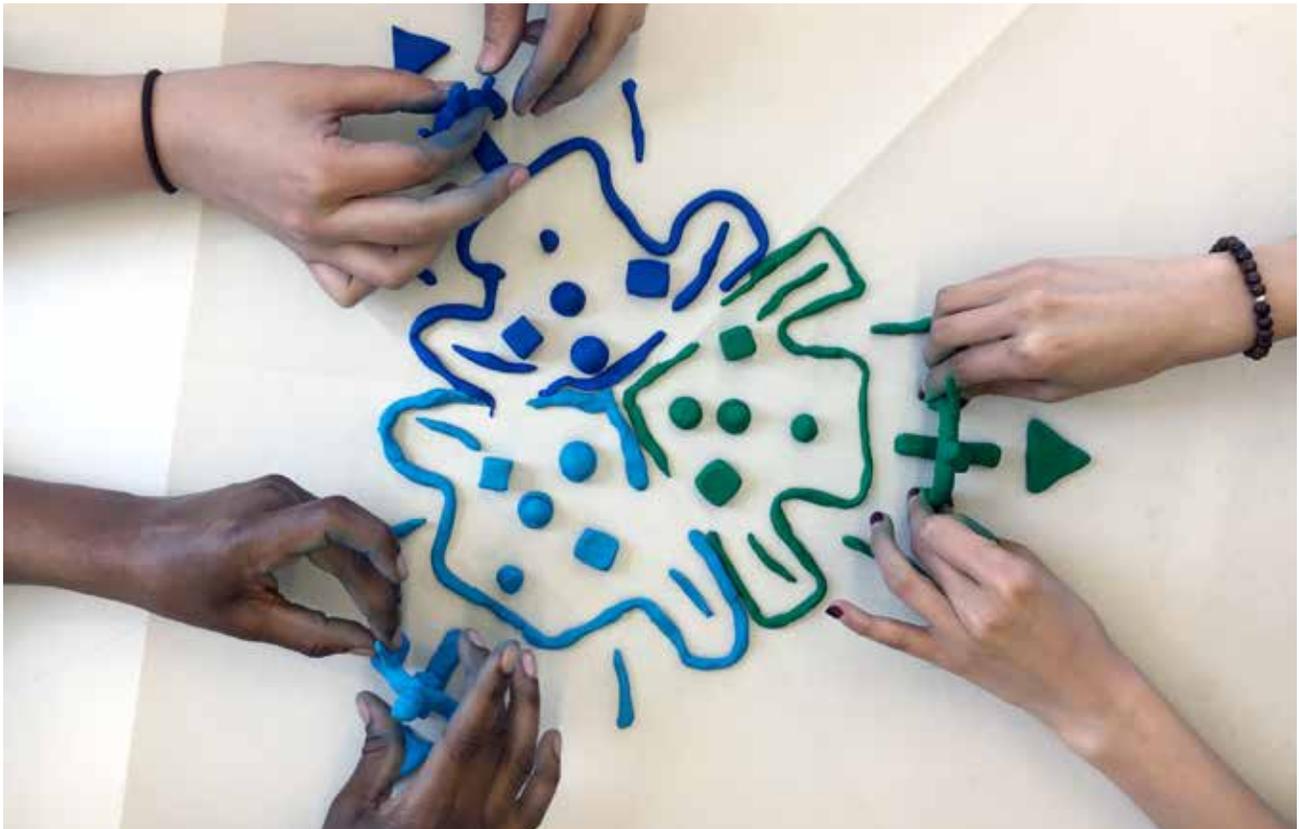
Texts and other materials listed in the weekly schedule are to be read/viewed by the day they are listed. Participants are expected to have readings and other materials at hand in hardcopy.

We will provide a course reader at the beginning of the semester. This will be available to order from the Pratt Copy Center which is on the ground floor of the ISC Building. The center is open Monday through Friday 9 AM–5 PM. There will be a small print fee for the reader. We will also share reading materials by Google Docs unless otherwise specified; texts will include complete bibliographic information.

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK	DATE	CLASS ACTIVITY
1	1/17	1. Introduction to the class. 2. Exercise: Four Sentences. Homework: Crowdsourced Play Theory
2	1/24	1. Pitching Charette Ideas, Round One (60 mins). 2. Review of Crowdsourced Play Theory (IL/30 mins) 3. Structuralist Play (IL/90 mins): Liminality, Combinatorics and Algorithms. Homework for next week: Read Christensen, Alphabet (p209) & write variant Readings: David Chang, "Unified Theory of Deliciousness" (p7) Guillermo Gomez-Pena, Essay + poem excerpt, from "Border Brujo" (p37) Queneau, from "Exercises in Style" (p13) various authors, "Exercises in Style 2016" (p28) "What Is Liminality" (p247)
3	1/31	1. Present/discuss Alphabet variations (45 mins) 2. Poststructuralist Play: Deconstruction and Freeplay (IL/90 mins). 3. Pen Extensions. Collaborative exercise. (DH/45 mins) 4. Improvisation: Movement/Sound (JM) Paris is Burning clip (10 mins) Readings: Judith Butler, "...Gender Insubordination" (p69) Kate Bornstein, from <u>My Gender Workbook</u> (p85) "Dr. Livingston's...Art Machine" (p65)
4	2/7	Guest - kate Bornstein
5	2/14	1. Improvisation and Creating the Rules of the Game, (JM/90 mins) 2. Pitching Charette Ideas, Round Two (90 mins) Readings: Danielle Goldman, "We Insist! Seeing Music and Hearing Dance" (p121) Sally Banes, "Choreographic Methods of the Judson Dance Theater" (p111) Allan Kaprow, "Just Doing" (p143) from <u>Conditional Design Manifesto</u> (p149) K. Van Mensvoort, "How Conditional Design Changed the World" (p167)
6	2/21	1. Physical warm-up - follow-up (JM 20 mins) 2. Collaboration/Open Process Yoko Ono's Grapefruit exercise; (DH and JM/90 mins) 3. Conditional Design Collaborative Project (DH/90 mins) Readings: Umberto Eco, from <u>The Open Work</u> (p257)
7	2/28	1. Collaborative Drawing Exercise (IL/60 mins): Entity World. 2. Charette Workshop: Assembling Into Groups (90 mins)
8	3/7	1. Scores 2: Improvisation with sound (Readings to come: Pauline Oliveros) (JM/60 mins) 2. Guest: Julia Steinmetz, on Child Development and Play (60 mins). Readings: Winnicott, from <u>Playing and Reality</u> (p179)

WEEK	DATE	CLASS ACTIVITY
9	03/14	SPRING BREAK
10	3/21	<p>1. Scores Exercise - changing one rule to known game (JM/90 mins) 2. Movement Exercise (JM) 3. Collaborative Publication (DH/90 mins)</p> <p>Guest: Monstah Black</p> <p>Readings: Sol Lewitt, "Paragraphs on Contemporary Art" and "Sentences..." (p157) Andrew Blauvelt, "Ghost in the Machine..." and "Towards Relational Design" (p163, 171)</p>
11	3/27	<p>1. Movement Exercise (JM) 2. Collaborative Publication (DH/90 mins)</p> <p>Guest: digital artist Carla Gannis</p> <p>Readings: TBD</p>
12	4/4	<p>1. In class work on projects (90 mins)</p> <p>Guest Artist - Lisa Nelson, on her video games & improvisation.</p> <p>Readings: Harry Smith, "String Figures and Paper Planes" (p271)</p>
13	4/11	<p>1. Charette Workshops (90 mins) 2. String Games (DH/60 mins)</p> <p>Guest: Victor Vina; exercise: becoming a computer</p> <p>Readings: TBD</p>
14	4/18	<p>Field trip to Museum or Gallery OR Studio working class. Review of first iteration of project work.</p>
15	4/25	Charette Workshops
16	5/2	Charette Presentations



A Manifesto for Higher Learning

1. Opinion is welcomed but it is not enough. Your ideas must be substantiated through facts and testing, through research and evaluation. Build the confidence and the expertise to substitute "I think" for "I know".

3. Solutions will always vary according to context, interpretation, and vision. There are no absolute answers. Learn instead to ask the right questions and allow the nature of the journey to determine the best destination.

4. Regardless of any specific interest or preference that you may have, in today's world all artists need to develop a multi-form understanding that is able to respond to multiple communication needs and platforms. Thus multimedia is not a component of contemporary art, it is its definition.

5. Beware of fashion - it encourages the idea that nothing is lasting and that you always have to be on the move. If you are never still you will never encounter profundity. Learn to stay in the same place and dig deeper.

6. Take nothing for granted. Learn to question what you think you know. Remember that the extraordinary is as likely to reside in the ground beneath our feet as in the stars above our heads. The capacity to create meaningful work is not simply measured by your willingness to explore new ideas and new territory but also through the ways that you are able to apply new ideas to old territory.

7. Art is a process of discovery through thinking and making, and our ability to discover is generally greater than our ability to invent. Think of your work process as a form of travel. Look for the things you don't know, the things that are revealed or inadvertently uncovered. It is easier to find a world than to make one.

8. Critical thought being central to art and design does not make technical and craft skills secondary. Communication is not simply dependent on the power of thought. It is a process of making – of transforming ideas into tangible expressions. Thinking and making are not alternatives to each other. They are forces of reciprocal power within the making process. One cannot take place without the other.

9. Every medium has its own voice, every form its own possibilities, every technique its own expressiveness, every visual language its own history and significance. These are your tools and every choice you make becomes a particular way of saying something. Learn your craft and make your choices knowingly.

10. Art does not exist solely in the realm of the intellect. The power to enlighten, to celebrate, to inform, and to disturb expectations also lies in the capacity to make emotional connections. Always use your head but never forget your heart.

11. The unique capacity of an artist is the ability to dismantle existing communication codes and to recombine some of their elements into structures which can be used to generate new narratives for the world. This tells us that method is at the heart of our practice and that art is not a piece of the puzzle, it is a way of putting the puzzle together.

12. You cannot succeed without commitment. You cannot thrive without passion. You cannot survive without pleasure. All these things, or their absence, should be reflected in your work. The resonance of art as a collective social project is in your hands.

Andrew Howard, "A Manifesto for Higher Learning," 2013.



