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 Prof. Lauri Ramey
 ENG 4379
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Patchwork Project Midterm Progress Review

Overview of the Project

SLOs:

1. Develop their own well-informed and substantial picture of the characteristics and significance of the modern and contemporary periods
2. Gain familiarity with a diverse range of poets and poetry which both reflect and helped form these eras.
3. Articulate our own vision of modern and contemporary poetry
4. Take responsibility for being invested in some of the larger issues entailed this course, such as purpose and meaning of poetry to individuals, societies, communities, and nations in this particular era. Why does poetry matter at all?
5. Progress in skills of critical thinking writing and research relaying the modern and contemporary poetry and reflecting on the broader context of literary studies.

Proposal:

Compose an electronic and tactile collage “text” -- a hybrid text -- that explores various facets of modern and contemporary poems and their purpose, meaning, and reason for being. The individual “parts” will collect as a whole “experiential” journey of the semester and its content. Includes images, original creative text, and scholarly responses. Housed at <http://keogden.weebly.com>

1. What did you know about Modern and Contemporary Poetry at the start of the course and what do you know now?

Despite having an MFA in Creative Writing, and teaching modern and contemporary poetry at the lower-division and upper-division levels in college, I always feel like everything I’m learning is completely new to me. Honestly, I envy professors who can keep so much knowledge in their heads about what they’re learning, and I often suffer from “imposter syndrome” as a professor, feeling like I don’t know enough and that I need to know so much more. So far in the first few weeks of our time together, I’ve been enriched thinking about the materials we read while keeping in mind our opening questions: *What is the evolutionary reason for singing, dancing, poetry, etc.?*; *Why do we need to formalize and articulate what our literature is?* When I teach a

literature course, I often begin with the important question of “what is literature,” leaving the conversation open for students to come up with their own ideas of what literature is. Our investigation so far into futurism, dada, and surrealism were deep in my mind as I listened to the keynote poetry speaker at Prof. Ramey’s event. I was haunted by a statement posed by Rosanna Warren when I was her fellow at the Kenyon Review: “Poetry can’t just be important because of its content and subject matter; it has to have artistry.” Part of me believes in that statement, and yet, another part of me, the one who seeks opportunity through equity to involve a multitude of voices in poetry, asks what is “artistry” in poetry? There are certainly formal considerations that involve the ‘tools’ of poetry, and our guest poet’s work challenged that for me. When I read his book after the reading, I marveled at the long lines and the robust, almost revolution-calling subject matter. On the page, his work seemed to echo the futurists, the surrealists, and the dadaists, and that idea of defining “artistry” in poetry-making was at the forefront of my thoughts. His work seemed more powerful because of the subject matter, and less so because of the artistry. I think I’m still grappling with this idea and would like to include it in my investigation/project somehow.

2. How have the class materials and experiences contributed to your current knowledge of Modern and Contemporary Poetry?

The idea of responding with hybrid texts and book arts came to me after our investigation into calligrams. As a director and performer grounded in theater and performance, I find that the work we’ve read so far lends itself strongly to the performative -- on the page and off. Velimir Khlebnikov’s “Incantation by Laughter” was a revelation as a text that engenders audience response. I found myself asking: When we, as writers and artists, seek to develop our work for readers, what is our purpose? Often, for me, the purpose of a text I’m working on comes after the initial drafting of work. I begin to think about what sort of outcome I’d like for the reader only

after I begin to write. I tell my students that writing is a way of thinking, and so the development of creative work doesn't fully reach potential until the writing is completed.

I am also, as a researcher, interested a great deal in context and historiography, so I look to the making space of the work to see how the time, place, and world in which the work was created lends itself to the appreciation of and understanding of the work. Can poems be anything? What makes a poem? How is it artful if it is an assemblage? These questions are at the root of my patchwork project -- as an artist myself, wanting to use hybridity and assemblage to investigate the ideas and the context of the work we're exploring. Prof. Ramey keeps saying "these poems are 100 years old" and that really boggles my mind in our discussions. I find the work so PRESENT. How has this been accomplished by the writer? I want to keep exploring that idea in my patchwork project. Mayakovsky's "Screaming my head off" seems like an important cornerstone for then and now. The blend of self/autobiography and historicism is part of my own work as a writer -- this is why I love Joy Harjo so much. Reading her memoir has actually framed our investigation in the modern work for me -- I can see direct lines to the inclusion of "outsider" stories and the importance of those voices. This enlarges the possibilities for defining "poem" and "artistry" and "literature."

3. What remains for you to complete your patchwork text between now and the end of the course?

I've done just a small portion of actual art-making beyond sketching out materials and writing drafts and some research and assemblage, so I need to devote more time to do the art-making process in context with the work we're reading, and then transfer that art-making to the electronic ePortfolio I'm assembling. My initial idea was to 'enter an experience' online, and I'm still figuring out how to accomplish that. I also want to include an invitation for poeisis in the project when readers 'enter' my electronic space. I want to also infuse the research components

I've explored so far. For example, some of the research I've re-read the past 3 weeks includes the following:

Frost "The Figure a Poem Makes" discusses the idea of "abstraction" and "wildness" -- two themes clearly present in modernist work, and important for today's creative writers and researchers.

Amy Lowell's introduction to "Some Imagist Poets" is an important grounding in the ways in which imagist poets are asking for their work to be considered within the "literature" genre that differentiates it from previous trends in literature.

Gertrude Stein's "Composition as Explanation" is wonderful; "Each generation has something at which they are all looking." This seems to me a call to arms for modernist and contemporary poetics.

William Carlos Williams's "Poem as a field of action" is something important: "I propose sweeping changes from top to bottom of the poetic structure." What does that mean for contemporary poets? I can see it in modernist work -- reconsidering what a poem is -- and taking me back to that idea of "artistry."

4. What would help you in completing your patchwork text in a spirit of calmness, meaningfulness, satisfaction, and support?

A small group "workshop" of like-styled patchwork projects would be really good. I'd like to get in a small group and hear what others are doing, and also share what I'm doing and get some feedback.

I also need to create a time-map each week as we move forward so that I can set aside more specific time to work on my patchwork project pieces: reflective, hybrid/collage essays, book-arts responses to various movements, and reflective/analytical text composition exploring what I'm doing and why. The ideas are still in my head, and I need to leave my researcher-brain

and begin *poesis*. I do have a few pieces I've been playing with -- such as the accordion/patchwork book in response to surrealism. I'll bring those into class to share at the midterm point.