COMPARATIVE LITERATURE
CONCENTRATION

SENIOR THESIS
HANDBOOK

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Dear Seniors,

Welcome to your last year in the undergraduate Comparative Literature concentration. We hope that it is an exciting and fulfilling one for you.

One of the central elements of your final year in our concentration is the writing of the senior thesis. The material contained in this Handbook is intended to facilitate the thesis writing process. It includes a thesis calendar that lists all relevant thesis-related dates as well as guidelines that address practical issues of thesis presentation and evaluation. There is also important information on writing the thesis proposal (due September 29) along with sample thesis proposals and two helpful documents: “How to Write a Good Research Proposal”, and “Twenty Tips for Writing the Senior Thesis.” Please read all of the material carefully. You will find it useful and reassuring.

The early days of the semester are inevitably full and somewhat confusing, so the prospect of the senior thesis can seem daunting. Remember that we are all here to assist you in any way possible. Your tutor is an invaluable resource, and you should plan to meet with him or her as early as possible in the first week of the semester, and on a weekly basis thereafter.

Your faculty mentor can also be a terrific source of information and support, and we encourage you to meet with him or her as often as your schedules allow throughout the year. At a minimum, we require four meetings between you and your mentor: The first should take place in early-mid September and should ideally bring together you, your tutor, and your mentor; a second private meeting with your mentor should take place before your thesis proposal is due; you should next meet with your mentor before the close of the first semester to discuss the thesis chapter you submit in late November; and your final meeting should take place right before you hand in the full thesis. **You are responsible for scheduling these meetings.** Your tutor can assist you, as can I, if necessary. Please give your mentor enough time and advance notice to accommodate your meeting request.

Needless to say, you should not hesitate to check in with me about any concerns or ideas you might have about the senior thesis, or, for that matter, any aspect of the upcoming year. I look forward to meeting with each of you individually in the course of the year to review your program of study and to discuss your literary experience. In the meantime, my very best wishes for a happy and productive year.

Yours,

Sandra Naddaff
Director of Undergraduate Studies
Comparative Literature
SENIOR TUTORIAL TIMETABLE
2017-2018

- Aug 30 Fall Term Begins (on a Monday Schedule)
- Aug 30-Sept. 15 Meet with Mentor
- Sept 7 Course Registration Deadline
- Sept 12 Seniors Meeting with Dr. Naddaff at 4:30pm
- Sept 22 Draft of Thesis Proposal due to Tutor and Mentor
- Sept 29 Final Thesis Proposal due to Department by 2pm
- Nov 20 1st Chapter of Thesis due by 2pm (2 copies) for CI 99a credit
- Nov 22-26 Thanksgiving Break
- Dec 1 Last day of Fall Term Classes
- Dec 2-8 Fall Reading Period
- Dec 4-19 Meet with Mentor to discuss 1st Chapter
- Dec 9-19 Fall Exam Period
- Dec 20-Jan 21 Winter Recess/Winter Break
- Jan 22 Spring Term Begins
- Jan 26 Course Registration Deadline
- Jan 26 Second Thesis Chapter due to tutor and to Department
- Jan 26-Feb 2 Meet with Mentor to discuss remaining thesis work
- Feb 22 Thesis Title due to Department by 4pm
- Feb 23 Full Thesis Draft due to Tutor
- Mar 9 Thesis Due to Department by 2pm + Reception
- Mar 10-18 Spring Break
- Mar 19-Apr 25 Orals Preparation
- March 28 Senior Thesis Panel at 7pm
- Apr 4 Orals List Draft due to Tutor
- Apr 11 Final Orals List due to Department
- April 23 Orals Intellectual Biography due by 4pm
- April 25 Last Day of Spring Term Classes
- April 26-27 Orals Examinations
- April 26- May 2 Spring Reading Period
- May 3-12 Spring Exam Period
- May 24 Commencement
The following guidelines address some of the basic questions regarding the more practical dimensions of the senior thesis project. In general, however, we recommend that you consult the most recent edition of either the Modern Language Association’s Style Manual or the University of Chicago’s A Manual of Style for full information regarding the mechanical aspects of the thesis.

**THESIS PROPOSAL:** A final description of the thesis project should be submitted to the undergraduate Comp Lit office on Friday, September 29th by 2:00 pm. The proposal should consist of a full description of the project and include an annotated bibliography. It should be drawn up in full consultation with the thesis advisor and the faculty mentor. It will then be reviewed by a sub-committee that is headed by your senior tutor and includes your faculty mentor and one member of the Tutorial Board. Your senior tutor will provide you with their feedback both orally and in written form. For more information on the thesis proposal process as well as sample thesis proposals, please consult the memoranda distributed at the first senior thesis meeting of the year and included in the Senior Thesis Handbook.

**THESIS DUE DATE:** For June graduates, the thesis is due by 2:00 pm on Friday, March 9th. **THIS IS A FIRM DEADLINE.** Late theses will not be accepted. Extensions will be considered only in the case of exceptional circumstances, such as prolonged illness or family emergency, upon application to the Director of Undergraduate Studies.

**LENGTH:** The thesis should be no less than 11,250 words and no more than 18,750 words in Times New Roman, 12 point font (~45-75 pages). This does not include footnotes, endnotes, bibliography, appendices, or other critical apparatus. Any student who anticipates exceeding this limit must petition the DUS at least two weeks in advance of the due date for an exception. Please note that a reader may penalize a thesis that is over the limit, even if an exception has been granted, if the excessive length is deemed unnecessary.

**HONOR CODE AFFIRMATION:** Students must append an acknowledgement of the Harvard College Honor Code to the page following the thesis title page. The statement should read: “I affirm my awareness of the standards of the Harvard College Honor Code.”

**TRANSLATION THESIS:** Specific information on the translation thesis is included below.

**ORIGINAL CREATIVE MATERIAL:** Specific information on incorporating original creative material is included below.
**QUOTATIONS:**

Quotations of four lines or less should be surrounded by quotation marks and incorporated into the text. Longer quotations should be set off from the text, indented, and single-spaced, and should not be set off in quotation marks.

All direct quotations from a foreign language, whether a single word, a short phrase or a longer excerpt, should be given in the original and accompanied by a translation. We generally recommend that a student include translations of brief passages (single words or short phrases) in the body of the text, while translations of longer passages should generally be included in the footnotes/endnotes. In any case, a student should be consistent in his/her translation practices. Translations may either be from a published source or may be the student’s own. Non-romanized alphabets may be transliterated for quotation purposes when necessary.

**FOOTNOTES/ENDNOTES:**

Either footnotes or endnotes may be used. Consult either the Chicago Manual of Style or the MLA Style Manual for proper formatting.

In general, notes should contain supplementary textual commentary/information or reference information. For further remarks regarding note logic and format, consult the sources above.

**APPENDICES:**

Any longer supplementary material that is considered useful for understanding the thesis but is not part of the actual analysis or exposition may be included in an appendix. Such material may include an original text under consideration if not readily available, illustrations or similar visual material, original creative work that supplements the analysis at hand, etc. Material included in the appendix is not included in the final word count of the thesis.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

A list of works cited and works consulted should be appended to the Senior Thesis. Again, refer to the above sources for the proper bibliographical format.

**TITLE PAGE:**

See Section V for an example of the proper format of the thesis title page.

**FINAL COPY:**

A clean final presentation of the thesis is very important, and a student should not under-estimate the time necessary to prepare the final copy. The thesis should be error-free; all accent marks should be included in quotations in foreign languages; and both footnotes/endnotes and bibliography should be complete and correct.

Each page of the thesis should have a one-and-a-half inch left-hand margin in order to prevent the binder from blocking any of the text. There is no specified right-hand margin limit. Times New Roman, 12 point font should ordinarily be used. All pages should be numbered, and each thesis should include a table of contents.
Students should submit two copies of the thesis on acid-free, acid-neutral paper. The thesis should be contained in a black spring binder (available for purchase at Bob Slate’s).

Students in **Joint Concentrations** should submit one copy of the thesis to Comp Lit and the other copy to his/her other concentration. Joint concentrators should follow the deadlines established by the primary concentration for all matters pertaining to the senior thesis.

**THESIS EVALUATIONS:** All theses will be evaluated by two readers, at least one of whom will be a member of the faculty. In cases where two widely divergent readings are submitted, a third reader will be asked to evaluate the thesis as well. All evaluations will be signed and students will be encouraged to meet with their readers to discuss the comments. Any thesis that receives a grade of MAGNA or above will be sent to the University Archives. The final thesis grade is an average of the two (or exceptionally three) thesis rankings. This grade will count for 30% of the student’s overall degree recommendation in concentration.
THE TRANSLATION THESIS

The undergraduate Comp Lit program allows students to undertake a translation as their senior thesis project. In general, a translation thesis is comprised of a translation of a text that may or may not have been translated previously, as well as a significant critical commentary on the work in the form of a translator’s preface and notes on the text. Students who wish to undertake a translation thesis should consult with the Director of Undergraduate Studies before launching the thesis work.

The following guidelines provide valuable information on the form and content of a translation thesis:

FORMAT: One clear copy of the original text must be provided along with the two copies of the thesis. For other formatting indications, refer to the general thesis guidelines.

LENGTH OF TRANSLATED TEXT: The translation itself should be between 15,000 and 22,500 words, or about 60-90 double-spaced pages. Texts that fit this format well include novellas, plays, collections of short stories or poems, and some critical essays. A student who wishes to translate from a longer work (such as a novel) should choose a representative excerpt or a collection of excerpts that functions well as a standalone text.

TRANSLATOR’S PREFACE: The translator’s preface is a crucial component of the translation thesis. It should be no less than 5,000 and no more than 7,500 words, or about 20-30 double-spaced pages. The preface should:

- Introduce the text to a general academic readership and explain its significance. Relevant information about the author and the composition or reception of the text may be provided. If English translations of the text already exist, the preface should situate the new translation in relation to existing ones, and explain what the new translation seeks to achieve.

- Detail the translation challenges posed by the text. Using well-chosen examples, the stylistic particularities and semantic richness of the original text should be highlighted, demonstrating an informed understanding of the text in the original language.

- Describe and justify the translation strategies chosen in order to best render the original text. It may be useful to refer to other translations used as models (or counter-models), or to relevant texts on translation theory.
FOOTNOTES/ENDNOTES: Footnotes or endnotes should highlight, within the translation, places where a difficulty presented itself (such as word play, semantic ambiguities, or terms with no English equivalent), and explain how that difficulty was handled. In the case of a recurring difficulty, a note at the first occurrence is sufficient. A translation should not be overloaded with notes: in some cases, it may be advisable to limit notes to representative or significant instances. Important or recurrent difficulties can be addressed at greater length in the translator’s preface.

Notes can also be used to provide information about cultural or historical background relevant to an understanding of specific elements the text.

THESIS EVALUATIONS: Translation theses will be evaluated by two readers, at least one of whom will have a knowledge of the original language. In addition to the accuracy and readability of the translation, evaluators will devote particular attention to the quality of the critical apparatus (preface and notes).
INCORPORATING CREATIVE MATERIAL INTO THE SENIOR THESIS

The undergraduate Comp Lit program supports the inclusion of original creative material into a critical thesis, although we do not accept stand-alone creative projects such as a collection of poems, a dramatic production, an installation, or a musical composition as a complete senior thesis.

Some past examples of how creative material has been incorporated into a senior thesis in Comp Lit are:

- The conclusion to a thesis on the graphic novel *Persepolis* that was written in the style and format of a graphic novel.
- The inclusion of a video documenting a musical performance in a thesis on performance in both verbal and musical media.
- An original non-fiction personal essay on cheerleading camp in a thesis on the creative non-fiction writing of David Foster Wallace.
- A thesis chapter that analyzed the oral autobiography of the student’s grandmother in a thesis on the genre of the oral autobiography.

Each of these examples offers a different way of including the creative material into the thesis: as a chapter in the thesis itself, as an appendix, or as extra-documentary material. You should discuss carefully how you plan to use your creative material with your thesis advisor and with the Director of Undergraduate Studies well in advance of submitting your thesis in order to avoid any unanticipated complications. All creative material should add value to the thesis itself and should be undertaken thoughtfully and carefully.

FORMAT:
If the creative work is non-verbal in nature, two copies of the material must be included with the thesis submission. If the work involves a performance, the student should inform the department of the performance dates and location well in advance so that the readers can attend.

LENGTH OF CREATIVE MATERIAL:
If the creative material is part of the thesis itself, it should be included as part of the thesis word count. Material that is included in an appendix or is included in another medium is considered outside of the word count tally.

THESIS EVALUATIONS:
The thesis readers will consider all creative material as an integral part of the senior thesis as a whole. The final evaluation of the thesis will consider the creative material on its own terms as well as the way it contributes to the overall argument and analysis of the topic at hand. Every effort will be made to find at least one reader who is knowledgeable about the relevant medium or art form.
WRITING:

THE URBAN CALLIGRAPHY OF NEW YORK CITY

by

Stephanie Tung

Presented to the Undergraduate Comparative Literature Concentration in the Department of Comparative Literature in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Harvard College Cambridge, Massachusetts

March 9, 2018
THE SENIOR THESIS PROPOSAL

Fall 2017

Writing the senior thesis proposal is the first and perhaps the most important step in formulating your senior thesis project. The proposal should define carefully the parameters of your field of exploration and inquiry and should consist of three parts: 1) a tentative thesis title; 2) a prose description of approximately 800-1000 words outlining your proposed topic; and 3) an annotated bibliography listing at least five works that are relative to your topic. The proposal is due on Friday, September 29.

READ AND REFLECT: It can be difficult at the outset to decide the focus of your thesis work, so take plenty of time in the early days to think about what you are most interested in. It's often useful to start by reflecting on past projects and papers. What texts have you found most provocative over the past three years? Which courses have served as your intellectual touchstones? This kind of reflection can be helped enormously by reading widely in both primary and secondary literature as you are trying to formulate your topic. Re-read works you already know well; read the books that you’ve been meaning to read for years but haven't, if they tie in to your field of interest. Look back at critical and theoretical texts that have opened up new fields of inquiry for you, paying special attention to the introductory chapters and the way the problem is formulated. Finally, talk at length to your tutor or any other member of the Faculty Committee or Tutorial Board about your interests and ideas. Use them to help you formulate your thoughts, define an area of study, and determine interesting texts to consider for your project.

ASK A QUESTION: One of the most productive ways to formulate a thesis project is to ask a question and then attempt to answer it. Sometimes the most simple questions are the most productive: Why do some novels use a first-person narrator? Why is Dracula, a textual fantasy about reverse colonization, set in the Balkans and what does this imply for the use and limitations of postcolonial theory? What is the function of embedded letters in certain narratives? Tease out the various implications and ramifications of the question. Try it out on different texts. Don't feel that you need to know the answer to the question, or even have a working hypothesis, at the outset of the project. But make sure that you find the question interesting, and that it is rich enough and provocative enough to sustain you through seven months of reading, thinking, and writing.

BE SPECIFIC: Your proposal should specify which works you intend to examine in your thesis. There is no set or recommended limit to the number of works to analyze. Successful theses in the past have concentrated on one work alone; others on several works from different genres and traditions. Similarly, there is no one kind of text to investigate. Some theses have focused primarily on theoretical texts, others on primary works of fiction or poetry; still others on works drawn from different media. The important thing to remember here is that you should read closely whatever work(s) you choose to investigate and analyze. Engage your works carefully as a means of answering the questions you have asked.
You should also outline the structure of your thesis in your proposal: How many chapters do you anticipate? What will each chapter address? Do you anticipate an appendix or other textual material that is not a part of the thesis itself (e.g., the original text of a work you are translating)? Will your thesis contain external material (e.g., a video, a recording, a DVD)? Obviously this structure will change as your project develops, but it is very helpful to think early on about the shape of your work.

**CREATIVE COMPONENTS IN THE CRITICAL THESIS:** See the section entitled “Creative Material” in *Guidelines* in The Senior Thesis Handbook for information on incorporating creative material into the senior thesis.


**BIBLIOGRAPHY:** In addition to specifying those texts to be examined in the body of your proposal, you should append an annotated bibliography of at least five critical or theoretical works that pertain to your proposed topic. You should have read these works before submitting your proposal, and in addition to giving the conventional bibliographic information, you should write three or four lines outlining the subject matter of the book, making its relation to your thesis topic clear. Keep in mind that your final thesis project will include a lengthier bibliography indicating works cited and consulted in the course of your research.

**MENTORS:** The goal of the mentoring program is two-fold: to facilitate more contact and communication between students and faculty; and to provide seniors with, if possible, an expert in their field of study with whom to consult as they develop their thesis project.

We have discovered that there is no prescribed formula to follow in facilitating the connection between student and faculty member, but we do have a few requirements in place to make the relationship as productive as possible. You should meet with your mentor twice before you submit your proposal on September 29th, once with your tutor, if possible for a general conversation, and a second time for an individual discussion about your thesis proposal. A third meeting in December to discuss your chapter submission is required; and finally you must also arrange for a mid-year conversation in January/February to review pre-submission progress. In return, your mentor will serve as a member of the committee that reviews your specific thesis proposal, and will read and comment on the first thesis chapter you must submit on Monday, November 20th, as well as on the second one, due January 26th. We urge you, however, to take full advantage of your mentor and to meet with him or her as often as you can.

**It is your responsibility to choose and initiate contact with your mentor.** You should contact him or her as soon as possible to set up an initial meeting to discuss your thesis plans. You should do this even if you feel that you have nothing particular to discuss at this point. This state can often lead to the most productive conversations. The Director of Undergraduate Studies is available to discuss any questions and concerns you may have. Please give your mentor enough advance notice when you request a meeting to accommodate his/her schedule.

**PROPOSAL PRESENTATION:** Your proposal needs to include the Thesis Proposal Cover page shown below. Students should email their entire proposal in a single Word file to the Undergraduate
Office by the specified deadline. Your tutor must also send a separate acknowledgment and indicate his/her approval to the Undergraduate Program Coordinator. The proposal itself and the annotated bibliography should be included with this form. The proposal should be well-written and carefully presented.

**PROPOSAL FEEDBACK:** A small sub-committee, headed by your senior tutor and including your faculty mentor and one member of the Tutorial Board, will review the individual proposal for content, argumentation, bibliography, etc. and will offer ideas for further development as necessary. Your tutor will either provide you with their feedback directly, or will arrange a meeting that includes the student and the sub-committee. Occasionally a student will be asked to rewrite the proposal and resubmit it.
NAME: _____________________________________________

TUTOR: ___________________________________________

MENTOR: __________________________________________

TENTATIVE THESIS TITLE: ___________________________

Please use this form as the cover page for your proposal and save it all in one document. Please limit your proposed senior thesis topic description to 800-1000 words, and include an annotated bibliography. Consult the handout entitled “The Senior Thesis Proposal” for further information.

Email your entire proposal in a single Word file to Isaure Mignotte at (mignotte@fas.harvard.edu) by the specified deadline. Your tutor must also send a separate acknowledgment and indicate his/her approval to Isaure Mignotte.
Thesis Proposal Samples
Bernard de Chartres once said that we stand on the shoulders of giants, peering ahead, hoping to see further than our predecessors. His vision, built on a linear model of time, seemed promising for those who spied in it ascendant progress. Yet the same image posited a descent from giant to pygmy, a personal and cultural waning toward death. In this double bind, we can see modernity’s terrible burden: a legacy where one could feel crushed by industrial, commodified time, by the weight of the past, the struggle to innovate, the inevitable approach to an apocalyptic end. Instead of gazing forward, many artists began to look back—on memories, on histories and literatures—hoping to escape the endgame or find some solace in what came before.

In my junior paper I proposed a new approach to studying these burdens of time and cultural history through one such way of looking back: intertextuality. An intertext, I argued, is not simply a structural and relational device, but is embedded with a specific time representation and temporal color available to the writer who practices it: a specific relationship to one’s textual predecessors. My thesis takes that theoretical framing as its starting point, but expands from my earlier Anglophone, modernist examination of Virginia Woolf. Now, I propose to move comparatively between French and Serbian literatures, across modernist and postmodernist paradigms.

Woolf, I argued, confronted the burdens of cultural past and linear time by interweaving Shakespearean intertext so radically that her characters are fully fused with their literary predecessors. Now I turn to two authors whose work mediates the local and the global, the East and the West, the earnest and ironic, to confront those same burdens. I wonder, first, how Woolf’s quasi-utopian outcome manifested differently across the Channel in the oneiric architecture of Marcel Proust. I am curious, too, as to its transposition into postmodern irony, meta-fiction, and non-closure, specifically in the work of Serbian author Milorad Pavić. How do the burdens of time, and the writers’ solutions, develop across these varied cultural contexts?

The essay will be divided in three chapters:

1) A comparative analysis of the intertext as representation of time in modernism versus postmodernism. My previous work built on Matei Călinescu’s delineation of two modern temporalities and fused his framework with the schools of Julia Kristeva and Erich Auerbach. In addition to the cultural theorists and post-structuralists previously examined, I will incorporate George Poulet’s foundational work on human time as well as phenomenological and philosophical approaches to time from Friedrich Nietzsche and Martin Heidegger—whose theories both reveal and structure the (post)modern relationship to the past. Global/Anglophone postmodern theory by Brian McHale, Linda Hutcheon, and Ihab Hassan will be localized to the specificity of the Eastern European context with the use of Hungarian, Romanian, and Serbian theorists.

2) A modernist case study on Marcel Proust’s À la recherche du temps perdu. The novel’s central conflict, by many accounts, is the narrator’s confrontation with mortality and irreversible time. Yet, when the plot is fully played out in this circular, closed novel, that narrator seems to ultimately write himself into redemption. How does intertextuality mediate and complicate the
Proustian development of this modern internality? I will look at Proust’s use of French writers like the post-Romantic Gérard de Nerval and the Realist Gustave Flaubert, as well as his creative engagement with Antoine Galland’s *Les mille et une nuits*, a global tale turned local through translation. How does this engagement with both the local and ‘the Orient’ offer a different modernist relationship to cultural history than Woolf’s?

3) A postmodernist case study on Milorad Pavić’s lexicon novel *The Dictionary of Khazars*. The novel is based on the historical account of the Khazar people’s conversion to Judaism, but it multiplies that singular narrative into three accounts that cannot be unified into a single time scale or cultural history. Filled with ruminations on non-linear time models and a litany of editors/transcribers/corruptors of each presumed source text, it constantly evades closure. I will examine how Pavić develops a collage of real, fictional, and even anachronistic intertexts from the Bible to Yehuda ha-Levi’s work to Pavić’s own crypto-Serbian poetry. Just as Proust sought in the East an oneiric escape from modern industrial developments, Pavić looks to the West for a postmodern aesthetics that flees local political totalitarianism. How does his work deny the modernist dream of reconciling with the cultural past, while at the same time displaying a nostalgia for that project? How does *The Dictionary of Khazars* challenge Anglophone assumptions about a single uniform postmodernism replicated throughout the globe? This chapter will be informed by my work this summer with Pavić’s manuscripts and with academics at the University of Belgrade.

Taken together, these chapters will track the intertext as representation of time far beyond Woolf’s London streets. My thesis, I hope, will offer theoretical tools for the practice of world literature, while staying true to local specificity in France and Serbia. The result will be neither prescriptive nor relativistic, but rather will trace the global burdens of Chartres’ modern giants as they have manifested from the Nebuchadnezzar to Scheherazade, from Combray to the Khazar salt sea.
Selected Bibliography


A fundamental theoretical work that frames modernity as developing between two temporalities: measurable, linear time as a bourgeois commodity and a writer’s or artist’s non-linear time that fights back the former. Călinescu delineates that modernity into five faces: modernism, avant-garde, decadence, kitsch, postmodernism. His work is the foundation on which I build my own theories of the burdens of time and cultural history, as accessed through the use of the intertext.


Heidegger’s canonical study of the relationship between existence and various temporalities offers a philosophical complement to Călinescu’s cultural perspective. In particular, his delineation of authentic and inauthentic temporalities—the first which unites future, past, and present, the second which separates them and prioritizes the present—can find an analog in different uses of the intertext. One use of the intertext as it reaches across times may be to shift one from inauthentic to authentic temporality, and being.


Poulet’s work investigates the problem of isolated present moments that, bereft of a God-given telos, teeter on a meaningless void. If Heidegger offers an ontological schema of how temporalities can be linked or separated, Poulet presents the efforts of various writers to perform that linking process. He reads Proust, for instance, as recovering a temporal continuity and a sense of stable self through the acts of memory and writing—but Poulet’s framework and critical style can be brought to bear more widely on the construction of personal and cultural histories.


As one of the earlier theorizers of postmodernism, Hassan’s work will operate as a cornerstone of the theoretical chapter. He makes several key delineations. One is between chronological and typological assessments of postmodernism: the first pegs it to a specific time period and group of authors, while the second links it to devices and forms that could appear centuries before. Another is the combination of continuity and discontinuity in postmodernism: a phenomenon that both breaks with modernism while always looking back and defining itself in terms of what came before. Another is between postmodernity as a social and historical phenomenon that arises in post-industrial late capitalism versus postmodernism as an aesthetic movement. This distinction is particularly important to contextualizing Pavić, as Eastern European postmodernism developed without those materialist postmodern social conditions—and therefore
elides many canonical characteristics of postmodernism such as engagement with pop culture and kitsch.


Like Hassan, Hutcheon, will be a central theorizer of postmodernism in my first chapter. In particular, I will situate *The Dictionary of the Khazars* within her discussion of historiographic metafiction: works that posit historical reality, while foregrounding the biased and narrativized ways that reality arrives to later generations. By her account, history becomes itself an enormous intertext, constantly revised by the present’s retrospective gaze. Her work discusses the postmodern nostalgia for a grounding referent, the use of paratext, anachronistic/parodic intertextualities, and the de-totalized role played by the author figure. Like Hassan, Hutcheon’s Anglophone-centric work, though, will need to be translated to the local specifics of Eastern European postmodernism. In many ways, Pavić eludes her universals.

**Additional Secondary Sources on Marcel Proust and Milorad Pavić**


The Concept of Authorship with Continual Reference to Copyright

Tutor: Tom Wisniewski
Mentor: Jeffrey Schnapp

“The Congress shall have Power…To promote the Progress of Science and useful Arts, by securing for limited Times to Authors and Inventors the exclusive Right to their respective Writings and Discoveries;” (United States Constitution, Article 1, Section 8, Clause 8)

“Copyright protection subsists, in accordance with this title, in original works of authorship fixed in any tangible medium of expression, now known or later developed, from which they can be perceived, reproduced, or otherwise communicated, either directly or with the aid of a machine or device.” 17 U.S.C. § 102(a)

“Authorship” is a fundamental principle of United States copyright law. Without authors, intellectual property protections would have no one to protect. However, while the concept of authorship is clearly indispensable to the current intellectual property regime, it is less clear what the theoretical and legal phenomenon of authorship actually means. New media technologies have challenged our intuitions about who or what can constitute an author or an authored work. My thesis will distill the concept of authorship that is enshrined in copyright law and then examine whether that concept can be coherently applied to questions of authorship raised by new media.

The literary and artistic construct of authorship has been the subject of a great deal of theory. Rather than transposing a critical conception of authorship onto a legal framework, I plan instead to conduct case-based analysis of intellectual property law in order to construct a jurisprudential answer to the question, “what is an author?” To answer this question, I will also consider the roles that intentionality, foreseeability, and chance should play in the assertion of authorship and/or ownership of a work—questions that have also played a significant role in literary theorizing about authorship.
In the first chapter of my thesis, I will explicate the philosophy of authorship put forth by copyright legislation and jurisprudence. Two main currents of legal thought appear most relevant to the authorship question: “work made for hire” doctrine and “joint authorship” doctrine. The former deals with cases in which authors of works are not in fact legal copyright holders of those works, and the latter deals with questions as to when two parties have equal stakes in the authorship of a copyrighted work. In tandem, these currents triangulate upon the idea of authorship within copyright. I will examine core cases that have shaped each doctrine, such as *CCNV v. Reid* (1989) and *Childress v. Taylor* (1991), in addition to other authorship-related cases including *Baker v. Selden* (1879) and *Feist Publications v. Rural Telephone Service Co.* (1991).

Chapter 2 will consider the contemporary copyright regime’s applicability to new media by examining a small number of emerging models of authorship and contrasting them with past conceptual shifts. I have not yet determined what these case studies will be. However, I will curate examples that challenge both traditional literary-theoretical and jurisprudential models of authorship. To compare emerging phenomena to past developments in new media, I plan to examine copyright litigation that took place at other points of inflection in media, such as *Atari v. Oman* (1992), *Sony v. Universal* (1984), and *MGM v. Grokster* (2005). Additionally, I intend to find contemporary copyright disputes that have confronted the judiciary with unprecedented issues of authorship in new media, such as the “Monkey Selfie” controversy, in which Wikipedia
and other media outlets have refused to recognize a photographer’s copyright over a self-portrait taken by a macaque using the photographer’s equipment.¹

My research for Chapter 2 will consider not only adjudicators, legislators, and litigators, but also creators themselves. The work of Nick Montfort, an MIT professor who, for lack of a less controversial word, authors “computational poems” with the help of computer algorithms, is a likely case study. Along with more in-depth case studies, this chapter will include a survey of emerging approaches to content creation that challenge the author-centric model of copyright.²

Finally, Chapter 3 will synthesize chapters 1 and 2 to evaluate the theoretical integrity of the current copyright regime and its application to new media. This chapter will draw heavily on analysis of Pamela Samuelson’s work and that of subsequent legal commentators, as well as analysis of the programs and outputs used in Montfort’s œuvre. As both a creative exercise and practical illustration of my analytical conclusions, I hope to include an appendix of Montfort-influenced, text-generating computer programs of my own composition.


² Cf., for example, Wolfram Tones, which are algorithmically-generated snippets of music available for users to request online. The Wolfram Tones Terms and Conditions stipulate that “All content offered on this Site is copyright Wolfram Research, Inc. All rights reserved. By using this Site, you disclaim any authorship rights to content presented at your request on this site.” The site’s functionality is further protected by patent law. (http://www.wolfram.com/legal/terms/wolfram-tones.html).
Annotated Bibliography


Benjamin’s seminal essay introduces the difficulties presented by new media formats in the evaluation, appreciation, and interpretation of works of art. Mechanical reproduction has, in some respects, attenuated authors from works in certain media, and this essay offers a, if not the, definitive commentary on the phenomenon.


CCNV v. Reid is a canonical case in the doctrine of works made for hire, and addresses the question of who may “own” a particular piece of work when the circumstances of authorship and employment are a matter of debate.


This edition of the compendium begins to address fascinating edge cases in the allocation—and denial—of copyright. For example, this edition specifically enumerates “A photograph taken by a monkey” as an example of non-copyrightable subject matter, which appears to be a direct response to the “monkey selfie” imbroglio.


#! (shebang) presents computer-generated poems alongside the programs that generated them, which presents interesting copyright implications for readers who choose to use these programs to generate poems of their own.

Print. 2 vols.

*Nimmer on Copyright* is the touchstone treatise on 20th-century copyright law. Chapters 5 and 6 are authoritative resources on the work made for hire and joint authorship doctrines, respectively.


Samuelson’s article is among the first of a growing field of commentaries on how to allocate copyright ownership of works generated in part or in full by artificial intelligence.
“The personal is political,” wrote Carol Hanisch in 1969, in an essay reflecting on the conflicts between feminist theory and personal reproductive choices. And although her words were written more than a century after the first modern Hebrew literary works began to penetrate the Pale of Settlement, the collapsing of personal and political choices encapsulates the historical, linguistic and national debates surrounding the development of a modern Jewish literature. In this time of upheaval, the linguistic was political, a struggle for the hearts and minds of Jewish readership between Hebrew, Yiddish and a plethora of local languages in the Pale of Settlement. In the period between 1828 and 1921, the end of the Russian Revolution, Hebrew was transformed from a language of liturgy and exegesis into a viable medium for sophisticated modern prose, poetry and journalism. In my senior thesis, I hope to explore and translate critical and theoretical works by Micah Yosef Berdichevsky (1865-1921), one of the foremost—and most radical—writers in this literary revolution, in an effort to inform English-language readers about this unprecedented linguistic, literary and ideological phenomenon.

I plan to translate three early-twentieth-century Hebrew works by Micah Yosef Berdichevsky: *Lemahut Hashira* (Towards The Essence of Poetry), *Al Ha-Perek* (On the Chapter), and *Inyanei Lashon* (Matters of Language). Each work is a thematic collection of smaller essays that allow Berdichevsky to express himself in his preferred form—the short and often cryptic reflection. These essays, on the border between literary theory and literary criticism, express Berdichevsky's views on issues pertaining to the philosophy of literature: the specific role of Hebrew literature in a modern world; the role of the artist in historical memory;
and the role of poetic creation in man's relations with the divine, among other topics. Cumulatively, the essays provide a fascinating insight into the self-conception of an author writing amid the revival of his language of choice. The essays reflect the perspective of a man trained in the classical German philosophical tradition in Berlin and Bern, and, at the same time, the expressions of an artist writing in a half-formed and continually evolving language, with a minute and disputed readership. As these essays have never been translated into English, my work will allow a new set of readers to access a series of questions evoked by Berdichevsky's thought: What does it mean to write in a new, or revived, language? What is the role of national art, and the artist in a developing nation? Was the development of Hebrew into a spoken tongue historically inevitable—or historically necessary? These, among other questions, are ones I plan to answer in my translator's preface.

Choosing Berdichevsky as an author offers a unique perspective on the ideological and aesthetic motivations behind the Hebrew literary revolution. Well acquainted with a variety of European languages and their literatures, and the Jewish religious sphere, Berdichevsky embodied the Europeanism that defined the resurgence of Hebrew letters. Berdichevsky was even dubbed 'The Hebrew Nietzsche'-- a name that not only revealed the deep influence of Nietzsche on Berdichevsky's writing but also pointed to the depth of the German writer's influence on Hebrew ideologues of the time, and the emergent Zionist movement. In my preface, I will explore the influence of Nietzsche's aesthetics and ideas of nationality on Berdichevsky's writings, in addition to outlining the challenges of translating these works.

Translating modern Hebrew literature from the turn of the twentieth century presents a unique set of translation difficulties and rewards. Like most of his Hebrew-writing peers, Berdichevsky was reared in a religious home and comprehensively educated in the Jewish textual tradition, including the Old Testament, Mishnah, Talmud, and centuries of exegesis.
Thus, both the author and his audience were steeped in a rich and highly intertextual Hebrew tradition. Hebrew writing of the period, though bereft of a spoken dialect, drew on linguistic strata ranging from Genesis to the Medieval Hebrew poetry of Spain. The resultant texts are host to a complex network of allusions, from the Pentateuch and Prophets to Talmudic tractates both minor and major; they contain Aramaic phrases taken directly from the Talmud, Greek-influenced Hebrew vocabulary from the Mishnah, and a plethora of words newly invented by the authors of a language perpetually adapting to the needs of modern realist prose. In my translation, I hope to highlight the complex subtexts engendered by allusion, taking advantage of the many pan-Biblical and pan-Talmudic reference works that render this effort possible in a modern age. I plan to reflect my research in a significant number of footnotes and, if necessary, explanatory appendices.
Annotated Bibliography


This compendium of Modern Hebrew literary works, with a highly informative preface by Robert Alter, will allow me to view Berdichevsky's works in the literary context in which he wrote them. Authors include Uri Nissan Gnessin, the pioneer of stream-of-consciousness writing in Hebrew; Hayyim-Nahman Bialik, the national poet of Israel; and Shaul Tschernechiovskiy, who brought sonnets, ballads, epics and other classical literary forms into the Hebrew language for the first time.


In this book, Robert Alter outlines the stages in the Hebrew-language literary revolution, tracking the developments in Modern Hebrew prose style over the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This will allow me to pinpoint the unique features of Berdichevsky's style in historical context, and chronicle the remarkable evolution of Hebrew prose in the absence of spoken dialect.


The primary source text I will be working from, this 1921 collection includes the contents of Berdichevsky's collection of essays 'Ba-sadeh Ha-sefer,' (In the Fields of The Book): 'Al Ha-Perek' (On the Chapter'), 'Le-Mahut Ha-Shirah' (Towards the Essence of Poetry), and 'Inyanei Lashon' (Matters of Language). The essays express Berdichevsky's ideas and attitudes towards the role of the artist, what constitutes literature, and the specific roles of Hebrew literature and language in the modern literary sphere.


This text, edited by Berdichevsky's foremost biographer, gathers testimony from relatives, coworkers, friends and followers in a book of essays and excerpts that paint a remarkable portrait of the life of the author. Texts include the testimony of former yeshiva classmates, prominent historian Simon Dubnow, fellow Hebrew poets and feuilletonists, and the author's wife, Rachel.


This text chronicles the development of Hebrew and Yiddish literatures within a series of historical events Harshav dubs the “Modern Jewish Revolution,” ranging across continents, empires and languages. The book provides an important theoretical context for the development of these literatures, meshing literary theory and historical perspective.
In one of his earliest works, Nietzsche explores his philosophy of aesthetics and outlines his notions on the nature of art. In exploring texts by Berdichevsky and Nietzsche in tandem I hope to examine Nietzsche's influence on Berdichevsky's aesthetic philosophy directly.

In this aphoristic work, Nietzsche advances the idea of eternal recurrence and the notion that “God is dead,” and begins to develop a number of his theses on power. Both the form and the content of this book are important for study of Berdichevsky, as Berdichevsky adopted the aphoristic form in many of his short (and somewhat cryptic) essays.

This work seeks to explore the influence of Nietzschean thought on Hebrew writers and ideologues in the early twentieth century, and the consequences of this for the ideology of Zionism. Among other prominent writers of the period, such as Martin Buber and Theodor Herzl, Golomb devotes multiple chapter to Berdichevsky's relationship to Nietzsche as visible in his work and correspondence. In particular, Golomb explores the Nietzschean influence on a central debate between Berdichevsky and the scholar, writer and editor Ahad Ha'am, on the fundamental nature of Hebrew writing.

A collection of scholarly articles about various aspects of Berdichevsky's life and work, Mekhkarim U-Teudot includes an essay about Nietzsche's influence on Berdichevsky and the Zionist movement; an essay about the role of historical study in Berdichevsky's works; and a collection of one hundred letters culled from Berdichevsky's correspondence in the years 1890-1900, a period in which he wrote and formulated many of the works I am translating.

In this essay, Marcus Moseley delineates the complex, ambiguous, and often vilified role of memory and historic consciousness in Berdichevsky's work. The essay traces influences of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche on Berdichevsky's views of memory and consciousness; the relation of Berdichevsky's autobiographic work to his notions of memory; and the role of memory in art as evidenced by his literary criticism, including essays I will be translating.
Post-colonial French-North African writing exemplifies the kind of “minor literature” that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*: it is a multifold impossibility. Writers descended from North African cultures, whether they identify themselves as North African, French, *beur*\(^1\), or otherwise, find themselves at a linguistic and cultural standstill due to the psycho-linguistically damaging effects of colonialism. If they write in the language of their families and forebears (i.e. Berber or colloquial or classical Arabic), they risk being dismissed by the rest of the world for whom these languages are unfamiliar. However, if they write in French, they seem to betray their families and their cultures: they write in the language of the conqueror.\(^2\) Yet French and Arabic (and, to a lesser extent, Berber) are the main languages of the whole post-colonial system in France and North Africa-- writers like Amara Lakhous, whose *Clash of Civilizations Over an Elevator in Piazza Vittorio* is written in Italian, may try to side-step into another language altogether but their work instantly becomes less identifiable with the experience from which they write. The problem of language choice informs not only the form, but also the content of many works from the post-colonial genre, and becomes a central question when one tries to translate these works. One of translation’s goals is to make the works more widely accessible, and their ideas more widely considered-- when a language-problem has influenced both the form and subject of the text, then the problem is compounded by attempts to move it into yet another tongue.

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\(^1\) A somewhat pejorative term for French men and women whose parents are North African immigrants.

\(^2\) One of the most interesting responses to this literary quandary is to use the colloquial *verlan*, the slang that inverts French spelling as a way to gain mastery over the carefully-guarded French language. Beur writers especially might use this, the dialect they also speak in everyday life, to communicate their ideas, but this approach too can lessen the literary clout of their works due to its colloquial and hermetic nature.
In my thesis, I will examine this language problem first-hand by translating Georgette!, a 163-page novel by Farida Belghoul, and writing a commentary to accompany my translation. Georgette! is a novel about a child growing up in Paris, but the themes treated therein go far beyond the playground. I have picked Georgette! to translate for several reasons, both linguistic and thematic (and often both-- in my commentary, I will argue that form and content are inseparable in this genre). Linguistically, the novel is fascinating because it is written in French, but with many “errors” and instances of knotty language that relate directly to the beur experience (which Belghoul also treats thematically). Not only will I be challenged by the colloquialisms and conversational tone of the work in general (since it is a novel, not a classical play like those I have translated in the past), but I will also need to consider carefully my translation of sentences like the book’s very first line:

La sonne cloche...non, la cloche sonne. (Belghoul 9)

My translation of it will likely read as follows:

The ring bells... no, the bell rings.

To convey in my translation the ideas of linguistic violence, cultural friction, and educational disparities (among others) that are so important to the rest of the book thematically, I will employ several modes of translation that I learned in Dr. Naddaff’s course “On Translation.”

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4 In the novel Belghoul (a beurette herself, the daughter of Algerian immigrants) creates a fierce portrayal of the trials beurs face from their earliest days. The fact that it is told from the point of view of a child is very significant: just as in Hélène Cixous’s Reveries of the Wild Woman (written in 2000), the child’s perspective makes even more poignant the very adult emotional trials the narrator suffers. These works also resonate interestingly with Y.B.’s Allah Superstar, written in 2003.

5 “La sonne cloche...non, la cloche sonne.” Here, Belghoul is not simply establishing the tone of a child prone to making mistakes (though it certainly adds to the narratorial voice). The French in this line has multiple, deeper resonances has that do not come across in the English translation: for one, the noun cloche can signify “idiot” as well as “bell.” By making such an ostensibly simple error in the very beginning of the text, the narrator comes across as potentially “idiotic” in some way (perhaps due to youthful inexperience or cultural difference). Furthermore, the verb cloche in French (“il y a quelque chose qui cloche”-- “something’s off”), signifies that something is incorrect, or does not fit (with the sense of being off-putting as well). In this one line, Belghoul sets up the reader for an experience in which some things (the multiple languages and cultures of her life) must always cloche-- the narrator always feels the trauma of beur existence.
I will attempt to make my translation fluid, yet still meaningful, and to capture the voice and the experience that the narrator conveys. Therefore, depending on context, I will attempt to unravel linguistic knots that I find using footnotes, endnotes, or mentions of the problem in the commentary.

This commentary will complement the translation itself by outlining my own translation process (which will be informed by various translation theorists, including Derrida, as well as by translations of other beur works\(^6\)), highlighting particularly fascinating linguistic challenges, and providing a historical and cultural context for the work itself (drawing not only on history but on other contemporary beur and Francophone North African works for comparison). Georgette!, like most works of beur literature, has not yet been translated into English, so a secondary aim of the commentary will be to delineate reasons why these works are so rarely translated--and why I think they should be. Due to my background in the field of Francophone North African history and literature, I believe that works like Belghoul’s merit a wider audience than their problematic language allows: drawing attention both to the quality of the literature in terms of content and to the linguistic violence that colonization continues to inflict on those in the post-colonial French-North African sphere is very important to me.

\(^6\) Some of which will serve as foils for my work: Dorothy S. Blair’s translation of Leïla Sebbar’s novel *Sherazade* is particularly lacking.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


In their discussion of Kafka, who wrote in German despite being a Jewish Austrian, Deleuze and Guattari describe two related concepts that will be central to my discussion of language and literature as they relate to politics and culture. The first is that of a minor literature (a genre written in a major language by a specific minority-- in my case, literature written in French by authors of African descent), and the second is of the threefold impossibility of minor literary writing (which, I will argue, is expressed formally and in terms of content in the works of minor literature I discuss).


Of greatest interest here is Derrida’s discussion of the “Exorbitant,” in which he maintains that “il n’y a pas de hors-texte” (“there is nothing outside of the text”) because nothing in the human mind can be conceived of in a non-textual way. In other words, everything that is read into a text (whether or not it is explicitly textually stated) becomes part of the text, because the readers (including the writer) cannot conceive of the material except in terms of language. This concept will be important to my translating method (as well as my discussion thereof) because of its relation to translation’s attempt to restate a text (a supplément par excellence).


Dunwoodie’s work is a history of language, literature, education and related issues in French Algeria, and particularly discusses the impact of colonialism on these matters. It examines the ways the colonial experience has affected language questions both in French Algeria and in France itself (where postcolonial immigrants both influenced the language sphere in France and were influenced by immersion in the French language). This work will provide significant historical context for Georgette! and for the topics I will discuss in the commentary.

The Schleiermacher piece, as the title suggests, is a discussion of translation that is very much informed by its nineteenth-century context, but that will still be relevant to my own translating experience. Schleiermacher’s ideas of the limits of translation (the limits of one’s thought within one’s own language) and of the concept of moving the reader towards the original author (or vice versa) will particularly inform my translation.


Shepard’s work describes the effects of the decolonization process on post-colonial France. Though it has a more broadly political and social (not necessarily linguistic) focus, it will be helpful in providing context for the beur experience in particular (since it revolves around changes in France instead of in Algeria). The influx of African immigrants in France catalyzed drastic changes in the European French sphere, and these changes necessarily inform the literature from this area.
Last year, when my Arabic professor told me about *Dabada*, a novel written by Iraqi author Hasan Muṭlak that is known for being incomprehensible, I was intrigued. What does it mean for a text to be incomprehensible? Are there ways of reading an “incomprehensible” text that might render it comprehensible?

Written in 1988 against a backdrop of oppression under the Hussein regime, *Dabada* depicts a period of time in the life of a young man in rural Iraq and largely lacks a traditional narrative. Reading *Dabada*, I was struck by the preponderance of “meaningless” sounds, both human and animal, that form a rhythmic refrain that endures throughout the text as traditional language increasingly becomes fragmented into babble. *The Shunra and the Schmetterling*, a novel written in 2004 by Israeli author and professor of Buddhist Studies Yoel Hoffmann, presents similar challenges to traditional notions of comprehensibility. It depicts the observations of its protagonist, a young boy, and lacks a traditional narrative structure. The novel’s lyrical language, division into short chapters that resemble prose poems, and use of a mix of languages (including Aramaic, Hebrew, and Yiddish) give the novel a musical quality. In my thesis, I hope to consider rhythm/music as an alternative semiotic lens through which we can read these texts, thereby rendering them “comprehensible.”

My thesis will be divided into four chapters. In the first, I will focus on animal sounds and human utterances that resemble them in *Dabada*. I will argue that tracking these sounds renders the narrative more comprehensible to the reader, contending that the “meaningless” syllables into which language fractures in this novel do indeed have significance, especially in terms of their organization into rhythmic patterns. In the second chapter, I will draw on Western philosophy that deals with rhythm and repetition as well as studies of rhythm in Arabic poetry and music. I will focus on rhythm as a unique means of organizing sounds and events into a new semiotics that renders them “comprehensible.” The structure of this novel is inherently rhythmic; events acquire meaning only through their juxtaposition with other events. My reading is legitimized by Hasan Muṭlak’s claim that literature must aim to model music.

The third chapter will question the way in which ideas and experiences are connected in *The Shunra and the Schmetterling*. Should we read this novel “rhythmically,” or must we approach it differently? In reading this novel, will we find our conception of “rhythmic reading” altered? I will focus on the Hoffmann’s frequent images of layering (Russian dolls, stacking sheets, etc.) and discussions of the concept of layering, as well as the noticeable preponderance of similes (a form of signification that links two terms rather than replacing one with another) in the novel. These ideas about connectivity are related to memory and translation, both key themes in the novel, as well as to the novel’s structure and reliance on stream of consciousness. In the fourth chapter, I will argue that in fact, this novel most benefits from a *musical* reading. Like Muṭlak, Hoffmann has expressed a commitment to writing in a “musical” way. Focusing on musical elements in the text (both literal mentions of music and structural elements that mimic cadence, harmony, etc.), I will engage Western and Arabic music theory as well as Western philosophy that deals with music. As in the rhythm chapter, I will discuss music as an alternative semiotics for reading.
I hope that my thesis will prove valuable not only as an interrogation of the concept of incomprehensibility, but also in terms of its implications for the study of Middle Eastern literature. Dabada is a distinctly Arab text but nevertheless displays the influence of the West (Muṭlak was well-versed in Western literature and philosophy); as the protagonist comments on the political situation in Iraq, we must recognize that the novel itself represents a commentary on East-West interactions. *The Shunra and the Schmetterling* is located in a tradition of Israeli literature (and music) that combines Middle Eastern and European influences. Hoffmann’s status as a professor of Buddhist Studies adds an additional intercultural element to the text. In addressing the question of incomprehensibility, I recognize that it is integrally tied to questions of cross-cultural reading and understanding. I hope that by reading these texts through the alternative semiotic lens of rhythm/music, infusing my reading with writings by Western and Middle Eastern theorists, I will be able to overcome some of the obstacles that stand in the way of such intercultural readings.
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In this book, Deleuze discusses the concepts of difference and repetition and pays particular attention to the idea of rhythm as a form of temporal organization. Deleuze conceives of rhythm as the gradual construction of a system in which each term is defined by its juxtaposition with other terms and argues that irregularities and inequalities are the most important elements of such a rhythmic system. This book is extremely helpful as I develop the second chapter of my thesis because it helps me understand the concept of rhythm not merely in a musical sense, but more broadly.


Two chapters of this book will prove most useful to me. Chapter 10 (“1730: Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible), which focuses on the relationship between animals and humans and discusses the aural/musical component of this relationship, will be valuable for the first chapter of my thesis. Chapter 11 (“1837: Of the Refrain”), which deals with music and the concept of the refrain and links music back to some of the main themes of the book (such as rhizomatics and deterritorialization), will be useful in the second and fourth chapters of the thesis.


Here, Derrida discusses the figure of the animal in philosophy, interrogating the line between human and animal. This will be useful for the first chapter of the thesis,
especially when Derrida writes about communication between animals and between humans and animals.

Derrida, Jacques. “Che cos’è la poesia?” in Points...: Interviews, 1974-1994. ????????

This essay is extremely useful because in it, Derrida discusses rhythm in connection to poetry (which could prove interesting if juxtaposed with Arabic theory about rhythm in poetry) as well as the figure of the hedgehog in philosophy (interesting because of the importance of the donkey named Hedgehog in Dabada). Thus, it provides a link between animals, philosophy, and rhythm.


In this book, Lefebvre argues that life, especially urban life, is composed of “linear” and “cyclical” rhythms that overlap and interact with one another. This will prove useful in the second chapter of the thesis, especially as pertains to the idea of the contrasting rhythms of rural and urban life that Muṭlak develops in Dabada. Rhythmanalysis also includes a chapter about music that argues that music is built on oppositions; this idea may form an interesting bridge between chapters three and four, a transition from my discussion of layering/connectivity to my “musical reading” of The Shunra and the Schmetterling.


In this collection of his autobiographical writings, Hasan Muṭlak expresses his views on the purpose of literature. Most significant to my thesis are his claim that literature should aim to reach the level of music and his discussion of the inadequacy of traditional language to express true emotion and lived experience. The book’s introduction also includes useful biographical information about Muṭlak’s life.


This Arabic theory book is largely a chronology and explication of main developments in Western philosophy, but it also raises interesting questions about the possibility of juxtaposing Western philosophy with Islamic thought as well as treating the issue of the struggle between nature and technology in the modern era and the philosophical implications of that struggle.
How to Write a Good Research Proposal

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Many research proposals I read begin with a set of propositions or a thesis. But don’t you find it strange to offer conclusions before the actual work of collecting, organizing, and synthesizing the material? To my mind, it is more reasonable to think about the proposal as a plan for research—a document that poses questions, rather than answering them. If that makes sense to you, I suggest your proposal contain a concise treatment of the following (in any order):

- What has prompted your interest in the topic?
  The purpose of the first paragraph is to ease your audience into the field of your research. A small case-study, a quotation, or an anecdote can be used to create a reader-friendly "point-of-departure," which introduces the reader to the range of questions that motivate your work.

- What kinds of questions will you be asking?
  What is your problematic? What philosophical, literary, social, ideological, or historical problems will your work engage? What kinds of questions do not interest you? What categories of thought and critical assumptions involved?

- How do your questions fit into a broader intellectual tradition?
  What is the tradition of answering these types of questions? Where do you expect to continue or break with the tradition?

- How will you answer your questions?

- Where will you look for your answers?
  Create a sense of your archive. What kind of materials will you be looking for (literary, legal, scientific)? What period? What language? What medium? What genre? Where is it? How will you get to it and when? This could be as simple as "Ulysses, by James Joyce," the graphic novel collection at Butler Library, or as complicated as "Comparative traditions of Medieval Slavonic hagiography." What are the biases implicit in your archive or dataset? What kind of things are included or excluded?

- What kind of answers do you anticipate?
  What do you expect this material to tell you? What form do you expect your thesis to take? How might you structure your writing? What possible problems (theoretical, practical, or otherwise) could stand in the way of your analysis?

- A plan of action
  Identify any gaps you have. Describe work completed (if any). Come up with a reasonable timeline. Suggest per-week, per-month, per-semester goals and milestones.
Twenty Tips for Senior Thesis Writers
(and other writers, too)

by Sheila M. Reindl, Ed.D., who grants permission for use of this handout to
the Bureau of Study Counsel, Harvard University

1. Begin with something unresolved. some question about which you are truly curious. In a course she once taught
at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Carol Gilligan talked about the imperative to orient your inquiry
 toward “a real question,” which she defines as a question to which you don’t already know the answer and to
which it matters to you to know the answer.

Although it is important to "begin" your focused exploration with a governing question and to make that question
clear early on in your thesis, you need not – in fact, probably can not – begin the entire research and writing
process with a question. It takes a lot of work – reading, talking with people, thinking, freewriting – to generate
and focus your governing question.

Your question derives from your noticing something counterintuitive or surprising or confusing. You make
observations that appear to be in tension with one another and to point to some apparent contradiction, mystery,
conflict, surprise, discrepancy, problem, oversight, or puzzle – something that makes you stop and say, “Huh.
What’s the story here?” We could call these observations competing observations in that both are compelling yet
neither prevails over or negates the other. These might be observations you make about an organism or
ecosystem, about a character in a piece of literature, about two (or more) approaches to understanding and
addressing some problem, about two (or more) interpretations or arguments, etc.

Your job is to formulate a question(s) that derives from these competing observations. For instance, you might
think, “In looking at the perpetuation of poverty… or at how epigenetic phenomena lead to heritable traits … or
at how we understand what leads to the development of empathy in people … we have tended to focus on x.
And yet evidence (or experience) indicates that y might also play an important role. How can we better
understand the role of y?” Or, “We used to talk about this issue in terms of the metaphor of x, but over time, the
metaphor has shifted. What is the metaphor implicitly or explicitly in use now? How do we understand that shift?
What are the implications of that shift?”

2. Let questions guide your inquiry and the structure of your piece. Make clear to yourself and your readers the
unresolved question that you set out to resolve. This is your governing question, the question that governs your
inquiry and ultimately guides and governs the structure of your piece. Show your readers what leads you to pose
your question in the first place, what competing observations gave rise to the question.

Keep your eye on your governing question. You might want to put that question somewhere where you will see it
every time you sit down to work – e.g., on a note you attach to your computer, on your bulletin board, or on the
wall in front of your workspace. This will serve as your lighthouse, your beacon on the horizon that helps guide
you home. You need not be bound to the original form of this question. You might need to revise it or supersede
it several times as you move along. When it changes, your destination changes, and you will take a different tack
or chart a different course. Make note of how your governing question evolves. The narrative of your inquiry is
itself an interesting story.

Identify your subordinate questions. Just as the thesis as a whole is a response to a governing question, each
chapter, each section, and each paragraph of the thesis is a response to a subordinate question – subordinate in the
sense of being in the service of the governing question. Subordinate questions are the questions you will need to address or resolve on the way to addressing your governing question.

Make clear to yourself and your readers the subordinate questions to which each chapter is a response. When you are having difficulty developing an idea or structuring your piece, make a question outline, i.e., an outline in the form of questions. Write out the questions to which each paragraph is a response: questions tend to beget more questions and to form a natural pecking order (order of priority) and nesting order (like Russian dolls, smaller ones being nested within larger ones).

3. Freewrite. In brief stints of time, write without censoring yourself at all. Freewrite to loosen your mind (analogous to stretching before running) and to let yourself follow the playful, associative, non-linear logic of your mind. Often we don't follow that associative logic very far because we dismiss it early on as entirely illogical and useless. While it is true that in our final product ideas need to be in the form of linear logic so that others can follow our thinking, we need to draw upon our associative logic in the creative process. Associative logic is the logic of dreams. It is also the logic at work when our mind makes a creative connection or leap, often seemingly out of the blue. This typically happens just before we fall asleep or just as we wake up, while we’re in the shower, while we’re driving, while we’re walking, or when we’re having a generative, free-flowing conversation that lead us seemingly – yet not entirely – far afield from where we started. When our mind is free enough to follow its wanderings and associations far enough, they often lead to something creative and useful. Freewriting – without stopping and without thinking about whether what we are saying is elegant or grammatical or concise or logical – promotes the generation of ideas and of creative connections between ideas. Think of freewriting as soil, not seed. Soil is the muck that nurtures a germinating idea rather than the perfect seeds that become the actual sentences and paragraphs of the final product. ((For more thoughts about freewriting, creativity, and associative logic, see Writing without Teachers, by Peter Elbow, and the handout “Writing Things Down Before Writing Things Up,” written by Sheila M. Reindl and available at the Bureau of Study Counsel of Harvard University and at bsc.harvard.edu.)

4. Do focused, or prompted, freewriting. Sometimes freewriting works better with a focus and/or a running start. Consider using the following sentence stems as prompts for your freewriting. Complete the sentence and continue writing from there.

1. When I started this project, the thing that really interested me was . . .
2. The questions I find myself thinking about these days are questions like . . .
3. What I really want to know is . . .
4. I want to figure out how . . .
5. I have a hunch that . . .
6. I am confused by . . .
7. I feel angered or annoyed by . . .
8. What stands out to me about all the stuff I’ve been reading is this idea that . . .
9. What I’ve been reading makes me wonder . . .
10. Dialogue between me and the experts (this exercise comes from writing teacher Eileen Farrell):
   
   This author/professor/theorist/expert says . . .
   And/but I say . . .
   He or she also says . . .
   And/but I say . . .
11. If I had to put my project/paper so far into the form of a single question, it would be . . .
12. The observations I make that lead me to pose that question are . . .
13. What makes my question hard to reckon with or difficult to resolve is that . . .
14. One way in which I could attempt to reckon with that difficulty of how to resolve my question is . . .

15. If things were as neat and tidy as I’d like them to be, I would be able to make the argument that . . .

16. One way in which things aren’t so neat and tidy is that . . .

17. One way in which I might address that messiness is . . .

18. I’m stuck. I’m stuck because I can’t figure out . . .

19. I can see that my method of approaching my question has some real problems, or at least challenges, including . . .

20. One way I could possibly address that methodological/approach/design issue is . . .

21. I realize I need to define some terms. If I were to try to define the term ________, what occurs to me is that . . .

22. [A letter to a friend or to your reader] Dear ____, I’m trying to write this paragraph/section/chapter about ______. And do you know what? . . .

23. Let me state what I think I know so far, even if it seems obvious or self-evident (in the belief that sometimes it’s actually easy to overlook the obvious and that sometimes the seemingly obvious deserves another look):

24. Of all these seemingly obvious, self-evident things, the one that keeps catching my attention is . . .

25. If I think of “theory” as simply another word for “explanation,” I would say that one of the explanations that people have offered for the thing I’m researching is that . . .

26. But that theory or explanation doesn’t seem to account for . . .

27. If I could say what I really want to say, . . .

28. If I could approach this project in the way I really want to, . . .

29. If I could write about the question that really interests me, . . .

30. What I wish I could convey to my audience is . . .

5. Work in fifteen-minute to twenty-minute stretches. We tend to approach big jobs by thinking we need big amounts of time. We say to ourselves, "I need to write this paper. It’s 1 o’clock now. I’m free until dinner at 6 o’clock. That’s five hours. I should get a lot done." But in fact, we barely make a dent. We brush our teeth, do our laundry, check our email, pay a few bills, straighten our room, make a list of errands, hang out with our friends, go on Facebook. But we spend very little time on task (the task of writing). That’s because few of us can work for five solid hours on one thing, especially something as difficult and anxiety-provoking as writing.

Especially if you are having difficulty getting started or staying with writing, try to work for very small stretches of time. Most of us can do anything for fifteen to twenty minutes. Work for fifteen to twenty, break for five to ten is not a bad guideline. You might be surprised at how much you can get done in fifteen to twenty focused minutes. It is much better to work for fifteen to twenty minutes and get something done, however small, than to keep thinking for five hours that you should be working and be so daunted that you get nothing done and then feel discouraged, demoralized, and guilty.

6. Employ the S-O-S strategy: specific, observable steps. (*The notion of specific, observable steps is drawn from Jane Burka and Lenore Yuen, authors of Procrastination: Why You Do It, What to Do About It. The “S-O-S strategy” is a term I coined.) Think in terms of specific, fifteen- to twenty-minute tasks that you can picture yourself doing and completing. "I am going to take fifteen to twenty minutes to write down a list of a questions that my thesis will need to address"; "I am going to take an inventory of all the things I can say, all the things I wish I could say but don’t know if I have the evidence to support, and all of the hunches I have"; "I am going to skim this article to see if its methods section is relevant to how I’m approaching my research"; and "I am going to write a memo to myself about what makes my question a hard one to answer" are examples of such tasks. "I’m going to work on my thesis for five hours between lunch and dinner" and “I’m going to work on my literature review this weekend” are examples of plans that are neither specific nor observable: with such a vague intention or general goal, there is nothing specific you can picture yourself starting, doing, and finishing.
7. Take the “So/And Even So” Approach. Whenever you find yourself saying "I have only fifteen minutes, so I can't do anything productive," try saying, "I have only fifteen minutes, and even so . . ." I could jot a few notes about what questions I might address in this paper/skim the beginning and end of this chapter to identify the question the writer's addressing/make a list of some of the challenges or criticism someone might make of my project/brainstorm how I might address those challenges or criticisms.

The “So/And Even So" Approach can also work when you are feeling tired, sad, lonely, scared, discouraged, overwhelmed. It is my version of an approach that comes from a friend who used to coach beginning adult runners. He told them they didn't need to run every scheduled running day but that on those days they just needed to suit up – put on their running clothes and running shoes. If they said to themselves, "I'm tired/busy/sad/lonely, so I can't run today," he asked them to say, "I'm tired/busy/sad/lonely, and even so, I could suit up." The runners found that once they were all suited up, they felt that they were already on their way, and taking a run was not as daunting a prospect. Similarly, if you put yourself in a position to do your work and take even a small step in that direction, you might find that you can, and even want, to keep on going.

When you find yourself saying things such as "I'm sleepy, so I can't work on this"; "I haven't called my best friend in a week, so I can't work on this"; "I have rehearsal in half an hour, so I can't work on this"; "I really want to see a movie, so I can't work on this"; "I'm scared I'm going to fail, so I can't work on this," try replacing the "so" with "and even so": "and even so, I could work for fifteen minutes on tracing the line of thinking that leads me to pose my questions"; "and even so, I could brainstorm for fifteen minutes about questions I might want to address in my paper"; "and even so, I could skim this chapter to see if I can get the governing question that the writer sets out to address"; "and even so, I could read for fifteen minutes to see how this author defines this tricky term"; “and even so, I could write about my fear and how I might proceed in the face of it.” (Writing can be a way of keeping yourself company in your fear, discovering what that fear is about, letting the fear be there without letting it stop you. When you can have your fear rather than be your fear, you are not overwhelmed by it.)

8. Keep track of your ideas and thoughts as they develop. Just as you need to save often when you're working on a computer, you need to save often (in your brain) when you're reading and studying. The way to save your thoughts is to jot them down. Otherwise your ideas might get deleted, especially if you have a power surge (get caught up in another idea) or a crash (fall asleep). (Interestingly, the Macintosh Users' Guide of my old PowerBook 160 made this save-frequently analogy in the other direction. A section called "Save Your Work," read, "Since work that exists only in memory is lost when you shut down the computer, you need to save your work so you can come back to it later. If you don't save your work, it disappears – like thoughts that are lost unless you write them down.")

Write notes to yourself. One way of saving often is to keep a thesis journal or memos folder on your computer. Use your thesis journal or memos folder for freewriting (prompted or unprompted) (see tips #4 and #5 above). Also use your journal or folder to write your notes in the form of brief memos to yourself about your latest response to, or further questions about, or musings on a particular question. Keep a memo document open whenever you are writing at your computer (no matter what you're working on). This open-window approach allows you to catch those fleeting thoughts that fly through your mind in the middle of whatever else your doing.

Create two thesis journals or folders: one on your computer (i.e., a folder for memos – see above) as well as one for hand-written entries (i.e., a notebook, big envelope, manila folder, or big piece of paper on the wall) to record thesis thoughts that come to you in moments when you’re not at the computer. Great ideas often come at unexpected times. You might end up jotting some of your best ideas on dinner napkins, the backs of old envelopes, scraps of paper, and receipts. Just make sure you have one place or “bin” where you keep them all together. Some people keep one such bin for the introduction, another for the conclusion, one for each chapter, and one miscellaneous file for what writing teacher Larry Weinstein calls "gems without a setting." (For more on gems without a setting, see "Worksheets for Senior Thesis Writers (and other writers, too)," written by Sheila M. Reindl and available at the Bureau of Study Counsel of Harvard University and at bsc.harvard.edu.)

Believe that some notes are better than no notes. As you read or listen, jot down even brief notes about what is standing out to you, puzzling you, or bothering you. These need not be extensive or grammatically correct or stylistically elegant notes. They can be just a couple of words – enough to help you register and recall an idea. Their purpose is two-fold: to help you do something active with the material to make it your own and to leave you with enough of a record of your reading and thinking that you can recall it later.
9. Keep track of others’ ideas. In your notes (and in the final product), make clear which words and ideas and lines of reasoning are yours and which need to be attributed to someone else. When you are noting someone else’s words or thinking, write down the information you will need to accurately cite the source of the material in the future or to return to it again down the road. Keep that information firmly attached to the material even as you go through different drafts.

Remember that, as Abigail Lipson and Sheila Reindl point out in “The Responsible Plagiarist: Understanding Students Who Misuse Sources,” acknowledging others’ work is about being responsible not only to academic rules but to a set of relationships: “As scholars, we have a responsibility to our sources (to acknowledge our indebtedness to them), to our readers (to let them know what our sources were and how they informed us), and to ourselves (to declare our own contributions). Proper documentation traces a family tree of intellectual kinship, in which we place our own ideas and text in context” (p. 12). They observe that attributing and citing others’ work is part of our responsibility as members of the community of the mind.

10. Let your reader in on your reasoning. Let your reader know what you want him or her to take away from or learn from a chapter and from your thesis as a whole. Don’t just present data. Show your reader how you want him or her to make sense of the data, what you want him or her to see as meaningful about all that data. Show your reader the inferences you make, the things you see as you read between the lines. Think of your thesis as a museum: you are the museum guide giving your audience a guided tour. Don’t just let them wander around, trying to make whatever sense they might of what’s in there. Point their attention to what you’d like them to see and to the connections you’d like them to make between things. Help them to see and understand what you have come to see and understand.

Use chapter titles and subheads as important signposts for your reader and as ways of challenging yourself to clarify and summarize your thoughts and the connections between your thoughts. To name is to know.

Make sure your reader can tell which ideas, which words, and which lines of reasoning are yours and which are someone else’s. Both by attribution within the text and by formal citation, let your reader know where you are making your own contribution and where (and how) you are drawing upon the contributions of others. Different disciplines have different conventions about attribution and citation. If you have questions about how to handle issues of attribution and citation, consult with your adviser or others in your field; find a manual that speaks to the conventions of your field; and look to model writings in your field in the form of professional publications, dissertations, and honors-level senior theses.

11. Make a point. Many senior thesis writers tend to rely on summarizing, describing, narrating, and categorizing and never get around to making a point. While an elegant and clarifying summary, or a careful and sensitive description, or a well-chosen and illustrative narrative, or a new and intriguing categorization might be a contribution to your field, chances are you will be expected to develop some sort of argument or point, that is, to use your summary, description, narrative, or categorization in the service of an analytic response to some unresolved question or problem. If you find yourself relying on summaries, descriptions, narratives, and categorization, ask yourself, “What larger question is this in the service of?”

Show the subtleties of your thinking. Many students rely on variations of "and" to connect their ideas: "and"; "in addition"; "also"; "next"; "another example"; "later"; "plus"; "besides"; "yet another thing." It is as though they knit one very long piece with a basic knit-one-pearl-one stitch and then decide after it is long enough that they will cast off, add a few tassels or a bit of fringe, and call it a scarf. That is fine when we are just learning to knit or to write, but to construct complex garments and arguments, we need to make more complex connections between things.

Don’t say "and" when you mean to form a more precise connection: "even though"; "seems like, but"; "is insignificant unless we consider"; "is based on the problematic assumption that"; "does not adequately address the question of"; "goes even farther and demonstrates that"; "despite its problems is nonetheless useful for"; "but this definition differs in one critical respect"; "addresses that question but does not address the matter of." An analogy or metaphor can also help you clarify a connection between ideas.
12. Reckon with the complexity of your question. You don't necessarily need to resolve your question completely. Sometimes it is enough to talk clearly about how and why things remain complex rather than to clear up the complexity.

13. Let readers of your draft know the questions you have about the draft. While you might sometimes want to give your adviser and friends carte blanche to respond to whatever strikes them in your drafts, sometimes specifying some of the questions you have helps you feel less vulnerable to getting feedback. As a rule, it’s helpful to you and your readers to append a memo to a draft. You can take the first shots at your work so that you keep your dignity, saying, in effect, “I know this draft has its problems.” And you help your readers by guiding their attention to what is most important to you. You can ask people to tell you what they see as your governing question, or to name three things they learned in reading your chapter, or to tell you what they liked most and what they had the most trouble with, or to tell you where your argument is weakest and where it is strongest, how the tone works in a particular place, etc.

14. Overview and read other senior theses. Read senior theses from previous years. Ask your senior thesis adviser if your department keeps some senior theses available for students’ use. Check with the library to find out whether and where senior theses from all departments are kept. (At Harvard, the Harvard University Archives (in Pusey Library in Harvard Yard) houses theses that have received a grade of magna cum laude or higher; Lamont Library keeps on Level 1 the most recent two years of theses which were awarded the Hoopes prize.) While it might be useful to read a thesis that is similar to yours in content area or topic, it can be especially helpful to read one that is similar in method or approach (e.g., a thesis that relies upon interview data, or quantitative data, or government documents, or ethnographic data, or a portrait of a community).

15. Accept that anxiety and anxiety-management are part of the writing process. Upon the completion of his doctorate, a former graduate student commented that 80% of the time and energy involved in writing a dissertation goes to anxiety management. You can’t wait until you are not afraid or not anxious to begin writing. You need to find ways to write even when you are feeling anxious. Writing in your thesis journal about your fear or anxiety can be a way of keeping yourself company in your fear, discovering what your fear is about, letting the fear be there without letting it stop you from doing what you need to do. Consider using the freewriting prompt, “I fear that…” And then try, “I want to find a way to go forward in the face of that fear. One first step I could take is to ….” You might also try, “I am stuck. I am stuck because…” In addition to writing about your fear or stickiness, working in fifteen- to twenty- minute stretches, taking frequent breaks, getting regular exercise, meditating, using the S-O-S strategy, using the “So/And Even So” Approach, and talking with people are all ways of managing your anxiety.

16. Take frequent breaks. To sustain your focus and concentration, you need to pace yourself. Pacing requires timely and attuned breaks—timely in that you take a break before you reach your breaking point (i.e., the point at which you are so exhausted that you collapse or are so frustrated that you avoid getting back to the task) and attuned in that it hits the spot of what you need to recharge or restore yourself at that particular point in time.

Many people say, “But my ‘little’ breaks inevitably last for hours.” You can avoid the potential for dangerously long breaks if you a) develop a repertoire of refreshing activities; b) experiment with breaks of different sizes; and c) develop a sensitivity to when you need a break and to what kind and what length of break you need at any given point. Your repertoire of breaks might include talking with a friend, meditating, dancing in your room to a favorite song, reading your email, making a phone call, getting something to eat or drink, taking a walk, taking a brief nap (notice how long of a nap is “just right” for you), reading a novel or a newspaper, doing the dishes, getting fresh air, doing some artwork, starting a letter to a friend, getting exercise, or running an errand. When you take a break, ask yourself what exactly you need right now. Do you need a change of activity (e.g., to do something physical rather than something sedentary or to work on an art project rather than a problem set)? Do you need a change of environment (e.g., to get some fresh air or to work in a friend’s room)? A change of
17. **Attend to your senses.** The enterprise of studying and writing can sometimes be one of the most depriving experiences known to humankind. It’s sensorily depriving—we are not seeing something that’s visually interesting, smelling something wonderful, tasting something delicious, feeling a soothing or stimulating touch, or hearing beautiful sound. Studying is socially depriving: we are typically alone. And it is kinesthetically depriving: we are just sitting. We’re effectively in a deprivation chamber.

Try to attend to your senses not only when you take a break but when you create a context for studying. Sit where you can see something appealing. Make a cup of hot, fragrant tea or hot chocolate to smell and taste. Wrap yourself in something warm and cozy. If you can study with music playing, listen to music that will hit the spot. And get up and move from time to time.

18. **Think of your work in terms of a relationship, a process of continually connecting and re-connecting.** Things get out of perspective when they fall out of relationship: we cannot tell how big or small things are unless we see them in relation to something else. To keep your work in perspective, or to bring your thesis back to scale once you’ve lost perspective, try to stay in relationship with, i.e., connected with

- **your curiosity and your caring** (also known as your interest, your passion, your desire to understand or to know) – by remembering what drew you to your question in the first place.
- **your question** – by freewriting, being playful with ideas (see tips #4 and #5 above).
- **your coaches (i.e., teachers), colleagues (i.e., fellow students), and loyal fans (i.e., friends)** by talking with them about your ideas and about your experience of trying to write.

You might find the following three metaphors of connecting and reconnecting helpful:

**Engaging, disengaging, and reengaging gears.** Imagine your mind and your project as two gears. To turn, they need to engage, to mesh. Questions are the cogs of the gears, the means by which your mind engages with your project. You prepare to write (or read) by remembering the questions your piece is addressing (or discovering the questions an author is addressing) and by generating questions of your own. Meshing the cogs on one gear (the questions of the piece you are writing or reading) with the cogs on another gear (the questions on your mind) engages the gears and sets them in motion. Whenever your mind disengages (i.e., you lose your concentration) use these sets of questions to help you reengage.


One senior thesis writer referred to his thesis as “Taylor” and would say, “Taylor and I are spending the weekend together.” “Taylor and I haven’t been doing so well, so we decided we needed a date night.” “Even when we’re having a hard time, I try to remember what drew me to Taylor in the first place.”
Practicing Zen Mindfulness (an approach to everything in life, including one’s writing, reading and studying). A Zen approach to life involves mindfulness (vs. mindlessness); being present (vs. being absent); and cultivating an abiding awareness of your relation to all you do and encounter in your life.

When your attention wanders, as it inevitably will, just notice that it has, and bring it back to your task. Don’t judge yourself or your behavior – berating yourself by saying, for instance, “There I go again being such a poor writer (or reader). I never keep my focus. I have such a short attention span. I bet I have the poorest concentration of anyone. I can’t believe I am so distractible. I must be doing something wrong. Everyone else in this class (or this library, or the world) knows how to keep their focus. I’m just not a good reader. . . .” Such judgments waste your precious time and energy. When you lose your concentration, just notice what you are doing, and then bring your attention back to your focus.

19. Negotiate with yourself. When you seem to be sabotaging your own efforts to do what you intend, listen for internal voices that express your competing needs, desires, and fears. Part of you might be saying, “Me, I really do want to do well on this project. I want to get down to work.” But another part might be saying, “Me, I’m going to make sure I get some time to hang out with friends no matter what.” And yet another part might be saying, “Me, I’m afraid I’m really not competent to do this project. I’m afraid that if I work on it now, I’ll just discover that I really don’t know what I’m doing or that I can’t do as good a job as I want to.”

At times like this, it is as if our behavior is being guided by an internal committee whose members each have a vested interest in their own particular preferred activity. The committee as a whole has trouble either accomplishing a task or enjoying itself wholeheartedly because its members keep quibbling over which activity should have priority. Worktime tends to be compromised by the desire to rest or play, and playtime tends to be contaminated by guilt and anxiety over not working.

To work and play with less internal conflict, you need to form alliances among various parts of yourself – for example, among the part of you that aspires to do your best; the part that values other things in life besides achievement; and the part that is afraid of failure, compulsive working, loneliness, or other potential risks of engaging with your work. To form such an alliance requires that all of the separate, uncooperative, "me/l" voices join to create a generative "we/let's" voice (e.g., “Okay, we have several different things that matter to us. Let’s figure out how can we get going on this project and also help manage our fear about not being good enough and also guarantee that we can have time to play”). In creating a "we/let's" voice, you bring together all of your energies in the effort to live a life that feels whole and true to the complexity of who you are.

20. Let yourself be surprised in the process of writing your thesis. True learning involves a transformation of sorts, and we all know how disorienting transformations can be.

Sources and Resources


