COMM 6400 **– Contemplative Communication**

## **Introduction to the Course**

“Life is short, art is long…. It is not that we have a short time to live, but that we waste a lot of it. Life is long enough, and a sufficiently generous amount has been given to us for the higher achievements if it were all well invested. But when it is wasted in heedless luxury and spent on no good activity, we are forced at last by death’s final constraint to realize that it has passed away before we knew it was passing. So it is: we are not given a short life, but we make it short, and we are not ill-supplied but wasteful of it…life is long if you know how to use it.” **--Seneca**

“On the Shortness of Life” (1st century CE)

“Art is as long as ever, but life is more interrupted and less available for a man's proper pursuits. It is not an era of repose. We have used up all our inherited freedom. If we would save our lives, we must fight for them.”

**--Henry David Thoreau**

“Slavery in Massachusetts” Address (1854)

This course approaches the study of communication from a **contemplative perspective**, from a deep consideration of the challenge to live *deliberately*. We will contemplate rather than analyze in deepening our thinking in relational terms. Instead of trying to adapt to the increasing acceleration of communication activities, we will attempt to deescalate communicative pressures in order to cultivate more reflection, care and thoughtfulness in our relations with others. Instead of breaking the world down, we will work on building it up, seeking wholeness beyond manipulation and control, increasing wonder over dullness. We will strive to contemplate communication in relation to living our lives as opposed to deadening them. Adopting such a contemplative approach to communication will entail working away from a *separatist* model of communicative relations, in which action pre-dominates, toward working with a more *communal* model in which contemplation liberates action. A central theme of concern this semester will be our experience of the interrelations between communication, time and the wonder of life. We will be pursuing the communicative arts of living in relation to a world we too often find difficult to live in. In a real sense, we will be listening for the insistence of beauty.

**Coursework**

Required Texts:

1. ***24/7*** Jonathan Crary (NY: Verso, 2014)
2. ***The Scent of Time***, Byung-Chul Han (NY: Polity, 2017)
3. ***The Experience of Meaning***, Jan Zwicky (Univ. of Regina, 2019)

Also Recommended: *Lyric Philosophy*, Jan Zwicky (Edmonton: Brush

Educational, 2014).

Assignments:

**Responsive Essay** 30% When you have time, what do you wonder about?

Begin this assignment by relating wonder to intellectual inquiry and the

dynamics of research as a pressure to know the world. Write to relieve as

you explore the varying degrees of such pressure. Then, place Crary and Han’s

arguments in relation to each other to illumine connect common themes or

questions regarding their relevance to your own research interests/agenda.

Guidelines: 8-10 pages.

**Contemplative** 50% This should be conceived as a work in progress, thus

**Project** open-ended and heuristic. Combine an essay with

either an artistic expression of the ideas in that work or in providing assistance to undergraduate students in preparing/exhibiting their communicative art projects at the end of the semester. Use Zwicky’s writings to center the theoretical argument in your prose and in relation to any artistic expression springing from your writing. There are many creative options here for how this project can be accomplished and so I encourage you to brainstorm with me as your imagination searches for poetic traction. In essence, you will be crafting a contemplative response to world dominated by constant activity.

Guidelines: TBA

**Engagement** 20% Contemplative and active wholeheartedness of

participation in sustaining the relational health of

our course of study-in-time together.

 

**Course Policies**

**Attendance:** Attendance plus participation in class discussion indicates a commitment to engagement. Missing classes and/or withdrawal from discussions signals disengagement. Your credibility as a student of *communication* is earned by your commitment to engage others in this shared course of study. Two or more unexcused absences will decrease percentage points and thus your final grade.

**Students with Disabilities:** Students with disabilities (including invisible disabilities such as chronic diseases, learning disabilities, and head injuries) are encouraged to notify their instructor of their condition within the first two weeks of the semester. The college and your instructor will make reasonable accommodations for persons with documented disabilities.

**Originality:** According to The University of Memphis Student Handbook, your assignments must reflect your own effort (or a group effort for team assignments). In situations where external sources are used, you must acknowledge your sources and add your own analysis. Otherwise, it’s plagiarism. If you plagiarize or cheat, the minimum penalty is an F on the assignment; other penalties could include an F for the course and/or suspension. All instances of academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of Judicial Affairs. Expectations for academic integrity and student conduct are described in detail on the website of the Office of Student Judicial and Ethical Affairs: [http://saweb.memphis.edu/judicialaffairs/dishonesty/definitions.htm](https://ch1prd0411.outlook.com/owa/redir.aspx?C=LLRemMr-U0WMj3-1x84tzZNnk3rwPs8In7VtETuMPgd6X_b4hLBVY8zRfHOaxIZCr8x4cHoIOF8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fsaweb.memphis.edu%2fjudicialaffairs%2fdishonesty%2fdefinitions.htm)

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for an evaluation of the originality of your ideas and proper use and attribution of source. As part of this process, you will be required to submit electronic copies of your written work, or be given other instructions to follow. According to the U of M’s Office of Legal Counsel (10/17/ 2005) by taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process and that the assignment may be included as a source document in [Turnitin.com](https://ch1prd0411.outlook.com/owa/redir.aspx?C=LLRemMr-U0WMj3-1x84tzZNnk3rwPs8In7VtETuMPgd6X_b4hLBVY8zRfHOaxIZCr8x4cHoIOF8.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fTurnitin.com)'s restricted access database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Any assignment not submitted according to the procedures given by the instructor may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

**Tutoring is Encouraged:** If you need help in your written work for this course, please know that The **Center for Writing and Communication (CWC)** offers assistance with written or presented assignments for all UofM students and may be of help to you in our course. Staffed by consultants from the Departments of Communication and English, the center features space to plan out or work through ideas, review essay drafts, and a studio that allows for recording and reviewing presentations. The CWC is open Mon-Thu 9am-5pm & Fri 9am-12pm, and located on the ground floor of the main campus library. Though walk-ins often may be accommodated, appointments are encouraged and can be made by clicking "Schedule a Session" at the center's website: [www.memphis.edu/cwc](http://www.memphis.edu/cwc)

**Course Calendar**

T 8-27 Introduction and orientation to the course

R 8-29 Thoughting—Thinking—**Contemplating**

T 9-3 Introducing contemplation (handout: Bugbee)

R 9-5 Contemplation and action

T 9-10 What happened to contemplation?

R 9-12 Commotion, oblivion and the coloniality of power

T 9-17 24/7 life

R 9-19 24/7 life

T 9-24 24/7 life

R 9-26 24/7 life

T 10-1 Introduction to Byung Chul Han’s work **Essay on Wonder**

R 10-3 Non-time and time without a scent

T 10-8 Speed and whizzing

R 10-10 Paradox and crystal

*Fall Break*

R 10-17 The angel and the clock

T 10-22 Round dance and oak wood

R 10-24 Profound boredom and contemplative life

T 10-29 Introduction to lyric philosophy (Zwicky)

R 10-31 Love, clarity and coherence

T 11-5 The experience of meaning **Essay on Time**

R 11-7 Contemplative criticism

T 11-12 Contemplative decolonization

R 11-14 Contemplative communication

T 11-19 Communicating contemplatively

R 11-21 TBA

**T** 11-26 TBA

T 12-3 Final Discussion

R 12-5 No class: *Study Day*

**Poem for Course Reflection**

**Late Love**

At the end, far into the afternoon,

I’d walk the same trail, when I could,

up to the ridge. For often then,

but only at that time of day, there would be

sun. The creeks still overflowing and the path

still slick, but what gushed

among the rocks and deadfall was alight,

the droplets flashing in the firs – gold, emerald,

rose – their sharp glint echoed

in the polished tangle of the overgrown salal.

And I saw that it was true,

what you had taught me: beauty

insists: it is connexion

with the real. Even on the days I couldn’t tell my sorrow

from the world’s: the sudden calm

that was your touch, how I was trued

inside your glance. The long and level shaft of light

at day’s end, reaching from the planet’s edge

beneath its lid of cloud. That clarity.

Brief brightness on the earth.

**Jan Zwicky**

From: *The Long Walk* (University of Regina, 2016, p 64).