

M.C. Escher

***Ways of Knowing in the Academy and Beyond
(NRLN 2000)***

University of Colorado, Boulder
Norlin Scholars Program

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(he/him/his)

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This course differs from probably all of your other courses in that its primary focus is you. As a skills-based course, it is not one in which you are expected to memorize or regurgitate information. It instead asks you to challenge yourself – repeatedly and continually – to explore, practice, and hone new skills: skills of self-interrogation and self-challenge, of analysis and critical thought.

Working on these skills successfully will require a commitment from you to engaging earnestly in several practices, including concerted critical inquiry, creative risk-taking, and honest self-reflection; embracing the act of self-authorship as an ongoing process involving continual and prolific production, revision, and re-production; and creating a respectful and supportive group environment.

The class will be conducted as a semester-long, collaborative workshop. We will spend much time discussing, writing, and otherwise creating and exploring – inspired by readings, films, activities, other stimuli, and each other. Our focus of inquiry is how we know. What is the difference between a fact and an argument? How do facts persuade? How do we know they're facts? Is the act of expressing or sharing inherent to knowing? (What is the status of knowledge that cannot be expressed or shared?) What role does technology play in what and how we know? What is the relationship between knowledge, memory, and imagination? What roles do gender, class, physiology, culture, etc., play in what and how we know?

At all times, as we engage with these and other questions, I encourage you to develop bold responses – and importantly, bold new questions – which challenge your initial viewpoints and habits of thought.

*Teachers open the door, but
you must enter by yourself.
-Chinese Proverb*

Ready Player One!

To succeed in the interactive exercise that is this course, select from the options explained here and below, according to category:

Response Activities:

Reflect	Three (3) at 60pts/each	(180 total)
Experience	Three (3) at 60pts/each	(180)
Create	Two (2) at 60pts/each	(120)
Lead	One (1) at 120 pts	(120)
		600 (Response Activities total)

Other:

Portfolio (3-4 revised responses, with reflective essay)	150
Journal	100
Daily Participation (+ other assignments)	150
	Total points possible: 1,000

Explanations:

- **Response Activities** are due on average every week to two weeks. You choose, from the lists below, which options you wish to respond to within each category, as well as the order in which you wish to complete them. *As there is much crossover with topics we will cover in class (see schedule), you are strongly encouraged to coordinate your responses, thematically, with our readings and assignments.* NOTE regardless: several of the *Experience* and *Create* activities require prep time – **PLAN AHEAD.**

A note on formats: If your Responses are written, they should be 1-3 pages (typed, double-spaced), clear, polished, stapled and organized. You are, however, encouraged to explore – and take risks with – alternative, creative formats as often as possible this semester. You should constantly consider the relationship between form and content. For instance: what types of stimuli prompt us to *think about* things – and which might prompt us to *feel* or *experience* something? How does either affect us? How can you manipulate, design, create, formats which evoke the desired response in us, your audience? I encourage you at all times to think beyond “standard” forms of writing – and indeed, beyond *words on a page*.

- Your final **Portfolio** is your opportunity to revise, re-work, and reflect upon your Responses all semester long. This document should include 3-4 rewritten Responses, accompanied by a summative, reflective essay interrogating – and demonstrating – how you have changed over the semester. For this essay, consider (among other questions): *Which of the course activities pushed your boundaries farthest? ...in what ways? Which scared you the most (either before or during)? Which surprised you the most? Which would you repeat, or hope/plan to do more of? When and how did you take your biggest “risks” this semester? Which paid off for you, and how? What do you take away from this? What have you learned/are you learning about how you learn? ...What else? (Make at least one suggestion of a new activity for next semester.)*
- **Journal:** As an integral part of our work this semester, I ask that you write in a journal regularly. This journal is a place to reflect upon themes from our classroom readings, discussions, & activities, relating them to your own life and experiences. Doing so will allow your journal to serve as a sort of personal narrative: by the end of the semester you will be able to look back over your writing and see how our discussions have impacted *you*. I will occasionally give you prompts to inspire your journaling, though *I expect you to journal on your own at least once a week, in response to one or more issues raised by our course that week.* *Bring your journal to class daily*, as sometimes I will ask you to reflect quietly during our class meetings. Journals will be collected and reviewed a couple times over the semester. These dates will not be announced, and late journals will not be accepted. While *they must be legible*, journals will not be evaluated for “correctness”. On the contrary, your journal is a place to process your own learning, by and for yourself. Thus, it is a place to take risks, explore questions you don’t have answers to, and try new ideas on for size without worrying about getting anything “right”.



RESPONSE ACTIVITIES (by category):

REFLECT (choose three/60 pts. ea.)

Stepping Out

Describe your (or your family's) daily routine from the perspective of an anthropologist from an alien culture. What do you observe – objectively? What can you infer from this about the values and mores of this culture?

Awe

What is the relationship – for you – between Science and Awe?

Note: your goal in this response – which can take any form you wish – is to convey something of that experience to your audience. Consider carefully: how can you make us feel what you experience(d)?

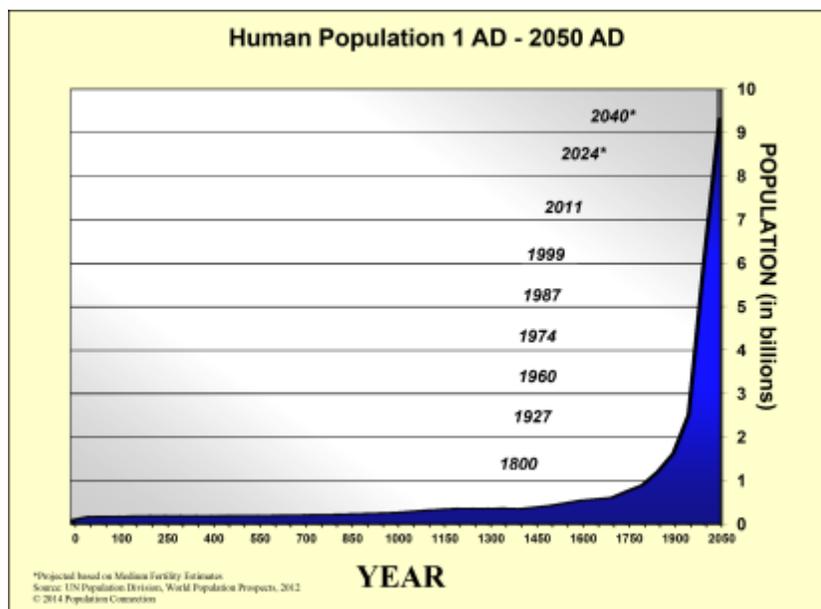
Dream

Envision utopia. Narrate an episode from there.

Notes: Identify, for yourself, your top three or four personal values: What would a society built upon these values look like – a society in which everyone shares or is able to live up to them? (Note: “utopia” involves a *society*; not a *personal fantasy*.) What types of institutions, customs, behaviors, interactions would develop? Then: Show these in action – already realized. Writing note: For this response, do not reveal what your selected values are! Let us discover them, based upon what you show us. I.e. the writer's maxim: *Show, don't tell*.

Pop Chart

Convey what this graph means to you:



Source: PopulationEducation.org

...(Pop Chart cont'd:) If you want to have children, does it mean something different for them? NOTE: Convey your response in whatever format you wish. *E.g. text (narrative, essay, spoken word, rhymed verse, blank verse...), visual (photo-essay/slideshow, painting, drawing), sculpture, digital or multimodal piece, song, movement, etc. Remember: you can always do this for any of your Responses!*

AI Am

After watching *HER* (see schedule) – and/or another film dealing with artificial intelligence (e.g. *Blade Runner*, *Ex Machina*, *Moon*...) – what questions (philosophical/ontological AND practical/legal) does the prospect of real “AI” raise for us as humans? E.g. If an entity is capable of rational thought and self-awareness, does it deserve *equal rights*? ...Do *origins* matter, among thinking beings? (I.e. whether one is conceived naturally, created by test tube, in-vitro fertilization, or other method, or otherwise “made”?) Apart from the obvious, what distinguishes “programming” from “instincts”?



Experience (choose three/60 pts. ea.)

Routes

Interview someone you admire, from an older generation. How did they become the person they are?

OR:

Interview someone working in your field (or a field that interests you). What things do they like most/least about their profession? How has their career choice impacted their life? Again, how did they become the person they are?

Mountaintop

Attend a religious/spiritual service of a faith or belief other than your own. Find God there. (I.e. without irony or judgment, try to identify and discuss how these practitioners identify and honor their idea of a higher power through their chosen words and/or forms of devotion.)

Note: If this experience does provoke judgment (or another response) in you, I am happy to discuss this individually.

Power Up

Have zero interaction with electronic/media technologies for a period of 24-48 hours. (I.e. no computers, phones, radio, TV...) Keep a log of your activities, thoughts, behaviors, interactions with others. Does anything change? What/how? What else do you notice? Convey your experience or observations in some form.

Access Ability

Walk through your entire one-day's routine while pushing (not pulling) a wheeled suitcase or similar device. Never let its wheels lose contact with the ground, even for a moment. What do you experience and/or notice?

Connect

Volunteer for two hours or more at a Boulder homeless shelter or another off-campus service venue. (See me for suggested contacts, if you wish.) In some form, convey what you experience there and how it relates to *your* life or how you see the world.

Ally

Attend an ally training or information session for a group to which you would like to be an ally. E.g. CU GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance), BSA (Black Student Alliance), MESA (Moving to End Sexual Assault), Muslim Student Association, etc. See me for more options, and/or for suggestions on approaching groups respectfully if they do not offer an outreach session. Write about what you learn/experience *about yourself* through this interaction.

Is it Sustainable?

Make one small change to your life or habits, toward greater sustainability. (See the CU Environmental Center's suggestions at <http://www.colorado.edu/ecenter/energyclimate/what-you-can-do> and/or ask me for ideas.) Whatever you choose should be simple, tangible, immediate, and something you maintain for the entire semester. *After at least three weeks* of enacting this change, respond to the following: *Knowing that your one, small act will not stop global climate change, or otherwise "save the planet", why do you do it?*

Shake It Up

Attend a cultural event off-campus that you normally would not. Consider: *plays, opera, ballet or modern dance, film festivals, lectures, art exhibits, history museums, ballroom/African/other dance classes, chorales/choirs...* Write about, or otherwise create about, how the experience impacts you.



Create (choose two/60 pts. ea.)

Fix-o-matic!

What's wrong with the world? ...What will help fix it?
Invent a product or service to help make the world a better place. Give it a catchy *name*. Create an appealing *logo* and *jingle* for it. If possible, present it in an infomercial to the class. (Consider: Who is its primary market? How will your marketing materials, above, appeal to them? Also: How will they afford it? What does it cost to make/deliver? How/where will you attain those funds for initial production/marketing/distribution?)

Ineffable

Identify an experience which changed you in some fundamental way – a moment in which you *grew*.
Convey this experience, change, or feeling to the class through some form other than language.

Holiday

What needs or deserves to be honored, that isn't? Create the holiday. Name it. Describe (and/or demonstrate) the practices of this holiday. How did your celebratory forms derive? (*Consider: how did we get mistletoe, trick or treat, egg hunts...??*) What are your invented forms intended to honor?

What's Your Art?

Create a work of art for the class. Work outside of any medium that is comfortable for you.
(Consider: *Song? Dance? Video? Photography? Architecture? Other drawing/sculpture? Legos? Minecraft? Other digital?...*)

Other

...Got an idea for something else you want to try in this category? Pitch it to me!



Lead (1 only; 120 pts.)

At some point in the semester, each student will lead the class in some experiential or otherwise learning activity. (Expected duration: 8-10 min – followed by discussion.) We will discuss these in class and I will ask you to submit a proposal and/or “script” of your presentation or activity at least one week in advance. What you choose to do with this activity can vary widely. This may be your chance to convey a significant set of knowledge on a topic of your choosing, to share a unique skill (to some critical or pedagogical end), and/or to present an interactive or creative response to one or more of the prompts above – or inspired by our class discussions and activities.



Other

NOTE: This response is required for every student and is factored into your Participation grade. You may complete it at any time.

Where in the World?

Complete the 30 minute “Abroad 101” session either in person or online at: <http://studyabroad.colorado.edu/> Then peruse the Study Abroad programs online and/or make a follow-up visit to the Study Abroad Office. Get information on at least one program you realistically hope to go on. Speak with an advisor to get your questions answered. (E.g. how can it fit into your major? How can you afford it? What scholarships or financial aid are available? When should you apply? Etc.) Then: **Write an informative and persuasive letter to your parent/guardian describing one program you actually want to go on.** Address as many counterarguments to your participation as you can, in an informative way. E.g. What kind of housing will you have while abroad? How long will you be there? What sorts of classes will you take – & how will they fit into your major? Are there language requirements? Scholarships? How (else) can you afford it? Answer these and any other relevant questions carefully.

Note: this should be a realistic proposal for your study abroad year.