

Writing and Seeing at 5 km/h

Monday through Friday 12.30-14 and 15.50-17.20 in the classroom
and

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday 10.30-12 walking in Brno

Instructor: Rebekah Bloyd, Faculty

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Course description:

“What does it mean to be out walking in the world, whether in a landscape or a metropolis, on a pilgrimage or a protest march?” Posed to us at the outset of writer and political activist Rebecca Solnit’s *Wanderlust: A History of Walking*, we will respond by considering her thoughts as well as those of urban planners, poets, translators, and citizen-pedestrians like ourselves. We’ll analyze the claims of renowned city designer Jeff Speck in his *Walkable City: How Downtown Can Save America, One Step at a Time* and we’ll track the recent legacy of journalist Jane Jacobs: the international “Jane’s Walk.”

We ourselves will take three walks, beginning with a Writer’s Walk, where we’ll practice mapmaking and expression through figurative language. Next, in our Urban Walk, we’ll apply the four criteria (utility, safety, comfort, and interest for the pedestrian) of Speck’s “General Theory of Walkability” to specific streets of Brno; as well, we’ll sketch and take photos of what catches our attention—later posting our visual, descriptive, and imaginative observations on a Tumblr site. Finally, we’ll engage in specific aural exercises in our Listening Walk, pondering our reactions and potential responsibilities in regard to noise and soundscapes.

As we examine works centered on a movement deemed “the most obvious and the most obscure,” we’ll note the way contemporary poet-translators A.E. Stallings, Peter Cole, Stephen Kuusisto, and W.S. Di Piero use the senses to engage us as they construct paths, places and ideas around, respectively, the cities of Athens, Jerusalem, Venice, and San Francisco. In turn, we’ll develop our own literary essays that invite the reader-listener to walk *this* way, in *this* place—and see what comes of a journey through time, environment and experience.

We’ll engage in peer response sessions as we revise our drafts, incorporating researched material, strengthening our assertions, and honing individual styles. The course format will include discussion, and critical and creative thinking, writing, and viewing activities. At least once during the course, each student (as part of a pair or trio) will facilitate class discussion on an essay, book chapter, poem, article or visual image and word pairing. We will pursue the pleasures, ideas, and formal strategies of literature and contemporary writings. Readings are chosen to inform, to stimulate discussion, and to present both models and inspiration for us to develop our own writing prowess, including analytical, descriptive, narrative, and imaginative writing skills.

Course requirements:

In advance: Students will read “**The Solitary Stroller and the City**” by Rebecca Solnit (25 pages).

Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday: **a rough draft or a revised draft of a literary essay** will be due (750 to 1000 words each day))

Tuesday and Thursday: **critical reading guides** (Each student will complete 6; these are written responses to classmates’ rough drafts.)

Daily, Monday through Thursday:

***one hour of in-class writing** (Students will write 7-10 minutes at a time in response to prompts and to assigned readings; these responses will be shared in class.)

***active participation** (Students will be invited to engage in a variety of exercises—including drawing and sketching—as well as whole-class discussions.)

***co-leading discussion** on an assigned reading (In trios, students will facilitate discussion, making use of a set of Guiding Questions—as well as their own questions—in order to help all of us better understand an author’s strategies, style, and ideas.)

***participation in three walks** (each walk is 1½ hours)

***two hours of out-of-class work** (roughly, 1 hour of reading and 1 hour of writing)