

PULMONOGRAPHIES

Kaushik Sunder Rajan (Chicago), with Stacy Hardy (Makhanda)

This class considers what it means to think the biographies and geographies of breath, in a time of climate crisis, a postcolonial time, a time of late industrialism, a time of mourning. How might we think a politics of breath, and the breather as a subject of politics? How might we generate a theory and praxis of the breather from the “global South”, recognizing that the cartography of center and periphery, “North” and “South”, is itself very much at stake in relation to a problem that is planetary as much as it is global? How might an experimentation with ethnographic, literary and musical form help us explore these questions in more vibrant ways than our inherited conceptual modalities might allow?

At its core, the class is a consideration of imperialism. It makes and explores the argument that empire has always functioned as primarily, at its heart, the oppression / suppression / exploitation of breath. This is laid bare in moments of violence (from the gassings in Algeria to “I can't breathe” in America), but is insidiously present in all other facets of colonialism, imperialism, apartheid - from geography and spatial development (townships / hostels / camps / slave ships), to architecture, to extraction economies, penal systems, and education. In addition, there are countless uses of breath as the primary form of resistance - music, healing practices, feminist philosophy. Thus, breath is at once physiological and political, simultaneously individual and trans-individual. Our attempt is to pull at some the knots that tie these scales together, to open up some of the more liberatory threads, potentialities and promises that come from our differentiated yet collective being, to imagine ourselves (as anthropologist Tim Choy has put it) as breathers of the world who might conspire.

If this class is a consideration of imperialism, then this consideration is empirically grounded within, and theorizes the politics of breath out of, the postcolony. It begins with a consideration of colonialism as a necropolitical entanglement of the physiological and the political, in which breath is both suffocated and fights to break free. We explore this through tuberculosis as a quintessentially colonial disease, and as one that endures across contemporary re-territorializations of the postcolony. It then proceeds to an exploration of what anthropologist Kim Fortun calls “late industrialism”, with a focus on the violence of industrial capital (itself often corporatized and transnational). The Bhopal gas disaster is the emblematic event through which we consider the politics of breath in this segment, though the postcolonial maladies of late industrialism extend well beyond the disaster and reflect in all manner of chronic ailments, at once pulmonary and atmospheric. The imperial resonances of the entwining of breath with the twinned histories of racialized medicine and racialized, extractive, monopoly capital are then excavated from the situation of South Africa, whose colonial, apartheid and postcolonial economies alike have depended substantially on mining.

We juxtapose this toxic, racialized, extractive and accumulative politics, in the second half of the class, to a consideration of the conspiratorial possibilities of collective breath, in music, healing, feminist breath, in cries and grounds for solidarity, decolonization and justice. These promissory horizons, we argue, emerge from and constitute a work of mourning, knitting together disease and loss, healing and community.

The class is at once a collaborative project and a series of writing experiments. We will be reading across genres: ethnography and social theory, but also art, poetry, fiction. We will be listening to music. We will be watching performances, and we will be performing. Pulmonographies is not simply about reading literatures. It is about generating embodied literatures, ourselves. About imagining forms and forums for breathing together.

Readings

Please get the following books:

Assia Djebar, “Fantasia, An Algerian Cavalcade”

Ahmed Bouanani, “The Hospital”

Indra Sinha, “Animal’s People”

Paul Kalanithi, "When Breath Becomes Air"

[all other readings will be made available on canvas]

Requirements

This class has four requirements: (1) that you do the readings; (2) that you do so with a spirit of generosity; (3) that you think about what the readings have to say or offer regardless of their specific relevance to your own developing interests; and (4) that you think about what the readings have to say or offer in relation to your own stakes – intellectual / political / personal.

To this end, writing requirements are brief but constant. For each class, we would like you to post two pages of scribbles. One is a response to the text(s) we are reading in its own terms: what they are saying, what they are doing, what is their moment of precision that for you is also a moment of whiplash? The second is to think aloud about how you might think with the text(s) in question in relation to your own stakes and projects going forward. Not all texts will do seminal or equivalent work for you; but try and think through what work any particular text or set of texts might be doing. These reflections must be posted on canvas by midnight before each class.

In addition, there will be an assignment stemming from the "Body Maps" workshop on May 19. The first draft of this assignment will be due May 26, and the final version on June 9.

Kindness & ethos

These continue to be unusual circumstances, and we are all going to be feeling our way through the quarter. Online teaching and learning continues to be an experiment that can never replicate in-person classes, and there will be everything from technical glitches to the constraints of building the atmosphere of a classroom environment. We fully understand that there will be good days and bad days, and personal, epidemiological and political circumstances on any given day are likely to be different, for all of us. So, aspirations notwithstanding, let's all cut each other some slack. Know that we will be understanding of accommodation requests and be flexible with your learning needs, so please do make them known.

Also, this is a collaborative experiment. This means two things.

First: we're in this together. The larger Pulmonographies project is a collaboration between Stacy Hardy, Kaushik Sunder Rajan and Neo Muyanga. It is as yet emergent and in formation, and we are conscripting colleagues and comrades into this project as we go along. This is one node in the project, one instantiation. As such, while we recognize that there are institutional hierarchies between "teacher" and "student", we would like to think of you as co-conspirators, as part of a network of academics, artists and practitioners of various kinds, located both in America and elsewhere, within the university and outside of it. All of us are reaching outside our comfort zones here, looking for vocabularies, figuring out modes of inquiry, and – in the most rigorous and dialogic sense of the word – improvising. We're learning from you as much as you are learning from us. So please do approach the writing exercises, the discussions, and indeed the interactions with our guests this quarter in that spirit.

Second: this class is not a product, but a practice. One that has structures and constraints built into it, as a means of generating unpredictable and open-ended outcomes. Please think of yourselves, then, not as consumers of a canon that we have to offer, but rather, again, as co-conspirators, who are practicing with us and helping us shape our practice. There is an ethos to collaboration, improvisation and experiment – as dialogic modes of critique, mutuality and responsibility – that we hope we can foster across disciplinary background, institutional structure and location, and virtuality. We're not always going to get it right ... but let's try and figure out what that's going to look like, together? We're here to learn from this material and from each other – and that learning is going to be intense, because we are doing this at a transformative moment, when the world as we know it is changing and the university

as we know it is changing, but when we don't yet know what either will become or what that will mean for any of us. It is precisely at such moments that pedagogy matters.

We hope therefore that we can be kind, be rigorous, cut each other slack when we need to, build collectivity in some small way, and forge solidarity by learning from one another.

PART I: IF WHITE PEOPLE DIDN'T INVENT AIR, WHAT WOULD WE BREATHE?

Mar 31: Introductions

Apr 7: My eyes seethe with ancestral conflicts

Reading:

Assia Djebar, "Fantasia, an Algerian Cavalcade"

Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*: Appendix to Chapter 1, "Algeria Unveiled" (64-67)

Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics", *Public Culture* 15 (1), 2003 (11-40)

Achille Mbembe, "Universal Right to Breathe"

Hymn:

Jacques Coursil Frantz Fanon 1952

Watching:

Achille Mbembe, "Fanon and the Right to Breathe", talk at WISER, Wits University (In class, 11.00 – 12.30)

Apr 14: I want to borrow eyes from another language

Reading:

Ahmed Bouanani, "The Hospital"

Frantz Fanon, "A Dying Colonialism*", Chapter 4, "Medicine and Colonialism" (121-147)

Randall Packard, *White Plague, Black Labor*

Introduction, "Industrialization and the Political Economy of Tuberculosis" (1-21)

Chapter I, "Pre-industrial South Africa: A Virgin Soil for Tuberculosis?" (22-32)

Bharat Venkat, "A Vital Mediation"

Janina Kehr, "The Precariousness of Public Health"

Andrew McDowell, "Dr. Ram's Triage"

Hymn:

Corona (Adesh Ravi)

Influenza (Philip Miller)

(Janina Kehr, Bharat Venkat and Andrew McDowell visit)

Apr 21: The very act of breathing may (soon? already) prove too dangerous for some of us

Reading:

Indra Sinha, *Animal's People*

Kim Fortun, "Advocacy after Bhopal":

Prologue, "The Times"

Introduction, "Advocacy, Ethnography, and Complex Systems" (1-24)

Chapter 3, "Union Carbide, Having a Hand in Things" (87-119)

Asher Ghertner, "Postcolonial Atmospheres"

Kim Fortun, "Ethnography in Late Industrialism"

Kim and Mike Fortun, The Asthma Files

(Kim Fortun, Mike Fortun and Asher Ghertner visit)

Apr 24: Their voices sound as if they are speaking in divining calabashes

Performance lecture:

Part I: Stacy Hardy and James Webb, "Museum of Lungs"

Part II: Listening session with Neo Muyanga & Asher Gamedze

(Note: this performance lecture will be open to an invited audience. It will be held on a Saturday, at noon CST)

Apr 28: Sink babe sink, sink a shaft!

Reading:

Randall Packard, *White Plague, Black Labor*, Chapter 3, "Black Mineworkers and the Production of Tuberculosis" (67-91)

Jack McCulloch, *South Africa's Gold Mines and the Politics of Silicosis*

Teboho Raboko, "Travelling Hymn / Sefela"

Photo essay:

Daylin Paul, "Broken Land", <https://www.daylinpaul.com/broken-land>

Watching:

Dying for Gold (before class)

Rehad Desai, *Miners shot down* (before class)

William Kentridge's mine animations (in class)

Hymn:

The Coal Train Hugh Masekela Stimela 1993

Performance:

James Webb, "Black Passage", and discussion around it

(James Webb visits)

PART II: BREATHERS OF THE WORLD, CONSPIRE!

May 5: Where does the breath end and the wind begin?

Reading:

Gaston Bachelard, *Air and Dreams*

Chapter 8, "Clouds" (185-196)

Chapter 11, "The Wind" (225-238)

Chapter 12, "Silent Speech" (239-246)

Shigeyoshi Kuriyama, *The Expressiveness of the Body*, Chapter 6: "Wind and Self"

Tim Choy, *Ecologies of Comparison*, Chapter 6: "Air's Substantiations"

Tim Choy, "Externality, Breathers, Conspiracy"

Tim Choy, "Museum of Breathers"

Hymn:

Francis Bebey

Performance:

Juliana Spahr, "This Connection of Everyone with Lungs" (10 min choral performance with the class)

(Tim Choy visits)

May 12: The sound of the wind is the memory of air

Reading:

Paul Kalanithi, *When Breath Becomes Air*

Kaushik Sunder Rajan, Stacy Hardy, Neo Muyanga, "Pulmonographies: The Curriculum is Everything" (cc: world)

Hymn

Neo Muyanga, "Choir Chantata"

Performance:

KSR photo essay, "Time is Caught Between Breath and Mourning" (8 mins)

May 19: There are bodies inside bodies inside bodies

Reading:

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari,

"Desiring-Production" and "The Body without Organs" (From Anti-Oedipus)

"How do you Make Yourself a Body without Organs?" (from Thousand Plateaus)

Performance:

Body maps workshop with Stacy

(Assignment from this workshop: first draft due May 26; final iteration due Jun 9)

May 22: A fissure opens between the page and the world

Performance:

Anastasia Koch & Ed Young, Eh! Woza

(10 a.m. CST. Open only to the class)

May 26: I pray to be haunted ... by her slight ghost

Reading:

Helene Cixous, *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, "Breaths" (47-56)

Shulamith Firestone, *Airless Spaces*, "Frontispiece, Of Plastic Wrapping and Cauliflower and Hospital" (1-50)

Clarice Lispector, *A Breath of Life*, Introduction and Chapter 1 (1-15)

Bessie Head, *A Question of Power* (1-51)

Sara Ahmed, *Living the Feminist Life*

Chapter 9, Lesbian Feminism

Conclusion 1: A Killjoy Survival Kit

Hymn:

Pamela Z, "Breathing" (8 mins)

Jun 2: A forest of bronchial branches opens before me

Reading:

Luce Irigaray, *Forgetting of Air*

Chapter 1 (1 – 22)

Chapter 9 (131 – 150)

Chapter 11 (161 - 170)

Adriana Cavarero, *For More than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*

Introduction

The Voice of Jacob

"Saying," Instead of the "Said"

When Thinking Was Done with the Lungs

The Hurricane Does Not Roar in Pentameter

The Reciprocal Communication of Voices

Narnia Bohler-Muller, "Justice as Breath(ing)"

Publica[c]tion

Watching:

Rehad Desai, "Everything Must Fall" (before class)

Hymn:

Lesogo Rampolokeng, "My Rhodesian Rant – Dedicated to Cecil John Rhodes"

(Kelly Gillespie and Leigh-Ann Naidoo visit)