

MASTER CLASSES

Three parallel masterclasses will take place on **Wednesday 18 June, at 4 pm**. You will have to enrol in one of these master classes (instructions on how to do so will reach/have reached you by email).

1. A Literary Cafe at the End of the World **Simona Micali, University of Siena,** **Room : Auditorium**

“For to make sense of our lives from where we are, as it were, stranded in the middle, we need fictions of beginning and fictions of ends, fictions which unite beginning and end and endow the interval between them with meaning”: as enlightening suggested by Frank Kermode, imagining the End, narrating the End is one of the most ancient and powerful tools of human culture to make sense of our life and the world we live in. This is clearly hinted by the etymology of term “Apocalypse” itself, which derives from the Greek *apokalupsis eschaton*, meaning “revelation of the events of the end times”; as well as by that of “crisis”, from the ancient Greek word *krisis* which meant “decision, judgment, or turning point”.

In intermingling these two notions, the apocalyptic crisis becomes precisely the moment in which we are forced “to reevaluate the significance of habits, established structures, and accepted categories” (as the description of our general theme goes). Imagining the End becomes a way to understand who we really are and what really matters, what we regret most among the things we have lost, what we should or could save – as human beings and children of the Earth, but more specifically as scholars in the Humanities.

We will then reflect of these topics by reading and discussing together two 20th century narratives of the End filtered through the perspective of two survivors – a Last Man and a Last Woman – who are also former scholars in the Humanities, and will consider the ways in which they struggle to preserve a knowledge, a vision which has become obsolete and apparently useless in a world which has regressed to barbarism. Our analytic perspective will be mainly focused on the political elements of the two stories, therefore we will devote a particular attention to the shifts from the margins to the center and from center to margins of the ethical, political and social structures of the world before and after the End, as well as to the dynamics of vulnerability, agency and empowerment involving specific categories of subjects.

These are some of the questions which will lead our discussion:

- How has the Doom changed the common hierarchies of power and value in the two stories?
- What is the implicit message hidden in this change? What is the core of the apocalyptic “revelation”?
- What is the role of Humanistic knowledge in coping with the catastrophe in the first place, and eventually with the postapocalyptic world?
- What are the narrative, linguistic and aesthetic strategies through which the political meaning of the story is conveyed?
- Is there any significant shift in the political perspectives suggested between the two stories?

Required reading:

Jack London, *The Scarlet Plague*, 1912

Octavia E. Butler, "Speech Sounds" (1983), in *Blood Child and Other Stories*, 1995

Suggested reading:

Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending. Studies in the Theory of Fiction with a New Epilogue*, Oxford UP, 2000

James Berger, *After the End. Representations of the Post-Apocalypse*, U. of Minnesota P., 1999, Part One: "Thinking the Post-Apocalypse"

(Texts by London, Butler and Kermode can be downloaded from https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1pwgqsWBa2C2G2cyKaqV_Jzl89RBkDp1r?usp=sharing; Berger text can be read on books.google.com)

2. Making the Humanities Humane

Stephen Ross, University of Victoria
Room : Kouros

How are Humanities methods different from those in the sciences? Is it merely a difference of subjective truth claims versus objective truth claims? Or is it rather that humanists just produce different kinds of truth claims from scientists? We all know of The Scientific Method, but is there a corresponding Humanist Method? What are its objectives and how are they achieved? This master class will begin with these questions and Eric Hayot's *Humanist Reason* as a foundation.

Next, we will turn to the notion of wisdom and its place in the contemporary world. What has happened to wisdom? Do we still value it? In what contexts and settings, and for what purposes? How do the Humanities inculcate wisdom, or is their role more along the lines of questioning it as a mode of cultural oppression?

In the final part of the class, we will then ask some difficult questions about pedagogy: about how we relate to students, why we teach, what we actually teach, and how we can embrace compassion where it matters most: in assessment practices. Supported by readings from Alfie Kohn and Jesse Stommel, we will clarify and discuss the role of grades in assessing student work and alternatives to using grading for evaluation. I will outline how my own approach to teaching has changed in the last five years, and with what results. I promise we'll have an excellent time!

Readings (you'll be sent a file after registration):

1. Excerpt from *Humanist Reason* (if students wish to read the whole book they can, but the first two-thirds deal with the historical separation of the Humanities from the sciences and the emergence of distinct university departments with distinct sets of methods).
2. Alfie Kohn's "The Case Against Grades"
3. Jesse Stommel's "Compassionate Grading"

Stommel's website jessestommel.com is an excellent source of lots of other work on alternative assessment practices as well, if students want to explore more widely.

3. The Narrative Compass: Metaphor and the Cognitive Foundations of Social Change

**Pablo Valdivia, OSL
Room : Panathénées**

Description:

The Narrative Compass: Metaphor and the Cognitive Foundations of Social Change, a book-in-progress by Pablo Valdivia, Professor of European Culture and Literature at the University of Groningen, offers a groundbreaking exploration of the role cultural narratives and metaphors play in shaping collective thought and driving societal transformation. Drawing on insights from cognitive science, cultural studies, and literary theory, his research illuminates how stories and metaphors act as cognitive tools that orientate and shape perception, emotion, and decision-making. Valdivia explores the cognitive mechanisms that support narrative creation and reception, illustrating how cultural narratives function as navigational systems—what he calls “narrative compasses”—that guide individuals and communities through complex social realities.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the concept of "narrative compasses" and their role in shaping social perception.
- Explore the cognitive foundations of metaphor and narrative.
- Analyze how metaphors and narratives drive social change.
- Apply the principles of "narrative compasses" to real-world examples.

Masterclass Structure (60 Minutes):

1. Introduction (5 minutes)

- Welcome and introduction of Pablo Valdivia and his research.
- Brief overview of the book-in-progress, "The Narrative Compass."
- Outline the masterclass objectives and the importance of understanding narrative in social change.
- Overarching research question for the audience: "How do stories shape your understanding of the world?"

2. The Cognitive Foundations of Metaphor (15 minutes)

- Explanation of the cognitive science behind metaphor: conceptual metaphor theory.
 - How metaphors are not just linguistic devices but fundamental to thought and perception.
 - Examples of common metaphors and their impact on understanding complex concepts (e.g., "time is money," "arguments are war").
 - Discussion of how metaphors structure our mental models.
3. Narrative Compasses: Guiding Social Perception (20 minutes)
- Introduction of the "narrative compass" concept.
 - How cultural narratives function as navigational systems, orienting individuals and communities.
 - The role of narratives in shaping emotion, decision-making, and social action.
 - Examples of narratives that have driven significant social change (e.g., historical narratives, political narratives, social movements).
 - Use of visual aids, displaying examples of narratives, and their relevant metaphorical structure.
4. Analyzing Narrative in Social Change (15 minutes)
- Case studies: Applying the "narrative compass" framework to analyze specific social phenomena.
 - Discussion on how to identify and deconstruct powerful narratives.
 - Exploration of how to create and utilize effective narratives for positive social change.
 - Q&A: time for audience questions.
5. Conclusion (5 minutes)
- Recap of key concepts and learning objectives.
 - Emphasis on the importance of narrative literacy in navigating complex social realities.
 - Brief overview of how to stay updated on Pablo Valdivia's research and book release.
 - Final thoughts, and thank you.

Recommended Preparatory Readings

Colston HL (2023) "The roots of metaphor: the essence of thought". *Front. Psychol.* 14:1197346.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1197346/full>

Landau, M.J. (2021). "Comparing Metaphor Theory and Embodiment in Research on Social Cognition". In: Robinson, M.D., Thomas, L.E. (eds) *Handbook of Embodied Psychology*. Springer, Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78471-3_20

Valdivia, P. (2019). "Narrating crises and populism in Southern Europe: Regimes of metaphor." *Journal of European Studies*, 49(3-4), 282-301. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244119865083>
(Original work published 2019)

Valdivia, P. "Conflictive Cultural Narratives in the Collective Memory of the Spanish Transition: The Case of Trampa para Pájaros by José Luis Alonso de Santos" co-authored with Bonifacio Valdivia Milla in *Remembering Transitions: Local Revisions and Global Crossings in Culture and Media* edited by Ksenia Robbe (De Gruyter, Berlin 2023). ISBN: 9783110707793.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110707793-003>