

# **RADICAL QUIET**

Honor 3418 – Spring 2022—Mon/Weds

Section 001: 11:50am-1:10pm • Section 002: 1:25pm-2:45pm • Section 003: 3:00pm-4:20pm

TA for Section 001 (11:50am): Raina Miller [u1307357@utah.edu](mailto:u1307357@utah.edu)

TA for Section 002 (1:25pm): Saey Kamtekar [u1162634@utah.edu](mailto:u1162634@utah.edu)

TA for Section 003 (3:00pm): Haylee Mathews [u1242209@utah.edu](mailto:u1242209@utah.edu)

Each can also be reached via Canvas messages

Office hours by appointment: email [phillip@bimstein.com](mailto:phillip@bimstein.com)

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*“If you look at zero you see nothing; but look through it and you will see the world.”*

- Mathematician Robert Kaplan, *The Nothing That Is: A Natural History of Zero*

As a counterbalance to the loud and fast modes so predominant in today’s society, **Radical Quiet** proposes, explores and develops vital alternatives: quiet and slow ways of living, learning and appreciating our lives and the world around us.

Our course will dig down to the radical root—the fundamental quality, meaning and aesthetics—of quiet. We will curate and cultivate a quiet that is not small, contained, weak or separate, but rather a quiet that is big, all-embracing, powerful and pervasive.

We seek not the absence of sound but the presence of awareness.

Our awareness will grow through the daily practice of mindfulness. Based on this foundation we will develop critical, creative and interpretive skills through deep listening (to sounds and music), slow looking (at art and film) and contemplative reading (of literature). Silence will be our teacher; music will include “the space between the notes” (Claude Debussy); and artistic concepts, structures and forms will be the architecture for our learning and experience.

Cross-cutting themes will include: (1) the quiet power of introspection and contemplation; (2) the Japanese concept of *Ma* (respect for pauses in time and emptiness in space); (3) the capability of “being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts” (*Negative Capability*, John Keats); (4) the environmental and social effects of noise; (5) the cultivation of quiet as a foundation for social activism and “as an act of political resistance to the attention economy” (*How to Do Nothing*, Jenny Odell); and (6) the skill and practice of listening (to ourselves and others).

**Radical Quiet** offers a “space both to be and to become” (Parker Palmer), and cultivates a classroom that equally values speaking and listening, so that each student may *know* in deep, profound and valuable ways.

Whether looking at art, dance, landscape or life, whether hearing music, nature or the sounds of the city, our goal is to “see with fresh eyes” and hear with fresh ears, to “turn the everyday flow of perception into an act of discovery” (*Slow Looking*, Shari Tishman), and to become “completely aware of being alive” (*How to Do Nothing*, Jenny Odell).

To help us see with fresh eyes and turn our perceptions into acts of discovery, we will be graced with performances, workshops and presentations from accomplished artists, scientists and scholars: Dr. Steven Waters (drum circle leader), Roz Newmark (dancer/choreographer), Dr. Monisha Pasupathi (Honors Associate Dean and Professor of Psychology), Devin Maxwell & Katie Porter (composer/musicians), Charlotte Bell (yoga/mindfulness teacher), Dr. Scott Black (Professor & Chair, Department of English). In addition we will be guided on a custom-designed *slow looking* tour and hands-on workshop by our generous partner, the Utah Museum of Fine Arts.

**Radical Quiet's** primary texts are:

- *Looking at Mindfulness: Twenty-Five Paintings to Change the Way You Live*, by Christopher André
- *The Little Book of Being: Practices and Guidance for ... Natural Awareness*, by Diana Winston
- *Silence, In the Age of Noise*, by Erling Kagge
- *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy*, by Jenny Odell
- *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*, by Susan Cain

Plus shorter readings (which will be provided in pdfs on Canvas), including:

- How to Meditate FAQ, by Tara Brach
- Short articles on the neuroscience of mindfulness
- "The Age of Rage" from *In Praise of Slowness*, by Carl Honoré
- 'Silence is here': Estonia pays homage to composer Arvo Pärt
- "Listening as Activism: The 'Sonic Meditations'" of Pauline Oliveros"
- The Slow Food Manifesto
- *Silence: How to Find Inner Peace in a Busy World*, by Christina Feldman
- "How Mindfulness Can Help You Navigate the Coronavirus Panic"
- "Five Minutes for Life" from *Silence: The Power of Quiet in a World Full of Noise* by Thich Nhat Hanh
- "Lecture on Nothing," from *Silence*, by John Cage (under consideration)
- "A Short History of Silence" from *The Mother of All Questions*, by Rebecca Solnit
- "Solitude," by Ursula K. Le Guin

Plus videos, audio talks and meditations (links will be provided on Canvas), including:

- 20-minute Central Practice of Mindfulness, led by Jack Kornfield
- Other guided meditations led by Joseph Goldstein, Tara Brach, Dr. Kristin Neff & David Gandelman
- "Silence and the Presence of Everything, an *On Being* podcast with Gordon Hempton
- "Shh! Sound Health in 8 Steps," TED Talk by Julian Treasure
- "The Voice of the Natural World," TED Talk by Bernie Krause (under consideration)

And four films (shown in class or streamed on Canvas):

- *In Pursuit of Silence* (directed by Patrick Shen)
- *24 Frames* (directed by Abbas Kiarostami)
- *Marina Abramovic: The Artist is Present* (directed by Matthew Akers)

Please note that this film includes nudity in the performance of the artist's works (though the nudity is not romantic and there are no sex acts depicted or implied). There is also an element of violence in some of the performances. If either the nudity or the violence would disturb you or conflict with your values, please let me know. While there is not a substitute assignment, a modification in the viewing of this film could possibly be made.

Additional texts, audio talks, videos and activities may also be assigned.

# Key Elements of the Course

## Mindfulness Meditation

A growing body of neuroscientific research confirms that contemplative practices such as meditation and traditional yoga have measurably positive effects on memory, attention, learning and well-being. Many American universities, medical schools, and research institutes have begun to incorporate forms of contemplative practice into their programs (the Stanford University Center for Compassion and Altruism Research is a notable example here in the PAC 12). As American society struggles with painful internal polarization and world conflicts proliferate, students and faculty alike hunger for a compassionate education of the “whole person” aimed toward making a positive impact locally and globally. (This paragraph is borrowed, with slight modification, from our syllabus for the 2016-17 Praxis Lab, *Opening the Mind’s Eye: Contemplative Practice and Higher Education*, which I co-taught with Joseph Metz)

A central goal of **Radical Quiet** is for each student to develop, deepen and fine tune their awareness. Therefore a key element of this course is a daily practice known as mindfulness meditation. You will be guided in this practice during brief periods of each class session. You will also be given audio links to guided meditations online. Options are available for modifying any of these instructions to suit your individual needs and preferences.

You are expected to commit to a daily practice\* at home. Beyond the benefits you receive, your practice experience will also be highly relevant and applicable to class discussions of the assignments—and will provide context, dimension and personal observations and insights for your Think Pieces and paper.

Therefore your daily meditative practice is integral to this course. To help you maintain consistency, to memorialize your steps along the path, and to record your thoughts and experiences for potential use in your Think Pieces and paper, you will keep a daily practice journal at home.

I welcome questions about your practice and will answer them at any time. There will often be an opportunity in class. You also may include questions or concerns about your practice in the Canvas comment box provided for every at-home meditation assignment. Either your TA or I will respond. I will also be happy to meet with you, individually or in small groups, to offer additional guidance, answer questions or address any concerns you may have about your practice.

A very helpful app, not only as a meditation timer with a lovely selection of bells, a motivator, log, possible journal, a place to share comments with meditators around the world, but also because several of our guided meditations are easily accessible there—is the **Insight Timer**, available for free in the App Store and on Google play. You can read about it at <https://insighttimer.com/>. You could also join the **Radical Quiet** discussion group on the Insight Timer app.

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\* Note: this class—and the meditative practices explored in this class—are presented in the spirit of academic inquiry and not for the purpose of promoting or proselytizing for or against any religious, faith, or secular tradition or belief. Participation in the meditative practices does not require students to accept, reject, or alter any personal beliefs or commitments, and a student may opt out of a specific practice that is prohibited by their religious or personal beliefs.

## Writing

In resonance with its subject and title, this course's deepest impacts will be experienced quietly—perhaps radically—personally and within. The discoveries you make, and the most enduring and transformative effects of your study and practice of quiet, will be ineffable and immeasurable. Your internal experiences and personal revelations are indeed the real potential treasure. However, you still must present something to measure. And that will be your writing.

You will write two Think Pieces over the course of the semester. These will be two pages (though they can be longer if you feel so guided). They will at times be commentaries on the readings, and sometimes they will be personal explorations of your own experience or an aspect of quiet that especially intrigues you. In either case, they will be well grounded in our readings, discussions, and presentations.

You will also write a longer and more formal final paper that will thoroughly explore and express what you have gleaned and experienced in this course. More guidelines and suggestions for this paper may emerge from the way your own involvement shapes this course, and will be further articulated later this semester. The paper is due the last day of class (in hard copy and online).

## Class Schedule

The class schedule, including all assignments, is posted to Canvas and can best be seen chronologically in the Calendar view of the course and in the Modules link (the current or upcoming week's Module can always be accessed from the course Home page). The schedule and assignments are subject to modification, in which case advance notice will be given in class and/or by email.

### Important note about the assignment load and how to best manage your time

It is generally expected throughout the University that there are 2-3 hours of homework per week connected to every credit hour for the appropriately prepared student. That translates into an expectation of 6-9 hours of weekly study for each 3-hour course—or 3-4½ hours for EACH of our two weekly classes. I try to keep the load well beneath that, but it still could take two or more hours to prepare for each class, depending on your own reading speed and study habits.

# Policies and Statements

## Teaching Methods and Goals

In a Navajo legend a coyote, or “songdog,” emerged from a hole in the ground and sang the world into existence. The *songdog* story, and the feeling of possibility it engenders, has inspired all my work as composer, mayor and citizen. My goal as teacher is to spark that feeling and develop that capability in my students, helping them to become conscious and intentional co-creators—*songdogs*—singing ourselves and our communities into existence.

My experiences as a musician and a mayor dispose me to think of learning taking place within collaborative frameworks, where ideas are proposed, elaborated, tested, counterpointed and reprised like themes in a classical sonata or issues at a town meeting. It is key that each participant interacts with the subject from his own experience, and speaks with her own voice.

I teach like I lead a band or conduct a meeting: Create the welcoming space, put a “song” on the table, propose an agenda, and have at it together. I present when useful and I listen always, my ears tuned to response, whether silent or spoken. The subject is then articulated in collaboration with one another. My students and I create a community of learning, and we learn in concert with each other.

## Key Evaluative Criteria

Your papers, discussion and online comments will be evaluated using the following criteria:

1. To what extent do you demonstrate a thorough and deep understanding (and/or critique of) our Readings and discussions?
2. To what extent do you fully engage concepts from our Readings and discussions and articulate them with your own?
3. To what extent do you meaningfully express your interpretation and application of the concepts we have studied to the topic you have chosen?

***Be sure to note the underlined words above:***

*The purpose of the underlining is to emphasize that papers and comments which truly demonstrate a considered understanding and interpretation of course topics (as developed in lectures, sources, class discussion and your own thought) will tend to earn the better grades. On the other hand, papers and commentary that skim the surface (for example, simply reciting the basic analogies we’ve discussed but not developing, exploring or analyzing them), demonstrating only a superficial, narrow or limited understanding and interpretation of course topics, will tend to earn lower grades.*

***The most important thing for you to know and keep in mind:***

Make sure that your writing and discussion are well-grounded in the topics we explore.

## Attendance and Participation

In this collaborative, seminar-style class attendance and class participation are highly important—and required. Some material is presented only in class, and student participation is key to achieving the course goals.

Therefore, each student is expected to attend and participate in ALL\* classes (including the guest presentations). In rare cases where class participation is not possible due to an unavoidable absence, an explanation is expected (when possible, in advance). I will excuse such absences only with a doctor's note or other form of official documentation. In any case, makeup work will be required (and it is the student's responsibility to contact your TA to find out what must be done, and to complete the work in a timely fashion).

Note: a conflict with another class, whether because of a project, requirement or a test, is NOT an excused absence. According to the Honors College, such conflicts should not occur, but if they do, I expect you to resolve them in favor of this course and ask the other course to make an accommodation.

Lack of student participation will affect the final grade.

Students are expected to arrive before class begins and remain until class ends. Coming to class significantly late or leaving significantly early may be factored into attendance.

Keep in mind that more than two unexcused absences will begin to affect your final grade.

\*Note: if on a particular day you are unable to attend your section but could instead come to another time slot, it would be far better to do that than to miss the entire day. However, this is only a rare stopgap solution, not meant to be a regular occurrence, as it is better for you to continue to develop your relationships and build the community in your own section. But again, in rare cases where you need to attend another section, you are welcome and encouraged to do so (just be sure to email to your TA know—whether before, during or after class—so we can make a record of your attendance).

## Personal Engagement

Because deep engagement is such a vital part of this course, and key to your own learning, here are a few thoughts to help you participate and strengthen your contributions:

You are expected to engage deeply, thoughtfully and thoroughly with every assignment—whether it is a book, a shorter reading, a work of art or music, a film, video, audio talk, or an activity. I trust you will bring your own perspectives, insights and interpretations to each one—and share them with your classmates, your TA and me.

Light or superficial engagement will be noted; active and deep engagement will be rewarded.

To play to your strengths and invite your preferred method of participation, there are three ways to engage in this class: (1) spoken, real-time in class; (2) uploaded written commentary; and (3) online discussion posts to the interactive [Open Forum on Radical Quiet](#).

(1) A valuable and productive way to manifest and express your engagement—and to share your insights with your classmates—is within our live in-class discussions.

(2) However, if you prefer collecting your thoughts on “paper” rather than expressing them in class, you may offer your summary, commentary, or other response and submit it directly on Canvas. An online **BUCKET** (please see below) for each group of assignments will be provided to you. I still ask that you contribute to our in-class discussions when you can, but your submitted commentary may help supplement or bolster your in-class participation.

(3) A third way to productively and creatively engage with course assignments and themes is by sharing your comments, perspectives, and insights in posts to the online and ongoing written discussion for this course on Canvas in the interactive [Open Forum on Radical Quiet](#).

About the **BUCKETS**:

Each class meeting has several readings (and sometimes films, videos or music). As you read (or watch or listen), take notes on what is most important, valuable, resonant, or meaningful to you, and also explore your own experiences and develop your own insights. Then open the **BUCKET** for that day and pour your own commentary, thoughts, insights and ideas into it.

What you drop in your **BUCKET** is up to you—it could be a variety of things, possibly including:

- Your commentary, discussion.
- What sings to you (or resonates with you)?
- What illuminates your own understanding?
- What do the readings (and films, video, music) prompt you to consider in your own life, or in the world around you?
- How would you summarize the readings (or what are their major points)?
- What connections or relationships do you divine between the various (and films, video, music)?

Just for fun, and to distinguish each **BUCKET** from the others, I've given each **BUCKET** its own name—but you don't need to constrain yourself to that theme. Usually the name just echoes a theme of one or more of the assignments. However, please fill the **BUCKET** with whatever reflects your own mind and heart—and the assignments—at that time.

NOTE: while the **BUCKETS** are only one of your three options for demonstrating your engagement with the assignments, and you are perfectly welcome to choose one of the other options when it suits your mind and mode, please note that several times during the semester the **BUCKET** will be required. For those assignments, you must place your commentary into the **BUCKET** to get credit.

***More about engagement and participation:***

I offer these three ways of engaging and participating in order to build on the strengths of each student. Some of us prefer to speak, while others prefer to write. Some of us prefer the spontaneity of the moment, while others prefer to process and collect their thoughts. Some of us love to jump in and raise our hands, while others prefer to wait and let others have the floor. And we may have different preferences at different times. I want you to be assured that in whatever way you choose to engage, your contributions will be valued and appreciated.

And you don't need to engage in all three ways in each class session. Just be sure to offer relevant commentary in at least one of the three ways for each class. And you can opt for a different way in different classes and for different assignments.

(Note: while the Canvas assignments may ask you to "Mark when done," please know that this is only a minimal indication—more for yourself than for me or your TA—that you have finished that particular assignment. It does NOT take the place of the engagement described above. You still need to respond to the assignments in order to earn full credit for engagement.)

**Tips for interactive discussions:**

For in-class discussions, depth, relevance and quality (of comment) is more important than quantity, length and frequency.

In other words, it is better to make one good, relevant point—that clearly builds upon or reflects on the assigned text—than to speak multiple times but without strong grounding in the text's ideas.

Therefore I ask that you pick your moments well, and, once you have spoken, consider giving space for others to share their insights. Of course, when a dialogue develops between you and another student, or in a continuing thread that relates to your original point, you are certainly welcome to continue to speak within that dialogue or thread.

To provide space for students who have not yet spoken, or are taking advantage of time to collect their thoughts, we will at times notice that a pause or moment of quiet enters our discussion. This is perfectly natural and productive, as it gives us time to reflect on what has already been said, and also offers an opportunity for a new voice to enter the dialogue. We can observe such a moment as a gift.



## Other Classroom Policies

This course is designed to cultivate a community of learning that is productive, hospitable and fair to all. To support our community of learning, all students are expected to abide by the following policies:

- IMPORTANT: The use of cell phones or other communication devices, whether for calling, checking news or messages, texting, social networking or any other purpose, is prohibited during class, except for a medical emergency. Students are expected to turn off such devices during class. Students using such devices will be required to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.
- Students are permitted to use computers during class ONLY for note taking, discussing assigned pdfs and other class-related work. Students using computers for any purpose not related to our class will be required to leave the classroom for the remainder of the class period.
- Late submissions of Think Pieces and the final paper can cost one letter grade per day.

## Faculty and Student Responsibilities

All students are expected to maintain professional behavior in the classroom setting, according to the Student Code, spelled out in the Student Handbook. Students have specific rights in the classroom as detailed in Article III of the Code. The Code also specifies proscribed conduct (Article XI) that involves cheating on tests, plagiarism, and/or collusion, as well as fraud, theft, etc. Students should read the Code carefully and know they are responsible for the content. According to Faculty Rules and Regulations, it is the faculty responsibility to enforce responsible classroom behaviors, beginning with verbal warnings and progressing to dismissal from class and a failing grade. Students have the right to appeal such action to the Student Behavior Committee.

## Student Names & Personal Pronouns

Class rosters are provided to the instructor with the student's legal name as well as "Preferred first name" (if previously entered by you in the Student Profile section of your CIS account, which managed can be managed at any time). While CIS refers to this as merely a preference, I will honor you by referring to you with the name and pronoun that feels best for you in class or on assignments. Please advise me of any name or pronoun changes so I can help create a learning environment in which you, your name, and your pronoun are respected. Therefore, please also let me know if I mispronounce your name, or mistakenly use the wrong pronoun. I want to be sure to get it right.

## LGBT Resource Center

If you are a member of the LGBTQ+ community, I want you to know that my classroom is a safe zone. Additionally, please know that the University of Utah has an LGBT Resource Center on campus. They are located in Room 409 in the Olpin Union Building. Hours: M-F 8-5pm. You can visit their website to find more information about the support they can offer, a list of events through the center and links to additional resources: <http://lgbt.utah.edu/>. Please also let me know if there is any additional support you need in this class.

## Diversity / Inclusivity Statement

It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well served by this course, that students' learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally or for other students or student groups.

## Modifications to the Syllabus

The standards and requirements set forth in this syllabus may be modified at any time by the course instructor. Notice of such changes will be by announcement in class.

## Coda (final notes)

I really look forward to our explorations and discussions of quiet, presence, awareness, music, art, film and literature. As a musician and former mayor I am attuned to the flow of a meeting. I encourage us all to listen and respond to each other. We will mindfully compose our community of learning together. Content may be shaped or altered to fit students' needs and interests. It is my hope that we will all leave this course having a richer understanding of the arts, ourselves, our communities and our world—and that we will become “completely aware of being alive.”