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I. Statement of goals and proposal’s measurable outcomes, rationale and method

One of the least-explored areas in the field of Hispanic literary studies is the interrelationship between the visual arts and literature. Although there have been far-reaching developments in the field of the visual arts and in comparative approaches to literary studies, there has been little production in the confluences of the visual arts and literature and the cultural projection and dissemination of cultural values that take place in the exchange image/word.

Some of the common approaches to the interaction between literature and the visual arts propose the reading of images as texts, treating the image as an import or an extension of language that ought to be articulated or subordinated by language. This is not an innovative method, nor is reading texts for the imagery. As W.J.T. Mitchell writes in *Picture Theory* (1994), “The notion that images may be read as texts is hardly news in art history these days: it is the prevailing wisdom, the latest thing. On the side of literary study, reading texts for the ‘imagery’ is definitely not the prevailing wisdom: it is as old as the hills. It is seen as an outmoded paradigm . . . at the expense of real cultural history” (99). I stress this because the above mentioned approaches consist mainly of examining and matching verbal and nonverbal contexts. To enable innovative work this will involve not only a larger analytic framework but also an approach that moves beyond the existing boundaries of discourse, considers methods and methodologies associated with each of these particular areas of study, and takes into account that the interrelationship image/text can be rendered legible without effacing the one from the discourse of the other.

My goal is to bring together the visual arts and literature not just as complementary partners but as disciplines invested with their own historical, social, and cultural values. Thus I aim to create an environment where learning is mediated or
evoked by the experience(s) of viewing and reading and where students are able to think, pose questions, and connect different dimensions of cultural experiences within an elaborated plan of study. While the interconnectedness of these two fields will be emphasized in this proposed course, such an approach will also draw upon a range of academic fields including art history, social history, aesthetics, ethics, philosophy, and critical theory. The objective is to develop methods of learning that offer the student interactive skills and cultural abilities to explore and establish a dialogic relation within a multidisciplinary environment of varying styles of engagement.

An interdisciplinary course demands an organized plan of what will be studied. The basic method is to prepare an outline of the material to be presented according to comparative and thematic relations, which will both highlight issues and strategies that are to emerge from the course and bring into focus aspects of current debates relating to the visual and the verbal media. The texts and art selected will play a clear role in the development of problem-solving skills and it will offer the students the opportunity to explore issues pertaining, for example, to history, ideology, ethics, aesthetics, critical theory, sociology of culture, cross-cultural communication, and social interaction. In this interactive environment students will not only be engaged with the humanities but will also be encouraged to learn and reflect on interdisciplinary relations and creative processes. This structure will ensure that students come out of the course with a strong historical and cultural background of reference, as well as the vocabulary required to write, communicate, and debate on the visual and verbal arts.

To introduce the students to the theme of the course, an introductory questionnaire—then to be revised and supplemented as the course progresses and as they become more self-conscious readers and viewers—will be useful to get students immediately involved. The intention behind the questionnaire is to have students think, talk, and make connections about the various expressions to be explored in the course. For instance, starting with the hermeneutic premise that, relating to art as well as to literature implies that a certain modification takes place in the viewer or reader, students can be asked the following questions: When studying a novel in which the verbal and nonverbal are interrelated (e.g. Mario Vargas Llosa’s *Elogio de la madrastra*), how does one speak of the image in painting when linked to a text? Does the image provide or
duplicates information about the text, or the text adds information or explains the image (Roland Barthes)? Where in art and in literature is the value of aesthetics to be found? What kind of information in the text or the image addresses notions of Spanish American history and culture, or political or ethical concerns? How can we understand human life and relations when looking at images and reading a text? Can one attain an inter-subjective interpretation without denying the subjective experience of reading or viewing?

These questions can help activate discussion and students’ interest about the material before studying it, as well as preparing them for the role they will assume as active participants in the processes of viewing and reading; and it will also help to frame the presentation of the critical approach to be used.

Students will also be challenged to think critically and in a comparative way when relating to the course material and other major cultural and historical developments of Hispanic culture. Class activities, in addition to each student’s oral presentation and written assignments will be based on: discussions and analysis of theoretical and philosophical approaches to the material to be learnt in class; identification of key references and other aspects that are fundamental to the process of reading and viewing; and comparative analyses of cross-cultural influences from other texts and visual media that are relevant to the course and for the purpose of tracing the development of particular movements or doctrines.

Furthermore, in an interdisciplinary course, both teacher and students must do some preparatory reading. Students will be asked to undertake a role as researchers so that they are engaged in their own education and development, acquiring specialized knowledge that will inform and allow them to generate unique approaches to the interconnectedness of these fields of study. This will also contribute to innovations in pedagogy and the art of learning as well as establish a close collaboration between student and teacher. I will draw on my ongoing research, which is grounded in art and literary theory focusing on the relationship between art and literature as social-cultural practices and on their aesthetic and ethical significance. For example, in my latest article, “War Photography and ‘the Lackey Behind the Camera’ in Arturo Pérez Reverte’s El pintor de batallas,” I explore how in this novel war photography is addressed. I posit that
the novel presents photography as a medium that has been politicized, restricted, and increasingly reassessed for showing the horrors of war, and I examine the dilemma that a photographer must face between ethical and aesthetic practices. Moreover, I discuss how in this novel war photography is no longer able to preserve its aesthetic autonomy when placed within the broader context of life (unlike painting), and how ethical responsibility is afforded to the war photographer. Research will serve then as a foundation of inquiry and learning to be incorporated into the overall plan of study.

The basic aims of this approach are not merely to stress the importance of interdisciplinary studies and to help students develop a personal sense of the texts and art to be studied through applied research and development activities, but also to encourage them to make informed choices and to raise their collective consciousness about the role art and literature play in our everyday life. To this end, the connections students will make as they make assertions about art and literature will be more valuable than “correct” interpretations.

II. Detailed Plan of Scholarly Activity

A. Teaching and learning

1. Context and proposed curricular innovation
   My aim is to design an interdisciplinary course that will contribute to the development of the Hispanic curriculum and will introduce students to the systematic study of literature and the visual arts. This course will examine the interrelationship between text and image within the context of selected Hispanic novels and the visual narratives that emerge from choice artworks by Hispanic artists.

2. Project benefits to students
   The proposed project will deepen students’ understanding of different cultural experiences and allow them to explore and critically analyze how visual representations, as linked to the novel, both function as frameworks for the rearrangements of textual narratives and serve to further articulate and mirror the text’s own commentary. Students will also come to understand how through works of art these literary texts seek to address not only the collective experience of reading and viewing, but also
processes of social formation and differences within regional cultures, as well as concepts of national and universal identity.

3. Project benefits to Faculty
Given that there currently exists no other interdisciplinary course of this kind in the School of Languages and Literatures, the proposed project presents the development and execution of a unique course that will allow for experts in literature and the visual arts to work together. Professors from SOFAM will be invited as guest speakers and/or to participate in designing or collaborating in teaching the course, which will allow for academic growth and communication across various departments.

4. Method of course presentation
This course will be taught both in Spanish and English, with a series of modules that will address and explore the material to be studied, including interactive multi-media lectures, student presentations, and class discussion.

5. Evaluation
   a. Specific desired learning outcomes
      To increase the awareness of text/image interrelation; to analyze and reflect upon the dissemination of cultural values that takes place in the exchange of image/word; to draw on a range of academic fields including art history, social history, aesthetics, ethics, philosophy, and critical theory.
   b. Mechanisms for assessing success
      Activities related to the course will be quantitatively assessed through tests, assignments, oral presentations, and research.
      Evaluations will target comprehension and production.

6. Timeline
This is conceived as a one-semester project, and the proposal for this new course will be submitted in June 2013.

B. Creative artistry
1. To contribute to innovative interactions across disciplines and departments, I propose to collaborate with Professor Nestor Kruger, of SOFAM, in the creation of an exhibition that aims to explore text-based art practices.

2. Exhibition
Both Professor Kruger and I have agreed to create new works of art that employ language as a way of conceptualizing ideas, exploring the materiality of text as well as poetic meanings, visual aspects, and contexts of dialogue and communication.

3. Project benefits to the academic and broader community
The proposed project encourages looking outside disciplines while encouraging collaboration between departments within the institution, as well as between the institution and the broader artistic community. It will increase aesthetic awareness and will contribute to the investigation of ideas that are to address not only issues of image/text interrelation, but additionally those of authorship, originality, interpretation, and translation. An important aspect of this exhibition will be the space in which text becomes image and in which language is displaced from an original context to a different mechanism of vision so that the aesthetic experience is constituted by both viewing and reading.

4. Timeline
The proposal for the exhibition at a gallery in Guelph or Toronto will take place in the fall of 2013.

C. Scholarly enquiry
I also plan to further academic exploration through the research and publishing of an article on the interaction image/text in the novel, La llegada: Crónica con ficción (1980), by Puerto Rican writer Jose Luis Gonzalez (1926-1996), which will form part of my plan of scholarly activities.