



FINA*6652 Individual Study in Art Theory and Criticism

Winter 2020

Section(s): C01

School of Fine Art and Music

Credit Weight: 0.50

Version 1.00 - October 30, 2019

1 Course Details

1.1 Calendar Description

Students will pursue special study under the guidance of a faculty member with appropriate expertise.

Pre-Requisites: Approval of the co-ordinator of the MFA program.

1.2 Course Description

Graduate Seminar Course Outline (FINA 6652) 2020

Extrapolations 3: Word Seedings

Instructor: Robert Enright

Time: 10:00 – 12:50

Location: DMS

Office Hours: Tuesday, 11:00 – 2:00 (additional meetings can be arranged)

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Course Description:

This is the third seminar on the theme of “Extrapolations” and like the first, it takes its direction from a line by the New York-based, SPA-winning Canadian photographer and writer, Moyra Davey, who says that her desire is, “to make some photographs but I want them to take seed in words”. This notion, with changes in mediums and practice, will be our operative principle in reading the texts that are an integral part of every seminar.

The course is structured through the intimate relationship that exists between images and

words, with the understanding that they are equivalents, where neither assumes any degree of privilege over the other. Our seminar is egalitarian in its appreciations. In The Theatre and Its Double published in 1938, Antonin Artaud suggests that, "If confusion is the sign of the times, I see at the root of this confusion a rupture between things and words". We will be working at healing the rupture and, in the process, minimizing the confusion.

A number of the artists we are looking at have also written about their own and the work of others, including Leon Golub, Amy Sillman, Ross Bleckner and Wangechi Mutu. Their writing has taken various forms: essays, reviews, manifestos and diatribes. (For its sheer exuberant fury, read Leon Golub's letter published in Artforum in November of 1968 in response to an article written by Robert Smithson. There is also a rich selection of his writing in a book called Do Paintings Bite? that is worth your serious attention). Amy Sillman is, also, an exceptional writer; her essay, "Shit Happens: Notes on Awkwardness" is an important aesthetic statement, not only for her work but for the work of others as well. Equally significant is her essay on Color and her most recent contribution to the conversation around contemporary art in curating "The Shape of Shape" as part of MoMA's reinstallation of its collection. In a review in BOOKFORUM of Into Words: The Selected Writings of Carroll Dunham, she shows how the form of the review can perform double duty as insightful criticism and personal revelation. Her review is raucous and raunchy and maybe even a bit inciteful: "He rubs language against art, and vice versa, to see what sticks after the frottage, and blows cross-pollinated seeds into the wrong holes. This dirty process is also a thrilling form of magic, desacralized and generative, which contaminates the teleological, fucks up the categorical imperative, and scumbles the idea of art as illustrations in an art-history story". The tone is classic Sillman and the language reflects both the writer's practice and the practice of the artist she is writing about. "Scumbling" is a painter-to-painter word and it's an apposite choice.

To support the texts we are reading we will need images as reference points. I see your paired presentations as points of departure, as sources of visual information that will give us some idea about what the writers we're looking at are writing about. I can imagine you would show the works being written about in the texts, but it is equally possible and acceptable were you to choose images that are not mentioned. In this reading, your imaging can take the form of a counter argument to the supplied texts, a form of visual contra-diction against what has been said. Harold Bloom, the American cultural and literary critic, saw criticism as a "map of misreading" and we should be open to the creative possibilities of a screwed-up, writerly cartography. Think of the famous lines from Samuel Beckett's 1983 story, Worstward, Ho!: "Try. Fail again. Fail better".

You can divide the seminar in whatever way you want – one of you can present the image portion and the other the text portion, but who does what is your determination. The conventional order would have the visual presentations go first, but you may have a different

strategy in mind. However it is done, we can decide whether the texts we are considering are verbal equivalents, embodiments, variations, or outright contradictions of what we are seeing. As extrapolations, they may be suspect and dubious, even contaminated. Ibid, Harold Bloom.

In one way, the focus of the seminar has shifted to reading writing and writing writing. Words are the material of the art of writing in the same way that paint is the material of painting and body the material of performance. As a result, we will be looking closely at diction. This is a form of textual analysis and we should be aware of the dangers of “murdering to dissect”, to borrow a phrase from William Wordsworth. In a poem called The Tables Turned, he warns that, “our meddling intellect/ misshapes the beauteous form of things”. So we should be cognizant that our close attention can kill the attended to.

It’s a caution that works the other way as well. Let’s use the Romantic poet again (this time from The Preface to the Lyrical Ballads), and note that writing isn’t only evidence of “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”; it is also a product of that same meddling and murderous intellect. I want to alter a line from Socrates who tells us, “the unexamined life is not worth living” (it’s in Plato’s Apology). My adaptation says that, “the unexamined sentence is not worth writing”. Ginsberg may be right when he pronounces, “first thought, best thought” but he may not be write. Once written, sentences should be re-considered. Some writing is slow, like carving in marble; at other times, the words can flow as easily as poured paint. Our muses are wayward. They can embrace us or they can abandon us. What language offers in Wayne Koestenbaum’s estimation are “opportunities for attentiveness”.

One issue that repeatedly comes up in writing is the question of intentionality. It is useful to keep in mind Alfred Lord Tennyson’s recognition from In Memoriam, that “language half reveals and half conceals the soul within”. Mel Bochner, writing from another country and in another century puts it more simply: “Language is not transparent”. But Tennyson goes on to comment on the value of trying to control the ambiguous ways that language conveys meaning. For the “unquiet heart and brain”, and that’s all of us in the art world (and maybe the world in general), “a use in measured language lies”. Don’t get me wrong on this: Tennyson’s oscillation between revelation and concealment can be both premeditated and accidental, conscious and unconscious, strategic and serendipitous. What interests me most at this juncture is language that is considered and aware of its own operations. We can let the accidents fall as they may, which they will do anyway.

Writing asks us to pay attention to a complicated triangulation: language, the written about, and the reader. Our excursion into language in this seminar will wholly involve that trinity. Let me reprise Wayne Koestenbaum. There is a section in his book, My 80s and Other Essays, where he enumerates his subjects: “...the interdependence of fragments, the weight of

incidents, subordination and insubordination, hierarchy, demonstration and denotation, shadow and palimpsest, argumentation and allusion, name-dropping and citation, causality and the aleatory". For Koestenbaum these are subjects, but for us they can be much more. I see them as writing perspectives, as points of view, as ways of thinking about how language can function.

For Amy Sillman, making language is a polemical act. "Artists (and other weirdos, witches, gumshoes, alchemists, provocateurs, and poets) must take the power of language into their own hands, with love and antagonism." That last phrase, prepositional and propositional, is the key. Fighting and loving language is exactly what writing is, and why it engages us. Make no mistake, though, in underestimating the challenges language presents. In a radio interview on CBC's Sunday Edition, the Irish writer John Banville perfectly expressed this engaging quandary. "Language is the angel we wrestle with every day, and the best we can hope for is a draw." You'll excuse the pun when I say that I'm looking forward to seeing your versions of that condition of 'drawing'.

The other important component of the seminar concentrates on the thesis support papers being written by those of you in your final year. This piece of writing is a critical part of the degree program and is invariably paid serious attention to during the oral defense. So we, too, will want to give them close (but not murderous) attention. In the process, the second years will have the benefit of getting input from the first years, while the latter will be able to take advantage of what is essentially a writing workshop, which will help in their writing for the course.

In the final hour of the third seminar on January 22 we will begin looking at the thesis support papers. The content and discussion around this portion of the seminar will be determined by the support paper's stage of completion. It can deal with everything from an overall argument to nuances of expression, diction and sentence construction. Just as the papers are, these seminars will be works-in-progress. I will ask that three of you volunteer to act as readers for the support paper being discussed. The format will be the writer, the three readers and myself in the seminar room. Anyone else who wants to stay may do so, but you are not obliged.

Seminar Presentations

There are 12 seminars in this semester and the responsibility for giving them is shared among you. A necessary part of your presence in the seminar is that you be enthusiastic participants in the conversations, whether as presenters or responders. I would insist that you attend all seminars and that you be prompt in arriving. It is a courtesy to your colleagues that you arrive on time and that you arrive prepared to engage the topic being discussed.

You will lead seven of the seminars, in pairs. In most cases, we are looking at one artist in each seminar but there will be occasions where the artist's work generates sufficient wake to double up our focus. So Nancy Spero's development of a language of representation of the female body is also what Wangechi Mutu is doing for the black female body. (The interview with her in the Border Crossings is useful in this regard, as is Meeka Walsh's "Bordernote" called, "Nancy Spero: Grit and Grace", in the same issue).

The first two seminars on "The Review" and "The Essay" will be an open discussion led by me but driven by your comments on the reviews you have read in the issue of Border Crossings that was left in your mailboxes during the week of the crits in December, and by your responses to the readings I've chosen for discussion in seminar 2. (They will be deposited in your mailboxes). I will also be leading Seminar 9 on "The State of Art Criticism" on March 11th. This will be a synthetic, catch-all seminar where we apply the lessons from the reading we have done over the semester to an assessment of the condition of contemporary art criticism. I want you to have thought about what critical writing is, what it does and what it fails to do. You are not only welcome but encouraged to bring into the conversation writings about and responses to artists who have not been considered in the seminar. You will have opinions about this topic but I want you to bring in a piece of writing that is an embodiment of good criticism on the artist you're talking about. Or an inadequate piece of writing that fails for reasons you will articulate. The seminar on March 26th takes place the Thursday morning after the Shenkman Lecture and will be a freewheeling conversation with this year's lecturer, the multi-talented, Nicole Eisenman. We will have looked at her work in depth in Seminar 10 on March 18, so the critical pump will have been primed. As has become customary, the final seminar will be a film screening, semester-end assessment and a celebration.

For each of your seminar presentations I would expect you to choose a piece of writing that we will all read and discuss after your visual presentations. At the very latest, these texts must be photocopied and left as hardcopies in our mailboxes (mine included) on the Friday before the Wednesday seminar so that we will have time to carefully read and make notes on them. The earlier they are received, the better.

Written Assignments

The written assignments differ depending on your year in the program. The second year MFAs will only be responsible for completing their thesis support papers (and they will constitute 50% of the final mark). The due date for the TSPs will be as flexible as we can make it. I ask that you discuss your progress with me as the semester progresses.

Evaluation

- i. Thesis Support Paper 50%
- ii. Seminar presentation 25%
- iii. Seminar participation 25%

Seminar Schedule

Seminar 1, January 8th The Review

Seminar 2, January 15th The Essay

Seminar 3, January 22nd Nancy Spero and Wangechi Mutu

Seminar 4, January 29th Ross Bleckner

Seminar 5, February 5th Amy Sillman

Seminar 6, February 12th Carolee Schneemann (and her slipstream)

Reading Week – February 17th to 21st

Seminar 7, February 26th Shelley Niro and Indigeneity

Seminar 8, March 4th Leon Golub and Adel Abdessemed

Seminar 9, March 11th The State of Criticism

Seminar 10, March 18th Nicole Eisenman

Seminar 11, March 26th Eisenman in seminar

Seminar 12, April 1 Film screening and celebration

1.3 Timetable

Timetable is subject to change. Please see WebAdvisor for the latest information.

1.4 Final Exam

Exam time and location is subject to change. Please see WebAdvisor for the latest information.

2 Instructional Support

2.1 Instructional Support Team

Instructor: Robert Enright
Email: renright@uoguelph.ca
Telephone: +1-519-824-4120 x53012
Office: ZAV 309

3 Learning Resources

4 Learning Outcomes

4.1 Course Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

1. By the end of the seminar we will be looking, reading and writing better.
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5 Teaching and Learning Activities

6 Assessments

6.1 Marking Schemes & Distributions

Evaluation

- i. Thesis Support Paper 50%

 - ii. Seminar presentation 25%

 - iii. Seminar participation 25%
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7 University Statements

7.1 Email Communication

As per university regulations, all students are required to check their e-mail account regularly: e-mail is the official route of communication between the University and its students.

7.2 When You Cannot Meet a Course Requirement

When you find yourself unable to meet an in-course requirement because of illness or compassionate reasons please advise the course instructor (or designated person, such as a teaching assistant) in writing, with your name, id#, and e-mail contact. The grounds for Academic Consideration are detailed in the Undergraduate and Graduate Calendars.

Undergraduate Calendar - Academic Consideration and Appeals

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-ac.shtml>

Graduate Calendar - Grounds for Academic Consideration

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/index.shtml>

Associate Diploma Calendar - Academic Consideration, Appeals and Petitions

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/diploma/current/index.shtml>

7.3 Drop Date

Students will have until the last day of classes to drop courses without academic penalty. The deadline to drop two-semester courses will be the last day of classes in the second semester. This applies to all students (undergraduate, graduate and diploma) except for Doctor of Veterinary Medicine and Associate Diploma in Veterinary Technology (conventional and alternative delivery) students. The regulations and procedures for course registration are available in their respective Academic Calendars.

Undergraduate Calendar - Dropping Courses

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

Graduate Calendar - Registration Changes

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/genreg-reg-regchg.shtml>

Associate Diploma Calendar - Dropping Courses

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/diploma/current/c08/c08-drop.shtml>

7.4 Copies of Out-of-class Assignments

Keep paper and/or other reliable back-up copies of all out-of-class assignments: you may be asked to resubmit work at any time.

7.5 Accessibility

The University promotes the full participation of students who experience disabilities in their academic programs. To that end, the provision of academic accommodation is a shared

responsibility between the University and the student.

When accommodations are needed, the student is required to first register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS). Documentation to substantiate the existence of a disability is required; however, interim accommodations may be possible while that process is underway.

Accommodations are available for both permanent and temporary disabilities. It should be noted that common illnesses such as a cold or the flu do not constitute a disability.

Use of the SAS Exam Centre requires students to book their exams at least 7 days in advance and not later than the 40th Class Day.

For Guelph students, information can be found on the SAS website
<https://www.uoguelph.ca/sas>

For Ridgetown students, information can be found on the Ridgetown SAS website
<https://www.ridgetownc.com/services/accessibilityservices.cfm>

7.6 Academic Integrity

The University of Guelph is committed to upholding the highest standards of academic integrity, and it is the responsibility of all members of the University community—faculty, staff, and students—to be aware of what constitutes academic misconduct and to do as much as possible to prevent academic offences from occurring. University of Guelph students have the responsibility of abiding by the University's policy on academic misconduct regardless of their location of study; faculty, staff, and students have the responsibility of supporting an environment that encourages academic integrity. Students need to remain aware that instructors have access to and the right to use electronic and other means of detection.

Please note: Whether or not a student intended to commit academic misconduct is not relevant for a finding of guilt. Hurried or careless submission of assignments does not excuse students from responsibility for verifying the academic integrity of their work before submitting it. Students who are in any doubt as to whether an action on their part could be construed as an academic offence should consult with a faculty member or faculty advisor.

Undergraduate Calendar - Academic Misconduct
<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/undergraduate/current/c08/c08-amisconduct.shtml>

Graduate Calendar - Academic Misconduct
<https://www.uoguelph.ca/registrar/calendars/graduate/current/genreg/index.shtml>

7.7 Recording of Materials

Presentations that are made in relation to course work - including lectures - cannot be recorded or copied without the permission of the presenter, whether the instructor, a student, or guest lecturer. Material recorded with permission is restricted to use for that course unless further permission is granted.

7.8 Resources

The Academic Calendars are the source of information about the University of Guelph's procedures, policies, and regulations that apply to undergraduate, graduate, and diploma programs.

Academic Calendars

<https://www.uoguelph.ca/academics/calendars>
