

Word Work & Hybridity: A Graduate Poetry Workshop

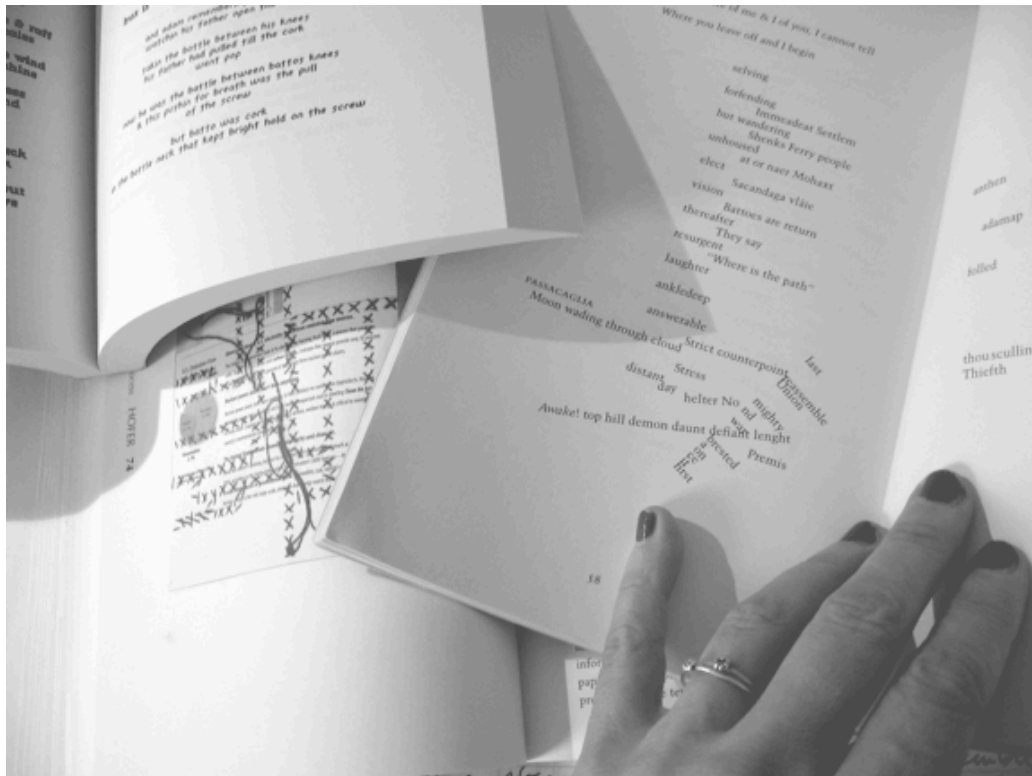
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, spring 2013

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Tuesdays, 9-12; individual meetings by appointment

“The book before writing, arcing once more through the crisp dark air. And the line the book makes is an axis, a hunk of electromagnetic fur torn from the side of something still living and thrown, like a wire, threaded, a spark towards the grass.”

-Bhanu Kapil, from *Schizophrenie*



What are your “books before writing”?

What line does your writing make? From what material is it cut?

How will your language spark? What will catch fire?

Overview:

In this poetry workshop we will focus on poetry's conventions: word choice, line break, concision, use of white space, syntax, and the sonic elements of language. We will simultaneously consider hybrid texts: works that move between poetry and prose, work that experiments with fonts, handwriting, and other visuals such as photographs and stitching. Our focus will be on the page as primary frame, though we may also consider text for the wall, the screen, or handmade book; and we may also consider our lives as hybrid and the fact of no space between living and writing.

Goals:

To experiment with various ways of generating texts; to focus on poetry's conventions while remaining open to hybridity: texts that move across genre boundaries; to revise work generated this semester; to read a wide range of texts; to explore text and image and the construction of text-image relationships; to consider the book as form; to practice reading closely and providing generative peer feedback; to reflect on our own practices of reading, writing, and making, and our learning in general.

In-class work:

In class, we will

- do writing exercises together in to loosen our composition muscles and build community;
- read works out loud to experience them sonically and somatically;
- discuss published works for inspiration, as well as to put them in art historical and literary lineages;
- share our own works-in-progress as well as revised work to learn how others are reading and experiencing what we make;
- provide feedback to others to fine-tune our abilities to read closely, as well as to practice identifying individual tastes and the difference between expressions of taste and feedback aimed at meeting an author's intention.

Assignments:

These include

- reading published texts closely and discussing them,
- generative writing exercises, revisions (and please feel free to apply these assignments to your existing and in-progress writing & studio projects),
- sharing your work for feedback in class,
- an essay that conducts a close reading of a poem, sequence, or page from our syllabus
- a prose essay on looking at text-image works at the Art Institute,
- a final portfolio of a sequential work, revised creative work, plus a self-reflective essay or artist statement, approximately 20 pages. (More on this portfolio when class is underway.)

Missing one creative assignment is allowed, and late work is not accepted. Please print out all assignments and give them to me in paper form. If something you are working on requires me to view it in electronic form, please talk to me about this—it's often still possible to print the work out, and in that form, I have found revision is much more doable.

Attendance:

Missing one class is acceptable; two absences put your passing grade in jeopardy. It is not possible to pass the class if you miss 3 or more classes for any reason. Failure to bring an assigned text to class counts as an absence, and more than two late arrivals constitutes one absence.

Grading:

A passing grade is determined by fulfilling the following in a satisfactory way: attendance and in-class participation, weekly assignments/writing experiments, one “close reading” in essay form, one essay on text-image works at the museum, and one complete portfolio including a self-assessment essay.

Required Texts:

The following are required texts. Nearly all are from small presses, so you are doing the non-commercial literary community a wonderful service by including their texts in your library.

Nets by Jen Bervin

Singularities by Susan Howe

Schizophrene by Bhanu Kapil

154 Forties by Jackson Mac Low

Recyclopedia by Harryette Mullen

Zong! by M. NourbeSe Philip

Instan by Cecilia Vicuña

Other resources for poetry:

“Forms and Techniques” from the Academy of American Poets:

<http://www.poets.org/page.php/prmID/197>

“Poetry Glossary” also from the Academy: <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/17105>

The Electronic Poetry Center at Buffalo (good for experimental works): <http://epc.buffalo.edu/>

The Poetry Foundation, Harriet blog, plus reading room here in Chicago:

<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/>

Electronic Devices & Technology:

We will be exploring and utilizing the amazingly pliable, portable, economical, and relatively eco-friendly technology of the book. To that end, please supply yourself with a notebook for writing and note taking, and for our class, read all books in paper form, as well as print out all pdfs and assignments. No laptops need to be used during class and of course, turn your phone off. If there are specific assignments you are doing that require projection or some kind of electronic device,

please talk to me about your project and how you'll share it with the class. Note that photo-documentation of work can often be put into pdf form and printed out.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities:

SAIC is committed to full compliance with all laws regarding equal opportunities for students with disabilities. Students with known or suspected disabilities, such as a Reading/Writing Disorder, ADD/ADHD, and/or a mental health condition who think they would benefit from assistance or accommodations should first contact the Disability and Learning Resource Center (DLRC) by phone at [312.499.4278](tel:312.499.4278) or email at www.dlrc.saic.edu. DLRC staff will review your disability documentation and work with you to determine reasonable accommodations. They will then provide you with a letter outlining the approved accommodations for you to deliver to all of your instructors. This letter must be presented before any accommodations will be implemented. You should contact the DLRC as early in the semester as possible. The DLRC is located on the 13th floor of 116 S Michigan Ave.

Valerie St. Germain, Director
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Course Schedule (subject to change)

Date	Topic/Read Assignment Due	Writing Assignment Due
Jan 29	<p>Introduction: How to read a poem plus a list of literary terms.</p> <p>Writing and units of meaning: from the mark-making gesture to the sentence to the act of reading and book as object.</p> <p>The sentence, white space, clarity, concision: William Carlos Williams and Bei Dao</p>	
Feb 5	<p>Performativity and prose/poetry hybridity:</p> <p>Gertrude Stein's <i>Tender Buttons</i> http://www.bartleby.com/140/ (print out 10-15 pages of your favorite section)</p>	<p>Letter of introduction to Jill.</p> <p>5 sentence experiments, in the vein of Williams or Dao: working on concision, word choice, line breaks, use of white space.</p>
Feb 12	<p>Harryette Mullen's <i>Recyclopedia</i>:</p> <p>Read all of <i>Muse & Drudge</i> plus either of other two sections, your choice</p>	<p>5 prose blocks in the vein of Stein: on objects/rooms/food in performative, narration that writes "around" the subject</p>
Feb 19	<p>Shaking the soil off the roots of words: Concision, History, and Language:</p> <p>Susan Howe's <i>The Singularities</i>; read all of "Thorow" and one other section of your choice</p>	<p>10 quatrains or 5 prose blocks in the vein of Mullen</p>
Feb 26	<p>Fonts, Erasure, Stitching, Display:</p> <p>Jen Bervin's <i>Nets</i> and her Emily Dickinson tapestries http://www.jenbervin.com/html/dickinson.html</p> <p>Jen Hofer's "Uncovering: A Quilted Poem Made from Donated and Foraged Materials from Wendover, Utah." http://www.alligatorzine.be/pages/101/zine127.html</p> <p>In class: view works by Glen Ligon, Brendan Fernandes, Jenny Holzer work from "Protect Protect," Tracy Ermin, Louise Bourgeois</p>	<p>Begin research: find historical document/text/book you wish to manipulate, sculpt, erase</p>

March 5	History, Poetry, and Spirituality: <i>Zong!</i> by M. NourbeSe Philip	Bring historical document(s) into class. Essay on a “close reading” of one poem/sequence/page of something from our syllabus.
March 12	A Kind of Autobiography: Lyn Hejinian’s <i>My Life</i> (pdf)	3-5 pages of erasure/reductive treatment/font manipulation/stitching/mark-making on or around historical document.
March 19	Handwriting/Writing as Drawing: Cecilia Vicuña’s <i>Instan</i> In class: view other works by Vicuña plus work by Mark Lombardi, Cy Twombly	3 sections of set # of sentences telling your “my life” story.
March 26	Comics and Graffiti Paolo Javier & Akilah Oliver (pdfs) In class: view works by Jean-Michel Basquait	Report from visit to Art Institute collections, exhibits: on the marriage of/tensions of text and image. What do you take, as a writer, from what you saw?
April 2	Books and Failure/Book as Ritual Object: Bhanu Kapil’s <i>Schizophrenie</i>	
April 9	Daily Writing and Procedural Works: Jackson Mac Low’s <i>154 Forties</i> In class: thinking about Fluxus as writers	1-3 pages, any form, on the physical act of writing, and the attempt and failure to write about something.
April 16	Mac Low, continued What is a book? Alan Loney’s <i>The Books to Come</i> (pdf) Semester review: reflecting on your learning	5 “poems” from your established procedure in the vein of Mac Low.
April 23	Visit library to look at book arts, handmade books	Keep writing/revising Mac Low-esque procedural work.

	On your own: visit Art Institute to look at examples of any books there, plus the boxes by Joseph Cornell	
April 30	Critique Week: no class	Keep writing/revising Mac Low-esque procedural work.
May 7	Mac Low wrap up Reading/Celebration	Portfolio Due, comprised of three sections: of Mac Low-esque procedural works + exemplary revisions from the entire semester + self-reflection essay: what did you learn about writing, reading, revision, poetry, text-image work, prose, hybridity, books, work on the wall, performativity and language?