

FACULTY OF FINE ARTS

Visual Arts

Course: FA/VISA 3001B 3.0 – Critical Issues in the Studio: The Artist as Activist and Educator

Course Webpage: <http://www.xenopraxis.net/critical-issues-artist-as-activist>

Term: Winter 2014

Course Director

Marc Couroux (course director)
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Course consultation hours: by appointment.

Time and Location

Thursday 11:30 AM – 2:30 PM, Accolade West 003

Expanded Course Description

This class is conceived as a laboratory for investigating alternate activist modalities, frameworks for action gleaned from multiple disciplines and various historical eras. As William Gibson once put it, the future is already here but unevenly distributed. Futurity indeed is a topic of pressing concern. Increased precarization and debt, environmental cataclysms, paranoid security models (among other pathologies) characterize late capitalism in general, but particularly acutely since the 2008 financial crisis. Despite massively losing any semblance of legitimacy, the system we are embedded in persists nonetheless. Mark Fisher has named the malaise of our times as "capitalist realism", appended with echoes of Margaret Thatcher's iconic statement: "there is no alternative".

And yet, the various epistemic accelerations which have been fueled by the expansion and pervasiveness of communication technologies and the intensification of scientific research make possible unprecedented transdisciplinary consolidations and productive collisions. There is more than ever a capacity to pressure existing orthodoxies in new and unsuspected ways.

Given the appropriation of the avant-garde by the military-industrial-corporate complex—who has long understood and readily exploited the potential for sensory redistribution which to a large extent determines what is thinkable, perceptible—it is urgent for artists not only to gain a firm grasp on the specific modalities by which power operates, but also to develop speculative practices as “positive feedback”, essential to ejecting from increasingly tight communication and control. Consequently, much of this course will be devoted to directly engaging with the idea of the **FUTURE**, which has suffered greatly in light of the so-called “end of history”.

Interrogations of the **technical environments** in which we are situated (we have long been cyborgs) will constitute a central trope, modulating their potential effectiveness. Technologies often function as pharmaka: both poison and cure.

The course will be divided into **10 themes**, with an introduction (week 1) and conclusion (week 12). The themes broadly capture clusters of ideas sharing common valences: **(dis)position, acceleration, cooperation, situation, conjunction, hyperstition, contagion, secession,**

overidentification, levitation.

The first three weeks will involve **brainstorming exercises** designed to acutely foreground current pathologies within the capitalist system which impede the conceptualization of imaginative exploits, modes of potential ejection, the envisioning of other futures. Weeks 4-11 will involve substantial **presentations** (in groups of two - see below) dedicated towards developing teaching methods while unpacking the content of a given reading.

The final project (see below) will consist in a **Speculative Intervention Proposal**.

Presentations

Presentations constitute the most important part of the class. Given the pedagogical orientation of this course (**The Activist as Educator**), the student will be teaching, fleshing out the weekly themes through close readings of assigned texts.

Presentations will take place in groups of two. Two presentations will take place each week. Each presentation will last 45 minutes (including a question/discussion period).

Each presentation will focus on ONE reading. (Assignments will occur between Week 1 and 2)

Reading Responses

Two reading responses will be due throughout the term. Each one should be 1000 words and work through the details of a particular reading. You can choose any assigned text.

First RR due: **Week 5**

Second RR due: **Week 10**

Final Project: Speculative Intervention Proposal

In 3000 words, referencing no fewer than 5 of the readings (and alternate sources) worked on throughout the class, detail a proposal for an intervention. This proposal need not be realized (though it might be possible to do so). The emphasis is on speculation: drawing certain vectors, lines of flight, dimly glimpsed insights that mobilize an alternative praxis (theory+action). Your proposal should be as detailed as possible and involve a close analysis of the situation which is to be intervened in (be it online, physical or a combination of the two). Understanding the particular dispositions of a situation affords a more precise strategic elaboration and makes possible the seizing of a kairotic (from Gr. kairos), opportune moment. Your text can be accompanied by diagrams and other forms of documentation which allow for a more detailed picture of your proposal to emerge.

Evaluation

In addition to three major studio projects, each student will be required to maintain an online blog (in any format) documenting theoretical and practical knowledge and personal sonic investigations undertaken during the course period.

The final grade for the course will be based on the following items weighted as indicated:

Presentation:	30%
Reading Response #1 (1000 words):	15%
Reading Response #2 (1000 words):	15%

Final Project (3000 words): 30%
Participation + presence: 10%

The Senate Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy stipulates that (a) the grading scheme (i.e. kinds and weights of assignments, essays, exams, etc.) be announced, and be available in writing, within the first two weeks of class, and that, (b) under normal circumstances, graded feedback worth at least 15% of the final grade for Fall, Winter or Summer Term, and 30% for 'full year' courses offered in the Fall/Winter Term be received by students in all courses prior to the final withdrawal date from a course without receiving a grade. See the policy for exceptions to this aspect of the policy:

<http://www.yorku.ca/secretariat/policies/document.php?document=86>

	Term F	Term Y	Term W
Last date to drop courses without receiving a grade	Nov. 11	Feb. 10	March 9

Grading, Assignment Submission, Lateness Penalties and Missed Tests

Grading: The grading scheme for the course conforms to the 9-point grading system used in undergraduate programs at York (e.g., A+ = 9, A = 8, B+ = 7, C+ = 5, etc.). Assignments and tests will bear either a letter grade designation or a corresponding number grade (e.g. A+ = 90 to 100, A = 80 to 90, B+ = 75 to 79, etc.)

(For a full description of York grading system see the York University Undergraduate Calendar: <http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/calendars/2011-2012/academic/grades/>)

Students may take a limited number of courses for degree credit on an ungraded (pass/fail) basis. For full information on this option see Alternative Grading Option in the Faculty of Fine Arts section of the Undergraduate Calendar:

http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/calendars/2011-2012/faculty_rules/FA/grading.htm

Assignment Submission: Proper academic performance depends on students doing their work not only well, but on time. Accordingly, assignments for this course must be received on the due date specified for the assignment.

Lateness Penalty: Assignments received later than the due date will be penalized (one half-letter grade for each additional day after the due date). Exceptions to the lateness penalty for valid reasons such as illness, compassionate grounds, etc., may be entertained by the Course Instructor but will require supporting documentation (e.g., a doctor's letter).

IMPORTANT COURSE INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Academic Honesty and Integrity

York students are required to maintain high standards of academic integrity and are subject to the Senate Policy on Academic Honesty

(<http://www.yorku.ca/univsec/policies/document.php?document=69>).

There is also an academic integrity website with complete information about academic honesty. Students are expected to review the materials on the Academic Integrity website

(<http://www.yorku.ca/academicintegrity>).

Access/Disability

York provides services for students with disabilities (including physical, medical, learning and psychiatric disabilities) needing accommodation related to teaching and evaluation methods/materials. These services are made available to students in all Faculties and programs at York University.

Students in need of these services are asked to register with disability services as early as possible to ensure that appropriate academic accommodation can be provided with advance notice. You are encouraged to schedule a time early in the term to meet with each professor to discuss your accommodation needs. Please note that registering with disabilities services and discussing your needs with your professors is necessary to avoid any impediment to receiving the necessary academic accommodations to meet your needs.

Additional information is available through Counselling & Disability Services at www.yorku.ca/cds or from disability service providers:

- *Personal Counselling and Learning Skills Services: N110 BCSS, 416-736-5297*
- *Mental Health Disability Services: N110 BCSS, 416-736-5297*
- *Learning Disability Services: W128 BCSS, 416-736-5383*
- *Physical, Sensory and Medical Disability Services: N108 Ross, 416-736-5140, TTY: 416-736-5263*

Deaf, deafened and hard-of-hearing students may also contact dhh@yorku.ca

Glendon students - Counselling & Disability Services, Glendon Site: Glendon Hall E103, 416-487-6709

Ethics Review Process

York students are subject to the York University *Policy for the Ethics Review Process for Research Involving Human Participants*. In particular, students proposing to undertake research involving human participants (e.g., interviewing the director of a company or government agency, having students complete a questionnaire, etc.) are required to submit an Application for Ethical Approval of Research Involving Human Participants at least one month before you plan to begin the research. If you are in doubt as to whether this requirement applies to you, contact your Course Director immediately.

Religious Observance Accommodation

York University is committed to respecting the religious beliefs and practices of all members of the community, and making accommodations for observances of special significance to adherents. Should any of the dates specified in this syllabus for an in-class test or examination pose such a conflict for you, contact the Course Director within the first three weeks of class. Similarly, should an assignment to be completed in a lab, practicum placement, workshop, etc., scheduled later in the term pose such a conflict, contact the Course director immediately.

Please note that to arrange an alternative date or time for an examination scheduled in the formal examination periods (December and April/May), students must complete an Examination Accommodation Form, which can be obtained from Student Client Services, Student Services Centre or online at http://www.registrar.yorku.ca/pdf/exam_accommodation.pdf (PDF)

Student Conduct

Students and instructors are expected to maintain a professional relationship characterized by courtesy and mutual respect and to refrain from actions disruptive to such a relationship. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the instructor to maintain an appropriate academic atmosphere in the classroom, and the responsibility of the student to cooperate in that endeavour. Further, the instructor is the best person to decide, in the first instance, whether

such an atmosphere is present in the class. A statement of the policy and procedures involving disruptive and/or harassing behaviour by students in academic situations is available on the York website <http://www.yorku.ca/univsec/policies/document.php?document=82>

Please note that this information is subject to periodic update. For the most current information, please go to the ASCP webpage (see Student Information Sheet under Reports, Initiatives, and Documents)

http://www.yorku.ca/univsec/senate_cte_main_pages/ASCP.htm