

## Artists' Publishing & Experimental Book Forms

VAH 3392G Winter 2018  
Monday 11:30 – 2:30  
VAC 249

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Penelope Umbrico, "Our New Library," 2009

### Course Description

Artists' publishing encourages subversive manoeuvres, incorporates a wide range of media, and provokes future-gazing modes of thought. This course examines the rich history between artistic practice and print culture. We will look at significant moments in which publishing projects challenged or evaded expectations of authorship, ownership, access and identity, with examples including (but not limited to): the Voynich manuscript, documents of Dada and Surrealism, Japanese photobooks of the 1960s and '70s, General Idea's FILE, Sophie Calle's conceptual documentations, zine culture, interactive hypermedia formats, and recent curatorial interest in artist novels. We will discuss the politics of self/independent publishing, the reciprocal relationship between print and online platforms, and organizations that support artists' publishing. Course assignments will encourage hands-on research and experimentation to explore how methods of publishing engage our contemporary and networked experience of the world.

### Prerequisite

The prerequisite for this course is VAH 1040 or two of VAH 1041A/B – VAH 1045A/B, or permission of the Department. You are responsible for ensuring you have successfully completed all course prerequisite (or obtained a permission waiver from the Department).

### Learning Outcomes

#### 1. Depth and Breadth of Knowledge

Students will acquire the range of skills required to engage in a material and theoretical study of artists' book works, and will develop an understanding of the genesis of those works historically. Students will develop a vocabulary for describing the physical and formal attributes of a book work and will become familiar with key conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Students will be able to identify and engage

with canonical book works, and will develop an ongoing personal library of established and emerging publications-based artists. Students will develop their awareness of the art publication world, and of differing arenas and audiences for art publications, and they will understand the function and appropriateness of their own creative strategies in relation to the immediate context as well as a broader context.

## 2. Knowledge of Methodologies

Students will gain an understanding of the experiential and critical potential of book works, as well as be able to identify various ways these works operate critically in the world. Students will acquire the discursive and theoretical vocabularies that structure debates within the fields of experimental publishing and will demonstrate their knowledge of these fields through the deployment of that vocabulary in class discussions, presentations, and both written and creative assignments.

## 3. Research Skills

Students will be able to read, comprehend, and summarize the main argument of an academic article, essay or interview, and recount this knowledge in brief synopses that also consider authorial style and voice. Students will conduct individual research using the library catalogue and database, become familiar with Western's book collections, and use these sources effectively in a research essay. Students will articulate an analysis in writing, support the analysis using appropriate evidence and formal discussion, and introduce theoretical perspectives into that analysis.

## 4. Application of Knowledge

Students will use their capacities with these media as critical, discursive and/or expressive tools to develop their own creative work. Students will become familiar with the potential viability of their works, and will utilize their reflections on their works to explore and develop further insights into the conceptual effectiveness of both historical and contemporary publications-based work. Students will utilize their knowledge of appropriate methods, the vocabularies pertinent to the field, and their ability to make appropriate judgements in order to develop a sound argument regarding a particular historical or contemporary development, and will be able to defend their argument according to knowledge of scholarly works. Students will be able to communicate both in writing and orally (formally and informally) regarding their projects and regarding relevant art and cultural moments of this genre.

## Required Texts and Readings

Weekly course readings and examples are available in pdf format or through external website links on OWL/Sakai under the "Resources" section for this course.

*Many of the course readings are quite image-heavy, and a number of "readings" are entirely image-based works or documentations. Don't be discouraged by what appears to be a lot of reading!*


## Grading

Attendance and Participation	10%	Ongoing
Reading Responses	10%	Ongoing
Library (Re)search	5%	Due January 15 <sup>th</sup>
Book Report (750-800 words)	15%	January 29 <sup>th</sup>
Publication Project	20%	Due February 26 <sup>th</sup>
Class Presentation	15%	March 26 <sup>th</sup>
Research Essay (1500 words)	25%	Due April 9 <sup>th</sup>

## Evaluation of Grading

1. Attendance and Participation (10%) ; Reading Responses (10%)

Attendance will be taken each week and in-class participation in course discussions and workshops is anticipated. Students are expected to come to class prepared to discuss that week's assigned

readings. As the course progresses, students will be tasked to develop connections and comparisons across the course readings. Students will prepare a brief response for each week's readings to be handed in at the beginning of class. These responses should summarize the readings, engage and respond to their style and content, and situate them within the broader context of the course. Please ensure your name and date are at the top of your reading responses. Weeks in which you are expected to hand in responses are marked with a , with ten responses in total.

## 2. Library (Re)search (5%)

*Assigned on January 8<sup>th</sup>, Due January 15<sup>th</sup>*

In the first week of class, students are asked to spend time in the D. B. Weldon Library book stacks. Many art-related books are on the 4<sup>th</sup> floor, but students are encouraged to look in any areas of their choosing. Students will make detail photographs of four books (3-4 details per book), and will note each book's specific design choices, elements and technologies. Keeping the readings for Week 1 in mind, students will briefly describe why these choices appeal to them or don't.

## 3. Book Report (15%)

*Assigned on January 15<sup>th</sup>; Due January 29<sup>th</sup>*

750 – 800 words

Choosing one work from a selection of artists' books on reserve at the D.B. Weldon Library, students will write a coherent essay that analyses the formal, conceptual and creative choices implemented by the artist(s). Students are expected to introduce vocabulary from class lectures, readings and discussions to engage with the book on multiple levels: discuss the formal choices made; describe the overall effectiveness of the work's physical presentation; describe the work's conceptual project and whether this project is effectively communicated. This is not a research assignment: students are not expected to reference outside sources, but should properly cite sources when referencing materials in the course readings. Essays must be typed, double-spaced and handed in at the beginning of class. The student is expected to provide original images of the work analyzed with their research paper.

## 4. Publication Project (20%)

*Assigned on February 5<sup>th</sup>; Confirm project with Instructor on February 12<sup>th</sup>; Due February 26<sup>th</sup>*

In this hands-on assignment, students will develop their own creative work using formal and conceptual tactics that relate to material covered in the course. This assignment will be based on a research prompt delivered to students in class. The parameters of this project are open: the work can take the form of a book/pamphlet, online publication (or digital mock-up), performance, installation, etc. The student is expected to provide deliverables, whether this is a finished book or documentation of a performance or installation. Students will communicate their project idea during individual student/Instructor meetings on February 12<sup>th</sup>. We will have a roundtable presentation of deliverables in the second half of class on February 26<sup>th</sup>.

## 5. Class Presentation (15%)

*March 26<sup>th</sup>*

Students will give an informal 5-minute presentation of an active/on-going publication platform (print or online-centric). While navigating the class through the publisher's website, students will be expected to discuss details about their chosen example (history, mandate, outputs, audiences, distribution strategies, etc.) within the context of the last three week's readings, as well as within broader theoretical frameworks from the course. Students will be evaluated on the overall clarity of their presentation, their engagement with the readings, and their critical engagement with their chosen example. In lieu of a reading response for that week, students are asked to hand in a brief outline/sketch of the main points from their presentation (1 page).

## 6. Research Essay (25%)

*Assigned on March 5<sup>th</sup>; Proposed topic due by March 12<sup>th</sup>; Essay due on April 9<sup>th</sup>*

1500 – 1750 words

Students will develop a research topic of their choosing that relates to material covered in the course. The research essay will clearly state a particular position or argument. Implementing vocabulary and theoretical frameworks from the class, the student will critically engage their topic. This research paper will incorporate an analysis of one publication-based artistic work that relates to the chosen topic (this can be a book work, artist multiple or digital work). The student should be able to engage with the work first-hand and provide original images of the work with their research paper. The student cannot use the same artist work referenced in their February book review. As this is a research assignment, students must include two further scholarly sources from outside the course readings in the formation of their essay, with no fewer than four scholarly sources in total. Students are asked to email their proposal (including their proposed artistic work) to the Instructor no later than March 12<sup>th</sup>. Essays must be typed, double-spaced and handed in at the beginning of class.