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LIT 521.01: Seminar in American Literature - Autotheory

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LIT 521 01 Literary Criticism

Fall 2021

“Autotheory as Rebellion”*: Art and Theory Under the Skin in the Space-Time of Settler Colonialism

“Even the most abstract theories are, to varying degrees, informed by their subjective conditions of existence: by, that is, the inner psychic dynamics of the theorist”—Stuart Hall

“Theory can do more the closer it gets to the skin.”—Sara Ahmed, Living a Feminist Life

LIT #521: 01 /CRN 75839

R: 3:00-5:50 LA 138

Instructor: Katie Kane (she/they)

Email: katie.kane@mso.umt.edu

Office Hours mostly by Zoom and by Appointment

Fall Semester 2021

Office: LA 111

Text #: 406-880-5856

O. Hours: T 12:30-1:30

R 12:30-2:00

Course Description

In this seminar we will read in and explore the restive “genre” Autotheory, which lays claim to textual and performative objects as diverse as Gloria Anzaldúa’s *Borderlands/La Frontera*, Lindsay Nixon’s, *nîtisânak*, Adrian Piper’s installation *Food For the Spirit* (1971), and Ann Cvetkovitch’s *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Autotheory began to circulate in intellectual/institutional discourse after the 2015 publication of Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts*. Paul B. Preciado’s earlier use of “auto-theory” in *TestoJunkie* (2008/2013) is, however, the first time the practice of autotheory was identified or named. Preciado might provide a jumping off place to begin defining Autotheory, although Autotheory also comes out of earlier feminist performance art, body art, and conceptual art practices, as well as intersectional feminist writings by BIPOC artists, writers, and theorists—Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, and Audre Lorde. Fornier has argued that for Preciado the practice of Autotheory involves the imbrication/layering of modes of expressive production that resist the “rules” of older genres of writing and art: “Precidio’s use of the term “auto-theory” in *Testo Junkie*, inscribed a particularly performative mode of citation alongside a kind of post-memoir, queer feminist life writing text.” Autotheory can provisionally be defined as a “practice of performing, embodying, enacting,

processing, metabolizing, and reiterating philosophy, theory, performance, memoir, and art criticism in the contexts of neoliberalism, late capitalism, and the post-confessional technologies of social media.” Stated more simply: Autotheory = Theory + Memoir/Autobiography (put together in ways that transgress the textual and involve embodied performance and/or acknowledgment of the body as it is constructed in, wounded by, desired after, and confined by social contexts and institutions).

The seminar will work to provide space to reflect on the aesthetics, politics, and ethics of “Autotheory” as a self-reflexive and performative practice of the early twenty-first century. I would like to propose that we attempt a performance/reading as part of the final work of the semester, and that we use time in the first two sessions to imagine how this might look, feel, sound, and move.



Art work of Elsa von Frytag-Loringhoven, Dada Artist
Poet, Dadaist, Sculptor, Assemblagist, Painter, Living Collage to be worn and
constructed out of found objects (as above)
Duchamp may have stolen his readymade “Urinal” from her.

[Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.](#)

Policy Statement

Required Texts:

TBA

A number of articles and chapters will be available to you on UM Box.

The English Literature Seminar:

The word *seminar* is derived from the Latin word *seminarium*, meaning "seed plot."

A classic English Literature/Cultural Studies seminar functions to bring together small groups to focus on a particular subject in which all involved are asked to actively participate in the form of engaged dialogue. Primarily, then, the course is community, rather than individually driven. I will offer up opening remarks to begin class: these remarks may take the form of a small contextual lecture or they may involve the consideration of an outside source (video, filmic, textual). I might also call for a focus on sections of a text, or I might ask you what you want to focus on. We may, if people feel it productive, work in groups on individual texts or sections of texts. The bottom line is that the focus of the class is the responsibility of all concerned: this is not a lecture course. It is a seminar in the classical sense in which dialogue—inquiry and discussion between individuals—predicated on posing, probing and addressing questions is done in order to respond to the critical imperative and to illuminate what is unfamiliar. The seminar is a relatively informal space when compared with the lecture method of academic instruction. There is not a hierarchy but a fluidity of the most intense rigor.

You will discover that there is not enough time in any class day to cover the material that is on the schedule. The seminar is meant to provide a venue for all participants to familiarize themselves more extensively with the methodology and focal areas of the field and also to allow for engagement with practical problems. The seminar is a place of discussion and debate. Assigned readings always exceed the capacity of the class to directly discuss, but they must all be read since they form the important context of an issue/text/idea/politic/aesthetic. All readings are inherently and necessarily selective. The focus of the class will be determined by the participants themselves and this may mean that not all the work assigned and read for the day will be directly discussed.

I deliberately ask you to work without a net in reading (that is to begin to engage with the text without “things to look out for” or “questions to answer”). This kind of work can be daunting and sometimes can feel as though you are working in the dark, but in my experience, such structures, if given in advance, foreclose creative and new responses to the text. The great Cultural Studies theorist Stuart Hall would tell you that doing theoretical work is often like “wrestling with angels,” and it is so. You will wrestle for a while by yourself and then we will undertake collective battle with the text, with some guidance in the shape of lectures, context, discussion directions provided by one or more of us, often me. I will, then, be giving you lectures on the topic, but they will not be the only work of the class, they will not often be the first work we do in class, and they may be of differing length and form. This classroom discussion schemata is constructed to allow us to avoid the Socratic dialectic, which is inappropriate to the course material itself. That being said, please feel free to ask questions during my “lectures” about anything: concepts, history, terminology, and etc. Simply raise your hand and ask.

One note about **General Discussion**: it is hard, even in a smaller class, to accommodate all ideas, questions, comments, etc. Often participants will get stacked up in a discussion line like airplanes. I do my best to fulfill the role of dialogic air-traffic controller, but you should feel free to break in if, in the excitement of discussion, you get passed over.

Participation:

Each class starting next week, a student or two will present a response to the text that will, if necessary, performative, poetic, analytic, memoristic, transmedial, or a living collage. Please try to keep to 15 minutes.

The Seminar Paper:

A seminar paper has two primary aspects. First, the seminar paper demonstrates the author’s development in the course itself. Moreover, a good seminar paper fits into the author’s scholarly trajectory. However closely tied to the specific subject matter of the course, the seminar paper ideally generates ideas, skills, research, and questions that contribute to the individual’s own larger scholarly project. These two aspects of the seminar paper may, at first glance, seem contradictory, but since the Literature seminar (be it in Education, Creative Writing, or Literature and Cultural Studies) constitutes the groundwork for all future academic work the dichotomy is somewhat of a false one.

Seminar papers can and should motivate and structure thesis inquiry and labor and yet remain their own individual intellectual exercise.

Other than the days on which individuals will be asked to do a presentation to the work we will process, and the rigorous and engaged participation in debate, the seminar paper is the **ONLY** assignment of the semester. It is an assignment that you will begin working on the first day of class.

Ways to conceptualize the use-value of seminar papers (and why seminar papers must be thought of as the work of an entire semester):

- a text written with an eye toward future publication, complete with thorough knowledge of secondary criticism, footnotes, and bibliography;
- a highly informed and detailed exploration of a single primary text or set of primary texts using the theories of the course or reading one of the texts of the course; an intensified close reading;
- an application of the skills and knowledge the seminar is intended to transmit, referring to the texts, theories, or approaches covered during the semester;
- a very specific type of paper with a pre-defined structure or purpose (e.g., an application of a particular theory to a particular text);
- an opportunity to pursue individual inquiries as long as those inquiries relate to the materials, issues, questions of the course.

Each of these various conceptions entails necessary practical steps.

Coursework: Final grades will be determined by your performance in three separate categories of coursework:

1. Participation	10%
2. Abstract Presentation	10%
3. Final Essay	<u>80%</u>
	100%

Attendance: Attendance is required and will be recorded: three or more unexcused absences are grounds for failure of the course itself. Late arrivals and early departures will, if they occur frequently, count as absences. If you do arrive late you will be responsible for letting me know after class that you were present for the day. Absences due to medical and family emergencies will be excused, provided you come and discuss the situation (**ASAP**) with me. Lengthy crises that require multiple absences may require your reconsideration of enrollment in school this semester. Strolling in and out of the classroom, if it happens with frequency will result in your attendance being affected.

Disabilities Accommodation:

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodations for coursework. To request accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible in the semester. I will work with you and with Disability Services in the accommodation process. For more

information, visit the Disability Services website at <http://www.umt.edu/dss/>, or call 406.243.2243 (Voice/Text)."

Pronouns

Please let us know what pronoun that you would like the class to use.

Names:

If you have an alternative name or nickname or pronunciation that you would prefer to be called, please let me know.

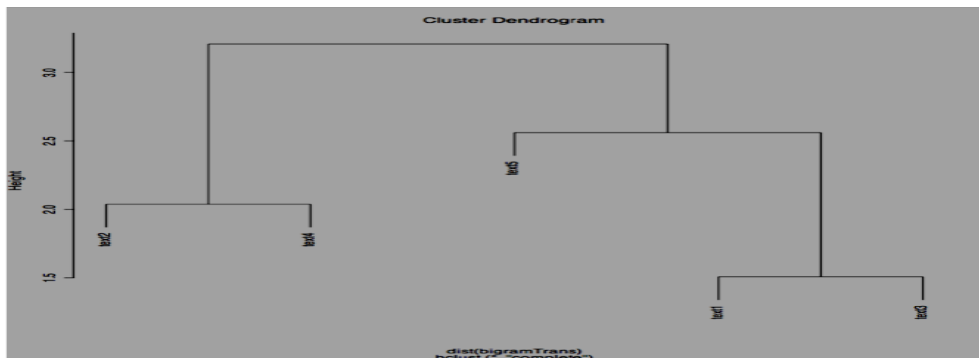
Moodle: Minimal to No Involvement. Unless something unusual happens: like the end of the world.

UM Box: Yes. PDF Documents will be shared on UM Box.

Scholastic Dishonesty: Plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty—in as much as they keep the individual student as well as the collective community from learning—will result in an automatic F and may entail a variety of other sanctions up to and including expulsion from the University. FOR A DEFINITION OF PLAGIARISM SEE <http://www.lib.umt.edu/services/plagiarism/index.htm>. The Provost's Office has asked all faculty at the University of Montana to attach the following statement on plagiarism to their syllabi: "All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student.conduct.php>

THE PURCHASED PAPER

"The Internet and email are now the tools of choice for plagiarism. Advertisements in college papers and in the regular press as well as on the Internet announce the availability of student and professional services, sometimes couched in such euphemistic terms as 'editorial assistance,' but often blatantly offering commercially prepared essays, academic papers, and even theses for sale. The easy availability of such assistance from various web sites has increased student 'cut and paste' activity to the degree that it is now expected and regarded as a common practice (*Chronicle of Higher Education*, 2000 a)" (31, Source).



“Lack of integrity and unethical behavior within the educational sector is inconsistent with one of the main purposes of education; that is to produce ‘good [critical] citizens, respectful of the law [and willing to challenge it when necessary], of human rights and fairness (it is also incompatible with any strategy that considers education as one of the principle means of fighting corruption)” (10, “Combating Academic Fraud: Towards a Culture of Integrity”
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001330/133038e.pdf>)

UNIVERSITY WIDE COVID PROTOCOLS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PROVOST

- Mask use is required within the classroom or laboratory.
- If you feel sick and/or are exhibiting COVID-19 symptoms, please don’t come to class and contact the Curry Health Center at (406) 243-4330.
- If you are required to isolate or quarantine, you will receive support in the class to ensure continued academic progress.
- UM recommends students get the COVID-19 vaccine. Please direct your questions or concerns about vaccines to Curry Health Center.
- Where social distancing (maintaining consistent 6 feet between individuals) is not possible, specific seating arrangements will be used to support contact tracing efforts. [FRANKLY, I HAVE NO IDEA HOW THIS WILL LOOK. WE WILL ATTEMPT SOCIAL DISTANCING.]
- Class attendance will be recorded to support contact tracing efforts.
- Drinking liquids and eating food is discouraged within the classroom.

Course Calendar

Week One:

September

R 2: TBA

Week Two: TBA

R 9: TBA

Week Three: Transitive Autotheory: *TBA*

R 16: TBA

Week Four: TBA

R 23: TBA

Week Five: TBA

R 30: TBA

October

Week Six: On the Transmedial Road

R 7: TBA

Week Seven: TBA

R 14: TBA

Week Eight: Affect Theory

R 21: TBA

Week Nine: Abstract Presentation

R 28: Abstract Presentations

November

Week Ten: Auto-Theorizing in the Digital Age and TBA

R 4: TBA

Week Eleven: No Class

R 11: Veteran's Day Observed.

Week Twelve: TBA

R 18: TBA

Week Thirteen: No Class

R 25: NO CLASS.

Week Fourteen: The Orthography of the TBA

December

R 2: TBA

Week Fifteen: Conceptualizing TBA

R 9: TBA

Week Sixteen: Finals Week.

M 13: Final Essay Due. 5:00 uploaded to UMBox.

R 18: **No Final Exam**, although one is listed on the schedule for Friday, December 13rd at 10:10-12:10 in the same room.