

English 649: Seminar in Modern & Postmodern American Poetry
Fall Semester 2011 | Mondays from 6:00-8:30pm | Neville 406

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Office Hours: Tuesdays, 2:00-3:30pm and by appointment

Meditations in an Emergency: Frank O'Hara after Modernism and before Postmodernism

In this seminar we will combine a close examination of the full range of Frank O'Hara's writing—poetry, plays, art criticism, cultural writings—with an investigation into the specific historical conditions in which his career and those of his peers in the so-called New York School unfolded, namely the post-WW2 period in which the US asserted its global political and cultural hegemony, the international logic of “Cold War” became entrenched, and the complex conflictual processes of desegregation at home and decolonization abroad unleashed other liberation movements, including the struggle for gay and lesbian rights that would break into wider recognition following the Stonewall Uprising in 1969 (a few years after O'Hara's premature death at the age of forty in 1966).

Some of our shared objectives will be: (1) to identify the key “structures of affect and reference” (to use a concept Edward Said developed in dialog with the work of Raymond Williams) that animate O'Hara's work; (2) to research pre-Stonewall constructions of gay identity within and beyond the poetic community; (3) to study the logic of literary group formation as manifested by the New York School poets; (4) to trace and investigate O'Hara's affinities for the international avant-garde in various media; (5) to consider the situation of poetic practice in the mid-century artistic and cultural field; and (6) to question the way that the categories “modern” and “postmodern” (and their various correlatives) have been theoretically constructed in recent literary and art history by testing their aptness for an understanding of O'Hara's actual practice in a period that falls clearly “after” the heroic period of modernist practice but well “before” the codification of postmodernism.

In the first two thirds of the semester, students will regularly write and present on various aspects of O'Hara's poetic practice. In the final third, they will pursue individualized research projects formulated in consultation with peers and the instructor.

Required Texts

Allen, Donald, Ed. *The New American Poetry*. New York: Grove, 1960; rpt. 1999 (any edition will do).

LeSueur, Joe. *Digressions on Some Poems by Frank O'Hara: A Memoir*. New York: Farrar, 2004.

O'Hara, Frank. *Art Chronicles 1954-1966*. New York: Braziller, 1991.

O'Hara, Frank. *Collected Poems*. 1971. Berkeley: University of California, 1995.

Recommended Texts

Anything else by O'Hara (e.g., the several volumes published in his lifetime, the terrific *Selected Poems* of 1972—more interesting than the recent, staid, redo by Mark Ford—some of the posthumously published work from Grey Fox) that you come by and can afford to add to your library is recommended, as is, with some reservations, the only complete biography of O'Hara by Brad Gooch.

Major Assignments & Evaluation

- 20% Frequent, informal, written and oral commentaries on poems
- 30% Article, chapter, and book annotations
- 10% Research presentation on modernist predecessor
- 10% Research presentation on New York School poet
- 30% Seminar paper of approximately twenty pages

Attendance

This course requires the consistent, active participation of each student enrolled in it. If an emergency arises that will prevent you from attending class, it is your responsibility to communicate with me at the earliest opportunity. More than one unexcused absence will lead to a diminished grade for the semester; more than three will make the student ineligible for a passing grade.

Health-Related Contingency Plan

In the event of disruption of normal classroom activities due to an H1N1 swine flu outbreak, the format for this course may be modified to enable completion of the course. In that event, you will be provided an addendum to this syllabus that will supersede this version.

Plagiarism & Academic Dishonesty

Plagiarism—the presentation of someone else's writing and/or thinking as your own—will result in immediate failure of the class and notification of the appropriate University authorities. Other forms of academic dishonesty are, likewise, not tolerated.

Disability Notice

If you wish to request an accommodation for a disability, please speak with me or with Ann Smith, Coordinator of Services for Students with Disabilities (Onward Building, 1-2319) as early as possible in the semester.

COURSE CALENDAR

subject to revision, check on-line version regularly

KEY:

Top, flush left = Required reading for the week

[*] = a collection or publication arranged by O'Hara; often possible to reconstruct, at least in part, within *Collected Poems*

Indented = Non-required readings that may be of interest

Week 01 – August 29

Course Introduction. Remarks on poetics. "Personism." O'Hara at Buffalo, 1964.

Week 02 – September 05 – Labor Day

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 3-60 [ca. 1948-1951]

Allen, *New American Poetry* 239-270; 419-420 (Sect. IV, O'Hara Selection)

Early Writing [1946-1950] (Bolinas: Grey Fox, 1977)

Poems Retrieved 3-51 [1950-1951] (Bolinas: Grey Fox, 1977)

Selected Plays: "Try! Try!, a Noh Play" [February 1951]; "Change Your Bedding, a Noh Play" [1951]

Week 03 – September 12

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 60-110 [ca. 1951-1952]

[*] "A Byzantine Place" (Hopwood Award in Creative Writing, 1950-1951)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 216-238; 271-278 (Sect. IV, New York School selections)

LeSueur, *Digressions* xi-28

Poems Retrieved 52-93 [1952]

Week 04 – September 19

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 110-170 [ca. 1952-1953]

[*] *A City Winter, and Other Poems* (New York: Tibor de Nagy, 1952)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 216-238; 271-278 (Sect. IV, New York School selections)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 31-36

Poems Retrieved 94-130 [1953]

Selected Plays: "Try! Try!" (new version) [February 1953]

Week 05 – September 26

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 170-230 [ca. 1953-1955]

[*] *Oranges 12 Pastorals* (New York: Tibor de Nagy, 1953)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 2-68 (Sect. I, Black Mountain selections)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 37-58

Poems Retrieved 131-162 [1954-1955]

Week 06 – October 03

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 230-290 [ca.1955-1958]

[*] *Meditations in an Emergency* (New York: Grove, 1957)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 2-68 (Sect. I, Black Mountain selections, cont'd)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 59-173

Poems Retrieved 163-181 [1956-1958]

Week 07 – October 10 – Fall Break

No class

Week 08 – October 17

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 290-350 [ca.1958-1959]

O'Hara, *Art Chronicles*, "Cavallon Paints a Picture" (Dec. 1958)

[*] *Jackson Pollock* (New York: Braziller, 1959)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 114-167 (Sect. II, Berkeley and San Francisco Renaissance selections)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 174-222

Poems Retrieved 182-188 [1959]

Selected Plays: "Love's Labor, an Eclogue" [December 1959]

Week 09 – October 24

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 290-350 [ca.1958-1959], cont'd

O'Hara, *Art Chronicles*, "Cavallon Paints a Picture" (Dec. 1958)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 168-215 (Sect. III, Beats)

LeSueur, *Digressions*

Jackson Pollock (New York: Braziller, 1959)

Poems Retrieved 182-188 [1959]

Selected Plays: "Love's Labor, an Eclogue" [December 1959]

Week 10 – October 31

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 350-410 [ca. 1959-1961]

[*] *Second Avenue* (New York: Totem, 1960)

O'Hara, *Art Chronicles*, "5 Participants in a Hearsay Panel" (Winter-Spring 1959),

"Larry Rivers: Why I Paint as I Do" (Sept. 1959), "Helen Frankenthaler" (196),

"How to Proceed in the Arts" (Aug. 1961)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 168-215 (Sect. III, Beats)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 223-232, 249-255

Poems Retrieved 189-207 [1960-1961]

Week 11 – November 07

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 410-460 [ca. 1961-1962]

[*] *Odes* (New York: Tiber, 1961)

O'Hara, *Art Chronicles*, "Growth and Guston" (May 1962), "Art Chronicle" (Summer 1962), "Robert Motherwell" (1962)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 280-335 (Sect. V)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 233-239, 264-272

Poems Retrieved 208-217 [1962]

Week 12 – November 14

O'Hara, *Collected Poems* 460 to end [1962-1966]

[*] *Lunch Poems* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1964)

[*] *Love Poems (Tentative Title)* (New York: Tibor de Nagy, 1965)

O'Hara, *Art Chronicles*, "Introducing the Sculpture of George Spaventa" (Apr. 1964), "Alex Katz" (Summer, 1966)

Allen, *New American Poetry* 336-384 (Sect. V, cont'd)

LeSueur, *Digressions* 273-276

Poems Retrieved 218-220 [1963-1966]

Selected Plays: "The General Returns from One Place to Another" [March 1964]

Week 13 – November 21

Research and presentations

Week 14 – November 28

Research and presentations

Week 15 – December 05

Research and presentations

Finals Week – December 12

Seminar paper due on Wednesday, December 15, by midnight