

Writing Visual Culture Cluster
at the Institute for the Study of Culture & Society
Summary of Achievements 2007-8

Overview:

The Writing Visual Culture cluster at ICS is dedicated to the development of scholarly texts that engage with the ongoing discourse surrounding the reading and interpretation of visual signs. Members of the cluster are committed to interdisciplinary exchange, critical theory, and the dissemination of research through lectures and publication. This year's cluster met 8 times throughout the academic year to discuss the research and writing by the individual members of the cluster, and, additionally, spent the fall and spring collaborating on the development and staging of the interdisciplinary conference, *Beholding Violence: A Conference on Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, held at Bowling Green State University between February 28-March 1, 2008.

Members:

Allie Terry, Assistant Professor, Art History (Co-leader)
Erin Labbie, Associate Professor, English (Co-leader)
Jolie Sheffer, Assistant Professor, English
Irina Stakhanova, Associate Professor, GREAL
Sue Carter Wood, Associate Professor, English
Piya Pal Lapinski, Associate Professor, English
Kelly Watson, Ph.D. student, ACS

Conference:

February 28-March 1: *Beholding Violence: A Conference on Medieval and Early Modern Culture*

Co-organized by Allie Terry and Erin Labbie, this interdisciplinary conference was held at Bowling Green State University between February 28-March 1, 2008. The conference directly developed out of Terry and Labbie's research interests and was supported by the School of Art, the Institute of Culture and Society as part of the Provost Lecture Series, as well as by the Faculty Research Committee of the Office of Sponsored Programs and Research, the Graduate College, English, GREAL, ACS, Ethnic Studies and the Division of Art History.

The conference takes as its point of departure the beholder of violence in medieval and early modern culture; its goal was to forge new ground in the examination of the ways in which images, texts and performances promoted, supported or helped negotiate real or imagined violence during the era and to consider how certain types of artistic or literary production may be viewed as a response to collective cultural attitudes and customs.

The decision to pursue an international venue for the conference was grounded in a consideration of the way in which the medieval and early modern periods address issues regarding violence and representation that continue to perplex us today in our contemporary moment. The medieval period is often considered by historians and theorists, as well as the general public, to be the most violent and barbaric historical

epoch; when compared with our contemporary moment, the images and commentary on political and ethical experiences produced during the Middle Ages provide material that has the potential to teach us about the power of representation to provide potential solutions to problems that are evident in historical documents and in our contemporary moment.

In recent years there have been a growing number of studies that have reconsidered the place of violence in medieval and early modern culture in Europe, although a comprehensive examination of these new findings in an interdisciplinary environment has not been staged until now. This conference intended to bring together for the first time the foremost experts on violence and representation in medieval and renaissance studies and to challenge and debate the larger significance of beholding violence in today's age.

On a local level, the conference signaled a serious collaboration between scholars of medieval and renaissance studies within the Division of Art History and the Department of English for the first time in BGSU history. The conference built on a growing community of scholarship within the medieval and early modern periods at BGSU and it will create links among those working in these historical periods and scholars across disciplines, who are concerned with the elements of the visual and violence.

In our interdisciplinary pursuit within the chronological time-frame of the medieval and early modern periods (c. 800-1660), we emulate the models of scholarship forged at Duke University, Binghamton University, and University of California Santa Barbara. These programs have fostered inter- and multi-disciplinary study and have determined the course of academic pursuits by setting intellectual agenda and educating some of the foremost leaders in our fields. Gathering these scholars at BGSU for our conference will provide a rich environment for our own graduate and undergraduate students.

[a thank-you letter from Dr. Patraha is attached at the conclusion of the report]

The Writing Visual Culture Cluster members served as active participants in the *Beholding Violence* conference.

-On Thursday evening, February 28, Allie Terry provided the introduction for the plenary speaker of the conference, W.J.T. Mitchell.

-Erin Labbie provided introductions for our second keynote speaker, Michael Uebel, on Friday evening, and our concluding featured speaker, Eileen Joy on Saturday evening.

-Irina Stakhanova presented a lecture on "Murder and Death in Medieval Russia: Narrating Collective Memory" in the panel on Death as/and Spectatorship on Friday, Feb. 29th.

-Kelly Watson presented her paper on "Arousing America: Cannibalism and Conquest in the 'New World'" in the panel on Innocence on Saturday morning.

-Jolie Sheffer served as a moderator for the panel on "Innocence" and Piya Pal Lapinski served as a moderator for the panel on "Boundaries of the Body," both sessions on Saturday morning.

Schedule of meetings with updates on individual projects

Oct. 24: Kelly Watson

Title: "Cannibal Mothers: Early Modern Representations of Breastfeeding in the Americas."

Goal: Further rework and develop an article on the representation of breast feeding and the maternal aspects of cannibalism. The text began as an M.A. thesis, was reworked for a conference paper and now is developing as an article.

Update: Kelly presented on this topic in the conference, *Beholding Violence: A Conference on Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, held at Bowling Green State University between February 28-March 1, 2008.

Nov. 7: Erin Labbie

Title: "Historical Materialism and the Automaton in *Volpone*"

Goal: Complete book chapter for inclusion in collected volume

Update: Erin's essay is forthcoming in the book, *Mummy Possessed*, ed. by Wendy Hyman, Ashgate, 2008/2009.

Nov. 14: Jolie Sheffer

Title: "Guns, race, meat, and Manifest Destiny": Media-Mediated Identity in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*"

Goal: Develop an article from a conference paper on the role of documentary, fiction, and fake documentary within Asian American literature, using Ozeki's novel as a representative example.

Update: Jolie presented the paper at the American Studies Association annual conference and began work on revising for an article.

Nov. 28: Allie Terry

Title: "Somaesthetics and the Renaissance: Medieval Torture to Aesthetic Terror"

Goal: Working toward a series of articles and ultimately a book-length manuscript on medieval torture objects, performances of execution, and the creation of the national sculpture museum of the Bargello in Florence

Update: Allie delivered a series of lectures on the theme during the fall term (Villanova University, Idaho State University, Moore College of Art and Design) and then taught a graduate seminar on the topic during the spring term 2008. She will continue to develop the framework and perform research while she is onsite in Florence, Italy, this summer, and then is scheduled to deliver a series of lectures on the topic in the fall of 2008 (Universita' di Venezia, Huntington Library, Florida Atlantic University) and the spring of 2009 (BGSU; College Art Association; Renaissance Society of America). She has received a Faculty Fellowship for the Spring of 2009, and plans to dedicate her time to the realization of the manuscript.

January 16: Irina Stakhanova

Title: Time and Memory in Andrei's Zviagintsev's *Vozvrashchenie*

Goal: Finish the article for submission to the **24 Frames** series *The Cinema of Russia and the Former Soviet Union*, ed. Birgit Beumers

Update: accepted for publication in forthcoming collection (tentatively, 2009)

Irina prepared two lectures on Gilles Deleuze and Post-modern Russian cinema, which

will be delivered at the research seminar at St.Petersburg State University, June 2008
Irina is working on a paper about the art of Julia Kissina (trauma, memory and image), which will be presented at the AATSEEL conference in Philadelphia, November 2008

January 23: Erin Labbie

Title: "The Long Drive of Courtly Love"

Goal: Complete book chapter for inclusion in collected volume.

Update: Erin's essay entitled, "The Long Drive of Courtly Love, the Distance-Time Ration in *Amor de Longh*," is forthcoming in the book, *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, ed. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen (press and date not yet finalized).

March 26: Allie Terry

Title: "Lamenting the Past: Fra Angelico's Altarpiece for 'Il Tempio' and Criminal Repentance"

Goal: To prepare a conference paper for the Renaissance Society of America's annual conference, and then develop the topic into an article for the journal, *Studies in Iconography*

Update: Conference paper was extremely well received; article will be submitted to *Studies in Iconography* by August 2008.

April 2: Jolie Sheffer

Title: "I... am... a... fucking... American!": Asian American Identity and Left-of-Center Narrative Strategies in Ruth Ozeki's *My Year of Meats*

Goal: To prepare a conference paper for the Association for Asian American Studies, and then develop the topic into an article focused around multiculturalism as a discourse, to be submitted to MELUS, a journal devoted to multiethnic literature.

Update: Jolie gave the paper, to enthusiastic response at AAAS. She also drafted an article that extends the conference paper to show how the novel represents the neoliberal contours of multiculturalism and globalization. She is further revising the article based on feedback from her peers in the cluster and at the conference and will submit for review in early summer.

Further achievements:

In addition to the specific achievements of the cluster listed above, the members of Writing Visual Culture have presented the following lectures and developed the following publications throughout this academic year:

Allie Terry, "The Craft of Torture: Bronze Sculpture and the Punishment of Sexual Offence in Early Modern Italy." *Sex Acts: Practice, Performance, Perversion and Punishment in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Allison Levy, Hampshire, U.K.: Ashgate (forthcoming 2009).

Allie Terry, "The Craft of Torture: Bronze Sculpture and the Punishment of Sexual Offence in Early Modern Italy." *Sex Acts: Practice, Performance, Perversion and Punishment in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Allison Levy, Florence: Le Lettere (forthcoming 2008).

Allie Terry, "Meraviglia on Stage: Dionysian Visual Rhetoric and Cross-Cultural Communication at the Council of Florence," *Journal of Religion and Theater*, Vol. 6, No. 2

(Fall 2007): 38-53.

Allie Terry "How to Approach the Medici in Florence." *ContextTravel Guide to Florence*, 2007.

Allie Terry, "Donatello's Decapitations and the Rhetoric of Beheading in Renaissance Florence" (article under review, *Renaissance Studies*)

Allie Terry, *Ritual Frames of Humanist Viewing: Fra Angelico and the Library of San Marco* (book manuscript under review, Yale University Press)

Allie Terry, "Meraviglia in the Renaissance?" in *Renaissance Theories of Vision*, eds. John Hendrix and Charles Carmen (book chapter in progress, projected 2009).

Allie Terry, "Lamenting the Past: Fra Angelico's Altarpiece for 'Il Tempio' and Criminal Repentance" (article in progress, to be submitted to *Studies in Iconography*, August 2008)

Erin Labbie, "Historical Materialism and the Automaton in *Volpone*," forthcoming in *Mummy Possessed*, ed. by Wendy Hyman, Ashgate, 2008/2009.

Erin Labbie, "The Long Drive of Courtly Love, the Distance-Time Ration in *Amor de Longh*," forthcoming in *Queer Times, Queer Becomings*, ed. E.L. McCallum and Mikko Tuhkanen, press and date not yet finalized.

Erin Labbie: presented a new version of "The Speaking Thing and the Return in the *Dream of the Rood*," which we read in a draft form last spring, at the MLA, and will send that essay to *Exemplaria* for review this summer.

Erin Labbie has another book chapter on paranoia forthcoming with Duke UP, and gave two other conference presentations which were not affiliated with the group

Jolie Sheffer submitted her essay, "Recollecting, Repeating and Walking Through: Immigration, Trauma, and Space in Mary Antin's *The Promised Land*" to the journal *Criticism*; it is currently under review.

Jolie Sheffer submitted an article entitled, "'Citizen Sure Thing' or 'Jus' Foreigner?': Half-Caste Citizenship and the Family Romance in Onoto Watanna's Orientalist Fiction" to *American Literature*. It is currently under review. Jolie presented an earlier version of this article to the Visual Cluster last year.

Beholding Violence in Medieval and Early Modern Culture. Edited by Erin Labbie and Allie Terry (Ashgate Press, projected 2009)

Plans for the Writing Visual Culture cluster for 2008-9:

Potential Faculty and Graduate Students to Invite to the Cluster for 2008/2009:

faculty

Jolie Sheffer (English)
Allie Terry (Art History)
Jessamyn Abel (History)
Jonathan Abel (GREAL)
Bill Albertini (English)
Becca Cragin (Popular Culture)
Rob Fallon (Musicology/Composition/Theory)
Scott Magelssen (Theatre/Film)
Rebecca Mancuso (History)
Irina Stakhanova (GREAL)
Maisha Wester (English/ACS)

graduate students

Kent Anderson (ACS)
Phillip Cunningham (ACS)
Rachel Dean-Ruzicka (ACS)
Justine Lutzel (ACS)
Kelly MacDonald (ACS)
Aisha McGriff (ACS)
Charlotte Quinney (ACS)
Eric Weeks (ACS)

Dr. Erin Labbie, Department of English
Dr. Allie Terry, School of Art

20 May 2008

Erin and Allie-

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your wonderful accomplishment in organizing “Beholding Violence: A Conference on Medieval and Early Modern Culture.” I have spoken to many attendees since that weekend, and all have declared the conference a resounding success. I can only agree with that assessment.

Beginning with W.J.T. Mitchell’s seminar on Thursday, the conference managed to reach across disciplinary boundaries and drew a broad selection from the BGSU intellectual community, including participants from the School of Art, Art History, English, American Culture Studies, Romance and Classical Studies, Women’s Studies, and Theatre and Film. Scholars presenting at the conference took part as well, including keynote speaker Michael Uebel and featured speaker Eileen Joy. Discussion was lively, and included many contributions from graduate and undergraduate students.

Later that night, at Mitchell’s keynote talk “Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9-11 to Abu Ghraib,” which served as the second event in the 2008 Provost Lecture Series, as well as the kickoff event of the conference, support for your efforts was notable. Attendance at the talk neared two-hundred, and is among the highest number I have ever seen for a public talk on campus. Presenting his newest work in an engaging, unscripted fashion, Mitchell managed to offer a complex approach to his topic while keeping it accessible for the diverse audience.

This is a testament to the hard work of both the ICS staff and everyone associated with the conference, especially students from Erin’s English 707 “Theories of the Gaze” course and Allie’s Art History 582 “Capstone: Beholding Violence” course. Incorporating undergraduate and graduate students, involving these courses with the conference provided students with an opportunity for engagement with visiting scholars at an uncommon level of intimacy. I know of two students, one undergraduate and one graduate, who have established research connections with visiting scholars, and have no doubt that others are following suit.

Friday’s events proved equally successful, with the first day of sessions at the School of Art running smoothly and producing a fertile environment for discussion of the many ideas in circulation, covering topics such as “Optics and Somatics,” “Death as/and Spectatorship,” and “Saints and Devotionals,” among others. After a full morning and afternoon of presentations, the scene moved to the Little Theatre at the Toledo Museum of Art, where Michael Uebel gave his keynote talk “Masochism in America” to an interested audience of visiting scholars, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, and community members. Uebel’s talk compellingly tied together a number of themes from the conference, providing a fitting end to the day and preparing the ground for further explorations on Saturday.

Shifting to the Bowen Thompson Student Union, Saturday’s sessions continued the precedent of high level thought established on Friday, with as many as three panels

running simultaneously to accommodate the outpouring of scholarship, covering topics such as “Boundaries of the Body,” “Fantasy, History, and Nation,” “Warfare and the Body,” and “Medievalism and Media,” among others. To conclude the day’s events at the Union, Eileen Joy delivered her featured talk “That Terribly and Splendidly Made Spectacle: Beholding Our Dead Enemies” to the assembled scholars and students, spurring a spirited wrap-up discussion.

That evening, everyone retired to Erin Labbie’s for a sumptuous medieval feast, taking the opportunity to share ideas in a less formal but no less intellectual environment. In particular, the undergraduate and graduate students attached to Erin and Allie’s courses seized the chance to speak with visiting scholars, with the discussion extended into the early hours of the following morning.

I cannot overstate the valuable contribution that this conference made to the BGSU community. Through its attention to a vibrant and burgeoning area of research, the conference managed to bring together visiting scholars, faculty, graduate and undergraduate students, and members of the community, with events spanning across campus and into Toledo. The collaboration between ICS and the School of Art proved particularly fruitful, making the most of limited funding and staffing to achieve a considerable success, word of which will no doubt spread as visiting scholars return to their respective institutions. Thank you again for helping to enrich the BGSU community.

Sincerely,

Vicki Patraka

Director, Institute for the Study of Culture and Society