

Johanna Drucker
H-35: Modern Art of the Book
26–31 July 2015

Narrative Course Evaluations

- 1) *Were the pre-course reading assignments useful? Did you do any additional preparation for your course? Are there any books or articles that you would like to see included in future years? Any that you might suggest removing?*
 1. Pre-course readings were useful in establishing baseline knowledge, but were not essential to this course. That's kind of fine, though, as some students aim for greater levels of expertise than others.
 2. Yes, very, even though it was pretty extensive. Well worth the time spent.
 3. Pre-course readings were useful, but very voluminous. Could have used a little culling to focus things a bit more...though it will be a valuable list for future reference!
 4. Yes—the pre-course assignments were helpful, though I usually also read them again after class to get the most out of them. Perhaps there can be some indication of what work will be most useful given the breakdown between required and recommended readings—these didn't always correspond to helpful and unhelpful.
 5. Pre-course reading list was comprehensive, and helped provide foundational grounding. In terms of my own preparation, it was helpful to have access to many of the books discussed in the readings—it provided a strong background prior to the course.
 6. Yes.
 7. They were useful, but somewhat disjointed. The piece on San Francisco fine press, for example, did not seem relevant to the other readings. Perhaps some should be incorporated into the week of class.
 8. The books assigned were very useful, and will be a great reference for my future studies on artists' engagement with books.
 9. The pre-course readings were very helpful. The only suggestion would be to indicate which books are recommended for purchase, and which are suggested only for excerpts.
 10. {no response}
 11. The required reading list on the website turned out to be really misleading. I spent at least \$200 on the books, and that was getting them as cheaply as possible and skipping some altogether. Then it turned out most of what we needed was reproduced for us when we got here. If I had spent my own money rather than my institution's, I'd be really upset!
 12. Readings were useful and essential, for the most part. Least helpful were Rota's chapter on bookbindings and "A Game in Hell." Also, I don't know if the entire Peterson book on the Kelmscott Press was necessary.

- 2) *What are your thoughts on the course workbook and/or other teaching materials distributed during class? Was the content appropriate and useful? Will it continue to be useful for you after the course?*

1. The reproduced readings were unnecessary. A list of books we viewed from the collections would have been enough.
2. Great to have book list of the items we looked at. Reference material is always useful.
3. Yes, on both counts.
4. For some reason, our workbook contained copies of the readings that each of us bought some time ago as pre-course assignments. This makes the workbook look more helpful than it in fact is. The books we looked at were well cataloged in the workbook.
5. Having the readings packaged in the workbook will be helpful when I'm back at my institution, along with the list of books we looked at during class. It would be helpful to have the publisher's info on the books listed in the workbook.
6. The most useful part was the list of books shown in each class period. Some of the readings came from books listed as the pre-course assignments, so I won't be using those.
7. One thing I would like to have would be a timeline or a space to plot important works and to imagine them in relation to one another. We had our book list and took notes, but relationally, it's still hard to think about any individual work among other artists' books.
8. The course workbook and teaching materials were both appropriate and useful, and will certainly be useful at the conclusion of the course.
9. Workbook was great. Will return to book lists included there for a long time to come. Wish I had had access to it prior to the first day.
10. Yes, very useful, and referenced well in the course. It's very generous of JD to include important sections in the course book, so I can go back to them after I've returned my inter-library loans.
11. Great materials, but I had already purchased these readings because they had been listed as required. That was frustrating! The list of books we viewed might be more descriptive, and I'd love a larger list of the websites that we looked at.
12. I appreciated that copies of some of the readings were in the course workbook for future consultation.

3) *If you've taken previous RBS courses, how did this one compare?*

1. N/A
2. Just as good—same high caliber.
3. Similar in subject (modern books) and format (lecture, book viewings, and guests).
4. The course was probably the best one I've taken at RBS, though perhaps this is because the subject is more in keeping with my interests.
5. N/A
6. {no response}
7. N/A
8. N/A
9. N/A
10. That's like comparing one's children. I love them all.
11. This was excellent. This probably covered the broadest range of materials, but somehow in the most useful depth of any course I've taken.
12. It was what I have come to expect from RBS classes—top-notch teacher and engaging throughout.

- 4) *Which aspects of the course were most interesting and relevant for you as an individual? Did you walk away with any new insights, ideas, or project plans?*
1. The concepts and approaches I learned for interpreting the physical and visual features of the modern book will be essential to my dissertation chapter.
 2. Definitely more insight and understanding. Ideas are bouncing around in my head.
 3. Hearing how other curators collect artist books, and hearing from artists and scholars on important aspects, will all help me make better acquisition decisions.
 4. Yes. For me, this question speaks to what I feel is the real strength of the course—it's a tremendous opportunity for stimulation for projects. More artists should take the class or be included in it, but JD did a fantastic job bringing in great speakers.
 5. Most helpful were some of the ideas around selection criteria, but also helpful is that it provided additional context for artists' books that I can use in my seminars and workshops. It helped to fill in some gaps in my knowledge of the topic.
 6. Most interesting were the sessions devoted to artists' books. In most cases, these are books I haven't seen before and won't easily see again.
 7. JD is a very elegant commentator on art. I'm taking some critical cues for my own work, some turns of phrase, strategies to be more simple and more didactic in my own critical work.
 8. The entire course was relevant for me as an individual. Not only did it inspire my scholarship, but it has also inspired me to further explore artists' books and their materiality through future courses on printmaking and bookbinding.
 9. I was especially interested in the pre-conceptual art period, and was glad that we covered such a breadth of these historical sources and influences on more modern artists' books. I have several new projects, critical and creative, from this week.
 10. I feel my comprehension of this topic is much better after the course, which will be very helpful in research and exhibition work I'm pursuing.
 11. OMG, everything was interesting and relevant.
 12. Framing the understanding of the art of the modern book within the context of technology and changing aesthetic cultures and movements. Yes, I have plenty of plans for the near future in my own library.
- 5) *Did the instructors help you to acquire all the skills and information promised in the course description? Was anything left out or undeveloped? Did you learn what you had hoped to learn?*
1. Yes, without any exceptions.
 2. "Modern Art of the Book" met its course description. It's provided me with a good base in understanding what makes an artist book (and what doesn't).
 3. I believe so, yes. (I don't recall everything about the course description.)
 4. I did, though I was hoping for a bit more of a focus on artists' books themselves. But this was not an expectation of mine, just a hope.
 5. I got what I needed from the course. It was a broad survey of the topic, and while it's impossible to cover the breadth of the topic in one week, it did its best to cover the key aspects.
 6. Yes. I entered the course especially interested in early twentieth-century printing, and left captivated by conceptual and artists' books.

7. JD's knowledge of the subject is intimate and broad. The course was very good, and I learned a great deal, but it would benefit from more synthesis. I missed a panoramic, historical kind of summary—a place to plot what we learned.
8. The only area where I see room for development is the connection between artists' books and graphic novels and comic books—although this could be an entirely separate course.
9. JD was amazing as an instructor. Being a new course, some of the mechanics will likely be smoothed out, but she is incredibly gifted as an explainer and knowledgeable about the aesthetics of the book from several disciplinary and intellectual perspectives.
10. Yes!
11. Yes, and I learned plenty more than I'd hoped, too. Incredible.
12. Course description was in sync with the actual content.

6) *How do you plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired during your time here?*

1. In future scholarship, and in my dissertation.
2. Better collection development and appreciation.
3. Considering attending book fairs. Online resources for artists' books will be valuable, too.
4. In both critical and creative writings in the field of artists' books. I hope to really develop my ability to write critically on the topic for the sake of the topic, if nothing else.
5. I will use the knowledge acquired both for setting our acquisition policies and for my teaching.
6. Most directly, I will be incorporating artists' books (and, to a lesser extent, fine-press printing) into courses I teach to undergraduates. As well, the course will help me as I work with librarians to build a teaching collection.
7. I plan to think about some of the objects of my critical inquiry (literary texts) more in book-object terms, where appropriate. In many cases, this is appropriate, and I was glad to get an introduction here.
8. I plan to use the skills and knowledge acquired here to develop my dissertation proposal and to inform my scholarship on early twentieth-century artistic engagements with the book.
9. Critical essays and digital-editing projects.
10. See Q4, above. Also: an exhibition this fall, and an article on chromolithography currently in preparation.
11. I will be teaching a history of the artists' book course, and absolutely everything I learned here will be put to use. I don't currently acquire artists' books, but if I do in the future, this experience will be invaluable.
12. Re-evaluate books in the collection in my care to draw out examples that can be used to teach about the history of the book and the art of the book.

7) *Please briefly describe the intellectual level of the course. What sort of person might benefit the most from taking it?*

1. Rigorous, but accessible. Any level of graduate student, advanced undergraduate, or library-related person.
2. Librarians charged with institutional acquisitions.

3. Grad students and up. Scholars, curators, educators.
 4. The intellectual level was perfect—high (as one expects from JD), but the instructor was willing to stop at any point and explain concepts that people struggled with (or pretended to know).
 5. It's not a heavy theoretical course, which I personally appreciated. It was more of a practical, "this is the arc of the history of artists' books" course, which seemed appropriate to me. People looking for that broad survey will definitely benefit.
 6. JD was careful to make sure everyone understood terms, references, and historical/aesthetic periods and moments.
 7. The intellectual level of the course is, on one level, quite high: I think you need to be familiar with book culture, big western aesthetic paradigms, and intellectual history to be conversant. On the other hand, much of what we did was intuitive, show-and-tell stuff.
 8. The sorts of people who might benefit from this course are graduate students, librarians, curators, and other individuals from the worlds of art, literature, and publishing.
 9. The course is largely about concepts of the book, so anyone willing or able to think critically about books.
 10. I enjoyed the fact that the students were all very different sorts of people who came to the topic from different perspectives. JD kept this in mind, and continually pointed things out that would be of interest to individual students. The resulting discussions were particularly engaging.
 11. I would have been better off if I had more knowledge of art history, but I muddled through. This course is best for those with either book history or art history knowledge.
 12. As someone without formal background in art history, I appreciated the fact that JD did not presuppose a certain level of knowledge. Someone who works directly with material related to nineteenth- and twentieth-century books should consider this class.
- 8) *If applicable, what were the most original, powerful, or otherwise noteworthy educational moments in the course? Were there any "aha!" moments you'd like to share?*
1. Viewing the Gabberjab pieces really made me rethink the integration of narrative and material reflexivity.
 2. Partway through the week, looking at a book about artists' books and recognizing notable items in the canon.
 3. {no response}
 4. Too many to mention, which is the nature of reading about an artist's book and then actually seeing it.
 5. Viewing many examples of the books was the true "aha" moment. It's definitely a course for people who love and appreciate the beauty of the book in all forms.
 6. "Process rescues us from the poverty of our intentions." (Elizabeth King)
 7. Many of the most powerful moments came early. Talking about various printing technologies and seeing examples immediately after was quite valuable.
 8. The concept that sticks out to me the most is JD's notion of approaching artists' books as an interrelation between production and conception, and thinking about whether a book's production value matches its conception value.

9. Too many to list, but reading an artists' book with JD is a special treat; whether it's a great book or a minor one, she can make it interesting.
10. {no response}
11. Generally, learning about the movements behind the art was so helpful, especially regarding futurism and the avant garde.
12. Thinking of artistic traditions in terms of movements and styles that are not the same thing.

9) *How could the course have been improved?*

1. More time for conceptual discussion.
2. A lot of standing, which was tiring, but I don't think it could be avoided.
3. We had hundreds (or so it seems) of books to look at. As JD admitted, they were presented in a way that could have been better organized. Also, since we couldn't touch the books anyway, it felt unnecessarily tiring to spend hours standing around them and craning to see them.
4. A bit more coordination between the collections and the ordering of the workbook, but I don't think JD is to blame.
5. Being able to handle more of the material would be helpful. Perhaps having more examples of artists' books in the RBS collection might help, or having some after-hours sessions with the material.
6. I would have loved additional evening sessions, in the spirit of "Desbib," in which we could have access to the RBS collection of artists' books. It was important that we got to see a large number of works, but I often wished I could spend more time with individual books.
7. I think some more structure, historical framework, would have been nice.
8. N/A
9. Slightly more chronological ordering of hands-on and demonstration materials. (I believe this was mostly an issue due to this being a new class and teaching collection.)
10. JD mentioned tweaking the order of the presentation some, but that's just part of getting a new course going.
11. More hands on! RBS, please build your artists' book collection, with some avant garde stuff, especially, please!
12. Some more time devoted to nineteenth- and early twentieth-century books, and a bit less time with artists' books.

10) *Do you feel that you got your money's worth? Would you recommend the course to others?*

1. Yes, and yes (although a scholarship and my department paid my tuition, so maybe "N/A").
2. Yes—we looked at a lot of books...the only way to start recognizing things is to keep looking. Would definitely recommend.
3. Yes, and yes.
4. It's hard to say just yet—but it feels like I got my money's worth.
5. Yes, definitely, on both counts.
6. Yes, absolutely.
7. My tuition was covered, but I think the course was worth while.

8. Yes, I would recommend this course to others. JD is sharp, critical, knowledgeable, and speaks with incredible clarity.
9. I was very pleased, and will evangelize if the course is picked up for future terms.
10. Yes, without hesitation.
11. Yes, and yes!
12. Yes, and yes!

11) *If your course made any trips outside of the classroom, do you feel that they were time well spent?*

1. N/A
2. N/A
3. N/A
4. We didn't leave the classroom except for breaks.
5. We had guest speakers, which helped provide a break and additional contextual info.
6. {no response}
7. N/A
8. N/A
9. N/A
10. N/A
11. N/A
12. {no response}

12) *If you attended any of our optional evening events, do you feel that they were a good use of your time? Were there any that were particularly important to your RBS experience? Any that you could have done without?*

1. N/A
2. Sarah Werner's talk was excellent—thank you!
3. I attended the lecture on social media, and found it enlightening and entertaining.
4. I always had to drive back home, so I'm afraid I missed them all.
5. Only attended one lecture, which I thought was quite good.
6. {no response}
7. All the evening events are valuable, but I think it's very hard to make them all. It's a tiring week.
8. N/A
9. {no response}
10. The paper museum was absolutely fantastic—I could easily have spent a whole day there. I really appreciated getting the chance to enjoy it.
11. The lectures were unimpressive this year.
12. This time I did not feel that the lectures were as engaging, and Booksellers' Night was rather a disappointment. (Some shops were closed.)

13) *Do you have any additional thoughts or advice for anyone considering taking this course in a future year?*

1. N/A
2. Definitely do the readings in advance, and, if your institution has artists' books in

- the collection, go look at them.
3. {no response}
 4. Make sure to read JD's own book slowly and carefully—including the notes.
 5. I'd recommend this class, if only to tap into JD's deep knowledge and passion for the topic. She is a joy to have in a classroom.
 6. It's an excellent course! Make sure to do the advance reading, as there is a lot of material, and not enough time to go into as much detail as the pre-course readings allow.
 7. I would suggest a bit of reading on print technologies and the history of printing before class.
 8. N/A
 9. {no response}
 10. Be prepared to cover a very wide range of materials, and to enjoy discovering the topic in a broad context.
 11. Take it!
 12. Read and look at as many resources as you can on the reading list, especially if many aspects are new to you.

14) *If you had to sum up your RBS experience with a single sentence, phrase, or haiku, what would you say?*

1. Delightful!
2. Thank you, again.
3. RBS packs as much information and networking into one week as humanly possible (while still remaining fun).
4. This question intentionally left blank.
5. I will return!
6. {no response}
7. Drinking from the fount.
8. Are you looking for a straight edge or a critical edge?
9. Yes.
10. I'm afraid I'm not really that clever, but I love RBS. It is one of the happiest things in my life.
11. What would I do without you, RBS? Haiku: Oh what would I do/without you, dear Rare Book School/less rain, next time, though.
12. Nowhere else can you get this experience!

Student Data

Number of respondents: 12 (of 12)

How did you arrange for time off to attend this course?

My institution/employer gave me professional leave time: 8 (66.67%)

My institution/employer did not give me professional leave; I used paid or vacation days: 1 (8.33%)

I am a student or non-year-round employee, with a more flexible summer schedule: 3 (25%)

Who paid your RBS tuition costs?

I paid 100% myself: 1 (8.33%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 5 (41.67%)
My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 1 (8.33%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive 100%: 2 (16.67%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to pay/waive part; my institution/employer paid the rest:
1 (8.33%)
I exchanged goods or services in lieu of tuition: 1 (8.33%)
My situation does not fit any of the options above: 1 (8.33%)

Who paid your RBS housing expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 2 (16.67%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 5 (41.67%)
I used a scholarship/fellowship to cover part; I paid the rest: 1 (8.33%)
I stayed with friends/family, or stayed in my own home and commuted: 4 (33.33%)

Who paid your RBS travel expenses?

I paid 100% myself: 4 (33.33%)
My institution/employer paid 100%: 2 (16.67%)
My institution/employer paid part; I paid the rest: 3 (25%)
I live locally, and had no travel expenses: 3 (25%)

Which of the following best describes your current occupation?

Library disciplines:

Conservator/binder/preservation librarian: 1 (8.33%)
Curator: 2 (16.67%)
Special collections librarian: 3 (25%)

Student working toward a/n:

Ph.D./D.Phil: 3 (25%)

Professional educator:

Lecturer/adjunct: 1 (8.33%)
Full professor: 1 (8.33%)
College/university administrator: 1 (8.33%)