Keynote Speaker: Caroline Levine, Cornell

“All the forms of art come to us in their own ways and allow us to make more forms, and to make this exchange” – Muriel Rukeyser

Abstract yet tactile, familiar and aloof, form contains as many oppositions as the critical vocabularies in which it is employed. Form has often been approached through sets of binaries structured around that elusive conjunction and: form and content, form and matter, form and context, form and history, form and intention. Within these oppositions, form appears without articles – not a form, or the form, but abstract form. “In Forms” resists abstraction and asks how form, within specific social, historical, and authorial contexts, affects the way we value and experience literature and art.

The vocabulary of formalism draws on a rich variety of approaches and methodologies from prosody, rhetoric, and semiotics to genre studies, philology, and narratology, often with a basis in so-called “close reading.” More recently, New Formalist critics have sought to join formal analysis to historical approaches that explore how form(s) emerge out of, reflect, and respond to contemporary political situations. Caroline Levine’s provocative Forms (2015) joins this conversation, considering how the tools of formalist literary analysis can productively read sociopolitical experience. At the same time, postcritical approaches might (questionably) value surface form over ideological depth.

“In Forms” invites papers that build on and challenge these conceptions of form, offering a forum to reflect on the variety of ways one might approach two implicit, yet fundamental and seemingly unanswerable questions – what is form and why does it matter?

We invite submissions from graduate students of all disciplines that draw on topics such as but not limited to the following:

- Poetics, historical poetics
- Rhetoric
- Genre
- Form and content
- Forms of reading and thought
- Forms of resistance and embodiment
- Social forms, institutional forms
- Material, digital, and bibliographical forms
- Critical methodology (postcritique)
- Philosophical idealism/ formalism
- Adaptation, (de)formation, (re)formation

Please submit abstracts of 250-300 words and a brief bio of 50 words to in.forms.uoft@gmail.com

Submission Deadline: January 25th, 2019

Conference website: https://uoftinforms.wordpress.com/