

LTWR215
CROSS-GENRE SEMINAR Spring2015
NON-HUMAN WRITING
Prof. Cristina Rivera Garza

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Office Hours: TW 11:00-12:00 pm

As a range of writing communities embrace the non-human turn, questions relating to the link between the expressive capacity of organic and non-organic matter and writing processes increase. These questions, which encompass both machines, animals, plants and rocks, among others, are of particular relevance and difficulty for writers. While it is generally accepted that machines—as in computers—write, it is more complicated to register and articulate with the writing lives of volcanoes, cells or seeds. But if they express themselves, as some contemporary thinkers argue, wouldn't they be able to, in fact, write? Framed by what Lazzarato termed asignifying semiotics, as well as the theoretical framework and methodological insights from sensory ethnography, we will explore the writing practices of some components of our bodies—as in cells explored in neurosciences—as well as of some elements in our environments—mostly water, but also plants and rocks.

I have invited a series of experts in fields as varied as marine biology, neuroscience and environmental history to share with us the documents they generate and interpret as they elaborate their conclusions. I am assuming that they are the ones first capturing the “writing” of our surrounding non-human and non-organic worlds. After their talks, which will take place during the first half of certain sessions (see calendar below), we will use the second half of the session to collectively design writing exercises based on the data shared by scientists. Writing and sharing these exercises in advance and commenting them on dates included below will be one of the main objectives of this writing seminar.

In addition to designing, developing and commenting on the writing exercises generated in class, each member of this seminar will be responsible for developing a larger project over the course of the quarter, ideally one related to the theoretical and aesthetic concerns discussed here. “A work of art engages us,” claims Bruno Latour in *An Inquiry Into Modes of Existence*, especially in a chapter devoted to Situating the Beings of Fiction, “and if it is quite true that it has to be interpreted, at no point we have the feeling that we are free to do ‘whatever we want’ with it. If the work needs subjective interpretation, it is in a very special sense of the adjective: we are subject to it, or rather we win our subjectivity through it.” We will proceed in this seminar (especially when discussing your larger projects) according to this

idea: a work contains the prescriptions for its continuation. Instead of revising, correcting, improving, or honing our writing skills, our main task as we engage with these works will be to continue them—yes, indeed, to re-write them—according to its own prescriptions, or rather the prescriptions legible to ourselves, as readers. Each student will exchange his or her own work early in the quarter to see it emerge back later, appropriated by other in its re-written form, during the last three weeks of the quarter.

REQUIRED READINGS:

Most of our required readings are available on line. You will find the links throughout this syllabus.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

If you have not read the following, please, do so before or throughout the seminar. I will be weaving my talks and comments back to these (and other) works quite often.

Maurizio Lazzarato, *Signs and Machines. Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*

Bruno Latour, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence. An Anthropology of the Moderns* (especially chapter 9, Situating the Beings of Fiction)

Sara Pink, *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (especially chapters on emplaced knowledge and interpreting multisensory research)

Trevor Cox, *The Sound Book. The Science of the Sonic Wonders of the World* (especially the introduction)

Jussi Parikka *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*, introduction:

http://books.google.com/books?id=cLbYMCjAXY8C&printsec=frontcover&hl=es&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false

REQUIRED WORK:

1.

Monday, March 30

THE WRITING LIVES OF THE ANIMATED AND THE INANIMATED

Screening:

Leviathan: Sensory Ethnography

Reading while walking:

Tim Ingold, "Culture on the Ground. The World Perceived by the Feet," in *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 9 (3), 315-340: 2004.

<http://www.oneonta.edu/faculty/walkerr/Issues/Ingold%202004.pdf>

Discussing in seminar classroom (if we have time, otherwise, start reading):

Manuel de Landa, *Inorganic Life* (Zone, 1992):

<http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic641765.files/8%20Delanda%20-%20Inorganic%20%20Life.pdf>

2.

Monday, April 6

THE WRITING OF GLACIAL FJORDS

Talk by Grant Deane, Marine Physical Biology, Scripps Institute of Oceanography, UCSD.

Read: "Directionality of the ambient noise field in an Arctic, glacial bay," in *Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*:

<http://scitation.aip.org/content/asa/journal/jasa/136/5/10.1121/1.4897354>

Task (second half of session):

Collaborative design of writing exercise.

3.

Monday, April 13

SENSORY WRITINGS 1

We will try to read and comment on all the WEs received. This will depend on the number of members of this seminar.

WORKSHOP

4.

Monday, April 20

DISSAPPEARING WATERSCAPES, VANISHING WATERWRITINGS

Talk by Matthew Vitz, Environmental history, UCSD

Read: "The lands with which we shall struggle: Land reclamation, revolution, and development in Mexico's Lake Texcoco's Basin, 1910-1950," *Hispanic American Historical Review*:

http://www.academia.edu/5425630/The_Lands_with_Which_We_Shall_Struggle_Land_Reclamation_Revolution_and_Development_in_Mexicos_Lake_Texcoco_Basin_1910-1950

Task:

Collaborative design of creative writing exercises

5.

Monday, April 27
SENSORY WRITINGS 2

WORKSHOP

6.
Monday, May 4
THE EXCITABILITY OF NEURONS

Talk by Mauricio Mantel, Neurobiology, UCSD
“Hierarchy of orofacial rhythms revealed through whisking and breathing,” in
Nature, 2013.
<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/23624373>

Task:
Collaborative design of writing exercise

7.
Monday, May 11
SENSORY WRITINGS 3

WORKSHOP

8.
Monday, May 18
Workshop of Larger Projects

Names:
Names:
Names:
Names:

9.
Monday, May 25
Workshop of Larger Projects

Names:
Names:
Names:
Names:

10.

Monday, June 1

Workshop of Larger Projects

Names:

Names:

Names:

Names: