

Sophister Module Description Template 2021-22

Full Name: Nonhuman Writing

Short Name: Nonhuman Writing

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ECTS Weighting: 10

Semester Taught: MT

Year: SS

Module Content:

Nowadays, writing is generally seen as one of the great human inventions. But the notion that writing was invented by humans has not at all times been self-evident and accepted. For long periods of history, writing was seen as a domain of the gods and of their representatives. In diverse traditions, letters were thought to have preceded the creation of the world. By some, the whole act of creation was conceived as a form of writing, and therefore signatures were thought to be embedded in all creatures. Some aspects of this tradition have been perpetuated even after the secularizations of modernity: there are still discourses that refer to writing without a human writer and without a human reader. The world is still thought to be full of nonhuman entities (animals, plants and anorganic matter) that leave traces and inscriptions for other nonhuman entities to read. A prominent example is the “deciphered” genetic code. Machines obviously also have learned to read and write to one another. Furthermore, psychoanalysis has asserted that the human psyche engages in writing and reading procedures of which the human subject is unaware. In this seminar, we will read and discuss literary and theoretical texts that engage with these nonhuman forms of writing (and that sometimes even claim some kind of “nonhuman” status for themselves).

Learning Outcomes:

- Learn to see writing and its history from a different angle.
- Read some important (and slightly odd) literary texts from several epochs (Thomas Browne, William Wordsworth and others).
- Read some influential theoretical texts (Walter Benjamin, Jacques Derrida and others).

Learning Aims:

- Gain a deeper understanding of the relation between writing, literature and some “inscriptions” that seem to lie outside the scope of human language.

Assessment Details:

- Number of Components: 1

School of English

- Name/Type of Component(s): 1 final essay
- Word Count of Component(s): 5000
- Percentage Value of Component(s): 100%

Preliminary Reading List:

Walter Benjamin, *On Language as Such and on the Language of Man*

Jacob Boehme, *The Signature of All Things* (Excerpts)

Thomas Browne, *The Garden of Cyrus*

William S. Burroughs, *The Soft Machine* (Excerpts)

Arthur C. Clarke, *The Nine Billion Names of God*

Gilles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, *The Geology of Morals*

Jacques Derrida, *On Grammatology* (Excerpts)

Geoffrey Hartman, *Inscriptions and Romantic Nature Poetry*

Eva Horn/Hannes Bergthaller, *The Anthropocene* (Excerpts)

Edmond Jabès, *The Book of Questions* (Excerpts)

Jacques Lacan, *The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious*

Barry Lopez, *Crossing Open Ground* (Excerpts)

Reza Negarestani, *Cyclonopedia* (Excerpts)

Erwin Schrödinger, *What is Life?* (Excerpts)

William Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (Excerpts), *Lines Left Upon a Seat in a Yew-Tree Which Stands Near the Lake of Esthwaite*

Please note:

- **Curricular information is subject to change.**
- **Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.**