

Western University Graduate Course in Comparative Literature, Spring 2018

CL 9691B Sinography, Corpography and Beyond

Instructor: Dr. Guoyuan Liu

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Office Hours: Friday 11:30-1:30 or by apt

Class Time and Location: Thursdays 9:30 am-12:30 pm / TBA



Course Description

In the 2000 art project “The Genealogical Chart,” Chinese artist Zhang Huan had three calligraphers write Chinese texts on his face. The texts consisted of Chinese terms and phrases representing names or stories that the artist was familiar with, and they were written in the fashion of traditional Chinese calligraphic art, with the Chinese writing brush and in black ink. The process started early in the morning and lasted until night. Thus as the day gradually became dark, so did the artist’s face, until the face was completely covered in ink and no longer recognizable.

Zhang Huan’s project is rich in metaphors that urge us to re-think our understanding of writing and the body: Does writing have a “body,” namely a corporeality with spatiality and temporality? Can the body be reduced to “writing,” namely a social construction with no material, physical or biological significance? Does writing as social or cultural inscription construct, shape, occupy or swallows up the body? Is the body a medium for writing or is it writing per se?

The fact that writing in this specific instance is Chinese also sheds lights on the concepts of “writing” and “body.” The Chinese script has for a long time been imagined as a kind of writing with a graphic body, and thus is either inferior (for thinkers such as Hegel) or superior (for thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan) to the European alphabetic writing, a writing that is phonetic, logocentric and thus immaterial. Yet to what sense is the artist’s inscribed body Chinese? To what sense is the writing on his body material or immaterial?

This seminar will provide a forum for discussions on these questions from cross-cultural and interdisciplinary perspectives. We will examine examples of the writing body, the inscribed body and the body of writing in film, literature, and performance art, and we will explore the possibilities of understanding writing and the body in cultural theories of Georges Bataille, Judith Butler, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Jean-Luc Nancy, etc., as well as social theories of Pasi Falk, David Howes, Nicholas Rose, Chris Shilling, Bryan Turner, etc.

Grade Breakdown:

Class participation:	10%
Short assignment (4 pages):	15%
Seminar (25 minutes):	25%
Essay (20 pages):	50%

Schedule of Classes

Thu Jan 11 **Introduction: the leading questions**

Reading:

1. Shilling. "Introduction" from *The Body and Social Theory*.

Thu Jan 18 **The body of Chinese writing**

Readings:

1. Hegel. Selections from *The Science of Logic*.

2. Derrida. Selections from *Of Grammatology*.

3. Borges. *El idioma analitico de John Wilkins* ("The Analytical Language of John Wilkins").

4. Foucault. Selections from *The Order of Things*.

Thu Jan 25 **Writing the Chinese body**

Readings:

1. Pu. *Huapi* ("The Painted Skin") and *Lupan* ("Judge Lu").

2. Tang. Selected scenes from *Mudan ting* (*The Peony Pavilion*).

3. Kristeva: Selections from *De Chinoises* (*About Chinese Women*).

4. Yourcenar. *Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé* ("How Wang-Fô was Saved").

Thu Feb 1 **Writing and boundary in bodily communication**

Readings:

1. Deleuze. Selections from *The Logic of Sense*.

2. Falk. Selections from *The Consuming Body*.

3. Kristeva. "Gesture: Practice or Communication?"

4. Kafka. *Ein Hungerkünstler* ("A Hunger Artist").

Film:

The Book of Pillow (dir. Peter Greenaway).

Thu Feb 8 **Tattooing: writing on the body**

Reading:

1. Takagi. *Shisei satsujin jiken* (*The Tattoo Murder Case*).

Thu Feb 15 **Skinscape and bodily knowledge**

Readings:

1. Howes. "Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture, and Environment."
2. Hardy. *Wear Your Dreams: My Life in Tattoos*.

Short assignment due.

Thu Feb 22 **Spring Reading Week.**

No class meeting.

Thu Mar 1 **Social inscription: more writings on the body**

Readings:

1. Foucault. Selections from *Discipline and Punish*.
2. Carey. "The Fat Man in History."

Film:

Hollywood Hong Kong (dir. Fruit Chan).

Thu Mar 8 **Social construction: the body as writing**

Readings:

1. Turner. Selections from *The Body & Society : Explorations in Social Theory*.
 2. Brooks. "Narrative and the Body" from *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative*.
 3. Dai. *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress)*.
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Thu Mar 15 **Scarring the body**

Readings:

1. Caruth. Selections from *Unclaimed Experience*.
2. Scarry. "Pain and Imagining" from *The Body in Pain*.

Film:

Red Cherry (dir. Ye Ying)

Thu Mar 22 **Writing as the text(ure) of the body**

Readings:

1. Rose. Selections from *The Politics of Life Itself*.
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2. Nancy. Selections from *Corpus*.
 3. Liu. “The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species” and “The Paper Menagerie.”
 4. Barnes. *Flaubert’s Parrot*.
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Thu Mar 29 **The body that writes**

Readings:

1. Plato: *Ion*.
 2. Benjamin. “The Storyteller.”
 3. Lu. *kuangren riji* (“Diary of a Madman”).
 4. Barnes. *Flaubert’s Parrot* (cont).
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Thu Apr 5 **Embodiment and performance**

Readings:

1. Butler. Selections from *Gender Troubles*.
 2. Braidotti. Selections from *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.
 3. Lu. *Nu fuma* (*The Girl Who Marries a Princess*).
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Required Readings

I. Theory:

Walter Benjamin. “The Storyteller.”

Rosi Braidotti. Selections from *Metamorphoses: Towards a Materialist Theory of Becoming*.

Peter Brooks. “Narrative and the Body” from *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern*.

Narrative

Judith Butler. Selections from *Gender Troubles*.

Cathy Caruth. Selections from *Unclaimed Experience*.

Gilles Deleuze. Selections from *The Logic of Sense*.

Jacques Derrida. Selections from *Of Grammatology*.

Pasi Falk. Selections from *The Consuming Body*.

Michel Foucault. Selections from *Discipline and Punish*.

---. Selections from *Order of Things*.

G. W. F. Hegel. Selections from *Science of Logic*.

David Howes. "Skinscapes: Embodiment, Culture, and Environment."

Julia Kristeva. "Gesture: Practice or Communication?"

Jean-Luc Nancy. Selections from *Corpus*.

Plato. *Ion*.

Nicholas Rose. Selections from *The Politics of Life Itself*.

Elaine Scarry. "Pain and Imagining" from *The Body in Pain*.

Chris Shilling. "Introduction" from *The Body and Social Theory*.

Bryan S. Turner. Selections from *The Body & Society : Explorations in Social Theory*.

II. Fiction:

A. Novels:

Julian Barnes. *Flaubert's Parrot*.

Dai Sijie. *Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse chinoise (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress)*.

Takagi Akimitsu. *Shisei satsujin jiken (The Tattoo Murder Case)*.

B. Short stories:

Peter Carey. "The Fat Man in History."

Franz Kafka. *Ein Hungerkünstler* ("A Hunger Artist").

Ken Liu. "The Bookmaking Habits of Select Species," "The Paper Menagerie"

Lu Xun. *kuangren riji* ("Diary of a Madman")

Pu Songling. *Huapi* ("The Painted Skin") and *Lupan* ("Judge Lu").

Marguerite Yourcenar. *Comment Wang-Fô fut sauvé* ("How Wang-Fô was Saved").

III. Nonfiction:

Ed Hardy: *Wear Your Dreams: My Life in Tattoos*.

Julia Kristeva: Selections from *De Chinoises (About Chinese Women)*.

Jorge Borges. *El idioma analitico de John Wilkins* ("The Analytical Language of John Wilkins").

IV. Plays:

Lu Hongfei. *Nu fuma (The Girl Who Marries a Princess)*.

Tang Xianzu. Selected scenes from *Mudan ting (The Peony Pavilion)*.

VI. Films:

Peter Greenaway, dir. *The Pillow Book*.

Fruit Chan, dir. *Hollywood Hong Kong*.

Ye Ying, dir. *Red Cherry*.

VII. Other:

Poetry, art work, etc. to be shown in class.