FALL 2012

Writing the outsider
Instructor: Manuel Muñoz

This seminar will focus on issues of representation and authenticity, examining the various strategies that writers employ in depicting characters who are outside the “normative” boundaries of American fiction, if not the subject position of the writer herself. How are characters “marked” and what questions must be negotiated when a writer tackles narratives not immediately aligned with personal experience? Texts may include William Styron’s The Confessions of Nat Turner, Susan Straight’s Aquaboogie, and Toni Morrison’s Song of Solomon, as well as recent popular fiction, from Kathryn Stockett’s The Help and Chad Harbach’s The Art of Fielding.

New York School poets & painters
Instructor: Joshua Marie Wilkinson

In this course, we will investigate the crosspollination between the seminal poets of the New York School (Guest, Ashbery, Koch, Schuyler, & O’Hara) and the painters whom they influenced and who influenced the poets themselves (de Kooning, Pollock, Kline, Motherwell, Guston, Rivers, Frankenthaler, Newman, Twombly Rothko, and many others). We will also explore the so-called 2nd Generation of the NY School, especially Notley, Ceravalo, Waldman, Berrigan, Mayer, and Myles through Maggie Nelson’s book Women, The New York School, and Other True Abstractions; David Lehman’s The Last Avant-Garde; and Daniel Kane’s All Poets Welcome. Assignments will be a mixture of structured and improvised, collaborative and ekphrastic, verse and prose, critical and creative.

Crafting the technological / sublime
Instructor: Christopher Cokinos

From writers of antiquity—Statius and Longinus—to philosophers of the 18th century—Burke and Kant—and on to the Romantic poets, painters, photographers, diorama builders, architects, nature writers, science-fiction novelists, and filmmakers, artists of all kinds have been trying to make sense of the ultimately inexpressible emotion of the sublime, what the
historian David Nye says is the feeling that strikes us “dumb with amazement.” This amazement can arise from nature and it can arise, for some, from technology. We will spend the semester reading philosophy, history, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction (especially this)...looking at paintings, photographs, and films...then trekking to places such as the Grand Canyon, the Nevada Test Site, the Very Large Array, and the Palo Verde Nuclear Generating Station as we read and write our way into a more nuanced understanding of the natural and technological sublime. We will ground our approach to the craft of expressing the sublime by understanding its history, its psychology, its social and aesthetic construction. We will keep journals, try our hands at different writing and visual modes, and engage in an exploration that is at once intellectual, creative, and physical. Some nonfiction writers we will read include John Muir, David Nye, J.G. Ballard, Jon Hersey, Ginger Strand, Rebecca Solnit and Tom Wolfe. Other writers and texts we may encounter include “2001,” Godfrey Reggio’s techno-nature film trilogy, ViewMaster reels, Walt Whitman’s “Song of the Exposition,” and samples from the pen of William Gibson. Please note that there will be several excursions for the class. I won’t require that you go to all of them, but we’ll set a number—four, say—and you’ll need to have some times open to accommodate those trips, most of which will be on the weekend.