

## Environmental Humanities Writing Seminar – Spring 2020 – Professor Tiffany Higgins

This course is required for all first-year students and offered as an option to second-years as well as non-EH students. Much of Euro-American environmental writing holds as an underlying assumption Western culture's historical and ontological division between nature and culture. We will examine Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro's formulation of Amerindian Perspectivism, in which all creatures (including plants) are humans with differing cultures that are "natural" to them, but possess the ability to shift perspectives to take on another creature's cultural point of view. As habitat loss and warming climate increase, what methods do we as writers and leaders use to tell the stories of specific, endangered non-humans? We will challenge the fixed categories in our own ontological formulation, to shake up the habitual ways we tell "environmental" stories, taking our cue from our readings, many of which compose a cultural narrative in which natural figures are woven. As Luis Prádanos and Mark Anderson [point out](#), with our current ecological-economic crisis, it is necessary that thinkers and leaders make alliances across ontological differences. Given that many of the peoples most affected by ramped-up extraction and climate change are traditional and poor communities, these alliances and perspective-taking abilities are increasingly essential in order to convey the significance of their socio-environmental challenges to a wider public. How can we make our own writing and thinking a site of ontological alliance, including translating scientists' current findings to a general public?

Students will read a variety of recent texts (the majority on the US West and Brazil) that incorporate creative non-fiction techniques, and will write two articles of their own engaged reportage on issues of local, pressing socio-environmental concern. (Local is interpreted as anywhere in Utah or surrounding states so that the student can make a site visit at least 2-4 times.) Students will materialize and embody this local, current concern in specific people and places (using creative non-fiction techniques of setting description, character depiction/internal conflict, possible inclusion of the narrator in the story, dialogue, and story arc), and are encouraged to experiment with different ways to represent non-human perspectives. These writing projects will be broken down into manageable steps, including frequent peer reviews of the developing material, and supported by frequent feedback from peers and the professor.

Some of the books we'll be reading:

Badkhen, Anna. *Fishermen's Blues: A West African Community at Sea*. Riverhead, 2018.

Branford, Sue, and Mauricio Torres. *Amazon Besieged: By Dams, Soya, Agribusiness and Land-Grabbing*. Practical Action, 2018.

Brum, Eliane. *The Collector of Leftover Souls: Field Notes on Brazil's Everyday Insurrections*. Graywolf, 2020.

Deming, Alison, and Lauret E. Savoy, eds. *The Colors of Nature: Culture, Identity, and the Natural World*. Milkweed, 2011.

Hansman, Heather. *Downriver: Into the Future of Water in the West*. U Chicago, 2019.

Hogan, Linda. *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World*. Norton, 2007.

Ketcham, Christopher. *This Land: How Cowboys, Capitalism, and Corruption are Ruining the American West*. Viking, 2019.

Kopenawa, Davi. *The Falling Sky: Words of a Yanomami Shaman*. Translated by Bruce Albert, Nicholas Elliott, and Alison Dundy. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2013.

Owen, David. *Where the Water Goes: Life and Death Along the Colorado River*. New York: Riverhead, 2017.