

Writing as Historical Practice
A History & Theory Workshop

May 18-19, 2017
 Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN
 www.historyandtheory.org

The workshop is open to the public.

Location: 123 Buttrick Hall, Vanderbilt University. Meals are at RPW Center for the Humanities.

Organizer: Prof. Laura Stark, Associate Editor *History & Theory* laura.stark@vanderbilt.edu

Workshop coordinator: E. Kyle Romero eulogio.k.romero@vanderbilt.edu

Format: Commentators will give a ten-minute response to pre-circulated papers, to be followed by a brief response from the author. The floor will then open for group discussion. There will be a twenty-minute break between discussions. For access to the papers, email Julie Perkins: HistoryandTheory@wesleyan.edu

Thurs., May 18		
12p	Lunch	RPW Center
12:45	Welcome & introductions	Buttrick 123
1:00	Matthew Eddy (Durham, Philosophy), "Thinking with Pen and Paper: Notekeepers as Artificers, Notebooks as Artefacts"	
	Commentator: Jonathan Lamb (Vanderbilt, English)	
2:30	Tyler Williams (Chicago, South Asian Languages), "If the whole world were paper... A History of Writing in the North Indian Vernacular"	
	Commentator: Samira Sheikh (Vanderbilt, History)	
4:00	David Carr (Emory, Philosophy), "Reflections on temporal perspective"	
	Commentator: Gabrielle Spiegel (Johns Hopkins, History)	
Fri., May 19		
8:30	Breakfast	RPW Center
9:00	Nancy Rose Hunt (Florida, History & African Studies), "Near and Far, Lines and Form"	Buttrick 123
	Commentator: Stefan Helgesson (University of Stockholm, English)	
10:30	Joshua Kates (Indiana, English), "The Roots of History: Gadamer's Tradition in Some Contemporary Contexts"	
	Commentator: Lisa Guenther (Vanderbilt, Philosophy)	
12:00	Rosalind Morris (Columbia, Anthropology), "Shadow and Impres: Writing History in the Space of South Africa's Deindustrialization"	
	Commentator: Maya Jasanoff (Harvard, History)	
1:10	Lunch	RPW Center
2:00	David Lurie (Columbia, East Asian Languages) "Parables and Allegories: Premodern and Modern Historiographies of the Origins of Writing"	Buttrick 123
	Commentator: Reginald Jackson (Michigan, Asian Languages)	
3:30	Jaume Aurell (Universidad de Navarra, History) "Writing beyond Time: The Durability of Historical Texts"	
	Commentator: Hans Kellner (NC State, English)	
5:00	Wrap up	

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History is made not found, the saying goes. But how is it made? It takes shape, in the most immediate and literal sense, through the activity of writing—both by historical actors and by their historians. Writers of history evoke a feeling of time whenever they put pen to page, finger to keyboard, ear to airwaves, or eye to the screen, whether intentionally or by the by. Writers manage the experience of time and temporality in the flow or skip of a piece of writing: by shuttling between past, present, and future tense; by forcing the eye to drop from body to footnote and back; or by stringing sentences that, in content, rupture time through their grammars. Writers obscure, undermine, or impose a sense of chronology and ontology in the activity of writing, which is itself a time-bound process.

Writing may be solitary at times, but it is just as commonly a social act, and is always a tactile and situated practice. As a result, the sense of the past can shift as words move beyond their original media into different modes of experience and communication. This has been the case not only for familiar examples, such as when oral testimony is written down, but is also the case when folios and photocopies enter different social, sensory, digital worlds or when static texts are declaimed, sung, or performed. Attention to paratexts, marginalia, indexicals, and intertextuality shows the social, situated quality of historical evidence and expression.

As a result, the process of writing and its change in form can produce a sense of order and difference, certainty or equivocation, new ontologies and surprising chronologies. Recently, scholars from history, anthropology, sociology, and philosophy have explored these issues. By focusing on manners of expression and the trajectories of texts—not only on the representations or words themselves—these approaches have held at bay the appeals of formalism, narratology, neurohistory, and genre studies. By engaging writing as a material process, they have worked to collapse classic divides, for example, between narrative camps and the new materialist camp. The aim has been to better describe the process and theorize its implications—the process that yields written traces, as much as the traces themselves.

Taken together, this line of work from disparate fields prompts exciting questions:

- On what grounds can we claim that static words evoke emotion, equivocation, or a sense of time?
- What are the implications of such claims for theory of history?
- How does a better understanding of the phenomenology of writing change our interpretations of sources and practices as history writers?
- At the broadest level, how does attention to the social phenomenology of writing rebalance classic debates between language and materiality in the making of the past?