

THE POLITICS OF LIFE

Winter 2018

Tuesdays and Thursdays

1:30-3:20

MGH 278

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Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:30-12:30 and by appointment

To ‘de-passion’ knowledge does not give us a more objective world, it just gives us a world ‘without us’; and therefore, without ‘them’ – lines are traced so fast. And as long as this world appears as a world ‘we don’t care for’, it also becomes an impoverished world, a world of minds without bodies, of bodies without minds, bodies without hearts, expectations, interests.

--Vinciane Despret

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Welcome to CHID 390. This colloquium has traditionally focused on theoretical and practical problems of interpretation and knowledge production. In this course, we will examine ethnographic, philosophical, and historical accounts, as well as theoretical essays and literary texts that demonstrate a range of cross-cultural interpretive strategies. Throughout the quarter, we will also explore the “politics of interpretation and representation”: the ways in which different perspectives and practices are tied to intellectual, political, social and economic power.

This seminar invites you to think deeply and critically about the broad theme of life. Drawing on scholarly, literary, and visual texts, we will explore the politics of life and death in the context of migration, slaughter, extraction, and activism. We will also expand discussions of life to include more-than-human others. What happens when we consider the possibility that rocks listen and “earth-beings” (such as rivers and glaciers) speak? Finally, we will consider entanglements of race, gender, species, and (dis)ability. It is my hope that our rigorous examination of these and other issues will serve as windows through which we can view the workings of alterity, marginalization, and vulnerability, as well as survey pathways to alternative and better futures.

This course employs three interconnected critical practices: *reading, talking, and writing*. The first objective of the course is to expose students to a wide range of readings that deal, explicitly or implicitly, with problems of interpretation and representation. Some of these texts are quite intellectually challenging, and all of them will require careful, thoughtful, and detailed reading. The second critical practice is engaging in verbal discussion, which serves to create and sustain a learning community. One of the things I hope you will gain from this class is an enhanced ability to carry on a conversation about your own, and others', ideas. This is also a perfect context in which to "think out loud" and develop your thoughts and ideas through productive and supportive discussions. Finally, you will write regularly in response to the readings. Writing is a crucial component of academic thinking, and is a practice we will spend much time developing.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now.

–Rainer Maria Rilke

I. Participation in Seminar (30%). Your thoughtful and engaged participation in class is perhaps the most significant component of the seminar. I will assume that you have read and examined readings carefully and critically *before* class discussion. My job as course instructor is not to give you all the answers but to help you ask better questions. To that end, I will guide discussion and try to provoke thoughtful and respectful conversation, but much of the success of the seminar depends on your curiosity, energy, and work. Seminars are important opportunities for thinking out loud and listening actively; they are important spaces for us to learn together. In short, you are expected to read all texts with care, attend all class sessions, and contribute to discussions in a lively manner. While I do expect you to speak in class, I also understand that some of you may prefer to deepen your dialogues elsewhere, e.g. in the Canvas discussions that I will set up each week. You are also welcome to meet each other outside of class, cultivate conversations with our speakers or others in the community, etc.

II. Weekly critical essays and peer feedback (30%). In addition to completing reading assignments and being present in seminar, you are expected to engage with texts critically through written essays and peer responses each week.

- **Weekly critical essay:** Once each week you will write a 1-page (single-spaced) essay engaging with some of the major points raised in the texts (readings, films, podcasts, etc.) that week. These short essays should not summarize, but rather raise intriguing questions, address interesting connections, or challenge authors and arguments. The point of these papers is for you to think critically about the

topics for discussion *before* our class meetings, so responses should not address texts or films we have already discussed in class. *Additionally, at the end of each response you should include at least two questions inspired by the readings for that week. Please bring these questions with you to our class meetings.* Essays and questions should be posted on Canvas. You will turn in your first response paper on the second week of the quarter, on the discussion forum for the week.

- **Peer feedback:** Throughout the quarter you will be expected to engage with your peers in a thoughtful, detailed, and constructive manner, both in class and online. To that end, in addition to posting your own reading reflection, you will also respond to one of your peers' critical essays via Canvas each week. These comments should be posted (as a reply to your peer) on the Canvas discussion page by no later than Fridays at midnight. I would like you to respond to a different person each week where possible.

III. Final Project. This assignment can either be a written essay (8-10 pages, double spaced) or a creative project. The idea is for you to reflect on the significance of thinking about life beyond the human; of the entanglements and intersections of humans and other lives. As you do this, keep in mind the complicated history of “the human” (e.g., who counts as human? who do we center by invoking “the human” as a universal category?). What work does this kind of thinking do? How do we think in more expansive ways about life? Why should we? As you develop your project, you should be sure to find ways to engage directly and explicitly with *at least two concepts and at least two thinkers* we have encountered in class this quarter. Those of you thinking about creative projects, consider a digital platform, a podcast, a video, or a photographic essay. If you do choose a creative option, please note that I will also expect a brief written reflection (3-5 pages) about the project, research, and creative process (think of it as an artist statement). The assignment is deliberately broad and open, but we will talk more about it in class. *A short abstract of your preliminary thoughts on the project is due on Thursday February 15* (you will post this on Canvas). The final project is due **Thursday March 15**. You can email your work to me directly anytime that day, or drop off any hard copies or project materials in my office (or in my mailbox in CHID).

Alternative Learning and Disability Accommodations

If you would like to request formal academic accommodation due to learning differences or disability (visible or invisible), please contact Disability Student Services, 448 Schmitz, 543-8924. If you have a letter from Disability Student Services indicating a need for academic accommodations, please show us this letter as soon as possible. If you have not worked with Disability Services but would like to talk to us about accessibility issues in general, I am very happy to do so.

Writing support

CHID works with the [Interdisciplinary Writing Studio](#) on campus. Please visit the IWS at least once during the quarter for support with your writing. For more information, please contact director Caitlin Palo cpalo@uw.edu.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to be familiar with the principles outlined in the Student Code of Conduct as regards academic integrity (i.e. submitting work that is substantially your own). I understand that there can be confusion about what constitutes “plagiarism” so please do talk to me if you have questions. Of course, you will be using sources and other peoples’ ideas – the trick is to credit them properly when you do so. Take a look at the UW resources on academic integrity:

<http://depts.washington.edu/grading/pdf/AcademicResponsibility.pdf> . If I suspect you have knowingly cheated, or plagiarized, I will report your work to the office for student conduct: <http://www.washington.edu/cssc/>

Grades:

- Seminar participation: 30%
- Weekly essays and peer responses: 30%
- Final project: 40%

REQUIRED TEXTS

I think we ought to read only books that bite and sting us. If the book we are reading doesn't shake us awake like a blow to the skull, why bother reading it in the first place? A book must be the ax for the frozen sea within us.

--Franz Kafka

- Jason De León. 2015. *The Land of Open Graves: Living and Dying on the Migrant Trail*. University of California Press.
- Radhika Govindrajan. 2018. *Animal Intimacies: Interspecies Relatedness in India's Central Himalayas*. University of Chicago Press.
- Timothy Pachirat. 2013. *Every Twelve Seconds: Industrialized Slaughter and the Politics of Sight*. Yale University Press.
- Sunaura Taylor. 2017. *Beasts of Burden: Animal and Disability Liberation*. The New Press.
- Additional readings will be made available through Canvas.

Advice from a Caterpillar

Chew your way into a new world.
Munch leaves. Molt. Rest. Molt
again. Self-reinvention is *everything*.
Spin many nests. Cultivate stinging

bristles. Don't get sentimental
about your discarded skins. Grow
quickly. Develop a yen for nettles.
Alternate crumpling and climbing. Rely
on your antennae. Sequester poisons
in your body for use at a later date.
When threatened, emit foul odors
in self-defense. Behave cryptically
to confuse predators: change colors, spit,
or feign death. If all else fails, taste terrible.

---Amy Gerstler, *Dearest Creature*

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1

Thursday 1/4

- Introduction to course and each other: reading, writing, talking
- In class:
 - read [this](#) poem by [Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner](#)
 - watch [trailer](#) for Chris Jordan's film Midway
 - For more information on DAPL and Standing Rock, see [this syllabus](#). We will engage more fully with this material later in the quarter.
 - For more information on the history of nuclear tests on the Marshall Islands, read [this](#) article from *The Washington Post* (2015), and watch [this](#) short (5 min) video.

Between now and Tuesday January 16, try to go to the Bellevue Arts Museum to explore and experience Humaira Abid's exhibit, [Searching for Home](#).

Week 2

Tuesday 1/9

- Start reading De León, *The Land of Open Graves* (at least Introduction and Chapters 1-3)
- On the Media, "What We Know About the Border," <http://www.wnyc.org/story/what-we-know-about-border/>
- In class: *Which Way Home*

Thursday 1/11

- Keep reading De León (Chapters 4-7)

- Watch Vice video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BH_Z5BEZ5ts

Week 3

Tuesday 1/16

- Finish De León (Chapters 8-12)
- Begin reading Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds* (at least Chapter 1)
- Post questions for De León by end of the day

Thursday 1/18

- Begin reading Pachirat, *Every Twelve Seconds* (at least Chapters 2-3)
- 1:30-2:15: Skype conversation with Jason De León

Week 4

Tuesday 1/23

- Keep reading Pachirat (Chapters 4-7)
- Greenwald on [FBI and Factory Farming](#), *The Intercept*
- Watch *Food Inc*
- Recommended:
 - Michael Moss. 2015. "U.S. Research Lab Lets Livestock Suffer in Quest for Profit." *New York Times*, January 19: <http://nyti.ms/1CuZaN3>
 - Kathryn Gillespie. 2013. "Sexualized violence and the gendered commodification of the animal body in Pacific Northwestern US dairy production." *Gender, Place and Culture*, OnlineFirst.
 - Will Potter, explore his blog, [Green is the New Red](#)

Thursday 1/25

- Finish Pachirat (Chapters 8-9): post questions on Canvas by 5am this morning
- Skype with Timothy Pachirat: 1:45-2:45

Week 5

Tuesday 1/30

- Govindrajan, *Animal Intimacies* (read Introduction and Chapters 2-3; Chapters 4-5 are recommended)

Thursday 2/1

- Govindrajan (read Chapter 6 and Epilogue)
- Guest speaker: Radhika Govindrajan (Anthropology, UW)

Week 6

Tuesday 2/6

- Dian Million. 2014. “[There is a River in Me, Theory from Life](#),” In *Theorizing Native Studies*, Duke University Press.
- Robin Wall Kimmerer, “The Intelligence in All Kinds of Life,” *On Being*, <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-wall-kimmerer-the-intelligence-in-all-kinds-of-life/>
- Explore [this](#) syllabus on Standing Rock; pick one essay, read it, and come to class ready to share your thoughts on your chosen text.
- Recommended:
 - Lecture by Robin Wall Kimmerer.
 - Marisol De la Cadena (2015), *Earth Beings* (Duke); ebook available via UW libraries

Thursday 2/8

- Eduardo Kohn. 2015. “[Anthropology of Ontologies](#).” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 44: 311-327.
- Zoe Todd. 2016. “[An Indigenous Feminist's Take on The Ontological Turn: ‘Ontology’ Is Just Another Word for Colonialism](#).” *Journal of Historical Sociology*, March, 29 (1): 4-22.
- Recommended:
 - Eduardo Kohn (2013), *How Forests Think* (UC Press) and interview

Week 7

Tuesday 2/13

- Donna Haraway. 2008. “Introduction.” *When Species Meet*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Anna Tsing. 2012. “Unruly Edges: Mushrooms as Companion Species.” *Environmental Humanities* 1 (1): 141-154.
- Jane Bennett. 2010. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press. Read Preface and chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8.
- Recommended: Mel Chen (2012), *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect* (Duke)

Thursday 2/15

- Post thoughts on your final project on Canvas (before class)
- Kim TallBear. 2013. “An Indigenous Approach to Critical Animal Studies, Interspecies Thinking, and the New Materialisms.” Talk delivered at the University of Washington.
- Class discussion of final projects

Week 8

Tuesday 2/20

- Claire Jean Kim. 2015. *Dangerous Crossings: Race, Species and Nature in a Multicultural Age*. Cambridge University Press. Read Chapters 1 and 2; Chapter 8 is recommended.

- Aime Breeze Harper. 2011. "Connections: Speciesism, Racism, and Whiteness as the Norm." In *Sister Species: Women, Animals and Social Justice*, ed. Lisa Kemmerer and Carol J. Adams. Chicago: U Illinois Press: 72-78.
- Aph and Syl Ko. 2017. *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*. Lantern Books. Read selections on Canvas.

Thursday 2/22

- María Elena García. 2013. "The Taste of Conquest: Colonialism, Cosmopolitics, and the Dark Side of Peru's Gastronomic Boom." *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology*, Vol. 18 (3): 505-524.
- Recommended: Claudia Serrato on "indigenous veganism"
 - Radio interview with Serrato in Animal Voices: [Resisting White Settler Colonization through Food](#)
 - Essay featuring Serrato, Breeze Harper and Margaret Robinson: [Food as a Feminist Project: Decolonizing Bodies Through Veganism](#)

Week 9

Tuesday 2/27

- Sunaura Taylor, *Beasts of Burden*. Read prologue and chapters 1-7.
- Explore Taylor's website and portfolio: <http://www.sunaurataylor.org/>

Thursday 3/1

- Keep reading Taylor (chapters 8-15)
- Vasile Stanescu. 2016. "Lost in Translation: Temple Grandin, 'Humane Meat' and the Intersection of Oppression," paper presented at the *Decolonizing Critical Animal Studies, Crippling Critical Animal Studies Conference*, Edmonton, June.
- Vittoria Lion. 2016. "Disrupting Temple Grandin: Resisting a 'Humane' Face for Autistic and Animal Oppression," paper presented at the *Decolonizing Critical Animal Studies, Crippling Critical Animal Studies Conference*, Edmonton, June.

Week 10

Tuesday 3/6

- Finish Taylor (chapters 16-18)
- Discussion of final projects

Thursday 3/8

- Discussion of projects and final reflections (potluck)

Final project due Thursday March 15