

**CDLTI Report  
Fall 2015**

**Thinking Animals**

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“Thinking Animals” addressed how nonhuman animals can be understood and incorporated into scholarly disciplines and creative practices that are traditionally the domain of human questions, concerns, and capacities. The emergent field of animal studies, along with more established areas like the environmental humanities, nonhuman geography, and critical race studies, have placed considerable pressure on the autonomy and stability of the "human" vis-a-vis that which is designated as beastly, wild, nonhuman, more-than-human, or otherwise animal. This group sought to engage and elaborate on these pressures by creating a space for faculty to explore the relationship between animals and humans across disciplines.

Readings and discussions were open-ended to nourish participant interest in fostering scholarly interests and building informed and innovative lesson plans, course materials, and syllabi. Emily Jones came to the workshop with an interest in developing a class on animals in German thought and literature. Kisha Schlegel wanted to use our conversations to contextualize the literature of her ENGL 181 “Humanimal” class. Hilary Lease sought to incorporate lessons on the interconnectedness of humans and animals. Adeline Rother planned to develop a thematic thread involving the literature on animals, for a course on “Introductory Studies in French Literature.” Lisa Uddin sought to consider how approaches and topics in animal studies might figure more prominently in, or in contradistinction to, her current teaching around race and U.S. visual culture.

Each meeting lasted two hours so we could delve deeply into each topic and expand upon our current concerns. One member facilitated the discussion, providing a question or concern with which she was grappling.

-Lisa Uddin and Kisha Schlegel

*Workshop Coordinators and Participants:*

Lisa Uddin (Art History and Visual Culture Studies)

Kisha Schlegel (English)

*Participants:*

Emily Jones (German Studies and Environmental Humanities)

Adeline Rother (General Studies and Foreign Languages and Literatures)

Jakobina Arch (History)

Hilary Lease (Biology)

## Workshop Syllabus

### Session 1: September 11

Viewing of “Meat”

Wiseman, Frederick. “Meat.” 1976. Film.

### Session 2: September 18

Facilitator: Lisa Uddin

Discussion of Meat

### Session 3: September 25

Facilitator: Hilary Lease

Readings: Tinbergen, Niko. “On the Orientation of the Digger Wasp *Pilanthus triangulum* Fabr,” *The Animal In It’s World*. 1932. Print.

Kruuk, H. “Functional aspects of social hunting by carnivores.” 1975. Print.

Burkhardt, Jr., R.W. “Niko Tinbergen: Life and Scientific Career.” U of Illinois. Print.

### Session 4: October 2

Facilitator: Jakobina Arch

Readings: Ritvo, Harriet. *Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras: Essays on Animals and History*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010. Print. (p. 1-12) and (p. 103-122)

### Session 5: October 16

Facilitator: Adeline Rother

Readings: Singer, Isaac Bashevis. “The Slaughter,” *The Collected Stories*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996. Print.

Coetzee, J.M. “Meat Country.” Print. (p. 43-52).

### Session 6: October 23

Facilitator: Kisha Schlegel

Readings: Poems by Marianne Moore and Tomaž Šalamun

Marianne Moore: “The Pangolin,” “The Monkeys,” “Elephants”

Tomaž Šalamun: “The Rise of the Zebra,” “Alone,” “Ships”

### Session 7: November 13

Facilitator: Emily Jones

Readings: Sebald, W.G. “And If I Remained by the Outermost Sea,” *After Nature*.

Modern Library Paperback Series, 2002. Print.

Agamban, Giorgio. “Theriomorphus,” *The Open: Man and Animal*. Stanford University Press. Print.

### Session 8: December 4

Facilitator: Rebecca Hanrahan

Readings: Diamond, Cora. “Eating Meat and Eating People,” *Animal Rights: Current Debates and New Directions*. Print.

Singer, Peter. “All Animals Are Equal,” *In Defense of Animals*. 1985. Print.

## Participant Reflections

### **Lisa Uddin**

This workshop met the goal of encouraging creative inquiry into the possibilities of cross-disciplinary teaching and learning. We quickly established a warm and inquisitive atmosphere that was essential to taking up our historically, conceptually, ethically and aesthetically delicate topic. We were able to cohere around one or two common texts every session, felt free to position our worldviews, questions and academic and creative backgrounds in relation to them, and gave each other the space to openly challenge each other's perspectives. This was one of the more generous and porous learning experiences I have had at Whitman. I suspect the topic itself was also conducive to generating this outcome.

I began this workshop unsure of my future – pedagogically or otherwise – in the field of animal studies. Having collectively considered a range of material from across the disciplines, my concern about the relationship between “thinking animals” and thinking about/with other minoritized communities has not diminished. There remains, for me, something often and problematically racialized and normatively gendered and sexualized about the “question of the animal” that I would not want to duplicate in any of my teaching – for example, approaching the history of animals in Western European art as a surrogate or displaced discussion of brown and black people in said art. How to teach human difference and species difference together continues to perplex me. That said, I am also now more likely to include an animal text in any of my classes, without feeling like I have to teach the entire field. Likewise, I did revisit the idea of offering a course that examines the many U.S. artistic practices that have defined and regulated boundaries between the human, the not-quite-human, and the nonhuman as they intersect with race, gender and sexuality.

I have no major concerns about how the workshop was designed, organized, and led. One slight concern was the extent to which the group was pitched in favor of humanistic and scholarly inquiry, a function of the composition of our group. One conceit of many “thinking animals” projects is to try thinking *with* nonhuman animals, but there was a noticeable absence of that activity in the workshop. If ever another workshop were to happen, I think a trip to the lab, aviary, pet store, humane society or other animal space might be in order. Scheduling constraints made that difficult this time.

### **Kisha Schlegel**

Because of this workshop I was challenged to think about my approach to the subject matter from different perspectives. As we discussed diverse texts, our various areas of concern came into conversation, revealing the nuances, challenges, and possibilities of “thinking animals.” The most beneficial conversations occurred when participants came to the workshop with a question to which we could apply our areas of expertise. This approach allowed us to investigate lines of thought that we otherwise would not have had the time to pursue.

I began this workshop with questions about a nascent writing project. I now have a collection of readings and notes from our vibrant conversations, which I can return to as I continue to think about the development of this project. What was made evident through this workshop is the analytical and humanistic approach that we rely on when considering animals. As I continue to develop my own work, I hope to interface that useful approach with my own, which is pitched toward the experiential and emotive ways we engage animals. Through this workshop I was also able to articulate a central question: How do we write animals? Not write *with* them or *about* them. How do we write them? I will use this question and the workshop to further develop my ENGL 181 HumAnimal course. Because of this workshop I will be able to design the course at the 300-level, greatly adding to English Department offerings.

As the designer and organizer, I have no concerns. I think the organization worked quite well and allowed each individual the space to present materials of interest to her.

### **Jakobina Arch**

I think this workshop was highly successful in fostering cross-disciplinary teaching and learning, as I would not have run across either the perspectives or the particular readings we discussed if I were doing this research on my own. During the course of this workshop, in other words, we had conversations about the ways that people situate animals in writing, film and other media which I never would have had within my own discipline.

These conversations were extremely helpful not just in thinking about some other ways I can incorporate animals into a 19th-century animals in history course I'm preparing, but also in considering the kinds of perspectives that might be most interesting to the widest range of students in that class. While some of the texts we read are from the wrong time period to be included directly in the course, I am now considering in particular what kinds of literature and poetry from the period might best represent some of the ideas we discussed, as primary sources to be read alongside the primary and secondary sources I was already thinking about using.

Also, this workshop has helped me to consider how modern perspectives on and uses of animals might be similar or different from 19th-century ones, which will be a helpful touchstone for showing the students in the course how this period is relevant to later societies and cultures. In particular, I am planning the course to include debates about major ethical issues in this period, such as the development and concerns of animal protection societies, the keeping of pets, and vivisection in medical research. I feel much better prepared to guide these debates within the course after our ethical and philosophical discussions on animals in this workshop.

In sum, this workshop has inspired me to present and choose my readings for a course currently in development in ways that I hope will be more effective for generating broad-ranging and insightful discussions in the classroom, while also expanding my research interests into new areas and providing me with contacts with colleagues I know will be willing to talk over work I am doing in ways that will enrich the final product.

I liked the design and organization of the course, the flexibility in what we might do within each session were very helpful in accommodating different disciplinary approaches. I also thought the wide range of readings we got by having a particular set chosen by each person in their area of interest made for very interesting conversation.

### **Hilary Lease**

The Thinking Animals CDLTI organized by Kisha Schlegel and Lisa Uddin was a pleasure to be a part of. The focus of the CDLTI was on nonhuman animals, and more specifically on the relationship between humans and animals. The group was lively, and thought provoking. It was interesting to talk about animals with non-biologists, and to see where our perspectives overlapped and diverged on a variety of topics.

For the session that I led, I had the group read excerpts from a work that addressed aspects of social hunting by carnivores (e.g., cooperation), and a classic work (by Niko Tinbergen) that described the foraging, digging, and hunting behaviour of Scandinavian digger wasps, in addition to an elegant series of experiments that Tinbergen did in order to investigate these behaviours. I choose these works because a core question of animal behavior is why an animal behaves as it does. Niko Tinbergen revolutionized this field several decades ago (and won a Nobel Prize for it). Tinbergen argued for a rigorous separation of causal, functional, developmental, and evolutionary analysis--i.e., he proposed that one can narrow the ANY behaviour of animals to function (how is it done?) and cause (what is it's use or survival value?), while separately considering the development of the behaviour (in an individual, in a species). The CDLTI was a great "excuse" for me to revisit this classic work, first encountered in an undergraduate level Animal Behaviour class while at Middlebury College. It was also nice to introduce non biologists to these works (if I recall correctly, only one other member of the group had previously read Tinbergen).

One of the aspects of the workshop that I found valuable was a recurrent theme of should we (and if so, how should we) distance humans from "interpreting animals". This is a core "problem" to scientists: (human) understanding of (non-human) animal behaviour can be reliant on the biases of the human observer. Tinbergen demonstrated how a scientific approach can be used to remove human bias from animal behavior, and scientists often encourage our students not to anthropomorphize, and to try to remove human bias from interpretation of animal behavior. Throughout the weeks of the workshop, I found it quite interesting to observe how most of the participants actually seemed to prefer to not remove the human from the relationship. That rather, the interaction of the two (human and non-human) was what was most celebrated in their appreciation of thinking about and reading about animals.

I would indeed consider the workshop a success. I enjoyed both the readings and the discussions, and I think others did as well. I am excited about the collection of readings that I was exposed to, and I foresee using several of them in future classes. Lively and invigorating discussions were the norm for the group, and I often found myself taking notes on authors to look up after we dispersed for the week. Thank you for the opportunity!

**Adeline Rother**

This workshop met the goal of encouraging creative inquiry into the possibilities of cross-disciplinary teaching and learning by bringing together teachers and scholars from diverse fields, from Biology, to History, Art History, Philosophy, Creative Writing, French and German. In accordance with the interdisciplinary workshop format, we met face-to-face on a regular basis to discuss readings and ideas from each participant's respective field. The topic we chose – animals – was particularly apt for encouraging multi-disciplinary dialogues. I think each one of us came away with a sense of excitement regarding the truly limitless possibilities for thinking and studying human-animal relationships in our teaching and research.

Animals are such a great topic of study because they pop up everywhere. Many of the texts and cultural phenomena I teach both in French and Encounters have to do with animals or human-animal relationships in some fashion. I can certainly imagine tilting the pedagogical focus of my courses to put more emphasis on non-human animals. I can also envisage developing new assignments, lessons, and themes within my courses to engage students in reading, thinking, and speaking about this keenly interesting topic.

I have no concerns at all with our CDLTI! Professors Schlegel and Uddin designed, organized, and led this workshop in the best possible manner to facilitate rich discussion and timely completion of our requirements.

**Emily Jones**

Thinking animals was an invaluable venue for me to explore ways that my colleagues in other disciplines and fields approach questions that motivate my teaching and research. Time and resources permitting, I could see opportunities for team teaching and research collaborations to develop out of this group. I found it particularly fruitful to work with a colleague from the natural sciences as well as colleagues from a variety of ranks (including non-tenure track and senior colleagues).

This group has enabled me to deepen my knowledge of a theoretical field that is of interest to both my teaching and my research. I will incorporate some of the material from our CDLTI (ideas and themes, certainly, but possibly also readings that we discussed) into a new course next fall in Environmental Humanities. Specifically I plan on developing a unit on animal and post-human studies theory that is inspired by our work together. In addition, I am beginning work on an article that will incorporate some of the ideas and texts we've discussed. This was really an opportunity for me to marry my teaching and research interests and profit from (and hopefully contribute to) my colleagues' expertise in the field.

The workshop was designed, organized and led beautifully. There were no problems whatsoever and I would be eager to work with our leaders (and group) together again.