CDLTI Report

*Animals and the Future*, Spring 2018

Maria Lux, Coordinator (Art); Jakobina Arch (History); Eunice Blavascunas (Anthropology and Environmental Studies); Zachary Campbell (Film and Media Studies); Eva Hoffman (German and Gender/Women’s studies); Adeline Rother (General Studies and Foreign Languages and Literatures); Ana Maria Spagna (English)

“Animals and the Future,” focused on the potential future presence or absence of nonhuman animals on the planet, in particular through issues such as extinction, overabundance/population explosions, invasive species, and conservation. Fields such creative writing/literature, film, and art are often adept at speculating about and imagining these (often dystopic) futures, so these forms, as well as empirically-based predictions/case-studies, and scholarly analysis, formed the basis for our exploration. What can creative production tell us about the future for animals, or about the present? How do imaginative fictions relate to research-based studies? How can scholarly analysis guide us in interpreting various forms of predictions? And ultimately, how can we incorporate these examples into our teaching in order to help students engage with animals as subjects in an interconnected, cross-disciplinary way?

Our group brought together faculty who all either teach directly on animals, or whose courses connect to the broader ideas listed above. We wanted to take advantage of the unique expertise of several visiting faculty, alongside more long-term faculty.

Our regular meetings were an hour and 45 minutes long, with a special longer sessions for a film screening and an off-campus field trip with a broader discussion of pedagogical applications of our work together over the semester. Each group member contributed readings (or curated a film screening) for at least one meeting and initiated the discussion on that piece, though we sometimes had contributions from multiple group members during a session that we thought would dialogue well with one another.

**Syllabus:**

Initial planning meeting: January 4

**Session 1: February 8**

Contributors: Maria Lux, Bina Arch, Ana Maria Spagna

* Chapter 4 from *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* by Ursula K. Heise (+optional introduction section)
* Selection from *Spineless: The Science of Jellyfish and the Art of Growing a Backbone* by Juli Berwald, 2017
* “Sackerson” and “Celia” (two essays from *Animals Strike Curious Poses* by Elena Passarello, 2017

**Session 2: March 3**

Contributor: Zach Campbell

Film screening

* GoPro Dog (2014?)
* The Private Life of a Cat (Alexander Hammid & Maya Deren, 1944-1947)
* Hyas and Stenorhynchus (Jean Painlevé, 1927)
* The Love Life of the Octopus (Jean Painlevé & Geneviève Hamon, 1967)
* Mothlight (Stan Brakhage, 1963)
* Excerpt - Sweetgrass (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Ilisa Barbash, 2009)

**Session 3: March 29**

Contributor: Eva Hoffman

* Introduction, Chapter 4, and Conclusion from *Animal Alterity: Science Fiction and the Question of the Animal* by Sherryl Vint
* Chapter 6 from *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material* Self by Stacy Alaimo, 2010
* Chapter “Animal Studies” by Joan Gordon from *The Routledge Companion to Science Fiction*, 2009

**Session 4: April 19**

Contributors: Adeline Rother, Eunice Blavascunas, Eva Hoffman

* "*The Legend of Saint Julian the Hospitaller*," by Gustave Flaubert
* “The root of all cruelty?” article by Paul Bloom, from the *New Yorker*
* Rewilding Research Prospectus (Eunice’s current research work)
* “Expressing Engtangled Empathy: A Reply” from *Hypatia* vol. 32, no. 2 by Lori Gruen

**Session 5: May 18**

Field Trip to Water and Environment Center at the Walla Walla Community College

**Participant Reflections:**

**Bina Arch**

This workshop provided a strong cross-disciplinary setting for discussing teaching and learning, as the variety of different disciplines each participant belonged to allowed for consideration of readings/films that I would not have encountered on my own. The variety of participants also created directions for conversation that were likewise not where I would have gone on my own and enlivened my thinking about the ways that I might include concerns about extinction and other animal futures in my courses. I think this kind of cross-disciplinary setting was particularly useful for my own teaching because I often have students from other departments taking my environmental history courses and I want to make sure to foster inclusion of their own experiences from other perspectives.

The most direct product of the workshop for my own teaching, apart from its ability to help me think about different perspectives on how to teach and discuss animals in general, was the discussion of the reading I presented to the group which I am now planning to add into HIST 231 in the fall. I was not sure how well the reading would work, and it was very helpful to discuss it with fellow animal-interested colleagues to see what kinds of things I could do with it in my class. However, even if I had not decided to offer a course-related reading to the group, I think the experience of discussing topics related to animals and the future (especially extinctions and what makes us focus on particular species and solutions) will continue to be helpful in thinking about how to present environmental history in ways that resonate with students concerned about the state of the planet in their lifetimes. Also, the workshop offered a space that I think benefitted all of our research interests/projects, simply by offering a group of colleagues who we know are interested in the topic but not experts in the disciplinary avenues we each approach them with. For me, the richness of my research always influences how exciting and deep the courses I offer can be, so aspects which supported my research interests I consider to also be supporting future course development and offerings.

I liked the design and organization of the readings that allowed for a kind of round-robin of chosen texts (broadly defined) and I was pleased to see the threads of commonality and difference developing over the course of our discussions among those texts and other works we use in and out of class. Finally, I was pleased to be able to share some of my conclusions/tips from having just offered an animal history course (HIST 307) last semester, which I think will benefit not just my colleagues but also myself when I polish it up to teach it again.

**Eunice Blavascunas**

Our workshop came to understand that animal studies is best learned when historians, creative writers, cultural studies scholars, gender studies scholars, anthropologists, film scholars and artists bring their unique framings into a conversation about teaching and learning.  In that sense the workshop allowed us to both exchange materials and collaboratively work through specific readings and ideas for different kinds of courses.

I plan to incorporate the workshop into the way I teach Introduction to Environmental Studies, ES 120.  ES 120 already has a small animal studies component, looking at the way animal rights and environmental concerns sometimes overlap, but often conflict.  This workshop tested out certain readings, namely Urusula Heise, that I will use to prepare my lecture on that topic.  The course also visited a lamprey and freshwater mussel lab that I previously visited with ES 120. After discussions with my colleagues in the workshop, I can now see how to enrich that field trip to teach about animal futures and extinction. In the past I used the field trip to think about habitat restoration and Tribal innovations in restoration science. But now I would layer on another lesson, prepped in class before the field trip, about how this kind of lab might be the lab of the future in the "sixth great extinction." I imagine teaching about the Anthropocene as an era in which humans must provide care if they want certain species to continue to reproduce. This would follow work the class has already done on settler colonialism and changes to the land since the Whitman missionaries arrived. Students and I could use the lab to explore more dimensions of previous class units. The lab involves much more than just the CTUIR and just lamprey and fresh water clams, whose populations are not federally threatened or endangered, but yet significantly diminished. Imperialist visions, in the form of large scale dams on the Columbia and landscape transformation for agriculture reduced the habitat of these animals. The lab is part of the legacy then of the Anthropocene, following on a global story about the diminishment of indigenous peoples and lands. I plan to design a workshop to help students connect the minutiae of the lab with both the past and the future. How are the animals in this lab cooperating? What do they symbolize for a world that is diminished (thousands of species extinct or who have lost habitat), but where technological fixes offer solutions?

The workshop was designed, organized and led with thoughtful attention.

**Zach Campbell**

The workshop was successful in planting interdisciplinary seeds. The range of discussion from different fields and specializations allowed for a number of different perspectives on the shared theme of ‘animals and the future.’ This helped frame the issues in ways that I think will be useful in classroom settings, especially how they might meet students from a broader set of intellectual backgrounds and approaches as well.

One of the intriguing features of this workshop was how cultural attitudes toward animals rely on a certain amount of thoughtlessness or willful blindness. There is no single solution in response to the larger environmental challenges that the 21st century futurity holds for human engagement with animals, but as a scholar engaged in the field of media and moving images, I intend to incorporate discussions of animals into the classroom around two major areas: (1) to study as a common narrative or thematic device subject to thought or thoughtlessness; (2) to explore the question of representation and difference through case studies occasioned by animals. I incorporated some discussion of animals already, albeit largely informally, into the course on Visual Rhetoric that I taught this past semester. This was helpful to delineate the two aforementioned areas in which I think animals & futurity could figure more into the classroom in a range of ways. This includes courses that do not explicitly address the theme but are nonetheless open to it.

I had no concerns about the workshop design and think that it was successful; future workshops on similar themes of animals & futurity, bringing together new inter-disciplinary configurations, might be really fruitful.

**Eva Hoffmann**

This workshop helped to foster discussion among scholars and teachers from different disciplines. As an inherently interdisciplinary filed, animal studies live from the exchange among researchers and educators from with different backgrounds, focus, and expertise. I found it very fruitful to discuss recent and pertinent texts with colleagues from different fields. I benefitted especially from being exposed to different texts from various disciplines—texts I would have not necessarily heard of or be aware of otherwise, and that I am planning to incorporate into my future classes on animals to different degrees and in different capacities. I also found it helpful to discuss these texts with experts from different fields, which opened new perspectives, questions, and approaches to me. Another great outcome of this workshop was a panel at this year’s annual conference of the NWSA (National Women’s Studies Association) that Maria Lux and I organized in conjunction with this workshop.

I will integrate some of the readings into my future classes, especially Ursula Heise’s Imagining Extinction and Elena Passerello’s Animal’s Strike Curious Poses. Next year, I will teach a class on animals and literature that will be cross-listed for German Studies and Environmental Humanities. While the focus of the class will be mostly on German texts, I would like to add a section on literature and extinction, and anticipate adding Heise’s introduction and some of Passarello’s short stories.

I thoroughly enjoyed this workshop and believed that it helped me in my own learning process and teaching. I would suggest being more systematic about the interdisciplinary nature of the workshop, and focus, for example in each meeting on a different field (history, literature, visual art, anthropology, film studies …) and read and discuss the recent literature for that particular field. Even though we did that, mostly, it would be good to make that approach very explicit and make sure everyone brings in the literature from their field.

**Maria Lux**

It was invigorating and encouraging to see the extent to which many of my colleagues already bring a variety of disciplines into their teaching (by virtue of readings and activities that draw upon many fields). For me, seeing the different lenses of interpretation were extremely helpful in illuminating our readings. For example, the Heise reading is one I’ve been considering using in future classes, partially because it articulates different agendas for people in animal studies or concerned with animal welfare, and people in environmental studies or primarily concerned with ecological issues. It was really helpful to have a discussion with people who either identify with those perspectives, or are outside of them, to determine how helpful and accurate that reading would be for students in providing that background. As a relatively new faculty member, one of the strongest benefits for cross-disciplinary learning and teaching for me was getting to know my colleagues better (both those who I will have a chance to work with in our futures at Whitman, and those who were only here for a short time but left their impact of expertise, ideas, and energy on our community). I was also really interested in scouting field trip locations for future courses, so our visit to the Water and Environment Center at Walla Walla Community College was both practical, and another excellent example of the value of exploring alongside colleagues from different perspectives. This was a particularly fascinating experience because of the kinds of questions each person asked. So many of them were questions that I wouldn’t have thought to pose but were so instructive, and will undoubtedly influence my own approach to sharing that space with students if I’m able to do so in a future course. This field trip also brought a laboratory-sciences perspective into our group (the lead and in fact only researcher heading the project generously described and elaborated on her work, her training, her day-to-day experience designing and running studies, and her opinions and feelings about her).

Much of our work together this semester will find its way into my future classes. As noted above, I plan to use the Heise reading in future courses (either in another iteration of my Animals & Art foundations class or, if I am offered the chance to teach a class in the newly-forming Environmental Studies/Art major, in that course). Adeline’s contribution to our discussion was really fruitful for me in thinking more about the role of the animal in Encounters, and since I will be teaching that course for the first time next year, I hope to continue her work in infusing the syllabus with animal perspectives. I also incorporated aspects of our workshop into the course I taught this spring (Animals & Art studio course) including several of the films that Zach suggested for an assignment on animals and animation/film. The context he provided for how these films are viewed and discussed within film studies was especially useful. In addition, I found much shared ground between Ana Maria’s approaches to teaching and evaluating creative writing and my own approaches to teaching and evaluating creative visual production, so some of our group conversations that addressed pedagogy more broadly will influence my thinking about grading and assignments beyond the animal perspective.

In terms of organization, I had originally hoped to participate in a CDLTI before coordinating one myself. Since the opportunity to work with our visiting faculty was mostly limited to this year and I didn’t want to miss out, I organized the group. My approach was to make sure everyone got something on the syllabus that was on their personal pedagogical reading list, while balancing a very busy semester for some participants with our desire to be ambitious and cover a lot of ground. I think next time, I’d suggest that we devote some time during each meeting to how we could connect the readings to our teaching, rather than having it concentrated in a workshop at the end. The field trip was also a really exciting aspect of the group and if possible, I think more site-visits would have been productive (perhaps more for the faculty who will remain local rather than those moving on after a year). I also realized that my own contributions were not from the field of visual art but instead on texts I found potentially useful, so I think I’d like to get other perspectives on visual art as well. Thanks to the support and enthusiasm of the faculty who have participated in a CDLTI before, and everyone’s willingness to contribute, I think the workshop went well.

**Adeline Rother**

The “Animal Futures” CTLDI succeeded in helping me understand how Animal Studies is informing and informed by disciplines outside my own. I knew that Animal Studies was a very interdisciplinary field (and potential academic concentration), but it was eye-opening to see animals through the lens of film studies (and animals used **as**the lens of film studies in *Mothlight,*a film reel physically constructed using the bodies of insects). I also greatly benefited from touring the Water and Environment Center at the Walla Walla Community College. I am accustomed to talking about human-animal relations in literature while philosophizing about what defines “the animal” or “the human,” but seeing a laboratory in which hundreds of thousands of fish and mollusks were being raised by one female scientist gave me a new, local, material context in which to develop these questions further. Lastly, discussing animality with faculty from other disciplines expanded my vocabulary and conceptual frameworks, and allowed me to form new bonds with colleagues as well.

For me, Encounters is a place where more attention can and should be paid to non-human animals. Interrogating the non-human world is a challenge in Encounters because the course is focused (intentionally or not) on specifically human experiences, many of them involving discrimination or exclusion of one human group or individual by another. Still, there are many “animals” peppered throughout the texts in Encounters, and I have made it a point to draw attention to how these “other” beings are helping tell and illustrate the breadth of human experiences. Talking with the other faculty in the CTLDI inspired me to continue emphasizing non-human others in Encounters and also made me ponder the value or ethical standing of the environment. In the new syllabus we’re using in Encounters next year, I can continue to make these concerns more salient in my section of the class and in faculty development seminars.

I would like to encourage the continued inclusion of non-tenure track faculty in these opportunities. It is true that, because of the way the primary goals are framed (in terms of developing future curriculum), non-TT people can seem less capable of taking part. After all, we don’t usually create entirely new courses. But, many of us are involved in shaping the curriculum in Encounters and other entry-level courses such as Composition. We can incorporate the interdisciplinary insights of our CTLDIs into our teaching of these courses, and we can also contribute (during the CTLDI) our knowledge in conversation with that of other faculty members. I appreciate having now been in two of these groups, and would encourage the continued inclusion of non-TT faculty, especially long-term adjuncts who will continue to pay back the investment of the workshop stipend in their future teaching endeavors.

**Ana Maria Spagna**

The workshop was fabulously successful in giving me a broader lens through which to understand consideration of animals in the humanities. My initial interest lay in finding ways to encourage creative writers away from solipsism using the perspective of animals. I wondered how scholars in other disciplines might consider such an approach, whether it would be frowned upon or encouraged, and what constraints writers should consider. Workshop participants showed enthusiasm for the project, offered thought-provoking examples of how to handle the challenge of portraying animal otherness in both creative and theoretical ways, and through discussion, opened several other avenues of inquiry to me especially in regard to how to imagine and or contextualize animals of the future.

I plan to add a unit to creative nonfiction writing courses dedicated specifically to animals, which will include a theoretical component—discussions of readings from Ursula K. Heise, Sherryl Vint,  and Stacy Alaimo, perhaps—and the option of completing either a speculative or investigative assignment. The speculative approach would involve inhabiting basic questions through imagination: what it’s like to be an animal, how the world, especially the future world, may look from a non-human perspective. (The film examples Zach Campbell offered will be especially helpful here.) The investigative approach, taking a cue from our field trip to the community college, would ask students to seek out people working in the field and shape reportage on the research into narratives that engage larger questions.

The workshop was well designed and organized. (Thank you, Maria.) I appreciated the egalitarian approach, the way each participant brought her own ideas and examples to the table. I also liked that this workshop came at the animal question strictly from a humanities perspective. I’ve almost always discussed these issues with scientists or land managers. That said, I wonder how the vibe may have changed if at least one person from the sciences were along for the ride.