

New York University
Spring 2020

The Multi-Species Lab

Mondays, 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m.- XE Conference Room, 14 East 8th Street

Instructors: Yanoula Athanassakis, Una Chaudhuri, Robert Slifkin and Marina Zurkow

- Dept. of Environmental Studies, CAS: ENVST-UA 450.006 Topics in Environmental Values and Society: The Multi-Species Lab
- Animal Studies Program, CAS: ANST-UA 600.002 Topics in Animal Studies: The Multi-Species Lab
- Department of Drama, Tisch: THEA-UT 632.004 Topics in Performance Studies: The Multi-Species Lab

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Co-taught by four professors in fields ranging from drama, art history, literature, environmental studies, and art, the Multi-Species Lab develops practices and strategies that decenter the human being in a world of ecological uncertainty and recalibration. Through collaborative and creative activities and assignments, we will research and question ideas of how to understand life—including human life—as a plural and ecologically enmeshed phenomenon. The Lab will be structured as a series of meetings and activities with artists, practitioners, and researchers engaged in developing “arts of living on a damaged planet.” Drawing our conceptual frameworks and key ideas from recent work in ecotheory, new materialism, posthumanism, and multi-species ethnography, we will dedicate ourselves to creating actions, rituals, habits, ceremonies, practices, and art works—in many mediums—that work to disrupt unthinking anthropocentrism and to replace it with ecospheric consciousness. We welcome your participation and contributions regardless of major or year.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS, POLICIES and GRADE VALUES

CLASS WORK and PREPARATION FOR CLASS: 20% of final grade

ASSIGNMENT 1: 20% of final grade

ASSIGNMENT 2: 20% of final grade

STUDENT-LED CLASS: 20% of final grade

ASSIGNMENT 3: (GROUP PROJECT) 20% of final grade

CLASS WORK and PREPARATION FOR CLASS: 20% of final grade

- **Attendance is required.** Unexcused absences will result in a lowering of your grade by one increment per absence (i.e., a grade of B will become a B-). Excused absences require either approved medical documentation or prior permission, which will only be granted for compelling reasons that are related to your academic life.
- You, the student, are responsible for finding out what you missed due to an absence, and for **making up the missed work in time**. Please get the emails of a couple of your classmates whom you can ask for notes, announcements, or assignments that you missed.

- **Punctuality is required.** Arriving more than five minutes late to class will count as an unexcused absence. In general, please try to arrive at least five minutes before class time, and be seated and ready to start work at the posted start time.
- Thoughtful and energetic **participation** in class discussions.
- **Please bring copies of the assigned materials to class.** The copies should be annotated, to reflect your careful reading and preparation.
- Please TURN OFF your laptops, tablets and phones during class time.

ASSIGNMENTS

The assignments for this class will be designed to incrementally deepen our pursuit of the following main goals:

- To connect to non-human species--animal species and others--using all of our senses, especially those we share with the selected species. selected.
- To cultivate a keen sense of attention to species in our urban environment.
- To developing new and experimental ways—i.e., ways other than the academic, analytical, paper—of responding to and engaging with the ideas we will encounter in our readings and viewings.

The progression of assignments will require the following skills to be layered upon each other:

1. Observation, relationship, building intimacy.
2. Representation, speaking on behalf of another species.
3. Creating a platform by which to share the relationship/knowledge with others, thereby making a contribution to interspecies knowledge-making.

Additionally, the assignments will be nested within and contribute to a **larger group assignment**, which will consist of two elements: 1) a student-led class session (details below), and 2) the creation of a final participatory engagement (Assignment 3). Each group will consist of 4 students and will be focused on one of four areas of the more-than-human world, which we are calling:

1. Plantscapes
2. Foodlands
3. Petworlds
4. Waterways

(See [this link](#) for a chart of possible sites for each of these groups to explore.)

We will create the groups (by lottery) on the first day of class, and discuss the group work in detail.

Assignment 1: *Umwelt*

Study the *umwelt* of a nonhuman co-inhabitant of your apartment, your room, or someone you see every day along your commute. Using careful observation and research, and determining one or more methods of documentation, find out as much as you can not only about this species member. Work systematically and experimentally to imagine how that being experiences the world around them.

- How does their experience differs from yours?
- How do their own perceptual affordances define the ways in which they experience the world
- Is there any way for you to try and experience the world through their affordances?
- Can you map your senses onto theirs?

If possible (which we recognize might be difficult or impossible) do not generalize; try to think about a specific inhabitant (this mold, this insect, this pigeon, etc)

Outputs: Documentation of your intensive study (text, video, photographs, attempts at imitation). Whatever the format of this project the result should convey a degree of experience and research-based knowledge of the subject and exhibit a degree of formal intelligence that makes the material compelling and even possibly attempts to produce or recreate perceptual realms of the animal. Preparatory sketches and other materials related to creative process such as bibliographies should be submitted alongside the final product.

In-class presentation: 5 minutes TOPS!!

Assignment 2: *Polemics*

Create a statement on behalf of another species - a daily practice, a manifesto, an anthem, a broadside, a legal defense, a nation, a flag, terrarium, a diorama, etc.

Compose and deliver a brief (written or oral) text explaining the process and logics that produced this statement:

- What concerns brought about its existence?
- What research methodologies and findings did those concerns generate and deploy?
- What other considerations went into the form and content of the final product?

In-class presentation: 5 minutes TOPS!!

Assignment 3: *Public Engagement and Interspecies Knowledge-Production*

This assignment will govern the work of each group for the entire semester. The groups' work consists of

1. Research
2. Preparing and running one class session, including assigning preparatory activities, readings, and media to the rest of us, and leading class discussion

3. Creating something that puts the group's findings into a form that creates public engagement and knowledge. Examples include tours or walks, field guides, life practices, events, performances, rituals, meditations, and other ways of fostering in consciousness and conversation.
4. We encourage you to follow these [collaboration guidelines](#)

Student-led Class Session

- Please assign us no more than 30 pages
- Presentations should be under 20 minutes, plus 40 minutes for your guided Q&A.
- Please prepare a slide show. The Q&A should be guided by you. Please determine 2-3 leading questions for the class.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

At the end of class, due xxx after the last class, please write a Final Reflection and submit it all the instructors via email.

- What did you learn?
- What feedback did you receive?
- What was inspiring? What parts?
- What would you do differently?
- How did you balance research, experimentation, testing, and revisions? Which is easier? How can you do more of the areas you shy away from?
- How did you manage your time? Could you realistically improve that?

COURSE SCHEDULE

1. January 27: Introduction
 - Due today:
 - Read "[Out of Time: Listening to the Climate's Clock](#)," Astra Taylor
 - Read "Badger," from [Being a Beast](#) by Charles Foster (PDF)
2. February 3: *Umwelt*
 - Due today:
 - Peruse Gal Nissim's [The Synanthrope Preserve](#)
 - **Do the sound-walk** (in Tompkins Square Park) entitled "[The First to Cross](#)"
 - Read "[A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men](#)," by Jakob von Uexkull
 - Read "[Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin](#)," by Donna Haraway
 - Guest: Gal Nissim

- Introduction to *Assignment 1: Umwelt*

February 6-March 15:

Marina Zurkow/ Sarah Rothberg *Wet Logic* at [bitforms gallery](#)

3. February 10: The Multi-Species Sensorium
 - Due today:
 - Read from "[Being a dog](#)" by Alexandra Horowitz (PDF)
 - Guest: Alexandra Horowitz
 - Introduction to Student-Led Class Presentations

February 17: President's Day. No class

4. February 24: Presentations of *Assignment 1: Umwelt*
 - Due today:
 - 5 minute presentations of Assignment 1
 - Peruse [Multi-Species Design Cards](#) (PDF)
 - Introduction to *Assignment 2: Polemic*
 - Remind Group 1: Foodlands to assign readings for March 2
5. March 2: Group 1: Foodlands Student Presentations
 - Due today:
 - Readings/Screenings to be assigned by Group 1: Foodlands
 - Group 1 text
 - Group 1 text
 - Read "[You see me, but do you hear me?](#)" by GA Bradshaw (PDF)
 - Guest: Becca Franks
 - Remind Group 2: Petworlds to assign readings for March 9
6. March 9: Group 2: Petworlds Student Presentations
 - Due today:
 - Readings/Screenings to be assigned by Group 2: Petworlds
 - Group 2 text
 - Group 2 text
 - Read introduction to [Bodily Natures](#) by Stacy Alaimo (PDF)
 - Guest: Agustine Zegers
 - Remind Group 3: Plantscapes to assign readings for March 23

March 16: Spring Break. No class.

7. March 23: Group 3: Plantscapes
 - Due today:
 - Readings/Screenings to be assigned by Group 3: Plantscapes
 - Group 3 text
 - Group 3 text

- Readings on Joshua's play on Darwin and taxidermy will be shared one week in advance.
 - Guest: Joshua Williams
8. March 30: Presentations of *Assignment 2: Polemic*
- Due today:
 - 5 minute presentations of Assignment 2
 - Introduction to *Assignment 3: Public Engagement and Interspecies Knowledge-Production*
 - Remind Group 4: Waterways to assign readings for April 6
9. April 6: Group 4: Waterways
- Due today:
 - Readings/Screenings to be assigned by Group 4: Waterways
 - Group 4 text
 - Group 4 text
 - Readings **provided by Chisa**
 - Guest: Chisa Hidaka
10. April 13: Multi-Species Politics
- Due today:
 - Read the Introduction from [*Zoopolis: A Political Theory of Animal Rights*](#) by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka
 - "[Animal Agora: Animals Citizens and the Democratic Challenge](#)" by Sue Donaldson (PDF)
 - Attend 12:30-1:30 lecture by Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka on "Multi-Species Kinship"
11. April 20: In-class Labs for Final Presentations
12. April 27: In-class Labs for Final Presentations
13. May 4: Final Presentations
14. May 11: Final Presentations