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[Please do not use FB for professional matters.]

**Professor of English
Distinguished Teaching Professor**

English 6370: Thinking with Plants, Animals, and Materialities

Thursdays 6-8:50

Carlisle 212

Course Description:

Anthropologist Eduardo Kohn considers “How forests think.” The call to think with life forms, systems, and materialities is a vital challenge for the environmental humanities and science studies. Such matters have traditionally eluded the humanities because they are outside the social, the cultural, and the linguistic, as those domains have been defined. This interdisciplinary seminar will consider how to think with plants, animals, and inhuman material substances and systems by examining recent scholarship in animal studies, plant studies, anthropology, science and popular science, science studies, and material ecocriticism, as well as works of literature, film, and art. We will discuss how thought, representation, and signification are redefined when we think with creatures and material agencies that are not contained by the human. Questions regarding thought, consciousness, culture, scale, material agency, biosemiotics, extinction, multispecies ethnography, the ecodelic, the anthropocene, and more will arise.

Required Texts: Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: with A Theory of Meaning*; Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*; Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*; Barbara Gowdy, *The White Bone*; Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*; Ruth Ozeki, *All Over Creation*; Daniel Chamovitz *What A Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*; Opermann and Iovino, *Material Ecocriticism*; Jeffrey J. Cohen, *Prismatic Ecologies*; Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse, *Making the Geologic Now* (available in paper or online); as well as selected essays, poetry, films, web sites, and art. Selected articles and chapters will be available on Blackboard.

Course Requirements

Participation, two presentations: 15%

Weekly papers: 25%

Seminar paper (including presentation of seminar paper): 60%

You must complete all the required work in order to obtain credit for the course.

Eight short response papers (3-4 double-spaced typed, stapled pages) will be required. These will be due at the beginning of class each week and will be handed in again,

gathered together in a folder, at the final class period. These papers are not meant to be fully fleshed out arguments or analyses. Instead, these papers should analyze and interpret the texts for the week, compare them to other readings in the course, remark upon the most significant ideas, evaluate the merits and limitations of particular arguments and theoretical frameworks, and raise significant and provocative questions. The response papers will receive immediate comments but not grades; these papers will be graded in a portfolio manner, along with your presentation and participation, at the end of the course. (If the papers are C, D, or F papers, they will receive those grades, however.)

Two 15-minute presentations, which you will sign up for, will also be required. (A written version of your presentation can be handed in as that week's required paper.)

One 20-page seminar paper and an oral presentation of an abstract of that paper will be due the final class period. These papers should demonstrate an understanding and engagement with theoretical issues we have discussed in the course. The paper must include a one-page abstract.

Ph.D. students will also be required to attach a final page explaining how they would revise the paper for publication and listing five journals to which they would submit the paper. They should also list conferences and panel topics that would be a good fit for this paper. (Ideally, the paper will be presented at a conference and then be revised for publication.)

Mechanics: All papers must be "typed," stapled, and have a significant title. Please do NOT use plastic folders or paperclips for your paper—a staple is sufficient. All papers are due at the very beginning of the class. I never accept faxed papers or emailed papers. Be sure to keep an extra copy of your paper. Please Note: plagiarism is a serious offense and will be punished to the full extent.

Participation/Attendance

Your active, informed participation is crucial to the success of the course. Carefully prepare for each class period by doing the reading in a rigorous and inquisitive manner. Every day that you come to class you should have something valuable to say. I will grade on actual participation, rather than on mere attendance. However, if you miss class two or more times, I will lower your course grade and if you miss more than that you will fail the course.

Official UTA Policies:

Americans With Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of federal equal opportunity legislation; reference Public Law 92-112 - The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended. With the passage of federal legislation entitled *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*, pursuant to section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, there is renewed focus on providing this population with the same opportunities enjoyed by all citizens. As a faculty member, I am required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Student responsibility primarily rests with informing faculty of their need for accommodation and in providing authorized documentation through designated

administrative channels. Information regarding specific diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability. Also, you may visit the Office for Students with Disabilities in room 102 of University Hall or call them at (817) 272-3364.

Academic Integrity: It is the philosophy of The University of Texas at Arlington that academic dishonesty is a completely unacceptable mode of conduct and will not be tolerated in any form. All persons involved in academic dishonesty will be disciplined in accordance with University regulations and procedures. Discipline may include suspension or expulsion from the University.

"Scholastic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person, taking an examination for another person, any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts." (Regents' Rules and Regulations, Series 50101, Section 2.2) [NOTE FROM DR.

ALAIMO: PLAGIARISM IS INEXCUSABLE AT THE GRADUATE LEVEL; I WILL CERTAINLY PUNISH PLAGIARISM TO THE FULLEST EXTENT POSSIBLE.]

Support Services Available: The University of Texas at Arlington supports a variety of student success programs to help you connect with the University and achieve academic success. These programs include learning assistance, developmental education, advising and mentoring, admission and transition, and federally funded programs. Students requiring assistance academically, personally, or socially should contact the Office of Student Success Programs at 817-272-6107 for more information and appropriate referrals.

Minimal standards for classroom etiquette:

1. **TURN OFF** all pagers, beepers, cell phones and other electronic devices! You may not have these devices turned on while in class. You may not text message or read email or engage in any other electronic activities during class. The only exception is if you choose to access the course readings electronically.
2. Arrive to class **ON TIME**. It is distracting to both the professor and the students to have someone come in late. If you come in late, you will be marked absent.
3. Arrive to class **PREPARED** to discuss the texts and materials in an informed manner. You are expected to make a substantial contribution to every class..
4. Treat your classmates with **RESPECT**. Learn to disagree without being disagreeable. We will often discuss controversial, volatile topics, so everyone needs to learn how to disagree with someone's views, beliefs, or perspectives while maintaining a sense of civility.

Suggested reading before the class begins: "Productive Bafflement" and "Animal Cognition," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/cognition-animal/>

Thinking with Animals

Week One. January 22.

Jakob von Uexküll, *A Foray into the Worlds of Animals and Humans: with A Theory of Meaning*.

Vinciane Despret, "From Secret Agents to Interagency."

Thomas Nagel, "What is It Like to Be a Bat?"

Steven Best, "Minding the Animals: Ethology and the Obsolescence of Left Humanism."

http://www.inclusivedemocracy.org/journal/vol5/vol5_no2_best_minding_animals.htm

Week Two. January 29.

Donna Haraway, *When Species Meet*.

Traci Warkentin "Interspecies Etiquette: An Ethics of Paying Attention to Animals."

Week Three. February 5. Barbara Gowdy, *The White Bone*

Byrne, Bates, and Moss, "Elephant Cognition in Primate Perspective"

Catrin Nicol Keiper, "Do Elephants Have Souls?"

<http://www.thenewatlantis.com/publications/do-elephants-have-souls>

Week Four. February 12. Encountering Animal Minds and Lives

Selected Poetry by Les Murray and others.

Sy Montgomery, "Deep Intellect: Inside the Mind of an Octopus"

D. Graham Burnett, "A Mind in the Water: The Dolphin as our Beast of Burden."

Barbara Smuts, "Encounters with Animal Minds," *Journal of Consciousness Studies*

In class: short films by Jean Painlevé.

Thinking with Plants

Week Five. February 19.

Whitney Anne Trettien, "Plant, Animal, Book: Magnifying a Microhistory of Media Circuits."

Carla Hustak and Natsha Myers, "Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters"

Natania Meeker and Antónia Szabari, "From the Century of the Pods to the Century of the Plants: Plant Horror, Politics, and Vegetal Ontology."

Recommended: Watch *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, or check out the digital essay of

Plant - animal - book : www.palgrave

journals.com/pmed/journal/v3/n1/plantanimalbook

Week Six. February 26.

Michael Marder, *Plant Thinking: A Philosophy of Vegetal Life*

Daniel Chamovitz, *What A Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses*

Week Seven. March. 5.

Eduardo Kohn, *How Forests Think*

Richard Doyle, "Introduction" and "From Zero to One: Metaprogramming Noise with Special Reference to Plant Intelligence" from *Darwin's Pharmacy*.

Week Eight. March 12. Spring Break!

Week Nine. March 19. Productive Pause: Reconsidering the Theories. Assignment TBA.

No new reading; reflect back on previous readings. Email your own essay to your classmates by Wednesday March 18th; then email your response to their essays by Friday March 20th.

Week Ten. March 26.

Ruth Ozeki, *All Over Creation*

Molly Wallace, "Discomfort Food: Analogy, Biotechnology and Risk in Ruth Ozeki's *All Over Creation*."

Thinking with Materialities, Imagining Futures

Week Eleven. April 2. Material Ecocriticism

Material Ecocriticism, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Opperman, selected essays.

Alaimo, "Thinking as the Stuff of the World."

Week Twelve. April 9. Prismatic Ecologies: Thinking with Color

Prismatic Ecology, ed. Jeffrey J. Cohen, selected essays.

Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Elemental Relations."

Week Thirteen. April 16. "Covered in Oil": Petrocultures and the Anthropocene

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History."

Stephanie LeMenager, "The Aesthetics of Petroleum," from *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*.

Stacy Alaimo, "Your Shell on Acid: Material Immersion, Anthropocene Dissolves."

Week Fourteen. April 23. Thinking with Geology and Extinction

Making the Geologic Now, Elizabeth Ellsworth and Jamie Kruse. Paper or digital.

Claire Colebrook, "Framing the End of Species: Images without Bodies," introduction to *Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction*, Vol. 1, available online: <http://openhumanitiespress.org/essays-on-extinction-vol1.html>.
Cary Wolfe and Claire Colebrook, "Is the Anthropocene A Doomsday Device?" video dialogue, widely available online.

Week Fifteen. April 30. Film, video, multimedia, audio.
Being Caribou, <http://www.beingcaribou.com/beingcaribou/>
Sam Easterson videos, Nature holds my Camera: _____?
sLowLife ?<http://plantsinmotion.bio.indiana.edu/usb/essay.htm>;
<http://www.indiana.edu/~rcapub/v27n2/plants.shtml>;
<http://plantsinmotion.bio.indiana.edu/index.html>,
Episode of podcast "We're Alive: Zombie Story of Survival" or "FutureCoast"
<http://futurecoast.org>

Week Sixteen. May 7. Seminar Papers Due. Presentations.
Please do course evaluations on your own since they are now electronic. You should receive an email from UTA prompting you to do evaluations.

Presentation of Seminar Papers

Seminar Papers Due. Please hand in a copy of your paper, stapled, in an envelope with all your graded weekly papers. [Remember to include all commented-upon weekly papers as well, in a folder.]