ANST-GA2500.001: Animals and Media Studies
Summer Session 1

Tuesday and Thursday 2:00-4:55
Dr. Jordan Sheridan
Email: js10941@nyu.edu
Office: 285 Mercer Street, 8th Floor,
Office Hours: TBD

Course Description

This course examines how communications and media platforms such as journalism, social media, entertainment, advertisements, and public relations represent animals. We will pay close attention to how media forms represent animals through anthropocentric frameworks that position them in relation to humans. Throughout the course, we will engage the tension created by new visual and digital technologies that multiply the production, circulation, and consumption of animal images and stories: although they generate awareness of animal issues and provide communication platforms for advocacy groups, media depictions can also obscure the underlying conditions that facilitate violence against animals. We will draw on a range of disciplinary approaches such as history, critical theory, animal philosophy and ethics, ethology, and media and communications studies to ask questions such as: How does our exposure to animal images and stories on social media affect our relationships to animals, nature and the environment? What can the circulation of these narratives tell us about how human exceptionalism functions in our society to distance us from other animals? And, finally, what forms of systemic animal exploitation do new media forms invite us to consider, which ones do they conceal?

Required Texts

Susan Sontag. On Photography (1977)
Gabriela Cowperthwaite. Black Fish. (film 2013)
Vinciane Despret. What Would Animals Say if We Asks the Right Questions? (2016)
Labocine.com (30$/year or 3$/month)

All readings not from the required books will be available on NYU classes or online.

Assignments

Grading Criteria: This seminar is designed to develop close reading, critical thinking, and rigorous conceptual analysis across a range of interdisciplinary subjects and texts. Engaged, active participation alongside careful reading and analysis is required to work through assumptions, unpack prior knowledge, and build and awareness of the significance and implications of the course content. The main objective of this course is to offer you a conceptual framework for understanding how media and representational forms influence how we think about and engage with animal life. For all assignments the grading criteria seeks: comprehension, clarity in presentation and writing, and innovative, critical thinking. All written assignments must use current MLA formatting.

1. Participation (20%): Every class is mandatory. Any unexcused absences may lower your grade. Beyond simply attending class, I expect active, engaged, and regular participation in this seminar. Anecdotal,
disrespectful, off-topic, or distracting participation will negatively impact your grade. In-class, verbal work, such as responding to position papers and contributing to class discussions will comprise your participation grade.

2. Response Papers (30%): I will divide the class into three groups, group A, B, and C: these groups will take turns writing and presenting short (2 page) position papers two times throughout the course. Strictly limit your paper to two double-spaced pages. You are not required to, but if you do cite any external sources, include a works cited page. Two weeks before the paper is due, I will post two “prompts” on NYU Classes based on the readings/images/topics assigned for the day your paper is due. These “prompts” will be starting points for you to analyze and unpack how ideas are attached to animals on a discursive level. When your paper is due, you will bring a hard copy to class and each member in your group will present their position, thereby sparking brilliant class discussion. You will then hand your paper in to me at the end of class and I will return it the following week.

3. Paper abstract and annotated bibliography (15%): This assignment will form the basis of our workshop. One week before the workshop you will submit the following to NYU Classes: a) a two-page, double-spaced abstract that could serve as a submission to a conference or publication. It will include a proper title, briefly outline your proposed topic, theoretical frameworks, and texts, and explain how your paper contributes to the field of animal studies; b) an annotated bibliography that includes six external scholarly sources. Each entry should be two or three sentences: identify both the arguments the piece and significant concepts, explain why the text is useful for your paper.

4. Workshop (5%): This workshop is designed to help you write the final paper. You will submit your workshop materials one week before the workshop. I will share clean copies with the entire class so that everyone will read each other’s work in preparation for the workshop. On the day of the workshop, having read your colleagues’ materials, you will come prepared to present your proposal, as well as give and receive feedback both in small brainstorming sessions and in larger discussion groups.

5. Final Paper (30%): 12-15 page paper that builds on your proposed ideas in response to feedback from the workshop and my written feedback. This paper should provide the foundation for either a conference paper or a publication.

Policies

Academic Accommodation: Academic accommodations are available to any student with a chronic, psychological, visual, mobility, learning disability, or who is deaf or hard of hearing. Students should please register with the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at 212-998-4980. NYU Henry and Lucy Moses Center for Students with Disabilities 726 Broadway, 2nd Floor New York, NY 10003-6675 Voice/TTY Fax: 212-995-4114 Web site: http://www.nyu.edu/csd.

Academic Dishonesty: You are subject to CAS’s guidelines on plagiarism: cas.nyu.edu/page/ug.academicintegrity. Plagiarism results in failure in the class and referral to an academic dean. Plagiarism includes: copying sentences or fragments from any source without quotes or references; not citing every source used in your papers; citing internet information without proper citation; presenting someone else’s work as your own; or copying verbatim from any source.

Email Policy: Other than coming to my office hours, email is the best way to communicate with me. I will respond to emails within two days of receiving them and may take longer over the weekends or holidays.

Late Policy: Late assignments will be subtracted one grade-point/day (including weekends) for lateness
starting immediately after the due date/time. If for some reason you are unable to complete assignments on time, please reach out to me before the assignment is due. I am not a robot. I understand that life happens sometimes so please come talk to me and we may be able to work out alternative submission timelines (within reason of course).

Readings and Assignment Schedule

Week One
May 26: Introductions

5/28: Media, Communication, Representation...and Animals
• Anat Pick, “Why Not Look at Animals?” (107-125)
• Creed & Reesink, “Animals, Images, Anthropocentrism” (95-105)
• Debra Merskin, “Media Theories and the Crossroads of Critical Animal and Media Studies” (from Critical Animal and Media Studies) (11-25)

Week Two
6/2: Animals as/and Mediums
• Jody Berland, “Assembling the (Non)Human: The Animal as Medium.”

6/4: Animals as/and Mediums
• Debora Merskin, Seeing Species: Re-presentations of Animals in Media & Popular Culture.

Week Three
6/9: Animals and Photography
• Roland Barthes, Camera Lucidia.

6/11: Animals and Photography

Week Four
6/16: The Circulation of Animal Suffering
• Gregory J. Seigworth & Melissa Gregg, “An Inventory of Shimmers”
• Chris Jordan, “Midway: Message From the Gyre,” (chrisjordan.com)
• Jo-Anne McArthur, We Animals (weanimals.org)

6/18: Animals in/as Social Media
• Lauren Berlant, “Affect in the Present” (1-23), “Cruel Optimism” (23-51) (From Cruel Optimism)

1 Readings are subject to change throughout the course
• Sianne Ngai, “Cuteness and the Avant-Garde”

Week Five

6/23: Animals in Science
• Cheryl Logan, “Are Norway Rats Things?”

6/25: Animals in Science
• Max Ritvo, “Poem to My Litter”
• Heidi Ledford, “Cancer’s Cruel Chimeras”
• Gail Davies, “What is a Humanized Mouse?” (126-155)
• Gail Davies and Helen Scalway, Micespace.org

Week Six

6/30: Rogue Animals
• Gabriela Cowperthwaite. Black Fish. (Film 2013)

7/2: Workshop