

HSSC 588: Humanities Beyond the Human

Graduate Seminar, Spring 2015

Wed. 5-8pm, Claudia Cohen Hall 337

History and Sociology of Science, University of Pennsylvania

Instructor: Etienne Benson (ebenson@sas.upenn.edu)

Office hours: TBA

Course description

The humanities are once again in flux as scholars experiment with a variety of new techniques and conceptual frameworks. In recent years many of these experiments have involved turning away from long-standing questions of representation, language, epistemology, and human exceptionalism and toward questions of enactment, materiality, ontology, and the nonhuman.

In this seminar we will examine a variety of manifestations of this turn as they have emerged in history, anthropology, literary studies, and philosophy under names such as new materialism, multinaturalism, big/deep history, multispecies ethnography, and object-oriented ontology. We will try to situate these recent turns in longer intellectual genealogies, drawing especially on works in science studies and the history of science that seek to provide contingent, situated accounts of what exists and what we can know about it.

Objects of inquiry will include dogs, mushrooms, cyborgs, seeds, mosquitoes, bacteria, stones, jugs, pictures, hormone disruptors, and the cosmos.

Weekly discussion introductions

Each student will be responsible for introducing the readings for one or more weeks (depending on how many students enroll in the course) and to jointly lead the discussion with me. The introductions should last about 10-15 minutes and should be discussed with me in advance during my office hours. While some background information about the careers and works of the authors is useful, your introduction should focus on critical issues and questions raised by the texts and should provide several potential starting-points for the discussion. The goal is to provide a platform on which the rest of the session's conversation can build.

Papers

You will be expected write three shorter papers over the course of the semester:

- One on a *scholar*, due February 27
- One on a *concept*, due April 2
- One on an *object* or *objects*, due May 7

Each of these papers should be about 2,000 words long, including references and footnotes. Significantly longer papers, like significantly shorter papers, are discouraged: conciseness is a virtue. Aim for within $\pm 10\%$ of the target word count.

For the first two papers, you are encouraged to write about scholars and concepts we are explicitly discussing in class. For the last paper, you are expected to choose an unusual or unexpected object, or take an unusual approach to a usual one, and to draw on source material beyond of the course readings. *Paper topics must be submitted to me by email at least two weeks before each paper's due date.* In most cases, a short paragraph should suffice.

These papers may be relatively informal in tone but should nonetheless be properly and consistently referenced (either Chicago or MLA), should engage with the relevant scholarly literature, and should contain a clear thesis/argument. That is, rather than simply summarizing or surveying your subject, they should offer an explicit and non-trivial evaluation of it; they should try to convince readers of something. A “non-trivial claim” here means the kind of claim for which you need to provide evidence and argumentation in order to convince someone that it's valid. Try to write your papers as if for a well-read peer who is generally familiar with the issues you are investigating but may not know the details of the authors and texts you are discussing. Misrepresenting others' work as your own is, of course, unacceptable.

Presentation

A 10-minute presentation of your third paper topic is to be delivered in class on April 28. The presentation should explain what your object of focus is, why you chose it, what your argument is, and which sources, scholars, and concepts you are using. The goal is not to present the project in all its details but rather to convey the essence of the argument.

Because this presentation will take place a couple of weeks before the final version of the paper is due, you should think of it as an opportunity to elicit the assistance of your peers in resolving any still-open questions. At the same time, you should have a clear idea of what you're going to do; otherwise the exercise will be of little value for you or for us. You will be expected to take critiques and suggestions into account in your final written version and to participate actively in the discussion of others' proposals.

Grading Guide

- 15% Discussion introduction(s)
- 25% Paper #1
- 25% Paper #2
- 25% Paper #3
- 10% Paper #3 Presentation

Schedule of Readings

Week 1 (Jan. 21): Introduction: How Human(ist) Are the Humanities?

Week 2 (Jan. 28): Matter, Materials, Life

- Karen Barad, "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter," 2003
- Elizabeth Grosz, "Matter, Life, and Other Variations," 2011
- Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2010, Chs. 1-2
- Tim Ingold, "Toward an Ecology of Materials," 2012

Week 3 (Feb. 4): Actors, Networks

- Michel Callon, "Some Elements of a Sociology of Translation," 1986
- Jim Johnson [Bruno Latour], "Mixing Humans and Nonhumans Together," 1988
- Susan Leigh Star and James Griesemer, "Institutional Ecology, 'Translations' and Boundary Objects," 1989
- Timothy Mitchell, "Can the Mosquito Speak?" in *Rule of Experts*, 2002
- John Law and Annemarie Mol, "Veterinary Realities: What is Foot and Mouth Disease?" 2010

Week 4 (Feb. 11): Concern, Care, Love, Suffering

- Bruno Latour, "Why has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern," 2004
- Maria Puig de la Bellacasa, "Matters of Care in Technoscience: Assembling Neglected Things," 2010
- Donna Haraway, "Sharing Suffering," in *When Species Meet*, 2008
- Thom van Dooren, "Invasive Species in Penguin Worlds: An Ethical Taxonomy of Killing for Conservation," 2011

Week 5 (Feb. 18): Things, Objects, Cosmograms

- Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," 1950 [trans. 1971]
- Graham Harman, "Technology, Objects, and Things in Heidegger," 2009
- Bob Brown, "Thing Theory," 2001
- John Tresch, "Technological World-Pictures: Cosmic Things, Cosmograms," 2007
- Bruno Latour, "Can We Get Our Materialism Back, Please?" 2007

Week 6 (Feb. 25): Cyborgs, Cybernetics, Systems

- Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"
- Peter Galison, "The Ontology of the Enemy: Norbert Wiener and the Cybernetic Vision," 1994
- W.J.T. Mitchell, "The Work of Art in the Age of Biocybernetic Reproduction," 2003
- Ron Kline, "Where Are the Cyborgs in Cybernetics?" 2009
- Bernard Dionysius Geoghegan, "From Information Theory to French Theory," 2011

— Paper #1 due on Feb. 27 —

Week 7 (Mar. 4): Animism, Perspectivism, Multispecies Ethnography

- S. Eben Kirksey and Stefan Helmreich, "The Emergence of Multispecies Ethnography," 2010
- Philippe Descola, "Human Natures," 2009
- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, "Cosmological Deixis and Amerindian Perspectivism," 1998
- Eduardo Kohn, "How Dogs Dream: Amazonian Natures and the Politics of Transspecies Engagement," 2007
- Rane Willerslev, "Laughing at the Spirits in North Siberia: Is Animism Being Taken too Seriously?" 2012

— Spring Break: March 7-15 —

Week 8 (Mar. 18): The Past: Big, Deep, Neuro

- Daniel Lord Smail, "In the Grip of Sacred History," 2005
- David Christian, "The Return of Universal History," 2010
- Edmund Russell, "Evolutionary History: Prospectus for a New Field," 2003
- Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," 2009
- Nasser Zakariya, "Is History Still a Fraud?" 2013

Week 9 (Mar. 25): People and Other Animals

- Harriet Ritvo, "Border Trouble: Shifting the Line between People and Other Animals," 1995
- Jacques Derrida, "The Animal That Therefore I Am (More to Follow)," 2002
- Donna Haraway, "Encounters with Companion Species: Entangling Dogs, Baboons, Philosophers, and Biologists," 2006
- Cary Wolfe, "Human, All Too Human: 'Animal Studies' and the Humanities," 2009

Week 10 (Apr. 1): The Revenge of the Vegetable

- Marder, "For a Phylocentrism to Come," 2014
- Carla Hustak and Natasha Myers, "Involutionary Momentum: Affective Ecologies and the Sciences of Plant/Insect Encounters," 2012
- Matsutake Worlds Research Group, "A New Form of Collaboration in Cultural Anthropology: Matsutake Worlds," 2009
- Miller, "Lives of the Monster Plants: The Revenge of the Vegetable in the Age of Animal Studies," 2012

— Paper #2 due on Apr. 2 —

Week 11 (Apr. 8): Microbiopolitics

- Rabinow and Rose, "Biopower Today," 2006
- Helmreich, "Trees and Seas of Information," 2003

- Heather Paxson, "Post-Pasteurian Cultures: The Microbiopolitics of Raw-Milk Cheese in the United States," 2008
- Celia Lowe, "Viral Clouds: Becoming H5N1 in Indonesia," 2010

Week 12 (Apr. 15): No class – individual meetings

Week 13 (Apr. 22): Toxic Animacies, Queer Disruptions

- Nancy Langston, "Protecting Our Bodies from Hormone-Disrupting Chemicals: A Precautionary Tale," 2011
- Michelle Murphy, "Distributed Reproduction," 2012
- Mel Chen, "Toxic Animacies, Inanimate Affections," 2011
- Donna Haraway, "Awash in Urine: DES and Premarin® in Multispecies Response-Ability," 2012
- Malin Ah-King and Eva Hayward, "Toxic Sexes: Perverting Pollution and Queering Hormone Disruption," 2014

Week 14 (Apr. 29): Presentations

— *Paper #3 due: May 7* —