GSWS 320-4: Special Topics: “Man’s Best Friend?”: Feminisms Engaging with Nonhumans

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Lecture: Thursdays 13:30 – 17:20; HCC 1425

Course Description:
Feminists are increasingly examining how the power structures that produce unjust oppressions for women and other marginalized Others extend to the nonhuman world. This course explores how feminists have theorized, advocated for, and fostered relations with nonhumans such as animals, plants, organic and inorganic matter, and machines.

Informed by feminist ethics, science studies, and philosophy, we ask: How do understandings of animals relate to conceptualizations of sex and gender? Are there feminist obligations to animals, plants, bacteria, viruses, fungi, and protists? How does feminism inform and support animal and environmental advocacy? Can nonhumans teach us about ethics, care, and equality?

This course accommodates students with or without prior scientific or ecological knowledge about such topics as evolutionary biology; environmentalism and the anthropocene; cyborgs and artificial intelligence; animal research and ethics; bacteria, viruses and prions; stratigraphy and geology; homo-, trans-, and inter-sexuality in animals; and paleontology and paleoanthropology.

Recognizing the timely and controversial nature of these topics as well as the role of GSWS in transforming students into critical advocates for change, assignments encourage engagement in public dialogues on human/nonhuman relationships.

This course is a “paperless classroom” managed on Canvas and has zero textbook costs.

At the end of this course, students will be able to:
1. Critically analyze popular, scientific, and feminist constructions of nonhumans
2. Engage in important public debates regarding gender, sexuality, species difference, environment, and artificial intelligence
3. Reflect upon their own assumptions regarding sex, gender, and human/nonhuman difference vis-à-vis feminist perspectives

Educational Goals:
For more detailed information please see the GSWS website: http://www.sfu.ca/gsws/courses/Educational_Goals.html

Course Texts and Courseware:
All readings will be on Canvas

Prerequisite: 15 units
Course Evaluation and Assignments:

- 20% Participation and attendance
- 20% Opinion editorial (optional: written in pairs or alone) Write a ~1200 word opinion-editorial about a relevant contemporary issue from feminist perspectives learned in the course. Due week 3
- Project: 3 Parts; In Pairs
  1. 20% Non-human Short Essay
     Write a ~1500 word academic essay analyzing a nonhuman from feminist perspectives learned in the course. Due week 9
  2. 35% Nonhuman Feature Article
     Write and design a Feature Article for the publication *New Scientist* on the nonhuman and it’s relation to contemporary feminist concerns. Due week 13
  3. 3.5% Presentation
     Share insights from the essay and feature with classmates in week 13

WEEKLY SCHEDULE
Week 1 – Introduction: Feminist Approaches to Nonhumans
Week 2 – The Anthropocene
Week 3 – Environmentalism and Nonhuman Charisma
Week 4 – Companion Species and Feelings for Organisms
Week 5 – Queerness and Nonhumans
Week 6 – Animal Ethics
Week 7 – Planthropocene
Week 8 – Primatology and Nonhuman Persons
Week 9 – Paleoanthropology
Week 10 – Paleontology and Stratigraphy
Week 11 – Gut Feminism and the Microcosmos
Week 12 – Cyborg Feminism and Artificial Intelligence
Week 13 – In class presentations of Feature Articles