

University of Vermont
Sociology Department
Soc 253
Spring 2010
4:00-6:45pm

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Hours: Thurs 12:30-1:45pm
and by appointment

Sociology of Animals and Society

Course Description

Is the cuddly puppy who sits on your lap a monster of dependence created by forced domestication or did her ancestors choose domestication? Should cows be liberated from farms or should we continue to use them for meat, milk, and leather but care for them compassionately? Should animals have legal rights or can we do whatever we want with them because they have no consciousness of past and future? Are people who live with companion animals neurotic or are they perfectly well adjusted? Are humans superior to other species, as Western tradition maintains, or do we co-exist interdependently?

These are a few of the many questions that arise from the changing relationship between humans and animals, which began in the late twentieth century and extends into the twenty-first. Many factors account for challenges to the clear boundary between humans and animals characteristic of Western culture. They include the findings of archaeology about the early domestication of animals, of ethology (the study of animals, particularly in their natural environments), and of medicine about how animals can be beneficial to your health. Other factors which cause us to rethink the animal/human relationship include: the ecological crisis, which forces humans to realize that we, too, are mammals at risk from environmental degradation; the changing patterns of family and community, which deed companion animals greater relevance; the importance of service animals who aid people with disabilities, assist in the army and in law enforcement agencies; ecological and ethical arguments for vegetarianism; the growing lack of certainty (due to environmental threats brought on by human mismanagement of the earth's resources) that we are a species superior to others.

These and other historical, cultural, and social developments have provoked scholarly disciplines as diverse as sociology, philosophy, history,

literature, geography, psychology, and zoology to turn their attention to the subject of human/ animal relations. As an index of interest, besides a burgeoning number of books on animals and society, Harvard Law School has offered a course in animal rights, the American Sociological Association now has a subsection entitled Animals and Society (after a protracted struggle for acceptance), and several scholarly journals, such as *Society and Animals* and *Anthrozoös* have come into existence.

This rich, new area of scholarly investigation is the subject of our course. But we also come together as readers of the printed page. Reading might seem less than exciting to young women and men accustomed to the visual acquisition of knowledge--TV, movies, computers--over the verbal. Yet the gray blocks of words on white paper in our five texts hold as much life in them as a wiggly puppy. Together, we will work on releasing the boundless energy contained in a text. The key is to look deeply at the words that create the author's story. Our weekly written exercises and discussions will help you cultivate the ability to look deeply at the text.

During the semester we will see a number of films and have several guest speakers.

University of Vermont/Classroom Conduct (Developed by the Dean and Chairs of departments)

Students enrolled in Arts and Sciences are expected to follow the following guidelines for behavior in class:

1/Students are expected to attend and be prepared for all regularly scheduled classes.

2/Students are expected to arrive on time and stay in class until the class period ends. If a student knows in advance that she or he will need to leave early, the faculty member should be notified before the class period begins.

3/Students are expected to treat faculty and fellow students with respect. For example, students must not disrupt the class by ostentatiously not paying attention or by leaving and reentering the classroom during the class period. Actions which distract the class from the work at hand are not acceptable. *Thus it is of the utmost importance that cell phones are off; that students refrain from texting, emailing, looking at Facebook or engaging in any other activity, electronic or otherwise, that distracts from being fully present in class. No multitasking (studies show that the human brain cannot multitask—hence cell phones users in the street tend to run into*

poles!). It is expected that students will pay respectful attention to comments made by the lecturer and by fellow students.

Behavior that departs from these guidelines is not acceptable and may be cause for disciplinary action.

Course Requirements

Attendance You are expected to attend *all* classes. I will be taking attendance. If you miss more than one week of classes, your grade will be reduced. For example an A- would become a B+. For each additional week missed, the grade will continue to drop.

Class participation You are expected to contribute to class discussion by having read and thought about the week's readings. Some weeks the readings will be easier, which will give you time to work on your end of term paper. But in other weeks, the readings may be more difficult. I do not believe in forcing people to speak by putting a question to them but each of you should come prepared to offer a question or comment each week based upon the readings. Hence, in your oral questions or comments, I only expect evidence of your having thought deeply about the material; I do not expect polished responses.

Oral Presentations Each week, one or two of you will be responsible for leading the discussion about the chapters we will have read for that week. These are not joint presentations: each presenter will be asked to write a five-page response paper as the basis of her or his presentation.

The paper should include three questions for class consideration. Ideally the questions should focus on the author's use of language and how it shapes the subject matter, rather than bypassing the language and asking questions about the subject matter in general. You may have a question to which you don't have an answer. Such questions provide excellent opportunities for you to make discoveries together with your peers. We will do the first presentation together as a class so that you can become familiar with the approach.

In addition, I have put on reserve in the library a set of papers by former students which can give you a sense of how to look with mindful appreciation on how and why an author uses the words she does (see below for a detailed discussion of looking deeply at how an author writes).

Response papers Each week, you will be expected to write a one to two page response paper to the readings. I would like the paper *typed*. Pick a word that arouses an emotion in you. It may puzzle, delight, annoy, or even anger you. It may illuminate something for you. The response paper should begin from a specific word *embedded in a quote* that you set down at the top of the page.

First, note the publication date of the book that is found on the copyright page. The date will help you put the book in historical context. For instance, if the author uses the word "mankind," and he wrote in the 1700s or even in the 1950s, you would know that he did so unaware that the word really refers to men, not to men and women. Public consciousness of the gendered nature of language did not arise until the second wave of feminism in the late 1960s and '70s.

Second, create a word cluster of associations that *you* have over the meanings of the word. If you wish, you may go on to discuss the relevance of the word to your own life. This exercise tends to make visible to you why the word you chose attracted you to itself.

Third, look the word up in a *recent* dictionary (check the date on the copyright page), and write down the definition in your paper. Dictionary definitions are very informative because they offer a public consensus on the meaning of a word. *Also*, note down the word roots--Latin, Greek, Old English or French or German; clues to the meaning of a word can be found in its roots.

Fourth, you want to consider how the word comes to life *in the context of the author's quote* you have presented at the top of the page. How do the surrounding words enrich your word? How does the word you chose contribute to the author's discussion overall?

The one-page response papers are rehearsals for the presentation papers, and for the term paper (a description of mindful appreciations appears below). I will collect response papers each week and return them the next week.

Term paper For the term paper, you are expected to write a *ten to twelve-page* mindful appreciation of texts which discuss a subject raised in our course. Your texts can be transdisciplinary.

The final paper differs from the response paper and oral presentation paper in the following ways:

The word cluster is optional; it would go in a footnote or endnote *in small type*.

The dictionary definitions go in footnotes or endnotes in *small type*.
Any reaction comments also go in footnotes or endnotes in *small type*.

Essentially, the main body of the final paper begins with the *fourth step* discussed above. That is, your first author's quote goes at the top of the page (no thesis statement—this is an *inductive* paper) followed by a discussion of *the quote*. Your second author follows, etc. The conclusion is where you draw all four authors together and compare them *in detail* (some students find themselves comparing authors as they go along, which is fine, although some conclusion still is needed).

You might think of the final paper as four response papers, each taking around two and a quarter pages, with the conclusion taking around three pages. The paper structure might seem odd compared to the papers you've written in the past, but it has a purpose. The purpose is to make *discoveries* about the author's use of language, which becomes the discovery of the author's lens (see below on "mindful appreciation"). Using the discovery method you can find material for your conclusion. Review the paragraphs you've written, note in the margin the discovery you made in each. Then weave them all together in the conclusion.

Daisy Benson at Bailey Howe Library will help the class learn how to use databases for *scholarly* research effectively. A good place to begin your research is in the bibliographies found in our books and the subject headings found on the copyright page, which can help you do keyword and subject searches for material related to our books. Your text search should yield twelve sources for a provisional bibliography that you will hand in about one month after classes begin.

Four weeks after turning in the text search, I will expect you to select four sources, create an *annotated* bibliography (you can do this by skimming the texts you've chosen), and hand it in to me. I would like you to use *one* of the readings in the course for your paper. I expect you to work with *four* authors altogether. You may choose three books or articles from scholarly journals, or a chapter from an edited volume of scholarly essays, or a combination of all three.

Crucial to our exchange as teacher and student is your providing me with a *draft of your paper*. By commenting on your paper in a formative stage of it, I can help you with the enterprise of writing. For me, the transaction over your

writing is the most significant contribution I can make to what you get from the course.

For proper citations consult *The Chicago Manual of Style* (there is a style given specific to the social sciences). *By the time of the rough draft, I expect your grammar, punctuation, and citation method to be done properly.*

I have put on reserve in the library some examples of drafts and final papers so you can see the kind of mindful appreciation I am looking for in your work.

With the idea of a draft in mind, and of the delay time when ordering books or articles through interlibrary loan, I propose the following schedule: *Subject search:* Thurs, Feb 18; *Annotated bibliography:* Thurs, Mar 18; *Rough draft:* Thurs, Apr 15.

Grading policy The final grade will be awarded as follows: Response papers 20%; participation in class discussions 10%; presentations and five page paper 30%; 10-12 page term paper 40%.

Mindful Appreciation: Looking Deeply at a Text

Most of the knowledge we acquire is not direct: It is mediated or filtered, through the lens of a writer, filmmaker, artist, or acquaintance. The purpose of a mindful appreciation is to study the lens through which the seer sees. That is, all persons who transmit knowledge are storytellers--even if the story is a scientific, sociological or historical account--and the story they tell is shaped by the lens through which they look at the world. This lens does not provide a transparent reflection of what they see--like looking out a window (although window panes have their peculiarities also); rather, the lens of the seer is ground, just like an eye glass, by the person's situatedness with respect to such things as race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual preference, physical ability, age, historical, national, and cultural context as well as his/her professional training and irreducible individuality.

Besides the lens metaphor, we can consider a quilt. An anonymous 19th century North American woman has crafted a beautiful quilt; when you stand back from it (it is hanging on the wall in a museum) you see a complex, alluring

pattern of flowers. How did the woman achieve this optical illusion? To study her craft you have to come up close and study the individual bits of cloth that make up the flower. When we study a word, we are coming up close and looking at the individual elements that build the author's quilt of words.

A third way of thinking about a mindful appreciation is that the *knowledge* we receive via an author is filtered through her or his *consciousness*. Imagine that as you read a text you enter the very mind and body of the author and look out at the world through her or his eyes. Your job in doing a mindful appreciation is to experience the writer's consciousness at work. This best can be done not by revealing biographical details of the author's life (though this can be relevant) or by summarizing the author's discussion, as in a book report, or by writing a heated reaction paper (though a mindful appreciation can be written from the heart). (In the final paper any heated reactions can appear in small type in a *footnote*.) The approach that works most successfully is to study the *language the writer uses* in constructing a discussion, for the way we see what the writer is looking at is through the words she or he uses: indeed, the words *are* the lens or the pieces of cloth that make up the quilt.

Some strategies for presenting a mindful appreciation:

1. Select a word *in the context of a quote*. Place the sentence at the top of the page (in the final paper, begin your discussion of each of the four authors by placing the sentence first). Pick a word that arouses an emotion in you. It may puzzle, delight, annoy, or even anger you. It may illuminate something for you. It may be a word that you do not know the meaning of. Develop a word cluster of your own associations to the word, and record these in your paper (in the final paper the word cluster would go in a *footnote* in small type).

2. Next, look the word up in a recent dictionary (including the word roots), and record the dictionary definition in your paper (in the final paper the dictionary definition would go in a *footnote* in small type). You may want to take a look at the Oxford Dictionary of the English Language (OED) to get a sense of the changing meanings of a word over time.

3. Then look closely at the word *as the author uses it* to build her/his discussion. The best way to look deeply at the word is in the context of the quote where it appears. The context is crucial to its meaning; a word may have one set of connotations in one place in the text, and other connotations elsewhere. How does the word come to life *in the context of the quote* you have chosen? How do

the surrounding words enrich your word? How does your word and the sentence it in contribute to the author's discussion overall? The idea, as one former student put it, is to "go from small to large."

You may include other quotes from the text in your oral presentation and final papers, quotes that use the same word or another word. Additional quotes cannot stand on their own: you must interpret them paying the same close attention to the language used as you did in your original quote.

4. Any conceptual assertions you make (i.e. "our postmodern interest in animals is due in part to ontological insecurity") must be supported with examples--quotations--from the text.

5. In presentations, response papers, and the final paper make sure that whenever you use an abstract term, you *define* it. Words such as social constructionism, essentialism, anthropocentrism--to take a few examples--need defining, either as how the authors use them or what you mean by them in using such terms.

6. Ask questions of *how* and *why* the author constructs the discussion as s/he does (if your appreciation mostly answers the question of *what* did the author say, this is a book report not a mindful appreciation).

7. Are there any contradictions in the author's discussion that you notice, or complexities? (These fault lines may yield the most telling insights into the author's work.)

These are the kinds of approaches and questions you should use in all of the three writing exercises we do in the seminar--writing response papers, giving presentations, writing your paper for the presentation, and researching and writing your final paper.

Lastly, I will not accept final papers, even in draft form, with incorrect punctuation and grammar. Use your response and presentation papers to practice these writing skills. As mentioned, citations and footnotes in sociology papers follow *The Chicago Manual of Style* rules for the social sciences.

Remember, my office hours are *Thursday 12:30-1:45 pm* or by appointment. I am happy to help you with the business of writing and presenting in the mindful appreciation mode. Each of you should plan to see me at least once before turning in a draft of your paper. As retired reference specialist Martha Day, who

helped seminar students greatly in the past, used to say --"don't figure out a topic in your room; go to the library and interact with the books and data bases."

Additional Writing Help The Writing Center at UVM offers valuable help to students. If you wish for help with your writing you can make an appointment through the Writing Center website (www.uvm.edu/writingcenter). Don't wait until the day before your paper is due; some students seek help from The Writing Center on a weekly basis.

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*As I said earlier, I have put on reserve examples of response papers as well as drafts and final papers based on the drafts from a previous semester for you to get an idea of the kind of mindful appreciation I am looking for in your work.*

#### Required Readings

S. Birkerts, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in an Electronic Age* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1994) Xerox handout.

Stephen Budiansky, *The Covenant of the Wild: Why Animals Chose Domestication* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Adrian Franklin, *Animals and Modern Cultures: A Sociology of Human-Animal Relations in Modernity* (London: Sage, 1999).

Michael Allin, *Zarafa: A Giraffe's True Story, from Deep in Africa to the Heart of Paris* (New York: Dell, 1998).

Clinton R. Sanders, *Understanding Dogs: Living and Working with Canine Companions* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999).

James Serpell, *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

## Schedule of Lectures

*(Films and speakers TBA)*

- Jan 21 Thurs Intro  
Electronic Classroom/Bailey Howe Library 5:15-6:45pm
- 28 Thurs Birkerts; Budiansky Prefaces/Chap I-II
- Feb 4 Thurs Budiansky Chap III-V  
Film: *Elephant Men*
- 11 Thurs Budiansky Chap VI-VIII  
Film: *The Witness*
- 18 Thurs Franklin Chap 1-3 **TEXT SEARCH DUE**  
Film: *The Life and Times of Sarah Baartman*
- 25 Thurs Franklin Chap 4-6  
Film: *Arctic Tale*
- Mar 4 Thurs Franklin Chap 7-9  
Speaker: Lori Zimmer/PETA Lawyer
- 18 Thurs Serpell Prefaces/Part I-II **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE**  
Film: *Peaceable Kingdom*
- 25 Thurs Serpell Part III  
Speaker: Holly Godfrey/Katrina Rescue Worker
- Apr 1 Thurs Serpell Part IV  
Film: *Monty Roberts: The Real Horse Whisperer*
- 8 Thurs Sanders Intro/Chap 1-2  
Speaker: Anthropology Professor Robert Gordon
- 15 Thurs Sanders Chap 3-4 **ROUGH DRAFT DUE**  
Film: *Dogs and More Dogs*
- 22 Thurs Sanders Chap 5-6  
Speakers: Sam Puchar and Jamie Shaw, dog trainers
- 29 Thurs Allin Prologue/Chap 1-15/Epilogue  
Film: *The Return of Sarah Baartman*

*Final paper due:* Thurs, May 6 4:00pm 31 South Prospect Street

*There will be no exceptions*

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