

Animals and Landscapes Symposium

17-18 November 2022

Thursday 17 November

Arrival and refreshments 9.00 - 9.30

Welcome: **Claire Parkinson & Brett Mills**. Poetry reading by **Gordon Meade** 9.30 – 9.45

Session 1 9.45 – 11.15

Dogs Looking at Me (Me Looking at Dogs) **Elizabeth Burke**

The foxes and I: the search for reciprocity in a garden in Belfast **Christine Rogers**

Animals, landscapes, and Ted Hughes **Jessica de Waal**

Break 11.15 – 11.30

Session 2 11.130 – 1.00

The Death of Mother(s): The Disruption, Destruction and Renewal of Forest Life in Disney's Bambi (1942) **Peter Kramer**

The Animated Forest: Puppetry, landscape, animals and plants **Hing Tsang**

Blue Avian Landscapes, Morecambe Bay **Catherine Oliver**

Lunch 1.00 – 1.45

Session 3 1.45 – 3.15

How Climate Breakdown is Undermining Animal Life **Richard Twine**

In Every Bite of the Emperor - Ecological Grief **Youngsook Choi**

Arctic Rewilding, Mammoths & Other Eco-zombie **Tara Nicholson**

Break 3.15 – 3.30

Session 4 3.30 – 5.00

limen **Rosie Benn**

A Material Approach towards Liang Shaoji's 'Broken Landscape': Liminalities of Silkworms' Agency in Art Making **Feixuan Xu**

The Future Was Desert **Tasha Pick**

Poetry reading **Gordon Meade**

Friday 18 November

Arrival, networking, and refreshments at Hilton Hotel. 9.00 – 9.30
Poetry reading by **Gordon Meade**

Travel to the Walker Art Gallery 9.30 – 10.00

Sessions 5 & 6 10.00 – 1.00

Performance at the Walker Art Gallery **EvaMarie Lindahl**

Multispecies Storytelling Workshop at Walker Art Gallery **Everyone**

Return to Hilton Hotel

Lunch at Hilton Hotel 1.00 – 2.00

Poetry reading by **Gordon Meade** 2.00

Future directions meeting 2.00 – 3.00

ABSTRACTS

Rosie Benn

limen Film (13 mins)

Camera and editing by Rosie Benn

Music and sound editing by Kit Wilmans Fedagroe

How can solidarity with other living beings take place on a site where food is produced for humans? The film *limen* weaves a story of interspecies collaboration and also its limits. Film is used here as an artistic method to conversing ethics. Notes of materiality, and embodiment in situation and place are cultivated as receptors for multispecies signaling and knowledge production. It opens up current perspectives within biocyclic-vegan agriculture. The material of visits to farms are combined with an abstract compilation of theoretical inspirations. The work is part ethnographic fiction and part video poem. Images and the entities within them invite the viewer to question conventional visuals and narratives often used to depict the lives of animals living on sites where farming takes place. Through the poetics of moving image and sound there is a disruption to the concept of anthropocentric values around food production, soil animals and tricky stories of grapes hint at entangled relations. While the view of the camera lens is intuitive and curious, the human perspective of the film-maker is taken into consideration through the use of collage and diy aesthetic. The current socio-ecological crisis poses an opportunity to acknowledge our interdependencies with other animals and those part of the greater ecosystem. It is this avenue of interrelationality that the work engages in. Drawing on the work of 'Animals as Legal Beings' by Maneesha Deckha in which the classic autonomous legal subject is challenged and rather a vulnerable subject model (Mackenzie 2014) (Fineman 2008), based on Feminist Care Theory is put forward.

Liz Burke

Dogs Looking at Me (Me Looking at Dogs)

I have lived with dogs for many years, including my current whippet, Zelda. During this time, I have become fascinated with the relationship between people and their dogs, within a domestic setting. Donna Haraway calls this relationship a "*conjoined dance of face-to-face significant otherness*". (Haraway: 2003, 41). This definition provokes me to consider how I choose to enter into this dance with my dogs, and causes me to film my dogs as a strategy for questioning my role in these relationships.

When examining this footage, I sometimes notice my dogs staring intensely at me in a way which makes me yearn to know exactly what they are thinking. This desire is common to dog owners, and the temptation to anthropomorphize their gaze into something that a human can easily discern and translate into human terms, is compelling. However, Alice A. Kuzniar warns against this desire when she writes: "[w]hat was needed was not how to project into human words what the dog was thinking but how to preserve, respect, and meditate on its muteness and otherness". (Kuzniar: 2006, 2).

Furthermore, Kuzniar warns us that, "[t]he subject of dogs is presumed to be unfit for serious scholarly investigation" (Kuzniar: 2006, 1). However, in this paper, and accompanying video excerpts, I beg to differ. I will explore the canine gaze, and how I have chosen to film it, with reference to Haraway's concept of the canine subject, as the significant other. I will contemplate what may occur in the human/canine relationship when we gaze at a dog through a camera lens, and they choose to gaze back.

Youngsook Choi

In Every Bite of the Emperor - Ecological Grief

Whilst we are responding to the climate crisis with technical innovations and human-centred solutions for eco-friendly systems, there is a lack of critical reflection on the loss and trauma within nature and surrounding communities. We tend to move on as usual and progress with the technocratic illusion. The ongoing long-term project 'In Every Bite of the Emperor' proposes the loss as the critical ground for structural changes and reclaims grief as a socio-political autopsy and interrogation around the loss. Weaving through different geographical sites that share the pain of ecological trauma and broken communities caused by neo/colonial extraction, this presentation looks into ecological grief as a portal to recover a multi-species perspective, build inter-species solidarity and conspire different futures.

Jessica de Waal

Ted Hughes, landscape and animals.

In relation to my thesis regarding Ted Hughes's ecological narratives for children, in the first instance, this paper will discuss Hughes's childhood landscape. Hughes's native Yorkshire, in particular the Calder Valley, would remain imprinted upon his soul throughout his entire literary and personal life, even though he was only a temporary resident himself. A childhood move from rural Mytholmroyd to the mining town of Mexborough would leave a lasting impression, where diverse readings of Hughes's ideas of place and space become complex and composite. The second half of the paper will briefly discuss Hughes's highly contentious relationship towards animals, but will show how his attitude also evolved. During Hughes's childhood, he would encounter a fox within the aforementioned Yorkshire landscape. I will be applying Jacques Derrida's theory of the 'animal gaze' to show the importance of man's relationship to animals, no longer viewing animals as 'other', but instead with a non-hierarchical lens. The fox would become a totemic figure for Hughes, serving as a catalyst for his creation of powerful poetic collections about landscape and animals. Poetry from collections such as *What Is The Truth?: A Farmyard Fable for the Young* (1984), *Moortown Diary* (1979) and *Wolfwatching* (1982) will be discussed. Finally, the paper will more broadly focus on Hughes's ecological narratives for children alongside the contexts of the Ted Hughes archive at the British Library, and a small sample of Hughes's letters. The intention of discussing this material will showcase Hughes's longing to educate children of being environmentally active and aware to both landscape and animals in an intensifying era of extinction.

Peter Krämer

The Death of Mother(s): The Disruption, Destruction and Renewal of Forest Life in Disney's *Bambi* (1942)

In surveys of people's most traumatic childhood film experiences, *Bambi* (1942) often has a prominent place. The trauma is presumed to be caused by the scene in which Bambi's mother dies (off-screen). But there are other traumatic elements: the large-scale invasion of the forest by (off-screen) hunters and an all-encompassing forest fire accidentally caused by humans. Thus, there are at least two levels of devastating destruction and loss in *Bambi* – of the mother who has taken care of Bambi, and of the forest (in turn a powerful instantiation of 'Mother Nature') that is all he has ever seen. Yet, these traumatic developments are mapped onto the seasonal cycle of growth,

decline, death and rebirth, and the socio-biological processes of one generation giving rise to and making way for the next. The experience of traumatic destruction and loss is thus balanced by a deep sense of ecological persistence through eternal renewal.

Drawing on a range of primary sources (mainly to do with the film's origins, marketing, success and long-term impact), on the existing scholarly literature about Disney's *Bambi* and Felix Salten's 1923 German-language novel on which the film is based and on philosophical publications, I propose a paper on the depiction of forest life in the two versions of this story: what kind of animal community is being imagined? What is the relationship between individuals, species and the forest ecosystem as a whole? How might the story's fictional vision of nature relate to our real-world understanding of human and non-human life?

Tara Nicholson

Documenting: Arctic Rewilding, Mammoths & Other Eco-zombie

An 'eco-zombie' or future-Frankenstein monster, the mammoth has become the poster animal for de-extinction and the latest techno-craze poised to solve the Sixth Mass Extinction. Existing below an umbrella of seemingly sci-fi developments that extend to cryo-zoos and trophic rewilding, are projects including 'Frozen Ark,' Silicon Valley's 'Colossal' de-extinction laboratory and 'Pleistocene Park.' Here, a vast sphere of suspended animals and habitats represent the tip of a climate-crisis-iceberg deployed to combat collective grief and astute fear while atoning for the realization that Earth is experiencing the destruction of countless ecosystems.

My presentation is an artist talk of my PhD research (University of British Columbia, co-supervisors: Professor/Artist Samuel Roy-Bois & Critical Animal Studies Professor Jodey Castricano). Grounded in a desire to examine postanthropocentrism, I am documenting the work of scientists and traditional knowledge keepers within the Arctic. Through producing a large body of art, I hope to query the language often employed within this more-than-human place. My photo-documentary process also includes the production of 'fake' ceramic tusks to probe the problematic export of mammoth ivory disguised as elephant ivory. Increasing, climate warming is enabling access to permafrost and further eroding divisions between scientific discovery, illegal commerce, and the destruction of Arctic ecosystems.

Incorporating future-thinking-possibilities, my presentation would hope to open increased dialogue between art and science. Perhaps, viewing my work one could imagine walking on permafrost that is often littered with mammoth bones. Visiting this prehistoric archive, the experience of being within a melting ecosystem is uncanny, sublime and directly connected to the future of Earth.

Catherine Oliver

Blue Avian Landscapes, Morecambe Bay

Birds have long served as "signal species" of anthropogenic climate change and a human-altered earth. Broiler chickens indicate a reconfigured biosphere, Adelie penguins trace the impacts of melting ice caps, and plastic particles found in vultures feeding on landfill signal chemical pollution. But, in Morecambe Bay, avian life is thriving in a rich and diverse natural landscape, that patchworks 'salt marshes and sand dunes, woodlands and limestone grasslands [into] a haven for wildlife' (Morecambe Bay Partnership). Across Morecambe's beaches and town centre, local avian life isn't just celebrated, it is memorialised in statues, art, and poetry throughout the town. In this paper, I contend that Morecambe's changing more-than-human landscape is cultivated through relationships between migratory birds, other non-human marine life, human communities, ecological regeneration projects, and the touch of the tides between land and water.

Britain's "bonniest bay" has seen 'the lives of the people around the bay intertwined with the land, sea and sky whose fruits and creatures they depended on for existence' (Bingham 1990: 42). Two decades ago, Morecambe Bay was described by Lancaster University ecologist JB Whittaker as a "laboratory for climate change" (Whittaker, 2003) while more recently its hauntingly beautiful landscape has served as inspiration in literature and nature writing. Using a motif of juxtaposition, I tell stories of Morecambe Bay and its seabirds as part of an ever-changing more-than-human landscape, shaped by animal presences and absences as much as it is by human, geological, and tidal ones.

Natasha Pick

The Future Was Desert

The desert is an easy metaphor for extinction. This paper explores a film by Qatari-American artist, Sophia Al-Maria, entitled *The Future Was Desert* (2016) to examine indifference, or *flat affect*, as a paralysed response to overwhelming crisis. I map the connections between the desert's dry, flat landscape and the states of paralysis, denial or indifference that so often characterise our responses to climate crisis. Drawing on Lauren Berlant's (2014) theorisation of 'anaesthetic feeling', I explore the entanglements of affect and attachment in the landscapes we inhabit. In *The Future Was Desert*, the post-apocalypse is located in an arid dreamscape, '[w]here the earth is sour, and the green place is nothing but a single petrified tree.' A robotic voice narrates planetary extinction in a detached monotone. The desertification of the land maps onto an affective sucking dry. Yet beneath these dry surfaces lurk stickier feelings associated with fantasy and desire. These are metaphorically held below ground in vast oil reserves that threaten to bubble over. Al-Maria complicates the desert archetype through the situated geographies of the Gulf; the mega-shopping malls, the journeys made by Bedouin people displaced by oil companies, her grandmother's jokes, her own childhood memories of car trips across the desert. For Mark Fisher (2015), in order to 'reclaim political agency', we must accept 'our insertion *at the level of desire* in the remorseless meat-grinder of Capital'. I argue that Al-Maria's work offers a lens onto the (im)possibilities for political responsiveness in scenes of dread, denial and attachment.

Christine Rogers

The foxes and I: the search for reciprocity in a garden in Belfast

A recent arrival in Northern Ireland from Australasia, I felt my unbelonging powerfully. The landscape and wildlife were familiar but unfamiliar. Behind the house we moved into is a high bank where trees and bushes grow in a dense tangle. It extends behind several properties. A piece of wildness in a domestic place, it felt rich with mystery. I hung a wildlife camera on a tree to see what belonged there.

In beautiful 20 second black and white images, foxes slide through the long grass, coming and going, pausing, marking, squealing. In Australia, foxes are pests. Introduced by colonial fools, they are deadly for native animals. Here, they are the ones that belong. Like shift workers who never meet, the foxes take possession at night, and I during the day.

For Māori, humans, animals, and the land are part of the one continuum, connected by *whakapapa* (ancestry). There is no hierarchy of categories such as physical, cultural, biological (Roberts & Wills, 1998), and relationships with animals are marked by respect, reciprocity, and a sense of spiritual guardianship (Lyver & Moller, 2010). If foxes had been native to Aotearoa/New Zealand, what place would their magnificence found in the *whakapapa* of my *tūpuna* (ancestors)? Haraway (2008) calls for entanglement with the non-human, but how is this possible without destruction? In this paper

and short film, I explore how indigenous knowledges inform my practice as a filmmaker and what *utu* (reciprocity and balance) with my backyard foxes might look like.

Hing Tsang

The Animated Forest: Puppetry, landscape, animals and plants

This paper presents recent practical work: a collaboration between Peruvian puppeteer Jose Navarro and myself Hing Tsang as filmmaker. The work that animal puppets set within and against different landscapes, thus (re)-creating and (re)-wilding multi species interaction amongst plants and trees in an English setting.

The paper will examine how a notion of biophilia - as expounded previously by philosopher Suzanne Langer and more recently the bio-semiotician Jesper Hoffmeyer – might even be expanded across the species. If, as bio-semioticians believe, semeiotic and life itself are continuous, it follows that much of what defines the semeiotic lifeworld is broadly inclusive of biophilia. My recent practical research is a modest attempt to explore these speculative ideas.

Nevertheless, the paper will also espouse some caution in regard to some attempts to differentiate *umwelt* and *lebenswelt*. Both concepts of the human and non-human lifeworld might seem readily applicable to a notion of landscape. In particular, *lebenswelt*, which might be seen as a more broadly inclusive account of animal perception that includes awareness of other *umwelts* pertaining to non-human animals, need not be seen as a pinnacle of semiotic richness. Instead my recent collaborative research attempts to suggest semiotic richness within the *umwelts* of many other animates. A distinction between *umwelt* and *lebenswelt* need not be seen as anthropocentric.

Richard Twine

How Climate Breakdown is Undermining Animal Life

In this presentation I outline the broad range of ecological impacts associated with climate already leading to the loss of animal life on a colossal scale.

From phenological mismatch, to shifting ranges, disease spread, droughts and heatwaves I highlight research from conservation science that both documents impacts on individual animals and whole species.

The main focus is on nonhuman animals both 'wild' and 'domesticated', but examples extend to impacts experienced by human animals also. Furthermore, I reflect on the meaning of this suffering and these threats to ecology and species.

Feixuan Xu

A Material Approach towards Liang Shaoji's 'Broken Landscape': Liminalities of Silkworms' Agency in Art Making

'Broken Landscape' (2008-2016) is an installation work by Chinese artist Liang Shaoji, who worked with domestic silkworms for over 30 years to make art. 'Broken Landscape' contains a long rectangular yellowish-variegated piece of silk fabric made with a special technique of 'flat cocoon'; the lifespan of numerous silkworms from larvae to moths was spent and recorded on it, including dispersed faeces, urine and eggs. This paper examines this artwork as an object of inquiry instead of a mode of expression and unpacks the artist's tactic execution of the 'flat cocoon' technique and employment of silkworms' biological traits, a facet that has been largely neglected by many bio-art critics.

While silkworms were forced to secrete silk filaments on the flat surface to accumulate the thickness of 'Broken Landscape', they were also granted the freedom to crawl and excrete over this silk flake and stay on-site as active performers-cum-fabricators till the final stage of their metamorphosis. This paper hence argues that the generative processes of 'Broken Landscape' is an artistic ritual encompassing rich liminal states between life and object, intervention and spontaneity, dirt and purity, art and artefact etc. Under the prudent programming of the artist, this miniature silky landscape was composed by and composed of silkworms, whose agency sits between an organic art object and a producer of art materials. This paper's non-aesthetic approach towards this artwork centres on the virtuosity of bio-artist Liang's collaborative strategies with silkworms, and thus broadens trans-species moral concerns in art beyond life and well-being towards copyright or labour rights.