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Dierdra Reber
University of Kentucky

Erin Koch
University of Kentucky

Aylin Castro
University of Kentucky

Jed DeBruin
University of Kentucky

Kelly Ferguson
University of Kentucky

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Whose Ethics?: Thinking Multispecies Relationships Through the Pandemic Classroom

Authors

Dierdra Reber, Erin Koch, Aylin Castro, Jed DeBruin, Kelly Ferguson, and Jacob Saindon

Whose Ethics?: Thinking Multispecies Relationships Through the Pandemic Classroom

An Interview with Dierdra Reber and Erin Koch, *University of Kentucky*

Interviewers: Aylin Castro, Jed DeBruin, Kelly Ferguson, and Jacob Saindon, *University of Kentucky*

Dierdra Reber is Associate Professor of Hispanic Studies at the University of Kentucky. She is a critic of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Latin American, Latinx, and US culture in a diversity of media (literature, film, television, new media, political discourse, academic criticism, advertising) and literary genres (novel, short story, poetry, essay, journalism, blogs). Her first book, Coming to Our Senses: Affect and an Order of Things for Global Culture [Columbia University Press, 2016], explored what happens to cultural epistemology (knowledge-making) in the context of a widespread cultural turn toward affect. Her follow-up book in progress, Losing Our Minds, Racializing Our Feelings: The Persistence of Coloniality in the Age of Post-Truth Affect, explores the limits of affective inclusivity in a culture that cannot let go of its exclusionary foundational hierarchies. She is also working on a study of the way that Mexican director Alfonso Cuarón's filmography may be considered an epistemological inventory of post 1989 capitalist culture for the University of Illinois Press Contemporary Film Directors Series.

Erin Koch is Associate Professor of Anthropology at the University of Kentucky. Her primary interests are in ethnographic studies of science, technology, medicine, and the state. Her previous research investigated responses to tuberculosis [TB] in Georgia following the collapse of the Soviet Union, focusing on the implementation of a global WHO-based protocol for TB control. In her book based on this project, Free Market Tuberculosis: Managing Epidemics in post-Soviet Georgia [Vanderbilt University Press, 2013], she examined cultural, (micro)biological, and political aspects of TB control in Georgia, and how contemporary global health standards for TB control multiply and reproduce the very disease they are designed to combat. The book received the 2011 annual Norman L. and Roselea J. Goldberg Prize for the best project in the area of medicine (Vanderbilt University Press) and the 2014 Davis Center Book Prize in Political and Social Studies for an outstanding monograph on Russia, Eurasia, or Eastern Europe in anthropology, political science, sociology or geography (awarded by ASEES (Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies)).

Jed DeBruin (JD): [...] So our first question here, to sort of get us in the framework, we were wondering: why did you choose the four scholars that you did to participate in the Animals seminar and sort of what was the process for selecting who you wanted to participate?

Dierdra Reber (DR): Do you mean the four scholars that we invited?

JD: Yes.

DR: Okay. Erin?

Erin Koch (EK): I want to start with the obvious caveat of how long ago this was, and how much we've been through. I'm so sorry. Actually, I wasn't involved - I wasn't originally supposed to be part of the seminar. One of my colleagues in Anthropology left the university and then there was a hole, I guess, and Tony Stallins and I have been in sort of long-ish-term communication about human microbe stuff. So, he thought I might be interested in stepping in. So, I'm going to maybe defer that - I mean I picked one scholar and I'm happy to talk about that. But I don't know, Dierdra, was there...?

DR: Yeah.

EK: I missed a lot of the earlier conversations and everything about the focus.

DR: I mean I think, as far as I remember, we just all talked about it together and sort of like each person ran their idea by everybody else. But we didn't conceive of it as a collective activity per se. It was like everybody kind of brought an idea and vetted it with the group, but it was still kind of like each person had their own invitee. So, hopefully, Doug and Tony would be able to speak to theirs and then Erin and I can talk about why we chose the people we chose. Does that work for you guys?

JD: *Yeah for sure.*

DR: And sorry, I'm from Boston, and so I say 'guys' for everybody, but it's not meant to be gendered. It's just that I'm old.

JD: *You're good. Yeah, so would you, I guess, would you both like to kind of tell us like why you chose who you chose?*

EK: Would you like to start, Dierdra?

DR: Go ahead.

EK: Okay, so I chose the cultural anthropologist Radhika Govindrajan, who is at the University of Washington in Seattle. And Radhika has done really interesting work in India around human-animal relationships and entanglements, and she uses this theme 'entanglements' a lot in her book that we read for the class, *Animal Intimacies*. And so, one of the reasons why I selected her, actually, is because in anthropology we've been doing a lot of work around anti-racist decolonizing efforts, including in terms of the speakers that we bring in. So, I really wanted to make sure that I brought in someone who was not a white person, to be perfectly honest, and to sort of promote the contributions of this scholar to the field of animal studies and anthropological perspectives in particular.

But I think more specifically related to her work, her book focuses a lot on different forms of relatedness between animals and humans in a particular region of northeastern India, and how those tie into national and regional politics, gender identities, you know, notions about

matters of care, and I really like the way that she argues for decentering human points of view as kind of the center of the universe, and contributes to [...] larger debates, I think, in scholarship but also, increasingly, in general about matters of care and what kinds of relatedness and entangled caring relationships matter. So, a lot of those reasons are just: I liked how she approaches relatedness as opposed to kinship; I liked how she addresses very messy entanglements between people and place and animals. And yeah, those were some of the reasons. I also, honestly, I wanted to read her book, I wanted to meet her. And she turned out to be super cool, so it worked out well.

JD: *Great.*

DR: Yeah, as I was listening to you - well, first I was remembering her awesome talk - but I think we, all of us, wrote intros for the people that we invited, and so I was just thinking I'll dig up the intro that I wrote for the talk for Cary Wolfe, in case any of that is interesting for you all to put in there. And I think Tony would be the only person that wouldn't have worked up something like that, because his scholar - the pandemic hit and his speaker could not come, which was always a sadness for our seminar.

But I invited Cary Wolfe who's in English at Rice, and he's also the director, I think, the founding director of the Center for Critical and Cultural Theory. And I invited him because back when I was a grad student - I'm sort of mixing because I know this is a later question, so I guess I'll kind of wrap them together. When I was a grad student working on my thesis, which was about affect, I realized that the question of post-anthropocentrism and post-humanism was kind of wrapped up in that. And that the question of the Other was turning more on questions of emotion, at least from what I was seeing and what I was trying to theorize for myself. You have to remember this is back in the very early 2000s and it wasn't really on the map yet. And I started to see many post-structuralist or feminist theorists like [Jacques] Derrida or like Donna Haraway begin to write, to shift their focus away from writing about and being concerned about the Other within a human playing field, and instead to begin to talk about and think about the animal in that position of like radical alterity and otherness, and that questions of ethics became tested and contested along those lines. As not divorced from the question of how humans treat each other but almost as like a more... an even more powerful test of our capacity for empathy. And at that point in time Cary was really the only person in the humanities that was really taking this on, like, front and center. And his dissertation and his first book, which I didn't know very well, revolved - they kind of matched my intellectual progression too, from thinking about money and capitalism and how the structures played out mostly within, sort of, intrahuman affairs and then transposing that onto the animal world as well. And he had one monograph and one edited volume: *Zoontologies: The Question of the Animal*, and *Animal Rites: American Culture, the Discourse of Species, and Posthumanist Theory*, both of which came out in 2003. And so just from that point forward, he was front and center on my radar in terms of writing about, theorizing about, from the perspective of the humanities, what the animal meant, again in terms of cultural politics, ethics and the obligation and relationship to the Other. Also, in terms of care, as Erin said, many of these same topics.

JD: *Great. Yeah, so I think that was a good kind of buildup, starting to get our minds wrapped around where your minds were at getting people together for this. So, another question to sort of keep with the origins of this particular seminar: why choose animals as the central theme? What was the impetus or the catalyst, especially in that moment in time?*

DR: I guess that would fall to me, as one of the original members. [...] How did it evolve? I guess it evolved, originally, in conversation with a faculty member who wound up not being able to do this, with Leon Sachs in French. He mentioned to me at one point in passing that he was interested in this, and I said “Oh, this is something that is totally up my alley too, I wonder who else we could get involved” and from there, it was just kind of reaching out to other people and seeing, you know, what their work was and how it would all fit together. So, it was more of just kind of an interpersonal, word-of-mouth type of movement. And we were lucky that Erin said yes.

EK: I was super happy to get this invitation. Yeah, I just wanted to tack on to that and, you know, I wasn't part of the initial conversations, but I will say, I think one of the things that compelled me, when Tony first reached out to me, was sort of the combined social science-humanities approach. And I know that sort of interdisciplinary and, you know, trying to kind of break down binaries and false boundaries between those kinds of approaches - it just seemed like a really great opportunity, so I was really compelled by the opportunity for those kinds of, what I was hoping would be and what turned out to be, those kinds of conversations, where people were not only not hesitant about staying inside of their disciplinary boxes or things like that, but in fact, moving outside of them and trying to sort of rethink some of the bigger issues that Dierdra and I have just mentioned from different approaches. So that was one of the things that sounded so cool. I'm from California so you'll hear 'cool' and 'like' and, I think I've gotten 'dude' out of my vernacular but...

JD: *As geographers we appreciate that linguistic diversity.*

EK: Okay.

JD: *Yeah thanks. Well, I'm going to turn it to Aylin here for our next couple of questions.*

Aylin Castro (AC): *Well Erin I think your response kind of goes into our next question. So, what [...] methodological, departmental, or theoretical disagreements or convergences did you guys experience in co-teaching the seminar? Was there also anything that was fun or productive? You know, you all come from different disciplines, so how was that approached?*

EK: Do you want to take a stab at that first, or...? [...] I'll take a stab at that first. So, I think – I read these questions in advance, and I struggled with this one, because I don't remember us having any real disagreements. We had a blast. I loved this class. It was so much fun to you know, be able to - well, especially you know before mid-March - be in a room with people who were interested in similar issues but looked at them from such different vantage points in terms

of, like you said, methodology, theoretical imperatives, that sort of thing. So, I think that there were convergences in terms of, you know, some of us might be more accustomed to doing firsthand research with people in present moments and animals or, in my case, microbes and what have you. Other people might be more accustomed to doing literary analyses or film studies and things like that, right. But I felt like there was this kind of convergence around agreeing, almost without having to articulate it, that there was a lot at stake in addressing some of the issues that we wanted to address, right? The political debates in theory and sort of moving into and beyond post-structuralism. If we're taking the messiness of these entanglements seriously, what does that look like from the perspective of someone who does field work like Radhika, right, with animals as some of her interlocutors, versus some of the other kinds of approaches that we saw? So, I don't know, Dierdra, maybe you remember differently, but I don't remember us having any real disagreements, I think we all just kind of enjoyed the seminar.

DR: It was like a spa day, I think, for us every week. The dynamic and the conversation just came really easily. It just felt really fluid and, unlike other team teaching that I've done, where [...] everybody's been present and contributing, but it has stayed within - you know, each faculty members in charge of a given day. I sort of lost track of who was - we all held it together so much that it felt much more continuous and seamless. And our grads also had days where they were in charge of teaching, and that was really nice too.

I guess in terms of differences, it was interesting to compare animals represented, or on a more discursive plane of representation, you know: metaphor, analogy versus an ontological, even physiological, consideration of animals as beings. And then also, whether this was kind of an intellectual or esoteric question, or whether - like, how much of this we lived in our daily lives. And during the pandemic, it was interesting how many animals populated our screens. And that was kind [...] like right in the very first moment when it hit, and so we didn't have our Zoom protocol and etiquette worked out. Everybody was just kind of wherever they were, like, I don't know, on their sofa, outside with their pets and/or kids, in my case. And so that was fun too, I remember - you could ask, when you talk to Tony, you could ask - am I remembering right, Erin? I think he fosters wounded snakes and things like that. [...] He's really intense about his commitment to the animal world. And even talking about things like, who among us were vegetarian or vegan and why. And it was an interesting cultural moment as well, when there was discussion of, like, red meat and hunting as sort of part of a pro-Trump political stance that kind of came into the mix of our conversations too. Yeah, I wouldn't say we had - like we had sort of methodological and disciplinary differences of perspective, but no real conflict or debate, not about animals at least.

I remember having one - it was interesting that the pathway, if you think of the theoretical pathway to animals as having been routed from people into animals, the more we talked about animals and affect, the more we realized that all of this was going to bring us back to humans. And at that point in time, you know, the question of how to handle the country's and the world's really deep political divides came up. And how much empathy are we, should we, or might we extend to everybody in an attempt to try to heal those divisions. I remember that being

a particularly heated conversation. But it just went to show how deeply - you know, on the face of it, when you see the term 'animals,' you wouldn't think that it necessarily would be something that would touch so deeply in the cultural politics of our lives, but it did.

AC: *Thank you for that. So, going back to something that was mentioned earlier, your seminar was disrupted by COVID-19. How have you guys been thinking about animals or animal studies now since the pandemic?*

EK: Do you want to take this one first, Dierdra?

DR: I'm still thinking about it, do you have a ready answer?

EK: I'm thinking about it as well. You know, I don't necessarily define myself as an animal studies person as much as sort of a feminist science and technology studies, anthropology, multispecies person. That includes plants and organisms and things like that, so I don't have an exact answer, but one of the things that I have found myself thinking about since the pandemic and including, you know, at one point, especially, I would say, from like April through all the rest of 2020, I developed a pretty unhealthy relationship with MSNBC. It got bad. And in that you know mass media news arena, as well as other arenas, my radar kept picking up on the ways that the virus was being anthropomorphized, specifically around rhetorics of care, and you know sort of people who are trying to encourage people to basically, and I say this in scare quotes critically, but basically be "good public health citizens." You know: masking, social distancing, getting vaccinated when that became possible, so on and so forth. This constant sentence that I kept hearing which was, you know, "the virus doesn't care"- the virus doesn't care if you do this or do that, it doesn't care what your religious background is, it doesn't care... and so that has kind of started me thinking about different ways of thinking and talking about care. Not only in terms of practices, right, taking care of patients, families, communities, animals, but also how notions of care in terms of what does and doesn't matter from an anthropomorphized perspective if that makes sense. I'm still working this out, but that's one thing that I've been sort of noticing myself, thinking about. I haven't gone anywhere with it, but I think that's one way in which my own kind of theoretical and methodological praxis has been affected by the pandemic. Sorry, that was ramble-y.

DR: No! Well, I should say, also, that animals are like - my work doesn't foreground animals per se. But they're always something that I pay attention to. And I think the pandemic, more than anything, really drove home that we were not finished working out questions of inequality and empathy between humans. And I also noted that in that time of deep introspection and solitude that people - there was a huge uptick in people talking about their pets, posting pictures and stories about their pets. There was this - I can't remember the name of it, the name of the video - but there was this kind of radical Chilean singer that made a sort of social protest video - there have been social protests in Chile over the past couple of years - and it just had cats everywhere. And that was a huge source of comfort, that relationship. Almost that that was where a feeling of safety and emotional plenitude could be counted upon to draw energy to deal with the very real and deep social and justices that were just rocking our culture in a way that I never thought I

would see, not because I didn't hope it would happen - I certainly didn't hope it would happen the way that it did. But, you know, I had just grown up so deeply cynical that we would ever witness anything on this scale. So, I think there's some... I haven't been working on animals per se, but there are definitely some representations of animals that have really strongly resonated with me that I've come across during this time.

One of them is in the first episode of Nikole Hannah-Jones' *1619* [podcast]. She [...] includes interviews from the Public Works project of somebody who had been enslaved by Thomas Jefferson. And he talks about slavery as, like, "you're nothing but a dog." And [...] the way that he speaks, his syntax, allows you to conclude that this is an ongoing condition for him. In what way is unclear, because he acknowledges that it has ended, and that if he were forced back into enslavement that he would choose to end his own life first, rather than be forced to go back to being what he defines as being nothing but a dog. But then, on the other hand, some of his turns of phrase you can interpret to mean that the situation has not ended. And so I've thought about that phrase and his voice has just resonated with me so strongly over the past year and a half as I've thought about the pandemic, you know, which pandemic are we talking about? I remember seeing [...] an Instagram image of a Florida church sign, the kind where you can take the letters off and rearrange them. And it said something like, "our longest running virus was white supremacy - 500 years long." And the pandemic to me really shifted in terms of its meaning and became that more so than coronavirus, it was almost like coronavirus gave us this opening in which, in our time of solitude, we were able really to begin to have a consciousness about this that, as I say, I've never seen before.

EK: I think just, Dierdra, your response also kind of made me think about how, as a medical anthropologist [...] I've studied infectious diseases, I studied tuberculosis and things like that, and I remember during the 2014 to, what, 2016 Ebola outbreak in western Africa, there was an issue of, I believe, *Newsweek* or *Time Magazine* that had [...] a very large photograph of a chimpanzee's face. And it was used to represent, in no uncertain terms, not veiled thinly or at all, the backwardness and so-called primitiveness, right, of Africa and African people, including very much - and this goes into something that Radhika talked about in her book a little bit - very much in terms of their relationships with people, like, human-animal relationships became an avenue for further cementing very harmful stereotypes and tropes along the lines of what Dierdra was just talking about, right, like, slaves are like dogs, they're less than human. [...] So they talked about how one of the explanations for the Ebola outbreak was the consumption of certain kinds of meat in those areas of Africa and they're buying and selling in outdoor markets. So very much like the geographies of blame emerged in relationship, at least early on, to the outdoor markets in China that were targeted, right, racialized and targeted. And this was happening in relation to the Ebola outbreak and that issue of that magazine sparked a really big pushback, including several - I can't remember the blog right now, but there were several blog posts and mass media articles about how racist this trope [is], this narrative about how, looking at the ways in which humans and animals relate to one another, can both explain otherness and cultural differences in really problematic ways, very reductionist problematic ways. And a lot of them responded, one of them in particular, responded with photographs from a [...] white male hunter somewhere in the Midwest of the United States, like, hanging the deer that they had just hunted and skinning it and did a sort of parallel of images to most of the stories and said, you know, why

is this person hunting not seen as a representation of all of the assumptions that we make about rural African communities that eat bushmeat, for example. But yet we are blaming this Ebola epidemic on the buying and selling of bushmeat in western Africa that might be getting into the United States. So just kind of all of these things about fear, insecurity and epidemics, pandemics, right, that are explained, usually in really worrisome, harmful ways, by looking at human, animal relationships. That's something that I've thought about before, I've talked about it before, but it's just kind of brought that back to the surface again.

AC: *Thank you for your answers. I think Kelly's going to ask you guys the next question.*

Kelly Ferguson (KF): *Yeah those are super interesting, so thank you. My next question kind of touches a little bit - Dierdra was kind of getting into it at the start: how do you tie animal studies in with your own research? How did you come to study animals and how have your research methods been influenced by the perspectives of animal studies?*

DR: So, in the same way that I talked about earlier, that I started to see theorists starting to work with animals, the same thing happened - I'm a Latin Americanist, right, like 20th-21st century, more than anything else. I spent quite a bit of time in my early years as an assistant professor studying revolution, mid-century, protest New Latin American cinema, which is sort of the lesser-known counterpart of the literary boom which most people know, like [Gabriel] García Márquez and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. But there's a really radical activist counterpart in film and I started reading dependency theory and one of the most emblematic, iconic figures in books of that is Eduardo Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America* that was published in 1971. And still, you know, even, for example, when Hugo Chávez was in power in Venezuela, he gave to Barack Obama a copy of this as a presidential gift. Obama said that he didn't read Spanish - this is something that's been translated into everything in the world, that's a different commentary - Galeano went from, you know, interpreting Latin American economic, subalternity, I guess, on a sort of geopolitical scale as the effect of 500 years of colonialism, white supremacy - are they interchangeable is a huge question as terms, I mean, and phenomena. And so Galeano went from being this really sort of hard-hitting political figure to also transitioning to writing anecdotes about animals.

And his anecdotes about animals were also very politically charged but it was an interesting format that I'm still thinking about. And one of his anecdotes is about the way that birds fly in formation, and that they're neither *superpatos* nor *subpatos*, like, you're not high or low, you're all helping each other. That sometimes birds fly in the vanguard until they get tired and then they circle to the back, and that they all help each other in this way. And this anecdote of his was cited almost verbatim in a Mexican film called "Duck Season" ("Temporada de patos"), which has sort of been called like a *Breakfast Club*, Mexican-style, of this unlikely group of people that come together and spend a day together. And in the course of that they work through all of their trappings and prejudices, and even violences, that they take from the capitalist world, like: there's a pair of 13-year-olds that are playing these uber-violent video games until there's a blackout, and one of them is George W. Bush and the other one has bin

Laden, this is 2004 so it's old. And another, the oldest of them, has worked in an animal shelter. He wanted to be a veterinarian and he was so thrilled to get this job at an animal shelter, but as soon as he did, he was given to understand that his job was not going to be saving dogs, it was for dogs specifically, but rather killing them. And this is the film's metaphor for capitalism itself. It's like: it doesn't save, it kills. And by the end of the film all four characters stare at this duck painting, which is a constant motif throughout the film, and you see them have kind of like a political awakening, if you can call it that, or resistance to being deadened slowly by this culture. And seeking out... at the very end, you see one of them with the painting strapped to his motorcycle, sort of driving off into an unknown, much like the birds in the vanguard that led the way for the others to follow. And so, this is just one example, sort of like a quick close reading of a film that uses animals to signify much deeper political critique, and this is, I've found, really frequent in Latin American cultural production, especially films from the 1960s forward. So, I have just kind of been collecting them and trying to see where that will take me in the future.

In terms of how that's changed my approach, I think that noticing the way that animals were incorporated into these narratives as a metaphor, [...] there's a lyricism often, like, I think, for example - one more quick example, I won't describe it in the same level of depth, but: "The Hour of the Furnaces" ("La hora de los hornos"), is a classic revolutionary film from 1960s Argentina. And one of the most famous and difficult-to-watch sequences is in a slaughterhouse, which is because there's an emphasis on extractivism, and meat has long been one of Argentina's major exports. And you see these men smashing to death cows and sheep and it's really, really, really hard to watch. But against that you hear this beautiful aria, and you see all of these images of wealthy Argentines sort of enjoying in commercialized images, like publicity for a car, or for a diamond ring, or a type of beverage, or whatever luxury object it is. And so you have this sort of paired contrapuntal sequence, in which you see that what underwrites all of this wealth and luxury is this animal sacrifice that represents - it's meant not only like the literal animal sacrifice but it's meant to represent the disproportionately poor elements of Argentina that are often ignored because it's considered a "European" Latin American country. And so that kind of lyricism and poetry of these moments when animals are used as a metaphor, I think it opened, again going back to empathy, it opened up my understanding of empathy as a factor in the representation of political protest in a way that it hadn't before.

EK: Can you repeat the question? I was just trying to process everything that Dierdra was just describing... how animal studies has influenced our own work or...?

KF: *Yeah [...] it's a little bit of a long question, I will copy and paste it to you real quick. I just put it there so you don't have to look anything up, but: how do you tie animal studies in with your own research, how did you come to study animals, and how have your research methods been influenced by the perspective of animals?*

EK: Okay. So, like I said earlier, I don't consider myself to be an animal studies person. And one of the reasons for that is just the nature of the projects that I've undertaken. So, as I mentioned, post-Soviet responses to tuberculosis, war and displacement and health, things like that. But in

doing my dissertation, and ultimately first book project, about tuberculosis in post- Soviet Georgia, my approach was really, really heavily influenced by feminist science and technology studies: Donna Haraway, Bruno Latour - with a tangential conversation another time about my critiques of Latourian approaches, at least some of them - other people in anthropology: Rayna Rapp, Emily Martin, people who sort of took entities and objects that are vibrant and part of our daily lives, even if we don't necessarily always treat them as such, and looking at their role in terms of how authoritative knowledge and expertise, ideas about those things, are produced in scientific setting. So, I did a lot of participant observation sitting around the national tuberculosis reference lab in Georgia's capital city, Tbilisi, watching people process sputum samples, and observing how the sputum samples from prisoners during a big screening of all the prisoners in the country were treated and talked about differently than so-called civilian populations, to use the terminology that the people I worked with used. And so I think just taking inspiration from feminist science and technology studies and then anthropological entry points into that field in the '90s and early '00s, and since.

How does looking at the relationships between those things, and how they acquire meaning and significance in people's lives and produce effects, right, this is about these efficacious processes that happen in these spaces? How does that ask us to think different questions about agency and how we understand agency, and I think in relation to the seminar a lot of the conversations that we had you know, even though I'm not an animal studies person, I don't define myself that, no offense, but sort of narrowly. I think a lot of the conversations that we had, a lot of the text that we read, many of which were completely new to me, which I also loved - we had a lot of conversations, not only about empathy as Dierdra was saying, but also about agency, colonial legacies of, you know, othering and ideas about the native other that are sort of represented and sort of transposed through the perspectives of animals or other non-human agents. Things like that taken seriously, the agency of non-human co-conspirators in our lives; I don't like using 'actants' and some of that terminology, right, that we develop relationships with whether they are in the foreground of our consciousness and what we do on a daily basis or not. Yeah, I think it poses really interesting questions about kind of truth and responsibility, and how we decide who has agentive spaces and positions in society and who doesn't, and what are we missing when we ask those questions in particular ways. So, it's a very up in the air theoretical response, but I think animal studies hasn't really influenced me in those ways, but the seminar, it just sort of brought in different perspectives as someone who just really likes microbes, you know, benevolent or malevolent ones and there you go anthropomorphizing them, me. Thinking about those things in slightly different ways.

KF: *Well, thank you. Those were both really cool, very, very cool answers, and it was nice to kind of learn about both of you. I think Jacob is going to finish us off today.*

Jacob Saindon (JS): *Yeah thanks Kelly, so we have about two questions left, and I do want to be conscious of time, since we have about 10 minutes before Kelly has to leave, but if we run over it's totally fine by me, we can keep talking through it. But kind of sticking with these questions about disciplinary a little bit and [...] you both have discussed your relationships to animal*

studies and how you may not consider yourself scholars who are strictly working within animal studies, but I'm curious how you've seen animal studies or multispecies studies and however you want to kind of think about it, how they've affected the body of scholarship or the disciplines that you primarily engage with or consider yourself working with most strongly? [...] Or maybe how they haven't affected those? And then relatedly what disciplines you might think, or bodies of work, might benefit from engaging more with animal studies or multispecies relations that really haven't?

DR: Well, I think, for me, the way that I think about the space that animal studies and this seminar occupy for me is less about what disciplines I would connect out to and more about, taking off on what Erin just said, about what issues, what problematics, came really clearly into focus during the seminar and how that set of issues really relates out to just so many areas of concern. You know, even - I remember one day having a conversation about caretaking and can it ever be truly horizontal or is there always a vertical sort of element of domination of agency that imposes itself on another? We talked about, for so long, questions of power, questions of relationships, [...] how all of that relates to survival and what emotion is involved in all of that. I'm just trying to think - I think many of these things Erin already said, but what she said, that list of items: that populated all of our discussions, all the way through the semester, and all the talks. And I would say that it's really given me a full working idea of sort of the prismatic concerns that we have, as we are trying to reshape our world to be more socially just. That there's a huge intersection there with - you know, anybody wanting to work on social justice will inevitably touch, or at least some, if not all of these questions.

EK: Yeah, I have a similar response. It's not more about directing me towards different disciplines or trying to advocate for anthropological perspectives in other fields or things like that. It's more I think one of the things that... engaging with all the different kinds of work that we did and all of our conversations, I think another thing that we came back to a lot in the seminar was how important it is to always, kind of, work against and call into question presumed separations between theory on the one hand, and methodology on the other, and so I think some of what came out of, you know, this - what I felt like was a really collaborative learning space for all of us - was looking from different approaches stories and vantage points to kind of think differently about the importance of praxis, not just from you know feminist, decolonizing anthropology literature, but branching out and seeing, trying to imagine, right, what that looks like from the perspective of some of the animals represented in the film Dierdra was just talking about or from some of the goats that Radhika helped take care of during her research, or [...] so on and so forth. So, what [do] these questions of praxis look like from the perspective of those that are different than humans, but without kind of othering them in those problematic ways.

And then, yeah, I think, like Dierdra has so well said again and again, I think all of this also kind of lays bare, brings into sharp relief, on the one hand, how - and this is kind of, this is definitely a pandemic perspective that I've been recognizing in myself - on the one hand, thinking about how we relate to animals and how we represent those relationships, talk about them, all those kinds of things, I think, simultaneously can bring into sharp relief how certain

inequalities and injustices are reinforced and reproduced, or emergent new ones; but at the same time, opens up these spaces of possibility for different - gosh, I almost said modality, which is like one of my least favorite words now - different, you know, [...] forms of empathy and relatedness and care. I don't know if that makes sense.

JS: *No, yes, thank you so much. Those are both really excellent responses, and a lot to think about. We have one final question which I think [...] you both have already really touched on, and Dierdra you brought in, specifically, in actually the first question, which is around ethics and how ethics both factored into the course, but also [...] how ethics came up in your discussions. So, I guess the question is around how you incorporated ethics both into the course's syllabus and then how you're thinking about animal studies and [how]post- and more than-human contexts reorient approaches to ethics. And Erin used the word, you referred to praxis, which I think is a helpful way to think about this as well, both in terms of scholarship and everyday practices of, you know, ethical orientations.*

DR: I don't think there was a single day that didn't turn on some kind of ethical question, and that was one of the things that we discovered. And so, I think if you're doing animal studies, one of the things that you do learn quickly is that there's no way not to incorporate ethics. And that, you know, [come] from a human perspective... how do I say this. So, I remember seeing this documentary called "Food, Inc." that I think came out around 2006 or 2008, sometime around then [ed. note: 2008], and there's a pig farmer who says that the way that society treats its animals and treats its pigs is reflective of the way that they will treat each other. And again, like not to - animals were definitely the star of our course, [...] but it was so clear that the question of perspective, and an ethical holding of that perspective was so clear in the course as well, and how can we know the question of intersubjectivity and how can we know what consciousness means for another being? And how can we evaluate communication and other forms of relationships and assess how much control we're exerting over another being? How do we understand, define, parse, and modulate our power dynamic with another? If it's hard with just one other being, that sets into clear relief also how difficult is it with all beings?

So, I think those are some of the ethical questions that were just so salient throughout the entire course, and, as I say, that I have taken with me since - I mean I think about it, I don't know, I think about it in terms of my relationships with other humans and animals now, with the earth. I don't know, I'm more mindful of all of those things, and I think, for me personally, I fall on the side of believing that horizontal relationships are more healthy than vertical ones. And so, in terms of my teaching and my relationship with my students and my advisees - how can I achieve that, how can I empower them? Rather than you know be... sort of renounce the traditional authority figure position not as a professional, but also as a parent.

EK: So, yeah, I think, kind of just thinking about the phrasing of your question, you know, I agree with Dierdra. Whether we intended it or not, ethics just permeated everything that we that we engaged with and thought about and talked about together. And so, I don't think we incorporated it into the course theme, I think that it was always already there. So, I guess, the

question about how should taking seriously multi- and interspecies relationships and animal studies and things like that kind of reframe ideas about ethics... I'm trying to think of an example. So, for example, "whose ethics?" is what I was going to say. Whose ethics are we talking about? And, you know, how do we grapple with those things? I think engaging with some of the animal studies literature that I wasn't so familiar with, as well as, you know, we read novels that I had never read before, and all kinds of things. And I remember very well the care discussion that Dierdra was talking about. Sorry, I just lost my own train of thought. Oh yeah, whose ethics are we talking about? And how do you recognize... right, so the kind of cultural, political aspects of recognition: how do you recognize when you've overstepped, you know, my dogs' ethical boundary? Well, they're pretty expressive about that so it's easy to understand, but Dierdra when you were talking - this doesn't exactly answer your question - but when you were talking, Dierdra, I started thinking about - I live in a neighborhood that, you know, it's not like a homeowner's association or anything, but a lot of people in our neighborhood have clipped front lawns that are perfectly manicured. I don't like lawns, I'm not a lawn person. I let our daffodils grow all summer, because bees come to them, and all these kinds of things. And we have a really old oak tree out in front of our house that's starting to drop a lot of its leaves. It's one of the only ones left in the neighborhood - I guess years ago there was an epidemic of disease that killed a lot of these native Kentucky oaks - and I do not rake my leaves. And it annoys some of my neighbors profoundly. And one of the reasons, the main reason, why I don't rake the leaves is because of the chrysalids that might still be living in them. Birds and other animals use those piles of leaves for warmth and protection during the winter. Apparently queen bees burrow into the ground, and sort of in relationship to leaf piles, to get themselves protected through the winter. And so, every time I crunch on a leaf I'm like, who did I just step on? Not to mention the leaf itself, which has fallen off the tree and that's another story. So that was an example where this question of "whose ethics?" and how do you know what the there is, even to begin with.

I think, animal studies has just kind of reoriented my own thinking. I'm not sure how it could rearrange other things. But I think definitely in anthropology, political ecology, right, these fields where the multispecies-ness is being taken, I think, very seriously in interesting ways. "Whose ethics?", I think, would be one way that I would think about that. And how do you know, right? It's a very human-oriented question. It's a very conscious, like, "I'm having a thought" question, so, yeah.

DR: I love that about you Erin.

EK: What?

DR: That you don't rake your leaves. I love the way you care for your yard.

JS: *Well, that's all of our questions, so thank you both so much for your time. This has been a really great conversation, and it's been a pleasure to meet you and listen to you today.*