

## **Nature in Popular Culture**

ENVS 410/510  
M/W 12-1:50pm  
Winter 2017

This course examines the various ways that nature is represented in U.S. popular culture. What can advertisements, films, television, and video games teach us about the ways we imagine nature and the environment? What ideas about nature are conveyed by zoos, aquariums, and nature-oriented theme parks? Popular culture representations of nature tell us more than how we imagine nature and the environment. They also articulate and naturalize ideas about race, gender, sexuality, and ability. They present certain kinds of identities as natural and normative and other kinds of identities as unnatural or out of place in nature. We will examine the politics of identity and environment in depictions of SeaWorld, gay penguins, and Mother Earth. What is at stake in movies like *Pocahontas*, *Avatar*, and *Moana*? How are ideas about race and colonialism communicated in advertisements for the Discovery Channel and The Body Shop? We will explore the ways that representations of nature can at times justify existing relationships of power and privilege in society and the ways in which such representations may also at times contest those existing relationships of power and privilege.

As part of this class, you will be responsible for contributing examples of popular culture to class discussion through your portfolio assignments. One of the aims of this class is to help you be a more critically and engaged reader of the popular culture that surrounds you.

### **Learning Objectives**

- Provide a working definition of popular culture and an explanation of what we gain from studying popular culture representations of nature and the environment.
- Analyze the depictions of nature and the environment in television shows, films, advertisements, video games, and other popular culture texts.
- Describe and provide examples of the way ideas about race, gender, ability, and sexuality are communicated and contested through depictions of nature and the environment.
- Communicate effectively through written and oral communication.

### **Required Texts**

Noël Sturgeon, *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009).

\*All other readings are available on Canvas.

## Course Policies

**Preferred First Name:** The University of Oregon has a preferred first name policy. According to this policy, a student or employee's preferred first name will be used in university communications and reporting except where the use of the legal name is required for university purposes. If you have reason to believe your preferred first name may not be listed correctly in the roster or you do not feel comfortable taking advantage of UO's preferred first name policy, please communicate to me the name you wish to use. The preferred first name policy can be accessed here: <http://policies.uoregon.edu/node/216>

**Accessible Education:** The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. Please notify me if aspects of the instruction or course design result in barriers to your participation. Students are also encouraged to contact the Accessible Education Center (AEC) 541-346-1155; <http://aec.uoregon.edu/>. AEC helps provide services including sign language interpreting, computer-based note-taking, classroom relocation, exam modifications, and alternative text conversion. Please request that the Accessible Education Center send me a letter outlining your approved accommodations.

**Late Work:** All work is to be handed in on time. Late work will be penalized one grade per day.

**Academic Integrity:** Students are expected to adhere to University of Oregon's standards of academic integrity. All work should be your own, and all sources should be appropriately acknowledged. Violations of academic integrity include plagiarism, duplicate submission, cheating on examinations, and false citations. Please do not hesitate to speak to me if you have any questions about use of sources or citations. It is far better to ask than to unintentionally plagiarize. Please refer to the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers as a citation style-guide. Please read the Academic Misconduct Code in full. It can be accessed at: <http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx>

**Attendance:** Attendance is mandatory and constitutes part of your grade. You may miss two class meetings without penalty. Your final grade will drop one-third of a letter grade for each subsequent absence. **Missing four classes is grounds for failure.** Exceptions to this policy may be made for those with adequate excuse and sufficient documentation. Please contact me to discuss. You are responsible for all assigned materials in the class and ensuring that your work is turned in on time.

**Participation:** This is a discussion-based seminar. Consequently, attendance alone is not adequate. You are expected to come to class prepared, having read the material and engaged critically with it. You should attend class ready to share your thoughts about the readings and discuss your portfolio assignments. I expect you to contribute meaningfully during each session.

**Title IX Policy and Reporting Responsibilities:** UO is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender-based stalking. Consequently, all UO employees are required to report to appropriate authorities (supervisor or Office of Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity) when they have reasonable cause to believe that discrimination, harassment or abuse of any kind has taken, or is taking, place. Students seeking to discuss a situation without talking to a mandatory reporter may call 541-346-SAFE. This 24/7 hotline is staffed by confidential, trained counselors. For confidential help, students may also contact University Health Services (<http://healthcenter.uoregon.edu/>) or Sexual Assault Support Services (<http://sass-lane.org/>).

**Inclement Weather:** In the event of inclement weather, the UO home webpage (<http://www.uoregon.edu/>) will include a banner at the top of the page displaying information about delay, cancellation, or closure decisions for the Eugene campus. Additionally, the UO Alerts blog will be updated with the latest updates and bulletins. Local television and radio stations will also broadcast delay and cancellation information. Classes will not be held if cancelled by the university. Additionally, members of the campus community are expected to use their best judgment in assessing the risk of coming to campus and returning home, based on individual circumstances. Those who believe the road conditions from home are dangerous are urged and even expected to stay there to prevent injury.

**Class Communication:** The primary means of communication outside of class in this course will be through your UO email account. Please check this account regularly. I am also most readily available through email. Generally, you can expect an email response from me within two working days. You should also check Canvas at least once prior to each class session.

**Classroom Electronic Communications Policies:** Cell phone use during class is prohibited. Tablets are permitted only to access the reading. Laptops are permitted only with express permission or during class activities requiring laptop use.

## Course Assessment

### Undergraduate

- Attendance and Participation, 10%
  - To receive an A, you should attend every class, arrive on time, bring a copy of the readings, and contribute thoughtfully to the discussion. Contributing thoughtfully means that you pose questions and provide answers that reflect your careful reading of the material, including directly referencing passages in the reading. In responding to your peers' observations, questions, and interpretations, you engage with the substance of their ideas and model respectful disagreement. In your questions, comments, and critiques, you show a willingness to take intellectual risks. You remain focused and fully engage with any work (including group work) assigned during class. Your contributions develop bridges between different class sessions, contributing to a conversation that spans the quarter.
- Portfolio: 40%
  - There will be 8 portfolio assignments during the course of the quarter. Each one will be due on Canvas prior to class on Wednesday. Each portfolio entry will be worth 5% of your grade.
  - Each portfolio entry focuses on a popular culture text you have found. This can be an advertisement, a television episode, a youtube video, a video game, an internet meme, a song, a popular book, a film, etc. You are to apply one of the readings from that week to the popular culture text you selected. You are expected to write 300-500 words.
- Final Research Project: 50%
  - In your final research project, you will apply what you have learned in class to a song, film, advertisement, television show, video game, or other popular culture text. You may revisit a popular culture text from your portfolio. Your final research project should apply at least 5 peer-reviewed works to your popular culture item. You may use readings from the class, but you are not required to rely solely on course readings. A list of additional resources is provided at the end of the syllabus.  
**You should meet with me outside of class to discuss your project and sources prior to Week 6.**
  - Early Draft: 5%

- This typed double-spaced document should include either an image or link to the popular culture item on which you intend to write your final project. You should start the draft with a paragraph discussing the argument you might make. You should then discuss three assigned articles you intend to use in your final project. For each article, you should write a paragraph explaining how you might apply this article to your item. Thus, you are expected to have at least four paragraphs in this early draft. It is due to Canvas prior to class on Monday, February 27<sup>th</sup>.
- Peer Workshop: 5%
  - If you are absent, insufficiently prepared, or fail to fully engage with your peers, you will not get credit for this opportunity.
- Presentation: 10%
  - This short presentation (10-15 minutes) will be given during the last two weeks of class. Feedback from this presentation will help you craft your final paper. Your final presentation should include a sample of your popular culture item, identification of your argument, and examples of how you will be applying at least 3 of the articles to your item in building this argument.
- Final Paper (8-10 pages): 30%
  - Due to Canvas prior to final exam period, Monday March 20<sup>th</sup> @ 10:15am

## Graduate

- Attendance and Participation, 10%
  - To receive an A, you should attend every class, arrive on time, bring a copy of the readings, and contribute thoughtfully to the discussion. Contributing thoughtfully means that you pose questions and provide answers that reflect your careful reading of the material, including directly referencing passages in the reading. In responding to your peers' observations, questions, and interpretations, you engage with the substance of their ideas and model respectful disagreement. In your questions, comments, and critiques, you show a willingness to take intellectual risks. You remain focused and fully engage with any work (including group work) assigned during class. Your contributions develop bridges between different class sessions, contributing to a conversation that spans the quarter.
- Portfolio: 30%
  - You will complete any 6 of the 8 portfolio assignments. Each one will be due on Canvas prior to class on Wednesday. Each portfolio entry will be worth 5% of your grade.
  - Each portfolio entry focuses on a popular culture text you have found. This can be an advertisement, a television episode, a youtube video, a video game, an internet meme, a song, a popular book, a film, etc. You are to apply one of the readings from that week to the popular culture text you selected. You are expected to write 300-500 words.
- Final Research Project: 60%
  - In your final research project, you will apply what you have learned in class to a song, film, advertisement, television show, or other popular culture text. You should meet with me to discuss your final paper topic prior to week three in the class.
  - Annotated Bibliography: 10%
    - Your annotated bibliography should contain ten sources from peer-reviewed journal articles or chapters from reputable academic books. Four of these sources may be from the class. This is due to Canvas prior to class on Wednesday, February 15th.

- Early Draft, 5%
  - You should turn in a 4-6 page draft of your paper to Canvas prior to class on Monday, February 27.
- Peer Workshop: 5%
  - If you are absent or not sufficiently prepared, you will not get credit for this opportunity.
- Presentation, 10%
  - This short presentation (7-10 minutes) will be given during the finals period for this class. Your final presentation should include a sample of your popular culture item, identification of your argument, and examples of how you will be applying at least 3 of the articles to your item in building this argument.
- Research Paper (12-15 pages): 30%
  - Due to Canvas by Thursday March 23rd at 12:00pm

### **Class Outline and Schedule**

#### **Week One** Introducing Environmental Cultural Studies

Monday, January 9: Introduction

Wednesday, January 11: What is Popular Culture?

Marcel Danesi, “What is Popular Culture?” *What is Popular Culture?: Introductory Perspectives*. Second Edition (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012), 1-34.

#### **Portfolio Entry 1 Due**

#### **Week Two** What is Nature?

Monday, January 16: No Class, MLK Jr. Day

Wednesday, January 18: Keywords: Nature, Wilderness, and Mother Earth

Raymond Williams, “Nature,” *Keywords* Revised Edition (New York: Oxford University, 1983), 219-224; William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness,” *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 69-91; Kate Soper, “Naturalized Woman and Feminized Nature,” *The Green Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 139-143.

#### **Portfolio Entry 2 Due**

#### **Week Three:** Nature and Popular Culture

Monday, January 23: The Politics of the Natural

Noël Sturgeon, “The Politics of the Natural in U.S. History and Popular Culture,” *Environmentalism in Popular Culture: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and the Politics of the Natural* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2009), 17-49.

Wednesday, January 25: Buying & Selling Nature

Susan Davis, “Touch the Magic,” *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 204-217; Jennifer Price, “Looking for Nature at the Mall: A Field Guide to the

Nature Company,” *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 186-203.

### **Portfolio Entry 3 Due**

**\*Graduate Students** Meet with Prof. Wald about Final Paper Topic Prior to End of Week

## **Week Four: The Ecological Indian**

Monday, January 30: The Ecological Indian in Film

David Ingram, “Ecological Indians and the Myth of Primal Purity,” *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), 45-55; Noël Sturgeon, “Frontiers of Nature: The Ecological Indian in U.S. Film,” *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*, 53-79.

Wednesday, February 1st: The Ecological Indian Goes Global

Laura L. Sullivan, “You Make Me Feel Like a Natural Woman: The Political Economy of Contemporary Cosmetics Discourse,” *The Nature of Cities*, eds. Michael Bennett and David W. Teague (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999), 213-230; Selections from #MoanaSyllabus: Doug Herman, “How the story of Moana and Maui Hold Up Against Cultural Truths,” [http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-story-moana-and-maui-holds-against-cultural-truths-180961258/?utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_medium=socialmedia](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/how-story-moana-and-maui-holds-against-cultural-truths-180961258/?utm_source=facebook.com&utm_medium=socialmedia); Dina Gilio-Whitaker, “Disney Refines Its Cultural Competence in Moana, But Bigger Questions Remain,” *Indian Country Today*, <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/11/09/disney-refines-its-cultural-competence-moana-bigger-questions-remain-166394>; Vicente Diaz, “Don’t Swallow (or be Swallowed by) Disney’s ‘Culturally Authenticated Moana,’” <http://indiancountrytodaymedianetwork.com/2016/11/13/dont-swallow-or-be-swallowed-disneys-culturally-authenticated-moana>

### **Portfolio Entry 4 Due**

## **Week Five: Environmental Exclusion**

Monday, February 6: Racialized Leisure Identities

Carolyn Finney, “Black Faces,” *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors* (University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 67-91; Derek Christopher Martin, “Apartheid in the Great Outdoors: American Advertising and the Reproduction of a Racialized Outdoor Leisure Identity,” *Journal of Leisure Research* 36.4 (2004), 513-535.

Wednesday, February 8: The Corporeal Unconscious

Sarah Jaquette Ray. “Risking Bodies in the Wild: The Corporeal Unconscious of American Adventure Culture,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 33.3 (2009): 257-284.

### **Portfolio Entry 5 Due**

## **Week Six: Queer Ecologies**

Monday, February 13: Gay Nature?

Noël Sturgeon, “Penguin Family Values.” *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*, 120-146; Myra Hird, “Naturally Queer,” *Feminist Theory* 5.1 (2004), 85-89.

Wednesday February 15: Normative Environmentalisms

Noël Sturgeon, “‘The Power is Yours Planeteeers’: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in Children’s Environmentalist Popular Culture,” *Environmentalism in Popular Culture*, 103-119.

**Portfolio Entry 6 Due**

**\*Undergraduate Students** Meet with Prof. Wald about Final Paper Topic Prior to End of Week

**\*\*Graduate Students: Annotated Bibliography Due**

**Week Seven: Digital Contexts**

Monday, February 20: Video Game Environmentalism?

Alenda Y. Chang, “Games as Environmental Texts,” *Qui Parle: Critical Humanities and Social Sciences* 19.2 (2011): 56-84; John Parham, “Green Computer Games: To Play is to Inhabit,” *Green Media and Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2016), 205-229.

Wednesday February 22: Guest Speaker Alenda Y. Chang!

Alenda Y. Chang. “Back to the Virtual Farm: Gleaning the Agricultural-Management Game,” *ISLE* 19.2 (Spring 2012): 237-252. Alenda Chang takes over our class!

**Portfolio Entry 7 Due**

Special Event: Alenda Y. Chang Public Lecture @ 4pm

**Week Eight: Unpopular Culture**

Monday, February 27: Peer Workshop

To be prepared for your peer workshop, you need to bring five copies of your outline to class.

**Early Draft Due** to course website prior to the start of class.

Wednesday, March 1: Unpopular Culture

Anthony Lioi, *Nerd Ecology: Defending the Earth with Unpopular Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2016. Excerpts TBA.

**Portfolio Entry 8 Due**

**Week Nine: Final Presentations**

Monday, March 6: Presentations

Wednesday, March 8: Presentations

**Week Ten: Final Presentations**

Monday, March 13: Presentations

Wednesday, March 15: Presentations

**Final exam period**, Monday March 20<sup>th</sup> @ 10:15am Graduate student presentations. Attendance required from all.

**Undergraduate Student Final Paper Due** Monday March 20<sup>th</sup> @ 10:15am to Canvas

**Graduate Student Final Paper Due** Thursday, March 23rd @ 12pm to Canvas

### **Additional Resources**

- See also, <http://www.ecomediastudies.org/resources/bibliography/>

Karla Armbruster. "Creating the World We Must Save: The Paradox of Television Nature Documentaries." *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*. Ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells. London: Zed Books, 1998. 218-238.

Derek Bousé. *Wildlife Films*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

William Beinart and Katie McKeown. "Wildlife Media and Representations of Africa, 1950s to the 1970s." *Environmental History* 14.2 (2009): 429-452.

Cynthia Belmont. "Claiming Queer Space in/as Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of *Secretary*." *ISLE*. 19.2 (Spring 2012): 317-335.

Pat Brereton. *Hollywood Utopia: Ecology in Contemporary American Cinema*. Bristol: Intellect Books, 2005.

Colin Carman. "Grizzly Love: The Queer Ecology of Timothy Treadwell." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18 (2013): 507-528.

Deborah Carmichael, Editor. *The Landscape of Hollywood Westerns: Ecocriticism in the American Film Genre*. Salt Lake City, UT: University of Utah Press, 2006.

Joseph Clark. "Second Chances: Depictions of the Natural World in Second Life." *Creating Second Lives: Community, Identity, and Spatiality as Constructions of the Virtual*. Eds. Astrid Ensslin and Eben Muse. NY: Routledge, 2011.

Sean Cubitt. *Eco Media*. New York: Rodopi, 2005.

Kevin DeLuca. *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*. NY: Guilford Press, 1999.

Finis Dunaway. *Natural Visions: The Power of Images in American Environmental Reform*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Kelly Enright. *The Maximum of Wilderness: The Jungle in the American Imagination*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2012.

Carolyn Finney. *Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014.

Lee Gambin. *Massacred by Mother Nature: Exploring the Natural Horror Film*. Midnight Marquee, 2012.

Donna Haraway. *Primate Visions: Gender, Race, and Nature in the World of Modern Science*. New York: Routledge, 1989.

David Ingram. *Green Screen: Environmentalism and Hollywood Cinema*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Juke Box in the Garden: Ecocriticism and American Popular Music Since 1960*. New York: Rodopi, 2010.

Adrian Ivakhiv. *Ecologies of the Moving Image: Cinema, Affect, Nature*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013.

Jennifer K. Ladino. "For the Love of Nature: Documenting Life, Death, and Animalty in *Grizzly Man* and *March of the Penguins*." *ISLE* 16:1 (Winter 2009): 53-90.

Stephanie LeMenager. *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century*. Oxford: University Press, 2014.



- Andrew Light. "Boyz in the Woods: Urban Wilderness in American Cinema." *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*. Ed. Michael Bennett and David Teague. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999.137-156.
- Anthony Lioi. *Nerd Ecology: Defending the Earth with Unpopular Culture*. London: Bloomsbury Press, 2016.
- Mark Meister and Phyllis M. Japp, Editors. *Enviropop: Studies in Environmental Rhetoric and Popular Culture*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002.
- Arielle C. McKee. "The Kind of Tale Everybody Thneeds?: Ecocriticism, Class, and the Filmic *Lorax*," *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 40.1 (2015): 39-57.
- Greg Mittman. *Reel Nature: America's Romance with Wildlife in Film*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999.
- Adam Miyashiro, Moana Syllabus, <https://moanasyllabus.wordpress.com/>
- Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands and Bruce Erickson, eds. *Queer Ecologies: Sex, Nature, Politics, and Desire*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- Robin L. Murray and Joseph K. Heumann. *Ecology and Popular Film: Cinema on the Edge*. Albany: State University of New York: 2009.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Film and Everyday Eco-disasters*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2014.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Gunfight at the Eco-coral: Western Cinema and the Environment*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *That's All Folks?: Ecocritical Readings of American Animated Features*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2011.
- Anil Narine, Editor. *Eco-Trauma Cinema*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- John Parham. *Green Media and Popular Culture*. New York: Palgrave McMillian, 2016.
- Mark Pedelty. *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012.
- Stephen Rust, Salma Monani, and Sean Cubitt, eds. *Ecocinema Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge/AFI, 2013.
- Stephen Rust and Carter Soles, ed. "Ecohorror: Special Issue" *ISLE* 21.3 (Summer 2014). Includes six peer-reviewed articles.
- Catriona Sandliands. "Desiring Nature, Queering Ethics: Adventures in Erotogenic Environments," *Environmental Ethics* 23: 169-188.
- Bron Taylor, ed. *Avatar and Nature Spirituality*. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2013.
- Ronald B. Tobias. *Film and the American Moral Vision of Nature: Theodore Roosevelt to Walt Disney*. East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2011.
- Paul Wells. *The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture*. Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2009.
- David Whitley. *The Idea of Nature in Disney Animation*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008.
- Alexander Wilson. *The Culture of Nature: Northern American Landscape from Disney to Exxon Valdez*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 1992.
- Alice Wondrak Biel, *Do (Not) Feed the Bears: The Fitful History of Wildlife and Tourists in Yellowstone*. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006.