

LTEN – 159 (d) US Environmental Cultures of the late-20th and early-21st Centuries

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Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:00 am -12:00 pm in the Literature Building, # 438

Course Description

How do 21st century Americans perceive of the *wilderness*? Is it something to be feared, a hostile and distant land, foreign to our known cosmopolitan world? Is it an Edenic garden, a primordial space of longing and comfort, a relief from the noise, the smog, the traffic of urban life? Is it something to be bought, owned and controlled - does it control us?

These questions will serve as the basis for our quarter-long exploration of the various conceptualizations and representations of nature as it appears in US culture, both past and present. In this course, we will observe a variety of texts dealing with the representation of ecological landscapes and environments in late-20th and early-21st century American culture. Moving away from the bioregionalism of early American naturalism, we will engage with writers, poets, and filmmakers like Rachel Carson, Cormac McCarthy, Cherrie Moraga, and Kelly Reichardt, considering their works in transnational dialogue with artists and activists concerned with global ecological crises. We will additionally discuss the current genre of the post-humanities, a speculative discipline that deals in utopian and apocalyptic depictions of the American wilderness.

As our current generation witnesses both the destruction and dissolution of the ecological landscape, as well as a renewed emphasis on environmental concern in the popular political narrative, we find an ever increasing necessity for informed understandings of 'nature' as it plays out across different sectors of our communities. By the end of this course, students will be familiar with the role of contemporary American literature in these popular debates, and the place of eco-criticism as a theoretical discipline in contemporary cultural studies scholarship

Required Books

McCarthy, Cormac. *The Crossing*

Moraga, Cherrie. *Watsonville*

Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Ceremony*

Waldman, Anne. *Manatee/Humanity*

Yamashita, Karen Tei. *Tropic of Orange*

Films

Caruthers, Shane. *Upstream Color*

Kennedy, Scott Hamilton. *The Garden*

MacKenzie, Kent. *The Exiles*

Penn, Sean. *Into the Wild*

Reichardt, Kelly. *Wendy and Lucy*

***Articles and other required materials will be available on Course Reserves, unless otherwise noted.

(E-Reserves Password: rb159)

Course Requirements

Attendance and Participation (25%)

As in any good course, engaged participation will be a key component of our meetings throughout the semester. With this in mind, students should 1) attend all sessions 2) be sure to have completed all readings required for the particular day we meet 3) should be prepared to take an active role in facilitating our discussion of the materials.

Reading Quizzes (15%)

There will be five unannounced reading quizzes throughout the quarter. These will be brief and straightforward, short-answer quizzes designed to ensure that you have done the appropriate readings/viewings assigned for each class meeting.

Group Presentations (10%)

Beginning in Week 2 and ending in Week 10, students will each be asked to participate in one group presentation. Groups will consist of no more than 3 students. During Week 1, a sign-up sheet will be passed around, and students can decide which set of themes/readings/viewings they would like to present on. Presentations should last between 10 and 15 minutes, and will serve as an oral extension of the work being done in the weekly Written Reflections. They will serve as a platform to share the group's own collaborative reflections on the material, as well as a means to raise questions to the larger class. Outside sources or alternative media that students find relevant to the assigned materials may also be incorporated into the presentations.

Written Reflections (15%)

For every week (beginning in Week 2 and ending in Week 9), students will prepare a one-to-two page (double-spaced) response to one of the required readings on our list. These writings might allow you to develop your critical engagement with the texts and can be analytical in nature. They might also take on the formal elements of journal entries, creative nonfiction essays, or employ other nontraditional means for critical assessment and reflection. All entries, whether they are expository or analytical, should offer suggestive questions in respect to the readings along with an assessment of what the particular piece is attempting (and/or how it is doing so) in terms of key elements such as content, argumentation, and method.

Written reflections will be evaluated on the following scale:

- ✓+ An outstanding paper that effectively and creatively synthesizes course material with a response to a reading/viewing for the week.
- ✓ A good paper that meets the requirements of the assignment as outlined above
- ✓- A paper that is not long enough (1 page minimum) or doesn't mention any of the week's readings/viewings in any substantive way

Final Paper (35%)

You will submit a 6-8 page paper at the end of the quarter that will act as a more formal extension of the engagement you have displayed in your written responses. You will be expected to address the stakes presented in the texts you choose to reflect on. What are their social, cultural, political or artistic investments? From your own critical platform, gauge the degree to which the works succeed in what they set out to do. What is the piece's place within the fabric of theoretical, historical, and cultural concerns that we have raised in the course (or not)? For whom are they written and why—i.e. into which cultural, political, social, or historical debates are the works attempting to intervene?

Midterm and Final Exam

There will be no formal midterm or final exam this quarter. However, it is Department policy that we meet during our scheduled final exam period (Friday, December 13th, from 8-11 am). We will use this time to conclude and reflect upon discussions held throughout the quarter. *You must attend this final exam meeting in order to receive a passing grade!*

Extra-Credit Project

In an effort to bring the resources and discussions of the university classroom into broader conversation with cultural and political initiatives in the larger San Diego\Southern California\Tijuana community, I encourage all of you to attend at least one meeting or event held by an organization or collective concerned with issues of ecological justice or environmentalism. This could be a group on campus, or a San Diego\Tijuana based organization such as *The Environmental Health Coalition* (www.environmentalhealth.org). After attending a meeting or event, if you can write a three-paged (double-spaced) essay detailing your experience, as well as the way in which the goals and concerns of the group fit into or diverge from themes within our course, I will add 1/3 of a letter grade to your final grade.

Course PoliciesE-mail and Office Hours

For any quick questions you may have, please email me at rheryfor@ucsd.edu. During the week I will try to respond to emails within 24 hours. I don't check university email on the weekends.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of the course in more depth, please plan on meeting with me during my office hours on Mondays and Wednesdays from 11:00-12:00pm in my office in the **Literature Building, #438**. Please contact me if those hours don't work for you in order to make alternative arrangements to meet.

Academic Integrity

University policy requires me to report all cases of suspected plagiarism to the Office of Academic Integrity. You are responsible for understanding what constitutes plagiarism, and for avoiding it. If you are unsure how plagiarism is defined, or if you would like guidance with knowing how to avoid plagiarism, please consult the following university resource: <http://libraries.ucsd.edu/locations/ssh/guides/preventing-plagiarism/index.html?temp-new-window-replacement=true>

Weekly Schedule

I. Transforming American Nature Writing in the late-20th Century

Week 0:

Friday, Sept. 27th - Introductions

Recommended: William Howarth's "Some Principles of Ecocriticism"

Recommended: Dana Philips' "Is Nature Necessary?"

Week 1:

Monday, Sept. 30th – The Foundations of US Nature Writing

Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature"

Recommended: Scott Slovic's "Nature Writing and Environmental Psychology: The Interiority of Outdoor Experience."

Wednesday, Oct. 2nd – The Foundations of US Nature Writing (cont)

Henry David Thoreau's "Chesuncook"

David Mazel's "American Literary Environmentalism as Domestic Orientalism"

Friday, Oct. 4th – Rachel Carson and the New 20th Century Environmentalism

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (pp. 1-13 & 187-198)

Week 2:

Monday, Oct. 7th – Questioning American Masculinity in the Wilderness

Film: Sean Penn's *Into the Wild*

Wednesday, Oct. 9th – Eco-feminism

Film: Kelly Reichardt's *Wendy and Lucy*

Vandana Shiva's "Reduction and Regeneration: A Crisis in Science" in *Ecofeminism*

Recommended: Colleen Mack-Canty's "Third Wave Feminism and the Need to Reweave the Nature/Culture Duality"

II. Environmental Justice and Eco-Ethnic Solidarities

Friday, Oct. 11th – The Sacred Hoop and Ecological Indian: New Perspectives

Paula Gunn Allen's "The Sacred Hoop: A Contemporary Perspective"

Shepard Krech III "Introduction" from *The Ecological Indian: Myth and History*

Leslie Marmon Silko's "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination."

Week 3 –

Monday, Oct. 14th – Native American Eco-criticism

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (pp. 1-29)

Wednesday, Oct. 16th – Native American Eco-criticism (cont.)

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (pp 29-72)

Friday, Oct. 18th – Native America Eco-criticism (cont)

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (pp 72-116)

Recommended: Film: Kent MacKenzie's *The Exiles*

Week 4 –

Monday, Oct. 21st – Native American Eco-criticism (cont)

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (pp 116-176)

Recommended: Finis Dunaway's "Gas Masks, Pogo, and the Ecological Indian: Earth Day and the Visual Politics of American Environmentalism"

Wednesday, Oct. 23rd – *Ceremony*

Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (pp 176-End)

Friday, Oct. 25th – From Environmentalism to Environmental Justice

Film: Scott Hamilton Kennedy's *The Garden*

Cherrie Moraga's *Watsonville* (pt. 1)

Week 5 –

Monday, Oct. 28th – From Environmentalism to Environmental Justice (cont)

Cherrie Moraga's *Watsonville* (pt. 2)

III. Post-Apocalyptic US Naturalism

Wednesday, Oct. 30th - The American City as Ecological Nightmare

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (pp 3-51)

Recommended: Mike Davis' "The Literary Destruction of Los Angeles" in *Ecology of Fear*

Friday, Nov. 1st – The American City as Ecological Nightmare (cont)

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (pp 55-93)

Recommended: Laura Pulido's "Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California"

Week 6 -

Monday, Nov. 4th – Uneven Environmental Catastrophes

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (pt 97-171)

Wednesday, Nov. 6th – Uneven Environmental Catastrophes (cont)

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (pp 175-207)

Recommended: Melissa Checker's "‘Like Nixon Coming to China:’ Finding Common Ground in a Multi-Ethnic Coalition for Environmental Justice"

Friday, Nov. 8th – *Tropic of Orange*

Karen Tei Yamashita's *Tropic of Orange* (211-End)

IV. Transnational American Environmentalism

Week 7 –

Monday, Nov. 11th – *Veteran's Day (No Class)*

Wednesday, Nov. 13th – US Environmental Imperialism

Amy Kaplan’s “Left Alone with America: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*

Friday, Nov. 15th – US Environmental Imperialism (cont.)

Rob Nixon’s “Environmentalism, Postcolonialism, and American Studies” in *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*

Melissa Johnson’s “Ambivalent Landscapes: Environmental Justice in the US-Mexico Borderlands”

Week 8 –

Monday, Nov. 18th - Trans-Border American Environmentalism

Cormac McCarthy’s *The Crossing* (pp. 3 – 43)

Wednesday, Nov. 20th – Trans-Border American Environmentalism (cont)

Cormac McCarthy’s *The Crossing* (pp. 44 – 79)

Recommended: Barry Lopez’s “An American Pogrom” in *Of Wolves and Men*

Friday, Nov. 22nd – *The Crossing*

Cormac McCarthy’s *The Crossing* (79-135)

Recommended: Wallis R. Sanborn’s “Wolves as Metaphor in *The Crossing*” from *Animals in the Fiction of Cormac McCarthy*

V. Posthumanities and the Human-Animal

Week 9 -

Monday, Nov. 25th – The Human/Animal Divide

Anne Waldman’s *Manatee/Humanity* (pp 1-43)

Scott Knickerbocker’s “Organic Formalism and Contemporary Poetry” from *Ecopoetics*

Wednesday, Nov. 27th – The Human/Animal Divide (cont)

Anne Waldman’s *Manatee/Humanity* (pp 43-End)

Jonathan Safran Foer’s “Storytelling” from *Eating Animals*

Friday, Nov. 29th – Thanksgiving Break (No Class)

Week 10 –

Monday, Dec. 2nd – Posthumanities: America without Humans

Steve Mentz' "After Sustainability"

Wednesday, Dec. 4th – Posthumanities: America without Humans (cont)

Film: Shane Carruther's *Upstream Color*

VI. Environmental Narratives of the San Diego\Tijuana Border

Friday, Dec. 6th - Environmental Questions Along the San Diego\Tijuana Border

Final Paper Due

Tito Alegria's "The Transborder Metropolis in Question: The Case of Tijuana and San Diego" from *Tijuana Revisited*

Teddy Cruz's "Practices of Encroachment: Urban Waste Moves Southbound; Illegal Zoning Seeps into North" from *Tijuana Revisited*

FINAL EXAM: *Friday, December 13th: 8:00 am – 11:00 am.*