

Ecology and Legacy: Intellectual Traditions 2109
Unsettling Ecological Thought
Fall 2022
Instructor: Juliana Chow

How do we inhabit a place and how do we get to know it? Who or what is part of a place? Our sense of the environment has been shaped by historical and cultural understandings of the environment and how we relate to it. In many Euroamerican histories and cultures, people have taken “nature” or “wilderness” and turned it into a cultivated space or resource and even a philosophical ideal—frontiers explored and civilized, forests cleared into farms and homesteads, wild creatures tamed or hunted to extinction, nature revered as a refuge or retreat. How does environmental awareness change when we reconsider how we inhabit places through both settling and unsettling, sensing and dreaming? This is an environmental humanities course centered on the relationship of humans and nonhumans in the environment through a place-based study of ecological thought. Throughout the course, we will explore key concepts, narratives, histories, philosophies, and spatial and sensory practices pertinent to ecological thinking. The aim of the course is to think critically about how environmental attachments to place have been and are constructed. Students will investigate key words and concepts in narratives of places and chart their changing definitions, experiment with weaving their own narratives and using maps to constellate the potent meanings of place. Assessment will be based on discussion participation, presentations, short writing assignments, a research paper, and final project.

Please note that this is a draft syllabus. Readings and assignments will be adjusted at the beginning of the course.

WEEK Rio Mesa

Senses, Sensing, Sensuous

David Abram, excerpt from *The Spell of the Sensuous* (“Ecology of Magic” and “Philosophy on the Way to Ecology”)

*Writing Exercises and Further Readings: TBA, see below for some potential topics

Site Specific Sensory Sequences for Rio Mesa:

Light: James Turrell, Sueyeun Juliette Lee, Cyanotypes

Desert: Edward Abbey, excerpt from *Desert Solitaire*, Miacel Spotted Elk,

<https://www.hcn.org/articles/indigenous-affairs-pollution-two-southwest-tribes-raise-concerns-over-uranium-storage>

Dirt/Sand: Gumbs, “Archive of Dirt,” soil analysis

Sound: Bird songs and calls, Bernie Krause, “Natural Imperfections” (2005), Ben Mirin, Beast Box Application (<https://academy.allaboutbirds.org/beastbox/>)

Rivers/Water: Rebecca Solnit, “Letter from a Drowned Canyon”

<https://story.californiasunday.com/drowned-canyon/>, David Owens, *Where the Water Goes*

<https://www.newyorker.com/tech/annals-of-technology/where-the-water-goes>

WEEK 1

Introductions: What is nature? What is wilderness? What is home? What is place?

William Cronon — “The Trouble with Wilderness”

Raymond Williams – Keywords intro and “nature”

Map Exercise: Eco/Oikos Keywords, tracking historical developments and ecological relations

Writing Exercise: Intro to Meditation and Writing Practices

WEEK 2

Introductions: Geographies, Histories, and Ecologies

Janet Browne, “Biogeography and Imperialism”

Alexander von Humboldt, chart: "Geographie des Plantes Equinoxiales. Tableau Physique des Andes et Pays Voisins"

Bruno Latour, "Circulating Reference" from *Pandora's Hope* on scientific practices

Robin Wall Kimmerer, excerpt from *Braiding Sweetgrass*, "Asters and Goldenrod" (39-47) Bartram, Prologue to *Travels*

Darwin, excerpt from *Origin of Species*

Henry David Thoreau, excerpts from *Walden*

Map Exercise: Mapping layers of meaning in a place or plant

Writing Exercise: TBA

WEEK 3

Other Ecologies, Emergent Ecologies

Anna Tsing, excerpt from *Mushroom and the End of the World*

Leila Nadir, on ruderal ecologies

Bayo Akomolafe, "What Climate Collapse Asks of Us"

Map Exercise: Mapping Emergent Ecologies

Writing Exercise: TBA

Check out: Feral atlas (<https://feralatlansupdigital.org/>)

WEEK 4

Earth Systems: Anthropocene and other Scenes like Global Capitalisms and Colonialisms

Maslin and Lewis, "Anthropocene: Earth System, geological, philosophical, and political paradigm shifts"

Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene"

Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin"

Werner Herzog, *Lessons of Darkness* (film)

Map Exercise: Vantage Points, Perspectival Drawings

Writing Exercise: TBA

WEEK 5

Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and Specific Environmental Histories: Grasses

Jeff Spitz "Return of Navajo Boy" (film)

Tommy Orange, prologue to *There, There*

Kyle Powys Whyte, "Our Ancestors' Dystopia Now"

Robin Wall Kimmerer, "Mishkos Kenomagwen: The Teachings of Grass"

William Cullen Bryant, "The Prairie"

Emily Dickinson, "To make a prairie"

Layli Long Soldier, grass poems

Cecil Giscombe, poems on prairies

Map Exercise: Prairie Divination, tarot cards and divination practice

Writing Exercise: TBA

WEEK 6

Settler Colonialism, Slavery, and Specific Environmental Histories: Rivers and Oceans

Alexis Pauline Gumbs, "From the Lab Notebooks," in *M Archive*

Douglas Kearney, flood songs from *The Black Automaton*

Bessie Smith's flood blues

James Clifford, excerpt from *Routes* + visit to UMFA or NHMU

David Chang, excerpt from *The World and All the Things Upon It*

Map Exercise: Mississippi Meander Map and Temporalities

Writing Exercise: TBA

LAST WEEK

Some Contemporary Environmental Narratives: Making Kin

Jeff Vandermeer, *Annihilation*
Thich Nhat Hanh, on Inter-being
Writing Exercise: TBA