

# Environmental Narrative, 1980-2018

English 260 | Winter 2019 | Tuesdays | 4:00-6:50 pm  
UCLA Botanical Gardens Classroom (LKG 100)

Professor Allison Carruth

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CREDITS: Oliver Kellhammer, rendering of Eocene landscape, date unknown | Kayla Harren, "Planted Astronaut" (inspired by Jeff VanderMeer's *Borne*), circa 2017 | Helen and Newton Harrison, *Lagoon Cycle* installation, circa 1974-1978

## SEMINAR DESCRIPTION

Focused on American culture, this seminar takes contemporary narrative as a rich subject for environmental studies in the period since global warming cohered as a scientific consensus about anthropogenic climate change and a complex story about modernity. The guiding questions are: Can we define environmental narrative as a distinct rhetorical form? What is at stake in this category for both literary studies and environmental science? How does narrative take shape in prominent forms of science communication (such as maps, data visualizations, models and dioramas)? By comparison, how do the narratives of writers, artists and media makers conceptualize environmental knowledge? Drawing on a multidisciplinary secondary literature, we'll pursue these questions by way of four topics: (1) biodiversity and biotech; (2) multispecies ecologies (3) climate change, climate chaos, climate justice; and, finally, (4) alien ecologies, terraforming fantasy and "multi-planetary" futurism. Primary materials will be selected from the following: novels by T.C. Boyle, Octavia Butler, Ruth Ozeki, Jeff VanderMeer and Karen Tei Yamashita; art and performance works by The Harrison Studio, Richard Misrach and Guillermo Galindo, Angelo Vermeulen and Marina Zurkow; and popular science media along the lines of "green" games, the iNaturalist platform and NASA's *Visions of the Future* poster series.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

- Digital | digitized primary and secondary materials (accessible via course shared BOX folder)
- T.C. Boyle, *When the Killing is Done*
- Octavia Butler, *Lilith's Brood: The Complete Xenogenesis Trilogy*
- Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*
- Ruth Ozeki, *A Tale for the Time Being*
- Bill McKibben, *Eaarth: Making a Life on a Tough New Planet*
- Karen Tei Yamashita, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*
- Jeff VanderMeer, *Borne*
- Jeff VanderMeer, *The Strange Bird: A Borne Story*

## OFFICE HOURS | Kaplan HALL 262

- By appointment: sign up at <https://acarruth.youcanbook.me>

## ACADEMIC MONOGRAPHS AND COLLECTIONS FOR PRESENTATIONS

You'll each read and present on one of these recent works that are helping to shape the cross-disciplinary field of the environmental humanities and that are of particular interest to the study of environmental narrative. Plan to purchase your chosen/assigned book from this list.

- Joni Adamson, William A. Gleason and David Naguib Pellow (editors), *Keywords for Environmental Studies*
- Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*
- Ursula K. Heise, *Imagining Extinction*
- Eben Kirskey, *Emergent Ecologies*
- Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil*
- Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects*
- Leilani Nishime and Kim D. Hester Williams (editors), *Racial Ecologies*
- Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence*
- Elspeth Probyn, *Eating the Ocean*
- Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*



"Dear Climate" project (Posters, podcasts and participant-authored letters), 2014-  
Core collaborators: Una Chaudhuri, Fritz Ertl, Oliver Kellhammer and Marina Zurkow

## SEMINAR REQUIREMENTS

Assignment	Deadline	Weight
<p><b>Presentation on an academic book</b></p> <p>Prepare and deliver a 10 to 12-minute presentation with slides that offers both a pithy summary of and critical response to a focused aspect of the monograph or essay collection assigned to you; focus on arguments, methods and stakes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Treat this as a test run for conference papers and other genres of presentation.</li> <li>▪ In addition to reading the book, conduct limited secondary research to situate it in a larger conversation. Refer to the bibliography / index to identify key scholars in that conversation.</li> <li>▪ Write a script of 1,000-1,200 words, but craft a structure and style geared for a live audience. TIPS: Avoid long sentences and dependent clauses; aim for short sentences that lead with main clauses; use citations only when critical to the ideas; use long quotations sparingly; signpost your subtopics / sections. Most importantly, practice several times with your slides and a timer.</li> <li>▪ Slides are required to offer you an opportunity to experiment with and hone this now pervasive medium. TIPS: Approach slides as a visual tool for the audience not as a mnemonic tool for you; sans serif fonts are easier to read than serif fonts; use text sparingly and employ readable fonts / font sizes; all images and figures should have a caption.</li> </ul>	<p>As assigned, starting in week 2 of the seminar</p>	<p>20%</p>
<p><b>Two essays, ~2,000 words each, chosen from the following three genres</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Nonfiction / narrative essay Develop a nonfiction narrative about a focused environmental issue informed by one or more of our seminar topics or assigned materials. Conduct limited research in the form of literature review, 'discourse analysis' of existing media coverage of the issue, and/or interviews. The final essay should be narrative and documentary (but not opinion-based or editorial) and should be addressed to a public, non-specialist audience. Visual or other media 'assets' are encouraged.</li> <li>2. Review essay Write an extended review of one scholarly book that intersects with our subject. There are no constraints on publication dates. You can select to read and review a book represented on our syllabus OR you can select a book based on your own outside research. Your review should provide a framework for what is significant about the book and in what wider intellectual conversation(s) it participates. Aim to balance concrete, pithy synopsis with evaluation of the book's merits and shortcomings. Clear, crisp and fully proofread writing is a key criteria for this assignment. Vary sentence length, avoid passive voice throughout, define any terms and write for a broad audience.</li> <li>3. Interpretive essay Write an analysis of a primary text from the syllabus in which close reading and an attention to form, genre and/or style are central and in which you make effective use of a few secondary sources from the syllabus to develop your core concept(s) and, as appropriate, literary/artistic/social context(s).</li> </ol>	<p>Week 6 &amp; Week 9</p>	<p>25% each</p>
<p><b>Collaborative project</b></p> <p>We will develop the goals and requirements for this project together in the first three weeks of the seminar. The broad aims are for each team to research and curate a digital exhibit or 'toolkit' of environmental narrative models and resources that could be used for K-12 or college teaching, environmental humanities research, public engagement with environmental science, etc.</p>	<p>Finals week</p>	<p>30%</p>

## TENTATIVE SCHEDULE (may be refined as we go)

All materials beyond the required books will be uploaded / added to our shared BOX folder

Week   Topics	Date	Assigned Materials
WEEK ONE Introductions and course overview	T 1.8	<input type="checkbox"/> Rachel Carson, Chapters 1-2 from <i>Silent Spring</i> <input type="checkbox"/> William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness"  <u>Digital materials to peruse in seminar together</u> <input type="checkbox"/> iNaturalist [Citizen Science] <input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Human Interaction Lab, "Sustainable Behaviors" [VR] <input type="checkbox"/> Marina Zurkow, "Mesocosm (Wink, TX)" [Animation, Algorithm]
WEEK TWO Biodiversity and biotech; uncanny environmental plot	F 1.18 <small>re-scheduled</small>	<input type="checkbox"/> Jeff VanderMeer, <i>Borne</i>  <input type="checkbox"/> Melinda Cooper, "Transgenic Life, Controlling Mutation" <input type="checkbox"/> Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" <input type="checkbox"/> Kate Marshall, "The Old Weird"
WEEK THREE Multispecies narratives and narrators; biodiversity data	T 1.22	<input type="checkbox"/> Jeff VanderMeer, <i>The Strange Bird: A Borne Story</i> <input type="checkbox"/> IUCN Red List entries (peruse homepage, read <i>Homo sapiens</i> , <i>Urocyon littoralis</i> / California Channel Island Fox, and <i>Ectopistes migratorius</i> / Passenger Pigeon)  <input type="checkbox"/> Heather Love, "Close Reading and Thin Description" <input type="checkbox"/> Ursula K. Heise, "From arks to ARKive.org," in <i>Imagining Extinction</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Michael Soulé, "What is Conservation Biology" <input type="checkbox"/> Peter Kareiva et al., "What is Conservation Science?"  <input type="checkbox"/> <del>Model essays for writing assignments</del>
WEEK FOUR Multispecies ecologies; ecomedia; borderlands; writing workshop	T 1.29	<input type="checkbox"/> Karen Tei Yamashita, <i>Through the Arc of the Rainforest</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Richard Misrach & Guillermo Galindo, "Border Cantos" (peruse site)  <input type="checkbox"/> Stacy Alaimo, "Sustainable This, Sustainable That" <input type="checkbox"/> Mark McGurl, "The New Cultural Geology"  <input type="checkbox"/> Model essays for writing assignments
WEEK FIVE (De)extinction drama; rewilding science	T 2.5	<input type="checkbox"/> T.C. Boyle, <i>When the Killing is Done</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Nathaniel Rich, "The Mammoth Cometh" <input type="checkbox"/> Genome 10K, Biospecimen Database (peruse site)  <input type="checkbox"/> Josh Donlan, "Re-wilding North America" and reply by Philip J. Seddon et al., "Frankenstein Ecosystems...." <input type="checkbox"/> Ben A. Minteer, "Extinct Species Should Stay Extinct"

Week   Topics	Date	Assigned Materials
WEEK SIX Climate change, chaos, justice	T 2.12	<input type="checkbox"/> Amitav Ghosh, Selections from <i>The Great Derangement</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Inuit Knowledge and Climate Change</i> (film available in Box folder) <input type="checkbox"/> Stephanie LeMenager, "The Humanities after the Anthropocene" <input type="checkbox"/> Michael Ziser and Julie Sze, "Climate Change, Environmental Aesthetics and Global Environmental Justice Cultural Studies"
WEEK SEVEN "Cli-fi"; genres of environmentalism	T 2.19	<input type="checkbox"/> Bill McKibben, Selections from <i>Eaarth</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Harrison Studio, "Independence Lake" animation <input type="checkbox"/> Marina Zurkow et al., "Dear Climate" poster series <input type="checkbox"/> Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History" <input type="checkbox"/> Rebecca Tuhus-Dubrow, "Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre"
WEEK EIGHT Alien ecologies and terraforming fantasy	T 2.26	<input type="checkbox"/> Octavia Butler, <i>Dawn</i> and <i>Adulthood Rites</i> (from trilogy) <input type="checkbox"/> <del>Angelo Vermeulen, "Merapi Terraforming Project" (peruse site)</del> <input type="checkbox"/> Rachel Greenwald Smith, "Ecology Beyond Ecology" <input type="checkbox"/> <del>Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"</del> <input type="checkbox"/> Stefan Helmreich, "What Was Life?"
WEEK NINE Alien ecologies and multiplanetary futurism	T 3.5	<input type="checkbox"/> Octavia Butler, <i>Imago</i> (from trilogy) <input type="checkbox"/> Elon Musk, "Making Humans a Multi-planetary Species" <input type="checkbox"/> NASA, <i>Visions of the Future</i> , poster series <input type="checkbox"/> <del>Peder Anker, "The Ecological Colonization of Space"</del> <input type="checkbox"/> <del>Ursula K. Heise, "Martian Ecologies and the Future of Nature"</del> <input type="checkbox"/> Lisa Messeri, "Gestures of Cosmic Relation..."
WEEK TEN Experiments in environmental narrative and the environmental humanities	T 3.12	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruth Ozeki, <i>A Tale for the Time Being</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Anna Tsing, Selection from <i>The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <del>Jamie Lorimer, Selection from <i>Wildlife in the Anthropocene: Conservation after Nature</i></del>