Course Description

In this seminar we will study a sampling of texts from various fields that deal with the dialectic between wilderness and civilization and the identities it enables. We will consider how the concept of wilderness sometimes doubles for that of nature to shape a dynamic identity we call “civilized.” Our studies will draw on insights from biology, ecology, anthropology, political theory, and literature.

We will attempt to respond to such questions as: If wilderness is nature without humans, why are we so irresistibly drawn to it? What function does wilderness serve in our civilized lives? How has it become necessary to our imaginative, spiritual, and political lives? What does an investigation of “wilderness,” “nature,” and “civilization” allow us to express about the world we inhabit? What are the limits of these concepts—what possibilities do they disallow?

We will examine these concepts in terms of how they work to create identity for humans, what ways of life they offer, what they obscure. And we’ll look closely at related concepts that structure our sense of ourselves, sometimes without our being wholly conscious of it: What does it mean to be natural, or live a natural lifestyle? Should social organizations follow nature, be “organic,” or go in a different direction? How natural is sex? gender? class? race? How does what we consider “natural” and “unnatural” affect the lifestyle options available to us?

Our goal in this seminar is to think through these and related issues and to develop language that enables us to imagine viable alternative futures.

Course Objectives

1. To use close-reading and writing to evolve the ability to discuss and think critically about an array of texts;  
2. To acquire a critical awareness of how identity categories are never simply given or natural but are subject to a specific set of social-cultural conditions that change through time;  
3. To synthesize this awareness so that it can inform your own personal life experience and broaden your scope.

Required Texts

I have also placed many required readings on the NYU Classes site for our course. These readings are indicated by an asterisk (*) in the schedule below.

**Suggested Texts, Course Reserves**

The following titles contain essays that go deeper or range wider than the assigned readings for particular topics. I have placed them on reserve for our course in Bobst Library.


**Writing Practices: Formal and Informal Writing and Workshops**

You will write three formal essays for the seminar: one 3–4-page essay, one 4–5-page essay, and one 6-page critical essay. I encourage you to develop the topics for your essays from your particular interests and from the readings. I can also help you develop topics suitable for these essays, if you wish. You will shepherd these formal essays through a process of drafting and peer-workshopping.

In addition to these three essays you will write two thinking essays (2–3 pages each), and one group essay (at least five pages) submitted as a forum post. You will also do several other writing assignments in the course of our seminar.

A word on our writing practices. We draft, and drafts of your essays in progress form an essential component of our workshops. I’ll give you more detailed information on workshops as we approach our first one.

**Formatting.** Final versions of your essays must be formatted as follows: double-spaced, 12-point typeface, with one-inch margins on all sides. “Four pages” means four full pages of your own writing. Put your name, my name, the course name, and the title of your essay on a separate cover sheet. If you need to include documentation, style it in accordance with MLA style guidelines (see Hacker for details). You must carefully proofread and edit your final versions.
**Submitting work.** Final versions of each essay are due on the due dates indicated on the syllabus; hard copy is due at the beginning of class on the due date; electronic versions are due by 12:00 p.m. on the due date.

All thinking essays and final drafts for formal essays may be submitted electronically by sending an attached Word file to my e-mail address: al260@nyu.edu. Please label your file as follows: your first name, comma, name of the author you’re writing on. For example: **Andrew, Eisenberg.doc.** It’s also fine to submit your work in hard copy.

**Course Requirements and Grades**

Our seminar relies on discussing and analyzing the readings together and on a regular series of writing workshops. This method will not succeed without your regular and timely attendance.

Your attendance is vitally important—to me and to your grade. Virtually all of what we do takes the form of group discussions. This includes your reading and critical appreciation of the texts. If you’re not present and alert in class, you aren’t able to participate in the group events. I encourage and greatly value your active and vocal participation. That is to say, I want to hear each of your voices at least once every class.

Turn off your cell phones and put them out of sight during class. You may use laptops, tablets, e-readers for class-related purposes only.

You must attend class on a regular basis and arrive on time. If you fall ill or experience an emergency, please contact me right away so that you can be prepared for the next class. Excessive absences (more than two) can jeopardize your course grade.

Grades are based on your ongoing class participation and on the quality of your written work. The development you make as you write improves the quality of your writing, so I will consider it when reckoning final grades. I am happy to read and evaluate any revisions of essays, provided they are submitted not later than one week after I have returned the graded essay to you.

**Grading Policy**

Roughly 80 percent of your final grade is based on your formal essays. The rest consists of informal written assignments and participation. Participation consists in regular attendance, punctuality, in-class work, and contributions to discussions. An approximate quantitative breakdown follows:

- First formal essay 10 %
- Second formal essay 10 %
- Third formal essay (critical essay) 20 %
- Thinking essays (2) 20 %
- Forum post 20 %
- Writing exercises (low stakes) 5 %
- Participation (including written homework) 15 %

More than two absences will jeopardize your grade. **Do not miss a workshop day.** Workshops give us all key insights into revision possibilities. If you’re not there, you won’t benefit and your grade for that essay will be subject to a deduction of half a letter grade.
Doing Honest Work

I follow the Gallatin policies on academic integrity.

As a Gallatin student you belong to an interdisciplinary community of artists and scholars who value honest and open intellectual inquiry. This relationship depends on mutual respect, responsibility, and integrity. Failure to uphold these values will be subject to severe sanction, which may include dismissal from the University. Examples of behaviors that compromise the academic integrity of the Gallatin School include plagiarism, illicit collaboration, doubling or recycling coursework, and cheating. Please consult the Gallatin Bulletin or Gallatin website [www.gallatin.nyu.edu/academics/policies/policy/integrity.html] for a full description of the academic integrity policy.

I will go over proper documentation style in the course of the semester in conjunction with Hacker’s A Pocket Style Manual.

Office Hours and Connectivity

My office is room 416 in 1 Washington Place (the Gallatin building).

My regular office hours for the Fall term are:

Wednesday 10:00–11:00 a.m., and Thursday mornings by appointment.

E-mail is the best way to contact me: al260@nyu.edu. I read e-mail during regular working hours (Monday to Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.). My e-connectivity is more sporadic in the evening and on weekends.

I may need to adjust this syllabus and course schedule to accommodate pedagogical needs as they arise. If I do, I will.
Course Schedule

You should read each assigned text by the dates indicated below. For instance, you have to finish reading all of Eisenberg's “Earth Jazz” before coming to class on Sept. 12.

7 Sept.
- Introduction.

12 Sept.
- Reading for discussion: Eisenberg, from “Earth Jazz”* (pp. 283–319).
- Writing assignment: Write a two-page essay on one metaphor from Eisenberg’s “Earth Jazz.”

Q: How is stewardship different from management?

1. Nostalgia for Nature

14 Sept.
- Two-page essay on one metaphor from Eisenberg’s “Earth Jazz” due.
- Readings/clip for discussion: Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness”* (pp. 7–28); Miller, “The Selfish Gene Reconsidered”* (pp. 208–223); Rifkin, “The Empathic Civilization”* (10:40).

Qs: How natural is nature? How natural is empathy?

19 Sept.

Q: Who dreams of equality, and why?

21 Sept.
- Readings for discussion: Guha and Martinez-Alier, Introduction to Varieties of Environmentalism* (pp. xi–xxiii); “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation, a Third World Critique” (pp. 92–108; optional); Smith, Conclusion* (pp. 186–201); Nelson, “Becoming Métis” (pp. 146–52; optional)* (); Booth, “We Are the Land: Native American Views of Nature”* (329–49).
- Writing assignment: Write a thinking essay (2–3 pages).

Q: How complicit is environmentalism in oppressive mindsets?

26 Sept.
- Thinking essay (2–3 pages) due.
- Discuss topics for the first formal essay (analytical, 3–4 pages);
- Writing assignment: Draft a 3–4-page close-reading essay.

Q: How exactly does speciesism affect how we organize the world?

28 Sept.
- Workshop for the first formal essay (close-reading essay, 3–4 pages).

2. How to Speak Animal

3 Oct.
- First formal essay due.
- Film for discussion of Grizzly Man (2005; 104 min.).

Qs: How viable is a return to nature? Why would you want to?
5 Oct.
  o  Reading for discussion: Snyder, “The Etiquette of Freedom”* (pp. 3–24) and “The Woman Who Married a Bear”* (155–74);
  o  Group 1 presentation and forum posts due.
  Qs: Who guarantees the compact with the wild? What do breaches of the compact entail?

10 Oct. M: No classes, Fall recess.

12 Oct.
  o  Reading for discussion: Abram, excerpts from Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology: “Reciprocity”* (pp. 57–80); “The Speech of Things”* (pp. 159–81).
  o  Discussion of close reading as a practice.
  o  Group 2 presentation and forum posts due.
  Qs: How does our language disrupt our sense of the world?

17 Oct.
  o  Reading for discussion: Shepard, Nature and Madness, pp. xix–73.
  o  Group 3 presentation and forum posts due.
  Q: Why do we destroy our habitat?

19 Oct.
  o  Reading for discussion: Shepard, Nature and Madness, pp. 75–130.
  Q: How can we better sync up our cultures to our biologies?

24 Oct.
  o  Reading for discussion: Quinn, Ishmael, pp. 3–148.
  Q: Where did civilization turn competitive? violent? bellicose?

26 Oct.
  o  Reading for discussion: Quinn, Ishmael, pp. 151–263.
  o  Discuss topics for the second formal essay (close-reading, 4–5 pages).
  o  Writing assignment: Draft a 4–5-page close-reading essay.
  Q: How can telling a different story change how we are living?

31 Oct.
  o  Workshop for the second formal essay (critical essay, 4–5 pages).

3. The Body through Space

2 Nov. Off the Grid? Solitude, Silence, Simplicity.
  o  Second formal essay (4–5 pages) due.
  o  Reading for discussion: View or read one of the sources on the website Hermitary and present it in class.

7 Nov.
  o  Reading for discussion: Coetzee, The Life and Times of Michael K., pp. 3–126.
  Qs: Why survive? How natural is survival?

9 Nov.
  o  Reading for discussion: Coetzee, The Life and Times of Michael K., pp. 129–84.
  Q: How coercive is learning to tell your story?

14 Nov.
  o  Reading for discussion: Solnit, Wanderlust excerpts* (approx. 80 pp.).
  o  Reading for discussion: Basho, Narrow Journey to the Far North (pp. 97–143);
  o  Group 4 presentation and forum posts due.
  Q: How does walking clarify our relation to space and place? to community? to nation?
4. Nature Out of Bounds

16 Nov.
- Film/reading for discussion: Lee, *When the Levees Broke*, acts 2 and 3 (film; approx. 2 hours); Ruffin, “After Levee Disaster”* (pp. 158–75).
Q: Who is responsible for nature’s extremes?

21 Nov.
- Discuss kinds of writing (academic, personal, journalism) and their audiences;
- Writing assignment: Write a thinking essay (2–3 pages) on Garrett/Lee.
Q: How can we administer epidemics?

23–27 Nov. THANKSGIVING RECESS.

5. Body Rebooted: The Myth of Beyond

28 Nov.
- Thinking essay (2–3 pages) on Garrett/Lee due.
- Reading/clip for discussion: Slater, “Dr. Daedalus”* (pp. 313–31); Holmes, “The Erotic Crisis”* (17:12).
Qs: How embodied are our identities?

30 Nov.
Qs: How can gender disarticulate the body? the mind? What can such disarticulations tell us about power relations between bodies? people?

5 Dec.
- Film for discussion: *Ghost in the Shell* (1995; 82 min);
- Assignment: Develop a critical question derived from at least three of the sources we’ve covered since the last formal paper (November 2).
Q: How embodied are our political identities? Can cyborgs resolve themselves?

7 Dec.
- Critical question due.
- Revisiting our critical questions: Roundtable on the final paper.
- Writing assignment: Draft a 6-page critical essay.

Coda

12 Dec.
- Reading for discussion: Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest*.
- Group 5 presentation and forum posts due.
Q: How natural is gender? colonialism?

13 Dec. Tuesday, Legislative Day
- Reading for discussion: Le Guin, *The Word for World is Forest* (cont’d).
Q: How do utopias guarantee our survival, especially when they appear to be unattainable?

14 Dec.
- Futures Perfect.
Q: What questions are you leaving with?
The final essay is due no later than Monday, December 1.