

Seeing Nature: An Environmental Humanities Field Guide to Visual Culture

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Environmental historians as well as other academics in the environmental humanities excitedly sprinkle images throughout their scholarship and teaching. They enthusiastically paste maps into PowerPoint presentations for classroom lectures and public talks, and lobby hard with editors to include photographs in the pages of their monographs and journal articles. Yet rarely do these scholars analyze the images as sources in their own right. Instead, they insert a painting, political cartoon, or magazine advertisement into their teaching materials and published work as ‘window dressing,’ an afterthought that merely illustrates facts or supports arguments made with other more traditional sources such as census tracts, diaries, or newspaper articles. Thus, while environmental humanities scholars love using images, they often don’t ‘read’ them analytically as texts.

This is the problem *Seeing Nature* will address. The main goal of this book is to provide environmental humanities scholars and their students with theoretical and practical tools to help them analyze visual sources. With this field guide in hand, readers will be able to interpret visual sources of the past that are vital to, yet under-utilized in, their work. They will also become savvier about using visual sources to communicate their own arguments regarding the political, social, and economic factors that continually shape society’s relationship to non-human nature.

Seeing Nature will be an approximately 250-page textbook comprised of a fifteen-page introduction followed by ten chapters that are each 20-25 pages in length. Each chapter, which will include four or five illustrations, is dedicated to one analytical ‘tool,’ or tip, that will teach readers a method for analyzing various aspects of an image. My co-author (Cindy Ott) and I have divided these tools into three overall groups: a pair of introductory chapters that present basic principles of visual analysis, a second set that focuses on skills for analyzing visual elements within the co-called ‘picture frame,’ and a final group of tools to help readers situate images in a broader context outside the picture frame. Each chapter will draw on relevant scholarship and include a short, annotated bibliography as well as a step-by-step exercise, based on that chapter’s ‘tool,’ that readers can use to train themselves and their students to analyze visual culture more effectively.