

**Marxism and Nature**  
American Studies 520  
Wednesdays 10:00 AM— 12:30 PM  
Humanities 420

Professor: David Correia  
Office: Humanities 440  
Office Hours: T 1:00-3:00, W 8:30—9:30 AM, or by appt.  
email: dcorreia@unm.edu

**Description:**

This class begins with Karl Marx and moves out into contemporary, interdisciplinary scholarship that draws on an explicitly Marxist framework in order to examine nature-society relations, broadly conceived. The texts for this course have been chosen for the ways they examine how the extension of capitalist social relations in contemporary society have remade nature in the image of capital: nature as an assemblage of commodities with broad consequences, experienced unevenly, for human and non-human life. The class will begin by examining the origins of the contemporary mode of capitalist social relations in contemporary society (the nature of *capitalism*) as a way to consider how these relations have given rise to particular kinds of political subjectivities and forms of resistance. The last two-thirds of the course will take up the question of *nature* and its uses and representations in capitalism. What becomes *nature* and what becomes *of* nature when it is understood as a commodity that circulates as private property in a global capitalist market where value is expressed only through exchange.

**Course Requirements:**

The assignments will be worth the following percentages for your final grade:

- Participation                      50%
- Book Review                        20%
- Final Essay                         30%

**Participation**

Participation in this seminar consists of the following four elements:

Attendance and Participation

Attendance is required in all meetings of the seminar. Medical or family emergencies, if possible, should be cleared in advance. I expect consistent, prepared, and appropriate participation in class discussions.

Facilitation

Each student will facilitate class discussions at least once during the semester, possibly with another student-colleague. Facilitators will construct a facilitation plan that explores the central

theoretical and methodological questions raised by the text. Facilitators should send along an email (outlining the facilitation plan **by Tuesday at 1 PM**, or sooner) so I can offer suggested changes to your plan, if needed.

### Critical Reviews

A critical review will be due each week **by Tuesday at 12 PM**. These short summaries should be thorough, thoughtful and well written. Each review will begin with a four sentence précis, followed by sections that examine methodology, method and argument. It should culminate with a concluding section that offers a critical appraisal of the text—an appraisal that includes a consideration of how the text engages (or doesn't engage) Marxism and other texts in the course. Include also one or more critical questions for discussion.

Below are some **specific** guidelines for writing a précis:

**A précis is NOT a reaction paper or an opinion piece**, rather it is a summary of the author's piece in as close and exact a form as possible, concisely written.

The structure of a précis:

1. Begin a précis by identifying both the author and the main argument in the first sentence.
2. In a second sentence explain how the author develops or supports the major claim (supporting argument statement).
3. In a third sentence state the author's purpose in writing the piece, using an "in order" phrase to be explicit.
4. Conclude with a sentence that identifies the intended audience and/or the relationship the author establishes with the audience.

### **Book Review**

You will be required to write one critical book review during the semester. In this review you should present a concise summary of the book's thesis or overall argument, and then analyze the work in terms appropriate to Marxian analysis as developed in the seminar. We will discuss how to write critical review essays more extensively in class.

### **Final Essay**

You are required to produce a conference-length paper in which you take up a Marxian concept or idea (For example: value, commodity fetishism, alienation, primitive accumulation, surplus labor, labor process and so on) and either review its use in contemporary scholarship in nature-society scholarship, or apply it to your own work. Papers should be submitted electronically no later than Noon on May 14th.

### **Special Accommodations:**

If you have or believe you have a disability, you may wish to self-identify. You can do so by providing documentation to the office for Services for Students with disabilities, which is located in Mesa Vista Hall, #2021. Appropriate accommodations may then be provided for you. Any

student in this course who has a disability that may prevent full demonstration of academic ability should contact me as soon as possible so that we can discuss accommodations necessary to ensure full participation and to facilitate your educational opportunities.

### **Academic Integrity:**

From the UNM Student Handbook: You will maintain the highest standards of honesty and integrity in academic and professional matters. The University reserves the right to take disciplinary action, up to and including dismissal, against any student who is found guilty of academic dishonesty or otherwise fails to meet the standards.

### **Required Texts:**

#### **Readings**

---

The following books are required.

1. Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I (Penguin, [Ben Fowkes, transl.] )
2. Geoff Mann, *Disassembly Required: A Field Guide to Actually Existing Capitalism* (AK Press, 2013)
3. Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (Routledge, 2006)
4. Joel Wainwright, *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008)
5. Paige West, *Conservation is our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea* (Duke, 2006)
6. Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, 2004)
7. Matthew T. Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom and the Forces of Capital* (Minnesota, 2013)
8. Vinay Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India* (Minnesota, 2008)
9. Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minnesota, 2009)
10. Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Duke, 2006)

### **Schedule:**

January 22  
Introduction

January 29  
Karl Marx: *Capital*, Volume I, Parts I & II

February 5  
Marx, Part III

February 12  
Marx, Part IV & V

February 19  
Marx, Part VI, VII & VIII

February 26  
Geoff Mann, *Disassembly Required: A Field Guide to Actually Existing Capitalism* (AK Press, 2013)

March 5  
Melissa Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (Routledge, 2006)

March 12  
Joel Wainwright, *Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2008)

March 19:  
**SPRING BREAK—No Class**

March 26 (**finalize book review selection**)  
Paige West, *Conservation is our Government Now: The Politics of Ecology in Papua New Guinea* (Duke, 2006)

April 2  
Anna Tsing, *Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection* (Princeton, 2004)

April 9:  
**AAG—No Class**

Spend the week completing your book review on one of the following books:

1. Friedrich Engels, *The Dialectics of Nature* (Int'l Publishers, 1968 [~1872])
2. Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the Political and Economic Origins of our Times* (Beacon, 1971 [1944])
3. Alfred Schmidt, *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (Verso, 2014 [1971])
4. Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine, and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Georgia, 2013 [1983])
5. Neil Smith, *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (Georgia, 2008 [1984])
6. Nancy Peluso, *Rich Forests, Poor People: Resource Control and Resistance in Java* (California, 1994)
7. James O'Connor, *Natural Causes: Essays in Ecological Marxism* (Guildford, 1997)
8. Ariel Salleh, *Ecofeminism as Politics: Nature, Marx and the Postmodern* (Zed Books, 1997)
9. James Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (Yale, 1999)
10. Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World* (Verso, 2002)

11. Scott Prudham, *Knock on Wood: Nature as Commodity in Douglas-Fir Country* (Routledge, 2004)
12. John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Rift: Capitalism's War on the Planet* (Monthly Review Press, 2011)
13. Julie Guthman, *Weighing In: Obesity, Food Justice and the Limits of Capitalism* (California, 2011)
14. Rebecca Lave, *Fields and Streams: Stream Restoration, Neoliberalism, and the Future of Environmental Science* (Georgia, 2013)

April 16 (**Book Review Due**)

Vinay Gidwani, *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India* (Minnesota, 2008)

April 23 (**Final Paper Abstract Due**)

Kaushik Sunder Rajan, *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life* (Duke, 2006)

April 30

Nicole Shukin, *Animal Capital: Rendering Life in Biopolitical Times* (Minnesota, 2009)

May 7

Matthew T. Huber, *Lifblood: Oil, Freedom and the Forces of Capital* (Minnesota, 2013)