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Book Review

Nicole Seymour, *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2018, 320 pp., ISBN 9781517903893

Climate change, pollution, species extinction, and environmental degradation in general are the reality that we face today. This reality has been vigorously reflected in various cultural texts that attempt to spread ecological awareness and call for action in order to make the survival of the planet and its inhabitants, both human and nonhuman, possible. While there seems to be no place for humor in the discussion of such a grave issue as environmental degradation, there are numerous cultural texts that tackle the current environmental situation from a rather peculiar perspective: trying to generate the audience's laughter in the contexts when it seems to be inappropriate at all. These texts are the primary concern of Nicole Seymour's *Bad Environmentalism: Irony and Irreverence in the Ecological Age*.

Examining the value of these texts as eco-narratives, Seymour coins the term "bad environmentalism" that she defines as "environmental thought that employs dissident, often-denigrated affects and sensibilities to reflect critically on both our current moment and mainstream environmental art, activism, and discourse" (6). According to the author, "such thought is both widespread – spanning multiple media forms and genres in the Western world, including animation, documentary and fiction film, performance art, poetry, prose fiction, reality TV, social media, sketch comedy, and stand-up comedy since at least the 1970s – and understudied" (6-7). Indeed, as Seymour underscores, the cultural examples of "bad environmentalism" are numerous and therefore should be carefully examined as legitimate texts that influence the construction of ecological and environmental knowledge today. Zeroing in on what one might call "alternative environmentalism," Seymour refutes the current, rather limited perception of environmentalism, ultimately "expand[ing] our narrow understandings of what environmentalism looks, sounds, and, most importantly, feels like" (7).

What makes this book unique and much needed is that it “makes the rare academic move of taking climate denialism/skepticism and antienvironmentalism seriously” (8). Seymour scrutinizes various cultural narratives of antienvironmentalism through the prisms of affect theory and queer theory. She starts her project with the examination of irony in eco-films, including Hannes Lang’s *Peak* (2011) and Mike Judge’s *Idiocracy* (2006), and then moves to, what she calls, “recent perversions of an educational phenomenon: nature/wildlife programming” (35), providing a close analysis of the MTV reality program *Wildboyz* (2003-2006) along with the series of short films *Green Porno* (2008-2009). After that, Seymour investigates queer eco-texts, arguing that “queer environmental performances reveal that mainstream environmentalism is itself a performance, one with very strict codes” (36). She demonstrates how mainstream environmentalism and queer environmentalism are similar in their technicalities yet different in their ways of communicating their messages regarding current environmental problems, the latter being full of “camp, gaiety, and frivolity” (36) that the former lacks. In the chapters that follow, the author is interested in the role of race and class in environmentalism. Thus, first she examines “the myth of the Ecological Indian and the stereotype of the Urban African American” (36). Seymour claims that “these tropes are, centrally, issues of affect – sentimentalizing Native Americans and framing African Americans as ecophobic – as well as distractions from the environmental injustices that both groups suffer in common” (36). Finally, focusing on several examples, among which is James L. Brooks and Matt Groening’s animated *The Simpsons Movie* (2007), the scholar examines class as a social construct that “shapes affective relationships with the nonhuman” (37).

Bad Environmentalism is a very witty yet doubtless important book to read. Seymour’s focus on those eco-texts that have, for various reasons, not drawn sufficient (if any) scholarly attention helps expand the meaning of environmentalism today, in ecologically precarious times. The scholar recognizes the marginalized position of the narratives that she explores, yet she underlines that “in their practices of alternative environmentalisms, they remind us of the unlimited imaginative possibilities of an era facing some of the most troubling limits we have ever known” (38). The book will be of a particular interest to scholars and academics working in the field of environmental humanities. It is also an excellent source to use in undergraduate and graduate courses on environmental justice, eco-cinema, and environmental history.