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## AREA OF FOCUS / PROBLEMS I'M ADDRESSING

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I work in the **environmental humanities**, which explores how literature, film, poetry, philosophy, and other cultural forms shape our views and values toward the natural world.

Humanities scholars challenge the notion that our environmental crisis is primarily a techno-scientific problem. In fact, much of what we have conventionally termed “environmental issues” are profoundly entangled with human ways of being in the world: questions of representation, belief, power and social justice. The humanities -- which engages problems of **meaning, value, ethics, and knowledge production** -- enrich ecological inquiry and sustainability education by providing insight into these realms. Moreover, the **arts of imagination** (and study thereof) draw on the power of **word, story, and image** to enliven and shape environmental concern, and are powerful tools for **imagining alternatives**.<sup>1</sup>

## WHAT GAME WOULD I DESIGN?

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I'd love to tackle the problem of mass-consumption by designing a game around philosopher Kate Soper's concept of "**Alternative Hedonism**." I admit that I've rarely played games in the past (I know that should change!) so have little idea for a good format, but here are some key principles it might highlight:

- Soper reminds us that pleasure is a better motivator than fear: it would be more effective to **seduce** people to adopt a sustainable society than to scare them with warnings of catastrophe. We should also stop framing sustainability issues in terms of deprivation and what we must “give up,” and focus instead on the pleasures we would *gain* in an alternative society (more time for family & friends, better food, more opportunities for creativity, art, sex, adventure, just being lazy and napping all day, more outdoor activity, etc). Players exploring the realm of **Alternative Hedonism** would be invited to INDULGE themselves in the sensual pleasures listed above, and hardly miss the “lesser pleasures” of our dominant work-and-spend economy.
- Rather than focusing on sustainable lifestyles as a “sacrifice,” how about exposing the **sacrifices inherent in consumer culture!** (which are not always obvious). Even if consumer society were ecologically sustainable, it still would fail to make us happy. Mass

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<sup>1</sup> From Buell, Lawrence, Ursula Heise, and Karen Thornber. “Literature and Environment,” in *The Annual Review of Environment and Resources* Vol. 36 (2011) 417-440.

consumerism increases rates of stress, long work hours, ill-health, and loss of personal time as we race to stay afloat in our work-and-spend economy.

- The game could also highlight a third point Soper makes in discussions of Alternative Hedonism: Capitalism commodifies basic leisure activities and then sells *back* to us those things we sacrificed in devoting so much of our time to work and spend. For example, the gym is a way to get exercise in just 30-40 min because the opportunity to be active during the day has disappeared (or has been commodified itself in car and highway systems); dating agencies and 24/7 childcare are created after we lose the time for personal relationships, and now we must pay for capitalism to manage those relations; expensive luxury holidays become ways to regain the pleasures and feelings we had to give up to work so hard to support consumer habits; agencies charge us for home cooking and cleaning because we are left with no time to manage this ourselves, etc...

**TO LEARN MORE ABOUT ME AND MY WORK, CONTACT OR VISIT:**

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**Recent Seattle Times story** on my Environmental Greif and Climate Anxiety course: "Feeling it: UW Bothell class helps students face emotional impact of a warming planet" (Mar 13, 2018)