

## Return to Nature - The Regenerative Animation Theory (RAT)

**Regenerative Animation** (RA) is a practice that pairs love, preservation, and lessons from Nature with 2D and 3D animation production tools and techniques. RAT delivers a **Return to Nature** philosophy, or style of living, that emphasizes closeness to nature, rather than to artifice (advertising / marketing) and the damage caused by civilization (climate change). W. Paul

“I have looked over your Regenerative Animation Theory, and I have to say that I am very impressed. It is certainly a sound theory. I feel that you should absolutely proceed with your work here, as it is much needed for future generations.”

Rachel McCoppin, Ph.D., Professor  
Liberal Arts and Education Department  
University of Minnesota Crookston

“For the most part, animation has been excluded from the purview of film theory.” From “Animating Film Theory” Karen Beckman, Ed. Duke University, Press. 2014.

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## Hypotheses

[1] Like all Disney's conservation efforts, the underlying philosophy is that promoting a love of, and connection to, wildlife is the best way to ensure current and future generations seek its preservation.

[2] Nature always evolves and adapts. Humans should, too. In biology, regeneration is the process of renewal, or restoration, of ecosystems making them resilient to natural fluctuations or events that cause disturbance or damage. Every species is capable of regeneration, from bacteria to humans.

[3] RAT is a values-based theory that points to choices and consequences for humans and their experience in Nature. But there is a spiritual component too Nature, too. "A love for Nature."

[4] Ecology + Love / Respect / Preservation = Human Nature Experience (HNE)

[5] As there is no clear theory of animation, RAT will advance and integrate the core subjects at hand.

## Theory of Animation

There is no formal theory of animation. The following passages help to understand why:

"... animation is the least theorized area of film... as either the 'step-child' of cinema, or as not belonging to cinema at all, belonging to the graphic arts." (p. 114)

"The discipline of animation studies is riddled with what amounts to an avoidance of resolving the problem of animation within the larger scope of film studies." (p. 121)

"Scholars working on animation often did so as a tangent to their disciplines, more often than not cultural studies, languages and literature, or art history, frequently providing historical and contextual information, but there were few research-specific or theoretical book length publications on animation." (p. 112)

"... studio ideology, production hierarchy, union contracts, special effects hybridization, and independent film affect the (theorizing) definition of animation." (p 114)

"The cultural impact of animation is impossible to funnel into a theory of animation...we need to draw on interdisciplinary methodologies to contextualize the making of animation films in related practice areas." (p. 122-3)

"One area that is recently taking on substantial theoretical form is documentary animation." (p. 125)

Author: Suzanne Buchan, Animation, in Theory, Chapter 7. [Animating Film Theory](#), Karen Beckman, ed.

### Key definitions for RAT include:

#### [A] What is regeneration?

The repair and long-term preservation of damaged ecological and man-made systems that have been impacted by climate change and other human causes.

#### [B] What is animation?

Animation is the method that encompasses myriad filmmaking techniques, by which still images are manipulated to create moving images. In traditional animation, images are drawn or painted by hand on transparent celluloid sheets (cells) to be photographed and exhibited on film. Animation has been recognized as an artistic medium, specifically within the entertainment industry. Many animations are computer animations made with computer-generated imagery (CGI). Stop motion animation, in particular Claymation, has continued to exist alongside these other forms. Wikipedia

## [C] What is Nature?

"Nature, in the broadest sense, is the physical world or universe. "Nature" can refer to the phenomena of the physical world, and also to life in general. The study of nature is a large, if not the only, part of science. Although humans are part of nature, human activity is often understood as a separate category from other natural phenomena." Wikipedia

Nature is best enjoyed as a local or regional pleasure. An animated Nature film is a long cartoon.

Partnering with nature is one of the most effective ways to be resilient to the effects of climate change, and that's exactly what regenerative food systems do. [nature.ly/461Onhn](https://nature.ly/461Onhn). The following are closely-related Nature RAT components:

**Permaculture** – It works with Nature. Permaculture is the concept of utilizing land, resources, people, and the environment in a manner that doesn't produce any waste – and encourages the use of closed loop systems seen in nature. Closed loop systems, when speaking about the environment, refer to the ideal where nothing should be wasted.

**Regenerative Agriculture** - is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems. It focuses on topsoil regeneration, increasing biodiversity, improving the water cycle, enhancing ecosystem services, supporting bio sequestration, increasing resilience to climate change, and strengthening the health and vitality of farm soil.

**Sustainability** is the practice of using natural resources responsibly, so they can support both present and future generations. Forests are one natural resource that sustainability groups are focused on.

**Nature Immersive Education** - encourages children to explore, inquire, and discover the wonders of the environment around them. <https://www.edenacres.org/nature-days>. Through hands-on experiences like forest hikes, wildlife encounters, gardening, and nature-inspired art....

**Nature-based Human Development** - Key are the cumulative impacts that local initiatives can have at global levels. It highlights the contributions that indigenous communities around the world are making every day to protect the planet. <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdr2020chapter6pdf.pdf>

**Biodiversity** — short for biological diversity — is the variety of all living things and their interactions. Biodiversity changes over time as extinction occurs and new species evolve. Scientists often speak of three levels of diversity: species, genetic, and ecosystem diversity. <https://naturalhistory.si.edu/>

**Rewilding** - Rewilding is comprehensive, often large-scale, conservation effort focused on restoring sustainable biodiversity and ecosystem health by protecting core wild/wilderness areas, providing connectivity between such areas, and protecting or reintroducing apex predators and highly interactive species (keystone species). <https://rewilding.org/what-is-rewilding/>

Two helpful children's teaching methods in support of Nature are:

**STEAM Education** - an approach to teaching and learning that combines science, technology, engineering, the arts, and math to guide student inquiry, discussion, and problem-solving. Education experts say STEAM education is about more than developing practical skills alone.

**SEL**, or Social-emotional learning, commonly referred to by its acronym, SEL, is a method of promoting holistic child development by teaching students skills such as self-regulation, persistence, empathy, self-awareness, and mindfulness.

## The RA Process and the Monomyth

RA involves an oral, written or hand-drawn story for the animator. It is recommended that Mythologist **Joseph Campbell's monomyth** structure, the Hero's Journey, be a framework for RA. For kid's use, the monomyth is simplified into three phases: the community issues, a journey to find out about the issue – to find answers –

and finally to return to the community and solve the issue. This method to “find-out and take action” is a corollary definition of regeneration.

## Three WilliPaulStudio.com RAT Cartoons



Permaculture Willi - Hawk Drone @ Food Forest



Wild Horses in the Aquifer



The Oil Spill Myth

## Four Big Budget Nature Films

“Who doesn't love nature? Seeing the natural world in action, especially without the influence of humanity, has remained one of the most awe-inspiring sources of beauty and creativity. Countless works of art have found their inspiration from nature's beauty, especially in recent years when environmental awareness has become a bigger focus. In the world of cinema, animated movies offer some of the most creative looks at the natural world. They offer unique blends of storytelling and artistry that let audiences bear witness to untouched realms and learn valuable lessons about man's responsibility to the planet.

**Finding Nemo** - After the death of his wife and all but one of his children, Marlin (Albert Brooks) the clownfish dedicates himself to keeping his surviving son, Nemo (Alexander Gould) safe from danger. Sadly, Marlin's overprotectiveness drives Nemo to an act of rebellion by swimming into open water, where he gets picked up by a diver. With the aid of a forgetful fish named Dory (Ellen DeGeneres), Marlin braves all the dangers of the ocean to find his son.

**Avatar** - Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), a paralyzed former Marine, becomes mobile again through one such Avatar and falls in love with a Na'vi woman (Zoe Saldana). As a bond with her grows, he is drawn into a battle for the survival of her world. Avatar derives from a Sanskrit word meaning "descent," and when it first appeared

in English in the late 18th century, it referred to the descent of a deity to the earth—typically, the incarnation in earthly form of Vishnu or another Hindu deity.

**Bambi** - The residents of a tranquil forest are delighted to hear of the birth of a baby deer and young prince of the forest called Bambi (Bobby Stewart, Donnie Dunagan, and Hardie Albright). Under the tutelage of his mother (Paula Winslowe), Bambi has a good childhood and makes friends with other animals. Things change in the wintertime when Man enters the forest. Bambi was Disney's first attempt to portray more realistic animal characters, and the result is nothing short of magical. Because the animations used real animals for reference, they could perfectly capture the miracles of nature, from a baby's birth to the loss of a parent. The backgrounds by Tyrus Wong help to sell the forest as a mystical place of beauty, wonder, and danger.

**Lion King** - As the future king of the Pride Lands, Simba (Johnathan Taylor Thomas and Matthew Broderick) naturally gets a bit of a cocky attitude and enjoys looking for adventure. His father, Mufasa (James Earl Jones), tries to impart onto him the virtues of a good king, such as a focus on responsibility. Meanwhile, his uncle Scar (Jeremy Irons) covets the throne and plots to kill them both.”

<https://collider.com/best-animated-movies-nature/>

## Research Questions

1. Where are we returning from?
2. What is the status of HNE today?
3. How is animation different than film?
4. Compare and contrast cartoons and documentary animation.
5. How does Nature-centric advertising support regenerative animations?
6. How does RAT incorporate mythology, regeneration, and Nature? (monomyth, McCoppin interview)
7. Back to Nature but looking forward to a regenerative future?
8. What is documentary animation?
9. What are the connections between children and cartoons?

## Conclusions

If children are the inheritors of the Earth, then we must find ways to help them find solutions to the challenges that we have given them. Adults need to make themselves whole before our children can find this balance. Nature, with all of her complexities, must come first.

'The Lessons of Nature in Mythology reveals the important role of nature in mythology: from creation myths, myths that present the necessity of the harvest for survival, myths that tie humans to wild aspects of the environment, and finally myths that reveal the human life cycle as no different from the cycles of the seasons.' (McCoppin, p.16)

<https://www.planetshifter.com/myth/2315/sacred-trees-and-refuges-interview-with-rachel-s-mccoppin-author-of-the-lessons-of-nature-in-mythology>

## Degeneration – implications

### “Entertainment ecology”

### Implications of regenerative systems?

### Regenerative Animation? Questions, next steps? Examples?

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[https://willipaulstudio.com/pdf/Regenerative\\_Animation.pdf](https://willipaulstudio.com/pdf/Regenerative_Animation.pdf)