

DHSS 377

Media Narratives in the Chthulucene

Section: 1

Days/Times: MWF 11-11:50 am

NOTE: We will meet, variously, in person or online Fridays, depending on the week

Location: WAL A430

Instructor: Dr. Anne Royston

Office Location: LBR 3317

Office Hours: by appointment

Email Address: amrgsl@rit.edu

Overview and Goals

In her 2016 book *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, scholar Donna Haraway re-christens our current Anthropocene the “Chthulucene,” seeking tangled (or “tentacular”) stories that combine multiple approaches, scientific and humanities-based and technological, to difficult, overwhelmingly large situations and environments. This class takes its cue from Haraway’s work, engaging with her book and a wildly various selection of other works: stories, nonfiction, poems, artist’s book, art installation, video game, film. In doing so, we destabilize both terms in the course title: what we mean by both *media* and *narrative*.

There is no way to think tentacular stories and hybrid media without deepening the context in which these function. As we account for race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and other positionalities, we will consider animal consciousness and writing from non-human points of view, ecological engagements, retellings of fantasy and myth, transnational and transcultural constructions of the world. Bringing together our different backgrounds, technical skills, interests, and stumbling blocks, we will seek to understand from as many angles as we can the thorniness of how and to what end we tell stories in the Chthulucene, and how different kinds of media enable (or make difficult) these stories. Understanding also entails undertaking our own experiments, in the form of the midterm and final projects that comprise the bulk of this class’s deliverables.

During this course, you will

- engage in unconventional, experimental, tentacular thinking to build an understanding of the kinds of urgent stories demanded by the Chthulucene
- ask incisive questions of those stories and their tellers
- think about how contemporary media allows and encourages particular conceptions of “narrative” and how to exploit, as well as break, these conceptions

- think and work alongside others to create your own multimodal narratives, both in digital and non-digital forms
- gain a greater sense of the complexities at play in our contemporary world, and a greater sensitivity to the risks (and capacities!) of being human.

Required Texts

All readings and works will be available on, or linked to via, mycourses unless otherwise specified.

General Requirements

Be in class. The most obvious. But let me give you some further encouragement:

1. A significant amount of learning occurs face-to-face, especially in class sections this small. Despite what SIS says, this is a seminar, not a lecture: it relies on you, dear students, being involved and both physically and psychically present. Things happen in class that cannot be replicated outside of class.
2. I expect you to bring the reading for that day to class, which means bringing printouts, tablets, laptops, etc. Use your phone if you must, even though it always hurts me to see you straining your eyes, but do not dare to send a text or Snapchat or check Discord or whatnot. This is extremely rude and it enrages me.
3. I do not have a strict attendance policy or late penalty. I simply expect you to be in class. Ergo, if I sense I am being taken advantage of, I will ask you to account for your lateness or lack of attendance. I reserve the right for lateness or lack of attendance to reflect unfavorably on your final grade!

Turn in all assignments on time. If you are scurrying around to make up assignments and I am grading and returning things after their due date, that cuts into all our time. If you have an issue with a deadline, come talk to me about it before the due date! I can't guarantee an extension, but I'm fairly amenable. I do not grant extensions after the due date. Otherwise, for each day you are late (including weekends) I will deduct one full letter grade from the grade you would have earned had you turned the assignment in on time.

Do the reading and be an active participant. If discussion is lagging, I will assume the worst—that you have not done the reading!—and begin assigning short papers or surprising you with quizzes to ensure the reading is being done.

Grades

Reading responses (40%)

In lieu of traditional papers, we will be exploring topics through a quantity of informal writing. Each week before **Monday 11 am** (aka when class starts), post a thoughtful response to the mycourses discussion board as well as a

response to a colleague's post. I expect these to be well-developed, at least a few paragraphs of original thought, and at least a paragraph in response.

Midterm: Experiment//exploration (20%)

Locate an example of a muddle, a string figure, a knotty issue, and analyze it utilizing appropriate media to convey your (researched!) story. Your product can be written as a paper, presented as a compact webpage or poster, or take another form—I encourage you to think outside the boundaries of traditional academic production.

Final project: Tentacular thinking (25%)

For this, you will bring together several facets of a Chthulucenic issue in a critical-creative way. You might attempt a robust revision of your midterm, but it's not required. You might work singularly or in a small group. Digital projects are encouraged, but exceptions will be readily granted. Workshops/presentations comprise part of this grade.

Attendance and participation (15%)

Grading scheme

93 – 100 A
 90 – 92.9 A-
 88 – 89.9 B+
 83 – 87.9 B
 80 – 82.9 B-
 78 – 79.9 C+
 73 – 77.9 C
 70 – 72.9 C-
 68 – 69.9 D+
 63 – 67.9 D
 60 – 62.9 D-
 below 60 F

All work (when possible) will be submitted to me online at mycourses. The final project will be submitted either online at mycourses or in person on the final day of class.

On Content

All my classes read a wide variety of material, incorporating diverse viewpoints and life experiences that may be unfamiliar, challenging, difficult, etc. While I will try my best to give content warnings where I think it's applicable, everyone is unique. Therefore, it is up to you to take care of yourself and self-modulate! If there is a discussion during which you need to be absent, just drop me a line stating as much; no need to give details or explanations. In more extreme cases, we may be able to discuss alternative options if issues are ongoing. If you suspect this is you, consider another section of this course.

RIT Honor Code

Plagiarism is an incredibly serious offense. Any plagiarized material submitted to me, including work you have completed for another class, will automatically result in a failing grade for this class. As an institution of higher learning, RIT expects students to behave honestly and ethically at all times, especially when submitting work for evaluation in conjunction with any course or degree requirement. The Department of English encourages all students to become familiar with the RIT Honor Code and with RIT's Academic Integrity Policy.

RIT Academic Integrity Policy URL: <http://www.rit.edu/academicaffairs/policiesmanual/d080>

Student Accommodations

RIT is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities. If you would like to request accommodations such as special seating or testing modifications due to a disability, please contact the Disability Services Office. It is located in the Student Alumni Union, Room 1150; the Web site is www.rit.edu/dso. After you receive accommodation approval, you must let me know in person or via email so we can make necessary arrangements.

Writing Commons Resource Information

The UWP Writing Commons provides free writing instruction for all RIT students at any stage of the writing process. Located on the first floor of the Wallace Center, the Writing Commons is staffed by peer and professional writing consultants with diverse backgrounds and from a variety of academic disciplines. Whether you need help getting started, organizing your thoughts, developing ideas, struggle with grammar and mechanical issues, using sources effectively or properly formatting your citations, we help students develop productive writing habits and revision strategies. To schedule an appointment, go to <https://www.rit.edu/writing/writing-commons-overview>.

Course Schedule

This is a living document. It is subject to change!

Welcome to the Chthulucene

Week 1

Mon	8/28	welcome to class!
Wed	8/30	Donna Haraway , Chapter 1: Playing String Figures with Companion Species in <i>Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene</i>
Fri	9/1	Haraway
Mon	9/4	Labor Day - no class
Wed	9/6	Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, et. al , "Bodies Tumbled into Bodies" in <i>Arts of Living on A Damaged Planet</i>
Fri	9/8	Tsing et. al

Mon	9/11	Ursula K. Le Guin , "The Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction"
Wed	9/13	Aimee Bender , "Devourings"
Fri	9/15	Le Guin and Bender

Mon	9/18	Kristen Gallagher , <i>85% True/Minor Ecologies</i>
Wed	9/20	Gallagher
Fri	9/22	Octavia Butler , "Bloodchild"

Mon	9/25	Butler
Wed	9/27	Career Fair - no class
Fri	9/29	No class

Indigenous Perspectives

Mon	10/2	Tutorial with Rebekah Walker - meet in lab
Wed	10/4	Layli Long Soldier , selected poems from <i>Whereas</i>
Fri	10/6	Long Soldier

Week 7

Mon	10/9	Fall break - no class
Wed	10/11	Natanya Ann Pulley , "The Killers of Rabbits and Brothers"
Fri	10/13	Pulley

Week 8

Mon	10/16	Never Alone and Beyond Blue
Wed	10/18	Tutorial with Rebekah Walker - meet in lab
Fri	10/20	

Midterm due Friday 10/20

In the Environment

Week 9

Mon	10/23	Jen Bervin , selected poems from <i>Silk Poems</i>
Wed	10/25	Bervin
Fri	10/27	Bervin

Week 10

Mon	10/30	Andy Goldsworthy , <i>Rivers and Tides</i>
Wed	11/1	Goldsworthy
Fri	11/3	Goldsworthy

Week 11

Mon	11/6	Species in Pieces
Wed	11/8	Plant Wave
Fri	11/10	

Week 12

Mon	11/13	Okja (screen in class)
Wed	11/15	Okja (screen in class)
Fri	11/17	Okja

Week 13

Mon	11/20	Catch-up day
Wed	11/22	Thanksgiving - no class
Fri	11/24	Thanksgiving - no class

Week 14 **Final project presentations & work**

Mon	11/27
Wed	11/29
Fri	12/1

Week 15

Mon	12/4
Wed	12/6
Fri	12/8

Week 16

Mon	12/11
-----	-------

Final project due 12/15 on mycourses or to my office