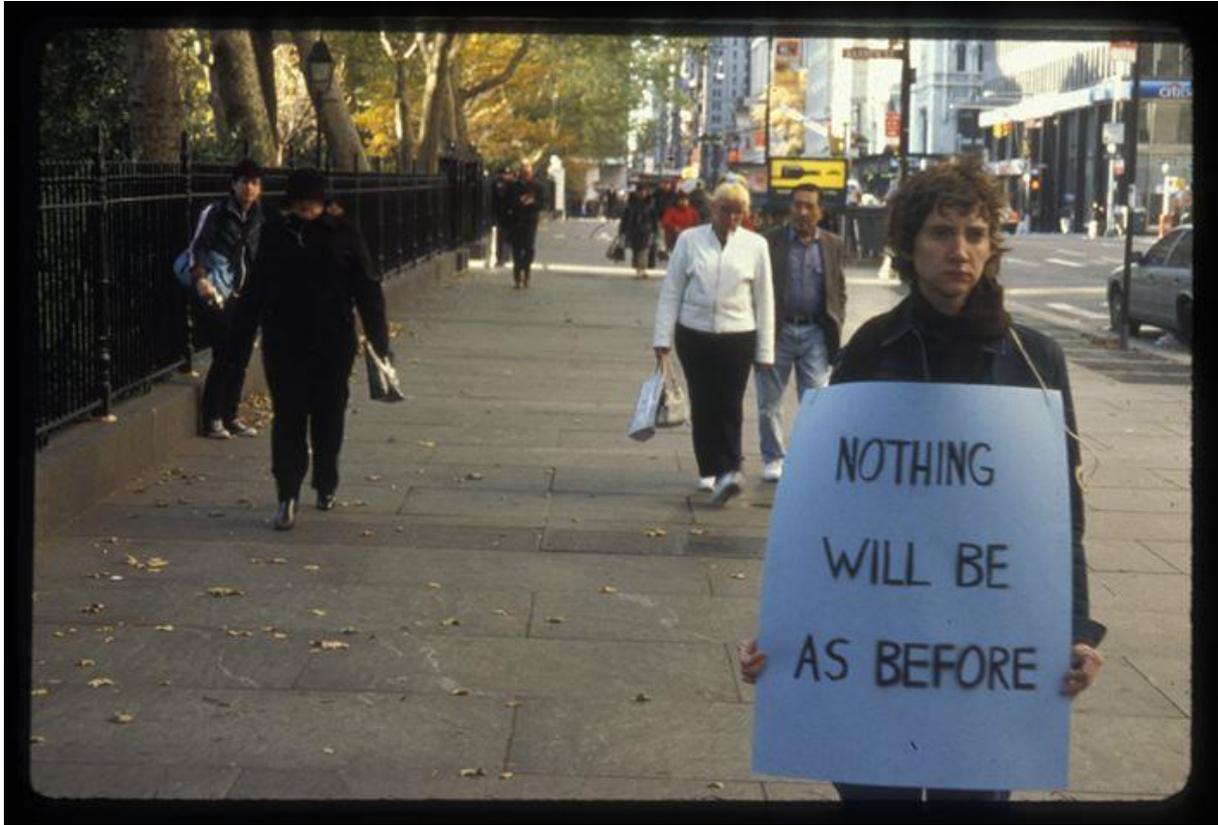


## **ESH293 The Long Contemporary**

**Spring 2022**



Sharon Hayes, 'In the Near Future' (2005)

### **Weekly Outline**

#### **Week 1: What is the Contemporary?**

##### **What we are doing this week:**

This week we will consider the questions "what is the contemporary?" and "what is contemporary literature?" We will work with Raymond Williams' writing on the relationship between literature and its historical moment of production, to begin to answer these questions. We will also consider the contemporary publishing landscape and what trends are dominant and emergent in literature today.

In preparation, please 1) read the assigned excerpts from Williams; and 2) look over the module reading outline and bibliography on QMplus to

check you are able to access all the material needed for the rest of the module.

### **Necessary reading (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Raymond Williams, "Dominant, Residual, Emergent" and "Structure of Feeling" from *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 1977), pp. 121-135 [PDF].

### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- When is the contemporary?
- What makes literature contemporary or otherwise?

## **Week 2: At the End of the Human**

### **What we are doing this week:**

This week we will encounter our first dominant theme of contemporary literature, "the Anthropocene". We will consider how literature contends with climate change, and how narrative can (or cannot) imagine life *after* "the human".

### **Necessary reading (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Nicola Davison, 'The Anthropocene epoch: have we entered a new phase of planetary history?', *The Guardian*, 30 May 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/may/30/anthropocene-epoch-have-we-entered-a-new-phase-of-planetary-history>

Rob Nixon, "Anthropocene: Promise and Pitfalls of an Epochal Idea", in *Future Remains: A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene*, eds. Gregg Mitman et al., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), pp. 1-20. [PDF]

Amitav Ghosh, "Where is the fiction about climate change?", *The Guardian*, 28 October 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/oct/28/amitav-ghosh-where-is-the-fiction-about-climate-change->

### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- What is most striking to you about the definitions of "the Anthropocene" you have read this week?
- What recent fiction have you encountered that you think is "about" the Anthropocene?

### **Wider reading:**

Heather Davis and Zoe Todd "On the Importance of Date, or Decolonizing the Anthropocene": <https://www.acme-journal.org/index.php/acme/article/view/1539/1303>

### **Week 3: After Human / After Man ("Water" *Heat and Light*)**

#### **What we are doing this week:**

We continue with the work from last week, reading an excerpt from the Australian Aboriginal (Mununjali) writer Ellen van Neervan's 2014 novel, *Heat and Light*. We will consider questions such as how can we understand the Anthropocene as a crisis of the human and of 'humanism'? Who is the 'human' in narratives of human extinction? How might the rhetoric of the Anthropocene reproduce processes of marginalization and subjugation for some humans?

#### **Necessary reading (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Ellen Van Neervan, "Water," *Heat and Light* (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 2014), pp. 69-123. [PDF]

(brief excerpts from) David Scott, 'The Re-Enchantment of Humanism: An Interview with Sylvia Wynter', *Small Axe*, 8, September 2000, 119-207. [PDF]

#### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- How do the texts we are reading this week represent "the Human"?
- How does this week's reading about the human relate to last week's work on the Anthropocene?

### **Week 4: Fate of the Nonhuman (workshop screening of *Arrival*)**

#### **What we are doing this week:**

This week we continue with our project of thinking about life at the end of humanity by turning to non-human and "more-than-human" figures. We will consider how recent film and literature has represented the world from a non-human perspective, and what such shift in perspective might do to the stories we tell about "the end of the world".

#### **Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

*Arrival*, dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2016 [WORKSHOP SCREENING]

Robert Macfarlane, *Underland: A Deep Time Journey* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2019), pp. 367-383. [PDF]

Robin Wall Kimmerer "Learning the Grammar of Animacy", *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom: Scientific Knowledge and the Teaching of Plants*, (Milkweed, 2013), pp. 48-59. [PDF]

### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- How does our reading and viewing this week "animate" non-human points of view?
- How do these texts imagine relations between humans and nonhumans?

### **Wider reading:**

*Y: The Last Man*, Brian K. Vaughan and Pia Guerra (comic book published between 2002 – 2008); also TV series (2021). [this narrative also raises issues we discuss in weeks 8, 9, 10 of this module].

## **Week 5: Deindustrialisation's Afterlives**

### **What we are doing this week:**

This week we will be zooming in on some of the material conditions of contemporary working life that we have encountered as part of our work on the Anthropocene: mining natural resources; the changing conditions of such work; and land as having agency, as another non-human figure. This week we will read poetry by the Native American writer Simon Ortiz and consider poetry as a form of political activism.

### **Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Simon Ortiz, excerpts from *Fight back: for the sake of the people for the sake of the land* (New Mexico: Institute for Native American Development, Native American Studies, University of New Mexico, 1980) [PDF]

Roger Moody, *Rocks and Hard Places: The Globalization of Mining*. (London: Zed Books, 2007), pp. 10-12, 127-129 [PDF]

### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- How does Ortiz' poetry represent the relation between land and people?
- What strikes you about the form of Ortiz' poetry – what interests you about its language, tone, structure?

## **Wider reading:**

Adamson, Joni, Rachel Stein, Simon Ortiz, Teresa Leal, Devon Peña, and Terrell Dixon. "Environmental Justice: A Roundtable Discussion", *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 7, no. 2 (2000): 155–70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44085765>. [PDF]

Lima Majhi and Word Sound Power

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPq\\_1hb\\_W1g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vPq_1hb_W1g)

Bhagban Majhi on Development:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fHZiQmalmMU>

## **Week 6: Work Work Work**

### **What we are doing this week:**

Continuing with the theme of work, this week we will think about how literature contends with dominant and emergent experiences of labour in relation to customer service work, and to structural conditions of economic precarity. We will be reading the novel *Convenience Store Woman* by the Japanese writer Sayaka Murata, as well as excerpts from a recent essay on work, by the scholar and activist Amelia Horgan.

*This week we will also discuss your first assignment, due Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March (week 8).*

### **Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Sayaka Murata, *Convenience Store Woman*, translated by Ginny Tapley Takemori (London: Portobello Books, 2018)

Amelia Horgan, "The Paradox of New Work", from *Lost in Work: Escaping Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), pp. 48-65 [PDF]

### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- What images of "labour" stick with you from this week's reading? Why do you think they resonate so loudly?
- Discuss experiences of work with older people in your life – are they similar, different? What is notable about your shared experiences?

## **Week 8: Social Reproduction**

### **What we are doing this week:**

This week we continue to think about work but from the angle of "social reproduction". We will spend some time thinking about what social reproduction is, as well as the particular gendered and raced forms it takes in the contemporary moment, such as "care work". We will read from the American poet Anne Boyer's *Garments Against Women*, as well as scholarly work by Nancy Fraser.

**Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Anne Boyer, *Garments Against Women* (London: Penguin, 2015).

**Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- Keep a note of cultural, historical, literary references you needed to look up as you read *Garments*; what these references tell you about the world Boyer *reproduces* in her writing?
- How does Boyer write about "care"?

**Wider reading:**

Nancy Fraser, "Crisis of Care? On the Social-Reproductive Contradictions of Contemporary Capitalism", in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), pp. 21-36. [PDF]

**Week 9: Automation**

**What we are doing this week:**

One of the dominant narrative concerns of contemporary popular culture is the encroaching impact of automation -- from Amazon's Alexa to automated factories. This week we work out why this narrative has such purchase in contemporary literature and film, and we will consider both the speculative fictions and the historical matter of automation.

**Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

*Her* (dir. Spike Jonze, 2013)

Jennifer Rhee, "Caring Care Labor, Conversational Artificial Intelligence, and Disembodied Women" (excerpts) in *The Robotic Imaginary: The Human and the Price of Dehumanized Labor* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), pp. 31-58. [PDF]

**Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- When you think about the word “automation”, what do you think of?
- What scenes of work and labour do we encounter in *Her*?

### **Wider reading:**

Kazuo Ishiguro, *Klara and the Sun* (London: Faber, 2021)

Neda Atanasoski and Kalindi Vora, *Surrogate Humanity: Race, Robots, and the Politics of Technological Futures* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2019). [Links to work we have done on the “human” and “man” in week 3 and 4].

Caroline Bassett, Sarah Kember, Kate O’Riordan Furious, *Technological Feminism and Digital Futures* (London: Pluto Books, 2020).

## **Week 10: Sexual Politics**

### **What we are doing this week:**

Reading one of the most highly acclaimed novels published in English in 2020, Raven Leilani's *Luster*, this week we discuss contemporary sexual politics. We will consider representations of desire and sexuality in relation to historical structures of work, care, and romance.

### **Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Raven Leilani, *Luster* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020)

Katherine Angel, *Tomorrow Sex Will Be Good Again: Women and Desire in the Age of Consent* (London and New York: Verso, 2021), pp. 27-40.  
[PDF]

### **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- How is sexuality and desire narrated in *Luster*?
- Returning to the language we used in week one, what “emergent” discourses around sexual politics do you identify in the reading this week?

### **Wider reading:**

Amia Srinivasan, “Does Anyone Have the Right to Sex?”, *London Review of Books*, 40.6 (22 March 2018). <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n06/amia-srinivasan/does-anyone-have-the-right-to-sex>

## **Week 11: What now?**

## **What we are doing this week:**

This week we will reflect on the work we have done together on this module, and how we take that work forward into the world. By reading a selection of manifestos and visions for the future, we will begin to collectively address the question: "what now?"

## **Necessary reading/viewing (to be done before workshop & seminar):**

Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Naomi Klein, "Nishnaabeg Anticapitalism", in *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2017), pp. 71-82. [PDF]

Gargi Bhattacharyya et al., "Shared Grief, Hope and Resistance", in *Empire's Endgame: Racism and the British State* (London: Pluto Press, 2021), pp. 186-200 [PDF]

## **Questions to think about as you are reading this week:**

- What about our contemporary moment do you want to reproduce? What do you want to abolish?

## **Week 12: Essay Tutorials**