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Fall 2020 office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 1:00 pm – 4:00pm, and by appointment.
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LIT 6105-001 Petrocultures/Energy Humanities
Tuesday, 4:00PM-06:50PM
Room CU 321



In the day we sweat it out on the streets of a runaway American dream
At night we ride through the mansions of glory in suicide machines
Sprung from cages out on highway nine,
Chrome wheeled, fuel injected, and steppin' out over the line
Oh, Baby this town rips the bones from your back
It's a death trap, it's a suicide rap
We gotta get out while we're young
`Cause tramps like us, baby we were born to run—
Bruce Springsteen, “Born to Run” (1975)

If the spice trade has any twentieth-century equivalent, it can only be the oil industry—
Amitav Ghosh, “Petrofiction” (1992)

Course Description:

What would happen if we were to examine literary texts through the lens of energy? That is, what if we approached William Wordsworth’s Romantic ruminations on the “sublime” crafts of “men’s arts” as a praxis for thinking about the material forces of the sublime—“motion and means...on land and sea” made possible first by the winds that would move commerce across the Atlantic Ocean in the long sixteenth century and soon thereafter by coal? What if we understood colonial occupation in the context of East Africa or throughout Latin America in terms of the transnational plantation economies that would also be fueled by wind or hydropower or coal, and thus conducted

postcolonial critiques of novels like Gabriel García Márquez's *Autumn of the Patriarch* or Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *A Grain of Wheat* accordingly? Might we then understand energy not merely in terms of the "fuel-injected" American dream featured in a Bruce Springsteen song, but instead as the very means of fueling culture? Might we then appreciate that the conventional tropes of literary expression and critique are the products of the material forces contemporary to each work? That petroleum, for example, isn't simply a theme, but is that which enables the very production of culture?

As a seminar on Petrocultures, and an introduction to the Energy Humanities, this course shall focus on the imbrications between energy and cultural production in order to understand the ways in which material forces like coal or petroleum literally *fuel* culture. We shall explore a wide archive of cultural works that represent, in the words of literary scholar Patricia Yaeger, the "ages of wood...coal...oil" and ultimately *alternative* fuel sources like wind and solar power. Writers like Ursula LeGuin, Amitav Ghosh, Kim Stanley Robinson, Muriel Rukeyser, Nawal El Saadawi, Paolo Bacigalupi, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Herman Melville, and many others will guide us through our new geological epoch—call it the Anthropocene or the Thermocene—illustrating the intersections of cultural discourse, political ideology, and aesthetic expression.

As we will also come to learn, there is no "age of wood," for example, without a correlative commitment to Enlightenment notions of "improvement," whether of self or land. There is likewise no age of oil, nor of wind, without a persistent commitment to such notions of civilizational progress as we see in the paeans to industry and "enlightenment" that generally characterize popular political thought. Thus, while we end with an exploration of alternative energy—alternatives, that is, to fossilized carbon—we likewise question whether a simple shift in fuel is sufficient to the task of averting the sorts of apocalyptic scenarios presented in novels like Bacigalupi's *Ship Breaker*. Ultimately, we will follow the After Oil collective in asking how aesthetic forms represent (and often reinforce) energy regimes and how, in the face of an overwhelming commitment to disaster porn, we might "frame the unimaginable," which is to say life after carbon.

Required Texts:

Chris Abani, *GraceLand*, ISBN-13: 978-0312425289

Paolo Bacigalupi, *Ship Breaker*, ISBN: 978-0316056199

Brett Bloom, *Petro-Subjectivity: De-Industrialization Our Sense of Self*, ISBN: 978-1-4951-5922-0

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, ISBN-13: 978-0393284386

Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*, ISBN-13: 978-0375758775

Ursula LeGuin, *The Word for World is Forest*, ISBN-13: 978-0765324641

Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*, ISBN-13: 978-0995042001

Imre Szeman, Jennifer Wenzel, and Patricia Yeager, eds. *Fueling Culture: 101 Keywords for Energy and the Environment*, ISBN-13: 978-0-8232-7391-1

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (ISBN: 978-0691178325)

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, ISBN-13: 978-1949982909

A.C. Wise et al. *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation*, ISBN-13: 978-1937794750

All readings appended with an asterisk () will be made available on Canvas.

Class requirements and Policies:

- **Critical essays:** each student will prepare **two** brief (2-3 page) essays over the course of the term. Essays shall respond to a key text from our weekly readings and should contain: clear explanations of central concepts; close readings of key passages; and suggestions for new avenues for critical intervention—i.e., where these texts might also lead us. It is expected that the short essays will follow a logical research itinerary—that is, the shorter essays are designed to offer an opportunity to explore ideas and concepts with an eye toward the seminar paper.
- **Book review:** students will compose a traditional book review of 1500-2500 words based upon one of the assigned texts. We will discuss genre conventions and submission procedures in class.
- **Seminar leadership:** each student will be assigned a weekly discussion to lead. This will require a brief (3-5 minute) synopsis of central ideas; a selection of keywords to anchor class conversation; and a minimum of two questions for class discussion. **Students are encouraged to lead a discussion based upon the same text for which they prepared a critical essay.*
- **Conference abstract** (250-500 words): each student will construct an abstract for a national or regional academic conference based upon their proposed seminar papers.
- **Seminar paper** (20-25 pages): each student will produce a formal critique of selected works inclusive of appropriate secondary source material. We will discuss secondary source material, including our library's electronic resources as well as a host of digital archives focused on Environmental Humanities research, as we move through the semester. Primary and secondary source material must be reflective of the work of our class.

Grading policy:

Critical essays: 40%

Book review: 15%

Seminar leadership: 15%

Paper abstract: 5%

Seminar paper: 25%

Attendance/Lateness Policy:

Your presence is vital to our classroom community, so regular attendance is required. You will be permitted ***one unexcused absence*** after which your grade will be negatively affected. You are expected to come to class prepared to discuss assigned texts and to produce written responses both in class and at home. You are also expected to bring your textbook(s) to class every session.

Grade Scale:

Florida Atlantic University follows a plus/minus (+/-) grading system. Numeric Values for this course are as follows: 93-100 A+; 92-90 A-; 89-87 B+; 86-83 B; 82-80 B-; 79-77 C+; 76-73 C; 72-70 C-; 69-60 D; 59-0 F

FAU ATTENDANCE POLICY:

Students are expected to attend all of their scheduled University classes and to satisfy all academic objectives as outlined by the instructor. The effect of absences upon grades is determined by the instructor, and the University reserves the right to deal at any time with individual cases of non-attendance. Students are responsible for arranging to make up work missed because of legitimate class absence, such as illness, family emergencies, military obligation, court-imposed legal obligations

or participation in University- approved activities. Examples of University-approved reasons for absences include participating on an athletic or scholastic team, musical and theatrical performances and debate activities. It is the student's responsibility to give the instructor notice prior to any anticipated absences and within a reasonable amount of time after an unanticipated absence, ordinarily by the next scheduled class meeting. Instructors must allow each student who is absent for a University-approved reason the opportunity to make up work missed without any reduction in the student's final course grade as a direct result of such absence.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES: In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA), students who require reasonable accommodations due to a disability to properly execute coursework must register with Student Accessibility Services (SAS)—in Boca Raton, SU 133 (561-297-3880); in Davie, LA 203 (954-236-1222); or in Jupiter, SR 110 (561-799-8585) —and follow all SAS procedures. For more information, see <http://www.fau.edu/sas/>

COUNSELING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES (CAPS) CENTER: Life as a university student can be challenging physically, mentally and emotionally. Students who find stress negatively affecting their ability to achieve academic or personal goals may wish to consider utilizing FAU's Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) Center. CAPS provides FAU students a range of services – individual counseling, support meetings, and psychiatric services, to name a few – offered to help improve and maintain emotional well-being. For more information, go to <http://www.fau.edu/counseling/>

CODE OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY: Students at Florida Atlantic University are expected to maintain the highest ethical standards. Academic dishonesty is considered a serious breach of these ethical standards, because it interferes with the university mission to provide a high quality education in which no student enjoys an unfair advantage over any other. Academic dishonesty is also destructive of the university community, which is grounded in a system of mutual trust and places high value on personal integrity and individual responsibility. Harsh penalties are associated with academic dishonesty. For more information, see: http://wise.fau.edu/regulations/chapter4/Reg_4.001_5-26-10_FINAL.pdf

Class Schedule: (subject to change depending on class progress)

Weeks 1 & 2: Introductions, Reading Energy (8/25 & 9/1)

Dominic Boyer & Imre Szeman, "The Rise of Energy Humanities"*

Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Planet: An Emergent Humanist Category" & "The Climate of History: Four Theses"*

Patricia Yaeger, "Literature in the Ages of Wood, Tallow, Coal, Whale Oil, Gasoline, Atomic Power, and Other Energy Sources"*

Amitav Ghosh, "Petrofiction: The Oil Encounter and the Novel"*

Jennifer Wenzel, "Introduction" (*Fueling Culture: 101 Keywords for Energy and the Environment*)

Vivasvan Soni, "Energy" (*Fueling Culture*)

William Wordsworth, "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways"*

Herman Melville, from *Moby Dick**

Ursula LeGuin, *The Word for World is Forest*

Week 3: What's in a Name: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Thermocene, Chthulucene, Plantationocene...or a Billion Black Anthropocenes? (9/8)

Stacey Balkan, "Anthropocene." *Global South Studies: A Collective Publication with The Global South**

Jason Moore, from "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis"*

Christopher Bonneuil & Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, from "Thermocene: A Political History of CO₂" from *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us**

Donna Haraway, from "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene" from *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene**

Sophie Sapp Moore, Monique Allewaert, Pablo F. Gómez Pablo F., and Gregg Mitman. "Plantation Legacies"*

Kathryn Yusoff, "Geology, Race, and Matter" from *A Billion Black Anthropocenes or None**

Week 4: Wood & Plantationocene Aesthetics (9/15)

Vin Nardizi, "Wood" (*Fueling Culture*)

Cultures of Energy podcast: Eduardo Cohn*

Jamaica Kincaid, "The Flowers of Empire"*

Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins*

Week 5: Sylvan Thinking (9/22)

Amitav Ghosh, *The Glass Palace*

Week 6: King Coal (9/29)

Ashley Dawson, "Coal" (*Fueling Culture*)

Susan Hatmaker, "Coal Ash" (*Fueling Culture*)

Nathan K. Hensley and Philip Steer, "Signatures of the Carboniferous: The Literary Forms of Coal," from *Ecological Form**

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*

Week 7: Energy and Worker Struggles (10/6)

Ashley Dawson, "Energy & Autonomy: Worker Struggles and the Evolution of Energy Systems"*

Timothy Mitchell, from *Carbon Democracy: Political Power in the Age of Oil**

Cultures of Energy podcast: Timothy Mitchell*

Andreas Malm, from *Fossil Capital**

Muriel Rukeyser, "Absalom"*

H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*

Week 8: Petrocultures (10/13)

Imre Szeman, Adam Carlson, and Sheena Wilson, "Introduction: On Petrocultures, Or, Why we need to understand oil to understand everything else"*

Stephanie LeMenager, from *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century**

Brett Bloom, *Petro-Subjectivity: De-Industrializing Our Sense of Self*

Week 9: Reading Petroleum (10/20)

Graeme Macdonald, "Oil and World Literature"*

Imre Szeman, "Conjectures on World Literature"*

Peter Hitchcock, "Oil in an American Imaginary"*

Stacey Balkan & Swaralipi Nandi, "Reading our Contemporary Petrosphere"*
Frederick Buell, "A Short History of Oil Cultures: Or, the Marriage of Catastrophe and Exuberance"*
Cultures of Energy podcast: Graeme Macdonald*
Pablo Neruda "Standard Oil"*
China Mieville, "Covehithe"*
Italo Calvino, "Petrol Pump"*

Week 10: Petro-Violence (10/27) (Merkin)

Michael Watts, "Petro-Violence" (*Fueling Culture*)
Cultures of Energy podcast: Michael Watts*
Rob Nixon, "Pipedream: Ken Saro-Wiwa, Environmental Justice and Micro-Minority Rights" from *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor**
Jennifer Wenzel, "Petro-Magic Realism: Toward a Political Ecology of Nigerian Literature"*
Ken Saro-Wiwa, "Ogoni! Ogoni!"*
Chris Abani, *GraceLand*

Week 11: Gendering Petrofiction (11/3) (Sara)

Cultures of Energy podcast: Sheena Wilson*
Sheena Wilson, "Petrofeminism and Petrointersectionality"*
Sharae Deckard, "Gendering Petrofiction: Energy, Imperialism and Social Reproduction"*
Nawal El Saadawi, *Love in the Kingdom of Oil*

Week 12: After Oil (11/10) (Chey)

Amitav Ghosh, "Stories," *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable**
Shelley Streeby, "Introduction," *Imagining the Future of Climate Change: World-Making Through Science Fiction and Activism**
Cultures of Energy podcast: Paolo Bacigalupi*
Paolo Bacigalupi, *Ship Breaker*

Week 13: Solar Futures (11/17) (Kelsey)

Amanda Boetzkes. "Solar" (*Fueling Culture*)
Herman Scheer From *The Solar Economy: Renewable Energy for a Sustainable Global Future**
Jamie Cross. "The Solar Good: Energy Ethics in Poor Markets." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (2019): 1-20*
Cultures of Energy podcast: Solarpunk (feat. Rhys Williams)*
A.C. Wise et al., selections from *Sunvault: Stories of Solarpunk and Eco-Speculation*

Week 14: Aeolian Landscapes & (Just) Energy Transitions (11/24)

Lester Brown, from *The Great Transition: Shifting from Fossil Fuels to Solar and Wind Energy**
Dominic Boyer, *Energopolitics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene* (selections TBA)
Cymene Howe, *Ecologics: Wind and Power in the Anthropocene* (selections TBA)

Week 15: Solarity: Imagining Just Energy Futures (12/1)

Petrocultures Research Group, *After Oil*
Kyle Powys Whyte, "Way Beyond the Lifeboat: An Indigenous Allegory of Climate Justice"*
Cultures of Energy podcast: "Kyle Powys Whyte"*
Darin Barney, Imre Szeman, *et al*, "Solarity: Energy and Society after Oil"*