



University of Stuttgart

American Literature and Culture

**Virtual Lecture Series:
Towards “Environmental
Humanities”?
Ecocriticism in Theory
and Practice**

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 9, 8.00 P.M. (CET)

The Environmental Humanities in the Age of Global Syndemic

Prof. Dr. Joni Adamson

In the past year, as COVID has moved throughout the world revealing dire truths about the connections between climate change and diverse contagions that are impacting societies around the globe. How will we teach this “new normal”? In this lecture, I will discuss why, in a COVID-19-affected world, the keywords and discourses around anthropogenic climate change must now illuminate the connections between contagions of various kinds, both biological (in the conventional sense of epidemiology) and anthropogenic (climate change, racism, infrastructural and environmental injustices). I will introduce and discuss the history of an emerging keyword, ‘syndemic,’ a relative new term put forward in a 2019 Report of the Lancet Commission, to define a “synergy of epidemics” that “co-occur in time and place...[and] interact with each other to produce complex” pathological conditions “that share common underlying societal drivers.” I will then explore how the environmental humanities, long a champion of interdisciplinarity in teaching, scholarly research, and the practical application of the humanities in public-facing projects is confronting the challenge of syndemic. I’ll focus on how literary critics specifically, and environmental humanities networks more generally, are focusing on the strengths of the humanities in storytelling and narrative to prepare students to meet the complex challenges we are facing in the critical span of time which the United Nations has dubbed the “Decade of Action” (2020-2030).

As example, I’ll discuss my own pedagogical practice around climate fiction, or cli fi, in courses that allow students to explore how they might confront and/or avert synchronous future epidemics. Taking examples from my course, “Food, Film and the Future,” I’ll discuss how climate fictions and film can give students opportunities to explore why social injustices cannot be uncoupled from environmental injustices, and give them opportunities to imagine how they might build inclusive, just, diverse, interdisciplinary communities of purpose with the skills, flexibility and co-produced knowledge for catalyzing food system transformations that will be requisite to ensuring the health of future generations, human and nonhuman.