

# ENVS 411 Communicating Environmental Issues with Theater and Film

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## COURSE INFO

Monday & Wednesday 2:00-3:50pm

Location: Columbia 142

Co-instructors:

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

*Our species, ours, has by itself in the course of a couple of generations managed to powerfully raise the temperature of an entire planet, to knock its most basic systems out of kilter. But oddly, though we know about it, we don't know about it. It hasn't registered in our gut; it isn't part of our culture. Art, like religion, is one of the ways we digest what is happening to us, make sense out of it that proceeds to action. Otherwise the only role left to us—noble, but also engaging in its impotence—is simply to pay witness.*

-- Bill McKibben, "Imagine That: What the Warming World Needs Now is Art Sweet Art"

*Film as dream, film as music. No art passes our conscience in the way film does, and goes directly to our feelings, deep down into the dark rooms of our souls.*

-- Ingmar Bergman, quoted by John Berger: 'Ev'ry Time We Say Goodbye' in Sight and Sound, BFI, June 1991

*Stories are how we think. They are how we make meaning of life. Call them schemas, scripts, cognitive maps, mental models, metaphors, or narratives. Stories are how we explain how things work, how we make decisions, how we justify our decisions, how we persuade others, how we understand our place in the world, create our identities, and define and teach social values. "*

— Dr. Pamela Rutledge, Director, Media Psychology Research Center

The aim of this course is to evaluate and illustrate how film and the theater arts can help communicate, critique, and educate the public about the complex environmental and social issues of our times.

Students will analyze how environmental and social issues are presented on-stage and on-screen through different forums for visual storytelling, ranging from fictional film to activist theater to documentary film. The overarching theme of the course is to investigate how environmental/social activism and communication is enhanced (or hindered) through these modes of creative visual expression. As the course develops students will have the chance to put these concepts into practice and create their own environmentally-themed theater or film pieces. The course will examine, explore and apply drama and filmmaking techniques as communication tools to support transfer of complex environmental information and inspire social change. We will analyze through active workshops how to work around barriers of accessibility, understanding, culture, etc. Students will examine if and how drama and documentary can be used as a unifying language in environmental conflicts that cross many disciplines and livelihoods.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Attendance and participation in class discussions
- Attendance on ONE FIELD TRIP to view a theatrical performance at the University of Oregon: *LOVE.WILL.SHAKE*, playing Nov. 2-17 (not environmentally themed) live and in-person. **There is no cost for this trip IF you arrive early enough to score the student tickets. Make sure to be there at least ONE HOUR before the show starts to get these. It is easier to get tickets on Thursday nights rather than Friday or Saturday.** See the UO Theater website for more details: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/theatre/>
- TWO 1-2 PAGE ANALYSES of pre-assigned environmentally themed film/theater pieces (see below). Students will offer insight into how an environmental issue was presented/framed, the use of communication techniques (characters, setting, mood, etc.), and analyze core messages within the piece.

- WEEKLY JOURNAL assignments to play, experiment, and develop individual theatrical/creative works. Journal assignments will be given weekly and will include things like: writing monologues or dialogues, outlining a potential documentary film, sketching sets and costumes, describing a choreographed movement piece, developing a character profile, etc. Each entry will surround a specific environmental issue.
- ONE 5-6 PAGE “SCRIPT,” documentary film script, street composition, screenplay etc. about an environmental issue of your choice. Examples include monologues, dialogues, forum theater, documentary film treatment, descriptions of dance choreography, plans for a performance, or other creative outlines of how the performing arts or film might be used to communicate a topic. *Students will also provide a demonstrated understanding of their chosen environmental issue with a one-page treatment discussion of main arguments, controversies, misconceptions, etc.*
- FINAL GROUP PERFORMANCE PIECE and/or FILM that builds on the individual script assignment. With a group of 4-6 other students, you will work to create a final creative performance piece or film that sheds light on a specific environmental topic. You will be given chances to build on components of your midterm script, or create something new entirely. For performance pieces, students will present a staged reading of their piece in-class during week 10. For films, students will screen their films in class during that same week.
- REFLECTION PORTFOLIO that incorporates an individual reflection on the group project, an exploration and refinement of one journal entry, and a short proposal for incorporation of performing arts/film activities to be designed for use in an a UO ENVS class discussion section on a predetermined topic/issue.

All assignment due dates are marked in the course schedule below.

## GRADING CRITERIA

Participation and attendance	10%
Weekly Journal	15%
Theater piece/film analyses	15%
“Script” assignment (midterm)	25%
Final group project	20%
Individual reflection portfolio	15%

## COURSE POLICIES

- CLASS PARTICIPATION
 

Discussion is vital to this course. You’ll be expected to be an active participant in class discussions. That means completing readings before class and engaging professionally in discussion. Although no relevant comment is off-limits in this course, we will be discussing controversial topics and you are expected to treat all members of this class respectfully. Be careful not to dominate discussion so others feel welcome to contribute.
- ATTENDANCE
 

Don’t miss class unless you’re sick. We’ll all be working to stay healthy this term. If you get the flu, please email us ahead of class so that we know not to expect you. Attendance counts for 5% of your grade and each absence will be calculated accordingly. Please arrive to class on-time.
- HOW TO TURN IN COURSEWORK
  - Journals should be brought to class each Monday for peer exchange and discussion
  - All other written materials (unless otherwise specified) must be turned in to **BOTH KELLY AND MEGAN** via email. If you send an assignment to one of us and not the other, this creates hassle and confusion for us. Please always email us both at: [ksky@uoregon.edu](mailto:ksky@uoregon.edu) and [mtoth@uoregon.edu](mailto:mtoth@uoregon.edu).
- In order to pass this class, students must complete and turn in all assigned coursework. No incompletes except in the case of a documented emergency.
- Please retain copies of the original graded work that is returned to you throughout the term. It is your responsibility to keep these original copies as documentation of your grades.
- TECHNOLOGY
 

No texting. Laptops are allowed in class only for note-taking and other class-related purposes.
- INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES: If you experience difficulty in the class for any reason, please don’t hesitate to contact us. If you have a disability that may prevent you from fully participating in this class, please let us know as soon as possible.

- ACADEMIC HONESTY: All work presented in this class must be your own and produced exclusively for this class. Any information from outside sources must be properly cited, preferably with the MLA, ASA, or APA format.
  - Links to MLA, ASA, and APA citation guides: <http://library.uoregon.edu/guides/citing/index.html#tools>
  - Tips for avoiding plagiarism: <http://library.uoregon.edu/guides/plagiarism/students/index.html>
  - Procedures for academic misconduct at UO: <http://uodos.uoregon.edu/StudentConductandCommunityStandards/AcademicMisconduct/tabid/248/Default.aspx>

## **RESOURCES**

The UO offers a range of free services to help students in a variety of situations:

- TEACHING AND LEARNING CENTER (TLS)  
Provides workshops, individual tutoring, and other services to help students with coursework including WRITING. (<http://tlc.uoregon.edu/learningservices/labs/labs.html>). You will be graded on the quality of your written work in this course, so remember this great resource.
- UNIVERSITY COUNSELING AND TESTING CENTER  
Provides comprehensive mental health and testing services to UO students. Counseling services are provided through a student paid fee as part of the incidental and student health center fee, so there is no additional cost to students. <http://www.uoregon.edu/counsel/> Phone: 541-346-3227
- DISABILITY SERVICES (DS)  
Provides assistance and support to students with documented physical, psychological or learning disabilities and provides accommodations to students based on disability. <http://ds.www.uoregon.edu/>. Phone: 541-346-1155. TTY: 541-346-1083.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### UNIT 1: OVERVIEW OF CONNECTIONS BETWEEN FILM, THEATER, AND ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION

#### **Week 1: Introduction to course themes, evolution of “eco-theater” & environmental issues in drama, communicating environmental issues through multimedia and film**

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- McKibben, B. (2005). Imagine That: What the Warming World Needs Now is Art Sweet Art. Grist.org. Available at: <http://www.grist.org/article/mckibben-imagine>.
- Cless, D. (1996). Eco-Theatre, USA: The Grassroots Is Greener. *The Drama Review*, 40(2), 79-102.
- Todd, C. (2011). The Shared Experience of Absurdity. TED: Ideas Worth Spreading. Available at: [http://www.ted.com/talks/charlie\\_todd\\_the\\_shared\\_experience\\_of\\_absurdity.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/charlie_todd_the_shared_experience_of_absurdity.html)

In-class:

- MONDAY: Improvisation warm-up techniques
- WEDNESDAY: Improvisation warm-up techniques; Watch *Baraka*

Assignment:

- DUE WEDNESDAY: Bring journal to class (no entry required)
- Course readings as required

### UNIT 2: MAIN STAGE AND BIG SCREEN FILM PRODUCTIONS

#### **Week 2: Environmental main stage theater and fictional film for a general audience**

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Diggs, E. (1982). *Dumping ground: A play in one act*. New York: Dramatists Play Service.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Bahk, C. (2011). Environmental Education Through Narrative Films: Impact of Medicine Man on Attitudes Toward Forest Preservation. *Journal Of Environmental Education*, 42(1), 1-13.

In-class:

- MONDAY: Scene study from *Dumping Ground*
- WEDNESDAY: Watch *A Civil Action*

Assignment:

- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: First 1-2 page analysis of performance piece (See Blackboard assignment)
- Weekly journal assignment (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

#### **Week 3: Documentary productions for a general audience**

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Juel, H. Defining Documentary Film. Available at: [http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue\\_22/section\\_1/artc1A.html](http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_22/section_1/artc1A.html)
- Miller, D. (2011). Reading and Writing about Films.
- Miller, D. (2011). Notes on Advanced Editing Aesthetics

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Nichols, B. (2006). What to do About Documentary Distortion? Toward a Code of Ethics. Available at: <http://www.documentary.org/content/what-do-about-documentary-distortion-toward-code-ethics-0>
- Watch: *Flow* on the world water crisis. Available at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DlbWsWPgUx8>

In-class:

- MONDAY: Watch *Bitter Seeds* on genetically modified seeds in India
- WEDNESDAY: Watch *Gasland* on hydraulic fracturing

Assignment:

- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Second 1-2 page analysis of performance piece (See Blackboard assignment)
- Weekly journal assignment (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

### UNIT 3: COMMUNITY ACTIVISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

#### **Week 4: Community-based environmental theater and other formats (street, improvisation, forum, etc.)**

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- French, W. (1983). A Double-Threaded Life: Maryat Lee's Ecotheatre. *The Drama Review*, 27(2), 26-35.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Martin, H. (1990, August 31). Stage Direction: Actors Use a Play to Educate Field Workers on Rights and Pesticides. *Los Angeles Times*. Available at: [http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-31/local/me-117\\_1\\_field-worker](http://articles.latimes.com/1990-08-31/local/me-117_1_field-worker)
- Nadkarni, N. M. (2004). Not Preaching to the Choir: Communicating the Importance of Forest Conservation to Nontraditional Audiences. *Conservation Biology*, 18(3), 602-606.

In-class:

- MONDAY: Scripting workshop
- WEDNESDAY: Theater exercise

Assignment:

- **DUE WEDNESDAY** group formation for final production project and selection of environmental issue
- Weekly journal assignments (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

#### **Week 5: Activist theater/film – exploration of social and environmental justice in theater and film**

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Sawyer, S. (2011). Activist awareness in the theatre of the oppressed classroom. *Canadian Theatre Review*, 147, 12-17.
- Chapter: Theater for Oppressed
- Diamond, D. (2007). *Theatre For Living: The Art and Science of Community-Based Dialogue*. Trafford Press.
- Whyte, T. (2009). *The Power of Theatre. Nepal*. Available at: <http://vimeo.com/5122142>

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Watch: Roddy, C. (2011). *Harvest of Pride*. (3-part film series). Available at: <http://huertodelafamilia.org/>

In-class workshops:

- MONDAY: Theater exercise
- WEDNESDAY: Watch *Crude* on the case against Chevron and the oil spill in Ecuador

Assignment:

- Weekly journal assignment (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required

- Continue group project

#### UNIT 4: WILDLIFE AND NATURE-BASED THEATER AND FILM

##### Week 6: Connecting audiences with the natural world

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Chapter: The Council of All Beings  
Seed, J. (1988). *Thinking like a mountain: towards a council of all beings*. Philadelphia, PA: New Society Publishers.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Palmer, C. (2012). The Best and Worst of Wildlife Films. *An Evening with Chris Palmer*.
- Watch selected links from article: Shark Week (one or two videos) <http://dsc.discovery.com/tv-shows/shark-week/videos/2011-videos.htm>; Sunbathing Sharks (first video) [http://www.monstersandcritics.com/smallscreen/news/article\\_1653813.php/Great-White-Invasion-and-Jaws-Comes-Home-on-Discovery-Sunday-July-31](http://www.monstersandcritics.com/smallscreen/news/article_1653813.php/Great-White-Invasion-and-Jaws-Comes-Home-on-Discovery-Sunday-July-31)
- Excerpts from *Green* Available at: <http://www.greenthefilm.com/> (excerpts TBA)

In-class:

- MONDAY: Theater exercise
- WEDNESDAY: Watch excerpts from *Blue Planet*

Assignment:

- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Individual Script Assignment
- Weekly journal assignment (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Continue group project

Field trip – showings begin:

- Nov. 2-17: See UO Theater Production of *LOVE.WILL.SHAKE* | Free tickets: <http://pages.uoregon.edu/theatre/freetickets>

#### UNIT 5: COMMUNICATING COMPLEX ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES USING MULTIMEDIA

##### Week 7: How to use multimedia to reach a wider audience

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Gifreu, A. (2011). The interactive multimedia documentary as a discourse on interactive non-fiction: for a proposal of the definition and categorisation of the emerging genre. Available at: <http://www.upf.edu/hipertextnet/en/numero-9/interactive-multimedia.html>
- Briefly browse through this multimedia collaborative documentary film project: *18 Days in Egypt*. Available at: <http://beta.18daysinegypt.com/>.

Readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- Watch: *A Sea Change* on ocean acidification: <http://www.aseachange.net>

In-class:

- MONDAY: Discussion and group project
- WEDNESDAY: Watch *Flow* on the world water crisis

Assignment:

- Weekly journal assignment (announced in-class)
- Course readings as required
- Group project

Field trip – showings continue:

- Nov. 2-17: See UO Theater Production of *LOVE.WILL.SHAKE* | Free tickets:  
<http://pages.uoregon.edu/theatre/freetickets>

## UNIT 6: GENERATING ACTION – MAKING CHANGE THROUGH THEATER AND FILM

### Week 8: Films and plays that inspire change – what messages do they communicate and how do they do it?

Readings and course work due MONDAY:

- Watch: The World According to Monsanto. Available at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U8xsJJKZqtg&feature=gv>

Proposed readings and course work due WEDNESDAY:

- TBA

In-class:

- MONDAY: Watch *Taking root: the vision of Wangari Maathai*
- WEDNESDAY: Watch *Wasteland*

Assignment:

- **DUE FRIDAY** by email: Draft of group film/theater script, design ideas, etc.
- Group project
- Reflection portfolio
- Course readings as required

Field trip – final showings:

- Nov. 2-17: See UO Theater Production of *LOVE.WILL.SHAKE* | Free tickets:  
<http://pages.uoregon.edu/theatre/freetickets>

### Week 9: In-class workshops for film/theater scripting, film editing, set and prop design, costume design, presentation preparation, etc.

- Group project
- Reflection portfolio

### Week 10: Presentation of final project

- **DUE MONDAY AND WEDESDAY**: Group performance and/or screening and discussions
- **DUE WEDNESDAY**: Individual Journal

**Finals Week:**

- **DUE TUESDAY OF FINALS WEEK**: Reflection Portfolio