

TH261-30 Wildwork: Theatre, Performance and the Natural World

24/25

Department

SCAPVC - Theatre and Performance Studies

Level

Undergraduate Level 2

Module leader

Ian Farnell

Credit value

30

Module duration

20 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This module enables students to harness their creative skills towards supporting nature as well as tackling the climate and biodiversity crises. Through seminar-based discussion and hands-on activities, students will critically engage with a range of scholarly, scientific and practical approaches that seek to understand our place in the natural world and to mitigate ecological collapse. Blending theoretical study with real-world application, Wildwork encourages students to explore how their artistic abilities can be used to communicate, support and enact efforts to restore natural habitats, protect species, and effect climate justice. It will also enable students to consider how their own theatrical practices can incorporate sustainable processes.

In seminars throughout the Autumn term, students will be introduced to an array of theoretical concepts related to nature, climate change and biodiversity loss, including the Anthropocene (as well as Capitalocene and Chthulucene), food production, land management, net zero emissions, rewilding, indigenous knowledge, and sustainability. They will also interrogate the work of theatre practitioners and other artists who have engaged in ecological debate, through which students will examine the role of theatre and culture in drawing critical attention towards climate breakdown. These discussions will be supplemented from talks by colleagues in Global Sustainable Development, Warwick Food & Drink, and other cognisant groups.

In the Spring term, students will continue these seminar-based discussions, but will also enhance their scholarly investigation of the climate crisis by gaining practical knowledge of working in, with and for nature. Collaborating with local wildlife organisations and other groups, students will be given the opportunity to participate in a variety of activities designed to support the natural world. By drawing links between theoretical knowledge, cultural representation and practical action, students will utilise their agency as artists and scholars to intervene upon and contribute towards solutions pertaining to climate breakdown and biodiversity loss. Capitalising on their creative talents, they will generate imaginative and innovative responses which highlight, disseminate and encourage positive action on behalf of nature. Such responses may include dramatic stagings, performance art, public awareness campaigns, filmed projects, podcasts, interviews, educational resources, and other forms appropriate for their learning. To illustrate their learning, students' creative work will be shared in the Summer term in a festival of environmentally conscious practices.

Module aims

- Raise eco-consciousness through a discursive, practical and artistic exploration of our relationship with the natural world
- Introduce students to cultural, scholarly and organisational responses to climate change and biodiversity loss
- Deliver hands-on experience in a variety of fields such as managing land for nature, food growth, biodiversity surveys, recycling, gardening, and wildlife conservation
- Highlight local efforts towards nature restoration while signalling links to regional, national and global priorities
- Engage with theatre, performance and other arts-based practices that illuminate climate-based issues
- Disseminate climate-conscious messages and action through use of theatre and performance
- Promote individual and collective efforts to tackle climate change

Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Term 1

Week 1: Introduction

This session will introduce students to the module. Through group discussion and other activities, they will begin to explore their own relationship to the natural world as individuals and artists.

Week 2: Eco-consciousness 1 - what is wild?

This session considers the (dis)connections between our lives and wilderness. It will ask how the wild is (de)constructed in policy and the popular imagination, how it is relegated to the margins and how this may be remedied through individual, ethical, behavioural and collective change.

Case studies will include:

- The Peace of Wild Things, Wendell Berry
- A Sand County Almanac, Aldo Leopold

Week 3: Eco-consciousness 2 - living (with) animals

This week examines the ways in which our lives interact with animals. It will consider the moral demarcation between humans and nonhumans, as well as the ways that this is being revised.

Case studies will include:

- *Beastly*, Keggie Carew
- *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, Olga Tokarczuk

Week 4: Eco-consciousness 3: practical responses

This week, students will respond creatively by making mini-performances (or other forms such as poetry) which reflect the ideas explored on the module thus far.

Week 5: Climate change plays 1: living in a time of crisis

This week, students will begin to explore depictions of the climate crisis in contemporary theatre. They will consider how theatre can play a role in disseminating and promoting climate-conscious messages, as well as some of the challenges in reproducing the images and impacts of the climate crisis on the stage. Case studies will include:

- *The Children*, Lucy Kirkwood
- *Lungs*, Duncan Macmillan

Week 6: Reading week

Week 7: Climate change plays 2: resilience and adaptation

This week will examine how theatre and performance has plotted the future of the crisis and the ways in which humans might limit its impact on society (if not necessarily on the planet). They will explore how theatre can draw critical attention towards governmental policy and capitalist consumption. Case studies will include:

- *The Contingency Plan*, Steve Waters
- *Oil*, Ella Hickson

Week 8: Climate change plays 3: eco-justice

Building on last week, students will consider how performance has engaged with issues of environmental responsibility, justice, and ecocide. They will explore how individual and collective responsibility is managed through the crisis, as well as the ways in which responsibilities (especially at a national and corporate level) are obfuscated and sidestepped. Case studies will include:

- *Kill Climate Deniers*, David Finnigan
- *The Trials*, Dawn King

Week 9: Ecoscenography 1

Moving from text to production, this week will introduce students to the concept of 'ecoscenography' within the broader context of sustainable productions. A key point of departure from Week 8 will be the sustainability statement that Dawn King includes in *The Trials* as a form of invitation to theatre-makers to think about sustainability in their practice. It will enable students to consider how sustainable practices can be re-framed as part of a creative, necessary, challenge and as a response to the climate crisis. It will also, via *Theatre Green Book*, offer students a set of practical guidelines as to how sustainable practice might be embedded in their future theatre-

making. Case studies will include:

- Theatre Green Book Volume 1: Sustainable Productions
- Katie Mitchell's production of *A Play for the Living in the Time of Extinction* (which works with Theatre Green Book's advanced level guidelines)

The second half of this seminar will include an invitation for students to work with the guidelines to develop a sustainable concept for a short piece of work or eco-scene. Ahead of week 10, it will invite students to think about the kinds of materials they might need to realise this concept.

Week 10: Ecosceneography 2

This week will build on our work with Theatre Green Book Volume 1: Sustainable Productions, but our focus will primarily be on materials. This week's case studies will include:

- Introduction to Tanja Beer's *Ecosceneography: an introduction to ecological design for performance*, pp. 1-20.
- Tanja Beer's works 'This is Not Rubbish' and 'The Living Stage': <http://www.tanjabeer.com/>
The second half of this seminar will invite students to build on the sustainable concept they began developing last week with the introduction of the materials that they have brought along. Students will be invited to showcase parts of this idea with the group and to clearly bring their practice into dialogue with the Theatre Green Book guidelines and the principles of eco-scenography they have considered this week.

Term 2

Week 1: Welcome back

This week, students will reconnect with the natural world around them by participating in mindfulness and wellbeing activities on campus, including a nature walk.

Week 2: The Land (1)

Through a lecture-seminar on Anthropocene and related concepts, students will explore how humans are alternatingly in control of, removed from, and intertwined with the land around us.

Week 3: The Land (2)

Expanding on the themes discussed last week, students will explore efforts to restart natural processes through careful negotiation alongside nature. There will be a particular emphasis on working with the land and the concept of rewilding.

Week 4: Wildlife (1)

This week, students will look at how wildlife - particularly animal life - operates within the biosphere. They will explore concepts such as keystone species and eco-engineers, and will discuss the reintroduction of species such as beavers, bison and wolves.

Week 5: Wildlife (2)

This week, students will explore some of the wildlife found within and around the Warwick campus, and consider the ways that these spaces are managed for nature.

Week 6: Reading week

Week 7: Sustainability (1)

This week, students will explore the relationship between nature and food production. They will

consider the journey from source to plate, and the various costs (financial, ecological) that this entails. They will also examine movements that act in opposition to industrial-scale production including veganism and the slow food movement.

Week 8: Sustainability (2)

Building on the ideas introduced in the previous weeks, students will consider how data capture and other survey methods can help to monitor the health of areas on the local scale.

Week 9: Sustainability (2)

Following on from last week, students will explore how their data can be used as part of global scientific efforts to reduce biodiversity loss.

Week 10: Wrap-up, reflection and assessment prep

Term 3

In the Summer term, students will rehearse and perform their assessed creative performance pieces.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate an understanding of the ideological, political and scientific concepts underpinning climate breakdown and biodiversity loss, as well as practical steps aimed at mitigating or reducing their effects
- Analyse the work of theatre makers attending to issues of climate change, in conjunction with wider debates on these issues and alongside other cultural responses including poetry, fiction, performance art, journalism, and activism
- Engage in practice-based, artistic and/or socially engaged work that critically and creatively responds to issues explored throughout the module
- Communicate their learning through practical, written and oral responses

Indicative reading list

- Angelaki, V. (2019) *Theatre & Environment*. London: Macmillan
- Angelaki, V. (2022) 'Writing in the Green: Imperatives towards an Eco-n-temporary Theatre Canon', *Journal of Contemporary Drama in English*, 10(1), pp. 26–43
- Beer, T. (2021) *Ecoscenography: An Introduction to Ecological Design for Performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave
- Besel, R. D. and J. A. Blau, (eds). (2014) *Performance on Behalf of the Environment*. Lanham: Lexington
- Carew, K. (2023) *Beastly*. Edinburgh: Canongate
- Chaudhuri, U. (1994). "There Must Be a Lot of Fish in That Lake': Toward an Ecological Theater." *Theater* 25.1: 23–31
- Chaudhuri, U. (1995). *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Chaudhuri, U. (2007). 'Animal Rites: Performing beyond the Human.' *Critical Theory and Performance*. Reinelt, J. G. and Roach, J. R. (Eds). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 506-520

- Chaudhuri, U. and Hughes, H. (2014). *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Chaudhuri, U. and Fuchs, E. (Eds.). (2002). *Land/Scape/Theater*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Cless, D. (2010). *Ecology and Environment in European Drama*. New York, London: Routledge
- Giannachi, G. and Nigel, Stewart. (Eds.). (2005). *Performing Nature: Explorations in Ecology and the Arts*. Berne: Peter Lang
- Gow, D. (2020) *Bringing Back the Beaver*. London: Chelsea Green
- Gow, D. (2022) *Birds, Beasts and Bedlam*. London: Chelsea Green
- Heddon, D. and Mackey, S. (eds.) (2012) "Environmentalism, performance and applications: uncertainties and emancipations." *Research in Drama Education*, 17 (12), 163–192
- Ingold, T. (2000). *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, London: Routledge
- Kershaw, B. (2009) *Theatre ecology: environments and performance events*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Lavery, C. (2016) Introduction: performance and ecology – what can theatre do? *Green Letters*, 20 (3), 229-23
- May, T. J. (2005). 'Greening the Theatre: Taking Ecocriticism from Page to Stage.' *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*. 7.1, 84–103
- May, T. J. (2007). 'Beyond Bambi: Toward a Dangerous Ecocriticism in Theatre Studies'. *Theatre Topics*, 17.2, 95-110
- Morton, T. (2013) *Hyperobjects: philosophy and ecology after the end of the world*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press
- Theatre Green Book <https://theatregreenbook.com/book-one-sustainable-productions/>
- Tree, I. (2018) *Wilding*. London: Bloomsbury
- Watson, A. (2022) 'Contemporary Catastrophes: 2010s British Climate Crisis Theatre and Performativity', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 32(2), pp. 140–161
- Woynarski, L. (2020) *Ecodramaturgies: theatre, performance and climate change*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

Interdisciplinary

- This module will draw from across the Arts, with case studies encompassing theatre, film, television, poetry, literature and other media.
- This module will draw from across the social sciences, with scholarship drawn from environmental studies, global sustainable development, politics, ecology and other allied fields. The module will also offer opportunities for experts in these disciplines to contribute to teaching and learning.
- Students will approach their learning through an interdisciplinary lens as they consider how artistic practice interacts with, and can support/disseminate the work of, scientific and environmental work.

International

The module's focus on climate change and biodiversity loss has a natural international perspective.

Subject specific skills

By the end of this module, students should be able to demonstrate a critical understanding of:

- the relationship between human activity, climate breakdown and biodiversity loss.
- what is meant by specific terminologies in the study of these subjects, including Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene, hyperobjects, and other terms.
- what steps are being taken by local, national and governmental organisations to work towards the restoration of the natural world, and what role individual citizens and artists can play in supporting these steps.
- how theatre, performance and other artistic practices contribute to the dissemination of climate-conscious messages and the deacceleration of climate collapse.
- how performance processes can model, experiment with and benefit from sustainable practices.

Transferable skills

- Analysis and decision making
- Cognitive ability
- Communication skills
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- Independent research
- Interpersonal and communication skills
- Intrapersonal skills
- Problem solving
- Project planning and delivery
- Self-management
- Time management

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Seminars	18 sessions of 3 hours (18%)
Tutorials	3 sessions of 1 hour (1%)
Private study	153 hours (51%)
Assessment	90 hours (30%)
Total	300 hours

Private study description

Weekly readings, group rehearsals, personal reflection

Costs

Category	Description	Funded by	Cost to student
Field trips, placements and study abroad	Collaboration with the Wildlife Trust will entail costs to cover PPE for students.	Department	£0.00

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
Group performance	50%	60 hours
In groups, students will devise and deliver a sustainable performance (or similar creative response such as a public awareness campaign, documentary or educational resource) reflecting the concerns of the module.		
Reflective portfolio	50%	30 hours
The portfolio will consist of two main elements:		
1: a series of reflective written pieces responding to themes and issues explored across the module.		
2: a reflection on the process of devising and delivering their sustainable performance, including a group mission statement on sustainable methods employed in their practice.		

Feedback on assessment

Students will be provided written feedback with the option of one-to-one or group oral feedback.

Availability

Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UTHA-QW34 Undergraduate English and Theatre Studies
- UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies

This module is Option list C for:

- UTHA-W421 Undergraduate Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies
 - Year 2 of W421 Theatre and Performance Studies