Ecological Crises: Investigation Through Performance
Spring 2020, 1.0 credit

Facilitators:

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As an imaginative and experiential form, live performance presents an opportunity to collapse the physical and emotional distance between ourselves and ecological crises. This forum will explore how we can invite audiences to intimately encounter passive or future environmental degradation in the present moment, creating real urgency for immediate action and thoughtful future-imagination.

This forum will also serve as a site for the creative development of *The Party at the Edge of the World,* a devised (collaboratively created) theater capstone project that will be performed in Fall 2021.

Learning Objectives:

- Explore and deepen the dramaturgical and creative foundation of *The Party at the Edge of the World* through readings, discussions, and performance experiments.
    - Use elements of environmental theory and philosophy to create movement, writing, improv, visual art, music composition and theater.
- Develop performance and storytelling strategies as a means of environmental activism.
    - Experiment with performance as a site for heightened connection and collapsing distances.
    - Reimagine our human position relative to scale and time.
    - Create narratives that situate ourselves within a single collective ecosystem.
- Identify existing creative, political, and social responses to ecological crises in order to expand and think critically about our own practices.
- Consider what is asked for in a decolonial, justice-centered environmental movement. Use both western scientific and indegenous methods of “knowing” and framing ecological well-being and destruction.
- Build ensemble collaboration and devising skills.

Core Values:

- Seek actively to learn from each other; generously teach each other.
- Support each other as we experiment & take risks.
- Grow and flourish as an ensemble of creative researchers.

Structure:

Each week we will begin with a “Think Tank” style class that centers discussion around the materials we have all been sitting with for the week. The second class will be a “Generative” class in which we use prompt(s) to collaboratively develop creative work as a mode of further investigation and inquiry into the same material.

Recurring Assignments:

Offerings:

Each week we have provided you with a set of readings or “offerings” (theoretical readings, creative pieces, etc.) that will serve as inspiration for our discussions and creations for the week. You should read/watch/listen to them by our first class of the week.

Journals:

Every week we ask you to write a journal entry reflecting on readings, viewing assignments, investigations, and generative/creative class exercises. There is no specific format or page allowance, and we encourage you to “journal” however feels best for you. This is a space to be rigorous and generous intellectually, artistically, and emotionally. You are encouraged to use this as a way to recount your findings, questions, puzzles, emotional reactions and creative inspirations. Feel free to revisit content and discussion from previous classes, content from outside class, and your life at large. You will turn these into us as a way for us to see what you're thinking/be inspired by you.

Final Project:

Your final project will be a substantive potential piece of the *Party at the Edge of the World*. This can be pages of a script, artwork about/for the party, the party’s music, movement that happens at the party--whatever is most exciting to you. Perhaps you use this opportunity to build off/adjust/adapt something we have created in class. Or maybe you are excited to do something completely new. We have no expectations as to what form(s) your project will take, but we would like you to consider how it could fit into/ is [a component of] the final iteration of the *Party*.

We want you to use this opportunity to dive deep/investigate questions that keep you awake at night/think of your creativity as a mode of research/try something new/make connections/take risks. You will work closely with both your

forum-mates and Liz & Michayla to workshop and develop your ideas and we are open to collaborative projects between folks.

Week 1: Ecological crisis (why this, now?) & Building ensemble

Goal: Outline our goals for this class as a laboratory for ideas and creative work. We'll tell you what we know about the *Party* and talk logistics! Create shared knowledge about ecological crises, environmental justice, and begin to get people comfortable with the collective in a creative/generative context. Consider our own relationships to the climate crisis.

Think Tank Offerings:

- **For Fri** 2/19: Familiarize yourself with this website - specifically check out the links in "Big Brainstorm."

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 2: Performance & Ecological Storytelling.

Goal: Interrogate the place of embodied performance as a vehicle for solving problems inherent to ecological storytelling.

Think Tank Offerings:

- Read *Research Theater, Climate Change, and the Ecocide Project*, Una Chaudhuri (Chapter 2: Theorizing Ecocide: The Theater of Eco-Cruelty pp. 22-30)
- Watch Climate Despair with the Green Rooms
- Explore How to Build a Forest - pearldamour

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 3: Site-specificity & place

Goal: Consider how place and space inform and shape performance work. Hypothesize ways to use site-specificity and immersion as a way to bridge distances between audience and narrative; narrative and immediacy. Where are we in Middletown? What does it mean to make a locally situated performance (and can wes students?)?

Think Tank Offerings:

- Read *Making Site-Specific Theater and Performance: A Handbook*, Phil Smith (Prologue pp. xi-xvii, Why Make Site Specific Performance pp. 1-24)
- Explore 36.5 performance
- Explore Forklift Danceworks
- Explore Cry You One
- Explore Bread and Puppet

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 4: Geologic Time and Slow Violence

Goal: Consider how to situate ourselves within the massiveness of a geologic time scale, and how resituating ourselves within time can encourage different relationships to place/ourselves/each other. Explore and conceptualize harm enacted on this immensely slow scale. Consider the challenges and opportunities presented by such processes in a socio/political/artistic context.

Think Tank Offerings:
- Read *Making the Geologic Now: Responses to Material Conditions of Contemporary Life* (Intro pp.1-26)
- Read "Slow Violence and Environmental Storytelling," Rob Nixon
- Watch *A Body in Fukushima*, Eiko Otake

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 5: Deep time and Haunting ("Distance is malleable, time is not even")

Goal: Chew on the concept of haunting and ghosts as a physical/invisible representation of time, timelessness, and how history situates itself in a space.

Think Tank Offerings:
- Read *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (pp. G1-G14)
- Read "A Glossary of Haunting," Eve Tuck and C. Re
- Watch *A Ghost Story*, David Lowery

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 6: Myths & Mythmaking

Goal: Explore the history of myths and language that build stories around the land and other natural phenomena. Experiment in creating new and embodied myths for the world we live in today.

Think Tank Offerings:

- Read *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (Skywoman Falling; The Gift of Strawberries; Burning Cascade Head, People of Corn, People of Light)
- Read *Anna Bella Emma*, Lisa D'Amour

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 7: Precarity/Edge

Goal: What is the "edge" at this *Party*? In a world where very little about the future is certain, how do we translate the precarious/ephemeral/fleeting nature of our collective (eco)systems into narrative and performance?

Think Tank Offerings:

- Read *The World On Edge*, Edward Casey (Pick 1 chapter about edges that calls to you)
- Watch Cecilia Vicuna's film

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 8: Apocalypse?

Goal: How can we problematize the assumptions that underlie apocalypse eco-narratives? Can we ethically tell a non-apocalypse, apocalypse story? Can this *Party's* apocalypse be a beginning? What makes an edge different from an apocalypse?

Think Tank Offerings:

- Read Indigenous Action "Rethinking the Apocalypse: An Indigenous Anti-Futurist Manifesto"
- OPTIONAL: Read "Who Gets to Have Eco Anxiety," Joseph Weiss

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 9: Floods

Goal: Why does it feel like this *Party* is somehow a flood? What does a flood present us in metaphoric and realistic terms? What does it mean to live in a flooding world?

Think Tank Offerings:

- Watch *Beasts of the Southern Wild*
    - OPTIONAL: Read The Skeleton Isle of Jean Charles as context for the real environment on which the Bathtub is based.
- OPTIONAL: Listen to Floodlines, episode 2: "Come Sunday"
- OPTIONAL: Explore HOLOSCENES

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 10: Party

Goals: What's in a party? Why do we feel the need to have these spaces of (often intoxicated) collective release? What does the setting of a party pose to this piece?

Think Tank Offerings:

- Read Through Page 28 of *Cherrywood*, Kirk Lynn
- OPTIONAL: Read "Perhaps the World Ends Here," Joy Harjo
- OPTIONAL: Watch Frank Ocean's *Nikes* Music Video
- OPTIONAL: Audrey Helen Weber Art

Generation: TBD prompt

Week 11: Buffer week

Goal: A week for everything we didn't have time for yet//for cravings that we haven't got to yet//for collective workshopping of final projects.

Week 12: Sharing of final projects

Goal: Learn from our cohort & share our work!