

COMS 360—Environmental Communication

Department of Art History & Communication Studies
McGill University
Sessions: T/Th 11:35-12:55
Arts W-215

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Fall 2023

COURSE OUTLINE:

This course will survey contemporary approaches to communication, media and environment in the field of media and communication studies. This will include critical attention to media, communication and knowledge practices concerning environmental information, issues and controversies, as well as attention to the environmental impacts and implications of media technologies, infrastructures and practices. Topics to be discussed include public communication of science and environment (journalism, corporations and social movements), climate change, media materialities and toxicities (energy, pollution, labour and disposal), environmental racism and environmental justice, environment and disability, environmental humanities, and non-human communication.

Learning objectives:

- Develop an understanding of diverse approaches to environmental communication and media studies
- Develop conceptual tools and vocabularies for critical engagement with contemporary environmental issues
- Preparation for advanced study in environmental communication and media studies, and environmental humanities

Required Texts:

All readings are available on the course website in .pdf format, or via electronic copies held by the McGill library or online. Students are responsible for downloading and/or printing the readings for the course.

Course requirements:

- Quizzes – 40%
- Short paper – 30%
- Final exam – 30%

Quizzes: students will complete five quizzes, each worth 10% of the final grade (the lowest scoring quiz will be dropped, the remaining scores will count for 40% of the final course grade). Quiz Guidelines will be posted on the myCourses site and discussed during the first week of class. Quizzes will not be re-scheduled, and make-up assignments will not be permitted, except in cases of illness or emergency. Missed quizzes will result in a grade of “0.”

Short paper: Student will complete one short paper (approx. 750-1000 words) on a prescribed topic. Paper topic, guidelines, grading rubric and due date will be posted on the myCourses site and discussed in class early in the term.

Final Exam: A take-home examination will be conducted remotely during the final exam period. Exam Guidelines will be posted on the myCourses site.

Electronic mail:

E-mail inquiries regarding substantive course material (i.e., material in course readings; ideas discussed in class) or to make appointments, will receive a prompt and courteous reply. My strong preference, however, is that substantive inquiries are made in class or in the Course Matters discussion forum, so that other students may benefit from them; in some cases, replies to substantive inquiries will recommend that the issue be raised in class, for this reason. Additionally, students should be aware of the following guidelines:

1. I read and reply to electronic mail once daily, typically during the morning of standard working days. Under no circumstances will I read or reply to e-mail outside business hours. Do not expect that I will read or reply to an e-mail inquiry after 5 pm or on weekends.
2. Notification by electronic mail of a missed assignment or examination due to illness will be accepted but, in some cases, appropriate documentation will also be required.
3. Grade inquiries/disputes will not be considered or discussed via e-mail. All grade inquiries should be made in person during office hours, or by appointment.
4. I will not reply to e-mail inquiries regarding course matters (such as assignment requirements, due dates, exam structure, etc.) that clearly arise from lack of attendance or inattention to the course syllabus. Inquiries requesting clarification will receive replies, though I would strongly prefer these inquiries to be made in class or during office hours, so that others might benefit from the replies.

Grading:

Grades will be assigned according to the scale set out in the Arts and Sciences calendar, reproduced here. Students should note the following “definitions” attached to letter grades, as these will be observed strictly: “good” work will receive a grade in the C range; “very good” work will receive a grade in the B range; “excellent” work will receive a grade in the A range; the grade of A will be reserved for work that is unambiguously “outstanding.”

Grade Appeals: Assignments are graded on performance, not effort. Grades are final, except where a mistake has been made in calculation. The professor will consider a grade change under the following conditions: (a) if an error has been made in calculation, or (b) if you have not been held to the same standard as everyone else. If you seek clarification of a grade you have received, you should visit the professor during office hours. In the event that you feel you have received an undeserved grade and wish to dispute it, you must make your case in writing within no less than 24 hours and no more than one week (7 days) of receiving the grade. The case in writing must detail the grounds on which you are making an appeal, accompanied by the original graded assignment (retain a copy for yourself). If your assignment is reviewed, keep in mind that your grade could remain the same, be elevated, or be reduced.

Grade	Grade point	Percentages
A	4.0	85 - 100
A-	3.7	80 - 84
B+	3.3	75 - 79
B	3.0	70 - 74
B-	2.7	65 - 69
C+	2.3	60 - 64
C	2.0	55 - 59
D (Conditional Pass)	1.0	50 - 54
F (Fail)	0	0 - 49

Nondiscrimination and academic conduct:

As academics, we value equality of opportunity, human dignity, and racial, ethnic, sexual, physical, and cultural diversity. Be assured that we will promote a safe and conducive environment for learning. This will include enforcing the norms of open inquiry, respectful dialogue, and tolerant disagreement. In accordance with University policy, we will not tolerate discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, sex, age, civil status, familial status, sexual orientation, or disability. We will also make every effort to avoid discrimination based on class or income. In addition to the University’s policy, we do not discriminate based on political creed. This means that you do not have to agree politically with the professor, TA or course material in order to do well in this course. So long as you demonstrate an understanding of the course material, you are under no obligation to agree with it. If there is something I can do to make the class more hospitable, please let me know.

Additional information:

Accommodations: If you require accommodations due to special circumstances, challenges or disabilities, please notify both the professor and the Office for Student Accessibility and Achievement as soon as possible. The OSAA provides a broad range of support and services to assist students, faculty, and staff with disabilities. (1010 Sherbrooke Ouest, Suite 410, 398-6009 (voice), 398-8198 (TDD)

(<https://www.mcgill.ca/access-achieve/>). Every effort will be made to accommodate students with special needs arising from learning challenges and disabilities.

Please note the above commitment to accommodate applies equally to survivors of sexual assault and/or harassment on or off campus. Survivors are encouraged to consult the resources provided by the Students' Society of McGill University (<https://ssmu.ca/resources/sexual-violence/>), the Sexual Assault Centre of the McGill Students' Society (<http://www.sacomss.org/wp/>) and the McGill Office for Sexual Violence Response, Support and Education (<https://www.mcgill.ca/osvrse/>).

Academic resources: Students looking for additional assistance with academic reading, study, research and writing skills should consult the McGill academic resources website www.mcgill.ca/students/academicresources/.

Counseling: The McGill Wellness Hub provides personal, academic, and career counseling to undergraduate and graduate students. They also offer workshops on study skills, multiple choice exams, text anxiety/stress management. The hub is located on the third floor at the Brown Student Services building (3800 MacTavish St.; 514.398.6017; <https://www.mcgill.ca/wellness-hub/>).

Illness: Students are responsible for material covered in all classes, including those missed due to illness. Copies of lecture notes from missed classes should be solicited from classmates, as they will not be made available by the professor. Examinations will not be re-scheduled, and assignment/exam due date extensions will not be considered, for any reason other than emergency or documented illness or distress. Anyone unable to attend or complete examinations assignments due to illness or distress is expected to make every effort to contact the professor prior to the examination or due date, and to co-operate in arranging a make-up examination or revised due date. Appropriate documentation may be required to support requests for special consideration due to illness (see the "Illness" tab at www.mcgill.ca/oasis/programs/common-issues).

Language: In accord with McGill University's Charter of Students' Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Conformément à la Charte des droits de l'étudiant de l'Université McGill, chaque étudiant a le droit de soumettre en français ou en anglais tout travail écrit devant être noté (sauf dans le cas des cours dont l'un des objets est la maîtrise d'une langue).

Academic integrity: McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/). L'université McGill attache une haute importance à l'honnêteté académique. Il incombe par conséquent à tous les étudiants de comprendre ce que l'on entend par tricherie, plagiat et autres infractions académiques, ainsi que les conséquences que peuvent avoir de telles actions, selon le Code de conduite de l'étudiant et des procédures disciplinaires (veuillez consulter le site www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/).

CLASS SCHEDULE

Week 1 (Aug. 31): Entrance

Aug. 31 – Lecture

Week 2 (Sept. 5-7): Nature, environment, climate, Anthropocene

Sept. 5 – Lecture Sept. 7 – Screening

Florian Sprenger, “Surrounding and Surrounded: Toward a Conceptual History of Environment,” *Critical Inquiry* 49:3 (Spring 2023) 406-427

Andrew Curley and Sara Smith. “The ‘cene Scene: Who Gets to Theorize Global Time and How do we Center Indigenous and Black Futurities?” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* (2023). 1–23

Raymond Zhong. “For Planet Earth, This Might Be the Start of a New Age,” *New York Times* (Dec. 17, 2022).

Containment. Peter Galison and Robb Moss, Redacted Pictures (United States, 2015) 82 mins. Streaming (rental) at <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/containment3>

Week 3 (Sept. 12-14): Environmental communication and the politics of knowledge

Sept 12 – Lecture Sept 14 – Flex

Robert Cox. “Nature's ‘Crisis Disciplines’: Does Environmental Communication Have an Ethical Duty?” *Environmental Communication*, 1:1 (2007) 5-20

Candis Callison. “The Inuit Gift,” *How Climate Change Comes to Matter: The Communal Life of Facts* (Duke 2014) 39-57

Viviane Fairbank. “Climate change is a fact – but to prove it, scientists are bogged down in a battle about what facts really are.” *The Globe and Mail*, 30 October 2021.

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-climate-change-is-a-fact-but-to-prove-it-scientists-are-bogged-down-in/>

Matt Huber. “‘Awareness’ Will Not Save Us from Climate Disaster,” *Jacobin* (May 12, 2022).

<https://jacobin.com/2022/05/awareness-climate-change-disaster-working-class-professionalism-policy-green-new-deal>

Week 4 (Sept. 19-21): Environmental in/justice

Sept. 19 – Lecture Sept. 21 – Quiz

There's Something in the Water. Elliot Page and Ian Daniel. 2 Weeks Notice (Canada, 2019) 70 mins. Steaming available on the Netflix platform.

Traci Brynne Voyles. “Sacrificial Land,” *Wastelanding: Legacies of Uranium Mining in Navajo Country* (Minnesota, 2015) 1-14; 16-19

Farhana Sultana, “The unbearable heaviness of climate coloniality,” *Political Geography* 99 (2022) 1-11

Supplemental:

Michael Mascarenhas, Ryken Grattet, and Kathleen Mege, “Toxic Waste and Race in Twenty-First Century America: Neighborhood Poverty and Racial Composition in the Siting of Hazardous Waste Facilities” *Environment and Society: Advances in Research* 12 (2021): 108–126

Week 5 (Sept. 26-28): Environmental communication: journalism and publics

Sept. 26 – Lecture Sept. 28 – Flex

David Robbins and Dawn Wheatley. “Complexity, Objectivity, and Shifting Roles: Environmental Correspondents March to a Changing Beat” *Journalism Practice* 15:9 (2021) 1289–1306

Candis Callison. “Journalism, Indigenous knowing, and climate futures (and pasts),” *Negotiating Rifts of Time: Journalism and Climate Change*, eds H. Bødker and H.E. Morris, Routledge (2022) 10-20.

Shane Gunster. “Engaging climate communication: audiences, frames, values and norms,” and “Contesting conflict? Efficacy, advocacy and alternative media in British Columbia,” *Journalism and Climate Crisis: Public Engagement, Media Alternatives*. Eds. Robert A. Hackett, et. al. (Routledge 2017) 49-71; 120-139

Week 6 (Oct. 3-5): Environmental communication: corporations

Oct. 3 – Lecture Oct. 5 – Quiz

Rachel Webb Jekanowski. “Fuelling the Nation: Imaginaries of Western Oil in Canadian Nontheatrical Film,” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 43 (2018) 111–125

Jordan Kinder. “From dirty oil to ethical oil: Petroturfing and the cultural politics of Canadian oil after social media.” *Journal of Environmental Media*, 1:2 (2020) 167-183

John Woodside. “The advertising blitz crafted to change your view of Big Oil,” *National Observer*, July 20th 2023 www.nationalobserver.com/2023/07/20/analysis/advertising-blitz-big-oil

Week 7 (Oct. 17-19): Environmental communication: activists and social movements

Oct. 17 – Lecture Oct. 19 – Flex

Shane Gunster & Robert J. Neubauer. “(De)legitimizing extractivism: the shifting politics of social licence,” *Environmental Politics* 28:4 (2019) 707-726

Andreas Malm (interviewed by David Remnick), “How to Blow Up a Pipeline,” *New Yorker Radio Hour* podcast (Sept 24, 2021) <https://www.wnycstudios.org/podcasts/tnyradiohour/segments/how-blow-pipeline>

Jordan Kinder. “Solar Infrastructure as Media of Resistance, or, Indigenous Solarities against Settler Colonialism,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 120:1 (2021). 63-73

Week 8 (Oct. 24-26): Political ecology of communication

Oct. 24 – Lecture Oct. 26 – Quiz

Matt Brennan and Kyle Devine. “The cost of music,” *Popular Music* 39/1 (2020). 43–65

Benedetta Brevini. “Black boxes, not green: Mythologizing artificial intelligence and omitting the environment,” *Big Data & Society* (July-December 2020) 1-5

Eric Nost and Jenny Elanie Goldstein, “A political ecology of data,” *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5:1 (2022) 3-17

Supplemental:

Kyle Devine and Matt Brennan. *What is the environmental cost of recorded music?* Dir. Graeme O’Hara; illustr. Anna Miles (2019) 7:44 mins <https://youtu.be/XfbyWZxmkLo>

Week 9 (Oct. 31-Nov. 2): Mediating environments

Oct. 31 – Lecture Nov. 2 – Flex

Jennifer Gabrys. “Smart forests and data practices: From the Internet of Trees to planetary governance,” *Big Data & Society* (January–June 2020), 1–10

Max Ritts and Michael Simpson. "Smart oceans governance: Reconfiguring capitalist, colonial, and environmental relations," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 48 (2023) 365–374

Kelly Bronson and Irena Knezevic. "Big Data in food and agriculture," *Big Data & Society* (June 2016) 1-5

Week 10 (Nov. 7-9): Environments and the dis/ability to communicate

Nov. 7 – Lecture Nov. 9 – Quiz

Sara J. Grossman. "Disabilities," *Environmental Humanities* 11:1 (2019) 242-245

Sarah Gibbons, "Neurological Diversity and Environmental (In)Justice: The Ecological Other in Popular and Journalist Representations of Autism," *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*. Eds. Sarah Jaquette Ray, et al. (Nebraska 2017) 531-546

Alison Kafer. "Bodies of Nature: The Environmental Politics of Disability," *Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities: Toward an Eco-Crip Theory*. Eds. Sarah J. Ray, et al. (Nebraska 2017) 201-233

Supplemental:

Amanda (Mel) Baggs. "In My Language" (USA 2007 8:37 min)

<http://www.interactingwithautism.com/section/understanding/media/representations/details/12>

Amanda (Mel) Baggs. "More information, links and interview transcript for Amanda Baggs" *CBC News* (26 Oct 2009) www.cbc.ca/news/more-information-links-and-interview-transcript-for-amanda-baggs-1.860246

Week 11 (Nov. 14-16): More-than-human communication

Nov. 14 – Lecture Nov. 16 – Flex

Anja Kanngieser and Zoe Todd. "From Environmental Case Study to Environmental Kin Study," *History and Theory* 59:3 (September 2020) 385-393

Janelle Marie Baker. "Do Berries Listen? Berries as Indicators, Ancestors, and Agents in Canada's Oil Sands Region," *Ethnos* 86:1 (2020) 1-18

Michelle Westerlaken, Jennifer Gabrys, Danilo Urzedo, and Max Ritts. "Unsettling Participation by Foregrounding More-than-Human Relations in Digital Forests," *Environmental Humanities* 15:1 (March 2023) 87-104

Week 12 (Nov. 21-23): Environmental humanities

Nov. 21 – Lecture Nov. 23 – Quiz

Kyle P. Whyte. "Indigenous science (fiction) for the Anthropocene: Ancestral dystopias and fantasies of climate change crises." *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 1:1-2 (2018) 224–242

Cajetan Iheka. "Waste Reconsidered: Afrofuturism, technologies of the past, and the history of the future." *African Ecomedia: Network Forms, Planetary Politics* (Duke 2021) 25-63.

Supplemental:

Graeme Macdonald. "Research note: the resources of fiction." *Reviews in Cultural Theory*, 4:2 (2013) 1-24.

Week 13 (Nov. 26-Dec. 5): Exit?

Nov. 26 – Lecture Dec. 5 – Flex

Joanna Zylinska. "A Feminist Counterapocalypse." *The End of Man: A Feminist Counterapocalypse* (Minnesota 2018) 38-45

Anja Kanngieser and Nicholas Beuret. "Refusing the World: Silence, Commoning, and the Anthropocene." *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 116:2 (April 2017) 363-377

Darin Barney. "How to Respond to Climate Change." *Medium* 27 June 2019

https://medium.com/@ldunn_24152/how-to-respond-to-climate-change-f1687bda55bf