***ECOLOGICAL MINDS ON THE STAGE***

**I. Theatre as a genre**

It is live

It requires a setting and props and special effects

It entails an interaction with the audience

(Un)reproducibility of the theatre as opposed to cinema

Improvisation

Theatrum mundi

Aristotle’s classical theory about the unity of TIME, SPACE AND ACTION for the sake of plausibility

Bertold Brecht’s early 20th-century theory of Entfremdung Effekt / Estrangement effect

Theatre of the absurd: Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco

**II. Features of Ecological Theatre**

Live: YES

Setting and props and special effects: YES

Interaction with the audience: YES

(Un)reproducibility of the theatre as opposed to cinema: YES

Improvisation: YES

Theatrum mundi: YES

Aristotle’s classical theory about the unity of TIME, SPACE and ACTION for the sake of plausibility: YES

Bertold Brecht’s early 20th-century theory of Entfremdung Effekt / Estrangement effect vs empathy and identification: BOTH. Empathy as a way of getting near to the audience and then estrangement so that the audience takes distance and reflects

Theatre of the absurd: Samuel Beckett and Eugene Ionesco: YES. Distance between the actor and the audience is more stretchable: it a theatre that plays with all the possible devices in contrasting ways in order to reach multiple effects.

How do the arts and theatre contribute to INTERNALIST FACTORS AND INTRINSIC MOTIVATIONS to reflect and take individual/public/social/political action?

What can the humanities and the arts do TO and WITH ecology, and in particular what can theatre do?

Whether we think that our highest aim is to RAISE AWARENESS and CHANGE THE FRAME OF MIND AND BEHAVIOURS and STIMULATE A CULTURAL SHIFT

Theatre helps synthetize difficult issues

Theatre helps embody the topics in a way that is not possible is a movie because of the screen separating actors and audience.

**III. People and the Environment**

**Environmental impacts are the aggregate of actions of individuals: do we agree to that?**

Each of us in our daily life makes choices that may or may not have an impact on the environment

We as people have a great power in our hands and we must use it in the right way in our daily lives

**Art is generated by environmental conditions, contexts and crises**

**Facilitate change in ethical frameworks and belief systems**

Which narrative do we need? To what extent should we preserve our human rights and freedom of choice or think of us as part of an environment that needs protecting at all costs, also by sacrificing certain privileges we have acquired as humans?

We must consider intergenerational dynamics and realize that we cannot impose changes on older generations while we have to work on educating future generations

Chase Buckle, trends manager, at GlobalWebIndex said: ‘It may come as a shock to some that the younger consumers are more considerate about sustainable materials than older generations. ‘What is important to note, is that the younger generations grew up during the height of the sustainability crisis with high-profile, environmentalist documentaries widely available on the content platforms they prefer over conventional TV.’

Read more: https://metro.co.uk/2019/04/11/the-attenborough-effect-53-of-people-report-using-less-plastic-9156711/?ito=cbshare

Twitter: https://twitter.com/MetroUK | Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MetroUK/>

**IV. The Media and the Environment**

**David Attenborough**

Powerful performative skills, rhetorical skills, use of language

Humanists not only observers but also agents of change

Netflix, Instagram, use and role of social media

Risk of being one among many

Shooting technique

Netflix, graphic images of walruses falling to their death

It may border on excess, but it works and it is necessary

In communication terms it is a success

It aims at touching people’s hearts, shaking our conscience and making us do something. It is very well staged, above all the camera on the director crying.

This is a form of advertisement, comments are vital to advertisement, SEO - Search Engine Oriented, Money earned by Netflix and the team

Something different from Attenborough’s traditional programmes

The danger of overloading

**V. Steve Waters**

***Essential Drama, Thinking together about Theatre***

<http://essentialdrama.com/playwrights/steve-waters/>

Steve Waters considers most of contemporary theatre as being over-intellectualised. He decided to take distance from that and regards himself as a political playwright who started his career with a comedy set during the miners’ strike. Connection with his background and native town of Coventry in the Midlands.

Experience as a teacher of theatre at a comprehensive school.

Middle brow theatre as a mainstream theatre or academic theatre, that can be aesthetically pleasant and entertaining while it does not pursue the aim of challenging conventions and received ideas.

Steve Waters wants to shake the conscience of his audience.

The ways in which you can situate theatre -high, middle and low brow - are not very permeable. They are labels that tend to stick. Waters reflects on the state of contemporary theatre as an institution.

What we want to test is whether a new form of committed theatre that delves into ecological topics is effective.

George Monbiot, “Only rebellion will prevent an ecological apocalypse”, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/15/rebellion-prevent-ecological-apocalypse-civil-disobedience>

“The media, with a few exceptions, is actively hostile. Even when broadcasters cover these issues, they carefully avoid any mention of power, talking about environmental collapse as if it is driven by mysterious, passive forces, and proposing microscopic fixes for vast structural problems.”

**VI. *The Contingency Plan* by Steve Waters**

Will Paxton Joseph Kloska

Sarika Chatterjee Vineeta Rishi

Robin Paxton Robin Soans

Jenny Paxton Susan Brown

Christopher Casson David Bark-Jones

Tessa Fortnum Stella Gonet

Colin Jenks Michael Elwyn

*On the Beach*: soundtrack by Neil Young

The album expresses a sense of despair. *On the Beach* talks about someone who wants to be surrounded by people but does not want to see them because he fears that they can be harmful. It is an expression of loneliness.

“Now I am living out here on the beach but those seagulls are still of reach.

[…]

Because the world is turning I do not want to see it turn away”

The reference to popular music suggests a strong connection with a popular heritage.

The play has a popular atmosphere about it.

Thanks to the connection to pop music the spectator/listener can feel closer to the play and get a stronger effect.

The play opens in medias res, when the action is well under way, wanting to convey a contrast between an apparently ordinary setting and a lingering sense of anticipation and anxiety.

Sound of the seagulls providing clues about an outdoor environment, then replaced by an artificial setting characterised by the sound of glass.

Language colloquial and familiar, the action is based on the dialogue between the two couples of characters.

Domestic environment, family relationships.

Will Paxton is going back to his native place and his parents Jenny and Robin are waiting for him.

Reference to a research being made by Will and to the sea that “will prevail”.

Will is referring to his research on glaciers and the father shares the same scientific background but not the same view as they seem to disagree with each other. Will would like to present his research as soon as possible while Robin suggests that he reaches conclusive results first.

Will is accompanied by Sarika who seems to be a colleague as well as a girlfriend. They are uncertain as to how she should be introduced to his parents. Will is emotionally torn, the tree of his childhood is empty inside, which works as a metaphorical indication of an upset environment. Psychological insight into the characters.

Awkward atmosphere of pending doom in contrast with the jovial attitude of the father and the banter between him and his wife.

Robin is stuck in the Seventies

Reference to specific environmental issues: 0 carbon emissions, processed food, use of mobile phones.

Each of these topics invites closer inspection.

Use of a micro-lens in order to point to big environmental issues

Interaction between the micro and macro level

It is apparently a simple conversation between a mother and a son that soon becomes loaded with much deeper concerns. Allusions and references to the environment are there for us to catch and reflect upon. This enhances a sense of involvement and identification.

Waters’ oblique criticism to the preacher mode and allusion to a patronising attitude that he wants to avoid. He wants to elicit response by showing a context we can totally relate to in ordinary life.

Robin’s career, reason for quitting Antarctica is not connected to science but personal reasons, such as a mental breakdown. A colleague took all the credit for Robin’s science. Jane came to the rescue and found him completely overwhelmed, sitting on the floor at Trinity College, and took him away to a secluded town.

Sarika is good-looking and a scientist: old patriarchal bias

Ministry of Climate Change, being fictional, is an indication that the play is set in the near future.

Ministry of a fictional institution are strongly reminiscent of Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Dystopias portray totalitarian states in which control is exerted at the level of the government. The Ministries are the ones that manipulate society and are the opposite of what they claim to be. Ministries of Love, Peace, Plenty, and Truth. The Ministry of Peace deals with war. The Ministry of Truth reports historical events constantly changing them.

Robin is very sarcastic about the effectiveness of the Ministry: Now we can all relax and go home.

“Robin knew the ice sheet was melting and he suppressed it”. Will questions his father as to why he did not publish an article.

“They were not ready to hear it”

There is some unfinished business between father and son and there are some hidden truths.

Will: “You have contempt for anything but data. But what is a fact?”

Issue of the truth of scientific discourse and of science communication

How and where scientists organize, communicate and circulate scientific findings. And what is their audience?

The problem of scientific discourse and of the rhetoric of science becomes very prominent with regards to climate change.

Will and Sarika are going to report to the government and there is clash between the way in which Robin dealt with the findings and the way in which Will thinks he may handle things differently and better.

Robin is sceptical as to whether taking things at the highest political level will actually make a difference.

Robin has faced a strong moral dilemma. Spreading his data would have a strong impact on the wider public. To what end?

Symbology of the robin as the only bird that provides water in Purgatory

Will as in volition

Will “What you know must be shared, must be accounted for”

To be held accountable. Problem of sharing and accountability

“You need to sign the release”: non-disclosure agreement, confidentiality

“I am not in any way a partisan, politically partisan.”

“Today is not about the politics, today is about the climate”

The relationship between politics and climate change

“With the new government everything must be questioned”

Definitions of resilience: changing habits, mitigation.

Climate policy has become less about preventing than mitigating.

Problem of precariousness and short term of all political mandates

Most respected climatologist in the country: ironic presentation

It has already been proved that climatology, though relevant and accurate, has not had a big enough impact on societies and cultures

4% renewables: absolutely not enough

Significant reduction of CO2 emissions by 2025

Will: a scientist whom Sarika defines as a total political virgin, which is much better, he can be better managed because his political position may be negotiated and influenced

The role of religion in our perception of climate change

Problem of censorship in communicating controversial topics

Difference in terms of individual autonomy and freedom of expression when it comes to protesting and circulating news

Influencer: Imen Jane Boulahrajane, student of economics engaging with the audience. She posts videos of political meetings and explains them

The micro-dynamics of misunderstanding between father and son at the beginning are replicated in the macro-dynamics, in which the government denies strong, direct responsibility about climate change because they have to cope with the short term of the mandates.

Waters’ choice of creating a parallel between the micro and macro is not over-intellectualised, it feels radical because the sense of anxiety boiling through the scene is reminiscent of 20th century major dystopias by Orwell and Huxley.

Introducing a totally political part in the play is risky because it soon sounds contrived, forced, formulaic. However, Waters succeeds in sounding authentic because he still includes personal traits such as the idiosyncrasies and biases of the climatologist being self-conscious and pompous and of Sarika wanting to involve Will. We never lose sight of the characters.

RESILIENCE: resiliere, to bounce back, ability to cope and adjust

Minister for Resilience, Minister for Climate Change

Will has been observing the ice in the Artactica

The equilibrium of the oceans, all the oceans, is disrupted

“Your home will be fine, London will be absolutely fine”

Will: Sea level swollen

Tide, tower of water

Reclaimed marsh

Christopher: Finally this is not about politics, it is about survival

We need to stay cool

Tessa: Let us put a huge injection of cash into civil contingency.

She embodies the unscrupulous ruler

I am back from my constituency

Struggle between the political sphere and the personal sphere

Risk society, Ulrich Beck: Prevention, Preparedness, Mitigation, Resilience

Shift of the cultural frame of mind is essential to deal with climate crisis

University Education, children’s education

Renewable energies and energy-saving

Ecoteatro: <http://www.ecoteatro.it/>

Rewarding good practices: good motivation

Colin worked with Robin Paxton on Antarctica in 1964

Will’s majestic plan: Gap between the urgency that derives from the scientific study and the unfeasibility of the plan that would have a stratospheric economic and social cost, because people are not “prepared”.

“Willingness to pay”

Increase in eco-investment

**The exam will consist of:**

**1. Evaluation of teamwork, Powerpoint presentation and contribution to class**

**Please send me the Powerpoint Presentations by Friday the 6th of December.**

**2. Written exam**

**2.1. You can submit an essay, which should be 5 to 8 pages long, on the topic of your Powerpoint presentation;**

**2.2. You can write an essay on a general topic in an hour and a half on the day of the written exam.**

**3. Oral exam**

**Questions will cover:**

**- the essay on the Powerpoint presentation or on a general topic**

**- the critical texts on Ecology and the theatre**

**- *The Contingency Plan* by Steve Waters**

**- English literature - fiction, poetry and drama - from the Second World War to the present day**