

A film crew is shown on a beach. In the foreground, a large puddle reflects the scene. A man in a patterned shirt stands on the left, looking towards the camera. In the center, a man in a dark shirt is operating a camera on a tripod, with another man in a red shirt standing next to him. To the right, a woman in a blue skirt and a man in a white shirt are looking towards the camera. The background shows a beach, a palm tree, and a cloudy sky.

Teachable Moments in Climate Change Films

A Workshop on Moving Images

Conference Teaching and Learning for Change
Sustainability in Higher Education, Bern

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Teachable Moments in Climate Change Films

Warm-up & getting to know each other

Teaching with movies – some reflections & insights from teaching students (at a business school and in social work education)

Short film "Petro-Mama" & analysis – discussion

Ideas for teaching scenarios of participants & further resources

Open questions & Wrap-up



Who are we?

Introduce yourself, by telling us...

... your name

...where you work

... what's the first "climate change film" that comes to your mind?

... what do you hope to take away from this workshop?



Teaching with movies – some reflections & insights



Climate Coverage

The exclusive deployment of science journalists to the climate beat has had the unfortunate problem or effect of scientising the whole thing, when it's really a human life, human hopes, human dreams, human inter-generational responsibility type of issue.

Kennedy Warne, founder and former editor of New Zealand Geographic

[Why climate change must stay on the news agenda beyond global summits \(theconversation.com\)](https://theconversation.com/why-climate-change-must-stay-on-the-news-agenda-beyond-global-summits)

Two complementary fields

Science Communication

Film consultancy, film content and audience reception of scientific images and messages.

Climate Change Communication

Visual communication and public engagement on climate change.

Films that address climate change directly or indirectly.

Film analysis as a point of connection between the physical sciences and the social sciences and humanities

“Although it seems counter-intuitive, the public’s difficulty in distinguishing fact from fiction has rendered cinema a useful tool within conventional pedagogical situations and for informal science education (ISE)”.

Kirby, 2014, p. 105

Kirby, D.A., 2014. Science and technology in film: themes and representations. In: Bucchi, M., Trench, B. (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Publication Communication of Science and Technology*. Routledge, London and New York.

“One of the surest ways to misunderstand images would be to read them as if they could be real or true...The assumption that films can show audiences the ‘truth’ is deeply ideological”.

Mboti, 2010, p. 318

Mboti, N., 2010. To show the world as it is, or as it is not: the gaze of Hollywood films about Africa. *Afr. Ident.* 8, 317–332.

The usefulness of climate change films

"...the two key criteria for determining usefulness are *teachability* and *integrity*. Whereas the former term attaches principally to the educative and affective aspects of climate change communication, the latter is about ensuring the credibility of images and messages through truthfulness, openness and honesty in communication. Teachability and integrity relate directly to climate change films. They also link to significant broader themes in science communication and climate change communication, namely public understanding *of* science and public trust *in* science."

Kate Manzo (2017) The usefulness of climate change films. *Geoforum* 84: 88-94.

Al Gores's CO2 Emmissions Chart-Scene in *An inconvenient truth* (Davis Guggenheim, USA, 2006)

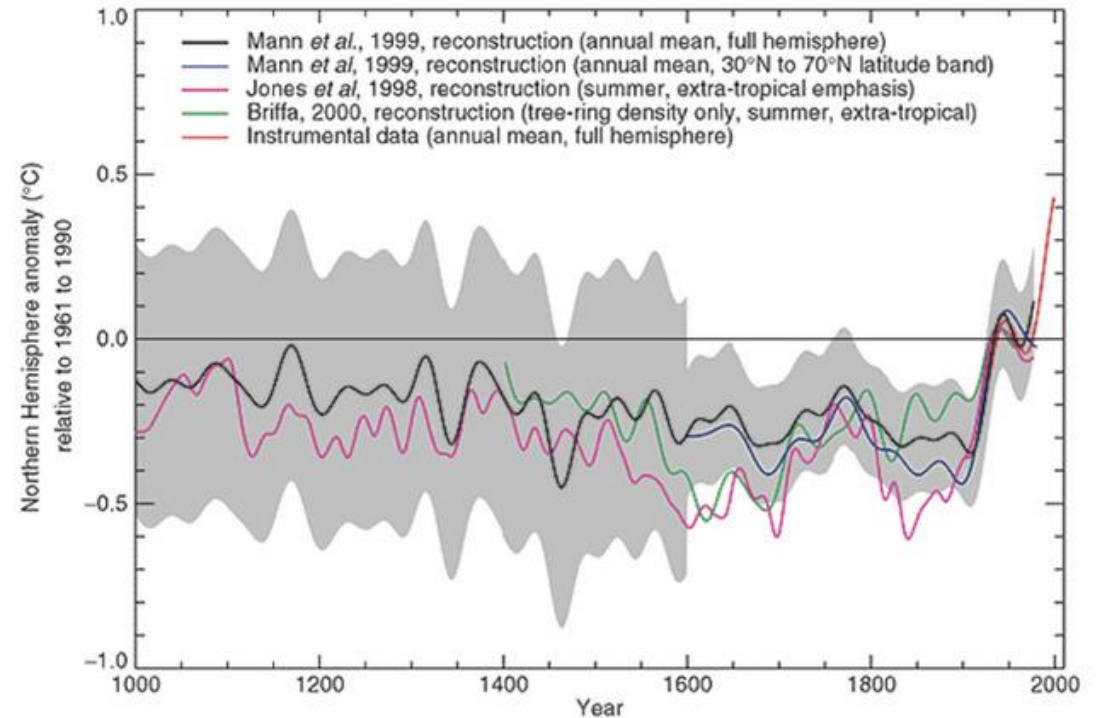


Michael Mann, Raymond S. Bradley, and Malcolm K. Hughes' "Hockey Stick" graph – one of the most storied cases of climate visualization.

- Because of its prominence, the hockey stick's scalar message became a lightning rod for political disputes, including those levied in good faith and those with a more partisan or ideological motive.
- Proving or disproving the hockey stick was and, in some very stubborn circles, still continues to be a chief arena in which climate change skeptics and deniers go to war.

Further reading:

Anne Pasek: "[Mediating Climate, Mediating Scale.](#)" *Humanities* 8.4 (2019).
<https://doi.org/10.3390/h8040159>.



Teaching with film

- Enhance critical thinking by shifting the focus from content (*what is told?*) to form (*how is it framed?*)
 - Give some context to the film (this requires a bit of research)
 - Be transparent about why you chose that particular film (reflect on your own selection criteria and share them)
 - What makes (a particular) film a trustful source of information (or not)?
- Create "teachable moments" – stimulate (public) interest in formal science and open up new discursive landscapes
 - use films as stimulation and inspiration for engagement – in short: as an entry or starting point to motivate to take action



Student's voices

"Very soon I realized that when watching the documentaries, I was much more attentive and critical of *how* climate change is pictured and how arguments are developed around it. **I even catch myself critically assessing other types of information I am exposed to in the news, advertisements or other types of film.**"

"The communication of climate change in films happens in a highly visual way. I used to pay much more attention to what was said in documentaries, than what was shown. **Images can impact viewers deeply and can cause more intense emotions than words possibly could.** And this is not only limited to images of nature and human experiences within the environment. **It was eyeopening to me how even graphs can move us and stick with us,** for instance the ones displayed in *Cowspiracy* or *An Inconvenient Truth*."

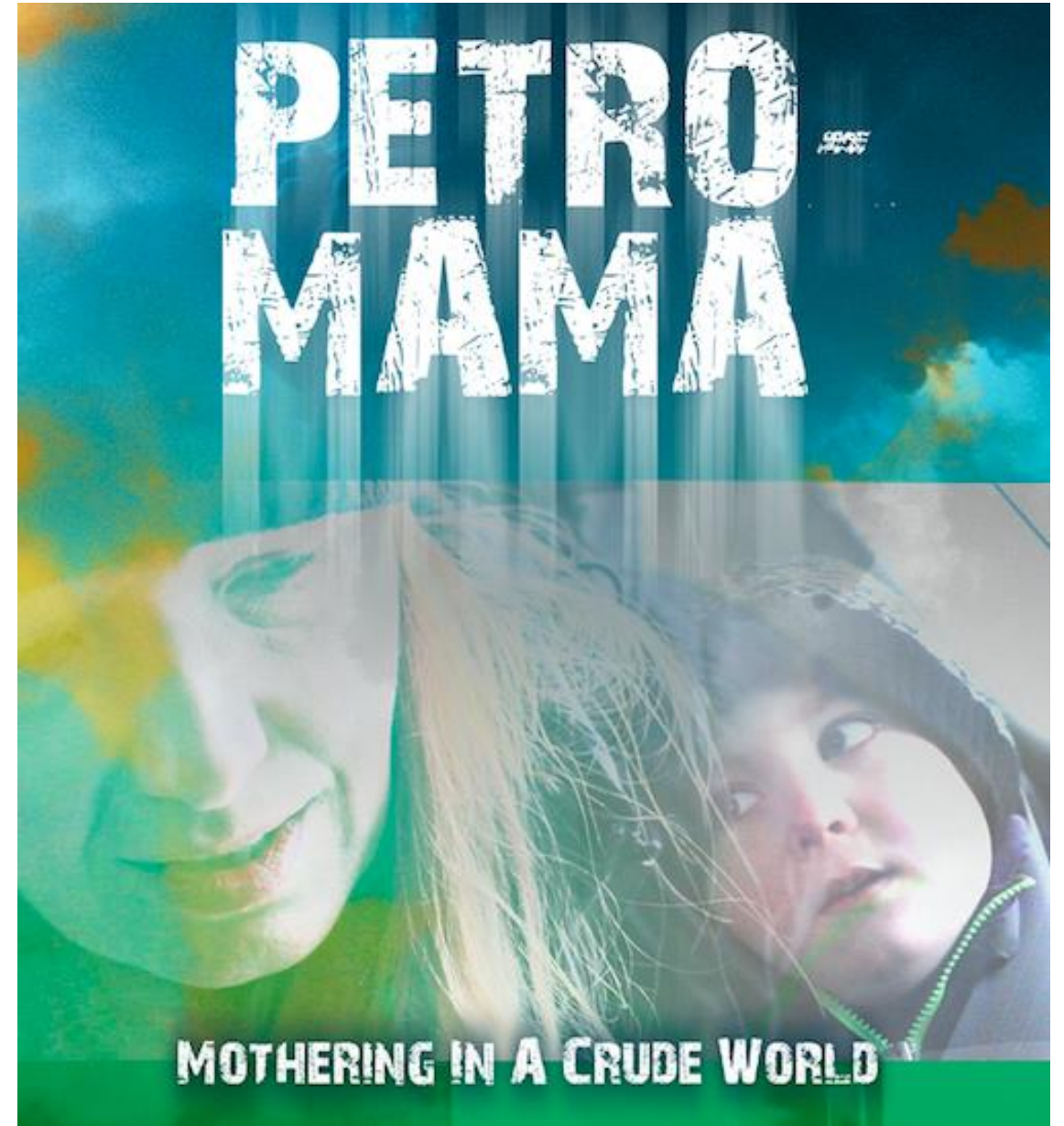
"There are so many facets to film production that influence what the viewer perceives and how she or he evaluates it. Also, **since the daily content especially our generation consumes on social media is very "video-focused"** I believe **it is crucial to reflect on this awareness not only related to climate change.**

"Often, my exposure to climate change is via social media platforms (e.g., Instagram), academic articles, or more simply, via peer communications. It never occurred to me that I could learn via movies. Or better, **I was aware of movie as source of knowledge, but never actually thought of it as one of *my sources of knowledge.***"

Petro-Mama (Sheena Wilson, CA, 2016, 5 min)

Petro-Mama links the personal with the political. In a tense and evocative moment, the film parallels a mother's desperation as she deals with her young son's acute respiratory attack, with our collective suffocation in a culture defined by oil production and a boom-and-bust economy.

While watching the short film pay attention to your emotional responses to the images.



How I integrated it in a lesson on "Petrocultures"

1. **Readings:** *On Petrocultures: Or, Why We Need to Understand Oil to Understand Everything Else* by Sheena Wilson, Imre Szeman, and Adam Carlson. You can also listen to this book chapter as a podcast: [S1E0 – On Petrocultures: Or, Why We Need to Understand Oil to Understand Everything Else | Just Powers](#)
2. **Watch:** **Dark Eden** (Jasmin Herold, Michael Beamish, DE/CA 2018, 80 min) & **Petro-Mama** (Sheena Wilson, CA 2016, 5 min)
3. **Check:** Check out the [research project *Just Powers*](#) at the University of Alberta
4. **Discuss:** Please post one or more questions you would like to discuss with Sheena Wilson in the [Petrocultures Discussion Board](#)

Student's questions (example):

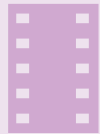
Individual actions & raise awareness

- Despite we need collective actions toward the ecological transition as mentioned in Petro-Mama, how do you think we can, as an individual, help this transition with little and easy actions ?
- What do you think is the most powerful tool to raise awareness about petrocultures in society? Are documentaries the best way?

Your ideas



If you were to organize a film screening at your university – which film would you choose?



Who would you (eventually) invite for a discussion of the film?



What activities could be organized around the screening?

Further resources

Film library: [Films - Films for the Earth](#)

In this film library you will find all the information about environmental films in one place. From trailers to descriptions and jury evaluations to information on where the film is available.

Recommended reading:

Jouko Aaltonen (2014) Claims of hope and disasters: rhetoric expression in three climate change documentaries, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 8:1, 61-75, DOI: 10.1080/17503280.2014.900947

Alex Lockwood (2016) Graphs of grief and other green feelings: the uses of affect in the study of environmental communication, *Environmental Communication*, 10:6, 734-748, DOI: 10.1080/17524032.2016.1205642

Kate Manzo (2017) The usefulness of climate change films. *Geoforum* 84: 88-94.



Thank you for participating



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"Climate Change Films"

- Don't look up!
- The day the earth caught fire
- La belle verte
- An inconvenient truth
- Disruption
- Wake up, freak out (Vimeo)
- Global 2000 (book)
- Demain
- Take Shelter
- The Day After Tomorrow
- Snowpiercer
- Dark Eden
- Merchants of Doubt (book & documentary)

"How they made us doubt everything"
(BBC podcast)

Not evil, just wrong