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The Magazine for Drama, Dance & Theatre
at York St John University

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ISSUE 18, 2020

THEATRE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

THEATRE PAGES

ISSUE 18. 2020.

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THEATRE AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

We are living in the anthropocene.

First coined in the 1970s, the term anthropocene describes how we have entered a new geological epoch in which it is human activity, more than any other factor, that shapes Earth's climate. The increase of pollutants in the planet's atmosphere since the second half of the twentieth century has been exponential, impacting on global temperatures and leading to ever more extreme weather patterns. The result is an immediate threat to the ecological balance at a planetary level.

This issue of *Theatre Pages* explores the potential role of theatre, and the arts, in the age of the anthropocene. The articles, the majority of which have been written by undergraduate drama students at York St John University, make the case for the ability of theatre to present powerful stories of lives lived in the context of a global challenge. They present creative projects that give voice to the worlds of bees and bears, demonstrating why we must resist the arrogance of our human-centric perspective and act as custodians for the more-than-human planet. They describe the intersection between environmental justice and social justice, and discuss how the arts have given voice to the experiences of black, indigenous and people of colour, often at the front line of the climate crisis.

The arts cannot reverse climate change, but they can give voice to the urgency of the crisis. They can touch people's souls and spur people to action. It is this potential of the arts to make a difference that we aim to instil in the drama, theatre and dance students at York St John. We work with students as artists and activists, providing a sense of hope and agency, without misrepresenting the horror of the crisis that we face.

Issue editor: Matthew Reason

BEE THE CHANGE

**JANE CORBETT, GEORGE BOURNE, LIV HALL,
CHLOE HOLBURN, ELIZA JACKSON, RACHAEL
LANAGHAN, REBECCA LAWN, GRACE MCLEAN,
BETH SMITH, ROSIE SYKES**

Up to 150 species of animals, insects, flora and fauna are being lost every day and we, as humans, are wholly responsible. Scientists have declared a sixth mass extinction is underway and we only have a short window of time in which to act.

Bees play a particularly important role within our ecosystem and their population is being continuously threatened by environmental factors including loss of habitat as green spaces disappear, unrestricted use of pesticides and weather patterns and temperatures shifts beyond the norm. Together these contribute to the rapid decline in numbers of bees. Recent surveys have highlighted that the overall picture for bees is one of serious decline, with 71 out of 267 species under threat and more than 20 already extinct.

Bees are champion pollinators and responsible for pollinating three out of four crops worldwide and are crucial for food production, human livelihoods and biodiversity. If their demise continues, the implications will be catastrophic causing both a global and ecological crisis.

Put simply, without bees there would be no us, as Albert Einstein is



rumoured to have declared: 'If the bee disappears from the surface of the earth, man would have no more than four years to live.'

In 2020, a group of ten second year drama and theatre students inspired by their Politically Engaged Practice module felt strongly enough about the importance of bees to form a swarm of their own and take flight. Dressed as bees whilst pulling a cart named the 'Hive of Activity' (filled with seed bombs, bee-themed cakes, bee fact leaflets and craft activities to encourage bees into gardens) we took to the streets of York to give bees a platform to tell their story. As a collective we believed passionately in reminding people that we hold the future of bees in our hands – and that their future is also our own.

Our flight path meandered from outside York Minster to Kings Square, Parliament Street, St Helen's Square and the Museum Gardens. We felt that by being peripatetic, we would reach a wider audience and if we were asked to move on, we would easily be able to do so, without disruption as we were eager to stage a peaceful protest.

We were keen to break the fourth wall between artist and spectator and explore ways in which our arts activism campaign could instigate a dialogue with the public. As we approached people dressed as bees, offering leaflets and seed bombs filled with bee-friendly flowers, passersby soon became part of our event. One gentleman we approached spoke of an incentive in Sheffield where they have

introduced two million honeybees to hives around the city. Two students from Leeds spoke about an old Jewish custom honouring bees to celebrate Rosh Hashanah and people proudly told us where the seed bombs would be planted, from Glasgow to London, Scarborough to Barnsley and as far afield as Sweden, Amsterdam and Russia.

We viewed our protest as a form of relational aesthetics, in which rather than being an object, a painting or a play, the art exists in human relationships and the creation of collective experiences. The idea perhaps traces its roots back to Allan Kaprow's earlier Happenings, as we offered each participant a unique encounter that was transient, non-replicable and defined by our actions rather than an arts object.

We also drew inspiration from the guerrilla gardening movement and community seed swaps, making 300 seed bombs to hand out to the public. Made from soil and clay and filled with pollen-rich, bee-friendly flower seeds, the public were encouraged to take them away and plant them in gardens, window boxes or public spaces. The action itself a symbolic commitment to take practical action. Growing plants, especially from seed, allows people to slow down, appreciate the seasons and helps them pay closer attention to the nature that is around them.

Many people asked further questions about plants they could buy for their garden that would help bees and several people offered money for the

seed bombs and were taken aback when they learned they were free. This small act of giving away something seemed to give people the permission to connect and engage with us on a deeper level, instead of avoiding or rushing past us altogether. Our swarm became something carnival-like, and as we paraded through the streets gaining the public's attention many people voluntarily approached us, rather than vice versa.

Ultimately, we realised the importance of empowering people to make a difference, rather than staging an angry protest that accentuates what people are not doing. The gentle steps of quiet activism worked well in contrast to the loud, often self-alienating, large footsteps of a more anarchic protest, though as we travelled through York market, we passed a plastic flower stall and I could not stop myself from shouting, 'Plastic flowers don't feed bees!' to the mortification of some of my fellow activists.

We may not have changed pesticide legislation or affected the plastic flower industry, but on a small scale our hope is that seed bombs will be planted, flowers will grow, bee hibernators will be made and we may have inspired a few more people to help bees and make more ecologically sustainable choices now and for future generations to carry forward.

Words by **Jane Corbett**. **Bee the Change** are second year BA Drama and Theatre students at York St John University.



EDUCATING STUDENTS FOR A WORLD IN CRISIS

CATHERINE HEINEMEYER

How would we know if a university was responding to the climate and ecological emergency? If it was really preparing its students for the environment, economy and society we are likely to see develop over the coming decades? I'd like to think of this question as if university life were a play. This isn't too big a stretch as a metaphor – university staff and students 'design' and 'write' the university in all sorts of ways. So, as a play, it would have a scenography, and it would have a script.

As an audience member, the first thing you notice about a play is its scenography. So, in this university that is taking our ecological future seriously, you'd walk around the set and see rich green spaces abuzz with wildlife; energy hyper-efficient buildings and solar panels; zero-waste systems co-designed by staff and students; plant-based, locally sourced meals in canteens; people drinking out of reusable cups and bottles; student food cooperatives doing a busy trade in affordable, healthy food in the Union; car parks repurposed as allotments; furniture being built to last and kept for decades; and abundant cycle parking jammed full of bikes.

Some elements of that scene may be harder to achieve than others, but as



a member of the YSJ Staff Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) working group, I have discovered that the university has started to walk the walk on some of these issues. For example, York St John now sends zero waste to landfill, plants native trees on all its sites, and carbon emissions per student have halved in just over a decade. Next on the 'to-do' list are the solar panels and green canteens. The plastic continues to be pumped out and there's little sign of the co-ops yet – so definitely, more set-builders are needed to create the full picture. Yet the scenography is, in many ways, taking shape.

What about the script? That is, the curriculum, both the one written out on programme specifications and the one on the ground curriculum that students experience during their years at the university. The script communicates to the audience, the students and the wider community, the drama of how lives play out in this emerging world: what it means to be professional, or to be a citizen, or a theatre-maker, in a society in ecological crisis.

We're finding in the staff working group that the script is much harder than the scenography. It's taking longer to write, and it matters just as much – perhaps more. Of course, the two are intimately linked: they tell the story together. The immediate environmental impacts of the campus are important, but the main impact of a university is its students, and the knowledge and experiences they take with them into their long, working, acting, caring lives.

Many of the students leaving York St John this year will be in their early fifties in the year 2050. Even the more optimistic forecasts predict by then a climate of extreme, unpredictable floods and droughts, fires and storms, and frequent food shortages and pandemics. Seas will keep rising; deserts will keep expanding; economies will keep collapsing. Environmental refugees will flow in ever greater numbers from regions which have become uninhabitable. The poorest will bear the heaviest burden, over and over again. We know this because it's already started to happen – it just hasn't hit the UK very hard yet.

It's hard to look at that picture. Just like with coronavirus, it's hard to believe drastic changes are really possible, until suddenly they are upon us and we lament our ill-preparedness. But look it square in the face if you can, and ask yourself: what sort of skills and knowledge do students need to have, not just to survive or thrive in that world, but to help others do so? To challenge its injustices, to limit or even reverse the damage to ecosystems, to rebuild societies where both the human and non-human worlds look after each other? That 2050 world will be much harder than this one (which is already no bed of roses), but it will still contain great potential for creativity, care, collaboration, resourcefulness, innovation and radically different ways of organising our societies and politics. In fact, like the Covid-19 crisis, it will draw the best out of many of us.

So the staff working group on ESD



has been working with the university's Learning and Teaching Committee to review what aspects of the script for education at YJSU need to be rewritten. It's a task that operates on many levels and across all programmes. On many levels, because it can't be achieved by top-down orders. It needs a rethinking of everything from programme aims, to module outlines, to recommended case studies, to research topics, to extracurricular opportunities. Across all programmes, because whether someone is studying sports science, drama, business or education, they will be contributing to leading their communities and workplaces through very difficult times and redefining their profession for those times.

To finish with an example fit for *Theatre Pages*, we cannot know exactly what world theatre-makers will be

addressing in 2050, or what theatre-making economies and ecologies they will be helping to shape. Perhaps they will be living on Universal Basic Income and making theatre alongside growing vegetables on a community farm, or using drama to help children make sense of their experiences of extreme weather events, or perhaps theatre will have become a more influential mode of communication within political decision-making. In any case, it seems unlikely that their scripts and scenographies will be able to ignore the interdependence between humans and the natural world.

Catherine Heinemeyer is Lecturer in Arts and Environmental Justice at York St John University.

OUR HOUSE IS ON FIRE

**EMILY BINKS, CAITLAN DIXON, JAMIE MCKELLAR,
LAURA MCLEAN, REBECCA RICHMOND,
GABBY WOLSTENHOLME**

<i>What do you want?</i>	We want change.
<i>In 5 years?</i>	We want help to make a difference.
<i>Next year?</i>	We want something, anything, from you.
<i>Now?</i>	We want you to feel guilty and uncomfortable. But willing and strong. So we can join together and shout.
<i>Ask yourself.</i>	That our world is on fire. It needs us.

We are shouting 'help' at the top of our voices. We are performance, images, imagined, fragmented, writings and sound, instructive. We are thoughtful, emotive, explorative. We are green. But we are our house and our house on fire.

We don't want you to be hopeful, we want you to panic.



We write about the climate as a way to sort. We write about the climate to sort through our feelings. A way to sift and sort and settle our feelings. We write them as scripts because that's what we know and can control. We can't control other people's actions. Only you can control your own actions.

*So write it down, sort it out,
make sense of it how you must.
Begin to declutter what clutters your mind,
and take action to declutter our time that's left.
We are inviting you to do. To move. To create. To respond.*



Two feet standing on a patch of grass
One standing woman
Ten toes
Ten red painted toes on two feet
Two feet standing on a patch of grass
A patch of grass
Yellow from the sun, the heat
A pair of feet
Can you feel the spikey grass
The cold grass
The damp
Can the grass feel your feet
Your warm feet
Your two feet
Your two feet stood on a patch of grass.

Part 1: The Truth

As human beings, we tend to live on Earth, rather than within it.

Nature has become disconnected from our everyday, and as society evolves further, we encounter the risk of becoming disconnected completely from the natural world.

Jungles are now concrete and rivers are now plastic.

We breathe fumes rather than oxygen and eat chemicals rather than nutrition.

Humans have lost our physical connection with the natural Earth.

There is no harmony, only destruction.

Some have to travel miles to see the colour green, or a wild animal.

Some wild animals will never be seen again. Some green is now burnt, black and dead.

We are surrounded by industrial and man-made landscapes.

Society orbits around technology and mechanics. As technology develops, we have left the environment behind.

We are responsible.

It is because of us and our way of life, the environment is suffering.

We have forgotten to notice where we are, what we live amongst and our duty to share.

We do not share the Earth.

We destroy it.

Part 3: Actions Not Words

Humans are natural movers; we are moving, living things.

The Earth is a moving living thing also.

The Earth moves as whole, as it orbits the sun, but also moves internally, the rivers, the wind, the growing plants. We move externally and internally too.

We dance, run and play, but we also have blood running through our veins, air circulating in our lungs and water in our cells.

As Gibson writes, 'Changing physical symptoms occur in your body much like they do in the Earth. What is the natural mover of the Earth? Water: the element of your emotions.'

Our bodies have many parallels with the Earth, though these parallels can often be forgotten.

The choreographer Meredith Monk suggests that 'it would be the saddest thing in the world to go into a space and pretend that it is not there and just do what I would normally do anyway.'

How often do we go and sit amongst nature and just be?

How often do we look at nature instead of our phones?

How often do we really see and experience the natural spaces around us?

Though we may travel through nature, have nature surrounding our houses or visit places of natural

Earth, how often do we really see it?

**Look at us. Take notice of us. Read from what you see.
Learn from what you read.**

Part 2: The Body

Our bodies are direct lines to the Earth. Native American scholar Ruby Gibson suggests that, 'Your body moves like the Earth. It enjoys permanence, structure, and predictability. It is an organic compilation of systems, all interdependent on each other.'

Though our bodies have now become separate from nature; our soles, now soft from the comfort of shoes and socks, are no longer tough from the soil.

Our eyes are weak from artificial light, our natural light rhythms disrupted. We hide from the rain and the cold, yet burn our skin in the sunlight.

As Karel and Iris Schrijver point out, our bodies are the products of living

on Earth, 'some of our cells only exist for a few days; these tend to be the ones that form the part of our body that is directly touched by the external world.'

When rebuilding our human connection to the natural world, our bodies are powerful tools to use. It is through our bodies we smell, hear and feel. It is through our bodies we experience.

The ecological philosopher Tim Morton argues that, 'If gender, race and capabilities coordinate the body, then so must they coordinate place and the environment, since according to phenomenology, the body and place and in a chiasmic relationship with one another.'



Caitlin, Emily, Gabby, Jamie, Laura and Rebecca are third year BA Drama and BA Dance students. *Our House is On Fire* presents text developed for their final group project.

ALL IN A DAY'S WALK

JANE CORBETT IN CONVERSATION WITH JESS ALLEN

All in a Day's Walk (AIADW) was a score for a month-long performance, created by walking artist and eco activist Jess Allen. The score dictated that for a month Allen had to live within the distance she could walk from her home and back in a day, eating only the food grown, processed, and sold entirely within this radius.

AIADW was performed twice; once from Allen's home in the Wye Valley in winter 2012 and then again, from her home in the Forest of Dean in the summer of 2013. The walks were a means of sourcing food from local producers but also initiating conversations with strangers. Jess Allen elaborates on her experience.

You use the word 'tracktivist' to describe yourself. Could you expand on this?

Tracktivism was a tongue-in-cheek neologism I came up with after finding the term 'slacktivism' online – modern slang to describe a lazy approach to activism where signing a few online petitions assuages our conscience and lulls us into a self-righteous sense that we're 'doing something' and so we don't need to bother with doing anything else. (This isn't to suggest that internet activism and campaigning isn't incredibly useful and effective at times, but it shouldn't replace taking



Jess Allen. *All in a Day's Walk*. Photo. Richard Gott

action in the real world, at least for those who have the time and energy and resources to engage in that.) When I thought about my practice – which required a sustained physical commitment to walking across long distances and engaging face-to-face with strangers in real time – I had a sense it was the 'opposite'. And since I was walking in mostly rural areas – along 'tracks' – then tracktivism made a neat rhyme.

What were your motivations behind *All in a Day's Walk*?

I need to say at the outset that none of my work is about spreading a 'message' as such. I think activist art must walk a tightrope between a certain aesthetic ambiguity and a concrete message. Somehow in that dance, it leaves a space for the audience to find their own meaning, or not.

AIADW was about making a frame that sought to draw people's attention to loss – of functional local food infrastructure and knowledge, but also of ecological understanding. That is, 'ecology' as it relates to our material needs (for energy, food, water) and not just something abstract or other (like wildlife or climate).

Who did you draw inspiration from?

I came up with the idea spontaneously when I was out for a very long walk and had forgotten to take food, water or money. It was October, I was living in Herefordshire – which is an apple-growing county – and found myself walking through an orchard. There should have been a lot of windfalls for me to scrump in my hunger. But it had been a very bad harvest year (largely due to extreme weather events) and there was very little fruit at all. It suddenly made me think about the connection between walking, hunger, local food and climate change – what could be revealed about ‘ecology’ by linking walking art to eating?

Once I had the basic idea, I was signposted to the work of Taiwanese American artist Tehching Hsieh and his year long performances. I suppose this gave me the context and confidence to explore the idea of ‘durational performance’ that encompass every aspect of your life for a set period with a rigorous set of rules to follow.

With hindsight, what would you have done differently?

AIADW took me by surprise in so many ways – and I think the performance was more effective for those unexpected and extreme challenges that it revealed, otherwise I might not have embarked on it! So, in this case, hindsight might have been more of a hindrance than a help. Though, I do think I could have spent more time exploring how I was going to engage with the people I

met. My later performances have included a very specific and structured moment of one-to-one performance or ‘intervention’ that I didn’t create for this piece.

What were the greatest challenges/highlights of your journey?

Undoubtedly, the greatest challenge was dealing with hunger because there was very little food available that I could eat, according to the terms of the score. This was also the highlight: learning to be at peace with this sensation, understanding that it was a choice – an ‘aesthetic’ one, even – when millions of people experience extreme hunger as a part of daily life, and understanding this finely calibrated balance between the body crossing the landscape, and food the produced from its soil to sustain that body.

You speak of having a catastrophic loss of faith in environmentalism. Could you expand on this?

I’ve been an environmentalist since I was a teenager but had never stopped to think what was actually meant by ‘saving the planet’. Coincidentally, not long after the first performance of *AIADW*, I had this realisation that it meant humans naively thinking we could ‘save’ a planet we’re also actively destroying, essentially for the benefit of our own species. I no longer believed that this was possible. It took me a while to recover a sense of purpose for my performance practice but, inspired by the Dark Mountain project, I realised my activism would

now have to be about how we can live more fully, creatively, ethically, ecologically in whatever time our species has left.

What advice would you give performers who are passionate about highlighting environmental issues and awareness?

Relinquish the idea that you WILL (or have to) bring about change in your audience and instead focus your energies and passion and creativity on carefully constructing your work to make space for people to find their own way to change. Be enchanting not didactic – remember that so many childhood lessons were better learned for being magical, moving, poetic.

In what re-imagined ways do you make Eco activist art now?

I’m not making eco-activist art at the moment and this is very liberating! Now I teach and perform aerial circus (albeit in a ‘ecological’ context, for a theatre built by the resident eco-activist company) which is the most enriching thing I’ve ever done. But I feel it’s connected to my activism, because we have to feel empowered in ourselves before we can act on behalf of others or ‘ecology’, and aerial circus has a way of helping people find joy in their strength. I might make eco-activist art again, but only if I feel really consumed by an idea.

Jane Corbett is a second year BA Drama and Theatre student at York St John University.



ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM AND RACIAL VISIBILITY

CHLOE HOLBURN

There are few issues more urgent, or which affect everybody no matter who they are, than the ongoing climate crisis. Yet the lack of racial diversity and visibility within the environmental movement hinders its impact and legitimacy. We see and hear in the news and on social media how climate activists all over the world are protesting, demanding action and change. But where are the voices of people of colour, including those whose cultures are already being directly impacted by the climate crisis?

The consistently perceived 'whiteness' of environmentalism can seem inescapable at times. Headlines such as 'Does Extinction Rebellion have a race problem?' (*The Guardian* October 2019) highlight the ongoing racial visibility issues that are very present and relevant here in the UK. As someone who is mixed-race, I have often longed to see representations within modern issues like this that resonate with me, that enable me to see myself and people who look like me as active participants in the story. Growing up, I always understood the importance of looking after our environment, but never really knew how to be actively involved. Instead I would do the littler and quieter things like recycling, composting, and using sustainable products, still wanting



to make a difference but not having the confidence to use my voice. The lack of racial visibility was part of the reason I didn't think it was my place to speak out, or be actively involved in the protest for climate justice – because growing up I very rarely, if ever, saw a racial representation that I could identify with.

I feel that now I am older I am

able to recognise that I probably subconsciously thought that the climate debate and environmentalism was something exclusive to certain people: to people that didn't reflect me, to white people, to people with power or money. This is why it is so important to listen to the people whose culture this issue is already affecting. It is important to hear what they have to say and to be open to learn from

their knowledge and experiences. Rural communities in places like Africa, which as a continent is the least responsible for climate change, are particularly vulnerable to the effects. The most apparent examples of this are things like how climate affects rainfall patterns, floods and drought. This then affects community agriculture which then reduces food security and worsens water

security. If we do not make visible the communities that feel the harshest impacts of the climate crisis then we can never tell a complete story. The UK has undoubtedly contributed to the effects of climate change, ranking in the top seven for CO2 emissions per capita. It is with this knowledge that we understand how environmental justice and social justice go hand in hand. It is in this context that Extinction Rebellion has committed itself to working towards greater diversity and to 'amplify the messages of Black, Indigenous and POC activists and environmental leaders'.

It is for all these reasons that as a young mixed race artist, I'm interested in the people of colour who are using their voices and their artistic talents to represent their cultures and to fight for the visibility, inclusivity and equality that they should have within the environmental movement.

Zena Edwards is a socially conscious arts activist who has over twenty years of experience as a poet, performer, and educator in London. The work she makes as a woman of colour focusses on a fusion of poetry and music, often using traditional African instruments like the Kalimba to make the soundtracks that accompany her poetry and stories. In her current work, Edwards has turned her attention to climate activism, producing work on and being involved in events that highlight the need for people of colour to be heard. In 2019 Edwards was involved in the Culture Declares Emergency procession in London, co-organised by the arts collective

Ackroyd & Harvey, where she performed a protest song with the message 'I sing of a re-birth/ not a victim song'. Her performance of this song took place in the Tate Modern's Turbine Hall, one of many locations in London used as a place to stage the action. Throughout her performance Edwards wore a living grass coat to bring attention to the environmental implications of low-cost, fast fashion.

Something which I find really powerful about Edwards' performance style, both in this procession and in her other work, is the peaceful yet commanding power of her poetry and song fusion. Music is something that is often embedded deep within the roots of culture and is used as a way to bring people together and instil a sense of community and togetherness. I feel that Edwards achieves this in her work; her strong voice and powerful words encourage us to listen to what she has to say and in this particular piece her demand for change echoes around the vast space of the Turbine Hall, capturing the attention of the spectators and people who are just passing by. We cannot deny or overlook the powerful statement that Edwards makes as she stands and addresses the gathering crowds. Her voice and her presence command a venue that houses the work and talent of a privileged and still largely white art world. Zena Edwards is one of many influential artists of colour who are involved in helping to connect and highlight the issues of climate justice, race, power, and inequality. However, their work is rarely at the forefront of what the media presents us with, and

we barely hear their voices in a debate that appears to remain largely white.

As I write this article, I have also been listening to a podcast called The Colour Green which explores the links between climate change, race, nature and social justice from the perspectives of artists and activists of colour in the UK. Alongside Zena Edwards' episode you have the chance to hear and learn from Ama Josephine Budge, Judy Ling Wong, Farah Ahmed and Kareem Dayes, all UK activists and artists of colour at the forefront of social innovation. Listening to their episodes is a great way to learn more about these issues whilst supporting the visibility and voices of people of colour in this ongoing global environmental crisis.

If the fight for climate justice is to be inclusive, and truly speak for everyone in the manner it must, then we desperately need to start seeing more diversity within environmentalism. The climate crisis movement must not be perceived as a white movement for the middle classes, it should be and is a movement that is for everyone. More inclusivity of race within debates like this doesn't mean less visibility for white people, it means more inclusivity, equality and potential for the next generation of children of colour to grow up knowing that they have a much needed, valued and important place within this ongoing debate.

Chloe Holburn is a second year BA Drama and Theatre student at York St John University.



Photo of Zena Edwards, courtesy of Ackroyd & Harvey

THEATRE IN EDUCATION & THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

NELLI YLI-MALMI

Climate change is on everyone's lips. In the past few years we have seen activists such as Greta Thunberg take centre stage in voicing the distress young people feel about the future of our planet. We have seen images of people getting arrested in climate protests whilst others refuse to change their behaviour to contribute to the fight against climate change. September 2019 saw an estimated 7.6 million people protesting climate change and demanding action from our leaders, with movements such as Extinction Rebellion (abbreviated as XR) leading the way.

Yet, even as all of this is going on, adults struggle to discuss climate change with their children – how do you translate scientific facts into something younger folk can comprehend and thus, take action? Also, many adults believe that children should remain children and therefore shouldn't be involved in politics, or have to face the true horror of the environmental emergency. It is here that I believe theatre could have a central role in educating young people on the subject of climate change.

In 2019 a small Finnish theatre company called Ihmisen teatteri (Theatre of the Human) realised they had an opportunity to make a



Photo by Ilkka Koski: *Are you ready for climate change?*

performance which, not only brought attention to climate change, but also provided an opportunity for discourse with members of the audience afterwards in order to relieve 'climate anxiety', a distress felt especially by the youth. This kind of anxiety stems, according to Tamara Plush, from the fact that 'While children have done very little to cause the changing climate, they will inherit its problems. This puts

them in the precarious situation of having to cope with both current and future impacts from increasing climate shocks and stresses.'

The motivation to amplify children's voices, together with the realisation that scientific facts are not enough to prompt action, led the company to believe that theatre could appeal to audiences' emotions so that actual

change was more likely to be effected. Indeed, company choreographer Meeri Toivonen argues that 'if a person doesn't feel emotionally connected to a matter, why would they go out of their way to do anything about it? Why should I recycle just because someone says so? Rather, now they will remember the emotions and empathy they felt during the performance and this emotional trigger will drive them

to, for example, recycle a lot more.'

The result was *Are you ready for climate change?* an episodic style performance that went against the trend for reassuring, optimistic performances that suggest that ultimately everything will be alright. Instead, by using improvisation and devising techniques in the making process, the performance presented a candid and unsugared social commentary. The episodic style also allowed the actors to perform all the characters. These included Climate Change, a somewhat annoying and people-pleasing character trying to take over the world; Greta, a fictional character inspired by Greta Thunberg who attempts to beat Climate Change; a Magician suffering from eco-anxiety, yet who doesn't do anything to aid it; and a chimpanzee called Ham, who returns from space to find out that all the chimpanzees on the planet have, in fact, died.

Aiming to appeal to the emotions of the spectators, the performance ends in the failure of Greta's battle against Climate Change, and the dystopian future that results from that failure. One of the vivid memories of the performance Toivonen has is performing the role of Climate Change: 'It was super to play the role. Saying things like "I, Climate Change, kill about 200 species everyday" makes me really see the true impact of this whole situation on our planet and on our lives.' She carries on, pleading: 'Dear people, we need to act now. There is literally no tomorrow if we don't.'

In order to offer tools for the audience of sixth form students on how to cope with climate anxiety, the company decided to open up a conversation post-performance and explore any responses the audience might have. They found that although a vast majority of the audience knew about the issues presented, many of the viewers weren't sure how to take action against climate change. Some lived at home and thus ate what was made for them (often very meaty dishes) and some questioned how they could make a difference because being underage they can't vote just yet.

The response from the company was simple: if you have any of your own money, you can vote with that. Whenever you buy something, and do so informed by an environmental awareness, that is essentially a vote for the future. The discussions also empowered many of the audience because the emotional responses made them feel more inspired to take action.

Interactive drama practices such as these support young people's learning processes, which is why using theatre as a means of education is vital. An example in the UK is Manchester-based Contact Theatre, who've explored climate justice and social inequality in a show called *Climate of Fear*, which looked at the link between the planet and the impact people have on it. Contact – formed by people between the ages of 13-30 – places a young people centred approach at the heart of decision making and seeks



Photo by Ilkaa Koshi: *Are you ready for climate change?*

to change audiences' lives through performance. fulfil something, we can do anything.'

Performances like *Are you ready for climate change?* and *Climate of Fear* encourage young people to consider challenging topics for themselves. As such they are part of a Theatre in Education movement that seeks to use theatre performances to inspire learning, challenge perceptions and attitudes but also deliver important messages that are easily understood and remembered. The discussion following *Are you ready for climate change?* created a safe space for young people to develop enquiry skills, which in turn improves their ability to question their surroundings and the outcomes that follow actions. Indeed, as Greta Thunberg said in 2019 in the UK Houses of Parliament 'The moment we [children] decide to

Ihmisen teatteri are:
Performers:
Merri Toivonen
Toni Riihiluoma
Helmi Linnosmaa

Writer and director:
Juti Saari

Nelli Yli-Malmi is second year BA Drama and Theatre student at York St John University.

CHANTAL BILODEAU: THEATRE OF THE ARCTIC CIRCLE

MAIA MCCONNELL

The arts have always been a powerful method of supporting change, so it is no surprise that as climate change has become an increasingly urgent problem, the arts have become an important and critical resource.

Climate art has many roles, but is a particularly effective way to educate, inspire and, for those passionate about the crisis, to explore the emotions attached to the movement. While plays covering the issue of climate change might not have a direct role in mitigating the effects of the environmental crisis, speaking from personal experience, they do have the power and opportunity to spark changes in their audiences' lives and convince them to think about the consequences that their actions have on the climate. Many plays covering the climate issue have been written within the past ten years, showing the commitment of a number of artists and playwrights to the movement. An interesting and prominent example amongst these is the work of Chantal Bilodeau, an award winning playwright and activist for climate change.

Bilodeau was raised in Montreal, speaking the minority language of Québécois French. Now that she lives in America and writes in English,



Photo by Fiona Paton. Nunavut, Canada. Creative Commons License

she describes herself as being at a crossroads 'between language, between cultures and between social classes.' Being both between and part of so many groups within society has led to a successful career in the arts. Bilodeau's work is centred around and brings together science, policy, art and climate change. She uses theatre to bring environmental and social justice issues to the forefront of the public's

mind, because artists have the power to use their voices to change and shape the future – something that, as a drama and theatre student, Bilodeau's works have taught me.

Bilodeau is the Artistic Director of The Arctic Cycle, an organisation that 'uses theatre to foster a conversation about our global climate crisis [...] and encourages people to take action.' She

has written two plays for The Arctic Cycle so far. The first, *Sila*, engages with the very different worlds of Inuit mythology and Arctic environmental policy. It uses puppetry, poetry and three different languages to follow a number of characters – including coast guard officers and the local Inuit community – as they experience the effects of their competing interests on the future of the Canadian Arctic. The

result is a deeply moving and political story that examines how polar bears' behaviour is changing as the ice around them melts, and the struggle of the Inuit people to uphold their traditional ways of life.

The Inuit are an indigenous peoples inhabiting Nunavut, a vast territory in the Canadian Arctic. They have learnt the weather patterns of their environment, allowing them to travel and hunt safely on the ice, but the Arctic is warming and the once familiar land and ice is changing and unstable; the Inuit culture is becoming endangered. As a result, some are turning to work in contemporary settings to earn a salary, with traditions – such as hunting and sewing animal skins – beginning to lose their significance in their day-to-day lives. Despite this, I am hopeful for the future of Inuit people and their traditions as there is increasing awareness of their way of life from the work of environmental groups. The power of Bilodeau's play is to make their story visible and the urgency of the issues accessible to a new and wider audience.

Following the success of *Sila, Forward* is the second of Bilodeau's plays for The Arctic Cycle. *Forward* intertwines social change with climate change to form a reminder of the impact our actions can have on both a personal and global level. Both *Forward* and *Sila* are written with the intention of educating people and inspiring change. Whether we are performing, watching, reading or discussing Bilodeau's plays, they open up conversations about climate change. This action of starting

a conversation can be the beginning of making personal or community level changes to support the climate fight. Bilodeau has said that initially she had thought she would only write one play about climate change but she found there was so much to explore. She is now on the journey of writing a play for each of the eight countries that are part of The Arctic Council in order to explore climate change from eight different angles, and many people across the world are anxious to read and perform them in order to educate themselves and others.

Bilodeau is also the co-creator of Climate Change Theatre Action (CCTA), a collaboration of The Arctic Cycle, The Centre for Sustainable Practice in the Arts and Theatre Without Borders, that has produced a series of readings and performances of short plays about climate change. The project provides the plays free of charge in order for people to use them as a tool to engage with climate change while realising their creative potential and the power of art to engage with audiences emotionally. As part of this project, they commission fifty professional playwrights from across the world to write the five minute plays about climate change, first taking place in 2019, this will be repeated at the end of 2021.

During the coronavirus pandemic, CCTA has gone online, inviting artists and members of the community concerned with climate change to record their own readings of five-minute plays, from their collection about climate change, and are posting



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them weekly on their Youtube channel. Climate Change Theatre Action being active online during this time of uncertainty brings a sense of comfort; watching the readings of the plays reminds me that, although things are difficult right now, art will find a way through. It also puts my mind at rest as I am, and I know others are, struggling to perform activism for climate change while the world is dealing with the pandemic, but with this climate art we can still support the cause.

For artists, students and creative people who want to make a difference and support the fight against the climate crisis, I couldn't recommend reading the plays or joining the work of Chantal Bilodeau more. Her plays

are grounded in facts and the science while being deeply moving. Meanwhile, the online material of Climate Change Theatre Action is a great resource and creative outlet on the topic. It provides us with the opportunity to take a break from the troubles of the world and remember that we are not alone in the fight for climate justice.

Maia McConnell is a second year BA Drama and Theatre student at York St John University.

THE BEAR NECESSITIES OF SURVIVAL

ROSIE SYKES

Since the 1950s, we have been aware that the world is facing a growing environmental emergency. This is due to the greenhouse effect caused by increasing levels of pollutants and CO2 in the atmosphere, resulting in climate change. The main cause of this issue is, as I imagine you already know... us, humans. CO2 emissions and other human activities are fundamentally altering our climate on a global scale, causing higher temperatures and more violent and unpredictable weather patterns.

These issues affect humans, and are caused by humans, but this is a more-than-human world. We may be the ones destroying it, but we aren't the only ones occupying it. If we consider all living things on planet Earth: trees and plants take up 82% of the biomass; followed by bacteria which accounts for 13%; then there are animals, they make up only 0.4% of the biomass. Finally, in last place, comes us. Humans are only a tiny 0.1% of our planet's biomass yet we are the ones causing the destruction. We behave as if our actions have no consequences, as if we are the only things living on this planet.

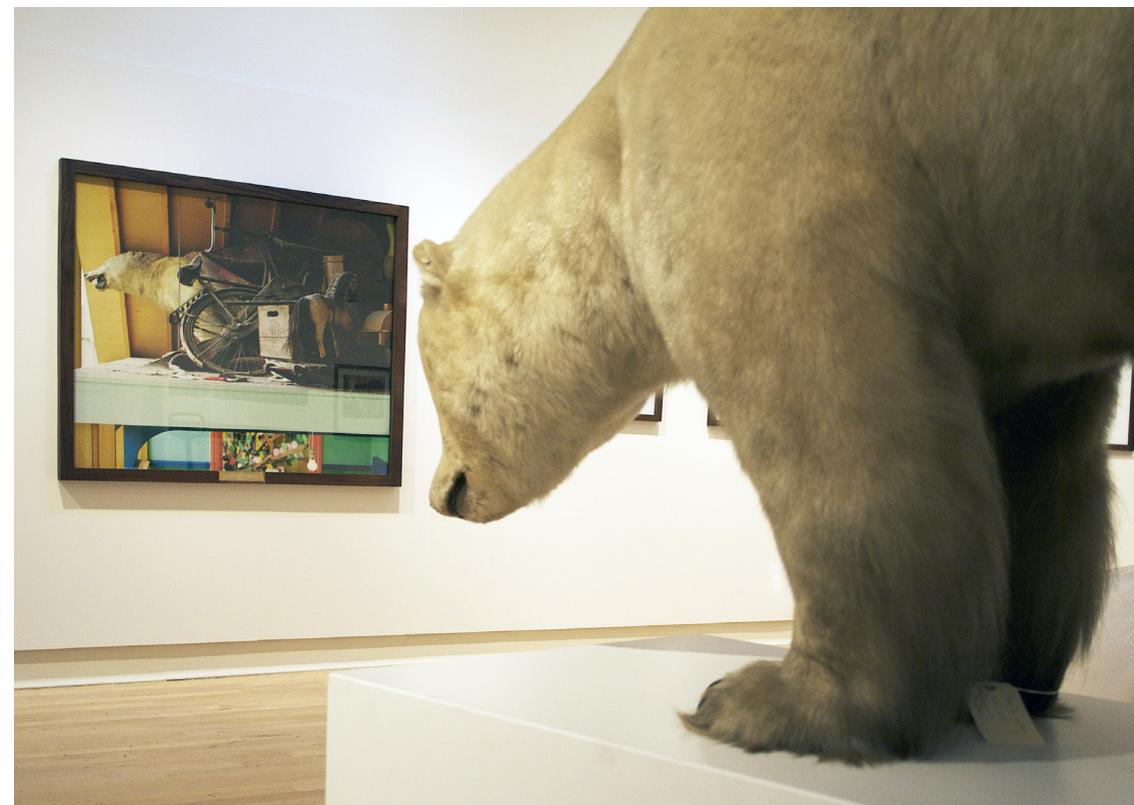
In the past decade, however, environmental activists have been getting creative with ways to educate,

influence and seek to inspire people to act now. But what gets people to listen most effectively? And in particular how can artistic responses to environmental issues find ways of engaging people with the more-than-human world – reminding us that we are not the only animals on this planet?

One example of work that can inspire future political artists seeking to represent a more-than-human world, is *Nanoq: Flat Out and Bluesome*, by contemporary artists, Bryndís Snæbjörnsdóttir and Mark Wilson. From 2001-2006, together they made an exhibit to raise awareness of the vulnerability of polar bears to climate change. They did this by identifying all the taxidermized polar bears in the UK, researching their histories and undertaking the mission of tracking down as many details as they could about each one. This included the places, dates and people associated with the capture and killing of the bears. They first displayed this project at Spike Island in Bristol, UK, where ten of the taxidermy polar bears were shown. Since then they've released an archive of photographs of the many bears they've tracked down as well as touring the exhibit to over 20 museums in Scandinavia. The grim appearance of so many stuffed polar bears nudges audiences to consider the broader



Photos: Nanoq: Flat Out and Bluesome!



history of hunting and how the display of these animals as trophies and museum specimens adds towards the tragic extinction the species is now facing.

What strikes me the most about this exhibit, is the way it invites us to think about how endangered these beautiful creatures are, and the ridiculous number of them killed for decoration or entertainment purposes. Looking at this piece, and at so many bears in glass cases, is heart-breaking. And that feeling leads us to question why anyone thought that this was ever okay. Perhaps this is because it doesn't directly affect us as humans. There's no harm done to us. So, it must be okay, right? Then we question why is this species endangered in the first place? Oh yes, climate change..

I personally believe that the true message of this piece is not just that hunting and taxidermy are bad but that the taxidermy polar bears in *Nanoq* are a symbol for climate change. They symbolise the fact that if we can't see the urgent issues surrounding climate change right in front of us, we don't think it affects us. We don't see that we are the problem here. Instead, the polar bears are facing the devastating results of our actions. They're the ones whose homes are melting away, who can't feed themselves or their families. It's politically engaged art like *Nanoq* that can manage to truly touch people's feelings and provide the emotional reaction that will inspire us to understand the urgency of the climate crisis right now.

An artist who takes a more immersive approach to how to communicate the impact of climate change on the more-than-human world is Deke Weaver. Weaver's *The Unreliable Bestiary Project* is a series of performances, designed to give audiences an enveloping insight into how animals live in the wild and what they need from the planet to survive. He has five different sets of performances within this project, each looking at a different animal who lives in the wild. One set of performances, *BEAR* (2016-17), looks at the six-month period in the year where the bears are awake. *BEAR* comes in three seasonal chapters: one for Fall, Winter and Spring. Each chapter has a different performance which gives the audiences a up-close experience of what life is like for bears living in the wild.

My personal favourite is the Fall chapter. This is a silent walking tour which takes place through a large city parkland in Urbana, Illinois. Here, small groups are led by park rangers to different 'stations' (made from recycled materials) around the park. Each station represents a month in the year when the bear is awake. They show the environment the animal needs around it during that time and the audience members are told a new story at each one. At the last station, for example, audience members are asked to crawl into a close, dark den where they are told the last story. This is where the bear's six-month year ends, and they go to hibernate.

The powerful thing about this piece, is



Photo by Nathan Keay: Deke Weaver, BEAR

that participants are given the chance to see the planet from a bear's-eye-view. From experiencing the bear's perspective, they can see how they survive and what they need in order to do so. What they also have the chance to understand, is the harm we as humans cause them. They can see all we are doing to destroy the planet and its natural wildlife may not be affecting us – yet – but it's beautiful animals like bears who are at the receiving end right now. And if we don't all start to change the way we live soon, then these creatures won't be able to live at all.

In order for someone to want to make a change, I believe they must experience

something inside of them. It must be a feeling, rather than just an abstract intellectual thought. Experiencing environmentally engaged arts, such as the examples here, can produce these kinds of personal experiences.

I hope that more people are inspired to create arts activism that engages with climate change and the environmental crisis in a manner that educates, provokes and helps audiences engage with the more-than-human world.

Rosie Sykes is a second year BA Drama: Education and Community student at York St John University.

ADAPTATIONS... OR HOW TO LIVE A HUMAN LIFE AS IF ONE WAS A NEWT

RITA MARCALO

During its life, a great crested newt will breathe in three distinct ways.
(Anita Roy 2020)

I am a dancer.

For a while now, my dance has been listening to the world and to the climate and biodiversity emergency that we find ourselves in, and it has been changing. It has been evolving and it has been adapting.

I'm going to now take you through three of its latest adaptations.

First adaptation: My dance is now land-based

For the first four or five months, it is entirely aquatic, breathing through gills that it wears in a froth around its neck like a feather boa.
(Anita Roy, 2020)

In the past my dance flew, from Portugal to the UK. As far as Chicago in one direction, and as far as Ukraine in the other.

These days my dance does not fly. It has lost its wings. It has evolved to be land-based: it has decided to only travel as far as it is possible to travel by land or by sea. And to travel almost exclusively on public transport, as I do not own a car.

In 2018 I danced my way out of England (a country that I had lived and worked in for 24 years) on foot. I danced into the Republic of Ireland: my new home. This dance started in Guildford and ended in County Tipperary in Ireland two months later.

It now takes me 12 hours to travel by land and sea from Ireland to York. And it takes me three days to travel to Portugal, where I am originally from and where some of my family still live.

The biggest learning that I have undertaken through this adaptation is how long geography takes. I have discovered the duration of geography, something I had never considered before, as I was born into an age of flying and fast travel.



Rita walking from Guildford (England) to Cloughjordan (Ireland). Image by Kristina Lomas



Dancing with Strangers



Rita travelling by boat.



Solar powered speakers for festivals.

Second adaptation: From ego-system thinking to eco-system thinking

As autumn approaches, the juvenile 'eft' emerges from the water, sheds its gills and begins to breathe with its lungs.
(Anita Roy, 2020)

My dance is feeling like it no longer wants to be 'my dance'. It no longer wants to attach itself to a self. It no longer wants to be 'my work', an expression that I have used for the past 20 years. The word 'my' in that expression is slowly being rubbed out and being replaced with *the work*.

The work.

The work *that needs doing*.

The dance that needs dancing right now, rather than a dance that a supposed self called Rita wanted to do to fulfil her artistic needs. I feel like I am becoming one dancer in a choreography that is not decided by myself but by the current needs of the planet, humanity and other beings.

In this adaptation my dance is aware that age and longevity, class, ethnicity and opportunity are factors. My dance has been so fortunate to have had over 20 years of fulfilling those individual artistic needs.

So I am aware that 'the work that needs doing' will look very different to an emerging artist who is beginning to find their artistic voice. Or very different to that of a working class choreographer who, last year, said to me: 'You know Rita, I am only just beginning to apply the word "artist" to myself, because in my community that is frowned upon.'

As it moves into eco-system dancing, my dance is striving to place its individual needs aside for a greater choreography, while I also support those for whom the work that needs doing is different from my own.

Third adaptation: The work wants to duet between the personal being political and political being planetary

It then lives exclusively on land until it reaches sexual maturity at around the age of three, when it returns to its natal pond to spawn.
(Anita Roy, 2020)

In her arguing for the interconnection between colonial violence and planetary violence, the physicist and ecofeminist Vandana Shiva writes that 'the extermination of biological diversity and of indigenous cultures that know how to live in peace with Mother Earth is part of one extinction, one interconnected war against life. Ecocide and genocide are one indivisible process, and they began with the idea of colonization of the Earth as the "civilizing mission" of a "superior race"' (2019).

I want to dance this duet.

The adult newt is a true amphibian – a creature of both (amphi) worlds (bios) – slipping easily between the elements, breathing underwater through its skin and above through its mouth.
(Anita Roy, 2020)

I want to dance this duet between the political and the planetary, and I want to dance it with those of you who can teach me this duet.

None of these dances can be done by me alone, or you alone, or anyone alone.

So this is my provocation to you.

Join me in these dances.

Because can you imagine what the world could look like if we danced them together?

Rita Marcalo is a dancer, choreographer and long-term friend and collaborator of York St John University.

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