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# **Climate Conversations: Making Theatre in the Context of Climate Crisis**

**Report by Zoë Svendsen  
Commissioned by the Donmar Warehouse  
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**Theatre artists always work within parameters (of time, cost or scale). Working in the context of the climate emergency, they should feel no more restricted in creative ambition than they do now. Rather, their purpose is to channel that creativity through a new set of premises.**

**(Paddy Dillon)**

**It is now time for us to be the most creative we have ever been, the most far-sighted, the most practical, the most conscious and selfless. The stakes have never been, and will never be, higher.**

**(Ben Okri)**

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# Introduction

## Overview

This report, *Climate Conversations: Making Theatre in the Context of Climate Crisis*, addresses the question of how to develop creative artistic practice in theatre in the context of living through the rapidly accelerating crisis of global climate breakdown. The ideas and recommendations explored emerge out of a multiplicity of conversations and workshops held over a year at the Donmar Warehouse, London, from December 2021 to December 2022, with a preparation phase of defining the research process from August 2021 to December 2021, followed by an 'embedding' phase of exploring how best to put some of the discoveries into practice, which extends up to June 2023 (and which will continue beyond the publication of this report). This is an industry-facing report, orientated to the context of making theatre in the commercial and subsidised sectors in theatre buildings that commission plays and/or programme productions. I want to recognise at the outset that there is already a vast ecosystem (despite funding cuts) of theatre and performance creation beyond these theatres with a plethora of ways of engaging with climate crisis. Some, but not all, of what this report has to say will also be relevant for that wider culture.

This research aims to complement and build on the comprehensive detail of the *Theatre Green Book*<sup>1</sup> and the longstanding work undertaken by environment and arts consultancy *Julie's Bicycle*,<sup>2</sup> both of which focus on practical measurable steps to lower theatre's carbon footprint. However, this report focuses on the artistic and ethical values that will drive long-term systemic transformation in theatre in relation to climate crisis, through the practice of what we have named 'climate dramaturgy'. Climate Dramaturgy builds on the foundations provided by the *Theatre Green Book's* emphasis on collaboration and its emphasis that not only productions but also the operations and buildings that house them have a key role in mitigating environmental impacts, exploring the multiple ways that a theatre can facilitate its creatives to achieve the *Theatre Green Book* standards creatively (see the section 'Climate Dramaturgy & the Production Process' pp. 36–55). At the same time, Climate Dramaturgy extends beyond the remit and philosophy of the *Theatre Green Book* or *Julie's Bicycle*, to explore the 'why' and the 'how' in relation to creative practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Buro Happold and Renew Theatre, *The Theatre Green Book. Part 1: Sustainable Productions (version beta.2 for trialling)* (2021): <https://theatregreenbook.com/book-one-sustainable-productions/>. This remains the version available as of June 2023. [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>2</sup> <https://juliesbicycle.com> [accessed 22 June 2023]

## Values

The climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination. [...] What we need is to find a way out of the individualising imaginary in which we are trapped.

(Amitav Ghosh 2016)

The context of climate crisis poses a radical challenge to the *de facto* separation of art and artistry from its contexts of production and reception. 'Art for art's sake' is a phenomenon of western modernity, and despite long being contested by scholars and artists alike (McGrath 1973; Kershaw 1992; Jackson 2011; Born et al 2017), the separation of art and the social conditions of its production and reception remain for many intrinsic to perceptions of a cultural work *as* art. The urgency and scale of the climate crisis, along with its capacity to infiltrate every aspect of all lives, however, calls for us to re-enmesh and recognise artistic practice in the contexts of its production and reception (and their impacts). Climate Dramaturgy seeks to reconnect art with its times through inviting attention to climate contexts beyond those artistic questions deemed immediately relevant for a particular piece of work. **At its heart is a holistic approach** that focuses on practices of giving attention to contexts beyond the immediate and visible, both off stage and on. It is a method for undertaking a multiplicity of actions across many areas of theatre-making, including:

- procurement of resources
- disposal of resources
- finances
- ideas and stories
- communication
- institutional structures
- antiracism and inclusive practice
- artistic collaboration
- energy consumption
- working practices

Climate Dramaturgy also offers a counternarrative to the dominant cultural model for response with respect to climate crisis more broadly, because it doesn't offer or seek a 'one-size-fits-all' solution to 'save the planet' but instead invites a continuous practice of attention and care, engaging with multiple small-scale actions that vary in specifics according to context and capacity. Like any 'emergent' strategy (adrienne maree brown 2017), this kind of focus on timing/planning requires care and vigilance from all involved, and recognition that the work may not look like the 'directional' leadership the culture is used to (Figueres 2020). The rapid, astonishing twists and turns of a murmuration are

created by each starling just paying attention to its seven nearest fellow flyers (brown 2017): a similar kind of micro-attention in theatre across all aspects of making work can produce shifts in creative and social practice at a scale that collectively far outweighs any one of the actions that enables those shifts.

The tenacity required to maintain such a holistic approach can be likened to Chief UN Negotiator of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, Christiana Figueres' characterisation of 'stubborn optimism', which steers a course between what activist and theorist Vanessa Machado de Oliveira describes as the pitfalls of 'desperate solutionism' and 'reckless fatalism' (Figueres 2020; Machado de Oliveira 2021). The dominant cultural narrative constantly veers between these poles: loading collective systemic issues onto individual shoulders whilst at the same time representing climate crisis in ways that lead many in theatre to assume that the actions within theatre's reach are 'not enough' or cannot produce impactful results when compared, for example, with other industries. Climate Dramaturgy seeks to steer the narrative away from such comparative modes, that pitch different sectors against one another, to look at how future-fit artistic practice is entwined with, and can emerge out of, ethical practice that is rooted in self-determination. Not only does this align with social methodologies for change (brown 2017), it also aims at reframing the question as a moral imperative. In this, it is not only about *how much* change occurs, or how big an impact it makes, but also about how theatre wants to align itself: whether it wants to remain with those parts of society that are around thirty to forty years out of date in believing that climate crisis has nothing to do with them, or as part of a culture that is visionary and incisive in understanding the world around us (and the ethical obligations that go with that).

Collectively, the theatre sector has the power to model how culture can increase its resilience, play a role in facing and recognising the times we are in, and rehearse collaboratively for ways of equipping both audiences and makers with the emotional and social flexibility and resilience we will need to survive our times (Krenak 2020; Wall Kimmerer 2013; Haraway 2016). The significance of stories and the imagination to enabling cultural transformation is increasingly recognised by campaigners, activists and economists (Klein 2014; Raworth 2017; Monbiot 2017; Ghosh 2017; Figueres 2020). As the creators and presenters of stories, therefore, the theatre not only can respond to the context of climate crisis in terms of the practices and process, but also in exploring the many kinds of stories the culture needs to face, process and adjust to the climate context. Theatre's specialism in framing narrative is, however, much broader than staging plays directly 'about' climate change: it is vital for asking searching questions about who we are, how we got here – and how to face the transformational changes ahead. This report largely focuses on context, rather than content, but explores how the context of climate crisis asks us practitioners to think about the nature of storytelling at the level of form.

**The overall aim of this report is to invite and provoke producers and artists towards a creative renaissance in defiance of adversity.**

## Form

Whilst the section 'A Note on Methodology' will outline the research process in more detail, it seems useful at the outset to share the motivation for the form this report takes. Because its values and the resultant actions are enmeshed, the report moves continuously between exploring the 'why' and making suggestions for 'how' – **it can therefore be read either as a meditation on an ethos of making theatre under current conditions, or as a how-to guide for implementation.** As a response to a particular theatre culture in London in 2023, undertaken in the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and in the context of funding cuts<sup>3</sup>, the report not only models a variety of ways of engaging with climate crisis in theatre, it also seeks to articulate the challenges faced by freelance practitioners and individual theatres and makes suggestions for how they might be met.

The report deliberately focuses on **what is or can be possible**, both at the Donmar and beyond, rather than on critique. Whilst it outlines the challenges practitioners face, it seeks always to couple this with antidotes: models for responding to challenge that centre creative practice, which are themselves the outcome of sustained discussions and practical exploration.<sup>4</sup> Although the research emerges from being embedded at one theatre, the freelancers consulted work at many theatres, so this report is written with specific examples from the Donmar, alongside recommendations that are adaptable to different theatre contexts. In this, I hope it is clear that the process of changing habitual processes and practices, both at individual and institutional level, is iterative, evolving and ongoing: this report represents a snapshot in time of a dynamic system that will keep moving.

Part I of this report outlines the research context, both in terms of the process and methods used, and the cultural and scientific context for the research. Part II outlines the practice and process of 'Climate Dramaturgy' that emerged through the research. If you want to jump straight to reflection/recommendations, this is where to start; as well as an outline of the ethos of Climate Dramaturgy, the detail of ways of paying such attention is divided into three related areas: the production process, social practice, and story-telling. The first, 'Climate Dramaturgy & the Production Process' focuses on production and on how a theatre institution can enable practitioners to work in ways that will meet the *Theatre Green Book* standards, incorporating suggestions for how the *Theatre Green Book's* emphasis on clear parameters and collaboration can inspire and foster creative ingenuity. The second, 'Climate Dramaturgy & Taking Care', focuses on the relationship between attending to environmental care, and care for practitioners working in a theatre, in recognition of how fundamentally entwined harm to people and harm to nature has always been, due to the forms of resource extraction and exploitation that have caused the climate crisis (see the section: 'Legacies of Colonialism'). The third section, 'Climate Dramaturgy & Stories', is about attention to climate crisis in

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<sup>3</sup> Towards the research period, the Donmar learned that the Arts Council would no longer fund it as an organisation on a regular basis.

<sup>4</sup> The practice of offering 'antidotes' is inspired by the document *White Supremacy Culture in the Workplace* <https://coco-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Coco-WhiteSupCulture-ENG4.pdf> (see Part III: 'Challenges and Antidotes' for further detail) [accessed 22 June 2023]

terms of the way it makes us, as theatre makers, consider the nature and form of the stories we are telling. This focuses not so much on the stories that can, and increasingly are told about climate change, but rather on what it means to be making theatre now, at this extreme 'tipping point' in human history. This is not about prescribing – or proscribing – what stories are told. Rather, it is a reflection, drawn from multiple conversations, on the kinds of questions and challenges the context of climate crisis brings to the artistic process – whether that is a production of Dawn King's eco-dystopic drama *The Trials*, or Shakespeare's *Henry V*, both of which took place at the Donmar during the research period. This part asks the question of what happens when the context of the climate crisis is invited into, rather than excluded from, fundamental questions about how we make theatre, who is making it, who we make it for, and why.

Part III of the report returns to some of the themes of the previous section in a different form, outlining challenges and antidotes that can help meet them or which can reframe the issue to change the mindset. In the Coda, you will find an outline of how an institution might work with a 'climate dramaturg'. Climate Dramaturgy, as I hope will become clear, is about relations between people, between people and (visible and invisible) climate contexts, and between people and materials. As such, it cannot be embodied in a single person. However, due to the conversations needed for climate care ranging so broadly across different theatre departments, and the symbiotic relation needed between artistic, social and institutional questions, it can be helpful to involve someone in holding that range of conversations across the institution<sup>5</sup>. For Climate Dramaturgy is an institutional practice that connects aspects of theatre-making that are often otherwise seen as separate. For example:

- Climate Dramaturgy attends to the forms and variety of stories that are being told on stage across a season AND to whether the stock in the theatre bar can be vegan and sourced from ethical, nearby sources.
- Climate Dramaturgy attends to diversifying the backgrounds of those given the opportunity to make work, AND to ensuring the set and costumes are reused, or recycled postproduction.
- Climate Dramaturgy attends to using environmental parameters to seek the most precise design for the expression of that story AND care practices in relation to the different contexts practitioners bring to the work.

## Language

I am acutely aware that the language I use in this report represents a moment in times that are rapidly changing. I have followed the rationale of Mikaela Loach in her 2023 climate justice wake-up call *It's Not That Radical* (pp. 13–15), for use of the common terms 'Global North', 'Global South' and to refer respectively to the areas of the world that have caused most harm to the environment through colonial extraction, profit-driven growth and the use of fossil fuels, and to the areas of the world that

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<sup>5</sup> See the section on 'Working with a Climate Dramaturg', pp. 69–70.

are experiencing the heaviest impacts, respectively. I also follow Loach in my use of the term 'global majority', not least because it references the inequity inherent in racialised hierarchies (Loach 2023). With regard to climate, I tend to focus on discussion of environmental impact/harm and to talk about 'climate care', rather than 'sustainability', which whilst it has advantages due to its widespread use, is a term that is vague at best and misleading at worst. I go into more detail on this in the section on 'Climate Dramaturgy & Language'. The appendices further hold a 'Green Glossary' to share the terminology and ethos for clear conversation about environmental responsibility and the climate crisis. That said, 'climate crisis' can be used to refer only to the impacts of global warming; and I would like to clarify that I intend it always to also cover the impacts of environmental degradation, biodiversity loss, chemical imbalances and pollution caused by human activity.

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# Part I: The Research Context

## Process and People

### The Research Partnership

The Donmar Warehouse is a 251-seater theatre situated in London's Covent Garden. The Donmar is widely known in the UK and internationally for its high production values, intimacy and its casting of actors who are highly respected in the industry, and in some cases, who are household names.<sup>6</sup> The Donmar operates on a production cycle of mounting between five and seven productions per year. Across the period of research, these were:

- *Force Majeure* – adapted by Tim Price (from Ruben Östlund), directed by Michael Longhurst, designed by Jon Bausor, 10 Dec 2021–5 Feb 2022
- *Henry V* – by William Shakespeare, directed by Max Webster, designed by Fly Davis, 11 Feb 2022–9 Apr 2022
- *Marys Seacole* – by Jackie Sibblies Drury, directed by Nadia Latif, designed by Tom Scutt, 15 Apr 2022–5 June 2022
- *A Doll's House, Part 2* – by Lucas Hnath, directed by James Macdonald, designed by Rae Smith, 10 June 2022–6 Aug 2022
- *The Trials* – by Dawn King, directed by Natalie Abrahami, designed by Georgia Lowe, 12–27 Aug 2022
- *Silence* – adapted by Sonali Bhattacharyya, Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti, Ishy Din and Alexandra Wood (from Kavita Puri's *Partition Voices: Untold British Stories*), directed by Abdul Shayek, designed by Rose Revitt, 1–17 Sept 2022 (co-production with Tara Theatre/<https://taratheatre.com/>)
- *The Band's Visit* – based on the screenplay by Eran Kolirin, music and lyrics by David Yazbek, book by Itamar Moses, directed by Michael Longhurst, designed by Soutra Gilmour, 26 Sept 2022–3 Dec 2022
- *Watch on the Rhine* – by Lillian Hellman, directed by Ellen McDougall, designed by Basia Bińkowska, 9 Dec 2022–4 Feb 2023

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.donmarwarehouse.com/about/> [accessed 23 June 2023]

The research was commissioned by the Donmar Warehouse, and led by Zoë Svendsen as Associate Artist, in close collaboration with the Donmar's then Head of New Work, Clare Slater, and producer Nick Morrison, and in consultation with the Donmar's staff across all departments.

## The Research Objectives

The research originally aimed to examine the artistic process of making theatre in the era of climate crisis, by taking **climate crisis as a context** (*within* which theatre is made) **rather than as a topic** (for a show *about* it); regarding it as 'an era', not 'an issue' (Finnigan 2021). The research aimed to respond to three cultural 'myths' by exploring and building alternative stories/practices:

**Myth One:** That '**making theatre sustainably limits artistic freedom**'. This links both to the idea that art and environmental concerns are intrinsically opposed – that it is an either/or negotiation between aesthetics and ethics. In turn this leads to 'fears that sustainable sets "will all look like junk yards" or else "Peter Brook's empty spaces"' (Mock 2013, 13).

**Myth Two:** That '**there's only room and energy for dealing with one social issue at a time**, and/or there are other social justice issues that theatre engages with more easily/are more urgent'.

**Myth Three:** That theatre's primary relationship with climate crisis is as the subject matter for an occasional play: '**Commissioners often say "There's only room for one 'climate crisis' play in a season"**' ('New Work' workshop participant, 21 April 2022).

The aim was to dismantle these myths, and **to develop alternative models** for understanding the relationship between theatre and climate crisis, that would evolve or amplify different stories that **place an emphasis on creativity and ingenuity.**

In the course of undertaking the research, new additional objectives emerged, which build on the recommendations of the *Theatre Green Book*:

- To explore a shift in 'artistic mindset', towards attending to the context of climate crisis as part of artistic practice.
- To investigate the institutional conditions for enabling climate conscious practitioners to meet the Theatre Green Book standards without artistic compromise.
- To develop and embed robust processes for theatre institutions to foster climate care, which are not dependent on individuals' enthusiasm for or capacity to engage with environmental concerns, but influence the whole ecosystem of theatre-making, in order that any part of the theatre-making process can lead on taking environmental responsibility.
- To identify challenges and formulate implementable antidotes to them.

## Outputs

- This report: *Climate Conversations: Making Theatre in the Context of Climate Crisis*
- A Donmar *Climate Conversations* Podcast, hosted by the Donmar, first broadcast August 2022, hosted on the Donmar Warehouse website: <https://www.donmarwarehouse.com/climate-conversations/>
- A 'green' glossary – circulated to Donmar staff and appended to the Donmar's Environmental Policy and the Environmental Action Plan, see appendix 4
- 'Provocations for Commissioning and Writing Plays in the Context of Climate Crisis': a document outlining recommendations for Climate Dramaturgy's approach to playwriting, see appendix 1
- Two infographics / explainers developed in collaboration with Design Agency 'The District' and consultation with anti-racism practitioners mezze eade and Anna-Maria Nabirye
  - *Climate Conversations: Everyone Has a Role to Play*
  - *Climate Conversations: The Show Must Go On*
- Templates for documents to communicate the expectation of climate care at significant points in a production process [see appendices 5–8]
- Alterations in current and future practice at the Donmar: listed in 'Changes Undertaken at the Donmar Warehouse'

## Practitioners Consulted

Natalie Abrahami, Director  
Sarah Beaton, Designer  
Nia Bentham-Prince, Operations and Producing Trainee, Donmar Warehouse  
Sonali Bhattacharyya, Playwright and Screenwriter  
Alex Bliss, Head of Corporate Development, Donmar Warehouse  
Melissa Bonnelame, former Executive Assistant to the Artistic Director, Donmar Warehouse  
Sylvie Bressler, Board Trustee, Donmar Warehouse  
Joshua Bungard, Financial Controller, Donmar Warehouse  
Helen Bychawski, Executive Assistant to the Executive and Artistic Directors  
Ben Clare, Head of Marketing, Donmar Warehouse  
Lee Curran, Lighting Designer  
Ishy Din, Writer  
Emma Dobson, Technical Assistant, Donmar Warehouse  
Caroline Dyott, former Senior Producer, Donmar Warehouse  
mezze eade, Anti-Racism and Inclusion Lead, Donmar Warehouse  
Inua Ellams, Poet, Playwright and Performer  
Henny Finch, Executive Director, Donmar Warehouse  
Sammy Fiorino, Participation Producer  
Andrzej Goulding, Video Designer  
Craig Greaves, Finance Assistant, Donmar Warehouse  
Joseph Hancock, Associate Director, The Trials  
Paul Handley, Head of Production, National Theatre  
Rupert Henderson, Assistant Producer, Donmar Warehouse  
Ella Hickson, Playwright and Director  
Jessica Hung Han Yun, Lighting Designer

Martha Jordan, Operations Manager, Donmar Warehouse  
Marec Joyce, Head of Production and Premises, Donmar Warehouse  
Farah Karim-Cooper, Co-Director of Education and Research /Professor, Shakespeare's Globe/King's College London  
Dawn King, Writer  
Nadia Latif, Director  
Dadiow Lin, Resident Assistant Director, Donmar Warehouse  
Michael Longhurst, Artistic Director, Donmar Warehouse  
Georgia Lowe, Designer  
Isley Lynn, Playwright and Poet  
James MacDonald, Director  
Phil McCormack, Director of Participation, Donmar Warehouse  
Silvia Melchior, Director of Development, Donmar Warehouse  
Marty Moore, Production Manager  
Jai Morjaria, Lighting Designer  
Nick Morrison, Senior Producer, Donmar Warehouse  
Vicki Mortimer, Designer  
Nao Nagai, Lighting Designer  
Asuza Ono, Lighting Designer  
Josh Parr, Resident Assistant Director, Donmar Warehouse  
Charlotte Ranson, Assistant Production Manager, Donmar Warehouse  
Khadija Raza, Designer  
Rachel Roussel-Tyson, General Manager, Donmar Warehouse  
Clare Slater, Artistic Director of HighTide, former Head of New Work, Donmar Warehouse  
Lauren van Zyl, Director of Finance, Donmar Warehouse  
Steve Wald, Production Manager  
Max Webster, Associate Director, Donmar Warehouse  
Kate West, Production Manager  
*And many others.*

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## About the Author

Zo   Svendsen is a dramaturg, director and researcher who works nationally and internationally. Zo   makes participatory theatre performances and installations exploring ecological crisis and capitalism, including the Amt f  r Zuwart und Gegenkunft @reEDOcate me! (Raumlabor/Floating University, Berlin); the cabaret improv show, Love Letters to a Liveable Future (Cambridge Junction); Ness, a sonic landscape work adapted from Robert Macfarlane's prose poem (Metal Culture/Estuary Festival); the video installation Factory of the Future (Oslo Architecture Triennale); the Artsadmin Green Commission, WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE (Barbican), World Factory (New Wolsey Theatre/Young Vic/tour); 3rd Ring Out (Tipping Point commission, UK tour). As dramaturg, Zo   collaborates with directors to adapt classic texts for contemporary performance, including: Macbeth, The Tempest (Globe Theatre); Hamlet, Merchant of Venice (Sam Wanamaker Playhouse); A Midsummer Night's Dream, Measure for Measure and The Changeling (Young Vic); Othello, Edward II (National Theatre); Arden of Faversham, Macbeth (RSC).

Zo   is associate artist at Cambridge Junction, and lectures on dramaturgy at the University of Cambridge. Zo  's work has been developed in several interdisciplinary artistic residencies, including at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, Berlin, the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, Cambridge, and the Restorying residency, Hawkwood Centre for Future Thinking. Zo  's book *Theatre & Dramaturgy* will be published by Bloomsbury in 2023. Zo   has recently been made associate artist and AHRC Knowledge Exchange Fellow (Climate Dramaturgy) at Hightide new writing theatre company, and is co-curating a symposium for directors on Making Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis, with the National Theatre, London, The National Theatre of Wales, and the National Theatre of Scotland.

## A Note on Methodology

This report is the outcome of an iterative process of practice-led engagement undertaken at the Donmar Warehouse over the research period. The process examined different areas of theatre-making and consulted extensively with Donmar staff and freelancers connected to the theatre through working on shows in the 2022 season (see 'Practitioners Consulted', p. 15). What emerged was the concept of 'Climate Dramaturgy'. As an ethos and a method, Climate Dramaturgy focuses on making theatre in the context of climate crisis primarily focused on the subsidised sector, and work commissioned by theatre buildings that confirm to standard production processes. In this, the Donmar is both a specific case study (although the Arts Council has ceased to provide annual funding from March 2023) and stands in for practices that are generally common across much of the sector. At the same time, Climate Dramaturgy suggests a general ethos and approach that can be applied and adapted for many different contexts of theatre-making.

The research took the form of the following phases of engagement:

- Listening to internal views and devising the process: August–December 2021
- Holding workshops bringing together freelancers connected to the Donmar with permanently employed staff, January–June 2022:
  - Design: Concept and Collaboration (3 March 2022)
  - New Work and Commissioning (21 April 2022)
  - Changing the Artistic Mindset (21 June 2022)
  - Ethics and Environment (30 June 2022)
- Exploring and actioning ideas emerging from the workshops: September–December 2022

The final phase of research involved informal internal conversations that explored how to test, refine and evoke the changes to practice suggested in the workshops. The approach was iterative, responding in real time to the opportunities and challenges of embedding climate care in the day-to-day operations of a working theatre. The specific recommendations developed in each workshop are attached as appendices to this report, along with details of those who attended.

The recommendations in this report have been formulated with an 'on-the-ground' awareness of the reality of making change in a 'just-in-time' system that is heavily reliant on established methods of working. This embedded experience has been used to develop the flexible and implementable ethos of collaborative working that is outlined in what follows. There is much in this report, therefore, which has emerged in/from multiple conversations – in person and online – in the context of a workshop or in relation to a specific production. By the very nature of being embedded in an organisation, there are also multiple conversations that happen by serendipity. All of the staff and freelancers I have interacted with, and who have contributed to the thinking, are named in the following section.

This practice-led research ultimately focused on exploring how to alter the production process in small, manageable ways to create the conditions for practitioners who already have a commitment to climate care, to facilitate them in acting on their ethics as part of their creative process. The aim was to make it possible to produce shows at the Donmar that meet *Theatre Green Book* standards in ways that would foster artistic ingenuity. At the same time, the aim was to devise a strategy that would be robust and manageable across different productions with varying levels of climate conscious practice and leadership. The recommendations that have emerged develop a system of distributed responsibility, so that the working conditions provided by the theatre allow every practitioner to consider environmental impact, and to work effectively towards avoiding harm. The overall aim was to understand how climate care can be embedded in the production system as a default, so that when/if inspiration wanes on the part of some practitioners, others in the team remain enabled.

The research process thus involved putting working conditions in place that both foster cultural change and also prepare for degrees of change that haven't yet been achieved (and may not yet be possible). The approach therefore involved dreaming the 'impossible' – and working out how this can widen perception of what is, in fact, possible, following the approach advocated for by theorist Bojana Kunst, where better conditions are 'already practiced *as if* the changes desired are already here': moving between imagining how it could be different, and behaving as though the cultural conditions for transformation were already present (Bojana Kunst 2018, 94).

The research did not follow the basic model of a scientific experiment, where 'tests' that do not yield desired results lead to abandoning the practice. Rather, embedding practices of climate care in the theatre's processes was regarded methodologically as a matter of ethos. Putting suggestions for change into practice was/is an iterative process, with different productions having different levels of engagement – depending on how they were led and the timescale on which they were made. Assessing the efficacy of what was explored through the practice-led research involved multiple conversations, resulting in ongoing tweaks to the production process. As an iterative practice, although the research process is over, the work towards enabling climate care in a highly challenging theatre context, will continue to evolve.

## Ecodramaturgy

Is there really a need for a new name and new terminology for the ethos and practices outlined in this report? I feel a degree of hesitation, in that Climate Dramaturgy invites us to move away from the competitive spirit enshrined in terms like 'new' or 'first'.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, one outcome of the Climate Dramaturgy consultation workshop on Commissioning and New Writing was the suggestion that the term 'new' be dropped from 'New Writing'.<sup>8</sup> Climate Dramaturgy draws together a range and ways of doing things, into a framework that draws on and responds to the specific theatre context that gave

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.thestage.co.uk/features/climate-dramaturg-zoe-svendsen--this-isnt-theatre-that-preaches-to-the-converted> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>8</sup> See appendix 11 'Notes from the Donmar New Work and Commissioning Workshop'

shape to it. It is not claiming any conceptually 'new' territory, but proposing an umbrella term for a matrix of practices that pay attention to climate crisis, situated within the current culture of mainstream theatre in London and England more broadly. In her essay 'Climate Lens: Birth of a Post-nation!' for HowlRound in 2017,<sup>9</sup> Una Chaudhuri uses the term 'climate dramaturgy' in passing, in articulating the concept for a project/network, Climate Lens, that has spawned a range of performance works.<sup>10</sup>

Since the millennium, there has been a proliferation of modes of dramaturgy beyond traditional understandings of the term (Trencsényi 2014). The term 'Climate Dramaturgy' expands the general definition of dramaturgy that I give in *Theatre & Dramaturgy* (2023):

Dramaturgy is the arranging of actions in space and time,  
orientated towards establishing a relationship with an audience.  
(Svendsen 2023, 2)

That is, dramaturgy is about the structure and form of how we represent ideas and fictions. 'Climate' Dramaturgy extends this to include all contexts of production and reception – the making process and its impact – that pertain to, or affect, climate crisis.<sup>11</sup> In this it has much in common with the widely used term 'ecodramaturgy' (cf. Lisa Woynarski's 2020 book *Ecodramaturgies: Theatre, Performance and Climate Change*). North American theatre maker and scholar Theresa J. May defines ecodramaturgy three ways, two of which also define Climate Dramaturgy:

As a praxis that centres ecological relations, ecodramaturgy endeavours to: (1) examine the implicit environmental message of a play or production by illuminating its underlying ecological ideologies and their implications; (2) use theatre as a methodology to approach contemporary environmental problems (writing, devising and producing new plays that engage environmental issues and themes); (3) examine how theatre as a material craft creates its own ecological footprint and works to

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<sup>9</sup> <https://howlround.com/climate-lens> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>10</sup> See [climakazemiami.org](https://www.climakazemiami.org) <https://www.climakazemiami.org/the-climate-lens-1> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>11</sup> This definition more or less maps onto/reflects Marianne van Kerkhoven's 'micro' (the artwork) and 'macro' dramaturgy (society), as discussed by Katalin Trencsényi in her introduction to her ecological dramaturgy manifesto 'Leave No Trace Dramaturgy' <https://www.critical-stages.org/26/the-seven-principles-of-leave-no-trace-dramaturgy/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

both reduce waste and invent new approaches to material practice (May 2022, 164–5)

Climate Dramaturgy, in focusing on context, engages most strongly with points (1) and (3).

Climate Dramaturgy is an approach, rather than a description, and therefore whilst being relevant to any work with overt ecological themes can be used as a method to understand and/or develop creatively any aspect of theatre practice. That is, Climate Dramaturgy is an approach that offers particular ways of bringing the climate crisis as context into provocative and productive contact with any and all kinds of theatre. See Part II: 'Climate Dramaturgy & Stories' (pp. 59–64) and Coda: 'Working with a Climate Dramaturgy' (pp. 69–70) for further details.

In this, defining 'climate dramaturgy' separately from 'ecodramaturgy' is perhaps only necessary because of a general cultural sense – focused on the London scene and emerging across multiple conversations in the context of the research – that theatre works that deal directly with climate crisis or other ecological themes 'do not work'. Indeed, perhaps because of the wider cultural context of alarmed urgency coupled with a doomist sense of impotency (Loach 2023), plays or other works with climate themes have long been expected to deliver behaviour change (are perceived as aiming to do so) and are deemed unsuccessful when they inevitably fail to do so – or, equally, fail to 'convert' supposedly sceptical audiences to accept the reality of climate crisis and their role in mitigating it.<sup>12</sup> As Woynarski points out, this is a misappropriation and simplification of the scientific experiment:

The problem-solution model, drawn on when theatre is utilised to 'communicate' specific ecological problems and 'solutions', often instrumentalises performance in a reductive way and largely focuses on content. This approach does not always leave room for the nuance, complexity or intermeshment of contemporary ecological issues. (Woynarski 2020, 2)

Climate Dramaturgy aims to work against such perceptions through its emphasis that to engage with climate crisis in theatre as artists is not only about making work *about* climate change.

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<sup>12</sup> This is despite the overwhelming majority of British adults (and particularly those based in London) on data from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey (OPN) collected between 14 September and 9 October 2022 by the UK government body, the Office for National Statistics (UK), 74% of adults in Great Britain aged 16 years and over (and 81% of Londoners) said they were (very or somewhat) worried about climate change, a figure that is similar to a year ago (75%) (Data collected from 6 to 17 October 2021) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/worriesaboutclimatechangegreatbritain/septembertooctober2022#worries-about-climate-change> [accessed 22 June 2023]

Furthermore, the aims of Climate Dramaturgy differ from ecodramaturgies in that whilst Climate Dramaturgy understands climate crisis as the toxic consequence and legacy of some kinds of human behaviour, it generally stops short of the post-humanist and other-than or more-than-human aims of much ecodramaturgy in decentering the human, accepting the theatre – as it is currently generally practised in London and the UK – as a place of examining human behaviour. That said, Climate Dramaturgy can ask useful questions about the assumption of an automatic divide between nature and culture. The presumed separation between nature and humans is so embedded in the English language that no commonplace vocabulary exists for talking about humans and nature as not just entwined or mutually dependent, but part of the same sets of relation – with humans simply being part of the natural world, not defined (tacitly or explicitly) against it. This is not an ideological move that denies the crucial value of recognising our entanglements with, and dependency on/within, the natural world (Haraway 2016; Raworth 2017), but simply defines the limits of this particular investigation and process, which is linked to a specific place, specific time, and the inheritance of a specific culture in which, as Una Chaudhuri so decisively demonstrated, is heavily invested in excluding nature (Chaudhuri 1994). In other words, all ecodramaturgy involves Climate Dramaturgy – and Climate Dramaturgy is not, in that sense, claiming to do something new conceptually; but not all Climate Dramaturgy can be said to be truly ecodramaturgical.

## The State of Play

### The Climate Context

The IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change)<sup>13</sup> increasingly emphasises ‘the interdependence of climate, ecosystems and biodiversity, and human societies’. Given this interdependence between all living beings, when referring to ‘climate crisis’, I therefore use the term to encompass the full range of human impacts on the environment, including, but not limited to: global warming, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation, and also their impacts on societies around the globe. The most recent IPCC report, published March 2023, lays out the situation in the starkest terms:

Approximately 3.3–3.6 billion people live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change. Human and ecosystem vulnerability are interdependent. Regions and people with considerable development constraints have high vulnerability to

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<sup>13</sup> The IPCC is the global body responsible for assessing and reporting the work of thousands of scientists researching the climate.

climatic hazards. Increasing weather and climate extreme events have exposed millions of people to acute food insecurity and reduced water security.<sup>14</sup>

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, in his opening speech to the 2021 global climate conference hosted by the UK in Glasgow, COP26, outlined the urgency of taking decisive action:

The six years since the Paris Climate Agreement have been the six hottest years on record. Our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink. We face a stark choice: Either we stop it — or it stops us. It's time to say: enough. [...] We are digging our own graves. Our planet is changing before our eyes — from the ocean depths to mountain tops, from melting glaciers to relentless extreme weather events.<sup>15</sup>

Human-induced warming reached approximately 1°C above pre-industrial levels in 2017 (relative to the period 1850–1900).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, even if all countries fulfil the 2030 climate pledges made in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the globe is on track to warm between 2–3 °C by the end of this century.<sup>17</sup> According to the Climate Action Tracker, which assesses how countries are performing in relation to their climate goals, no country in the world is yet meeting its climate pledges for 2030. In fact, global emissions from fossil fuels continue to rise, with higher emissions in 2022 than any year previously.<sup>18</sup>

Therefore, despite a rise of 3°C in global temperatures involving catastrophic and irreversible environmental destruction across the world (Lynas 2010), it is by no means the worst-case

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<sup>14</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *AR6: Synthesis Report: Summary for Policy Makers*, March 2023, p. 5; [https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf) [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>15</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1104542> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>16</sup> Allen, M.R., O.P. Dube, W. Solecki, F. Aragón-Durand, W. Cramer, S. Humphreys, M. Kainuma, J. Kala, N. Mahowald, Y. Mulugetta, R. Perez, M. Wairiu, and K. Zickfeld, 2018: Framing and Context. In: *Global Warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty* [Masson-Delmotte, V., P. Zhai, H.-O. Pörtner, D. Roberts, J. Skea, P.R. Shukla, A. Pirani, W. Moufouma-Okia, C. Péan, R. Pidcock, S. Connors, J.B.R. Matthews, Y. Chen, X. Zhou, M.I. Gomis, E. Lonnoy, T. Maycock, M. Tignor, and T. Waterfield (eds.)]. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK and New York, NY, USA, pp. 49–92, doi:10.1017/9781009157940.003. <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/chapter-1/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/environment/article/5-possible-climate-futures-from-the-optimistic-to-the-strange> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>18</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/11/global-co2-emissions-fossil-fuels-hit-record-2022/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

scenario for how the climate crisis will unfold.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, our 1°C of warming is already proving catastrophic for many peoples and habitats across the world. In the past year alone, climate disasters have included: multiple typhoons raging in the Philippines; Hurricane Ian devastating Florida, USA; unprecedented wildfires destroying a record area of the EU, due to the worst drought in 500 years; and East Africa’s worst drought in 70 years, exposing 22 million people to famine.<sup>20</sup> The Donmar’s co-production with Tara Arts, *Silence*, told the story of Partition in 1947, detailing the violence of forced migration due to British colonial policies of divide and rule. It opened at the Donmar in September 2023, just as extreme flooding in Pakistan was developing into a humanitarian crisis that saw the displacement of 7.9 million people.<sup>21</sup>

As the IPCC acknowledges, the climate crisis is not only a story of the dramatic increase in the unpredictability and extremity of damaging weather events, but also a story of the loss of countless species of animals and plants, in the sixth mass extinction in the history of the planet.<sup>22</sup> The threat to biodiversity is due not only to climate change disrupting seasonal cycles, but is also the result of habitat destruction, through deforestation, agribusiness and mining – on land and on the sea floor. The proliferation of plastics in the ocean and on coastlines across the world further demonstrates the global reach and impact of a specific set of cultural, economic and political practices.

Scientists are clear that there is very little time left to decarbonise economies across the globe sufficiently to avoid more than 1.5 degrees of global warming,<sup>23</sup> with the United Nations Environment Programme’s executive director saying:

We had our chance to make incremental changes, but that time is over. Only a root-and-branch transformation of our economies and societies can save us from accelerating climate disaster.<sup>24</sup>

In October 2022, the United Nations Environment Programme published a report that examined countries’ pledges and policies for emissions reductions, and found that at current rates of reduction

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>20</sup> <https://news.sky.com/story/10-most-costly-climate-change-related-disasters-in-2022-revealed-12774943> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>21</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/devastation-pakistan-deadly-floods-displace-millions#:~:text=The%20U.N.,7.9%20million%20people%20since%20June> [accessed 22 June 2023];

<https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/horn-of-africa-projections-of-a-famine-in-2023/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.worldwildlife.org/stories/what-is-the-sixth-mass-extinction-and-what-can-we-do-about-it> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>23</sup> [https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf) [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>24</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129912> [accessed 22 June 2023]

there is 'no credible pathway to 1.5°C'.<sup>25</sup> The stark nature of these warnings, from international scientific bodies, indicates the severity and urgency of the situation.

## Legacies of Colonialism

Colonialism, patriarchy and imperialism are the drivers of where we've got to globally right now with nature changing rapidly in every part of the world. [...] And they evolved around 400 years ago in this form and destroyed many cultures who had, up until that point, been living more or less with a way of understanding and being at peace with nature. (Farhana Yamin)<sup>26</sup>

The behaviours that have led to climate crisis are culturally specific and not universally 'human' (Wall Kimmerer 2013; Tsing 2015; Ghosh 2021). Developed largely in the Global North, the practices of industrial modernity have now reached most corners of the earth and ocean, driven by extractive, transactive systems of production and commerce. More than 400 years of colonial appropriation and exploitation provided the resources and labour for creating the profit-driven, growth-focused, fossil fuel-dependent culture that is the context for this report (Ghosh 2021; Machado de Oliveira 2021). The culture of the modern industrial global elite is thus based on a worldwide system of extreme financial and social inequity. London is one of the major centres of this culture, with its financial heart, the City of London, continuing to guarantee the global financial flows that uphold this system (Galaz et al 2018). I call it 'high carbon culture', as a shorthand for the cultural practices that are embedded in this toxic nexus of capitalism, colonialism and addiction to fossil fuels (Svendsen 2021).

Economist Kate Raworth summarises the cultural norm for the life cycle of the vast majority of materials in high carbon culture as TAKE – MAKE – USE – LOSE (Raworth 2017). The earth and its ecosystems are treated as a service from which resources can be extracted without limit (TAKE), from which people produce everything from buildings to technology to theatre shows (MAKE). When people are done with using the products (USE), they are thrown away, where they pollute and further disable ecosystems (LOSE). This linear model of production and waste cannot be sustained by the planet (Meadows 1972). The harm done to people is inextricable from the harm done to the wider natural world, through the exploitation of nature, in the extraction of the resources that fuel high carbon culture, and in the degradation of nature due to the pollution and waste produced in the process (Nixon 2011). Those who are most affected are disproportionately likely to be global majority and/or

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<sup>25</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/10/1129912> [accessed 28 June 2023]

<sup>26</sup> <https://soundcloud.com/donmarwarehouse/climate-conversations-02-force-majeure?in=donmarwarehouse/sets/climate-conversations/> [accessed 22 June 2023]; <https://www.donmarwarehouse.com/climate-conversations/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

disabled – whether in the global south or in global north cities such as London.<sup>27</sup> This high carbon culture thrives on a ‘just-in-time’ mentality where a vast network of algorithms and couriers ensure that most consumer goods are just an online click away for those who can afford them. That affordability relies in turn on a vast precarious workforce. The ‘just-in-time’ culture prioritises speed and accessibility of new consumer goods over environmental care, and extraction and waste over reuse and repair.<sup>28</sup> Addressing climate breakdown not only in relation to ‘carbon footprint’ but also in relation to all forms of harm that come to peoples and the environments across the world due to exploitative supply chains or excessive use of resources is therefore a matter of climate justice.

We are at a crucial moment in history, where future generations will hold us to account for the forms of irreversible destruction with which we are complicit (Ghosh 2016). *The Guardian* newspaper is uncovering its own historic complicity with slavery in the Caribbean and the USA, not only in the way it reported on it, but particularly through the way the founding of the newspaper itself was funded by profits from cotton that was produced by trafficked and enslaved African people.<sup>29</sup> The endemic whitewashing and/or silence (e.g. in schools) regarding the UK’s colonial history has enabled the impression that its contemporary cultural institutions – museums, art galleries, concert halls, universities and theatres, as well as print media – have no relationship to that history, despite the spoils of colonialism and the slave trade providing the wealth for founding and funding so many of Britain’s public civic institutions.<sup>30</sup> In recent years, increasing numbers of such institutions – from the National Trust<sup>31</sup> to the University of Cambridge;<sup>32</sup> from the Bristol Old Vic Theatre<sup>33</sup> to the Tate Galleries<sup>34</sup> – have started to investigate their past and account for historic complicity. There is an analogy here with the way that businesses that support and profit from the extraction of fossil fuels and other environmentally genocidal practices, sponsor and fund cultural organisations in the UK.

## The Theatre Context

Like every other institution or business working within the conditions of high carbon culture, UK theatre is nested in a social and political context where practices that harm the environment are standardised in ways that mask or ignore that harm. Therefore, those who are working to change the

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/climate-crisis-hits-poorest-londoners-hardest-sadiq-khan> [accessed 22 June 2023]; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *AR6: Synthesis Report: Summary for Policy Makers*, March 2023, p. 5; [https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC\\_AR6\\_SYR\\_SPM.pdf](https://report.ipcc.ch/ar6syr/pdf/IPCC_AR6_SYR_SPM.pdf) [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/oct/11/just-in-time-supply-chains-logistical-capitalism> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/news/ng-interactive/2023/mar/28/slavery-and-the-guardian-the-ties-that-bind-us> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>30</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>31</sup> <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/research/addressing-our-histories-of-colonialism-and-historic-slavery> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2023/mar/18/cambridge-trinity-college-to-create-fellowship-to-examine-slavery-links>; <https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/legacies-of-enslavement-inquiry> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>33</sup> <https://bristololdvic.org.uk/blog/a-monumental-task>; <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2018/sep/09/bristol-old-vic-slave-trade-theatre-reopens-25m-facelift> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>34</sup> <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/history-tate/tate-galleries-and-slavery> ; <https://artlyst.com/news/tate-galleries-slavery-past/>; <https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/people/sir-henry-tate> [accessed 22 June 2023]

narrative and reduce impacts, are swimming against a tide of tacit cultural norms – this is as true in theatre as in any other professional context. However the emergency and imminence of climate breakdown entails that theatres – particularly in England, where legislation lags behind that of Scotland and Wales – cannot wait for wider social and political change to begin the process of decarbonising.<sup>35</sup> Since the founding of the Arts Council after World War II, the UK's commercial theatres have been joined by theatres that receive public funding and which were founded to serve their communities. As such they are civic institutions. But whether for **reasons of business resilience or ethical commitment, or to fulfil their civic remit**, like any other part of the commercial, civic or third sectors theatres have a role to play in minimising the environmental impact of their practices, **to create an ethical, resilient, and future-fit sector**. This has been recognised by Arts Council England, who have made 'Environmental Responsibility' one of the four 'Investment Principles' by which it assesses the suitability for funding of National Portfolio Organisations.<sup>36</sup>

Over the past few years, there have been significant developments in theatre practice, in line with increasing public recognition of the urgency and scale of action needed to avert climate crisis. As well as the well-established practices recommended by arts consultants Julie's Bicycle, and assessed in their certification processes, theatre-industry-specific training is increasingly being offered. Pioneered by Jennifer Taillefer at the Unicorn Theatre,<sup>37</sup> Carbon Literacy training is now being offered by the Society of British theatre Designers.<sup>38</sup> Aiming to standardise practice across the theatre sector, the *Theatre Green Book*, an in-depth online resource detailing how to reduce the environmental impact of theatre productions, was published in a 'beta' version.<sup>39</sup> Led by architect Paddy Dillon, the *Theatre Green Book* was produced by design and engineering consultants Buro Happold, and draws together expertise from across the theatre sector and beyond. Two further sections have since been published *Green Book Two – Sustainable Buildings* and *Green Book Three – Sustainable Operations*, which together focus on how theatres are built, run and managed.<sup>40</sup>

The *Green Book One – Sustainable Productions* is an essential publication that decisively focuses on the 'how' of making theatre, rightly moving away from the idea that it only matters to consider environmental impacts when making shows explicitly referencing climate crisis. Rather, the *Theatre Green Book* aims at cross-sector systemic change – and aiming to meet its targets is rapidly becoming standard practice across theatre and the wider arts sector, nationally and internationally (for example, Germany and Denmark have recently launched their own version of the *Theatre Green Book*). A wide

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. Creative Carbon Scotland website <https://www.creativecarbonscotland.com> and Welsh 'Future Generations Act' 2015 legislation <https://www.futuregenerations.wales/about-us/future-generations-act/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/lets-create/strategy-2020-2030/investment-principles/investment-principles-resource-hub> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.unicorntheatre.com/about/sustainability> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>38</sup> <https://www.theatredesign.org.uk/news-story/carbon-literacy-training/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.burohappold.com/theatre-green-book/#> [accessed 22 June 2023];

Buro Happold and Renew Theatre, *The Theatre Green Book. Part 1: Sustainable Productions (version beta.2 for trialling)* (2021): <https://theatregreenbook.com/book-one-sustainable-productions/>. This remains the version available as of June 2023. [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>40</sup> <https://theatregreenbook.com/book-one-sustainable-productions/> [accessed 20 June 2023]

<https://theatregreenbook.com/book-two-sustainable-buildings/> [accessed 20 June 2023]

<https://theatregreenbook.com/book-three-sustainable-operations/> [accessed 20 June 2023]

range of theatres across the U.K. have committed to trialling and/or adopting the *Theatre Green Book* standards, and many of these have produced case studies to share lessons learned.<sup>41</sup> In June 2023, as this report was being finalised, the National Theatre in London announced that all upcoming productions over the next 12 months would meet the *Theatre Green Book's* baseline standard.<sup>42</sup>

The *Theatre Green Book* primarily advocates for a 'behind the scenes' ethical process of greening the sector, in line with theatres' cultural position as civic institutions, embedded in their communities and wider national and international cultural networks. Roberta Mock, in her Discussion Paper, 'Transitioning to Sustainable Production across the U.K. Theatre Sector', demonstrates how:

...the most significant ambition and achievement of the *Theatre Green Book* is likely to be the socialisation, monitoring and tracking of behavioural and cultural change at both micro (individual production) and macro (the UK theatre industry) levels. (Mock 2023, 6)

What the report also makes clear is that whilst in terms of direct carbon emissions those associated with the resources and energy used for production, are 'relatively small', 'their reduction enables theatre-makers and producers to model behaviour, engender conversations with venues and audiences, and exemplify a values-led approach to their practice' (Mock 2023, 9). Further, a focus on carbon emissions does not account for other forms of social and environmental impacts that may occur unless a climate careful approach is taken, including the global damage done by exploitative supply chains and other forms of environmental degradation.

Attention to environmental impact is not only important for civic reasons of 'doing our bit'. Such change forms the first part of a bigger matrix of cultural shifts that theatre has the power to lead: because theatres' core function is to **produce artworks and represent human life**. Indeed Arts Council England recognises this, outlining a role for theatres that involves supporting its audiences in recognising and coming to terms with the urgency of acting on climate crisis:

We encourage and support the sector to look beyond its carbon footprint, to expand ambitions and embed environmental thinking into everything it does. We especially welcome innovative, creative and thoughtful perspectives.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> <https://theatregreenbook.com/book-one-case-studies/> [accessed 20 June 2023]

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.theatrust.org.uk/latest/news/1510-national-theatre-commits-to-theatre-green-book-standard-for-shows> [accessed 20 June 2023]

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/essential-read-environmental-responsibility> [accessed 22 June 2023]

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## PART II: Climate Dramaturgy

### A Holistic Approach

#### The Ethos of Climate Dramaturgy

We need a theatre fit for the Anthropocene. The looming car crash between exponential climate change and unfettered capitalism gives us all no genuine choice but to re-imagine our world in a way that is value – and not growth – centred. We're trapped in an economic model that is no longer sustainable. And in significant ways the theatre industry is bound up in this.

(James Macdonald, *modelling a new theatre*, 2021)

Dramaturgy is a practice of **paying attention** to the relations between all the elements of a theatre work – and Climate Dramaturgy takes this a step further, to widen the lens to include the context of climate crisis. This shifts dramaturgical practice from being primarily focused on individual productions, to working at an institutional level **to connect the artistic and ethical practices of the theatre in relation to the climate crisis.**

Climate Dramaturgy is a provocation to artists and producers **to attend closely** to the world around us, and **to engage with wider contexts** beyond those assumed to be directly relevant to delivering the performance. If dramaturgy attends to what is visible and specific to the work of a particular production, Climate Dramaturgy asks practitioners to attend to the unseen as well. **It therefore invites practitioners to look beyond their role, or the specific needs of the production, to influence theatres' practices in the longer term.**

Understanding theatre overall as **interdependent, networked and always in shifting relationships** (rather than as single, autonomous and in competition) reframes the story of how we can respond in theatre away from finding a one-size-fits all 'solution'. Climate Dramaturgy takes a **holistic approach** that recognises the value of **multiple, connected, small-scale and bespoke changes** that shift the whole shape of theatre-making away from the model of the factory production line and consumption, towards a **collaborative, networked ecosystem**. As the Donmar's 2021 mission statement pointed out, 'talent isn't born, but nurtured and empowered through opportunity, investment and exposure' (Donmar Warehouse Strategy 2021–24). Reframing the story in this way

further has strong links to social justice and anti-racist practice and learning. Importantly, **Climate Dramaturgy bridges divisions between the artistic and the practical.**

Climate Dramaturgy asks the following questions:

- What does it mean to be making this work **in the context of climate crisis?**
- **What kind of story** about humans does the work present? (Individual or networked? Hierarchical or multi-relational? Collaborative or competitive?)
- **Who is the work speaking to, how and why?** How can the work speak directly to the times and contexts of that particular audience?
- **Who is making the work** and how does that relate to who else is getting to make work?
- **How is the work made** – in terms of process and practically, in terms of materials? (as focused on in the *Theatre Green Book: Productions*)
- What are **the unseen consequences** of using particular materials and working processes?
- How does the organisation **use its financial power to reduce environmental harm** and/or influence culture? E.g. through using green energy/offering green pensions
- How does the organisation **screen its funders for the source of their money** in relation to environmental impacts?

Practising Climate Dramaturgy therefore requires **that the work is not seen in isolation**, as a 'sealed' artwork, separate from social life and the wider world (Jackson 2011). However, Climate Dramaturgy is not about making a particular kind of work or fostering a particular kind of design or style. On the contrary, **for theatre to respond to the climate crisis creatively, imaginatively and with leadership, a greater diversity of stories, forms of expression, and artistic forms must be encouraged** (Krenak 2020).

**Climate Dramaturgy is thus about thinking holistically, rather than thinking 'big'**, aiming at long-term systemic change, rather than a quickfire 'solution' to 'saving the planet' that fizzles out or even leads to feelings of despair when it doesn't immediately produce measurable change – what scholar and activist Vanessa Machado de Oliveira calls '**desperate solutionism**' (Machado de Oliveira 2021). Climate Dramaturgy therefore moves away from seeking a one-size-fits-all solution that focuses on results and achievement (and therefore is also susceptible to being abandoned when it does not 'deliver'). In this respect, Climate Dramaturgy requires **patience and a commitment to the ethos** of shaping the conditions for effective action over the long term.

The infographic ***Climate Conversations: Everyone Has a Role to Play*** illustrates the many different inputs and impacts of theatre, and gives some sample pointers for how each area can play a role in avoiding negative environmental impact. Please see appendix 2 for an A4 version.

## Ensure a wide range of IDEAS & CREATIVE voices.

- Facilitate creative attention to the context of climate crisis
- Question the role of the solo hero
- Design with existing materials
- Encourage collaboration
  
- Expect Theatre Green Book standards to be met
- Ensure ethical supply chains

## Attend to afterlife of RESOURCES before acquiring.

- Hire if possible
- Re-use existing materials
- Avoid single-use items (check recyclability)
- Minimise transportation

# Everyone has a role to PLAY.

- Source green energy
- Bank ethically
- Offer green staff pensions
- Turn heating down 1°C
- Build energy resilience with solar/wind generation
- Insulate buildings

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- Celebrate funders' environmental actions
- Encourage funders to de-carbonise operations
- Screen funders for environmental record

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- Collaborate with other theatres to share set, costumes and props
- Store what you can
- Share details of all resources in storage with incoming creatives
- Recycle all you can't re-use

## SKILL up staff, freelancers & audiences to take care.

- Make considering the environment in all decisions a habit
- Pass on climate care know-how to future production teams
- Ensure continuous learning towards anti-racist practice
- Skill up freelancers to avoid climate impacts in future

- Connect the dots between colonialism and climate damage past and present
- Challenge assumptions
- Acknowledge grief
- Enable empathy

## Through SHOWS & STORIES, enable audiences to face climate upheaval.

- Act as role-model for climate care
- Share backstage climate care stories
- Influence cultural and climate policy

## See WASTE as a resource for future shows.

CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS  
**DONMAR**  
Design by The District

## Climate Dramaturgy & Artistic Mastery

Overall, Climate Dramaturgy asks us to consider how to approach mastery – both of the process of undertaking a climate careful practice, and in terms of artistic practice. The values of high carbon culture, with its extractive, hierarchical mentality, rewards singular control, rather than the time it takes to collaborate well. It also favours that which can be mastered – i.e. controlled – over the complications of acknowledging and **working within the contradictions we experience** when aiming to minimize environmental impact within the artistic process. In this, the relationship between artistic mastery and master-servant mentality can become blurred. Artistic mastery can be defined **as attention to detail, listening, humility, revision, iterative practice, an ability to see the bigger picture**. The image of a master violin-maker, who listens to the form and resonance of the wood, comes to mind. The master-servant mentality by contrast uses control and careless exploitation to achieve effects that primarily furthers the master's aim/profit. Working at the highest level in theatre often requires a combination of both aspects, but the system currently favours the speed of decision-making enabled by the 'control' version of mastery. Environmental care and artistic mastery are not synonymous, but each can support the other. **Attention to detail, flexibility and listening to what lies beyond the visible and voiced** become the guiding principles of creating artistic work.

## Climate Dramaturgy & Collaboration

Many of the ideas emerging from the consultation workshops emphasised how creating theatre in a hierarchical structure, in the context of a 'just-in-time' culture, poses serious challenges for collaboration – which takes time, co-working and cross-pollination between different job roles and practices. Nevertheless, the suggestions that emerged from the consultation workshops decisively corroborated the *Theatre Green Books* emphasis on the **necessity of collaboration**: within individual production teams, but also between production teams on different shows, at each theatre and across the sector as a whole. The increasing adoption of the *Theatre Green Books* principles across the sector provides an industry-wide set of standards that **enables a streamlining of collaboration**, as freelancers who move between different theatres become more familiar with its principles. Indeed it is clear from individual theatres' attempts to work to these standards, that the challenges are greater when each theatre tries to manage alone. However, ambition for high-level collaboration moves against the prevailing cultural narrative, which is one of scarcity and competition. This is fostered by the way in which the public and private funding systems are structured, and by how underpaid freelance artists must struggle for survival. Locked into cycles of competition, the theatre sector is thus deterred from acting as a collective body to bring about change.

Nevertheless, another story has begun to emerge over the past decade, and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, in which the sector as a whole sees itself as **an interconnected ecosystem** underpinned by **collaborative knowledge exchange hubs** – such as What Next?, the London

Theatre Consortium, Scene/Change, Ramps on the Moon, Freelancers Make Theatre Work, Julie's Bicycle's Creative Climate Leadership cohort, or the Society of London Theatres, alongside numerous others, including many region-focused consortia. **Bringing industry leaders together** to reflect further on how theatres and other arts organisations can support one another to **minimise waste of resources, and maximise the know-how across organisations**, feels crucial.

Collaboration can happen at different scales – **between creative team members; between different productions across a theatre's season**; or between theatres in the wider industry and between established and emerging theatre makers. These were some of the collaborative ideas that emerged in workshop consultations:

- Enable collaboration *between* creatives on different productions working in the same season/theatre. Not only does this increase the possibility of lowering environmental impact, but it also presents an opportunity to foster artistic community – creating **a sense of belonging and mutual endeavour**.
- That long-term shared storage is crucial to transforming creative practice and inspiration as well as enabling us to reuse materials and goods.<sup>44</sup> However, keeping stuff is not sufficient: to be effective, storage needs **a dedicated person/team to manage it: to archive in detail and to repair and maintain the contents**. Equally, information about what is available needs to be provided to creatives right at the start of the production, so that it can be part of shaping initial ideas.
- Artistic ingenuity in **reusing, transforming, repurposing** is a practice that can (a) inspire collaborators – e.g. through delivering a season where there's active reuse of resources and (b) excite audiences in their experience of the transformation.

Collaboration across productions within an individual theatre can further take a variety of forms:

- Put each member of the creative team in touch with their counterpart from the previous show to **hand over knowledge of the space/kit/potential** – and to see where reuse/collaboration is possible.
- Invite all practitioners – freelance and staff – involved in making the shows that season to **a social event**, where they can get to know their counterparts on other shows in the season, **facilitating future collaboration** and sharing of materials/know-how across shows.
- Designers collaborate to ensure different elements of their individual **designs can be reused/transformed** for further productions in the season.

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<sup>44</sup> Across the period of research, calls for theatres to join together to organise shared storage space to provide reusable resources for future shows have gained significant momentum. Production managers have already begun to develop informal networks for sharing and asking for resources for reuse.

- A theatre might give all designers in the season the same concept delivery dates and invite the designers to **collaborate to realise elements together across a whole season**, either sharing designs or creating a modular reusable core.<sup>45</sup>

## At the Donmar: the Environmental Action Group

The Donmar's Environmental Action Group is a committee formed of staff members of all departments: both junior and senior. Its brief covers the Earlham Street theatre building, all production operations, and the Dryden Street office. A representative of each department sits on the committee enabling **a holistic approach that focuses on every aspect of environmental care**, across the buildings, operations, and productions aspects of theatre.

The committee runs the Environmental Action Plan, a spreadsheet of goals for greening every aspect of the theatre. Chaired by the Donmar's producer, Nick Morrison, the committee meets monthly to review the Environmental Action Plan, including updating progress towards achieving each action, which is then presented to the Donmar's Board every quarter.

This ongoing, staff-led attention to environmental action at every scale, from introducing plants to the office, to reducing the energy and light used by the buildings, provides a crucial basis for Climate Dramaturgy. **Ongoing practical action of this kind not only lowers the theatre's carbon footprint, but it also ensures that attention to environmental care is embedded in the everyday life of the theatre.** When developing the processes of an Environmental Action group, however, there are pitfalls to be aware of, to ensure it is genuinely effective:

- The **more significant actions usually take longer and are more complex to achieve.** Ensuring interim milestones are set, met and celebrated helps to mitigate fatigue/slippage in timescales.
- **Avoid false equivalences** – it is important that all departments are encouraged to participate, and that all action is valued, but also that the actions, with greater impact, are prioritised.
- **Don't prioritise comfort over critique.** For example, the introduction of office plants to ensure a less polluted, more pleasant working environment is important – but should not be prioritised over ensuring that invisible damage is minimised (e.g. by ensuring all supply chains are transparent and environmentally certified).

The redevelopment of this committee as part of the research process has created a conduit for the recommendations emerging in consultation workshops and conversations to be put into action, **enabling changes to be embedded across the organisation.** As an outcome of the research,

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<sup>45</sup> Sheffield Theatres trialled this model during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Presentation Theatre Green Book Day, National Theatre, London, 6 June 2022)

the Resident Assistant Director and Assistant Stage Manager will sit on the committee for the duration of the production(s) they are employed on, to provide **a channel of communication** between what the Donmar is working towards as a building, and actions taken in the context of a specific production.

## Climate Dramaturgy & Language

The research identified a need, particularly among staff members who have joined the re-established Environmental Action Group, for an explainer which would share **best practice in talking about environmental care in theatre**. It was felt that many terms are opaque, leading to a lack of clarity as to how to translate concern into action. This is particularly the case when the word 'sustainability' is used across the board as a shorthand for actions that aim at reducing harm to the environment. In essence, if a material is environmentally sustainable, it means that it doesn't damage the future life of the environment as a whole. The word in fact only applies to materials like wood, which can be regrown.

The reality is that it takes 30 years to grow a tree that will supply the wood to make the 'sustainable' plywood for one theatre show.<sup>46</sup>

The green glossary recommends that rather than asking the question 'is it sustainable?', practitioners can more pointedly ask: '**does it do environmental harm?**' or '**how can we ensure we have the least impact on the environment with this production?**'. Further, the predominant context for the word 'sustainable' in theatre is the current, highly challenging funding context, in which year on year theatres are expected to do more with less, in which 'sustainability' equates to 'affordability'. In environmental circles, the word 'sustainable' is being replaced in many cases by the word 'regenerative', meaning that the practice can contribute to regenerating land and repairing ecosystems. This however rarely applies to theatre, which is ultimately an ephemeral practice, productions being of their moment and generally lasting only a few weeks or months. The 'green glossary' was therefore developed in order to **make the language of addressing environmental care more transparent** when discussing it in theatre contexts. The Green Glossary can be found at appendix 4.

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<sup>46</sup> Conversation with Paul Handley, Head of Production, National Theatre.

## Climate Dramaturgy & the Production Process

**Myth One:** That 'making theatre sustainably limits artistic freedom'. This links both to the idea that art and environmental concerns are intrinsically opposed – that it is an either/or negotiation between aesthetics and ethics. In turn this leads to 'fears that sustainable sets "will all look like junk yards" or else "Peter Brook's empty spaces"' (Mock 2013, 13).

**An alternative perspective:** The climate crisis asks us to rethink what 'artistic freedom' means. From an artistic perspective, attending to environmental parameters can produce greater ingenuity. The factor that hampers creativity most is not the parameter itself, but lack of time, and/or inappropriate timing in production scheduling. Attending to the context of climate crisis is not about pursuing any single aesthetic. It will not automatically translate into a 'poor' theatre look. Ultimately, attention to climate demands and needs more imagination, greater diversity – and an abundance of ingenuity.

### Environmental Responsibility

Climate Dramaturgy as a question of ethos and method is aimed at complementing the *Theatre Green Book* and enabling practitioners in their creative engagement with its principles and practices. With the *Theatre Green Book*, for the first time, there has been the development of industry-wide standards and **a language of accountability** to maintain and improve theatres' practices across the board: crucial in an industry where most creatives and production managers are freelance, working across many theatres (with the concomitant potential for know-how to be transferred – or indeed, lost). There are a number of reasons that **Climate Dramaturgy as a practice is only possible in tandem with committing to the practical process of environmentally responsible theatre-making**. The first reason is the most obvious: that theatre, like all other sectors, needs to reduce its environmental impact as rapidly and fully as possible, in order not only to participate in global efforts to prevent runaway climate change, but also **to increase its own future resilience** in the face of the likely disruptions as the climate crisis intensifies.

There is a second, related reason, which is about mindset: in this, every step taken to minimise environmental harm is an action that in itself has value (not as a comparator in a possible measure of 'saving the planet'). In this mindset, the mental load of living in one of the primary cultures that caused the crisis **is lightened by minimising participation in the ongoing damage**. This is undoubtedly an intergenerational question: for young theatre makers, the idea that the previous era's career trajectory of being allowed to work with ever larger budgets, and ever more materials and control over the outcome, is no longer possible, could feel like a punishment. However, using Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and Permaculture Designer Sarah Queblatin's methodology of **shifting perspective from 'victim' to 'survivor' to 'thrivers'** (Queblatin 2023), this mindset can be exposed as belonging to a culture that values material progress as though that were a marker of artistic development.

Climate Dramaturgy invites a different perspective on artistic practice and its relation to ethics: that at last we are developing systems of making art that will not rely on unseen and unvoiced exploitation and damage enacted elsewhere. Upcoming generations of theatre makers have the opportunity to **embed climate care in their art as an ethical and creative practice from the start**: they do not need to unlearn the habits that so many of us rely on for our sense of professional capability. Meanwhile for decades now, theatre and live artists, as well as activists, have already been working outside (and only occasionally in partnership with) mainstream theatre buildings, to explore the questions about who we are and who we could be, that the climate crisis asks of us. **Through reducing its dependency on materials**, mainstream theatre can, in its very process, **rehearse for the climate just future that many of us would like to live in**, by behaving in our own artistic practices as though attention and care to the unseen contexts and impact of what we use were standard. To return to Bojana Kunst's maxim that **we can act 'as if the changes desired are already here'** (2018, 94): and in doing so, theatre can play a part in bringing those changes about by enacting them in the now. No matter that the future trajectory of the climate crisis is alarmingly far from what climate justice calls for, **in rehearsing for an alternative, the theatre bears witness to the fact it could be otherwise**.

The ethos of Climate Dramaturgy thus extends beyond the practical agenda of the *Theatre Green Book to explore institutional values and questions of artistic mindset*. However, it quickly became clear in the research process that artistic consideration regarding the form and content of the work on stage could not begin without **first enabling environmental care in the process** and practice of making the work – and the long-term actions of the theatre as an organisation. Firstly, the **process of making the work cannot be detached from its presentation and affect as artwork**, without attracting accusations of hypocrisy. Secondly, **artists only feel empowered** to explore their own relationship with climate crisis and develop artistic strategies for response, when they also feel that the **theatre is fundamentally committed to ethical environmental care across the board**. This is where, in addition to the *Theatre Green Book: Productions*, the *Theatre Green Book's* follow-up publications, the *Theatre Green Book: Operations*, and the *Theatre Green Book: Buildings*, offer **crucial guidance documents**, not only for reducing a theatre's carbon

footprint, but also to allow the theatre to create fertile and generous conditions for **the empowerment of artists** in making environmental ethical decisions.

Despite the 'operations' and 'buildings' aspects of theatre having greater negative environmental impacts than productions, the research consultations yielded the strong sense from freelance practitioners that it is they – particularly designers and production managers – who are required to do the heavy lifting of a theatre's commitment to environmental responsibility. There are two reasons why this is the case:

- It is currently beyond the budget parameters for many theatres to update their infrastructure, or indeed at the time of writing, to afford green energy, when fuel bills have increased exponentially whilst funding is becoming scarcer.
- Theatres exist to engage and serve their audiences, and what goes on stage is the most visible aspect of taking care of climate concerns. A recent survey demonstrates that in the UK, 90% of audiences expect theatre 'to be made sustainably'.<sup>47</sup>

Nevertheless, among practitioners there is a sense that their work can be used to display a theatre's 'green' credentials, without the salaried staff of theatres undertaking their own audits and actions to minimise environmental harm where they can. There are two key ways to combat this perception, and **encourage and support freelancers in taking environmental responsibility**:

- **Organisational commitment.** Theatres, despite the challenges, must do what they can to follow the guidance of the *Theatre Green Book: Buildings*, and *Theatre Green Book: Operations*, to ensure that there is a fair distribution of responsibility for reducing environmental impacts.
- **Transparency.** Regular **sharing of stories of climate care** within the organisation is crucial. Further, giving incoming freelance practitioners an overview of what the theatre is doing across all its departments reassures practitioners they are contributing to a larger collective effort, rather than shouldering a disproportionate burden.

Conversations with freelancers and Donmar staff demonstrated that many were not aware of the environmental work of the theatre beyond their own specialism. As a result, the 'Welcome Pack: Environmental Responsibility' and 'Climate Care Explainer' for creatives now shares this information (see appendices 7 and 8), whilst the Donmar's Environmental Action group regularly updates staff on its progress in staff meetings and board reports.

## Climate Careful Creative Practice

What has been repeatedly striking in the research is the extent of the gulf between practitioners' desire to work within an ethical framework that is concerned with environmental care and practising it in reality. The research confirmed widespread enthusiasm for the aims and recommendations of

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<sup>47</sup> <https://theatregreenbook.com/what-audiences-expect-of-theatre/> [accessed 21 June 2023]

the *Theatre Green Book*, but also highlighted the way that practitioners experience multiple barriers to its implementation. Under conditions of extreme time pressure and precarity many practitioners rely heavily on habitual ways of doing things, which don't need conversation or a recalibration of how to make decisions. In this situation, attention to environmental impacts can feel like a disruption to the smooth flow of established practice.

This is reflected in the wider UK culture where high levels of concern about the climate crisis are not translating into sufficient levels of social or political action: in a UK government poll undertaken in October 2022, **74% reported being worried or very worried about climate change** and felt climate change was the second biggest concern facing adults in Great Britain, with the rising cost of living being the main concern (79%).<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, current policies will not even enable the UK to meet its current climate pledges, never mind facilitate a just transition (Somerville 2021), whilst across the globe, governments are declaring investments in projects with little or no relationship to mitigating environmental harm as the 'climate finance' pledged by 'developed' countries as part of the UN Paris Climate Agreement 'to help developing nations reduce emissions and adapt to a warming world'.<sup>49</sup> In this atmosphere, high levels of fear coupled with low levels of action makes ambitions for changing artistic mindsets challenging. The research evolved therefore to tackle the question of what conditions practitioners might need to make it easier for them to collaborate on creative and effective climate care. **This led to the recognition that there are three essential elements to embedding climate care in current theatre processes:**

### **expectation, facilitation, and permission**

#### **Expectation**

It matters that theatres *expect* those working for them to undertake climate careful practice, and that this expectation is made clear from the start – and backed up in detail in offer letter and contract.

Further, the invitation should be specific, rather than a generalised demand for environmental responsibility, so that practitioners are clear on the nature and degree of what is expected, and when.

Examples of **expectation**:

- Holding a conversation about environmental responsibility prior to any job being offered (freelance or staff).
- Inclusion of a 'values' document with the offer letter, outlining expectations of environmental responsibility.
- Inclusion of a 'green debrief' meeting and questionnaire in the production schedule as standard.

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<sup>48</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/worriesaboutclimatechangegreatbritain/september2022> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>49</sup><https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/climate-change-finance/> [accessed 22 June 2023]

- Use of the environmental tracker, or equivalent, to record decision-making, along with the expectation that practitioners will flag up any potential environmental impacts before they occur.

## Facilitation

**Facilitating climate care** involves changing specific aspects of the process of making shows, to provide the conditions that will enable practitioners to work in environmentally responsible ways. This is where theatre administrations have enormous power to provide the conditions for climate conscious artistry to flourish, i.e. to have real-world impact *and* inspire/provoke creativity. Freelance creatives have little influence on the overall timeline/process/schedule for making the work, most of which is set before any practitioners are employed, and which is generally dictated by precedent. **Therefore, practitioners are heavily reliant on theatre administrations to facilitate a climate careful process.** That said, within that framework, it is **imperative that director and designer take** responsibility for how their schedule will affect their wider collaborators, especially production managers, either enabling or disabling them for following through on environmental parameters, depending on whether the necessary timescales for collaborative climate care are met.

Examples of **facilitation**:

- Inclusion of details of the Donmar's work on climate care in the Welcome Pack given to creatives, cast, and stage management at the start of rehearsals.
- Inviting the creative team to hold an early stage 'design concept meeting' to enable an anticipatory environmental exploration, to inform creative direction. Offers the opportunity for cross fertilisation between the different elements of design (sound, light, costumes, set).
- Inviting commentary on environmental impact from creative and technical team as a standard part of their departmental update in production meetings.
- Organising monthly 'pre' production meetings for early-stage troubleshooting.
- Holding a parameters meeting specifically for makers, costume/props buyers and stage management, in which the priority for ethically sourced, environmentally friendly choices is discussed, and any queries or challenges addressed.
- Holding a climate contingency budget to facilitate environmental care when making last minute decisions that will involve additional financial cost when avoiding environmental harm.
- Using the 'green debrief' meeting at the end of the production to evaluate the data gathered on the productions' environmental impact and share discoveries with the next production team.
- Introducing each member of the creative team to their counterpart on a previous production, to share know-how.

## Permission

Staff and practitioners need to feel that there is 'permission' to make climate careful choices, or even just to articulate environmental concerns. However collaborative in the moment, **the current theatre system requires hierarchy to function smoothly**, in order to deliver the show to a high standard on an extremely short (by European standards) time scale. Therefore, many involved in the system may only feel enabled to consider environmental questions if they feel they have **permission** from those they answer to. **Giving permission** can be as simple and obvious as asking questions about where materials will be sourced from or simply **demonstrating concern for the context of climate crisis**. What is key is that practitioners will only feel they have **permission to attend to avoidance of environmental impacts** if this is made explicit by other team members, and by the theatre management, not just once, but **repeatedly**. Thus reinforced, giving permission opens the way for collaboration between team members across established hierarchies. This is essential, as when it comes to climate care, knowledge and awareness are unevenly distributed among the team, increasing the importance of consultation when decision-making.

Examples of **permission**:

- The director announcing the importance of environmental care and asking questions relating to it in every group meeting.
- The set/costume designer backing the director and taking the lead on keeping the conversation alive with the production manager, costume supervisor and any other members of the production team.
- The production manager ensures that everyone involved in production particularly buyers is strongly encouraged to make climate careful decisions.

## The Permission Hierarchy

Please take positive action against the environmental harm caused by the rehearsal and production of this play. The diversity of the cast and crew of this production should reflect, as far as is possible, the diversity of the world outside the theatre.

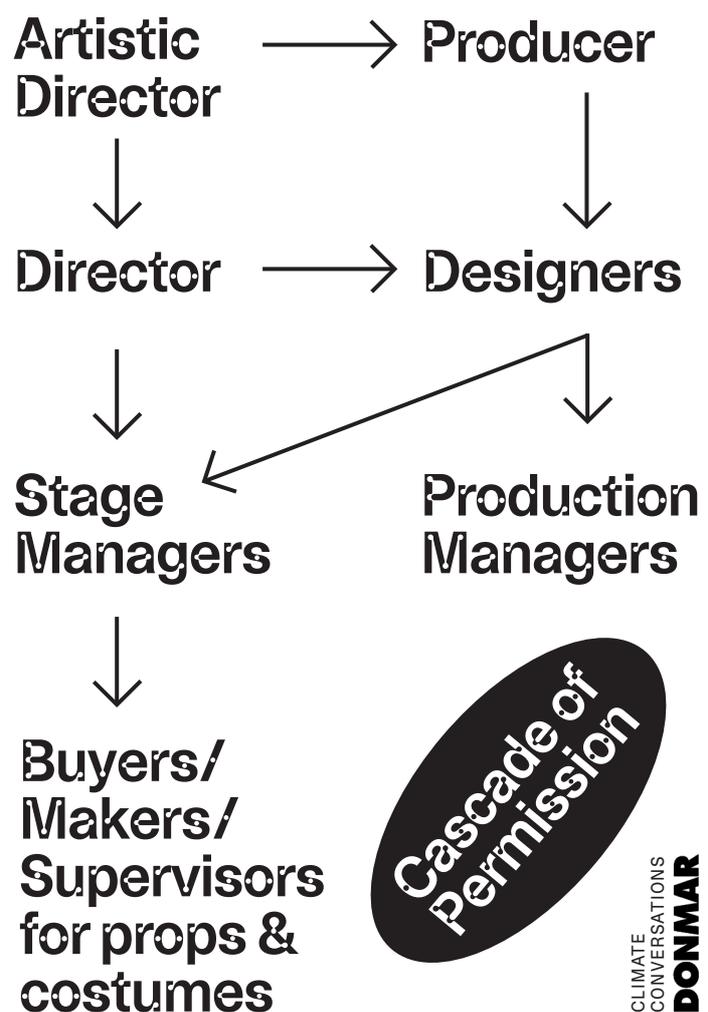
(Dawn King, *The Trials*, p. 1)

By making this statement at the start of her manuscript of *The Trials* (staged in August 2022 at the Donmar), Dawn King created an **expectation** that her text would be staged in a manner that reflected the concerns of the work, connecting care for social representation with care for the environment, echoing the tenets of climate justice. Crucially, this statement also **gave permission** for the whole creative team to advocate for such care in every aspect of the production.

**Permission is not automatic**, and it is dependent on the hierarchy that underlies successful collaborative working on productions. Therefore, the theatre’s leadership – ideally artistic director and producer in tandem – must give the freelance director and designer on each production, **from the very beginning, permission to lead a climate careful process**. Although a director might not expect to themselves engage with the pragmatic detail of minimising the environmental impact of their production, their leadership shapes the culture of the production as whole, and as such, can empower others (or conversely, make it more difficult for them) to pursue climate care. As lead artist, who is contracted first and selects and leads the rest of the creative team, as well as the actors, the director thus has a crucial role to play in **enabling the creative and production team to attend to environmental parameters**. The director must then also give permission – and ideally inspiration – to the designer and to their wider creative team (sound, lighting, composition, video, and so on), to explore ideas in a climate conscious way. This **permission empowers** the rest of the creative team to pay attention to potential environmental impacts and be inspired to take avoidant action. If senior members of the team give permission to take the time needed to attend to climate care: **their team will feel empowered in turn to give permission to others**. In all cases, assistants can be empowered through being invited to undertake production-specific research in relation to environmental considerations, which also provides them with know-how, and future-proofs their own emergent practice.

Beyond the director and designer therefore lies a **cascade of permission**. Each participant in the system must work out **who they are able to give permission to**, as this will depend on the precise nature of the overall process. What this **permission** does, is allow **collaborative and reciprocal relationships** between different positions in a hierarchy, rather than relying on the ‘command’ structure of traditional hierarchical practices.

In practice, the act of ‘giving permission’ can be very simple – it simply involves **public recognition in meetings** that decision-making should take the potential for environmental harm into account. Crucially, this involves ensuring engagement with climate care is **shared and reported on at every meeting**, not as an



adjunct agenda item, but as a **core part of the expression of the values of the work**. Observing process on such a variety of productions at the Donmar – and through multiple conversations – it became clear that individuals might express the intention of being eager to minimise environmental impact at the start, but feeling they had permission to do so enabled the necessary collaborative conversations possible.

Importantly, **facilitation, expectation and permission** all reinforce each other – and are **much more effective where all three are in place**. What follows are some examples demonstrating how this works:

**Challenge:** Unless the systems are in place that will **facilitate** action, **permission** will not be effective – and being encouraged to pursue climate careful aims but without providing the means of doing so, can leave practitioners burnt out and disillusioned.

**Antidote:** Ensure the theatre's processes are fit for purpose when encouraging/inspiring practitioners to be climate conscious.



**Challenge:** Expectation can have a negative impact on creativity, if practitioners feel they are not being supported by the theatre to achieve those expectations.

**Antidote:** Any expectations that are contractually agreed at the outset must be backed up by a clear and transparent **facilitation** of the process for meeting those expectations.



**Challenge:** Expectation will not translate into action, if practitioners feel that there is 'no time' to reflect on the work in relation to environmental parameters.

**Antidote:** As well as the **facilitation** of a climate careful process, the theatre must make repeated visible and verbal commitments to climate care, to ensure that practitioners feel that they have **permission** to take the time that is needed to reflect and research in creatively generative ways.



**Challenge:** Facilitation can only go so far – if directors/designers don't engage with the issues, it is difficult for **facilitation** on the part of the theatre to translate into practical action.

**Antidote:** The feeling of having **permission** is key to the facilitation of process being effective, but it can come from the theatre's leadership as well as the freelancers engaged for the particular production. The producer and artistic director – can provide **permission** through how they **welcome freelancers into the theatre**.

## Climate Dramaturgy & Time

There is some plausibility to the myth/belief that ‘working sustainably limits artistic freedom’. Many practitioners have felt this, in particular when a last-minute decision demands that either an aesthetic choice is made that is environmentally harmful, or the idea must be abandoned. This is not, however, because the statement is fundamentally true, but because in UK theatre artists are largely working on extremely tight timescales on low pay. Using environmental parameters to catalyse greater ingenuity fundamentally **depends on there being enough time** for those parameters to provoke renewed thought/a creative response, rather than settle on compromise. **Climate Dramaturgy requires attention to detail**, with time ringfenced to reflect on and evolve working practices: it is no accident that the *Theatre Green Book: Productions* repeatedly returns to **the need for more time**, across all areas of creative endeavour. Time was also repeatedly mentioned in the Donmar’s workshop consultations. At every stage, attempts to embed more climate careful practice, following the principles of the *Theatre Green Book*, are hampered by the **standard theatre schedule involving insufficient time to research, reflect or reconsider decisions**. This is a two-fold issue.

Firstly, it is a question of pay. In 2022, the National Theatre instituted an additional fee explicitly to enable directors and designers to take environmental responsibility into account in their process.<sup>50</sup> Not all institutions are able to raise fees in this way – however, the need to pay additional fees for the time needed to undertake a climate careful process is related to a wider context of low pay for freelance theatre creatives across the sector, resulting in excessive workloads.<sup>51</sup> As well as the issue of fee levels for artists, there is a direct correlation between pay and freelancers’ capacity for taking on attention to climate care, particularly for production teams, from production managers to stage managers, to buyers and supervisors. Although these roles were not the focus of the research, it is clear that **providing these roles with sufficient time** – particularly in advance of the start of rehearsals – is essential for ethical and environmental responsible procurement. The Theatre Green Book recommends that production budgets are altered **to invest more time in people, and less in materials**, making it possible to raise fees without increasing the overall budget. This is a crucial ‘real world’ way to enable change in a sector that is receiving decreasing levels of funding (but equally crucially, attending to climate care under these limiting conditions should be used to argue for increasing funding).

Conversations throughout the research process suggested however that taking time for environmental care is not only a question of money: experiencing time as lacking relates to questions of habit and process. Theatre is embedded in a wider just-in-time culture in which many of us work at speed, leaping from deadline to deadline: the *feeling* of having no time is endemic, regardless of the reality,

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<sup>50</sup> <https://www.thestage.co.uk/news/national-theatre-to-offer-extra-pay-to-creatives-improving-green-standards> [accessed 22 June 2023]

<sup>51</sup>For a fuller picture, see the reports published by the freelancer advocacy body, Freelancers Make Theatre Work: <https://freelancersmaketheatrework.com/bigfreelancersurvey/2022report/> [accessed 22 June 2023]; <https://freelancersmaketheatrework.com/jobjugglingreport2022/> [accessed 21 June 2023]

making this a cultural parameter resistant to change. **Climate Dramaturgy requires a deeper level of attentiveness and collaboration**, which works against the pressure of the 'just-in-time' delivery model that govern most practices/businesses today. Resisting this model could in itself be seen as a resistance to the forces that drive the climate crisis, but theatre's age-old adage, 'the show must go on', suggests that theatre's relationship to (lack of) time is fundamental to how theatre works. This is not to suggest that artistic practice and environmental care are incompatible; rather it suggests that it might be useful to **think of the need for 'more time' as being about 'prioritising what to attend to'**. Climate Dramaturgy requires that moments of reflection and questioning of standard practice are built into the production cycle at key points. If this is managed well, **this reflection and attention to detail will work towards, and not away from superior artistry in the work**. This is not necessarily about how much time overall, but *when* in the process time is ringfenced for such reflection and research.

The research suggests that it is at the **beginning of a production process** that more time/reflection/research/thought will make the **most difference** in terms of **preventing environmental harm**. Forward planning is particularly key for the early stages of developing the production, with consultation suggesting that for time not to be felt as a limiting factor in creative climate care, **production teams need to be employed a good 6–9 months before rehearsals are due to start**. This in turn affects theatre's programming cycles, requiring greater lead-in times.

Reports and recommendations can of course deal in ideals, and the practice is rarely able to match up. The holistic and **non-judgemental approach** of Climate Dramaturgy suggests another way forward: acceptance that there is 'never enough time', without accepting that this is a viable argument for not paying attention to the ramifications of 'just-in-time' decision-making. If there is little opportunity for 'making time', the next best practice is to **pay attention to timing**. There is a real chance of system change if:

- a collaborative focus on 'paying attention' to what can be done most effectively and brilliantly within environmental parameters suffuses the ethos of the work from the very start
- theatre managements and freelancers alike prioritise planning, well in advance, to ensure opportunities for collective reflection/reorientation are built into the process wherever possible – and that the necessary people will be available for those meetings

As using the *Theatre Green Book* to undertake environmental care becomes standard across the theatre industry, research and reflection will still be needed, even with the development of new habits and therefore the greater ease of avoiding environmental harm. **Reflection will remain crucial** because the wider context for taking care is unlikely to improve as quickly – the theatre sector will still be contending with opaque supply chains, higher prices for 'ethical' goods, greenwashing and culture wars-style resistance to change. Similarly it should be noted that the process of embedding changes to a production cycle – as we found in the process of developing the recommendations of this report – also **takes time and patience**. Rather therefore than seeking to transform the system

in one go, at the Donmar we have started to embed the changes as and when capacity has allowed. This incremental approach has made the changes less immediately visible, but at the same time, less disruptive, **focusing on altering habits** over time rather than an immediate system overhaul.

## At the Donmar: the Environmental Production Tracker

Climate Dramaturgy focuses on balancing ethical and artistic priorities, inviting artistic ingenuity to be embedded in the minutiae of production practice. To record that process, and enable long-term learning from production to production, we developed the Donmar **Environmental Production Tracker**. Designed by Head of Production Marec Joyce, the Environmental Production tracker is a straightforward, simple to use, google sheet that allows logging of the decisions made that produce the physical and material aspects of a production: from the parameters meeting at the start through all production meetings during rehearsals to plans made for storage, reuse or recycling of the production at the end of a production cycle.<sup>52</sup> The tracker also has a tab that automatically calculates the timeline of the production, to support scheduling in a way that allows time for climate care (see the section, 'Climate Dramaturgy & Time' pp. 44–46). Using the tracker ensures that there is transparency and accountability in decision-making – **providing a non-judgemental way to hold everyone on the creative team accountable** for the environmental impact of the production and supporting them in how to tell the story of their decision-making clearly, for future benefit. When targets are set at the start of the process, it allows for the recording of progress towards those targets. Equally, if a production is unable to focus on environmental considerations, the tracker provides a snapshot of why and how, leading to longer term learning about barriers to the implementation of environmental parameters.

In principle, every creative team member can have access to the tracker and update it as they go. However, in practice, it quickly became clear that it was more efficient to amalgamate the tracker with production meeting notes, thereby embedding the capacity for environmental assessment into core production activity. The tracker is now **designed to take the minutes of every production meeting** as well as all other presentation and decision-making meetings where the physical production is discussed. It is an efficient tool **to record decisions, identify actions to be taken, and who is taking responsibility** for that action. The minutes of production meetings are clearly laid out and can be extracted and shared as a PDF afterwards. Because the process of using the tracker is **embedded in the core practice of putting the show together**, it doesn't require anyone to be running more than one process of documentation during the intense, time-poor, deadline-orientated rehearsal period. To enable the production to attend to environmental parameters and take timely avoidant action, **the tracker offers a 'traffic light' system**, allowing for the identification of anticipated environmental impacts as soon as they emerge in a process. 'RED' means 'likely high impact', and 'ORANGE' 'likely medium impact', allowing a simple indication of whether a

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<sup>52</sup> A template for the Environmental Production Tracker can be accessed here [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1n8DySmOif\\_3SFebVCpXctTDHHTiZpDr3y2g7P3XEUtU/edit?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1n8DySmOif_3SFebVCpXctTDHHTiZpDr3y2g7P3XEUtU/edit?usp=sharing)



Exploring a variety of ways of addressing expected and actual environmental impacts, as logged in the tracker, demonstrated that having 'environmental impact' as a single agenda item at the end of a production meeting, for all departments, often led to creatives not mentioning environmental impacts. What proved **more effective** was to ask each department to comment on environmental concerns as part of their general update, as well as any steps already taken to avoid impacts. In production meetings, when time is often at a premium, this helped to ensure that **environmental considerations could remain embedded in the conversation**, rather than being cut short because of running out of time. However, it was also felt that keeping 'environmental impacts' also as an agenda item in its own right, provided the opportunity for the minute-taker to report on **whether potential environmental impact had changed since previous meetings**, prompting creatives to consider further environmental ramifications that had previously been overlooked. At the Donmar it has become the role of the Assistant Production Manager to update anticipated and actual environmental impacts, based on production meeting conversations, any further necessary research, and past experience. Depending on the scale of a show and the theatre/company producing it, the tracker can be used and updated by a variety of members of the production team, depending on what is most efficient for that team.

Once the production is done, the tracker becomes the basis of evaluating the production's environmental impact at the 'Green Debrief'. At the Donmar this has led to developing a system for logging four or five main takeaways (successes and learnings) from the production, to be added to a 'know-how' log, modelling ways of being climate careful at the Donmar, which can then be passed on to incoming freelance creative teams to encourage best practice, and enable artists to learn from the challenges faced.<sup>53</sup> The tracker also means that the theatre has **sufficient data to hand to assess how it is improving its practice over time**. Ultimately, recording all decisions made in the Environmental Production Tracker offers a way of demonstrating how small-scale actions can lead to a significant minimisation across the life of a production, and how this mounts up over the theatre's season and, indeed, year on year.

The template of the Environmental Production Tracker can be found [here](#).<sup>54</sup> It is open source – it is hoped that others will use it, add to it and adapt it for different theatre-making contexts. Please see appendix 9 for a User Guide on how to use the tracker.

## A Note on Metrics

Rather than focusing specifically on metrics, **Climate Dramaturgy focuses on the relations between people and ideas**, and between people and materials. However, Climate Dramaturgy's holistic approach complements rather than replaces systems of measuring. Where used in tandem with the *Theatre Green Book* targets **it focuses on 'how' to change practices to enable targets**

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<sup>53</sup> At the time of writing, this practice is still in the process of being tested and embedded.

<sup>54</sup> [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1n8DySmOif\\_3SFebVCpXctTDHHTiZpDr3y2g7P3XEUtU/edit#gid=0&fvid=1216554052](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1n8DySmOif_3SFebVCpXctTDHHTiZpDr3y2g7P3XEUtU/edit#gid=0&fvid=1216554052)

**to be met, without compromising creativity.** Several practitioners commented that they found that being given 'hard targets', **provoked creative response**, as well as being the most effective way to ensure reductions in environmental harm. Where such fixed targets are set, the tracker can demonstrate how close the production is to being likely to meet those targets, at any point in the process.

## At the Donmar: the Design Concept Meeting

As suggested by the *Theatre Green Book: Productions*, early-stage creative/practical conversation, before the main design ideas have taken root, is key to enabling a productive collaborative practice, that inspires artists to deeper thought and stronger ideas, using climate parameters as a springboard rather than a limiting factor. It is at this early creative stage, moreover, that most 'savings' on an environmental front can occur, potentially entirely unnoticeably, **if director and designer come up with a core concept for the work that will not require intensive use of new/carbon-rich materials to be realised.** The *Theatre Green Book's* excellent design hierarchy provides an easy-to-use model.

One intervention trialled at the Donmar has been to offer a 'design concept meeting', held at an early stage of the director and designers' collaborative relationship. This allows the core/initial ideas to be shared at an early stage with the production manager and the wider creative team, and any thoughts on how to mitigate environmental impacts to be shared. The meeting also becomes **an opportunity to respond collaboratively** to any challenges introduced by environmental parameters. Realising a design that will express the play most fully *and* meet environmental parameters, may be through **lighting, sound and space being conceived of in collaboration**, early in the design process, in ways that reduce reliance on material resources. For example, *The Trials* planned to use the Donmar space as a 'site', coming up against a variety of obstacles to that aim that could have led to resource-heavy options, but which were solved through the **ingenuity of lighting and sound design** (Jai Morjaria/XANA).

*A Doll's House, Part 2*, meanwhile, was designed with a **spare minimalist aesthetic** by Rae Smith. Costume expressed the period and further the socio-economic dynamics of the play, primarily through the opulence of just one costume piece (Nora's dress) that was all the more marked for being contrasted with a set design that otherwise minimised the use of resources, with just a few items of reused furniture placed like chess pieces on a raised platform that appeared to be made of reused wood. This production is however an example of a design that was itself climate careful, that, due to external factors, was operating on a last-minute timescale that rendered the acquisition of reused/reusable materials extremely challenging. The recommendation to hold a 'design concept meeting', first tested in *The Trials*, the next production in the season, partly evolved in recognition of this need to **align artistic intention with a timescale that will allow for research and sourcing.**

In many design processes, the collaboration between director, designer and production manager mirror the wider culture's model of resource use, which economist Kate Raworth outlines as 'TAKE – MAKE – USE – LOSE' (for more detail see the section 'Legacies of Colonialism', p. 24). The equivalent in theatre production is one of 'design' and 'execution'. Director and designer conceptualise the form of the production – its look, feel, visual and spatial dramaturgy – mocking up how it might look in a model box. Broadly, with some back-and-forth regarding costs and budget parameters, the production manager then takes on the task of realising that design. This process requires a significant amount of *taking* (usually) new materials, executing the ideas *making* the set, which *uses* the materials up, and then 'losing' them – sending them to landfill at the end of the production run.

What might an alternative process look like? The *Theatre Green Book* invites practitioners to '**design out' unnecessary waste in early-stage creative conversations** (p. 2). This is where a 'design concept' meeting can be particularly useful – as it allows the collaborative development of ideas at an early enough stage that ingenuity rather than late-stage compromise can enable potential environmental impact to be avoided. Equally though, conversations throughout the research suggested that a design process can be facilitated by an artistic mindset that works **from and with already existing materials, allowing what is already available** for use and adaptation **to inspire design**. This represents a distinct shift in artistic mindset: and therefore requires **the director also to be open** to this contextual approach, which **situates process in the specific context** of what is already available for production – not as limit, but as potentiality for inspiring ideas. Designers consulted in the process have observed that what is crucial to this approach is theatres maintaining **excellent documentation of the resources that can be reused** – and being willing to share these resources with designers working on shows at other theatres. The discussion of the importance of storage facilities – which came up several times across the workshops – is not merely a pragmatic answer to minimising waste: it allows designers **to imagine and create differently**. Whilst there is already a growing trend for production managers to share materials from the shows they are working on, this generally takes place once the design process has already developed the core ideas. Giving designers – and directors – **access to existent materials can entwine reuse with core creative practice**. Similarly, the more site-specific the design in responding to the architecture of the theatre it is performing in, often the less it will need to 'add'.

Of course, such considerations are context specific – it is clearly not an appropriate approach for touring, whilst it can also come up against health and safety considerations (as for *The Trials* at the Donmar, where attempts to use the real, concrete floor were ultimately thwarted by the number of trip hazards). Nevertheless, the approach also led to using the actual back wall of the theatre (instead of a false version) and transforming the scene dock doors to transform it into an openable window. In a related move, the sound designer, XANA, used live sounds channelled from outside the theatre in the sound mix. Ultimately, such a mindset requires **flexibility** – and movement away from the belief that theatre is only about the 'new'. Rather, altering artistic mindset plays into another core aspect of theatre: **transformation: the magic of one thing becoming another**. Repurposing set design can create extraordinary transformations – and be equally, if not more impressive for

audiences (particularly if they know the story of that transformation). Again, it comes down to shifting mindsets – and crucially, **directorial and audience mindsets**, as much as the mindset of designers themselves – away from the production of final, perfect, contextless, one-off designs by isolated individuals, to a design practice that draws on – and expresses – how we are **interconnected and interdependent** with the world around us (Raworth 2017, May 2022): **an ecosystem rather than a market.**

## At the Donmar: the Green Debrief

The Green Debrief meeting is the final addition to the standard production calendar. The purpose of this meeting is for the freelance production team, along with Donmar staff, to use the record provided by the Environmental Production Tracker to evaluate the production's climate care: celebrating its achievements and noting any recommendations for how the theatre can better support practitioners in working in an environmentally careful way in future. The aim is not only to evaluate the past, but to gather stories and pointers, **to build a body of shared knowledge** that can be drawn on by practitioners working at the theatre in future. The main takeaways are written up by the Resident Assistant Director working on the production and added to the Climate Care Introduction Pack provided to practitioners when they start work on a production at the Donmar.<sup>55</sup> The main obstacle to the 'green debrief' being efficacious is the fact that it isn't culturally embedded as a norm in the production cycle, meaning that few freelance practitioners (are able to) make time for evaluation after they have finished their work on a production. For this reason, the Donmar may invite attendance from freelancer creatives, but if they are unable to attend, expects them to contribute their thoughts by email, for inclusion in the evaluation process.

## A Timeline of Climate Careful Practice

As part of the research output an infographic, *Climate Conversations: The Show Must Go On*, has been developed in collaboration with Design Agency The District, to summarise the key points of focus on climate care, across a production cycle. The infographic brings together the shifts in practice that are being embedded at the Donmar at an institutional level. Please see the next double page for the infographic, which can also be found in A4 format at appendix 3. What follows is the list of actions outlined in the infographic, with an indication of how they enable one or more of the keywords outlined above: **Expectation, Facilitation, and Permission.**

**(E)** = Expectation (i.e. the theatre explicitly states what it requires from freelancers and staff to ensure climate care.)

**(F)** = Facilitation (i.e. organising the conversations needed throughout the production cycle to enable climate care.)

**(P)** = Permission (i.e. each feels empowered to make climate careful decisions against the grain of 'no time/no money' deadlines.)

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<sup>55</sup> At the time of writing, this is in the first stages of the process of being embedded in standard practice at the Donmar.

## **1. Engaging the Creative Team.**

- (P) Share ethos of climate care with each creative at first meeting
- (F) Ensure creative production fees cover time for climate careful planning
- (E) In offer letter share expectations for climate care and how facilitated
- (F) Offer Carbon Literacy Training
- (E) Expect use of the *Theatre Green Book*
- (F) Contract creative teams at least 6 months in advance, including production manager
- (F) Share details of resources for reuse (set/costume/tech equipment)
- (P) Communicate climate care ethos publicly

## **2. Parameters Meeting.**

- (P) (F) Introduce Environmental Production Tracker to the team
- (E) (F) Arrange schedule for director/designer process to ensure time for climate care
- (F) Arrange tech schedule to fit the team's access needs/care responsibilities
- (F) Pool ideas for how best to meet *Theatre Green Book* standards

## **3. Design Concept Meeting.**

- (F) Bring creatives together to explore early-stage ideas, to enable collaborative climate care
- (F) Start using Environmental Production Tracker
- (E) (F) Schedule time prior to White Card to research/'design out' any potential environmental impacts

## **4. White Card.**

- (E) (F) Expect to name/troubleshoot environmental impacts
- (E) Use Environmental Production Tracker to track intended/actual action on impacts

## **5. Final Design.**

- (F) (E) Use Environmental Production Tracker to calculate impact

- (F) Schedule procurement to ensure transport minimised
- (F) Discuss afterlife of all set/costumes/props
- (E) (P) (F) Hold climate parameters meeting for stage management/buyers/props & costume

## **6. Show Rehearsal.**

- (F) Adjust rehearsal schedule for access needs/care responsibilities
- (P) Artistic Director/Producer share climate ethics with cast & celebrate climate care in design
- (P) Share anti-racism learning and practice
- (E) In production meetings expect each departmental update to include climate impacts
- (E) (P) Publicise climate care through backstage interviews with creative team

## **7. Technical Rehearsal.**

- (F) Use a climate contingency budget to reduce impacts of last-minute decisions in tech/previews

## **8. Performances.**

- (P) Communicate show-specific stories of climate care to wider public

## **9. Green Debrief.**

- (F) Capture learning from the Environmental Production Tracker to take forward internally/share with future productions

## **10. Afterlife.**

- (F) Store reusable resources and share details for future use
- (F) Implement recommendations from the Green Debrief
- (P) Put creatives in touch with their counterpart on the next production to share climate care know-how

# 1. Engaging the Creative Team.

- P** Share ethos of climate care with each creative at first meeting
- F** Ensure creative production fees cover time for climate careful planning
- E** In offer letter share expectations for climate care and how facilitated
- F** Offer Carbon Literacy Training
- E** Expect use of the Theatre Green Book
- F** Contract creative teams at least 6 months in advance, including production manager
- F** Share details of resources for reuse (set/costume/tech equipment)
- P** Communicate climate care ethos publicly

- P** Introduce Environmental Production Tracker to the team

- E** Arrange schedule for director/designer process to ensure time for climate care

# 2. Parameters Meeting.

- F** Arrange tech schedule to fit the team's access needs/care responsibilities
- F** Pool ideas for how best to meet Theatre Green Book standards

- F** Bring creatives together to explore early-stage ideas, to enable collaborative climate care

# 3. Design Concept Meeting.

- F** Start using Environmental Production Tracker
- E** Schedule time prior to White Card to research/ 'design out' any potential environmental impacts

EXT



# The Show Must Go On.

- F** Store reusable resources and share details for future use

# 10. Afterlife.

- F** Implement recommendations from the Green Debrief
- P** Put creatives in touch with their counterpart on the next production to share climate care know-how

# 9. Green Debrief.

- F** Capture learning from the Environmental Production Tracker to take forward internally/share with future productions

# 8. P

- P** Co sp cli wi

UNDED PLANNING TIME

#### 4. White Card.

- E** Expect to name/
- F** troubleshoot environmental impacts
- E** Use Environmental Production Tracker to track intended/actual action on impacts



- F** Use Environmental Production Tracker to calculate impact
- E**
- F** Schedule procurement to ensure transport minimised

#### 5. Final Design.

- F** Discuss afterlife of all set/costumes/props
- E** Hold climate parameters
- P** meeting for stage management/buyers/props & costume
- F**



## Permission

i.e. each feels empowered to make climate careful decisions against the grain of 'no time/ no money' deadlines.

## Facilitation

i.e. organising the conversations needed throughout the production cycle to enable climate care.

- F** Adjust rehearsal schedule for access needs/care responsibilities
- P** Artistic Director/ Producer share climate ethics with cast & celebrate climate care in design

#### 6. Show Rehearsal.

- P** Share anti-racism learning and practice
- E** In production meetings expect each departmental update to include climate impacts
- E** Publicise climate care through backstage interviews with creative team
- P**

#### 7. Technical Rehearsal.

- F** Use a climate contingency budget to reduce impacts of last-minute decisions in tech/previews

#### performances.

communicate show specific stories of climate care to the public

CLIMATE CONVERSATIONS  
**DONMAR**  
Design by The District

## Climate Dramaturgy & Taking Care

**Myth Two:** That 'there's only room and energy for dealing with one social issue at a time, and/or there are other social justice issues that theatre engages with more easily/are more urgent'.

**An alternative perspective:** Climate crisis is a consequence of how the living world has been treated by 400 years of colonialism and capitalism as a resource rather than a life source (Ghosh 2021). That is, climate crisis is another outcome of the global systemic inequities that cause harm, such as sexism, racism, ableism, heteronormativity and the exclusions that occur as a result. These global inequities also entail that the impact of climate crisis hits the global majority, the disabled, the impoverished and women hardest, with each of these identities acting as a multiplier of vulnerability. Further, the history of racism in environmental conservation means that it is crucial that environmental care is approached in tandem with anti-racist learning and practice.

### Climate Dramaturgy & Care Practices

Climate Dramaturgy as a practice of giving attention to contexts beyond the immediately visible therefore involves attending to **the differing contexts of all practitioners engaged** on a project, including those often tacitly or explicitly excluded through ableism, racism, normative gender assumptions or class prejudice. The just-in-time culture often means that complex issues go unresolved, harm is ignored, or artistic decisions are compromised. All of these detract from the potential quality of the work as well as practitioner well-being. Taking care to acknowledge and include the diversity of contexts that practitioners are working in takes time. **It requires active engagement**, working against the grain of rehearsal processes that are highly pressured for time, and therefore prone to prioritising only what is recognised as necessary to the production. The practice of Climate Dramaturgy that takes those wider contexts into account, produces a workforce who will **be comfortable and confident** and therefore more likely to be able **to produce their**

**best work.** As well as being the key parameter that will enable a climate careful practice, **booking the creative team well in advance of the show is also an act of care.**

Because making theatre fit to meet the climate crisis involves a shift in practices that is often challenging, Climate Dramaturgy will be much more effective on any given production when the institution is invested in taking care in its practices as a whole. What has come across very clearly in numerous conversations is that **for theatres to expect freelancers to undertake climate care, they need to feel cared for by the institution in turn.** There are numerous ways of taking better care of the freelancers working in a building, from ensuring the contract sets clear parameters for how many hours' work is expected, to **requiring participation in anti-racism learning** from all staff and freelancers, to making provision for a well-being practitioner to accompany a production. At the Donmar, this research on climate care took place in the context of a broader set of care practices. For the duration of the research period, anti-racism practitioner and consultant mezze eade was employed both to share anti-racism practice and learning across the organisation – internally and in relation to specific productions, whilst also working as Talent Development Manager for the Donmar's 'Catalyst' scheme, which employs early career creatives from social groups underrepresented in theatre, in design (including lighting and sound) and directing.<sup>56</sup> The scheme is designed to facilitate long-term pathways into the industry, rather than merely provide one-off opportunities. In the spirit of transparency, the Donmar's contracts for freelance creatives also indicate the approximate hours of labour expected for the fee. Such practices make for a more fertile seed bed for the fostering of environmental care in an organisation, although none can fully counteract the delivery pressure of the 'just-in-time' culture.

When facilitated with care, working towards environmental aims **can unite operations, office and production staff in the common pursuit of longer term aims** beyond the frenzy of the production cycle. Further, when undertaken as part of a wider ethos of care, collaboration on climate care has the potential to **foster well-being**, partly through how alliances are forged that bridge staff/freelancer divides, and partly through enabling people to feel that they are **more able to align their ethics with their practice.** Similarly, where it is possible to connect freelancers to their counterparts on previous and future shows, to share know-how and tips for climate careful practice, this also **connects freelancers into wider networks of care**, making them feel part of the theatre's culture beyond the particular piece of work they are employed to work on.

There are affinities between the kinds of **system change** needed to **embed anti-racist practice** and learning, and that needed for **environmental care.** Anti-racist and anti-colonial learning is a core part of recognising how the climate crisis impacts globally in ways that exacerbate colonial inequity, as well as the U.K.'s historical culpability in driving and fuelling it. Further, both require a pause, and a critical examination of 'business as usual' practices – in theatre and the wider world. That is, each requires attention to contexts that may not be visible to all those who are in the room. Each requires **a willingness to stop, take stock and review practice** at any given moment. Each

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<sup>56</sup> <https://www.donmarwarehouse.com/talent-development/> [accessed 21 June 2023]

requires a long-term commitment to care and to changing habits. Each requires **a willingness to adjust and keep adjusting** without the expectation of 'mastering' practice or finding a 'one-size-fits-all' solution.

## Climate Dramaturgy & Casting

**Casting is an example of how climate care intersects with social justice.** Climate justice requires that efforts to reduce carbon emissions/rewild/decolonise their practices do not replicate the racialised hierarchies embedded in capitalist structures or reinforce the same social exclusions. How this translates into theatre is twofold. As a representational space it matters that those on stage reflect the demographics of those on the streets outside, otherwise theatre is not only conforming to Western society's preferential treatment of those who are white, male, non-disabled, heteronormative and (upper) middle-class, it is actively reinforcing that hierarchy of values.

Secondly, it matters to enable all actors to bring their context to the role, to **broaden the scope of representation** and show the **plethora of ways of being** in the world. Otherwise, a global majority actor may find themselves being asked to conform to how the role would be played by someone white, tacitly reinforcing racialised hierarchies whilst appearing to value inclusion. Unthinking re-enactments of white dominance in casting choices impoverishes the work, narrowing its range of reference. At the same time, it tacitly reinforces the value system that led to the climate crisis occurring – a presumed superiority of the white European and their/our cultural and economic dominance (see 'The Climate Context' in Part I, pp. 21–24).

Questions Climate Dramaturgy asks in relation to casting:

- Is it taking the diversity of the UK, culturally, ethnically and in terms of class, into account, either in the show itself, or across the season?
- How is that diversity related to the themes and content of the play being staged?
- Has colour-blind casting been avoided? That is, has care been taken to ensure that each actor is enabled to bring their own context and lived experience to bear in their work on the role?

Further, casting decisions should not occur in isolation from ensuring the culture of the theatre as a whole is engaged in antiracist and inclusive practice both in terms of its policies and in ensuring that the ethos is **visible, enabled and enforced** across all aspects of production. This goes for all other identities marginalised by current mainstream practices. As with other aspects of Climate Dramaturgy it is a matter of ensuring the wider context(s) of those working on the project are not tacitly excluded from the process.

## Climate Dramaturgy & Stories

We have to be strong dreamers. We have to ask unthinkable questions. We have to go right to the roots of what makes us such a devouring species, overly competitive, conquest-driven, hierarchical. (Ben Okri)<sup>57</sup>

**Myth Three:** That theatre's primary relationship with climate crisis is as the subject matter for an occasional play: 'Commissioners often say that "there's only room for one 'climate crisis' play in a season".' (New Work and Commissioning workshop participant, 21 April 2022)

**An alternative perspective:** The climate crisis is part of the context in which all contemporary life is lived (whether or not it is acknowledged), and theatre, in acknowledging this context, can start to play a leadership role in recognising what is at stake, culturally, emotionally and in terms of power structures – opening up space to explore our contemporary experience in a wide variety of ways, from how we process grief, to how we face change and uncertainty. The climate crisis is a context not just a topic.

### Changing the Cultural Story

In the West, the dominant socio-political story of how to respond to climate crisis positions wealthy fossil fuel-driven countries as in a lose-lose position – the debate is characterised often either as one of sacrifice of cherished comforts (meat, travel, consumer lifestyles) or face climate disaster. Given the enormity of what faces us, it is not surprising that therefore many look away, overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis, terrified by what is at stake and feeling powerless to do anything about it – our

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<sup>57</sup>Ben Okri, 'Artists Must Confront the Climate Crisis', The Guardian Newspaper, 12 November 2021. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/12/artists-climate-crisis-write-creativity-imagination> [accessed 22 June 2023]

attention occupied by the business of immediate survival in increasingly precarious times (Marshall 2015; Liboiron 2021). In the context of this 'story' of climate crisis, it is easy to feel despair, to see small-scale action as impotent to produce real change.

However, many activists and thinkers are identifying other stories for understanding ourselves in the world – **as interconnected and interdependent** (Haraway 2016; Raworth 2017; Krenak 2020). In this story, everyone has a role to play, in collaboration with one another, as we each try to do whatever we can in our different spheres of life, personal and professional: **every element is recognised as necessary to make up much larger scale collaborative networks of action** (brown 2017). In the wider culture, the call for such alternative stories about who we are is ever louder (Monbiot 2017), and it is in this respect that theatre can play the role it is most suited to and is its specialism: telling stories about who we are. The theatre can explore both the qualities that have driven the treatment of peoples and environments that have brought humankind to the brink of planetary liveability, and also, crucially, what stories might reframe our perspectives and **rehearse other ways of being and doing that will help us not only survive, but thrive** (Queblatin 2023).

## Climate Dramaturgy & Programming

How can we evolve a 'climate dramaturgy' which goes beyond addressing the symptoms of climate chaos and instead begins to forge the new imaginations we will need in order to confront the long-term, unpredictable effects of those symptoms on our lives?

(Una Chaudhuri 2017)

As a practice focused on acknowledging and engaging with **context**, Climate Dramaturgy is not primarily focused on the promotion of stories that directly discuss climate change or climate crisis in their content. These works matter but they form only a part of what a theatre culture can offer in responding to the climate crisis. The increasing range of works that take an aspect of climate crisis as their topic – including Dawn King's eco-dystopia, which had its UK premiere at the Donmar during the research period – demonstrate that there's a wide range of approaches to how to explore climate crisis as content.<sup>58</sup> Yet what Chaudhuri highlighted in 2017 as part of the motivation for founding CLIMATE LENS, still holds:

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<sup>58</sup> Including (but not exclusively): Zinnie Harris, *Further than the Furthest Thing* (1999); Caryl Churchill, *Far Away* (2000); Clare Pollard, *The Weather* (2004); Mojisola Adebayo, *Moj of the Antarctic* (2006); Caryl Churchill and Orlando Gough, *We Turned On the Light* (2006); Platform, *And While London Burns* (2007); Rachel Portman and Owen Sheers, *The Water Diviner's Tale* (2007); Mojisola Adebayo, *Matt Henson, North Star* (2009); Nick Payne, *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet*

People tended to 'shut down' when they heard that a theatre piece dealt with climate change. They tended to assume they knew what that would entail, and that it would be depressing, even when it came in the form of a sugarcoated pill, or a deft and elegant presentation of scientific information, or a lyrical ode to the vanishing green world. Climate change, we feared, was turning into a dreary theatrical theme, prejudged and too easily 'slotted'. (Chaudhuri 2017, 2)

Yet as Elizabeth Freestone and Jeanie O'Hare show in *100 Plays to Save the World* – their reframing of plays through using the context of climate crisis as an interpretative lens – there are a plethora of already existing works written that engage with themes relevant to exploring not only impacts and action, but the emotional dimensions of existential threat and the demand for transformation (Freestone and O'Hare 2021).

Climate Dramaturgy provokes questions about what kinds of stories are told and how we represent human qualities. **Climate Dramaturgy brings to the fore the historical links between individualism and extractive colonialism** and asks practitioners to look with fresh eyes at the implied messages about what is valued, embedded in theatrical representation.

Climate Dramaturgy invites consideration of the themes and dramaturgical structure of the works planned across a season, particularly in relation to the following questions:<sup>59</sup>

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(2009); Steve Waters, *Resilience* (2009) and *On the Beach* (2009); METIS, *3<sup>rd</sup> Ring Out* (2010); Mike Bartlett, *Earthquakes in London* (2010); Richard Bean, *The Heretic* (2011); Moira Buffini, Matt Charman, Penelope Skinner and Jack Thorne, *Greenland* (2011); Dawn King, *Foxfinder* (2011); Duncan Macmillan, *Lungs* (2011); Jonathan Dove, *The Walk from the Garden* (2012); Katie Mitchell, *Ten Billion* (2012) and *2071* (2014); Jonathan Dove, *The Day After* (2015); Caryl Churchill, *Escaped Alone* (2016); Ella Hickson, *Oil* (2016); Lucy Kirkwood, *The Children* (2016); Stef Smith, *Human Animals* (2016); David Finnigan, *Kill Climate Deniers* (2017); James Phillips, *Flood* (2017); Rimini Protokoll, *win<>win* (2017); Selina Thompson, *Salt* (2017); Coney, *How We Save the World* (2018); Clare Duffy, *Arctic Oil* (2018); METIS, *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* (2018); Lina Lapelytė and Vaiva Grainytė, *Sun and Sea* (2019); Stuart Macrae and Louise Welsh, *Anthropocene* (2019); Sabrina Mahfouz, *A History of Water in the Middle East* (2019); Belgrade Young Company, *Like There's No Tomorrow* (2020); April de Angelis, *Extinct* (2021); Fehinti Balogun, *Can I Live?* (2021); Chris Bush, *Kein Weltuntergang* (2021); Company Three, *When This Is Over* (2021); Polly Creed, *Humane* (2021); Miranda Rose Hall, *A Play for the Living In A Time of Extinction* (2021); Nina Segal, *ASSEMBLY* (2021); Sounds Like Chaos, *DIRT* (2021); METIS, *Love Letters to a Liveable Future* (2021); Coney, *Overgrown* (2022); Tim Crouch, *Superglue* (2022); Dave Davidson, *That Is Not Who I Am* (2022); David Finnigan, *You're Safe Til 2024: Deep History* (2022); Dawn King, *The Trials* (2022); Lucy Kirkwood, *Rapture* (2022); Pigfoot, *Hot In Here* (2022); Mojisola Adebayo, *Family Tree* (2023); Coney, *The Future for Beginners* (2023); Shybairn, *Burnout* (2023); Selina Thompson, *TWINE* (2023) and numerous productions among the 250 internationally-produced activist short plays of the biannual Climate Change Theatre Action festival (2015, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2023). This list was compiled by Milo Harries.

<sup>59</sup> These particular questions emerged from the conversations at the Donmar. There are a range of practitioners and theorists who similarly have drawn together questions for undertaking climate dramaturgical processes, which usefully overlap with and expand on those indicated in this report. These include 'Some Green Questions to Ask a Play' (May 2007, 105), 'Leave No Trace Dramaturgy' (Trencsényi, 2022), and *Dis-Anthropocentric Performance: The CLIMATE LENS PLAYBOOK*' (Chaudhuri, with members of CLIMATE LENS, 2023).

- Does the play focus around a hero narrative? If so, what is the identity of that hero? Do they conform to traditional and dominant ideas of what a hero looks like, i.e. are they Caucasian, male, non-disabled, and heteronormative? Do they come from an elite class? If so, is the perception of them as a hero investigated by the work? (Cf. *Force Majeure*; *Henry V*)
- Does the work show humans as isolated individuals disconnected from their environment, and who are seen as exceptional solely due to their individual qualities? Does it confirm this view of human agency, or does it critique it? (Cf. *A Doll's House, Part 2*, *Marys Seacole*)
- Or does the work show other kinds of interactions and relationships between peoples' social environment, their experiences and their capabilities? (Cf. *Marys Seacole*, *The Band's Visit*)
- Does the play recognise complicity in colonial damage? What extra care might be needed for cast and creative team in dealing with traumatic histories that are not fully recognised in the wider culture? (Cf. *Silence*)
- Are there sensitivities or blind spots in the writing (or in the likely attitude of audiences) that might require dramaturgical intervention to ensure audiences are asked to question any harmful stereotypes? (Cf. *Henry V*, *Watch On the Rhine*, *Silence*)

As a result of the workshop on 'New Work and Commissioning' (June 2022), a detailed document was produced in close collaboration with Clare Slater, then Head of New Work at the Donmar, outlining Climate Dramaturgy's ethos for commissioning, including recommendations for writers' consideration. Provocative rather than prescriptive, this document is designed to enable a conversation about the dramaturgy of a play and what that structure tacitly infers about views of personhood and power, and how that in turn relates to representations of the human in ways that either have driven the practices that led to the climate crisis – or might be able to offer alternatives. See appendix 1, 'Provocations for Commissioning and Writing Plays in the Context of Climate Crisis' for more detailed guidelines.

## Climate Dramaturgy & Publicity

Two important aspects of Climate Dramaturgy are transparency and how to tell a good (alternative) story. Transparency matters in part to model how it is possible to care and work towards environmental goals without being 'perfect', and in part because it demonstrates to freelance artists and technicians that their contribution is part of a long-term strategy for shifting theatre's relationship with the world around it. As previously indicated, multiple conversations with freelance practitioners indicate that they have very little sense of the ways the theatres that they are working for take environmental responsibility across the organisation, and therefore this is a particularly crucial area for engagement.

Theatres also have an **important cultural leadership role** through how they shape the story of their environmental care, connecting the specific practice of reducing environmental harm through

ingenious use of resources, with bigger ethical questions about how and **why it matters to attend to climate crisis** – and to the **power structures and histories** that have brought the earth we live on to the brink of collapse. Climate Dramaturgy can help audiences connect with climate crisis as a context that invites us to think about colonialism, care, gender, power, norms of behaviour and how we treat one another and the natural world. The **Donmar's Climate Conversations Podcast** explores these themes, and the series (released in August 2022) has proved popular on the Donmar's social media channels, its popularity proving to have significant longevity, particularly with international audiences. The *Climate Conversations* series was initially conceived of as a series of live events connected with each show. However, the decision to make it a podcast, featuring directors and activists discussing the theme of each play in relation to climate crisis, brought the issues to a much wider audience over a much longer period of time; overall, in the six months following their release, **the Climate Conversations were the most played content across all the Donmar's online channels**. This also demonstrates the way that linking time-specific work (the theatre production) to the climate crisis can also be an opportunity for theatres to produce 'evergreen' content (i.e. which remains relevant and of interest to audiences beyond the dates of the production itself).

A less successful intervention was publishing programme essays exploring the themes of the play and how they connected to climate crisis. It was hard to measure impact on audiences (apart from anecdotal commendations), and the first essay drew some unhelpful 'culture wars' style right wing social media fire, about whether printing programmes was 'environmentally friendly'. The social media outrage missed the point of the research: to broaden the conversation around climate crisis beyond localised specific actions. It was a reminder that there is a long way to go in challenging and changing the cultural narrative – and that discussion of climate-related issues has to be framed carefully, in terms of how they are contextualized. For example, programme essays near the front of the programme that looked directly at the play's themes apparently received more negative attention than those that were placed near the back, juxtaposed with other information on the Donmar's participation practices. However, it should be noted that information-gathering and analysis of audience response was outside the parameters of the research and therefore only 'loud' and antagonistic responses came to the Donmar's attention.

Longer term, **questions about how the creative team are approaching climate care now form a standard part of the 'behind-the-scenes' offer**, as part of the Donmar's overall publicity strategy. Inviting creatives working at the Donmar to discuss environmental care, alongside more online content that tackles the themes and questions in-depth, **embeds attention to the climate crisis as a standard part of a contemporary theatre's offer**.

The Climate Conversations Podcast episodes covered the following areas:

- **Climate Conversation One:** *FORCE MAJEURE and Masculine Mastery* (24 January 2022) with Michael Longhurst (Director of Force Majeure and Artistic Director of the Donmar Warehouse) and Farhana Yamin (International Climate Lawyer). This podcast explored relationships to control and power, in the context of climate crisis and particularly climate negotiations.

- **Climate Conversation Two:** *HENRY V and Imperialism* (2 March 2022) with Max Webster (Director of Henry V, Associate Director, Donmar), Professor Farah Karim-Cooper (Co-Director of Education at Shakespeare's Globe and Professor of Shakespeare Studies at King's College London) and Indra Adnan (Founder and Co-initiator of The Alternative Global, socio-psychotherapist, writer and consultant on soft power). This podcast looked at the relationship between colonialism, Empire, nationalism and the climate crisis.
- **Climate Conversation Three:** *MARYS SEACOLE and Taking Care* (23 May 2022) with Nadia Latif (Director of Marys Seacole, Theatre Maker and Film Director), Courttia Newland (Author and screenwriter) and Indra Adnan (The Alternative Global). This podcast explored racial inequity in relation to care practices, and exploring the process and practice of taking care in making theatre.
- **Climate Conversation Four:** *A DOLL'S HOUSE, PART 2 and The Place of Complexity* (13 July 2022) with James Macdonald (Director of A Doll's House, Part 2), Simmone Ahiaku (Campaigner, geographer, writer and educator) and Farhana Yamin (International Climate Lawyer). This podcast explored polarization and the place of debate in contemporary discourse on climate.
- **Climate Conversation Five:** *THE TRIALS and Better Futures* (16 August 2022) with Dawn King (Writer of The Trials, award-winning theatre, film, TV, VR and radio writer), Anjali Raman-Middleton (A-level student, environmental activist and co-founder of Choked Up) and Tolmeia Gregory (Climate justice activist and digital artist, host of the podcast IDEALISTICALLY). This podcast explored youth activism in relation to the climate crisis.

The podcast can be found here: <https://www.donmarwarehouse.com/climate-conversations/>

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## Part III: Response-Ability

### Overview

Because any theatre's attempt to transform their practice is taking place in a culture – political and social – **that remains in denial with regard to the urgency and scale of transformation required** (IPCC Report 2022), it requires constant vigilance to ensure that practices remain consistent with principles. The challenges to creating a theatre sector that is resilient, climate aware and future-orientated, are multiple. The challenges identified by practitioners at the Donmar tally with those indicated in other research contexts, for example, 'not knowing how to start implementing changes'; 'a lack of unified thinking across the sector' and 'contradictory information available'; the need for 'a clear value statement', 'public recognition of values' and 'practical knowledge from case studies exchange'; 'feeling alone', 'time constraints' and 'lack of funding or budget' (Mock 2023, 13).

This section on 'challenges' describes some of the further obstacles, both cultural and practical, that the sector faces, along with 'antidotes', which outline ways of facing and responding to those challenges. The method of identifying '**antidotes alongside challenges**' is owed to the antiracist guidance open-source document '*White Supremacy Culture in Organizations*' which **demonstrates the power of offering pathways** forward as well as identifying obstacles and harmful practices.<sup>60</sup> A key finding of the research has been that such challenges need to be articulated and acknowledged with the whole team making the work, and **the responsibility for finding workarounds must be held collaboratively**. These are largely framed from the perspective of what institutions can do to facilitate artists to change how they work. However, they have different kinds of relevance for many practitioners in different capacities.

### Challenges and Antidotes

**Challenge:** No one can go it alone. Departmental silos make acting to minimise environmental harm complicated – as does the hierarchical structure used to deliver many shows, which inhibits collaboration.

**Antidote:** Ensure that there's a 'cascade of permission' – that each practitioner is enabling those who answer to them to value climate-conscious decision-making. Work out where collaborative energy can make a difference and foster that potential in whatever way you can.

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<sup>60</sup> <https://coco-net.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Coco-WhiteSupCulture-ENG4.pdf> [accessed 22 June 2023]. I owe my awareness of this document to theatre director and anti-racism practitioner, Nicole Brewer.



**Challenge:** The fact that the impact of any given action is uncertain and hard to measure – particularly when attempting to minimise harm that takes place out of sight, a long way away, or is about future impact.

**Antidote:** Encourage everyone to 'do what they can'; use the tracker, move away from judgement while enabling documentation, accountability and the chance to anticipate and share solutions to challenges. Acknowledge that no one can have the perfect solution – recognise and celebrate the attempt.



**Challenge:** The model of theatre as currently practised is part of a wider 'just-in-time' culture that thrives on rapid, last-minute decision-making – and derives much energy and creativity from this.

**Antidote:** Create longer lead-in wherever possible with clearly scheduled deadlines to meet – which include environmental assessment. Hold a climate contingency budget for last minute decisions, rather than preventing them or implying that there has to be artistic compromise.



**Challenge:** There is little visibility of the action that is being taken by theatres at an organisational level, such that freelancers feel they are being asked to do the theatre's environmental work for them, whilst theatre institutions feel that their hands are tied because the freelancers making productions are not leading on the issue.

**Antidote:** Ensure transparency and fluency on climate issues among staff. Make sure that everyone, internally and externally, is aware of the steps the theatre is taking to lower its overall carbon footprint. Be transparent about where making quick change is difficult due to costs/pre-existing relationships and contracts and share long-term plans for change.



**Challenge:** Careful use of resources is seen to be (and sometimes praised as) a 'fringe'-like attitude, allied with low budgets and compromise due to the conditions of early career work in UK theatres. This can mean climate care is neither aspirational for younger theatre makers, nor habitual for more established colleagues whose practice has shifted as their work has become larger scale, and whose time is at a premium due to heavy workloads. These challenges are interlinked, and they combine to create a feeling of inertia or incapacity or overwhelm.

**Antidote:** Focus on artisanship, craft and the ingenuity required for that particular production. Don't cut production budgets and claim it is about provoking environmental care: a lower budget often means greater environmental harm due to the origins of the cheaper products purchased. Celebrate practitioners' attention to environmental concerns in your marketing (as for example the Donmar's

popular 'behind the scenes' videos for its productions, which now include a question about environmental care).



**Challenge:** Ethical consumption is more expensive in the short term.

**Antidote:** Consume less rather than cause more damage by buying unethical products. The Donmar now aims to source its hospitality locally and sustainably – but provides less, on the basis that 'when it's gone, it's gone'. Activate a climate contingency line in the budget, to enable ethical consumption, when there's no other way to minimise environmental harm.



**Challenge:** There's often an element of class prejudice in how the demand for environmental care is framed, making it a competition between individuals, when in fact for many the cost of ethical consumption places it out of reach – equally this fosters the patronising and classist assumption that working class people are not interested in engaging with their environment.

**Antidote:** Focus on changing systems and habits rather than judging individuals, on enabling shifts in practices that are possible in your own context, and on being clear about any privilege you may have in being able to engage in these questions. Ensure that the professional context people are working within commits to ethical consumption in the workplace rather than passing the buck by simply exhorting workers to change their personal habits. Notice when claims about exclusive practice, on behalf of disenfranchised groups (often other than the person making the claim), are used as an argument against taking care of environmental concerns: a tactic that has now been adopted by the extreme right wing in the USA, where there is a shift away from climate denialism to the insistence that transforming the fossil fuel system to end climate destruction is 'unaffordable' for 'ordinary people' (Daggett 2017). Become well-informed about the way that environmental harm impacts the poorest and most disenfranchised most heavily in virtually every city and rural area across the globe – including London. Ensure that environmental care practices are inclusive and led by those who are most connected to/affected by the issues at stake. Allow people autonomy in how they approach care for the environment – their version of it may be different to yours.



**Challenge:** Faced with an ecological context as pressing, severe and existentially threatening as outlined in the section 'The Climate Context' demands an equally decisive and swift large-scale response. The enormous gap between the small scale of actions that are within our immediate grasp, and perceivable outcomes for the environment, globally, often leads to a sense of powerlessness and disenfranchisement.

**Antidote:** Change of mindset, away from 'solutions' with visible effects, to recognising that all action is valuable. Recognise that your actions are not necessarily about offering a solution ('save the planet')

but work to minimise the degree to which your professional practice impacts harmfully on others and the environment.

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## Coda

In the coming years and decades, the way that we make theatre in a resource-intensive, throwaway process, will start to feel to audiences either that theatre is participating in the cultural gaslighting that implies that the culture's current practices can continue ad infinitum, or that there is a contradiction between how the work is made and the views expressed on stage. In an era of climate breakdown, neither fully serves our audiences, now or for the future. What this report shows, I hope, is that there is **a moral imperative to green our stages**, to increase theatres' resilience in the face of highly challenging and uncertain climate futures, whilst **rehearsing for a culture of climate justice** that we would like to bring into being instead. Further, I hope it is clear that in order to achieve the levels of resource efficiency needed for theatre to have an impact as a sector, **theatre institutions must treat climate care not only as a logistical question, but as a question of artistic process**, involving attention to artistic methods, working practices and collaboration across disciplines/departments. However, **creating a theatre fit for responding to the climate crisis** a matter only of artistic engagement: for freelance artists be able to attend to climate care, the theatre must have in place **robust processes to facilitate their work**. Similarly, theatres cannot only focus on what goes on stage: sharing what the theatre is doing to mitigate climate harm, as a civic institution, is **crucial to asking artists to take on the additional thought and labour** required to reduce environmental harm in the making of productions.

In aggregate, if the approach outlined in this report for facilitating climate care were refined and adapted for the specific contexts of all the theatres in the UK, there would be **a transformation in working practice**, which would produce **a positive feedback loop** as care for resources and people and attention to contexts beyond the obvious, became established norms. Allowing time for the fostering of artistic mastery in terms of attention to context, rather than relying on systems of control, can also have a positive effect on the work produced – allowing us as a sector **to serve our audiences better** as they are increasingly impacted by climate crisis and the attendant global and local disruptions to food supplies, transport infrastructure and political upheaval. The work is, however, ongoing and can never be complete. Rather than 'mastering' climate care, **part of Climate Dramaturgy is maintaining constant vigilance** and accepting that the work is never 'done'. The challenges are multiple – and are growing. Ultimately, **making theatre in the context of climate crisis is not about 'do it yourself' but 'do it with others'**: involving collaboration across departments and disciplines and a willingness to **improvise, share and try again**.

## Working with a Climate Dramaturg

As the research process developed, the idea of the role of 'climate dramaturg' came into focus. As a researcher, although I was often introduced as 'climate dramaturg', my role was largely observational and exploratory, as the practice of embedded research that has led to this report was a process of exploring institutional and artistic mindset, rather than delivering the role that is outlined below (the recommendations for which have come about as the result of the research). To be clear, Climate Dramaturgy is a practice that is distributed among all practitioners working on a show – or indeed a theatre's longer-term strategy. It does not necessarily need an additional person to take on that role. However, because Climate Dramaturgy is, in practice, enacted through multiple small acts of attention to context, conversation and collaboration, it was found that it can be helpful for someone to take on a specific role. By embodying Climate Dramaturgy in an artist, as both facilitator and provocateur, it enables a reimagining of the theatre production system, keeping conversations about climate care active and generative, across both the organisation and individual productions.

### What does a 'climate dramaturg' do?

The climate dramaturg is a role that is more expansive than dramaturgy in relation to a single production and must operate at an institutional level to embed operational change in a way that fosters creative practice. In the first instance, the role can enable a theatre to recognise, communicate and amplify what it is already doing, joining the dots between the different kinds of care practice it is already undertaking – both environmental and social. The role supports shifts in practice that will enable a theatre to hold itself accountable at an institutional level for its approach to environmental responsibility. The role will depend heavily on the needs, capacities and values of those making the work – but aims to provoke, inspire and enable attention to care beyond the immediate, bringing together short-term goals with long-term ethical practice.

A climate dramaturg's role is therefore to connect a production's work to the broader work of the theatre and to themes and concerns that demand attention due to the climate crisis. Where a dramaturg might work specifically on the relation between the internal structure of a play and its expression in performance, a climate dramaturg looks beyond the immediate to work with producers, directors, designers and in-house staff, to enable the production to speak to the times we are in and enact the ethical values of the artists and producers involved.

The climate dramaturg can mediate between the production and the building, enabling both to achieve long term goals of climate care whilst maintaining creative balance between the demands of the present context, and climate careful ambitions. Further, the climate dramaturg can apply the learning from any challenges in which climate care seems to contradict creativity, to see how the theatre's systems can better support their alignment.

## Areas of engagement for a Climate Dramaturg:

- Conversations about programming with the artistic director and programming team, including:
  - looking at themes and their relevance to our contemporary cultural situation
  - encouraging diversification of narratives away from the 'hero'
  - encouraging context-specific diversity in representation in creative teams and casting
- Working with commissioners to support writers in their engagement with questions provoked by climate crisis – in relation to form as well as content. See appendix 1: 'Provocations for Commissioning and Writing Plays in the Context of Climate Crisis'
- Supporting the theatre to develop holistic time-rich systems of production that encourage creative collaboration.
- Working pre-production with director and possibly designer and writer on how the work can speak to the issues that the climate crisis embodies. These include but are not limited to: grief and loss, structures of power, racial inequity, the legacy of colonialism, existential uncertainty, fear of the future.
- Supporting theatre staff to develop an ethics of care in process – set-up of rehearsal structure / transparency around hours worked / scheduling that allows for research and reflection.
- Liaising with designer / production manager over the tracking and production of environmental assessments – and keeping the conversation live in productions meetings.
- Checking in regularly with creatives throughout the production, to anticipate crunch points.
- Working with audience engagement departments to amplify thematic and/or political questions arising in the work.
- Acting as a (gentle/firm) provocateur to invite practitioners to think harder, further, deeper about the implications/consequences of their creative decisions both terms of representation and the practical effects of their decision in terms of environmental impact.
- Working with the artistic director to identify key points where inspiration and permission to attend to climate / environmental questions will empower artists and provoke creativity.
- Work with producer / general manager / head of production to:
  - update policies to embed climate care
  - develop a values document to share as point of contact
  - embed the ask around climate care in early-stage conversations and offer letters
  - ensure the production process is scheduled in ways that mean artists can meet expectations around climate care
  - foster collaboration that bridges the divide between freelancers and management

## Changes undertaken at the Donmar Warehouse

As part of the research process, the following alterations to the Donmar's standard production process have been made, in order to foster the conditions for climate careful practice. The spotlight of Climate Dramaturgy has enabled the Donmar to reduce its environmental impact across all departments, through multiple small-scale actions. The focus has been on providing facilitation to enable practitioners to further their own climate careful aims, whilst also putting in place a robust system of expectation, to encourage, and also to raise awareness, that environmental care is to be taken seriously in practice:

- Development of the Environmental Production Tracker to log the actions of every production
- Development of the 'green debrief' evaluation meeting, and the 'design concept meeting', and exploring how to embed these in standard production timelines and processes
- Re-establishment of the Environmental Action Group and updating of mission and purpose. The EAG has incorporated the recommendations made in the 4 workshops held with staff and freelancers as part of the Climate Dramaturgy research process. The EAG now meets monthly, and reports to the Donmar's Board quarterly. Representatives of every department sit on the committee, which looks after the Environmental Action Plan, detailing aims and achievements across the whole of the Donmar's operations
- Embedding of the findings from the Environment and Ethics workshop in the Environmental Action Plan
- New documentation of the Donmar's available materials/resources for sharing with incoming freelancers
- Creating, updating and editing relevant documents to share information about environmental responsibility, including:
  - updating the environmental policy
  - contributing to the environmental responsibility section of the new 'values' document for creatives that goes out with the offer letter
  - altering the parameters meeting information to reflect environmental care, both for materials and people
  - updating the 'Welcome Pack: Environmental Responsibility'
  - developing the agenda and evaluation process for the Green Debrief
- Creation of a 'Green Glossary' as an appendix (4) to the Donmar's Environmental Policy
- Commitment to energy resilience through investigating solar panels and other methods of achieving self-sufficiency in energy

- Offering all staff a 'green' pension option, and letting them know that they are able to switch onto it
- Installing smart meters at Earlham Street (theatre) and Dryden Street (offices)
- Creating a garden committee to maintain the Donmar's garden spaces
- Creating new procedures for saving energy across the organisation
- Creation of a climate contingency budget to ensure that any last-minute production needs can maintain ethical environmental standards
- Developing a management process for the afterlife of materials, that anticipates what kinds of recycling will be needed for what materials, if they can't be given away/reused
- Reduction of consumables across the theatre's production practices (e.g. in Lighting, Sound and Rigging)
- Introducing digital screens/projections to replace printed posters; research into and implementation of digital marketing strategies that reduce digital carbon footprint
- Creation of a local costume store for Donmar productions, for costume supervisors to source from
- Creation of digital ticketing, and an investigation of digital programmes (which resulted in the decision to continue with a limited run of printed programmes)
- Creation of a new props store, on site, primarily for rehearsal props, to enable re-use and reduce repeat buys of single-use items
- Equipment for marketing/video production bought, to reduce transport for repeated hires, plus creation of a system of recyclable batteries for camera kit

Further actions that are underway:

- Checking and recording ethical credentials of all suppliers – database currently being updated
- Embedding environmental responsibility in all job descriptions
- Sharing questions around climate crisis as a context with writers at commissioning stage
- Doing a building audit on energy use (using the Theatre Green Book tool)
- Eliminating single use plastics
- Putting in place measures to enable attention to use of consumables (sign out sheet, etc.) in office and theatre
- Working on establishing trusted routes for reuse and recycling of all materials leaving the theatre, from coffee grounds to large pieces of set

- Aiming for *Theatre Green Book* baseline and intermediary standard productions in future seasons, using the Environmental Production Tracker to manage and record progress
- Developing a Climate Care Introduction Pack, provided to practitioners when they start work on a production at the Donmar, comprising:
  - an explainer
  - the infographic *Climate Conversations: The Show Must Go On*
  - the 'Green Glossary'
  - a regularly updated 'know-how' one-pager with tips for climate care derived from previous productions

## Appendices

This report aims not only to describe and recommend ways of undertaking climate careful practice, it also seeks to offer models/frameworks for adoption and adaptation to new contexts. Appendices 10-12 offer further detail on considerations that arose in the consultation workshops. Appendices 5-8 offer templates/examples for adaptation. Appendices 2 and 3 are infographics that represent the concepts discussed in this report.

### Contents:

- 1) Provocations for Commissioning and Writing Plays in the Context of Climate Crisis
- 2) Infographic: *Climate Conversations: Everyone Has a Role to Play*
- 3) Infographic: *Climate Conversations: The Show Must Go On*
- 4) A Green Glossary
- 5) Sample Designer Offer Letter: Environmental Responsibility Statement
- 6) Sample Parameters Meeting: Environmental Responsibility Introduction
- 7) Sample Welcome Pack: Environmental Responsibility
- 8) Sample Climate Care Explainer
- 9) Environmental Production Tracker - User Guide
- 10) Notes from the Donmar Climate Conversations Design Workshop: Concept and Collaboration (3 March 2022)
- 11) Notes from the Donmar New Work and Commissioning Workshop (21 April 2022)
- 12) Notes from the Donmar Ethics and Environment Workshop (30 June 2022)
- 13) Climate Conversations Podcast Listener Statistics (September 2022)
- 14) Programme Essay: *Force Majeure*
- 15) Programme Essay: *Henry V*
- 16) Programme Essay: *Marys Seacole*
- 17) Programme Essay: *The Trials*

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