

Climate Change and Theatre – What have We Learned?

This is a digest of a four hour Colloquium held at the premises of Artsadmin in London on March 21 2013. The event was convened by TippingPoint, to bring together as many people as possible who have direct creative experience of exploring climate change in a theatrical setting (see the appendix for information on attendance). The intention was partly for those present to learn from each other, partly to share some of the hard-won experience and insight developed by those present, in the hope that it will help others working in the field.

Chaired by Chris Campbell of London's Royal Court Theatre, the afternoon was a free-ranging discussion, covering a wide range of perspectives. All had been invited to read Bradon Smith's paper *Staging Climate Change: the Last Ten Years* as a preparation. The points below are presented under a number of (overlapping) headings, and are drawn verbatim, with modest editing, from the transcript. In some cases they exactly reflect the chronology of the conversation, in other cases the structuring under headings doesn't permit this.

There are a number of references to work in the text, some of it written or directed by those present, including [My Last Car](#) *, a touring show written by Sarah Woods and directed by Alan Dix; [3rd Ring Out](#) *, also touring, directed by Zoe Svendsen and Simon Daw, and [Contingency Plan](#), a diptych of plays by Steve Waters. Simon Beaufoy wrote the only film considered, [Burn Up](#), broadcast by the BBC in June 2008.

Other work was not personally represented (though not for want of trying by TippingPoint). This includes [Greenland](#), a production by Britain's National Theatre in February/March 2011, which did not enjoy critical success. It was roughly contemporaneous to [The Heretic](#), which took a sceptical line on climate science, and was generally better received as drama. At the Royal Court, a year or more later [10 Billion](#) was an unusually dark reflection by scientist Stephen Emmott on the impossibility of the situation we are in. Another production referenced is [As The World Tipped](#) *, a large scale outdoor spectacle, touring for its third season in 2013.

No attempt has been made to present a consensus on the many subjects that were explored. The comments below are better seen simply as the reflections of a thoughtful group of people, highly motivated by the subject, and challenged by the particular problems that it faces in theatrical work.

Inevitably these reflect the time and place at which this Colloquium was held. We very much hope, however, that there are general conclusions and observations that will be of much wider value.

We would like to express sincere thanks to the UCL Environment Institute for supporting this work.

Peter Gingold
Director, TippingPoint
July 21 2013

* TippingPoint Commission

Purpose

We need to liberate ourselves from the idea that every time we make a piece of work it has to radically alter the direction of society. If we do that we have more freedom to make great work.

Content and process – sustainable work, and work about. How to make our artform anything other than voracious of energy and resources?

Is it the purpose of this work to persuade people who are not persuaded, or is that a waste of time? Are they un-persuadable, and if so, why?

Having discussed persuasion with social psychologists, you can't change behaviour at all easily. There is a massive cultural bias in how we behave. The method we use in theatre, the conscious sense of something, is minimal compared with the big cultural picture in which live, and your perception of what other people do. People do the thing that they think others will do rather than the thing they say they are going to do.

I'm pretty pessimistic, I don't think you can alter people's behaviour from an evening in the theatre. That is not to say that I don't wish you could. But that is also not to say that you can't do something else unconsciously that is much more powerful, and which the audience is not aware of. I saw *10 billion*, and my instinct is that through sheer fear it is attempting to galvanise you. I don't necessarily think it does, nor do I know if it is an accurate description of what it is trying to do, but that was my impression. But it is just as likely to paralyse you.

The finale of *As The World Tipped* is 'Demand Change Now'. Of whom, and in what context? The Agency question needs to be answered – if that is the purpose of the work, what on earth do we want people to do?

I believe that this work is less about changing how people behave, and more about getting people to think about it.

If we are trying to tell consumers what they should consume we are not going to get anywhere. What we should be trying to do is enable people to think of themselves less as consumers and more as citizens – consumption is about your rights, citizenship is about your responsibilities, and for that reason I think we should talk about participation, which I think is really important.

A lot of these things boil down to: 'Don't send your audience away feeling inadequate and helpless'; this is not quite the same thing as 'just hope'. You can be confused, and uncertain and doubtful, and possibly unhappy, but those can be really positive things.

We want to protect our families, and one of the things we want to protect them from is fear. So we don't want to project an apocalyptic vision to the next generation. We need to find ways of dealing with it that don't say 'we are all going to die'.

Unless we ARE. *10 Billion* argues that the actions that are needed politically cannot take place, and we are doomed. By the time of its production in Avignon he was saying It is too late, we are all screwed, and it is your fault. The logical extension of this thinking seems to be to create a benign dictatorship – no political system exists that can do what is needed.

You don't persuade, you embody, it is a bit like parenting. We have all been changed by climate change. What defeats us is the scale of change that is required and the tempo at which that has to occur. Hectoring apocalyptic like *10 billion* are a complete waste of time. The gap between our current experience and whatever nightmarish vision is being offered is so apparent that it short-circuits the imagination.

What *3rd Ring Out* did was take us very carefully, patiently and wittily through tiny little examples of change that add up to, not apocalypse but crisis.

Audiences

My Last Car is deliberately not a didactic piece – it is a piece about our love affair with the car. Quite a lot of 'car people' came; none of them seemed to deny that humans are causing climate change. They all knew, somewhere inside. The 4x4 people seemed to know that they are riding around on dinosaurs. 100% of the people at Coventry transport museum asked 'do you think you will be driving around in the same sort of car in 15 or 20 years' time?' answered 'No'. To 'What will you be doing?' the answer was 'Don't know'.

We discovered that a lot of people who are interested in the environment don't go and see theatre.

Interesting that following several of the pieces of work we have talked about people have come out wanting to talk about climate change, but also that there is a resistance to talking about it when it is laid out as a *topic*. Early on we were knocking on closed doors – why would anyone be interested in this, is it a subject that theatre can handle? We were delighted to have completely proved them wrong, but we were so surprised that it was a subject that people wanted to stay around and talk about. When you are able to tell a story, and people are able to connect it to their lives, then they want to share their connectedness, which is something brilliant that the theatre can do. I don't think it is different groups of people that don't want to talk about it when it is a media topic, and that do want to talk about it when they have had the experience that we provided.

Hasn't the audience already taken action? They have engaged fully with what you have presented – that is the contract, in a way.

Trust audiences to make the journey. Don't over-stuff them with information. Also use the resource that the audience represents, even if they are sitting in a darkened room.

The Role of Theatre

Do we believe in anthropogenic climate change? Of course, we do, but what does that mean? The questions we ask artistically are precisely about not being able to quickly answer that. I know no more on my skin, feeling it physically, intuitively, about the truth of these matters than I did years ago when I wrote my piece. That is partly what makes it interesting to write about.

Is theatre a good way to persuade anyone of anything? It might be almost the worst way of doing so. People who have tried to persuade people of things have generally been most successful when they have failed.

It is frustrating to have a behavioural model for judging a piece about climate change, as though you could add up the number of people who start recycling as a result of it. What there IS is a space of the imagination – who do we imagine we are, who do we want to be, how do we relate to other people, how do we conceptualise the environment in which we live? Those seem to be territories for art that are really important. You can see theatre as a way of rehearsing a way of being for the time that you encounter it, but the really important thing is that you don't have to commit to it. Opening up that space to play can allow you to come back to the real world with more options and ways to respond to it.

Climate change now changes the way we think. What I want to see is something that will help me think about this in more intelligent ways than I can do by myself. I want to leave the theatre with arguments raging. I want to see the sort of debate that is going on in society reflected on the stage. That is where the great difficulty arises – didactic theatre doesn't work.

A few years ago I sat with some theatre directors, and asked them if they would ever consider commissioning a play about climate change. The answer was no, they wouldn't, it would have to come from the writers.

The best play I saw recently about climate change was *Galileo* at the RSC. Galileo says 'I drop the ball, nobody can say it does not fall. The truth is irresistible'. Well, not everyone seems to agree.

I wonder if it is easier to write about apocalyptic events from a historical perspective. Looking back on it, even when it was as hideous as the holocaust, there were stories of survivors, there was a message of hope. When we are looking forward we are positing the future, and we have to do two things, invent a forward history, and invent the lives tracking through that history, and that is very hard.

Doing things in a small way is really key. There is a tendency to get seduced by the magnitude of the issue and think '****! We have to do it all, now now now.' (which is possibly what happened with *Greenland*). This quote from Mike Hulme (from his important book *Why we disagree about climate change*) is relevant: 'Climate is an idea that can be approached using either physical or cultural pathways, but it is best understood as an idea that binds together the physical world and our cultural imagination. The idea of climate originated deep in the human past, and is one

around which our notions of Nature, Culture and History have formed and reformed. Climate is therefore not just an abstract idea, but also a somewhat elusive one; a bit like 'goodness' – easier to recognise than to define'. If things can be bound into stories, that are linked, specifically to climate in the dramatist's mind, and they are recognised by the audience, then gradually over time that is going to have a greater impact than going hell for leather.

What this amounts to is a process of gradual, *psychological* climate change. That is very powerful – that is what the arts **can** do; for example, being gay is now fine, and the arts had a lot to do with bringing that about.

Art in general and theatre in particular is really bad at dealing with things that are not human. We used to be able to do it, because we had Gods, who could personify these things. Theatre for young people has been more successful at this, because you could have a princess-frozen-in-the-forest type scenario. It is more difficult for us to dramatize a conflict between human and non-human agencies, which is why so much of the play-writing about climate change is writing about people and their responses to climate change.

My play was about that boundary; climate change is quite exciting; as James Lovelock said, it is going to be like the war generation, facing limits; I can see the appeal of the Stephen Emmott (*10 Billion*) approach.

You could say that theatre is the strangest place to address questions of nature, because it is the most artificial place in the world. Everything is meant, everything is significant, nothing is accidental. That contradiction is very interesting, and it leads us back to Naturalism; where did that come from? Northern Europe – Ibsen, Chekhov, they were from countries where it wasn't possible to displace the notion of nature, it was a determining factor in existence. A lot of theatre exists as it were in a weightless world, and the thing about climate change is that it reminds us we are not in a weightless world. It brings the body back into theatre.

Why hasn't climate change had as much attention as say the Iraq war? One answer: it's not the same sort of issue; I can imagine myself having argued for both intervention and non-intervention in Iraq; the climate 'debate' seems to be much more of a sort of howling at each other, with no exchange. It isn't a debate.

Greenland felt like Official Art: 4 people in a room, here is your task, off you go. That is a disastrous approach for this issue; if it hasn't been through some sort of sensibility, if it doesn't come out from inside you, it will feel even more artificial than if you read an article about it.

I recently saw Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*, and towards the end of that play the characters talk about the weather 'taking sides'.

There is something inherent in dramatic structure, of wanting to see the effects of the changes that we make, in the timescale of the drama, which is very difficult in the emergency of climate change. Also it is teleological, it is about progress, it is about change and development, and other ideas that stretch back through human history,

and that drama is at the centre of, which somehow fall apart a little when you are faced with climate change.

In terms of theatre you need a layered, complex story, not 'you are good, you are bad'. Also, we don't have to be activists when you try and address it – I think that is really important. If everything is perceived as being activist, just by dint of being about climate change, that is really problematic, because it doesn't allow us to test things out, it doesn't allow us to go to difficult places where we are not sure how we are going to deal with it.

As writers, if you say you want to do a play or production 'about' climate change – surely the story comes first, whatever that might be. In theatre I have never had to explain or pitch what I am trying to do. In film or TV you would probably have something like that – hey, it's a climate thing, but really it's about dogs [laughter].

Themes

Why would I trust the scientific community more than the other community of people who seem to know relatively little about it, and are resisting it? In a sense the doubt is what is interesting. The doubt about the future is artistically irresistible.

I find it difficult to think about this in abstract terms; easier to think what is happening here and now – in Northern Nigeria, in Brazil, in the Caribbean, with more storms. There are a lot of stories to tap into that, making it very real for me.

One of the themes that connects this with everyday stuff like headlines on bankers' bonuses is social inequality, the way people experience life very differently in different parts of the world. It also maps onto people's access to resources and opportunities. It will still be possible, quite far into the future, to 'buy your way out' of problems of climate change depending on where you are in the world, and your access to resources.

There was also a good deal of apocalyptic material in *Burn Up*. The science and the eventual consequences of a warming world make shocking – and crucially for a writer – dramatic material. I'm now not sure that helps. It's a very difficult fact for a writer to accept that the drama of man-made climate change – the deserts, the tornadoes, the migrations, droughts and salting seas – are in fact the wrong approach, but that's the conclusion I've come to. Apocalypse fatigue has set in. We are witnessing the hurricanes and tornadoes that the characters in *Burn Up* predicted, literally and exactly, a tornado hitting New York. And yet, little seems to unlock a growing ennui to the terror. A global recession certainly came at the wrong time. But there is more to it than that. I think it is a combination of overload and helplessness that comes with Armageddon scenarios. They somehow lack that crucial element of the human spirit – hope.

Our perception of resources is the underlying problem. The issue of inequality is a deep one, of which climate change is a manifestation. These broader social issues have similar solutions – but we are going in exactly the opposite direction.

There is also the paradoxical fact that in some sense the lack of economic development in some parts of the world is a ‘good thing’. We can’t all live the Manhattan lifestyle, and there is this awful difficulty of persuading people that they don’t want the things that we have had and decided that they don’t work. That is really, really tough.

A lot of my work focuses on values. Even though we might work on climate change, we are not there just because of that, we are there because of global justice, because of the values that we carry, and we assume people share those values; for example, look at these poor polar bears, and others say ‘we don’t give a **** about them’. So we need to focus on values, perhaps drawing on the approach of Common Cause. When we do this we see the connections that need making.

It is really important that a play about climate change has some sort of context in people’s lived experience.

Greenland was a very conscious, explicit attempt to be the *Enron* of climate change.

You can’t take the conversation between the global south and the global north out of this, it is a huge part of it. A friend went back to Trinidad after 6 years, and said, everyone is driving 4x4s. Anyone who has a reasonable standard of living wants to enjoy the same things as North America and Europe; that conversation is a very real conversation that is very complex and difficult, including history, racism, feminism, etc.

In the process of making a judgement about climate change and the actions of others you also have to make a judgement about your own actions. With *My Last Car*, the challenge was working out how to have a conversation about that without it becoming bogged down in guilt, because that doesn’t help, in the end. We all have to accept the fact that we are complicit in this. It is your own judgement as to whether you are acting responsibly in the world, and we all have variable standards as to what that means. This is also why the *Enron* model cannot possibly work, because in *Enron* there is a villain, there is a bad man committing a crime, and who is the villain here?

How can we possibly tell other people how to behave when progress has been our watchword for so long, and we are coming to the end of the period of thinking of progress in the way that we have done for such a long time?

Hypocrisy comes into this, and perceptions of hypocrisy, and the thing to do is not be afraid of it. We are all hypocritical to some extent and in some way or other. As soon as you say ‘we shouldn’t have a car’ you start to produce an ‘us and them’ when we are in it together (dreadful phrase) which denies something about the human universality of it.

I prefer to call this subject environmental politics, and one of the reasons I am strangely optimistic is the way it connects to every-day activity; that is why you can have scales of engagement, it makes things matter that are just beyond the radar. It can only be addressed outside conventional forms of politics, it can only be addressed in new forms of politics, of engagement and connection with people; there is something about the everyday romanticism of climate change politics which is exciting to me. The way that is linked to global justice, to our relationship to the biosphere, our relationship to science, all those things can be derived from this very quotidian subject, which is very ethically enlarging.

We can examine hopelessness.

Laments – some of the greatest art has come out of that.

There is something about aesthetics. A despoliated, barren landscape feels wrong, people don't feel comfortable there. Creating a community orchard which has a tree growing apples that have disappeared from the locality feels like a gesture that is against ugliness.

Socialist politics was somehow immune to the sort of lyricism implicit in this, very wedded to a certain version of materialism. But aesthetics is at the centre of green politics. The food we eat, the types of shop we buy things in, they don't feature in conventional political discourse, it is a useful lever to bring in to so many questions about quality, art, taste, which are generally seen as matters of private decision-making.

Climate sceptics seem to have hijacked the language of religion, the language of belief. It is very driven by the American survivalist culture. Which is interesting, isn't it? When you think about survivalists, they ought to be green.

Has anyone dramatized a story about the incredible sums of money that are spent on discrediting climate science?

It is often remarked that the greenest thing you can do is not have children, and I don't know of any works of art which are preparing us to make that gigantic shift in our thinking. It would be very doable in terms of drama, but I don't see anyone rushing to do it. [Though see *Lungs* by Duncan McMillan] It crops up in a lot of new plays, but the couple always decide it is worth doing after all.

Timing

Nothing has got clearer, although the landscape has changed in the last few years. All of the events that we were projecting for 2033 (in *3rd Ring Out*) have happened. It feels as though we are in a different landscape now, and people do argue about whether storms and floods are related to climate change. Various environmental changes like bees, erratic weather, now seem more tangible than in 2008.

If there is I haven't found it yet (by Nick Payne) was produced in NY; it is about an academic just about to publish a book about climate change, who has been so obsessed that he has missed his daughter growing very depressed; two thirds of the way through the play she runs a bath, gets in the bath, and attempts suicide. For the first part of the run there was a palpable resistance from audiences to a play that was trying to tell them something; then, about a third of the way through the run, Hurricane Sandy hit; after that, it seemed that audiences completely changed how they were taking it in. The theatre started doing Q&A sessions after each performance, and some kind of discussion after the play became as important as the production just seen.

Time and Place; public opinion, politics, etc, are all changing. Something that would have been appropriate 6 years ago will not be now.

Form

A lot of the attraction of community-based work is that it allows you to open up a conversation with people about the future that wouldn't otherwise take place.

We did workshops with 13 and 14 year olds [for 3rd Ring Out] and they said it was great. 'We get told to recycle but we don't get told what might happen.' For the first time someone has actually talked to them about the future. It was important that it wasn't linked to an apocalypse.

When we were making *Miss Julie* [at London's Young Vic] we wanted to make it completely off-grid. But we realised that we couldn't make it without using any energy, so we decided to be as ambitious as we could be in each area. Looking back on it I think that because it was about their work, everyone in the organisation had to think about what they do in a different way. Because it was just one production, it didn't have the sense of 'Oh God, we have got to do this for ever', so it felt much more playful, people could engage with it; the marketing department said, great, let's go paper-free, and they learned from that. The production department talked to artists about – does that really need to come from that far, or do we really need to use these materials? And having done it once, in a way that was unthreatening, the organisation has absorbed a lot of new ways of working; I can now see it in people who are new to the organisation, and are worried about doing things in a sustainable way, as opposed to those who have done it, and have confidence. The panic goes just by trying it. The fact that the play was set in 1940s austerity Britain was helpful, but we were very quiet about what we were doing in public. We only shared the process with the audience at the point when they had booked a ticket.

Comedy is very good at being reactionary – we are getting worked up about nothing, there is hypocrisy abroad, and so on. And we all desperately need to have a laugh. I thought *The Heretic* was a fine play; I can't resist it as a piece of dramaturgy. Comedy is a very powerful and necessary tool but it tends to gravitate in a particular

direction. Towards representing a conspiracy of the well-meaning, Guardianistas, supported by professional scientists; we have already got to something that seems quite consensual, and there is already a backlash, and comic characters who are fatuous greens, that have very quickly become stock figures that Ben Jonson would recognise.

Scientists, when writing about the future, present a spectrum of possibilities, and are very reluctant to commit to any one of them. In theatre we have to pick a particular scenario; and that is where the comedy comes from, because it is easy to lambast. This is also where the science/drama thing gets very complicated. How do you make the comedy not a cynical, or split along traditional right wing/woolly left lines?

The absurdity of our current situation – the fact that people know they are behaving in ways that are damaging but simultaneously carry on doing it – there has to be powerful potential. Compulsive behaviour is the definition of a farce, for example.

Much of the talk here has been about theatre which happens in dark rooms and buildings; over the last 20 years theatre has moved out. Many of us are working with communities, and relationally. How can theatre support the transition that is needed? How can we create embodied art that can be taken by people and lived with? How do we enable other people to bring themselves and their stories to the work?

[Discussing a multi-site opera project] it has turned out to be quite difficult to make an opera shared between three locations (London, Cape Town, Rio) to happen. However, it is still much easier to create an opera than bring about the large scale political collaboration that is needed for effective action; an opera modelling the large scale collaboration that is needed would in itself be interesting. It would also be a metaphor for people communicating across the globe; the action of doing that, the act of ambition, is itself very interesting.

Opera is not a good medium for communicating ideas; but singing 'I'm losing my home and I don't know where I am going', is easier than saying it. What can be sung that can't be said, what can be said that can't be sung?

Maybe the answer is a musical. NO! If the answer is a musical, there is something wrong with the question [much laughter]. The trouble with musicals is that they always deliver the same message: everything is going to be fine; just be a little bit more American and your life will be better. Every time anyone tries to write a musical on a serious topic the result is a catastrophe!

There is something about an opera – the collective voice – many people singing the same is really powerful, plus you can move between the individual and the mass.

[Discussing an outdoor musical performance – *Unplugged – Winning the Clay*] The full richness of this community piece could be found not just in the relatively short performances (25 minutes), but in the process, the collaboration, devising and sharing of ideas.

As *The World Tipped* is large scale, epic, and also highly visual. [I thought it was] successful and really good fun. Partly set in climate negotiations, including apocalyptic imagery, it had many of the hallmarks of what we have been critical of, but those slightly bitter pills were sweetened by a very dramatic visual form. Maybe given all the drama some of the elements that in a darkened room piece of theatre you would be a lot more attentive to and critical of are more acceptable.

Having brought in the question of spectacle versus argument, and the lyric versus the spoken one, is this about the role of thinking vs feeling? I don't think it is spectacle vs argument, I think it's about simplicity vs complexity, and whether spectacle is a medium which naturally reduces issues to a form in which they are already quite obvious.

I'm fearful that climate change art will become ideological, with an ideology that pre-existed artwork, informs the artwork, structures it; of course people will resist that, because they resist anything that is ideological in an informed and clear way; they don't sense the cracks in it, it is like public art. Is 'demand change now' ideological? Yes, it is also platitudinous. It suggests a unity of thought and a coherent point of view.

We DO need to think about form – the form addresses the subject as much as the content.

There is an argument that the best theatre is some people in a room telling you a story, and you don't need any technology to do that. But then when you hear about spectacle, or have a Skype conversation, there is a profound sense of what it means to be alive now. I constantly felt the conflict of the ethics of participating in creating a more sustainable future and the politics of the piece of work we were making, where we used lots of technology. How to balance the need to build ecologically sustainable spaces but also to make work that speaks in terms of contemporary culture?

What about Bach? There is something interesting about those great liturgical pieces of music, that have that structure of participation, standing back, performance, drama, choral engagement; they are complex pieces musically and emotionally, and they are also a way of addressing the non-human. The choral theme, it is hymnal, it is a way of addressing something which is not just another person; it is numinous .

I think the systems that are at play can very easily be addressed through design, music and sound, you can show patterns that way, which can connect the concrete with the less tangible.

Thinking vs feeling: we've talked about the thinking brain, the facts, the science, as not really having done it; cognitive science tells us that most of our decisions are made emotionally, before the rational brain comes in and tidies them up a bit, and we perceive ourselves as having those thoughts. That is very interesting in relation to the work we are talking about; dance can be what touches somebody, through kinaesthetic empathy, watching another human being move can move you at an

emotional level, with no words; when I think of music it is a similar sort of thing, something else is happening.

The increasingly widely known psychological truth is important, that we decide things for reasons that we don't realise, we have instinctive beliefs in something that no amount of information will change. Take climate change deniers – how can theatre, how can art, unlock that?

We work a lot with what is different between us: I think this, you don't agree with me, I am going to make you. We do that on stage: our Western story form is about conflict, which is why we tell stories of apocalypse where a few of us survive, and the rest of us can be shot at and killed. We put ourselves into these weird places in order to tell stories in a certain form; though those forms are not perhaps doing the jobs that we need them to do. If you use Western story structures to tell stories that don't fit that structure, then you are really on to a loser. You end up with something like *The Heretic*, which fits that structure much better. When we look at how we work more emotionally and intuitively with people, we need to find the forms that would fit that.

It takes a long time for the ideas to creep up on you. The short sharp hit is never going to be more than a gesture; it is a long journey to get even to the story, the audience has to be very patient.

What about the spiritual and religious? There is something about different ways of appealing, that are non-didactic, that are an invitation; there is the custodian of the planet idea. And old stories can carry new meaning for us – Shakespeare, there is a lot of climate change in Shakespeare, and nowadays when those plays are done those lines zing out at you.

A lot of what I am working on at the moment is about re-engaging in what has been called community theatre, which has for a long time been quite a dead model. There are new community forms that we are beginning to see. I work in the theatre, taking science and experts, lots of comedy and disruption, with a community audience.

Community work is about plurality of voice, about artists as space-holders, focusing and enabling the creation of a narrative that is well held. I have found that people create powerful narratives, ones that we would hope to hear. Through plurality we learn, and there is also something about modelling. They also allow connectedness.

You need to give the audience some kind of agency, to counter the sense of panic and helplessness in front of the situation, even if it is within the show, even if afterwards it is hard to know what might happen,

In community work you still have to have the professional artist to make sure that the work is of the quality that you would hope it to be – participation doesn't counter that.

Don't we all exist at different scales of activity? Participatory work is not what my writing is about, but it all has a place. I hold on to a representational model of story-telling and art.

Doom and Gloom

My experience is that if you put that sort of negative experience in people's faces they become helpless and hopeless – what can you do? We need to bring it down to the human – how can we usefully connect with this? If we can tell stories about the future, and then we see glimpses of that future coming along, we recognise them, we can respond in a hopeful way and can connect with them. It is making that connection that is important, and some scientists recognise this: science hasn't done it, the media hasn't done it. We can't respond usefully to 'facts', no matter the integrity with which they are conveyed.

The comparison with nuclear war is very instructive. A lot of the writing about that was, particularly in comedy, 'we are all going to die'; really scary. The comparison feels very rich. Climate change is very different; the nuclear issue was – 'shall we do this?' No. This issue has a different shape. It is about what we have to give up, what we stand to lose. We have to change. Recognising that difference of shape might be helpful. Also, the nuclear thing was so hair-trigger.

The greatest problem with regard to this conversation is that the nuclear apocalypse didn't happen – and as a result a lot of people think 'that is what happens'. In every generation there is a terrifying existential threat, it never happens.

It's a very difficult fact for a writer to accept that the drama of man-made climate change – the deserts, the tornadoes, the migrations, droughts and salting seas – are in fact the wrong approach, but that's the conclusion I've come to. Apocalypse fatigue has set in. We are witnessing the hurricanes and tornadoes that drama predicted; literally and exactly, a tornado hitting New York. And yet, little seems to unlock a growing ennui to the terror. A global recession certainly came at the wrong time. But there is more to it than that. I think it is a combination of overload and helplessness that comes with Armageddon scenarios. They somehow lack that crucial element of the human spirit – hope.

Politics

If you do any reading or thinking about this, overwhelmingly, it splits into a left-right thing. Doesn't it? Which must mean it is not a scientific argument. Mustn't it? Something that theatre definitely could engage with is what are the deep processes that lead person A to believe something that person B thinks is insane, and contrary to actual scientific 'fact'.

When I inspect my environmentalism it isn't necessarily from the left; there is an element which is my sense of my own locality; and there is a degree to which Stephen Emmott's invocation of authoritarianism makes some sense. Also, if you see green-ness as an extension of anti-industrialism then there is a conservative tradition there.

Also, there are sustainability movements in Nigeria and South Africa which are about resources being available to local people rather than multinationals – it's about how the resources might be used or not used.

Why can't you have green libertarians? Libertarianism is 'my land, my stuff, big government get out of here', so why doesn't 'my atmosphere' work? Because clearly it doesn't, all the evidence says so. One answer – because there have to be rules about emissions, regulation to prevent emissions. Yes, that is one reading of it, but it still feels as though it should be possible to say 'this is my planet' – Stewart Brand's line.

It is difficult to imagine major left-wing playwrights like David Hare or David Edgar writing about this, it doesn't seem to be in their ken, which I find interesting. There hasn't been a big Edward Bond play about climate change. Why doesn't it fit? Could it be that those socialist playwrights have not been attentive to nature? Brecht is an example of a thoroughgoing materialist for whom nature is something to be manipulated and controlled, but so much of our work in English theatre is social comedy, socially connected and rooted; the way to get a quick laugh is to make a joke about Sweden or something. There is this other not very urbane and rather provincial world out there.

The science that climate change draws my attention to is incredibly gripping and fascinating, it reveals this great apparatus of knowledge, and endeavour, and interconnectedness, and it also re-animates your relationship to plays. I don't think there is much more that one can do than reconnect people to where they are, and to make them care about what is happening to flora and fauna. The big campaigning organisations in the UK like the RSPB and National Trust all have millions of members, quite a lot of whom probably vote for UKIP [a minor right-wing British political party]. For me it all comes back to environmentalism, more so than it is about climate change. If you can awaken those passions and that sort of care, then other things could follow.

Personal perspectives and experiences

What is interesting is how thinking opens up. I went through a transition of thinking only about climate change, to realising that I knew nothing about climate change, to thinking that everything was about climate change, and then having to retreat from the research because it was all too horrible; all that push and pull.

Is it possible for work that is more overtly about climate change to shift the mind-set so that we can see other work as being about social and political issues that really broadens the culture? Every time I think and talk about climate change it is a bit like being alive, now.

I really struggle with this. I didn't fly for years, but then something happened that was irresistible and.... It's really interesting, the manifesto of trying to live a green life – when you say to someone, 'you shouldn't have a car', they say 'of course I'm allowed to have a car'. It can't be about reduction at every level of your life; if you

want to eat burgers, you need to find another area of your life where you can recalibrate things. That is an idea that I think is sometimes lost – the idea that we can all, as individuals, control what we consume.

Writing is necessary to think things through (on the terms of the given writer). You can't be told to do it, sent off to do it, you have to find it in your heart to read those books, talk to those people, visit those places, and then write your work – that's your journey. This will lead to an idiosyncratic outcome – the idiosyncrasy is part of the power of the experience.

So often the conversation with the scientists is 'go off and say this, convey that' and you are thinking, 'well, as soon as you tell me something I am already turning it into something else'.

I just want to come away thinking 'God that was good'.

Whether it is participatory or a conventional play, the audience have to be actively having to imagine something, and the trouble with 'Demand Change Now' is that it requires no act of the imagination, you are not asking someone to empathise; I wouldn't begin something with an issue, I just wouldn't go near it. That's not to say that it couldn't emerge, but I imagine that it would emerge naturally – me trying to tame it, or censor it, or shape it, would be the death of it.

Maybe it is all about making work about stuff that bugs you, and maybe the only discussion to have with other artists is 'why isn't this bugging you?' I have found that the more I make work for an audience of myself the more accessible it has become; the more you try to imagine how an audience might respond the more wishy-washy it gets. If you really try to get to the heart of something that is bothering you, you might be able to touch a nerve in someone else.

Things need time to emerge; *Greenland* took less than a year – it is hardly surprising that it was problematic.

This is a really difficult topic to write about, why do I bother? I think it is really important to understand precisely why one thinks climate change is important, why it matters to me. And this is difficult, because there are so many answers, hundreds and hundreds of them. Is it conservatism, is it lifestyles, is it consumption, is it resources, pollution, loss of biodiversity, global equity? It needs an honesty about which bits of it matter to you. It won't be the same for all of us here. For me, no question, part of it is that it is a big, difficult, intellectually challenging and interesting topic. But I think it would be helpful to spend more time on the other reasons.

When I was responsible for a piece on climate change, it was the first time that I felt that I had done something that really mattered. An artistic interest of mine had something to do with this enormous subject.

We have to really fight to get our teeth round this. It is a massive challenge for artists. Even if it is a complete self-deception, it feels like at last it is something more than merely keeping busy.

Appendix – biographies of those present

Simon Beaufoy is a screenwriter and film-maker. His first screenplay, *The Full Monty* went on to be nominated for four Academy Awards as well as a BAFTA for Best Film in 1997. His other screenplays include the Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Miss Pettigrew Lives for a Day*, *127 Hours*, the climate change drama *Burn Up*, and most recently an adaptation of the novel, *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*. His adaptation of *The Full Monty* for the stage has just started touring Britain. He is currently adapting the epic poem *Sharp Teeth* and writing an original screenplay, *First We Take Manhattan*.

Hannah Bird creates and leads projects with cultural and creative partners. She is particularly passionate about the art of exploration, and the synergy and overlap between art and science. Between 2007 and 2010, she worked at Cape Farewell managing expeditions to the High Arctic and the Peruvian Andes, visiting both areas with diverse groups of artists, scientists and collaborators facilitating knowledge exchange, developing ideas and ultimately producing artworks and events. She is currently working with What Next?, Southbank Centre, University of the Arts, London and TippingPoint.

Robert Butler is online editor of *The Economist's Intelligent Life* magazine, co-editor of "Culture and Climate Change", blogger about culture and climate change at *Ashdenizen*, former "Going Green" columnist at *Intelligent Life* and former drama critic of the *Independent on Sunday*. Twitter: @ashdenizen

Chris Campbell joined the Royal Court as Literary Manager in April 2010. He was previously Deputy Literary Manager of the National Theatre for six years where he chaired the National's reading panel before joining the Literary Department and taking a leading role in the discovery and promotion of new work, with a particular interest in getting new plays onto big stages. He has translated plays by Philippe Minyana, David Lescot, Rémi de Vos, Adeline Picault, Frédéric Blanchette, Catherine-Anne Toupin and Fabrice Roger-Lacan for the National, Almeida, Donmar, Traverse and Young Vic among others.

Alan Dix is a theatre director, producer and cultural consultant. His company, 509 Arts, works with many public sector bodies and arts organisations and in 2011 was awarded a TippingPoint Commission for *My Last Car*, a project developed with Shanaz Gulzar and Sarah Woods which looks at our complicated relationship with the automobile in times of climate change and peak oil. *My Last Car* was co-produced with Warwick Arts Centre and went on to play rural venues in North Yorkshire. Alan is currently working with Derby Theatre and the Southbank Centre and is planning a re-tour of *My Last Car* in 2014.

Jonathan Dove is the winner of the 2008 Ivor Novello Award for classical music, he takes opera to new places and reaches new audiences. In 2008 he joined the Cape Farewell voyage to the Arctic, and has subsequently been developing opera projects relating to climate change: *The Walk from the Garden* (Salisbury Festival 2012), *The Day After* (Holland Opera) and a community opera about climate migrants (World Stages London).

Peter Gingold founded [TippingPoint](#) and is Director. He has had a very varied career, including spending a number of years working in low cost housing in developing countries, founding an electronics business in the silicon fen, and working as a management consultant. He became Chief Executive of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra in 2001, and led the artistic side of Liverpool's successful bid to become European Capital of Culture in 2008. He is a Trustee of the meditation centre Gaia House, and the homeless charity Emmaus Greenwich.

David Harradine is co-founder and artistic director of Fevered Sleep. As well as making work with Fevered Sleep, he works independently through collaboration with artists, designers and performance makers. From 2005 – 2008 he was Research Fellow in Performance at the University of Winchester, where he investigated the links between light, photography and performance. From 2009 to 2011 he was a Leverhulme Artist in Residence in the School of Art, Design & Media at the University of Brighton. He is currently Visiting Research Fellow at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama. David is a winner of the Jerwood Young Directors Award, and has a doctorate in Performance Studies from the University of London.

Wallace Heim researches, writes and teaches on performance and nature and she does this in many places. Her doctorate is in philosophy, on ethics, rhetoric and social practice art. She is co-editor of the Ashden Directory and taught on the MA Arts and Ecology when it was at Dartington College of Arts. She is a research fellow with the Social Sculpture Research Unit at Oxford Brookes University and a trustee for PLATFORM. She co-curated the conference/event BETWEEN NATURE; co-edited Nature Performed. Environment, Culture and Performance. she has also worked as a set designer in theatre and television/film.

Robert Hull is the former Head of the Environment Policy Division in European Commission and Director in the European Economic and Social Committee, Brussels. He is a consultant working on sustainability issues with a special interest in theatre and the environment as well as a consultant dramaturg. Board member of Theatre Sans Frontieres and Queens Hall Arts, TippingPoint; Council member Newcastle University.

Vicky Long is an artistic collaborator on The Edge with Transport Theatre, a project which explores environmental change in the Indian Sundarban and along the Kent coast. Vicky is also a collaborator on The Planet & Stuff with Tonic Theatre and produced Unplugged - Winning the Clay, an outdoor musical event and Tipping Point Commission performed at the Eden Project in 2011. Vicky was Managing Editor of the publication, Culture & Climate Change: Recordings. She was Project Director and then a Producer at Cape Farewell from 2005-2011.

Frederica Notley is the general Manager/Producer at the Young Vic mainly producing shows in their Maria theatre. She is also a board member of ITC. Previous roles include Executive Director of Pop-Up Theatre/Equal Voice, Head of Marketing & Development at the Gardner Arts Centre Brighton and general management of Red Shift and Orchard Theatre companies. Her first theatre job was coordinator of Winchester Hat Fair, Festival of Street theatre.

Nick Payne is a playwright who won the prestigious George Devine Award in 2009 with his play *If There Is I Haven't Found It Yet*. This was produced at the Bush Theatre in October 2009, directed by Josie Rourke and starring Rafe Spall. Nick studied at the Central School of Speech and Drama and the University of York. He made his debut at the Royal Court theatre in September 2010 with his comedy *Wanderlust*. In January 2012, Nick's latest play, *Constellations*, opened at the Royal Court Upstairs. *Constellations* transferred to the West End in November 2012. It received universally glowing reviews and won the Evening Standard Best Play Award and was nominated for an Olivier Award for Best New Play.

Bryan Savery is Executive Director of Rico Arts, Executive Producer for The Red Room Theatre and Film company and consultant for "What Next?". He is a Director of the Unicorn Theatre, Advisor - Teatron Theatre, Paris, Fellow of the RSA and a Freeman of the City of London. As a freelance Producer/Executive has held roles at Somerset House, LOCOG, Arts Council England, The Young Vic, Soho Theatre, Punchdrunk, and Ballet Boz.

Bradon Smith is currently the Newby Fellow at the Institute for Advanced Studies in the Humanities at the University of Edinburgh, where he is researching the representation of climate change in contemporary literature. His doctoral research looked at contemporary popular science writing and representations of science in contemporary British fiction and drama. From 2011-2012 he was the Research Fellow for Climate Change at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

Zoë Svendsen as Director of [METIS](#), Zoë makes interdisciplinary projects utilising small spaces to create immersive experiences, exploring contemporary political subjects such as capitalism and poker; climate change; virtual reality. Directing/dramaturgy projects include [3rd Ring Out](#), which received a TippingPoint Commission Award and The Gate/Dance Umbrella commission, *The Difference Engine*. As dramaturg she works with the Young Vic (*The Changeling*) and the National Theatre (*Edward II*). Zoë is also Associate Artist with Company of Angels, script reader for the National Theatre, and honorary research fellow at Birkbeck's Centre for Contemporary Theatre.

Steve Waters is a playwright whose plays include ['The Contingency Plan'](#) (2009), a double-bill of plays about climate change that played to great acclaim at the Bush theatre London and have subsequently been adapted for radio (Radio 3) and currently for film. His other plays include *'Ignorance/Jahiliyyah'* (Hampstead 2012), *'Little Platoons'* (The Bush, 2011) and *'World Music'* (Sheffield Crucible/Donmar Warehouse 2003/4). His plays for radio include *'The Air Gap'* (October 2012, Radio 4). He has also written *'The Secret Life of Plays'* (2010); all his books and plays are published by Nick Hern Books. Steve has blogged for ['The Guardian'](#) and is a lecturer in creative writing at UEA.

Sarah Woods is a playwright and activist, often working with climate change and global justice. She has written for the BBC, RSC, Hampstead, Soho and Birmingham Rep, among others. She is currently writing *WATCH ME* (BBC Radio 4), about empathy and the science of mirror neurons, and *THE EMPATHY ROADSHOW* (People United). Her performance piece *THE ROADLESS TRIP*, about systemic change and future narratives, is being produced by ArtsAdmin.