

# HIGH TIDE

The image features a coastal landscape under a clear blue sky. In the distance, a dark, cylindrical lighthouse stands on a grassy dune. The foreground is dominated by a dense field of green bushes with numerous bright yellow flowers. A large, curved yellow shape overlaps the bottom of the image, serving as a background for the title text.

**Climate Dramaturgy: How To Guide**  

---

**For Producers**



## HOW TO: INTRODUCING CLIMATE DRAMATURGY

---

### making theatre in times of climate crisis: for producers

*'Before an idea is fully formulated, it is often a subversion of the current state of affairs by a playful or indignant creative.'*

- Ann Light

Climate Dramaturgy is a **holistic approach** to theatre-making and artistic practice. Dramaturgy is about how all the parts of a work relate to one another; Climate dramaturgy is about recognising the **climate crisis is a context** for everything we do – **artistically, practically, relationally**. That is, if you're making theatre now, your work relates to social, environmental, planetary transformation. Climate dramaturgy encompasses **attention to story, process and/or materials**: it brings together many existing and desired ways of making theatre—not all of which are overtly 'about' ecology. **Great art of the climate era** will interrogate the essentials of theatre: **why, who for, how?**

We live in times of struggle. Climate dramaturgy rejects an either/or mentality of winning or losing, success or failure. It is about approach: **attending with care to our relationships** (creative, technical, administrative) as well as with the living world around us. **There are no quick fixes** but many ways of **aligning your values with your creative practice**.

Climate dramaturgy is therefore not a 'to do' list. It's an approach to making theatre that recognizes the **environmental and social** to be **fundamentally connected**. It is not only about 'greening' theatre, but also about moving towards climate justice: recognising the **extractive, transactive systems of colonial capitalism** that carried us here. By attending to climate crisis, its causes, impacts, and implications, we **more fully inhabit the real world** and become better equipped as artists to make art that truly grapples with **what it means to be alive now**.

*'We've been reproducing patterns that are damaging, if we repeat them, we will be entrenching them... We need to embody a new culture to emerge it.'*

- Isabel Cavelier Adarve

## WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY 'SUSTAINABILITY'?

---

- ◇ 'Sustainability' implies we can carry on as we were. But as UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in 2021: 'Our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to the brink. We face a stark choice: Either we stop it — or it stops us.'
- ◇ **GET REAL**. What are we sustaining? Who is the status quo working for?
- ◇ **FLIP IT**: If theatre isn't climate-conscious (in form, or working process, or

materials, or story) is it in fact **ignoring the reality** we are living through?

- ◇ How can we **imagine alternatives**? – both in how we work, and what work we make?
- ◇ ‘sustainable’= something that can keep going; therefore it is future-oriented. Ask what environmental and/or social harm is also being done now, and what the **antidotes** might be.
- ◇ Instead of ‘is it sustainable?’ ask ‘is it environmentally responsible?’ **‘What impact does this have on climate crisis?’**
- ◇ How can climate crisis make us **attend to the times** we are living through, more fully, more deeply?

## **If you can do ONE THING:**

---

**Start a conversation** with your collaborators about climate: love, longing, care and fear. We are living in the contradictions and complicities of contemporary society – **high carbon culture** – making it difficult to effect real change alone.

**Recognise the challenges:** where do you site the struggle? What are the antidotes? How are your collaborators feeling about it? **What matters to each of them? What will energise their engagement?** What obstacles do they feel they face? The first step towards shifting our relationship to the living world around us, is **naming, not berating**.

High carbon culture is **full of contradictions** that make little sense: flights being cheaper than trains, cheap fast food and unaffordable housing, recycling bins and exporting plastic waste to low-income countries, claiming ‘green’ policies whilst subsidising/investing in fossil fuels. By **making these contradictions visible** (and not waiting for them to be solved), we can **start to imagine alternative climate cultures**.

The first step is **starting that conversation:** about what is challenging, what is possible, and what you long for. Keeping this conversation alive **throughout the creative process** will **deepen your collaboration, and your artistic decisions** and will permit change (whether small or large, it all matters). If you work in theatre, you already know **that meaningful action is never achieved alone**.

*‘The crisis is everywhere, massive massive massive. And we are small. But emergence notices the way small actions and connections create complex systems, patterns that become ecosystems and societies.’*

– **Adrienne Maree Brown**

## If you can do MORE THAN ONE THING:

---

The NEXT PAGES share 3 entwined threads for manifesting climate dramaturgy in your work. Whatever you decide, explore these approaches:

- ◇ **YES/AND.** Use the improv strategy of ‘yes/and’: celebrate what people are doing and build on it.
- ◇ **Acknowledge challenges: embrace antidotes;** take challenges as a chance to sharpen your ideas. When proposing antidotes recognise struggles and adapt as needed.
- ◇ **Recognise interdependence:** foster theatre as an ecosystem of mutual support, in active resistance to pressures to isolate and compete.

These strategies will start to enable you to shape a culture that becomes the norm. By acting **as though** the world you’re aiming for were already in existence you begin to shift artistic culture towards climate care – and ultimately, **climate justice**.

*‘Tomorrow belongs to those who can hear it coming’*

- David Bowie

## CLIMATE DRAMATURGY FOR PRODUCERS

---

As a producer you can work on creating the **optimal conditions** for artistic creativity and climate care to be **mutually reinforcing** – how you bring the team together **sets the stage** for what is possible.

A **deep engagement with climate justice** can make theatre – both process and performance – more meaningful, more connected. It can **enhance the sense of mutual commitment** and general wellbeing among your team if aims, values and actions are expressed and aligned.

Climate dramaturgy has three entwined threads which, braided together, will mutually enable each other: the stories you stage; the materials you use; and the working process.

### 1. How we make work TOGETHER

- ◇ **Appoint the team early** to allow climate-careful imagining to lead the process.
- ◇ Adjust budgets to spend on people’s **ingenuity** rather than single-use resources.
- ◇ Start conversations early with director/team about rehearsal conditions; **ask questions, notice assumptions, consider needs** – including/especially working hours.

- ◇ Recognise internalised capitalism: **rushing, productivity pressure, extractivist attitude** to yourself and others: the infrastructure is designed to make each of us in our roles both enact this and pass it on to others – it requires vigilance and continuous care to work against it.
- ◇ Recognise people & planet are **interconnected**. Inequitable power relations contribute historically and in the present to climate crisis: and climate instability impacts the marginalised most.
- ◇ Consider the '**antidotes**' to oppressive, competitive workplace culture (Dismantling Racism, RadHR, OpenHire). Embed and **regularly repeat training** in anti-racism, anti-ableism, decolonisation.
- ◇ Dismantle the binary between the 'creative' and 'technical' teams: for climate careful artistic practice, everyone has to be **creative and practical**, and willing to listen: how you set up meetings, and describe roles, will contribute to this.
- ◇ Hold conversations with funders in relation to **environmental and social impact**: be in the know – holding the conversation even when there's no immediate outcome still adds **pressure for change**.
- ◇ Consider how you use financial power? What can you change? E.g., suppliers you work with; **banking; pensions; energy**.
- ◇ Audit how you currently **engage with freelancers**. What further support you could offer? Familiarise yourself with Freelancers Make Theatre Work. E.g., do you pay freelancers to attend interviews? Can you?
- ◇ Look into companies trialling a 4 day/30hr week
- ◇ Who is the audience? **Is access to the work inclusive** (financially, socially, in relation to disability)?
- ◇ **Attend to casting** – are you applying anti-racist principles that ensure the cast reflects actual demographics whilst not erasing individuals/ being colour-blind?

## 2. How we make work MATERIALLY

- ◇ Seek balance – **allow the art to lead** the process whilst anticipating and discussing potential environmental harm – at all stages.
- ◇ Be **conscious of timelines**: contract people early to build in time for sourcing/building/gathering. See Climate Dramaturgy infographic '**The Show Must Go On**' for key points.
- ◇ Put any **expected engagement** with environmental responsibility in all contracts with creative and technical teams.
- ◇ Use the **Theatre Green Book** for detailed information on how to minimise resource use, including examples of others' approaches. Follow Green Book standards and the Ecotage framework to enable you to learn from others and **share best practice**.

- ◇ **Find out** what all partners are already doing and share this with the whole team: model and **celebrate previous successes**
- ◇ Hold discussions about what will happen to the materials you are using **after the end of the show** – at the **beginning** of the process.
- ◇ Introduce creative and technical teams working on different shows across a season/s to each other to **foster a culture of re-use and sharing**.
- ◇ Encourage creative teams to **'design out'** waste by facilitating **'design concept'** and/or **'green card'** meetings to share early-stage creative ideas and attend to potential environmental harms.
- ◇ Use HighTide's 'Production Decision Impact Tracker' to track all decisions, enabling you **to anticipate** and avoid those that might lead to environmental harm
- ◇ Recognise **just-in-time consumer mentality** as a specific cultural framework we are immersed in. Investigate the **unseen consequences** of the materials or suppliers you might use.

### **3. What STORY are we telling?**

- ◇ Who and what are you **celebrating/noticing/platforming?** Be aware of cultural dominance of individualist hero narratives and what this story implies about who is valued.
- ◇ **What kind of story** about humans is the work presenting? (Individual or networked? Hierarchical or multi-relational? Collaborative or competitive?)
- ◇ **What audiences is the work speaking to?** Does it consciously work to acknowledge, shift or critique traditional power structures? How and why?
- ◇ Where is the **agency/power** located in the form and story? **Who are you casting?**
- ◇ As well as the story in the show, **what is the story around the show?** How are you **empowering audiences** in their own climate engagement through sharing your climate commitments in the making of the work?

*'The production should be as low waste with as light a carbon footprint as possible in all aspects including props, set, printing, travel etc. otherwise the staging will contradict the content'*

**- Mojisola Adebayo, 'Notes' to Family Tree, 2023**

## EXERCISE: REFLECT & RESEARCH

---

**WHAT MAKES YOU TICK:** How do the three threads of story, working together and materials relate to your current work and artistic ambitions?

You can work through the following as an exercise – yourself, with your team, and/or with the theatre(s) you are working with. Or you can take what follows as principles to apply more generally across your work:

- » **CELEBRATE** what you're currently doing
- » **FIND EXAMPLES OF WHAT** another company/show/organisation is doing that embodies one or more of climate dramaturgy's principles.
- » **DREAM up** what you would love to do, if circumstances allowed it

### ACT & SHARE

- » Talk about your celebrations and inspirations with your collaborators
- » What did you DREAM of? Chances are it already exists somewhere or has been tried out by someone.
  - ◇ Seek an existing example: **adapt it, implement it, scale it up.**
  - ◇ If you can't find it, how might you **sow the seeds** to make this happen in your context, now or in the future?

## HOW TO MOVE FORWARD: NEXT STEPS

---

**Ask yourself:** how did exploring these suggestions in relation to your practice make you feel? What excites you? Which are you already doing? Which can you embed in your practice?

Remind yourself and others that **there's no one way** of getting it 'right' – and that perfectionism is likely to get in the way of acting. Ultimately, as a practice, climate dramaturgy invites you to approach whatever you do next with the principle of **hope as a verb** rather than a noun; that is, as an **action**, not a **feeling**. **Hope as a verb** is 'about **doing not having, doing not wishing**' (Käthe Weingarten). Why? Because if hope is something you have, it can be taken away, and can quickly dissolve in despair when outcomes are not visibly achievable ('solving' climate crisis, surviving capitalism, dismantling imperialist patriarchy). But **when hope is something you do, and do with others, then no matter what happens next, no one can take that away from you:**

*'hope is a practice; it is something we do with others. A practice is a program of action undertaken, not just or even for pragmatic purposes, but as **an expression of who one wants to be and how one wants to act in the world.** [When] the present is filled with working not waiting, we scaffold ourselves to prepare for the future'*

## And finally...

- ◇ Don't let overwhelm get in your way—decide on **something you can action** in your context and do that.
- ◇ Keep holding **conversations** with your team/with peers about how you'd like to be working, and act whenever conditions allow (or act to change the conditions).
- ◇ **Return and reread** this 'how-to' document in a month or so – what else can you act on/expand (with thanks to Ecotage for the 'R's): **refuse, rethink, reimagine and regenerate?**

---

These guides – for writers, directors, dramaturgs & producers – were written by director-dramaturgs Lucy Wray and Zoë Svendsen (AHRC Climate Dramaturgy Research Fellow with High Tide 2024-25), in consultation with playwright Nicole Latchana, designers Vicki Mortimer and Paul Burgess, dramaturg Clare Slater, production manager Paul Handley, and Artistic Director of HighTide, Titiola Dawadu. The guides were further inspired by participants' engagement in many climate dramaturgy workshops 2024-26. See also: <https://metisarts.co.uk/climate-dramaturgy>

Designed for you to print (in black & white), add your own notes/highlighting, & keep.