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Sustainability in technical theatre pedagogy and practice

Kelli Zezulka 

In March 2023, third-year Technical Theatre (Production and Design) students at the University of Salford produced a festival of environmentally engaged design-led performance pieces focused on the climate crisis. All four productions were based on plays from *Lighting the Way: An Anthology of Short Plays about the Climate Crisis* (Bilodeau and Peterson 2020) and were devised and developed by the students, who were encouraged to be as sustainable as possible in both their designs and their execution. The festival was part of the first stage of our collaborative online international learning (COIL) project with Humber College in Toronto, which continued into 2024. In devising the projects, students were encouraged to consider concepts of affectivity, relationality and materiality in relation to expanded scenography (McKinney and Palmer 2017), the practice of scenography as a political act (Elnile 2020), and the ethics of ecoscenography (Beer n.d.). Using principles from the ABTT Green Book for sustainable productions (2021), all materials and equipment used in the final performances were either drawn from in-house stock or borrowed, repurposed or upcycled, encouraging further conversations around accessibility and our collective carbon footprint.

KEYWORDS: sustainability, scenography, theatre design, technical theatre

The BA (Hons) Technical Theatre (Production and Design) course at the University of Salford is now in its sixth year. Our students study a wide range of theatre production and design subjects across the three years of their degree: lighting, sound and video; set and costume design; stage and production management; and theatre history and critical analysis, with the opportunity to apply these skills and knowledge to practical project work in every term. The module I will focus on here is the third-year Advanced Design for the Theatre module, which builds on Intro to Design in the first year and Design for the Theatre in the second year.

At each stage, students are required to demonstrate skills in research, craft, presenting, and critical and reflective thinking and writing.

I have led this module since its first iteration in autumn 2020. This, of course, was complicated by challenges presented by Covid lockdowns; however, as only the module specification existed for this module, this opened up opportunities for flexibility and innovation in the way that material was presented, discussed and critiqued, and how students would be assessed. As a double-weighted, 40-credit module, it forms a substantial part of the third-year curriculum and is the culmination of students' design training (in conjunction with a trimester 2 module, Collaborative Project). Therefore, it was imperative that, as both the module and the course found their footing, sustainability and environmental concerns were considered as part of this module – not just in terms of materials but also in terms of working practice.

Background

In late 2021, our programme team was approached by Tanya Greve, program coordinator of Humber College's Theatre Production diploma. Humber College is located just outside Toronto, Canada, and the University of Salford had a pre-existing relationship with Humber College in the form of student exchanges and study abroad programmes. At the time, Humber was in the process of curriculum review, and Greve approached Salford's international department to discuss "the possibility of infusing virtual global engagement through COIL, perhaps even blended with in-person theatre production and performance when [Covid] travel protocol allows" (Summers 2021). Collaborative online international learning (COIL) "projects enable students to develop their digital technology skills through working in group collaboration activities while using different applications to engage in learning with their global peers" (Kunjuthamby, Bennett, and Zhou 2021, n.p.). At the time, with social distancing and travel restrictions still in place, this felt like an ideal way to give our students an opportunity to produce work digitally and across borders, a practice that was being developed in the professional theatre industry, with designers working remotely during lockdowns.

Additionally, the taught provision between the Salford and Humber courses complemented each other well. The Humber course focuses more on craft skills in lighting, sound, carpentry, paint, props and wardrobe, with the Salford course having a stronger design and stage/production management element. We held an initial meeting in January 2022 with representatives from both universities' international departments and teaching staff on both programmes. Following this, Greve and I arranged to meet weekly, joined by Tom Baranski, who taught carpentry and production skills at Humber until May 2023.

It was during these weekly meetings that we began discussing sustainability concerns. On 24 February 2022, the UK government announced a lifting of all domestic Covid restrictions (Faulkner 2022, n.p.), with all travel restrictions ending three weeks later on 17 March 2022 (Austin 2022, n.p.). During the pandemic, while theatre and performance venues

were closed, the UK theatre industry, led by the Production Managers Forum, rallied around an initiative called “Reset Better”. The aim was to “actively build a workplace focussing on human needs and real work-life balance” (Production Managers Forum [n.d.](#), n.p.), and a Reset Better Charter was produced, alongside some suggested principles or ways of working that would promote theatre production and design as a more sustainable career (Production Managers Forum [2021](#)). Even though restrictions had been lifted, we still wanted our COIL project to be an exercise in sustainability, as we had seen through the pandemic how working practices around travel and carbon footprints had significantly changed through necessity. These directly informed other areas of practice, such as work-life balance and mental health and burnout, explicitly addressed in the Reset Better principles.

As educational institutions, employability underpins much of our pedagogy; while we aim to teach students best practice and to prepare them for current industry practice, there is also a need for them to challenge the status quo, to be critical and analytical thinkers who can “push back” against existing practices in the industry where they are no longer ethical or sustainable. This is highlighted in the 2023 Freelancers Make Theatre Work survey, in which respondents noted that “the whole industry is broken” and it is “so endemic they do not know where to start to fix it” (Freelancers Make Theatre Work [2023](#), 62).

Material sustainability was also one of our key concerns in developing our COIL activities. The “online” element of COIL was fairly broadly defined, but early on we decided on a virtual performance element as part of our collaboration. This had a very clear sustainability impact in terms of carbon emissions and transport, and it also allowed us to embed developing digital working practices into our projects. For Salford students, I added an additional challenge: no money was to be spent on these productions. All of the materials used came from existing in-house stock or were borrowed or otherwise obtained for free (for example, from local Facebook groups or Freecycle).

Embedding sustainability in design and production

In our weekly discussions, Greve, Baranski and I aimed to embed these related areas of sustainability – material and human – in all of our students’ work on these productions. This led us to using an anthology of plays titled *Lighting the Way* (Bilodeau and Peterson [2020](#)) as the source material for our productions. This collection of forty-nine short plays about the climate crisis was born out of Climate Change Theatre Action (CCTA), “a worldwide series of readings and performances of short plays about climate change, presented to coincide with the United Nations Conference of the Parties – the annual meetings where world leaders gather to discuss strategies to reduce global carbon emissions” (Bilodeau [2020a](#), 2–3). This anthology was ideal for our COIL project: its focus on the climate crisis clearly tied into our goals around sustainability, and the inclusion of global playwrights, including those from indigenous communities, helped both groups of students think more broadly about

international and intercultural experiences of climate change. Indeed, Bilodeau writes in the anthology's introduction:

My hope is that through stories from and about various parts of the world, this book can help unite people who share a common experience, an essential feature in driving action at the scale required to address the climate crisis. [...] Finally, it is my sincere hope that this anthology will encourage more people to think and talk about the climate crisis in ways that are thought-provoking and empowering instead of demoralizing and paralyzing. May this book inspire students to find out more and get involved, professors to consider new ways of teaching about the climate crisis, and artists to lend their voices to this most pressing and dire of issues. (2020a, 6–7)

To help students think about theatre design through a more experiential lens, at Salford early teaching sessions in the Advanced Design for the Theatre module encouraged students to consider the theory and practices underpinning sustainability in design and production.

The module was timetabled for three sessions a week: a synchronous, in-person seminar; a self-directed session in one of our in-house performance spaces; and an online seminar, which was used to explore transferable skills and/or employability subjects.

Before the first week of teaching, students were asked to watch the first episode of Rachel Hann's *Beyond Scenography* YouTube series (Hann 2019), alongside reading the introduction to her book of the same name (Hann 2018). They also read the introduction to *Scenography Expanded* (McKinney and Palmer 2017) and were asked to respond to the following questions in response to both readings: What is scenography? What does scenography do? Where and how do you experience scenography? What is the difference between scenography and set design? Our discussions in class encouraged students to explore scenography outside built performance spaces, from installations to urban scenography and architecture. For the first self-directed session, students were asked to explore an urban space near to them in terms of its scenography, thinking specifically about the dramaturgical potential of the everyday.

The second week focused on the politics of scenography and how our work as scenographers is inherently political. This follows Tanja Beer's claim that "While aesthetics are important, the ecoscenographer is also concerned with the inherent ecological value of his or her design intentions. This means that the quality and success of the scenography is not only measured by its aesthetic outcome, but also by how it relates and contributes to social, environmental, economic and political systems beyond the theatre" (Beer n.d., n.p.). For this week, I asked students to watch and experience *Prayer* by scenographer Rosie Elnile, presented online by the Gate Theatre, London. *Prayer* was originally intended to be staged in person at the Gate, until the forced closure of theatres during the Covid pandemic. Given the inclusion of indigenous and global majority playwrights in *Lighting the Way*, Elnile's observations on design as a "political act" and how *Prayer* "allowed me to think about process and land in a new way" (Elnile 2020, n.p.) became key considerations for

students in thinking about ecoscenographic processes. Acknowledging their relationship with space and place and their privilege in relation to the climate crisis sparked conversation and debate in this week's seminar, as we discussed *Prayer* in relation to "the critical role that new models of scenographic practice will take in realizing carbon budgets and the need for a decolonial aesthetics that embraces space as full, ready and situated" (Hann and Elnile 2021, n.p.). We used Hann and Elnile's work, in particular, to discuss how locations and sites are political, how they are occupied, and how they are co-opted for performance; how the institutions in which we create theatre are political and how hierarchies and existing power structures relate to this; and how we project our own politics into our scenography. Using Kathleen Irwin's discussion of the agency of scenographers in relation to spectators, we explored the role of "scenographic practice as agential and the scenographer as shower, doer and agent operating within a broad social context" (2017, 141).

In an opinion piece for the *Stage* newspaper, Elnile wrote a kind of mini manifesto for changing design structures in UK theatre. She maintains that it is "impossible to imagine that we can reduce the ecological cost of theatre making without designers and visual artists being in the core creative team of a theatre building", positioning "design not as any kind of backdrop but as an active site of change" (Elnile 2020, n.p.). As a relatively new course among the Performance directorate at University of Salford, Technical Theatre has often been relegated to "support" for the performance students, providing lighting, sound and staging requirements as per the actors' or director's requests. This project, however, was the first time in this cohort's university career in which design and production took precedence, allowing students full creative control and, therefore, full responsibility for the ecological impact of their design work. This was noted in the module review comments as a particularly positive aspect: "Creating theatre has been the best part of this module but being able to do this with 100% creative freedom has really helped." This second week of the module helped cement their understanding of scenography and scenographers as agential, operating "inside a burgeoning network of possibilities, interconnectivities and co-constituted intra-actions, working to make the most of the situation in relation to what is afforded by circumstances – negotiating limitations and opportunities accordingly and doing so with an obligation of care" (Irwin 2017, 153).

With this theoretical grounding and the resulting discussions underpinning the students' thinking, they were then tasked with reading all forty-nine plays in *Lighting the Way* and choosing a selection that they wanted to explore further. We also explored the Green Book, published by the Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT). The Green Book is written in three parts: sustainable productions, sustainable buildings, and sustainable operations. At the time, only part one, sustainable productions, was fully available, though still in a beta version. However, it became one of the most useful resources in guiding design decisions (where circumstances allowed).

Project development

From this point onwards, students worked in small groups of design teams to realise four different productions, with white-card presentations in week eight of the module. The Advanced Design for the Theatre module runs in parallel with an advanced production management module, and students therefore had both design and stage or production management roles on two of the productions. The final performances were presented in March 2023, as part of a festival titled “Change and Consequence”.

The four plays that were presented across the New Adelphi building were:

- *Ignorance* (New Adelphi Theatre): An escape room with a twist, exploring the classic story of Little Red Riding Hood and how else the story could have ended.
- *YourLife Presents: Singapore Spa* (Rehearsal Room 1): A piece based around the concept of a spa day in an increasingly farcical (and warm) environment.
- *Our Beautiful World* (New Adelphi Studio): An immersive movement piece that looked at the beauty and destruction of the planet we call home.
- *It Starts with Me* (New Adelphi atrium): An audio-visual call to action, using the audience’s mobile phones.

Ignorance was based on Hassan Abdulrazzak’s play *Laila Pines for the Wolf*, which tells “the story of Little Red Riding Hood from the perspective of the maligned Wolf who is struggling to survive because of climate change” (Abdulrazzak 2020, 55). Abdulrazzak was inspired by an article by Taylor Hill describing how the grey wolves in Isle Royal National Park in Michigan have been affected by climate change, with their numbers dwindling to just nine in 2014 due to the infrequency of ice bridges forming that would allow them access to the mainland for mating purposes.

In our large rehearsal room, *YourLife Presents: Singapore Spa* was an adaptation of *Steamy Session in a Singapore Spa* by Damon Chua. Audience members were invited to a kind of sales pitch for a spa experience, in which the room became increasingly warm and uncomfortable. It is finally revealed that the spa experience being sold is the reality in equatorial countries such as Singapore, where “rising heat and humidity [are] threatening to plunge much of the world’s population into potentially lethal conditions” (Milman 2021, n.p.).

Our Beautiful World was a physical theatre piece that combined themes from three plays: *Drip* by Yolanda Bonnell, *Appealing* by Paula Cizmar, and *Canary* by Hannah Cormick. There was no dialogue, but the scenography drew on themes of beauty and destruction presented in all three plays to create an immersive installation, choreographed by student set designer Morgan Toole.

Finally, *It Starts with Me* is Chantal Bilodeau’s “battle cry [...] inspired by Greta Thunberg, Katharine Hayhoe, Wangari Maathai, Alexandria Villaseñor, Naomi Klein, Rebecca Solnit, Sheila Watt-Cloutier, Alexandria



Figure 1 *It Starts with Me*. Video design by Amy Oxley and sound design by Abbie Gresty. The set was constructed from cardboard boxes, on which were projected images of women. The full video can be seen at <https://vimeo.com/804517803>.

Ocasio-Cortez, Christiana Figueres, and countless more women who are fighting for us all” (Bilodeau 2020b, 69). This was presented in the atrium of the building, in an area with high passing footfall. Audience members scanned a QR code with their mobile phones and were assigned a “track” of female voices that then played through their phone speakers, synced with video of women speaking the lines (Figure 1).

Sustainability in pedagogy

According to Ian Garrett, director of the Centre for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, the past decade has seen an “ethical turn in sustainable technical theatre production pedagogy” (2021, 179). Not only is there a focus on material sustainability, in reusing, reducing and recycling production materials, but there is also a greater focus on sustainable practices and processes and making the industry a sustainable career choice. As Garrett succinctly notes, “Training in universities, colleges and other institutions establishes the values that guide students’ future professional practice”; however, “once working in the field, the opportunities to critically explore novel methods of production diminish” (2021, 179–180) due to the combined pressures of time, money and resources. Throughout this module, and reflected in the production process, students were encouraged to consider their own personal ethics as theatre-makers, identifying issues and interests that would drive their future professional practice. As preparation for a later taught session, they were given a selection of online portfolios from designers across disciplines and asked to think about the designer’s own ethics – what could they glean from their portfolio about the type of theatre-maker the designer is? This is something we returned to multiple times and in multiple ways throughout this module, both in preparation for the students’ own assessed portfolio and in preparation for their future professional career. As students

neared the end of their penultimate term at university, employment was very much at the forefront of their thinking, and this helped them to target their jobseeking as well as refine their own online presence.

Human sustainability

Sustainability was designed into the production process in relation to budget and materials as well as in the sustainable thinking students were asked to engage with throughout. Taxopoulou describes this as “a systemic approach that extends beyond specific projects, such that sustainability is not an add-on to certain aspects of the curriculum, but an integral component of the educational process” (2023, n.p.). There is sometimes a paradox here, with students needing to be aware of industry working practices but also being able to challenge them where appropriate: industry practice is not always best practice.

This was reflected most significantly in the production week, with students working only two-session days, for a maximum of eight hours a day, in contrast to the prevailing professional practice of thirteen-hour technical rehearsal days. This latter practice has come under some scrutiny in recent years. In the US, campaign group No More 10 Out of 12s has collated both anecdotal and statistical data to show that “this way of working is not only outdated, it’s unsustainable and unethical” (No More 10 Out of 12s [n.d.](#), n.p.). In each year of the Technical Theatre course, students also study stage and production management, and the Working Time Directive is one of the key pieces of legislation that is built into all three of these modules. Working day structures were also part of the Reset Better principles, and we aimed to follow these as closely as possible. Breaks were adhered to, production and design meetings were scheduled during class time to enable students to keep their lunch breaks free, and the production week (including performances) was limited to 9am to 5pm: “Experience tells us that tech sessions run out of steam when they hit the third session in a day. Redistribute the hours worked to promote a better quality of life and more rested workforce” (Production Managers Forum [2021](#), n.p.). This, arguably, was more easily done in a university setting, in which 5pm is the “usual” end of the working day. In contrast, it could also be argued that, mirroring industry practice, running a three-session day would be beneficial for students about to enter the professional industry, in order for them to build up the stamina required for production weeks. However, two-session days proved to be more than sufficient for realising all four productions. The time constraint forced students to work more efficiently in the time available and to pre-plan more effectively. This also allowed students to plan other outside commitments around their production work, helping them to maintain a work–life balance. However, with “more students in paid work (55%) than not (45%)” and “students in paid employment working an average of 13.5h per week” (Standley and Fesner [2023](#), n.p.), this meant that some students either lost income during the production week or continued to work in the evenings, negating the work–life balance we were attempting to maintain.

Material sustainability

The decision was made early in the process to keep the budget for all four productions as close to zero as possible. This was partially influenced by the materials hierarchy laid out in the ABTT Green Book, which states: “Everything in a truly sustainable show will have had a previous life. Everything will be used again. That creates a ‘circular economy’. *Start by designing out the need for materials*” (Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT) 2021, 14, emphasis added). Under the section titled “Sustainable making”, the Green Book recommends: “The first step is to minimise, through design, how much material a set requires. The next is to find reused components or recycled materials – ideally locally, to reduce transport. Failing that, new material can at least be sourced as sustainably as possible” (ABTT 2021, 16). All set, sound, lighting, video and costume elements were taken from in-house stock, borrowed from local venues, or sourced for free online. Three of the venues (the theatre, the studio and the rehearsal room) have fixed lighting, sound and video rigs to accommodate a variety of configurations and performance work. While students did add to these, the majority of equipment came from existing stock; the exception to this was battery-powered fairy lights used in *Our Beautiful World*, which belonged to the student lighting designer (Figure 2).

Costumes for all productions were provided by the actors from their personal wardrobes or borrowed from our wardrobe department. Set items and props were minimal; however, elements that were included were specifically designed to be modular, a specific recommendation in the Educators’ Notes that accompany the Green Book. This document



Figure 2 *Our Beautiful World*. Set design by Morgan Toole, lighting design by Megan Ashbrook, and sound design by Elliott Thurlby. The cages were borrowed from the Royal Exchange Theatre, the steel deck was from in-house stock, the umbrella was destined for landfill, and the actor wears his own clothing. Photograph by Abbie Gresty.

also acknowledges the link between budgets and materials in university settings: “The basic concept of ‘spend less on materials, more on people’ works well in educational settings as generally educational organisations have the (student) labour but limited financial resources. As educational institutions don’t pay for more of the workforce, they are in a great position to make this work!” (Theatre Green Book [n.d.](#), n.p.). However, as noted in the previous section, throughout this process, we balanced both human and material resources at the (literal and metaphorical) expense of neither.

Two of the productions utilised a BBC app called Audio Orchestrator to develop “interactive, 360°, spatial audio that envelops your listeners in sound – from above, from behind, sending sound to one, many or all connected devices to tell your story in a new and unique way” (BBC [n.d.](#), n.p.). In *It Starts with Me*, audience members were assigned a track of a single female voice that played out of the speakers on their mobile phones to create an immersive and collective experience. Similarly, in *Ignorance*, participants navigated a series of tasks that placed them in the role of the wolf, the grandmother or Little Red Riding Hood. They were guided through these using headphones connected to their mobile phones, which they were asked to bring with them when booking tickets. The Audio Orchestrator app was developed by BBC R&D and had previously been used in audio drama and music projects but not live performance. The decision to use Audio Orchestrator was mooted during a seminar on sound design as part of the Advanced Design module, looking specifically at audio walks and binaural sound. In particular, we explored Simon McBurney and Complicite’s production of *The Encounter*, with sound design by Gareth Fry and Pete Malkin. In *Ignorance*, the use of headphones worked “to both isolate audience members from one another and plunge them further inside a communal theatre experience” (McKee [2021](#), n.p.), drawing explicit parallels between our individual and our collective responsibilities for climate change. From a material perspective, the use of personal mobile devices in both productions was both a sustainable choice and a dramaturgical one. *It Starts with Me* was deliberately staged in an area of the building that has a high level of passing footfall and thus drew audience members in as they walked past, either as participants or just to listen and watch. Again, this was designed into the production following discussions in seminars focused on collective responses and shared experiences of audiences, especially in the work of companies such as Punchdrunk. While this was not a site-specific production, guidance in the Green Book toolkit for outdoor and site-specific performances was of use, as the foyer area of the New Adelphi building is filled with natural light, eliminating the need for any lighting equipment to be used. The only light source was the small projector, showing video of women talking, projected onto an arrangement of cardboard boxes. One ecological concern we did not foresee, however, was the proximity of the performance to the motion-sensor-controlled entrance doors, over which was a heating unit. On the day of the performances, the building’s Estates team disconnected the heater, thus ensuring the audience design was not contributing to any excess energy use.

Digital versions of all four productions were produced to send to students on the Humber College course. Unfortunately, given the production timescale and the constraints of the academic calendar, there was not time to develop the digital versions fully and to integrate them into the performance schedule. However, the two student production managers were tasked with creating a digital site visit video that showed Humber students around the Salford performance spaces, in line with Green Book guidance and as a precursor to a larger version of this project in the 2023–2024 academic year with our next cohorts of students.

Further development

Working with Greve and Humber College students, we have continued to develop this project into the current academic year. Throughout the autumn term of 2023, new student cohorts have been working together to develop two productions, from the second edition of CCTA plays (*The Future is Not Fixed: Short Plays Envisioning a Global Green New Deal*), which will be presented in both Salford and Toronto in February and March 2024. Salford students are responsible for the design and production management of both productions. All design documentation and build information will be sent to Humber in January 2024; Humber students will build and install the relevant technical requirements as part of their taught curriculum. Salford students will then travel to Toronto for four weeks to take part in Humber classes as well as work on the production of their performances.¹ While there is an obvious carbon footprint implication in students flying to Toronto, in terms of material transit, we have designed this out of the project in order to mitigate this impact. All materials will be sourced locally in Toronto, either from in-house stock or from local suppliers. On their return to Salford, students will remount these productions, again using in-house equipment. This does mean the designs may have to adapt or change between venues, but this caveat has been set up as part of the design challenge for the students. This is also in line with one of the Green Book principles for touring productions: “At the outset, set a limit for the volume of sets and scenery, props, costumes and technical equipment to be transported between venues” (Theatre Green Book 2022, 1). In this case, no production materials are being transported between venues; rather, they are being provided locally at each venue.

Future iterations of this project are planned for 2024 onwards, dependent on continued funding and student interest in each location. There are three recommendations from the ABTT Green Book that I will aim to integrate into this future work, starting in autumn 2024. The first is appointing “Sustainability Champions” “at the outset to track, guide and support sustainability efforts across the team” (ABTT 2021, 27). Part of this responsibility includes my second goal: using carbon calculators to properly and fully track the carbon impact of these productions. In order to facilitate this, carbon literacy training will be built into the parallel Production Management module to equip students with the necessary skills to enable this work. Finally, in addition to the assessed

¹ This is made possible by funding from the Turing scheme: www.turing-scheme.org.uk.

white-card model showing and work-in-progress presentations, we will be adding a green-card meeting, a formal chance for students to “review where the design is in general environmental terms; assess it against its Green Book standard; work collectively to develop the idea towards the most sustainable possible outcome, ensuring that it meets Green Book targets; clearly list actions and decisions made” (ABTT 2021, 42).

Conclusion

There is still clearly much to be done in terms of embedding sustainable practice in this collaborative project specifically, as well as within our wider design and production curriculum. However, sustainability concerns should not be solely within the remit of creative and production staff, such as designers and production managers. The ABTT Green Book and research from Julie’s Bicycle and other environmental non-profits working across the creative industries has helped bring these concerns to the forefront of industry practice. Theatres in the UK are taking a leading role here, with organisations such as the National Theatre aiming for net zero status by 2030 (National Theatre n.d., n.p.). Awareness of and the ability to adapt to changes in theatre-making in response to the climate crisis, however, should be embedded in theatre design and production courses, and should address both material and human sustainability – in order to prepare students for the reality of the industry they are entering and to give them the knowledge and agency to change it. As Garrett notes, “Equipped with the skills to make critical, value-based decisions, they will be able to enter the field and lead the organization, venue, production company” and “move away from the narrow priority of reducing environmental impacts and toward a broader systems-thinking approach to realize our work within the context of that more global consideration of sustainability” (2021, 184). Technical theatre training in higher education needs to reflect this broader view of sustainability and consider issues of wellbeing and work–life balance as well as the more “traditional” aspects of materials and their uses. The COIL project between University of Salford and Humber College has allowed us to start to explore some of these issues, while using the play texts themselves as catalysts for wider discussions about the climate crisis. However, there is more work to be done, and environmental concerns should be embedded into all performance courses, not confined to technical and design students.

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