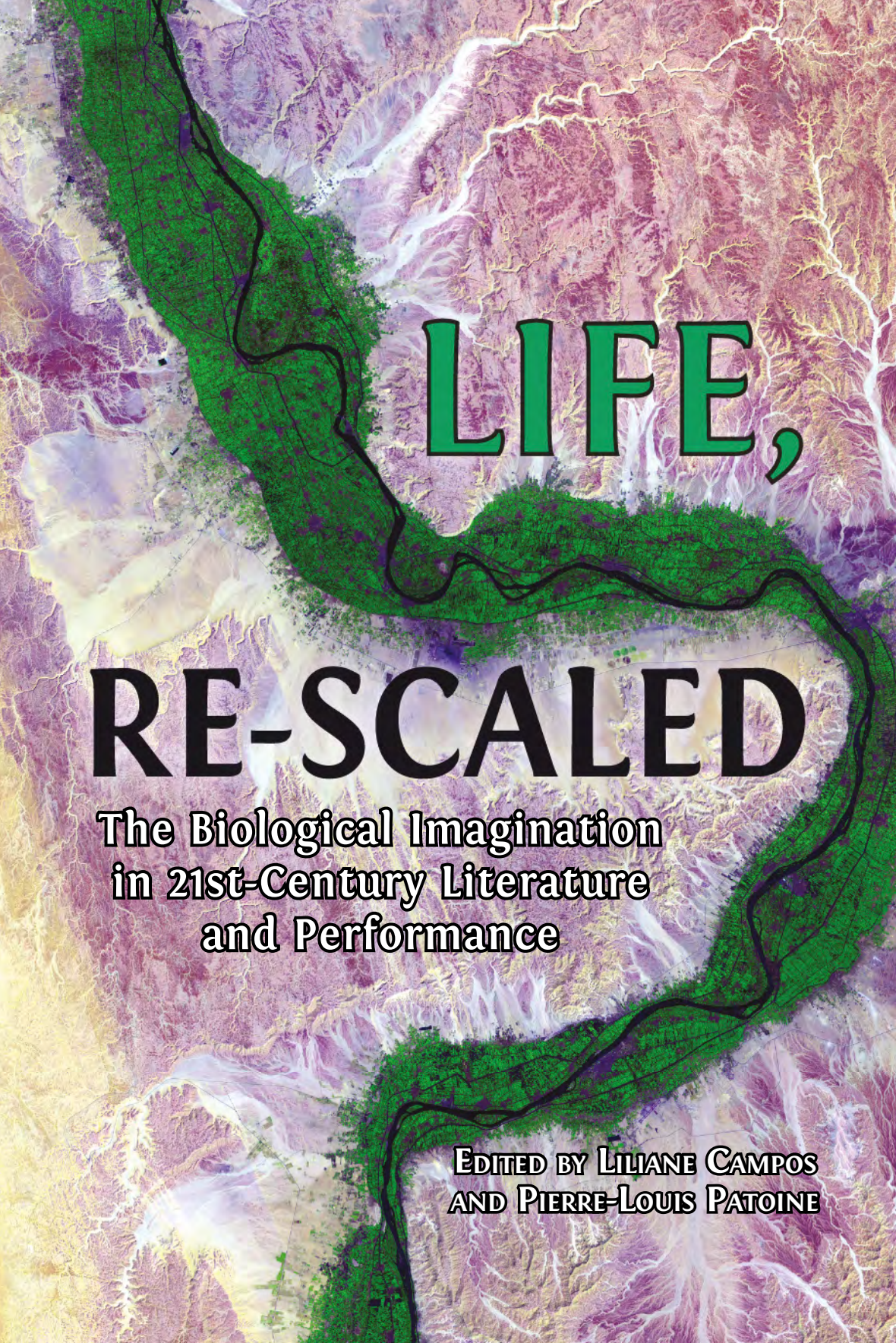
LIFE,
RE-SCALED
The Biological Imagination
in 21st-Century Literature
and Performance
Edited by Liliane Campos
and Pierre-Louis Patoine

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12. Displacing the Human

Representing Ecological Crisis on Stage

Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr
and Hannah Simpson

The visual iconography of the COVID-19 global pandemic has been striking. Every night for at least eighteen months, BBC News showed an enormous backdrop graphic of the virus, blown up to grotesque proportions that dwarfed the news presenter and made its crown-like protein structures clearly visible. The image served as an instantaneous shorthand for two otherwise 'invisible', near-incomprehensible scales of existence: the microscopic virus itself, and the unprecedented worldwide health crisis it caused.

Our iconography for climate change is rather different, typically resorting to the more familiar scale of animal and landscape. Several recognisable images recur on our pages and screens: polar bears stranded on shrinking ice; sea birds drenched in oil spills; vast swathes of the rainforest burned or cut down. But rarely do we see images of climate change that take place beyond the more easily conceived human scale, at the level of microorganisms analogous to the icon of the COVID-19 virus, or on the vastly larger scales of global CO_2 emissions or ozone layer depletion: 'the new kind of incommensurability that is being forced on us by our ecological predicament'.[1] Endearing, easily

1 Una Chaudhuri, 'Anthropo-Scenes: Staging Climate Chaos in the Drama of Bad Ideas', in *Twenty-First-Century Drama: What Happens Now*, ed. by Siân Adiseshiah and Louise LePage (London: Palgrave, 2016), pp. 303–21 (p. 305), https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48403-1_15.

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anthropomorphised animal beings like the tiger and the panda tend to take precedence in our collective visual imagination, and yet it is the less photogenic beings, like insects and still smaller microzoa, that are the engines of our ecosystems. Tony Juniper's environmentalist study *What Has Nature Ever Done for Us?* (2013) underlines this point via the striking image of the teaspoon of soil dug up from an ordinary plot of land, home to millions of microorganisms, a tiny ecosystem in itself recalling Darwin's iconic metaphor of the 'entangled bank' teeming with life.[2] Alan Weisman's book *The World Without Us* (2007) offers a thought-experiment about how the world would cope if all human life disappeared. (Spoiler alert: it would do just fine without us.) And Rhys Blakely's 2020 *Times* article 'Why saving the panda, but not its parasites, is really a lousy idea' cautions:

> Ticks and tapeworms may not stir the emotions in the same way as large charismatic species such as tigers and elephants. But researchers are warning that millions of parasitic animals face local declines or global extinction and that their disappearance risks throwing ecosystems out of kilter.[3]

At the other end of the scale, colossal global, atmospheric, and multi-century or even multi-millennial environmental changes are difficult to conceptualise, let alone represent—a challenge neatly articulated by Timothy Morton's influential concept of the ecological 'hyperobject', so vast, hyperdimensional, and massively distributed in time and space as to baffle the scope of human comprehension.[4] Our collective consciousness lacks ready visual iconography for the 'invisible' spectra of climate crisis that extend beyond or below our own human-centred scale.

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2 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (London: John Murray, 1859), p. 489. See *Darwin Online*, http://darwin-online.org.uk/Variorum/1859/1859-489-dns.html.

3 Rhys Blakley, 'Why saving the panda, but not its parasites, is a really lousy idea', *The Times* (24 August 2020), https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/why-saving-the-panda-but-not-its-parasites-is-really-a-lousy-idea-9026rlwx2. See also Ursula Heise's exploration of how conservationist activism tends to foreground 'charismatic megafauna' in public campaigning, in *Imagining Extinction: The Cultural Meanings of Endangered Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), pp. 23–25, https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226358338.001.0001.

4 See Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the Earth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), pp. 1–3, and *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010), pp. 130–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvjhzskj.

The problem with this anthropocentric scope of reference is the obstacle it poses to our larger understanding of (and effectual response to) the climate crisis. As Patrick Lonergan observes, 'if our models of representational realism fail to accommodate the realities of climate change, [...] those models of realism might be inhibiting our ecological awareness, and therefore our ability to produce meaningful change'.[5] And representing climate change beyond the human scale is doubly challenging when it comes to theatre. Theatre's engagement with climate change has tended to remain human-centred and thus human-scaled. The theatrical medium traditionally relies on the human as its main referent, with human actors (and audience members) at its core, and so inevitably inclines towards the anthropocentric. Theatre's engagement with climate change suggests that we may need to update the classic *theatrum mundi* trope: no longer the 'theatre as world' but the world as theatre, *mundus ut theatrum*, climate change as a drama enacted on simultaneously microscopic and enormous scales, in which the natural world sits centre-stage as protagonist and human characters are relegated from centre to wings or backdrop. The real action that climate change has produced, after all, is a paradoxically nonhuman one: it is the earth responding to the consequences of human activity. The representational challenge is not to downplay or deny human agency in ecological crisis—or indeed human responsibility in attempting to remedy the damage done—but rather to deprioritise human action and experience as always the primary concern, to avoid 'reinforcing the anthropocentrism that got us into this mess in the first place, falling back on the habitual human exceptionalism of Western dramatic tradition', as Catherine Love puts it.[6]

To conceptualise this new *mundum ut theatrum* is an imaginative leap that requires new stage images and new scales of dramatic representation. Might there be a theatrical representation of the vast macro scale of global climate change, atmospheric pollution, and mass species extinction, analogous to the iconic COVID-19 microbe: a powerful representation of

5 Patrick Lonergan, 'A Twisted, Looping Form: Staging Dark Ecologies in Ella Hickson's *Oil*', *Performance Research*, 25.2 (2020), 38–44 (p. 41), https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2020.1752575.

6 Catherine Love, 'From Facts to Feelings: The Development of Katie Mitchell's Ecodramaturgy', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 30.2 (2020), 226–35 (p. 226), https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2020.1731495.

a biological phenomenon that becomes a part of our shared imaginary, crossing cultural and linguistic borders? Why does so much theatre remain narrowly anthropocentric, when there are so many other ways it might convey the problems and challenges of climate change? In this chapter, we explore some of the efforts to wrestle with innovative stage images and scales that theatre-makers have produced in their creative endeavours to capture and convey the current ecological crisis, and offer some models and theoretical approaches that might be productive in thinking about the theatre's representations of climate change, and of the science of climate change.[7] Theatre's unique functioning in a range of spatial and temporal dimensions and sensory modes, we argue, offers rich potential for representations of climate change that might move us into a more-than-human scope of thought.

'It's Actually Not About Us': The Paradox of Human-Centric Ecological Drama

It is hardly surprising that in the realms of prose fiction and non-fiction, where representation is conjured in the mind of the reader via narrative, we find some innovative imaginings of the nonhuman, the non-anthropomorphic, and of micro- and macroscopic ecological scales. Climate change fiction specialist James Berger cites Richard Powers' Pulitzer Prize-winning novel *The Overstory* (2018) as a compelling recent example of a prose fiction work that reaches beyond traditional human-centric expectations: 'It's about forests. And it really is about forests. There are interesting human characters too. But in a sense, it's actually not about us'.[8] New narrative and framing conventions are required to represent environmental crisis, which in turn require new ways of reading such works.

7 A comprehensive catalogue of climate change drama and performance lies beyond the scope of this chapter. Readers seeking such a list can consult Chantal Bilodeau's list of climate change plays on the *Artists and Climate Change* website (https://artistsandclimatechange.com/2014/11/01/creating-a-list-of-climate-change-plays/) and Julie Hudson's article '"If You Want to be Green Hold Your Breath": Climate Change in British Theatre', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 28.3 (2012), 260–71, https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266464x12000449.

8 James Berger and Peter Cunningham, 'Meditations in an emergency: James Berger on climate, fiction, and apocalypse', *Yale News* (27 January 2020), https://news.yale.edu/2020/01/27/james-berger-climate-fiction-and-apocalypse.

However, in dealing with ecological crisis, theatre has tended to be very much 'about us'. Realism, which typically forces a focus on the human story, may be in part to blame, and science fiction and fantasy seem the obvious route out of the realist trap. Yet how does this play out on stage, in practical terms? Even when plays have featured talking, sentient, or otherwise agentive plants—for example in Susan Glaspell's 1921 *The Verge* or Alan Menken and Howard Ashman's rock musical *Little Shop of Horrors* (1982)—these ostensibly nonhuman creatures have been played by people wearing plant suits. Similarly, George Bernard Shaw's 1932 play *Too True to Be Good* introduces the microscopic scale of existence into its condemnation of luxury consumption with the appearance of a jelly-like talking microbe—enacted by a human in a microbe suit. Fast-forward to 2018, and Punctuate! Theatre's *Bears* enacts a range of Trans Mountain Pipeline flora and fauna through the movement of the choreographed eight-person chorus and its combination of animal mimicry and interpretative dance (Fig. 45).[9]

Fig. 45 Matthew MacKenzie, *Bears* (2018) © Alexis McKeown and Punctuate! Theatre. Environmental design by T. Erin Gruber. Pictured: Sheldon Elter. Chorus: Lara Ebata, Gianna Vacirca, Skye Demas, Alida Kendell, Zoe Glassman, Kendra Shorter, Rebecca Sadowski. Photograph by Alexis McKeown. All rights reserved.

9 For fuller analysis of Punctuate! Theatre's *Bears*, see Gabriel Levine's 'Black-Light Ecologies: Punctuate! Theatre's *Bears* Wipes Off its Oil', *Performance Research*, 25.2 (2020), 45–52, https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2020.1752576.

Again and again, the reference point remains the human body, and the scale remains human. What usually gets put on stage is the results or effects of climate change felt by human inhabitants of the earth, rather than its often difficult-to-see (and indeed, difficult-to-conceive) causes or mechanisms. The drama comes from the conflict between human and nature: a new mode of revenge tragedy that sees humans battling hugely destructive natural disasters brought about by our own disregard for the planet. This dynamic was effectively portrayed in the National Theatre's 2015 version of the medieval morality play *Everyman* in a new adaptation by Carol Ann Duffy that gave it a climate change context. Reimagining older plays as relevant to the current ecological crisis has proved fertile ground for twenty-first-century theatre: Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* (1961), for example, has been restaged as a 'climate change drama', most recently in Sarah Franckcom's 2018 production at the Royal Exchange Manchester, which staged Winnie's mound surrounded by a puddle of water and an assortment of plastic bags and bottles, and in Katie Mitchell's 2015 production at the Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg, which saw Winnie submerged in floodwater rather than sand.[10]

Beckett's blighted landscape is given new ecological impetus by these restagings—but the vividly characterised human figure of Winnie remains literally central to the stage focus, and our spectatorial access to the play's landscape itself is strictly limited to Winnie's own periods of consciousness. Much 1890s Symbolist theatre struggled with the human-inclined materiality of the theatre medium by hinting at a world devoid of all human activity, a blueprint for Samuel Beckett's later barren theatrical landscapes in *Endgame* (1957), *Act without Words I* (1957) and *Happy Days* (1961).[11] Maurice Maeterlinck's *Les Aveugles* (*The*

10 On Beckett's evolutionary and geological vision across his theatre work and in *Happy Days* in particular, see Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr's 'Beckett's Old Muckball', in *Theatre and Evolution from Ibsen to Beckett* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), pp. 237–72, https://doi.org/10.7312/shep16470. See also Anna McMullan, 'Katie Mitchell on Staging Beckett', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 28.1 (2018), 127–32, https://doi.org/10.1080/10486801.2018.1426822, and Joe Kelleher, 'Recycling Beckett', in *Rethinking the Theatre of the Absurd: Ecology, the Environment and the Greening of the Modern Stage*, ed. by Carl Lavery and Clare Finburgh (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 127–46, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472511072.0009.

11 For fuller discussion of older plays reimagined as contemporary climate-change theatre, see Shepherd-Barr, *Theatre and Evolution*.

Blind, 1890), for example, shifts attention away from the recognisably human by staging depersonalised beings in place of any realistically sketched characters. In a similar gradual deprioritising of localised human action, Shaw's *Back to Methuselah: A Microbiological Pentateuch* (1922) stages a vastly protracted scope of action that extends from the Garden of Eden to 31,920 AD and a final vision of human beings transformed in immaterial luminescence. Yet even where the threat of human extinction is dramatised, or where the natural world encroaches more determinedly into the scene, it is still the human body and the facticity of human experience that structures these stage texts.

Even in much recent contemporary theatre, the human has remained the central focal point of environmental anxieties. The profusion of new British and American plays focused on climate change that premiered between the years 2008 and 2011 repeatedly turned to human relationships to focus or metaphorise their ecocritical stakes. In Duncan Macmillan's *Lungs* (2011), for example, climate-change anxiety is framed through a young liberal couple's discussion as to whether or not to have children; Macmillan has spoken of *Lungs* as the solution to his struggle 'to write about some of the bigger issues facing our species', to 'distil' large-scale environmental concern 'into a pinpoint, compelling dramatic metaphor'.[12] Richard Bean's *The Heretic* (2011) filters the threat of climate crisis through a heady rush of romantic affairs, broken marriages, mother-daughter discord, and a climate change scientist being subjected to professional pressure, death threats and stalking because of her research. *Greenland* (2011), co-authored by Moira Buffini, Penelope Skinner, Matt Charman and Jack Thorne, similarly dramatises ecological anxiety through a medley of intersecting narratives featuring multiple instances of parent-child conflict, romantic discord, the Copenhagen COP 15 climate change conference punctuated with casual sex, and an Artic explorer who communes in flashback with

12 Duncan Macmillan, 'Some Thoughts on Lungs', *The Old Vic* (11 October 2019), https://www.oldvictheatre.com/news/2019/10/duncan-macmillan-some-thoughts-on-lungs. Catherine Love discusses how Katie Mitchell's 2013 production of *Lungs* at Berlin's Schaubühne theatre introduced an enlarged sense of ecological scale by means of a backdrop screen that 'displayed the global population—a number that changed in real time throughout the performance', emphasising the individual and the global simultaneously. However, as Love points out, this widened lens 'still excluded the more-than-human world' (2020, p. 233).

his younger self. Wallace Shawn's *Grasses of a Thousand Colors* (2009) focalises its Anthropocene concerns through the figure of an arrogant GM food scientist, whose main concern is satisfying his erotic urges by both extra-marital and trans-species means. And Simon Stephens' *Wastwater* (2011) employs a triptych of troubled couples, their fractured relationships edged with the gradually encroaching forces of mud, water, plant life, and pollution to disquietingly suggest environmental as well as personal disaster. In each case, the human figure is the central focal point onstage: interpersonal human crisis translates larger ecological catastrophe while at the same time relegating it to the margins of the action.

A sharply different strand of ecological performance is the hybrid form of the 'lecture-performance' or 'dramatised lecture', at least in part a legacy of Al Gore's documentary-lecture *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). Stephen Emmott's *Ten Billion* (2013) and Chris Rapley and Duncan Macmillan's *2071* (2014), both directed in the première performances by Katie Mitchell at the Royal Court, offer key examples of the form: in place of actors, professional scientists Emmott and Rapley appeared as 'themselves' on stage, delivering something more akin to a university lecture or keynote address in order to foreground a climate scientist's perspective on our environmental crisis. The dynamics of dramatic performance are not entirely absent from either endeavour: in the Royal Court's production of *Ten Billion*, for example, Emmott appeared in a replica of his University of Cambridge office reconstructed on the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs stage, and playwright Duncan Macmillan was responsible for crafting Rapley's words into a monologue with dramatic and affective impact for *2071*. But most recognisable theatrical conventions have been expunged. There is no scenic action, scripted plot or choreographed movement, no mimetic construction or enactment of character. The emotional muddle and noise of interpersonal human conflict are elided in favour of the delivery of as unmediated a form of fact-based scientific communication as possible, with all the attendant promises of authority and authenticity. Here, the idea of conventional theatrical performance becomes something suspect, unnecessary or distracting 'ornamentation', something 'extraneous—if not opposed—to fact', as Ashley Chang puts it.[13]

13 Ashley Chang, 'Staging Climate Science: No Drama, Just the Facts', *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, 43.1 (2021), 66–76 (p. 67), https://doi.org/10.1162/pajj_a_00547.

French sociologist and philosopher Bruno Latour's performance lectures such as *Inside* (2017) and *Moving Earths* (2020), developed in collaboration with scenographer Frédérique Aït-Touati, similarly placed Latour himself on stage in keynote-lecture style, accompanied by large-scale, high-quality visual and animated projections, lighting changes and occasional sound effects that complement his discussion of human interaction with, and perception of, the environment. Just as director Katie Mitchell explains the performance lecture as a response to conventional theatre forms that threaten 'to diminish and oversimplify and sensationalise the subject',[14] Latour and Aït-Touati also emphasise the form's potential to refocus attention on the scientific and more broadly intellectual dimensions of our discussions about ecological catastrophe—with a particular emphasis on the deprioritising of the human figure within the grand scheme of ecological catastrophe. Their collaborative work, Aït-Touati explains, asks 'how can we deconstruct theatre as a traditionally human-centred art form?', and Latour elaborates, 'We are seeking another relationship to scenography by—yes—decentring the human, moving him or her slightly off stage so to speak'.[15] Rather as the flurry of large-scale animated projections in *2071* drew the eye from Rapley's onstage body, similarly in *Inside*, Latour is a small figure on stage, visually dwarfed and often blurred by the large projections of the earth and its various ecosystems that overlie both the stage backdrop and his own body; he occasionally disappears from view altogether in the dark as the moving projected images shift and coalesce behind him.[16]

Nevertheless, in each of these lectures, the onstage individual still remains the centre of attention (often quite literally, in terms of stage imagery), almost inevitably coming to dominate audience focus. As recognisable individual figures of intellectual expertise—and,

14 Mitchell quoted in Stephanie Merritt, 'Climate change play *2071* aims to make data dramatic', *The Guardian* (5 November 2014), https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/nov/05/climate-change-theatre-2071-katie-mitchell-duncan-macmillan.

15 Latour quoted in 'Décor as Protagonist: Bruno Latour and Frédérique Aït-Touati on Theatre and the New Climate Regime', Sébastien Hendrickx and Kristof van Baarle, *The Theatre Times* (18 February 2019), https://thetheatretimes.com/decor-is-not-decor-anymore-bruno-latour-and-frederique-ait-touati-on-theatre-and-the-new-climate-regime/.

16 Frédérique Aït-Touati and Bruno Latour, 'Inside—a performance lecture', http://www.bruno-latour.fr/node/755.html.

particularly in Latour's case, of the rare 'star power' of celebrity public intellectual status—Emmott, Rapley and Latour sit authoritatively at the heart of their performances, the central axis around which the lecture unfolds. Even visually, the ostensible minimising of the human figures in these lecture-performances is inconsistently enacted. *Ten Billion*'s stage setting of Emmott's own office calls attention to his personality as an individual within a larger institution—his choice of pot plants, his conference lanyards displayed behind his desk—and Royal Court press images frequently focused in on Emmott's face, illuminated by or shadowing his projected data; likewise, the theatre's promotional material for *2071* typically foregrounded Rapley's seated figure.[17] Early in *Inside*, the dark backdrop curtains open slightly directly behind Latour's figure, illuminating him in a floor-to-ceiling shaft of bright white, almost angelic light. Latour's individual features are indiscernible, but his human figure is clearly, dramatically silhouetted in the centre of the stage. His audience applauds wildly. We have returned from our virtual planetary travels to the comfortable and familiar human scale.

Shifting the Boundaries: The Spatial, the Temporal, and the Sensory

However, other recent plays have shifted theatrical imagery away from the human body and towards nonhuman scales. These plays often draw successfully on theatre's near-unique functioning in a range of spatial and temporal dimensions and sensory modes, exploiting the consequent opportunity for multi-elemental, boundary-defying representation that moves us into a more-than-human scope of thought. While the human figure may not disappear from the stage altogether, slippages disrupt the borders between human and nonhuman, biotic and abiotic, organism and environment. These are plays that, in stretching the boundaries of both human action and theatrical staging conventions, offer a new perspective on other ecological forces.

17 See, for example, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ten-billion-at-the-royal-court-sw1w-v7l5bqj0jx0, https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2012/dec/10/best-theatre-2012-ten-billion, and https://www.britishtheatreguide.info/reviews/ten-billion-royal-court-the-7701.

The Contingency Plan by Steve Waters, which premièred at the Bush Theatre, London, in April 2009, is structured in two parts—*On the Beach* followed by *Resilience*—and is to some degree rooted in similarly family-centric (that is, human-centric) structure as *Lungs*, *The Heretic*, and the other plays mentioned in the foregoing discussion. *On the Beach* focuses on the antagonistic dynamic between a father-son pair of glaciologists; *Resilience* sees the son Will ignore his father Robin's advice that he avoid mixing science with politics as Will moves into a governmental advisory role in an effort to prevent catastrophic flooding of England, caused by melting glaciers and rising sea levels. However, *The Contingency Plan* self-consciously diverges from the human-centric theatrical image and scale in several notable ways. *On the Beach* looks constantly towards the inevitable wiping of human presence from the earth by geological forces far beyond our scope of power or lifespan, by staging a miniature ecosystem, a kind of environmentalist metatheatrical device: a fish tank, '*a stage-design model box*' constructed by Robin, that demonstrates what will happen to the ecosystem of the Norfolk coastal area—where the characters live—if sea levels rise. The resultant catastrophic flooding is illustrated in miniature in the fish tank. Robin's human body becomes an onstage visual surrogate for larger geological forces as he operates the fish-tank model: 'and we have to factor in the surge— (*He is splashing and moving water about with his hands*)'.[18] In one simple but effective stage image, this fish-tank scenario shifts the focus and scale of the play's concern from the human to the planetary: the localised emotional catastrophe of the family's home being destroyed is literally minimised before the audience's eyes, reduced conceptually to 'a Petri dish' for wider, global-scale extrapolations, gesturing towards the scope of unseen forces beyond the human eye. '[B]ack comes the pristine landscape of the Holocene era', Robin predicts. '[W]e are a disturbance in the sleep of the world and we're gonna be brushed away, sweated out. The sea rises, the land goes, the cities go, the people are gone. You can't fight that'.[19] His wife Jenny's expression of fear shortly before the play's end—'It's the sea, Rob. […] I don't recognise it. Fine. It doesn't recognise me'—redefines the sea as the dominant agential subject and herself as the passive object of its gaze.[20] Fulfilling Robin's prophecy, by the end

18 Steve Waters, *The Contingency Plan* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 52, p. 54.
19 Ibid., p. 55, p. 83.
20 Ibid., p. 81.

of *On the Beach* the coastal family home and both parents are poised to be swept away by the rising tide, into the vast scope of 'continental time. Geological time' that Robin invokes in his final words.[21] Likewise, at the end of *Resilience*, the babble of human voices attempting vainly to counter the force of ecological apocalypse is replaced, abruptly, mercilessly, by '*the sound of an enormous storm. Blackout*'—represented onstage, we should note, by 'invisible' sonic rather than any human-scaled visual modality.[22] The diptych drama stretches ecological scale across the two plays, in an *Alice-in-Wonderland*-style shrinking and growing cycle enabled by specifically theatrical means.

Temporal and spatial dislocation interrupt the human-centric scope of climate-change theatre in several recent plays. Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling* (2009) focalises ecological disaster through a father-son estrangement, mother-son conflict, and fracturing marriage, but the scope of the play extends across four generations of intercontinental family shift, flitting between 1959 and 2039, and between London and various urban and outback spaces in Australia. Thus, although much of the play's ecological concern is once again metaphorised through a human-centric model, Bovell expands the localised, individualised human scope to a vaster multi-generational and international scale. Ella Hickson's *Oil* (2016) offers a still more striking version of this expansion of theatrical time and space in grappling with the hyperobject nature of ecological shifts. Moving between 1889 Cornwall, 1908 Tehran, 1970 London, 2021 Baghdad, and back to 2051 Cornwall, it explores the global use of oil at domestic and industrial levels and associated geopolitical and ecological consequences.[23] The mother-daughter relationship between Amy and May ostensibly structures the play, but the exaggeratedly non-realist course of their lives—May is twenty and pregnant with Amy in 1889, and approaching old age in 2051, cared for by the young adult Amy—shifts the informing temporal scope of the play from the recognisably human to the larger-scale, beyond-human chronology of the slow calamity of environmental breakdown.[24] Patrick

21 Ibid., p. 84.

22 Ibid. p. 182.

23 Editors' note: See also Ferebee's discussion of oil as a hyperobject (chapter 8). Here oil might be considered as a hyperactor rather than a hyperobject (see Beaufils's distinction in chapter 13).

24 The anagrammatic overlap of mother May and daughter Amy's names further destabilises our sense of these characters as not-quite-real human figures, as in

Lonergan has connected the colliding chronologies of *Oil* to Morton's argument that ecological catastrophe demands that we think 'at the level of both individual and species simultaneously'.[25] Hickson enacts this challenge by way of the seemingly unstageable scripting of the human body in the interscenes that mark the passing of time between acts. For example:

> She walks through lands, through empires, through time.
>
> A woman walks across a desert.
> The air is hot; the night is black.
>
> One newborn baby gasps for breath.
> A million newborn babies gasp for breath.[26]

Or later:

> A child flies backwards into the future.
>
> A child drives backwards.
> A child walks backwards
>
> Retreats, returns, retracts
> Yestermorrow.
>
> A child returns, retreats, contracts
> A child sits.
>
> Home in time for bed.[27]

Representing the vertiginous passage of ecological time between acts, these interscenes unsettle any straightforward staging of the human body. 'One newborn baby gasp[ing] for breath' already poses a challenge to even the most innovative director; the sudden expansion of the direction to a 'million newborn babies' pushes into the bounds of the seemingly impossible. Hickson's interscenes chafe at the scope of what the theatre medium can stage, the very possibility of staging the human figure in

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the similar case of the couple Gabriel and Gabrielle in Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling*.

25 Lonergan, 'A Twisted, Looping Form', p. 38. Lonergan quotes here from Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology: For a Logic of Future Coexistence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p. 40, https://doi.org/10.7312/mort17752.

26 Ella Hickson, *Oil* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 26.

27 Ibid., p. 101.

line with the vast scale of ecological change, eventually seeming to erase the human referent altogether in the subject-less direction '*Retreats, returns, contracts / Yestermorrow*', before demanding the reappearance of the child's figure onstage again. By challenging any staged production 'to work physically with impossibility', to borrow theatre scholar Karen Quigley's evocative expression,[28] Hickson's interscenes in *Oil* offer an alternative iteration of the 'unrepresentable' scale of the climate crisis in the theatre medium.

Hickson's provocative intertwining of environmental and biological timescales might shift our attention to other recent theatrical works that have attempted to engage with ecological frameworks of thought by breaking out of the confines of the traditional proscenium stage space.[29] Where *The Contingency Plan* used '*a stage-design model box*' to miniaturise the human-scaled stage space, these plays stretch theatrical scale by literally expanding it beyond the limits of the proscenium stage itself. Mike Bartlett's carnivalesque extravaganza *Earthquakes in London* (2010), for instance, paralleled its inflated temporal scope (the play's timeframe ran from 1969 to 2525) by taking over the auditorium itself as a site of action. '*The play is about excess*', Bartlett's opening stage directions note, and the stage '*should overflow with scenery, sound, backdrops, lighting, projection, etc*'.[30] Accordingly, Miriam Buether's award-winning set design for the play's première production at the National's Cottesloe Theatre connected two stages at the front and back of the auditorium with a bright orange, winding catwalk, with the audience seated on barstools running the length of both its sides (Fig. 46). Other productions have played on the theatre medium's functioning in multiple sensory dimensions to expand beyond the visual confines of the proscenium stage. Ian Rickson's 2018/19 production of Brian Friel's *Translations* (1980) at the National Theatre, London, for example, filled the amphitheatre-style Olivier stage with cut turf; the strong smell of the turf suffused the auditorium, blending an ecocritical dimension into the playtext's concern with land colonisation. Similarly, Rickson's première

28 Karen Quigley, *Performing the Unstageable: Success, Imagination, Failure* (London, Methuen, 2020), p. 5, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350055483.

29 Editors' note: In chapter 13, Eliane Beaufils studies the strategies used by three contemporary performances to turn this traditional proscenium stage space into a bio-geological milieu, allowing the deployment of a spectatorial gaze 'from inside'.

30 Mike Bartlett, *Earthquakes in London* (London: Methuen, 2021), p. 5.

production of Jez Butterworth's *Jerusalem* (2009) at the Royal Court saw set designer Ultz bring live chickens, tortoises, freshly cut logs and real trees onto the stage; the noise and smell of the animals and plant material that permeated the auditorium added a competing ecological sensory-scape to the human-centric threads of the play (Fig. 47).[31] These plays reach beyond the proscenium stage confines—whether by extending the tangible material elements of performance into the auditorium, or by employing more subtle multi-sensory mechanisms—to re-imagine the possible scales of theatrical representation in the context of climate change.

Fig. 46 Miriam Buether's auditorium set for Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London* at the Cottesloe, National Theatre, London (2010). Photograph by Manuel Harlan © Manuel Harlan. All rights reserved.

31 Anna Harpin notes that, in Rickson's production, 'the trees were rotten and so already earmarked for felling and thus they got a new lease of life through the production'. See Anna Harpin, 'Land of Hope and Glory: Jez Butterworth's Tragic Landscapes', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, 31.1 (2011), 61–73 (p. 69), https://doi.org/10.1386/stap.31.1.61_1. However, beyond this immediate eco-friendly concern, the presence of literally rotting trees on *Jerusalem* stage adds a material ecological dimension to a play centrally concerned with the demise of 'traditional England' and its outdoor spaces.

Fig. 47 Mark Rylance on the Royal Court stage set of *Jerusalem* (2009). Photograph by Tristram Kenton. © Tristram Kenton. All rights reserved.

While these plays break through the proscenium stage space, other ecologically inclined performance pieces have rejected the confines of the theatre building itself, reaching out into the outdoor world that is their subject. In Carole Kim's immersive site-specific work *The Seed Will Search…*, performed in the Descanso Gardens in California, participants were led at night through the gardens to the three-hundred-year-old Heritage Oak, where Butoh dancer Oguri moved in and out of the tree alongside the projected image of Rozanne Steinberg, who was dancing in real time elsewhere in the garden and projected in virtual space onto the oak tree. Once again, the human body did not vanish entirely from the performance site, but here the dancers' bodies facilitated rather than focalised the performance; the central unfolding focus remained the oak tree itself—a subject in its own right, rather than a theatrical backdrop—and the audience's direct encounter with the exterior natural world. In a more explicitly politicised context, Earth Ensemble, the playwriting and performance-making arm of environmental protest group Extinction Rebellion, regularly stage outdoor 'guerrilla theatre' plays specially written for mobile protest performance, such as April de Angelis' *Mrs Noah*, *Plane Truth* and *We Hear Bird Song*, Bec Boey's *An*

Apology, and John Farndon's *The Silence Ends* and *Paper Cranes*. Earth Ensemble's outdoor protest plays blur a line between indoor theatrical performance and the equally theatrical protest gestures devised by Extinction Rebellion: dumping manure outside *Daily Mail* newspaper offices in London; the hundreds of litres of fake blood spilled outside Downing Street; co-ordinated 'die-ins' on city streets around the world; regular parades of sackcloth 'penitent' figures (Fig. 48) and the iconic Red Rebel Brigade protestors (Figs. 49 and 50).[32]

Fig. 48 Extinction Rebellion 'penitent' performer in Cornwall, protesting the G7 Summit (June 2021). Photograph by Greg Martin © Greg Martin / Cornwall Live. All rights reserved.

32 Extinction Rebellion, 'From Monday 15 April: Extinction Rebellion to block Marble Arch, Oxford Circus, Waterloo Bridge & Parliament Sq round the clock until Government acts on Climate Emergency', https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2019/04/09/from-monday-15-april-extinction-rebellion-to-block-marble-arch-oxford-circus-waterloo-bridge-parliament-sq-round-the-clock-until-government-acts-on-climate-emergency%EF%BB%BF/.

Fig. 49 Red Rebel Brigade in Cornwall, protesting the G7 Summit (June 2021). Photograph by Joao Daniel Pereira © Joao Daniel Pereira / Extinction Rebellion. All rights reserved.

Fig. 50 Red Rebel Brigade protesting in London (2019). Photograph by Connor Newson © Connor Newson/Adams Creative Media. All rights reserved (no financial gain).

Earth Ensemble's outdoor guerrilla plays, like Extinction Rebellion's protest performances, formally replicate several key properties that Morton has ascribed to ecological hyperobjects. Permeating the common spaces of daily life, they mimic the hyperobject's viscosity, simultaneously 'near' but 'uncanny'.[33] As Morton explains, 'along with this vivid intimacy goes a sense of unreality',[34] and the Earth Ensemble and Extinction Rebellion performances specialise in this heady combination of intimate unreality: a scripted speaker in character suddenly appears beside you in the crowd, transforming you from anonymous pedestrian to disoriented audience member, abruptly involved in theatrical action; or you turn a street corner or a bend in the beach and are confronted with the otherworldly sight of the Red Rebel Brigade. These are affectively sticky performances, to borrow (and slightly adapt) Morton's articulation of hyperobjects as viscous phenomena which '"stick" to beings that are involved with them'.[35] They are designed to impel immediate and enduring affective response—it is hard to forget these stark little vignettes, particularly when unexpectedly encountered in one's everyday environment—and indeed they often solicit mass and even spontaneous participation: John Farndon's verse performance *The Silence Ends* (2019), for example, is a group spoken-word chorus that stages a medley of overlapping voices, designed to accommodate as many participants as can be persuaded to join. These protest performances are also frequently '*nonlocal*', a term Morton uses to describe the ecological hyperobject, 'massively distributed in time and space' and visible only in their localised effect or partial appearance.[36] Many of Earth Ensemble's plays are devised specifically to lend themselves to multiple concurrent performance across various locales, paralleling Extinction Rebellion's co-ordinated global protests that take place simultaneously in cities across the globe.[37] Similarly, the

33 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 28.
34 Ibid., p. 32.
35 Ibid, p. 1.
36 Ibid., p. 1 (emphasis in the original), p. 48.
37 The #EverybodyNow International Rebellion in October 2019, for example, occurred simultaneously in more than fifty cities, including London, Berlin, Paris, New York Los Angeles, Washington DC, Santiago, Buenos Aires, and Montreal, and was estimated to have involved up to 30,000 protestors worldwide. See the XR plans for the event at https://extinctionrebellion.uk/2019/10/04/everybodynow-londons-rebellion-on-track-to-be-five-times-bigger-than-april/.

sackcloth 'penitent' (Fig. 48) and Red Rebel Bridge attire (Figs. 49 and 50) are designed not only to offer a visually striking presence in public, but also to provide an easily replicable costume, allowing protestors around the globe to join the ongoing performance.[38] With an estimated 5,000 Red Rebel Brigade members worldwide, any of us who have witnessed one of their protest parades cannot be said to have 'seen the Red Rebel Brigade' in any total sense, just as any one performance of one of Earth Ensemble's multiple simultaneous guerrilla productions is only a fraction of the full simultaneous performance, impossible for any individual to see in its total form—and just as 'any "local manifestation" of a hyperobject is not directly the hyperobject'.[39] By shifting from the enclosed space of the theatre auditorium into direct contact with exterior public spaces, and exaggerating the common theatrical phenomenon of repeated and reproduced stagings into simultaneous and/or globally ranging performances, the Earth Ensemble and Extinction Rebellion protest works push into a scale and affective range comparable to Morton's ecological 'hyperobject' dimensions.

'Fragments, Shards, Whispers': Imagining the Impossible Other

Finally, we turn to Deke Weaver's *The Unreliable Bestiary* (2009–), a collection of immersive performance pieces that work beyond the typical temporal, spatial and sensory dimensions of conventional theatre in their staging of multi-species extinction. The ongoing project plans an 'ark' of twenty-six individual site-specific and multi-media performance pieces, focusing on one endangered animal or habitat for every letter of the English alphabet. At time of writing, Weaver has produced five of the projected twenty-six pieces: MONKEY (2009), scripted for black-box theatre performance; ELEPHANT (2010, Fig. 51), produced on the dirt floor and towering walls of the University of Illinois' amphitheatre-style Stock Pavilion; WOLF (2013), in which audience members are guided by

38 The Red Rebel Brigade provide instructions for members on how to craft the costume and replicate the group's make-up and choreography themselves. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_qIfSNP2nuo and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hGPv0wALfWw. Video footage of the first public appearance of the penitents and Red Rebel Brigade, at St. Ives, Cornwall, August 2019, is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Z7DbR9VY9E.

39 Morton, *Hyperobjects*, p. 1.

a park ranger by bus to Allerton Park in Monticello, Illinois, across the park's river and woods to a barn performance space; BEAR (2016–2017, Fig. 52), spread over three parts in a six-month period, played out in Meadowbrook Park in Urbana, Illinois, in online performance videos, and in a mass group banquet; and TIGER (2019), an intimate séance- or salon-esque piece devised for small theatre, living room and museum performance.[40] Weaver's *Bestiary* opens up the space of ecological performance at the level of both site and scale. Focusing his attention beyond 'strictly human stories', Weaver seeks to produce work 'about the big questions [...] about moments where you know there's something bigger going on—bigger than email and Facebook, coolness and hipness, bigger than shopping, bigger than politics, bigger than power struggles, bigger than your career or your family'.[41] He correspondingly rejects the limiting constraints of conventional theatre form, theatre spaces, and single-media presentation, drawing on a medley of claymation, mechanical puppetry, realistic and exaggeratedly non-realistic costume, dance, song, documentary footage, film clip, animated video projection, photographs, sketches, and often the presence of the unchoreographable natural world. Commenting on the chaotic intermedial texture of his pieces, Weaver explains:

> In putting these pieces together I wonder what it will be like when these animals are gone. We're going to be left with these fragments, shards, whispers and cartoons of what the animal must have been like. As far as 'accurate' and 'truthful' representations, it's always always always going to fall short of the real thing. So I'm more interested in the failure of representation, as a way to point out the absence of the real animal.[42]

40 Further details of individual performances can be found online at https://www.unreliablebestiary.org/projects/. The full text of MONKEY and excerpts of ELEPHANT have been printed in *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*, ed. by Una Chaudhuri and Holly Hughes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014), pp. 141–55 and pp. 163–81, https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.5633302. Digital video documentaries of MONKEY, ELEPHANT, and WOLF have been archived at Princeton University, New York University, University of Michigan, University of Iowa, University of Georgia, and University of Kentucky. Una Chaudhuri and Joshua Williams offer a detailed overview of participating as an audience member in several *Unreliable Bestiary* performances in 'The Play at the End of the World: Deke Weaver's *Unreliable Bestiary* and the Theatre of Extinction', *The Cambridge Companion to Theatre and Science*, ed. by Kirsten E. Shepherd-Barr (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), pp. 70–84, https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108676533.006.

41 Deke Weaver and Maria Lux, 'Interview: *The Unreliable Bestiary*', *Antennae*, 22 (2012), 31–40 (p. 40).

42 Ibid., p. 34.

The disorienting impact of Weaver's breakdown of the theatre's traditional formal limits is intensified by the improbable, even impossible scale of *The Unreliable Bestiary*'s projected scope. As Una Chaudhuri and Joshua Williams observe, 'With twenty-one letters left to go, and averaging one performance every two years, the fifty-something Weaver's plan betrays an aching irony: the project faces the same near-impossible timetable as global efforts to stave off catastrophic species loss'.[43] For all its formal innovation and protracted temporal scope, *The Unreliable Bestiary* can hope to represent 'only a tiny sliver of our current catastrophic loss of habitat and biodiversity'.[44] At its most basic level of existence, then, Weaver's project is bound up in an impossibility that parallels both the seeming impossibility of these species' continued survival—and the audience's own inability to conceive of the total non-existence of this range of animal species, so deeply imbricated in our own cultural mythologies.

Fig. 51 Deke Weaver, *ELEPHANT* (Stock Pavilion, University of Illinois, 2010). Photograph by Valerie Oliviero © Deke Weaver (artist) and Valerie Oliviero (photographer). All rights reserved.

43 Chaudhuri and Williams, 'The Play', p. 72.
44 Deke Weaver, *The Unreliable Bestiary*, https://www.unreliablebestiary.org/.

Fig. 52 Deke Weaver, *BEAR* (Meadowbrook Park, Urbana, Illinois, 2016). Photograph by Nathan Keay © Deke Weaver (artist) and Nathan Keay (photographer). All rights reserved.

Furthermore, although *The Unreliable Bestiary* often still depends on the human body and voice to stage its ecological concerns, the human figure is decentred not only by the intermixing of intermedial resources, but also by the project's refusal to prioritise (or even permit) any stable human comprehension of the world it presents. Each piece mixes factual, mythical, and outright false information about the animal in question to the point that any definitive interpretation becomes impossible, and spectators must 'learn to content themselves with a base level of uncertainty about whether or not what they are hearing is objectively true'.[45] Reviewing WOLF, for example, Elizabeth Tavares recalls how '[s]eeing a trapped wolf far ahead on the path, it was unclear whether this was actor or animal',[46] and Nigel Rothfels notes how ELEPHANT creates 'an unsettling contemplation of the elephant as an animal we both might know better and will never know at all'.[47]

45 Chaudhuri and Williams, 'The Play', p. 75.

46 Elizabeth Tavares, 'WOLF Politics: Performance art behind the barn', *Bite Thumbnails* (12 September 2013), http://bitethumbnails.com/archives/433.

47 Nigel Rothfels, 'Commentary: A Hero's Death', in *Animal Acts: Performing Species Today*, ed. by Una Chaudhuri and Holly Hughes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan

Weaver's work decentres the human and disrupts the human-centric scale by interrupting our sense of our own capacity for comprehending the beyond-human world. Yet he also insists on the simultaneously 'unreal' nature of these performed animals, presented as the product of human imagination. The result is a kind of structural irony: a series of performances that decentre the human yet constantly remind us that we cannot access the animal world without the mediating filter of our imagination. The destabilising of the anthropocentric experience, then, takes place at the level of the spectator's experience rather than solely on Weaver's 'stages' or in his performance imagery. By means of its affectively and cognitively disorienting forms, *The Unreliable Bestiary* engages with uncontainable, inconceivable ecological otherness.

This de-anthropocentric re-imagining is crucial, we suggest, to contemporary and future theatrical representation of climate crisis and the ecological world more broadly. Weaver's performance pieces draw together the human and the nonhuman in non-hierarchised forms, in which the human figure is present but not central or authoritative. Comparably, recent ecocritical thinkers and theorists have returned repeatedly to imagery of pluralised material unity (the woven cloth, the mesh, the web, the compost heap) to articulate the profound interconnection and unavoidable ongoing interaction between all human and nonhuman beings in the Anthropocene era. In *The Ecological Thought*, Morton employs the image of an immeasurably vast mesh to describe both 'the interconnected-ness of all living and non-living things', and the simultaneous gaps, absences, and voids between these interdependent organisms, the 'strange, even intrinsically strange' relationships between non-hierarchised beings.[48] Elsewhere ecofeminist Donna J. Haraway's conceptualising of the 'Chthulucene' as an alternative to the human-centric Anthropocene offers a similar foregrounding of the 'compost piles' of multi-species relationships, asserting the necessity of making ontologically heterogeneous kin or 'oddkin' with 'microbes, plants, animals [...] human and nonhuman bodies, at different scales of time and place' in order to more properly

Press, 2014), pp. 182–88 (p. 183), https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.5633302.

48 Morton, *The Ecological Thought*, p. 28, p. 15. See also Morton, 'Queer Ecology', *PMLA*, 125.2 (2010), 273–82 (pp. 274–78), https://doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2010.125.2.273.

comprehend and exist on our shared planet.[49] Similarly, Weaver himself argues,

> The gears of an ecosystem's clockwork include air, water, animals, money, and the human imagination. Our fantasies, assumptions, and cultural mythologies literally shape the land. Animals and their stories are embedded in our environmental, economic, political, and judicial systems. It's all part of the same cloth. You tug on one corner of the bedsheet and the whole thing moves.[50]

Mesh, compost pile, bedsheet: each of these unifying models demands a re-imagining of un-hierarchised co-existence rather than human-centric mastery, or indeed total human detachment. After all, if we assume that much ecologically-oriented theatre is at least partially 'activist', interested in influencing its audience's subsequent behaviour for the greener good, then ecological performance must still imbricate—if not centre—the human figure at some level. As Haraway notes, 'human beings are not the only important actors [...], and the biotic and abiotic powers of this earth are the main story. However, the doings of situated, actual human beings matter'.[51] This combination of radical intimacy yet insistent strangeness, as staged by Weaver's *The Unreliable Bestiary*, proffers a new relation of uncanny interconnection that promises 'new epistemological orientations, affective entanglements, and ethical commitments' between human and nonhuman participants.[52] It is precisely this revolutionary shift in perspective and feeling, this generative affect of intimate strangeness, that ecologically inclined theatre performance is poised to achieve by way of its uniquely multi-spatial, multi-temporal, multi-sensorial scope of play.

Conclusion

Two productions, one recent and one upcoming at time of writing, are radically relocating the natural world in theatrical performance, and physically relegating humankind to the margins of attention. On 22

49 Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), p. 4, 169, 16, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv11cw25q.
50 Weaver, 'The Unreliable Bestiary', https://www.unreliablebestiary.org/
51 Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, p. 55.
52 Chaudhuri and Williams, 'The Play', p. 72.

June 2020, Barcelona's Liceu Opera re-opened for the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic forced a lockdown closure in March that year—but without a human audience. A string quartet played Giacomo Puccini's 'Cristantemi' to an auditorium in which every one of the 2,292 seats was occupied by plants from local nurseries, in what curating artist Eugenio Ampudia called a foregrounding of 'something as essential as our relationship with nature'.[53] In February 2021, director Katie Mitchell announced her plans for a new production of Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* (1904) from the point of view of the trees. Mitchell explained:

> We'll do the play backwards, and then we'll exit out of the play, and we will keep going backwards through lots of geological time, through until the carboniferous period, which is when the trees first started. So that's going to be using that play as a threshold through which we can walk to also look at planetary time, as well as refocus[ing] the drama so it's no longer anthropocentric. [...] You will spend more minutes in a theatre with the trees than with the human beings. It will be a very strict ratio of about 80 trees, 20 human beings. [...] I think it's just really pushing ourselves to try, you know, theatrical embodiments of the more-than-human world.[54]

In both cases, the nonhuman plant forms take precedence over the human.[55] In Mitchell's planned *Cherry Orchard* production, the trees become the central subjects, rather than the backdrop or metaphorical props to the human action; in the Liceu Opera's performance, the auditorium plants become 'subjects' in that they are positioned as expectant audience, rather than the onstage 'object' of the spectatorial gaze. These are extreme examples of the repurposing of the *theatrum ut mundi* model, but they offer timely indications of the drive towards radically repositioning the human figure as—at the very most—co-habitant, rather than master of our ecological and theatrical landscapes.

53 https://www.liceubarcelona.cat/en/artist-eugenio-ampudia-inaugurates-activity-liceu-concert-2292-plants. A recording of the performance is available here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rgvadprJFRc&t=11s.

54 'In Conversation with Katie Mitchell, Professor Fiona Stafford and Dr Catherine Love', The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities (4 February 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FHa-S-5XWcg.

55 Editors' note: See also the 'longterm planttheater' developed by Tobias Rausch (2010–2015) and studied by Eliane Beaufils in chapter 13.

Decentring, re-scaling, and enmeshing the human figure within the micro- and macroscopic scales of the climate crisis is the crucial work of twenty-first-century theatre and performance practice—particularly while our collective consciousness lacks any ready imaginative sense of the 'invisible', inconceivable, seemingly unrepresentable spectra of ecological forces that extend beyond or below our human-centric scale.

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