

# Making Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis

## The Asks (a complete list)

What follows is the full list of 'asks' submitted on postcards, on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2023, as part of 'Making Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis, at the National Theatre, London.

### ***From the briefing notes (recap on purpose of Asks)***

The task for the day is to come up with some 'asks' that will help us to collaborate better at the earliest creative stage of making the work. By the end of the day, your task is to have written an 'ask' on the postcard you were given, and to put it in the post-boxes or hand it to an usher on your way out. We will then collate these and share the resulting document.

Ask (from freelance director to artistic director): 'what will help me to foster an ethos of ethical environmental responsibility and meet green book standards in my production is: ....'

- **For example**, some budget to be ringfenced for late-stage decisions to ensure they remain ethical.
- **For example**, For the theatre to provide me with detailed documentation of everything my creative team can use, so we can take creative inspiration from it at the start.

Ask (from artistic director to freelance director): What will help me steer this theatre towards climate careful practice will be if you, as a freelance director leading a production, can:

- **For example**, as an artistic director, I need the directors I work with to schedule the design process in a timely way, with early-stage consultation with our production, department, and to stick to the schedule.
- **For example**, I need the directors I work with to ensure that they lead the conversation about the process of climate care, in every meeting, from the start of the very production.
- **For example**, I need directors to commit to working with their designer to 'design out' environmentally harmful materials – i.e. create a design that does not need much in the way of single-use, one-off resources.

### **Asks submitted on postcards by participants**

*NB: Some names and email addresses were provided. These have been redacted.*

### **Pledges (submitted with the asks)**

We pledge to include the climate conversation at all points and levels of production

Pledge – to continue to inform myself to improve my practice as an art director/set designer.

### **Some feedback:**

The day was:

- informative
- thought-provoking
- truly inspirational

### **Asks from Artistic Directors to Freelance Directors:**

*(NB noticeably fewer of these than the other way round)*

Please lead the conversation about climate impact and how it is part of the work you are making. If you do this, everyone else will feel confident to participate.

Will you be a climate action leader and empower your whole creative team to also be climate action leaders? If so, these are all the things we'll do to facilitate that...

Can we have a longer artistic development process? And can we tap in much frequently so I/we/the company can support you sustainably?

Allow space and time for the *[artistic/production/acting]* team to challenge decisions.

*[Approach negotiations on climate care with an awareness of/willingness to recognise the context I am working in, and]* remember that Artistic Directors are only individual humans that are trying their best.

### **Asks from Freelance Directors to Artistic Directors & Organisations**

#### **Creative process asks:**

Give freelancers longer lead-in times.

Give me time to research and develop things so I can make decisions based on discovery and play in a room

Producing and programming needs to be one of the very first steps in 'Climate Dramaturgy'. Please make it part of your Ask to me as an artist.

Quite apart from production issues, playwrights might write material that doesn't necessarily address climate change directly but rather the social conflicts, value structures and situations that tend to produce issues like climate change – or obstruct people from dealing with it. (A primary example of such a play is Ibsen's *Enemy of the People*, that deals with pollution – but exactly puts forward the same sorts of issues of status, greed, etc. that inform social reluctance to deal with climate change). There are so many such social issues involved (denial, greed, etc.) entailed in addressing climate change but all of them are social and political. Such theatre at least could provoke discussion and debate as well as awareness.

If storytelling is a superpower we need to include writers and those programming content in this movement to inspire new content.

- give me a document that details material and intellectual resources you have.
- Recycling should not breach the copyright of the other designers whose sets are being upcycled. Using the materials and not the 'designs', much like the German pavilion example.
- practical possibility: rehearsal weeks with some time in between maybe in 3 periods so the choice of props, costume is tested and has the time to be found/made/crafted. Because what is needed is time.  
We need to slow down and do less

### **Ethos asks:**

Ask of Artistic Directors and Executive directors: read *The Great Derangement* by Amitav Ghosh [and *The Nutmeg's Curse*] in order to understand the connectivity between climate crisis, and equity (climate, capitalism and colonialism) – and therefore to provoke deeper thinking around real innovation and change. (not just adapting our design and touring models in order to keep things as much as possible as they are).

Remember that Green Book is an approach and ethos, not just a badge for certain shows.

Ask: Will the *Theatre Green Book* add "Making a culture Declaration" to its repertoire? (And put it on its website?)

Can venues please practice more joined up thinking that leaves space for freelancers to bring their priorities for Climate Care and be really listened to.

For organisations to engage mindfully in this way with all your freelance directors (including those working with participants) not just on big stages.

Have faith and put faith in freelancers – bring them into the conversation (around and beyond climate) and genuinely listen.

To AD's / Institutions: help me understand your environmental commitments and policies from the very beginning of our collaboration!

I am taking away Amanda's offer of Environmental and Social Equity as being inextricably linked. For her definition of marginalised artists, i.e. FREELANCERS to genuinely be part of the conversation, and the solution, I as for Artistic Directors to take action to end gatekeeping and commit to transparency in how freelancers interact with buildings. We have agency but only as much agency as is afforded to us, in terms of resources and relationships, clear/open instructions from venues about how to communicate with them for climate, but also programming, hiring and sharing resources is the ASK.

Can we create a space for the question not answered on the voices not in the 'room' to be explored?

To organisations: Can freelance Directors be involved in evaluation and debrief to talk through success/failure and impact?

Recognize that a sustainable set does not necessarily imply, mean or equal minimal or sparse.

Provocation -> we need to integrate the practice of social ecological equity in everything, not make it the subject, no lesson-giving

### **Asks in relation to working conditions:**

How can you ensure equity within your organisation (Front of House not being on low pay, etc.) so I/we are not working in an environment that enables inequality.

4-day week and shorter hours -> current working hours are for RATIONAL ECONOMIC MAN who has no DEPENDENTS, not disabled, CARE TAKES TIME.

Can freelance Directors be paid properly for these longer timelines needed to embed this thinking and hear learning from previous work in your organisation.

Emerging Artist to AD: Will you invest earlier in artists incorporating these principles? In seed money (which limits size of ACE bid due to match requirements), in training and time?

Fund the design process more realistically, taking into account the extra work load required for a Green Book (and similar) show, for (already poorly paid) design teams. They are a fundamental element of all the discussions today who weren't represented enough.

How do we support freelancers when in funding limbo – when a big solution is longer lead-in times and higher fees.

### **Audience-facing asks:**

Ask: involve Front of house and Catering in "show-related" presence of e.g. Presence of one small eco-food producer and their collaboration

Think

Front of House  
Doorstep  
and  
Just outside

Before, during and after the show.

My Ask/Provocation: Accompany the show with a pertinent suggestion of "one green thing" that audience-members can do on a daily/regular basis to move climate care forward. The "one green thing" needs to be linked to the show

- locally pertinent
- do-able
- and 'satisfying'

Can the building embody sustainability by promoting, providing, facilitating responsible consumption by eliminating (or at least reducing) plastic packages goods?

Alternatives -> storing and displaying sweets and snacks in bulk and selling returnable (silent) containers.

How can theatre makers/companies reach culturally impoverished or geographically isolated communities while still remaining climate conscious?

And how can that be achieved while ensuring art is financially accessible during the cost-of-living crisis?

From an emerging theatre maker in the Scottish Highlands

### **Budget asks:**

- slow fashion only, in costume

Prioritize paying people not for things

Please share information about the facts of cost of making a production has on the climate so we can be less ignorant and more empowered.

Freelance Director to artistic Director: I need a higher fee to cover research and prep needed to make production sustainably generative

How do you address all of the asks in here without putting more unpaid labour on freelancers?

### **Board/Organisation-level asks:**

How do we lead the way on de-investing – from fossil fuel extractors/climate exploiters – as a sector, and pushing our funders to de-invest?

Director to Artistic Director: When will large organisations' boards and investors be held to account over the damage caused and how do they intend to make reparations for them?

- large organisations to not use sponsors who fund oil or arms

Directors asks to AD: where are you putting my pension contribution? Will it match the efforts me and my team will make in climate care?

As a freelance Director, I'd love to ask arts organizations to interrogate funding structures.

- Can a theatre building and rehearsal room become zero single use plastic?

A provocation – the climate crisis is an enormous and radical problem. What can we/you/your organisation do with your work that is the most radical response to the climate crisis that you can think of? And how could this idea be real, or change thinking?

Is it possible to embed climate change and sustainable development into the core principles of a building? To incentivize productions and artists to make work and produce theatre that is sustainable.

Technical Director to producer: understand it will take more time and might cost more!!

### **Theatre Sector asks:**

#### **Commercial:**

To ask commercial theatre to engage with Environmental theatre, publicly. What can they do?

Where is the commercial sector in this conversation? Are they invited to this conversation? They have a huge part to play in changing the sector.

### **Communication:**

How do we bring together all sector groups already working on solutions to avoid doubling up on solutions that can help all.

More representation of smaller organisations to be involved in the conversation. (hearing from micro and a variety of missions).

To each other: we are (traditionally) solitary beasts as Directors – can we find ways to talk about this more...

How we have succeeded

Where we have tried/failed

Questions/approaches we champion

RECIPROCITY: exchange with others, for mutual benefit  
Especially privilege

How do freelancers engage with the Mycelium Network?

Ask for All Directors/ADs: Don't 'speak' for design and designers. It's our industry and planet too. For discourse that features the word 'design' more than it does 'director', it amazes me how few /(or little) designers are considered integral to finding solutions to issues.

Can we do this more often? With Designers, producers, directors, etc.  
Keep momentum, keep sharing practice  
Keep climate justice forefront

### **Training and development:**

- How can ecodramaturgy and sustainability be an intrinsic part of education so that for the next generations this is the norm?

Ask: from educators to the sector

That the central hubs, networks and joint resources include drama schools -> they are the next generation of theatre makers.

I would ask how transparency can be given to help graduates (those thinking up solutions to the big questions) gain opportunities?

## **Resource sharing:**

Make your resource known. Understand that in terms of equity the burden on small companies outweighs yours to deliver the same in terms of % resources.

Ask of the Artistic Directors of larger national companies to be generous in the sharing of 'best practice' findings relating to the Climate Crisis with Artistic Directors of the full ecology of theatres – particularly those with little funding who are supporting communities with added challenges.

Can someone please find sponsorship/contract for a shared/national/easily bookable green fleet of transport?

Can we collectively store sets as we do costumes so that design elements and materials (thanks Vicki!) can shared/hired/repurposed and accessed by those who need them...

Please can the NT prop store make a database of its stuff available online (incl. images) so it's easy for Fringe companies to find stuff, without having to come to London.

We need a system and commitment for sharing of resources e.g. National Theatre/RSC and large N.P.O's sharing their sets/props/costumes with non-NPO theatres.

Request from independent producer to venue/building: please can we have a storage space where we can donate set/props/costume to, as well as rent/borrow from. (Thank you 😊)

Sharing is crucial and it's wonderful how much the NT is already doing. The more knowledge we all have the more we can share – databases are the answer! LX kit, mics, costumes, props. Small companies to join in too and add their stock (I've got a props chest I can upload). No need for additional storage, we use existing. The principle I guess is if I'm not doing it and we can afford to transport it then you can have it. Obvious logistical/transport nightmares but it's a way to be more equitable without bleeding out. Thank you for an inspiring day – I'm so grateful to be here.