Arts & Theatre

# Conceptualising A New Approach

## Kyoto: An Arts & Climate Gathering

Sophie Layton (she/her)



Credit: Good Chance Theatre

The climate crisis is the extinction-level event of our generation. We, as a planet, are hurtling towards an uncertain future, with the only fixed-point being destruction on an unprecedented scale. But whilst we all hear the fate being told to us by scientists and climatologists with growing desperation, we are increasingly not listening. We all know the climate crisis is here, and yet our actions, as individuals, communities, nations, are pitifully slow. The message is no longer ringing; global warming is old news. It's time to change that.

London's West End has just bid goodbye to *Kyoto*, a play unlike any other documenting and dramatizing the consequential Cop3 Climate Summit almost 30 years ago, where nations agreed to act, in the face of tough resistance from competing interests. But *Kyoto*'s true power is how it has cut through the ecosystem, and seen a near sold out run in one of the world's largest and most challenging theatre districts. It is a reimagining; a new approach.

And that's what Good Chance Theatre offered. Representing Forge Press and the Sheffield University Theatre Company (SUTCo), joining hundreds of other delegates from the arts, theatre makers, journalists, activists, policymakers and more, we came together to think, to share and to collaborate, to find new solutions and new approaches, to not just talk about climate but to help people listen.

Moderated by actor & cultural advisor Ankur Bahl, *Kyoto: An Arts & Climate Gathering* was a new approach, one that transcended barriers and industries to help us all think differently. Whether discussing the impact of design, and how 80-90% of a garment's environmental impact is determined at the design phase, with climate communicator Indré Rockefeller, or Nicky Hawkins at Heard Consulting pressing us all to consider the story we tell, it was a chance to stop, refocus and recentre, but collectively.

Between talks, left from each with a singular question to consider, we saw hundreds of us turn to those near us, complete strangers, and discuss. Bringing ideas from across classes, creeds, borders and backgrounds together to think outside of the pre-determined boxes and crucially, to think outside of our own respective industries. Engaging with other theatre-makers, as well as an activist, creators and others, breaks down the conventions of a convention. Suddenly, we are not the presented, but the presenters, shaping the conversation with each of our experiences, before coalescing around single ideas or thoughts.

Moving between delegates, engaging with new people from across the country and world, connections unlike any other were forged. Long-lasting? Maybe not. Influential? Certainly.

Not one of us solved the climate crisis in that room, and no one expected to. But it was what we did do that made this event so groundbreaking. The thinking, the collaboration, the community that was fostered in just several short hours, in the shadow of *Kyoto*'s set, that forged something different. By connecting with those we had never met, leaving all preconceived notions at the door and coming together with a common goal of exploration, we found new solutions, new ways of doing things and new ideas to bring back to wherever we came from.

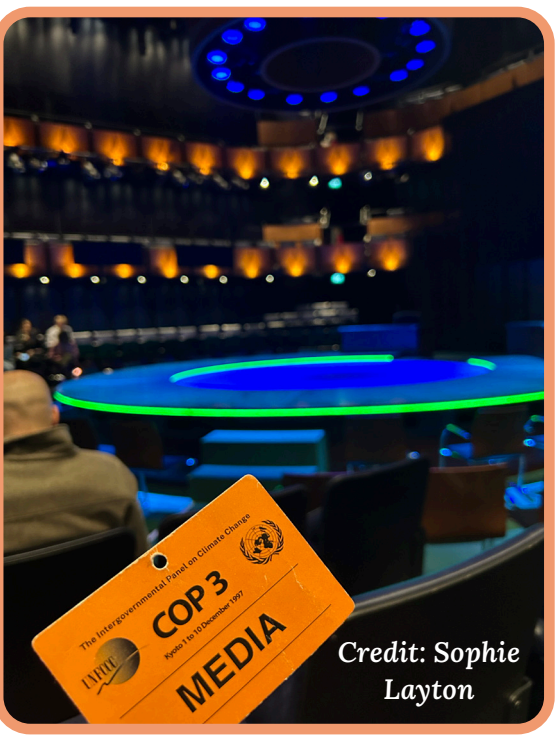
For journalists, it's about often leaving statistics behind and focusing instead on people and on the stories that matter. For theatre-makers, considering whose stories we're telling, why we're telling them, and what benefit it brings to our subjects to share it in this way. For designers, incorporating smart design and an awareness of life cycles and circularity to reduce waste. And for activists and policymakers, how to make the world listen, rather than just hearing. Sitting on the convergence of journalism, theatre and policy specialities, it is this interconnectivity that made *Kyoto: An Arts & Climate Gathering* so effective. For so long, each area is considered as having a part to play but each with its distinct remits, challenges and limits. But by disregarding these, and bringing these fields together, we can work more effectively towards a tangible solution. I come back to Sheffield with ideas; small seeds inspired by conversations, questions, or even individual words, that aren't much yet, but with time, space, and crucially, more collaboration, can grow towards fully-fledged projects, initiatives and more, to help fight the climate crisis, either directly, or through how we discuss it.

This gathering must not be the end. I have experienced a variety of talks, presentations and workshops, but not one that felt so natural or so consequential as the one which welcomed new possibilities. If collaborative, shared spaces like these were to grow, become more widespread and applied to a wide variety of challenges we face, it may be the next unexpected solution to finally crack the problems we must so urgently tackle.

*Kyoto: An Arts & Climate Gathering was held on April 25th at @sohoplace in London's West End*





Credit: Sophie Layton