

**By Youth, for Adults:
Categorizing 100 Watt Productions' Ecocentric Applied Theatre Methodologies**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis project explores the evolving relationship between Applied Theatre and youth-led environmental activism in Canada. It uses Ottawa-based 100 Watt Productions as its primary case-study, locating the company's performance history, creation methodologies, and pedagogy within English Canada's recent Applied Theatre and Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) landscapes. This analysis is accomplished through a mixture of textual analysis, performance analysis, and interviews with the company's founder, Kristina Watt Villegas. Particular focus is placed on Watt's approach to collaborating with young people on *12*, the company's most recent theatrical production and most urgent call for climate action to date, having toured theatres, schools, board rooms, and government offices across Canada's capital region. *12* is composed of a mixture of brief vignettes, poetic compositions, and verbatim excerpts regarding climate crises, described as a "cross-generation love story – a playful theatrical invitation [...] to stop, listen, and to consider what it actually means to take action at this point" (Watt, "Creations: 12").

This thesis project proposes that productions such as these demand a new subcategorization of Applied Theatre, formulated here as Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences (YTAA). This YTAA terminology describes Applied Theatre that has been specifically created by young people for adults, a performance dynamic that has proven to be particularly well suited to the unprecedented political challenges faced by our youngest generations, not only in its compatibility with the platforming of climate appeals, but also in its unique capacity to elevate those young voices through a reframing of the aesthetic experience, often incorporating the participants' own creation process into the audience's overall consideration of aesthetic experience. In this sense, *12* acts as a microcosm for YTAA's escalating significance as an Applied Theatre subcategory, pointing towards an urgent need for increased attention, both in Canadian theatre criticism and scholarship more broadly.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- YTAA: Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences.
- TYA: Theatre for Young Audiences.
- ASC: Arts for Social Change.

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STATEMENT OF ETHICS APPROVAL

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INTRODUCTION

I am an optimist, unrepentant and militant. After all, in order not to be a fool an optimist must know how sad a place the world can be. It is only the pessimist who finds this out anew every day. (Peter Ustinov 167)

Hope is not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. (Václav Havel 181)

In the Fall of 2019, myself and a few of the other graduate students at the University of Ottawa attended our capital's climate strike. This event stood alongside a series of climate marches around the world, chiefly organized and realized by young people. I had been reflecting upon young people's role in the climate movement for a great deal of the preceding summer, inspired like many others by the likes of Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier, and more personally by the young people I had had the pleasure of mentoring through CISV, an international summer camp program which focuses upon sustainability, among other peace education pedagogies. Youth climate advocacy is by no means an invention of 2019, of course, but its prominence in that year's news cycle was relatively unprecedented, and the Ottawa climate strike will likely be my most vivid memory when reflecting upon my time as a graduate student.

Given the circumstances of the coronavirus pandemic, however, these protests, marches, and the greater climate movement have transitioned largely online. No blame can be placed for this unforeseeable shift, of course, and the flexibility of young climate protestors in continuing their democratic participation online has been commendable. Nevertheless, this unfortunate online relocation stands alongside a broader trend. Ontario is developing an increased dependence on online learning with each passing year, and the province has recently seen a widespread expansion of classroom sizes in both face-to-face and online classes (Barbour i). While online learning has its merits, and while social media can be an incredibly effective tool for any democratic practice, the virtual movement comes with a number of unwelcome pedagogical disadvantages for young people. These disadvantages

arise primarily out of a gradual shift away from the in-person benefits of active, participatory pedagogies, towards the conveniences of passive, transmission-based learning. Given this context, I hope that my research, in its own small way, will serve as an implicit defense of these pedagogies.

The above concerns were my point of initial inspiration; however, I found myself in the discipline of theatre studies, and I was considering performance-based creative projects that spoke to the particular political, pedagogical context of climate crises. More specifically, I was hoping to develop a thesis project that could be approached underneath the umbrella of Applied Theatre, which is, broadly speaking, impact-focused theatre, “specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies” (Nicholson 3). Applied Theatre seemed most appropriate for balancing my interests in pedagogy and activism as it is often “politically committed theatre-making,” aiming to empower and educate all those involved, participant and spectator alike (13).

I came to propose a sequence of Applied Theatre workshops to my university, aimed at developing my own particular methodology of theatre education, one intended to help young people reflect upon climate crises and feelings of climate anxiety through puppet theatre creation, found-object aesthetics, and experimental teaching models, among other techniques. This thesis project was approved to move forward into research ethics applications; unfortunately, this process took place in the earliest days of the pandemic, and it was eventually decided that I should return to the drawing board. It had become clear that my project was not feasible under the circumstances, and that I must adapt from a firsthand, pedagogy-oriented project to some other methodology, whether that be performance analysis, textual analysis, or interviews.

Luckily, in preparing this initial thesis proposal and searching for relevant Applied Theatre artists and case studies, I had already happened upon the work of Kristina Watt Villegas and her Ottawa-based theatre company, 100 Watt Productions. Watt’s work with young artists serves as an effective microcosm for the aforementioned cultural shifts and responses to climate crises, and I quickly became interested in better understanding Watt’s pedagogical priorities and influences.

100 Watt Productions

Kristina Watt Villegas is a multi-award-winning actor, director, theatre creator, and educator. She has worked as an independent artist across many regions, including Canada, Colombia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Watt relocated to Ottawa more permanently in 2003, quickly becoming a key fixture in the local theatre community and launching 100 Watt Productions in 2009. This theatre company is self-described as creating “innovative, boundary stretching theatre through collaboration between professional artists and young people” (Watt, “About 100 Watt Productions”). 100 Watt Productions is “driven by a curiosity about humanity’s relationship with nature and to one another,” and the company’s resultant performances “embrace the tension that vibrates between innocence & anarchy, while posing universal questions that may resonate with any age” (Ibid.).

100 Watt Productions’ pillars exhibit clear potential for better understanding the youth-led climate movement’s relationship with performance, in that they prioritize young people’s evolving relationship with the natural world and platform that relationship for audiences of varying ages. My pedagogical interests were particularly piqued by *12*, 100 Watt Productions’ most recent environmentally-focused performance. Watt created *12* in collaboration with young people ages twelve through seventeen, and the performance is described by 100 Watt’s website as a “theatre creation that gives voice to youth with regards to the Climate Crisis and the future they feel they’ve inherited” (Watt, “Creations: 12”). It is a “cross-generation love story – a playful theatrical invitation by 10 young people to stop, listen, and to consider what it actually means to take [climate] action at this point” (Ibid.). *12* does not tell this “cross-generation love story” through a traditional narrative structure, however; it is instead composed of a mixture of brief vignettes, poetic compositions, and verbatim excerpts, taken both from interviews that the creators conducted with Ottawans of all ages, as well as from published interviews, featuring a number of “global youth activists,” such as Boyan Slat, Marinella Ubaldo, and of course, Greta Thunberg, among others (Ibid.). By foregoing a linear narrative in favour of this pliable thematic investigation, *12* paints a uniquely truthful portrait of the youth-led climate

movement's varying hopes and fears, leaving ample space for contradiction, conflicting emotion, and self-reflection.

I2 has seen great success on a local level, having toured Canada's capital region, "not just to theatres but to corporations and inside government offices," a community-oriented mobility and flexibility that has proven to be characteristic of many successful Applied Theatre productions (Watt, "For Youth, Theatre is Action"). However, *I2*'s recent accomplishments were put on hold by the coronavirus pandemic; the young performers involved "decided [collectively] that *I2* couldn't be replicated online" (Ibid.). Instead, they reconvened with Watt to create a new piece of Zoom-based theatre titled *While We Wait*, which served "as a means to question how to navigate a life-on-hold while still wanting change" (Ibid.). This digital performance stands apart from most pandemic-era theatre creations in its intense self-reflexivity, explicitly questioning the relationship between performance and activism in an online world, while also foreshadowing *I2*'s eventual return to live performance in November 2021.

Notably, echoes of this distinction between typical digital theatre and *While We Wait*'s 'in-the-meantime' theatre can be found in the Canadian eLearning Network's recent call for clearer distinctions between "online learning" and "emergency remote teaching" across Canada, the two of which have been frequently conflated by pandemic-focused media coverage, resulting in a wide-spread muddying of the pedagogical waters (Barbour et al. ii). 100 Watt seems to similarly recognize that the transition between *I2* and *While We Wait*, if framed indelicately, could easily misrepresent their company's relationship with pedagogy, online relocation, and the broader youth-led climate movement, all of which seem to be easily misrepresented more broadly.

Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences (YTAA)

100 Watt Productions' creative navigation of these distinctions, as well as their awareness of the youth-led climate movement's evolving strengths and weaknesses, provides this thesis project with

ample insight into Applied Theatre's broader ability to navigate current given political circumstances, and particularly Applied Theatre practitioners' ability to shape their methodologies to those political circumstances. This thesis project seeks to articulate this adaptive process, locating 100 Watt Productions' performance history and creation methodologies within English Canada's contemporary Applied Theatre and TYA (Theatre for Young Audiences) landscapes. Particular efforts are dedicated to better understanding these landscapes' evolving relationship with youth-led environmental activism through an analysis of 100 Watt Productions' playscripts, performances, and unique relationship with aesthetic theory.

That being said, 100 Watt Productions does not include the traditional pillars of TYA in its public-facing operating mandate, nor does it cater exclusively to young audiences. Rather, productions like *12* are fairly explicit in their unconventional target audience: "[12] is theatre for adults but – by necessity – performed by youth" (Watt, "Creations: 12"). Watt's emphasis on the necessity of a youth-to-adult audience dynamic allows us to approach the unique relationship between youth-performer and adult-spectator as a fundamental pillar of the work, potentially opening up new lines of inquiry surrounding Applied Theatre and TYA's currently prominent categorization models. In fact, I argue that 100 Watt's unique collaborations with youth suggest a newly pertinent subcategorization of Applied Theatre, seemingly heretofore undefined, which I will refer to and formulate as Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences (YTAA). This YTAA subcategory seems to have emerged out of the unique demands and opportunities of our political moment, particularly the recent efforts of the youth-led climate movement and the unprecedented challenges faced by our youngest generations, especially the need to appeal to older generations' authority for enacting policy-level change. As such, YTAA is this thesis' guiding terminology and frame of analysis.

While TYA and YTAA might seem disparate due to this inversion of target audience, of youth taking the stage while adults fill the seats, TYA is nevertheless uniquely helpful for developing and applying YTAA terminology. Many of TYA's prominent insights and supporting theories can be

applied similarly to young people's experiences of creating theatre for adult audiences, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of YTAA and any perceived youth-adult gaps. For example, Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator*, a popular reference point across TYA practice, is helpful in re-evaluating the presumed distinctness between young people's experience as spectators and their experience as actors. Rancière claims that there is "no opposition or inequality between [the two]" acts of spectating and acting, and that "both demand the same intelligence" from young people (Elnan 169). For Rancière, the young spectator is not passive, but rather active in "link[ing] what she sees to what she has seen, done, and dreamed; she uses her imagination and her intelligence" (169). Rancière also reminds his readers that a child learning to communicate "must force (...) her will onto another in order to be understood," charting the child's active progression from a "noisemaker to a speaker, a political figure" (170). His emphasis of children's activeness conflicts with "other emancipatory pedagogical theory, where the child will be emancipated and able to speak *after* being taught in a certain way" (170, italics added for emphasis). From pedagogical perspectives such as Rancière's, the young spectator does not only play a more active role than is often presumed, but the inverse also proves true: the young actor is a spectator to their own performance and to their own learning experience, seeing as there is "no opposition or inequality between [the two]" acts of spectating and acting (169). In short, Rancière's theory, among other emancipatory pedagogical theories, provides a potential bridging point between TYA and YTAA theory, a foundation upon which new models for YTAA can be built, including models for applying aesthetic theory, as will be theorized in Chapter 1's aesthetic theory section.

This thesis project aims to apply aesthetic theories and YTAA terminologies in more detail through an analysis of 100 Watt Productions' particular creation methodologies and resultant performances. It also seeks to clarify YTAA terminology's particular usages and relevance by briefly considering similar youth theatre productions from other Canadian theatre companies, such as Spare Change Theatre and their production of *No More Secrets*; by providing readers with an example of

contrasting approaches to youth collaboration underneath the YTAA umbrella; and by analyzing the techniques undertaken in framing and elevating young people's voices. As well, this exercise is being undertaken in the hopes that future scholarly research will be dedicated to this subcategory's scattered, yet resonant emergence across Canada.

Interview methodology

In the spirit of approaching the work on its own terms, this thesis project's primary means of data collection is interviews, conducted with 100 Watt Production's founder and artistic leader, Kristina Watt Villegas. These interviews provide invaluable insight into 100 Watt Productions' creation methodologies and their relationship with Applied Theatre theory, TYA theory, and more. Interview topics include Watt's approach to the overall artistic process, her consideration of pedagogy and performance theory, her work's target audience, her inspirations and influences, as well as 100 Watt Productions' performance history and questions regarding the broader theatrical, and political landscape within which her work finds itself. Full transcripts of these interviews can be found in Appendix A and are a worthwhile reading experience; Watt's voice is more than capable of standing apart from my own targeted efforts at interpretation and contextualization.

My interview methodology utilizes a flexibly-structured interview schema, with a loose commitment to predetermined questions. The effectiveness of such schemas is well-articulated by Alison Burke and Paul Innes' discussion of how performance research can borrow from recent methodological developments in the social sciences. Burke and Innes claim that:

[...] specific [interview] questions allow for the areas of research interest to be addressed, whilst the less tightly structured elements allow 'free reign' to the interviewee to explore the areas that are of his/her concern. In this way the formal aspect of interview question and answer is maintained, but similarly so is the conversational transaction between participants; the research agenda is met and potential new unanticipated lines of enquiry are opened up. (Burke and Innes 7)

Such “semi-structured” schemas are thereby useful not only for assuring ample ground is covered, but also for remaining reflexive in one’s own methodology, remaining open to unexpected discussions that might challenge predetermined research goals and confirmation biases. D. Soyini Madison makes a similar claim for emerging interview methodologies more broadly, such as those which fall under “critical ethnography,” where the “rigid back-and-forth replay of question-answer-question is replaced by a more fluid and reciprocal dynamic [...] You are listening with an open heart and kind reception to what is being said and expressed to you; you are not motivated by judgment, but by understanding” (Madison 12). Additionally, flexible interview schemas are reflective of the social sciences’ recent acknowledgment that “the role of the interviewer is [not] a role that can potentially be expunged” (Burke and Innes 7). Instead, a schema built upon “conversational transaction” recognizes that the creation of meaning is inevitably shared between the interviewer and the interviewee, in spite of any futile attempts at sealing off the subject from all external influence (7).

For the most part, my interview schema limited the use of heavy jargon and esoteric terminologies, so as to avoid the exclusion of “those who are not privy to the implied meanings in a coded language” (8). While such language might allow for a more specified pursuit of research goals, it risks “the interview los[ing] its interrogative function and becom[ing] a display of knowledge” (17). Additionally, I do not consider overt jargon to be profoundly necessary or complementary to the intended subject matters at hand, being primarily a mixture of autobiography, oral history, and personal narratives.

It should also be acknowledged that these interviews are a limited account of 100 Watt Productions’ performance history and creation processes, prioritizing the perspective of the company’s leader and primary instructor over the company’s participants. This prioritization is not intended to disregard those perspectives, invaluable in their own right, but rather to achieve a productive level of specificity and to work within my research study’s limited scope and resources. Additionally, Kristina Watt Villegas has already published her own interviews with *12*’s participants through Artists &

Climate Change, an online blog and resource hub (Watt, “For Youth, Theatre is Action”). These interviews are an exceptionally helpful supplementary source for any eager readers, particularly those who wish to identify “points of similitude or difference” between participants’ perspectives (Burke and Innes 11).

Research scope and limitations

As this thesis project aims to analyze and contextualize 100 Watt Productions’ performance history within the evolving English Canadian Applied Theatre landscape, it should be acknowledged that French Canadian theatre remains largely unaddressed throughout. My intention is not to dismiss the rich, varied youth theatre of French Canada, but rather to pursue the abovementioned specificity of research scope and to work within my available resources. Similarly, this thesis project will not survey all of Canadian TYA’s varied strengths and weaknesses but will instead limit itself to TYA that clarifies and contextualizes this thesis project’s particular YTAA terminology, as well as 100 Watt Productions’ unconventional relationship with TYA.

This thesis project also avoids diagnosing or waxing poetic on the politics of climate crisis denialism and processes of climate policy implementation, refraining from grappling with debates that exceed its grasp; such work has elsewhere been pursued effectively. Instead, this thesis project limits itself to referencing political and psychological research that draws parallels between Applied Theatre and effective climate crisis communication techniques, staking a claim for climate crisis theatre’s significance more broadly. This research also allows 100 Watt Productions’ politics to be approached on their own terms, in the hopes of better appreciating the targeted methodologies involved when creating political theatre that platforms young voices and intersects with other climate crisis media.

Blueprint

The first chapter of this thesis develops its unique terminology (YTAA) in more detail by pulling from relevant Applied Theatre theory and TYA theory, exploring the complex theoretical differentiations between young people's theatre and 'adult' theatre. This foundation of theory will allow for a more nuanced exploration of 100 Watt Productions' own navigation of such differentiations and offer a better understanding of the points at which Watt diverges from common practice. This chapter also provides a basis of relevant aesthetic theory in order to clarify the terminology of YTAA and its implications for textual analysis and performance analysis, with a particular focus on YTAA and Applied Theatre's unique emphasis of participatory, heteronomous aesthetic experiences, as opposed to closed, autonomous aesthetic experiences. This chapter ends by providing examples of recent Canadian Applied Theatre productions that can be approached as YTAA by audiences and scholars alike, in addition to providing a brief, supplementary case study in *No More Secrets*. These examples illustrate the local field within which 100 Watt Productions operates and demonstrate the potential for further applications of this thesis project's YTAA terminology.

Chapter 2 seeks to briefly summarize the strengths and weaknesses of Applied Theatre in English Canada today, partially by surveying the broader field of Arts for Social Change (ASC). It also surveys the broader field of climate crisis theatre, particularly in its intersections with the youth-led climate movement. These summaries are not comprehensive, but rather limit themselves to observations that contextualize 100 Watt Productions' performance history and creation methodologies, as well as observations that might help to generate ideas for better supporting YTAA efforts in the future. The chapter ends by providing examples of recent Canadian climate crisis theatre, in addition to providing a brief, supplementary case study in *The Pipeline Project*. These examples once again illustrate the local field within which 100 Watt Productions operates, in addition to identifying local precedents for Watt's targeted use of talkbacks and ancillary programming.

Chapter 3 focuses on locating 100 Watt Productions and *I2* within the above fields through a mixture of textual analysis, performance analysis, and interviews with Kristina Watt Villegas. Particular focus is placed on Watt's pedagogy, creation methodology, and any strategies undertaken to navigate the strengths and weaknesses of both the Applied Theatre field and the youth-led climate movement in Canada. Watt's consideration of target audience is also analyzed at length, including the extent to which her consideration of target audience impacted her facilitation tactics and her overall framing of 100 Watt Productions, a consideration that has proven to be the bedrock of YTAA's development as a terminology. This analysis and its relevance to Applied Theatre, and TYA studies more broadly, underscores the urgency of Kristina Watt Villegas' localized performance-based, pedagogical contributions to the youth-led climate movement, while simultaneously advocating for other Canadian Applied Theatre artists to be likewise appreciated.

A note on autoethnography

This thesis' conclusion includes a first-person, narrative account of my experience as an audience member at *I2*'s remount in November 2021, its first return to live performance after the initial lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic. This thesis project is largely based on earlier, pre-pandemic iterations of *I2*, and this section attempts to honour *I2*'s malleability, seeing as the production will likely continue to evolve alongside its young performers, responding to future developments in the youth-led climate movement. This section also illustrates some of the unique challenges faced by YTAA performances, such as their inevitable thematic responsiveness to performance context, including a responsiveness to venue, marketing, and audience demographics. This section ends by suggesting potential paths forward for YTAA, calling for greater access to resources and more varied performance opportunities.

This personal narrative is a culmination of the thesis project's broader inclination towards autoethnography. As defined by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, autoethnography is "an approach to

research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner 273). Autoethnography combines autobiography and ethnography in the pursuit of “meaningful, accessible, and evocative research,” an approach gently utilized in the above account of this thesis’ own origins (274). This approach resurfaces in Chapter 3’s analysis, which refers back to my own experience as an audience member of *I2* in 2020, finding deep relevance in personal responses and the extrapolation of other audience members’ responses in turn – responses that both resemble and contrast my own. For example, I put great effort into analyzing the role played by audience participation in *I2*, and how invitations for audience participation have been largely neglected by audiences thus far. Just as autoethnography asks researchers to question themselves and to “consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies,” the reluctance of *I2*’s audiences to participate offers an added layer of legitimacy to the performance’s unique political messaging, implicitly asking audience members to notice their reluctance and to thereby question themselves and their own complicity (276). Autoethnography allows my personal experience of spectatorship to explicitly inform such analyses while nevertheless maintaining a critical eye.

Autoethnography is also complementary to the abovementioned interview processes. Compared to other methodologies, autoethnography has a unique capacity to recognize “subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (274). From this perspective, the interviewer’s influence on the interviewee is not an obstacle to be overcome, but rather an opportunity for deeper analysis, particularly considering the potential for emotional responses to arise in discussing climate anxiety.

Finally, autoethnography is a suitable approach for analyzing 100 Watt Productions, seeing as the pillars of autoethnography share parallels with Kristina Watt Villegas’ own intentions as an artist, as will be discussed in Chapter 3. For example, Ellis, Adams, and Bochner claim that:

[...] the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people. (Ellis et al. 277)

As will be seen, Watt similarly prioritizes personal experience, in the hopes that those experiences' sense of urgency will draw in a range of diverse audiences. In fact, the questions "most important" to autoethnographers are strikingly similar to those asked by Watt of herself: "who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?" (284). This thesis' autoethnographic conclusion is written in the same spirit.

CHAPTER 1 – THEORY & TERMINOLOGY: YOUTH THEATRE FOR ADULT AUDIENCES (YTAA)

1.1 Theatre & Climate Crises

Peter Handke, in his well-known response to the work of Bertolt Brecht, expresses a scathing critique of politically-minded theatre, targeting its ineffectiveness at animating immediate social change. Handke argues that “the [traditional] theatre’s sphere of relevance is determined by the extent to which everything that is serious, important, unequivocal, conclusive outside the theatre becomes *play*; and therefore unequivocation, commitment and so on become irretrievably played out in the theatre” (Handke 7). Any call-to-arms remains easily dismissible by the average theatregoing audience, according to Handke, as political messaging is inevitably framed as play-based entertainment, in spite of Brecht’s famous estrangement effect, due particularly to the performance’s containment within an institutional consumer space, being the traditional theatre (Ibid.). From this perspective, the very moment that climate crises and their ecological devastations are portrayed on stage, they are sapped of their political weight and immediacy, as they are inadvertently restricted within their recreational context.

More than just an interest in the youth-led climate movement’s desire to perform and platform its own political urgency on stage, however, this thesis project also emerged out of the unique parallels shared between theatrical performance and recent research into climate crisis information dissemination, including the strengths and weaknesses of different information dissemination techniques; these parallels reveal potential strengths in practice that might supersede Handke’s critique of theatre’s political limitations, among others. Literary scholars, for example, have observed that “many playwrights [already] utilize and illustrate the same concerns and recommendations to move their audiences as those that are voiced in climate communication manuals,” even playwrights who operate outside of climate-fiction subgenres (Hoydis 345). Similarly, the Center for Research on

Environmental Decisions at Columbia University outlines the ideal conditions for disseminating climate science information to the public, conditions from which one can easily infer theatre's compatibility: "[climate science] must be actively communicated with appropriate language, metaphor, and analogy; combined with narrative storytelling; made vivid through visual imagery and experiential scenarios" (Hoydis 345). Recent psychological research has made complementary claims, finding that "concrete experiences in the here and now are essential to people's belief in climate change" (Van Lange et al. 270). If the threats of climate crises are perceived to be immediate and tangible by the individual, they are more likely to be treated as legitimate and actionable. From this perspective, it is necessary to simulate such "concrete experiences" where there might otherwise be none, particularly in areas of the world where the effects of climate change tend to be less immediately perceptible (but no less threatening to the status quo). In my experience, for example, many Canadians are initially surprised to hear that Canada is warming at "more than double the global rate" (BBC). In summary, the tangibility of theatre can supplement a necessary immediacy and vividness to climate advocacy's primary obstacle: abstractness.

Given these priorities, this thesis project's understanding of climate crises and environmental sustainability is not necessarily concerned with the details of broad, legislative change. Instead, this thesis is framed by the attitudes and behaviours of the individual; primarily through their subjective relationship to climate crisis information dissemination, climate policy, and climate advocacy itself, and secondarily through their understanding of ethical consumption practices. This framing allows for a narrower focus on topics with immediate relevance to young people's lives and provides an efficient springboard to the local, communal goals often pursued by both the youth-led climate movement and many Applied Theatre practitioners. Further research should be dedicated elsewhere to this movement's tangible implications for policy reform, being beyond the scope of this thesis project.

That being said, local reform and ethical consumption practices are not the only benefits of discussing environmental sustainability with young people; these conversations act as effective

connectors to complementary sustainability topics, opening a door to the wide variety of societal and political factors that can impact a community's capacity for climate action. For example, Gillian Symons describes how a simple discussion with young people about environmentally friendly transportation options almost inevitably prompts questions of "why people move around," allowing for an easy transition into discussions of city infrastructure, economic factors, barriers faced by specific communities, and more (Symons 61). The type of Applied Theatre being explored by this thesis project is not only an opportunity for young people to explore and express their climate anxiety, but also to expand their appreciation for the tangible, systems-based nuances of implementing climate policy and the potential consequences that might arise in practice.

1.2 Applied Theatre & Climate Activism

Let us briefly return to Handke's critique of Brecht. After laying out his grievances, Handke concedes that, despite traditional theatre's ineffectiveness at producing immediate political change, theatre can still function as a facilitator for "hitherto undiscovered areas of play, as a means by which the individual's awareness becomes not broader but more precise, as a means of becoming sensitive, of becoming susceptible, of reacting, as a means of coming into the world" (Handke 10). Given the priorities stated above, of simulating tangible climate crisis experiences while simultaneously building the skills necessary for youth-led climate activism, Applied Theatre emerges as a suitable performance medium, one which might satisfy Handke's vision of political theatre and play "as a means of coming into the world" (Handke 10).

Helen Nicholson defines Applied Theatre as theatre that is "specifically intended to benefit individuals, communities and societies" (Nicholson 3). These benefits, while diverse, are often linked together by an "invitation to participate and encourage critical debate" (Abraham 5). In other words, Applied Theatre is often, but not always, "politically committed theatre-making," as it aims to empower and educate all those involved (Nicholson 13). Other scholars take this definition a step

further, claiming that Applied Theatre takes “participants and audiences beyond the scope of conventional, mainstream theatre into the realm of a theatre that is responsive to ordinary people and their stories, local settings and priorities” (Prentki and Preston 9). While definitions vary, it is the shared notion of Applied Theatre’s unique capacity to be political, empowering, educational, and localized that is most significant to this thesis project’s intentions. It should be admitted that Applied Theatre is not inherently education-driven, being distinct from Theatre in Education as a field of studies (TIE), but education and shared learning are nevertheless emboldened within the Applied Theatre context, as it encourages a dialogue between different peoples and distinct perspectives on topics that often invite contention.

A major influence on this vision of Applied Theatre is the innovative pedagogy of Paulo Freire, the pedagogy of the oppressed, in which “both learner and teacher respect one another as co-subjects who discover and develop their understanding of situation, circumstance and knowledge together” (Abraham 5). This emancipatory approach to pedagogy emerged in Brazil in the late 1960s, proposed by Freire to “ensure that those impacted by oppressive rhetoric are involved in a process of discovery through education that is ‘not pseudo-participation, but committed involvement’” (5). Most notable for Applied Theatre, perhaps, is this pedagogy’s prioritization of “the expert lived experiences of communities over the often research-informed knowledge of the practitioners” (6). Nicholson surveys contemporary Applied Theatre practices similarly, and through this work, one might recognize Freire’s legacy, including how Freire’s emancipatory pedagogy has been built upon over time. For example, Nicholson argues that while it can be tempting to frame Applied Theatre spaces as learning environments of cohesion and unification, it has proven much more productive to acknowledge these environments’ tensions, which are inherent to any true encounter between active, engaged perspectives (Nicholson 28). In other words, Applied Theatre’s primary motivator should not be a pursuit of harmony nor definitive consensus, but rather “[an acceptance] that the realm of the political is always a site of antagonistic struggle” (28). By embracing the antagonisms of critical and inquisitive learning

environments, rather than ineffectually rejecting or avoiding those tensions, the facilitator allows the participant to explore this landscape of potential antagonisms more confidently and to strive for more respectful, informed modes of communication, as with Freire's emancipatory emphasis on co-subjects in the learning environment (Smidt 65). In this spirit, this thesis project seeks to better understand the tensions of Applied Theatre facilitators' practice, which can manifest in both rehearsal spaces and theatrical performances themselves. This project is particularly interested in whether or not these tensions are embraced or resisted by the facilitator, as this decision shapes both their pedagogical intentions as well as the resultant aesthetic experience.

Nicholson goes on to detail a number of specific creation strategies for Applied Theatre, the most relevant likely being the "Reflect" process, which locates the inspiration for group discussion within participants' own personal experiences (Nicholson 48). "Reflect" accomplishes this by providing a clear, guiding syntax through which participants can transfer those personal experiences onto their Applied Theatre production's particular creation process (48). According to Nicholson, this process "enables participants to use their own local knowledge as a starting point for literacy development, inviting them to generate a vocabulary around a theme or a place which is significant to them" (48). This type of three-part transferal process, from individual experience, to shared group vocabulary, to collective creation, can be found in a wide variety of Applied Theatre strategies, demonstrating Applied Theatre's unique prioritization of participant empowerment, as well as that newly empowered individual's coalescence with their group's shared goals. By grounding the collective creation experience in these transparently subjective terms, Applied Theatre allows for less intimidating conversations to occur on expansive topics and political dilemmas, by acknowledging the limitations shared by every individual in the room, including the facilitator. Additionally, this approach provides young participants with an opportunity to see the personal side of contrary opinions, acting as a bridging point to more empathetic conversations.

Approaches such as these, in their explicit foregrounding of subjectivity, share notable parallels with recent climate advocacy research. For example, Julia Hoydis, in advocating for theatre's compatibility with climate advocacy, references Mike Hulme, a professor of human geography at Cambridge, who suggests that efforts at climate advocacy should "discard the focus on unilateral solution-orientation; for [Hulme], climate change is an 'imaginative idea' which can find multiple expressions and should be approached as such" (Hoydis 346). It is necessary to embrace "plurality, multiplicity, [and] multivocality," which provides "many more resources to work with creatively as a society or as a global collection of societies" (347). This vision of multivocality is shared by Nicholson's "Reflect" process described above, among other Applied Theatre techniques, suggesting a compatibility of practice between Applied Theatre and climate advocacy more broadly.

Such multivocal techniques also open a door for participants to better appreciate the context within which their voices operate. For example, Nicholson claims that many of Applied Theatre's creation processes "displace the centrality of human experience by recognising that people are enmeshed in wider networks of interdependence" (Nicholson 40). In other words, the object of discussion is often presented as being contingent upon complex, political contexts, encouraging the participants to recognize the potential restrictions of their limited point-of-view. Applied Theatre's creation processes allow participants to momentarily relegate the weight of their own subjective perspective, to "displace their [own] centrality," and to elevate the opinions of others while simultaneously recognizing their own position in the community, both locally and more broadly (40).

This displacement of centrality complements the emphasis of intersubjectivity described above and provides another bridging point to climate advocacy, by allowing for a more potent appreciation of climate crises' gravity. Here, one can again turn to Hoydis, who briefly surveys research into theatre's unique ability to "[confront] spectators with their own/shared mortality" (Hoydis 346). She references Jill Dolan, who argues that theatre, through its ephemerality, "spurs political action by reminding us, perhaps, that however differently we live, our common, flesh-full cause is that in performance, we're

dying together” (346). Hoydis borrows such claims to argue that “one can see climate change plays as ‘an affective, even therapeutic reckoning with species finitude’” (346). This expansion of climate change plays’ affective experience beyond the individual experience to embrace the collective experience is in line with the displacement of individual centrality described above, and the two claims contribute to a common effect: increasing participants’ consideration of “wider networks of interdependence” (Nicholson 40). The immediacy of these affective experiences can also help to counter the perceived “abstractness” and “time extendedness” of climate crises, which recent psychological research has demonstrated to be one of the foremost obstacles to individuals undertaking climate action (Van Lange et al. 270).

Similarly, studies have shown that individuals are less likely to undertake climate action if they perceive that “other people are not prepared to cooperate” (270). This reluctance is amplified by the “myth of self-interest,” the “tendency to overestimate selfish behavior by other people,” which is easily superimposed onto climate crises due to their high levels of “abstraction and uncertainty,” meaning that “people are prone to remain pessimistic about other people’s willingness to contribute to reducing climate change” (270). Applied Theatre is a fitting countermeasure to these assumptions, as Applied Theatre frequently “works with communities where a readily available community isn’t always easy to identify or bring together, particularly in a world where individualism, protectionism, and neoliberal discourses of social exclusion are rife in everyday life” (Abraham 6). Such formations of unexpected micro-communities, however temporary, can help to demystify assumptions of self-interest by asking participants and audiences alike to consider commonalities within their community, foregrounding commonalities which might not seem ‘readily available.’ Applied Theatre can thereby encourage participants to re-evaluate their community’s broader capacity for climate action. It is the hope of many Applied Theatre practitioners that their participants can then extend this re-evaluation process more broadly, more frequently reflecting upon the capacity for action in their daily lives.

1.3 YTAA (Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences)

Given the unique reciprocal potential shared by Applied Theatre and climate crisis activism, as surveyed above, new emergences of youth-specific activist performance were likely a foregone conclusion. The youth-led climate movement, in its demands for immediate attention and media coverage, was likely bound to reach for the tools and platforms of public performance art, an artistic symptom of our moment's particular political context. Applied Theatre facilitators, as shall be demonstrated, are often simply heeding this demand, helping young people to shape their artistic voices for public platforms and older audiences. This particular facilitation process' resultant product, Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences (YTAA), is this thesis project's guiding terminology.

Of course, YTAA and Applied Theatre's political potential is not limited to climate crisis activism but is also conveniently well-suited for familiarizing young people with democratic structures and the tools of active citizenship more broadly, helping those young people to develop the participation skills necessary for addressing older audiences and engaging in political action. For example, Nicholson draws direct links between Applied Theatre and fundamental notions of western citizenship, repeatedly referring to Chantal Mouffe's "description of citizenship as a process of identifications, a 'collective undertaking' in which a plurality of identities are recognised and legitimated rather than ignored or privatised" (Nicholson 39-40). Applied Theatre and this vision of modern, western citizenship share in a mutual democratization of voices, a recognition of plurality and participation that can empower young people to engage in their local and national political contexts.

At first, the unique democratizing potential of Applied Theatre might seem to have subversive implications for the formulation of YTAA as terminology, by suggesting that YTAA requires its own independent artistic, pedagogical considerations and theories; in other words, it might suggest the need to start from scratch. However, while YTAA might appear to be a sort of anti-TYA in this regard, inverting TYA's typical adult-performer to youth-spectator dynamic, YTAA and TYA nevertheless share an inalienable relationship, the former branching off from the latter, providing this new

terminology's formulation with some constructive roots. This relationship is comparable to the deconstructive relationship of the postmodern with the modern; YTAA carries a relationship of symbiosis and anamnesis with traditional TYA dynamics, particularly in terms of the supporting theory and epistemological frameworks of politically-oriented TYA creation methodologies, frameworks which inevitably linger and influence YTAA creation and reception processes. In short, YTAA asks us to question our own assumptions about the role of young people in the theatre, particularly assumptions surrounding traditional theatre pedagogies and aesthetic theories, in addition to the contested borders between youth theatre and adult theatre, while nevertheless providing a pre-established foundation of artistic and pedagogical theory upon which to build.

As discussed above, the theories of Paulo Freire and Jacques Rancière, common reference points across TYA practice, also prove to be applicable to YTAA in their emancipatory impulses, blurring the otherwise rigid boundaries faced by young people between student and teacher - actor and spectator. Other influences on the development of this YTAA subcategory include Suzanne Osten of Unga Klara, an innovative youth theatre company in Stockholm. Merete Elnan applies Rancière's emancipatory theories to Suzanne Osten's work, discussing Rancière's applicability for emerging, experimental TYA practices. According to Elnan, Osten creates theatre that challenges TYA's instinct towards "reinforcing cultural norms," particularly by committing her practice to two pillars: "first, we think that children are equally important as ourselves; second, we believe that they understand the same as us" (Elnan 167). Osten treats young people in the rehearsal process as esteemed members of the ensemble, valuing their contributions, comments, and creative improvisations in an equal manner (172). These pillars challenge restrictive notions of "children's capacity" in a like manner to Rancière (162). Other notable influences include the TYA creation techniques employed by GRIPS Theatre in Berlin, as well as the innovative techniques of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, among others.

This motley of influences demonstrates the centrality of TYA theory to the development of YTAA practice. While YTAA shifts TYA's target audience, it does not cut itself off from TYA

altogether, as these productions are still created ‘for young audiences,’ only in a deferred sense. Young people are not the immediate intended spectators of YTAA, but rather the ever-present spectators, whose implied gaze remains present over the entirety of the performance event, including the adult audience members themselves; in other words, the adults in the room are consistently reminded of their “being watched” by the young performers on stage and, by association, their being watched and scrutinized by younger generations more broadly, beyond the confines of the theatre. The adults in the room are asked to remember their responsibilities to those young people, to whom the planet and climate will eventually be left. Within such a performance phenomenon, one might hear echoes of Greta Thunberg’s iconic, affecting speech at the United Nations, in which she critiques adults’ deferral of hope and responsibility onto young people’s shoulders: “Yet you all come to us young people for hope. How dare you! [...] The eyes of all future generations are upon you” (Thunberg). In the YTAA performance event, young people’s voices hold adults’ attention, and their concerns are the primary point of focus, but the spotlight is nevertheless allowed to turn outwards; it is the audience members who are being watched, and who are being invited to question their own complicity and capacity for action.

All of that being said, it is crucial to acknowledge that 100 Watt Productions and *I2*’s creators do not view their production in an accusatory, antagonistic light, potentially setting it apart from Thunberg’s combative appeal. 100 Watt Productions makes great efforts to emphasize that *I2* is not a “teen rant,” but rather a “cross-generation love story – a playful theatrical invitation [...] to stop, listen, and to consider what it actually means to take action at this point. [*I2*] voices [young people’s] confusion with the inaction of corporations, leaders and their elders” (Watt, “Creations: *I2*”). Such apprehensions towards “lecturing” are shared by many creators and audiences in the climate-fiction subgenre, sometimes resulting in the reluctant omission of “practical ‘solutions’” from the text (Hoydis 345). However, *I2*’s “playful theatrical invitation” is not reflective of such a hesitance but is rather an active attempt to engage and spark conversation as an alternative to surface-level exercises in guilt and

condemnation (Watt, “Creations: 12”). It should be noted that such observations of 100 Watt Productions are by no means intended to discredit Thunberg’s speech, which served as a necessary affective appeal at a particular moment in time, and which was accompanied by an undeniable weight and spotlighting effect. Rather, 100 Watt Productions’ approach demonstrates the youth-led climate movement’s desire to be varied and multifaceted in its affective appeals.

In a sense, these navigations of guilt and affect speak to a persistent obstacle throughout the field of political theatre, being that, by simply attending the performance, audiences might feel implicitly absolved of responsibility, understanding their own attendance and ticket-purchase as affirmations of solidarity with the present political cause, as a type of contributive action, in place of any actual, tangible changes in behaviour. Such obstacles prompt us to invoke Handke once again, specifically his critique that the theatre does not exist “as a means of immediately changing prevailing conditions: it is itself a prevailing condition” (Handke 9). However, this critique of Brecht’s shortcomings emerged from Handke’s impression that politically-minded theatre is, in function, play-based entertainment under the false veil of action; what happens, then, when a political performance no longer disguises the role of play? What happens when young performers, in targeting an adult audience, expose the role of play and games in the creation process, as a means of inviting the audience into that shared affective experience? What happens when the performers actively associate this sense of playfulness with a politicized self-questioning, self-doubt, self-critique, and an outward, affect-based invitation for the spectator to do the same? While *I2*’s capacity for action and its engagement with such questions will be explored in proceeding chapters, it suffices to say that YTAA’s unique performance dynamics require their own particular consideration of political effectiveness, and particularly of aesthetic theory.

1.4 YTAA: Aesthetic Theory

Recognizing the relationship between play-based entertainment and social change, and between recreation and action inevitably raises questions surrounding Applied Theatre's complex and widely contested preoccupation with effect over affect. This emphasis of measurable, surveyable benefits has largely persisted in order to prove Applied Theatre's legitimacy of practice, particularly in appealing to funding bodies and when proposing Applied Theatre as a "corrective approach to challenge *at-risk* behaviours" (Abraham 5). Such a dependence on measurability poses expectable dilemmas for the arts, of course, and these dilemmas are then heightened for artists operating within climate crisis movements due to a scarcity of existing data on the "effectiveness of [climate-fiction] in general" (Hoydis 345).

In response, many Applied Theatre scholars and practitioners have recently cautioned against "over-instrumentalizing" their processes, instead re-emphasizing the oft-dismissed political potential of beauty and aesthetic experiences (White 3). Beauty, from this perspective, serves as a "facilitating quality rather than one that exists apart from efficacy" (8). Many of these practitioners, in fact, have proposed entirely new paths forward, moving even further away from effect towards affect. James Thompson, for example, "proposes an end to [this] preoccupation [...], and moves us towards the affective potential of moments of joy that can be felt from engaging with creative processes" (Abraham 8). In this view, "affect becomes the radical and may also be seen as the necessary engagement to move people to action" (8). This affect-based approach is particularly well suited for YTAA due to the emotional weight that accompanies these productions' appeals for action and political stakes, as well as due to the potential complexity and vagueness of 'effect' in the YTAA scenario, seeing as YTAA's tangible impacts are very difficult to survey, measure, and assess without much longer-term research projects than are currently commonly available to Applied Theatre researchers (Busby 8).

In order to further advocate for the affective potential of YTAA, it is necessary to first establish an aesthetic epistemological model that serves those affective experiences.¹ Formulating YTAA raises a number of unique questions regarding Applied Theatre's relationship with aesthetic theory, particularly considering Applied Theatre's tendency to emphasize participatory, heteronomous aesthetic experiences, rather than defined, autonomous ones, as observed and discussed at length by Gareth White, a lecturer at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, who argues that the aesthetic "calls us to relate to each other, invites us to participate, and it has radical potential" (White 10). White's aesthetic experience is relational, rather than contained. White also observes that Applied Theatre, in its prevailing prioritization of community, grassroots movements and usage of untrained actors, consistently reminds audiences and scholars alike that "the participants are nevertheless in the role of the audience members [as well], having an aesthetic experience in relation to their own actions" (61). Thereby, YTAA asks us to consider how the performance's aesthetic experience serves those involved differently; how can a facilitator craft an aesthetic experience that targets the adult spectator and youth performer with equal purpose? Is such a balance feasible?

Arnold Berleant's notion of the "aesthetic field" is helpful in this regard, as it might broaden any restrictive understandings of aesthetic theory's relationship with the performance situation. Berleant's aesthetic field is "understood by 'making reference to the total situation in which the objects, activities and experiences of art occur', rather than excluding elements that do not conform to a preconceived idea of what is relevant or valuable in art" (72). This aesthetic field is divided into four elements, being "the object, the artist, the perceiver, and the performer" (72). Berleant gives equal weight to each of these elements, given that these four roles are often "'collapsed', or 'telescoped'," frequently permeating one another (72). For example, if a given piece of art has no present, visible

¹ For relevant precedents in Canadian theatre aesthetics, see Denis Johnston's discussion of the 70s avant-garde movement in *Up the Mainstream: The Rise of Toronto's Alternative Theatre 1968-1975*. More specifically, for recent precedents in the aesthetics of Canadian youth theatre, see Green Thumb Theatre based out of Vancouver, BC and Carousel Players based out of St. Catharines, ON.

performer, the performer-role is “‘telescoped’, into that of the perceiver, who in effect performs the work by actively engaging with it in the experiential moment of perception” (72). This flexible notion of telescoping is useful for Applied Theatre’s aesthetics, as it allows for the “locus of the [aesthetic] functions [to be] variable, rather than belonging to a typically linear artist-object-performer-perceiver structure” (White 73). These aesthetic functions can be exchanged and conflated depending upon the needs of the performance context.

More specifically, in terms of YTAA, the aesthetic field’s flexibility allows for a differentiated understanding of the aesthetic function, in which the Applied Theatre performance is crafted towards a hypothetical adult spectator while nevertheless prioritizing the young-creator’s own aesthetic experience; these two aesthetic experiences, while distinct, can then serve, inform, and heighten one another. In other words, Berleant’s notion of the aesthetic field reaches beyond the traditional borders of a performance situation, expanding the scope of the YTAA performance to include the creation process itself, with an emphasis on the aesthetic experience of the participants and an interest in how that particular aesthetic experience can then be communicated to an adult spectator. The performance’s greater aesthetic potential is only realized by inviting the adult spectator to engage with the affects of the young people’s own initial creation experience.

Of course, such a balancing act is not wholly unique to Berleant and YTAA; other fields of performance incorporate the affective experience of the performer into the production’s aesthetic, as with Augusto Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed. Nevertheless, Berleant is helpful for articulating YTAA’s particular political capacity and intentions. For example, by placing such emphasis on dissolving the aesthetic boundaries of participatory experiences, Berleant’s aesthetic field allows for YTAA’s flexible aesthetic model to include a performance’s ancillary events and resources, which are often featured prominently in politically-oriented Applied Theatre projects. This includes performance talk-backs, resource packages for drama teachers, and more; these elements are often referred to as a production’s “extended programming” (Gallagher and Wessels 1). Kathleen Gallagher, for example,

approaches the physical, pedagogical space of an Applied Theatre production through a similar aesthetic lens, analyzing instances in which the curation of theatres' foyers and lobby spaces "maximised the pedagogical potential of social exchange but also extended the aesthetic experience of theatre-going beyond the limits of the theatre auditorium" (31). Notably, in Gallagher's case, this "extended programming was not simply for the edification of the audience," but rather reflected an "[invitation for] people to continue relationships with [the creators] and to become involved in 'doing good' in their local communities" (32). In this sense, a flexible model for appreciating aesthetic experience can heighten a project's extended programming, particularly when that programming is framed as a communal 'invitation,' as is the case with 100 Watt Productions' *I2*. The extended programming of *I2* will be discussed at length, including its unique talkback experience.

In summary, Berleant's aesthetic field and other types of heterogenous aesthetic models are well suited for Applied Theatre, as they "can better address the plurality of experiences that happen in applied theatre participation [...] there is art in participation that invites people to experience themselves differently, reflexively, and self-consciously" (White 83). This thesis project's formulation of YTAA will be further developed and applied through this appreciation for the participatory, heteronomous potential of Berleant's aesthetic field model, in an effort to better appreciate such affective experiences' political potential and their resultant influence on YTAA's unique youth-performer adult-spectator dynamic.

1.5 YTAA: Canadian Landscape

There are many recent examples of Canadian Applied Theatre closely associated with YTAA, but that do not fit the precise conditions of this terminology. Such productions nevertheless demonstrate a fertile landscape from which the YTAA subcategory can continue to emerge. For instance, there have been many verbatim, impact-focused theatre projects across Canada that explicitly

spotlight young voices, such as *The Middle Place* by Project: Humanity and *Paths Less Travelled* by Scott Sharplin and Sheila Christie.

The Middle Place stages Project: Humanity's interviews with shelter youth in Toronto, Ontario, tactfully dramatizing their experience with homelessness (Gallagher 4-5). This production reflects similar priorities to YTAA, going so far as to interrogate its own generational dynamic by incorporating the interviewer as an on-stage character (Kushnir 16). However, the young people interviewed do not appear to have had a significant role in crafting and curating *The Middle Place*'s aesthetic experience (16-18). *Paths Less Travelled*, a digital theatre production about Canadian environmental activism, also bears similarities to YTAA in spotlighting young voices and their climate crisis concerns for adult audiences through pre-recorded interview clips (Sharplin and Christie, "Paths Less Travelled"). However, similar to *The Middle Place*, *Paths Less Travelled* does not appear to have included any of such young people in the creation process, at least not prominently (Sharplin and Christie, "The Team"). These types of omissions are not necessarily shortcomings, as they are typically ethically or logistically motivated; rather, they simply demonstrate the scattered emergence of YTAA's priorities across Canada and the potential opportunities available to young artists in this landscape. For an effective example of young artists rising to such occasions, a brief case-study of YTAA in action is necessary. Another Ottawa-based production, *No More Secrets*, will suffice, serving as a secondary case-study, with 100 Watt Productions as the primary in Chapter 3.

1.5.1 *No More Secrets*

No More Secrets is a verbatim, documentary theatre piece created and performed by five teenagers from Canterbury High School. It is an adaptation of an investigative report and accompanying podcast series from 2018, similarly titled "No more secrets," which exposed the abuses of three teachers at Bell High School over the span of three decades; the performance stages the report's testimonies and allegations, made by several victims of sexual abuse. The performance also

stages the investigative reporting itself, which brought this legacy of sexual abuse to light; Julie Ireton, the reporter who authored the longform report for CBC, is a character in the production, played by one of the young performers. It is an affective watch, to say the least.

No More Secrets was short-lived, having only been performed on two occasions for the Ottawa Fringe Festival in 2019, but it was nevertheless received positively, described by critics as “an awe-inspiring mediation between the vitality of today’s young people and the haunting verbal transcripts of past survivors, with a fantastic cast and an impactful, ethically-constructed script” (Murphy). I was lucky enough to attend this production, and I was similarly impressed by the young performers’ confidence in presenting such traumatic experiences with empathy, restraint, and nuance.



Fig. 1. *No More Secrets*, shadows. *Apt613*, <https://apt613.ca/no-more-secrets/>.

On first impression, this production’s compatibility with the YTAA subgenre might seem tenuous, being less overtly appeal-based than the 100 Watt productions to be discussed in this thesis project; however, a brief analysis of *No More Secrets*’ creation process and staging choices reveals compelling parallels with more political YTAA, demonstrating the flexibility of this YTAA

terminology and allowing for a greater appreciation of *No More Secrets*' affective potential, filtering Spare Change Theatre's efforts through an aesthetic model that complements and heightens their advocacy-based intentions. For example, while *No More Secrets* does not adhere to this thesis project's defined parameters for Applied Theatre, as it was largely self-produced and therefore lacked a trained, external leadership figure in rehearsals, but the production was nevertheless "created with the help of Julie Ireton, the investigative reporter who broke the story for the CBC," demonstrating a similar impulse towards external facilitation and collaboration between age groups (Spare Change Theatre, "photo of show announcement"). Additionally, *No More Secrets* displays a similar prioritization of community-impact to other Applied Theatre productions, given the inclusion of a talkback (an uncommon choice for any Ottawa Fringe Festival production), which featured a survivor of Bell High School's abuses, and given the donation of all production profits to Canadian charities focused on sexual abuse prevention and awareness (Spare Change Theatre, "photo of profit donation announcement"). Finally, while the young people of *No More Secrets* did not explicitly craft this production for adult audiences, the subject matter alone distinguishes it quite clearly from TYA. Consequently, the show was given a rating of "M" for mature by the Ottawa Fringe Festival, included in that year's widely available festival program (Ottawa Fringe Festival).

Given these parallels, YTAA arises as a compelling frame for analysis, allowing for a more thorough articulation of *No More Secrets*' relationship with its apparent target audience. Aisling Murphy of the Capital Critics' Circle, for example, observes that the production's heavy use of shadows and silhouettes "quietly asserts that the phenomena presented in *No More Secrets* could occur anywhere and to anyone" (Murphy). Additionally, the production makes heavy use of "repeated sections of [verbatim] text throughout," making "the issue at hand feel unbeatably cyclical" (Ibid.). As one cast member states in an interview: "This is a conversation that we cannot let die, for fear of future students who are being placed in this position not speaking up and not coming forward" (Fulcrum). This production is not only exposing traumatic histories or simply platforming the damage that has

already been done; *No More Secrets* reaches further, presenting those histories as pieces of potential cycles of abuse - cycles which can spread, silently spinning out of control to impact multiple generations. Put differently, these testimonies of abuse are not presented as isolated, contained snapshots of the past, but as a legacy with which to be reckoned, especially if we are to avoid passing such legacies continually downwards to younger generations. Through these staging choices and through the performance's resultant aesthetic experience, the young performers of *No More Secrets* assert to adult audiences that this story's implications are shared, thereby implicitly advocating for more action to be undertaken, not only on survivors' behalf, and not only on the performers' behalf, but on their own. The effects are shared, as is the responsibility.

Just as *No More Secrets* does not wish to present its traumas as isolated, contained, and thereby inert to its audience, Berleant's aesthetic field allows for a similarly expansive appreciation of the production's aesthetic experience, resisting the impulse to treat that aesthetic experience as contained, instead asking audiences to consider the creation process itself and its broader implications. By including Julie Ireton as a character in the performance, for example, the young performers demonstrate a resistance to centring themselves in the narrative, as well as a blurring of Berleant's aesthetic roles, being "the object, the artist, the perceiver, and the performer" (White 72). Ireton is the artist, in that she directly contributed to the creation of *No More Secrets*, and yet Ireton can also be easily categorized into the other four roles; Ireton is the performer, in that she is presenting her findings to the audience; Ireton is the perceiver, in that she is seen to bear witness to testimony alongside the audience; Ireton is the object, as she has become a character and her interviews serve as the performance's primary aesthetic artifact. The ambiguity of Ireton's role in *No More Secrets* thereby subtly asks the audience to open up their consideration of aesthetic experiences' traditional boundaries, while also asking the audience to consider the long, painful process that brought these very testimonies to light.

In summary, *No More Secrets* may present seemingly disparate subject matter to the work of 100 Watt Productions, as well as a looser relationship with the pillars of Applied Theatre, but it nevertheless demonstrates the capacity of YTAA terminologies and aesthetic models to broaden our appreciation of a youth production's affective potential, particularly in terms of its capacity to engage adult audiences and to collapse restrictive aesthetic functions. The above analysis also suggests that 100 Watt Productions participates in an easily-overlooked, relatively unanalyzed local field, sharing its advocacy-based priorities and expansive aesthetic impulses with other Ontario-based theatre creators, calling for further connections to be made between these efforts, in the hopes of painting a more thorough picture of Canadian YTAA and youth activism. As a frame of analysis, YTAA allows for researchers to make new, worthwhile connections between political theatre artists, opening a door to better understanding how these artists might influence one another's work.

CHAPTER 2 – CANADIAN CONTEXT: APPLIED THEATRE AND THE YOUTH-LED CLIMATE MOVEMENT

In my efforts to provide an extensive contextual backdrop for 100 Watt Productions, I came across a surprising shortage of surveys on Applied Theatre across Canada. I am including my findings here as a small step towards filling this gap. Additionally, my brief surveying finds that Applied Theatre has faced many similar obstacles to TYA in recent years, suggesting a set of parallel strengths and weaknesses. These parallels might help to more clearly articulate the opportunities presented by YTAA in merging the two fields and paving shared paths forward.

2.1 Arts for Social Change – Strengths & Weaknesses

In 1998, the Canadian Conference of the Arts (CCA) released its “Arts in Transition” report, which found that “education, training and funding of artists in Canada tend[ed] to [...] place primary value on the artist as solitary creator” (Little 5). The CCA went on to express “concern that many younger artists find [this] model confining, unable to accommodate their desire to work more closely with communities and to incorporate social and ecological issues in their art” (5). The twentieth century had not yet seen an embrace of community-engaged arts approaches, which are characteristic of most Applied Theatre practice.

Given concerning reports such as these, the twenty-first century has proven to be a period of rapid growth for community-engaged arts, otherwise referred to as Arts for Social Change (ASC) by the International Centre of Art for Social Change. Their definition of ASC bears advantageous similarities to Abraham and Nicholson’s understandings of Applied Theatre, defining ASC as “collective art-making [...] facilitated by a specially-trained artist or group of artists” (“The ASC! Research Project” 1). They add that ASC is “rooted in social, environmental, and political justice and is a form of cultural democracy designed to nurture insight, exchange and action” (1).

In 2019, the ASC! research project found Canada's ASC sector to be "rich, vibrant, and growing, with more than 500 ASC organizations – and many more individual ASC practitioners – working throughout the country" (2). They also found that these ASC organizations often "become adept at "creating something out of nothing" through share economies, crowd funding, and the work of volunteers ("State of the Art" 5). 100 Watt Productions, for example, frames recurrent financial limitations with an unabashedly positive spin, describing those limitations as "a positive impetus to explore and merge new forms that rely on exercising the imaginations of both the artists and the audiences" (Watt, "About 100 Watt Productions").

While Canada's ASC field may be flexible and flourishing, these financial constraints are nevertheless characteristic of the many hurdles faced in its path forward. ASC! clarifies, for example, that "fluctuating funding and financial constraints can prevent many organizations from hiring sufficient staff to respond to public interest in their offerings" ("State of the Art" 5). Financial constraints may push artists into creative corners, but they nevertheless impose a variety of burdensome resource limitations.

Additionally, while training opportunities have increased for community-engaged artists, ASC! found a "concerning lack of mechanisms for inter-generational ASC knowledge transfer," both in terms of mentorship for new ASC practitioners as well as more "formal training opportunities" ("The ASC! Research Project" 2). In 2016, ASC! observed that, even though these types of opportunities were slowly increasing in number and variance, they nevertheless "require[d] face-to-face participation and [were] usually based in urban centres, making them challenging for practitioners in rural settings to access" (9). Such access issues have resulted in new ASC practitioners struggling to "find relevant resources and professional development opportunities to help them expand their practice, to work effectively with partners, and to meet requirements, such as those for evaluation and impact assessment" (2). In short, funding, training, and knowledge transfer remain a persistent obstacle.

2.2 Applied Theatre – Strengths & Weaknesses

When narrowing the scope of ASC to focus particularly on Applied Theatre across Canada, one quickly observes parallel strengths and weaknesses. Applied Theatre is currently experiencing a similar richness of scope and variety to ASC, featuring many new artists in addition to new theorists and scholars (Prendergast et al. 11). This richness is due in large part to the emergence of new training opportunities; for example, the past decade has seen developments in the post-secondary world, including renowned Applied Theatre degree programs at the University of Victoria, Brock University, and Cape Breton University (9). Several other Canadian universities have also begun to offer Applied Theatre “as part of a [broader] degree in performance creation or interdisciplinary arts” (9). The University of Toronto is an effective example, as many students within the MA and PhD programs are allowed and encouraged to focus on Applied Theatre research, and these students can then find support from several different faculty members (Freeman 253).

In spite of this growth in academic recognition, the struggling knowledge-transfer mechanisms described by ASC! are nevertheless reflected in these university programs’ hesitance to branch out. Researchers have found that these post-secondary Applied Theatre programs need to expand their curriculum so that students can “exercise their capacities as ethical leaders” (Prendergast et al. 10). This would include courses in “educational leadership, social work, and child and youth care,” as well as courses that “address cross-cultural understanding and experience” (10). In other words, these programs’ knowledge-transfer mechanisms need to better recognize the frequently interdisciplinary demands of Applied Theatre work, in addition to the field of ASC more broadly.

Additionally, rather than fully adopt the umbrella of Applied Theatre terminology, Canadian academia has tended to keep its terminology more “methodology- or discipline-specific,” resulting in a lack of centralized Applied Theatre research, including a “lack of a professional association or a refereed journal focused on Applied Theatre and Performance research” (Freeman 252). While such associations, journals, and wide-ranging centralization efforts are not necessarily essential to the field’s

success across Canada, they would nevertheless “foster a training and research culture” for future artists and researchers, addressing many of the knowledge-transfer gaps described by ASC! and Prendergast (255). Centralization would also address the shortage of surveys on Applied Theatre across Canada, a shortage which impedes (and perhaps helps to justify) this thesis project’s own efforts at developing an extensive contextual backdrop, a backdrop that would allow for a more thorough articulation of 100 Watt Productions’ lineage and influences.

2.3 TYA (Theatre for Young Audiences)

In order to demonstrate the compatibility of YTAA with Applied Theatre practice, it is first necessary to provide a contextual summary of TYA’s history and positioning in Canada, particularly in terms of its recent hurdles, which prove parallel to those faced by Applied Theatre, including questions of effect versus affect.

Prior to the 1970s, across Canada, TYA was perceived as being largely inferior to, or as an early “stepping stone” into a more legitimate career in adult theatre creation (Fairhead 152). The field’s legitimacy slowly grew over the course of the 1970s and 1980s, but TYA was still largely rejected by drama educators, especially in elementary schools (153). It was only in the 1990s that a more “fertile ground” emerged for “renewed and strengthened relationships between TYA companies and educators,” effectively jumpstarting the field nationally (154). This shift was inspired primarily by a broader appreciation of the “process-product continuum” in Canadian arts education, in addition to educators’ growing desire for supplementary means of addressing socio-political issues’ growing presence in the classroom, including “racism, equity of access to opportunities and the environment” (154).

This trend towards strong, varied relationships with schools has continued into the early twenty-first century, particular in terms of TYA companies’ touring productions and on-site visits, which have quickly gained wide popularity as well as increased attention from funding bodies, who “finally

recognized the equal value of professional TYA writing, directing, and producing” to schools and communities (Ardal 192). That being said, these school relationships have potentially exceeded or overshadowed their own initial function, as artists’ growing dependence on school and teacher receptiveness has also resulted in an outsized financial dependence, meaning that TYA companies have to “play to schools and school audiences if they are to survive” (Bannerman 55). Teachers, for example, often have “difficulty justifying bringing students to a play that did not connect somehow to the class curriculum,” greatly limiting the creative capacity and subject matters potentially available to TYA creators (Ardal 195). Similar struggles to attain independent recognition are reflected in the academic publishing surrounding TYA, where, in spite of TYA’s complex and varied presence across Canada, scholars still “rarely engage with Canadian professional TYA” (Frey xvi). Instead, the “contemporary [...] scholarly landscape [opts for] abundant investigations of drama and education,” leaving TYA itself “largely invisible” to their readers (xvi). This neglective tendency further limits students’, scholars’, and creators’ access to alternative TYA approaches and greatly hinders any broader efforts at contextualizing the field, contextual data which could otherwise be used by TYA artists appealing to funding bodies.

Dependencies on schools and school curricula have prompted many TYA artists to call for a merging of TYA companies with ‘adult’ theatre companies, allowing for broader artistic freedoms, flexibility of subject matter, as well as the opportunity to “cross-pollinate artists” between the two often-insulated fields (Ardal 197). Additionally, this solution would reprioritize “the role of young people as members of [general] theatre audiences [...] rather than primarily as students or children” (Bannerman 54). That being said, these merges nevertheless introduce new hurdles for young spectators, particularly because such merges tend to be motivated by the adult theatre company’s own “self-preservation,” often featuring reactionary functions and a “view of young audiences as potential consumers” above all else, as opposed to learners and distinct thinkers (54).

From another perspective, the contrast between these two potential paths can be framed as follows: adult theatre companies “generally focus on how to get audiences into the theatre and what they will see there,” compared to TYA companies, who need to appease educators by “focus[ing] on the specific effects of their performances on their audiences” (56). Whether young people are targeted through school partnerships or through more traditional theatre outlets, there remains a consistent challenge in the delicate balancing of TYA’s priorities: measurable pedagogical intentions versus affective aesthetic experiences for their own sake.

Shifra Schonmann, in her exploration of the boundaries between TYA and adult theatre, echoes the contradictions of this delicate balancing act. She says that didactic approaches should be avoided in theatre “at all age-levels,” as they can impose upon the “artistic and aesthetic appeal” of the work; yet, she simultaneously argues that “serious attention” can still be paid to developing the work’s “pedagogical aims” (Schonmann 26-27). Canadian teachers seem to express a similar dilemma; Debra McLauchlin finds that, when drama teachers are presented with theatre company partnership models that increase ease of access, teachers express concern that more “generalist teachers may unduly value the commodity of resource materials at the expense of the innate artistry that a new generation of theatregoers should be invited to appreciate” (McLauchlin 125). In other words, scholars and educators alike are concerned with the overemphasis of effect and measurable benefits over artistic experiences, but they nevertheless hope to align that artistic experience with their own pedagogical intentions.

This broadly-concerning preoccupation with effect and evidence-based links to curricula draws a clear parallel between TYA and Applied Theatre’s Canadian histories, particularly in their recent mutual efforts at reorienting themselves towards a prioritization of the affective, aesthetic experience, away from the overly didactic experience, while still somehow holding on to their pedagogical values, efforts which clearly re-emerge in this thesis’ analysis of 100 Watt Productions and YTAA more broadly. These parallels point towards a potential compatibility in TYA and Applied Theatre’s paths

forward, perhaps through YTAA, and in their shared reconsideration of young people's potential role and function in theatre spaces.

2.4 Youth-led Climate Activism

In 2018-2019, the youth-led climate movement reached an “unprecedented” global scale, having since inspired a “global attitude shift, elevating the importance of climate change in the global agenda and calling for urgent social transformation” (Han et al. 16-17). The historic rise of this movement has proven to be more gradual than is often assumed, in spite of the apparent skyrocketing of figures like Greta Thunberg and her Fridays for Future campaign. In terms of its Canadian presence, the youth-led climate movement began a gradual journey towards national recognition in 2006 with the creation of the Canadian Youth Climate Coalition, introduced in direct response to the UN's Climate Change convention of the preceding year, a convention that featured momentous new emphases on youth delegates (Morgan 449). The UN has since expanded their approach, hosting its inaugural Youth Climate Summit in 2019, which offered “a platform for young climate activists to discuss their ideas with their peers and world leaders” (Han et al. 6). While the efficacy and tangible impact of these UN efforts to elevate young voices is often debated, they nevertheless prove substantial by inspiring parallel organization efforts in participating countries, as with this Canadian Youth Climate Coalition.

The youth-led climate movement's initial presence in Canada also seems to have been sparked in response to the Conservative federal government of the time, which began its nine-year tenure in 2006, the same year as the first Canadian Youth Climate Coalition. This conservative government's climate-related actions were often perceived by such groups to be “[recreating] Canada as a global ‘energy superpower’ while simultaneously weakening domestic environmental protection, vilifying activists, and contesting territorial rights of Indigenous peoples” (Lakanen ii). It is not surprising that young people began to organize in response, as Canadian youth of the time are recognized by Statistics Canada to have been “more diverse, educated, connected and socially engaged than past youth,” with

Canadian youth born after 1990 noted to be particularly “[well] equipped with unprecedented technological savvy, an entrepreneurial orientation and confidence in their ability to change the world” (Cox 215). Additionally, young people are customarily “more informed about climate change than the general public,” with young people “in countries such as the US [being] significantly more likely to express concerns over climate change than older generations” (Niederer 29). These findings suggest that young Canadians were eager to engage in climate advocacy, seeking opportunities for active participation. In fact, in a recent study of youth climate activist narratives, one which encompassed both European and North American iterations of the movement, Heejin Han and Sang Wuk Ahn found that, when asked who should fix these climate problems, youth activists tended to “[identify] themselves as protagonists in the narrative” (Han and Ahn 10). This self-centring does not seem to be reflective of arrogance or inflated egos; rather, Han and Ahn note that young people “see themselves as agents of change who can improve the status quo in multiple ways” (10).

That being said, the political capacities and aptitudes that coincided with the youth-led climate movement’s emergence in Canada do not seem to be fully appreciated in recent governments’ treatment of young people; rather, governmental attempts to elevate and incorporate young, political voices have often been performative, lacking substance or momentum. For example, in 2015, the Federal Liberal Party formed the “Prime Minister’s Youth Council,” announcing that Justin Trudeau was seeking young people’s perspectives on a variety of pressing issues, including “high unemployment, rising student debt, and lack of affordable housing,” issues which are notably “tethered to environmental decision making in less populated regions of the country” (Morgan 449). However, Vanessa Sloan Morgan observes that government-led councils such as these, which claim to highlight “young voices in [the governmental] decision-making process,” are often unclear in their intentions and lacking in surveyable follow-through, despite youth councils’ many successes in parallel political contexts (449). These councils’ tangible influence on decision-making processes is rarely specified. Morgan goes so far as to compare this treatment of young, political voices with resource extraction

industries themselves, claiming these vague, performative inclusions to be similarly “extractive” (449). In fact, while young people across Canada are broadly “civically and politically active,” a recent survey “commissioned by a coalition of Canadian youth-serving organizations” suggests that Canadians are well-aware of the “civic empowerment gap” exemplified by these seemingly performative youth councils, with 56% of Canadians believing that young people have “too little influence over the decisions governments make” (Cox 215).

Dissatisfaction with performative inclusions such as these can help to contextualize the youth-led climate movement’s current prominence and its broad emphasis of generational solidarity; recent studies show that young people “have more trust in their peer network than in adults when it comes to climate change engagement,” suggesting that youth climate advocacy programs are “more effective when led by young people [themselves],” rather than adults and older mentor-figures (Niederer 24). In fact, these studies note that people are “best motivated when [climate] engagement reinforces their identity, sense of belonging to their social group as well as pride in who they are or have become” (25). These emphases on both social belonging and processes of becoming bodes well for youth activist subcultures, particularly those areas of the youth-led climate movement that take participants’ learning journeys into account, elevating those young people as engaged citizens in an active, shared process of political development (as with Applied Theatre).

In spite of these collective resiliencies, the youth-led climate movement nevertheless suffers from internal vulnerabilities that are particular to the Canadian youth activism landscape. For example, due to Canada’s unique socio-political context, including: “its specific blend of liberal democracy, its mythology about being a ‘helping nation,’ its privileged locale within global power relations, and the claims that have flowed from that about what it means to be a ‘good person’ in the contemporary moment,” many youth activist subcultures have come to establish themselves on top of a uniquely tense “dichotomy between ‘caring for self’ and ‘caring for others’” (Kennelly 299). Canadian youth activism has come to be associated as something that is largely done “for and on behalf of others,”

rather than being done for oneself, resulting in emotional burdens and pressures that feel mostly self-imposed (299). Jacqueline Kennelly notes, for example, that young people born and raised in Canada are much more likely to raise these self-reflexive links between “guilt, responsibility, and activism” in political discussions than those who were born and raised elsewhere, emigrating to Canada (299). Of course, this does not suggest that the latter group is less capable of reflecting upon such topics by any means, but rather that the former group is overly preoccupied with such topics, predisposing them towards feelings of shame, self-judgment, and resultant emotional exhaustion, feelings with which they might be somewhat inexperienced at processing. This finding also suggests that the motivation for Canadian youth activism often finds its footing in these feelings of guilt, remorse, and in a sense of ideological obligation. These emotions can lack the forward-momentum and positivity of other potential motivators, such as first-hand experiences.

Kennelly goes on to claim that this emergence of excess guilt-ridden feelings and emotional exhaustion can also be linked to the process of “individualizing social change struggles” in Canada more broadly (297). Here she refers to the means by which democratic participation and social change are framed in “modern liberal democratic states,” including an increasing sense that the primary burden of democratic responsibility rests on the individual citizen, rather than the collective (297). The act of voting in Canada, for example, has adopted a “kind of economic rationality” according to Kennelly, which “sees democracy as the aggregate result of individual choices (or purchases)” (297). This economic framing of individual democratic participation fails to sufficiently emphasize “social interaction or mutual accountability” (297). Kennelly claims that this “[overly] individualized vision of democracy” has resulted in an “overwhelming burden of individualized responsibility and its powerful psychic associate, guilt,” effectively exemplified by the recurring sense within youth activist subcultures that one can never “do enough” (297). These emphases on individual choice, with their “deep roots within traditions of liberalism, [are] particularly dominant in Canada and [serve] to mask

other aspects of activist cultures, such as the impacts of class and race conflicts,” in addition to potentially provoking emotional exhaustion (310).

These Canadian vulnerabilities also retain a unique capacity to impact members of the youth-led climate movement due to their potential association with this movement’s particular ideological values. For example, the aforementioned guilt associated with individualism can easily extend to individual consumption habits, as these consumption habits have become “increasingly inseparable from the idea of the “active citizen”” in Canada, with patterns of “self-regulation” being gradually elevated in importance above more tangible examples of democratic participation “within [the] political public sphere” (308). This increased political emphasis on consumption practices carries outsized implications for the climate movement compared to other activist subcultures due to the movement’s inherent emphases on sustainability, waste, and individual carbon footprints.

Overall, this Canadian context is susceptible to foregrounding guilt, shame, anxiety, and a resultant sense of paralysis in activist subcultures. The youth-led climate movement must come to terms with these vulnerabilities if it is to sustain its newly-established global prominence and see its members fend off emotional exhaustion. Unfortunately, scholarship “has not paid sufficient attention to youth climate mobilization,” and further research is required to contextualize and address these challenges to emotional sustainability (Han and Ahn 1). This thesis project seeks to play a small part in this research; Applied Theatre’s capacity to encounter, consider, and grapple with such emotions is a central focus of Chapter 3.5.1, which demonstrates potential means of bypassing the abovementioned paralyses.

2.5 Climate Crisis Theatre

Understanding climate crises' current presence on Canadian stages begins with understanding those stages' dominant terminologies, foremost of which is that of ecocriticism. Generally speaking, ecocriticism can be defined as a subfield of literary studies, one which “[investigates] the many ways in

which culture and the environment – the realm that both includes and exceeds the human – are interrelated and conceptualized” (Soper and Bradley xv). This definition is necessarily broad and inclusive in its scope, not only because any text can be analyzed through an environmental framework, regardless of the natural world’s presence or lack thereof in the text, but also because the field of ecocriticism is growing more and more varied in each passing year, particularly in terms of the manifold “intellectual traditions that [ecocriticism] claims” (xv). Ella Soper and Nicholas Bradley cite Lawrence Bell on this point, claiming that ecocriticism “has a history both of strong position-taking by individual spokespersons and of reluctance to insist on a single normative, programmatic definition of its rightful scope, method, and stakes” (xv). Ecocriticism is specific to certain analytical interests but expansive in its ever-growing framework.

Broadly speaking, this field has flourished alongside general cultural trends and attitudes towards environmentalism since the 1980s, with several environmental artists and artistic organizations achieving rapid international recognition by the end of the twentieth century (Thomas 11). The 1990s marked a critical turning point in this regard, with ecocriticism emerging out of the “perceived immediacy and severity of environmental change” (Soper and Bradley xix). In this sense, an “activist impulse has informed ecocritical practice from the outset,” and the field is thereby innately political (xix).

That being said, ecocriticism’s influence on theatre and performance studies has been very gradual in comparison to other artistic mediums, for both artists and scholars alike (Thomas 12). Prior to 2013, ecological priorities within the western performance landscape were still relatively minor compared to those in literature and visual arts (13, 15). Its spread has also been slow compared to the growing presence of environmental concerns in film and other visual mediums (Hoydis 340). These delays might have been caused by the unique, multidisciplinary challenges faced by theatre creators compared to other mediums, but further theorizing would require further research. For now, it is sufficient to note that the previous decade has marked a dramatic shift in these trends, with much

greater attention being paid to climate crisis issues on western stages (340). This dramatic upsurge seems to have been precipitated by a number of milestone ecological productions in the United Kingdom between 2009 and 2011, such as Steve Waters' *The Contingency Plan*, Mike Bartlett's *Earthquakes in London*, Andrew Bovell's *When the Rain Stops Falling*, Richard Bean's *The Heretic*, Simon Stephens's *Wastwater*, and the National Theatre London's *Greenland* (341).

This slow spread is particularly surprising for the Canadian theatrical landscape, considering the variety of stereotypical assumptions often made of Canada's thematic priorities, being the supposed, iconic 'great white north.' Some of these stereotypes prove true; from the very beginnings of the "notion of a Canadian national literature, nature has occupied a central place in critical conversations" (Soper and Bradley xvii). The first signals of nature being a national thematic priority for theatre artists arises in the 1920 and 1930s, with playwrights "beginning to turn their attention to this country's expansive natural environment as an oikos or dwelling-place" (Gray 511). Additionally, the fragility of Canada's natural environments has been a recurring concern for Canadian playwrights since the late 1960s, and "in many of these works such recognitions are integral to the action" (Gray 513).

These trends have continued into the twenty-first century, which has seen no shortage of environmentally-minded performances; yet, prior to 2010, Canada suffered from a shortage of media coverage and scholarship concerning such productions (Gray and Rabillard 3-4). This shortage emerges in spite of the "flourishing" of eco-centric performance in Canada, which is particularly present in, but not limited to, "the work of many Métis and First Nations playwrights in Canada" (3-4). Theatre artists of wide-ranging backgrounds are creating eco-critical performances that are "original, life-affirming and, in some cases, downright celebratory" (3). This lack of theatre coverage has also persisted despite the "lively ecocritical debates" and "established community of [ecocritical] scholars" found in the Canadian literature landscape (Soper and Bradley xxiii).

While coverage may not have risen to the occasion, this saturation of eco-critical performances has nevertheless resulted in the formulation of a number of prominent new terminologies within theatre

and performance studies, particularly that of “ecodramaturgy,” a term coined by Theresa May in direct response to the work of Métis performer and playwright Marie Clements. May defines ecodramaturgy as “play-making (script development and production) that puts ecological reciprocity and community at the centre of its theatrical and thematic intent” (May 6). Soper and Bradley see great potential in this definition of ecodramaturgy and in its “conjunction of community and performance,” promising such conjunctions to be “a rich site of inquiry for Canadian ecocriticism” moving forward, in addition to exemplifying the “natural fit” of theatre and ecocriticism more broadly (Soper and Bradley xxxix). In theory, this “natural fit” can also heighten theatre’s psychological compatibility with climate crisis communication techniques, as discussed in Chapter 1.

Canadian trends, and Western ones more broadly, can be observed in these climate crisis plays’ recurring thematic contents, motifs, and plot-points. For example, Julia Hoydis characterizes common trends in climate crisis theatre and performance as follows:

Typically, the setting is before or in the aftermath of a disastrous event; the plays explore psychological implications and anxieties of climate change; they feature debate and dissent about its realities and who is to blame; there is a strong focus on (dysfunctional) relationships, parenthood, intergenerational justice and reproduction; there is at least one scientist character, who is more often than not also a father; and they parallel decay on the planetary and personal level. (Hoydis 341)

Hoydis also cites Shepherd-Barr in describing most climate crisis plays as being fairly “main-stream in their theatricality,” often choosing “realist ‘kitchen sink’ drama, which intersects banality and atrocity, but also commonly features climactic disastrous endings [...] or includes elements of speculative fiction (such as multiple time levels or settings in the far future)” (341). Most of these characteristics can be observed in Canadian climate crisis performance trends, particularly those that are concerned with ecological disasters and psychological ramifications. For example, Kimberly Skye Richards, in her appeal for a Canadian “Green New Theatre,” places emphasis on the “abundant” presence of recent theatrical productions tackling the damaging supremacy of Canada’s resource extraction industries, with the oil industry being the most commonly addressed offender (Richards 10, 13). These

productions include the “debate and dissent” defined by Hoydis, but they are also particularly notable for “challeng[ing] the Canadian myth of nature’s boundlessness,” a post-colonial effort to expose the damage being done to Indigenous lands and, by extension, to dismantle dominant settler cultures’ self-affirming processes (10). As examples, Richards cites Annabel Soutar’s *The Watershed*, Len Falkenstein’s *Lac/Athabasca*, Downstage Theatre’s *Good Fences*, and Matthew MacKenzie’s *Bears*, in addition to Kevin Loring, Quelemia Sparrow, and Sebastian Archibald’s *The Pipeline Project*, which will be analyzed in further detail (13).

Nelson Gray categorizes Canadian eco-performance somewhat differently than Richards while remaining in line with Hoydis’ outlined trends, dividing eco-performance up into two distinct yet broad categories. Gray’s first category includes playwrights who “[convey] environmental losses as an attendant loss of self and a profound displacement from the more-than-human world” (Gray 511). These playwrights thereby portray the average Canadian’s sense of identity in relation to the environment as “abject – the visible evidence of a collective ethos that is as toxic as the environment it has fouled” (515). Gray cites Canadian theatre creators Michael Cook, Karen Hines, Daniel Brooks, and Blake Brooker as examples of this fouling impulse and abject identification process (511). The second outlined category identifies playwrights who portray “relations with the more-than-human world [as], more often than not, identity-forming – part of an Indigenous response to social injustice” (511). Tomson Highway, Monique Mojica, Marie Clements, and other First Nations and Métis playwrights are cited as examples, with notable attention paid to *Burning Vision* (511). These two categories demonstrate a dichotomy of potential responses to the natural world’s current crises: does the individual find emotional and psychological instability in these crises’ implications for human progress, or does the individual find a grounding source of identification within these greater, “more-than-human” forces? (511).

While Gray’s two ecoperformance categories are disparate in terms of what the individual receives from their emotional relationship with the natural world, they nevertheless share in mutually

prioritizing the immediate psychological implications of climate crises' existential themes. The two categories can thereby be unified under Kimberly Skye Richards' "Green New Theatre" appeal, and particularly her claim that such productions work to align exploitations of the land and their accompanying colonial mindsets with dysfunctional social relationships and psychological traumas more broadly (Richards 10). Gray's two ecoperformance categories thereby share in elevating a sense of psychological, emotional, existential unsustainability, suggesting a mutual thematic concern: a shared, impending expiration date to the status quo of resource exploitation. As examples of this Canadian psycho-environmental alignment, Richards cites Chantal Bilodeau's *Sila*, Carole Fréchette's *Violette sur la terre*, and Catherine Banks's *Bone Cage*; to quote Richards once more, through "representations of suicidality, racism, anti-Indigeneity, homophobia, and violence against women, [productions such as these] make clear that when the land is marred by colonial incursions, our psychic and physical well-being is also devastated" (10).

I would add Yvette Nolan's *The Unplugging*, Colleen Murphy's *The Breathing Hole*, and Ellen Close and Braden Griffiths' *My Family and Other Endangered Species* to the above list, particularly due to those plays' preoccupation with aligning the socially unsustainable with the environmentally unsustainable. Special attention should be paid to *My Family and Other Endangered Species* by those interested in this thesis project's aims, as it translates this complex social-environmental alignment into accessible TYA, following a nine-year-old narrator expressing two of his most destabilizing anxieties concurrently: his concern over potentially becoming a child of divorce and his concern over climate crises.

2.5.1 *The Pipeline Project*

Potential avenues for these visions of eco-performance, and particularly for understanding ecodramaturgy's relationship with the youth-led climate movement, are perhaps best encapsulated by *The Pipeline Project*. Written and performed by Quelemia Sparrow, Sebastien Archibald, and Kevin

Loring, founding Artistic Director of the National Arts Centre's Indigenous Theatre Department, *The Pipeline Project* is primarily concerned with Canadians' ambivalent relationship with oil, investigating individual feelings of complicity and individual capacities for action. This production:

[...] confronts [Canada's] extractive histories and fossil-fuel dependency by way of raw and honest conversations between Indigenous and white artists that expose intercultural ignorance, as well as the potential for personal growth and collective transformation through creative collaboration. (Richards 9)

These priorities hold resonance for this thesis project's first chapter, particularly in terms of youth activism's unique relationship with feelings of guilt, complicity, and resultant emotional exhaustion. *Pipeline Project* repeatedly recognizes that each of its characters and actors are similarly "complicit in this system," and, as a result, "audience members [are] able to relinquish some of their individual guilt around their personal carbon footprint while beginning to grapple with the ways our society is an oil society through and through" (14). For example, *Pipeline Project* features several scenes that seem to take place in the production team's own rehearsal hall (see fig. 2), airing the creators' own internal ecological debates with the audience, while simultaneously providing space for the creators to tease one another, poking fun over levels of complicity, providing audiences with a model of this shared grappling (Loring et al. 69). These concerns with individual complicity prove to be in line with most climate fiction, and the recurring "psychological implications" of climate crises and concern with "who is to blame" (Hoydis 341). Yet, by focusing so heavily on explorations of shared complicity and resultant relinquishments of shame in favour of more productive emotions, *Pipeline Project* charts a path forward that can benefit the particularly guilt-prone members of the youth-led climate movement.



Fig. 2. The Pipeline Project, rehearsal room. *Savage Society*, <https://savagesociety.ca/past-projects/the-pipeline-project/>.

Most notably, *Pipeline Project* takes these interrogative, self-reflexive instincts a step further, reframing its own relationship with its audience. *Pipeline Project* ends with a talkback, during which a guest speaker, typically an expert in their field, discusses the preceding performance with performers and takes questions from audience members (Loring et al. 73). Perhaps surprisingly, this section of the playscript is labelled as “Act Two,” rather than being included as some sort of optional, ancillary programming (73). This framing is significant in elevating the role of expert guest speakers, positioning them as key contributors to the production rather than supporting commentators. Additionally, Act Two is labelled as a “Talk Forward,” rather than as a traditional talkback, suggesting a forward-looking momentum, prioritizing the climate action and events to take place post-performance, rather than any attempt on the creators’ part to linger upon their own production’s artistic merits (73). Of particular note are the young people who have been featured in these Talk Forwards, specifically “youth engaged in environmental struggles and community organizing” (17). Through this inclusion, *Pipeline Project* elevates young activist voices to a parallel level of importance with performers and other guest speakers, suggesting that they are, in their own way, experts in their particular field (17).

The scripted means by which *Pipeline Project* introduces this Talk Forward to its audience is also revealing for the production's greater political potential, and particularly for its reframing of the performance's aesthetic boundaries, opening up its capacity for heteronomous aesthetic experiences, as discussed in Chapter 1 through Berleant's expansive notion of the aesthetic field:

Chelsea: (*To the audience.*) One of the things we discovered in the creation of this play is that the issues related to 'the pipeline' are varied, emotional, deep. In the room during the creation process, we had lots of heated discussions, and we were left feeling like the best way to dig into these topics was not just for us to tell you our thoughts but to really engage with you. To give you a chance to process and explore the way we did in the room. [...] By being here tonight, you are becoming an integral part of *THE PIPELINE PROJECT*. Together we are co-creating the ongoing story. (Loring et al. 73)

This passage inserts the production's director, Chelsea Haberlin, directly into the performance, explicitly reminding the audience to consider the creation process when evaluating the production's aesthetics and affects. For example, by explicitly referencing "the [rehearsal] room" and stating the creation team's goal of providing the audience with an opportunity "to process and explore the way [they] did in the room," *Pipeline Project* overtly aligns the creation and spectatorship experiences, both positioning the audience as active and urging the audience to prioritize the creation process itself in their consideration of the performance's overall aesthetic experience (73). This conflation calls Berleant's aesthetic field to mind, specifically the four elements of Berleant's aesthetic field, being "the object, the artist, the perceiver, and the performer," and how these functions can be "'collapsed', or 'telescoped', their boundaries beginning to blur (White 72).

In this way, the Talk Forward's introduction expands the scope of *Pipeline Project's* aesthetic experience, resisting the impulse towards reductive aesthetic evaluations. The audience members are "becoming an integral part of THE PIPELINE PROJECT" in this moment; through this particular framing, the actors, guest speakers, and audience members participating in the Talk Forward are not merely perceivers, nor performers, nor artists, but a collapsing of these functions, pieces of the puzzle that shape the overall aesthetic experience (Loring et al. 73). They are not only a part of *Pipeline Project's* creation process or its gradual evolution, but a central pillar of the actual aesthetic object

itself. In short, by prioritizing the act of “co-creating the ongoing story,” Chelsea Handler collapses aesthetic functions and broadens the aesthetic experience of all those involved, opening up *Pipeline Project*’s political capacity to a wider range of affects.



Fig. 3. The Pipeline Project, projections. *Savage Society*, <https://savagesociety.ca/past-projects/the-pipeline-project/>.

These conflations are also significant considering *Pipeline Project*’s overall structure. It begins from a more traditionally linear “artist-object-performer-perceiver structure,” at first appearing to be a contained aesthetic experience, gradually transitioning into the collapsed aesthetic experiences of Act Two (White 73). The first act has characters, monologues, and contained scenes and conflicts to be potentially-passively absorbed by the audience; yet, when I saw the production at the 2018 Undercurrents Festival, there was audience seating available on the stage itself, drawing attention to the very act of spectating and foreshadowing the production’s eventual transition into more expansive, participatory aesthetic models. Additionally, Quelema’s fileting of an actual salmon on stage subtly foreshadows an eventual post-show participatory element of sharing the food, given that it is unlikely so much fish would go to waste in a production so concerned with sustainability (several of us had also

heard rumours of this post-show element in advance, well before the performance began) (Loring et al. 68).

Yet, all of that being said, *Pipeline Project*'s first act nevertheless ends with “(Curtain.)”, suggesting a self-contained consideration of the performance's first half, a perimeter that borders the production's aesthetic experience with applause (73). By progressing away from a contained, linear aesthetic structure over the course of the performance, culminating in Act Two's sharp break from aesthetic tradition with ““(Curtain.),” *Pipeline Project* acknowledges that certain aesthetic traditions are still necessary to satisfy general audiences, while nevertheless suggesting that it is necessary to progress away from such limitations if political messaging is to take genuine hold and inspire legitimate changes in worldview and, by extension, climate policy. The contained aesthetic experience is insufficient for their purposes.²

These navigations of aesthetic experience clarify how productions like *Pipeline Project* can serve as a precedential framework for Canadian Applied Theatre artists like Kristina Watt Villegas to build upon, an approach to eco-critical performance that confronts passive spectatorship and grapples with feelings of guilt and shame in order to achieve a more participatory exchange of ideas on climate crises. In the proceeding chapter, this framework is applied similarly to the aesthetic functions of 100 Watt Productions and to the overall political capacity of *I2* as a YTAA production.

² Further connections between a broadened aesthetic experience and a capacity for political action are suggested by Kimberly Skye Richards' in her framing of these Talk Forwards through a more anti-capitalist lens. Richards claims that positioning audience members as “collaborators” also demands that they “show up” as more than mere “consumers” (Richards 17). This dissolution of the consumer perspective complements the aforementioned collapsing of aesthetic functions; just as borders are blurred between artist, audience, and object, so too are borders blurred between product, consumer, and worker. Parallels such as these demonstrate the potential elasticity of Berleant's aesthetic field in supporting a variety of political, activist performance contexts.

CHAPTER 3 – 100 WATT PRODUCTIONS & 12

3.1 Kristina Watt Villegas

Kristina Watt Villegas is a multi-award-winning actor, director, theatre creator, and educator. For as long as I have participated in Ottawa's theatre community, Watt has been a key fixture, with a hand in such an impressive variety of projects that I find it difficult to determine my first exposure to her work, the memories overlapping one another. *PARTICLE* comes to mind, Watt's original creation for the 2016 Undercurrents Festival, which was an exploratory reflection on Virginia Woolf's novel *The Waves*, described by critics as an "energetic one-woman show that defies easy classification" (Babcock). *Holding Mercury* also comes to mind, Watt's contribution to Ottawa's Fresh Meat Festival in 2017, described as an "experimental fusion of science, spoken word, explosive drumming and drama," and a performance that "stands upon cutting edge research in neuroscience and in particular the concept of brain plasticity" (Watt, "Creations: Holding Mercury"). Clearly, Watt's work is expansive in its scope as well as in its interests. She consistently provokes great interest and discussion in the Ottawa theatre community; *Holding Mercury* led critic Brie McFarlane to state: "What's great about Watt's work though is that it always leaves you thinking even after the play has ended" (McFarlane).

As I browse Watt's curriculum vitae and reflect upon my responses to these performances, it occurs to me how much more of her remarkably varied oeuvre there is to unpack, compared to my own limited exposure. Born in Scotland and raised in both Colombia and Canada, Watt has worked as an independent artist in all three regions, in addition to the United States, where she attained a Master of Fine Arts in acting and taught acting and play analysis at the University of Carolina at Chapel Hill (Watt, personal interview). Watt relocated to Ottawa more permanently in 2003 and is currently a Part-Time Professor at the University of Ottawa (Watt, "About Kristina Watt"). Recent Canadian credits include work with the National Arts Centre, the Great Canadian Theatre Company, the St. Lawrence

Shakespeare Festival, and the Magnetic North Festival (Ibid.). Watt's work has even reached into several unexpected realms of performance, including the coaching of lawyers, litigators, figure skaters, and more (Ibid.).

The expansiveness of Watt's artistic career poses clear challenges to a research project such as my own, as it presents an intimidating array of options for fruitful analysis and discussion. In an effort to establish an initial foundation for my analysis, which will focus upon her work with young people through 100 Watt Productions, I will begin with Watt's account of her own artistic development, and how that development has impacted her consideration of tension in the creation space.

3.2 Pedagogy and Preferred Style of Instruction: Embracing Tension

Watt credits her unique artistic development and geographically far-reaching career as clear contributors to some of her performance work's key principles and pedagogical pillars. When discussing her approach to the creation space, for example, a consideration of tension and discomfort repeatedly arises, one which explicitly addresses her current Canadian context. Watt says:

I had a very split existence and I developed, very honestly, a real questioning of, what I feel to be, the core values in a lot of places in Canada, which are to remove discomfort at all costs, and really finding that problematic as an artist, because I would feel it in the room, and then I would feel it on the stage, as an audience member, and I couldn't understand it. (Watt, personal interview)

Such emphases of discomfort are central to Watt's work with young people, positioning Watt in line with the likes of Helen Nicholson, who describes Applied Theatre as necessitating an "[acceptance] that the realm of the political is always a site of antagonistic struggle," demonstrating an openness to tension and interpersonal struggle that Watt believes to be generally lacking across Canadian stages and rehearsal rooms (Nicholson 28). With a laugh, Watt claims to be "infiltrating Canadian spaces, with the courage to disagree and to question constant conformation for the sake of comfort where there obviously isn't comfort" (Watt, personal interview).

These emphases on tension and on the questioning of conformity also position Watt within a clear pedagogical lineage, with potential linkages to other popular emancipatory pedagogies, including Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed (as most famously employed by Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed). Freire proposes that learners should be positioned as co-subjects in the learning environment, emphasising learner-input and correspondent instructor responsiveness, which are observable in Watt's aforementioned prioritization of curiosity and an accompanying openness to conflicting perspectives (Smidt 65). In fact, Watt finds great excitement in moments that completely subvert her own intentions as an artist, saying that it is one of her "great joys" to impulsively scrap a lesson plan when a more interesting path arises through this openness - an impulse that Freire would likely commend (Watt, personal interview). Over time, these pedagogical priorities have resulted in a loosening of Watt's lesson plans' initial structuring phase and a confidence in those lesson plans' elasticity, as well as her own ability to adapt to the rehearsal room at hand (Watt, personal interview).

Emphases on tension and conflict also position Watt's pedagogy as being particularly suitable for eco-centric theatre creation, suggesting a sort of embodying of the subject matter; for example, Watt expresses an intriguing inability to separate her own work and pedagogy from her ecological influences, referring to them "one and the same" (Watt, personal interview). When describing the above tensions and their creative potential for an ensemble, Watt invokes how a "season changes, explodes into something new because of this meeting up of resistance" (Watt, personal interview). She refers to this kind of rehearsal room as an "ecosystem [...] of different personalities" (Watt, personal interview). Other examples include Watt's description of taking inspiration for a dance piece based on the "movement of a leaf" (Watt, personal interview). These images are not merely poetic analogues, employed to beautify a process, but are rather reflective of Watt interweaving her creation methodology, pedagogy, and ecological influences; at times, in conversation with Watt, they seem indivisible from one another.

This interweaving of influences is the foundation of Kristina Watt Villegas' theatre company, 100 Watt Productions, launched in 2009. Thus far, it has created eight original, ecologically-minded performances in collaboration with young artists of varying ages and backgrounds. 100 Watt Productions also created the 100 Watt Earth Stage at the Ottawa Children's Festival, a themed venue that ran for five consecutive years, hosting a lineup of performances and workshops for young people up to age twenty, ranging in mediums from theatre to dance, music, and poetry.

The full title of Watt's company, often abbreviated, is "100 Watt Productions: Innocent Anarchy," a unique pairing of descriptors that Watt portrays as being a consistent philosophy across her work. Watt describes innocent anarchy as a "beautiful collision," innocence being briefly described as the "courage to look [...] at anything, any entity, with an innocent eye," and anarchy as the "desire to rebel, this desire to kind of shake the rafters a little bit, even for the sake of shaking them sometimes" (Watt, personal interview). Watt believes this pairing of innocent exploration and anarchic dissent to be a duality originating from nature, an innate sense of collision and forward momentum found in animal behaviour, plant life, and evolution more generally.

Innocent anarchy can be a particularly valuable tenet when working with young people, according to Watt. One might prematurely assume that this suitability is due to a childlike sense of boldness and abandon, inherent to youth, but Watt frames it conversely, arguing that young people progressing into adolescence are in constant danger of losing their innocent anarchy, their ease of access to this duality and, by extension, a certain amount of connection with the natural world. To illustrate this point, Watt claims that young people (young adolescents in particular) often "vacillate" between two positions, between the "complete child" and the self-conscious agent. The former is open to innocent, playful exploration, the latter more prone to self-reflection and insecurity, asking: "How am I seen by the other?" (Watt, personal interview). From this uncomfortable position of instability, it often "takes a very interesting type of courage" for a young person to allow themselves an innocent point-of-view, to remain in awe of something, to be comfortable "in the not-know," to "tolerate the

ambiguity of sitting in wonder” without sacrificing their emerging sense of maturity (Watt, personal interview). This “sitting in wonder” is an “anarchic” act, according to Watt, as “to be curious about a system can be a little bit of a threat to [the safety of] distance [from that system]” (Watt, personal interview).

If the above perspective is assumed to be accurate, then a full embrace of innocent anarchy as pedagogical tenet should result in a creation methodology that allows for potentially intimidating topics of discussion (such as the political systems that govern climate crisis policy) to become more approachable for young people, without misrepresenting those topics’ scope or dismissing their complexities. Innocent anarchy accomplishes this approachability by inviting young people to treat curiosity itself as a norm, as a sort of default setting, a point-of-view to be embraced, exercised, and sharpened, rather than viewing such curiosity as an additional source of unwanted instability and insecurity.

This sort of sharpening is manifest in Watt’s particular approach to creation with young people. Watt structures the entire learning environment around curiosity; in Watt’s rehearsal room, when she takes attendance, participants do not respond with an expected “here;” rather, participants typically answer a prompt, calling out what they had for breakfast, for example. Then, other participants must ask questions in reply: “If someone said: “I had cereal with milk,” what cereal? Do you use a lot of milk? Do you use half-milk?” (Watt, personal interview). These potentially mundane questions are not asked out of a genuine sense of urgency, but rather for the sake of potential unexpected discoveries and curiosities. Activities such as these, while seemingly frivolous, reflect a widely encompassing approach to curiosity on Watt’s part, infusing this pedagogy across the entirety of her lesson, even in its spare moments, and treating curiosity as “a muscle that gets dulled,” an active skill that can be trained and applied at will, rather than framing curiosity as a passive experience of inspiration, as a surfer’s wave that comes and goes as it pleases (Watt, personal interview). These activities create an environment “in

which life is insatiably fascinating, and [in which] it's the details, not the generalities, that make an exciting piece of artwork" (Watt, personal interview).

3.3 *12*: Synopsis

In the case of *12*, 100 Watt Productions' most recent eco-centric performance, it is evident that the tenet of innocent anarchy predates the performance's particular focus and contents. *12* did not begin as a pre-outlined climate crisis project but was rather billed in its call for participants as a "Theatre of Action Project," open to that future collective's particular shared interests and concerns, as discovered via group writing exercises (Watt, personal interview). Through these exercises, the collective eventually narrowed their focus by stumbling upon a "sort of a [shared] paradox" of expectations in relation to their own futures: "One [side of this paradox] is: "There's a lot expected of us." [The other side of the paradox] is: "We're really worried and scared about what lies ahead" (Watt, personal interview). This troubling contradiction of expectations echoes 100 Watt Productions' tenet of "innocent anarchy," in that it contains a duality between that which is expected and that which is unknown. In this case, however, that duality seems to have curdled; both sides now carry a sense of mounting pressure, and curiosity has become laced with existentially threatening unknowns.

Watt planned discussions, games, and improvisations to further unpack this age-specific paradox, resulting in a gradual narrowing of the collective's focus to the specifics of climate crises, a topic which served as a suitable example of the outsized pressures placed on their generation's shoulders. Additionally, since the climate crises focus emerged out of an expansive exploration of shared concerns, the collective had by that point "earned the ability to listen to each other and be interested in each other," and, perhaps most importantly, to "even contradict each other" (Watt, personal interview). If the project's parameters and focus on climate crises had been prescribed in advance, rather than negotiated over time, the collective would have been denied that opportunity to practice such negotiations and to expand their capacity for tension.

The results of this process are evident in *12*, a performance that unpacks young people's shared climate anxiety for adult audiences. *12* dramatizes the emotional burdens that have been placed on younger generations' shoulders and probes the ambivalences of their being tasked with providing 'hope' for the world at large. The young performers do so by looking back on their own formative experiences, looking forward to an uncertain future, and reflecting upon their own relationship with current political circumstances. Climate crisis topics addressed by *12* include: the responsibilities of individuals versus collectives; the responsibilities of young people versus older people; the difficulties of uniting disparate generations under a common goal; the politicized dissemination of climate crisis science; climate activism and the ambivalent impact of ascribing activists with celebrity-status; and the broader emotional nuances of young people's climate anxiety.

12 accomplishes this compressed mixture of concerns through a series of twelve brief, loosely connected vignettes, referred to as "episodes," which vary greatly in style and form. This episodic narrative is guided by the collective's personal experiences in researching climate crises, discussing their findings, and creating the performance itself, rather than being guided by a linear, externally-imposed narrative or invented character arcs. As a result, episodes are often connected emotionally or thematically, rather than narratively or temporally. Some episodes include loose recreations of events, learning environments, and politicized spaces, such as classrooms, museum exhibits, climate marches, and the 2018 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP24). Other episodes are simply recreations of games pulled directly from the performers' own creation process, experimenting with the production's numeric patterns (such as the recurrence of the number twelve in their research) and improvising on top of climate crisis science. Throughout *12*, there are also poetic compositions, many direct audience addresses, and a variety of verbatim excerpts, taken both from first-hand interviews conducted with Ottawa residents, as well as from published interviews with climate scientists and global youth activists Greta Thunberg, Boyan Slat, and Marinel Ubaldo, among others.

If one were forced to ascribe *I2* with a simplistic narrative arc, it would be the performers' gradual progression away from an individual sense of isolated frustration with climate crises towards a collective, cathartic entrance into the political sphere, Episode 10 depicting the performers' own participation in the youth-led climate movement's many marches and organized protests. However, beyond this arc, *I2* resists any such reductive categorizations, due in part to its constant references to the present-tense, here-and-now experience of the performance situation, in addition to simultaneously slipping in-and-out of varying mimetic functions, as will be discussed below.



Fig. 4. *I2*, standing, *100 Watt Productions*, <https://12-100watt.com/>.

While the above description of vignettes and non-linearity might appear minimally organized, Watt, in describing the performance's creative writing process, suggests that *I2*'s structure is not as loose as it might seem upon first encounter. Watt summarizes *I2* as a "collection of moments," but describes facing difficulties in determining those moments' specific sequencing, particularly in terms of "[making] sure there'd be humour and irreverence" to support the tone of the piece without undercutting its momentum and its politics (Watt, personal interview). Watt refers back to Brecht in describing this dilemma, particularly Brecht's insistence on entertainment, which is too-often

overlooked in discussions of his dialectic approach and famous alienation effect: “That was [Brecht’s] thing, it must entertain. And I actually think one releases the other (Watt, personal interview). I think that the joy and the laughter is a great foil for what we find ourselves laughing at, and one of the things that we constantly had to work on was to play against the gravitas” (Watt, personal interview).

3.4 100 Watt Productions: Before *I2*

While 100 Watt Productions’ entire performance history is ecologically-focused, *I2* is largely a departure from the company’s previous aesthetic approaches. *I2*’s scope is generational, addressing the tensions and commonalities shared by different age groups, as well as those age groups’ differing relationships with climate crises. Prior 100 Watt productions are much more preoccupied with the probing of nature itself through playful explorations of ecological parallels on stage. From this perspective, 100 Watt Productions’ performance history begins by exploring the relationship between humans and the broader planet and slowly progresses towards critiquing the interrelationships of humans within the context of ecological crises, a progression that implicitly suggests climate action as its final destination. In this sense, the company’s arc not only provides *I2* with a foundation of first-hand experience in creating eco-critical theatre, but also a supplementary thematic resonance, a path to be emulated. Additionally, this arc helps to further contextualize the relationship between Watt’s methodology, pedagogy, and resultant performance aesthetics.

A brief consideration of these earlier productions will delineate this arc. The first two 100 Watt productions, *Connections: Two is Better than One* and *noitanilloP*, both explore core human connections with nature, “finding parallels, disconnects, sameness, not-sameness, in the animal world” (Watt, personal interview). *Connections*, for instance, stages animal courtship rituals and animals’ “seeking of another,” while *noitanilloP* (pollination spelled backwards) stages breeding patterns among plants and explores other “behavioural links” between plants and human beings (Watt, personal interview). 100 Watt Productions’ next two productions, *The Taxon Trials* and *I2 Drops and 1 Moon*, expand upon this approach, opening a door towards stagings of ecological damage and human

complicity, essential groundwork for *12*, while nevertheless prioritizing those earlier productions' playful ecological imaginations. *The Taxon Trials*, for instance, invents a fictitious courtroom in which endangered species can speak and prosecute complicit human beings (see fig. 6), while *12 Drops and 1 Moon* questions the validity of "ownership" in relation the natural world, experimenting with playful methods of embodying water on stage (Watt, personal interview).



Fig. 5. Alan Dean. Connections. *100 Watt Productions*, <https://12-100watt.com/100-watt/>.



Fig. 6. Alan Dean. Taxon Trials. *100 Watt Productions*, <https://www.100watt.org/images>.



Fig. 7. Alan Dean. noitanilloP. *100 Watt Productions*, <https://www.100watt.org/images>.

From there, 100 Watt Productions takes another a step towards climate action with *Wild Life* and *These Enchanted Woods*, productions which centre the emotional stakes of ecological crises. *Wild Life*, for instance, dramatizes the notion that “if you want people to take [climate] action, they have to care first” (Watt, personal interview). In this production, set on Sable Island (situated off the coast of Nova Scotia), a horse guides children through an immersive, sensory, environmental journey, and when one of the children questions the horse’s intentions, the horse responds: “Because once you care, then you know what you’re losing” (Watt, personal interview). Watt believes that if she “can create an emotional engagement with climate, with the environment, then it’s not just about putting out the blue bin, there’s actually an emotional cost” (Watt, personal interview). Here, she once again links her impulses back to Brecht, in that “the emotional life will activate the conscious life” (Watt, personal interview). *These Enchanted Woods* operates similarly, telling the story of a small branch, the “runt” of the tree, who, in response to a forest fire, decides to form an international conference of trees in order “to make the humans care about the forest” (Watt, personal interview). It is only after the branch has completed this task that it allows itself to finally drop off the tree and decay, not knowing whether its efforts will have been worthwhile. The branch’s final moments are spent expressing hope, potentially

worthwhile, potentially in vain, and the final emotional note is one of beautiful heartbreak, of dedication and acceptance. Once again, the emotional stakes are foregrounded to “activate the conscious life” (Watt, personal interview).



Fig. 8. Richard Ellis. *These Enchanted Woods*. *100 Watt Productions*,
<https://www.100watt.org/images>.

This arc towards climate action culminates in *I2*, a performance which draws from these previous productions in “plead[ing] against a disconnect from nature” and advocating for climate action; however, it does so by denying its audience of 100 Watt Productions’ expected environmental stagings and playful embodiments of ecological parallels, a major deviation in the company’s approach (Watt, personal interview). *I2* limits itself to urban performance venues, sparse stagings, and interhuman, social scenarios. No animals, plants, or personified resources appear on stage (other than a brief, understated recreation of a tree, composed of metal stools and performers’ bodies), only people, who rarely embody anything besides loose, fictionalized versions of themselves or other human climate activists. This deviation suggests that, while *I2* is similar to prior 100 Watt productions in its openness to a range of potential age ranges and audience demographics, its particular target audience has grown

more specific. Less priority is placed on compelling varied audiences through an overt sense of environmental playfulness and immersion, potentially suggesting a step away from the demands of TYA. In short, *12* features very little sugar-coating of 100 Watt Productions' typical ecological anxieties.

This rejection of environmental stagings is also significant in that it allows Watt a new angle from which to confront tensions, as with the pedagogy and preferred style of instruction described above. For example, Watt describes *12*'s set design as follows: "we could make something that looked like a tree, but no matter what, because of those stools, it also looked like trash, a trash pile, so the invasion of the ugly, y'know, the ugly of the questioning, the discomfort" (Watt, personal interview). Watt sees this image as being expressive of a simultaneity, the set design invoking trash and pollution, a potential symbol for the oncoming threats of current climate crises, while simultaneously suggesting a confidence to confront and question that which is uncomfortable or dissonant.



Fig. 9. Catherine Robson. *12 Stools*. 2019. *100 Watt Productions*, <https://12-100watt.com/this-project/>.

This embrace of the uncomfortable and the dissonant also reveals a less obvious unifying approach across 100 Watt Productions' arc, as suggested by Watt's recurring Brecht references. While all of 100 Watt Productions' performances examine ecological themes, they do not present their politics from a reductively didactic position, seeming to prefer a dialectical approach. 100 Watt productions refrain from providing easy answers, typically limiting themselves to asking questions and presenting contrasting opinions, consistently leaving their audiences with open-endings; the branch of *These Enchanted Woods*, for instance, does not learn whether its efforts were entirely effective or successful. The courtrooms of *The Taxon Trials* may provide trials, but they do not provide verdicts; in fact, when a performer plays an endangered animal in one scene, they then play a complicit human in the next scene, ensuring a consistent clashing of perspectives. Watt consciously monitors for any such impulse towards resolution and didacticism throughout her creation processes, due to that impulse's prevalence among young creators who are potentially new to creative writing, in addition to that heavy didacticism's potential rejection by adult audiences. In discussing *I2*, Watt says: "I would tell [the young creators] very openly: "If the audience smells "teen rant," agenda-based "we-know-everything, you're-the-problem," we will not reach them"" (Watt, personal interview). Instead, Watt advocates for *I2* as a love story, a framing she frequently repeated for her young creators: "This story is a love story between you and the planet, you and each other, and you and another generation" (Watt, personal interview). Watt views *I2* as an act of generosity, rather than a retaliation, and it is thereby fitting to leave some of the performance's key takeaways open-ended. *I2*'s relationship with open-endedness is discussed in more depth below.

3.5 *12*: Analysis

3.5.1 Addressing Feelings of Inadequacy in the Creation Process

As discussed above, *12* addresses the variety of feelings awakened in young people by climate anxiety, including feelings of shame, self-doubt, and inadequacy. Many aspects of Kristina Watt Villegas' creation methodology reflect consistent, youth-centered variations on emancipatory pedagogies; however, these methods are also well-suited for facilitating youth explorations of climate crises, particularly in bypassing any shame that arises in the creation room so that it can be interrogated from a more critical distance, empowering the young creators to engage with the political realm more candidly in addition to engaging their own climate anxieties. These efforts also reflect Watt's emphasis on the affective experience of her participants, working from the assumption that bypassing shame can positively impact the performance's overall affects and aesthetics.

For example, early on in *12*'s creation process, Watt often imposed strict time constraints on creative writing activities, specifically "so that doubt and all those other voices [wouldn't] get in the way," and so that the performers "[wouldn't] have time to correct themselves" (Watt, personal interview). She also used "scraps of paper" in order to impart a "casual association with [creation]," dispensing of any unnecessary formalities (Watt, personal interview). From there, Watt typically read all the participants' writings aloud without naming participants or attributing authorship. In this way, writing becomes "absolutely inoffensive in its obligations, in its standard of being 'right'" (Watt, personal interview). The freedom to distance oneself from one's own writing through anonymity can help to bypass the shame of inexperience, both as creators and as political thinkers (Watt, personal interview).

Watt repeatedly refers to how approaches such as these not only bypass self-doubt, but also elevate the "voice of the room" over the voice of the individual, claiming that "nobody owns a thought" in this ensemble-building process (Watt, personal interview). There is no guarantee that a particular line's author will be its eventual speaker; Watt describes this sharing as a step towards establishing

“trust and generosity in the room,” values which will expand their capacity as both theatre makers and political agents (Watt, personal interview). Notably, by prioritizing ensemble-building and the bypassing of shame concurrently, such techniques also create an association between a sense of belonging and a sense of freedom in thinking politically.

Watt has many such tools in her repertoire. She describes how, rather than directing the participants’ performances through expected commands and line readings, she opts for a less peremptory approach, reframing herself as a sort of gamemaster. For example, rather than simply direct her participants to “speak faster [or] speak slower,” Watt opts for a technique in which the ensemble collectively practices acting at different “tempos,” or shared speeds for performance, going so far as to number these tempos on a scale of one to five, numbers which can then be called upon in rehearsal with ease (Watt, personal interview). In justifying this technique, Watt refers to how young people can carry an implicit association between feelings of shame and the experience of being directed, particularly when that direction pertains to young people’s physical presence:

[Typical directing] tends not to work if their whole life [the young person has] been told “oh you just talk too fast” and then their muscles associate it with that and then it’s always an obstacle [...] [With this tempos approach,] they have no idea that they’re being told to talk slower or faster. (Watt, personal interview)

These tempos, as an establishment of a shared vocabulary or a “codification for the room,” do not only reflect an emphasis on efficiency of communication and “reference points,” but also an effort to bypass the burdens of excessive self-judgment in the room; this technique subtly transforms a qualifier of individual performance and a judgment of their acting tendencies into a collective “game,” a playful shared task with no inherent bearing on skill or talent, thereby allowing participants to engage with feedback more openly.

In other words, for both the creative writing and rehearsal processes, Watt consistently aims to lift the burden of responsibility off the individual young person, instead locating that responsibility within the collective and the greater voice of the room. These ensemble-centric approaches are

reflective of a pedagogy that values individual perspectives while nevertheless shifting attention away from any perceived inexperience or sense of inadequacy towards a collective responsibility, towards a process of tension and negotiation. Watt's approach is thereby consistent with several effective climate crisis pedagogies and information dissemination theories, such as Mike Hulme's claim that climate advocacy should embrace "plurality, multiplicity, [and] multivocality" in order to provoke discussion and inspire creative, unanticipated climate solutions (Hoydis 347). Watt's prioritization of the collective over the individual also echoes Hulme's advocacy for a "discard[ing of] the focus on unilateral solution-orientation," in that both Watt and Hulme suggest the need to open climate advocacy up to an expansive collective imagination, finding new climate solutions in an unhindered range of backgrounds, experience levels, and educational standings (Hoydis 346).³

In other words, the goal of this creation process is not for young performers to shed feelings of complicity altogether in addressing climate crises, but rather to provide the performers with a reflective, shame-free position from which they can interrogate those responsibilities and can question how that sense of anxiety may have been heightened by their positioning as young 'inheritors' of the future, by the political climate more broadly, and by the strengths and weaknesses of formative educational experiences.

This supportive process also speaks to *I2*'s pertinence as a case-study for the proposed YTAA subgenre, as it provides these young performers with a uniquely confident position from which they can address adult audiences, interrogating and dramatizing their own relationship with the parents, teachers, and politicians who have shaped their relationship with political thinking more broadly, whether directly or otherwise. This confidence draws further attention to the urgency of Watt's work

³ Watt and Hulme's approaches are also in line with Jacqueline Kennelly's aforementioned claim that an "[overly] individualized vision of democracy" in Canada has resulted in an "overwhelming burden of individualized responsibility and its powerful psychic associate, guilt," as with youth activist subcultures' persistent impression that the individual can never "do enough" (Kennelly 297). Watt's approach suggests that these phenomena, in the context of climate crises, can be confronted via targeted pedagogy.

with young people: her creation and rehearsal processes take full advantage of intersections between effective Applied Theatre practice and effective climate crisis advocacy, prioritizing the confidence and emotional well-being of her participants.

3.5.2 Addressing Feelings of Inadequacy on Stage

The results of Watt's emancipatory pedagogy are also evident within the performance itself; Watt's awareness of shame and self-doubt provides *I2* with surprising access to some of the oft-overlooked emotional considerations of climate activism, such as the unique pressures involved. Episode 10, for example, features several prominent youth climate activists, emerging on-stage one-by-one, prompted by the performers repeatedly asking: "But what else can I do?" (100 Watt Productions, "Unpublished playscript draft" 14). The climate activist proceeds to describe the inspiring climate action they have undertaken, ranging from organizing protests to developing sustainable technologies; however, the activist then becomes a silent onlooker for the rest of the episode, moving to the edges of the performance space and watching the performers somewhat ominously (14). By the time a fourth activist icon appears on-stage, one of the performers' questions is cut-off mid-sentence, interrupted by one of the acclaimed youth activists (18). The question is recognized and appreciated, being addressed in full, yet the performer is simultaneously dismissed.

This staging calls to mind the impact of youth activists' increased media coverage in recent years, and particularly the contradictory affects of those activists' emerging celebrity status. On the one hand, these activists are sources of profound inspiration for young people, expanding the scope of potential action that can be undertaken; structurally, it is notable that this scene is followed by Episode 11, which depicts sweeping climate marches and protests. On the other hand, these young icons set difficult standards for action and their achievements can contribute to the aforementioned sense of burden on young people's shoulders; in the above staging, the performers are watched and scrutinized by the very icons who have inspired them. These implicit expectations can reinforce the sense of shame

and self-doubt experienced by younger people, particularly if they are new to engaging with the political sphere first-hand.



Fig. 10. 12, chatroom. *100 Watt Productions*, <https://12-100watt.com/creative-team/>.

Additionally in this Episode, performer #11, who has remained in the audience for the performance's entirety as a plant, is described by the playscript as now being "very close to the stage," much closer to engaging with the action, seemingly drawn in by the activist icons; yet performer #11 then expresses: "Yeah, we all want to take action—" (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 16). The intimidating presence of acclaimed youth activists seems to leave performer #11 relegated to a position of spectatorship, here literally remaining in the audience, only able to voice the tension between their political desires and their dissatisfactory reality; in fact, performer #11 only joins the other performers on stage when they begin to "defend themselves and each other [to the activist icons]," feeling the desperate need to justify their perceived shortcomings as activists and sustainable citizens (17). In this sense, feelings of guilt are not dismissed altogether, as they nevertheless motivate performer #11 to move onstage, entering the realm of political action; however, those feelings are not enough to

maintain a unified movement long-term; when the performers defend themselves to these activist icons, the sound of overlapping voices becomes hectic and cacophonous, almost indecipherable.

It is noteworthy to this thesis project's formulation of YTAA that this framing of activist icons does not undermine those icons' greater importance or cultural impact, but rather recontextualizes their espousal by young people, complicating the common, reductive assumption that these activists are idolized by young people from a position of political naivety or blind idealism. Instead, these activists' contradictory functions, their potential to simultaneously inspire and demoralize, paints a more realistic picture of political development and affiliation, reminding the adult audience members that younger people are capable of grappling with nuance, and drawing attention to the need for young people's internalized sense of inadequacy and complicity to be addressed for the sake of building a stronger, more emotionally sustainable climate movement. Such sustainability cannot be achieved through idolization alone, but rather requires the individual to investigate the variety of means by which their own self-esteem and political motivations are shaped and maintained. In this sense, YTAA becomes a means by which young people can expose any reductive assumptions about their political capacities, complicating adult audiences' potential assumptions of youth apathy, laziness, or naivety, instead asking those adults to consider the youth-led climate movement as a collection of self-reflective individuals.

3.5.3 Foregrounding Agency

This multilayered investigation of young people's parasocial relationships reflects 100 Watt Productions' broader impulse towards staging dual-functions and double-edged swords, refraining from presenting the audience with didactic absolutes; instead, Watt opts for a more dialectical, open-ended approach. For example, it is evident that *I2* positions its young performers as active political agents; what proves more impressive is that *I2* manages to do so through an investigation of powerlessness. *I2* elevates these young people's authority to speak publicly on the topic of climate crises without

dismissing those young people's feelings of passiveness in the face of said crises. In Episode 4, the performers begin to move in an "organized chaos," each performer rushing towards the audience to speak a "public secret" (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 4). Each public secret is a series of spoken lines, structured around a single, active verb; performer #3 repeats variations on: "I see...", performer #5 repeats variations on: "I want...", and so on (4). While these public secrets primarily express each young person's individual concerns, fears, awe, and sense of sensory overload in the face of climate crises and parental expectations, the heavily repetitive active verb structure provides a revealing contrast, elevating the activeness of their first-person experience above the passiveness they describe. Additionally, these public secrets begin to overlap, an overwhelming dialogue that elevates the cumulative effect of their concerns above any individual sentiments; eventually, the audience is mostly able to distinguish the repeated first-person pronoun from the vocal chaos, "I" statements slowly becoming an indiscernible collective voice. This staging suggests that the group gradually discovers a sense of agency and empowerment through their shared experience of passiveness and resultant desire to organize, as reinforced by the episode's conclusion, when the performers find themselves beginning to slowly synchronize within the chaos, their movements and dialogue forming fluid, coordinated patterns of unexpected call-and-response.

That being said, this embrace of agency through collectivity is not presented as climate crises' final solution, but rather as a step in the right direction, hence the Episode's placement near the beginning of the performance; this Episode sets the table so that more complex obstacles to climate action can then be explored. For example, the proceeding Episode marks a transition into creative experimentation, playing with variations on the number twelve; this sequencing positions group games and creative play as a direct response to the sense of powerlessness expressed in the previous episode, a means of beginning to explore feelings of newfound political consciousness and to embrace a sense of activeness. In short, now that they have found comfort in their collectivity, they can begin to parse the problem.

While much of *I2* makes great efforts to distinguish between generations, one age-group directly addressing another, certain episodes instead demonstrate the two generations' inextricability in the context of climate crises, as well as the tensions that arise within younger generations as a result of that inextricability, particularly in the challenges presented to their sense of generational solidarity. In Episode 7, for example, the performers read aloud excerpts from the COP24 2018 report, a dire yet determined UN survey of global climate crises (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 8). Throughout these readings, it is not made clear to the audience whether the young performers are still embodying their primary characters, being somewhat fictionalized versions of themselves, or whether the performers are now embodying the older, quoted scientists and politicians of the COP24 conference (8). This ambiguity is heightened by the inclusion of a microphone and paper documents, two of *I2*'s only props, which further confuse the Episode's mimetic function (8). A similar sense of inextricability is expressed in the proceeding Episode, when the young performers refer to how the Paris Agreements have been repeatedly broken and dismissed without consequence, in spite of having been repeatedly told by adults to "Keep [their own] Commitments" (11). A young performer goes on to claim: "If [young people are] learning off those making mistakes... it's confusing what you expect from us—" (11).

This lack of mimetic specificity is particularly significant to Episode 7's overall thematic resonance, further complicating any reductive generational scapegoating. Mid-way through the Episode, for example, the performers begin to interrupt one another while reading aloud from the COP24 report (9). By the Episode's end, the performers are even heckling one another; the origins of this tension are not made explicit, whether it be the young performers themselves or the older COP42 participants being potentially depicted (9). This tension renders the Episode's ambiguous mimetic function all the more disconcerting. It suggests that young people should not be viewed by adults as purely distinct, isolated, political agents, a view which predisposes those adults to positioning young people as scapegoats for the mistakes of older generations; rather, it asks that those young people be

viewed as deeply impressionable extensions of adults' previous and ongoing political decisions, as inadvertent continuations of their own tensions and divisions.

Additionally, in this Episode, the performers do not heckle dissenting opinions; they all appear to agree on the COP24 report's conclusions and the science involved, yet they heckle nonetheless, tearing each other down to express relatively equivalent conclusions (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 9). While consensus on climate change may have been largely accomplished in the broader scientific community, at least in the mainstream context that includes conferences like COP24, young people have nevertheless been raised in a time of intense division and apparent short-term memory on the part of those holding political influence over climate policy. *12* presents a counterproductive limbo where scientific consensus does not coincide with political consensus, productive dialogue, nor notions of accountability, and the above mimetic ambiguity of Episode 7 suggests that these failures will inevitably influence young people's own development as political thinkers for the worse, fomenting unnecessary tensions and strains to generational solidarity.

Yet, these young performers also demonstrate a capacity to resist such harmful inheritances. For example, at the end of Episode 8, after quoting a COP24 report, a performer draws attention to that report's disagreeable word choice:

8: We have 12 years--

Audience Member #11: 8!!

8: --to "limit the Climate Change Catastrophe?"

6: Catastrophe. Your word, not ours. (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 11)

Notably, in the episode that immediately proceeds this line, titled "Learning," the performers become students, and they are tested on their ability to define the word "Anthropocene," defined as the "period in which human activity significantly affects the environment" (12). All of the students' hands fly up immediately after the word is spoken, positioning climate crises as a universally understood threat for their generation. The episode ends with praise by the teacher and a sense of shared satisfaction, seemingly in opposition to previous Episode's spirit of defiance. In fact, the playscript asks for

performers to be “*obedient, quiet [...] taking notes,*” suggesting a passivity (12). Even though the pedagogy of this classroom scene is relatively transmission-based, depicting the students as well-behaved receptacles for knowledge, the preceding rejection of older generations’ politically-biased, defeatist climate language (“Your word, not ours.”) nevertheless positions these performers as “co-subjects” in this learning environment, in the vein of Paulo Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed, as discussed in Chapter 1; in other words, these young people are not merely demonstrating their best behaviour, but are demonstrating an eagerness to participate when presented with engaging, contextualizing climate terminology, as opposed to reductive, fatalist framings like “climate change catastrophe” (100 Watt Productions, “playscript” 11). In this sense, ‘catastrophe’ and ‘Anthropocene’ are both positioned as words that have been inherited by younger generations, but the young performers foreground their own ability recognize the words’ differences and to decide for themselves which language to incorporate into their shared lexicon.

The above observations also gesture towards further, significant bridging points between YTAA and aesthetic theory, once again affirming *I2* as an effective case-study for YTAA as subcategory of Applied Theatre. The mimetic ambiguity of Episode 7’s COP24 conference suggests that the performers themselves are still in a process of unpacking the relationship between their independence as political thinkers and their impressionability as young learners, interrogating their own capacity for independent thought given the learning contexts faced daily. Meanwhile, the YTAA performance context, as discussed in Chapter 1, asks adult spectators to appreciate a production’s overall aesthetic experience by engaging with young performers’ own affective experience; this type of invitation is achieved in Episode 7 by prompting an attentive audience to search for clarity, to pin-down the Episode’s mimetic function, an impulse which can mainly be satisfied by considering the young performers’ own point-of-view. This dynamic is again supportable by Berleant’s theory of the aesthetic field, in which the aesthetic experience is “understood by ‘making reference to the total situation in which the objects, activities and experiences of art occur’,” and which allows the “locus of the

[aesthetic] functions [to be] variable, rather than belonging to a typically linear [aesthetic] structure” (White 73). *I2*’s aesthetic experience is best served when considered loosely and when the performers’ own affects can be considered.

In short, *I2* positions young people as active political agents capable of individual responses while nevertheless recognizing their inextricability from adults in the context of climate crises; they are independent yet nevertheless impressionable. This simultaneity reaffirms young people’s political voice while also undermining any reductive attempts by adults at generational scapegoating, asking those adults to consider the obstacles and weighty expectations faced by young people as well as the ways in which they themselves have failed to lead by example. These invitations, achieved by shaping the aesthetic experience to the performance context’s particular generational dynamic and unique affects, position *I2* as an effective example of YTAA’s capacity to navigate and enact Applied Theatre’s aesthetic theories.



Fig. 11. Catherine Robson. “We march.” 2019. *100 Watt Productions*, <https://12-100watt.com/now-playing/>.

3.5.4 The Ambivalent Invitation to Participate

In his description of the relationship between Applied Theatre and aesthetic theory, Gareth White claims that much of Applied Theatre's "radical potential" derives from how the aesthetic experience "calls us to relate to each other" and "invites us to participate" (White 10). Notably, *I2* both begins and ends with such invitations, bookended by opportunities for direct audience participation. These moments open the performance up to many new possibilities, greatly expanding *I2*'s spectrum of potential political resonances; however, these moments also carry a number of complex, ambivalent expectations, both in terms of their political implications and in terms of the dramaturgical boundaries of the performance itself. These ambivalences leave an audience member's decision to participate uniquely open-ended, while nevertheless charging that decision with a thematic weight, implicitly commenting upon older generations' response to climate crises.

At the beginning of the performance, for example, once the performers have initially entered the playing space and physically configured themselves, they simply "look at the audience" and "wait" (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 1):

One by one, never taking eyes off the audience, they walk downstage. Each puts their cell phone in a pile downstage centre, right near the audience. They walk back, still looking at the public. They stand. Wait.

#11 walks out of the audience to the stage. Puts her cell phone in the pile. Walks back into the audience. (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 1)

Immediately after this moment took place at my performance, I felt an impulse to stand, to add my own cell phone to the pile, an action modelled by performer #11, being an audience plant. However, in that moment, I hesitated, partially in an attempt to reflect upon the moment's thematic resonance and partially out of a reluctance to interfere, suspecting I might eventually write about the production for my own research. More importantly, however, I hesitated in anticipation of a fellow audience member's response. I looked around the room, waiting for something to happen, and saw others doing the same to no avail. The performance then moved on, without comment, as though these moments had

never happened at all. *I2* eventually closes with a similar moment of invitation, in which a stool is moved downstage and offered to an audience member, a second, final “*offer to the public to join*” (24).

While not explicitly voiced, these moments frame the performance as an invitation, a prompt to offer up one’s phone, symbolically setting aside external influences and internet-influenced preconceptions of climate crises. However, at the performance I attended, no audience members engaged, a hesitance which could have emerged from a variety of sources. For example, the production’s unique touring structure and outreach strategies might have resulted in an audience that was relatively unfamiliar with theatre and unconventional dramaturgical boundaries, and who were thereby uncomfortable with audience participation, either failing or unwilling to recognize this moment as an invitation for active engagement. Conversely, the audience, being primarily adults, might have felt hesitant to insert themselves into a youth-led aesthetic experience and to hijack their platform, especially so early into the performance.

Regardless of the cause, this invitation’s lack of audience recognition or reciprocation is reflective of the very problems being addressed within the performance: young people are inviting adults to recognize their responsibility and complicity in climate crises, as a vast number of those adults have not risen to the occasion thus far, at least not sufficiently. This resonance is bolstered by my own initial source of reluctance: I was waiting for somebody else to act on my impulse, to engage with the performance on my behalf; the bystander effect comes to mind, a shared denial brought on by the dispersal of responsibility. My experience as a member of *I2*’s audience suggests that adults are not merely unwilling to act on their responsibilities, openly refusing to engage; there is also the tacit, passive, sometimes unconscious assumption that somebody else will participate on their behalf.

As discussed above, from *I2*’s point-of-view, many adults unfairly place young people in a scapegoat position, resting excessive hope for the future on their shoulders. In placing the above invitation at the beginning of the performance, the proceeding scenes become framed by that initial invitation’s failure. In this participatory performance space, the scapegoat is no longer available; the

performance instead becomes a response to older generations' hesitance to respond to climate crises and to engage their scapegoats in genuine dialogues. In other words, older generations' hesitation to enact change is not a matter of debate, but is rather *I2*'s presupposition, understood and anticipated by the young performers in creating this very performance. From this perspective, *I2* confronts those adult audience members who might have entered the performance space from a position of arrogance, self-righteousness, or from the assumption that by attending such a production in the first place, they are already on the 'right side' of history; instead, those adults are asked to interrogate their own capacity for action and are reminded that, since nobody stood up, nobody is beyond complicity. This self-questioning can linger post-show: "Why didn't I stand?"

Of course, it must be acknowledged that this invitation could have just as easily been embraced by the audience; I almost stood, after all, which could have potentially inspired a chain reaction, a larger piling of cell phones. A feeling of self-satisfaction could have then spread across the audience, potentially undermining the above thematic resonances for scapegoating and shared complicity. However, if I had stood, this contrary course of action would not have necessarily diluted the moment's thematic resonance but could have simply provided a differently effective framing device. In this scenario, the audience would have begun the performance from a shared feeling of collaboration, a brief, ambiguous achievement in setting aside distractions and external influences for the duration of the performance, making a symbolic stand alongside young people. The success of this invitation, through its wordlessness and through the open-ended nature of the cell phone's potential symbolic resonances, could have allowed for a variety of potential affective engagements, not placing a distinct interpretation or condition on the individual audience member's affective experience, instead foregrounding the affective experience of intergenerational collaboration itself above any other explicit political interpretations or symbolic resonances. In other words, a successful audience invitation could have framed the performance from an initially uplifting affective position, allowing the proceeding scenes to then question whether that same sense of collaboration is being enacted outside of the theatre,

as with *I2*'s concluding scene, when the audience is invited to participate once more. While this course of action would have differed from the former in its affects, the two are nevertheless in thematic agreement, both allowing for reflections upon complicity. This capacity to accommodate contrary potential outcomes without compromising the performance's particular politics is reflective of 100 Watt Productions' aforementioned hesitance towards didactic approaches, demonstrating an openness to the particular audience at hand, allowing that audience to shape the performance itself to their preferred affective experience while nevertheless leading that audience towards intended political conclusions. This responsiveness to audiences can be seen as an expansion upon previous 100 Watt productions' open-endedness, as discussed earlier in this chapter, demonstrating a growing elasticity to 100 Watt Productions' aesthetic experiences.

I asked Kristina Watt Villegas about these moments of audience invitation, voicing an abridged version of the above interpretations. Watt wishes that I had stood up, noting, significantly, that I would have been the only audience member to have ever done so: "after having toured it, and [after having been] together for a while, [the young performers] were so kickass, because they were getting to the point where they were like: 'I just hope someone [stands]. I hope someone does it'" (Watt, personal interview). This led to a discussion of *I2*'s final moments, in which a stool is moved downstage and offered to an audience member, a second, final "*offer to the public to join*" (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 24). This moment is particularly significant when understood as a follow-up opportunity for audience participation, a chance at redemption of sorts, particularly considering the direct youth-to-adult accusations of Episode 8's intervention scene. In fact, *I2* repeatedly demonstrates its own capacity for participation, preparing the audience for this final invitation. This modelling is largely achieved through performer #11, who begins the performance by visibly choosing to sit among the audience rather than remaining on stage, opting for passivity (but nevertheless adding her phone to the pile at the beginning of the performance) (1-2). Performer #11 remains a relatively passive spectator throughout, but they repeatedly, vocally respond to the performers' invitations from this remove,

displaying an incrementally increasing urge to engage, moving closer and closer to the stage over time (8). By the performance's end, performer #11 has fully joined the other performers on stage, initially to "[defend] her [own climate] actions" or lack thereof, but then joining the collective in political marches (17, 19). While performer #11 is by no means a direct audience stand-in, being too young, they nevertheless act as a model for engagement, an example from which a reluctant audience member can take inspiration. Yet, as Watt herself had anticipated, despite such models for engagement, *I2*'s final opportunity for audience participation has been similarly neglected in performances thus far (Watt, personal interview).

By bookending the performance with such moments of invitation, opening the performance up to audience participation but accurately anticipating audience reluctance, *I2* positions that very reluctance as a subject of inquiry and, by extension, intimates such reluctance to be a contributing factor of climate crises. Notably, *I2* does not forcibly or didactically impose such an interpretation upon its varying audiences; instead, this condemnation of older generations, perhaps the most potent condemnation of the performance, arises out of the audience's own contributions, or lack thereof. Not only are these adults complicit in climate crises, but they are also complicit in the performance's own outcomes and resultant political resonances; if adult audiences are to criticize *I2*, it is suggested that they must first recognize their own failure to participate.

Additionally, the audience's final neglect of participation is coupled with the following line, spoken once by an individual performer and once by the entire cast collectively, closing *I2* with an explicit recognition of the performance context: "Weird. As if I'm a spectator but it's real" (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 24). This line carries a dual resonance, being potentially spoken in response to the failure of the performers' final "*offer to the public to join*," or in response to the ambivalent emotional experience of climate anxiety more broadly (24). In either case, this dual resonance suggests an alignment of the affective experience of climate anxiety with *I2*'s own performance context, including the abstractness of its subject matter and any resultant feelings of artificiality, unreality, or

bewilderment. *I2* elevates the present-tenseness of the performers' climate concerns by drawing attention to their immediate context, shared with the adults in the room, while simultaneously addressing those concerns' difficult abstractness. In doing so, *I2* suggests that many of the obstacles faced by climate activist movements run parallel with the obstacles faced by political-theatre itself, such as the imprecise struggle to incite genuine changes in behaviour post-performance. As discussed in length in Chapter 1, the calls-to-action of both climate activists and political theatre share in their potential to inadvertently encourage passivity through their abstractness and through displaced feelings of immediacy. Ending *I2* on this alignment acts as a final affirmation of thematic weight; *I2* justifies its own existence in the theatre landscape by exposing parallel obstacles to be overcome.

Such indirect means of communicating political messaging prove complementary to Berleant's aesthetic field and particularly to attempts at pairing Applied Theatre with the aesthetic field through the notion of telescoping. As defined in Chapter 1, telescoping describes the four aesthetic roles of "the object, the artist, the perceiver, and the performer" and their subtle ability to permeate one another, such as when an aesthetic experience has no visible performer and the role of the performer is then "'telescoped', into that of the perceiver, who in effect performs the work by actively engaging with it in the experiential moment of perception" (White 72). Berleant's aesthetic field allows us to recognize the audience as having potential access to feelings of participation and performance regardless of that audience's actual amount of tangible participation – a capacity that is complemented by Applied Theatre's uniquely approachable aesthetic experience, being often targeted to a performance's local context. From this perspective, *I2*'s above moments capitalize upon the audience's capacity for participatory feelings by drawing repeated attention to the audience's failure to act upon such affects, heightening feelings of complicity by drawing attention to the telescoping of performer and perceiver roles. In embedding such political messaging within the audience's own behaviour in the room, *I2* stretches the boundaries of its overall aesthetic experience, prompting the audience to question the variety of other ways in which they might be more than spectators at an evening of theatre.

Insights into the flexibility of this aesthetic experience are also evident in Watt's description of the creation process, specifically in her account of the unexpected changes elicited by *I2*'s early performances. For example, Watt clarified that the above invitations for audience participation have evolved greatly over time. She described to me a particularly resonant turning point in their development:

There was this, by coincidence, a little girl from France who was here in Canada on exchange and living at one of the actor's houses, and her mother asked me [if she could] observe the rehearsals and if there are any games, can she play can she assist you [...] and she spoke some English but mostly French [...] and she was due to leave back to France a couple of months later [...], [*I2*] used to end with, they call out "11?" waiting for an audience member to join, and nobody comes, and they move forward [...] what we did in that one is, I planted [the little girl], she was in the audience amongst those 400 raucous high school students, they call out "11?" she stands up and she goes "11!" and she walks all the way down the audience [and the audience members start chatting and mumbling] because they totally didn't buy that it was a plant, for a second [...], and then she joins them and they all stand up there and they go "12?" and then it ended [...], and she did it and she had her little coat on and her boots as if it was totally from the outside [...] and then she left, and then we knew we wanted something more at the ending. (Watt, personal interview)

Watt also clarified that a major motivator for this audience plant stood apart from of any consideration of a final, aesthetic product: "Part of it was truly so that I could say to her and her mom 'Do you want to be in it?'" (Watt, personal interview). The young French girl's inclusion is thereby enacting the broader 'invitation' approach emphasized by *I2*'s audience participation framing, in addition to actualizing the global ambitions of the performance's content, such as the unifying of younger generations across differences and across borders through youth-led climate movements. By prioritizing the enriching experience of international collaboration at a young age, the affective experience of the performers is emphasized, and the moment's aesthetic approach becomes largely dependent upon that emphasis. The resultant aesthetic invites an adult audience to witness and engage with the participants' own affective experience in creating the performance itself, and to discover their own affects accordingly, rather than depending purely upon that audience's reaction to a traditional aesthetic experience and its "linear artist-object-performer-perceiver structure" (White 72).

These broader appreciations of *I2*'s unique ambivalence towards audience participation are uniquely suited to the YTAA subgenre; as defined in Chapter 1, YTAA is partially characterized by an adult audience that is consistently reminded of their own "being watched" by the performers on stage and by younger generations more broadly. Additionally, YTAA, particularly when politically-motivated, benefits greatly from an adult audience's appreciation of young people's own affective experience in crafting the aesthetic experience. *I2*'s moments of audience invitation are thereby well-suited, as they explicitly address the young performers' previous experiences engaging with adults, but they simultaneously invite adult experiences into the fold of climate action.

These moments also drop adult audience members into a scenario where they are forced to contribute to the aesthetic experience, whether through engaging or through failing to engage. Regardless of the adults' reactions or intentions, the final aesthetic experience becomes a collaboration between the two parties, a product of that generational relationship, rather than an aesthetic experience that can be dismissed by adults as inaccessible or used for further scapegoating. Such an assumption can once again be approached through Berleant's aesthetic field, particularly in terms of its telescoping function. Here, the four functions of "object, artist, perceiver, and performer" begin to mix, and locating the source of the moment's aesthetic experience becomes increasingly complex; the adults' influence becomes increasingly inextricable, and so too does their complicity (White 72).

3.5.5 Extended Programming: Talkbacks

In the event of a talkback, this expanded aesthetic becomes particularly evident. For the most part, these talkbacks follow tradition, the performers all returning to the stage immediately post-performance with Watt herself serving as moderator. Adult audience members are then given the opportunity to ask the young performers questions about their creation process, as well as the performers' overall reflections on the current climate crises; however, at my performance, most of these adults also felt inclined to speak to their own experiences and their own perspectives on climate

crises. For example, one audience member purely spoke to their own perspective, to the point that it became unclear what they expected from the performers on stage, lacking any actual questions. While these audience members' contributions were informative, articulate, and key to establishing the intergenerational dialogue that *I2* seeks to facilitate, their contributions nevertheless carried a defensive tone; it did not seem that these adults aimed to absolve their broader generation, but they nevertheless implicitly defended their own actions and the gradual pace of their own journey towards climate action. In doing so, these audience members subtly dodged the directness of *I2*'s calls to recognize individual complicity, as with the intervention scene, in favour of a more generational complicity.

Of course, these contributions should not be assumed to be reflective of all audiences' responses to *I2*. Rather, these contributions simply demonstrate the persistence of the impulse to dodge complicity, particularly through the self-exonerating act of having attended a political performance in the first place, not to mention having stayed for a talkback. In other words, at my performance, some audience members seemed to take comfort in their participation during the talkback yet failed to recognize their own reluctance to participate during the performance itself. This oversight is not necessarily surprising, and the persistence of such oversights is not a failure on *I2*'s part but is rather notably addressed by the performance itself; *I2* acknowledges that its own efforts feel insufficient for fully eradicating these impulses more broadly. For example, near the beginning of the performance, *I2* explicitly acknowledges the flexibility of its own accusatory functions, as well as the potential for an audience member to individually navigate those feelings of complicity:

- 1: Some of what we're about to say will be directed at you. Yes, it's to you.
- 2: But it's not you. Personally.
- 3: You can decide how much is you. (100 Watt Productions, "playscript" 2)

From this perspective, the above evasive talkback contributions do not undermine *I2*'s effectiveness, but rather reinforce the performance's own concerns through those concerns' immediate exhibition post-show. In this sense, *I2* seems to prove itself with an almost shocking speed.

The extended programming model of Applied Theatre as employed by Helen Nicholson is helpful in this regard, as Nicholson allows talkbacks to be considered a key part of the performance event itself, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Gallagher and Wessels 25). Therefore, for any audience members who are conscious of the potential impulse towards dodging complicity and self-absolution, such as myself, witnessing these concerning talkback contributions can reinforce *I2*'s overall impact and concerns, thereby stretching *I2*'s affective experience beyond the initial aesthetic boundaries of the scripted performance, bridging the performance experience into post-show life.

I2's talkback did not put up a didactic front, nor present the performers as a unified, homogenous, political voice. Rather, through Watt's facilitation, the talkback allowed the young performers to speak to their own individual experience in creating *I2* and, most importantly, provided space for the performers to visibly disagree with one another. For example, at my performance, two performers began to briefly debate the level of optimism warranted by the youth-led climate movement, no longer addressing the audience at all. Watt did not snuff out this debate, nor attempt to harmonize their differing perspectives, but rather allowed them to continue, unfiltered. In doing so, Watt employed a style of facilitation that recognizes tension, an approach that is reflective of Helen Nicholson's emphasis on the political as a "sight of antagonistic struggle" (Nicholson 28). Tensions were not smothered, but rather allowed to breathe. Such approaches to tension are particularly effective for stimulating climate action, as argued by Mike Hulme in his conviction that climate change and climate action, being an "imaginative idea," must embrace "plurality, multiplicity, and multivocality" and "discard the focus on unilateral solution orientation" if action is to be embraced by a variety of peoples, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Hoydis 346). In asking adult audiences to recognize young people's capacity for productive tension, these visible disagreements foreground plurality and further challenge generational scapegoating, undermining any reductive attempts at amalgamating younger generations into one, world-saving whole, while nevertheless affirming generational solidarity by demonstrating a capacity to accommodate difference.

The decision to platform these tensions also speaks to Watt's other concerns as an educator.

When I asked Watt about her approach to participants' frustrations, she told me: "I guess I'm not scared of anger. I guess what I'm more scared of is a society that tries to make people, especially very young people, know that anger is highly unwanted" (Watt, personal interview). By allowing such unfiltered emotions to arise in the talkback, a talkback which can be seen to be a part of the performance's greater aesthetic experience through Nicholson, Watt allows for her performers' frustrations to stretch beyond the typical boundaries of the performance, establishing a more flexible aesthetic experience that can help her participants feel validated.

CONCLUSION

Coda – *I2*'s Remount

The date is November 21st, 2021. *I2* is being remounted, its first return to the stage after the initial lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, and I am attending its closing performance. The production is being staged at Canada's National War Museum. As I approach the building, I am immediately struck by a sort of tension; this is an institutional space for nationalist memorializing, grieving what the nation has lost while celebrating what it has achieved; *I2* expresses a somewhat similar collective mourning, but oriented in the opposite direction, grieving what will eventually be lost. As I walk through the front doors, I wonder whether any other audience members have made similar connections. I show a volunteer my vaccine passport, complete a quick covid-screening, and make my way into the venue.

The seating is half chairs, half floormats. *I2* is being hosted by the Ottawa Children's Festival, home to several past 100 Watt productions, and the floormats immediately invoke a sense of playfulness, a prioritization of the youngest audience members present (although notably, the floormats are a stark grey). I wonder whether this framing undercuts the basis of my analysis, my proposed YTAA terminology; I worry that adult audience members might unwittingly dismiss *I2*'s calls-to-action, interpreting their own function to be nothing more than babysitters, rather than the intended target audience.

I hope for an inverse effect. I hope that parents will take *I2*'s messaging more seriously given their own children's presence, especially since they sit directly in their parents' line of sight. I catch myself, however, and I worry that, in hoping for the performance's relevance to be made more prescient, I have essentially wished these parents to be made more emotionally distraught, for them to imagine their children in peril. The thought leaves me uncomfortable, but I am not given much time to resolve this dilemma; before long, the lights begin to dim.

100 Watt Productions began *I2*'s creation process in 2018, and I last saw the production in January 2020, though it feels much longer ago. It was staged in the Great Canadian Theatre Company's studio space, with no floor mats, no children-seated-on-laps, and a largely adult audience. This performance was the initial inspiration for my YTAA conceptualizations. Now, in 2021, I feel myself beginning to worry. I expect the audience to divide themselves up similarly to the rest of this festival, with children seated on the floor mats, closest to the stage, and adults seated in the chairs, merely watching over them, lines drawn in the sand. This does not prove the case, however; I shift myself over by a chair to make room for a mother's daughter, and a group of university students sit on the floor mats immediately in front of me.

Kristina Watt Villegas appears on the stage, removing her mask to address the audience. She welcomes us all with a quotation from a mentor, saying that, regardless of whether or not art can change the world, art can still change the people who change the world. In this moment, it is not clear whether she is referring to the hopeful faces in the audience, or the young performers waiting in the wings. Perhaps the answer is both. She ends her introduction by clarifying that *I2* is not her own story, but the story of these young performers.

The production is different from how I remember it. The opening invitation for audience participation remains intact (and is still ignored), as does the majority of the playscript, but some faces are missing, and some faces are unfamiliar. The performers I recognize are visibly older and taller with matured faces, different hairstyles, different outfits. They voice updated scientific findings, new statistics, new warnings. There is a new musical score made up of electronic hip-hop beats, and the performance closes with a hip-hop track written by a climate activist from another country. The music sounds ominous but carries a forward momentum. There are some pandemic references, as well as brief allusions to *While We Wait*, the digital theatre piece they created in direct response to *I2*'s hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic, but the performers do not linger on looking backwards. The performance ends with an unidentified young person answering their call to participate, sitting on the

offered stool and joining the other performers on stage for the curtain call. It is unclear whether this conclusion is preplanned.

A talkback begins immediately after our applause has died down. The lighting remains the same, the doors remain closed, and Watt emerges from the wings. She introduces the talkback as being explicitly “part of the performance,” rather than an optional or ancillary element. I am immediately taken back to *The Pipeline Project*, as discussed in Chapter 2, its second act having been framed similarly, not as a talkback, but as a “Talk Forward” (Loring et al. 73). I recall how *The Pipeline Project* framed its Talk Forward’s participants similarly to Watt, describing expert guest speakers and audience members alike as an “integral part” or the production’s overall aesthetic experience, as “co-creating the ongoing story” (73).

Three audience questions are addressed, and we are sadly out of time. One of the performers abruptly runs off stage and returns with a bouquet of flowers for Watt, to mark the closing of their run. The audience trickles into an enthusiastic standing ovation and Watt appears at a loss for words (but finds them anyways, as per usual). She expresses her gratitude, appeals for hope, and wishes us well.

As I leave the venue, I overhear a father and daughter discussing what they have just seen. The daughter is no older than eight years old, the father in his thirties. The daughter says that the production felt long, while the father claims it passed surprisingly quickly. I wonder whether this truly reflects their respective enjoyment of the performance, their individual levels of engagement, or whether the father is simply playing devil’s advocate for his daughter. Perhaps the daughter is a little too young to fully grapple with *I2*’s troubling, global themes, and perhaps the father is not convinced that he was the performance’s target audience, given the fact he is attending a “children’s” festival. I cannot help but worry that YTAA might be hit-or-miss in these regards; I worry that, without a designated performance context, one which makes the intended audience overt, the targeted messages of YTAA might go unrecognized. This thought inspires another worry, however; in some cases, such overt framing could actually drive that target audience away, coming off as antagonistic.

I do not have a complete resolution for these thoughts; yet, I do not leave the museum disheartened. This is merely a single point of concern, piqued by a brief, overheard conversation. In fact, it points towards future possibilities; it has called to mind my research into TYA's recent developments, specifically Canadian TYA artists' call for a merging of TYA companies with 'adult' theatre companies, a call prompted by TYA's increasing dependency on schools and on complementing school curricula (Ardal 197). As discussed in Chapter 2, these TYA artists claim that such a merging could allow for broader artistic freedoms, as well as the opportunity to "cross-pollinate artists" between the two often-insulated fields (197). Additionally, this merging could reprioritize "the role of young people as members of [general] theatre audiences [...] rather than primarily as students or children" (Bannerman 54).

Perhaps a solution to my concerns lies in these types of emerging partnerships and creation spaces. Perhaps TYA artists are correct to call for increased opportunities at cross-pollination, not only between older and younger audiences, but between older and younger artists. There seems to be a growing need for Canadian institutions and organizations that aid in pairing Applied Theatre artists with young performers, or perhaps simply for increased Applied Theatre training opportunities; in either case, developments such as these could result in a wider variety of performance opportunities for politically-minded youth, opportunities which would allow YTAA's messaging to be targeted even more pointedly.

Regardless of these hopes for the broader field's future, this evening's performance sold-out and post-performance chatter has been lively; *I2* has clearly achieved its aims, deepening and polishing its own articulations of climate anxiety while keeping the intergenerational climate conversation moving along. In doing so, Kristina Watt Villegas has demonstrated that which might be gained by paying increased attention to like-minded artists, and the potential rewards of providing those artists with ample resources.

Reflections

Initially inspired by 100 Watt Productions and its framing of their most recent performance as “theatre for adults but – by necessity – performed by youth,” this thesis has utilized a combination of Applied Theatre theory and TYA theory to develop its original terminology, Youth Theatre for Adult Audiences (YTAA) (Watt, “Creations: 12”). YTAA has been used to identify theatre that recognizes young performers’ capacity for civic participation and, with the help of an external facilitator, platforms their affective appeals to older generations. Performances like *I2* have proven to be uniquely suited for these political efforts, not only through this act of platforming, but also in substantiating young people’s position as future inheritors of today’s political crises.

While my surveying of such YTAA productions has been somewhat limited, this thesis has nevertheless demonstrated potential future applications of the YTAA terminology through a brief analysis of *No More Secrets*, a verbatim, documentary theatre piece created by young Ottawans to stage necessary testimonies against sexual abuse at Bell High School. Any future research into YTAA would benefit greatly from broader surveying and French Canadian examples, a process which was beyond this project’s scope.

This thesis has also considered its YTAA terminology alongside recent climate crisis research and broader contexts of ecocriticism and eco-centric performance, in order to demonstrate YTAA’s unique suitability for engaging with such contexts. Rather than expand upon preexisting research into climate crisis denialism or processes of climate policy implementation, however, this thesis project focused its attention on the youth-led climate movement and complementary research into climate crisis communication techniques and relevant pedagogies. This restraint has allowed for a more purposeful appreciation of 100 Watt Productions’ creation processes, as well the performance efforts of the youth-led climate movement more broadly.

The YTAA terminology’s ramifications for aesthetic theory have also been considered at length, advocating for a renewed emphasis of Arnold Berleant’s aesthetic field, whose relevance to

Applied Theatre is discussed at length by Gareth White. For example, this thesis has found that Berleant's notion of "telescoping" allows for a more thorough analysis of YTAA's aesthetic experiences, particularly by allowing for a deeper consideration of the creators' own emotional experience and those affects' influence on the overall aesthetic (White 72). Audience members are not merely asked to consider young people's emotional experiences as part of the performance's explicitly-stated appeals, they are also prompted to do so because such emotional considerations prove necessary for fully appreciating the performance's aesthetic experience.

Berleant's notion of "telescoping" has also proven helpful for deepening an understanding of YTAA's relationship with audience participation, as with these performances' targeted use of ancillary, otherwise-optional programming, such as talkbacks, exemplified by both *I2* and *The Pipeline Project* in their unique Talk Forwards. This thesis project has also demonstrated how the invitation for audience participation can provoke audience members to reflect upon their own capacity for action, regardless of whether that invitation is actually acted upon. In short, audience participation, whether integrated or ancillary, whether acted upon or rejected, can raise prescient questions as to the efficacy of calls-to-action in artistic contexts, thereby deepening the performance's exploration of complicity in the face of political crises.

It is also worth acknowledging that all of the above efforts are elevated by YTAA's use of an older artist or external facilitator, who's association grants the younger participants an additional impression of legitimacy in the eyes of the audience. When Kristina Watt Villegas provides *I2*'s pre-show remarks, for example, the performance is immediately understood to have artistic value and imbued with a higher level of legitimacy, likely moreso than if it had been a purely youth-led initiative, unfortunately. However, in the case of *I2*, the older facilitator's influence is presented as being simultaneously essential and secondary, or unobtrusive; Watt is clearly vital to *I2*, but she explicitly concedes in her pre-show remarks that this is not her story, it is the performers'. In other words, effective YTAA facilitators do not draw attention away from the young performers; they elevate their

participants, exhibiting self-control and consideration when discussing their own contributions to the project. In this sense, YTAA frames young people as present-tense artists in their own right, rather than as mere artists-in-development; they are valuable creators and collaborators, rather than pawns of a more experienced artist. They are still in a process of artistic development, but so too is Watt, and all those in attendance. Through navigations such as these, YTAA has proven to be uniquely capable of responding to the demands, opportunities, and political challenges faced by today's young people, validating their personal experiences and further legitimizing their presence on the stage.

It is my hope that this thesis project's analyses have demonstrated the YTAA terminology's unique potential for future Applied Theatre productions, more acutely applying the tools of textual analysis and performance analysis to the unique political, pedagogical contexts within which youth-led activist collectives operate. However, I consider YTAA's primary achievement as terminology to be its specific utility for 100 Watt Productions. YTAA provides a complementary frame of analysis for Kristina Watt Villegas' work, allowing her unique amalgamation of creation methodologies, pedagogical influences, and aesthetic preferences to be appreciated from a new perspective. It is for this reason that significant time and effort have been dedicated to conducting interviews with Watt, charting the history of 100 Watt Productions and elucidating her ever-evolving artistic practice. It is my hope that such a practice will inspire future artists to lead YTAA projects of their own and to pursue opportunities for "cross-pollinat[ion]" between the often-insulated fields of adult theatre and youth theatre (Bannerman 54). The uniquely specialized platforms of YTAA reaffirm the value of such efforts to our civic life.

APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS, KRISTINA WATT VILLEGAS

The following transcripts are taken from interviews between myself and Kristina Watt Villegas, 100 Watt Productions' founder and artistic leader. These interviews serve as this thesis project's primary means of data collection, apart from playscripts and attended performances. They took place on January 8th 2021, February 8th 2021, March 7th 2021, and May 7th 2021 over Zoom video conference call, each interview lasting for approximately an hour. The transcripts have been edited for clarity and Watt was provided the opportunity to freely omit information as desired.

I am including these transcripts as an appendix to this thesis project for two reasons: 1) the full versions of these interviews provide invaluable insight into the performance history of 100 Watt Productions and into Watt's unique creation methodology, insights that do not otherwise fit into my thesis project but which can nevertheless significantly deepen a reader's understanding of the youth-led climate movement, Applied Theatre, and my proposed YTAA terminology, and 2) I consider these transcripts to be a worthwhile reading experience, independent of my thesis project's efforts at interpreting and contextualizing. Watt is more than capable of speaking for herself, expertly articulating her own methodologies. These generous insights are worth including here, in full.

I hope that these transcripts, along with the overall thesis project, will act as a platform upon which Watt's singular voice can gain further attention and academic inquiry. Watt has been successfully pursuing this line of work for many years now, and she is more than deserving of any additional recognition that comes her way.

My first interview with Watt begins by discussing the origins of 100 Watt Productions, establishing a brief company timeline. From there, we discuss Watt's own artistic development, her interests and inspirations, her history as a teacher and her relationship with pedagogy, her understanding of both the local and national contexts within which her work finds itself, and more.

Great efforts are made in this interview to articulate the pillars and operating values of 100 Watt Productions, particularly Watt's concept of innocent anarchy.

Interview #2 delves further into Watt's unique creation methodology and approach to ensemble building, as well as Watt's understanding of her work's target audience, her work's capacity for audience participation, and more. We also discuss *I2*'s framing as an invitation.

Interview #3 shifts focus towards *I2*, discussing the production in much greater detail, including how creation processes and ensemble-building techniques were shaped to *I2*'s specific subject matter. We also discuss *I2*'s unique narrative structure, Watt's understanding of *I2* as an aesthetic experience, *I2*'s relationship with activism, and more. This interview is also particularly notable for discussing *While We Wait*, a digital theatre piece created by 100 Watt Productions in direct response to *I2*'s hiatus during the COVID-19 pandemic's early lockdowns.

Interview #4 expands these conversations' political implications, discussing environmentalism, climate justice, and ecodramaturgy's influences on Watt's creation processes, as well as their influences on *I2*'s performances thus far. We also discuss *I2*'s unique touring structure, its relationship with tension and disruptive impulses, and more.

For the most part, I refrained from inserting my own interpretations of Watt's work into these conversations, in an attempt to minimize the influence of any potential biases and presuppositions; however, there were several moments where I considered it worthwhile to share. It is my hope that these contributions have not come off as immoderately imposed. Further information on my interview methodology can be found in this thesis' introduction.

It should also be acknowledged that transcripts such as these are only a partial impression of the interview process itself. Burke and Innes effectively articulate this limitation in their discussion of performance studies' emerging interview methodologies:

[...] the reader is not necessarily able to capture the context into which the words are delivered (physical and linguistic), nor the emotion with which a word or sentence is invested [...] Thus,

the transcript is akin to a script without stage directions, design, direction and actor's interpretation, requiring the reader to be aware that he/she has not heard the nuances that determine or shape meaning. (Burke and Innes 9)

It is my hope that, by allowing Watt to review these transcripts and request revisions, the nuances of our conversations are more accurately represented.

Interview #1, January 8th 2021 – Transcript

(edited for clarity)

MV: Today is January 8th 2021, and this is the first interview between Kristina Watt and I, Matthew Venner, to chat about her theatre company, 100 Watt Productions, which is the major focus of my master's thesis's research study.

Kristina and I have completed a consent form for these interviews, as required by the University of Ottawa's office of research ethics and integrity, and I just wanted to quickly draw attention to a couple key points, the first being that Kristina always has the ability to omit information from my final thesis before it is submitted to the department, and the second being that she also has the ability to withdraw herself from this project altogether, at any point in time, which would include the deletion of all collected data. Kristina can reach out to my thesis supervisor, Yana Meerzon, or the office of research ethics whenever she feels necessary.

So yeah, just wanted to make sure that was on the record.

Now, as we're chatting today, we can deviate from our structure as we wish, but I was thinking that today we could focus a little bit on the beginnings of 100 Watt Productions, and discuss your work and your field a tiny bit more broadly, for context, so that in later interviews we can then delve a bit more into specific productions, like *I2*, once I've had the chance to read over some scripts and account them into my research. Of course, that's just a broad goal, so if we deviate, that's totally fine.

Do you have any questions before we dive in?

- **KW:** [*shakes her head: "No."*]

MV: Great. Well, I guess we may as well start from the beginning! Was there a distinct starting point to 100 Watt Productions, and if so, how did that come about?

- **KW:** Well, it's a non-traditional trajectory, and I'll try to make the first part brief, because it doesn't feel as pertinent to what you're doing, but originally, many, many years ago, not that many, I was living in New York for a while, I'd got my MFA in acting in the states, and then I moved up to NYC and one of the things that I'd always loved doing since I was, I don't know at what point, was actually drawing, so visual art. When I was in NY, I started drawing more, in addition to my acting career, and the drawings were, whatever chain of events, people were responding to them, and then I started to change them into cards, so I would take the drawing and make them into cards, greeting cards, thank you cards, whatever, just a blank card, the image, and in the back would be my logo, and the logo was just playing with numbers and shapes, and I mention that because I realize in saying that, that's forever been something that I see, and I end up, without consciously aware of it until now, articulating this with you, that I see it and I draw upon it on stage as well. So the mathematics of life, the science of life, and then the poetry, and where the two are one in the same or crossover or talk to each other, so anyways, it was all about just balancing out figures on a page and so the little 100 and then Watt and then in the middle the three lines of a lightbulb, and it just became this little thing. This became attached to my cards, so entirely my drawing work. And then, to make a long story short, I was back in Canada by circumstance, so I moved back to Canada to thinking I'd stay, and then because of the circumstances, basically the health of my parents, I ended up staying. Now, what happened when I stayed was that my previous, I'd started working with children and teenagers since I was about 15, but not in terms of creating theatre work. Once I moved back

here, it was such a different atmosphere in Ottawa, a very different way to live as a professional artist and operate and function as a professional, and with that, that came with some frustrations, but then one of the benefits was that I felt much more open to start to build my own work. And that's where the 100 Watt started to become focused on collaborating with youth initially, and then creating new work, and then it expanded to include new innovative work always in collaborating with youth, so sometimes the projects, like the ones in particular that you're interested in, have youth directly involved in the creation and their bodies are on stage, but other 100 Watt work is that they're part of the research process, they're an emerging artist under development, but they're not within the performance itself per se. And that's kept going. The additions of the two words, so 100 Watt Productions' long name, to spell out the whole package, is 100 Watt Productions: Innocent Anarchy, and the innocent anarchy goes back to the cards, and is consistently through all the work I do, and encapsulates what happens when I feel like, when the work is in collaboration with youth, this beautiful collision that is this blend of innocence and idealism or maybe its hope or maybe it's the courage to look, the way to look at anything, any entity, with an innocent eye, which I actually believe could happen at any age, and should happen at any age, and then the word anarchy, which I feel is inherently within the spirit of young people that this desire to rebel, this desire to kind of shake the rafters a little bit, even for the sake of shaking them sometimes, but that spirit of courageous questioning. So that has gone through my continued drawings, and that really seems to continuously drive the work. And I don't sit down and go: "Ok so where is that appearing," it seems to keep appearing, it seems to be something maybe in me that I'm not, it just seems to be a driving spirit. It resonates in all my work.

MV: To me, when you dig into those two words, what really stands out to me as a bridging point is that they both really emphasizes curiosity, and just remaining constantly curious.

- **KW:** Absolutely.

MV: So even if they sound sort of disparate, they're linked by that consistent questioning and remaining curious.

- **KW:** And I think, living in the time we're living in now, I think within curiosity, I love that you use that word, it demands courage. And when I think about youth in particular, they get to a certain age, and I'm not saying vast generalizations, I can speak from myself, there's a certain age where, to be in the know, to not be in awe, to be certain, to actually have an opinion and a judgment, rather than be curious or just in awe, or going: "I don't know," actually takes a very interesting type of courage. And anarchic as well, because to be curious about a system can be a little bit of a threat to that distance. So, I like that.

MV: And it gets me thinking about a lot of my work with summer camps. I think a lot about these turning points in youth, these turning points of when kids start thinking a little bit outside of what's in front of them, something like systems, and of course I don't want to generalize either, but I noticed with 11 year olds, that always seemed to be this age where they're suddenly thinking more globally, thinking more about the world outside of their home.

- **KW:** Yes, and along with that becomes – and I love that, the age you just named there, because along with that, and then it stays, perhaps for life, so with that, you did with your arms, there's also self-consciousness, in terms of what others think of me, what others think of what I might say, y'know Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the whole idea of just fitting in and peer pressure, so again, I love that tension, and I feel in that age, we're living through that clash, and they

vacillate, so within maybe one day at the summer camp, maybe you've seen it, or whatever the task is, they become the complete child, and then within a moment or a situation or some kind of reflex or trigger, it suddenly: "How am I seen by other? How do I fit in?" And what happens to the self? And then the self as a creative voice? Again, I like that collision, like innocent anarchy, that rubbing point.

MV: Yeah. I'm trying to figure out how to phrase this next part... When you're starting a new 100 Watt project, what's the first thing that happens? Does it just sort of happen, or is it much more intentional? Is it very much, you're starting from these principles and branching out from there, or is it more instinctual? If there is a pattern.

- **KW:** It's a bit of a motif in speaking with you about these things today, which I hadn't consciously thought of, because I think as I reflect, there is a pattern, but to go to what you said before, I don't think there's a pattern. I don't go in going, this is going to be the pattern, and these are the dominant principles, but those dominant principles are core values that I seem to have when I am in a room with, we'll focus on for instance, young artists, so, for instance, one of the, yeah, and I'm not going to go in any particular order because sometimes one might come before the other, and you know this, depending on the group, and then there's these other factors like time or whatever. But let's say time wasn't a factor, so I'll take that out, because time as you know in the creative process can distort, time in terms of: "You need to finish this by," can distort what might be your guiding way of working, or desired work. The number one thing, I think yes, because I was just going in my brain and I was challenging myself to say: "Ok, what would be the most important thing that you want to start happening in the room and start being whenever, however long that is," and it's the four letters, it's play. And within innocent anarchy, fearless play. But that's a loaded thing, because in order for genuine play to

happen, as you well know and these are buzz words, which have truth but then how, things like creating trust, both ways, within each other, of me, I mean that's a really really big one, and that trust back on themselves, to link to what we were just talking about, in terms of their trust that they can be seen in ways that is not in control, to them. And at that certain age it's harder than others. So I begin the path towards play. And that is really, and that happens even if, and this doesn't always happen, like it didn't happen with *I2*, even if I come into the room going:

"Alright, I'm contracted or I'm driven to personally thematically that I want whatever ends up with this group to live in this world," y'know a topic, pick a topic, right? Even if I have that, that will not come up. It might come up in how I shape the exercises and the little tricks and the little games that I put in, because it's a dominant thing inside me, it might appear, so let's say in this trying to free up a room based on fearless play, I play with language, or questions, like totally in a game-like fashion, maybe some of the questions might just happen to be in that world. So: "What's your favourite kind of garbage," right? Y'know? And so they're not aware of it, and it's within the realm of the silly, so would I never gear it entirely, probably, maybe not, but not very consciously. Fearless play, number one.

MV: So would you say that at the beginning of the majority of these projects, is it typically, are you being brought to a group, are they being brought to you? How would you describe that initial contract phase, and has it always allowed you this sort of freedom to follow the paths that the kids lead? Or were there times where 100 Watt was tasked with making a specific type of show.

- **KW:** Both. Both, but my process will be the same. And yes, it's let the kids lead, but I'm leading. I'm leading, but I think it's a different view of that word leading. I'm very very conscious of what I'm doing, but one of my great joys is having something that I planned and throwing it out in the moment, and suddenly it's something else. I love that. I hate it when I

lecture, it gives me panic attacks, but somehow when I'm in a creative space, and especially with youth, I love that, when they throw me off my own block, or suddenly I see something more interesting than what I thought was next. But I am driving. I'm driving, I'm watching, I'm monitoring, but it might not be the traditional way when one thinks of that as a teacher.

- Sometimes I'm not always clear with all that I say; so, sometimes the groups come to me, sometimes they come to me with an open-ended goal, such as, and you know this: "collective creation with teenagers," but on the other hand I have also been contracted to create something because, or to build something that will fit in with another organization's goals. I've also put together groups before, and I've also been given the groups.

MV: Would you say that this approach that you're describing, and your definition of the word "lead," can you see a sort of trajectory of how your practice changed in these terms, over the course of 100 Watt's history? Or was it in general the same emphasis on these ideas from the start? That might be a little bit broad. Can you, from your perspective now, see an arc to these ideas?

- **KW:** Sure, it's a general question, but it's a general answer as well: it has become more and more so that way, and it has become more and more that I can even speak to you today and identify it as something. I can also express to you today my, kind of the high, the euphoria I get off of that interplay between the known and the unknown in the room. Whereas I would say, at the beginning, I would say in terms of the beginning of collaborating with young people, and this didn't entirely happen in Canada, I was much more structured, in terms of the lesson plan, I as much more influenced by those that did it better than me. And I'm putting that in my head, those that teach young people, and that there's sort of a way that it goes about, a way that it's approached, and it goes into teaching adults as well, and I would say that's still there, but much less so. And I have confidence, more confidence now, I'm always not the most confident book

on the shelf, but I have more and more confidence now that I may be doing things that are a little bit not by-the-book, but that's ok. And that's taken a long while, that's a lot of negotiation.

MV: Out of curiosity, have you ever taught, whether it be youth or adults, outside of the realm of performance?

- **KW:** No, I've taught language, and I still do, and I've taught dance, for quite a few years, highland dancing. And uh, what else have I taught. Yeah, language. In Colombia I taught English, here I teach Spanish, and I teach at the university level, sometimes theory. In North Carolina I taught play analysis, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, so yeah, sometimes.

MV: And so language, was that where you started teaching, or was it at the same time as performance?

- **KW:** I would say in a way, concurrently. In Ottawa, I've only recently started teaching Spanish. But no, I would say, yeah, concurrently. I mean dance came first. I was teaching dance when I was trusted by someone to teach at 15. [laughs] So yeah, dance came first.

MV: How do you feel your time spent teaching languages has informed your practice teaching performance? Whether specifically with youth, or more generally. Do you see a clear link between your experiences in those two worlds, or do they feel distinct?

- **KW:** That's an interesting question. I think I have an answer; I'm so curious why you're asking that. That's a fascinating question.

MV: Yeah—

- **KW:** I know, I don't think this is allowed, wait a minute who's asking the questions! Maybe I'll answer and then you can tell me, I'm so curious now why that came to you.
- Ok, I am going to hypothesize here, alright, that as you spoke that I went: "Yeah." But see if this makes sense. This seems to me my belief and then my editor comes in and goes: "Well not everything you teach," but maybe it's also the situation and the context, that doesn't let it happen at times, but one of the things that both interests me and I think is very necessary is that I have to be fascinated by how the other person or people, how they think. I have to figure out, and it's like this wonderful puzzle, and I love games, I love puzzles, everything's play; like how do they see? How do they hear? How do they respond to fear? How do they respond to not knowing? How does their brain work? I'm fascinated, I feel like that is so essential to, and it sounds presumptive, but to crack that in order that I can teach in a way that they're going to receive it, and ideally enjoy it. I think things stick when there's joy included. So, especially initially, now that I realize this, and maybe it's like that: "Gotta have play in the room" phase at the beginning, which always lasts, but we talk about that, or maybe I'm just meeting a student and it's a one-on-one, I would say initially I am watching how they receive and I find it fascinating, I find it fucking fascinating, maybe it's the actor in me, but I just find people fascinating. And what makes them laugh? And what was funny to me in what I just said and they didn't — and then I start to either instinctually or pragmatically, like with a language student: "Ah! I now know that I'm going to bring in this." And I actually decided this student, we're going to play a game, there's going to be the lesson, but we're going to learn the language through literally I'm going to pull out Mastermind cards, it's always going to be through a board game, and then the language, because that's what I, so I made a change in accordance to that. And so I would say all teaching is that way, is that I only know what I, the most important

person in the room is the other person, I mean it sounds so trite, but in an actual way of living that, their way of learning, I cannot do shit until I figure out or at least get some clues as to how they operate. So then when we've got my group of 12, who I've been with for two years now, two and a quarter, I now talk to them in different ways, in order that they're just at their freest. You probably do this.

MV: Oh yeah.

- **KW:** So yeah, that would cross over from language to this, because I think language is also play-based, I think. Living language, joy of language, courage to speak. Anyways.

MV: For me, it almost sounds... not trite, but a little obvious: for me, both the most rewarding part of teaching and the most useful part for my practice, is the particular relationships you develop with the kids and the particular understanding you get of how they learn. But the reason I initially asked that question and I thought about that link between language and performance is because I was thinking a little bit about my research into Applied Theatre mor generally, and thinking about how some different researchers and theorists like Helen Nicholson, if you happen to know her, she talks about how the goal of Applied Theatre shouldn't be just developing this total harmony within a group, how the goal should be to acknowledge any tensions or frustrations that might arise, and actually addressing them. The reason I thought of that, is I was thinking about the frustrations that arise when, especially kids trying to learn a new language, those frustrations that can come up.

- **KW:** Just to bounce off something you just said: conflict is essential in the room. Really big premise. Maybe that's within the innocent anarchy, really big premise. I do not shut conflict down. Ad in fact, I was asked at one point to, it was this national conference of teachers, led by

someone in the teaching college at the University of Ottawa, and he found my name through someone at the National Arts Centre, and I did a talk on the importance of conflict, and the dangers of where we're heading, in terms of society and in particular children onwards, in terms of removing conflict from all spaces. And especially as an artist, I mean, y'know. The premise of removal of all discomfort for the sake of who? That's always interesting, is really, really problematic, but the powerful entity of conflict is fantastic. It's delicate.

MV: Do you find that that's something that's changed in your practice over time? Would you find, for example, that early on in your practice, you would try to maybe solve tension more quickly? Over the course of your career, have you become more open to tension in the room?

- **KW:** Yeah, I'm just challenging myself to think first before I go blahblahblah.

MV: Yeah, I think it's a difficult impulse to fight as an educator, just in general. The instinctual thing might be that you want everyone to get along, but—

- **KW:** You see, Matt, this is personal. The majority of my family are from Colombia. My father was Scottish, I was born in Scotland. I lived part of my life here in Canada, and then I went away for a long time, and I lived in New York for eight years, and I went back and forth to Colombia until it wasn't really possible anymore with my career, but for a couple of months every year. I thrive on human beings that live with a freedom of interaction, that it's ok if they, by accident, interrupt each other, that they disagree, that they touch, that they, y'know, physically, I know that's a dangerous word now, and I feel that in moving back to Canada, and also this conflict I would feel moving back and forth into Canada since I was a very little girl, I had a very split existence, and I developed very honestly, a real questioning of the, what I feel

to be, core values in a ton of places in Canada, which are to remove discomfort at all costs. And really finding that problematic as an artist, because I would feel it in the room and then I would feel it on the stage, as an audience member. And I couldn't understand it, I find it problematic within relationships, even, I find I'm apologizing a lot, or y'know, or I'm careful, I live in a cautious bubble with regards to that, maybe less so over the years, but actually, maybe more so sometimes. So this is something, and I mention because it's in my blood. That I resist at all costs when I feel a degree of dishonesty about what is being said, not said, can't said, can't be said, and why. And I'm not reckless and fearless and looking for fistfights, it's nothing to do with that. And when I teach youth, and especially here, now that you talk about it, I am, one of my goals, is usually, when I talk about that fearless playful room, it's to create a room where they develop skills to not be in agreement with each other all the time. And what I relish with them is teaching them not how to shut it down or avoid but, but how to get through it, and sometimes the creative friggin' discoveries that come out of the problems, and we know this ideologically as artists, but actually as human beings, it's actually like a secret goal. [laughs] I'm infiltrating Canadian spaces, with the courage to disagree and to question constant conformation for the sake of comfort where there obviously isn't comfort. Anyways, it's sort of a bigger puzzle, that I'm very fascinated by, and I'm fascinated by it socio-politically as well, and honestly without judgment. But it is fascinating, the dangers of repressing true-thought to me are much more frightening than expressed-thought, or expressed-feeling.

MV: It's really interesting to hear you discuss it in these terms, and I guess I'm trying to figure out how to phrase this next part.

- **KW:** Take your time.

MV: Part of the way you were framing that was in discussing Canada, and I guess, maybe this is actually a pretty simple question: would you say that that's also reflective of your experience in the theatre industry and working in the theatre industry in Ottawa, or is it a bit more general than that? Do you feel like you can point to experiences you've had in Canadian rehearsal spaces, where it felt like that relationship with tension? Where it's either avoided or the opportunity isn't taken to actually explore those tensions?

- **KW:** Or embrace them, or let them be ok in the room, permit them to be in the room without being not-liked or whatever... Yeah, I mean, I hate to single things out.

MV: Oh of course.

- **KW:** And I'm sure there were instances in the States and in England and other places where it's happened, I mean it's also part of human nature, but in terms of the collective experience, in terms of the whole room, oh yeah. And without naming a specific, actually a group I was in ended up being no-more, and it was because that, what you described, it needed to happen. And there were very strong personalities and passionate personalities and similar personalities, and it needed to be able to happen, but there was another code in the room that said: "This must not happen. It signifies something not-healthy in the room." And there were a few projects and really, ultimately good work, but actually, strangely enough, and maybe they'll be something again, but for a while, not directly spoken, many of the collective, it just did this [hands]. And then when something would come up: "Oh! You know, do you want to bring something together to do it," it just sort of wouldn't. And that's very vivid. And I remember personally, y'know, I don't know if this has anything to do with your work here and what I'm here for, but I found it so unjoyful. And it actually shaped, is there something that has changed in me over

the last few years? Like, two or three, not even that long before? Who I work with, or what that room is, holds bigger weight than the paycheck or the project. It's a health – I can't do it. I think I could tolerate it more or maybe not, but now, if there's no joy in the room, which has a connection to what we just said, yeah.

MV: I would definitely say it's pretty key to what I'm hoping to continue researching, specifically in terms of how tension is handled when it arises in this type of a production and this type of work with youth, how it's responded to. And so, I guess I'm curious, once again, there's no pressure to name-names or anything like that, but do you find it easy to find like-minded artists in these terms? Do you find that this approach to tension in the room is common? Do you find you can point it out in the field you're working in, or does it feel like more of a personal approach? Do you wish you'd see more of it?

- **KW:** Yeah, I would say I wish I'd see more of it. I think I'd like there to be more of it. Yeah. But I'm not a big self-marketer, so I haven't, y'know. I would say I'd like to see more.

MV: Yeah, and part of what I'm hoping to do is to keep looking for recent projects that have similar approaches, not the exact same of course, but like-minded approaches to these creations processes with kids. So you never know! Maybe next time we meet, I'll be able to say: "Hey, I found this artist in Winnipeg--"

- **KW:** Absolutely! And not to say that there aren't individuals – but it feels like there's a code, almost like a lens or a veil, y'know, we wear masks all the time. There's a mask on how things should be, what a "healthy space" is, what a "safe space" is, and it would be really wonderful to keep exploring those two words, within what we were just talking about.

MV: Yeah!

- **KW:** I actually think, and I'm certainly not inventing the wheel here, someone said it the other day actually: A safe space isn't a space where everyone agrees. That's an unsafe space. A safe space is when people can disagree. That's a safe space, when there's permission to disagree.

MV: Before, I asked about like-minded artists: is there any reading you've done, not even necessarily theorists, but any writers that you find have similar approaches to the creation space?

- **KW:** If I just riffed off the top of my head, and then I can honestly give it more thought, because I know what'll happen is we'll "End meeting for all," and I'll go: "Ah!" So yes, not that I went to them to foster this, but sort of in a weird way they started to inspire me and who knows what, y'know, anyways. So for instance, maybe some of these are obvious, but Anne Bogart, her approach to the room and her values in the room. Um, what's his name, Rollo May, I'm looking at books, Rollo May, *The Courage to Create*. Just give me a moment. Oh, absolutely the work of Forced Entertainment in England, the work of Aline at the National Theatre, but give me a moment.
- And then deep within that, and these aren't the recent cool kids, would be for instance Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, Beckett and his short stories and why he wrote the way he did, his view on things, just from his own writings. Bits of, bits I say in part because I don't know it all and wouldn't want to assume, but little bits of Augusto Boal, little bits of Viola Spolin, Jane Nichols, Christopher Bayes, who's the head of physical theatre at Yale. Once I moved back to Canada I literally paid to fly back and forth to go continually be trained by him, and he's actually released a book over the last year. So Christopher Bayes.

- Yeah. I would say definitely. And it tends to be people that I find solace when I read their ideas or just how they think about something, or how they see the world, how they write it.

MV: Do you find yourself turning to these writers more so for inspiration, or do you find yourself actually consciously bringing certain ideas or approaches into the rehearsal room? Do you intentionally consciously bring them into a creation space with youth, or are these writers moreso for developing your overall ideology surrounding your practice?

- **KW:** That's really great, and you're just going to hate this answer, but it's entirely both. At this point, I would say that these, and I named a few, are at one point, not intentionally, but foundational, and me sort of seeking and being hungered and fostered but not really knowing why, and really inspired by how certain people write, think, talk, and now, I would say what I do is, it's very, very selective. And when I consciously bring something in, it's very consciously because I'm stuck, and I've got to get out of my own head and then suddenly I go: "Ok, I'm going to try this", or going back to it I go: "Oh it's this!" And then it becomes a combination of that and something I invented. Yeah, it's mostly that. So now, they're kind of in-and-around, which literally, I do this with my hands [*gesturing around the room*], because they're in binders, they're in books, they're on paper, they're in images of shows, I can remember certain moments that brought about certain images, and yeah. I didn't finish that last thought, I'm sorry.

MV: That's ok!

- **KW:** Did I answer it?

MV: Yeah, it totally makes sense that it wouldn't be one or the other.

- **KW:** But one came before the other. Y'know, you asked a couple of time, y'know, did things shape? Did things change? And those are questions, y'know, I don't reflect on my own personal arc much, but that has changed. So, it's, yup. That has gone from reading, developing: "Oh yeah! Joseph Chaikin," and then now, it's case-specific.

MV: And that description of when you're feeling stuck, is that more of a recent thing? Of like: "Oh I'm feeling stuck at this point in the creation process, so I'm going to..."

- **KW:** No, I think it's like the relationship with technique as an actor. Technique, at a certain point, should be working, with you. It's neuromuscular. And then you entirely lean on a particular technique because there's a need for it. I think that's the relationship with conscious use of technique. So spontaneity within form. The form, all these tangible things are there, and we lean on them more when the spontaneity's not within it, when the technique is not releasing something, then we go "boom," right? I'm going to try blue paint! And then the process releases again, ideally. And then there's probably some jobs, I mean, you probably feel it in so many things in your work, where we do, we have jobs or a paper or whatever where there's never freedom, or there's very rarely, and it's one of those where you go: "Oh my god I was slogging the whole way," right? There's certain ones where you just need to work at it more. And I'm not saying, y'know, that's an extreme maybe more negative experience, but it's that same kind of thing. Maybe that last example wasn't useful.

MV: No what you're saying makes total sense to me, it's really resonating.

- **KW:** I think it's the same with teaching, the same with creating, it's happening, it's flowing because a set of circumstances are in place, and then something's not happening and then we consciously draw upon something, or we give up *[laughs]*.

MV: A toolkit that we can turn back to.

- **KW:** Yeah! And that's when technique gets sort of a "ugh," y'know? It's not as cool as organic spontaneity, and I'm like: "Well, what are you going to do that night when the spontaneity's not there? You're lost." But I don't want to see your technique, when you're playing. I don't want to see your technique; I want you to use it so you can play. I had a great teacher who said: "I don't want to see where you trained. If I can see where you trained, I can see your technique."

MV: That's an interesting way of framing it, I like that.

- **KW:** Yeah, and I'm a little bit resistant to, and maybe that's where I'm going to be a tricky subject at times, is that, y'know, there's teachers of actors who say: "Oh, I'm Meisner, I'm this, I'm this," and I just, I really resist that. Until you're not, until you require more, until you require something different, until that lets you down. But that's an individual thing.

MV: Yeah. Speaking of process though, I'm noticing the time. I hate cutting us off, but I should let you go.

Interview #2, February 8th 2021 – Transcript*(edited for clarity)*

MV: I wanted to quickly return to something we chatted about in our first interview, which, if you remember, we talked a lot about the need for a sense of play in the creation space, from a very early stage, having that as a priority. I think you used the term “fearless play,” and you spoke about how, to really get to that type of space, you of course need to build trust and develop those relationships. I was wondering if you could maybe expand a little bit on your approach to building trust with your collaborators, maybe even with *I2* specifically, whether that be specific techniques, like you alluded to some games that you do last time, or even if it’s a bit more fundamentals. And then we can, from there, dig a little bit more into *I2*. So yeah, building trust with the goal of play.

- **KW:** Yes, absolutely, or play as a means to build trust, y’know? Because I think they’re a chicken-and-the-egg thing. So I use play to remind the individual who is now, in terms of the *I2* group, y’know they’re 14 to 17, so they’re in a hot spot where play, as I hope always, but in particular, is still fiercely within them, yet I would say equally fiercely there are all sorts of other noises, already in the way, depending on, if I were to think almost like little animals, depending on how their socialization has happened, and that can be in their home, that can be at school and whatever social situations they’re experiencing and dynamics, that could be the development of their bodies. So there’s a fierce opposition in the room, I believe, at that age, with always exceptions and with a different, y’know, scale.
- I would say one of the first things that is fundamental that I put in the room, and this isn’t an exercise, this is almost like *modus operandi*, that leads towards that play and trust, whichever comes first, and that is that they have a voice in the room. And that I am extremely interested in their voice, genuinely so, and I’ve seen it, and maybe you have, when it’s not genuine. And

they're used to that. And they can smell that. But, the fact is I truly am, like I really am [laughs].

MV: That helps!

- **KW:** Yeah, I am fiercely more interested in them than I am myself, to use that word again, and genuinely so. So I make— “make” sounds like it’s so consciously manipulative, but it’s not; I am consciously, more tactically in the beginning of our work, making space so that is exemplified. And I am also very consciously creating a space where others are, even if it’s just in behaviour at first, absolutely fascinated by each other. An example of that would be, for instance, play-based, so instead of taking attendance or taking names, you have to call out what you had for breakfast, right? So right away there’s play, and this is a silly example, it might seem, but they right away have to come up with something, memory, and its vulnerable, right? They have to say something truthful of their own life, and I don’t give them enough time to worry about it, and then I, right away, set in the room that after that, time wise, I allow one or two, and I will do it by model, that people have to ask questions about it. So, if someone said: “I had cereal with milk,” what cereal? Do you use a lot of milk? Do you use half-milk? So right away, I put as much value on that little game, which is otherwise known as attendance, as the person saying what they said. Until the point where I usually notice, and maybe there’s exceptions, but I can’t remember them right now – it takes so long to get through attendance because all these questions are coming, and what I’m also teaching them, at the same time, is a room in which life is insatiably fascinating and it’s the details, not the generalities, that make an exciting piece of artwork. And that generalities don’t spark the human being’s... it doesn’t throw us off, when we get the generalities. “I had breakfast.” But right away, when somebody goes: “But I only eat with a small spoon,” suddenly in all of us, almost like a dog that goes *[impression of ears*

perking up], suddenly the person comes to life and something's happening there. So, I set that in the room. So that would be one small example, that's only round attendance, but it's covering play, to a certain degree, it's covering fascination with the other, and curiosity with the other. It's also fostering when you, Matt, as a youth, have something to offer, even if it's fraught with doubt or rough, you are the most interesting specimen in the room. And so yeah, that's something fundamental. So to go back, it's, yeah, it's that they are of genuine interest, they are of value, genuinely.

- And, to add on to that, and I will get to specifics, to use a couple of games, even though kind of everything I try to establish in a game-sense, but near the beginning, and I remember doing this with *I2* very specifically, is that I like to get them writing, but very, very early. But writing in a way where it is absolutely inoffensive in its obligations, in its standard of being right. So for instance, I intentionally make it scraps of paper, scraps, and the scraps are not big, and I rip them, and they just grab them, so there is already a casual association with the form. And then, using, and I credit Martha Ross on this, from my work on my own show *Particle*, but just using little prompts, this is nothing that nobody else in the world does, everyone uses prompts, but little prompts that allow for something private in the group to come out, on paper. I never, in this initial phase, have their name on it. So when they hand them to me, there are no names attached. I insist on, and I can only use their trust, but they seem to want to, that even on break or whatever, nobody needs to share which was theirs or not. So what I'm also setting in place in this beginning, within a spirit of play and trust, is, when I read them all, I will read them all out loud. And that is a risk. But because I'm reading them all out loud, without any name, and because I've set this room where everyone's of interest, if not fascination, what I'm getting them to do is hear them all, and then I don't ask them about individual thoughts, I ask them about what did that whole, what is the voice of the room. *I2*, part of the script, the script, not all of those words that you see written, so they've got the numbers, the 11 of them, but I would say

50% of it, those lines were written by somebody else, and they got to pick. So anyways, that would be an example of, so at the beginning these writing prompts are not me knowing at all or suspecting what the project might be, it's just another tool.

- In terms of exercises, I want them in their bodies a lot. I'm constantly, constantly changing the use of the body. So they will go from on their feet, to on the ground using their brain, to on their feet, constantly never letting the room get too cerebral, and if it does then we change it. In a bit of a response session after each game or exercise, dealing with them in a similar way. So the whole idea of: "What did the room say to you based on the writing?" that being treated no differently than: "What did the room say to you based on," I don't use tag, but let's say I used a form of a game of tag. And part of that, so this is all going back and forth, depending on the day, going in and out over the first six weeks easily, where I'm also establishing that impulse, the whole counter-scholastic view, even if they were homeschooled, that thoughts of the body and thoughts of the head, a thought of a wave or a thought from a word, has equal weight. And that the written word is not everything. And what I'm also planting in there is, I'm circumventing any, any occurrence to them when it gets to, let's say rehearsing, in terms of the importance of someone's lines or not, in terms of quantity, in terms of whatever. So these are all, through play, to trust, through trust to play, also establishing a code of values in the room, that I believe are inherent in play and inherent in trust.

MV: Yeah, and it also sounds like a way of valuing certain ideas, like even just this idea of curiosity. There can be this tendency to see curiosity as an ephemeral sort of spark, but it sounds to me like it's also treated as a skill, where sometimes you can apply it, like with the breakfast thing, and treating it not as something that you have to wait for, to hit you, but instead you can apply it to other things, and start to unpack, and ask these little questions.

- **KW:** Great, and my belief is that it's within us all, but that it's also a muscle that gets dulled. And so when you say "apply it," I think of it as like I'm starting to work that muscle. I noticed, and maybe Matt, you too, when they get to a certain age, and of course it's a vast generalization, right, when we do these aging categories, but sometimes, as you work with young people and children, you can see trends, right? And we do know there are certain effects, when certain things happen in their life, right, as young people, from toddlers, there are changes that effect things. So, I resist the stereotype, but let's just call them trends. At a certain point, to be in awe, to wonder, to be in the not-know, to be just curious, is not cool. It's not. You see it within y'know, our age, your age as well, it's not. And it's especially not because at any time I could pull something up and find the answer. So there's also a kind of utility in it, but the energy of a young person in particular, to keep on topic here, wondering, just tolerating, "yeah I wonder why that is," or "I wonder if they do think that," or "I wonder," and, to tolerate the ambiguity of sitting in wonder. Big thing for me.

MV: Yeah, and energy stands out from what you just said, like I think there can be a tendency to see certain types of curiosity as a waste of energy, when in reality it can be the opposite, like a generator more so, and it's funny since it's a show about resources and energy and the climate. Yeah, I guess to bridge into where I want to go next, this might be a slightly impossible question...

- **KW:** [laughs] Nice intro! Good, I'll bite.

MV: You'll see what I mean [laughs].

- **KW:** Go for it.

MV: How do you know when the group is ready to move into whatever you consider to be the “next phase” of the development process? You can see what I mean by impossible, like it’s not going to be a concrete “Oh well this happens, and that’s how I know we can do the next step.” But how do you look at that process when you’re in it? Do you look for signs of the next stage? How do you consider that arc?

- **KW:** That is a great question; slightly impossible, but not entirely, because, it’s great, you’re making me think about things where I could easily go: “Well Matt, I just know! I just know.” But I must know why I know.
- If I were to randomly put up sign posts, right, what would be certain signals that say things to me... where that, what I might call that condition of readiness, might be there.

MV: Or even just signs that things are going well, that they’re receiving what you’re giving them in this process.

- **KW:** Um. The room is louder. It is harder for me to— I feel like I’m interrupting their joy. Which is very different than a room where I feel I have no control. I’ve seen teachers that have no control over the room, and it’s really loud and chaotic. That is. A very different thing. This is one where, the room is so alive and within whatever I just set out to them, that I feel like, to stop them, I’m the impediment, to their keeping on going. I’m not generating every next step, I am not feeding them, they are feeding. That is really, now that I say it, is really key. I might feel it in a small way at the beginning, when they come in, so there might be a shift of what starts to happen in the beginning, in terms of what I see in their interactions. When they come in, I’m watching them socially, whether they’re always clustering to the same people, or whether there’s more of this [hands] and it keeps changing. I want that last, not the first. I see that a lot

in drama classes, the first, where it's always the same little pods, and its these oppositions in the room. Doesn't mean there can't be patterns and trends, but, not interested. I see things like gender being visible and invisible. Yes, and what I said before, I would say is key. When that starts happening, when I am driving the room, and they're driving the room, but they're driving it within the content. I also feel it in my body, where I feel like my joy factor, play factor, is as high as theirs. Yeah. And I know that feeling, and it's heaven.

MV: Yeah, I know it, it is.

- **KW:** So I would say that's one. I would say another signpost of readiness is... so I tend to work with laddering, and what I mean by laddering is that I will know the seed of what I want to work on, whether I've invented it myself or I've taken it from somebody else's inspiring work, right? And what happens is, I will lay that in, and either in the moment, or pre-decided, I will know how to then build on that to the next step of complication, and then the next, and then but now let's try this, and then that condition that we just talked about is they're coming up with it, they're coming up with "I wonder how this would work if we did this?" Or they come in at the top going "I thought about this, and I wondered if it could happen this way? What if we did that whole thing but without speaking?" So I know that they're ready to create with me.
- With regards to *I2*, there are sections of it where I could say: "Yeah, I came up with that, I drove that thing, but it was because of what that person put forward." So I'm actually creating in response, as much as pre-prepping, looking at the material, and then coming in.

MV: I'm guessing, then, you don't view it as "We're in Phase 1 of bonding, now we're in creation," I'm guessing it's more of an ambiguous shift between phases?

- **KW:** I think it might be ambiguous in that I will keep the one going into the other, and they may... I think the first premise will always be there and I will always use it. But what I do have, which is really, y'know, I do establish a timeline, for myself in my brain, but I give myself permission, I have to be very judicious and diligent with myself not to force it if it's not there yet. But I do try and go "By this time, we should know this," talking for the room. "By this time, we should know this." And I also like to name it for them, because then it excites them. And I use those big words, like you just said, "We're now in the development phase," y'know? And they really own that. They own that, and secretly inside my brain I go "Well, I could call that many things, but sure." And so I do that as much for them. But I do have a date, I will be worried if, at a certain point... I think I know by now that at a certain point, if none of this is working, there might be something, it might be me, it might be the group, it might be that I'm forcing something, it could be many things. It's just not working, and I would have to stand back or question.

MV: And so for the "development phase," I guess we'll call it, for 12, what did that look like? Is it games that turn into scenes that you then develop into the script, is it improv based, is it going away and writing; what types of activities do you use for actually developing the script?

- **KW:** I think this is where I'm going to be a bit problematic, because even with what I'm doing now with the group, we're starting to initiate this thing, well not initiate, it's moving along, this whole project called *Stuff*, with the same group – have we talked about *Stuff*?

MV: I don't think so!

- **KW:** Ok cool, love to tell you about Stuff. So, it's happening very differently. But of course we're in covid and it's all different, but if I looked at other things, it didn't all happen in the same way. Can I tell you specifically what happened with 12?

MV: Yeah, that would be perfect.

- **KW:** And I even don't mind, I think I can find the material too. I might have to scan it. I'm sort of a pack rat for some of the different phases. It takes me a lot to go "Ok, this is the 5th copy, all it is is a date, you can throw that one out" *[laughs]* Anyways, alright.
- So, I had a list of writing prompts that, short little words, so "I this, I wonder, I know, I hear, I see," and I had developed them, nothing that probably isn't somewhere on the internet, even though I came to these in my brain, and they actually came to me working with a group of children MUCH younger, and it was for an entirely different purpose, it was about giving life to an inanimate object, so it was a complete disconnect, and I'd been with the 2 group, I'd met them and been with them now for, I would say 2 and a half months, and of course what you know from that is, it's 2 and a half months where you're meeting them for 2 hours one a week, right? So it's not an equity *[laughs]* y'know? But in a way, those times can be more intensive, anyways, whatever, it's in that construct, so however many hours that is, from literally "My name is __," right? And it was actually the second last day I was going to be with them that was in the fall before the holidays, Christmas or whatever, y'know whatever they celebrate or not. And the kismet, to use your word, was these words, and I remember specifically that day, and I got them to, there's about 12 or 15 of these prompts, so it was a long time on the ground, big pieces of paper, and they had to write the end of that sentence. And then some of them even wanted more time after break, just to finish it. Again I'm learning their relationship to language, who takes longer, you know, whatever, which has nothing to do with me finding out if they

have a disability or a different ability, its just watching how thoughts come to them. And then we took another break, and I read them out loud to them by the end of the class, and we were all unifiedly? I don't know if that is a word... We knew what the cloud, even a beautiful cloud in the room was, and that was that these, there was sort of a paradox in place. One is: "There's a lot expected of us." One is: "We're really worried and scared about what lies ahead." And with those both, there were other variances, so within the expected-of-us, it felt like a room that very authentically, innocently, vulnerability, expressed that they feel judged, that there's assumptions about their generation, with regards to technology, with regards to what they read, what adults read through body language, and on the other side, that they don't know what to do. They really don't know what to do, but they feel there's these expectations and within that was also a certain degree of anger that I could tell they didn't want to express, but it was in the writing, that they feel that, and I've used this almost as a tagline for *I2*, that they feel they've inherited a situation that they might be a part of, but they also inherited values, yet they've got it. And again, I will look for these writings, because out of that came us, the next week, which was our last week before we would see each other, just playing within that, playing, writing, playing images, playing, so almost a variation of so many other maybe they were exercises, maybe they were improvs, maybe they were, y'know, some viewpoints, whatever, but a bit within that world. And we knew. And I knew, that that's what was going to happen, and then that next week, there was, we just, it was this room of kismet because suddenly we then started talking more with regards to the climate, to the planet, to their love of whatever, their concerns, their guilt, whatever, so, we had more, and of course now we got a bit of play in the room, a bit of trust, so the discussion was now, we'd earned the ability to listen to each other and be interested in each other, even contradict each other— oh and that's a signpost, from before! When they can not agree in the room. Ok, anyways. So, they're doing this, and then one of them starts to talk about, and I had discovered it as well, because in that week I went digging, and United Nations

had the big meeting, and that was when they declared 12 years, and that window, 1.5 degrees, and believe it or not, at that point, there were 12 actors in the room. So we actually lost one. But with that, this, y'know, with kids when they're free and they're open, even in late high school, everything's really cool, right? So it's like "12 years? There's 12 of us!" And then we kept finding more of these numbers, everything became about numbers. So 1.5 degrees, 12, how many weeks, and then oh the 12 days of Christmas, and it was actually, in that day, when that scene that is in *12*, where they riff on 12 members to a jury, 12 this, y'know, that was just a game. But suddenly something came to land that mathematics was going to somehow frame something, and in my mind, I was also knowing that it would frame patterns of movement. And that hinges directly on my love of Mary Overlie, and some of the roots of *Viewpoints*, and yeah, so there was something about that. Yeah. And so that's how *12*.

MV: I want to ask a little bit about, you mentioned it pretty quickly, but you mentioned the little bit of anger underneath the surface; in your role in this space, what was your view on your relationship with that anger? Because we've talked before about tension in the space, but what was your view on that anger when it did come up? What was your reaction when that started to bubble up in the space?

- **KW:** I guess I'm not scared of anger. I guess what I'm more scared of is a society that tries to make people, especially very young, know that anger is highly unwanted. So, if I think back, it was within the writing, and I would be to blame for this, because I actually said: "This bothers you, doesn't it? What is this?" So I didn't, in fact, the room was much more feeling unjustified with their anger, but it was all over them. So I felt like we needed to, and I needed to hear from them, well, what does piss you off?
- But you see, at the same time, within the value system maybe of the room, within that enormous word "curiosity," is that there was no tolerance in the room for... it's hard to put it in those

words, but I think they knew by that time that it's a no-fly-zone to just take someone down. So that intention is always founded on curiosity, so that what I would be constantly doing, because I represent the adults, believe it or not I'm older than some of their parents, it slowly dawns on me *[laughs]* y'know, duh. So I would always work that muscle of curiosity by example. But it's also genuinely me, so some of them would go: "When my dad does this, or when my parents do this," and I would go: "Why would they do that?" So, y'know, but I would also allow them, y'know, I wouldn't indulge them if they just went: "Well I don't know they're just idiots," and then we'd laugh right, like: "Ah parents whatever," and then I'd give an example of my parents. But I don't let it go to a place of personal implication and attack. Even with, because if you think of the timing, this was Trump, and kids that age, as much as they knew or they didn't, it was cool to talk about Trump and come up with funny one-liners and like: "Oh he's a this," and they don't really know context and they don't really know details, even if they're right, so I never even let that linger in the room much, because I also was constantly going: "Well what does that mean? That's pretty general? Ok well what do I do with that?"

MV: Yeah. There's a quote that I like, it's something along the lines of: "Anger is not a real emotion," which, of course it's a real emotion, but what it means is that anger doesn't come out of a vacuum, it comes from somewhere, whether it's a place of vulnerability or fear or hurt, or anything like that. And when you're describing it in this way, it makes me think of the framing you've put on *I2*, of it being an invitation, and maybe this idea of exploring anger, an invitation to dig a bit further into the anger and see that it's not coming out of a vacuum. Which I think *I2* does really well, keeping it an invitation, and doesn't necessarily have to be combative or antagonistic, it's an invitation.

- **KW:** It makes total sense, because it was very conscious. Things take time, right, I had to let certain arcs go to their full fruition, and then at a certain point, I'm also very cognisant of

stereotypes about teenagers. And I mean you can see them everywhere, and some of them might have seeds of truth, and so you might see in some of the longer descriptions: *12* is not a rant. But I brought that in the room, and then they were so on board with it, and it's so beautiful now after two and a half with this group, where they, we talked a lot and we worked a lot on what is it like, what's going to happen if they feel attacked? What's going to happen if it seems like you're the perfect and they're the problem? But that was earned, Matt, because, oh my god, some of our explorations, and I know I'm jumping around, but I think it was maybe six months in, scenes that ended up on the cutting room floor. We did a lot of work where they, through games, through exercises, through writing, through researching and then coming in, they talked about what frauds they are, they talked about, like [name] is very open with: "Oh my god, I believe this, but if I don't get the ride to school?" And [different name], who is a front-runner, she would come in with research and everything, she's just like: "I am fast fashion." And so we had a scene that was called, and maybe there'll be another iteration and it's like an hour long show or something, but we had a scene which was essentially a confessional, and it was all these *[laughs]*, this public place, and I think [different name] was almost like the catholic confessional, and it was just these people, and it was them, but they'd also done interviews, so in the text you'll see there's interviews of citizens of Ottawa. These are actually people that talk about, y'know: "I use plastic straws, alright? I do! I do!" And so it would be a blend of their own self and either their parents or friends or whatever, they had to do like, on-the-beat interviews, but it was this confessional, and [name] was taking the notes, this little guy, *[laughs]* he's just so serious and taking the notes, and yeah, it was the confessional scene. So they knew, they knew that they, that it was like you just said, it was like "Can we just talk about this?"

MV: It kind of addresses too, the slight air of shame that can surround all of this stuff, and how that's not actually that productive of a feeling.

- **KW:** Absolutely.

MV: This also makes me think about how you also describe *I2* as: "for adults but, by necessity, by youth." I was wondering how influential that idea was to the show's development, and had you had that type of consideration of target audience in the past? Or was this your first time being explicit in that way?

- **KW:** Great... Um. I knew, if I look in hindsight, maybe there was a consciousness to it. And I've mentioned it before, but I knew that I was drawn towards a type of theatre where there could be a range of ages in the audience, and what would that be, and what does that mean the piece needs to do? Or can't do, or can do? And then at the same time, I was looking into material written mostly abroad, but that's not to say it doesn't exist here, but I find it more abroad, where it was pieces of theatre that were written specifically for teenagers that were speaking about their values in relationship to the world, whatever that might be. So I was always drawn to that more than, and in fact slightly not liking it as much, this silo of when teenagers and youth perform, it means it's inherently at least for their age and younger. I just wanted to bust that, and so, with some of my work with TWA, and instead of doing the youth fringe, where there's two spots, right, I would bank on and convince, working with James and Third Wall, that no, we put it in the Fringe, it's going to go in the main Fringe and that will inform our choice of material and how we handle it, right? And also, the value system in terms of what quality of work, what goals in terms of... wanting to counteract against "Oh it can be of less quality, less creativity, less whatever, because it's younger people." So that was very

conscious, sort of a bigger envisioning and mission. Now this one, this one there was something new about it, Matt, that hadn't occurred to me. That actually, as it started to define itself, and I'm happy to speak more, but different phases we went through, but as it started to define itself, actually we fell into a place where it needed to be an adult audience, mostly. And in fact, in November 2019, when we were invited to open, it was the 30th anniversary of the United Nations year of youth, this was a universal day, and the Ottawa International Writers Festival contacted me to see if *I2* could open that event. And this was a big deal, there were going to be funders, there were going to be members of Parliament, whatever, but, it was going to be, first it was by virtue of needing a space big enough, at Fischer Park slash Summit Alternative School, because they have an auditorium that seats about 800 people. So, about 400 of those people, maybe even 500, were high school students and younger. And we were, I would say, collectively, but I had to, I was authentic with them, but I had to be their fearless leader, that these were their peers, and would it work? Because are we preaching to the converted? How would this land? And then, I can talk more about what that was, because there was a talkback afterwards, but that was the first time it was done where, by circumstance, it was an audience that I thought didn't... not that they didn't need it, but what would it say to them? So to answer your question, I hope I did, and didn't go too much off track there, but it was entirely built, and since it started to tour, including at PSAC and in the government building, in a conference room, including at different places, it's been adults. But not negating any friends, family, whatever, or children, y'know?

MV: Yeah it would definitely have value, but just of a totally different kind. What it leaves me curious about... I'm wondering, with this slightly shifted consideration of target audience, which wasn't quite what it had been in the past for you, did it change any of your techniques or approaches in the creation

room? Other than subject matter, did you actually have any different tactics in that space? Or was your process relatively the same? Does that make sense?

- **KW:** It does. I don't think my process has ever been the same, except for maybe some of those value systems. So I can't, in hindsight, think the process was the same. So there's that, and as it and we and the piece started to define itself, you know that feeling, it starts to say "I think I know what I want to be, I think I know what I'm meant to be, follow me now," or whatever, then what was always on my mind was who the audience is. So a prime example would be what I call the intervention scene, where they suddenly take all of their stools or chairs and they come down, and I imagine it in my mind, the way I set it up to them is this gigantic living room, and the audience is your parents and adults. That scene is, not a case of pride, but it's one of my favourites, because it's the most frightening to adults. You can feel the room change. And when [name] stands up and first goes, and this was an added line after, where he kind of breaks away from what the group wanted and he kind of loses his courage to be angry, to be on attack, and he starts with: "First I want to thank you, for everything you've done for us." And then in the direction, I had them kind of looking at each other, almost as if he broke from the pact, like we're trying to keep a strong front, and then that scene went from there. And a lot of that scene, I like it because, by accident, it's unifying our session together today, because a lot of the text of that scene came from what they wrote a year before in December when we knew. It was literally their text. And I just went [*mimes sticking pieces together*].

MV: It's such a good example of something I love about *I2*, which is that it's exploring this tendency to view the different generations in this combative way, where they're almost at war with one another, and its exploring that without necessarily giving into it and just becoming an example of it, y'know? It

finds a way of exploring these things without falling to them, and it remains, like we've been saying, an invitation.

- **KW:** Thank you. I remember having, I think it was an interview with Eric Coates at the GCTC, and I remember saying: "I think it's a love story." I want us to think about it as a love story, whether it's between the planets, between generations, and within love, there's that conflict, and there's resentment, and there's hope, and there's disappointment, and there's resentment, all those things that you said so beautifully could be the seed of anger, if not rage, if not violence, right? Cicely Berry of the RSC says: "When words fail, violence prevails." So maybe in a sense, *I2* is, I'm just thinking this now, it's kind of like, this group of *I1*'s last ditch effort to talk. Right?

MV: Everything on the table.

- **KW:** Yeah. And if it doesn't work, then we tried. And I don't know what we'll do, y'know?

MV: Thinking of this invitation, I've been wanting to ask this awhile, from when I remember seeing the show myself. Are there any audiences who have ever tried to participate or engage with the performance? I'm thinking particularly of that moment early on, when they all put their cell phones in a pile near the front of the stage. And I remember in that moment, in myself, I felt that slight impulse to be like: "Should I stand? Should I add my phone?"

- **KW:** Oh!

MV: And I don't know why I didn't in that moment, but there was that slight electricity in the air of: "Is anybody else going to stand up and put their phone?" And in my case, nobody did, which, in hindsight, is powerful, there's a ton you could read into that of course. But I don't want to dive too deep into my own analysis of that moment *[laughs]*. Has anything like that ever happened in a performance of *12*?

- **KW:** *[laughs]* Can I just say that I wish we had the 11 here in the room, because they would be like: "Yeeeah!" Ok, so, when I proposed this to them, that was a Kristina moment, and the prolonged silence of doing it, they were terrified, they were like: "What if someone does it! What if they-" and I said "I don't know. Let's see what we'll do." And that's that whole trust and play thing that, after having toured it, and together for a while, they were so kickass, because they were getting to the point where they were like: "I just hope someone does it. I hope someone does it." But to answer your question, no. The other time is where they put the stool down at the end, the invitation to join them. And that has evolved over time, that was never in the initial performance. So the whole idea of the 11th character, who is not part of the group, that is not sure, not sure, not sure, then joins. That evolved over the year in steps, Matt. So in the 2019 performance at that United Nations thing, that character wasn't there at all. The script before that would've had all of them on stage, but there was this, by coincidence, a little girl from France who was here in Canada on exchange and living at one of the actor's houses, and her mother asked me, had heard about this project, said "Could she observe the rehearsals and if there are any games, can she play can she assist you?" And I say little because she's like really little, she's like littler than me. And she spoke some English but mostly French, we're talking like Paris, and she was due to leave back to France a couple of months later and it was totally by chance that the script went from, they ask at the end "11?" and there was no stool move, and it used to end with, they call out "11?" waiting for an audience member to join, and

nobody comes, and they move forward, and we get to the: “Strange, as if I’m in a dream but it’s true,” or whatever. What we did in that one is I planted [name], she was in the audience amongst those 400 raucous high school students; they call out “11?” she stands up and she goes “11!” and she walks all the way down the audience and *[imitation of chatting/mumbling]* because they totally didn’t buy that it was a plant, for a second, in the audience, and then they figured out it must’ve, and then she joins them and they all stand up there and they go “12?” and then it ended. So she, it’s like, you could pull apart that, it’s not an adult, it’s a teenager, but that was all just by circumstances of me finding a creative moment, but part of it was truly so that I could say to her and her mom: “Do you want to be in it?” And she did it and she had her little coat on and her boots as if it was totally from the outside, and then she left, and then we knew we wanted something more at the ending. It couldn’t go back to the other version. So if we get to keep playing it, I don’t know where it’s going to go. It’s going to keep changing. Not for the sake of messing with it, because I think there’s something tight there, but I think we’re very curious, it’s on hold but, what’ll happen when we try and do it again? How changed we are and how changed the world is? Anyways.

MV: Yeah, because I think that even if you don’t change it, it all comes back to this discussion of the invitation, where even if it is an invitation to join them, it almost says just as much when that doesn’t happen, it almost raises that as a question, of, if we’re talking about getting the audience to question themselves, it makes me think about post. Like myself, I’m the perfect example, where I was like: “Wait, why didn’t I stand up? Why didn’t I go on stage?”

- **KW:** That’s the conversation of the play, isn’t it?

MV: Yeah, and that was almost more effective for me than if I *had* stood up. It was that lingering feeling after I left, of being like “Oh yeah, I didn’t engage...” So I think that, either way it goes, there’s so much there.

Interview #3, March 7th 2021 – Transcript*(edited for clarity)*

MV: So I was hoping today that we could shift our focus towards the aesthetic approach to *I2*, both in terms of your general relationship or approach as a creator to developing your visual language, and a bit more particularly in terms of *I2*'s emphasis on, we talked last time about math and geometric shapes and the staging, and how that all came about. So yeah, how do you understand your aesthetic approach to this process for yourself? Do you have a quick, easy way of describing it, or is it a little more fluid?

- **KW:** Yeah, I'm just thinking... I think it is fluid in that maybe the dominant trend is that the ideas come out of what comes at me. So it could be the amount of bodies in the room, it could be the room, it could be the way they use their bodies, y'know, and that's fluid in that it also evolves over maybe the development period. So then I start to see things, I see a lot, in terms of, I get pictures, I get pictures in my brain, I get images and their usually very physical, and they tend to be bigger than the language of that moment, although they're probably connected. So whatever that moment tends to be about, very quickly becomes a picture, not necessarily like a stage picture, but a picture about bodies in space and I guess bodies in space would be sort of, even in a big generalization, whether I see that it's clumped, whether I see that it's spread, whether I see that somehow that moment is a line, whether I see that it's distanced from the audience. So it's actually a use of relative space that I start to see. Another variety of this is I see clusters in isolation, so then suddenly I have this vision of bodies together and one alone. So, there is a mathematics to it, and it's about space and bodies and what distance is around the space, and what distance that is to the audience. What distance and angle to the audience. Yeah, I start to see the pictures, and that picture has sort of an emotional intent, so almost being able

to name that that image is capturing a sense of “I want the audience,” or there’s a sense of loneliness in that moment, there’s a sense of attack in that moment, there’s a sense of fragmentation, and then just see what happens with the bodies. One of the steps in *I2* that I remember, and I’ve probably done this enough that someone from the outside might go: “Ok, that seems to be a step in her process” is, I will take, let’s say for instance like... So there was one step in our exploration where I gave, so I talked to you last time about this, really this turning point where the room established what it’s biggest ache or concern or questioning seemed to be, and it came through a collection of their own very personal articulations in response to prompts. A step towards what you’re talking about might be that I then remember reading all of those to everyone, and then imposing to them a five step, very western story-narrative structure, which is: 1) Once upon a time there was 2) Every day 3) But one day 4) And because of that 5) And because of that 6) until finally. Sorry that’s six *[laughs]*. Talk about math, I’m good with math. So I imposed on them that they could only do that structure and they could only do 1 to 2 sentences, so creative restraints, and I gave them a creative time constraint, I use that a lot with young people so that doubt and all those other voices don’t get in the way, so that their true impulses, which are 90% of the time just fucking phenomenal, won’t have time to correct themselves. But they had to springboard off what hearing that room’s comments, none of which I would name names to, so that’s the other thing is that once they write, it becomes collectively anonymous, it becomes the voice of the room, and nobody owns a thought, and that’s a further step in that kind of trust and generosity in the room. And also teaching that whole thing of like, we don’t own a story. We do it so that we can give it to you and it can be your interpretation. Anyways, that’s a big step for them, as teenagers. So they did that, and they came up with their story, and I remember them taking, so they all had their stories, I then took them again, and I read them out loud, not naming a name, I then randomly gave those stories, I put them in groups of like 4 or 5, and they very randomly had to pick one

of those invented stories, impulsive stories based on that structure, and they had to create, and this is classic work that can be done with youth and they're called "tableaus" or whatever, but I call them more like freeze frames, as if the camera happens to stop, and they had to, in a group of perhaps 4 or 5, they had to capture the essence of that, like let's say it was: "Once upon a time there were two cats in an apartment made of stone," I don't know, and they had to work on capturing that essence, what Stanislavsky calls the "kernel," in a picture. And that's where it gets into trying to work with them on, we could create the literal, so we could see two of you become cats, or what does it mean to capture the essence of it, what is the essence of that image, of that moment, and Stanislavsky calls it the 'kernel,' of course translated from Russian, and then, so they have 5 pictures. So that's what the different groups would do, and so they would do those 5 pictures. I remember then, I remember taking that exercise... so what's happening to me, to answer your question, is I'm starting to see their bodies in space, and I'm starting to see from them what images come out of their imaginations, and I have no pre-decisions yet, it's just really fun, it's all on them, and I'm just being glugged by this, and I might make little notes, or sometimes I make drawings. And then I remember taking that task one step further, so this is an example how that training and the trust and the play is still going, but now we know what we're building, we know the world of it, we know where it's going somewhat, and an example would be that then I take those 5 or 4, and whoever's story it was, they get to play director. And what I mean by that is what'll happen is, I'll pull one out of the group, and it'll be them. The rest of the group get into whatever their first visual essence was, and that person, without speaking, and without explaining why (and this is obviously pre-covid), will go around and adjust the bodies. Maybe it's the angle of the head, maybe it's closer, maybe it's two over here. And the room then has to accept that and also feel what it feels like if I was looking over there and now they want just a head-tilt change. And so I want them to experience that and grow with that, and so we get this added level of trust and learning. And so that's a next step, and then they quote-on-

quote “present,” but the body of the director has to put themselves back into that scene, right?

So then we’ve got that, and then everyone shows each other, and these things are coming at me, and that only happens, and then they re-read the words. So the whole room, including myself, except for that group, see something, have an experience, and then we hear it’s relationship with language, as opposed to the other way around. And then we feel that disconnect, healthy disconnect, or connect, whatever that is.

- Then I start to play with tempo. So time and space, it’s a really big thing with me, in terms of bodies. So I start to play with tempo and precision, and precision with tempo. So what happens then, is now we’ve got this base material, whether it’s all going to be thrown out or not, but I can now play with it and train them with it, and yeah, and discover from it. So then, we have already had, early in the process, what I call: “tempo programming,” so we’ve done a lot of games plus exercises and explorations all based on five tempos. 0 is stillness, out of which I tell them that the fastest speed is within stillness, its just restrained, and then 1 is as slow as you can possibly go, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 5 is as fast as you can possibly move without running. And then we program the precision of all those.

MV: Can I ask quickly, at one point in the script, it says: “in tempo 4.” I’m assuming that’s what this is referring to?

- **KW:** Exactly it. And then that codification for the room, I can also apply to language, by the way. So we also play with, if I said: “Hi Matt,” and then I do that in tempo 5: “Hi Matt.” Or: “Hi... Matt...” And so they’re learning, and so I could even articulate, I could then direct them through that as well, with language. And it’s a really great way that I play with, I don’t like working with actors in: “Speak louder, speak slower, speak faster,” I go: “Y’know what, let’s try that moment where the language is more a tempo 2.” And so you’ve got a young person

who's been told their whole life that they just talk very fast, but I'm giving them actually a more interesting way in, and they'll actually do it, and it'll work. It tends not to work if they've been told their whole life: "Oh you just talk too fast." And then they're muscles associate it with that, and then it's always an obstacle.

MV: Yeah, and it sounds sort of like, if I were to tell someone: "Can you do that slower, can you do that faster," it's very much about them, or something they're doing right or wrong, whereas if it's: "Can we try this out in a different tempo," then it's much more about what we're hoping to get out of the scene, rather than necessarily their performance.

- **KW:** Absolutely! And it fits into this, what always excites me, it's like a game! It's playing. I go: "Y'know what, let's try that one a 3. Alright, let's go to a 4," and they're just loving that shit, they have no idea that they're being told to talk slower or faster [laughs] y'know? So, to bring in tempos then, what will happen is, now we've got tempos not just as a programming, but let's say they've got six essences, six camera-freezes, and then I send them away and I go, they have to put them all together, but the transitions between each has to happen at one of the precise tempos. So you get, and 5 tempos sometimes becomes a lot, and it's too hard to be precise and they have a lot on their mind, for any actor, right, let alone youth, absolutely, so I will go: "It can either be a one, a three, or a five," for instance, just to pull that out. And then they have to put together the whole thing and choose that tempo for how they will get from image one to image two, image two to image three, and I will get them to try different variations and then come up with the version they like the best, and then they offer that. That's probably almost one of the, it's a really actually exciting phase of the process because it's so unexpected. So if you can imagine, they've got one image, and they know what the next image is, but their bodies go in slow motion all the way to the next. Now the training aspect of that is,

everyone's tempo 1 might be slightly different. So they need to collectively feel what the group's tempo 1 is, and the thing that I say to them is: "You have to all stop at exactly the same time." And then what 5 is, and then, y'know? And then these become plays. So that takes me further to starting to see bodies in space, and see spacing and see what a room looks like when their bodies are in different configurations, to see their bodies from the back, from the front, from the side, slowly, inside out, y'know? Slowly, fast, and it becomes one big picture. Yeah.

MV: Did you do this more than once in the creation process for *I2*? Or was it setting a baseline and then you didn't return to the activity?

- **KW:** Correct. This activity I think spanned over two to three rehearsals though. Yeah. And it's like, I think as I think about it now and your questions, it becomes an investment. And what I mean by investment is, just like the tempos, it's establishing reference points that I can then call upon, and it makes it almost more time efficient. So I can think about a moment in *I2*, and I can go: "Remember that moment when you were x/y/z? It's more like that." Y'know?

MV: Yeah, developing a shared vocabulary.

- **KW:** Yeah, there's a shared vocabulary, you're right, like a code. But you're right, it's a shared vocabulary, and the vocabulary is very physical. Always in the room, their ability to sense each other is everything. So I go: "Get in a circle," and at a certain point, they will know that the circle, they're incredibly equidistant from each other, and it almost feels awkward when they're not. The equidistant, to use this as an example, equidistant in a circle, they also know that their body is slightly in a "V", so that they can look forward and completely see everyone in the room, and yet soft focus. That is enormously different, especially when we are a visual world

and I only see you versus me by doing this [*gesture*] and then they just become this [*gesture*]. So you might've seen a lot of *I2* where they were in a line, where they were in chairs, and they would even intentionally go from clumps to absolutely equidistant. And the whole premise in the room, I will say at some point: "Look after each other. Look after each other." So, and that's almost, y'know, that's a bit poetic for themselves in the world, not poetic, literal in terms of an awareness in the world, I mean, talking covid, y'know, you just sense; the six-feet isn't just about me, where are you, where am I with you, look after each other. So they will feel what needs to be adjusted, even if it's down the line, y'know?

MV: Were you thinking about this type of synchronization in terms of the subject matter of *I2*? Or is it more so something that you pursue as a baseline in all of your work? Like did you feel that this was particularly necessary for *I2* and what was being discussed? This ability for them to be so well in-synch and able to just go into it, like you're saying?

- **KW:** I would say actually probably, very truthfully, it's a perfect storm, but I would say that no, that's very much what I long for in ensemble building. And I see this, and I need this out of a group, even if the work ends up being more, y'know, Ibsen-realistic. But that kind of sense of their body in space and the ability to be absolutely precise and to have two people move their head at exactly the same time. And then that can extend to one of my passions, which is more abstract or... I fell in love with, when I was doing my own thesis and I worked in, I was very lucky, I was invited to train in Germany for awhile; I fell in love with the form of dance theatre, and Pina Bausch and Hofeshcher and all these companies, and I grew up dancing, since I was three, and once I had my accident I couldn't dance anymore, but I think it's in my sensibility. So I think to answer your question it's something that I, if given the time and space, and if I know it's a collective creation, I'm going to want it to be in the room. And I'm going to want

that material, that base-line of vocabulary to be in their muscles so that different things are possible.

MV: Yeah, and in both our previous interviews, we've discussed the ability or the permission to disagree with one another; were you thinking about it in those terms as well? The fact that, if they're able to be so in sync, thereby distinguishing those moments where they aren't in sync? And where they're maybe disagreeing with each other?

- **KW:** Yeah, that's great, sure, absolutely. Absolutely.

MV: Can I ask too, this is going back a tiny bit. In terms of, you talked about, in the freeze frame activity, that they could take either the literal approach or they could go for the essence or the kernel. Did you notice a pattern? Did they tend to lean more on one over the other?

- **KW:** Oh absolutely. Their first instinct is to absolutely go towards the literal. And I have to really honour that. It's a big threat, that's a strong word, but it's a threat to them sometimes to challenge ingrained ways of producing results. And it's very, very challenging within this to also threaten, question, disrupt, their association with being given a task and the easiest quickest way to complete it and to put the hand up as "done," is the most rewarding result. And if within that, they can also do it in the most predictably correct way, which is in other words doing what the person in authority secretly has the answer, and wants, then that's entirely codified in them, and rightly so, that is a survival mechanism that is reinforced everywhere, not just in the school system, everywhere. It's engrained especially in western thinking. So you're challenging that. And you're challenging that within themselves and their peers, and how long one group is taking versus another; if someone in the group doesn't get it yet, or needs or wants to question;

like it's just... I will impose, if I see that, and that's big, and that's still with me, with that group, it's still with them, and in my ongoing process with them. But now it's almost like they have and they know the capacity for: "Other than," so all I have to do is just press a little button and remind them and they're like: "Ohh ok right," y'know what I mean? But that instinct, we're battling against the forces that come at them most hours of most days outside of rehearsal, right? So that's something... oh and part of what I will do there, I will subvert that in a play-based way, is that they're done, they've presented, and then they'll have that, y'know the room, and they've all had their satisfaction in their work or whatever, and then I'll say: "Ok. That's one version. What else could you do?"

- And this comes back to a very simple exercise I give, and I use this even when I'm training actors, I was given it myself, I think it sources back to a little bit of Grotowski work; actors are put in chairs, we sit in a chair, and then the quest is to, the prompt is to imagine that you have to sit in that chair for all of eternity. All of eternity. And even that is like, stretch the imagination: "What the hell does that mean?" All of eternity, and you only have one position to sit in. find the one position where you're most comfortable. And I keep giving them different phrases: "Where your whole body can sustain it with ease for all of eternity." And nobody's allowed to talk. So they have to have a discussion with their body. And most actors in training will go to an ergonomic position and I'll go: "Really? Really?" And they'll keep moving, and some will sort of and up like this [gesture] and I'll go: "I want you to talk to your thumb. Is he ok for all of eternity, holding up your chin?" And then they're just like [gesture]. Anyways, and they go, and they finish that, right, and I prolong it. It wants to last one minute, and I'm at seven minutes, and I keep just instigating them, and then they come up with them, and then I challenge them that they have to find two more, but they don't know until I go: "Ok that's one, now your body wants, you're allowed one other option, and it can't be that." So I guess that's also subverting

the: “there exists one final result, fast, and accurate,” and the “Kristina somewhat knows more about us, about, she secretly knows the answer.”

MV: Yeah, and even just ending these activities in that way, of: “Well that’s one approach we could take,” I like it because it validates the work that they’ve done while also leaving it open for something else. A good balance there.

- **KW:** And I’ll usually phrase it as a game, I won’t phrase things usually in actor or artist-speak, most of the time. Sometimes then I’ll encapsulate and explain to them what that was or something, but I will phrase it to them, I will go: “Oh wait, your body’s allowed one more.” And so it’s, y’know? Let the kitten drive. Kitten wants one more. It’s a phrase I used, I credit Christopher Bayes, he taught me clown, he’s at Yale, he said: “Let the kitten drive, Kristina, let the kitten drive.” I always just imagine this little kitten in like a really big Chev, the dashboard, and the kitten *[laughs]*.

MV: And even just with the piece as a whole, it keeps them from thinking that there’s an end-goal, that there’s an endpoint, that once you get there, it’s done, we did it. And that that’s not really what it’s about, at all.

- **KW:** And what has happened with by necessity and when it toured, is that every time we did it, until covid, we were in an entirely different space, entirely different lighting, entirely different size of audience, proximity to the audience, so when we had, I give them kudos, sometimes we’d have as little as an hour, and the best I could get would be, for instance when we did it in the board room at PSAC, I just had images and the size of that boardroom, so I could play with that in the room, but we only had 45 minutes before the suits came in, and we’re in a room

that's a board room and we've got fluorescents and rolling chairs and we have to go: "Ok, what does this geometric formula," which I guess is what the play in a way became, "how does it fit in this room?" And not: "How do we cram it?" Sometimes: "What is the essence of that same moment adapted?" So for instance, they are all eleven bodies across, but some spaces wouldn't allow for that, and it was the wrong idea if they were all packed idea, so how do we create that picture with two behind two forward? So again, it's back to what's the kernel of that picture, and what's the personality of this room? And they were throwing decisions at me, and as teenagers, y'know, they would come in and they would go: "Ohh no Kristina this isn't gonna be possible! The other room was better!" And I'm just like: "No time! What could be great in this room?" So it's also learning them to come into a negative situation and go: "Huh... this is a really cool problem." [laughs] Y'know? Which is the muscle of the artist, which is curiosity versus judgment.

MV: Would also make for some great Fringe artists!

- **KW:** Oh my god, you're right! Or covid artists.

MV: I'm thinking of this one time I toured a show to Halifax, and we got put in a converted Pool Hall, and we were like: "I don't know if this quite works... but it's also kind of fun!" Anyways, training them to look at that space as a challenge of: "Oh ok, ok, this is challenging, but it's an opportunity, and how will this force us to change..."

- **KW:** Yeah, or: "What's the game here? What's the game? We've got seven minutes, solve it," y'know? And it was always slightly terrifying for them, every time, because also the audience was, every time was a first, until we had to shut down. Y'know, for instance, the first time

doing it in front of a bunch of corporate suits, that's terrifying. How dare we have a voice in this room. And then they felt the respect, and they were just like... rockstars.

MV: So, there's obviously such a huge emphasis on being adaptable and adapting to new circumstances and spaces as an opportunity, but can I ask how you... do you aim, either at the beginning of the process or overall, are you aiming for a visual or aesthetic consistency for the whole piece, or is it a little more scene-to-scene, what matters to that scene? How do you look at that process of overall aesthetic consistency, and communicating that with them?

- **KW:** I think the overall is later in the process, I think the overall starts to find itself, in a really pedantic way, because of what we had seen in that first image, the next image, y'know, what's the movement? What's the movement and how do we change the air in the room for that next moment, and what does it want, and that starts to build itself, and as the whole starts to create itself, I might realize: "No, that energy is repeating itself too soon, but the energy of the Australian Prime Minister is more about this." So then, like you talked about with the vocabulary, it then becomes about Lego, and then I started to, at a certain point, I started to see, I'm going to keep using your word, but the vocabulary of shapes, that it became about shapes. And so for instance, the shapes are, I'm looking over here because I'm kind of seeing it in the distance, but, we have lines, and within a line it can be compressed or far, whatever, a line that is parallel to the audience, we have diagonals, one that establishes and then the other, we have very close proximity for what I call the intervention scene, and that uses a semi-circle of equidistant chairs right up against the audience, we have Greta as one body versus chaos all around her, and not seeing, y'know, so there's the one, we have the classroom, which is again a certain part of the room, so the room moves over, and within the classroom we have the one, which is the teacher with the back to the audience as opposed to the front, and then the chairs

are in a row, we've got the marching, which, the first marching is almost like, y'know whether you think sort of military troops in a gym or the school gym, and you've got them in rows there with the coach, figure of authority over there, we've got the pyramid that they try and make; and then, from there we have moments of absolute chaos. So the chaos, for instance, when at the end, so they're in the gallery, they create a circle which is actually the image of a tree, so in that exhibit of Anthropocene that travelled the world and at the National Gallery, there was one room that was a gigantic tree, and it was in the room and just phrrroooooom! And the image for that scene, in terms of the characters being at the exhibit, whether the audience consciously had to know that at all, their bodies were facing out, encircling/creating the tree trunk with their body, and then it rotated as they literally speak stats that were part of the exhibit. And then, when they get to, I think there's a line of someone talking about waste and garbage, and then the response to that goes: "Wait. Our waste? In Africa?" or something. The fact that Canada actually sends its garbage to third world countries. And then we did this *[laughs]* we had a lot of fun in this rehearsal, and I'm getting to the whole thing with the chaos, where it was controlled chaos; so, they were eleven bodies by that point, because the actor that was the plant has joined, and they all were either team one or team two. Team two ran on the outer circle, team one was inner, team two went in one direction, team one in the other; and they had to call out timed lines, which they heard, they had to listen to each other while running, and they knew the trigger word was to then "boom," and someone had to knock over the chairs, and they had to splash on the ground, and that was to also exemplify the chaos inside the teenager, and what they're really holding in and the disaster. So, we used that whole idea of, to go back to your thought of putting it all together, that image of the chaos was earned because of the precision of the geometry in other sections. The other geometrical variety is what I call the chatroom, or it might be the library, where they're all online, and how we placed them. One of the last changes of the play was actually the reordering of... it was just niggling at me, and I

asked them if we could try it, and this was big for them, I wanted to exchange the position of two scenes. And that was really phenomenal, to see them take on that, because they had to change, there's transitions that were coded in them, use of the stools – that's the other thing, part of the geometry were these stools – and they had to reconfigure that, and when I moved that scene, we all knew, that's the order it was meant to be. And that order had nothing to do with plot, but that's the sequencing of energy. That's how we earn the maximum payoff when we get to the gallery.

MV: When you say that it had nothing to do with plot, do you mean those specific scenes and the change of sequencing, or more overall?

- **KW:** What I mean is that it didn't change the story. It didn't change any of the text, it didn't change the meaning of the piece. But maybe in a way it did change the meaning, in terms of the ride that we take the audience on found its home. And we had already done a show, and then we changed it for the rest of the shows. And that's really cool, for me as an artist, but also youth, that: "No, you're not done, we're still questioning. And we've opened." *[laughs]*

MV: Can I ask you to build a little bit on the sequencing, and what the overall approach was to making those sequencing choices? In terms of the overall show, was it a little bit about the type of information you're providing, or was it more about the energy of the scenes, as you're saying. Or if it's harder to put into words, that's ok.

- **KW:** No, no, keep talking to me and then I will know how to put it into words. I think I'm on track with what you're seeking, I'm just seeking my way to clearly do it.

MV: Or even their understanding of how to go about the sequencing of these scenes they've made.

What was their initial feeling of order and how it should all be put together? Did they have a clear vision, or did they need help in terms of: "Well, we have all of these scenes, we have all of these bits and pieces..."

- **KW:** Great, thank you. I would say at this point in the process, I establish myself as: "We are a collective, but I'm going to take the lead on this."

MV: Is: "this point in the process," when is that point? Sorry. *[laughs]*

- **KW:** No that's ok. At this point in the process, when we're getting to the point that we've read through it, we've been playing, we've been exploring, we've been doing games, I've got images, I've got drawings, we've tried different things, we've laughed y'know, we've done even improves of other possibilities, remember I talked about [name] and we've got all this writing, and it's starting to find itself into a script, so there's a script evolving and I'm starting to put it on stage. So the staging... what happens with me is that the script is not done, and then we stage it. I know the language that's there, but that keeps changing. And that's hard for them, I would go: "Nope, we've got another script." So that's another thing to note is that, at the point where we're going from, let me call it this: language and text, say that part of the raw material, and even what the goal of a scene is about, for instance the intervention scene or the school scene or whatever, the gallery; at that point, what is on the page, I would almost call it a word-based map, and after each rehearsal, I would then almost rescript in accordance to what I'd discovered on the map. And that might mean changing some of the words, it might mean adding in precise stage directions now when it starts to define itself, y'know, so that's going back and forth. There is no: "Script now staging." So that's happening in tandem.

- What I mean by: “At this point in the process,” is when we, in the room, are now more consciously going: “Ok, let’s just read that. And now let’s get on our feet.” At that point, I am taking a leadership role, ok? I might reference stuff they’ve done before, I might say: “Y’know that thing [*name*] you came up with there, does everyone remember that? Can everyone get in that position?” But I am now taking a voice in the room that they are following, alright? And what I ask of them is that they... we don’t talk about possibilities, so if I throw down an idea, there’s no discussion until we try it. “Yeah but that’s not gonna work,” and “Yeah but that might lead to this,” there’s no talk as a means to discover. We attempt. “Ensayo” in Spanish means “attempt.” So we discover by trying it out, and test driving it. The test drive of the kitten. And then I will stand back from it and I will put it back to them, I’d go: “Well what did that feel like? What did you...” And it’s never to do with that worked or it didn’t work. It’s not: “How did we do?” It’s: “What did I discover there?” So that’s also a code of language and I will constantly have to correct them. So they’ll go that place of: “I don’t know, that, I didn’t like that, I didn’t like that, I don’t know, it just-” and I’m like: “Ok, I can’t work with that. I don’t know what that is. So let’s try it again and try here.” But I am now at the wheel, more, ok?
- What’s fascinating, or thrilling is better the word, is that when I would get, and it’s true, I would get stuck, and I would be very, very transparent with them, and I would go: “I have no idea. All I know is this isn’t it, and I have no idea.” And they will solve it. Or they won’t entirely, but they’ll try something disastrously wrong, and that will unlock me, and I will go: “Oh my god I’ve got it!” I will always tell them, and it is true in a sense: “It’s because of what you just did.” I will always err on the side of: “You cracked it. Great. Let’s try this. Thank you.” Y’know? And you can feel that ownership in the room, y’know. So in terms... that’s the process there in terms of how the, not hierarchy, but how we use the voices in the room, the collective input in the room. And then, and I will go scene by scene, so I might have already, from my apartment, an image of the school, or that tree in the gallery, but I don’t know the how yet, so maybe

there's times when I go: "Oh I think I want to get to that," but it will be entirely: "Because of this moment, I now feel what the next moment is," right? Oftentimes we will do something like, and this is very, very traditional, we'll do a moment, and I'll go: "Ok, we don't know what comes next, let's just sit down and read it, ok?" And then I'll tell them: "Get back to where you were in that previous moment, so we'll put them in the visuals physically, and then read it from there," and then it will go. And then it will go. And then, from there, I will sense: "Y'know what?" And sometimes it's as simple as this: "We haven't used a diagonal before." At a certain point I knew I was playing with geometrical shapes: "What about a diagonal? Ok, alright, we'll use that, yeah."

MV: Yeah, I guess part of why I'm interested in those transitions and the sequencing is because there are certain scenes that are right next to each other, where, on your first read, you're like: "Oh, I don't quite see why that one led into that one," but then looking at the script again, it'll be like: "Oh no there's a clear..." Sometimes it'll feel like a thematic jumping-off point, where a scene will end on a point of, whether it be shame or a feeling of: "Well we're doing something wrong." And then the next scene, even though it seems disconnected, will be unpacking that shame. So I guess I was wondering how conscious those transitions from scene-to-scene were, in terms of theme versus energy, and so on.

- **KW:** To be very honest, I intentionally named them, because I wanted to reconfigure them, I named them episodes. And so I actually never entirely knew what the whole would be. And I was never intending – and this was a big challenge with them, but I didn't really have this pre-discussion – I was never intending it to be a story, or thinking in terms of that, I was thinking of *12* as almost being a collection of moments. And because of that collection of moments, that's what the story is. And the changes between them were about, like if we think of an episode or a scene, captures maybe a certain feeling, a certain idea, a certain problem, like the chatroom or

like the school; do we... I don't know, it's not conscious, it's like, what do we either blow up? So it's like, let's just subvert the energy in the room. Or what's the growing spirit among the youth? So there was something about the marches that had to happen at a certain point. But I only ever thought of it as almost Brechtian, in that there are, and it was actually another pleasant accident, that there ended up being actually 12 episodes. Yeah. 12 episodes, 12 moments, 12... and some, like the game of, y'know, how many things you can come up with that are, 12 members to a jury, 12 this, 12 this, that was just a discussion and a game. And another factor in terms of the sequencing was making sure there'd be humour and irreverence and also, this is something that I love in all my work, not really being worried if the audience doesn't know entirely what's going on or in particular where it's going, so within the necessary content, there'd also be the seemingly unnecessary, such as kids coming up with the number 12 and how many things they can do with it.

MV: Yeah, I think that... I mean it's a critique that pops up in political theatre more generally, this idea of, even with the Brechtian stuff, theatre is still a building that's built for entertainment, so people can use that as a way of almost dismissing it; but what interests me is, well what happens when you acknowledge the entertainment factor and you acknowledge the game-ness of these things, and you lean into it, rather than try to cover it up?

- **KW:** Absolutely.

MV: How does that effect the potential political effect of these things, if you don't deny the game-ness and the entertainment value, y'know?

- **KW:** Yeah, and in fact, and Brecht was number one to say it is, ultimately, number one is it has to entertain. That was his thing, it must entertain. And I actually think one releases the other. I think that the joy and the laughter is a great foil for what we find ourselves laughing at, and one of the things that we constantly had to work on was to play against the gravitas. And which moments do we lean into it, we let it land, and then in terms of space and timing, where is there space, around it? So one of the things, very challenging with young people, that you know, is that once they get something, right, they can do it [snap], and it becomes faster, and they know what's next, and they go and I think that's where I wanted to go more with. I think that the piece needs more of it, if it were to be back on its feet, of giving space to certain moments [snap] and then moving, and finding more of those contrasts. And which moments, or you could phrase it in different ways, which need to breathe. But that gives weight to that moment, not the actor, the teenager, emotionally playing that moment. In fact, it was very, very challenging for them, and I said: "You just have to trust me," and that's where it took on a different kind of leadership, going: "Please. Take this note and trust me." So a character just going: "I'm sad." And not playing the sadness. And that being the most powerful thing. And that, in addition to, this piece cannot be a rant, this piece cannot be a rant, you are going to be dismissed, and I would tell them very openly: "If we smell, if the audience smells "teen rant," agenda-based "we-know-everything, you're-the-problem," we will not reach them." And that's where I kept getting back to this phrase, that of course made them squirm a bit at first but then they got it, I said: "This is a love story. This story is a love story between you and the planet, you and each other, and you and another generation. You need them on your side." And they got it, they got it. I think. But I always had to pull back.

MV: It makes me think of, when you were talking about giving things room to breathe, and these pauses and those shifts in tempo, giving something room versus going into the next thing.; it made me

think of *While We Wait*, since that whole thing is framed by waiting, and giving something a moment to just be. And I thought of *12* and all the pauses and all the moments of waiting, whether it be waiting for a response from the audience that either does or doesn't come...

- **KW:** Or the whole thing with the big, you mentioned it a few sessions ago, that whole idea of the cell phones.

MV: Yeah.

- **KW:** And just, waiting. And the risk of someone coming up and, y'know whatever. But, waiting.

MV: This is a little bit jumping back, but the chatroom/library scene has come up a few times, and that's the scene with several youth activists popping up. I was curious, I guess this could be our last topic since I notice we're starting to run out of time; I'm wondering if you could speak a little bit to how they view these figures, whether it be Greta or one of the others. How would you describe their relationship with those figures? Was it purely: "Oh they're great," or as you dug into it, did you discover more? I'm thinking particularly of the moment where they start to defend themselves to the activists. Was it a bit more complicated than you were expecting?

- **KW:** The thing is, it goes back to... I didn't know the scene would happen, and part of our process was, you see they picked these people. Part of our process, unplanned, was that they all had to go out and research and find who's doing what out there. And so they came in kind of going: "Did you hear about? I want to tell you about this guy!" And then they'd look further, and so the guy doing Ocean Cleanup, Boyan Slat, and then there's the guy in Brooklyn who's

writing graphic novels; they discovered these people, I had no idea who they were. So within that, they were already, strong word, but a little bit in awe of this person. That led to, yes, some of our conversations about like: “Well, these people, I mean they gave up their whole lives. This is their whole life. I can’t do that. And I don’t even know if I want to. So in order to make a difference like Boyan Slat, I...” And one of the dominant questions that came on earlier was actually even looking at, y’know we had a conversation about people that put out their blue bin, and there’s a certain pride and the box is checked off, and the question was, that’s carried by that one character: “Is that enough?” And so the moment of the defence was actually very much them. But also representing that kind of human instinct to go: “Well, I’m doing my best, I do this,” and wanting the respect of, y’know, these kinds of gods! But they were gods that, none of the teens actually thought they could ever be them. They recognize that takes an extraordinary cluster of circumstances and possibility and: “I’m not great enough.” And they would come up with different ideas, like [name], 17, he said that the only solution is that everyone just needs to be writing letters to corporations, we have to stop it at a corporate level. And no matter what came up in the room, even Ocean Cleanup or whatever, it was like: “This is the only way.” And that would lead to other discussions, and sorry, I realize that’s a side tangent that I’m mentioning. But you’ve articulated a really big moment that came out of their discomfort with: “What does it take to make a change?” And that even led into discussions of, like: “I don’t know, does doing this play really make a change?” And then what they do enjoy, and they felt it when covid came, is by contrast, they said, and that’s *While We Wait*: “Now that I don’t have that, that was my way of getting my voice out there.” So they actually got inside the fact that, for them, doing this piece of theatre was something. And *While We Wait* came out of, actually, what is the experience of feeling: “What do I do?” And some of them did the marches on Fridays virtually, but they felt like this one opportunity for action was taken away. And then that led to the heart of *While We Wait*, is: “Is that happening to the whole planet? Can the whole

planet only handle one crisis at a time? Is everyone now pulling back from climate action because we have a human health crisis? What is that problem?" And like *I2*, it doesn't solve the problem.

MV: Yeah. And that's something that I really appreciate with *I2*, to bring it back to those youth activists; I think there can be this assumption from adults towards youth, that: "Oh, if you're a kid, then you idolize Greta. It's just like that." I appreciate that the show goes: "Well no, there's actually so much more to unpack about how kids feel about these figures that have attained this status," y'know? It's not just: "Oh this person's great, let's just do what they're doing," there's so much that comes with that, and I appreciate that way of complicating it, there's a bit of a double-edged sword here. Like to use your words, you described it as "being in awe," and there's two sides to awe, there's the fear side too.

- **KW:** And they're doing so much, that again, like the whole problem of climate action is that it's so, it's so distanced from their room, y'know, very privileged in Ottawa; they can't even reach them, they don't even... So yes, there is a complicated thing, and then, how do you make peace with the maximum that you're willing to sacrifice? And the size of your voice, within a provocation for change? And at the beginning of the process, Greta was not a known name! They didn't all know who Greta was. By the end, she's kind of a zeitgeist and a rockstar and a Hollywood hero, and that in itself brings up questions. So yeah, anyways.
- And they wanted to find ones no one knew about, so that was also part of the story, is that media-wise, once it became Greta, everything was Greta, and what about Jamie Margolis, right? So, yeah. And what is climate action fame, y'know? And that's really, they live off a screen, and who's hot and who's not, and who's trending, and they have to sort of navigate that.

MV: Yeah, and once something like this attains that zeitgeist status, then what do you do with it to keep it in line with the values that originated it? So that it doesn't run off course and become this other thing.

- **KW:** Yeah! Yeah.

Interview #4, May 7th 2021 – Transcript

(edited for clarity)

MV: Did the subject matter of these shows, being the planet, the environment, and youth's relationship to it, change your typical approach to the ensemble building process?

- **KW:** For me, they're one and the same. When I, for instance, look at the necessity for conflict and tension in the room, I draw on that necessity from what happens in nature, when for instance, a season changes, explodes into something new because of this meeting up of resistance, and when I look at the behaviour of a human being and I model my own work as an actor on maybe how they walk, I might get that from the movement of a leaf. I actually try and bring into the room a lot of what I marvel at and question and am curious about and worry about and find humour about. Actually what I see in the behaviour of the natural world, and a lot of those principles that nature operates by, I find that problems arise and even creative problems arise, when we've strayed farther away from that. And so, when I think of the room as this ecosystem or this collective of different personalities, and the way it navigates through knowing to not knowing, from explosion of tempo to stillness, from curiosity rather than cerebral socially-imposed judgment, I actually think they're one in the same. Either in the training techniques, imagery on stage, or the innocent anarchy, innocent anarchy actually comes from nature, it comes from behaviour in nature, it is both of those things. And innocence doesn't necessarily mean an age, it's a quality, it's an approach, it's a vulnerability, it's a humour. So I think one has led into the other, and one has infused the other.
- The premise for the first show that I did in Canada was called *Connections: Two is Better than One*, and that's literally from something that Piglet says to Pooh. I was invited to the National Museum of Nature, and before the museum had all of its renovations, there was an actual little

theatre in there, and the theatre was mostly used for lecture talks and movie-screenings. What resulted was this show, which centred on, literally, playing with parallels of animal/nature behaviour and human behaviour. It was looking at, it's too general to say the mating rituals, but it actually looked at humans and their seeking of another, and finding parallels, disconnects, sameness, not-sameness, in the animal world, including insects. So there was one scene for instance that was fireflies at night, and the human parallel scene was actually a rave, a psychedelic rave, and it was almost disturbing in ways, and it looked at literally that parallel

- Another one after that called noitanilloP, which is Pollination spelled backwards, it literally looked at, which seems to be a theme now, literally sex and breeding among plants, and similarities, differences, humour, and interactions between that and humans. So I bring up those examples because they were direct links. Humans, the youth, myself, using our bodies, our imaginations, looking for behavioural links, and then how do we bring that to the stage, and what's the story?

MV: It's really interesting too; I don't want to impose an arc where there isn't one, but it's interesting in terms of these explorations of relationships, where *I2*, the most recent production, is very much between generations, but then when you go back to the beginning of 100 Watt Productions, it's much more about these core relationships, between humans and nature, animal partnerships. It's so interesting to see that it starts from those very core questions, of us and the natural world around us, and then over time, it kind of expands to this generational scope.

- **KW:** And if I look at *I2*, and even the scenes in *I2*, they're really looking at, or they're questioning, or they're pleading against, a disconnect from nature. There aren't scenes of nature in *I2*, and that's very different from my previous work. That probably does mirror something in me, but who knows what influences us.

MV: You were saying that *I2* is the only one with no nature scenes: are there any other shows where nature is the topic-at-hand, but it doesn't actually end up on stage? Or was *I2* more of a departure in that sense?

- **KW:** *I2* is a 100% departure. But you're right, there's an arc. *The Taxon Trials*, for instance, happens in this fictitious court room, which is fictitious but it's a social construct, and the animals, the wildlife take the humans to court, but it happens in court. *I2* would be the most distanced from nature. And literally, in its staging, the closest that it comes is when the young characters are at the National Gallery, the Anthropocene exhibit, and they form a gigantic tree and they're talking about nature, what they saw through the exhibit. So it's still something that happened in a building, and the construct of that shape was made moments before, from putting the stools in a pile, and I remember through an exercise just playing with the stools, that we could make something that looked like a tree, but no matter what, because of those stools, it also looked like trash, a trash pile, so the invasion of the ugly, y'know, the ugly of the questioning, the discomfort.

MV: While working on *I2*, or even going into *I2*, did you have that approach in mind? That it would be, for lack of a better framing, an "environmental" show that doesn't actually feature environmental content?

- **KW:** No, that came as it built itself. [*brief technical issue*] We didn't plan that. And when, here's another example, when the teenagers brought up things from their research, and one of them talked about Boyan Slat, he's the one doing The Ocean Cleanup project, oh yeah, we went right down that tangent of the ocean... so yeah, it sort of decided itself.

MV: In terms of all the different places where *I2* ended up being staged, in terms of the spectrum of conference room versus forest, did it always play in more urban venues? What types of different places did it end up being performed, in terms of nature?

- **KW:** *I2* always ended up being inside. Of course, the tour got cancelled, but *I2*, at first, my excitement and that of the group would be that we would do *I2* on the steps of Parliament Hill, that we would somehow afford body mics and amps and that this would be done literally at Parliament, I even had the research material. I wanted to do it outside City Hall, and inside City Hall, I actually pulled on that string and absolutely just hit up against barriers and barriers. It's not that I gave up, it's just that it became "Well what's the next thing I can do? And how much energy can I put on what I can't do?" And I didn't have someone to work with me that could possibly be doing the site-hunting, that would have been a dream. Working together on that, and then the beautiful puzzle of "Ok Kristina, I have a possible location, but we're going to have to shape it to this, and here's the dimension of that," and we ended up doing a bit of that, but.
- I originally wanted to do it outdoors, but with this clash, visual and literal, between systems of power – and a lot of what was driven by that is that I did not build it ever to be performed specifically for teenagers, it is by teenagers for adults, and for adults where we're not preaching to the choir. That's my question a lot with climate action work within the arts: "Where is this going?" When my work was invited to that thing in Brazil, I gave a talk afterwards, and I spoke very politely, but I was hinting at "Who else will see these pieces?" So, we feel like we're taking action, but we're all aligned, and so I think that's where my work maybe differs. And that was fully ok for many people, like absolutely, they're doing the work and they're driven by this topic and they care and so this is what they do, and they put it on a stage, and it's got an audience who probably are already going to the arts, so there's probably somewhat of an

alignment of views, and that still keeps the conversation going. My quest is that, and I secretly thought that this would help theatre survive as well, but what are the audiences that we need to be waking up or speaking to or asking to or creating that love story with? And then yes, what I just said there, was that I have this pet dream of like, well what are the audiences that don't go to the theatre? There was an alignment between those two intentions, somewhat. So I wanted, intentionally, to take it into the middle of City Hall, in front of Parliament, and what started to happen is that then, to performing at the GCTC was almost the most problematic, even though it was a great setting for a great show, that to me was a great opportunity and I loved doing it there and I'd do it there again in a heartbeat, and consciously I was going "This show really serves as, for instance with you here today, interesting *other* people about the show, so that it can be done..." right? I'm still questioning what that is...

- One of the shows that got cancelled was going to happen during Lent at a church. They contacted me and said they were doing something a little bit different with the whole idea of Lent and giving up things for Lent, what he called Green Lent, and so the sermons or services and pleas as to what to get people to try to give up would be things like plastic, not chocolate and things like that. He actually asked if *I2* could perform as part of one of the services. At first I was like [*concerned sounds*] but then I thought "how friggin' cool," not just for the subject matter but for theatre, and so to me *I2* also became this piece of theatre that also breaks down the barriers of where theatre can happen and really the whole idea of theatre transmitting a message. And within different settings, different demographics, different disciplines, so that started to really excite me.

MV: Would you say that this is the first 100 Watt show where you were this conscious about the disruptive role? Disruptive might be the wrong word, but were there other projects where you were looking for similarly exciting contrasts?

- **KW:** This is the first that would be, I would say, a little bit more provocative. And I think there's an urgency behind it. But the whole, like the intervention scene, and the use of the cell phones, I think it was much more (and I hope it's not that) on-the-nose. Like in *Wild Life*, which was a couple years before, there was a line in it, and I'm now blanking on the line, but the whole idea that if you want people to take action, they have to care first. So I want people to feel the cost. In other words... if I think about your questioning today, and you took the lead on really making me see a possible arc, the idea was much more about immersing, to use a loose word, a receiver in something so beautiful, something so magical, funny, unique, close to our own behaviour, y'know? The theatre of life, the drama of life, and then having that conversation within it of where the cost is. But not, what I call, agenda-based theatre, where it's like "Here." No. And I like to think that *I2* isn't that way either, but.

MV: And that description was for *Wild Life*?

- **KW:** *Wild Life*, *noitanilloP*, a lot of the others. But there's a moment in *Wild Life*, it was the horse, there's a horse the whole time, and it was the horse that argues that that's why. To make a long story short, the horse takes the young people to all these different places, and makes them see things and feel things and hear things, and the horse reveals near the end, in response to one of them: "Why? Why do we have to see this?" "Because once you care, then you know what you're losing." I want you to feel what you're losing. And the thought that, if I can create an emotional engagement with climate, with the environment, then it's not just about putting out the blue bin, there's actually an emotional cost. And this comes back to Brecht and political theatre, that the emotional life will activate the conscious life. We take action on things we feel and believe, not just on our thoughts. Theatre has the power to do that, or the arts.

MV: Can I ask a little more about *Taxon Trials*? Based on the way you've described it so far, it seems to be one of the most direct shows about this cost, and this idea of what has already been lost. How do you see it fitting into this discussion? Do you see it as being very direct in this judicial treatment of climate justice?

- **KW:** No, it played upon the construct of that. I don't think any have been as direct as *I2*, and hopefully *I2* is also not so on-the-nose. But no, the thing with *The Taxon Trials*.
- *Taxon Trials* was informed externally, I was invited to come back into the Museum of Nature, but the problem that they presented me was that renovations were starting, so that old cave of a room, dark sort of 70s mahogany, y'know, that small presentation space was gone, and then what else could you do? So I walked around the different exhibits and the floors, and I was very struck by those old-school dioramas, and they're spectacular, and there's ones in the Nature Museum in New York, and they're of a certain time and they're slightly disturbing too since it's basically stuffed animals. *[laughs]*

MV: Little uncanny.

- **KW:** Oh yeah, and they're lit and there's the glass, but you know, as an artist you're kind of like "Huh." So anyways, I decided that that was the floor, the wildlife exhibit, and I also saw that there was something about that space that was almost rectangular, so dioramas, and then this long rectangular open-space where the public would move from one to the next, definitely not a performance space. There were different factors like that, space. Of course, by this time I'm working with the young people, so we're developing different skills, so then like *I2*, comes this merging, and then what happens is, so we knew we were centering it on animals, and this

was a group that's a little younger than 12, they would have been from about 12 to 15. So we're discussing their favourite animals and everything, and with that, being very aware that some animals are becoming extinct or not, and which animals in the diorama were extinct or not, and this leads to this whole idea of extinction. And as I work, very often I'll send them off to research something, so that they would bring information into the room, and so this whole idea of Taxon, so taxon numeric number is the degree within the scientific community of extinction, extinct, endanger, like all of these classifications, and it's fascinating, like really really massive breakdown in these charts, and so I was equally excited, and then you always have that kind of a mind within one or two of the young people that are like "Ah this is so cool! And these charts!" And then, either I found it or one of the others did, I love it, it's blurry at this point, but I found out that, and this was what I would call the trigger, like *I2* and the UN thing, so maybe in each one there's a trigger, this was in 1971, might be 1973, that actually President Nixon, who everyone just knows of course from the Nixon trials and whatever-gate and all of that, he actually established a bill of rights for animals. It's on the record, and it was the whole idea that animals would have rights. So this was just, as you can imagine, metaphorically, creatively, literally, politically, just mind-blowing, and of course, as equally mind-blowing that no one talks about this, and that this guy who y'know to a credit, I think of with all of these mess-ups in his leadership, but this was a priority for him, and it was actually in place. And there were all sorts of layers to it, in terms of negotiating with the cattle farmers, and the land ownership. So this sparked this whole idea of rights, and of human rights, what they have a right to, and some kind of judicial law protecting them, and this whole idea that animals, at one time, and not now, actually had rights. So the fictitious set-up is that. Process based, from there, each of the group chose an animal, and they had to research its taxonomic status, and then it went into what is its background what is its habitat, and it was my dramaturgical role to make sure we didn't have all birds, for instance, or all extinct, so then it was all that kind of work, but they came in, and

it's very important to me again that they came in with, I just remember this young girl and she picked the snow leopard and everything about cats was just everything to her, so that they are invested in this, and when they research, they're doing it for fun. Anyways, here was the obligation though, and this is very true to all of my work, and it's why I call *I2* not a rant but a love story and a plea, is that all of the actors had to be an animal in one scene and a human in another scene. For instance, if you were a snow leopard, you would have to be the human on trial to another animal. So the teenagers had to do research; for instance there's the whooping crane, very much endangered, and one of the main causes for its numbers dropping was discovered in our research, overhead electricity wires, because they are migratory, and they fly in a certain way and have really long necks and literally they would carat themselves or get tangled, and this was the number one reason, so what we literally did was that if you were the adult, you had to find a way to invent a story of a human that lived in those particular areas that, without electricity, and why are they overhead and why are they not under, so that what happened in *The Taxon Trials* was that, at the end of the play, there's no verdict given. The way that I did that, the whole idea, thematically or with the work or intentionally, is that it poses questions, and again, it is looking at our relationship with the plant, where the balance is, what is that relationship? It's all about relationships, not a rant, not a one-sided blame, and a bit of a heartbreak. And there was only one actor that didn't play both sides, and he played the judge, and I actually got him judicial robes and everything, and we looked into details of the structure of a trial, so that we would really honour them and break them where needed, and there was this song at the end, that if I still hear it, it causes a bit of heartbreak, and it was called "The Beast in Me." What happens is the trial ends, and then the room almost becomes the museum again, and the animals all played by the actors come in from all sides and they dance and they play and they dance and it's wild within the museum, while the lights are low and then they leave. The other thing within that, is music was very important. I tasked them with – Every piece in there,

except for “The Beast in Me,” is Beethoven, and the Beethoven sonatas, and I’m not a classical music geek, but I love when it’s beautiful. Beethoven personifies to me nature, this anarchy and explosiveness and darkness but yet so fucking heartbreakingly beautiful and tormented and lovely and can turn on a dime. So I brought in tracks of Beethoven’s sonatas, and here were a bunch of teenagers, 12-14, and they had to pick the sonata that would be the theme for their animal. So the whole piece, I guess a bit like the sound in *I2*, was very united by one thing. And they picked *[laughs]* and they were really great because they fell in love with their song, and then the curtain call was Beethoven’s 9th but the pop-rock version *[singing]*, so we subverted it. And I’ll always remember this one young girl, one woman, she was like 13, and she was like: “You just can’t do that to Beethoven!” She got all sort of sacrilegious by the end, like: “Ok, but it’s not Beethoven!” Anyways.

MV: Really went on a journey.

- **KW:** Yup. That is something I will always remember, and I have the tracks for those.

MV: It’s so interesting to listen to with *I2* in mind, because there are so many differences of course, but it also feels like the spine is the same, where it’s circling around these ideas of climate justice, taking two parties and acknowledging the tensions between them, but without necessarily resolving those tensions.

- **KW:** And some kind of a conversation happening on stage. And the audience is implicated, but.

MV: Yeah, implicated but not directly.

- **KW:** Yeah.

MV: I also can't shake – ever since you pointed out Nixon, I've just been thinking of Taxon and Nixon, how they're both five letters with an X in the middle.

- **KW:** Oh my god! Where were you when I needed you!

MV: I could have designed the poster, with a little parallel.

- **KW:** Yeah! I was going to say, poster design.

MV: Going into *Taxon Trials*, was that the idea, that it would be: “Ok, we're going to acknowledge the tension between these two parties, but we're not going to necessarily offer a solution,” like was it that same mindset as *I2*?

- **KW:** That's a great question, I don't know if we knew how it was going to end. I remember us really not knowing how we wanted to call it, and I think what we came to, and this is very tricky, and this is me really having to massage them, because, as you might know, and it is a bit me, the part of me that hasn't grown up: children are justice freaks. Children want justice. If something is wrong, it is *wrong*, except when it serves them [laughs]. Like they do not tolerate injustices, and actually, they have a natural empathy towards any injustice, and this I learned from Bruno Bettelheim and his writings, the whole idea that they actually align themselves with animals because they sense the powerlessness, up to a certain point. So, where I'm going to here, is that I kept saying: “But we're not going to demonize the humans. How do we keep that balance, almost tipping and then not?” And also, it's very new to young people, and maybe this

is an asset to them: to create theatre that doesn't wrap things up. And then, but what I observe, is they love it when you get to the other side, because they think they're messing with their parents, they think they're missing with *[gasp]* and: "They're not going to know," and then: "But what if this!" and it's just like: "Well, I don't think we'll know. I think it's up to them." "Ah!" And then they're kind of like: "Yeah!" And so it's also teaching that kind of ambiguity. That if I tell a story to you, what you do with it is the new truth of my story. And that's really hard for anyone to tolerate.

MV: Yeah, and it sounds like in *I2*, the way you described their reaction to the idea of "Well maybe someone will put their cell phone, maybe they won't!" And how initially "Well what do we do?" "I don't know!" And by the end, they were like "I hope someone does it."

- **KW:** One thing that came up with *I2*, it's similar but a little tangential, when we were going to do it at PSAC, and it was the first time we were doing it literally in a board room, and what they were really anxious about is the idea of not being liked. Not necessarily as a show, but they were really worried that a room of adults would be angry at them. It never occurred to me until that moment that, of course, that's primal. So we had to really talk about that, and what's the difference between not being liked and maybe not liking what they hear or agreeing with you, and how do we stand up for that? And just, yeah.

MV: This is deviating a little bit, and I meant to ask earlier: Were there any 100 Watt productions with youth that were outside? I know there's 100 Watt Earth Stage, were there others?

- **KW:** Before the Earth Stage became the Earth Stage, *These Enchanted Woods*, which was about trees, was performed in an outdoor tent.

- There was this one-off grant called The Forest of the Future or something like that, and it was this big grant where I and three other artists, one theatre, one visual arts, one music, would create something in this whole outdoor covered tent, but outdoors and open panels, so it was just covered to protect what was inside, created this gigantic space called The Forest of the Future, and a play I already had in the works and was developing, called *These Enchanted Woods*, performed in there, and it could not have been more perfect and synchronous, even though I knew early enough that I really shaped it towards it. But within a space that was almost as close to outside, and thematically the whole space was playing with the idea that it was a forest, and the forest was in the non-performance spaces, was made of plastic bottles. Another school that was working with the visual artist had made something with all types of sticks, like chopsticks and everything, but everything that they'd done were tiny ladders, it was magnificent, and the audience would walk around all these, and then when I performed *These Enchanted Woods*, it was almost at an end-stage, but the setting was close to possibly doing it within the forest, and I used for the trees, it was entirely done with five wooden easels and one wooden ladder, and all the trees were formed with the youth in conjunction with the easels, in order to manifest the different trees, and their bodies and masks. California redwood, an olive tree, they were all very specific.

MV: Was there any similar climate justice element?

- **KW:** Absolutely, all of them have that undertone. Actually, *These Enchanted Woods* is one that I really should, and other people saying you really should, and you keep trying to get to it but you procrastinate in case it doesn't work: to change it into a storybook. It tells the story of a snag. The main character is a little branch of a tree, like a snag that catches you, so it's a little runt of the thing and, to make a long story short, it calls together a conference of trees, and the

mission of the conference, this little snag is trying to put together an international conference, and the snag's mission is to, its conference will be attended by human beings, and the whole idea is to make the humans care about the forests. But more poetically storytelling wise, it looks up the most famous trees in the world, and that's what we researched, the most famous trees, and there are famous trees, like the biggest redwood ever, and the idea of the snag, and this is almost a statement on culture and look at it with the pandemic, is that it takes a famous person, if a famous person says it then it'll have more credibility, so it sends out invitations and five trees end up showing up, and the whole thing takes the form of this conference, and then it plays upon the fairy-tale, and there's an uninvited guest at the end, and the uninvited guest is a tree. We don't even know what kind of tree it is, and it's just a tree, in this little kid's backyard. So.

MV: I don't know all the details, but do you see it as having a similar sort of open-endedness as *I2* and *Taxon*? Looking at these tensions without resolving them, putting it on the audience?

- **KW:** Yes, I would say so, it ends with the snag finally letting itself drop and decay. This snag refused to hit the ground, because then it would decompose, until it had accomplished this, for the sake of, it was in light of a forest fire, and so it was pleading for trees, and so the snag, there's no. But the snag is not conscious whether it worked or not. It knew that it did what it tried to. The whole piece is a hope. The whole piece is a very epic, vain quest by an ordinary, tiny little thing in nature, just like an anybody, a human who's not anyone, that just wants to fight for something. The end, like the dance in *Taxon Trials*, very different than *I2*, really ends on something much more almost sad or poetic or heartbreaking, or uncomfortable but in an absolutely sort of beautiful way, with either music or image. You're seeing a twig let go, but they dedicated their last breath to just hoping, to convince a room of people that a tree matters.

MV: Very different to how *I2* ends, but it's still that note of hope, that note of ambiguity.

- **KW:** That note of hope and the vulnerability of subject matter. And I think the subject matter of *I2*, maybe as opposed to the others, is that the vulnerability is both the young people and their future as well as the planet. So that's a bit of the joint heartache in it.

MV: Yeah. It's so interesting to see all of these parallels and similar spines across your work, even though so much of the structure varies.

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