# WOR CULTURE - NO CULTURE ON A DEAD PLANET: HOW THE ARTS CAN LEAD THE RESPONSE TO THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Welcome to this reflection from our most recent **Wor Culture** event which focused on **How the arts can lead response to the climate crisis.** Here, we'll share the presentations, reflect some of the discussions, provide some (hopefully) useful links and resources, and let you know what's happening next.

For those of you who couldn't be with us for our zoom gathering, further information on what **Wor Culture** is about can be found at the end of this document. Please get in touch if you'd like to contribute, have any suggestions, or would like to share any links or resources.

We look forward to welcoming you to one of our events.

The #WorCulture team,

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## Presentations

Our event included presentations from **Suzanne Dhaliwal,** a Climate Justice Creative, Campaigner, Researcher, Lecturer in Environmental Justice and Trainer in Creative Strategies for Decolonisation, **Rakesh Prashara,** the Membership Secretary of Greens of Colour, the BAME Green Party group and **Andrea Carter**, the Lead Producer at D6: Culture in Transit

## VIDEO

Subtitles are available by clicking 'Subtitles/Closed caption (c)' https://youtu.be/xSeBFSTUe7A

## BREAKOUT ROOMS

After the presentations we split into Breakout Rooms (smaller discussion groups), here's a summary of the key points from those groups.

## 1. If your creative practice doesn't lead towards system change, have you missed the memo?

- Those in the group included creative practitioners working in Visual Art, Literature, Sound and Theatre. It was agreed that creative practitioners are used to (and preferred) working with the positive, responding in innovative, transformative ways to different questions.

- We are used to identifying new, overlooked perspectives, listening intently and participating in complex, multi-stranded systems often working collaboratively, within established communities, facilitating the expression of diverse voices.

- Experiences cited included new digital ways of working post-pandemic, shifting more to the local, using sound as a way of measuring the health of ecosystems, working across generations, building a sense of community and allowing themes and ideas to emerge from research and dialogue with no preconceived notions about 'outcome', attentive to the materiality and potentiality from the ground up. Joanna Macy's 'Work that Reconnects', based on open systems theory, is a helpful way of working deeply and inclusively with ecological subjects.

## 2. Is it too much effort to change our cultural organisation's systems so we're tackling the climate emergency?

- Someone made the distinction between the campaigning element of the cultural sector and organisations who are maybe more mainstream. For those mainstream organisations who have a role in putting on performances and doing substantial outreach work in disadvantaged communities, it is important not to alienate audiences (and keep selling tickets to remain financially viable). The feeling was that there is a need to not 'hector' and be more subtle. People don't want to be told off.
- There was also a distinction drawn between the climate emergency and more of a focus on environmental practices and outlook of the cultural organisations. The Sage Gateshead had long had a 'Green Team' and Joeli Brierley (who went on to found Pregnant then Screwed) had been a driving force behind that initiative, but it was felt 'green fatigue' crept in.
- National Portfolio Organisations need to write environmental reports and that can be a challenge to small organisations who may not feel they have the expertise, but often individuals do have an interest in sustainability even if it is practices their children have been introduced to at school.
- On an optimistic note, it was felt that the context has shifted with Covid and lockdown with more willingness to access culture in different (digital) ways. The work of the North East of England Climate Coalition (NECCo) was mentioned and also that North East Cultural Partnership (NECP) had had a meeting in January 2020 around environmental issues and there was great interest with a Facebook group being set up the same night.
- The need for diversity on boards came up again - do you need an environmental activist as well?

- While the subsidised part of the cultural/creative sector may be encouraged to consider their organisation in terms of its environmental impact, the (especially big) commercial players (e.g. Metro Arena etc..) wont necessarily, even though they are bound by legislation to comply to a certain extent. And it is the latter organisations (or the big ones anyway) who have more of a negative impact.
- Rather than necessarily only focussing on targets to reach 'net-zero', organisations need to focus, more broadly, on social justice.
- Cultural/creative organisations should look to turn their structures on their head. They should revisit traditional organisational hierarchies, seek to be more inclusive of the voices that make up the communities they operate in, make their governance structures more representative.

# 3. Being able to respond to the climate emergency requires a certain degree of privilege - yet those who are feeling its immediate effects are primarily in the global South and are more marginalised members of society. What role does culture have here?

- Climate refugees lack a voice as they are not recognised in law
- Culture can provide a way of helping refugees and immigrants put down roots and foster common ground with the host community.
- An appreciation of nature and the landscape is something we all have in common even though we may have grown up with different kinds of landscapes (desert cf dales)
- Can connect local climate change and impacts (in the North East e.g. Holy Island) with global impacts (in global South)
- Community gardens are another way of engaging refugees, bringing their voices out and making them heard as well as fostering community cohesion
- The way things grow can show us what is happening around us e.g. blackberries and potatoes smaller last year because of impacts of climate change and we can use art to capture and track that over time
- Using zoom and other technologies is a way to connect and build a dialogue with others that wasn't as easily accessible/well known/familiar before the pandemic and there are opportunities to use this to reach out.
- We use our cultural venues politically and socially to raise awareness of the wider global issue
- We amplify the voices of the communities that are unable to have their voice heard
- We amplify the voices of the people most effected by climate change
- We provide a platform for people to speak out and generate activism in addressing climate change
- We research and develop more projects and conversations that are co designed internationally, break down barriers
- We don't 'other' people, climate change isn't happening *there* or *here* its everywhere and it is everyone's responsibility
- People in positions of power use it to make change
- Cultural venues work to be more eco friendly, reducing carbon footprint and actively continue to improve this, not just make a few changes, and then stop.

# RESOURCES/READS/SECTOR NEWS

This is not a comprehensive list (and many sources will have been updated or have become outdated by the time you read this). It is what we've come across, what people have been reading recently, and resources suggested by yourselves.

- Julie's Bicycle - Creative Green Tools https://juliesbicycle.com/reporting/
- The Colour Green Podcast https://juliesbicycle.com/podcast-the-colour-green/
- Culture Declares Emergency https://www.culturedeclares.org/resources/what-to-do-next
- Music Declares Emergency https://musicdeclares.net/gb/take-action
- Suzanne Dhaliwal https://www.suzannedhaliwal.org/
- 'Battle Bus' memorialised executed environmentalists https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/stories-51493664
- D6 - Contested Stories http://www.d6culture.org/contested-desires.html
- North East of England Climate Coalition https://neecco.org.uk/
- Climate Crisis Culture Podcast https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/climate-crisis-culture/id1550902870
- Work That Reconnects https://workthatreconnects.org/
- Climate Symphony https://www.jamieperera.com/climate-symphony
- Rise Up Bequia: https://www.facebook.com/groups/617450281655978 (donation link: app.payswif.com/v1/button/BTNX1-jas58qq14dkneow8fq)
- The Hub Collective: https://www.facebook.com/thehubcollective (donation link: https://donorbox.org/support-the-hub-1)

If you have any other resources you would like to add to this list please email bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk

# Finishing Notes - in case you are wondering...What is Wor Culture?

*Wor Culture* is a forum for discussing issues relating to the culture and creative sectors in the North East, and contribute to shaping its future. The gathering is facilitated by Newcastle University but we strongly encourage you to propose topics for discussion, join in the debate, or offer to lead a session.

At the moment, due to COVID19, this is an online gathering using Zoom. We will be looking at alternative formats in due course.

## How is the programme put together?

The sessions focus on topics suggested by you. You can also suggest speakers (or offer to do a presentation or provocation) and/or host a session (we'll support you!). All suggestions to: bob.allan@ncl.ac.uk

# What is the format of the event?

Normally the event follows a format where we have a series of short presentations (c. 10 minutes) to help establish the context for the discussion. This is followed by a Q&A. We then have a series of breakout groups each focused on a different theme or topic. You choose which one you want to join beforehand. Breakout groups are smaller, focused discussion groups. After this each group feeds back into a general discussion.

There is a function in Zoom called the 'Chat' function which is like texting or messaging. We use this to gather questions and comments. Participants can also use it to contribute or send a private message to the host if they do not want to speak using their video.

# What is expected of me?

We warmly welcome everyone who would like to come along to the event. How you participate is entirely up to you.

At the beginning of the event we ask everyone to mute their microphones and turn off their video to try to avoid any problems with background noise and videos crashing. You can listen, keeping your video and microphone off; you can contribute to the discussion via the chat function; you can contribute by turning on your video and asking a question; you can have your video on in the breakout rooms or not; and you can decide whether you want to come along to the coffee social. **We would love to hear your voice and have your thoughts** but there as absolutely no pressure to contribute.

**What if I can't join in or come along to the Zoom gatherings?**
We are very aware that digital gatherings are not accessible for everyone for many reasons. We are working to make our sessions as accessible as possible (if you have any ideas or suggestions let us know) but we are still conscious that they still will not be accessible to everyone. If you would like to contribute to any of the sessions but cannot attend the zoom gathering, we'd be happy to talk to you beforehand by whatever means is best for you, you could contribute in writing or by submitting a short video, and we can feedback to you after the event. Or, if you have any other ideas, do let us know.

# What happens after the event?

After each event we will produce a reflection of the event including information from the presentations, insights and questions drawn from the conversation on 'chat', information from the breakout room discussions, and any useful resources participants might have shared or we've discovered that are relevant to discussions. This might take a little time as we're a small team but bear with us! We will then circulate this to participants, regional networks, colleagues in local authorities etc. so they can see what your thinking is.

We will also look at the information and issues raised and, where possible, feed these into future sessions.

## Want to be kept in the loop?

For information on future sessions you can sign up here and view our blog at https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/culturencl/