

Deres, Kornélia, Paul Geary, Rand T. Hazou, Stefanie A. Jones, Godwin Koay, mirko nikolić, Bella Poynton, Rumen Rachev, Haerin Shin, Lara Stevens, Joel Tan, Alvin Tran, Rita Martins Rufino Valente-Quinn, wen yau, Marcus Yee, and Soo Ryon Yoon. "Future Now: A Forum." *Global Performance Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.33303/gpsv2n2a11>

## Future Now: A Forum

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Kornélia Deres

### **Immediacy and the Senses**

Paul Geary

### **Staging the Right of Return: Moving Beyond the Now**

Rand T. Hazou

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Stefanie A. Jones

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### **like a quantum of past future now**

mirko nikolić

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### **A Forward-looking Theater? A Theater that Moves us Toward Equity and Justice — Today!**

# Climate Change Futures: What Can Performance do that Theory and Politics Can't

**Lara Stevens**

University of Melbourne



Audio recording segment of *Not Now, Not Ever*, a techno-arachnid fantasy and sing-and-dance-a-long to former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard's "Misogyny Speech." In a world that is warming, sinking, outlawing crop diversity and running short of fresh water, this performance asks: can Spider Woman fight evil, weave her way to justice, feed her children, finish the ironing and still be prime minister?

*Not Now, Not Ever* will be performed at the Mechanic's Institute in Melbourne, Australia on 10 and 11 May 2019 as part of the ART+CLIMATE=CHANGE 2019 Festival.

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This companion piece to the audio-recording segment of *Not Now, Not Ever* is like Donna Haraway's companion species, it is domesticated, by scholarship, it can sit on your lap and you can stroke it or you can play fetch with it. It is not native or wild. It is tamed, demure and obedient but it's also thinking, feeling and sentient. It is not one of Descartes' animal-machines, it's not made of wax, though it would like to have recorded *Not Now, Not Ever* on a wax cylinder, to retain the warmth of the voice, to avoid the dull drone of the digital. But it can't help being a cyborg.

It is now thinking about the future, about the generations unfolding and those yet unborn. About the quality of life in that future

about the human and nonhuman Maldivian refugees

about the subsistence farmers in India

about Hurricane Florence and the broken dykes in the Carolinas (all these sweetly named women!),

about the needles found in strawberries in supermarkets across Australia, a farmer or a strawberry voodoo?,

about the soil in Fukushima.

**So, in the face of man-made environmental change, what can performance do that theory and politics can't?**

**1) It can take care of the ones that philosophers and politicians don't tend to care for**

The UN WomenWatch notes that "women are more vulnerable to the effects of climate change than men [and]... are especially vulnerable when they are highly dependent on local natural resources for their livelihood."

The 2014 IPCC report states that: "People who are socially, economically, culturally, politically, institutionally, or otherwise marginalized are especially vulnerable to climate change and also to some adaptation and mitigation responses... Such social processes include, for example, discrimination on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity, age, and (dis)ability."

**2) It can stretch, warp and jump through time**

The Anthropocene has roots traceable to Ancient Greek thought, it has unpaid debts to Enlightenment scientists, it materializes in the Industrial Revolution in Europe and its futures are pregnant with mystery, potential, loss, extinction, unexpected resilience and techno-fantasy. Performance can journey seamlessly through all these pivotal moments, join them up, rip them apart and re-configure them into new sequences.

### **3) It can embody what some of us only know abstractly**

Some of us geographically placed (for now) on this planet urgently need a somatic understanding of atmospheric changes, climate warming, species loss, pollution, contamination or rising sea levels. Performance can embody, can demand spectators embody. Performance lets us get down and dirty with the earth, lets us be material-girls without spending a dime, without driving the capitalist machine. The challenge of such an embodiment is to avoid using the nonhuman world metonymically or metaphorically.

### **4) It can imagine the unimaginable**

Performance can make drastic conceptual leaps to reimagine the world around us. It can put forward radically new possible ways of living and radically different visions of ourselves as a species and our place in the food chain. It can even sketch possible endings for our kind, stage the truly posthuman. No Godot, no Vladimir, no Estragon, no Pozzo, no Lucky, no Boy(s); just a tree and all its nonhuman actors and spectators.

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## **Fever Dream**

### **Joel Tan**

Drama Centre London, Central Saint Martins

*Fever Dream* was written as part of a climate change event. I wanted to avoid the didacticism or critically-charged mimesis that are amongst the biggest dramatic tools when it comes to addressing “topical issues.” The scale of the spiritual crisis presented by climate change led me to write a play that would provoke a spiritual, or deeply emotional, rather than rhetorical or moral, response. The play dramatizes radical hope: characters coping with the end of the world through rituals of survival and expiation. Perhaps it is this drama of hope against futility that offers us a way to sit honestly in the weight of the coming future.

## FEVER DREAM

Characters

Climatologist

Martian Scientist

Mother

*B, played by same actor who plays the Martian Scientist*

*C, played by same actor who plays Mother*

1.

*The not too distant future.*

**Climatologist** The sun was red the day the end began. Like an angry sore on the face of the sky. It cast the air in the city a dirty orange, like rusted pipes. The kind of orange that if it mixes in with your blood would give you lock-jaw. It was living prophecy: like we had finally entered the end-game of a 1960s sci-fi movie. Like we, bewildered people minding our own shopping, had become a living, walking memory, someone's sepia-toned recollection of the day before it all went bust. In fact, later we were told, it was an improbable hurricane making its way here from the other side of the planet. Along the way, it had sucked up sub-Saharan dust, and laid a treacherous Instagram filter over reality. The hurricane was the first of many bad things.

**Martian Scientist** Thousands of miles away, the air is always red. Red is the predominant logic on the surface of Mars. Everything is informed by it. The frequencies of light are adjusted so it doesn't feel like we're looking through a film of blood all the time. The frequencies of light are adjusted so the plants in the labs can fruit and flower. The frequencies of light are adjusted so we can remember the blues and the greens we are trying to cultivate in our little tents, a pale shadow of earth, which is from here a little cerulean speck in the sky. When we rest, we spend hours washing red dust off the crevices of our bodies. Our skins are slowly reddening as if from a rash. We joke about how anyone could have imagined Martians

being green.

**Mother** The red bins are for plastics, I keep having to tell them. But they never listen. I spend half an hour each day sifting through the red bin and picking out tinfoil, cardboard, little tetrapacks of juice—they tell me tetrapack is really plastic, these stupid monkeys—and I smack them across the face.

*A shift.*

2.

*Kitchen. MOTHER and the scientists as children, sorting through their recycling.*

**Mother** Do you know how much plastic is found in the oceans wrapped around turtle's necks, lining the stomachs of whales? Huh? You, David, you say you like animals don't you? You ever think about Shoob Shoob? If Shoob Shoob weren't in Water World, if Shoob Shoob were out there in the oceans swimming around with his whale friends, you ever think about how all the plastic we don't recycle gets thrown into the water, and Shoob Shoob, he looks at it yeah, and he thinks, oh it's a jellyfish—

**Climatologist** —Whales don't eat jellyfish, they—

**Mother** —Whales absolutely eat jellyfish, don't be cheeky with me, and you *know* they do because you and I watch the same documentary every week, and you *know* whales eat plastic now and they choke and die.

**Climatologist** Whales eat krill.

**Mother** Here, you do it. (*handing him the bin*) Sort it out, I'm tired of sifting through your bad recycling.

*He complies.*

**M.Scientist** They don't actually recycle this stuff, you know that.

**Mother:** (*to M.SCIENTIST*) You're telling me the estate management spends thousands of dollars—

**M.Scientist** I saw it on a documentary.

**Mother** (to *CLIMATOLOGIST*) Take the caps off the bottles.

**M.Scientist** They don't actually recycle anything, it all gets sent to a landfill anyway. In China.

**Mother:** Peel the label off the wine bottle and put it in the yellow bin.

**M.Scientist** Most of it gets burnt, 'cuz it costs too much to hire people to sort it.

**Mother** That Ziploc is still good, wash it out and keep it in the cupboard.

**M.Scientist** The glass gets buried deep in the ground and kills worms 'cuz they cut their bellies against the shards, and the soil around the landfill dies. And actually if we just burnt all of our recyclables, it'd be better for the environment.

**Mother** Pat. Darling would you shut up.

**Climatologist** Yeah shut up.

**M.Scientist** That's censorship.

**Mother** No it isn't.

**M.Scientist** It's an alternative view. You said this household will always hear the alternative view.

**Mother** Your source is a documentary of dubious origin. Where'd you see it?

**M.Scientist** YouTube.

**Mother** Who made it?

**M.Scientist** Some university.

**Mother** Fosters?

**M.Scientist** Yeah, how'd you know?

**Mother** Their whole business is making people feel good about themselves.

**M.Scientist** Bullshit.

**Mother** Climate change isn't real. Homosexuality isn't natural. Modern art is bad. English Departments around the world are overrun by Marxists.

**M.Scientist** That's academic chauvinism.

**Mother** Cite your sources, next time, darling, saves us all a lot of time.

**M.Scientist** You know no one else on the block recycles anymore.

**Climatologist** Can I go make putty with my linseed now?

**M.Scientist** Yes, darling, go.

*Climatologist goes.*

**Mother** Pat.

**M.Scientist** They've given up.

**Mother** Given up.

**M.Scientist** After we went past the UN threshold.

**Mother** It's just my quaint past-time, then.

**M.Scientist** Mum are we going to die?

**Mother** We all die.

**M.Scientist** They say there's no turning back.

**Mother** No there isn't.

**M.Scientist** They say next year the half the rainforests will be dead.

**Mother** Conservative estimate.

**M.Scientist** They say we need to wear jumpers out to protect ourselves from the sun.

**Mother** Yes.

**M.Scientist** Red fruit will be the first to go.

**Mother** Very soon the green ones.



**M.Scientist** Islands have disappeared.

**Mother** Yes.

**M.Scientist** I saw a report today. On Noah's Ark.

**Mother** One of the scientists died, didn't they?

**M.Scientist** They're down to two.

**Mother** Well, they were the first wave. More will go.

**M.Scientist** They'll never work fast enough.

**Mother** No, they won't.

**M.Scientist** We'll die here before anything grows on Mars.

**Mother** Yes.

*Silence.*

**M.Scientist** I'm fifteen.

**Mother** You will live a strong, long life, darling.

**M.Scientist** But what's the point?

**Mother** Don't say that.

**M.Scientist** In less than twenty years they say we will need face-filters to breathe. Mum.

**Mother** I know.

**M.Scientist** I'll be 35. I'll be on a respirator at 35.

**Mother** I know.

**M.Scientist** Where will you be?

**Mother** Right there, darling.

**M.Scientist** Conservative estimates suggest you won't make it past sixty.

*Silence. **Mother** holds **M.Scientist**.*

**Mother** What do you want me to say?

**M.Scientist** I don't know.

*Shift.*

3.

***Climatologist** in a bunker with **B**, a stranger.*

*The bunker is assailed by intense winds, the scraping of sand, the occasional blast of metal against metal.*

**Climatologist** We shouldn't.

**B** Just one.

**Climatologist** It won't last otherwise.

**B** This will pass soon enough. I'm hungry.

**Climatologist** The radio is shot.

**B** I've got some data. I'll check the update.

**Climatologist** Save your data. We should wait it out.

**B** It's just a tin of sardines.

**Climatologist** Fine.

**B** I'll share.

**Climatologist** They're mine.

**B** I know. It's the principle.

*Silence as **B** opens a can of sardines.*

**Climatologist** Funny eating sardines, when you think about it.

**B** Why's that?

**Climatologist** No more sardines in the water, last I heard.

**B** Thank goodness for canning. Makes them last forever. Edible museum. Oh I get it. Funny.

**Climatologist** Sad funny, more like.

*They split the sardines and eat in silence.*

**Climatologist** Those poor people.

**B** Who?

**Climatologist** The ones at the beach. Couldn't have seen it coming.

**B** Should've known better. Hurricanes once a month at the least. Something fatalistic.

**Climatologist ...**

**B** Going to the beach.

*A shake and a shudder.*

**B** Got yourself a nice bunker, didn't you.

**Climatologist** Yeah. We built it strong after we saw what the red monster did.

**B** Horrible stuff. Couldn't tell if the red on the streets was sand or guts, or a little of both.

**Climatologist** Wasn't guts

**B** I saw a man smashed into the side of a bus. Who's we?

**Climatologist** We?

**B** You got a wife?

**Climatologist** Husband. He passed.

**B** Sorry to hear.

**Climatologist** Alright. Cancer.

**B** Mm. (*beat*) Thank you for letting me in. I didn't know if anyone would, this far out of town. You some sort of hermit?

**Climatologist** I'm a researcher.

**B** Very nice. What/

**Climatologist** Climatologist.

**B** Funny.

**Climatologist** You know there is a very strong possibility we may not survive this.

**B** That your professional opinion?

**Climatologist** Somewhat. The storm is one thing, but it's sucking sulphurous gases from the Antarctic, so when we get out of here, there's every chance we'll choke and die.

*Silence.*

**Climatologist** I'm not joking.

**B** Didn't think you were.

**Climatologist** Are you prepared? Spiritually. Mentally. Whatever.

**B** I thought I'd have died by now. Something or the other. Always something or the other. Probably have some sort of cancer anyway. The sun burnt through most my hair.

**Climatologist** Yes.

**B** I'm homeless, you see.

**Climatologist** Sorry to hear.

**B** Very lucky to be here with you.

**Climatologist** Would've been lonely.

**B** For both of us, no doubt.

*They finish their sardine in silence.*

**Climatologist** Could you empty that please. The tin?

*B does so. Climatologist takes the empty tin and puts it into a bin.*

**B** What you doing with that?

**Climatologist** Recycling.

**B** Funny.

**Climatologist** Old habit.

*A shift.*

4.

*Mars.*

*A chamber filled with plants. The **Martian Scientist** is working alone.*

**M. Scientist** (*speaking to log*) Batch 489 of the cabbages are doing well, the added nitrates in the feed have improved colouration and growth. The snap peas less so, no signs of fruiting yet. Mung beans are stringy. Broccoli is limp. The future of cuisine on Mars looks like cabbage soup. (*beat*) Cabbage soup.

*Enter C, a colleague.*

**C** Pat.

**M. Scientist** Mars only supports cabbage soup. I remember that's what my grandparents smelled of all the time. Cabbages. Farts. Mars will smell of old people.

**C** There's a video from home.

**M. Scientist** New?

**C** Yes.

*Beat.*

**M. Scientist** You okay?

**C** Not really.

*Beat.*

**M. Scientist** What?

**C** It's bad news. They, uh, have called it a trifecta of climactic events. Three separate and simultaneous, uh...

**M. Scientist** What?

**C** A massive pair of hurricanes in the Northern hemisphere. Frost blitzes in the South. Heatwaves in the twin poles. They're not sure what's happening, the transmission was very patchy.

**M. Scientist** What did anyone expect. Fevers don't stop until the virus load is burnt. They're still burning coal for electricity. To stay warm in the blitzes.

**C** I think everyone's dead. Or dying. It's not far gone now.

*Silence.*

**M. Scientist** You cannot panic.

**C** I know. But

**M. Scientist** You cannot afford to panic. (*beat*) What?

**C** There was a transmission delay.

*Beat.*

**C** Six months.

**M. Scientist** Shit.

**C** It happened six months ago. Maybe more. Comms say we've been receiving fewer ping-backs from central.

*Silence.*

**M. Scientist** You cannot panic.

**C** We're alone.

**M. Scientist** We're not alone.

**C** We're stuck on another planet while earth is burning itself up. Burnt itself up.

**M. Scientist** We knew that when we left.

**C** Knowing is different. This is different. (*beat*) We've got nothing but cabbages.

*C starts to weep. M.Scientist holds C.*

**M. Scientist** We are going to be fine.

**C** It's over.

**M. Scientist** We are going to be fine.

**C** It's over.

*A shift.*

5.

*Split scenes. Climatologist in the bunker, M.Scientist and C on Mars.*

**Climatologist** He died soon enough, and too soon. Five days before the hurricane's 100-day span ended. Food poisoning. Or a weak immune system. A combination. Canned sardines don't in fact last forever. There was a weak strand of some kind of salmonella, enough to take down his compromised defenses. He had gone into a delirious fever state. His body burnt up, so hot it kept me warm at night.

**M. Scientist** (*to C*) When we were young, my mum made us recycle when it had long become a joke. This was in the late 2000s. People had long given up. These were the suicide years, the debauched years, the anarchic years. But through them all we sorted our plastics and our metals and our glass and our paper. We were never short in supply. They kept coming, and no

one knew what happened to them. But my mum made us do it, every night, sorting trash, like a ritual.

**Climatologist** Then finally he went cold, and hard. I needn't describe the smells. I wrapped him in antibacterial towels and hoped for the best. The hurricane has abated. There is the threat of a sulphurous gas chamber outside. Inside, a rotting corpse, the smell of which will drive me insane. So septic, I might die of it. The end of the world is a bad, bad smell.

**M. Scientist** She was not religious, but I think this was a religious act, now that I think about it. It had all the hallmarks. Purging of guilt. Belief in virtue. An offering of labour. Something, anything, to feel like we could do something to make it better, long after the entire world had pushed itself into the point of no return.

**Climatologist** I have a gas-mask that might not even filter sulphur. I have a chemical suit that has ten hours of exposure left. I have a supply of compromised sardines. I have no guarantee of survival in the next twenty four hours. I have research left to do. I have to reach my lab across town.

**M. Scientist** But it's what kept our family going. Through it all. Through the skepticism, and doubt, and hysteria, and despair, we sorted our rubbish until they stopped collecting the rubbish. But by then we'd become adults, mum had died of some hideous cancer or another, but my brother and I became scientists when the world no longer believed in science. That's you and me, too. Here. And look how far it's gotten us.

**Climatologist** (*steeling himself*) One small step.

**Climatologist** *puts on his suit and mask.*

**M. Scientist** We've got cabbages. We've grown cabbages on a red rock. We've got stringy mung beans and limp broccoli, but we've got greenery on this red rock.

**Climatologist** I hope you're safe, sis.

**M. Scientist** We can't panic now. Can't give up now. Hope is a stupid, laughable patch of cabbage on a red rock. A bad joke is all we've got.



**Climatologist** Here we go.

**M. Scientist** Come on. Get up.

***Climatologist** opens the door. Bright, yellow light.*

***End***

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