



***Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* – Creating Community Resilience through Collective Listening Events**

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This article is framed within the practice of socially engaged performance and participatory theatre. Lena Šimić and James Marriott discuss their research methodology of collective listening events, as a means of responding to the climate crisis. Working from the audio play that they co-created *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* (2023), these researcher-practitioners engaged various communities across the North of England and Scotland (Stove Café in Dumfries; Artistic Research Centre in Bidston; Kitty's Laundrette in Anfield, Liverpool; Glenlivet Estate Office in Tomintoul; and Cornucopia in Hawick) in order to think together about climate futures in these specific locations. The article argues that the creative methodology of collective listening to audio drama and follow up discussions in local communities, allows for the building of and re-iteration of community resilience. Using audio drama as a springboard for facilitated conversations around climate futures supports in depth emotional engagement from the audiences. The research revealed that the communities' main concerns were to do with physical impacts of climate crises, local and global migration, and social deprivation and decline. However, all these factors also allow for emerging models of new community formations and co-existence together in present and future worlds. The article is in contextual critical dialogue with scholarship around ecodramaturgies and environmental theatre. It also includes extracts from the audio play in order to engage the readers with the experience of listening, as well as enabling climate future imaginaries.



Introduction

This article explores the use of participatory theatre practice, in the form of collective listening events, as a means of responding to the climate crisis. As researcher-practitioners and co-creators of the audio play *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* (2023), we facilitated collective immersive listening events with people from various communities across the North of England and Scotland.¹ Some communities were pre-existent, some were created temporarily for the occasion. The five largely non-arts spaces included Stove Café in Dumfries; Artistic Research Centre in Bidston; Kitty's Laundrette in Anfield, Liverpool; Glenlivet Estate Office in Tomintoul; and Cornucopia in Hawick. The main research aim for the listening events was to engage audiences in discussions around climate futures in their specific locations.

The research questions of the project were:

- In what ways, if any, does the collective immersive experience of listening to speculative fiction of climate future narratives enable social and political action, and change?
- How are audiences affected by the existential challenges that the *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* play poses, which are not only about the climate crisis and upheaval, but also about imagining different ways of co-existing together in future worlds?

The communal experience of listening to a dramatized climate future narrative, and the conversations that followed, drew out from the participants a sense of engagement in their collective present as well as the future. This created a space in which the participants could listen to each other. Building on the analysis of the conversations, and the follow up questionnaires, this article presents the research findings.

This research is contextualised within the field of socially engaged performance whilst in critical dialogue with performance scholars Theresa J. May, Wallace Heim, Lisa Woynarski and Zoë Svendsen exploring environmental theatre and ecodramaturgies, with an aim to open up new ways of engaging audiences with the topic of the climate crisis. The article includes extracts from the audio play itself and thus enables a more immersive reader experience.

Socially engaged performance and climate futures

A number of theatre practitioners have been creatively engaging theatre audiences in the challenges of imagining climate futures. Zoë Svendsen, theatre scholar and Metis artist who is working on transforming 'high carbon culture' through a number of theatre projects including *WE KNOW NOT WHAT WE MAY BE* (Barbican 2018), writes

about alternative dramaturgies and asks: ‘Could we see ourselves in another way, as part of an epic, unfinished story that none of us will ever see the whole of? Could we start to understand ourselves as co-dependent creatures with multiple pasts, and many potential futures that we can’t predict but we can, collectively, work towards shaping?’ (Svendsen 2023: 82). Participatory theatre, with an emphasis on socially engaged performance, creates a space which offers an opportunity for imaginative rehearsals of the future, thus becoming a laboratory of ecological imagination.

There are models for such participatory theatre where audiences become actors themselves.² In *Theatre & Environment* (2019) Vicky Angelaki describes Rimini Protocol’s *Welt-Klimakonferenz* (World Climate Change Conference) (2014) which included collective conversations that led to declared intents for action from the audiences/participants. Angelaki argues this work ‘reinforced democracy, as a tool not only for action but also spectatorship’ (2019: 45). Caridad Svich’s participatory play *The Next One Hundred Years* (2025) is, in her own words, ‘a rehearsal for the future and a reckoning with the past’ (Svich 2025: 2); the text is an invitation to groups, communities, and classrooms to stage the future together. The work of artist researcher Jen Rae is important in this context too, in particular the transdisciplinary Creative Resilience Labs which are housed in the Centre for Reworlding.³ Another solid example is the theatre event *Citizens’ Assembly* (2024) by Andy Smith, in collaboration with applied arts practitioner Lynsey O’Sullivan, which has toured across the UK since 2024. This is a part of Smith’s umbrella project *Plays for the People*, which is aimed at groups of people in communities, classrooms, and arts centres. Again the emphasis is on starting conversations and bringing those into the act of the performance itself, rather than them happening after the event of theatre (Scott-Bottoms and Smith 2024).⁴

Thinking specifically about climate futures and what kinds are desired, in the collaboratively-written journal article ‘Dossier: Climate Change and the Decolonized Future of Theatre’ (Woynarski et al 2020), the authors describe and analyse a number of theatre and performance practices, which open up questions around, in their words, a ‘climate-changed future’. Drawing on decolonized, feminist, anti-racist, queer-affirming and disabled-inclusive perspectives they write: ‘The ability to imagine a future is the result of different experiences, complexities and the privilege of hope. Theatre and performance can be a place where the relationship between nature and culture is negotiated, where futures are imagined and traditional knowledge is recuperated’ (Woynarski et al 2020: 204). Theatre is context-specific as it is located in a certain place which carries a particular kind of knowledge. Theatre gatherings grant us an opportunity to think together reflexively, and address our own positionality in the process of crafting the climate future narratives.

Three Sisters and oddkin community making

Writing about theatre and ecology, Theresa J. May is eager to stress the importance of Donna Haraway's dictum *staying with the trouble*, which encourages us towards 'understanding compassion as action, and offering a vision of how to *inhabit* a living-if-turbulent present' (May 2017: 12). Times are such that we have no other option but to remain interconnected with one another. The importance of community making was crucial to us in the creation and dissemination of the *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* audio play.

We were keen to explore the topic of climate futures, but also to address ways of living and belonging to one another and in relation to the more-than-human, in love, in companionship, in friendship, in communities, and between generations. This was evident in the drama script and in the way the audio recording was made. Set in rural Scotland in the late 2030s, the play utilised the structure and sensibility of Anton Chekhov's *Three Sisters* (1900) – a dissection of isolation, longing, and family ties – to explore an intentional intergenerational household set up against the backdrop of social and ecological collapse. The play imagines how people carry on in a dislocated world, suffering from the impacts of climate change and repeated pandemics. In our play a flooded London replaces the Moscow of the original script, from which the family is relocated. The story of this rural, relatively remote, community comprising of London refugees and Scottish residents asks: How will we live under the impacts of climate change, with extreme weather events and so many forced to be refugees? How will we reshape relationships? How will we love? How are we to live?

Theatre scholar Wallace Heim names the theatre 'a place of doubt and delight' as she writes about 'endorsing the possibilities for performance to change people's perceptions of what it means to be human and interdependent with environments and with nature, with the other-than-human' (Heim and Margolies 2014: 4). The Narrator of the Prologue to *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* ([play MP3 file Act 1 from 0:09–3:12](#)) contextualises the new community and gives it a background story.

NARRATOR: The house has off-grid power. It needs it – the storms and floods downed the electricity lines. And the people who live in Kirkconnell House come from all over. Some by choice, some by chance. It's an 'oddkin' household. 'Oddkin' – an unlikely collection of intimate people. Otherwise known as The Project. The house was chosen carefully – abandoned but large enough to accommodate many souls. Families, friends and lovers, displaced by the climate.

The four-part drama follows the members of an oddkin household from 2035 until 2038. We took the term *oddkin* from Donna Haraway's call towards other relations.

Haraway writes: ‘Making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to, godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible. Who lives and who dies, and how, in this kinship rather than that one?’ (2016: 2). Whilst losing their mother and father to a pandemic and floods, the oddkin siblings feel stuck, living with two elderly friends of their parents as well as an influx of newcomers, who provide a stream of excitement and opportunities for falling in love. Nevertheless, the sense of physical and emotional remoteness remains. They are all longing to be elsewhere, imagining a different kind of life, and dreaming of returning to London.

Famously, in the original play, the three sisters never get back to Moscow; likewise in our version, the return to London is impossible. Discussing the main characters’ inability and inactivity in terms of getting to Moscow, theatre practitioner and scholar Brian Kulick warns: ‘Like the three sisters we are aware of the threat, we know it could lead to losing our home (the very planet itself), and yet we seem incapable of concrete action. *What is stopping us?*’ (2023: 166). In the opening of his book *Staging the End of the World: Theatre in a Time of Climate Crisis* Kulick asks does the current climate crisis ‘render all our aesthetic responses somewhat impotent’ (2023: 1). The author discusses the importance of thinking collectively rather than through individual frames, praises the community aspect of theatre as an artform, and makes us remember that it is the work of many artists that changes the collective imaginary, not a singular artefact.

The sense of community was crucial for this project. The first version of the play built an online community, brought together during the pandemic in a rehearsed reading in November 2020. The second community was created between actors, sound recordists, producers and co-authors in August 2022, when the play was audio recorded on location at Kirkconnell House, near Dumfries, for which it had been written. Recreating an imaginary intentional household, we all lived on location, ate together, and recorded each act in a certain time period to coincide with the time in which they were set in the play. For example Act 3, which happens during a stormy night, was recorded at 3am, in order to provide us with a sense of the discomfort of a climate emergency. At the end of the recording process we held a group discussion on how to live in these turbulent times, the central inquiry of the artistic project, as well as referring us back to the characters’ own dilemmas on unsatiable yearning and uncertainty.

In October 2023, we created an immersive production of the whole play in Kirkconnell House, as a part of the annual Wild Goose Festival in Dumfries and Galloway. The audio was broadcast throughout the rooms of the building, with Kirkconnell House appearing to give a fictional account of its future residents. This three and a half hour event moved from space to space, including the garden, living rooms and bedrooms, and concluded

with a discussion. The audio play was launched online at around the same time, divided into four acts/episodes of approximately 40 minutes, available on all major audio platforms. However this medium, though it reaches an international audience, does not create community because the work is experienced in an individuated context, at home, in the car, whilst walking, etc. Consequently we wanted to extend the medium beyond its usual usage and create collective listening experiences for the audiences across different locations, thereby bringing its topics of climate futurity, anxiety, intergenerational living, loss and belonging, into communal and mutual spaces. We therefore created a final set of temporary communities, using the play as the starting point for conversations about climate futures. It is these listening events that are the focus of this research article. Our audiences, in their role as research participants, become the main protagonists of these gatherings. They become the listeners, not only of the play, but crucially each other.

Research methodology: mapping places and facilitating collective listening events

Theatre helps shape our attention, making us more attuned to relations around us, human and more-than-human. As May writes: 'Theatre's immediacy requires us to be attentive and responsive to others' (2020: 3). As theatre researcher-practitioners, we hoped to alter how audiences feel, imagine and perceive climate entanglements. Working on this qualitative research project, we took care in managing our audiences, who became research participants, as well as the spaces in our five distinct locations of Dumfries, Bidston, Anfield in Liverpool, Tomintoul and Hawick.⁵

The locations were carefully chosen: Dumfries because it is close to where the audio play is set in South West Scotland; Bidston on the Wirral peninsula because it is threatened by the climate impact of tidal storms; Anfield because one of the researchers is engaged with it as a local city councillor; Tomintoul because it is one of the most 'remote' townships in the UK; and Hawick because of the enthusiastic engagement of producers in this border town (see **Figure 1**).

The experience of the project was built upon, and developed, our understanding of community. Through the process we came to comprehend several notions of community. There were those of intent, where people in the room gathered for the same social or political purpose; this was clearly the case in Dumfries where we worked within a meeting of the Climate Kitchen group, and to a lesser degree in Bidston where the majority of participants were individual artists, local politicians and community organisers concerned with climate matters. There were communities of place, where those in the room largely lived nearby; this was the case of most, but not all, of the attendees in Tomintoul. There were communities of shared activity; as was the case



Figure 1: Locations Map. Darren Bennett, dbk creative, 2026. Reproduced with permission of the designer.

in Anfield where all of the attendees were users of the laundrette or supporters of the initiative as a key tool strengthening the neighbourhood. And finally communities of friends; as was the case in Hawick, where, although the attendees lived dispersed across the surrounding area, many of them had bonds of friendship. None of these categories were exclusive and most overlapped (see **Figure 2**).

Within all of these communities, we worked to create an intimate immersive encounter with a climate future imaginary. We organised each distinct space with chairs and light as well as using high quality headphones with a transmitter. We attended to the physicality of how participants were seated during the event, in relation to each other, and in relation to the space they were in, as we experimented with the optimum setting. For example, in Dumfries we used a café format, drawing on the nature of the Stove space; in Bidston the attendees were seated in a circle around the inside of the observatory tower high above the landscape; whilst in Anfield they sat facing the silent washing machines of the laundrette. Being immersed into the acoustic ecology of the audio play, as well as the follow up discussion, encouraged listeners to *hear* their location anew and imagine its possible climate future.



Figure 2: Three Sisters and Crown Estate Scotland cupcakes made by the hosts of the listening event at Glenlivet Estate, Tomintoul, March 2025. Photo: Lena Šimić. Reproduced with permission of the photographer.

The dramaturgical script that we had for these listening events changed slightly as they developed through the five locations, however the main structure remained the same. Following the introduction, the participants listened, via individual headphones, to the opening of the play. It was important to allow the participants to immerse themselves into the narrative of the play by hearing the majority of Act 1. This functioned as a springboard for the participants to think deeply about the nature of community. Subsequently they gathered their impressions on the postcards we provided, sharing those in pairs and then feeding them into the full group. We concentrated discussion on thinking around the place we were in, the place of this community, asking the participants to imagine where they might live ten years into the future (see **Figure 3**).

The participants then listened to part of Act 3, the climax of the play, both inside the characters' worlds and an actual storm raging outside. We utilised one of two possible extracts from Act 3. The first was a dialogue exchange among several characters talking about local services being cut and the region feeling left behind, whilst also addressing

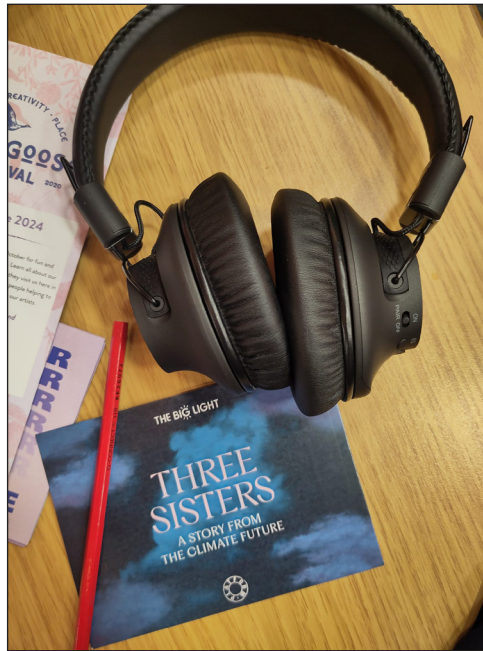


Figure 3: Immersive listening event at Stove Network, Dumfries, October 2024. Photo: Katie Percival Reproduced with permission of the photographer.

the question of elitism of the intentional community that was created which only welcomed ‘the right kind of strangers’.

BAZ: When your dad and all you lot moved into this area, you bought one of the biggest houses and said you would be ‘welcoming to strangers’. But actually, you only mean certain kinds of strangers. Nick’s very welcome, of course. The right kind of stranger. It’s just a mirror of how people like you deal with climate refugees. Only the right kind of refugees get to be cared for.

The second extract was Erin’s breakdown monologue, in which the youngest sister, suffering from mental health issues including ecoanxiety, is desperate to find a meaningful way of living and loving.

ERIN: ... I can’t even seem to remember life in London before all the Chaos began... what was it like then? How did we live then? Before the storms, the fires and the wars.

A final question was then asked of the participants: *how to live*.

As facilitators we took notes throughout the discussion. We purposefully decided against the recording of conversations so as not to impede the flow, but wrote up our notes, and consulted the questionnaires which were sent to the participants three weeks after the event.

From climate impacts to collective resilience

The table below outlines our listening events and the main themes and responses which emerged.

Listening Event	Number of participants	Extracts from <i>Three Sisters</i> used	Themes and concerns in discussions with participants	Main responses to the question: how to live?
Climate Kitchen at Stove Café, Dumfries, ⁶ 11 October 2024	15	Opening; Extract: an exchange	Intense pessimism about the future around migration; flooding; food security; public transport; economic inequality; regional development issues	Protect your family; prepare for migrants; radical reduction in travel/movement
Bidston Observatory, Wirral, ⁷ 26 October 2024	12	Opening; Extract: Erin's monologue	Flooding including surface flooding; mould and damp houses; migration to the higher ground; gardening and soil quality; the problem of online living; decline of town centres	Small-scale private migrations are happening; close-knit community living on a street by street basis; locating 'third spaces' of encounter
Kitty's Laundrette, Anfield, Liverpool, ⁸ 27 October 2024	6	Opening; Extract: Erin's monologue	Erosion of community; changing technologies; the importance of making by hand; climate scepticism; generations blame each other; public health; capitalism	Lessons and memories from the past can inform future community-building; neighbourliness; food growing initiatives
Glenlivet Estate Office, Tomintoul, ⁹ 28 March 2025 two sessions	14 and 10	2:30pm Opening; Extract: an exchange; 4pm Opening; no second extract	Loss of snow; changing patterns of weather; water insecurity; wildlife changes; flooding; loss of trees; road closures; high land prices; loss of local services; hybrid working and isolation; food production; rewilding	Migrants have a capacity to build resilience in the community; defend local services (transport and shops); organise local events and activities; share and learn new skills; be more self-reliant; enjoy the natural environment more; connect in person
Cornucopia, Hawick, ¹⁰ 23 October 2023	7	Opening; complete Act 1	Question of community organising; consensus making; skills sharing; self-sufficiency; question of desire/belonging; flooding; resilience; intergenerational living; role of art; storytelling	Art can help us survive as we choose which stories we tell; re-imagine community living beyond the nuclear family; relationships are sites of change

The dominant concerns, supported by the data gathered from participants' questionnaires, that emerged from the conversations in the five locations were:

1. physical impacts of climate change, which we named *the coming storms*
2. migration, which we named *pressure from the south*
3. the decline of communities, which we named *in the wind of capital*

At Dumfries we learnt that the starkest issue was of the fear of future impacts of international climate migration upon the community of the town and region. At Bidston we discovered a strain of climate migration currently underway within the UK, from the lower ground to the higher ground, as those at risk of flooding want a more secure future. In Anfield participants were struggling against the hollowing out of their community, not driven directly by climate change but by the shifting impacts of financial capitalism. At Tomintoul people talked of their hope of being able to build a resilient community, in the face of impacts from both climate change and financial capitalism, and how this community building can use the energy and commitment brought to the township by migrants from elsewhere. Finally at Hawick conversation focused on how to build and maintain alternative communities beyond family ties and the importance of storytelling, art, and relationships within this.

1. *The Coming Storms: physical impacts of climate change*

Six months before our event at Bidston Observatory on the Wirral, on 9 April 2024, the winds from the Atlantic drove the seas against the concrete walls around the peninsula. The defences were breached. There was extensive flooding in West Kirby and similar impacts in Hoylake and New Brighton (Wirral 2024). The storm surges were followed by days of clear-up and recriminations, from residents outraged that more had not been done to ensure the defences were sufficient to hold back the floods. The battle was not only over the threat of rising seas but also over the rising cost of keeping those seas at bay. How long can the economy – local, regional and national – continue to pay for the concrete walls to protect the Wirral from the power of the Atlantic? Unsurprisingly the threat of flooding was a dominant theme at our Bidston listening event.

We had expected for the listening event in Dumfries to be similarly concerned about flooding as the town has been repeatedly inundated by the waters of the River Nith (Rinaldi and Jarmyn 2023). This was something we had carefully thought about when composing the play, and referenced a number of times in it. However, the issue was hardly touched upon. We had a similar expectation in Hawick, which had disastrous floods in 2015 and 2020; which catalysed the creation of the Hawick Flood Protection Scheme

(Scottish Borders Council 2025). But again the issue was only lightly touched upon, portraying a sense that flooding was too much of a given issue to require collective exploration.

The physical impacts of climate change were peripheral to the conversation in Anfield, except in comments on how the changing climate will affect those living in poor quality housing in the neighbourhood. In Anfield ward 26.5% of the households live in fuel poverty. That means 1595 homes (Liverpool City Council 2025). A woman working at Kitty's Laundrette, where we held the event, explained: 'What will Anfield look like in ten years' time? ... it will be busier at Kitty's, for the wrong reasons ... more people will struggle with energy bills ... more people will come to Kitty's for the "Free Wash" we offer, and the warm space we provide... it'll be busy here because of people trying to keep warm from the cold, dry from the rain.'

The complexity of the impacts of climate change was discussed in the rural community of Tomintoul. Participants talked of the loss of rainfall and the absence of snow in winter producing a drought in the Cairngorms; leading to a collapse of the skiing industry, and the drying up of springs and the soil. With the latter leading to landslips and road closures, these had a knock-on impact on the economics of local farms and the viability of the township Post Office.

2. *The Pressure from the South: migration*

In the summer of 2024, during our exploratory research journey to the Highlands, walking along a trackway on the Old Military Road in Tomintoul we chanced upon a man in his 80s. He explained that he'd lived in the township all his life. But it had changed, due to the influx of new people. 'The pressure from the South' he'd said in a doleful tone. The phrase stuck in our minds.

Seven months later during the listening events at Tomintoul, a similar sentiment was expressed, delivered by the long-standing residents and embodied in the story of a couple at the event who had escaped the pressure of life in southern England, and had unwittingly become part of *the pressure from the South*.

At the listening event in Bidston we understood that migration in the UK was not happening only regionally, say from Kent to the Cairngorms, but also locally. One Bidston participant had consciously moved to Irby, up to the higher land at the centre of the Wirral. Another explained that she had carefully studied the flooding information before deciding to live on the Wirral. 'I moved here from North Wales to stop being on a flood plain.' Private decision by private decision, here as in other parts of Britain, people are moving to higher ground. These are inevitably, in the main, people who have the wealth or time to be able to choose where to live with careful consideration.

People are moving to the hills, searching for the premium of security and lower house insurance costs.

The most striking discussions on migration were held at Dumfries. Reflecting on the references in the play to climate refugees coming to the Dumfries region, several spoke of their fear that whole sections of the UK population, and communities overseas, are likely to migrate north to Scotland. Perhaps it was because of the diversity of the people in the room, but the conversation quickly focused on the global. Only a few were 'born and bred' in Dumfriesshire, the majority were from elsewhere, London and Lancashire, Poland, Morocco and Spain. Some participants shared their own migration stories, explaining the difficulties of moving, and the importance of knowing they were well received. Others, who perhaps felt more 'at home' in Dumfriesshire, probed themselves as to whether they would be as welcoming as they would hope when the going gets tough. By contrast, in both Anfield and Hawick, places where the neighbourhood is most clearly deprived, there was little or no mention of migration and migrants.

3. *In the Wind of Capital: decline of communities*

The Anfield listening group focused on the hollowing out of the community through the impacts of what is best described as the wind of financial capitalism. Time and again participants talked of a neighbourhood that had once thrived on neighbourliness, on the busy to and fro to the butchers and bakers, and on the capability of residents to have met their needs through their own skills rather than purchasing all the necessities of life from the supermarkets. One of the elders present described a key driver of change: 'Then ASDA came along, and the community was dispersed.'¹¹ These comments echo the Bidston event discussions about the destruction of town centres at New Ferry and Birkenhead. The same concerns arose in Tomintoul, where there was much discussion about how the local area might be rescued from hollowing out as a result of the relentless conversion of local housing to holiday/second home use.

It is notable that whereas discussions of the physical impacts of climate change and the issue of migration were both anchored in images of the future, the impacts of capital were anchored in images of the past. Participants illustrated the poverty of the present by comparing it to memories of the past. When they were discussing the future, what was wanted in the future was what had been lost in the past.

Central question: how to live?

In light of the three main impacts on communities, we return to the central question: 'How to live?' Time and again participants saw the essential requirement of a sustainable

future is to build, and be part of, resilient communities. They also felt connection to nature and simple pleasures in life were crucial.

There was a sense of defiance in the room in Tomintoul. The participants agreed that practical actions can be taken, that the Post Office can be defended from closure, that the shop in the village can be supported, that the onslaught of residents going to ASDA and Tesco in Elgin can be resisted. And the lifeline of public transport – in the form of the Heather Hopper bus – can be maintained.

The gathering felt optimistic. It was agreed that the ability of people – individually or collectively – to avert global climate change, and its impacts locally, was minimal. However, the ability to build the community that will provide shelter from those impacts, did lie within the power of those gathered in the room. And in this task *the pressure from the South* could be utilised, could be channelled, for the good of all, coupled with a determination and a faith in the future.

Similarly, in Anfield there is already a counterweight to the destructive force of ASDA, with initiatives such as Kitty's Launderette, Homebaked CLT with its range of activities and the Homebaked community-owned bakery and café. These initiatives were places where some of those who live locally gather. These ventures echo what was said of the past, and that guides the desired future. In Dumfries, Climate Kitchen is a monthly occurrence.

In Hawick, much attention was paid to how to live in community, as well as the challenges of cooperating collectively, and coming to decisions among individuals brought together by living in the same neighbourhood. Also discussed was the need not to wait for some future point of disaster but be building those communities in the present. As one participant said 'The question of how to live, is really the question of how to live together. We ought to be relational, not transactional.'

In the closing moments of our play ([play MP3 file Act 4 from 29:33–32:45](#)) the three sisters' voices merge into one monologue on how to live, realising this is an ongoing negotiation, they are staying with the life itself:

OLIVIA. My dear oddkin, life ... for us and for the more-than-human ... is not finished yet! Life is going to live! And maybe if we wait a little longer, we shall find out how to live... Oh, if only we knew...

Conclusion: listening events

In answer to our research questions:

- In what ways, if any, does collective immersive experience of listening to speculative fiction of climate future narratives enable social and political action, and change?

- How are audiences affected by the existential challenges that the *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* play poses, which are not only about the climate crisis and upheaval, but also about imagining different ways of co-existing together in future worlds?

The methodology of the listening events, which utilised short extracts of the full length play to provoke discussion and listening within a temporary community, proved surprisingly effective.

Immersing the participants into the novel experience of listening to the same audio play together, undertaking an act that is normally private and yet in this instance was communal, provoked participants to recognise their communality with the others in the room. This readied them to dare to share their hopes and fears for the community in ten years' time, and crucially to actively listen to each other.

In Chekhov's *Three Sisters* and our own adaptation, the characters in the play do not really listen to one another, and yet, in facilitating listening events, we came to realise that at the heart of this community-making is listening to one another. The 'listening' in the event is not just the participants listening to the play extracts but more importantly to each other. By bringing participants together into a mutual space in which they are all immersed, the opportunity arises for them to embody collectivity and community. Whereas the audio play on its own is a disembodied technology if experienced online, the listening events are a revolt against the 'individualist trajectory of the tragic' (Svendsen 2023: 85). This innovative practice of listening events thereby becomes a response to Svendsen's call: 'As theatre makers, trained in the work of the imagination, it is up to each of us to invent our way out of the individualist trajectory of the tragic and instead to find a way to participate in transformation of our current challenges, on the scale of the epic' (2023: 85).

The events brought people together who were engaged in climate crisis issues, intrigued by the experimental format of listening to an audio play or involved in the future of their town. Through reflecting on the conversations at the events, and the feedback in the questionnaires, it is clear that although participants largely came from the same geographical communities, and were drawn to the events by similar interests, they held quite surprisingly divergent views. This demonstrated that the listening events are a form that is capable of engaging people in dialogue, and holding a space for listening, where participants not usually in conversation come together. They enable different sentiments to be exchanged. The rarity of this experience was commented on by several participants, and inspired them to feel that they had been involved in something unique.

Many participants wrote about their appreciation of a sense of community, coming together and educating one another to provide a more hopeful outlook. One wrote: 'I

am more likely to engage with the subject with the community members who attended the workshop.’ Reflecting on the discussion one commented: ‘I found it comforting. It was interesting to hear different perspectives and understand how other people’s experiences contribute to forming their outlook. I think discussing things in safe ways and finding common ground is always beneficial. I came away feeling inspired and it gave me lots to think about.’ Another wrote: ‘It made me feel more hopeful about community and connection to nature. It made me want to work on my own artistic projects that are related to climate futures.’ One other commented on ‘the value of a well-connected community and the strength and importance in working together and supporting each other.’ And one of the participants reflected: ‘Yes, it helped me recognise how people in our communities here see themselves in the context of climate change, and what they feel they could do, and it’s affected my work in how I support this to happen.’

Drawing from the conversations and the questionnaires, in relation to the first research question, we can conclude that although the events did not directly catalyse social and political action, they did give participants courage and resolve to continue the actions that they were already taking in response to climate change. The experience of listening together, and listening to each other, created a sense of community. Thinking back on Heim and May’s assertions, perceptual and ethical transformation of theatre makers as well as audiences/participants might function as pre-political groundwork, whilst they simultaneously enable a deep attention to the context in which they are experienced. The clearest proposed strategy arising from the listening events for tackling climate impacts was that we should work to defend and build community. As the series of events progressed, it became increasingly clear that the act of bringing people together to discuss future scenarios was precisely an act of building community resilience, building through listening.

Overall conclusions from the listening events, related to our second research question, indicate that local communities are keen to discuss the physical impacts of climate crisis, migration (regional, local and global), deprivation within communities, and finally, opportunities to build community resilience with the influx of migrants into them as well as new ways of organising household living. Using an arts methodology (the creation of listening events) has the affirmative effect of reinscribing and reiterating community resilience. Whilst the play itself was used to quickly and deeply engage the participants by evoking emotional responses to climate crisis, the listening events revealed that the process of their creation was indeed a tangible expression of building community resilience and co-existing together not in future worlds but in the lived and realised present.

Notes

- ¹ The whole audio play *Three Sisters: A Story from the Climate Future* is available through <https://www.thebiglight.com/commissioned-audio/three-sisters-a-story-from-the-climate-future/>.
- ² Significantly Applied Theatre Research journal has added 'Socially Engaged Performance' to its title which as editorial states is 'an inclusive term that invites radical and interdisciplinary praxes from new ecologies and centres' (Afolabi et al 2025).
- ³ See <https://www.centreforworlding.com/>.
- ⁴ These models of participatory practice link with the work of applied drama in education settings, oftentimes with young people, dealing with climate crisis (see edited collections Turner-King and Smith 2024; Gallagher and Balt 2024) as well as museum and art gallery exhibitions (Carbon Ruins at the Manchester Museum 2023; The Museum of Carbon Ruins (MCR) Lund, Sweden 2019). Researchers on Climaginations, political scientists and world-builders Paul Graham Raven and Johannes Stripple (2021) consider the speculative turn in culture and future modelling due to the climate crisis. The authors are particularly concerned with the notion of shared collective imaginaries. Discussing MCR and its method they note that the exhibits are actually about discussions they provoke and not the artefacts (2021: 230). We address the importance of discussion as an integral methodological part of our listening events.
- ⁵ Extended essays about each one of the listening events with particular emphasis on place will be made available in the forthcoming report of the research project, produced by Platform.
- ⁶ The Stove Café on the High Street is a place for socialising and cultural events, including the Climate Kitchen, run by a collective of residents of Dumfries and surrounding area. For our listening session, we tapped into a pre-existent community whose website declares: 'We care deeply about our planet and want to find solutions to the climate and biodiversity emergencies threatening our futures through community-building and activism' (Climate Kitchen 2025).
- ⁷ Bidston Observatory Artistic Research Centre (BOARC) is 'a self-organising study site for research, communality and experimentation' (BOARC 2025). As the space welcomes a variety of activities and events, we decided to organise our session there, and hired the space. This venue was the least formed as a pre-existent community.
- ⁸ Kitty's Laundrette is a local laundrette in Anfield, an area in North Liverpool. In addition to washing services, including 'free washes' for those in need, the laundrette organises a number of cultural and regular community activities. The website states: 'One of our core principles is to create an accessible, welcoming social space for everyone in our diverse local community. ... Kitty's Laundrette encourages you to socialise in the space as long as you like, stay a while on the comfy benches, have a cup of tea and a natter or use the Wi-Fi and listen to the relaxing hum of the machines' (Kitty's Laundrette 2025).
- ⁹ Glenlivet Estate Office is situated at the end of the Main Street in Tomintoul village; in terms of its public facing activities, the office provides information on walks in the local area and wildlife, as well as organises and holds various events from organised walks to Scything Workshop and Rainbow afternoon tea, aimed at LGBTQ+ community (Glenlivet Estate 2025).
- ¹⁰ Cornucopia (Cornucopia 2025) is gathering place that combines a bookshop with a venue for films, talks and music events at the heart of Hawick. This latter town, built in valley of the Teviot, was once a world centre for the manufacturing of cashmere and other woollen goods. However, the industry has collapsed in the last two decades leading to high unemployment, population decline and derelict mill buildings.
- ¹¹ ASDA at Utting Avenue, Clubmoor, <https://storelocator.asda.com/north-west/liverpool/utting-avenue>.

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Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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Lena and James presented their artmaking and research at **Bunker Talks** at the Manchester School of Art (July 2025).

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