

visiting the rehearsal room

I was invited to attend one of the meetings of the FST sector strategy working groups. The group I visited had been tasked with the colossal job of thinking about the environment, over a number of sessions.

I sat in on that one session, bringing along my own perspective as a playwright, a performance maker, a board member of Creative Carbon Scotland, a trying-his-best-to-be-green citizen, a queer person and dog owner, a bruised but hopeful believer in progress, amongst many other things....

And as I sat quietly on this zoom call I carried, somewhere within me, curiosity, interest, as well as of course, anxiety. Or you know not just anxiety but let's face it that low down blood curdling terror that exists in us all that the world is completely failing to face the climate crisis and soon all hope and kindness will be gone.

This is a reflection of something of that moment.

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I often get asked to come into a creative process, sometimes quite late in the day.

It's always very exciting!

Seeing people think and feel their way through new ideas. Tentatively stretching towards some new idea, expression or provocation. Something to challenge an audience, inspire them, maybe even change the way they see the world!

But I must confess...

Sometimes it is disheartening. Or a little underwhelming.

Lots of clever thoughtful people, saying clever thoughtful things. Lots of earnest and sincere observation.

Good intentions. So many good intentions. The fog, the faceless oblivion, the slippery weightlessness, of good intentions.

And so I come to wonder, what should I say?

When there seems to be no map, and no terrain. How do I orientate?

Perhaps

HEY! You're due onstage any moment, why are you so hesitant?! The audience are gathering, what are you going to show them? Why have you brought them here? What are you trying to say?

Perhaps

There are so many wonderful ideas here. Such rich and interesting discussions. I think an audience will see that there is a lot of thought in this.

and then just a little nudge

I wonder if you can be clearer with what exactly you're trying to say?

Maybe it's that. Just be kind. Because of course magical things can happen in those final days, hours, before the show begins.

Things can coalesce and crystallise in a way that shocks and delights not just the audience but the people who made the work.

Making decisions, committing to ideas, creating content, is hard.

Collaboration is *really* hard.

I know.

I've been in many creative processes with lovely people and good intentions and interesting questions. All ticking over and bubbling away.

And then somehow we find ourselves at a point where we silently admit

oh well

this isn't what we hoped

too late to make anything of this

it's not...

terrible.

People will see we meant well

it's shapeless

but there are some nice bits

and we can use some design elements to present it in a stylish and confident manner.

People will be kind and understanding of our failure to deliver...

But this time, at this moment in the world, we don't get to drift onto the next thing. The stakes are too high.

The world is littered with strategy documents, published in a fancy way with nice images and lovely fonts. And they are almost impossible to disagree with because they have no content.

I don't want to offer bland kindness or blunt dismissal, but I think the time for good intentions is gone.

Creating something meaningful and tangible which will be wholly well received is an impossible task. And it certainly won't be right the first time it meets its public. But that's where it really begins, where it starts to grow.

People will always argue with what they are presented, they'll challenge it, celebrate it, be inspired by it. But at least that means they'll be engaged. They'll be facing it.

To borrow a phrase from Donna Haraway, it is time for *staying with the trouble*.

This conversation about the climate crisis, it's on all of us. We must accept the paradox that we need slow thinking and urgent action.

So what do we say now, in this most slippery, complex and ever evolving creative process, as the curtain is twitching to open?

Don't just point in a direction, plot a course. We can't plan forever. The map is not the terrain. We need to stop contemplating the horizon, and start walking towards it.