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“Ecodramaturgy and the Genesis of the EMOS Ecodrama Festival”

Abstract

As theatre artists respond to the environmental and climate crisis, the EMOS Ecodrama Festival has recognized and nurtured new works of ecodrama. Founded in 2004 by myself and Larry Fried, EMOS (an acronym for “earth matters on stage”) has called for plays that draw attention to human kinship with the natural world, and to the struggles for environmental justice among communities most impacted by environmental degradation and climate changes. EMOS occurs every two or three years, and has been hosted by six universities in partnership with local communities, and indeed, regional community engagement is at the center of its mission. As a festival meant to inspire and showcase theatre-makers responding to the rising tide of environmental concern, EMOS raises new voices and new plays to national critical attention. EMOS includes the Ecodrama Playwrights’ Contest, a symposium on performance and ecology, readings of works-in-progress, somatic workshops, as well as the production of winning scripts. This paper examines how each iteration of the festival has highlighted unique voices, visions and concerns through a myriad of activities, and given rise to a praxis I’ve called “ecodramaturgy” – theatre-making that centers ecological relatedness and kinship.

Author Bio

Theresa May is Professor in Theatre Arts at the University of Oregon where she received the Thomas F. Herman Distinguished Teaching Award in 2021, and the 2022 Sustainability Award. She teaches Native theatre, Latinx dramatic literature, ecotheatre, as well as devising and performance courses. Her publications include: *Earth Matters on Stage: Ecology, Environment and American Theatre* (Routledge 2021) and *Salmon Is Everything: Community-based Theatre in the Klamath Watershed* (OSU Press 2019); an edited volume, *Readings in Performance and Ecology* (with Wendy Arons) (Palgrave 2014); as well as articles and chapters that bridge performance studies and environmental humanities. She is co-founder of the EMOS Ecodrama Playwrights Festival, and is currently working on a new play in collaboration with Native tribal members of Oregon.

Ecodramaturgy and the Genesis of the EMOS Ecodrama Festival

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I am a white/Irish-descent allied theatre-maker and scholar who has been engaged in ecoactivism for over 30 years. My journey from the early 1990s to the present has underscored the vital importance of community engagement, relationship building, and resisting and repairing the damage of ongoing settler colonialism and white supremacy. I believe that theatre is a communal space to examine and heal the past, activate the present and create a common and just future; to tell stories of renewal and resilience, stories that grow compassion and nourish democratic values. In 2004 I co-founded the EMOS Ecodrama Playwrights Festival, and concurrently, I began a continuing collaborative relationship with regional Indigenous communities with whom I develop and produce plays and performances on environmental justice themes.¹ While the two endeavours are independent of one another, both are expressions of ecoactivism work as small acts of repair in the face of ongoing impacts of what Jules Bacon has called “the ecological violence of settler colonialism” (59).

In what follows, I map the genesis and growth of the EMOS Ecodrama Playwrights Festival from its inception to its most current iteration. Since 2004 EMOS (an acronym for “earth matters on stage”) has showcased new plays that draw attention to human kinship with the natural world, and to the struggles for environmental justice among communities most impacted by environmental degradation and climate changes. EMOS recognizes ecologically-themed new plays that “respond to the ecological crisis and that explore new possibilities of being in

relationship with the more-than-human world” (Guidelines).² Such responses might include, but are not limited to, exploring the relationship between sustainability, community, and cultural diversity; putting an ecological issue at the center of the play’s action; interpreting “community” expansively, to include the non-human community and the land as characters or agents; and (re-)imagining intersections between nature and culture. The idea for a new play competition that called for dramatists to respond to the mounting ecological crisis first arose as part of the 1991 conference “Theatre in and Ecological Age,” hosted by Seattle’s Act Green under the leadership of Larry Fried. At that time ecodrama was popularly understood as protest theatre; there were very few full-length professionally produced plays on environmental themes. Fried and I founded EMOS to inspire theatre-makers to respond creatively to the rising tide of environmental concern and raise those new plays to national critical attention. In bi-annual rotating convenings, the EMOS festival has been hosted by six universities in partnership with local communities. Indeed, regional community engagement is at the centre of its mission. Each site has brought unique voices, visions and concerns to light through the myriad of activities including a symposium on performance and ecology, readings of works in progress, somatic workshops, and productions of winning scripts. Since its inception EMOS has included play readings and community-based plays that work to enact decolonization on stage and forward the recognition and return of the Indigenous lands.

Ecodramaturgy Taking Root

The EMOS Festival emerged as the *practice* of what I have called “ecodramaturgy” – theatre-making that centres ecological relatedness and kinship (2021).³ As a theoretical framework, ecodramaturgy refers both to the sensibilities and strategies employed by playwrights telling stories that might help us understand and possibly act to avert ecological crises, as well as the

critical approaches taken by scholars and directors as they (re)read or (re)stage works to foreground ecological themes. As a critical lens that centers ecological relationships, ecodramaturgy examines the role of theatre in the face of rising ecological crisis, revealing the often-invisible environmental message of a play or production. As theatre-making, ecodramaturgy engages contemporary environmental problems in myriad theatrical ways. In the brief history of EMOS that follows, I hope to highlight how this activist standpoint forwards decolonization, interspecies understanding, and community engagement.

EMOS began in 2004 at Humboldt State University in California, with the winning ecodrama *Odin's Horse* by Robert Koon. Set in a small Pacific Northwest lumber town where jobs are being lost and activists are staging protests, in Koon's play, the national and often violent "environment vs jobs" debate becomes personal. Arman, a newly engaged would-be novelist from the big city follows his fiancé deep into redwood country as she takes a job as a public relations specialist for a timber company. Struggling with writer's block, Arman walks in the forest among 800-year old trees. There, he encounters an enigmatic tree-sitter, and begins to question his environmental values and finds himself caught in the struggle between those who make their living cutting timber and those who risk their lives to save the oldest trees.⁴ On the face of it – on the page – *Odin's Horse* clearly had the qualities of the new ecodramas we were looking for: it reflected a transformation of worldview without being didactic; it is a play with depth, humanity and a moral dilemma that asked audience members to examine their own environmental values. But in performance, and in the context of a community polarized over timber politics, *Odin's Horse* became a kind of happening. Groups of activists called Forest Defenders attended the production each evening, often engaging the audience in conversation after the performance about how they were represented on stage and in the media. The theatre became a site of civic dialogue

about the ethics of clear-cutting and the loss of one of the only remaining sustainable timber companies in the Pacific Northwest to a leveraged buy-out by Maxxam Corporation of Texas.⁵

That first EMOS also included outreach to regional tribal communities, community organizations related to the topics and themes of the winning plays. Activist dramaturgy complemented rehearsals, and included post-show discussions with experts, culture bearers and knowledge holders. EMOS partnered with Dell'Arte Theatre of Blue Lake, California, which also presented a play on the topic of timber and deforestation. *Shadow of Giants* by Mathew Graham Smith was based on interviews with Humboldt County tree-sitters, and employed commedia style to vilify big timber, much to the delight of the activists. These two “tree plays” represent a spectrum of ecodramaturgy as activism that moves from advocacy to inquiry – both stimulate curiosity, dialogue and civic engagement.

EMOS 2009, hosted by the University of Oregon, celebrated *Song of Extinction*, by Ellen Lewis, an intimate and personal exploration of transnational ecological connections that weave identities and places together into a story of pan-geographic loss.⁶ In *Song of Extinction* Lewis personalizes the scientific concept of “extinction” through the story of a family coping with cancer. Max, a young musician, must cope with his mother’s diagnosis and death as his father struggles to preserve a species of butterfly at risk of extinction. Max’s high school science teacher, Khim, who lost his own family in the genocide of Cambodia’s Khmer Rouge, helps Max face the inevitable loss of his mother – a loss that also helps us understand the palpable and irrevocable loss of species extinction.⁷ The potential loss of species and ecosystems, the loss of a young mother to cancer, and the loss of family, community and culture to genocide, the play argues, are not separate. In Lewis’s play, the juxtaposition of extinction, genocide, and devastating personal loss allows us to comprehend what such losses mean and why they matter. While species extinction is geopolitical

in its causes, it is also personal: heartbreak without equivocation, forever changing the membership of our ecological family.

Meanwhile, 2009 keynote speaker Una Chaudhuri, and keynote eco-performance artist, Rachel Rosenthal, together set the tone for theoretical and artistic risk. Rosenthal provided a performative retrospective of her fierce synthesis of feminism and rising ecological consciousness in *Gaia Mon Amour*, through which she conjured the outrage of the earth itself.⁸ Chaudhuri engaged attendees critical thinking about the ways in which we perform, mimic and otherwise use animal bodies as discursive devices with little attention to their suffering and scant awareness of their bodies of knowledge. Her talk invited EMOS artists and attendees to consider instead a “theatre of species” in which animals are conceived and represented as vital ecological kin (2012: 45-58).

EMOS 2009 also added four important elements that have continued into subsequent years, including a Symposium on Performance and Ecology, with a dedicated track for designers on sustainable scenography, a Northwest Theatre Panel, and an Indigenous Theatre panel. A staged reading of *Salmon Is Everything* – a new community-based play developed in collaboration with Indigenous tribal communities of the Klamath River watershed, embodied the concerns and lived experience of regional tribal communities.⁹ The symposium for scholars, workshops for artists, a forum for local and regional theatre partners, and recognition and inclusion of regional tribal communities have become hallmarks of EMOS going forward.

[PHOTO #1 HERE]

Salmon Is Everything by Theresa May. EMOS 2009 concert reading. Dale Dudeck photographer.

EMOS 2012, hosted by Carnegie Mellon University under the leadership of dramaturg Wendy Arons, actualized Chaudhuri's "theatre of species" through Chantal Bilodeau's winning play, *Sila*, and Holly Hughes's keynote, "The Dog and Pony Show."¹⁰ Both called attention to the interwoven lives and cultures of human and other species. In the context of climate crisis theatre must not only cross boundaries of species, culture, language, and nation state, but also examine diverse ways of knowing and the ways in which our lives are always and at once intersectional with varied and shifting ecological communities. Bilodeau's *Sila*, takes up questions of climate justice in relation to geopolitics, local politics, and ecological reciprocity on Baffin Island, in the Inuit territory of Nunavut, Canada.¹¹ From the opening scene, *Sila* centers recognition of Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty within a geopolitical arena. Leanna, inspired by Inuit climate activist Shelia Watt-Cloutier, struggles to balance the two worlds that need her: her family and her geopolitical activism.¹² In passages reminiscent of a number of speeches by Watt-Cloutier, Leanna asserts the authority of Indigenous traditional ecological to the Circumpolar Commission about her land, culture and people:

I come from a place of barren landscapes and infinite skies. I come from a place of rugged mountain, imperial glacier, and tundra covered permafrost. I come from a place where North is where you stand and South, everywhere else. [...] I come from a place where you can walk onto the ocean, and if you're lucky, beyond the horizon itself. I come from a people who have kept accounts of the early days when the world was rich and urgent and new. [...] When spirits roamed the land like polar bears and muskoxen and caribou. (12)¹³

A second storyline follows a Mama Polar Bear and Daughter/*Paniapik*, her cub, as they hunt, swim, and try to survive in a world where the winter ice that they depend on is melting too soon and too fast. However, these polar bears are not the mega fauna so ubiquitous in climate change discourse. Rather, Bilodeau has written these polar bears as ecologically and culturally situated autonomous beings with whom Inuit communities have long shared a mutually life-sustaining relationship. *Sila*'s bears thus resist the objectification of animals (that Chaudhuri decried in her 2012 EMOS keynote) by situating Mama and Daughter polar bear within framework of Inuit cultural knowledge and philosophical tradition. Mama and Daughter are fully developed characters with lives and lineage; knowledgeable, feeling beings who live in a world also inhabited by humans. "It is my duty to make you a good hunter. [...] So you may live a long life and be a great *nanuq*," Mama tells her, "[I]ike the *nanuq* who climbed into the sky? [...] tell me the story again!" the cub cries (18). The story Mama tells establishes a cosmology of interdependence and reciprocity as it tells of a time "when strange power were shared among animals, people, and the land, when all creatures spoke the same tongue and traded skins with ease" (19). Inuit stories affirm ecological knowledge and cosmology, and provide a culturally specific place for Mama and Daughter in their habitat and homeland, and in Bilodeau's story.

[PHOTO #2 HERE]

Sila by Chantal Bilodeau. 2014 production, directed by Theresa May, University of Oregon. Courtesy of the author.

EMOS 2015 came back to the West Coast, hosted by the University of Nevada-Reno under the leadership of scenic designer Jonathon Taylor. The winning play, *Thirst*, by MEH Lewis and Anita Chandwaney, took us to a village in India to face the cultural, political and personal

implications of what many say will be the next global crisis: water. Faced with the question of how to produce a concert reading of *Thirst* required the EMOS production team at UNR to face the institutionalized whiteness in which they worked each day, and to resist the impulse to reject diverse dramatic material because “we don’t have the actors for it.” Instead, directors reached out to develop relationships within Reno’s Indian-American community. Indian actors were cast in culturally-specific roles and production dramaturgy engaged cultural knowledge and environmental justice struggles that shaped the experience of Indian community members and their families, some of whom lived a continent away. Ecodramaturgy goes forward with this central commitment to responsible interculturalism that honours the authority of culture bearers and knowledge holders.

In his keynote for EMOS 2015, dramatist José Cruz González described the two-year development process of his site-specific bi-lingual play, *The Long Road Today/El Largo Camino de Hoy*,¹⁴ and reminded us to be attentive to theatre’s role in democratic community-building as part of environmental and social healing. Cruz González underscored the ways ecodramaturgy must include the *way we work*, the processes of making theatre. Theatre’s means of production can be economically or culturally exploitative, if outsider artists simply mine marginalized communities for their stories. But, as Cornerstone Theatre of Los Angeles has demonstrated, when collaboration and consultation are practiced, theatre-making can help sustain and nurture communities, promote health and well-being of neighborhoods and land. In his talk Cruz González explained the structure and challenges that this commitment to community engagement requires. In 2012 South Coast Repertory Theatre of Costa Mesa, CA, and Latino Health Access of Santa Ana, CA, a community health advocacy organization in the largely Latinx city bordering Costa Mesa, began a collaborative project entitled Dialogue/Diálogos, with the aim of developing a

community-based play.¹⁵ Over two years, hundreds of primarily Latinx residents would work with SCR artists to tell the story of their community. As community-engaged theatre, the project demonstrated inherent ecological values of reciprocity, collaboration and immersion in place. Bilingual teaching artists facilitated story-circles, taught workshops, and worked with Cruz González in devising sessions based on hundreds of community interviews. Throughout the development process, Cruz González took revised drafts back to the community for guidance, and led listening sessions and story circles. Public readings of the play-in-progress allowed the community to hear the play and offer feedback and suggestions. For González, the play needed “everyone’s voice to tell the story of who we are and who we could be,” because Santa Ana’s story is important.¹⁶

Santa Ana, 78% Latino and the largest Mexican American community (over 200,000) in the U.S., was rated among the top cities in the nation by the *Los Angeles Times* for unemployment, low education, poverty, and density (Anton and Mena 2004). The medium age of residents of Santa Ana is 29. Gang violence and poor health among young people are exacerbated by a lack of open space. The disparity of access to open space and natural areas is characteristic of the white privilege embedded in notions of “Nature” and the “great outdoors” that informed the first wave environmental movement. In contrast to Orange County’s affluent communities (Irvine, Newport, and Costa Mesa) that celebrate golf courses, beaches, and mountain bike trails as part of its planned communities, Santa Ana has few parks, and little space for children to play. Even vacant lots and school yards are fenced and locked. Cruz González’ play, ultimately titled *The Long Road Today/El Largo Camino de Hoy*, follows two families, fictional composites of hundreds of stories: one family’s little boy is killed by a passing car while he plays soccer in the street; the other family’s teenage son was driving that car. The story of both families unfolds through a series of loosely woven scenes that move back and forward in time, from the devastating loss of a child, to

a young family's dream of their own *panadería*, into a child's day-dream of a park in which to play, a hipster's encounter with a neighborhood *tamales* seller, or a women's sewing circle that advocates for a new park. The Dialogue/Diálogos project illuminated and called into question the ways in which privilege (social, economic) is reinforced and policed based on the places that people live and work. Some cast members were nervous about leaving Santa Ana and going to Costa Mesa (an economically privileged community) for rehearsals. "It meant crossing the border," one cast member recalled, referring not only to the actual municipal boarder between the affluent, predominantly white, city of Costa Mesa, and their own Santa Ana, but also to the cultural and economic divide that it represented. Across that border, Latinos were more likely to be stopped by police, to feel out of place in a sea of upscale corporate buildings and high-ed shopping malls.

Culminating in a performance drawn from community stories, *The Long Road Today/El Largo Camino de Hoy* was staged as a site-specific, multimedia production in Santa Ana's Civic Center, with a cast of over sixty actors, musicians and dancers. The process of inclusion and reciprocity built vital collaborative creative relationships between the teaching artists, the regional theatre, and the community.

The indelible results of a project like Diálogos must be recognized in what Indigenous theorist Dian Million calls "felt experience" (50). Emphasizing the power of collective imaginaries, Million argues that positive affective experiences "charge positive moments, not just compromising ones" (50). Relationships born of working creatively together, sharing food and childcare, performing one's own or one's community's stories are acts of habitation. Community-based theatre-making, such as *The Long Road Today/El Largo Camino de Hoy*, generate a collective embodied civic imaginary. Such collective "dreaming", Million argues, "has impact" (50). Empathy arises from sharing and embodying stories; empowerment from the active

participation in theatre-making; both are fundamental to democracy and to the ecological well-being of people and communities.

EMOS 2018, hosted by the University of Alaska-Anchorage under the direction of dramaturg and director Brian Cook, awarded and produced *Rain and Zoe Save the World* by Crystal Skillman. When two eco-activist teenagers embark on an impulsive cross-country motorcycle ride in order to join a protest against fossil fuels, the irony of their adventure is immediately apparent. But this familiar footing ultimately draws audience members into an intersectional world in which identity, culture, family and place are intertwined and mutually constructed. The themes of the play critique an extractive economy in which land, water and bodies are merely the waste product of profit. In performance the play delivers a warning from the citizens of the future on stage to the baby boomers in the audience: you/we are all responsible for this mess. Sustainability must be rooted in community responsibility that reaches back in time to repair the damages done as well as forward toward healing and valuing all relations. EMOS 2018 hosted panels and speakers from regional environmental activist organizations, including those working to stop construction of an open pit mine in Bristol Bay, Alaska.¹⁷ Bristol Bay is home to the largest sockeye salmon fisheries in the world and the traditional watershed and fisheries of Yup'ik, Dena'ina, and Alutiiq communities in Southwest Alaska. Activists argue that the proposed Pebble Mine would destroy pristine habitat that feeds and nourishes Indigenous lifeways. Intended to extract copper, gold, and molybdenum at the headwaters of Bristol Bay, the mine would produce up to 10.2 billion tons of toxic waste threatening the entire watershed. The resonance between the *Rain and Zoe Save the World* and the regional struggle to safeguard Bristol Bay and its watershed were palpable. EMOS keynote artist, Allison Akootchook Warden, Iñupiaq, embodied these themes of relatedness across time and ecologies through her fierce performance of “Ancestors of

the Future.” An installation and performance artist, Aku Matu (her performance name) envisions her role as artist as “that of a community healer, one that provides inclusive environments for all people to decolonize and to process the impacts of the changing climate and also the political climate” (Artist Statement). Her performance asked audience and EMOS attendees to envision time as circular rather than linear, and to imagine into our children’s children as ancestors coming up behind us, before us, and walking with us. Laguna Pueblo poet and theorist Paula Gunn Allen identifies this “ceremonial time” as an Indigenous “concept of time [that is] timelessness” in which both time and space are multidimensional (69-70). Within this achronological, orbiculate time, the self, Gunn Allen argues is conceived “as a moving event within a moving universe,” not a fixed object (the individual), but a process, a set of relationships (69-70). Aku Matu’s performance presented this world of relations as she invoked ancestors past and future, performed kinship with more-than-human and asserted the virancy of traditional lifeways thriving now and into the future.

Postponed due to the pandemic, EMOS 2022 will be hosted by Emory University under the leadership of directing faculty Lydia Marie Fort. EMOS received over 300 new plays—double that of previous years—perhaps a result of the pandemic or the rising specters of a changing climate. The five finalists all pointed the way forward with intersectional plays that centered BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color) and LGBTQIA characters and communities. *Transmissions after the Second Great Dying*, by Jessica Huang, is a tale of grief and global warming through the intersecting lives of Earth’s inhabitants. The play takes place in a hypothetical 2045, an envisioned future where a diverse group of human and non-human characters cope with the daily tasks of living in and living through a changed and changing world. The play asks us to consider our relationships to survival and to loss. Will we defend our privileges as long as we are able? What kinds of new relationships to one another will be required? How

will we work together even in the face of inexorable loss that human caused climate change has already and will continue to cause? Huang's play, like Bilodeau's *Sila*, takes up the task of giving form and shape to grief. As Ashlee Consolo Willox reminds us in "Climate Change as the Work of Mourning," grieving is not merely a personal nor a-political act (136-64). To the contrary, as the Black Lives Matter uprising, and the allied groups of students and parents in the wake of school shootings have demonstrated, mourning is and must be understood as a political act; expressions of grief are a vital part of our civic resilience in the face of climate-related losses. As these EMOS winning plays demonstrated, even as theatre is a site of activism, it can also be a ceremonial practice that provides space for, and expressions of, grief stemming from climate crisis.

At the heart of EMOS is abiding faith that the stories we tell matter, and that the human imagination is an ecological force. EMOS has sought to centre the ecological relatedness of diverse peoples with the land, its biotic communities, and its dynamic processes. But justice, like ecology, is always a dynamic and unfolding process. While the plays have been central to the purpose of EMOS, they are not all of what the festival has accomplished over time. The story of EMOS is composed of relationships that form larger and larger circles of inclusion – geographic, cultural, and temporal. Relationships and endeavours have emerged from EMOS' working sessions and from sharing food around a common table. Partnerships formed over years have carried on: with Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts, with Climate Change Theatre Action, and Indigenous communities and artists in the regions EMOS has convened.¹⁸

Stories Are Acts of Repair

What does decolonizing have to do with leveraging the power of theatre toward ecological values? Indigenous theorist and artist Eve Tuck writes that "decolonization is not a metaphor" (3). The

acknowledgement of Indigenous lands before a performance is merely a first step in an ongoing process of decolonization that requires me to continue to ask, “what does decolonization mean for me as a theatre-maker, as an activist and academic? How do I, as a non-Native settler-decedent artist, take responsibility for my inherited privilege? How do I give back? How can I insure that the theatre work that I have a hand in making forwards restorative justice, and return of lands and all that land means and provides?

In 2002, I saw first-hand the ecological and cultural impacts of settler colonialism in the form of a devastating fish kill on the Klamath River. The death of over seventy thousand salmon on Yurok homelands on the lower Klamath River brought home to me not only the artificial separation of “nature” from “culture,” but also the subtle ways this binary thinking perpetuates ongoing ecological and cultural violence. Working with Karuk, Yurok, and Hupa tribal members, students and community members, I wrote *Salmon Is Everything*, a community-based play that documents the cultural significance of that historic fish kill, and was performed as a staged reading at EMOS 2009. The process of developing *Salmon Is Everything* was an exploration of the complex ways ecology and environment are materially intertwined with culture, identity, and sovereignty – a process of community collaboration that changed me.¹⁹ As I listened to and learned from my Native collaborators, I became keenly aware of the systems of power and privilege evidenced not only in the control of water on the Klamath River and in the economic priorities that privileged some communities while ignoring others, but also in who was included in policy solutions and whose narrative drove public debate. The process also changed my thinking about what theatre can do as a site of civic engagement.

[PHOTO #3 HERE]

Salmon Is Everything, directed by Theresa May. 2011 production, University of Oregon. Courtesy of the author.

[PHOTO #4 HERE]

Salmon Is Everything, directed by Theresa May. 2011 production, University of Oregon. Courtesy of the author.

Choctaw scholar and dramatist LeAnne Howe argues that among Native people storytelling is understood as an action that can generate material change (117-30). As powerful forces of transformation, stories help people remember and reclaim the past and call forth new visions of the future. Stories carry layered knowledge about place, histories, and values. Stories can build relationships, intervene in long-standing ideologies, open new possibilities, and reshape the social, political, and ecological landscapes of our lives. Indeed, stories *do work* that often cannot be done by procedural, legal, or scientific efforts alone. The work of stories is relational awareness. Stories are dynamic, ongoing phenomena, circles within circles within circles that unfold outward like a tide of connection across generations, cultures, and species, and exist within and outside of time. Stories have a life of their own. They command our attentiveness to relationships and track the consequences of relationships disregarded. Like circles that draw us together even as they widen across time and place, stories bring us into relation with one another, with the land and its communities, and with the past and future.

In the present historical moment theatre artists have an opportunity to tell stories and explore forms that actively practice compassion and demand justice; stories that are visionary, generative and healing. For theatre artists in particular, EMOS has been a project that continually poses the question: in the face of the shattering facts of climate change and other human-caused planetary biocide, *what if* the skills that you possess, the stories that you tell, and the forms through

which you tell them could help save lives, prevent suffering, heal destruction, reclaim worlds, and transform what it means to be a human animal in a diverse ecological community? As a site of civic discourse and communal imaginings, and as this issue argues, theatre might help us compassionately navigate the social changes that are and will occur as a result of climate change. In this way, theatre exercises the imaginative elasticity necessary to safeguard democracy and practice compassion as the lived experiences of climate crisis unfold.

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Endnotes:

¹ EMOS was co-founded by Theresa J. May and Larry K. Fried, and hosted by Humboldt State University in 2004, the University of Oregon in 2009, Carnegie Mellon University in 2012, University Nevada Reno in 2015; University of Alaska-Anchorage in 2018, and will be hosted by Emory University in autumn of 2022. See <http://earthmattersstage.org>

² Guidelines for the EMOS Ecodrama Playwrights Festival can be found at <http://earthmattersstage.org>.

³ The term "ecodramaturgy" originally appeared in May, "Kneading Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*," (2010). However, the ecodramaturgy lens has gone by various monikers in recent decades, including green dramaturgy, environmental dramaturgy, and ecological theatre. As a starting point for eco-dramaturgical, critical and historiographic examinations of plays and performance see my "Green Questions to Ask a Play," in May (2007, 110). See also, Arons (2012); Chaudhuri (1994); Cless (1996; 2010); Lavery (2018); May (2021).

⁴ Tree-sitting is form of direct action in which protestors live on make-shift platforms in the top of old growth redwood to prevent a stand of trees from being harvested by timber companies. See, for example, Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna* (2000).

⁵ See, for example, Harris, *The Last Stand* (1995) and Widick, *Trouble in the Forest* (2009).

⁶ In addition to the 2009 EMOS award, *Song of Extinction* was received the Harold and Mimi Steinberg/ATCA New Play Award from the American Theatre Critics' Association.

⁷ The Khmer Rouge was the name popularly given to the totalitarian Communist regime that gained control of Cambodia and ruled from 1975 to 1978. During this period the Khmer Rouge regime carried out a racist policy of national purity resulting in the genocide of Cambodian minorities, as well the murder or thousands of political opponents and intellectuals. The period stands as one of the foremost examples of genocide in the late Twentieth Century. Many new accounts of this tragic time were surfacing in the early 2000s providing inspiration to dramatists such as EM Lewis. See, for example, Loung Ung, *First They Killed My Father* (2000), and Denise Affonco, *To the End of Hell* (2007).

⁸ See "Gaia, Mon Amor," by Rachel Rosenthal, in *Rachel's Brain and Other Stories*, edited by Una Chaudhuri, 139-160. London; New York: Continuum.

⁹ See May, *Salmon Is Everything: Community-based Theatre in the Klamath Watershed* (2019) in which the play along with contextual essays by Indigenous collaborators, is published.

¹⁰ See Chaudhuri and Hughes, *Animal Acts* (2014) which expands on the ideas in Hughes 2012 keynote.

¹¹ Nunavut was formed as a new territory of Canada in 1999, when it gained autonomy from the Northwest Territories. The change has brought increased regional independence and Indigenous cultural and linguistic autonomy (Kikkert 2019).

¹² In 2007, Shelia Watt-Cloutier gave testimony before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, laying out the way climate change disproportionately impacts traditional peoples of the Arctic, as well as indigenous people and vulnerable populations throughout the hemisphere and the world (2015, 224-58). In 2007, even as her petition before the Inter-American Commission was denied, Watt-Cloutier was a nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Her activism shifted the conversation such that today it is not possible to talk about mitigating the impacts of climate change without also talking about climate justice. The full text of Watt-Cloutier's testimony before the Inter-American Human Rights Commission can be found on the Earthjustice website. See, Watt-Cloutier, *The Right to Be Cold* (2015).

¹³ In Leanna's speech in Scene 2, Bilodeau draws on the words of Watt-Cloutier. Because Watt-Cloutier has primarily shared her knowledge orally through her activism, I encourage readers to seek out her many talks available on Youtube, including her Keynote Address at Climate 2050, "Climate Change and Human Rights."

¹⁴ Portions of this section appeared in an earlier form in "Stage Dialogue, and Civic Diálogos, at South Coast Rep" and are used here with permission.

¹⁵ *Dialogue/Diálogos* was funded by a \$600,000 grant from the James Irvine Foundation Exploring Engagement Fund, which called for projects that engaged low-income or ethnically diverse populations that are historically underserved by arts nonprofits. See www.scr.org/get-connected/dialogue-diálogos.

¹⁶ Personal Interview. October, 12, 2014.

¹⁷ See, for example, <https://stoppebbleminenow.org/>. Accessed 3 June, 2022.

¹⁸ See the Center for Sustainable Practice in the Arts (CSPA), which publishes a quarterly journal on the topic and maintains a blog with up-to-date resources. Concurrent with international COP21 in Paris, Climate Change Theatre Action (CCTA) called for short plays or performance events initiated by artists and communities around the world and then published and promoted those events on social media (Bilodeau 2016). CCTA continues as an increasingly international consortium of playwrights and participating community organizations; in 2018, the group published a collection of these short plays in a volume titled *Where is the Hope?* (Bilodeau 2018).

¹⁹ In "The Education of an Artist," I write in detail about my personal process of learning Indigenous methodologies from Karuk, Yurok and Hupa collaborators. (2019):111-52.