

This Place is a Message

Faultline Ensemble

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Current Working Script

Table of Contents

Script Outline

Current Draft

1. Preshow

I. NAIVE OPTIMISM

2. Garden 1- Neglected garden

3. Climate 1 - Intro to Climate Change Letters

4. HITF 1 - Intro to the Human Interference Task Force (HITF)

5. Communication Diagram Movement Sequence

II FINDING THE VOID

6. Climate 2 - Climate Change Information Montage

7. Garden 2 - Voyager

8. HITF 2 - HITF Solution Propositions

III NIGHTMARESCAPE

9.5 - Garden 3

9. Climate 3 - Climate Despair Montage

10. HITF 3 - Transition scene to nightmarescape

11. The Nightmarescape

12. HITF 4 - Sebeok/Fabbri Argument

14. Climate 4 - Climate change future thinking

15. Garden 4 - Dreamscape

16. Post show - finding the Tree

Script Outline

Each of the three storylines goes through a similar process: first identifying a problem or question, then suggesting or trying out solutions, then a failure of the things they’ve tried, and then a discovery of emergent possibilities that are less clear but more hopeful than the previous solutions. This ties the stories to one another - at each step, the task force brainstorms ideas about that step, the climate scientists talk about the step, and the gardeners enact the step. Towards the end, the realities merge till we are living in one world of combined talk, brainstorm and action.

<p style="text-align: center;">Naive Optimism (The Question)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Learning/Being Shaken/Finding the Void (Proposing/trying solutions)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Nightmarescape (Solutions fail)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Dreamscape (Finding emergence)</p>
<p>1. Arrival of audience, introduction to the nuclear waste warning sign question</p> <p>2. Neglected garden scene - weeding (action), intro to the mugwort/potato problem, zebra finches as one possible solution, Carl begins to build a device to communicate the problem to others</p> <p>3. Intro to Joe and the climate change letters - the problem/struggle</p> <p>4. HITF first reenactment - posing the question/call for solutions / debate of ethics</p> <p>5. Communication movement sequence based on Sebeok’s description</p>	<p>6. Climate change montage - how we try to communicate, things we’ve tried, things that motivate us to try to talk to others about the problem</p> <p>7. Garden - enacting different solutions, arguing over them, trying things out, starting to fail</p> <p>8. HITF solution proposals and debate</p>	<p>9. Gardeners in conflict and continuing to fail</p> <p>10. Climate scientist despair montage: flattening the curve and feverish forests</p> <p>11. Sebeok Yucca Mountain indigenous history context revelation</p> <p>12. Nightmarescape and downwinders</p> <p>13. Sebeok and Fabbri argue about leaving ray cats out of the HITF report, we find out about Bastide’s death</p>	<p>14. Final Climate Scientist letters - emergence, care, personal narrative as ways forward</p> <p>15. Dreamscape and emergence - dusk of communication as dawn</p> <p>16. Finding the tree</p>

This Place is a Message

Scene 1: Preshow

You are greeted in the early evening at the entrance to the landscape lab by the box office attendants. They greet you, and direct you down a wooded path to the preshow area, located outside a small barn. In the near distance THE GARDENERS are doing real farm tasks in a tiny well-tended section of a much larger neglected garden and boiling water for herbal tea.

The musicians play and sing nearby as audience members are encouraged to fill out pre-show surveys, and answer the question "How does climate change make you feel?" by writing emotions on wooden discs collected in a jar. BASTIDE works in her lab nearby, oblivious to the audience gathering. As the show begins, audience members are directed to an arc of chairs facing the overgrown garden terraced into a nearby hill.

The co-directors introduce the project and describe the movement process to the audience - when it's time to move from scene to scene, you will follow the monologues of climate scientists placed along the path. As in real life, you can stop and listen to them for as long as you like, or ignore them and walk right by. The gardeners on the hill begin the show.

I. NAIVE OPTIMISM

Scene 2: Intro to the Gardeners

(The gardeners - Alex, Florence, Rudolph and Carl are weeding, harvesting, and making tea.)

Rudolph: I'm sick of roots.

Alex: Not again!

Rudolph: Aren't you? They're endless! My whole lis pulling mugwort roots!

Carl: We know.

Florence: Take a break then. Here. Have some tea.

Alex: There's no time! We have to keep working.

Florence: We can make time. They need a rest.

Rudolph: *(to Alex)* Right, because *you* work so hard -

Florence: Come on -

Rudolph: Sorry -

Carl: Oh not AGAIN!

(Brief silence. Florence sets a cup of tea next to Alex. Squeezes his shoulder tenderly. Alex drinks while the rest weed.)

Alex: I dreamt about mugwort again last night. Endless weeds with roots trailing through the understory. They were everywhere underneath me, waiting to trap my feet and pull me under.

Florence: Terrifying.

Carl: That's the mugwort talking.

Florence: What do you mean?

Rudolph: The mugwort! It makes you dream!

Alex: I thought it was protective?

Rudolph: That too.

Alex: *(Suspicious)* According to who?

Rudolph: Everyone!

Florence: *(Suspicious and protective)* Meaning?

Rudolph: Traditions all through Europe and parts of Asia. They say it protects against evil spirits. That's where it came from, you know.

Carl: *We know.*

Rudolph: Colonizer ships in the 1600s - without them, no mugwort invasion. Can you imagine? *(Extending arms and grabbing a hand of Alex's, creating a small moment of weight sharing)* We'd have so much space... *(Rudolph passes Alex's hand to Carl, who drops it unceremoniously. Alex falls to the ground.)*

Florence: *(Rushing to him, concerned)* Are you alright?

Alex: I'm FINE. *(Still doubtful)* But it also makes you dream?

Carl: Wild dreams! More vivid than any you've had before!

Alex: No wonder.

Florence: *(Brushing Alex off, pulling pieces of mugwort from his clothing)* And people thought this would protect them? I don't believe it.

Carl: You never believe anything.

Florence: I'm just saying -

Alex: We'll if you'd been in my head the last few nights, you'd have no doubts. *(Florence is silent.)*

Rudolph: You couldn't pay me to be in your head.

Florence: HEY -

Rudolph: What? Why are you so uptight?

Florence: Mugwort is growing. Plantable land is shrinking. Yield is way down. We're all in trouble. Do I need another reason?

Rudolph: A negative attitude helps no one-

Florence: *(Brandishing a handful of mugwort)* Do you think my "attitude" is making a difference? I'm talking about the real threat here. The mugwort gets stronger every year the winters are mild. We're in trouble.

Carl: I never thought I'd long for ice.

Rudolph: *(Beginning a weight sharing moment with Carl)* Remember when we got feet of snow?

Carl: And we grew enough in the summers to make it through the winters....

Alex: Will we have enough this year?

Rudolph: *(Hesitating)* Yes.

Florence: *(Simultaneously)* No. *(Seeing Alex's stressed expression and softening)* Well, maybe.

Carl: Just. But if people keep hoarding *(eyeing Alex)*, we may be in trouble...

Florence: Carl!

Carl: Just saying.

Alex: if you've got an accusation, I suggest you -

Florence: *(Trying to distract)* We could talk, or we could work.

Rudolph: I really think we need a plan. We have to be in psychic alignment before we take action...

Florence: You always think that, that's why we never get any work done. Mugwort's not going to weed itself.

Carl: *(To Alex)* Not like that. You have to grip it low down, like this, and pull it out from the root.

Florence: *(Intervening)* We know.

Carl: Remember the root's brutal. We've got to remove all of it! Get it out completely!

Rudolph: *(Not working)* Remember when this all used to be garden?

Florence: It's not a garden now?

Rudolph: I mean when it all produced food. Not just the little bit we can clear.

Alex: Multitask, Rudolph! If you're going to talk, do it while you work.

Rudolph: See this? This is boneset. It's still here, a bit of it. It's used for flus and fevers. And this is echinacea! It strengthens the immune system. We planted these once. The mugwort *(pointing to the*

mugwort all around) was an accident. It's invasive here. It chokes out all the rest. And every year it spreads more.

Carl: Lemon balm. Reduces tension. Rudolph, you have to get the roots out. *(Takes Rudolph's hands while speaking. Weight sharing and music begin.)* It's a rhizome. Its roots branch out all over the place and send up more shoots from underground. One plant, many trunks. You don't even see it, but it's everywhere. When you pull one shoot, it sends up another.

Rudolph: Aspen. Ginger. Spread. Orchid. Bamboo. These plants move. Horsetails. Most root only once. Live in place. Not us. Nettles. Foot by foot. Trunk by trunk more dispersed. Poison oak.

Alex: Dig it up, it comes back, you dig it up again. You're never done.

Carl: It's hard. That doesn't make it impossible. You find the sprouts, and then you dig down under and find the roots, and you follow them through dark dirt and stones that once were mountains into places you never thought they'd be able to reach, and you dig them out there too.

Florence: And then you come back the next day, and there's more to dig. And each year it gets warmer, the mugwort grows taller..

Carl: Maybe we need to try something different.

Alex: No! We can't do that. If we stop, we'll fall too far behind...

Carl: We already *are* too far behind. Harvest will be tiny this year if we keep doing the same thing.

Florence: *(With a concerned look at Alex)* You're so negative!

Carl: I'm just saying, I don't think this is working. I think we need something new.

Alex: So what's YOUR plan then?

Carl: I don't have one yet, I'm saying we should *find* one -

Alex: Great, no plan. Back to work.

Carl: But maybe this isn't the right work -

Florence: What else are we going to do?

Carl: *(Frustrated with the argument, turning to audience)* Sometimes I wish I were a bird. I could live on seeds and worms, and fly away any time I wanted. We can't do anything but argue anyway, what's the point of having language? But birds can *sing*. Listen to them all. By the end of summer, I don't even notice birdsong anymore, but after a long winter without it, those first spring days. *(They pause, really let the audience hear the birds for a minute)* It's beauty, isn't it? Do you ever wonder how birds talk to each other? Or what they're saying?

Most birds have short, simple calls. Like the chickadee's Fee-bee *(chickadee sound, whistled or sung)*

(Florence sings chickadee fee-bee sound.)

Carl: Some birds, like the zebra finch, have a longer series of notes – actual songs. Tikity - tikity - ta x2 *(zebra finch courtship song)*.

Florence: Did you know birds practice their songs in their sleep?

(Florence sings zebra finch courting call.)

Rudolph: Zebra finches sing to their eggs when they're nesting. The kind of call they choose changes the size and the choices of their hatchlings. When it's warm, the parents sing different notes to the eggs. The eggs that hear those notes hatch smaller and don't grow as big. They build nests suited to warmer temperatures. They evolve in real time, just based on hearing those notes...

Florence: Is that true?

Rudolph: You think I'd make it up?

Carl: *(Ignores the question)* Smaller bird, smaller body. Less body, less flesh in the sun. Less hurt by the heat. The Genius of Birds.

(Florence sings chickadee fee-bee sound.)

Alex: Fascinating. Why am I the only one working?

Carl: Because the same thing isn't *working*. *(Alex turns away in disgust - to Alex's back:)* How do I talk to you about evolution? Adaptation?

Carl: *(Darting to the thermometer hanging on the barn, glancing from the temperature to the mugwort and back)* Sleep-birds practicing songs that inspire - Change! Invention! I wish I could sing into you the need to do something *different*. If I could just find the right words to show how things are changing... or maybe not words? Maybe some other sound?

(Carl taps on a few objects, making different sounds. Then they see a set of wind chimes hanging from the barn eave. They ring the chimes.)

Alex: *(Looking up)* Oh Mr. Science has something to say?

Carl: *(Thrilled this has worked)* Yes! Listen. We need to agree on a tactic. The garden is overrun and it's only going to get worse. What can we do different?

Alex: Nothing. Just have to do what we can. It's hopeless *(Turns back to half-hearted weeding)*.

Florence: It's not totally hopeless! Here, I can help.

Rudolph: We're thinking too small. We need to think in new dimensions!

Carl: Exactly!

Rudolph: I've got some crystals around here somewhere... *(turns to look in the barn)*

(Carl and Florence roll their eyes together. Florence turns back to helping Alex. Carl looks around despondently as they drift back to their activities, then takes the wind chimes from the eaves and examines them.)

Carl: we need to try something different...*(They gather the chimes together and turn to notice Joe Duggan entering, played by a musician)*.

Scene 3: Intro to the Climate Change Letters

Joe Duggan: This is what I know: food is getting harder to grow. Towns, coastlines, islands engulfed by the sea. The west drowning in flame. Mass migrations of refugees. Places on this globe are becoming unlivable.

This is what I know how to say: We may hit 1.5 degrees Celsius above average by 2024.

I've never been good with numbers. They're just scribbles on a piece of paper. I couldn't make myself care about them.

So I went looking for something different.

I wrote letters to climate scientists all over the world and asked them one question.

How does climate change make you feel?

(The climate scientists begin speaking, simultaneously, from their places along the path. Ushers encourage the audience to rise and make their way along the path, taking as much or as little time as they like listening to the gardeners.)

Climate Scientist 3:

I feel like nobody's listening. Ok Sure, some people are listening but not enough of our leaders are listening – those that make decisions that influence all our lives. And climate change is affecting and will continue to affect all our lives.

Knowing how much is at stake, knowing that I am one of the few people who understand the magnitude of the consequences and then realizing that most of the people around me are oblivious. Some of the people are not only oblivious, they also do not want to understand. They have made up their mind, maybe based on the opinion of someone they trust, someone in their family, or a friend, maybe based on a political conviction, but certainly not based on facts.

Climate Scientist 4:

Let's picture this. There's this something—Earth—that we all have equal ownership to, can each use however we want. It is the source of life—its wellbeing is inseparable from ours. So when earth's wellbeing is threatened, we do what we always do: turn to the government and the law to define how this thing should be used. The law makes it so that you can't just build a house with your own money, on a piece of land no one has ever claimed. You can't just use Earth like that, it might be bad for others or yourself; you need to obtain a permit first!

The very same law, though, allows for a company to engage in activities that are proven to be bad for all of us. The company can legally keep receiving funding from investors, contract other companies to do part of those activities, etc. A corporate ecosystem that promotes those harmful activities can keep growing, and it seems the law is okay with that. It makes you wonder what we're protecting, wellbeing or wealth? Earth that we all have access to, or wealth that not all have access to?

One thing is clear: my wellbeing isn't the priority. Yours isn't. And if we're deliberately harming each other's wellbeing, why would we ever trust each other. So how does climate change make me feel?

Alone, like I never want to trust anyone with my wellbeing. Yet, together is the only way we can combat this.

Climate Scientist 2:

I used to think I was paranoid, but it's true. This earth is slipping away from us. She's been showing signs of acute illness for quite a while - certain behaviors that rarely occurred are starting to occur more often, and with heightened anger. I've tried to highlight these changes time and time again, but no one has paid attention. It almost seems everyone has been ignoring me completely, and I'm not sure why. Is it easier to pretend there's no illness, hoping it will go away? Or because they've never had to live without her, so the thought of death is impossible?

How can you ignore the severe sickness of someone you are so intricately connected to? How can anyone not feel an overwhelming sense of care and responsibility when those so dear to us are so desperately ill? How can you push all this to the back of your mind?

Climate Scientist 1:

Look at this mugwort - it smells so rich. I grew up eating bowls of warm mugwort soup. My mom told me it would warm my belly and clear my blood. Everybody in my town, whether they're the rich or the poor, has enjoyed this rich herbal scent of mugwort for a long, long time.

I came to this land to become an atmospheric scientist and a professor. I'm an expert in the physics and chemistry affecting the earth's climate system. I am also the daughter of a farmer. Both of my grandparents were farmers. I learned when to collect mugworts and when to wait for them to grow and bud their soft green young from my mother. Her knowledge came from the mother of her and the mothers of her mother. We grew up as stewards of the land, in relationship with the land, and we care about the future abilities of farmers to feed the world. And I am watching our world burn. Even these viable, strong mugworts cannot survive burning fields.

(By the time the audience passes Scientist 4, they have arrived at the setting of scene 4. Carl settles with them to watch the scene, still working with the wind chimes, now using one of the tin can telephone lines to attach a strap to carry it over one shoulder, on their chest.)

Scene 4: Intro to the Human Interference Task Force (HITF)

(Bastide is working in a lab. She has headphones in and is dancing dorkily while she works. There's a high table she is working at and a blackboard. Fabbri enthusiastically enters, surprising her, waving his arms, and flailing a letter in front of her until she removes her headphones. Carl takes a tool off the table - a bell or other small noisemaker - and sits down to tinker with adding it to the instrument, while watching the scene.)

Fabbri: What a fascinating problem!

Bastide: *(startled)* Aaa! Fabbri! Why do you always show up when I'm finally getting work done?

Fabbri: That isn't your real work. You know that, I know that. This! This is the real work.

Bastide: And why do I feel like I've heard this before?

Fabbri: We both know that semiotics is more important than kidney function.

Bastide: Oh we do?

Fabbri: Surely you'd admit that studying kidneys and cleaning up other people's messes is less important than the study of meaning, of communication, of how we transmit ideals from one person to another...

Bastide: Ideas.

Fabbri: Right. Ideas. Ideals too!

Bastide: Sure. Alright, break's over, I'm returning to my lowly study of vital body functions.

Fabbri: I couldn't have chosen a better example! The problem of semiotics and the transmission of meaning. Bastide, you're not hearing me. I'm holding in my hands something far more interesting and important.

Bastide: Fine. Speak.

Fabbri: The Human Interference Task Force in the United States –

Bastide: This again?

Fabbri: Listen! They have put out a call for proposals. How do you make long-lasting warning signs to mark their nuclear waste site - read!

Bastide: (Pushing away the paper he shoves at her) Oh, and you want to participate in the nuclear industry?

Fabbri: Think of it! They're planning to bury high-level radioactive waste at Yucca Mountain. Nevada. They bury it underground, where it decays for 10,000 years or more, up to a million years. The site is radioactive for over 10,000 years! If humans dig it up, they'll spread radiation around and die horrible deaths! But how do you stop them? How do you create a warning sign that lasts 10,000 years?

(Brill and Sebeok enter carrying a coffee pot and papers, sit at table.)

Bastide: Burying radioactive waste. This sounds like a fail-safe plan.

Fabbri: *(Ignoring the sarcasm)* Safe, except if humans dig it up! Imagine a group of people, 8,000 years down the line. They move to the area and begin to dig a foundation for some giant structure.

Sebeok: *(More ominous tone, in contrast to Fabbri's enthusiasm)* They find the waste, crack open the barrels, begin to explore...or maybe they don't dig deep enough to find it, but they all begin getting sick from radiation poisoning with no warning. Cancers multiply. No one can tell why.

Bastide: There, you've outlined a few of the reasons this is a terrible idea.

(Sebeok looks affronted)

Fabbri: True, but it's happening! The waste has to go somewhere. So the question they are asking is, how do we mark this site? How do we tell people thousands of years down the line that this place is dangerous?

(Bastide turns back to her lab equipment.)

Fabbri: How long has the entirety of written language existed, Bastide?

Bastide: 5,000 years.

Sebeok: So how do we communicate to others across a divide twice as long as written language has existed?

Bastide: Use pictures.

Fabbri: You're smarter than this.

Brill: Symbols change over time. Pictures won't mean the same thing.

Fabbri: Exactly. So what to do?

Brill: Create a comic strip. Stick figures. Those look like people, whoever the viewer is.

(Sebeok rolls his eyes, unimpressed, and turns to his papers.)

Fabbri: *(Draws the basic comic strip proposed on large paper or a whiteboard)* Sure – like so? Stick figure comes along, finds the barrels of waste. He opens the barrels, plays with the waste inside, maybe finds some use for it...and then he becomes miserably ill. A clear message. Problem solved?

Bastide: *(Has turned back to her work, and is not paying attention)* Sure.

Fabbri: Come on.

Sebeok: *(Annoyed)* A comic strip is genius, unless people 5,000 years ahead happen to read from right to left.

Bastide: Yes, then you've marked these barrels as the fountain of youth. There, we've all got it. Thank you.

(Bastide turns back to her work)

Fabbri: Your kidneys can't be more interesting than this. *(A pause)* This is what makes this problem fascinating! How do we communicate with other humans across a vast divide?

Sebeok: What communication endures over changes of culture, language, generation, when lives are at stake?

Fabbri: How do we imagine what civilization will look like in 10,000 years?

Brill: what if they build a train from Denver to Los Angeles? The tunnel route would pass right through yucca mountain!

Sebeok: They could have robotic machines that go rogue.

Fabbri: they could just ignore the signs. I've ignored plenty of no trespassing signs.

Sebeok: (*Indicating his notes*) So we look to history - which messages have lasted longest? Portions of the Old Testament were written around 900 bce, and some parts seem to come from even older sources.

Brill: Nonverbal communication! Here. (*Hold up letter - They've drawn a shape suggestive of the spike field*) How does this triangle make you feel?

Fabbri: uh? Indifferent. A little awkward.

Sebeok: the flood story in the Old Testament was derived from the Enuma ELISH circa 2000 bce , and some people are still scared the waters will rise and flood the earth.

Fabbri: And in Japan, stone markers 600 years old show warnings of the waterlines from past tsunamis, but we forget and build below them anyway.

Brill: what if I make the angle sharper. Fill a field with them. A threatening landscape.

Sebeok: too open to interpretation. The less people get to interact with and interpret the message the better. We need people who can enforce the story we want to be told. Who are tasked with that work from one generation to the next. A priesthood, totally in control of the narrative. How many years did the church rule Europe?

Bastide: Maybe we stop producing nuclear weapons and nuclear power instead.

Sebeok: Too late. The waste is already here. It's sitting on the ground at plants all over the country, waiting for people to spill it or blow it up or – and we keep making more. You know what they thought at first? Put it on a rocket and shoot it into space. Or into the sun.

Fabbri: But if it blows up during launch -

Bastide: The atmosphere is filled with radiation.

Brill: A field of thorns or spikes or something that looks like the DMV. No one wants to go there.

Sebeok: NO. This is all too uncontrolled. In the masses everybody reads differently, speaks differently, understands differently. Responds to different images...But if we can get everyone worshiping at the same altar and keep the message coming from that altar the same and holy and incontrovertible...

Bastide: No no no, everyone understanding is key. It can't just be your small group. That's the problem with science already!

Sebeok: (*A little affronted*) Meaning what?

Bastide: Only a few people understand what is safe and what is dangerous. They have trouble convincing others to listen to them. People die because we don't share the knowledge we have (*She pulls a pack of cigarettes from her pocket*).

Sebeok: (*Looking pointedly at her cigarettes*) People aren't smart enough. Or trustworthy enough.

Fabbri: (Interrupting the argument) Why don't we just use a written message? Make sure everyone can read it. What language will we speak in 10 thousand years?

(Silence.)

Fabbri: What language did we speak 10 thousand years ago?

Brill: he who has seen everything, I will make known. He saw the secret - discovered the hidden. he brought information of the time before the flood.

Bastide: what's that?

Brill: Gilgamesh. Only four thousand years and already you can't understand me.

(Brill exits)

Sebeok: I have a speech to prepare for.

(Sebeok exits)

Fabbri: How do we pass a message without shared language?

Bastide: *(lighting a cigarette)* how do we pass a message WITH shared language?

Fabbri: *(Regarding the cigarette)* Still?

Bastide: Always.

Fabbri: I want to stop humans of the future from destroying themselves, but I can't even get you to stop smoking!

Bastide: By participating in the industry, you support it.

(Fabbri makes a face)

Bastide: What, you disagree?

Fabbri: No. I think we start to think. That's how you approach a problem, you start. And then you see where you go.

Bastide: But you have to think about where you're standing. Where is it you're starting from?

Fabbri: I'm starting from my own two feet.

Bastide: You're such a man.

Fabbri: Excuse me?

Bastide: You heard me fine.

Fabbri: Well, I wanted to give you a chance to take it back.

Bastide: You can't start where you are standing. You have to back up.

Fabbri: Fine. *(He steps backwards a few paces)* There. What is different from here? The waste exists. They are burying it. We do not have a say in that.

Bastide: So we just go along, tackle the problem they ask of us?

Fabbri: This is where we are starting.

Bastide: Fine. So say this moment is the beginning. Where are we trying to go?

Scene 5: Communication Diagram Movement Sequence

(A shift in movement, soundscape - we are in the same place but in a different moment. Movement sequence to music.)

Fabbri: in the beginning god created the heaven and the earth

Carl: What next?

(Movement continues. Then Sebeok enters holding a clipboard and begins to lecture. Carl listens, and Bastide and Fabbri play the parts of Sebeok's speaker and listener.)

Sebeok: In order to consider how we communicate across divides - especially divides of 10,000 years or more - we have to understand how communication works.

Carl: And then what?

Sebeok: Which is infinitely more complicated than it appears to the untrained observer (gesture to audience). It isn't a process of direct sharing of information - more of a process of translation. Impacted by chaos.

We start by thinking about the speaker.

The speaker is a mystery. They can be pictured as being a black box (*Bastide makes a box around her head*). Some kind of input goes into the box - (*Sebeok mimes input going into Bastide's head*) images and sounds and sensations - and something comes out (*Sebeok mimes something emerging from Bastide's head*) - speech. how it works inside is hidden from me. We don't know how a speaker comes up with a message - Hello, goodbye, don't smoke that, get in line, build an ark, get out of my sight - whatever it is.

(Brill appears holding a large tin-can telephone and places one can in Bastide's hand and one in Fabbri's)

A speaker decides he has a message to communicate to another being - the listener. As there is no direct neuro-electrochemical passageway between the brains of the speaker and listener, the speaker must transmit the message across the distance between, yes? (*To Bastide*) transmit the message "I'm sorry for your loss."

(Bastide rubs her heart in a gesture of sympathy, holds her palm to the can in her hand, and blows across her palm into the can. Fabbri responds to the emotion emanating from the can in his hand.)

Our speaker must create a code - language, words, symbols, writing, expressions - and share their message via this code. A translation process, if you will. From the thought in one's brain, to the words

one speaks. So. Message is encoded. Transmitted. Because of entropy, the message can never be identical with the initial thoughts of the speaker. Every step in the process introduces chaos to the order.

(Bastide begins to swing the can, shaking the string between her and Fabbri.)

The listener is a second box. The listener receives the message, but has to interpret the message. Decode it. He hears the words, but also the tone, the body language, perhaps has heard similar words before, sifts through his memories and finds ones using similar words and the listener relies on these memories to help him interpret this message. We don't understand this process, but we know it happens.

(Bastide swings harder, making large waves in the string. Fabbri joins in.)

Stop that! Like the speaker, the listener interprets messages in a process we don't understand fully. We have some idea, the speaker is not a completely black box.

(Bastide and Fabbri begin to tangle the string around themselves, winding their way closer together.)

Please stop.

But there are so many layers, so many unknowns...our understanding of his process shades off into unfathomed dusk...

(Bastide and Fabbri join hands and run off across the field in a tangle of string and tin cans.)

In talking to one another, we are fighting entropy.

Sebeok: STOP THAT! I SAID STOP THAT! LISTEN TO ME!

(Sebeok follows Bastide and Fabbri, waving his clipboard. Carl picks up the instrument and leads the audience towards the next group of climate scientist monologues.)

II FINDING THE VOID

Scene 6: Climate 2 - Climate Change Information Montage

(The audience once again follows the climate scientists along the edge of a small field to the next scene.)

Climate Scientist 4:

Climate change as an issue is being framed like an all-or-nothing problem. And tv and twitter aren't helping! Climate change must be an absolutely catastrophic Doomsday phenomenon, or it is not

important. Climate solutions need to be single actions that fix everything completely, or they aren't worth doing. As scientists, we are required to be absolutely, completely certain, and if we are not then we obviously have no idea; no room for nuance or judgment in a 30 second sound bite or 150 characters.

But the reality is that climate change is, almost certainly, not going to cause a Hollywood-style sudden apocalypse. It is best thought of as a ubiquitous, insidious process that will influence almost everything, sometimes in ways that are not at all obvious. Think about this, Climate didn't cause the political tensions that led to the 'Arab Spring', but drought and high food prices were definitely a factor; growing global wealth inequality is not due to climate change, but the fact that human emissions disproportionately affect nations with the least resources to deal with them does not help.

We need to stop thinking about the Doomsday and think instead of the Everyday.

Climate Scientist 1:

I have the best job security of anyone I know. We used to joke that the climate change models we made would never be proved right or wrong, because we'd never reach that point. Now we get to see it happening in real time. It's more exciting than we ever could have dreamed a decade or two ago!

That is, until you think about the consequences.

Fields flooding. Forests burning. I have never known so many suicidal farmers. Our food growers are close to giving up. And then you think, I have to tell people what's coming! That's my job! You sit down and you write and write and write and nothing comes out. Nothing that captures the imagination or worry or urgency of...anyone. Your words fade out, floating into the air, dissipating into unfathomed dusk...and nothing changes. Why?

I sit down in an air-conditioned laboratory and model to predict Climate Change. Thinking about farmers, my friends and my family who watch their fields and precious youngs burning, I feel guilty about my surroundings. I am more desperate to change something on my end, to speak up for increasing awareness. Is someone listening to me...? Please echo with me.

Climate Scientist 2:

How do i feel? I don't know about you but sometimes i feel so desperate to be understood I could fill this page all black and it wouldn't be enough. Imagine how a medical doctor feels having to inform their patient, an old, life-long friend, of a dire but treatable diagnosis. There is a similar closeness between climate scientists and the planet. There's a sense of wonder and respect. But the friend angrily disregards what you have to say, for a variety of very human reasons, and you watch helplessly as the pain and illness unfold over the rest of their shortened life. I feel frustrated that my friend won't listen. But I hope they will listen to other doctors and come to accept the diagnosis. I hope that we see ourselves as the patient.

Climate Scientist 3:

I feel like I will be the worst old man - "I told you so" will be my catchphrase. But when I think it through and think about what that means 'on the ground' so to speak, for humanity, then I realize, I don't want to be that grumpy old man. Because that would mean that global temperatures and sea levels have risen. I told you so. That we experience more extreme extremes in weather, and more often. I told you

so. That people are suffering through drought, bushfires, and floods more often – who wants that for the world’s future?

Sometimes I wish I could occupy other people's brains and just make them do what was right and good. If only I could place my knowledge in an altar and let people worship it as they worship the words of the saints. I'd form my own religion. Create my own commandments. Commandment: i am the lord thy god. Commandment: thou shalt have no other gods before me.: thou shalt not consume the long-dead flesh of prehistoric plants that sit in black-rock form under so many mountains. Thou Shalt not disturb my holy places. Thou shalt protect each other. And each other’s children and each other's children’s children. Thou shalt inconvenience thyself for their safety. Thou shalt inconvenience thyself for their safety. Thou shalt inconvenience thyself for their safety.

Scene 7: Garden 2 - Voyager

(Carl and the audience arrive at the next scene. Alex is planting seeds. They are located in an area overshadowed by mugwort with little sunshine or space to grow, but he ignores this. Florence arrives, notices Alex, and approaches.)

Florence: *(With extreme care)* What are you doing?

Alex: What’s it look like? Planting.

Florence: But that’s not going to work.

Alex: What do you mean?

Florence: Those can’t grow there.

Alex: Seeds wanna grow.

Florence: No, not there - they’re all overshadowed by mugwort. They don’t have any space.

Alex: They’ll be fine. I don’t have time to pull everything else first. Do you not trust me?

Florence: But that’s -

Alex: Fine! If you know better, do it your way.

Florence: That wasn’t what I meant -

Alex: I don’t know why we’re bothering anyway, we’ll never grow enough for next season without the others working harder. But I never get to decide.

Florence: Maybe if we can clear a little more -

Alex: You sound just like Carl. Telling me what to do, telling me I'm wrong. I thought you were more realistic than that.

Florence: *(Shrinking back a little)* What else can we do?

Alex: Get out. It's everyone for themselves now.

Florence: We're not there yet.

Alex: No? Then keep planting! I'm done.

Florence: No don't -

(Alex throws the seeds on the ground, grabs a bag and starts stuffing stores into it. Florence drops to the ground and frantically begins picking up the seeds. Carl approaches, carrying their instrument and some of Bastide's lab equipment and pens, trying to incorporate these into the instrument bundle. Florence turns her body to shield Alex from Carl's view.)

Carl: Are you busy?

Florence: Yes actually!

Carl: Sorry, I meant to ask - can you help me? I need a hand. Wait, what are you doing? Those can't grow there.

Florence: They're seeds. Seeds want to grow.

Carl: They can't grow all crowded by invasives. You've got to clear it first!

Florence: No time.

Carl: Where are they supposed to get sunlight? That won't grow enough food for all of us.

Florence: We grow what we can. Time to face reality. *(Florence continues to plant, every once in a while handing seed to Alex to fill his bags.)*

Carl: We have to work together.

Alex: That's not how I see it. Don't see you working much.

Carl: But -

Florence: Leave her alone, Carl.

(Rudolph enters, carrying a spray bottle with a long tube)

Rudolph: Scuse me! Carl, could you give me a hand.

Carl: I was actually hoping you would help me! I'll help you if you help me back.

Rudolph: Deal! Hold this and pump.

Carl: Pesticides?

Rudolph: Of course not! I would never do that to Mother Earth, our collective womb. It's a homeopathic mixture. One part per million the juiced essences of native plants.

Carl: And you think it'll work?

Florence: No, it won't, how many times do I have to tell you -uh

Rudolph: Oh, I'm sure it will. I left it out under a full moon!

Florence: *(to Carl, slightly panicked)* He's lost all sense of reason.

Alex: He never had any.

Florence: Exactly!

Carl: Let's go ahead and consider this an experiment. Who knows? It's something to try.

Rudolph: Thanks. Well what are you doing? You said you needed help.

Carl: Yes! Can you hold this? *(Holding out the wind chimes)* I'm trying to fasten them -
(Alex notices what Carl has been doing with the chimes, tin cans and lab equipment.)

Alex: What are you doing? That doesn't look like clearing.

Carl: I'm building!

Florence: Building what?

Carl: A tool -

Florence: That does what?

Carl: Well, more of an instrument -

Alex: Like, for music? What good is that going to do?

Carl: Look, if we can't communicate, we can't achieve anything, right? We have to learn to talk to each other. Better than we can now. What if I could make an instrument that let me connect my brain directly to yours to transmit messages. A way to ACTUALLY EFFECTIVELY INFLUENCE other people's behavior.

Alex: You talk fine. Way more than enough, if you ask me.

Carl: if we had a way of talking to each other that inspired change - the zebra finches - the birds -they can actually affect each other's physiology with what they say - or sing -

Florence: That's ridiculous, we need to be working -

Carl: See! No one listens!

Rudolph: Carl, the need to find blame in every situation can be a toxic trait.

(Rudolph looks unimpressed, others don't even look up.)

Carl: Look, what did we do when we built the first spacecraft that would reach the outer planets?

Alex: Spent a lot of government money.

Florence: Now that's an idea.

Carl: We sent messages! A message in a bottle, to the far away stars - communication is always the question, and always the answer! Like this bell, no matter what else it says, it says "listen to me." Listen to me. Or these letters. They're saying something. Something big. Without ways to talk with one another, we're lost!

Rudolph: Are we talking about Voyager again?

Carl: Look, we sent a satellite off into space - it's still out there! 16 billion miles away and counting! - and what did we decide to put on it?

Rudolph: You use the royal we now?

Carl: Very funny, just cause no one else saw reason doesn't mean it wasn't collectively the best idea humanity has had in -

Alex: Right, you put a record on a spaceship. Your proudest achievement. Yowling at the stars. *(Florence grins.)*

Carl: Not just a record! The most vital pieces of humanity - the highlights of humanity's creation, condensed into one metal record. The most important things we could share with another planet. Imagine another being out there finding that! Finding someone saying something big.

Alex: They'll have a nice selection of music from around the earth. If they can figure out how to play the record at all. Well done.

Carl: How would you feel finding a message from another planet, even if you couldn't understand what it said? We said, "We can only explore the universe for the first time once. We only have one chance to introduce ourselves to any beings who this spacecraft might encounter over the billions and billions of miles." And we sent them the best of humanity. In faith that they'd find a way to understand us.

Florence: How does any of that matter? By the time any of your space-beings find Voyager, we'll be long gone.

Alex: Choked out by the plant we brought here ourselves. That's the best of humanity for you.

(Small pause in which others look doubtful to blatantly annoyed.)

Rudolph: Here, I'll help. We'll add a strand of mugwort. Homeopathy, you know.

Carl: Great, thank you.

(Carl and Rudolph leave, working on the instrument.)

Alex: *(Pulling out a sack and filling it, Florence helps)* Stick it up your ass science boy.

Florence: Alex! Really?

Alex: He thinks he's so much better than everyone and we don't know anything. But he doesn't even have a stockpile.

Florence: I think he suspects us.

Alex: He can't prove anything.

Florence: I wish you wouldn't steal things, Alex.

Alex: Why do you care so much what I do?

Florence: I'm scared you're going to get in trouble.

Alex: Well I'm not scared. I'm not scared of him.

Florence: Of course not.

Alex: He just doesn't get it. When the time comes only the strongest will survive. The big ones will chase away the little ones. Then who'll be in charge? Me, that's who. *(Florence looks a little horrified)* And I'll take you with me. But no one else. *(Florence looks gratified, and continues helping Alex.)*

Scene 8: HITF Solution Propositions

(Carl walks off, carrying the bundle of tin can telephones and chimes with him. They quickly come to the HITF set, in a new location, where the table is strewn with papers and empty coffee mugs. Bastide is still working at her table. As Carl watches, Fabbri enters, unzipping his coat.)

Bastide: Back from feeding the cats?

Fabbri: In the nick of time. They'd just started yowling at my back door.

Bastide: Couldn't Maria have done it, saved you the trip?

Fabbri: Maria doesn't space the saucers out enough. The littlest get chased away by the bigger ones. Bullies.

Bastide: *(Lighting a cigarette)* You've gone soft. Those cats have you trained.

Fabbri: I've always been soft. You're still smoking those?

Bastide: So surprised? It was only in your dreams that I quit.

Fabbri: You're a brilliant scientist. We all agree on that. But I've heard you cough. Sometimes you look like you're in pain. You're more tired than usual.

Bastide: They will be the death of me. Thank you, we've got it. Understood.

Fabbri: I've got a semiotic problem - relevant to our nuclear question - for you to untangle. How do you convince a friend to take action they don't want to take?

Bastide: This will get you nowhere.

Fabbri: Bastide - I don't want you to die. Call me selfish if you want, but I like having you around.

Bastide: I like having you around too, when you aren't trying to train me like your cats.

Fabbri: If only. Cats train the humans, not the other way around. Is it the same with you?

Bastide: Ask your herd of strays.

Fabbri: Always dodging the important questions.

Bastide: So, make this question important.

Fabbri: I have no interest in the opinions of cats.

Bastide: Except when they want to be fed.

Fabbri: Except then. What other use are they, besides yowling at my back door every evening?

Bastide: Well, longevity.

Fabbri: The nine lives are a myth.

Bastide: But humans have been soft for cats always. Haven't they been with humans thousands of years? Training us to care for them? Even been found worshipped in Egyptian tombs?

Fabbri: As long as humans exist, cats will train them.

(Brill enters, settles in, pours himself coffee)

Bastide: So teach your cats where the radiation lies, and maybe the problem is solved.

Fabbri: Good luck. Humans have never been able to train cats.

Bastide: So we take their opinion out of it...

Brill: Genetically alter them somehow.

Bastide: We make them highly sensitive to radiation. When the cats get sick, humans have to flee?

Fabbri: You wouldn't! To innocent cats!

Bastide: No, I wouldn't. But I had to see your reaction. Softie.

Fabbri: Color, then. The cats change color when they're near radiation.

Brill: That...could work.

Bastide: It's not bad for an old cat hoarder.

(Sebeok enters.)

Sebeok: Please take a seat. We've got proposals to look through. Voight, writing from Budapest, suggests concentric rings of warnings in the most important global languages. We keep adding rings for 10,000 years -

Fabbri: Boring!

Brill: Far too didactic.

Sebeok: *(A little amused)* Alright, control yourselves... next Stanislaw Lem writes from Poland. A science fiction writer! He says make artificial satellites, which transmit a message about the danger down to earth continually for thousands of years...but does he...no, he has no ideas about what language the messages should be in.

Brill: Pointless.

Fabbri: Ridiculous!

Sebeok: But there's more - he wants to encode plant DNA with a message about the danger, and plant these flowers only on Yucca Mountain. Interesting.

Bastide: How would future humans know to recode the plant's DNA?

Sebeok: Valid question.

Brill: What if the flowers stop growing there? The climate changes. We could have another ice age.

Sebeok: Well, it was an idea. This is what sci fi writers contribute, apparently. Brill, what have you got?

Brill: *(stands and moves to blackboard)* We abandon written language all together. It's too unreliable anyway. Nonverbal communication. Visceral. Emotional. Intuited rather than read. *(drawing on the blackboard)* We alter the physical land. Build a hostile landscape of thorns. Sharp, ominous angles. Threatening shapes. A place so hostile, you feel in your bones that nothing good can ever happen here.

Bastide: Except the one daredevil who decides to impress his teenage friends by braving it.

Fabbri: A kid after my own heart.

Brill : That's not the point -

Sebeok: Thank you! An interesting thought. Next please!

Fabbri: You go, Sebeok.

Brill: *(Under her breath)* We all know you're dying to...

Sebeok: All right. For my solution, I looked to history. One can't help but think of the Catholic Church as a monolith, unchanged throughout centuries.

Fabbri: Well...

Sebeok: *Relatively* unchanged. So we build a new church. A monastic order. An atomic priesthood. A religion whose central tenet is shunning one place. Yucca Mountain.

Brill: How would that last? I'd argue the pyramids have changed less than the church, and been around longer.

Sebeok: The same way the church has lasted. Each generation of priests trains the next generation, teaching them the danger of the repository site. They alone hold the knowledge, and they spread the religious command to avoid the site.

Bastide: Because who has ever ignored a religious command, eh?

Fabbri: *(Rolling his eyes at her)* Alright, but why the secrecy? Why not task the order with sharing the truth?

Sebeok: Entropy. Messages that are popularized will change. The more instances of translation, the more gets lost.

Bastide: But a plan that doesn't account for change will never reach the potential of human imagination! We don't know what to do with this waste - other than bury it under a mountain, which is far from perfect - maybe humans of the future have a better answer? Why assume we have reached the best one?

Brill: But what if the vital information gets lost before a solution is found?

Bastide: We take the chance? Evolution will happen. The key is to popularize the knowledge - to spread it to as many people as possible, to put as many minds to the task as we can find -

Sebeok: It's too dangerous. Control of the message is the only option.

Fabbri: Control of the message is *not* an option. Not a viable one.

Sebeok: What's your solution then? Do you have one? Or is it just whispering the repository's location in everyone's ear and hoping it is repeated for 10,000 years?

Fabbri: We do, actually. Bastide?

Bastide: *(As she speaks, Fabbri draws a cat on the blackboard. It's cartoonish, badly drawn, and looks ridiculous)* Humans have lived alongside cats since ancient Egypt - worshipped them, domesticated them - our plan capitalizes on this relationship, assuming that cats and humans will live nearby far into the future.

Brill: *(containing his laughter with difficulty)* Is that supposed to be a cat?

Bastide: We propose genetically altering cats to be sensitive to radiation, and to react to radiation by changing color.

Sebeok: That's -

Fabbri: Possible, we think. Then the cats change color in a noticeable way when radiation levels rise - such as when they approach Yucca Mountain.

Brill: But people would have to know why the cats changed.

Bastide: *(Discovering the idea as she speaks)* Which is why we build a culture in which cats changing colors means danger.

Sebeok: We what?

Bastide: We write songs about color changing cats, create legends, share stories with our children. Those children sing the songs to the next generation. Oral traditions are created. The stories evolve and shift and grow along with the culture, and the essential element - that cats changing color means danger - has a greater chance of being remembered because it is embedded in story -

Sebeok: You can't be serious.

Fabbri: You proposed creating an entire new religion -

Sebeok: And the religion of the neon cats is more believable?

Fabbri: More interesting, at least. It will capture the imagination! Children will dream of glowing cats!

Brill: Which will achieve what?

Sebeok: Nothing. Can we return to the land of sanity, please. If we created a priesthood -

Bastide: Then you saddle one unfortunate order of people with the task of protecting humanity forever. See how they like it.

Brill: True. We hadn't thought of that.

Sebeok: It will be their duty to humanity.

Fabbri: But maybe it's too much. To ask a priest to carry that knowledge. *(As Fabbri speaks, climate scientist 4 begins speaking in unison from the next playing space. As Fabbri gets gradually quieter, the climate scientist gets louder, pulling focus.)* It starts out as interesting, to know these important things, life and death information, cutting edge science - things the rest of the world doesn't know, needs to know, will die without knowing. You feel important, you're fascinated, you're drawn to the excitement, maybe the horror, of it all.

Climate Scientist 3: The biggest crisis you've ever heard of, and you see it ahead, and you have the chance to prevent it. Your work is vital. You are more important than you'd ever dreamed of being. You want to run through the streets shouting, tell the world how to act, order everyone to obey...

Climate Scientist 1: *(Taking over from CS# 3, leading the audience onward)* But they don't, do they? So you try again, because now you feel responsible, and the weight of that is heavy, and you take each person you come to by the shoulders and look into their eyes and say "Listen, the world is on fire but I know how to survive," and they laugh and turn away.

Climate Scientist 2: *(Taking over, leading the audience to the next space)* And the weight is heavier now, and you're getting desperate, and you grab them back, shake them, and they shrug and look the other way, and you know what will happen if they don't hear you, but they walk away, and you watch them disappear into the unfathomed dusk... And think the size of the Universe Unfathomable.

***** MISSING TEXT *****

III NIGHTMARESCAPE

Scene 8.5: Garden 3

(Carl and the audience arrive at the next scene. Carl approaches Alex, who is trying to stuff three bags of winter squash into two sacks. He looks behind him furtively, as though hiding. Florence stands guard.)

Carl: Florence, do you have a second? I need to test this thing. *(Taps the instrument, making a wind chime sound)*

Florence: Carl, not right now. Not here. Can we take a couple steps that way?

Carl: (ignoring her) Okay bite down on this and plug your ears. Bone conduction - you should be able to hear me in your skull now.

Florence: gdhbfjebdjd

Carl: (loudly) I'm going to turn it on now. *(It makes a sound)* How much more likely would you say you are, on a scale of one to ten, to wear shorts tomorrow?

Florence: hdgehbdhd

Carl: So...five? Six?

Florence: *(Removing instrument)* Why would I wear shorts while weeding?

Carl: I can build records to talk to beings in other galaxies, but not to you.

Florence: Well, talk doesn't really achieve anything.

Carl: *(Seeing what Alex is doing)* What are you doing?!

Florence: *(Standing in their way)* Nothing.

Carl: *(Pushing past)* Where did this come from?!

Alex: It's mine. I grew it, I stored it -

Carl: WE grew it!

Florence: We've got no time to get precious. There's not enough -

Carl: *(Trying to grab hold of a sack - moment of ferocious weight sharing as Alex and Carl fight over the sack, while Florence tries to intervene and shield Alex)* So this is your answer? Hoarding what you can and sneaking away?

Alex: I'm not changing anything. I've survived this long, I know what needs to be done, and I'm doing it.

Carl: What you're doing isn't working!

Alex: Maybe not for all of us. It's working for me. And her. Maybe we don't need the rest of you.

Rudolph: *(to Florence)* Is it working for you?

Florence: Stay out of this.

Alex: Screw your feelings. You do whatever silly thing you want, but I'm not going to let your problem get the better of me.

Rudolph: Everybody let's calm down, okay?

Carl: When we collaborate, we can create great things - ships that reach the outer plants and -

Alex: The stars. You're talking to the stars! The cosmos. The empty space. The infinite black. What do you know about the dark! You snipe at me and treat me like I'm stupid but you're out of your mind! The stars don't care! They don't care about you. About any of us. There's no one out there. No one's coming to help us. No one gives a shit about us. You sit there on your high horse, talking about teamwork and communication and adaptation and talking to the stars! Did you ever listen to me? Have you ever heard what I have to say? No, we're just supposed to listen and listen and listen -

Carl: I'm trying to save you! All of us! You can't survive alone.

Florence: He's not alone.

Alex: I'm planning to survive.

Carl: So are all of us.

Alex: It doesn't work like that.

Florence: Carl, leave him alone -

Carl: Fine!

(Alex tears the sack away from Carl, struggles to drag them all off. He can't lift them. Florence tries to help, but they can't lift it between them. Alex collapses on top of the sack. Florence wraps their arms protectively around him. Carl watches in disgust, then stumbles away, enraged.)

Scene 9: Climate 3 - Climate Despair Montage

(Carl leads the audience down another path, weaving between climate scientists.)

Climate Scientist 1:

I've watched things burning for so long, I don't remember what things used to look like. Fields flooding, or drought - farming used to be magic. Now it's endless uncertainty.

Sometimes I have this dream.

I'm going for a hike and discover a remote farm house on fire.

Children are calling for help from the upper windows. So I call the fire brigade. But they don't come, because some mad person keeps telling them that it is a false alarm.

The situation is getting more and more desperate, but I can't convince the firemen to get going. I cannot wake up from this nightmare.

Climate Scientist 4:

Our climate is changing. It's not a story from a science fiction book, or a Hollywood movie. This is happening. It amazes me that people still question whether we, as a species, are having an impact on our planet and climate. There are seven billion of us on the planet. Seven billion of us.

Seven billion people all needing food and water and energy and housing. We've built cities and roads, ploughed the land, domesticated animals, fished our oceans. Made wealth that accumulates like dew, condenses on a few hundred or thousand people and evaporates from the rest of us. I'm one of the seven billion, as are you.

I wish that climate change were not real. If climate change were not real, we would not have to be concerned about it. We wouldn't have to worry about the future of our water resources. We wouldn't have to worry about sea level rise increasing the flooding of our coastal cities and of low-lying, densely-populated areas of poor countries. Above all, we wouldn't have to worry about climate change being yet another source of conflict in an already tense world.

Life would be so much simpler if climate change didn't exist. But as scientists, we don't have the luxury of pretending.

Climate Scientist 2:

The truth is that more often than not I just feel tired. What motivated me to become a scientist in the first place was my desire to explain and model things we did not understand. It was never about preaching to others about an existing scientific consensus. I feel uncomfortable in this strange role. But my sick friend still won't listen when I tell him he needs treatment. I know I'm not supposed to treat my friends, but I do it anyway because, when it comes to this catastrophe, the world is my patient. How can I separate my loved ones from that? Even when they don't listen, even when they ignore my warnings and sign themselves out of the hospitals and refuse to hear me calling them back, when all I want is to care for them. But they don't see how all of us will be sick soon. And what if we have to be? What if we have to blow it all up to start anew?

Climate Scientist 3:

My overwhelming emotion is anger; anger that is fuelled not so much by ignorance, but by greed and profiteering at the expense of future generations. I am not referring to some vague, existential bonding to the future human race; rather, I am speaking as a father of a ten year-old girl who loves animals and nature in general. Horses are her favorite. As a biologist, I see irrefutable evidence every day that human-driven climate disruption will turn out to be one of the main drivers of the Anthropocene mass extinction event now well under way.

Public indifference and individual short-sightedness aside, I am furious that politicians are stealing the future from my daughter, and laughing about it while they line their pockets with the figurative gold proffered by the fossil-fuel industry. Whether it's sheer stupidity, greed, deliberate dishonesty or all three, the outcome is the same – the destruction of the environmental life-support system that keeps us all alive and prosperous.

My frustration with these greedy, lying bastards is personal. Human-caused climate disruption is not a belief – it is one of the best-studied phenomena on Earth. Even an idiot can understand this. As any father would, anyone threatening my family will be on the receiving end of my ire and vengeance. This anger is the manifestation of my deep love for my daughter, and the sadness I feel in my core about how others are treating her future.

Mark my words, you plutocrats, denialists, fossil-fuel hacks and science charlatans – your time will come when you will be backed against the wall by the full wrath of billions who have suffered from your greed and stupidity, and I'll be first in line to put you there.

Scene 10: HITF 3 - Transition scene to nightmarescape

(Carl leads us to another table surrounded by Task Force members in the middle of a continued argument. Bastide is leaning on the table, hand on her heart, looking ill. Sebeok stands over the table, papers in his hands. Carl settles to work on the instrument, winding mugwort strands around the pieces to hold them together.)

Sebeok: The problem with all your solutions is a lack of control. You're naming a problem and letting everyone come up with their own answers. We have to control the narrative, otherwise the future is doomed. We know religion has successful roots at Yucca Mountain. It clearly needs to be part of the solution.

Fabbri: What are you talking about Sebeok?

Sebeok: The protesters have proven to be a problem now, but the sacred nature of the site will be an asset in the end - it's already significant, we just need to change the context.

Brill: What protesters?

Sebeok: Sure now, but that's a temporary situation. What I mean is that we can harness that power and shape it - the mountain has a long history of religious significance, so why not capitalize on that?

Brill: Significance to who?

Fabbri: No one lives in Nevada. Didn't they test bombs out there? It's a wasteland, right?

Sebeok: Well -

Bastide: Sebeok. What are you not telling us?

Sebeok: Nothing! Nothing new. The resistance to the repository is a temporary setback -

Bastide: What resistance?

Sebeok: The local community - in the region, Yucca Mountain has religious significance -

Fabbri: To who?

Sebeok: The local tribes, the ... *(he checks his notes)* the Western Shoshonne.

Bastide: *(Grabbing his notes and scanning them)* Sebeok! How did you never tell us this? Yucca Mountain is on Indigenous lands?

Sebeok: You never asked - I figured you knew.

Brill: And how would we know?

Sebeok: I assumed you were professionals and had done your own research. The point is, Indigenous resistance to the waste repository is stopping our efforts.

Bastide: They never ceded this land to the federal government - how are we even considering this?

Sebeok: They've been offered compensation for the land, but they're refusing it.

Brill: Which means they still own it.

Sebeok: Well yes, that's the problem - without their accepting the money, they continue to claim rights to the land -

Brill: And you thought this was still a viable plan?

Sebeok: It wasn't *my* idea, Brill -

Brill: No, you're just carrying it out. How's that working?

Sebeok: Compensation for the land was *offered*.

Fabbri: *(Reading over Bastide's shoulder)* At a rate of 15 cents per acre? Would you make that trade?

Sebeok: That's not -

Bastide: *(Reading off Sebeok's papers)* "Over 1,000 nuclear bomb tests conducted at the Nevada Test Site adjacent to Yucca Mountain make the Western Shoshone nation the most bombed nation on earth." You thought we knew this, and that we supported this plan anyway?

Sebeok: What, you thought there was no one there? That Nevada was just empty? There's always resistance, no one *wants* this repository in their backyard, but -

Fabbri: I thought we were talking about empty space! A blank canvas to build on.

Bastide: I said we should never have gotten involved.

Sebeok: It's a process of choosing the place of *least harm*. The waste has to go somewhere.

Brill: And the place of least harm just happens to be on native land?

Fabbri: We have to put it somewhere else.

(Brill leaves the table in disgust, walks to the other side of the grove of trees, and begins to dig a grave. Bastide crosses to the grave and watches.)

Sebeok: Location isn't what we were hired to address. We have a specific set of parameters. It's Yucca Mountain or nowhere.

Fabbri: This seems extreme Sebeok.

(While Sebeok speaks, Bastide stands, stricken. By the end of his text she is walking away in the direction the audience can watch her go for the longest time.)

Sebeok: You want extreme? A surface-level leak of high level waste - a successful terrorist attack on the piles of waste we have stored above ground at reactors around the *country* right now - the state, country, world, atmosphere poisoned by radiation. An above-ground storage site in Georgia is making animals who live on the water radioactive right now - what do you think is happening to the humans?

Fabbri: Fuck your priesthood, Sebeok.

Sebeok: I don't think this is productive anymore.

Fabbri: No, I don't think it is.

(Fabbri leaves angrily.)

Sebeok: Maybe we're done for the day.

(Sebeok leaves with his clipboard.)

Scene 11: The Nightmarescape

(Brill continues digging. Carl steps forward, noticing. Brill whistles the zebra finch melody.)

Carl: That song! Where did you learn that song?

Brill: Who knows? Someone sang it to me long ago. A dream, maybe. That ought to be big enough.

Carl: What are you doing?

Brill: *(Measuring)* She was shorter than you. Here. Help me dig. *(Tosses a shovel to Carl)*.

Carl: The ground's too hard here.

Brill: Hard work. Dirty work. Real work. I've watched mugwort move north year by year. I notice the clouds and their shapes. Cumulus. Nimbus. Mushroom. Cirrus. Sometimes caring about someone means digging a hole.

Carl: So that's it? She's just dead now? She's gone and in a hole that someone else dug. The story's over?

Brill: Maybe that's not the right story. Look around you.

Carl: Sometimes I feel like I woke up floating - an ocean where my room used to be. Only water where the nightstand was. No lamp. No door. Everything is collapsing. I don't know what to say anymore.

Brill: Let me tell you a story. I used to live in Utah, you know. A town called St George. Ranchers. Cows. Open space. Freedom. I liked being a kid there. My aunt did too. She told me about what it was like back when she was young.

She used to play in the summer snow, shake it from the oleander trees. She would look up through the leaves like stained glass in a variety of greens and open her mouth to catch the shower of light pink dust that fell from the sky like a little miracle. Just kids playing in fallout dust. Mushroom clouds over Yucca Flats. She got cancer in 1950. And 58. And 71.

Carl: Sometimes I think nothing good has ever happened here.

Brill: She would've gotten it more if it hadn't gotten her. She's buried next to her brother. He worked on the ranches closest to the test site. All that land. Empty save for a few hundred cows and a few hundred people. Where better to put a test site? As long as you launch when the wind blows away from Las Vegas all those atoms land on the dry dirt and the dry people. Poor people. Rural people. A family. The neighbor's uncle. One of their kids. their friend. their grandma. 928 nuclear bombs upwind of my little town.

Carl: Sometimes I think nothing good will ever happen here.

Brill: They'd told us it was safe, and we believed it until we started getting sick. We had to learn to take care of ourselves. We had to prove what was killing us. Imagine. Having to prove to your own government that they are killing you. Imagine that they already know. Imagine that maybe they don't care. Look (*Hands Geiger counter to Carl, who straps it into the instrument and starts wielding it*) point it anywhere and measure the radiation. Test, test, test. Test before the bomb, during, and after. Document. Prove.

Carl: (*Watching the numbers on the counter, starting to add it to the instrument.*) It's rising - how can they not care?

Brill: We care. When there's no one coming to save us, what choice do we have? Fight or dig. Fight until we're forced to dig. Dig while fighting.

Carl: We can't stop this.

Brill: No.

Carl: People are going to die.

Brill: Some faster than others.

Carl: (*Turning to the instrument again*) I don't know what to say. (*After a moment, Carl turns the tin can around, listening instead of talking. As they listen, music begins. Carl follows the sound from the tin can, leading the audience to the next scene.*)

Scene 12: HITF 4 - The Argument

(*Carl journeys on, coming upon the next scene. On one side, Sebeok sits at the table, writing. Fabbri enters, enraged.*)

Fabbri: *(to Sebeok)* What have you done?

Sebeok: Hello?

Fabbri: Do not say hello to me, sir!

Sebeok: Don't call me sir, Fabbri.

Fabbri: Don't mock me.

Sebeok: I don't know what you mean.

Fabbri: Well then what fuck is this, *sir*?

Sebeok: I don't think I owe you an answer.

Fabbri: No?

Sebeok: It doesn't seem my answer would help you.

Fabbri: No, I guess you're right. I can answer it for myself I think. What is this? Is it possibly the report? What report? Oh yes, the human interference task force report. wait, if it were that report, it would have reference to the solutions proposed by the range of people consulted, wouldn't it? Oh yes, and here's Brill's proposal to build hostile architecture, and here's labeling the site with rings of inscriptions in different languages, and here's the technologically implausible idea of building satellites that beam coded information down from orbit, and OF COURSE here's an arrogant semiotician's plot to establish an atomic priesthood - but for some reason, the ray cat solution is nowhere to be found here, can you see that? Yes? No, no we don't find it here at all! Her work! Bastide's work!

Sebeok: I knew you would overreact.

Fabbri: WHO'S OVERREACTING??!!

Sebeok: FABBRI. CALM. Down. I have no obligation to carry Bastide's proposal -

Fabbri: We were a TASK FORCE not a DICTATORSHIP.

Sebeok: If anyone hears anything about this project it'll be about your cats!

Fabbri: Further proof that her idea was a good one! It captures the imagination!

Sebeok: If we come to the Department of Energy with COLOR CHANGING CATS they'll throw the whole thing away!

Fabbri: Bastide's illness was just what you wanted, wasn't it? Color changing cats sounds ridiculous - offends your serious sensibilities.

Sebeok: Your role was to make suggestions, not decisions. That's my job.

Fabbri: And with Bastide out of commission and me by her bedside, you're free to submit whatever proposals you like - and I suppose when she DIED, it was just more CONVENIENT -

Sebeok: That's going too far.

Fabbri: Just one more ignorant smoker lost to lung cancer! Time to forget she ever existed, ever had an idea -

Sebeok: This isn't about Bastide! It's about our duty to the next generations - if I don't deliver a serious report, they'll ignore all of us and jeopardize humanity's entire future.

Fabbri: It's about you saving face!

Sebeok: Do you think I'm heartless? I lost a friend too. But I have a job to do. I work for the United States Government, and I don't have the luxury of mourning. *(Silence. Then, yielding:)* She was a very sharp mind. *(A pause)*

Fabbri: She left us in the dust.

Sebeok: I was charged with running a committee. Streamlining the process. You all were like herding cats.

Fabbri: Cats. Too difficult to train, eh?

Sebeok: I've always hated them.

Fabbri: *(Bitterly)* Entropy. Unexpectedly chaotic. Weren't we? *(Carl looks up at this.)*

Sebeok: Yes.

Fabbri: Loss of control isn't the enemy, Sebeok. Stasis is.

(Fabbri pulls a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, and turns to leave. Sebeok stares after him. Fabbri pauses, lights the cigarette, and takes a drag. He blows smoke to the sky, and whistles the zebra finch song. Across the playing space, Carl looks up, recognizing the song. Fabbri exits, Carl follows, and the audience follows them.)

IV. DREAMSCAPE

Scene 14: Climate change future thinking

(Carl leads the audience past two climate scientists speaking. Two others play bird and wind whistles creating background sound.)

Climate Scientist 1:

The calms are getting shorter, and in the worst times, I wonder if we'll only know crisis from now on. The wildfires burned my favorite mountain last summer. I've returned there for years, hiked through miles of woods and camped in the same alpine meadow. This year the woods were blackened spikes, reaching towards the sky. Black and red earth. Like a photo negative of the damp green forests I'd known before. The world reversed. The most sinister landscape I've seen.

And then I came over a ridge - the sun was hot, without the leaves and needles, and you could see forever, just angled black spires against the sky. There below me, through the not-trees, the former-trees, was a spring, filling a small valley. Water emerging from the burnt soil, rushing over stones downhill. And around it was the most brilliant green, so bright it almost hurt to look at. Not the green of the forest I remembered, but the neon of new grass emerging from catastrophe. Beginnings of mugwort, fire lilies, lodgepoles, the plants that know how to survive destruction, and the ones that only reproduce in flames.

I don't know what we're moving towards, or if we'll survive it. But when I've spent all day failing to tell someone we've passed another milestone towards unliveable, and I turn away and bury my head in my hands, ready to give up, I see that brilliant color against the inside of my eyelids. I want to take you there. I want you to see it.

Climate scientist 2:

How do I feel? In the minuteness of my life this is a universe of relevance.

I'm watching my house burn down and I know every photo and family heirloom and thrift-store chair we bought when we first moved in together is turning into ash. There can be no change more profound. Accelerated decomposition. What was once a chair is cinder and ash and particle, not even the same substance it once was. And in the street the cars keep passing like it's just another day and not the end of the world. But sometimes, when the moon is full, I feel a fierce love overtake me and I love every piece of charred wood and every person passing in their own little car in their own little world. It comes most easily on summer nights when the heat makes me kick my sheets off and moonlight in the window calls me out to the road and I see I'm not alone - the streets flood with our hot and restless bodies out onto the asphalt under pools of sodium yellow streetlight and cool blue moon. I watch the car headlights slide over roadside mugwort weeds and endless rows of corn like some spotlight operator went rogue and said - 'forget the actors! Look at this instead' - and each and every inch of unimportant dirt and green looks like the lynchpin of the world. and I feel like my heart is cracking open and it feels good.

Scene 15: The Dreamscape

(Carl continues, leading the audience into the final meadow. The Gardeners sit around a fire pit. Lights twinkle in the small fruit trees surrounding it. In our production, movements, lifts and acrobatics for this scene were devised by the performers. See video for visuals.)

Carl: Do you ever just wish you were a bird?

Rudolph: All the time!

(Carl starts to jump in and respond, then steps back to listen to Florence instead.)

Florence: I'd like to be something with wings and no responsibilities. So not a Canada goose. Too much group responsibility. And all that migrating. Fighting the wind all the time. No thanks!

Alex: How about a pigeon? You can live on scraps in city centers and not work a day in your life. No weeding to do, no hoeing or planting or seeding.

Florence: Just stolen French fries...

Alex: Exactly! *(Florence glows at this agreement)*

Carl: How do we keep going, knowing we're failing?

Rudolph: *(Outstretching arms recklessly)* I'd want to be a turkey vulture.

Florence: *(Immediately unimpressed)* Dream big, why don't you?

Rudolph: No really. The songbirds have their advocates. The beautiful birds have theirs. Let me love something ugly and necessary. I am the garbage disposal of the universe! The god of roadkill and unwanted abundance.

Florence: The harbinger of death.

Rudolph: Or of salvage and rebirth.

Carl: *(Getting lost in the dreamworld a little)* If I were a seagull I could fly away from every conversation I don't want to have and task I don't want to do. I could spend my time chasing children and playing in the waves and never have anything more serious to say.

Alex: What's the point though? I am where I am. I weed and seed and plant and harvest. Every year the mugwort will creep north and the crops will be fewer and I'll pull it out by the roots as best I can and

probably fail. How am I supposed to imagine not being me? *(Florence wraps their arms around Alex, a protective but smothering embrace.)*

Carl: That's sad.

Alex: No it's not, it's acceptance.

Carl: Then acceptance is sad.

(Alex shrugs. Florence begins to lift him, and can't. Carl joins. Over the next three texts Carl and Florence lift Alex. Alex is passive and relaxed. We use movement from acro therapeutics. Text is dreamlike. After a while, another person is lifted - in some way the flyer shifts between characters. Fabbri is invited in, lifted, and folded into the sequence.)

Florence: Then let me imagine for you. I imagine a garden with no weeds to pull because you're surrounded by friends who'll pull them with you. I imagine a place where no one is dying faster than any other. And where the most important words are the care that comes out when we try to talk to each other, even when we fail.

Fabbri: *(Stepping forward)* Communication will always be dusk - ambiguous, ever changing.

Climate scientist 1: *(Entering)* I imagine you've figured out the perfect crop rotation and you never have to buy nitrogen or phosphorus to spread on the soil. I imagine a well that gets you through the droughts and a hoop house that gets you through the cold snaps. I imagine the coal power plant downtown shut down by community vote and the space filled with wind turbines and solar panels.

Fabbri: Messages and signs are meant to spread as much as possible. To be accessible to all, and to evolve as they pass from one person to another.

Brill: *(Entering)* We need new languages, to replace these old, worn ones. Visceral. Emotional. Intuited.

Climate Scientist 4: *(Entering)* Songs and stories that draw lines from my experience, to yours, to theirs...

Fabbri: If the work can be related to curiosity, to imagination...ray cats were brilliant, not because the idea solves the problem, but because it can captivate others. Inspire them to use their imaginations to seek better solutions. Next steps, the road ahead.

Climate Scientist 2: *(Entering)* I may not see the answer in my lifetime. But I can begin the conversations where the answers will be created.

Florence: I don't know if this is a happy ending -

Rudolph: But here we are let loose in open fields!

Fabbri: The grey unfathomed dusk between us - maybe it's not the end but the beginning. The grey dawn.

Carl: I imagine I am a bird. I imagine I am one of thousands. My flock flows like water over the land. We change shape so often it feels like we have no shape at all. We build nests and hatch young. We fly together and I don't know where we are going or how to get there but I know we need to turn to not run into the barn. I know we need to turn right now. Someone next to me knows where to go after that. Someone next to them knows where to go after that. Not one of us knows the whole route.

Scene 16: Post show - Finding the Tree

(Carl leads us into the grove of fruit trees. It is beautiful, surprising. We recognize its design from the instrument Carl has been building - the devices are there, the tin can telephone lines, the branches and twine. It is filled with written messages and tin can telephone lines that dangle among branches emitting spoken messages from battery-powered speakers. The messages come from past audiences, climate scientists, and messages recorded in the audio booth by the current audience during the arrival scene at the start of the play.)

Carl: Here. I made this for you.

(The audience and performers listen to messages, read messages, and are invited to participate - they have the option to add messages, hanging ribbons on the tree inscribed with things we hope never to lose to climate change, based on the work of the climate ribbon project. Gradually they move from the tree to the fire in the herb-surrounded fire pit for conversation.)

(End of Play.)