

## *Chapter 9*

# Staging Sustainability: Making Sense of Sustainability in HE Dance, Drama and Music

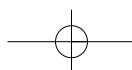
*Paul Kleiman*

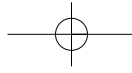
*Universities bear profound responsibilities to increase the awareness, knowledge, technologies, and tools to create an environmentally sustainable future. (ULSF, 1990)*

*What we use on stage is a way to demonstrate that we are accountable to our relationship with the planet. (May, 2008).*

## **Introduction**

While for some disciplines the sustainability agenda is regarded as ‘natural territory’, the relationship of the performing arts (dance, drama and music) and the act of performance with that agenda is somewhat indirect and problematic. As a consequence, there are a wide and diverse set of understandings, discourses and practices around the notion of sustainability. These range from basic issues such as the use and recycling of the materials used in performances and productions through to more complex issues such as of the role of the arts as a tangible means of articulating and disseminating ideas about sustainability by, for example, exploring narratives of consumption and investigating our relationship with landscape and the environment. There is also the important issue of personal and professional sustainability in the face of an uncertain future. This chapter will explore and illustrate the manner in which some of these discourses and practices around sustainability appear in performing arts HE.





## Working with sustainability

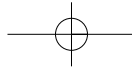
In 2008, a job advert appeared for a professorship in performance design and technical theatre at the University of Colorado. Alongside the usual outline of the responsibilities of such a position, the advert asked for: ‘an understanding of sustainability issues and willingness to articulate environmentally sensitive designs’ (*Inside Higher Ed*, 2008). Such a requirement probably would not have appeared until relatively recently, and its inclusion might be perceived as an indication of the extent to which the sustainability agenda has impacted on the performing arts in HE. Yet in their report *Sustainable Development in Higher Education*, Dawe et al investigated ‘how different subject disciplines taught within the higher education system are contributing to creating sustainability literate graduates’ and reported that the arts and humanities subject areas generally – and the performing arts in particular – identified the largest number of barriers to embedding sustainability in the curriculum. Those barriers ranged from an ‘awkward fit with the subject area to lack of staff expertise, irrelevance, financial restrictions and limited institutional commitment’ (Dawe et al, 2005, p4).

When I started out to research material for this chapter, I sent an email in September 2008 with the subject line ‘Do we do sustainability in higher education performing arts?’ to the online discussion lists of the three main subject associations in HE in the UK: the National Association of Music in Higher Education (NAMHE), the Standing Conference of Dance in Higher Education (SCODHE), and the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD). The email asked colleagues to comment on and, if possible, provide examples of how sustainability is understood and how it manifests itself in these subject areas. I received a number of interesting and detailed replies, many of which have informed what follows. But one in particular struck me as exemplifying both the possibilities and problems of addressing the notion of sustainability in the performing arts.

The response in question was from a colleague in music, and he provided several examples of where he thought music is addressing, or could address, sustainability. The first was through the use of open, sustainable technologies to generate and disseminate music as a way of countering the ‘throwaway culture of mobile phones, mp3 players etc.’ This included teaching ‘as much programming as we can afford to so that students can make their own solutions’.

The second was through encouraging and enabling students to be active listeners, who have ‘the respect for sound which comes from recording it, shaping it and listening to it in an active and engaging way.’ It is through this ‘active listening’ that one can build ‘a sustainable aural understanding and thus a greater relationship with the changing sonic planet. The [use of] mp3 in-ear headphones is isolationist and should be strongly discouraged.’

The third was a recommendation to read Eric Clarke’s book, *Ways of Listening: An Ecological Approach to the Perception of Musical Meaning* (2005). This is an explication and application to the field of music of James Gibson’s influential ecological perceptual theory – which assumes that structure is inherent in the



environment, not a construction of the mind, and that perception and action are tightly interlocked and mutually constraining (Spiegelberg, 2006; Zhang and Patel, 2006).

For the fourth he suggested ‘the study (and performance) of Beethoven. While I might think it’s time we listened to composers of the 21st century, Beethoven did die in 1827 – how sustained do they want it? (this is yet another reading of sustained, sorry)’.

Finally, he wrote that the biggest challenge for music in the academy is ‘the perceived need to adapt to uncharted changes in a mass-media dominated bums-on-seats driven climate’.

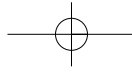
Although all the examples provided interesting and potentially valuable avenues to explore further, perhaps the most memorable and relevant of his comments was the final sentence of his message: ‘I’m afraid I don’t understand the term sustainability at all. My apologies.’

The apparent confusion is, perhaps, unsurprising. While it is very noticeable – and the more one looks, the more noticeable it becomes – how the words ‘sustainable’, ‘sustainable development’ and ‘sustainability’ have become part of the strategic, operational and everyday discourses and practices of both HE and the arts, one of the consequences of their ubiquity has been a multiplicity of definitions, understandings and misunderstandings of what the terms actually mean. The influences and impact of these various and varied currents and streams of discourse around the notion of sustainability manifest themselves in a plethora of ways in HE dance, drama, music and performance.

## Sustainability and performance

*Performance is increasingly regarded not only as a creative practice and mode of representation but also as a vital means of embodied enquiry and as analytical trope (Arts and Humanities Research Council [AHRC], 2009).*

If one looks beyond and behind the word ‘sustainability’, and understands it – at least in part – as an active concern with the relationship between humans and their environment, and the impact and consequences of the activities of the former on the latter, then it becomes obvious that there is a sustained and rich tradition of that concern manifested in the performing arts. The arts, generally, have long been a powerful source of awareness, understanding and appreciation of our environment, whether it is the ‘natural’ world or the urban and industrial landscapes that the majority of the world’s population now inhabit. There are numerous works of art, literature and music in which natural, urban or industrial environments play a major role, and many of these – for example the art and literature of the Romantic movement – have left powerful and indelible marks on our individual and collective psyches. As Wasserloos reminds us: ‘The deep embedding of natural experience has remained a characteristic of Northern literature,



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painting and music as a mirror of nature since the 19th century to the present day' (Wasserloos, 2007, pp1–2). Similarly, there are numerous works of art and performance that tell of humankind's often baleful impact on these environments and the communities that inhabit them.

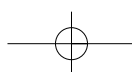
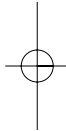
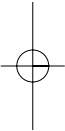
Performance is not only an action and an art form. In the discourses and practices of performing arts higher education, it is also a field of study and a method of inquiry (or a way of knowing):

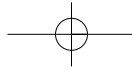
*Arts-informed research ... may trump conventional forms of research when it comes to generating questions or raising awareness of complex subtleties that matter. The deep strength of using arts in research may be closer to the act of problematizing traditional conclusions than it is to providing answers in containers that are watertight. In this sense, the products of this research are closer in function to deep conversation and insightful dialogue than they are to error-free conclusions (Eisner, 2008, p7).*

The arts can be seen as ways of doing, knowing and being that often involve multiple paradoxes and the holding-in-mind of many interpretations and positions (Danver, 2007). The philosopher Alva Noë, who has worked closely with dancers and choreographers, states that 'experience, consciousness, is always necessarily embodied. It is always, necessarily, environmentally situated'. He goes on to say that performance – particularly dance – 'is an enactment or modelling of the fundamental fact of our relationship to the world around us' (Noë, 2008), and that dancers perceive of their dancing not simply as a form of doing or action but primarily as a research tool, a way to explore the world and to generate knowledge and understanding.

There can be no doubt that a concern with sustainability and, particularly, an interest in the relationship between performance and the environment has become an established strand in those discourses and practices. In 2005, the AHRC established its £5.5 million *Landscape & Environment* transdisciplinary research programme. The aim of this four-year programme is to develop 'arts and humanities understandings of landscape and environment in distinctive, innovative and engaging ways' (AHRC, 2005). Following the announcement of the programme, a symposium of academics from a range of disciplines including anthropology, archaeology, architecture, dance, drama and theatre, geography, literature, music and the visual arts, met under the title *Enchantment and Haunting: Creating Landscape Through Performance* to explore how the AHRC's programme might be used to investigate, in particular the relationship between performance, landscape and environment.

The AHRC's initiative was welcomed at the symposium 'not least for how it might demonstrate distinctive arts and humanities contributions to our understanding of the bio-physical world, human relations to it, and their current constellation around both various environmentalisms and politics of place' (Clang, 2005, p2). Among the many responses and ideas that the symposium





produced, the emergent interest in ecologies of performance was highlighted 'for its concern with relating epistemologies of performance and ecology, and for mobilising notions such as sustainability and recycling in performance studies' (Clang, 2005, p4). There was also an interest in 'investigating site-based or site-inspired "eco-theatre", various environmental and land arts, and the role of performance in environmental education and environmentalism more generally' (Clang, 2005, p4).

The importance of considering performance in relation to sustainability is that it is both a conceptual and practical terrain that has the potential to generate and provoke genuine shifts in attitude and behaviour by engaging the emotions and senses as well as the intellect, its ability to disturb accepted attitudes and behaviours and its facility to make the ordinary extraordinary.

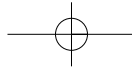
### Sustainability and drama

*Theatre reaches audiences in a very personal and compelling way, touching both the heart and the mind. Because theatre can also impart technical information and encourage action, it addresses one of the most notorious challenges of the sustainability project: moving people from the status quo to sustainability action (Clark, 2008, p5).*

In 1882 Henrik Ibsen wrote the play *Enemy of the People*, which is set in a small town that has invested heavily in tourism by developing a spa. The local doctor discovers and points out that pollution from the town's tannery is causing serious illness amongst the tourists visiting the spa. The doctor is denounced by the local authorities, businessmen and press for threatening to ruin the town's reputation and prosperity. Ultimately he is cast out of the town and branded 'an enemy of the people'. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation Director Siân Ede, in an interview for *The Ashden Directory* (a website dedicated to 'bringing together environmentalism and performing arts') says of the play:

*[It is] the most interesting play in the field of environmental issues, and it's one which I draw on all the time ... It is a brilliant piece of writing that shows the political dilemmas surrounding environmental issues. It is the most fantastic example of somebody standing up for freedom and not looking at the commercial aspects of it. You see how unpopular the hero has to make himself and the effects on his family as a result of that. It ought to be done over and over again. You can hardly better that play (Ede, 2004).*

While productions of *Enemy of the People* are relatively rare nowadays, there is a more recent history of education engaging directly with environmental issues and the performing arts. The Theatre in Education (TIE) movement that thrived in the UK, particularly from the mid-1960s to the 1980s, focused its work in schools.



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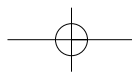
Working and engaging *with* (rather than simply performing *to*) young people and teachers, TIE companies developed, produced and performed drama-based programmes ‘around a topic of relevance both to the school curriculum and to the children’s own lives’ (Jackson, 1993, p4). TIE was an ‘issue-based’ movement, and many of the companies pursued an agenda that enabled them to combine theatre, politics and education in a unique, potent and sometimes controversial mix.

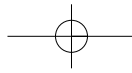
One of the most influential of the many environmentally focused plays and projects produced by the TIE movement was *Drink the Mercury* by David Holman, who has written a number of plays directly tackling environmental issues. First produced in 1972 by the Belgrade TIE in Coventry, the play is still performed regularly around the world – an example, perhaps, of creating sustainable theatre? The play dramatizes, in an extraordinarily powerful way, the medical and social impact of 36 years of industrial effluent poisoning on the once-prosperous Japanese fishing community of Minamata and tells the story of the struggle of the surviving victims and their families for justice and reparation. (The famous ‘Minamata’ series of photographs by W. Eugene Smith (1996) is an eloquent and terrible testimony of that particular tragedy.)

An important feature of both the plays mentioned above<sup>1</sup> is the quality of the work – not only in the original writing but in their production. One of the challenges of the sustainability agenda in regard to the arts and arts education is that, perhaps inevitably, the discourses and practices of sustainability are often framed and influenced by the rationalism of the scientist and the pragmatism of the bureaucrat rather than the passion of the artist. Each, of course, is important in its own way, but when the artistic agenda is set by the scientists and/or the bureaucrats, the art tends to lose out. Siân Ede provides a typical example of this tension:

*All our [arts] grants are for early research and development activities. I’m now half-wondering whether to do an arts and environment strand. But I think I probably won’t call it that. I’ll probably say we’re continuing to do R&D but this will include environmental issues. My fear is that very poor applications will come forward. My joke is always – and this is absolutely true – when I was on the Science on Stage and Screen Committee at the Wellcome Trust<sup>[2]</sup> and we asked for things addressing science we got I can’t remember how many plays with the title Hello, hello, hello, Dolly, Dolly, Dolly. They were all really dreadful plays about cloning. Nothing had broken boundaries. Quality is the key issue. When people write to me with an application and say ‘We’re writing a play to change the world and these are the issues,’ I say, ‘Well, who’s going to disagree with that? But are you any good?’ (Ede, 2004).*

That ‘But are you any good?’ describes one of the tensions inherent in tackling sustainability in the performing arts curriculum. As Ede points out, very few if any would disagree with the sustainability agenda, so the ‘what’ is not in question. It is the *how best to do it* in a way *that works* which exercises those with responsibil-





ity for designing and delivering meaningful learning experiences in HE performing arts.

Such developments in HE performing arts are a response to some of the 'hard questions' identified by Kershaw about the theatre's relationship with and response to the environment and environmental issues, and 'the ambivalence of theatre in the face of a calamity for humanity' (Kershaw, 2007, p10).

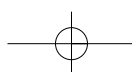
One of the hard questions Kershaw asks is 'In what ways has the theatre been unavoidably embroiled in the ecological mess that is climate change?' (Kershaw, 2007, p10), and anyone who has been involved in theatre-making and production will know that the theatre has a complex and difficult relationship with the notion of sustainability. On the one hand, the theatre is intensely frugal in the acquisition and use of resources, and simultaneously wildly profligate in relation to their disposal. In the face of the general lack of financial resources in the arts and the resulting, often severe, limitations on production budgets, designers have to be particularly innovative in their design solutions, and very resourceful in acquiring the materials to realize their designs. The constraints also mean that, when purchasing items, frequently only the cheapest options are or, up until recently, were pursued. Inevitably, questions such as where and how items such as timber were sourced were rarely if ever, considered.

More troubling, perhaps, from a sustainability perspective was the matter of disposal once a production had finished. The traditional theatre flat of painted canvas stretched over wooden frames was eminently recyclable. It is now rarely if ever seen, and many companies and theatres utilize the latest (affordable) developments in materials and technology.

Building-based theatre companies had scenic stores, props rooms and wardrobes where scenery, properties and costumes could be kept to be used or adapted in other productions. But in many cases, at the end of the last performance, the crew would dismantle everything on stage and much of it would go into a skip to be taken away to some landfill site.

Those practices were frequently replicated in the conservatoires, universities and colleges where the performing arts were studied and performed. With the increasing focus on sustainability and the environment, while the skip may still stand outside at the end of a production period, it now often remains partially filled or even empty, as policies – both explicit and implicit – on the acquisition, use and re-use of materials are taken on board and implemented.

Some HEIs are actively developing and promoting the sustainability agenda as it relates to the performing arts. In 2008, the Centre for Excellence for Theatre Training at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London took part in the Mayor of London's Climate Change Action Plan for London Theatre, with a series of focused discussions and open access forums. The conference, *Theatre Materials/Material Theatres* (Central School of Speech and Drama, 2008), included discussions on 'sustainable theatre architecture' and 'sustainable theatre production'. Central is also involved with the Bartlett School of Architecture at UCL on a project to rethink the design, fabrication and purpose of performance spaces and to explore 'issues of sustainability and spatial innovation'.





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As an example of the importance of demonstrating an institution's sustainability credentials, a new music and performance centre was recently heralded by West Chester University in the USA for winning a prestigious rating for 'features including use of products made from recycled materials, locally manufactured or harvested wood products from a sustainably managed forest, materials with low or no volatile organic compounds, and energy-efficient mechanical and electrical systems' (Arnold Creek Productions, 2009). While this is, of course, admirable and welcome, in the light of Ede's question 'But is it any good?' there is no clue as to whether the building works as a performance space.

Theatre companies, too, are now proclaiming their sustainability credentials. The 2009 tour of the musical *Cloudcuckooland*, produced by the Onassis Programme at Oxford University, which supports new writing based on classical Greek drama, claimed that it was perhaps 'the first ever environmentally sustainable touring musical' (Eastman, 2009). This claim, perhaps inevitably, set off a series of questioning and sceptical exchanges when it appeared on the SCUDD list, the discussion list of university drama departments (SCUDD, 2009).

As the notion of sustainability has risen up the agenda for HE, its integration into institutional practices has occurred not only at the macro level of strategy and policy, but also at the micro level of course content. Increasingly, performing arts students encounter course curricula and content that requires them to consider and demonstrate an awareness and understanding of sustainability issues in relation to their subjects of study and related activities.

In a typical example, students on a new technical/production degree course at Rose Bruford College (RBC), a specialist higher education performing arts institution in Kent in the UK, have to 'demonstrate an awareness of the environmental issues associated with the live performance industry' (RBC, 2008). This learning outcome is developed at all three levels of the degree course, but is only assessed at level three in a module that has the assessment task outlined in Box 9.1.

RBC is now planning to introduce a sustainability element into all its courses (Email correspondence with author, 2008).

### **Box 9.1 Project specification for RBC level three assessment**

Students will develop a specification for a real-world live performance event with

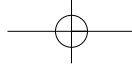
EITHER

a) Full costings, technical specifications, creative overview, profit/loss breakdowns and environmental impact assessment for taking the performance to two commercial venues.

OR

b) Full costings, technical specifications, creative overview, environmental impact assessment and completed grant application (Arts Council, Lottery or others) for taking the performance to two venues. (RBC, 2008)





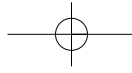
At another UK HEI, the University of Chichester, although sustainability per se is not addressed formally on the curriculum there is, as in other institutions, a significant amount of concern among students and staff about environmental issues. A senior lecturer reports that a considerable proportion of final year devised productions devote an element of their considerations 'to the narratives of consumption and sustainability' (Email correspondence with author, 2008):

*In the past three years we have had a number of ecological disaster zones (exploded suns, waste-filled landscapes, spaces where the 'natural' reclaims a redundant 'technological' space etc.) Following more recent work and collaboration with an architect who designed 'rain water capacitors' blending glass architecture with gardening, I have engaged with two undergraduate devising processes that have engaged with 'sustainability'. United States Of Austerity (2006) drew on the imagining of an unsustainable city and worked from Paul Auster's novel Country Of Last Things and Donald Barthelme's They Called For More Structure (Email correspondence with author, 2008).*

At Edith Cowan University in Australia, one of the project units on its Contemporary Performance course was based entirely on sustainability and the environment. Students created four original performances that were presented as part of the university's annual theatre festival. The festival was staged entirely at an inner city site that, 14 years previously, had been a heavily degraded and polluted industrial area, and which, by the time the Peppercorn Festival took place in 1997, had become a rehabilitated wasteland developed according to permaculture principles. The titles and descriptions of the productions, which were produced to coincide with World Environment Day, demonstrate very different takes on the project theme (Edith Cowan University, 2007).

The examples above demonstrate that there are clearly a number of opportunities and a variety of ways in which sustainability issues can be and are being addressed in performing arts curricula. The first example, namely ensuring that students have properly to consider the environmental impact of their plans and activities, is a more formal approach that is more in line with the legal and regulatory framework that has developed around sustainability. While it is clearly essential that students who are planning careers in the performing arts – particularly in the areas of design, management, and technical production – are made aware and have some experience of sustainability considerations in relation to their work, it does not necessarily follow that they themselves are interested in or committed to sustainability. Rather like health and safety regulations, there is a danger that sustainability issues can be perceived merely as something that has to be taken into consideration along with everything else.

In the other examples, students are creating work that has a sustainability theme. This approach may not have the *force majeure* of legal obligation, but it does provide the opportunity, through the process of research, devising, performance and reflection, for students to develop, individually and collectively, an



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intellectual, emotional and even a political commitment to the idea of sustainability. Students are increasingly creating work, and being increasingly *encouraged* to create work, that is ecologically themed because it is clear that it is important to society and its survival. This work is then communicated through various arts and performance practices to the wider culture, where it contributes to the ‘warming effect’ around sustainability. One of the academics who responded to the question ‘Do we do sustainability in the performing arts?’ described this process as follows:

*While it may be considered that the performing arts subject areas do not share the immediacy of subjects such as architecture or engineering sciences, they are valued by colleagues in these areas who welcome the opportunity to either use the performing arts as a means of communicating ecological sustainability issues and practices, or draw on the knowledges (e.g. of space, narrative and decision-making processes) of the subject area (Email correspondence with author, 2008).*

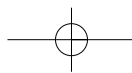
One curriculum area in drama/theatre that does lend itself to the integration and promotion of sustainability is that of applied drama or applied theatre (Nicholson, 2005). Both terms are used to describe an expanding set of practices and accompanying discourses in which theatre and drama skills and a range of other skills are applied in specific contexts such as communities, prisons, schools or hospitals. The teaching of applied theatre and drama necessarily involves equipping students with the pedagogic experiences and tools that enable them to conceptualize and develop into their roles as emerging applied theatre practitioners who will, as graduates, go out into the community and find work in such roles, thus continuing and expanding the field and themselves.

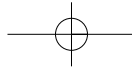
Courses in applied theatre have embedded in them many opportunities for students to engage with sustainability issues through placements and the development of applied theatre projects for and with a range of arts and non-arts organizations and communities. At the Central School of Speech and Drama and at Royal Holloway, University of London, part of this provision enables students to set up and run projects in developing countries. Providing these curriculum opportunities creates the first layers of potential sustainability, that is, the students develop links (and future jobs) while on their course, and through undertaking projects in the community develop their skills as practitioners.

### Sustainability and music

*Imagine if all sound-related disciplines added soundscape listening, analysis and topics of acoustic ecology to their course curriculum (Westerkamp, 2001, pp3–4).*

The ethnomusicologist Jeff Titon describes music as ‘a human bio-cultural resource’, and writes about ‘worlds of music’ as ecological systems (Titon, 1984,





p9). The subject area of music – which in HE includes related areas such as sound technology and sonic arts – offers a range of approaches and activities that provide opportunities for students to enhance their thinking and practice on the environment and sustainability.

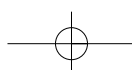
The importance of, and threats to, the physical environment – both locally and globally – has been paralleled, but in a much smaller way, by a recognition of the importance of the acoustic environment. In this respect, the development of the discipline of acoustic ecology has been very significant. The underpinning philosophic principles of acoustic ecology were developed 30 years ago by R. Murray Schafer in his seminal book *The Tuning of the World* (Schafer, 1977). A sophisticated and complex discipline, it focuses on the relationship, mediated through sound, between living beings and their environment and it considers the acoustic environment as a ‘soundscape’ in much the same way one might consider the physical environment as a landscape. For example, there are ‘soundmarks’ that are analogous with landmarks, and which are sounds of particular significance (e.g. waterfalls, church bells, trains) in a particular community or environment (Wrightson, 2000).

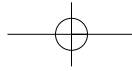
*Schafer’s terminology helps to express the idea that the sound of a particular locality (its keynotes, sound signals and soundmarks) can – like local architecture, customs and dress – express a community’s identity to the extent that settlements can be recognised and characterised by their soundscapes. Unfortunately, since the industrial revolution, an ever increasing number of unique soundscapes have disappeared completely or submerged into the cloud of homogenised, anonymous noise that is the contemporary city soundscape, with its ubiquitous keynote – traffic (Wrightson, 2000, p10).*

The influence of Schafer’s ideas can be seen, for example, in a 2008 project for music students at Bristol University called *Urban Soundscapes: Music in the English Town 1800–1900*. The project entailed second- and third-year music students exploring the 19th century soundscape of a particular city. According to the course documentation, they had to do this in ‘as specific and unique detail as you can muster, relating it to whatever concept of overall coherence seems to you most fruitful ... Give attention, where appropriate, to geography, architecture, institutions, communities and significant individuals’ (Banfield, 2008).

At Tufts University in Massachusetts, 100 students from across a range of disciplines worked with a composer to create a ‘cross-disciplinary audio exhibition’, using the university campus as a psycho-acoustic map. One of the aims of the project was to make people become far more aware of their audio environment, to think about and question the elements that go into making it. The instigators of the project also recognized that it had a political purpose in enabling people – through enhancing their understanding – to take or at least have some control over their acoustic environments.

Although neither of the projects above has nor makes explicit links to sustainability, they fall clearly into the category of work that raises an awareness of and





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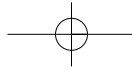
concern for the environment that is one of the essential first steps in changing not only peoples' attitudes but also their practices:

*Soundscape and acoustic ecology approaches are important to us pedagogically ... In these projects we explored a range of technologies that allow environments to be 'brought inside' the classroom, to be considered and reflected on and used as a source of musical expression. Whether this is a geographical or social environment, individual or collaborative reflections can lead to an increasing sense of environmental awareness (Savage and Challis, 2001, p38).*

One of the problems that music has in relation to sustainability (or any other non-musical topic) is that music, for many, essentially concerns itself with composition, performance and analysis – that is, it is all about the music, musicianship and musicology. However, reporting on a cross-disciplinary initiative that involved academics reflecting on how sustainability might be made relevant to their subjects and demonstrating how environmental sustainability could be integrated into at least one course, Wachholz describes an approach to a music curriculum that explicitly links music to sustainability. It takes the form of asking music students to explore a number of sustainability-related topics and questions (Wachholz, 2007, pp5–6). These include:

- What might be the consequences of global warming on the music and music traditions of African peoples and communities who have to leave their homelands due to drought and famine?
- How might an unclean or polluted environment affect musicians? (Example: an increase in asthma and other respiratory conditions.)
- How might music have contributed to the problem? (Example: the glorification of the automobile in popular music.)
- Exploring sustainability in music instrument production. (Example: Investigating what and how many different types of wood and other materials are involved in making string instruments, pianos and so on.)
- Exploring sustainability in music consumption. (Example: What is required of the environment for the production or dissemination of music – the energy consumption in mounting a huge venue concert, the energy needed and waste produced in the glass mastering, electroplating, stamping, moulding, metalization, lacquering, printing, and packaging of CDs or DVDs, the necessity of battery disposal for iPods and other such gadgets, and so on) (based on Wachholz, 2007, pp5-6).

If one accepts Titon's description of music as a 'bio-cultural resource' (Titon, 1984, p9) then one could add to those questions and topics an exploration of what it is to be a musician in a rapidly changing cultural environment (Bennett, 2008, preface). It is perhaps no accident that Helen Stowasser, in her foreword to Bennett's work, uses an environmental analogy:



*It is widely recognised that the survival of all living things on this planet depends largely on their ability to adapt to environmental changes. It is also acknowledged that plants nurtured in a hothouse (also known as a conservatory!) do not always survive when transplanted into the open air. Classical musicians are no different, and if they are to avoid extinction they need to develop the diverse skills required to survive in our present day multicultural, economic rationalist and computer-dependent society (Stowasser in Bennett, 2008, foreword).*

Although music is not immediately a candidate for the integration of sustainability into its curriculum, the examples in this section demonstrate that it – as a discipline – provides a number of fascinating and excellent opportunities to explore sustainability: from the personal to the practical and political.

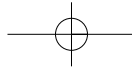
## Sustainability and dance

Dance, as with drama and music, has had a long-standing relationship with the environment and, particularly, landscape. This relationship has become ever more explicit with the development of organizations and companies such as Interdisciplinary Laboratory for Art, Nature and Dance (iLand) and Human Landscape Dance. iLand describes itself as ‘a dance research organization with a fundamental commitment to environmental sustainability as it relates to art and the urban context, cultivates cross-disciplinary research among artists, environmentalists, scientists, urban designers and other fields’ (iLand, 2009). Matthew Shute, the Artistic Director of Human Landscape Dance, writes:

*By plying the counter-tension between person and space, this group reveals humanity’s interdependence with our world ... The group treats the interconnectedness of man and nature through modern dance in public spaces (Shute, 2009).*

The concerns about the environment, and questions about sustainability and sustainable practices, have become increasingly the concerns of the discipline, and because many dance practitioners are also dance teachers in HE, there is a constant flow of ideas, practices and people between the dance world and that of HE dance. It is important to remember that dance is not just an art form but also a form of enquiry and research (Noë, 2008; Eisner, 2008), and the HE dance curriculum reflects these concerns. Dance courses and dance institutions have begun to explore questions that range from ‘How we can better understand the environment through movement practice?’ to ‘What are sustainable dance practices?’ and ‘What constitutes a healthy dance ecology?’

Also as with drama and music, one of the recurring themes in dance is that of personal sustainability, that is developing the knowledge, the skills and, importantly, the attitudes that might enable an individual to sustain a career in what is a



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particularly demanding and difficult field of work (Bennett, 2008, p1) Professional dancers, in particular, tend to have relatively short careers as 'working dancers', and teachers, researchers and practitioners in dance have grappled increasingly with the notion of sustainability, not only for what it means for individual dancers but also for what it means generally for dance. These and similar questions formed the agenda for a student-focused symposium on *Sustainability, Ecology and the Moving Body* (University of Northumbria, 2009) that explored ways that the discourses and practices surrounding sustainability might become core discourses and practices in the discipline of dance.

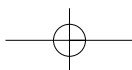
### Endnote

Finally, it is worth mentioning an alternative approach to encouraging students to engage with sustainability. Some US HEIs, as part of their strategic and operational commitment to sustainability, have recently begun to require that all students, regardless of their main subject of study, undertake a sustainability-related course. At Goucher College in Baltimore, for example, all first-year students are 'required to explore the ecological and/or policy dimensions of environmental sustainability', and they are offered a choice of 17 courses that range from the scientific to the philosophical and ethical (Goucher, 2009). One of the courses, *Consumerism, The Media, Popular Culture and the Environment*, is one that might well attract dance, drama and music students. The course description is, perhaps, a useful way to end this chapter on sustainability and the performing arts curriculum because it encapsulates many of the themes that have been discussed, as well as some of its aspirations for a more sustainable world:

*This course will examine the relationship between culture and environment. We will focus on how the mass media and popular culture create and perpetuate the mythology of the American Dream and the "good life"—with all its material abundance and consequent wastefulness. How does our culture talk about various forms of consumption? What is the relationship between the media, cultural and political elites, corporate entities, and the consumer? How do we, as an audience, receive, internalize, and operationalize these messages? And how can we escape the mantra of "more is better"? The course will include a strong experiential component meant to encourage students to live in more sustainable ways (Goucher College, 2009, p93).*

This chapter has demonstrated that while dance, drama and music in HE may well appear to have an 'awkward fit' with the sustainability agenda (Dawe et al, 2005), appearances can be deceptive. It is perhaps the nature of that agenda and, particularly, assumptions about how best it should be implemented that provide the awkwardness. It is clear that the performing arts not only have a long and significant history of creative engagement with environmental issues, but also that





they continue to play an important and influential role in the development and transmission of ideas, attitudes and calls to action in relation to sustainability.

## Acknowledgements

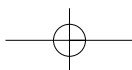
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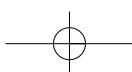
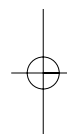
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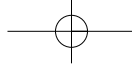




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## Notes

- 1 In a remarkable but potentially tragic example of life imitating art, on 21 February 2008 the *New York Times* reported a story under the headline 'Mercury Taint Divides a Japanese Whaling Town' ([www.nytimes.com/2008/02/21/world/asia/21dolphin.html?scp=1&sq=Mercury%20Taint&st=cse](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/21/world/asia/21dolphin.html?scp=1&sq=Mercury%20Taint&st=cse) accessed 1 February 2010). The story combines elements of *Enemy of the People* and *Drink the Mercury*. Taiji, a seafaring town in Japan, is (in)famous for its annual dolphin drive, involving the slaughter of hundreds of dolphins. The *Times* reported that high levels of mercury had been found in the mammals, and that a member of the town's council, backed by scientific evidence, was fighting a lone battle against the authorities and the local fishing community who insisted that the danger was overblown.
- 2 The Wellcome Trust is an independent charity funding research to improve human and animal health. Established in 1936 and with an endowment of around £13 billion, it is the UK's largest non-governmental source of funds for biomedical research.

