

Exploring Environmental Scandals as Staged Events

Do They Make the Case for an
Environmental Diamond Model?

It's a Scandal!

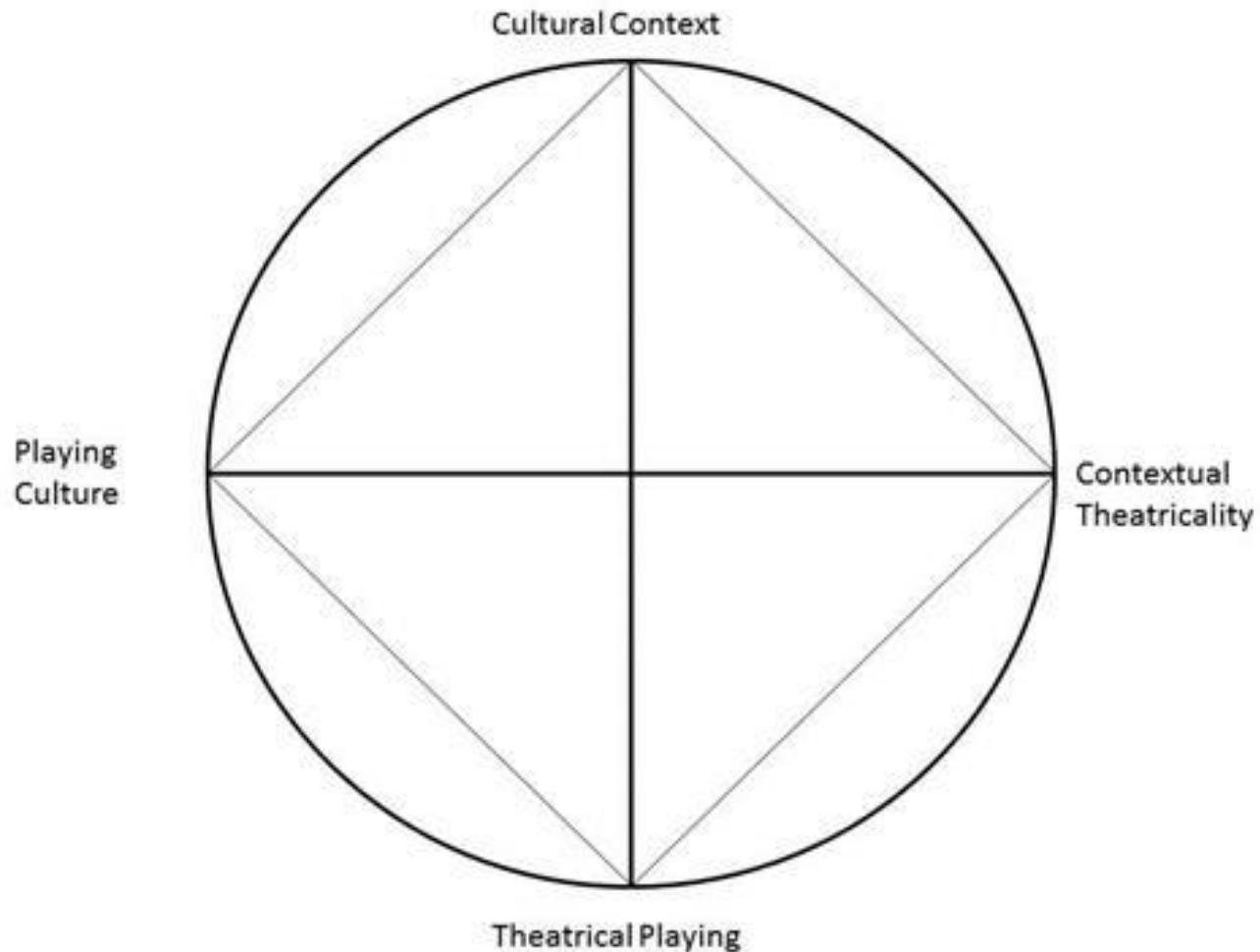
- 'From the polluted streams of Dr. Stockman's town to Beckett's ash cans and beyond, a largely negative ecological vision permeates the theater of this century.'
- 'Pervasive though it is, the specifically ecological meaning - as opposed to the mere theatrical presence of this imagery - has remained occluded [...]' (p. 25).

Una Chaudhuri (1994). "'There Must be a Lot of Fish in that Lake": Toward an Ecological Theater', in *Theater*, 25:1, 25-31.

Scandalous Subversion of Meaning?

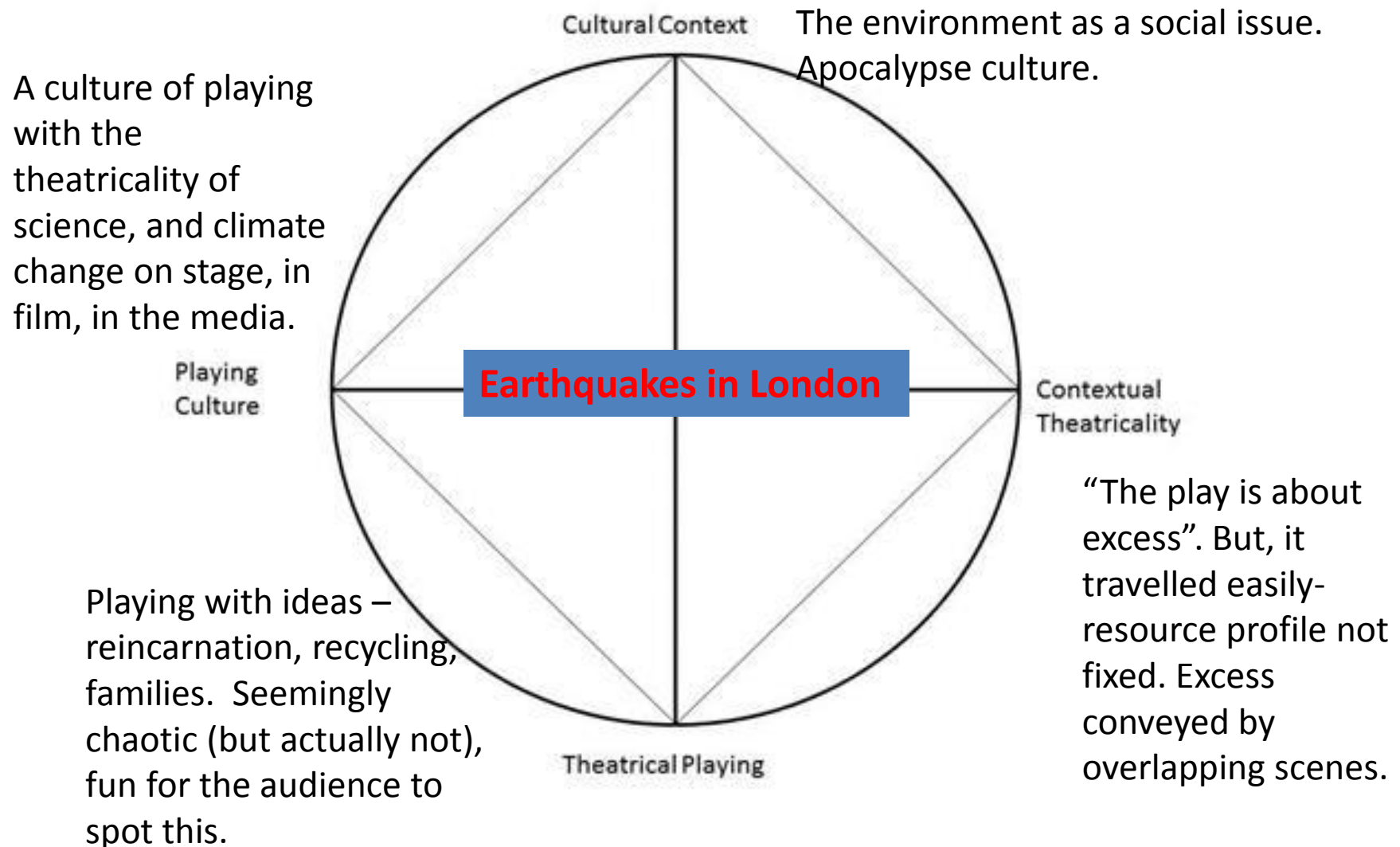
- Cultural divides: ‘In terms of planet earth, the environment is where life happens. [...] In terms of performance, an environment is where the action takes place.’ (Schechner).
- *Environmental theatre* and scenography is expensive and time-consuming because whole spaces have to be redesigned and constructed. (Schechner)

The Diamond Model



Willmar Sauter (2004). 'Introducing the Theatrical Event', in Vicky Ann Cremona, Peter Eversmann, Hans van Maanen, Willmar Sauter, John Tulloch, eds. *Theatrical Events. Borders Dynamics Frames. IFTR/FIRT Theatrical Event Working Group* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi), pp. 1-14.

The Environment in the Diamond Model - *Earthquakes*



Scandalous Environmental Theatrical Playing?

- December 2013 National Theatre production of Debbie Tucker Green's play *Nut*.
- A play about the relationship between dysfunctional family relationships, destructive human behaviour and self-harm.
- The cigarette is the highly sensory means by which self-harming burns are administered, and smoking (harm done with cigarettes used as intended) tropes harmful behaviour all round.
- The potential is there for spectators – all too aware of sitting in a pall of secondary smoke - to connect damaging human behaviour to environmental harm.

Playing Culture (1)

- Science-themed productions seem to delight in playing, or experimenting with, theatrical convention. Given the close connection between earth sciences and the ecosystem, environmental subtexts are often found in science plays.
- In Theatre de Complicite's *Mnemonic* there is a key scene in which the audience is asked to hold a leaf and, blindfold, run their fingers along its veins (pp. 6-7), in this way becoming directly connected, through nerve endings, nerves and synapses, to what is happening on stage, in the auditorium, and in the environment.

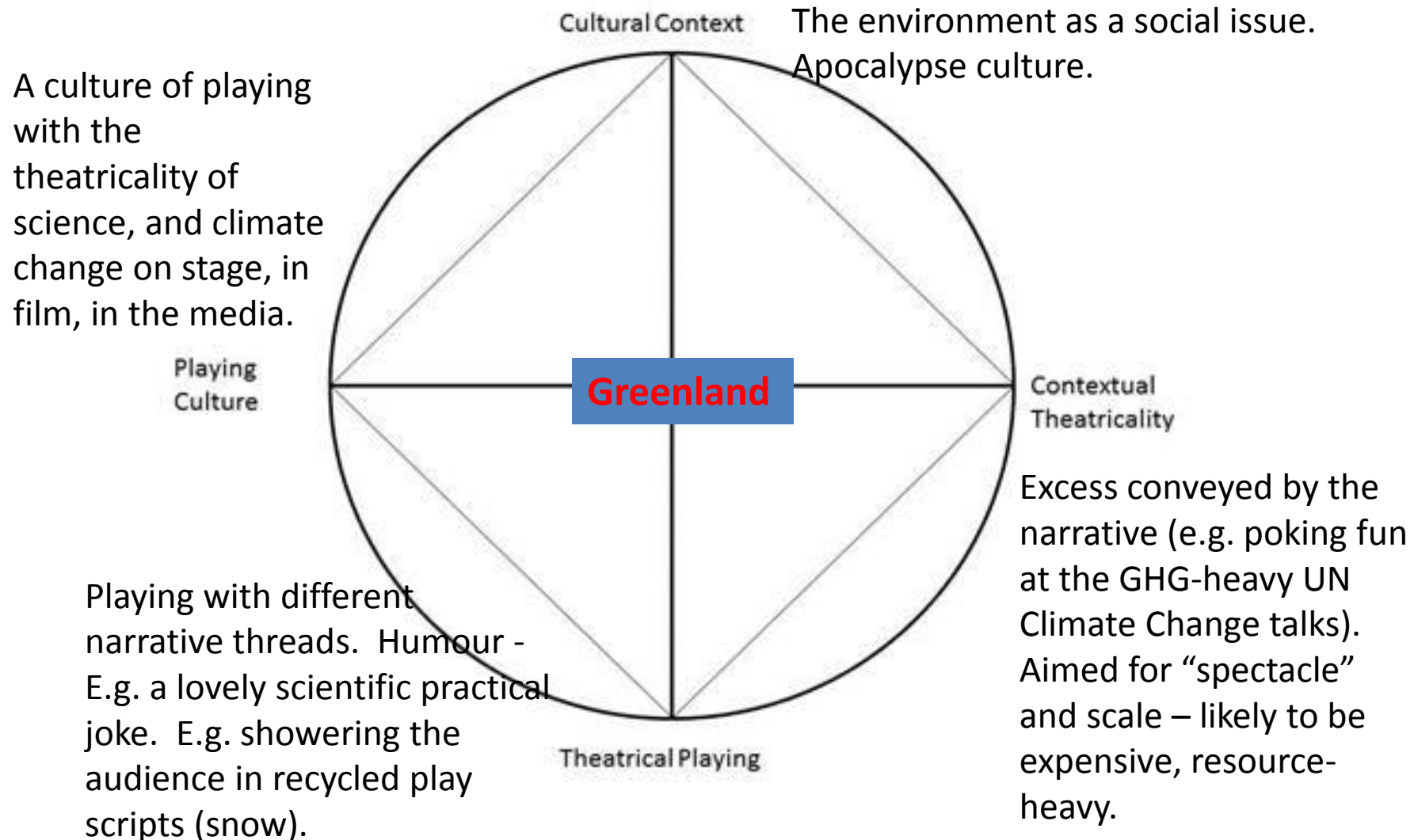
Playing Culture (2)

- A possible reading of the 2010 Royal Court Theatre production of Richard Bean's climate change play, *The Heretic*, is that Bean was setting up the two sides of the climate change debate (those arguing for and against anthropogenic climate change) in the audience in such a way as to enrage some spectators on both sides (c.f. Hudson, *NTQ* 111).
- Anyone on either side of the argument could have laughed at the game Bean and the production team seemed to be playing thus taking away a message about ethics and scientific data, had they been willing or (sufficiently free from bias to be) able to see it.

Cultural Context- Climate Change Plays

- *The Contingency Plan* (2009), *Earthquakes* (2010), *The Heretic* (2011) and *Greenland* (2011) all depend on the cultural context for their climate-change ‘vernacular’:
- E.g. Discussions of climate change science with the help of a paraphernalia of often virtual and sometimes physical props – calving icebergs, flooding events, scientific climate models in prototype or on computers, charts of CO₂ emissions and temperature, polar bears, and birds. Such ‘docu-science’ (Hudson, *NTQ*, 111) has become part of the 21st century cultural context.

The Contextual Theatricality of *Greenland*



Environmental Contextual Theatricality

- *Wastwater*

- In contrast the Royal Court, well known for its emphasis on (new) writing, eschewed dramatic extremes in favour of three static sets in the small Jerwood Theatre Downstairs
- Presented a production in which the text lay at the core.
- The climate change message was only subtly present, underscored by sound effects – jets flying overhead to land at nearby Heathrow and a mobile phone constantly answered – commented on by Frieda, Harry’s foster mother, as ‘a kind of tic” (p. 10).

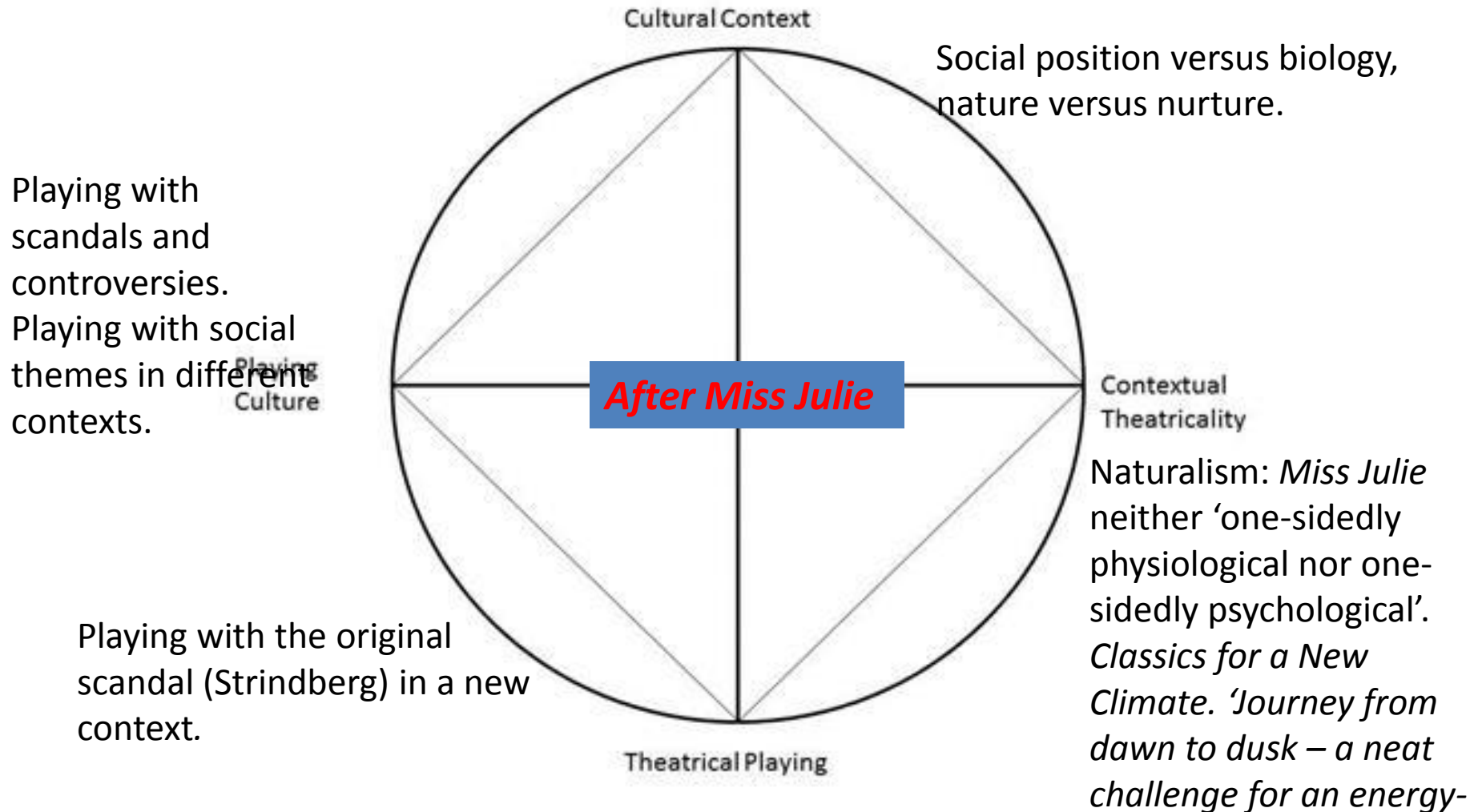
Scandalous Environmental Intrusion? - *Nut*

- Returning to December 2013 National Theatre production of Debbie Tucker Green's play *Nut* .
- The potential is there for spectators – all too aware of sitting in a pall of (what seemed to be) air polluted by secondary smoke - to connect self-damaging human behaviour to environmental harm.
- **The Shed: part of the redevelopment plan designed to 'enhance [the NT's] relationship with the environment around [them]' (Website).**

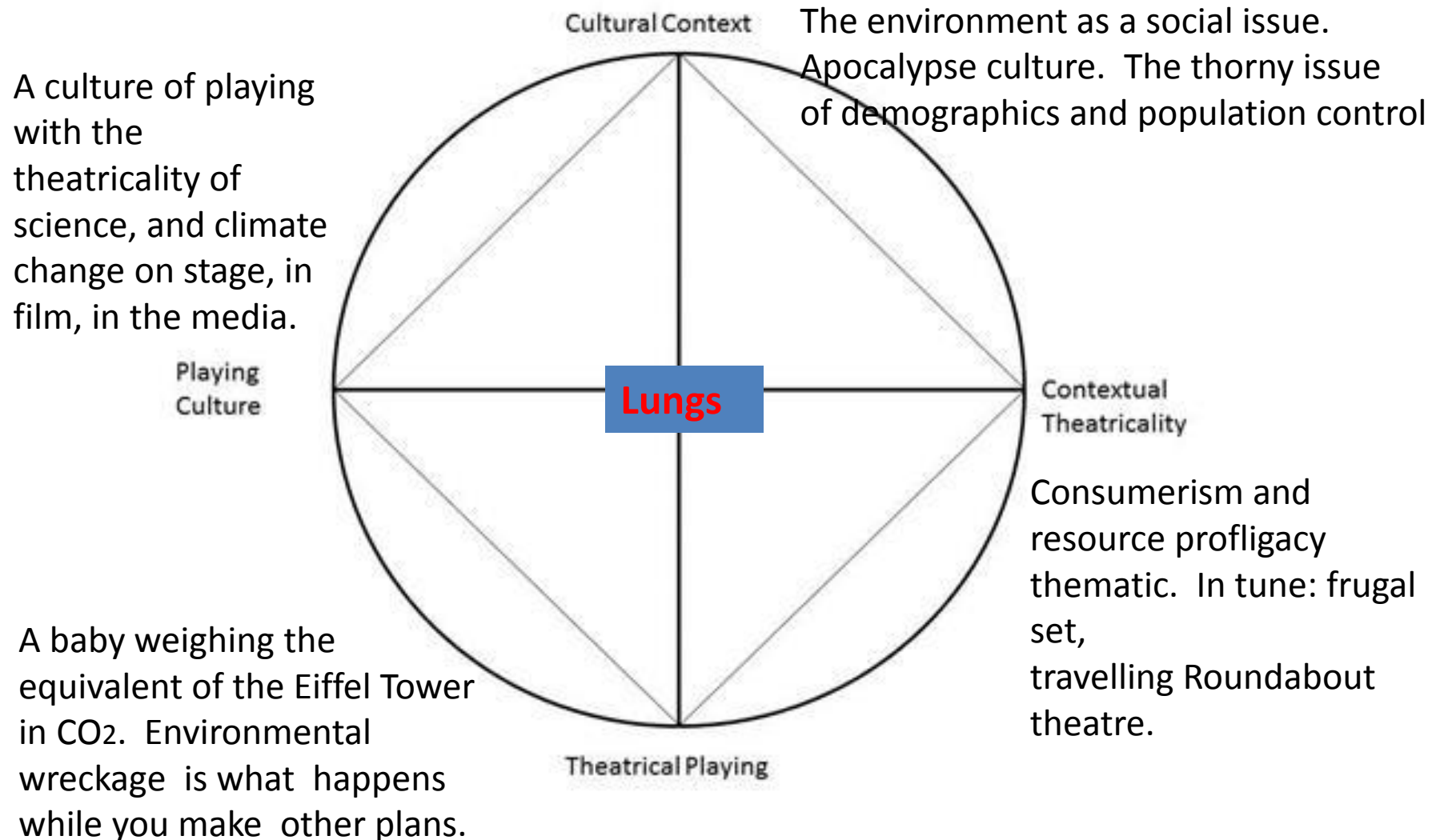
Playing with Contextual Theatricality – *Public Enemy*

- In a key scene, David Harrower's 2013 play *Public Enemy*, a version of Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*, breaks the fourth wall and (in effect) puts the audience onstage with the players, by turning the auditorium into a forum. The finger is pointed directly at the *spectators*. 'You are the enemies of truth. The majority. You.' (p.58).
- The aesthetic and political impact of this memorable scene, in which theatre audience becomes meeting crowd voting on what to do about the pollution in the spa (but in reality powerless to do so) was shaped, in this production, by the entrapment of the audience in traditional theatre seating under the accusatory glare of the full-on house lights.

Contextual Theatricality – *After Miss Julie*



Ecotheatre in an All Round Sense - *Lungs*



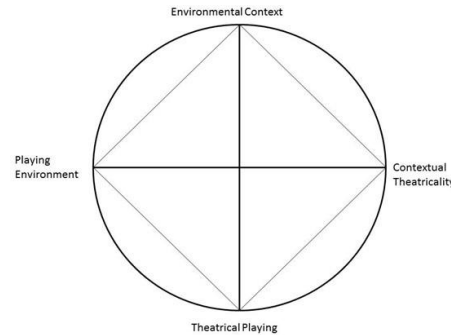
Environment: Woven through Culture or Context?

- The Diamond model

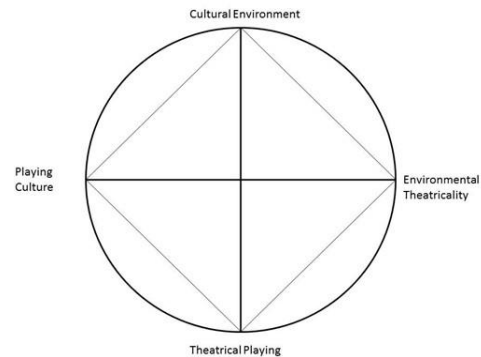
- Event = Theatrical Playing * Playing Culture * Cultural Context * Contextual Theatricality.

- Environmental Diamond models?

- Event = Theatrical Playing * Playing **Environment** * **Environmental** Context * Contextual Theatricality..
- Event = Theatrical Playing * Playing Culture * Cultural **Environment** * **Environmental** Theatricality.



*Green
Diamond
Version 1.
Environment
as Culture*

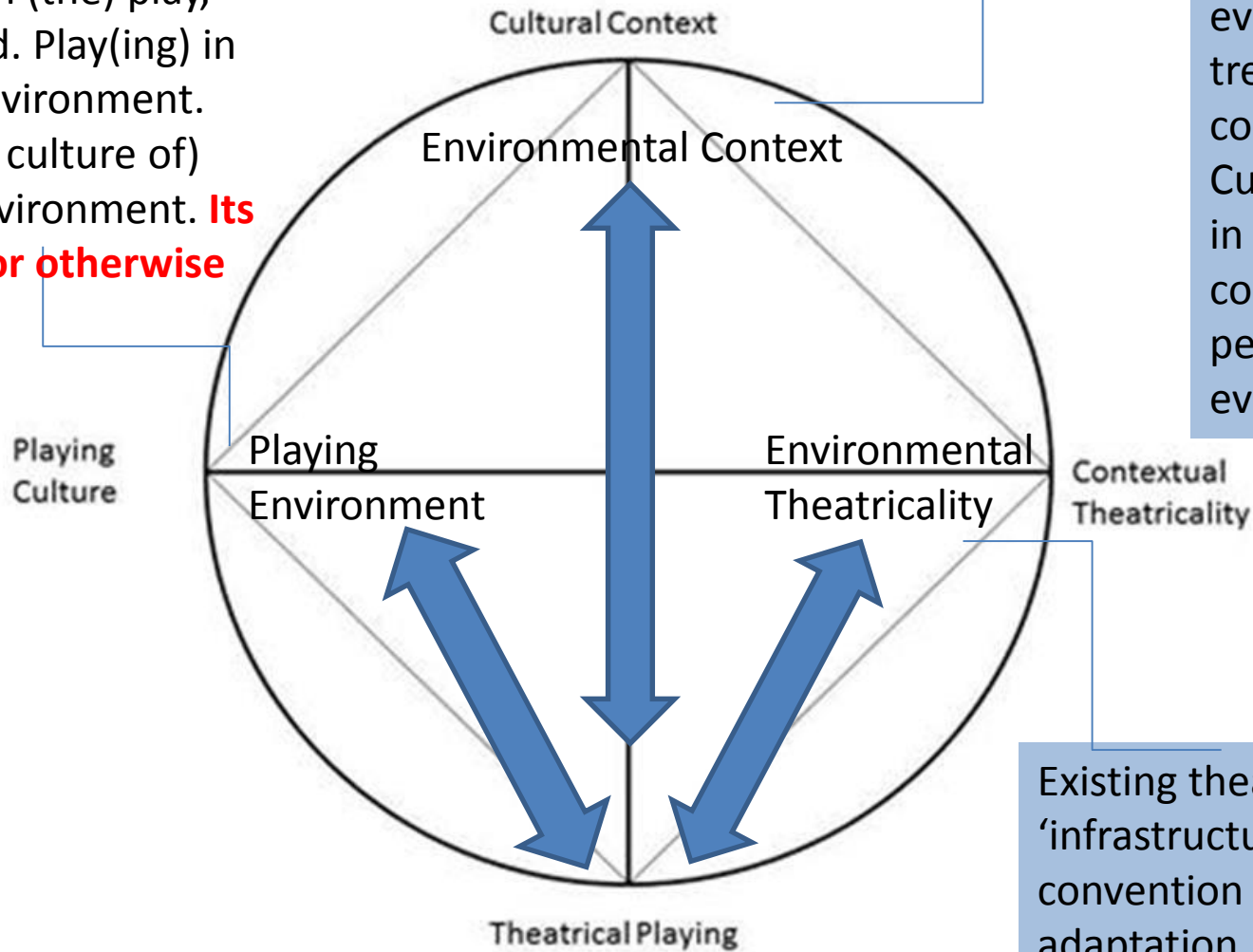


*Green
Diamond
Version 2.
Environment
as Context*

Is context analogous to scenery, and culture representative of (environmental) shape-shifter?

Environmental Overlay?

Environment in (the) play, as playing-field. Play(ing) in and on the environment. Presence of (a culture of) playing the environment. **Its acceptability or otherwise**



Environmental events and trends shape context. Cultural divides in broader context shape performance event.

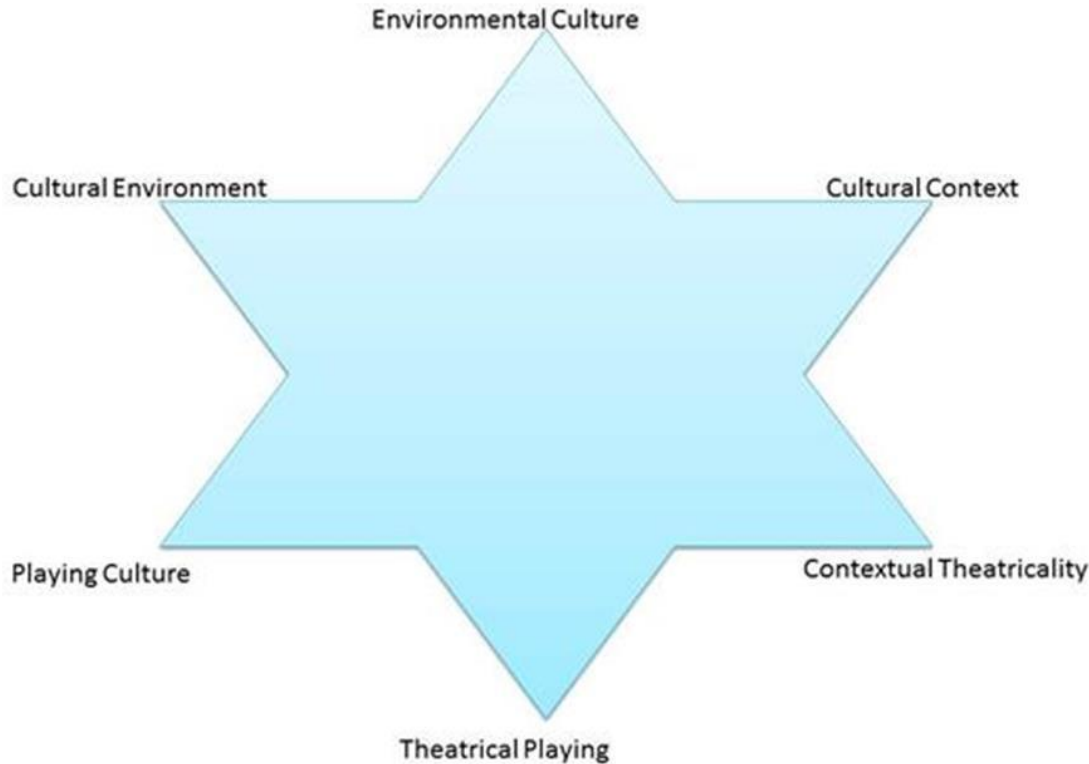
Existing theatre 'infrastructure' & convention may impede adaptation, run against the ecological grain.

Diamond Model Algebra

- The Diamond model
 - Event = Theatrical Playing * Playing Culture * Cultural Context * Contextual Theatricality.
- The folded-down Diamond model
 - Event = Theatrical Playing * ~~Playing Culture~~ * ~~Cultural~~ Context * Contextual Theatricality.
 - Event = Theatrical Playing * Playing Culture * ~~Cultural Context~~ * ~~Contextual~~ Theatricality.

Culture is woven through the folded-down model but invisible. Alternatively, context becomes invisible but is inevitably still there as a sub-text.

The Unfolded Environmental Diamond Model : Green Star Model?



Environmental culture – human behavior in the environment. A regime of ‘hyperenvironmentalism’ (rupture, depletion to exhaustion and degradation) or an ecological regime of continuity, recycling and conservation?

Cultural environment - the positioning of the environment in society. Is the environment accepted as a hybrid of the man-made and the natural, or seen as an environment degraded by the presence of human beings?

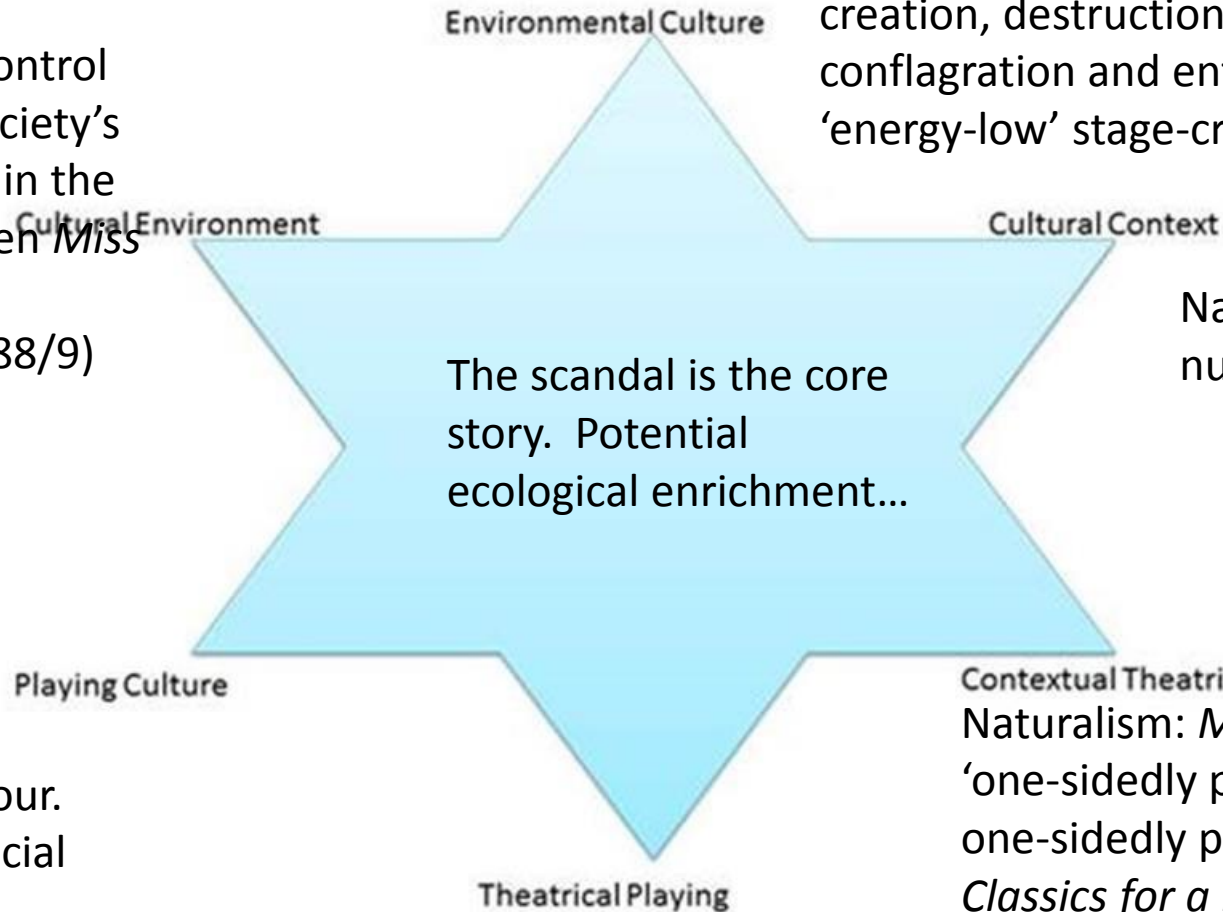
After Miss Julie, Patrick Marber.

A rich seam of potential connection between the text (with its embedded themes of life-cycles, sexual energy, life, death, creation, destruction, chaos, conflagration and entropy) and 'energy-low' stage-craft.

Irony: out-of-control explosion in society's lust for energy in the interval between *Miss Julie* by August Strindberg (1888/9) and this play.

Playing with scandals and controversies.
Playing with human behaviour.
Playing with social themes in different contexts.

Playing with the original scandal (Strindberg) in a new context.



Nature Versus nurture.

Contextual Theatricality
Naturalism: *Miss Julie* neither 'one-sidedly physiological nor one-sidedly psychological'.
Classics for a New Climate.
'Journey from dawn to dusk – a neat challenge for an energy-low production style.'

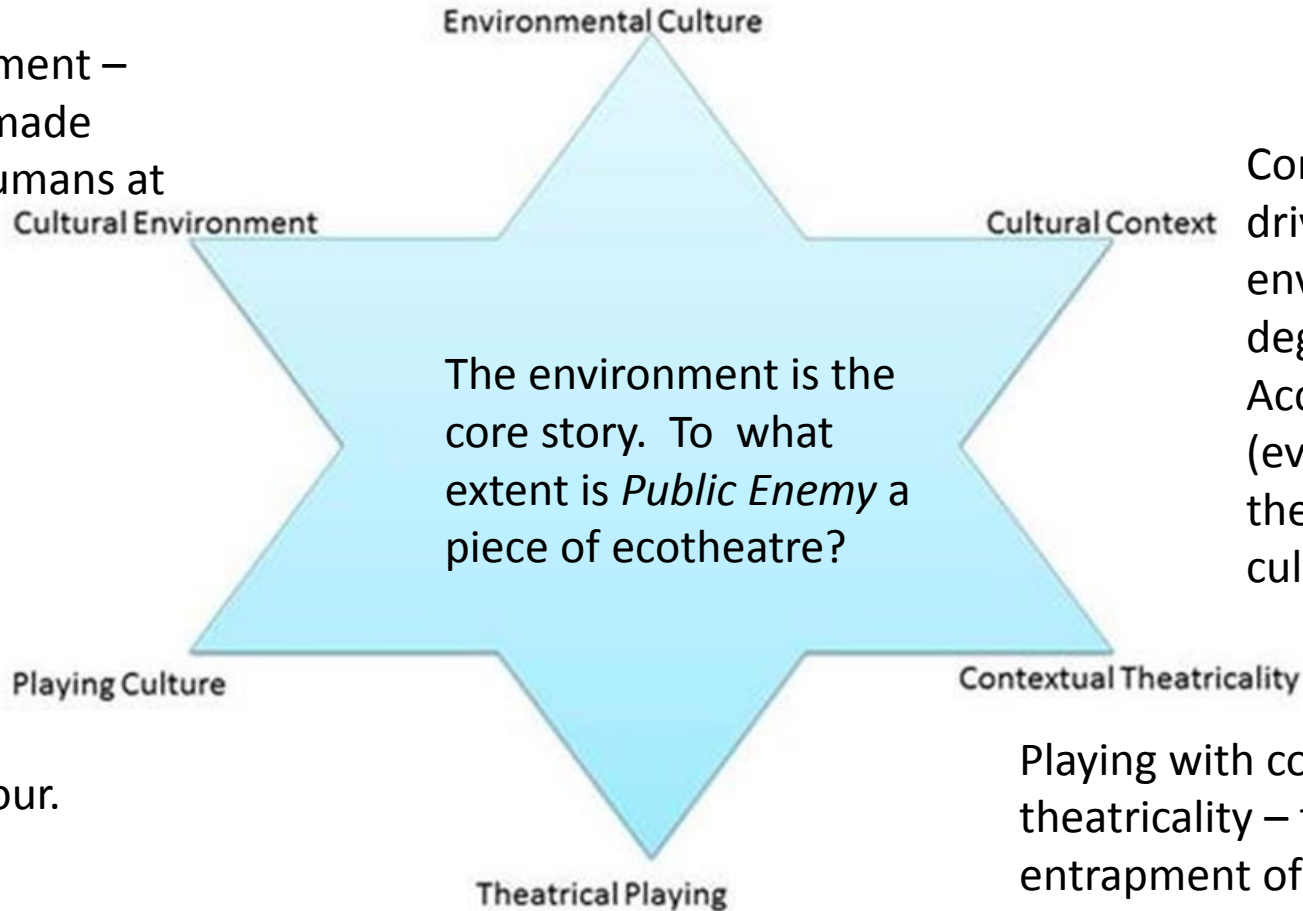
Public Enemy, Harrower.

Where does modern-day culture position the environment?
Something to exploit or something to take care of?

Urban environment – hybrid of manmade and natural. Humans at the top of the hierarchy.

Playing with scandals and controversies.
Playing with human behaviour.

Playing with the 19th century (Ibsen) play, connecting its themes of science, scientists, and pollution to the 21st century.



Consumer-driven environmental degradation. Acceptable in (evidence of) the presence of cultural divides.

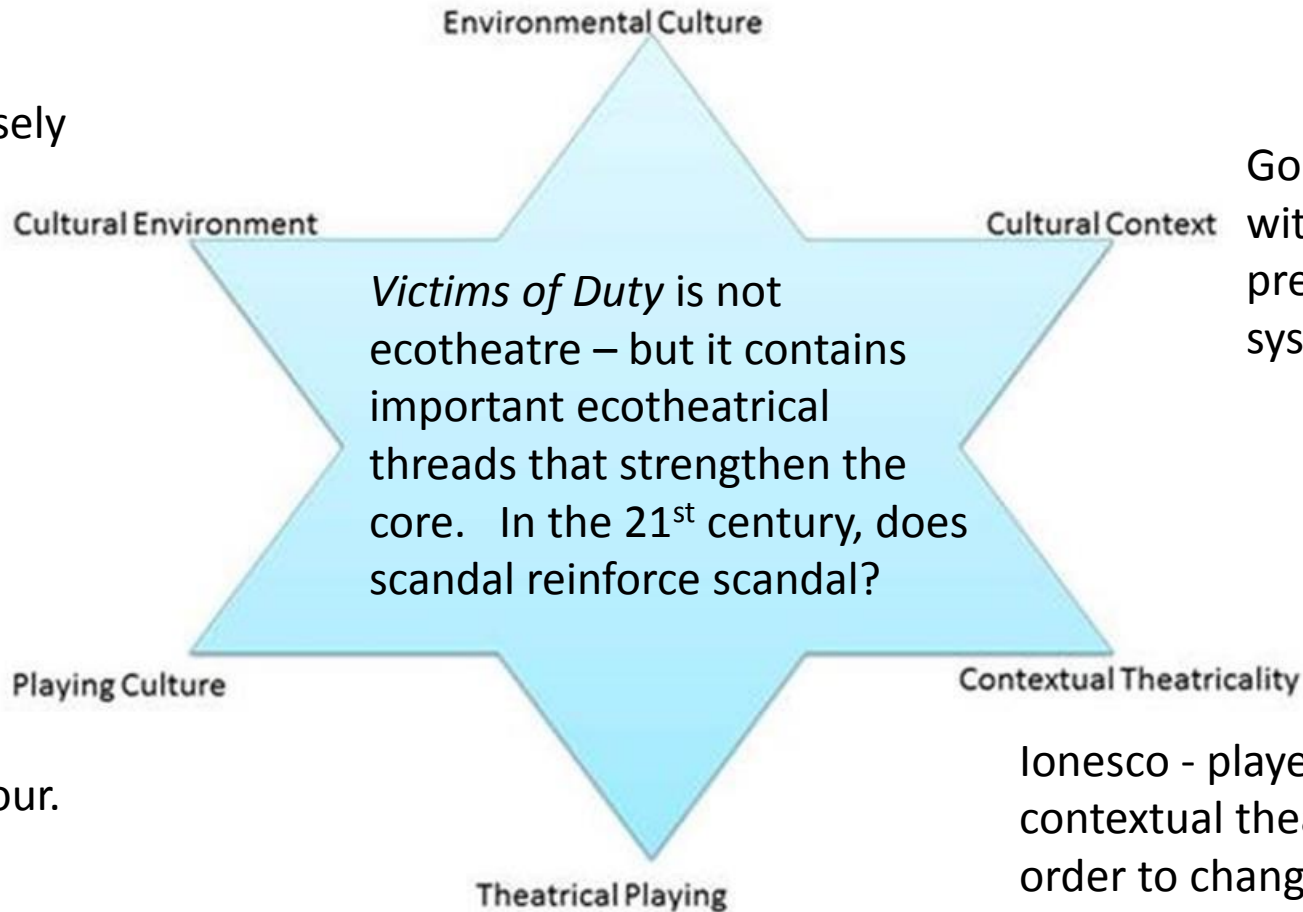
Playing with contextual theatricality – the entrapment of the audience tropes entrapment in consumerism. Sense of entrapment intensifies impact. BUT theatre (industry) is also trapped.

Victims of Duty, Ionesco.

Where does modern-day culture position the environment? Something to exploit? A symbiotic system happening to contain human beings?

Physiology and psychology closely intertwined.

Playing with scandals and controversies.
Playing with human behaviour.



Going along with the prevailing system.

Ionesco - played with contextual theatricality in order to change it: Theatre of the Absurb.

Playing with the prevailing system in order to challenge it - political theatre.

Wastwater, Simon Stephens.

Where does modern-day culture position the environment? Something to exploit? A symbiotic system happening to contain human beings?

Environmental Culture

Connection-blind human beings do enormous damage without thinking about it.

Cultural Context

A play about human beings treating each other very badly and the knock-on effects. Climate change on the oblique. Scandals woven around scandal. Written with environmental awareness.

Cultural Environment

Contextual Theatricality

A conventional theatrical canvas – three acts, three simple sets. Adaptable – open to frugal production practices.

Playing Culture

Theatrical Playing

Child trafficking, porn, abandoned children, drink-driving, woven around climate change/ environmental degradation.

Human beings and natural systems closely intertwined. Thus, the consumer society has system-wide impacts.

Playing with scandals and controversies. Playing with human behaviour.

Discussion

- Environmental Diamond Models
 - Scandalous suggestion? The Diamond Model can address the joint scandals of theatrical ‘hyperenvironmentalism’ and the complicity of the theatre in the consumerism model of environmental degradation?
 - A useful addition to the model helping to address the scandal of the relationship between theatrical events, the environment and society?