

*“LONDON’S
LOST
GARDEN”*

A Performance For Convoys Wharf

By Jack Lowerson

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PREFACE

This performance is about one specific garden, but it is for many gardens. Many spaces threatened by seeping urbanization, where communities are unable to voice how their public space is designed and used. Convoys Wharf is an historic brownfield site in Deptford, London. Within its guarded gates lies the remains of John Evelyn's 17th century experimental garden, designed to bring good health and clean air to the city.

In 2014, the mayor granted permission for private flats to be constructed on the site. This opposed the views of Historic England, and local community groups such as 'Voice 4 Deptford' and the Pepys Community Forum, both of which have contributed to the research conducted throughout this project.

Evelyn's manifestos, which once lead visitors through his garden, have been adapted to construct the dialogue. It is hoped now, as it was then, that the people of Deptford may once again share in the earthy materiality of the Garden.

The performance will also be filmed and distributed to 'Voice 4 Deptford', the Pepys Community Forum, and 'the Sayes Court Garden Project'. The film will serve as a document that can be presented to Hutchinson Property Group, the development company overseeing the plans, as a critical piece of public engagement for moving the debate forward.

Some elements of the performance encourage audience participation, designed to inform members of the public about the activities of gardening, and introduce the notion of collective action, but this is not essential to the progression of the play. The Narrator and the Garden characters should gauge how willing the audience are for participation throughout.

CHARACTERS

■ The Narrator

A mediator who negotiates the demands for resurrecting the garden with the property developers. They are stern, but fair, and enthusiastically speak out for the voices within the community. The Narrator would wear a loose-fitting shirt, and trousers. They may also wear a town crier's hat and long coat, but this is optional.





■ Convoys Properties LTD

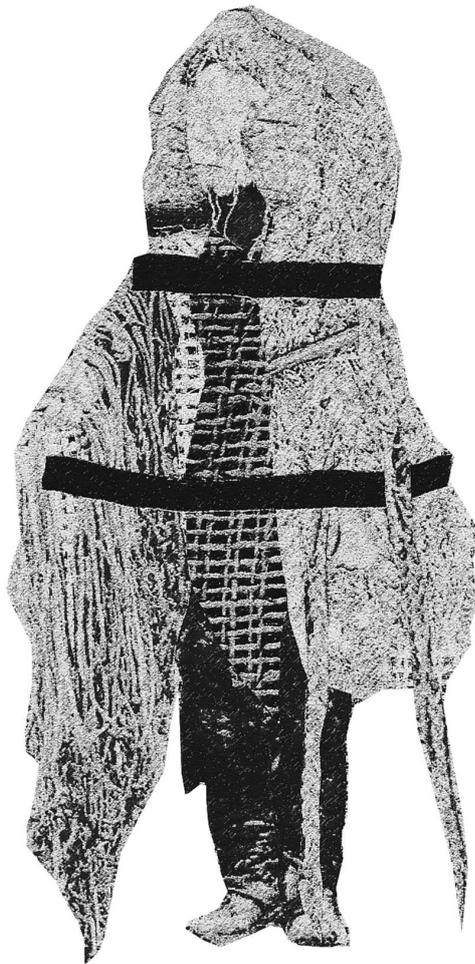
The planning committee attempting to push forward the building of private residences and a retail complex on the site. They are genuinely optimistic that the work they are doing will bring great things for the area, but this sometimes comes across as dismissive, and at times a little overbearing. They carry a briefcase and wear a hard hat. Their clothing can be a smart casual shirt, and trousers, or a suit and tie.

■ The Garden

The mystical and earthy embodiment of Evelyn's experimental garden. The Garden is a liminal and ancient creature, but with the air of youthful ambition and determination. They are discontented by the injustice they feel has been placed on them. Their costume is a ragged garment, made with recyclable fabrics like hessian. They may also wear an optional mask. Soil and moss drips from their body. (Examples of garment making techniques to achieve this aesthetic can be found on page 5)



PROPS



The Garden's costume resembles that of the 'Green Man' tradition found in folklore, where the wearer is adorned with fabrics and natural materials that create a mass of leaves and twigs. Ideally, you will use a more sustainable fabric for the base of the costume, such as hessian sack, which will biodegrade when it is no longer in use.

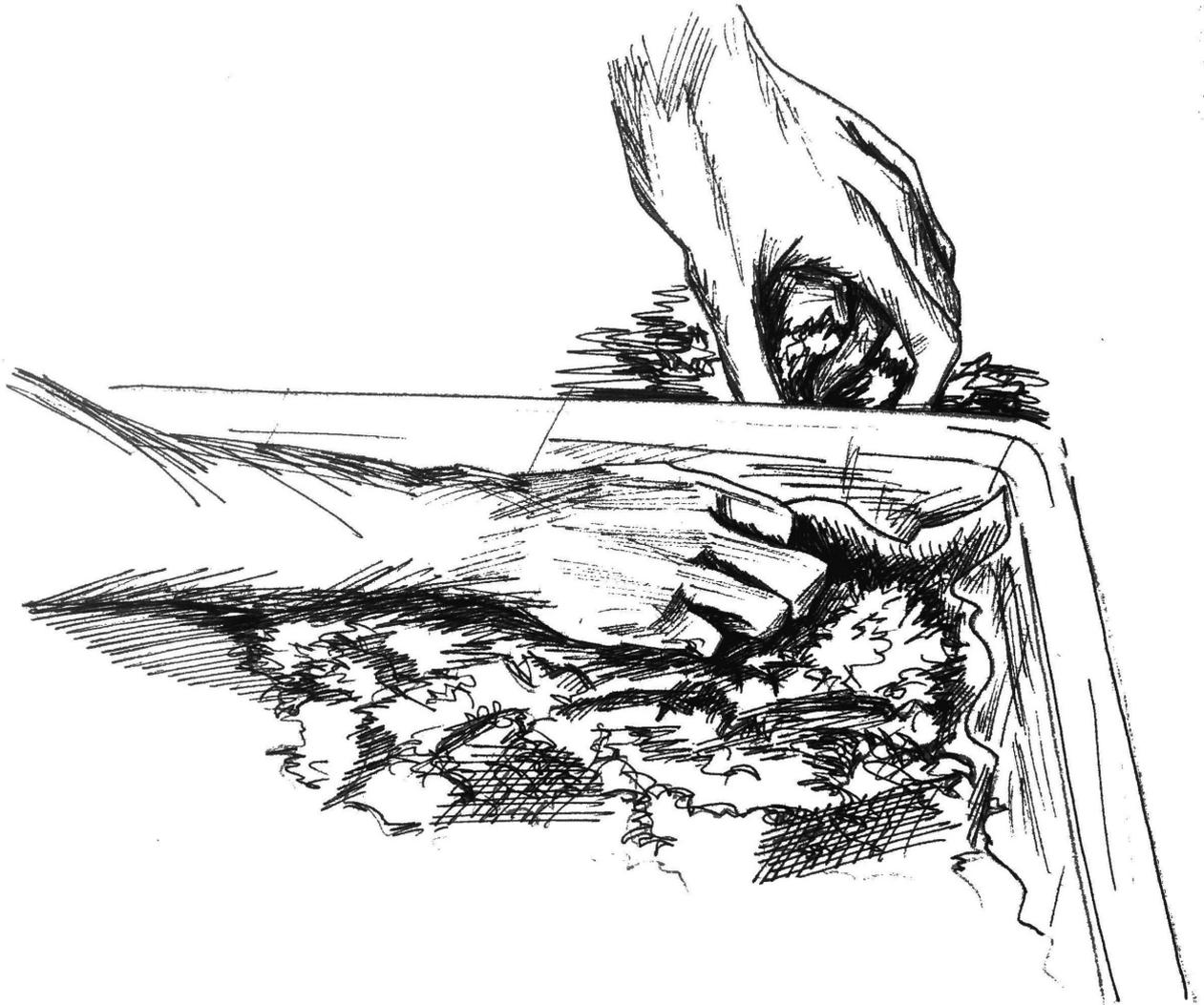
There are several methods listed in the following pages that you can try in order to achieve this aesthetic. Some of them involve the collection and growing of natural materials that can be found on location. This will serve to symbolically situate the character within the site where the performance will take place.





1. Be on the lookout for moss to harvest from the site. Moss can be grown on the fabric used to make the costume in a terrarium. It can often be found on walls, in the cracks of the pavement, and growing on rocks.

If using this method, be sure to set up your moss terrarium at least 8 weeks before the performance takes place to allow the moss to flourish on the fabric.

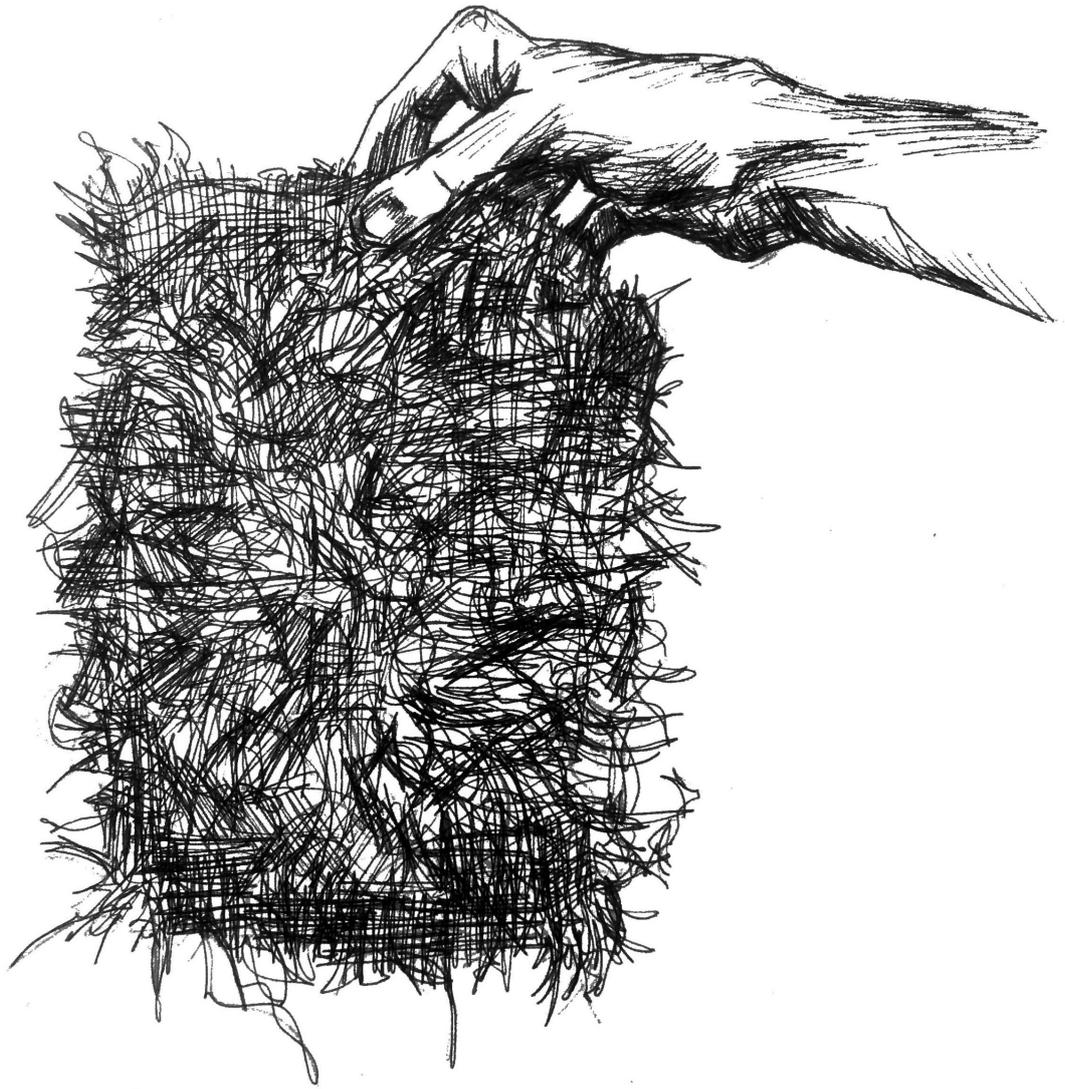


2. Collect materials from the site, such as leaves and twigs, which can then be tied to the costume and used to adorn the mask, if you choose to have one.

3. Use the soil you have collected for the hydrosol to make a soil paste. Mix approximately half a cup of soil with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of PVA glue. Stir thoroughly and paint onto the fabric to create a more durable texture.

4. Bury the garment on site or in the back garden. Leave the garment for approximately 6 weeks to allow enough time for the soil to seep into the fabric. Dig up the garment after the 6 weeks and store in a container, such as a recyclable plastic bag. The soil should provide a natural scent and organic texture to the costume.





5. Grow wheat grass or rye grass on the fabric. Wheat and rye grass seeds are fast growing, taking approximately 2 weeks to grow, and require little water if using a substrate with high levels of water retention, such as coco coir.

Put the seeds in a jar of water for 2 days until they begin to sprout. Place the fabric in an open container, with a thin layer of coco coir on top. Once the seeds have been submerged for 2 days, drain them, and spread them on top of the fabric. After approximately 2 weeks the root systems should have anchored to the fabric and have sprouted long grass to adorn the costume with.

The Hydrosol Recipe

The soil hydrosol is symbolic of the original aroma of the historic garden. It is also as the object that is used to summon 'The Garden'. It can be created by distilling the plant material that is native to the location the performance will take place in.

You will need:

- Soil
- Cooking pot with lid
- A brick
- Small jug or bowl
- Small bottle with a cork or lid
- 8-12 ice cubes
- water

1. Harvest a small bag of soil from the site in which the performance will take place.

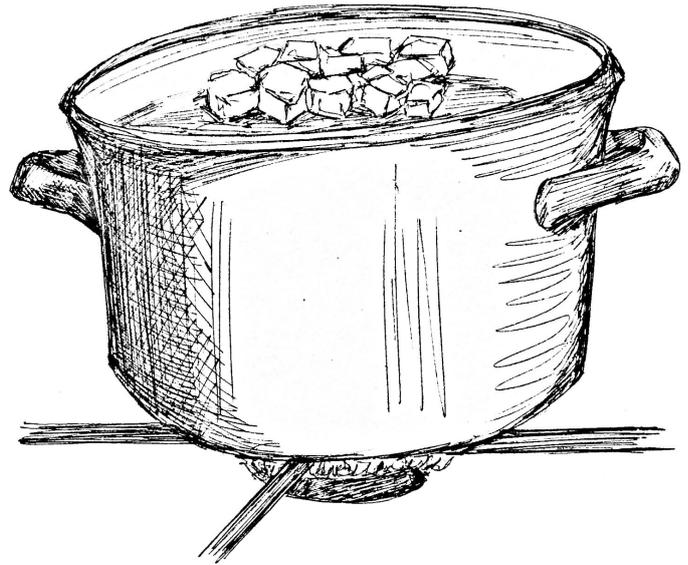


2. Place the brick inside the cooking pot and put the small jug or bowl on top of the brick. The pot should be tall enough to allow the lid to be placed upside down without any gaps. Fill the bottom of the pot with soil, just below the top edge of the brick.

3. Pour boiled water over the top of the soil. Do not allow any water into the jug or bowl. Place the pot lid upside down so that the handle is directly above the jug or bowl.



4. Put the ice cubes in the middle of the lid. This will allow the liquid to condense at the top and drip down the lid handle. Put the pot on the boil for 15 to 20 minutes.



5. After boiling, take the pot off the heat. The liquid in the jug or bowl should be clear. Pour this liquid into the bottle and seal the lid. The liquid will smell of the soil that has been distilled.

SCRIPT

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PRE-SHOW

The Narrator meets the audience beside the gates of Sayes Court Park and leads them onto the grass verge by the fence. A group of performers (Up to six) dressed in black, walk through the gate in a line. The Narrator gathers the audience in a semi-circle, and the performers begin walking around the space. A crossed legged figure (The Garden) sits away from the action, hunched and facing the fence with their back to the audience.

ACT I: SCENE I

SAYES COURT PARK. THE GRASS IS BARE AND THE SHRUBS TWIST AROUND THE BARBED WIRE FENCE THAT MARKS THE BOUNDARY OF CONVOYS WHARF. THE NARRATOR TAKES THEIR PLACE ATOP A TREE STUMP TO GREET THE AUDIENCE.

NARRATOR

(GRANDLY)

Greetings everyone! Welcome to the Sayes Court Park in Deptford. We stand amidst the great orchard of John Evelyn's 17th century garden. It has been buried and compressed for over 300 years, but it swells for 100 acres! In these groves and through running waters.

The performers pause in the positions they are in in the space.

(EARNESTLY, as if pleading with individuals in the crowd to believe in the cause)

This has *always* been your garden! To grow from the ground up. The roots stir restlessly between the cracks of Convoys Wharf-

They are cut off by the entrance of Convoys Properties LTD, who enters grandly from 'stage left' with beaming optimism.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(HEROICALLY)

And rest assured ladies and gentlemen we have assessed the... 'root problem' and they will be removed in due course. We can't have them playing havoc with our new landscaped areas. Such unruly things, aren't they? They would severely damage the commercial, leisure and retail facilities!

NARRATOR

(DISPLEASED)

Convoys Properties Limited. Your plans show no due regard to the site. This was Evelyn's Elysium, grown in the name of improved health and extended life!

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(LAUGHS)

The restoration of any part of the garden is infeasible! Unless of course you mean the strategic tree planting, which I think you'll find creates a clear and legible hierarchy-

NARRATOR

-and so much less than what a garden can be! As Evelyn himself said, it is a large and goodly circus resembling some amphitheatre.

The Narrator takes a vial of clear liquid out of their pocket.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(PUZZLED)

And...what have you got there?

NARRATOR

In this bottle is a hydrosol. This was a laboratory of rare experiments and strange plants after all. I brewed this by distilling the soil that has rested beneath the concrete for centuries.

They walk to each of the performers, allowing them to smell the scent of the liquid. They then go to the audience to do the same.

(SOFTLY)

Close your eyes and smell its essence. I find it resonates the garden as it was then. It's smell, taste, sound...what sound does it create for you?

The narrator and the performers invite the audience to join in forming a circle with them. All close their eyes and begin making their sound. The audience may choose to join in if they wish.

NARRATOR

[HUMMING A CONTINUOUS SOUND THAT REACHES A CRESCENDO¹]

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

How do you expect us to make any progress with all this absurdity?

The sound gradually begins to resonate around the circle. This lasts for around one minute whilst the Garden enters the middle of the circle. The sounds silence, leaving the calm of the park for a few seconds before the Garden announces their presence.

THE GARDEN

(STARTLED, as if suddenly awoken)

Hither! and let mad billows beat the strand!

The Garden tentatively addresses the circle.

(LAUGHING JOKINGLY)

I did not intend to startle you!

(INTENSELY, as if talking privately to someone)

It has been many years since I have had visitors... I think my nature is liable to be purer when exposed to air and sun...

The performers begin slowly curling their bodies and sinking to the floor. This lasts around one minute until they are tightly compressed into balls on the ground. Convoys Properties LTD steps into the circle from their position at stage left to greet the Garden.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(CLEARS THROAT)

You are the Garden of Sayes Court I take it? I have to say it is an honour, and your timing is impeccable. Your legacy is in good hands! I have outline planning permission for 3,500 new homes for the Convoys Wharf site! All of which will reference the history and legacy of Sir John Evelyn.



NARRATOR

Ha! You can't mean your 'locked out' parks?

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

Our 'private residents' garden.

NARRATOR

The one with insufficient green space, and an all private podium in the middle?

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

[REASSURINGLY]

We have approval of reserved matters for Plot P15 ranging between 2, 9 and 13 storeys in height. The amount of ground required for a garden as...elegant as Evelyn's once was is simply too great!

The Garden pauses momentarily. They have become more solemn. They shift their attention towards the fence. The performers begin to rise again and stretch themselves out as far as they can go. This should last for approximately one minute.

THE GARDEN

(DISTURBED)

Where poplars hoary-tressed once drooped o'er the cave,
you would have me trapped beneath your shining steel
palaces for ever more!

Convoys Properties LTD consoles them condescendingly.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

Areas for wildlife will be provided at roof level. Listen, we will re-establish Deptford's sense of place and identity unique to this part of London. After all you changed through time! Some sort of... "contemporary interpretation" of Evelyn's work will be a more than suitable tribute.

The Garden's expression appears horrified and they step away from Convoys immediately.

THE GARDEN

(HORRIFIED)

You are the snake in the grass...

(URGENTLY)

We must all run away! These starch't and affected designs smell more of paint than of flowers.

The performers, now fully stretched out, form two rows facing each other to create a central walkway at centre-stage. The Narrator paces through the middle to meet the other two characters at the front.

NARRATOR

(PACIFYING THE SITUATION)

The people of Deptford need no planning permission to resurrect this garden. Nor do we require tools. Together we can re-establish its fertile ground.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

And how do you plan to do that without a suitable planning proposal?

NARRATOR

Historic England says that a garden is a garden so long as it displays "the perpetual balance between the cycle of the seasons." The growth and decay of nature. A garden isn't a static thing! But a performance of many things. One we will re-enact right here and now.

Each performer enacts one of four gardening actions whilst facing their partner:

- raking
- weeding
- planting
- digging

The performers should either mirror or oppose their partner's action and



maintain a consistent rhythm. The narrator and the Garden also join in. This is free to evolve with the decisions of the performers. Actions may be precise and calm or become more urgent and confrontational. The Garden is in a world of their own. They circle the performers as they 'garden', inspecting the action.

THE GARDEN

(SOLEMNLY)

This raking, this weeding; these are things I have not witnessed in so long. Unfold the soil so that we may prevent it from turning stale and Lo! the limber vine plaits leafy bowers.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

Well, an amusing demonstration it must be said...but not one *my clients* will be very convinced by I'm afraid.

After approximately two minutes of performing, the actions become slower, heavier and eventually stop. The performers hold their position in a 'Tableau Vivant'²

NARRATOR

We demand that the public/private divide be minimized..

THE GARDEN

(FERVENTLY)

Yes! So that we may fill this town with gardeners who will tend to the ground for years to come!

The Garden draws the audience's attention to the boundary fence of Convoys Wharf and bounds over to it. The Garden knocks four times heavily against the fence.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(CONDESCENDING)

Ah-ah-ah careful! you will knock the fence over if you bang on it like that. The warning signs clearly state there are deep excavations to be wary of here! Not to mention the barbed wire.

The Garden ignores Convoys Properties LTD and proceeds to knock four times

once again in defiance.

THE GARDEN

(DEFIANTLY)

These cladded walls obstruct the boundaries that once observed the Deptford Strand! Yet...busy spring inscribes her flowers in songs...

[HUMMING A CONTINUOUS SOUND THAT REACHES A CRESCENDO]

The Garden makes a continuous sound like the ones previously. This may use their voice or objects immediately available in the space, such as sticks, stones and leaves. The Narrator encourages the audience to join in making the sound with the Garden. They should gauge how willing the audience may be to participate. The performers relax their bodies and organize themselves into a line either side of the Narrator.

NARRATOR

And what would a garden be without them! These notes will carry themselves to the very edges of the town. And we must follow them to the gates of Convoys Wharf!

The sounds continue whilst the performers move towards the entrance to the park, led by the Narrator. The audience are encouraged to follow. The Garden paces ahead as if in a trance state. Convoys Properties LTD trails behind.

TRANSITION

The audience are led around the corner, down Prince Street to the Convoys Wharf entrance. The performers, still making the sound, slow the pace as they reach the white cladded walls. Some may use these walls to enhance their sound, keeping in rhythm. The performers reach the front of the gate to the site and return to their line. Their sounds gradually fade.





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ACT I: SCENE II

THE CROWD ARRIVE AT THE IRON GATES OF CONVOYS WHARF. GREY SKIES. OVER IN THE DISTANCE ACROSS THE RIVER LOOMS THE GLASS TOWERS OF CANARY WHARF. THE GRASS BLOWS BETWEEN THE CONCRETE.

The 'stage' lies between the two clad walls with the backdrop of the gate. The Garden stands away from the crowd, now observing the action from across the road on Prince Street with their moss and soil dripping onto the pavement. They watch as Convoys Properties LTD paces the area, inspecting it keenly.

NARRATOR

Gather round all. Listen to the soil as it shifts beneath these hills and precipices!

The performers form a circle and begin to walk around it. Convoys Properties LTD voices their concern from whichever position they are in at the time.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(SHOUTING FROM A DISTANCE)

I have made provisions for 15% affordable housing!

NARRATOR

And we are acting on your outlined conditions, written on this lamppost here..

They step over confidently to the lamppost at 'stage right' to read a section of the document that is tied there out loud.

(READING)

Condition 14(i) (Biodiversity) and Condition 42(i) (public open space and landscaping).

The performers, still walking in a circle on the concrete, enact 'A sculpture garden'*³ Convoys Properties LTD approaches the crowd and stands amongst the audience.

THE GARDEN

We will make the concrete beneath our feet tender with our footsteps, and from it will sprout trees, living walls and green walkways!

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(PATRONISING)

You suburban gardeners with your disorderly plantations. Look, you may water, and you may plant but it does not necessarily make it anything..

NARRATOR

(To Convoys Properties LTD)

But by such collective action do the people of Deptford lay the foundations for walks, alleys and terraces. Groves, labyrinths and pavilions!

The Narrator encourages the audience to join in and bring their own actions into the sculpture garden. Leave this open for the public to join if they wish or continue watching. The Narrator stands 'stage right' of the sculpture garden.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

(WEARY)

And so, the debacle continues, all the while this site lays waste. Why do you object so strongly when all I wish is to enhance the existing High Street and historic town centre of Deptford?

NARRATOR

(INTENTLY, pleading with Convoys Properties to understand)

...with 'anywhere in the world' buildings. You make no attempt to engage with the local community! They reserve the right to touch the ground they walk on. To *really* feel it, and to grow something they can all share in!

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

But was it not Evelyn himself who said we should read the garden with our eyes and *not* our hands?

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THE GARDEN

(LAUGHING FRIVOLOUSLY)

And did you never say or do things you have come to repent? You who would say: 'his garden changed through time'. I speak only for me and not the views imposed upon me!

NARRATOR

We will amend the statement: Read the garden with your eyes *and* your hands!

The performers actions gradually begin to slow down. They become heavier and less frequent, until they are paused in Tableau Vivant again. The Garden removes a fragment of soil from their garment and hands it to Convoys Properties LTD.

THE GARDEN

(SOLEMNLY, to Convoys Properties LTD)

Here, I give to you a piece of me. Take this soil between your fingers.

Flinching at the touch Convoys Properties LTD takes the soil from the Garden and rubs it between their fingers.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

This sensation is peculiar to me. Why would you give me this?

THE GARDEN

(ELEGANTLY)

Who would have a splendid garden endowed with flowers, yet would neglect to cultivate any gifts?

The Narrator steps towards Convoys Properties LTD.

NARRATOR

Historic England also say that a garden is "an architectural and horticultural composition".

(INVITING)

So, join our performed garden! It showcases to the world

Deptford's exceptional heritage and creative talent.

The performers bring themselves into their two rows of three again and begin their raking, weeding, planting, or digging actions. The Narrator invites Convoys Properties LTD and audience members to join them in the line of performers. The Narrator begins by making an action and Convoys mirrors them self-consciously. Gradually they begin to get into the rhythm of movement.

After approximately two minutes of performing, the actions gradually close as they become looser. All the performers stop and turn to face the audience⁴. Once again, like the beginning, the performers start to slowly curl parts of their body for about one minute until they are curled up on the ground. Only the Narrator, Convoys and the Garden should remain standing, unless audience members are present and have chosen to stay standing.

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

Hmm, I can't pretend to understand what you must be imagining when you act out these proposals ...but admittedly it was enjoyable to take part in them.

THE GARDEN

And now that you have connected with the cycles that tend and nurture the ground, do you still believe that neither they who water nor they who plant are anything?

NARRATOR

Perhaps we should amend those old words as well. "They who water and they who plant are anything!"

(PERFORMERS CHEER)

THE GARDEN

(CELEBRATING)

Hooray! We measure time by landmarks and have found, for the whole day the dial of our ground!

CONVOYS PROPERTIES LTD

Well, I suppose... in ways-

⁴ If all audience members are involved in the action, then the entire group face the gates of Convoys Wharf.

(DISMISSIVELY)

But the issue still stands. A performed garden is one thing...but whether it will persuade my clients is another, and I must warn you they are not as broad minded as I.

Convoys adjusts their attire and looks at their watch.

Now I must be catching my train. These plans are still on display. You will be hearing from me very soon.

NARRATOR

(PROUDLY)

And until then, the people of Deptford will continue to perform their garden in the days to come!

Convoys Properties LTD exits between the audience and walks away towards Deptford High Street down New King Street. The Narrator draws the performance to a close. The cast join audience members to look towards the river side through the locked gates.

EPILOGUE

THE GARDEN

(REFLECTING)

And once again, after so many years, my story is carried amongst the embraces of joyful people, the kisses of the adoring, and the applause of admirers. I would never have expected to be held in such high esteem, and under such tumultuous circumstances as these! It is violence indeed, but a famous life!

THE END

ALL PERFORMERS RETURN TO STAGE TO TAKE A BOW.

THE COSTUME OF THE GARDEN MAY BE STORED FOR FUTURE PERFORMANCES, EITHER IN A BACK GARDEN OR INSIDE IN A CONTAINER WOULD BE SUITABLE IF IT IS GROWING GRASS OR MOSS, OR IT CAN BE RETURNED TO THE GROUND BY BEING BURIED, ALLOWING THE MATERIALS TO DECOMPOSE NATURALLY.





ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

With thanks to all who have contributed to the research carried out to produce this publication, be they gardeners, campaigners, performers, developers, bloggers, or urban planners...

The Pepys Community Forum

Facilitating projects to support the education, employability, and health of Deptford's residents, and putting them at the centre of development initiatives.

The John Evelyn Community Garden

Who maintain an open and inclusive environment for sharing the benefits of urban gardening.

Voice 4 Deptford

For their contribution to the project as the leading organisation that aims for local people and businesses to actively participate in the redevelopment of Convoys Wharf.

The Sayes Court Garden Project

Who led the campaign for the reconstruction of Evelyn's historic garden on Convoys Wharf as part of the S106 agreement.

Convoys Properties Limited

Whose website 'Convoys Wharf' inspired some of the dialogue to enrich a more balanced and considered debate.

Karen Liljenberg

Whose blog 'Sayes Court - London's Lost Garden' (2010-2014) was fundamental to the historical context needed to fuel this project.

