

ARTICLE

Designing Collective Artist Residencies: Cultivating imaginative disruptions and light-heartedness in times of gravity

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Starting with an argument for a humanistic approach to climate change, this paper discusses the concept of the 'Collective Artist Residency' as a practicable means for engaging with complex socio-ecological issues that require collective answers. Through our analysis of the research project 'Imaginative Disruptions,' we propose that there is a need for creative spaces that include artists and non-artists alike, and which engender aimless play, inquisitive making and dialogic contemplation in the face of issues which are too painful, overwhelming and complex to rationally comprehend. We further argue that such residencies can generate comfortable, and even light-hearted, spaces in which people can be uncomfortable together. In other words, environments that feel safe and caring but that also encourage us to challenge status quos and experiment with alternatives via emotional, aesthetic, cognitive, somatic and social processing. The paper closes with five (suggested) guiding principles for designing a Collective Art Residency that supports groups of people to co-reflect upon their fragility whilst re-imagining present and future possibilities for being in the world: deeply participatory, balanced between comfortable / uncomfortable emotions, highly experiential, cross-sectoral and intergenerational, place-based.

Keywords: Climate change, participatory art, art residencies, art-based methods, creative methods, transformative learning

Introduction

We write this article during the pandemic-induced global disruption that marks the beginning of the new decade. As charts of the epidemic show countries across the world rapidly moving between the peaks and troughs of infection and death, the slower-moving climate crisis continues to loom. In parallel to the pandemic, social change agents of all types – in the private and public sectors, in citizen organisations and in academia – continue to search for ways to respond to the climate emergency. Thus far, the dominant approach has been to look to the natural sciences for more facts and statistics (Hulme 2011a) and employ primarily technocratic and structural solutions (Boyd 2017; Soete 2019). Such positivist approaches however, can miss the more intangible and culturally embedded dimensions of the climate crisis. The natural sciences are not designed to consider how values, worldviews, emotions, mental models, practices of relationality and experiential knowledge affect our individual and collective responses (Leiserowitz 2006). They do not offer solutions to the challenges posed by widespread 'eco-anxiety' (Pikhala 2018; Usher et al. 2019) and the fact that people tend to withdraw and become numb and disengaged in the face of fear created by too much overwhelming and alarming information (Van Boeckel 2013;

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Lertzman 2015). They also do not address the possibility that the climate crisis is merely a symptom of deeper cultural and relational dysfunctions that need to be faced and transformed (see Bateson 1972; Leiserowitz and Fernandez 2008).

As a way to respond to these gaps, multiple branches of social science research suggest that we address climate change not only through the natural sciences, but also through the lens of the arts and humanities (Alessandri 2019; Castree 2016; Holm et al. 2013). While there is indeed a growing body of research around using art to communicate and to raise awareness about climate change (Roosen et al. 2019) there is less information about the potential role of artistic practices in actual processes of generating climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. To explore this topic, a group of academic partners initiated a project entitled *Imaginative Disruptions*, which took place between 2017 and 2019 across three European countries. It was an experiment in exploring locally relevant climate change issues via a range of arts-based approaches that were intended to disrupt unsustainable habituated patterns of thinking and doing in creative ways.

Reflecting on data gathered through a practice-based research methodology, this paper shares key learnings and proposes the concept of *collective artist residencies*, an idea that emerged from our analysis. First, we position the *Imaginative Disruptions* project in the context of 'humanistic responses' to climate change. Next, we provide an overview of the project and our methodology for reflection and analysis, followed by a summary of key insights. Finally, we propose the idea of the *collective artist residency* as a conceptual framework to guide future experimentation.

A humanistic response to climate change

In his article 'Meet the Humanities', Hulme describes how public and political discussions around climate change are largely dominated by natural sciences: only a small minority of sources cited in the 3rd IPCC assessment report referenced social science articles, whilst the humanities were virtually absent (Hulme 2011a). Discourses have focused primarily on positivist epistemologies that aim to increase measurability of climate change or improve climate predictions, rather than on interpretative, subjective approaches that deal with people's values or perceptions of change and their ability to respond. This matters profoundly, Hulme argues, because it shapes how the problem is framed in the media, in policy debates, and in private and public sectors, which in turn shapes the types of solutions that are proposed and considered. When issues related to the climate crisis are framed chiefly in terms of technical facts and data, there is a sense that they must also be solved with more data and measurements (Hulme 2011a). It has been well established, however, that more information about the causes and ramifications of the climate crisis are not sufficient to stimulate the cognitive and emotional resources necessary for transformative action (Leiserowitz 2006; Norgaard 2011; Moser 2014; Stoknes 2015). A part of what keeps us locked into cultural patterns that result in ecological destruction is the power and inertia of habituated thoughts, frames and everyday practices (Bourdieu 1990). On the individual level, overwhelming emotions such as fear and anxiety can contribute to action-paralysis, numbness and denial in relation to climate change (Lertzman 2015; Van Boeckel 2009; Weintrobe 2012). Boykoff aptly describes these phenomena as follows: "while scientific data are often privileged as dominant ways by which climate change is thought to be articulated, public understanding and engagement is embedded within a matrix of cultural, social, political and economic processes that make climate change meaningful in our everyday lives" (Boykoff 2011, 78).

Hulme (2011b) also criticises 'climate reductionism' wherein political and social discourse is dominated by natural sciences that rely on predictive modelling. By focussing too much on the models, we might forget that our future is determined by more than just climate predictions. He argues that human agency, creativity, ingenuity and

imagination exert significant influence on the shape of future social, cultural and political worlds, creating futures that we can't predict and model. Climate reductionism, he states, and the associated media focus on global climate calamities, arguably contributes to driving a collective perception of fatalism and human incapacity, in the face of an uncertain, climate-changed future. To change this frame, he argues, we must pay attention to affect and emotion, situational knowledge and humanistic (personal and historical) accounts of how humanity has dealt with change and uncertainty in the past. New frames have the potential to change how we respond and cope, opening up new routes for action and hope. An approach grounded in the human experience of climate change, including affect and emotions, values and subjectivity, can be considered a 'humanistic climate response' (Hulme 2011b, 178) that addresses the 'human-dimensions' (Castree 2016) or 'inner-dimensions' of climate change (Horlings and Padt 2013; O'Brien 2013).

Research suggests that arts and arts-based practices are particularly well-suited for delving into such inner-dimensions (Horlings 2017; Kagan 2014; Kepes 1972) via what could be summarised as 'generative engagements'. Such engagements employ a range of practices that evoke multiple forms of intelligence and enable emotional, aesthetic, cognitive, somatic and social processing (Eisner 2002). The hands-on process of creating 'practical-aesthetic' subjects, for example, enables a process of "thinking with our hands" (Sennet 2008; Sheridan et al. 2014) and gives us experiences that are "multimodal and linked to our meaning-making as individuals and as social and cultural beings" (Gulliksen 2017). Generative engagements can facilitate and trigger the exchange and co-creation of knowledge through making and sharing artefacts (Groth 2017; Mannay et al. 2017), by bridging knowledge systems (Rathwell and Armitage 2015), through embodied learning and knowing (Gulliksen 2017; Eernstman and Wals 2013) and through playful experimentation (Soursa 2017; Brown 2010).

Francois Matarasso, a community artist and writer, refers to art as 'an adventure playground of the heart', positing that: "art helps us accept the dangerous, unstable things we avoid in everyday life ... It allows us to focus on what is fluid and changeable, open to interpretation, unexpected or unfinished, deniable, hesitant or uncertain in our experience. (Matarasso 2019, 43). There is indeed a growing number of artists developing these types of practices to specifically engage the human-dimensions of climate change and researchers that describe the 'mechanics' of such interventions (see for example Kagan 2012; Kagan 2014; Neal 2015; Van Boeckel 2017). This article aims to contribute to this knowledge base by examining the relevant dimensions of the project Imaginative Disruptions, to identify (1) some specific roles arts and art-making play in helping people respond to climate change, and (2) potential pathways for designing climate-focused artistic interventions.

The Experiment: Three Art-based Community Engagements

Imaginative Disruptions was developed to experiment with operationalising an arts-based humanistic climate approach¹. The project consisted of three distinct sub-projects that took place in Sweden, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands². Each of the three sub-projects had the autonomy to design a participatory art-based engagement or artwork in collaboration with local artists (we return to the concept of participatory artwork later in the paper). Each was to be relevant to the local context, while the core international project team offered collective brainstorming and peer-to-peer support and consultation. The resulting three events were quite different in topic,

¹ The project was initiated in response to a call for proposals from The Seedbox, an international environmental humanities organisation headquartered at Linköping University in Sweden; and funded Mistra, The Swedish Foundation for Strategic Environmental Research.

² The original concept for the project was "to bring together an intergenerational group of people [in each location] who will play, eat, (re)imagine, learn and create together, to design alternative futures around a selected 'glocal' issue, and explore what needs to be disrupted to realise these imagined realities; what is working with us and what is working against us?" (Wals and Eernstman n.d., 2).

emphasis, process and structure; however, they were similar in the sense that they explored various emotional-dimensions of climate change, rather than focusing on future action-oriented planning and scenario building. They are briefly described below and summarised in table 1³.

Event	Retreat	Vonk	Compose
Topic	Climate refugees	Energy transition	Role of the researcher in the face of climate change
Setting	Rustic, rural wooded camping area in central Cornwall (UK)	A relatively prosperous neighbourhood in a small university town in the Netherlands	University classroom, local historic tower and 20 min walk between these two places in Gothenburg, Sweden
Duration	4 days	4-6 hours	8 hours
Participants	20 people (7 families) including people from ages 2-50	Around 100 people: neighbourhood residents including children and elderly residents	15 people: including university students and middle-aged adults
Design process	Local transdisciplinary group (artist, outdoor instructor, academic) organised and designed the event with ongoing consultation from members of the Imaginative Disruptions Core Team	A local artist collective was commissioned and had nearly complete autonomy to design the project with input from the core research team and people involved with the energy transition initiative. Members of the artist collective live in the affected neighbourhood	Core team of academic partners (three of whom are also artists) worked during a long weekend to design the masterclass. The process was emergent and consisted of informal conversations and brainstorming sessions
Forms of participation (summary)	Planned creative activities, in which the participants were actively making Everyone participated in daily tasks e.g. cooking, cleaning, creating shelter Emergent: participants initiated new activities (e.g. children created play areas and proposed a 'talent show')	Scenes performed by artists' collective, with neighbours as engaged audience The audience was invited to 'join in' at 2-3 points during the performance Various people from the neighbourhood helped during the day Participants shared soup and drinks together	Core team created the design of the masterclass in which each activity facilitated "making" practices by the attendees of the event
Outputs and data	Collective artwork (Boatbarrow) turned mobile gallery space, photographs, audio and video recordings, interviews with participants, reflective sessions (during event), reflections and notes (after event), post event survey	Photographs, audio and video recordings, interviews with participants, reflections and notes (after event)	Photographs, audio and video recordings, reflections and notes (after event)

Table 1: Overview of Imaginative Disruption events

Source: generated by the authors

³ From all the video material, a short documentary summarising the project was produced. This can be viewed here: <https://vimeo.com/378882648>.

RETREAT: Re-inventing home in an imagined climate refugee camp. Cornwall, United Kingdom

The first sub-project, named *Retreat*, was primarily designed and led by a local community-focused artist, her partner (outdoor instructor and forest school educator) and one of the core academic partners. It began with the premise that the participating families were climate refugees in an imagined world 70 years from now. In this future world, coastal homes have become uninhabitable, sea levels have flooded harbours and eaten away land, causing houses to fall into the sea. The event kicked-off with an alarming video-message calling for the imagined climate refugees to report to a holding camp. After arriving at the 'camp' (in reality, a rustic wooded camping facility), they spent the next four days participating in creative activities, facilitated by various artists, that explored the emotional dimensions of climate change.

At different 'stations' across the camp, the participants engaged in a range of making processes, often simultaneously, which helped them to think through a particular aspect of climate change. It was designed loosely according to the structure of Theory U (observe, presence, act) (Scharmer 2009) and moved through the different levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, with participants exploring the emotional impact of different 'needs' being affected by climate change. On the first day, a ceramic artist with a PhD in climate science invited participants to create a ceramic figure of something each participant would miss were they to leave their homes behind. This exercise invited discussion, amongst families and between families, on the idea of loss and fragility (also represented in the materiality of the ceramic). Later, in a Forum Theatre session (see Boal 2008), participants were taken through an embodied imaginary journey of climate refugees by enacting tableaux of leaving home, of crossing a large sea and of arriving at a camp (Figure 2). This exercise led to deep emotional responses and unexpected tears, and to discussions around kindness, compassion and mutual aid and support. This activity linked to an exercise that used copper to create an individual talisman representing something that gave people courage, strength and hope. Once again this was a springboard for discussion about how people might strengthen their own resilience in the face of climate change. Other activities included song-writing sessions that resulted in a 'ballad' of the participants' imagined climate-change experience, a talent show and a game that used juxtaposition and humour to describe life in the camp. One of the primary activities was an ongoing project to create a mobile exhibition space for the results of participants' various artistic endeavours. At the same time, it was designed based on a collectively imagined home that would be able to weather rising sea levels. Design sessions, including all ages of participants, included drawing, prototyping with found objects and illustrating a final plan. The resulting *Boatbarrow* was later exhibited in a gallery space with a curated selection of objects made by the participants over the four days.

VONK: Exploring the unruly emotions that lurk beneath pragmatic measures. Wageningen, The Netherlands

The second sub-project was called *Vonk*, which means 'spark' in Dutch. Neighbours in a small Dutch city were invited to explore the emotional aspects of their imminent (non-fictional) energy transition from natural gas to local renewables. The energy transition initiative is led by community members who are deeply committed to a transition towards a more independent, self-determined and localised system. There is a lot of support, both local and national (the initiative received national funding as an exemplary energy transition project), yet there is no clear pathway forward. Many people in the neighbourhood, even those who are ostensibly pro-energy transformation, have doubts or are even sceptical about the whole initiative.

Vonk was a 1-day event curated by a local artist collective that led people through a series of dynamic performances throughout the neighbourhood. The short scenes brought various doubts, questions and anxieties to the surface that were present, but not typically expressed in public meetings and strategy sessions. In the first scene for example, the audience witnessed a woman's disjointed climate musings. As we watched her make a cup of tea, a recorded narration projecting her train of thought boomed out of speakers. Familiar feelings of guilt, doubt and

uncertainty mingled and contorted until she slid off the chair in exhaustion. Later, in the third scene, the audience stood in a circle while a performer in the middle narrated the history of fossil fuels and energy grids. We were asked to shape certain parts of his story using a provided lump of clay. At the end of the scene, he invited us to create a large circle, by connecting each individual string of clay to that of our neighbours. We then carefully lifted the circle of clay together, as a metaphor for how a community powered energy grid might work (Figure 3). The final performance was an improvised monologue by a participant who is also a resident of the neighbourhood. He shared his doubts and fears regarding the energy transition project, inviting audience members to reflect on their own misgivings and hesitations. Afterwards, people gathered to eat soup and exchange experiences.

COMPOSE: A transdisciplinary masterclass in the art of being a researcher in turbulent times of fake news and climate change. University of Gothenburg, Sweden

The final sub-project consisted of two phases: a) the planning and b) the execution of a masterclass for academics. A group of four colleagues from the core team, along with one outside expert on art and environmental education, holed up for a long weekend at a rural farm to reflect on the learnings from the previous two residencies and design this final one. The question guiding the design was: how can we support academics to explore the role of the researcher in these ambiguous times, especially in the face of ‘alternative facts’ and existential climate crisis? The result was a day of hands-on making and creative non-linear practices, intended to explore what it means to be impacted by and embedded in our research, while at the same time attempting to retain a degree of scientific objectivity and composure. The workshop was conceived according to the storyline of the archetypal ‘quest’, in which the protagonists (the participants) travel out of the known (a room in the university building) on a journey to a place where they encounter a series of challenges and trials, and finally return to where they started, with newly gained wisdom. Our ‘heroes’ walked up a hill adjacent to the campus to a castle overlooking the city of Gothenburg (Figure 1). There they participated in different visual and somatic activities that invited them to explore the concepts of ‘research frame’ and perspective. Back in the university room they assimilated and shared what they learned through a guided ‘conversation in clay’ (devised by art educator Jan van Boeckel).

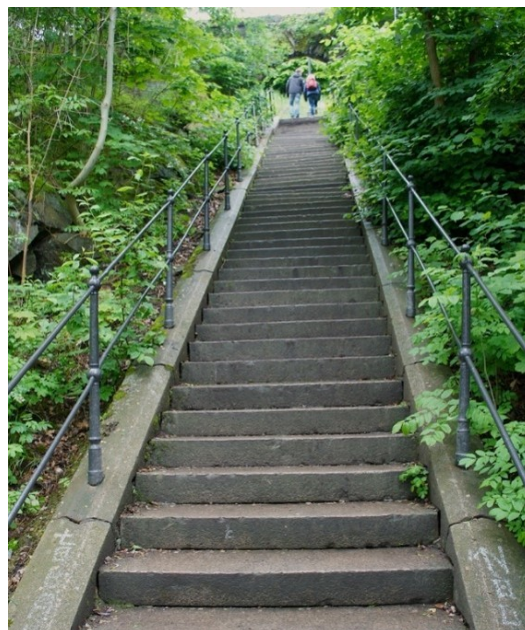


Figure 1: Heroes' journey - ascending the mountain
Source: Royner Norén (reproduced with permission)

Methodology

To assess the results and the learnings that came out of these experiments, the core project group employed an interdisciplinary research methodology that drew from practice-based, art-based and qualitative research methods. Like action research, common in social and educational sciences, practice-based research, used predominantly in the creative arts and performance studies, employs iterative cycles of reflective doing that inform a body of theory (Nelson 2013). The practitioner-researcher assesses the value and potential of a practical engagement in the world (i.e. the making of a performance, object or creative process) through reflection and evaluation. The practice in our research project, consisted of the three iterative cycles of collective creative process in the three contexts described.

To evaluate the creative practice, we applied qualitative and art-based methods (Leavy 2015; Norris 2017). The research team functioned as observers during the development and execution of the practice, interviewing each other at different times during the process. We documented the practices in detail through notetaking, through still and moving images, as well as audio. A selection of participants was interviewed after the events, both in the form of semi-structured interviews and an online survey. In Cornwall, we experimented with different art-based methods that enabled the participants to reflect and provide feedback on their experience during the residency. Various prompts in a secluded caravan, invited participants to leave their thoughts and opinions through different media (collage, drawing, diary writing etc.). In the Netherlands, data consisted of video footage and interviews, as well as texts from the series of the interactive performances and notes from multiple participant observers. From the practice in Sweden, we have visual records of the artefacts and activities, as well as notes from the design process and from the participant observers.

We ended up with a vibrant dataset of over 500 images, video (totalling around 40 hours), interview transcripts (with 25 people), diary entries, reflective writing, drawings and observations. The data were analysed through an inductive and iterative process (Thomas 2006) where themes were identified by members of the core group in the role of 'professional strangers' (Agar 1980). Themes were first identified individually, then shared and discussed to reach synthesis and agreement. The guiding question in this analysis was: what are the most important dimensions of using art to engage people around climate change challenges? And what seemed to be the essential 'ingredients' of these processes (and should be considered in future engagements)?

Key insights and reflections

In response to the guiding question, three categories emerged: (1) *Light hearts amid heavy realities*; (2) *Comfortable spaces to be uncomfortable together*; and (3) *Design for deep participation*. Below we elaborate on each of these categories, with specific observations and data, and with reference to relevant literature.

Light hearts amid heavy realities

From our reflections and analysis, we recognised that the elements of play and humour contributed to an atmosphere of light-heartedness and to positive experiences of dealing with what is normally regarded as a heavy topic. For example, even the most serious and emotionally heavy activity during Retreat – the Forum Theatre session in which participants explored the experience of being climate refugees – began with a game that evoked a lot of laughter (Figure 2). In an interview with the facilitator, she explained that starting with play helps people to open up to the difficult emotions later in the exercise. Many participants cited this exercise as the most impactful of the four days and after the event we reflected that it represented a microcosm of balance between playfulness and serious emotional engagement.

During both Retreat and Vonk, we observed that the involvement of children and young people contributed to the playful, light-hearted environment. Within moments of arriving at the holding camp at Retreat, the children had created a makeshift slide out of debris and had made connections across families through their spontaneous play. They organised a talent show and endless extemporaneous games and brought a youthful enthusiasm and willingness to dive-in to each new arts activity. Multiple adult participants observed that the experimental spirit of the children helped everyone to engage with the heavy subject of the weekend in a more light-hearted manner – helping connect to each other and to somehow metabolise the overwhelming challenge of climate change. In a follow-up survey, one participant described Retreat as: *“A place to play, reflect on current issues, and leave with hope for the future”*.



Figure 2: Forum Theatre exercise at Retreat:
a playful game as entry point for exploring more difficult emotions
Source: Kelli Pearson (reproduced with permission)

In Vonk, the children played a similar role – adding energy, laughter and delight during the performances – particularly during the hands-on moments such as illustrating the performer’s story with clay images and holding up the large clay circle (Figure 3). In the less-structured moments of eating soup at the end of the performance, the children played spontaneously.



Figure 3: A circle of clay representing the future community-based
energy grid of the neighbourhood
Source: Kelli Pearson (reproduced with permission)

The importance of play shouldn't come as a surprise, as there is an abundance of research that discusses its relevance from educational (Vygotsky 1978) and evolutionary perspectives (Pellegrini 2009), and points to its importance in coping with stress (Magnuson and Barnett 2012) and in design processes (Holopainen and Stain 2015; Johansson and Linde 2005). Play is regarded as intrinsic to being human and is firmly at the heart of creativity and art. It creates space to drift and fail – to take risks and experiment (Brown 2010). Yet, when it comes to our daily adult existence (and increasingly children's lives, due to mounting pressures on educational establishments to start academic learning at an increasingly earlier age) there seems to be very little space for playing (Gray 2011) or for experimenting, musing, drifting and failing (Rosen 2019). When it comes to the practice of making art – the 'mucking about' with materials in a studio and the testing of different processes to arrive at new and interesting outcomes – there is expansive space for play. As well as play, 'failure' is seen as a prerequisite for the successful creation of art (see the numerous texts devoted to the topic like Le Feuvre's book *Failure* 2010). From the positive feedback we received from families after the experience, we came to realise that there is a great desire for adults and children to (a) carve out spaces in their lives to reflect on climate change, and (b) explore the matter in a playful, experimental fashion. Retreat seemed to function as a space for families that already had an awareness of climate change to work their way through the personal and emotional sides of the concept using hands-on workshops (making) and playful interactions.

In addition to play, humour – both planned and spontaneous – contributed to the atmosphere of light-heartedness and the collective learning in all three events. Both Retreat and Vonk included humour by design. During Retreat, for example, we played a humorous word/card game that was designed for the event, using local references. The camp rang with belly laughter into the night and throughout the pouring rain of a storm. In Vonk, each of the performances expertly and intentionally entwined humour and gravity, and participants could be observed laughing one minute and nodding seriously and thoughtfully the next. During Compose, humour was not intentionally embedded into the structure, but emerged spontaneously, particularly during the design phase, in advance of the masterclass, in which there was more unstructured time for cooking and eating together.

Viktor Frankl, in his 1946 memoir *Man's Search for Meaning*, explains that during his time in a concentration camp humour "was another of the soul's weapons in the fight for self-preservation. It is well known that humour, more than anything else in the human make-up, can afford an aloofness and an ability to rise above any situation, even if only for a few seconds" (Frankl 1985, 63). Humour has been shown to support learning processes (Lovorn 2008) and trauma recovery (Sliter et al. 2014; Mooney 2000). It is also used to form and strengthen social connections (Lynch 2010). Humour can enable people to handle stress (Abel 2002) which could help them to process serious and frightening topics that, without humour, could cause an emotional shut-down (e.g. Frankl 1985; Booth-Butterfield and Wanzer 2016).

Comfortable spaces to be uncomfortable together

The presence of light-heartedness in all three events led to our reflection on the balance between comfort and discomfort in grappling with heavy topics. In relation to climate change, some research suggests that, while there are many benefits to incorporating humour, if the content lacks a balance of fear and anger, humour alone can lead to emotional distancing from the topic (Boykoff and Osnes 2019; Skurka et al. 2018). Essentially, if people are too overwhelmed they can't respond creatively and proactively (Lertzman 2015), but if people are too comfortable, they aren't motivated to change (Chaves and Wals 2018).

Throughout the project, we observed the power of creating convivial environments in which people feel safe and cared for, but which also nudge us to leave our comfort zones. During Retreat, for example, once people arrived and set up camp, the 'holding camp' quickly resembled a 'summer camp'. Even through two days of severe storms,

everyone kept in good spirits and contributed to maintaining and storm-proofing the camp. At the end of the four days several participants admitted that they had been relieved by the easy atmosphere, as the tone of the invitation video had been quite serious and alarming and they hadn't known what to expect. In fact, many of the parents shared their initial doubts about whether to share the invitation video with their children, stuck between wanting to involve them in the important topic of climate change, but not wanting to terrify them. In one interview, a young participant explained that she was glad Retreat made her worry more about climate change because it made her want to act and it also gave her some insight as to *how* to act (*"we cannot be competitive, we have to do it together"*). This seems to be in line with the recognised need to face the (often painful) reality of the threat as a first step towards developing personal and local responses to climate change (Macy 2012). Retreat created a sense of convivial, light-hearted safety that invited parents and children to engage in discomforting experiences together – something (the interviews show) they both longed for.

The structure of Vonk was quite different. The event did not require people to leave the comfort of their neighbourhood or their daily lives, but it did create a space to bring up uncomfortable emotions and doubts and unspoken tensions surrounding the energy transition project. Many people commented that they recognised the feelings that were played out in the performances and they felt empowered by seeing them externalised and shared publicly. Community meetings and local politics usually follow specific 'ritual' forms which do not typically surface and reflect the emotional dimensions of an issue. Through the Vonk performances, feelings of frustration, anxiety and insecurity suddenly became legitimate elements in the transition process that could be openly discussed, rather than repressed or bottled up. In this sense, the habituated container for holding neighbourhood planning conversations and collective decision-making was disrupted. It is worth noting that, if not done skilfully, bringing in emotions via the arts could have overstepped the participants' comfort zones and made people more suspicious and withdrawn (Wals and Peters 2017). The quality of the performances and the preparation of a welcoming environment – including warm food served to the audience - created a comfortable and safe environment in which people were visibly at ease.

During the Compose workshop, the familiarity of the workshop structure and the professionalism of the facilitation created a safe environment that supported people to participate in activities that were outside of their comfort zone. At certain moments, participants felt unsure and uncomfortable about the process: what was the point? What was the outcome? This was by design: an important part of the hero's journey is 'the dark night of the soul' where the hero must face and grapple with elements of chaos before they conquer (or integrate) the enemy and emerge triumphant. After participants experienced the event, they expressed satisfaction and enthusiasm about the opportunity to reflect creatively and non-linearly on their role as academics in the face of climate change (during a final round of collective reflection).

In sum, the three generative engagements demonstrated that dealing with difficult topics related to climate change requires eliciting emotions (both positive and negative) and facing harsh realities, but in a way that makes participants feel stronger and more connected to one another. Arts-based methods can help create a kind of liminal safe-space, or so-called 'holding environment', in which people step outside the everyday habits of silence and denial and can process deep and troubling issues (Nicholsen 2002). Artmaking in this context allows participants to express and explore emotions through multimodal (embodied, visual, linguistic, etc.) processing.

Design for deep participation

A third area of learning regarded how different forms and levels of involvement can shape participant experience. In comparing the three sub-projects, we observed that the participants had different, as artist Jeppe Hein terms it,

“levels of influence” (Schikowski 2016, 767) in each respective participatory art event. We also noted that participants’ levels of influence extended beyond the realm of the artworks and into the informal or semi-structured activities involved in creating and maintaining the ‘container’ of the event via supportive or care tasks, such as cooking, cleaning and eating together.

In Retreat, for instance, the facilitated activities and creative engagement stations offered participants a ‘high’ level of influence. The activities were carefully designed in advance by the local team, but built into the design were structures that enabled everyone to be part of the emergent making process. Some activities had formal instruction and guidance (such as making clay figures or a copper talisman), and others were ‘stations’ where people could work independently and respond to creative, topical prompts. The adults and children moved in and out of structured activity as they wished, filling the time in between with unorganised play, talking, eating, or just hanging out. Although the facilitators provided a framework and invitation for the engagement, the content and outcome of the engagement was entirely shaped by the participants. What emerged was very much ‘of’ the participants, while the distinction between non-artist participants and artist initiators became fuzzy and almost entirely indistinctive. Consequently, there was a real sense of collective meaning-making as insights and ideas emerged through making and being together, in the liminal spaces between activities, and through unplanned collective creation where groups of people sought solutions for practical problems.

In addition to the structured activities of artmaking during Retreat, the families also joined in daily camp activities such as preparing and sharing meals, doing dishes and making the campfire which added to the conviviality, connectivity, trust between participants and a democratic sense of ‘being in it all together.’ The combination of the structured, semi-structured and the spontaneous, further blurred the line between the professional artists/organisers and the participants, and created ample space for reflection and meaningful conversation. Literature on ‘commensality’, or cooking and eating together, supports this conclusion and points to the importance of these activities in building trust and connections (e.g. Giacomani 2016; Marovelli 2019).

Vonk was structured with more separation between ‘artists and audience.’ It consisted of four performances scattered throughout the neighbourhood that required some responses and participation (such as playing with clay and holding part of the stage set), but it was highly guided and left little room for open-ended, undirected creativity on the part of the audience. Several of the participant-observers noted that the moments when the audience was asked to participate created visibly high levels of energy and engagement amongst the crowd. Compose was also highly structured in a workshop format, but many of the activities allowed people to express themselves creatively and to communicate with each other via making objects. As compared to Retreat, the participants in both Vonk and Compose didn’t have as much opportunity to demonstrate agency in terms of contributing to emergent structures.

While Vonk and Compose followed well-established formats of creative participation in the context of artistic climate change response, i.e. that of a site-specific performance (see Pearson 2010) and a workshop that employs arts-based approaches (see Pearson et al. 2018), we believe that Retreat offered a novel constellation between artist, participant and artwork. To make that argument we draw from Matarasso’s definition of ‘participatory art’ and the concept of ‘practicable’ as discussed extensively by Bianchini and Verhagen. Matarasso defines participatory art on the basis of two characteristics: first, that it “involves the creation of art” (2019, 48), and second, that everyone involved in the creation is an artist, whether professional or not. Aligning with a trend in social art in which emphasis on the completed work of art is shifted to the processes of its creation (Bishop 2012; Lacy 1995; Kester 2011), the ‘artistic quality’ of the art in this context is irrelevant. What matters is the fact that by making and creating, or responding to something creatively, the participants bring something into the world and thereby “conjure up new possibilities in all our imagination” (Matarasso 2019, 49), which in itself is transformative. Herein,

Matarasso argues, lies the power of (participatory) art. ‘Practicable’ art, according to Bianchini and Verhagen, denotes artworks in which the distinguishing feature “is their capacity to accommodate the concrete involvement of their viewers and to generate an activity that may transform the works themselves as well as their audience” (Bianchini and Verhagen 2016, 1)⁴.

Based on these two interpretations we would argue that Retreat was both participatory and practicable, with (a) the process design allowed for high levels of openness that enabled participants to almost entirely determine the outcome of the work, and (b) the implicit recognition that because of this influence and creation, everyone involved was an artist. If everyone is indeed an artist on an equal basis – regardless of whether they are art professionals or the initiators of the process – then, we would argue, the process ceases to be a ‘participatory artwork’ in which non-artists work alongside artists, but instead takes the shape of a group of artists experimenting together, playing with ideas and materials, testing and failing: a scenario that mirrors the notion of an ‘artist colony’ or ‘artist residency’. The difference between participatory art on the one hand and a collective art residency on the other is nuanced, but as we will demonstrate in the next section, acknowledging this distinction ultimately determines how highly we value *everyone’s* ability to be creative and artistic with the purpose of generatively engaging with climate change.

The Collective Artist Residency

Historically, artist residencies have existed to provide artists with a retreat from everyday life, thereby creating working conditions that are “most favourable to the production of enduring works of the imagination” (Wiseman 2006, 10; Lübbren 2001). Often located in rural, idyllic spots, the residency provides the artist with isolation and ‘incubation’ to maximise their artistic potential. A related concept is that of the ‘artist in residence,’ which emphasises the interaction between the artist and non-artists in their everyday organisational settings. In this scenario, the artist, who is an outsider, is embedded in an institution or organisation and typically creates work that “creates possibilities for ... free play or shifts between a given reality and another while leaving room for ambiguity and uncertainty” (Lithgow and Wall 2019). There are increasing numbers of residencies that invite socially engaged artists to develop projects in/with communities, indicating there is a trend towards residencies being “less about supporting isolated practice of artists and more about using art as a way of collectively responding to the global challenges [of] our time” (Badham 2017). This includes different ‘climate change residencies’ such as Cape Farewell, where scientists and artists travelled to the Arctic on so-called expeditions, resulting in a range of pieces created by the artists in response to their experiences and observations. All of these scenarios, however, still typically conform to a pattern in which the locus of creativity and making is with the professional artists, who work *with* community members that are notably *non-artists*.

We would argue that the durational and participatory qualities of Retreat echo the idea of an artist residence, as participants ‘retreated’ from their everyday obligations and were given dedicated time to do, explore, experiment,

⁴ Although we are arguing that a democratic, Beuysian (‘Everyone is an artist’) approach to artmaking is helpful in organising generative arts-based engagements with climate change we also wish to acknowledge three important issues that are outside the scope of this paper. (a) We wish to emphasise that the criteria by which we value art varies depending on the context – e.g., participatory/ community art versus professional art (Bishop 2004), and that we hold in high regard the quality and professionalism of art and artists which is developed by dedicated practice over time. (b) We also acknowledge the potentially flawed binary between participation and non-participation in art. Bruno Latour, for example, makes the point that drawing a line between works of art that audience participates in and those in which it doesn’t, can feel contrived; as he says: “I can’t think of any more incredibly lively activity than to sit in front of a painting and contemplate it” (Latour 2016, 775-776). (c) We recognize the importance of the critical perspective on participation in general. Indeed, participation should not be framed as a universally applicable approach and some forms of participation might in fact serve the status-quo more than it disrupts it, by removing a person’s right to be socially disruptive (see Bishop 2012).

and produce creative work. Contrastingly, in our conceptualisation of a ‘collective artist residency’, the emphasis shifts away from lead artists onto the collective results of collaborative creative inquiry: all involved engage on an equal basis in the process of making objects and knowledge. Retreat provided the non-professional artists/makers with a comfortable space to creatively and collectively explore a potentially uncomfortable subject matter; generating art together as a means for inquiry, conversation and meaning making, resulting in tangible artefacts.

Emphasising this engagement as a ‘novel’ concept is important for two reasons. First, our data (i.e. the overwhelmingly positive feedback of participants) demonstrates that people – whether professional artists or not – crave undirected spaces that are dedicated to such artmaking. As argued above, despite its proven importance, there are very few opportunities in our adult lives to engage playfully with important topics in a spirit of experimentation. In the vein of cultural democracy, we posit that everyone in society should have access to spaces dedicated to meaning making through the arts, and that these spaces should not just be the privilege of artists.

Second, we believe that explicitly calling this form of engagement an artist residency, acknowledges the value of *everyone’s* creativity, experimentation and playful engagement with societal issues. This is especially relevant in the context of urgent and complex issues such as climate change, as research has demonstrated that when people feel overwhelmed and anxious about an issue their capacity to come up with new solutions is reduced (Albrecht 2011; Clayton et al. 2014; Lertzman 2015). As a problem grows more urgent and stressful, people are less able to play, experiment, imagine and test possible ways forward, and consequently their horizon of possibility and sense of agency shrinks, which, in a vicious cycle, increases their feeling of stress and anxiety. Therefore, while we recognise the need for urgent action and technical solutions that directly mitigate the effects of climate change, we argue that there is also a societal need for places where people can come together to muse, make, reflect, tinker and ‘doodle’. This could take the form of dedicated spaces, where young and old can break away from everyday obligations and stressors, to retreat from the constant (reductionist) fear-inducing deluge of media coverage of climate change as a hyperobject (Morton 2013). People can be critically informed about predicted challenges and changes, but can also express emotions of anxiety and frustration in the face of an uncertain future, and take time to play and experiment to find personal and collective ways through impending crises.

In sum, a *collective artist residency* can be characterised as a temporal and physical space or ‘holding environment’ that supports collective, democratic processes of artistic/aesthetic making as a way to generatively engage with issues related to climate change (or other ‘wicked’ issues). Based on our experience and process of iterative reflection, we suggest some guiding principles that could be useful to consider in designing a collective art residency:

- *Deeply participatory*: The foundational element of the residency is that the boundaries between facilitators and the participants, or artists and non-artists, is dimmed, wherein everyone contributes to the shared experience and the collective creation and exchange of knowledge. This includes participation in the art-making processes, as well as the care of ‘container’ (i.e. cooking, cleaning, etc.).
- *Balanced between comfortable/uncomfortable emotions*: As per critics of ‘feel-good art’ that is ‘only’ convivial and purely seeks to create harmonious uncritical encounters between people (see Jackson 2011; Bishop 2012), a collective artist residency creates an opportunity for people to tease out the heavy matters that impact their lives through playful, light-hearted experimentation. The design intentionally balances seriousness with humour and seeks to create a safe ‘holding environment’ which supports the exploration of complex/painful emotions, while also allowing for dissensus (Ranci re 2010).
- *Highly experiential*: Evoking an expressive, somatic, or emotional experience and integrating processes of reflection with doing and making.

- *Cross-sectoral and intergenerational*: Bringing together people of all ages and societal sectors, e.g. linking community members – young and old – policymakers and scientists to share perspectives, while also acknowledging that children are instigators of play and hands-on experimentation.
- *Place-based*: Exploring a locally relevant issue with global implications, informed by participants' experiential and situational knowledge, and directing localised or personal responses to the issue in question.

We suggest that these principles serve as aspirational and flexible guidelines or points of consideration, rather than as strict criteria or as a basis for quality assessment.

Conclusions

“Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent responses to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and to rebuild quiet places.” ~ Donna Haraway (2016, 1)

Art and artistic practices have the potential to support generative engagement with the existential urgency of climate change. Our experiment with Imaginative Disruptions provided a fertile ground for reflecting on ways to operationalise arts-based practices to engage with climate-change related topics. Each of the three sub-projects challenged and disrupted aspects of the status quo, in terms of forms and modalities for addressing climate change, and simultaneously experimented with alternatives. Retreat delved into community (emotional) preparedness for the possibility of climate change displacement via a four-day intergenerational artistic playground. Vonk incorporated dynamic, site-specific performances into the process of community planning for energy transition. Compose used arts-based practices within the structure of a hero's journey to challenge the way universities frame and deliver 'objective' research during the global crisis of climate change. Although the parameters of our research did not include follow-up with participants about the longer-term impacts of their participation, informal anecdotal stories suggest that several Retreat participants have deepened their involvement with local climate activities or organisations. The success of all three events, in terms of enthusiasm and positive feedback from participants, suggests a demand for more opportunities for people to explore the human-dimensions of climate change through art-based approaches.

As we metabolised the results of these experiments, we emerged with the concept of *collective artist residencies* as a way to structure a practicable container for arts-based engagement. Such a residency evokes the playful creative capacities that we all possess, and can support psychological and social strength, as well as generate visions of alternative futures/ imaginaries that diverge from the inertia of our habituated trajectories.

Future research could include follow-up studies about how such residencies influence people's mind-sets and future actions, as well as more specific inquiries into values, attitudes and motivations before and after the event. Further inquiry could also explore the impact and details of creating a caring environment and the role this might have in the participatory experience and valuation of the event.

More work is needed to understand how the residencies we propose can be made accessible to a wide subset of society, e.g. how they can happen in varied geographical communities and be made attractive to diverse societal communities. The groups taking part in this project were all relatively homogenous. Although we didn't ask participants to describe their socio-economic background, we would describe them all as well-informed about and aware of climate change. Having understood what the important design elements are, our next step is to consider how we can engage a wider more diverse audience, potentially including people that are less aware of the impacts of climate change.

There is a great scope for implementing various interpretations of collective artist residencies and studying their potential, such as in processes of contributing to the transformative agency of individuals (Westly et al. 2013) and the transformative capacity of systems (Wolfram 2016). Perhaps even more critical in today's world of rising eco-anxiety, nowadays coupled with a fear of pandemics, is the question of whether collective artist residencies can provide an effective way of countering feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and apathy, and instead become breeding grounds of active hope (Macy 2012) and concrete utopias (Jakobson 2018).

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