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THE NOMADIC RADICAL ACADEMY: CREATING A DIALOGUE ABOUT ECO-FRIENDLY BEHAVIOUR USING ARTS-BASED METHODS

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ANNOTATION

The research explores how to create a dialogue with youth and children about climate change and water pollution using arts-based methods (ABR), exemplified by two cases of artwork. The aim of the research is to create recommendations for artists, collaborating with environmental scientists, within NGOs on how to work within InterMedia and complete the Artistic Cycle by involving participants in a dialogue about nature and the environment at the site of the gallery. The objectives of the research are to analyze the cases and discuss environmentally friendly behaviour through art. The research results are the recommendations targeted at artists and art educators working with environmental themes.

INTRODUCTION

The Nomadic Radical Academy (2019), realized at the Gallery Meno Parkas, is the object of the research presented in this article, through the means of Arts-Based Methods, involving artists and environmental scientists and activists. The Nomadic Radical Academy involved live performance and artwork within an art installation comprising an immersive artistic conversation about climate change, environmental sciences, and eco-friendly behaviour (Griniuk, 2021). This research is innovative and significant for the artists and art educators due to its implementation of cross-disciplinary discussion on climate change and water pollution, targeted at young audiences utilizing dialogical art and aesthetics. The research problem concerns the lack of tools and terms for art production and art education practitioners to engage in InterMedia discussions about the artistic methods to enhance empathic connections of the involved project participants with nature. The aim of the research is the development of tools and recommendations, which could be applied by the artists and art educators, working on the projects themed around environmental issues in collaborations with environmental scientists in NGO organizations. The objectives of the research are as follows: to analyze the cases of the artworks by two artists, realized within The Nomadic Radical Academy and to discuss how art can create empathic connections with nature and open a discussion about environmentally friendly behaviour.

The article comprises the following parts: presenting methods and terms used in the research; presentation and analysis of the two cases and recommendations to artists collaborating with environmental scientists or working with art projects themed around eco-friendly behaviour.

Method and Terms

The research philosophy within this study is interpretivism (O'Reilly, 2009, pp.119-124). The methodology is framed as complex mixed methods (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). The time horizon of this research is cross-sectional, as the study is completed within two years (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012). The data collected included participant observations as well as photo and video materials from the project The Nomadic Radical Academy (2019). Artists of the case projects Anne-Louise Knudsen (DK) and Anders Werdelin (DK) were invited to participate at the Nomadic Radical Academy and the researcher was an eyewitness to their artistic contributions.

The method used to collect this data and analyze it is the Arts-Based Research (ABR) method. ABR was developed in the 1970s as an interdisciplinary approach to research that uses a range of art practices, such as creative writing, drama, music and visual art forms, in order to address social science questions (Eisner, 1997). Exploratory research is close to ABR in that it involves creative interpretation and creativity exercises. ABR is described as a data-collection

method with art at its core (Barone & Eisner, 2012). In ABR, the process is as important as the product. This is why there is so much focus on the creative process within the contributions to the Nomadic Radical Academy. The product is needed to help answer the research questions, for example the objects and items, used during the performance of a workshop, as at the later phase they can become the parts of the data collected. However, the process of creating this product is just as important as the data is gathered during the interactions between the artists and the audience members (the children).

The goal of this kind of research is to improve the understanding of human behaviour through the involvement of aesthetic means (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2018). ABR helps the researcher understand the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, such as in the case of the artworks within The Nomadic Radical Academy. ABR belongs in the field of qualitative research (Leavy, 2018). The data of the described cases is analyzed using the tools of qualitative data analysis. To analyze the collected data are used categories and keywords. The cases in this article are illustrated by the four included images (Image 1, 2, 3 and 4), where the three first images are aiming to highlight the installation at the gallery and the fourth image is unfolding the interaction between the artist and the audience members.

The cases presented in this article will be analyzed through the concepts of *eco-friendly behaviour*, *InterMedia*, and the *Artistic Cycle*:

Eco-friendly behaviour or practices have been gaining ground in recent years due to increased awareness of the need to conserve the environment and promote ecologically sustainable living (Carfora, V., Caso, D., Sparks, P., Conner, M., 2017). Eco-friendly behaviour in this study is combined with artistic action.

The term *InterMedia* (meaning “between media”) was originally used to describe Fluxus works that used pre-existing media (e.g. music, painting, sculpture) in new ways (Andersen, 2002; Higgins, 1984; Griniuk, 2020). Creators of such artworks may use any number of objects, media, and/or the human body in combination. The term intermediality can be used more specifically to refer to *InterMedia* and interdisciplinary works that involve the audience directly (Rippl, 2015), as opposed to works in which the audience are only observers. In the context of this article *InterMedia* is used as a term very similar to Fluxus pedagogies (Griniuk, 2020), as interaction is with children.

Artistic Cycle, a term described by art critic and scholar David Burton (2006), is characterised by dialogue with the audience members while completing a studio-based process and during its exhibition. In other words, according to Burton (2006), it is the period during which an artist comes up with a concept and then executes and presents the concept to an audience or spectator, who, in turn, gives rise to new ideas.

Analysis of the Cases

The organizer of The Nomadic Radical Academy (2019) is artist and PhD candidate at The University of Lapland Marija Griniuk (LT/DK/FIN). The following artists were involved in The Nomadic Radical Academy (2019): Tue Brisson Mosich (DK/LT), Nanna Ylönen (FIN), Marta Gil (SE), Sanna Blennow (SE), Rikke Goldbech (DK), Anne-Louise Knudsen (DK), Anders Werdelin (DK), Dr. Adomas Danusevičius (LT/DK), and Kaunas-based Lithuanian artists and initiatives: Evelina Šimkutė, Šilainių Sodai and Vyrenijus Andrijauskas. Video documentation was done by Albinas Liutkus, and photo documentation was done by Antanas Untydi and Marija Griniuk. The cases described in this article are the artworks created by Danish artists Anne-Louise Knudsen (DK) and Anders Werdelin (DK). The project comprised a day camp consisting of performances, workshops, discussions, collective food preparation, and collective dinners. The regular visitors of the gallery could observe the art project in situ. The Nomadic Radical Academy is built upon the ideas of *InterMedia*, a concept coined within the conceptual framework of Fluxus art (Andersen, 2002).

Anne-Louise Knudsen presented her artwork “The Sun” (2019), created from recycled textiles, at The Nomadic Radical Academy. The sewn/quilted pieces of old fabric were the first part of her contribution to the project. In the second part, she expanded her artwork through a workshop

with children who created three-dimensional collages from recycled materials. InterMedia was present in the transgression of the two-dimensional artwork into a dialogue-based production involving the children. Also, the *Artistic Cycle* could be perceived as the static artwork became the basis for an active discussion on the issues of responsibility and recycling (Burton, 2006).

“The Sun” (2019) was created as a part of an ongoing exploration of nurturing ecologically sustainable lifestyles, such as waste and water conservation. The piece symbolises our reliance on the sun for life and how we are destroying it by creating toxic waste. This piece’s use of recycled fabric raises awareness of the importance of recycling and emphasises how we are literally killing ourselves by poisoning our environment. Presented as a tarot card, it also signifies that there is still hope for the future and a chance to change.



Image 1. The Nomadic Radical Academy. Anne-Louise Knudsen, “The Sun” (2019), Photo: Marija Griniuk

Knudsen has worked with fabric (recycled or otherwise) for a long time and views it as a powerful medium for expression. The message behind “The Sun” (2019) is important: we need to take care of ourselves and our planet in order to survive, and we need to practice eco-friendly behaviour. The artist’s use of fabric is also a symbol of our need for clothing and warmth. Thus, it ties into the idea that this is an issue that concerns us all.

Both the artwork and the dialogue it generates are intended to promote care for our environment. In the second part of this project, the artist led a workshop with children. In this workshop, *InterMedia* art (Andersen, 2002; Higgins, 1984; Griniuk, 2020) and education merged as the artist, with the help of the children, created a work of art that would later become part of an exhibit. The act of working together to complete a piece of art using the children’s collages sparked a meaningful discussion about the environment and how to help protect it, which, in turn, contributed greatly to the *Artistic Cycle* (Burton, 2006) in the case of this artwork.



Image 2. The Nomadic Radical Academy. Anders Werdelin, “Untitled” (2019), Photo: Marija Griniuk

The contribution by Anders Werdelin, “Untitled” (2019). The work is directly related to climate change and, at the same time, is visually and architecturally interesting.

“Untitled” (2019) is a follow up to his earlier work entitled “Woodwave” (2017), which he created for the Copenhagen Metro fence project (“Byens Hegn”) in October 2017.

Here, Werdelin made a sculptural rendering of sea waves, aiming to communicate that the very place of the exhibition will someday be covered by the ocean if glaciers indeed melt away. His decision to mount the waves vertically was partly the result of the fact that the fence had to be standing upright and partly to bring about the idea of a blind road, the end of evolution, a full stop.

The artwork “Untitled” (2019) was presented at The Nomadic Radical Academy as several parts that fit together, as a habitat made of several reciprocally fitting parts of different ages, all burnt looking on the outside, symbolising a dangerous environment in the form of a hydra of exhaust pipes. The burnt elements of the sculpture left marks on the children’s hands or clothes when they attempted to touch them at the gallery.

The children intentionally and unintentionally created patterns on their bodies by interacting with Werdelin’s sculpture. Werdelin’s piece “Untitled” (2019) was presented by the author to the children as part of a discussion about CO₂ emissions and our responsibility to use eco-friendly means of travelling. Here, *InterMedia* (Andersen, 2002; Higgins, 1984; Griniuk, 2020) is seen both in how the children interacted with the sculpture and how the dialogue with the author arose in the gallery.



Image 3. **The Nomadic Radical Academy. Anders Werdelin, “Untitled” (2019) (the black objects on the wall), Photo: Marija Griniuk**

Through the process of making the piece for the exhibition, “Untitled” (2019) transformed into a tool for discussions on issues related to climate change. This is where the challenge lies: How can we make the connection between art and actions? This is where the artist gets in touch with the children directly and makes them aware of our environmental responsibilities as humans today. The artwork “Untitled” (2019) thus becomes part of an important discussion on the environment and is delegating a message that the children are accepting into their daily lives.

The artist makes a connection between the artwork and the children’s lives by opening up a discussion on the topic of climate change. The artist gives the children a chance to voice their concerns and make them known to others. In the case of Werdelin’s work, the *Artistic Cycle* (Burton, 2006) is completed by the dialogue created between the artist and the children participating in the gallery.



Image 4. The Nomadic Radical Academy. Anne-Louise Knudsen, workshop by “The Sun” (2019), Photo: Antanas Unitydy

Recommendations Based on the Cases by Knudsen and Werdelin.

There is a difference between what we think we do and what we actually do, as most of our lives are spent doing things on “auto-pilot.” The problem with “auto-pilot” is that we lose some of the essential details. The aesthetic approach helps us to slow down and pay attention to the little details in our lives, including those regarding responsible consumption and eco-friendly behaviours.

ABR makes us ask the questions that help us to understand our own responsibility and the ways we connect with nature. These questions are different for everyone, but they all help to make us more aware of ourselves and the world around us. The live discussion between the artists and the participating children is at the core of the educational approach within the Nomadic Radical Academy. Therefore, artists engage in the dialogue with children at the site of the installation at the gallery, close to their artwork.

Enhancing awareness about climate change and eco-friendly behaviour through arts-based methods is practiced not only by the artists, but in collaborations between the artists and environmental scientists. In the case of the Nomadic Radical academy cross-disciplinary collaborations were encouraged as such collaborations can widen the scope of the information artworks communicate to the audience members. Knudsen and Werdelin communicated with all the artists, environmental specialists and activists and participants of the Nomadic Radical Academy and this contributed to their experience of the event. They also visited the Kaunas-based initiative Šilainių Sodai and participated in one of their events as the audience members.

The organizer of the Nomadic Radical Academy had a double role, representing both fine arts and environmental sciences, due to her academic background, which was especially present in the later edition of the event in 2020. Part of the discussions with the children and feedback about the performances were conducted by the artwork analysis through the prism of environmental sciences. The language needed to be adapted to the listeners and all the concepts explained and

unfolded, in a way accessible to the young audience. While utilizing arts-based methods to communicate environmental sciences in organizational settings one should be aware of the wide scope of the audience. Thus, the narrative should always be adapted to the interests and backgrounds of the listeners.

The following recommendations are targeted at artists and art educators working with environmental themes, as well artists, collaborating with environmental scientists in the setting of non-governmental organizations:

- ABR (Barone & Eisner, 2012; Leavy, 2018) is an important approach, as it can help people make sense of the data collected and improve projects. There are many ways to collect data, but the ABR approach uses a wide range of artistic practices to do this, thus allowing the artist-researcher to review and analyze the events.
- Everyone has their own interests, likes, and dislikes. Everyone also has their own experiences that affect the way they see and understand things. When a wide range of art practices are used, it is more likely that some of the participating children will connect with something. Therefore, the Nomadic Radical Academy values a wide range of approaches to create a dialogue with children on the themes of the environment and responsible consumption. Collaborations and network-building between the international professionals and local art and environmental sciences communities should be encouraged.
- Completing the *Artistic Cycle* (Burton, 2006)—not only presenting the artwork in the gallery space but also by engaging with the young audience in in-depth conversations about the ecology and environment—is beneficial to the audience and the artist, as it evokes new ideas and thoughts, leading to the further development of the concepts behind the artworks.
- Art is meant to be enjoyed and appreciated. It is meant to express the innermost feelings and ideas of an individual. It is meant to be shared and enjoyed by others. By means of *InterMedia*, emphasis is placed on co-participation and co-creation in the exhibition space (Andersen, 2002; Higgins, 1984; Griniuk, 2020) or enhancing of the scope of participation in the workshop or event setting.

CONCLUSION

This research presented here builds upon the two artistic contributions to the Nomadic Radical Academy created by artists Anne-Louise Knudsen and Anders Werdelin that were observed by the organizer of the Nomadic Radical Academy (who is also the author of this paper). The method used within this research is ABR.

The aim of this research was to create recommendations for the artists, who work with environmental issues and communicate with young audiences and artists collaborating with environmental scientists. The main points of these recommendations are as follows:

- ABR is a useful tool for analyzing art projects about nature, the environment, and participants' behaviours within them.
- The variations and experimentations towards engaging with the audience are key to connecting with most of the participants and having in-depth discussions about eco-friendly behaviour.
- The *Artistic Cycle* is completed by the active involvement of the young audience in the dialogue, and it can benefit the artists' further work.
- The gallery space provides the possibility to generate a story and complete the *Artistic Cycle*, resulting in the dissemination of the narrative about eco-friendly behaviour among a young art audience.

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