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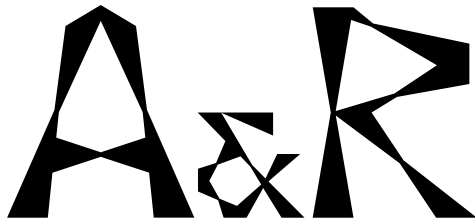
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Drama as a hopeful practice when navigating liminal times

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Abstract

This article presents results from a study where applied drama interventions were deployed in four different groups to build capacities to re-imagine economics. Participants were interviewed or entered dialogue with each other after completing the drama work. Through a close reading of one of the conversations that stands out as glowing in the research material and with inspiration from rhizomatic analysis, we identify four nodes that point to drama as a hopeful practice during insecure times. The dramatic arts have historically facilitated the navigation of localized political and economic tensions, but research and practice has not seemingly addressed the transitions to more holistic forms of development embedded within the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal 8: Decent Work and Inclusive Economic Growth. Conceptualizing this transition as liminal, we argue for the use of drama(tic) arts to navigate this state. The node Space for emotions articulates drama as a possibility to embrace and integrate difficult emotions. The node Openings and invitations – a new learning experience describes drama as an unconventional form of teaching that opens for creativity and new understandings. The third node

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Pretending towards new realities points to how the imaginative aspects of drama can give experiences of new pretended states beyond the liminal. Finally, the node Discomfort and its reinterpretations shows how challenging aspects of drama can be understood as in itself creating a liminal state where the unexpected can emerge. Findings echo the transformatory potential of drama(tic) arts in prior environmental and sustainability education research but extend it in the specific context of navigating and re-imagining economic growth (SDG8), and point to specific qualities of drama when trying to move towards sustainability in difficult times.

Keywords: applied drama, environmental and sustainability education, liminality, economics

Introduction

Applied drama is an art-form as well as a pedagogical practice that embraces contractions and emotional content. It has various elements designed to bring participants into active engagement with multi-faceted issues (Lehtonen et al., 2020; Österlind, 2018; Wall et al., 2019). As in many areas, the insights of climate change and biodiversity loss are moving the field of drama and theatre to explore how the assets of the area can contribute to solutions (Heddon & Mackey, 2012; Lavery, 2016; Smith, 2020). Drama and theatre have a history of engaging with political and economic tensions, from the Greek dramas to today's applied theatre practices situated in societies and performed in close collaboration with citizens experiencing the issues at hand (Nicholson, 2014). In this article we turn to the practice of applied drama to understand what possibilities it holds to support processes of transitions towards sustainability, and specifically to navigate what we describe as a liminal state regarding economics and sustainability.

There is a growing knowledge on how human activities on earth are causing climate change and biodiversity loss. Science is pointing out how the lifestyles that large parts of the world population now practice, are unsustainable (IPBES, 2019; IPCC, 2021). Although the insights of this is reaching the public and shaking many of us at the core, visions of how to organize our economies in sustainable ways are still absent in the public debate. We know that the overuse of resources is causing devastating changes on the planet and that the use of resources is linked to GDP growth (Parrique, 2019). Yet, the economies of the world are dependent on GDP growth to not fall into crisis. Thus, most politicians and world leaders still proclaim the importance of growth – they have nothing to offer as an alternative. We are lingering in an in-between state where we have left the joyous days of the great acceleration

when we saw no end of the expansion, but we do not yet have in sight the ways in which we could organize our societies to live as truly respectful habitants of the earth. The present times can thus be understood as a liminal state where we are no longer in the safe times of the Holocene but in what some call the Anthropocene, an unpredictable era where humanity has become the main geological force (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2013). This liminal state can be uncomfortable and demanding to stay in. Thus, there is a need to explore how individuals and groups can be supported to not shy away, but instead become creators in the liminal.

The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are ambitious and aim at a world without hunger or poverty and with flourishing seas and forests. This vision requires some imagination as it is far from the world as we know it, however, the imagination has not yet led to new ways of understanding economics. Economic growth is still an unquestioned goal in the SDGs (Filho et al., 2019) and placed at the centre of SDG 8 (United Nations, 2015). The goal relies on the decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation despite the fact that there is no empirical evidence to show the existence of absolute decoupling to the extent that the magnitude of the ecological crisis demands (Parrique, 2019; Parrique et al., 2019). However, whilst the paradigm of growth still imbues leaders' thinking and official documents, things are moving at the grass roots level. Placards telling us to "change the system – not the climate" is a common sight at the climate demonstrations that have been spreading around the world since autumn 2017. In line with this, new economic research points to how the fundamentals of our economic paradigm needs to be challenged, for example by exchanging the goal of profit to the goal of social benefit (Hinton, 2021), and letting monetary valuation give room to deliberation of value (Isacs, 2021). There are thus big gaps in the different understandings of the solutions and the paths forward from the environmental crisis, gaps that can be seen as manifestations of the liminality we live in.

At the same time, sustainable development refers to transitions towards sustainability, or the move from where we are currently, to more sustainable ways of planetary existence. In this way, we conceptualize this transition as liminal. The concept of liminality was first developed by anthropologists referring to the transitory rituals of major passages in life, such as entering life as married or going from childhood into the world of adults. This liminal timespace, where one is between states, has been used to understand situations 'out of the ordinary', when established structures have dissolved and the continuity of traditions has been broken. Today the

concept is used within various research areas as “a prism through which to understand transformations in the contemporary world” (Horvath et al., 2015, p. 1). The liminal is described as a risky state but also one that bears potential for creation and new things to emerge. Victor Turner (1982), one of the early writers on liminality, makes the connection between how symbols and performance is used for rituals of transition in indigenous tribes, and modern theatre performances. Both modern performances and traditional rituals are used to support humans to deal with changes and challenges in their inner life as well as outer circumstances.

There is transformative power in aesthetic spaces as they hold the possibility to “imagine, give form to something that is not real and real at the same time” (Cohen, 2011, p. 87). To step into fiction and be ‘in role’ as someone else is at the core of applied drama (Sternudd, 2000). Anna-Lena Østern and Hannu Heikkinen (2001) has with reference to Turner (1982) used the liminal as a metaphor of the processes occurring in applied drama and theatre. Through being in role in a fictive drama one can reach a dual consciousness - experiencing the world as someone else at the same time as carrying an awareness of one’s ordinary world and self (Bolton, 1984). This relation between the real world and the imagined has by drama theorists been described as *metaxis* (Boal, 1995; Bolton, 1984) and *aesthetic doubling* (Østern & Heikkinen, 2001). This move between ‘what is’ and ‘what if’ opens up for dislocations of our ordinary ways of being and seeing. Such openings are also enabled by “the empty space” (Østern, 2009, p. 4) pointed out by Østern as central in transformations in theatre. Østern describes this as an in-between space between the things that are created that gives room to learning and the possibility to see new aspects of oneself. Another concept for understanding drama as a way to work with the liminal is Augusto Boal’s notion of the *aesthetic space*. The aesthetic space is a physical space but also a multidimensional space. The aesthetic space comes into being when we designate a part of a room or any physical space as ‘the stage’ or ‘drama space’, the aesthetic space is then “the interpenetration” (Boal, 1995, p. 18) of the drama space and the ordinary space. However, the aesthetic space goes beyond the physical realm, it is also “the dissociation of two times” (Boal, 1995, p. 19) which gives the possibility to integrate memories of the past and imaginations for the future, into one’s present. The aesthetic space is created through the meaning we give to it and it is a place where we can “coincide with ourselves” and be “two in one” as Boal puts it (1995, p. 19). This together shows how drama can be understood as a created liminality and points to its potential to explore other liminal states, but scholarly work

has not yet researched the use of drama in the context of reimagining economics or SDG8.

From this vantage point, *this article explores drama as way of navigating the liminality characterizing sustainability issues in general, and a shifting economic paradigm in particular*. We ask what traces of being with and moving through the liminal we find in the participants' descriptions of their experience of the drama work. Below we start by presenting the research study from which we derive our results and give a brief description of the actual drama work in which the participants took part. This is followed by an explanation of why we chose the specific part of the material that is in focus here and a description of how the material was analysed. In the result section we introduce four nodes - points in the material where there is a lot of energy and many intersections - that point to drama as a hopeful practice in relation to liminality.

Method

This article is based on an action-based study with a post qualitative approach (Gunnarsson & Bodén, 2021). The empirical material is derived from drama interventions taking place in Sweden from January 2020 to May 2021. Applied drama was utilised in four groups in two different educational settings where there was an interest in new ways to organize economies. The young people in both settings had a willingness to step out of the trajectory of the present and were looking for new perspectives. They came with a knowing that the current conditions will not last and an interest to explore what may take form instead. One setting was a youth project where young adults gathered in their spare time to imagine what sustainable economies could look like in the future, the other was a university course with the explicit aim of exploring alternative economic futures. The conversation that this article is focused on took place during the second iteration of the university course and that work there is therefore described below.

The 15 credits course "Sustainable Economic Futures, Nature, Equity and Community" ran over one semester at CEMUS, a student-initiated, transdisciplinary centre for sustainability at Uppsala University. In collaboration with the coordinators of the course, four drama sessions of 2,5 hours each were planned and integrated into the curriculum. All teaching in the course was given online, thus the drama work was designed and adjusted to work in the digital format.

The first drama session, given early in the course, was called *Dreamweaving*. It focused on values and on the participants' feelings about living in the present economy, as well as what their desired economic futures would look like. After some movement to warm up together the students were led through a process where they felt into how it is for them to live in the present economy and how that affects them. They were asked to find the shape of this in their bodies and they shared their experiences by showing, talking and writing. Further on in the session they instead imagined themselves in an ideal future where things had developed in the best possible way and they interviewed each other in this imaginary future, as if one was already *in* that future. This was followed by work in groups where the students talked more specifically about which societal and economic structures would need to be in place to enable the life they imagined, and they wrote down what would signify such a society. The session ended with the students making an embodied transition from the society we live in now to their ideal society. This was prepared in small groups and performed to each other in the plenum.

The two following sessions were centred on the idea of participatory economics, an alternative economic model developed by Robin Hahnel and Michael Albert (Hahnel, 2012). The students had in advance read a text explaining the basics of the model. During these two workshops the students learned and experienced the different parts of the model through a role play. Students played citizens in a town in a fictive world where the economy was based on the participatory model. Brief lectures on the different institutions of the model was altered with scenes where the students in role got to experience that part of the model and took part in decisions made on different levels. The idea of letting the students immerse themselves in this model was that it would contribute with an outsider's view on the way our present economy works and thus widen the spectrum of how one is able to imagine economics.

The fourth and final drama session was called *Gazing forward* and was also the last class in the course. In this session we returned to the exercise from the first drama workshop, when we stepped into an imagined and ideal future, now with the expectation that the students would have more ideas and material from the course to draw from. This time all students were in role in the future at the same time, in pairs they had conversations on what life in this world is like, looking back and remembering the past together. After this they stayed in role in the future and individually wrote letters to someone dear who lived in another part of the world, telling them about their life and their society. From these letters each student chose

10 words that they used in groups where they gathered all their words and put them together into poems. The session ended with the groups reading their poems to each other.

Analytical framework and process

The drama interventions in the four groups were documented in multiple ways including recorded dialogue and individual interviews with participants (n=36) after completion of the drama work. Of these were 16 individual interviews and 8 dialogues in groups or pairs (n=20). There was text produced as well as filmed and audio recorded parts of drama sessions. The recorded film material consisted of approximately 14 hours of interviews and 6 hours of workshop recordings. Interventions and documentation were performed in line with the ethical guidelines of Stockholm University and the research has passed the Swedish Ethical Review Authority without objections. As an analytic framework and process, we adopted rhizomatic analysis (Sellers & Honan, 2007) where the empirical material is understood as part of a bigger rhizome of drama knowledge and drama research. A rhizome is a philosophical concept developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and adopted from the root systems of plants that grow in all directions and that sends out shoots from its nodes. We follow the lines of one rhizome arising from a conversation between two young women in their early twenties here called Sara and Erika (pseudonyms), two participants from the second iteration in the university course. Sara and Erika spoke to each other (without a researcher present but with a written interview guide) for one hour about their experiences of the drama work. They spoke in Swedish with each other and the quotes in the text are translated into English with the aim of mirroring the content of their expressions rather than giving a word by word translation.

In this analysis we undertook a close reading of the conversation between Erika and Sara, in order to answer the research question: *What traces of being with and moving through the liminal are found in the participants' descriptions of their experience of the drama work?* Analytically, our analysis highlights empirical material which *glow* (MacLure, 2013), that is, parts of the material that for some reason stand out from the rest. *Glow* is noticed through an intuitive recognition that is affective and embodied, one might notice intensified engagement and bodily reactions. As such, the identified nodes are not representative but there are lines and interweaving between that which Erika and Sara express here and what is expressed by others in the research material, to drama research and to our own and other drama practitioners'

experiences. We understand these nodes as stops and concentration points in the rhizome of experiences that participants have expressed, and that continue out with connections to the wider rhizome of drama understandings surrounding this research. The nodes are thus not to be understood as separate categories but temporary gatherings in the material that point out certain understandings that resonates with our research question. The four nodes that formed in the conversation, resonating with patterns in the wider study, are presented below.

Results – drama as a hopeful practice

Learning about the environmental crisis is worrisome (Pihkala, 2018). The young people in this study are among those who choose to learn about the situation and try to figure out how they can contribute to solutions. In different ways, participants in the empirical material show how they are challenged and troubled by what is happening in the world, in terms of environmental issues but also the politics surrounding it. The hope the students express that they felt through the drama work, also displays the worry they feel towards the future:

Erika: Well, one new thought [derived from the drama work] was that ‘we will make it’. Or that ‘we can make it’. In thirty years, we can actually sit there and look back and think that: ‘Shit, how crazy that we lived like we did before. That we accepted status quo as it was. That we just thought it was normal to live like this without the possibility to see anything else’.

Erika’s words point out just how insecure it is to be in this liminal state. To this young adult the future feels uncertain to the degree that the thought “we *can* make it” is a relief.

Drama is an arts-based method that we here describe as a hopeful practice, but not through ignoring the difficulties or only focusing on the positive. Rather the drama work is understood as hopeful because it embraces and gives space to integrate the difficult emotions, this aspect is described in the first node named *Space for emotions*. The second node *Openings and invitations – a new learning experience* relates to how drama is described as an unconventional form of teaching that opens for creativity and new understandings. In the third node *Pretending towards new realities*, the imaginative aspects of the work can give the sense that something different is possible, and through role even give an experience of that new imagined state. In the fourth and last node *Discomfort and its reinterpretations* we address

some challenging aspects of drama and how drama in itself can be understood as creating a liminal state where the unexpected can emerge. Below we present these four nodes that highlight different aspects of drama work related to liminality.

Space for emotions

Erika describes how the course content has given her an increased feeling of responsibility. Having a lot of knowledge and agency gives a privileged position, which also feels heavy when the global situation is so serious. For Erika it seems as if the drama work offered a way of dealing with the difficult emotions that she has in relation to the sustainability crisis.

Erika: In that way it has been good to have the drama part, to be able to connect the content of the course with my emotions.

Sara: Yes, very much so!

Erika: Otherwise, they are always so separate. When we spoke about the facts we didn't speak about emotions, but the drama has somehow connected the two. When we were going to express how the current economy makes us feel, I somehow bring my emotions into my knowledge. So that has really helped me.

Sara also describes how it has been a relief to not only focus on all the issues and problems we see today, and to not only imagine a positive future, but for a short time pretend that you are there:

Sara: So, I think that has been so good and such a relief. Especially in an education that is, well it is positive and fun, but it is also quite heavy. So, it is a comfort to be able to be in that reality [referring to a positive future] for a little while.

Integrating emotions in the teaching is also described as a way to grasp the factual knowledge better and Sara and Erika agree that they wish for drama teaching in other courses as well.

Erika: To be able to put words on, to link together that which you are thinking – the factual things, with your emotions. And see how that interacts. [To have done that in another course] could have helped us to really take in all the theories.

We understand the integration of knowledge and emotions as an important part of capacity building to retain agency as well as creativity in the liminal state in order to deal with insecurity, unpredictability and the difficult emotions it evokes. Drama is described as both a space for those emotions to be present and a possibility to get comfort.

Openings and invitations - a new learning experience

Erika and Sara spend quite some time in their conversation thinking about how the drama teaching differs from ordinary teaching. They are critical to how education is normally formed, they claim it limits thinking and they refer difficulties in the group work to how their thinking has been formed by previous education. They speak of how they sometimes got stuck in the group work because they started focusing on details and what is 'right', instead of letting ideas flow. In relation to this Sara refers to how she and her fellow students' thinking is contrived by the learning they are used to:

Sara: Perhaps we are very stuck in the academic idea that you need to produce something. We have to like know all the parts in order to have a say about something, instead of just: 'It could be sort of like this and then we let it be like that for now' instead of 'It has to be logical, everything has to fit and have a structure.'

Sara seems to long for more freedom and allowance to let her mind take new paths:

Sara: It's ok if all parts aren't there already, it's ok if you just have what you have and take it from there. [...] It's ok to guess somehow. [...] Like we said so many times in this conversation, to allow oneself to be creative. That's something that we are not allowed to be generally at the university. But it is good for you, it should be incorporated more in other courses.

The traditional forms of teaching that Erika and Sara criticize are put in contrast to the drama teaching which they describe as giving them an opportunity to step out of their ordinary thinking.

Erika: You sort of, instead of the little recipe that there is, you get to take a step out of the box and see what possibilities could be there and what I could act on in the future.

Erika continues:

Erika: [The drama] has opened up even more and given me a wider perspective. A more open way to look at things, not just look at things so tightly [shows a square with her hands].

In addition to the creative thinking that Sara and Erika identify, they also allude to agency.

Erika: Exactly, for the first time ever during our studies you have had the chance to formulate yourself how you think something should be, and not just take it from some old theory of how things should be. For the first time I got to look at myself and ask 'What future do YOU want to see?'.
[Referring to the drama workshops]

Sara and Erika repeatedly come back to how drama is a way of teaching that differs from that which they criticize. They articulate how it opens up for creativity and invites their own agency, here understood as vital qualities to navigate the liminal.

Pretending towards new realities

When thinking about what they particularly remember from the drama work, Erika and Sara both refer to exercises when they were guided to imagine themselves in the future and play with the idea that things have gone well. The exercise Erika describes below took place during the first drama session. After some movement to get into their bodies, the students were asked to stand up, close their eyes and imagine a future where the major issues of environmental damage and injustices had been solved. After some time of imagining this in their mind, but also letting it echo in their bodies, they were put in breakout rooms to talk to each other in pairs.

Erika: That time when we were interviewing each other, one was in the past and one was in the future, that made a special impression on me. [...] it was a cool feeling to be able to answer from the future and bring in aspects we had in the course. You could like link it together. I don't think I had linked very much of all the different theories and different parts of the economy and how it works and stuff, before that conversation. I think that meant quite a lot to me, that conversation with a person from the past and one person from the future.

Drama as a hopeful practice when navigating liminal times

Erika describes something that is visible throughout the interview material – how drama integrates knowledge, brings tacit knowledge to the surface and allows new meaningful connections to be made.

Through dwelling in a positive future in their imagination, building images of that in their minds, letting the feeling of it take shape in their bodies, talking to each other from the position of that future, and writing letters from that position, participants seem to have, for a moment, transcended the liminality of the present, created images of and even experienced future states of well-being.

Sara: The possibility to feel into the reality we want to work towards. Instead of just seeing the little steps – we have to do this and this and this and things to solve. Instead, it's **being** there and getting that feeling in your body and what it would actually mean, rather than seeing all the problems along the way.

When the participants place themselves in the position of already being there, after the transition, the aesthetic doubling helps them to think further and not limit their thoughts by what they perceive as within reach. Below Sara speaks of how she tends to constrain her thinking to what is possible and that the drama sessions opened for a wider range of thoughts.

Sara: Yes, it is easy to be very pragmatic. What is reasonable to wish, what is reasonable to demand? What is reasonable to work towards? And this [referring to the drama work] gave, if we speak of another economic system, to get to be in the reality you want to create. And just that possibility to think freely in a completely different way. It creates other possibilities to what we actually want to achieve. Rather than thinking what is possible, instead we are HERE. And how do we get there? So, I think wider about what I want the future to contain than I did before and what I could dream of before.

To have transcended the liminal in one's imagination and been there in playful encounters with others seem to have created positive images to work towards and thus evoked feelings of hope. In the playfulness of the drama, participants sometimes found themselves on the other side of the liminal, although pretended it was a new positive state where they felt safe. This seems to have made it easier to bear with the insecurity of the present.

Discomfort and its reinterpretations

The drama work has so far been described in very positive terms. However, the drama was also demanding things of the participants that they in many cases were not used to. As in most participants' reflections Sara and Erika also share moments of confusion or feeling uncomfortable.

Sara: Yeah, it's so unusual that it's hard to get into it. I mean the first times when we had exercises, standing stretching and dancing around. I mean it's a bit weird. [...] It was a bit of a distance, at least for me personally, to overcome.

Erika: Same here, the first time it was a bit held back for me too.

Due to its weirdness and the discomfort it evokes, the drama space can be identified as a liminal space. When working with drama we move ourselves out of the ordinary and into a play and pretend state. This state holds possibilities for new thoughts and pathways to occur, but to get there you also need to let go of some control, you cannot predict what will come out of it. There seems to have been a threshold where participants felt a bit uncomfortable or hesitant at first, but once they were warmed up, they found value in it.

Sara: Well, the first difficult thing was to just let go of yourself. [...] To just put your head in first and go for it. Because you cannot hold back. And I think it was difficult at first, but then when you had done it a few times it became easier and easier, 'cause you just do it. [...] So, for me I think the last time was when I really found flow, like I'm flying free. Anything is allowed, anything is possible [showing flying motions with her arms]!

Sara describes how once the difficulties were overcome and she had become comfortable with the form, the drama became a micro cosmos where anything was possible. One can look at the drama work as a space for participants to practice playful ways of dealing with insecurity and face new situations through creativity rather than fear. We understand these as useful experiences to bring into one's own life when navigating the changing times we live in. Utterances in the material as a whole point to that this is the experience of many participants.

Discussion

We have followed Horvath et al.'s (2015) claim of liminality as a powerful tool to analyze societal movements of our present society and utilised the concept in two ways. Firstly, to describe the gap that we see between the knowledge that is available today regarding the unsustainability of economics and the societal responses, and the in-between-state that this puts us all in as citizens. Secondly, we used liminality to describe the in-between-state that is created in applied drama through playing, pretending and imagining together. Describing the drama work as liminal contributes to additional clues of how these transformations happen in the context of economics which is typically understood as impersonal and dissociated from everyday experience. Drama is shown to be a meaningful resource for the two participants, who were chosen for their many connections with other experiences generated through the longer study. The drama classes built up a liminal state, where participants stepped out of their ordinary ways of learning and being in a university setting. They practised dwelling in this liminal state despite feelings of insecurity and awkwardness. They explored pathways into something new, a 'what if', and imagined what it would be like to live in those worlds, relating directly to the dual consciousness described by Bolton (1984). Conceptually, we identified four nodes to elucidate such pathways: *Space for emotions*, *Openings and invitations – a new learning experience*, *Pretending towards new realities* and *Discomfort and its reinterpretations*.

Describing drama as the creation of a liminal state where one in the realm of play and pretend can expand oneself, is in line with how Østern and Heikkinen (2001) has conceptualized drama. The contribution of this paper is showing how it can be put to work with the sustainability issues of today and let the liminality of drama support us in dealing with the uncomfortable and unpredictable state that is experienced presently in the 'real world'. Through the aesthetic doubling (Østern & Heikkinen, 2001), but also through other components of the drama work such as playfulness and creating together, participants could experience positive future images and a new relation to their now. This is in line with the conceptual point that the aesthetic doubling is a central component in drama work, however, not the sole one. The findings of this research add to how aesthetic doubling does not happen in a vacuum, but in an atmosphere of community, playfulness, and allowance to fail. These may be as important components to endure and remain creative in the liminality of our times. As pointed out by Turner (1982) play is a serious matter, it is at the core of moving through the liminal states in tribal communities, and we claim this is also valid in our

societies today. Although the play in the work described here was much more limited than that observed by Turner, and took place online, it was described as having an impact. Additionally, in contrast to prior empirical work in the field, we have found that drama holds the possibility to bring in ease and imagination into an area that is often understood as hard and distant – that of economic thinking. During times that the young participants perceived as deeply challenging, they experienced the drama work as a hopeful practice.

These findings open for further explorations of how the liminality created in a safe drama setting can support us to find agency and playfulness in the midst of insecurity and unpredictability. The findings show the potential of drama and how we can understand it *when* it works, but we recognise that this form of teaching does not resonate with everyone in the same way (in rhizomatic fashion), and individuals who were not drawn to drama were likely to not take part in those sessions which were not compulsory. Additionally, individuals who participated, but did not appreciate it at the time of the study (or ever), may have been less likely to volunteer and spend time on a research interview.

The drama work that Erika and Sara participated in was undertaken online, yet they point to processes similar to those we recognise in ‘ordinary’ drama work. This expands Boal’s (1995) notion of the aesthetic space as something stretching beyond the physical space, in the movements of our imagination in time and space. The implications for this in a time when so much of our encounters have transitioned to online spaces needs to be developed further in order to understand what is possible without the physical meetings, and what we lose when we no longer breathe the same air or relate physically to each other in a drama space. The conditions for drama efficacy in the context of economic thinking is another area for further research, specifically for example, how do the framings and the facilitation of drama contribute to those processes?

The transformative power in aesthetic spaces described by Cohen (2011) has been recognised in Sarah and Erika’s descriptions of the drama work they experienced. Cohen also points out that the more people that direct their aesthetic power in the same direction, the more powerful it gets. We find this claim to be present in the following poem collectively created by participants in the drama work described in this article and we let it end the article as a prompt for further rhizomatic reflection:

I felt like I couldn’t breathe

But people rose up, demanding They changed their ways

We spoke of care, solidarity and strong communities

We gave the ocean a voice

And businesses a different purpose

I felt like I couldn't breathe

But we developed new skills, listening to the land and animals

So that generations to come could not only grow their own plants

But feel fulfilled and have a sense of purpose, finally

We recycled, bought less, repaired and distributed our resources

I felt like I couldn't breathe

But with age we learned to see, that there is magic in helping each other

And so cooperatives sprouted everywhere like growing seedlings

They lead the way in creating solutions that considered different issues simultaneously

Discarding the old paradigm, organised as not-for-profits

Engagement grew while power and wealth was distributed

I used to feel like I couldn't breathe

But now we've made sure that we all can

About the authors

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Tony Wall is a professor and specialist in transformative methodologies including organisational development for wellbeing. Wall is ranked as #1 globally for 'management development' (Google Scholar), and his work is featured in the top 5% (of all outputs tracked by Altmetrics). The excellence of his collaborative research approaches with local government (e. g. public health) and across regions has been independent judged as "world-leading" and continues to be used by the European Union. His recent research work was funded by The British Academy to examine the use of Appreciative Inquiry by policy makers for the empowerment of minority ethnic young people. He is recognised in the World Health Organization's "Global literature on coronavirus disease" database and in The World List of Sustainability Researchers.

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