

ALL TOMORROW'S TOMORROWS: activating the imagination in the face of global challenges through sandplay.

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"Let us make no mistake: the climate crisis is also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination." (Ghosh, 2016:9)

"It is not surprising then that the crisis of climate change should produce anxieties precisely around futures that we cannot visualize." (Chakrabarty, 2009:211)

"We need to rewild the world. That much is obvious. But first we need to rewild our imagination. We must learn how to dream again, and we have to learn that together. To break down the old ways of thinking and to move beyond our current conception of what is and what is not possible." (Sam Knights in Extinction Rebellion Calgary, 2019)

Introduction

Mulgan (2020) makes the persuasive argument that we are facing a crisis of social imagination. Whilst we can easily imagine apocalyptic scenarios, "we find it much harder than in the past to imagine a better society a generation or more into the future." (Mulgan, 2020:3) As he goes on to state, many polls and surveys show that among young people "a pervasive pessimism has taken hold, whether about democracy or the environment." (Mulgan, 2020:6)

The decline in our ability to envision optimistic futures can be seen as a logical response to the sheer complexity of the world and the problems it faces, which undermines our sense of agency (Mulgan, 2020:7). Moreover, there is a growing 'burden of knowledge' where accumulating information and narrowing expertise "come at the cost of reducing individual innovative capacities" (Jones, 2009:283). If increased specialisation is a prerequisite for new breakthroughs, there will be an inevitable reduction the scope of our discoveries. As Einstein said, "imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." (Einstein, 1929)



Aims & Objectives

Engaging our imagination is precisely what is needed to resolve, or at least adjust to, the various global crises we face. The aims and objectives of this performance-based project therefore are:

- to acknowledge and work through our pessimism and anxieties, not conceiving crises as dead-ends but understanding them as dynamic situations which lead to new beginnings and potential positive changes;
- to activate and democratise our imagination, in order to widen and diversify innovation, whilst at the same time empowering individuals to regain a sense of agency and investment.

Methods

Play therapy using a sand tray and figurines is credited to Dr Margaret Lowenfeld, a pioneer of child psychology. Frustrated with the limitations of traditional talking therapy and aiming "to find a way for children to express their emotional and psychological inner worlds in developmentally appropriate manner" (Homeyer, 2015:243), Lowenfeld developed her World Technique in 1929.

In the 1950s Dora Kalff, who studied with her, combined this approach with Carl Jung's notion of the collective unconscious, renaming her method as sandplay. Although similar work has also emerged from Gestalt, Adlerian or humanistic perspectives, Kalff's sandplay has become widely adopted as the primary form used worldwide (Homeyer, 2015:243). Sandplay can "provide a containing vessel that can transform boundless fantasy into focused and creative energy" (Weinrib, 2004:61), where adults as well as children can play "with seriousness" (Weinrib, 2004:71). Since scenarios are not just imagined or verbalised, but are brought into being in material, haptic, and visible ways, sandplay "seems to encourage a state of absorption and relaxed concentration, a kind of non-rational awareness." (Weinrib, 2004:83) Moreover, in bypassing the linguistic plane, clients can go beyond words and conventional reasoning patterns. In the process, therapists do not merely interpret the client's sandtray word "but [have] to become co-explorers of their world" (Labovitz Boik & Goodwin, 2000:8).



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ALL TOMORROW'S TOMORROWS (2021) is an interactive performance-installation inviting participants to actively imagine worlds, probe at cataclysms, and rehearse futures. Whilst it does not make any therapeutic claims, it is guided by similar ethos and principles to sandplay. However, instead of being a platform to process personal issues, it is designed to address and begin to imaginatively resolve the global challenges humanity faces. Reflecting our Anthropogenic circumstance, where the distinction between natural and human history has been breached (Chakrabarty, 2009), during the experience everything is built, destroyed, rebuilt, explained and resolved by the participants' hands – who co-author their experience by taking the reins of their own narrative(s). Each participant imagines and creates three scenarios from their positionality, enacting their personal concerns, priorities, fears, hopes, and fantasies. *ALL TOMORROW'S TOMORROWS* follows this simple three-part structure:

1. **Build a world:** Participants build a world on the sand using a variety of small objects and detritus. This opening section encourages participants to enter a child-like mindset by engaging in worldbuilding. It is the power and freedom of this playful energy the performance-installation aims to harness in the final section.
2. **Cataclysm ensues:** Participants enact a cataclysm onto their world, a disaster of a specific socio-political, environmental, cosmic and/or fantastical nature by moving, removing or replacing objects on the sand. Here participants can safely play out their apocalyptic anxieties or destructive impulses, which are later channelled towards constructive action.
3. **Tomorrow's tomorrows:** Participants enact what might happen next, after the dust has settled. Driven by the playful energy harnessed thus far and responding to the catastrophic situation they have created, participants have to engage in lateral thinking to rehearse possible beginnings and alternative futures beyond the catastrophe.

Each part of the experience is accompanied by a different music track with a distinct emotional texture. They have been edited by looping and sampling existing works by established composers. The soundtrack's repetitive nature, operates like a mantra, hoping to deepen the participants' engagement and opening up a meditative space where they can dwell on the big questions raised by the work. During the experience, the performer takes on a facilitating role and, after each of section, he invites participants to step back and observe the world-situations created. Through a process of gentle Socratic questioning, they are encouraged to narrativize their choices and reflect upon them critically.



References

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