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## A Space for Grief: The Climate Artivism of the Red Rebel Brigade

**Abstract:** This article examines performances by the climate activist group Red Rebel Brigade, who appear at climate change demonstrations in full-body red costumes and perform in silence and slow motion. The performances aim to “embody the grief of the Earth” by creating an emotional space. Apart from analysing the Red Rebels’ performances, this article also discusses whether the concept of grief is useful in climate mobilisations. The Red Rebel Brigade is seen as a manifestation of post-apocalyptic environmentalism – an activism that acknowledges that the climate catastrophe has already occurred. The article examines this concept using an intermedial framework and a space-place theory. Space is understood as a category that is created relationally between people and places, as well as between people. Content analysis was used to analyse material consisting of YouTube videos of manifestations relating to COP26 in Glasgow in 2021 and A Funeral for Nature in Bath in 2024. The analysis yielded four types of relational spaces through the Red Rebel’s relationships with the environment, other people, the mass media, and other media. The results showed that, during the COP26 performance, the Red Rebels focused strongly on creating striking images for mass media. However, it seemed that they did not engage with or make sense to bystanders. By contrast, the use of a funeral theme in the Bath action seemed more intelligible to those not involved in the performance, making it easier for them to engage with it. Lastly, the question of whether grief can be fruitful in climate activism is addressed. One problem with grief is that, if it is fruitful, it leads to acceptance rather than action. Consequently, mobilisations focused on climate change may be better served by emotions such as fear, panic and anger.

**Keywords:** Grief, artivism, climate activism, post-apocalyptic environmentalism, Red Rebel Brigade, intermediality, space.

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## Introduction: The Red Rebel Brigade

The Red Rebel Brigade (RRB) is an activist performance group that performs in climate change manifestations around the world. The aesthetic nature of these performances is characterised by the presence of silent actors dressed in red robes and white-painted, expressionless faces, moving in slow motion. The group's objective is to “embody the grief of the Earth”, a sentiment that reflects the profound environmental devastation caused by the emission of greenhouse gases, the collapse of the ecosystem and the subsequent sacrifice of biodiversity. The aim of the group is to create an affective space, a mode of communication that does not require explanations, an understanding through empathy and emotion (Benjamin 2019). This chapter will examine the RRB's climate activism, with a particular focus on their activities around COP26 2021 and their action A Funeral for Nature (FFN) 2024. The central question guiding this inquiry is whether the Red Rebels' performances of grief engender a space “for action in relation to temporalities and scales that are difficult to grasp.”<sup>1</sup>



**Image 1.** The Red Rebels in *A Funeral for Nature*.  
Screenshot from Mark Richards “A Funeral for Nature – (coderedfornature).”  
© Richards @Aurora Findhorn 2024.

RRB was established in 2019 by Francisco and Justine Squire, who are members of the Bristol-based company Invisible Circus. The Red Rebel Brigade (RRB) draws inspiration from the ancient drama, Japanese Butoh, and Victorian funeral processions (Red Rebel Brigade 2021). Since starting, RRB has grown to become an international movement with groups in many countries around the world. The group has close ties to Extinction Rebellion

1 CFP, International Society for Intermedial Studies. *Environmental Emergencies Across Media* 2023.

(XR), a movement that employs civil disobedience as a means of raising awareness of the ecological catastrophe and the need for immediate action. A useful conceptual framework for analysing the groups is that of *post-apocalyptic environmentalists*. This term, coined by Cassegård and Thörn (2022), refers to “activism based on catastrophic losses experienced as already having occurred” (4).

The Red Rebels are characterised as “[g]hostly yet vibrant, their attire suggests sorrow, despair, and rage while also conjuring excess” (O’Shea 26). Francisco describes how the RRB’s slow movement engenders a *Verfremdung* effect, thereby inducing the audience to perceive an otherworldly sensation (Red Rebel Brigade 2021). Furthermore, RRB are recognised as being particularly effective in the realm of media, with their visually striking performances garnering significant attention from news media outlets – to use Darcy White’s term, they are *mediagenic* (2022, 216). This is a conscious strategy, as evidenced by XRs advance publicity for FFN, which promised media “[d]ramatic photo and film opportunities” (Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK 2024).

RRB has received particular attention in theatre, dance and performance studies. One example is Lavender (2019), who argues that RRB demonstrates a tendency for popular protest to become increasingly aestheticized and theatricalised through uniform costumes. Shepherd-Barr and Simpson (2022), discuss how climate change has been represented on theatre stages and during RRB mobilisations. Drawing on RRB’s choreographic and dramaturgical strategies, O’Shea (2022) analyses their tactics for creating emotion. She concludes that RRB’s “actions invoke something and that something points in a general direction—sorrow—but at the same time, its meaning is enigmatic” (27) On the contrary, art historian and XR member White believes that RRB offers genuine expressions of the deep sadness and grief felt by so many rebels and bystanders’ (216). In a previous study, I conducted an analysis of the more than one hundred photographs published by RRB on Instagram and Facebook between 2019 and 2020 (Sternudd 2024), see below.

The aesthetic expression of RRB can be conceptualised as a transmediation of climate research reports into the medium of street theatre. In all transmediations, the content of the original medium is, to a greater or lesser extent, retained, with additional aspects being added depending on the possibilities offered by the medium and its limitations. The objective of the red rebels is to extract the sense of grief evoked by the scientific reports, while leaving behind all other content. Consequently, RRB aspires to convey an emotive message “without having to explain”, as Francisco state in Benjamin (2019). RRB’s performances follow the logic of activism as activist artistic expression with the aim of provoking an immediate response (White and Hartle 8).

## The Study

The material for the study is video documentation of RRB's performances in relation to the twenty-sixth annual meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP26), which was held in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November 2021, and of FFN in Bath on 20 April 2024. The documentation includes video footage showing how local groups of Red Rebels from across the UK travelled to Glasgow in full costume in a *Pilgrimage* ahead of COP26 (*Herefordshire Green Network* 2021). On their arrival they were received by their sister organisation, the Scottish Blue Rebels. During a three-day relay, the group performed at train stations and in carriages (*Extinction Rebellion Scotland*. 2021a). During their days in Glasgow, the Red Rebels took part in climate rallies and finally, on 13 November, disappointed by the poor outcome of the conference, they performed *The Funerary of COP26*.

FFN was a "staged mock funeral for nature" (coderedfornature. 2024a). The event was organised by coderedfornature and led by RRB and XR. According to a live report from the event, 400 Red Rebels participated in the procession, which was described as an exceptional number of participants (coderedfornature. 2024b). The central theme of the event was the threat to biodiversity and the ongoing mass extinction of species. It is noteworthy that FFN is not a singular project for RRB, as they have employed the funeral theme from the outset, as evidenced by the Funeral Cortege organised by the Sheffield Red Rebels in 2019 (White 2022, 216) and the *March of Mourning for Mass Extinction* in Gothenburg on Good Friday that same year (Cassegård and Thörn 2022, 97).

In accordance with Elleström's intermedial theory, performances are analysed according to the type of media categories to which they belong. An individual performance is defined as a *media product* based on a *technical media of display*, such as the paper of a book or the sound waves of spoken words. A media product is typically classified as a *qualified media*, which is defined as a type of media that is socially and culturally recognised, e.g. theatre and newspapers. All media are based on several *basic media*, such as sound or gesture, which, as Bruhn and Schirmacher state, are "the smallest entities that can provide meaningful information" (2022, 18). A given type of media engages the perceiver through different modes: "as a material object" – *the material modality*, "which we perceive with our senses" – *the sensorial modality*, "spatial and temporal characteristics" – *the spatiotemporal modality*, and the perceived things that represents something else, for instance signs – *the semiotic modality* (ibid., 18–19).

The analysis differentiates between the concepts of *place* and *space*, as defined by Brudin Borg (with reference to Lefebvre [1991]). Place is understood as a tangible environment that can be experienced through the senses. In contrast, space is defined as an abstract social category that is relationally created between people and place, and person-to-person. These concepts were then employed to categorise the material using content analysis (Lutz and

Collins 1993; Rose 2023). The analysis process began with an overview of the material to gain insight into the manner in which RRB related to and interacted with the surrounding environment, including architectural elements, people and objects. The analysis yielded four categories: The first category, RRB's relationship to the *environment*, refers to the location where the Red Rebels were present. The second category, RRB's relationship to *other people*, refers to individuals who were in the same place as the Red Rebels. The third category, RRB's relationship to *mass media*, refers to professionals such as filmmakers and photographers who documented the performance. The fourth and final category, RRB's relationship to *other media*, refers to other forms of media that were present in the same place as the Red Rebels.

This material consists of videos published on the YouTube platform, covering RRB activities related to COP26 and FFN (see Appendix); with a total of five videos pertaining to COP26 and ten videos relating to FFN. The videos represent a variety of perspectives, some of which are published by the group or supporters, while others are produced by professional news media or individuals who were present at the events. Two videos were live streams, one from Glasgow and one from Bath. With the exception of the live streams, the videos concerning COP26 have a duration of a few minutes, whilst the majority of the videos concerning FFN have a duration of between eight and fourteen minutes. The collective assessment of these videos was that they offer a comprehensive representation of the RRB performances on these two occasions.

The videos were not subjected to analysis from the perspective of media products.

## The Result

RRB's performances are improvisations around a strict aesthetic concept that remains constant across different stagings. Consequently, this presentation commences with an inter-medial analysis of RRB's activism, drawing upon the findings outlined in Sternudd (2024). The ensuing presentation of the results of the analysis will focus on the differences between RRB's activities during COP26 and those in FFN, in order to avoid tiring repetitions.

### **RRB: An Intermedial Perspective**

A single performance by RRB constitutes a media product that appears in manifestations together with other activists. Given its developed aesthetic expression, it can be identified as activism. Red Rebel's technical media of display and basic media types are performances that involve the bodies of the participants in movement, gesture and pose, as well as textiles and make-up. The Red Rebels distinctive presence in demonstrations is characterised by their processions, which feature synchronised, rehearsed movements executed in slow motion RRB's gestures and poses have their own special meaning. Their repertoire also includes mime and tableaux, which are considered qualified media types with theatrical qualities. While the

participants' expressions in processions are neutral, in tableaux they adopt melodramatic expressions of emotion in poses and facial expressions. The RRB's mime origins are reflected in their white make-up faces, with black eyeliner and eyebrows, and red lips.

In relation to the initial three modalities outlined by Elleström – material, sensorial, and spatiotemporal – RRB's media products can be conceptualised as living performing bodies attired in specific outfits, visualised and co-presented. The performance uses the cityscape as a backdrop that contains spatial, visual and auditory elements to which they must relate. For the audience, RRB's performances have no clear beginning or end.

The performance of the Red Rebels is characterised by a number of significant elements, including the colour red, their silence, and their spectacular costumes. The colour red is present both in their costumes and in their name. The employment of the colour red as a symbol has been observed in various contexts, including the adherents of Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh and the Yellow Vests movement in France. The designation of the journey to COP26 as a pilgrimage alludes to the spiritual and religious rhetoric of RRB. The colour red is also associated with violence and resistance; the name RRB, for example, recalls the Italian left-wing terrorist group Brigade Rosso. Conventionally, the colour red is associated with intensity, drama, emotion and danger. The red procession is also linked to the metaphor of drawing a red line, meaning this far but no further, which is common in climate rallies.

The notion of performing without words alludes to the concept that verbal communication is inadequate in conveying the magnitude of environmental collapse. The deliberate choice of a slow pace represents a significant semiotic element in the RRB. This deliberate pacing can subvert the expectations of speed in an urban context, thereby creating a sense of alienation. The act of moving slowly is also a conventional sign that alludes to funeral processions.



**Image 2.** The Red Rebels in a Tableau at Glasgow Central Station. Screenshot from We Walks' "Red Rebel Brigade in Glasgow Central Station For COP26 | Scotland." © We Walks 2021.



Image 3. The Red Rebels during COP26.

Screenshot from Catherine Heinemeyer's "Red Rebel Relay to COP26 NOV 2021: York-Manchester section."  
© Heinemeyer 2021.

A significant semiotic element in the staging of RRB is the full-body costumes, which are designed to cover the wearer completely. The long skirt is designed to cover the feet extensively, giving the impression that the participants are floating (Francisco 2019). This is consistent with the desire to emphasise the Red Rebels' intangible, otherworldly nature. The veil, a traditional component of bridal attire and a common funeral adornment for women, further enhances the thematic cohesion and cultural significance of the costume.

### The Videos from The Pilgrimage and COP26

*RRB's relations with the environment:* The Red Rebels performed in urban public spaces, mainly streets and railway stations. The relationship to these places varied from a prescribed use of the environment, including avoiding obstacles in their way, to integrating buildings and objects into the performances, e.g. using them as frames for the processions or backdrops for tableaux. For instance, a fence on a bridge [3]<sup>2</sup> or the outline of a railway station platform [4] can provide a foundation for the performance, offering a sense of anchorage within the environment. The concept is further illustrated by the tableau before an advertising pillar promoting the We Mean Green campaign for sustainable travel (see Image 2). In some of the videos, RRB added an aesthetic dimension to the environment, as illustrated by the creation of a 'floating' procession on an electric walkway [4], thereby redefining the everyday practical object as something magical/strange.

*RRB's relation to other people:* The relationship between the Red Rebels and other individuals can be categorised into three distinct classifications: Firstly, there is the relationship

2 The numbers in brackets refer to the YouTube videos that were used in the study. See Appendix.

with bystanders who happen to be present, secondly, there is the relationship with other activists, and thirdly, there is the relationship with individuals utilising cameras to document the performance.

As demonstrated by the videos, the RRB were not generally perceived by the general public, who consistently allocated them a significant degree of personal space, such as during the group's movement through Manchester Piccadilly railway station, when the assembled throng parted to allow for the RRB's passage [3]. In such locations, individuals typically averted eye contact with the group or continued with their own activities. Even in situations where the Red Rebels were in close proximity to other train passengers, there was an absence of interaction between them [3]. It is plausible that the Red Rebels' blank faces, silence and strange costumes distanced them from the other passengers. Alternatively, the people did not want to be involved in something they had not signed up to in the first place. This is a space of mutual acceptance but not interaction.

The space constituted in relation to the XR-activists and volunteers is quite different. The Pilgrimage to COP26 was made together with other activists who contributed to the performance with other media, such as the banner CODE RED FOR HUMANITY they used at Glasgow Central Station (see Image 3). In these intermedial encounters, RRB's action seems to be explained through other media (textual and auditory), making it more comprehensible to the audience. The relationship between the RRB and the volunteers appears as a hierarchical space, with the activists serving the Red Rebels.

The manner in which RRB performed engendered a space characterised by distance between them and the audience. It is probable that the group was perceived as a performing entity, resulting in the bystander's withdrawal from the actors, thereby situating them on a stage. This phenomenon can be attributed to a combination of factors, including the actors' ability to engage the audience through interest or curiosity, as well as the conventions of theatrical media. The staging process effectively situated RRB within a secure social milieu, thereby eliminating the alienating effect. The act of spectators capturing moments with their mobile phones further augmented this sense of distance. The nature of this distance was conceptual rather than physical; a screen was erected between the photographer and the performers, thereby 'capturing' the moment for future viewing.

*RRB's relation to mass media:* When RRB walked in processions, they paid little attention to the professional photographers, proceeding with unstoppable momentum, even as the photographers ran around them to get the perfect shot. However, when the Red Rebels engaged in tableau staging, the relationship underwent a transformation. A clear separation was established between the audience and the performers. A notable illustration of this phenomenon is observed in the tableau depicted in front of the advertising pillar mentioned above, wherein a semicircle of photographers, in various positions including standing, squatting and sitting in rows, formed a physical barrier between the Red Rebels

and the audience [5]. The intense photographic documentation by the mass media appeared to impede the visibility of the tableau for other observers. When groups perform for the photographers, they are united in a common goal: to get a “striking visual image”. In this case, the performance becomes a photo shoot.

*RRB and other media:* During their performances, the Red Rebels interacted with various media appearing in the designated performance area. Examples of such media included textual elements such as visual texts displayed in the place of the performance. These interactions could take the form of relatively unassuming messages, such as “Exit only” or “Private”, appearing behind the Red Rebels as they created a tableau. These fortuitous encounters possess the capacity to effect a change, or at the very least, an influence on the meaning of both the text and the tableaux. Furthermore, RRB’s performance engaged with deliberate texts, such as the banner [4]. A further illustration of the RRB’s interaction with spoken text was evident in their visual accompaniment of the reading of John Roedel’s poem *And Now* with a tableau [3]. In the former instance, the text can be interpreted as a means of elucidating or contextualizing RRB’s performance; in the latter, the performers appeared to imbue the poem with emotional expression.

A particular intermedial interaction is observed when a drummer accompanies the procession of the Red Rebels at Glasgow Central Station [5]. The drumming was characterised by a deliberate and slow tempo, suggesting war, struggle or a funeral. The auditory aspect of the percussive instrument was not merely a complement to the performance of the RRB, but also a congruent element with the banners bearing the text code red. The juxtaposition of these elements – the colour red, the body movements, the slow procession and the dramatic poems or muted performers– collectively engender a space characterised by grief and emergency.

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*The Funerary of COP26* was held in the Glasgow Necropolis by RRB in collaboration with the Blue Rebels. During the procession to the cemetery, the Rebels were accompanied by twenty-six performers attired in black, full-body costumes, each symbolising a COP summit, bearing a sign bearing the acronym COP and the respective summit number. Within the confines of the cemetery, the group engaged in performances “between the headstones and perform[ed] grief poses” (Extinction Rebellion Scotland, 2021b). The performance was accompanied by a bagpiper who played lament tunes. In the cemetery, twenty-seven cardboard headstones, inscribed with the number of the COP summit, had been prepared, and each of the black performers lay down in front of them.<sup>3</sup> The performance concluded with a wreath-laying ceremony at a designated cemetery monument.

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3 Tombstone 27 was probably prepared for the upcoming COP meeting. No performer laid down in front of it.

### The Videos from *A Funeral for Nature*

In FFN, RRB employed the same set-up as their customary performances, with the exception that, as judged from the videos, they did not stage any tableaux. As in *The Funerary of COP26*, the funeral procession was employed as a thematic element, but on this occasion the performance incorporated a deceased figure on a bier, bearers, drummers and mourners. Moreover, a new basic medium was added to their repertoire: a sculpture representing Mother Nature (see Image 4). This sculpture functioned as the focal point of the performance, both in a literal and metaphorical sense. The staging of the deceased nature served to accentuate the theatrical nature of RRB's activism.



**Image 4.** The bearers carrying the bier with Mother Nature.  
Screenshot from Richard Wyatt's "Funeral for Nature."  
© Wyatt, Bath Newseum 2024.

Four hundred Red Rebels participated, with the number of drummers and mourners being tallied at several hundred (see Image 1). This substantial number of participants, together with the drums' slow "single funeral beat" (Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK. 2024) likely contributed to a physical impact of the procession. All participating groups were dressed in uniform costumes. The bearers were attired in long black and emerald green coats and hats. Resembling the Red Rebels, they had white painted faces, with accentuated contours around the mouth and eyes. The drummers and mourners were attired in black costumes, the latter in a gothic style. The depiction of Mother Nature was as a naked woman, white, with long hair hanging down from her head. She was depicted reclining on a verdant bed of moss and foliage. Plants concealed the figure's womb, as if it was their own seedbed. The bier, crafted from willow, was fitted with a pole at each corner, its branches newly sprouted and overhanging the bed.

*RRB's relation with environment:* In a manner similar to the COP26 campaign, RRB used the environment of Bath, its streets, parks and squares, as a framework for action. In comparison to the COP26 event, it appears that a more deliberate utilisation of the urban environment in Bath has been employed. Two sites were central to the action: the Circus of Bath and the Abbey, which was the final destination of the procession. In what becomes a significant spatiotemporal aspect of FFN, the processions circulate around the Circus: RRB proceeded in a counter-clockwise direction, in accordance with the customary direction employed in magical rituals, while the mourners traversed the grounds in a clockwise direction. The long line of Red Rebels coalesced into a red circle, enclosing the park of lush green trees in the centre of the circus [10]. Within this red circle, the brier and drummers had stopped, becoming a central point of the action – a hub (or heart). Upon arriving at the Abbey, the bier was positioned outside its front door [15]. It is important to note that the bier does not enter the church, thus demonstrating its liminoid character.

*RRB's relation to other people:* As demonstrated by the FFN videos, there appears to be a notable absence of the same level of ignorance from passers-by as was observed at COP26. During the procession in Bath, the RRB appeared to be in closer proximity to the surrounding individuals, both physically and metaphorically. The footage often captures a densely populated space, with spectators filling the area surrounding the Red Rebels. This resulted in a greater degree of interaction between the RRB and the crowd than was observed at COP26. For instance, onlookers can be seen spontaneously following the procession or standing in a line near the bier [12].

FFN involves other groups of activists in a manner that was not observed at COP26. These groups are distinguished by their unique costumes, as previously outlined, and collaborate with RRB to create a cohesive performance. This collaborative performance incorporates choreographic elements, wherein the various groups participating in the procession interact with one another. At a certain point in the march, the drummers and bier converged with the Red Rebels, who, in a formation of two lines on the sides of the road, proceeded ahead of the procession, with the drummer and bier assuming the vanguard. However, an analysis of the videos reveals that the typical sequence of the march appears to be two Red Rebels at the vanguard, one of whom is a child, followed by the bier, RRB, drummers, mourners, and finally, “civilian” participants.

*RRB's relation to mass media:* The level of mass media attention during FFN was substantial, as evidenced by the numerous photographs and videos that have been published. As was the case in Glasgow, photographers were present in abundance and adopted a range of positions, including walking backwards while taking photographs or videos, and positioning themselves at key points along the performance route. They also held their cameras close to the faces of participants, who generally ignored them.

*RRB and other media:* As demonstrated above, the actions associated with COP26 encompassed substantial written documentation. This is not the case with FFN, where no banners or placards are visible in the videos during the procession.

## Summary

The analysis identified four spaces that were created by the relationship between the Red Rebel Brigade and the environment, other people, news and media representatives, and other media. The results demonstrate that the environmental relationship gives rise to distinct spaces, including: Specifically, these included environments where objects were perceived as obstacles that had to be circumvented based on their physical appearance. Conversely, on other occasions, the encounter proved more fruitful, with the architecture and urban environment serving as a frame that defined the space in which they appeared, or they integrated the environment into the performances.

The interpersonal relationships cultivated by the RRB were generally characterised by a degree of tolerance, albeit with a notable absence of genuine interest. This tolerance can be attributed to the distinctive appearance of the Red Rebels, their costumes and the vagueness of their purpose. The expressionless nature of their mimetic style serves to exacerbate this sense of distance. The RRB's style, which does not encourage physical contact, appears to contradict their stated mission. This was accentuated by the tableaux, which create a theatrical space, complete with stage and auditorium, emphasising the theatrical and detached nature of RRB. This may be the reason why RRB excluded this element in FFN, because the setting was characterised by emotion and thus did not require melodramatic tableaux. The relationship between RRB and fellow activists in FFN is distinct, characterised by mutual effort and a shared objective, albeit with a hierarchical structure, as evidenced by the fact that the activists who assisted RRB during COP26 served RRB themselves. Conversely, in FFN, where a multitude of activists participated in various roles (theatrical or practical), this distinction appears to be largely mitigated.

The medium with which they primarily engage is photography. This medium fosters the creation of a space that alludes to the future, as the act of photographing a situation captures a visual record of that moment and preserves it. The challenges faced by professional photographers in capturing a satisfactory image are also evident in the Red Rebels' performances, leading to the recognition of their work as a staged cultural act, a form of media.

In addition to its engagement with photography, RRB also interacts with other media, both textual and musical. The latter is exemplified by the manner in which percussive music accentuates the visual aesthetics of performances. Interactions with textual media manifest in random encounters with texts in public spaces, or in the form of speeches, banners, and

leaflets that elucidate or expand their message. These texts function as a medium through which RRB is able to articulate its artistic vision. While percussive performances and spoken texts such as Eulogy serve to reinforce the performance, the effect of these texts could be to demystify the Red Rebels, thereby prompting questions regarding their aesthetic strategy. Consequently, written texts were excluded in FFN probably because the theme, a funeral, was so obvious that there was no need for explanation. The presence of written text would also create a sense of estrangement within the theatrical setting.

The analysis of the videos reveals that the relational space in FFN was more inclusive than in Glasgow. The cityscape was both aesthetically and practically integrated into the theatrically staged funeral procession, and the setting was more comprehensible and easier to integrate with, which meant that people could find their role in the performance – a role of grieving.

### Spaces of Grief in Climate Mobilizations

The question that was posed at the outset of this text should be returned to: Do the performances of grief exhibited by the Red Rebels result in the creation of “a space ‘for action in relation to temporalities and scales that are difficult to grasp’”?

Expressions of grief, mourning and loss are logical responses to the environmental catastrophe. These emotions have been employed in various contexts and through diverse media. For instance, The Remembrance Day for Lost Species was established in 2011, and in 2019, a funeral service was conducted to honour the memory of the Icelandic Okjökull glacier, which has completely disappeared due to climate change. A related example is the project Climate Thanatology (CT), inspired by the concept of music thanatology, which is defined as an end-of-life music that supports the dying “to experience the dying process as a natural passage” (DeLong 2024). The project, under the leadership of the researcher and artist Heidi Hart (Hart 2024), encompasses a range of subprojects and serves as an illustration of post-apocalyptic environmentalism.

The Red Rebels’ aim to create inclusive spaces with their performances, they want to “illuminate the magical realm beneath the surface of all things and [...] invite people to enter” (Red Rebel Brigade 2024). However, this act of entering appears to be fraught with difficulties. Their stylised performances, characterised by a lack of dialogue and minimal facial expression, appear to preclude interaction. Furthermore, the majority of the audience on the street is unable to comprehend the group’s semiotic references, and their performances lack a comprehensible narrative (O’Shea 2022, 27). For instance, RRB’s references to Victorian funeral processions may be entirely unintelligible to the unfamiliar viewer. O’Shea’s conclusion is corroborated by an interview study carried out by Stammen and Meissner.

However, they also found that RRB's performance was well received by XR activists, for whom "the performance induces the cognitive realisation of, and emotional engagement with, ecological breakdown" (2022, 9). These observations are in alignment with the results of this study regarding the performance of RRB's during COP26. However, when RRBs utilise the setting of a funeral, a socio-culturally recognisable medium, as in FFN, they appear to achieve greater success. The performance in Bath engendered a space characterised by enhanced inclusivity, attributable to the presence of a familiar social paradigm. A funeral, as Atkinson posits, functions as a "structure for interacting with community when we are bewildered and disoriented in our grief" (2021, 10). The space created by FFN was one characterised by collective mourning, grief and loss, and was a relational space.

The magnitude of the climate catastrophe is frequently characterised as a phenomenon that is challenging to comprehend and even more so to act upon. In the course of time, scientific discourse has encompassed the question of whether the apparent lack of public action regarding the climate crisis is attributable to a deficiency in information. However, this concept has been contested on the basis that the knowledge of the results from climate research has been widely disseminated. The issue of mobilising people in the struggle against climate change has been explained by scholars in the field of Climate Change Communication (CCC) as a result of the perception of the problem as "invisible, remote, abstract, global, complex, uncertain, and people see very little opportunity to affect it directly or meaningfully" (Moser 2010, 43).

In light of the aforementioned points, it appears that climate scientists are increasingly adopting an emotional perspective on climate change CCC (Chapman 2017). According to the American journalist Wallace-Wells, "scientists began embracing fear" (2019, 157) in 2018 when the Global Warming of 1.5°C report was released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Concurrently, the young Swedish activist Greta Thunberg also embraced this fear in her address to the World Economic Forum: "I want you to panic / I want you to feel the fear I feel every day. / And then I want you to act" (Thunberg 2019, 24). In a similar vein, climate scientist Johan Rockström has argued that reports on climate change have not employed sufficient alarmism and emotionality (Söndagsintervjun 2021). According to these examples, feelings and emotions are proposed as a means of mobilising people to act on the climate catastrophe. However, none of these examples alludes to grief.

The concept of the *hyperobject* was introduced by Timothy Morton to encapsulate phenomena of immense magnitude, such as climate catastrophe (or, as Morton prefers, global warming). A hyperobject, as Morton asserts, is "so vast in both temporal and spatial terms that we can only see slices of it at a time" (2018, 125). Morton further contends that the global warming phenomenon demands an artistic expression that does not rely on aesthetic distancing or the attempt to persuade the audience of the emergency. Instead, Morton proposes that a more efficacious artistic expression would be one that "confronts",

“sticks to”, and “flows over” its audience (2013, 189). This experience, Morton contends, bears resemblance to the Romantic sublime, yet lacks its “power and freedom” (ibid. 196).

The intention of RRB to embody the grief in face of a dying world with a message that is not reliant on explanation can be regarded as an answer to CCC’s wish for a more emotional communication and Morton’s affective art. While the efficacy of their performance remains a subject of debate, their emphasis on the concept of a grieving space serves to promote action. O’Shea’s assertion that emotional responses such as grief “do not readily translate into action” and that, in some cases, they can impede mobilisation, underscores the complexity of such emotional responses (2022, 28). This perspective aligns with the widely accepted theory of the five stages of grief, which culminate in acceptance.<sup>4</sup>

In light of the urgency to limit the mitigation of greenhouse gases and other human induced activities that worsening the climate catastrophe it seems offensive to sit back and help the world to die as in the CT project, that has a goal to “create a pause in habitual, carbon-costly mindsets to allow for new imaginaries to emerge” (Hart 2024). Such a pause seems impossible to take for people who at the same time are dealing with the effects of the catastrophe, for instance the inhabitants of Bangladesh who see their homes and grounds flooding over on a regular basis. Some of the most provoking pieces in this project is Catharine DeLong’s video performance 2021 on the shore of the Great Salt Lake who’s “waters have reached an historic low, which is essential for sustaining wildlife and the communities that surround it”. A video that brings to mind the story of Nero playing his violin while Rome is burning (Genda 2020). Having said this I am not arguing that all art should influence their audience to take action.

It is possible to observe RRB’s activism, with its objective to create an emotional message “without having to explain”, as an answer to both CCC and Morton. However, as O’Shea observes, RRB’s performances frequently elude comprehension for audiences unacquainted with the concept. The question that arises is whether RRB’s FFN is a productive space, where people can take action outside of the funeral march. Even if they do understand, the question remains whether grief can be considered a mobilising emotion. When viewed through the lens of this article, the ways in which grief and mourning are utilised appear to lack mobilising potential, at least in the short term. However, the timeframe in which we must act is rapidly diminishing. It is also possible that the climate catastrophe may not be so “difficult to grasp” as Roger Hallam, one of the founders of XR, suggested in his 2018 talk, *Time to Act Now*: “One of the biggest lies [about climate change] is it’s really complicated [...]. But the fact of the matter is, it’s not that complicated, right? [...] There’s this stuff called ice, its warm, it

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4 “The 5 Stages of Grief is a theory developed by psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. It suggests that we go through five distinct stages after the loss of a loved one. These stages are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance” (Clarke 2023).

melts. You don't have to have a degree in science to work that one out. [...] It's a catastrophe." (Extinction Rebellion (XR) UK 2019, transcript.). In light of Thunberg's remarks in Davos: "I want you to panic / I want you to feel the fear that I feel every day. And then I want you to act" (Thunberg 2019, 24), it seems more reasonable to panic than to grieve.

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## Appendix

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