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MA Arts and Society – Master Thesis

February 13, 2023

## **Art in Activism**

### **Extinction Rebellion's performance in and as protest**



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“Let’s end this failed civilisation wisely and voluntarily, not in chaos and terminal collapse”

- Rupert Read

## Abstract

Activists are increasingly deploying artistic practices in their activism, creating, what is called, activism. Weibel argues that this activism is the first new art form of the twenty-first century. The way in which activists today deploy performance in their activism could, however, according to some authors, receive more attention. By researching how Extinction Rebellion makes use performance in and as protest, this thesis aims to respond to this call and contribute to theoretical knowledge on the use of performance in activism.

Extinction Rebellion is a globally active environmental activist group that rebels against the dying of our Earth, which they believe to be caused by the capitalist system, and aims to move towards a new regenerative culture. With their performance in and as protest, they aim to advocate for social change. To contextualise Extinction Rebellion's practices, this thesis gives a theoretical discussion of activism, performance in and as protests, theatrical strategies and tactics, the hegemonic system of climate crimes and the concept of performativity in protests.

A dramaturgical analysis of two protests held during the London Fashion Week 2019 in this thesis, shows how Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics allow them to attempt to reveal the hegemonic system of climate crimes and the creation of a space that invites their spectators to imagine other ways of living and dying with our Earth. This thesis furthermore argues that Extinction Rebellion attempts to reformulate our existing discourse of a capitalist ideology that sees the Earth as dead matter, through their aim of the creation of a new norm in which we treat the Earth as a living ecosystem.

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## 1. Introduction

November 26th 2021. The streets of the shopping centre of Groningen are, despite the covid-19 pandemic and the advice to avoid social contact and stay at home as much as possible, filled with people. They have gathered outside of stores, excitedly waiting in lines to enter. All these stores hold their annual sale; it is Black Friday. For climate sympathisers, this Friday, in which overconsuming is unabashedly encouraged, symbolises a black day indeed. No wonder then, that climate activist group Extinction Rebellion shows up to mute the cheerful crowd. With slow movements, pessimistic faces and in complete silence, a procession of people walking in front of each other marches through the streets. They carry signs with slogans like '70% sale on the earth! Gone=Gone' and 'People and Planet over Profit'. They are led by a smaller group of people dressed in red cloths, their white painted faces covered by a red veil. The Red Rebels. They are mourning. All of them are mourning. This is not just a protest; it is a funeral cortege. The bargain hunters fall into an awkward silence. Some take photos. As soon as the cortege has passed, they start to chat with each other. No, this action might not make them immediately turn around and go home. It might, however, get people thinking and talking. About Black Friday. About consumption and climate change. They might remember what it felt like to watch that sorrowful procession. And who knows, maybe next year they will stay home.

Extinction Rebellion is a globally active climate activist group that deploys civil disobedience in order to force governments and large corporations to: 1) *"Tell the truth"*, i.e. *"all institutions must communicate the danger we are in"*, 2) *"Act now"*, i.e. *"Every part of society must act now to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025 and begin protecting and repairing nature immediately"* and 3) *"Decide Together"*, i.e. *"The Government must create and be led by a Citizens' Assembly on Climate and Ecological*

*Justice*" (Extinction Rebellion, "Our Demands"). With their protests, they are rebelling against a system that is "contemptuous of humanity and the living world", a "heartless, loveless and lifeless delusion" that sees "Earth as dead matter" and has a "pathological obsession with money and profit" and is "held in place by a toxic media (power without truth); by toxic finance (power without compassion); and toxic politics (power without principle) (Griffiths and XR UK). In this thesis, this system is conceptualised as *the hegemonic system of climate crimes*. Extinction Rebellion aims to move towards a "new regenerative culture", in which we "have restored the intricate web of all life" (Extinction Rebellion UK, "Our Vision"). In this thesis, I will research how they use performance in and as protests in an attempt to do so.

Such activism, in which artistic practices - among which performance - are used, is in this thesis conceptualised as *artivism*. This artivism is becoming more and more important. According to Weibel, "the "artist" is the new type of artist of the twenty-first century" (57). The changed circumstances of our world, such as globalisation, individualization and the spread of capitalism, have created new forms of repression and exploitation that have forged new ways of activism. These new forms of activism have a "creative new edge that blu[r] the boundaries between artist and activist" (Harrebye 26). Activists are increasingly trusting in art's "ability to change our minds—inspiring us to take on different perspectives and to reimagine our worlds" (Nossel 103). They are thus increasingly deploying artistic practices in their activism, performing artivism.

Such artist practices have existed, and received scholarly attention, for quite some time. However, this field is every-changing due to changing conditions and developments of both the world and the field of art (McGarry et al.). Therefore "much work still needs to be done in this ever-evolving field of activist artistry" (Harrebye x). The way activists today use

performance in their activism could, according to some authors, receive more attention: “It is surprising how little attention has been given to the role of performance in political activism” (McGarry et al. 19). Extinction Rebellion is a new player within this field of activism. The climate activist group was only founded in 2018. Therefore, not a lot has been written about their particular protests. I thus believe a research on the way in which they use performance in and as protest can be helpful to “rethink and explore theoretical concepts and tools through practice [...] for a better understanding of theory and practice” (Firat and Kuryel 17).

I have guided this research with the following research question: *How does Extinction Rebellion's use of performance in and as protest allow them to advocate for social change?* In my analysis I will focus on their use of *activist and theatrical strategies and tactics*. These activist and theatrical strategies and tactics are understood as a way to use performance in and as protest. Activist and theatrical strategies are a way “to produce, tabulate and impose spaces” (de Certeau 30). The “ways of operating” within these strategies are conceptualised as activist and theatrical tactics (de Certeau 37).

With this research, I have aimed to respond to the call of academia to conduct more research into the use of performance in activism and contribute to knowledge on the use of art in activism. To answer my research question, I first built a theoretical framework by exploring the key concepts of activism and activist strategies and tactics, performance in and as protest, theatrical strategies and tactics, the hegemonic system of climate crimes and finally the concept of performativity in protests. These concepts informed the dramaturgical analysis I conducted of two protests held during London Fashion Week 2019. For this analysis, I followed the relational approach of Groot Nibbelink and Merx. According to them, dramaturgy is a method used to analyse how staging practices relate to the outside world.

This is not limited to performance on stage but can also be used to analyse the dramaturgy of protests (Groot Nibbelink and Merx). I guided my analysis with three sub-questions that together allow for an answer to my research question:

1. What possibilities does Extinction Rebellion's use of art in their protests open up to their activist practices?
2. How does Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics in the opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 allow them to express their statement?
3. How does Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics in the opening and closing protests allow them to construct a position for their spectator?

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Artivism

Artivists use artistic activist practices to “intervene in political context, struggles and debates” (Taylor, “Performance” 147). Several terms are used in contemporary academic writing to describe these artistic activist practices, such as political art, critical art, creative activism and artivism. I will talk about artivism, which I understand to be the same as creative activism:

a kind of meta activism that facilitates the engagement of active citizens in temporary, strategically manufactured, transformative interventions in order to change society for the better by communicating conflicts and/or solutions where no one else can or will in order to provoke reflection (and consequent behavioral changes) in an attempt to revitalize the political imagination. (Harrebye 25)

In the Oxford English Dictionary, activism is defined as “the use of vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change” (“Activism”). A broad used example of this vigorous campaigning by activists, is protesting. With protest, “the democratic public performs its existence through resistance” (McGarry et al. 16). Protest deploys the power of the people. It allows the otherwise powerless people to express their voices and strive for their own principles and ideas. They are thus a fundament of democracy: “democracy is the paradoxical power of those who do not count” (Rancière and Panagia 124). Protests are a “collective struggle” of numerous individuals or groups of people, who together challenge the status quo by “disrupt[ing] the existing political order, transcend[ing] or abandon[ing] its ideological trappings, and creat[ing] new possibilities” (McGarry et al. 16). They take place in public space, which sends a powerful message to both the government and the people; the state is not the only one who has authority here, all voices can lay a claim and challenge the

current ways of political legitimacy (Butler, "Notes"). Protests allow people to become active members of society who have a voice worthy to be heard, instead of being mere passive followers; "the about-turn from passive behaviour, which the individual struggles to break away from, to active participation is revealed in the creativity of the protest" (Heissenbüttel 467).

Activists use protest as a "vital social response to awful situations". (Taylor, "Performance" 168). Through these protests, they want to bring about social change. Activists are thus critical of the current status quo; they are striving for another, better world. They are therefore not only against something, but also in favour of something, of something different. Activism is thus about moving the material world, about generating effect. Social change, however, does not come about easily. Activists may be able to stir up a social mobilization, but broader circumstances have to be favourable in order to create the disruption needed for actual revolutionary change (Harrebye). We (the people) thus have to be ready to seize the moment, whenever it occurs: "By helping people to reimagine a different kind of world, we are preparing for that moment, so that we can seize it" (D'Souza in D'Souza and Staal 53).

To generate such social effect, activists can very well deploy art in their activist practices: "art has the ability to change our minds—inspiring us to take on different perspectives and to reimagine our worlds" (Nossel 103). With such activism, they make use of the power of the imagination that is inherent to art.

One of the tactics used by activists in their practices is applying specific aesthetics such as meaningful colours, sounds and form to activate our imagination. With this, activists aim to disclose the world to us differently. They reveal to us "a world that is completely new yet always already there" (Dolphijn 185), hiding behind the surface of "our seemingly

coherent ideologies” and “belief systems” (Harrebye 19). Aesthetic practices, par excellence, have the ability to create meaning and alter our perception of the world. They are “configurations of experience that create new modes of sense perception and induce novel forms of political subjectivity” (Rancière “Politics of Aesthetics” 4). With the use of specific aesthetics, activists thus “addres[s] human deafness and human blindness” (Dolphijn 185). They present to us a new perspective that is able to confront us with our contemporary reality.

Another tactic used by activists through the use of art, is to open up this contemporary reality by imagining other possibilities to it. Activists are striving for a better world, but to “change the world, we have to imagine change first” (Staal in D’Souza and Staal 38). In their practices, they therefore create alternative realities in which their objectives have already been achieved. For example, a legal system that does acknowledge environmental pollution as a crime in the art installation *The Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes* (Staal and D’Souza) or the Dutch prime minister holding a press conference on the importance of our Earth in the deepfake-video *Beste Mark Rutte, zo klink je als je #klimaatleiderschap toont* (Mommers et al.) Such imaginations hold the potentiality to become reality: “the gesture makes this process of becoming imaginable, and once it is imaginable—once the future has been experienced affectively, even though it is not yet present—it has already become too real to ignore” (MircMan and Staal).

This affect is another tactic deployed by activists through their use of art in their activist practices. Art is an affective expression that evokes feelings in its viewers: “it moves a person’s heart, body and soul” (Duncombe, “Does it Work” 118). Using artistic practices to communicate an activist message will therefore result in a deeper, more anchored experience for its spectators. As such, activism can stir up individuals. It is about “e-motion,

affect in movement” (Taylor, “Performance” 127). People will only “change their mind and act accordingly[, if t]hey are moved to do so by emotionally powerful stimuli” (Duncombe, “Does it Work” 119), not just because they have been enlightened to do so. Knowledge and “understanding alone can do little to transform consciousness and situations” (Rancière, “Problems and Transformations” 83). Artists thus use art, its aesthetics, imaginative- and affective power to effectuate actual social change: “There cannot be transformative change without knowledge that speaks to our reason. At the same time there cannot be transformative action if that knowledge is not accompanied by art, literature and music that can speak to our hearts, our ethics and aesthetics” (D’Souza in D’Souza and Staal 54).

With activism, artists thus make use of what Rancière calls the “connection between art and politics” (“Politics of Aesthetics” 10). Its appearance is characterised by two extreme forms of art: art that completely merges with the reality of which it is a reaction or reflection, or art that is completely autonomous (i.e. *l’art pour l’art*). These two apparent contradictions are, according to Rancière, however, always inextricably linked (“Politics of Aesthetics”). The power of activism lies precisely in the tension between the two extremes of this connection. Within this field of tension, the artist can convey a rational activist message by making use of art’s affective and imaginative power. The artist must therefore strike a good balance between “the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form of art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning” (Rancière, “Politics of Aesthetics” 59). If the artist wants to be able to “raise consciousness of the mechanisms of domination” present in our contemporary reality, she thus has to be careful to keep enough distance from this reality (Rancière, “Problems and Transformations” 83). She has to be attentive to not become trapped within, or even worse, reinforce the very mechanism she tries to resist. Through exposing the signs of Capital within

the everyday, she might be only able to “change the minds of those who leave room for mistakes and are open to new ways of looking at things” (Harrebye 19), if she is capable of keeping her own autonomous expression. She must be able to resist the one-dimensionality of our capitalist society in which “the consciousness of and instinct for an alternative existence atrophies or seems powerless” (Marcuse 127). If she is able to do so, her activist artistic practices are “providing the first examples of how mass culture can become critical instead of affirming mass consumerism” (Weibel 60). Through activism, the artist is then able to “turn the spectator into a conscious agent in the transformation of the world” (Rancière, “Problems and Transformations” 83).

Artivists are thus those activists that deploy artistic practices in their activism, performing what is defined in this thesis as artivism. Through their deployment of art in their activist practices, these artivists can turn to different tactics as explained in this first theoretical section: aesthetics, imagination of other possibilities and affect. Artivists can work with different artistic practices to deploy these tactics in and bring about social change. An example of this is the use of performance, that can be used by artivists as “the continuation of politics by other means” (Taylor, “Performance” 147). In my analysis I will discuss Extinction Rebellion's use of performance in (and as) protest.

## 2.2 Performance in and as protest

In her book “performance”, Diana Taylor writes about performance as being artivistic in itself. According to her, performance “enable[s] individuals and collectives to reimagine and restage the social rules, codes, and conventions that prove most oppressive and damaging” (Taylor, “Performance” xiv). Performance practices are thus used by artivists to expose to us

the cracks in our system, to see beyond its surface and to reimagine alternative realities:

“performance is world-making” (Taylor, “Performance” 208).

Such reimaginings of alternative realities are speculations, that is, theories that are not certain. For Donna Haraway speculations are a way to engage with the present. A way to “stay with the trouble” (Haraway 2). She uses speculation in her concept of Speculative Fabulation: the telling of stories in the everyday and (scholarly) writing that include fables or “wild facts” (Fabbula TV). This does, however, not mean that such speculations are not truthful. Haraway advocates using Speculative Fabulations alongside Science Facts. We need to take Speculative Fabulation seriously, precisely because it allows for the re-imagination of a different and better world: “it matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with [...] It matters what stories make worlds” (Haraway 12). Patricia Reed, however, talks about Speculations not in a present, but future sense: “speculation is an ethos of non-presentness” (527). She distinguishes Speculations from Prognostics. Prognostics are, according to her, anticipations of the present. They are mere predictions of the future. Herein, the future is envisioned as a continuation of present tendencies, as an actualization of threads and trends that are, and were, already here: “it feels locked in the past” (Reed 526). Prognostics therefore do not speculate. They can be useful as a warning of that what we do not want, “but wither in the face of producing what we do want” (Reed 527). Speculation, for Reed, then, moves beyond the present towards the unknown future. It attempts to pre-shape this unknown future through experimentation with the existent and in-existent through that which cannot be known (yet): “To speculate, on the other hand, is to mobilize the capacity of epistemic fallibility; to deploy this fallibility as an engine in the never-ending effort for socio-politico-technological (not to mention ethical) redefinition” (Reed 527). Speculations, Prognostics

and Speculative Fabulations are forms of other world-making (Haraway). They confront us with our contemporary reality and as such have the ability to propose alternatives for another, better world.

For quite some time, there have been activists active who have used performance in and as protest to imagine such alternatives for another, better world. These activists have thus been strategically deploying art in their activist practices. Yes Men and the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) are examples of such activists groups that have been around since the early 2000's. They are historical precedents to Extinction Rebellion, shaping the discourse around them.

The activist group Yes Men is made up of the duo Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos, under the aliases Andy Bichlbaum and Mike Bonnano. They impersonate big corporations and governments and act as if these corporations or governments right their wrongs. They build real-looking fake websites, release press statements, send e-mails and even double as spokespersons on camera. With their protests, they create an alternative reality in which their objectives have been achieved. Yes Men, for example, impersonated the Dow Chemical Company by building a fake website through which BBC News contacted them for a short interview regarding the 20th memorial of the Bhopal disaster (i.e. the accidental releasing of more than forty tons of methyl isocyanate from one of the Union Carbide Corporations (owned by Dow) factories, costing thousands of lives). On television, the so-called spokesperson of Dow said the company would finally clean up the disaster's site and compensate all victims. With this action, Yes Men pressured the actual Dow Chemical Company into a response and caused a dilemma regarding the decision of this response: making them damned if they do, and damned if they don't. They, of course, choose the latter. Yes Men, still impersonating Dow, released a formal press statement in which they

highlighted what and why exactly Dow would not, making them damned that they didn't: "Dow's sole and unique responsibility is to its shareholders, and Dow CANNOT do anything that goes against its bottom line unless forced to by law" (Yes Men). Yes Men thus uses performance in and as protest to imagine the change they want to achieve, which corresponds to the aforementioned activist strategy of imagining other possibilities. By allowing people to experience the possibility of change, they hope to "mak[e] its realization a question of time" (Mircan and Staal).

The Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) is a horizontal activist network that operates within Europe, the States and Israel. They practice non-violent activist clowning at large protests and during their own rebellious actions. Dressed up as actual clown soldiers, including red noses, painted faces, uniforms in colourful camouflage and non-violent weaponry, CIRCA acts jolly, childish and innocent. By doing so, they create a big contrast between themselves and the causes for, and the people against which, they protest. CIRCA aims to give us another perspective, to make us see the cracks within the polished surface of our contemporary reality. They, for example, went inside the Royal Air Force recruitment centre in England to try to sign themselves up for the military to join the war in Iraq. They plead to the recruiting officers: "Please teach us how to liberate people" (Boyle 202). When the officers tried to remove the clowns forcefully out of the centre, the clowns fought back in their own way. They whizzed balloons around the centre and polished the shoes of the recruiters with their feather dusters. One of them read the clown communiqué, in which the war in Iraq is discussed and the takeover of the city by the Clown Army is announced. Outside of the centre a group of clowns had set up a CIRCA recruitment stall. They handed out their own pamphlets: "Be Rubbish! Join the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army!" (Boyle 202). Through their active deployment of clownish aesthetics,

they aim to confront us with the violence that hides under the surface of our contemporary reality. They reveal to us a “world that was always already there” (Dolphijn 185), which aligns with the aforementioned activist tactic of the use of specific aesthetics. CIRCA aims to facilitate critical reflection on the harm this violence does. To make us think about other, better ways of living on Earth.

Yes Men and the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army both deploy the artistic practice of performance in their protests, to stage a speculation on our present. In their protests, they both make use of Speculative Fabulation (Haraway) to imagine for us other, better possibilities in this present. Yes Men and CIRCA make thus use of performance in and as protest.

Artivists can thus very well turn to the artistic practice of performance to allow us to see beyond the surface of our current reality by restaging oppressive and damaging conventions, and imagine for us other possibilities through a reimagination of our current reality. By doing so, artivists use performance in and as protest. Herein, they not only deploy the activist tactics we saw in the first section, but also more specific theatrical tactics and strategies. The speculations on both our future and present discussed in this section are examples of such theatrical tactics.

### 2.3 Theatrical strategies and tactics

In his article “It stands on its head: Commodity fetishism, consumer activism, and the strategic use of fantasy”, Stephen Duncombe explains the strategies that new consumer activists use in their activism. Consumer activists are those activists that critique our capitalist society, to strive for a better world for both humans and non-humans. These new

consumer activists are strategically making use of a (transparent) fantasy through the artistic practice of performance in their activism. They are thus artists.

Consumer activists used to focus on the “phantasmagorical nature of the commodity”, making fantasy the locus of their attack (Duncombe, “It stands on its Head” 361). Commodities are manmade utensils that are manufactured in order to be exchanged. They present themselves as a twofold entity: being both an object of utility, - having a use-value - and, when used as a value in a trade relationship with another commodity, having an exchange-value (Marx). Within our consumer society, commodities have become a fantasy in themselves. They are not presented to consumers as what they truly are. Their exchange-value “conceals the social character of private labour, and the social relations between the individual producers” (Marx 33). Consumers therefore tend to see only their own relation with the commodity, instead of their relationship with all human individuals and products of nature that worked together in presenting this commodity to them. For Marx, this is “the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is, therefore, inseparable from the production of commodities” (Marx 31).

Consumer activists de-fetishized commodities in two possible ways: using the revelatory or restorative strategy. With the revelatory strategy, activists tried to reveal the actual socio-political history that is concealed within these commodities: “its raw materials, the labour practices which produce it, the resources expended in its production and consumption, and even the commodity’s real use value (Duncombe, “It stands on its Head”). The problem is diagnosed by these activists as being one of blindness, so they enlightened the consumer with the truth. With the restorative strategy, on the other hand, the activists tried to restore the natural-socio-connections between products, people and nature. They made people

conscious of human interdependence in the production of commodities and consumption and tried to extricate oneself from this cycle (Duncombe, "It stands on its Head"). These two practices have, however, their limitations. The revelatory strategy is conditioned upon the contested Enlightenment idea that knowledge leads to doing. But "understanding alone can do little to transform consciousness and situations" (Rancière, "Problems and Transformations" 83), as discussed in the previous section. The restorative strategy, moreover, contains the danger of getting ambushed within the very cycle of consumption and production it tries to break away from. It often, unintentionally, creates a new form of commodity: the brand. This strategy has often proven to be unable to resist the one-dimensionality of our contemporary society in which "the consciousness of and instinct for an alternative existence atrophies or seems powerless" (Marcuse 127). The problem with these de-fetishizing, reality-based strategies is what Duncombe has called the "problem of totality": since it is almost impossible to imagine something you are not familiar with, the critique of activists becomes "wed to and dependent upon the very system it ostensibly rejects", "there seems to be no way out" (Duncombe, "It stands on its Head" 370). To critique our capitalist society, activists should experiment with different perspectives. They need to be able to see beyond the rigid structures that are holding us hostage, to imagine a different reality that could have been, or could be. Reality thus "needs fantasy to render it desirable" (Harrebye 21).

Newer consumer activists therefore actively deploy such fantasy: "they are experimenting with freeing fantasies from the commodity" (Duncombe, "It stands on its Head" 374). Since "performances move between the as if and the is, between pretend and new constructions of the 'real'" (Taylor, "Performance" 6), new consumer activists strategically deploy the artistic practice of performance. In these fantasies, they stage or

perform things as if they are genuine. Think of Yes Men acting as if they are Dow, or CIRCA-members acting as if they are soldier clowns. Fantasies are thus speculations, presenting to us things that are not really here (yet). To create these fantasies, activists can thus deploy the tactic of Speculative Fabulation (Haraway) through staging a speculation on the present, Speculation (Reed) through staging a speculation on the future or Prognostics (Reed) through staging an anticipation of the future.

These fantasies, however, must be transparent. In order for this activist message to come across, the spectator must know at some point that she is not being confronted with reality, but with a fantasy. The activists must balance between the “readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification” (Rancière, “Politics of Aesthetics” 59). These fantasies must therefore be presented as a fantasy. They must be “dreams that present themselves as dreams, and insofar as they are transparent there is a reality to them which commercial fantasies do not have. That is to say: there is no deception” (Duncombe, “It stands on its Head” 367). A good way to create such a transparent fantasy is through deploying the tactic of alienation.

Berthold Brecht encourages the use of alienation in performance practices (Turner and Behrndt). His epic theatre therefore stands in direct opposition with the traditional dramatic theatre. In the dramatic theatre, a phantasmagorical fantasy is presented to the spectator. Here, illusion is strengthened to the level of complete absorption: spectators are “invited to experience the play events as if they are actually taking place at that moment” (Turner and Behrndt 52). The epic theatre, on the contrary, is a dream presented as a dream. Through the use of alienating elements, it forces spectators to “look on the stage events as things that are being recounted” (Turner and Behrndt 52).

Alienating elements are elements that “destroy the habitual way of looking” (Wekwerth 119). Examples of alienating elements are the use of historical material, interruptions, incoherences in the story, the exposure of the use of extra-theatrical means (i.e. all methods and tools that are used to create theatre) and detournement. The latter is used in the speculative performances of Yes Men and CIRCA, and the protests of Extinction Rebellion – as my analysis will show. Detournement is a resistant tactic originating from the Situationists. In detournement “pre-existing aesthetic elements” of the dominant culture are used in a subversive manner, to “convey opposing – and often witty – messages” that critique that very culture in itself (Firat and Kuryel 9). Think of the soldier clowns of CIRCA wearing a full military uniform, including camouflage and weaponry, but turned it into something joyful to expose its violence. Alienation thus allows that “reality may be perceived” (Wekwerth 119).

Through the use of such alienating elements, spectators see a performance for what it is: not reality, but something that is being performed. Alienating elements thus construct transparent fantasies that create agency for the spectator and as such “facilitate critical awareness” (Turner and Behrndt 52). The spectator is no longer being silenced, an opening is created for her to think for herself: “we are put in control of our collective destiny; we have made the world and, as such, we can transform it and make it anew” (Duncombe, “It Stands on its Head” 372).

Artivists can use several theatrical strategies and tactics through their use of performance. To be able to express critique of our current reality, artivists need to be able to imagine a different reality. Artivists therefore use performance to stage such different realities, creating what is called a fantasy. For this, they can use the tactics of Speculation (Reed), Speculative Fabulation (Haraway) or Prognostics (Reed). These fantasies, however,

must be transparent in order for the spectator to decipher the activist message. Activists thus strategically create transparent fantasies by tactically deploying alienating elements such as detournement. These transparent fantasies disturb the habitual way of looking and allow for critical reflection in their spectators.

#### 2.4 Hegemonic System of Climate Crimes

Extinction Rebellion is saying to be rebelling against a system that sees “Earth as dead matter” and has a “pathological obsession with money and profit” (Griffiths and XR UK). According to Latour, we are indeed living in an era wherein “the Earth itself has largely been seen as playing a backstage role, the mere window dressing for human intention and interest” (Latour, “War and Peace” 73). In an era designated as the Anthropocene, wherein we humans are of such a great “power of disturbance” (Stengers quoted in Latour, “Anthropologists” 602) to our Earth, that we are destroying her. However, this is not about human individuals. It is about, as the spokesperson of Extinction Rebellion UK states, “targeting the *system* they run, and sometimes targeting their role in running that *system*. It is about *system* change” (Read 91; emphasize added). This system has become the all-encompassing dominant norm in our society. I have therefore conceptualised this system as the *hegemonic system of climate crimes*.

We are currently facing a serious *climate* crisis. Our earth is warming at a rate unprecedented in the last decades. Global warming pushes ecosystems beyond their natural ability to adapt, which will (and already does) cause extreme weather events such as droughts and floods, sea level rise and ice cap melting, biodiversity loss to the extreme of a mass extinction, energy/water/food insecurities, diseases and (violent) social conflicts, all of which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable human beings and non-human species

(IPCC, "Climate Change 2022"). And we are the ones to blame: "It is unequivocal that human influence has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land" (IPCC, "Climate Change 2021" 5).

It is humans who continue to pump greenhouse gasses into the atmosphere, who continue to degrade the environment, who continue to harm the Earth. We humans are therefore culprit to "the extensive damage, destruction to or loss of ecosystems of a given territory [...] to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished": we are culprit to ecocide (Higgins 3). According to criminologist Rob White, continuing to do so is "the most significant crime of the twenty-first century" (White, "Foreword" ix). Extinction Rebellion therefore states that we humans are committing a particular kind of crime: a *climate crime*. Such climate crimes consist of: (1) "organizational acts (and omissions) that are responsible for causing global warming" (2) "deny[ing] that climate change is real or humanly caused" (3) "fail[ing] to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions" and (4) "adapt[ing] to climate disruptions in militaristic and unjust ways" (Kramer 6; White, "Climate Change").

If it is "human influence that has warmed the atmosphere, ocean and land" (IPCC, "Climate Change 2021" 5), why do we continue to do so? The answer is simple: "it's capitalism that is at fault" (Kramer 51). Capitalism's ideology of infinite growth is a self-destructive mechanism that lies at the heart of our current climate crises. Within capitalism, corporations are under constant pressure to increase their productivity, to look for ways to transform use-values (i.e. object of utility (Marx)) into exchange-values (i.e. utility objects produced for trading (Marx)) in order to keep up with consumerism. Keeping up is necessary to remain viable in a competitive capitalist market. This pressure is inherent to capitalism's corporate form: large corporations only remain viable because of shareholders, and shareholders only buy shares if they receive dividends. Therefore, corporations have to

always remain profitable. Shareholders have, however, no responsibility whatsoever: they cannot ever be held accountable for the deeds of their company. Corporations are thus only focused on maximising profit, ignoring all other economic, social or ecological interests: “the interests of the powerful are increasingly tied up with the diminishment of Nature’s bounty in the pursuit of economic viability and growth” (White, “Climate Change” 399). Some criminologists see capitalism therefore as “intrinsically criminogenic” (White, “Climate Change” 387). TOP (treadmill of production) theory argues that the destructive incongruity between capitalist economy and ecological well-being is fundamental to the capitalist system (Kramer). We are thus winded up in a *system*, in which harming the Earth, committing climate crimes, is business-as-usual.

This capitalist system has become our new status quo. It is not only influencing our economy but also our political and social landscape (Kramer; White, “Climate Change”). It has become a guiding principle, financed by banks, supported by governments and internationalised in our thinking about the way in which a society functions (Fisher). It is influencing our beliefs, morals and values. Our thinking has become fully individualistic, with self-interest being the basis to our morality and individual responsibility being the idea of accountability, instead of emphasising general well-being and collectively thinking for the common good (White, “Climate Change”). Capitalism has thus “move[d] beyond a position of corporate existence and defence of its economic position”, it has gained a “position of leadership in the political and social arena” (Gramsci 20). It has become *hegemonic*. Our whole society has internalised this capitalist system, it is all around us. As such, it erases its traces of existence. It has blinded us. For us, capitalism has become an irreversible given: “It's easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism” (Fisher 13).

So, even though the amount of unanimous scientific evidence that we are in the midst of a human caused climate crisis is accumulating, still (almost) nothing changes: “even if most of you follow the [IPCC] report, you are nonetheless all climatosceptics since this knowledge, even if widely shared, does not trigger as much action as is necessary” (Latour, “War and Peace” 75). Even the world’s leader in funding fossil fuels, J.P. Morgan Bank, is aware of the disastrous path we are on, but still continues to fund these fossil fuels: “It is clear that the earth is on an unsustainable trajectory. Something will have to change at some point if the human race is going to survive” - a quote from a leaked (and disappeared) report written by the economists of the J.P. Morgan Bank (Read 133). With his book *Extinction*, René ten Bos explores exactly this phenomenon: “How is it possible that we are not, or too little, affected by this [climate crisis]?” (Ten Bos, “Human”). Extinction of almost all life on earth, including that of ours, is, due to the climate crisis, not only a serious threat but something that is already happening. And this might be part of the problem. The “shifting baseline syndrome” is the “phenomenon that, if we have only seen scarcity in the living world around us for a while, we automatically start thinking that this is the ‘new normal’” (Ten Bos, “Extinction” 48). This might be why we do not perceive it as problematic as we should, and therefore do not act as we should. We can thus speak of a *hegemonic system of climate crimes*.

Large corporations are the ones committing climate crimes by continuing to pump greenhouse gasses into our atmosphere, but it is the governments that fail to mitigate this – which is also considered a climate crime (Michalowski and Kramer; Kramer). The interplay between corporations and governments in committing particular type of crimes is defined by criminologists Ray Michalowski and Ronald Kramer as “state-corporate crimes”: “illegal or socially injurious actions that result from a mutually reinforcing interaction between (1)

policies and/or practices in pursuit of the goals of one or more institutions of political governance and (2) policies and/or practices in pursuit of the goals of one or more institutions of economic production and distribution” (Michalowski and Kramer 201). Such state-corporate crimes are, however, not labelled an official crime according to its legal-based definition. Radical criminologists point out that this legal-based definition of crime is merely a reflection of the capitalist system. The legal-based definition of crime is therefore excluding all those crimes that are committed by powerful actors - such as large corporations and governments - within this system (Schwendinger and Schwendinger). A harm-based definition of crime, however, allows for the labelling of state-corporate crimes as actual crimes (Kramer). This harm-based definition is not an “ideological instrument which shape[s] and develop[s] language and objectives of science in such a way as to strengthen class domination” (Schwendinger and Schwendinger 8), but “contests the historical and institutional conditions that regulate and organize the frames of reference through which we think and act” (Parr 2).

This reasoning of a harm-based definition of crimes is also used by artists Jonas Staal and professor of law Radha D’Souza in their performative artwork *The Court for Intergenerational Climate Crimes* (CICC) (Staal and D’Souza). With the CICC, they aim to “present evidence of climate crimes” by “deconstruct[ing] legal frameworks and procedures and show how they are based on the ontological falsehood that state and corporations are ‘persons’”. The project exposed how the law creates these golems and breathes life into them, and how the extended lives of states and corporations as legal persons allow them to commit crimes that are intergenerational” (D’Souza in D’Souza and Staal 55). In my analysis I will discuss how Extinction Rebellion can also be said to follow this reasoning.

With their protests, Extinction Rebellion can be said to rebel against this hegemonic system of climate crimes that they believe to be laying beneath the surface of the business-as-usual practices of our current capitalist society – as my analysis will discuss in more depth. It can be argued that they want to break the alleged norm created by this supposed hegemonic system and create a new discourse, which is also further discussed in my analysis. Their protests can therefore be thought of as being performative.

### 2.5 Performative protests

Protests are performative; activists (and artists) aim to make something happen with their protests. With their protests, they are expressing their critique and opting for change. Since protests express a certain statement, the act of protesting must realise that which their protest declares. The act of protesting is thus a performative act.

In his lectures, Austin has defined performatives as those utterances “in which to say something is to do something” (12). For example, by saying you promise a certain thing, you make a promise. Or, by saying ‘I do’ during a wedding ceremony, you become married. With this, he demonstrated how words could be more than just a description of a certain act; words can become an act in themselves. Butler shifts the understanding of this doing and becoming of an act, from the power that certain words have, towards the power of discourse and power as discourse. In her theory on gender performativity, she defines the performative not as a “deliberate” and “singular ‘act’” through which someone “brings into being what s/he names”, but as the “reiteration of a norm or set of norms” through which the “discourse produces the effect that it names” (Butler, “Bodies” 2). This discourse is constructed through the repetition of certain acts, which becomes the norm that is being reiterated by these acts. The discourse becomes hegemonic, it holds power and is enforced

by social punishment, sanctions and taboos. There is, however, a possibility to challenge this hegemony, because that which is constructed within discourse is not fixed in or by it: “In its very character as performative resides the possibility of contesting its reified status” (Butler, “Performative Acts” 520). To challenge the hegemony, one has to act in a performative manner. Reformulating a discourse is only possible by creating a new norm. Such a new norm can only be constructed by convincingly repeating subversive actions that in themselves become a reiteration of that new norm (Butler, “Bodies”; “Performative Acts”). By expressing their statement again and again through their protests, Extinction Rebellion can also be said to try and contribute to the construction of such a new norm to move away from the alleged hegemonic system of climate crimes – as I will discuss in more depth in my analysis.

I started this theoretical framework with a discussion of the concept of activism and activist strategies, as this thesis is focussed on how Extinction Rebellion's use of an artistic practice in their protests – performance – allows them to advocate for social change. I continued with a discussion of performance in and as protest and the theatrical strategies and tactics that can be deployed herein. I also contextualised the hegemonic system of climate crimes, the system that Extinction Rebellion can be said to rebel against with their protests. I ended with a discussion of the concept of performativity in the light of protesting. These concepts and ideas will feature in my analysis, to show how Extinction Rebellion's use of performance in and as protest allows them to advocate for social change.

### 3. Methodology

In the previous chapter, I contextualised the use of art in activism and the practices of Extinction Rebellion. These findings will be used in my analysis to discuss the activist and theatrical strategies and tactics used in their protests. In the following chapter, I will first give an explanation of the methodology used for this analysis.

I chose to analyse the performative protests of Extinction Rebellion following Groot Nibbelink and Merx's relational approach of dramaturgical analysis. This approach is not limited to performances on stage: it can for instance also be used to "equally look into the dramaturgy of environmental protests" (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 15). Moreover, Groot Nibbelink and Merx's method is concerned with analysing how (extra-)theatrical means are deployed in staging practices to construct meaning, create experience and reverberate social phenomena: "answering the question of what the performance 'says' or is trying to do is crucial to dramaturgical analysis" (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 9). Extra-theatrical means is an umbrella term that includes all methods and tools that are used to create theatre, such as "the use of bodies, spaces, objects, text, media, gesture, acting or movement styles, light and sound design, music, cameras, screens and other technological equipment, and more" (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 7). The relational approach of dramaturgical analysis is therefore particularly useful to research how Extinction Rebellion makes use of performance in and as protest to advocate for social change.

According to Groot Nibbelink and Merx's relational approach, all three fundamental planes of dramaturgy (i.e. *composition / spectator / context*) are activated within a dramaturgical analysis (see figure 1). This first plane, *composition*, refers to all

(extra-)theatrical means used to create a staging practice and structure it from its start- towards its endpoint. It is “the architecture of performance” (Turner and Behrndt 5). *Spectator* comprises the ways in which staging practices organize experience for a specific spectator and invite for meaning-making processes. Spectator focusses not on audience reception, but on single-spectator address: “address means that

spectators are invited to adopt a particular point of view from which to look at what is being presented on stage” (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 8). *Context* pays attention to the reverberation of the societal and artistic context within a staging practice, since nothing exists in a vacuum: “we need to look at how a performance is situated within the context of a community, society and the world” (Turner and Behrndt 35). Whereas the societal context consists of the social, cultural, political and economic reality of the world, the artistic context refers to the oeuvre of the artist. Both these contexts influence staging practices and their communicative potential. Since “a production comes alive through its interaction, through its audience, and through what is going on outside its own orbit” (Kerkhoven), “dramaturgical analysis comes alive through actively tracing such interactions” (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 9). Connecting the planes of dramaturgy allows for a dramaturgical analysis of spectatorship (i.e. connecting spectator and composition), statement (i.e. connecting composition and context) or situatedness (i.e. connecting spectator and context) (see figure 1).

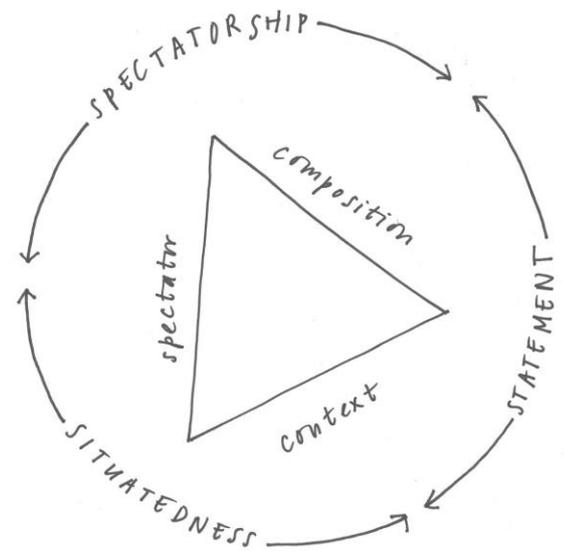


Figure 1. Dramaturgical analysis and the planes of dramaturgy (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 9)

My analysis will be guided by three sub-questions. These sub-questions will follow the three planes of dramaturgy from composition, to statement, to spectator: “Which starting point to choose and which plane to emphasize [in the dramaturgical analysis] depends both on what the performance itself seems to foreground and on the position of the analyst-researcher” (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 9). To answer these sub-questions, I will use the concepts laid out in my theoretical framework. Together, these three sub-questions provide an answer to my over-arching research question *How does Extinction Rebellion's use of performance in and as protest allow them to advocate for social change?*

1. What possibilities does Extinction Rebellion's use of art in their protests open up to their activist practices?
2. How does Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics in the opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 allow them to express their statement?
3. How does Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics in the opening and closing protests allow them to construct a position for their spectator?

For this analysis, I have focussed on two protests held during the London Fashion Week of 2019. I choose to analyse protests that have already happened, because of the uncertainty caused by covid measures at the start of this thesis trajectory. The protests held during London Fashion Week received a lot of media attention and are therefore well captured. There are both first-hand and second-hand reports of these protests available. For my analysis, I rely on the documentation from news sites, Extinction Rebellion's own accounts of the protests, and photos and videos posted on social media platforms such as

Instagram and YouTube. The photo- and video material and detailed descriptions of the happenings during the protests have enabled me to get a thorough understanding of its composition. This composition (see 4.1) forms the basis of my analysis. I have found the news sites reporting of these protests by searching for 'London Fashion week 2019' and 'Extinction Rebellion' on Google. I used the same search tags on YouTube. In order to gain a wider range of perspectives on the protests, I made use of news sites that range from a left- to right-wing orientation such as (but not limited to) the Guardian, Independent, CNN and the Sun. On Instagram, I searched with the hashtag #XRFA (i.e. Extinction Rebellion Fashion Action) and looked at both posts and tagged posts from @xrfashionaction.

More important, I believe the protests of Extinction Rebellion during London Fashion Week to be a good focal point for my research. London Fashion Week is "a critical moment in the life of the field [of fashion] as a whole" (Entwistle and Rocamora 250). It is "a 'field-configuring event'" that (re)produces the characteristics of the whole fashion industry, such as its boundaries, habits and positions (Entwistle and Rocamora 250). For Extinction Rebellion, this industry is "the most influential industry on the planet", because of the omnipresence of creativity and culture (XR Fashion Action). They even advocate that this culture and creativity should "lead the way" in society (XR Fashion Action). London Fashion Week actively deploys such creativity, creating a spectacle of their tradeshows: "these shows are often spectacular events which involve much more than simply the clothes: they are sensory experiences which invoke moods, sensations and associations around the collection [...]. Narratives are created around the various collections presented that help support their branding and add value to the clothes on show" (Entwistle and Rocamora 249). Following their own beliefs about culture and creativity, as well as responding to the active deployment of creativity and performance within London Fashion Week, the protests of

Extinction Rebellion held here are very creative in nature. Moreover, Extinction Rebellion considers the fashion industry to be “one of the most polluting industries in the world” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “BREAKING”). They also believe that London Fashion Week is a “demonstration of culture” that has “a responsibility in this time of [climate] crisis” (XR Fashion Action). Furthermore, Extinction Rebellion only existed for approximately one year when their protests during the London Fashion Week 2019 happened. These are thus early protests in their repertoire (i.e. the “embodied memory” of “all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge” that “allows scholars to trace traditions and influences” (Taylor, “The Archive” 20)). The strategies and tactics used in these protests are continuously being deployed by Extinction Rebellion in their current protests (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Actions Archive”). The protests held during London Fashion Week 2019 are therefore regarded as a fundamental moment in their repertoire and exemplary for their use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics. I therefore trust an analysis of Extinction Rebellion’s performative protests during London Fashion Week to be useful for researching how Extinction Rebellion makes use of performance in and as protest to advocate for social change.

## 4. Analysis

### 4.1 Artivism in Action: Extinction Rebellion's use of activist strategies and tactics in their protests

In this first part of the analysis, I will give an analysis on the activist strategies and tactics used by Extinction Rebellion in their protests. Using the ideas on activism laid out in the theoretical framework, I will explain what these strategies and tactics allow for their protests. I will also take a first look at, and give a contextualisation of two protests that are exemplary for their use of these activist strategies and tactics and are therefore the point of focus of my further analysis – the opening and closing protests held during London Fashion Week of 2019.

Extinction Rebellion are environmental activists. They aim to “*halt mass extinction and minimise the risk of social collapse*”<sup>1</sup> due to climate pollution (Extinction Rebellion UK, “About Us”). It can therefore be argued that they have a critical attitude towards our current status quo, which is, according to them, characterised by a continuous pollution of our Earth. Extinction Rebellion is striving for another, better world. A “*regenerative culture*” in which we as humans live together with the Earth: “*We catch glimpses of a new world of love, respect and regeneration, where we have restored the intricate web of all life*” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Our Vision”). On October 31, 2018, Extinction Rebellion held their first protest on Parliament Square in London. Here, they publicly announced their Declaration of Rebellion. This rebellion takes the form of non-violent, civil disobedience: breaking the law and aiming for arrest. Extinction Rebellion has blocked high-profile locations such as bridges

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<sup>1</sup> I use italics to refer to the words spoken by Extinction Rebellion, to distinct those words from my own words and use of literature to interpret their words.

and crossroads with sit-ins, disrupted traffic by marching across roads and glued themselves on entrances (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Actions Archive”). In their first months of being active, more than a thousand rebels were arrested. Extinction Rebellion are thus practicing activism following the Oxford English Dictionary definition. They use “vigorous campaigning” by means of civil-disobedience actions “to bring about political or social change” (“Activism”), by aiming to move away from a world in which we regard the Earth as dead matter towards a world in which we treat it as a living eco-system. These civil-disobedience actions are examples of protests in which they together challenge the status-quo by creating disruptions in the public space as a response to the “awful situatio[n]” (Taylor, “Performance” 168) of mass extinction.

Extinction Rebellion justifies their law breaching by arguing that our laws are an ideological system that represent the interests of the capitalist system. It can be said that they follow the same reasoning that underpins the shift from a law-based definition of crimes towards a harm-based definition of crimes, as explained in the theoretical framework (Kramer; Parr; Schwendinger and Schwendinger). According to them, our laws are not just. They do not represent the will of the people or morality, but those of capital: our *“laws and policies are shaped by the undemocratic influence of foreign governments, billionaires, mass media conglomerates, or other corporate lobby groups”* (Alexander and Burdon 244). Our laws and policies are, according to them, *“contemptuous of humanity and the living world”*, a *“heartless, loveless and lifeless delusion”* that see *“Earth as dead matter”*, because our current system is *“pathologically obsessed with money and profit”* (Griffiths and XR UK). In the *“regenerative culture”* envisioned by Extinction Rebellion, the Earth is regarded as a living ecosystem of which we humans are part (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Our Vision”). Extinction Rebellion therefore treats practices that pollute our Earth as crime. They thus

hold onto a definition of crimes that is based on the harm done, instead of on the law. This corresponds to a tactic used in activism: Extinction Rebellion offers us a new possibility for our contemporary reality regarding our definition of a crime. With this, Extinction Rebellion already offers an opportunity to look beyond the rigid structures of our current reality, to show that other possibilities are possible.

The artistic practices used in their protests allow Extinction Rebellion to visualise these other possibilities. Such artistic practices have greater expressiveness than written or spoken text alone. It is a way to transcend language barriers. The use of art allows them to distinguish themselves from all other messages that are sent to us (the people); Extinction Rebellion is actively working together with artists to create their own aesthetics (The Open University). But, moreover, the use of artistic practices brings the message to life for their spectators, because it captures their imagination. Artistic practices allow for the activist message to become part of reality, because it creates a space in our current reality where the spectator can experience that allows it to become reality; “even though it is not yet present – it has already become too real to ignore” (Mirca and Staal). Through using specific aesthetics to visualise other possibilities, Extinction Rebellion is able to “create new modes of sense perception”, to disclose the world to us in a new way (Rancière, “Politics of Aesthetics” 4). They for example spill fake oil over themselves and buildings at bank headquarters to which they bring wheelbarrows of coal, which can be interpreted as an aim to reveal that these banks, in their view, commit climate crimes by funding the fossil fuel industry, they colour the streets in front of the HM Treasury (i.e. the department of the UK Government responsible for economic and public finance policy) red that can be read as their attempt to reveal that the Treasury is, in their believe, culprit to climate crimes by investing in companies that damage the planet, and they stage funeral processions and die-

ins (i.e. falling/lying on the floor as if dead) in shopping areas to show how the fashion industry commits, according to them, climate crimes by continuing to pollute our Earth in extensive ways (Extinction Rebellion UK, "Actions Archive"). In their protests, their use of specific aesthetics is thus a means by which they attempt to reveal to their spectators the alleged climate crimes of our capitalist system. Extinction Rebellion thus use art in their activism to bring their activist message across; they are artists. This use of art in their protests allows Extinction Rebellion to present a different perspective on reality to their spectators, enabling them to "addres[s] human deafness and human blindness" (Dolphijn 185).

It can be argued that Extinction Rebellion's use of artistic practices in their protests allows them to attempt to break the norm created by the supposed hegemonic system of climate crime with the aim of creating a new discourse. Their protests are, through their use of artistic practices, a visualisation of the declared climate crimes of a hegemonic system. Their protests can therefore be seen as their way to attempt to reveal to their spectators that this system of climate crime is hiding beneath the surface of our capitalist society. This statement is expressed in all of their protests. With each protest, they thus establish what they see as truth and morality. By always performing the same actions that refer to this statement, they reinforce this statement. Their aesthetic protests have moreover the objective to generate attention in the media, which ensures a further repetition of their message. Their way of looking at the world is thus shared with many people at many times through their use of artistic practices; their reality is increasingly becoming discourse. Art's affective power enables them to, moreover, open up a space in which we are invited to imagine other ways of living and dying with the Earth. A new "*regenerative culture*", in which we regard the Earth as a living ecosystem and do not harm it (Extinction Rebellion UK, "Our

Vision). Their use of art thus allows them to try to reformulate our existing discourse by creating a new norm in our society through reiteration, which aligns with the ideas of Butler about performativity and discourse as discussed in the theoretical framework (Butler, “Bodies”; “Performative Acts”).

To discuss how exactly their use of art makes this possible, I will further dive into the exemplary opening and closing protest held during London Fashion Week 2019 in 4.2 and 4.3 of this analysis. In the current section I will take a closer look at the composition (i.e. all (extra-)theatrical means used to create a staging practice and structure it from its start-towards its endpoint (Groot Nibbelink and Merx)) of these two protests, to show that there are several activist strategies and tactics present. I will first start with contextualising these two protests.

In July 2019, Extinction Rebellion petitioned the British Fashion Council to cancel London Fashion Week 2019, following Stockholm, to pursue more sustainable alternatives (XR Fashion Action). The bi-annual fabrication of new collections that are shown during fashion week are reinforcing the “fast-response system that encourages disposability” that lies in the nature of the fashion industry (Joy et al. 275). This fashion industry is proven to be “*one of the most polluting industries in the world*” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “BREAKING”). They are currently “responsible for 10% of global carbon emissions”, but “if we continue this trend, statistics show that by 2030, the climate impact of the fashion industry will double” (Ting and Stagner 2-5). The British Fashion Council did not want to cancel London Fashion Week; they argued that they could change the industry from within. They announced the launch of the Institute of Positive Fashion, with environment as its first strategic pillar, to “help brands in the industry navigate an often confusing to understand topic and kick-start a much-needed insight comprehensive step-change” (British Fashion Council). Extinction Rebellion, however,

believes we are past the time to try and turn the industry for the better, while continuing to perform polluting business-as-usual. They thus aim to shut down London Fashion Week.

During London Fashion Week 2019, they therefore organised protests throughout the whole of fashion week.

On Friday morning 13 September 2019, Extinction Rebellion opened London Fashion Week with a die-in on a red carpet of blood. Five persons dressed in white barricaded a black door. They glued themselves to the main entrance of the opening Tradeshow of the London Fashion Week. They caused quite a stir; a back door had to be used to get people inside. Two of the barricading individuals held a white flag with the symbol of an hourglass; the trademark of Extinction Rebellion. They did not move and kept their faces grim. A red substance was poured onto their left breast by other persons in white t-shirts. It resembled fake blood; it was as-if their hearts were bleeding. Beneath them, a puddle of red emerged. It flowed underneath the security guards, underneath the crush barriers towards the street. A red carpet made of blood. The persons who poured the substance laid down into it. Some of them with their eyes closed others with eyes wide open. On their t-shirts they had slogans printed such as *'Repair, Rewear, Rebel'*, *'Beyond Fashion'* and *'~~Fashion, Beauty, Truth, Justice~~'*. The black buckets that had contained that red substance laid still around them. No one moved. It was as if they died. They held a die-in. On the street stood one activist holding a microphone, she was dressed in the same white t-shirt, covered with a black cardigan and a black scarf. She recited a poem.



Figure 2. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's openings protest during the London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Klink)



Figure 3. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's openings protest during the London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Klink)



*Figure 4. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's openings protest during the London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Klink)*

After a week full of protests to disrupt this edition of London Fashion Week, Extinction Rebellion got ready to end London Fashion Week - forever. At their closing protest on Tuesday 17 September 2019, on the last day of London Fashion Week, around 200 people gathered at Trafalgar Square. Most people wore outfits in all black, creatively put together. Several had covered their faces in veil. Their clothes were pinned with white cloths, proclaiming messages like *'No Fashion on a Dead Planet'*, *'Fuck Consumerism'*, *'Fashion Weak'*, *'Fashion = Ecocide'*. Quite a few carried small bouquets of (dried) flowers. After speeches about the fashion industries' carbon footprint, the crowd marched towards 180 Strand (the British Fashion Council building). A black coffin labelled *'R.I.P LFW 1983-2019'*, lifted by eight rebels in black led the way. They were accompanied by a walking orchestra. Behind this coffin there was a group of people fully dressed in red costumes, only showing their white painted faces. The Red Rebels. They walked in pairs, holding their hands up. Behind them another lifted coffin emerged, carrying the label *'Our Future'* with patches of

animals and plants, patches representing our Earth. The people dressed in black followed the coffins. It was a funeral procession. Out of the crowd, several light-coloured flags with the symbol of an hourglass stuck out. The symbol of Extinction Rebellion. In front of the fast fashion chain H&M the procession held still. The Red Rebels formed a barrier with their hands up in the air. In front of them, one of the activists held a speech about the environmental consequences of fashion production. A space was reserved for the press in front of her. After the speech, the procession continued towards 180 Strand. Here, they laid down the coffins. The Red Rebels gathered around the coffins and the other activists created a circle around them. They all put their flowers on the coffins. A few activists stepped into the circle to give a last reflection on Fashion Week, fashion and climate emergency. Afterwards, everyone sang a song together. They chanted lyrics such as '*people going to rise like the water*' and '*climate justice now*'. During this song, the Red Rebels performed a funeral ritual around the two coffins. The protest ended with a silence, to pay respect and reflect on the legacy of the fashion industry and the lives already lost due to climate change.



Figure 5. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's closing protest during London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Immo Klink)



Figure 6. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's closing protest during London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Klink)



Figure 7. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's closing protest during London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Klink)



*Figure 8. Photo of Extinction Rebellion's closing protest during London Fashion Week 2019 by Immo Klink (Klink)*

In this opening and closing protest, Extinction Rebellion thus makes use of several artist strategies and tactics. The artist tactics of specific aesthetics (through their use of the aesthetics of death), the imagination of other possibilities (through their staged and performed practices) and affect (through their use of artistic practices) are present in these protests. In the following sections of the analysis, I will zoom into how these artist strategies and tactics, together with more specific strategies and tactics used in performance practices, allow them to express their statement and create an experience for their spectators.

#### 4.2 The fashion industry and climate crimes: Extinction Rebellion sets the stage

In this section, I will analyse how the use of the artist and theatrical strategies and tactics in their opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 allow Extinction

Rebellion to express their statement. To be able to do so, I will combine the composition of these protests with their societal and artistic context – as described in the previous section.

Extinction Rebellion believes that the fashion industry is culprit to committing climate crimes. According to them *“the fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world with a carbon footprint more than international flights and shipping combined”* (Extinction Rebellion UK, “BREAKING”). As said, Extinction Rebellion regards such climate pollution as being a crime. Given the importance of London Fashion Week for the fashion industry as a whole, they use protests during this particular Fashion Week to express this statement. The opening line of the poem recited in their opening protest is therefore stating that it is *‘the fashion industry’* that *‘is killing our planet’*, rather than London Fashion Week. It can be said that Extinction Rebellion argues that there is a destructive incongruity between the business-as-usual of the fashion industry and the well-being of our planet, which corresponds to the TOP-theory (Kramer): *“the action highlighted the blood on the hands of the industry due to its environmental record and that ‘business as usual’ will lead life on earth towards extinction”* (Extinction Rebellion UK, “BREAKING”). The literal barricading of the entrance door to the opening trade show, can in this light be interpreted as their declaration that the fashion industry can and should not continue with their supposed damaging business-as-usual. Opening London Fashion Week with a *“bleeding red carpet”* (Extinction Rebellion UK, “BREAKING”), can moreover be interpreted as their aim to show that London Fashion Week - a business-as-usual practice of the fashion industry – is, as they believe, built upon bloodshed, upon the *‘killing’* of our Earth to which these polluting business-as-usual practices are said to be culprit. London Fashion Week is thus seen by them as a crime scene; a place where the fashion industry *kills* our Earth – thus commits a crime.

Extinction Rebellion's use of aesthetics of death in their opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 can be seen as a means with which they attempt to reveal this alleged '*killing*' of our Earth. In these protests, they bring to the colour red to the fore by contrasting it with the colours white and black. These colours can, in the context of a die-in and funeral, be interpreted as aesthetics of death: their meanings reinforce each other. In all of Extinction Rebellion's protests, red is used to "*symbolise blood*" (Red Rebels). A red substance dripped from the hearts of the activists barricading the door during the opening protest; their hearts can thus be said to be bleeding. The red puddles on the ground in which the other activists lied as-if dead, become puddles of blood. The Red Rebels that walk with the funeral procession during the closing protest are fully dressed in red, visualising the bleeding of our Earth. All other activists were dressed in black, a colour used to, specifically in this context, visualise mourning. During the opening protests, all activists were fully dressed in white, which is used often as a reference to innocence. Extinction Rebellion's use of these specific colours allow them to aim to reveal this alleged "*blood at the hands of the industry*" (Extinction Rebellion UK, "BREAKING"). A reference to death itself is also made in these protests. The still-lying limp bodies in the puddles of blood during the opening protests seem to depict dead bodies. In their closing protest, Extinction Rebellion held a funeral march with actual coffins leading the way. Here, everyone was dressed in "*smart funeral attire*" (Extinction Rebellion UK, "XR Fashion Boycott"): black clothes, faces covered by veils, carrying flowers in their hands. They even carried death itself around, a life-sized skeleton. The closing protest moreover ended with an actual funeral ritual in which the coffins, labelled as "*London Fashion Week*" and "*Our future*", were laid to rest. The flowers were thrown on them, songs were sung and a ritual dance was performed. This use of aesthetics of death thus visualises alleged bloodshed and death; the '*killing*' of our Earth. Extinction

Rebellion's use of the aesthetics of death can thus be interpreted as their way to stage a crime scene. This allows them to show that the business-as-usual practices of the fashion industry (London Fashion Week) are, as they believe, committing a climate crime.

Extinction Rebellion's use of the specific aesthetics of death thus aligns with the activist strategy of revealing “a world that is completely new yet always already there” (Dolphijn 185). Their use of aesthetics of death, their creation of a crime scene, allows them to shed light on the supposed climate crimes the fashion industry is culprit to; the extensive pollution of our Earth that causes its death. With these protests, Extinction Rebellion thus aims to create a new way of experiencing our contemporary reality, which compares to Rancière’s idea of the creation of a new political subjectivity (Rancière, “Politics of Aesthetics”): it is a way to allow their spectators to see the dying of Earth, which they believe is being *killed* by normal business-as-usual practices - something that we normally do not see.

It can be argued that Extinction Rebellion aims to show that the fashion industry is committing these alleged climate crimes, because of capitalism. Connecting the fashion industry to the wider system of capitalism can be interpreted as a way to prove that the fashion industry is complicit in a wider hegemonic system of climate crimes that, in their view, hides under the surface of our capitalist society. Their poem reads: ‘*you [the fashion industry] choose profit over planet, profit over people, profit over our future*’. Here, Extinction Rebellion is thus stating that the fashion industry is following capitalist mechanisms by solely focussing on making profit. The poem continues by saying that ‘*the fashion industry tugs at our heartstrings, it begs us to come into shops, feel its fabrics, don beautiful dresses, trendy tops, season’s hottest handbags*’. Extinction Rebellion thus argues that the fashion industry aims to make this profit through a continues sale of clothes.

Hereafter they explain that the fashion industry wants people to buy new clothes, even if they do not actually need them: *'you entice us with shiny shimmering things, shallow empty promises and I almost fall into your trap, but then I ask 'Who made this, and where?' But you don't tell us the truth'*. This can be connected to Marx's theory about fetishization: their poem can be interpreted as Extinction Rebellion's arguing that the fashion industry has fetishized the commodity of clothing from needs of the "stomach", to wants of the "fancy" (Marx 125). It can thus be said that they aim to reveal that the fashion industry estranges us as consumers from the produced product that clothing actually is. Extinction Rebellion can therefore be said to agree that "fashion is the child of capitalism" (Wilson 13). The poem thus allows Extinction Rebellion to express their statement, because it allows for "the revelation of a world that was always already there" (Dolphijn 185). It is a means with which they aim to reveal to their spectators that, in their interpretation, a harmful capitalist ideology of infinite growth is obscured by the fashion industry through the created illusion that clothes go out of style and promoting new trends with bi-annual fashion weeks. As such, Extinction Rebellion can thus be said to aim to confront their spectators with the fashion industry's supposed complicity in a hegemonic system of climate crimes that, in their view, hides under the surface of our capitalist society.

The opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 can be interpreted as a restaging and reimagination of damaging capitalist conventions of the fashion industry; by opening London Fashion Week with a red carpet of blood and closing it with a funeral for both our future and London Fashion Week, Extinction Rebellion aims to show that business-as-usual practices of the fashion industry are *'killing'* our planet and thus indeed prove to be very damaging. This aligns with Diana Taylor's theory on performance (Taylor, "Performance").

With these protests, Extinction Rebellion can be said to speculate on the future in a way that aligns with Patricia Reed's idea of Prognostics (Reed). Extinction Rebellion is presenting to the spectator a future wherein we (as a society) have ignored the warnings of climate scientists and continued business-as-usual. Life on earth is already dying because of global warming (IPCC, "Climate Change 2022"), and Extinction Rebellion is stating that a continuation to pollute the earth with business-as-usual practices will only result in more death and eventually even in extinction (i.e., all life on earth is dying). The die-in on a "*bleeding red carpet*" (Extinction Rebellion UK, "BREAKING"), in which activists of Extinction Rebellion are lying dead in puddles of blood, can be seen as their visualisation of this extinction. This aligns with a Prognostic future scenario, following the definition of Patricia Reed: Extinction Rebellion is showing us a future scenario that focuses on the continuation of present tendencies (Reed). The part of the final protest in which the coffin labelled as '*our future*' is put to rest, can moreover be read as their way of stating that we stop having a future if we continue with business-as-usual. The Prognostic future scenario performed in their opening and closing protest of London Fashion Week 2019 thus allows them to warn us of the bleakness of our future that they envision for us if we do not beat the supposed hegemonic system of climate crimes.

The part of the closing protests where Extinction Rebellion puts to rest London Fashion Week, can also be interpreted as a performed speculation on the present that aligns with what Donna Haraway has coined Speculative Fabulation (Haraway). Here, they propose an alternative of the prognostic future they have warned us for. In this speculation, our society has decided to not continue with business-as-usual and thus disrupt the hegemonic system of climate crimes. Here they thus reimagine a, in their view, better world by making use of "wild facts" (Fabbula TV). In this protest, Extinction Rebellion buried London Fashion Week

with a coffin labelled 'R.I.P LFW 1983-2019'. This is, however, the example of such a wild fact, a fable: the British Fashion Council chose to continue with London Fashion Week instead of cancelling it, as Extinction Rebellion had asked. In their speculation, London Fashion Week is, however, cancelled. Extinction Rebellion therefore held a funeral ritual to pay respect to its legacy. Putting London Fashion Week to rest can therefore also be interpreted as a reaction to the denial of their demand to cancel London Fashion Week 2019; if the British Fashion Council does not want to cancel London Fashion Week, Extinction Rebellion will bury it within the ground themselves. Either way, it can be said that it allows Extinction Rebellion to open up contemporary reality as they see it – a reality in which the fashion industry is complicit in the hegemonic system of climate crimes –, by imaging another possibility to it in which we try to beat this supposed hegemonic system.

Such a speculation thus fits the tactic of imagining other possibilities that fit the ideas of Jonas Staal. In their closing protest, Extinction Rebellion created a reality in which their objective, ending London Fashion Week, had been achieved. By visualising this through a performance, they created a space that allowed their spectators to experience this other possibility. By showing this other possibility than our current business-as-usual to their spectators, Extinction Rebellion can be said to want to move “from the imaginable, [...] into the realm of the inevitable” (Staal and Mircan): *“It’s our duty to ask for what is necessary to mitigate this crisis, instead of what is perceived as achievable within our current system”* (XR Fashion Action). In the following section, I will discuss another staging of Extinction Rebellion that also creates a space that allows for affective experience and the imagination of other possibilities - a funeral for our future in which they mourn the death of our Earth.

### 4.3 The spectator as advocate for change: Extinction Rebellion's art of alienation and affect

In this section, I will analyse how Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics in their opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 allows for the construction of a specific position for their spectator. I will conduct this analysis on spectatorship by combining insights received from the dramaturgical planes of composition and spectator of these protests. The subject seeing, the spectator whose point of view is in this analysis adopted, is in this analysis understood as a random by-passer who is unexpectedly confronted with these protests. Differences in the situatedness of potential spectators is thus not taking into account here, the focus is solely on a general possible experience of Extinction Rebellion's protests.

Extinction Rebellion's opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 can be read as being a transparent fantasy, following Duncombe's theory on such fantasies (Duncombe, "It Stands on its Head"). For instance, the performed speculations on both the future and present that can be read in Extinction Rebellion's opening and closing protest, as discussed in the previous section, are fantasies. In these performances, Extinction Rebellion presents to the spectator things that are not really here (yet). Extinction Rebellion does allow their spectator, however, to know they are being confronted with a fantasy and not with reality. If their spectators thought they were looking at a genuine funeral procession through the streets of London, a genuine funeral ritual or that an actual multiple homicide was committed in front of the building of the opening tradeshow of London Fashion Week 2019, they would not ever be able to decipher the activist message that Extinction Rebellion tried to send to them with these performances. In order for their spectators to reflect upon these speculations in the light of London Fashion Week, to see that Extinction Rebellion tries

to reveal that the fashion industry is in their view complicit in a hegemonic system of climate crimes, they indeed, following the theory of Duncombe, need to make sure that their spectators know that what they see is not genuine (Duncombe, "It stands on its Head").

Extinction Rebellion can be said to make use of alienating elements in their opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 that are, as explained in the theoretical framework (Turner and Behrndt; Wekwerth), a way to create such a transparent fantasy. The opening protest starts with a number of persons dressed in white, barricading the black entrance door. They catch the eye of the spectator. The spectator possibly wonders if she is being confronted with an act of the London Fashion Week, a week known for its spectacle. The interruption caused by the activists who suddenly pour a red substance on the ground and on the clothes of the activists barricading the door, function as an alienating element that allows the spectator to realise that she is looking at something else. Extinction Rebellion wants the spectator to understand that this is meant to symbolise blood; she is meant to see bleeding hearts and dead people lying on the ground on a "*bleeding red carpet*" (Extinction Rebellion UK, "BREAKING"). The skeleton that marches with the activists in the funeral procession of Extinction Rebellion's closing protest also expose their use of theatrical means, that of "*funeral attire*" (Extinction Rebellion UK, "XR Fashion Boycott"). Such a reference to harm allows the spectator to realise that this act is indeed not part of London Fashion Week. The buckets that contained the red substance are still lying next to the activists. This is also an exposure of their use of theatrical means; it exposes their use of fake blood. The spectators that were only now confronted with their protests could, by seeing these buckets, also logically conclude that the red substance they saw was not real blood. As such, they could know that they were being confronted with not reality, but a staged act; a fantasy. Since the funeral procession marches through the streets of London, spectators could be

confronted with it unexpectedly. Such a public funeral procession is of course already a little strange. It is a way to attract the spectators' attention, to make her look at Extinction Rebellion. The coffins, the black-dressed people with faces covered in veil that carry flowers and are accompanied by, had, however, a genuine look. The interruption caused by the skeleton that suddenly passes in front of them, marching along in the procession, allows the spectator, on the other hand, to become aware that this funeral procession is not genuine at all, but a staged act of which all observed funerary attributes are part. Extinction Rebellion's use of the alienating elements of interruption and exposure of their use of theatrical means thus allow their spectator to realise that she is looking not at reality, but at staged acts.

The alienating element of detournement can also said to be present in Extinction Rebellion's opening and closing protests of the London Fashion Week 2019. Following this resistant tactic of the Situationists as discussed in the theoretical framework, it can be argued that they use the spectacle that London Fashion Week is known for against itself in order to express critique of London Fashion Week and the fashion industry (Firat and Kuryel). Once the spectator realises that she is not being confronted with a real funeral procession, she might believe the protest of Extinction Rebellion to be part of the closing spectacle of London Fashion Week; it is of course its last day. The people marching in the procession are all dressed in creatively put together all-black outfits, looking highly fashionable. Giving it a closer look, however, Extinction Rebellion allows the spectator to realise that they are not in favour of, but against London Fashion Week. The white cloths pinned on their black clothes proclaim messages that subvert its meaning. The spectator reads, for example, *'Fashion Weak'* instead of Fashion Week. Extinction Rebellion uses this same tactic in their opening protest. Here their spectator might also believe, at first, that their protest was an act part of the spectacle of London Fashion Week. This is interrupted by

the spectator's sudden confrontation with the aesthetics of death (a visualisation of the alleged 'killing' of the planet caused by the polluting business-as-usual practices of the fashion industry), turning London Fashion Week against itself. With the printed slogans on the t-shirts of the activists performing the die-in, Extinction Rebellion is also critiquing the fashion industry. The spectator reads messages like: '*Repair, Rewear, Rebel*' and '~~*Fashion, Beauty, Truth, Justice*~~'. Through the use of the alienating element of detournement in their opening and closing protests, Extinction Rebellion allows the spectator to realise that she is confronted with a protest against London Fashion Week and the fashion industry. The alienating elements in Extinction Rebellion's opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 thus allow that "reality may be perceived" (Wekwerth 119), because there is "no deception"; these protests can be read as transparent fantasies (Duncombe, "It Stands on Its Head" 367).

These protests find themselves within the field of tension between the two appearance forms that characterises the connection of art and politics (Rancière, "Politics of Aesthetics"), because of these activist and theatrical strategies and tactics used. There can be argued that the opening and closing protests of Extinction Rebellion are able to, following the ideas of Rancière, balance between the readability of their activist message that jeopardises the intuitive and sensory form of art and a radical uncanniness that jeopardises the meaning-making of that activist message (Rancière, "Politics of Aesthetics"). By unexpectedly confronting their spectators with the aesthetics of death, the opening and closing protests of Extinction Rebellion are able to create a feeling of unheimlich-ness. They bring death to a place where their spectator would not expect it. At the opening and closing of the London Fashion Week, the spectator would sooner expect festivity and exuberance instead of blood, grief and death. The spectator therefore possibly wondered what that

blood, grief and death were doing there. Along with the aforementioned alienating elements, they facilitate critical awareness of the spectator about the subject seen. Such critical awareness may, in turn, enable critical reflection on the meaning of that what is seen. The spectator is therefore thus invited to decipher Extinction Rebellion's activist message, their statement about the fashion industry's complicity in a hegemonic system of climate crimes.

Extinction Rebellion can also be said to aim to affect their spectators in order to create an urgency for them to want to move away from the supposed hegemonic system of climate crimes that they want to reveal with their protests. This ties in with Rancière's idea that understanding alone has too little influence on changing one's consciousness (Rancière, "Problems and Transformation"). Extinction Rebellion confronts their spectators with the aesthetics of death; blood and death are ways to provoke emotional responses. The closing protest allows for an even deeper anchoring of the spectator's experience. The staged funeral creates a space in reality where the spectator is allowed to feel actual grief over the dying of our Earth. Watching the procession full of grieving people already allows for feelings of sadness, but during the performed funeral ceremony they even invite the spectator to join their grieving. The funeral ritual held here includes a moment of silence to reflect on the lives lost due to climate change. Herein the spectator is thus invited to mourn over these deaths herself, in order to create *"a very strong impression of the depth of feeling"* (Extinction Rebellion Lewes). She is invited to feel eco-grief. Since *"grief is an expression, above all, of a profound love"* (Read 51), this allows the spectator to reflect on her own connection to our Earth. It gives her the opportunity to feel how the Earth should not just, following Latour, be *"the mere window dressing for human intention and interest"* (Latour, "War and Peace" 73), but that the Earth is vibrant and alive. This affective experience thus

allows for a seed to be planted in her mind about another possibility, about another way of living and dying with the Earth. The use of affect thus allows Extinction Rebellion to take a step towards the establishment of a “*new regenerative culture*” in which we live and die with the Earth in their opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019 (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Our Vision”).

Their use of language is moreover a way in which they invite their spectator to become “a conscious agent in the transformation of the world” (Rancière, “Problems and Transformations” 83). In their opening and closing protests of London Fashion Week 2019, Extinction Rebellion invites their spectator to join them. To become part of “the protagonists” who are capable of “correcting the problem the movement has identified” (Benford 148). London Fashion Week, the fashion industry and the whole capitalist system are viewed by Extinction Rebellion as “the antagonists” who are “blamed for causing the problem(s) the movement seeks to overcome” (Benford 149). In the poem of their opening protest, they work with this distinction by describing experiences from the point of view of an ‘us’ that the spectator recognizes. This can create a feeling in their spectators of belonging to them, to the protagonists: *‘The fashion industry tugs at our heartstrings, it begs us to come into shops [...] You entice us with shiny shimmering things [...] But you don’t tell us the truth’*. The antagonists are placed in direct opposition of the protagonists; they are referred to as the ‘you’ who is to blame: *‘you [the fashion industry] choose profit over planet’*. In their poem, Extinction Rebellion also literally stated that they, as well as the spectator who recognizes herself in the poem, got almost dragged away in the hegemonic system: *‘I almost fall into your trap’*. This allows their spectators to feel a further sense of belonging to them. It can therefore be argued that Extinction Rebellion manages to not blame the spectator, but keep their critique on a systemic level. As such, Extinction

Rebellion's opening and closing protest of London Fashion Week 2019 allow the spectator to become an advocate for change.

## 5. Conclusion

The forms of repression and exploitation present in our current society have forged new ways of activism “that blu[r] the boundaries between artist and activist” (Harrebye 26). Activists are critical of our current society; they are striving for another, better world. They want to bring about social change. They need to, however, stir up a social mobilisation to do so. Activists are therefore increasingly relying upon art’s ability to change people’s perspective. More and more activists are thus strategically deploying artistic practices in their activism, creating, what is called, activism. With this thesis I have attempted to give a response to academia's call to conduct more research into this "ever-evolving field" of activism, especially towards the role of performance in activism (Harrebye x; McGarry et al.).

I have therefore focussed on the use of performance in the protests of the climate activist group Extinction Rebellion in this thesis. Extinction Rebellion uses civil disobedience as a means to rebel against our current capitalist system that is, according to them, “contemptuous of humanity and the living world” because it is pathologically obsessed with making profit (Griffiths and XR UK). They want to move towards “a new world of love, respect and regeneration, where we have restored the intricate web of all life” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Our Vision”). The research question that has guided my thesis has therefore been: *How does Extinction Rebellion's use performance in and as protest allow them to advocate for social change?*

In the theoretical framework, I have contextualised the use of performance in and as protests. Here, I discussed activist and theatrical strategies and tactics, performance in and as protest, the hegemonic of climate crimes that Extinction Rebellion can be said to be rebelling against and the concept of performativity.

To answer my research question, I conducted a dramaturgical analysis of two protests of Extinction Rebellion held during London Fashion Week 2019 informed by the concepts laid out in my theoretical framework. Considering that dramaturgy is used to “explore how theatrical strategies are put to use to manage the attention of the audience, how these strategies create meaning and experience, and how theatre, dance, and performance relate to the ‘world at large’” (Groot Nibbelink and Merx 6), I believed a dramaturgical analysis to be of use to analyse how Extinction Rebellion makes use of performance in and as protest to advocate for social change. Following the relational approach to dramaturgy by Groot Nibbelink and Merx, I combined the three planes of dramaturgy (i.e. composition, spectatorial address and social and artistic context) in my sub-questions to conduct my analysis. The focus on the already performed opening and closing protests during London Fashion Week 2019 was motivated by both the importance of the fashion industry for climate pollution and change, and the uncertainties caused by Covid measures present at the beginning of my thesis trajectory.

I started my analysis with a discussion of what Extinction Rebellion's use of art offers to their protests. Here, I explained the activist practices of Extinction Rebellion and the activist strategies used herein. I can conclude that the use of specific aesthetics, imagination of other possibilities and affect allow them to create a space in which their activist message is visualised and their spectators are able to experience it. The use of art thus offers the possibility of a greater expressiveness than written or spoken text, because it captures the imagination of their spectator. This conclusion is also the answer to my first sub-question. In this first section, I also gave an in-depth description of the composition and a contextualisation of the opening and closing protest held during the London Fashion Week

2019 in which these activist tactics are also present. This composition and context form the basis on which I build my further analysis.

In the second part of the analysis, I analysed how Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics in their opening and closing protest of London Fashion Week 2019 allow them to express their statement. For this analysis on statement, I combined the dramaturgical planes of composition and context. This analysis allows me to answer my second sub-question. I can conclude that with their use of the aesthetics of death, Extinction Rebellion creates a crime scene at London Fashion Week that allows them to express that the fashion industry is, according to them, culprit to committing climate crimes. Their poem allows them to connect this to a wider system of climate crimes of which we (as consumers) are unaware because it is, according to Extinction Rebellion, concealed; Extinction Rebellion thus states that the fashion industry is complicit in a hegemonic system of climate crimes. This is not the statement they communicate on their website or through their written demands, but the expressiveness of their performance and used aesthetics in relation to the theory allows for this reading. I furthermore conclude that their performance of a die-in and funeral for *our future* can therefore be interpreted as a prognostic future scenario (which aligns to Reed's idea of Prognostics (Reed)) in which they warn us for the consequences of this hegemonic system of climate crimes. Their performed funeral for *London Fashion Week* can therefore, moreover, be interpreted as a speculation on the present (which connects to Haraway's concept of Speculative Fabulation (Haraway)) that allows for the imagination of another possibility that distances itself from this hegemonic system.

In the third part of the analysis, I conducted an analysis on how Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics allows them to construct a position for the

spectator. For this analysis of spectatorship, I combined the dramaturgical planes of composition and spectator. In this analysis, I discussed how we can read Extinction Rebellion's protests as a transparent fantasy according to Duncombe's definition (Duncombe, "It Stands on its Head"). I showed how the alienating elements of interruption, exposure of theatrical means and detournement were present in their performed speculations about our future and present. I can therefore conclude that the protests of Extinction Rebellion allow the spectator to critically reflect upon the supposed hegemonic system of climate crimes that they try to reveal with their protests and the role they believe the fashion industry plays herein. This critical reflection is reinforced by Extinction Rebellion's use of affect, which allows the spectator to feel how she is personally connected to our Earth. The protests therefore enable the spectator to imagine another possibility for the alleged hegemonic system of climate crimes; a "*regenerative culture*" in which we live together with the Earth (Extinction Rebellion UK, "Our Vision). Extinction Rebellion thus invites the spectator to become an advocate for change. This conclusion constitutes the answer to my third sub-question. It is important to add the critical note that the personal situatedness of the spectator ultimately determines whether Extinction Rebellion's planted seed ends up in fertile soil. This situatedness is not taken into account in this analysis. Spectators that have close ties to London Fashion Week and/or the fashion industry, or spectators who do not believe climate change to be real, for example, could experience these protests differently from spectators who do not have a relation to London Fashion Week and/or the fashion industry themselves or spectators that worry about climate change.

In this thesis, I have thus discussed how Extinction Rebellion uses performance in and as protest, as a "continuation of politics by other means" (Taylor, "Performance" 147): they use

aesthetics of death, imaginations of other possibilities and affect alongside performed speculations on both the future and present and alienating elements in their protests, which constructs a staged crime scene that presents itself as a transparent fantasy. As such, Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics allow them to attempt to reveal to their spectator the supposed hegemonic system of climate crimes that in their view hides underneath our capitalist society. Their use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics moreover create a space in their protests that allows their spectator to imagine as well as experience other possibilities of living and dying with our Earth and therefore allow their spectator to become an advocate for change. Extinction Rebellion can thus be said to aim to reformulate our existing discourse - of a capitalist ideology that, according to Extinction Rebellion, sees our Earth as dead matter -, by creating a new norm in which we treat the Earth as a living ecosystem. With their use of performance in and as protest, Extinction Rebellion thus advocates for social change.

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, I have only focused on an in-depth analysis of two protests of Extinction Rebellion. Even though I do believe these specific protests to be exemplary of Extinction Rebellion's use of activist and theatrical strategies and tactics, two protests give, of course, a limited understanding of their use of performance in and as protest in general. A suggestion for future research would therefore be to conduct research on more of their protests, which allows for a more thorough understanding of Extinction Rebellion's use of performance in and as protest. This limited scope moreover resulted in a dramaturgical analysis that only focussed on an analysis of statement (for which I combined the dramaturgical planes of composition and context) and spectatorship (for which I combined the dramaturgical planes of composition and spectator); I did not conduct an analysis on situatedness (for which I should have combined the dramaturgical planes of

spectator and context). The discussed experience for the spectator differs, of course, based on the situatedness of that spectator. Taking this situatedness into account could therefore lead to additional insights regarding the constructed experience for the spectator. Future research is therefore encouraged to include such an analysis of situatedness. Furthermore, I conducted the analysis based on documentation. Since “how you understand something affects how you write about it, and in person experiences are enriching for your understanding” (Joseph), this is a limitation of my thesis. Future research should therefore be conducted based on in person experiences of Extinction Rebellion’s protest. Additionally, this thesis knows limitations due to my own subjectivity, prejudices and biases. As an analyst-researcher, one of course always influences the research conducted. This is especially true for this thesis, because I conducted the analysis myself and wrote my thesis alone. I have tried to minimise limitations based on such biases and prejudices, by discussing my ideas with loved ones and having my supervisor read with me along my thesis trajectory – though I understand that it is likely for people close to me to have similar biases and prejudices.

Since Extinction Rebellion’s protest strategies are changing, there exists future potential in researching their new protests. In their four-year existence, Extinction Rebellion has mainly focused on creating awareness through an attempt to reveal the alleged hegemonic system of climate crimes. At the beginning of this new year, however, Extinction Rebellion UK announced a (temporary) end of their civil disobedience. They see that their acts have brought a shift of awareness regarding climate crimes and believe that it is now “time to seize the moment” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “WE QUIT”). They will therefore focus on “building a collective power” through bridge building between all social, environmental and justice movements in order to create a “democracy that free[s] and empower[s] the voices of the people” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “WE QUIT”). Extinction Rebellion trusts that this will

“bring about the positive societal tipping point we all need” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “WE QUIT”). Extinction Rebellion is thus moving more towards active creation a new norm in our society, a “*new regenerative culture*” (Extinction Rebellion UK, “Our Vision). Further research into these new protests of Extinction Rebellion can thus contribute to knowledge about the performativity of protests.

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