

Let's Play Together

The Role of Positive, Creative & Collective Practices towards Building Adaptation.

We would like to share a short film clip at the conference that documents our initiatives over the past year (c.6 minutes), that you can view here:

<https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/855289738>

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Abstract: Throughout 2022-23 Watershed (cultural cinema & creative technology centre) have been working with, George Lovesmith, an architect & socially-engaged artist on plans to adapt their building for the Climate Emergency. Watershed leads within its communities with a proud activist agenda and has set ambitious Zero Carbon 2030 commitments. Housed in a heritage structure where building operations form the majority of its carbon emissions, the challenge is immense.

Integral to this endeavour are creative methods for coming together as an alliance of building users, staff, creatives, activists & visitors, demonstrating the value of creative practices (e.g. events, games, storytelling, play, metaphor, gratification, imagination, collective learning, reciprocating, entertaining...)

This is bringing people into partnership to address the challenge, establishing shared understandings of building retrofit principles

This isn't a purely technical challenge – Indeed the endeavour is intentionally re-framed as transdisciplinary, and inherently creative, because the way things are currently getting done internationally isn't working and has insufficient urgency.

& because as an arts organization, addressing the climate emergency isn't only about technical solutions, it's about collective expression and welcoming people on board.

The practice and research have hinged around:

-a recognition that design proposals are more successful if clients/users/others are invited to invest expertise, understandings, creativities and desires in the processes

-testing the educational value of commoning – mutually engaging those same clients/users/others in design processes

& - a belief in the net gain to society of increased critical design appreciation and a wider-spread ability to contribute to improvements of our built environment.

Keywords: Climate Emergency Retrofit, Creative Building Reuse, Green Public Heritage, Socially Engaged Creative Practice

1. Introduction

Many arts organisations are housed in industrial buildings and increasing energy costs are burdening an already stretched sector struggling to bounce back after the pandemic. Global estimates indicate operational emissions

from buildings account for 25-30% of all carbon emissions. Most buildings we will inhabit in 2050 already exist: to meet climate emergency targets we must streamline retrofit approaches.

Housed in thermally inefficient, old buildings and operating with limited financial resources, such organisations must navigate complex choices and bureaucracy to meet their netzero ambitions (building technologies, value-for-money, statutory permissions and operational sustainability).

Retrofitting historic buildings is a significant contribution of arts organisations to the decarbonisation effort of the creative sector, and their unique relationship with audiences, customers and communities can support a broader demystification of retrofit as part of a just transition.

2. Wild & Generous

A pilot with Watershed's staff-, artist- and audience- communities surfaced a desire to create a cultural climate refuge that navigates:

- financial priorities
- material choices
- tensions between building conservation and energy conservation
- colonial legacies of climate injustice and exploited more-than-human ecologies

We are imagining a building wrapped with nature, showcasing examples of environmental innovation, a climate-safe space for others to dream.

Generosity has always been at the heart of Watershed's approach – generating resources, space and time in order to put them in the service of others. In Kate Raworth's 'Doughnut Economics' (2017) she identifies generosity as a necessary business behaviour for creating a world where we live within the envelope of natural resources available to us. We are exploring what that means for Watershed in terms of sustainability by creating a building that is, in her words 'regenerative by design, giving back to the living systems of which we are a part'.

Integral to this endeavour has been an exploration of creative methods for coming together - commoning as an alliance of building users, staff, creatives, management, activists and visitors...

...demonstrating the value of creative practices & bringing people into a partnership to address the challenge and establishing shared understandings of building retrofit principles.



Figure 1: One window in the building, used as the basis for a game in which energy losses, as well as financial & carbon losses were explored. (Source: Lovesmith, G, 2022)



Figure 2: The game in which energy losses, as well as financial & carbon losses were explored. (Source: Rasbash, Z, 2022)

This has not been a purely technical challenge – Indeed the endeavour is intentionally re-framed as transdisciplinary, and inherently creative, because the way things are currently getting done nationally simply isn't working and has insufficient urgency.

The arts can enable us to:-

- -create emotional connections
- -reflect our values, that which is important to us
- -express ourselves, giving us vocabularies & shared references to which we can relate our own experiences, anxieties and our cultural contexts.

This can be particularly useful when dealing with cultural contexts as diverse and complex as:

- -historical & colonial legacies,
- -notions of cultural refuge,
- -built heritage,
- -climate injustices
- & an exploited planet.

This initiative seeks to relate these value paradigms to material data such as u-values and carbon footprints and the reality of what these terms even mean.

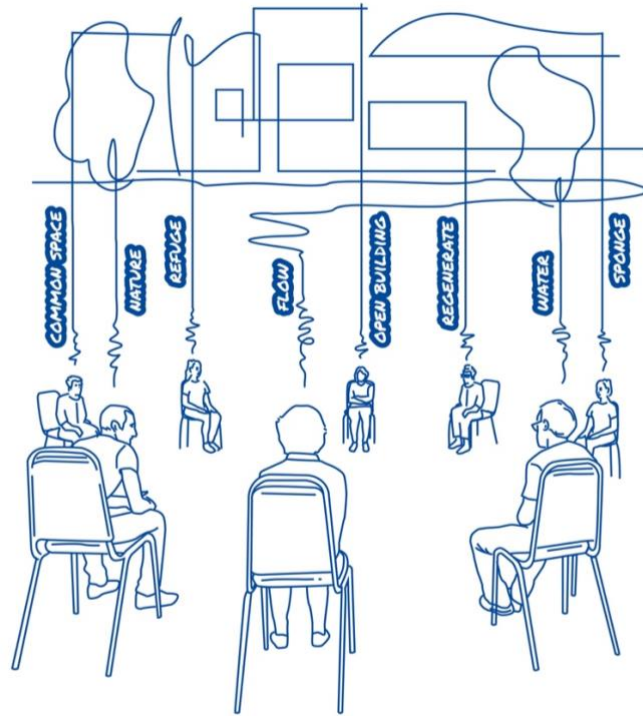


Figure 3: Illustration from 'Wild & Generous' collaborative creative event using the power of story & meditation to collectively imagine. (Source: Vichare, A, 2023)

In the pilot initiative we have:

- evidenced the possibilities for game play to make legible the carbon & financial data of energy loss through a leaky old window
- creatively used the power of narrative & imagination (film, story, meditation) to engage – fostering emotional connections to issues of climate change where policy and science can't cut through.
- invited processes of creative expression (making, collage, illustration) to enable contributions to the debate and focus the values that we must use to navigate complex design decisions
- established partnerships to share learning, nurture arts alliances & make replicable the progress we see on our journey.

Motivations for working in this way hinge around:

-a recognition that resultant design proposals might be more successful if the communities of building users are invited to invest their expertise, understandings, creativities and desires into the design processes.
& we have a belief that creatively engaging people with the process can demystify some of the complexities of technologies and associated issues, which in turn might empower people to make change in their own homes.

The process has been regeneratively holistic, investing in talent development. By working with paid interns across disciplines of illustration, engineering, architecture and film we have been actively developing our local emerging green-transition workforce in experimentally creative ways.

This has been important for us because as an arts organisation, addressing the climate challenges is not just about technical solutions but fundamentally about collective expression and welcoming people on board.

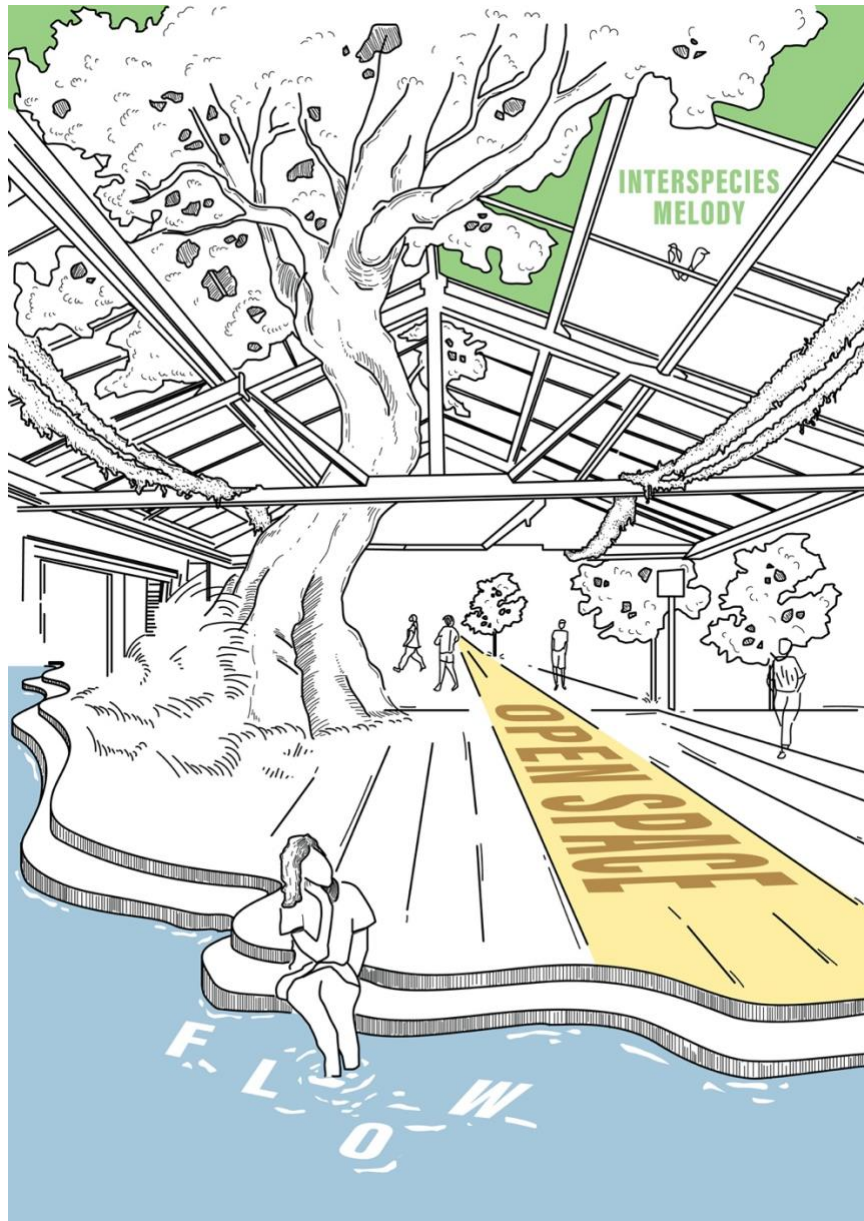


Figure 4: Illustration from 'Wild & Generous' collaborative creative event using the power of story & meditation to collectively imagine. (Source: Vichare, A, 2023)

Acknowledgements

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References

Raworth, K. (2017) *Doughnut economics : seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. London: Random House Business.

