



Sini Mononen

Engaging Emotions?
*Music and Sound as Affective Transformative
Communication in the Artivism of the
Extinction Rebellion Finland*

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*Aktivoivat tunteet? Musiikki ja ääni affektiivisena
muutoskommunikaationa Elokapinan aktivismissa*

Tämä artikkeli käsittelee musiikin ja äänen roolia Elokapinan (XR Finland) muutoskommunikaatiossa. Artikkelissa kysytään, kuinka äänen ja musiikin affektiivisuus on valjastettu liikkeen aktivismissa osaksi ilmastonmuutoksen muutoskommunikaatiota. Hybridietnografiaa (*hybrid ethnography*) (Przybylski 2021) hyödyntävä tutkimus tuo esiin kahden tapauksen avulla, kuinka ääni ja musiikki kommunikoivat liikkeessä erilaista affektiivisuutta erilaisille yleisöille instituutioista kansalaisiin ja liikkeen sisällä vaikuttaviin aktivisteihin. Artikkelissa analysoidaan keväällä 2021 järjestetyn *Kirjoita Kriisistä*-kampanjan sekä lokakuussa 2021 pidetyn Pitkäsillan tiesulun äänellistä ja musiikillista retoriikkaa. Näistä ensimmäinen yhdisti niin sanotun *die in*-aktion symbolista lamaannusta alarmistiseen äänelliseen kansalaistottelemattomuuteen (*sonic disobedience*). Jälkimmäinen puolestaan kommunikoi musiikin avulla liikkeen luonnetta rauhanomaisena.

Yhteenvetona todetaan, että siinä missä ilmastonmuutoksen muutoskommunikaation ”parhaisiin käytäntöihin” on aiemmassa tutkimuksessa määritely kuuluvan kulttuurisesti positiivisiksi koettuihin affekteihin keskittyminen (Moser 2019), Elokapinan aktivismissa ääni ja musiikki ilmentävät laajaa affektiivista skaalaa hätätilan ilmentämisestä rauhallisuuteen ja arvokkuuteen.

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Music is an affective force. It has the capacity to sooth, to encourage, to radicalise, to inflict, and to embrace. The affectivity of music is not tied solely to individual expression and experience, but it has a crucial significance in collective culture. The transformative nature of music as affective expression is also harnessed in the transnational Extinction Rebellion (XR) environmental movement in which music and other arts are employed as a communicational strategy which aims to affect the ways both individuals and different institutions perceive, understand and feel the need to act in the face of the climate change. Previous studies have discussed music in social movements from the point of view of constructing a collective identity and a sense of cross-generational continuity (Eyerman & Jamison 1998) as well as the significance of music in transnational activism (Salerno & van de Warenburg 2023). Likewise, the impact of music for the culture of participation (Turino 2008) and the sense of belonging and inclusion in activism (Kallman 2020), as well as to the activist counterculture (Perrone & Dunn 2001) are well recognised. Furthermore, when it comes to the societal significance of the affectivity of music, previous studies have discussed music as way to work through various cultural emotions, such as trauma, loss, and sorrow (Välimäki 2015). Moreover, music can be considered to be *transformative communication*, when music contributes to communicating different ideas, values, aims and goals to a range of audiences.

In this article, I will discuss *music and sound as an affective transformative communication in the activist actions of XR Finland (Elokapina)* and ask, *how is their affectivity harnessed as a means of communication within the movement?* To provide context for my analysis, I will also describe briefly the overall activist means at play in the movement. Extinction Rebellion Finland

(XR Finland, *Elokapina* in Finnish) is a local branch of the transnational Extinction Rebellion (XR) environmental movement.¹ According to the global XR website, the goal of the movement is to persuade governments around the world to “act justly on climate change and ecological emergency” (XR s.a.). XR was established in May 2018 in the United Kingdom (see also Knights 2019, 10; Smyth & Waters 2020). The XR handbook, *This is Not a Drill*, describes the movement as being active on all continents except Antarctica (Knights 2019, 19). XR is a non-violent organisation, which is characterised by abandoning dominating leadership in favour of participation and co-creation (Smyth & Waters 2020, 621–622). To enhance the agency of citizens, the movement defies central-led and hierarchical organisation systems and resembles the organisational model of various movements of the time. It has a decentralised and leaderless organisation structure, which rejects the hierarchical organisation model and emphasises a “flat,” self-organising system (Smyth & Waters 2020, 622, Fotaki & Foroughi 2022). The agency of the participants and spontaneity in the movement are often highlighted (Fotaki & Foroughi 2022, 225). In its handbook, the movement mentions creativity and the DIY culture as a means of participating and regenerating culture towards one which is more sustainable (Glyn & Farrell 2019, 120–121).

A researcher of social movements and environmentalism, Julia Ramirez Blanco (2013), characterises the transnational activist culture of the 21st century as adopting aspects from artistic creation. She points to a *creative turn of activism*, in which the influences between extra-parliamentary politics and artistic means are mutually beneficial as they affect each other (Blanco 2013). A similar tendency is also prevalent in Finland, where activism (i.e., practices that harness both the means of activism and art (Nossel 2016)) has been increasingly visible in demonstrations and activist actions during the last decade. For example, the Loldiers of Odin performance group used clownery as a counter demonstration strategy to the right-wing anti-immigrant group the Soldiers of Odin in 2016. Additionally, a performative drumming network called Rhythms of Rebellion, which was formed in UK during the Earth First! uprising in 2000, started to operate in Finland in 2009 (RoR s.a.), and has since been active in several demonstrations, among them the demonstrations and actions of XR Finland. However, these are only a few examples of the diverse and multifaceted creative protest and activism at play in Finland today, which

1 The name of the XR Finland in Finnish is *Elokapina*, which is a hybrid of the words *elo* (Engl. life, living, crop, harvest) and *kapina* (Engl. rebellion).

builds on a wide range of forms of art from songs to poetry, and from visual arts to dance, memes and various forms of audiovisual expression.

The relationship between art and society is complex and has roots in various socio-political contexts. It is impossible to draw an exact line between protest culture and protest art. The traditions and discourses of art live in protest culture and have been reshaped by it. One could mention the performative protests of women's suffragette movement which harnessed many forms of art from music to visual symbols, performances and literature (Wiley & Rose 2021). The songs of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) are another example of political creativity of the early 20th century for which artistic means were adopted to the purposes of the movement (see also Rantanen 2017). Furthermore, the history of art and activism is often associated with the early avant-garde, that crossed the boundaries of the art establishment while seeking the relationship between life and art.

Since the mid-20th century, many theorists have described art-audience relations in various terms and often in relation to socio-political history and activism. The role of art as communication and meaning making are at the centre of these discourses. Homi K. Bhabha (1998) used the concept of *conversational art*, and Nicolas Bourriaud (1998) emphasised the engagement of the audience with the concept of *relational aesthetics* while Grant H. Kester (2004, 10) harnessed the concept of *dialogical art* to emphasise art as dialogue and meaning making that unfolds in performative processes. These discourses also echo in music culture, in which a range of participatory, dialogical and engaging practices are discussed (see also Turino 2008, Talvitie 2023). Characteristic to activism of today is indeed the way it is directed towards audiences as communication and dialogue. One could mirror this tradition against the theorisations of Suzanne Lacy (1995), who described art as engagement in the context of so-called *new genre public art*. The idea of the *new genre* referred to the ways this kind of art used different forms of media in addition to traditional sculpture and installation. Often the aim was to engage the audience and to address them directly. Thus, art would present itself in newspapers and public spaces rather than in concert leaflets, exhibition catalogues, and the art media (Jacob 1995, 52–53). Through its aesthetics, it debated topical questions of the society of the day, such as identity, housing, war, race, and environmental questions. (Lacy 1995, 19–21.)

Similarly, music and sound can also be understood as affective media aimed at engaging and addressing different audiences side by side with other creative and expressive means of protest culture. In the activist

culture of today, the activist practices have been drawn from multiple discourses and inter-art relations. Also, in the context of XR Finland, music and sound are part of multimodal expression, in which different arts contribute to activist culture in dialogue with each other. Thus, in this article, they will not be discussed as being separate from other activist means, but as part of the creative communicational ecosystem of activism. Similarly, in this article, I will consider music and sound as being mutually engaged. While culturally a song or a melody is more often understood as music than a single beat of a drum, they each can have signifying symbolic and activist function. I understand different sounds, melodies, noises, and speeches as existing in the same sonic continuum, which is harnessed in the context of extra-parliamentary politics, civil disobedience and activist culture as means of activism (see also Chion 2016, 57).

In this study, the activism is understood as a form of *transformative communication*, which aims for societal change. In order to reach its goals and have its demands met, a movement must communicate them to various audiences as effectively as possible. In the case of XR Finland, on the one hand, the movement is directing its communication to the large audiences, and on the other to the government and various financial and cultural institutions that can have an impact on the course of climate policies in Finland. Activist practices and other creative means can be considered to be part of the communication strategies of the movement. Often, the creativity adopts the form of a *symbolic object*, which is a component of contentious performance (Abrams & Gardner 2023). Within contentious politics, symbolic objects such as placards, signs, posters, and stickers appear side by side with activism. Often, it is impossible draw a line between symbolic object and activism, as activism may employ symbolic objects as its means. Moreover, symbolic objects can also include other signifying objects that are harnessed as communicative tools within social movements. For example, these can be symbolically significant places, individuals, artefacts and gestures (Abrams & Gardner 2023, 17). An essential property of a symbolic object is its potency to prompt action. The aim of social transformation is also an essence of activism. Mutually different creative means can be harnessed to highlight, amplify, soften and emphasise the chosen message and employ a range of symbols to communicate abstract and complex phenomena such as climate change to chosen audiences.

Communication studies have recognised transformative climate change communication as largely relying on affects and creative thinking rather than communicating data and information (Moser 2019). Susanne

C. Moser (2019) describes the transformative communication of climate change as a reciprocal and dialogical practice fostering transformative imagination, which is necessary if action is to be prompted. According to her, transformative communication evokes the need for change as well as the ability to imagine change as possible: it relies on empathy to mirror and enable change. It is often the feelings considered to be positive, such as empathy, love, rejection of numbness, radical hope, encouragement and love that are seen as crucial in transformative communication (Moser 2019, 148). However, it should be noted that the transformative communication of art can be depicting emotions deemed as negative (e.g., grief, anxiety) in order to address cultural crises such as the changing climate (see also Torvinen & Välimäki 2019). Indeed, many thinkers also find emotions such as grief, anger, and anxiety, as those that can trigger social change (see also Ahmed 2004, Butler 2004).

Famously, the transformative potential of music (and sound) is often associated with its nature as affective art. Music has the capacity not only to represent and symbolise emotions, but also to inflict them and create an atmosphere in which emotions and affects can be shared collectively. Music and sound can reach beyond subjectivity towards collective and asubjective experiences where the boundaries between self, other, and music are blurred. This capacity of music and sound to resonate in between bodies is in relation to the music's potency to create a sense of collective affectivity (Vadén & Torvinen 2014). Affectivity, be it individual or experienced collectively, is in relation to transformative potential. When discussing the role of affect in activism, theorists of activism, Stephen Duncombe, George Perlov, Steve Lambert and Sarah J. Halford introduced the concept of *Æffect* (Duncombe et al. 2018). As a hybrid from the words *affect* and *effect*, the concept describes the relationship between desired effect of activism and affect inflicted by art. In this relationship, the affective dimension and effect are often complimentary; as Duncombe and others see it, people are moved to create change through emotional stimuli. Furthermore, they added that art and symbols provide us with tools that help to "make sense" of the world, both cognitively and emotionally (Duncombe et al. 2018, 6–7.) A similar significance of emotions in the context of politics is also recognised in the various strands of feminist theory, in which emotions are not only understood as signs of individual experience, but also as affective-cognitive framework and as signals of social reality and thus are capable of prompting action (see also Ahmed 2004). As an example of such emotions, one could mention eco-anxiety

and climate anxiety as crucial affects affecting the actions of individuals (Pihkala 2020).

In the following pages, I will be discussing the affective communication in the activist actions of the XR Finland and analysing the ways they harness music and sound as affective media. My analysis of the activist actions is informed by the nature of contentious politics and civil disobedience. In his seminal book, *Power in Movement* (1994) political theorist Sidney G. Tarrow describes contentious politics as being the base of all social movements. Unlike collective action in general, which can be carried out by any group of people, contentious collective action is conducted by people who do not have a regular access to representative institutions. It is furthermore characterised as antagonism against unaccepted claims and policies and challenging others or authorities and can also be presented as civil disobedience, that is, an active refusal to follow laws and regulations. That said, contentious politics is not necessarily involved with civil disobedience and it can be manifested in many forms and practices from building organisations to fostering collective identities (Tarrow 2011, 7–8).

I will next introduce XR Finland as a movement and to the methods of the study before describing the music and other activism in the movement. Then I will focus on the affectivity of activism in the two case studies used in this research, the *Kirjoita Kriisistä* campaign and the *Pitkäsilta Bridge Roadblock*, both of which were organised by XR Finland in Helsinki in 2021.

XR Finland as a movement

XR labels itself as inspired by other non-violent grassroots movements of the 21st century, such as Occupy Wall Street, and drawing inspiration from central non-violent, feminist and anti-racist movements, such as Satyagraha, the women's suffrage movement, and the various American civil rights movements of the 1960s (Fotaki & Foroughi 2022, 230). XR was founded in the UK in May 2018 and XR Finland started to operate a few months after that, in November 2018 (*Elokapina* About Us). XR Finland mentions three central demands on its website, which are also shared by XR UK: 1) Tell the Truth, 2) Act Now, and 3) Beyond Politics. The demand to tell the truth focuses on the declaration of climate emergency with regular emergency announcements. "Act now" requires the passing of binding legislation on net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 as

well as prompting a vast ecological reconstruction. With “beyond politics” the movement demands the formation of a Citizens’ Assembly that will make suggestions for nature conservation and socially just emission reductions, which the Finnish government would be bound to process (*Elokapina* Our demands; see also Knights 2019, 11). In Finland, the movement received a grant of EUR 200 000 from the Kone Foundation in 2023. The grant was announced to be used for a forest themed campaign in autumn 2023. One of the aims of the campaign was to direct the climate debate in Finland towards discussing the role and significance of forests in climate change. As one of its means, the movement announced artistic performances, participatory demonstrations, and popularisation of science in public debates (Kone Foundation 2023).

XR Finland draws from the practices and histories of the transnational environmental movement (Reponen 2021, 176). For example, the second demand for telling the truth echoes *Satyagraha*, which translates as “the force of truth.” *Satyagraha* is based on the principles of non-violent civil disobedience and passive resistance. Mahatma Gandhi applied *Satyagraha* to various peaceful civil-disobedience movements, such as opposing apartheid in South Africa in 1906. Later, particularly in India, the history of *Satyagraha* is entwined to the resistance against British colonisation of natural resources. For example, Salt *Satyagraha* in the 1930s was organised against British monopolising the production of salt. In the 1990s, the Bija *Satyagraha* aimed to resist the industrial monopolisation of seeds. In *Satyagraha*, the ideas of resistance and freedom are associated with the protection of the Earth and its biodiversity against unequal and disproportions harvesting of natural resources (Shiva 2021). Philosopher, eco-feminist and environmental activist Vandana Shiva quotes Gandhi who phrased the spirit of *Satyagraha* by saying that “*Satyagraha* is a ‘No’ said from our deepest conscience” (Shiva 2019, 82). Shiva has also referred to XR as “*Satyagraha* for Life” (Shiva 2019, 7). The nature of XR as a creative movement is also reflected in *Satyagraha*, which emphasises co-creativity practised in collaboration with the Earth and all beings (Shiva 2021, 89).

While XR is a transnational movement, its local networks (such as XR Finland), act autonomously (Reponen 2021, 168). However, the international XR shares the core values of the movement as well as visual identity, including a logo, with a stylised hourglass depicted in it. The common strategy of XR is to shut down government and commerce until the demands of the movement are met (Stuart 2022, 807). In the UK, the movement achieved some of its goals fairly quickly, when the UK Parliament

declared the climate emergency in 2019 after large demonstrations in the country in April that year (Smyth & Waters 2020, 621). In January 2023, XR UK declared that it would cease organising roadblocks. The resolution was made in response to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act in 2022 which gave police more power to restrict disruptive protests (*The Guardian* 1.1.2023). The announcement by XR UK was followed by a statement by XR Finland, which declared in its social media accounts that it will continue to use roadblocks as a means of civil disobedience in Finland (Elokapina “XR UK”).

The methods of the study

This study uses the methods of hybrid ethnography (Przybylski 2021) by applying semi structured interviews, thematic analysis and fieldwork both on-site and on-line. I have observed the field over the period from autumn 2021 and all through 2023. Hybrid ethnography is a method designed to utilise both the abundance of the available data on-line as well as engaging the field by doing traditional ethnography such as interviews and fieldwork on-site (Przybylski 2021, 4–5.) The method has advances when studying culture that is practised by mostly anonymous individuals often in unpredictable settings. One of the challenges of the study of activism in the context of contentious politics, activist culture and civil disobedience is the irregularity of the activist actions. While there is a certain sense of predictability and reliability in the institutional music culture, such as available information on concert venues, album releases and streaming services, in the context of civil disobedience and contentious culture, the element of surprise is often an important strategy used to draw attention to the movement and thus the actions tend to happen unannounced even from the point of the view of the researcher (see also Ellman 2020, 243). That said, I have not always had a chance to observe the actions on-site. However, the actions of XR Finland are usually streamed, and in addition to being present on-site as much as possible, I have filled the gaps in the analysis by observing the documentation of the actions on various social media platforms (such as Instagram, Facebook). While documentation is an important part of the ethnographic fieldwork, and on-line material is not constructed based on the choices made by the researcher (Przybylski 2021, 4), streamed videos offer an insight on the mediation of actions to various audiences as on-line streaming is used as a common communicational strategy by XR Finland (Elokapina viestintäopas s.a.). Online plat-

forms, such as Facebook events and Instagram posts, have also provided me with a valuable background on the range of activism in the movement.

However, there are some complications in the on-line ethnography. First, it will keep the researcher relatively distant from the field and will not reveal in-depth information that might be accessible, through interviews (Przybylski 2021, 5). Second, the quality and the focus of on-line streaming varies a lot. For example, during the streaming, the camera may drift away from activist action, and the streaming will not necessarily offer the context which is required for the analysis. Furthermore, the technical condition of the streaming might not be strong enough to mediate crucial aspects, such as the characteristics of sound and music. Thus, I interviewed activists and undertook fieldwork onsite as much as possible to gain a deeper understanding of the culture of XR Finland.

As most of the XR Finland activists operate anonymously, in order to find interviewees, I circulated a questionnaire among the activists of XR Finland during autumn 2022. I used the RedCap software program (which is designed for collecting sensitive data) to create the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed in the inner communicational channels of the movement, which I had no access to at the time. However, I formed the contact to the activists of XR Finland in social media (Facebook) and asked them to spread the questionnaire among the movement's activists. In addition to this, I published the questionnaire on a webpage designed for this research project and spread information about it on-line.

In addition to helping me to find the activists, the questionnaire was designed to provide basic information on the music culture of XR Finland, such as, what kind of experience the activists had in music as well as the musical genres played in the movement. The questionnaire was aimed at anyone who had played music or sung in the actions and/or demonstrations of XR Finland. Bystanders witnessing the demonstrations and actions were ruled out. The questionnaire received 24 replies, which is a fairly small turnout, to draw major conclusions about the musical practices of the movement, but enough to provide the research with an invaluable contact to activists available for interviews. The interviewees were selected according to their experience and activities in XR Finland, such as demonstrations and actions they had attended to. The interviews were conducted as semi structured interviews during autumn 2022 and winter 2023.² I interviewed nine activists in four individual and two group inter-

² A comprehensive list of the interviews is listed at the end in the references. As a part of anonymisation process, I made no references to individual interviews.

views. The interviewees included both professional musicians and enthusiasts. The activists were asked about their background in music and musical involvement in XR Finland. The questions also concerned the kinds of music the interviewees found to be valuable from the point of view of the demonstrations and activist actions. Most of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, but I interviewed two of the activists via Zoom. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed thoroughly. I also participated in the introductory training to the practices of XR Finland in winter 2023 which helped me to grasp a deeper understanding of the practices and the culture of the movement as a whole.

As to the analysis of the collected data, I have observed the audiovisual material in dialogue with the theories of activism and music in the context of contentious culture (Turino 2008, Ellman 2020, Abrams & Gardner 2023). The interviews were analysed by conducting thematic analysis (Braun et al. 2017) which helped me to map out reoccurring themes and functions of music in the interview data.

As there is a history of backlash and aggression towards the activists of XR (Stuart 2022), all the activists are anonymised in this study and I will not draw references between replies to avoid connecting them to individuals. However, the names of the bands and their members that had been publicly associated with XR and had performed at the events of the movement and/or are identified in the public communication of XR Finland, are mentioned.

Music, sound and other activism in XR Finland

While the studies of the musical practices in XR Finland are still scarce, the previous studies, describe the XR as valuing art and creativity. Musical activities, such as singing, are an essential part of XR (Smyth & Walters 2020, 626). Indeed, the movement describes itself as prioritising creativity (Knights 2019, 11) and when stating directions on how to conduct activism, such as starting a roadblock, the Extinction Rebellion handbook mentions music as a means of creating a desired atmosphere, as “it is hard for drivers to go ballistic if you are having a disco” (Farrell et al. 2019, 189).

The on-line fieldwork revealed, that after its establishment in 2018, the activists of XR Finland have organised activist actions and practices, that include radio programs, meme workshops, music performances, so-called die-in or lie-in actions at which activists lay on the ground

and pretend to be dead or asleep (Goldstein 2014), poetry readings, film screenings, and dance performances. The activists have also produced audiovisual material, spread performative letters and posters to the public space, “green washed” the façade of the headquarters of energy company Fortum, organised protests designed for a single activist, and harnessed the statues of Helsinki to take part to the activist protest of the movement. XR Finland has adopted some of its activist strategies and performance concepts from XR UK, such as the performance concept of *Veriprikaati*, which is known as Red Rebel Brigade in the UK. Red Rebel Brigade is an international performance group (Red Rebel Brigade s.a., Stammen & Meissner 2002, 7–8). The original concept of the group was developed by Doug Francisco and Justine Squire from Bristol’s Invisible Circus for XR UK Bristol’s Spring Uprising in 2019. Following the original Red Rebel Brigade concept, *Veriprikaati* moves in complete silence and dresses in red costumes symbolising the blood shared by all species and the ongoing sixth mass extinction event (Red Rebel Brigade s.a.). According to the social media posting on the Instagram channel of XR Finland, *Veriprikaati* appeared in Finland for the first time in 2019 during the World Village Festival in Helsinki (*Elokapina* “MK”).

The activism in XR Finland entails performances, skill sharing sessions, and various networks of activists who plan and organise creative forms of protest. These are also present in music practices that can be divided roughly into two categories: performances on a stage at XR events, and music played/sung as part of actions in public spaces, such as roadblocks. Among these are both presentational performances and (partially) participatory performances at which the distinction between the audience and the performer is blurred and the audience is invited to be part of the performance (Turino 2008). The events, such the Autumn Rebellion (*Syyskapina*) in 2021, can last for several days (*Elokapina* “SK”). They usually take place in a public space and have a stage or another performing area for performing artists and activists giving speeches. Often, the performances are designed to keep the spirits of the activists up during the long events, and the performances in the stage area alternate with speeches and discussions. At these events, the music can include almost anything and vary from folk to singer songwriters playing their songs, and from DJ sets to rap, electro, pop, choir singing and chanting. The events are promoted beforehand on XR Finland’s social media platforms, and the audience consists of people taking part in the events along with any pedestrians passing by.

It is worth noting that while some music genres are traditionally considered to be more political than others (e.g., rap and punk), and while the classical orchestral music continues to be associated with apolitical abstractions (Rastas & Seye 2019, 596), the range of instruments played in XR suggests the movement welcoming music across genre lines. In this research, both in the interviews and in the questionnaire, the activists reported playing a wide range of instruments at XR Finland's events and demonstrations: violin, viola, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, bass, flute, French horn, saxophone, mandolin, accordion, recorder, ukulele, trumpet, drums, surdo drum, and laptop.

While the music of XR Finland encompasses a diverse and loose group of activists playing and singing music, XR Finland has some fairly regular performing and practising musical groups. One of them is *Elokuoro* (Elo Choir) which may take part in a range of events, demonstrations and actions. In addition to *Elokuoro*, there is also an orchestra called *Elo-orkesteri* (Elo Orchestra), which, however, seems to be less established, loosely connected network of musicians that show up to play at demonstrations whenever the need for musicians is expressed in the communication channels of the movement. While *Elokuoro* announces practice sessions in its social media, *Elo-orkesteri* was not reported by the interviewees as rehearsing regularly. Rather, one of the activists, who had played with the network, described how they received information on the performance via social media. The instrumentation of the "orchestra" reflects the spontaneous culture of the network: activists, who might be free for the demonstrations bring whatever instruments they may have at hand. While the activists usually plan a starting time for the musical demonstrations, some of them may also show up unannounced and leave the demonstrations when they feel like it.

All in all, the musical practices in XR Finland are based on volunteer, free-to-come–free-to-go principle. This is likely to be due to the principle of sharing and trying not to exhaust the activists in the movement, as one of the activists interviewed for this research project informed me. On the other hand, one activist, who was also a professional musician, mentioned, that they do not want to make the musicians working in their band to feel like they had to work and perform for free unless they wanted to make the decision to join the demonstrations themselves. As XR was described by this activists at least a "somewhat political" organisation, they felt that they could not expect their colleagues to be part of the movement unless they chose to do so. That said, the music played at XR Finland depends a

lot on the activity of the activists involved, and if they might have time and resources to take part to the movement and its actions.

Case Studies

I will describe two case studies, and analyse how the affectivity of music and sound is harnessed as a communicational strategic in them. The analysis described below is partially based on my observations at the Pitkäsilta roadblock in Helsinki in autumn 2023 while I was at the site as a pedestrian. The observation was later extended by interviewing the activists who had been either singing and/or playing an instrument during the Pitkäsilta roadblock. In addition, I observed the documentation of the action online (Facebook).

The latter case study, the *Kirjoita Kriisistä Campaign*, was first brought to my attention by two activists in separate interviews, after which I conducted the analysis on the action by observing it on the XR Finland Instagram channel. While the documentation of the action does not cover the action as the whole, it serves the purposes of this study as the streaming was used to communicate the action to a larger audience. I was informed about the overall structure of the performance by the activists.

The case studies described below demonstrate how the activist actions of XR Finland are targeted at different audiences and how they vary with their emotional content. Similarly, the case studies suggest the multifaceted nature of music and sound as affective transformative communication in activist actions and how they can have multiple communicational and strategic functions simultaneously.

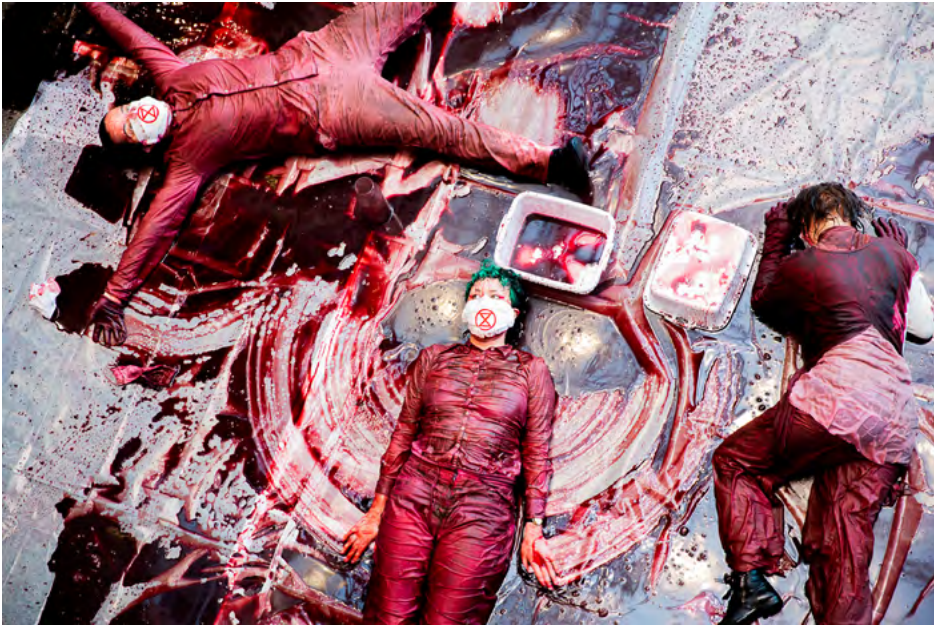
Kirjoita Kriisistä Campaign

Kirjoita Kriisistä (Write about Crisis) was a campaign organised by the activists of XR Finland which took place during spring 2021. The goal of the campaign was to urge professional journalists to “tell the truth” about climate change and cover the climate emergency more efficiently and with a wider scope. The campaign had several activist actions. The *Kirjoita Kriisistä* campaign was opened by a performance that took place in Helsinki on 1 March 2021. The location of the performance was highly symbolic and tactical. The performance took place in the lobby of the Sanomatalo building, which hosts the two largest newspapers in Finland, *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Ilta-Sanomat*, as well as television broadcast company Nelo-

nen Media. The performance was later followed by a series of actions and events spreading around during spring in Helsinki and other cities in Finland. These included a panel discussion, on 12 April 2021, another performance in the Sanomatalo building on 7 June and activist actions in public spaces, such as placards hung on statues around the Helsinki city centre on Global Climate Strike day, 19 March, 2021 (Elokapina “KK”).

In this analysis I will focus on the third act of the *Kirjoita Kriisistä* opening performance which resembled a noise demonstration with loud and alarming sound. The third act of the performance was also streamed via the Instagram account of XR Finland. The campaign can be identified as having several audiences from institutions such as Finnish media houses and media professionals, to citizens observing the campaign either on-line or on-site.

The first of the four acts of the opening performance included a procession of activists approaching the Sanomatalo building dressed in black and pressing themselves to the glass walls of the building. The second was a hybrid of a lie-in performance and a noise demonstration: it had activists performing as sleeping journalists in the lobby of Sanomatalo building while a drummer was beating a snare drum at the scene of the action. The third act also relied on the contradiction between alarm and apathy. It consisted of activists bathing in fake blood, under a red banner hung in the lobby stating that “*Hiljaisuus on veriteko – kerro totuus*” (Silence is a Bloody Act – Tell the Truth) and spreading the “blood” in the lobby of the media house. Towards the end of the third act, the activists settled into the puddles of “blood” in the manner of a lie-in performance while there was a sound of a siren fluctuating in the background. The fourth act had activists performatively cleaning up the space dressed in white overalls. The third act of the performance received some media attention from the Sanoma media papers, namely *Helsingin Sanomat* and *Ilta-Sanomat* which reported it the same day (*Ilta-Sanomat* 1.3.2021, *Helsingin Sanomat* 1.3.2021). There is streaming of a total of 30 minutes in XR Finland’s Instagram account, which I have analysed.



Picture 1: A scene from the third act of the opening performance of the Kirjoita Kriisistä Campaign. Picture: Joel Tainio / XR Finland.

The principle sonic symbols of the performance – the beating of a drum and a sound of a siren – resemble an alarming noise demonstration by taking over the semi-private space of a media house lobby. Affectively, the sonic elements resemble the alarming visual symbols of the performance: the red banner had the XR hourglass logo stylised in to “eyes”, symbolically witnessing the scene. The fake blood used in the act is a recurring theme in international XR and it is often used to “paint” institutions red. For example, in October 2019, XR UK used old fire engines to spray fake blood on the Treasury in Westminster (*The Guardian* 3.10.2019). A similar activist action also took place in London during “The Impossible Rebellion” in autumn 2021. The rebellion lasted for ten days and nights, and it included a performative action that took place in Paternoster Square and included fake blood which was poured on the street and used to smudge the façade of the London Stock Exchange (Johnston & Holland 2022, 6–7).

However, as an attention trigger, the performance adopted a form of sonic disobedience by pointing out and intruding sonically the private editorial offices that are located on the upper floors of the building (see also Ellman 2020, 242–243.) It is indeed unlikely that a silent demonstration

would have drawn as much attention in a large building. Rather, the banging of a drum and the sound of a siren were likely to pierce through the walls and intrude the offices as a distracting element, demanding for attention. As a message, it was contentious rather than conciliatory. Rather, the sound was used as a polarising component, because it pointed out the contrast between the “sleeping” journalism and the climate emergency.

The follow-up performance of the opening act in June 2021, however, was affectively different. This performance was humorous in its nature and in its tone resembled the series of placards that were placed on the statues in the city centre of Helsinki on the Global Climate Strike day on 19 March, 2021. The placards used irony, humour and carnival in order to laugh at the media institutions and to invite the citizens to participate in the laughter with hashtags (#kirjoitakriisistä). For example, there was a bear statue (1918, by sculptor Emil Wikström), standing by the main entrance of the Finnish National Museum. The bear was carrying a placard in its neck, stating, “Media Silence is a disservice for future generation, #Writeaboutcrisis”. The slogan was a pun. In Finnish, it stated “Mediahiljaisuus on karhunpalvelus tuleville sukupolville”, where the *karhunpalvelus* translates literally to a “bear’s service”, that is, disservice. A similar activist act was repeated nearby, at the statue of runner Paavo Nurmi (1952, by sculptor Wäinö Aaltonen) at the Helsinki Olympic Stadium. The statue was carrying a placard, stating “Climate Goals are Running Further away”. Similar humoresque affect was created in the follow-up performance, which took place again in the lobby of the Sanomatalo media building. The performance, titled “*Uutisoinnin uuden viitekehyksen työmaa*” (“The construction site of the new journalistic framework”) was a carnivalesque noise demonstration, with the activists dressed up as construction site workers building a wooden “framework” for the benefit of climate change journalism.³ The building was accompanied by excessive hammering. It should be noted that Sanomatalo stands out from other buildings in the Helsinki city centre with its tall glass walls. As a soundscape, the loud and echoey banging of a hammer inside such a building, was itself highly performative. Sonically, it repeated the strategy of the opening performance with the nature of a noise demonstration, whereby noise is used to occupy, to attract attention and to amplify the message of the action. On this occasion, however, instead of being an alarm, the noise was used to trigger laughter, which is an old affective strategy of a protest, especially when framed as a critique of “the establishment”.

3 Engl., *framework* > Finn. *kehys*.

Pitkäsilta Bridge Roadblock

A roadblock at Pitkäsilta bridge took place during the Autumn Rebellion on 6 October, 2021, in Helsinki. Autumn Rebellion demanded that the Finnish government declare a climate emergency and to start acting accordingly to the seriousness and urgency of the climate and environmental crisis. The acts demanded included regular climate emergency announcements, reducing of the carbon emissions and founding of citizen's assemblies (Elokapina "SK2") Pitkäsilta bridge roadblock was drawing attention to the Autumn Rebellion and its demands, and music was one of its central communicational means.

Pitkäsilta is a bridge connecting the southern part of the city to the Hakaniemi and Kallio districts. The location has symbolic value. In Helsinki, there is a history of framing the bridge culturally as dividing the central, upper-class district from the northern side of the bridge, that is historically deemed to be a working-class district of Helsinki. The Pitkäsilta bridge roadblock gathered enough activists to stop the traffic for a few hours and gained media attention. According to media sources, police detained 123 activists during the roadblock (*Iltalehti* 16.10.2021).

At the roadblock, the music was used to support the activists blocking the road as well as to communicate the nature of the movement as peaceful to anyone observing it, as one of the activists I interviewed characterised the music in the action.



*Picture 2: A scene of the roadblock at the Pitkäsilta bridge.
Picture: Emma Reijonen / XR Finland.*

As a performance, the roadblock resembled a partially participatory performance, during which the distinction between the audience and the performer is blurred (Turino 2008). The roadblock had activists sitting on the road while other activists walked among them, playing music. As I was observing the roadblock as a pedestrian, I paid attention to how the music created a remarkably calm atmosphere to the otherwise charged setting of a roadblock.

The instruments played at Pitkäsilta bridge were various, ranging from electric guitars, violin, trumpet, saxophone, French horn, flute, xylophone, acoustic guitar, mandolin, and bass gave an impression of attracting musicians across genre lines. Anyone could join in the activists and the musicians, if not by playing an instrument, but by singing, moving along the music and the musicians, or in some other way of their choosing.

The music performed at the roadblock was fairly simple, to be joined in with by singing or by playing an instrument. In fact, one of the activists interviewed informed me that this occasion was the first time they played violin in public and that they found the atmosphere safe and “warm” enough to do so. In addition to a short melody repeated over and over again (Figure 1), the activists improvised in a calm manner. I was at the site of the roadblock by chance: I happened to be nearby at the time and stopped to make observations. At the site, I recorded the sound of activists playing the melody with my iPhone. While I did not have a chance to document the performance thoroughly, the recorded extract of the performance consists of 20 minutes of uninterrupted repetition of this one melody. The melody, which was transcribed to be played in C minor and consist of eight bars was performed at a calm pace. Some of the activists sang one word, “katoaa”, which in Finnish means “disappearing”, and which was sung as a simple musical gesture (c2–b1–c2) in between the two phrases. The notation of the melody circulated among the activists in their social media accounts prior to the roadblock. The melody, which was named by the activists in the interviews as both as “*Katoaa*” or “*Sittalaulu*” (Bridge song, referring to Pitkäsilta bridge) was originally composed by Aino Kallio, a member of the progressive folk band Vimma, as an assignment while studying at the Pop and Jazz Conservatoire in Helsinki.⁴ While the identity of the composer of the melody was unknown to

4 I would like to thank Aino Kallio for giving me a permission to publish the notation in the context of the research.

most activists, the band Vimma is well known in the movement, as it has performed on various occasions at XR Finland events.



Figure 1: “Sittalaulu”. This notation circulated in the social media platforms of XR Finland.

During the roadblock, activists playing music and singing moved freely on the bridge, some of them carrying small amplifiers with them. There was no band leader *per se*, though there was an activist present, who gave a sign when to begin the music and when to stop. The line-up of the band changed during the demonstration, as some of the musicians came later or left before the demonstration was over. I interviewed six musicians who were present in the Pitkäsilta roadblock in two individual and two group interviews. One of them told me that the musicians (a network, that some called the Elo Orchestra), were called at short notice to the site on a social media platform used by the movement. Prior to the roadblock, the activists gathered in Kaisaniemi park nearby, to discuss and rehearse the music briefly.

Later on, during the interviews, an activist who is involved in coordinating musicians in demonstrations, explained how the organisers may call for certain kind of music by describing desired affects. Also, in this case, the music was not curated for the roadblock based on well known and celebrated individual artists nor songs considered suitable. Instead, the roadblock was designed to present a certain kind of an affect. In this case, it was hoped that the musicians would play “dignified,” “sad” and “calm” music.

If the opening performance of the *Kirjoita Kriisistä* campaign amplified the message of the campaign with alarming music and sound, the music at the Pitkäsilta bridge roadblock toned it down. When being brought to the context of a roadblock, which is one of the most criticised

forms of civil disobedience of XR (Finland), the music softened the image of the movement and its choice to use disruptive civil disobedience such as roadblock as a strategy. As to the communicative strategies, the music addressed several audiences at once. First, there were pedestrians and other citizens observing the situation either onsite or online via streaming services. Second, music communicated support and a sense of safety to the activists blocking the road. Third, it sent the message of collective action to counter demonstrators who have a habit of showing up to the demonstrations and actions of XR Finland. Often, they are carrying loudspeakers with them and playing music, which is drawing references to the military history of Finland and nationalism, such as *Finlandia* by Jean Sibelius.

Activists involved with the roadblock seemed to be very conscious of various functions of music. One of the activists I interviewed described how playing beautiful music would create an image of the movement as peaceful. Furthermore, as the activist explained, calm music was designed to “take over the airspace” and to prevent tension in the scene where the presence of the police and counter demonstrators would be likely to create stress among activists blocking the road. They even mentioned that music was designed to de-escalate the situation, and to calm down the atmosphere, if needed. These remarks were echoed also in a statement of another activist, who pointed out, that instrumental music is a safe communication strategy, as its message cannot be reframed in social media and used against the movement by bringing it falsely to undesired context.

Communicational strategies and affective transformative communication

In this study, I have analysed the activism of XR Finland as an affective transformative climate change communication. I have paid attention in particular to the sound and music in two case studies while discussing them as part of the overall creative and activist communication practices of the movement. The observations, interviews and analysis of the case studies suggest that XR Finland uses music and sound to communicate various emotions to different audiences from institutions to citizens at large as well as addressing activists within the movement. This study recognised emotional cues such as calmness, grief, alarm, and humour. At times, they were used in order to emphasise and amplify the message, such as during the opening performance of the *Kirjoita Kriisistä* cam-

paign, and at times they were harnessed to soften the image of the ongoing actions and offer support to the activists, such as in the case of the Pitkäsilta roadblock.

The two case studies presented two different communicational strategies in relation to affect: while the music played at the Pitkäsilta roadblock echoes the basic principles of “the best practices” of the transformative climate change communication with calm and peaceful music (see also Moser 2019), the affective sonic content of *Write About Crisis* opening performance derived from these practices with an alarming tone. However, as the analysis of the performance suggest, the nature of the opening act of the *Kirjoita Kriisistä* campaign partially as a noise demonstration was designed to attract attention and to amplify the message of the action.

This study had no means to evaluate the communicational impact of the activist actions from the point of view of the different audiences. Furthermore, these findings are not enough to suggest that the emotional content of activism should or should not be in line with the best practices of transformative climate change communication. However, with this study I hope to contribute to the ongoing discussion about the of role emotions in activism and artistic protest and how they contribute to the society at large. While it is suggested in communication studies that climate change communication should aim for affectively calm and hopeful communication (Moser 2019), the role of art is often debated as collective and individual emotional work in which a wide range of emotions can be experienced and contemplated in a safe setting (see also Carroll 1990). On the other hand, there is a debate going on regarding the polarisation of Finnish society, which also touches on the question of affectivity and affective communication (Saarinen 2022). That said, more study is needed to discuss the impact of affective activist communication about climate change from the perspective of different audiences in Finland as well as the different affects in relation to transformative communication in the context of activism and activist culture and Finnish society at large.

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