

Esprit de Corpse: Further Co-Creative ArtScience Journeys

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Abstract

c(Beck et al., 2021; Claudet et al., 2020; Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018; Franke et al., 2020; *Ocean ArtScience and the Exquisite Corpse Process - Developing new Insights, Surfacing Values and Building Community through a Participatory Art Process*, n.d.; Jung et al., 2022; Kemmis et al., 2014) In 2021, and again in 2022, our globally scattered group of artists and scientists followed the *Exquisite Corpse* process for co-creating multiple threaded series of artworks inspired by extreme ocean events. In 2023 some members of our two groups convened a series of collaborative synchronous sessions to create a shared understanding of the paths we took to join this creative community and engage in this open ArtScience collaboration. Prompted by a sense of curiosity, a shared passion for the ocean and the will to collaborate, artists and scientists came together (virtually) to forge relationships around the shared intent to deepen our understanding of transdisciplinary ArtScience and how it can contribute to ocean knowledge. Discovering common ground (and creating a grounded commons) and mutual interests, we set forth on a path of curiosity into a formal *Exquisite Corpse* cycle. We created an array of art projects drawn from a semi-ambiguous “seed” within a semi-safe, not-always-comfortable space for experimentation and creation. Through cyclical introspection, enactment, opening, giving, and receiving, we developed our artwork series and relationships among our group. Finally, in the sharing of these series, we experienced new insights about our individual and collective perceptions of extreme ocean events, while simultaneously further deepening our relationships and appreciation for the potency of ArtScience collaborations.

This poster was presented at the AGU23 Meeting in San Francisco, CA, on 13 December 2023. Conference abstract URL: <https://agu.confex.com/agu/fm23/meetingapp.cgi/Paper/1266010>

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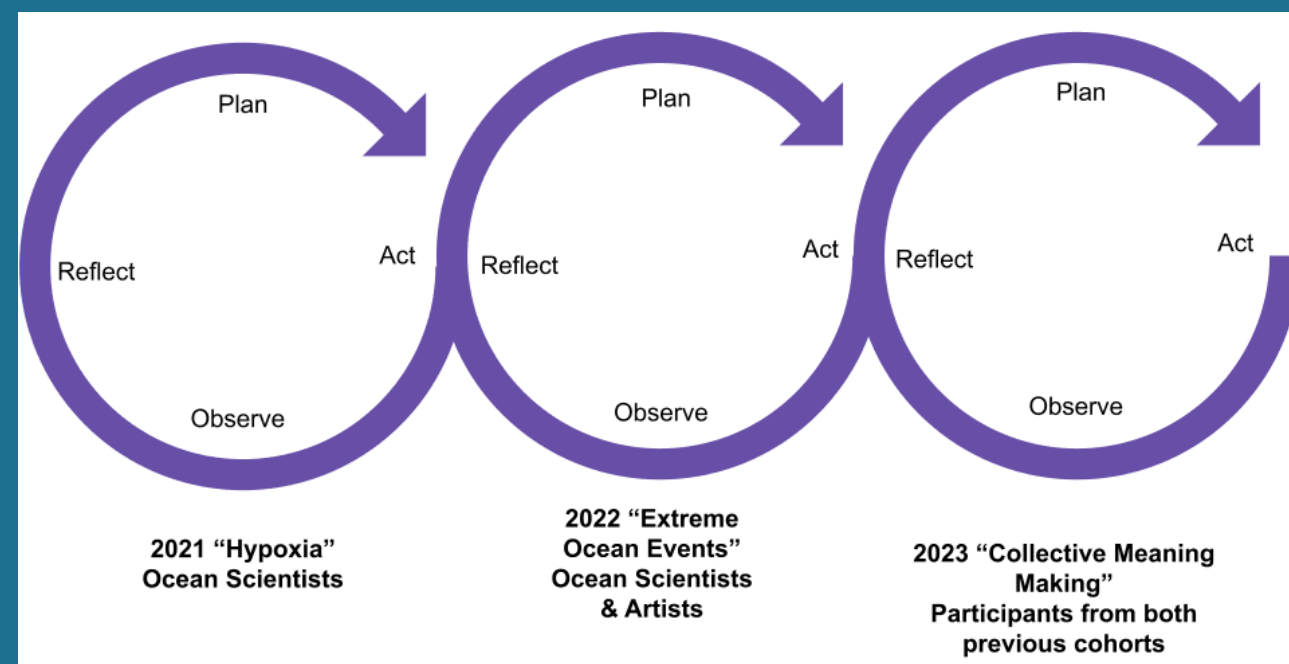
(An interactive version of this poster is available at <https://agu23.ipostersessions.com/Default.aspx?s=3A-36-87-59-60-CB-8D-32-CD-9B-85-99-D7-B5-37-82>)

Overview

It is evident that we need different approaches to address the current combined crises of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and increasing social injustice. This is especially important in our Ocean. Several intertwined problems pose existential threats to the survival of myriad Ocean species and possibly humanity itself (Franke et al. 2020; Ord, 2020). The UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development echoes this with a call for a paradigm shift in Ocean science and marine conservation. In order to address these problems in a more holistic way, the UN Ocean Decade calls for increased and innovative transdisciplinary collaborations (Claudet et al. 2020). Recently, much attention has been given to the potential of Ocean ArtScience collaborations to provide one of these possible avenues for transdisciplinary collaborations to for holistically addressing these challenges (Jung et al. 2022; Whittaker, 2023).

We present the outcomes of an ongoing ArtScience initiative among a mixed group of Ocean scientists and artists using the Exquisite Corpse method (Jung, 2022; Jung et al. 2021; Owens et al., 2022). During the Exquisite Corpse process, three interconnected artworks are created by participants that build on each other as and emerge from a common prompt.

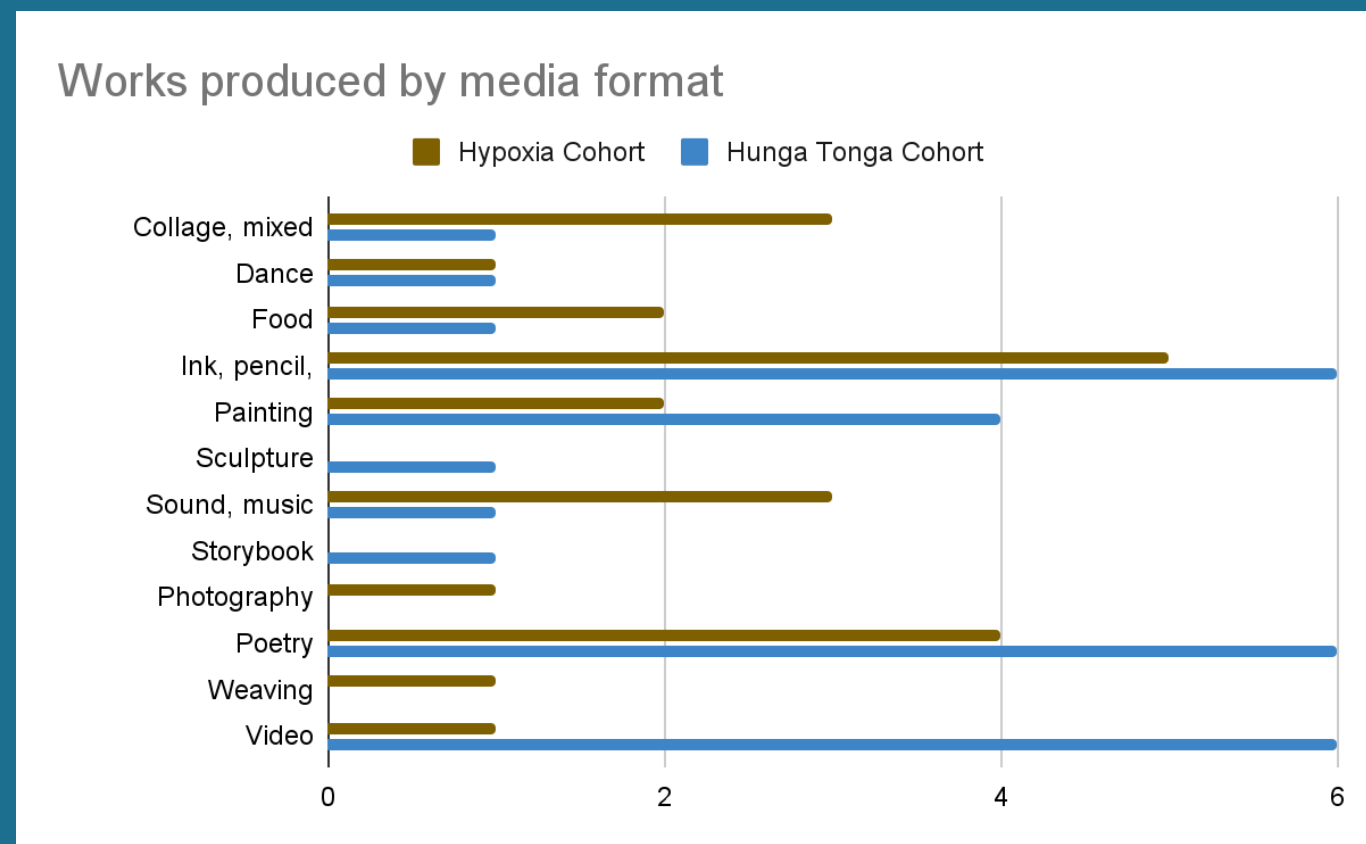
This project followed a participatory action research approach and consisted of three action cycles of creating artistic projects and collective reflection as detailed below (Kemmis et al., 2014).



We conducted two cycles of the "Exquisite Corpse" process followed by a final cycle of collective meaning making.

Outputs & Benefits

The two cohorts produced more than 30 artworks in a wide variety of media as detailed above.

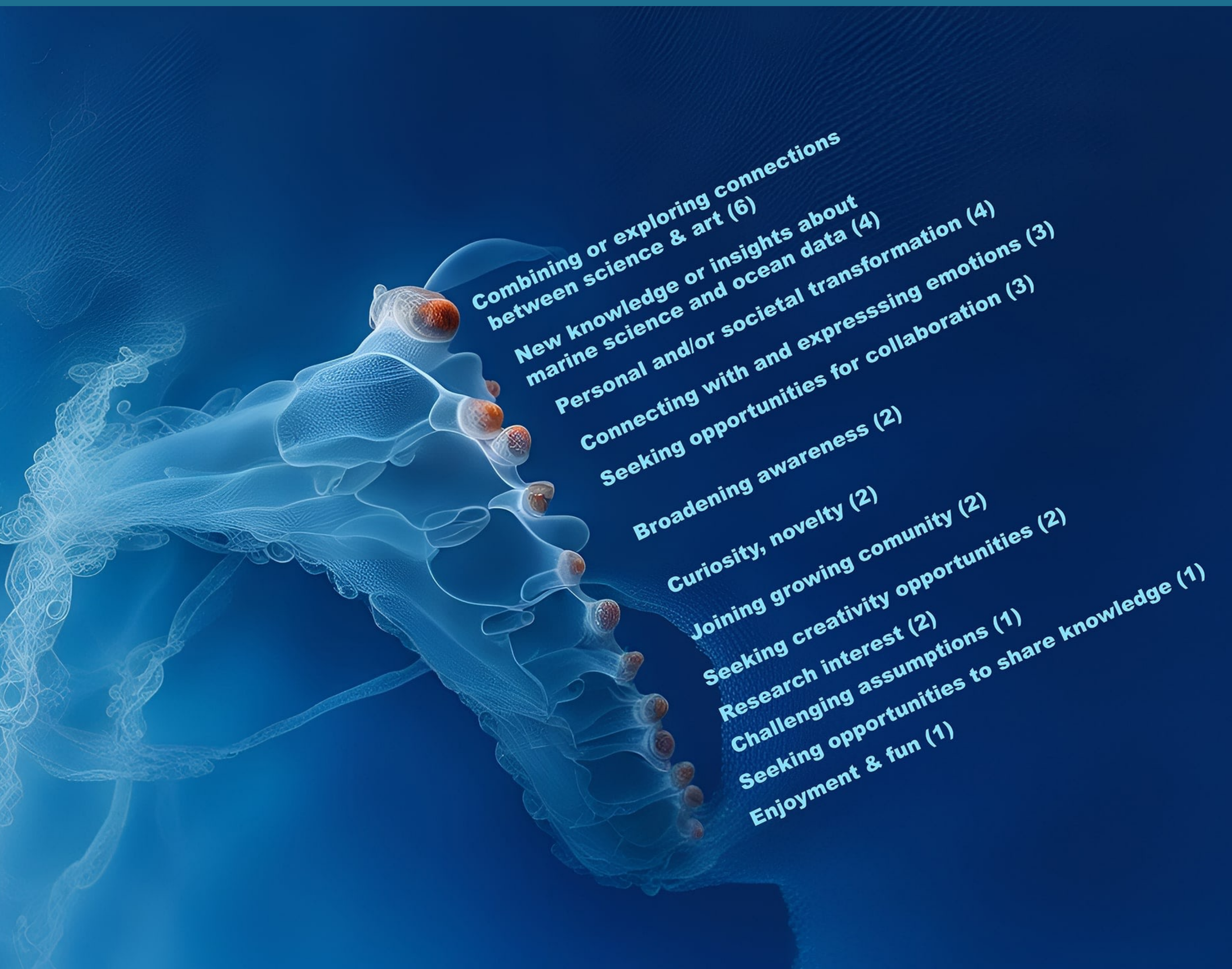


A range of different benefits were reported by participants of one or both of the Exquisite Corpse cycles.

Reported Benefits		
Reported Benefits (post-surveys & interviews)	Hypoxia	Volcano
Opportunity to experiment with new expressive modes & media		✓
Greater appreciation of human (and non-human) dimensions of ocean extreme events	✓	✓
Enhanced scientific understanding	✓	
Deepened connections with co-participants, strengthened relationships	✓	✓
Surfacing perspectives and values	✓	
Greater sense of connection with ocean art-science community	✓	✓
Deeper introspection/connection to one's own scientific work	✓	✓

Motivations

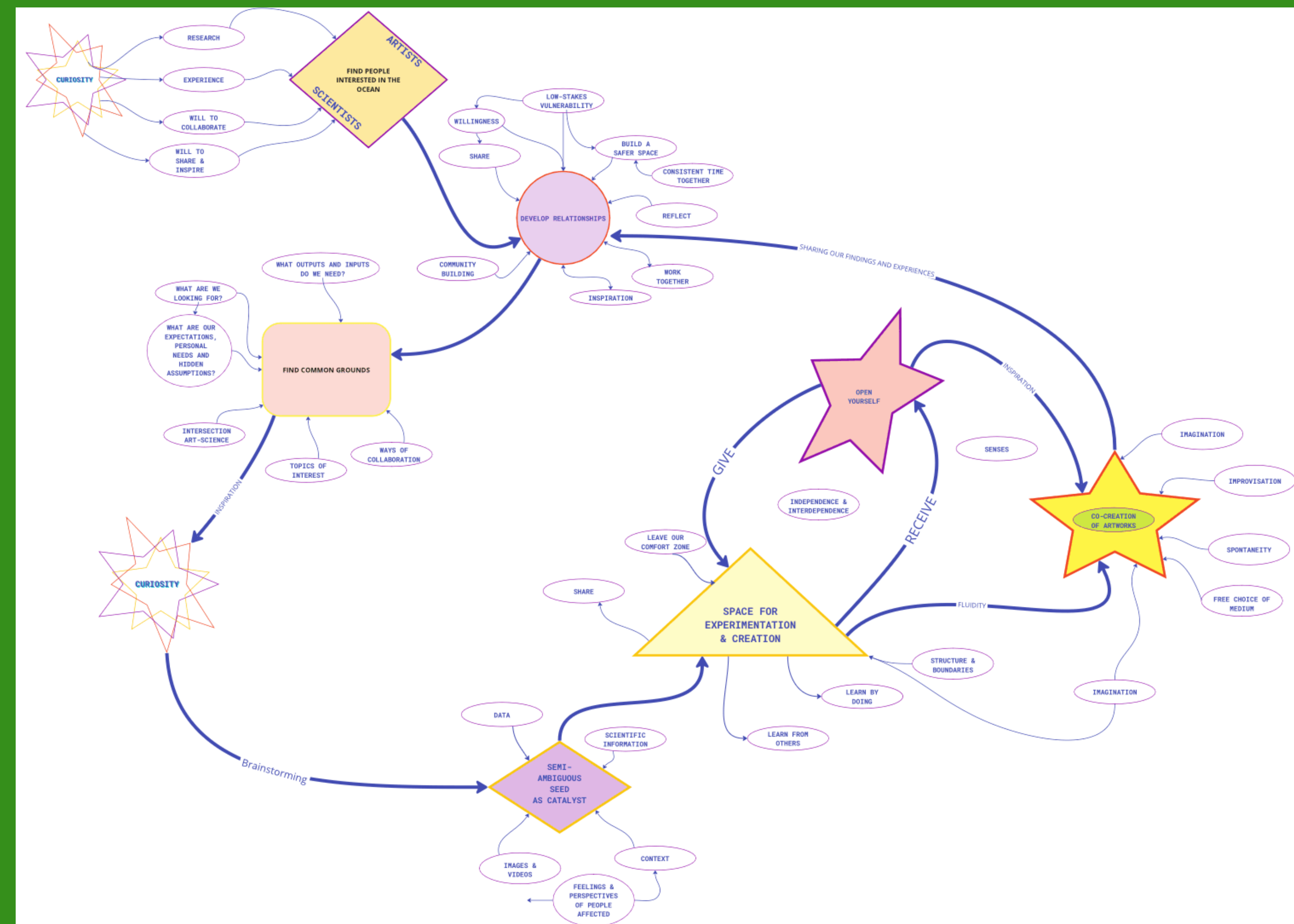
Prior to each cohort commencing, participants completed a survey, which detailed a variety of motivations for joining and previous experience with ArtScience initiatives. These are summarized by the list in this illustration, including numbers of mentions for each category. Most participants listed multiple motivations for joining.



Bubble diagram summarizing participant motivations for joining the project. Numbers and bubble sizes indicate total participant mentions for each motivation category. Image by Diego Narvaez.

Emergent Themes

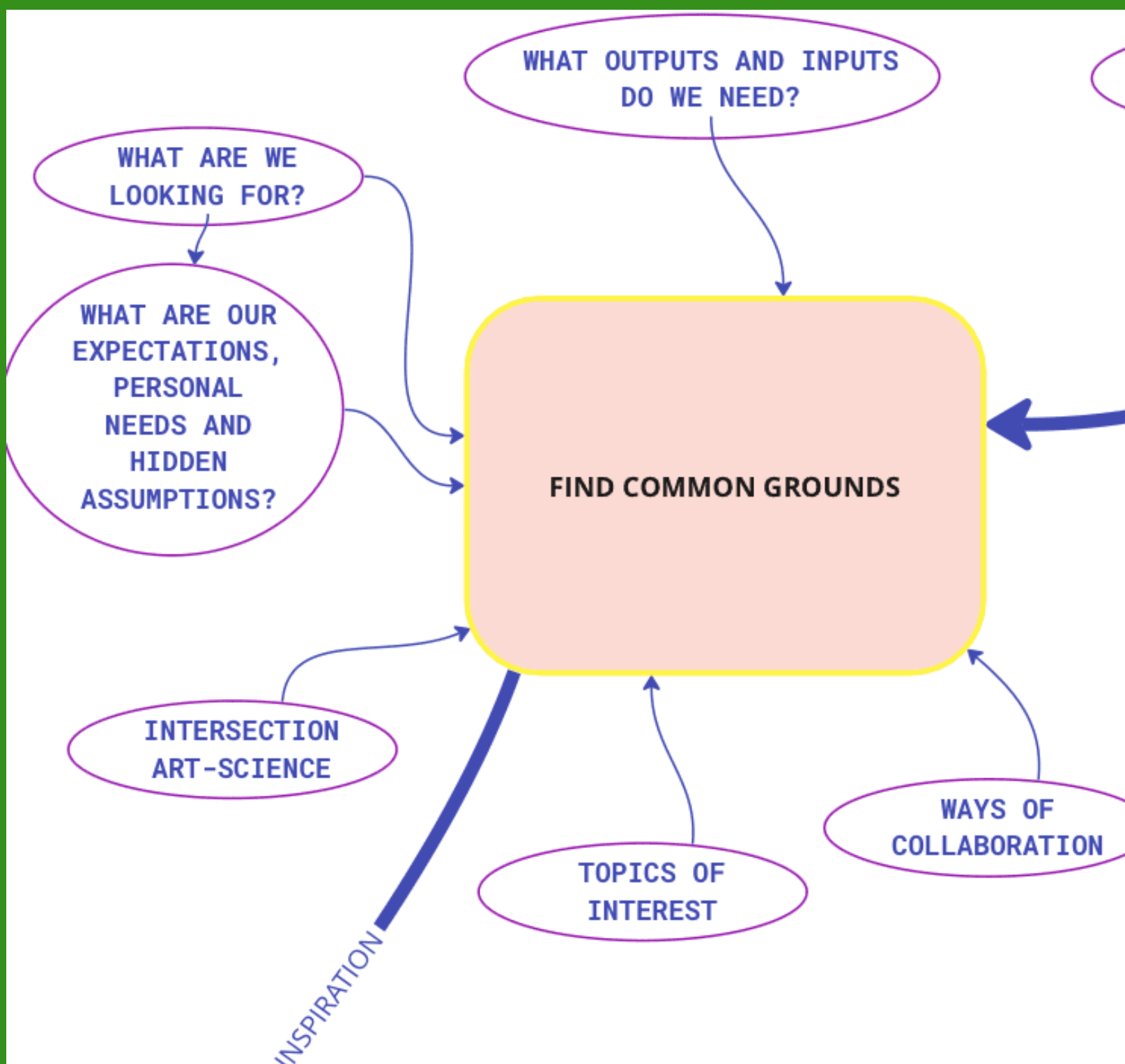
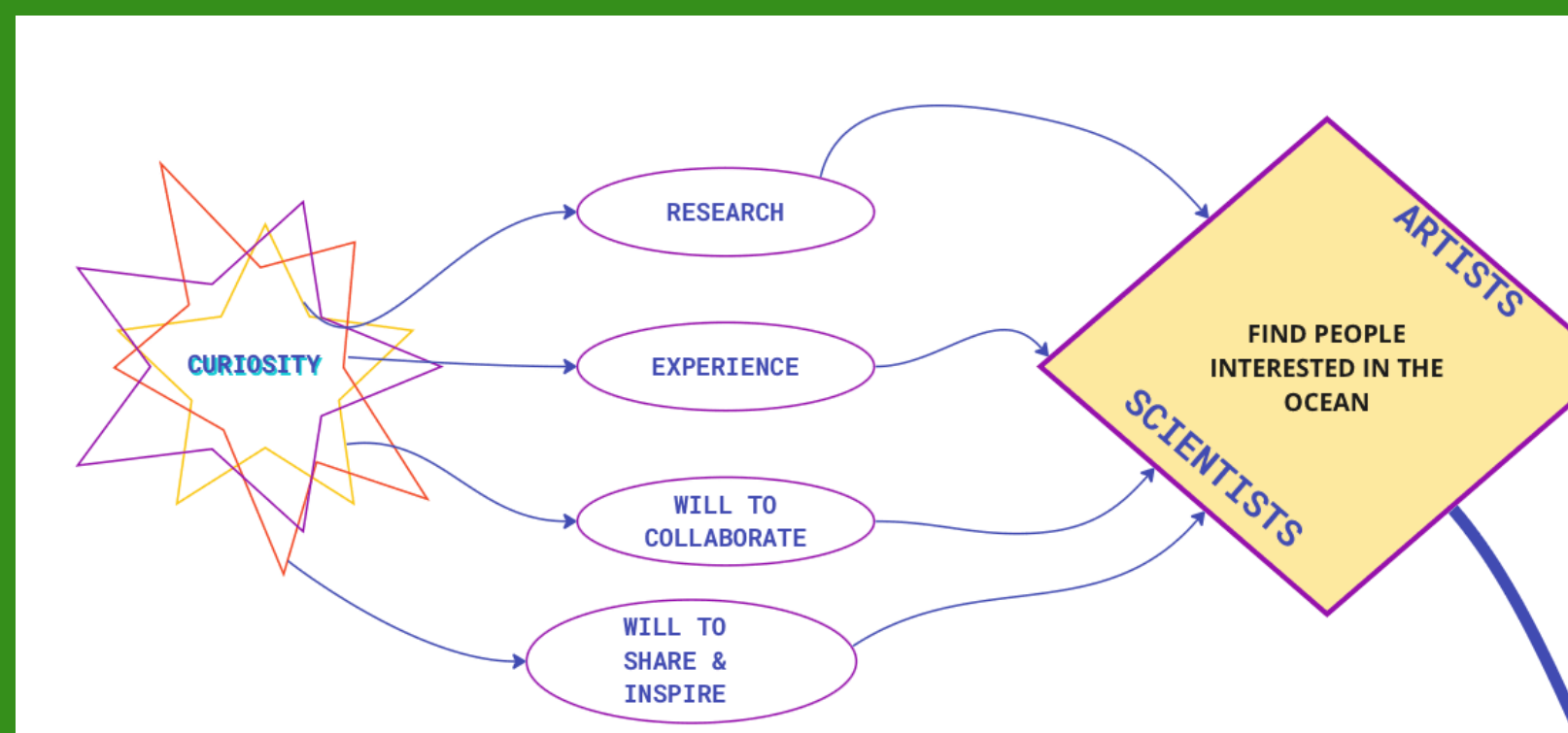
In a collaborative online session, the authors brainstormed themes and processes (described in the Emergent Themes section below) relating to the overall process of joining this creative community and engaging in the Exquisite Corpse process. These ideas were then transformed into a Miro diagram, designed by D. Narvaez and collectively revised by group members. This diagram describes the process, landscape and the journeys undertaken throughout this ArtScience project:



Prompted by a sense of curiosity and the will to collaborate, artists and scientists came together (virtually) to forge relationships around the shared intent to deepen their understanding of transdisciplinary ArtScience related to the Ocean. Discovering common ground(s) and interests, they set forth on a path of curiosity into a formal Exquisite Corpse cycle. Drawing from a semi-ambiguous seed as catalyst, they created new works within a semi-safe, not-always-comfortable space for experimentation and creation. Through cyclical introspection, enactment, opening, giving and receiving, they co-created threaded series of artworks. Finally, in the sharing of these works, they experienced new insights and further deepened their collective relationships. Themes emerged during initial workshops and were continually iterated and revised during the writing process.

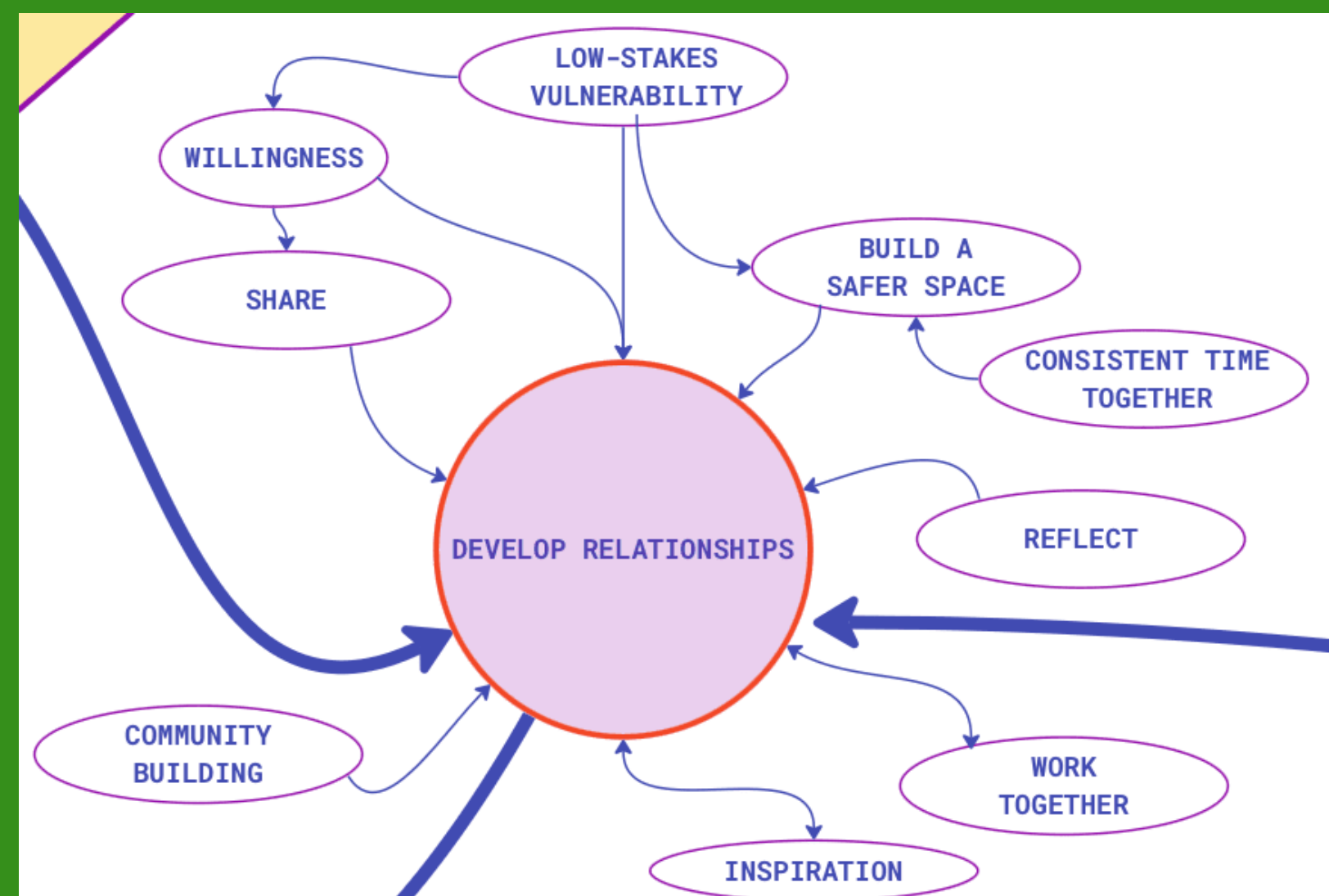
Curiosity and Connecting

The authors' Exquisite Corpse community evolved from initial sparks of curiosity. A loosely affiliated group of people exploring the inter-connections between Ocean art and Ocean science who recognized a common drive to collaborate, experiment, share and inspire.



Developing Relationships

Relationships are central to the exquisite corpse process; they influence every aspect of the process in determining the way ideas and artworks are shared among participants, but strengthened relationships are also one of the key outcomes.



Finding Common Ground(s)

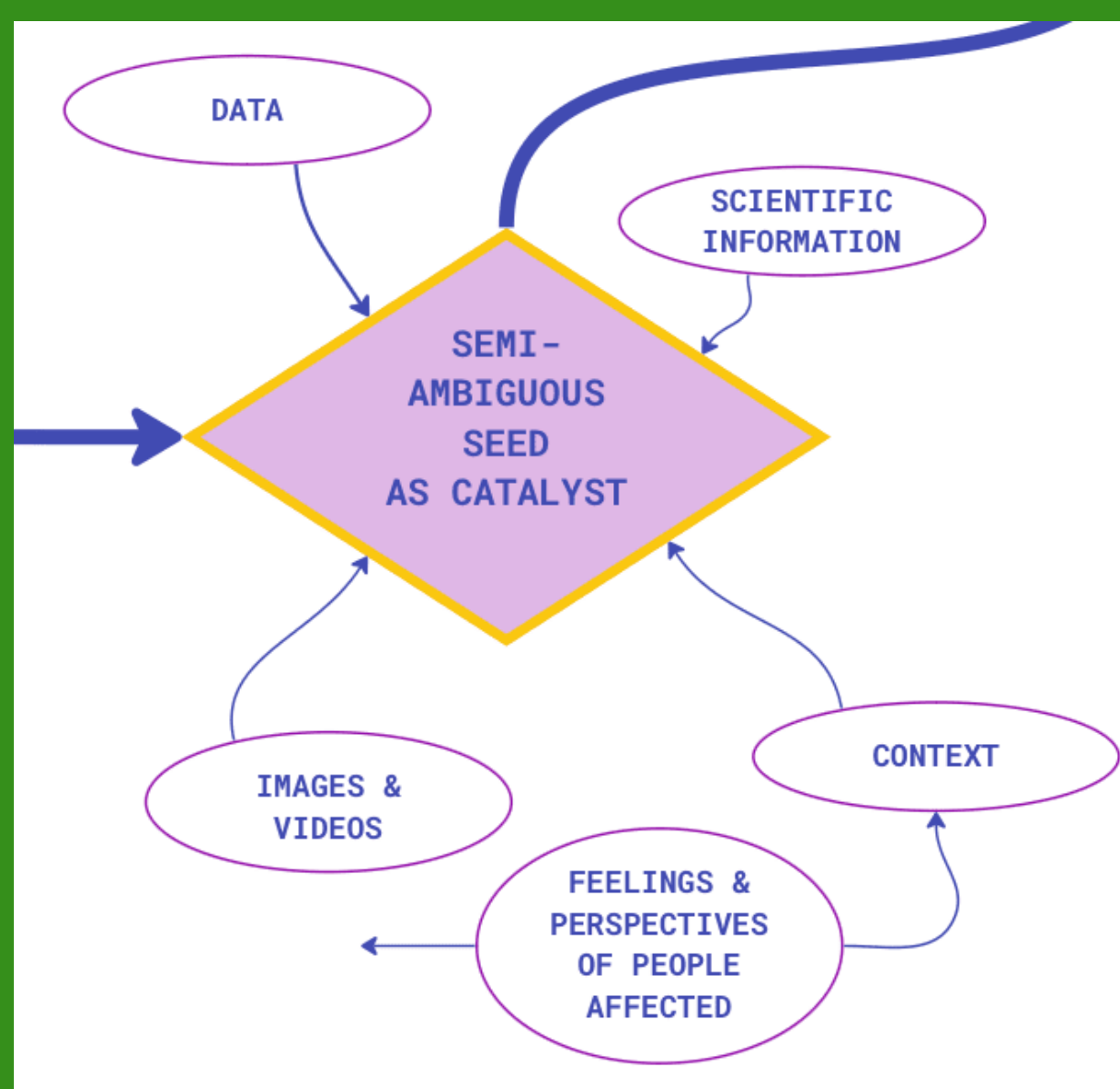
Collectively, the Exquisite Corpse process is a pathway for finding common grounds. These unfold through layers of relationship building. The full blossoming of common ground(s) comes into focus during the final unveiling of 3-part artwork series created by different participants, where the pathways from the initial seed to derivative interpretations are displayed and the individual-to-individual connections merge into the whole group. A rich array of interconnections becomes evident to the group. Various common grounds emerge in terms of ideas, aesthetics, approaches and more.

Pathways

Having formed relationships and recognized common grounds, the group develops a level of trust that allows inspiration and curiosity to unfold. Within a safe(r) virtual space for brainstorming, individuals are afforded the space and encouragement to offer ideas without fear of criticism and leading to more ArtScience endeavours.

Semi-Ambiguous Seeds

The Exquisite Corpse process grows from an inspirational and ambiguous seed to allow everyone to project their own thoughts, ideas and experiences onto it.



Giving, Receiving, Opening

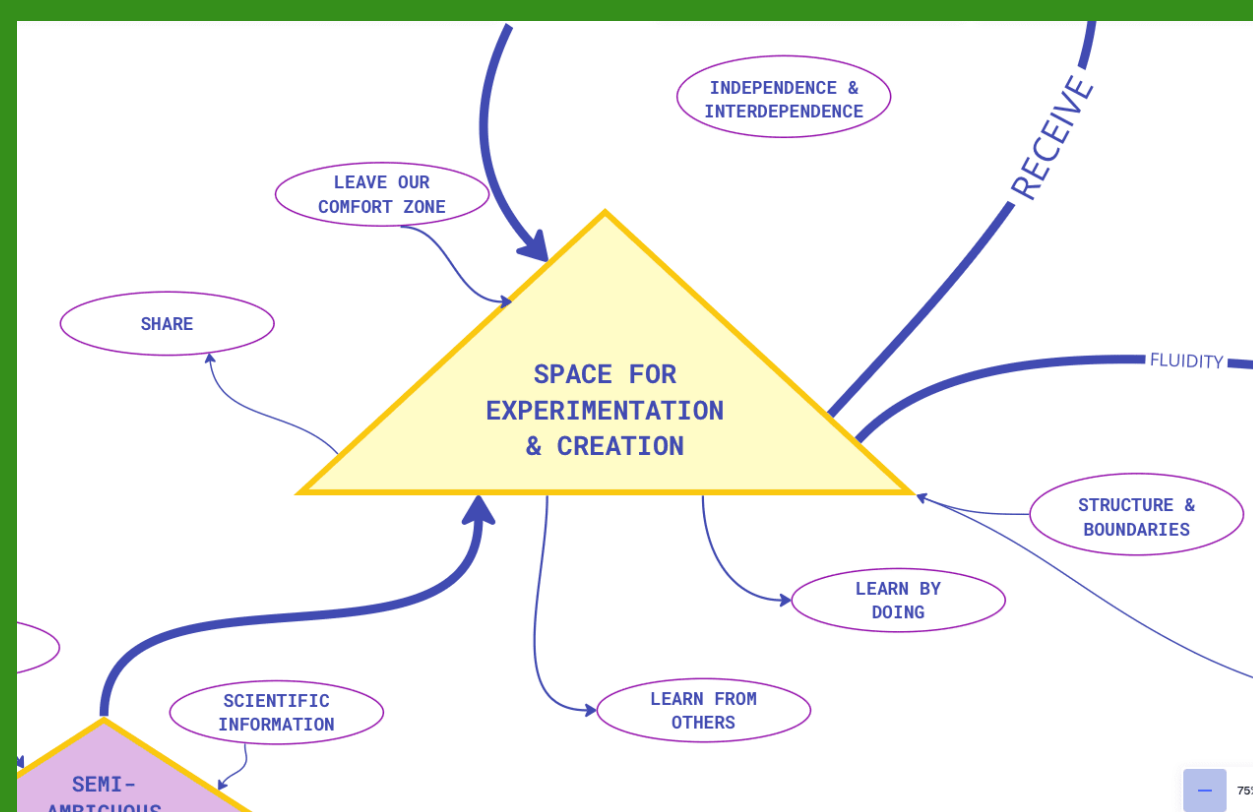
Working through the exquisite corpse mode we have come together from different backgrounds to share with one another, in the spirit of giving to the group without expecting any specific results. By being emotionally available for the process of giving, receiving and opening, each participant can take what they need from the process.

Fluid Boundaries

Through art, we see how we can overcome our social boundaries and limits, recognizing how things are interconnected. The ocean is a metaphor of this fluidity and the absence of strict boundaries, inviting us to be in movement.

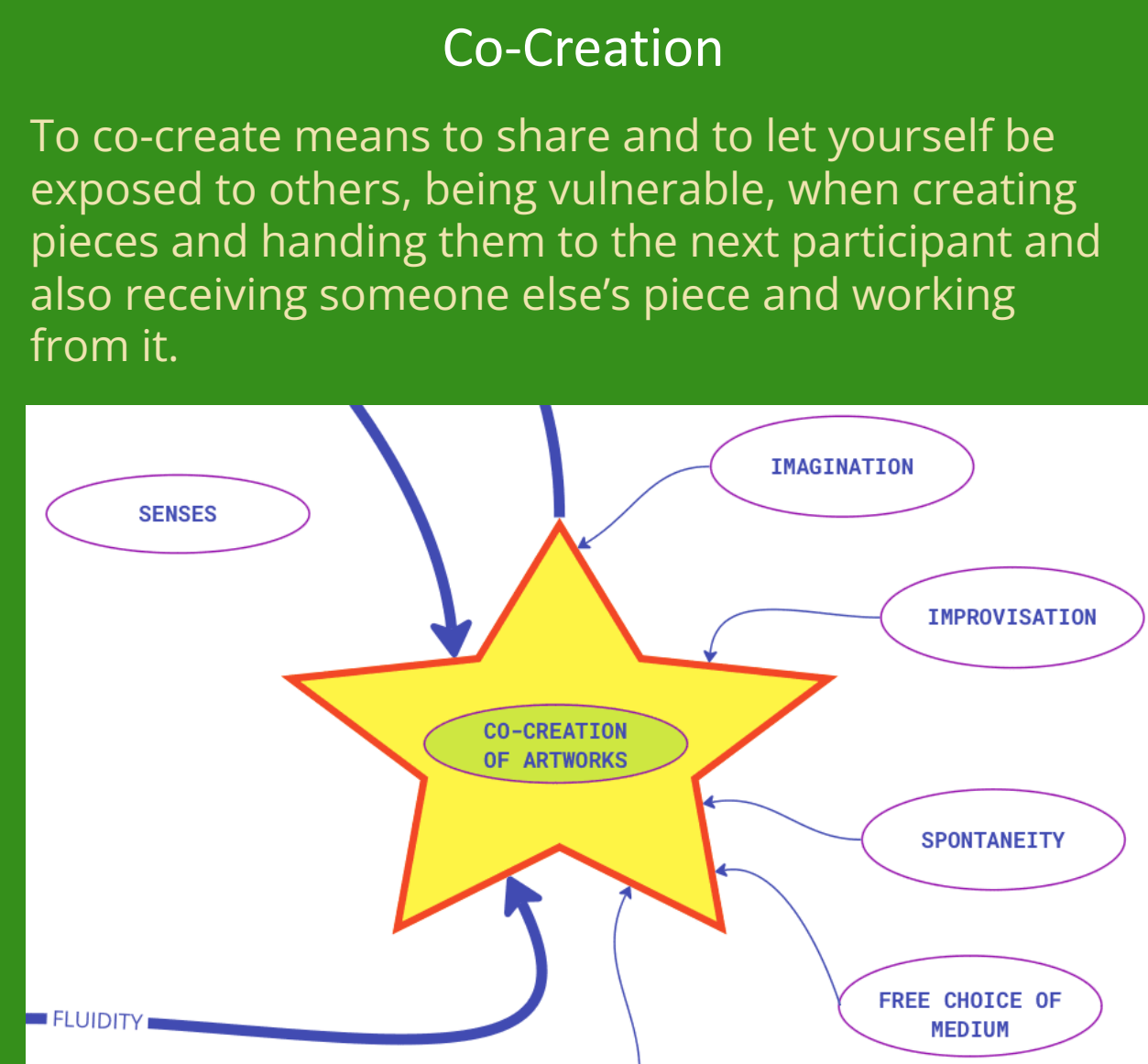
Space for Experimentation

The Exquisite Corpse process is an invitation to experiment while being fully aware of all the people and mountains, and ocean currents who are simultaneously experimenting while also potentially being experimented upon.



Sharing

The sharing of findings and experiences is one of the central mechanisms for the process. The sharing of artworks creates a situation of "low-stakes vulnerability" that facilitates emotional connection.



Extrapolating Benefits

On an individual level, ArtScience can provide ways of engaging more deeply with Ocean science and marine conservation topics from an emotional perspective. The Exquisite Corpse method creates opportunities to engage with the underlying feelings that are often sidelined during the more dispassionate scientific exchanges of daily life. Getting the opportunity to connect with others to be listened to and get inspired by each other can also help deal with climate grief and eco-anxiety (Cunsolo & Ellis, 2018). Beyond those emotional benefits, there are also more obvious ones including networking, insight into new perspectives to animate your research, opportunities for trying out and building new artistic skills or engaging in self-reflection, which is increasingly recognised as a crucial skill for more holistic and ethical Ocean science and marine conservation (Beck et al. 2021).

On a systemic level, the different dimensions of ArtScience collaborations and the emerging relationships nurtured by them can contribute to achieving the goals of the UN Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development. ArtScience collaborations can provide ideas for innovative research approaches, engage the public and other stakeholders with deepened empathy and prompt us to take on new perspectives. Furthermore, it can provide methods and opportunities to re-imagine the hopeful futures we want and strive to collectively re-imagine our relationship with the Ocean. Within the framework of this project, positive outcomes play out over longer time scales. The results continue to unfold through years, creating new opportunities and meanings.

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